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▶ **To cite this version:**

Pierre Zembri. Chapter 18 Integrating Public Transport management in France: how to manage gaps between mono-scale policies. Integrated Transport : From Policy to Practice, 2010. hal-02189619

HAL Id: hal-02189619
https://enpc.hal.science/hal-02189619

Submitted on 19 Jul 2019

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Chapter 18
Integrating Public Transport management in France: how to manage gaps between mono-scale policies

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1. Introduction:

It might be considered that the integration of public transport policies, especially where several decision levels are operating within a given urban territory, provides the best guarantee for efficient intermodality. In Great Britain, this requirement was underlined during a conference given at the Royal Society of Arts in November 1973 by Sir Colin Buchanan and Geoffrey Crow (Buchanan & Crow 1974). A large number of contributions subsequently reinforced this idea, developing a systemic approach to travel movements and localisation practices. More recently, a large number of authors have integrated the environmental aspect into this approach[i], given that transport is now the first source of pollutant and CO2 emissions in the urban environment. Public authorities followed this movement[ii], noting a growing social demand for a better quality of urban life, a factor requiring better transport quality[iii].

The recent energy crisis provides an opportunity to give thought to best practices in terms of organising modes of transport able to replace private cars. While awaiting a necessary middle term reconfiguration of urban forms[iv], action on the efficiency of existing networks has now become necessary. The current recorded growth in public transport ridership is unprecedented, even in countries where the private car plays a paramount role, such as the United States[v]. In the specific case of France, the most recent surveys carried out in large cities such as Lyon, Rennes, Rouen and Lille reveal that public transport has begun winning back some market shares following a long decline (Quételard 2008). Between October 2007 and June 2008, the regions and SNCF (French railways) engaged in a forward-thinking exercise to examine the consequences of quadrupling regional traffic (TER[vi] x 4) by 2030. This was in reaction to the current annual ridership growth rate which was between + 7 and + 13 % in 2007.

But the French case, with the exception of Île-de-France, is also characterised by a considerable dispersal of responsibilities in terms of transport organisation given that it is subject to four decision-making levels (Table 1). Each network operating in a given territory has an "organising authority"[vii] that has no obligation to coordinate its actions with other ones. At each level, the various policies that were supposed to be jointly applied are not necessarily run by the same departments. Finally, the financing systems change from one mode to another. This leads to integration difficulties and a lower level of overall efficiency in the public transport offering and in the organisation of alternative individual modes of transport such as walking and cycling.

This chapter proposes placing this *a priori* unfavourable situation in perspective by examining the configurations to be found in other European countries, given that the extent to which transport policies are integrated appears to depend on both the institutional framework and the nature of the relations between transport operators and organising authorities.

The remaining of the chapter is organised as follows:

-a description of the French institutional framework,

-some elements about the functioning of the French public transport market, characterized by an open market for urban and interurban networks and by a remaining monopoly for regional rail market,
-an analysis of the quality of intermodality resulting from the organisation already described,
-and an international comparison showing that the number of decision levels is not the only criteria to take into consideration.

2. Description of the French institutional framework

The National Transport Framework Act (Loi d'orientation des transports intérieurs - LOTI) dated 30 December 1982 dissociated four political decision levels for three markets (Table 18.1). While the distribution of competences initially appears logical, a large number of overlaps subsequently revealed themselves.

Table 18.1: Modes, markets and organising authorities in France

Decision-making level	Urban transport	Interurban bus transport	Rail transport
State		Inter-regional	Inter-regional
Region		Inter-départemental	Regional
Département[viii]		School buses and intra-départmental	
Local authorities (in the framework of an urban transport perimeter - PTU)	Bus, light rail and metro		

