2. Integrating politics and transport policy through historical institutionalism

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In the opening chapter, the editors outlined an imbalance in transport policy research. They contrasted a small number of studies exploring transport as a manifestation of political authority with a majority of studies that framed their contribution as an active part of an advisory process in transport policy. The latter see policymaking as an instrument to achieve rational and progressive ends for society at large (Van Wee et al. 2013, 302), and they examine transport policy through the insights of multiple disciplines: civil engineering, economics, psychology and geography (Van Wee 2013, 1). Politics, the process through which all these claims are mediated, and perhaps reconciled, is absent from this initial list and where it is presented later in the book, governments are said to be concerned with supervising improvements in efficiency, increasing social welfare, and ensuring fair distribution (Van Wee 2013, 283–84). In this conception of policymaking, the planner's task is to allocate resources rationally and to achieve their aims according to a proper scheme of priorities (Hart 1976, 183).

Other authors have challenged the whole concept of coordinated policymaking by politicians in transport. John Hibbs termed it a 'myth' (Hibbs 2000, 9) and called for there to be less policymaking, not more (Hibbs 2005, 9). His Hobart Paper for the Institute of Economic Affairs, 'Transport Without Politics', could be equally accurately titled 'Transport Without Policy,' as he recommended leaving transport provision to be determined by price signals from the market rather than by a controlled process (Hibbs 1982, 14–15).

This chapter challenges both these positions, arguing that Van Wee's benign rationalism is unrealistic, while Hibb's attempt to expel politics from transport is futile in a policy arena where politics is both necessary and inevitable and, therefore, needs to be understood rather than rejected. Pete Dyson and Rory Sutherland add that the present focus on utilitarianism and efficiency in transport planning has run its course and that 'Homo transporticus,' a close relative of the 'Homo economicus' beloved of classical economists, is a convenient fiction of transport design. Instead, we need to better understand how people and institutions really behave (Dyson and Sutherland 2021, 5). In this respect, I see politics as influencing not just the planning and selection of transport projects, but also how transport systems operate, who controls them, who pays for them, which services they offer at what price and, more intangibly, how and why their wider reputation and legitimacy waxes and wanes in the public eye. This holistic view of politics in transport, exceeding the limitations of rational choice and cost-benefit analysis in policymaking, has practical as well as abstract implications for researchers. In support of this position, I offer theories and methods that support a more expansive and less instrumental understanding of politics in transport, followed by an example of those approaches in two case studies.

In the first section, I present three complementary theoretical frameworks within which researchers may wish to work when they are trying to recognise, explain and integrate the role of politics in transport. I proffer historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy[1] as

theoretical precepts around which to construct a narrative and provide superstructure to voluminous data whose interpretation can easily disintegrate into a mass of parochial detail. I then deal with generating the supply of evidence which can challenge, affirm or reconceptualise what we know by proposing research methods drawn from business history. I suggest that these are particularly apposite to answering the call from the editors for a more wide-ranging, subjective, realistic, and grounded understanding of the role of politics in transport. Business historians' analysis uses numbers but is not confined to them. Archival research yields the qualitative records of organisations which provide the evidence for densely descriptive narratives encompassing the role of the personal, the political and the irrational to explicate the way that organisations really operate and make decisions (Tennent 2020, 83).

This approach shows its value in the latter section of this chapter, where I provide two much abridged case studies covering London's transport in the 1910s–30s and in the 1970s–80s. These were particularly turbulent political eras in the city, and as the highly visible provider of the capital's public transport system, London Transport (LT) was thoroughly caught up in the ideological confrontations of each period. These clashes had appreciable impacts on all the issues regarding transport provision, such as planning, operation, control, investment, fare structure, service pattern, popularity, reputation and legitimacy alluded to earlier. In both periods, but especially during the 1970s and 1980s, LT was a highly politicised organisation being explicitly used as a vehicle in the pursuit of differing political ideologies. This affected staff appointments at the highest level, investment decisions, services and fares (Garbutt 1985, 36–45). Its performance and future were widely debated in the media and in Parliament. London Transport's form and scope were ostensibly the products of rationally and openly debated policy, but I suggest a more realistic appraisal is that they were a series of often messy confrontations and compromises between rival political conceptions of what transport ought to do.

