

T²M

International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility



A mural train in Philadelphia – part of the city's mural arts program. Photograph by Candice Roberts

Newsletter

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Editorial

It is not long now until T²M's Annual Conference will get underway at Drexel University in Philadelphia, USA. The location of forthcoming event is unusual for T²M. Of eleven previous conferences only three have taken place outside Europe. This has, in a way, quietly privileged those based in Europe who have been spared transcontinental air flights and their associated jetlag (not to mention the bonus of avoiding certain visa formalities). Thus in a way we can celebrate this year's conference location as a step towards overcoming this asymmetry. But there is still much to be done to ensure T²M lives up to its international status. With the exception of the 2010 conference in New Delhi, all T²M conferences have been located in only two of the world's six inhabited continents. But there are other reasons to celebrate the forthcoming conference, not least the fact that it represents the outcome of T²M's continuing connective efforts with for the first time the conference programme being shared with the Pan-American Mobilities Network. For these reasons and in order to introduce the conference's venue city we have decided to dedicate this issue of the newsletter to Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is inspiring in multiple ways for all types of people – for tourists, artists and academics alike. The city's landscape has been strongly shaped by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) that permeates the area with an impressive range of public transportation types. Its network includes subway, buses, trolleybuses, tramways (the term “trolleys” is often preferred in the US) as well as various other rail services. You will read more about these services in Candice Robert's 'View from the Street' contribution. Meanwhile readers will enjoy an insight into the artistic inspiration that Philadelphia has generated in this issue's 'In the Spotlight' segment where artists Esther Polak and Ivar van Bekkum discuss the project they are currently curating in the city, a innovative hybrid art/science navigation documentary called *250 Miles Crossing Philadelphia*. Many of us will observe first hand how such creative spirit is reflected by the conference venue itself. For example, Drexel University's Papadakis Integrated Sciences Building boasts a unique Biowall described by its website as “a 22-foot wide, 80-foot tall ... beautiful and functional wall of plants that purifies indoor air.” Such an environment sounds perfect for generating fresh ideas. For others (including Andrey!), however, the conference will serve as a reminder that physical distance and visa requirements still do matter. Those who can only join the event in spirit or virtually are, no doubt, wishing those who can be there in person a pleasant stay in Philadelphia and of course there will be plenty of other opportunities to meet again at future T²M meetings – on whichever continent they may occur.

Before you launch into the issue we would like to thank Claudine Moutou for all of her previous efforts as newsletter editor. Claudine stood down from her role after the last issue and so now we are looking for a new co-editor. Please contact us if you are interested in getting involved. As always we also encourage you to send us news, reports and articles for the next issue to newsletter@t2m.org. The deadline for items to be included in the August issue is **Monday 10 November 2014**. Please bear in mind our publication schedule when sending CFPs. Newsletters will be released towards the end of the issuing month and unfortunately will not include expired CFPs.

Andrey Vozyanov
Samuel Merrill

President's Page

Dear colleagues,

in two weeks, T²M will meet in Philadelphia and discuss Spinoffs of Mobility (Technology, Risk and Innovation) at our twelfth International Conference and the third one in North America, and the first to elect an American president who combines both American and European scholarly experience, and historical, sociological and ethnographic perspectives on transport, traffic and mobility.

Looking back on the history of our association and the broader research field, I am both happy and thankful to see, how cultural and social sciences integrate again to understand (and shape) the history and future of transport, traffic and mobility. But still, the organisational and institutional structure of our field is split and underdeveloped. Besides of T²M, we have Cosmobilities, the PanAmerican Mobilities Network, the EASA Anthropology and Mobility Network, ICHTT and a couple of other associations and networks. I have the feeling that all these associations including our well-established T²M are interesting but too small to gain more influence in academia and support the creation of academic jobs. The same is true for our periodicals (Journal of Transport History, our Yearbook, Transfers, Mobilities and others) to sustainably influence and shape the academic discussion in history, sociology, political sciences and cultural studies. Transport planning, which became more sociological and cultural in the past (see e.g. the International Association for Travel Behaviour Research), is underrepresented in our field. The same is true for Museums Studies.

