

Transport and the Media Lancaster symposium

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intro

- Travel demand is socially and culturally constructed: a response to a range of factors that constitute an ‘opportunity structure’
- [inter-related] Trends suggest increasing recognition of attention to media portrayal of transport policy issues in shaping travel demand:
 - Significance of behaviour change agenda
 - Evidence of potential of ‘soft’ measures
 - Shift from expert-led planning to co-production

media roles in public policy

- it provides information about ‘events’ that it deems newsworthy in the context of this wider agenda
- it then sets and perpetuates wider news agendas:
 - for example transport is now linked in the public mind to debates about climate change in ways that it wasn’t previously, yet it also gets ‘stuck’, framing issues in terms of familiar ‘repertoires’;

What is newsworthy?

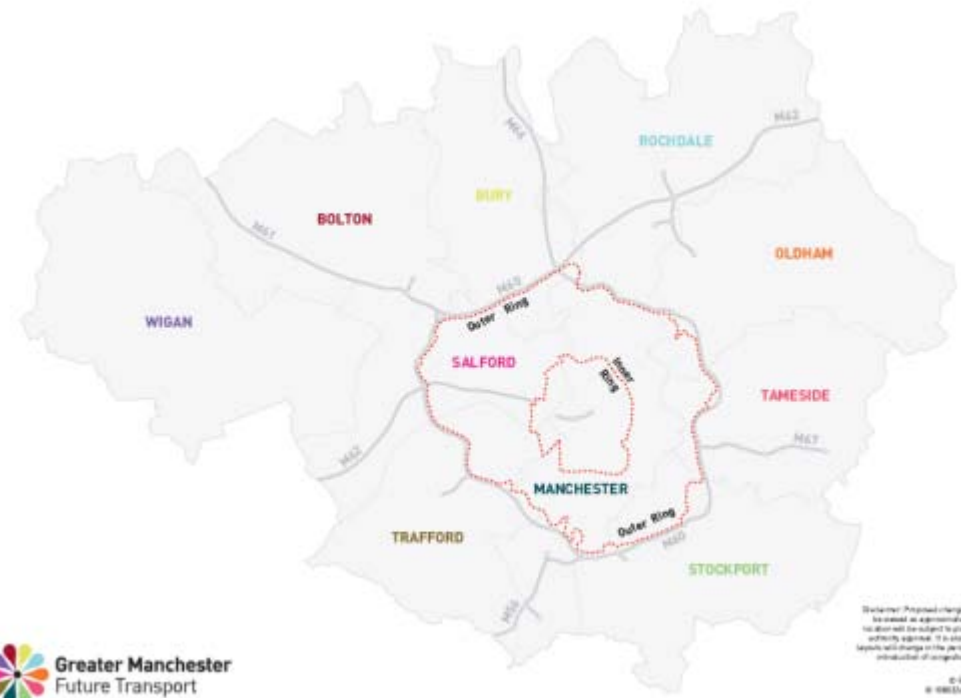
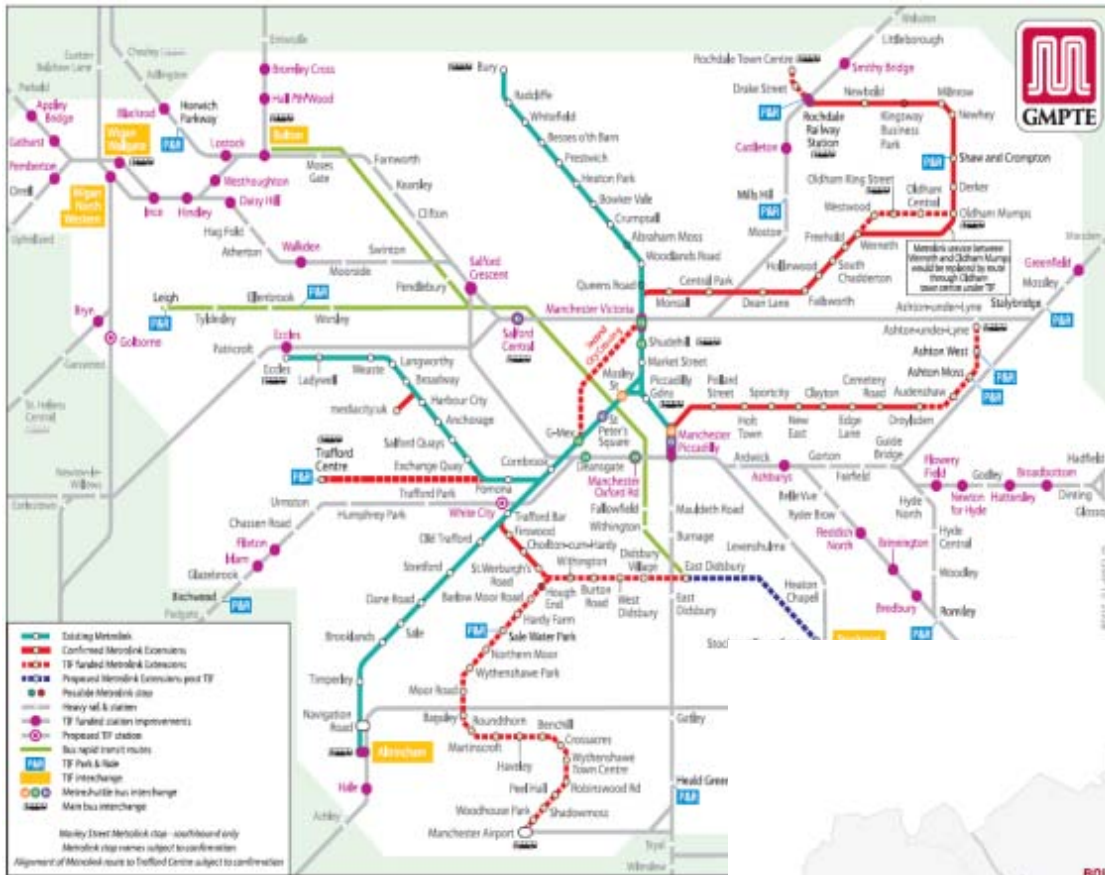
- personalisation of stories,
 - dramatisation (emphasising crisis), and
 - novelty
-
- Potential disconnect to many of the elements of sustainable mobility?

