Steering Away from Car Dependency: An Analysis of Collective and Individualistic Transport Alternatives in the UK

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how alternative transport systems in the UK either challenge or reinforce the car-based capitalist individualism entrenched in modern society. Focusing on the cities of Preston and Milton Keynes, it analyses local transport policy documents and interviews using a comparative case study approach. The study applies three key criteria - *affordability, reliability and accessibility*; *ownership and control;* and *modal shift* - to assess whether alternative transport systems promote collective values or sustain capitalist individualistic frameworks. Findings indicate that while both cities recognise the need to reduce car dependency, their strategies diverge sharply. Preston demonstrates a stronger emphasis on collective ownership, spatial redesign, and behavioural change, whereas Milton Keynes tends to reinforce individualistic patterns through private sector reliance and limited modal shift efforts. The study concludes that although systemic capitalist pressures persist, localised initiatives - particularly those with the political will to challenge the status quo - can partially resist and reshape dominant individualistic transport structures. These findings highlight the importance of critically evaluating not just the existence of alternative transport systems but their underlying ownership structures, funding models, and cultural framing.

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Ethics Approval

I declare that this research was approved by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group

Research Question: In what ways do alternative transport systems to cars challenge or reinforce capitalist individualism in the UK?

Methodology: Policy Document Analysis and Interview Research

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List of Abbreviations

DRT	Demand Responsive Transport
EV	Electric Vehicle
MKCC	Milton Keynes City Council
PCC	Preston City Council
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Chapter 1: Introduction

Car dependency remains a defining feature of modern transport systems, deeply embedded within wider social and economic structures. Although alternative transport options are growing, private cars still dominate travel patterns (Mattioli et al., 2020), sustained by capitalist individualism that limits collective alternatives (Dennis and Urry, 2012). However, evolving urban transport policy, such as expanded bus networks and pedestrianisation, signals a shift away from extreme car dependency (Newman and Kenworthy, 2011). Through case studies of Preston and Milton Keynes, this research examines in what ways such alternative urban transport systems challenge or reinforce this car-based capitalist individualism.

Although individualism is a contested and hard to define term (Birnbaum and Leca, 1990; Lukes, 2006), the political individualism this research bases its analysis on is defined by Tocqueville (2002 [1838], p.574) as a "mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures; and to draw apart with his family and his friends; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself." This individualism acts as the key social behaviour of modern neoliberal capitalism, fostering ideas of private property, individual freedom, personal responsibility and the rejection of a collective society as a whole (Harvey, 2005). In contrast, Dalley (1996) explores collectivism, emphasising collective responsibility, interdependence, and the organisation of society around shared community and public needs rather than individual gain. This dissertation expands significantly on these concepts, but these opposing ideas frame the analysis.

A substantial body of research already examines the entrenched system of automobility and car dependency (Urry, 2004; Litman and Laube, 2002), often linking it to the political economy of capitalism and the pervasive ideology of individualism (Mattioli et al., 2020; Paterson, 2007). Much of this scholarship focuses on the US context (Muller, 2017; Pucher and Lefèvre, 1997), where the dominance of the car is more extreme and closely tied to intensified capitalist structures than in the UK. Instead, this dissertation shifts the focus to the UK, addressing a comparatively under-researched

context by analysing the topic on a more local level than other global or nationwide studies (Jeekel, 2013; Giuliano and Dargay, 2006). "While car dependency provides context, this research focuses on alternative public transport systems through the theoretical lens of individualism and collectivism - an area that remains relatively underexplored in existing research, with a few exceptions (Ashmore et al., 2019; Dingil et al., 2019) Understanding where these alternative transport systems succeed or fail in disrupting capitalist individualism is crucial to advancing beyond car dependency and towards more inclusive, collective transport solutions.

The research first reviews literature on individualism and collectivism, car dependency and alternative transport systems, forming the theoretical framework. This explores the individualistic nature of car dependency and highlights how transport can be collectively organised. Next, the methodology chapter outlines the use of comparative case studies and data collection methods. The core of this study is structured around three thematic chapters, each applying a comparative approach to the case studies of Milton Keynes and Preston. The first thematic chapter examines p*olicy and funding,* assessing how local council strategies either reinforce individualism or foster collective transport alternatives. The second chapter focuses on *spatial and physical infrastructure*, analysing how urban design and infrastructure development influence transport choices and either sustain or challenge individualistic patterns. The final chapter explores public *perceptions and attitudes*, considering how cultural attachments to both alternative transport modes and private cars interact and ultimately shape the success or failure of collective transport initiatives. By integrating these three areas of analysis across two case studies, this research offers a critical assessment of the ways in which alternative transport systems in the UK effectively challenge capitalist individualism or reproduce it. Ultimately, this study finds that while capitalist individualism remains deeply embedded within transport, there is a clear divergence between the two case studies. This suggests that car-based individualism is not an all-encompassing phenomenon, and that collective transport alternatives can meaningfully challenge it at the local level where political will and collective values exist.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Individualism and Collectivism

To provide a solid theoretical base for this research, it is essential to analyse the structures of individualism alongside contrasting ideas of collectivism. Lukes (1971) highlights how individualism is a notoriously complex and contested concept, with Birnbaum and Leca (1990, p.1) describing its "indeterminate shape" and wide range of meanings. Lukes (2006), Greene (2008), and Peters (1994) all frame it as an ideological construct, emphasising its role in shaping political and social norms. This understanding of ideological political individualism forms the foundation for the analysis in this research. One of the earliest and most influential explorations of the concept comes from Tocqueville (2002 [1838], p. 574), who asserts that individualism "saps the virtues of public life" and ultimately results in selfishness. His framing captures the core tenets of individualism: rejection of collective public life and emphasis on an atomised, selfish existence.

In Marxist analysis, this self-interested foundation of individualism reinforces the concept of false consciousness, as discussed by Eyerman (1981) and Greene (2008), whereby workers pursue personal, material desires at the expense of developing the class consciousness necessary to challenge capitalist structures. As capitalism has evolved into its neoliberal form, this ideological individualism has only intensified, becoming deeply embedded across social and political life (Rustin, 2014). Harvey (2005) emphasises that neoliberal policy, built on individualism, prioritises personal freedom within a ruthless market system, championing personal responsibility and privatisation. He draws upon Thatcher's (1987) infamous claim that there is "no such thing as society" to underscore neoliberalism's ideological opposition to collective life. Esposito (2011, p. 33) echoes this, arguing that neoliberalism's emphasis on self-interest and competition not only rejects public and collective influence but also "erodes communities while fostering an atomised society."

Given that capitalist individualism stands in clear opposition to community and collective society, it is equally important to explore theoretical frameworks that offer alternatives. Kağıtçıbaşi (1997) examines the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism, highlighting their contrast and reviewing various scholarly definitions of the two ideologies (Hui and Triandis, 1986; Etzioni, 1993;

Bellah et al., 1985). Dalley (1996, p. 50) describes collectivism as fostering “mutual, reciprocal and all-embracing concern for one's fellows as free, autonomous human beings.” Dalley (1996) further argues that under capitalism, communities cannot truly embody collectivism; with Marx and Engels (1974 [1846]) highlighting how only within a communist society can “individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association”. This stands in stark contrast to the individualist perspective that personal freedom can only be realised through a self-interested, capitalist society (Duncan and Hobson, 1995), highlighting a fundamental divide in thought. Consequently, collectivist ideals often align with public ownership or state involvement in the provision of services that serve the common good, explicitly rejecting market-based approaches (Boubakri et al., 2015).