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM, HYBRIDITY AND LEGITIMACY

Historical Institutionalism

Historical institutionalism positions institutions as the consequence of previous events, which led individuals to establish formal or informal norms that are open to changing significance over time. This process allows habituated actions and meanings to become reified as objective social structures (Suddaby 2014, 111). It emphasises asymmetries of power, path dependence and the influence of ideas in the operation and development of institutions. Unlike rational choice and sociological institutionalism, historical institutionalism allows for a combination of self-interested rationality and social norm-following in explaining an individual's actions (Steinmo 2008, 126). I suggest that individuals' actions are more conditioned by the previously established norms of the institutions within which they operate and their personal interests than they are by rational analysis. Thus, a person's perspective is shaped more by their prior circumstances rather than their present conscious deliberation. Therefore, the history of institutions and the normative behaviours within them offer a useful explanatory advantage in discerning the complex, politicised and sometimes capricious nature of decision-making in transport policy. We can see this in Vigar's book *The Politics of Mobility*, where he theorises the political connections and contexts that underpin decision-making in transport policy

using examples from Lancashire, Birmingham and Kent. As an example of this complexity, in Lancashire, Vigar found that the politics of transport provision did not find expression through overtly party-political lines, as a traditional pro-road policy was, in fact, a cross-party position. The policy endured in spite of public protestations because of the power of a small policy-making elite and promises made to electorates at an individual level within the County Council (Vigar 2002, 114). In Robert Caro's book *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, he offers a carefully researched view of power politics in New York, how it affected transport policy, and the practical realities of implementation for communities (Caro 1974, 850–855). Elsewhere, Mees' *Transport for Suburbia* provides excellent examples from Switzerland and Australia on the impact of politics on the formation of transport organisations, such as the Swiss Federal Railways (Mees 2010, 129–130), the Toronto Transit Commission (Mees 2010, 95–103), and the Brisbane busway system (Mees 2010, 120–124), what they provide, and how they operate.

All these books examine past linkages, connections and associations between individuals and organisations in order to understand the politics of transport policy networks, discourses and communities. They do not view transport policy as a rational process, and Mees and Caro especially point out the detrimental effects of policies executed in spite of, rather than because of, the evidence provided by experts about the likely outcomes of what was planned. Both authors, but particularly Caro, also emphasise the role of powerful individual actors in transport policymaking and discuss the degree of agency they enjoy. In Caro's book, Robert Moses' agency in New York's transport and urban planning appeared unfettered by normal procedural or legal restraints. Even protests from New York's most influential citizens were unheeded (Caro 1974, 645–650). Caro's account from New York and Mees' description of events in Auckland, New Zealand, along with other examples from South and North America (Boone 1995, 363–365 and 1996, 25–26), depict chaos, contingency and capriciousness as the important if not the determining factors in accounts about the design and operation of transport. These narratives combine both the importance of past decisions through path dependency with the recognition that, for the most part, they are made in less-than-optimal conditions from a rational perspective. They are, I argue, realistic portrayals of how politics and transport interact.

In summary, historical institutionalism is a well-established framework that recognises social and political pressures and influences in organisations that are distinct from material and technical factors (Suddaby 2014, 100). Acknowledging these factors and explicitly building mechanisms to capture them in research design lends itself to addressing the shortcomings of rationalist approaches to transport provision and policy detailed by the editors in the opening chapter.

Hybridity

Hybridity offers a series of models that account for and help explain the frequently muddled structures and purposes of transport organisations (Table 2.1).

Hybrids span an administratively awkward space in governance between the public and private spheres, which is a dilemma frequently encountered in transport and with obvious consequences for political involvement and interaction. A hybrid organisation can combine the functions and characteristics of private, public and charitable bodies (Billis 2010, 48 and Greve et al. 1999, 129–131). The multiple forms they appear in combine their diverse origins

Table 2.1   *Taxonomy of hybridity*

Taxonomy	Privatisation (whole/part)	Public Body	Contract Agency
Definition	Former state-owned company now wholly or partly privatized.	At arm's length but publicly funded.	Quasi autonomous but overseen by government department
Finances	Capital market, stock exchange	State budget	State budget
Ministerial Responsibility	External regulator	Delegated	Directly controlled franchise or concession
Public Task	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public Domain	Partial	Yes	Yes

