

# Public Transport and Urban Citizenship

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## 1. Introduction

In July 2003, statues of cows appeared in the streets of Dublin. The cows were different colours and shapes. One had wings. Dublin, like many other European cities, was participating in a light-hearted initiative for temporary statues in public spaces. After a few days the cows were removed away from public access into protective custody because they had all been vandalised – the wings of the winged cow had even been cut off. Dublin’s unique spirit had once again triumphed – in every other city the cows remained happily in public pastures. Why did the cows get cut up? Nobody to the author’s knowledge has suggested the obvious answer. The answer is that the cows got vandalised *because Luas is not working*.

Perhaps not quite, but this paper argues that there *is* a connection between such misuse of public space in Dublin and the city’s lack of public transport. After ten years of economic boom, we have a situation where Dublin is the only city in Europe where you cannot put art in the street, because the population will destroy it. When people who live in a city vandalise their own facilities, it is meaningful to talk of a lack of citizenship. **Public transport, so this paper will argue, is a crucial and undiscussed component of urban citizenship.** Dublin’s lack of public transport is interwoven with its weak citizenship and interestingly, government plans to privatise much of the transport system will ensure that this becomes even worse.

The paper is largely exploratory and ‘theoretical’, developing some ideas, which emerged from empirical work in a research project<sup>1</sup> on urban transport and mobility in

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<sup>1</sup> Project ‘SceneSusTech – Scenarios for Sustainable Technology: Car-Systems in the city & the sociology of embedded technologies’. Funded by the European Commission within the Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER) programme of the Fourth Framework Programme. Contract number: SOE1-CT97-1071. Full details of the project, including the complete final report and more detailed individual reports, are available at the Employment Research Centre website (<http://www.tcd.ie/erc/projects/cars>)

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four European cities (Athens, Bologna, Dublin and Helsinki).<sup>2</sup> In terms of policy debates, it is part of an attempt to broaden discussion in Dublin away from the technical issues of how to solve traffic jams to the broader issues of social inclusion, social cohesion, urban design and urban citizenship. It is these issues which make transport, I suspect, so important to people, yet precisely these issues are not even discussed by the discourses of engineering and neo-liberal economics which dominate transport policy discussion in Dublin today.<sup>3</sup>

The paper begins by arguing that at least within the city, social inclusion must involve the right to mobility. This in turn creates an important role for public transport. However, the ‘public’ element of public transport is not simply a means to an end (i.e. a mode of mobility to reach a place). Public transport is also inherently public in two other ways – as a public *space* and as a public *service*. Whereas the first of these arguments involves raising issues of urban design, the second involves challenging some of the orthodoxies of ‘new public management’. In particular, I argue that new public management is part of a process, which undermines the public realm and genuine citizenship.

## **2. Social citizenship and the right to mobility**

From Henry Ford on, the great appeal of the car has been its democratic nature. As Gramsci (1971) long ago pointed out, Ford linked a particular form of production (the assembly line etc.) with a particular form of consumption (‘mass consumption’). The car is the iconic artefact (Lefebvre) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – in particular its second half –

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<sup>2</sup> See also the author’s forthcoming article ‘Cutting Up Cows in Dublin: Public spaces, public realms, public transport’ in Peillon and Corcoran eds., *Perspectives on Irish Society* (2004), and report *Cutting the sinews of urban citizenship: the hidden risks of privatising Dublin Bus*, Report for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, (August, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> As a slight exaggeration, compare the ways in French and Irish (or British) policy makers discuss urban transport. The French discuss urban design, the Irish cost-benefit analysis. There is no prize for guessing which country has the most attractive cities...

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because both of the way it is (was) produced<sup>4</sup>, and the way it is consumed. The car appeared to involve a classic trade-off. The production of the car involved a loss of choice for the individual worker, since work became deskilled, fragmented and closely supervised, all to an unprecedented extent. By contrast, higher productivity ensured that workers could now buy cars, so consumption increased individual choice. The car enabled the worker – and hence putatively, all members of society – to go anywhere. The car was democracy on wheels.

There were always a few sceptical voices, but it was really only in the final quarter of the previous century that car-democracy was the subject of ‘progressive’ social criticism. Some aesthetic criticism had always existed, but it was usually linked to explicitly elitist politics, as for example in John Betjeman’s 1930s poem:

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough

It isn’t fit for humans now

John Betjeman, ‘Slough’, 1937.

Before the car became a mass consumption good, there was some class-based opposition, since rich people in cars killed poor people on foot (Albert, 1999). Once most people either had a car, or could reasonably aspire to one, such opposition disappeared. For a majority of adults in the in the West today, using a car is a *right*. Accessing this right involves obtaining a driving licence and then buying a car. The importance of this right for ordinary citizens is shown by the fact that in a study of ‘critical moments’ in the life history of UK adolescents, of 50 categories *none* involved voting or even politics in general, but two involved cars (‘passing driving test’ and ‘getting a car’) (Thomson *et al.*, 2002). In other words, a significant aspect

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<sup>4</sup> Studies of car plants occupied a key role in the ‘industrial sociology’ of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Car workers were at the centre of attention in the 1960s with the ‘affluent worker’ debate; car plants at the centre of the ‘Japanisation’ and ‘lean production’ debates of the 1990s. In Germany debates over ‘polarisation’ in the 1970s were followed in the 1990s by debates over ‘reprofessionalisation’, again focusing on car plants. By contrast the sociology of the car as transport was largely abandoned to cultural studies. For literature review see Wickham *et al.* (2002), chapter 1.

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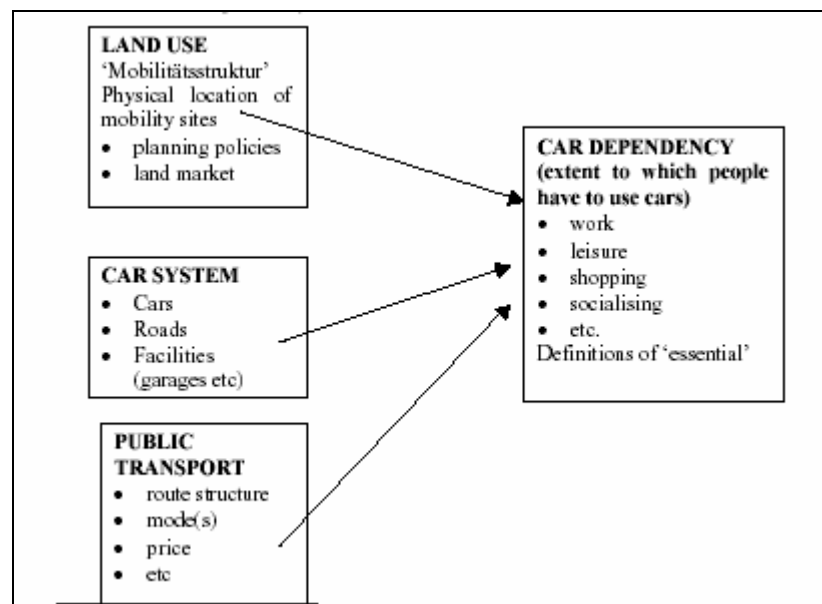
of the transition to young adulthood now revolves around gaining access to what Mrs. Thatcher called approvingly ‘The Great Car Society’.

