

The Centralisation of Regional Land Transport in New South Wales and the Prospects for Change in Australia¹

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1 Introduction

Outside the context of relatively localised issues, regionalism, regionalisation and devolution are seldom discussed with respect to non-metropolitan transport in Australia. This is perhaps a little surprising in the context of a history of the expression of regionalism, at least in the form of 'countryminded' (Aitkin, 1985) thought, during debate about transport issues in a context of highly centralised administrative systems. There has been some effort to regionalise or decentralise state administration and planning of transport, but certainly nothing which could be termed devolution (of power or control). The federal system, as it arose from the colonies, has cemented anomalies and inequities in transport provision. Regional organisations have developed as expressions of regionalism in response, but transport planning in Australia still shows its centralised colonial legacy.

World System Theory prompts a look at that history from an unusual angle for transport research. It is used in this paper to help illuminate the tenacity of centralism despite a rural tradition which could be strongly regionalist. To build this picture, the paper looks at the history of transport development and administration alongside some of the characteristics of rural Australia's growth and administration. The paper then examines road and rail in the regional (non-metropolitan) context focusing largely but not entirely on New South Wales. It highlights some potential problems facing regionalisation (seen as top-down change) in a context of regionalism (seeking change from the bottom-up).

2 The colonial agenda

Rivers and some roads offered the early colonies their means of inland transport. Rivers obeyed only the natural topography and seasons, but the roads and railways which eventually replaced the rivers were subject to the politics and the ambitions of colonial development. Both road and rail systems have been owned and operated by private and public organisations and from time to time both systems have been highly problematic for their administrators. Many of these problems persist, and some of the most persistent can be attributed to the federal system which grew from the colonies.

This history and its current manifestations can be viewed in the light of World System Theory. This theory proposes that the industrialised 'core' regions are supplied by the primary industries of the 'periphery' to the greater advancement of the interests of the former than the latter. Rural Australia developed as a periphery to Britain, but can also be seen as peripheral to Australia's metropolitan cities. This dependent and in many ways subservient status was enabled by the control which colonial

¹ Parts of this paper draw on material in Gray (2006a and b).

governments had over the development of transport. This is a very different view to that which sees transport enabling development and therefore necessarily good, but it is neither inconsistent nor contradictory with the latter view. World System Theory would predict transport to be potentially bad because the people of the regions whose economies are based on extractive industry can be worse off after extraction ceases than they had been previously (Leitner, 1998) but the same people can be grateful for, supportive of and enriched by this relationship. Transport enabled the creation of a periphery within the United States where peripheries formed within the nation-state which is, in world terms, part of the core. In peripheral places, the export economy can attract transport infrastructure development while other industries lag and control is centralised in places most tightly linked to the financial system (Dunaway, 1998). The notion that inland Australia could be worse off after the cessation of primary industry is given some credibility by observation of land degradation following application of agricultural practices which are not environmentally sustainable (Gray and Lawrence, 2001). Meinig's (1962) history of the advance and retreat of grain-growing into marginal areas of South Australia presents an illustration of the unsustainable exploitation of land resources which has occurred at many places and times though usually less obviously or spectacularly. This exploitation was facilitated by the development of rail transport.

World System Theory draws attention to the processes through which these relationships are developed and maintained. It prompts historical analysis of the system through which the core-periphery relationships, in the Australian context, developed in the periphery. These relationships are not necessarily spatially consistent. As mentioned above, the spatial-political relationships of settlement have differed among the colonies/states of Australia. This suggests that the core-periphery relationship is not necessarily immutable.

From a World System perspective applied to Australian transport history, inland transport systems appear to have provided colonial governments with media of administration as much as, if not more than, serving their overt purpose of moving agricultural products to the ports for processing and export. Long distance land transport was based initially on rivers and then on government railways, after some quick private railway failures. Roads had been provided from the outset. Some were privately operated before government takeover. They became the more significant mode, particularly for non-bulk products and people, during the 20th Century. The regulation of all forms of transport has been a serious occupation for all governments. In addition, the inland railway systems, and the urban tramways and railways were very substantial investments for the colonial and state governments. Hence they are all prominent before the public gaze.

Alongside other elements of colonial administration including local government, the inland railways were planned and administered from the colonial capitals in ways which ensured that the capitals' commercial interests were furthered. Road transport, including infrastructure and regulation, has appeared more decentralised by the involvement of local government. However, since Federation it has in effect seen one layer of centralism, that of Commonwealth Government administration, laid over the foundations of an earlier centralism, that of the colonial governments.

Through the 20th Century, the states of the Federation maintained much of the pattern of transport infrastructure laid down in the 19th Century despite the formal disappearance of economic boundaries since Federation and the development of national highway and airline networks. The pattern of regional settlement in Australia was cemented by the construction of railways during the nineteenth century in

networks determined by the boundaries of the colonies and competition for commerce among them. The colonial governments built railways in directions which focused commerce on the colonial capitals and a few other ports. The expansion of road transport since World War II made only minor differences to settlement patterns as some towns grew, at least in relative terms, while 'railway towns' declined.

The colonies often competed with each other rather than cooperating to develop the most efficient transport services for their interiors. Federation made little effective difference². The Commonwealth Government could do little without the agreement of the affected states and the states did not want anything to restrict the ability of their capitals to draw on their own regions (Stevenson, 1987). The Commonwealth did seek and obtain agreement to build the Trans-Australia Railway at Federation, to acquire two state railway systems in the 1970s and to make more substantial changes to the main interstate railway system during the 1990s which eventually involved the transfer of the management of interstate rail infrastructure to the Australian Rail Track Corporation, owned by the Commonwealth. This did nothing to reorientate the states' 'regional railways' towards regional flows developing or having potential to develop independently of the state capitals, despite many instances of agitation for railways which would have provided more direct access to nearer ports and fostered a more regionalised economy. Public agitation for equitable freight rates and more direct access to ports were from time to time common expressions indicative of regionalism.

3 Metropolitan Dominance

Consistent with the prediction of World System Theory, the government railway organisations were designed and controlled to maintain the dominance of the state capitals and discourage the rise of regionalism, although the pattern of settlement with large towns along the coast of Queensland created a more regionalised system in that state, as occurred also in Western Australia and Tasmania but not in Victoria or South Australia. The state railway organisations were generally headquartered in the capitals, firmly so in the more centralised states. Regional interests lacked authority over the development of transport infrastructure and services. All they could do was engage in localised disputes over the placement of new lines, having been effectively divided and conquered. Railway management imposed military style structures on their organisations with clear hierarchies of command and headquarters located in the capitals. With the focal points of the rail systems remaining unchanged, the influence of their colonial development could arguably have discouraged regionalist thinking in transport planning in Australia in the 21st Century.

Also consistent with World System Theory, it is probably reasonable to argue that the colonial governments sought to use the railways to facilitate trade which would benefit the metropolitan cities while the resources of the regions were exploited. McKillop (1999) raises the controversial issue of freight rates. He argues that the control exercised by the New South Wales Government extended to the use of differential freight rates to ensure that regional industry could not compete with industry located in Sydney. Blainey (1968: 264) seems certain that 'Melbourne manipulated freight rates in its own interests early in the twentieth century'. Freight rates were certainly controversial in the 19th Century, with railway administrations

² This presents problems a little like those confronting policy-makers trying to integrate Europe (Haynes, Gifford and Pelletiere (2005)).

finding it necessary to justify the rates which were set. However, as Blainey agrees, differential freight rates were not a necessary condition for the growth of metropolitan industry at the expense of regional industry. Stubbs' (2000) analysis of the brewing industry shows how rail access to non-metropolitan markets enabled the larger metropolitan breweries to expand at the expense of smaller regional breweries while the latter gained little advantage from railway transportation. The railways were not built to expand the markets for regional secondary industry. Their purpose was the movement of primary products to factory and port in the metropolitan areas and the few other coastal cities. It was the colonial/state capitals which developed from the expansion of commerce that the railways enabled.

4 Road provision and funding

Colonial governments assumed responsibility for roads, but progressively transferred responsibility for local roads to local government. The states kept the local road system in the hands of local government, despite the latter's lack of resources. Australian local government was created by the colonial and state governments, sometimes at the prompting of local people but almost always on a local community, small town or rural area scale. Increased demand for roadways prompted the states to take greater responsibility during the 1920s in what Williams (1995) sees as centralisation.

From the 1920s, the Commonwealth Government became involved in road infrastructure funding by granting money to the states. In the 1960s, the Commonwealth began to develop a national roads policy which led to the establishment of the national highway system (Williams, 1995). The Commonwealth provides \$1.7 billion of a total \$7.7 billion spent on roads, rural and urban, in Australia. The states remain the largest contributors to roads overall and the contribution of local government is declining (Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, 2005). There has been an extra layer of centralisation added rather than any degree of decentralisation toward the regional level. Local government retains responsibility for local roads. It receives some tied and untied funding directly from the Commonwealth specifically for roads. Local government continues to operate under state legislation. The Commonwealth is obliged to work with the states which exercise central control of their road systems.

5 Trucks, buses and regionalisation

While rail was yielding its freight traffic to trucks and its passenger traffic to cars and later airlines (and to a much lesser extent to buses and coaches) trucking, bus/coach and airline businesses grew in regional towns and cities. In contrast to the highly centralised administration of the railways and the deceptive decentralisation of road responsibilities, many truck, bus/coach and airline operations developed regional headquarters. Many still do as they operate regional services. The trucking industry in particular has experienced market concentration with small local firms being purchased by larger operators. However, apart from a few very large operators, it remains highly dispersed. There has also been some concentration in the long-distance coach industry. Local, privately owned and operated buses are common in the larger regional centres and the metropolitan areas, but apart from a small number of inter-regional services they operate, the companies depend on a highly regulated system subsidised by state governments with minimal local input and very little regional-level planning in either country or city.

Bus deregulation in the 1980s has enabled some minor regionalisation by permitting local bus operators to provide inter-regional services. For example, the Australian Rail Maps web site (<http://www.railmaps.com.au/>) shows a thrice weekly coach service between Dubbo and Newcastle operated by a Newcastle-based bus company. Inter-regional public transport remains heavily dominated by the Sydney-focused (government) Countrylink train and coach service. Some inter-regional services are provided by interstate coaches, public and private. The viability of coach services often seems under question, however. ABC regional New South Wales radio news reported on 19 July 2006 that the Greyhound company was to cease its daily Melbourne-Brisbane services which connected Central West New South Wales directly with Melbourne. A representative of the coach company said that when they told the state government, its response was that the people can use Countrylink train/coach service. That would require travel via Sydney and an overnight stop other than on the three days each week when a coach connection is provided at Cootamundra with a train service to Melbourne. This may not seem to be a big issue, but when combined with other local issues about timetabling, the New South Wales government sometimes appears from a regionalist perspective to be disconnected from regional travel issues. This problem was acknowledged by Unsworth (2003) and subsequently tackled by the appointment of regional transport coordinators around New South Wales. Such situations are potential fuel for regionalist thinking.

5 The railway 'problem' and its centralising solutions

The railway systems came to be defined politically as problems more than solutions as road and air transport grew. Regional railways have been seen as problems almost from their construction. As motor vehicles became affordable and governments responded to demands for improved roads, the railways ceased to be objects for investment and came to be seen as encumbrances. The solutions which governments have chosen to solve the problem currently threaten to centralise the regional railways out of existence.