We have to and we are going to change this, in order to flourish and grow as an interdisciplinary field of research on transport, travel and mobility. Our joint conference with the PanAmerican Mobilities Network on “Spinoffs of mobility” in Philadelphia is a big step in this direction and the next annual conference 2015 together with Cosmobilities another one. We need further activities to intensify cooperation and maybe merge in order to develop and flourish our field. I invite you to openly discuss these issues in our members meeting in Philadelphia and I am looking forward to seeing you there,

Yours as always



Hans-Liudger Dienel



In the Spotlight



Esther Polak & Ivar van Bekkum **PolakVanBekkum – 250 Miles Crossing Philadelphia**

The Dutch artist couple Esther Polak and Ivar van Bekkum, operating under the name PolakVanBekkum, focus their practice on landscape and mobility (or motion or movement) and the experience of space. Since May 2014 they have been working a project called *250 Miles Crossing Philadelphia* in conjunction with Philadelphia's Science Centre campus as part of a unique place-making and community engagement program called Art Along the Avenue of Technology. In this project they are exploring the intersection of art and technology along Market Street as they build an online GPS-based navigation documentary, which will follow the movements of both objects and people as they move throughout Philadelphia. Andrey caught up with Esther and Ivar over Skype to find out a little more about their project.

Could you tell a bit about the idea of the '250 Miles Crossing Philadelphia' project, how did you come across it? Whose initiative it was?

Well, I think Mimi sent us a message that this call was out here. It was a competitive call here, so the artists could at first send their portfolio, and of those, five were picked to work out an idea for the local environment. We have been working earlier on this idea of doing a navigation documentary that combines sound recordings with GPS-trajectories, but we haven't found a good context to actually develop it further.

Can you tell us a little more about the equipment you use in your practice?

How did you invent this text?

It is a little bit based on our own curiosity in space. Ivar and I have collaborated since 2010. And we experiment to find out how we both experience mobility in Philadelphia. So at the end of the day we decided to tell each other how we remembered our trajectories. And then we found that Ivar remember very much the flow of the traffic. So, for example, we can specifically remember a person in a car, a car passing, that we had to wait for another car, so he remembers the whole interaction, little details. But I have a sort of different approach - I mostly remembered open spaces. I remembered where buildings were lacking, and then there was openness in space, that is how I sort of relate to space. I remember there are a lot of empty lots here. Philadelphia was a big industrial city but industry declined over the last fifty years. So there was big population that was here previously, so many sites became unused, so they turned it down, and the city is very much half-open half-built. There are a lot of little open spaces, which are not planned. I really noticed that in the way you can see one street from another, reliance of sight, that is what I remember. These are different ways of experiencing the city. So these observations were also used.

Your sound recording also unavoidably records the sound of movement itself. How do you treat this sound?

Surely. So, it depends a little bit. Some wind sounds on a microphone are really annoying, so we try to avoid those. It heats the microphone with the sounds that are not natural, so we try to avoid them or get rid of them. On the other hand you want to have the experience of the mobility. But we solved that by not recording the stereo then we have a person with two split mono-microphones. One microphone is on the person's belly, the other is on the person's back, so it's a stretched out stereo effect. In a way the person becomes a microphone.

And how did you avoid undesired noise?

We invented a combination of foam, fur and various other bits of material to pack the sound recording equipment. But you also want to keep the person looking around more, to interact with the environment and not to be a totally wired, weird, kind of robot. So we put it in the bag in a way that did not stand out obviously.

Has this practice brought you into contact with social scientists that are interested in mobility studies?

We got into contact with Mimi Sheller and organised feedback meetings, where we show both the current stage of our project but also other art projects or things that we find inspiring for our work. And there we invite people who are interested and may apply more reflections about it. So we organise special evenings to talk about these matters. But we do not involve them directly in the research, process.

But is there some exchange of knowledge between you as artists and "them" as scientists, do you use the findings, theories or concepts of mobility studies or sociology?