This distinction between individualism and collectivism underpins the central tension of this research: whether collective values can challenge capitalist individualism based on atomisation and self-interest. As this research demonstrates, this dichotomy has profound implications for understanding the implementation of transport systems in modern urban life

2.2 Car Dependency

Although it's important to frame the analysis with theoretical concepts of individualism and collectivism, it is also essential to relate these theories to the practical realities of car dependence. Seiler (2008) and Newman and Kenworthy (2015) explore the emergence of car dependency in the 1940s and 50s alongside post-war economic restructuring and growing individualism. Mohr (2023) explores how, due to this, the private car became synonymous with the growth of private home ownership, urban sprawl and suburbia, ultimately creating an extensive system of atomised and fragmented individuals.

Car dependence and the system of automobility have been extensively explored in the literature (Urry, 2004; Pucher and Lefèvre, 1997; Dennis and Urry, 2012), with Litman and Laube (2002, p.1) defining it as “high levels of per capita automobile travel, automobile-oriented land use, and reduced alternatives.” Key works by Mattioli et al. (2020) and Paterson (2007) dig deeper into the entrenched

political economy of car dependency, with Paterson linking car dependency to capitalist accumulation, the neoliberal state, and the car industry. Mattioli et al. (2020), Hamer (1988) and Luger (2000) build on this, illustrating how powerful car lobbies entrench these systems with the support of a neoliberal state that always favours cars in policy making.

The literature also explores the car as a cultural symbol of individualism. Paterson (2007) shows how cars shape social identity, turning drivers into "car subjects" (p. 121) and reinforcing "atomistic individualism" (p. 51). Similarly, Gartman (2004), building on Urry (2004), argues that cars embody individual consumption and neoliberal ideals of self-interest and personal freedom. Walks (2014) notes the irony that in car-dependent societies, vehicles can actually constrain freedom and mobility, as individuals are forced to drive. Cars also serve as status symbols within consumerist societies, functioning as emblems of commodity fetishisation (Gartman, 2013) and fostering psychological dependence on the automobile (Freund and Martin, 1996). Adding to this understanding, Walker, Tapp, and Davis (2023, p. 3) discuss 'motornormativity', describing how deeply entrenched social norms allow individuals to recognise the negatives of car usage, yet continue to rationalise it due to an individualistic psychological attachment. Ultimately, the car and the dependence it fosters embody the defining characteristics of capitalist individualism: atomisation, consumerism, and the prioritisation of self-interest.

This dependency is further reinforced by the spatial dominance of the car. Mohr (2023) explores how car dependency developed alongside a distinct form of spatial politics rooted in urban sprawl and suburbanisation. Muller (2017) offers a comprehensive historical account of suburbanisation and transport, describing a period in which post-war urban space, particularly in the United States, became increasingly shaped by car-centric infrastructure. As a result, public spaces historically defining cities became privatised, centred around drivers and private cars (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Sennett, 1977). Newman and Kenworthy (1999) highlight that as urban infrastructure prioritises car travel, alternative transport becomes even less viable, reinforcing car dependency.

There is a substantial body of literature discussing car dependency and its links to individualism, spatial politics, political economy, and psychological dependence. However, while key works such as those by Paterson (2007) and Urry (2004) do reference the UK and Europe, their work and other research (Muller, 2017; Pucher and Lefèvre, 1997) adopts a predominantly American or global perspective. Notable exceptions include Jeekel's (2013) European study and UK-focused works by Mattioli (2014) and Giuliano & Dargay (2006). Regardless, this dissertation builds on and moves beyond these works, using car dependency as a conceptual foundation for a solely UK-focused local investigation

2.3 Alternative Transport Systems

While car dependency provides context, this research focuses on whether alternative transport can challenge capitalist individualism rather than on private car use itself. For this dissertation, alternative transport includes all major modes apart from private cars, such as public transport, cycling, and pedestrianisation. Preston (2009) defines public transport as "any form of transport available for general public use," including buses, trains, trams, and less common modes like demand-responsive transport (DRT). DRT refers to small buses, vans, or taxis that adapt their routes and timetables in response to passenger demand, unlike conventional fixed-route buses (Davison et al., 2014). Although not public transport, cycling and pedestrianisation - often termed active travel (Burbidge and Goulias, 2009) - are widely seen as alternative modes challenging the private car (Godefrooij, de Jong and Rouwette, 2007; Zivarts, 2024; Buehler et al., 2016).

Next, it is crucial to examine whether alternative transport systems are collective or individualistic, and how they challenge or reinforce the neoliberal capitalist order. Glover (2011) notes that "collective" transport is often vaguely defined, with some distinguishing it from public transport (McManus, 2005) and others using the terms interchangeably (Banister, 2005). Bissell (2010), however, identifies public transport such as trains and buses as collective due to their shared nature, contrasting the atomised experience of car travel. Walker (2024), echoed by Bovo, Briata and

Bricocoli (2022), further suggests that these modes function as public spaces fostering community connection and bringing people together. Kwarciński (2018) frames public transport as a public and common good, highlighting its role in enhancing mobility, reducing social exclusion and promoting equitable use of urban space. Aldred (2010) similarly explores cycling's collective dimensions, arguing that cycling's spaces and culture foster shared practices and challenge car-based atomisation. Although not a physical transport mode, pedestrianisation has also been described as a collective mode, creating community cohesion, fostering social connection and encouraging public use of space. (Demerath and Levinger, 2003; Middleton, 2016).

However, alternative transport systems can also reinforce capitalist individualism rather than offering truly collective mobility. A key mechanism undermining public transport's collectivist potential is the emergence of feedback loops favouring car dependency. Mattioli et al. (2020) highlight that inadequate investment in public transport leads to unreliable, inaccessible or unaffordable services, pushing individuals toward car usage. This shift then justifies further disinvestment, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of car dependency. Jeekel (2013) and Mattioli (2017) argue that individuals, especially in suburban areas, are therefore effectively forced into car ownership due to inadequate alternatives. These inadequate public transport alternatives and self-reinforcing feedback loops are also intrinsically linked to privatisation, a core tenet of neoliberal capitalism (Mattioli et al., 2020). Studies by White (2019), Alston, Khawaja and Riddel (2021), and Currie (2016) highlight how privatisation of public transport increases fares and lowers service quality, therefore decreasing ridership. Mattioli et al. (2020) demonstrate this, emphasising how under Thatcher's deregulation and privatisation, corporate bus companies cut unprofitable yet socially necessary services, disadvantageous to public transport reliant local communities. Thus, declining service quality due to transport privatisation reinforces car dependency and distorts public transport from a collective good into a profit-driven system.

