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TGRG page ☆
The role of transport geography: a survey

As discussed in the Transport Geography Research Group (TGRG) page published in *Journal of Transport Geography* 7(3), September 1999, the TGRG is seeking to develop an investigative agenda, which engages with a changing research environment that emphasises the relationships between transport, mobility, behaviour and social change. Irrespective of transport mode, there are two distinct and not necessarily easily reconciled arenas of socio-political contestation at which such policies are aimed. On one hand, there is the question of congestion, which largely can be interpreted as an economic inefficiency, albeit invoking significant questions of political acceptability and social equity. On the other, are the environmental repercussions of traffic growth and the increasing societal acceptance – at least in theory – of the 'polluter pays' principle. What is less than obvious, not least in the United States but also in the United Kingdom, is the political will to implement any policies which significantly constrain mobility.

Questioning or challenging the culture of mobility, but also reconciling the prerequisite that any ensuing policies must not impede economic development and regeneration at a variety of scales, nor adversely impact on programmes of social justice, clearly provides a major research opportunity for transport geographers. In the UK, for example, ESRC has just announced a Priority Networks competition aimed at this very topic. If, however, transport geographers are going to capitalize on the surging interest in mobility constraint and substitution, several difficulties must be addressed.

In the first instance, transport studies constitute a very diverse field of research and it is often less than easy to identify the geographer's remit within it. This extends to more than the identification and analysis of spatial variations, or the modelling of networks. The strength of the geographical contribution- as witnessed by the second edition of *Modern Transport Geography* (Hoyle and Knowles, 1998) - lies in its unique capacity to research the multiplicity of social, political, cultural and economic interconnections that link transport to the wider context of social change and scale. The challenge lies in transmitting that message to the wider world of funding agencies and decision-makers.

Secondly, however, despite the excellence of the *Journal* in which these comments appear, and the overwhelming societal importance of the mobility debate, the TGRG has major concerns about the apparent decline in transport geography courses being taught in UK universities, and consequently the very limited number of postgraduate students who constitute the research resources for the future. In an effort to evolve strategies, which might more effectively confront this situation, while also raising the profile of transport geography, it is evident that we require more precise information. Consequently, the TGRG is conducting a survey of research and teaching in UK transport geography, partly by circulating its membership. However, it is also the case that there are people working in transport geography who are not members of the TGRG because they are not fellows of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). We are anxious that the survey be as comprehensive as possible and an e-mail *pro forma* can be obtained from bj.graham@ulst.ac.uk if you have not already received one. It is intended that the survey will be completed by 31 January 2000. In addition, we are still processing the responses to the research agenda outlined in *Journal of Transport Geography* 7(3) and further comments are welcome at the same e-mail address.

TGRG activities

Seminar, east and central Europe

The proposed two-day seminar on 'Transport developments in East and Central Europe' in September 1999 had to be cancelled because of insufficient offers of papers.

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

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RGS-IBG annual conference, University of Sussex, 4–7 January 2000

The TGRG is promoting two sessions as part of this conference. The first is on 'Transport, internationalization and globalization', while the second is concerned with 'Planning for sustainable and integrated transport systems in the new millennium'. This latter session is being organized in conjunction with the Planning and Environment Research Group. Reviews of both will appear in subsequent editions of the *Journal*.

References

Hoyle, B., Knowles, R. (Eds.), 1998. Modern Transport Geography. Wiley, Chichester.

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