Media Production- trends

- Contestation about decline in resources for reporting, print in particular
- Seems to be a decline in specialist / 'regional' correspondence
- Rise in social media and plurality of platforms/sources
- Local news, historically a good source, now much diminished – churnalism, albeit with a few rare exceptions

Analysing media

- Production- text/ content – receipt
- Vigar et al 2011 uses quantitative ‘manifest’ content analysis plus qualitative ‘latent’ content analysis deployed using a relatively simple discourse analysis to analyse media reporting of the Manchester TIF proposals.
- Lexis Nexis used for ex-post 6 week period in run up to and straight after Manchester congestion charge referendum, of 6 newspapers; and BBC online.



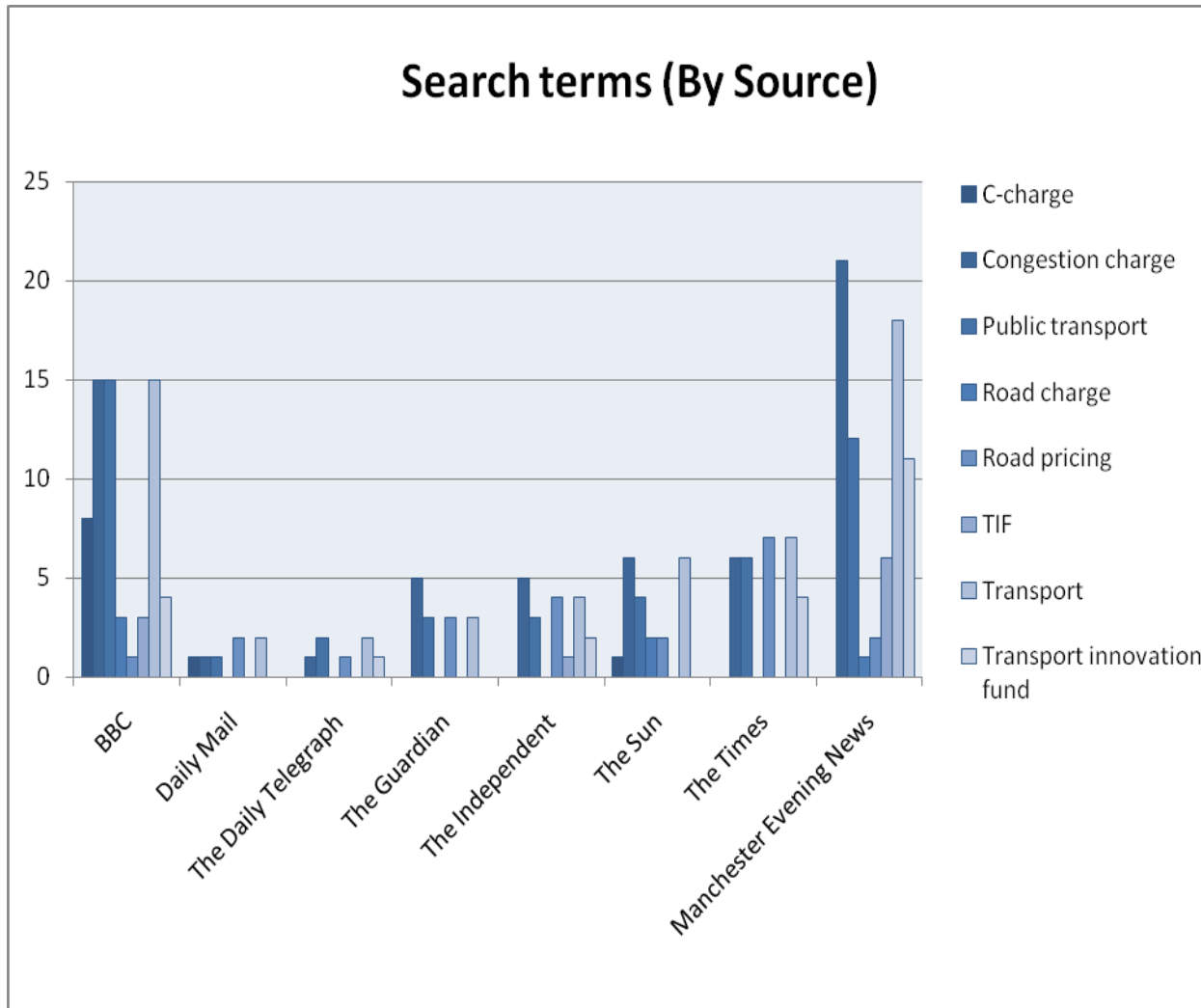
Greater Manchester Future Transport
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Manifest CA search terms