As Norbert Elias implied, learning to drive also involves learning rules about how to treat others: the rules of the road are rules, we could say, of mechanised social interaction. Thus the long-term relative decline of car accidents is part of the ‘civilising process’. The right to motorised mobility, like any right, involves potentially balancing duties (Pagano, 2001). The *right* to mobility in a car also involves the *duty* of obeying traffic laws. However, the problem with this perspective is that the more most of us exercise our ‘right’ to use our car, the more we *tend* to undermine the rights to mobility of those who do not have a car. For a long time this problem was ignored, because it took a curiously long time before anyone noticed that car ownership was not in fact universal.

However, by the 1990s a few isolated voices began to be raised. In the epoch of the family car, the father-worker had priority access over the (house) wife. Even today, it is usually the case that women use public transport more than men, presumably because they do not have a car, and in older age cohorts’ women are less likely than men to have a driving licence. However, the obvious solution to this gender inequality problem was – more cars – one for him *and one for her*. Yet while the family car has been partially replaced by the individual car, there remain many people who do not own their own car and must share with other members of the household. There are others who do not even have access to a car; some people (children, young teenagers) are too young to drive a car, while in an aging population there are relatively a larger number of older people for whom driving is dangerous or frightening. However, as we have demonstrated elsewhere (Wickham *et al*, 2002), the problem is not simply that some people cannot use cars; it is rather that increasingly the physical layout of the society assumes that they can. Suburban housing is increasingly detached from any public transport. In 1922, only 135,000 homes in suburban areas of 60 US cities were beyond the reach of public transport, by 1940 it was 13 million. First, housing was suburbanised, followed then by

employment, and facilities for education, health and leisure (above all shopping). In the USA, the dominant urban form has become the ‘edge city’ (Garreau, 1991). Over the last 10-15 years, Dublin has followed this path (Corcoran, 2000). Indeed, for all Dublin’s claims to be a European city, in fact it is now perhaps more American than European, since as we shall see below, the ‘European’ countervailing pressures are particularly weak in Dublin. In such a situation non-car users are disadvantaged *in ways they are not in less car-oriented societies*. The issue is only partly whether or not people have access to a car, it is also whether the society is physically and socially constructed such that people have to use a car in order to participate in the society. Thus, car dependency is not to be confused with car usage per se: car dependency is a situation in which a choice of mobility does not exist. The extent of car dependency depends therefore on the physical location of ‘mobility sites’ (places to which people travel), the car system itself (car ownership, roads, facilities) and the extent to which public the public transport system provides an alternative for those journeys which people they must make (Chart 1).

**Chart 1. Car dependency in context**

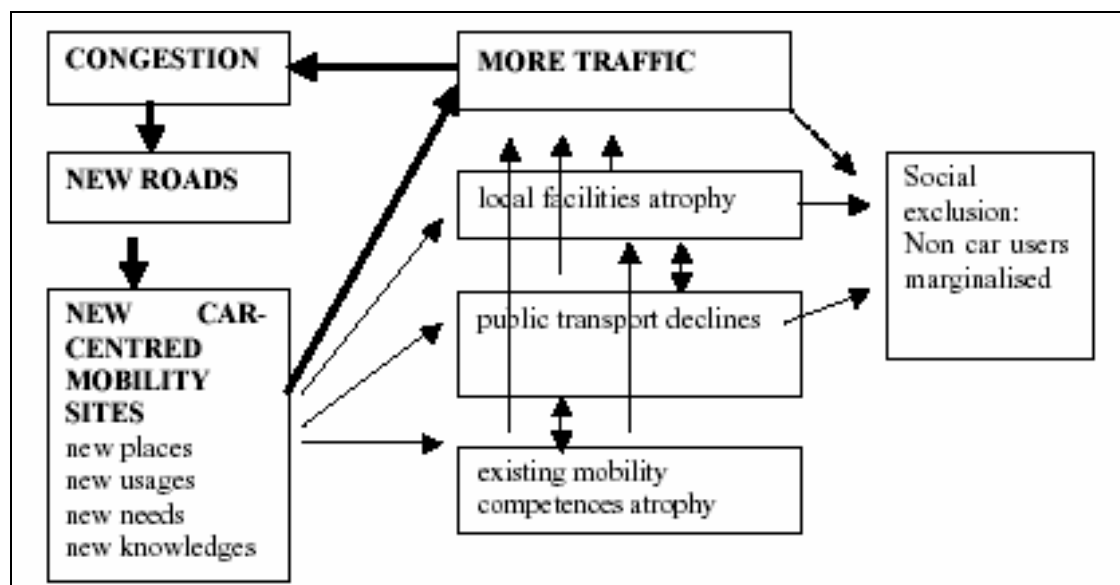


Source: Wickham et al., 2002: 8.



To some extent, there is a vicious circle involved here. As car *usage* increases, more facilities are provided for the car and more 'mobility sites' require the car, thus generating further car usage. Consequently, other forms of mobility (including the knowledge that their usage requires) atrophy and mobility sites that depend on them become less important. Such sites become less important, their users more marginal, thus justifying further withdrawal of services. One well-known example of this process is the inter-relationship between expanding motorways, growing suburban shopping malls and declining local shopping facilities, all of which leave the poor even worse off than before (Chart 2).

