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PLANNING FOR PUBLIC TOILETS

PART 1: MACRO LEVEL: : A CITY WIDE TOILET HIERARCHY

EXPLANATION

This unit teaches that public toilets should be seen as an integral component of city planning, and not as an add-on provided with little consideration of the spatial, social or design aspects of the city. The Unit is in 3 Parts. First, the city-wide 'macro' level of provision, then the 'meso' district level of urban design and toilet siting level and last, but not least, the 'micro' level of more detailed toilet block design issues is outlined later on. Each of the three components is illustrated by a PowerPoint presentation.

Related project work may be based upon looking at a city as a whole. For example in Singapore it would involve mapping out an overall outline of a city-wide (macro) hierarchy of toilet provision; then identifying the best location for one toilet block at district (meso) level within this hierarchy and giving reasons for the choices made: and thirdly drawing up a draft internal layout plan for an individual toilet block at the detailed (micro) level.

In each Part, there are a few pages of guidance, followed by an 'optional' fuller account of how it might work in practice for you to read if you wish, and therefore I have not provided a long list of additional reading. I also refer to other documents, such as Revisions to the British Standards BS6465 'Sanitary Installations' on 'how many' toilets are needed, and also other toilet papers including one on toilet hygiene (on disc). There is also a summary list of points at the start, as set out below.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS AT CITY WIDE TOILET STRATEGY LEVEL

Public toilets should be provided in:

- All main public transport termini and stations and major car parks
- Central areas, and in all district centres, and local shopping centres
- All parks, allotments, urban farms and leisure areas
- At main junctions and by post offices in all suburban areas
- Out of town developments in office, industrial and retail parks
- In all villages over 5000 population and every 3 miles along main roads
- User consultation and public participation should shape toilet policy making
- In summary toilet 'hotspots' should be identified and concentrated upon

A toilet strategy, an overall spatial plan setting out the hierarchy, location and distribution of public toilets, should be provided for every local authority as part of mainstream planning policy development. This is the fundamental starting part for public toilet provision.

Suggested project work: Try and identify 'toilet hotspots' where public toilets should be located in the city, town or administrative area, you are studying. Develop, in draft form at least, perhaps as a tracing paper overlay over a city map, or on computer, a draft hierarchy map (and see PowerPoint for general idea of how to do it).

INTRODUCTION

Public toilet provision should be seen as a strategic, high-level urban spatial policy, as part of the 'normal' work of city planning departments, and as a key component alongside other economic, social and urban design considerations. In reality, public toilet provision often dealt with as a separate disconnected function, administered by technical departments who have little communication with strategy policy departments, with social user needs, or with higher level government policy. Which department manages your toilets?

But policies relating to the location, distribution and design of public toilets have knock-on effects for the whole urban area. If the government wants to encourage people to leave their cars at home and use public transport then there is a need to provide public toilets at the main transport termini, such as bus stations and railway stations. Likewise if there is a priority on creating accessible, urban environments, particularly for those with disabilities, then it is important to provide adequate and accessible toilet provision co-ordinated to meet people's needs. Many people are discouraged by going out for long journeys because of 'the bladder's leash', that is they need the reassurance that they can find a toilet when they need one. Whilst there has been a great deal of emphasis upon 'disabled toilets' there has not been enough attention given to the needs of everyone else, many of whom are 'dis-enabled' by lack of public toilets. Toilets are very important to tourists too, for 'a nation is judged by its toilets': they are the first thing a person needs on arriving in a country or new city. What are yours like?

Public toilets need to be seen as a major contributory factor in creating famous cities, not as a drain on resources, but as a reflection of civic pride and modernity. Good toilets raise the quality and economic level of an area, for as the Americans say, 'bathrooms mean business'. It is important to 'raise consciousness' of the importance of public toilets, as 'the missing link' that contributes towards creating sustainable, accessible, prosperous and attractive cities. We cannot think about creating a toilet hierarchy unless high status and respect is given to the topic of public toilets to start with!

But government officials and policy makers often appear confused about what is needed. One of the big questions everyone always asks is, 'How many toilets should be provided? And where should they be located?' These questions cannot be answered just by a fixed set of mathematical 'quantitative' standards, an element of professional judgment, which takes into account qualitative factors, such as social needs and geographical constraints need to be taken into account. However, I have included current British toilet standards as one set of current standards. Therefore in each section I have added some more discursive, illustrative sections, that are 'optional' but may give you a better 'feel' for what is needed.