Source: Taken and adapted from Greve, Carsten et al. 1999."Quangos: What's in a Name? Defining Quangos from a Comparative Perspective." *Governance,* 12 (1): 129–46.
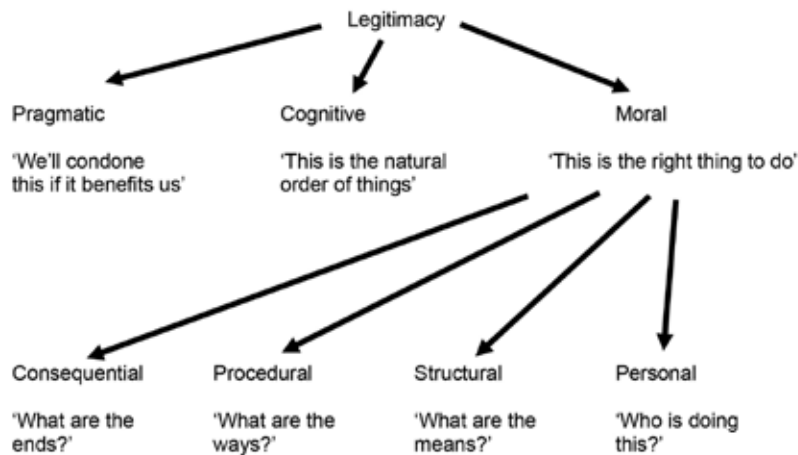
and varying blends of institutional logics,[2] and the resulting diversity of hybrids lets the researcher draw on a wide evidential and comparative span as well as offer precise explanations for events rooted in specific circumstances (Battaliana and Lee 2014, 397–400).

Legitimacy

Earlier, we saw that rational policy planners were expected to allocate resources according to a proper scheme of priorities (Hart 1976, 183). But what makes a scheme proper? Public and personal attitudes and perceptions can be hard to discern, though they may be found in the media, in personal correspondence, and in formal reporting systems when compared over a long period of time. A further problem is how to structure and explain what may amount to a mass of seemingly unrelated personal or circumstantial details in a way that offers a degree of reliability and intelligibility. Policies are generally explicitly expressed and, therefore, their evolution is clearer to follow, but we are still left with the question of how they came to be accepted internally in the first place and why they were then received in the way they were by external audiences. Exploring legitimacy is one way of doing this.

Legitimacy is a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions (Suchman 1995, 574). It is a generalised perception because it is created by a group of observers, who, though they may individually entertain doubts about single aspects of an entity's actions, are nevertheless content to accept or support what they collectively perceive as a general behavioural pattern (Suddaby 2017, 451). Suchman then breaks the meaning of 'legitimacy' into three: pragmatic, cognitive and moral. Within the moral category, he builds on Weber to construct a further set of four subdivisions (Figure 2.1).

Pragmatic legitimacy is the simplest to consider. This is the self-interest of the immediate audience, asking itself whether a given pattern of behaviour is sanctionable because it benefits them. Cognitive legitimacy proposes a less instrumental and conscious state of affairs on the part of the audience. Instead, legitimacy is the product of how well the individual, organisation or idea is either congruent with preconceived frameworks and expectations, or

Figure 2.1   Suchman's Taxonomy of Legitimacies

it has gone one step further and has become such a part of the natural order of things that alternatives become unthinkable. In this way, even quite irrational or counterproductive policies may acquire legitimacy simply by virtue of their longevity. Lastly, we come to the issue of moral legitimacy. Unlike cognitive legitimacy, moral legitimacy is conferred consciously and deliberatively, and unlike pragmatic legitimacy, the calculation is not instrumental (how does this benefit me?) but concerns the wider social context of activities (is this the right thing to do?). Within this schema, Suchman identifies four separate permutations. He begins with consequential legitimacy, which is a moral judgement based on the evaluation of outputs. Next comes procedural legitimacy: moral discernment based on the assessment of techniques; then structural legitimacy, which takes organisational activity one step further back than procedural legitimacy and asks whether the organisation is doing the right thing rather than doing things right. Lastly, there is personal legitimacy, resting on the charisma of individuals, about which Suchman says the least as he sees it as transitory, hard to objectify and idiosyncratic (Suchman 1995, 581–582).

To answer these challenges, Suddaby et al. identify three approaches that investigators have taken (Suddaby 2017, 457–458). The first is the density of population. By this, they mean the more legitimate an organisational form or practice is, the more frequently that form or practice will appear in a population of organisations. Here, we can chart the rise, proliferation and fall of certain types of transport organisations as policies come in and out of favour. This simple, quantitative approach has been augmented. As well as counting organisations, researchers have conducted content analysis to count the frequency of conversations in the media about behaviours and practices and whether they are referred to in a positive, neutral or negative way (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, 42–43). Lastly, researchers have looked at regulators' authorisations. The approval of a regulatory body is, of course, a powerful symbol of legitimacy.

