

Article

## Themed Volumes: A Blessing or a Curse?

Mary R. Brooks <sup>1,\*</sup> and Stephen Ison <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rowe School of Business, Dalhousie University, Halifax, B3H 1P2, Canada

<sup>2</sup> School of Civil and Building Engineering, Transport Studies Group, Loughborough University, Loughborough, LE11 3TU, UK; E-Mail: S.G.Ison@lboro.ac.uk

\* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: m.brooks@dal.ca; Tel.: +1-902-494-1825.

Academic Editor: Andrew Kirby

Received: 19 May 2015 / Accepted: 14 August 2015 / Published: 20 August 2015

---

**Abstract:** Research in Transportation Business and Management (RTBM) was launched in 2009 with the first volume appearing in August 2011. The format of the journal is somewhat different to that of conventional journals in that each volume is themed focusing on a particular aspect of transportation from a business and management perspective. This paper focuses on the format of the journal and the decisions taken at the time of launch, eventually drawing conclusions about the chosen format and whether it has been an effective format for the competitive space into which the journal was launched. With four years of production data available, the authors conclude that the format has offered both positive and negative aspects, but that overall the launch format chosen was right for the competitive environment faced.

**Keywords:** scholarly transport journals; transportation modes; theme issues; scholarly journals; management

---

### 1. Introduction

Transport is a complex sector influencing all aspects of human life, not least in terms of the transfer of passengers and freight from one location to another. Transport is central to economic activity, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and growth, and improvements to transport result in a nation's economy becoming more competitive. In addition, it is multifaceted with infrastructure, information and communications technologies, environmental, human factors, and safety implications. Furthermore,

there are a number of transport modes—maritime, road (both public and private transport), rail, aviation, walking and cycling—all of which interact with each other and growth drivers differently. Given this complexity, there are a large number of scholars in the field and a multitude of perspectives on how to address the challenges faced by public policy planners, managers and citizens.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's International Transport Forum (2015) [1] states that global road and rail passenger travel will grow by between 120–230 percent to 2050; the figures depend on what happens to fuel prices and transport policy in an urban context. In terms of the growth in world freight by road and rail, the figures range from 230–420 percent by 2050; the figures depending on the future growth in GDP and freight intensity. As for air traffic passenger volumes, a 5 percent per annum growth is projected in the medium term. According to the World Bank (2014) [2], 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions are transport related and 1.2 million people are killed and 50 million injured each year on roads with 90 percent of deaths being accounted for by low- and middle-income countries. Given the plethora of issues to be found in the transport arena, it is not too surprising to find that there is a range of journals devoted to the subject area. One such journal is *Research in Transportation Business and Management (RTBM)*, launched in 2009 with the first volume appearing in August 2011. This paper focuses on the format of a journal and the decisions taken at the time of its launch.

The competitive space the journal was entering already had a number of journals serving several market segments but the editors and publisher of RTBM firmly believed that there was an underserved portion of the market both in terms of content and format. This paper examines the motivation for starting such a journal and the competitive environment it faced at the time of the launch and the journal format decisions, including the decision to launch as a “themed volume only” format. The paper then discusses various original decisions made and whether we believe they worked to enhance the contribution of the journal in the field of transportation research. This is then followed by a discussion of what we see as our key challenges in common with other journals and what specific challenges a themed-volume only format faces. Where relevant we use production and distribution data to evaluate our success. Unlike many other journals, this journal has veered from the standard processes and we frequently discuss our decisions in a context of a shared philosophy in our monthly editorial Skype. This article is based on our experiences to date and as such is more a case study and less empirical than usually found in a scientific journal, but we hope it will prove instructive for those publishers and editors considering this type of format.

## **2. The Motivation for the Journal**

RTBM was launched in 2009 and was the result of discussions held with the Executive Publisher for the Transport portfolio at Elsevier. There were a variety of journals published at the time in the area of transportation covering:

- Specific modes of transport (e.g., *Journal of Air Transport Management*, *Journal of Public Transportation*),
- Methodological approaches (e.g., *Transportation Research Part B*),
- Policy (e.g., *Transport Policy*, *Transportation Research Part A*),

- Subject-specific areas (e.g., Journal of Transport Geography, Journal of Transportation Engineering, Journal of Transport Economics and Policy, Maritime Policy and Management, Maritime Economics and Logistics, the International Journal of Transport Economics), and
- Technologies (e.g., Transportation Research C).

There was however no journal devoted specifically to transport in a business and management context. This was deemed to be an important but underserved area that RTBM set out to address. In fact at the time of the launch Elsevier published (among others) the transport journals listed in Table 1, which also states their primary focus. In addition there were a number of titles that were seen by the Executive Publisher (for Transport titles at Elsevier) as competitors to the Elsevier stable of transport journals, and these are listed in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Elsevier’s Existing Portfolio of Transportation Titles in 2009. (1) Impact as of 3 August 2015, information obtained from each Journals website; (2) Transportation Research was founded in 1967. It split into Parts A and B in 1979. Part A was initially subtitled “General” from Volume 13 to Volume 25; (3) Logistics and Transportation Review was originally published at the University of California at Berkeley, and then at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver Canada) before being sold to Elsevier in 1997 and rebranded as Transportation Research E.

