

Introduction – Why do we need a Forum for Alternative Belfast

The Belfast we now live and work in has been shaped in recent years by a relatively unconstrained development market and by an approach to infrastructure that privileges the car over the pedestrian. We seem to be losing our city, our streets and our spaces to the imperatives of profit and functionalist regulation.

How can we start to create and envision a city that we can all enjoy: a city that is connected; a city that is open to all; and a city without barriers? We seem to be almost obsessed with barriers and boundaries; not just barriers between the 'traditional' communities, but barriers between the rich and the poor, the city centre and neighbouring communities, and between the institutions of government and the people.

FFB aims to facilitate the development of workable ideas about how Belfast can be developed for all its citizens as well as for visitors. It hopes to encourage debate about how we can influence and affect changes to the built environment. It wants to explore how the mistakes of the past can be addressed and it wants to look imaginatively at opportunities for the future.

Belfast is our city; it's our environment. It is essential that we create and develop a city that is accessible, connected, and safe; a good place to live in and a good place to invest in.

The Forum seeks to affect change to Belfast's built environment. We want to do this by raising awareness and by demonstrating alternative ways that our city can be developed. We are a 'think' tank and a 'do' tank. We offer an independent forum for the discussion and development of ideas about buildings, spaces and the street infrastructure we use every day.

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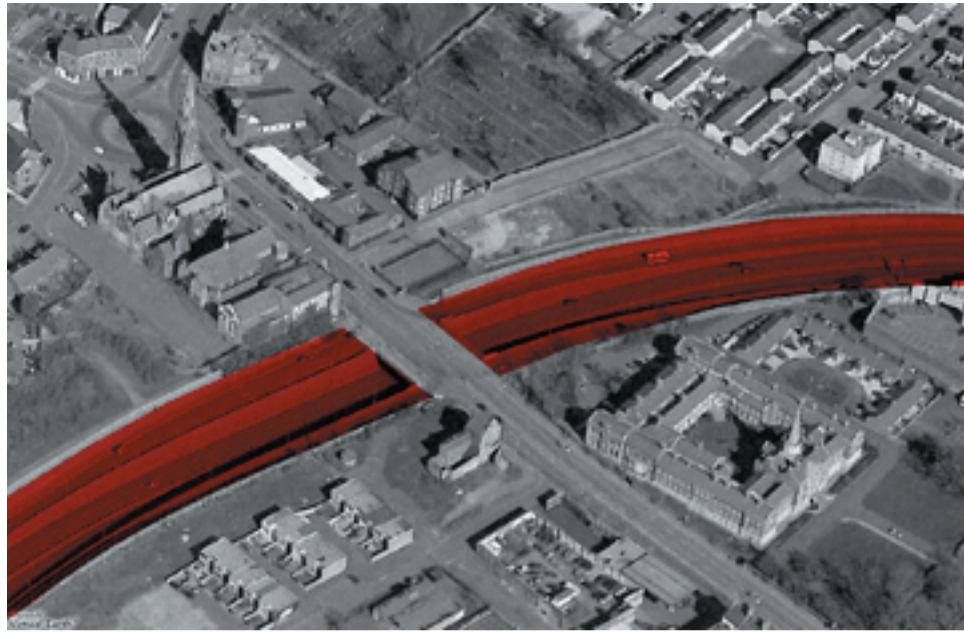
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The Forum includes

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Forum for Alternative Belfast is open to collaboration with other organisations and individuals





the grey doughnut

The grey doughnut of blighted space surrounds almost the entire city; Dublin Road to the south offers a tenuous connection between neighborhoods and the centre. A long planned completion of the 'Inner Box' road, the Bankmore link, threatens this last connection for people on foot.

The city is held on a thread.

To the west huge areas of vacant land are retained unbuilt to accommodate the Westlink, between this and the 'Inner Box' small pockets of housing and buildings feel isolated, like islands in a sea of grey roads.

To the east of the city the river forms a natural break - some cities use rivers and bridges as vital connections, the heart of the city, Belfast however has few bridges and these generate impassable junctions at each end to the pedestrian.

There are no shops or windows in these areas, advertising billboards provide the only visual relief.