Scholars also explore how alternative transport systems can help shape a more collective organisation of urban space. Through his famous concept of *The Right to the City*, Lefebvre (1996 [1968])

envisions a radically democratic urban environment in which control over the city and its spaces lies with the communities who inhabit them, rather than being dominated by private capital and market forces. Alternative transport systems align closely with this vision, with both pedestrianisation (Villani and Talamini, 2021; Middleton, 2016) and cycling (Mayers and Glover, 2021; Furness, 2007) presented in the literature as means of reclaiming urban space from car-dominated, privatised use and transforming it into shared, community-oriented spaces. Developing infrastructure centred on alternative transport modes, such as bus and cycle lanes, can significantly reduce car usage and transform urban road space for more collective, public transport solutions (Gössling, 2020; Litman, 2016; Roca-Riu et al., 2020).

Finally, the literature discusses cultural perceptions of public transport, particularly in contrast to the cultural dominance of the car. Ramos et al. (2019) and Chowdhury and Ceder (2016) explore negative perceptions and attitudes towards public transport, highlighting how these act as barriers to both usage and investment. Building on this, the literature discusses how cultural attachment to the private car contributes to these negative attitudes. Studies have shown that car users tend to have significantly more negative perceptions of public transport than non-car owners (Beirão and Sarsfield Cabral, 2007; Tao, He, and Thøgersen, 2019). While cars are often associated with social status and reflect an individualistic attachment to private property, reliance on public transport is frequently perceived as a marker of lower social status and economic class, particularly in societies oriented around individualism and private interest (Guiver, 2007). This cultural framing reinforces the stigma attached to public transport, further entrenching car dependency and shaping policy decisions

Although some literature addresses the collective or individualistic nature of alternative transport systems, much of it makes only vague links to these ideologies (Glover, 2011) or focuses exclusively on one side of the dichotomy (Walker, 2024). While valuable, existing discussions of collectivism or individualism also tend to concentrate on a single mode of transport, such as cycling or buses, rather than considering multiple alternatives in conjunction (Aldred, 2010; Bovo, Briata and Bricocoli, 2022; Middleton, 2016). This dissertation aims to provide a more holistic overview of alternative

transport systems to the private car, analysing them through the lens of the individualism–collectivism dichotomy.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Although car dependence and alternative transport systems exist globally, this dissertation narrows its focus to two UK cities as case studies: Preston and Milton Keynes. Preston was selected for its collective values and emphasis on community wealth-building. The 'Preston Model', as outlined by Manley and Whyman (2021), involves smaller co-operative businesses reinvesting in the local economy instead of directing profits to large corporations. This fosters collective ownership and community spirit (Prinos and Manley, 2022), making Preston valuable for examining the relationship between transport and collectivism. In contrast, Milton Keynes, a principal 1960s new town, embodies a different urban model aligned with American-style grid systems (Marum and Patterson, 2017). Primarily designed around cars (Dzięcielski et al., 2024) and shaped by private investment and commercial development, Milton Keynes more so reflects capitalist individualism (Pikó, 2017). Despite differing underlying values and urban planning, both are medium-sized cities and have comparable populations (PCC, 2019; MKCC, 2024b), making them suitable for comparative analysis.

For this comparative case study analysis, his study used local council transport policy documents as primary qualitative data. The methodological framework draws on Bowen's (2009) document analysis, combining content and thematic analysis to interpret documents systematically. According to Bowen, content analysis involves selecting meaningful and relevant excerpts from the documents, while Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) highlight how thematic analysis enables these excerpts to be categorised into broader themes for deeper analysis.

This dissertation analysed policy documents from Preston City Council (PCC) and Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC), including: Preston City Transport Plan (PCC, 2019); Mobility Strategy for Milton Keynes 2018–2036 (MKCC, 2018); Milton Keynes Bus Service Improvement Plan (MKCC, 2024a); Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (MKCC, 2023); and the Mobility Strategy for Milton Keynes 2018-2036: Transport Infrastructure Delivery Plan (MKCC, 2019). Although Preston had only one policy document, its length, detail and supporting interviews compensated.

As Owen (2014) and Yanow (2006) highlight, interviews can complement document analysis well by offering clarification or deeper insights into the policy texts' meaning and intent. Given potential limitations of policy documents, such as author bias or inaccuracy (Scott, 1990), this research also incorporated interviews to strengthen the depth and validity of the analysis. While policy documents offered valuable insight into planned council policies, interviews provided greater nuance and depth, as participants could express their perspectives more freely. Conducting semi-structured interviews facilitated this, allowing flexibility of responses while also guiding the conversation according to pre-established themes and criteria. Four interviews were conducted for this research, with all participants based in Preston and none from Milton Keynes. To preserve anonymity, interviewees are referred to by their job titles: Preston City Council Member, Transport Consultant, Academic 1, and Academic 2. Although the Transport Consultant provided some insight into Milton Keynes, interview requests to local councillors, groups, and organisers went unanswered. This absence, while unconfirmable, may suggest broader apathy or disinterest in alternative transport systems within Milton Keynes.

The analysis of policy documents and interviews is structured around three thematic chapters outlined in the introduction: *Policy and Funding*, *Spatial and Physical Infrastructure*, and *Perceptions and Attitudes*. These themes were developed through the process of thematic analysis, which forms a core part of the overall policy document analysis (Bowen, 2009). Within these three chapters, three analytical criteria were applied to address the research question. The first criterion, *affordability, reliability and accessibility*, addresses the fundamental requirement that alternative transport systems must be functional and effective to meaningfully challenge car dependency and its embedded individualistic values. Drawing on feedback loops (Mattioli et al., 2020), this criterion shows how unaffordable, unreliable, or inaccessible systems can deter usage and instead reinforce car use and individualism. The second criterion, *ownership and control*, examines how different ownership models influence the structure and outcomes of alternative transport systems. This includes a comparative analysis of individualistic, privatised approaches with more collectivist models such as public or community-led ownership. The final criterion, *modal shift*, evaluates the

extent of transition from car use to alternative transport modes. Without such a shift, alternative systems cannot meaningfully challenge entrenched car dependency and capitalist individualism.

Theme and criteria development followed an iterative process shaped by the policy documents and aimed at addressing the research question. The final grid-style table used to categorise the data is shown in Appendix A.

Chapter 4 - Policy and Funding

This chapter analyses how policy and funding shape alternative transport systems from a top-down, council-led direction. It analyses policy documents and interviews to assess the ways in which these transport policies challenge or reinforce individualism in both Milton Keynes and Preston, comparing and contrasting throughout. This analysis is based on the aforementioned criteria *affordability, reliability and accessibility; ownership and control*; and *modal shift* in order to categorise and analyse the data.

