

⋮ Research Agenda  
⋮ 2026 to 2030



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## From the Director

Many challenges beset transport and mobility. There are long-standing challenges like the intensifying climate crisis and newer ones such as transport's increasing salience to the culture wars and to global geopolitics. Technological innovation is often not the answer. Its pace is only matched by its social and spatial unevenness. Transport use, operation and governance struggle to keep up and adapt.

Our world-leading research and engagement address the challenges and opportunities created by the rapid evolution of transport, shaping how mobility is practiced, experienced, and governed in and between cities worldwide. In this document, we explain our research strategy for the next five years and highlight our impactful engagement and teaching.

I am proud of our commitment to enhancing the sustainability, fairness and justice of passenger and freight transport. We do this through a focus on four thematic areas that capture the intersecting environmental, health, political and social dimensions of transport and mobility.

To ensure our research has impact, we engage with the wider world to influence thinking, inform practice, and co-create change. We educate transport and urban professionals, policymakers and business leaders through our executive education programme; we work with governments, businesses and civil society to inform decision-making; and translate our research insights into different and creative formats targeting diverse audiences. Our expanding networks are essential. Over the past five years we have welcomed over 200 participants in our executive education courses, 21 DPhil (PhD) students, and 27 visiting researchers.

We hope you too will be inspired by our work to date, and the ambitious research agenda we here set out for the next five years. We very much look forward to working with you to realise our vision for more just and sustainable transport for all.

**Tim Schwanen**

**Professor of Transport Geography  
Director of the Transport Studies Unit**

# History of the TSU

1958

Endowment given to the University of Oxford by the Chartered Institute of Transport (CIT). Denys Munby, Nuffield College, is appointed as the first Reader of Economics and Organisation of Transport

1973

The Transport Studies Unit (TSU) is founded with Director Ian Heggie and a small group of staff

1980

TSU's first major ESRC grant produces the book **Understanding Travel Behaviour**

1981

Phil Goodwin becomes Director and Reader in Transport Studies

1989

TSU wins the Rees Jeffrey Road Fund project funding under **Transport and Society**, producing the project report **Transport, the New Realism**

1960

1970

1980

1990



**1994**

The TSU joins the UK Department for Transport Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA), contributing to a key report that road expansion added to the total volume of traffic

The TSU wins a large fund from ESRC and changes status to designated research centre. The University of Oxford, ESRC and UCL move the ESRC Transport Studies Unit from Oxford to London

A new Transport Studies Unit is established in Oxford with an endowment from the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. TSU's home moves to the School of Geography and the Environment

