



Global
Urban
Research
Unit

**School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape
Global Urban Research Unit
University of Newcastle upon Tyne**

Electronic Working Paper No 36

**MANAGING CHANGE IN A FRAGMENTED INSTITUTIONAL
ENVIRONMENT:
THE MICRO-POLITICS OF TRANSPORT'S 'NEW REALISM' IN TYNE
AND WEAR**

**Previously published in July 1998 as Working Paper No. 69
by Simon Pemberton, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences,
University of Aberystwyth & Geoff Vigar, Centre for Urban Development
and Environmental Management, Leeds Metropolitan University¹**

Contact: kim.mccartney@ncl.ac.uk

¹ The authors would like to thank the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund for funding the study from which this material was taken; the four other research team members - Patsy Healey, John Nelson, Matthew Steele & Alan Wenban Smith; and last but not least all the interviewees that took part in this study

ISBN: 0 905770 69 2

1 RESEARCHING THE 'NEW REALISM' IN TRANSPORT PLANNING

By the late eighties...every country in the world was facing a frightening new paradox. On the one hand, the growth in demand for traffic, and particularly for motorcars, showed no signs of abating. On the other, concern about the consequences of unrestricted traffic growth, particularly the problems posed by vehicle emissions and congestion were beginning to be recognised as challenges on a global scale. The task of reconciling the two is one of the most important we will all face in the twenty-first century", Steven Norris² (Minster for Transport, 1992-1996).

1.1 Research Questions

This paper explores the challenge to local policy-makers of reconciling traffic growth with concerns over the damage caused to the environment and communities of the effects of road traffic. The Paper is centrally concerned with reviewing *institutional structures* and *governance processes* to critically examine how far these structures and processes provide fair, implementable solutions to policy concerns. It provides a rare detailed exploration of transport planning and policy-making in practice through a case study of the Tyne and Wear conurbation.

Transport policy has shifted rapidly in recent years. Concern for the environmental impacts of transport choices, mounting evidence that road-building generates more traffic, and restrictions on public spending have allied in a powerful challenge to the policies of the 1980s. These factors have led to a growing awareness amongst the transport profession of the need to mobilise a range of solutions to transport policy issues, rather than simply relying on one mechanism be that road-building or any other. The notion of a 'new realism' is invoked³ to describe an emergent consensus amongst the transport planning community. The 'new realism' is underpinned by a widespread recognition amongst transport professionals that transport planning can no longer provide for the predicted levels of traffic growth. The main elements of this new approach focus upon the following policies⁴:

- containment or reduction of traffic
- improved public transport systems
- better provision for pedestrians and cyclists
- pedestrianisation and traffic calming
- traffic restraint and management
- awareness of the contribution of land-use planning and controls over the location of development in particular.

However whilst there is some broad agreement over these principles, implementation appears to be patchy. The delivery of such policies is arguably hampered by a fragmented institutional landscape arising from the de-regulation and privatisation of public transport services in the 1980s and reforms in local government, most notably the abolition of the Metropolitan County Councils in such areas. In addition at local levels lobbies for or against

² Norris, S., 1996, *Changing Trains*, Hutchison, London.

³ Goodwin et al, 1991, *Transport: The New Realism*, TSU, Oxford.

⁴ Cairns et al, 1996, *The Real Effects of Environmentally Friendly Transport Policies*, Paper to ESRC Transport and Environment Conference, London, March.

individual schemes and local political difficulties inhibit the implementation of policies with a more strategic focus.

There are then many barriers to the implementation of the 'new realism'. This paper aims to explore these barriers in detail and make proposals as to how the implementation of a more socially and environmentally responsible transport policy can be implemented in the case study area and beyond. The paper thus aims to;

- assess how policy-makers are responding to the competing demands of environmentalists, business groups, and other political influences in a fragmented institutional landscape and an era of tight fiscal restraint
- examine the depth and breadth of a 'new realism' amongst a range of stakeholders.
- develop a fuller understanding of the barriers to innovation in transport planning and explore ways of overcoming them.
- propose ways of improving policy and decision making processes in order to achieve more open, workable solutions to transport problems.

1.2 The Methodology

The research operationalises an institutional approach to the study of governance⁵. Such an approach uses the concepts of stakeholders, policy communities, policy arenas, and policy discourses to explore contemporary governance processes. The concept of stakeholders encompasses all those potentially affected by events in the policy realm⁶, not just the currently active participants but those who may have an interest as yet undeclared. Policy arenas make up the institutional 'sites' where policy is discussed. A study of such arenas highlights the relations amongst stakeholders and the implications arising from the nature of these 'sites' where discussion takes place. This focus enables the arenas where transport issues are discussed to be located among other significant sites of discussion, whether formally-constituted or not. Such practices and formal organisational structures are important, but it is the quality of the relations (or networks) amongst stakeholders, both formally and informally constituted, which are crucial in revealing the way one arena links to another. To explore these relations, the research examines the activities of policy communities, that is, collections (or networks) of stakeholders clustered around particular issues of policy concern. This notion helps to identify the focus and boundaries of the relations which existed. Policy discourse analysis is deployed as a tool for identifying the substantive content of the discussions arising in the arenas and flowing along the networks, and their reflection in policy issue agendas. This allows analysis of the direction of flow of influence, as ideas which were developed in one arena and policy community were translated into another, framing the debates therein⁷.

The focus then, is on the relations between stakeholders in the conurbation, the places in which discussion takes place, the networks of interest that tie stakeholders together and the discourses and frames of reference that structure networking activity. In order to get a detailed grasp of the finegrain of policy debates and the relations between stakeholders we have tended to focus on particular 'sites' of interaction, either a physical site about which there

⁵ Healey, P., 1997, *Collaborative Planning*, Macmillan, London.

⁶ Bryson & Crosby, 1992, *Leadership for the common good*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco.

⁷ Latour, 1987, *Science in Action*, OUP, Oxford.

was much negotiation, or an institutional arena of interaction. Three such sites are detailed in Part 2.3.

Data collection included reviews of policy documentation, attendance at several transport debates⁸ conducted in the North-east between September 1997 and April 1998 and 19 semi-structured interviews⁹ with stakeholders in Tyne and Wear (see Appendix A). Interviews were conducted between October 1997 and January 1998 and all were taped and transcribed.

2 TRANSPORT AND THE WIDER POLITY IN TYNE AND WEAR

2.1 Changing Mobility Patterns

Similar trends in the organisation of modes of production and consumption are occurring throughout the Western World. These are reflected in turn to varying degrees at national and local levels and contribute to debates as to whether this represents a new phase of development, commonly presented as a shift from fordism to post-fordism. What is clear is that certain trends in movement are observable at the level of the conurbation that are either driven by changes in modes of production or consumption and /or enabled by changes within the transport sector itself. Principally these trends relate to changes in the nature of production including a shift away from manufacturing industry to service industries, the increasing internationalisation of production processes, the acceleration of innovation and change and the rise in the importance of information as a commodity. In relation to consumption, a key trend of concern to us here is the emergence of new spaces of consumption often beyond existing urban centres.

In relation to Tyne and Wear the demise of ship-building and heavy engineering has a number of consequences, particularly in relation to journey to work travel patterns. Prior to this demise Gillespie refers to the spatiality of Tyneside as “pre-Fordist”¹⁰. That is the conurbation in part consisted of a string of communities, each relatively self-contained in terms of employment, retailing and leisure opportunity. As a consequence journeys were in the main very short.

New employment has tended to be in service industries: financial services’ back offices and call centres in particular. Virtually all of this new development is beyond the river-side communities and much of it beyond the central area of Newcastle. However in contrast to other cities most is within the existing urban edge. Encouraged by public subsidy, a great deal of new development is on brown-field sites and often has some degree of public transport service. Retail and leisure developments follow a similar pattern. In addition central Newcastle has retained its prominence despite the development of new spaces of consumption beyond traditional areas. Less robust retailing centres have been damaged by developments such as the Metro Centre and Team Valley Retail Park although both of these developments

⁸ Four debates took place as part of a regional response to the Government White Paper. Team member(s) attended each one. Meetings of the Newcastle Healthy City Initiative and the NorthEast Chamber of Commerce to discuss the White Paper were also attended.

⁹ Throughout the remainder of this Paper quotes in italics which are not given a footnote reference are from interviews. They are not attributed for reasons of interviewee confidentiality.

