My Ideal City: a City for today and tomorrow

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My Ideal City

When presented with the opportunity to write about my ideal city I immediately thought of 8 years of living in New York City and what ultimately led to my family and I leaving. On weekday mornings, my father would usually wake up at 5 am for the 10 mile drive to his workplace. Utilising 60 year old parkways such as the Grand Central and Jackie Robinson it often led to unpredictable commutes such as congestion, turning what would be a 10 minute commute (assuming 60 mph) into something that would take 1.5+ hours. Understandably he didn’t rely on the PT system with a ride between the two points taking 1 hour assuming no service disruptions. My father is not necessarily wrong in thinking that, it is reported that the average speed of buses passing through the state assembly district I used to live in travel at an average speed less than half the 25 mph speed limit at a mere 8.3 mph. Once he had completed the 3 hour, 20 mile round trip journey for the day, all the recreation and entertainment that the city has to offer would be so close but so far to enjoy. There are many like us who have moved because they’ve been let down because of 60’s era, unsuccessful urban planning. To me, a successful city is one where people can be as productive as they can be, where people feel they have all the resources and necessities within a reasonable reach and the city has the people within a reasonable reach to provide these resources.

My ideal city would be located along a river in the middle of semi-flat land such as London, DC and Seoul. The location on a flat area along a river would give my city the advantage of being able to use the air, water and land effectively. The flat area would ease the construction of infrastructure such as walkways, rails and roads. My city would be in a circular shape like many of the cities on a river, with everything radiating from the city center where entertainment complexes, cultural centers and government houses would be located to the outer reaches where density would be lower in comparison to the center. The outer reaches would too, have some commercial and entertainment zoning for easier job, day to day needs and entertainment access lifting the strain on the primary larger areas in the center. In the middle and outer reaches of my city Greenbelts would be constructed orbiting my city.

Like spokes on a wheel, my city’s transportation network would radiate from the center. Transportation would be executed in my city so that it has provisions for upgrades. Starting off, I’d have an extensive bus and light rail network where there are higher population densities as a feeder to the center and outer-city + suburban rail services. In addition, a dedicated, vast, pedestrian and bicyclist network that radiates out from the city center would be built with features such as route numbers, lighting, strategically placed electronic info signs and security features such as minimalistic metal barriers in the same areas. Your average metro system which doesn’t extend beyond the city limits and compromises of express and local services on trunk lines and their branches to and from the “city” would also be built. Suburban services would be
provided but in addition to that, I would have the fare set to the same as it would be if travelling on the city network within city limits to get some people off of the metro.

Although not a road-centric city, it would still have roads that will too transport people effectively. An idea I would have executed in my city is an “express/local” freeway concept with a “local” carriageway at grade making local exits within the city and an “express” carriageway elevated above it with no exits until out of the city limits (with the exception of major interchanges with other expressways). This would help cut travel times for all as some people would be segregated based on where their destination is. A good example of where this would help people is in my home borough of Queens where the Long Island Expressway is traffic ridden until the Nassau County line carrying residents of both areas. An example of where this is executed is in Metro Manila with the Skyway taking the “xpressload” out of Metro Manila and the SLEX taking the “local-load” within the Metro Manila. Orbital roads would also be built as it would deflect and unnecessary interchanging of outsiders within the city. Features on my road network would consist of electronic guiding signs which traffic controllers may change due to changing traffic conditions, recommending other routes/deflecting people off a certain route and, separated HOV lanes.

As mentioned above, many cultural institutions, colleges and government houses would be situated in the center with many private businesses too having offices there. Areas to the likenings of Los Angeles’ Pershing Square, Boston’s Common, New York’s MOMA would be erected to invigorate the city center. To complement the area and make it less confusing for those who live there and for those who are only visiting, simple wayfinding signs would be put up all over the city center stating locations of buildings, walking distance to metro stations, and conditions on modes of travel. This will ultimately help those have more time at the areas they want to see the most and workers would have less time interacting with those finding their way. In addition to erecting new structures and venues to cater for my city I would also reuse areas used only once for major events or have been abandoned for causes like entertainment and housing.

In the outer reaches, I would encourage the zoning of neighborhood commercial centers such as shopping centers, markets and small entertainment areas so that people could eat and shop without going into the city. Located in these areas, I would have info centers that offer city services staffed by local residents to give the city government a community oriented feel. Services offered here are things that would otherwise needed to be conducted in main city offices. These info centers would help save time travelling to the city and headaches of travelling from between each city department. In addition to having these city info centers, in each neighborhood would be a police “substation”. The idea behind these “substations” is that it isn’t a full-service police station where one may file a police report or get information about being recruited but it is more of a center where officers can be easily dispatched. These personnel only
stations would be placed more commonly in the neighborhood than actual precincts to cut down on the response time that larger cities usually have.

While on the topic of the necessities in the outer areas of the city, I would also like to talk about the recreation in these areas. A park of a larger scale and to the likings of icons like Griffith Park in Los Angeles and Central Park in New York City would be constructed in my city while maintaining neighborhood parks. In addition, my city’s greenbelt project would be one of a kind with a size of 1-2 miles wide and orbiting the center at 10-15 miles away, while within city limits. An alternative to that would be a bunch of smaller parks being connected with “green” paths that too form a circle around my city. The primary greenspace in my city for all citizens to enjoy will be accessible by all modes of transport in my city, encase ponds, awnings, miles of pedestrian and cyclist paths, amphitheaters and adventure courses. It’ll also serve as the major north-south beltway of my city for peds and bicyclists. To ensure the greenbelt’s scenery and attractions are undisturbed by the reality of urban life, the number of expressways, busways, and train lines would be wisely chosen and therefore limited because they would have to be tunneled under the park so that it would allow for a continuous park. Along serving as the city’s primary greenspace it would serve as a healthy environment promoter filtering out the air from my city and surrounding municipalities and giving a safe haven for creatures of all kind.

To help ensure that people are able to perform the best they can, my city would enact several public policies and ordinances to help them out. One thing which would be vital to my city is securing the funding for public programs such as housing or healthcare. One way to raise a good amount of funds for my city is with the legalization of Marijuana. With the successful legalization campaigns (medical and/or recreational) in 8/9 states on the 2016 ballot the public perception of Marijuana is obviously shifting to a positive one, fast. The hallmark of these bills that are currently being signed into law in the aforementioned states is that the sale of the plant is being taxed with the revenue going towards several different causes. It’ll help my city by giving funds to help citizens who are less fortunate, reducing amount of drug related crime (illegal firearms, theft, murder etc.) and police resources being used for activities more violent. In addition to public policy, I would change the way public policy is voted on, higher stakes policy wouldn’t go through the chambers of city council but it would go straight to the people bypassing bureaucracy and getting things done quicker.

My city would be better than one that uses conventional methods to be built and expanded because it takes the same conventional methods and reinvents them so that it is used towards my city’s advantage. In addition to me reinventing these the city would also adapt other methods and designs that are used around the world instead of sticking to the norm that was in our city. Using methods that are widely accepted in other societies would turn my city into a true world city and will show that it can operate on ideas that are not entirely common in the area. As this paper comes to a close, I look back on how my ideas could help NYC, if enacted I believe it
would have the opportunity to save people time and money while also helping people with their day to day needs and have them be as efficient and productive as they can. Just what I think a city should and could do.