

A summary of the sixth report from the Transport Visions Network

This is a summary of the sixth in a series of eight reports to be produced by the Transport Visions Network. The Network is a novel venture to project the views of young professionals into the debate concerning the future of transport and its role in society. It is comprised of individuals who are aged 35 or under from universities, public authorities, consultancies and industry both in the UK and overseas. The series of reports covers eight different topics and aims to build up a coherent vision for the future of transport. Each report is produced through a managed process of discussion involving e-mail debate, a face-to-face workshop and the writing of the report with input from an editorial board of Network members.

The first report in this series, Society and Lifestyles, considered a myriad of issues and trends that are shaping or have the potential to shape the way we live in the future and our travel needs. In the second report, Transportation Requirements, the Network set out twelve guiding principles for the design of future transport systems. In the remaining six reports the Network explores possible solutions to current and emerging transport problems. The Network has not been seeking merely to guess or predict what the future of transport holds in store. In acknowledging that the future is not predetermined and is ours to shape, the reports will identify developments we would like to see and perhaps those we should guard against.

The third report in the series, Land Use Planning, considered the role of land use planning in shaping transport. Visions were developed for four different aspects of land use planning. The fourth report, Vehicles and Infrastructure, examined ideas for vehicles and infrastructure that could apply to the UK surface transport network in the future. Six visions of how vehicles and infrastructure might change to meet current and future transport needs were developed.

The fifth report in the series, Local Travel, offered a range of solutions to problems associated with

local travel. Solutions were presented in the form of a 'toolkit for local travel'. The toolkit offered a set of options which given local areas could adopt and develop selectively as they saw fit according to their own local circumstances and aspirations.

This report presents the Network's views on the future of long distance travel. It begins by considering the current and projected future context for long distance travel. It discusses present policy approaches before introducing the Network's own ideas and solutions which are presented under four headings:

1. Domestic Business Travel;
2. Domestic Leisure Travel;
3. International Business Travel; and
4. International Leisure Travel.

Each section concludes with a vision for the future of long distance travel based on the integration of ideas and solutions developed in the section. The visions are presented in the form of a series of personal accounts from individuals in the future and these are set out below:

1. Smarter Work Travel

The Business Traveller: "I have found long distance business trips much less tiring and stressful since switching from the car to the train. Working carriages help me to be productive enroute and being able to hire a fully equipped workstation has meant I can travel pretty light. I'm not sure it's fair to call it business 'travel' – although I'm on the move it's more like being in the office – my productive working day starts as soon as I board the train. It is quite an improvement on setting off in the car at 5am trying to stay awake and then hitting the traffic just as I get to the difficult final stages of the journey when I am trying to find the office. Travelling by train is so convenient because so many of my meetings take place in station conferencing facilities. It wouldn't make sense for me to travel any other way.

On the way home I unwind in one of the quiet carriages or take out my tension by playing a video game in a leisure carriage. Although I enjoy such trips they are becoming less and less frequent. Whilst business was already moving in the direction of replacing non-essential business travel with ICT based alternatives, the introduction of tax incentives from government to do this accelerated uptake. Most of our customers have tele/videoconferencing facilities and so actual meetings are usually reserved for the deal clinchers and the odd progress meeting."

The Business Travel Plan Co-ordinator: "Business Travel Plans (BTPs) have become part of mainstream business planning, like company travel plans. The bosses took hold of the potential of BTPs when they saw the figures in black and white and the potential savings that could be made. Our company has just achieved its ICT replacement target. 20% of long distance business travel has now been replaced by ICT. The company decided to only pay expenses for long distance business travel if undertaken by rail unless it was unviable. Travel by rail is so much more attractive for companies these days, particularly with station conferencing widely available. The modal shift target was being achieved because effectively every other business was aiming for it too."

The Rail Infrastructure Construction and Operation Company: "I reflect with pride on the fact that our company was part of the first two high-speed rail projects which brought about the rail travel boom we are now experiencing. We always felt that building a dedicated high-speed rail connection crossing from Norwich to Bournemouth (via Ipswich, 2 London stops, Heathrow and Southampton) and from Leicester to Brighton (via Northampton, Luton, two London stops and Gatwick) would be successful."

