

Moving Infrastructure and designing spaces

5 sessions:

1. Who keeps transit moving? Agency, power and spatiotemporal dimensions of public transport work in the Global North

Session organiser: Chiara Vitrano, VTI - The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, Sweden, **E-mail:** chiara.vitrano@vti.se

Public transport (PT) plays a vital role in advancing sustainable mobility and ensuring equitable access to opportunities for residents, commuters, and visitors across both urban and rural areas. PT is not only a means of transportation but also a crucial public space and public good. Its quality, safety, and reliability depend on the often invisible yet essential work of drivers, conductors, engineers, and mechanics. Albeit an established form of employment in a crucial sector, work in PT is presently undergoing a crisis pertaining to working conditions and labor supply. Workers and trade unions bemoan a deterioration of working conditions, citing long and stressful working days, unpaid breaks and inadequate spaces for resting. At the same time, PT operators face an acute shortage of staff (primarily drivers, but also mechanics, traffic controllers, and technicians), leading to service disruptions and putting the sustainability of the sector at risk.

Contemporary transport studies provide limited tools for understanding the working conditions and the agency, power relations and spatiotemporal dynamics in PT work. While research has largely prioritized service quality and passenger needs, it has paid much less attention to the well-being and agency of workers who operate, maintain and monitor PT services. Critical transport and mobility studies have begun to address these issues, but primarily in informal contexts within the Global South and East. Research on PT workers in the Global North, despite growing, remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of studies that critically engage with the structural conditions shaping their labor and livelihoods.

In this session, we welcome contributions that explore the multifaceted dimensions of labor in passenger PT in the Global North. These may address any segment of its diverse workforce, including on-board staff (such as bus drivers, train conductors, and ticket inspectors), as well as mechanics, maintenance staff, schedulers and other roles.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

Working conditions and everyday experiences of PT workers;

Forms of agency and resistance within PT labor;

Intersectional analyses of gender, race and ethnicity, class, age, and migration in PT work;

Spatiotemporalities of labor in PT, including issues related to time pressure, time sovereignty, and work-life balance;

Interaction between PT workers and passengers;

Historical perspectives on the evolution of PT work;

Methodological approaches to studying PT labor, ranging from ethnography and archival research to quantitative methods and innovative mixed-methods designs;

Comparative or transnational perspectives on PT systems and labor struggles.

2. Transforming urban transport in unfavourable conditions

Session organiser: Kristina Trygg, Linköping University, Sweden, **E-mail:** kristina.trygg@liu.se

Many cities and regions have set ambitious climate goals for transport and try to integrate decarbonization with improvements in air quality, public health, social equality and economic growth. However, and despite the urgent need to transition, the question remains how cities and regions can make the changes that are required in order to achieve just mobility transitions. There is broad consensus on the vital role local governments play in driving sustainability transformations, particularly through policy and by enabling institutional conditions. The priorities and initiatives of local authorities will significantly shape outcomes. However, research gaps persist on how these actors can govern and plan for low-carbon, resilient, and just transport futures (Grundel & Trygg, 2024). Attempts to reduce car use and flying are challenged and framed as reducing hard-won individual freedoms, or when national governments are more interested in technological substitution (e.g. vehicle electrification) than comprehensive transformations that reduce the dominance of privately owned cars and use of vans and trucks for the movement of goods (Schwanen et al., 2025).

This session explores opportunities and challenges in transforming passenger and freight transport at city and regional scales when support among the public and actors at national and supranational scales is limited or declining. Many different attempts at transformation can be considered, from vehicle electrification, automation and car sharing, to Bus Rapid Transport and (light) rail development, the creation of 15-Minute Cities or super-blocks, the establishment of mobility hubs or local distribution centres, the removal of parking spaces, and to community-led initiatives seeking to 'common' (Nikolaeva et al., 2019) urban mobility. In all cases, governance often poses a key challenge, while funding gaps and limited public are never far away. Unintended consequences, such as transport-induced gentrification or security risks because technologies have been designed by businesses abroad, can further diminish the prospect of just transformations in urban transport.

For this session we welcome papers on urban transport transformations in unfavourable conditions. Possible topics:

Public resistance to sustainable transport policies

The fair and just governing of urban mobility at the city or regional level

Multi-scalar tensions and contradictions in passenger and/or freight transport policy and governance

The role of experimentation in dealing with, and responding to, public resistance to low-carbon, climate resilient and equitable transport policy

Transport-induced gentrification and other unintended consequences of low-carbon transport policy

The potential of, and tensions in, the commoning of urban transport

3. Platforms in the City: Conceptualizing Place-Specificity, Infrastructure and Everyday Lives amidst the Homogenizing Logics of the Platform Economies

Session organiser: Hoai Anh Tran, Malmö University, Sweden, **E-mail:** hoai.anh.tran@mau.se

Service platforms transform lives and labour practices for a great number of individuals and industries in many cities around the world. Platforms introduce new, precarious forms of labour such as "non-standard employment" and "gig work" in many cities of the Global North. Meanwhile, in cities of the Global South, platforms

simultaneously contribute to the formalisation of the service sector, while creating new mechanisms of labour informality.