**Chart 2. Infrastructure induced mobility and social exclusion**

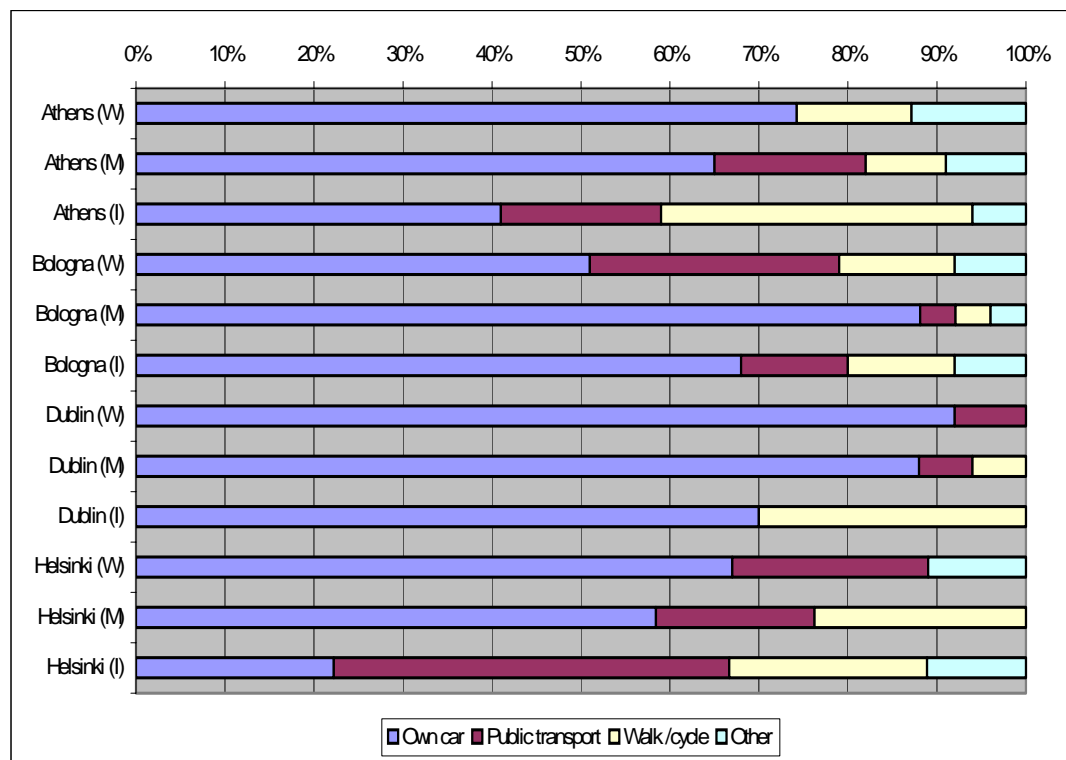


Source: Wickham et al., 2002: 15.

In innovation studies such patterns of technological dependency are known as 'network effects'. As usage of a technology increases, so the cost of not using it rises, and those who refuse to do so risk social or perhaps professional marginalisation (Dupy, 1999). Consider for example our attitude now, as opposed to even five years ago, to a colleague who refused to use e-mail! The point about car dependency however is that some (though not all) non-usage is not a matter of choice. Some people cannot afford a car or are not allowed to use one. There is relatively little

research on the relationship between car dependency and social exclusion, since transport policy is not usually seen as part of social policy (but see Cahill, 1994; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), although there is already some evidence that those without cars are excluded from employment opportunities. While in the USA this is particularly a problem for inner city residents unable to reach new employment in the suburbs (see Shen, 1998), in the UK it is more a problem of the difficulties of suburb-to-suburb commuting for those without cars (Webster, 1997).

**Chart 3. Travel to work in 12 European city areas. All employed aged 25-64, car owners only**



*Base: All aged 25-64 and at work who own cars, N=212.*

Here the previously mentioned project with which the author was involved had significant results. By comparing similar areas in cities with different levels of public transport, the project was able to show how lack of access to a car is far more serious in Dublin, given its poor public transport, than in well-provided Helsinki. Thus Chart

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3 shows that in this study, the working class suburban area of Dublin had the highest level of travel to work by private car amongst car owners, *even though it had the lowest level of overall car ownership in the study*. In other words, having a car enables a qualitative shift in people's access to the labour market, and so having a car becomes an absolute priority for household expenditure. This involves not just access to employment but in particular also, access to health, shopping and recreational facilities. Furthermore, the Dublin interviews showed how the need to own a car if at all possible placed poor households under a considerable financial strain. This was not the case for similar households in Helsinki, where better public transport and better land use planning made the car less of a necessity.

Car dependency therefore actually contributes to poverty. On the one hand those with low resources have the expense of buying, maintaining and running a car. On the other hand those who cannot afford a car are excluded from the normal activities of the society:

[People are poor who...] lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely recognised or approved, in the societies to which they belong (Townsend, 1979:31 quoted in Mingione, 1996:8).

This famous definition of relative poverty alerts us to the implications of not owning a car in a car dependent society. One element of an anti-poverty strategy should therefore include transport policy, and conversely, transport policy itself needs 'poverty proofing'. From this perspective, the right to live according to the standards prevailing in the society involves a right to mobility. Since exercising the right to individual motorised mobility within the city usually undermines the rights to mobility of others who do not have cars, public transport becomes crucial. Public transport increases the chances that all citizens can have access to the same physical spaces. An effective public transport system thus increases choice for all. An effective public transport system is thus crucial to ensuring social inclusion.

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Although public transport is thus particularly important for low-income groups, individual transport investments may well disproportionately benefit the better off. Indeed, this does seem to be particularly likely in car dependent cities. Thus, in Dublin, the DART – Dublin’s only major public transport investment in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, notoriously serves the richer suburbs.<sup>5</sup> In Athens, the new prestige metro project has a similar character. How then can better public transport reduce social exclusion? The paradox is resolved at two levels.

- Firstly, cost-benefit analysis (including analysis that attempts to assess the differential social impact of transport investment) almost inevitably focuses on individual routes. The SceneSusTech project showed that public transport challenges social exclusion through the development of an integrated transport *system*. Yet in car dependent cities, public transport initiatives tend to be isolated and often prestigious projects (e.g. the Athens metro, the DART line).
- Secondly, the SceneSusTech project showed that good public transport (as in Helsinki) can be supported by the broad public and used by population groups which in cities with bad public transport will not use public transport at all. By contrast, a public transport system will command little public support if, with the possible exception of a few isolated prestige projects, it has only a ‘safety net’ function for those who have no private car. Such a system will be locked into a vicious circle of declining resources, declining quality and declining passengers, and consequently further loss of political support. In transport, as in other areas of state provision, arguments that provision should be cost effectively targeted on specific groups have the (only sometimes unintended) corollary that such provision should be residual and second best.

Evaluating the contribution of public transportation to facilitating social inclusion therefore involves evaluating the extent to which all citizens can move around the

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<sup>5</sup> In terms of reducing car usage this is certainly an effective investment. The most systematic and extensive international comparisons (Kenworthy *et al.*, 1997) show that the most cost effective way of ensuring a major modal shift on journeys to work (and hence of making mobility environmentally more sustainable) is the introduction of heavy rail services in *affluent* commuter areas.

