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CONTROVERSIES ON THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT POLICIES IN SÃO PAULO

ABSTRACT

The term Policy refers to a group of objectives that conform a program and creates the conditions to its execution.

Based on the above statement, considering Internal Controversies to a Policy presupposes the acknowledgment of inconsistencies between the logical connections of its terms. In practice, this can be observed in situations where (one or more of) the following patterns are reproduced:

a) When the lack of definition of a given policy compromises the formulation of the program that should support it, or the means to its execution; b) When there is incompatibility between the definition of the program and the declared aims of the related policy; c) When the material conditions provided to the execution of the program are incongruent with the nature and/or the scope of the related policy.

This paper aims to point out the main processes or mechanisms through which the controversial nature of the Transport policies of São Paulo has been imposed and sustained, blocking, neutralizing or weakening the actions of the State that meant their implementation.

I'll begin this paper presenting the main ideas expressed in the last phrase of the *abstract* written some months ago.

First, I will point out the existence of mechanisms operating in Brazilian society that guarantee the permanence of the structural inefficiencies of urban transport (and, in more general terms, of urban infrastructures and services). Second, I will assert that the mechanisms responsible for this almost permanent crisis are mostly embedded in State's proceedings. And finally, I will say that the controversial character that constitute the main feature of urban transport policies does not arise from real conflicts about directions, investments, terms to decide for. The controversies are ideologically produced, as part of the hindrance themselves.

In other words, it is to say that in Brazil the endless discussions shaping the directions of Public Transport Policies are, on their own right, a Transport Policy. Based on several forms of inconsistencies between the declared aims of the policies and the scope, the patronage, the dimensions, the legal and institutional support, or the material conditions of execution of the related programs, these controversies have preserved, for years and decades, the precarious functioning of urban space, as a condition of reproduction of this society. In what follows, after a short introduction, I will try to exemplify some of these situations as they happen in São Paulo.

Transporte público coletivo em São Paulo

estrutura da oferta - corredores



In Brazil's autonomous history (that is, from 1822 onwards, when the colonial status gave place to the independent state), the efforts to change the country's economical support - mainly based on export of crops, raw materials and similar, have always been subdued. A fierce criticism, of ideological nature?core has been put into use, as shown by the historical debates for, but mostly against, industrialization that animated the Brazilian parliament along the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. These debates became more recently, the object of several studies and critical analysis. Through them it became quite clear, for us, that a room for industrialization in Brazil emerged mainly from the negative balance of payments of the country. They were the limits to indebtedness, and the consequent necessity of substitution of import articles that played the role that a development policy should do. The industrial sector has grown up almost incidentally, by successive movements of stop and go, against the predominant aims of the society.

The defense of an innate agricultural vocation of the country remains alive, as shown, for instance, by the actual discussions about the Forest Code. The pressure the agro-business sector of the national economy exerts in order to reduce the levels of legal protection of forested areas is based in the argument that in a country blessed with so rich natural resources, the suppression of some more forests on behalf of bigger areas of plantation or farming is a legitimate social aim in order to alleviate the famine in the world. In such ideological framework, it is somehow 'natural' the shortage of investments in urban areas.

Nonetheless, Brazil is today a fully urbanized country, with more than 80% of its population living in cities, and where about 80 millions people live in 30 big metropolitan areas, most of them in shanty towns, slums and irregular suburbs, traveling for hours in undersized transport systems, and producing commodities at a very low level of productivity. In front of this high level of demand for the improvement of urban areas, it is politically unthinkable to explicit

policies that disregard solid investments in urban space. That's why the 'problem' must be plunged in the turbid waters of the controversies.

In the urban transport system of São Paulo - today next to chaos - it works as follows.

Aims *versus* material resources in Transport Policies: the Ideology of Scarcity and the São Paulo transport network

In contradiction to their former arguments, that tried to postpone investments in mass transport systems to moments when supposedly the city would, once for all, stop to grow and to change, today all transport authorities of the São Paulo Metropolis recognize that the actual conditions of mobility and accessibility impose to whatever Transport Policy to have at its core a large underground network.