When developing guidance on the location, distribution and design of public toilets, it is vital to see the problem in terms of a hierarchy of levels of provision,. These might range from, for example, from supplying large facilities in central locations serving large numbers of people converging on the main transport termini; to the distribution of a strategic sprinkling of smaller facilities in local neighbourhood centres serving a smaller catchment area; and 'down' to the installation of individual facilities in less frequented areas where nonetheless the passing motorist or pedestrian desperately need a toilet. This paper seeks to give guidance on these issues.

CITY WIDE POLICY AT MACRO LEVEL: A TOILET HIERARCHY

In developing toilet policy, we need to consider the distribution and location of toilets over the area in question, rather than just focusing down on individual toilets in isolation. It is important to assess the 'catchment area' that each toilet is covering, in terms of geographical 'radius', numbers of people, and the types of local land uses and development, for example, retail or leisure, that generate toilet demand. The city centre is likely to be the main focus of the city's business and retail activities, the location of many of the main bus and railway stations, and the main part of the city that tourists and visitors are likely to see. Indeed the city centre railway station or bus station is often the gateway to the rest of the city, and so it is very important that adequate toilets are provided as part of the overall transportation strategy for the city. This is particularly so in European cities, where historically the main transport routes radiate out from the centre, and where, unlike American cities, there is still a high concentration of office, business and residential land uses, often at high densities creating large concentrations of human beings within a relatively small area. You need to think about how applicable this approach is to your cities, where perhaps there is not just main centre, but several thriving centres that have been developed in recent times.

Whatever the country or city in question, it seems from research that many local authorities (local municipalities, government bodies) have no overall toilet strategy or plan, and little awareness of differential levels of need, resulting in a very fragmented policy situation. Such authorities have inherited a hotchpotch of toilets which were built at different times for reasons. Perhaps they have simply built a new toilet where a piece of land has become available with little consideration of need.

Some local authorities, in the UK for example, do have a spatial toilet strategy, but this is not to provide new toilets in ideal locations, but rather to 'rationalise' and reduce the number of toilets available rather than to plan for a wider coverage and increase in facilities to meet the demands of modern travel patterns. Toilets are an extremely 'local' issue, there is no point in closing some toilets to provide money to improve other toilets 5 miles away, as people need them 'here' and 'now' not miles away. For example, as shown on the PowerPoint, in our research study of the Bristol area (South West England) we found that one local county had a location policy based upon putting toilets into three categories, strategic (on main roads and in central areas); tourist (by the seaside and other attractions); and local (villages and local centres). In the course of the cost-cutting rationalisation process the local ones were most likely to be closed, as they were seen as the least important, but from a sustainability viewpoint these were the most important to local people - hence the many complaints when local toilets were closed. Local facilities linked to district shopping centres are particularly important for the elderly who cannot travel far, for those with children, those with dependent on public transport, and tourists who may have no idea of the geography of the area. This aspect relates, already, to the 'meso' level of toilet provision at district level, for every city is made up of a collection of local areas, which are like a cell structure which makes the whole.

HOW MANY PUBLIC TOILETS ARE NEEDED?

Toilet Population Ratio

British Toilet Association members have recommended that 'a local authority should provide no fewer than 1 cubicle per 500 women and female children and one cubicle and one urinal per 1100 men, and no fewer than one unisex cubicle for use for people with disabilities per 10,000 population and no fewer than one unisex nappy changing facility per 10000 people dwelling in the area. The relevant 'population' in question should also include commuters, tourists and visitors as well as residents. This standard should be used in calculating facilities relative to town centres, shopping streets, railway passenger needs, bus stations, car parks etc etc.

SEE TABLES FROM REVISED BRITISH STANDARD BS6465 'Sanitary Installations' as to levels of provision, relating to both on street 'public toilets' and 'off street' private 'away from home toilets, in offices, shops, public buildings and so forth.