While platforms exhibit a globalising logic, platformisation is not, however, a homogenising process that spreads evenly throughout the world. Rather, many service platforms only exist in conjunction with local infrastructures of a specific city, such as communications, mobilities, electricity networks, and people. The idealised projection of the universal spread of platforms across the globe diminishes the importance of local social and cultural elements, as well as the fact that the digital does not create a separate world independent of local people and material infrastructures.

This session invites papers that examine the interdependence of platforms, local people and material infrastructures. We welcome studies that investigate the various ways platforms work in and with specific urban contexts, as well as studies that highlights the diverse ways platform workers mobilise local resources to adapt and/or resist platforms' impositions. Comparative analysis and discussions on global spread of platforms are encouraged, particularly those that move beyond conventional dichotomies such as north/south and formal/informal.

4. Urban Lines and Informal-Formal Meshworks: friction zones at the intersection of formal and informal urban infrastructures and practices.

Session organiser: Andrew Byerley, Kulturgeografiska Institutionen, Stockholm University, Sweden, **E-mail:** andrew.byerley@humangeo.su.se

Urban Lines and Informal-Formal Meshworks: friction zones at the intersection of formal and informal urban infrastructures and practices.

Andrew Byerley (Assoc. Professor, Kulturgeografiska Institutionen, Stockholms Universitet)

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The lines that weave city surfaces can tell stories. Well-documented and predominately straight-lined stories and logics of formal city-making and, alternatively, less documented informal stories and logics of 'do-it-yourself' urbanism, etched - often ephemerally - into the urban fabric as 'spoor-like' traces (Holston, 2020; Tonkiss, 2013). The latter, long a research focus and necessary practice of everyday urban life in Southern contexts, are now receiving greater scholarly attention in the North (Iveson et al, 2019). This includes elaborations of how micro-spatial informal practices including graffiti (Ward, 2022), informal footpaths or 'desire-lines' (Byerley & Jansson, forthcoming), and guerrilla gardening (Dimick, 2025), contest or rhizomatically subvert formal stories to form informal-formal 'meshworks' (Ingold, 2022). Such studies importantly emphasize the need to examine the logics and material expressions of informal practices as always existing in complex and often friction-laden 'transversal relations' with formal logics (Caldeira, 2017), thereby positing the latter as contingent, negotiable and mutable (cf. Bolt, 2021).

This session seeks to foreground stories elaborating the changing spatial configurations and discursive representations of such informal lines, and their transversal relations with formal stories. Stories about, for example, the formation of 'publics' and practises that contest perceived democratic 'deficits' in urban planning and governance regimes, and the potentialities that exist for more creative and democratic informal-formal urban co-production.

The session provides a forum to debate the shifting balance, over time and between places, between maintaining urban 'order' and facilitating 'openness' vis-à-vis citizen's rights not only to the city but to 'remake the city' (Harvey, 2019). We welcome papers addressing:

The politicised nature of such informal practices and their possible de-politicization

Legal-geographies of such practices

The (changing) transversal relations between informal and formal logics (e.g. in planning and urban governance)

Mapping the (changing) configurations of graffiti/urban art, informal footpaths (desire lines), guerrilla gardening, or other informal urban line-making practices not mentioned above.

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5. Between place and practice: Perspectives and understandings of, in, and through infrastructures

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With increasing interest in how everyday spaces and places are experienced, how do we explain the "boring things" (Star, 1990: 377) that make the everyday function? Infrastructure is fundamental to how modern societies are constructed and how people perceive the horizons of their potential interactions with the world. However, the uses of the term "infrastructure" have grown to mean many different things so as to be increasingly considered a diffuse and disjunctive term (e.g. Larkin, 2013; Lee & Schmidt, 2018).

In the common imagination, for instance, infrastructure is understood as the constructed results of planned systems—that is to say, bridges and roads—necessary to organize flows of goods, people, and/or ideas imagined to support commercial and/or military logistics (Cowen, 2010). However, as material objects of study, infrastructures have also been considered as representative of socio-technological regimes supporting a politically motivated spatial ordering of the world, whether that planning is formal and state-led or the result of informal necessity (Larkin, 2013; Scott, 1998). Further, infrastructures have been conceived of as ecological and relational systems, positioning human interactions as infrastructures in and of themselves (e.g. Larkin, 2008; Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012; Star, 1999). And as both material and social structures, infrastructures have been considered in the temporal terms of decommission, heritage, repair, or ruin (e.g. Jackson, 2014; Velkova, 2023).

Taken together, these diffuse meanings can be considered a strength, helping to: (1) open the terminology of infrastructure to external modes of thought and critique and (2) use the lessons learned from studies of infrastructure to think through and critique other systems of thought. At the same time, this vagueness means that infrastructure has become a term that can mean and say anything, and thus risks saying and meaning nothing. With these considerations in mind, this session invites scholars to explore thoughts, reflections, and examples from around the world that try to make sense of spaces that are constructed of, perceived in, and understood through infrastructures, whether as a theoretical lens, as a field of research, as a methodological tool, or as producing a matter of concern.

If you are interested in presenting, please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words to bjorn.nordvall@humangeo.su.se, jack.odeo@humangeo.su.se, and lorena.solano@humangeo.su.se.