¹⁰ Gillespie, 1998, *Movement and Mobility in the Post-Fordist City*, in Banister (ed.), *Transport Policy and the Environment*, Chapman and Hall, London, pps.

are comprehensively served by public transport and 20% of all shoppers at the Metro Centre arrive by public transport. New leisure developments has also been on brownfield sites. Although most users of such sites arrive by car these developments are almost all well-served by public transport. Thus travel patterns are changing but the impact is lessened in comparison with other places, “more decentralised, dispersed travel patterns are beginning to become established, though their impact is very much lessened by the locational peculiarities of the predominantly brownfield forms of development”¹¹. Combined with Tyne and Wear’s continuing high usage of public transport and low car ownership this situation creates a unique “window of opportunity” for transport planning and spatial strategy-making more generally.

However given the previous very localised journeys being undertaken in many areas a marked change in travel patterns has occurred. The release of greenfield sites is a feature within the region driven by perceptions as to what development markets want and the threat of the release of similar sites from other authorities in the competition for scarce investment. Given current local planning policy in Tyne and Wear we can expect a continued centralisation of commercial activity in the core urban centre of Newcastle but more significantly rapid growth in peripheral retail, office, and industrial development; and as a result a greater dispersal of travel patterns across the conurbation and wider (sub) region.

2.2 Responses to Changing Mobility Patterns: the dominance of an urban regeneration discourse

The key strategic issues in relation to transport policy are perceived by our interviewees to be: congestion, pollution, car ownership levels, public transport patronage and public transport integration. The key concern for most is that increasing levels of pollution and road traffic congestion are the consequence of a decline in public transport patronage, despite increasing provision (see Figures One, Two and Three), and a rapid increase in car ownership and use¹². Congestion is *perceived* as a problem principally through its impact on business and therefore economic growth. The perception of congestion is strongly influenced by problems at pinch points such as central urban areas, the Tyne Bridge, the A1 and access to and from the Metro Centre. However, congestion and pollution levels in Tyne and Wear at present are posing far less problems than in other conurbations within the United Kingdom. Congestion is primarily limited to Newcastle and Gateshead of the five metropolitan authorities and this is ‘momentary’ congestion at peak periods and following road traffic accidents. As a result despite pollution peaks associated with the ‘momentary’ congestion, there will be no significant difficulties in meeting any new air quality targets set out by national government in the foreseeable future¹³.

The emphasis on congestion is thus limited to specific points in space and time, rather than in relation to traffic levels per se and this conception has significant implications for the way transport issues are tackled in Tyne and Wear. In one or two authorities attempts were being made to reduce traffic demand on an authority-wide scale but a ‘splatter gun’ perspective of

¹¹ Gillespie, 1998, *ibid.*, p.xx.

¹² However, the conurbation has a low level of car ownership compared to others in the United Kingdom (there are 264 cars per 1000 population in Tyne and Wear, as opposed to 403 cars per 1000 population in the West Midlands).

¹³ Newcastle City Council, 1995, Energy, Transport and the Urban Environment, NCC, Newcastle.

the need for demand management measures was more the norm. Attention is thus focused on reducing movement by private vehicles only in specific areas, typically town and city centres.

Figure One - Rail Services: Provision and Patronage Levels - 1982/83 to 1995/96

Figure Two - Metro Services: Provision and Patronage Levels - 1982/83 to 1995/96

Figure Three - Bus Services: Provision and Patronage Levels - 1982/83 to 1995/96

This perception of the congestion problem suggests that attitudes toward demand management as the key principle driving policy change may not penetrate as deeply as might be imagined. This supports a suspicion that:

It is difficult to separate out whether people's views have changed because of the money which is now available for different public transport / environmentally-friendly transport schemes, or because they generally believe that the move away from road building is the right thing.

The area still has relatively high levels of public transport patronage however and 19% of the Tyne and Wear population travel to work by bus and four per cent by rail (the corresponding figures are ten and two per cent in the West Midlands). This level of public transport patronage is widely thought to be a relic of the emphasis on public transport integration that existed before bus deregulation. Partly as a result of this demise there has been a renewed emphasis recently by local authorities and the Passenger Transport Executive (PTE - also known by the commercial name of 'Nexus') to strive for (re)integration of transport services. The notion of the seamless journey has begun to be promoted as a consequence but mainly in discussions at regional level with this idea yet to penetrate the day-to-day practice of transport planning in the conurbation.

To situate transport planning within the wider polity we use a three fold typology of economic, environmental and social issues. It is clear that throughout Tyne and Wear economic considerations predominate in the minds of most stakeholders. All public policy decisions tend to be taken within a climate which approaches issues from the point of view of their impact on economic competitiveness and job creation in particular. Transport and land-use planning policy is thus considered and framed within a dominant economic regeneration discourse;

private transport cannot be unduly restricted in the present circumstances without adverse implications for economic regeneration, which is the council's priority¹⁴.

As in other cities we note that environmental issues still do not receive the same policy attention as economic issues¹⁵. Local authorities in Tyne and Wear have been slow to take a lead on such matters and Local Agenda 21 processes and other mechanisms such as the Newcastle Environment Forum have not attained the legitimacy of voice in public policy discussions that such arenas have in other parts of the UK. The link between increasing pollution and incidences of asthma is pushing a transport-related environmental issue on to the agendas of local politicians but such issues are likely to take a back-seat in discussions where job creation remains an issue. The discourse of demand management is as a result slow to permeate local authority policy.

Social issues are subsumed in general terms into a jobs and regeneration discourse and in the transport policy field to one of "accessibility". The discourse is quite well developed in Tyne and Wear focusing on disabled access issues principally but with reasonably well developed discussions emerging of the links between access to work and leisure opportunities as well as to employment opportunities. The targeting of specific areas of the City in this regard,

¹⁴ City Of Sunderland Council (1995) *Unitary Development Plan*, p.199.

¹⁵ Marshall, T, 1994, 'Dimensions of sustainable development and scales of policy-making', Paper to ECPR Green Politics Study Group, Crete, October.

linking to agendas of social exclusion is rarely explicit however. As such, social issues have tended to become linked to one or two ‘specialist’ individuals who are in many ways ghettoised within their own departments and institutions. Evidence of an emerging agenda linking employment opportunities and public transport provision did exist in some authorities, in part been driven by European Union (EU) funding priorities which make provision for assistance to public transport projects only where they link areas of economic growth with areas of economic and social deprivation¹⁶. Thus Newcastle City Council is pushing for improvements in the public transport network to link the Newburnhaugh and Northern Development Area employment sites with communities in the west end of the City where there is high unemployment and low-levels of car ownership. Sunderland City Council and North Tyneside MBC are undertaking similar work.

In general terms however the implementation of ‘new realist’ policies is driven by a perceived problem of congestion and not one of environmental or social limits. This perception, coupled with the lack of depth of penetration of the environmental discourse, will create real difficulties when attempts are made to reduce traffic levels in the conurbation, and in part explains why such efforts are yet to make it to the top of the agenda of all but a few stakeholders.

2.3 Key Policy Initiatives

This section details three principal transport planning initiatives currently proposed in the conurbation that all in their ways represent a response to a new emphasis on central locations for development, and the need to facilitate a modal shift. The three were also selected to illustrate the range of issues and views which cluster around transport policy issues and thus the tensions in moving toward a ‘new realist’ approach.

First, Newcastle City Council plans to introduce a ‘trial permit scheme’ to limit access to the inner core of Newcastle by private motor vehicle. Buses, service vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists will have rights of access to the city centre, whilst businesses will be issued with a limited number of permits for vehicles based on their “needs”. It is unclear how the Council will actually implement this traffic restriction project though, and details concerning ‘rights of access’ need to be clarified: ‘need’ versus ‘price’ arguments are critical, with the Council favouring the former because of free car-parking available in neighbouring retail centres, notably the nearby Metro Centre in Gateshead. The scheme is intended to support city centre regeneration, making the central area an attractive place to live and work. Research work undertaken for the City Council supports this view. However, some politicians remain uncertain over the extent of possible leakage from the city core to other commercial areas and this uncertainty is holding up implementation. Given the limited penetration of the ‘new realist’ discourse it is somewhat surprising that this scheme is proposed at all. Its adoption may reflect the key role of academics in promoting and legitimating this particular course of action.

Second, the key element in public transport policy in recent years has been the emergence of ‘*quality partnerships*’ between local authorities, the Passenger Transport Executive and the

¹⁶ The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is now giving priority to bids which emphasise the development of ‘soft’ infrastructure (for example, public transport initiatives to make connections between (deprived) residential and employment areas), rather than ‘hard’ infrastructure (road construction to ‘relieve’ congestion etc.).

bus operators. Such partnerships aim to improve the reliability, frequency and quality of bus services along corridors. In Newcastle for example bus operators are investing £20 million

over the next two years on accessible low-floor buses. For their part the PTE and the local authorities are improving the infrastructure through new bus shelters and real-time passenger information for example, and reallocating road space to bus only lanes. Two critical problems associated with this approach have however emerged. The first is the lack of public sector resources available (see section 4.1). In addition there is a geography to the development of such partnerships as certain areas are not considered suitable for such investment by bus companies. South Tyneside MBC had thus experienced considerable difficulties in getting a partnership going with bus operators because of the nature of public transport markets in the Borough.