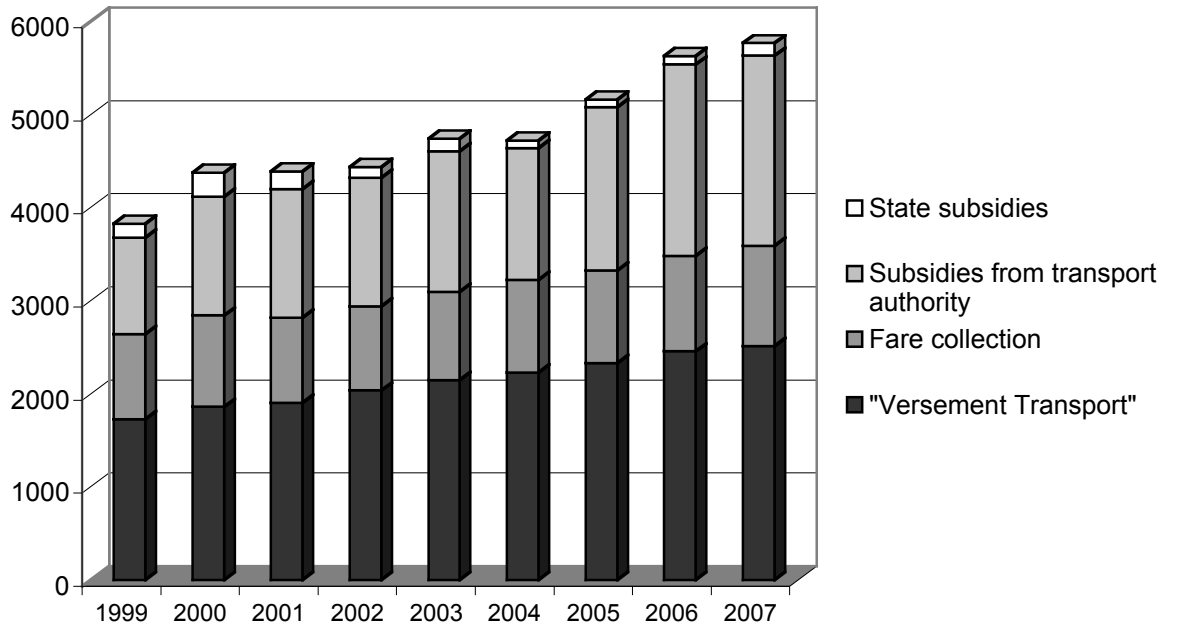
It is on the level of large towns that the situation is most complicated: we are seeing a real interlocking of competences (Zembri 1999:57). Although the four categories of services are present on the same territory (long distance trains, regional trains and coaches, départemental coaches and urban services), they are under no obligation to coordinate with one another. There is little integrated fare pricing given that the level of integration depends on the willingness of the various institutional partners to work together and the transfer of resources from one mode to another. It was only imposed in the Paris region (Ile-de-France) in 1971 with the creation of the Région des Transports Parisiens.

The differences are equally important in terms of financing, making barriers harder to overcome. There is just one market, being urban transport, which benefits from a specific resource called the Versement Transport[ix] – (VT). This was created in 1971 exclusively for the Paris region and aimed to control an alarming crisis of growth that had generated social movements between 1968 and 1970. It takes the form of a tax on the payroll of companies with over nine employees located in the territory served by urban transport networks. Its level, voted by the local authority, depends on the density of the networks, with the maximum only being charged in Paris and the Hauts-de-Seine Département which incorporates the La Défense business centre. As from 1973, VT collection was extended to other large cities and then to smaller towns. Since 2000, it has been applicable to any urban centre of over 10,000 residents. The development of the metro, tramway and other public transport systems owes a considerable amount to this vital resource given that it now represents 40% of the sector's income (Figure 18.1). The levying rates also take the existence of guided public transport projects into account (Table 18.2). In addition, they have recently also taken into consideration the integration level of the organising authorities: the choice of Federation of Municipalities status (Communauté d'Agglomération[x]) provides a 0.05% "bonus" over the maximum rates.

Table 18.2: Transport levy rates applicable since 2006 (source: GART, 2008)

Category	Maximum levying rate on payroll
Towns with between 10,000 and 100,000 residents	0.55 %
Towns of over 100,000 residents outside Île-de-France	1.00 %
Towns of other 100.000 residents outside Île-de-France with guided public transport project (tramway, metro, etc.)	1.75 %
City of Paris and the Hauts-de-Seine Department (La Défense)	2.50 %
Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne departments	1.60 %
Other Île-de-France departments (outer ring)	1.30 %