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city. It suggests a definition of urban rights that include the right to mobility within the city. Such a right is even more difficult to define ('how much mobility at what cost?') than the rights of social citizenship (Marshall, 1950) to education, training, housing and health, some of which are enshrined in declarations such as the Council of Europe's European Social Charter of 1961 (Bainbridge and Teasdale, 1995: 224) and even the Social Charter of the European Union. Such a generalised right to mobility is not to be confused with social cost benefit analysis, determining the costs and benefits of transport provision for different social groups (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). As Hodge (1995) has argued in his detailed discussion of such analysis in the USA, an over focus on equity may well detract from the *general* benefits of public transport. The right to mobility requires a *systemic* approach to public transport provision.

Such an understanding of public transport and social inclusion seems very far from much policy discussion in Dublin today. A study commissioned by the Public Transport Partnership Forum (NERA and TIS.PIT, 2001) reviewed public transport in Dublin compared to Adelaide, Copenhagen, Evora, Lyon, Manchester, Preston, The Hague, Toronto and Zurich. Yet even this report, despite an explicit attempt to get beyond an evaluation in terms of narrow economic efficiency, merely defined 'inclusion' as the extent to which transport facilities were accessible to the disabled: conventional issues of inequality or social class were literally not mentioned.<sup>6</sup> An effective public transport system is therefore in these terms *a system*. As it is not a series of discrete commuter routes, but a system linking all the areas of the city, it enables all citizens to move around their city. The technical requirements are obvious enough: routes, which are not simply radial but orbital and even grid-like. An integrated network so that transfers from one mode to another is easy (modal interchanges, integrated ticketing). Some of the required elements are very simple indeed including, for example, effective and comprehensible information that allows all to understand how to move around the city.

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At its simplest, such a system ensures that poor housing areas are not physically isolated from the rest of the city by lack of transport. Of course, such links do not solve all social problems, but they do make some contribution to preventing income poverty becoming social isolation. Thus, the SceneSusTech project compared Jobstown in Tallaght (Dublin) with Kontula in Helsinki. Both are areas of social housing with high unemployment, but good transport links in Helsinki ensured that the inhabitants of Kontula were not excluded from the employment and recreational opportunities of Helsinki as a city. By contrast in Jobstown, those without a car were isolated: getting a job or even doing the shopping became major and sometimes insuperable logistical problems. A comparison between Dublin and Paris is suggestive also here. In Paris, the ‘banlieus’ are seen as dangerous areas (‘zone de violence’) (Body-Gondriot, 1993). However, the fast suburban rail system, the RER, links ‘notorious’ areas like La Courneuve to the city centre – these areas may be danger zones, but – unlike Tallaght – they are not quarantined.

### **3. Urban citizenship and public places**

The previous section has argued the right to participate effectively in the society requires a prior right to mobility as part of social citizenship. According to Marshall, social citizenship is:

‘The whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society’ (Marshall, 1963:74) (cited in Cahill, 183).

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<sup>6</sup> Intriguingly, this narrow understanding seems to be common where public transport is weak. Thus in the SceneSusTech project, it was also the understanding of social inclusion put forward by the Greek experts in relation to Athens, another city with a weak public transport system.

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There is a subtle difference between this definition and Townsend's. 'Sharing the social heritage' and living the life of a 'civilised being' hints at a normative definition of the good society. Indeed, this becomes explicit when one recalls that for Marshall, the rationale of social citizenship was to make a reality of political citizenship. If the reason for social support is to ensure that people can participate in the political life of the society, then, if such participation does not occur, presumably that particular rationale for social support also falls. Thus, whereas the Marshallian definition of social citizenship explicitly connects us to the ideal of the active citizen, the Townsendian definition of poverty, for all its apparent similarities, is (and was indeed intended to be) a simple relativism ('customary standards'). This movement gives some credence to Schnapper's claim that the welfare state ends up turning citizens' rights into simple claims for individual consumption, thus undermining the rationale and indeed the effectivity of the nation state as a 'community of citizens' (Schnapper, 2003). For Schnapper, the citizen has the right and the duty to participate in political deliberation, for Townsend, the citizen is an equal consumer.

This concept of the active citizen is of course at the centre of notions of citizenship. As any account of citizenship agrees, it derives (or at least, first appears) in Ancient Greece, where the citizen is an active member of the law-making polity. The Roman concept of citizenship was imperial, in that it disconnected citizenship from particularistic ethnies – *civis Romanus sum* did not depend on ethnic origin. At the same time however, the citizen became passive, acquiring certain individual rights under a universalistic legal system, but no rights of political participation. According to Schnapper, modern political citizenship, dating from the American and French Revolutions, involves the creation of the modern nation. A modern nation is fundamentally political. The nation, according to the much quoted aphorism of Renan is 'a daily plebiscite' since it is only indirectly connected to particularistic ethnies and in principle open to all those who wish to join. The citizens comprise a public realm, *separate from their private particularities*. This 'public' (Negt and Kluge, 1972) operates on the ideal of Habermasian *herrschaftsfrei Kommunikation*. This is very

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similar to Barber (2003) who sees civil society as the space of voluntary but public social relations interposed between the market and the state.

Social rights, including the right to mobility, are fuzzy. They are almost indefinitely expandable and potentially infinitely costly. Political citizenship by contrast is much 'harder'. The formal equality of citizens, just as the definition of the citizen, can be specified in law. While the duties which balance social rights are less clear, those of political rights are clear, at least for men – the ultimate duty of dying for the nation, which is why for Schnapper, the citizen is the *citoyen-soldat*.

The city as a physical place is potentially an important component of the public realm (Delanty, 2000). The city provides physical spaces in which people can enact a public life; whether these are the grand 'public' spaces (squares, plazas etc) used for demonstration and symbolic events or the smaller scale 'parochial' meeting places of playgrounds and parish halls (Beauregard and Bounds, 2000). This notion of the public is different to the ethnic solidarity and the world of 'ethnic mobilisation' and identity politics. Echoing the civic life of the European mediaeval city, this is a local polity to which anyone can have access. Given the decline in public engagement (Putnam, 2000), the image of a city in which citizens are active from the neighbourhood residents' association through to the grand public demonstration is more aspiration than reality. However, the city remains a physical space for citizenship in another, more residual way. Those who live in the same city, even if they do not live in the same neighbourhood, do share common physical places and spaces. Thus the city has a shared physical reality that the nation often does not have. The city is a space used by strangers who nonetheless have something in common. The city is therefore a low-key version of Schnapper's *communauté des citoyens*.

Moving around the city therefore, is not just about the access of privatised individuals to specific mobility sites. Rather, being a citizen of a city involves the right to move around the city and to share this right with other citizens. This right to mobility is



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shared with visitors (and in this sense, the city is far more welcoming than the nation state, which reserves many of its welfare facilities for national citizens).

