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CONSULTING ENGINEERS

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For the attention of <i>Ronald MacInnes</i>	Date <i>20.9.93</i>
From <i>J.P. McCafferty</i>	No of pages (incl this page) <i>1</i>
Project <i>G.I.R.R.</i>	Job No <i>—</i>
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Details of document attached <i>Ronald - I have read your revised text and have no adverse comments to make. The use of my name &amp; that of SWK is quite satisfactory. Please call me if you wish to discuss - Regards J.P.</i>
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**HISTORIC**



**SCOTLAND**

20 Brandon Street Edinburgh EH3 5RA  
Telephone 031 244 Fax 031 244

Mr McCafferty

20/9/93

Please find enclosed revised article text.  
I hope the quotation in its present form is  
acceptable. I am on holiday today (Edinburgh  
September weekend) so will 'phone later if you  
**W I T H       C O M P L I M E N T S**  
don't mind. With very many thanks. R. C. C.

## 'AN AMERICAN IN GLASGOW' : THE INNER RING ROAD

Strathclyde Region's swansong may be a less than satisfactory 'completion' of Glasgow's Inner Ring Road. Do we need to look again at this much-maligned but much-used motorway?

Postwar Glasgow's reputation was perhaps its worst: the label 'cancer of Empire' had stuck and the word 'Gorbals' was known all over the world. Solutions to the 'problem' poured in from every quarter, but most of these were concerned with de-constructing the massive power base that Glasgow had become. The Clyde Valley Plan, for example, aimed to strip the city of one third of its inhabitants, with ring roads by-passing the city.

By contrast, Glasgow's Inner Ring Road - among the most daring and innovative conceptual motorways in the world - was designed to save the city. Its aims, like those of Glasgow's own Haussmannites, the nineteenth century City Improvement Trust, were to set Glasgow free of the stranglehold of its congestion, to clear away its decayed housing stock, and to establish planned growth areas of industrial land. Its associated structures, such as the Kingston Bridge and the Townhead Interchange, and its landscaping, are among the best of their type in the world.

But roads have had a bad press, particularly in the UK, where a British, anti-urban sentiment has reduced any debate on the subject to the level of rhetoric. Just as Patrick Geddes mourned the loss of picturesque Paris for the construction of Haussmann's boulevards, so we have experienced a great tidal wave of nostalgia for the buildings 'lost' in the construction of the Glasgow IRR. We should bear in mind that where Haussmann, or the planners of the Vienna Ringstrasse, (or, indeed, the nineteenth century railway companies) could simply impose a straight line or a circle on their respective cities, the IRR planners had no such dirigiste powers, and had to thread the road through a living city, causing as little aesthetic or physical damage as possible; targeting a circle of decay in the Comprehensive Development Areas, disused canals, or redundant industrial areas.

Glasgow has a long history of prestige road building, inspired initially by the visit of the City Improvement Trust to Paris in the 1860s. The tradition of wide, rhetorical roads and urban spaces, sweeping away slum property and replacing it with prestige buildings in key locations such as Glasgow Cross, was actively continued into the 1930s in major trunk roads, still echoing their Parisian exemplars in schemes such as The Dumbarton Boulevard, Maryhill Road, and Mosspark Boulevard. The Bruce Report of 1945 aimed to go further, to deal with the inner city and to put these quite grandiose schemes into a totally planned framework of two ring roads with radial motorways. This epoch-making idea was enshrined in various official documents, but most crucially in the Glasgow Development Plan of 1954, whose quinquennial Review in 1960 finally defined the strategy:

"The future social and economic health of Glasgow will

depend... on a successful attack on the interlocked problems of Housing, Employment and Communications..(T)he campaign should be centred on the 29 CDAs and on the traffic proposals for the central area."

Clearly, Glasgow's detractors had not reckoned with the force that would be unleashed in response to the concerted attacks on its power base, its population. This civic pride, with its powerful urbanist ideology, was the product of many hundreds of years of 'burghism', which had been spectacularly promoted by the self-loving oligarchy that was Glasgow City Corporation. In housing, a dynamic tension was set up between the 'regional' planners and the City, which resulted in the commissioning of many hundreds of multi-storey blocks within the city's boundaries, on any piece of land that the Committee could acquire. In transportation, it put in motion a series of events that was to end with the building of a road, to motorway standards, through the heart of the city.

The home of the urban motorway was America, and it was, therefore, to the New World that the Postwar improvers looked. Glasgow had a long tradition of borrowing from, and lending ideas and designers to, North America: a glance at the commercial buildings of Chicago or the work of one of our greatest firms of architects, Burnet Tait and Lorne, will confirm this. Aside from the technical necessity of doing so, It should come as no surprise that the city's leaders looked to the USA as a model for their grand plan of urban re-generation. In 1961, 100 years after their Improvement Trust predecessors had visited Paris, Lord Provost Jean Roberts led a similar study tour to Washington DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, New Haven, Pittsburg, Detroit, and Chicago, where the members of the group became convinced that mass transportation and urban motorways would stop Glasgow's terminal decline.