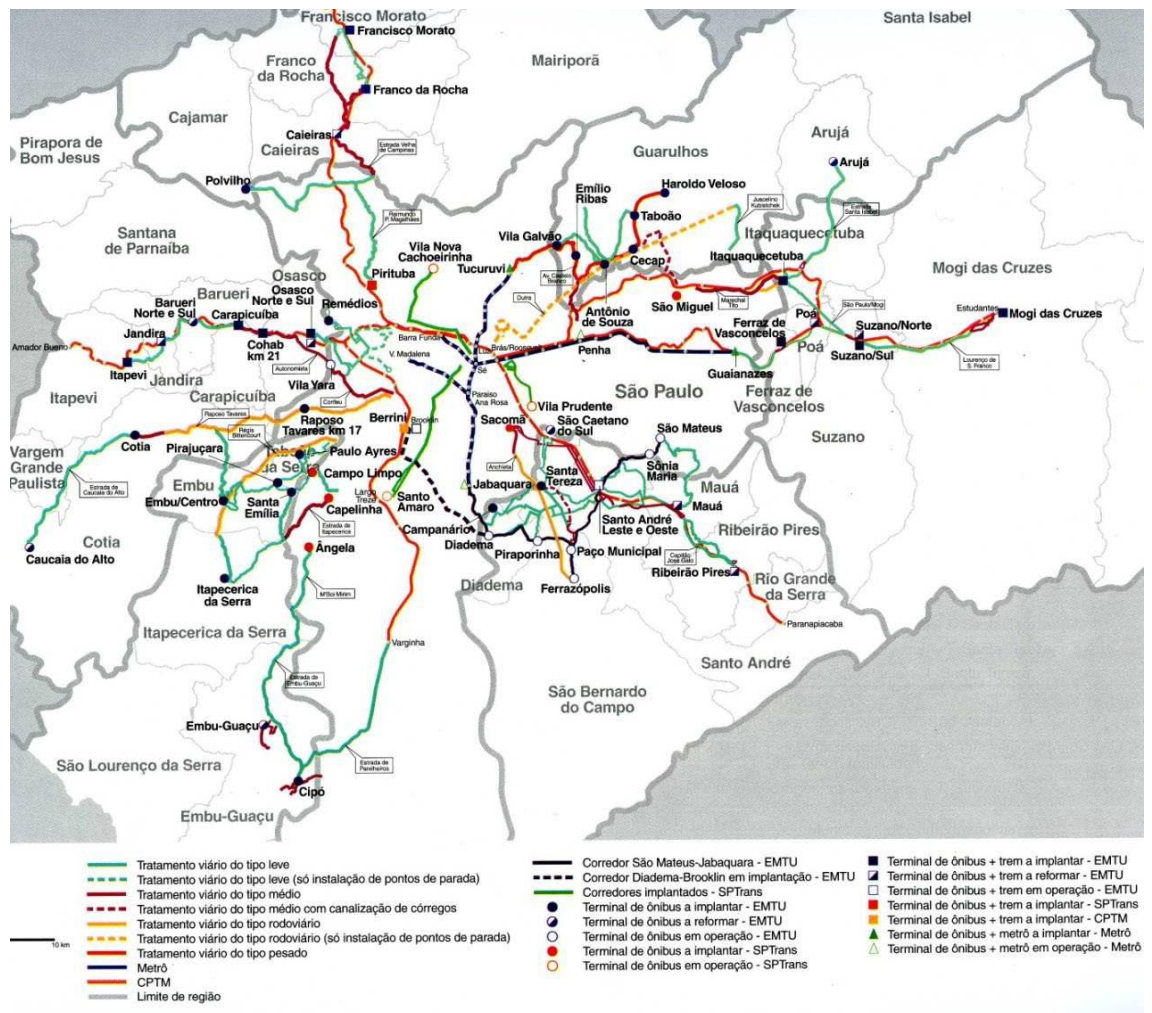


But how large should this network be? Technically, the only form to answer this question lays on the establishment of some pattern, (or patterns) of system performance, to be pursued, and obtained in a given period of time. But helped by the ideology of scarcity, the political decision-makers look at the question out of its concrete urban framework, and out of the realm of social reproduction. No aims, no patterns, no terms instruct the programs, as these served only to sustain the dispute, with infinite other programs, for the resources of the State.