Those vandalised cows were in ‘public places’. Roads are public places, but on a road you are expected to be in a car. By contrast, pavements, plazas and parks are for everyone – so that is where public art is placed. Furthermore, whereas roads are mono-functional, public places such as parks are open to different uses. Such places are public in that they are publicly controlled; they are the property of the public (the local authority or whatever) and for use by *citizens*. They are not shopping malls, which are for *consumers* (even though children hang out in shopping malls and so use them, partly on the owners’ sufferance, as if they were parks) (Corcoran, 2000). Another expanding pseudo-public space is the gated community, a private housing area with its own roads and ‘public’ areas but which can only be entered by residents. To my knowledge there are not yet such developments in Dublin, but there are increasing numbers of urban developments, which include such privatised public space. Similarly, office developments often include such controlled private-public places (‘plazas’ and atriums), which are only open to workers. Where these privatised spaces of home, work and entertainment are connected by people driving in their private cars, public spaces are almost completely abandoned, as in some American cities or, more spectacularly, Johannesburg in South Africa.

Of course, the issue of urban design is not just a question of reducing the domination of the motorcar. The centre of many medium-sized German cities have pedestrianised shopping streets through which modern trams thread their way; walking here is a pleasurable experience which hopefully will soon be replicated in Dublin. More generally, public transport facilities can make their own architectural contribution. All across the world, 19<sup>th</sup> century railway stations (including Dublin’s Heuston station) were often some of the best public buildings of the city. In the 1930s, London Transport set new standards of public design in stations and even in lettering; the stations of the Moscow metro remain one of the city’s tourist attractions. Today, cities that aspire to world leadership are again investing in the design of their transport

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facilities (e.g. London's Jubilee extension, the renovations on the Paris metro). Equally nowadays, some city governments are creating new public spaces: pedestrianising streets, creating new parks, and creating novel spaces such as Dublin's Broadwalk cantilevered over the Liffey or the temporary 'Paris Plage' where the fast road along the right bank of the Seine is converted into a beach for the summer.

Public transport is also partly itself a public space in a double sense. Firstly, people use it *together*. It involves the commonality and passing companionship of fellow passengers rather than the individualised isolation of the 'carcooned' driver. This presumably explains why, for all the frequent discomfort, those who use public transport to travel to work are more likely to enjoy their journey than those who travel by private car<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, the 'public realm' is a sphere of activity, which is not defined by the market. At the same time it is not a private or personal area, since it is one to which all citizens have access. Creating such a space has costs, but these are borne from general taxation and thus, are paid for by all citizens. This is justified because activities in the public realm are, so it is argued, important for the society as a whole. The public realm is not just paid for by the public, it is *used* by the public and this very usage creates 'the public', individuals who, even though they have no personal relationship with each other, have some mutual connections and some real, if limited, mutual responsibility.

Some such public realm is essential in any democratic polity, however right wing or socially conservative. However, Hutton argues that the public realm is more developed in Europe, not least because European *conservative* politicians have traditionally understood private property as involving duties as well as rights. The European public realm is as much the creation of European Christian Democracy as of European social democracy. It puts forward a model of a democratic market society in which individuals are both private consumers and public citizens, and recognises that the quality of life requires that both elements are taken seriously. This 'European Social Model' (Wickham, 2002) in many ways defines Europe (or at least 'old

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Europe’) as different from the USA, where private property is seen as having absolute rights, where extremes of rich and poor are socially acceptable, and where high levels of violence are tolerated and even encouraged (Duclos, 2003).

Certainly, comparative studies of ‘advanced’ economies do show that Europeans<sup>8</sup> are more likely to use public transport than Americans and other non-European inhabitants of the ‘Angloworld’ (Canada, Australia etc) (Wickham and Lohan, 2000). More generally, there is something distinctively *European* about public transport:

‘This social capability is supported by a conception of the public realm whose underwriting of public science, **public transport**, public art, public networks, public health, public broadcasting, public knowledge and the wider public interest gives European civilization its unique character while offering many of its enterprises competitive advantage.’ (Hutton, 2002: 258-259, emphasis added).

Sociological discussion of citizenship has spent more time on the ‘rights’ of citizenship than on its ‘duties’, yet legal theory shows that rights necessarily involve restraints on the rights of others (Pagano, 2001). My right to cheap transport constrains your right to spend your income. Frequently, rights and obligations are imposed on the same people (my right to transport means I have to pay higher taxes). Furthermore, once people have *rights*, they are also opened up to *duties*. Thus the right to public space imposes on us the duty of appropriate public behaviour towards others in that space. The only way to avoid this duty is not to exercise the right – and to withdraw to private space (Beauregard and Boudms, 2000). Thus, in terms of public transport, we can speak of the right to mobility and to safety, and the duty that we do not undermine others’ use of the facility. Loutish and threatening behaviour, graffiti, littering, all indicate that the perpetrator exercises his or her use of the facility *at the cost of others*. Such behaviour has of course a simple consequence – other

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<sup>7</sup> Finding from SST

<sup>8</sup> Of the advanced economies, the same also applies to Japan, Singapore and Taiwan.

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citizens abandon the facility as soon as they can, usually for private transport. Accordingly, one of the first steps in restoring the New York subway system was zero tolerance for graffiti:

‘Our view was that the fact that graffiti could not be controlled was saying to the public, no one is in control, proceed at your own peril. Crime was very high – though actually less on the subway than elsewhere – and so we decided to take graffiti on. The system was completely covered with graffiti – 6,200 train carriages, 470 stations, the depots, the shops. It was a kind of leprosy.’ Bob Kiley, ex-head of New York’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority, quoted in Wolmar (2002: 166).

If public transport is to create public spaces and citizens exercise their right to mobility, then the duty of public civility has to be enforced. If libertarians object to this, they are condoning the collapse of public spaces in our cities.

#### **4. Political citizenship and public services**

More so than perhaps ten years ago, many will now accept the need for public transport as a public service, and accept that this requires public subsidy. However, it is equally increasingly argued that such public services can and indeed should be provided by private enterprises. This final section of the paper explores some of the arguments. I tentatively suggest that such private supply of public services can have many unanticipated and undesirable consequences. It is important here not to oversimplify. Current government proposals are not to simply hand over public transport, or even Dublin buses, to the free market. The government plans a *regulated* market. It would be perfectly logical for the government to accept that a pure market solution cannot provide adequate transport services. It is therefore, planning to regulate the market to ensure that competition and private enterprise will deliver public services,

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which will be superior to either the existing status quo or a pure market situation. This section of the report explores the problems involved in this strategy.

