

# A new regional élan?

## Transport investment in the re-scaling competition state

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TSU Seminar Series – Politics of Infrastructure: Spineless Development?

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# Argument in a nutshell

- ✓ Across England LEP formation seems to rekindle **a pro-growth 'dispositif'** in transport planning focused on transport infrastructure investment at the regional level.
- ✓ This comes with **benefits** but also major **risks** – in particular the cancelling out of environmental and social benefits of recent local policies and grassroots initiatives regarding urban/regional mobility.
- ✓ These developments are **not inevitable** – regional differences across the UK are likely to intensify.



# Structure of the talk

Three parts:

- a) Academic perspectives on the rise of LEPs
- b) Our research project on innovations in urban mobility
- c) Selected findings on LEPs and transport planning from the project



# Academic perspectives on LEPs

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History and concerns

# History

LEP formation as latest instalment in **ongoing state restructuring** in England

LEPs often seen as Coalition Gov't's replacement of Regional Development Authorities instituted by Labour:

- a) Place-based approach to regional development & rebalancing of national economy
- b) Attempt to increase regions' competitiveness in globalised economy through localism

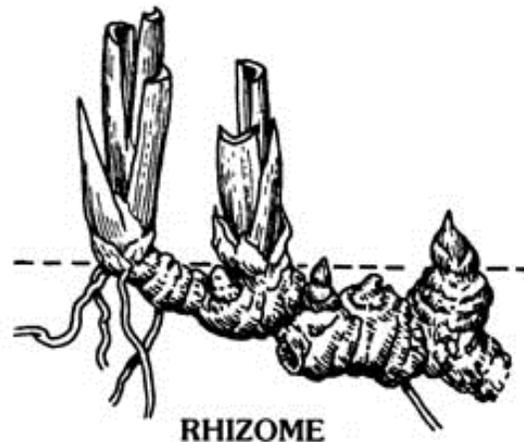
**But:**

- a) RDA disbandment already begun under Labour
- b) EU role is key – subsidiarity and territorial cohesion enshrined in Lisbon Treaty & requirement for money from European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)

# A new geographical imagination?

The Coalition Government's idea has been to:

- a) Align geography of decision making (governance) with that of economic flows (functional economic space)
- b) Move from stable, hierarchical & territorial structures to fluid, flat networks involving multiple stakeholders

