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## Should Wikipedia be embraced by the transport profession as an influential source of information on transport issues?

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### Abstract

Like it or not, Wikipedia has become an influential source of information for the public and for professionals on many subjects, including transport. Enter either 'high speed 2' or 'peak car' (a debate of increasing academic interest) into Google and the associated Wikipedia articles are ranked second and first respectively (10th July 2012). Such observations provide the context for this paper, which explores the implications of Wikipedia's increasing presence for the transport planning and research community.

The paper begins with a general review of academic studies of Wikipedia, uncovering the contested and unresolved debates around Wikipedia's credibility. The review reveals: the altruistic motivations of Wikipedia contributors; the remarkably small number of contributors accounting for most Wikipedia content; the internal hyper-linking that drives the high ranking of Wikipedia articles in search engine results; and, most significantly, the way Wikipedia is now being embraced as a mainstream information source in other disciplines – for example being widely used by both patients and doctors in relation to medicine.

The paper goes on to explore the extent to which Wikipedia is becoming a repository of transport knowledge. An audit of Wikipedia content confirms that the majority of nationally significant transport infrastructure schemes and transport debates (since the 1998 transport White Paper) are both covered on Wikipedia and the associated articles are ranked highly by Google. More detailed article case studies reveal the expected link between official information releases and increased article viewing and editing. Interviews with selected transport planners and researchers underpin the hypothesis that Wikipedia is indeed regularly read by transport professionals, but the professional community has not yet widely engaged in adding or editing Wikipedia content. On the basis of this exploration, the paper concludes by repeating Nature's (2005) call for transport professionals and researchers to "read Wikipedia cautiously and amend it enthusiastically".