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URBAN PUBLIC TRANSPORT TODAY

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PREFACE

Although we all have an image of what we think of as being public transport, when we come to define it, it is not quite so easy. We may think of public transport as any means of passenger transport available to anyone without restriction as to membership of any group, provided that the conditions of the operator are met, including payment. It may be publicly or privately owned and will run regularly, usually to a timetable.

Such a broad definition would include all kinds of localized transport such as moving pavements at airports for example, cable cars at ski resorts or in other mountainous areas, small-scale monorails or other railways at leisure parks, horses and carriages in some towns with a substantial tourist industry. These kinds of transport may be important locally but here I have restricted myself to the sort of public transport for longer journeys and which account for the main part of public passenger journeys. In effect, this means buses and railways.

There is a widening gap between what we expect of public transport and what can be delivered, given the circumstances in which we seem to expect it to operate. Our expectations for travel are increasing, both in quantity and in the standards of speed, reliability and comfort. Out-of-town shopping, leisure parks and business parks all involve more travel than did their predecessors. Cars are becoming more like mobile sitting rooms with all the home comforts such as CD player and telephone. To give all this up for a bus or train is asking a lot.

We all still recognize that there are many people for whom public transport is essential, particularly amongst the elderly, children and teenagers and others who have only limited access or no access to a car. Less obvious is the dependence of our cities for their existence on high capacity public transport. Yet there is still a prevalent view that local public transport, especially buses, is only for those who do not have a car, a welfare service for the needy. We still prefer to spend our money on cars rather than public transport, knowing

that we cannot all have unrestricted use of them. But we are slowly and patchily beginning to realize that we will have to face up to the reality that we must now find ways of restricting use of the private car more severely, and that will involve some transfer to public transport.

Public transport has suffered badly from the imposition of political dogma. Some parts of our public transport network are underfunded. Elsewhere, public money is being wasted. Some of our transport policies conflict and undermine the financial viability of public transport leading to poor value for money. Public transport needs to be coordinated and planned together with land uses under the Town and Country Planning legislation. The plain truth is that since the coming into force of the Transport Act 1985, no-one plans transport or even public transport as a whole. Not only has no-one the duty to do so, no authority even has the power to do so should they think it advisable.

By international comparisons, our public transport operators are on the whole quite efficient, given the unhelpful legislative and political context in which they have to operate. Even so, a great deal of improvement is possible without throwing a lot of money at our public transport networks. Certainly there are many opportunities to get better value for money at the same levels of public expenditure.

This book is about how local public transport can be made to address what will continue to be asked of it, about how public transport can be made a less unacceptable alternative to the private car than it is now. It is intended for officials, politicians and others interested in the land use/local transport conundrum, about the understanding and reconciliation of what at present is a misfit between demand for movement and the possibilities of achieving it. These should certainly include town planners and those working for passenger transport authorities and in fact anyone concerned with policy making and project appraisal for local public transport.

If passenger transport planning is about arranging for people to have accessibility to where they want to go, easily, quickly and in large numbers, we have been performing far below our best for a long time. This book is certainly concerned with the problem and hopefully provides a few clues as to how passenger transport planning can be nudged a little closer to the ideal.

Barry J.Simpson MSc PhD

ISSUES FACING LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

1.1 THE RISE OF THE PRIVATE CAR

The increase in the number of vehicles, particularly private cars, on the roads of Britain during recent decades is well known: in 1974 there were 13 399 000 licensed private cars, in 1983 15 543 000, and in 1991 19 737 000—an increase of 47% between 1974 and 1991. We might think that as the number of cars in relation to the population increases then usage per car will decrease: those acquiring cars may be those who give less priority to car ownership, some will be buying second cars. In fact the usage of private cars and taxis by passenger kilometer increased even faster than car ownership—by 87% between 1974 and 1989. The length of motorways in Great Britain increased from 1870 km in 1974 to 3070 km in 1990—64%—rather more than private car registrations. Meanwhile, the number of buses licensed has declined from 79 000 in 1974 to 69 000 in 1984 but rose following deregulation of local bus services under the Transport Act 1985 to 73 000 in 1990. The number of public transport passenger journeys declined from 6224 million in 1980 to 5085 million in 1990 (Department of Transport, 1991a).

