



The Research Group  
Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research

has the honor to invite you to the public defence of the PhD thesis of

## Merlin Gillard

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences

Joint PhD with Université du Luxembourg

Title of the PhD thesis:

**Producing public transport:  
the roles of fares in mobility governance, labor and policing**

### Supervisors:

Prof. dr. Kobe Boussauw (VUB)  
Prof. dr. Wojciech Kęłowski (VUB)  
Prof. dr. Veronique Van Acker (Université du  
Luxembourg & Luxembourg Institute of  
Socio-Economic Research)

The defence will take place on  
**Thursday, May 22, 2025 at 1.30 p.m.**  
**on VUB Etterbeek campus,**  
**Pleinlaan 2, Elsene, auditorium I.2.01**

The defence can also be followed online:  
<https://tinyurl.com/yc4csxn2>

### Members of the jury

Prof. dr. René Kreichauf (VUB, chair)  
Prof. dr. Markus Hesse (Université du  
Luxembourg, secretary)  
Prof. dr. Lucas Melgaço (VUB)  
Dr. Sonja Ruud (KU Leuven)  
Prof. dr. Vania Ceccato (KTH Royal Institute of  
Technology, SE)

### Curriculum vitae

Merlin Gillard is a researcher in geography and holds a master in urban studies from VUB and ULB. Since 2021, he has been working within the project *"From low fares to no fares: an analysis of economic, operational, socio-spatial and political dynamics of fare-free public transport"* as a PhD candidate at Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research and at VUB. His research relates to the political economy of mobility policies, the labor conditions of transport workers, and the policing of public space (the policing and surveillance of public transport and of mass events).

### Abstract of the PhD research

Public transport (PT) fares policies are usually examined from an economic or social point of view, looking at whether they produce effects on passengers, modal shift, or mobility sustainability. This thesis examines instead the political aspects of fare policies, at the two levels of a) policy-making and b) the social production of PT by workers and passengers.

To this end, I ask two main questions: (1) How are fare policies conceived, produced and implemented by policy-makers, planners and transport operators? (2) How do these fare policies affect the everyday labor of policing public transport? This research addresses these questions throughout four empirical chapters, examining the cases of Luxembourg and Santiago de Cuba, which provide two highly contrasting examples of fare policies. In Luxembourg, fares were abolished in 2020, as part of an entrepreneurial project fueled by environmental and social rationales. In the city of Santiago de Cuba, strategies to mitigate the long-lasting mobility scarcity resulted in an increase and complexification of fares.

The first chapter looks into the ideological struggle of Luxembourg's fare-free public transport project, before it was implemented as an entrepreneurial strategy without questioning the domination of car use. In the second chapter, I analyze how authorities and inhabitants of Santiago de Cuba are countering the daily struggle of mobility scarcity by developing various strategies of commoning and privatizing transport, aimed at collectively maximizing the use of motorized vehicles. The next two chapters compare the impacts of fare abolition and complexification on the micropolitics of PT. The third chapter examines the double role of fares in PT policing and surveillance through flows management, maximizing passenger mobilities or disciplining them. Paradoxically, fare abolition is linked to the re-bordering of PT spaces and fare complexification is linked to the horizontal management of such spaces. The fourth chapter studies how fares affect the working conditions of PT staff, whose daily tasks and pricing practices are monitored by supervisors, colleagues, and passengers, and highlighting in addition how workers engage in struggles with the state over these fare policies. Overall, this work sheds light on the various political dimensions of fare policies, allowing to go beyond assessments that would be solely economic, technical, or behavioral, and show the impacts of fare policies beyond passengers.