

Retailing and the City: an Investigation into the Relationships between Urban Form and Retailing in Edinburgh

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ABSTRACT

Edinburgh is a relatively compact concentric city, and as such is regarded by the UK Government as the most sustainable urban form¹. Yet, its radial transportation network is unable to handle the huge volume of commuters and shoppers it draws from across the Central Belt of Scotland². Even with the addition of an outer ring road network the congestion problems persist, thereby suggesting that the compact city is not without its difficulties.

This paper is part of a larger project that seeks to investigate the sustainability of the compact city, and focuses on the characteristics of the urban retailing landscape within Edinburgh. More explicitly, it explores how urban form affects the accessibility and attractiveness of comparison shops and the behaviour of shoppers. The principal elements of urban form examined include population density, the diversity of land use within the immediate vicinity, accessibility in relation to road and foot movements, and the characteristics of the built retailing environment.

The analysis begins by mapping key urban form and property market features using GIS to give spatial representation of the Edinburgh retailing market. A theoretical gravity model develop to enable the impacts of changes in key elements of urban form on retail expenditure flows and the attractiveness of shopping centres to be simulated. The model is then calibrated and estimated.

Preliminary findings show that higher density forms support larger shopping centres and a more diverse retailing mix, by making retailers and units more viable. Density, travel times, the scale and type of retailing environment, the concentration of retailing within the area, and pedestrian accessibility impact on the trade flows generated by comparison retailers, which in turn will influence the viability of retailing developments, via property values, costs, risks or timing. Enclosed retailing space appears to be a significant determinant on shopping patterns. Surprisingly, results suggest that the availability of free parking has little impact on comparison shopping but this may be because most enclosed retailing centres and malls have purpose built car parks, and the importance of this is captured by the variable measuring the

¹ Urban Task Force (1999). *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. London: E and FN Spon.

² Bramley, G. and Kirk, K. (2005) Does Planning make a Difference to Urban Form? Recent Evidence from Central Scotland, *Environment and Planning A* (37) pp.355–378.

type of retailing environment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the provision of open, green space has little impact of shopping flows. It may improve the overall urban environment but the insignificance of this suggests that the scale and diversity of retailing units and associated services are substantially more important influences on shoppers' behaviour than the availability of green spaces.

Key Words: urban form, retailing