4.1 Affordability, Reliability and Accessibility

To implement successful alternative transport systems that challenge capitalist individualism, policy and funding must support affordable, reliable and accessible services that function as a genuine collective alternative to the dominant private car. In Preston, the local government admits public transport is "often confusing, costly, and unreliable" (PCC, 2019, p. 23). The council highlights how young people, the unemployed, and disabled people are often excluded from public transport due to affordability and accessibility issues. These concerns were echoed by a Preston Council Member, who said:

> "The service is poor. I mean, I use it myself, but buses don't turn up and the prices are going up now" (Preston City Council Member, Interview)

Similarly, Milton Keynes acknowledges that although accessibility has improved, significantly more work is needed, particularly in enhancing reliability and the overall attractiveness of the network (MKCC, 2018). MKCC even presents quantitative data for the lack of reliability, highlighting that in the year 2023/24, only 77% of buses were on time despite a target of 90% (MKCC, 2024a). Drawing on Jeekel (2013) and Mattioli et al. (2020), these shortcomings in public transport alternatives contribute to feedback loops in which poor service provision reinforces car dependency. Whether due to high costs, low reliability, or lack of convenience, inadequate alternatives make car use appear not

only preferable but necessary. As a result of these poor public transport provisions, both cities initially appear to reinforce the individualism of a car-dependent capitalist society.

Despite these shortcomings, both cities have introduced policy proposals to tackle these issues. PCC proposes measures to improve bus services, including technological upgrades, an enhanced bus partnership for greater reliability, and driver training to make the network more accessible for disabled passengers (PCC, 2019). A further proposal focuses on network simplification, a single mobile app for bus times and contactless payments across all buses. While these measures make the network more convenient and accessible, there is limited discussion of improving transport affordability. MKCC proposes a similar 'enhanced bus partnership', using operator data to boost reliability (MKCC, 2018; MKCC, 2024a). To enhance accessibility, Milton Keynes plans multi-modal transport hubs combining cycle hire, car parking, and bus stops. Although ownership is discussed later, it is important to note Milton Keynes' reliance on commercial operators, increasingly linked to fare rises and persistent affordability issues (Alston, Khawaja and Riddel, 2021).

Overall, both cities are making efforts to improve reliability and accessibility, suggesting some challenge to car-centric individualism through policies and investment in technology and connectivity. However, the failure to address the unaffordability of public transport undermines these efforts. This limitation reflects both local policy shortcomings and structural constraints of the privatised, deregulated UK transport system, where councils have limited power to control fares and pricing. While Preston and Milton Keynes show some promise in resisting car-based individualism in terms of accessibility and reliability, without tackling affordability, their alternative transport systems fall short of offering truly collective alternatives and reinforce individualistic practices in transport.

4.2 Ownership and Control

Building on this lack of action regarding affordable pricing, this research examines the role of ownership and control in shaping the provision of alternative transport systems. Public transport is often perceived as an inherently collective good, acting as a public service that facilitates shared journeys (Bissell, 2010; Bovo, Briata and Bricocoli, 2022). In reality, however, the collective nature of public transport is undermined by policy frameworks and funding models that prioritise privatised control. When transport is privatised, it becomes driven by profit and the pursuit of individualistic gain by large corporations (Alston, Khawaja and Riddel, 2021). The market-driven system shifts the focus from providing a public service to catering to individual consumers, treating public services as a commodity rather than a collective good (McDonald and Ruiters, 2006)

Preston's council directly addresses how privatisation of buses has negatively impacted services. The council recognises that commercial operators dictate "routes, frequencies, timetables, fares and quality standards for services," leading to fragmented and confusing provision across multiple companies (PPC, 2019, p. 55). An interview with a Preston City Council member further illustrates this negative view of privatisation :

> "We're just in the hands of the private sector. And once they've got everything, they can do whatever the hell they want, they can stop services, they can charge what they want"
> (Preston City Council Member, Interview)

Although the council is critical of private ownership, it acknowledges that current legislation limits its ability to intervene. As PCC explains, it remains illegal under a deregulated system for local authorities to run their own bus services (PCC, 2019). However, the recently elected Labour government's Bus Services Bill (2025) aims to change this, granting councils the power to establish publicly owned bus companies. While the bill is still passing through the House of Lords at the time of writing, there is optimism. As the same council member stated :

> "We're very interested in that, either taking over a bus company or starting a new one or whatever it takes to intervene in that market. To challenge the private sector and make things better for people." (Preston City Council Member, Interview)

In contrast, Milton Keynes has embraced privatisation more fully. Its bus network is split across seven different private operators (MKCC, 2024a), supplemented by MK Connect, a DRT system operated by the international tech company Via Transportation (Potter et al., 2021). Unlike Preston, Milton Keynes actively promotes commercial operation in its transport policy. The proposed "Premium Bus Route Network", for example, explicitly relies on private operators to deliver more reliable services (MKCC, 2018, p. 9). MK Connect has also replaced council-subsidised rural bus routes (MKCC, 2024a), highlighting how commercial operators continue to prioritise cost-cutting and profits over true public service.

Although local authorities remain limited in countering profit-driven transport systems, Preston and Milton Keynes address the issue differently. This may stem from Preston's community-oriented values, exemplified by the Preston Model, versus Milton Keynes' business-focused identity centred on economic growth and private companies. As White (2019) and Alston, Khawaja and Riddel (2021) note, the privatisation of UK public transport under Thatcher's neoliberal agenda introduced problems such as cuts to rural services, declining ridership, increased car dependence, and a shift from public good to private profit. Despite Preston's more critical stance and Milton Keynes' stronger alignment with commercial operators, it would be difficult to describe either of the fragmented commercial transport systems as being a truly collective alternative that challenges capitalist individualism. Ultimately, based on ownership and control, both cities' transport systems largely reinforce capitalist individualism, though there may be hope for change in the future.

4.3 Modal Shift

Despite private ownership limiting the potential for truly collective alternative transport, one key criterion cannot be overlooked: to meaningfully challenge capitalist individualism, alternative transport systems must first succeed in encouraging a modal shift away from car dependency. As Paterson (2007) highlights, cars are emblematic of capitalist individualism, creating atomised individual units of transport. Therefore, moving away from cars moves away from this individualism. However, to truly challenge this individualism, any modal shift must be fostered alongside the aforementioned improvements in affordability, reliability, accessibility, and ownership models. In this research, modal shift refers to the transition from private car use to alternative transport systems.

In Preston, there is a clear recognition that car use is too high, creating various issues for the city. The policy documents highlight that "Around 70% of trips to work are made by car – partly due to a lack of real alternatives" (PCC, 2019, p. 11). It goes on to highlight how, although alternative transport systems exist, they simply do not provide enough incentive to decrease car usage. Furthermore, the absence of an expanded local public transport network leads to increased car use. For example, although Preston railway station serves as a key northern rail hub, the lack of local rail systems means many passengers are forced to drive to the station. Preston identifies a range of issues stemming from car dominance, highlighting that a shift to a multi-modal network would enhance sustainability, improve public health and safety, ease congestion, and support economic growth.

