Chapter X?

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Hypermobility: a challenge to governance

The year 2001 set a record for new motor vehicle sales in Britain – 3,137,700 were sold. The following year surpassed this record with 3,229,400. 2003 produced yet another record – 3,231,900. The forecast for 2004, at the time of writing, is a number of a similar size – another record or nearly so.

Allowing for the scrapping of old vehicles, the annual increase over these years in Britain's motor vehicle population has been over 800,000. Allowing 20 feet for each of these vehicles (the distance between parking meters) we can estimate the size of the parking space they demand – each year the equivalent of a new car park stretching from London to Edinburgh more than nine lanes wide was required to provide one parking space for each of these extra vehicles.

The threat posed to the natural environment by the growth globally in the numbers and use of cars, and the much more rapid growth of air travel, has received much attention but little effective action. The social consequences of this growth have received much less attention. This growth, I argue below, is not only exacerbating environmental and social problems, but making solutions to these problems by democratic means – by governance[1] – increasingly difficult.

Policy makers sometimes claim that transport policy is more 'joined up' than many other policy areas. However this claim usually refers to horizontal integration between infrastructure planning and transport policies. There are no effective mechanisms, horizontal or vertical, for integrating the wider societal impacts of hypermobility described here into planning and transport policy making.

[1] The first meaning for "government" and "governance" in the dictionaries I have consulted indicate that the words are synonyms for "the act or process of governing; *specifically*: authoritative direction or control". But a distinction appears to be establishing itself between processes of governing that are top-down and those that are bottom-up. For the purposes of this essay I take *government* to refer a centrally controlled top-down process, and *governance* to refer to a more bottom-up process for ordering human affairs characterized by more self-regulation and democratic accountability.

Hypermobility: too much of a good thing

Mobility is liberating and empowering but it is possible to have too much of a good thing. The growth in the numbers exercising their freedom and power is fouling the planet and jamming its arteries. Prodigious technological efforts are now being made to solve the problems of pollution and congestion caused by the growth of motorized mobility. Let us suppose that they succeed.

Suppose technologists were to succeed in inventing a pollution-free perpetual motion engine; the laws of physics dictate, of course, that they can never succeed, but this defines the goal towards which the motor industry and environmental regulators are striving. Suppose further that they succeed in developing the ultimate Intelligent Transport System – a computerized traffic control system that will hugely increase the capacity of existing roads, rails and airports. And finally, imagine a world in which computers are universally affordable and access to the Internet is too cheap to meter; pollution-free electronic mobility is vigorously promoted as an important part of the solution to the problems caused by too much physical mobility. The lion's share of time, money and regulatory energies now being devoted to the pursuit of solutions to the problems caused by motorized travel is currently being spent on these "technical fixes".

