

Panel 28. Transportation Ethics

Convenors:

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Keywords: Accessibility, Justice, Sustainability, Transportation Ethics, Urban Mobility

Several unprecedented challenges are forcing cities to rethink how transportation systems are designed and governed, whom they serve, and how they impact urban life. Demographic growth and rapid urbanization are straining the capacity of transport systems to move an increasing number of people. Climate change and rising temperature require us to radically reshape urban environments and move towards a more sustainable mobility. Economic inequalities and urban gentrification contribute to residential segregation, creating disparities in access to key services, amenities, and opportunities.

Moreover, technological innovation has introduced profound changes. Vehicle electrification offers a promising solution for reducing emissions, yet it presents a range of challenges, including the need for extensive charging infrastructure, the necessity of radically transforming energy systems, and the environmental implications of battery production and disposal.

Autonomous vehicles promise further transformations, yet they raise pressing questions about responsibility, safety, and governance. The rise of platform companies for ride-hailing and micro-mobility is altering the way people and goods move through cities. The gig economy introduced new dynamics, with couriers often facing high traffic risks and inadequate labour protections.

Concurrently, transportation agencies continue to be shaped by powerful groups such as real estate developers, car manufacturers, and tech corporations, who often influence decisions on urban mobility according to their agendas. This raises important questions about how to democratize the governance of transport, making it more inclusive and equitable for all the stakeholders involved.

How can we navigate these challenges and identify viable solutions for the future of urban mobility? This is not a simple question, as urban mobility is a contested space, with competing visions of what a "good" transportation system should look like.

Centring on the intersection of moral values and transport, Transportation Ethics can provide useful insights to such a multidisciplinary debate. It raises important questions about what values and principles should underpin our transportation systems, how we can balance competing interests and priorities, and how we can ensure that all voices are heard in the decision-making process. It challenges us to consider who benefits from transportation policies, how to address structural injustices, and what responsibilities we have toward current and future generations in shaping sustainable, equitable, and inclusive urban mobility. It examines the responsibilities of administrations, planners, and engineers in promoting traffic safety, advocating for a shift from an individualistic to a collective understanding of accountability for traffic risks. It addresses trade-offs between safety and individual autonomy, as well as the pervasive use of surveillance technologies and their implications for personal privacy. It challenges the widely held belief that the primary role of transport planners is to solve congestion problems, emphasizing instead the importance of ensuring sufficient accessibility for all citizens to essential services, amenities, and opportunities.

We encourage submissions for 20-minute talks that discuss the ethics of transportation from these different angles and perspectives, with the aim of kickstarting an interdisciplinary conversation on this much needed, but still quite under-researched field of applied ethics.



12 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 153 - Travelling on the edges: marginalisation and hierarchy in transportation systems

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Keywords: Transportation ethics, road systems, relational equality, marginalisation

Road spaces (understood broadly) are vital yet highly unequal spaces. The dangers of road travel and costs of associated pollution are distributed highly unequally (DfT 2022; WHO 2022; Sheller 2018 26, 68; Bullard 2004), as is the access to space and opportunities that road systems enable (Hine 2011; Lucas 2011). This paper aims to provide one theoretical basis for moral diagnosis and assessment of these inequalities. It argues that an ideal of relational equality constrains the conventions that organise road systems when the latter exist within a regime of private property in land. And more specifically, it will suggest that in road systems we have good reasons to be concerned about one particular form of relational inequality (not hitherto the focus of much of the philosophical literature on relational equality), namely marginalisation.

The argument begins from the observation that private ownership of land restricts movement (Ripstein 2009). Justification of private property depends on its not frustrating a basic interest in an adequate capacity for movement. To achieve this, a property regime depends on a system of publicly accessible roads governed by shared conventions (needed to keep the roads passable), enabling movement between privately owned land. In other words, groups of people operating or imposing a regime of private property are morally required to maintain a substantial relationship, of road-convention creation and upholding, with each other.

The ideal of relational equality, which has gained prominence in the political philosophy of recent decades (Anderson 1999; Kolodny 2023; Schemmel 2021) objects to social relations characterised by unjustified hierarchy or distinctions of social status. Where a group of people share a road-convention-maintaining relationship, there are relational egalitarian reasons to avoid forms of hierarchy it might produce. One distinctive form of relational inequality, this paper argues, is marginalisation, the involuntary confinement of some members of a relationship to its peripheries, the denial of 'centrality' in the relationship. The paper adopts an account of marginalisation, according to which it can take two forms: 'participation marginalisation', where some are denied opportunities to participate in the forms of social activity most central to the shared relationship, and 'control/influence marginalisation', where some are denied proportionally equal opportunity to influence the shape or course of the relationship. There are grounds for objection to a system of road conventions, then, where it has the effect of denying access for some to the most central aspects of shared life or where it is established or organised in a way disproportionately responsive to the voice or interests of a subgroup of those subject to the conventions. Road systems that enable movement (and hence social participation) primarily for those with the economic means to access a private care, for instance, look likely to marginalise in the first way, while those that are subject to capture by powerful interest groups or managed in a way that responds primarily to purchasing power, look likely to marginalise in the second way. The paper explores some of the implications of this ideal for existing road systems.