Elsevier Journal Titles as of 2009	Date of First Volume	Single Mode or Multi-Modal	Specialist or Generalist Topic	Numbers on the Editorial Advisory Board	Impact Factor (1)
Accident Analysis & Prevention	1969	Multi-modal	General	63	2.070
Journal of Air Transport Management	1994	Single Mode	Specialist	37	0.931
Journal of Safety Research	1982 (Volume 13)	Multi-modal	General	73	1.870
Journal of Transport Geography	1993	Multi-modal	Specialist	36	2.650
Research in Transportation Economics	1994 (Volume 3)	Multi-modal	General	7	na
Transport Policy	1993	Multi-modal	General	46	1.492
Transportation Research Part A: Policy & Practice (2)	1992 (Volume 26)	Multi-modal	General	14	2.789
Transportation Research Part B: Methodological	1979 (Volume 13)	Multi-modal	General	68	2.952
Transportation Research Part C: Emerging Technologies	1993	Multi-modal	General	44	2.818
Transportation Research Part D: Transport & Environment	1996	Multi-modal	Specific	15	1.937
Transportation Research Part E: Logistics & Transportation Review	1997 (Volume 33) (3)	Multi-modal	Specific	55	2.676
Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology & Behaviour	1998	Multi-modal	General	15	1.473

A factor of importance to the development of a business and management oriented transport journal is deregulation. In many jurisdictions, once all modes and selected infrastructure had been deregulated, the focus of research became a business and management one and not a regulatory one. Privatisation furthered this trend. Both deregulation and privatization therefore were significant motivators for the

journal, seeking to address these areas from an academic business transportation perspective and thinking strategically rather than operationally about these issues.

**Table 2.** Competitor Journals as seen by Elsevier in 2009. (1) Impact as of 3 August 2015; (2) Known as Transportmetrica A: Transport Science. (2005–2012).

Competitor Journals	Date of First Volume	Publisher	Single Mode or Multi-Modal	Specialist or Generalist Topic	Impact Factor (1)
Transportation	1972	Springer	Multi-modal	General	2.358 (2014)
Transport Reviews	1981	Taylor & Francis	Multi-modal	General	2.903 (2014)
Transportation Science	1967	Informa	Multi-modal	General	2.294 (2013)
Transportation Planning & Technology	1972	Taylor & Francis	Multi-modal	General	0.512 (2014)
Journal of Advanced Transportation	1984 (Volume 18)	Wiley	Multi-modal	General	1.606
Transportmetrica (2)	2005	Taylor & Francis	Multi-modal	General	1.333 (2014)
Journal of Transport Economics & Policy	1967	-	Multi-modal	General	0.95
Transportation Research Record	1963	Transportation Research Board of the U. S. National Academies	Multi-modal	General	0.556 (2013)

As can be seen in Table 1, overall there was a lack of a business and management focused transport journal with the exception of the specific air transport management focused journal. The Executive Publisher had been aware of this for some time, and had indeed made an unsuccessful attempt at addressing this with the launch of the International Journal of Transport Management, which only managed to publish two volumes in its three-year life (2002–2004). It is not possible to state for sure why the International Journal of Transport Management did not continue other than to say any new journal needs a degree of luck and no small measure of persistence in gaining awareness in the early stages. RTBM was fortunate in being able to be launched at the World Conference on Transport Research in Lisbon in 2010 and finding very competent, senior academics willing to be Volume Editors from the outset; they were able to elicit good quality contributions and set a high bar from the outset. As such, the launch of RTBM provided a focus for articles specifically devoted to business and management within the transport sector, offering a forum for the exchange of new and innovative ideas.

Rather than replicate exactly the same format as that of the International Journal of Transport Management, and indeed the majority of journals, RTBM modeled itself on Research in Transportation Economics (RTE) in terms of themed-only volumes. RTE comprised themed volumes including Shipping Economics, Port Economics, Bus Transport—Economics, Policy and Planning, Railroad Economics and Transit Economics. This essentially meant each volume was of a “special issue” type format, a format that proved popular with RTE. Clearly such a format has advantages and disadvantages and as such is a “blessing” and a “curse”—and the conclusions will focus on this assessment.

The transportation field has a large number of journals of both single mode and thematic types, with a particular focus be it economics, geography, safety, modeling or the like. For those undertaking research in the field of business and management, there is little to relate to and the submission of an

article based on the strategic management literature would often get the feedback: “Please rewrite; we suggest a political economy theoretical base would be more appropriate for your work.” In other words, the research conducted in business and management academic programs were hitting a hurdle against acceptance by journals serving another discipline. RTBM focuses on this underserved group of authors, and, for Elsevier, also provided a relief valve for RTE as too many proposals submitted to RTE for themed volumes did not fit its economics focus.

In saying this, we agree with an anonymous reviewer that the transportation literature is continually changing and there has been a blurring of the boundaries between the disciplines. It is no longer the case that engineers publish in engineering journals, or transport economists publish in economic journals and so on. In other words there is no longer a set of discipline silos but rather an abundance of interdisciplinary research interests and influences. An illustration of this is Transportation Research E: Logistics and Transportation Review, which publishes papers across the spectrum of disciplines and covers all modes along with broad policy, and infrastructure issues.

