

Grand Paris or Île-de-France? Comparing two institutional models for transitioning to sustainable transport in the Île-de-France region

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Abstract: Since 2000, the Paris region has seen a substantial transition in transport governance, as the regional transport authority shifted from the control of the state to the region. Additionally, the state created a new entity, the Société du Grand Paris (SGP), to develop a rail network, the Grand Paris Express. This research explores these institutional changes, seeking to understand both how the new institutional forms came about and what these new forms enable and constrain, particularly with respect to creating a more just and sustainable city. This research is a comparative historical case study from the 1990s to the present, looking at two processes of institutional change occurring at different scales within the same place. It uses Kingdon's three-streams model to assess the opportunities and moments for institutional change. The two processes reveal many of the tensions in governance debates, with the more formal regional authority having greater democratic accountability than SGP. Additionally, as SGP began shifting to the construction phase, its public engagement came to resemble that of a more formal and accountable transport provider, as the agency encountered communities that would feel real material changes from its projects.

Keywords: governance; sustainable transport; political windows, institutional analysis

Introduction

In 1996, dual crises of air pollution and public transit strikes forced attention on the growing transport problems in the Île-de-France region and the need to shift away from private vehicle travel (Zittoun, 2013). The Green Party made transport one of their signature issues, and politicians on the left began pushing for more investment in public transport and cycling. These efforts have brought results. Since 1997, the region has built 7 tram lines, extended 4 metro lines, and reallocated over 100km of road space away from cars to buses, bikes, and pedestrians, most notably the pedestrianization of the banks of the Seine. In addition, the city of Paris set up some of the first municipal bike and car share programs and adjusted parking pricing to encourage drivers to leave their cars at home. The policies have demonstrated results, with car traffic on Paris roads falling 46% from 1992 to 2015 and the modal share by car falling 10 percentage points in Paris and 7 percentage points in the suburbs (Heran, 2017; Halpern and Le Galès, 2018). The shift to sustainable mobility has also moved across the political spectrum, as politicians from both the left and the right tout policies to encourage public transport and cycling.

The story of Paris's significant mode shift over the past twenty years coincides with a story of increasing decentralization of power away from the state toward the region and localities. At the start of the 1990s, the national government controlled nearly every piece of transport infrastructure in Île-de-France, whether as the head of the local transit authority, the major shareholder of the two largest transport providers, the owner of the major roads in the departments, and the regulator of traffic with Paris proper. Today, the president of the region heads the transport authority, one of the transport providers has decentralized its offices and embedded officers within departments, the roads are being progressively transferred to departments and municipalities, and the mayor of Paris has just won the right to enforce her own traffic laws.

As the decentralization finalized, however, the state reasserted itself in the transport conversation with the creation of the Société du Grand Paris (SGP), an institution created with the sole purpose of constructing four new metro lines in the Paris suburbs. The lines are financed separately from other



transport infrastructure, and the regional transport authority does not retain oversight. Yet while the creation of SGP was a state project, the suburban ring subway project existed for a long time in the regional consciousness. The political coalition that made the Grand Paris Express possible includes not only the state but also networks of local and regional actors who carried the project over the long term.

Participation played a legitimizing role for both regional control and the SGP. Regional control was premised in part on the idea that as a major funder of transport projects, the region should participate in the decision-making. At the same time, both regional and local governments were making efforts to be more accountable to citizens, a major tenet of Bertrand Delanoë's 2000 campaign. Participation as legitimacy was an even stronger anchor for the SGP, which engaged in a large formal concertation process around the Grand Paris metro system and the idea of Grand Paris itself.

The institutional changes around transport governance reflect a spectrum from hard to soft governance, that is, the formal transfer of power from the state to the region, the creation of the Type II institution of the Société du Grand Paris, and significant background networking and moments of political influence. The benefit of the lens of soft governance is that it shifts the focus from the decision itself to the networks of influence and power that set the premises for the decision and the subsequent implementation (Moos, 2009). If we also take a normative stance of seeking a just transition toward sustainable transport, we can ask to what extent the various institutional forms contributed to such a transition, where justice refers both to attention to the least well-off and to the inclusion of diverse voices in the process.

