

# Why Did UK Governments Cut Road Building in the 1990s and Expand it After 2010?



# Forthcoming Book: *Transport Protest and Politics – From Swampy to Extinction Rebellion*



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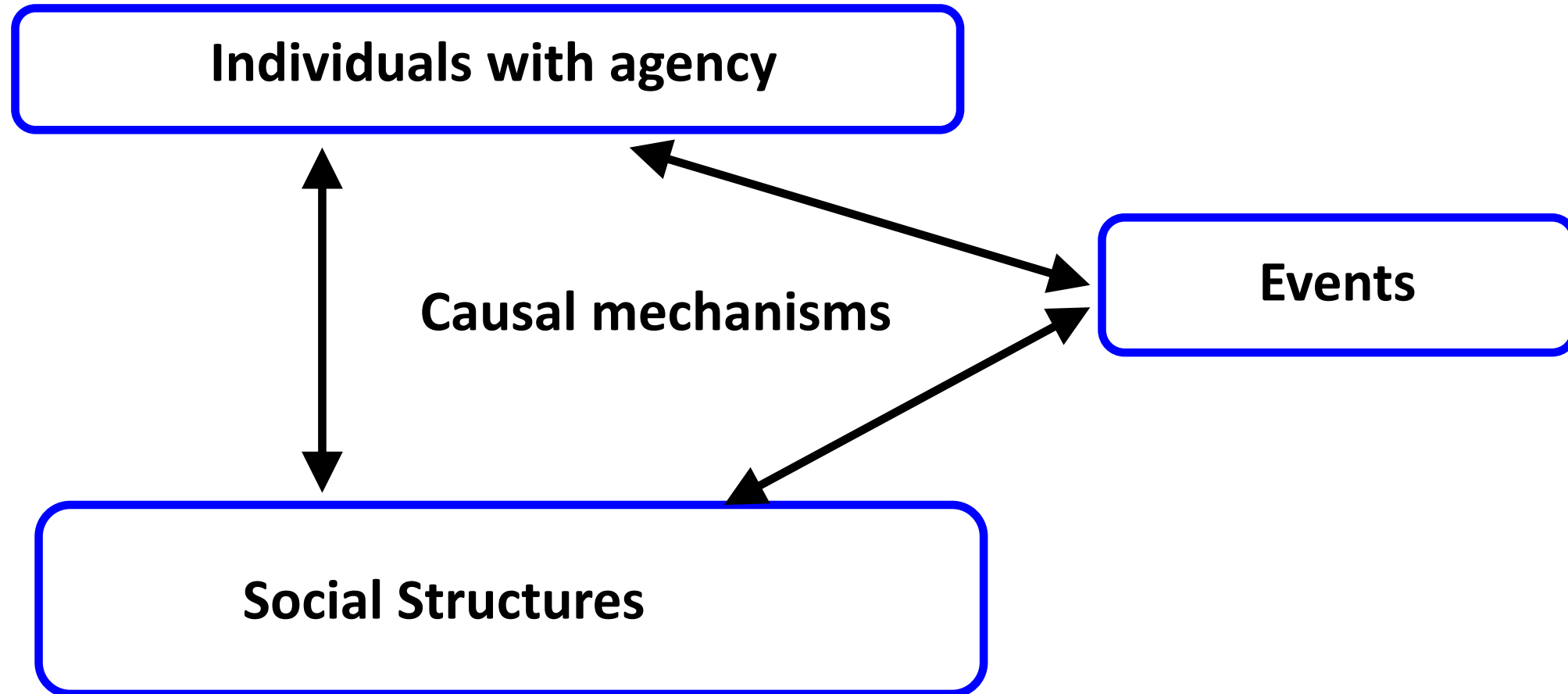
Planned publication date: End 2020