Absolutely. I've been reading Tim Ingold, I think many people in mobility studies read this text as well, I've have also been reading some texts on cartography. It has been very interesting to see how at first I felt more related to cartography but now that I have started to see how these mobilities texts also provide relevant contexts for us. I actually found mobility studies texts more inspiring for our work than cartography.

It seems like your projects are very much focused on human experience. Nowadays there are plenty of ways to displace the experiences of mobility - like headphones, smartphones and other gadgets. What is your own experience of these activities?

Nice question! First, I am always aware whether I distract myself from mobility or not, and if other people are also doing the same. I also realise that what works for distraction can also function to intensify the experience of space. For example, I remember when I bought my first Sony Walkman, I think it was in the late 70s, if I remember correctly. And I started to listen to music on the go. The Walkman did so much for my imagination, and I remember that it intensified my experiences of space a lot. If you listen to music whilst you are moving for the first time, for me it was like daily life became more like a movie, so it was like everything I've seen was relevant in a new way. I also think a lot of people have specific music for the car, and I don't think they are using this to distract them, they also use it to intensify their experience of space.

Is it your first time in Philadelphia? If so, what is your impression of the city and its mobility?

Yes, it's the first time and of course it's really totally different mobility dynamic, because it's only the first time we are in Philadelphia, but also the first time we are doing the project in the US. And for the last 10 years we focused mostly on non-urban landscape than on the city. So it is both a new thing to be here but also to work in a city. So it is very specific for us. The city is organised by a grid, it is very American, and it creates a totally different way of experiencing the space, because it's very clear-cut. There are not many curves on the road. And for this reason it really turns your experience. All streets are straight. If you look in Google map on Philadelphia or other American cities it's very geometrical. It is not only a visual effect it also changes the way your mobility is organised. Taken to extreme, if you go from one place to another, you can only make one turn. Everything is in the grid, so you can look at the right, at the left, and just move in one direction until you are at the right surface and you have arrived at your destination. So, if you planned carefully, you can go from one place to another and only make one turn.

The US is well-known for its car culture, the Netherlands, in contrast, for its bicycle or public transit culture and, Europe is in general more public transit friendly and not so car dependent. Do you feel this difference here, or is Philadelphia an exception with its buses, trolleybuses, trams, subway and rail?

I think Philadelphia is very much an exception. Maybe you are a little bit more car dependent here than in the Netherlands, but I think it is the most intensively biked city of the States, so we also reacted by buying a bike, I do not even have a driving license, so I mostly bike around here, and in the neighborhood there are sidewalks with parked cars, there is hardly any public space here and you can basically move around with a car, it is very durable if you drive.

For your project do you also make sound recordings in public transit and in vehicles?

We also make recordings of buses and trolleybuses. We try to work not only with people but also moving objects. We also made recording of horse rides, because, surprisingly, there are a lot of stables here in the city, and people still go horse riding in the city. I think it is very special. And we also record the objects that are not self mobile but are part of mobility systems. For example, Uzbekish restaurant, there are many people who migrated here from Russia and come to the restaurant to have their favourite food. We did recordings not in the restaurant itself but in the street near the kitchen, so that you can hear the hum of the fridge when the door opens with voices of all these people in kitchen mostly speaking Russian.

What are the expected outcomes of the project?

If everything goes well, it will be the interactive website where you can see the map with trajectories, we made them into animations, using Google as a platform and we will also make a version suited for display in an exhibition situation.

Sounds very intriguing! We look forward to the results. Thanks for taking the time to tell us more about the project and good luck with it in the future.