However, the mere fact of the application and existence of a regulator for that sphere of activity is in itself indicative of controversy. Whatever activity is happening, it clearly no longer resides in the cognitive domain where legitimacy is so natural that it is unspoken and undebatable if it is a matter of regulation.

All these measurements are measurements by proxy. It has to be so when legitimacy itself, even when argued as a 'possession' of organisations, has no physical form. The measurement of contingent, socially constructed relationships between entities and their environments will always pose considerable problems. But that does not make the consequences of perceived illegitimacy any less real, as successive chairmen of LT discovered when they were removed from office by their political masters (Garbutt 1985, 60–62), or for Robert Moses when his methods were investigated by the media (Caro 1974, 980–984).

While the loss of legitimacy has real consequences for individuals, policies and institutions, acquiring it is also a long and painstaking process. In their carefully researched historical study of London's governance, Pimlott and Rao show that establishing centralised institutions to provide public services like transport and making policy at a city level has been an extremely difficult process. Their argument is that creating a sense of overarching metropolitan community in London was frustrated through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries by the fragmented, diverse and inchoate nature of London's growth (Pimlott and Rao 2002, 22–27). The result was that the policy process tended to be dominated by parochial rather than rational perspectives. In the face of hostile, pre-existing, localised interests, successive city-wide authorities or rationalising, overarching policies struggled to gain or retain legitimacy. The parochial interests were portrayed by progressives as venal and corrupt, but Pimlott and Rao point out that they also accurately reflected a metropolis that did not conceive of itself as a unified community with common needs. Other historical studies, like Robson's and Travers', concur that this, in turn, resulted in frequent structural revisions and changes of policy direction (Travers 2004, 41–42) and meant that policy making as a rational, objective process was highly likely to be stymied from the outset (Robson 1939, 21–24).

In summary, the use of historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy as conceptual frameworks enables a mass of qualitative data from the archive and the political status of transport institutions to be carefully elucidated rather than worked out by implication from economic data or assumed to result from the operation of rationalist cost-benefit analysis. By understanding the political parameters of the authorising environment within which policy networks, arenas and discourses work, we can much more accurately and realistically create the 'Overton Window' of transport policy debate. This requires going into the details of the organisations themselves at the managerial level and picking apart the interplay of goals, values and interests. Struggles for legitimacy, strategies and norms have real-world consequences, such as new infrastructure, patterns of service provision and fares. These themselves can be observed over long, periodised transport histories such as those covering the history of British Rail by Terry Gourvish. History contextualised in such a way links commuters' daily reality to managerial decision-making and then further to political environments. As the borders of state and market are always shifting, extensive archival historical sources exist both within and outside the context of transport history in numerous public and private institutions. Moreover, these are generated constantly and accumulate extended antecedents charting the ebb and flow of power relations (Lipartito 2014, 299–300). Acknowledging and incorporating these frameworks into the process of analysis and narrative building lends credence to thick

historical description, accentuating realism over elegance and difference and detail over formulas (Scranton 1997, 3).

Constraints

Historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy come with limitations. They assume the existence of institutions and accentuate their role. Furthermore, linking these changes to patterns in the concept of legitimacy means encompassing a huge variety of meanings attached to that word and is fearsomely difficult to definitively prove (Suchman 1995, 572). The constructs that all these ideas employ to analyse their development, such as the state, markets, professions, etc., are themselves open to different interpretations in different periods (Bucheli and Kim 2014, 257). Framing transport within an institutional setting may place ethnographic research outside the organisation concerning the individual experience of travel, at a discount. In addition, the archival research on which this approach relies requires the existence of quotidian data-gathering mechanisms within organisations. This restricts research to certain time periods and, even within those periodisations, relies on the consistency, or otherwise, of record keeping (Decker 2013, 157). It also privileges larger organisations that generate a volume of records, have the means to store them, and are perceived as important enough to be worth keeping.

These are all serious problems which the researcher needs to account for in applying this approach, should they choose to use it. Nevertheless, alternatives offering more theoretical fluency and reliability can be in danger of creating narratives and prescriptions which I argue are insufficiently relatable to actual experience (Gill et al. 2018, 193 and Tennent 2020, 83) and so less useful to the policy practitioner. The products of archival research, strained through the sieves of historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy offer alternative analytical frameworks to universal economic laws and locate transport in diverse social and political circumstances, facilitating the analysis of transport through politics. I remain an advocate of them.