12 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 347 - Ethical Issues in Philanthropic Engagement in Global South Road Safety Work

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Keywords: Philanthropy, Road Safety, Public Health, Global South

Each year, nearly 1.3 million people die, and approximately 50 million are injured in road traffic crashes, with over 90% of these casualties occurring in low- and middle-income countries. To address this crisis, the United Nations has proposed a set of evidence-based road safety measures. However, a critical funding



gap persists, hindering their implementation. Private sector contributions—including funding from businesses, insurance companies, and philanthropies—have been proposed as a solution. In response, several philanthropic organizations and charities, such as Bloomberg Philanthropies, the FIA Foundation, and the Global Road Safety Facility (GRSF), have become key players in global road safety in recent years. Their growing influence reflects a broader shift in global public health governance, where private actors increasingly assume roles traditionally held by national governments and international organizations.

While philanthropic involvement in public health and development has been widely debated, its ethical implications in road safety remain underexplored. This paper addresses this gap by examining whether philanthropic engagement in global road safety initiatives is ethically problematic, particularly in the Global South, where state and corporate funding are insufficient. We identify three key aspects of philanthropic involvement with significant ethical implications.

First, concerns arise regarding how philanthropies acquire their wealth, particularly the impact of their income-generating activities or investments on road safety. The road safety community has often criticized philanthropies with ties to tobacco and alcohol industries. We argue that similar scrutiny may be warranted for philanthropies connected to the car and motorcycle industries, given potential conflicts of interest, and the many moral problems associated with car ownership and driving in many countries in Global South.

Second, ethical issues pertain to the role of philanthropic actors in policymaking and implementation, specifically whether their involvement aligns with fundamental moral and political values such as justice, equity, transparency, accountability, and democracy. A key concern is the extent to which philanthropic actors influence policy agenda-setting and whether their priorities genuinely reflect the needs, values, and concerns of Global South countries and their communities.

Finally, concerns emerge from the specific road safety strategies and interventions philanthropies promote, particularly regarding their efficiency and effectiveness.

By evaluating these concerns, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of private sector involvement in global road safety.

12 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 554 - Who Gets to Move Sustainably? Mobility Justice and the Socio-Technical Landscapes of School Escorting in Padova, Italy

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Keywords: mobility justice, sustainable mobility practices, school escorting, socio-technical systems, spatial inequalities

One of contemporary cities' main goals, inspired by the aim of shifting away from the dominant use of the automobile, is the promotion of what are defined 'sustainable mobility practices'. These refer to an abstract vision of the city where the majority of the dwellers move by foot, bicycle or public transportation. However, this vision rarely becomes a reality, highlighting the limited effectiveness of the policies that consider only the provision of infrastructure to enact this goal. In our contribution, we argue that the field of transportation ethics can serve as a guide to better understand the pitfalls that dominant infrastructure-centred policies approaches present.

Starting from these assumptions, this study employs an STS perspective to raise questions related to access, capabilities and ethics of mobilities, such as "How is mobility connected to the idea of justice? Who is included/excluded from sustainable mobility practices? How does the agency of the infrastructures play a role in allowing/constraining sustainable mobility?". To do so, we draw on Mimi Sheller's (2018) concept of mobility justice to highlight how the interplay between social inequalities, infrastructural design, and everyday practices plays a role in shaping the different forms and conditions of mobilities. Mobility justice



hence aims to offer a framework for analysing both exclusionary mechanisms and pathways toward equitable futures.

To ground this theoretically informed approach, we focus on the empirical results of the SCHOOLNET research regarding walking/cycling school escorting attitudes in schools in Padova. Through a mixed-methods analysis of questionnaires and interviews with parents, we identified three key findings: 1) Proximity to walking/cycling accessible environments correlates strongly with active mobility practices; 2) Shorter daily travel distances (e.g., routine commutes) enable higher rates of walking/cycling escorting; 3) Flexibility in work schedules and access to support networks further incentivize non-motorized mobility. These results highlight how spatial, temporal, and relational inequalities—transcending infrastructure alone—mediate participation in sustainable practices, disproportionately excluding those in car-dependent neighbourhoods, with rigid schedules, or lacking social capital.