# The Research Question:

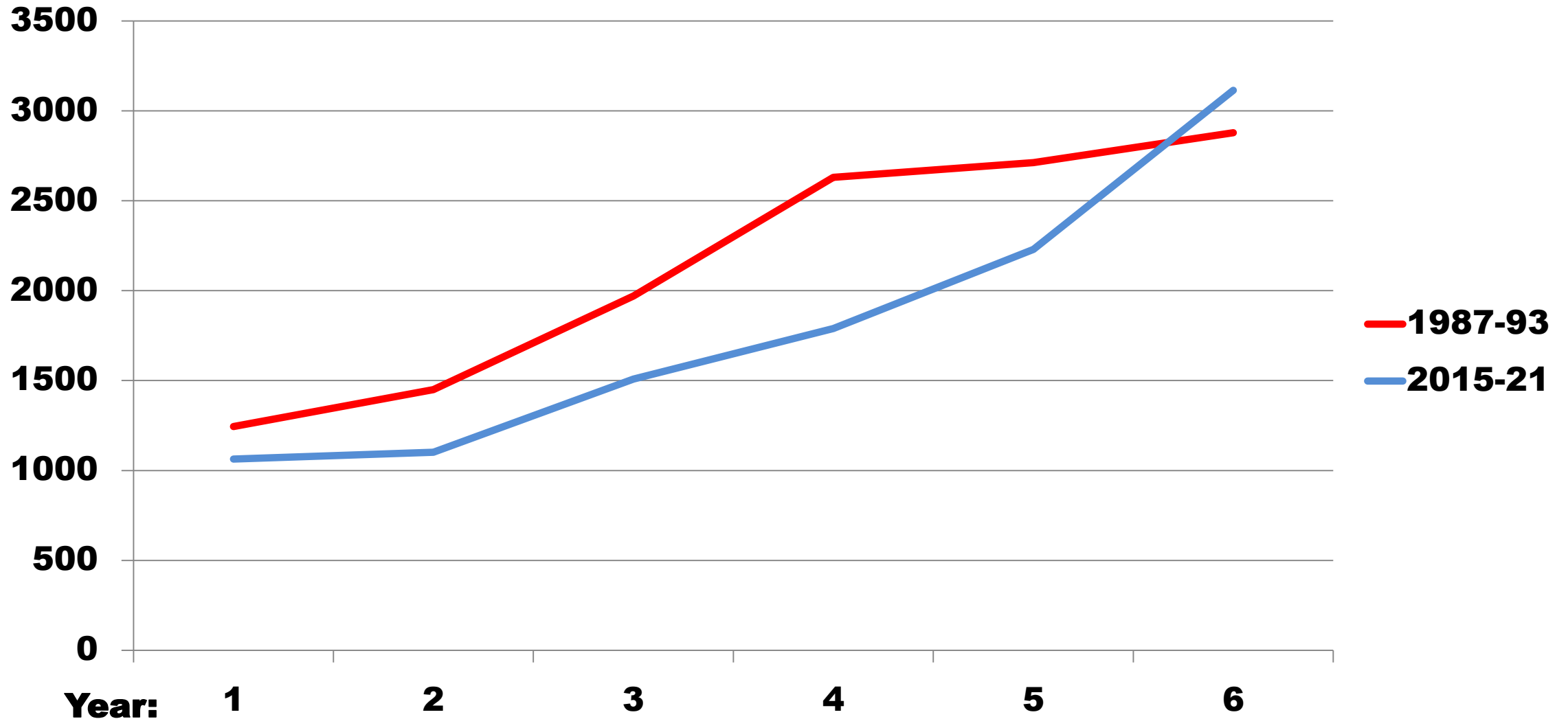
- In 1996 a Conservative Government, leading the country out of recession, struggling with a large budget deficit decided to **slash** the road building budget.
- In 2013 a Conservative Government, leading the country out of recession, struggling with a large budget deficit decided to **treble** the road building budget.

**Why?**

# Simplified Critical Realist Model of Social Change



# Strategic Road Building Programmes in Constant (2015) Prices



Sources: Trunk Roads England (DTp, 1990), Roads Investment Strategy (DfT, 2015)

