

TRANSIT AND TOWN PLANNING

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It is quite unnecessary in Canada or the United States to point out what an influence electric railways have had in developing cities and towns. On account of the possibilities of traction lines in moulding the growth of communities, town planners are now beginning to recognize transit as a vital factor in town planning. Transit can no longer be regarded as a luxury. It is a necessity in our daily life, enabling people to live in healthy locations at a distance from work. It connects people with recreative and educational centers, libraries, parks, etc. It can make a city a unit, bringing all people within reach of each other, for mutual help and exchange of ideals.

Until very recently, our streets were laid out and built without any regard to possible car lines in them. Next, more width was allowed, and sometimes a reserved space for car tracks. While at last, in certain cities, notably New York and Paris, the public authorities have laid out and are still building municipal rapid transit systems, whose aim is primarily to benefit the city as a whole and not to make money for a person or company, although the systems are still privately operated.

We are only just at the beginning, however, of appreciating the importance of transit in town planning. Traction lines have generally been built for the purpose of making money, especially in America, and as a result there has been no adequate study of the vital principles which should govern their construction and of all their possibilities for good. Who can say for example, with any positive assurance or being right, exactly how far apart surface electric lines should be built to properly serve a tract of suburban territory, in order to give no one too long a walk between car line and home? How large should a city be before real rapid transit is introduced, with trains to take the place of surface cars. Are subways a healthful enough means of transportation; or should freight be carried underground, and passengers kept up in the light and air? If subways are not healthful, or are otherwise undesirable, is there any type of overhead structure which is so noiseless, so free from obstructing light and air, and so otherwise unobjectionable that it will meet the severest tests of artistic critics? Should people be encouraged to ride less than now, and live where they can walk to their work, or is the Belgian idea the best one, of having the workmen own their homes in the country as far as possible, and ride long distances to whatever city they may have work in?