MACRO LEVEL TOILET DISTRIBUTION HIERARCHY (Further description to illustrate the principles)

City Centres

All town centres should have the highest level of toilet provision, and the widest range of facilities as these have the biggest catchment area, with at least one 'toilet palace' as described in my book (Greed,2003, see reference list at end) covering all sorts of disabled and specialist needs as well as full provision for women as well as men. A survey of should be undertaken of demand in relation to 'time planning' day, evening and night-times, and to the differences in toilet need from different sorts of people. It is important to identify 'toilet magnets' such as shopping centres, tourist attractions, parks etc. This standard should exclude all off street public toilets, such as found in shops, pubs and malls as these are not open out of hours. Every city centre should provide at least one well signed posted, 24 hour block of toilets. This should be placed as centrally as possible in terms of pedestrian flow so that people get used to the idea that they will 'always' find such a toilet in any town they visit. All railway stations, bus stations and transport termini should provide free toilets, which are fully accessible and not down steps. At least some toilets should be available on a 24 hour basis, for women as well as men, because, they too are out and about in the evenings travelling, working and at leisure.

In addition, off-street toilets should be provided in association with retail development for modern shopping malls and large out of town retail developments. For example British Standards 6465 requires 1 male toilet, 1 male urinal, 1 unisex toilet for the disabled, and 2 female toilets for every 1000-2000 square metres of retail floor space (and so forth in proportion to total net sales area). Please see the 2006 BS standards revision.

The ideal goal should always be toilets that people can gain access to directly from the street without having to enter private premises. There are major debates about public or private, and on-street or off-street provision, as management issues are always central to achieving success. In the transitional phase, whilst new toilet construction is underway, all existing restaurants, cafés and pubs should be required to make their toilets available to the general public (Lobby, Lift, Lavatory, 3 'L's principle). A local tax (rates) allowance would be given for this, and additional funding would be given to provide better access and disabled toilets. The challenge and cost of providing disabled access, as to be required under the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 and 2005 (the DDA), have been a bone of contention among small business owners and shopkeepers

so this proposal will help solve two problems at once. 'Shop improvement grants' along the lines of housing improvement grants would be a fair way to deal with this issue.

Many European towns have long rows of shops extending out from the centre serving adjacent residential districts and these might be served with toilets at every half mile along the main road. In Shanghai, for example, there is a very high level of toilet provision along these lines. It should not be assumed that 'everyone' can use the toilets in private premises, such as bars, restaurants, shops, particularly if they are not open. As shown in the PowerPoint, distinct public toilets should be provided for each specific public facility.

High levels of provision will generally be achieved according to the toilet population ratio, resulting in both large blocks in central locations and a good distribution of smaller facilities. The minimum facility that should be provided is to be based upon a common American highway-side solution of a small block comprising 4 Ladies cubicles, plus two cubicles and two urinals for the Gents, with each 'side' including one accessible larger 'disabled' compartment, plus one unisex and multi-use toilet available 24 hours. (Similar to the New Zealand one on the PowerPoint). But the central area should contain, what I call a 'toilet palace' a much larger toilet block with facilities for everyone. In areas where there is a high level of female employment the proportion of Ladies facilities would be increased as 80% of workers in the central area offices are women, whereas in some industrial and sporting locations higher male provision may be needed. In all cases the proportion provided should be based upon the demographic and employment surveys undertaken.

With higher levels of provision, based on a predictable pattern of likely location people will get to used to 'what to look for' and be able to find the toilets even in a strange town. Once people know they can rely on finding toilets, and that they will be open and usable, it is likely that the 'missing millions' will venture out of their houses and many will travel further afield and for longer periods, thus increasing the economic and social viability of many areas and reducing car use and creating a healthier environment for all.

District Level

(Discussed further in Part 2). In summary, at the district and local neighbourhood level toilets should be provided in conjunction with all local shopping centres, car parks and transport termini, according to the toilet population ratio. In deciding 'how many where' the survey process should help identify 'hotspots' where toilets might best be located. A combination of a parade of shops, significant local public facilities such as pubs, take aways (hot food stalls and shops), churches, clubs, pubs, bus stops, signify a potential 'toilet hotspot' Do not assume that just anyone can use the toilet facilities in schools, hospitals, libraries, hotels and so forth. With increase security fears it is nowadays often very difficult just to walk into a building and use the toilet.

