

TUT-POL CASE STUDY

Paris: From City Streets to Urban and Regional Transport Governance



Summary

Since the 1990s, the City of Paris has undertaken major expansions in transport infrastructure and services as well as modifications in street space to promote strong alternatives to private vehicle use. The City has also worked more concertedly with its inner suburbs to coordinate urban transit initiatives across municipal boundaries and throughout the Ile-de-France region. From the expansion of the urban tramway and metro to the introduction of the night bus, rapid transit lines, and electric car and bike share systems, recent sustainable urban transport measures cross and connect distinct political jurisdictions in ways that depart from the past. Historically, the capital city region has been characterized by highly uneven transit investment and spatial development. The city center benefitted from a dense public transport network, while the rail and bus systems serving the inner and outer suburbs had major inconsistencies and service gaps that disproportionately burdened working and lower middle class residents outside of Paris. Current transport policies and programs point to a new direction, as they have become increasingly regional in geographic scope. These developments have resulted from alliances among a wide range of political actors and institutions at all three levels of government—local, regional, and national—that in prior years were more likely to compete than cooperate. In prior periods, ongoing conflict across levels of government and between political parties, state-owned companies, and other key decision makers in the metropolitan region stymied efforts to produce agreement on transport priorities for the Paris region. More recently, a Socialist–Green–Communist coalition has played an integral role in facilitating a move toward shared urban and regional governance—albeit negotiated case-by-case amidst continuing competition among the parties—while also driving policy collaborations with state-owned companies and private sector partners. One result is that car-induced traffic stabilized from the early 2000s, reflected in a steady decline of daily car use both in the center city and inner suburbs (IAU, 2011). The use of public transport also sharply increased across the region, even as the average number of daily bicycle trips doubled between 2001 and 2010.

This is a story of political conflict and competition as well as negotiation and partnership in which the introduction of a series of flagship transport initiatives in combination with incremental changes on existing public transit systems altered mobility patterns while also encouraging new forms of stakeholder engagement across municipal boundaries. These policy advances and the political relationships that enabled them have enhanced the institutional capacities of Paris and Ile-de-France public authorities to territorially expand sustainable urban transport, producing a new spatial vision for the metropolitan area and re-scaling future mobility challenges through a linking of transport priorities at both the urban and regional scale.

Strategic Actions

Framing urban transport policies and programs in non-transport terms to gain policy resources and generate widespread public appeal across party lines.

Under the Socialist Mayor Bertrand Delanoë, the Left–Green coalition justified efforts to reduce road spaces available to cars and construct right-of-way bus and cycle lanes. These measures were touted as reducing noise pollution and “giving Paris back to its inhabitants,” rather than being tied to the contentious issue of car use. By framing the urban tramway project as an urban regeneration issue, party leaders also gained support from city planners in the Paris Urban Planning Agency (APUR), thus enabling access to funds and new policy and planning allies across levels of government.

Restructuring the city bureaucracy so as to promote local autonomy and accumulation of policy resources.

The Delanoë administration reshuffled funding priorities in favor of transport and urban renewal, for instance, expanding resources under the supervision of the Traffic Department, reorganizing

tendering procedures in transport to encourage competition with state-owned companies like RATP and SNCF, and creating a new Mobility Agency (2011) tasked with developing research and innovation activities. In so doing, the City lessened its reliance on the central government while also launching new transport initiatives through public-private partnerships.

Renegotiating terms of engagement across levels of government through shared policy experimentation and innovation.

By the early 2000s, the state-owned transport company RATP acknowledged the growing role of local authorities in the funding and organization of transport. In addition to opening local agencies across the Ile-de-France region, RATP simultaneously implemented a new incentive structure within the civil service bureaucracy that drew a new generation of highly skilled state elites to urban transportation projects. In response, the governing Left-Green coalition in Paris solicited cooperation from Parisian RATP agency officials on small-scale public transport measures such as night bus services and a bus rapid transit line, setting the foundations for ongoing policy coproduction between city technicians and state bureaucrats.

Steering decentralization reforms in ways that promote inter-municipal transport policy and planning collaborations while also strengthening regional autonomy.

As decentralization reforms transferred authority over regional spatial and transport planning to the Regional Council, the Left-Green majority contravened existing patterns of unilateralism and conflict among local authorities by facilitating inter-municipal collaboration around transport planning and policy implementation at local and regional scales (e.g. Mobilien, urban tramway lines, metro line extensions, Vélib extension to 30 municipalities outside Paris, Autolib launch across 46 regional municipalities). Key appointees such as the Communist Deputy Mayor of Territorial Cooperation fostered cooperation between the City of Paris and “red belt” of working class suburban municipalities. These new planning measures and contractual agreements promoted sustainable transport and quality of life for regional inhabitants against state imposition.

Tactical Actions

Leveraging existing events and programs to increase public awareness and mobilize political coalitions capable of challenging existing transportation policies while also highlighting new action agendas.

When air pollution peaked in major French cities during the early to mid- 1990s, networks of public health professionals, urban planners, and proponents of non-motorized transportation drew research and discursive linkages across their respective policy domains to spark public debates about air pollution. In response, allied citizen groups and political leaders identified reductions in auto emissions as a key policy challenge for both political parties and governing officials.

In 2002, the Delanoé administration extended a Tiberi-era weekly traffic ban on the Pompidou expressway along the Seine River through the entire summer and complemented it with small-scale, interim programs such as artificial beaches and seasonal leisure activities under the name “Paris Plage.”

Using major transit service interruptions and gaps as opportunities for promoting alternative urban mobility solutions.

During the 1995 General Strike, when work stoppages among public sector workers disrupted transit services, users spontaneously turned to cycling and car sharing en masse, demonstrating to the public and policymakers alike that transport alternatives existed and should be encouraged across the region.

Accelerating diffusion of sustainable mobility and transport policies by accessing alternative funding resources through the national government, international partnerships, and public-private partnerships.

From 2008, Paris and its inner suburbs utilized national funding available for right-of-way bus and tramway projects in distressed areas within major metropolises along with alternative transportation systems, car and bike renting systems, congestion charges, and electric cars.

The City of Paris additionally participated in bids for European funding, sought membership in international networks of cities, and cultivated research and development partnerships with universities and state-owned enterprises such as RATP and EDF (Électricité de France). Resulting experiments provided the city with new ideas for improving urban transport.

Through an advertising concession granted to JC Decaux in exchange for start-up and operation, Paris launched the Vélib system (2007) in which users pay a small annual subscription to take a bicycle for up to 45 minutes free of charge. In 2013, the city introduced Autolib, an electric car sharing system, in partnership with the Bolloré. The company invested €200 million in start-up and will additionally pay €750 annually for each parking space, while receiving all the revenue from the program.