

Transport Problems in the Soviet Bloc

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In an analysis of the Soviet transport experience, Hunter (1968), while drawing implications of this experience for the developing countries, maintained that countries in the early stages of economic development can learn one lesson of fundamental importance : 'Transport investment is a concomitant of, not a precondition for, economic development. Such countries need not accept the orthodox view, based on a misreading of the nineteenth century experience in the United States, that large scale expensive transport facilities must be laid down before agriculture and industry can begin to grow. Transport capacity can be expanded as the demand for it grows rather than being provided in advance'. But it is equally true (William 1962) that plant location has been forced to conform to railway location. The widely accepted view of the Soviet experience demonstrates that the transport sector can be made to serve an industrial development programme without itself becoming the largest single claimant for capital plant and equipment. While it is emphasised that the reasons of the Soviet experience mainly relates to the problems of less developed countries, it has also a number of interesting implications for highly developed economies. It is necessary that they too are conscious of the close connection between national objectives and an appropriate set of transport policies. Transport capacity expansion should be planned so as to avoid excessive building up of capacity as in the case of the railway network in the United States, given the long run effects of the development of various models. But it has also been argued that the Soviet solution has developed in response to distinctively Soviet purposes which are unlikely to be relevant to the situation of other developed economies, where market forces dominate. In the socialist countries, the transport system being subject to the modalities of state ownership and centralised planning (Mieczowski, 1978), planning plays an important role in assuring dynamic growth in these economies.

* *Soviet and East European Transport Problems*. Edited by John Ambler, Denis J.B. Shaw and Leslie Symons, Croom Helm, London, 1985. Pp.xix+260
Price : £19.95