

Part 3

Situating Agency

Am I driving today? I don't really want to. I hate the rush hour traffic. I haven't got a meeting until 10 so I could get the bus and read the documents on the way, that'll save some time... but then again it doesn't look good if I'm the last one into work, plus if I'm waiting nearly half an hour at the bus stop like last time that's just time wasted. And then if I've got the car, I'd be able to do that client site visit this afternoon. It's much better for our working relationship to see them in person. But it's such a nice day, I really should cycle, I keep saying I need the exercise. Wait, isn't it school half term break? So the rush hour traffic won't be half as bad! Car it is, I can pick up the dry cleaning on the way home too.

The management of energy and mobility demand is an increasing concern as infrastructural capacity in many respects becomes more pressured and carbon objectives more urgent. Imperatives are increasing for overall reductions in demand, but also for spreading it, temporally and spatially, to avoid problematic peaks. Existing discourses often suggest that these objectives might be facilitated through encouraging people to make alternative choices, such as walking or cycling instead of driving, or exhorting them to do less of things such as long haul flying. Starting as we do from an interest in how social processes make energy demand, however, it is clear that such a framing of agency does little to acknowledge the interconnections between travelling and other practices. We already know that we do not have complete freedom to organise our lives as we wish:

much of what we do is caught up in strong social and institutional dynamics and in material arrangements that structure the norms and routines of everyday living. The interplay between structure and agency, however, must also be considered in relation to the interdependence of different practices, as changing how someone performs one practice changes how she can perform others. In this section, the authors therefore make contributions that stem from situating agency as not about rational choices, or even the interconnected constraints and opportunities within travel and transportation systems, but rather as enacted in relation to specific spatial relations, temporal constraints and sequences of practices. By questioning how assumptions that are routinely made about people's agency compare with participants' accounts of negotiating working, commuting, chauffeuring, caring and travelling, among other things, authors contribute to more robust understandings of the feasibility of projected or proposed changes to demand for energy-intensive mobility.

Caroline Mullen and Greg Marsden start from a concern for social inclusion and justice. Building on a literature that has emphasised that, for people in relative deprivation, transport is important for accessing important services, they suggest that there is limited scope for reducing carbon emissions among this group because of how working and commuting are interlinked. They develop this argument by highlighting the role of uncertainty in the structural arrangements of work, showing that where uncertainty over times (or spaces) for work is high, people are more likely to depend on the availability and use of a private vehicle. In the current UK context of increasingly prevalent zero hours employment contracts, as well as short-term housing contracts in a growing private rental market, this is an important point. A key conclusion is thus that forms of instability in working or living practices place significant constraints on the constitution of mobility-related energy demand and are thus particularly problematic in terms of moving away from the routine use of cars.

Julian Burkinshaw takes on moves towards increasing the flexibility of working patterns, in both spatial and temporal terms. Part of the rationale for promoting such transformations is that flexible working policies are designed to acknowledge the structures that constrain individuals'

actions, and therefore increase the scope of individual agency to organise the means and timing of travel to work, and indeed whether such travel needs to be done at all. Burkinshaw's investigation identifies that what looks easy on paper does not necessarily play out this way in participants' lives, where multiple needs and workplace practices are taken into account. His engagement with concepts from practice theory leads him to examine the synchronisation and bundling of commuting practices with other household practices, revealing that journeys to work are seldom, perhaps rarely, just about journeys to work but also about school runs, exercise (or not), shopping, dog walking and being prepared in vehicular terms for activities that need to happen later in the day. The potential of flexible working policies to change patterns of commuting travel therefore needs to be understood in relation to all of these other practices with which they are connected.

Rosie Day and colleagues' challenge to assumptions is rather different in that it questions the extent to which increasing long-distance mobility and associated energy demand will actually play out as expected. Infrastructural developments and social norms that commend travel in later life are largely assumed to support a future of increasing leisure travel amongst older people. Their discussions with people moving towards and through retirement reveal that ambitions for significant travel during that time of life do exist and can be made concrete where people's circumstances allow. But, drawing upon participants' accounts, they also highlight that the agency to travel is intertwined with and limited by the form of ageing bodies and the competition for time resources posed by the needs of other people.

Something that these three chapters all expose, and discuss to varying degrees, is how energy and mobility demand are orchestrated through policies that are not generally considered to be energy policies. The timing and mode of journeys to work may be more significantly shaped by school hours than by any transport or indeed flexible work policy. Institutionally mandated flexibility, that is, uncertainty, in work hours can also strongly affect how people move around and lead to more carbon-intensive transport alternatives being used. The extent to which retired people engage in travel may be as much affected by wider social care provision—the absence of which requires them to take on more

caring work—as by their own desires and financial resources. Thus, in this part of the book we can see that when seeking to either predict or manage energy and mobility demand, we need to look closely at the sets of institutional and policy structures within which energy consuming practices are embedded.