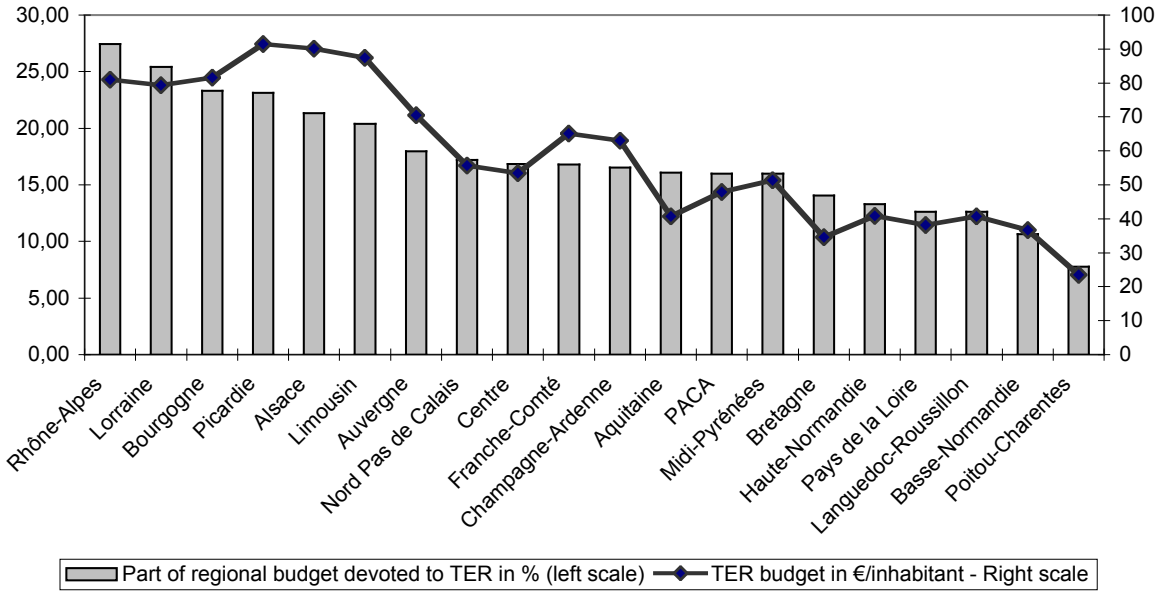
Figure 18.1: Sources of urban public transport financing outside Île-de-France and their increase between 1999 and 2007 (source: GART, 2008 and unit: € million)



On the basis of this data and on the fact that the unitary expenses are under control, it can be considered that the development of the urban public transport sector is strongly supported. The progressive financial withdrawal of the State has not resulted in a loss of income. In contradiction with the earlier trend, the recent national "Grenelle Environment Round Table" (Grenelle de l'Environnement) held in November 2007 saw the State promising to finance new tramway projects.

Regional rail transport also profits from abundant financing, but this is essentially State funding. The transfer of responsibility for these services to the 20 concerned regions (Île-de-France and Corsica being subject to a specific plan) took place between 1995 and 2002 and saw the State make a considerable budgetary transfer. Its participation in the cost of fast-growing TER services increased from €598 million in 1994 to €1.7 billion in 2004. The budgetary effort made by the regions was equally important although unequal due to considerable disparities in their resources (Figure 2). Fare income represents more or less 30 % of operational costs[xi]. The TER is not eligible for the Versement Transport, even for lines included in PTUs.

Figure 18.2: Measurement of the regional budgetary effort using two indicators (year 2005). Source : annual report of Rail et Transport Magazine*, nov. 2006)*



Interurban transport by buses (excluding school transport which is fully covered by public funds) is the sector least well equipped in operational terms. While particularly patchy, investments made by the Départements are generally low. Most operators only have fare income to balance their operating costs given that public subsidies give precedence to renewing the rolling stock. Investment in the 85 surveyed Départements represented a total of €36 million in 2003[xii]. 39% of the Départements have done nothing to harmonise price setting between the different sub-networks.

At this point, we can consider that the three existing markets (urban, interurban buses and regional rail) have little in common, either in terms of the means of financing or the involvement of the organising authorities. We shall now examine whether the same is applicable to the methods used to operate the services.

