

**BLAME GAMES AND CLIMATE CHANGE:
ACCOUNTABILITY, MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE
AND CARBON MANAGEMENT**

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*Paper to be presented to the Public Policy Group,
London School of Economics and Political Science,
on Thursday 21 Feb. 2013.*

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KEYWORDS

*Fuzzy Accountability; Blame Games; Depoliticization;
Governance; Transport; Climate Change; Leadership*

‘As climate change has moved from the possible to the probable’ Dieter Helm and Cameron Hepburn note ‘and as scientists have both refined our knowledge of the processes and the predictions of the consequences, climate-change policy *has not kept pace* [emphasis added]’.¹ Anthony Giddens goes as far to suggest that ‘we have no politics of climate change’, whilst David Orr argues that a combination of political negligence and a disdain for the wellbeing of future generations have brought global society to a crucial tipping-out.² The question these studies – and many others – promote is ‘why has so little been achieved?’ Theoretically this paper seeks to engage with this question by drawing upon the concept of multi-level governance but in a way that is sensitive to the politics of *blame-avoidance*. Empirically it deploys a case study of the changing interplay between central and local government in the United Kingdom (UK) in relation to sustainable transport and carbon emissions reduction. The existence of a statutory and ambitious target for carbon reductions, under the *Climate Change Act 2008*, alongside measures that have sought to decentralise powers to the local level, under the *Localism Act 2011*, make the UK a particularly attractive case study of MLG in general, and the politics of climate change, in particular.³

What this research reveals is an *accountability vacuum* within an increasingly complex architecture of MLG; despite the existence of a high-profile statutory target at the national level detailed research reveals that although there is a *top-down* delegation of responsibility for transport emissions management to local authorities there are no *bottom-up* systems of accountability anywhere in the UK for interventions in transport governance that are explicitly connected to a national target. If anything the research reveals a complex architecture of ‘fuzzy governance’ and ‘fuzzy accountability’ that when set against the literature on ‘blames games’ and ‘blame avoidance’ begins to suggest that politicians may create or tolerate increasingly complex and fluid governance structures as a rational self-defense mechanism when faced with apparently intractable socio-political challenges. More specifically, what this research reveals is a lack of meta-governance for delivering carbon reductions and a sophisticated awareness

• The authors would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council. [Grant Ref. ES/J007439/1 ‘Multi-Level Governance, Transport Policy and Carbon Emissions Management’].

¹ Helm, D and Hepburn, C. 2009. *The Economics and Politics of Climate Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.1

² Giddens, A. 2009. *The Politics of Climate Change*, Cambridge: Polity, p.4; Orr, D. *Down to the Wire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ The aim being to reduce emissions by at least 80% by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels) and by at least 26% by 2020. In Scotland these targets have been taken further with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 setting an ‘interim target’ of a 42% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

amongst actors in the delivery chain about the manner in which the nature of democratic politics (i.e. short-term, risk averse, etc.) frustrates the pace of reform (*cf.* Helm and Hepburn, above). As such this paper attempts to make a distinctive contribution to the existing research base in at least five ways.

1. *Theoretically: Although the concept of multi-level governance has emerged as a dominant concept within political science (and beyond) very few studies have focused specifically on the issue of accountable governance and none have sought to integrate the insights of ‘the politics of blame avoidance’.*⁴
2. *Technically: A great deal of scientific, technical and economic research and analysis has been undertaken in relation to climate change mitigation in transport very little has drawn upon the insights of political science.*
3. *Empirically: Studies that examine the implementation of policy in domestic contexts, given the different political and administrative structures and the trend towards decentralization of powers to provincial and local authorities, remain exceptional.*⁵
4. *Temporally: The paper provides the first detailed analysis of recent reforms in the UK that have sought to shift the balance of power towards local governance which, in turn, raise broader questions about ‘credible commitment’ dilemmas.*
5. *Normatively: By seeking to emphasise the politics of climate change and suggesting that the existence of ‘fuzzy governance’ and ‘fuzzy accountability’ produce certain benefits for politicians this paper challenges depoliticised accounts of MLG.*

A multi-levelled account of *this paper* might therefore identify three inter-related analytical levels or lenses that are deployed in relation to a case study of carbon management in the UK transport sector (Table 1, below).

Table 1. A Multi-Levelled Paper

	<i>Analytical Lens</i>	<i>Emphasis</i>	<i>Key References</i>
Macro	Politics of climate change and the limits of democracy	The basis of democratic politics on the maintenance of popular support within a relatively short electoral cycle builds in short-termism and creates incentives for politicians avoid making tough (i.e. unpopular) decisions.	Shearman, D. & Smith, J. <i>The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy</i> , 2008.
Meso	Multi-level governance	The capacity of national politicians to control a range of functions and policy areas has become less direct due to a combination of increasingly complex bureaucratic structures (above and below the nation state) and the existence of a range of challenges that defy geographical boundaries.	Piattoni, S. <i>Multi-Level Governance</i> , 2010.

⁴ For a discussion of this failure to adequately examine the *politics* of multi-level governance, especially as it relates to sustainable development, see Bulkley, H and Betsill, M. 2005. ‘Rethinking Sustainable Cities: Multilevel Governance and the ‘Urban’ Politics of Climate Change’, *Environmental Politics*, 14(1), 42-63.

⁵ Gupta, J. 2007. ‘The Multi-Level Governance Challenge of Climate Change’, *Environmental Sciences*, 4(3), 131.

Micro	Blame avoidance and blame games	Politicians will prioritise the avoidance of blame over the taking of credit.	Hood, C. <i>The Blame Game</i> , 2011.
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At root what this paper leaves the reader with is a suggestion of *complexity as a form of statecraft*. Or, put slightly differently, a picture of complexity by accident and by design; *accident* in the sense that climate change is a complex socio-political issue that does not respect political borders, is the focus of debates regarding cause and effect, which intersects with a number of related global challenges (over-population, resource-depletion, etc.), is largely invisible to the public (and therefore easy to ignore), and cannot be successfully addressed by any single actor (i.e. it demands an effective politics of MLG); but *design* in the sense that the climate change challenge will – at some point – demand that elected politicians take unpopular decisions. This is a critical point. At the heart of the politics of climate change is less an issue of institutions and structures and more of an issue of political will. ‘Some policies will have to have a hard edge to them’ Giddens admits ‘many will be unpopular and actively resisted’.⁶ The insight offered by this paper is the manner in which the construction or toleration of *fuzzy governance* structures facilitate a form of *fuzzy accountability* in which the problem of ‘many hands’ creates a valuable shield for elected politicians. The case-study research presented in this paper concerning the levels of multi-levelled complexity and the absence of a clear, explicit or integrated accountability system for the governance of transport or carbon emissions adds weight to this argument.

This is clearly (and explicitly) a wide-ranging paper and, like painting on a large canvas, this has required the use of a fairly broad brush, in analytical and empirical terms. Nevertheless it is hoped that by locating the climate change challenge within the parameters of debates concerning (*inter alia*) democratic theory, MLG and blame-games that this paper will stimulate more scholarly interest in this topic, thereby filling-in the detail and achieving a more fine-grained understanding. This paper is divided into five sections. The first section provides a brief account of the climate change challenge in order to underline its multi-dimensional characteristics and the position of transport-related emissions as a key contributor to CO₂ emissions. The second section focuses on the concept of MLG as an analytical tool through which to understand the labyrinthine institutional architecture of modern governance. The third section then *reflects-back* on the concept of MLG as it is currently understood and applied and suggests that the approach is in many ways strangely *depoliticized* in the sense that it assumes complexity, networks and ‘fuzzy governance’ are to a great extent inevitable (while this paper argues they *may* be manufactured or sustained). In order to develop this line of argument and *politicize* MLG, the third section draws-upon the field of accountability studies, in general, and a seam of scholarship on blame-avoidance, blame-games and blame-boomerangs in order to sensitize students of MLG to the role of agency. The theoretical formula is therefore one of almost primitive simplicity: MLG [*emphasizing structure*] + blame-shifting [*emphasizing politics*] = MLG-*plus* [*a more politicized account of complexity as an approach to statecraft*]. With these theoretical foundations in place the fourth section examines the changing governance of transport-related carbon emissions management within the UK through a detailed analysis of transport policy in four major cities (Leeds, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow) between 2010-2012. This reveals a significant governance ‘gap’ or ‘vacuum’ when it comes to linking and incentivizing local activities with national targets. The findings of this research resonate with the critical report of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) in May 2012 that found local authorities insufficiently embedded in an explicit and coherent delivery framework.⁷ The political rationale for not closing this ‘gap’ or filling this ‘vacuum’ provides

⁶ Giddens, *op cit.* 2009. p.22

⁷ Committee on Climate Change. 2012. *How local authorities can reduce emissions and manage climate risk*, London: CCC.

the hook that to some extent the whole of this paper hangs. However, in order to explain the reasons and implications of this conclusion it is necessary to step-back and reflect upon the broader climate change challenge.

I. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE

As Jared Diamond's *Collapse* (2005), Elizabeth Kolbert's *Field Notes from Catastrophe* (2007), Alistair McIntosh's *Hell and High Water* (2008) and Clive Hamilton's *Requiem for a Species* (2010) – to mention just a few leading texts – emphasise with unnerving clarity, the climate change challenge can no longer be either denied or ignored. Just as the once vocal pool of climate change sceptics has largely melted away so a vast reservoir of data and evidence regarding the growth of CO₂ in the atmosphere and warming sea temperatures has become compelling. Numerous detailed accounts of this data exist and it is sufficient for the purposes of this section to focus on the David Keeling's longitudinal analysis of CO₂ levels in the atmosphere and Peter Wadham's work on summer sea ice in the Arctic. As Diagram 1 illustrates, atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ increased consistently and significantly during the second half of the twentieth century. Diagram 2 puts the Keeling Curve in context and reveals the manner in which for most of the last millennium – that is, before the industrial revolution - CO₂ levels were relatively stable at around 280ppm.