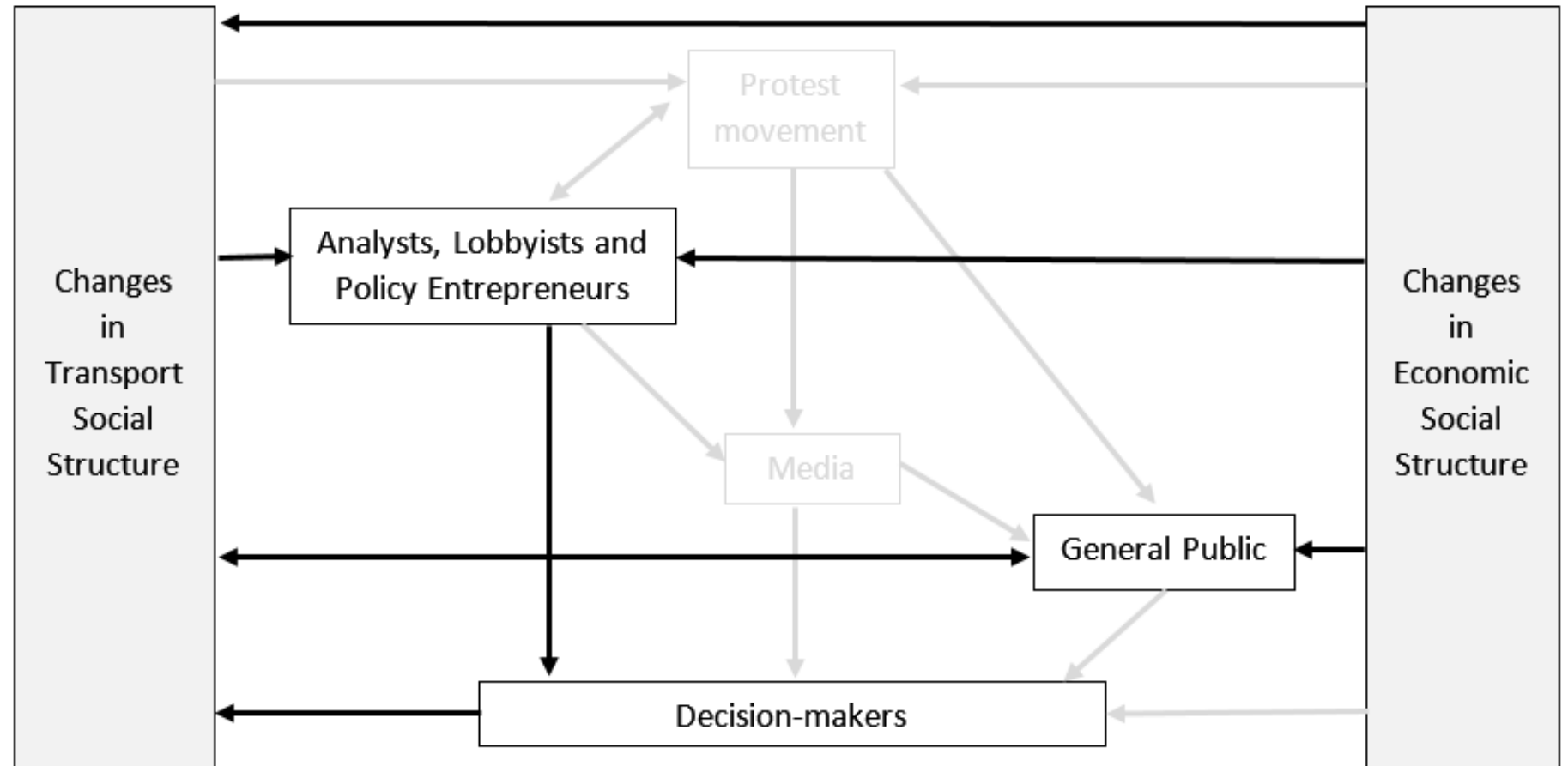
# People Interviewed

		Experience Relevant to Government:		
	Total	Major	Labour	Coalition
Government Ministers	6	4	6	6
Advisors	8	3	8	7
Civil Servants	5	4	5	5
NGO representatives/lobbyists	6	6	6	4
Leaders of campaign movements	4	4	3	3
Civic leaders (elected and officers)	3	2	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26</b>

