What happens if we think about railways as a kind of consumption?

Towards a new historiography of transport and citizenship in early-twentieth-century Britain

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Historians of twentieth-century Britain have long been interested in the emergence of a mass-consumer society, which most scholars take to have evolved rapidly in the four decades before the second world war.[1] Much of the analysis has focussed on the consumption of retail goods and services through everyday activities such as shopping and sport as well as somewhat less frequent events such as tourism. In all of these activities the mobility of individuals and the goods they consumed were obviously prerequisites.[2] Generally speaking, however, historians have been rather unconcerned about how the provision and use of transport, both personal and collective, might have influenced consumption in these and related areas up to 1939. This is not to say that transport is totally ignored. Rather, it is treated as a largely unproblematic matter of consumers taking up (or, perhaps, abandoning) possibilities that are understood to be inherent in a particular mode, such as the car.[3] Transport thus tends to be regarded as no more than a functional means to, or a necessary condition for, the development of mass-consumer society. From this perspective, how and why particular modes of transport and their associated mobilities 'emerged' to serve consumers in some ways and not others is not thought to be important. Thus whilst a few historians of consumption occasionally recognize that consumers' spending on transport, particularly on motor vehicles, needs to be acknowledged as such,[4] as a body they pay little attention to the idea that personal mobility should be analysed in ways analogous to other kinds of consumption. In particular, remarkably little attention has been given to the idea that transport has a place alongside other kinds of 'necessaries', such as food, in defining the basic rights that define citizenship in any particular period. Nor is it yet very common to argue that transport can be a sphere of aspirational consumption beyond that which is defined as necessary.

Naturally enough, historians of British transport have picked up on many of these themes. They have shown that transport in the first four decades of the last century should be of particular interest to historians of consumption partly because it is not easy, particularly in the inter-war period when new opportunities opened up, to draw a neat dividing line between 'necessitous' and 'aspirational' consumption. Even the most apparently utilitarian of journeys, such as the daily commute, might present choices that extended far beyond a 'rational' calculation based on price alone.[5]

In line with the historiography of other countries, notably the United States, most attention has been given to the consumption of personal forms of transport in Britain before the second world war, such as the car, motorcycle and bicycle. Perhaps the most notable single instance of this emerging body of work is Sean O'Connell's book on motoring and the car.[6] At the core of his wide-ranging study lies the recognition that preferences for one kind of transport over another reflect social, economic and political power, and that this power is partly exercised, and indeed constituted, through everyday cultural means. In this way O'Connell integrates the growing popularity of personalized forms of motorized mobility before 1939 into the wider consumer society, with all its opportunities and inequalities grounded in social class and gender. The historical geographer David Matless has also made important contributions, in his volume on Englishness and landscape, to our understanding of motoring as a middle-class way of apprehending the countryside, creating in the process a 'motoring pastoral' which both confirmed and subtly transformed individual and collective identities.[7]

Public transport has not been nearly as well treated, despite the fact that before the second world war trams, buses, coaches and trains played a greater role in making and keeping Britain mobile than cars and motorcycles.[8] Obviously motoring represented the 'shock of the new', and attracts historians for that reason. But the relative lack of concern for the railways is still surprising given their continued importance up to 1939. Passenger traffic continued to expand after 1918, if not at the same rate as previously.[9] Indeed passengers became an increasingly important part of the railways' business, the companies' modest successes bolstered by the recognition that they now had to compete for traffic and would need new techniques for doing so, including aspirational marketing.[10] Yet it is only in the past five years or so that we have started to see studies which systematically treat 'railway mobility'[11] in the first four decades of the last century as a kind of consumption.[12] Particularly notable are David Watts and Ralph Harrington's semiotic deconstructions of the railways' inter-war graphic advertising, [13] both of which are informed by a sense of the importance of the companies' 'commercial culture'. This useful analytical tool acknowledges that 'various aspects of cultural production... are inherently concerned with the commodification of various kinds of culture difference' at the same time as 'the apparently rational calculus of the market is inescapably embedded in a range of cultural processes'.[14]

In this paper I want to build on these studies by looking a little more widely at what it might mean to take Britain's railways as a kind of consumption in the early-twentieth century, a period in which they for the first time faced serious competition for passenger traffic (first, in the urban context, from the electric tram and then, increasingly in all spheres, from the motor bus, coach and car). This is partly just a matter of suggesting – in the final section of this paper – a modest broadening of the kind of sources that we might look at in order to deepen our grasp of the complexities of commercial cultures. But I also want to attempt something which is a bit more ambitious conceptually, bearing in mind calls such as those by Matthew Hilton, Frank Trentmann and Frank Mort for a new approach to the study of consumption in twentieth-century Britain. They stress the desirability of the kind of holistic treatment which scholars such as John Brewer have long employed in studies of the eighteenth

century.[15] More particularly, Hilton suggests that in the last century consumption was 'one of the most recurring means by which citizens... moulded their political consciousness, as well as being one of the main acts around which governments... focussed their policies and interventions'. In a wide-ranging and theoretically sophisticated analysis, he traces the myriad ways in which organizations and individuals combined in many-sided, often contradictory 'consumerist' movements which helped to define 'new forms of citizenship and political expression' beyond the traditional loci of the nineteenth-century spheres of the state, workplace and home.[16] Similarly, Frank Trentmann argues for studies that treat the 'broader dynamics of change in the history of consumer politics' such as the 'larger reconfiguration of consumption and citizenship' represented by historical debates and practices in the twentieth century around 'necessaries' such as food.[17] Transport in general and the railways in particular merit only passing mention in this body of work, [18] and I want to start the task of dissecting the meaning of (the consumption of) transport for citizenship in early-twentieth-century Britain.