In Between Areas

Many areas are not particularly busy, central or exciting. Towns and cities are composed of all sorts of 'in-between' urban areas, over 30% of housing stock is to be found on council estates of various types and at least another 40% comprises 'suburbs', and there are vast areas of spread out industrial estates, warehouses and docklands. These are the areas where delivery drivers, bus drivers, postal workers, market traders, health workers, domestic workers on their way to work, schoolchildren may all need public toilets. In such areas where there are no natural nodes or focus points but 'just houses' or 'just roads and buildings', a spatial strategy should be developed that

there are small toilet blocks located at key junctions along main spine roads, especially by bus stops, the exact amount being based upon survey of likely numbers of users. However, local residents should not simply have a toilet imposed upon them, full participation should be encouraged, with offers of rate reductions, and payment for keeping an eye on the toilet. Rather than building new toilet blocks it may be possible to arrange for local business, churches, mosques, temples, village halls to make their toilets available to the public, but this is a 'difficult' issue and not ideal if they are likely to have restricted opening hours.

Whether your cities are high-density, and high-rise, or low-density, low-rise and spread out, you need to develop an appropriate toilet strategy according to local cultural, climatic, and city-form considerations.

Less Built Up Areas and Countryside Areas

There are many areas of open space, including parks large and small, playing fields and landscaped areas. Some have never had decent toilets particularly for women and this must be remedied. Just 'going behind a hedge' is not an option with increased numbers of people visiting these areas. Public parks may have been equipped with public toilets but some have been closed owing to vandalism. Restoring provision, but with better supervision, and the return of park keepers would improve such areas. Making the sports 'pavilion' or changing room toilets available to both women and men might not only improve toilet provision but also ameliorate the vandalism problems associated with such buildings that are often seen as male territory and treated accordingly. Some very useful toilets are already located on the edges of parks and common land, available to passing motorists, and to tourists and hikers. Such toilets need attendants as much as more central urban locations to avoid 'undesirables' moving in and vandalism taking place.

Toilets in the 'real countryside' are even more of a problem. Opening up the toilets at a village hall or church to passing travellers might solve the toilet problem in more rural locations. In our research we found that some rural local authorities were keen to enter into agreements with local shops, halls and cafes to make their toilets available to the public or to maintain adjacent local toilet facilities. Where there are no settlements but miles and miles of moorland or fields, rural planners for the area should draw up a spatial strategy of distributing public toilet blocks at key intersections of footpaths, at scenic spots and other honey pot areas. Local farming diversification policies should include tax allowances for farmers who provide rural toilets for hikers and walkers. At least one small toilet block should be provided in all settlements over 5000 population, a figure which is used in France as the minimum for the provision for various public amenities. Local planning authorities do have the power to provide toilets in national parks, but the number and distribution is not specified.

Attention should be given to ensuring that at least one small toilet block is provided on the main road approach to out of town business park locations, possibly with a short term lay by, as people can spend hours driving around trying to find decentralised offices and have no guarantee of toilet relief upon arrival at their destination. Toilets should also be provided at least every 5 miles along main A roads, indeed many routes have a range of toilets already spread along them dating from various epochs, albeit many are now closed. Toilets should be provided at least every 35 miles along motorways and as stated at all stations and termini. Toilets should be provided at

every 3 miles along cycle routes. Cycle parking facilities with toilets, good washing and drying facilities, and left luggage lockers should be provided for cyclists in all town centres. At least one basic block should be provided for every car park of over 100 cars, with the toilet population ratio applied to all car parks.

In practice all this will not lead to 'toilets everywhere' but good coverage might be achieved by a strategic distribution of toilet blocks which meet, for example, the needs of car park users and also provide relief for passing motorists and pedestrians. Toilets must be located in open, visible locations with good signage, and served by accessible pathways and routeways. Even in off street locations such as shopping malls, a free standing toilet block gives more flexibility and more external surveillance, but on the other hand blocks that are integrated in with retail units give a greater sense of 'normality' and savings are made in wall construction.

Information about toilets should be given on road signs on all main roads (stating distance to next toilet), and mobile phone text information, and I Pod services should provide toilet information in the same way they provide taxi and hotel information. All road maps, tourist leaflets, TV travel programmes, and guidebooks should also provide toilet information as a matter of course. In terms of hierarchy not all public toilets will provide the same number of facilities in every location. Rather, heavily used central locations will be provided with toilet palaces with every lavatorial amenity, whereas every small local area will have at least a basic toilet block.

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