To explore this question, we conducted a content analysis of official reports, and documents produced by experts. As the Grand Paris Express project is better documented than the smaller sustainable transition projects, we supplemented with interviews with planners involved in the significant smaller transportation projects, particularly the Plan des Déplacements Urbains and its flagship project, the Mobilien bus network.

Political windows: the failure of state-led transport governance and the rise of the region

While Paris has had a regional council since the 1980s, it was historically relatively powerless, both within the region and compared to other regional authorities. In 1994, for example, the regional council ceded input on the joint State-Region infrastructure plan to the technical representatives of the national government (Gonzalez Alvarez, 2006). Similarly, while negotiations with the transport operators were technically done in collaboration with the region, the region held very little power or technical capacity.

As the current transport paradigm came under threat in the early 1990s, the governance mechanisms were equally implicated. In particular, the lack of power for the Paris region not only ran counter to the trend for decentralization, but it also was evident as a culprit in Paris's delay in sustainable transport programs relative to other areas. Nantes and Strasbourg were developing tram networks and reimagining parking policy while the Île-de-France remained stuck in a car-oriented mindset with public transport projects that were both duplicative and overbudget. Public transport priorities were set by competing companies rather than a regional entity.

Public transport in the Ile-de-France region is provided by two state-owned companies and a group of smaller operators. RATP, formed in 1949, owns the exclusive right to operate the Métro system and bus network within the Metro system boundaries. Their right expires in 2024. SNCF, the French national rail provider, operates a regional commuter rail network (known as Transilien) and shares operation of the regional express rail (RER) network with RATP. Bus service outside of the boundaries of the RATP monopoly but inside the region is provided by a number of smaller service providers, organized as Optile.

Responsibility for transit network planning was held by the Syndicat des Transport Parisien (STP) until 2001, when it became the Syndicat des Transport Île-de-France (now known as Île-de-France Mobilités). STP was controlled by the national government, which held the majority of seats on the

board. Major funding was provided by the state and by the *Versement Transport*, a payroll tax levied on businesses with more than 11 employees.

As resistance grew to auto-oriented development, the existing structure was inadequate. In particular, regulation of soft modes and of the roadscape that could be allocated away from cars to buses, bikes, and pedestrians, occurred at the municipal level, but such modes crossed municipal boundaries. In addition, the large infrastructure projects that RATP and SNCF wanted went over budget and did not address the new shape of the city, in which the center of Paris was being depopulated in favor of growth of jobs and population in the suburbs. Instead of suburb-to-suburb travel, both companies focused their attention in the 1990s on projects to relieve congestion on the main East-West connections through Paris, RER A and Metro line 1. The projects, the construction of the RER E by SNCF and of Line 14 by RATP, absorbed the bulk of the financing in the state-region infrastructure contract.

As an alternative, the near suburbs, which fell within the RATP boundaries, were demanding more capacity for suburb to suburb trips, as well as Metro expansions. The department of Seine-Saint-Denis worked with RATP to bring trams, which had proved successful as an agent of urban regeneration as well as transport, to the Paris region, opening T1 in 1992. The department of Hauts-de-Seine followed with T2 in 1998. Within Paris, Mayor Tiberi began exploring a tramway on the Parisian side of the Boulevard Périphérique, and installing bus lanes on the Petite Ceinture, the busiest bus line in Paris. Part of the focus on surface transportation was due to a desire to directly take road space from cars, but it also represented a financial reality, as the twin tunneling projects in Central Paris did not leave space for a suburb-suburb metro. Thus, in places where an elected body could begin to wrangle local communities and elected officials into road space reallocations and new forms of transport investment, it was happening, but that kind of control was not available at the regional level.

The rise of the region and the shift to sustainable transportation entered through the same political window. The idea of the political window comes from John Kingdon (1995), who posited that policy change comes from three streams, one of problems, one of policy solutions, and one of politics. Political windows open when problems rise to the top of the agenda in moments of political opportunity when solutions are available. The political opportunity for both was the relative failure of governance in transport, combined with the end of long-standing conservative rule in the Île-de-France region on the backs of a corruption scandal. In 1998, Jean-Paul Huchon from the Socialist Party was elected head of the region, marking a significant political shift. He lobbied for the region to have increased powers within the STP. The idea of the region playing a significant role in governance had been in the solutions stream since the 1982 decentralization law which put all the regions except Paris in charge of their own transport. Commissions in 1992 and 1994 had explored how to shift both decision-making power and financing to the region, but the political window was not open until the end of the 1990s when the region was ready for significant change (Larroque et. al., 2002).

