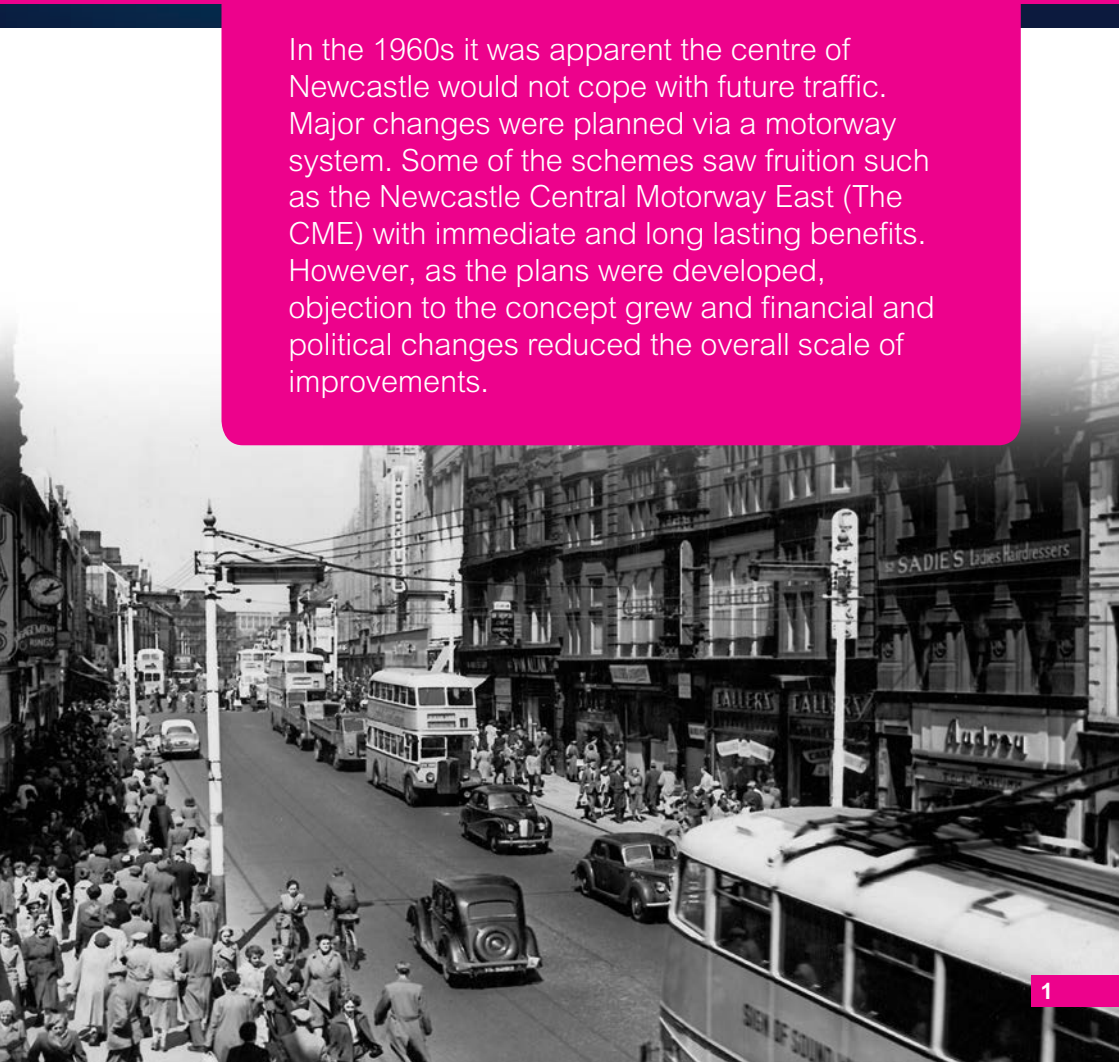


# The Newcastle Central Motorway East and Other Plans

In the 1960s it was apparent the centre of Newcastle would not cope with future traffic. Major changes were planned via a motorway system. Some of the schemes saw fruition such as the Newcastle Central Motorway East (The CME) with immediate and long lasting benefits. However, as the plans were developed, objection to the concept grew and financial and political changes reduced the overall scale of improvements.





