

Four Questions (?) in American City Planning

Ar. Kishore Thapa

Urban Planning Expert

Nepal Institute for Urban and Regional
Studies (NIURS)

August 09, 2023

Cities visited in the US



1. What are the common features of American cities?

- Grid iron pattern of planning
- Standard design of highways, roads, walkways, traffic lights, street light, bridges, sign boards, flyovers, underpasses, parking lots
- Street furniture, bus stand, tree guards, waste bins, roadside railings,
- Gas stations, super markets, outlet stores,
- Downtown skyline, roadside buildings,
- Landscaping, green lawns, residential houses

2. What is the impact of IT in the development and management of cities?

- Increasing system of work from home - which is reducing need for office space at city centre
- Online shopping that is threatening the conventional department stores and super markets
- Algorithm guided driving practice, goods and service delivery system
- Online ticketing, online checking at the airport, train station and bus station.
- Online ride sharing such as Uber, Lyft and
- Machines replacing humans in many types of jobs.

3. Are American cities growing?

- Based on the economic growth or recession, cities in America have risen up or gone down. For example, Detroit is going down where as Charlotte of North Carolina is rising up.
- Most of the state capitals have either been static or going down. For example, Trenton, the capital of New Jersey, Columbia- capital of South Carolina.
- Many of the small and medium size cities of the last century are going down because of the closure of manufacturing industries.
- Cities of mid-west states such as Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Alabama, Wyoming, Indiana, Idaho, Iowa are almost stagnant.

4. What are the impacts of COVID and climate change in the cities?

- COVID has left many impacts in city life particularly in public spaces, public transportation, use of bicycles and walking.
- Online shopping, work from home practices are getting more and more popular.
- Coastal cities are experiencing more cyclones, hurricanes, rise in sea level and flooding.
- Existing drainage system are inefficient or dysfunctional.
- Rise in temperature , heatwaves, pollution and unpredictable weather conditions

Darker sides of American city planning

- Car centric urban planning which is forcing people to own cars and sit behind the wheels
- Low density urban sprawl which consumes more land and puts additional burden on provision of physical infrastructure
- High energy consumption, higher volume of garbage production, need for larger parking spaces in public parks, buildings and markets.
- Deserted downtown, abandoned neighborhood, run-down industrial estates.

Brighter sides of American city planning

- Standard and higher quality infrastructure and services
- Smarter public information system
- Very systematic, organized and inclusive physical facilities
- Easy access and connectivity to different parts of the city
- Neat, tidy, functional and well serviced buildings and neighborhoods.

Social aspects of cities

- Clear manifestation of racial and ethnicity in urban neighborhood.
- Increasing social diversity in younger population and aging and declining white population.
- White population(about 68%) are facing threats in terms of racism, human rights, LGBTQ issues and political representation leading to emergence of Donald Trump type of leaders.
- Crumbling law and order situation, weaker policing, rise in crime in cities
- Widening gaps between older and newer (Gen Z) generation.

What can we learn?

- Uniform norms and standards of physical infrastructure, utilities and buildings.
- Defined role of citizens and residents- what to do and not to do?
- Wholistic approach in neighborhood planning and completeness in the design of public spaces and buildings
- Use of lightweight materials in the construction of smaller buildings
- Landscaping, tree plantation, greenery
- Avoidance of excessive hoarding boards and signboards in buildings and streets- neatness and tidiness in built environment.

Pedestrianization of a street in Brooklyn, NY



Bus stand at Astoria neighborhood of Queens, NY



Respecting the bicycle by Rutgers University Bus



Creation of separate bus lane at Rutgers University campus



Oculus at Ground Zero, New York



Gloomy weather at Times Square, New York



Central Park and skyscrapers of Manhattan, NY



Brooklyn bridge



Skyline of Manhattan with One World Trade Tower



Multi-colored lighting in the buildings of downtown Charlotte



Duke University, Raleigh, North Carolina



Intersection of 34th street and 9th Avenue, Manhattan NY



The World Bank Headquarters, Washington DC



Washington Memorial seen from Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC



Streetscape of Houston city, Texas



Thank You

