

Transport as both a function and a facilitator of metropolitan development?

A comparative view of Paris, Lyon and Marseille

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In Paris, Lyon and Marseille, the development of public transport is a central element of the metropolitan projects currently under way. However, the challenges to be tackled and the approaches adopted differ significantly from one city to another. Here, Aurélien Delpirou compares the three situations and analyses the strengths and weaknesses of their respective strategies.

As part of the major territorial shake-up presently under way in France,¹ a new type of intermunicipal body is set to come into being: the *métropole* (“metropolis”). *Métropoles* will have more extensive powers than existing intermunicipal bodies such as urban communities, and their creation in France’s three largest cities – Paris, Lyon and Marseille – lies at the heart of the current reform. While the reconfiguration of these cities’ local-government institutions has been recently accelerated, the idea and subsequent development of a metropolitan project is linked, in all three cases, to long-standing and complex dynamics. Public transport plays a significant role in this process, as it is both a key responsibility of metropolitan-level governance and a “lever” for metropolitan projects, which depend on efficient transport systems to ensure their smooth running and their cohesion. This article builds upon contributions presented at the “Journées Grand Paris” (“Greater Paris Days”) event at the École d’Urbanisme de Paris (Paris School of Urban Planning)² and offers a critical interpretation of the structural role attributed to transport infrastructures, continuing the comparative approach initiated recently by Daniel Béhar.

Paris: public transport as a metropolitan project?

In Paris, Lyon and Marseille, the question of public transport has crystallised debate on *métropoles* on the basis of three key aims: enhancing the competitiveness of the metropolitan system; encouraging modal shift to means of transport other than the car; and reinforcing social and territorial cohesion at a very large scale.

In Paris, there is a striking example of synecdoche that represents the metropolitan project: in the minds of inhabitants, journalists and even politicians, the term “Grand Paris” (“Greater Paris” in French) is still associated first and foremost with a new metro network. Initially named the “Grand Huit” (literally “Big Eight”, because its lines form an approximate figure of eight),³ this network was eventually – after much negotiation – renamed the “Nouveau Grand Paris” (“New Greater Paris”). While the question of metropolitan development had grown in importance long before this project, one cannot help but notice that it has polarised – some might say taken over – the political and media debate on Greater Paris for the last seven years now (Orfeuil and Wiel 2012). The priority given to this issue can be explained in particular by efficient PR strategies on the part of the

¹ “MAPTAM” law (*Loi de modernisation de l’action publique territoriale et d’affirmation des métropoles* – Law on the modernisation of territorial public action and the affirmation of metropolitan areas) of 27 January 2014, creating special statuses for Paris, Lyon and Marseille.

² The fifth edition of which took place on 20 and 21 March 2014 at the Cité Descartes in Marne-la-Vallée.

³ *Grand huit* can also mean “rollercoaster” in French.

project leaders, with communications focused simultaneously on regional competitiveness (as the loops of the new network will link numerous key clusters) and opening up disadvantaged neighbourhoods to the rest of the city (for example, by improving transport links for poorly served suburbs such as Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil to the east of Paris). After much controversy and major changes to the original plans, the project has now entered a more consensual stabilisation phase. Nevertheless, according to a number of authors, this project is only a very partial response to the challenges of day-to-day mobility in the Paris metropolitan area, not least because it neglects the existing network to a certain extent (Orfeuil 2014).

Lyon and Marseille: developing and reorganising obsolete or non-existent infrastructures

In Lyon, the issue of transport has not played as central a role, in a debate that has long been built around mobilising economic players for greater metropolitan competitiveness (Payre 2013). However, the question of transport has gradually emerged following a number of realisations: first, the imperative to ease both residential and functional demand across the wider urban region (extending as far as Saint-Étienne and Grenoble); second, the urgent need to modernise Lyon's rail hub, whose infrastructures are saturated and risk becoming obsolete;⁴ and, third, the desire to reinforce the intermodal hub at La Part-Dieu, the strategic core of the Lyon metropolitan area and the driving force for its attractiveness at national and European level.