## The Background to Change

Northumberland Street in Newcastle is now a pleasant pedestrianised street. However, many people will remember when it was part of the A1 Great North Road, linking the Tyne Bridge to Gosforth and onto Northumberland and Scotland, as well as being the principal shopping street in Newcastle.

At Christmas, to cope with the numbers of shoppers, heavy baulks of timber were placed to narrow the carriageway and widen the footways on Northumberland Street.

Temporary fencing was placed to prevent encroachment from the footways onto the carriageway because the situation was still fraught with danger due to over-crowding.

The Central Motorway East, more commonly referred to as 'The CME', was the result of the need for change.

The road was planned in the early 1960s, when road traffic and vehicle ownership in Great Britain were both increasing at about 8% per annum. It was predicted that 1980 traffic levels would be 5.3 times those in 1960 when taking into account the expectation that the relatively low vehicle ownership in the North East would catch up with the rest of the country, and also the anticipated effects of the city centre redevelopment.

The Central Motorway East however was only one part of a network of motorways that was planned at this time to cope with the increasing traffic situation. Newcastle and Gateshead had the A1 Trunk Road running through their shopping centres. At that time, the bridges across the River Tyne were the first vehicle crossings of the river, aside from the ferry between North Shields and South Shields. Local traffic wishing to cross the city from east to west, and vice versa, had to use roads along the quayside and through commercial streets within the city centre.







There is little doubt that the road network of Newcastle would have seized up if nothing had been done. Nevertheless there was much opposition to the plans. The organisation SOC'EM! (Save Our City from Environmental Mess!) was active in opposition and produced booklets through the early 1970s describing and arguing against the proposals. They were supported by the national organisation Transport 2000, formed in 1972 from representatives of railway unions and environmental groups who were against the decline of railways and the growth in motor vehicle use.

There was the expectation that Newcastle would be strangled by these motorways, a sentiment expressed in Lindisfarne's song 'All Fall Down'. There was also a national concern growing that the march of new roads across the country in the 1960s and 1970s was destroying both rural and urban areas and introducing noise and air pollution. Not least, urban motorways with viaducts had a visual intrusion unacceptable to many and they also produced severance between communities on opposite sides of the motorway. People in Newcastle increasingly reflected that concern and were becoming much more active in public inquiries that were an essential part of the legal process.

The motorway construction within Newcastle nevertheless commenced in 1972 but the city was perhaps saved by the oil price surge in 1974 that stopped many road schemes as the cost of road materials and incidental items soared. Also, as part of the reorganisation of local government in 1974, the City of Newcastle lost its role as the highway authority to the new authority Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County Council. That authority was to pursue the development of the Metro system, which took priority for finance over road schemes for many years hence.

For those reasons the plans were implemented in part only, as described below.

## The Motorway Plans

A number of connecting road schemes was planned within Newcastle and neighbouring areas.

**The Central Motorway East (CME)** was completed. It runs east of the city centre from The Great North Road coming from Gosforth to the Tyne Bridge. It has grade separated junctions with Jesmond Road, New Bridge Street and Pilgrim Street. This road carries the bulk of north-south traffic crossing the river.

The CME can be seen in the photograph of the model created to illustrate some of the proposed system. The start of the CME Bypass can be seen at the bottom of the photograph and also the East-West Underground Motorway as it would disappear under the central shopping area of Newcastle.



**The Central Motorway East Bypass** was never built, in any form. It would have run from spurs which were actually constructed on the Central Motorway East and the Gateshead Viaduct to accommodate the future links. It would have essentially provided a new bridge across the River Tyne to motorway standard.

It would undoubtedly have relieved the congestion that has occurred, and continues to occur daily, over the Tyne Bridge. It would also undoubtedly have been at considerable financial cost. There would perhaps have been less in terms of environmental damage as much of the route was to be redeveloped later. For example, the Northumbria University has utilised land north of New Bridge Street following a short lived cinema complex.

**The East-West Underground Motorway** was never built, in any form. It would have run beneath the shopping centre from New Bridge Street junction on the CME to the Gallowgate junction on the Central Motorway West.

