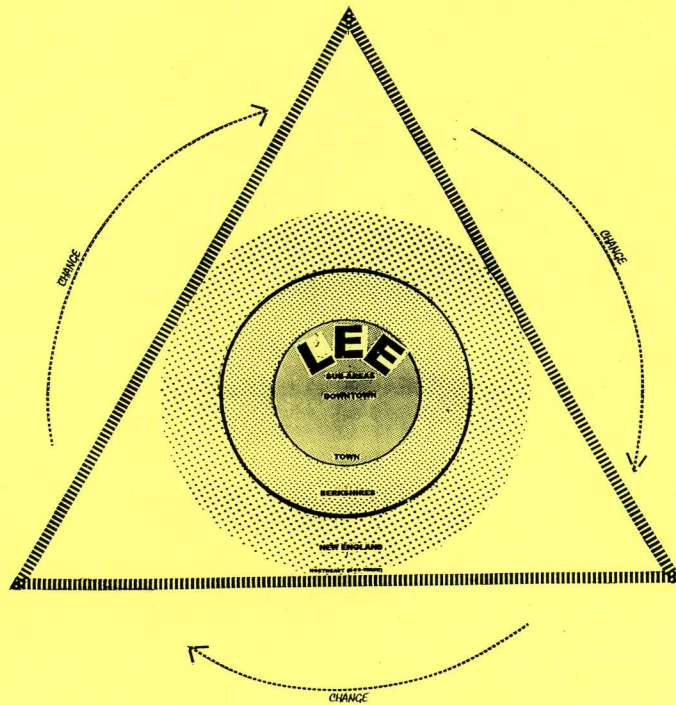


ANALYSIS

MANMADE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

(Vehicular circ/park, Pedestrian, Space, Landuse, Structures, Special)



EXISTING CIRCULATION

INTRODUCTION TO CIRCULATION SYSTEMS

In this section of the information-gathering phase, we analyze existing "circulation"-- the actual and desired ways that different people do/need move near, to, through, or about Lee, and the historical morphology, problems and opportunities entailed. This includes vehicular modes (driving, parking, service); pedestrian modes (by walks, hard and green activity space); and alternate transportation modes (bus, railroad, plane). They are important as means or ends of town activity. Different scales of circulation, ranging from the "external context" through the "internal town", are shown of interrelated concern. (Such analysis is an abstraction of circulation per se, focusing percisely on the essential functions of connection, movement, access, and activity expanse-- with implied relations to other analysis-categories considered in synthesis).

The format below begins with various large-scale circulation situation that we call 'external' circulation forces: the existing contextual (demographic related) New England/Ny interstate and Berkshire regional roadway systems that bring trucks and autos to and through and about Lee. Then we focus 'internally' at the local scale: first at the general force and structure of circulation within the downtown as a whole and the effects of a serious overall vehicular/pedestrian conflict; then we give analysis of the separate modes in more detail. Conclusionary remarks then follow. The entailed text, maps and photos are different yet compatable expressions of the same existing situation: circulation proves to be Lee's most important problem and opportunity at this time. Understanding will ultimately help designers to propose improved, harmonious circulation (in concert with other categorical aspects) within whole proposals.

CONTEXTUAL TRAFFIC SITUATION

As described in the introduction and so powerfully expressed in the location map, Lee is at the busy crossroads of both north/south (rts 7,20) and east/west (Mass pike and/or rt 20) routes serving local, Berkshire County regional, and New England/NY/Interstate needs. On one hand, this context makes Lee blessed with accessibility and regional Berkshire proximity for residents and a variety of actual or potential visitors. On the other hand it results in the excessive and chaotic downtown traffic problem and pedestrian conflict (as detailed in the analysis and downtown map below). Much of the traffic passes thru downtown by necessity, but doesn't stop or contribute positively-- for want of a regional traffic-bypass and reorganization of the downtown circulation and space. It is important to understand Lee in terms of these external circulation forces, both the positive ones to be harnessed, and the negative ones to be diverted, before we consider the internal revitalization of downtown. For our purposes here it suffices to delineate between several sorts of external traffic as relate to their different contextual 'scales' that present problems and opportunity, as follows:

