

# **Strategy and Managed Decline**

# FRONTIERS OF MANAGEMENT HISTORY

**Edited by:** Dr Kevin D. Tennent, University of York, UK; Dr Alex G. Gillett, University of York, UK

*Frontiers of Management History* focusses on new and emerging scholarship on management history, presenting innovative methodological approaches to study history, and new or disruptive ways of thinking about and theorising management and business history. The books within the series combine the craft of the business historian with the methodology of the social scientist, to offer interdisciplinary perspectives on the management history field, alongside theories, frameworks, critiques and applications for practice. Featuring a wide range of theoretical, empirical and historiographical contributions concerned with organisations from various sectors, the series creates a new space in which to engage a new generation of historians and social scientists, to contribute to the future direction of business, organisational and management history.

**Previous volumes:**

*London Transport: A Hybrid in History 1905–1948*

By James Fowler

*The Red Taylorist: The Life and Times of Walter Nicholas Polakov*

By Diana Kelly

*The Emergence of Modern Hospital Management and Organisation in the World 1880s–1930s*

By Paloma Fernández Pérez

# Strategy and Managed Decline: London Transport 1948–87

BY

**JAMES FOWLER**

*University of Essex, UK*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

Copyright © 2021 Emerald Publishing Limited

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80043-189-8 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80043-188-1 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80043-190-4 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# Contents

List of Figures	<i>vii</i>
Abbreviations	<i>ix</i>
About the Author	<i>xi</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xiii</i>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Relevance Today	1
Business History	2
Transport History	3
A Brief Overview of the Contents of This Book	4
Theoretical Dilemmas	5
Historical Arguments and Omissions	7
Summary	16
<b>Chapter 2 Historical Overview 1948–1987</b>	<b>17</b>
‘Goodbye Old Tram’: The LTE 1948–1962	17
‘A Collection of Placemen and Non-entities’: The LTB 1963–1970	24
‘An Albatross Around the Neck of London’s Ratepayers’: The LTE (1970–1983)	25
‘Nationalisation by the Back Door’: LRT (1983–1987)	30
Conclusions	31
<b>Chapter 3 Cars, Innovation and Finance</b>	<b>33</b>
Cars and Innovation	33
Finance	48
<b>Chapter 4 Decline, Politics and Strategy</b>	<b>59</b>
Decline	60
London Politics	61

Pick and Ashfield's Strategic Legacy	65
Strategy 1948–1973	67
Alternative Strategies 1973–1987	69
Conclusion	79
<b>Chapter 5 After Ashfield: The Post-war Chairmen</b>	<b>85</b>
Leadership and the Post-war Chairmen of London Transport	86
The Chairmen 1948–1978	88
The Chairmen 1978–1987	99
The Chairmen in Retrospect	110
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusions</b>	<b>113</b>
Explaining the Past	113
Discerning the Future	116
Afterword: A Brief Alternative History of London Transport 1948–1987	118
Appendix 1: Competitors and Service Outputs	121
Appendix 2: Financial Results	135
Appendix 3: Governance	147
References	153
Index	165

## List of Figures

London Transport Bus Advert.	12
Lord Latham.	81
Sir John Elliot.	81
Sir Alexander Valentine.	81
Sir Maurice Holmes.	81
Sir Richard Way.	82
Sir Kenneth Robinson.	82
Ralph Bennett.	82
Sir Peter Masefield.	82
Sir Keith Bright.	83
Ralph Bennett in the 1978 Annual Report.	109
The Board in 1991.	109

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Abbreviations

BAA	The British Airports Authority
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
GLC	The Greater London Council
LBC	Leading Britain's Conversation
LCC	The London County Council
LT	London Transport
LRT	London Regional Transport
LTB	The London Transport Board
LTPE	The London Passenger Transport Board
LTE (BTC)	The London Transport Executive (British Transport Commission)
LTE (GLC)	The London Transport Executive (Greater London Council)
MP	Member of Parliament
NPM	New Public Management
PA	Personal Assistant
PA International	Personnel Administration International Consulting Group
PR	Public Relations
SR	The Southern Railway
TfL	Transport for London

*This page intentionally left blank*

## **About the Author**

Dr James Fowler is a Lecturer at The Essex Business School. His academic interests are in the fields of business, management and organisational history. He has published in the areas of disaster management, hybrid organisations, public governance and statistical accounting. His previous book in this series covers the history of London's transport from 1905 to 1948.

*This page intentionally left blank*

## **Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful to Kevin Tennent and Alex Gillett for giving me the chance to write this book. It has been a pleasure for me to do so and a very welcome respite from an otherwise grim year. I am also very grateful to Roy Edwards and David Turner for their continued background encouragement, and to Nathan Darroch and Leon Daniels for inspiring many of the background ideas. I would also like to thank David Bould for his editorial help, Tamara Thornhill and Melissa McGreechan at the TfL Archives as well as Caroline Warhurst at the LTM library and the LTM pictures team who allowed me access to all of the fascinating archival materials without which this book would not exist.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Relevance Today

At the beginning of the previous book,<sup>1</sup> I opened by emphasising the sheer scale of Transport for London's (TfL) current operations in the context of British public transport provision, and celebrating the rise and reinvention of London's transport as safe, clean and modern in the context of the capital's wider reinvigoration after the 1980s. Those achievements still stand, and TfL remains a considerable player even on the world stage, but what I did not mention in the previous introduction was that after 2016 that seemingly inexorable rise had faltered. Customer numbers and revenues which had risen more or less continuously for over 30 years plateaued. At the time of writing, it is too early to decide definitively what the long-term effects of the arrival of the Coronavirus and subsequent lockdown might actually be, but it seems unlikely that they will significantly boost mass transit. So, the theme this time is quite different from the last which charted a decades-long episode of sustained exuberance that created the original unified system. Instead, this book asks what happens when systems and institutions decline and fail. It might turn out to be even more apposite for the present day than I had thought when I first began considering it in 2019.

The story of London Transport between 1948 and 1987 is heroic in places but is not a glorious one compared with what went before and what occurred after. As we will see, current history paints it as a time of complacency and under investment, though whether this was the fault of successive governments or the LT management is disputed. Cars are identified as the villains in the story, but although there is general agreement that they are a bad thing and a bad plan, what exactly their causes or impacts were is seldom looked at in great detail. What is not disputed is that a former world leader in public transport systems became dilapidated, unsafe and second rate. This book sets out to review, challenge and at times revise what is known about those assertions. As such, although it is in part a work of history, it is also about business, and to that end it uses a variety

---

<sup>1</sup>*London Transport: A hybrid in history 1905–48*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

of theoretical frameworks from the world of social science to lend rigour to its conjectures and figures to its interpretations.

### **Business History**

Business history is a useful vector through which we can combine two intellectual traditions. Economics suggests that optimal outcomes can be calculated if all the data are known and quantifiable. The discussion is a speculation about how an organisation can get from where it currently is to where it ought to be, and these are claimed as precisely definable quantified points. This is highly attractive. By contrast, history suggests that situations are subjective and intractable. Nevertheless, although the past is qualified it is not a purely theoretical conjecture. It reassures us that in real-life problems always get solved in the end. This is attractive too, though not as seductive as the idea that the future is somehow knowable. By running these two together, business history offers a model of constrained optimisation that may be valuable to policy-making and management as well as to historians (Offer, 2006) and a dual integrity of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Decker, Üsdiken, Engwall, & Rowlinson, 2018; De Jong, Higgins, & Van Driel, 2015; Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg 2016; Rowlinson & Hasard, 2013). Business history also promotes a particular form of research, the historical case study. Here an individual instance is intensely scrutinised through longitudinal data to create a very detailed 'thick' history of the subject in the pattern of Scranton's (1997) study of American Industrialisation, Williams et al. (1994) analysis of the car industry, or Gourvish's (1986, 2002, 2008) histories of British Rail which this book attempts to imitate, albeit much more modestly.

Naturally, the approach has strengths and weaknesses. To begin with the positives, the power of detailed empirical research is twofold. First, its strength lies in its ability to generate detailed longitudinal data. This means that broad generalisations on which broad theoretical analyses rest can be challenged or finessed. Corporate governance and financial systems are particularly susceptible as they often do not account for the range of variation over long time periods (Jones & Zeitlin, 2007). Its second strength is historical fidelity. Scranton pointed out that there was a universally accepted, abbreviated and gobbet-sized version of American industrial history that was all about mass production and standardisation. It made sense, it was easy to follow, and it was also wrong in many ways. In a more individual sphere, McKenna's (2009) and Otahara's (2000) studies of Honda show that their detailed re-appraisals also forced a major re-think of that company's history, and like Williams et al. they challenged the accepted narrative of Japanese industrial success. Thus, case studies generate the level of detail required to point out the gaps in historical knowledge and challenge consensus validly and credibly.

But does the singularity of case study research fail the reliability test? Case studies are certainly often misemployed in practioner literature to 'prove' that this or that check list of managerial practises leads to success or failure, however, the authors chose to define them. The failure is an undue positivism. However, even the more nuanced academic case studies suffer from a lack of generalisability. Is the price of achieving authenticity to past events invariably a degree of parochialism? Situating the narrative within nomothetic analytical architecture allows a

certain degree of generalisability, and there are observable similarities to events in Buenos Aires (Heras, 1994) and especially in New York (Caro, 1974; Cudahy, 1995). But fundamentally, this book is about London and its transport system. I think it fair that readers should be aware that wherever a choice has to be made I have opted to sacrifice scope for specialisation.

## Transport History

I now want to briefly look at another branch from the economic history tree, the history of transportation. In this field, there have been repeated calls for new avenues of transport history research (Moraglio et al., 2020). After the creation of the *Journal of Transport History* in 1953, the field briefly found itself in the forefront of cliometrics through Robert Fogel's work *American railways*. But this level of importance was not sustained, and there has been an on-going debate about how to maintain modern relevance (Armstrong, 1998; Gourvish, 1993). Transport history has been criticised for being too British, too focussed on railways, too nineteenth century and too wedded to using economic data (Moraglio, 2017). This has allegedly led to a narrow engagement with technicalities rather than exploring more expansive and relevant perspectives encapsulated by conceptions of mobility, which could be fully realised by taking a 'cultural turn' (Divall & Revill, 2005). This book stands guilty of at least one of the charges of failing to expand beyond traditional economic and Anglo-centric frames of study, but I do want to provide a more expansive political view of London Transport by proposing transport outcomes as informed by conflicting goals, values and interests. Few transport historians would argue that the influence of politics on transport is anything other than pervasive (Mees, 2010). Yet I have argued previously that much research appears reluctant to confront the reality of political power in transport history directly and that relevant work is scattered through a variety of journals, employs a variety of methods and focusses on singular examples or personalities.

In this vein, Michael Robbins' and Theo Barker's histories of London Transport move through their entire panoramic narrative without devoting any serious discussion to the political and administrative structures and politics of London. Parliament and the London County Council are treated as 'black boxes' inside which mysterious things happen. Transport proposals went in, laws and money sometimes came out. What the reasons were for went on inside these political institutions were left as 'best known to themselves' (Croome & Jackson, 1993). More recently, two articles dealing with the crucial modal and infrastructural transition from public transport to private cars in Brussels and Paris do so without explaining how either city is governed, what the relationship between municipal and central government is. Neither do they comment on what transport policies were advocated by political parties, their performance in elections and how that impacted on management (Flonneau, 2006; Pelgrims, 2020). These details may not be judged important to the arguments by the authors, but it is indicative of how divorced the practicalities of politics appear to be from transport history, even in a paper whose stated aim is to demonstrate that automobilisation in Paris until the 1970s was the result of coherent, popular political processes. Whilst I accept

#### 4 *Strategy and Managed Decline*

that there is a danger of selecting the literature to suit the argument I make here, I propose that there nevertheless remains an appreciable explanatory gap relating to why transport growth, provision and management occurred as it did which can only be effectively answered politically. Transport will always sit on the controversial political fault line between state and private sector interests. This book confronts that fact head on. In doing so, it plays a small role in widening the scope of transport history beyond the economic and the technical.