**The Central Motorway West (CMW)** was not built. It was planned to run from The Great North Road near the Hancock Museum through Barras Bridge and the top of Percy Street before swinging across Gallowgate past St James' Park and on to the Redheugh Bridge, which at that time was to be a dual carriageway bridge. In due course, this route was downgraded in scale to a normal urban road with at-grade junctions. Part of this route was eventually developed as the West Central Route which was fully complete in 2001 and includes the St James Boulevard.

**The Gateshead Viaduct** was completed. It is a relatively short length of elevated road east of Gateshead town centre from south of the Tyne Bridge.

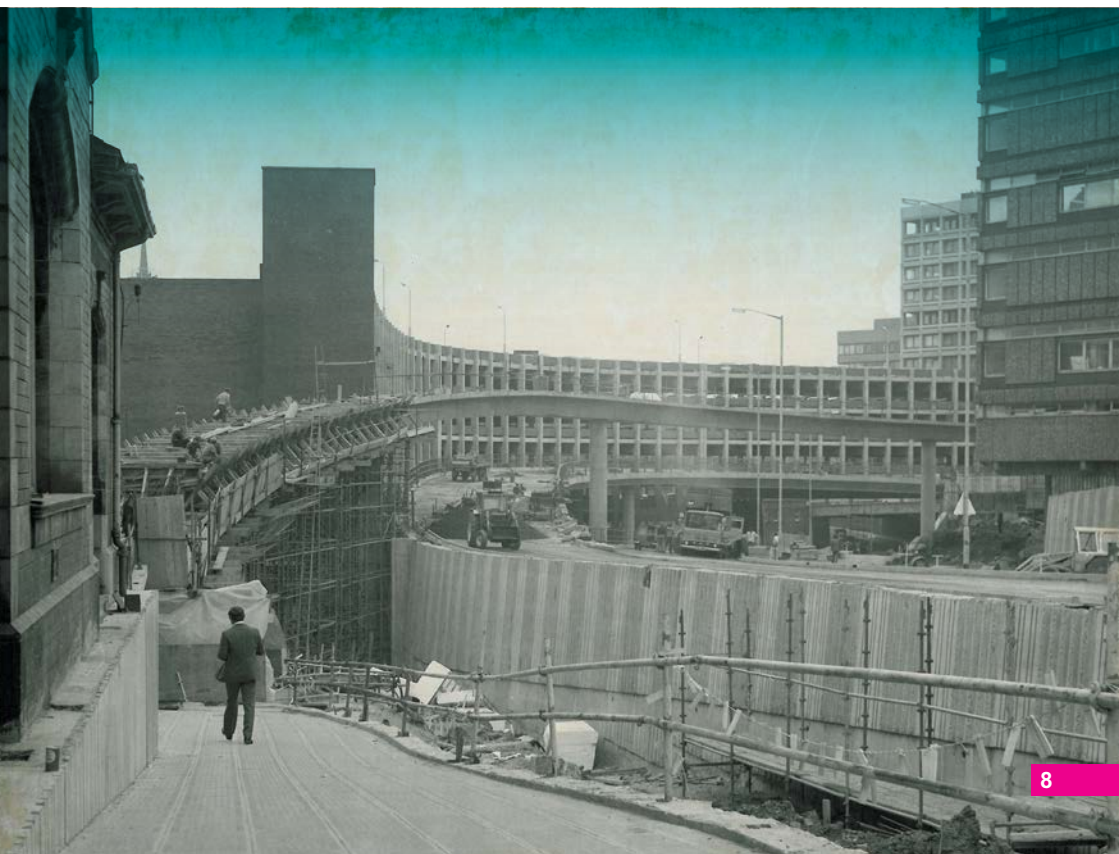
The Viaduct was part of the intended alternative route of the A1, bypassing the centre of both Gateshead and Newcastle. As on the north side of the river, the stub ends can be seen of what would have been the new motorway over the river. It was completed around 1969/70 and was the first part of that bypass route to be opened to traffic.