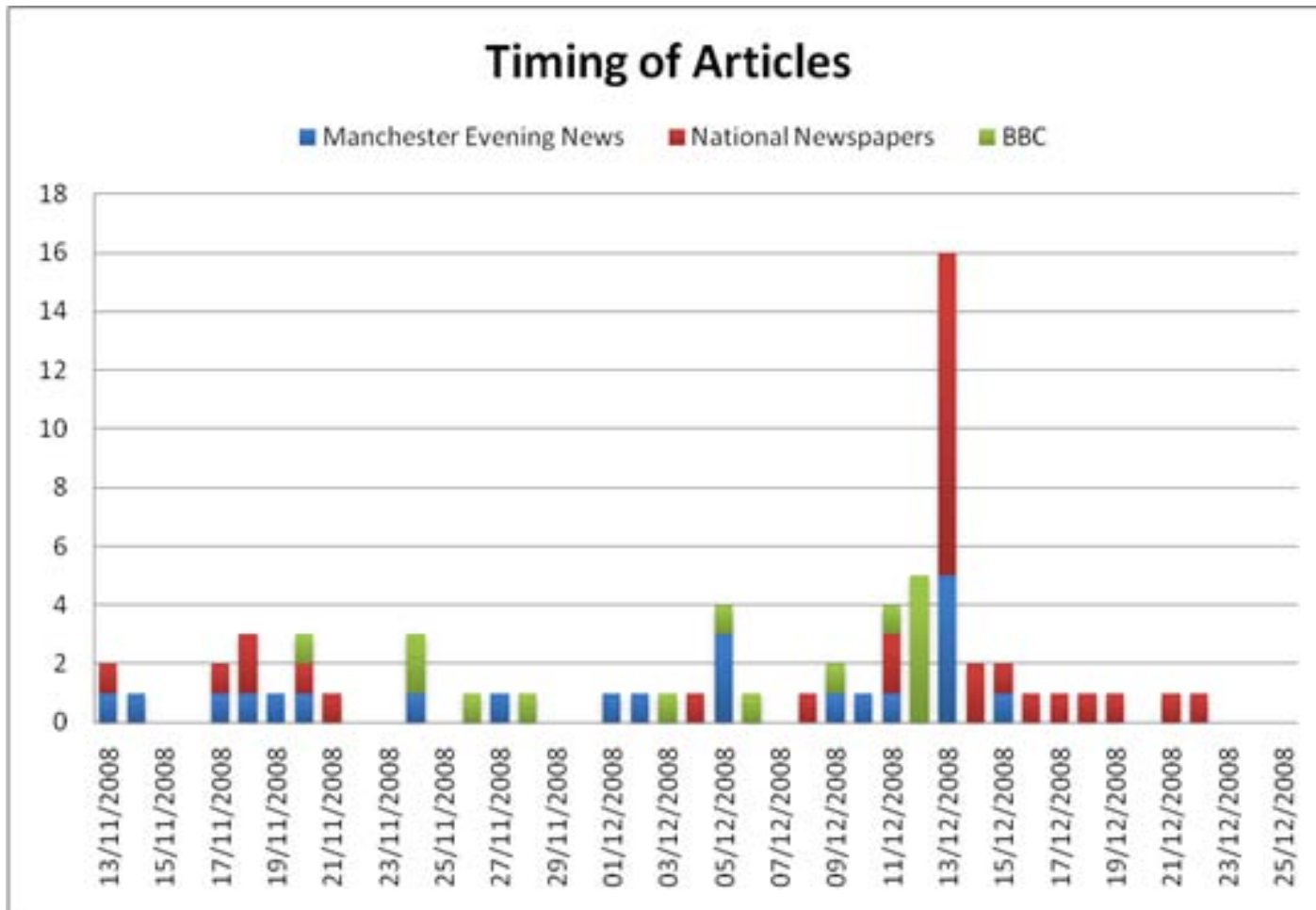
- Manchester [and] C-charge
- Manchester [and] Congestion charge
- Manchester [and] Public transport
- Manchester [and] Road charge
- Manchester [and] Road pricing
- Manchester [and] TIF
- Manchester [and] Transport
- Manchester [and] Transport Innovation Fund

Latent CA

- Articles sorted based on the tone and framing of their headline [reflecting the relative significance of this] and the article text (Positive, Negative or Neutral) towards the TIF bid
- Tone of quotes in articles also analysed and sorted according to their tone (Positive, Negative or Neutral) towards the bid

