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Proceedings of two seminars on 24 February and 10 March 1983

TRANSPORT and LAND USE PLANNING in LONDON

FOR THE ASSOCIATION OF LONDON BOROUGH PLANNING OFFICERS

TRANSPORT AND LAND USE PLANNING
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held at The Camden Centre, London, WC1.

- (i) TRANSPORT and LAND USE PLANNING IN LONDON, 24th February 1983
- (ii) TRANSPORT INTERCHANGES, TOWN CENTRES and TRAFFIC POLICY
implications for public transport, 10th March 1983

The initiation of these seminars was by Geoffrey Hoar, Chairman of the Association of London Borough Planning Officers, with John Gent and David Freeman of London Transport Executive. They were devised and organised by Gerald Smart, Shean McConnell and their colleagues at The Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning and at The Polytechnic of the South Bank.

Those who participated were from The London Transport Executive and from the London Boroughs.

The first seminar was chaired by Geoffrey Hoar, Chairman of ALBPO and Director of Planning, the London Borough of Camden. The second seminar was chaired by Professor Gerald Smart, The Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning, University College, London.

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INTRODUCTION

by Shean McConnell

The Context of Transport and Land Use Planning in London

In London in the last twenty years there has been a well documented moving outwards of residents and of job opportunities. Residential densities in London are now much lower, and as a consequence the operational and financial viability of public transport is being threatened. The movement of 'white' and 'blue collar' jobs alike to the outer London Boroughs and to the country and new towns in the Home Counties has meant demands for different and more complex travel patterns in South East England. Most of these new patterns of demand are met by the private car and the economics of public transport have become a more sensitive issue, politically, with each year. If the current trends continue, as expected, the next two decades will present even more difficulties to those who are to provide public transport for Londoners. It is noteworthy that technological change has not done much to alleviate the transport problem. As different speakers told of the difficulties of providing public transport in inner, middle and outer London, it was only too clear that public transport is a political issue, and that its future can be predicted in terms of the political ideology of the parties likely to be in power at local and central government level.

De-regulation and Decentralisation

In discussion, Dr. Quarmby, Director of London Transport Bus Services, asked whether we might be moving into a period of de-regulation. Such a move would apply equally to Town Planning and to Transport Planning. In more rural parts of the country the privatisation of bus services is more than a possibility. Could this happen in London, it was asked.

If there were to be a decrease in support for public transport and of planning controls, the centre of London would radically change. The market processes of decentralisation of commercial activities would continue unchecked, and there would be less and less movement of commuters in and out of the centre. Indeed as E.A. Gutkind theorised in "The Twilight of Cities", 1962, modern cities may be doomed because the cultural and social advantages of megalopolis can be reproduced in small communities. These can be dispersed throughout a region, each specialising in some functional service, and yet be linked by transport routes so that there is accessibility from one centre to another in less than an hour.

Gutkind predicted that decentralisation would result in central area slums being replaced by parks rather than new dwellings. He advocated such decentralisation so that gradually the urban core would be converted into an open space system of urban parks. When Gutkind wrote this at the end of the 1950's the process of decentralisation of activities was proceeding in most of the American cities from a quarter to half a million residents. At that period - in the 1950's - such theories seemed to have no application in much planned London. But today the data on population and employment movements from London during the last three decades shows clearly that decentralisation of people and jobs has been a fact.

The car, except for priority uses, can be excluded by regulation from the central area. This is what a number of younger Labour councillors elected to some of the inner-London boroughs in 1982 would like to happen. The result would be a greater role for public transport. Perhaps the opposite alternative is to motorise the inner core as proposed in the Buchanan Report "Traffic in Towns" 1963. But as this would be very expensive it will not happen in this or in any other city in the developed world. There are too many more pressing priorities for public expenditure like health, employment creation and unemployment relief, education and defence.

It was noticeable during the seminar on February 24th how seldom goods were mentioned as a problem. This further stresses the fact that London is no longer in any important sense a manufacturing centre. The goods to be transported are mostly consumer items being brought into the retail establishments of central London. Transport of these does of course bring problems of the heavy lorries and juggernauts which were mentioned by several speakers. But it was made evident that the problem of London's public transport is principally that of transporting people at peak periods at minimum cost.