Introducing comfortable, spacious and well equipped double deck trains, with designated carriages for work, quiet and leisure was central to attracting customers and accommodating large numbers of passengers. Customers also appreciate the restaurant and café facilities on board which provide real space for socialising and relaxing. Feedback on ticketing has been encouraging. Customers appreciate the fact there are only two types of fare: economy advanced and walk on.

Simplicity, speed and service have been the crucial factors in our success. Cost has also played its part

and our ability to keep prices competitive is due largely to the high levels of patronage achieved. Now that air transport is paying more of the costs it imposes, it is finding it difficult to compete with rail in the domestic market. The morning and evening peaks that used to dissuade people from travelling by rail are less severe these days. As many business travellers can now work effectively on the journey they are less restrained by traditional 9 to 5 working hours, they can leave the office at 3 o'clock and do a couple of hours work on the way home.

The Secretary of State for Transport: "Politically the reshaping of domestic business and business travel has been a comfortable ride. Realisation of the untapped effectiveness of rail and ICT use to allow travel time to be productively employed and to reduce the amount of travel time respectively has made good business sense and is well received by employees. Whilst investment in rail has been substantial to achieve this, conspicuous by its absence in this policy area has been the need for specific sticks to accompany the carrots."

2. Space for Leisure

The Theme Park manager: "Working in the leisure industry has become a more stable and predictable business. It used to be a 'boom and bust' industry with massive peaks in tourism and leisure during bank holiday weekends and school holidays followed by lengthy quieter periods. Now that the bank holidays have been consolidated into longer breaks and staggered regionally it means we have more sustained, predictable and manageable patronage levels. The decision to stagger school holidays across the UK had the same effect. We are now able to employ staff on a more permanent basis and we don't have so many days when sheer pressure of numbers takes the fun out of visiting and working at a place like this."

The Public Transport Operator: "It's great to see the roads so much quieter in the summer. It used to really raise tensions when local people could not go about their business because of all the holidaymakers. The local tourism industry has profited from investing in the tourist bus service. The volume and frequency of services has meant that the flexibility holidaymakers want to visit the different attractions around the area is well catered for. The younger tourists are pleased that they can leave the clubs in the small hours and rely on the bus to get them back to their accommodation."

The Holidaymaker: "I never thought we would take our family holidays by any other means than the car. Although I never enjoyed the driving I thought it was the only sensible way to do leisure travel. In the end it was the persistent nagging from the kids that persuaded us to try the luxury coach. Their friends had told them about the video games and snacks available on board and the fact that they could have mum and dad's undivided attention for the whole journey!

It was so easy and convenient, the coach picked us up from our front door and the time taken for other pick-ups was soon made up on the motorways where the dedicated coach lanes meant that we sailed through the traffic. I was worried about how we would travel about when we got to our destination and took the local car hire company's phone number just in case. It wasn't necessary though as the tourist buses went to all the places of interest and we met some nice people on the journeys, which made our holiday experience more enjoyable. We didn't get that before when cocooned in our car."

The National Leisure Spatial Planning Board Member: "With the opening of Tate Sheffield and the Natural History Museum in Norwich tomorrow there will be a Tate and NHM attraction in every region of the UK. The decentralisation of the nation's cultural heritage has greatly benefited the regions. The parallel investment in leisure and sporting facilities such as Harry Potter World in Newcastle and the National Athletics Stadium in Coventry has also been a great success. Such projects have proved a catalyst to the regeneration of communities and helped to foster civic pride. They have enabled a number of cities to develop a range of amenities sufficient to satisfy the leisure needs of a high proportion of the regional population and have attracted visitors from across the country, thus dispersing leisure travel and reducing the pressure points."

3. Confronting Inefficiency

The World Business Traveller: "For a company like ours, which is trying to establish its market presence beyond Europe and into Asia, a lot of international travel is necessary. However, those of us making all the trips had realised a long time ago that simply darting around all over the world was exhausting and not very efficient. It hit me during a meeting in Mumbai in India, when the

combination of jet lag and sheer exhaustion led me to dry up mid-presentation. I hadn't just forgotten my commentary, I had no idea what country I was in or what day it was!

At a subsequent company meeting it became apparent that those of us doing all the travelling wanted some changes made. We decided to attempt some strategic planning by employing an international business travel planner. The planning process established a grading system for trips determining whether they could be replaced by ICT or not. It also established a health check safeguard by which staff were protected from excessively intensive travel by setting minimum standards in terms of office working days.