This paper is very much an initial stab in this direction, a report on work-in-progress which is itself part of the much larger project. First I draw on a long-established body of work by railway historians to review briefly the process by which in the nineteenth century the railways came increasingly to be regarded in political discourse as a kind of public service, and certain types of railway travel thus came to be thought of as necessary for participation in civil society – 'citizenship' in the sense that I shall understand that term. As part of this historical process, Timothy Alborn has argued that 'the organization and social relations of railways were constitutively political, such that they could not ignore politics without hampering economic performance',[19] which I take to mean partly that the railway companies themselves accepted that their activities should be governed by a sense of public service as well as commercial imperatives more narrowly conceived. I suggest that we should extend this argument into the early-twentieth century, so that we acknowledge more fully how the railway companies' development of passenger transport helped to shift historical conceptualizations of citizens' mobility. I then go on to sketch two complementary lines of research that might help us in this task. First I look at attempts to secure the representation of passengers' interests in the regulatory machinery of the inter-war period. Then, and finally, I return to commercial cultures, looking briefly at how the largest of the inter-war 'Big Four' companies, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), represented, and thus helped to construct, the passenger as a consumer of railway services and hence as a 'mobile citizen'.

The passenger as citizen and consumer: the state and railways to 1914

First I want to pick up Martin Daunton's analysis of the politics of regulation of consumption within natural monopolies, including transport, in nineteenth-century Britain.[20] State regulation of the railways is not exactly a subject that has escaped the notice of scholars, but for the most part this work has concentrated on freight.[21] Whilst this emphasis is justified by the historical facts, a brief review of the regulation of passenger traffic will tease out the political construction of the passenger as a 'mobile

citizen' in the period before the railways finally lost their status as monopolistic suppliers of transport.

As Daunton notes, two issues centrally defined the nineteenth-century debate over natural monopolies: how best to ensure that consumers should be guarded against exploitation by utilities; and how to define consumers in a world where generally 'the consumer was someone for whom others claimed to speak, rather than an interest with his or her own voice'.[22] This is not the place to rehearse all the twists and turns of government policy and practice with regard to the railways, which may be summarized by saying that by 1900 passengers' interests were defined by a combination of government legislation, quasi-legalistic regulation, and the politico-commercial acumen of the companies themselves. Much of the raft of statutory requirements, backed up by a vigorous inspectorate, concerning railway operations (signalling, for instance) and working conditions addressed the concerns of passengers, most notably safety. There was, however, one piece of legislation that had a considerable bearing on everyday mobility among the working class, the Cheap Trains Act of 1883. I shall return to this shortly. Regulation of charges and general facilities was carried out through a legalistic body, the Railway and Canal Commission, although this had little jurisdiction over passenger fares, which were generally fixed, if at all, by each railways' enabling act. This left the railway companies, which were trading in a highly concentrated industry where price competition was discouraged by increasing working costs, with a considerable, but not absolute, degree of freedom to provide passenger services and to charge fares based upon perceptions of what they thought was commercially viable.[23] But such considerations were alloyed with others regarding the wider political context in which the railways did their business. By 1900 railway managers had taken on board the rhetoric and even the practice of public service, partly as a defence against further state regulation or even nationalization.[24]

The argument that passenger services were at least in part a public service that should not be subject to the usual norms of trading had been developing since at least the 1840s. It would not be going too far to say that many Victorians saw a measure of access to the mobility afforded by the railway as something approaching a citizen's right: disagreement lay increasingly with the methods by which this might be achieved than the goal itself. Thus much of the debate over nationalization during the 1860s was couched in terms of the supposed benefits to 'the public' conceived largely as passengers.[25] Reformers looked to the railways as a social service that would deliver improved passenger facilities, higher levels of safety and cheaper fares once government ownership and management replaced the defective combination of self-interested directors and passive shareholders. The benefits would not be felt just by those who travelled. The public-health reformer Edwin Chadwick, for example, argued for state ownership on the grounds that it would improve living conditions in the cities by allowing workers to live in new suburbs served by loss-making lines. Although nationalization was to prove several decades distant, the terms of the debate in the 1860s irrevocably marked future discussions about railway policy, such as the renewed debate over state ownership in the early 1900s and the detailed discussion in the run-up to the 1921 Railways Act about the representation of passengers' interests.