CASE STUDIES

I now turn to two case studies to illustrate what the insights from employing these methods can look like. In each, I will refer back to the three conceptual pillars discussed previously: historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy. Through them, I will explore an alternative, politically orientated perspective of the evolution of London's transport system in two distinct periods: 1913–33 and 1970–84. Naturally, this is 'cherry picking', though I argue that the influence of politics is always discernible in institutions to a greater or lesser degree. It therefore makes sense in illustrating a point to use particularly intense episodes of transport policy activity where the irrational hand of political influence is very visible.

Politics and the Unification of London's Transport 1913–1933

The development of London's transport for much of its history has been couched in terms of an almost inevitable march towards integration, which finally occurred in 1933 (Barker & Robbins 1974, 1–11). London is often chided for being slow in comparison to the policies

of its European neighbours to recognise and act upon the seemingly obvious benefits that would arise from economies of scale and efficiencies in operation related to the centralised coordination of transport. The numerous private companies that built the majority of the system are derided as counter-productive, self-interested and inefficient, and the long journey to unification is regarded with exasperation and a certain amount of condescension (Barker and Robbins 1974, 273; Croome and Jackson 1993, 215–216; Wolmar 2012, 254). This verdict is made possible by ignoring issues raised by historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy and treating politics as a mechanism that should only deliver on the basis of rational, cost-benefit analyses, which are then manifested as transport policies.

Extensive archival research coupled with the three pillars of analysis reveals a more interesting and realistic picture of the interplay between politics and London's transport. It shows why Londoners, the press and politicians were unwilling to hand over monopoly powers in transport provision to a small set of senior transport managers simply on the basis of claims about unification equating to greater efficiency. Their scepticism was visible in the newspapers and in Parliament (Editorial, 1912; House of Commons Select Committee, 1913) where, through a mixture of legislation and regulatory adjudication, efficiency gains via agglomeration were weighed against the possibility of abuse of monopoly power. London's transport had developed in the nineteenth century as a patchwork of private enterprise with minimal regulation under laissez-faire. By the twentieth century, the need for some central direction was understood, but the existing institutions were historically shaped by the long-standing commitment to free-market competition, whose sheer duration had conferred on it a sense of permanence and 'Britishness' (Edgerton 2018, 10–13). This meant that the results of governmental and municipal adjudication varied: In 1907, a proposal to bring London's underground railways under the control of the municipality was rejected, as was a similar proposal in 1920 to allow the city authorities to run buses. But elsewhere, private underground railway and bus companies were allowed to merge where it was thought that financial viability and ongoing service were at stake (Barker and Robbins 1974, 164–166). Some of the reasoning was grounded in logical critiques about whether the relationship between efficiency and centralisation was really as straightforward as its supporters claimed. Other motives were rooted in subjective prejudices. Winning legitimacy for a transport monopoly was not automatic and needs to be understood in the context of the complex politics of the period.

The first issue revealed by archival research is that the centralisers' case for efficiency was a good deal less impressive when put into practice after 1933 than its proponents had hoped for and claimed (Fowler and Gillett 2021, 500–506). Since this could not have been proven either way before the creation of the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933, rational cost-benefit analysis was only one factor in play, and a best guess at that. The main debate shaping policy unfolded as the result of social prejudices, serendipitous events and turbulent politics. These conflicts are visible in the way that forms of legitimacy were contested between interest groups. For example, the popular reluctance to grant monopoly powers over London's transport ran deep because of very legitimate suspicions about the financial probity of former key figures in London's transport development, such as the American Charles Yerkes, which seamlessly intertwined fears about Britain's diminishing status in the world and the control of key infrastructure in the face of great power confrontation (Marin 2016, 38–39; Le Queux 1906, 4–6; Lentin 2013, 47). Less reasonably, the German-Jewish origins of Yerkes' successor as Chairman of what became the London Transport Combine, Edgar Speyer, made him a hate figure who was driven out of Britain and stripped of his citizenship after the First World

War (Liebman 2015, 68–69). Speyer's services to improving transport were ignored, but his defenestration reinforced the idea that London's transport was controlled by untrustworthy foreigners determined on amalgamation to further their own interests (Hansard, 1918 and 1920). These acute problems with personal and social legitimacy, which had spilt over into perceptions of the organisation, had to be overcome by Sir Albert Stanley, Speyer's successor, before he could be entrusted with the responsibility for the capital's transport system (Fowler 2019, 96). Having mastered the social and political prejudice against Americans and achieved elevation to the peerage as Lord Ashfield in 1920, Stanley was fortunate that events outside his control then assisted him in further pursuing the case for unification. Here, he had to tread a careful policy line that favoured centralisation of control, but still under private direction. This pointed to a hybrid organisation which allowed for a public service ethos but preserved private autonomy over finance.