Lastly, in Marseille, the shortcomings of its public transport network and the saturation of its road network are often cited as two of the main “structural handicaps” that are holding back the metropolitan area's development and undermining its territorial cohesion (Viard 2014).⁵ In a context marked by significant urban dispersion, the city is often cited as an exception, characterised by massive car use (95% of modal share for home–work journeys to the Pôle d'Activités des Milles), limited heavy transit modes (just two relatively short metro lines) and more generally a metropolitan public transport network that is not particularly fit for purpose. As in Lyon, a recent increase in awareness has led to various initiatives, but which are unfinished and disorganised – the regional council is in favour of rail, the *département* in favour of coaches, etc.⁶ In this context, transport is now defined by most stakeholders as the “priority project”⁷ of the future *métropole*.

Transport and metropolitan governance: contrasting trajectories

Public transport is a domain that often lends itself to intermunicipal cooperation. Since the 1970s, the creation and extension of urban transport perimeters (*périmètres de transports urbains* – PTUs), each managed by an urban transport organising authority (*autorités organisatrices de transport urbain* – AOTUs), has made it possible to coordinate the operation of transport networks in a supramunicipal context (Beaucire and Lebreton 2000). The case of Marseille provides a somewhat absurd illustration of this development: the fragmentation of the transport services on offer, “with its multiple star-shaped networks that are disconnected from one another and managed by a dozen

⁴ See, for example, this article published in 2011 in *Les Échos* (in French): www.lesechos.fr/31/01/2011/LesEchos/20859-023-ECH_les-premieres-pistes-pour-demeler-le-noeud-ferroviaire-lyonnais.htm.

⁵ See also this article published in 2013 in *Alternatives économiques* (in French) titled “De quoi souffre Marseille ?”: www.alternatives-economiques.fr/de-quoi-souffre-marseille_fr_art_1183_61949.html.

⁶ We might also cite the role of certain local authorities, such as the Communauté d'Agglomération du Pays d'Aubagne et de l'Étoile (an intermunicipal structure covering Aubagne and a number of other eastern suburbs of Marseille), which implemented free public transport and developed a tram scheme, which entered into service in September 2014.

⁷ Title of the first meeting of the “Ateliers de la métropole”, a series of debates among experts, professionals and politicians that has been organised since 2013 by the Marseille–Provence Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

different local authorities”⁸ (Gilles Pipien⁹), reflects and exemplifies the fractured nature of the intermunicipal landscape. Only the coach network, run by the *département*, connects the different hubs and centres of the metropolitan area.

However, with the expansion of residential areas and increased levels of mobility, the question of the governance of public transport now extends far beyond the intermunicipal context;¹⁰ it has become “interterritorial”. In this respect, the Lyon and the surrounding area has been something of a test bed: in 1989, an association of local authorities called the Région Urbaine de Lyon (“Lyon Urban Region”) was created with the aim of developing shared mobility-related strategies; a cooperative multi-territory planning approach (known as an “inter-SCOT”) has been implemented with the support of the various territories’ urban planning agencies;¹¹ and, between 2005 and 2010, the REAL (Réseau Express de l’Agglomération Lyonnaise – Lyon Metropolitan Express Network) rail infrastructure modernisation project was rolled out at the instigation of Rhône-Alpes Regional Council, nine AOTUs, four *départements* (Rhône, Ain, Loire, and Isère), numerous intermunicipal structures, SNCF (the French national rail operator) and RFF (the former national body responsible for rail infrastructure). In January 2012, this initiative was taken a step further with the simultaneous creation of a “metropolitan transport association” and a *pôle métropolitain* (“metropolitan hub”), known as G4,¹² covering the urban areas of Lyon, Saint-Étienne, Bourgoin-Jallieu/L’Isle-d’Abeau and Vienne. Unlike STIF (the transport authority for the Paris region), it is not a fully-fledged transport organising authority, but rather a structure for dialogue intended to facilitate the implementation of joint action and ensure coherent transport services. However, these initiatives have faced considerable resistance because of recurring conflicts and political stances concerning the funding of projects. As Corinne Tourasse¹³ points out, “the introduction of a little government in an ocean of governance has tended to generate obstacles rather than enthusiasm”.¹⁴

Métropoles with or without transport...