Third, we examined a road scheme, the *West Central Route*, (currently under construction) to investigate how this major piece of new road construction fitted within a policy framework in Newcastle and the conurbation which was moving toward emphasising priority for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users. As a project, it exemplifies many of the other issues currently high on the political agenda in Tyne and Wear. For example, the plan originally for this road scheme was for it to be the ‘central motorway west’, and hence help to improve the east-west flow of traffic through the city¹⁷. Whilst this is still one of the objectives, and for many within Newcastle City Council this remains its principal objective, the scheme is now justified on demand management grounds (as an integral part of restricting city centre traffic) and on road safety grounds (will allow ‘traffic calming’ measures to be put in place on local streets adjacent to the route). Such rationales have been questioned by various stakeholders who believe the route will simply generate more traffic as the route improves accessibility for motorists to travel from north-west Newcastle to locations south of the Tyne.

(See overleaf for **Figure Four**.)

¹⁷ Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council’s development of the ‘East Gateshead Riverside’ site, which it has identified as being its priority area for economic development over the next three years, will generate extra east-west movement of traffic however.

Figure Four - Tyne and Wear Case Study - Table

Transport Issues	Participants	Alliances	Discourses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispersion of activity, more travel, more by car • Increasing congestion leading to environmental costs • Inappropriate price signals encourage adverse trends • Lifestyles aspirations favouring car use mean political problems in managing demand • Cost, political & technical considerations prevent providing for demand 	<p><i>Providers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LA Engineers • LA Planners • PTE/PTA • Govt Office • Bus Operators • Rail Operators • Railtrack <p><i>Users/3rd Parties</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passengers/TUCC • Business Interests • LAs/PTA • LA Econ. Devt. • Env't Agency • Env. Pressure Grps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Govt. Business • LA Env. Officers & Green groups • LAs' Engineers (limited) • LA Engineers / planners (limited) • LAs/PTE (limited) • TWDC/PTE/LAs (limited) • TWDC / community gps (limited) 	<p><i>Technical</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • car/road access 'good for the economy' • Predict & provide (current forums) • demand management and constraints on car use • market vs plng & regulation of public transport • official 'sustainable dev.' policy <p><i>Community/Political</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misc. 'green' agendas • political trading-off of conflicting interest • communitarian/ participation/ consensus building • top down consultation/ imposition
<p>Arenas</p> <p><i>Official/Prof</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Package W/G • T&W operators panel • SRB/ERDF bids • NE Chamber - TP&E cities - cycling ctte - Chamber/GO-NE • Reg. Devt. Forum • ITS White Paper responses • Healthy cities project • Plan participation (limited) 	<p><i>Political/Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NE Assembly - Cities • Jt Chairs of Transport • TWDC member panels • Regional Agenda 21 Forum • N/c Transport FocusWkg Gp 	<p>Institutional Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disparate professional approaches between engineers, planners & Env. officers - lack arenas • lack of accepted rationale connecting transport provision & economic, social & Env. aims • lack of voice/power of public transport users via PTE/PTA • dispersed/weak community input via 'participation' forums. wkg gps etc, paternalist political culture • lack of clear structure of subsidiarity allowing appropriate levels of involvement • Engineers Dept's. organised around roads struggle to adapt to changed requirements for calming/safety/bus priority/restraint • Business lacks time of consistency of view to participate meaningfully at the wide range of levels currently engaged to • Package Bid suffers from mismatch between narrow/limited/short-term funding & large strategic aims, continuing separation of funding regimes, 'fair shares' rather than policy approach to allocation between bodies perceived Newcastle dominance • Obstacles to earmarking of existing/new sources of local or national funding • competitive model of public transport undermines fixed links 	

3 PARTICIPANTS, ARENAS AND NETWORKS IN TRANSPORT POLICY

3.1 The 'Usual Suspects': Key participants in transport policy discussions

The main participants in relation to transport policy issues are the five metropolitan authorities (Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, North Tyneside and South Tyneside), the Passenger Transport Executive (Nexus), the major bus operators (Stagecoach Busways, Go-Ahead and Northumbria), and the Government Office for the North East (GO-NE). Metropolitan districts were thought to have a slightly stronger role than in the 1980s as a result of the vacuum created following the abolition of the Metropolitan County Council. Transport issues are low on the political agenda in Tyne and Wear however. To illustrate, the Chair of the Passenger Transport Authority is a position low in the 'political pecking order' and a meeting as part of central government's recent white paper consultation process was attended by just one North East MP:

This tells you something about the importance of the roads issue vis a vis the West Midlands, from where 20 MPs attended.

Others involved to a lesser extent and typically in relation to particular issues, include the North of England Assembly of local authorities (NEA), the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, the North East Chamber of Commerce, rail and bus service providers, the Rail Users' Consultative Committee (RUCC), the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT - Northern Region), various environmental interests (Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000, representatives of Local agenda 21 fora and initiatives such as the Newcastle Healthy City Project etc.), cycling organisations (the Cyclist's Touring Club, Sustrans and TyneBikes), and the general public. Some of these participants are relatively new to transport planning arenas.

Representatives of the main bus operators in Tyne and Wear perceive that their voices are being heard, but that relationships with the PTE especially and also the local authorities would help in the provision of public transport services. Bus operators have not contributed greatly to discussions concerning TPP submissions for example. Differences in the 'leverage' of bus companies over transport policy varies spatially according to their main area of operation. Thus Go-Ahead has been extremely active in South Tyneside and Gateshead in developing the 'quality partnership' approach to introduce higher quality services and improve the existing infrastructure on the major transport corridors within these areas. However, Stagecoach Busways has been more active in Newcastle and North Tyneside, and previously had greater input into policy discussions in general as it was more politically 'in-tune' with the PTA than Go-Ahead. This situation arises from the legacy of Busways having previously been the municipal operator. Bus operators were having quite limited institutional 'leverage' in part due to internal organisational restructuring which has led to fewer staff available to enter policy discussions. Companies are quite understandably focusing on (short-term) 'day to day' operational issues, rather than on more general policy issues.

Due to Nexus' strong role as a public transport co-ordinator within the conurbation, the CPT (Northern Region) has less influence in the area. In other parts of the region it fulfils a role in the discussion of tendering contracts between the local authorities and the local bus operators. It thus perceives itself to have more of a 'listening brief' in Tyne and Wear, as does the Rail Users Consultative Committee for the North whose role is generally to be the 'ears' and 'eyes' of the rail regulator. Each points out that Railtrack has become more of a powerful

player since rail privatisation, primarily because of new, innovative funding packages for rail infrastructure improvements (especially to improve access to rail travel by the disabled and the elderly).

The environmental lobby in Tyne and Wear is particularly weak. Groups have relatively few members and are therefore limited in the issue areas they can actively participate in. As a result they have tended to focus on 'friendly arenas' such as Local Agenda 21, the 'Newcastle Healthy City Project', and the 'Newcastle Environment Forum'. The influence of all these initiatives in transport policy directly is rather marginal as the officer and member 'elites' with NCC are not listening to these groups to any great extent.

Each of the metropolitan authorities in Tyne and Wear have attempted to open-up decision-making processes, in some cases including the TPP submissions, to the public in recent years. Newcastle City Council has done this through its community sub-committees. Information related to transport issues flows from these to transportation committee of the full Council. However, the time constraints placed on local authorities to submit 'package' and TPP submissions for funding transport initiatives is considered to be a major barrier in securing public involvement in strategy development. This time constraint could be overcome if local authorities instigated a rolling programme of TPP preparation. However, the production of annual central government guidance late in the TPP preparation process makes councils wary of committing themselves to work which could be undermined by policy shifts within central government. There is evidence to suggest that elsewhere local authorities who engage user communities in strategy development are rewarded in relation to the level of funding that is allocated by central government¹⁸.

Business interests are represented in transport policy debates principally through the regional and local Chambers of Commerce and an active local Freight Transport Association. The regional Chamber of Commerce is working more closely with the five local highways authorities. In order primarily to stimulate debate and get such issues on the agenda the Chamber outlined proposals for road-use pricing in the region in a submission on the government white transport paper to alleviate what it sees as the primary problem, of congestion for business.

3.2 Arenas and networks in the discussion of transport policy

At a conurbation-wide scale, the discussion of transport policy primarily takes place through the *Joint Transportation Working Group (JTWG)* and the *Joint Chairs of Transport Group (JCTG)*. The former is a monthly forum comprising of one senior officer (generally a transport engineer) from each of the five metropolitan authorities, representatives from Nexus, the Government Office for the North East and the major bus operators. The purpose of the JTWG is to discuss transport policy for the whole of Tyne and Wear and to subsequently develop the 'package' approach. Neither of the two Groups existed before the introduction of the 'package' approach, and so meetings between the local authorities in the 1986-1994 period tended to be on an ad hoc basis.

The JCTG comprises the five Chairpersons of the relevant Highways / Transportation Committees and the Chairperson of the PTA. It meets every other month to consider the

¹⁸Wenban Smith, A., 1993, Getting the policies accepted, Paper to PTRC Conference, Cambridge, June.

policies forwarded by the JTWG. Principally this arena politically legitimises work already proposed in the JTWG.

The *Tyne and Wear Operators Panel* has existed since bus deregulation in the mid-1980s and primarily exists to monitor network ticketing and to act as a 'sounding board' for local authorities to test out local transport policies. Participants include the bus operators, representatives from each of the metropolitan authorities and from Nexus (attending as both a 'regulator' and an 'operator'). The bus operators believe that the Panel has worked reasonably well since its inception, but that problems have arisen in recent years in terms of Nexus's dual representation and its increasing reluctance to develop a consensus with the bus operators over the planning of public transport services in the conurbation. The presence of this arrangement and its success in co-ordinating the main elements of the private sector is actually and potentially a highly significant resource.

The environmental implications of transport policy are discussed through a variety of local fora, specific to each metropolitan district. Their influence is limited and the principal actors in these fora tend not to be involved in transport arenas. In Newcastle the *Newcastle Environment Forum* was initiated in 1994 and now has well over 100 members from the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is attended by officials from the transport section of Newcastle City Council and is becoming increasingly active and respected¹⁹. The Forum allows interested parties to meet to discuss environmental and sustainable development issues, upon which transport has, in many instances, a key influence. Nevertheless, it isn't an arena where local communities can freely input their views on transport. At regional level the Local Agenda 21 Regional Forum, which is attended by Local Agenda 21 officers from each council, and also by individuals from the Government Office and the Environment Agency may take on a more active role in promoting sustainability issues in relation to transport.

Recent moves to create a Regional Development Forum, initiated by GONE, reflect a short-term need to get a 'North-East response' to the transport white paper but also a perceived longer-term need to look at developing a consensus over strategic transport issues across a wide variety of interested parties. It is attended by representatives of business, local authorities, environmental groups, bus operators and Nexus. It is chaired by the Director of Transport, Environment and Planning from the Government Office.

At the local authority level, a range of arenas exist for the discussion of transport policy. One of the newest has been Newcastle City Council's '*Transport Focus Working Group*'. The aim of this arena is for the informal discussion of transport policy to take place between officers and members of the Highways and Transportation Department and other groups and individuals, such as planning officers and members, cycling and disability organisations, environmental representatives, bus operators, local business and the general public. Such a Working Group thus acts as an 'open forum' where officers, members and other interested parties discuss issues of mutual concern. It has helped to open-up the policy-making process in some respects but attendance at the Group's meetings has been by invitation and this has undermined its legitimacy to a degree.

NCC discusses a range of services and issues at neighbourhood level through *Community sub-committees*, which meet monthly and which are attended by officers, local councillors, voluntary sector representatives, community leaders etc. These committees then feed any

¹⁹ A centre for 'Urban Sustainability' is shortly to be set up in Newcastle city centre.

particular issues predominating at the local level into the council's main Highways and Transportation Committee.

As well as the formal arenas detailed above a number of informal arrangements exist, activated as and when necessary, to discuss transport issues. The RUCC and the Newcastle Healthy City Project rely exclusively on such meetings to discuss issues with Nexus, the bus operators and traffic engineers from the local authorities. Such meetings have been called to discuss issues such as the City Centre Traffic Restriction Scheme in Newcastle. A number of fora not directly concerned with transport have proved to be important in contributing to wider transport debates and sharing knowledge and best practice around the conurbation. The Regional Chamber of Commerce has linked up with the Government Office to undertake a research project on the role of transport upon regional competitiveness, and it has also been working closely with Nexus and Railtrack on the Metro line extension to Sunderland. Planning and highways officials from each of the five metropolitan authorities have presented UDP and TPP proposals at the Chamber's meetings, and such arrangements have subsequently allowed Nexus and the Development Corporation to address the local Chambers also.

4. BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 'NEW REALISM' IN TRANSPORT PLANNING

The principal focus of this research is to investigate the barriers to the implementation of the 'new realism'. Are current institutional arrangements for transport planning capable of making the transition to the new set of policies? The research divides potential barriers into a three-fold classification; *financial*, *institutional*, and *cultural / perceptual* barriers.

4.1 Financial barriers

In terms of *financial* barriers, a number of issues were raised. The first relates to the levels of finance available. Funding for roads schemes has been severely cut back in recent years. However affecting a modal shift requires major investment in public transport infrastructure, certainly more than is currently allocated to local transport.

The levels of funding available to local authorities affects their ability to bring resources to the partnership table and potentially undermines such working. Thus '*quality partnerships*' are in danger of failing through inadequate public sector resources. Sunderland City Council has experienced major problems in finding £150,000 to put in appropriate bus infrastructure (priority lanes etc.) along certain routes even though Stagecoach Busways has been willing to spend over £2 million on new low emissions, low-floor buses.

So, there is a question of the level of resources, but also the ways in which they are delivered through the mechanisms of the trunk roads programme, the TPP, Transport Supplementary Grant and Package bids. The principal issues in the North-East would appear to be first, the desire to devolve responsibility for trunk roads planning from central government, possibly into a regional framework capable of balancing trunk road priorities with other elements of spatial strategy as well as other transport priorities. Second, a radical overhaul of local transport finance as currently conceived through TPP/ Package mechanisms. The level of

finance available for package bids and TPP is not commensurate with the effort required in their preparation. Whilst the approach of package bids is widely supported, the introduction of such bidding mechanisms has made the TPP less relevant. An overhaul of this financial delivery system seems in order to simplify it, open up the processes to wider groups of stakeholders and link it more closely to the policy framework, the development plan, in which it is intended to sit. A further critical point to consider in such an overhaul is the length of time over which the package is intended to operate. All of these points are neatly summed up by one of our interviewees;

The Government and the local authorities see the 'package' very differently....there is no point in central government saying that we need to plan our transport system strategically and then fund us on a one-year basis for minor schemes....they tell you to spend hours and hours producing a strategic package and then just give you enough money to do a couple of bus lanes.

Clearly moves to extend Package funding beyond one year will encounter Treasury resistance as it curtails their operational flexibility, but a good case can be made for this aspect of public spending to have some form of guarantee of future funding.

Debates over car parking and the hypothecation of revenues have also been a feature of discussions in the region and at conurbation level. All local authorities make the point that they cannot implement strict parking charges without agreements of others to do so. However much of this is rhetoric. There is already considerable variation across the conurbation and the strongest Centre, Newcastle, has relatively low charges compared to the other four. It was widely held that without real public pressure to tackle traffic only a very large carrot in the form of the hypothecation of revenues from increased parking charges would make such a policy acceptable. There is understandably Treasury resistance to this.

4.2 Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers may relate to the absence of appropriate arenas for discussions to take place, the absence of voices at the policy table or problems of 'access' to arenas, the difficulty of engaging stakeholders in durable coalitions. In addition there may also be problems in the nature of the debate between key policy-makers (and between user communities) due to the lack of a common discourse. Many of these issues are deeply inter-connected.

The only arena that exists above the level of individual local authorities for transport policy-makers to come together is the Joint Transportation Working Group (see section 2.1). This Group is open only to public sector officials directly charged with developing the Tyne and Wear package bids. No formal arena exists on a conurbation-wide scale where a wider set of stakeholders can come together, although GONE is attempting to set up such a forum at regional level.

The effectiveness of the JTWG, even as an arena for local authorities to debate the merits of schemes, was questioned by a number of interviewees who perceived that it just 'rubber stamped' schemes already decided upon individually by the five metropolitan authorities. This simplification and lack of attention to cross-boundary issues in part negates the merits of the package approach.

At the local authority level, barriers still exist in terms of access to certain arenas and the incapability of such fora to engage the various participants into durable coalitions. Newcastle can be used as an example to illustrate this point, as

Newcastle City Council is not encouraging outsiders to attend the meetings of the Transport Focus Working Group, and as a result transport issues tend to be 'chopped up'.....an overall approach is lacking as connections fail to be made between the different forms of transport.

