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TGRG page

Developing research agendas in the TGRG—transport and devolution in the UK

As noted in previous TGRG pages, part of the current strategic agenda for the Group is for its members to become increasingly involved in the wider discourse surrounding transport policy beyond the academy. There are many reasons why this engagement is valuable, ranging from government desire to harness academic expertise as part of its drive to ensure public policy is more 'evidence based', to the continuing need to sustain and develop the profile of transport geography amongst academic and practitioner colleagues in cognisant disciplines.

Recent TGRG activities have sought to enhance the Group's profile by facilitating contact between transport geographers and other professionals working across the transport sector. Building on the *Prospects for Transport in the New Parliament* conference held in September 2001, and the forthcoming publication of *A New Deal for Transport*?, the TGRG's new book on British transport policy trailed in the previous edition of this journal, the next phase of the Group's development agenda will be to expand the range of policy-oriented research undertaken by its members.

The Group has a long and distinguished record in policy research, such as Brian Hoyle's renowned work on waterfront management and regeneration, Richard Knowles' analysis of the policy impacts of structural change in the ownership and regulation of the rail and bus industries, and Brian Graham's longstanding work on aviation policy. The challenge is to extend these horizons, making sure that the voices of transport geographers are heard in other areas of the public policy debate beyond the confines of the transport community.

With this in mind, the TGRG is currently developing a new research agenda focusing on the impacts of UK devolution for the development and implementation of transport policy. Led by Iain Docherty and Jon Shaw, this research stream is designed to further the debate on how the different powers, structures, political dynamics and policy priorities of the devolved nations and regions impact on transport.

In so doing, it is hoped that this research effort will help to strengthen yet further the links between transport geography and other sub-disciplines such as economic geography, urban geography and political geography. There is currently much academic effort being directed towards understanding and evaluating the performance of the devolved administrations. The opportunity to bring transport to the fore arises out of the different degrees to which responsibility for transport policy and service provision is devolved to each of the new administrations. For example, while the Northern Irish Assembly (when not suspended) has full control over the province's railways, the Scottish Parliament shares responsibility for rail with Westminster institutions, and the Welsh Assembly has an even weaker, advisory role. Equally, the long term future of road user charging, which could bring profound changes to the social and economic geography of the UK, might depend on the extent to which the Mayor of London and the Greater London Assembly are able to successfully implement the concept in the capital.

It is hoped that by showcasing transport as a policy 'laboratory' in which to understand the changing landscape of post-devolution Britain, interest in transport geography can be widened to the mutual benefit of the TGRG and other groups of the RGS-IBG. From time to time, future TGRG pages will highlight other developing research developments in the same way, so that the Group's ongoing activities can be as widely disseminated as possible.

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