In 1965 the 'Highway Plan for Glasgow' was published. The plan took the principle of inner ring road to its logical conclusion; the complete separation of major traffic on a full-scale motorway with complementary expressways, and pedestrianisation of the central core along with the discouraging of commuter parking in favour of short-term parking, which was to be strictly limited. Here we can see the underlying logic: the flight away from the city, and into the suburbs or the overspill areas, was to be halted - not promoted - by ease of travel within the city, both for business and for city-dwellers. The idea that the Inner Ring Road was built to allow executives to roar to and from work in the city is quite wrong. Commuter traffic was to be discouraged as part of the complete transportation picture, and public transport improved. Road safety, also a major factor, was enhanced by grade separation and through networks of pedestrian bridges and underpasses.

Glasgow Inner Ring Road was a massive response to a massive problem: arguably, the final push by the mighty Glasgow Corporation against the UK politics of 'overspill'. The Corporation effectively engineered a solution to the three problems of mixed development, housing decay, and traffic congestion. Built on a truly monumental scale, the GIRR has, in recent years, perhaps suffered at the hands of a British

townscape ideology, antithetical to its imposing technical and aesthetic rhetoric, but, perhaps more significantly, to its unashamedly American inspiration. However its nationally-orientated 'megastructural' tendency, which can ultimately be traced back to Robert Adam and the 'Proposals' for Edinburgh of 1752, place the scheme firmly within a national cultural tradition of massive engineering and architectural monumentality. It also has a place in the contemporary and historical context of world motorway design, from 1930s Italy and Germany, to the parkways and urban motorways of America which inspired the international team of designers working in Glasgow in the late 1950s and 60s.

Work on 'Target One' of the phased motorway - what we see on the ground today - was completed by 1981. But by then the will to finish the job had evaporated, and the logic of the 'box' was therefore seriously compromised. As J. P. McCafferty of the original designers, Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick put it at last year's conference of the Scottish National Group of DOCOMOMO, "Unfortunately, perhaps, our traffic predictions were correct...the decision to defer completion of the Ring Road has resulted in predictable congestion."

It remains to be seen if the severance, disruption, and pedestrian accident rate - dramatically improved by motorway 'grade separation' - will be badly affected by the watered-down version of the East Flank which is intended to deal with this congestion. The proposals currently on the table would send traffic at speed, and on normal roads, through the area around Glasgow Cross and the Barrows. Similarly, the Twin Bridges at the Kingston Bridge may alleviate congestion at that point, but may exacerbate the problems of severance and safety which the depressing of the motorway at Charing Cross with its famous 'bridge to nowhere' (never a bridge, in fact) was designed to limit.

Since traffic flow and current predictions dictate that the choice is not between the current proposal and no new roads at all, is there not an argument for taking the more environmentally-friendly route, and for accepting the logic of the original plan? The completion of the East Flank to the very high design standards of the original motorway, perhaps with a grade separated boulevard, would be bolder, more imaginative and aesthetically-pleasing - and it would probably be much safer.

Ranald MacInnes  
16 September 1993



# THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

## Telex/Facsimile Message

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Location/Serial No **AH/206**

Security Classification (tick as appropriate)

Top Secret  Secret  Confidential  Restricted  Unclassified

From: **RANALD MACINNE**

Room/Building: **AL. HO. 1211**  
**041 242**

Extension: **5520** Date: **17/9/93**

To: **MR J P McCafferty**  
**SWK**

Fax/Telex No: **677 333 9360**  
**041**

Copies to:

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### Supplementary Message

*Mr McCafferty*

*This is a short piece for the 'Scotsman' in the IRR. Would you be happy to be quoted - and with the rest of the material. It may be that my own publicity office will want to tone down some of the statements but there would be other changes.*

*Thank you*  
*Ranald*

No of Pages (excluding this page) **3**

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## 'AN AMERICAN IN GLASGOW' : THE INNER RING ROAD

"Unfortunately, perhaps, our traffic predictions were correct...the decision to defer completion of the Ring Road has resulted in predictable congestion." J.P. McCafferty.

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Glasgow's congestion problem had been addressed in the Bruce Report of 1945, the principles of which were actually put into practice in a piecemeal way (The Great Western Road Boulevard, Maryhill Road, Edinburgh Road at Carntyne), but which advocated the building of two ring roads with radial motorways. This idea was enshrined in various official documents, but most crucially in the Glasgow Development Plan of 1954, whose quinquennial Review in 1960 finally defined the strategy:

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