The Green party took the same opening to push for sustainable transport policies. While the Socialist party won the regional elections outright in 1998, Mayor Delanoë had to enter into coalition with the Greens and Ecologists in Paris. He gave them the transport portfolio under the direction of Green Party member Denis Baupin. Delanoë permitted them free rein as long as there was significant public engagement. For the Mobilien bus priority project, staff from the city and the RATP held public meetings in each arrondissement, in addition to hosting an extra-municipal committee on transport. However, the participation, particularly the arrondissement meetings, were not effective participation, as the implementation decisions were largely based on politics and technical factors rather than engagement. The city director of the Mobilien project recalls sitting in public meetings with Baupin and not even being allowed to respond to angry residents. Baupin told him not to bother, as the project would be implemented anyway (personal interview, 2019).

Alongside the regional efforts, Delanoë began working with the inner suburbs on a project called Paris Metropole. While this collaborative project spanned beyond transport, it paralleled efforts by the city of Paris to create a surface transportation operating authority that would control roads, parking, and surface transport. The city pushed for such a secondary operating authority during the regional takeover process. Though the authority has not yet been created, close cooperation with the

neighboring communes remains a priority for the city and was a central goal of the 2018 bus network restructuring (personal interview, 2019).

Political windows: the genesis of Société du Grand Paris

Just as the regional takeover of the transport system was underway in 2004, engineers at RATP returned the idea of a suburban ring metro to the public discourse, under the name of Métrophérique (Auzannet, 2018). This was at least in part a play for the organization's own survival, as EU regulations were likely to open up its networks to competition at the end of the monopoly period in 2024-2030. At the same time, it was also a sound strategic move, as the suburb-to-suburb metro had been in the solutions stream since a report by the Regional Institute for Urban Planning (IAURIF), written for the regional takeover of the infrastructure planning process. Now that the region was in charge, and one which prioritized the needs of the relatively left-leaning inner suburbs, it was a good moment to push for it. However, the region placed the project in the regional plan as one project in many in an attempt to spread the plan across the region. The Arc Express project did not become a signature plan until the national government re-entered the picture.

In June 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy, only recently elected, announced his support for the Métrophérique during the discours de Roissy (Delourme, 2018). It was the first time that the government took a position on the suburb-to-suburb metro. Moreover, Sarkozy launched the Grand Paris initiative, a broader effort to rethink metropolitan Paris and a counter to the left-aligned Metropolitan Conference. Sarkozy turned the Grand Paris project into “a war machine against Jean-Paul Huchon, the socialist president” (Levy, 2010). He therefore appointed Christian Blanc as head of a state-led Grand Paris project to counter the decisions of Huchon. Blanc's approach was inspired from the financing of the Parisian metro more than a century before: very long term loans. Blanc turned the Grand Paris Express into a flagship - platform: technological performance, elaborate design and architecture for the train stations, infrastructure, cultural programming, and amenities delivered in addition to the core transportation network.

Nearly all of the Grand Paris Express planning happened among a limited number of people, and their work “vanished into the cigar smoke of their boss, Christian Blanc” (Levy, 2010). Christian Blanc became the face and the father of the Grand Paris Express, but after the discursive work performed to legitimate regional takeover, new discursive work was needed to legitimate this small, state-led project. Enter the founding discourse of Grand Paris, given by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009 and the grand concertation, involving international architects and a formal, state-led engagement process.

The formal state led engagement process began September 30, 2010. It was guided by the Commission Nationale du Débat Public (CNDP) (Levy, 2010). The first order of business was deciding whether to present the “Grand Huit” transportation network (proposed by the State) alone or to the “Arc Express” transportation network (proposed by the Région):

- The “Grand Huit” (130km) went beyond the existing metro network and loomed large, offering to cover the grande couronne Ouest (Versailles/Saclay) and Est (Noisy-Champs/Roissy), while crossing through Paris
- The "Arc Express" (60 km) offered two tangential lines in the petite couronne, in the North (Nanterre/Bobigny) and in the South (Meudon/Créteil), with an extension to the grande couronne towards Noisy-le-Grand.