The development of Newcastle City Council's 'Accessible City Project' brought a range of organisations together to talk about transport issues, many for the first time. Despite the rejection of the project's bid for lottery funding the project has led to the implementation of some initiatives such as on-street information points and better cycling infrastructure. However the general aims of the Project have had to be scaled down and as a result the project was increasingly (and perhaps inevitably) subsumed into the Highways and Transport Department of NCC. As a result the strategic objectives of the Project, which involved looking at transport issues from the perspective of the mobility needs of residents on a city-wide basis, has been lost.

Transport planners in all local authorities have made efforts to involve themselves more closely with local communities. But formal policy arenas such as Local Agenda 21, the Newcastle Environment Forum and the Healthy City Project, although helping to create partnerships between local authorities and various other organisations, were not linked to transport policy officials in the main. So, links between work done in such arenas and the transport policy community are not well developed and the outputs of such fora appear to be having minimal impact on transport policy.

This latter point relates to issues of access and legitimacy of voice. All stakeholders beyond the public sector felt that they had a lack of leverage' which resulted in insufficient attention paid to their agendas, particularly in relation to policies for cycling / pedestrianisation. Although Gateshead MBC and North Tyneside MBC have made greater efforts to ascertain the views of local cycling organisations (such as Sustrans and TyneBikes) through the creation of *Cycle Working Groups*²⁰, in other areas the knowledge such groups can contribute to the successful implementation of new schemes is lost due to their absence.

In fairness the time taken to prepare TPPs makes it very difficult for local authorities to usefully consult local communities over policy proposals and business interests tend only to involve themselves with the implications of individual transport schemes. Subsequently, this means that problems still currently prevail with reference to the range of participants, supporting the notion that;

one of the problems with transport is the narrow boundaries within which discussions are conducted. You always end up talking to the same people.

²⁰ North Tyneside MBC is attempting to double the use of cycling over the next five years, and the council has been working very closely with *Sustrans* to maximise the role of cycling as a form of transport for shoppers, commuters and schoolchildren through the construction of on and off-road routes.

The lack of a common discourse in transport planning policy.

At present, not all of the ‘stakeholders’ in transport planning in Tyne and Wear recognise that the issue of traffic congestion is a sufficiently important one to address, and even fewer participants have made any connections between the impact of congestion on other issues (such as the environment) beyond its perceived effects on the region’s economic competitiveness.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that barriers to the widespread adoption of a more demand-management orientated discourse still predominate *within* and *between* each of the local authorities in the conurbation. In terms of the latter, competition between each council for inward investment has resulted in every highways section submitting bids through the ‘package’ approach for (long-standing) road schemes which are isolated from consideration of a wider package of transport and other policy measures.

With reference to barriers *within* institutions, there is a lack of ideological consensus over the merits of a demand management approach to transport planning. Support for road schemes is still prevalent in parts of local authorities, as different groups of actors in them work with different agendas and value systems. The views of transport planners, land-use planners and economic development officers appear to be converging but are still quite distinct;

There is still ‘tunnel vision’ amongst people in the Highways and Transportation Department...They haven’t embraced an holistic approach of seeing transport in a complete social, economic and environmental context, with each being equally important.

Support from officers is used by local politicians to highlight the need for road schemes to be implemented in their constituency patch to generate investment and keep the area competitive. In addition the lack of attention paid by transport policy officials to other arenas is ultimately damaging for transport as an issue area in the context of considerably reduced funds for transport from central government and the nature of funding available through other mechanisms of traditionally lesser importance in providing funds for transport infrastructure such as urban regeneration grants and EU structural funds;

One of the reasons why transport isn’t getting quite the same influence or priority as other policy areas is because the networks for people involved in transport do not quite link in with the networks which exist for people involved with economic development [for example].

This lack of a common discourse implies that any major radical new policies will have to be implemented slowly and with a great deal of pro-activity on the part of their promoters to build support, preferably early on in these processes. This has not occurred over the Newcastle traffic reduction scheme proposals and this is evidenced in the backlash from business and the general public to the proposals.

Networks and alliances in the development of transport planning policy.

The ‘package’ approach has introduced a greater level of contact between highways and planning officials in Tyne and Wear. The JTWG provides a useful mechanism but, considerable scope for enhancing the networking remains. In addition there is a feeling that Newcastle City Council through its role as Chair creates problems of impartiality and bias towards Newcastle at the expense of other parts of Tyne and Wear. This builds on a

widespread and long-standing view of a perceived over-dominance of Newcastle in the politics of the conurbation and the region.

Networking between transport planners and land-use planners within each authority were thought to be now sufficiently well developed to allow them to work more closely together than in the past, although as we might expect this is variable across the five authorities. Nevertheless, the Chairperson of Newcastle City Council's *Transport Focus Working Group* pointed out that discussions tended to be informal rather than formal and that planners and engineers rarely attended each other's committee meetings.

The continued existence of the PTA/ PTEs, as relics of transport planning in the former Metropolitan County Council areas are a unique feature of government in the six UK conurbations. We made efforts to investigate their role in some depth as current debates often centre on their suitability for more roles and responsibilities in transport planning²¹. We encountered a number of issues pertinent to this debate.

The bus operators and some of the local authorities have developed a distrust of the PTE (Nexus) for a number of reasons. First, it is seen as largely beyond the control of the PTA, undermining its political legitimacy. Second, its dual role both as a *regulator* of public transport services and as a *provider* of the Metro service leaves it vulnerable to accusations of bias in the amount of policy attention and funding that the Metro receives. This view is given added weight due to the pivotal role of the PTA in the preparation of the package bid and its perceived position of privilege in attracting funding through this mechanism exacerbates this conflict. This situation leaves the PTA/PTE open, perhaps unfairly, to getting two bites of the funding cherry. Third, there was a feeling that the PTA and the PTE have never accepted the privatisation and deregulation of the bus industry in the mid-1980s. This has meant that some of the members on the PTA have, in the opinion of one of the major bus operators, developed a mindset which perceives that they cannot achieve anything (in terms of improving public transport provision) unless bus services are under their direct control;

there has been a lot of propaganda that has been geared to developing a picture that the bus operators are purely self-centred profit seekers who couldn't give a toss about the community. This causes friction between the operators and the PTE / PTA because they look first to protect the Metro service, even though the bus is the dominant mode of public transport.

Fourth, the PTE's ambitions to enhance its role and promote itself as a type of 'Regional Public Transport Panel' creates tensions with other bodies such as local bus operators:

We didn't sign up to their 2010 Public Transport Strategy Document as we didn't like their desire to try and take over the transport planning system.

In addition tensions arise from a view that Nexus 'sells itself as the impartial providers of everything' and that this then acts as a major barrier to dialogue developing between the major employers in the area, the local authorities²² and the bus operators. This role gets in the

²¹Hibbs,J., 1998, Trouble with the Authorities, Adam Smith Institute, London

²² In response to the Government's transport consultation document, there had been some friction in relation to the role that Nexus envisaged for itself, and the roles that the metropolitan authorities envisaged that they would have within any moves to develop a more integrated transport system.

way of a simpler two-way relationship that sometimes emerges between developers and operators directly;

Sites for development will be where investors want them to be. Nexus will then become involved, and if we are very, very lucky then they will come and talk to us about bus provision to the new sites.

To this end Stagecoach has been involved in a new set of informal networks with developers in Newcastle's NDA to help design routes which will maximise access by public transport to each new site.

So, there is a view that Nexus provides an unnecessary complication in delivering transport services. Operators believe that if Nexus didn't exist then it would be rather more straightforward to develop a 'quality partnership' approach as the local authorities would have no other option apart from entering into negotiations with the operators and each other. There is also a perception amongst the operators and the CPT that Nexus fails to do one thing that could be of benefit to them, that being the co-ordination of the actions of the five councils in providing appropriate public transport infrastructure.

This tension between operators and Nexus has led some local authorities into particular roles, with many acting as 'brokers' between the bus operators and Nexus because of the distrust of the latter by the former. This distrust is in part being overcome through the creation of 'quality partnerships' between the local authorities, Nexus and the bus operators although this has depended a great deal on personalities. Some bus companies have found that the negative attitudes of individuals in local authorities has made some partnerships impossible, or slow to develop.

However Nexus puts a valid case for the extension of its boundaries to cover the region or an area beyond the metropolitan area, and/ or increase its responsibilities²³. The RUCC strongly support this view seeing it as an opportunity to redevelop commuter lines into the conurbation, and helping to reduce significantly the amount of traffic travelling into Newcastle by road. In addition the absence of a cohesive force strongly marketing public transport across the conurbation has hindered, at least up until very recently, the development of appropriate land-use / transportation policies.