In addition there was an opportunity for a journal that provided for longer, more complex articles and also provided a publishing outlet for practitioners. The majority of original research articles in the transportation field have a word limit imposed, often from 6000 to 7500 words. While concise papers in accurate and targeted language are appreciated by most readers, it is often not possible for complex topics to be discussed in sufficient depth within tight word limits. From the outset the Editors of RTBM made a decision that a 7500 word limit, as seen for example with the *Transportation Research Record*, is grounded in the days of counting words to conform with a strict page limit so as to save paper in typeface set articles; the recognition that electronic publishing may free the author to right-size the article for the topic, and that restrictions on page length do not always serve the reader best became guiding principles endorsed by the Executive Publisher. As a case in point, one of the articles in the themed volume *Railroad privatization and deregulation: Lessons from three decades of experience worldwide* [3] exceeded the usual word length restrictions of most journals by about a factor of two, but is an effective illustration of what can be accomplished if word limits are relaxed. The author had investigated the regulation of open access provisions for rail operations in Australia, the UK and North America and assessed these countries’ regulation of access provisions in privatization and de-regulation. The absence of word limit restrictions allowed the author the space needed to adequately explore the topic in depth and served both rail managers and regulators in North America well.

From the outset, the vision for RTBM was one where authors are challenged to make their research relevant to practitioners as well as to further scholarly investigation. In addition practitioners are encouraged to submit papers, subject to the normal peer review process and a number have indeed done that.

*The aim and scope of RTBM is to publish research on international aspects of transport management such as business strategy, communication, sustainability, finance, human resource management, law, logistics, marketing, franchising, privatisation and commercialisation. RTBM welcomes proposals for themed volumes from scholars in management, in relation to all modes of transport. Issues should be cross-disciplinary for one mode or single-disciplinary for all modes. It is keen to receive proposals that combine*

*and integrate theories and concepts that are taken from or can be traced to origins in different disciplines or lessons learned from different modes and approaches to the topic. By facilitating the development of interdisciplinary or intermodal concepts, theories and ideas, and by synthesizing these for the journal's audience, we seek to contribute to both scholarly advancement of knowledge and the state of managerial practice.*

To support our target audience of practitioner authors and to explain our vision, we added a downloadable Author Information Pack to the web site information on the journal and made the following request of all authors submitting papers to the journal:

#### Implications for Managerial Practice

Identify the implications of your findings and conclusions for future managerial practice. Do not simply restate the results but tell the practicing reader how your results may be applied to future transport projects and the management of them, for example.

#### Contribution to Scholarly Knowledge

Identify the contribution that your research has made that other scholars may build on. Consider providing a research agenda for you/others to execute through future research. This section may stand alone or form a subsection, when coupled with the previous one, of a section called Research Implications.

It is our belief that practitioners are actively seeking knowledge that will help them manage their businesses better and we hope they will think of RTBM when seeking input to their decision-making. There has been a move in recent years for academic research, at least in the UK, to be required to reveal its relevance to the business and management community. RTBM provides this opportunity.

### **3. Other Original Decisions Made**

The majority of scholarly journals have quite large editorial boards, as seen in Table 1. The reason for this is many and varied. They may be designed to spread the reviewing load (although experience is that loads are concentrated), to solicit papers (although in reality this is very rare), to reflect a wide geographic diversity, or to be based on key names in the area. In reality the demand by the journal on each individual is actually quite small.

For RTBM the reverse is true, with six Editorial board members. Because so few of the papers in each volume are unsolicited, the individual volume editor is responsible for assigning appropriate reviewers from their own networks. As the topic of each volume is quite different in terms of scope, modes and approach, Editorial Board Members may be asked to serve as reviewers and then not used again for a number of years. Given these differences, we sought geographic coverage and modal diversity with as few individuals as possible in our Editorial Board. Therefore, unlike most journals, we set the ideal number of advisors at six, limited how many from each major geographic region, and sought senior colleagues to assist us rather than looking to grow the board by adding mid-career individuals. The primary role of the Editorial Board Member is to encourage proposals for volumes from their network of colleagues and we consider their contribution to be successful if that is what they do for us. It is not a usual approach but it serves the volume proposal generation purpose effectively.

One of the issues with a journal of this type is maintaining momentum and we are keen to ensure that we have a steady stream of proposals. This is where we find our Editorial Board to be most helpful. In addition, we encourage members of the editorial board to consider acting as a Guest Editor for a volume based on the Aim and Scope of the Journal. Three of our Editorial Board members have acted as Volume Editors so far, and we see this as something we would like to continue to encourage. In addition, one of the Board members is currently editing a second volume of the Journal.

#### **4. Managing the Review Process**

##### *4.1. The World as Seen by Authors*

For authors, RTBM is another publishing avenue they would not have had five years ago. It is our opinion that authors seek: (1) journals that are marketed well and read; (2) journals that treat them well with timely feedback; and (3) journals that respect their hard work. In addition, some authors feel they must publish in a journal with an impact factor and that is on a respected or prescribed journal ranking list. Potential contributors do contact us asking about the ranking of the journal, its impact factor and the peer reviewing process, and we discuss the first two later in the next section.