### **A Brief Overview of the Contents of This Book**

This book sets out to review and develop what is known about the 1948–1987 period. It also challenges what we think we know. Unlike the pre-war period both the nostalgia industry and more serious books have comparatively little to say about London Transport in the post-war world, and, therefore, there is a bigger job to do in terms of simply expanding what is in the public sphere than in earlier periods. However, whilst a factual account offers some interest, I think there is a much greater opportunity to expand the scope of our understanding by engaging with the assumptions about what we think we know at a theoretical level and introducing some new frameworks through which to view and explain events that have not hitherto been employed.

My starting point is to challenge what I term the Pick-Ashfield consensus in London Transport. Much of this is expressed, consciously or otherwise, in terms of Great Man theory where in this instance two 'great' men worked together to create a unified public transport system for one of the world's largest cities. Thus, the consensus runs that they were good men and a good thing. However, the underpinning logic of their actions is Chandler's (1990) assumption that economies of scale and scope were not only desirable but realisable in the context of public services as well in the context of manufacturing where they originated. Furthermore, having achieved their object in 1933 how long could this be sustained? Chapter 3 critically examines the claim that economies of scale arising from horizontal and vertical integration and managerial efficiencies arising from centralisation were indefinitely sustainable, especially after the arrival of the car. It looks in detail at the transport innovation that arrived to disrupt the assumptions that the strategy of Pick and Ashfield was built on and what the outcomes were.

Chapter 4 takes the narrative a step further. If a strategy built around scale and centralisation no longer worked, why did it persist for so long and what were the other options? Here I explore how wider schools of strategy fit into the classic transport policy dilemma of utility versus profit maximisation and how this strategic choice in turn dovetails into political ideologies from left and right that came to have increasingly direct effects on the day-to-day managerial choices of London Transport after 1973. I examine how the narrative and fact of organisational decline were exploited by both right and left wings to justify increasingly extreme policy prescriptions, and how this confrontation was eventually won by a neo-liberal vision of strategy associated with Michael Porter in the early 1980s. The chapter concludes by asking whether the upturn in London Transport from 1984 onwards was causally or coincidentally linked with that profound change in strategy.

Chapter 5 begins by considering the record of all the chairmen of London Transport and reviewing whether their critics are really justified. It then directs its focus on to the personalities involved in a very specific, controversial and fascinating juncture in the governance of London Transport between 1978 and 1983. I argue that the events in those years have come to epitomise the entire post-war period and their vivid legacy has to a certain extent become a caricature of the issues in play. They also represent the pivot around which the changes in strategy described in Chapter 4 revolve. I revisit the archival record left by Horace Cutler, Ken Livingstone, Leslie Chapman, Ralph Bennett and Peter Masefield as the chairmen of the Greater London Council (GLC), a political appointed fixer, and the chairmen of the London Transport Executive (LTE), respectively. The chapter challenges the depiction of the London Transport Board (LTB) and LTE's chairmen as supine and suggests a more mixed picture. Many of them were astute manipulators of the authorising environment whilst others failed to understand the politics and times in which they operated. I also suggest that our understanding of the phenomena of decline and turnaround in public organisations needs refining, and with it our understanding of the role of CEOs' and Boards' behaviour. The events of 1978–1983 offer a fascinating real-life case study against which we can test and develop theory as well as understand better what was in contention and how it was resolved.

Chapter 6 concludes and looks forward. If failure is the best teacher, what can it tell us? I surmise that decline sharpens political conflict and involvement because it lays bare previously ameliorated hard choices. Therefore we should be prepared for increasing rancour over transport in London. I also suggest that radical disruptions to patterns of transport use force organisations not only to innovate but also to exnovate. Moreover, I argue that exnovation may be more important than innovation as a reaction to novel circumstances. We should be prepared for TfL to jettison some of its more expansive commitments. Finally, decline is not necessarily a sequential or terminal event. It represents a long series of responses to an environmental re-ordering where many of the strands of activity that make up an organisation and the ecosystem in which it exists change in their order of priority. The problem is where the substance of organisational output and perceptions of what it should be doing remain rooted in the past. In this case, the private car arrived as a major factor in London's Transport in the 1950s, but it took about 30 years for methods and mentalities in public transport to move to a position which really accepted their existence and what it meant. Along the way, there were periods of improvement as well as deterioration, and some solutions were tried several times with differing results on each occasion. It is this intriguing complexity that makes decline so apposite for detailed case study analysis and so infuriatingly difficult in terms of lessons learned.

