

Social Change and Sustainable Transport, edited by William R. Black and Peter Nijkamp. 2002. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 306 + xiii. ISBN 0-253-34067-5, \$69.95.

Although absent from early declarations of human rights, freedom of movement and mobility are now considered fundamental and inviolable rights. For instance, Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted during the post-war automobile-era, reads “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state, “ a right that ranks conspicuously higher in the United Nations article list than the traditional rights of assembly, association, religion, speech, and press. With much of that movement now facilitated by pollution-emitting, traffic congesting, and land-use modifying machines, the contributors to this book reckon that the time has arrived to scrutinize the mounting environmental and social costs of mankind’s apparent growing need to travel faster, further, and more frequently than ever before.

The articles in this book are the outgrowth of a conference (Social Change and Sustainable Transport or SCAST) held at the University of California-Berkeley in March, 1999, and financed jointly by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and European Science Foundation (ESF). The conference brought together both European and North American scholars from a variety of disciplines to examine cross-disciplinary and Transatlantic approaches to the fundamental conflict between growing demand for mobility and a quieter, less harried, more orderly, egalitarian, and environmentally sustainable future.

An eclectic cross-section of contemporary academia was represented. Imagine if you will economists and civil engineers sharing the conference dais with cultural studies advocates who invoke the jargon of “re-contextualization” and “reflexivity.” The chapters in the book, for the most part, are non-technical presentations and often provide a summary of ongoing research or research proposals. Frequently the work presented represents collaboration between North American and European scholars. There are also offerings for the more methodologically and technically inclined, including descriptions of research utilizing Spatial AGE (Chapter 10—Hans Kremers), Land-Use Transport Models (Chapter 11—Lars Lundqvist and Tschangho John Kim), Microsimulation (Chapter 16—Ilan Salomon, Paul Waddell, and Michael Wegener), and Network Flow (Chapter 27—Michel Beuthe, Bart Jourquin, Fabrice Degrandt, and Jean-François Geerts). However, with an average paper length of only eight pages, the purpose is to introduce rather than to analyze, to stimulate rather than satiate.

In the introduction, the book’s editors, William Black and Peter Nijkamp, do a good job of bringing order to what could be a confusing montage of conflicting perspectives, approaches and ideas. They identify three fundamental features of the economy (behavior, technology, and policy), describe important contemporary driving forces in each of the areas, and describe how these factors interface and integrate. Furthermore, each paper in the collection is categorized into a cell of a matrix that reflects this organizational framework. This chapter sets the stage for the remaining papers and makes it easier to more clearly identify research gaps and possibilities.

In addition to the editors’ roadmap, readers will be able to discern several additional broad recurring themes in this collection. For example, authors frequently highlight the obvious differences between North America and Europe in both the scope of the transportation sustainability problem and policy responses. Car ownership is much higher and public transport use much lower in the U.S. lower compared to European countries because of public policy differences, varying levels of economic development, population density, cultural factors, etc. Moreover, European countries tend to adopt economic policy approaches (e.g., fuel taxes), while regulatory responses (e.g., fuel economy standards) are more common in the U.S. Even policy development methods differ between the continents. Richard Gilbert (Chapter 8) and David Banister and Peter Steen (Chapter 9) explain how Europeans favor the more radical method of “backcasting” from goals to specific policies over the more traditional approach of forecasting specific policies to outcomes still used by Americans.

Whatever the reasons for the differences between the continents, the trends in both places are toward less sustainable transport. European patterns are converging on North American patterns rather than vice-versa because of the pressures of market forces, globalization, deregulation of transport, greater individualism and consumerism, and the increasing separation of workplace and home as explained by Donald G. Janelle and Michel Beuthe (Chapter 6) and Piet Rietveld (Chapter 7). Ilan Salomon and Patricia L. Mokhtarian (Chapter

22) observe that culturally and demographically, different demographic cohorts are becoming more alike in their mobility behavior. Several authors examine the underlying reasons for these convergences (and the occasion anomaly) with the aid of survey-based research (Karin Sandqvist—Chapter 15; Birgitta Gatersleben and David Uzzell—Chapter 17; Karin Tillberg Chapter 21) and government microdata (Jean-Loup Madre, Akli Berri, and Francis Papon—Chapter 26).

With the bulk of transportation work focusing on commuting and shopping behavior, some of the most important sources of increased travel demand and some of its most deleterious effects are frequently overlooked. Several chapters of the collection examine the growing importance of these other travel demand factors, including the role of employers in shaping travel demand through the provision of company cars and company parking (Piet Rietveld and Jos van Ommeren—Chapter 25) and the continued growth of travel for leisure and recreation (Jillian Anable—Chapter 23). Other chapters examine the effects of inequity in transportation provision and the often unevenly distributed environmental impacts of unsustainable transport (Eran Feitelson—Chapter 18; Amanda Root, Laurie Schintler, and Kenneth Button—Chapter 19; Georg Rudinger—Chapter 20)

Contributors seem to be in general agreement about the need for more comprehensive (including fiscal, regulatory, technology, land-use, demand management) and international approaches to achieving sustainable transport. Authors identify promising public policies that might be introduced to support sustainable transport (e.g., international agreements and taxation of international transport, employer taxation policy, legal and regulatory reform, road pricing; subsidy of public transport). Some of the contributors hold out hope that ICT and new technologies like IVHS, smart cards/electronic tolling, and synthetic fuels will have a salutary effect on the environment, but the cumulative evidence is mixed.

There are significant cultural and institutional impediments to the adoption of more sustainable forms of urban and rural transport. This book identifies some of them, including the view of many that mobility is a fundamental right. Therefore, it is a little unsettling to this reader when the editors boldly announce in the concluding chapter that “The automobile culture must end in the United States and Europe” and that “the population on both continents must be willing to try new technologies and, in some cases, even give up some of the mobility they have had in the past.” Hard-core sustainability advocates will argue that this manifesto falls too short—the root of the problem is our increased affluence, transportation consumption being just one feature of our unsustainable lifestyles. Market proponents will argue that it goes too far: new technologies and incremental valuation and internalization of congestion and environmental externalities will do the trick.

Developments since the SCAST conference suggest that there is potential movement toward more sustainable transport but the mechanism is more likely to be the rationing devices of supply and demand than a revolution in prevailing public attitudes about automobiles or ecology. For better or worse, post-9-11 security developments have eroded fear of surveillance; this may bode well for the acceptance of technologies like GPS and smart cards for improving freight and commuter transportation flows. Also, London has followed Singapore in adopting a price-based strategy for stemming traffic congestion that seems to have been accepted at least grudgingly by its public. Maybe consumers are willing to rein in a right to mobility when the result is a more immediately recognizable improvement in safety, comfort and convenience.

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