

# JONATHAN BRAY



## Change is happening fast - what's next?

Reflections on the need for a more diverse workforce, the future of streets and the success of Nottingham's workplace parking levy

► Now we are the Urban Transport Group the pace is picking up with more invitations to speak at more conferences and events. Which also gives the opportunity to hear from others and tune into what's going on out there in a host of areas, from skills to tech and streets to logistics. With the future speeding up many of these events had more verve than they might have had a few years back. After all, one year ago no electric double deckers, five years ago no Uber, 10 years ago no iPads, smartphones, Facebook or Twitter. With transformative change happening so quickly - what's next?

### Skills and diversity

We may be facing waves of social and technological change - but at many transport events it's still a sea of grey male heads. I sometimes wonder if there are many other sectors as white, male and middle aged as transport is? Not all areas of transport of course, nor all organisations - but I'm sure entering a transport meeting where it's all middle aged men in the room wouldn't cause anyone to keel over in amazement.

The facts back it up. Women represent just 20% of the rail industry and 4.4% of rail engineering. Nearly half of the workforce are over 45. Transport is also losing out to other sectors in attracting the most talented engineering graduates. An ageing monotone workforce in a sector which the majority of society thinks this is either not for the likes of them, or thanks but no thanks, is exacerbating

the significant skills shortage the sector faces.

The National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR) forecasts core skills shortages in signalling and telecommunications, electrification and plant, traction and rolling stock of 10,000 people between 2014 and 2019. And for transport construction there's an estimated shortage of 57,000 people out of the 239,000 people needed to deliver the £61bn of capital transport infrastructure to be delivered within the parliament. The largest shortages here are in engineering and technical, and skilled trade and labour.

You wouldn't start from here in terms of skills because clearly it takes time to educate, recruit and develop people to provide those skills - and the skills shortage is here and now.

But, to be fair, this government can be decisive when it wants to deliver mega projects

(like HS2) or those protects that it sees as putting the UK in a position to lead in growth transport sectors (like half a billion pounds of backing for ultra low emission cars). The heat is being turned up on the issue with the adoption of the Department for Transport's new transport infrastructure skills strategy, which among other things commits to 30,000 apprenticeships with at least 20% of new entrants to engineering and technical apprenticeships in the transport sector to be women by 2020.

OK, enough with the problems already - what are the solutions? Read the DfT's strategy and the excellent 'Routes to diversity and inclusion' by the CIHT (Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation) and you will have a good grounding in what works. But to whet your appetite here are a few ideas to chew on. It's about organisations recognising and owning the problem. It's about taking on conscious and unconscious bias that means people can end up employing people like them (for example, through being more creative about job design and promotion and building diversity into both the shortlisting process and interview panel). It's also about making flexible working a reality for all.

Skills and diversity is an issue that needs to be front and centre for the sector (and will be for the Urban Transport Group) otherwise the competition for skills and talent between the players will only become more intense with local transport authorities in danger of being at the bottom of the heap, unable to compete on salaries with HS2 and private sector consultancies who, in turn, are competing with the lure of even bigger rewards available overseas - like in the Gulf states.



# “I wonder if there are other sectors as white, male and middle aged as transport?”

## Future streets

Went to the fascinating ‘Future of London’s Roads’ exhibition (now finished) last month at the London Building Centre which got me thinking further about future streets (as well as the way in which exhibitions can be a better way of getting ideas across than publishing yet another report to read). Before diving in I’d better establish my bus priority credentials! As pteg we initiated the alliance of CbBT (Campaign for Better Transport), CPT (Confederation of Passenger Transport), TfL (Transport for London) and Greener Journeys that has built up the evidence base for bus priority and articulated it. I’m setting out my credentials on bus priority as a precursor to saying that I think the debate is moving on from a simple but furious battle of the modes as to who gets the lion’s share of declining available road space (is it buses, motorbikes, taxis and PHVs, bikes, cars, pedestrians, freight and logistics?). It’s becoming something more sophisticated and agile that seeks to balance place with movement in the most elegant and effective way possible.

TfL are doing some fascinating work here where they have painstakingly categorised the entire London road network around the balance between place (for example, does it function as a local high street or a city square) and movement (does it have a role as a distributor or as a core strategic route). This is in turn part of a growing recognition that transport policy needs to be also about place making. Transport provides the connectivity that places need but it also needs to fit in with the kind of places people want to live in. Real streets (which sometimes have conflicted roles as both places people want to be as well as corridors for movement) are where these tensions play out.

There are no easy answers here - and the case for giving the bus access to urban areas needs to be made loud and clear. But that case needs to be more than just about ‘white lines on tarmac’ as a symbol of victory over other modes, it needs to reflect this wider and more sophisticated debate about how best to reconcile place and movement and the competing cases of different modes in an era where improving air quality is a political priority and where technological change means that hard infrastructure is not the only way to better manage road capacity.

## Design not accident

Although the roads exhibition has come to an end, the London Building Centre is still worth a visit to see the amazing 12.5-metre long permanent interactive model of 85 square kilometres of London (from Kings Cross in the north to Peckham in the south, and from the Royal Docks in the east to Old Oak Common) which brings the story of London’s past, present and future to life through a sophisticated projection system integrated with films.

What struck me forcibly from the exhibition was how although London is home to freebooting mercantile capitalism its development and growth isn’t happening by accident, or by free for all. It’s happening by grand, ambitious and thoughtful design with clusters of urban densification and towers focussed on public transport hubs, and with the rapid implementation of a much cleaner and high quality urban realm including taking out the worst of the gyratories. The decking over or burying of key sections of the road network is potentially part of the next wave.

Also in that next wave will be transport’s role in tackling what is now London’s biggest challenge - housing: either through enabling greater densification or through providing access to new more distant housing sites.

## “London’s development and growth isn’t happening by accident”



## Traffic restraint

Road user charging has proved a tough sell (to say the least) outside London and the scars are not yet healed from those that sought to introduce it. But there’s more than one way to skin a cat on traffic restraint and in Nottingham the workplace parking levy has delivered as we heard at the recent quarterly meeting of senior transport planners from Urban Transport Group and Core Cities in Birmingham.

Although it’s too early for a full evaluation - we know already that revenue from the scheme has been key to funding the expansion of Nottingham’s tram network, the largest electric bus fleet in Europe, the upgrade of the mainline railway terminal as well as a host of other schemes - from bike hire to business travel planning. Threats of non-compliance or business moving out of the city to avoid the charge have not materialised, and the running costs of the scheme are low. Interesting too is that there’s emerging evidence of parking spaces being turned to more productive use to help avoid the levy. Nottingham’s tight boundary and political stability do make such schemes easier to deliver but as other cities grapple with the need to reduce traffic, raise funding and tackle air quality the quiet success of Nottingham’s workplace parking levy is standing out. ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

▶ Jonathan Bray is director of the Urban Transport Group, formerly PTEG. Before joining PTEG in 2003, his background was a mix of transport policy and transport campaigning.