INFRASTRUCTURAL MONUMENT

8-9TH APRIL  2013  MIT, CAMBRIDGE, MA.

HOSTED BY:  MIT Center for Advanced Urbanism  CAU

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INTRODUCTION

As our post-war urban infrastructures have aged, new voices call for the urgent need to replace and reconstruct them. However, rather than rebuilding or rewiring entirely new systems, urban designers, developers, investors, policy makers, and planners will be most effective by targeting specific infrastructural projects that address multiple urban problems. The Infrastructural Monument challenges us to rethink how we design infrastructure for the long haul.

The Infrastructural Monument is the inaugural symposium of the MIT Center for Advanced Urbanism. The symposium brings together architects, planners, urban designers, real estate developers, investors, policy makers, transportation experts, and others to explore new ways of designing infrastructural objects in order to accommodate diverse user groups, and provide multiple benefits. The symposium will tackle the design of infrastructure projects, the funding models behind these projects, and the policy required to enable these types of projects.

Each of the scheduled panel sessions is organized around a question that examines a different aspect of transportation infrastructure for US suburban cities. The panels will look at the repurposing of excess infrastructure, investment opportunities arising from the alignment of design and development, the role of large-scale projects such as intermodal stations, and the potential of infrastructural objects to act as monuments for our regional suburban environments.
OVERVIEW

MONDAY 8TH APRIL

3:00 pm  Registration
3:45 pm  Welcome and Introduction
4:05 pm  Infrastructural Monument
6:00 pm  Reception

TUESDAY 9TH APRIL

8:30 am  Breakfast and Registration
8:55 am  Introduction
9:00 am  Infrastructural Redundancy
11:00 am  Break
11:30 am  Marrying infrastructure design and urban development
1:30 pm  Lunch
2:30 pm  The intermodal station as a viable alternative
4:30 pm  Break
4:45 pm  Infrastructure for the long haul
TOWARDS A NEW INFRASTRUCTURAL MONUMENT FOR THE LONG HAUL
Can a typical American city be transformed from a collection of fragments assembled regionally by interstate highways, to a more durable regional constitution, using targeted infrastructural investment projects? A positive answer would imply that it is possible to use infrastructure designs and investments to leverage results beyond the realm of transportation of goods or labor; in the realm of culture, public space, architecture and landscape form. This question frames the first conference of the Center for Advanced Urbanism.

We live among infrastructural objects, and use them collectively on a daily basis. As a result, they are a part of our common culture, embedded in our collective urban experience. They provide a shared commonality throughout the physical space of society. And yet we have not up until now conceived of these as objects of a public culture, which they are more than anything else in our cities.

Separating every possible functionality into its own dedicated artifact constitutes the post-war suburban paradigm across the United States. However, two important urbanization trends may end up altering this model soon. First, our suburban regions are becoming more intensely developed, putting pressure on the existing infrastructures. As suburbs age, they become progressively more dense and more mixed in terms of class, culture, and program. Second, research in climate change, ecology, economics, environmental performance, and public health have created an urgent need for urbanists to conduct broader systemic analysis of how infrastructures can have multiple uses and benefits. Rethinking infrastructure’s multiple roles is not a question of disciplinary ideology but of collective intelligence.

As urban infrastructures age, on a daily basis new voices speak to the urgent need for their replacement and reconstruction. Rather than forcing the rewiring of entire regional urban systems, urbanists will be more effective by targeting specific infrastructural projects that address multifunctional urban problems always asking, “what extra services can infrastructural design provide to society beyond its primary function?” Such targeted projects constitute a smart infrastructure: not ‘smart’ as in using sensing and technology; but ‘smart’ as in integrating apparently mutually exclusive performance criteria and cultural desires.

We call these infrastructures ‘systemic objects’, because the intervention is limited and precise (as an object) and yet it addresses the multiple systemic layers of functionality (capital, energy, health, hydrology, mobility, among others). Investing in infrastructure as systemic objects may, over several growth cycles, result in a reconfigured and durable new urban order. Whereas yesterday’s layout of an infrastructure may define the extent or limits of urban expansion, tomorrow’s must accommodate at least the next half century of urbanity more strategically and systemically.

The development of an infrastructural research agenda and projects is a key mission for MIT’s Center for Advanced Urbanism. However, it is not the only one. This conference is the first in a series, devoted to a set of strategic design challenges facing cities worldwide.
SYSTEMIC OBJECTS
4:05 pm  Infrastructural Monument
Which great projects need to be undertaken today that can have a great visibility and demonstrate that infrastructures can inspire optimism and a sense of progress? The Chinese and Europeans have high-speed rail with great stations; or new airports. What monuments can we configure that are productive for the American city, while instilling a new sense of civic pride?

**Discussants:** Hon. James L. Oberstar, Henk Ovink, Christopher Lee, Pierre Bélanger.

**Respondents:** Antón García Abril and Eran Ben-Joseph

**Moderator:** Ole Bouman
8:30 am Breakfast and Registration

8:50 am Introduction

9:00 am **Infrastructural Redundancy**
Any analysis of infrastructure grids of American cities, compared to others, displays the massive presence of transportation infrastructure, specifically for automobiles. As we move past peak car use, do our cities have excess infrastructure, and if so, does it make sense to eliminate certain redundancies, and re-program roads for other (including private) uses?

*Discussants:* Stan Allen, Donald Briggs, Robert Levit, Stephen Ramos
*Respondents:* Miho Mazereeuw and Brent Ryan
*Moderator:* Nader Tehrani

11:00 am Break

11:30 am **Marrying infrastructure design and urban development**
Historically suburban development is grounded in the independence of the production of roadways (public, government) from the development of properties along it (private). In order to guarantee this independence, roads are designed with rules and zoning principles that are value-neutral to any adjacent development opportunity. Recently, cash-strapped towns are beginning to outsource infrastructure design and production to real estate developers. What are the opportunities that a more close alignment of infrastructure design and development can offer to the public interest?

*Discussants:* Jo Guldi, Alex Klatskin, Roger Sherman, Malcolm Smith
*Respondents:* Dennis Frenchman and Anne Spirn
*Moderator:* Alan Berger
1:30 pm  Lunch

2:30 pm  The intermodal station as a viable alternative

The intermodal station, and the associated intersection of regional highways or interstates, with railroad lines, offers a great opportunity, based on the latent centrality of such intersections within the larger urban transportation system. Should we place big bets on such projects? Is this a future for the suburbs?

Discussants: Stephen Crosby, Petra Messick, Marcel Smets, Cino Zucchi
Respondents: Kent Larson and Christopher Zegras
Moderator: Alexander D’Hooghe

4:30 pm  Break

4:45 pm  Infrastructure for the long haul