3. The operation of the French public transport market: historically open to competition

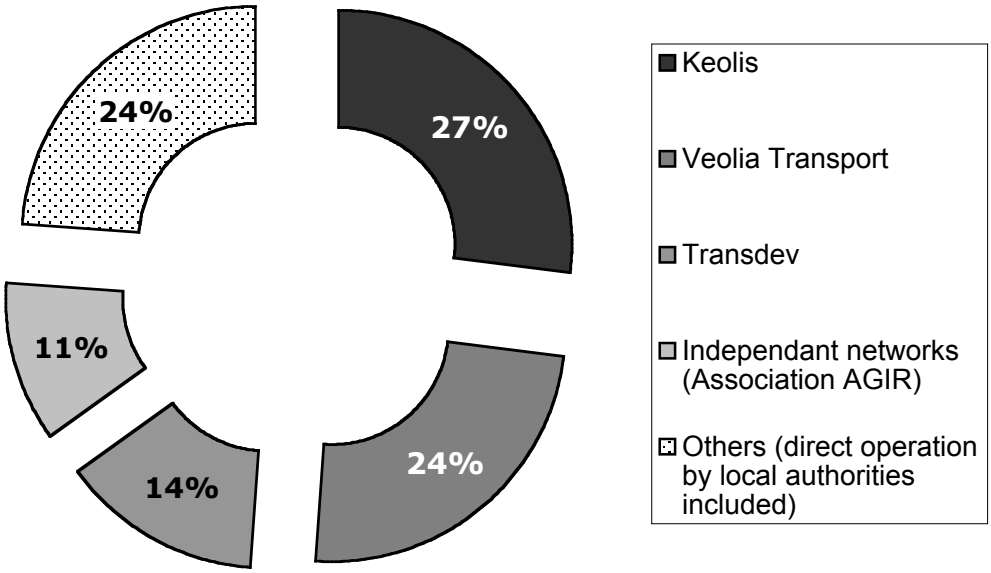
Compared with a large number of European countries (Spain, Italy, Switzerland, etc.) that have remained loyal to the municipal urban transport company model, or its German multi-service variant called *Stadtwerke*, urban transport in France (with the exception of Île-de-France) was opened up to calls for tenders very early on at the beginning of the 1960s within a context of decline and underinvestment. The initial long term concessions (up to 99 years) given to contractors that had built a large proportion of the 101 tramway networks were gradually ended. These concessions took the form of models similar to those of the current build, operate & transfer (BOT) contracts or municipal ownership systems set up to achieve the same end but operated exclusively through public funds. The main reason for the decline was the reduced ridership level due to the competition of the car and a lack of renewal of rolling stock and installations reaching the end of their service life. In all cases, with the exception of three lines in Lille, Marseilles and Saint-Etienne, the change in system coincided with the winding up of the old tramway networks that took place as from 1961.

The adopted principle remained innovative for quite some time:
- short-term operating contracts (3 to 8 years) based on public tenders, with payment of a subsidy calculated according to criteria that can be different from one town to another (lump sum, capped, by kilometre produced, etc.),

- the ownership of the installations, machinery and equipment remain the property of the local authority making the investments,
- the personnel remain attached to the operation and is transferred from one contractor to another should the service provider be changed.

The result is the emergence of pure operations contractors that did not have to make major investments and which paid themselves on the basis of increased productivity or greater level of clientele using the networks. During the 1970s and 1980s, they were subject to considerable consolidation that, in the end, saw the emergence of three large groups, a few private independents or semi-private companies[xiii] and a small number of direct operation by local authorities with their own staff and vehicles (Figure 3).

Figure 18.3: Typology of urban transport operators in France in 2007 (source: GART, 2008)



The interurban sector was even more fragmented, and generally placed in the hands of small and medium sized local and regional companies. The market was considered to be open to competition, with the exception of 16 Départements which continued to run the systems themselves (self-production). The three largest groups continued their development by successive purchases, with Veolia Transport taking the leading role as, in 2002, it bought Verney, the largest remaining independent family-owned group. Operating on both urban and interurban markets where work organisation, the status of employees and salaries were different, the groups were quick to use their urban operations to subcontract services to their local interurban subsidiaries.

In 2008, the three main French groups having considerably profited from the calls for tender across the world using the French model were respectively first (Veolia Transport), 3rd (Transdev) and 4th (Keolis) on a world scale based on their turnover[xiv]. Veolia Transport (€6,080 billion turnover) is the only group present on all five continents.

