

1. Crossed Perspectives



Public Policies & professional mobility

Between Marie-Hélène Massot (Economist)
And Jean-Marc Offner (Urbaniste)

24 June 2014

A University lecturer and an urban planner discuss professional mobilities and their role within community life. How do public authorities and, more broadly, society and its various components deal with mobility management?

01. Today, what should the objectives of public policy with regard to professional mobility, i.e. home to work mobility and/or those generated by economic activity, be?



Marie-Hélène Massot

The number one objective for public policy in this area should be ensuring access to jobs by guaranteeing safe, smooth and comfortable journeys for everyone. In metropolitan areas, where the transport services are good but overcrowded, if not completely saturated, the priorities should be on guaranteeing service reliability and passenger comfort.

Outside of cities, access to jobs is difficult, even impossible, without a car, the costs of which have become prohibitive for some people (in France, a daily commute of 40 kilometres by car is equivalent to a quarter of the minimum wage).



J. O

Certainly... but you could make the same analysis for access to leisure or to consumption. You have to dare to weigh up the socio-economic importance of mobility against the reasons for travel, as it's a well-known fact that we cannot guarantee access for everyone, everywhere, at the same time. There's no such thing as a flying carpet!



Jean-Marc Offner

It is not unreasonable to believe that work-related travel should be a priority of local public policy – especially during a period of economic crisis. The proper function of employment areas allows for better balance between labour supply and demand. And focusing on work-related travel (from parking spaces for craftspeople to deliveries to trips between metropolitan facilities) makes things easier for companies and their employees.

So, de facto, this means prioritising the different reasons for traveling according to their relative importance, bearing in mind that, in certain places and at certain times, work-related mobility has precedence over other travel (leisure, shopping, etc.).



M. M

Giving priority to work-related mobility at certain times in certain places is clearly a realistic objective, given the power of the tools which are being announced by engineers for regulating transport flows in real time.

However, this objective could lead to a greater concentration of employment, which would be in conflict with the aim of having a functional mix in urban areas.

02. What measures should be implemented to meet these objectives, and should they target mobility itself or regional planning?



Marie-Hélène Massot

In the major cities, opting for certain development policies, such as the location of housing and/or jobs, or a transport policy designed to reduce car speeds, could reduce both saturation of transport networks and car use, as our research has demonstrated (1).

Employed people who move home or change job (nearly 20% of the total each year) take this new context into account when making their choices.

In areas that are sparsely populated and/or far from areas of employment, where 40% of working people live, acting on development can do very little. The same is true for traditional public transport services. The actions here consists of making daily car use something acceptable, by looking closely at the options in terms of shared transport (bicycles, cars, minibuses, work spaces and home working). In short, we should be looking to share our existing fleet of cars and our use of them.



J. O

We should consider re-starting the work of “time agencies” – those public departments responsible for reconciling transport timetables, working hours, opening hours etc. - which are useful for helping the sharing process and managing the peak flows of traffic. It’s not easy to get different public institutions to cooperate, but avoiding cost of the new infrastructures thanks to optimised patterns of usage of the existing networks would be well worth the effort made by the relevant authorities.



Jean-Marc Offner

Given the lack of fluidity in the housing market, calls to bring the home and workplace closer together seem to be in vain. What's more, it is also the range of work opportunities that makes metropolitan areas so attractive. Nevertheless, this functional diversity, where economic activity and habitat coexist in the same neighbourhoods) has an important to play in balancing traffic flows.

Effective action depends on having a variety of different ways of intervening, e.g. regulating access to the major roads (with a priority for work-related travel during rush-hours), developing mobility services at a metropolitan level (rapid public transport networks, car-pooling routes) and regulating car parks according to usage.



M. M

The effectiveness of any action depends not only on the diversity but also by the level of priority when it comes to the often difficult task of having coherent transport policies. For example, regulating parking clearly has a constraining effect on car usage, but also reduces the fluidity of traffic, increases pollution emissions and leads to an increased use of motorbikes and mopeds, which are 20 times more likely to be involved in a fatal accident caused by a third party than a car!

