



JONATHAN BRAY



What I discovered on Planet Freight

If freight is from Mars is public transport from Venus?
It often seems that they are worlds apart, but they shouldn't be

► It's odd how the various transport sectors keep themselves to themselves. In all the excessive array of transport conferences ceaselessly tilling the same bone dry ground hoping to unearth new caches of delegate fees or potential sponsors: there's rarely anyone from the car industry invited to speak - or in the audience. This despite the fact that the auto industry is clearly gunning its engines and tooling ominously down the main street of the wider mobility agenda. Nor are trade unions ever invited to speak at anything for that matter. Though clearly a terrible blight would stalk the land and the moon would fall into the sea if that were to ever happen: but that's another story!

It's strange too how freight and passenger are generally kept apart. They shouldn't be - because freight and public transport need road space and cities need both goods and people safely and happily delivered. Neither need is going to go away, however much the sectors studiously ignore each other or policy makers say 'oh yes freight, forgot about that, put a para in at the end of the report'.

At PTEG we have been venturing into the freight agenda - somebody has to give the DfT has put up the 'do not disturb' sign on freight. This culminated in our recent *Delivering the Future - new approaches to urban freight* report but also took in a fascinating Last Mile challenge conference we organised in September 2014 and some rock solid earlier work done for us by the razor sharp freight

specialists at MDS Transmodal.

So here's what's I've learnt on my journey from a vast warehouse of ignorance to the click and collect of the 10-point list below. Or to put it another way: inhabitants of Planet Public Transport this is what I have to report from my trip to Planet Freight.

1 Freight works. It works in that the shops have milk and newspapers and the pubs have beer. This isn't a sector that falls down on the job. Stuff gets where it's supposed to be.

2 Freight doesn't work. It doesn't work in that lorries kill cyclists; old trucks and vans pump out carcinogens; and streets full of vans and lorries are nobody's idea of an urban realm they want to live in.

3 Freight is dynamic and market-led. It is more dispassionate than the world of public transport. Less distortions around trying to mix high subsidies with the pretence of free market entrepreneurialism and less Old Testament fervour about resisting the horrors of any change whatsoever. When change comes the freight sector reacts fast - because it really is a free and competitive market out there. As diesel truck and van access to sensitive and congested urban environments becomes harder and more costly, the industry is responding. Already around 1-2% of logistics is green and innovative - like using cargo bikes and zero emission electric delivery vehicles.

You have probably started to see it yourself on city streets. Take the city where we at PTEG are based: Leeds. A company called Last Mile Leeds operates a fleet of cargo cycles, delivering everything from magazines to large parcels. The company now counts logistics giant DHL among its clients. The company allows DHL couriers to drop parcels at a depot from where Last Mile Leeds cargo cycles complete the last mile of the journey within the city centre. This has cut the number of vans DHL uses into the city centre by half.

4 The largest cities, where congestion and environmental pressures are greatest, are where innovation is happening fastest. For example In Paris, major retailer Monoprix has 90 stores in central Paris. Every week five trains carry the future contents of those Monoprix shops from suburban warehouses to Paris-Bercy in central Paris. From there low emission gas-powered delivery vehicles complete the last mile delivery ...and let the shelf stacking begin.

5 Consolidation centres on the edge of towns and cities (where trains or big trucks deliver for onward distribution to city centre stores and offices) have been an aspiration of policy-makers for decades but results have been mixed as costs are high and logistics companies don't want to know. However, if the savings to logistics companies of delivering once to a depot rather than multiple times to city centre locations can be captured, and the squeeze goes on the wrong type of city centre delivery vehicles (through emissions restrictions, pedestrianisation and so on), then maybe the sums begin to add up.

6 The public sector could also help make consolidation centres work. Local authorities, the health service, schools and colleges are all merrily organising their own deliveries generating van traffic galore and wasting their own staff time dealing with multiple deliveries over the course of a day. Why not pool and let the big trucks deliver to one consolidation centre on the city boundary and then have fewer deliveries by more sustainable means to those council offices, schools and hospitals? Camden Council have been leading a public sector consolidation project with other boroughs that is working well. The scope for scaling up is considerable...



“The cleverest cities will see the opportunities from getting the ‘last mile’ right”



Last Mile Leeds operates a fleet of cargo cycles, delivering everything from magazines to large parcels

7 Cities already have central hubs for freight deliveries that are largely unused at night and can be served by 125mph mobile warehouses. These hubs are called railway stations. For example, Euston station has a huge logistics hub built in the 1960s. But even where such facilities don't exist, empty nighttime platforms can often be used. The first stirrings of using stations as the access point for city centre deliveries have already happened, including trials using Euston as the railhead for local electric and low emission van deliveries (there are 100 supermarkets within two miles of Euston).

8 Technological change and vehicle standards are key. For example, the ability of cycle delivery firms to compete changes with the availability of lighter and innovative cargo carrying systems and with the legal framework governing battery power assistance technologies. It changes too with access to the highway and shopping street environment.

“Already around 1-2% of logistics is green and innovative”

9 Freight has a host of complexities like any sector - vehicle standards and legislation, distribution sites, loading gauges and lorry weights and all the rest of it. Complexities which can be enough to deter the non-native freight speaker from leaving the comfort zone of public transport - because everybody thinks they know how to fix public transport! And can I gently suggest that sometimes the freight sector has a tendency to get lost in the details at the expense of some of the bigger ideas that might make the issue light up more brightly in the cerebral cortex of busy politicians' and policy-makers' brains.

But here's the thing. There's a central organising principle of any sensible urban freight policy that's simple: Get the bulk freight delivered into or near to urban areas

by rail (or water) where you can, and the last mile delivered by unobtrusive and low impact means wherever you can. Are you listening, Department for Transport?

10 Finally, I can exclusively reveal that freight isn't boring. It's part of (rather than an add-on to) a much wider debate about what kind of cities we want to live in and how smart technologies are creating new opportunities: for entrepreneurs; for cleaner, safer and more attractive environments; for getting people and goods where they need to be efficiently. In short, the cleverest cities will see the opportunities from getting the 'last mile' right. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

► Jonathan Bray is director of the PTEG Support Unit. Before joining PTEG in 2003, his background was a mix of transport policy and transport campaigning.