Regional rail transport continued to be a monopoly as the market had not been opened like in Germany and Sweden. The regions could only contract with SNCF and, even then, the contracts were for relatively short periods (5 to 10 years) and became increasingly complex when the reform based on the Solidarity and Urban Renewal Act dated 13 December 2000 came into force on 1st January 2002. "Bonus-malus" clauses[xv] were added, especially insofar

as service quality was concerned. Penalties were applicable should the agreed objectives were not met. But major disputes developed as SNCF did not provide all the means necessary to meet the level of offer to which it had committed itself. However, to develop its regional sector, SNCF reorganised and incorporated itself into a new management structure (created in 2005) called *Proximités,* integrating Keolis which became a subsidiary, in order to constitute a multimodal operator[xvi]. Currently only one region, Alsace, envisages opening its network to competition as from 2010, being the year that the market can be opened by local authorities.

While the players are close to one another on urban and interurban markets, their different statuses make it difficult to integrate operations. In addition, the growing power of the large groups is perceived as a potential danger by urban Transport authorities. These are now asking themselves whether there should be an "allotment" of networks, being their breaking down into sub-networks whose size would make it possible to attract smaller or more specialised contractors (for sectors such as public transport on demand or the transportation of disabled persons). The behaviour of SNCF which took control of Keolis and is attempting to impose "packages" that incorporate the urban network and extensions on the national rail network by the use of hybrid light rail networks, and the control of multi-modal information and fare pricing, represent other sources of concern. However, it might well be asked whether the carriers themselves are not effectively grouping together operations, a measure that, due to regulations, is very difficult if not impossible for organising authorities to carry out.

4. A difficult integration

It was demonstrated (Zembri 1999:58) that, with the exception of the Île-de-France, the negative effects of the French institutional configuration take two forms:
- **barrier effects** between urban transport perimeters (PTU), generally favoured (lower fares, higher level of service), and the adjoining territories. These effects can be that much more prejudicial given that the PTU does not necessarily cover the entire urbanised territory and the inclusion of the communes is not obligatory. For reasons of political opposition to the main central commune or fiscal selfishness (refusal to share the income from local taxes on businesses), certain communes refuse to join the PTU, and nobody can oblige them to do so. In some large towns (Tours, Rennes, Nancy) there are even two separately managed PTUs,
- **difficulties in providing integrated railway networks** serving within large towns: public transport authorities cannot directly intervene in the management of railway services, even for lines completely located within their territorial jurisdiction, and these lines cannot claim any urban transport financing (such as income from the transport payment). The only responsible body is the regional government and this implies agreements between the regional and the urban authorities, and the transfer of resources (especially those coming from the Versement Transport).

These problems were highlighted when hybrid light rail projects were developed during the 1990s: according to the model developed in Karlsruhe and then in Kassel (Germany), the task was to interconnect urban tramway networks and the regional rail network in a way able to compensate for the locations of certain central stations built outside the city centre. To date, only one project has been translated into reality, being the network introduced in Mulhouse, but even here there is no certainty that the project will be fully completed. This simultaneously raises the issue of the nature of the authority responsible for the service (regional government, local government, or both together through a common structure?) as well as the nature of the operator (SNCF, urban operator, both at the same time?). The problem is that the projected lines go beyond PTUs. If they use routes already served by regional trains, then the regional government has no choice but to be a stakeholder. If the approach taken is to recuperate former railway lines that are no longer used, the Département is also involved as it is responsible for the interurban bus services that will necessarily be concerned by the project.

Another cause of friction between public transport players is the creation of mobility service centres in application of article 113 of the Solidarity and Urban Renewal Act (Loi Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbain - SRU) dated 13 December 2000. This requires that all towns with

over 100,000 residents will have a multi-modal information service available to users. In addition, the requirement that public transport networks will be fully accessible, imposed by the 2005 law on equal opportunities, demands that public transport services be adapted to the disabled (transport des personnes à mobilité réduite - TPMR) or based on bookings in addition to regular accessible lines. Finally, public transport on demand (transport à la demande - TAD) is being developed in most large towns, both around the outskirts as well as in certain highly populated districts.