Similarly in Milton Keynes there is an explicit recognition that a key target of the Mobility Strategy for Milton Keynes 2018-2036 is to achieve modal shift away from the car, with a target of reducing car journeys to work in central Milton Keynes down to 60% by 2030 and 50% by 2050 (MKCC, 2018). The council also highlights both a lack of alternatives and alternatives that cannot compete with the private car. The Redways cycling routes, for example, are touted as being too indirect and lacking the ease and convenience to realistically create any kind of modal shift. It is also important to note that although MKCC recognises that there must be a modal shift, they highlight that the system

of car reliance has “served the Borough well in the past” (MKCC, 2019, p. 2). Due to the council’s assertion that reduced car dependency could free up land for increased commercial development (MKCC, 2019, Milton Keynes’ reasoning for promoting a shift away from cars appears to be driven more by economic motives than by public need.

Building on this recognition of the need for change, however, both cities outline ways a modal shift away from cars might be achieved. Preston notes that while a bus network is in place, significant investment in local rail projects would be necessary to encourage such a shift, reducing reliance on either cars or an underdeveloped bus service (PCC, 2019). PCC also acknowledges that while the centre has become less car-dominated, similar progress must now extend to surrounding areas. In Milton Keynes, policy proposals include increasing workplace car parking charges and promoting modal choice, although this suggestion remains vague and lacks clear implementation plans. (MKCC, 2019) Furthermore, there is also significant emphasis on electric vehicles (EV) as a technological solution within a policy scenario that emphasises continued personal choice (MKCC, 2019, p. 43). This is in contrast to Preston’s assertion that “we can little afford to sit back and rely on EVs” (PCC, 2019).

Although both cities recognise the need for a modal shift away from cars, their approaches differ sharply. PCC is more critical of car dominance, linking reduced car use to social, environmental, and economic benefits and proposing concrete transport alternatives to enable a shift away from cars. Milton Keynes, while expressing a commitment to reducing car dependency, offers vague policies and continues to prioritise ‘choice’ and car-based technologies like EVs, addressing sustainability but not car dependence itself. Reflecting its car-centric design and history, Milton Keynes reinforces capitalist individualism with its weak commitment to modal shift, while Preston challenges the individualistic nature of car-based travel through stronger emphasis on improved public transport as a viable alternative.

4.4 Chapter Review

In conclusion, while both cities acknowledge the need for improved public transport to counter car dependency, their approaches differ in ways that shape their potential for fostering collective alternatives. Preston challenges car dependency and individualism more critically than Milton Keynes, reinforcing the need for modal shift and opposing private ownership. Although progress is being made towards greater reliability and accessibility, affordability remains a challenge. Milton Keynes, by contrast, largely reinforces capitalist individualism through policies that fail to promote true modal shift or collective transport solutions, instead reinforcing the role of privatisation. While both cities struggle to implement truly collective transport systems, Preston offers more hope that future efforts may shape solutions.

Chapter 5 - Spatial and Physical Infrastructure

This chapter examines how spatial organisation and physical infrastructure impact alternative transport systems. As outlined in the literature review, urban space is predominantly designed around cars, with public spaces increasingly shaped by the individualistic ideology of car dependency (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Sennett, 1977). However, drawing upon the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]), alternative transport systems have the potential to reclaim urban space and return it to communities. The chapter analyses policy documents and interview data to assess how these systems challenge or reinforce individualism, applying criteria of *affordability, reliability and accessibility*; *ownership and control*; and *modal shift.*

5.1 Affordability, Reliability and Accessibility

Although less easily applicable than direct policy around ticket pricing, for example, this criterion can still be applied to physical and spatial infrastructure. To implement successful alternative transport systems that challenge individualism, investment is needed in spaces and infrastructure that make this transport more affordable, reliable and accessible. However, due to limited council control over fares and pricing, affordability is less influenced by spatial planning and infrastructure,. Therefore, this section focuses on reliability and accessibility, which are more directly shaped by spatial planning and infrastructure.

Preston recognises inefficiencies in public transport space use and the need for infrastructural changes to improve reliability and accessibility (PCC, 2019). The council also addresses the accessibility of public and pedestrianised spaces, consistently highlighting the needs of those with visual impairments or disabilities (PCC, 2019, pp. 89, 113). In Milton Keynes, there is some recognition of the need to improve spatial design and infrastructure to enhance reliability and accessibility. The Bus Improvement Plan (MKCC, 2024a) acknowledges a lack of political will to reallocate space for buses and notes that the current layout of bus stops is disjointed and inaccessible, making bus journeys less convenient. Additionally, the council highlights that the Redways cycling

network lacks clear visual segregation from roads, increasing safety concerns and reducing the reliability and accessibility of cycling (MKCC, 2023).

Recognising these issues, PCC dedicates a full section of its transport policy, ‘Great Streets and Spaces’, to spatial transformation (PCC, 2019, pp. 89–113). One such action addresses connectivity to Preston station, proposing the creation of ‘Railway Bridge Square’, a pedestrianised area improving access for train passengers. Restricting nearby streets to buses and taxis would also reduce congestion and improve reliability on journeys to and from the station (PCC, 2019, p. 97). Preston also proposes ‘bus priority routes’, where infrastructure prioritises bus movement over private vehicles (PCC, 2019, p. 57). The council argues that dedicated bus lanes enhance reliability and reduce journey times, a point supported by Litman (2016), who links improved bus reliability with increased ridership. PCC reiterates that investment in bus priority infrastructure is key to offering “a viable alternative to car travel” (PCC, 2019, p. 57).

In Milton Keynes, there are also policy proposals directed towards addressing spatial issues that decrease reliability and accessibility. Although not as extensive as Preston, the infrastructure delivery plan highlights policies to review bus stop locations, which would increase accessibility and connectivity (MKCC, 2019). Furthermore, the council highlights how the development of both park and ride and park and pedal schemes would improve access from further outside the city centre, while bus priority infrastructure would address the unreliability of bus services. (MKCC, 2019) However, Milton Keynes falls short of Preston in addressing some accessibility, acknowledging limited stakeholder engagement with disabled people and failing to address their needs in pedestrianised spaces (MKCC, 2023).

Overall, both Preston and Milton Keynes are making efforts to improve how spatial infrastructure supports the reliability and accessibility of journeys, thereby promoting alternative transport systems. Preston's policies aim to enhance public transport reliability through dedicated infrastructure while also considering the accessibility needs of marginalised groups in public space design. Although

Milton Keynes falls short in some aspects, it recognises these gaps and is working to improve both bus stop and route infrastructure to enhance journey reliability. Affordability remains largely unaffected, as it is less easily addressed through spatial planning. However, when evaluated against the criteria of reliability and accessibility, both cities show signs of challenging the spatial dominance of car-based capitalist individualism and fostering more collective, inclusive transport systems.

5.2 Ownership and Control

While developing physical infrastructure and spaces to support alternative transport is crucial, their ownership and control determine whether these spaces and infrastructure promote collectivism or reinforce capitalist individualism. As with the privatisation of public transport, if these spaces are not publicly controlled or designed to serve community needs, the transport systems they support cannot function as truly collective alternatives. In line with (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]) ideas of reclaiming the city from the hands of private capital, these spaces should reclaim space away from car-based individualism and private interests.

