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TGRG page ☆

A proposed research agenda for transport geography: mobility and social change

As the principal body representing the interests of UK transport geographers, the TGRG is increasingly concerned at the peripheral role of transport-related themes in the research agendas being orchestrated by funding agencies such as the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Moreover, despite the centrality to the social sciences of the current debate on the nature and processes of globalization and the network society, transport is often treated as little more than an incidental assumption in these arguments. In part, this neglect reflects the traditional ways in which transportation planning and policy-making in their many forms have been driven by technology, engineering and an emphasis on modal analysis. Now, however, if most particularly in Europe, that emphasis is moving towards the relationships between transport, mobility, behaviour and social change. The TGRG is seeking to develop a research agenda which engages with these issues, the aim being to promote a higher profile for transport geography within the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and funding institutions.

Transport and mobility are implicated in the transformation of global societies in numerous ways. These include:

- the changing processes of social reproduction as new patterns of social inclusion/exclusion are forged at a variety of scales ranging from the global to the local;
- the dramatic modifications in household, population and labour structures in the IT society, which are both inducing and reflecting new transport technologies and patterns of mobility;
- the transport-specific connotations of IT, which is permitting enhanced management of mobility, but is also acting as a substitute for movement;
- the apparent paradox that travel is increasing and transport demand accelerating as access to IT expands;
- the ability of technology to control mobility and its environmental externalities at a variety of scales.

These and other issues are manifested in different ways in different countries, most starkly between Europe and the United States and, more generally, between the Developed and Developing Worlds. Differences in economy, culture and public policy shape contrasting attitudes to the relationships between social change and mobility and to the comparative importance of technology/engineering or behavioural modification. In sum, the initial draft research agenda sees two inherently conflicting factors dominating the interfaces of transport, mobility, behaviour, and processes of social change. On one hand is the need to restrain mobility growth for sustainability reasons; on the other, we have the emergence of a increasingly fluid and flexible network society dependent on unconstrained mobility.

In addressing this nexus of contestation, research areas might include:

- institutional regimes and policies for mobility and the array of scales involved – sometimes incompatible – at which these work;
- mobility and the changes in labour markets, especially the post-Fordist flexible labour force;
- the role of transport and transport intermodality in the rise of the network society and its sets of flexible interconnected nodes;
- globalization and its array of mobility enhancing attributes, especially those related to flexible production processes;
- the converse processes of social exclusion, poverty and inequality in wealth and mobility;
- the meaning of personal mobility and the contrasting attitudes expressed in different societies;
- the role of electronic networks in mobility substitution;
- the planning policies that might attempt to reconcile at least some of these issues.

We would be very grateful for comments on these draft ideas and for any further suggestions regarding ways in which the TGRG might access policy-makers and funding institutions more effectively. Responses

☆ TGRG: Transport Geography Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers.

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should be sent to Professor Brian Graham, School of Environmental Studies, University of Ulster at Coleraine, Coleraine, N. Ireland BT52 1SA (email: bj.graham@ulst.ac.uk).

Future TGRG activities

Seminar, East and Central Europe

The TGRG is convening a two-day seminar on 'Transport developments in East and Central Europe' at the RGS-IBG, 1 Kensington Gore, London on 16–17 September 1999. This is being organized by Dr Derek Hall, Department of Leisure and Tourism Management, Scottish Agricultural College, Auchincruive, Scotland KA6 5HW (email: d.hall@au.sac.ac.uk).

RGS-IBG Annual Conference, University of Sussex, 4–7 January 2000

The TGRG is involved at two sessions as part of this conference. The first is on 'Transport, internationalization and globalization', further details being available from Professor Brian Graham (address as above), or Dr Clive Charlton, Department of Geography, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon PL4 8AA (e-mail: ccharlton@plymouth.ac.uk).

The second session on 'Planning for sustainable and integrated transport systems in the new millennium' is being organized in conjunction with the Planning and Environment Research Group. Details can be obtained from Dr Julian Hine, Transport Research Institute, Napier University, 66 Spylaw Road, Edinburgh EH10 5BR (mail: j.hine@napier.ac.uk), or Rachel Goodman, Centre for Alternative and Sustainable Transport, Division of Geography, Staffordshire University, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs ST4 2DE (email: r.goodman@staffs.ac.uk).

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