Cross-boundary issues always create difficulties as political priorities vary between local authorities. North Tyneside MBC's transport funding allocations have traditionally been lower than Newcastle's and they expected a degree of financial support from Newcastle to improve accessibility in a particular economic development area as this improvement has benefits for access to Newcastle's Northern Development Area. NCC have been reluctant to do so however. The existing arenas and mechanisms have failed to resolve this issue. Similarly transportation issues that involve Gateshead and Newcastle are not helped by the rivalry between the two authorities, compounded by the development of the Metro Centre, now classified as a city centre' in terms of PPG6 has meant that:

There might as well have been the Berlin Wall between Gateshead and Newcastle because each have viewed their areas as distinct separate entities.

²³Nexus/PTA, 1996, *Towards 2010: A Public Transport Strategy* Nexus, Newcastle pp. 18-30.

This lack of cross-boundary communication leads Gateshead MBC to feel that NCC has not done enough to relieve Gateshead of through traffic destined for Newcastle. The alternative view is that:

Gateshead has developed policies geared to getting traffic through their 'patch' as fast as possible, but then this traffic has had nowhere to go when it has reached Newcastle.

These difficulties may be added to as attention focuses on the Quayside area with the winding-up of the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation.

4.3 Cultural barriers

Finally, *cultural / perceptual* barriers exist to the implementation of the new realism. Traffic congestion is limited to very specific points in space and time and is comparatively low in relation to other areas of the United Kingdom. The implementation of traffic management measures seems more politically acceptable where congestion and perhaps previous attempts to tackle it, exist. The relatively low (although rapidly rising) car ownership levels coupled with relatively high public transport ridership (although falling) leads to a perception amongst stakeholders that there is a 'window of opportunity' in which to successfully implement demand management measures before dependence on private car transport increases further and public transport services and the knowledge bound up with its users declines. However there is a paradox at the heart of this in that whilst this window of opportunity exists it is unlikely that most people are going to change their movement patterns. The lack of a "climate of desperation"²⁴ caused by widespread traffic congestion as exists in other more heavily congested areas of the UK means that the perceived need to implement demand management measures does not find unequivocal support within the professional transport policy community and is certainly not widely held beyond it. Local politicians in particular see there is less of a need for 'stick' measures due to the relatively free movement which is still currently possible. The result is that reducing car use is only considered applicable in relation to central areas. Unless local authorities grasp a difficult political nettle with regard to the implementation of politically unpopular car traffic restraint measures this limited spatial focus will have two consequences. First, the local authorities of Tyne and Wear charged with traffic reduction targets are likely to fail to meet them as without overall car restraint traffic may simply re-route to other areas and destinations. Second, the 'window of opportunity' may be lost and the difficulties of turning round a population more dependent on car transport is all the greater.

Additionally, barriers remain within the transport policy community itself as it is made up of actors working to differing professional norms. The need to reduce the overall demand for travel was still not held by many individuals, particularly highways engineers who were thought to have a different approach:

The 'old school' approach is about road building and catering for traffic, instead of thinking in a holistic way of the social and environmental implications of transport. This culture still exists within certain individuals in Newcastle City Council.

²⁴ Trulove, P., personal communication.

Transport planners were still thought of as being too keen on undertaking road schemes to keep highways construction people employed. This hidden agenda, although diminishing, is still a barrier when it comes up against other officers' desires to implement more sustainable transport and land-use policy. This issue is again compounded by the views of politicians. Only around ten per cent of Newcastle's councillors were thought to be committed to 'sustainable development' and had a good knowledge of what it entailed:

getting councillors to think differently is not easy...Local Agenda 21 hired a company to try and get the 'sustainability' message across to councillors. However, only 14 turned up and these were already the ones who were 'clued-up'

Local authority employees in particular have a new set of skills and competencies to learn given the new policy climate and its requirements. Communications and networking skills are much to the fore here. There was a widespread view that transport planners (and in many instances land-use planners) did not find it easy to enter into meaningful partnerships. Often transport planners were felt to be extremely difficult to work with as they only tended to take an interest in the initiative in the first instance for purely defensive reasons:

Consultation for them is to put up a display and to hope that nobody comes along to view it.....engineers tend to deal with 'things' rather than people. Planners do come into contact with people so there is a 'social' kind of aspect to their work. But they too have an 'in-bred' type of working culture and so their ways of working are often rather similar.

These issues serve to illustrate the politically contested nature of transport policy and that 'new realist' policies will not be easy to implement. The emphasis in Tyne and Wear on economic issues especially amongst local authority politicians who are still hooked into the 'jobs at all costs' way of thinking implies there is a wariness of implementing 'stick' schemes' because of the perceived potential damage to the local economy. Politicians are fearful that placing restrictions on car drivers might damage local economies irreversibly, especially if such restrictions are not in place in other areas. This issue is particularly relevant to parking policy.

This issue is compounded by a lack of awareness amongst politicians of the need for a combination of carrot and stick measures and that it is the combination of these that will make a real difference. Members may understand why officers are setting out policies to restrict the use of the car, but when it comes to the actual implementation of 'stick' schemes they cannot make the links as to why officers are promoting this type of approach;

Members, like large proportions of the community, don't think one stage on as to what the effects are of implementing elements of the 'New Realism' in Transport Planning.

However, an issue only alluded to in this research still provides the major barrier, the difficulties in getting across a message that people's mobility patterns and their overall 'lifestyle' decisions in terms of their employment, residential, retail and leisure choices may have to change,

lifestyle' issues are one stage further on again, and I don't think that members are anywhere on 'lifestyle' issues. But neither is the vast majority of the country either.

5. BUILDING THE CAPACITY TO ACT: TURNING THE 'NEW REALISM' IN TRANSPORT PLANNING INTO REALITY: OVERCOMING THE INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

“Policy issues are becoming increasingly complex, and the decentralisation and commercialisation of public services has created new challenges for policy formation and implementation. Hence progress on increasingly complex policy questions will require the widest policy inputs, with decision-making becoming more open, consultative, consistent and accountable. The overall process to achieve this goal involves a consensus-based approach involving all stakeholders”²⁵.

From our initial scoping work we hypothesised that a range of solutions might be necessary to make realism become reality.

- i the development of a common discourse / agreement on a set of common values placed on policy outcomes
- ii changes in the range, ‘leverage’ and legitimacy of participants / the construction of more effective networks and alliances.
- iii the creation of new arenas or improving access to different arenas
- iv changes in the regulatory frame

These four issues are discussed below.

5.1 Discourses and Frames of Reference

There is a requirement for a broad ideological consensus across the range of stakeholders involved in transport planning so that each can positively evaluate their own contribution towards implementing the ‘*New Realism*’. Locally and nationally the notion that a ‘new realism’, the existence of a widespread consensus, is misleading. A great deal of work needs to be done throughout transport policy communities and beyond to generate a broad political consensus as to the way forward. Arriving at this consensus will take time and a great deal of effort from the members of transport policy communities. Consensus within the communities themselves is the first step and evidence from Tyne and Wear suggests this is a long way off. Some form of consensus is needed at the very least so that responsibility for implementing measures becomes linked to specific policy issues and clear strategy and thus becomes not simply about “*blame avoidance*”. At present however the lack of incentives for local stakeholders to work toward such agreement is absent. Thus this consensus is unlikely to occur unless increased funding for local authorities to develop ‘carrot’ schemes is made available.

²⁵ Cheese, J. (1993) *The Way Forward: A summary of the key issues in transport and communication* CEST, London pp. 4-5.

Currently such development is in part hindered by the dominance of an economic competitiveness agenda. If the 'new realism' is to become reality, transport issues need to become more embedded into the wider polity which in turn needs to embrace a wider definition of the issues at stake;

economic, social and environmental issues [need to be considered] together to come up with a completely different approach within which the 'sustainable development' concept pervades everything.

However as this paper has illustrated any attempts at demand management are linked to traditional concerns with reducing congestion, the environmental impacts of transport and the whole idea of traffic reduction are not driving change to any great degree. Unless demand management as a discourse becomes institutionalised it is unlikely to have any material effects²⁶. However local politicians in particular are wary of demand management measures. *The Road Traffic Reduction Act* may prove to be an important step here in that it might focus local political priorities on reducing car use even where to do so might impinge on economic development objectives. The implementation of any requirements and associated rewards and penalties will be critical to its success. The Act also highlights the need for a clear strategic national framework to overcome local political barriers.

The integration of economic, social and environmental issues is slowly beginning to happen through the package approach and through localised initiatives which focus on the needs of places. This is in stark contrast to previous policy which was often merely a collection of individual schemes. However the Government's recent consultation paper on the Development of an Integrated Transport Strategy is of little help in this regard focusing as it does only sporadically upon transport's wider role within society.

