

case for regarding planning problems as exercises in systems analysis by saying that "the railway system, underground, bus and taxi services, freight services, traffic interchanges, pedestrian facilities and even parking provisions all form together a total system. . . ." But why stop there? Why not inquire what the "total system" is for? To judge from the plan, the council's objective is freedom "to move about efficiently", almost as an end in itself. But are all city travellers really sustained through the hours they spend in traffic queues by the belief that it is better to travel than arrive? And is not the purpose of the "total system", like the purpose of city life as such, the mixing together of people, workplaces and public institutions in such a way that all concerned are stimulated and improved?

This is where the planners should have let their imagination loose. Perhaps the most obvious thing to say about the interaction between the population distribution and the traffic network is that a more widely distributed population must necessarily make greater demands on the traffic network. Los Angeles is a perfect illustration of that. But this implies that the council's passive acceptance—even encouragement—of the outward shift of population must necessarily exaggerate the problem of building and maintaining a traffic network which functions smoothly. So is it possible that the council in the construction of its plan has grabbed the wrong end of the stick altogether? Is it possible that it could have simplified the traffic problem without building roads on a vast scale simply by aiming at a distribution of population which would reduce the demands on the network of roads and railways? Certainly the co-existence of these problems should have persuaded the planning people to look again at the GLC's policy on housing densities in Greater London. As things are, the city is too thinly spread for comfort and efficiency.

Housing density, however, is only one of the parameters which determine the distribution of population in a city. With the opportunity with which the GLC has been provided for a thorough examination of the future of the city, a much wider range of possibilities should have been considered. The concept of a kind of cellular city should have come high on the list. London, like a great many other cities, has grown up by the agglomeration of separate districts with distinctive character. The result is that people say that big cities are nothing but loose confederations of villages, and there is no doubt that this flavour of individuality helps to make cities seem attractive. But the overriding need is that it should be possible to get from one village to almost any other in a reasonably short time—ideally much less than an hour. That is what makes a city. So would it not be a sensible strategy for the future development of London to give priority to the development of a fast transport system connecting the network of putative villages of which the future city should be made? With luck, it should be possible to aim at travel times which are much smaller than at present, and even to build a transport system

which competes effectively with motor-cars. To be sure, it would also then be necessary to design residential units in which people were more densely packed than they are at present in Central London, but one obvious benefit would be that the intervening space would be opened up for all kinds of developments which could quickly add to the sense of spaciousness which is one of London's present boasts. And such a strategy would have the great advantage that it could be made to work gradually, without the need artificially to impose networks of new roads on the existing fabric. It is earnestly to be hoped that the council will be compelled by circumstances and politics to think all this out again.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES

Programme for Select Committee

FOR the first time, the British research councils are to come under regular parliamentary scrutiny. The Select Committee on Science and Technology of the House of Commons has decided to start by investigating the Natural Environment Research Council, and it is likely that the examination of one of the research councils will become an annual event. The first investigation will be carried out by a sub-committee, while another sub-committee intends to spend the next few months following up the work already done on the reorganization of the nuclear power industry in Britain. The Select Committee seems to be far from happy with the way the industry has been reorganized, and it is clear by now that the Government is not following the advice the Select Committee gave in its first report on the subject a year ago.

Both these investigations seem well timed. The NERC is responsible for most British work in oceanography, a growing field which has not been taken up in Britain with the enthusiasm it has inspired elsewhere. Recently the unhelpful "policy statements" at the Oceanology Exhibition at Brighton and the formation of an interdepartmental advisory committee have encouraged people to ask what the Government's policy is, but no satisfactory answer has yet been forthcoming.

The committee's report on British defence research should emerge within the next six weeks or so, if all goes well. Mr Arthur Palmer, chairman of the committee, promises that the report will produce some shocks—"particularly in the Ministry of Defence". With its successful report on the exploitation of carbon fibres behind it, the committee looks stronger and more competent than it has ever done. Despite the closing down of the Select Committee on Agriculture, Mr Palmer's optimistic claim that the committee is now a fixture of the parliamentary scene is probably justified.

OCEAN ENVIRONMENT

Transformation and Growth

THE Natural Environment Research Council has now added another independent institute to its roster by the decision, with the University of Liverpool, that the fifty year old Tidal Institute and Observatory should