By suggesting that mobility was increasingly seen as a right, I am not arguing that all passengers were taken as equal, nor that all 'citizens' (taking that term in a broad sense which goes beyond participation in formal politics) were to enjoy similar levels of access. Social class, filtered through the ability to pay, was a major determinant of the kind and quality of service that passengers could enjoy.[26] Nevertheless, on two occasions the state famously intervened to encourage the spread of mobility down the social scale, and thus defined particular kinds of railway travel as 'necessaries'. Gladstone's Railway Regulation Act (1844) and its 'parliamentary' trains for third-class passengers at a penny-a-mile did little to promote everyday mobility, being intended more as an aid to working-class migration to alleviate shortages of labour.[27] More relevant to everyday working-class travel was the response from the 1860s to the sort of concerns expressed by Chadwick. Acts enabling new works in urban areas generally required railways to run trains at low fares for workers displaced by construction. The 1883 Cheap Trains Act extended these rather ill-defined concessions to all workers in urban areas; its provisions largely governed the use of trains for the journey-to-work by the working-class up to, and indeed beyond, the first world war.[28] Cheap everyday travel was also in some measure gendered, since the assumption was that it would be largely work*men* who would travel to and fro their place of work at the special rates. The railway companies recovered some of their additional costs by charging ordinary fares to others in the family travelling to the city centre.[29]

For the purposes of my argument that the railway companies themselves helped to shape nineteenth-century attitudes towards 'necessary' mobility, the spread of inter-urban travel down the social scale is of greater interest for it was not the result of state intervention. At one level the Midland Railway's decision in 1872 to admit third-class passengers to all its long-distance trains, followed in 1875 by the abolition of second class (along with the gradual raising of the quality of accommodation in third) may be seen as a rational business response to the company's unfavourable competitive position. Similar reasoning may be applied to the subsequent experiments by most of the other companies with this high-volume, low-margin market.[30] But all this can also be read as pre-empting calls for such action from middle-class reformers who assumed that state ownership would be needed.[31]

It is in this context that I think it would be worthwhile to undertake a more detailed examination of the third wave of debates over nationalization, from around the turn of the century up to 1914. Although much of this focussed on possible benefits to railway labour and even, if to a lesser degree and with less popular support, traders, some proponents continued to couch their arguments in terms of passengers' interests.[32] Emil Davies, for example, who seems to have been a member of the Independent Labour Party, argued wrongly just before the first world war that the railway companies were only willing to grant improved facilities when forced by state intervention.[33] But he was on stronger ground when, in an adumbration of modern complaints, he directed his ire at the 'mass of absurd anomalies' represented by fares and their associated conditions of travel, a circumstance which he contrasted unfavourably with the situation on state-run railways in Europe. For Davies, British 'passenger fares are fixed practically without any system at all', whereas state administration at least had the benefit to the passenger of ensuring standardization.[34] But this apparent chaos was partly the

result of individual companies trying to 'grow the market' for what we now call discretionary travel by, as Douglas Knoop, an academic contemporary, put matters, reducing fares so as 'to induce people, who would otherwise not do so, to travel by rail, and to encourage such as would travel a little, to travel more'.[35] With this kind of consumption we are clearly crossing the permeable, and historically changing, boundary between the necessitous and aspirational consumption of mobility.

Thus in sum, citizens' access to railway mobility in the period 1900-14 was largely defined by the companies' various and varying pricing policies, based upon what managers thought passengers would pay for particular types of journey. But this is not to say that the railways operated in a manner which simply maximized financial returns. Their commitment, enforced or voluntary, to an ethos of public services meant that they had developed a range of services, facilities and fares which on average (always, of course, a potentially misleading concept) probably provided passengers with a greater measure of consumer-surplus than would have been the case if policies had not been constrained by the wider political context. For as Knoop argued in 1913:

> the Prussian system of several classes, with very marked differences in comfort between the lower and the higher classes, and but few kinds of tickets available for each class, is much more successful in making people pay according to their ability than the English system of practically two classes, both with a high standard of comfort and many scales of fares.[36]

In short, British passengers could pay shockingly high fares, but when they got a bargain, which they often could, they did very well indeed.

Speaking for the consumer, 1919-1921: the Ministry of Transport and the Railways Act, 1921

Although railway nationalization did not happen until 1948, it was very much on the mainstream political agenda inter-war.[37] Although more work remains to be done on the ideas of those groups which advocated a greater role for consumer organizations in the economy, it seems tolerably clear that none saw any real alternative to state ownership when it came to the railways. On the Left, Fabian thought as represented by the Webbs not surprisingly saw nationalization as the way forward, even though voluntary association might be more appropriate in other sectors. By 1928, Beatrice Webb even argued that state provision of transport, amongst other essential services, made the state an 'Association of Consumers'[38] Filtered through the party's policy-making, such ideas contributed to Labour's commitment by the mid-1930s to nationalization by means of a public corporation, the solution most famously adopted in the London Passenger Transport Board of 1933. The National Transport Board was to run the railways free of party-political direction, and in particular was to have no formal representation of interest groups.[39] Whilst such ideas accorded broadly with 'middle opinion' in the decade, some such groups, such as PEP (Political and Economic Planning), pressed for a greater weight to be given to consumers' interests.[40]

But other, more radical, ideas had briefly held sway on the Left. G.D.H. Cole's guild socialism of the late 1910s and 1920s provide examples of models for the collective provision of transport (still predominantly the railways) in which consumers were to be represented on the key decision-making bodies. In 1917 he envisaged the railways being organized as a national guild of workers, with consumers' interests articulated through a 'functional parliament' intended to resolve disputes between producers and consumers. Three years later the overall structure of guilds into which the railways were to fit had been somewhat simplified, but the general model of voicing consumers' concerns remained the same.[41]

