

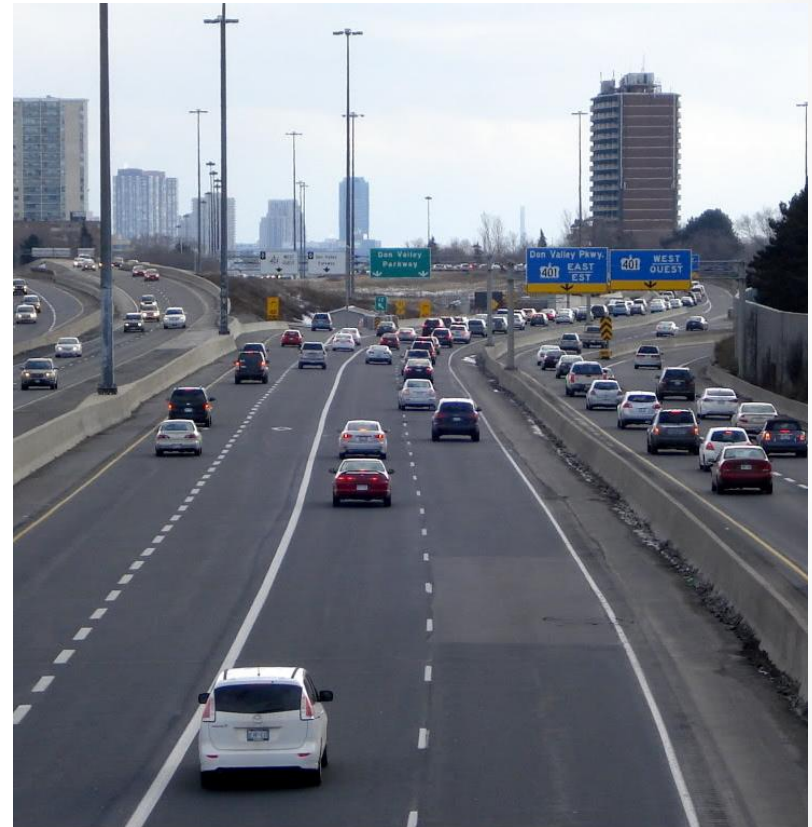
# MOTOR MANIA

A HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE ROLE OF PUBLIC  
DISCURSIVE CONFLICT IN TRANSPORT TRANSITIONS

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# Introduction

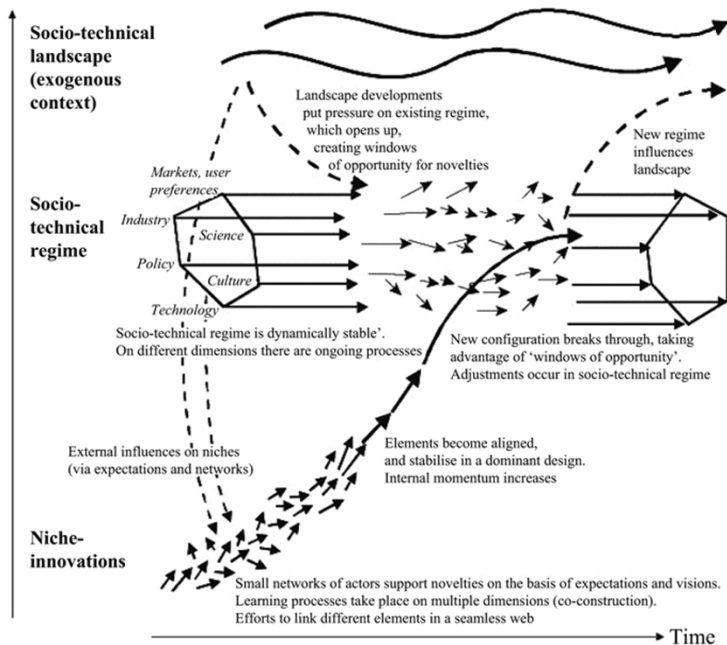
- Automobility is an extraordinarily resilient system.
  - It “...creates the conditions for its own expansion” (Urry 2004, p. 27)
  - “During the last fifty years it has facilitated and encouraged the creation of a mass culture increasingly organized around large-scale physical mobility, with enormous social consequences” (Dant and Martin 2001, p. 143)
- Historians recognize that transport systems have an important cultural component.
  - Nationalism was important in the construction of South Korea’s Gyeongbu Highway (Jeon 2010)
  - Gender associations contributed to the rejection of the electric car in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ivory and Genus 2010)
  - Nazi Germany used motoring as a symbolic device (Kopper 2013)