During the 1960s, the railways' finances rather than their capacity to provide transportation became the political problem, despite some still being able to cover operating expenses into the 1970s and freight services doing so into the 1990s. The national railway deficit peaked in 1988-89 and had declined by about one third by 1996-97. It had been almost entirely attributable to two states: Victoria and New South Wales (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and Microeconomic Reform, 1998: 110). In its response to the problem in 1989, the New South Wales government reorganised its railway administration along corporate lines and created a modest element of regionalisation for non-metropolitan administration. Three regional general managers were appointed and headquartered outside Sydney. However, this should not be taken as significant regionalisation with any real prospect of injecting regional level transport planning. This situation changed when the management of regional railway infrastructure in New South Wales was disconnected from Sydney as it was transferred to the Commonwealth's Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), headquartered in Adelaide. ARTC maintains a regional management structure and lacks the Sydney-focus of the old state-based system. However, the ARTC only manages the regional system. The infrastructure is still owned by and is entirely dependent on the New South Wales Government. Many of Australia's regional railways are presently under threat of disuse not because nobody wants to use them, but rather because there is no basis upon which their efficient use can be organised.

Regionalising solutions have been suggested. The Industry Commission (1991) suggested that the regional railway problem might be solved by permitting local councils to charge heavy trucks for the damage they cause to roads, and use the funds so raised to maintain railways. Unfortunately local councils have no role in rail maintenance and state governments, in concert with the Commonwealth, regulate road transport. Perhaps the earliest attempt at establishing a regionalised railway out of the New South Wales government system was that of Bourke (NSW) Shire Council in 1989 (Industry Commission, 1991: 114). The attempt was not successful, but it may have helped to give the New South Wales Government the idea to offer leases to organisations which would reopen branch lines. In 1992, that Government offered some lines, without subsidy for restoration, maintenance, operation or potential for monopolisation. No change ensued. Given their localised foundation, it is hard to imagine that those branch lines could have been viable or formed a regional system, despite consistent public protest at threats of closure or withdrawal of services. Arguments, like those of McKillop (1999) and Lander and Smith (2004) in favour of regionalising the regional railways have so far drawn little or no response.

6 User-pays, privatisation and cost-shifting

The railways have not been the only popularly defined land transport problem. Even the condition of the interstate highway system, funded by the Commonwealth, has attracted criticism, inflamed from time to time by tragic accidents. Apart from some very short distances of major highway on which tolls were temporarily charged, non-metropolitan roads have not been funded by tolls since the private operations of the early 19th Century were nationalised (Williams, 1995). State governments attempted to maintain a road user charge on heavy trucks but this ceased after a court challenge based on the free trade provisions of the Federal Constitution in the 1950s. Mass-distance charging of heavy vehicles has been discussed extensively but never implemented. Its latest rejection by government occurred in the Federal Cabinet in March 2006. The user-pays principle and privatisation have had no impact on the centralised administration of roads.

Privatisation of the railway systems has had a similar effect to that of the interstate highway system. The regional and interstate railway freight operations of the states except Queensland have been privatised and all of the main interstate track placed under the control of a Commonwealth corporation: the ARTC. Apart from some very long-distance services which were sold by the Commonwealth, regional passenger services, except a very small number of tourist operations, are still run by state governments. (Victoria's regional passenger services have been 'renationalised' after privatisation.) The state government freight systems, other than Queensland, were sold to an array of private companies and partnerships. Most have since been sold again which appears to be leaving just two large freight rail operators, only one of which is effectively national. From a regional perspective, the main effect of centralisation has been maintained even if the focus, the central point, seems mercurial.