Fanciful though such notions might seem today, it is worth recalling not only the wave of political opinion in this period that favoured greatly extending consumer representation with regard to other areas of necessitous consumption but also the practical measures that were taken to achieve this. Much attention in the immediate aftermath of the war focussed on food, occasioned not least by its high cost, and found practical expression in the short-lived Consumers' Council of 1918-21.[42] This embraced transport as one of the areas affecting the cost of living.[43] By the time of the Council's demise in early 1921, a consequence of wider political currents, it was calling for a department of state to represent consumers' interests, including those in the realm of transport.[44]

It is in this context that we must understand discussion in the early 1920s over the possibility of introducing a measure of passenger representation into the railways' regulatory framework. Although nationalization was briefly seen as a practical way forward from the war-time regime of state control of the railways, by the early 1920s it was clear that some modification of the existing system of regulated private companies was the road to be followed. Debates over the provisions of the 1921 Railways Act which established the new structure[45] show the strength of opinion, particularly on the Left, in favour of such representation.

The 1921 act was described by one academic contemporary as 'by far the most comprehensive statute which has ever been passed to regulate British railways'.[46] By extending regulation to passenger services and fares, it established a mechanism which had the potential to promote consumers' interests through a renewed Railway and Canal Commission and a new Railway Rates Tribunal. The Tribunal was charged with ensuring 'the maximum development and extension in the public interest of the carriage by railway of… passengers and their luggage', and was thus required, for instance, to consider the probable effect of existing charges.[47] But the Tribunal, a quasi-legal entity of three persons, was not intended to be representative of particular interests. This principle was however compromised in some small measure by the fact that for particular cases it could appoint additional members drawn from either of two panels. One of these, the General Panel, included 12 members 'representative of the interests of labour and of passengers' among its membership of three dozen.[48] This was all that was left of attempts by the Labour Party to include a permanent representative of 'general users', based on the practice of the Rates Advisory Committee.

This body had been established in 1919 to advise the new Minister of Transport. Reflecting the

more inclusive political outlook then current, the Minister had discretionary powers to add a single member to those who by statute represented traders (two), the transport industries and labour. Supporting the committee was a 'panel of experts, and of impartial persons' similarly charged with representing a wide range of interests.[49] These included, as one Labour member later noted in the parliamentary scrutiny of the Railways Bill, 'a representative of the general users of railways'.[50] Indeed, it is suggestive of the weight of political opinion still in favour of consumer representation in 1921 that Labour's attempts to have a representative of labour added to the Tribunal were couched more in terms of the railways' impact on the cost of living, through fares, than working conditions.[51] Much was made subsequently in committee by other M.P.s of the issue of fares, particularly with regard to the so-called exceptional fares that the railways were to be permitted to charge below the standard ones set by the Tribunal.[52] But parliamentary opinion was by now swinging more generally against the principle of consumer representation – one government member argued in committee that 'it is possible to push it so far that it becomes a fetish…'[53] – and the only concession was to enlarge a proposed Traders' Panel into the General Panel.[54]

The workings of the Rates Tribunal with regard to passengers would probably repay additional study, [55] but it is clear that although some useful advances were made in areas that had long proved troublesome – for example, drawing up standard conditions of carriage determining the kinds and quantity of personal luggage that could be carried free of additional charge – in practice rather little was achieved by the new regulatory regime, either in terms of the fares charged or the quality of services provided.[56] Indeed, if anything strategic policy favoured the railways against passengers' interests, particularly with the Commission's decision in 1931 that a company could not be required to continue to provide an unprofitable service.[57] But in any case, by the late 1920s the meteoric growth of road competition was making the regulatory regime obsolescent. Maxima for fares were, as one authority presciently put it, from the start either 'obsolete for practical purposes' or 'only registered what the companies had conceded of their own accord'.[58] The railway companies thus effectively retained their pre-war freedom to charge what they thought they could, but now in the context not only of a continuing commitment to public service but also of competition in many of their markets.[59] They therefore pursued with increasing vigour their earlier practices, tailoring fares and providing services to maximize revenue which they trusted would generate a return over and above direct costs. In the apparent absence of any systematically organized body representing passengers, it was left to the companies to judge which types of services would appeal to consumers and thus to construct notions of 'railway mobility'.

Constructing the passenger on the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, 1923-39

As Peter Butterfield has shown with regard to the London & North Eastern Railway (LNER), an ethos of public service continued to influence the companies' commercial policies between the wars, leading them to maintain many secondary passenger services that even the rudimentary management

accountancy of the time showed to be running at a loss.[60] Whether or not as a matter of deliberate decision, the companies therefore continued to define a certain level of access to railway services as necessary. But, as I noted above, it is the railways' attitudes towards those forms of travel that showed prospects for growth by appealing to consumers' social aspirations that have started to excite the interest of historians. Chief amongst these are leisure journeys, the focus of the published studies by David Watts and Ralph Harrington, and of Alan Bennett's doctoral study.[61] These important works show how the railways' sophisticated understanding of their potential markets enabled them to appeal through their graphic advertising (Watts, Harrington) or travel literature (Bennett) to several different groups. Thus in his study of the LNER, Watts argues that the company addressed itself (although with questionable results) to that kind of middle-class audience that might be persuaded to travel to places and through landscapes bound up with the 'conservative modernity' of the period. Similarly, Harrington shows that the railways' marketing of holiday destinations was underpinned by an appreciation of women's role, in both middle- and working-class households, in making decisions about leisure. Bennett's survey of the Great Western Railway's travel literature dissects that company's class-based apprehension of the English regions and Celtic 'peripheries', offering a parallel for the railway of Matless's motoring pastoral.

