



Conversations on Future Lifestyles:

Talk it through. Make it happen.

"Travel behaviour change: what is the best balance between price, culture and environment?" – Nov 2007

Introduced by Tom Cohen. Hosted by Andrew Stuck, Rethinking Cities Ltd.

<http://www.rethinkingcities.net/conversations>

Travel behaviour change: what is the best balance between price, culture and environment?

The opening proposition of the conversation is that we need to get people to use cars less (environmental imperative etc). The questions of interest then are:

- What is the most efficient/effective way of doing this?
- What is the most socially desirable way of doing this?

People's relationship with the car is complex and in large part emotional. Though greatly influenced by the marketing (and, I would argue, environmental factors), the car is so popular because it appeals to some primal sentiments – control, perceived safety, one-upmanship.

Various paradigms are in play to which we can appeal in seeking answers to our questions:

"Economists" – people are rational utility-maximisers in a world of scarce resources. So change the relative prices of car and the alternatives and wait for people to shift. The congestion charge in London shows that this model is at least partially accurate.

"Regulators" – people do what they want and this means the most powerful dominate the least powerful unless legislation (enforced) intervenes. So people make themselves as powerful as you can and reduce their risk, ie they get in a car. If we want to change this, we must introduce regulations that rebalance the power (eg continental laws that presume the guilt of drivers in collisions with walkers/cyclists) and everything will follow. Is there good empirical evidence that this does or doesn't work?

"Behaviourists" – the status quo is sub-optimal (because of ignorance, inaccurate perception) and a better balance (specifically including less use of car) can be achieved by tackling this. In fact, behaviour change strategies tend to be more sophisticated, reflecting the fact that most decision-making is only partially rational. The evidence is that this works and that it's cheap and quick. The magnitude of change is disputed as is rate of decay.

pto



Conversations on Future Lifestyles:

Talk it through. Make it happen.

"Travel behaviour change: what is the best balance between price, culture and environment?" – Nov 2007

Introduced by Tom Cohen. Hosted by Andrew Stuck, Rethinking Cities Ltd.

<http://www.rethinkingcities.net/conversations>

"Planners" – we are products of our environment and our behaviour reflects this. We get a huge number of environmental messages (many subliminal) that car is the mode of choice and that everything else is at least worse, possibly much worse. So we resort to cars in response. The most obvious example (though so fundamental that we probably don't see it) is that the carriageway is at the centre of the highway and the footway on its flanks, introducing a need to cross many times to follow a typical desire line on foot. More subtle is the fact that the footway is full of items that service the carriageway (signs, lights etc) and that, wherever there is a need for compromise (because of building lines, say), it's the footway that gives way.

What is really going on? If all these paradigms describe the truth to some extent, how are they actually interacting?

A proposition: if it is, at bottom, the law of the jungle (in parallel with which some other factors are operating), then perhaps the most *effective* way of tackling car use would accept this reality, ie would harness the power relationship rather than attempt to change it. The congestion charge means that poorer people are priced off the road, but it works – people use their cars less. Would that be the most *socially desirable* way? It might deliver the change but at what cost? Do people gravitate towards other modes or hunker down? And how does that make us behave towards one another?

Do we want people to be less individualistic? Or is that paternalism? To what extent can our approach to changing the way we travel affect how we are as social beings?