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## Low carbon mobility transitions

Debbie Hopkins & James Higham (eds.), 2016, Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Ltd

### Book Review

The transition to low carbon transport systems, both for passengers and freight, is one of the major, if not *the* major challenge for the transport system in the coming decades. Focussing on passenger transport, also known as ‘mobility’,) this book sheds light on several dimensions of this transition. Preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusions chapter by the editors, the book consists of three parts. Part 1 focuses on ‘people and place’. Its chapters (2-5) discuss such diverse issues as knowledge co-production and behavioural change, mobility differences between generations, links between carbon emissions, and health and equity, and hypermobile lifestyles. Part 2 (chapters 6-10) is labelled ‘structures in transition’. Its chapters 6-8 have a theoretical focus, discussing paradigms, regimes, institutions, innovation and transition theories, and the role of path dependence and lock-in in explaining current high levels of car use. Chapter 9 examines the low carbon transition in Finland, while chapter 10 discusses the role of structures of mobility and the impact for the transition to low carbon mobility. It explains the important role of travel time budgets of people for distances travelled using different transport systems. Part 3 (chapters 11-14) focuses on ‘innovations for low carbon mobility’. In this part theory and real world cases come together, such as in analysing electric mobility in Scotland or personal mobility innovations in the UK. Other chapters include the interrelationships between internet technologies and travel behaviour, and the unsustainability of air travel. Each part not only has 4-5 chapters, but also two brief case studies illustrating these three parts.

The focus of the studies is more on behavioural change than on technology. The book does not provide a comprehensive overview of past or future technological innovations, their role in a low carbon transition and their wider societal implications. This can be the result of an a priori demarcation or of the often heard claim that behavioural transitions are much more complex to realize than technological transitions that do not have major behavioural or institutional implications. One chapter (p.120) even provides a definition of sustainability that excludes other than behavioural aspects: “all forms of transport which minimise fuel consumption and carbon emissions *by minimising the need to travel*” (Italics are mine). This does not mean the book suggests that technological contributions are irrelevant. Case study 3 on Brazil even concludes: ‘this makes improving vehicle efficiency and moving to alternative fuels and powertrain technology key factors for achieving decarbonisation of transport’ (page 174).

What I like about the book is the diversity of author backgrounds and ideas. Regarding the editors, James Higham is a well-known full professor, while Debbie Hopkins started publishing academically more recently but has been very productive in past years. The other authors include both well-established scholars like Tim Schwanen, Alexa Delbosch,

Peter Newman, Stefan Gössling, and Paul Peeters, just to mention a few, as well as younger ones.

Also attractive is the eclectic multidisciplinary treatment of transitions to low carbon mobility, leaning on several theories from innovation sciences, transition studies and even psychology. Incidentally, for the readers without a background in innovation sciences a glossary with terms such as regimes, landscapes, structures, arenas, lock-in and path dependence would have added value to the book.

In addition I appreciate the explicit focus on air travel. It is very likely that a main challenge in the area of low carbon mobility will become the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from air travel, for various reasons: the share of aircraft in global GHG emissions is rapidly increasing; there are limited options for technological improvements; and actors with an interest in the status quo have considerable political influence.

What I miss in the book – as in most edited books containing chapters written by different authors, even on a common theme – is a more explicit link between the contributions, preferably in the form of a conceptual model and cross references. Although the book has a clear structure in the form of three parts, it remains implicit how the chapters, or better: the concepts and the factors contributing to low carbon mobility, interrelate. And this lack of interrelationships to some extent also applies to the cases. Using the first case study as an example: it is about mobility behaviour of Chinese migrants in Australia. The case shows that habits and cultural factors contribute to a public transport orientation of those migrants. But what does this case show in relation to the preceding chapters, and what does the reader learn about the transition to low carbon mobility? This is not clear. In addition, some chapters provide rather general knowledge on transitions but lack an in-depth treatment of the particular transition to low carbon mobility. An example is chapter 6 on changing paradigms and the roles of regimes and structures. It links general theory to low carbon mobility to some extent, but might have added more value if the insights would have come back in other chapters. What I further miss is lessons learned from book chapters. It would have been too ambitious or even naive to think that the book could lead to ‘recipes’ for the transition to low carbon mobility. The final chapter remains fairly general instead of offering new information that builds on the unique studies in the book.

Having said that, I conclude by saying I enjoyed reading the book. The editors have done a nice job in bringing together authors from several disciplines and backgrounds, content wise and geographically, and the book makes clear how complicated it is to escape from the lock-in into a car-based mobility system. It is a nice read for policy makers, researchers and students looking for an introduction into the area of behavioural transitions to low carbon mobility.

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