But as all these scholars acknowledge, the marketing of railway services was neither targeted solely at the leisure market nor relied solely on books, pamphlets and graphic posters. Other media were used: the likes of maps, handbills, timetable books, newspaper advertisements and press announcements are well-known, if rather too little studied, at least by academics,[62] but radio broadcasts, lantern slides, photographs, films and illuminated advertisements were among those that became increasingly important from the 1920s.[63] Together these media constituted what I call the railways' 'official' commercial culture – that which the companies deliberately sanctioned for public consumption. In order to get a fuller appreciation of the railways' understanding of their potential customers, we obviously need to embark upon a more rounded analysis of these media. But I suggest that we also ought to take more note of the fact that the companies themselves increasingly saw their front-line staff as a means of selling transport. This leads me to wonder if there might be scope for looking at what I call the railways' 'semi-official' consumer culture; in other words, those values and attitudes prevalent amongst its staff which a company was willing in some degree to sanction and encourage, even if they did not align fully with those embedded in official publicity. All these tasks remains to be done: what I suggest here is one possible avenue of exploration, based upon a preliminary survey of the largest of the inter-war companies, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS).

The importance the LMS accorded marketing may be gathered from the two textbooks on different aspects it published privately in the late 1930s[64] as well as the increasing prominence given to the subject in its staff periodical, the *LMS Magazine*. The latter is an invaluable resource for understanding the company's commercial culture, both official and semi-official, for one of its functions was to implicate staff at all grades in persuading people to travel by train. Launched in November 1923,

less than a year after the LMS came into existence, the magazine was published monthly until the outbreak of war. It represented a significantly increased degree of control by the railway's management over internal communications, being the officially sanctioned replacement for the *LMSR Gazette* which, as the *LNWR Gazette*, had been published since 1911 by staff themselves.[65] Attractively produced, the new magazine was sold chiefly to staff through a network (in 1938) of nearly 800 agents at the subsidized price of a penny (with a twopenny edition offering insurance benefits), settling down to sales of roughly 70 to 79 thousand in the second half of the 1930s.[66] Readership was then estimated to be about three times this figure,[67] which would suggest a penetration of something over three-quarters of the total workforce, assuming that all readers were employees of the company. This was highly unlikely though, for it is clear from the contents that a family audience was an important segment of the readership. The magazine was also sold to members of the public, something that was encouraged in the mid 1930s on the grounds that it would 'enable us to exert that influence to make people rail-minded that is so necessary for the future well-being of every servant of the Company';[68] 'school boys, university and professional men in all parts of the world' merited particular mention, suggesting both the gendered and class dimensions of this wider audience.[69]

Of course, we can no more assume the success of the magazine in developing a favourable commercial culture among its intended audiences than we can that of, say, graphic posters. High circulation was almost certainly due to other aspects of the magazine (social news, articles on travel, the work of the LMS's departments, the history of its predecessors, photographic competitions, ideas for holidays, insurance benefits, the women's page, humour, and so on). Yet both in the content explicitly directed at commercial matters, such as the 'quota system' intended to promote internal competition in pursuit of sales, and in that which more tangentially and often informally addressed the way in which people thought about transport (that is, aspects of semi-official culture), we do at least get insights into the company's thinking about commercial culture beyond the media of its public advertising or the often bare statements of the business records.[70]

Here I can do no more than sketch some of my initial findings. Sheryl Kroen has recently noted the increasing prominence of gender in the political historiography of consumption in the early-twentieth century, tying this in with the historical (and historiographical) emergence of a more 'positive appraisal of the consumer as an active agent of democratization'. Gender plays a major role in this analysis because in the first half of nineteenth century the supposedly virtuous world of the 'ascetic' male citizen was often contrasted to the 'despised' realm of female consumption. Thus the later conception of the person who becomes a citizen through acts of consumption represents in part the assertion of women's rights to full political, economic and social status.[71] The content of the *LMS Magazine* suggests the ambivalence of the company's semi-official culture in this regard.

I have already indicated the gendered nature of the external audience sought by the magazine, and it is worth recalling that the railways' workforce, the primary audience, was also largely, although not totally, male.[72] We might therefore expect the magazine to reflect wider male uncertainties in the face of women's growing influence, not least in the sphere of consumption. Nor are we disappointed.

Take, for instance, this cartoon, 'Nonplussed!' from August 1928, which clearly expresses a sense of male unease at the disruptive effect of changing fashions and behaviour on the railways' conventions of social propriety. The magazine was also wont, as in the cartoon 'Management!' from July 1934, to draw upon archetypal images of older, grotesque women as representative of domestic authority, an image that was conspicuously absent from the company's graphic advertising.[73] Such women did not even have to make an appearance for their presence to be felt, as the second cartoon, from June 1936, demonstrates.