**1995**

Gordon Clark becomes Acting Director

**1997**

John Preston is appointed Director

**2006**

David Banister becomes Director

**2013**

Global Challenges in Transport, Executive Education Programme begins

**2015**

Current Director Tim Schwanen is appointed

**2023**

TSU 50th Anniversary

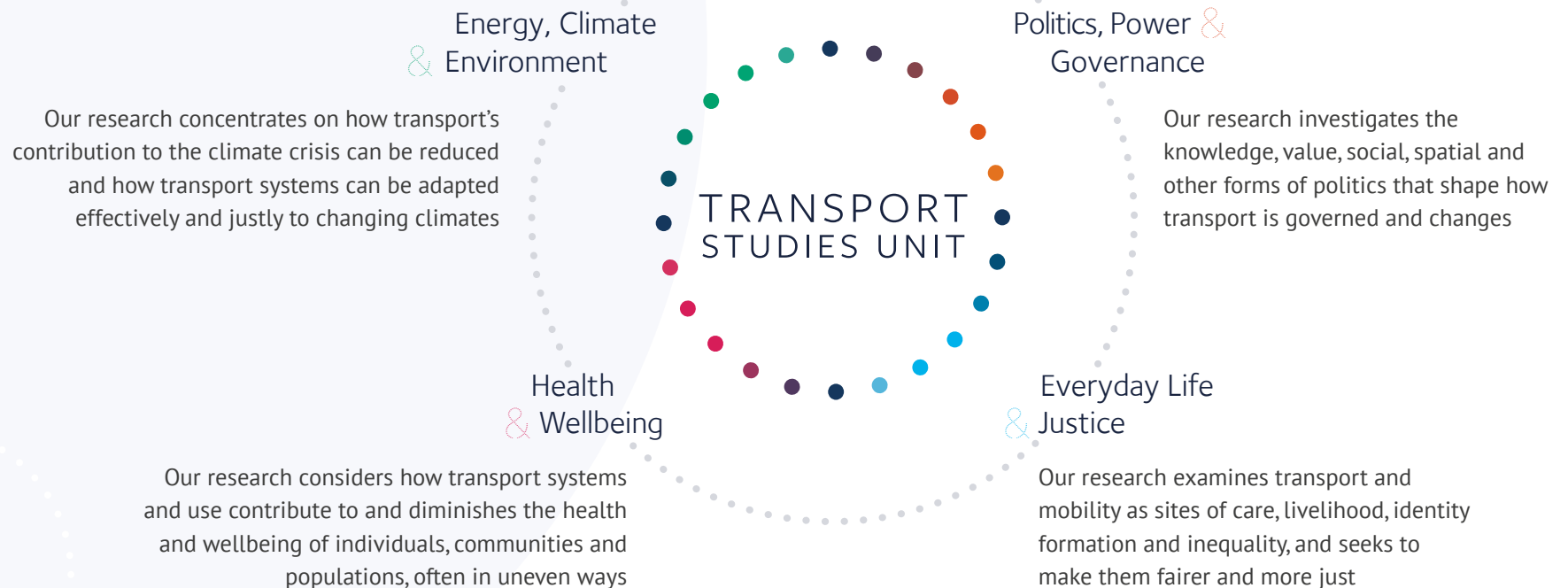
2000

2010

2020

# Research Programme

The TSU aims to inspire and inform change towards more sustainable and just transport systems through better understanding of how people and goods move.



Our research is interdisciplinary, with a strong grounding in human geography and the wider social sciences. It is both problem-driven and inspired by thinking from across the social sciences, engineering and computational science, and the humanities. It seeks to make transport systems better and enhance the wellbeing of the people who depend on them, while also advancing theory and pushing understanding and methodology into new directions.

We do not privilege a particular type of data, method or approach. In our research we strive for methodological innovation, using and combining qualitative and quantitative information. Inclusivity, dignity, care, reflexivity, co-creation, open science and creativity are central values in our research and engagement.

Our research and engagement concentrate on the transport and mobilities of people and goods within and between cities. Our activities are global in orientation, focusing on communities, places and urban areas worldwide. They consider transport systems, particular infrastructures and technologies, governance arrangements, and the people that use, operate, regulate or repair those systems. The mobilities of things, knowledge, ideas, data, procedures, finance and animals also feature in our research and engagement.



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# Energy, Climate & Environment

The climate crisis is arguably the largest existential challenge of our time. Transport is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases and remains largely dependent on fossil energy sources. Research in this theme starts from the premise that there are no simple solutions for transport's climate problem. A broad combination of meaningful changes to the ways in which we live, move, and transport goods is required.



Photo: © Zakīyya Adam



## What is studied?

Our research explores the nexus of how we travel and move goods and the impact on energy use, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. We examine this at the levels of individuals, communities, cities and countries, across all modes of transport and a growing number of countries. We evaluate interventions in transport systems that seek to mitigate and adapt to climate change and co-create initiatives that allow transport to become low-carbon and climate resilient.

## Areas of research 2026-2030

- Social and technological innovations that reduce energy demand and carbon emissions in passenger and freight transport
- New approaches to enhance the resilience of transport systems and practices to changing climates
- Inclusive transformations towards net zero and resilient transport systems within and between cities
- Co-creation of initiatives, policies and strategies by public, private and civil society actors to make transport systems fit for a climate-constrained planet

## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Inclusive transitions to electric mobility

Transport electrification is often presented as the primary route to low-carbon mobility. Yet this transition is complex and shaped by social, political and infrastructural factors. Our research explores how these dynamics affect both potential electric vehicle (EV) users and policymakers.

One strand has examined alternatives to home charging, analysing how people's ability and willingness to adopt electric vehicles varies according to gender, income and parking circumstances. Statistical modelling highlighted the diversity of user experiences, and revealed barriers influence to EV uptake.

In a comparative study across European cities, we have reviewed policy documents and interviewed decision-makers. This has exposed tensions between national strategies focused on private vehicle electrification and local priorities promoting public transport, active travel and social inclusion. Our research highlights the need for more integrated, balanced and inclusive transitions to electric mobility.

