

QUT Digital Repository:
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



This is the accepted version of this review. Published as:

Brunello, Lara R. (2010) *Railways, Urban Development and Town Planning in Britain: 1948–2008*, Haywood R. Ashgate (2009). £65.00, ISBN: 9780754673927.
[Review]

© Copyright 2009 Elsevier Ltd All rights reserved

Railways, Urban Development and Town Planning in Britain: 1948–2008, Haywood R. Ashgate (2009). £65.00, ISBN: 9780754673927

This book is a thorough investigation of the relationship between land use planning and the railways in Britain, through review of the factors affecting the two sectors and their integration during the period of public ownership. The rationale behind the book is explained as a timely analysis of the dynamic correlation involving town planning and management of the railway in a period when growing congestion on the road network is forcing people to look for alternative modes and capacity is badly needed to accommodate this increased demand for travel. The book calls for a modal shift from road to rail for passenger and freight traffic.

Thus the book aims to provide hindsight for future actions, drawing its lessons from the past. An historical review is carried out to better understand the areas of improvement with a theoretical framework to assess institutional structures, policy development and spatial outcomes, set against changes in attitudes toward the environment, transport and planning. An extensive research methodology is presented in Chapter 1, which introduces 13 steps for the analysis as the overall number of chapters in the book. These are structured around the smart concept of interface between the railway management and land use planning, with continuous benchmarking of their varying characteristics and degrees of interaction. This was possible thanks to the development of three explanatory themes around which the author designed the evaluation: the influence of politics and political ideology, of the professions and professional ideology, and the impacts of governance and management theory.

Chapter 2 reviews the period before 1948 to produce a position statement to better understand the historic context that formed the base line for the core of the research and to develop the analytical tools to evaluate policy and practice in the 1948–1994 and post-privatisation periods. The author chooses seven core policies/agendas for both the railway network and the town planning sectors: (i) rationalisation of the network, (ii) development of railway services, (iii) closing strategic gaps in the network, (iv) development of a programme of station enhancement, (v) patterns of urban development, (vi) management of the redevelopment process in existing urban areas and (vii) management of the location and character of green-field site development. These seven themes are continued through the book as a template against which to compare how things really turned out during the subsequent analysed periods.

The next chapters constitute the body of research, plunging into the analysis set out in the methodology: institutional arrangements are reviewed for both railway and planning sectors over the 1948–1968, 1969–1994 and post-privatisation periods, respectively in chapters 3, 6 and 10. Sector policy is reviewed for the same periods in chapters 4, 7 and 11 and this process is repeated to analyse the spatial outcomes in chapters 5, 8 and 12.

Chapter 9 stands out as it presents the case study to ground the theoretical research. The selection of Manchester conurbation as case study was due to the fact that it developed a complex railway network and the city radiated out along it in all directions. Thus it could demonstrate prototypical strengths and weaknesses of the interplay between institutional structures and policy within a single city region. This was achieved through an interesting mapping exercise that reveals both the power of the planning system to manage the land development process and the impacts of decentralisation, where the process has not been used to maximise rail utilisation.

To give additional weight and currency to the research commenced in the early 1990s when railway privatisation was taking place, the author extended the analysis into the post-privatisation era (chapters 10–12) arguing that most of the problems suffered since (low accountability, relationship complexities, little integration with land development) are attributable to the form of privatisation adopted for British Rail: the ‘track authority’ model where track ownership is separated from train operation. A further model is presented where a Public–Private Partnership was adopted for the London Underground, which also produced management problems to the point of breakdown, resulting in a failed privatisation example within the railway industry. Besides the rapidity in which privatisation was introduced or the model adopted, it is clear the stressed need for a regulatory body that could lead the railways and take a long term stance securing interest in the integration process with land use planning.

Chapter 13 draws conclusions together and poses few questions on the future of railways and their role to drive modal shift and to positively impact on a sustainable way of living.

Overall the book demonstrates that, even when opportunities are presented to develop integration between the railways and town planning, it has been difficult to secure equilibrium for any length of time, due to continuous shifts in political views and professional ideologies. One disappointing aspect of the book is that only sparse references to economic factors were made throughout the text and acknowledged only in the last chapter. The author’s effort to avoid blaming negative outcomes on economic downturns when they might have been more accurately dependent on policy shortcomings is, however, quite understandable.

The readability of the book is somewhat marred by some inconsistency between the use of metric, and imperial measures and some repetitiveness, revealing the nature of the book edited from a previous PhD thesis. Also its rigid structure following the steps of the methodology lacks in narrative smoothness, although useful to pinpoint issues and emphasize the analytical framework. Furthermore, even if the author explains the reasons to choose a spatially hierarchical approach, especially to handle the case study, for those new to the subject maybe a chronological approach might have given a better understanding of events or at least I would have seen the need for an extra conceptual map to give a chronological overview in a discernible pattern.

This aside, coming from the planning sector (being an architect in the first place) and also researching in the railway sector, I found this book an excellent text, where the topic is well thought-out and investigated, especially thanks to the analysis over such a long period of time, six decades, making its findings even the more strong and consistent. Thus, I would recommend it as a reference to anyone researching in the field of transport and land use integration.

Lara Brunello
School of Urban Development,
Queensland University of Technology,
2 George Street,
GPO Box 2434 Brisbane,
QLD 4001, Australia
E-mail addresses: l.brunello@qut.edu.au