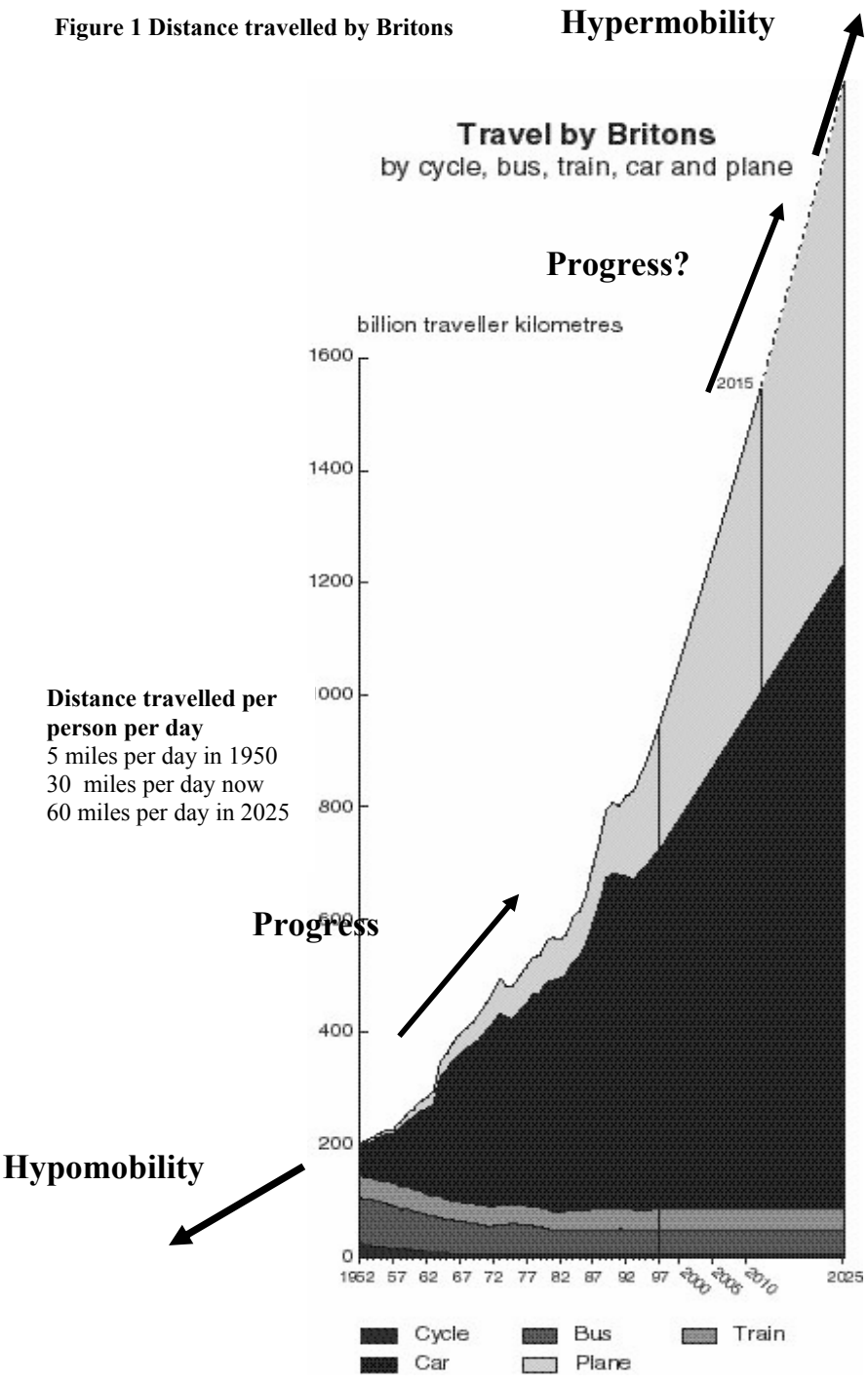
To the extent that they succeed there will be further large increases in physical mobility. Cleaner and more efficient engines will weaken existing constraints on the growth of travel – either by making it cheaper, or by removing environmental reasons for restricting it. Intelligent Highway Systems promise to greatly reduce the time cost of travel by eliminating much of the time now lost to congestion. And electronic mobility, while capable of substituting for many physical journeys is more likely to serve as a net stimulus to travel; by freeing tele-workers from the daily commute, it liberates them to join the exodus to the suburbs, and beyond, where journeys to shop, to school, to doctor, to library, to post office and to friends are all longer, and are mostly infeasible by public transport; and by fostering more social and business relationships in cyberspace it feeds the desire for "real" face-to-face encounters.

In 1950 the average Briton travelled about 5 miles a day. Now it is about 30 miles a day, and forecast to double by 2025 (see Figure 1). The growth trends for electronic mobility correlate strongly and positively with the trends for physical mobility, but their growth rates are much higher. Transport and communications provide the means by which everyone connects with everyone else in the world. The transformation – historical and projected – in the speed and reach of these means is having profound social consequences.

There are limits to what technology can do. A constraint on our behaviour that technology cannot relax is the number of hours in a day. As we spread ourselves ever wider, we must spread ourselves thinner. If we spend more time interacting with people at a distance, we must spend less time with those closer to home, and if we have contact with more people, we must devote less time and attention to each one. In small-scale pedestrian societies, *hypo*mobile societies, everyone knows everyone. In *hyper*mobile societies old-fashioned geographical communities are replaced by aspatial communities of interest – we spend more of

our time, physically, in the midst of strangers. The advantages of mobility are heavily advertised; the disadvantages of *hyper*mobility receive much less attention. Many of the unwelcome characteristics of the hypermobile society can readily be imagined by extrapolating existing trends.

