

THE CONTRADICTIONARY DEBATE ABOUT FARE-FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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“Free public transport
does not make any sense”

Vincent Kaufmann, École Polytechnique Fédérale de
Lausanne, sustainable transport scholar (CERTU, 2010)

“To really respond
to the urgency of climate,
public transport
would have to become free”

Naomi Klein, environmental journalist and activist
(Laystary, 24 April 2015)

1962

FFPT is born(?)
in Commerce, California

1971

1972

1978-9

1990

1996

2013

2016

1962

first European case:
Colomiers, France

1971

1972

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1962

first European case:
Colomiers, France

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Rome and Bologna

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1978-9

1990

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1962

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FFPT is born(?)
in Commerce, California

1990

1996

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Castellón, Spain

1990

1996

2013

2016

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2013

2016

“we don't need new roads,
we need new ideas”

FFPT in Hasselt

1962

1971

1972

1978-9

1990

1996

2013

2016

107 cases of 'full' FFPT

67 in Europe

25 in North America

11 in South America

3 in Asia

1 in Australia

towards a definition
of fare-free public transport (FFPT)?

‘partial’ FFPT

‘full’ FFPT

towards a definition of fare-free public transport (FFPT)?

‘partial’ FFPT

temporary: a limited period of time

temporally-limited: specific times

spatially-limited: specific spaces

socially-limited: specific people

‘full’ FFPT

towards a definition of fare-free public transport (FFPT)?

‘partial’ FFPT

temporary: a limited period of time

temporally-limited: specific times

spatially-limited: specific spaces

socially-limited: specific people

‘full’ FFPT

continuously embracing
(nearly) the whole network
and all its users

FFPT: uneconomical and irrational?

abolishing fares: lower revenues, higher costs
→ decrease of financial sustainability

what is free, has no value → FFPT “can create an illusion that there are goods or services that have no cost” (CERTU, 2010)

“[FFPT] does not exist, it is always paid for by somebody” (CERTU, 2010)

FFPT → irrational user behaviour

“non-productive trips” (Cats et al., 2016) and “useless mobility” (Duhamel, 2004)

FFPT: unsustainable?

FFPT does not increase the quality of public transport

→ weak in terms of generating a modal shift from private vehicles to public transport (Cats et al., 2016; Storchmann, 2003)

→ no direct challenge to the automobility

instead of abolishing fares: dis-incentivise the use of cars (via e.g. congestion charging, parking policy)

FFPT: critical?

economic strain on public transport network?

- FFPT: lower equipment and personnel costs (Volinski, 2012, Van Hulsten, 2015; Brie & Candeaais, 2012)
- farebox revenue = only a small part of public transport budget
- comparison with the cost of car infrastructure? (Brie & Candeaais, 2012)

increase of passenger demand?... a positive phenomenon

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increase of passenger demand?... a positive phenomenon

modal shift from car to public transport? → not the main objective

FFPT: an instrument of social inclusion, tackling 'transport poverty' (Courtecuisse, 2014)

FFPT: a challenge to power-relations? (Brie & Candeaais, 2012)

FFPT: an element of a wider urban transformation?

learning from contradictions?

FFPT is not (only) about transport
the debate about FFPT is first and
foremost political, not technical

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THANK YOU
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