Photo: © Zaptec / Unsplash



## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# E-cargo bikes for low-carbon living

In 2023, 49 households in the Oxford suburb of Kennington borrowed an e-cargo bike for one month as part of a trial to explore how electric micromobility can reduce transport emissions and support healthier, low-carbon lifestyles. The trial was part of an EPSRC-funded research collaboration between the TSU, the University of Leeds and the University of Brighton.

Findings showed that household members with different activity levels used the bikes for trips of varying distances, durations, and purposes, often to replace car journeys. The bikes also enabled new trips that would not have occurred otherwise.

As well as encouraging active travel and reducing carbon emissions, the e-cargo bikes contributed to families' physical and psychological well-being. Many families described e-cargo cycling as convenient and fun, building family bonding, and a stronger sense of connection to nature.



Photo: © Tim Schwanen

# Politics, Power & Governance

Transport projects and policies are shaped by power relations between people, civil society organisations, businesses, and governments across spatial and temporal scales. These interactions privilege some interests, concerns, values and knowledges over others, with consequences for the environment, the economy, communities and society. Research in this theme explores the multiple politics of change in the transport of people and goods.



Photo: © Gaurav Mittal



## What is studied?

Our research examines how change in transport at local, regional, national and international scales is governed. It considers transport decision-making, policy and governance as constituted through knowledge, value, social, spatial and other forms of politics and as a domain where institutions, interests, narratives and imaginations are contested. We also seek to contribute to inclusive, just and effective decision-making and governance related to transport and mobility.

## Areas of research 2026-2030

- The role of different knowledges, discourses and imaginations in transport decision-making, policy and governance
- Inclusive and fair governance of transformations in transport systems
- Methods for inclusive, just and effective decision-making and governance
- The role of transport in geopolitics

## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Dignity and inclusion in African popular transport

Across African cities, “popular” or informal transport systems such as walking, minibuses, rickshaws, bicycles, and motorcycle taxis provide mobility and livelihoods for millions. Ongoing research is exploring how these important systems are marginalised within urban and transport planning shaped by colonial legacies and global inequalities.

We explore how policy and planning have excluded people who use and work in popular transport, and what this means for the safety, affordability and convenience of mobility on the urban scale. Findings highlight the need to re-centre human dignity, community and local embeddedness in transport planning. Doing so will support more inclusive, just and sustainable city-building across Africa and challenge common assumptions about what “modern” transport looks like.



## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Navigating climate transitions for Indian street-based workers

We examine how climate transitions in Indian cities affect informal street-based workers – vendors, transport operators, and platform workers – whose livelihoods are threatened by heat, floods, and air pollution.

Our research explores how unequal power relations between governments, international agencies and workers shape which knowledges and whose voices are recognised in climate, urban and transport governance. We foreground everyday experiences to examine how policy processes and caste, religious and class hierarchies privilege some knowledges and interests and exclude others.

We highlight the importance of dignity, recognition and inclusion in urban governance, and offer insights about how climate and transport policies in rapidly growing cities benefit all, including the most marginalised workers and their families.



## SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT

# Supporting Oxfordshire residents with deliberative democracy

In early 2025, Oxfordshire residents took part in a Citizens Assembly to consider how the county's transport system could best support local health, economy, and environment by 2050. Participants were selected by lottery to reflect local diversity and heard from a broad range of expert speakers.

Two of our researchers offered evidence on car sharing, workplace parking levies and traffic filters. Our Director was also appointed to the steering group and acted as an expert who members could consult during assembly meetings. We fed relevant social science evidence into the assembly and helped its members to navigate the different insights and perspectives shared with them.

The assembly produced 20 recommendations. The county council has considered these carefully and has continued to consult assembly members subsequently. The assembly has shown that meaningful participation enhances the legitimacy and inclusivity of local transport planning.





# Health & Wellbeing

Current transport systems have widespread adverse impacts on public health and wellbeing. Extreme weather, traffic danger, and physical inactivity are all growing public concerns. Research in this theme examines the complex relationships of different forms of mobility with health and wellbeing.



Photo: © Smuki / AdobeStock



## What is studied?

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The risks and harms that collisions, extreme weather and pollution create for everyday mobility, populations and the city are studied alongside the contributions that cycling, walking, and wheeling can make to health and wellbeing. Our research examines the nature and distribution of health risks that different groups face and to evaluate transport-related interventions and strategies aimed at improving our quality of life.

