

TRANSPORT ECONOMISTS GROUP

Chairman's Report for 2006 - 2007

Background

This report covers the period March 2006 – February 2007, since this corresponds to the tenure of the Chairman's office, whereas the Financial Year is the Calendar Year, to enable the accounts to be presented at the Annual General Meeting in the following March.

Meetings

With the exception of the meeting on 28 June 2006, which was held in the lecture theatre at University College London, our meetings have continued to be held in the Arup Headquarters in Fitzroy Street, London. We are grateful to Arup for making their Headquarters available to us and to Peter Burgess, Shirley Brooks and in particular Daniel Percy for their help with meeting organisation and technical support.

During this period, the Group held nine meetings, as in 2004 – 2005. The June and September meetings were retained, but the December meeting was dropped to avoid conflict with members' seasonal commitments.

A key element of the programme was examining the effects of new technology on transport costs and economics. This included a meeting devoted to the impact of new technology on rail costs and a fascinating account of "pay as you drive" technology for car insurance, which has implications for road pricing systems. It will be completed next June by a meeting on the subject of the impact of new technology on rail pricing and ticketing.

Rail was once again well represented. Andrew Evans and Puff Addison stepped in at short notice in March 2006 to give us an interesting presentation on the interactions between rail and road safety taking account of whole journey effects and Tim Leunig (deputising brilliantly for Nick Crafts) explained the economic impact of railways on Victorian Britain. The impact of car ownership and the increase in travel was covered from an environmental perspective by Sir Christopher Foster and also by John Bates, who assessed alternative means of handling the high levels of ownership of cars and the falling direct costs of car ownership and travel.

Our theoretical and practical foundations were examined at the June 2006 meeting, at which Phil Goodwin and Tom Cohen discussed the paradoxes of transport economics.

In January 2007, Dave Wetzel stepped in for Bob Kiley at very short notice to give an excellent presentation on innovative methods of financing public transport, concentrating in particular on land value taxation. He was followed in February by David Thompson who gave the first of our annual presentations from senior DfT staff on current policy matters. David's topic was the Eddington Study and its links with the Stern Report.

Average attendance at meetings over this period was 32. The number of attendees ranged from 19 to 58, with the majority of meetings in the range of 30 – 35. As in the previous year, we have tried to expand the range of topics and speakers. Once again, the more specialised topics and the less well known speakers attracted lower audiences. This is understandable but a pity; the presentation by Douglas Vallgren on insurance had technological ramifications going far beyond its apparent scope.

Approximately a quarter of attendees were guests as in the previous year, the proportion of guests rising for the more popular and topical meetings as would be expected.

Organisation of Monthly Meetings

The move to the universal use of computer based presentations without overhead projection transparencies as a physical fall back has provided substantial benefits (see below), but has also created some problems.

In particular, it has proved difficult to ensure that presentations are forwarded by email in sufficient time and in one unfortunate case, a meeting was delayed by the failure of both the file transmission by email and the backup storage device.

To prevent a recurrence, we have encouraged speakers to ensure that presentations are sent by the preceding Monday evening and that two backups are brought to the meeting.

The second difficulty over the last year has been the number of speakers who have been unable to attend at short notice either due to illness or to serious and unexpected family commitments. I am very grateful to the Committee members who have helped to find replacement speakers and to the speakers themselves, including Peter White, Andrew Evans, Tim Leunig and Dave Wetzel.

The difficulties of ensuring that the date of the TEG meeting is kept free each month and that speakers, presentations and arrangements are in place has proved a major strain for all Chairmen, particularly those of us with heavy consulting commitments outside the UK. The Committee is looking at alternative ways of chairing the monthly meetings to reduce the dependence on the presence of the TEG Chairman. This should also bring some variety in meeting presentation and introduce the audience to other members of the Committee.

High Speed Train Seminar

Our improved financial performance has allowed us to recommence our former practice of holding a half day public seminar on a topical transport matter. In addition to his duties as Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Gregory Marchant took on the onerous task of arranging this seminar.

The seminar was extremely successful, attracting 46 paying attendees including 12 new members. The Committee are proposing to make this an annual event, which would also raise our standing in the profession and widen the net of our publicity.

Publications

Laurie Baker handed over editorship of the Journal to Peter Gordon during the summer and Peter has continued to uphold the previous high standard. The Committee is continuing to examine ways of further improving the quality of production but this is subject to the need to keep costs to an acceptable level.

“Acrobat” .pdf versions of presentations are now distributed to members who request them on a regular basis. We are very grateful to our speakers for allowing us to distribute their presentations in this manner.

Membership and Finance

Our Treasurer and Membership Secretary will be making a separate report. This will show that we had 144 paying members together with 11 honorary members who made presentations during the previous year. The Group continues to be in strong financial position and annual subscriptions allow us to ensure adequate reserves as well as enabling us to support longer term developments such as an annual seminar.

Future Programme

We are trying to advance the selection of topics and speakers for the coming year’s programme and the Committee has already met to discuss the programme in outline. We are hoping to continue our current mix of well known speakers on topical subjects with lesser known speakers who will open up less well known corners of transport operations and economics.

Retiring Committee Members

After two years in the role, I am not putting myself forward for re-election as Chairman.

This is in part because it has become increasingly difficult to combine the role successfully with my international work, which has included visiting twelve Asian countries over the last three months whilst arranging my schedule to avoid missing TEG

meetings. But it is also because I believe a body such as TEG benefits from a range of styles of chairmanship and that no-one should remain in the role for too long.

Jill Beardwood and Martin Laurence are also stepping down from the Committee and I thank them for their advice and support.

The remaining members will be putting themselves forward for re-election and I would like to thank them all for their hard work over the last two years. Jill and Francesca have provided very helpful advice and support as rapporteurs. Particular thanks go to those who have shouldered the most onerous tasks, Dick Dunmore (Secretary and Web Master) Gregory Marchant (Treasurer, Membership Secretary and also Seminar organiser) Laurie Baker and Peter Gordon (Editors) and Tom Cohen (Publicity).

I trust that with their support I have been able to help provide a foundation for the next stage in the development of the Group both as a learned society, in the true sense as envisioned in the Age of Enlightenment, and as a hub for the exchange of ideas and developments between practitioners, researchers and stakeholders in the field of transport economics.

Robert Cochrane

Chairman

28th March 2007