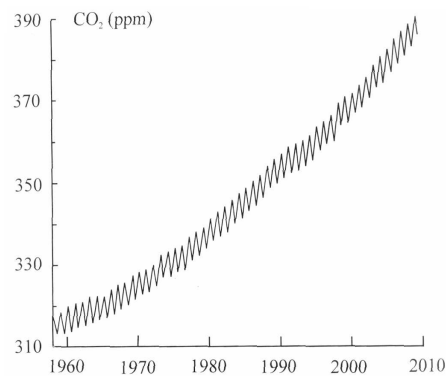


Diagram 1 The Keeling Curve 1958-2010

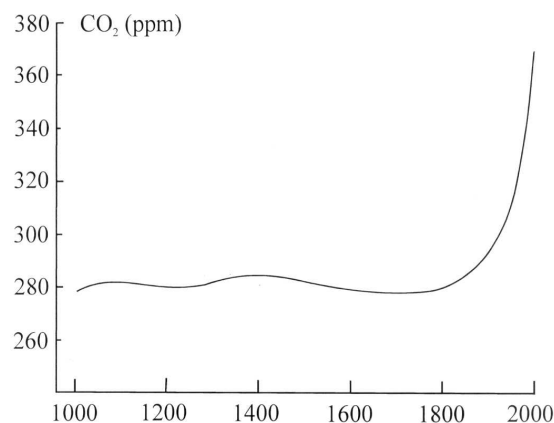


Diagram 2 The Long View

Both the long and short-term scientific perspectives point to the fact that CO₂ levels are increasing at a rate of around 20ppm per decade which is a level far beyond nature's built-in compensatory capacities and the evidence for this is reflected in the shrinking polar ice caps. In 2007 the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that unless emissions were drastically curbed globally the Arctic Ocean would be clear of summer sea ice by the end of the century. Five years later research suggests that this prediction was hopelessly optimistic. In September 2012 Arctic sea ice hit its lowest level ever recorded, at 3.41 million square kilometers. The area of sea ice that has vanished is 41 times the size of the island of Ireland. Not only had the coverage of the sea ice shrunk to barely half the 1979-2000 average size, its volume had declined by seventy-two percent (i.e. ice cover had shrunk while also becoming much thinner). Peter Wadhams, Director of the Polar Ocean Physics Group, described these findings as a 'global disaster' and suggested that the Arctic sea ice will probably have disappeared by 2015-2016. The climate change challenge is therefore multi-faceted and multi-barbed. *Multi-faceted* in the sense that a variety of anthropogenic (i.e. man made) factors appear to have created positive-feedback loops which accentuate the challenge (deforestation reduces the Earth's capacity to convert CO₂ into organic compounds through photosynthesis, shrinking ice sheets reduce the capacity of the ice albedo affect, population growth creates demands that require energy-intensive land use policies, etc.). *Multi-barbed* in the sense that the climate change challenge is at root a political challenge that spans at last five dimensions (see Table 2, below):

Table 2. Five Dimensions of the Climate Change Challenge

1.	The climate change challenge focuses attention on the institutions, structures and mechanisms of multi-level governance.
2.	There is no easy solution to this complex problem (there are no technological solutions, quick fixes, easy wins or magic potions).
3.	At some point politicians will be required to take unpopular decisions.
4.	The dynamics of political competition and rationality rarely embrace the taking of unpopular decisions.
5.	A surge of increasingly apocalyptic research and writing suggests that doing nothing is not an option.

The main aim of this section has not been to provide an authoritative or detailed account of climactic change or modeling but simply to provide a taste of what the data suggests as background context to this paper's main focus on *the politics* of climate change and its detailed analysis of carbon emissions management and city-led transport policies in the UK. If David Orr is correct that 'We presently have no system of governance adequate to the stresses and challenges of the century ahead... There is no escaping the fact that we are entering the opening years of difficult times with no adequate political framework or philosophy' then the aim of this paper is to look beneath such conclusions and understand *why* we have no politics of climate change (*qua* Giddens, above), *why* has so little been achieved (*qua* Helm and Hepburn, above) and – more broadly - *what* this tells us about politics, governance and democracy in the twenty-first century.⁸ It is for exactly this reason that the next section focuses on the concept of multi-level governance as an analytical tool through which to engage with many of these questions.

II. MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

In 2012 a University of Oxford-led scanning study of the existing research base on climate change, energy and transport-related issues concluded that the field had become polarised into 'technical versus behavioural' perspectives. The former focused on mechanical, technological

⁸ Orr, D 2009. *Down to the Wire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and scientific discoveries in the hope of averting the need for far-reaching changes in the distribution or use of resources; whereas the latter concentrates on economic and rational-choice theoretic approaches that focused on individual responses to social problems but arguably over-looked broader socio-political dimensions.⁹ The ‘overwhelming recommendation’ of the report- and all those that had contributed to it - was a need for,

[R]esearch to be undertaken in transport which captures the full extent of governance processes, policy networks and the politics of infrastructure and place, which moves beyond the slightly naïve view of policy as ‘something the public authorities do’ to understand all the actors involved at multiple geographical scales.¹⁰

The simple argument of this section is that MLG provides a valuable analytical tool through which to capture and map ‘all the actors involved at multiple geographical scales’ and to begin to move beyond simplistic statements regarding the capacity of the state or the role of politicians and instead highlight the existence of ‘chains of delegation’ (both vertically and horizontally), the need for political leadership and network management and (critically) the role of accountability mechanisms as a tool of governance. The aim of this section is therefore to briefly explore the concept of MLG before developing a critique and a refined model (i.e. *MLG-plus*) in the next section.

From Gary Marks first use of the term in 1992 through to Henrik Enderlein, Sonja Walti and Michael Zurn’s *Handbook on Multi-Level Governance* twenty years later – with Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks’ *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* (2001), Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders’ *Multi-Level Governance* (2004) and Simona Piattoni’s *The Theory of Multi-Level Governance* (2010) providing influential stepping-stones in between¹¹ – the core essence of MLG can arguably be reduced-down to five core points of emphasis (Table 3, below).

Table 3. Five Dimensions of Multi-Level Governance

	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Focus</i>
1.	Although national states remain central actors their <i>capacity for direct control and intervention has waned</i> due to the emergence of increasingly long ‘chains of delegation’ and a shift towards the pooling of sovereignty in certain areas. ¹²	<i>Institutions</i>
2.	The delegation of powers, role and responsibilities involves <i>both horizontal and vertical dimensions</i> and is therefore inevitably linked to concerns regarding the ‘hollowing-out’ and ‘filling-in’ of the state. ¹³	<i>Capacity</i>
3.	<i>Political arenas are interconnected</i> , both formally and informally, rather than nested and sub-national actors will often participate in supra-national arenas through the creation of trans-national networks. ¹⁴	<i>Relationships</i>
4.	The role of the nation state and of national governments has evolved towards more of an emphasis on ‘ <i>steering rather than rowing</i> ’ (i.e.	<i>Resources</i>

⁹ Anable, J. 2012. *Climate Change, Energy and Transport*, Scanning Study Policy Briefing Note 1. <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/ccet/briefing-note-ja-090212.pdf>

¹⁰ Anable *op cit.* 2012, p.4.

¹¹ See also César de Prado’s *Global Multi-Level Governance* (2007), Fabrice Larat and Beate Kohler-Koch’s *European Multi-Level Governance* (2007), Ian Bache and George Andreou’s *Cohesion Policy and Multi-level Governance in South East Europe* (2010).

¹² See, for example, Bergman, T Muller, W and Strom, K. 2000. *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹³ For a review of these debates see: Bell, S and Hindmoor, A. 2010. *Rethinking Governance*. Cambridge University Press; Davies, J. 2011. *Challenging Governance Theory*. Bristol: Policy Press.

¹⁴ Coen, D, and Thatcher, M. 2008. ‘Network Governance and Multi-Level Delegation’, *Journal of Public Policy*, 28(1), 49-71.

	attempting to manage complex networks) and ‘flexible gate-keeping’ (in the sense of controlling the flow of resources). ¹⁵	
5.	The transition from state-based government to multi-level governance has undermined traditional mechanisms of democratic accountability. ¹⁶	Accountability

Whilst these five points provide a valuable thematic framework it is possible to suggest that MLG remains little more than an ‘organising perspective’ or a ‘proto-theory’ awaiting further theoretical refinement through detailed empirical research. Andrew Jordan, for example, suggests that although the concept provided an ‘appealing picture’ of modern governance it is ‘weak at explaining which levels are the most important and why, and what actually motivated the experiment with governance in the first place’.¹⁷ Paul Stubbs and Simona Piattoni offered a similar critique from a different angle when they questioned whether MLG had become an unfortunate victim of *conceptual stretching* (i.e. the dilution of conceptual precision as it is applied to a greater range of cases).¹⁸ Criticisms such as these fuelled attempts to develop a more refined and focused analytical tool which culminated in the influential work of Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks and their differentiation between ‘two types’ or ‘contrasting visions’ of MLG (see Table 4, below).¹⁹

Table 4. Types of Multi-Level Governance

Type I	Type II
General Purpose Jurisdictions	Task Specific Jurisdictions
Non-Intersecting Memberships	Intersecting Memberships
Jurisdictions at a limited number of levels	No limit to the number of jurisdictional levels
System wide durable architecture	Flexible design
Consolidationism	Polycentricity
Emphasis on Voice	Emphasis on Exit
Communal Identity	Citizen Preferences
Process-based legitimacy	Output-based legitimacy
Layer Cake	Marble Cake
<i>Bundled</i>	<i>Unbundled</i>

Adapted from Hooghe and Marks (2003: 236)

The basic thesis that Hooghe and Marks sought to emphasise and explain was a shift in the nature of modern governance from a traditional emphasis on ‘Type I’ (i.e. *governmental* institutions) towards an increased role for ‘Type II’ bodies (i.e. that dense sphere of agencies, boards, commissions, private and third sector delivery bodies, para-statal and independent regulatory authorities - the institutions of *governance*). Furthermore, beneath this institutional focus lay a set of arguments or assumptions concerning (*inter alia*) changing inter-governmental relationships, new tools of governance, the essence of democratic communities and the shifting boundaries between the public and the private spheres. It is difficult to overstate the influence of Hooghe and Marks contribution to the study of MLG and to some

¹⁵ Bache, I. 1998. *The Politics of European Union Regional Policy: Multi-Level Governance or Flexible Gatekeeping?* London: Contemporary European Studies Series.

