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Introduction to Special Section on Transport Governance

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The articles in this special section on the theme of transport governance come from a call for papers by the Special Interest Group (SIG) on Governance and Decision Making Processes, for the World Conference on Transport Research (WCTRS) held in Mumbai, India in May 2019. The aim of the SIG is to advance understandings of the development and implementation of transportation policies in various contexts, and advance knowledge of the governance dynamics that influence and steer these processes. The SIG also aims to develop understanding of the role of transportation in wider governance and public policy trends. To that end, the call for papers for the WCTRS Conference was broad, aiming to encapsulate a range of different theoretical, methodological and analytical perspectives and approaches, applied to a range of pertinent governance issues and empirical contexts. The six papers in this symposium reflect the diversity of the call, but in turn highlight some key foci for advancing understanding of contemporary transport governance challenges.

As we have argued elsewhere, within the transport field there is a heavy emphasis on case study description of policy implementation and outcomes, to the detriment of critical analysis of the processes and power dynamics that affect policy (Marsden and Reardon 2017). In their different ways, the articles in this section point to the importance of this critical analysis; identifying the role of political goals, the relationship between politics and administration and the realities of negotiating and working through delivery on the ground as important variables in determining how governance affects practice. These contributions illustrate the fruitful ground for placing greater emphasis on analysis of the realities of network governance (Rhodes 2007) and the details of how policy-making and delivery occurs at street-level (Lipsky 1980). The role of policy making over time (Pollitt 2008) and the framing and bounding of the problems (Schön and Rein 1994) and solutions being considered also comes through. Far from being a search for 'optimal solutions' and a determination of what policy 'should' do (which more rational understandings of policy processes often assume is required to affect change), the articles here remind us that there are always winners and losers in policy development which need to be understood and that there are also, therefore, political risks to unpack. We hope that this special section, and the on-going work of the SIG will contribute to the continued development of the field in researching and understanding these issues in a more systematic manner. The specific contributions of the articles in this section are as follows.

McCarthy et al analyse the risk factors and drivers behind the cancellation, deferment and termination of public-private partnerships (P3) for surface transportation in the United States. Their research identifies four key vulnerabilities that these often complex, and increasingly prevalent, governance arrangements are exposed to; bureaucratic complexity; public voice; political voice; and economic conditions. Their analysis recognises the temporal dimension to risk, with economic conditions often changing in light of unpredicted shocks (such as recession) or inaccurate forecasts (relating to demand for example) that undermine partnership feasibility into the long term. Changes to legislation, and shifts in political support that come from fluctuating balances of power over time are also highlighted as prevalent risks that can undermine partnerships. Moreover, the paper identifies a link between political opposition to P3s and public concerns about the projects being implemented, in particular in relation to their environmental impacts, highlighting the importance of buy in from stakeholders – widely conceived – in ensuring the success of P3s. The lack of bureaucratic risk found in the analysis, may point to an increase in expertise and learning within the sector, as to the public management processes required to underpin such partnerships.

Moscholidou and Pangbourne analyse emerging city level responses to smart mobility; recognising the importance of the local level for shaping use (and impact) of new technologies within our transport systems. They identify the different regulatory challenges faced by cities, given the different legal, political and constitutional contexts they operate within and in turn the different policy responses these enable. In comparing two cities with existing smart mobility operations, they note London's 'reactive' and 'cautious' approach to ridesharing, car sharing, and bike sharing, in comparison to Seattle's 'proactive' and 'bold' one. In turn, Moscholidou and Pangbourne identify three primary ways in which regulation should be applied for effective management of smart mobility. First, regulation should be applied to specific types of smart mobility, recognising nuance in different types of service offer and their implications. Second, regulation should outline clear roles and responsibilities for smart mobility providers, and the consequences for failure to comply. Third, cities should aim to ensure that the smart mobility services on offer align with long term local strategic objectives. They argue that these principles are underpinned by the need to provide clear lines of accountability and demonstrate the preparedness required for fostering trust and confidence between stakeholders.

