



Thursday 24 November | Kia Oval London
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The place dimension of transport policy

If we are going to make progress on the place dimension of transport policy, we need to work in a much more co-ordinated way across disciplines and across sectors. Transport needs to be considered along with placemaking, the urban realm and the local economy, says **Jonathan Bray**, Director, Urban Transport Group



The transformation of Old Street, London from a pedestrian no-go zone to a safe and appealing walkway, busy with lunch-eaters during the day. Likewise, this is a road in Ashford, Kent, but it's also a lovely garden to sit in and much nicer to look at than tarmac and oil stains



There is now considerable interest in how the transport sector makes places as well as connects them, says Jonathan Bray, Director, Urban Transport Group, in conversation with Juliana O'Rourke, programme developer for the Better Places Symposium and a director of the Better Places Network (see box).

The past focus on connecting places has been expressed via an interest in journey times and capacity and, although these issues remain important, there is now more attention paid to how well-designed and appropriate transport infrastructure makes places both livable and attractive. 'If transport is designed and delivered in a way that is sympathetic to the place, and is in harmony with what people want from that place, then that is an important dimension that the transport sector needs to come to terms with,' says Bray. 'We need a much better holistic outcome.'

Increasingly, businesses and business sectors want to locate within urban areas rather than, as was a trend in the past, to work from out of town sites and locations on peripheral roads. The finance, creative and technology sectors wish to settle in vibrant urban centres. 'They want the things that cities at their best should provide: high quality urban realm, provision for active travel, clean air, and safer and cleaner environments. These kinds of initiatives are more important to them than single large pieces of infrastructure,' says Bray. 'What cities do best is provide an attractive and dynamic urban realm which is more about people than it is about

traffic.' This is a marked and interesting trend, he says, with popular and successful cities like London, Vienna, Paris and Hamburg putting policies in place to deliver quality public spaces, active travel initiatives and a wider choice of mobility options.

Obviously, there's also a need for quality mass public transport systems to bring people in and out of the city, he says. We all want to get around in our chosen modes, and this can become very challenging, especially as travellers and commuters are increasingly multi-modal, but often favour particular modes for specific journeys. Who wants to have their coffee vibrating and spilling on the pavement table as an HGV rushes by, be stuck in traffic in a taxi, Uber or shared car, or feel threatened on a shared bike or while crossing the road? Everyone has their needs and preferences, so how are we going to come together as professionals to achieve cohesive change?

Individual areas will decide which routes they wish to take, says Bray, but we professionals can help to inform and educate. 'There are some very difficult challenges around streets and how they're going to look and perform in the future,' he says. 'The bus lobby is pressing for extensive bus priority measures, advocates of active travel increasingly want segregated facilities, and the freight and logistics sector stresses that goods need to flow smoothly into towns and cities. There are policy aims around reducing the amount of space available for all kinds of traffic,



O'Connell St, Dublin: who says people can't share nicely? And in Vester Voldgade, Copenhagen, there's plenty of room for citizens as well as cars. Pictures courtesy of John Dales



Even in narrow streets, space can be made for non-car modes

and giving more space to active travel, pedestrians or to urban realm schemes. We also have priorities around air quality, and we simply can't reconcile all of these quickly and make everybody happy. There is a major debate to be had about the best ways forward, and how to reconcile these challenges in a way that addresses these different aspirations and works for cities as a whole.'

There is a danger, as has been the case in the past, that professionals have looked at streets with discrete hats on, either focusing on bus priority or active travel, air quality or freight and logistics, notes Bray. We need a more holistic approach, he suggests. 'I don't think there are perfect answers out there, but I think we'll reach better outcomes by working together and taking a more collaborative approach. We need more discussion and coordination across disciplines, and more learning from good and interesting practice across the UK and the wider world.'

New technologies and business models offer the potential for radical transport change by reducing private vehicle levels, if appropriately managed, Bray says. Mobility as a Service (MaaS), for example, provides a new way of approaching the delivery and consumption of transport (or mobility), and many authorities, for example the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (WMITA), are interested in its potential. A scoping report for WMITA described MaaS as 'a golden opportunity' for the authority to look to the innovation in 'as a Service' businesses that are successful in other markets, take that innovation and apply it to the challenges that the West Midlands transport sector faces. Successful MaaS systems are envisaged to offer

a range of economic and social benefits, and public and local authorities have a role to play in setting frameworks for such mobility management. 'No-one really knows yet how this will all play out in the end, in terms of the big Californian corporations and car manufacturers who are increasingly becoming involved in transport provision', says Bray. Regions like the West Midlands and London are actively engaging with some of these developments. The key is not to get dazzled by the technology, and to keep user benefits centre stage. Integrating existing assets such as the Oyster card system with car clubs and cycle hire, car hire and car rental means bringing on board new entrants and the private sector. 'The authorities need to ensure that new mobility offers are coherent and comprehensive enablers, and go along with the "policy grain" of where you want your city to be, which is a sustainable and attractive place to live, work and invest.'

Many new entrants to the transport sector have very big aspirations and seem to wish to dominate transport futures in the same way that they've dominated the internet, for example, says Bray. Cities need to think long and hard about how they avoid getting swamped, and make sure they develop a way forward which aligns with their long term objectives and the vision they have for their cities in the future. Transport authorities and government have a central role to play in enabling the delivery of new offerings such as MaaS by working with the private sector to build a framework in which new services can be developed, tested and deployed, whilst working collaboratively with the private sector so as to not stifle innovation, says Bray.

The Better Places Symposium 2016: how transport can make better places...

Transport is in a period of disruption. New thinking, new business models, new technologies and new channels for sharing and engagement are combining to offer real potential for positive change.

Join us on 24 November to meet expert international speakers and hear them explain how towns and cities can make the most of these new opportunities. And why not become part of the associated **Better Places Network** in order to remain involved with news, developments and best practice.

The Better Places Symposium 2016 will look at:

- how forward-thinking towns and cities are adopting new strategies and tactics to deliver safer, cleaner and people-friendly places
- how local authorities, businesses and communities are working together to manage urban mobility and so deliver positive change

Expert international speakers will outline:

- How to make shared mobility solutions work for everyone
- How better mobility management within a placemaking framework adds economic and social value
- Securing a positive impact for driver-assisted technologies and intelligent mobility services
- Improving parking and management of the street-scene
- Practical integration between land use, spatial analysis and transport planning
- The transition to smart urban management



The **Better Places Network** which incorporates the existing Active Travel Network, will bring together people who share a common interest in creating Better Places. Membership is free to all that attend Better Places Network supported events. Simply register at the event at the designated desk.

Find out more online: <http://bit.ly/2eecoZ5>

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Jonathan Bray will be introducing the inaugural **Better Places Symposium** on 24 November at the **Oval, London**, and chairing the morning plenary with speakers **Andreas Trisko**, *Head of the Department for Urban Development and Urban Planning, Vienna*; **Mahmood Siddiqi**,



Director of Transportation and Highways, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham; and **Robert Shorten**, *Professor of Control Engineering and Decision Science at University College Dublin*.