As private cars have increased in numbers there have come to be fewer people dependent on public transport, but as land uses have become more orientated to the private car, the need to travel to shops, work or for leisure for example, has increased. Prior to the rise of the car, more of these were within walking distance. There was more likelihood of a good bus service to those too far away to walk than is the case nowadays, especially outside the large cities. Those dependent on public transport have become more dependent on it than were their predecessors in the 1950s and before.

One of the first effects of the rise of the private car to attract public attention was the inadequacy of roads to meet the spiralling demands to use them.

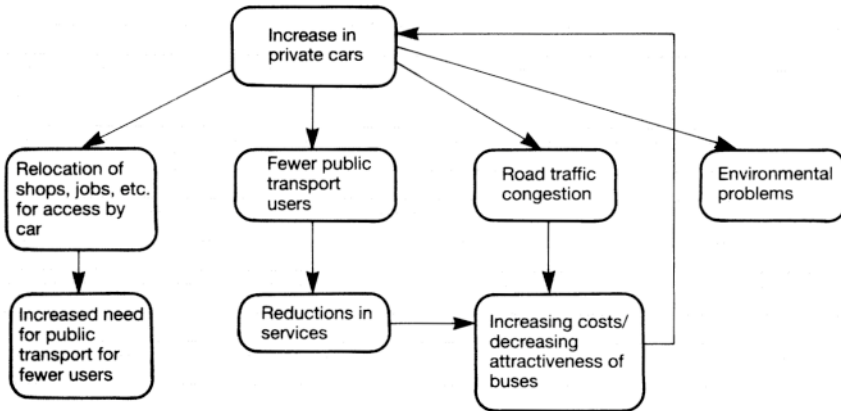


Figure 1.1 The main effects of increase in car ownership on public transport.

Before the motorways were started in the late 1950s, British roads were predominantly from town centre to town centre. Anyone travelling the length of the country would very likely have to pass through the centres of dozens of towns and villages. The volume of traffic pouring through towns incurred the wrath of residents. The slowing down of traffic annoyed the motorist. By-passes were an early solution for through traffic. Together with the motorways they were a boon for the coach industry. Neither were much use for local journeys but they did remove some of the traffic from towns. The speed of local buses in larger towns and cities came to be influenced increasingly by traffic conditions as well as the nature of the road, the number of stops and vehicle technology (Figure 1.1).

Throughout the 1960s, more road construction was seen as the solution and the foundations of the motorway network were laid. By 1972, the M6 reached as far as Carlisle. The M62 stretched across the Pennines. At first, construction was mainly outside urban areas. When attention was turned to large-scale urban road construction, opposition assembled with formidable force. The elevated A40(M), Westway, was opened in west London in 1970 and had a significant influence in demonstrating the costs of urban motorway construction. In 1972 and 1973 in particular, public reaction to the environmental damage caused by ever increasing urban road construction and the threat of more and more demolition of properties reached such proportions that the UK urban motorway programme was all but abandoned. Highway authorities did U-turns on motorways. Chairmen of planning committees ‘rescued’ the people from the ravages of urban motorways proposed by consultants whom they had engaged to do just that a couple of years earlier. Birmingham had just completed its inner ring road, several other large cities were part way there.

As well as public reaction against the environment of the motor vehicle, it

had come to be realized that the more roads being built, the more traffic that was being created by the temptation offered by better roads. Outside urban areas, motorway construction continued throughout the 1970s, increasing from 1075 kilometres in 1970 to 2290 kilometres in 1980. By the early 1980s trunk road construction was in decline. The M25 opened in 1986 and the M40 was completed in 1990 from London to Birmingham via Oxford after a long series of delays. This is probably the only example of a significant change in route of a motorway for environmental reasons.