In 1965 Ove Arup & Partners won the competition to design the Gateshead Viaduct, under the direction of the Partner, Povl Ahm. On the basis of that he started the company's new transport group, specialising in bridges and serving as Chairman from 1989 to 1992.

**The Claremont Road Motorway** was in due course built as a dual carriageway running from the CME/Great North Road to Cowgate roundabout. Its construction started almost immediately after completion of the CME.

**The North West Radial Route**, as it became known, was designed and constructed by Newcastle City Council's City Engineers Department but was supervised by Tyne & Wear Metropolitan County Council's Director of Engineering. T&WMCC became the highway authority in 1974 following reorganisation of local government. The project cost approximately £4m and was opened to traffic in 1976. Surplus material from the project was taken to the Town Moor to form the 'ski slopes'.

The route of the road was within the Town Moor. This was only possible when alternative areas of that part of Newcastle were given the same protective status as that enjoyed by the Moor, for example allotments and playing fields adjacent to The Great North Road.





Claremont Road was relieved of much traffic and now serves more local journeys and premises such as Newcastle University and the Royal Victoria hospital complex.

**The Coast Road Motorway** was built in part but a significant section in Newcastle was not. Tynemouth Borough Council built the eastern section in 1969 and the Wallsend section followed, built by Northumberland County Council, which was the highway authority at that time. Newcastle City continued it from there but it stopped at a traffic signal junction at Heaton Road. It was intended to continue through Cradlewell and along Jesmond Road to link to the Central Motorway East, which would have had a major impact on that locality.

In fact a public inquiry was held in September 1968 dealing with purchase of land. However, while construction was due to start in 1972, a Special Road Scheme for the route had not been published and objectors gained a 'stay of execution'. An inquiry was ordered which took place in May 1973. The scheme never got off the ground – the oil crisis of 1974 and the change of authority to T&WMCC stopping it in its tracks. It has been replaced in part by local improvements at Osborne Road and the Cradlewell Bypass.

**The Shields Road Motorway** was never built. It would have run along the line of New Bridge Street from the CME and ultimately bypassed Byker. The Byker Bypass was built as 4-lane road alongside the Metro.

There will always be debate about what was right, and what damage was done or might have been done by all of the proposed motorways. SOC'EM! predicted the cost of the motorways would have been £45m at 1972 prices. However, it is difficult to imagine the road network without the improved roads and motorways that were built, not least the CME.

## Building the CME

New motorways were subject to specific legal process as ‘Special Roads’. The Secretary of State for the Environment, at that time, could order a public inquiry before confirming the Scheme and the Order which gave authority to construct the road. A public inquiry into the CME was held in 1967 and the Minister for Transport pronounced in favour of the scheme in September 1968. The Scheme and Orders were confirmed in 1969.

There was however a second public inquiry, in February 1971. Land would be lost at Brandling Park and Exhibition Park and questions were raised about the environmental effects. In August 1971 the Minister decided that adequate provision was being made for public open spaces.

