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TGRG Page

New TGRG book to be published in 2003—A new deal for transport? The UK's struggle with the sustainable transport agenda

Despite passing largely unnoticed, 6 June 2002 was an inauspicious day for transport policy in the UK, since it marked a self-imposed milestone in the progress of the current government towards delivering sustainable transport policies.

Following its election in May 1997, the Labour government promised to introduce considerably more radical transport policies than had until then been seen in the UK, aspiring to the goal of much-improved environmental sustainability. Central to this was the desire to build on the "Consensus for Change" in transport policy identified by the party while in opposition in the mid 1990s. This consensus was built around the recognition that past policies aimed at accommodating relentless increases in the demand for travel were failing, and that reducing the dominance of the car in transport provision was essential to prevent a deepening crisis of sustainability, represented by more transport related pollution, deteriorating local air quality, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Although transport policy has continued to gain increased prominence in the UK's political debate, Labour has clearly struggled to live up to its promises to make 'hard choices' in transport policy, to implement sustainable transport strategies in government, and to convince the public of their value. After publishing *A New Deal for Transport*, the first UK White Paper on transport in 20 years, the 1997 Blair government developed a *Ten Year Transport Plan* designed to meet the needs of a growing economy and to tackle past underinvestment in transport infrastructure. However, as the White Paper also recognised, large-scale infrastructure development, including a significant roads programme, sits uneasily with ongoing concerns over the social, environmental and economic impacts of ever-increasing demands for travel. Following the safety crisis in the rail industry that developed in the aftermath of the several major accidents, most notably the Hatfield derailment of October 2000, and the fuel price protests of that autumn, renewed uncertainty developed over whether future governments can deliver a coherent integrated—or sustainable—transport strategy over the long term in an increasingly charged political atmosphere. The date of the 6th of June 2002 is particularly prescient because only a few weeks following its election, the government's transport policy champion, the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, quite clearly stated his aspirations for what could and should have been achieved by then:

> I will have failed if in five years time there are not many more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car. It is a tall order but I urge you to hold me to it.
> John Prescott, quoted in *The Guardian*, 6 June 1997.

Therefore, following the government's re-election in June 2001, the TGRG decided it was an appropriate time to enhance its involvement in the debates on Labour's record of achievement on transport while in government. Following detailed negotiations, the group is pleased to announce that it has agreed with Blackwell, the official publishers of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to produce a major new book reviewing Labour's record to date and its stated plans for the future. The book, *A New Deal for Transport? The UK's struggle with the sustainable transport agenda* will provide a timely examination of the principal factors that will shape the implementation of transport policies through the next parliament and beyond. It is designed to inform the debate over the future direction of transport policy by providing a clear, accessible critique of policy trends. The book will draw on contributions from a range of expert academics, offering comprehensive and authoritative analyses of contemporary issues germane to transport policy development in the UK. It will analyse why the government has been unable to live up to its own aspirations to change the direction of transport policy, focusing on a series of key events in the government's first five years, such as the last-minute removal of radical proposals from the Transport White Paper, the fuel tax protests and the collapse of Railtrack, to illustrate how Labour's view of the best means to develop a more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable transport system has altered during its time in government.

The book will be edited by Dr Iain Docherty and Dr Jon Shaw of the TGRG, and will be drawn from invited papers, including some from *Prospects for Transport in the New Parliament*, the TGRG's major

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conference on issues and trajectories in sustainable transport, which was held in London on 20 September 2001. It is hoped that *A New Deal for Transport?* will be an important contribution to the transport policy debate not only in the UK, but more widely. Progress updates on the book will feature in future TGRG pages.

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