## Areas of research 2026-2030

- .....
- Transport's impact on the wellbeing of individuals and communities
  - Methods for evaluating the health impacts of transport system use and transport-related policies
  - The social and spatial distribution of transport's health risks and effects
  - Effective and inclusive interventions that encourage active travel

## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Mapping access and air quality in Medellín

Our research has explored how air pollution affects people's ability to access essential goods, services, and healthy environments. We have co-produced an accessibility model with a group of low-income mothers living in the periphery of Medellín, Colombia that centres and reflects their concerns, experiences and knowledges. We have used the model to assess how transport and urban policy interventions can improve access to healthy living while reducing exposure to air pollution among women like those in our study.

Our co-creation approach links the social and environmental dimensions of mobility, developing inclusive and just ways to evaluate urban and transport policy measures. The model provides policymakers with a tool to co-design interventions that not only enhance access but also promote healthier and more equitable urban environments.



Photo: © Juan Pablo Orjuela Mendoza

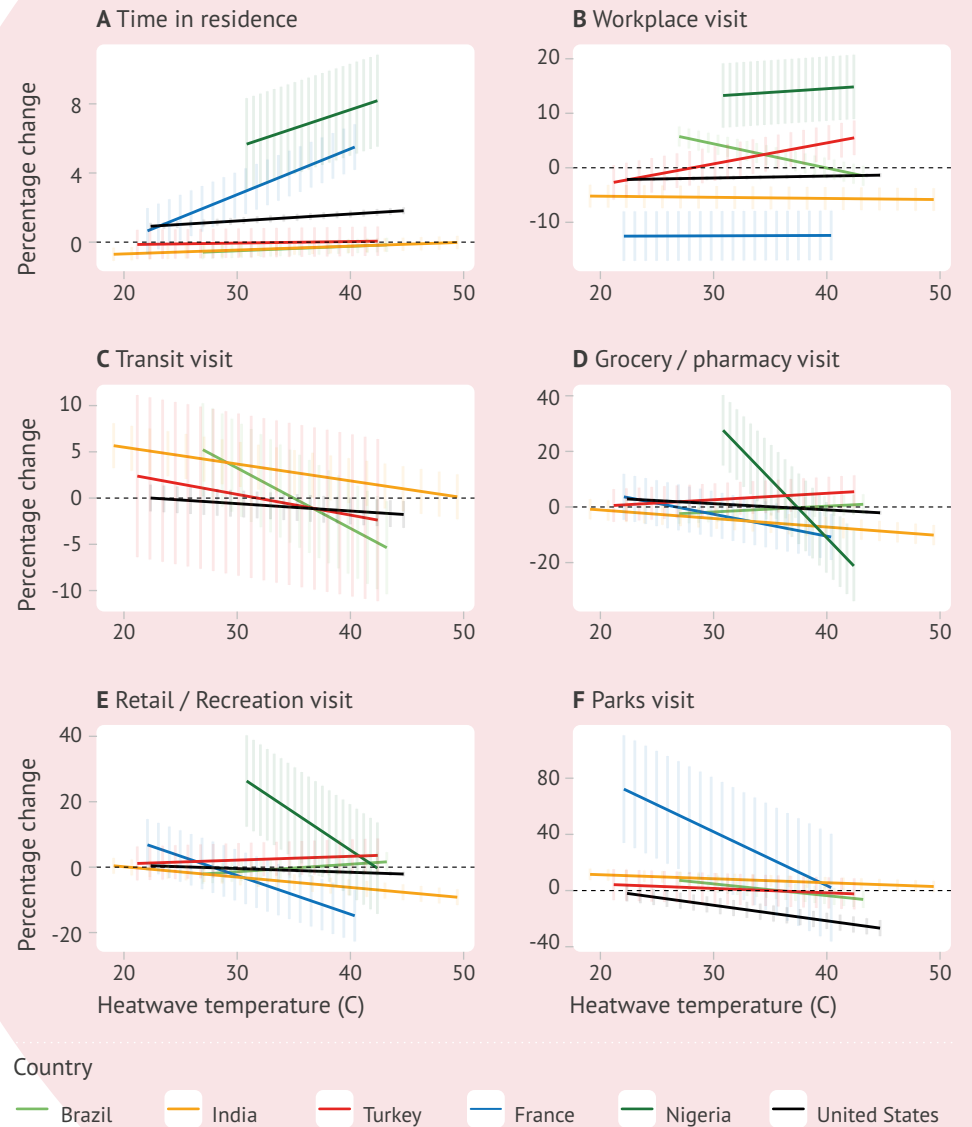
SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Staying or cooling – adapting to extreme heat in everyday life

Our research examines how people change their everyday mobility in response to extreme summer heat at a time when climate change increases the frequency, intensity, and duration of heatwaves. Using mobile phone location data and travel surveys, we integrate information on mobility, weather, resident populations and physical geography to understand how people adapt everyday routines to stay cool.

