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Book review

Urban Transport without the hot air Volume 1: Sustainable solutions for UK cities, by Steve Melia, 2015. Cambridge, UIT, £39.99 (hardback) ISBN: 9781906860271 £19.99 (paperback) ISBN: 9781906860264

The first book in the *Without the Hot Air Series* published by UIT Press was *Sustainable Energy Without the Hot Air* (MacKay 2009). This book was something of a sensation, breaking new ground both with its no-nonsense and infographic style and open-access on-line publication. (The book still provides a fantastic resource for energy researchers from its online home, withouthotair.com.) MacKay (2009) also had something new to say about transport, providing clear guidance on measuring energy use for different modes, which I have subsequently used in my own research (Lovelace et al. 2011). So I opened this substantial softback, which has the same bold, simple style as MacKay (2009), with high expectations.

Steve Melia is a veteran transport campaigner, environmentalist and now Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of England. The book (Melia, 2015) is divided into two parts, 'myths and problems' followed by 'sustainable solutions'. Happily the larger part is constructive. It is too easy to focus on the problems underlying our car-dominated world without proposing constructive alternatives. The book is a refreshing break from overly-academic transport textbooks which can lack policy-relevance (Lovelace 2014). Melia himself humourously jibes against such over-academisation of the transport debate: "I want to avoid the off-putting conventions of academic writing (Turgid et al. 2015)"! Although the book contains a thicket of information, the author is careful not to allow the references get in the way.

The book lived up to my expectations and exceeded them. Melia's concise prose quickly dispenses with many of the myths and prejudices embedded in transport planning. The reason for placing these myths at the beginning of the book is clear: it is their perpetuation that prevents the uptake of truly sustainable, joined-up and long-term planning policies. This is a large book covering a wide range of issues in considerable depth. As with MacKay (2009), there is no ideological bias in the work. And Melia has no magic bullet to sell: transport problems are complex and multi-faceted so 'one size fits all' thinking should be treated with caution. *Urban Transport Without the Hot Air* is committed to the evidence and open in its premises: the transport system is clearly unsuitable for the needs of the 21st century and must change. Work is needed to divert transport away from continued growth in demand for motorised transit and onto a path for environmental and social benefit. Melia does a sterling job of tackling these issues head-on, rather than 'beating around the bush' as other transport academics have done.

In terms of detail, there is too much information contained within the book's 264 beautifully printed large pages to summarise in a single review. Suffice to say that it is a tour de force of little-known facts and gems of case studies that would be of great benefit for practicing transport planners as well as academics wanting a wider perspective. Fitting the latter category, I will pick-up on a couple of areas that relate to what the book tells us about academic transport studies, with a focus on subjects that have received too little attention.

The idea that simple 'techno fixes' targeting car design can solve the UK's (or the world's) transport problems, for example, is disposed of with four deft observations.

1. Less than 50% of transport emissions are due to cars and the most rapidly growing sector for emissions is aviation, which is approaching (and has surpassed in some areas) levels of emissions from cars.
2. Electric cars, much touted as a solution by governments worldwide, have been much slower to roll onto the market than had been expected. By 2013, only 0.1% of new car sales were for electric cars, leaving projections that they would constitute 60% of the fleet by 2050 seeming highly optimistic.
3. Electric and hydrogen powertrains are associated with complex logistical problems that have not been fully appreciated: how would dense urban streets accommodate overnight charging, with the mass of cables that would entail?
4. Cars have an environmental impact that goes far beyond the type of engine found inside. Around 15% of car emissions are associated with manufacture, and this would increase as new technology is added.

Another myth tackled that is close to my heart is that "You'll never get people cycling over here like the Dutch" (Chapter 7), which is dispensed with using Melia's characteristic combination of adherence to the evidence and real-world experience. Although facts and figures play a prominent role in the book, Melia is not afraid to use a good quote when appropriate.

Because of the book's attention to detail at all levels, from the minutiae of street design to the rate of fuel tax, I was expecting the recommended solutions to be precise and prescriptive. Instead, Melia maintains his commitment to the evidence and attention to detail. He carefully describes case studies where transport policies have led to desirable outcomes and provides pointers about how the lessons learned could be applied to other contexts. It is focussed on the UK, but the points are generalisable to cities worldwide. The book is also empowering in the sense that it demonstrates what you, as a 'mere individual' can do to start make change happen. We can harness this wealth of evidence to change the world and this is the point at which the book becomes truly inspirational. "Walk the talk" as Melia puts it.

In summary, Steve Melia has produced a beautiful, meticulously researched and important contribution to the global transport debate. The work synthesises a vast spectrum of evidence on a range of urban transport issues, resulting in a concentrated work of art. Amazingly, this chunk of vital information is also extremely enjoyable to read. I strongly recommend *Urban Transport Without the Hot Air* to anyone interested in active transport, urban planning or sustainability overall. Indeed, the simple questions of how and why we move around as a species have dramatic (if invisible) implications for the future of human existence on planet Earth. Melia demonstrates that once we properly understand the problems the solutions are within our grasp.

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