For more information visit: <http://www.250miles.net/>

Journal of Transport History

Journal of Transport History, Vol 35 No 1, June 2014

Research papers (6)

An imperial railway failure: the Indochina-Yunnan railway, 1898-1941 *Jean-François Rousseau*

‘One of the noblest inventions of the age’: British steamboat numbers, diffusion, services and public reception, 1812 – c.1823 *David M. Williams and John Armstrong*

Urban transportation planning influences and legacies: Kurt Leibbrand, Germany’s acclaimed postwar traffic planner *Jeffry M. Diefendorf*

Marketing ocean travel: Cunard and the White Star Line, 1910-1940 *Graham Gladden*

Routes of conflict: building roads and shaping the nation in Mexico, 1941-1952 *Mike Bess*

Meaningful mobilities: the experience of underground travel in the Buenos Aires Subte, 1913-1944 *Dhan Zuninho Singh*

Survey and speculation (1)

Colonial India, its railways, and the cliometricians *Ian J. Kerr*

Book reviews (12)

As the official journal of the T²M association, members receive copies of the twice-annual JTH as part of their membership subscription to T²M.

The home-page of the Journal contains links to contents, author submission guidelines and to current and back-copies:

<http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?id=4>

Address all queries and submissions to the Editor, Gordon Pirie, at jth.editorial@gmail.com.

Gordon Pirie

Editor, *Journal of Transport History*

Transfers

Transfers, Vol 4 No 2, Summer 2014

Editorial

Mimi Sheller and Gijs Mom

Research papers (2)

Transitioning to a Low Carbon Society? The Case of Personal Transportation and Urban Form in Copenhagen: 1947 to the Present
Andrés Felipe Valderrama Pineda and Nina Vogel

Learning from Electric Cars as Socio-technical Mobility Experiments: Where Next?
Daniel Newman, Peter Wells, Paul Nieuwenhuis, Ceri Donovan and Huw Davies

Special Section on Railways and Literature (6)

Rail Networks, Mobility, and the Cultures of Cities: Introduction to the Special Section
Steven D. Spalding

“Behind the backs of houses”: Landscapes of Englishness in the Postwar Railway Poetry of John Betjeman and Philip Larkin
Heather Joyce

The Subte as Looking Machine into the City: Moebius’ Trajectory through Buenos Aires
Araceli Masterson-Algar

Harry Beck’s London Underground Map: A Convex Lens for the Global City
John D. Schwetman

Reworking Appropriation: The Language of Paris Railways, 1870–1914
Peter Soppelsa

Response: Reflections on Rails and the City
George Revill

Ideas in Motion

A City for Woody Allen? The New Banks of the Seine in Paris, a Product of Rootless Sociology and City Planning
Mathieu Flonneau

Art and Mobility

Turtle 1: The First System D Car
Film Review
Melle Smets

Old Model, New Parts
Matt Thomas

Museum Review

The Red Star Line Museum, Antwerp
Torsten Feys

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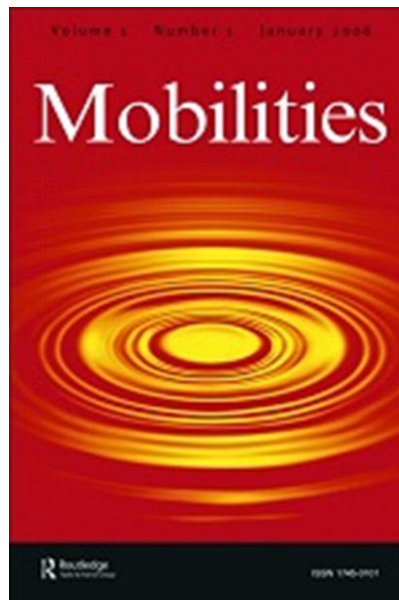
***Transfers* Editors:**