#### **4.1. Customers not citizens**

When a private company provides a service to a customer, it does so because the customer is paying for it. Rights to the service are conditional on paying for it. Equally, the firm only offers the service if it can be expected to be profitable. In many countries private sector banks are withdrawing facilities from low-income customers and low-income areas, for the simple reason that these are not profitable (SERVEMPLOI, 2002). ‘The customer is always right’ only applies when the customer can afford the service.

Citizens however are different to customers, for citizens have rights irrespective of their income. If public transport is defined as a public service, then although there may be a charge for the service, there is also an element of citizenship *entitlement*, just as in European welfare states (but not the USA) citizens have entitlements to health, education and housing. From this perspective, within the public sector citizens are treated equitably, irrespective of their financial resources. Consequently, the relationship between the employee providing the service and the citizen receiving the service is different.

Clearly the relationship between public sector employee and the public varies between services and between countries. Partly this depends on the occupation: it would be difficult to claim that bus drivers have the same commitment to their passengers as nurses to their patients. Equally it depends on the country: where citizen participation in state decision-making is high, then public employees are more likely to be committed to the welfare of their citizens than where the state is distant or even authoritarian. Irish political culture, with its clientelism and populism, is

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notoriously inhospitable to any idea of public service.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, public ownership provides the possibility for the development of public service in a way that private ownership does not.

In fact the failure of public enterprise to provide good customer service has been a key argument in favour of privatisation. Organisations such as Dublin Bus, let alone Iarnród Éireann, have in the past been notorious for the customer-hostility of many frontline staff. Yet the relationship between private ownership and customer orientation is not clear-cut. On the one hand, given clear management and human resource policies, nationalised industries can develop a good customer-orientation. Examples include British Rail in its final decade before privatisation (Wolmar, 2001), perhaps also Aer Lingus and even incipiently Dublin Bus. On the other hand, while improved customer service was seen as one of the perceived benefits of privatising British Rail, it does seem that British train operators have failed to develop a customer service ethos:

While a few train operators have developed a reputation for good customer care, most have barely matched BR's standards. Indeed, one of the most amazing failings of privatisation has been that the oft-repeated promises that the private sector would treat its customers much better than BR have been largely unfulfilled. In an assessment of customer service after privatisation Roger Ford, the highly regarded rail journalist, attempted to set out all the 'soft' improvements of service to passengers.<sup>10</sup> It proved to be a short list and indeed, some of the customer-friendly innovations made by BR had been scrapped (Wolmar, 1999: 195).

And in a warning note to those who expect better service when Dublin Bus is privatised:

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<sup>9</sup> The new Irish state developed an enviable reputation for honest (if penny-pinching) administration. This asset has now been squandered: one international survey reports Ireland is now seen as one of the most corrupt states in Europe.

<sup>10</sup> The source is cited as Roger Ford, 'Customer Service', *Modern Railways*, November 1999.

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Ford attributes the paucity of initiatives on customer care to the fact that most of the franchisees are bus companies who have, traditionally, paid little regard to the needs of their passengers (Wolmar, 1999: 196).

Given tight cost accounting and above all, the attempt by operators to reduce staff costs, the idea that privatisation will produce better service to citizens seems naïve.

#### **4.2. Public sector employment**

For many ideologues, it is often axiomatic that the public sector is over-staffed. In fact, much discussion of public sector employment ignores the fundamental differences between the public and the private sectors. In Ireland, even though semi-state companies are not part of the civil services, the rationale for most of them is that, at least to some extent, they provide a public service. This is one defining characteristic of public sector employment.

As providers of a public service, state organisations cannot work according to straightforward commercial criteria. As their output is not sold in the conventional way (even fares are subsidised), it is often difficult to measure; normal measures of productivity are often in inverse relationship to the quality of service (e.g. a ‘productive’ school is one with large classes). More fundamentally, working involves some notion of ‘equity’: the state – and hence its employees – has to treat citizens in particular ways. This in turn means that work often involves some commitment to providing the actual service. The greater this specific commitment, the clearer the *public service* quality of the employment. Although issues of pay and conditions are of course important to morale in the public service, it remains the fact that people often work in the public service in part because of commitment to the service they provide.

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These arguments have particular relevance for the public sector. It is utterly naïve to believe that the private sector can be the sole or even the main provider of good quality jobs. Even in Ireland, where high technology employment now does play a slightly higher role than in most EU member states, the *total* employment in high tech manufacturing and services is around 11% of all employment, and this includes all occupations within these sectors (European Commission, 2003: 32). Most high skill jobs are in the public sector, especially in education and medicine. A key social issue therefore is the quality of *low skill* jobs, and it is important to recognise the historic role of the public sector in providing relatively good quality low skill jobs. As above all Crouch et al have argued (2001: 239), low paid but secure public sector jobs have made played a specific role in the overall employment structure. The public sector has traditionally provided:

Work that required relatively modest skills, paid rather low wages, but offered security of employment and (because of the commitment of most public employers to concepts of the ‘good employer’) freedom from the brutalisation often associated with low-skilled and low-paid work (Crouch et al, 2001: 239).

Privatisation or even ‘marketisation’ aims more or less explicitly to erode these qualities of public sector employment. Quite apart from the wider social implications of this move towards Boston rather than Berlin, there are also negative consequences for the enterprises themselves. Firstly, there is a plausible argument that high turnover does contribute to innovation in highly technical and rapidly changing industries (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Such a description certainly does not apply to public transport, where innovation is nearly always slow and incremental. This form of innovation, so it has been argued, often utilises the knowledge and experiences of existing employees. Casualisation of public transport sector employees removes this *potential* (but hardly automatic) contribution. Secondly, casualising the public transport workforce necessarily destroys the experience and knowledge of employees, including any commitment to the service itself. A casualised and short-term



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workforce will have little knowledge of the customers, the routes, the equipment, etc. In some environments (e.g. the railways) this can lead directly to safety problems, as notoriously happened after the privatisation of British Rail (Wolmar, 2001; Murray, 2001). There is of course absolutely no guarantee that the knowledge and experience of a public sector transport workforce will be used to benefit anyone else but the employees themselves<sup>11</sup> and to the passenger there is little sign that the CIÉ workforce is committed to improving standards of service. However, with a casualised and demoralised workforce such a commitment would be impossible.