The findings highlight the diversity of cooling strategies people employ and the many ways in which differences in the flexibility of everyday activities, physical geography and the built environment, living conditions shape how people adapt everyday activities and mobility to extreme heat. The study offers valuable insights for designing policies that support equitable and practical adaptation to rising global temperatures.

**Figure:** Estimated effects of summer heatwave temperatures on everyday activities. (Source: Yücel et al., 2026)



# Everyday Life & Justice

Mobility is more than a means to access jobs, healthcare, education, leisure or relatives and friends. It is a site of care and livelihoods, critical to identity formation, linked to many different feelings and emotions, and socially coded and contested in numerous ways. As a result, it is a domain where social and spatial inequalities and injustices are created, entrenched and reworked.



Photo: © Gaurav Mittal



## What is studied?

Key concerns include how people undertake and experience everyday mobility and how they navigate the mobility challenges they face. The meanings, norms and values associated with particular forms of transport and mobility are also studied. Much of our research concentrates on disadvantaged people and communities and examines how intersecting transport injustices can be overcome.

## Areas of research 2026-2030

- The mobility practices and experiences of people navigating intersecting forms of disadvantage and oppression
- Transport and mobility as care, livelihood, contestation and decoloniality
- The development of appropriate methods for research on transport inequalities and justice
- The identification and realisation of transformative actions and strategies that can enhance transport justice

## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Women's everyday journeys and mobility justice

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Women in low- and middle-income countries face daily journeys shaped by social, legal, and infrastructural inequalities, whether they are domestic workers in cities, women commuting across borders, or recently arrived migrants using a complicated transit system. Our research highlights the needs of these women so often forgotten in policy and transport planning.

Through participatory action research involving women workers, unions and grassroots organisations in Colombia, Venezuela, South Africa and Zimbabwe, we build an unprecedented evidence base on the challenges women face in their everyday mobility. This offers vital insights to inform safer, fairer, and more inclusive transport systems for women in cities worldwide.

Photo: © Victor / AdobeStock

## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

# Mobility, disability, and care

Disabled people experience mobility shaped by the enablers and constraints of transport systems, but also personal, social, and care-related factors. These everyday mobilities, immobilities, and relations of care are often overlooked in policy and planning, leaving individuals, families, and carers navigating complex interdependent everyday challenges.

Through research projects that combine qualitative, quantitative, spatial, and playful methods, we critically engage with and develop socio-technical approaches to accessibility and mobility. We work in close collaboration with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families, neurodivergent people, and young carers. Our engaged research broadens the data and resources available for decision-makers, providing evidence to support more inclusive, responsive mobility systems that better meet the needs of disabled people and carers.



Photo: © Aartem Stoliar / Unsplash



# Engagement & Impact

Transport affects everyone. We create research and tools that help people around the world make transport work better for them, their communities, and the environment. We produce and co-create insights that are relevant to local contexts and can be used elsewhere, whether working in Abingdon-on-Thames or Zambia.

Our engagement is designed around contextual needs, whether it forms part of an existing research project, or is created in response to requests from interested individuals and organisations outside academia. Whether working on residents' doorsteps, with local businesses, or with global governance organisations, we seek to inform and contribute to local, regional, national and international efforts to secure more just and sustainable transport futures.

In 2021-2025 we have done this through engagement with local communities, collaboration with businesses and organisations, and capacity building among transport and urban planners and professionals.

We try to make a difference by:

- Making just and sustainable transport for all a reality, by co-creating research with transport users, those excluded from transport systems, and with people and organisations that can effect change
- Developing innovative and creative research, engagement, and communication methods that appeal to diverse audiences, carefully designed to reach and include under-engaged communities
- Engaging ethically and responsibly, recognising power imbalances and local contexts to ensure transparency, reciprocity, and fair outcomes
- Using our independent research outcomes to support decision-makers and practitioners to create effective and inclusive plans and policy