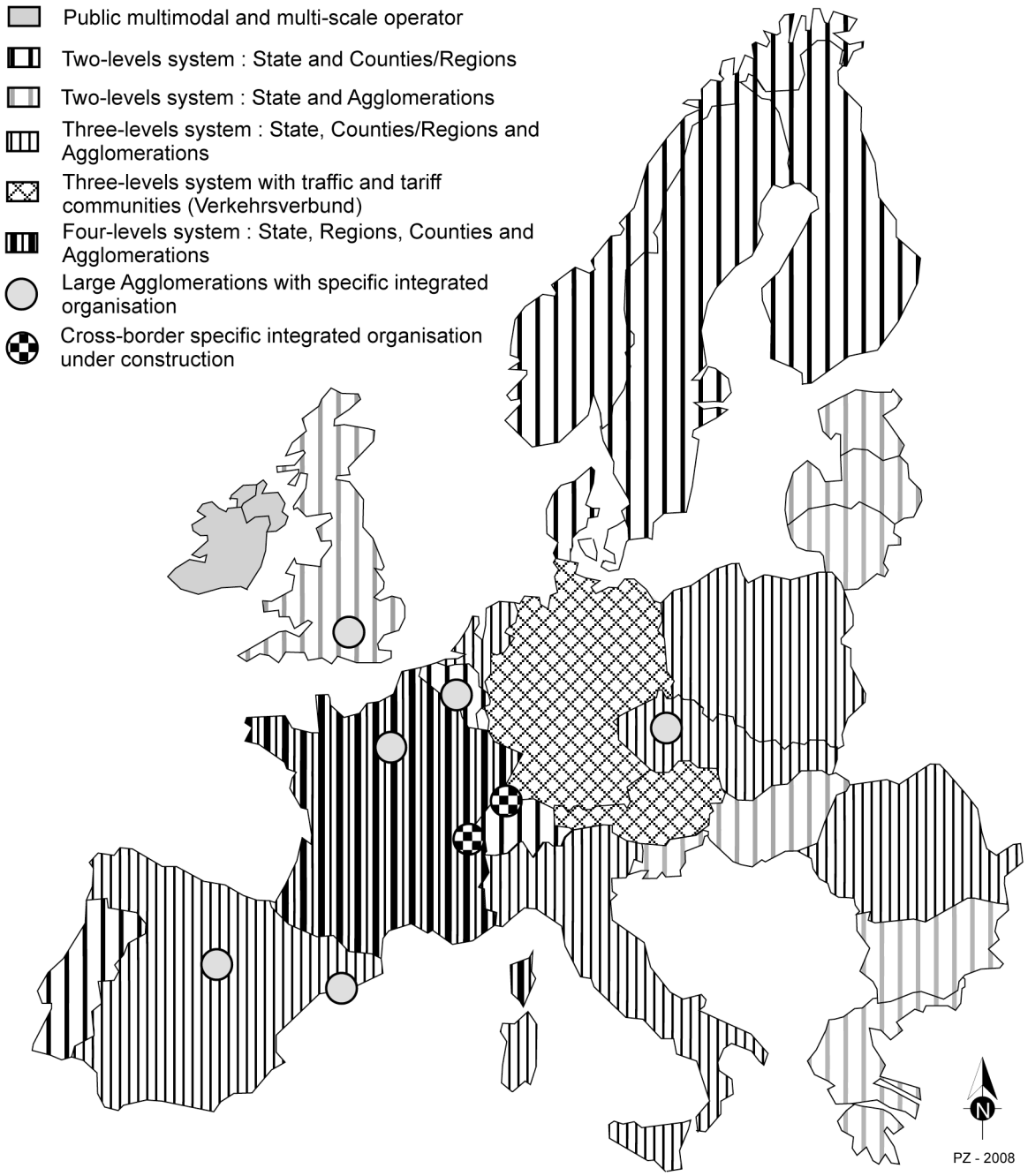
This has led to a growing number of Transport authorities to envisage specific calls to tender for the distribution of information to passengers with, potentially, the management of TAD/TPMR bookings. The contractors submitting tenders include specialised service providers as well as known transport players submitting tenders which, in this way, add a new business to their carrier activity. However, certain candidatures have an ulterior motive: for instance, the Clermont-Ferrand mobility service centre was won by Veolia Transport despite the fact that the group was not present on the local urban network. Similarly, SNCF and its Effia subsidiary consider that intermodality should be constructed on the basis of a framework formed by TER lines on a regional scale and that they need to control multimodal information.

The SRU Act also attempted to facilitate hybrid projects by providing the possibility of creating multi-level transport authorities incorporating several local authority levels able to charge the transport payment in their particular area of jurisdiction. Eight years later, it can be seen that this initiative has not been particularly successful as only eight companies have been created, despite over 100 towns being eligible. The distribution of responsibilities within these types of structures is problematic, with the root problem being that they create an additional management level without in any way altering the existing stacking of competences. To quote Francis Beaucire (1997): *"The complete separation of design and decision between the organising authorities, whether due to indifference or, more seriously, rivalry, has until now completely prevented the potential development of all the various forms of intermodality"*.