- 1) **INTERSTATE EXTRA-REGIONAL THRU TRAFFIC** (negative impact) Includes general transportation, major trucking, and most interestingly the seasonal tourist traffic that pours through Lee untapped (often multiple times per trip as they occupy the region), rarely stopping except stop for a break, meal or overnight stay (mostly on Housatonic street). This traffic presents opportunity for Lee to tap a very broad seasonal tourist flow that now doesn't stop, but only cuts through or near Lee, plus tap additional degree of general patrons year round. (To what 'degree' is possible and/or desirable is an issue of debate). (The Berkshires is described by tourist trade as "equidistant from Boston and Ny City"; Lee is centrally located within the Berkshires). The remaining interstate truck and negative-impact transportation is a problem that worsens, needing to have its effect minimized in Lee or the volume diverted from downtown. All extra-regional scale traffic can be itemized geographically:

East-West-North: Connecting Boston (Worcester or Springfield) and Albany (& northward) must cut through Lee. (Pike, rt20/Main St).
East-west: Connecting Boston westward to NY (or cross country) may cut by Lee, or elect a quick stop (typically Housatonic Street, but not downtown) as a break from pike last or first stop at border wishing a last or temporary stop on the pike before heading deeper interstate. (pike, rt 20)
North-South: Connecting Connecticut, and Vermont or Canada. sometimes cut through or by Lee. (rt 7, 20)

- 2) **REGIONAL AREA THRU TRAFFIC** (+/- impact): includes commuters, shoppers and truck traffic traveling between Pittsfield and Great Barrington, with limited stops in Lee. (Includes also the surrounding Berkshire County towns). In turn, some workers and occasional shoppers from Lee travel outward. (rt 102, 7). In this are potential patrons, but now constitutes a major disruption.
- 3) **SUBREGIONAL TRAFFIC** ("To or thru" Lee; +/- impact): includes residents from Lenox and Stockbridge and outer Lee, now use Lee as subregional shopping center (eg Price Chopper) year round but especially in summer. Some people from those areas also work in Lee. Reciprocally, some Lee people visit or commute to work in Lenox and Stockbridge as well.
- 4) **LOCAL TRAFFIC** (+/- impact; "To, thru, about the downtown or periphery hills"): include people who live, work, shop, worship, socialize in downtown or vicinity. Itemized below.

THE OVERALL EXISTING DOWNTOWN VEHICULAR/PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION CONFLICT

The contextual forces of traffic described above translate dramatically within downtown Lee (our target area) into unacceptable local vehicular/pedestrian conflict-- with negative effect on people that live, work, shop, recreate, pass thru Lee, and a dissuasion of desirable potential visitors. It is immediately apparant upon initial visit, and reinforced with time spent in Lee, that the downtown's dual role as "place" (for 'being') & as "circulation/transportation corridor" (for 'passage') is in contradiction. Traffic of all kinds simply overrun the town at the expense of both vehicular and pedestrian needs-- and this is Lee's most signifigant design concern. This problem should be appreciated from all circulation points of view in terms of being inefficent, unsafe, prohibitive and unattractive: for those doing different kinds of driving, parking, and servicing, and especially for limiting of all kinds pedestrian activity (needing walkways, hard space and green space), and subsequently creating a dampened town image and economy. Beyond the immediate observational evidence of local vehicular/pedestrian disfunction (see photographs), transportation records show that Lee has a higher than average and therefore intolerable accident rate, indicative of the combination of obsolete physical design and historically increasing traffic flow patterns within the limited size human-scale environment. The pyschological sensation of danger alone is an ominipresent discomfort, and prophetic of circulation as a fundamental town ailment that will increasingly threaten the quality of Lee's future.

Lee's existing patterns of driving, parking, and walking are often important as "isolate" activities, but even more often are "interactive" activities, with a sequential pattern of all movement modes engaged by all people at different times. Therefore there is need in Lee for design that considers all origin/destination scenarios-- the pedestrian and vehicular movement systems should be understood not only as separate systems but together as a unified system. Since analysis shows strong failing in Lee on both counts, there should be accounting in proposals for both 'individual' (complete-in-itself) and 'interrelated' functions. Streets and walkways are the lifelines of Lee, and when lifelines are so stressed, cross-circuited, misconnected, severed-- the health of the town as a whole, in its many physical and human aspects, is in jeopardy. (The analogy to balanced physiological circulation holds). Handeling the thru-traffic, providing appropriate in-town driving, parking, service, the desirable range pedestrian walking and outdoor activity-- and their interrelation with each other, with buildings, areas, and resources-- would constitute a healthy circulation system.* Yet beyond establishing a healthy system where conflicts are merely resolved, there is hope that pedestrian and vehicular forces are brought together in creative tension to transcend to the level of a "truely synergistic" circulation system, with enhanced quality of all movent for all town life, as one part of a complete revitalization.

