

Canadian Planning and Policy Aménagement et politique au Canada



Urban Mobility: How the iPhone, COVID, and Climate Changed Everything by Shauna Brail and Betsy Donald

Matthias Sweet 

Volume 2025, Number 1, 2025

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1116359ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24908/cpp-apc.v2025i1.18858>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association of Canadian University Planning Programs
Canadian Institute of Planners

ISSN

2816-6256 (print)

2562-122X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Sweet, M. (2025). Review of [Urban Mobility: How the iPhone, COVID, and Climate Changed Everything by Shauna Brail and Betsy Donald]. *Canadian Planning and Policy / Aménagement et politique au Canada*, 2025(1), 1–2.
<https://doi.org/10.24908/cpp-apc.v2025i1.18858>

© Matthias Sweet, 2025



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Book Review

*Canadian Planning and Policy /
Aménagement et politique au Canada*
Volume 2025
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License
ISSN 2562-122X

Shauna Brail^{ID} and Betsy Donald^{ID}, editors

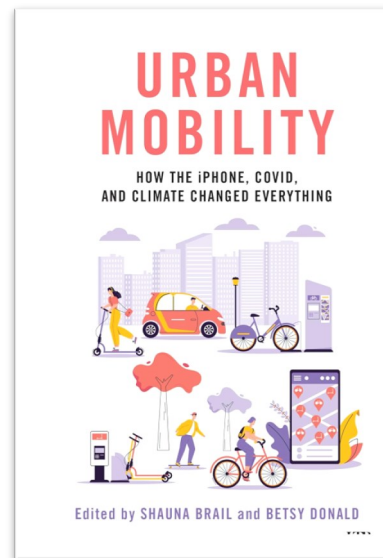
Urban Mobility: How the iPhone, COVID, and Climate Changed Everything.

Available at [University of Toronto Press](https://www.utoronto.ca/press), 2024; 354 pp., hardcover, paperback, and online; \$39.95 (paperback). ISBN 9781487550592.

Reviewed by: Matthias Sweet, Associate Professor in the School of Urban and Regional Planning, at Toronto Metropolitan University, email: matthiassweet@torontomu.ca

Shauna Brail and Betsy Donald have heroically compiled a diverse set of authors who have collectively created one of the first comprehensive efforts to document the state of mobility scholarship in Canada. For any readers who are familiar with the disjointed and highly path dependent nature of the different transportation policy contexts in Canadian urban areas, the siloed nature of transportation scholarship will not be a surprise, and its contribution is to be commended. This book strives to draw those disparate threads together on diverse topics (post-pandemic recovery, new mobility, justice, regulation, and climate change) and diverse disciplinary perspectives (business management, commerce, economics, engineering, geography, global affairs, history, planning, political science), and from the guidance on individuals at different career points (mostly mid-, but also early and late-career academics, as well as contributions by research analysts, policy analysts, and journalists). It is a welcome addition to transportation scholarship and highlights the need for more such collaborations towards arriving at a Canadian understanding of mobility scholarship.

The range of topics covered in *Urban Mobility* is vast and tends towards 1) impactful recent socio-cultural trends, 2) new technologies, and 3) non-traditional perspectives. Admittedly, my organization deviates from that of the book editors. First, impactful recent socio-cultural trends include the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath and the sharing economy – each of which permeate multiple chapters. The shorter and longer-term implications of the



Covid-19 pandemic are discussed in almost all chapters. The implications appear to be much more dire with respect to equity outcomes (e.g. in Chapter 6 by Palm and Faber) or broader social outcomes (e.g. in Chapter 3 by Cavalli and McGahan), than for opportunities to rethink the traditional mobility system using new

mobility tools such as bike-sharing (e.g. Chapter 8 by McNee and Miller) and digital mobility tools (e.g. Chapter 9 by Hashemi, Motaghi, and Tremblay).

Second, new technologies which are discussed include car-sharing, ride-hailing, bike-sharing, e-scooters, and demand-response transit (e.g. see Losada-Rojas and Miller). On this front, the book has some very interesting case studies which illustrate how diverse Canada's cities and policy contexts are and how these have addressed various new mobility technologies. These include chapters on e-Scooters (Chapter 9 by Kong and Leszczynski), ride-hailing and food-hailing (Chapter 10 by Brail and Donald, and Chapter 13 by Zwick, Young, and Spicer), and integrated mobility governance (Chapter 11 by Gorachinova, Huh, and Wolfe), and autonomous vehicles (Chapter 12 by Aoyama and Alvarez León).

Third, *Urban Mobility* offers a welcome plethora of non-traditional voices and perspectives which I might imagine is particularly important for practitioners or scholars who already have some of the foundations of understanding travel behavior, transportation policy and planning, and transportation-urban form interactions. For example, Tom Hutton's account (Chapter 3) of how transportation-urban form dynamics are being shaped by new technologies, the pandemic aftermath, and climate change is a refreshing telling by a practitioner of what can often be a treacherous and territorial story which looks very different from the perspectives of different transportation disciplines (e.g. the economists, engineers, planners, policy scholars, etc.). Likewise, Lorinc's consideration of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) illustrates the challenges and opportunities based on grounded case studies of this promising but imperfect set of technologies.

Urban Mobility illustrates the challenges of navigating Canadian transportation scholarship as a singular and cohesive whole due to the largely separate provincial and local policy frameworks with comparatively less common federal influence. But it also underscores the importance of bringing together those dispersed and diffuse sources of information towards distinguishing Canadian transportation scholarship from other work in North America or the west, most generally. Themes that percolate throughout the diverse chapters include the need for better Canadian travel behavior and transportation data and sharing (Chapter 4 by Vinodrai) and the questions about how intensely Canadian transportation communities should look to other Canadian communities or to other international examples for guidance and inspiration (Chapter 15 by Brail and Donald).

While the book's breadth of topics is formidable, it is more descriptive and cautionary and does not engage as deeply with differences with respect to normative questions of what, "good" policy is.

Admittedly, Brail and Donald argue that their compilation represents a unique Canadian contribution to the "iPhone-COVID-climate narrative," – meaning that the normative framework of addressing climate change is embedded (at least implicitly) by all chapter authors. Given the strength of representation among chapter authors in the fields of geography and business management, this emphasis on descriptive and technology-oriented questions is critical.

However, for those seeking opportunities to wrestle with normative questions about what better Canadian cities would look like and how to achieve them, the book editors leave us with reminders of the need to continue this journey in further research. Brail and Donald critically note that while some book chapter authors highlight socio-cultural and structural issues as being paramount, others are more surgically focused on the precise nature of specific technologies in specific places at specific times. Perhaps the clearest argument with respect to what Canadian policymakers should do to improve mobility is articulated by Vinodrai in Chapter 4. Vinodrai's verdict is a powerful reminder of how institutionally situated knowledge and action are. It ominously paints a picture of how little researchers and practitioners actually know from a comparative Canadian perspective due to institutional inability to modify, make publicly available, and to geographically expand mobility and travel behavior data collection efforts across the country. According to Vinodrai (p. 80),

“as scholars, we continue to puzzle through how cities in Canada and elsewhere change and transform over time. High-quality, publicly available data are necessary for that task.”

In this respect, the book editors and chapter authors make one thing abundantly clear: for everything that is known, there is much which is not and which should be better understood.