In Preston, policy documents highlight that existing urban spaces fall short of meeting community needs, stressing the importance of stakeholder engagement to create more inclusive and functional pedestrian zones (PCC, 2019). PCC also emphasises the need for spatial redesign to address pedestrian isolation and severance in parts of the city. Although Milton Keynes references public space and infrastructure, it places little emphasis on improving ownership or control, nor on reorienting these spaces to better serve community needs. While the Redways are acknowledged as shared spaces, there is limited discussion around community-based ownership (MKCC, 2023).

PCC demonstrates a strong commitment to creating public spaces focused on community needs, emphasising people-centred design and for genuine public use. Proposed ‘civic squares’ are envisioned as pedestrianised meeting points hosting “social events, street theatre and stalls” (PCC, 2019, p. 91). The council also proposes pedestrian-priority streets with minimal traffic and no curbs,

based on the concept of ‘shared surfaces’ aimed at enhancing community cohesion (PCC, 2019, p. 91). This policy is based on ideas of shared surfaces and enhancing community cohesion, highlighting a clear commitment to creating genuinely public spaces while promoting alternative transport systems, such as pedestrianisation While promoting genuinely public spaces and alternative transport, the council also suggests that infrastructure and public space investment may attract commercial development (PCC, 2019, pp. 21, 97), highlighting the involvement of private interests in shaping some urban spaces.

In contrast, Milton Keynes offers significantly less discussion on the ownership or control of public spaces or on improving them for community use. The only policy mentioned is the enhancement of local community connectivity through the pedestrianisation of certain areas, which highlights how the city's grid-style layout can lead to a severance amongst communities (MKCC, 2019, p. 20). Other than this, however, the policy documents make little mention of community control or collective allocation of space for alternative transport systems. Importantly, discussions around infrastructure are primarily focused on private and commercial involvement, with cycling storage and trip-end facilities being managed by commercial employers for their employees, rather than being public or collective infrastructure (MKCC, 2018, p. 9). Once again, this reflects Milton Keynes’ business-focused identity, shaped around economic growth and private companies.

Although both cities have policies to improve spatial and physical infrastructure for alternative transport, the ownership and control of the spaces differ. Preston shows a stronger commitment to ensuring public spaces and pedestrianisation serve the community, emphasising usage and community cohesion. While some private development accompanies this, such investment is difficult to avoid within a capitalist system. Milton Keynes mentions pedestrianisation to enhance community connection, but ultimately falls short, promoting policies that place infrastructure in commercial and private hands. Judged by ownership and control, both cities reinforce capitalist individualism to varying degrees, though Preston shows a more promising shift towards collectively oriented infrastructure that better supports alternative transport systems

5.3 Modal Shift

While the other criteria are essential, spatial and physical infrastructure must first support a modal shift away from cars to truly foster collective transport systems. Most cities, as Sheller and Urry (2000) and Newman and Kenworthy (1999) highlight, are designed around cars, creating self-replicating cycles of car dependency. Therefore, to truly shift towards alternative transport systems, spatial and physical infrastructure must reduce car usage and instead be based around collective alternative transport systems

PCC highlights that the city's spatial design is overly car-focused, consistently critiquing the 'Ring Way' - a highway-style road that cuts through the centre and hinders shifts away from car dependency (PCC, 2019, pp. 43, 53, 111). The council also criticises car parking issues, where improper parking disrupts pedestrianisation and cycle lanes (PCC, 2019, p. 112). Similarly, Milton Keynes acknowledges that its car-centric grid system creates car dominance, significantly hindering other transport modes (MKCC, 2023). Policy documents also note that bus stops along grid roads are difficult to use (MKCC, 2024a) and that creating direct cycle routes across wide roads is a major challenge (MKCC, 2023).

As a result of this recognition, PCC is promoting a range of policies to encourage modal shift by transforming physical infrastructure and public space. For example, one key proposal aims to reduce car use and optimise space by narrowing roads, lowering speed limits, and closing side streets (PCC, 2019, p. 81). Other PCC policies include limiting city-centre parking (p. 67), cracking down on illegal parking (p. 113), and reducing urban sprawl by focusing new developments around alternative transport (p. 65). The restriction of cars and pedestrianisation of key retail street 'Friargate' is another example of active efforts to reduce spatial car dependency. These are not just policy promises either, as noted by Academic 1, who emphasised that:

> "Transport's been positively encouraged, a move away from private cars. If you go to Preston, the streets have changed. There's more emphasis on pavements and walking. What used to be two-way streets have become one-way streets, and some of them are restricted to buses only" (Academic 1, Interview)

However, the Preston City Council Member highlighted ongoing challenges:

> "But at the same time, there's a big, you know, car lobby, who don't want bus lanes, they don't want cycle lanes" (Preston City Council Member, Interview)

As highlighted by Luger (2000) and Hamer (1988), the car lobby can disrupt moves away from car-based urban planning and genuine modal shift, something which would likely not be discussed in the policy documents.

Although not as substantially as Preston, Milton Keynes has made some efforts to move away from car-centric spatial planning. The council proposes reducing car dependency by banning cars in parts of central Milton Keynes or creating bus-only routes (MKCC, 2019). However, significant changes to encourage modal shift are lacking. The council prioritises investment in EV charging infrastructure (MKCC, 2018, pp. 8-9), which reinforces car dependency rather than reducing it. MKCC even proposes expanding the grid-style system (MKCC, 2018, p. 5), further entrenching individualised car-based planning, despite acknowledging its drawbacks. While Milton Keynes' car-centricity partly stems from its historical urban model, current policies that further entrench car dependency suggest political will, rather than structural constraints, remains the main barrier to change.

Ultimately, Preston demonstrates a much stronger commitment to moving away from car-centric infrastructure. While the car lobby may influence some planning reforms, interviews confirm that policies outlined in Preston's planning documents are being actively implemented. These documents consistently advocate for redesigning urban spaces not only to reduce car use but also to support and promote collective alternative modes of transport. Although Milton Keynes acknowledges issues with urban design and car dependency and has introduced some policies aimed at addressing them,

the scale of change remains limited. Certain policies risk reinforcing, rather than challenging, car dependency and fail to support a meaningful modal shift. Therefore, in terms of modal shift, Preston contests capitalist individualism through spatial reforms, while Milton Keynes largely maintains car dependency.

5.4 Chapter Review

Both cities have made efforts to promote alternative transport over car use, but differ in extent and approach. Preston shows a stronger commitment, improving spatial reliability and accessibility while prioritising community-focused public spaces over car-centric design. Although capitalist forces such as the car lobby and private developments continue to influence, interviews suggest Preston's policies are making an impact. In contrast, Milton Keynes recognises issues with car-centric design but makes limited attempts to address them. Investments in alternative transport infrastructure exist, but continued prioritisation of car infrastructure and reliance on private actors undermine progress. Although both cities still operate within a limiting capitalist framework, Preston offers a hopeful example of how urban space and infrastructure can be reimagined to support collective transport systems.