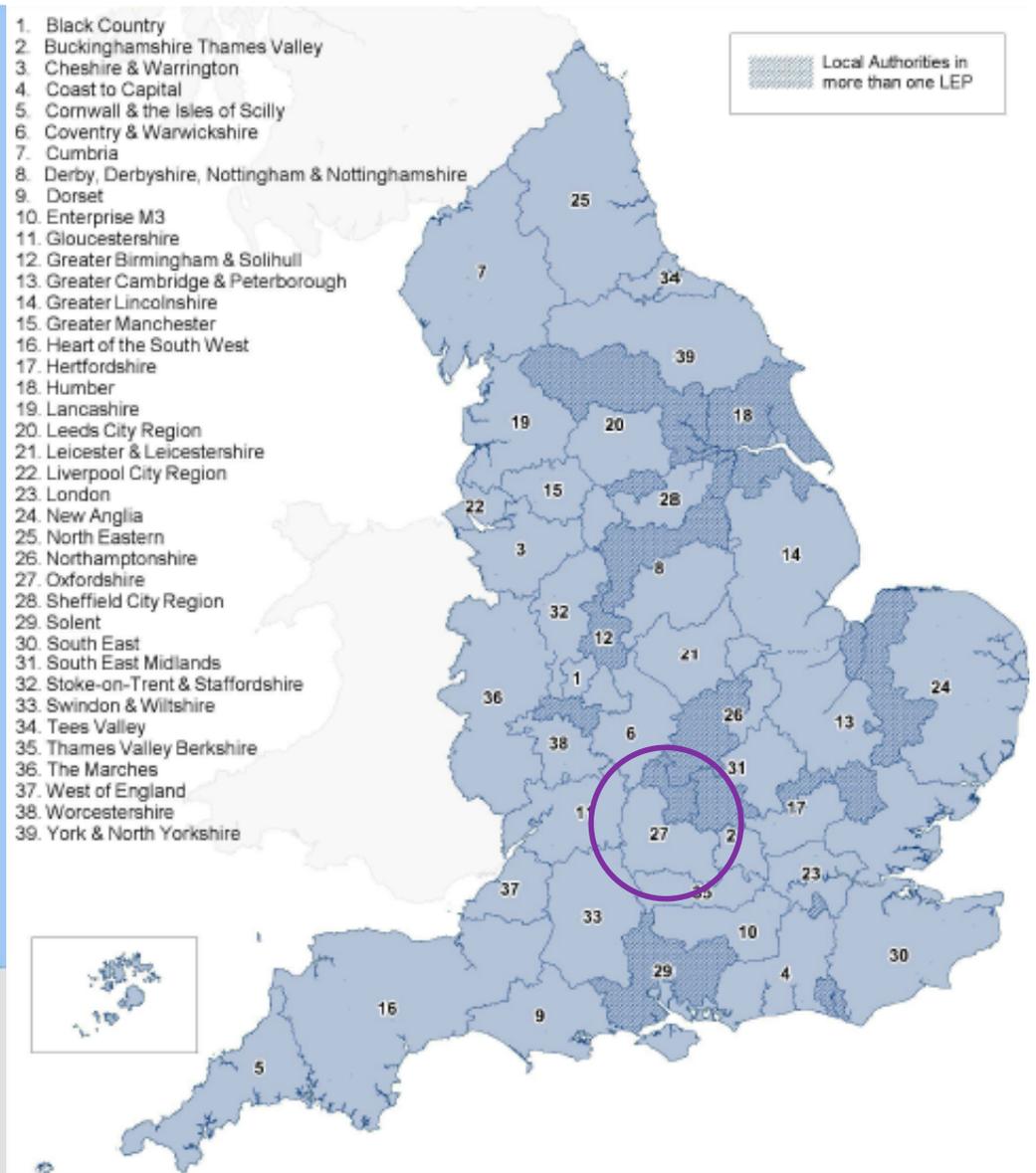


## 9 RDAs (1988-2012)

## 39 LEPs (2010- )



1. Black Country
2. Buckinghamshire Thames Valley
3. Cheshire & Warrington
4. Coast to Capital
5. Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly
6. Coventry & Warwickshire
7. Cumbria
8. Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham & Nottinghamshire
9. Dorset
10. Enterprise M3
11. Gloucestershire
12. Greater Birmingham & Solihull
13. Greater Cambridge & Peterborough
14. Greater Lincolnshire
15. Greater Manchester
16. Heart of the South West
17. Hertfordshire
18. Humber
19. Lancashire
20. Leeds City Region
21. Leicester & Leicestershire
22. Liverpool City Region
23. London
24. New Anglia
25. North Eastern
26. Northamptonshire
27. Oxfordshire
28. Sheffield City Region
29. Solent
30. South East
31. South East Midlands
32. Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire
33. Swindon & Wiltshire
34. Tees Valley
35. Thames Valley Berkshire
36. The Marches
37. West of England
38. Worcestershire
39. York & North Yorkshire



# Academics' concerns

**Path dependencies:** many LEPs are political constructs rather than reflecting functional economic spaces ⇒ are many of them **under-bounded** and **lacking fluidity**?