## **Theoretical Dilemmas**

This book contains a number of theoretical thematic strands which are visible throughout. In this section, I examine general theory and then move to look at some more specific historical arguments, misunderstandings and gaps found in

relation to London Transport. So, to begin with what is the ideal public transport system? In the previous book, this argument was presented as a clash between socialised and privatised perceptions of the public good. The entire period 1905–1948 could be represented as a pivot from emphasising the virtues of competition to recognising the strengths of monopoly. In this book, I want to refine this and characterise the debate as lying between utility maximising versus profit maximising strategic perspectives on transport provision which in turn inform lower level policy choices. This viewpoint has informed a series of academic studies starting in the 1970s whose initial primary concern was to calculate the optimal level at which fares were set on public transport but have gradually evolved to consider wider social and political implications (Glaister & Lewis, 1978; Mohring, 1972; Turvey & Mohring, 1975; Pedersen, 2003). Like this book, many later studies concentrate their research on a single city (Cats, Reimal, & Susilo, 2014; De Witte et al., 2006; Tennent, 2017) to facilitate the exploration of the broader context in which those decisions are made and what the consequences are. I too want to extend the utility versus profit maximisation debate far beyond the mathematics of optimal fares into wider service delivery and to explore the connections between policy, strategy and politics which guide and contextualise the decisions that are made in these trade-offs. As I mentioned earlier, I do not believe that there are perfectly quantifiable ideal outcomes here that can be transposed on to the real world, but I can show how seemingly impossible dilemmas were eventually ameliorated or re-conceptualised. The utility versus profit maximisation dispute is a classic ‘wicked’ problem that will never be resolved, but its main features can be illuminated so that decisions are made in an informed manner. In terms of managing this type of super complex issue, this is probably the best we can hope for in policy-making (Rittel & Weber, 1973).

Next, what is organisational decline and more particularly what causes it? This has produced fascination in the management community, particularly amongst practitioners because if this particular conceptual door could be reliably unlocked then CEOs would be able to rest more easily (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1998; Lawler & Galbraith, 1994; Mellahi, 2005; Richardson, Nwanko, & Richardson, 1994; Schwartz & Menon, 1985). In addition, it links to a desire to understand the nature of the two potential destinations, turnaround and failure, as well as engaging historians in attempts to rationalise the past performance of organisations both generally (Lamberg, Ojala, & Peltoniemi, 1998; Van Rooji, 2015) and in specific cases (Brownlow, 2015).

What emerges from both the academic and practitioner literature on decline is a straightforward environmental versus determinism debate about decline, failure and turnaround. Unsurprisingly the academics favour external meta narratives; the practitioners prefer to emphasise agency (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016). This book tries to give both a fair hearing, but also to systematically pick apart the strands that make up each thread of argument and see how or if they applied in this case. In addition to that I also ask if reality, or the past in this instance, has anything to add to theory. One of the curiosities of the academic versus practitioner debate is that whilst academics have generally kept a critical distance from directly advising on the day-to-day operations of organisations it

is their accounts, which encompass the nuances of real-life and reject nomothetic simplicities and managerialist positivism that have been found at times to be more authentic (Grey, 2017).

Finally, how should an organisation respond to decline? Here the debate becomes very muddy indeed. The argument pivots around the role of innovation. The central theoretical dilemma is whether managements should respond by increasing the rigidity in their processes or by innovating flexibly (Rosenblatt, Rogers, & Nord, 1993). However, there is no consensus on which posture to adopt and no definitive proof that the rigid or flexible actions of management during periods of growth are really any different from periods of contraction (Kitching, Blackburn, Smallbone, & Dixon, 2009). The empirical evidence is frustratingly inconclusive. Some organisations innovate and succeed in reversing decline, others do not (Aas & Pedersen, 2011; Damanpour, Walker, & Avellaneda, 2009). To try and break through this ambiguity, this book proposes that exnovation as well as innovation should be considered as a factor in explaining decline and revival. I take exnovation to be the removal of an innovation from the organisation rather than the stabilisation of an existing product or service which assumed to require no further development (Kimberly, 1981). The purpose here is to challenge the idea that London Transport was too complacent, and to suggest that in fact it tried too many innovations. I argue that turnaround is at the very least coincidental with the moment when the organisation focussed more directly on its key tasks which differentiated it from other transport alternatives.