Chapter 6 - Perceptions and Attitudes

This chapter explores how social and cultural perceptions and attitudes shape the capacity of alternative transport systems to challenge capitalist individualism. As the literature shows, cars are often seen as status symbols and expressions of personal freedom (Gartman, 2004; 2013), while alternative transport modes are frequently linked to lower social status (Guiver, 2007). Drawing on policy documents and a larger body of interview data, this chapter evaluates whether alternative transport systems reinforce or resist individualism in a social and cultural sense. The analysis uses the criteria of *affordability, reliability and accessibility*; *ownership and contro*l; and *modal shift*

6.1 Affordability, Reliability and Accessibility

Perceptions and attitudes towards alternative transport are shaped by this criterion. When transport is affordable, reliable and accessible, it fosters more positive attitudes toward collective alternative transport systems. Failing to meet these standards reinforces cultural car dependency, as alternatives continue to be perceived negatively. To shift towards collective alternatives, these systems must not only be affordable, reliable and accessible, but also perceived that way.

In Preston, policy documents acknowledge the negative public perceptions of alternative transport. Buses are seen as slow and unreliable, a view the council recognises will persist without intervention. (PCC, 2019, p. 57). Cycling is similarly perceived as unsafe due to car dominance, contributing to its perception as unreliable. In Milton Keynes, poor satisfaction with bus services has contributed to declining ridership (MKCC, 2024a). The Bus Service Improvement Plan also identifies public priorities like more frequent services and lower fares, reflecting perceptions of buses as unaffordable and unreliable. Cycling and walking on the Redways are also seen as unsafe for women due to the prevalence of underpasses beneath grid roads, highlighting accessibility concerns around walking at night (MKCC, 2023).

To combat negative perceptions and attitudes, PCC aims to foster a meaningful shift in transport culture. Rather than simply promoting cycling, the council encourages the building of a cycling

culture where cycling is normalised from a young age. Measures such as cycle confidence training are also proposed to address perceived accessibility barriers and encourage wider uptake (PCC, 2019). However, beyond cycling measures, there is little discussion of shifting transport culture and attitudes.

Surprisingly, Milton Keynes outlines a broader range of policies aimed at shifting perceptions of alternative transport. To improve the image of buses, the council plans social media campaigns promoting public transport as attractive and modern. They also aim to boost confidence in reliability and accessibility by expanding the use of live bus time displays across the network (MKCC, 2024a). To address perceptions of inaccessibility and safety on the Redways, MKCC proposes enhancing underpasses with lighting, local art, and community engagement, alongside creating a public brand with clear signage and maps to make walking and cycling seem more accessible (MKCC, 2023, p. 53). To foster a cycling culture, the council plans free or low-cost bike loan schemes, challenging perceptions of cycling as unaffordable (MKCC, 2019, p. 32).

Overall, when it comes to addressing the perceptions and attitudes towards alternative transport systems through the lens of affordability, reliability and accessibility, Preston falls short of delivering meaningful change. Although PCC recognises the negative public perception of bus services, it offers few concrete policies to address these views. The primary effort lies in fostering a cycling culture, which, while important, only addresses perceived issues of accessibility. In contrast, despite falling behind in other chapters, Milton Keynes appears to be more proactive in reshaping public perceptions of affordability, reliability and accessibility. Its policies, from social media campaigns to a low-cost bike loan scheme, represent a broader strategy to change how alternative transport is seen. While cultural perceptions of cars remain challenging, Milton Keynes ultimately does more than Preston here to reframe alternative transport as a viable and collective choice, challenging the individualistic logic of car dominance.

6.2 Ownership and Control

As well as perceptions of affordable, reliable and accessible transport, it is important to improve perceptions and attitudes towards more collectively owned systems of control. Without popular support for community-based or collective ownership and control, there will be less demand for a shift away from the privatised logics of capitalist individualism. For this criterion, the policy documents offer significantly less insight, therefore, the analysis draws largely upon interviews.

In Preston's policy documents, the perception of private ownership in alternative transport systems is only briefly addressed. PCC discusses the deregulated bus market, criticising how it results in fragmented and poorly connected services. It highlights that passengers often find privately operated bus services confusing due to the lack of integrated apps and ticketing, leading to a disjointed experience (PCC, 2019). This critique suggests that private ownership contributes to a perception of inefficiency and lack of cohesion. In Milton Keynes, there is similarly limited attention given to public perceptions regarding private ownership of transport systems. As noted, stakeholder engagement revealed public concern around high bus fares. Although fare pricing is the responsibility of private operators (White, 2019), it would be speculative to assume that dissatisfaction with pricing directly translates into a broader critique of private ownership itself.

For further insight into perceptions of ownership models in Preston, we must draw on interview data. Academic 2 highlighted the paradoxical nature of attitudes towards public ownership:

> "People don't like the idea of private companies profiting off public services, I don't think. … but in my view, there's an uncertainty about public ownership. So it's a bit paradoxical really" (Academic 2, Interview)

This reflects the extent to which capitalist individualism has affected the psyche of the public, hindering genuine ownership changes when the public struggles to move past these perceptions. Despite these conflicting public perceptions, Academic 1 provides some hope for collective ownership models. Discussing a group promoting cycling in Preston, he described their collective nature:

> "We have a group that's seeking to become a cooperative, that is called Preston Pedals. And Pedals is promoting the use of cycling and carbon-efficient ways of getting around Preston, by offering, for example, free maintenance … and it hasn't just organised itself as a collective. It's organising itself as a cooperative. And that speaks to the basic principles of the Preston model that are based on cooperative values and principles" (Academic 1, Interview)

Here, we see how the principles of Manley and Whyman's (2021) Preston Model sets Preston apart, indicating not only a promotion of alternative transport systems through cycling, but doing it in a collective way that challenges the logics of capitalist individualism and negative perceptions of collective transport.

In contrast, there is little data from Milton Keynes on perceptions of ownership, partly due to a lack of interview request responses, perhaps reflective of a lack of interest in discussing more collectively oriented transport systems. However, the Transport Consultant's interview provided insight into the DRT scheme introduced by MKCC, which cut bus services in favour of a privately operated transport system that is subsidised by the local council. With regards to DRT's ownership in Milton Keynes, he highlighted that there is little perception of this being a collectively oriented service, implying the council's lack of interest in public ownership when setting up the DRT scheme:

> "There is no evidence that co-operation or community ownership had any role in their thinking whatsoever. You know, they're not particularly co-operatively minded, I don't think" (Transport Consultant, Interview)

Although the data from Milton Keynes is limited, the difference in attitudes toward ownership and control in transport systems is nonetheless evident. In Preston, while there may not be unanimous support for full public ownership, there is a clear critical stance toward privatisation and a shift towards more collective thinking around transport provision. This is reflected both in policy documents and interview data. In contrast, Milton Keynes shows a notable absence of engagement

with these themes. The lack of responsiveness to interviews, combined with perceptions of DRT, suggests limited consideration of collective or community-led models of ownership. Ultimately, it is clear that Preston's more cooperative and community-oriented outlook presents a greater challenge to capitalist individualism within transport systems, whereas Milton Keynes largely maintains the status quo, aligning more closely with the individualistic capitalist logic of privatisation.