Pettersson and Sørensen also focus on governance and decision making at the city level, but in relation to a more traditional form of transport – buses – in particular, bus prioritisation policies and the factors influencing their implementation. They identify the need to focus on policy (goals and measures), polity (institutional arrangements), and politics (conflict and contestation) as potential influences on decision making. In their comparative analysis of two Scandinavian cities (Stockholm and Copenhagen), they find the polity dimension the most important factor in determining a focus on bus priority measures, recognising the importance of economic incentives and the impetus of co-funding (from State agencies for example) in driving forward implementation. They also note the prevalence of conflict as a detrimental factor to implementation. Contestation is generated with other road user interests due to the reallocation of road space the policy measures often require. For example, space being 'taken' from the private motor vehicle user, walker or cyclist to enable effective prioritisation. Moreover, their analysis highlights the different issue framings held by different governance actors that can hinder or enable support for bus prioritisation. For example, increasing the speed of buses (seen as a benefit for mode use) is seen as a negative to quality of life for communities where the bus corridors run through.

Hrelja et al. present a literature review of critical problems in creating an efficient public transport system. Whilst much has been written about how to create a well integrated, reliable, clean and accessible public transport system and on the barriers to doing so in different places, the authors contribution to the field is in drawing this together in a systematic review based on the PRISMA framework. The article reviews barriers and working practices separately which enables closer attention to be paid to the 'how' as well as the 'what' of improving public transport. It concludes that across a wide range of circumstances, greater attention needs to be paid to collaborative practices and working across institutional boundaries and cultures, with a call to a more networks governance approach to studying implementation through actors. In doing so, the need for analysis of formal and informal institutional arrangements and practices is highlighted. The authors conclude that the literature is largely case study driven with very little in the way of unifying framework and their review therefore contributes by outlining how future studies might become more closely related.

Aparicio discusses the evaluation of innovative transport policies and asks whether the process-based evaluations which have dominated European Union research programmes paint a full picture. Using evidence from the ECCENTRIC project and studying the development of innovations in the city of Madrid he suggests that the often incremental nature of demonstrations, coupled with the inevitable redistribution of winners and losers means that much greater attention needs to be paid to the

political and policy context. This is particularly important given the heavy emphasis in EU funding programmes for policy learning and policy transfer with “leaders” and “followers” forming part of the programmatic approach. The paper explores different types of policy interventions and concludes that market-based measures are difficult to implement in small ‘living lab’ areas due to scale issues and that more contentious space reallocation or other redistributive measures require significant political capital and focus which is hard to mobilise for small areas or to maintain over the timescales of bid through implementation. The failure to consider policy histories, the underlying narratives of choice and the realities facing street level bureaucrats all serve to reduce the implementation and longer-term impacts of innovation programmes and this could, and Aparicio argues, should, be part of the bidding process.

Hansson examines the role of public administrators in adopting new policy directives using two case studies on environmental policy from Sweden, one being the adoption of an EU Directive and the other a nationally driven initiative. Both were focussed on forward looking environmental objectives around adopting alternative fuel infrastructures and the other for how to create a fossil fuel free transport system. Hansson pays particular attention to four types of process knowledge, drawing on the work of Tennøy et al. (2016) and reflecting on the extent to which the separation between the political and administrative arms of government exists in practice. The paper finds a significant degree of recycling of policy knowledge, to a degree deliberately specified in the framing instructions. This is perhaps not surprising but is important in embedding previous thinking into a context which would appear to require new and more transformative actions. The paper identifies quite significant autonomy for bureaucrats, but only within the processes defined and suggests that wider consultation, whilst present, has an ambiguous role in outcomes. Hansson concludes by pointing to the limited scope, in these examples, for independence and challenge from within public administration which is a dynamic worthy of much wider investigation.

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