## ● Community engagement

- Co-produced a digital exhibition showcasing the experiences of key workers during the Covid-19 pandemic and their concerns and needs about travel when they could not work from home
- Created a play-based toolkit to co-produce brand new insights into mobility and SEND for young people and their families in Swindon and Oxford
- Worked with women in Kumasi, Ghana to identify the specific challenges they face in their everyday mobility

## ● Policy engagement in the UK and internationally

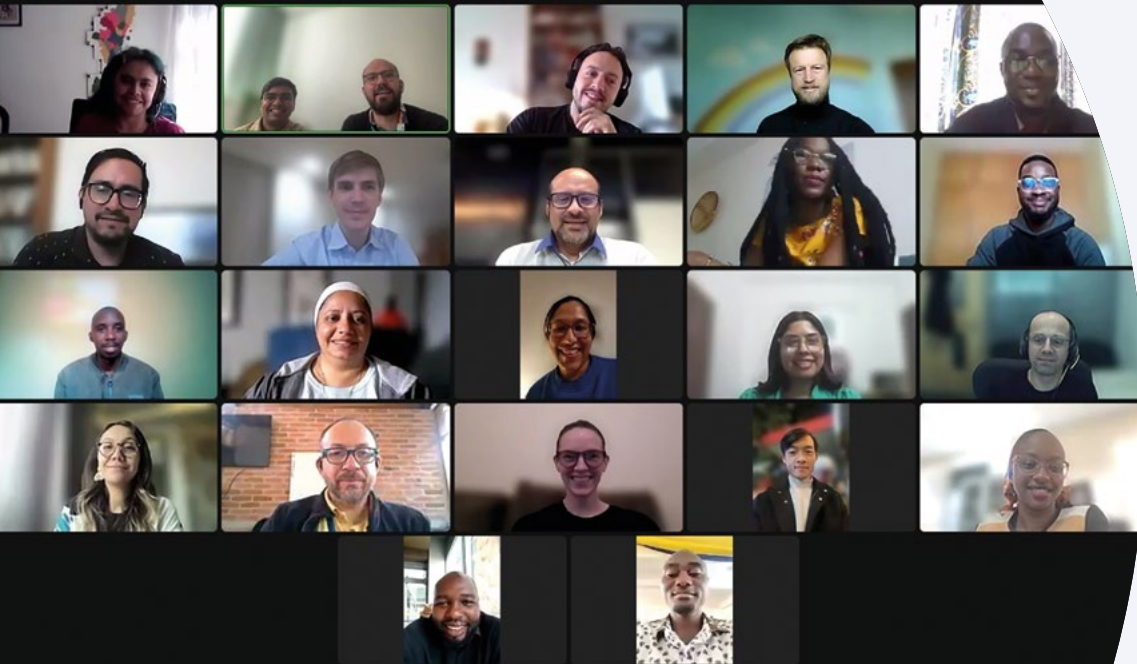
- Provided research data and insights to Oxfordshire City Council
- Responded to UK Parliamentary calls for evidence and given oral evidence at Parliamentary enquiries/committees
- Delivered workshops for UK government departments
- Delivered policy briefs to local governments in Europe and Latin America, national governments in Africa, and internationally for the UN

## ● Collaboration with businesses and organisations

- Engaged with insurers, policymakers and researchers to explore how new transport technologies, business models and data will impact the motor-insurance sector, and how changes in insurance may shape transport in turn
- Supported a new last-mile e-bike cooperative in Bristol, Pedal Collective, to establish a sustainable business plan supported by research data insights about their routes
- Worked with diverse organisations in the logistics, retail and university sectors to understand the socio-technical barriers to Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) upscaling
- Tested new operational models for last-mile delivery companies in Bristol, where vans are replaced by e-cargo bikes



Photo: © Pedal Collective



- Capacity building for better informed decisions and professional practices:

We were part of the team that created the HEAT tool, which is used by the WHO to quantify the health and carbon benefits of walking and cycling. It is used by a range of national governments worldwide, with some calling the tool the *de facto* tool for transport appraisals.

Since its inception in 2013, we have trained 600 policymakers, practitioners, and researchers through our Executive Education Programme, [Global Challenges in Transport](#). The programme delivers themed courses in small group online learning and provides scholarships for participants from the global South.

## SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT

# Accessible EV charging for all

Our research into on-street electric vehicle (EV) charging in residential neighbourhoods has influenced the provision of electric mobility services in three ways:

- The independent evaluation provided by our team of Oxfordshire County Council's Go Ultra-Low Oxford pilot (2017–19) shaped the procurement of over 1,300 charging installations for residents without off-street parking in 2025, tripling provision across the county.
- The evaluation resulted in Oxfordshire County Council and ODS, the local authority trading company owned by Oxford City Council, commercialising one of the trialled charging solutions. In 2020 they were awarded funding for the OXGul-e project, which developed and tested dedicated pavement gullies for EV charging cables in Oxford, Bedfordshire, the London borough of Bromley and other local authorities. OXGul-e has evolved into Gul-e and now offers placement channels for EV cables to local authorities across the UK.
- Another company, EZ Charge, which produces EV charging hubs, also emerged from the Go-Ultra Low Oxford project. A partnership involving them as well as Oxfordshire County Council, car club companies and TSU have developed an electric car club trial based at the charging hubs. In early 2026 ten shared EVs were operating in Oxfordshire towns and villages. Service expansion is planned for the near future.



Photo: © Tim Schwanen



Photo: © Invisible Commutes

## SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT

# Transforming commuting for healthcare workers in Montreal

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Research on commuting by healthcare workers at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) in Montreal has reshaped the transport policies of one of Canada's largest medical institutions. Using surveys, interviews, GIS analysis, and a Theory of Change developed with MUHC, our study identified barriers to scaling up low-carbon transport options and reducing car use.

The research directly led to five new mobility initiatives at MUHC: more than 900 employees now benefit from discounted public transit passes equivalent to two free months annually; secure bicycle parking has been tripled, alongside new repair stations; discounted bike-share memberships and raffles have been established to encourage cycling; a carpooling and shared parking pilot saves participants \$50–75 per month; and a Transit-for-Parking Swap scheme offers a year of free transit to staff who give up parking spaces. MUHC also began pursuing Bicycle-Friendly Employer certification, reflecting the study's emphasis on leadership in sustainable mobility.

These changes have benefitted over 10,000 employees across eight sites, demonstrating how applied research can create evidence-based change in local transport. As one healthcare worker reflected, "Every dollar counts. Having the transit discount helped me stick to public transport even when driving feels easier."

## Annual Lecture

As part of the TSU seminar series, the TSU invites a prominent speaker whose work speaks to both academic and wider audiences to give the Annual Lecture. Past guests include the author Caroline Criado Perez on the structural inequalities embedded in transport design and delivery; Professor Carlos Moreno, the creator of the concept of the 15-Minute City; and Councillor Andrew Gant on the newly implemented congestion charges around Oxford city centre.



Photo: © Yi Fan Liu

## Groups We Work With

From 2026, we will be working with groups around the world, including:

- Young carers
- Adolescents with special educational needs & disabilities

- Rural EV users
- EV companies

- Third sector organisations with a mobility interest
- Local policymakers
- National policymakers

- Delivery drivers
- Street vendors
- Autorickshaw drivers
- Last-mile delivery companies

- Museums
- Festivals

- Car-sharing cooperatives
- Workers' unions
- Popular transport users

# Where We Work



## Funders

The success of the TSU's research and engagement is made possible through external grants from a wide range of different organisations, including:

- British Academy
- Connected Places Catapult
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
- European Commission
- European Research Council
- Innovate UK
- John Fell Fund
- Rees Jeffreys Road Fund
- Regional Studies Association
- Road Safety Trust
- Robert Bosch Foundation
- UK Department for Transport (DfT)
- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
- UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO)
- University of Oxford internal funds for research, engagement and impact
- Volvo Research and Educational Foundations
- World Health Organization (WHO)

We invite potential funders and partners that share and support our vision, ambitions and approach to collaborate and help shape our future research. If you are interested in supporting our work, please contact us at [enquiries@tsu.ox.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@tsu.ox.ac.uk).



Photo: © Gaurav Mittal

**TSU**  
TRANSPORT  
STUDIES UNIT



## Contact

Transport Studies Unit (TSU)  
School of Geography and the Environment  
Oxford University Centre for the Environment  
University of Oxford  
South Parks Road  
Oxford, OX1 3QY  
United Kingdom

T: +44 07354 385939

✉ E: [enquiries@tsu.ox.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@tsu.ox.ac.uk)

🌐 [www.tsu.ox.ac.uk](http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk)

🌐 [www.linkedin.com/company/tsuoxford/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/tsuoxford/)

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To receive information on TSU research activity and events,  
sign up to our quarterly email newsletter at:  
[www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/tsu-e-newsletter](http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/tsu-e-newsletter)

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