6.3 Modal Shift

As explored in previous chapters, achieving modal shift is a fundamental necessity for the development of alternative transport systems. Crucially, this shift requires broad social and cultural support. It is only when the deeply embedded cultural attachments to private cars are challenged that effective moves towards collective, alternative transport systems can be made. While ownership models and the provision of affordable, reliable, and accessible alternatives are essential for increasing ridership, it is ultimately behavioural change, shaped by public perceptions and attitudes, that underpins all of these factors.

While PCC's discussion of car dependence does not directly discuss attitudes and perceptions towards a modal shift away from the car, it does highlight that the main reasoning for people travelling by car is the lack of alternatives or urban planning choices. This implies a reduced role for the perception of cars as a necessity. In Milton Keynes, there is also a limited discussion of car dependency beyond the realm of urban spatial planning, with minimal recognition of the issues surrounding perceptions or attitudes towards cars.

To challenge perceptions of cars as a societal necessity, PCC proposes several policies. While councils can influence urban environments through spatial redesign or infrastructure investment, reshaping cultural norms is a complex, long-term process. PCC emphasises that increasing pedestrianisation can shift public attitudes, citing the pedestrianisation of Fishergate as leading to greater acceptance of non-car use and supporting modal shift (PCC, 2019, p. 21). The council also promotes behavioural change through a travel demand management strategy, aiming to raise

awareness of alternatives and encourage people to “re-mode car trips, wherever and whenever possible” (PCC, 2019, p. 65). These initiatives demonstrate an active effort to reshape public perceptions and increase awareness of viable alternatives to car use, thereby facilitating broader cultural and behavioural shifts that support modal shift.

As with ownership and governance, Milton Keynes shows limited engagement with fostering modal shifts through changing perceptions and attitudes. While earlier sections highlight efforts to improve the perceived affordability, reliability, and accessibility of alternatives, fewer initiatives target public attitudes towards car use. One indirect challenge to car dominance is the attempt to improve perceptions of the Redways, making them a more attractive alternative (MKCC, 2023, p. 22). However, this still focuses on enhancing alternatives rather than actually influencing perceptions that limit car use. As with Preston, it is important to acknowledge that widespread cultural change is difficult for councils to achieve alone. Nevertheless, Milton Keynes’s lack of explicit efforts to reshape car perceptions suggests a deeper cultural attachment to private vehicle use, perhaps rooted in historical car-dependency and individualist attitudes.

Overall, both cities face challenges shifting perceptions around modal change. As explored within Walker, Tapp, and Davis’s (2023, p. 3) discussion of ‘motornormaity’, the deeply entrenched role of the car within a capitalist and individualist society makes this transition difficult. Nevertheless, Preston introduces policies that actively aim to shift public attitudes away from car dependency, signalling a move towards more collective alternative transport systems. In contrast, Milton Keynes makes little effort to challenge car-centric perceptions, thereby reinforcing its alignment with a transport system rooted in capitalist individualism

6.4 Chapter Review

This chapter highlights the contrasting efforts of Preston and Milton Keynes to shift attitudes towards cars and alternative transport. While changing perceptions is a complex challenge for local councils, both cities attempt to engage with this issue. Preston, while falling short of Milton Keynes on affordability, reliability and accessibility, challenges individualistic ownership models and attempts to promote modal shift. In contrast, Milton Keynes does little to shift attitudes around ownership or car dependency, and limited data suggests minimal success in improving perceptions of collective alternative transport. While both cities struggle to challenge the deep-rooted cultural and psychological grip of capitalist individualism in transport attitudes, Preston provides some grounds for optimism.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This research analysed how alternative transport systems reinforce the entrenched, car-based logic of capitalist individualism or work to foster collective alternatives. This was explored through a comparative case study of two UK cities - Preston and Milton Keynes - enabling a focused analysis. The analysis was structured across three thematic chapters and evaluated against three key criteria as outlined in the methodology and Appendix I. The research drew on policy documents and interviews to assess how each city's transport systems challenged or upheld capitalist individualism

One recurring theme that emerged from this research was the structural dominance of capitalist individualism, which undermines efforts to develop collective transport alternatives. This influence operates through mechanisms such as private bus operators, the automobile industry's lobbying strength and widespread individualistic psychological attachments to cars. These barriers to change are frequently highlighted by literature, exploring how privatised, car-based transport systems reproduce capitalist ideologies (Mattioli et al., 2020; Paterson, 2007; Gartman, 2004). A less documented finding, however, was the divergence between the two case studies: Preston and Milton Keynes. Although operating under the same national framework, Preston pursues a collective strategy, while Milton Keynes remains more individualistic. This suggests car dependency and transport individualism, while widespread, are not uniformly experienced across urban contexts. These findings challenge dominant US-based perspectives (Muller, 2017; Pucher and Lefèvre, 1997), which portray car-based individualism as homogenous. As part of this, Preston stands out as a site of local resistance. Although unable to dismantle capitalist structures entirely, its transport policies prioritise public needs and collective values. This challenges Dalleys' (1996) assertion that collectively oriented communities cannot exist within capitalism, showing how collective models can persist despite systemic pressures. Although some scholars (Aldred, 2010; Bovo, Briata and Bricocoli, 2022) explore individualism and collectivism within specific transport modes, this research also addresses the gap in providing a more holistic analysis across multiple modes. It also built on limited literature discussing the individualism–collectivism dichotomy within transport (Ashmore et al., 2019; Dingil et al., 2019), offering a deeper analysis of how these perspectives shape local policy.

While the analysis explores the nuances of alternative transport systems within a capitalist framework, it is not perfect.. The key limitation was the lack of interview data from Milton Keynes. Although policy documents provided insight, interviews added significant depth to the Preston case study. With more qualitative insight from Milton Keynes, a more complex picture could have emerged, potentially challenging the city's consistent attachment to individualism and car dependency, and highlighting a more meaningful shift towards collective alternative transport systems.

The findings highlight the deep entrenchment of capitalist individualism within transport systems, but also point to the potential for local challenges to emerge. The case of Milton Keynes demonstrates that even alternative transport initiatives can reinforce individualism through privatisation and feedback loops that sustain car dependency. Achieving more collective systems ultimately depends on political decisions made by local councils. Crucially, it is the implementation of alternative transport systems that determines whether they challenge or reproduce individualism.

Building on this research, future studies could use the framework developed here to investigate how individualism can be challenged through alternative transport systems across the UK. Analysing systems against the criteria outlined would allow for a critical evaluation, ensuring that they are held to genuinely collective standards. As the UK government moves towards greater public control of buses (Bus Services Bill, 2025) and efforts around pedestrianisation continue to grow (Newman and Kenworthy, 2011), this study and further research could provide valuable insight into creating transport policy where collective alternative systems serve communities rather than individuals and private interests.

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Appendix A

PRESTON

Criteria → Themes ↓	Affordability, reliability and accessibility	Ownership and Control	Modal Shift
Policy and Funding			
Spatial and Physical Infrastructure			
Perceptions and Attitudes			

MILTON KEYNES

Criteria → Themes ↓	Affordability, reliability and accessibility	Ownership and Control	Modal Shift
Policy and Funding			
Spatial and Physical Infrastructure			
Perceptions and Attitudes			