Figure 1 Distance travelled by Britons



Distance travelled per person per day
5 miles per day in 1950
30 miles per day now
60 miles per day in 2025

The hypermobile society

It will be more dispersed

The process of suburban sprawl will continue. Societies whose members move at high speed over great distances consume more space. It is the long distance journeys – by road and air – that are experiencing the fastest growth rates. Walking and cycling – the local, healthy, democratic, and environmentally benign modes of travel are in steep decline. Even with pollution-free perpetual-motion engines there will be unwelcome environmental consequences. More of the country will need to be paved to provide parking places; the extra roads required will scar cherished landscapes and subdivide still further the habitats of endangered species; room will have to be found for new and larger airports; those parts of the world valued for their remote tranquillity will be further encroached upon. The London-to-Edinburgh car park referred to at the beginning of this chapter provides only one space for each extra vehicle. Their owners will want parking places at the other ends of their journeys, plus wider roads to get them there. High-tech "solutions" such as congestion charging aided by satellites and tracking devices will, in the absence of constraints on traffic growth, encourage further dispersal into areas where there is still room to move and park.

It will be more polarized

The increase in the mobility of the *average* Briton described above conceals a growing gap between the mobility-rich and the mobility have-nots. All those too young, or old, or otherwise disqualified from driving will get left behind, along with those too poor to afford cars and plane tickets. They will become second class citizens dependent for their mobility on the withered remains of public transport or the good-will of car owners. And as the world runs away from them to the suburbs most journeys will become too long to make by foot or cycle. World-wide the mobility have-nots are still increasing. Despite a ten-fold increase in the world's car population since 1950 – to about 500 million - because of population increase, over this period the number of people who do not own cars has more than doubled – to about 6 billion. And despite the much more rapid increase in air travel over this period the number of people in the world who have never flown has also increased. In Britain, and worldwide, the onrushing trends are fostering a mobility apartheid.

It will be more dangerous

For those not in cars there will be more metal (or carbon fibre) in motion. The increase in danger is not well reflected in accident statistics. The fact that there are now about one third as many children killed every year in road accidents as in

1922 when there was hardly any traffic and a nation-wide 20mph speed limit, does not mean that the roads are now three times safer for children to play in; they have become so dangerous that children are not allowed out any more. The retreat of pedestrians and cyclists of all ages will continue. As traffic increases, fewer people try to cross the street - one of the reasons why diminishing numbers of people know their neighbours on the other side of the street.

It will be more hostile to children

Children's freedoms will be further curtailed by parental fears, and the social catalyst of children playing in the street will disappear. In Britain, as recently as 1971, 80% of 7 and 8 year old children got to school on their own unaccompanied by an adult. Now virtually none do, and the Government issues guidance to parents warning that allowing children under the age of 12 out of the house unaccompanied is irresponsible. As the world becomes ever fuller of traffic it becomes increasingly full of strangers; primary schools routinely run "Stranger Danger" campaigns – amplifying parental fears and inculcating paranoia at a tender age. Children become captives of the family chauffeur. The loss of traditional childhood freedoms denies them the experience of mixing independently with their peers and learning to cope without adult supervision, experience essential to the process of socialisation.

It will be fatter and less fit

Children with parental chauffeurs no longer acquire the habit of walking or cycling to school, friends or other activities. As functional walking and cycling disappear, we will have less exercise built into daily routines, although this is a trend that appears to be being partially offset by the growing numbers of people who drive to health clubs to run on treadmills. The US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention identified America's dependence on the car as the principal cause of the country's epidemic of obesity, declaring that "decades of uncontrolled suburban sprawl conceived around the motor car have left Americans unable to walk even if they wish to."[2] And the return of infectious diseases like tuberculosis to the developed world is attributed, at least in part, to the growth of international air traffic.

It will be less culturally varied

The McCulture will be further advanced. Tom Wolfe captures the phenomenon in *A Man in Full*: "the only way you could tell you were leaving one community and

[2] Despite the concern about rising levels of obesity in Britain, and the associated campaign against junk food, the real culprit appears to be declining levels of exercise. On average Britons today consume 750 fewer calories per day than 30 years ago – but burn off in exercise 800 fewer calories (House of Commons Select Committee on Health, 2004).

entering another was when the franchises started repeating and you spotted another 7-Eleven, another Wendy's, another Costco, another Home Depot". Tourism becomes an industry. Travel writers urge their readers to rush to spoil the last unspoiled areas on earth, before others beat them to it. The moving pavement that now speeds tourists past the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London to maximize throughput is but one example of the triumph of Fordist efficiency that now characterises mass tourism

It will be more anonymous, less trusting and more paranoid

Fewer people will know their neighbours. Gated communities and Neighbourhood Watch – attempts to recreate some of what used to happen naturally – are symptomatic of the angst of anomie. Even when they live in close physical proximity to each other the mobile wealthy and the immobile poor live in different worlds. The poor are confined by their lack of mobility in prisons with invisible walls. They are continually tempted and taunted - in a way that prisoners confined to cells with opaque walls are not - by the freedom and conspicuous consumption of the affluent. The wealthy can be seen and heard flying overhead, or driving along motorways through the ghetto, or on television, enjoying privileges that remain tantalizingly out of reach. To the wealthy, the poor are often invisible; because of the height and speed at which they travel, the wealthy tend to see the world at a lower level of resolution. A hypermobile world is full of strangers, and people place less trust in strangers than people they know. Lack of trust is conducive to paranoia.