The presented reflection hence aims at examining how the concept of mobility justice is fundamental to the field of transportation ethics. It can be applied to inquire the roots of such inequalities by adopting a socio-technical framework that transcends conventional notions of "transportation justice," which often overlook the embodied, infrastructural, and temporal dimensions of mobility. However, at the same time, we critically examine the limits that this concept has, and the difficulties it presents when it is translated empirically.

Nevertheless, we conclude that centring the analysis on how agency is unevenly distributed across infrastructures and actors is the starting point to foster more effective and equitable mobility policies.

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ID 617 - Socio-material networks and ethical challenges: an STS perspective on sustainable mobility practices

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Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, micromobility, shared mobility, electric vehicles, low carbon practices

Mobility and transportation systems are a fundamental pillar of contemporary societies. However, climate change and the subsequent need to lower CO₂ emissions are pushing these systems towards more environmentally-sound technologies. Transportation is indeed currently responsible for over the 20% of carbon emissions worldwide (Speizer et al. 2024), while on the European and Italian level this percentage rises up to 25% and 33% (EU Parliament 2024, EEA 2024) making sustainability an urgent priority.

This work, conducted as part of the PRIN PNRR 2022 project "PROSOCIAL-CLIMA," is based on two types of data: (a) a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) - carried out through the standard PRISMA - on 150 scientific articles analyzing low-emission behaviors in relation to micromobility, shared mobility and the use of electric vehicles; 12 focus groups conducted in four Italian regions, in which mobility habits and willingness to adopt low-emission practices were investigated among different age cohorts and in different territorial contexts (urban and suburban).

Adopting an STS framework, we analyze sustainable mobility behaviors as an interweaving of environmental and ethical practices and complex sociotechnical networks.

On the one hand, limited or uneven access to key infrastructures—such as bike lanes, EV charging stations, and digital platforms for shared services—often hinders the stabilization of sustainable practices. This challenge is particularly acute in rural and peripheral areas, where inadequate public transit systems, sparse infrastructure, and socio-spatial inequalities restrict residents' ability to transition to eco-friendly options. The implied risk is to exacerbate existing inequalities, leaving vulnerable communities behind. As a result, ethical concerns arise regarding fairness, environmental justice, and the unequal distribution of the benefits and burdens of sustainability policies. Conversely, maintaining the material components of



sustainable mobility, expanding and integrating them into broader networks (e.g. public transit systems) can foster low-carbon mobility practices by enhancing accessibility, equity and efficiency.

On the other hand, the stabilization of mobility networks also depends on policy choices in enrolling actors in co-design and participative processes. Evidence from current research shows that to involve potential users in decision-making, particularly those from underserved communities, is not only a matter of procedural fairness but also a way to enhance long-term sustainability and public trust. Expanding this approach in the assessment of transition strategies can help to re-align the expectations of the many actors involved across different social groups and sociotechnical contexts, ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of collective choices over time.

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ID 712 - Extending on Accessibility – A Reflection on the Conceptualization of Transport Justice by Fare Free Public Transport Activists

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Keywords: transport justice, distributional justice, recognition justice, procedural justice, activism

Literature on transport justice typically highlights the perspective from distributional justice: How are the burdens and benefits of transport distributed within a given community or society? Distributional justice, however can be interpreted in different ways: In the context of literature on transportation justice, one can see a rather narrow focus on the externalities of transport – like accidents, pollution etc. – as burdens and accessibility via transport opportunities as benefits. Indeed, both will be important elements of a comprehensive theory of transport justice. However, distributional justice – for example in the sense of John Rawls's theory of justice (Rawls 1999; 2005; 2001) – can be interpreted in a wider way that covers, at least to a certain degree, what other theorists would characterize as different dimensions of justice, which are distinct from a distributional perspective: recognitional aspects of justice and procedural aspects of justice (Schlosberg 2009). Therefore, one might ask whether these aspects should get more attention in the literature on transport justice.

We try to reflect on this question by considering the conceptualization of transport justice by activists for fare free public transport (FFPT) – which is an interesting topic on its own for transport justice. In particular, we analyze the public outreach by three FFPT activist groups: one in Canada, one in Brazil, one in Germany. These groups indeed conceptualize transport justice in a way, that highlights what one might call recognition justice and procedural justice. With respect to recognition justice, they claim that there is a right to mobility for free and equal citizens. With respect to procedural justice, they claim that a more participatory or democratic governance of transport is valuable in itself or at least instrumentally indispensable. In conclusion, there is a need to rethink the scope of justice related issues concerning transportation, that



transport justice as a field deals with.

