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## Editorial

For final published article, please see:

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### Transferability of Urban Transport Policy

Special Interest group (SIG10) of the World Conference on Transport Research Society focusing on Urban Transport Policy was launched at the 9<sup>th</sup> WCTRS in Seoul, Korea, 2001. Its principal objectives are to:

- collate experience on the performance of urban transport policy instruments;
- establish good practice in the evaluation of such instruments;
- enhance understanding of the design, implementation and performance of such instruments; and
- encourage the development of interactive learning methods in the subject area for students, practitioners and decision makers.

This Special Issue focuses on the transfer of transport policies between different contexts. It originated from a targeted SIG10 workshop undertaken in Gothenburg in April 2009 on the transferability of urban transport policy. The workshop was supported by and linked to the Volvo Research and Educational Foundation conference on Future Urban Transport. This special issue presents a selection of the papers from the workshop which have been further developed and peer reviewed.

Policy transfer is most commonly defined as 'a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, p344). The basis of the workshop and the Special Issue was a realisation that, whilst there are many studies comparing the presence and performance of transport policies in different contexts, there is comparatively little work which explains why some transport policies seem to achieve widespread adoption whilst others stall. This requires an understanding of the nature of the search for policy lessons, the process of policy transfer, the influences on the effectiveness of the transfer of policies and ultimately the benefits, or otherwise, of such processes.

Whilst policy transfer is under-researched in a transport context, there is a wealth of studies in wider public policy to draw on. These broadly speaking come from two perspectives. The first is an institutional perspective which considers the structural setting and power of actors within that setting to dominate transfer (e.g. Bulmer and Padgett, 2004). The second is a sociological perspective drawing on notions of policy diffusion which identifies the importance of social processes of knowledge exchange and the interaction that these have with more formal mechanisms (Marsh and Sharman, 2009). The most common overarching

framework for understanding policy transfer however comes from Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) which identifies eight questions or components of transfer (Why transfer? Who is involved? What is transferred? From where? What is the degree of transfer? What are the Constraints? How is transfer demonstrated? And does it succeed?). The papers in this special issue all draw to some extent on this framework and we draw together our synthesis below around these headings. However, it is important to note that this is simply a framework that has been demonstrated to be useful in organising themes and it is not suggested that this is a structured series of questions which policy makers think through in approaching the task of transfer.

The first of the six papers, by Marsden and Stead, presents a state-of-art review of why and how policies and policy lessons in the transport planning arena are transferred between cities. It sets out different theoretical and methodological approaches to studying policy transfer and uses thirteen case studies to understand how the policy transfer literature might apply in the transport sector. The paper critically reviews the components of Dolowitz and Marsh's framework and concludes that most of the dimensions can be observed as important in the transport sector. However, it finds that there is, as yet, little evidence on the extent to which the policy transfer observed in the sector leads to more effective outcomes.

The remaining five papers report the results of studies of cities in Australia, Europe and North America. The five consider in turn general practice, overall strategies and specific policy instruments. Marsden et al. present the findings of a study of the development and adoption or rejection of thirty policies in eleven cities across Northern Europe and North America. Timms reports on a survey of the information requirements of seven representative European cities. On this basis he considers their approach to policy transfer, and why and how they participate in information provision. Bray et al. report on a review of 43 transport strategies published for the five largest cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide) in Australia between 1965 and 2010. Rye et al. describe attempts to promote the transfer of the integration of mobility management policies and land use planning. Workshops with practitioners in Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Spain were used to explain and explore the potential for such policies to be applied in new contexts. Finally, Attard and Enoch examine the adoption of road pricing in Valletta by tracing the process of policy adoption from within the policy design team. The different studies contained in this Special Issue adopt different methodological approaches to shed light on the relevance of policy transfer to transport although all are based on small sample qualitative approaches.

Why Transfer? It is apparent that most cities are actively searching for policy lessons from elsewhere although they approach the task and resource it in quite distinct ways. Marsden et al. identify six principal motivations for policy transfer, of which strategic need (a recognition that current policies were not sufficient even if applied more intensively) was the most important. This appears to have been the case in Valetta also. Timms' paper and Rye et al both underline the influence, in Europe, of funding opportunities and information exchange programmes as a catalyst for exchange. Some cities in Timms' study appeared at least as

interested in promoting their 'best practice' as they were in learning from others. The one notable exception is the Australian experience. Bray et al conclude that the transport policies adopted by the five capital cities have been remarkably similar and have changed in a similar way over time. However, they find little evidence that formal policy transfer has underpinned this process although this may, in part, be due to the timescales over which the study looks.