Like many journals, we seek to provide timely feedback and respect. However as with the majority of journals, we are subject to the timely responsiveness of reviewers who are volunteers and are in the main not recognized for a quality review. The authors of this paper have faced this issue repeatedly with many of the special issues they have edited for journals such as Transportation Planning and Technology, Transport Policy, Maritime Policy and Management, International Journal of Shipping Transport and Logistics, and Case Studies on Transport Policy. As authors are “handled” directly by our guest Volume Editors, we can only achieve author satisfaction through making sure that Volume Editors are aware of our keen enthusiasm for a timely response to authors and we have incorporated our philosophy for such into a special document created for each Volume Editor on how we like our volumes (and our authors) to be managed. Regular contact between the Handling Editor (one of two Journal Editors) and the Volume Editor(s) serves to reinforce this. A core philosophy about the treatment of authors is examined by Day (2011) [4] and we subscribe to the belief that authors be treated well, even though the review process may result in rejection. We believe in treating authors (also reviewers and guest editors) as we would wish to be treated ourselves, and by providing timely and adequate feedback in a diplomatic way is how it should be done. We also firmly believe in dealing with rejection by providing as high a quality of feedback as is possible in order that authors may improve their papers for publication elsewhere.

We are also very pleased that the journal offers electronic publishing of articles via ScienceDirect as they are accepted, providing authors very timely access to their work by others; publication is not dependent upon all papers in a volume being ready.

Finally, there is the question of how we handle paper(s) submitted by the guest Volume Editor(s). Volume Editors often are also interested in submitting a paper to the themed volume as demonstration of their expertise in the topic area. This creates a conflict of interest but we believe that a themed volume without the editor as a key expert is also undesirable. As a result, the Journal Editor handling the volume for production is assigned to manage the review process for papers submitted by Volume

Editors and the manuscript management system firewall maintains the integrity of the blind review process so the Volume Editor is treated like any other author and the reviewers and processes are not visible to the Volume Editor for that paper.

#### 4.2. *The World as Seen by Reviewers*

Reviewing for journals is often seen by reviewers as a thankless task. Because a review is double-blind, the reviewer does not get recognition when they take the time to do a quality review (multiple hours of effort) *versus* a simple review (completed too quickly to provide author advice). In many cases, the reviewer may provide sufficient effort that they are almost a silent co-author. The philosophy espoused by Taylor (2003) is central to our approach [5].

Thus in the current time pressured world where too few are asked to review too frequently, it is becoming harder and harder to get quality reviewing completed in a timely way that serves the needs of authors and of editors. As the number of journals proliferate, not least in the area of transportation, there is also a tendency for native English speakers to be asked too frequently to serve as reviewers, as there tends to be a bias in favour of those with the native language skills. As non-English speaking authors tend to be asked to review less frequently, this results in a more onerous workload for English language reviewers. This is exacerbated by the challenge of providing adequate review of specialist topics when many of the authors for a themed volume may already know those specialists in their field. To prevent the incestuous nature of reviewing in a themed volume, we took the decision to ask Volume Editors to assign no more than one review to another author in the same volume and to draw on methodological reviewers from a broader group of specialists using the Elsevier “Find a Reviewer” tool.

We also took the decision to thank reviewers who provide high quality reviews with a reviewer “thank you” and recognition in the early years of production.

#### 4.3. *The World as Seen by Editors*

As Journal Editors we see quality research but also some disheartening concerns. In the four years of publication, we have experienced the following:

- Authors making similar paper submissions to multiple journals even though they sign the author agreement saying that the work is original;
- Authors making “out of scope” submissions; a paper on pavement life cycle is not really within the aims and scope of the journal, but it is definitely inappropriate for a volume on the Management of Transport in Remote Regions. Likewise a paper on intermodal terminals for freight does not belong in a volume on cycling.
- Even though the journal was launched four years ago and with very clear instructions on the website, we continue to receive unsolicited papers from authors who assume the journal has the conventional format.
- In spite of requests that papers have five authors or less, we see a trend to put all names in the department on the proposal to get better individual author scoring. Beyond five authors we have to question how much of the contribution is gaming of the system of scholarly citations driven by granting agencies and institutional funding.



- We are not alone when we see other journals gaming the citation system, as noted by Chorus (2015) [6]. We have seen journals require authors to cite author papers from the same journal and we believe this to be ethically wrong but all too frequent. We know that a number of competitor journals do this as a “default” by how the manuscript management system is set up.

We have attempted to identify why so few articles actually pass the bar given our “invitation from known networks” and a web-based Call for Papers process. Consulting the publisher’s manuscript submission database, we developed a data set for further evaluation. Working from a full set of all submitted articles since our first year of production (2011), we categorized papers submitted into three categories (Table 3):

1. accepted, defined as published
2. in process, defined as either under review, under revision, or with the editor
3. rejected, defined as all others. This category has been further subdivided into three sub-categories:
  - (a) rejected for cause, defined as a paper that was reviewed and failed to be of acceptable standard during the review process;
  - (b) unable to complete, defined as author declined to revise or revision not completed in time or editor rejected as the volume was closed for production and the author had been unresponsive; and
  - (c) rejected as an inappropriate submission, defined as all of those that were rejected or withdrawn because they either failed to meet the aims and scope of the journal overall, or failed to be appropriate for the themed volume to which they were submitted.