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12 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 891 - Mapping Movement: The role of technology in shaping urban mobilities and ride-hailing driver experiences.

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Keywords: Ride-hailing platforms, urban mobility, algorithmic governance, digital labor, feminist STS.

This paper explores the intersection of technology, urban mobility, and ride-hailing drivers' experiences in Bogotá, Colombia. Using a sociotechnical lens, it investigates how digital platforms reshape mobility through algorithmic governance, spatial imaginaries, and embodied urban knowledge. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews conducted under the Fairwork project, this research foregrounds drivers' strategies of adaptation, resistance, and co-construction within an evolving and platform-mediated urban landscape.

By employing feminist STS approaches and theoretical frameworks of spatiality—including territory, place, scale, and networks (Jessop et al., 2016)—this work uncovers how mobility transcends its physical dimension to reflect socio-political power, cultural practices, and urban transformations. The study conceptualizes ride-hailing as more than just a transportation service; it is a dynamic socio-spatial practice shaped by digital infrastructures, labor precarity, and informal networks of care. It explores how ride-hailing drivers strategically navigate urban terrains through sensory knowledge, technological negotiations (such as GPS reliance and algorithmic management), and social solidarities. These insights demonstrate how platform workers engage in "textured mobilities" (Sheller, 2018), where movement is shaped by affect, power asymmetries, and micro-interactions with urban infrastructures.

Furthermore, this research interrogates the ways in which algorithmic governance structures spatial and economic constraints for drivers, often reinforcing patterns of exclusion and precarity. However, it also highlights how drivers mobilize socio-technical assemblages—such as WhatsApp groups, knowledge-sharing practices, and safety networks—to contest platform control and co-construct mobility beyond algorithmic logics. Their movements operate across multiple geographical scales, from the micro-rhythms of city streets to broader urban infrastructures of control and exclusion.

By engaging with debates on spatial justice, platform capitalism, and the politics of algorithmic mobility, this study contributes to feminist STS and digital labor scholarship by centering the material, affective, and contested dimensions of ride-hailing work. It ultimately argues that mobility is not simply a function of digital economies but a deeply political and lived experience, negotiated through infrastructures of control and solidarities.

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12 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 895 - The Role of Ethical Values in Urban Planning

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Keywords: transportation, ethics

In order to achieve deeper changes in our transport systems around the world we need to combine understanding of individual daily perspectives and abstract knowledge about transportation systems. This would allow switching between different forms of urban planning and revisions in priorities in city transport systems. In order to change our cities for the better we need more engagement of communities informed by ethical evaluations of different modes of transport and conscious of consequences of planned systemic choices.

One of the biggest challenges for contemporary cities is the organization of an efficient, fair and accessible transportation system. At the same time there is a big discrepancy between what many people consider as the best way to commute and what would be the best choice from the perspectives of community, sustainability, environment, safety and effectiveness. For many people the most comfortable way to move around the city is to use their private car. From the mentioned other perspectives this is usually an inefficient, costly and polluting choice.

The contrast between individual experience and systemic perspective helps many people to ignore arguments from the systemic level of reflection. At the same time even if engineers or high rank city councils officials try to make transportation system more ethical and sustainable they are having troubles to find a proper language to talk about it. Concentrating on statistical and technical arguments might seem a way of producing consent, but instead it seems to alienate voters. In order to provide the space of discussion and the possibility for understanding choices we face we need arguments taking into account ethical values involved, as well as the possibilities of changes in transportation systems. To search for an agreement we need to start from talking in an open and honest way about differences and conflicts. This seems to be impossible without taking into account ethical values engaged in urban planning.

In my paper I would like to use ethical reflections of Thomas Nagel expressed in his famous essay Moral Luck in order to search for ways to diminish the fissure between individual and systemic perspective of perceiving transportation systems. In Nagel's view, the necessary condition of our ethical evaluations is our ability to ascribe to someone capability to control events, to act differently in a given situation. When we judge someone we widen our first person perspective of looking at the world and suppose that he/she could have done differently. In other word we think that others can make decisions and control their actions in the same way that we usually think about our own actions. Restoring the possibility of controlling transportation systems might be helpful in order to evaluate different scenarios and plans concerning future organization of cities around the world. In this picture ethical values will be useful in translating individual experiences into more generally shared evaluations, as well as in providing ethical justifications helpful for understanding and accepting recommendations resulting from systemic reflections.

