

WTS London's Camilla Ween Wants to Fix Your City, No Matter Where You Live



Camilla Ween, WTS London president, 2016

In his turn-of-the-20th-century novel *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser shocked America with his raw, naturalistic portrayal of a rural society transforming into an urban industrial one. Today, architect, Harvard Loeb Fellow, and WTS London president Camilla Ween has done much the same thing, captivating the world with her compelling treatise on the forthcoming 21st Century urban transformation, *Future Cities: All that Matters*.

“I was asked to write the book about three years ago. It was a combination of my thinking and my work experience,” explains Ween. “I had spent 11 years working for Transport for London, looking at the relationship between growth and development and the transport network.

Former London mayor Ken Livingstone set out an agenda with The London Plan. Every time a major development came in, we’d look at it in terms of transport and I’d advise the mayor. We’d work together and look at it all holistically, advocating mixed use and well integrated public transport services as well as ‘softer’ measures such as walking and cycling.

In 2000 it was estimated that London had about 7.5 million people, it is now at 8.5m, and in terms of growth, it’s on a similar trajectory as other established megacities around the globe. With that background and the context of London, I was excited to write the book because it took me out of London and I could look at other cities experiencing analogous growth.”

What Ween discovered surprised her.

“It is predicted that by 2030, 80-90% of the world’s population will live in cities, in some countries it will be 100%. At present, Singapore is considered to have a 100% urban population. And many cities will house more than 20 million people and some over 30 million. Naturally, creating the infrastructure required to support these cities will be a massive challenge for city planners and governments.

But the more I researched it the more I discovered that the doomsday scenarios of horrible cities just aren’t true. We can cope with these challenges. Big cities are doable if we do them right. But city planners must realize that they don’t have to reinvent the wheel everytime; solutions exist now. And there are so many people that are already doing fantastic things. We must ensure that we move away from carbon-intensive technologies, as there are already many sustainable alternatives. So it will take an extraordinary coming together of planning professionals and government officials to execute holistic solutions that the challenges require, but it is most certainly achievable.”

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Covering the impediments as well as the solutions, Ween's *Future Cities* is a smart, accessible primer on the future of megacities from their present evolutions. From Singapore to New York to Tokyo to Mexico City, Ween provides a compelling narrative about how select cities are already surmounting these hurdles. Though the book lays out her convincing approach, Ween hasn't stopped there.

"Since the book came out I've been focusing primarily on urbanism and transport infrastructure. For example, I've been working on transportation projects in Kano, Nigeria, and Mexico City. And in banging the drum for sustainable solutions, it's made me realize that transport is central to city-making. Traditionally, we think of it as only serving the economy. But it does much more than just support or empower the economy. It really serves society as a whole. You can deal with almost every societal issue through good transport infrastructure."

From an urban planning and transportation interchange project in Mexico City where she focused on social inclusion through transport improvements to participating in the drafting of the Johannesburg Declaration on Ecomobility in Cities (2015) led by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Ween advances her beliefs through numerous projects around the globe. But she also turns her exceptional observational and problem-solving skills on things closer to home. And she credits a certain transportation organization for helping in that regard.

"I joined Transport for London (TfL) in 2001, and in 2005 TfL set up WTS London. Under Ken Livingstone's direction, TfL was very much primed for addressing diversity. Everyone knew that women were very underrepresented in the transport industry and really wanted to do something about it. And they were right, for example in the national rail sector women only made up 4% for the workforce and in many public and private sector organizations women were grossly under-represented, and that got worse as you move up the managerial ladder. So they had the mandate and the funding to do something about it. They looked around for a model and found WTS.

They started a chapter and I joined it. Though I had managed to get past many of the traditional barriers in my career, I thought I'd do my bit to help others do the same. Then after a couple of years, I joined the board. I've been president for two years and I just got elected for my third year."

WTS London is an extremely active chapter, "thanks to a brilliant team of volunteers on the board". In the last year they've held more than 18 events. They also host two "big bashes" each year, with leading figures from the industry as speakers and guests. "We also arrange site visits to new transport infrastructure projects before they are open to the public as well as organizing professional development programs."

But the chapter's accomplishments recently ascended to a new level. Ween explains.

"We have persuaded Parliament to create an 'All Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Transport,' a working group with men and women from both houses of Parliament who will consider the issues and what the transport industry needs to do to ensure we have parity between genders. WTS will provide the secretariat for this group and we look forward to working with parliamentarians and the industry to run events in Parliament to sharpen the focus on this important issue.

We had our inaugural meeting recently and formally launched the group on 12th July at the House of Commons. It took us over a year to get this going, but this is a groundbreaking moment for WTS and for women in transportation in UK."

In *Sister Carrie* author Theodore Dreiser shocked America by illustrating its transformation from a rural to an urban society. Today, WTS London president Camilla Ween has captivated the world by demonstrating in her book, *Future Cities: All that Matters*, how cities can best serve another burgeoning urban transformation. And through her work with WTS London, she's also doing so much more.