

## Book Review

### David Banister *Transport Planning*<sup>1</sup>

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Transport planning has become one of the more complex challenges in our western regions. The tremendous increase in motorised transport in the past decades has had enormous impacts on urban and regional development, social and economic opportunities, environmental quality and technological innovations. Where half a century ago we expected mainly positive impacts of these developments and planned for accommodating them, since about 30 years we are more and more seeking strategies for balancing the advantages with the ever increasing negative impacts. To be mentioned are congestion, traffic accidents, fuel consumption, emissions, noise production, land use, and so on. The process of seeking the right balance is not a smooth one, but a battle based on a lack of knowledge and intervention means, with uncertainty, with unexpected impacts of policy measures, with locked-in behaviour of individuals and firms, with beliefs and changing policy values. In short: transport planning is an ongoing process of often trial- and error based attempts to find the best long term transport management concept for all of us within a dynamic context of rapidly changing conditions. Professionals involved in this battle, often experiencing the failure or only partly success of some policy measure, sometimes start fundamentally doubting whether traffic problems can be tackled by analytical approaches. Such doubts give space to a more normative view, that however has the danger to end in an individual belief.

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<sup>1</sup> David Banister  
Transport Planning,  
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317 pages

Much of this can be recognised in David Banister's book *Transport Planning*, including the tendency to translate uncertainty and doubts into firm normative statements. This struggle with the development of transport planning and the search by the author for his own position in this development, makes this book again of great interest for other professionals in this field. Again? Yes, because the 2002 publication is the update of a book with the same title, published in 1994. The present book almost takes the same structure of the first edition, but adds new information and colours it with an evaluation of the developments in the past decade.

The book is split into two parts. The first part is retrospective on the past 40 years; the second part attempts to specify issues for the future agenda. The first part starts with memorising the well-known explosive developments in car ownership, car use and freight transport. Next, the evolution of transport planning in the 1960s and the 1970s is discussed. Although, to a large degree this is based on UK experience, the shift from a car-accommodating approach with substantial road building schemes to an approach based on growing concerns in the 70's with social and environmental impacts, is typical for several European countries. This is followed by an analysis of the developments in transport planning in the 1980s and 1990s. Banister describes the attempts to switch from a more holistic approach based on large data collections and complex forecasting models, dominated by traffic engineers, to a new system of continuous and cyclical plan-making with more openness for public consultation and attempts to integrate transport strategies with land use, social and economic policies.

Growing doubts on the reliability of forecasts and growing environmental concerns underlie these developments. But these decades are also strongly influenced by institutional and radical policy changes. These are addressed in the next two chapters and regularly repeated in the remainder of the book. In particular the role of government was significantly reduced and the influence of market forces was welcomed. End 20th century, we can evaluate the impacts of these changes and Banister, although knowing that the more important role of the market is a fact, is to a certain degree pessimistic about the contribution of market co-ordination and reduced governmental intervention to solving transport problems. Public transport service radically changed reducing patronage significantly, public investments in infrastructure (maintenance) decreased whereas private investments in infrastructure schemes appeared difficult to realise, the conditions for car driving basically improved through relatively decreasing fuel prices causing ever growing traffic and environmental problems. Banister concludes (p.123): "Transport policy seems to lack any clear direction ..... The impasse is essentially a political one as policies which might address the congestion and environmental issues are available, but they do not seem to be politically acceptable..... There is no coherence in the discourse and no consistent storyline". The effect is that concepts in the 90's for travel demand management seem to be replaced again by investments in new infrastructures. And although Banister in this part of the book offers various lines of policy innovation ("reasonable travel as part of the policy agenda" (p.112), "slowing down of travel speeds"(p.112), a more important role for accessibility policy (p.114), a better housing market strategy (p.111), integration of different transport services (p. 118)), he ends this chapter somewhat pessimistic by stating "there seems to be no coherent alternative to building more roads" (p. 125). Realism or a desperate author? Given the fact that Banister in the second part of the book further elaborates many of these alternative policy approaches, I assume it is realism underlying this statement.