¹⁶ Papadopoulos, Y. 2010. ‘Accountability and Multi-Level Governance’, *West European Politics*, 33(5), 1030-1049.

¹⁷ Jordan, A. 2001. ‘The European Union: An Evolving System of Multi-Level Governance... or Government?’, *Policy and Politics*, 29(2), p.204

¹⁸ Stubbs, P. 2005. ‘Stretching Concepts Too Far?’ *Southeast European Politics*, 6(2), 66-87; Piattoni, S. 2009. ‘Multi-Level Governance: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis’, *Journal of European Integration*, 31(2), 162-180; See also Sartori, G. 1970. ‘Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics’, *American Political Science Review* 14 (4), 1033-53.

¹⁹ Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003) ‘Unraveling the Central State, but How?’, *American Political Science Review*, 97 (2), pp. 233-243.

extent their article on ‘unravelling the central state’ set in train a form of intellectual path dependency that has implicitly or (more commonly) explicitly shaped the field for the last decade. As such, studies already exist that have applied the concept of MLG to analyses of transport governance *vis-à-vis* the climate change challenge, some even explicitly drawing-upon Hooghe and Marks’ ‘two types’ approach, but none have focused explicitly on the issue of accountability or have sought to integrate the insights of the blame avoidance literature.²⁰ Furthermore, the element that allows this paper to *take forward and develop* the concept of MLG – and thereby differentiate this paper from the existing research base – is a critique based upon the notion of *depoliticisation*.

Following on from this last point, there is within the broad literature on MLG arguably an underlying assumption regarding the presumed inevitability of increasing complexity. The result - at its most extreme - is little more than a caricature of a centre-less society in which national politicians are buffeted by global trends and challenges but have little capacity to respond due to the pathologies of collective action problems and the challenges of network governance. To make such an argument is to work very much within the contours of Guy Peters and Jon Pierre’s observation that proponents of MLG appeared to have slipped into a rather simplistic view of political institutions and actors as passive, almost to the extent of being irrelevant.²¹ More recent contributions to the debate that resonate with this argument include Stephen Bell and Andrew Hindmoor’s *Rethinking Governance* (2009) and Jonathan Davies’ *Challenging Governance Theory* (2011) which seek to emphasise the capacity of actors and the political dimensions of modern governance. As the OECD’s *Cities, Climate Change and Multi-Level Governance* (2009) makes clear: ‘political leadership has been the most important factor in developing climate action plans’.²² Therefore although the shift in responsibilities from ‘Type 1’ to ‘Type 2’ forms of MLG has stimulated a large debate about the depoliticization of certain functions, powers and responsibilities the point being made is quite different.²³ Our critique of MLG as it is currently conceived rests with its explicit emphasis on contextual change and its implicit assumptions concerning the capacity of actors (in this case politicians) to achieve change that serves - to some extent - to *depoliticize* the sphere to which MLG is applied. The link between this argument and the existing *critical* governance literature is provided by Patrick Le Galès in a review of Davies’ *Challenging Governance Theory* when he describes it as ‘an essential book for the governance debate, an antidote to the enchanted view of depoliticized networks’.²⁴

To study the climate change challenge through the lens of MLG as it is currently conceived therefore risks immediately downplaying the capacity and responsibility of politicians. Or – to put the same point slightly differently – in order to understand why ‘we have no politics of climate change’ - or why so little has apparently been achieved - it is necessary to *politicize*

²⁰ Betshill, M and Bulkeley, H. 2006. ‘Cities and the Multilevel Governance of Global Climate Change’ *Global Governance* 12: 141-159; Bulkeley, H, and Betshill, M.. 2005. ‘Rethinking Sustainable Cities’, *Environmental Politics* 14: 42-63; Smith, A. 2007. ‘Emerging in Between’, *Energy Policy* 35: 6266-6280; Gustavsson, E Elander, I and Lundmark, M. 2009. ‘Multi-level Governance, Networking Cities, and the Geography of Climate-Change Mitigation’ *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 27: 59-74; Marsden, G and Rye, T. 2010. ‘The Governance of Transport and Climate Change’, *Journal of Transport Geography*, 18, 669-678.

²¹ Peters, G and Pierre, J. 2004. ‘Multi-Level Governance and Democracy’, in Bache, I and Flinders, M. eds. *Multi-Level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 75-93.

²² OECD. 2009. *Cities, Climate Change and Multi-Level Governance*. Paris: OECD, p.31.

²³ Gary Marks used his first ever contribution on the topic of MLG to highlight the manner in which the policies of the European Commission ‘attempted to technocratize – and in a narrow sense depoliticize – [structural policy]’. See Marks, G. 1992. ‘Structural Policy in the European Community’, in Sbragia, A ed. *Euro-Politics*. Washington: Brookings Institute, p.212. See also Flinders, M and Buller, J. 2006. ‘Depoliticisation: Principles: Tactics and Tools’, *British Politics*, 1, 293-318; Kassim, H and La Galès, P 2010. ‘Exploring Governance in a Multi-Level Polity’, *West European Politics*, 33(1), 1-21.

²⁴ http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1873419

MLG by drawing-upon a field of scholarship that focuses on how politicians respond to complex socio-political challenges. It is for exactly this reason that the next section seeks to move from MLG to MLG-*plus* by exploiting the insights of a narrow stream of scholarship on the avoidance of blame.

III. BLAME GAMES

Almost a decade ago Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders suggested that ‘the implications of multi-level governance for democratic accountability have been relatively neglected’ and to some extent this remains true today.²⁵ Although the emergence of an ‘accountability gap’ is widely acknowledged within the literature very few studies have focused on this specific theme, its roots, its implications; let alone whether this ‘gap’ has emerged through accident or design.²⁶ What is, however, interesting about the small pool of *specialized* literature on the relationship between MLG and accountability is the manner in which it hints at the use of ‘fuzzy governance’ (and therefore ‘fuzzy accountability’) as a political self-preservation mechanism or, at the very least, as a defensive strategy through which to off-set blame. As such, it leans towards *a more politicized account* of MLG and therefore towards the more full-blooded MLG-*plus* that this section seeks to develop. Deirdre Curtin’s analysis of the construction and architecture of European governance, for example, leads her to suggest that ‘blame-averse politicians may well also, in the EU context, be seeking to shift blame for adverse events to other actors’. Indeed what her research uncovers is not a lack of accountability *per se* but a complex ‘undergrowth’ of accountability mechanisms and ‘a chronic lack of transparency for *the overall system*... an evolving model of public accountability that is fragmentary and rather haphazard’ [emphasis added].²⁷

Curtin’s conclusions resonate with Yannis Papadopoulos’ arguments concerning the relationship between MLG and democratic accountability and particularly with his emphasis on the link between network-governance and blame-avoidance strategies (i.e. ‘the problem of many hands’) which, in turn, dovetails with a host of studies that have sought to emphasize the pathological organizational impacts of *too much* accountability (i.e. ‘the problem of many eyes’).²⁸ Like Curtin, Papadopoulos points to the existence of multiple and over-lapping accountability mechanisms (legal, professional, political, peer-control, etc.) but highlights the absence of any ‘coherent system’ (Curtin’s ‘gaping ‘black hole’’) of what might be termed meta-accountable governance (i.e. accountability to the top of the chain of delegation for the governance of governance networks).²⁹ This explains Papadopoulos’ argument concerning ‘more accountability but less democracy’.³⁰ What these studies appear to point towards –

²⁵ Bache, I and Flinders, M. 2004. *Multi-Level Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.202.

²⁶ An argument supported by Kohler-Koch’s analysis of 1,600 research projects on European governance which found that less than a fifth of studies focused on matters concerning democracy, legitimacy or accountability. See Kohler-Koch, B. 2006. ‘Research on EU Governance’, *Connex Newsletter* 3, p.5.

²⁷ Curtin, D. 2007. ‘Holding (Quasi-)Autonomous EU Administrative Actors to Public Account’, *European Law Journal*, 13(4), 540.

²⁸ Papadopoulos, Y. 2007 ‘Problems of Democratic Accountability in Network and Multi-Level Governance’, *European Law Journal*, 13(4), 469-486. For a broad review of ‘the accountability debate’ see, Flinders, M. 2011. ‘Daring to be a Daniel’, *Administration & Society*, 43(5), 1-25.