While this upheaval in the railway systems has been going on, the practice of 'cost-shifting' by state governments has worsened. 'Cost-shifting' (discussed as a general phenomenon affecting local government in House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration (2003)) occurs when a railway is abandoned by state government without any compensation to local government for the increased damage to be suffered consequently by local roads. The additional road maintenance costs can be substantial. This suggests more fuel

for regionalist reaction and resistance. The Commonwealth makes funding available directly to local government for roads and railways, but no local council has a capacity to maintain and/or operate a railway and the funding for local roads is aimed at specific maintenance and development projects. The Commonwealth and states have recently agreed to consult before making decisions which are likely to have 'cost-shifting' effects.

7 Anomalies

Federalism and the persistent attributes of the colonial period alongside centralism, or at least the absence of regionalist thinking, have left many anomalies and deficiencies. These include the continuing problems of the railway system and an array of road transport regulations. Some are so profound as to be still constraining the development of services which cross state borders. The Australian Constitution provided for the establishment of an Interstate Commission to harmonise trade and transport but it had no effective existence until 1983 and its work is far from complete (Scrafton and Starkie, 1985). The continuing significance of these problems is indicated by the existence of the Federal Government's National Transport Commission (NTC) and the corresponding ministerial council known as the Australian Transport Council. The Commission's website proclaims its 'mandate is to progress regulatory and operational reform for road, rail and intermodal transport in order to deliver and sustain uniform or nationally consistent outcomes' (<http://www.ntc.gov.au/Default.aspx?page=A0240030550000020>). The Council of Australian Governments' Meeting of 10 February 2006 announced its intention to 'harmonise and reform rail and road regulation within five years, including productivity-enhancing reforms, improved road and rail safety regulation' (<http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm#transport>). The Council furthered this process at its April 2007 meeting and indicated concern for regional transport but showed no apparent intention to regionalise administration. The remaining interstate anomalies demonstrate the persistence of the colonial system but none indicates any particular significance for regionalism or prospect for regionalisation, other than the argument that, were transport planned on a regional basis, the cross-border anomalies could be confronted more directly and would be more likely to be tackled in the first place.

Historically the best-known anomaly is probably the railway gauges. This is not just an interstate problem. Three states (Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland) have more than one gauge in use within their borders and one state (South Australia) has three gauges. In addition, some railways which use the same gauge have different operating procedures, to the extent that staff trained for one system would likely be unable to operate another. The engineering element of this issue is well known, but public appreciation of its significance may have diminished since the connection of Perth to the eastern states standard gauge system in 1970, the subsequent connection of Adelaide in the 1980s, the conversion of the Melbourne to Adelaide line in the 1990s and the recently opened line to Darwin. However, connecting the mainland state capital cities is only a partial solution – it leaves out much of regional Australia, in some regional places to the extent of creating more problems than it has solved as some lines have become stranded from the main system. This has been very significant issue around the Victoria – South Australia border. The imposition of a national system onto the colonial railway map has had victims.

Perhaps the most glaring anomaly lies on the New South Wales Queensland border. Queensland (narrow) gauge railways have not been built into New South Wales. A

New South Wales (standard) gauge line extends into Brisbane and the two gauges met, until closed recently, at Wallangarra, but no railway was built to connect either the agricultural areas of north-west New South Wales or the rapidly growing areas of the New South Wales north coast with Brisbane despite the relatively short distances involved. The possibility of a standard gauge line through inland New South Wales connecting Victoria and Queensland has been discussed since the 1930s. Direct rail freight services to Brisbane from northern New South Wales have been proposed (Bureau of Transport Economics, 1984). The inland Melbourne to Brisbane standard gauge line is still being considered by the Commonwealth Government and has recently progressed to 'scoping study' stage of consideration, but the north coast – Gold Coast and Brisbane connection is attracting little government interest despite strong regionalist support and agitation. Some sign of activity appeared when a joint New South Wales – Queensland government report on cross-border transport appeared just before the last New South Wales state election. The Commonwealth has generally preferred to leave regional problems with the states (see response to Parliamentary Committee recommendations in Anderson, 2000), though its provision of road funding to local government and its 'Strategic Regional Programme' under 'AusLink' help localities to solve local problems.