03. How can these policies be put into action? What actors should be involved? What measures should be proposed?



Marie-Hélène Massot

Measures based on shared use already exist, and have several characteristics. They are part of a coherent combination of diverse actions in different sectors, based on the areas and people to help (social action, housing, transport, employment, etc.).

What's so unique about these measures is that the focus is on individuals and their needs in terms of employability and the financial, physical and cognitive resources to act and to be mobile. In other words, ensuring that people are physically able to access jobs is a necessary condition for exercising a profession, but is not always sufficient.

As a combination of sectoral actions, these measures mobilise many players, not only from public policy and the regional authorities, but also the private sector – residents,

associations and service providers. Both are must work to identify needs and define measures. Their budgetary efficiency lies in the pooling of resources for a given initiative, so that a better service can be provided for the same cost.



J. O

That will involve a minor revolution, not only in the legal sense, but also in terms of the way things are understood by transport authorities. Given that they are, by law, the organising authorities for urban mobility, they have yet to invent new ways of intervening in favour of facilities for sharing.



Jean-Marc Offner

There are at least two 'contracts' that need made. The first is between local society and the organisations responsible for mobility, so that local residents and users accept explicit, negotiated regulation of their travel behaviour for more fluid work-related mobility. The second is between public authorities and economic forces (companies, chambers of commerce and trade unions), in order to promote ad hoc initiatives, e.g. corporate travel plans, specialised routes and access to areas of business activity.

Paradoxically, France's Versement-Transport (a tax on employers introduced in the 1970s to provide funding for public transport) has removed all responsibility from companies for the mobility of their employees. Meanwhile, local authorities have largely designed their policies according to the interests of their inhabitant. We need to renew the dialogue between the work world and political leaders.



M. M

The financing of transport policy has been at the heart of debates in France for more than 30 years now. It's linked to a sharp increase in the cost of public services and, more recently, to the cost of car mobility. For me, we urgently need the relevant authorities to put transport services and the funding for those services at the heart of their discussions, along with the question of the increasing inequalities of access to employment, according to where people live and their economic status.

These inequalities can be addressed by a tariff policy that's based on solidarity, with the better-off supporting the less well-off, and by boosting the use of smaller and cheaper

“clean” urban cars, while at the same time guaranteeing their safety on major road networks.

Ces inégalités peuvent être traitées par une solidarité tarifaire des plus nantis envers les moins nantis, et une solidarité spatiale, en “boostant” la diffusion de petits véhicules urbains “propres” et peu chers... tout en garantissant leur sécurité sur les infrastructures routières.



Marie-Hélène Massot

Economist

Marie-Hélène Massot is a Professor of Urban Planning and Development at the Paris School of Urban Planning (EUP), at the Ecole Nationale des Ponts et chaussées (Ponts-Paris Tech) and at the University of Paris-Est (UPE), where she directs the Transport and Mobility program of the Urban Planning and Development Masters (UPEC-UPEM) and the Network Mobility Transport Masters (ENPC-UPE) programs. She heads an interuniversity degree entitled “Mobility Integration Advisor,” which she developed in collaboration with Wimoov and the Laboratory for Inclusive Mobility.

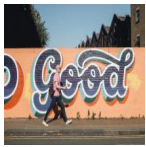


Jean-Marc Offner

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An urban planner and policy expert, Jean-Marc Offner is the managing director of a-urba, the urban development agency of Bordeaux Aquitaine, and of the Science Po Urban School. He was previously the director of the Technical, Territorial and Societies Laboratory (LATTS) and, prior to this, was head of the Urban Development-Transport-Environment Department at France’s École des Ponts et Chaussées.

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To cite this publication :

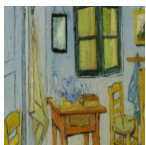
Marie-Hélène Massot et Jean-Marc Offner (24 June 2014), « Public Policies & professional mobility », Préparer la transition mobilitaire. Consulté le 17 May 2025, URL: <https://forumviesmobiles.org/en/crossed-questions/2459/public-policies-professional-mobility>



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