Preface

The invitation to produce this *Handbook of Sustainable Transport* arrived at a time when I was reflecting on my own contribution, over almost 40 years, to the ‘mission’ of achieving sustainable transport. This was at a ‘rock-bottom’ moment, where my optimism on progress was in doubt – the culmination of a series of events in my city. The summer of 2017 had been disrupted by big community protests witnessing the wilful destruction of a significant wetland ecosystem by a road proposal first mooted in the 1960s (Curtis 2017). I felt we were going backwards.

Other efforts to offer proposals to enhance the public transport network in order to provide a greater proportion of residents with transport choice were met with resistance based on archaic beliefs and practices rather than on aspirations for a more just and environmentally sustainable city. A return visit to my old home town of Oxford, sitting on a bus overhearing three women discussing a ten-year-old cyclist who was killed at an intersection we were passing due to inadequate infrastructure, led on to their plans for how Oxford could really deliver sustainable transport and showed me that ‘everyday people’ want change. I reflected how, in the intervening 25 years, little on-ground had been achieved for safe cycling in a city where the number of cyclists is high, and in a city that I had considered had a progressive sustainable transport policy when I lived there. I really wondered how we could succeed in achieving sustainable transport.

The design of this book came out of these reflections. It is important to tell the story of the genesis of sustainable transport – are we still confronted with the same issues today? What actions have we attempted – what have been the successes, and what are the barriers we must overcome?

Now we are in a climate emergency. Australians have experienced a horrific summer of catastrophic bush fires, drought and then deluge. Thousands of hectares of land has been burnt, there has been loss of human life, millions of animals lost their lives and there are questions as to whether some species will ever recover. Politicians are yet to accept that we are in a climate emergency, and the doubts are fuelled by the media. We are being told that what occurred was a ‘normal cycle’. Yet the evidence contradicts this, and Australians continue to make little impact on reductions in greenhouse gas emissions or in reducing use of non-renewable resources.

The transport sector makes a significant contribution to ideas of sustainable transport. But politicians continue to court the idea that major road-building projects are ‘congestion-busting’, investing in these at the expense of sustainable transport options. The work to counter this is immense. This *Handbook* maps out the enormity of actions needed across multiple geographic scales, across multiple layers of government, with community and in all the dimensions of sustainable transport. There are many positive achievements, new ways of thinking about the problem, a willingness to experiment and powerful stories of co-creation that cut across the ‘business-as-usual’ barriers. What is needed now is to learn from these and act with urgency! When I arrived in Australia, at my first professional meeting it was suggested to me

that the implementation of the sustainable transport paradigm required patience (I was told to take up fishing!). But the climate emergency leaves no room for such patience and the ‘lock-down’ experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that rapid change in travel patterns can be achieved if so desired.

A book project of this scale takes time to deliver, and during its final stages we have been confronted with a global pandemic – something I have never experienced. In conversation with a colleague, we noted that there have been actions and changes in people’s activity and travel habits that have been radical. Many have taken up walking and cycling, many have now experienced working from home, the internet has offered opportunities, not only for work, shopping, work meetings, online teaching, but also for online social events (‘sharing’ drinks and dinner). Local governments have also responded with speed to make temporary improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure. What is interesting in all these activities is that they have occurred rapidly and in the absence of policy. It shows the adaptability of citizens and governments, and the speed at which change can occur (albeit in unwelcome circumstances). Nevertheless, these responses have offered trials and testing, and may well provide the means to speed up progress with sustainable transport.

Another reason for optimism is demonstrated in this book by looking at the array of contributors. Some, like me, are still active and pushing for progress after many years, but it is also heartening to see many younger people rising to take things forward. My hope is that you will find valuable material in this *Handbook* to set your work in context and to help that mission progress.

The contributors were invited by me. I am very privileged to have crossed paths or worked with each author at some point in my career. Some have been important mentors to me, some I hope have benefitted from the mentorship I have offered. I am grateful for the energy, the inspiration and the support each has offered. This group of authors and their contributions are another reason for optimism!

The contributors are drawn not only from academia, but also from practice. Many of the academics themselves put their research into practice, or research their practice. This means that the chapters are grounded in a rich experience of the ‘real-world’, not just the lofty ivory tower that some think academics work from. My own journey has included planning practice; academia in the UK, Australia and more recently Sweden; various roles on local, regional, national and international advisory committees; ten years as the convenor of the Fremantle Bicycle User Group; service as a Commissioner on the Western Australian Planning Committee. This journey has not only connected me to many people and enabled me to visit, experience and learn from many different places, but has also shaped my own research curiosity and understanding. My research journey has evolved from a first focus on household travel behaviour and its relationship to the built environment, to city design for sustainable travel, to accessibility planning and tool development for planning practice, and on to exploring the institutional barriers to sustainable transport. This rich journey has informed the way in which this book is structured.

I will finish by revealing that I also had a ‘secret mission’ in selecting authors – that was to include the contributions of as many women in my field as I could encourage. This was driven by the experiences in the early days of attending transport events and meetings where ‘older men in grey suits’ dominated the group of participants (both in numbers and in their interventions!) and demonstrated a very narrow perspective on what mattered in transport planning and policy. It was not easy being a woman in those settings. The transport world still suffers

this problem – all too often the panel at a professional event, for example, will be male-only. I have to report that my mission was not as easy one – convincing overworked colleagues that they could squeeze another task in. I am really pleased that many accepted, and of course disappointed that some could not. And that is not to diminish to contributions of my male authors in any way (after all they don't wear grey suits ☺); I know they would support this sentiment. In the event we achieved an almost 50/50 share – my mission in part defeated by collegiality in the addition of co-authors.

REFERENCE

Curtis, C. (2017), 'Transport planning decision-making', in A. Gaynor, P. Newman and P. Jennings, (eds), *Never Again: Reflections on Environmental Responsibility after Roe 8*, Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing.