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Discovering the Radical Tradition in English Transport

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The hypothesis in this paper is that 'radical' ideas in transport can only be understood by seeing them as a quite long-standing tradition – dating back at least to the 1920s, and possibly earlier – with some fluid and contradictory links with radical traditions in other areas including politics, ideology and art. In some ways, it is not that they are 'innovative' which gives them their strength, but that they are deeply rooted. Thus the distinctions between individualist and collective traditions, embedded in intellectual approaches to capitalism and socialism, find a sort of reflection in discussions about cars and trains and buses. Disputes on the ethical foundations of, for example, the hidden hand of profit maximisation, utility, the 'greatest good for the greatest number', equality, accordance with divine will, or social Darwinism as alternative 'bottom lines' for appraising human endeavour see ghostly resonance in Webtag, multi-criteria assessment, and the policy objectives of a Chancellor. Art movements like Futurism and literary niches like science fiction are seen in current discussions about smart transport technologies. The question that then arises, is whether the concept of a 'radical tradition' itself is self-defeating: as soon as a radical idea comes close to winning, it is no longer radical, and needs to be overturned by new contrarianism. Do 'smarter choices' cease to be radical if they are implemented? Does road pricing not qualify as radical half a century after the Smeed Report?