²⁹ Curtin *op cit.* 2007. p.541. Bovens similarly discovers a ‘more diversified and pluralistic set of accountability relationships’- Bovens, M. 2007. ‘New Forms of Accountability and EU Governance’, *Comparative European Politics*, 5, 110

³⁰ Papadopoulos, Y. 2010. ‘Accountability and Multi-Level Governance: More Accountability, Less Democracy?’, *West European Politics*, 33(5), 1030-1049.

albeit somewhat obliquely and tentatively - is the existence of a *politicized and instrumental rationality* behind the creation and maintenance of accountability mechanisms. This is reflected in Papadopoulos' concerns regarding 'uncoupling' and the absence of 'democratic anchorage' and more clearly in Curtin's concerns regarding 'the emergence of an accountability game'.³¹ The great beauty of Curtin's passing remark about the emergence of an 'accountability game' is that it creates an intellectual bridge between the study of MLG and a seam of scholarship that has for some decades examined 'blame games' and 'the politics of blame avoidance' but largely in isolation from (or in parallel to) the related strand of work on MLG. The benefits of uniting these strands is that it serves to create a *more politicized* account of MLG, or what might be labeled 'MLG-plus'.

The intellectual heritage of the scholarship on blame avoidance can be traced back to Kent Weaver's seminal article on 'The Politics of Blame Avoidance' in 1986 and its theory about the rational behavior of politicians.³² That is, they are motivated primarily by the desire to avoid blame for unpopular actions rather than seeking to claim credit for popular ones. This, in turn, stems from the existence of a 'negativity bias' whereby the political costs of failure tend to outweigh the benefits of success and therefore politicians engage in a range of blame-shifting, blame-shaping, blame-management or blame-limiting strategies.³³ From Weaver it is possible to trace a distinguished flow of studies on blame avoidance – Tom Douglas' *Scapegoats* (1991), Richard Ellis's *Presidential Lightning Rods* (1994), Christopher Anderson's *Blaming the Government* (1995), Helmut Anheier's *When Things Go Wrong* (1999) and Debra Javeline's *Protest and the Politics of Blame* (2003) – that lead to arguably the most sophisticated analysis of blame avoidance to date in Christopher Hood's *The Blame Game* (2010).

At the heart of Hood's approach to the politics of blame avoidance is an awareness of the link between the 'blame game' and the 'risk game'. The latter signifying the emergence of new social risks – such as social exclusion or the risks associated with an aging population, or the unintended consequences of scientific and technological advances – that are characterized as one element of the transition to a post-industrial society.³⁴ The 'blame game' and the 'risk game' are therefore two sides of the same coin: as the range of (*perceived*) social risks has *expanded* ('stranger danger', genetically modified food, internet trolls, cyber-security, asteroid impacts, dangerous dogs, etc.) so too have the blame avoidance strategies of politicians become increasingly complex and elaborate in order to *narrow* the sphere for which they can be held personally responsible.³⁵ In this context Hood argues that politicians may adopt one of three ways to manage blame (Table 5, below).

Table 5. Blame Management Strategies

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Assume</i>	<i>Key Reference</i>
Presentational Strategies [Slogan: 'Spin your	Arguments for limiting blame (excuses) or turning blame into	Shaping of public perceptions through news management.	Presentational activity will limit or deflect rather than	Anheier, H. 1999. <i>When Things Go Wrong</i> , London: Sage.

³¹ Papadopoulos *op cit.* 2007, p.471; Curtin *op cit.* 2007.536

³² Weaver, K. 1986. 'The Politics of Blame Avoidance', *Journal of Public Policy*, 6(4), 371-398. It can in fact be traced back much further to Pendleton Herring's *Presidential Leadership* (1940) and Harold Laski's *The American Presidency* (1940) but Weaver is generally recognized as marking the beginning of an explicit focus on blame avoidance. See also Weaver, K. 1988. *Automatic Government* Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

³³ See, for example, Boin, A T'hart, McConnell and Preston, T. 2010. 'Leadership Style, Crisis Response and Blame Management', *Public Administration*, 88(3), 706-723.

³⁴ See, for example, Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society* (1992), Anthony Giddens' *Runaway World* (2002) and Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Fear* (2006).

³⁵ Hood, C. 2002. 'The Risk Game and the Blame Game', *Government & Opposition*, 37(1), 15-37.

way out of trouble']	credit (justifications) and other methods of shaping public impressions.		exacerbate or attract blame.	
Policy Strategies [Slogan: Don't make contestable judgments that create losers]	Selection of policies or operating routines to minimize risk of institutional or individual liability or blame.	Protocolization and automaticity to remove or minimize the exercise of individual discretion by officeholders.	There is a low or no-blame option (e.g. in choosing between errors of commission or errors of omission or between opting for automaticity and opting for discretion).	Twight, C. 1991. 'From Claiming Credit to Avoiding Blame', <i>Journal of Public Policy</i> , 11(2), 153-186.
Agency Strategies [Slogan: 'Find a Scapegoat']	Distribution of formal responsibility, competency or jurisdiction among institutions and officeholders in space and time.	Formal delegation of potentially blame-worthy tasks to 'lightning rods' (e.g. agencies, boards, commissions, etc.).	Formal allocation of organizational responsibility is sufficiently credible and salient to last through blame firestorms.	Landwehr, C. and Bohm, K. 2011. 'Delegation and Institutional Design in Health-Care Rationing', <i>Governance</i> , 24(4), 665-688.

Source. Adapted from Hood (2002) and Hood (2010).

Pulling the insights of Table 5 into the sphere of climate change and environmental politics begins to offer hypotheses about the statecraft strategies of politicians. Indeed, Hood identifies environmental control and regulation as a critical case of blame-avoidance through agency strategies (i.e. the deliberate creation of complex governance structures).

For blame-averse national-level politicians battered by the experience of BSE [Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, commonly known as 'mad cow disease'], and other blame-generating hazards, the logic of Weaver's analysis is that that 'ideal' design for regulatory system is one in which standards are set by international experts, monitored by autonomous agencies and enforced by local authorities – leaving those [national] politicians in the happy position of being able to blame everyone else rather than being blamed themselves when things go wrong.³⁶

Blame-shifting clearly has limits. Cultural conditions and political expectations may well lead the public to attribute blame to politicians irrespective of their blame-games (i.e. the notion of politicians as lightning-rods that serve to channel and earth public frustrations and anger); the person or organization to which politicians may seek to explicitly or implicitly shift the blame (i.e. the blame-shiftee) may reject such moves and engage in certain counter-games ('revenge effects' possibly creating an embarrassing 'blame-boomerang' for the politician). And yet the potential for blame-shifting is clearly linked to the extent of network complexity – the fuzzier the governance the fuzzier the accountability and therefore no *one* blame-shiftee is identified and politicians can draw-upon second-level strategies (e.g. 'blame the event or issue itself', 'blame the previous guys', 'blame the context', 'blame us all', 'blame them 'up above' or 'down below', 'blame ignorance itself', etc.).³⁷ The simple argument of this section (and indeed of this paper) is that a focus on 'blame games' and blame-avoidance provides the

³⁶ Hood *op cit.* 2002, p.20.

³⁷ See Olson, R. 2000. 'Towards a Politics of Disaster', *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 18(2), 265-287.

analytical tools with which to *politicize* the study of MLG. It has therefore offered a new conceptualization in the form of *MLG-plus* in order to inject ‘an antidote to the enchanted view of depoliticized networks’ (*cf.* Le Galles above) into the study of governance, in general, and MLG, in particular. Put slightly differently, the research Weaver, Hood and others suggests that complex bureaucratic structures do not appear as by magic but may well be proactively designed (or passively sustained) in relation to avoid decisions that are likely to attract more blame than credit. The next section attempts to explore what such theories suggest for recent developments in relation to the MLG, climate change and transport governance in the UK.

IV. CARBON EMISSIONS MANAGEMENT AND TRANSPORT GOVERNANCE

The climate change challenge (as Section One sought to illustrate) might be described as a ‘wicked issue’ in the sense that not only does it spill across a range of different policy areas (education, planning, land use, lifestyle choices, housing, health, etc.) and political jurisdictions but also (at a deeper level) arguably requires the implementation of policies that are likely to be resisted by the public.³⁸ ‘In other words’ Shearman and Smith suggest ‘democracy itself has a big problem’.³⁹ How and why the mechanisms and processes of democratic governance are dealing with this ‘big problem’ provides the focus of this paper. As such this section presents the results of a comparative case study analysis within the UK that examined the MLG of transport in a context of political decentralization (to the sub-national/regional level and to local government) and increasing fiscal cutbacks. In a sense the research sought to chart the *formal* topography of MLG as well as the less tangible (but arguably more significant) informal relationships, signals and resource-dependencies. The ambitious carbon reduction targets included in the 2008 *Climate Change Act* make the UK - combined with its power-hoarding majoritarian constitutional configuration – should, in theory, deliver a fairly clear and highly accountable chain of delegation for the implementation and delivery of this target.⁴⁰ What the research actually uncovers is a weak delivery structure and opaque accountability processes that appear to chime with the emphasis on ‘complex undergrowth’, ‘black holes’ and a lack of a ‘coherent system’ *vis-à-vis* MLG and accountability that were emphasized in the research of Curtin and Papadopoulos (discussed above). The complex institutional terrain and the recent dilution of explicit or robust targets would also seem to dovetail with Hood’s hypothesis regarding the ‘ideal design’ of an environmental governance system (i.e. the use of agency strategies – Table 5, above – that diffuse responsibility by creating fuzzy governance structures and therefore fuzzy accountability).