8 Regionalisation: devolution to what?

Institutionalised regional transport planning is often advocated. The report of the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services (2000: 172) Recommendation 57 states 'The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government encourage state and territory governments to support regional planning for roads by consortia of regional stakeholders.' The AusLink Strategic Regional Programme encourages cooperation among local councils. Overseas, the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (2003) advocates devolution. Vancouver's regional integrated public transport administration, based on local government and established in 1999, has apparently been very successful and obtained high praise.

The New South Wales and Victorian Governments have regionalised transport administration in small ways. In response to problems in rural areas, as mentioned above, Unsworth (2003: xiii) recommends: '... that the Ministry of Transport employ regionally-based officers - transport development officers - to manage the process of developing and implementing local level Integrated Regional Transport Plans.' This recommendation was accepted by the Government and the coordinators appointed. However, they are central government employees and their activities appear to be local more than regional (see Lee, 2005). The Victorian Government has been running a 'Transport Connections' programme with local government since 2003. Although undoubtedly positive from a regionalist perspective, there is nothing in either policy which seems likely to prompt devolution despite the notion of an 'integrated regional transport plan' in Unsworth. The Victorian programme does, however, bring some local government councils together as would New South Wales, if perhaps a little less obviously and deliberately.

These initiatives are responses to problems of centralised administration, reminiscent of the cessation of a shopper service to Tamworth when the old train services were rationalised and upgraded for long distance travel, as reported by Parolin (1996). They have also been prompted by lack of coordination and inefficient use of existing services. The changes are generally progressive, providing a faster, more comfortable service but not necessarily one which responds to all regional needs. They remain basically top-down and potentially seen from a regionalist perspective

as solving other people's problems. They are not necessarily trouble-free as conflict can arise when one community sees a possibility for disadvantage as trade flows with new or improved transport services to another community. There are no regional institutions with responsibility for resolving these issues.

Expressions of regionalism in transport planning have grown into organisations from the bottom-up. There are many regional transport organisations around Australia. For example, the Lachlan Regional Transport Committee and the more institutionalised Northern Rivers Council for Social Development, which has a public transport development programme, were established by cooperation among local councils which recognised regional-level problems. Some of those problems have arisen from the cessation of state government transport services. In far north Queensland, a community organisation enlisted three shires to help develop public transport (Department of Family and Community Services, 2003). The Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils is active in transport planning and coordination as are many similar groups, in for example, the Gladstone area in Queensland, the Cradle Coast in Tasmania and the Lower Hunter in New South Wales. These tend to be planning and/or coordination organisations rather than administrators with budgets and 'teeth'.

Regional government is sometimes mentioned as though it exists when all that really exists is either a regional organisation or regional representation of central government. For example, Manders' (2006: 119) report for the NTC on responses to rapidly growing demand for freight states: 'Achieving change in this [congestion problem] will require long term and quite fundamental changes in the land use and transport infrastructure investment priorities of most state and regional governments.' The Commonwealth Strategic Regional Programme offers funding to groups of councils, encouraging them to form where they don't exist. The amounts of money available are not huge in relation to the amounts which can be spent on transport infrastructure and there is an implied assumption that formation of regional groupings is unproblematic. But the programme has a clear regional focus, even if urban public transport is specifically excluded. Which ones, if any, of the regional transport organisations will be found to have sufficient stability, let alone administrative authority bestowed either informally or formally by the states, in the long term remains to be seen.

Calls for integration of transport modes, like Kierce and Mogg (2003), are more common than calls for regionalisation or devolution. Lack of integration stems from the history discussed above, when rail transport was almost entirely in the hands of state government departments and road matters were with other departments and local government. Integration for planning and service coordination can appear sensible. The importance of integration is a strong theme among regional-level transport planning organisations.

