

which may be inconsistent over the length of a route, or traffic volume, which would vary over both distance and time, a designation can stay stable indefinitely. Designating status according to function effectively builds in flexibility: because future function is being specified, any particular route or street can be expected to grow into its intended role. The functional designation need never be out of date, whatever the conditions on the ground, as long as it remains a future target.

If function is a designation, on what basis is it designated? The basis for designation does not always appear entirely clear or consistent: it seems to be a mix of parameters such as traffic flow, speed, design standard, strategic function and 'movement function' (as opposed to 'access function'). But these do not automatically correspond, either in theory or practice. How then is a particular section of road designated a particular status, when this status is not systematically related to form or use?

THE STRATEGIC STRUCTURE

We usually know a main road when we see one, and it may seem academic as to whether this main road is so called because it is a 'big road', a 'busy road' or a 'strategic road'. The correlation between road standard, flow and strategic status seems intuitively simple. Even if national road networks tend to be organised by designation, it appears to be a simple reflection of form or use. However, things are not necessarily as straightforward as this. If we look more closely, we find that designation is, generally speaking, not by form or use – but by *relation*. And this is not a trivial academic distinction; it provides a key to understanding hierarchy and the structure of urban layout.

Basis of designation

In the UK, 'A' roads may take the form of a narrow old street in a town, or a lightly trafficked cross-country road.¹⁶ The A960 in Kirkwall town centre is a single lane paved street with priority to pedestrians. The A830 between Lochailort and Mallaig – a trunk road – still has a single track section (Figure 3.10).

If roads were classified by form, then the classification of a route might change along its length each time there was a change in some physical property. For example, every point at which the width of the road changed or a frontage type changed or a bus or cycle lane started or stopped would be a potential point at which the classification could change. While classification by form can be useful for an urban design appreciation of a street as an urban space, it is not that typically used for route classification,