Gijs Mom, Georgine Clarsen, Nanny Kim, Peter Merriman, Mimi Sheller, Heike Weber

Mobilities Virtual Special Issue

Things that go: fast and slow

Available from: <http://explore.tandfonline.com/page/pgas/rmob-vsi>

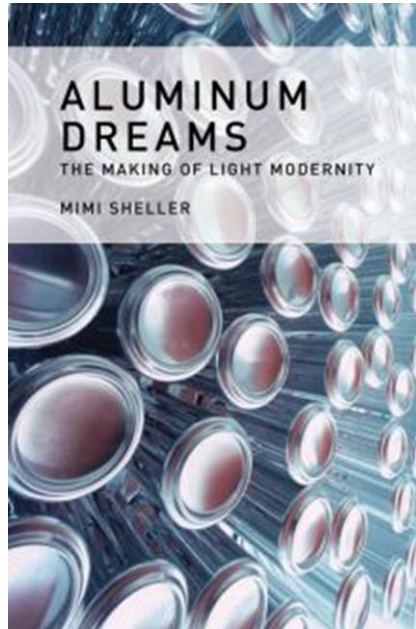


Research on the history of transport, qualitative analysis of modes of transport, and understandings of past and future transitions in transport infrastructure have been greatly enhanced by the new theoretical perspectives and methodologies of mobilities research. This *Mobilities* Virtual Special Issue gathers together recent research articles on automobility; cycling, bus travel, motorcycling, and infrastructure in a range of countries and locations. Each explores in different ways being in motion, from its sensory experiences to its regulatory frameworks. How do we go, fast or slow? Who can go, when and where? Who is included and excluded from different modes of mobility? And how does mobility shape space and its imaginaries?

News

New Book Release from Mimi Sheller

Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity



Overview

Aluminum shaped the twentieth century. It enabled high-speed travel and gravity-defying flight. It was the material of a streamlined aesthetic that came to represent modernity. And it became an essential ingredient in industrial and domestic products that ranged from airplanes and cars to designer chairs and artificial Christmas trees. It entered modern homes as packaging, foil, pots and pans and even infiltrated our bodies through food, medicine, and cosmetics. In *Aluminum Dreams*, Mimi Sheller describes how the materiality and meaning of aluminum transformed modern life and continues to shape the world today.

Aluminum, Sheller tells us, changed mobility and mobilized modern life. It enabled air power, the space age and moon landings. Yet, as Sheller makes clear, aluminum was important not only in twentieth-century technology, innovation, architecture, and design but also in underpinning global military power, uneven development, and crucial environmental and health concerns. Sheller describes aluminum's shiny utopia but also its dark side. The unintended consequences of aluminum's widespread use include struggles for sovereignty and resource control in Africa, India, and the Caribbean; the unleashing of multinational corporations; and the pollution of the earth through mining and smelting (and the battle to save it). Using a single material as an entry point to understanding a global history of modernization and its implications for the future, *Aluminum Dreams* forces us to ask: How do we assemble the material culture of modernity and what are its environmental consequences?

Aluminum Dreams includes a generous selection of striking images of iconic aluminum designs, many in color, drawn from advertisements by Alcoa, Bohn, Kaiser, and other major corporations, pamphlets, films, and exhibitions.

About the Author

Mimi Sheller is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Mobilities Research and Policy at Drexel University. She is the author of *Democracy after Slavery*, *Consuming the Caribbean*, and *Citizenship from Below*.

Endorsements

“*Aluminum Dreams* spans the globe in order to explain how one light, bright metal has made the modern age, and has made modernity simultaneously wonderful and terrible. This superb commodity study brilliantly carries forward the legacy of Sidney Mintz’s pioneering *Sweetness and Power*.” — **Joyce E. Chaplin**, James Duncan Phillips Professor of Early American History, Harvard University, and author of *Round About the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit*

“Through revealing graphics and polished prose, *Aluminum Dreams* delivers the retro pleasures of artifacts now gone by, but then—with the enticement well in hand—shows how oligopolies, war, and global exploitation follow on. It is a tour de force of cultural-material analysis, successful at many registers including the satisfactions of a mind-expanding reading experience.” — **Harvey Molotch**, author of *Where Stuff Comes From*.

“Mimi Sheller has produced a wonderful account of the light, bright, silvery metal that has become so central to the sleek modern world. Her shimmering story of ‘aluminum dreams’ links the very centers of global power, mobility, and communications with other places of abject poverty and environmental degradation.” — **John Urry**, Distinguished Professor of Sociology, Lancaster University

Regular link on the overview: <http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/aluminum-dreams>

New Edited Book from Martin Schiefelbusch and Hans-Liudger Dienel

Linking Networks: The Formation of Common Standards and Visions for Infrastructure Development.