Even when they were not represented as grotesque, the technological ineptitude of women was a fairly common theme, as in the first cartoon below, from September 1937. But the traffic was not all one way. In the second cartoon (November 1936), the humour turns on the young man's wrongful assumption of his companion's ignorance of railway engineering and operating.

In the 1930s the magazine included several cartoons which drew in a more positive way upon images of women to connote the desirability of rail travel, either specifically to women or more generally to both sexes. Here I note two categories, the first a series of cartoons (from the same hand, 'Sinton') depicting the railway carriage as a space permitting a degree of (hetero)sexual licence. This in itself was a fairly well-worn trope, but the degree of control asserted by these self-assured women was perhaps more novel (May 1936; May 1937). [74] The second category employed women to connote the

railway's favourable characteristics of, variously, speed, comfort and safety, sometimes by deflating male obsessions with motoring (September 1935) or, on at least one occasion (October 1937), by depicting the carriage interior, and more particularly the compartment, as a quasi-domestic space. The latter kind of representation was, of course, scarcely a novelty, and it is arguable that here the cartoonist's rendition of his (I assume – H.C. Walker) three middle-aged characters did more to confirm than challenge a traditional view of women's place in the domestic sphere. Nonetheless, and to look finally at a visual rendition of the LMS's official commercial culture in the magazine, it is clear that the company was keen to promote the idea of railway travel as something that could particularly appeal to women.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have skated quickly over a lot of ground, some of which has been researched more thoroughly than perhaps I have suggested. But my aim here is not so much to review the totality of the relevant literature on Britain's railways – an impossibility in the assigned space – but more to indicate the potential that the combination of a re-working of existing historiography, plus an extension of the exciting lines of research being developed on the railways' commercial cultures, could have for extending our understanding of 'railway mobility' in early-twentieth century Britain. More particularly, I have argued that by taking the railways seriously as a form of consumption, transport history will significantly enhance its appeal to historians who are working to develop a rounded understanding of the place of consumption in the formation of twentieth-century notions of citizenship. In short, this is one of the kinds of project that George Revill and I have recently argued, to the scepticism of some, should form an aspect of the future of transport historiography.[75]

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[1] E.g., J. Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980*, London & New York, 1994; G. Cross, *The Making of Consumer Culture* London, 1993; W.H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914*, Basingstoke, 1981.

[2] Benson, *Consumer Society* (note 2), part 2.

[3] E.g., Benson's comment that between the wars tourists used 'almost every conceivable form of transport'. Benson, *Consumer Society* (note 2), p.102.

[4] E.g., Benson, *Consumer Society* (note 2), pp.60, 63, 65

[5] I have developed this argument in the British context in 'Transport, 1900-39', in C. Wrigley, ed., *A Companion to Early-Twentieth Century Britain*, Oxford, 2002, pp.286-301, and (with Barbara Schmucki) geographically more widely with regard to urban transport in 'Technology, (sub)urban development and the social construction of urban transport', in C. Divall and W. Bond, eds, *Suburbanizing the Masses: Public Transport and Urban Development in Historical Perspective*, Aldershot etc, 2003, pp.1-19.

[6] S. O'Connell, *The Car in British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring, 1896-1939*, Manchester, 1998.

[7] D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, London, 1998, esp. pp.63-7.

[8] Divall, 'Transport' (note 5), pp.286-301.

[9] G. Crompton, '"Efficient and economical working?" The performance of the railway companies 1923-39', *Business History*, vol.27, 1985: 222-37.

[10] The railways generally divided their revenues into three: passenger, goods and merchandise, and mineral (principally coal and coke). It was the first two categories that faced increasingly severe competition from road transport, and whilst in absolute terms passenger traffic held up quite well (although taking a declining share of the expanding market), goods fell away quite sharply. Taken together goods and mineral traffic (i.e. freight) continued throughout the inter-war period to generate the larger proportion of railway revenue, and absorbed by far and away the greater part of the state's legalistic attempts at regulating railway transport.

[11] I don't like this neologism, but I use it to remind us that we do not quite have a word in English that neatly encapsulates for railways all the connotations that 'motoring' has for cars. This is indicative of both the different historical relationship between railway travel and consumer society, and historians comparative lack of interest in this relationship. Perhaps 'railing' would do (cp. 'Inter-railing' around Europe).

[12] D.N. Smith, *The Railway and its Passengers: A Social History*, Newton Abbot etc., 1988 and A. Jordan and E. Jordan, *Away for the Day: The Railway Excursion in Britain, 1830 to the Present Day*, Kettering, 1991 both contain useful insights but do not centrally address the kind of historiographical concerns outlined here.

[13] D.C.H. Watts, 'Evaluating British railway poster advertising: the London & North Eastern Railway between the wars', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. vol.25(2), Sept. 2004: 23-56; R. Harrington, 'Beyond the bathing belle: images of women in inter-war railway publicity', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. vol.25(1), Mar. 2004: 22-45.

