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# Spatial Economics Research Centre

Wednesday, 2 March 2011

## Transport and the economy

The transport select committee has published its report in to [transport and the economy](#).

The report pushes the idea that transport needs to be integrated in to a "fully integrated economic development strategy" and that stronger focus need: to be placed on how schemes will achieve regeneration and rebalancing. I am not fully convinced. Good transport policy needs government to state clear and credible objectives and assess schemes against their ability to meet these objectives. If that is what is meant by strategy, then the government does need more of it. But I suspect that many people pushing this agenda want more detailed economic development *plans* that specify how the government sees the economy developing and how transport fits in with their vision. Unfortunately, such "planning" is quite capable of pushing government to do some pretty silly things in the hope of transforming local economies.

With the strategy in place, we can step back and ask how policy will achieve the objectives. The funny thing about the transport select committee report is that they have already decided transport will help meet these objectives, but they insist that the government must explain how it will do so: "We welcome the Secretary of State's focus on using transport to support and stimulate the UK economy and to reduce the economic disparities between different parts of the country and we call on him to explain how his policy will achieve that end." I would usually expect the logic to flow in the opposite direction (i.e. from explanation to conclusion). But that's academics for you ...

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Wednesday, March 02, 2011](#)

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**Tom said...**

Some news out today links the point you raise in this post really well with your previous post on how ineffective government demand-side intervention is on the housing market.

Burnley, located 21 and 28 miles from the successful Northern cities of Manchester and Leeds, has the cheapest houses in the UK <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12850510> many of which are empty. Wouldn't repopulating it be a perfect way to cut down our housing costs and let people enjoy an historic town on the Leeds-Liverpool canal with a great football team and a short drive from the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales?

Well it would be but there are currently no direct train services from Burnley to Manchester despite decades of campaigning <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-11418241> and services to Leeds take around 70 minutes and run hourly on heavily congested diesel trains. I will bet any money that the government's transport plans do nothing to improve this any time soon.

Compare this to Guildford (21 miles from Reading and 28 miles from London) with trains (mostly electric) taking around 40 minutes to both destinations and running about every 15 minutes.

The two problems are closely linked.

[25 March 2011 at 01:17](#)

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