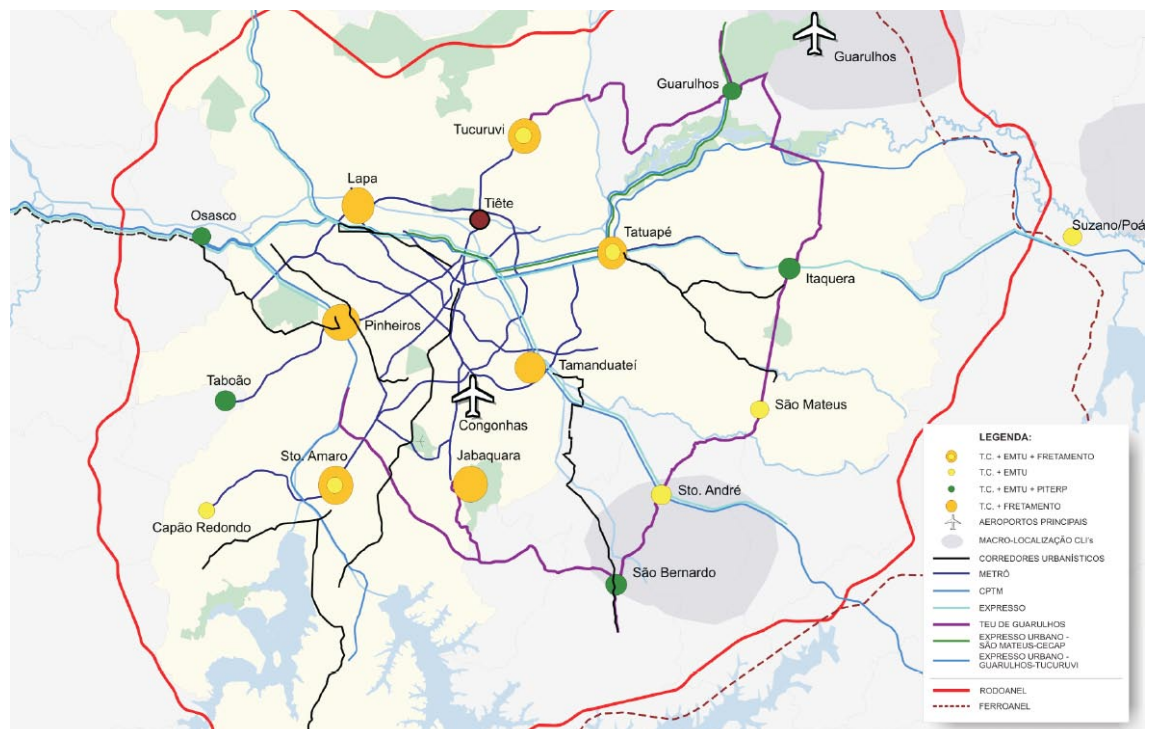
Investments decided this way are usually insufficient to operate real changes in the urban transport system, but help to sustain new controversies about how and where to intervene in order to guarantee, in a system near to collapse, the highest and fastest possible responses to the resources invested.

Successive rounds of surveys, studies, workshops, discussions and so on resulted, in the last few years, not only in the substitution of a relatively consistent official underground network for a much poorer one, but in the release, in the same period, of other underground plans, that do not demonstrate much congruence between them. They drove to the complete loss of guidelines

that mass transport networks used to present in city planning.



PITU 2020 The integrated transport plan for 2020



PITU 2025 – The integrated transport plan for 2025



Four moments of the construction plan of
REDE ESSENCIAL 2025 (The essencial metro network)

The Ideology of scarcity also justified the recent participation of private capital in underground-building (through the BOT system, in the fourth metro line of the city), showing once more the official disregard of the real dimensions of lack of accessibility. Forgetting all the previous incidents along the building period, the unjustifiable sub-dimensioning of the number and of the physical dimensions of the stations and equipments made the Yellow line, planned as long as fifty years ago, become obsolete the very year it began to operate.

