

More Roads = More traffic = More CO2

Professor Phil Goodwin, one of the UK's leading transport experts, a government advisor and a member of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment has described the phenomenon known as "induced traffic" or more commonly as "new roads generate new traffic". He says:

It was way back in 1925 that the opening of a new section on the Great West Road demonstrated "the remarkable manner in which new roads generate new traffic", as Bressy wrote in 1937, but the notion was soon forgotten. Glanville and Smeed at the Road Research Laboratory rediscovered it in 1958, however, as did Foster, at Oxford, in 1963, and it was also remembered long enough to appear in Ministry of Transport advice in 1968, which said:

"Generated traffic on large schemes has often amounted to between 5% and 25% over and above the normal forecast traffic level... larger in exceptional cases."

Within three years the advice disappeared, however, (nobody ever said why) and generated traffic was routinely not calculated for road schemes and the DoT even took a legal case to the House of Lords to prevent such forecasts being challenged by objectors. But the evidence kept re-appearing: a GLC study demonstrated it empirically in 1985, as did Martin Mogridge and his colleagues in 1987, and it was sharply reinforced in 1988 after the M25 exceeded its long term forecast traffic growth within months of opening.

Phil Goodman goes on to say:

In 1994 SACTRA, the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, published its best-known report, on what it renamed 'induced' traffic. The average traffic flow on 151 improved roads was 10.4% higher than forecasts that omitted induced traffic and 16.4% higher than forecast on 85 alternative routes that improvements had been intended to relieve. In a dozen more detailed case studies the measured increase in traffic ranged from 9% to 44% in the short run and 20% to 178% in the longer run. This fitted in with other evidence on elasticities and aggregate data.

The conclusion was:

"An average road improvement, for which traffic growth due to all other factors is forecast correctly, will see an additional [i.e. induced] 10% of base traffic in the short term and 20% in the long term."

"For 80 years, every eight years on average, there has been the same experience, the same conclusions - even, for goodness sake, more or less the same figures."

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