

POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF INTERMODALITY

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Why is inter-modal transport important?

Inter-modal travel is becoming a popular goal in urban transport planning, yet it does not appear to be easy to achieve. Changes of mode or vehicle during a single journey are inconvenient, and people make a considerable effort to avoid them, at least for regular journeys.

Since people prefer to travel without any change of mode, we need to be clear about the goal of inter-modality, and why we are seeking to increase what is clearly not generally desired.

As with most of our urban transport problems, private motorised travel lies at the root of the trouble. Most of our cities developed so that people and activities were close to one another, or grouped around the nodes and corridors provided by public means of transport. People located in such a way that a walk or cycle trip, or a single public transport ride, took them to their destination. The car (and the lorry), by offering door-to-door travel, removed such location constraints, while at the same time creating problems (of congestion and pollution) for those earlier patterns of travel and urban structure.

For car owners, the car provides most of their travel needs conveniently and comfortably. In addition, the fiscal regime in most countries encourages them to make as many of their trips by car as possible: more than half of the cost of a private car is paid in periodic lump sums, which means that owners cannot save money by driving less. For many car owners, there is consequently little interest in other ways of travelling. The habit of car use precludes consideration of less convenient and more costly alternatives.

A collective concern

The need to consider inter-modality therefore arises not from such narrow private considerations, but from a collective recognition of the severe

problems created for the population as a whole, when too much reliance is placed on the car. These problems include:

- Inferior travel opportunities for those without cars (about 2 out of every three people in Europe);
- Environmental degradation and congestion
- Reduced vitality of urban communities
- Poorer health and fitness

None of these problems can be addressed by providing only for the car. Many north American cities have attempted to plan for full car demand (for example: Atlanta, Los Angeles, Detroit, Houston), but most Europeans who experience them would be horrified at the prospect of their own cities going the same way, while inhabitants of those cities are becoming increasingly aware of the disadvantages they suffer.

The alternative to the American nightmare is clear: plan for a more limited and rational use of the car.

Assuming that people continue to aspire to the choice and range of destinations which car travel provides, the need to develop inter-modality becomes clear. Alternative means of travel cannot, individually, supply the range of trips possible with a car. Walking and cycling can satisfy only short trips, while public transport has limitations in terms of routes and level of service. Gone are the days when all development was grouped around public transport routes; and gone are the days when people were content to live, work and play within a single neighbourhood.

Opportunities to travel to a variety of destinations, as provided by the car, are therefore dependent on the use of more than one mode. If this is to be done with reasonable convenience, the means of connection between the different modes has to be developed well beyond what is offered in most cities today. London provides a good (or perhaps one should say bad) example: rail lines in the south of the city were planned, and remain to this day, as largely separate radial lines serving movements into and out of the city centre. While there are lines crossing one another in different directions, there is often no interchange between them, so consequently it cannot function as a network, only as a series of separate routes.

The potential for inter-modal development

Since it is private motorised travel that has produced the problem, it is to the car (and the lorry) that we must turn in finding solutions. Without limitation on private motorised transport, the potential for inter-modal development is small. Improved interchange between bus, rail and cycling facilities (and improvement to the facilities themselves) will be appreciated by non car users, but as a group they are unwilling to pay for them. Car users are equally unwilling to pay for improvements from which they gain no benefit. Therefore, inter-modal development may be difficult to justify in financial terms, and will have marginal impact on the problems it is intended to solve. Consequently,

unless people are encouraged or compelled to choose non-car modes, substantial inter-modal development will remain nothing but a wish.

Developing multi-mode lifestyles

The inter-modal scenario therefore begins with the aim of a more limited, and more rational use of the car. This involves:

- Breaking the habitual use of cars, by limiting car ownership, and getting rid of private parking;
- Providing alternative access to cars (as described in the paper by Michael Glotz-Richter);
- Limiting the use of cars by physical, legal and fiscal means.

The second part of the inter-modal scenario is to develop infrastructure for the "environmental combination" of modes, namely walking, cycling and public transport, and the means of interchange between them. This includes many kinds of infrastructure and service development such as:

- Park and ride
- Bike and ride
- Accessible public transport vehicles
- Interchange stations
- Multi-mode vehicles (able to use different tracks, power systems etc)
- Integrated public transport timetables
- Integrated ticket systems

The third part of the scenario is to improve the conditions and circumstances within which inter-modality can operate. These will require the following:

- Information for users on what is available (habitual car users usually have little or no knowledge of alternative modes); several papers today address this issue;
- Education about transport and environmental issues; not just school children but adults, employers, retailers, decision takers;
- Re-orientate land use planning so that no activities depend for their functioning on the car, and so that a choice of alternative means of access to them is available.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we should not assume that inter-modal development will provide the solution to excessive motorised travel. Without actively limiting both car ownership and car use the impact will be insignificant. For politicians anxious not to upset the car lobby, inter-modal initiatives may provide a convenient smoke-screen of good intent, behind which unsustainable transport and development trends continue unabated. For the transport professional, the temptation is to focus on the technological and engineering issues of inter-modal development, while leaving aside the broader and more

difficult issue of excessive car use. The problem of urban transport is not primarily technical, but social in character. The quality of urban lifestyles and "travelstyles" depends ultimately on changing individual travel behaviour; and technical development is merely a means to this end.

True inter-modal "travelstyles" therefore require the limitation of indiscriminate car use, as well as the supply of appropriate infrastructure, information, promotion and land use planning.

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