The next chapter (6) looks in more depth into the way transport planning is performed, in order to find an explanation. Banister argues that during the decades the limits of the traditional policy analysis approach have been recognised and new methods and approaches for analysis have been applied. He refers for instance to behavioural analysis, integrated transport studies, scenario studies, and so on. Nevertheless, he argues (p. 131) that transport planners “have tended to remain neutral rather than play a significant role in decision-making”. Instead, “they have cocooned themselves with a commitment to a technocratic role in transport planning and have restricted themselves to a relative comfort of expert advice.... This contrasts with the more political view taken in planning where the attractiveness of the politics bandwagon has proved irresistible and planning analysis has become explicitly political”. This political influence implies that issues such as market efficiency and productivity, technological revolution, institutional issues, the quality of life and environmental/ecological costs should be in the heart of transport analyses. This requires new methods to be applied and new routes for modelling to be explored. Chapter 7 globally compares these observations for the UK with the transport planning approaches and policies in the EU as a whole, Germany, France, The Netherlands and the USA. The conclusion is that in all these countries an engineering approach based on quantifying factors has been dominating. As in the UK, in all these areas the political and institutional context has significantly changed, in particular with regard to the position of transport policy as regulator and/or interventionist in various markets. And although differences do exist between various regions, basically, as in the UK, this has until now “not led to a major paradigm shift in transport planning”(p. 206).

The second part of the book (2 chapters) focuses on the future of transport planning. It starts with specifying a transport agenda for the new century, followed by a description of the role of transport planning and ending the book in a chapter with conclusions. In these chapters basically Banister more in depth discusses the variety of issues and questions raised in the previous part of the book. This discussion include various interesting views and certainly some firm normative statements. However, from these chapters I got the impression that also Banister, as so many other professionals, has no clear and coherent view on the best strategy. Priorities are only set at a rather abstract level, which leaves the challenge to make operational choices in practice in a given context of limited possibilities and means and large uncertainty. The discussion in these chapters is characterised by exploring a variety of avenues: what seems promising, what has been proved not to work well, what conditions should be created? Perhaps more questions are raised than answered are given and it even seems to me that certain choices of the authors contradict with some images presented in the previous part of the book. Examples include stressing the need for firm parking policies versus the need for societal support, or a powerful position for transport planners versus the strong influence of politicians, or the emphasis on cycling and walking and other non-polluting forms of transport versus the fundamental preference of people for using the car. I consider these and other contradictions as fundamental dilemma's of transport planning that have to be solved in a tailor-made transport management strategy for a particular area.

*Transport Planning* should be appreciated for the overview of and critical reflection on developments in transport policy making and transport systems analysis, the specification of relevant issues for the agenda for the future and the discussions and arguments on these issues. For professionals in transport planning, this book therefore has great value. It does not present us a recipe for practical decision making, rather it offers a platform for understanding

and setting the agenda for planning in practice. I would have appreciated more attention for at least the following three items, that are mentioned but not deeply elaborated in the book. First, the impact of freight transport is only marginally discussed in this book, whereas in practice it has a significant impact on the transport system and policy discussions. And behind this, the fundamental changes in logistics should be addressed more in depth as a driving force. Secondly, a great deal of work is now done in the field of intelligent transport systems, varying from dynamic traffic management systems to driver support and automated vehicle driving. These technological developments are mentioned at a too global level. Because of their possibly radical influence on the system, they deserve more detailed attention. Finally, the issue of the professional qualities of the transport planner is raised at several places in the book. The question is: what are the lessons for education and training programs? Given strongly limiting conditions of these education programs: what can be excluded and which priorities have to be set? Or is the new professional attitude not a matter of education, but a matter of learning in practice? I hope the third edition of *Transport Planning* will more explicitly elaborate on these issues.