

Enhancing and expanding WSTLUR's leadership and agenda: The urgent need for integrated interdisciplinary research, policy and practice

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By 2050, it is estimated that around 6.3 billion people will live in cities (United Nations Population Fund, 2011). Indeed, nearly 70% of humanity will live in cities, representing a unique moment in time in human history. As we hurtle towards this uncertain future, land use, transport, and infrastructure decision-making has never been more important: in the next two decades—and on our watch—the decisions made by the students and professionals taught, advised, and mentored by academics across multiple disciplines—including land use and transport academics—will profoundly impact the sustainability of cities and the health and wellbeing of their residents.

The health impacts of city planning were recently catalogued in a series on Urban Design, Transport and Health published in *The Lancet* (Gilles-Corti et al., 2016; Sallis et al., 2016; Stevenson et al., 2016). Fostering active modes of transport is important from a health perspective due to escalating health costs associated with rising rates of chronic disease globally (United Nations, 2011; Watts et al., 2015). Land use, transport and infrastructure policies interact to create a built form that determines the feasibility and/or attractiveness of active modes of travel (Sallis et al., 2016).

The Lancet series identified the need for eight integrated local and regional transport and planning interventions to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use, that reduce the eight risk exposures for health and wellbeing: three environmental (traffic, air quality, and noise); two social environmental (social isolation and crime and safety); and three individual (physical inactivity, healthy diet and sedentary behaviors) (Sallis et al., 2016).

However, to achieve this level of change requires integrated planning across multiple policies: including transport, land use, employment and economic development, housing, social infrastructure. Easier said, than done! In most countries around the world, health, land use and transport planning are traditionally taught by different disciplines informed by different theoretical approaches, and policies are developed by different agencies and departments across multiple levels of government (Sallis et al., 2016).

With the major challenges confronting cities in the 21st century, will this approach to academic training, policy and practice achieve their urgent needs? Unlikely: to achieve the UN's Sustainable

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Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) and the New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2015) there have been calls for changes to the way cities are planned, designed, built, governed and managed.

Recognizing the challenges ahead and urgency, The Lancet series called for academic leadership for interdisciplinary research and expansion of interdisciplinary tertiary and professional development programs that brings together the built environment and health fields (Sallis et al., 2016). The question for academics is: 'Are we up for it?'

The World Society for Transport and Land Use Research (WRTLUR) and its journal clearly are. Its interdisciplinary ambition is, unfortunately, still too rare. With its mission to promote the understanding and analysis of the interdisciplinary interactions of transport and land use, with a focus on analyzing, modeling and evaluating transport-land use interactions and related policy it provides an important forum for interdisciplinary evidence and debate, which is so important to move the urgent agenda of better city planning forward.

As a public health academic, alarmed by observing the global mobility trends contributing to a pandemic of obesity, health impacts and environmental harm, I am buoyed by this ambition. But (with respect) may I push you even further: I wonder if the Society has gone far enough? As noted above, the UN Habitat's New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2015) recognizes that the way we plan, finance, develop, govern and manage cities must be redressed to achieve sustainable development and universal prosperity. Integrated planning across multiple sectors — urban planning, transport, housing, economic development, employment, education, health and community services — is therefore essential to achieve the city transformation required to optimize transport and land use outcomes and to accommodate population growth and urbanization. None of this is easy. Hence, might there also be benefit in WSTLUR welcoming all fields — including public health — to work together to help solve these complex land use and transport problems, and to identify the full range of co-benefits of relevant policy interventions (e.g., health, social, environmental and economic)?

For example, given the impact of transportation on health, could WSTLUR foster collaboration with the health sector by including a specific stream exploring the health outcomes of transportation choices? Could the Society foster involvement of experts in urban governance to explore the transformative urban governance required for a healthy and sustainable future (RMIT University, 2018)? In the first instance, they could explore how the governance arrangements could be changed to overcome the siloed approach to urban and transport training and planning in both universities and government. Further, in order to support business cases for infrastructure and planning decisions designed to create a healthy, more sustainable future, could WSTLUR foster a new generation of interdisciplinary urban and transport economists who could meet the challenge of developing new economic methods for valuing the intangibles of good city planning that includes the full range of positive and negative externalities (health, social, economic and environmental) of transport and land use decisions (RMIT University, 2018)? Could the Society champion comprehensive multi-disciplinary natural experiment studies of policy implementation with 'air-tight' study designs (including multi-level measures e.g., attitudes, social environment and built environment) (Mokhtarian & Cao, 2018) that could not only study self-selection (i.e., whether policy reforms actually change behavior, or whether those predisposed to living healthier more sustainable lifestyles simply relocate to areas where those policies are implemented); but also enable a full range of co-benefits to be studied. As we hurtle towards a future with autonomous vehicles, could WSTLUR play a lead role in studying the comprehensive range of health, societal and environmental benefits and dis-benefits and governance arrangements required to optimize their introduction in a way that maximizes the benefits and minimizes any harms. Finally, given the intransigence of entrenched patterns of automobile dependency and the power of counter political and private sector

forces, how can we bring the community and politicians along with us to transform city and transport planning? Given how challenging this is, the theories of political and social scientists could bring new insights, and add value to the field in ways that help move forward the agenda (Pratt et al., 2014).

This is not a dress rehearsal: in the next 35 years, city planning land use and transport decisions will either enhance or harm, human and planetary health. The problem is large, multi-sector and multi-disciplinary.

WSTLUR is already playing a leadership role in bringing together land use and transport. This role is already critical, but could be extended. There is no time to lose: the time to act is now.

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