Some Problems Identified

A theme which emerged in the seminar discussions was that of contradictions between the levels of power of London Boroughs, the GLC and Central Government. An example noted by David Pike was that the GLC has complete control of the siting of pedestrian crossings. This further emphasises the point made above that political choice is dominant in the provision of public transport. David Bayliss and Bill Fairhall both noted that London's bus fares are among the highest in the world. This gives London Transport an unusually difficult problem compared with their counterparts in other metropolitan cities. Another result of inadequate funding noted by several speakers was that the fabric upon which public transport in London is dependent is deteriorating. On the Underground the lifts are now very old and need to be replaced. Many vehicles need to be replaced.

London Transport contributors complained that they are not consulted by the Borough Planners when Local Plans are being prepared and when important development control applications are being considered.

John Gent demonstrated the vicious cycle of declining public transport as related to the growth in the use of private cars: the more cars there are on the road the slower the bus services become and the more other commuters are tempted to use their cars. This matter is exacerbated because so many people working in Central London are provided with free cars, free insurance, and free petrol by their firms as a perk. They are often provided with free parking. The corollary of this problem is that only by restricting the use of private cars in inner cities can the roads be free for the faster passage of buses, and therefore only in this way will buses become more attractive to the people who have the choice between a private car and public transport. There are of course hundreds of thousands of people who are unable to afford a private car or who are unable to drive one. This fact encourages questions as to who benefits and who loses from transport policies, a point made by Tim Pharoah.

Bill Fairhall discussed some of the problems in social accounting. He stated that the hierarchy of decision making started with legal and moral obligations and duties. On the same theme David Bayliss warned in discussion of 'Greeks bearing Gifts'. Dave Pike emphasised the criteria of need but it is almost impossible to measure social need in a way which can be set against economic criteria.

Roger Khanna stressed the differences between Inner London with a residue of poor and unskilled people and Outer London, with a density too low to justify public transport. He accused planners of producing meaningless plans: "We waffle away in our plans". There was reference to the lack of Borough staff specialising in transport, and lengthy planning procedures.

Solutions

In a seminar, it is nearly as easy for people to offer solutions as to cite problems. Funds for transport purposes from Central and from local government were of course solution number one. The London Transport speakers asked the Boroughs for more commitment to transport issues in forward planning and in development control. The strategic role of the GLC was stressed. Parking policies were noted by John Gent as being in need of implementation. He quoted half a million acts of parking in London daily of which two-thirds infringed the regulations. The car had to be restrained. Bill Fairhall's multi-modal fare structure was a solution. So were interchanges as at Brixton. But the London Transport suggested solution of more development at nodal points, e.g. King's Cross, was strongly contested by David Pike and other Inner London planners.

Another widely accepted plea was for developers to be allowed to be less successful in bargaining and to provide more Planning Gain - perhaps for London Transport.

London Transport speakers saw more consultation as a solution to the mis-match between land use traffic generation and transport provisions. They wanted to be consulted more by planners and other public sector decision makers like ILEA and the Health Authority.

It was noteworthy that the London Transport participants had more ideas than the representatives of the London Boroughs.

In conclusion, a significant but discouraging fact about the content of the seminars was that despite the fact that so many of the ideas discussed were current twenty years ago, their implementation has been more notable by its absence than otherwise. A comparison of articles and books written in the early 1960's shows how little has changed in the theories and practices of transport planning in two decades. The seminars showed more evidence of the constraints than of the opportunities for transport planners in the 1980's. Some of the so-called solutions of the 1960's, like the mono-rail, are now seen to have been pipe-dreams - at least for London. One of the few innovations to be referred to during the seminars was the light railway proposed for Docklands.

The exchanges between London Transport's representatives and Borough Planning Officers, although occasionally sharp, showed that each group valued the role of the other. More co-operation in future is probably the most sensible and the least expensive solution to the interrelated problems of transport and land use planning in London.