He was fortunate that during 1923–24 a flood of new, small independent bus companies caused chaos on London's streets. Ashfield was able to contrast 'free-market anarchy' with his proposals for 'efficient coordination'. Transport chaos in the form of congestion, dangerous driving, and service unpredictability caused public anger and a threatened strike over falling staff wages, which panicked a minority Labour government into hastily legislating the independents out of business in favour of Ashfield's privately run transport conglomerate (Barker and Robbins 1974, 209–211). The case for unification gained significant momentum partly by rational debate and partly by social and political approbation, but also by an unforeseen and historically contingent episode.

The final piece of the political jigsaw that eventually allowed unification was navigating the legislative gridlock that arose out of the turbulent parliamentary politics of the 1920s. In 1922, the Conservatives won a general election. Barely a year later, they lost the 1923 election, which resulted in the first-ever Labour government, though ruling as a minority. The Conservatives then won again in the 1924 general election, and some progress was now made towards getting a London Transport Bill in favour of a unified provider through Parliament, only for the Conservatives to lose in the election of 1929. Despite protestations to the contrary from the new Minister of Transport, Labour only slightly adapted the Bill as the key transport Trade Union leaders involved had already made a private agreement with Lord Ashfield, showing considerable party disloyalty (Donoghue 2001, 120–121). But Labour lost power in turn in 1931. Finally, the Conservatives re-adopted the Bill, and with some further minor alterations, the London Passenger Transport Act became law in 1933.

As we have seen, the path to unifying London's transport was certainly long, tortuous, and innately political. It was the product of the resolution of many competing interests, many of which were illogical, unreasonable and parochial, rather than the result of a rational calculation of which policy would deliver the greatest benefit to the greatest number of travellers. We can understand what happened by using the concepts explored earlier to see that for historic institutional reasons, however rational it might be, it was always highly unlikely that London's transport would become municipalised. Too many vested interests stood against it as London's political landscape was too historically committed to free enterprise at an individual and institutional level. This situation shaped people and politics, meaning that London Transport was always likely to be a hybrid organisation, retaining private sector institutional characteristics despite its public role. The concept of a monopoly was not only too illegitimate to gain acceptance until the free market was discredited, but it also had to wait until a suitably socially legitimate personality to run the organisation appeared. Employing the concept

of legitimacy allows us to see how important the issue was at a social and political level in allowing London's transport to become London Transport.

Politics and the Disaggregation of London's Transport 1970–1984

Earlier, when discussing historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy, we noted that the effects of the fragmentary nature of London's governance and its commitment to laissez-faire on transport policy could be well traced through employing those three concepts. This meant that attempts to enact rationalising policies or create all-encompassing political institutions at a city level were considered illegitimate intrusions into the established powers of London's vestries, boroughs and the uniquely powerful Corporation of the City of London (Pimlott and Rao 2002, 24–25). Transport was one battlefield in a series of clashes over what constituted legitimate political involvement in the provision of public services. Before 1933, London's municipal authorities were mostly excluded from providing a full range of transport modes. A majority of the tram networks did belong to them, but even here, their geographical scope was incomplete as the widespread fear that they facilitated working-class mobility proved a more effective influence on policymaking than a reasoned debate about an efficient and comprehensive transport provision (Turner and Tennent 2021, 413; Wolmar 2016, 10–11). Additional policy proposals that the municipality should acquire buses and railways were rejected not only by a conservative Parliament, which was suspicious of an overmighty, radical city-wide authority (Robson 1939, 87) but also by a self-denying majority on the London County Council itself, who associated democratic, popular policymaking with financial profligacy (Chandler 2007, 134; Fowler 2019, 67). The result in 1933 was a hybrid organisation, the London Passenger Transport Board, which combined the features of both a state and a private organisation in an effort to satisfy all the stakeholders in the system: passengers, investors and trade unions while keeping local democracy at arm's length. Therefore, after 1933, London's local authorities were wholly excluded from providing transport, though they continued to deliver many other public services. This was felt to be an anomaly, especially by those who thought that unified control at the city level would facilitate rational, enlightened, and progressive transport policymaking (Hart 1976, 43–45). In 1970, having seen two decades of declining usage and legitimacy under the Ministry of Transport and then a quasi-independent, non-governmental organisation,[3] London's transport was given over to the Greater London Council (GLC) with a brief to turn around what was seen as a failing and increasingly unpopular organisation. The balance of institutional logic now tilted firmly towards the state.