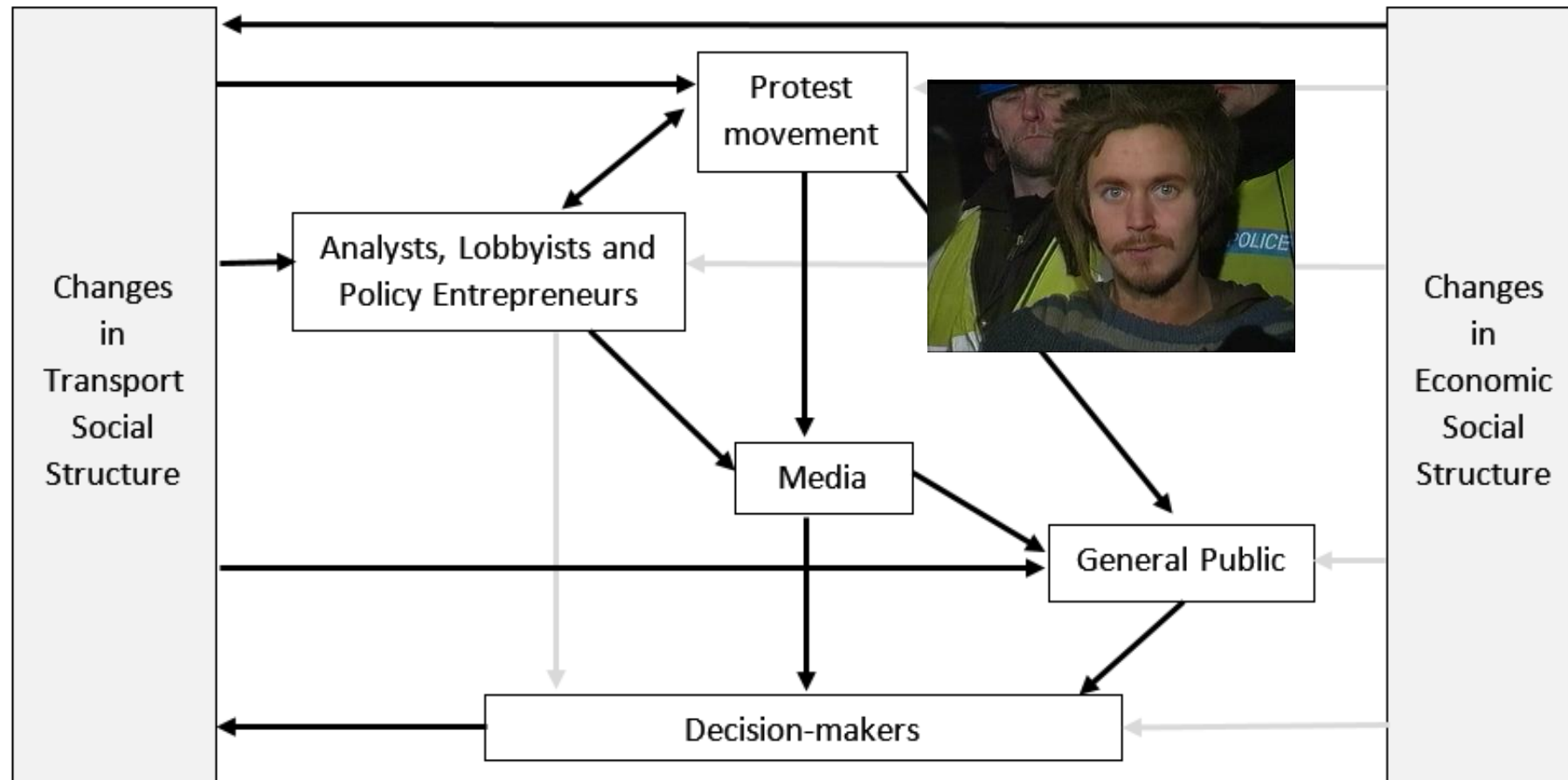
# The Rational Choice Mechanism – in the 1990s