From the mid-1960s there was a big decline in ridership on public transport. Car purchase had high priority amongst those with increasing disposable income. Whilst household expenditure on bus and rail fares rose from £1.89 per week in 1980 to £2.25 in 1989 (no account taken of inflation), expenditure on cars rose from £13.11 to £30.42 according to a Department of Employment Family Expenditure Survey (Department of Transport, 1991a, p. 51). This accounted for a large part of the increased demand for roadspace and road congestion and simultaneously took away many public transport passengers.

Private cars have increasingly become extensions of home: radio, stereo CD players, telephone and a whole range of other home comforts are not matched by local public transport. Cars have become easier and more comfortable to drive. One of the few advantages of public transport over the private car—ability to read a book, newspaper or do other minor jobs—really only happen on the longer train journeys. Asking the motorist to give up all these home comforts to return to the buses is asking a lot, even where services are reliable and convenient, particularly as the marginal cost of motoring is so low. Increasingly, public transport and particularly the buses have been left to the elderly, those at school, those not in employment and the less articulate—groups which are not able or inclined to press a case for public transport.

In some countries the increased demand for travel by car was addressed by a big increase in investment in public transport, partly to make it more competitive to the private car. Whereas in 1970 in France, investment in roads was around three times that in public transport, by 1980 these investments were practically the same. However, ridership and receipts did not increase to the same extent and by the 1980s deficits in public transport had become the prime issue.

1.2 EPHEMERAL INTEGRATION OF LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Contemporaneously with the demise of the urban motorway was the rise of integrated transport planning supported by both successive Labour and Conservative governments. Passenger transport authorities for Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, Merseyside and Tyne & Wear took over

council bus operations and became responsible for the planning and finance of other bus and local railway services. The metropolitan counties came into operation on 1st April 1974 and were responsible for land use planning, public transport and traffic management amongst other functions until their abolition in 1986. In 1970 the Ministry of Transport was incorporated into the Department of the Environment until it was separated six years later.

Soon after 1979, integrated transport planning was dismantled. Public transport was separated from land use planning. The powers of passenger transport executives were reduced. In 1989, a £12 billion road programme was announced at the height of a flood of light rail studies (for details see section 3.5).

1.3 CAR-ORIENTATED LAND USES

Even with the surge in road building, traffic congestion was not being relieved nor speed reduction reversed to the extents envisaged. More and longer journeys were being undertaken. People were travelling further to work. There is quite a lot of evidence to show that when the speed of transport increases, following the opening of a new road or a railway, many people travel further to work to get a wider range of job opportunities rather than just spend a shorter length of time on the same journeys. More and more houses have been built on the fringes of towns where life without private transport would be at least inconvenient. Bungaloid housing, suburban in style and density, has spread to many former villages and with it, a suburban life-style in terms of employment, car ownership and shopping habits.

Land use changes and site planning have been designed for the use of the private car. Particularly in urban areas, car users as a general rule have more money to spend than public transport users and certainly have more capacity to carry away the results. Shopping developers have come to assess site potential according to the capacity of the roads and the size of the car parks possible. More customers buy in quantities appropriate to the freezer and car boot rather than the shopping bag and bus. Shops are pleased to oblige with bigger and bigger car parks. Some even provide assistance to the customer staggering out with a mountain of grocery to the car.

Land use planning policies have often acquiesced with the demands of the car. Many planners have had misgivings about land use decisions and site planning for the private car but the demands from developers have been irresistible. Any town where they were refused would risk being abandoned by the commercial firms that the councils thought they needed. Refusing planning permission for a large commercial development will normally mean a loss of local authority revenue in the form of lost taxes.

With the decline of local shopping, more and more people have to use or even acquire a car whether they want to or not. In many rural areas, any household without a car would have to live bordering on self-sufficiency and the quality of life would be worse in some respects than it was up to the 1960s.

Some land uses, including shopping, at first became more concentrated into larger premises and into town centres. This increased the need to travel. Town centre supermarkets took the place of street corner grocers. Later, in the 1980s ever larger out-of-town hypermarkets began to replace the supermarkets involving even more travelling and even greater dependence on the private car. As for work journeys, when shoppers are able to travel further, they do.