In fact this is particularly true of public sector management. There is growing evidence that, at least in some countries, public sector management is motivated differently to private sector management. Yet paradoxically, just as this is becoming clearer, the ideologues of market totalitarianism ensure that the sole objective of public sector management reform is to make it like the private sector. Public sector managers do tend to value job security more highly than their private sector colleagues. However, one reason for this may well be that their skills and expertise are based on the particular area where they work. In other words, they value job security because their skills are less ‘transferable’ to other employers. More importantly, people often enter public service management with the belief that they are ‘Not just making money’ but ‘Doing something that matters’ (Brown and Scase, 1994). Again this involves a commitment both to the general idea of public service and to a specific area of work. The contrast to current fashions in the private sector could not be greater where it is increasingly assumed that managers can only be motivated by money, and that ‘management’ is a general skill, which can be applied to any area of activity. Within this model, managers need know nothing about the particular industry in which they manage, and in particular need no experience of or commitment to what ‘their’ enterprises actually do.

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<sup>11</sup> An example is where bus drivers can effectively control the timing of buses. This creates the temptation to drive in convoy with another bus along the same route. This infuriates passengers, but is more pleasant for the drivers.

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Within the private sector, some forms of human resource management (e.g. techniques such as Total Quality Management) attempt to mobilise employees' knowledge and commitment for the enterprise, not least by delegating decision downwards as much as possible. In theory, enterprise level partnership within the public sector should combine such new forms of employee empowerment with the maintenance of trade union rights (EPOC Research Group, 1999). It is an open question to what extent this has actually been achieved in Ireland. Indeed, it *seems* that precisely where partnership is most needed, that it is there it has been weakest.

The public sector has traditionally been a key provider of good quality *low* skill jobs. For opponents of the public sector this is a problem. It shows that trade union power and/or political expediency has enforced conditions that cannot be justified in terms of the market. Without such protection, low skill workers in the public sector would have lower pay, worse conditions, less job security – the same conditions as those with similar qualifications in the private sector. However, this 'privileged' position of public sector workers can be justified. Ultimately, the state employs people to provide services because part of the role of the state is to maintain the *social cohesion* of the society. In this context, state services should be provided to citizens by fellow citizens who have some basic commitment to the work they are doing. Such commitment is unlikely to be forthcoming if state workers are treated as casual labour. From this perspective, higher earnings differentials within the public sector ('market rates' for public sector managers) should also be regarded as problematic, because they may demotivate public sector employees as a whole.

Accepting that public sector jobs *should be* different to private sector jobs does not give much guidance for the nitty-gritty of wage bargaining. However, it does suggest that job security in the public sector is not simply a trade-off for low pay, but can be justified in terms of the nature of the service provided. Of course, this can only be the basis for a trade union bargaining strategy if the unions have a clear commitment to the public service their members provide – *and if this claim is credible to the broader public*. While Irish nurses, and even to some extent Irish teachers, have been able to

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make such a claim, to date unfortunately the same could hardly be said of Irish public transport unions.

### **4.3. State enterprises**

It is frequently argued that public enterprises should become more ‘commercial’, ‘entrepreneurial’ or ‘market oriented’. While this may appear to be self-evidently desirable, it is actually rather problematic.

A key characteristic of a state enterprise is that, even if it is profitable overall, it carries out activities, which are not commercially justified. These tasks and their rationale can vary enormously: taking on extra employees in order to reduce unemployment, training apprentices in order to counter-act a national skill shortage, installing filtration systems to protect the environment, even installing telecommunication links to facilitate multi-national companies.<sup>12</sup> In the case of public transport, the key issue is of course the provision of services, which do not cover their own costs. The argument of the ‘New Public Management’ school of thought is that such activities should be clearly identified so that the state can then explicitly pay for them. This should allow more rational decision-making. Once the cost of such subsidies is identified, then it becomes in principle possible to decide between different and competing uses of public funds. Paradoxically, such accounting techniques become an argument for privatisation, since if the ‘public service’ element of a state company’s activities is identified and charged separately, then there is no reason for the enterprise as a whole to be state-owned. However, if private companies provide public services, this creates its own problems. If the private company is a monopoly, then a private monopoly has simply replaced a public monopoly and this creates the need for extensive regulation. Equally, if there is competition between

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<sup>12</sup> It is ironic that one cause of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom was the state’s decision to dramatically upgrade the telephone system in the 1980s. As the slow development of broadband in Ireland shows, such an investment would be impossible today with a privatised telecommunications system governed by a regulator who has to enforce competition!

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enterprises providing the service (as in a deregulated bus market), then the fragmentation of service will not necessarily benefit the consumer. As we have seen, franchising and other forms of market-based regulation often require complex and rigid contracts to ensure that the service is actually delivered.

Such forms of governance run the risk of creating ‘perverse incentives’. If performance is measured (and profits effected) by tightly defined standards, then this will focus the attention of the company – and of its employees – on meeting precisely those standards. The letter of the contract will be followed, rather than the spirit. The emphasis is on making profits (or minimising penalties) rather than fulfilling the overall service itself. In particular, co-operation with other companies can be penalised rather than rewarded. Safety on the privatised British rail system is a notorious example of this problem. On the nationalised system, staff would report safety incidents as part of a general (if vaguely defined) sense of professional duty, but once they became focused on immediate performance targets there was little incentive for them to report safety incidents ‘especially as staff do not have the same public sector ethos as they were imbued with at BR’ (Wolmar, 1999:184). Measuring all elements of performance in order to identify the specific public service elements therefore undermines the general public service ethos of the enterprise. Conversely, the public service ethos is *potentially*<sup>13</sup> part of the general ‘culture’ of a public enterprise. It becomes part of what the enterprise ‘is’: isolating and costing its distinct elements runs the risk of destroying it.

In many European countries, public utilities are seen as public enterprises, not least because it is considered that they provide services, which are essential for all citizens. This means to say that we, the citizens, do actually consider them ‘ours’ in the way that we do not see private companies (Kay, 2002). For Dubliners, Dublin Bus is not Burger King, nor even Aircoach. At its best, public enterprise can therefore call on the support of citizens in a very different way to the ‘brand loyalty’ of consumers.

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<sup>13</sup> Potentially, not necessarily. This paper does not claim that all Irish public enterprises are imbued with a public service ethos.

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There is an important issue here for public transport. People increasingly recognise the environmental damage caused by car usage. People are probably more likely to heed appeals to use public transport if they are not simply contributing to a private company's profits. A private enterprise has a legal obligation to prioritise the interests of its shareholders, but therefore it can hardly appeal to customers in terms of the public good!

