

Have we waited long enough for mobility as a service?

Transport contributes to a quarter of all green-house gas emissions, and whilst other sectors are beginning to adapt, transport continues to lag. The Roads to Prosperity document noted the impact of induced demand in 1989, 30 years on we are still adopting strategies which favour large scale highway schemes, locking in future travel trends and capabilities. It is no surprise that since 1990 emissions from UK road transport have grown by a further 6%.

Should we be held accountable for these trends? Absolutely. Climate change is not a new phenomenon, neither is the study of climate change or how human activities affect it new.

Car travel is still the main source of transport emissions. Cities all face the same challenges in addressing the dependency on private vehicle travel. 60% of all trips are under 5 miles in distance, yet car travel still accounts for 60% of trips over this distance. There is a misconception that the car manufacturing industry can adapt to become sustainable, with electric vehicles (EV), followed by CAV's. Is this not yet another short-term distraction to the long-term policy aspiration to reduce the dependency on private vehicle travel?

Bus patronage has been on a slow downward trend (excluding London) since 2008, whilst a privatised rail network continues to price out travelling by train for many. As an industry we continue to fail to market public transport options effectively against car ownership.

To make things worse, we are now considered the most sedentary humans in history – with 25% of the population getting less than 30 minutes of activity a week. Whilst trends show active travel is now beginning to improve, it is starting from a very low base. There is an inherent need to address the last mile problem and enhance the attractiveness of multi-modal trips, combining public transport and active travel.

Whilst there is no obvious solution to delivering the level of change we need, there are measures and technologies currently available which could make a real impact. This paper puts forward mobility as a service (Maas) as an emerging technology which is still largely misunderstood, and I would argue underutilised within the sector.

Mobility as a service is a concept that envisages users buying transport services as packages based on their needs instead of buying the means of transport. In simple terms, it advocates access to a service rather than ownership.

Technologies to deliver integrated ticketing and mobility packages have been available for over 15 years. The oyster card launched in 2003, with contactless payments becoming widely available from 2007. Bike share, car clubs and even demand responsive transport options are now all common place in most cities, but successful examples of Maas is still forthcoming. Is this how long it takes before a technology can become embedded or have we given up on Maas before it has even started?

There is an argument to suggest shared mobility should be considered as all public transport and mobility options which are used in a shared way. This would include the traditional public transport modes (bus, rail), but also ride hailing companies / demand responsive transport, taxi's, shared bikes and car clubs. If we are going to address transports impact on air quality and climate, we need a streamlined approach to delivering change, integrating smarter transport solutions that enable customers to enjoy seamless travel options without the environmental cost.

Take car clubs as the most contentious of the options when considering air quality and sustainable futures. Ad-hoc access to a car is still a necessity for most, but many ignore the lack of efficiency in

ownership. Private cars are used on average 3% of the time and cost the average motorist £162 a month (excluding finance repayments). In contrast, shared cars are used on average 25% of the time and can be hired from just a few pounds an hour. Furthermore, each shared car is responsible for removing between six and twelve private cars from the network.

In isolation, each mode has its pitfalls. But together, they have the capacity to change the way we view urban mobility over the next decade.

Growth forecasts point towards the need for between 240,000 to 340,000 new homes each year in England. Currently, through S106 developer contributions, authorities can secure funding for sustainable travel. Historically this has been used to deliver cycling infrastructure, travel plans and occasionally booster tickets for use on public transport.

Access to sustainable travel options is now one of the key conditions in allocating new sites for residential development. If collaborative working could also enable services such as car clubs and shared bikes to be secured as part of the contribution, authorities could offer an integrated ticket to a captive audience. This product could offer access to car, bus, bike and if applicable rail travel offering an attractive alternative to private vehicle travel (carrot) and a means to reduce the allocation of parking provision within new developments (stick).

This paper calls for greater guidance on shared mobility options and their application. The current approach set from the DfT of “wait and see” is no longer fit for purpose in a largely unregulated network. With further disruptive technologies beginning to appear both legally and illegally on our streets, its clear policy needs to outline a vision for how they want the street to be used and how these technologies fit into local plans.

We already know marginal gains in the right areas can make a big difference! We need to deliver small changes which make a big impact. In a state of climate change emergency, we need to act now!

Alex Thomas

(Transport Planning Officer, Devon County Council)