In the late 1980s we had the rise of the business park, many of them on greenfield sites. Out-of-town urban development including both shopping and businesses has been motivated partly by better road access than is usual within urban areas, partly by the scope for more car parking. Typically, close-to-motorway-junctions business parks have been planned in such a way that even if it were possible to get a bus to the edge of the site, there would still be a long walk through a bleak, rainswept 'park', probably without even a continuous footpath. Design is solely for private transport. So too is their location. Like out-of-town shopping, many business parks are on radial routes rather than suburb to city centre. Many are isolated from other traffic generators. Whereas the occupier(s) of a private car often has a single destination, those of a bus usually have many destinations. Public transport thrives on routes with a succession of traffic-generating uses and activities, not a single destination.

1.4 INCREASING ROAD CONGESTION

Increasing road congestion affects buses even more than cars. Buses accelerate more slowly and are less able to take advantage of gaps in streams of traffic. Buses operate to pre-determined routes and so, unlike private cars and taxis for example, are limited in making detours to avoid congested sections of road. Decreased speed makes buses less attractive to passengers, increases fuel costs per mile and increases the number of buses needed for a given service time interval.

Perhaps even more objectionable to passengers than a slow journey is the unreliability of bus services resulting from traffic congestion. Passengers may be unsure whether a journey will take 10 minutes or 30, whether they will have to wait one minute or half an hour, the timetables having been rendered fictional.

Fast-accelerating buses have been tried but these are unattractive, if not dangerous, particularly for the elderly, frail, or those encumbered with shopping or small children. Together these make up a very important part of

bus passengers. Unlike car passengers, all bus passengers have to stand for at least part of the journey, even if only when getting to and from their seats. On coaches, passengers are often warned of the dangers of leaving their seats before the coach stops. On buses they invariably have to and many have to stand for the whole journey.

Away from the larger cities, it is not so much road congestion but low demand which has been the problem for public transport. Low demand without high subsidy means high fares which in turn means even lower demand. Reductions in services and operating costs per bus mile have been the responses, by substitution of minibuses or even school buses or post buses for standard vehicles. Such unconventional means of public transport have increased since the mid-1980s (Robinson, 1992).

It may seem that increasing road traffic congestion, whilst contributing to the decline of bus services, should help the railways. Indeed it has, in London at least. The near impossibility of using a car for many journeys into central London has probably been the main reason for the survival of many rail services. But in smaller cities using the car is not nearly so difficult. The shorter journeys to work would not be so difficult even if there was the same level of congestion on the roads. In the London region, longer train journeys make worthwhile having to travel a considerable distance to a railway station. Elsewhere, lines and stations have been closed, many of them at about the same time as the increases in road construction and car ownership in the 1960s and early 1970s. This has made necessary even longer journeys to the stations which remain, hence the railway networks have entered a downward spiral of decline. To some degree, buses will have substituted for railways, but will also have lost some custom in bringing railway travellers to stations.

1.5 PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR THE MOBILITY-IMPAIRED

Perhaps partly due to land use changes which have caused greater travel needs for almost everyone, the travel needs of the mobility-impaired have become increasingly recognized over the past decade or two. As well as the physically disabled, some recognition, perhaps not enough, has been given to the plight of the elderly and those encumbered with childrens' push chairs or shopping, for example. The needs of these groups may be addressed either by providing special services such as dial-a-ride (although these services are usually limited to the physically handicapped or the frail and elderly) or by adapting the normal public transport vehicles available to anyone. Low-floor vehicles, at first for light rail such as in Grenoble (Figure 1.2), more recently buses as in Caen, usually together with raised platforms to give level access, have been installed fairly widely, but still account for only a tiny fraction of public transport journeys.



Figure 1.2 The Grenoble low-floor tram.

The French have made significant progress in access to public transport for the less mobile. Speaking in June 1992 at the Sixth International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons in Lyon, Michel Gillibert, Secretary of State for Disabled People, claimed that by 1995, all new buses in France will be low-floor (Armitage, 1992).

Access to stations by those in wheelchairs can be achieved by ramp or lift (for underground stations). Although the access needs of the mobility-impaired may have been largely catered for in many of the new light rail systems, there remains the problem, even in towns fortunate to have such a system, of access to the other means of transport needed to get to and from the station.