Prof. Phil Goodwin



# The Public Opinion Mechanism – in the 1990s





# Changing Public Opinion on Road Building and Driving

Newbury Bypass evictions

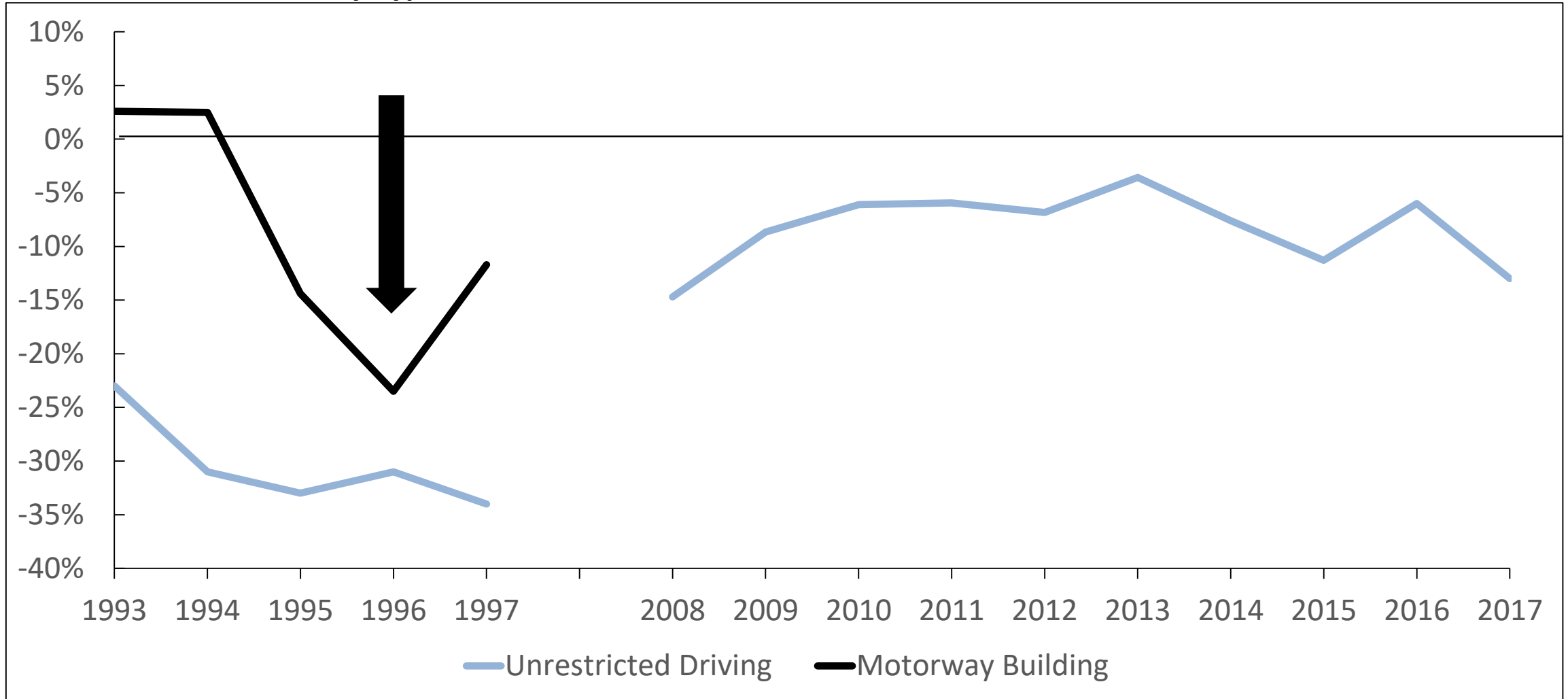
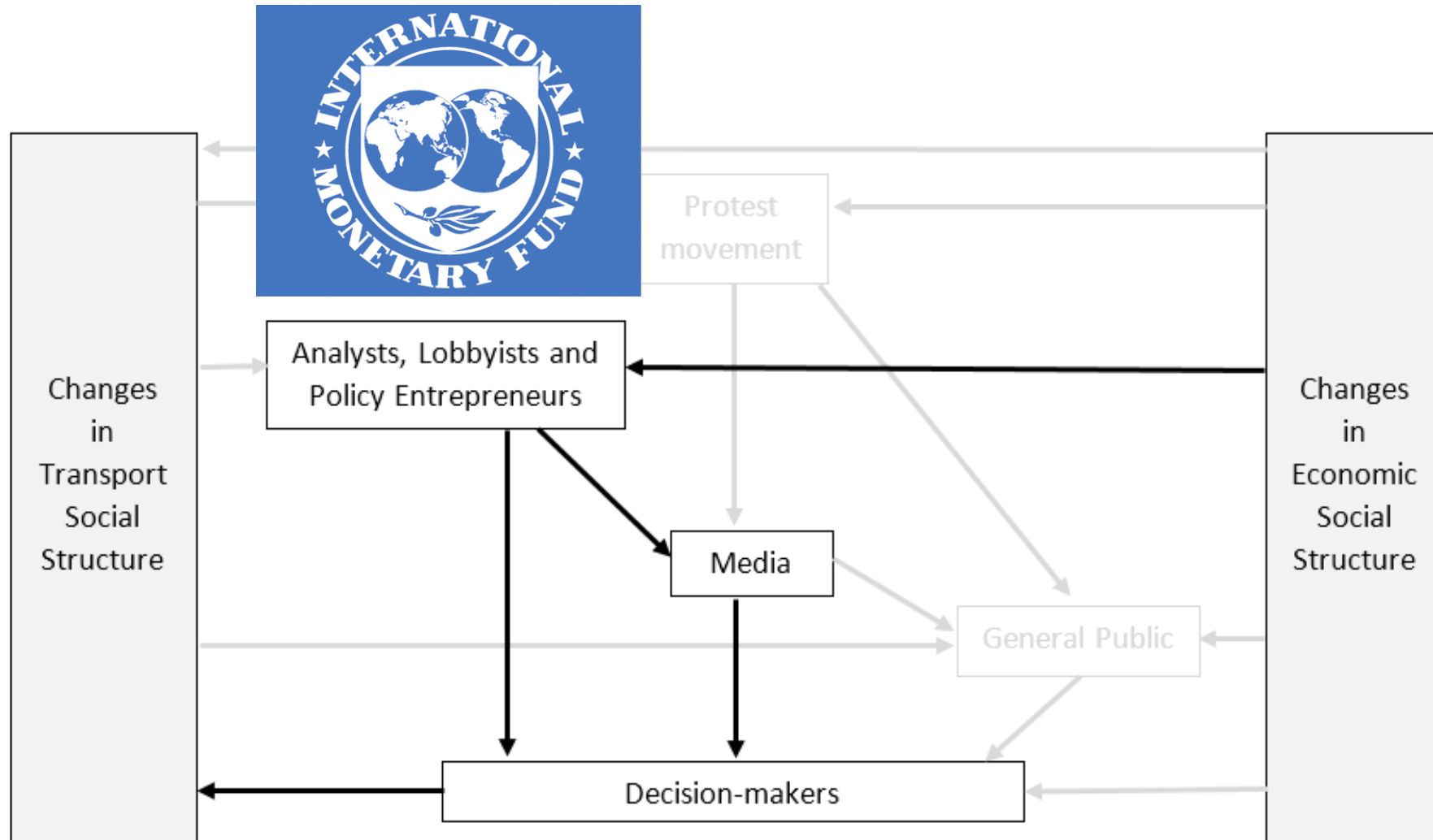


