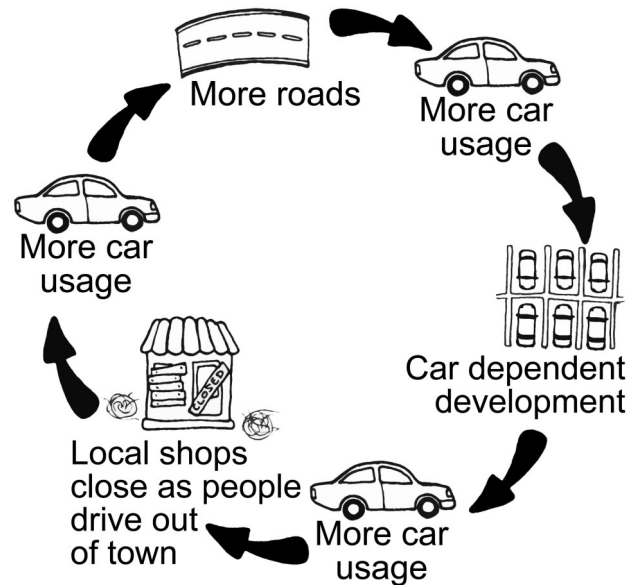


The economics of new roads

Roads are often justified on grounds of economic benefit.

- Clearly people and goods need to be able to get around for local economies to function, and more importantly for people to be able to live happily. However, not much research is done after road building to see if the hoped-for benefits materialise, and research which has been done suggests that there isn't as much positive economic impact as is expected by road building forecasts.
- "Of 25 road schemes justified on the basis that they would benefit the local economy, only five had any evidence of any economic effects. Even for these five, the economic effects may have arisen from changes incidental to the road scheme, or involved development in an inappropriate location, [e.g. car dependant areas in green belts], or involved changes that were as likely to suck money out of the local area as to bring it in." (Impact of Roads², p. 6)
- "Some road schemes were justified on the basis that by reducing journey times, they would increase the number of jobs that were accessible to local people, or increase the potential workforce able to access major employment sites, or create thousands of new jobs. There was no evidence of measurable economic benefit from these." (Impact of Roads², p. 6)
- "These studies demonstrate convincingly that the economic value of a scheme can be overestimated by the omission of even a small amount of induced traffic." (Department of Transport¹, 1994, page iii)



If a local authority decides to try to reduce car use rather than build roads, then it puts in alternative transport options to ensure mobility is still available. It also concentrates services and housing so that people can get around by foot and bicycle more easily. This is the opposite of what Leicester and Leicestershire are proposing in their Strategic Growth Plan⁸.

In fact, road building causes land development that encourages car-dependence and use.

- "...road building was associated with a highly car-dependent pattern of land development. Increased road capacity was 'consumed' in the form of housing developments in the countryside, from which the vast majority of trips were by car" (Impact of Roads², p. 7)
- "Road schemes were also associated with development of business parks and retail parks, generating large numbers of vehicle movements, and causing serious congestion. These sites included businesses and retailers that would be better located in a town center, where they would be more accessible by public transport, cycling and walking." (Impact of Roads², p. 7)

As the number of empty shops show, Leicester city centre is struggling with businesses moving elsewhere or ceasing to exist. Road building which encourages the development of more out of city businesses is unlikely to help with this - and prioritising cars over other forms of transport encourages out of town development.

There are solutions: car use can be managed instead of catered for. Public and active transport can be prioritised resulting in a happier, healthier and cleaner Leicester.