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TGRG page

Innovation in international transport geographies

RGS-IBG Annual Conference, London, September 2003

The TGRG, its members and its guests played a major role at this year's International Annual Conference of the RGS-IBG. Reflecting the conference theme, ''Geography Serving Society and the Environment'', the Group jointly organised three sessions with our German sister group, AK Verkehr, bringing together academics and professional colleagues to debate current innovations in international transport geography and links between the sub-discipline, transport policy and the professional transport community. The recent resurgence of interest in transport geography was reflected in the fact that the three TGRG sessions—the maximum possible allocation and our busiest annual conference programme for many years—were significantly oversubscribed.

The first module, focusing on modal innovations, was chaired by Jon Shaw (University of Aberdeen) and addressed a number of prescient policy issues. Richard Knowles (University of Salford) analysed the financial and operational impacts of privatising Britain's rail passenger services with a paper that attracted significant media attention. Following on, Lisa Davison (University of Salford) introduced her recent research on the bus industry, discussing the experience of innovative bus ''Quality Partnerships'' in delivering reduced congestion in Greater Manchester, England. Developing the theme of encouraging alternatives to car use, Simon Kingham (University of Canterbury, New Zealand) addressed the impact on mobility of the minimum driver licensing age in New Zealand, providing fascinating insights into the extent to which the idea that people have a ''right'' to a driving licence has become ingrained in that country.

The next three papers—although focusing on very different transport modes—each examined theoretical advances in transport geography. Torsten Luley and Barbara Lenz (German Aerospace Centre) outlined their research on the potential for virtual mobility, such as internet retailing and banking, to replace physical mobility. Iain Stevenson (City University, London) adopted a historical perspective in analysing how the Canadian Pacific Railroad reproduced images of that country to market its rail and shipping services in the early to mid 20th century. A vibrant discussion of the current marketing techniques of the no-frills airline industry quickly developed, providing the perfect link to Tobias Behnen (University of Hannover) who addressed the implications of that sector's growth for environmental sustainability. Finally in the opening session, Kieran Webb (University of Reading), analysed the geography of defence transport, examining how the demands of the cold war, modern conflicts such as those in Iraq and inherited military infrastructures continue to influence transport policy today.

The second session, chaired by the AK Verkehr's Matthias Gather (Fachhochschule Erfurt) focused on Transport Planning and Development. Eammon Judge (Leeds Metropolitan University) described the results of a survey of Polish local authorities which asked how environmental and economic development issues should be addressed as part of the development of the Polish motorway and roads programme. Continuing the theme of transport policy evolution in those countries joining the EU in 2004, Maria Attard (University of Malta) summarised her research, which seeks a better understanding of why the processes of making changes to transport policy in Malta in advance of EU succession have been problematic. Moving back to one of the founder members of the EU, Holger Dalkmann (Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy) gave a thought-provoking presentation on how trends of globalisation and technical change might affect the structure of future transport systems and demands for mobility in Germany, asking whether it might be possible for developing nations to ''leapfrog'' the stage of hyper-mobility that characterises Europe and North America today.

The next two papers also focused on developments in transport policy in times of governmental restructuring, in this case focusing on Scotland and the impact of devolution. Derek Halden (Derek Halden Consultancy) analysed the role of transport in supporting the economic development and Scotland's main city regions, and Tom Rye (Napier University) explained how the Scottish Executive has expanded the role of public consultation as part of local transport governance. The final two presentations continued the shift of the scale of analysis downwards to local communities. Andreas Kagermeier (University of Paderborn) analysed the possibilities and constraints for mobility management in small urban and rural communities in Germany. John Nelson (University of Newcastle upon Tyne) also focused on the rural domain in examining the potential for demand responsive transport to become a significant new means of transport provision for isolated communities.

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The final module, chaired by Iain Docherty (University of Glasgow) analysed recent changes in spatial structures and travel behaviour. Gerhard Bahrenberg (University of Bremen) presented a valuable theoretical contribution on developing macro-trends affecting the demand for communication and mobility in cities. Jim Whelan (GVA Grimley) then provided a link to current policy debates in addressing the economic, political and social impacts of current transport infrastructure development plans in London. Looking at innovation in policymaking, Joachim Scheiner (University of Dortmund) analysed the links between housing mobility and commuting in Germany, and Hugh McClintock (University of Nottingham) examined the tensions between the competing sustainable modes of cycling and light rapid transit in England.

The final paper of the TGRG's sessions attempted to summarise the breadth and variation of the preceding contributions, locating them in the wider theme of innovation in international transport geography. John Preston (University of Oxford) rounded off the conference in superb style with his paper "Making the connections: transport studies, geography and the social sciences", which posed a number of questions on the future development of transport geography that the TGRG and AK Verkehr wish to pursue at their next meeting, part of the 2004 IGU Congress.

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With the shift in timing of the RGS-IBG conference from January to September, Group activity in the months preceding the London sessions was focused on the administrative arrangements for the conference and the launch of its new book, *A New Deal for Transport? The UK's struggle with the sustainable transport agenda*, edited by Iain Docherty and Jon Shaw, published by Blackwell. The official launch of the book in London marked the culmination of two years' work, which began with the Prospects for Transport in the New Parliament conference convened by the Group in September 2001. The book has already attracted considerable positive coverage in the academic, professional and popular press, and seems likely to establish itself as a major text on transport policy. Reflecting on the initial success of the book, the TGRG would like to express its thanks to the contributors, and all those involved in producing the finished book to a very demanding timescale. Special thanks are due to Dr Lorraine Craig at the RGS-IBG, Katherine Wheatley at Blackwell Publishers and Dr Nick Henry from the RGS-IBG Book Series editorial team for their support for the book at the launch reception held during the London conference. Finally, the Group would like to thank Professor Phil Goodwin of University College London for his keynote speech at the launch event.

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