

Let's make car ownership illegal



I don't hate cars. Or even the pollution they cause. And it is not because they are the single biggest cause of death for people under 30 in the developed world.

I want to see fewer cars because they are such a waste of resources.

Cars waste raw materials. They waste them when they are made. They waste them when they are used. But the biggest waste comes when they are not being used, and that is most of the time.

Imagine, for a moment, arriving at an airport, going to the car park and then driving away any of the cars which are there. Imagine returning from your meeting to where you left that car and taking another to the station instead. When you get off the train, you take a third car for the last few miles home.

Of course, with a set of skeleton keys and a bit of hot-wiring you could do this today. But imagine being able to do it legally.

In the developed world, and increasingly in the developing world too, cars sit for most of the time on the streets. All those resources - that steel, that plastic, that consumed-energy just sitting there unused. All that investment tied up in stationary objects which are designed for mobility, losing value every day.

If we made their ownership illegal, if we made it possible for all cars to be used by anyone at any time, we would need many fewer of them. We could pay for their use by the hour. We could have pick-up and drop-off points in every street, available for anyone to use. All we would need is an SMS-delivered code to release the immobiliser. The charges would be added to our phone bill.

There are so many advantages. We could make half as many cars as we do today, and use them more efficiently. We would need less land to park them. We could stop manufacturing frivolous vehicles—cars that cost the same as a house or are faster than a light aircraft. Cars would become standardised and ubiquitous, like washing machines. Which is what they are really, the washing machines of the roads. Best of all, there would be no more taxis—and no more taxi drivers haranguing us with their unquestioning certainties.

Of course the car makers would hate it. But who said they should be in charge?