Consensus needs to be established within the public transport policy community and amongst local authority politicians in the first instance. Otherwise talk of partnership can not go much beyond rhetoric;

The local authorities need to contract to do something about car parking charges because that has as much influence on bus demand as any bus priority measures may have on the ground. The authorities cannot expect us to put several million pounds into providing new buses (through the 'quality partnership' approach) and then decide that they are going to build out-of-town developments and reduce car parking charges.

A local political consensus can however only really emerge when people and communities begin to make the links between transport choices and lifestyle issues. Many believe this can be partly facilitated through a major marketing exercise to improve the image of (and information for) public transport, coupled with cheaper, more reliable, integrated public transport to radically alter people's perceptions of such modes of transport. Furthermore, Nexus suggests that increasing to 99% the proportion of all households, retail sites and employment sites within a 400 metre walk of a public transport boarding point will also help persuade people that real alternatives to cars exist²⁷. There is broad support for this idea throughout the conurbation although less consensus over how it can be achieved.

²⁶ Hajer, M., 1995, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*, OUP, Oxford.

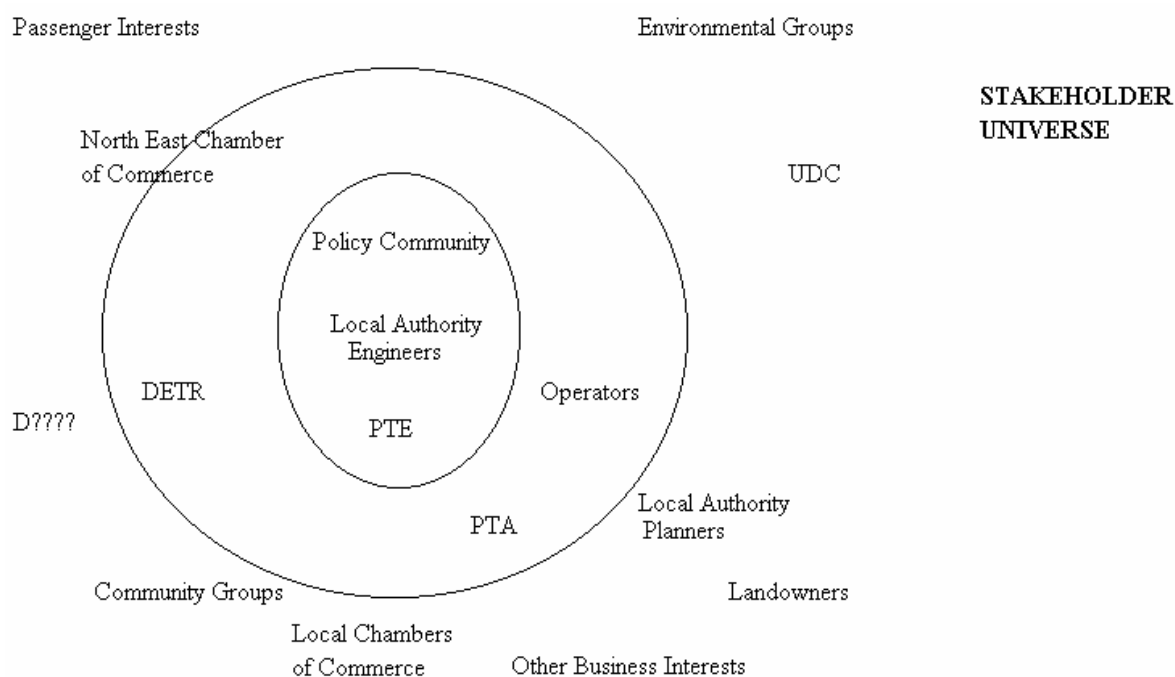
²⁷ Nexus / PTA, 1996, *ibid*

5.2 The range, 'leverage' and legitimacy of participants

The range of people involved in policy development is very narrow. Figure Four (see overleaf) highlights the policy community, the policy network, and the stakeholder community. The policy community is a very small collection of individuals centrally concerned with transport policy development. They are all from similar professional backgrounds working to similar agendas in the manner of a typical policy community²⁸. The wider policy network would appear to have some limited influence on transport policy.

The narrowness of the policy community appears to have genuinely inhibited the development of a 'new realist' agenda. The successful implementation of some schemes and proposals is disadvantaged by not involving users, be they bus companies, cycling groups or pedestrians.

Figure Five - Widening the Transport Policy Community in Tyne and Wear



Some authorities have created effective networks with such groups, typically relying on a local authority officer being sympathetic to the groups in question. At conurbation level no mechanism feeds these views in. Many stakeholders beyond the policy community expressed

²⁸ Rhodes & Marsh, 1992, *Policy Networks in British Government*, OUP, Oxford.

a desire to participate more actively in policy development. Many currently 'voiceless' stakeholders such as community groups might also contribute positively to policy.

The first task would appear to be to include the policy network members more actively in policy discussions. In the wider stakeholder community many interests have yet to declare their stake in transport issues even though they are materially affected by the decisions of the policy community. Creating a mechanism by which their views or their participation might be facilitated more directly in transport policy issues would seem to be a useful way forward; which might also secure commitment amongst user communities. This requires openness on the part of those already in the policy community but also attention to the arenas in which policy might be discussed.

5.3 The Arenas for Policy Debate

Whilst widening participation in transport policy discussions may be desirable, how might this be implemented? Most stakeholders from the public sector believed that a type of '*Inter-Authority Planning and Engineering Group*' would help to open up policy arenas so that those involved with highways were exposed to the wider debates currently beginning to take place in the wider local polity and with land-use planning in particular;

There is a need to build upon the Joint Transportation Working Group to try and develop a more strategic and widely-accepted approach so that partnerships are created between all sectors, and not just between the five sets of engineers within the different local authorities.

There was widespread support for this from outside the JTWG. Whilst it would be moving toward a wider form of elitism it would at least expose transport debates to a wider set of influences and potentially integrate it more closely with the policies and investment strategies of these other stakeholders. More controversially, an overarching forum to represent wider interests in transport policy discussions is a step further but would help develop closer links between policy and user communities, encouraging ownership of a strategy and securing a degree of commitment to achieving traffic reduction targets etc. Local Agenda 21 and UDP preparation processes could help contribute to this effort although the legitimacy in the minds of transport professionals of Local Agenda 21, and the peripherality of development plans to their everyday working practice run counter to this move at present. A further barrier comes from a view amongst the transport planners in the metropolitan authorities themselves who believe that existing participative opportunities taken by interest groups stop them from doing their jobs effectively and efficiently. How true this is is debatable but it does raise the question of whether such an approach can be made to work. First it raises the issue as to whether a sclerosis might develop through over-stretching the possibilities of policy through communicative action. Second it may merely reflect the lack of receptivity amongst the transport planners to such a collaborative approach.

The Operators Panel could also provide an arena within which more debate could occur at least within the private sector. Indeed the successful operation of this Panel could give some weight to those who would see no further role for the PTE in the co-ordination of conurbation wide services²⁹. However in looking beyond the conurbation it is unlikely that similar Panel's

²⁹Hibbs, J., 1998, op cit

work as well and there is no guarantee this one will continue to function effectively. Giving it more responsibilities might indeed upset the arrangements that work well presently.

5.4 The Regulatory Frame

Few stakeholders want a return to the public transport regime which existed prior to 1986. Although the high level of public transport network integration it achieved was seen as desirable, the regime was perceived by most interviewees as being too rigid and not responsive to user demands. Nexus advocates 'quality bus templates' as being the way forward. Such templates would be established within ten areas of the conurbation and would outline what public transport must achieve within a particular area. The 'London-style' franchising arrangements are viewed by bus operators in Tyne and Wear and elsewhere as being too restrictive. Nexus instead favours a combination of 'loose area franchises'³⁰ and/or 'real quality partnerships'³¹ to fulfil the aims of each template. The drawing up of the templates would be undertaken locally and the level of prescription would depend upon the area in question. This would allow local solutions to local transport problems and more of a 'place centred view' to be taken than that which presently occurs. Under such a system, Nexus would additionally have control over concessionary travel reimbursement, and would not reimburse operators for concessionary fares if they did not provide a good, reliable and high-quality service. Such regulation would prevent other operators free-riding on the back of the investment, through the partnership mechanism or otherwise, of others. Bus operators were less sure that 'quality templates' are the solution to improving public transport and particularly bus provision; perceiving any type of franchising arrangement to be inflexible and bureaucratic, involving the public sector dictating too closely the terms of their operations. They would prefer to enhance the role of Traffic Commissioners and strengthen licensing arrangements.

