

If car-use has peaked in many cities, is public sentiment all downhill from here?

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Underlying theme of the evolution of mobility in cities and public sentiment about cars.....

.....Three tenets – a view from the North:

1. Public sentiments are an influential dimension of cultures
2. We should think in terms of ICT-Transport Cultures, not just Transport Cultures
3. ICT-Transport Cultures are vulnerable to radical shifts in public sentiment in some circumstances

1. Public sentiments are an influential dimension of diverse, Regionally-Rooted Transport Cultures

- ❑ Public attitudes, opinions and sentiments are all *evaluations*. In Northern countries, in the case of policies targeting sustainable, safe transportation, they often add up to ambivalence, particularly if the policies are expensive.
- ❑ The **link between attitudes and behaviour** often takes a roundabout route. Contrary to popular beliefs, a successful policy or programme that achieves a change in a targeted attitude does not automatically bring about a corresponding change in behaviour. Also, note that participating in a novel behaviour can *lead to* a change in attitude.
- ❑ Public sentiments help encapsulate, symbolise and distinguish evolving **subcultures**, such as “**Car-centred**”, versus “**Content to live without using cars**” versus “**(Emphatically) Anti-Car**”
- ❑ **Perceptions** are of central importance. For example, those who wish to use cars may assume that anyone who does not drive is “anti-car”. But with increasing numbers of younger people who postpone getting their first licence, the sub-culture “content to live without using cars” seems to be gaining ground and this should favour Prof. Jones’ Stage 3 solutions.

2. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are rapidly becoming pervasive to the point that we should think in terms of ICT-Transport Cultures and the role public attitudes play in them

- The **growth of mobile phone users globally** has been astonishing : about 5 billion in 2015 – among a population over the age of 14 years of 5.4 billion !
- **Trading off between virtual and spatial mobility**: diverse modes of communication, navigation, etc., have been dramatically *democratised* using near-ubiquitous mobile digital devices [laptops, tablets, phones, smart phones, etc.]. An increasingly digital world has allowed public sentiment regarding mobility policies to build, grow and disseminate employing the tools of social media, much as has happened in other areas of public policy.

2. (continued) Towards thinking in terms of “ICT-Transport” Cultures and the role public attitudes play in them

- Evidence exists for ICT-enabled **shifts in the spatial and temporal organisation of activities and travel**, including for non-work activities. In general, ICTs appear to support “post-modern” dynamic behaviour.
- Closely linked to the wide availability of ICTs is the trajectory of **new service models** for transport (e.g. car-sharing, Uber and, ultimately, networked autonomous vehicles) that are emerging with potential benefits for security, safety and well-being – although not without some new types of risk.
- In sum, it makes sense to treat virtual and spatial mobility holistically as belonging to a **joint ICT-Transport Culture**. To the extent that this Culture overlaps others such as Community Energy Efficiency, Public Health or “Homeland security”, recent efforts by IATSS to take a more *trans-disciplinary approach* can help keep the cultural knowledge base up-to-date.

3. ICT-Transport Cultures are vulnerable to radical shifts in public sentiment if travel becomes *much less affordable or accessible* (e.g. full cost pricing of carbon, infrastructure (re)investment costs, traveller security systems....etc.)

- There is a serious possibility that travel will become much more difficult and/or expensive in the coming decade. To the extent that the public become convinced that their carbon emissions lead increasingly to intolerable global climate change, travel could even become subject to demand restraint or allocation mechanisms.
- The most recent oil shortages (1973; 1979), relatively minor as they were, brought much *public scepticism* about the cause of supply shortfalls
 - Canadian research in the 1970s and 1980s revealed potential public sentiment in favour of fuel conservation large enough to drive a 10%-15% voluntary reduction in a shortage. Beyond that, a shortage had to be convincingly real “like in World War II” to motivate any action by car-users.
- It is interesting to speculate how today’s “Content to live without using cars” and “anti-car” subcultures would coexist with the “car-centred” subculture under voluntary demand restraint or allocation policies.
- We can ask an analogous question about how public sentiment within today’s ICT-Transport culture is a help or hindrance to the implementation of Prof. Jones’ Stage 3 changes to the urban fabric, as well as “soft” policy innovations such as tradeable individual carbon permits.
- A concluding thought about public sentiment on mobility challenges in cities: *will the North learn from the South?*