**Table 3.** Understanding Rejection Causes.

<b>All Submissions 2011 to 1 February 2015</b>	<b>325</b>
1. Accepted	158
2. In process	28
3. Rejections	139
Rejection percent	42.8%
<b>Analysis of rejections</b>	
a. Inappropriate submission	59
b. Unable to complete the article in time (effective withdrawal)	8
c. Rejected for cause (paper did not meet standards)	72
Total	139

To categorize these, we reallocated papers based on Elsevier’s status identification. Categories 1 and 2 were direct from the manuscript management system. Category 3a was all those papers that were rejected, having had more than one round of review or were rejected by the editor (but clearly on topic for the submitted volume). The second and third categories were subjective, based on our recollection of events and assessment of the volume topic against the submitted paper title and abstract. Unable to complete the article on time is clearly a curse faced by Journals of this nature. There is a clearly defined production schedule and papers that do not adhere to that schedule are in danger of not being included in the volume. More importantly they cannot be carried over to the next volume since the

theme will be totally different. In conclusion, while the majority of rejections are for cause, it is a slim majority.

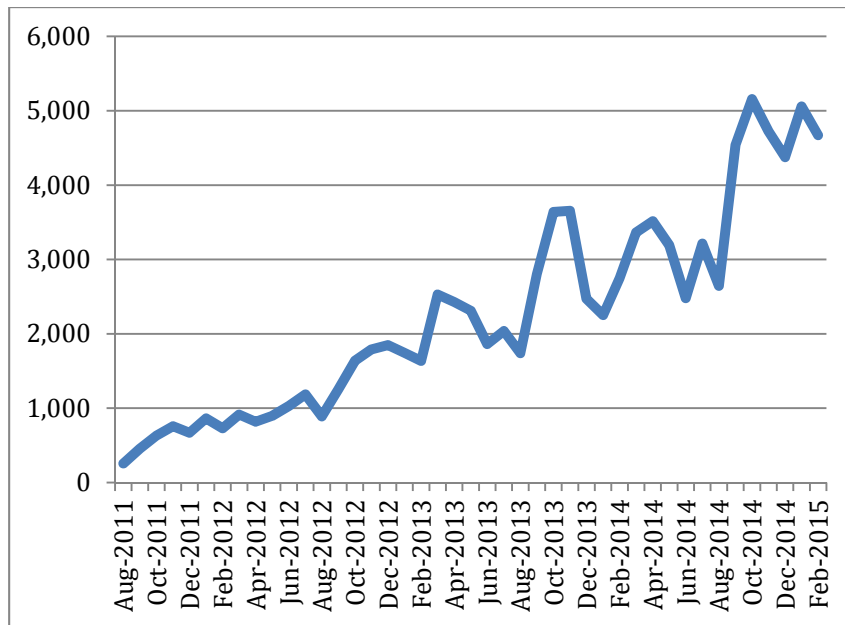
## 5. How Do We Measure Success?

A major success of the Journal has been to identify emerging themes/issues within the transport business and management arena as stated in the aim and scope of the Journal. For examples, published themed volumes include:

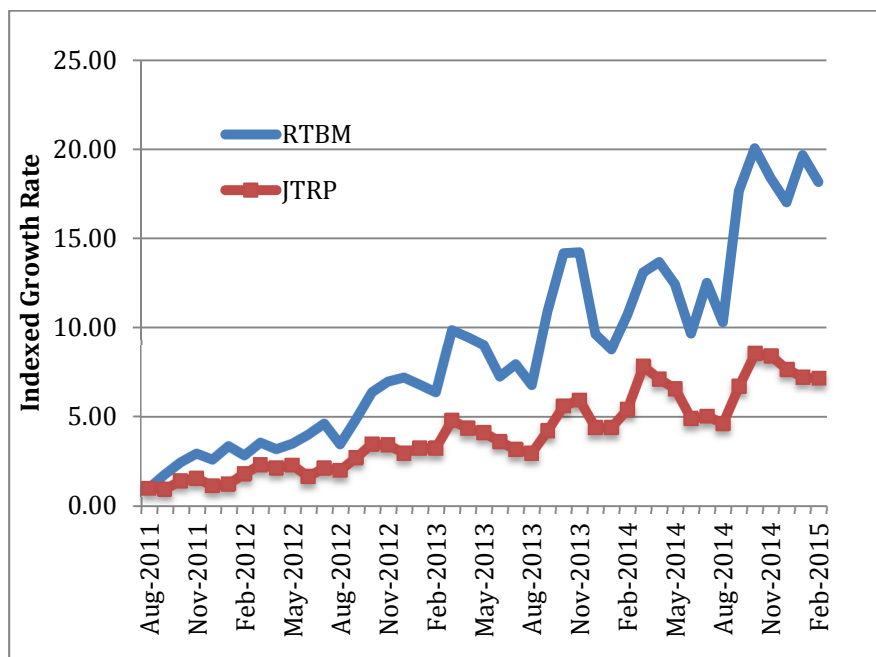
- airport management,
- accessibility in public transport,
- management of transport in remote regions,
- intermodal freight transport and logistics,
- valuing transportation: measuring what matters for sustainability,
- port performance and strategy,
- the marketing of transport services,
- business travel,
- cruises and cruise ports: structures and strategies, and
- operational constraints on effective governance of intermodal transport.