On paper, placing London Transport under the GLC should have brought about rational planning and policy coordination for transport at the city level. In line with those expectations, in 1963, the GLC was charged with producing a 'Greater London Development Plan' (GLDP). The GLDP's view of transport at this stage envisaged a central planner's dream of an extensive urban motorway network via a series of five motorway ring roads creating a 'motorway box' around London. However, a combination of voter revolts against large-scale housing demolitions, spiralling costs and resistance to the GLC by the boroughs made this top-down solution unworkable (Hart 1976, 159; Hatherley 2020, 101–107). In 1973, Labour gained control of the GLC on a radical, pro-public transport platform, and the price of oil quadrupled in the same year. The original GLDP transport policies were rendered redundant. Labour promptly replaced the chairman of LT with one of their own former ministers and enacted a policy of rapidly reducing fares on public transport, hinting that they eventually intended to

make it free at the point of use. Under these policies, London Transport would no longer be a hybrid organisation, but an explicitly public one. This was a considerable departure from its former history as an institution, and while this idea did enjoy legitimacy amongst many Londoners, the archives reveal a serious escalation in tensions beginning from this moment onwards between the travelling public, the leadership of LT, rival Conservative and Labour political factions, the GLC, central government, the London boroughs and key individuals in all those organisations.

I pause here to pose a question: is it realistic, or even possible, to construct a rational model that usefully explains policies as they now unfolded in London's transport policy in the years following 1973? Douglas Hart has produced a table comparing policy-making characteristics which provides a useful exposition of how what he terms cohesive, factored and diffused policy-making were all observable in this period (Hart 1976, 198). None of them, though, operated in isolation. Instead, they all operated in conjunction with one another in what he calls a 'process approach', involving all three, which was the result of the complex interaction of ideas, organisations and political interests (Hart 1976, 197). It is hard to see much 'process' in the process approach, though. It appears more as a collection of accurately observed and enduring themes in London's transport policy-making which interacted with each other in different ways at different times. The archives' store of records corroborates and augments this story, presenting a situation where layer upon layer of political viewpoints, personalities and contingencies interact with one another through the structures of institutions that were themselves changing internally. It is true that there were also formalised procedures, quotidian rhythms and linear cycles in the production of policy, but any account neglecting the effects of exigencies is sorely lacking.

After 1973, the former consensus about the provision of transport in London, which viewed commuters as the grateful recipients of a service provided by rational, neutral, beneficent but remote and unaccountable experts, collapsed. The falling quality of the service, rising prosperity and expectations were such that the public was no longer content to be treated as passive 'passengers' (GLC DG PRE 133). I see this as an institutional crisis where London Transport was losing its informal social license, that is to say, its wider legitimacy to operate. There were several possibilities about what might happen next, but I argue that the convictions of different sides in a political battle over legitimacy, each appealing to an understanding of London's transport rooted in historical values, beliefs and assumptions about its role as an institution, played a much bigger role in how policy was constructed than did rational analysis.

Politics in the GLC now entered a new and far more confrontational phase. Labour sought to rebuild LT's legitimacy by reconceptualising passengers as active citizens, reducing fares and widening provision to make transport a universal social good, perhaps even free at the point of access, by transferring investment and operational costs to property taxation (MT 198–42a, 1976; MT198–45b, 1981). In the early 1980s, they also attempted to restructure London Transport to make it more democratically accountable (MT 198–165c, 1983; Grigsby 1983) This alarmed the transport professionals who traditionally ran the Board of LT, many Londoners, the suburban borough councils and central government who saw LT through a different set of political perspectives.

In 1977, the Conservatives won control of the GLC, and in 1978 they also took control of the boroughs with a clear brief to reform transport (Grigsby, 1977). The Conservative strategy to re-legitimise LT was to re-position passengers as consumers and ensure that London Transport met its operational costs from fare revenue (GLC DG PRE 132/002). After 1984,

they would go further, removing LT from the GLC and creating a new body, London Regional Transport (LRT), which was directly controlled by central government with an explicit commitment to cost minimisation and meeting effective demand (LT 82–17/002 and 008).

Therefore, the development of transport policy in London from 1970–84 can be presented as a (fairly) smooth arc where a public revolt against a bureaucracy that attempted to neutrally mediate between all rival claims gave way to an experiment with a more collectivist, civic interpretation of transport policy-making and provision before settling for a market-orientated framework within which to enact policy.