It will be more crime ridden

The strained relations between haves and have-nots will generate more crime and fear of crime[3]. As with danger on the roads this phenomenon is not reliably captured by crime statistics. Homes become better defended with stronger doors and locks and alarm systems. People, especially women, retreat from the areas where they feel threatened, especially the streets and public transport, and growing numbers of motorists travel with their doors locked. Policing will become more Orwellian.

Orwellian is the only adjective that can be applied to the vision of the Department of Trade and Industry's Foresight Directorate. The Directorate's Crime Prevention Panel published a consultation document entitled *Just Around the Corner* (DTI, 2000). It surveys the potential for new technology to "create new opportunities for crime and crime prevention." It concludes with two scenarios. The first, "TECHies" (Teleworking Executives Co-Habiting) is the Directorate's *optimistic* scenario, in which advances in crime-prevention technology out pace advances in crime-promotion technology. It might best be described as *1984* with a *Brave New World* gloss – but which appears oblivious to Huxley's satirical intent.

[3] And, since 9 September 2001, more fear of terrorism.

It depicts a world in which *identity theft* is kept in check by all-pervasive surveillance technology, DNA fingerprinting, odour detectors and probabilistic profile matching. The second "socially exclusive" scenario is less cheerful – *1984* without the gloss: most people live in walled estates and don't venture out much because "all public space is potentially hostile." With the rising tide of refugees and the destruction of the World Trade Center by terrorists the Foresight Directorate's grim vision is acquiring a global reach. Gated communities are being superseded by gated nations.

This high-tech policing, decried by civil libertarians, is an inescapable cost of hypermobility. The alternative is ineffectual policing. If terrorists and criminals avail themselves of modern means of mobility – physical and electronic – and the forces of law and order do not keep pace, the latter will become impotent.

It will be less democratic

Individuals will have less influence over the decisions that govern their lives. As we spread ourselves ever wider and thinner in our social and economic activities the geographical scope of political authority must expand in order to keep up with the growing size of the problems that require governing. Political authority migrates up the hierarchy from Town Hall to Whitehall, to Brussels and ultimately to completely unaccountable institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation.

Democracy is government by the people. Its purest form (setting aside the plight of women and slaves) is widely held to be Athenian democracy – everyone in the forum had an equal say. Beyond a certain scale this becomes impractical, and the preferred model becomes representative democracy. But as the scale of issues requiring collective management increases still further, representative democracy also breaks down. Either the number of representatives becomes unmanageable and the limits of the Athenian model are reached again – that is the forum becomes overcrowded – or the number of voters per representative reaches a level that renders the individual voter insignificant.

On neither side of the confrontations in Seattle, Prague or Genoa between the advocates of globalization and disparate groups of protesters could one find institutions that were democratically accountable – Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are not representative democracies. Trust in these unaccountable institutions diminishes as their "facts" become increasingly difficult to distinguish from spin. In the whole of the genre of science fiction devoted to speculating about futures in which distance has been conquered by science and technology one can find no plausible examples of democracy. The form of government is invariably tyrannical hierarchy. The possibility of an individual voter being of any significance is defeated by scale.

The Governance Agenda for Transport

The trends that are creating the world described above have evolved from combinations of societal trends, in which increasing mobility has played an

influential role. They are meeting no effective resistance. On the contrary, they are being encouraged by governments everywhere.

When asked to discuss integrated transport policy development, policy makers generally claim that transport policy is well integrated with other areas of governance. What they mean is that it is integrated with the planning system. But there are few occasions where the transport elements of this system are well integrated with environmental policy, and none where they are integrated with policies that confront the growing social problems described above.

Transport Governance in Britain

Airport planning in Britain provides a good example. It continues to be based upon the *predict-and-provide* principle – and further vast growth is predicted. Airport planners everywhere reassure each other of the growth potential of their industry by noting that most people in the world have never flown; and the idea that this growth might be constrained by their failure to provide sufficient capacity is, to them, unthinkable.