50% Discount: Quote Code 50ADS14N when ordering

Edited by Martin Schiefelbusch and Hans-Liudger Dienel, both at Berlin Technical University, Germany Transport and Society

“This impressive contribution tackles difficult but timely questions about technology, integration, and governance. The case studies, focused on European transport, communication and energy infrastructures will appeal to a wide audience, as will the authors’ deft comparative analysis and the editors’ sure overview of the complex and contested terrain.” – **Thomas J. Misa**, University of Minnesota, USA .

Presenting recent research on the international integration of infrastructures in Europe this book combines general and methodological chapters and examples from a variety of different sectors such as transport, electricity and communication networks. The wide range of topics gives a good overview of the different challenges posed and the strategies employed in each sector to establish internationally compatible networks, procedures and standards. This work strengthens comparative research as a complement to the detailed analysis of singular cases that often characterises previous works in this field.

Contents

Foreword: Matthias Ruete.

Part I Introduction and Theoretical Background: Introduction and overview, Martin Schiefelbusch and Hans-Liudger Dienel; Methodological and conceptual challenges of comparisons across sectors and periods, Christian Henrich-Franke; Infrastructure and fragmentation: the limits of the integration paradigm, Jens Ivo Engels; Archetypes of international infrastructural integration, Gerold Ambrosius.

Part II Case Studies: Two hundred years of failed tariff policy: a comparison of the Reich Freight Tariff Law and the common customs tariff of the EEC, Christian Henrich-Franke; Visions of rail development - the 'internationality of railways' revisited, Martin Schiefelbusch; Functionalistic spill-over and infrastructural integration: the telecommunication sectors, Christian Henrich-Franke; Transportation infrastructure integration in East Africa in a historical context, Jacqueline Klopp and George Makajuma; From liberalism to liberalization: international electricity governance in the twentieth century, Vincent Lagendijk; 'Wings for peace' versus 'airopia': contested visions of post-war European aviation in World War II Britain, S. Waqar Zaidi; Iron silk roads: comparing interwar and post-war transnational Asian railway projects, Irene Anastasiadou and Aristotle Tympas; Spatial and social effects of infrastructural integration in the case of the Polish borders, Tomasz Komornicki.

Part III Comments: The expansion of infrastructures as 'the Second Party Programme': a look at the bright and dark sides of Soviet life, Klaus Gestwa; The challenges of transportation integration in the U.S.A., 1890–1960, Bruce E. Seely. **Part IV Conclusions:** Key findings of the case studies - a 'meta-analysis', Christian Henrich-Franke and Melissa Gomez; Experiences from comparative historical analysis – conclusions for research and policy, Gerold Ambrosius, Hans-Liudger Dienel and Martin Schiefelbusch. Index.

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View from the Street: Living In, Moving Through, Working Toward: SEPTA and Progress in Philadelphia

Philadelphia's Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) is a complex microcosm that in many ways represents challenges and triumphs of the city itself. Examining the parts that make up SEPTA and mass transit in Philadelphia (officials, individuals, the city at large) reveals interesting questions of who is represented through mass transit, and highlighting key events through historical, economic and social perspectives reveals that SEPTA may in fact be caught between advancing the status quo, maintaining the bottom line of a business and truly connecting and serving citizens of Philadelphia.

History and Nostalgia

SEPTA is the last mass transit holdout in a major U.S. city still using tokens. While magnetic swipe monthly passes are available, the primary payment mode requires cash upon entry or tokens pre-purchased from cashiers, vending machines in transit stations and vendors around the city. In many ways the SEPTA token itself is a fitting symbol for the state of mass transit in Philadelphia: a little old fashioned, almost anachronistic, but also endearing and inarguably tangible (Figure 1). One token costs \$1.80 but somehow they seem implicitly more valuable, partially no doubt due to the frequently frustrating process of acquiring token. Not every SEPTA station has a token vending machine, and cashiers are only on duty during limited and varying hours; both require cash and, in the case of the latter, exact change. (Murphy's Law dictates that the chances of two or more of those conditions aligning are slim, especially when you're in a hurry.) A friend who is willing to lend you a token is a friend indeed, and to further illustrate the weight of its currency, in some Philly dive bars I have even paid for beers with SEPTA tokens.



