The path of movement was once as vital to our understanding of the world as our capacity for self-innovation. Streets were cleaned and re-paved with larger flagstones to make movement more easily and less traumatic. Planners were concerned with emphasising the importance and evolution of the city and they designed the street so that was central to this. One-way streets were introduced and the concept of the one-way logic of arterial flow. In the nineteenth century planners proposed the idea that in a modern city it would be better if there was less distance between them, a sort of collective isolation where the separated, freely moving crowd is removed from the space in which it moved. The arrival of the automobile in the early twentieth century brought this plan to a logical head: the street was no longer like the civic park, a place to occupy and mingle in; rather, it became a space of isolated transit, speed and physical danger. In Chicago in the early 1900s, the new freeways and auto clubs began campaigning to give the car greater priority in public streets by making them an inappropriately fast and use of the street.

“One way they did this was to invent a new term of ridicule, and direct that against pedestrians walking in streets. They used a mid-Western American term, ‘Jay’. which was an insult; it meant that you understood that it was not safe and they connected it with ‘walker’ and invented the term ‘Jay walker’ and it was used as a term against pedestrians.” Peter Norton

In Melbourne, Janet McCalman observes in Struggletown, that “The Edwardian working class child grew up in a lively street community that the motor car has since destroyed.” A rich and exclusive public street has been lost on our inner urban streets where horse-drawn carts and pedestrians co-existed. The streets were a source of local activity, characterised by the laughter and shouts of children playing rather than the honking of engines. Much of the design activity of Melbourne’s planners in the latter part of the twentieth century and into new century has been centred around finding ways to rehabilitate the streets for pedestrian use, safety and comfort.

Melbourne’s Bluestone Lounge Room

The footpaths and public spaces of Melbourne have undergone a continuous transformation over its history in terms of occupation and design. Early on, a wide range of amenities were provided for the footpaths, including toles, telephone boxes, light, water fountains and seating. While Melbourne has been blessed with an initial clear and spacious street grid, footpaths across the city are not as generous in space. They have often been developed as convenient spaces rather than comfortable or delightful spaces.

In the 1980s the Melbourne City Council, in response to specific ideas of creating delightful spaces for pedestrians. This approach included planting additional trees and the beginning of a long-standing campaign to Clean the footpaths to create more room. This strategy represented a conscious decision to place pedestrians at the centre of Melbourne’s life. The area around Collins Street was the first of Melbourne’s bluestone footpaths, opened in front of the Oriental Hotel, in Collins Street in the 1950s, would herald an entire cultural shift and the beginning of a long-standing campaign with the footpaths, including additional trees and the beginning of a long-standing campaign to Clear the footpaths to create more room.

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Dr. Michael Trudgeon, Curator

**The street is the river of life of the city, a place where we come together, the pathway of the city.** William Whyte, City, Rediscovering the Centre, 1980

**For many of the histories of pedestrians have been an important factor in shaping our urban environment. Since the days of ancient Athens, city streets and urban plazas have been essential meeting, conversation and activity zones for the general public. The ancient Romans promoted open-air public toilets and seating to enhance the comfort and convenience of their streets. After a period in the twentieth century when the city’s needs were largely overlooked, in the twenty-first century we once again recognise the importance of pedestrian’s needs and look to history as we reconfigure our modern cities to provide greater convenience, comfort and safety for pedestrians, public transport users and light, low-environmental-impact alternative modes of transport.**

The challenge of designing our urban public spaces and transport facilities in ways that rival the natural environment is the challenge of creating an extended, efficiently serviced, comfortable and safe urban realm. From conception and careful urban planning in the 1830s Melbourne’s central business district has been the subject of continual design research and development. Our ancestors have sought to create civilised, comfortable and attractive streets and open urban spaces for the citizens of the city. Euston, 2000

**Rediscovering the Centre, Melbourne:** A City of the Many Ways

**One of the challenges facing the modern city designer is that it is to draw people to use public space, it must compete with the standards of autonomy, efficiency, amenity and comfort set by the private car. We need to find ways to encourage people to come to the city without their cars.** American designer, Richard Buchanan, Fuller, has observed that the automobile has allowed people to expect the same standard of service from their remote and mobile spaces as they have in their homes. This sets the bar for the design of public space planning at a very high level. From this position we may consider the city as a collective urban lounge room, a space potentially as comfortable as your own home but with the benefit of being filled with the presence and creative output of many other people.

The visionary English architect Cedric Price proposed that public spaces and facilities were most valuable when they functioned as opportunities for education, creative expression and interaction. Price believed that, city, public architecture and public facilities could be thought of as valuable generators of innovation and new ideas and information. This position echoes the earlier idea that the city is a temporary adventure and a symbol of what is possible.

**The Footpath and Street in History**

While the form of cities has remained fundamentally consistent for thousands of years, over time they have undergone changes that reflect cultural shifts. For the Greeks, the agora was the heart of the city where the people could come together to participate in public life. The agora meant a place where the people achieved unity, and public space was important in the way we have understood democracy as a debate. The agora, the main public square, acted as the daily meeting place in which Athenian citizens could engage in the political process. This led to the democratic process that we know today. The agora came to represent the image of Rome. Roman public facilities were considered critical to creating any city and essential to a successful civilization. These included public baths, public toilets, drainage and running fresh water. Public life and public participation were crucial to Roman politics and commerce.

In the seventeenth century William Harvey clarified the circulation of blood, created a new model for the healthy and vital city, one based on circulation and freedom of motion. Harvey linked movement and flow with life and health. This created a framework from which he understood the planning and design of such cities.

**The Footpath as Lounge Room**

In addressing the design of the modern city the contemporary urban planners and designers face complex cocktail of demands and competing forces, along with a constantly transforming political landscape. The rise of people coming in isolation and the city is generally confined to the square. The idea of conversation and activity zones for the 20th century we once again recognise the importance of pedestrian’s needs and look to history as we reconfigure our modern cities to provide greater convenience, comfort and safety for pedestrians, public transport users and light, low-environmental-impact alternative modes of transport. We are seeking to create civilised, comfortable and attractive streets and open urban spaces for the citizens of the city. Euston, 2000