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TGRG page ☆

RGS-IBG Annual Conference 2001, Plymouth, England, January 2–5, 2001

The usual TGRG day at the Annual Conference of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) went ahead despite the already-considerable friction of distance – Plymouth is in the far south west corner of the United Kingdom – being exacerbated by an unfortunate combination of bad weather and railway chaos. Attendance for the conference as a whole was around 20% down on average, and this was reflected in the TGRG programme (two out of 10 speakers were unable to attend). On a positive note, however, delegates witnessed the inauguration of the Brian Hoyle Lecture in Transport Geography series, and two of the papers presented (by Walton and Shaw and by Toole) received considerable media attention, including articles in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and *The Guardian* and mentions on BBC national radio.

The day began with a paper from William Walton and Jon Shaw (University of Aberdeen) which argued that Britain's Labour government, far from keeping a pre-election pledge to make road building an 'option of the last resort' and promote an integrated transport agenda across the UK, will, in England at least, complete on average a similar number of roads over each of the next 10 years as their pro-road Conservative predecessors did during their time in office. Walton and Shaw went on to suggest that Labour's approach is distinct from both *predict and provide* and *new realism* and perhaps represents a new 'third way' in transport policy which they tentatively labelled *pragmatic multimodalism*. Karen Bickerstaff (Staffordshire University) examined the issue of public participation in transport planning. Bickerstaff noted that enhancing public participation in transport planning is 'one of the most demanding aspects' of the new direction of transport policy, particularly at local level, because transportation planning is a sector of local governance with limited historical experience of involving the community in the policy process. Using empirical data from a survey of English highway authorities and a content analysis of draft 'Local Transport Plans', Bickerstaff demonstrated the tensions which exist between innovations designed to strengthen the relationship between local governments and the communities they serve, and the risks of disenfranchising the public, or specific publics, further from the policy-making process. Matthew Steele (University of Newcastle) continued the theme of public participation and built upon Bickerstaff's findings by reviewing data from Peterborough which suggest that the risks involved in transport policy making can be lessened through the use of collaborative techniques which engage local citizens.

The inaugural Brian Hoyle Lecture in Transport Geography was delivered by John Adams (University College London). Entitled *Managing risk in a hypermobile world*, Adams' presentation explored issues surrounding safety regulation in the modern transport environment. Adams introduced three forms of risk: directly perceptible, perceived through science and 'virtual' (i.e., scientists either do not know or cannot agree over their cause or likely impact). He argued that, although as we become more mobile more risks seem controllable by science, new virtual risks appear as a result of increasing human manipulation of nature. The scale of risk-controlling authorities, Adams showed, has increased in recent times, but this has reduced the chances of keeping them democratically accountable. Not only does this lead to democratic deficit, it also impacts upon society's attitude towards virtual risk. As Adams noted, "in the face of scientific uncertainty, what we believe about virtual risks depends on whom we believe, and whom we believe depends on whom we trust. We tend not to trust people or institutions whom we cannot hold accountable". The Hoyle Lecture was very well received by everyone in attendance and the TGRG would like to record their warm thanks to Professor Adams for delivering his impressive and thought-provoking arguments in an engaging manner. The Group looks forward to the continued success of the Hoyle Lecture series.

The first two papers of the afternoon continued the theme of safety. Steven Toole (Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety) reported on research which showed that death and serious injury rates on Britain's roads vary dramatically in different parts of the country. Toole suggested that it was unclear whether the government's target of reducing road casulaties (deaths and serious injuries) across Britain by 40% in the next 10 years is appropriate as regional variations are so high:

☆ Transport Geography Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers).

casualties in Redcar and Cleveland are 36 per 100,000, for example, while those in adjoining North Yorkshire are 136 per 100,000. Julia Edwards (University of Wales College, Newport) examined drivers' behaviour in wet weather as compared with that in dry conditions on two study sites with different road surfaces in south Wales. On a four-lane stretch of the M4 motorway with conventional asphalt surfacing, it was found that, although there was a statistically significant reduction in drivers' speeds in wet weather, this was not sufficient to compensate for the additional risks which exist in these conditions. The second survey, on a six-lane stretch of the same motorway with a porous road surface to reduce spray and surface water, was on-going, but data yielded were revealing a more complex set of results than at the first site.

Iain Docherty's (University of Glasgow) paper addressed transport policy making in Scotland in the light of the country's recent devolution from centralised UK administration. After appraising his (mainly non-Scottish) audience of the mechanics of devolved government, Docherty critically reviewed the key aspects and trajectory of transport policy in Scotland, adding insights from his involvement in transport policy forums organised by the Labour and Scottish National parties. Docherty's central contentions were that, for numerous reasons, transport policy in Scotland seems to be developing along strikingly similar lines to that in England (i.e., it has returned to a pro-roads agenda), and that this stands in stark contrast to the widely held aspiration for innovative 'new' politics under devolution. The day's final paper brought an international dimension to the session. Gina Porter (Durham University) reported on attempts by the World Bank and other development agencies to introduce Intermediate Means of Transport (IMT) to enhance mobility and accessibility in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Porter's evidence from Ghana (which prompted an interesting discussion about issues of research methodology) demontrated that, although rural inhabitants are often keen to embrace IMT solutions to their transport problems, developing a sustainable IMT project can be rather difficult.

The TGRG would like to thank all of those mentioned above, as well as Clive Charlton and Jon Shaw (the session organisers) for their contributions to the TGRG day. The group looks forward to welcoming delegates to Belfast in January 2002 for the session, *Transport: dividing communities*?

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Call for papers

The TGRG is holding another joint session with the Transportation Geography Specialty Group at the 98th Annual Meeting of the AAG. It will address the theme *Trends in the Geography of Mobility*. The groups have chosen this broad topic to encourage a wide range of papers from international researchers both within and beyond the sub-discipline of transport geography. Speakers might wish to address issues relating to how mobility varies across time and space, and thus how methods to manage mobility on a range of scales also vary. It is hoped that social and cultural aspects of *travel*, as well as transport, will be covered in the session. Abstracts should be sent to Shih-Lung Shaw (sshaw@utk.edu) or Jon Shaw (j.shaw@abdn.ac.uk), the session convenors, *as soon as possible*.

Jon Shaw
TGRG Secretary
Department of Geography and Environment
University of Aberdeen
Elphinstone Road
Aberdeen AB24 3UF, UK
E-mail address: j.shaw@abdn.ac.uk

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