# Theoretical Literature

## The multi-level perspective

Increasing structuration  
of activities in local practices



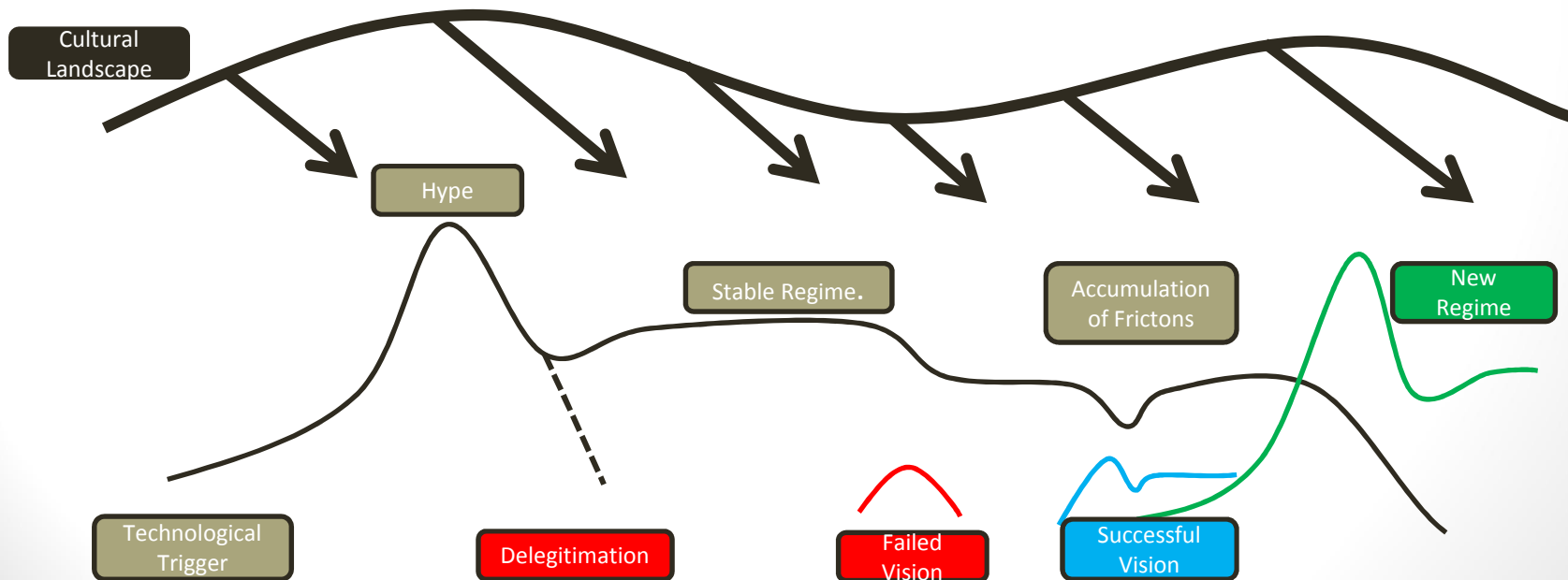
Source: Geels and Schot (2007, p. 401)

## Discursive, Political, and Cultural Literature

- Techno-tales: “Popular stories about technology” (Divall 2011)
  - Includes visions of the future. (Berkhout 2006)
- Discursive legitimacy (Verhees 2011)
- Hype cycles and Issue Attention Cycles (Downs 1972; Gartner, 2014)
- Policy paradigm shifts (Hall 1993)
- The cultural landscape (Alexander and Smith, 1993)

