

To: The Commission on Travel Demand

Submission by Bill Wyley MA FCIHT MICE Past Chair TPS

Preamble

I suspect that this submission will be rather different from most submissions that you receive. That is because it constitutes a request that the Commission should explore, not only ways in which demand for transport may be changing, but also the validity of historic and current assumptions regarding that demand, ie the essential starting point for understanding and assessing change.

My Submission

More specifically, and as an experienced senior member of the transport planning profession, I wish to formally request that the agenda for the work of the Commission includes an objective, open-minded review of the Travel Time Budget (TTB) hypothesis. The most appropriate starting point for this review is probably Dr David Metz' paper 'The Myth of Travel Time Saving', published in Transport Reviews in 2008 and available on-line. However, that is only the most recent, so far as I am aware, of a history of relevant research and publications dating back to Marchetti (1994) and Zahavi (1973-1980).

Background

Transport Planning, certainly in so far as it is concerned with investment in infrastructure, involves two significant strands of activity – demand forecasting and scheme appraisal. While both have evolved significantly over my working lifetime of 40 years, changes have been largely incremental; and have continued to be based on the fundamental premise that travellers endeavour to reduce travelling time, and that those savings can form the principal basis for economic appraisal.

So far as the second strand of activity is concerned, the last 10 years have seen growing debate, and associated developments in methodology, regarding the appropriate balance between time savings and 'wider economic benefits', as recently illustrated by the DfT consultation on draft Wider Economic Impact guidance.

So far as demand forecasting is concerned, however, minimal consideration appears to have been given in recent years, by either government, other academics or practitioners, to the series of research based papers to which I referred above, and which directly challenge the 'accepted wisdom' that new and improved infrastructure and services result in travel time savings.

The Work of the Commission

I think it is appropriate, at this point, to explain that I am not arguing, at this time, that the TTB hypothesis is correct – I do not have access to the necessary resources to come to that conclusion - but that the hypothesis should be given rigorous consideration, on the basis of

appropriate data capture and analysis collated, specified or undertaken by the Commission. Indeed, it seems to me that data collation and analysis designed to 'understand how new types of demand are emerging and old types of demand disappearing and the influences on these processes' should also, inter alia, be able to illustrate and explain the mechanisms which have driven demand over past decades, and thus confirm or rebut the TTB hypothesis. At this point I should add that it seems possible to me that the TTB hypothesis could well help to explain the very substantial difference between observed traffic growth on peripheral motorways, such as the M25 and M62, and other categories of road.

The above does, of course, raise the question of what evidence will be brought to the Commission as a result of the current 'call' and the quality of the ensuing debate, given the planned time-frame of a single year. But that is a matter for future consideration rather than this submission.

Looking Further Ahead

If the short-term work of the Commission were to provide positive indications in relation to the TTB hypothesis, then then that would have very significant implications, not only for additional work to confirm, or otherwise, those indications, but for nearly all aspects of the current complex of demand forecasting and scheme appraisal methodologies. But that would also be a matter for future consideration, rather than this submission.

Bill Wyley 29-1-'17