

# Against Street Widening

The piecemeal erosion of the city by the automobile continues. A plan to set a new sidewalk-roadway ratio for New York—a euphemism for narrowing sidewalks in order to widen streets—is scheduled for approval by the Board of Estimate. The idea is that chopping off the sidewalks will make traffic move more freely. Automobile traffic, of course, since pedestrians don't count.

The worst aspect of this instant remedy is that it won't help a bit. Swollen streets will just become further engorged. Double parking will give way to triple parking, uninhibited by any consistent police restraint. Moreover, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that traffic operates under its own version of "Parkinson's Law"—just as bureaucratic work multiplies to fill the time and facilities allotted to it, automobiles rush in to do the same.

Street widening ought to be part of over-all planning, and planning is something we are doing less and less of in New York under the new Charter. Where previously there was liaison with the Planning Commission in a matter like street treatments, the Board of Estimate is now advised by the Bureau of the Budget. Thus, the most depressing of all planners' nightmares has come true: the Bureau of the Budget has become the city's planning agency. It may be a good guide on figures, but it's a bit short on civic vision.

The automobile has become the tin god no one can bear to regulate. It must have free garaging on the streets and license to violate all existing controls. One neighborhood group threatened with street widening and tree loss proved that enforcement of regulations kept traffic moving smoothly. Maybe the Board of Estimate should work on that, rather than give the Department of Highways carte blanche for surgery.

Comprehensive answers such as peripheral parking garages and better public transportation are needed, not sidewalk narrowing or other shortsighted, self-defeating, stopgap devices. We can plan, or we can take the line of least resistance and abandon the city to the automobiles.