Significant cost savings were made by employing a smarter approach to business travel overseas, particularly as the investment required to get our ICT equipment up to standard was low as the proliferation of such goods in the market these days has brought prices down. It was only by having a member of staff dedicated to analysing travel that it became apparent how much excessive travel took place. We were all too busy chasing our tails to see it!"

The European Business Traveller: "When my firm opens up a new continental office I usually need to take a secondment of a few weeks. The latest trip was to our new office in Warsaw. We are fortunate that we can recruit good staff locally and the need for training is pretty limited in terms of timescale. Any further training on new products and services can usually be done through ICT once staff have the fundamentals in place.

Travel has become less stressful in recent times. I do as much by rail as air these days. Well, the facilities and comfort onboard are virtually identical. I suppose they should be now that a lot of the rail and air services are run by the same companies! It means that the interchange is pretty seamless; you just hop between the train and the plane. Being able to purchase a single travel ticket covering all legs and modes of the journey simplifies things. On the trip to Poland I flew from my local business airport at Bristol to Berlin then took the train to Warsaw. The travel was all booked on the Internet at one website in five minutes. Business airports have also made a difference, you feel as if your needs are catered for and you don't have to put up with screaming kids and the touring rugby club."

4. Information Driven Ecotourism

The Transport Direct International Operations Manager: "The success of TDI has been its ability to understand and adapt to the developing travel market. We knew when we were developing the system that the key requirements were ease of use and ease of access. The demise of the high street travel agents showed that people no longer wanted to make leisure travel decisions by going through the labour intensive process of travelling to a shop when it could all be done in five minutes on the Internet or phone. So it was soon agreed that TDI would be wholly accessed by ICT.

We also recognised that people were not entirely happy with how the travel industry was evolving. People wanted more control regarding the travel process. They appreciated cheap flights, but were often disappointed by poor service, inefficient connections and being stranded at airports miles from the city or resort centre with the prospect of a long taxi ride, which would often cost more than the flight. TDI has proved successful because it gives travellers much more control over their journeys. They know what local transport options are available when they arrive in a country. They can connect between flights by using the travel option most convenient to them rather than to the airline or tour operator and they can get constantly updated information on their mobiles."

The Tourist: "When they introduced the air miles quotas it caused quite a stink. But the people who protested that their second Mediterranean cruise was going to cost a bit more didn't really endear themselves to the nation. As long as most people could still get their annual fortnight in the sun at a reasonable price they were happy and most people felt that frequent leisure travellers should pay a premium for the impacts that their luxurious indulgences were having on the environment.

Charging for imposing costs has also worked in relation to airport access. I always resented the fact that if I wanted to fly from my local airport I had to pay a supplement for the convenience. Effectively I was being penalised by the travel and tourism industry for contributing to the relief of a problem that they would benefit most from alleviating. The imposition of congestion charging supplements at the busiest airports following the lead taken by the Mayor of London at Heathrow

and the removal of regional access supplements signalled the welcome reversal of the old practice.

I have found TDI really useful. It lets me know my travel options from the moment I leave home to when I arrive at my holiday accommodation. In fact, it goes further than that by offering advice on local travel options during my holiday so I can travel around like the locals without struggling to interpret what is going on. The fact that it takes an ecotourism friendly line in its advice has helped it gain public support. It worked like the organic and fair trades concepts by latching on to the concerns of a significant proportion of the UK population and establishing a strong brand identity."

Conclusions

The problems of long distance travel are many and varied. The Network has sought to identify ways of encouraging the use of more sustainable long distance modes of travel, including virtual modes. It suggests that travel substitution by virtual access is more likely to be taken up for business travel than leisure travel. The potential of travel planning to achieve more efficient and sustainable travel has also been identified.

For many problems related to the experience of undertaking long distance travel, solutions lie within society's grasp. For example, improving the efficiency and quality of transport interchanges offers considerable potential to make long distance travel more enjoyable. However, many of the sustainability issues regarding long distance travel are more intractable. A variety of potential solutions exist, but it requires political and commercial will, allied to strong, principled, public support for tough decisions to be taken and a more sustainable future for long distance travel to come to fruition.

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