1.6 PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR THE YOUNG

The transport needs of children and teenagers are often considered only in terms of transport to school, yet many live in housing estates with little to attract their interest during their spare time. Desolate, extensive grassy areas separate low-density housing, designed only for those with wheels as well as feet. Cycling is not without hazard and even more risky, threat of theft means that there is too high a chance that a cyclist will not have a complete bicycle for the return journey.

1.7 FINANCE OF LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

It is often pointed out that levels of subsidy from the public purse are very low in the UK both for capital projects and operational costs. Many European cities have operational subsidies of over 40%, some over 60%, whereas UK cities mostly have less than 20%. Undoubtedly most UK cities compare very well in delivering value for money in local public transport services. However, there are a lot of factors which influence the level of subsidy needed, and high levels of subsidy abroad should not necessarily be used as a justification for increasing them in the UK. Some of the factors are as follows:

- land use patterns and densities of occupation (which affect the number of public transport users);
- policies towards the private car;
- levels of fares;
- frequency of public transport services;
- routes of public transport services—the number of socially necessary/loss making routes;
- period of operation of services—the number of off-peak services.

Policies in all of these areas will affect the level of subsidy justifiable.

An important and contentious issue in the subsidy of capital projects has been the difference in methods of assessing road and rail projects for government subsidy which, it has been claimed, favours subsidy of roads. Certainly investment in roads has been greater than in rail for a long time. Birmingham City Council and the Department of Transport have commissioned a study by the Institute of Transport Studies at Leeds University and the MVA Consultancy to find a common method of assessment for road and rail.

1.8 PUBLIC TRANSPORT HAS A POOR IMAGE

Public transport, especially buses, are widely regarded as being something to avoid by anyone who has private transport. This is partly due to misuse by some members of the public. A trip on the upstairs of a double-decked bus is quite likely to involve being caught in the cross-fire between youths shouting obscenities at each other in what to them is normal conversation. Usually they are unaware of how offensive other passengers find them.

Boys running more or less wild on the upstairs of buses on a Saturday or in school holidays is common on some routes. Even when accompanied by their parents, smaller children are sometimes allowed to walk on the seats, even when they are visibly causing a mess which would spoil the clothes of any unsuspecting passengers afterwards.

On some routes, buses are littered with drink cans, bottles, half-eaten take-aways and a motley collection of all manner of rubbish within an hour or two after having been cleaned in the garage. Some trains and buses are so shabby that anyone who is smartly dressed would be put off from using them.

Safety from assault is perhaps even more of a deterrent. Railways in some cities have got a bad reputation, particularly late at night, with fears for personal safety in both carriages and on stations. In some cities, this has had a serious commercial effect. As a result, closed circuit television has been installed, stations and carriages have been designed so that they are more open to view.

Public transport and particularly buses frequently fail to meet the standards of cleanliness that is now expected from many potential passengers. Car users will be accustomed to dressing decently without fear of having their clothes spoiled. They will be accustomed to choosing their company, a particularly important consideration for parents who do not wish to have their children exposed to the kind of language and behaviour that is liable to be encountered on some routes. Bus operators have a very difficult job on their hands in trying to attract motorists.

1.9 RESPONSES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Since around the mid-1960s, the rise of the private car has caused local and central government to search for, and adopt with varying degrees of resolution, measures to support public transport. In many of the larger European and North American cities of at least 300 000 population, the centrepiece of the public transport response has been the development of urban railways. Most of these are entirely separate from road traffic. A few such as those in Nantes and Grenoble share roadspace at junctions, but all substantially offer an alternative means of travel to congested road conditions. Many of the light railways have been accompanied by significant pedestrianization projects and other city centre road traffic reduction measures. They therefore offer an alternative means of access and help to sustain shopping and other city centre activities which might otherwise be adversely affected by road traffic restraint.

The most common response to worsening road traffic conditions has been simple forms of bus priority such as the painting of bus lanes on existing carriageways. Violation by other road traffic has been allowed to happen on a big scale, a sign of reluctance to take a stand against the demands of road users rather than a lack of ability to uphold the traffic regulations.