**Partial participation:** Stakeholders strongly advocating social and environmental causes are underrepresented on LEP boards

**Capability issues:**

- a) LEPs have to work in complex field of centralising and decentralising forces – e.g. BIS & DfT vs DCLG
- b) Many LEPs have not (yet) developed the capacity to deliver place-specific visions, aspirations and strategies



# Research project on innovations in urban mobility

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A short introduction

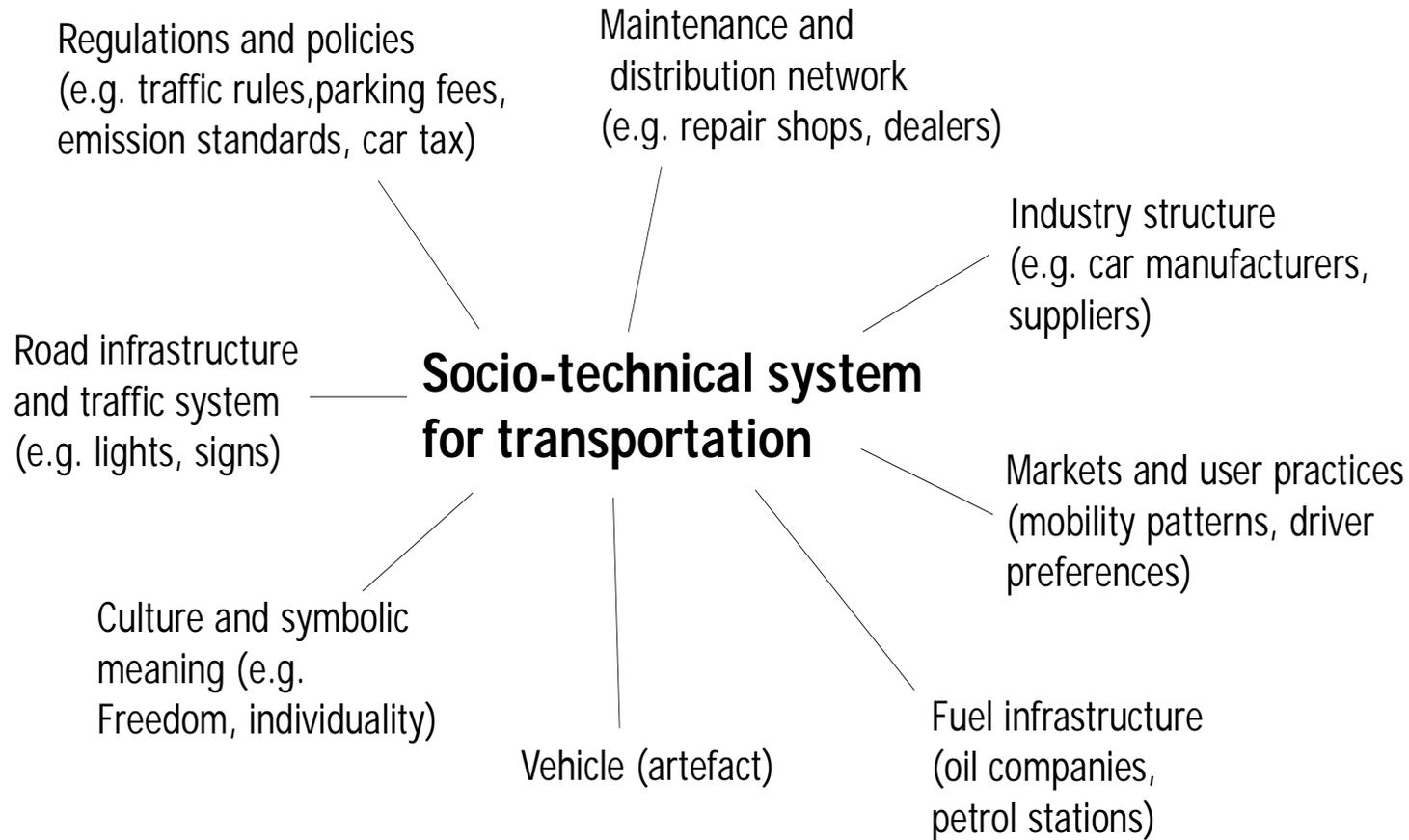
# Centre on Innovation and Energy Demand (CIED)

RCUK funded End Use Energy Demand (EUED) Centre involving universities of Sussex, Manchester & Oxford

