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TGRG page ☆

Conference reports

97th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, New York, February 27–March 3

Four members of the TGRG presented research papers at the AAG's Annual Meeting in spring of this year, in joint sessions organised by the TGRG and the AAG's Transportation Geography Specialty Group (TGSG). Clive Charlton (University of Plymouth) reviewed the geography of low-cost airlines' operations in Europe. He documented the inception and subsequent expansion of these operations and identified several key issues regarding the prospects for their further growth. Of key interest to those present – unsurprisingly given that the audience was mainly composed of geographers – were the spatial coverage of low-cost carriers' networks and the distribution of their hubs: the south east of England, for example, is easily the most comprehensively served of all European markets and its various airports offer locals a wide range of budget fares to many destinations. Charlton speculated that the move towards mass low-cost air travel in Europe would in time become less of a peculiarly British phenomenon. Jon Shaw (University of Aberdeen) reported on work which examined the policy of rail privatisation in Britain in the context of sustainable transport. In considering whether the former could be beneficial in terms of the latter, Shaw contended that the British Rail sell-off was not conceived as part of a sustainable transport agenda, but has the potential to make a significant contribution in this area. He warned, however, that the apparent ambivalence of current government transport policy in Great Britain makes it difficult to determine whether much of this potential will be realised.

The theme of railways was continued by the other TGRG members. Richard Knowles (University of Salford) focused on the current policy of reletting Britain's passenger rail franchises. Knowles' paper complemented that of Shaw and raised a number of specific points regarding the likely trajectory of refranchising; it also noted that continuing delays to the process are making it difficult to tell how far the growing problems of congestion and overcrowding on Britain's railways will be addressed by new franchise owners. Iain Docherty (University of Glasgow) shifted the spatial scale to the local by examining the politics of rail policy in Glasgow, Scotland. Using data obtained from a series of interviews with key local politicians and policy makers in the period 1995–2000, Docherty assessed how a change of local government structure – from a single, city-regional authority with area-wide responsibility for land-use and public transport planning to a fragmented system of smaller authorities with separate jurisdictions – has impacted upon the formulation and execution of rail policy. Docherty found that elements of coherence have been lost and that specific flagship policies, such as those designed to promote central Glasgow at the expense of out-of-town shopping centres (traditionally difficult to access for those without a car), have been difficult to perpetuate in the new structure which seems to emphasise competition as much as co-operation.

All four TGRG speakers attended the TGSG's business meeting, chaired by Shih-Lung Shaw (University of Tennessee), and arrangements were made for a further joint TGSG–TGRG session at the 98th Annual Meeting of the AAG in Los Angeles in 2002 (see previous issue).

Policy Directions in UK Air Transport: The Next Ten Years, London, March 14, 2001

This one-day conference was convened by the TGRG as part of the RGS–IBG's Environment and Society Forum and was organised by Alison Glazebrook and Helen Saunders (RGS–IBG) and Brian Graham (University of Ulster) on behalf of the TGRG. The conference, ably chaired by Doug Andrew (CAA), was attended by almost 100 delegates and speakers included academics, representatives of the aviation industry and environmentalists. At a time when there is an unprecedented discussion concerning the future of UK air transport (which will culminate in the publication of an aviation White Paper in 2002), the conference explored the many conflicts of interest that define current policy and practice relating to the industry and its environmental impacts.

Brian Graham and John Adams (University College London) began the debate by examining the policy context and the future demand predictions for air

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transport. Both isolated the key issue for UK air transport as being growth versus constraint through the effective rationing of airport capacity, a theme that dominated the subsequent papers. Tony Grayling (Institute for Public Policy Research) argued that as the economic case for air transport is unproven, demand had to be managed through planning and taxation. Richard Everitt (BAA) reiterated the airport industry's case for sustainable solutions that combined business and environmental priorities, but Ian Humphreys (University of Loughborough) pointed out that the commercial focus of privately owned airports may conflict with national goals related to environmental priorities and integrated transport solutions.

Unsurprisingly, representatives of the airline industries demurred from suggestions of constraints on demand. In explaining his company's role in a competitive global market, Paul Ellis (British Airways) forcefully argued for creative UK policy solutions that created a 'win–win' situation for the aviation industry and the environment. Tim Jeans (Ryanair) argued that low-cost airlines enfranchise people and effectively utilise airport capacity and that these were important dimensions to the sustainability argument. However, Tim Johnson (Aviation Environment Federation) pointed out that the very growth of air transport is eroding the technological advances aimed at ameliorating the industry's environmental impact. He argued too that alternatives are required to land-use planning, currently the only real mechanism for government intervention in the UK aviation industry. Finally, in maintaining that sustainability must reconcile the commercial priorities of the aviation industry with environmental imperatives, Callum Thomas (Manchester Metropolitan University) concluded that 'business as usual' is politically an unsustainable solution for the UK's air transport industry.

Jahrestagung des Arbeitskreises Verkehr der deutsche Gesellschaft für Geographie, Erfurt, May 17–19, 2001

Jon Shaw attended the annual meeting of the Transport Group of the German Geographical Society following an invitation from the Group's chair, Professor Matthias Gather. The aim of the visit was to strengthen ties between British and German transport geographers and much was achieved in this regard: information about the groups' key activities and research interests was exchanged, and members of the *Arbeitskreis Verkehr* expressed a keen interest in publishing more of their work in English language journals and attending English-speaking conferences in both Britain and the USA. It is also hoped that a joint TGRG/*Arbeitskreis Verkehr* conference can be held in the not-too-distant future.

Transport geography is in a healthy state in Germany. Although the *Arbeitskreis Verkehr* is only four years old, over 50 delegates-substantially more than have been present at TGRG sessions at recent RGS–IBG annual conferences – of various professional backgrounds attended the conference. The main theme of the conference was *Transport Developments in the 'new' Bundesländer*, and most papers reported results from studies undertaken around the former East Germany (one, for example, examined the socio-economic context of Berlin and detailed related patterns of east–west travel in the city). Some speakers dealt with broader issues, such as transport sustainability in Germany as a whole (it was interesting to hear German transport geographers arguing vigorously for greater transport sustainability given the already-renowned excellence of their public transport system), and international considerations, including competition between Japanese airports and recent transport developments in the Czech Republic, were also discussed.

The TGRG will undoubtedly build on this initial contact with the *Arbeitskreis Verkehr* in future years. Co-operation at the Group level will, in all likelihood, be undertaken by Committee members in order to simplify organisational matters, but should anyone wish to contact members of the *Arbeitskreis Verkehr* directly, please e-mail Dr Martin Lanzendorf (m.lanzendorf@geog.uu.nl) at the University of Utrecht.

The TGRG would very much like to thank Professor Gather for inviting a member the Group to participate in the annual conference of the *Arbeitskreis Verkehr*, and for the kind hospitality he – and all the delegates present – extended to Dr Shaw during his visit to Erfurt.

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