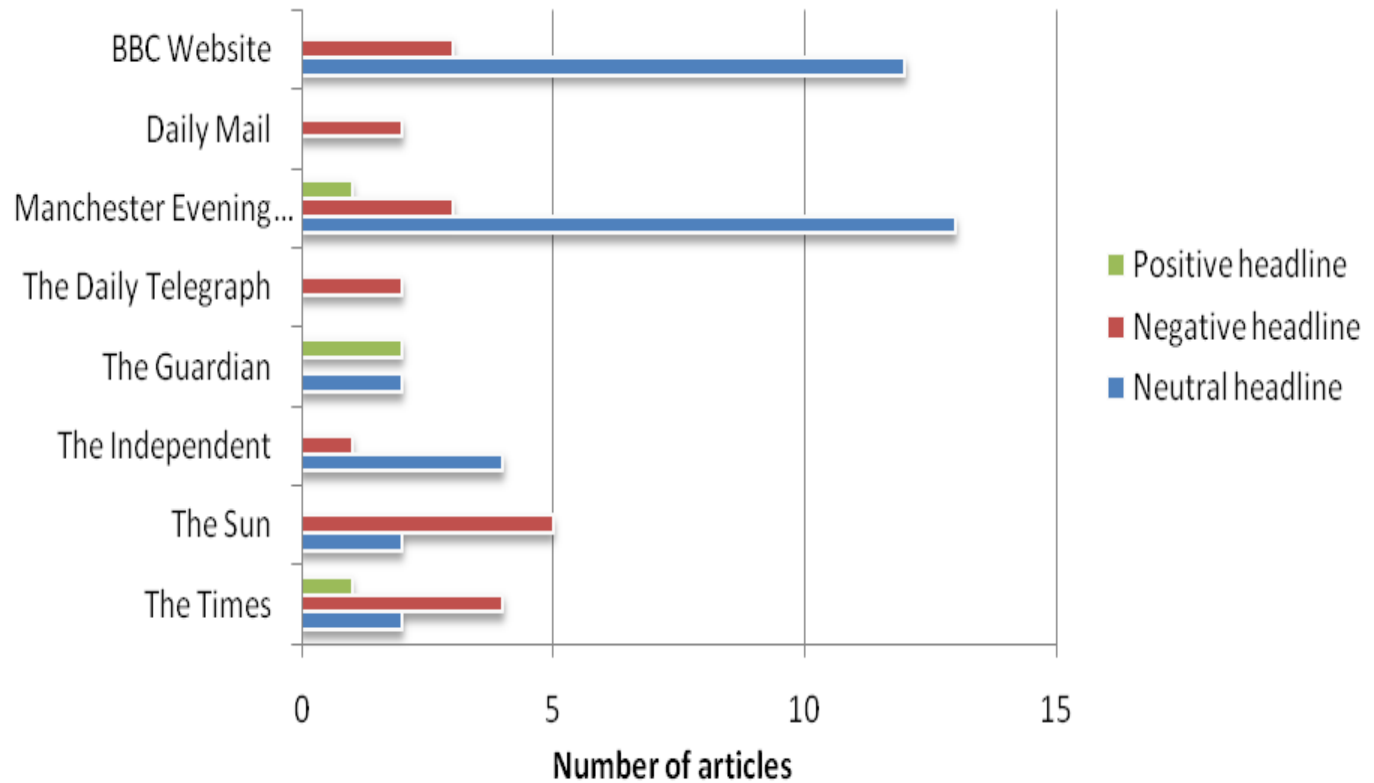


Online national media a potentially significant source of information compared with national print media



