# Discussion Paper 2: Changing the way we see things?

The Missing Perspectives?

The perspectives currently used to frame national policy are generally myopic, tunnel-visioned and often backward-looking. Policy debate needs to face up to the challenge of future uncertainties. We currently suffer from poor vision when scanning the road ahead and often blindly follow route maps which are driven by historic *predict and provide* agenda. Future proofing and scenario building are hampered by the need for a wide perspective across a range of possible routes, drawing on an understanding of spatial and temporal relationships between the drivers of change from conventional and 'unconventional' sources.
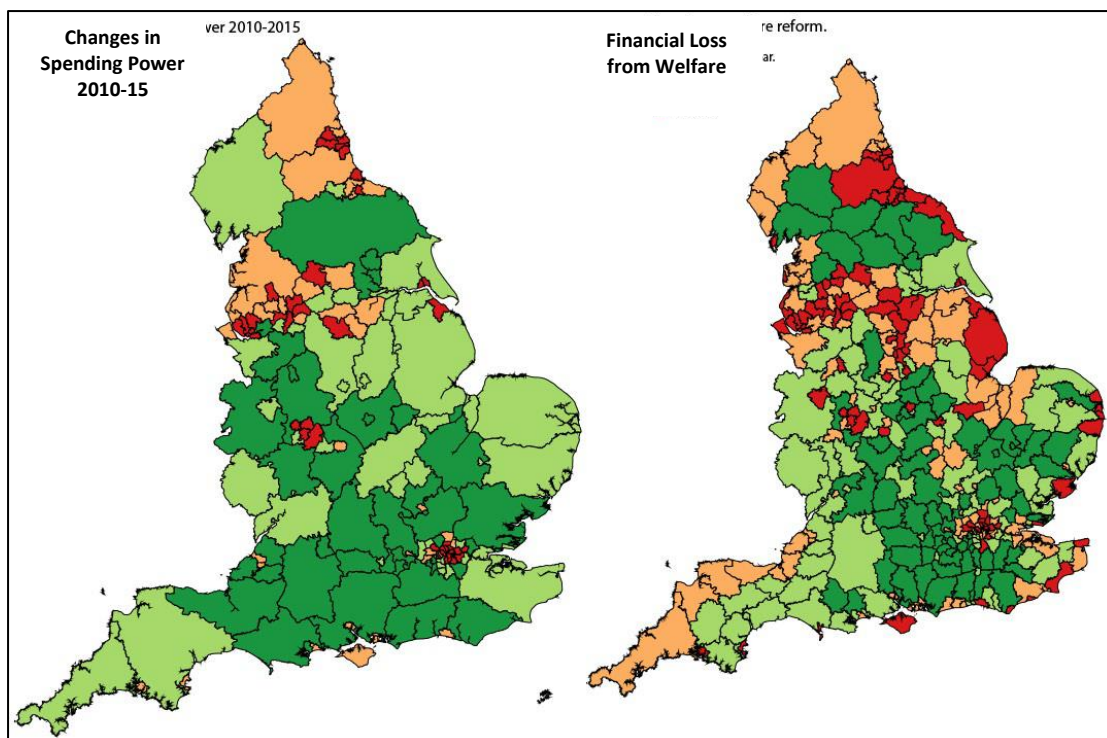
Sources: 1. DCLG - Local government financial settlement, 2.Beatty and Fothergill 2014

Creating a better vision for the future of Britain requires new lenses which improve our peripheral vision and give a wider and clearer longer-distance view of the road ahead and of potential routes that can be followed. This requires our policy tool-kits to be enhanced through new analytical lenses which are based on improving our ability to 'see things better' by using:

- New functional geographies are needed which relate to the areas within which people live, work and play rather than the administrative boundaries of mediaeval origin;
- Integrated data management: We need to overcoming administrative "colour-blindness" which results from sectoral responsibilities by using a full palate of information on which to base any sectoral policy;
- Alternative data sources: Policy-making is generally constrained by traditional data and the litigious testing of evidence basis which precludes or underplays the contribution from alternative data sources, especially behavioural or attitudinal or non-expert data. The big data revolution makes it vital that we develop new tools and standards for integrating alternative sources of knowledge/evidence where they sharpen the clarity of traditional information.

Creating new lenses?

The following examples illustrate the possible new lenses that already exist which need to be built on and enhanced.