Figure 7 – Net (Dis)agreement with Building Motorways to Ease Congestion and Unrestricted Car Use – Even if it Damages the Environment (DfT, 2018a)

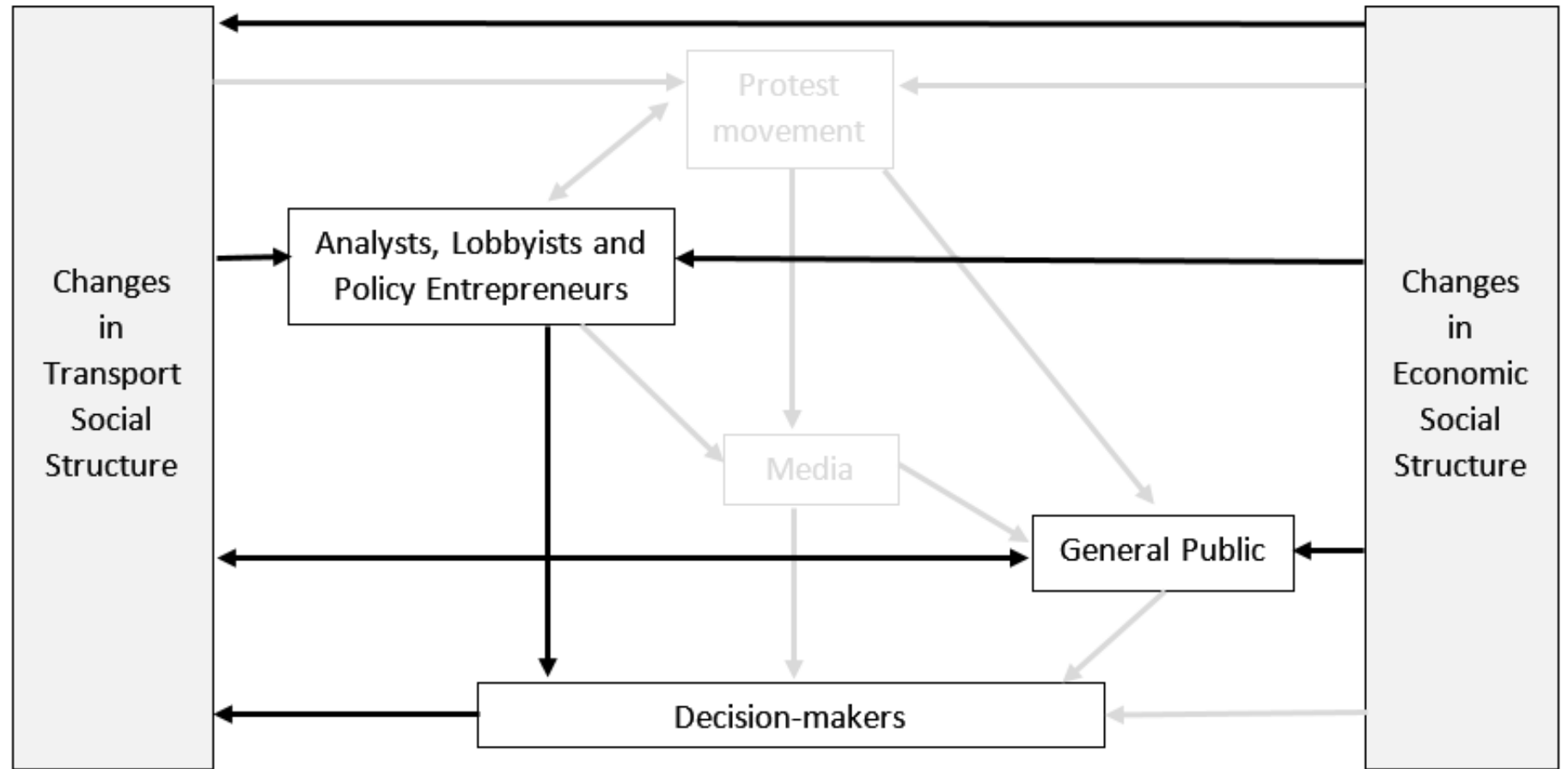
# The Economic Ideology Mechanism – in the 1990s