Figure 1. SEPTA tokens

The 69th Street Terminal is the far west endpoint of the Market-Frankford elevated railway line (or the “El”, slightly less famous than Chicago’s version) and is a glorious but well-worn representation of SEPTA’s history in connecting urban and suburban Philadelphia (Figures 2 & 3). Since opening in 1907, 69th Street has served as a center for residents and commuters transferring to and from trains, trolleys and busses. The station has seen several expansions over the past century; it has swollen and buckled to match the economic ebbs and flows of the city around it and carries the wear and tear as proof. Nevertheless, signs of dignity remain in the brick facade and Romanesque-style stone and tile work, and the neighborhood around the station is an energetic blend of traditional and contemporary urban, local shops and restaurants peppered with a few typical city outskirts fast food chains. It’s a little shabby but spirited, casually and proudly Philly.



Figure 2. 69th Street Terminal Exterior



Figure 3. 69th Street Terminal Interior

Highly fitting then that the path to 69th Street Terminal from Center City includes Love Letters, a series of murals created in collaboration by the Mural Arts program and a local street artist that “collectively express a love letter from a guy to a girl, from an artist to his hometown, and from local residents to their West Philadelphia neighbourhood” (muralarts.org). The Mural Arts Project hosts guided tours, which are among the highest rated Philadelphia activities on sites such as Trip Advisor and Yelp, and were even viewed by Prince Charles and Camilla on a recent visit to the city. The 50 Love Letter murals (part of the larger 3,000-plus street mural collection across Philadelphia) are vibrant against the more rundown areas; some are poignant and poetic, others are sweet and silly, most sharp and bright in a town known for being rough around the edges. One reviewer says, “You'll see abandoned buildings, houses falling apart, [and] you'll also see new houses. Regardless of their situation, there is love in this part of the city. They are definitely a community on the rise. These murals show the quiet optimism of Philly” (yelp.com/a-love-letter-for-you) (Figures 4 & 5).



Figure 4. The Kool Mural



Figure 5. The We Share Defeat Mural

Social Advocacy and Controversy

While optimism is certainly apparent, that's not to say there hasn't been controversy in Philadelphia's move toward a more modern and mobile city. In 2007, a transit passenger and trans-identifying woman was told she could not board a SEPTA bus using her transportation pass because of the required sticker that designated the pass-holder as male. In response to this situation and other similar reports over a number of years, an organization called RAGE (Riders Against Gender Exclusion) was formed and rallied for SEPTA to remove these discriminatory and exclusive gender stickers. Many protests, petitions and debates later, this grassroots campaign was finally successful in July of 2013 when SEPTA announced it would cease the use of any gender stickers on all monthly transit passes (phillyrage.org). I spoke with Max Ray, a founding member of RAGE, about his experiences. "They [SEPTA representatives] were always eager to meet with us [but] weren't ready to remove the gender stickers until it was better for their bottom line." Ray is very pleased with what he sees as a definite social justice victory but does question some of the political motives behind the decision.

"I think there were some sweet moments of learning for SEPTA," he says, "but there were also some frustrating moments where they told us, 'this is a bottom line issue for us' ". In the end, he views the positive outcome as an incident that raised awareness for Philadelphia citizens but is not necessarily indicative of SEPTA as a notably progressive organization.

