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

A change of name

With effect from January 1996, the Transport Geography Study Group (TGSG) changed its name to the Transport Geography Research Group (TGRG). This was in line with the other 20 Study Groups in the RGS–IBG and reflects the continued evolution of the merged Society. Since the promotion of research is the one of the main aims of the Group, it is appropriate that this interest is apparent in the title.

TGSG Postgraduate Seminar 20 September 1995

The seminar was the first meeting held by the TGSG at the London headquarters of the Royal Geographical Society. The congenial surroundings of the Council Room and the well-organized seminar facilities provided a fitting location for a stimulating day of presentations and discussion of a wide range of research topics in the field of transport geography.

Graham Parkhurst, a third-year postgraduate at the ESRC Transport Studies Unit in Oxford, began the morning session with his report on the perceptions of Sheffield residents of the Supertram light railway prior to its opening in 1994. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in 70 households and many respondents expressed strongly negative feelings towards the project, especially those living close to one of the routes, largely as the result of the disruption caused during the building period. Post-1950 housing estates planned around car and bus access will be harder to serve by light rail than the inner 19th-century suburbs and the Supertram system may find it hard to compete with cars and buses in these outer areas. The survey also indicated that the use of maps as tools and as conceptual analogies occurs less frequently amongst Sheffield residents than geographers might tend to assume. The quantity of data derived from the qualitative interviews also exceeded expectations. Supertram is now seen as a high-profile environmental stimulus for Sheffield and as preferable to investment in an improved network of conventional buses.

Iain Docherty (Department of Geography, University of Glasgow) reported on his first year of investigations into the prospects for railway services in the Strathclyde region following the local government reorganization which is to take effect in April 1996. Strathclyde Regional Council, which has acted as the Passenger Transport Authority since 1975, will be replaced by several smaller single-tier councils whose new boundaries will not coincide with those of the existing regional body. The new authorities will act together through a joint board to fulfil the transport obligations of the 1968 Transport Act but several issues have yet to be resolved. Methods of providing financial support for the Helensburgh rail route, and other local rail services have yet to be agreed and the proposed light rail transport system will also have to be reassessed with the abolition of the regional authority. The level of support that the new councils decide to give to the Passenger Transport Executive will be a critical issue in the future of Glasgow's local railway services.

Peter Reid (Department of Geography, Birkbeck College) a fourth-year student, is examining the methods by which a new transport initiative can be used to attract private funding for economic development. The opening of the TGV link between Paris and Calais, which passes through the economically depressed Lille conurbation, has stimulated local authorities to cooperate to ensure that any benefits deriving from the link will be distributed throughout the conurbation to combat the problems arising from the decline of textile and other older industries. This research has provided the opportunity to compare these French initiatives with policies for the South East of England, where the planning of the Folkestone–London high-speed rail link is seen as lacking the necessary integration with planning for the region as a whole.

The afternoon session began with a paper on travel for food shopping by Sally Cairns, who is a third-year research student in the ESRC Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford. An analysis of people's shopping activity patterns is examined in the context of recent government recommendations that future food superstores should be sited in or close to town centres, thus reversing the current practice of 'out of town' retailing centres. Survey findings indicate that this policy change is unlikely to reduce traffic associated with shopping trips and that any increase in town-centre parking capacity for shoppers could produce problems. The paper concluded by offering alternatives to the existing organization of food shopping which might complement locational policies on food retailing centres. Delivery services with the use of faxes or the Internet for ordering

goods may well be a viable option in the future and could be combined with the provision of social services to households.

Colin Black, a second-year postgraduate in the Department of Geography, University of Portsmouth, concluded the seminar with a review of his research into the transport dilemma and the role of sustainability. Transport sustainability is often seen by the media as the solution to all current transport problems, and generalizations of this nature only serve to confuse the real issues. The contemporary transport dilemma is seen as focusing upon unattainable aspirations for personal mobility, as the increasing use of cars and the widespread building of new roads have led to insatiable demands for mobility and to an economic framework and social lifestyles based on an unsuitable transport system. Only recently have governments realized the need for new transport policies that can address the problem of an unacceptably high level of car usage. Such policies will inevitably involve drastic changes in car users' lifestyles but are essential if the concept of sustainability is to be supported.

Although the seminar had no integrating theme, the consensus was that the meeting had acted as a welcome focus for the identification and discussion of methodological problems. Participants agreed that further sessions on an annual basis should be arranged, providing an opportunity for transport geography postgraduates to explore common concerns and problems. Dr Brian Turton will be responsible for convening the next seminar on 18 September 1996, and can be contacted at the Department of Geography, University of Keele, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK.

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