While relations had been poor between Christian Blanc and Huchon, Blanc's successor Maurice Leroy bridged the gap, opening the concertation to both proposals and beginning the negotiation process with the Region Île-de-France during his time as Ministre de la Ville (November 2010- May 2012). The way it differed from the first stage, was that it was clearly inscribed in a search for consensus with a larger pool of decisionmakers at different levels. It was formalized through the creation of the informal Club du Grand Paris which gave a seat at the table to the presidents of the department councils, the prefect of the Region (the national government's representative in the region), international architects, Paris

city hall, and representatives of the transportation sector. As one of the goals was to fix the lack of connectivity for the territories of the eastern *banlieues* of Seine-Saint-Denis: the decision process to create the metro line 15 Est generated a negotiation process with Claude Bartolone, at the time the Socialist president of the Seine-Saint-Denis General Council. This support from socialist Bartolone allowed to ease negotiations with the Region, which also had a socialist majority.

These three stages of technocratic expertise legitimized by formal concertation, regional negotiation, and the work of the departmental councils summarize well how this convergence of interests among the State, the Region, the mayors and the departmental councils paved the way for formal concertation. Metrophérique was a solution with a large latent coalition of actors that had been subsumed by other problems and the lack of an institutional structure to implement it. It had lain so long in the solution stream, however, that once the other two major projects were completed (RER E and Line 14), it was politically powerful to both the newly empowered region and a state entity looking to make a mark. By the end of the negotiation in 2012, Jean-Paul Huchon could write in a *Le Monde* op-ed, “The Grand Paris Express is not a luxury, it is a priority investment...It is not a technocratic project, it is a democratic project.” (Huchon, 2012).

Unlike in the case of regional empowerment, the political stream did not serve the same opening function for the Grand Paris Express. Instead, the political challenges of a regional and state government that were in opposition led to a proliferation of institutional actors in an already crowded scene. Since January 2016, the Grand Paris counts several institutional actors: the state, the region, SGP, the Préfet of the Île-de-France region, and Métropole du Grand Paris, which combines 131 municipalities regrouped into twelve territories (T1 to T12). The prerogatives of these actors have been defined thanks to the MAPTAM law, voted in November 2015. The law also officializes the use of public-private partnerships as go-to tools, formalizing them and making them a part of the new governance model strategy. It also revolves around a formalized participation tool, through the Commission nationale du débat public (CNDP), which researchers define as a “procedural concession” (Blondiaux, 2008), characteristic of the fact that since the 1980s, deliberative processes have gained traction, in the context of a crisis of representation, contestation of traditional forms of technical and scientific expertise (Bacqué & Sintomer 2011, Le Goff 2011).

The classic distinction between the *laissez-faire* approach to Anglo-Saxon liberalism where infrastructure provision might be seen as more subject to the pressures of private developers, and the French welfare state model is no longer that accurate. This opened the way to a slow but steady trend of public-private partnerships à la française, first made possible by the limited Loi d'Orientation Foncière of 1967 (Pollard 2018, Béhar et al. 2018), made systematic in 1985. The Grand Paris governance model epitomizes this shift, since the 2016 inauguration of political institutions in charge of planning and policymaking was preceded by the creation of the Société du Grand Paris in 2010, a single purpose company in charge of the development of the extended Grand Paris Express public transportation system (Enright 2016).

Participation, legitimacy and change

Discourses on how pragmatic and innovative these concertation processes were, formulated in order to secure the legitimacy of development projects, have started to be conceptualized in recent years. Practitioners in Paris refer to a “new generation” of urban development projects that distinguishes itself from traditional French planning. The recurring shifts referred to include a much more complex role given to real estate developers, as well as an extended range of new stakeholders involved in design, implementation and programming along public institutions. Yet, one major traditional standard remains, which is the use of discretionary expertise, and the exclusion of users from the decision-making process (Enright 2016, Béhar et al. 2018). This opens the way to arbitrary site selection, financialization, delegation of traditionally public services to the private sector, and as mentioned previously, minimal and carefully orchestrated citizen participation, seen most often as a threat to the regulatory viability of the project (Béhar et al. 2018). Behind the pragmatic and innovative governance

tools designed and implemented by a progressive mayoral administration, or campaigns of "Réinventons"¹, path-dependency prevails (Enright 2016).

