

Steven Burgess

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Ltd

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Complete Streets

Engineer, Street Maker, Story Teller



Steven Burgess is Australasia's leading voice regarding people-focused urban movement systems and places. His expertise is based on 30 years' experience as an engineer and urban strategist. His passion is for creating cities for people that can be sustained by vital local economies.

His gift is to be able to engage creatively and personally with any audience to help them understand and make better city-making choices

About me

I am a Story Teller

A significant part of my time is spent helping elected Councils, government executives and other decision makers come to terms with changes in contemporary city making. I have developed a gift for generating genuine excitement about change in some generally conservative audiences. This has given rise to authorities making more courageous long term decisions for a better City, and being excited to tell their story to the public. I am privileged to have been able to tell city making stories all over the world. I have also engaged with many sections of the media on many city making topics.



I am a Street Champion

I have been championing streets as the life blood of Cities my whole career. This led to me being commissioned by the Australian Public Works Engineering Association to author “Complete Streets - Guidelines to Urban Street Design” which was published in 2010. Since then I have delivered well over 100 street making masterclasses for different audiences in different countries. My theme of reintroducing the “Lost Art of Street Design” has allowed participants to see beyond road-making (infrastructure to save time) to street-making which is infrastructure where we spend time and create cities.



I am a Consulting Engineer

Engineers are good problem solvers and I have spent the last several years since the publication of “Complete Streets” assisting engineers, planners and designers, to use this problem-solving ability to make better cities. That is, not concentrating on the wrong problems (sprawl and congestion busting), but the right ones (vital active sustainable urban places).

My gift as an engineer has been to expand my thinking so engineers and planners are not just an excellent cog, but to make part of an excellent city making machine.

I Understanding Economics

I studied economics as a major in my MBA which has been of enormous benefit in helping government authorities and investors understand the economics of movement around a city. It is well accepted (although not well understood) that roads can save time and money. What is not understood is the benefit to city economics of walking instead of driving, of interacting instead of just moving and of course ultimately, stopping staying interacting and spending in our centres.

Key Achievements

- Hobart Transport Vision Implementation
- Complete Streets - Guidelines to Urban Street Design (principal author).
- Auckland Street Design Guidelines, Auckland New Zealand. (contributing researcher and author, stakeholder engagement)
- Global Street Design Guidelines (contributing author, reviewer).
- Al Ain Surface Transport Plan, Abu Dhabi Department of Transport, UAE (Placemaking, parking, street design, stakeholder engagement)
- Hobart Retail Precinct Revival Strategy (street design and economics, tactical urbanism, stakeholder engagement)
- International Speaker and Trainer: Walk 21, Bogota, Walk 21 Calgary, Walk 21 Sydney, Future Cities Summit Dubai, NACTO Designing Cities San Francisco, Street Design Toronto, Future of Streets Auckland, Street Design Down Under Boston, Lost Art of Street Design Brisbane, Sydney Melbourne Adelaide & Perth. (Complete list available)

Transport and City Shaping Challenges

The developed and developed world has got itself into a bit of a mess when it comes to integrating transport and land use to make sustainable cities. The worst part about this is that we are encouraging the developing world to follow suit. Whilst none of this might be deliberate it is nonetheless true. We have enticed all cultures to believe that there are resources enough for everybody to be able to drive where they want if they build enough infrastructure. This is in spite of the fact we have known for decades that this is not the case. We still can't develop enough momentum behind the idea, that having made an error with private vehicles, that we can't build our way out of it.

The challenge now is to first build capacity in the profession that there are alternatives, then elected representatives, investors and the general public. There needs to be exemplar projects on the ground on all continents that we can export to the world to teach the art of sustainable liveable cities. The 'this won't work in my town' attitude is a reality, but one that is so easily addressed, but we must get started.

The motor car is a symbol of prosperity. People mistakenly judge the wealth of a city on the diversity of car users not the diversity of active and public transport users. What many people don't see of course is the reality behind the glossy picture. Overblown road infrastructure, declining neighbourhoods, increasing health costs and environmental damage are among the many costs in a car city. These costs are well understood, but the story that links the supposed benefits of car based transport to the costs is poorly told, poorly rationalised and badly funded.

Many western countries are now raising their third and fourth generations that missed walkable active and sustainable neighbourhoods. Thus, they deal with disenfranchised communities, obesity, heart disease, economic decline and environmental decay. What makes it so frustrating is the solutions are technically simple. The challenge is to find dynamic storytellers to get our cities back on track, that can inspire leaders to take risks for spectacular multi-generational rewards that will be a real legacy. You don't need to be a genius, you need to be unselfish, empathetic, and brave.

Transport and City Shaping Solutions

For all their complexities, creating great cities is simply about priorities. My philosophy which I have been implementing on the ground throughout my 30+ year career is to balance movement with exchange. Notwithstanding the influence government has on private investment, there is limited public space in our cities with which governments can directly influence cities. Within these spaces there are only two types of activity; movement and exchange. Movement, how we get around, and exchange, which is our social, environmental and economic interaction. Exchange is what cities are for, movement is how we get it to work. Exchange makes us money, movement costs us money.

In modern times, all our intellectual and financial effort regarding movement has been to cater for the movement and storage of cars. This has led to a significant imbalance in our cities as we haven't left enough room for exchange, sufficient that we can make up for the cost of movement. Because of the imbalance, we have too much money going out. Not enough going in. This imbalance must be addressed.

To address this we must understand the makeup of movement and exchange space. We need to clearly define that while roads are movement space, streets are clearly exchange space. They may have car movement in them, but their purpose is to sustain land use and promote exchange. Roads are for saving time, streets are for spending time.

Understanding this subtlety allows professionals to address the symptoms more easily, poor mix of land use, parking oversupply, lack of active transport space, underuse of public transport, poor street design, bad building/street interface. Paired up with a great story teller it puts cities in a position where they can embrace change not fight it and we can again be proud of prosperous, active and sustainable villages, towns and cities.

Career History

Director, Complete Streets Pty Ltd	Current
Principal, Urban Strategy (Aust+NZ), MRCagney	2011 to 2019
Principal, PlaceMaking, Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Limited	2007 to 2011
Director, TTM Consulting (SC) Pty Ltd	2002 to 2007
Principal Engineer, Transport and Access Connell Wagner (now Aurecon)	2000 to 2002
Group Manager, Transport and Planning, City Design, Brisbane City Council	1998 to 2000
Senior Engineer, Transport and Traffic, Maunsell (now AECOM)	1995 to 1998
Traffic and Transport Engineer, Brisbane City Council	1991 to 1995

Qualifications

Bachelor of Engineering, University of Central Queensland;
Master of Business Administration, University of Central Queensland
Registered Professional Engineer, Queensland (RPEQ)

Professional Associations

Member Engineers Australia

Media Experience

My comments in the development of sustainable communities have featured in various media, including:

- ABC Radio National
- ABC Radio, Cairns, Central Qld, Melbourne, Hobart
- 3AW Melbourne
- Australian Financial Review
- NT News, Darwin
- Herald Sun, Melbourne
- Courier Mail, Brisbane
- WIN Television Sunshine Coast
- WIN Television Byron Bay