On the ground the current UK Government has now abandoned its unconvincing pretence that it wished to reduce the nation's dependence on the car. Gus Macdonald, until recently Britain's Transport Minister proclaimed the Government's support for increasing it: "If cars become more affordable and more people want to own them, that," he says "is not a problem." He placed the Government firmly in the technical-fix camp – "cleaner engines are the way forward." And John Redwood, a recent transport spokesman for the Conservative Party, not to be outdone in the pursuit of the motorist's vote, urges the construction of more roads to bypass "environmentally sensitive towns villages or beauty spots", forgetting the lesson painfully learned by his Conservative predecessors when in office, that there is a severe shortage of insensitive areas through which to build them.

What would be the principal feature of a policy that sought to *increase* dependence on the car? It would be a package of measures designed to encourage people to move out of town and spread themselves about at densities that were too low to be serviced by public transport. This policy under the previous government met with impressive success; a 1999 study by the Town and Country Planning Association (Breheny, 1999) reports the loss of 500,000 urban jobs and an increase of 1.7 million low-density jobs between 1981 and 1996.

A policy that sought to *reduce* dependence on the car would seek to restrict traffic in the areas where its growth is fastest – not in congested urban areas, where it has already stopped, but in the suburbs and beyond. Private sector consultants are now appearing, offering advice on relocation away from city centres. This free-enterprise equivalent to the old Location of Offices Bureau is a completely unsurprising market response to the additional centrifugal incentives now being devised by the Labour government in the form of urban road pricing and work place parking charges. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott insists that he is not anti-car. He, like his Transport Ministers, is happy for more people to own cars but

he does, from time-to-time express the wish that they would leave them in the garage more of the time. He should perhaps replace his road-building programme with a garage-building programme.

When people acquire cars they look for somewhere to drive them and park them, and they rarely find either in Britain's cities. If the nation's car population continues to increase, and the Government's forecasters predict that it will grow substantially, the urban exodus will continue and dependence on the car will increase. Can Britain afford alternatives to the car? Of course. There is no shortage of money. In each of the last four years over £30 billion has been spent on new cars alone.

The Government's enthusiastic promotion of the Internet frequently includes the contention that it will help to solve the transport problem by obviating the need for much physical travel. This hope rests upon a decoupling of the trends of electronic and physical mobility for which there is no precedent. Historically the growth trends of both sorts of mobility have correlated strongly and positively, and today the most physically mobile societies are also the heaviest users of all forms of telecommunications.

Advocates of telecommunications as a part of the solution to present transport problems argue that they will revive and promote human-scale community life by permitting more people to work from home, thereby encouraging them to spend more time close to home, and helping them to get to know their neighbours better. Perhaps. But it presumes that people will be content to lead a shrinking part of their lives in the *real* world which they will experience directly, and a growing part of their lives in *virtual communities* which they will experience electronically. It presumes that people will be content with lives of increasing incongruity of experience - that they will not want to meet and shake hands with the new friends that they meet on the Internet; that they will not seek first-hand experience of the different cultures that they experience vicariously electronically; and that they will not wish to have *real* coffee breaks with their fellow workers. It presumes much for which there is, as yet, little encouraging evidence.

I offer a bit of discouraging evidence, albeit anecdotal, from a chance encounter in Vancouver airport while waiting for a flight to London. I got chatting to the fellow sitting next to me who was waiting for a flight to Toronto. He was flying for a game of bridge with someone from Toronto, someone from Scotland and someone from San Francisco. They had met and played bridge on the Internet, and now they needed a "real" game. While writing this paper I listened to a BBC programme on "virtual tourism": without touching fragile environments or cultures it will simulate not only the view but also the noise, smells and even the weather of remote parts of the world which will be spared an invasion by real tourists. The complete lack of irony with which this vision was put forward suggests that its proponents could not have read *Brave New World* – which it mimicked perfectly.