As there is resistance to the PTE/ PTA expanding its remit other possibilities present themselves. The NEA has become more involved with strategic transport issues, and the bus operators and the local councils perceive that there could be a role for the Assembly in the future as a regional transport authority. However, at present there is a consensus that it lacks legislative powers and is little more than a 'talking shop'. An alternative lies with giving the new Regional Development Agencies (RDA's) such responsibility. They were not viewed as being a totally effective solution for the wider discussion of transport policy either, as their involvement was likely also to be little more than:

a 'talking shop' simply to define broad principles for transport policy across the conurbation.

The emerging role for the RDAs appears to be one of advocates for economic issues. It is clear that transport policy requires wider consideration encompassing environmental and social dimensions. In this regard the RDAs as presently conceived would not be suitable candidates to take on the role of a 'regional transport authority' although their input in transport policy debates will be welcomed.

³⁰ The bus operators design their services to meet Nexus' requirements and then submit a tender for running such services within the different templates.

³¹ This involves Nexus entering into contractual arrangements with the bus operators and the local authorities to deliver services outlined as being required within each of the templates.

Although there is a great deal of pressure to devolve responsibilities for many issues such as trunk roads planning down to sub-national levels, cross-boundary competition for spending and investment implies a continuing need for regulation at the national or regional level. The creation of a *Strategic Rail Authority* would receive wide support in the conurbation and many stakeholders would like to see this developed further with the creation of a national *Strategic Transport Authority* covering all aspects of transport provision. This would help balance what is seen as an over-concentration of policy attention on rail at the expense of other forms of public transport (also seen partly as a result of over-centralisation of policy, i.e. rail commuting is disproportionately important in the south east of England and of course to DETR civil servants!). Nexus see the Strategic Transport Authority's role as helping to grow public transport markets, provide a central information source, co-ordinate and regulate the public transport industry and agree patronage targets with localities linked to a package of incentives.

In relation to funding there was a consensus that the existing system needed to be radically changed. Regulatory and investment nexuses are very distinct. Local transport policy is framed heavily by annual government guidance relating to TPPs. This provokes two criticisms. First the annual nature of guidance (and its production late in the preparation year) makes for uncertainty at the local level and constrains participation opportunities. Second, the guidance was thought to be too specific, interfering in matters that should be locally determined. Both of these factors also prevent closer integration with land-use planning frameworks. TPPs were fast becoming a mere administrative chore and a sideline to the development of the package, even given its current complications arising from co-ordinating each local authority. The new funding mechanism will need to operate over a longer timescale than the current system which will help medium and long-term planning to occur and for transport funding packages to link more closely with other funding packages such as SRB³² and ERDF and tie it more closely with development plans.

Regulatory issues inevitably overlap with institutional ones. There was a clear fracture between what stakeholders felt would make a real difference to changing people's travel behaviour and what they felt they had influence over! That is, the most desirable measures were not within the aegis of the stakeholders interviewed. Despite many of the statements earlier, there has been a real change in transport policy in the conurbation and local authority transport planners are focusing on policy measures such as bus and cycle lanes, and the improvement of the environment for pedestrians. Whilst these were felt to have some influence over travel behaviour they were unlikely to reverse the trend towards increasingly car-based travel patterns. In addition whole issues such as freight movement were felt to fall outside the influence of all policy-makers at local levels.

6. CONCLUSIONS: CAPITALISING ON A 'WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY'

In a UK metropolitan context the Tyne and Wear conurbation exhibits relatively low (yet rising) levels of car ownership, and high (although falling) levels of public transport patronage. Public transport provision has been maintained due in part to the legacy of high usage and integration and the major asset that is the Metro transit system. The conurbation

³² For example, the Park Lane Transport Interchange which is to be constructed in Sunderland City Centre at a cost of £6.5 million, is to be substantially funded from Capital Challenge / SRB monies.

has also not experienced the large-scale decentralisation of activity that others have. These trends combine to make many policy-makers feel that there is a 'window of opportunity' in which to implement transport policies which have a real chance of working before the benefits of the public transport system are lost and car ownership and use becomes further entrenched amongst more and more residents.

Congestion and air pollution difficulties remain confined to specific points in space and time. Through traffic is not a problem to many communities. As a result there is little sense of a need to tackle car use per se. There is as a result less of a consensus to act than in many other conurbations and a subsequent lack of a shared discourse even within the local transport policy community. Road-building solutions are still perceived by many stakeholders as the answer to mounting congestion at pinch points on the network. The consequence of the lack of consensus is that there is a lack of political will and grass-roots support for traffic restriction measures. Indeed many officers from within the close-knit policy community are also not of the opinion that 'new realist' policies are either desirable or achievable in Tyne and Wear. In the context of increasing regional subsidiarity many in Tyne and Wear question whether the conurbation should pursue policies perceived as being desirable in the rest of the UK.

The lack of a common discourse around which a capacity to act might emerge suggests that each conurbation in the UK is likely to need a different set of steps to make the transition toward newly focused transport and spatial strategy. In addition transport resources and trends vary considerably across the country and the legacies of past policies linger on. Dominant discourses, existing arenas and the relational resources amongst stakeholders will then all vary and add up to make each area unique and the steps required in moving toward the new realism will therefore be spatially variable. It is likely therefore that implementing the 'new realism' will proceed at different rates across the Country. In Tyne and Wear the discourse needs to shift. The policy community needs to open up either by creating a more inclusive arena, widening involvement in existing arenas, improving relations between the policy community and other stakeholders or building up the knowledge resources flowing around in existing arenas. Efforts by the Government Office in creating a Regional Transport Forum are a possible way forward in this regard.

Institutional reform may be necessary and desirable. Much of the capacity to act present in the 1960s and 1970s, held together as it was around a strategic vision which was in part transport led, appears to have been lost. In many ways institutional reforms have been behind this loss;

Tyne and Wear was ahead of the game at that stage (pre-1986)...the area lost out due to de-regulation and ...we are only just beginning to get back to addressing some of the issues which had previously been dealt with as part of the more integrated system which operated

It may require an exogenous shock from beyond the local policy system to set things in motion. Institutional change is clearly one way to achieve this. The creation of a Strategic Transport Authority was widely touted amongst our interviewees, as was a regional manifestation of it, although the creation of one may negate the need for another. However much could be achieved through focusing on existing mechanisms rather than creating a further level of bureaucracy or administration. Greater dialogue needs to be encouraged amongst key stakeholders in the transport planning policy community and with others.

Participation in the existing arenas of the JTWG and the Operators Panel could be widened and such arenas could fulfil greater roles. Unfortunately such arenas may not be replicated in other conurbations and their capacity to act is likely to be highly variable. This in part explains such calls for a strategic authority to manage these relationships and co-ordinate services.

Thus to accelerate the adoption of a 'new realism' will require detailed finegrain work in places that focuses attention on existing arenas, the discourses that frame policy discussions, and in all things requires reflexivity on the part of the members of the current policy community to continually pay attention to the voices in the wider polity. Although there are concerns about its ability to make a difference³³, education in the wider impacts of transport choices is needed to make political commitment to demand management policies more acceptable where an obvious congestion-driven need for them is not readily apparent. Travelwise initiatives, green commuter plans and safer routes to school initiatives are all useful in this regard. Such initiatives coupled at a more strategic policy level with widening participation in key arenas to subject a narrow policy community to a wider range of views could make a real difference to the way transport issues are discussed and contribute to making the 'new realism' a reality.

³³Tertoulen,G. Krelveld,D., Verstatten,B., 1998, Psychological resistances against attempts to reduce private car use, *Transportation Research A* 32 (3), pp171-181.

APPENDIX A:

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Local Authority

Assistant Director of Highways and Transportation (Traffic and Environmental Management), Newcastle City Council
Official, Planning Department, Newcastle City Council
Councillor, Chair of Transport Focus Working Group, Newcastle City Council
Assistant Director, Engineering Services, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.
Transportation Officer, North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council.
Transportation Team Leader, Development Services Department, South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council.
Official, Environment Department, Sunderland City Council

Government Office

Director of Environment, Transport and Planning Government Office for the North East (GO-NE)

Development Corporation

Project Director, 'Newcastle Quayside' initiative, Tyne and Wear Development Corporation.

PTE

Head of Planning and Development, Nexus.

Bus Operators

Commercial Director, Stagecoach Busways (North East).
Commercial Director, Go-Ahead (North East Group).

Other Public Transport Representatives

Chairperson, Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), Northern Region.
Chairperson, *Rail Users' Consultative Committee* (RUCC) for the North

'Environmental' Representatives

Local Agenda 21 Officer, Newcastle City Council
Chief Executive, Newcastle Healthy City Project
Chairperson, TyneBikes.

Business Representative

Head of Policy, North East Chamber of Commerce