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Book review

The Transport Debate, J. Shaw, I. Docherty. Policy Press, Bristol (2014). £14.99, Paperback, ISBN: 9781847428561

Written by well-known academics in the UK transport domain (Jon Shaw is Professor of Transport Geography at Plymouth University and Iain Docherty is Professor of Public Policy and Governance (Management) at the University of Glasgow), this book is a little different to academic transport policy titles. Firstly it brings together insights from the more traditional (and usually quantitative) approaches from transport geography and transport economics with newer insights generated by the more qualitative, and often sociological, mobilities field. Secondly, it takes a semi-autoethnographic approach at times, and also illustrates the serious points made, not only with a thorough review of literature but also with vignettes focused on the fictional Smith family – mum and dad Susan and Paul, and their three children, Sophie, Lucy and Jack. The vignettes vividly illustrate and personalise the everyday choices society collectively makes that result in the transport landscape, with its associated economic, social and environmental impacts, that we are familiar with.

The book is in part a sequel to their edited volume *Traffic Jam* (2008). It updates readers on the changing policy context in the UK, and also notes the societal changes that seem to be occurring, such as the new (and less embracing) attitudes emerging towards the car amongst younger people. Whilst the book is grounded in the UK context the view of the authors is unblinkered, with many references to the wider European context. Other western developed contexts are also referred to, such as North America and Australia. Therefore, whilst acting as a splendid primer on the UK transport context, there is much material of relevance to transport planners and students of transport and mobility in other geographies.

The book is dedicated to the UK academic Phil Goodwin, and has an interesting foreword contributed by London mayoral candidate Christian Wolmar, himself a prolific author of transport histories and journalism. Series editor Michael Hill adds an additional foreword, in which he reflects on how reading the book highlighted for him his own inconsistent habits and biases about transport. The authors' preface rightly acknowledges the help and support of family and colleagues, and informs the reader a little more about the carbon footprint that was involved in producing the book. However please note it does not calculate that carbon footprint – perhaps Shaw and Docherty could do that next time! Indeed, on the subject of carbon footprints there was only one point in the book that I took exception to – Table 5.2 on page 127 does not adjust the total GHGs for cars to reflect per passenger km (as is the representation for public transport and air travel). In the vignette in this chapter ("the family visit") the Smith family decides to fly to Scotland, and then hire a car, rather than drive the whole way. As there are five of them in total, it is a moot point whether this was a rational decision. For five people, a fuel efficient car would be the most practical, not to mention cheapest, option. It quite likely would have been the most carbon efficient method as well. Whilst it is understandable in the context of the book why Shaw and Docherty have constructed this particular scenario as they have (in order to include domestic air travel as a comparator with long-distance rail travel), in my view it is the most contrived of the vignettes. The type of information that is presented in Table 5.2 about the carbon profiles of different forms of travel is an important underpinning in efforts to encourage people to change behaviours, but if the attitude is always that the car is to be avoided, this fails to reflect the reality that in many situations it is the more rational carbon choice. Therefore it is important that figures are more easily compared (i.e. for cars it could be presented as one person, two people, full to capacity), and for the other modes, the loading assumptions should be included.

There are seven chapters in all which, after the introduction, are structured around the typical journeys that we find in national transport statistics. The authors were very keen to get away from the usual transport analysis which focuses on modes, as this has proved unproductive in making transport more seamless and integrated for users. Chapter One sets the scene, covering the policy background and introducing the Smith family (in which dad Paul is characterised as a 'Motorway Man'). Subsequently the focus shifts to the journey types: Chapter Two covers commuting, Chapter Three considers the school run, Chapter Four explores business travel, Chapter Five takes on visiting friends and family and Chapter Six rounds off the journeys with a look at the annual summer break. In each case the relevant issues are covered through a literature review (itself seamlessly integrated into the narrative) and a vignette of how the 'average' Smith family thinks through how to make the relevant journeys. The coverage of relevant issues that Shaw and Docherty have achieved is impressive: congestion, road-pricing, planning, economic development, active travel, safety, health, psychosocial benefits of cars, ICT, the impact of privatisation, deregulation, the role of investment appraisal techniques, disruption, resilience, social inclusion, choice, subsidy, opportunity costs, environmental impact, shopping and global and local logistics are all squeezed into this compact and well-priced volume.

The final Chapter Seven summarises this landscape, and the authors are also not afraid to make their own views and recommendations clear. They do this both reflexively in the semi-autoethnographic acknowledgement of their own transport habits and lifestyles (recognising their own positionality), but also in their exploration about what could be achieved in the UK through redirecting investment, recasting appraisal and realigning policy to deliver what they call 'progressive realism'. Their progressive realism is a transport policy environment that is more just, with a transport system that is better at delivering mobility for all as well as being more sustainable and supporting economic activity. Many people will disagree with their prescription, and the concluding

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chapter was the hardest to read. However, the authorial and authoritative partnership of Shaw and Docherty will be familiar to many readers of this journal, and it continues to be engaging, challenging and readable in equal measure. I look forward to their next volume.

Kate Pangbourne
Research Fellow, College of Physical Sciences, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom
E-mail address: k.pangbourne@abdn.ac.uk

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