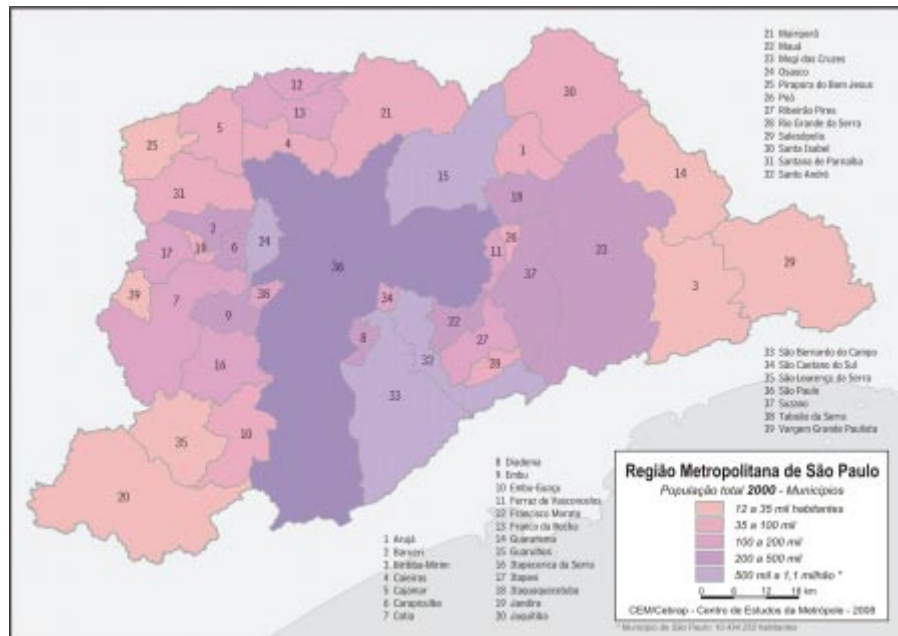
Lack of definition and/or lack of commitment of the transport policies

It is interesting to look at the structural complexity of the political and institutional support of the metropolitan transport planning activities, and at their correlations. São Paulo has representative organs of the four levels of administrations (of the Federal Government, of São Paulo State, of the Metropolitan Authority, and of the 39 Municipal areas that compound the Metropolis. There are transport planning agencies (or at least, activities) linked to every one of these levels, but their responsibilities aren't organized hierarchically. They are distributed by geographical plots and/or by transport modes. Like SPTrans (the municipal authority) and EMTU (the metropolitan intermunicipal bus agency that includes all municipalities excepting São Paulo), that operate respectively inside and outside São Paulo municipality, but lead only with buses, or

the Metro Company, linked to São Paulo State Government, that plans metro lines for the Metropolitan area, but never surpassed the municipal boundaries.

It is unnecessary to say that the complex political correlations between all these organs, subject to different political parties do not help to establish a coherent transport policy. On the contrary, they confuse the mutual responsibilities and mix up the respective competences.

They assure also a permanent room for the manipulation of the financial possibilities (or the levels of scarcity) of all of them, and so, constitute an equally permanent source of controversies around budgets, terms, and so on.



Incompatibility between aims and programs

The historical lack of an effective commitment of Transport Authorities to their so called 'Policies', the fact that the same networks, the same propositions, the same intervention plans may be repeated on and on for decades, reprogrammed, re-dimensioned, rewritten, and still unrealized, gives rise to another source of controversies.

That is: as policies lose effectiveness as instruments of social change, the programs required for their fulfillment also lose their real basis, and become mantras, or articles of faith. For instance: if adopted as guidelines of effective public policies, principles like Universal Mobility, Environmentally responsible Urban Transport, Transit Security, and others, should be translated in concrete measures, and originate an according set of investments, programs, social, cultural, economical and educational actions, and so on. As mere desires, their emotional appeal becomes proportional to their very ineffectiveness. One example may be sufficient to illustrate the statement: it refers to the actual promotion of the bicycle in urban transit system, and the passionate debates it generates.

