democratically to opt for lower greenhouse emissions, they would almost certainly prefer that reductions should come from some other source, however inconvenient and costly the alternatives might be. It is not, after all, that the uses people make of motor-cars are frivolous. To rural people, cars have become literally necessities. To large sections of most advanced societies, they are also means to personal efficiency that will never be entirely replaced by the benefits of telecommunications.

Balance

It is entirely right that the externalities of surface transport should be internalized, but the commission's figures suggest that Britain has magically arranged that the overall balance is about right. In the financial year just past, the British government collected about £20.4 billion from transport taxes, compared with an estimate of between £16.9 billion and £25.2 billion for the environmental costs of road transport (including the costs incurred in building and maintaining roads and the cost of accidents). The immediate objective now should be more accurately to match marginal costs. That argues for a readjustment of the tax burden. The British government is already tempted by theidea of schemes for road pricing in congested cities and motorway tolls. In equity, bearing in mind the interests of rural people (and the circumstance that the environmental costs of rural motor-cars are relatively low), those revenues should be used to reduce, not to increase, the costs of motor-fuel.

That does not imply that there are not serious problems ahead. One is occasioned by the probable secular increase of the price of crude oil as the accessible (and thus cheap) reserves are progressively exhausted. Unless alternative fuels (natural gas or electrolytic hydrogen seem the best bets in Europe) or means of propulsion (electric vehicles) become economic and reliable, it seems inevitable that there will be a secular decline in the availability (and the benefits) of personal motorized transport. Teleworking will soften the hardships thus created, but not completely. So the cost of social deprivation in rural communities will become one of the externalities to be included in the consideration of future transport policies.

There remains the greenhouse problem. Britain, to which the bulk of the commission's argument is addressed, has a reasonable record on compliance with the European Union's target of restoring greenhouse emissions to 1990 levels by 2000, but that is the easy part. Compliance has been assisted by the recession, while the target is insufficient for the long run. Given what appears to be its new-found ambition for making quantitative studies, the commission could do worse than embark on a study of alternative ways of reaching alternative targets, taking full account of the social and environmental consequences of those developments. But it should do what it can to suppress its populist animus against the motor-car, which has not yet become the icon of a profligate age the commission supposes it to be. ☐

Peace in Ireland?

The British and Irish governments could settle some contentious issues quickly.

Since the declaration by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), relayed to the world by the political party Sinn Fein, that military action would be halted, the British and Irish governments have been working diligently but cautiously on the document they hope may lead to constitutional change. The British are understandably the more cautious; the government's commitment to the people of Northern Ireland is explicit and unambiguous; there will be a united Ireland only if a majority of the people in the north elect for such a change. Nobody can complain at that; what else is democratic self-determination? But there is much else that can and should be done short of a united Ireland, to bring the communities of the Republic of Ireland and of Northern Ireland together.

The old links between north and south are much stronger than they have seemed in the last 25 years, since the first shootings at Londonderry. Both collaborate in mounting a joint team to compete in rugby football, for example, while there is still a Royal Society of Ireland in republican Dublin. But these are mostly historical accidents in a country in which history has a bad name. The more immediate need is for common institutions that are both modern and productive of benefits that will quickly become apparent. For many years, this journal has been urging that higher education and research provide a field that could function as cross-border cultural cement without prejudicing the great constitutional questions still unresolved. This is surely the time when the opportunities should be seized.

There are several things to do, among which the chief should be an open declaration that the two university systems will in future be planned in common and financed through a common mechanism (to which both governments contribute). Because of the links between the universities of Northern Ireland and those in the rest of the United Kingdom, that would imply a direct link into the rest of the university system throughout the British Isles. On the research side, there should be an understanding that academics from either north or south could apply for research support from any research council in the same territory. Initially, the British government would have to bear the major part of the cost, but that should not persist indefinitely. Unified research funding should quickly persuade the republic's government that it must (in the interests of its young people) pay more attention to research.

Meanwhile, there is a particular issue to decide. The University of Ulster has a plan to build a new campus in Belfast in a run-down region of the city straddling what is called the "peace-line" (more accurately, it is a no man's land) between the loyalist and nationalist communities. It is an imaginative scheme. It would strengthen an already innovative university. And it would help to cement what is still an uneasy peace. Why not do that now? ☐

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