However, while this description captures the essentials of the politics in play, it still misses the atmosphere of frenetic chaos and clashing personalities. It is worth noting in this respect that between 1970–84, Labour won the 1973 GLC elections, lost the election in 1977, but won again in 1981 before having transport provision removed from them by central government in 1984. At the same time, there were also London Borough Council elections in 1974, 1978 and 1982, and nationwide general elections in 1974, 1979 and 1983, all of which impacted what transport policies were considered legitimate.

We can see that from 1979 onwards, there was a gradual paradigm shift towards neoliberal policies, especially at a national level (Hall 1993, 278–279). There is evidence in the National Archive that by the early 1980s, central government senior civil servants regarded the GLC as an inappropriate and illegitimate body to be making transport policy at all (MT 198–45a, 1981; Mclain, 1982). However, we should be careful of drawing too neat a picture of the policy trends of the period because until the abolition of the GLC, there were contrary municipal forces at work against the prevailing direction of central government policy, and, until mid-1982, considerable uncertainty about whether the Conservative government of 1979 would be re-elected.

Meanwhile, within LT, successive leaders of the GLC perfunctorily removed the chairman in 1974, 1978 and again in 1980, while to add to the sense of confusion, between 1979–81 a major and very personalised dispute broke out within the Board between senior management, the GLC, and an external watchdog appointed to investigate managerial efficiency (Grigsby, 1978; LT 101–119). This spilled into the mainstream media and led to rather sensationalised allegations of profligacy which, whilst substantially disproved, nevertheless de-legitimised the traditional management style of LT and led to the chairman's enforced resignation (Baily 1979). Politics and personalities ensured that London's transport policies swung wildly between extremes in this period. Perhaps the most notorious episode was the 'Fares Fair' confrontation over policy from 1981–83, where fares fell by a third, then rose by 96%, before finally falling by a quarter in less than two years (Garbutt 1985, 67–73). In summary, we can see that the hybrid organisational model of LT, where public and private logics were juxtaposed, came under intense pressure in the 1970s. The introduction of full public control via the municipality in 1970 undoubtedly made political fault lines over policymaking more explicit. There then followed a political battle over which collection of values, beliefs, events and habituated actions derived from its historical legacy should become dominant and constitute the true 'legitimate' form that LT should take, and the policies that it should pursue. Archival research into organisational records and media of the period strongly suggests that this process of politics and policymaking can scarcely be understood as a techno-rational process, neutrally incorporated into a decision-making system embedded into logical and linear patterns of change.

CONCLUSION

Dyson and Sutherland argue that transport planners make decisions as a group, sharing data, analysing it rationally, conforming to previously agreed objectives and prioritising objectivity. But these processes emphasise behaviours that not only give them the false appearance of rationality but also make them the best planners for an imaginary 'Homo Transporticus,' rather than actual people (Dyson and Sutherland 2021, 14–16). We can see the pretense of rationality in many of the extant histories of London's transport, which are dominated by descriptive, chronological accounts emphasising the physical growth of transport networks and the development of the vehicles and rolling stock that used them. As a counterbalance, in this chapter, I have briefly sketched an alternative history, emphasising a real-world analysis of how decisions actually occur. These problems of rationality and objectivity are acknowledged in the final chapter of T*he Transport System and Transport Policy* (Van Wee 2013, 380). To address those problems, I have argued that rationalist approaches to transport policy are incomplete and based on assumptions about the innate stability of institutions and the rationality of decision-makers, which are misplaced. In this chapter, I have offered a method of research and three conceptual pillars—historical institutionalism, hybridity and legitimacy, which I think have the capacity to provide a more nuanced, political and ultimately realistic interpretation and understanding of what truly happens in transport policy. The examples I have provided are vivid and unusually turbulent episodes, but they serve to illustrate a point: Transport policies are made by fallible human beings acting within changing political environments, institutions, systems and procedures. Our research should be directed towards explicating and anticipating those fallibilities rather than towards perfecting systems.

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NOTES

1. Historical institutionalism is the socio-historical process by which habituated actions and meanings become reified as objective social structures (Suddaby 2014, 111). Hybrid organisations combine the functions and characteristics of private, public and charitable bodies (Greve 1999, 130). Legitimacy is a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms (Suchman 1995, 574).
2. Institutional logics are held to be the dominant norms, values and behavioural expectations enforcing legitimacy, authority and identity (Skelcher and Smith 2015, 436).
3. The short-lived London Transport Board, 1963–1969.

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