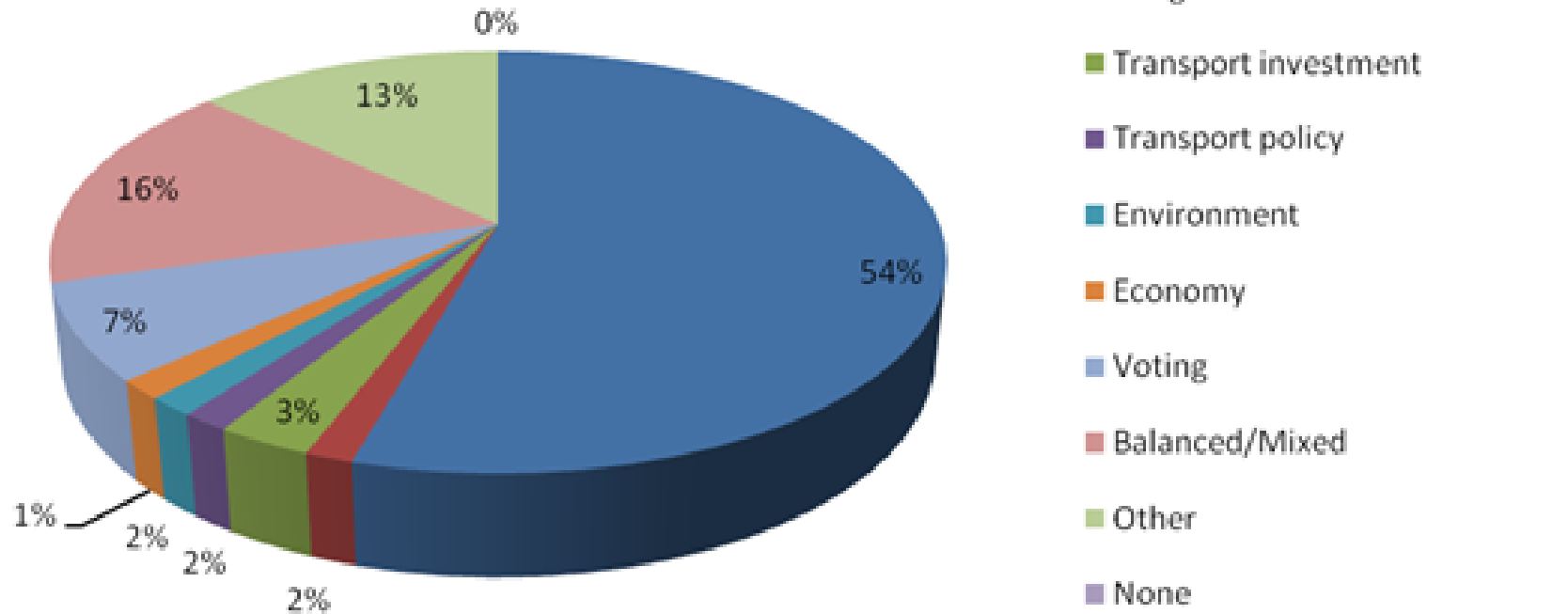
Most articles published after the vote on 11/12/08:
 information-giving potential of mainstream print
 media therefore rather small

Tone of Headlines



Reflecting or shaping public opinion?

Framing of Article Text



'Congestion' and 'charge/ charging' feature strongly

Analysis

- Many dimensions of the TIF bid were under-explained despite much material created by the 'yes' team: even articles that argued for the bid rarely detailed the transport improvements
- The core of the public debate centred on the charging element and fixed on the words 'congestion', [reflecting wider public discourse?] and 'charging' [reflecting the newsworthy element?]
- The 'bid' thus became known as 'congestion charging': media representations were part of this
- The way articles were constructed was important: headlines emphasised the charge and text was ordered to lead with the charging proposals, making it look like the bid was a charging scheme with a secondary public transport 'sweetener'.

Conclusions

- Media repertoire is narrow w.r.t. transport: 'congestion' is over-used especially, an empty signifier reflecting public discourse?
- This is unlikely to change in an era of 'churnalism' but upskilling the professions w.r.t. the realities of media production would be helpful – churnalism creates opportunities too !
- Could a greater engagement with elements of the media in the flow of events and earlier in large projects help shift representations?
- Thus, in future work I plan to look more at the production and receipt of transport issues/ stories and the interpretive repertoires of journalists and the public: this may help understand why implementing sustainable mobility can be difficult!