The integration problem has rough counterparts in the field of natural resource management. Management of water flows in rivers was commonly in the hands of one state government department while land management problems which affected water quality and stream flows were the responsibilities of others. The idea of 'total catchment management' was accepted in the early 1990s and integration pursued through the establishment of regionalised planning authorities with some devolved decision-making supported and effectively mandated by the Commonwealth (but remaining under state control). Regionalisation and integration went hand-in-hand. These organisations came about through Commonwealth funding programmes and

state government fiat rather than as a direct result of either regionalism or the lure of federal funds alone.

The same integration principles could be applied to transport. Haynes, Gifford and Pelletiere (2005: 208) set out some principles for planning sustainable transport which lean toward a regional basis and imply an element of management as well as planning:

'... all direct and indirect costs must not only be part of the decision process but must fall into the same decision space. These steps include making costs and benefits explicit, apportioning them to users, and then aggregating users to specific decision levels that ensure minimal spatial spillovers. Within those appropriate spatial units, issues of equity and efficiency can be managed provided the decision process is moderately open, transparent, and democratic.'

A lack of knowledge of all costs, benefits and externalities available to all decision-makers explains market failure in transportation, including for example, the often-cited and much argued issue of charging long-distance truck transport for road maintenance (see Laird, Newman, Bachels and Kenworthy, 2001). Haynes, Gifford and Pelletiere (2005) go on to explain how the United States Federal Government provided funds to establish urban regional planning organisations responsible for transport during the 1970s and required their plans as a condition of funding. However, Haynes, Gifford and Pelletiere (2005) say that 'for the most part they [the planning organisations] remain a forum in which the necessary consensuses are hammered out by independent regional jurisdictions in order to meet federal transportation and funding requirements.' As Jenkins (2000) argues with respect to regional tourism, such organisations can suffer internal conflict of a kind from which regional catchment management authorities are not immune either. To some extent, their work is about conflict management and resolution. Regional transport planning seems a good idea but any implementation is bound to be seen as potentially problematic (see Meligrana (1999) for a generally positive assessment of the then forthcoming, and subsequently said to be successful, regionalisation in Vancouver).

The fragmented nature of local government in Australia with the near-total absence of transport experience, other than road construction and maintenance, and any research capacity, would make regionalisation more difficult than in otherwise comparable situations. Nevertheless, some further regionalisation, and even devolution, toward institutions in which local government is a significant participant may be feasible in Australia, given the existence of viable regional organisations of councils, or the longer term possibility of some form of regional government (see Dollery, 2005 and Brunckhorst and Reeve, 2006 for debate about size of local/regional government).

9 Conclusion

The history of regional land transport has made regionalism and regionalisation problematic, and to a large extent they remain as non-issues. However, the many expressions of regionalism in the context of transport issues as well as the existence of many regional transport organisations, even if they are weak in broader political terms, make regionalisation if not devolution of transport planning a viable issue. The successful development of regional airlines without the legacy of colonial/state centralisation testifies to the logic of a regionalised transport system. Regionalism and transport have a long history of feeding on each other in a context of tension between the interests of metropolitan centres and the non-metropolitan regions, and

struggles within and among cities for transport resources. World System Theory helps to throw these issues into the historical spotlight.

Problems remain but there is progress. The persistent anomalies among the states are being tackled, but only very recently in the history of the federation. The Commonwealth's meagre willingness to involve itself in regional level problems is positive, but the cross-border transport anomalies which regionalisation might address persist, leaving the only significant national level effort attacking matters of regulation. Sensible though simplification of regulation might be, the Commonwealth's view of regional transport remains narrow and constrained by its desire to leave the problems to the states in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas despite the apparent difficulty which the states have in perceiving and acting on the problems. Persistent expressions of regionalism will keep regional level planning and administration on the agenda as an issue for public consideration at least. The existence of regional planning and management models in other places and policy fields could also help to maintain some momentum in the issue.

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