
Opportunities and Risks of Mobility as a Service in an Uncertain Future

Martin Higgitt, SYSTRA

1 Abstract

When I started my professional career nearly 20 years ago, I felt very certain about my purpose as a transport planner. Tony Blair had had his landslide election victory. Predict and provide was out and travel demand management was in. The objectives were clear: promote sustainable travel modes in order to reduce reliance on the car and reduce the need to travel. And the money was there to support this 'new' approach. As a sustainable transport professional, I was a foot soldier for the new Integrated Transport White Paper.

Now things seem a lot less certain. The policy commitment to travel demand management seems flimsy. In these times of austerity, what money there is seems to be getting invested in roads and big infrastructure. Experts and evidence seem a lot less important in a populist, "post-truth" world. Add to that the disruption that is starting to affect transport as new technologies and new services and business models emerge. Our lifestyles are also changing and, with it, the demands and expectations we have for the transport system.

So, in this changing world, how should transport planners promote a sustainable transport agenda? We should of course continue to improve sustainable transport networks and services and to promote behaviour change. But we should also seek to harness the emerging opportunities in relation to Intelligent Mobility and Mobility as a Service (Maas) to support our agenda. I will outline what I think MaaS platforms need to provide if they are to be genuinely transformational and beneficial to our aims of promoting sustainable travel as well as broader public objectives of increasing accessibility and social inclusion, managing air pollution and supporting our place-making ambitions.

I will highlight some of the deficiencies in the way in which IM and MaaS are being conceptualised at the moment, including the focus on large cities (with little consideration of rural and suburban contexts) and the primary interest of technologists with the technology itself, with little thought given to how the technologies will be deployed and adopted (or not) by people. The risk is that these wonderful new technologies and services may end up exacerbating inequalities, providing even better mobility services to the wealthy and mobile, whilst undermining services to poorer and less mobile groups.

In relation to this, I will identify the vital role that the public sector must play in steering the deployment of these new technologies and services to ensure they deliver positive social outcomes at the same time as helping them become commercially viable.

2 Biography

Martin Higgitt is Market Director for Sustainable Travel and Transport at SYSTRA Ltd. He has 19 years' experience as a transport planner, focusing on developing sustainable transport strategies and delivering behaviour change programmes. In this role, Martin has overseen our travel planning, personal travel planning and marketing and promotion capabilities. More recently he has been developing a research interest in Intelligent Mobility and Mobility as a Service and has conducted research with Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds and is currently involved in an Innovate UK research programme to develop a MaaS product and platform for young people in Scotland. He is also working with an app developer on using an activity-tracking app to support active travel programmes. He is a Trustee of Carplus / Bikeplus, the charity that promotes shared transport.
