



Frank Gehry, Millennium Park, pedestrian bridge, Chicago, Illinois. Infrastructure for the pleasure of movement, not an optimization of motion. Courtesy of Alex Krieger.

The Infrastructure of the City

The arrangement of streets and blocks, the distribution of open and public spaces, the alignment of transit and highway corridors, and the provision of municipal services certainly constitute essential components of city design. Indeed, to focus on just one category of urban infrastructure, few things are more important to cities or virtually any form of contemporary settlement than well-functioning transportation systems. Yet, the optimization of mobility pursued as an independent variable, separate from the complex and overlapping web of other urban systems, ultimately works against healthy communities. Engineering criteria, we have learned, are not by themselves sufficient city-producing tools.

Apart from the occasional efforts to “architecturalize” infrastructure, as in the various megastructure proposals of the 1960s (a source of fascination today), neither planners nor designers have played a significant role in transportation or other urban infrastructure planning. Thus, it has become another sphere for an urban designer to attempt to address at both the pragmatic level of calibrating demands for mobility with other social needs and in advancing new (or reviv-