Who is involved? A range of actors are engaged in different aspects of the transfer process although it appears, across the studies, that city politicians and officials are the critical players in instigating the search for new policies, and that officials lead in applying those policies in their own contexts. Marsden et al. find that private suppliers and, to a much lesser extent, interest groups and academics contribute to stimulating the search for new ideas. Suppliers (which includes transport operators) and consultants contribute more to the application of transfer. The importance of city officials was underscored in Bray et al.'s paper and Attard and Enoch where it was clearly shown how important local officials were in defining the search parameters. Timms' interviews outlined the role of networks of city officials as sources of information exchange in a number of places. Rye et al present a different experience, in which the policy search and execution are stimulated by academics and consultants, funded by the European Commission. Bray et al. noted that consultants from the USA were also often used and were a source of trans-national transfer.

What is transferred and what is the degree of transfer? Despite the similarity of strategies in Australian cities, there is little evidence of overall strategies being transferred. It is not uncommon for specific solutions to be selected at an early stage. Many of the case studies in Marsden et al are based on a particular, pre-selected solution, and in Valetta the choice of road pricing seems to have been made very early in the process without consideration of alternatives such as the access control schemes of Italian cities. However, it is rare for policies to be transferred in their entirety and most policies studied were a combination of ideas from several sites. In many cases particular aspects of a scheme are transferred. Marsden et al and Attard and Enoch provide examples of the transfer of technology, operating systems and scheme evaluation. For the more public-facing elements it is more common for a multitude of ideas to be considered and a hybrid solution developed which is tailored to the specific local context. Rye et al. considered the adoption of regulations and practices for mobility management. This paper in particular highlights the difficulties of cities trying to transfer policies (rather than technologies). The mobility management policies had been developed in countries with often quite different problems from those to whom the transfer possibilities were being presented. Some aspects of the solutions therefore had poor 'policy fit'. Other aspects were limited by different legislative frameworks over which the cities had limited control. Transfer was therefore only very partial.

From where are lessons sought? It is common for cities to seek solutions from innovator cities and from the best practice which they represent. Marsden et al find evidence of this process both in Europe and in North America, but there seems to be less willingness to seek innovations from other continents. Valetta drew heavily on influences from London and

Durham and to some degree from contemporary proposals in Edinburgh and Stockholm. Bray et al. note that North American consultants are a source of trans-national transfer and that national agencies could be – although this was not a strong feature. Rye et al's study is predicated on the transfer of experience from leader to follower cities. This process places considerable demands on the leader cities to provide information, and Marsden et al consider what motivates such cities to contribute in this way. However, many respondents in both Marsden et al and in Timms suggest that the search process for policy information is often unsystematic in nature, with reliance both on general search facilities such as Google and on personal networks of contacts.

What are the constraints? The papers highlight a range of constraints on the policy transfer process. Marsden et al identify institutional learning cultures as critical. Those cities which encourage staff to explore new ideas and which allocate staff time to the process, are more likely to be successful. Marsden et al. and Timms suggest that there is too much information available on transport policies, particularly as generated by search engines, but that it is of a varying quality and thus difficult to trust and interpret. Contextual constraints are identified in many of the papers. Trans-national differences, both formal (such as laws and regulations) and informal (such as custom and language) can act as significant barriers to adoption of policies. Marsden et al find that differences in organizational culture place a particular strain on transfer into new contexts. Rye et al note that differences between "best practice" and follower cities can make policy transfer difficult. Timms identifies the tension between the European Union's policies of promoting best practice and of respecting subsidiarity and hence diversity. Both Bray and Marsden et al identify the shortage of time and professional capacity as constraints on effective policy learning.

All the authors offer ways of overcoming these constraints, which will be important for the further development of policy transfer. Marsden et al emphasise improvements in cities' approaches to policy learning, greater investment in policy networks, improved facilities for information searching and support for more objective empirical evidence on policy performance. Timms identifies the importance of European funding as a means of overcoming some of these barriers but also notes that there is a risk that language barriers and traditions of participation may mean that participation of cities is not as broad as it needs to be. Rye et al suggest that longer timescales need to be allowed for the adoption of new policies in follower cities. These factors have implications also for future research on policy transfer. The institutional constraints suggest the need to consider structure and agency, while the apparent importance of networks of contacts suggests a greater focus on the social processes of transfer.

The impacts of transfer? Finally, whilst these papers all make a contribution to our understanding of how policies move between places and over time, none is able to demonstrate the benefits of the process of seeking these lessons. For example, Bray et al conclude that there is little evidence to demonstrate that the convergence of policy in Australian cities is optimal or that lessons of past strategies have been learnt. This is in part

because it is difficult to understand what the benefits are. In some instances it may be that the transfer lessons have unlocked an implementation that had previously stalled. In others it may be that the transfer improved acceptability or reduced the operating costs of one part of the system. In all of the cases the alternative scenario comparator is difficult to define and is not something that the cities themselves have an interest in presenting, given their focus on delivery.

This lack of evidence is potentially significant for two reasons. First, it should not be presumed that all policy transfer is inherently positive. Secondly, where policy transfer is generating positive impacts, it needs to be effectively supported through improvements in learning culture and policy networks, in the provision of information and in the search process. The current pressures on public spending threaten such support, but at the same time make it more important that city governments are able more effectively to identify successful cost-effective policies.

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