There have been some isolated attempts to improve standards for comfort, reliability and convenience of using local bus services but in general, standards have declined over the past two or three decades whilst

the expectations of those now travelling by means other than the bus have probably increased. It may be unkind, but probably largely true that only those with a low expectation in terms of speed, reliability or comfort will travel by local bus.

Public transport, particularly buses and urban rail in inner city areas has not only been losing passengers in terms of total numbers, it has been losing them selectively. Those who can get access to a car do so. It is only those who are left who use public transport. Problems of vandalism and assault of passengers on public transport has had more attention since the rise of the private car and the public image of buses in particular has deteriorated.

Unreliability of bus services is largely due to road traffic conditions beyond the control of the operator. Decline in convenience of using buses is partly due to reductions in services and routes as a response to rising deficits, partly because more and more people have moved from relatively densely occupied but convenient-to-serve inner city areas to low density suburban housing which, on average, is sure to involve a longer walk to the bus stop. The comfort of passengers has been sadly neglected in the attempt to pack in more passengers and produce cheap, rapidly accelerating vehicles. In continental Europe 200-passenger vehicles have been devised and 150-passenger buses are in common use. In Britain we have the minibuses and certain models of single-decked bus where some of the seats are so tightly packed that only a child can fit in reasonable comfort.

The bus industry in the UK is still seen as a welfare service to be provided for the less fortunate as a matter of social conscience rather than as a commercial operation needing to meet customers' wishes. Cheapness of operation and cheapness of fares have had priority for a long time. Of course there have been some worthwhile attempts from operators to see services from the customers' viewpoints and to operate efficiently, but sadly there are still too many cases of muddled operation that should reduce a commercial operator to bankruptcy. They probably would do if users had an alternative means of transport. Only a small minority of bus stops have reasonably comprehensive information about timetables, routes and fares, important to reduce fumbling about with change as passengers board. Information on where to catch buses is hard to come by in many towns. The bus industry has had to face formidable problems but has not always helped itself by using the simple, easy, cheap and very obvious measures which would significantly improve services.

1.10 THE TRANSPORT ACT 1985

The Transport Act 1985 reflected a desire to introduce competition into local public transport and a concern with increasing subsidies. In addressing these issues, two main changes were imposed on local bus services: deregulation,

involving the removal of barriers to providing local bus services, and the transfer to the private sector of publicly owned bus companies. It does not apply to London.

Bus operators no longer had to get permission from the Traffic Commissioners to run a service. They simply have to register a local service with the Commissioners giving details of route, timetable and maximum size of vehicle (to judge the possibility of them being unsuitable for the route). No information on fares is required.

The previous arrangements of support for the whole public transport system were replaced by giving powers to local authorities to support what they regard as 'socially necessary' services which are subject to competitive tender. Concessionary fares have been continued, commercial operators being compensated by local authorities.

Independent companies were formed from the transport undertakings previously operated by local authorities. These have to compete for any subsidies in the same way as other commercial operators. The National Bus Company, which carried about a quarter of all local public transport journeys in England and Wales before 1985, was split up and sold.

Grants for the purchase of new buses were phased out but the 100% fuel duty rebate for local bus services was continued.

Whereas previously, local authorities had a duty to plan and coordinate local bus services, coordination of all services is not now permissible. Any practice which may be deemed anti-competitive has to be registered with the Office of Fair Trading. This includes agreements between operators about fares and timetables, which bus stops and what kind of livery to use. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission may become involved if operators within a local area are bought up.

Deregulation has been accused of being the cause of many of the current problems in the local bus industry.

- There has been some reluctance amongst operators to enter into competition and many routes would not support more than one operator, but where there has been competition, it has resulted in buses running in bunches rather than at regular intervals.
- Fares have generally risen sharply (by 112% in metropolitan areas between 1985 and 1992, 60% in shire counties, and 76% in London, where services were not deregulated).
- Lack of cooperation between operators has resulted in poor connections between services.
- Companies are discouraged from agreeing to operate joint timetables because this might be deemed as preventing competition.
- The system of registration encourages destructive competition whereby services are withdrawn at short notice.
- Although there has been reduction in some fares where there is competition on a particular route, difficulties are experienced in

planning journeys due to lack of comprehensive information about timetables and on which services return tickets will be valid.

