

Inaugural Lecture Professor Stewart Barr

Friday 6th March
Henderson Lecture Theatre
XFI Building
University of Exeter
17:30



Climate Change and Personal Mobility: exploring the behavioural change agenda for sustainability

Abstract:

The transport sector is a significant source of global carbon emissions that contribute to anthropogenic climate change. The twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed an exponential growth in personal mobility, including greater use of private transport, longer work commutes, increased business travel and long-haul tourism. Yet the imperative of tackling climate change requires major emissions reductions from transport. To address this issue, efforts to understand and promote environmentally sustainable transport and mobility have frequently been focused on the role of individual decision making and encouraging relatively small shifts in behaviour, such as reduced car use and increased walking, cycling and public transport use. Indeed, these often relate to the idea of 'smart' travel and the use of technology to guide individual decision making. As such, cities are becoming re-visioned as hyper-technical, 'efficient' and rational sites of individual and autonomous mobility. In this lecture, I respond to these developments by arguing for an alternative understanding of sustainable mobility through considering how travel can also be understood as a behaviour intimately connected to historic, economic and cultural influences. I propose that we need to focus attention on two challenges that constitute underpinning obstacles for promoting long-term shifts in personal mobility: the ways in which cities are visioned, governed, designed and regulated to promote hyper-mobility (rather than dwelling); and the formidable problem of reducing personal carbon emissions from a growing international tourism industry. In addressing these two challenges, I argue for a renewed focus on personal wellbeing to promote shifts towards low carbon mobility behaviours. Such (radical) shifts include reducing the demand for travel, an emphasis on dwelling, the promotion of 'active' travel and 'slow tourism'.