Globally, transport accounts for 23% of CO₂ emissions.⁴¹ In the UK it accounts for around 20% of total greenhouse gas emissions and 24% of UK CO₂ emissions. The 80% reduction target by 2050 under the *Climate Change Act* necessitates an almost complete decarbonisation of road transport but, as Figure 1 illustrates, transport emissions have so far remained relatively constant. The dip in 2008-2009 was a result of a combination of efficiency improvements and the recession but, as the Department for Transport recognized in July 2009, transport related reforms must at some point play a significant role in moving the UK to a low carbon

³⁸ One Department for Transport official noted DfT ‘that it’s not a process where you’ve got like a sort of clear strong metal lever. Pull this lever and it leads to results at the other end. It’s a more diverse set of influences and accountabilities to different bodies ... with various elements of central government having an influence on sort of what’s happening at the local level but also with the accountability of local authorities directly to their local electorate, whose thinking in turn is changed by things that are happening at a national level so its sort of quite a complex interaction of influences’.

³⁹ Shearman and Smith p.xv.

⁴⁰ See Lijphart, A. 2012. *Patterns of Democracy*. Yale University Press.

⁴¹ International Energy Agency, 2011 *CO₂ Emissions from Fuel Combustion*. Paris: IEA

economy.⁴²

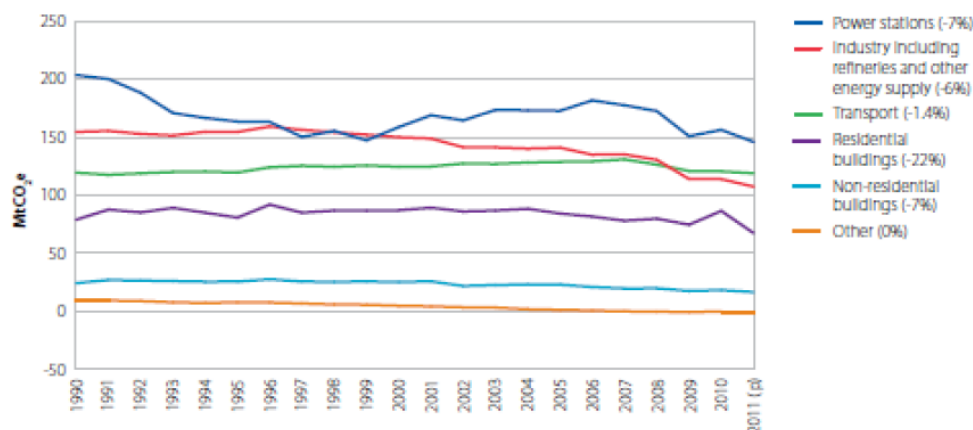


Figure 1. UK CO₂ Emissions by Sector

If the *Climate Change Act 2008* represents the high-level target then it is the Government's 'Carbon Plan' (last updated in March 2011) that sets out the plans for achieving the emissions reductions. The Department for Energy and Climate Change are formally responsible for the delivery of this plan with the Department of Transport responsible for transport's contribution to the plan. However, the quantification of and accountability for this responsibility is somewhat opaque. In Scotland, public bodies have a duty in 'exercising its functions' to 'act in the best way calculated to contribute to the delivery of the targets set out in the *Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009*. But how, exactly, targets will be assessed against performance and who would actually be held to account remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that responsibility for achieving transport-related carbon reductions have been delegated downwards to local authorities (and to a lesser or indirect degree to regional actors). As the Government's Carbon Plan emphasizes 'Local authorities have most scope to influence emission reductions...there is a crucial role for local authorities to design and implement local sustainable transport plans' (a view supported by the CCC's report of May 2012).⁴³

And yet after reviewing performance against targets at the national level in Scotland and England in 2009 Greg Marsden and Tom Rye concluded there was little difference between the two administrations and that a lack of clarity over the carbon management framework amongst state and non-state actors was a major impediment on the implementation of policies. Important issues regarding carbon accounting had also not been agreed, Marsden and Rye argued, which created opportunities for blame shifting.⁴⁴ The aim of the research presented in this section was therefore to explore this finding by conducting detailed research at *all levels* of government and governance (from the local to the European), and notably in the wake of the *Localism Act 2011*. Four case study areas were selected (see Table 6, below), the relevant Type I and Type II actors were identified and formally mapped, and 51 semi-structured interviews (involving 59 people) were conducted with civil servants, local authority officials, representatives from Regional Transport Partnerships (in Scotland) and the Passenger

⁴² Department for Transport, 2009. *Low Carbon Transport*, London: DfT.

⁴³ DECC 2011. *The Carbon Plan*, London: HMSO, p.23; The Committee on Climate Change similarly note, 'The most important role local authorities can play in reducing transport emissions is through implementing sustainable travel programmes (e.g. encouraging 'Smarter Choices' through car clubs, travel plans, cycling infrastructure, etc. and providing better public transport) and promoting low-carbon vehicles by rolling out electric vehicle charging infrastructure, providing incentives for drivers of low-carbon vehicles, and purchasing low carbon buses'.

⁴⁴ Marsden, G and Rye, T. 2010. 'The Governance of Transport and Climate Change', *Journal of Transport Geography*, 18, 669-78.

Transport Executive (Leeds) and Transport for Greater Manchester, former and serving politicians, business and environmental interest groups and private sector providers with a broad spread across each of the four cases. The initial results of the study were then presented and further explored in four focus group workshops in Leeds, Manchester, Edinburgh and London which embraced an even broader pool of respondents than the initial interviews and served to refine the findings.

Table 6. Case Study Descriptions

City Region	Population	Context	Carbon Policy
Leeds	2,954,700 ^a	Leeds City Region was not a formal administrative area but was considered a functional economic area. ^d It has recently gained certain powers including greater control over transport involving establishment of a West Yorkshire Transport Fund. ^e	The City Region includes a private sector led Green Economy Panel which has produced an agenda for actions towards a low carbon economy. In keeping with DfT guidance on the 3 rd Local Transport Plans (LTP3), the West Yorkshire LTP3 includes Low Carbon among its objectives.
Manchester	2,685,400 ^a	Greater Manchester has been given powers by government allowing formation of a Combined Authority and Transport for Greater Manchester which has significant control over transport in the city region.	The Greater Manchester Climate Change Strategy (GMCCS) has a target of 48% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020. The Strategy includes plans for targets for emission reduction from transport through implementation of the Greater Manchester LTO3 and national funding including the Local Sustainable Transport Funds. ^f
Edinburgh	1,600,000 ^b	Edinburgh City Region includes nine local authorities. The Regional Transport Partnership	The City Region Economic Review describes intentions to develop a low carbon economy. Similarly the Regional Transport Partnership includes measures to reduce emissions from transport (as required by the 2009 Act) ^g
Glasgow	1,195,200 ^c	Glasgow City Region includes eight local authorities	The vision for the Glasgow City Region 2008-2013 includes an objective of sustainable development which in turn includes mention of renewable energy and reduction of pollution. ^h The Strathclyde Partnership for Transport Regional Transport Strategy, includes carbon reduction from the transport sector as an indicator. ⁱ

a. ONS 2011

b. Edinburgh City Region Economic Review 2011

c. National Records of Scotland (2012)

d. Leeds City Region website

e. HM Treasury (18/09/12)

f. GMCCS 2011

g. SESTRAN Regional Transport Strategy 2008-2023

h. Metropolitan Vision – our vision for the Glasgow City Region 2008-2013

i. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport 2008

Detailed analyses of each of these cases have been published elsewhere and the aim of this section is simply to highlight three core and inter-linked findings that each in their own ways take the paper *back* towards a focus on blame games and climate change. These are:

1. The accountability space (or political context) has shifted away from a focus on the environment and climate change and towards an emphasis on economic growth and job creation.
2. The delivery chain governing the transport sector consists of a dense matrix of Type I and Type II bodies that are each subject to different accountability mechanisms (upwards, downwards, market, etc.).
3. The control and co-ordination mechanisms that were designed to bring together local governance with high-level national targets have been removed. As a result it is unclear *who* is accountable for *what*.

The remainder of this section examines each of these issues in more detail. However, the overall finding is a formalized high-level statutory target sitting above a weak and uncoordinated delivery structure. The distinctive twist about this finding, however, is the degree to which actors present the *political costs* of implementing meaningful reform as an explanatory variable for the existence of fuzzy accountability (i.e. an agent-centered and *politicized* rationalization).

1. The Accountability Space

At a meta-governance level, Mel Dubnick's analysis of the 'accountability space' arguably provides one of the most astute commentaries on the analysis and understanding of the nature of contemporary frameworks of accountable governance.⁴⁵ This draws attention to the milieu of account-giving and account-demanding socio-political human relationships that constitute what might be termed the 'accountability space'. What this reveals is that there are many forms of accountability and each of these forms may have quite different organizational, political or economic aims. Taking this forward, the reality of the 'accountability space' within the public sphere is that actors will frequently have to become accountability entrepreneurs in the sense of promoting some targets, aims and objectives above others.⁴⁶ Put slightly differently, as the literature on MLG stresses, principal-agent theory under-acknowledges the increasing existence of *multiple* principles and *multiple* agents within the public sector.⁴⁷ Moreover, for those responsible for delivery attempting to 'march to several drummers' brings with it risks of organizational chaos or what Jonathan Koppell refers to as 'multiple-accountabilities disorder'.⁴⁸ The clearest finding of the research presented here is that the contextual 'accountability space' within which local actors operated had shifted significantly; *away* from a focus on climate change and carbon management *towards* a robust focus on economic growth and job creation.