In *Bowling Alone* Robert Putnam documents the rise and decline of civic engagement in American life over a century of increasing physical and electronic mobility. Putnam has amassed an extraordinary range of indicators of "social capital", ranging from membership in Rotary Clubs and bowling leagues to the decline in hitchhiking and participation in parent-teacher associations. Putting all

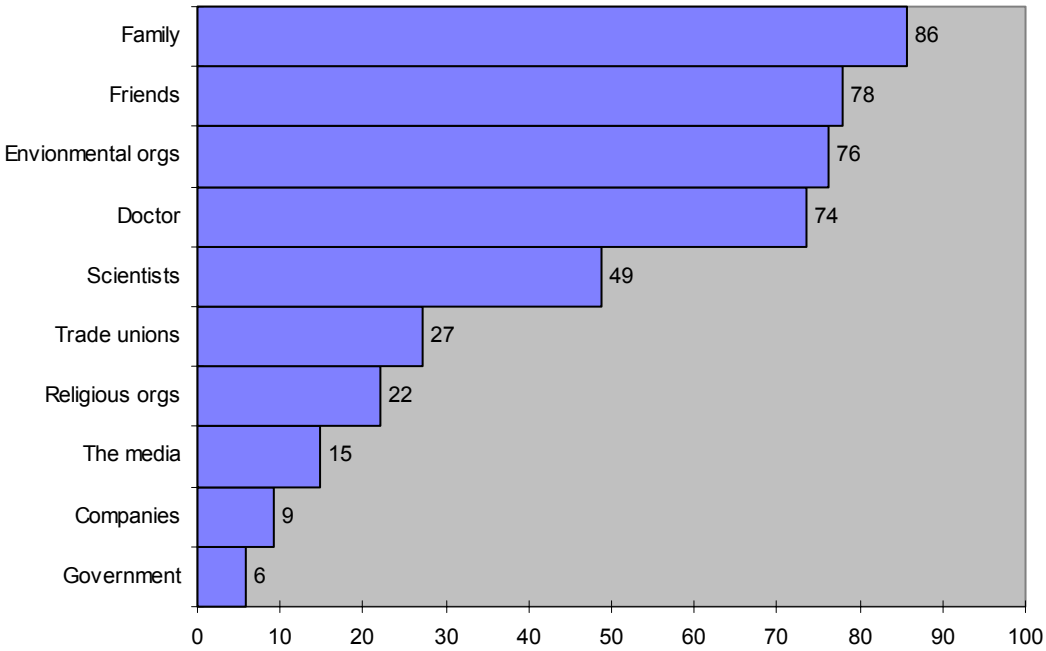
his indicators together, he found that the median peak year for civic engagement in America was 1959 – perhaps an approximate marker of the country's transition from hypo- to hyper-mobility. Putnam favours television – a weak one-way form of electronic mobility – as the principal villain in his story of civic decline. But he also gives an important share of the credit to "sprawl": "this physical fragmentation of our daily lives has had a visible dampening effect on community involvement."

As a sense of involvement dwindles, trust in the institutions that govern our lives also diminishes. Figure 2 from a survey by Marris et al (1996) reveals a remarkable lack of trust in established institutions - trade unions score only 27%, religious organisations 22% and government a miserable 6%. Companies at 9% do little better. Environmental organisations, score an impressive 76%, while family and friends, i.e. those likely to have the least expert knowledge about environmental risks, score the highest.

Scientists scored 49%, but a MORI poll cited by Marris et al (1997) found that approval ratings for scientists were strongly influenced by information about the scientist's employers: top, at 78%, came scientists who worked for environmental NGOs, bottom came government scientists with 32%[4]. The media, directly or indirectly the source of most peoples' knowledge about environmental risks, score only 15%. Not only do the media inspire little trust, their coverage of environmental issues is widely ignored. Hypermobility fosters political apathy which in turn generates a disinterest in debates about issues that are beyond the influence of the individual citizen. At the height of the Brent Spar controversy, an issue which received enormous media coverage, only 59% of those questioned about Brent Spar were aware of the incident. Only the doctor, amongst traditional institutions, retained a respectable level of trust.

[4] The widespread suspicion of conspiracy between government and industry, and the mistrust of science sponsored by either, was highlighted by Colin Blakemore, president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in his call for Britain's Minister of Science to be detached from the Department of Trade and Industry and given an independent position in the cabinet (*The Times*, 3 Sept 1998).

Figure 2 Percentage of respondents who said they would "often" or "always" trust institution X to "tell them the truth about risks"



Combined and weighted results from four samples: Chamber of Commerce, Scouts, Greenhouse (a green environmental organisation), and a general sample.

Transport Governance in Europe

There has been an impressive growth in recent years in an interest in governance, both on the part of Governments and the corporate world. Typing the word into Google, at the time of writing, yields 7.6 million hits; "corporate governance" yields 3 million. The European Commission has published a White Paper on the subject (European Commission, 2001) in which it presents its own concept of governance as referring to:

> the rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.