In this context, what changes can be expected with the creation of metropolitan institutions? In both Lyon and Marseille, the need to manage transport at the right scale and in an integrated fashion has often been presented as one of their primary justifications for their existence. And yet both projects have their fair share of ambiguities. In Lyon, while the integration dynamic is based on patient large-scale partnership-building efforts, the creation of the *métropole* implies a high concentration of responsibilities over a relatively limited territory, which is coterminous with the previous Greater Lyon urban community, and excludes Lyon Saint-Exupéry international airport and intermodal transport hub, for instance. Gérard Collomb, mayor of Lyon and former president of the Greater Lyon urban community, has laid down a clear road map for the new *métropole*, of which he became president on 1 January 2015: obtaining all transport responsibilities and merging the existing AOTUs.¹⁵ Tensions and rivalries are therefore on the cards, particularly between the

⁸ Contribution to the 5th edition of the “Journées Grand Paris”, École d’Urbanisme de Paris, 20–21 March 2014.

⁹ Inspector-General of the Conseil Général de l’Environnement et du Développement Durable (General Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development). He was invited by the Prefect for Metropolitan Affairs to contribute his ideas to the debate on transport in particular.

¹⁰ PTUs generally cover the centre city, the inner suburbs and part of the outer suburbs. Consequently, many periurban areas are excluded.

¹¹ In the wider Lyon urban region, no fewer than 11 SCOTs (schémas de cohérence territoriale – “territorial coherence schemes”) cover the metropolitan area for planning purposes.

¹² The G4 *pôle métropolitain* (“metropolitan hub”) is a joint association of *intercommunalités* (i.e. intermunicipal bodies with fiscal personality) created with the aim of fostering cooperation between Lyon and other major urban areas nearby. It covers 2 million inhabitants and over 140 municipalities.

¹³ Deputy director-general of Rhône-Alpes Regional Council.

¹⁴ Contribution to the 5th edition of the “Journées Grand Paris”, École d’Urbanisme de Paris, 20–21 March 2014.

¹⁵ See the amendment to the MAPTAM law proposed (and adopted) at the French Senate by Michel Mercier and Gérard Collomb in October 2013 (in French): www.senat.fr/amendements/2012-2013/860/Amdt_232.html.

métropole, the *pôle métropolitain* and the regional council, while the future of nearby territories that currently lie outside the *métropole* remains uncertain.

In Marseille, these issues have not arisen, owing to a much more widely drawn boundary for its *métropole* (93 municipalities, compared to just 59 for Lyon). This reflects a widely shared desire for a profound change in transport governance, shared even by elected officials who are opposed to the national reform. However, despite the drafting of a broadly consensual “metropolitan transport plan”, several recent projects – such as the Aubagne tramway and a bus rapid transit (BRT) system in and around Aix-en-Provence – show that the coordination of transport authorities at metropolitan level remains wishful thinking, let alone the idea of creating an integrated AOTU.

In terms of governance, Paris is an exception, in particular because of the historic role played by central government in organising transport in the capital region. This *dirigisme* led to the creation in 1959 of a single transport organising authority – the STP (Syndicat des Transports Parisiens), which would later (in 2000) be renamed STIF (Syndicat des Transports d’Île-de-France) and placed under the administrative control of the regional council – and a quasi-duopoly in operational terms, as practically all transport services in the Paris region are provided by one of two state-owned public companies, RATP and SNCF. After a period of relative “standardisation”, the governance of transport in the Paris region has once again become the subject of a new wave of state interventionism (Orfeuill 2014). The design and implementation of a number of projects – starting with the new Greater Paris transport network, entrusted to an *ad hoc* company (Société du Grand Paris) – was taken away from STIF. The legislator also took great pains not to make the future Paris *métropole* responsible for transport, even though it will be responsible for spatial planning and economic development... and despite calls from everyone on the ground for a better integration of transport and spatial planning!

