DISTILLATE Project D Structures Report – Executive Summary

This Report starts with a section locating it in the wider DISTILLATE Project, the specific sub-project within the DISTILLATE consortium within which it sits, and the wider social science and, to a limited degree, transport policy literature. This is followed by a section exploring in some depth the theoretical bases which have informed our thinking. It is important to note that we are using a 'grounded' approach: thus, our targeted literature and information review proper happens after this initial report on our data and cases. Section 3 looks at our case study data. The analysis is deepened at the end of Section 3 where the data is related back to our project objectives which are listed in Section 1. The *working* conclusion is in a final section. It is important to note that this report is part of the first tranche of output for Project D and, as a result of the approach we have taken, points only to our initial analysis which will be refined through our information and literature review and our continuing cases. These two early, formal deliverables from DISTILLATE Project D are the *Processes Report* (FD1) and the *Structures Report* (FD2). The two form an interlinked whole.

The distinction between process and structure is illustrated in the Report. The report concentrates upon the structure itself and also on ***how people think*** of it. How people think are often ingrained beliefs and – as such – may not be susceptible to quick and easy change but any ways that can be found of changing them should be effective and long lasting. Thus, we hope to be able to bring about a 'step change' in people's actions by influencing how they think about things. Both the physical structure and the non-material structure influence the behaviour and actions of individual actors and how they function. We are not saying that institutions and government structure are physical things alone: we are saying that they are both physical and non-material. Thus, there is a constant overlap in reality, e.g. actions are constantly mediated by structure and vice versa.

Organisational and institutional issues are one of a range of issues which affect the policy process. Analysis of this arena suggests structure and action and Politics (with a capital P) as well as politics (with a small p) and innovation are all important and these are dealt with the Report.

The changing system of government is explained; often described as the shift from government to governance. Some of the key barriers that are associated with transport policy development and delivery are outlined within the context of the structural attributes described above. There are two main ways in which local political structures and boundaries impact on policy development and delivery. Firstly, the division of responsibilities between a number of different organisations, and secondly, the way in which responsibilities are allocated within organisations. As DISTILLATE Project D is undertaking case study work in England with two PTEs, one Metropolitan City Council, a Unitary Authority and a County Council (and a number of borough councils) it is these structures that we discuss.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that the structural issues can lead to perceptions that are 'compartmentalised', with blinkered outlooks that hinder the ability of local authorities to think and act creatively and flexibly Clearly, physical structure isn't everything, however, this demonstrates that it does encourage joint working and relationship building and can provide key drivers for further collaborative work.

While the barriers that we are trying to address include lack of political will, addressing political aims and ambitions when they may be in conflict with policy aims and electoral cycles and processes, there are also more organisational issues which include different priorities at different levels; unnecessary shake-ups of successful working practices; misuse of evidence; too wide a range of objectives (which aren't necessarily compatible); a lack of clearly defined relationships between organisations where contacts and existing working relationships may be limited; one-way relationships (i.e. where one organisation is more keen on joint working than the other); perceptions about disciplinary boundaries remit, working practices, and concerns about losing control over discrete policy areas. Notwithstanding, there is empirical evidence of factors that facilitate good organisational working practice and these include:
- Political support for high profile problems,

- De-politicisation of evidence,
- Physical working proximity (provided roles and responsibilities are clearly demarcated),
- History of collaborative working,
- Consistency of staff,
- Recognition of the importance and added value of joint working,
- Similar goals,
- Clearly defined relationships and reasons for collaborative working,
- Communication & good relationships,
- Ability to see 'bigger picture' rather than sectoral interests, and
- Partnerships have to be sustained over time, not just *ad hoc*.
- A business type approach rather than a bureaucratic one may help dealing with the private sector.

What we have found so far suggests that a certain level of replicatability may be possible but the improvised nature and individuality of so many local governance organisational structures militates against a simple transfer of ideas or practice. As well as the findings presented there are some generalisable issues. The culture of the workplace – and the workforce – is important in that people who work for a council with a more rounded remit – including some opportunities for working in and with different service areas – can be wider that those working for a public transport organisation. However, this is not necessarily that case, our PTE has shown that a transport organisation can successfully adopt a wide remit for itself: but this wider remit may not always permeate that organisation's dealings with outside organisations. The limitation is certainly true for organisational and staff identities and organisational identity is important particularly as it relates to practical considerations.

In our County Council (CC) case study area, the institutional networks are probably strongest at the sub-regional level. The CC also works well with the Regional Assembly. The CC successfully engages down to the Boroughs when working on housing issues and up to the Regional Assembly and Regional Government Offices when discussing transport priorities. Although there is a strategic alignment on these issues at the regional level this is much less evident at the level of practical policy intervention. There are also significant boundary issues for the Council with the neighbouring economically buoyant city region. This is all born out in our PTE case study where the same issues of cross-level working are to be found and the PTE works well 'up' to the regional and national levels and equally well down to the authority and even community level. What is evident, however, is a siloing of this good practice! The people who engage well at the community level and who have overcome structural barriers to delivery at that level may not necessarily be the people who engage well at the borough, regional or national level so there is a level of 'joined up governance' yet to come within the organisations.

Other 'barriers' to good organisational good practice are related to the above point and include the use (or not) of evidence-based approaches. In particular there is a missing 'joined-upness' between a target-based approach as set out within LTP2 and an appraisal-based approach as inspired by NATA (NB not necessarily formal NATA appraisal but any NATA-influenced decision making). The issues here are more generic and we can focus upon key individuals within key institutions and organisations in the policy arena to see how they have overcome this barrier in particular. In this way we focus upon the actual drivers of decision making & implementation – the individual actors – but we do this within an understanding of the structures within which they operate, often a structure dominated by economic interests where transport plays a peripheral part or is a tool which is used as a means to an other ends.

Following these two reports (on Processes and Structures), the next stage in Project D is to use the analytical structure outlined in these Reports, and the output of the ongoing information & literature review, to suggest where we can best target our efforts to produce a step change in actors' behaviour.

John Forrester, October 2006