Beside the relative low cost of the interventions, I suppose that the great appeal that bikes exert over our public authorities and over the population is mainly due to the fact that it seems to answer, simultaneously, to several announced, but still unrealized, aims of our urban and transport

policy. Let's highlight, among others, the combat to air and noise pollution, the guarantee of mobility for low income population, the promotion of micro-accessibility, the recovery of possibilities of use of public places, or the diminishing of traffic congestion. All of them are convincing as principles. But, as long as they remain as mere aims, the use of bicycles as some privileged (even miraculous) way to their consecution only disguises the absence of real policies, promoting necessarily a bound of contradictory, controversial, or erroneous interventions in urban space.

Conclusion: the use of inconsistencies..

Finally, as a last example of the ways the precarious transport system of São Paulo is sustained through its own inconsistencies, it seems interesting to look at the controversies that have for object any funds directed to the development of the existent street network of the Metropolitan area. Here scarcity ideology, misunderstanding, incongruencies work together in order to preserve the present conditions.

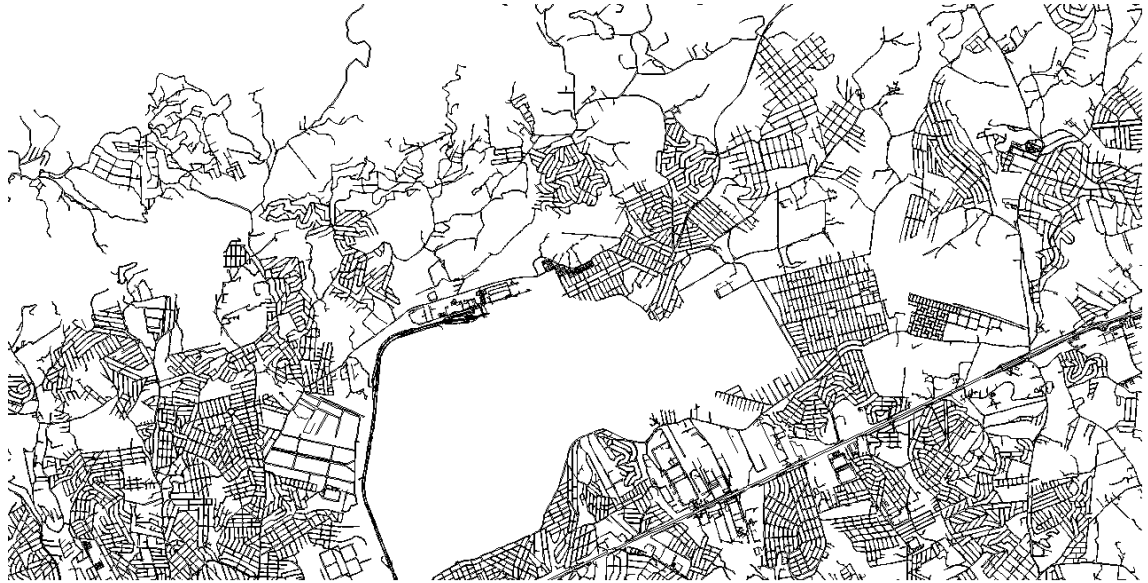


Structural street network in RMSP

I think that the image of the actual street network, with its obvious heterogeneity, discontinuities, lack of connections, lack of hierarchy between highways, avenues, main streets or local streets dispenses commentaries. But in São Paulo there is a kind of understatement relative to the traffic infrastructures, identified as physical extensions of social groups with different levels of income. As if there were a divide, on one side, the streets, the infrastructure that answers for a traffic model based on the private car - privilege of the economical elite. And, on the other side, the railways (the streetcars, trains or metro lines), that constitute a kind of symbolical vehicle of the poor.

The interminable discussions that oppose, with such ingenuity, rails and urban street

network seem to ignore the very reality of São Paulo suburban neighborhoods, where the informal occupation results in streets with such a poor geometry that jeopardizes even the transit of bicycles, not to mention ambulances, buses, or garbage trucks.



Street network in São Paulo – detail near the International Airport

This abstract and strange option to be made between streets and rails in São Paulo Transport Planning, probably guided by an idea of saving up (or not to waste) resources in unnecessary or even luxury public works has evidently no technical support. It points to the core contradiction of the current transport policy: its refusal to become a real support of urban development.