- Due to pressure to award tenders at the lowest price, more old, shabby vehicles are being retained. The number of maintenance staff employed in the bus industry declined sharply from 80 000 in 1984 to 58 000 in 1987.

The Transport Act 1985 has brought some benefits to some groups involved in public transport—the frequency of services has increased along some (mostly already busy) routes, subsidies have been reduced, benefitting taxpayers (grants to road passenger transport has decreased from £1031 million in 1984/85 to £936 million in 1990/91: Department of Transport, 1991a). However, the number of passenger journeys has declined in both metropolitan and shire counties between 1985 and 1991 whilst in London, journeys have increased. The consensus amongst those involved in managing, operating or using public transport is that the disbenefits are greater and revision of the legislation is awaited before many of the current problems can be adequately addressed.

1.11 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

British public transport faces an unstable immediate future. On the one hand there is a professed interest in maintaining and improving services by both the main political parties. The period since the late 1980s has seen a spate of public transport studies, particularly for light rail feasibility and a few lines have been built. On the other hand, no-one seems able and willing to take effective action against the root cause of most public transport problems—the unbridled use of the private car at very low marginal cost—and the coordination of land use policies with public transport infrastructure has, overall, been very poor. On the one hand we keep telling ourselves that we want a good public transport system whilst pursuing land use policies orientated to the private car.

The results of land use policies remain for decades. When cities have taken shape under the influence of the private car, the bus or any other form of public transport, it will take several decades until land uses and densities could significantly adapt to a different form of transport. Large parts of British cities have grown with the bus and in the past two or three decades, the private car as the dominant form of transport. Reintroduction of rail or any other form of transport needing higher densities than those adapted to the bus, or even worse, the car, will be an uphill struggle.

In any case, the desire for car travel is here to stay. In particular it seems likely to increase amongst some of the groups at present using public transport. In 1975/76 69% of men aged 17 or over in Britain and 29% of the women

had a driving licence. In 1989/90 the figures had risen to 78% and 48%, respectively.

The motor car industry is a powerful political lobby. Large numbers are employed in it, even larger numbers dependent on it. In times of economic difficulty a government has to seriously consider the effects on employment of the taxation level on cars. In voting terms there is far more to be lost from having high levels of taxation than there is to be gained from the votes of those concerned to limit the number of cars on the roads. There is a substantial number of marginal Parliamentary seats close to where motor vehicles are manufactured.

Central and local governments have tried to tempt motorists out of their cars. The carrot of improved public transport has hardly ever proved successful without the stick of intolerable levels of congestion or lack of car parking. In a few cities such as Singapore and recently planned for Stockholm, charging for road space has been a policy. Very commonly in Europe, simply blocking up roads to varying degrees, by restricting access times, or category of vehicle has been carried out hand-in-hand with public transport improvements.

Public transport in Britain and particularly bus deregulation, has become caught up in insensitive political dogma and there are few signs that legislators know and care about what has happened. Public transport does not have a high priority with any political party because no connection is made between quality of services and the way people vote. The private car is much more influential in voting. Politicians fear the consequences of raising taxes. Addressing road traffic congestion is seen by politicians as a vote winner, so much so that they have even claimed that improving public transport will achieve this voluntarily and have used this as a reason for public transport investment. It seems that many politicians think that spending on public transport cannot be justified simply because we want a better public transport system—it has to improve road conditions as well. Maybe the public transport industry should not complain about the result even if the reasoning is flawed.

1.12 A PAROCHIAL VIEW

Public transport has quite different meanings from one part of the world to another. Table 1.1 hints at a few of the issues worldwide. There is a very large variation in the level of public transport service (people per bus) although it should be remembered that some of the cities have a substantial rail network; land use patterns in the developing world tend to be more mixed and will require less travelling and, especially in the USA, the low level of bus use reflects the very high level of private car use.