5. Generally unfavourable international comparisons

Figure 4 below compares the way that public transport is organised in European Union countries. The comparison is largely based on the number of decision-making levels which range from a single level in Ireland and Ulster to four in France. The other countries have two or three organising authority levels. A first conclusion would be that that the main source of the French problem lies in this overly high number of decision-making levels that other comparable countries do not have. Without even visiting another country, the Parisian case where there is only a single level (the Syndicat des Transports d'Île-de-France, dominated by the regional authority) and a high level of integration (financing methods, fare levels, etc.) would be a good example to follow, but is considered as a very costly one.

Figure 18.4: Transport authorities in Europe: number of decision-making levels and urban regions with a particular status (source: Ollier & Pico, 2006)



But the reality is not that simple. The number of levels must be cross-referenced with market organisation methods: relevance of scales and whether or not partitions exist between the various networks. Taking, for example, countries with only two decision-making levels, a number of highly differentiated situations in terms of the integration of network and transport policies are revealed:

- In the case of the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland), Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands[xvii], there are two levels: the State and the regions. The former is responsible for national railways while the latter manage all the rest: local (urban and rural) and regional rail and bus services. The scale of the region means that the vast majority of standard travel movements (home-work, home-studies) are included. Tariff integration is complete, no matter whether there are one or more operators active in the

region. In the Netherlands, fare prices are organised on a national level using numbered zones: travelling from one town to another using the national railway network means purchasing a multimodal transport service from the departure zone to the arrival zone and includes local transport both upstream and downstream from the railway route. It is obviously possible, within a given zone, to travel on any of the transport modes and use any of the transport operators present. In a small country like Denmark, there are only five Transport authorities and these correspond to the main towns and their zones of influence.

- In the case of the United Kingdom (with the exception of Greater London and Northern Ireland), there are also two decision-making levels, being the State and the towns. However, the organisation of the market since the introduction of the 1985 Transport Act, means that it is no longer possible to apply a network integration policy on the level of the towns. This is despite the existence of the Public Transport Executive (PTE), which only has a very limited role: infrastructure planning (tramways) and the financing of social services when the private operator offer is considered to be incomplete. In practice, there is no tariff integration: each transport operator is free to set the prices it wants and it is rare that the tickets issued by one operator are accepted by the others. Wanting to harmonise fare rates would interfere with the free enterprise market principle, an absolute concept enacted by the Transport Act. In the case where a local authority installs a tramway network, the transport operators present in the town can retain parallel itineraries and thus be in competition with the new service.

The German and Austrian cases reveal that having three decision-making levels - State, Länder[xviii] and towns - is not incompatible with a high level of networks integration. In practice, they work in partnership within pricing communities (*Verkehrsverbund*) that correspond to the zone of influence of a town or group of towns. The issue of urban growth is resolved by the inclusion in the community of the concerned communes step by step. Generally speaking, pricing communities are based on a company whose shareholders are both the various levels of transport authorities (with the exception of the State) and the public and private operators: national railways, municipal transport companies, and other road or rail transport operators. The company acts as a clearing house, distributing the income and subsidies between the various operators. The setting of fare rates is integrated and based on "honeycomb" zones. Principles of continuity are negotiated between neighbouring pricing communities for cross-border routes. The result is a very high performance "network of networks" that is completely seamless for the user despite the presence of a number of operators and several decision-making levels. The system is highly resistant to the opening of the regional railway markets to competition now taking place in Germany: new operators having obtained a public service delegation are invited to join the community and fare setting remains in the hands of the organising authorities.

This comparison concludes by noting two contradictory logical approaches that can currently be observed across the world:

- the fragmentation of networks into sectors that are subject to separate calls for tenders,
- the full integration of certain contracts by combining various operational modes and scales.

In the former case, the organising authority assumes a growing responsibility in terms of the design and the commercialisation of the service, with the transport operator simply becoming a service provider, a mechanism in a system within which it has no power. Its role is essentially to produce within the best economic conditions while fully respecting the specifications. It is possible to break up the networks, subcontract the management, the distribution of information, and even the control of the execution and the quality of the services. This prospect is particularly appealing to transport authorities concerned with being overly dependent on the small number of large operators present on the market. This kind of management make possible to use the services of smaller or more specialised contractors (such as those specialised in the public transport on demand sector).