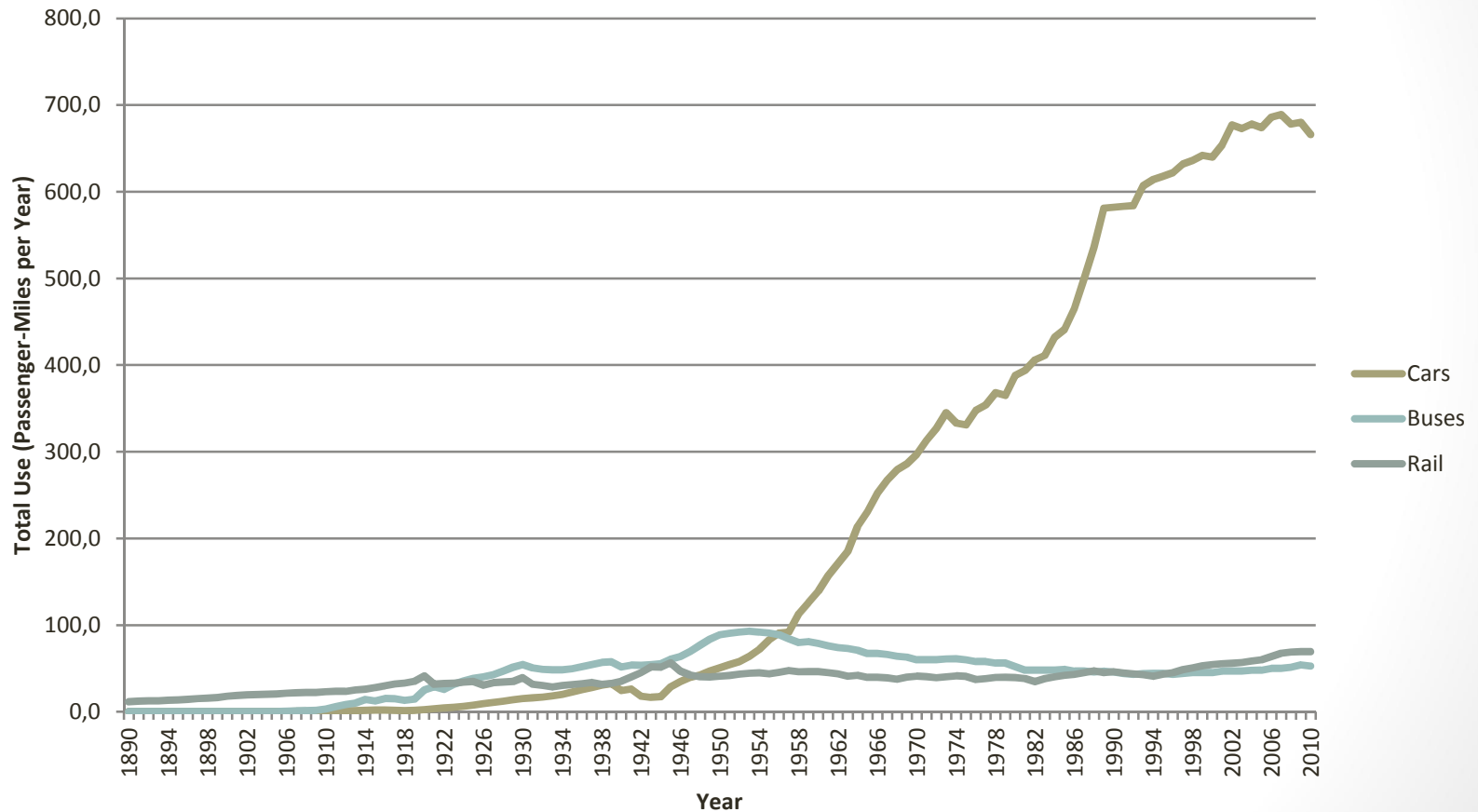
# Theoretical Model

- Phase 1: Legitimation.
  - Niche Technology must be perceived as basically acceptable.
- Phase 2: Accommodation
  - Problems associated with the growth of the new technology are solved by making space for it.
- Phase 3: Contestation
  - Conflict between new technology and pre-established regime.
- Phase 4: Maintenance
  - Further expansion of the new regime creates problems which must be addressed.



# Case Study: Rail to Road in the United Kingdom

## British Surface Transport (1830-2010)



# Phase 1: The Legitimation of the Motor Car, 1896-1919



- 1896: Locomotives on Highways Act
  - "...the public do not sufficiently appreciate the dangers that await them on our public streets and roads, when the Locomotives on Highways Act, 1896, comes into operation..." (1)
  - "Many of these last [ordinary drivers], most of them, perhaps, require their motor-cars primarily for the uses of everyday life, and regard tours of hundreds of miles as a matter of secondary consideration"; cars are seen as potentially utilitarian machines, but their utilitarian use is restricted to local travel" (2)
- 1903: Road Traffic Act further legitimizes motor vehicles

# Phase 2: Accommodation of Cars, 1919-1945

- Road accidents were a principle argument for the construction of motor roads.
  - “The safety of railways...is accepted by the public as a foregone conclusion, and the intimation that a mishap has occurred comes as a surprise and is given prominent notice. It is hard luck, but the brighter the sword, the more noticeable any tarnish...”. (3)
  - “On the railways, the toll of casualties is as nothing compared with that of the roads. The real reason is clear. From their outset, the railway tracks were designed solely for mechanical transport...But with the roads there was no such design. (4)
- 1937: Government takes control of 4,500 miles of trunk roads and plans to expand them for motor traffic.