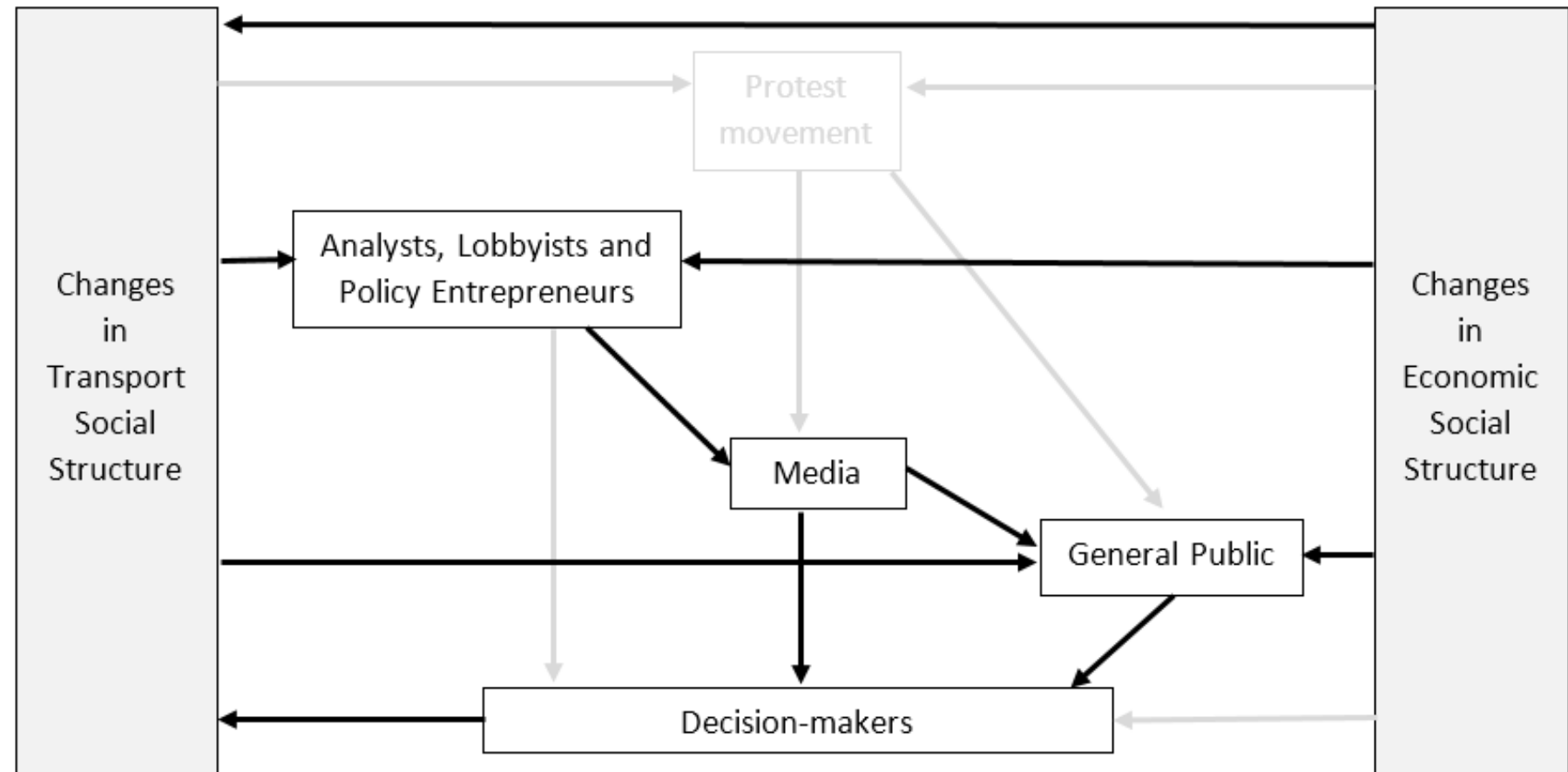
# The Rational Choice Mechanism – Post-2010

