

The Case Studies

This chapter includes a number of case studies that demonstrate a variety of plug-in urban design types. It begins with examples of infrastructure design at the citywide level. This set is divided into two parts: (1) where the infrastructure has preceded building and (2) where it has been plugged into an existing built environment. The second set of case studies deals with infrastructure design at the precinct level. It is subdivided in the same manner. There is only one example of the third set which deals with plugging in specific building types into a precinct to act as catalysts for development. It is included as a note rather than a case study because its impact is yet to be seen. It is the case of the use of schools as infrastructure elements in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Urban Links: Binding Cities into Units

The design of the links between precincts of a city might be expected to fall outside the purview of urban design, and be a regional and city planning or civil engineering endeavour. Much new town design, however, starts out by working out the infrastructure pattern as Le Corbusier did in promulgating his design for the restructuring of Antwerp in the 1930s (see Figure 10.6) and certainly it was the approach applied in Runcorn.

Links can be highways or roads, heavy- or light-rail links, and pedestrian and cycle-ways. Many cities in the world from Johannesburg to Los Angeles to Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) had extensive light-rail (or tram/trolley) systems until the 1940s or even later. Lobbying from motor organizations and motorists had many of them ripped up because they inconvenienced automobile drivers. There are, however, about 350 such systems now operating in the world; approximately 60 have been introduced since 1975. Los Angeles and San Diego initiated their new systems in the 1980s. Strasbourg opened its in 1994. These new networks are restricted in their range but plans for extension are numerous. In addition, many older systems are being rebuilt to operate in a more luxurious and smoother running fashion. Designers today are paying special attention to the landscaping of streets and public squares along the trolley routes to ensure that they are aesthetically acceptable components of the urban scene. Though all these networks may be important, roads and pedestrian paths remain the major structuring elements of urban form.

Three case studies of citywide infrastructures design that have strong urban design overtones have been included here. The selection of Curitiba in Brazil is arbitrary but it is internationally considered to be a good example of master planning and a relatively inexpensive plug-in urban design. It serves well as an example of how the infrastructure and urban design projects can go hand in hand. The other two case studies deal with mass transit heavy-rail systems. The first of these two is one that was largely, but not entirely, considered prior to urban development taking place. The second is a subway system put into place in response to potential demand but also as a catalyst for local urban renewal projects in areas of