A sociotechnical approach:

- **System transitions** are needed in multiple domains (incl. transport) for meeting 2008 Climate Change Act objectives and EU Energy Demand Reduction Targets
- Transitions can be triggered by **low energy innovations (LEIs)** = new technologies, organisational arrangements and behaviours that are expected to reduce energy consumption and/or increase energy efficiency





# Our research project

**Aims** to understand why LEIs in urban mobility emerge & flourish more easily in some places than in others

Focuses on three **city regions** besides London:

- **Oxford**: rapidly growing knowledge economy, very strong bus sector, strong links with automobile industry, city plus county council, stark differences in political orientation
- **Brighton**: rapidly growing knowledge economy, very strong bus sector, national leader on cycling, unitary authority, Green Party
- **Liverpool**: fastest growing northern city, enduring social problems, strong links transport & social policy, Combined Authority formation, regional transport authority in flux



# Relevance to discussion on LEPs

Near future of LEI in mobility in Oxford city-region is **linked** with that of OxLEP:

- a) Dependence on national funding streams (e.g. LSTF, GBF, CCAG)
- b) Some LEI streams are linked to LEP funding – this has strengthened the economic growth orientation of bids for national funding
- c) Cancelling out of reductions in energy consumption through LEIs by LEP facilitated investments in transport infrastructure?

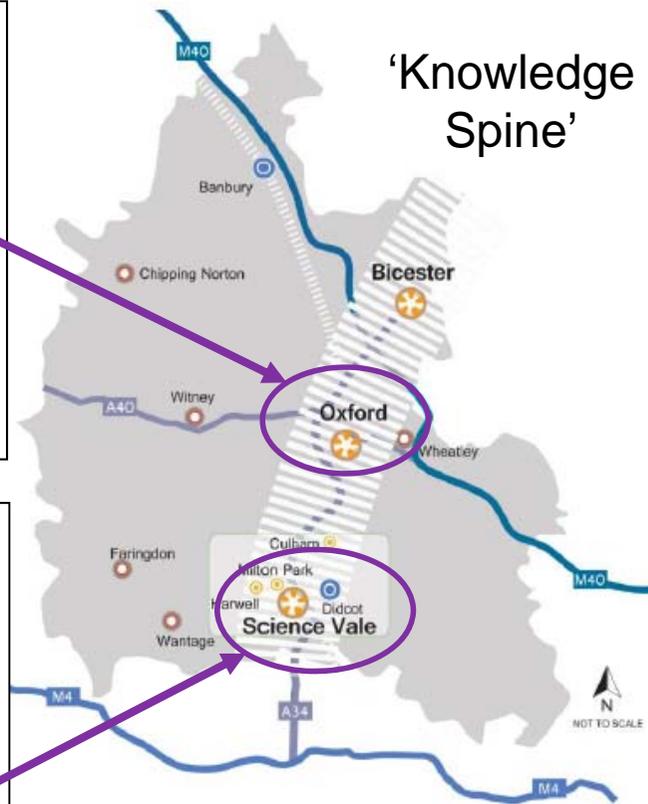
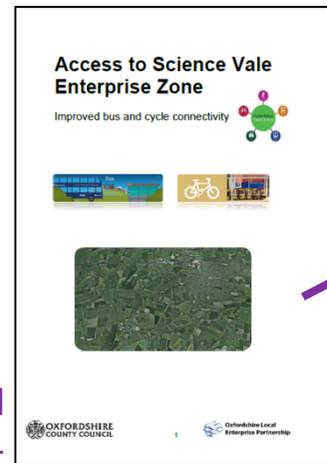