It must be recognised that privatisation by definition means selling public assets. Indeed, whatever the short term gains for governments may be, the disposal of public assets not only reduces the resources at the state's disposal but the cost of replacing them is often prohibitively expensive. In the public transport area the negative consequences can surface quickly. Thus in the UK, the Strategic Rail Authority found that it could not re-install railway lines in line with new passenger demand, because Railtrack, attempting to maximise the value of its assets, had sold off much 'surplus' land.<sup>14</sup> There are obvious lessons here for the government's current plans to use CIE's land bank to fund its privatisation (above all to 'buy out' employees). Privatisation also narrows the area of life in which actions can only be justified if they contribute to the 'bottom line'. Take one simple example: the Freedom of Information Act compels public authorities to provide information to citizens on request. However, to the extent that private companies provide services, increasingly information is withheld as 'commercially sensitive'. Whereas a public enterprise will often provide information from a general sense of public duty, private enterprises are likely to reduce the information available to the public because there is no commercial case for providing it. According to some researchers, research on public transport provision is becomingly more difficult for this very reason.

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<sup>14</sup> One reason for the initial success of Railtrack privatisation was that investors expected it to make money from its property portfolio (Wolmar, 1999: 20).

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#### **4.4. Institutions that work**

The NERA/TIS.PT study reviewed public transport in Dublin compared to Adelaide, Copenhagen, Evora, Lyon, Manchester, Preston, The Hague, Toronto and Zurich. The study was narrowly defined as an evaluation of the funding arrangements for public transport provision in these cities. It compared three different models: a controlled state market with a single supplier (effectively the Dublin situation), a regulated market with routes or areas franchised through competitive tendering (as currently practised in London and as proposed for Dublin), deregulated competition (as in most British provincial cities).

This report argued that while it was not possible to clearly identify one model of best practice, that Dublin was at a particular disadvantage because it lacked a single passenger transit authority:

Dublin is rather different from the other cities we have studied because no overall public transport authority exists apart from the Dublin Transportation Office established in 1995 with limited powers...The lessons from our case studies indicate the existence of a powerful public transport authority is highly beneficial. Most public authorities have achieved integrated networks, tariff integration and an overall co-ordination of the (public) transport system (NERA/TIS.PT 2001: 226).

It is quite clear that an integrated network is the basis of any effective public transport provision. This makes it somewhat bizarre that Irish public policy has prioritised the much more debatable objective of achieving 'competition' in public transport.

A broader overview of the overall effectiveness of transport policy is provided by a study by Apel and Pharaoh (1995). They compare ten European cities including Basel, Bologna, Freiburg, London, Stockholm and Zurich. Although all have had

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some success in restraining the growth in car usage<sup>15</sup>, only Basel, Freiburg and Zurich had stabilised car ownership and usage within the city area. Apel and Pharaoh argue that the most important policy measures have been an integrated transport system in which on-street light rail usually plays a key role. A necessary (but not sufficient) condition for achieving this has been an effective and democratic local government, which involved the citizens in decision-making.

Whereas other studies have focused on successful cities, the SceneSusTech project contrasted two ‘worst practice’ cities (Athens and Dublin) with two best practice cities (Bologna, Helsinki). This contrast allows some clear conclusions. Bologna and Helsinki are clear cases of strong *local* government. Both cities have decision-making powers and some financial autonomy. Financial autonomy, which has to mean tax-raising powers, is essential if local autonomy is to have any meaning and local politicians to have any power – and accountability.<sup>16</sup> Helsinki is the capital city of Finland and its architecture and urban environment are important to Finnish national pride. However, national government plays a limited role in shaping the city. Both Helsinki and Bologna are also anchored in an effective regional or metropolitan level government structure. This allows transport planning to encompass the city’s immediate hinterland and in the case of Helsinki in particular allows the transport planning to be linked to land use planning.

The contrast with Athens and Dublin is dramatic. In both cities the national government takes all major infra-structural decisions. In neither city is there an effective regional nor metropolitan authority, so sustained transport policy is impossible. National government may from time to time sanction major infrastructural projects (e.g. the Athens metro) but these do not provide an integrated system. While such prestige projects are sometimes popular with politicians, they can

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<sup>15</sup> At the time of the study London’s success was largely the historical legacy of extensive suburban underground and overground railway network consolidated in the 1930s.

<sup>16</sup> As Bob Kiley remarked in 1999 in a speech to a UK government seminar on devolution before he became London’s Commissioner for Transport: ‘What on earth made you think devolution could work unless the regional government is given the ability to raise taxes? In the US, 65 per cent of taxes are raised at local level’ (Wolmar, 2001: 163).

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often detract from the less glamorous but equally important (and equally expensive) task of maintaining the existing networks (Wolmar, 2002: 38). Significantly, Apel and Pharaoh also notice that the achievements of London and Stockholm have been hampered by weak *national* policies, in particular the construction of urban ring roads which have led to car-based developments and so, generated additional local motor traffic.

Devolved political systems provide the context in which local politicians can build careers with local successes. For example, the high profiled introduction of a modern tram system in Strasbourg was promoted by the Mayor, Catherine Trautmann: its success was integral to her political career. By contrast in Dublin, the existing structures give no such opportunities for local politicians, who can only be concerned with small-scale issues such as the provision of existing services. The SceneSusTech project also showed how successful public transport policies depend upon ‘urban coalitions’ of different interest groups, welded together by a common vision of the city. In Dublin, such an urban coalition could be seen emerging in the 1990s in the groups supporting the original Dublin Transportation Initiative. Mary O’Rourke’s decision to cancel the on-street city section of Luas however, showed that random interventions by national politicians still determine the capital city’s fate.

Dublin’s traffic problem is therefore in the first instance a question of local governance. Local government in Ireland as a whole has long been trapped in a vicious circle. In a tradition that dates back to the colonial period, central government sees local government as incompetent and even corrupt, and in response centralises power. This ensures that local government becomes even more mediocre and even less able to act strategically. Of course, institutional reform by itself will not necessarily reverse this process and create effective local government. For example, regional reform in Italy in the 1970s provided the framework within which cities like Bologna could develop; the cities of the Italian South remained mired in clientelism



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(Putnam, 1993).<sup>17</sup> In its initial documents, the government did propose a single transit authority for Dublin, which was to even have strategic land use planning functions. However, this was to be yet another appointed body with no direct democratic accountability. The reports are completely silent on the broader question of democratic metropolitan government. Today, even these proposals have been sidelined, and the focus is entirely on the question of privatisation. Nonetheless, the continuing public debate about Dublin's problems does suggest a new civic culture is growing in Ireland's capital city. Perhaps it is finally time to allow it to develop by decentralising power to Dublin.

## **5. Conclusion**

Public transport, so this paper has suggested, is in fact at the core of urban citizenship in three separate ways.

- Public transport counters car dependency, and so, facilitates social inclusion.
- Public transport is part of the public realm and contributes to physically maintaining the public space.
- Finally, public transport can be part of a public service.

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<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, Putnam notes that even Southern cities have benefited from decentralisation and there is little demand for a return to the old centralised system.

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