

# Failed freeways are a road to nowhere

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Freeways have failed to solve traffic congestion, but transport planners globally are hesitant to remove or rethink them, according to University of Queensland research.

UQ Ph.D. candidate Fahimeh Khalaj said freeways and highways were

not a magic wand for solving transport congestion and [global cities](#)—from Seoul to Madrid—were revitalizing and meeting sustainability goals through urban freeway removal.

"The transport planners' mantra of 'build more highways' has failed miserably," Ms Khalaj said.

"Freeways are an environmental disaster, expensive to maintain, divide cities and neighborhoods, and drastically incentivize [car ownership](#) rather than fostering community-based transport."

The team reviewed 45 studies, finding highways were often removed due to financial concerns about repair costs, but were often replaced with other car-based infrastructure accompanied by active transport space.

Ms Khalaj said the results suggested that the mentality of urban planners had not radically shifted.

"While many cities are indeed creating human-scale and active transport spaces, these spaces coexist alongside highways," she said.

UQ's Dr. Dorina Pojani said there were startling differences between planning trends internationally.

"American cities, once the pioneers of [highway](#) construction, are lagging behind cities in Europe and Asia in moving away from car dependency," Dr. Pojani said.

"Unfortunately, no Australian case studies were available, but we hope that Australian cities choose to follow in the footsteps of our European and Asian peers."

Dr. Pojani said quite a few cities were now removing their highways, replacing freed up space with regular streets and boulevards.

"And, outside of the US, motivations for removing highways have been often explicitly associated with urban beautification and placemaking.

"Millennials and Generation Z also seem to prefer vibrant, walkable urban places to suburban monotony and car dependency, and these new generations could pressure political leaders to accelerate the pace of highway removal.

"In the face of the unfolding climate breakdown, this might happen radically sooner than many expect.

"So let's step up—let's clear our skylines of overpowering highways and engage in human-scale urban revitalization."

**More information:** Fahimeh Khalaj et al. Why are cities removing their freeways? A systematic review of the literature, *Transport Reviews* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/01441647.2020.1743919](https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2020.1743919)

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