# Institutionalising pro-growth LEIs

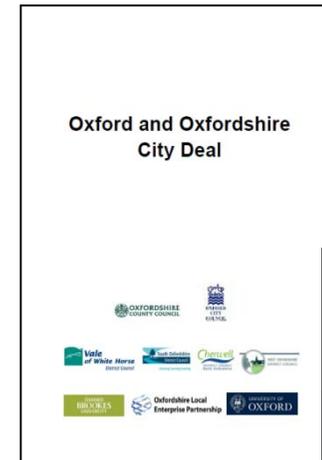
LSTF bid  
2011



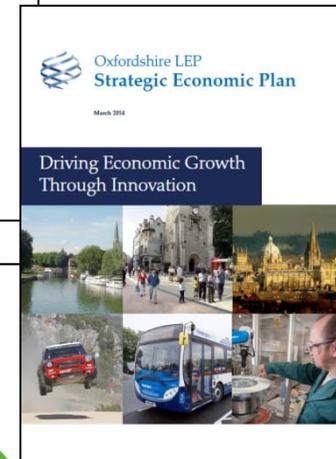
LSTF bid  
2014



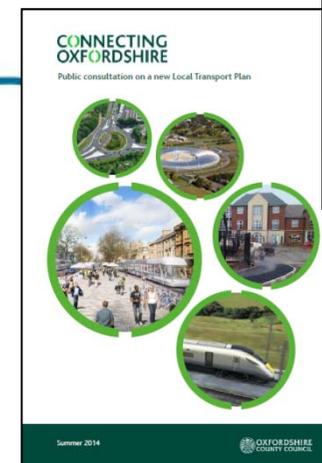
2014



2014



LTP consultation  
2014



# LEPs and transport planning

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Some empirical findings

# Positives of LEP formation

In 2 out of 3 regions – Brighton and Oxford – the changes that have come with LEP formation tend to be **appreciated** by local politicians and transport policymakers because of:

- a) The (further) institutionalisation of the **business case** – i.e. the need to convince stakeholders will protect policy makers from the temptation of pursuing projects that are doomed to ‘fail’
- b) The re-scaling and enhancement of sub-state spaces enhances **cooperation** and implies greater **agency** in decision-making

# On public sector temptations

*“if you’ve got more business-led things with more of a commercial kind of backing, then you are less likely to have things just failing because we maybe are often a bit like oh let’s do this lovely thing which is really nice and it’s the right thing to do, it’s going to encourage people to travel more sustainably but it’ll stop as soon as the funding ends which is what ends up happening with a lot of our things”*

**Polycymaker at Oxfordshire City Council**  
(emphasis added)

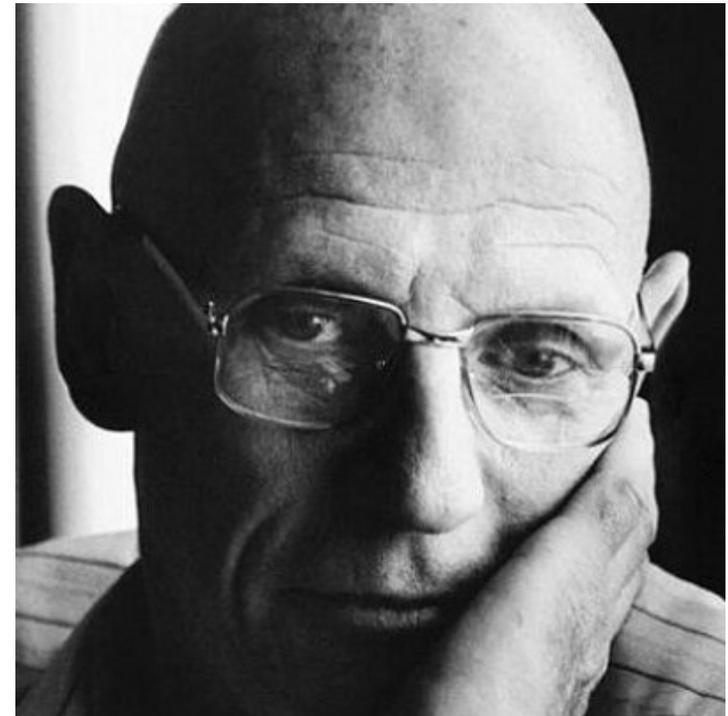


# But ...

*What/who is constituted as normal and appropriate? What/who is constituted abnormal and inappropriate?*

and

*What effects do such differentiations generate? What, for instance, does this mean for investments into radical innovations?*