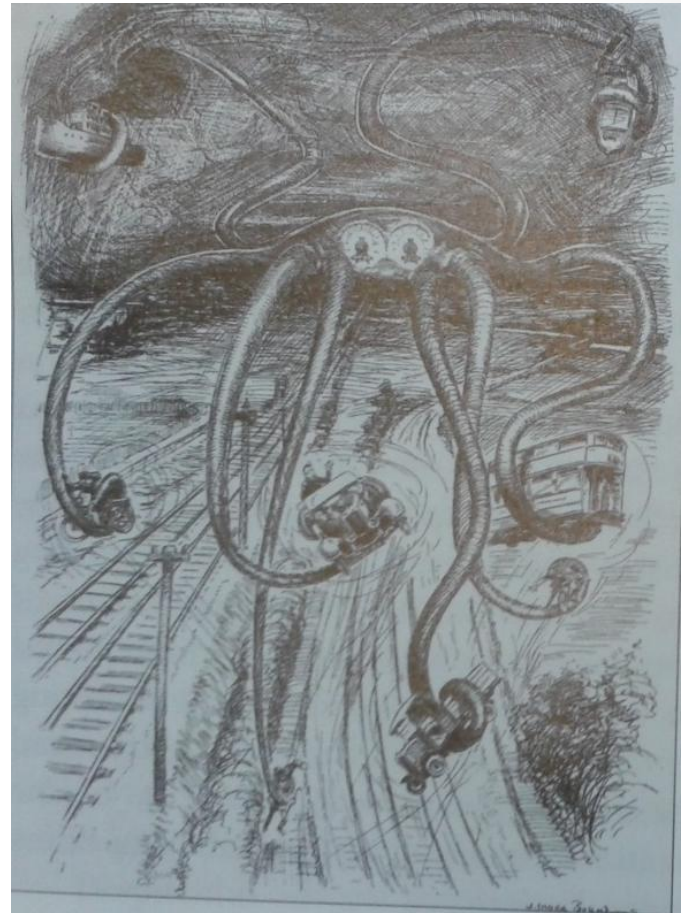


Figure 5: The Railway Octopus (Jeremiah 2010, p. 133)

# Phase 3: Road/Rail Contestation, 1928-1963



- 1928: Railway (road transport) acts
- 1937: Square Deal Campaign
- 1950s: Railway Modernisation vs. Motorways
  - “The motorway shrinks distances. When there are motorways it will be feasible to visit friends 150 miles away and to return the same day without fatigue”. (5)
  - “Will even a technically efficient railway be able to pay its way in the second half of the twentieth century? The experience of the post-war years—and not only in this country—has made the answer to this question a very doubtful one”. (6)
  - “Nothing can change the fact that a railway network flung out of the nineteenth century is unlikely to meet the needs of the twentieth and twenty-first”. (7)



# Phase 4: Defense of the Road Regime 1963-1990

- 1963: Buchanan and Beeching Reports establish dominance of road transport over rail transport. (8)
- Two growing strands of opposition to the motor regime emerged after 1963.
  - Opposition to cars
  - Opposition to roads
- Solutions within the motor regime, such as catalytic converters and electric cars are initially proposed, but are unable to stem the growth of an anti-car narrative.
- 1989: *Roads for Prosperity* causes massive controversy
  - “ Does the Secretary of State accept that 10-lane super-highways speeding traffic into the cities are useless if chronic congestion means that it cannot move in the cities when it arrives there? What effect will the White Paper's plans have on the environment, especially in respect of vehicle emissions? Road traffic alone accounts for more than one third of all harmful atmospheric emissions and is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gases. There is no mention of that in the White Paper, despite the Prime Minister's alleged concern about the greenhouse effect.”
    - –John Prescott, Labour Transport Critic (9)
  - To me, the White Paper represents motorway madness par excellence. I would have been prepared to cheer the right hon. Gentleman if he had announced a doubling of investment in the railways, which is what the people of this country clearly want. They do not want this amount spent on roads.
    - - Tony Banks, Labour MP (10)

# The Destablisation of the Road Regime?

- 1992: Clashes over Twyford Down
- 1995: Reclaim The Streets
  - “...you’ll maintain the status quo, trampling the freedom to walk and cycle, to cross the road in safety, to breathe clean air...” (11)
- 1996: Newbury Bypass Protests
- 1998: “A New Deal for Transport” (12)
  - “...the way we travel is damaging our towns and cities and harming our countryside. As demand for transport grows, we are even changing the very climate of our planet”
  - Proposed “A railway renaissance”
- 2000: “Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan” (13)
  - Released the same year as major protests against the price of fuel in Britain.



# Conclusions

- Early observations support my theoretical model
  - Legitimacy is a necessity to have a viable niche innovation.
  - Accommodation takes place through the reaction to frictions created by an expanding niche.
  - A regime whose legitimacy is destabilized will be at a disadvantage in a struggle with a strong niche innovation.
  - The destabilisation of a regime's legitimacy occurs through the accumulation of unresolved problems with the regime technology.
- More research is needed, particularly a comparative case study on the United States.

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