## Historical Arguments and Omissions

Having looked at the general theories in play, I now move to consider the specific history of the epoch. The first issue is that in comparison to the pre-war era this is not a period of time that has been extensively examined. Although it is covered in the classic histories (Barker & Robbins, 1976; Croome & Jackson, 1993), the proportion of scholarship devoted to it represents a very small portion of those books' attention. The more modern accounts (Halliday, 2001; Wolmar, 2002, 2005) have continued the steep slant of interest towards the first half of the twentieth century. The reasons for this reflect those initial books by Barker and Jackson and their angle and approach to the topic which have served as a foundation that subsequent literature has done comparatively little to revise. First and foremost, they are factual accounts of how a network was built, extended and operated. Thus, after the pioneering period of construction and unification came to an end in the late 1930s, there is lot less to say and discuss in this vein afterwards. Second, Barker and Robbins were writing within the period in question. It was understandably much harder to get a clear perspective on events. This was also true of Croome's initial edition of 'Rails Through the Clay' in 1962, though the revision in 1993 adds less than might be hoped for in terms of critical analysis of key events, especially political ones. Finally, I argue that there is also a tendency to dwell on past glories and shy away from failure. After the Second World War, London Transport was no longer the top system, and so the temptation was to let history come to a full stop. Even now transport historians primarily come to

praise public transport rather than to bury it and so I suggest that there has been a professional reluctance to fully engage with an era where mass transit was out of fashion and widely regarded as being in terminal decline.

Many transport histories eschew politics in favour of operational description. Those that do not consistently attack the short termism, self-interest, pro-road and anti-rail posture of politicians. This may be pleasing to the public transport aficionado but does not do readers or history any favours. To examine the issue of decline in London Transport politically as well operationally, we have three books all written by personalities directly involved in events. Horace Cutler, the flamboyant chairman of the GLC, and Leslie Chapman, a hard-line maverick civil servant, both wrote accounts in 1981 which contained substantial sections devoted to their activities regarding London Transport (Chapman, 1982; Cutler, 1981). They were very critical of London Transport's managerial performance. Perhaps to redress the balance Paul Garbutt, a senior LTE official, then wrote 'London Transport and the Politicians' (1985) where he primarily blamed the likes of Cutler and Chapman for inept interference. These are all fascinating and valuable accounts, but they have to be contextualised and cannot be taken as reliable stand-alone versions of events. Nevertheless, they provide immediacy, colour and a vivid sense of the tensions and confrontations between LTE, the GLC and to some extent central government.

So, having briefly explored the scene I suggest that the strands of historical argument run as follows. First, that following the Second World War London Transport lapsed into a kind of torpor. The studies are unanimous in claiming that funding for capital projects was practically non-existent until the construction of the Victoria line which began in the early 1960s. The traditional authors point the finger at the Treasury and the sublimation of London Transport into the British Transport Commission which is held to have had more pressing priorities across the national network. London was held to have benefitted from a pre-war investment spree through the 'New Works' projects, and so was doubly low on the investment priority list (Barker & Robbins, 1976; Croome & Jackson, 1993). Second, later authors have added another twist to the accusations of inaction. In the post-war years, London Transport was led by a 'collection of placemen and non-entities' (Wolmar, 2005). Here is the start of the thread of charge and counter charge that continues throughout the extant history. London Transport was apparently let down, but by whom, government or management? This story needs a revisit, not least to clarify who exactly did or did not do what and when. The accounts also lack a rigorous analytical framework within which to differentiate between what constituted managerial incompetence by the standards of what was known at the time, and what is to a certain extent ahistorical criticism. As I have previously described, the reader is trapped between personal accounts that are highly politically coloured and the absence of a thorough attempt in the historical studies to engage with or understand London politics at all. Insofar as politics is discussed in the histories, there tends to be sympathy for London Transport as an organisation over the machinations of the GLC or Westminster (Garbutt, 1985; Croome & Jackson, 1993; Wolmar, 2002, 2005). This serves the reader poorly because as in the pre-war era, many decisions are written off