At the time of writing, volumes in process include managing the business of cycling, transportation and trade across international borders and energy efficiency in maritime logistics chains. In each volume the editorial has been seen as an important means of setting the research agenda and for discussing the gaps in research programs for these new and emerging fields. Where there are new fields, like business travel, cruise and cycling, the volumes have been smaller but for emergent fields where there is a pent-up demand by authors for a transportation management venue, the volumes have more than exceeded a 12 articles per volume target.

A second measure of success is growing downloads. With any new journal, it is about word-of-mouth and awareness generating author submissions and downloads of published articles. From 2011 to 2014, seven articles in RTBM have had more than 1500 downloads and 25 had 1000 or more downloads each. Figure 1 demonstrates that the journal was able to move beyond the challenge of paper submissions with a themed volume approach and gained a respectable volume of downloads (more than 97,000 since inception) and download growth month-over-month from the early days after its launch. Figure 2 illustrates that the growth was strong, as would be expected in the growth phase of a new product, and exceeded the growth rate of a mature product, Transport Policy (JTRP). A word of caution is required in terms of downloads. Since the articles are free to download, it is all too easy to download a paper to look at later and then discard. A more robust metric might be to distinguish between downloads for free and those which have to be paid for. Unfortunately this level of information is not available.



**Figure 1.** RTBM’s Monthly Download Track Record (August 2011–February 2015); After deleting “Editorial Board”, “Errata” and “Correspondence” downloads, the figure shows downloads by month for the 168 RTBM articles and editorials available online January 2011–December 2014; Source: Elsevier internal data—COUNTER-compliant.



**Figure 2.** Comparison of Growth Rates in Monthly Downloads (August 2011–February 2015); After deleting “Editorial Board”, “Errata” and “Correspondence” downloads, the figure compares the indexed growth in downloads by month for the 168 RTBM articles and editorials available online January 2011–December 2014 and JTRP’s 455 articles published online over the same period. The indexed growth rate in downloads was set to 1.00 for the first month (August 2011) to put the data on a comparable base given the differences in production size; Source: Elsevier internal data—COUNTER-compliant.

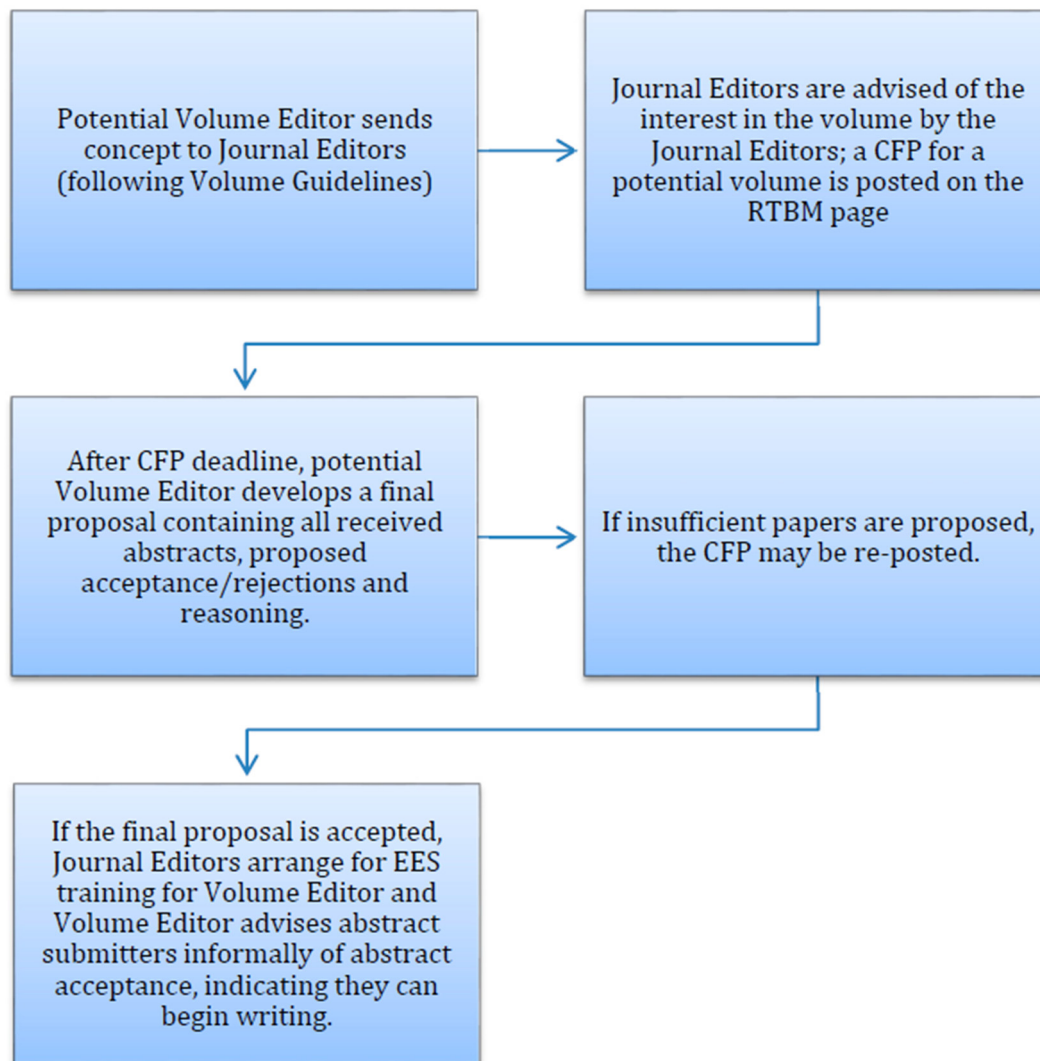
While downloads are a good measure of awareness (and a revenue benchmark for the publisher), a true measure of success is the number of citations received. After our first four years of production, an analysis of article citation data for articles published in 2011–2014 collected by Elsevier reveals that RTBM has an h-index of 5 based on the production of 175 articles. This means that the top five articles published have five or more citations. This compares with an h-index of 19 (the top 19 have 19 or more citations with 492 papers used to calculate the index) for JTRP.