[14] P. Jackson et al, 'Introduction: Transcending Dualisms' in P. Jackson, M. Lowe, D. Miller and F. Mort, eds, *Commercial Cultures: Economies: Practices, Spaces*, Oxford & New York, 2000, pp.1-4., quot. p.1; F. Mort, 'Introduction: Paths to Mass Consumption: Historical Perspectives', in Jackon et al, *Commercial Cultures*, pp.7-13.

[15] Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th-Century Britain*, Cambridge, 2003, pp.1-24; F. Trentmann, 'Bread, milk and democracy: consumption and citizenship in twentieth-century Britain', in M. Daunton and M. Hilton, eds, *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, Oxford & New York, 2001, pp.129-63, quot. p.130; Mort, Historical perspectives' (note 14), p.10.

[16] Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), pp.1-2.

[17] Trentmann, 'Consumption and citizenship' (note 15), p.130.

[18] Passing references are to be found at Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), pp.67, 70, 72 (on the Consumers' Council [1918-21], 40, 84 (Fabian attitudes in the 1920s to state provision), 95 (guild socialism during the 1910s and 1920s), 100 (Political and Economic Planning in the 1930s), 113 (motor-car taxation, 1920s), 118 (Labour criticism of distribution of foodstuffs, early 1920s), 126 (nationalization of distribution networks).

[19] T.L. Alborn, *Conceiving Companies: Joint-Stock Politics in Victorian England*, London, 1998, p.228.

[20] M. Daunton, 'The material politics of natural monopoly: consuming gas in Victorian Britain', in Daunton & Hilton, eds, *Politics of Consumption* (note 15), pp.69-88.

[21] The most interesting of recent analyses is Alborn, *Conceiving Companies* (note 19), Part III.

[22] Daunton, Natural monopoly' (note 20), p.73.

[23] The question of whether or not particular services actually paid is not one that I can address here. The companies themselves admitted that they did not know, and thus generally charged according to what the market would bear. See D. Knoop, *Outlines of Railway Economics*, London, 1913, p.229-30. This remained so during the inter-war years.

[24] The evidence is reviewed in Alborn, *Conceiving Companies* (note 19), chp.9. The companies' struggle with the emerging trades union movement formed part of their calculations. See also, e.g., T.R. Gourvish, 'The performance of British railway management after 1860: the case of Watkin and Forbes', *Business History* vol.20, 1978: 186-201; R.J. Irving, *The North Eastern Railway Company, 1870-1914: An Economic History*, Leicester, 1976.

[25] My account here draws on Alborn, *Conceiving Companies* (note 19), pp.211-224, esp. pp.216-19.

[26] Since railways were open to anyone who could pay the charges, social proprieties as well as commercial considerations required the separation of passengers by class. The companies thus divided passengers into three (or occasionally four) classes, differentiated by fares, speed, and the standard of accommodation both on and off the trains.

[27] J. Simmons, *The Railway In England and Wales, 1830-1914*, Leicester, 1978, pp.37-8.

[28] Smith, *Railway and Its Passengers* (note 12), pp.36-7, 100-107; R. Prys Griffiths, 'Railway Rates Tribunal: Part 5. – Passenger Train Traffic and its Constituents', *LMS Magazine* vol.6, Sept. 1929: 294-6.

[29] Smith, *Railway and Its Passengers* (note 12), pp.101-103, 106.

[30] E.g., Smith, *Railway and Its Passengers* (note 12), pp.59-61. By 1913 second class had largely disappeared and more than 95 percent of passengers travelled third class. Knoop, *Railway Economics* (note 23), p.237.

[31] E.g., as detailed in Alborn, *Conceiving Companies* (note 19), p.221.

[32] On the trades-union aspect, see Alborn, *Conceiving Companies* (note 19), pp.225-56, esp. 245-53.

[33] E. Davies, *The Case for Railway Nationalisation*, London & Glasgow, n.d. [ca 1912], pp.41-54.

[34] Davies, *Railway Nationalisation* (note 33), pp.41-8, quotes p.41, 44.

[35] Knoop, *Railway Economics* (note 23), p.235.

[36] Knoop, *Railway Economics* (note 23), p.236.

[37] G. Crompton, ' "Good business for the nation": The railway nationalisation issue, 1921-47', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. vol.20(2), Sept. 1999: 141-59, and 'The railway companies and the nationalisation issue, 1920-50, in R. Millward and J. Singleton, eds, *The Political Economy of Nationalisation*, Cambridge, 1995, pp.118-25.

[38] Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), pp.40, 84-5.

[39] Crompton, 'Good business' (note 37), p.149-51.

[40] Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), pp.100-101.

[41] Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), p.95.

[42] Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), pp.66-78.

[43] As freight carriers, the railways were collectively keen to impress on public opinion the modesty of their charges. Railway Clearing House, *Railway Rates: How They Affect the Cost of Living*, London, 1923, and *Railway Rates: How Little They Affect the Cost of Food*, London, 1927.

[44] Hilton, *Consumerism* (note 15), p.72.

[45] That is, the 'Big Four' companies: the London, Midland & Scottish Railway (the largest); the London & North Eastern Railway; the Great Western Railway; and the Southern Railway.

[46] K.G. Fenelon, *Railway Economics*, London, 1932, p.101. Fenelon was at the time director of the first department of industrial administration in Britain, at the University of Manchester.