It observes that:

> Today, political leaders throughout Europe are facing a real paradox. On the one hand, Europeans want them to find solutions to the major problems confronting our societies.

> On the other hand, people increasingly distrust institutions and politics or are simply not interested in them

And:

> despite its achievements, many Europeans feel alienated from the Union's work

The president of the World Bank has also taken an interest:

> Corporate governance is about promoting corporate fairness, transparency and accountability (*Financial Times*, 1999)

Figure 2, and other Mori polls[5], suggest that the growth in the number of high-level expressions of concern about openness, participation, accountability, corporate fairness and trust are negatively correlated with trends in popular belief in the effective existence of such phenomena. High-level responses to these concerns are largely platitudinous. In 2002 the European Commission published a report entitled *Making globalization work for everyone: The European Union and world trade* (European Commission, 2002). Consider the likely impact on the disengaged, alienated, non-voting EU citizen of this passage from the report:

> As the world economy globalises, the WTO is the most legitimate forum for removing obstacles to trade, creating and enforcing global rules and making them compatible with rules drawn up by other multilateral bodies. The aims of the EU's work in the WTO effort are:
>
> - to open up markets in goods, services and investment in accordance with clear rules and following a timetable that enables all countries to implement them;
> - *to make the WTO more open, accountable and effective by engaging in discussion with other groups and organizations*[my italics];
> - to bring developing countries fully into the WTO's decision-taking processes, helping them to integrate with the world economy.

Worldwide

As international travel becomes faster, cheaper and easier for the wealthy it becomes more difficult, bureaucratically, for the poor. Wealthy countries previously protected by distance from mass invasion by the indigent are increasingly resorting to restrictive prohibition and force. Barriers – in the form of stringent visa requirements, difficult-to-obtain work permits, and obstructive immigration requirements – are being raised to contain the numbers who seek to take advantage of the mobility afforded by technology. The "huddled masses" who used to be welcomed to America by the Statue of Liberty are now dubbed economic migrants and denied entry to protect the living standards of those who got there earlier.

Throughout history most people in most places have led pedestrian lives. Their settlement patterns and travelling have, as a consequence, been tightly constrained. Such vehicular transport as existed was powered by humans, animals or wind. The

[5] See http://www.mori.com/ and O'Riordan et al (1997).

rich had more mobility than the poor, but no one had very much. Mythologies abounding in advance technologies – flying carpets, seven-league boots, winged chariots and the like – attested to a pervasive desire for more, but in technologically unimaginative ages most people were resigned to this remaining the prerogative of the gods. Indeed the legend of Icarus suggests that the very idea of mere mortals attaining such means of travel was an impious one.

At a time that roughly coincides with the beginning of the industrial revolution in England there began a period of remarkable reductions in the cost of transport and even more remarkable increases in its speed and comfort, and in the numbers who made use of it. The achievements of the gods have been surpassed. Concorde can fly faster than Apollo's flaming chariot, and advances in telecommunications have created a capacity for exchanging information that far exceeds anything ever attributed to Mercury. The transport and communications history of this period is almost invariably told as a story of progress following in the train of technological advance. And any problems associated with this progress have been seen as "side effects" treatable by yet more technology. *Hypo*mobility was bad. More mobility is good. *Hyper*mobility? Might it be possible to have too much of this good thing? This is not a question that has been seriously addressed by historians of transport, or planners and politicians concerned with its future. Even to raise the question risks labelling oneself an anti-democrat – an enemy of freedom and choice.

This risk can be reduced if one is careful about the way one puts the question. Everywhere in the world the "transport problem" can be usefully put in three parts, in the form of three opinion polls.

- The first question is asked frequently. *Would you like a car, unlimited air miles and Bill Gate's level of access to all the electronic modes of travel?* With minor variations this simple question is routinely put by opinion pollsters, and worldwide the answer is overwhelmingly YES! This is the implicit opinion poll that still sets the political agenda for transport planning almost everywhere. In answering, people imagine the world as it now is, but with themselves gaining access to the greater range in opportunities in life that they see the wealthy enjoying. Most politicians believe it would be political suicide to resist such aspirations. It would be manifestly unfair, they often add, for those who already enjoy a high level of mobility to pull the ladder up behind them. The ladder metaphor, originally invoked by Anthony Crosland in a Fabian lecture almost thirty years ago, makes a strong moral point that translates readily into a political imperative.
- But, there is a second question which is never asked. *Would you like to live in the sort of world that would result if everyone's wish were granted?* Assistance with the answer might be given by rephrasing the question - *would you like to live in a dangerous, ugly, bleak, crime-ridden, alienated, anonymous, undemocratic, socially polarized, fume-filled greenhouse threatened by terrorism without precedent?* The "fume-filled greenhouse" is optional; I strongly suspect that technological improvements will not keep up with traffic growth, and that the physical environment will deteriorate as mobility levels

