

Urban Development and the Accommodation of Automobiles

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Jane Jacobs, well known for her contributions to urban theory and for leading a movement to stop the Spadina Expressway in Downtown Toronto during the late 1960s and early 1970s, had stated the following in her classic book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*:

"What if we fail to stop the erosion of cities by automobiles? . . . What is the purpose of life? For us, the answer will be clear, established and for all practical purposes indisputable: The purpose of life is to produce and consume automobiles."

Though she had argued the negative impacts of automobiles more than 40 years ago, Jane Jacobs views are still relevant to communities in Northern Alberta.

Still today, one of the top priorities of planners, engineers, and policymakers is how automobiles can be accommodated in the wake of economic and population growth pressures. Unfortunately, often roads are built excessively wide, and with large numbers of parking lots, so that automobiles could be easily accommodated. As a consequence of prioritizing cars, the pedestrian realm has often been compromised and aesthetically pleasing streetscapes have been lost.

Aside from its negative impacts to the urban landscape, the balance towards development that prioritizes cars raises equity issues as well because cars are not universally accessible to youth, people with lower incomes, or those with disabilities.

I am not arguing that automobiles are inherently a problem, but priorities should be ordered to emphasize pedestrian mobility, the aesthetics of streetscapes, and community vibrancy.