[47] Railways Act, 1921 (11 & 12 Geo.5 Ch.55), Clause 58(2).

[48] Railways Act, 1921, Clause 24(1) & (4). The other was the Railway Panel, representing the companies' interests.

[49] Ministry of Transport Act, 1919 (9 & 10 Geo.5 Ch.50), clauses 21(1), 23(1). The committee was chaired by a lawyer.

[50] National Railway Museum Research Centre [NRM], K7B/32. 'Parliamentary Debates: Railways Bill 1921: Official Reports Standing Committee 'A': First to Seventh Days' Proceedings…', col. 10.

[51] Parliamentary Debates, col. 10, 12-13, 16-17, 21-2.

[52] E.g., Parliamentary Debates, cols 139, 156-7, 160-1, 172-3, 178-9, 303, 327-8,

[53] Parliamentary Debates, col.17.

[54] Parliamentary Debates, cols 72-3.

[55] One contemporary account refers to 'various associations representing the interests of the travelling public' coming before the Rates Tribunal. Griffiths, 'Railway Rates Tribunal (note 29), p.294.

[56] Fenelon, *Railway Economics* (note 46), pp.114-15, 155-6; Railways Act, 1921, Part II, clause 16, and Part III, esp. clauses 30(1), 34(1); Griffiths, 'Railway Rates Tribunal' (note 29), p.294-5.

[57] Fenelon, *Railway Economics* (note 46), p.104 fn. Other measures taken under the act, such as the extension of pooling traffic receipts, indirectly affected passenger services.

[58] W.M. Acworth, rev. W.T. Stephenson, *The Elements of Railway Economics*, Oxford, 2nd ed., 1924, p.203. The authors were discussing an older scale of fares, upon which the Tribunals' standard fares were broadly based.

[59] In particular they continued to be relieved of any legal requirement to avoid 'undue preference'; that is, offering a superior service or reduced rate to one person but not another. Railways Act, 1921, Clause 41; Fenelon, *Railway Economics* (note 46), p.100. 'Undue preference' continued to be of some importance for freight. See also D.H. Aldcroft, *British Railways in Transition: The Economic Problems of*

Britain's Railways Since 1914, London, 1968.

[60] P. Butterfield, 'Grouping, pooling and competition: the passenger policy of the London & North Eastern Railway, 1923-39', *Journal of Transport History* 3rd ser. vol.7(2), Sept. 1986; M.R. Bonavia, *Railway Policy Between the Wars*, Manchester, 1981.

[61] Watts, 'Railway poster advertising' (note 13); Harrington, 'Bathing belle' (note 13); A. Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and the Celebration of Englishness', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of York, 2000.

[62] Robert Forsythe's collection of such 'ephemera' offers considerable potential, particularly for the years after the second world war.

[63] Smith, *Railway and Its Passengers* (note 12), pp.155-70, esp. pp.165. See also the examples instanced in the *LMS Magazine*.

[64] School of Transport, *Salesmanship* and *Advertising*, both London, 1938. These covered the marketing of freight as well as passenger services.

[65] *LMSR Gazette* vol.12, no.132, Aug. 1923, pp.234-6 [sic] and no.133, Sept. 1923, pp.265-6.

[66] *LMS Magazine* vol.3 (6), Jul. 1926, p.181; vol.11 (12), Dec. 1934, p.513; vol.12 (7), Jul. 1935, p.323; (12), Dec. 1935, p.583; vol.13 (1), Jan. 1936, p.1; vol.15 (1), Jan. 1938, p.1; (5) May 1938, p.211; (8) Aug. 1938, p.375. In 1924 distribution was said to be almost 175 000 (vol.1 (8), Jun. 1924, p.288), and in 1927, more than 101 000 (vol. 4 (12), Dec. 1927, p.397). It is not clear whether these earlier figures refer to sales or readership.

[67] *LMS Magazine*, vol.13 (11), Jun. 1936, p.1.

[68] *LMS Magazine*,vol.12 (7), Jul. 1935, p.323.

[69] *LMS Magazine*, vol.12 (12), Dec. 1935, p.583.

[70] This last claim remains to be fully substantiated. It is based partly on the frustrations of my research students when seeking illumination on such matters with regard to the other Big Four companies.

[71] S. Kroen, 'A political history' of the consumer', *The Historical Journal*, vol.47 (3), 2004: 709-36, esp. pp.717-20, 723-5, qu. p.720. See also, J. Livingston, 'Modern subjectivity and consumer culture', in S. Strasser, C. McGovern and M. Judt, eds, *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, 1998, pp.413-29.

[72] *LMS Magazine*, vol.16 (4), April 1939. This edition featured 'our thousands of women colleagues' (p.1), putting them more or less on par with the railway's 7561 horses, which had featured in the July 1938 issue!

[73] Harrington, 'Bathing belle' (note 13), esp. p.29.

[74] I. Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* Manchester, 2001, pp.171-2, 218-19.

[75] C. Divall and G. Revill, 'Cultures of transport: representation, practice and technology', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. vol. 26 (1) Mar. 2005: 99-111; M. Freeman, '"Turn if you want to' – a comment on the "cultural turn" in Divall and Revill's "Cultures of Transport"', forthcoming in *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. vol.27 (1) Mar. 2006, and our reply.