rise; but confining the question to the *social* consequences described above should be sufficient to elicit the answer NO. This opinion poll asks, in effect, do you want the consequences of "business as usual"? As these consequences become better, and more widely understood increasing numbers of people are clear that they would not want them. But the political response has been disappointing. The best that even progressive Denmark or the Netherlands have achieved so far is a response that slows the rate of growth in road traffic in urban areas, does little to slow the growth of traffic in the suburbs and rural areas, and does virtually nothing to arrest the far more rapid increase in air travel.

Crosland's ladder has become an extension ladder that is still extending. Britain's Department of Transport describes the continued growth of traffic as "inevitable" – cheerfully ignoring the fact that those on the bottom rungs of this ladder are being pushed deeper into the mire of social exclusion, and are manifesting their resentment in ever more terrifying ways. The political difficulty seems to be that the problem, when posed in the form of Opinion Poll 2, implies the need for a grim, grey, virtuous self-denial in order to save the planet. This is not a platform on which many politicians are enthusiastic to campaign.

But there is a third, more cheerful question – the inverse of the second question. *Would you like to live in a cleaner, safer, healthier, friendlier, more beautiful, more democratic, sustainable world in which you know your neighbours and it is safe for your children to play in the street?* If these rewards could be assembled in a convincing and affordable package most people could be expected to vote for them - especially if the consequences spelled out in Opinion Poll 2 were seen as the alternative.

For most people in the world, realisation of the aspirations encapsulated in the first opinion poll is a vanishing possibility. But so long as its pursuit continues to be the principal objective of transport planners and policy makers, the achievement of the bleak scenario set out in the second question becomes more likely. However, contrary to the assertion of Britain's transport minister, the rising tide of traffic which is bringing it about is not inevitable. This traffic tide is not an irresistible force of nature, like the oceanic tide, to which we can but adapt. It is the consequence of myriad human decisions large and small – of decisions by governments, about taxes and subsidies, about land use planning, about road and airport building, and of individual responses to these decisions. It is driven by a deeply-rooted, reality-denying, linear view of progress.

The first question is equivalent to asking a glutton if he would like unlimited quantities of his favourite foods and drinks. The answer is predictable. The second question confronts the glutton with the consequences of unconstrained indulgence. There are expensive, high-tech solutions to some of these consequences – liposuction, Olestra (the fat that slips straight through), and by-pass surgery (here the analogy gets particularly close). But eating less and walking or cycling to work are likely to be more effective, save money, and produce a greater sense of well-being and self-worth.

Achieving the society encapsulated in Opinion Poll 3, which appears impossible to most politicians, is *in principle* quite straightforward. It simply requires a reordering of priorities. Instead of continuing to sacrifice the physical and social environment for more mobility, it requires fostering the local at the expense of the remote, and foregoing some of the benefits of mobility to protect and enhance what we value in nature and our relations with friends and neighbours. To question the benefits of hypermobility is not to deny freedom and choice. It is to ask people what it is that they really, *really* want, and to confront them with the fact that their choices have consequences beyond the primary objects of their desires. Collective self-discipline is the wise exercise of freedom and choice.

Simple – *in principle*. In practice, the longer the linear logic connecting increasing mobility to progress continues to guide transport and communications policy, the more remote this possibility becomes. Bottom-up "governance" – as distinct from top-down government – is not possible in a fast-moving, anonymous, low-trust, paranoid hypermobile world.

Acknowledgement

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STILL TO CHECK

The president of the World Bank has also taken an interest Wolfensohn, president of the Word bank, as quoted by an article in Financial Times, June 21, 1999

> Corporate governance is about promoting corporate fairness, transparency and accountability (*Financial Times*, 1999)

The widespread suspicion of conspiracy between government and industry, and the mistrust of science sponsored by either, was highlighted by Colin Blakemore, president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in his call for Britain's Minister of Science to be detached from the Department of Trade and Industry and given an independent position in the cabinet (*The Times*, 3 Sept 1998).