Mobility in Japan—A Model for French Transportation Policies?

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Transportation patterns in French cities have changed dramatically over the last two decade. Changes in family lifestyles, as seen in the primacy of the individual (resulting in more women in the workforce, more flexibility in the family framework, etc.), have led to demand for more urban transport options. The transition from an industrial to a service-based economy, with more part-time work and shorter working days, has made commuters' daily schedules more variable. Transportation has likewise been affected by changes in tourism patterns (with more short-stay trips). Developments in communication and information technologies have also promoted global changes in lifestyle. Mobile phones, e-business and multimedia have changed relationships in space and time, blurring the distinction between private and work time, and allowing telecommuting.

In metropolitan areas, concepts of distance have been transformed through the increased mobility of people, goods and information. The residential and economic functions of cities have expanded over larger areas. Motorized transport has promoted urban sprawl into areas ever further from the city centre.

The distant suburbs have attracted mega stores such as those of the Carrefour Group, often in places beyond the reach of public transport. Multiplex cinemas have turned suburban shopping centres into 'commercial resorts' for middle-class car owners, so the traditional commercial and cultural functions of city centres can no longer be taken for granted. People with fewer socio-economic advantages must resign themselves to living in large outlying suburbs, often with relatively few public services. Vandalism directed at symbols of mobility and freedom, especially cars and buses, is a visible expression of this group's sense of alienation and entrapment. Much of the public transport infrastructure, particularly subway and tram networks, only covers limited areas and cannot

properly meet the needs of the majority. The people who benefit most from this infrastructure are usually those wealthy enough to be able to afford to live near the city centre.

New policies promoting mobility have been devised to attack these problems. They aim for more comprehensive management of the city and urban transit—now it is important not only to facilitate travel within the city but also to develop new services for commuters, to link transit policies with urban planning policies, and to ensure a 'right to mobility'.

Three major approaches are needed when introducing these new policies:

- Redefine areas covered by transportation planning, giving parameters that enclose a greater area and making more relevant than the actual municipal boundaries of the urban core
- Allow for cooperation between and integration of government departments that provide services and make decisions, especially with regard to urban planning and transportation, while pursuing partnerships with the private sector as well
- Promote coordinated use of different transportation modes, rather than treating cars and public transportation systems as competitors

To increase mobility, it is necessary to further develop communication and information services, and offer services that promote mobility (for example: reduce waiting times for transfers from one transportation mode to another; increase the availability of information; and provide accompanied-baggage services, automatic coin lockers, food services, etc.). These services should be concentrated at transportation nodes such as railway stations, petrol stations and airports. The nodes, generally considered unattractive in comparison to historic city centres, would then be transformed into service hubs.

It is a little surprising for Europeans to discover that Japan is far ahead in

improving transportation systems and encouraging intermodal transport, even though Europe, and especially France, has seen greater social changes over the last two decades.

France could take examples from the model offered by transport services in the megalopolises of Tokyo and Osaka, with a view to offering greater urban mobility. Transit networks in Tokyo and Osaka are organized, rather than planned or managed—they integrate various transportation modes (rail, motor vehicle, bicycle, pedestrian) generally centred on rail infrastructure. They systematically link transit infrastructure with other urban infrastructure; in the inner city, underground walkways link subway stations to major buildings, while in the suburbs, intermodal transportation links based on the rail system provide access to residential areas.

In Japan, motorway users are offered many services in petrol stations and convenience stores, and train users can enjoy convenient services on platforms and in other parts of stations. Over time, major stations have become focal points for their cities, integrating a wide variety of retail, sporting and cultural infrastructure, thereby providing a multitude of services in addition to mobility services. In Japan, we see the widespread use of 'on the go' services, made possible through automobile navigation aids (via GPS), mobile phones offering access to numerous services, and data ports in convenience stores.

To adapt these services for users in France, it would only be necessary to listen to input from citizens. Interestingly, citizen input is absent from the Japanese model, because Japan's transit systems are not the result of political will backed by the public, but are the result of long-term cooperation between the public and private sectors. The coherence of the Japanese systems is due to the integral role of the rail network, which continues to carry the greatest number of passengers over the longest travel segments in the Tokyo and Osaka

metropolitan areas. This is because a comprehensive train network was operating long before car travel became common, and because trains conveniently traverse vast areas where many people work.

However, the primary role played by rail does not in itself explain the surprising level of integration between the various transportation modes. Nor does it explain the close links between transportation and other forms of urban infrastructure or the variety of services offered by train companies. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of Japan's two major urban transit networks are due to their long-term reliance on the private sector.

Since their inception, transport services in Tokyo and Osaka have been provided by train companies competing with each other in the private sector, but subject to strict government control of fares. Unable to enjoy large profits from their train operations, railway companies soon set about diversifying their businesses, first by introducing services linked to their train operations, and then by penetrating other sectors. The result is that they have become enormous national—even international—enterprises.

Japanese railway companies have diversified in three directions, and this has been pivotal in determining the present configuration of transportation systems:

- They offer motor vehicle services (bus, taxi and rent-a-car services) to complement their train services. This ensures intermodal mobility in regions served by each train company, and minimizes wait times for passengers at transfer points along the route from city centre to the suburbs.
- They diversified into suburban residential development. Some housing projects are close to stations with ready access; others are further away, but are linked by bus to the stations. This has placed transportation and residential development under one group of companies.

Tokyo's busy Shinjuku railway terminal served by JR East's intercity and suburban services, three metro lines and three private railways that are carrying one and a half million daily passengers in total. JR East and the three private railways run department stores, shopping centres and hotels inside and around the station. People gather into the terminal also by buses, taxis and cars as well as on foot and by illegally parked bicycles and motorcycles.
(EJRCF)

- They established major department stores and other retail services in their train stations, changing transfer stations into major urban centres. Unlike the situation in European and North-American cities, the automobile is not a 'social filter' in Japan, because trains provide cheaper access to important commercial and leisure centres.

Even so, urban transport systems in Tokyo and Osaka are hardly satisfactory. The emphasis on rail transport is responsible for the seriously underdeveloped urban road system, resulting in frequent traffic jams in metropolitan areas; the exceptional mobility facilitated by intermodal transport and smooth transfers between different transportation modes has encouraged urban sprawl; and private ownership and management of residential zones—even entire neibourhoods—has relieved the government taking a more pro-active role in housing and urban planning.

Despite these drawbacks, Japanese transportation systems could serve as a guide for French carriers hoping to boost mobility in France. Two characteristics of the Japanese transportation system are particularly worth considering:

- The quality and diversity of services facilitating mobility (smooth transfers from one mode to another, excellent reliability, schedules displayed prominently, a variety of services for transit users, etc.)
- The use of urban space as a continuum, building a complex to house one or more train stations, a shopping mall, department store, offices, underground walkways, parking lots, cultural facilities, restaurants and hotels

Clearly, the principles underlying the Japanese transportation system should be better known and understood in France. ∎

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