New Functional Geographies

It is a universal truth that the effectiveness of strategic planning at whatever level is constrained by the coherence of the area. Integrated policies cannot be developed if they are dependent upon the decisions taken "in someone else's *backyard".* The legal Duty to Cooperate recognises this and that existing areas for planning are inappropriate. This, however, only addresses local functional interdependencies which are ad hoc arrangements. It would be more effective to have an established context for determining where cooperation is in the national interest, as is the case in Scotland and Germany. There are several models that could be used e.g. the Housing Markets Analysis for CLG by Cecilia Wong et al, or the LGA analysis (see diagram) based on economic, labour market, transport and planning factors.

map 1 – the preferred sub-regional map, which gives the best fit for the range of indicators used in our research
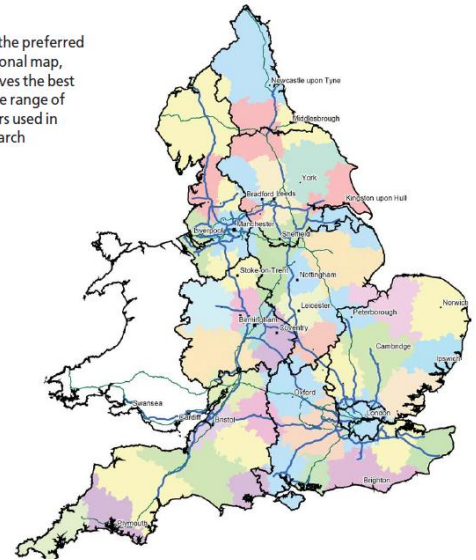
At a higher level of administration, strategic inter-dependencies are now recognised through the Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine and CAMKOX. These also need to be set within an analytical framework of functional relationships within a national context of networked cities. They otherwise run the risk of being constrained tend to be constrained by arbitrary administrative regional boundaries (e.g. the relationship between the towns and cities of the northern powerhouse and CaMKOx and the East Midlands).
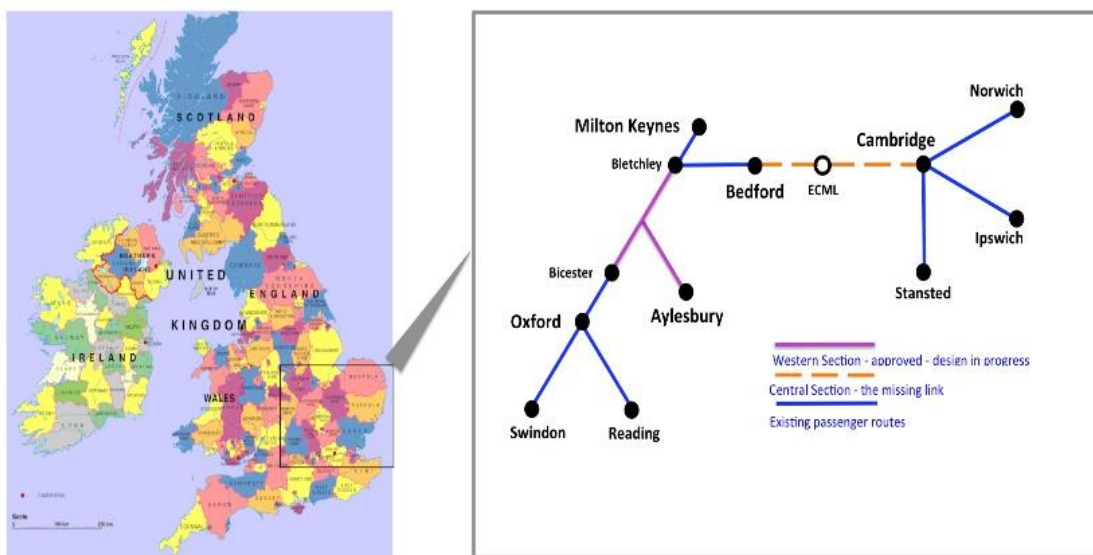
Integrated Data Management