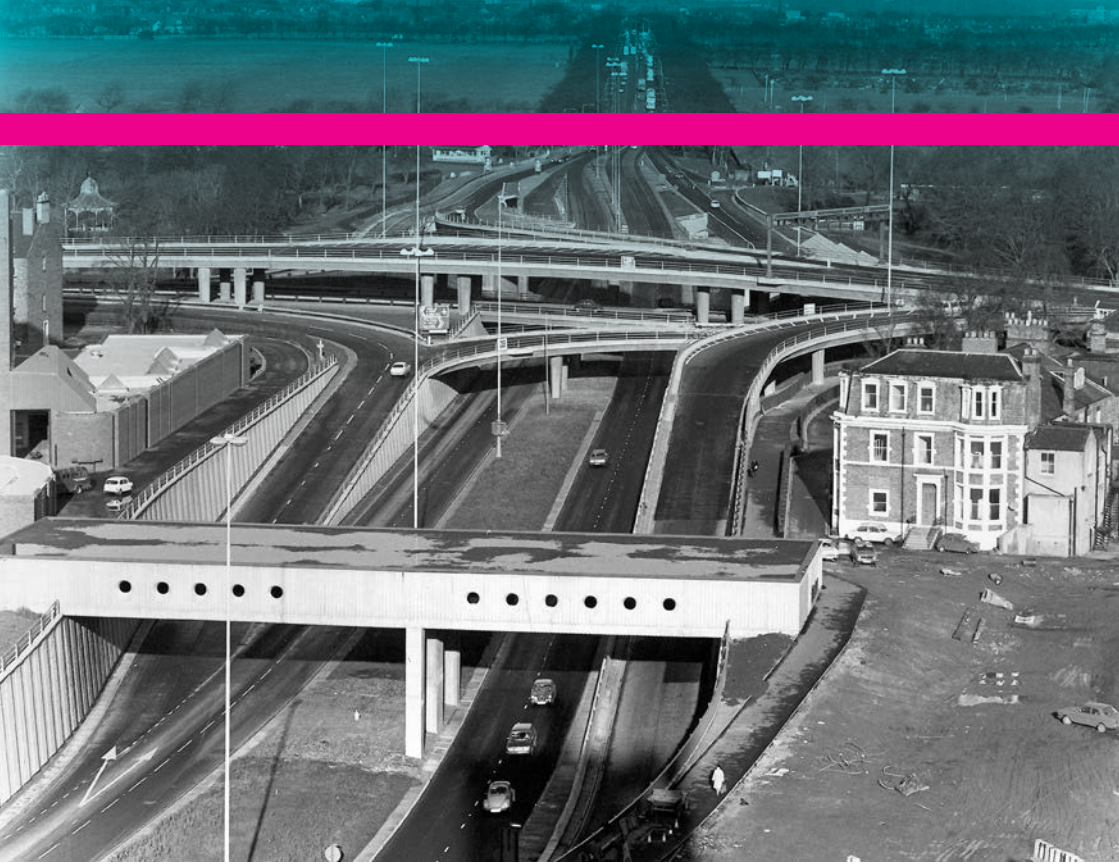


The Central Motorway East contract was awarded to Costain at a tender price of £7m in 1972. The CME opened to traffic in 1975 at a contract out-turn cost of £11.5m and an overall cost of £15m when land and other costs are taken into account. It brought instant congestion relief to the city centre.

The structures were designed by Mott, Hay and Anderson (now Mott Macdonald) and the highways and some of the footbridges by the City Engineers Department of Newcastle upon Tyne. Spoil from the construction was transported to the Town Moor with the approval of the Freeman to form a ski slope. To reduce land take, the motorway was constructed with the north bound lanes elevated over the south bound lanes in the Jesmond section.

There was considerable clearance of terraced areas east of the city centre on the route of the scheme though much of this occurred long before construction took place. These areas were in due course subject to redevelopment, for example by Northumbria University, much of the development actually taking place prior to the road. More apparent change occurred in the Brandling Village area. The road cut through school playing fields. The western end of Jesmond Road which had been the main thoroughfare from the east into the centre of Newcastle became a cul-de-sac, with traffic transferred onto the Sandyford Road into the centre of town.

All of this entailed massive disruption to traffic routes during construction with diversions constantly being changed. To help this situation the City Engineer published a magazine called “Diversion – Newcastle upon Tyne Roadworks Report”. No.1 was published in April 1972 and the final magazine No. 22 was published in August 1975.



If the reader puts ‘Diversion – Building the CME from 1972 to 1975’ into a search engine, all of the copies can be seen with comment and responses from current readers. The ‘ski- slope’ raised much cynical comment. The magazines gave details of roadworks and diversions and changes to bus routes. It also gave photographs of the works in progress including aerial photographs, and artist impressions of the finished works. The magazines are a mine of information about the construction of the CME.

Road structures in particular do not last forever without maintenance and occasional refurbishment. The CME underwent major refurbishment over the period 2000 to 2005 at an overall total cost of £10m. This involved new lighting, concrete repairs, joint repairs, re- waterproofing



and resurfacing. It also involved a significant improvement scheme to the Osborne Road/CME/Jesmond Road junction at a cost of £2.6m in 2003. This replaced small roundabouts with a full traffic signalised junction.

*Thanks to Paul Fenwick at Newcastle City Council Technical Services Division, for preparing this article.*

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