Westlink projects

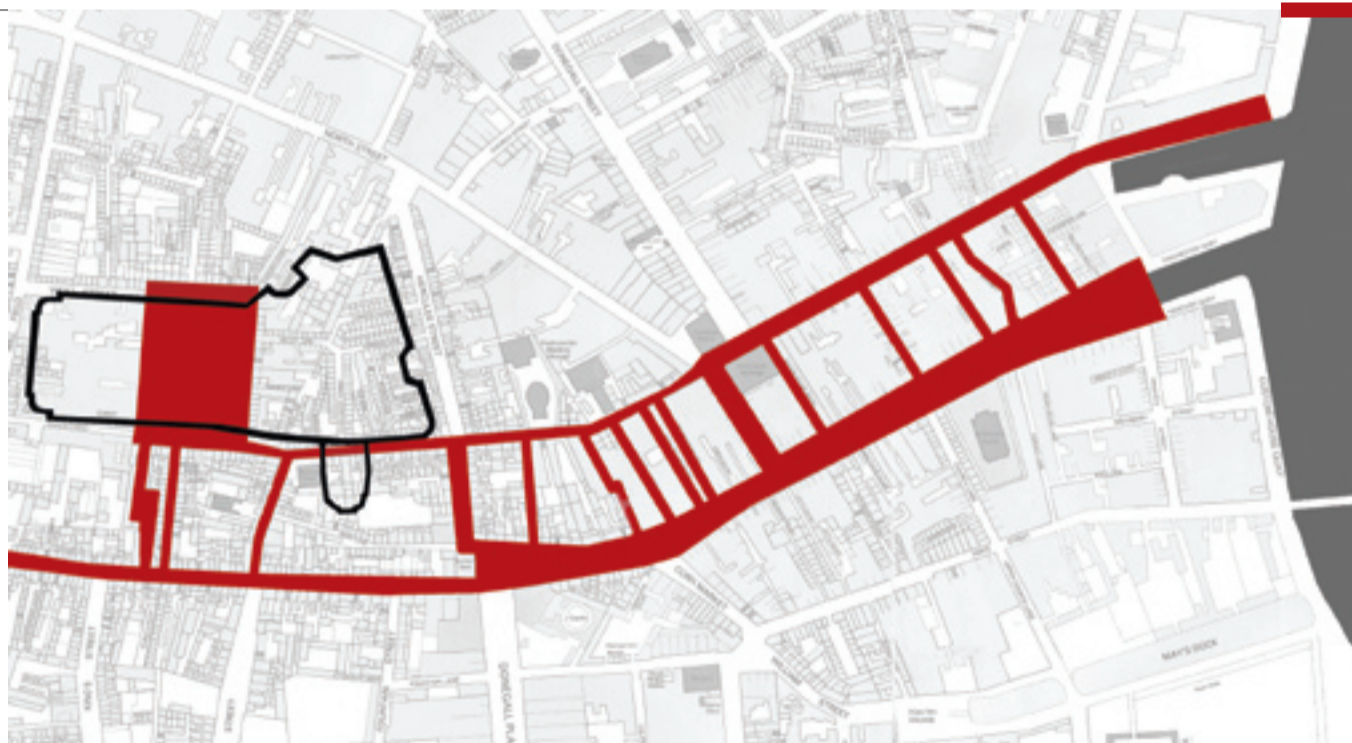
The urban blight of the Westlink can be overcome by a design strategy that is essentially self funding. The slip roads and intersections can be calmed and brought into a humane city scale by building active frontages on the wasted publicly owned ground. Projects such as this, we believe, should be the priority initiative for the city in recessionary times - essentially free but affecting huge improvement to the vitality of the city.

We would suggest similar linkages for many parts of the city. To the east the cross city traffic snarls at a few bridges, the walk from the east is windswept and the recent riverside development offers little in the way of shops, cafes or public buildings that one might call into. We need more bridges - small bridges for local traffic with pedestrian and cycle priority.



City Neighbourhoods - Connected Neighbourhoods

For the last 40 years Belfast has been shaped and re-shaped by both the 'troubles' and by major population shifts. We now have a geography of communities that are disconnected from each other and from the wider city. In addition, a process of change is underway around the inner and central city. New gated communities are emerging with many sitting cheek by jowl with longstanding working class communities. How do the notions of an open city; a connected city; and a sustainable city sit with all of this?



belfast boulevard

The 'Inner box' road has been restyled as a Boulevard, Belfast Boulevard is a nine minute film circling the city and looking at both sides of the road.

Belfast Boulevard is about four kilometres long and has about fourteen shops.

a film by Seamus Harahan and Mark Hockett

Berry Street

Berry Street is in the heart of Belfast's commercial core. Except that it's not really a street - the brick wall enclosure of Castle Court's rubbish compacting yard stamps across the street removing all commercial vitality. But, with an enquiring imagination and with a view to reconnect such lost streets a whole area can be re-invigorated.



Project 20

Reducing vehicle speed is the single most important factor in creating living streets. Project 20 aims to bring down traffic speed to 20mph outside schools and further across our city. A movement is currently spreading across Europe and the UK. We aim to draw inspiration, work with and share knowledge with other organizations.