The RTPI report, "A Map for England", highlighted not only the range of data that was explicitly spatially referenced but also the vast range of data sets which have an implicit but not articulated spatial dimension. New approaches are required to harness data sources. There are examples of the power of multi-layered spatial data sets which are publicly available including by the Centre for Cities, CASA, the IBG and DEFRA , Private data sources also exist but these are generally too costly for public access. The CfC work on Regional Growth Funds shows the importance of such cross-cutting analysis, by comparing allocation of finds against various criteria of need,
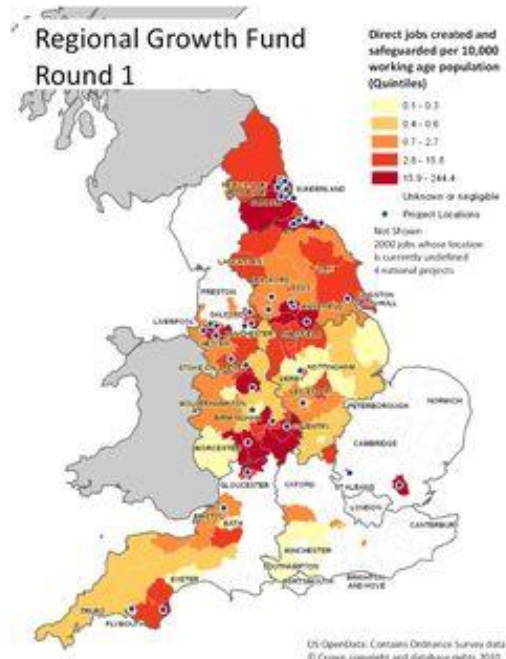
Alternative data sources
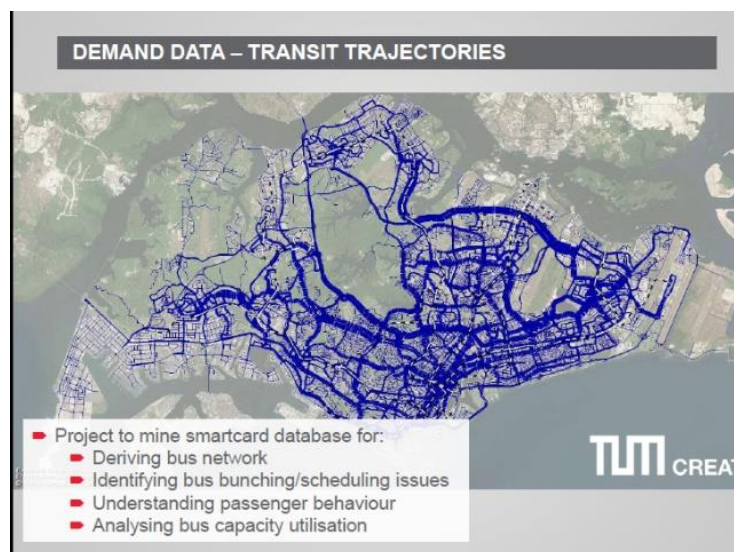
In addition to making much greater use of the existing plethora of official data sources, there is great potential additionality to be generated through the use of "alternative" data sources, for example with the explosion of big data sets and social media. Mike Batty has highlighted its contribution to the future of smart cities. Similarly, the Infrastructure Partnership Australia has shown the potential to develop a 'dashboard' for transportation management as has the use of smartcard data is also illustrated (see diagram).

It is also important to harness the power of behavioural data in understanding spatial dynamics. This was highlighted in the outcome of the UK Referendum on the EU. This is recognised in the Transformation Strategy of the UK Government. The work of the National Centre for Social Research and its annual attitudinal surveys are an untapped resource below the national level of analysis. The question is #Are there methods for unpacking this which could be called upon ?'

Implications

 Key issues are defining and deciding the range of data required; then identifying existing organisations that might provide some of this, and then looking at what else is required. Clearly any focussed data centre would require a particular organisation to do this because, although a lot of data exists already in various portals, no one portal has the capability of pulling all that is required together. Of course, there is no analytical skill usually when we speak just of data. For example, the way ONS make their data available is in a passive way where users can download data but they need to acquire their own expertise in doing this in addition to interpreting and analysing the data. Usually ONS-type data is self-explanatory but it soon becomes necessary to get expert help. Such is the case of the ONS Longitudinal Study. This enables users to access special time series data protected with individual confidentiality in secure setting. Users have to go to Drummond Gate [London] to get the data and need help in drawing it down etc. This is provided by the ESRC centre at UCL.

Apart from the centres that are in the public domain, there are key academic data portals e.g. the Big Urban Data Centre at Glasgow and the Consumer Data research centres at UCL and Leeds that collect retail data. This data is based on geo-demographics analysis. Both these groups are relevant to strategic spatial policy-making. In fact, the range of data centres funded by ESRC primarily for academics to work on are quite wide and quite sophisticate, and a lot of ONS work has been done in collaboration with these data centres.

(refer   http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/our-research/big-data-network/   ,   http://ubdc.ac.uk/ http://www.blgdataresearch.org/ and http://cdrc.ac.uk/)