The overwhelming finding of this research was that the 'accountability space' within which local authorities were operating had shifted from a focus on sustainable transport towards an almost exclusive emphasis on transport as a driver or facilitator of economic growth. 'The clear policy driver' as one official stressed 'is [now] economic growth and job creation'. What is interesting, however, is the manner in which local actors responded to informal signals rather than formal policy announcements. Irrespective of the case study city, the vast majority of respondents identified a clear sense of policy drift in relation to carbon reduction and – more broadly – the changing economic context created further tensions in the sense that although major infrastructure projects, such as the electrification of the railways or road enhancement schemes, could be framed as supporting a low carbon agenda they would ultimately generate more traffic and emissions.⁴⁹ Local and national politicians therefore realized, interviewees suggested, that what they would be held directly and personally accountable for was not carbon management (which was intangible and long-term) but the provision of direct and tangible economic growth and local jobs within their term of office. As one focus group participant noted,

I call it imposition by panic! The rhetoric takes over and there is no formal statement but the signal is clear: forget carbon reduction. This is a failure as we need a low carbon economy but economic priorities have been put above carbon objectives.

Financial cutbacks also affected carbon management and the governance of transport in the sense that less funding was simply available for technological research, public engagement and education initiatives, for the renewal of public transport or the promotion of integrated transport or sustainable travel programmes. Despite the availability of £560 million pounds for

⁴⁵ Dubnick, M. 2012. 'Move Over Daniel: We need some accountability space', *Administration & Society*, 43(6), 704-16.

⁴⁶ For a discussion see Schillemans, T and Bovens, M 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁷ See Flinders, M. 2009. *Walking Without Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁸ Koppell, J. 2005. 'Pathologies of Accountability', *Public Administration Review*, 65(1), 94-108; See also, Langford, J. 1984. 'Responsibility in the senior public service: marching to several drummers', *Canadian Journal of Public Administration*, 27(4), 513-21.

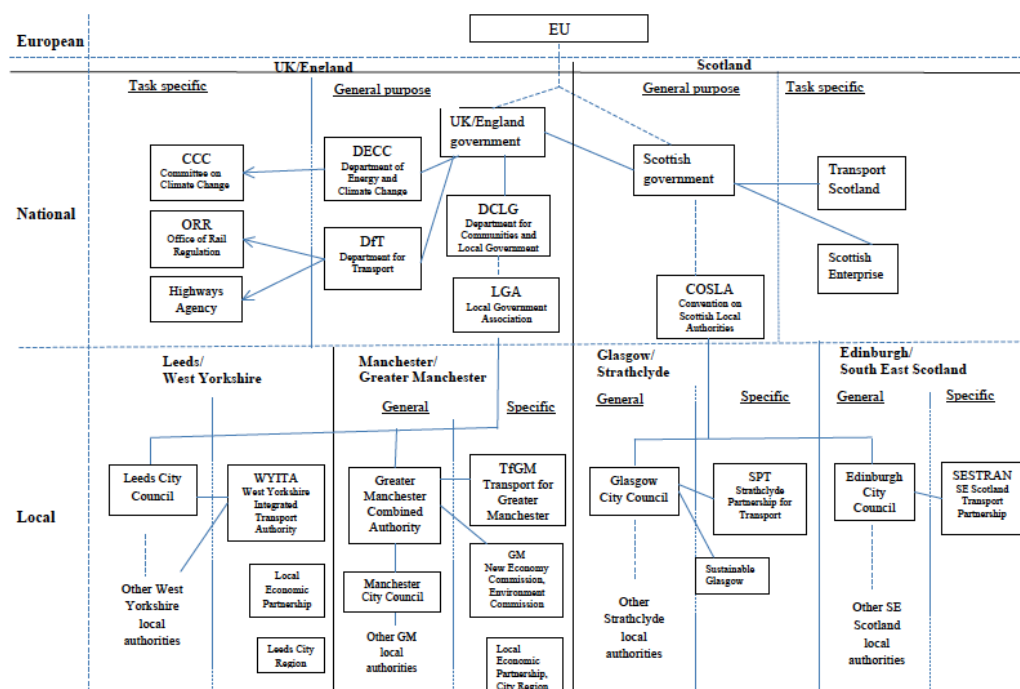
⁴⁹ The budget 2012 withdrew car tax exemption for zero and ultra-low emission vehicles in 2015.

English local authorities under the Local Sustainable Transport Fund the general view from respondents was that the financial package available to support local authorities reduce surface level transport carbon emissions was inadequate, while new financial initiatives were being implemented that were clearly inconsistent with the carbon reduction agenda (an opinion echoed by the CCC in May 2012). In Scotland the decision to remove the ring-fencing for transport spending was highlighted as a further potential risk to progress, not least while public expenditure was so constrained. Respondents in all four case studies outlined current funding levels as low as one quarter or one third of previous levels within their respective areas of activity. In summary, the ‘accountability space’ within which policies are made and prioritized had changed. Fiscal concerns had pushed the climate change challenge down the political agenda and this was reflected in the behavior and resources of officials further down the delivery chain.

2. The Delivery Chain

It is difficult to understand the delivery chain in relation to carbon management and transport governance - from the Government’s statutory target, through the various ministerial departments that share some element of responsibility, out *through* the labyrinthine system of non-ministerial departments, non-departmental public bodies and numerous arm’s-length agencies, boards and commissions, and down to local authorities and local public spending bodies – without regard to Anthony Down’s classic book *Inside Bureaucracy*, and particularly his ‘laws of bureaucracy’ (imperfect control, lessening control, diminishing control and counter-control).⁵⁰ As Figure 2 illustrates, the four case studies revealed a complex and overlapping institutional landscape that resonates with Hooghe and Marks’ ‘marble cake’ analogy for MLG systems (i.e. complex and over-lapping).

Figure 2. The Multi-Level Governance of Transport Governance



⁵⁰ Downs, A. 1967. *Inside Bureaucracy*. Boston: Little Brown & Co.

The reality of the situation is, however, far more complex than Figure 2 suggests with a host of other hybrid and quasi-governmental organizations – like the Office of Low Emissions Vehicles, Energy Saving Trust, European Environment Agency, Carbon Trust, - forming part of the administrative landscape. Type I and Type II organizations (Table 4, above) therefore co-exist across a dense institutional matrix in a model of variable geometry. Research therefore raises three distinct and previously under-explored themes – one *theoretical*, one *normative*, one *political* – regarding the governance of carbon reduction in relation to transport.

The first theme reflects *back* from empirics to theory in the sense of questioning the utility of Hooghe and Marks' influential 'two types' dichotomy (Table 4, above). Hooghe and Marks are clear that what they offer is 'a logically consistent schema' for identifying basic forms of MLG and, as such, they acknowledge that 'specialists will surely wish to make finer distinctions than the ones we draw'.⁵¹ This research has identified not 'two types' but a 'spectrum of autonomy' along which a range of different public, private, regulatory and truly hybrid bodies sit and a 'finer distinction' could usefully isolate at least three further categories of MLG (i.e. Types III, IV and V). The first relates to single-issue 'hived-in' (opposed to hived-out) organizations like, for example, the Highways Agency, that enjoy a high degree of formally stipulated day-to-day independence but constitutionally remain elements of (Type-I) ministerial departments. If hived-in organizations offer a new Type III category (or stage on the spectrum of autonomy) then regulatory bodies arguable provide a fourth type. At first glance the Environment Agency (for England and Wales), Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Office of the Rail Regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority and a number of similar organizations may appear as definite Type II organizations. However, their reliance on Type I bodies for funding and legitimacy, the fact that senior appointments are made by ministers and that they are financially dependent on their sponsor department (plus the fact that 'users' or 'customers' have little capacity to 'exit' the jurisdiction of either public body) may suggest that they exist within an intermediate zone between Type I and Type II.⁵² If Type IV bodies exist in the intermediate or what Greve describes as 'the grey zone' then Type V organizations exist on the outer boundary of the spectrum of autonomy and take the form of private companies who fulfill public tasks.⁵³ The CCC's emphasis on the introduction of new fleets of ultra efficient buses, for example, is to some extent complicated by the fact that these vehicles are owned, maintained and run (to a model of market accountability) by private companies (Stagecoach, National Express, etc.). It is for exactly this reason that Marsden and Rye argue that although 'their effect on the governance of transport in the UK is profound' they cannot simply be defined as Type II governing organizations.⁵⁴ The blurring of boundaries is illustrated by the fact that Edinburgh City Council holds a significant stake in Lothian Buses (one of two local operators) and this was identified by respondents as crucial to the ability of Lothian Buses to secure the investment necessary to improve the fuel-efficiency of the bus fleet.

From a theoretical perspective the findings of this study could be added to several others that have questioned the value of the 'two types' dichotomy when set against a far more complex

⁵¹ Hooghe and Marks *op cit.* 2003, p.241.

⁵² An argument that would chime with Skelcher's argument that any analysis of the problems of jurisdictional integrity in a world of polycentric governance must recognize 'the reality of an interlinked duality between "traditional" Type I and "emergent" Type II governance'. See Skelcher, C. 2005. 'Jurisdictional Integrity, Polycentrism and the Design of Democratic Governance' *Governance*, 18(1), 95.

⁵³ Greve, C. *The Gray Zone*.

⁵⁴ Marsden and Rye *op cit.* 2010, 675.

empirical reality.⁵⁵ However, what is more distinctive and relevant for the focus of this paper is an awareness of the existence of a complex accountability web whereby the different actors outlined in Figure 2 (above) operate to very different conceptions of ‘democratic’ or ‘accountable’ governance. The argument being that what this creates is not a lack of accountability *per se* but a lack of accountability for systemic outputs. What the analysis of the chain of delegation from national statutory targets to local implementation of carbon reduction policies in relation to transport reveals is analogous to what Curtin termed a ‘complex undergrowth’ of accountability mechanisms that lack any coherent system at a meta-governance level. (If anything the broader steering, control and co-ordination mechanisms have been stripped-back and reduced since the election of the coalition government in 2010 - discussed further below).

Interviewer – ‘You seem to be suggesting that the lines of accountability and responsibility across the various levels of government and to a degree organisations and agencies such as yourself are not particularly good’.