We see JTRP as an established journal with a solid impact factor and over 20 years to build that success; it has had the time to acquire market presence, is mature and therefore has high awareness, been able to build a much larger production base and be seen by authors as a reputable source for literature review and therefore citation. We view RTBM's current h-index as a good score given the time since launch and the lag between publication and citation being almost a year; we will look to see it grow in the coming years.

Two hurdles that any new journal faces are the need to be accepted into the citation indices managed by Thomson Reuters in order to get an Impact Factor and the ability to get the visibility to be on a journal-ranking list. As for the former, a journal must first demonstrate that it can publish issues in a regular and timely fashion; the evaluation by Thomson Reuters can then take a year or more and a journal cannot apply until it has passed a three-year production threshold. RTBM applied as early as possible and is patiently waiting to hear. In the interim, the website includes a section on the most cited RTBM articles based on Scopus.

To address the latter is more difficult. Journal rankings and the emphasis by business school accreditation organizations and/ or funding agencies can cause authors to ignore the opportunity to publish in RTBM. We agree with McKinnon (2013) [7], who noted several outcomes likely from the over-emphasis of these bodies on journal rankings, which can distort the choice of research methodology, lengthen publication times considerably and encourage disloyalty to the specialist journals in their field; he also noted that such emphasis on journal rankings favours an ivory tower, theoretical approach over practical relevance (and practitioner focus). While we agree that this emphasis deters publication in unranked journals and journals that seek to include practitioners in their readership, both features of RTBM, the use of rankings in many universities' tenure and/or promotion evaluations means all journal editors, not just RTBM's editors must seek to secure a ranking and impact factor or run the risk of the journal being ignored.

To ensure that all potential Volume editors have a greater likelihood of a successful volume, we require a more detailed volume proposal than is common with Special Issues submitted to most journals. As there is an expectation of more articles per published volume, this indicates to us that the potential Volume Editor needs to have extensive personal networks in the topic, the ability to attract authors to write on the topic, and the ability to attract reviewers. So in addition to developing the volume's Call for Papers, we ask that they also identify potential authors and encourage those potential authors to write possible abstracts to include with their proposal. This allows us to judge if the volume will meet our aim and scope, and therefore our target reader. We also clarify the decision process we use in our proposal guidelines; the flow chart is reproduced in Figure 3. Once a successful proposal is chosen a second set of guidelines is provided to the Volume Editor(s) with the aim that it will guide them through their first RTBM Volume's production. This attention to detail, we believe, provides more personal encouragement and manages expectations better.



**Figure 3.** Flow of Volume Proposals: From Concept to Authorization to Proceed.

A potential Volume Editor sends a draft proposal to Journal Editors (following Volume Guidelines, detailed on the journal’s web site). The Journal Editors advise the submitters of their interest in the volume; and if the response is positive, a Call For Papers for a potential volume is posted on the RTBM home page to help encourage papers from other authors. If the final proposal is accepted, Journal Editors arrange for manuscript submission program training for Volume Editor and Volume Editor advises abstract submitters informally of abstract acceptance, indicating they can begin writing the papers.

We have no evidence to suggest that contributors, to date, have had any issue with the production process. Since the themed volume operates on a strict production schedule, the time between submission and publication can be quite short and this can be seen as a blessing for the authors. This is particularly the case given the importance of peer reviewed papers as part of the promotion and tenure process.

## 6. Blessings and Curses with a Themed Volume Approach

Unlike most journals, the Volume Editor manages the review process with the Journal Editors serving as mentors and providing guidance. The resultant product is only as good as the Volume Editor(s). The blessing is that each Volume Editor knows his/her own networks and who are the best reviewers to use to evaluate the research. The curse is that they may find that they are making requests and expending the goodwill garnered over several years of research for one volume.