In addition to working through episodes of discrimination, SEPTA has been involved in other issues of public space and advocacy. Recent fare hikes to support new technology have caused many lower income residents to reconsider the affordability and accessibility of mass transit. Re-zoning the fare system and eliminating the use of bus and subway passes for weekday travel on Regional Rail substantially increased travel costs for many working class commuters who hold jobs in sparsely served transportation areas such as the Philadelphia Airport and Naval Yard. Meanwhile, transit between some of the more affluent suburban routes was actually cheaper because of the rearrangement in fare zones. While it's still statistically unclear how many riders in which demographics are negatively and positively affected, research continues, as does the long-term plan for increased fares. Additionally, the relations between SEPTA workers unions and management have grown increasingly tenuous in the past decade with major strikes in 2005 and 2009; the 2009 strike came after the death of a SEPTA worker due to a train rerouting malfunction, and negotiation talks are still ongoing.

Getting administration and leadership to commiserate with workers is one matter, but another part of the problem is convincing local businesses and citizens who value their cars and parking spaces that the overall expansion of mass transit infrastructure is in the best benefit of the city. A debate simmers in Northern Liberties, an up-and-coming boundary neighborhood in the northeast section of the city, between developers, community-zoning boards and, subsequently, residents concerning the potential development of a new residential lofts building. The project has thus far been denied due to lack of parking for future residents, even though the developer stated plans to appeal to car-free tenants such as cyclists and mass transit riders who could use the nearby trolleys and Girard Avenue El station (planphilly.com).

As Jon Geeting of PlanPhilly explains, the social and economic clashes here are complicated. If the car-commuting residents and business owners who contribute clearly to the growth of Northern Liberties demonstrate their desire for and use of parking spaces, why wouldn't the zoning board support them? Conversely, how is the city meant to increase overall interest in and support for public transportation infrastructure when car-free living and working is not reinforced as a positive neighborhood element? Further, where are the lesser called upon voices in this debate, those for whom public transit is not optional, and how can they be equitably represented?

Responsibility and Evolution

Despite many obstacles, SEPTA, the city, and the people of Philadelphia all seem intent on forward progress; there are clearly differences in perspective on exactly what 'progress' means in the case of the aforementioned parties, but the good news is that there is some overlap. In 2010 Philadelphia won the Siemens Sustainable Community Award, in part due to green implementation efforts for SEPTA; initiatives include more than 250 hybrid buses currently in use, as well as more accessibility and integration for cyclists both on and around transit services. SEPTA has also partnered with local farmers markets this summer in order to provide more direct access to fresh produce and further its goal of "improving access to local food via transit" (septa.org/sustain) (Figure 6 & 7)



Figures 5 & 6. A SEPTA supported farmers market

SEPTA releases official statements assuring the public that the fare hikes will pay off and continue to promise a fully operating NPT (New Payment Technology) system, the start of which has been delayed for the past four years. When it finally does go into effect, however, the new system is reported to offer a wider variety of payment choices including a contactless payment system that surpasses any smart card technology currently operating in cities like New York and Washington. An already observable change in the SEPTA system is the return of 24-hour service on the Market Frankford and Broad Street subway lines, when only limited bus and trolley routes previously served late-night riders. Campaigns to advertise and foster interest in this expanded service decorate the walls of several transit stations and stops (Figure 7).



Figures 7. SEPTA advertisements for its 24-hour service.

I think Ray is on target in his assessment of SEPTA as an organization caught in “the tension between trying to run like a business and trying to run like an agent of social progress”; SEPTA is a business with a bottom line but more broadly, a reflection of the people of Philadelphia, and both the challenges and the hopefulness are visible. As a Philadelphia transplant who grew up in largely rural parts of Southern Appalachia, I am frequently annoyed with Northeastern native friends’ complaints about the dire state of mass transit in this city. I always ask, “Compared to what?” If you live in almost any other place in the United States, excepting a handful of large metropolitan hubs, public transit is sparse to nonexistent, and SEPTA seems vast and accessible by comparison. There are certainly flaws, some related to the city itself and some attributable to the wider lack of emphasis on mass transit infrastructure in the U.S., but on the whole it is an historic, compelling and critical portrait of the complex relationship between transit and local and social mobility.



Figures 8. An art piece at 52nd Street SEPTA station entitled “Onward and Upward”

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