Journal of Transport Geography 72 (2018) 277

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Transport Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jtrangeo

Book review

Greg Marsden, Louise Reardon. (Eds.), Governance of the smart mobility transition, Emerald, Bingley (2018). (£40 (paperback). ISBN. 9781787543201)

This is a welcome book at a time when the transport sector faces a myriad of developments and possibilities associated with technological innovation and changing travel behavior. The book across its content provides a primer for anyone who might wish to make sense of what 'smart mobility' is all about. However, in line with its title, its intended focus is upon the matter of governance. We exist it seems in a transitional phase beyond the era of automobility of the decades before. The book's interest is in the interaction and influence between multiple actors and processes (including but not exclusively governments or 'the state') that together are shaping the nature of transition, with implications for where that transition is taking our systems of mobility. Its editors Greg Marsden and Louise Reardon elaborate on the book's agenda in the opening Chapter and explain its origins.

Section 1 considers the part of the state at a time when technology companies both large and small are at play within the mobility system. Iain Docherty very ably underlines in Chapter 2 the enduring importance of the state to governance and the criticality of the state's role in shaping rather than merely enabling the innovators' influence on the transition. Mobility as a service (MaaS) is, in name, a new phenomenon within smart mobility. In Chapter 3, Kate Pangbourne, Dominic Stead, Miloš Mladenović and Dimitris Milakis highlight how business and technology priorities appear to be driving the MaaS agenda and critically examine what they consider to be the associated promotional rhetoric and potential for unintended and undesirable consequences for the mobility system's sustainability.

Section 2 asks 'who's voices are in the smart mobility debate?'. Robin Dowling in Chapter 4 examines case studies of car sharing and battery powered 'personal mobility devices' in Australia. The latter especially highlights how path dependent categorisations of mobility can stifle new and hybridized forms of transport and how governance actors (notably the state) can be convinced of the appeal of reframing (the example of the Segway being seen as a tool for economic development through tourism rather than simply an (illegitimate) form of transport). In Chapter 5, Debbie Hopkins and Tim Schwanen consider the case of the race for automation in the UK. They apply a Transition Management lens to examine the highly engaged approach of the UK government to progressing driverless cars, while questioning the paucity of reflexivity and the consignment of the heterogenous public's voice to nothing more than 'future technology adopters'. Chapter 6 by Edgar Salas Gironés and Darja Vrščaj considers the winners and losers of the connected bike projects in the Netherlands. They identify the different target groups and how, through technology, they are treated in unequal ways by the introduction of smart mobility solutions and the associated 'materialized and rhetorical wins or losses'.

Section 3 turns to the capacity of the state in the governance process for smart mobility. Chapter 7 I must single out as the one I enjoyed most for its quality of insight, lessons learnt and incisive commentary. Diane Davis compares the case studies of San Francisco and Stockholm and the role of the state, through the mayors, in the governance process. San Francisco's facilitation of ride hailing allied to the governance influence of private sector disruptors and the city's commitment to high-tech innovation is contrasted with Stockholm's bumpier and consultative ride through the state's introduction of a technology-enabled congestion charge that has marked the city's global reputation for sustainability. In Chapter 8, John Stone, David Ashmore, Jan Scheurer, Crystal Legacy and Cary Curtis provide a sobering portrayal of the 'hollowing out' of urban planning and its influence in Australia in the face of powerful private actors and investors in the governance process, highlighting the high stakes for, and risk of diminished hope in, pursuance of environmental and social goals. They consider in particular how prepared the state and its planning agencies are for the emerging prospect of autonomous vehicles (AVs) and whether their governance influence is stymied by the uncertainty surrounding AVs, leading to a 'watch and wait' position. In Chapter 9 the book's editors Greg Marsden and Louise Reardon use a cross-national scenario planning exercise to examine the question of 'does governance matter?'. They conclude that if smart mobility is to chime with sustainable mobility then strong state involvement in the governance process is key. They point also to something that is apparent in reading this book as a whole, namely the importance of, and value in, comparative analysis across case studies and governance contexts in better understanding how the mobility transition could and should be influenced.

In Section 4 (Chapter 10) the editors draw the book to a close. In so doing, it underlines that this edited set of contributions is greater than the sum of its parts. Each chapter addresses one or more particular contexts and aspects of smart mobility but their shared focus upon governance accumulates some prominent overall messages from the book. With concerns over winners and losers and the timing and extent of the state's involvement in governance, what stands out in particular is the timely attempt by this book to introduces some checks and balances into a transitional period that seems at times overwhelmed by a fixation on the technologies and innovations themselves rather than on where they could or should be taking society.

Alongside the assembly of some of the most progressive commentators in this field as its contributors and an array of international examples, the book's added appeal is its modest length with succinct accounts for the reader across the territories it explores. Whether you are troubled or inspired by the smart mobility transition, this book offers an important reference point in cataloguing the many important issues of governance that are shaping or have the possibility of shaping our future.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2018.09.012

Available online 03 October 2018
0966-6923