In the latter case, the transport authority places all the industrial and commercial risks in the hands of the chosen transport operator and only retains organisational and supervision

functions. The highest level of simplicity was attained in 2006 in the province of Limburg (The Netherlands) where all transport networks (regional rail, urban and interurban bus, school buses, on demand services) were grouped together and tendered as a single block. Tenderers were invited, for a given subsidy level, to imagine the best possible network configuration able to meet the needs of the organising authority. Veolia Transport won the competition by offering the best level of service for the largest part of the Region (with an extended use of on demand services).

6. Conclusions

Making changes to the French system based on good practices observed elsewhere means working in two directions:

- **defining perimeters of competence without any preliminary territorial or modal constraint**, at a scale allowing the extended zones of attraction of towns to be taken into consideration. Integration requires unitary management, financing and pricing as well as the multiplication of connections between networks. The systematic association of a scale (or a mode) and an organising authority has revealed its limits;
- **smoothing out the regulatory differences between the various modes of public transport** (particularly urban and interurban services) so that, if required, calls for tender for large multimodal networks can be made. This would make it possible to derive the best possible use of the existence of large groups incorporating all the skills being sought and the opening up of the last few remaining protected markets (regional railways).

In any case, **the transport authority must retain control over the configuration of the networks (infrastructures, services), pricing, information and the quality of the service**. Experience has proven that a successful integrated network is one where the public authority is powerful and exercises a continuous control over the execution of the service and the use of public funds, no matter what the nature or number of operators.

It goes without saying that it would be possible to retain the existing number of decision-making levels, despite the fact that this is the only country in Europe with so many, but this would require the pooling of services and financing within the framework of a German or Austrian type of pricing community whose perimeter would need to be much larger than those of the existing PTUs.

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[i] In particular, see Hull 2007; Geerlings & Stead 2003, Bertolini, Le Clercq and Straatemeier 2008; May, Kelly and Shepherd 2006.
[ii] European Conference of Ministers of Transport, 1998.
[iii] Hine & Scott 2000.
[iv] Housing and workplaces at a distance from means of public transport would logically become less attractive.
[v] As an illustration, here are the titles of a few recent articles printed in the *New York Times*: "Gas Prices send surge of riders to Mass Transit" (May 10, 2008), "Travellers shift to Rail as cost of fuel rises" (June 21, 2008), "Politics failed, but fuel prices cut congestion" (July 3, 2008), "Fuel prices shift math for life in far suburbs" (June 25, 2008).
[vi] TER means Regional express rail services (Transport Express regional).
[vii] This is the literal translation of the French official term « Autorités organisatrices » for Transport Authorities. The organisational tasks include network design, tariffing, collection and redistribution of the resources, contracting with operators, etc.
[viii] Level of administration analog to the british Counties or the Italian Provinces. We use the French term and the corresponding adjective « départemental » in order to avoid confusions with the Department as part of an institution.
[ix] A literal translation would give in English : Transport Payment
[x] This is a public establishment responsible for cooperation between municipalities. It brings together a large number of competences (particularly town planning, transport, road management and station management) which, at least in theory, allows it to implement fully integrated policies.
[xi] Source: Association des Régions de France, year 2007.
[xii] This is the last available figure (source : GART, Annual report on public transport, 2006).
[xiii] These associate a private operator (large group or independent) owning less than 50 % of the shares and the Organising Authority owning the rest.
[xiv] Source: Annual reports for year 2008 or nearest period. This ranking only concerns service provider groups with no particular territorial attachment and which, consequently, are not "in-house" within the meaning of the 2007 European regulation concerning public service obligations.
[xv] When the fixed objectives of performance are exceeded, the operator profits from additional money given by the public auhority, as a reward for its efficiency (the « bonus »). On the contrary, when the objectives are not achieved, the operator is penalized and receive less money from the authority (the « malus »).
[xvi] Keolis was not competing with SNCF on the rails. In the French market, this company only operates urban public transport and interurban bus networks. SNCF just wanted to become a « global » operator by external growth.
[xvii] In the specific case of the Netherlands, three large towns provide the exception to the rule: Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague which make use of a third partial level.
[xviii] German administrative unit equivalent to regions and counties.