Response – ‘Well, they’re non-existent, I think, at the moment.’

If the existence of a systemic form of Koppell’s ‘multiple-accountabilities disorder’ was not enough a second issue that is generally under-acknowledged in the research literature was highlighted as a constant theme of concern by local authority officials – ‘institutional churn’ and ‘political turnover’. The former relates not just to a perception that institutional boundaries and roles were subject to an almost constant process of reform and revision but also to the manner in which funding opportunities tended to trickle-down from the European Union or Whitehall in a fairly random and uncoordinated manner. ‘It’s all knee-jerk and scattergun...like a scatter-gun of policies and funding streams but no clear approach’.⁵⁶ This lack of strategic direction was, respondents suggested, further augmented by the inevitable impact of political turnover (discussed below). The main argument of this sub-section is not therefore that the delivery chain reveals a lack of accountability for the organizations in the network but a lack of accountable meta-governance in the sense of a clear and coherent framework for ensuring that all the actors in the chain contribute to a common goal (i.e. the targets enshrined in the *Climate Change Act*). In order to drill-down still deeper the next sub-section explores recent changes to the relationship between central government and local government in the UK.

3. A Hollow-Crown

The literature on governance and public policy is replete with references to the ‘hollowing-out’ and ‘filling-in’ of the state. This focuses attention on the capacity of national governments to implement policies when faced with increasingly elaborate structures of MLG. The role of national politicians is generally referred to as ‘steering but not rowing’ in the sense of overseeing and coordinating those sub-national authorities and arm’s-length bodies that are responsible for actually delivering policies or reform. The existence of a high-profile statutory target in relation to climate change – indeed the first of its kind in the world – might therefore have been expected to produce a *tightening* of the internal reporting structures through which those bodies responsible for delivery were overseen and controlled by the national government. In relation to carbon management and transport governance at the local level a

⁵⁵ See, for example, Gustavsson, E *et al.* 2009. ‘Multilevel Governance, Networking Cities, and the Geography of Climate-Change Mitigation’, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 27: 59-74; Bulkeley, H and Betsill, M. 2005. ‘Rethinking Sustainable Cities’, *Environmental Politics* 14: 42-63.

⁵⁶ Local Official, Leeds focus group.

weakening of the internal control mechanisms appears to have occurred. The policy framework for how local authorities report to central government on delivering national priorities at the local level has changed recently, with significant implications for action on climate change, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation efforts. Between 2008-2010, a performance framework for local authorities was introduced as a basis for central government to manage outcomes delivered by local governments. Within this, local councils (as part of Local Strategic Partnerships – LSPs) reported their performance against 198 indicators reflecting national priorities and negotiated targets with the government on 35 national indicators through Local Area Agreements (LAAs). The relevant national indicators for climate change were:

- N185 – CO₂ reduction from local authority operations.
- N186 – per capita CO₂ emissions in the LA area, including emissions arising from buildings, industry and surface transport.
- N188 – adapting to climate change.

Two-thirds of LSPs in England chose to sign-up to N186 and set out targets to reduce emissions in their local area by 2011. In a 2009 review of N186, the Audit Commission found that this may have delivered limited results in some areas but recommended that far stronger levers – notably a change from voluntary agreements to statutory requirements - may be required to encourage more comprehensive action at the local level and more ambitious targets (and recommended that this should be kept under review).⁵⁷

The election of a coalition government in May 2010 led to a significant reform in the way local government operates, with some of the most important changes set out in the *Localism Act 2011*. Local Area Agreements and national indicators were abolished, and now there is currently no requirement for local authorities to negotiate or even set targets to reduce their own area-wide emissions.⁵⁸ ‘There is’ as one local authority officer put it ‘no accountability to the Department for Transport as there was before’.⁵⁹ At the same time Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), which had a statutory role in contributing to sustainable development, were also abolished and replaced with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) whose prime purpose is to drive-forward private sector led growth and job creation.⁶⁰ At the same time as these changes in the policy framework were being introduced revenue funding from government to local authorities was (or is being) reduced, by twenty-six per cent in real terms between 2010-2011 and 2014-2015 - a seven per cent annual reduction. In addition, councils have been strongly encouraged by the government to cap council tax increases. In this context, and given that the full benefits of action on climate change may not occur at or be visible at the local level, there is a question of whether local authorities will prioritize action to reduce emissions going forward.

Faye Scott’s 2011 report - *Is Localism Delivering for Climate Change?* - adds weight to this concern with the finding 65% of local authorities were deprioritising or scaling back on climate change initiatives in the current economic climate.⁶¹ Subsequent research by the CCC supported this conclusion and found that new initiatives such as the new ‘Home Energy Conservation Act’ guidance and the Local Government Association’s ‘Climate Local’

⁵⁷ The Audit Commission’s *Lofty Ambitions report* of October 2009 called on government to re-think whether the voluntary approach to local targets for CO₂ reduction can deliver the progress needed to meet national targets.

⁵⁸ Local planning authorities are responsible for producing Local Development Plans (LDP). The new *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF), published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in April 2012, calls for authorities to develop and implement plans that meet the challenges of climate change. Its objectives include the promotion of sustainable transport and helping to increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy.

⁵⁹ Leeds focus group

⁶⁰ Thirty-nine Local Economic Partnerships in England (covering all but one local authority area).

⁶¹ Scott, F. 2011. *Is Localism Delivering for Climate Change?* London: Green Alliance.

initiative were usefully but unlikely to fundamentally change this situation. The coalition government's approach to the management of local government is clearly driven by its localism agenda and a preference for decentralization and flexibility wherever and whenever possible. But, as one interviewee from the Campaign for Better Transport stressed, 'part of the difficulty is that no one knows who's in charge of anything in transport'. In fact an interestingly finding of this study was the manner in which a high degree of confusion exists as to whether carbon related targets actually existed for transport interventions at the local level. This is a critical point vis-à-vis a focus on accountable governance and blame games. Some actors were insistent there we no targets, other suggested that there were targets but these were only 'aspirational ambitions', 'indicative ranges', 'reduction profiles' or 'projected emission savings'; even where there was a sense that targets existed there was a lack of agreement on exactly what should be measured or why. As a result the Local Transport Plans for Leeds and Manchester reveal a different approach to goals, metrics and measurement with Leeds aiming for a reduction of 30% in emissions from transport by 2026 and Greater Manchester's Climate Change Strategy setting a total reduction target of 48% (integrated and not just transport) by 2020.⁶² When asked if these targets (or 'aspirations') were realistic and how they would be measured a senior official from Transport from Greater Manchester he replied,

I think you're absolutely right that ... because there has tended to be an approach that sets a big number at a year that's some distance away it's very easy to kind of lose track of your path to get there. I don't know whether we need particular systems of accountability but there's no doubt that whatever form of accountability is needed, if you don't have a common way of measuring the problem and the solution, then frankly that system isn't going to work anyway. You know, ultimately you just need a scorecard, don't you, for something like this, and we don't really have that scorecard at the moment.

The opacity around the existence (let alone measurement) of targets flows into a second key finding of this research: despite the decentralizing thrust of the coalition government's localism agenda a large number of groups and organizations operating at the local level called for a far clearer and stronger top-down framework for delivering carbon reductions. This is a critical point. From local transport operators and business groups through to environmental campaigners and sustainable transport groups there was a general sense that a more formalized 'scorecard' for carbon reduction measures was required. As one official noted 'We could all do a lot more if the Department for Transport was a little clearer and stronger... We're all too short-term and narrow at the moment and there is no transformative thinking'. This view was further elaborated by the CCC in 2012 when it called for the introduction of a statutory duty on local authorities to develop an area-wide low carbon plan and report on its implementation in order to prioritize the low carbon agenda within existing local authority budgets, and ensure a more uniform approach to the contribution of local authorities to national carbon budgets across England.⁶³ When placed within Dubnick's concept of the 'accountability space' the CCC can be interpreted as attempting to use a 'hard' accountability mechanism (i.e. the law) as

⁶² The city of Leeds faces an 11% population growth in the short-term combined with financial cutbacks but must somehow deliver a zero increase in car trips. London, by contrast, with more powers and funding, has set a target of 60% reduction in its carbon emissions by 2025.

⁶³ Committee on Climate Change *op cit.* 2012 p.71; Scotland's Climate Change Act came into force in August 2009, committing Scotland to a 42% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 (from a 1990 baseline), annual reductions in emissions each year from 2010-2050, and to the development of a statutory programme on adaptation. The duties came into force on 1 January 2011 and cover all 'public bodies', including all 32 of Scotland's local authorities. Guidance on how to put the duties into practice was issued by the Scottish Government in February 2011. The Committee on Climate Change believes there is evidence that the duties are 'helping to drive action in local authorities...it has helped keep the momentum of the act going'. All 32 local authorities are signatories to Scotland's *Climate Change Declaration* and for the reporting year 2010-2011 for the first time all submitted an annual report under the Declaration. Additionally, all 32 authorities also now have carbon management plans in place and have reported their corporate carbon baseline in the 2010-2011 SCCD report.

a policy lever to push the issue of carbon management and sustainable transport back up the political agenda.