To manage the process well, we found it necessary to develop detailed instructions for Volume Editors for both pre- and post- proposal development. The blessing is that the process is always the same (from a Journal Editor perspective). The curse is that the Volume Editor is different for every volume and so there is no benefit of a learning curve for the Volume Editor; we start fresh with each volume and its new Volume Editor(s). Each new Volume Editor has to undertake training in the use of the Elsevier Electronic System (EES) and this can be both time-consuming and somewhat difficult for Volume Editors. In saying this, the Journal Editors are very much aware of this learning curve challenge. Volume Editors also face the curse in that they have to encourage enough abstracts and full papers prior to obtaining volume approval and some may not make it through the review process leaving the volume light on papers. We do learn the “signs” that tell us the volume is not on track (for example a low number of papers for a particular topic, or poor response times by Volume Editors), but after four production years we do not see that the task is getting any easier.

The curse of a themed volume approach is that far too many authors are simply unaware that the journal has only themed volumes and select to make submissions inappropriately, as demonstrated by our analysis of rejection statistics. We can only hope that, as the journal becomes more widely known and recognized for the format, this cause of rejection will diminish.

One of the great blessings of a “Volume Only” themed journal is that each volume can stand on its own and may make a very coherent read on the state of the art in the topic area. Similar to a book series but dressed in journal clothes, RTBM enjoys the best of both worlds; an RTBM volume can have the stature of a book, while enjoying the benefits of journal format in terms of dissemination, discoverability, and citation. Furthermore, the editorial offers the opportunity for the Volume Editor to have influence in the field. The editorial can summarize the state of the art as represented by the papers in the Volume, set the future research agenda for others interested in the topic, and discuss gaps and opportunities in future research programs. We have concluded that themed volumes can fit into a crowded competitive space if there remains an under-served audience, as was the case for business and management authors in a space already well served by economics journals.

Volume Editors can draw on their networks so as to build their careers in a particular specialty area, and therefore this type of format assists in the advancement of mid-career scholars. They can also focus on particular conferences, or conference themes, as a source of papers<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the past, RTBM has published volumes on “Port Performance and Strategies” and “Cruises and Cruise Ports” arising from the 2013 and 2014 annual conference of the International Association of Maritime Economists and on Sustainable Freight Transport from the World Conference on Transport Research Society held in Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

## 7. Conclusions

In conclusion there are a number of blessings and curses in terms of a journal that follows the structure RTBM has adopted. It is important to say however that some of the issues the journal has encountered over its first few years are probably just normal “teething problems” that would be faced by any journal start-up and not necessarily due to it being a “Themed” journal. In saying this, however, the curse of a journal of this type is the potential loss of journal vision given that each volume involves a different guest Volume Editor. This is not the experience to date but it is a possibility. There is also the issue of training editors on the EES manuscript management system each time a new volume is contracted; this is both time-consuming and difficult for those editors unsure about such systems or those who have never held an editor role before. Another issue faced is the need for Volume Editors to chase authors to submit or resubmit papers. There is not the same level of urgency with conventional journals given their more flexible time-line to production, but with themed volumes there is only one window of opportunity. Finally, we conclude that authors submitting often have a poor understanding of the process and do not carefully check the journal web site before paper submission.

As for blessings, each volume therefore has a focus unlike the normal journal configuration where papers on a particular topic are spread throughout the various issues. This has the advantage of affording researchers in a particular topic area the opportunity to access relevant papers in that area. It also allows for a more integrated holistic approach in the editorial, providing a research agenda or guidance for future research. The RTBM format provides the opportunity for an editor/s to take a fresh view on a theme that they have a particular passion for. Themed volumes in a topical area are likely to result in the volume receiving more downloads resulting in the papers being used by those influential in the field or by practitioners seeking guidance in terms of a particular topic of interest.

## Acknowledgments

The authors appreciate the support of Elsevier in providing the data requested to create Figures 1 and 2, and the list of those journals developed in Tables 1 and 2.

## Author Contributions

This paper was written jointly following an agreed structure discussed at the outset and revised through discussion.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. OECD/ITF. ITF Transport Outlook 2015, OECD Publishing/ITF. 2015. Available online: [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/transport/itf-transport-outlook-2015\\_9789282107782-en#page4](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/transport/itf-transport-outlook-2015_9789282107782-en#page4) (accessed on 10 May 2015).

2. The World Bank. Transport Overview. 2015. Available online: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/transport/overview> (accessed on 10 May 2015).
3. Cairns, M. Expansion of regulated access to railway infrastructure in North America: Implications from practices and recent experiences with regulated access overseas. *Res. Transp. Bus. Manag.* **2013**, *6*, 31–44.
4. Day, N.E. The Silent Majority: Manuscript Rejection and Its Impact on Scholars. *Acad. Manag. Learn. Educ.* **2011**, *10*, 704–718.
5. Taylor, S. Big R (versus little r) Reviewers: The Anonymous Coauthor. *J. Acad. Mark. Sci.* **2003**, *31*, 341–343.
6. Chorus, C.G. The practice of strategic journal self-citation: It exists, and should stop. *Eur. J. Transp. Infrastruct. Res.* **2015**, *15*, 274–281.
7. McKinnon, A. Starry-eyed: Journal Rankings and the Future of Logistics Research. *Int. J. Phys. Distrib. Logist. Manag.* **2013**, *43*, 6–17.

© 2015 by the authors; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).