If we push the trends observed to the point of caricature, three scenarios emerge: a *métropole* with transport in Lyon; a *métropole* without transport in Paris; and transport without a *métropole* in Marseille.

A “hard” or “soft” approach? Walking the line between supply and service

In addition to governance-related uncertainties in all three cities, these projects reflect a structural tension between an supply-based approach focused on massive investment in major transport infrastructures on the one hand, and a service-based approach focused on rationalisation and improving the existing infrastructure.

In Lyon, most of the initiatives implemented over the last 10 years, particularly as part of the REAL project, tend to fall into the second category: prioritisation of public transport routes (with the introduction of fixed-interval timetables for all regional rail services), station improvements, fare integration, etc. These measures have proved remarkably successful in terms of ridership (45% more passengers in five years); however, the infrastructure-based approach is also present, as illustrated by the one-upmanship displayed by mayoral candidates in their election pledges concerning metro projects¹⁶ or the preparation of the 2014–2020 planning contract: “Local authorities want demonstrations of love in the form of investments rather than services”¹⁷ (Corinne Tourasse). However, maintaining the service offering at current levels already requires considerable funding. All eyes are now turning to La Part-Dieu, a transport interchange through which half a million people travel every day. The redevelopment of La Part-Dieu should mark the advent of a truly international hub in the heart of Lyon.

Conversely, the case of Paris, with the former Grand Huit project, has at times appeared to be the archetype of a model that Jean-Pierre Orfeuill describes as “Saint-Simonian”, based on the priority

¹⁶ See, for example, the following article published in *Le Point* in February 2014 (in French): www.lepoint.fr/municipales-2014/municipales-2014-lyon-la-guerre-du-metro-13-02-2014-1791377_1966.php.

¹⁷ Contribution to the 5th edition of the “Journées Grand Paris”, École d’Urbanisme de Paris, 20–21 March 2014.

accorded to major infrastructure. From the very start of the project, a number of stakeholders have criticised its extravagant nature and its lack of connections from the existing network, despite the fact that the latter is at saturation point on its busiest lines and offers a mediocre service overall. However, the project has undergone a series of modifications and revisions with a view to achieving a better match of supply to demand and greater integration with existing lines, while a complementary investment plan for the RER network¹⁸ and for extensions to existing metro lines has been adopted. A certain number of criticisms continue to be levelled at the project (Orfeuill 2014), in particular that some much less costly alternatives focused on improving service quality have not been considered (automation of metro lines, better incident management, improving passenger information, etc.).¹⁹

By contrast, the tension between supply-based and service-based approaches is less marked in Marseille: inherited deficiencies in service coverage, the dominance of car-based mobility and the polycentric configuration of the metropolitan area all call for differentiated treatment, both in space and in time. This is reflected in the three projects identified as those that “best embody metropolitan added value” (Fouchier 2014): in the short term, BRT-only lanes on motorways to link employment clusters; in the medium term, high-performance “rail corridors” resulting from the optimisation of existing lines in order to structure the metropolitan framework; and in the long term, the creation of an underground bypass line around the city’s main railway station (Saint-Charles) to create new links within the metropolitan area. This programme, which is both ambitious and pragmatic, clearly borrows from both registers.

Could the case of Marseille set a precedent for once? It has the merit of reminding us that, beyond the rhetoric regarding territorial integration, competitiveness and “structuring effects” (Offner 2014), transport can only support and enhance metropolitan projects via tangible and visible improvements in city-dwellers’ quality of life.

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¹⁸ The RER (Réseau Express Régional – Regional Express Network) is the high-frequency rapid transit network that crosses Paris and the surrounding Île-de-France region. It differs from the metro network in that it extends much further into the suburbs and has stations that are spaced much farther apart, and differs from suburban rail in that its lines do not terminate at city-centre mainline stations but instead cross the city, connecting various mainline stations.

¹⁹ These criticisms are broadly shared within the Atelier International du Grand Paris (“International Workshop on Greater Paris”), as David Mangin alludes to in an article published in *Libération* on 28 August 2014 (in French): www.liberation.fr/societe/2014/08/28/un-deux-trois-plans-b-pour-le-grand-paris_1088980.

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