The rhetoric of pragmatism and innovation behind the public-private implementation process, as opposed to a slower traditional public planning process, even becomes a justification for discretionary expertise in the hand of local elites (Béhar et al. 2018). Such a paradox is conceptualized as "urbanism 1.0" by Dominique Lorrain, who argues that behind rhetorics of pragmatism and innovation, the Grand Paris policy programs are developed in a very opaque discretionary way (Lorrain 2018). Yet the policy streams literature suggests that for implementation to occur, they will have to eventually enter into the political light, and in doing so, can at times be shaped to regional priorities.

The major argument about the role of experts that we can extract from the chronological study is that the Grand Paris is inscribed in a very old-school French framework: the Grand urbanism, the "Grand Project" (or major works) and the centralized *dirigiste* administrative model (Gonguet, 2015). Even though it appears as "new urban politics" based on growth coalitions and public-private partnerships (Enright, 2016), the first stages of its implementation were thus characterized by very limited participatory processes. The pre-implementation process involved "starchitects" and internationally renowned consultants, as a way to give a sense of imagined solidarity and legitimization to a rather top-down decision-making process. The sole shift is in the state's goal, which appears to be more market-oriented than in past decades: " authority is made polymorphic, consensual, participatory, and contractual, and spatial policies are increasingly oriented toward private concerns " (Enright, 2016, 27). Yet it would be a stretch to too firmly link participatory politics to private concerns. Models of participation less explicitly oriented to economic development, like the region's anti-car policies, can have participatory processes without public-private partnerships.

Conclusion Moving forward, what are the challenges and opportunities for each model?

While the concertation may have lent legitimacy to the Grand Paris project, implementation has stumbled. The Cour de Comptes, a national auditor, opened an investigation into the SGP underlying financial mismanagement (estimated at 13 billion euros) and suspicion of favoritism linked to Grand Paris Express contracts (Le Figaro, 2019). The investigation led to a follow-up by the Parquet National Financier (PNF), which tracks financial crime. There has also been delays in delivering construction for the Olympics, the full network will never be ready in time. The government will soon present a revised schedule to stop the delays and avoid the rising costs. Tensions between lines needed for the Olympics and lines needed to improve access for residents have led to mayors protesting the delays and refusing to make required payments (Gregoire 2018, Gregoire 2019).

The main point of criticism thus far is that it is hard to build legitimacy around a project supposed to "govern" for 12 million residents, and also the selection of priority neighborhoods and projects is not efficiently correcting territorial inequalities, and that it serves mainly the purpose of densifying and gentrifying neighborhoods located in the direct vicinity of the Grand Paris Express extended public transportation network. On the regional side, the region struggles from its sheer size and diversity. The "dusting" of projects across the region that imperiled the Arc Express in the first place continues to be a problem, perhaps more so now when the region is governed by a conservative elected from the outer ring suburbs, who owes no favors to the socialists in Paris.

Another major thread that runs through both stories is the role of the state-empowered technician. In both the Grand Paris Express and bus improvements, the main technical actor is RATP, which is state-controlled. RATP generated the vision for Mobilien, the structured regional bus network, and for the Métrophérique that spawned both the Arc Express and the Grand Paris Express. RATP engineers also staffed Christian Blanc, himself a former RATP head. In both cases, however, RATP has been losing ground. In the region's case, RATP is facing the loss of its monopoly on the bus sector in 2024, and the region is preparing to guide more of the technical planning and contract supervision. Instead of being the main engine of ideas, RATP may become just another operator. In the Grand Paris Express, RATP is losing out to public-private partnerships, already playing a role as a competitor. In

¹ Participatory campaigns to reinvent the governance model in Paris prior to its official inauguration.

one case, the experts are becoming subsumed to politicians, while in other, they follow the guise of the market. Who then generates the solutions that populate the solution stream?

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