FROM CONGESTION TO CIRCULATION

Tame traffic congestion with a three-prong approach: strictly limit access driveways along major roads, disperse vehicles on interconnected secondary street systems, and mix land uses closer together to encourage alternatives to the automobile.

Curing traffic congestion is hopeless task when every movement means getting into a car. Spread-out suburban development patterns require us to lug along 2,000 pounds of steel wherever we go, often wasting a half gallon of gas to pick up a quart of milk. The standard answer to congestion, adding more asphalt, has proven to just induce more traffic, so all too soon the wider roads are clogged again.

Uncontrolled access with multiple driveways along major roads leads to traffic tie-ups and more accidents caused by constant turning movements. The road from suburban congestion to smoother circulation involves a movement toward mixed land use patterns and the consistent application of "access management" strategies to keep traffic moving smoothly, increase safety, visually improve the roadway, and avoid expensive road expansion projects.

Minimize Driveways on Major Roads

Overly wide access drives allow unpredictable turning movements, often at unsafe speeds. One narrower entrance (24 feet for two-way) will slow entering vehicles and provide space for street trees and landscaping.

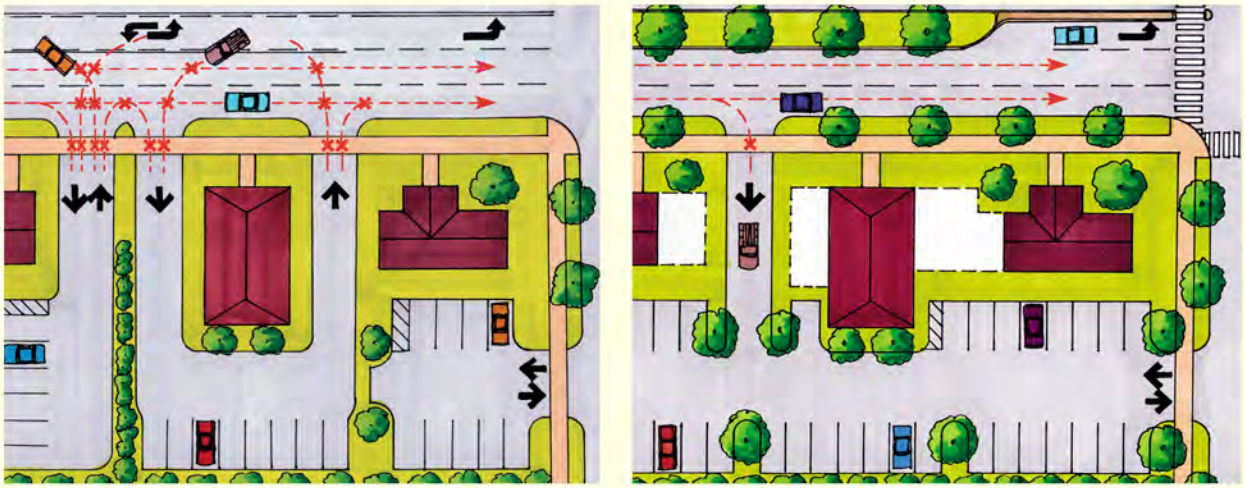
Paired one-way access drives cause multiple curb cuts too close together, lots of traffic conflict points, excessive breaks in the sidewalk, and repetitive enter/exit signs.

- Limit access drives to at most one per parcel unless a traffic analysis or unique conditions fully justify another curb cut.
- Close excess entrances and narrow overly wide driveways during any new site plan approval.
- Share access with neighbors whenever possible.
- Place entrance at the edge of the parcel so driveways can be shared.

A few uses, like gas stations on small sites, may need two driveways to provide through circulation, but third or fourth curb openings, especially those too near an intersection, should be closed and the front landscaped.

These adjacent businesses in Hyde Park share a narrow 16-foot entrance drive between buildings and a common exit onto an existing side road, along with consistent stone walls and the bulk of the parking to the rear.

Landscaped Medians allow sheltered left hand turns, provide safe refuge for pedestrian crossings, and create beautiful boulevards. Approximately two-thirds of accidents involve left turns. Raised medians in suburban areas have significantly fewer accidents than central two-way left turn lanes or undivided arterials.



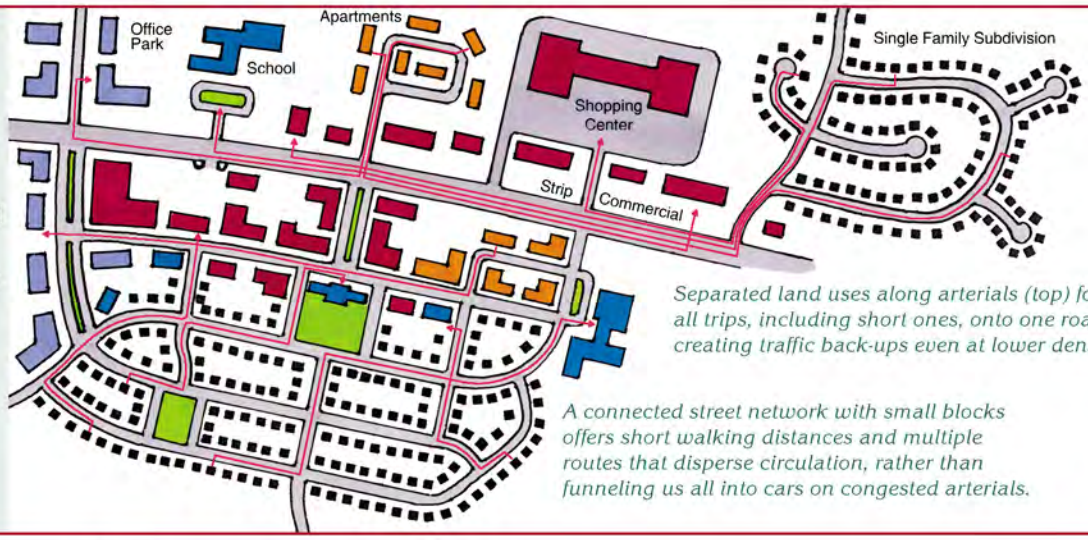
Center medians combined with shared access drives can ease congestion and dramatically reduce potential accident points (X). Fewer driveways also allow space for businesses to expand, creating a more continuous pedestrian-friendly frontage.

Build Connections Between Sites

- Cluster buildings and develop in depth with common entrances and internal circulation.
- Link adjacent parking lots and build continuous service roads toward the rear of properties.
- Provide temporary stub drives to connect to adjacent parcels when they are developed.
- Locate structures and parking lots to facilitate secondary streets based on a block system.

Rear service road between shopping centers in Hyde Park, connects over 30 stores with exits at two widely spaced traffic signals.

Compact, mixed use communities with interconnected streets, sidewalks, and transit linkages are the best long-term solution for traffic congestion.



Separated land uses along arterials (top) force all trips, including short ones, onto one road, creating traffic back-ups even at lower densities.

A connected street network with small blocks offers short walking distances and multiple routes that disperse circulation, rather than funneling us all into cars on congested arterials.

Sources:
Michael Leccese and Kathleen McCormick, *Charter of the New Urbanism*, 2000
Town of Rhinebeck, *Design Standards*, 1999