## On cooperation (i)

*“one of the most significant legacies of the current administration will be the creation of this kind of formal economic partnership working with our neighbouring authorities as a whole that starts to become something which is very coherent and makes a lot of sense, whereas before I had the impression that decision making ended at the city boundary. I feel we’ve started to move a little bit beyond that, and the potential that offers for transport in the future is exciting really”*

**Politician, Brighton and Hove**



## On cooperation (ii)

TS “Has the sort of changes with the LEP, has that a lot of effect on your work?”

PMT “*It’s just another partner for us to ensure that we integrate with and liaise with and cooperate. The LEP is represented at senior level in transport, so again we just include them in everything we do really, and we really you know, we work alongside them*”

(PMT = policymaker at Merseytravel)



# Greater local agency

*“the Local Enterprise Partnership, the funding coming through there I think it’s something I’m generally in favour of in terms of getting it down to a smaller region than the South East region, which it was previously. So it feels like a body we have an influence in, and you know, I think there’s arguments there to be won but you know we’ve done relatively well out of that so far and I would see us continuing to do so, so yes I think that’s generally quite positive. Sometimes, you know, I guess we have to present arguments in ways that are not that easy in terms of ... jobs, housing, economy kind of thing. And sometimes a public road improvement scheme, it is difficult to demonstrate exactly how it’s going to bring those improvements but that’s a challenge but I do feel it’s a bit more accessible to us than it was previously”*

**Politician, Brighton and Hove**



# Risks with LEP's role in transport policy

- a) Privileging of project delivery over longer-term comprehensive monitoring and long-term visioning on the regional level
- b) 'Predict and Provide' 3.0:
  - a) Discourse
  - b) Evaluation and monitoring practices



# Liverpool City Region's SEAP

*“However, what the LEP is focusing on largely is investment projects as you might expect, and so the project pipeline that we developed when we produced the SEAP has been used as a means for picking projects and taking them forward. What isn't being doing really at the moment is a sort of holistic maintenance of the SEAP, so ... any meaningful active monitoring of the project pipeline [is] not really happening in the way we see it needing to be done, and so there's a little bit of a hole there in that sense.”*

**Senior employee from a Merseyside public institution**



# 'Predict & Provide' 3.0

## Discourse

- a) Fast, smooth and efficient mobility as a sign of attractiveness, progress and opportunity
- b) Transport system users as rational actors keen to minimise time, money and effort
- c) Techno-optimism: IT as capable of solving many challenges regarding capacity and unreliability

## Practices of evaluation and monitoring

- a) Use of conventional transport models overseen by LA to legitimise wider stakeholders' preferences
- b) Authority of models hinges on their 'black-boxing'

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**Politician, Brighton and Hove**



# Regional variations re transport

(some) differences across LEPs in:

- a) Understandings & relative weights of economic, environmental and social sustainability
- b) Strategies for achieving aims and sustainability

Qualitative evaluation of 3 case studies:

- a) Merseyside most committed to road (re)construction, least to public transport – Oxfordshire is opposite, Brighton in-between
- b) In Liverpool and Brighton transport investment is much more seen as means to increase employability and reduce social inequality than in Oxfordshire
- c) Greatest focus on technological innovation (smart public transport) in Oxfordshire



# Final remarks

(Near) future – **large uncertainties:**

- a) Form, functions, visions, capabilities & funding of LEPs
- b) LEP's coexistence with local & regional public sector bodies

**Relative certainties:**

- a) Privileging of economic over environmental and social dimensions of sustainability
- b) Opening up of LEP boards to wider range of stakeholders increases sustainability & democratic legitimacy of interventions
- c) Greater regional differentiation – socially and environmentally benign investments in transport infrastructure will be realised more often in certain regions

# Thank you

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