Having briefly examined the changing accountability space, the complex delivery chain and the impact of the localism agenda it is possible to proceed to a concluding section that attempted to tease out the broader implications of this paper's focus on MLG, transport policy and carbon emissions management. And yet, as the OECD's research on similar topics has underlined, it is generally *political leadership* rather than *institutional structures* that play the most important role in developing climate action plans'.⁶⁴ This is a critical point and one that when combined with the findings of this study serve to *politicize* the understanding of MLG in a manner that chimes with the arguments offered in Section Two about the 'enchanted view of depoliticized networks'. Indeed, the twist, barb or hook in the findings of this research was a sophisticated awareness of how the structures of MLG *in themselves* reflect a deeper politics of blame avoidance and the irrationalities of democratic politics (i.e. *MLG-plus*). 'We all know what sustainable transport requires at the local level' one official stated 'it requires parking charges and pay-per-mile policies and things like that... tough choices but democracy gets in the way'.⁶⁵ A significant theme arising particularly from the focus groups was a need to complement the analysis of structures and contexts with a straightforward account of *the politics* of local governance and how this created incentives that frequently worked *against* the demands of the climate change challenge. As one local transport planner noted, 'Moving a bus stop or inserting a bus lane is almost impossible ...one appeal or complaint and its all over. They [politicians] simply don't have the balls' while others emphasized the manner in which a rolling two-year cycle of elections created instability within the council that, in turn, made long-term policy-making almost impossible. The tension between delivering economic growth and jobs, on the one hand, and achieving significant carbon reductions, on the other, was also emphasized as a clear dilemma at the local level. As one council leader explained, 'it's very difficult to develop actions to reduce them [carbon emissions], and then if you do - if you make them too harsh - then it's gonna cause problems for economic growth'. More broadly, however, was recognition that the climate change challenge posed more fundamental dilemmas for democratic politics. This sense of deep concern was captured in the following comment from an official from Transform Scotland, 'We need some visionary politicians who are prepared to stand up and be honest to the public as to why this is important and tackle the media as well, because you've got the media constantly trying to undermine serious scientific research'. The notion of 'visionary politicians' arguably brings the paper full-circle and back to its more basic focus on blame games and climate change.

V. BLAME GAMES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The *Climate Change Act* provides an ambitious legal framework within which the government can take steps towards creating a local carbon economy and a sustainable transport system. This paper has raised questions about the *delivery* of the targets set out in the legislation and has drawn upon three pools of political science scholarship – the failure of democracy literature at the broadest level, MLG as a mid-range approach and 'the politics of blame avoidance' as a more fine-grained lens - in order to understand *why* – going back to Helm and Hepburn in the opening sentence – climate-change policy *has not kept pace* with the increasingly stark and pessimistic scenarios emerging from the climate sciences. The research presented in this paper has discovered a structure of fuzzy governance and fuzzy accountability in which the mechanisms for delivering transport-related carbon emissions appear frail when compared to the scale of the challenge at hand.

⁶⁴ OECD *op cit.* 2009.

⁶⁵ Leeds Focus Group discussion

Critics could respond by highlighting two factors; one performance-based and the second constitutionally-based. It is true that in terms of performance the UK government's progress on the first carbon budget (2008-2010) was satisfactory. But, as the CCC has emphasized, the targets for the first five-year budget were not ambitious and a combination of high energy prices and the international recession helped stall emissions, particularly in relation to transport. The targets for future budgets are far more demanding, economic growth is likely to increase emissions significantly and so far the progress with achieving significant behavioral change or progress with technological advances is very limited. Secondly, it is also true that an argument could be made that the convention of individual ministerial responsibility makes the existence of 'fuzzy accountability' unthinkable in the British context. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change would in strict constitutional terms be wholly and personally responsible for the UK's performance under the *Climate Change Act*. In reality, however, the convention of ministerial responsibility is - as the 2012 report by the Constitution Committee in the House of Lords concluded - unlikely to deliver clarity or clear personal responsibility unless the institutional structures, relationships and expectations underlying that responsibility are also clear and coherent.⁶⁶ They are not. *Why* they are not is a political question that requires us to move back up the ladder of analytical levels outlined in Table 1 (above) and to reflect on the insights offered by each lens.

At the micro-political level, this research **has not** uncovered any hard evidence that ministers have consciously set out to deploy the 'problem of many hands' as a strategy for diluting their responsibility or distancing themselves from a knotty political dilemma. Its findings are more subtle in the sense that **it has** exposed a consciousness on the part of actors within the delivery chain of the manner in which the pressures of sustaining public support within a fairly short-term political-cycle affects political decision-making. As one local official noted when discussing increased parking charges, 'Politicians won't want it in their patch, it's what wins votes [that matters] not what matters in the long-term'. What this research has therefore uncovered is a governance framework that appears particularly amenable to blame-games and blame-avoidance due the existence of so many organizations, the invisible quality of climate change as a day-to-day concern *plus* the coalition government's emphasis on localism. When examined through the blame-management strategies outlined in Table 5 the institutional configuration for sustainable transport appears an almost perfect example of an *agency strategy* whereby blame-averse national-level politicians delegate responsibility for a thorny problem to local government 'leaving those [national] politicians in the happy position of being able to blame everyone else rather than being blamed themselves when things go wrong.'⁶⁷

As Figure 2 attempted to illustrate, the chain of delegation for transport governance and carbon emissions management provides a complex example of an evolving framework of MLG. What makes this sector arguably more interesting in the UK context is the coalition government's localism agenda on the basis that devolving responsibilities and powers to the lowest possible political unit provides a way of enhancing democracy *and* facilitating policy responses that chime with local characteristics and capacities. In this sense the localism agenda would appear to chime with the normative emphasis of Hooghe and Marks' scholarship on MLG (i.e. that decentralization is a 'good' thing). The obvious counterpoint to this position - and one that is increasingly visible in the UK - is that although local initiatives undoubtedly have a role to play in facing the climate change challenge there does need to be some broader form of meta-governance (i.e. strategic steering mechanisms) within which those local responses sit. It is exactly this 'meta-governance' framework that appears to be missing in the UK. Furthermore this research suggests that many local actors actually think that the balance between 'centrism' and 'localism' has shifted too far and, as a result, would welcome slightly less flexibility and autonomy and a far clearer and robust national accounting system. This finding dovetails with

⁶⁶ HL 61 *The Accountability of Civil Servants*, Sixth Report, Session 2012-2013.

⁶⁷ Hood *op cit.* 2002, p.20.

Hale's broader conclusion delivery and the *Climate Change Act* and the belief that 'what is required is a clear, comprehensive and compelling vision' from the government.⁶⁸

And yet the notion of national politicians setting out clear targets takes us back to 'the politics of blame avoidance' in the sense that targets are by their very nature dangerous for politicians. As a result they are generally avoided, imposed on other actors, set so low that their achievement is almost guaranteed or attached to timescales that are designed to outlive the current government. At a time when the economic imperatives of growth are so clearly working against the imperatives of carbon management there are very few incentives for government politicians to instigate national targets because to do so would be to remove the blame-shifting and blame avoiding-qualities that currently exist (and have been enhanced by the localism agenda). Acknowledging this fact does however inject a more *political and politicized* perspective into the broader research literature on MLG (i.e. the MLG-plus model that this paper has sought to promote, albeit at an embryonic stage of development).

Stepping back still further it is possible to argue that this paper's focus on sustainable transport and MLG has provided little more than a useful vehicle through which to explore a far bigger set of questions concerning the dilemmas of democratic governance, notably when it comes to taking unpopular political decisions, however necessary they might be. The decision by the coalition government in November 2012 *not* to include a decarbonisation target as part of its long-awaited *Energy Bill*, instead deciding to delay a decision until some time after 2016 (i.e. after the 2015 General Election), might therefore be interpreted as something of a case study of this dilemma.⁶⁹ Clearly the dilemmas of democratic governance cannot be examined in detail in this concluding section but this paper's emphasis on the relationship between 'blame games' and climate change does raise at least two core issues that deserve brief comment. The first relates to the relationship between policy and politics and reconnects with earlier comments about meta-governance and political leadership. The dominant response-paradigms in relation to climate change (globally and not just in the UK) have taken the form of technological optimism and behavioural change. The former focuses on *supply*-side variables and adopts an arguably rather naïve view that technological advances can avoid the need for more far-reaching measures; the latter focuses on *demand*-side variables and adopts an arguably even more naïve view that believes that hard choices can be avoided by 'nudging' individuals into more sustainable lifestyles.⁷⁰ Research on the psychology of climate change responses leads David Uzzell to conclude that 'an emphasis on individual behaviour change may not be the most effective way of tackling society's relationship with climate change',⁷¹ whereas Andrew Darnton's government commissioned research leads him to emphasise not behavioural economics but 'government-led interventions, the targeted delivery of public services or 'upstream' solutions'.⁷²

And yet what the research presented in this paper has revealed is a reluctance on the part of elected politicians – a reluctance borne of the rational incentives created by electoral competition- to take exactly those 'hard-edged and unpopular' decisions that Anthony Giddens (and many others) have argued will at some point become necessary.⁷³ It is for exactly this reason that Shearman and Smith have written of 'the climate change challenge and the *failure*

⁶⁸ Hale, S. 2012. *The Risk of a Lack of Vision*. London: Green Alliance; See also Urwin, K and Jordan, A. 2007. 'Does public policy support or undermine climate change adaptation?', *Global Environmental Change*, 18, 180-191.

⁶⁹ <http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/legislation/energybill2012/>

⁷⁰ See, for example, DEFRA's *Framework for Pro-Environmental Behaviours* (2008) and the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable's *I will if you will* (2008)

⁷¹ Uzzel, D. 2008. 'The Challenge of Climate Change', Australian Psychological Association, Hobart, p.4

⁷² Darnton, A. 2004. *Driving Public Behaviors for Sustainable Lifestyles*, p.9

⁷³ Giddens, *op cit*. 2009. p.22

of democracy' and why Geoffrey Harper feels reduced to offering a stark choice between democracy *or* survival, and it is for exactly this reason that this paper has offered the first foray into the relationship between blame games and climate change.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Shearman, D. & Smith, J. 2008. *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy*, London: Pentagon Press; Harper, G. 2012. *Democracy or Survival*. London: CPI.