VEHICULAR: THE EXISTING DOWNTOWN GRID-STRUCTURE OF STREETS AND DRIVING

Lee's overall street pattern, befitting a classic mill town, is a neighborhood-scale hierarchial grid, overlaid upon the moderately varied topography. (See "landform analysis" section for a revealing structural/topographic overlay and also the "landuse analysis" section for ordinatality diagram). Lee's grid is set on north/south axis and consists of four north/south streets, including Main Street as the central spine, and five east-west streets. These streets originally determined the order of Lee's structures, spaces, walkways, parking, and general areas, and facilitated growth of town and the traffic thru it. The human-scale of Lee's grid was appropriate to internal town circulation needs of yesterday, but is overstressed today by externally generated vehicular volume and speed, along with parking (and pedestrian) conflict. Still, it is fundamentally the most sound, relevant, efficient, and ever-inevitable geometry for handling driving and much parking and walking in Lee, and preserves the towns essentially humane character: It has straightforward functionality, immediate clarity of an unarbitrary order and direction (unifying all diversity within it), it has distributive hierarchy, simplicity in assimilating many kinds of movement; and there is adequate space within or supplementary to the grid for enacting circulation improvements within or external to it (ie a bypass), consistent with grid forces and scale. (It holds clues to determining future changes and stabilities). Lee proposals should therefore recognize the integral value and of this grid for Lee, and not needlessly violate it in addressing circulation problems. Additional notes regarding the grid, paraphrased from other analysis sections of this study, are as follows:

Regarding town layout: the grid's rationality and calculated proportion are true to Lee's industrial heritage-- depicting a pragmatic, unarbitrary Cartesian civilization carved in the biomorphic wilderness. Its comprehensive pattern and scale enforces the boundaries of the town within, while its compass alignment gives geographic orientation outward to the world. The scale of this grid also relates to other kin N.E. mill towns (eg Turnersfalls).

Regarding landuse-- the grid creates n/s & e/w polarities within its unified field, to activate the town's planal area coincidental with use-polarities: (e/w:) Main Street is a spine of which westward is larger scale commercial landuse and eastward smaller scale residential landuse; between, Main Street is a spine of "middle American" scale. (n/s:) Northward the town is private working neighborhood vs southward public ceremonial upscale. Between these n-s ends, Main Street's fixed horizontality allows a gradient of structure, density, and multiple (commercial/municipal/religious) uses, unified spatially between the extreme uses of the streets ends. The grid therefore is a conceptual indexing of landuses made physical-- a subdued but effective ordering device. Also, (to use Norberg-Schultz's terminology) the lines of streets coherently mark "movement places" for a patchwork of "being places"-- and the net as a whole marks the expansive stable "total-place".

Regarding climate: the grid's compass alignment depicts further orientation through the directional climatic cycles of sunrise, sunset, seasonal wind changes. It also gives rise to polarities of micro-climatic environments "northside"/"westside"/"eastside"/"southside" at building sides and street sides/ends (with human significance noted by Christopher Alexander).

Regarding landform-- the fixed horizontality of grid allows the vertical topographic change to be enhancingly experienced and cross-experienced by the driver (and pedestrian), thus revealing a further sense of special identity to the parts and whole of town: feeling with anticipation the 'dynamic rise and fall and climatic ends' of Main Street, 'riding the ridge' of High Street, 'descending the terraces' from the residential streets to the river; engaging the 'valley feel' of railroad street. The distinct physical character of places are also enforced by different landuses noted above: for one example, the "high enclosed" landform character of northend and the "low open" landform character of the south end dramatize and enforce, respectively, the private working neighborhood vs the public larger commercial node. * Any changes or additions to the grid's streets/buildings/spaces should carefully consider this topography.

Regarding history: The grid is a formidable if not Platonic archetype, universally entrenched in human history. It survives the onslaught of contrived rival planning models of recent decades. ((One should heed the record of failures in much urban design and site development of recent decades where contrived non-grid orders were attempted. The grid reigns supreme in the test of time of urban design from the newtowns of Ancient Greece through the Americanisms of colonialism, industrialization, modern urbanization, suburbanization, and revivalist (Krier-esque) postmodernism. Its fundamentalness makes it experientially operate properly below the level of intrusive obviousness-- we know the grid it a priori and it does not distract from our environmental consciousness and functions. Deviational design orders, when successful (Eg certain romantic efforts), usually have their place only as complementary subsystems within a larger urban/regional grid order)).

In conclusion: * The grid in Lee, when problems of circulation are corrected, can entail and perpetuate form/function/culture/nature and human rationality harmonized.