



Management Committee

COST 340

Towards a European Intermodal Transport Network, Lessons from History

Subject: Mobility History and the European road network: planning, building, use and spatial organization (1920 – 2000) Neuchâtel, Switzerland, December 12 – 15, 2002

Mobility History and the European road network: planning, building, use and spatial organization

(1920 – 2000)

**A proposal for a common workshop
of COST 340 WG3 and
Tensions of Europe, Mobility History Group**

Neuchâtel, Switzerland, December 12 – 15, 2002

CALL FOR PAPERS

organized jointly by Gijs Mom (Eindhoven University of Technology)

and Laurent Tissot (University of Neuchâtel)

Unlike the train (but like the ship and the electric tram), the bicycle, the motorcycle and the automobile (private car, bus and truck) did not start with a clean sheet regarding their infrastructure. They made use of an already existing network of roads, designed to the pace of the pedestrian and the horse in a century-long adjustment process, but paved in two consecutive waves: first on a national scale from the beginning of the nineteenth century, followed by a regional fine-tuning during the second half of the same century.

In every industrialized country in the West, the emergence of the bicycle and the automobile took on an a-systemic character and seemed to escape the systems approach of traditional transport authorities, who were used to develop and manage railroad, inland navigation and even road systems on the basis of central control. The answer of these authorities to the new phenomenon was the decision, to measure the flow of the new vehicles on the roads. These road censuses revealed that the new phenomenon was basically local (urban and peri-urban), but they also led to initiatives (often pioneered by intermediary organizations like Touring and Automobile Clubs) to adapt the road network to the new mobility mode in the sense that road construction should be made more robust. But when, from the beginning of the 1920s, the automobile witnessed its first breakthrough among the (upper) middle classes, the debate changed and proposals for automobile-only road networks popped up. Surprisingly, and in one case under the influence of what happened in the United States, in two countries (Italy, from 1922, and Germany, from 1934) these proposals resulted in the actual building of such networks before the Second World War (at that time both networks had a length of 500 and 4500 km respectively). In both cases it was the fascist movement which integrated limited access highway building into their highly ideological “modernisation” programs, and in both cases the realization of international connections were an important part of the plans. Other European countries had reached consensus to follow these examples by the end of the 1930s, but the war prevented these plans from being realized.

After the war, during the 1950s, when the signs of mass motorization became apparent, national motorway building schemes were integrated into a common European perspective from the start. However, it is not clear, whether the building of a truly European road network was hampered by comparable problems of transnational barriers as were the railroads and the inland navigation systems.

This workshop is organized to produce a first overview of the state of historical research in this field. It is organized as a joint effort of two European projects dealing with transport history issues: the COST 340 project “Towards a European Intermodal Transport Network, Lessons from History” (2001 – 2004) and the pilot project (2001 – 2004) on Mobility History within the general framework of the ESF sponsored Tensions of Europe program, aimed at writing a history of technology in Europe against the background of a process of “contested unification.” While the first project is aimed at advising the European Commission on the issue of intermodality from a historical viewpoint, the second project is more conceptual in scope and attempts to redefine “transport history” and to propose a research agenda under the umbrella of “Mobility History” for the years after the finalization of the pilot phase. Information about both projects can be found on the websites:

- for COST340: www.cordis.lu/cost-transport
- for the Mobility Theme within the Tensions of Europe program: www.histech.nl/tensions (click on “themes” and click on “European mobility”)

As we start our debate from the hypothesis, that, viewed from a user perspective, the road system and the centrally controlled systems are different in several fundamental respects, we will focus on two trajectories of research: the building of the European network on the basis of the national networks, and the use of these networks. We are interested in the following questions:

- what was the influence of the United States on the national road building projects?
- which were the main aims of the planners?
- for what purpose where the new roads used? (intercity traffic? local traffic? freight transport or personal mobility?)
- when and how was traffic flow measured on this network?
- how did national authorities try to get a grip on a vehicle type, which they experienced as utterly “anarchistic”?
- can we distinguish between “national styles” in network formation (for instance: “landscaping” of the German Autobahn system versus a raw engineering approach of the Italian Autostrade project with its straight-line highways between cities)?
- how was the European network constructed on the basis of these national styles? did one of the “styles” win or did the European system develop its own logic and momentum?

Potential contributors to the workshop are kindly invited to send an English abstract of max. 1 page and a short cv to g.p.a.mom@tm.tue.nl **before July 15th**. They will receive notice of acceptance on August 1st at the latest. Travel and accomodation costs will be reimburseed, provided **a written contribution (in English) is received before 1 November 2002**. In exceptional cases papers written in German or French can be accepted but the presentation will have to be in English. As all papers will be distributed in advance to all participants, presentation time is limited to 5 minutes to highlight the main points to be discussed, whereas most of the 30 minutes reserved for every contribution will be devoted to discussion.

We invite interested individuals to send in proposals for the following areas.

Introductory session (no proposals invited)

- introduction by local organizer Laurent Tissot
- introduction to the COST 340 project by Michèle Merger
- “What is ‘Mobility History’?” by Gijs Mom
- no proposals invited

Session 1: National road networks

Max.: 6 presentations.

This session focuses on the interwar years and analyses the ways the existing network was evaluated, debated upon, and what proposals for its adjustment to the new mobility culture were formulated. Also the competition between the railway and inland navigation networks and the road network is of interest here, and the question whether automobile-only networks were already proposed and even partially built. Also the tensions between local and regional, on the one hand, and national governments, on the other, are topics in this session.

Session 2: Road use and regional diffusion

Max. 6 presentations.

It is generally accepted that motorized road use started at a local and regional level. This session tries to identify, on a regional basis, the early adopters of the motorcycle, the automobile and the truck and bus. Two periods can be distinguished here: the pioneering pre-WWI period, and the 1920s, the years of the first breakthrough of the automobile in most countries. The contributors in this session are especially asked to at least tentatively make some international comparisons. It also covers the “road user culture” as built by Automobile and Touring Clubs.

Session 3: European road network

Max. 4 presentations.

This session focuses on the post-WWII period of mass motorization, the building of national automobile-only networks and the attempts, at the European level, to combine these networks into a truly European one. As to the last topic, we are especially interested in the “Brussels perspective” on this paneuropean network, and its competition with rail, air and inland navigation networks.

Session 4: Impact on spatial organization

Max. 4 presentations.

For this session we are interested in long-term perspectives on and debates about landscaping and cityscaping as well as in the relationship between local, urban road networks and national networks against a background of the debate of spatial organization.

Session 5: Conceptual issues

Max. 2 presentations.

This session tries to place our own methodologies within a wider context of conceptual debates, most importantly the research tradition of “Large Technical Systems” as initiated by Thomas Hughes’ analysis of electricity networks. It also covers critical contributions on “traffic engineering” as it emerged shortly after the Second World War.

Session 6: International experiences outside Europe

Max. 2 presentations.

In this session cases from outside Europe (USA?, Japan? colonies?) are used as a mirror on European network formation.