How is transport used for city-competitiveness?

Greg Marsden and Caroline Mullen
Economic theory → transport models:

- Economic benefits α travel cost and time;
- Transport can alter costs of production and access to employment;
- Employment tends to be exogenous;
- Employment tends not to be differentiated by type;
- Models have tended to consider a city or region acting in isolation.
Economic theory and transport

Employment in city before transport intervention

Transport intervention:

Transport barriers to taking up employment

But not -
Political geography:

- City and regional competitiveness relevant in current political climate
- Focus on creating supply side conditions for economic growth – transport is one supply side condition
- Claim that high GVA creative and knowledge based industries are attracted by high quality environment – role for transport policy in this.
- Political geography gives an impression of relationship between transport and competitiveness but limited detail
City competitiveness and transport: the questions

- Difference between economic picture in transport models and in political geography
- The overarching question is: what are the relationships between transport and economy?
- Our contribution is to ask:
  - What are decision-makers economic objectives and how is transport used in the quest to achieve those aims?
  - What types of rationale and evidence are used to explain transport decisions?
  - Are decision-makers’ objectives and concerns reflected in decision support tools?
## The study

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<th>City Region A</th>
<th>County Wide Integrated Transport Authority</th>
<th>Development Director (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round); Passenger Services Director (2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; round)</th>
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<td>Major regional city</td>
<td>Senior Transport Policy Officer (one interview)</td>
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<td>Smaller city in city region</td>
<td>Senior Transport Planning Officer (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; and 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; round); Senior Economic Regeneration Officer (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round)</td>
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<td>City Region B</td>
<td>County-wide Integrated Transport Authority</td>
<td>ITA Officer (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; and 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; round)</td>
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<td>Smaller city in city-region</td>
<td>Transport Planning Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; and 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; round); Economic Development Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round)</td>
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<td>Smaller Town in City Region</td>
<td>Transport Policy Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; and 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; round); Economic Development Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round); Planning Policy Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round)</td>
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<td>City Region D</td>
<td>Regional Partnership</td>
<td>Chief Executive (one interview); Head of Transport (one interview)</td>
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<td>Smaller city in city-region</td>
<td>Planning and Transport Policy Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; and 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; round); Strategic Transport Projects Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round); Economic and Business Development Manager (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; round)</td>
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To explore how competitiveness and economic objectives explain transport decisions and priorities:

- What are decision-makers economic objectives and how is transport used in the quest to achieve those aims?
- What types of rationale and evidence are used to explain transport decisions?
- Are decision-makers’ objectives and concerns reflected in decision support tools?
Transport judged to affect competitiveness especially in relation to:

- Employment growth
- Retail
- Regional collaboration and distribution of funds
Employment growth (i)

Connectivity: access to work

- Concern for supply side conditions - facilitate inward investment or expansion of private sector employers already located in the area
- Emphasise accessibility and quality of transport infrastructure to potential investors
- A focus on connectivity and access to employment sites
- Recognition that availability of transport is not always the problem – knowledge and confidence matters
Employment growth (i)

- Congestion could limit competitiveness – especially growth in employment
- Charges – for parking or road use – considered a potential problem for business and therefore employment growth – But:
  - Recognition that parking restrictions could help but there is inability to act given perceptions about politics and economy
  - Hypothetical idea of a congestion charge is attractive – but primarily for prospects that it will bring investment (more attractive supply side conditions)
Access to work feature of transport models, but -
• Is relation between employment growth and transport considered by models?
• Can models consider supply side conditions?
• Can decision-support tools consider transport problems that are more than absence of transport
Employment growth (ii)

Place making:

- Encourages investment by [high GVA] creative and knowledge business?
- A feasible policy for everyone?
- Another supply side concern.
Retail

- For smaller cities or towns: acute sense of competition with neighbours
- Prompts worry about car parking charges: although awareness that many reach shops on foot, bike or public transport
Regional collaboration and competition

- Political not economic competitiveness?
- Perception that cities and towns within city regions can all be better off if they collaborate
- Does not mean that cities and towns do not argue about fair shares
Competition for national investment funds
- Driven by national criteria
- 'Together stronger'
- Regional prioritisation to maximise chances
- One eye to main competitors but package is critical

Weak evidence of pan-city region cooperation (e.g. Northern Hub)

Competition within City Region for investment funds
- Strong evidence of pork barrel politics within bids
- Local context is very important
- Leading city relatively unconstrained in choices
- Smaller towns have more competition amongst themselves
- Demand management driven by weak retail and need for development
Conclusion

Officers draw on a range of rationales – including political ideas, economic theory and empirical evidence. Complex account of transport’s economic and political role:

• Employment growth
• Differentiating types of employment
• Shift from focus on travel time and cost – place-making
• Competition with neighbours: retail and funding
• Collaboration with neighbours

In many cases these are perceptions – at minimum we need more empirical evidence to turn into claims

One step in search for evidence is thinking about how to model these objectives and perceptions.