Fuel tax protests 2000

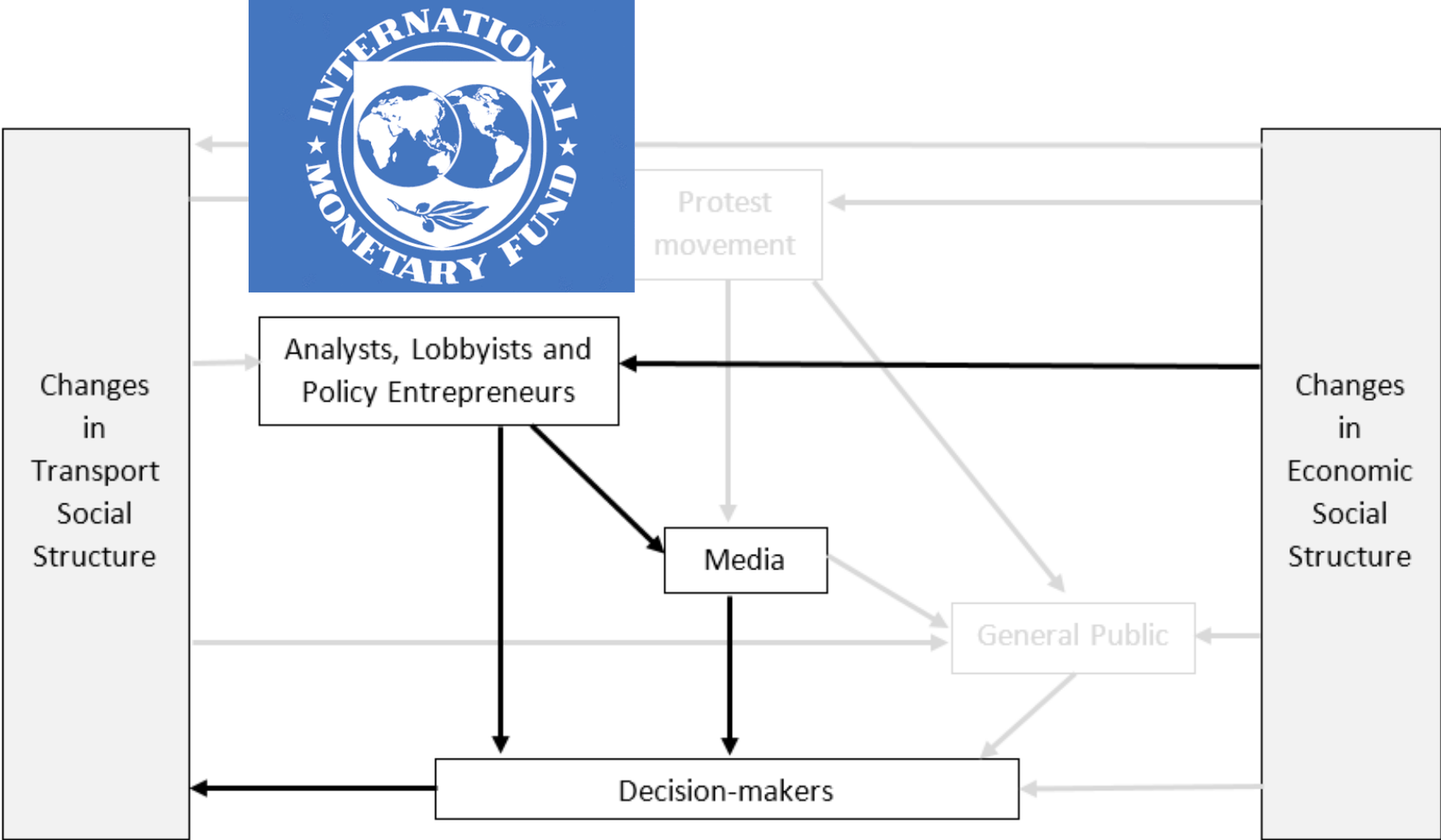
Rejections of congestion charging 2005 & 2008 – curtailed demand management



# The Public Opinion Mechanism – Post 2010

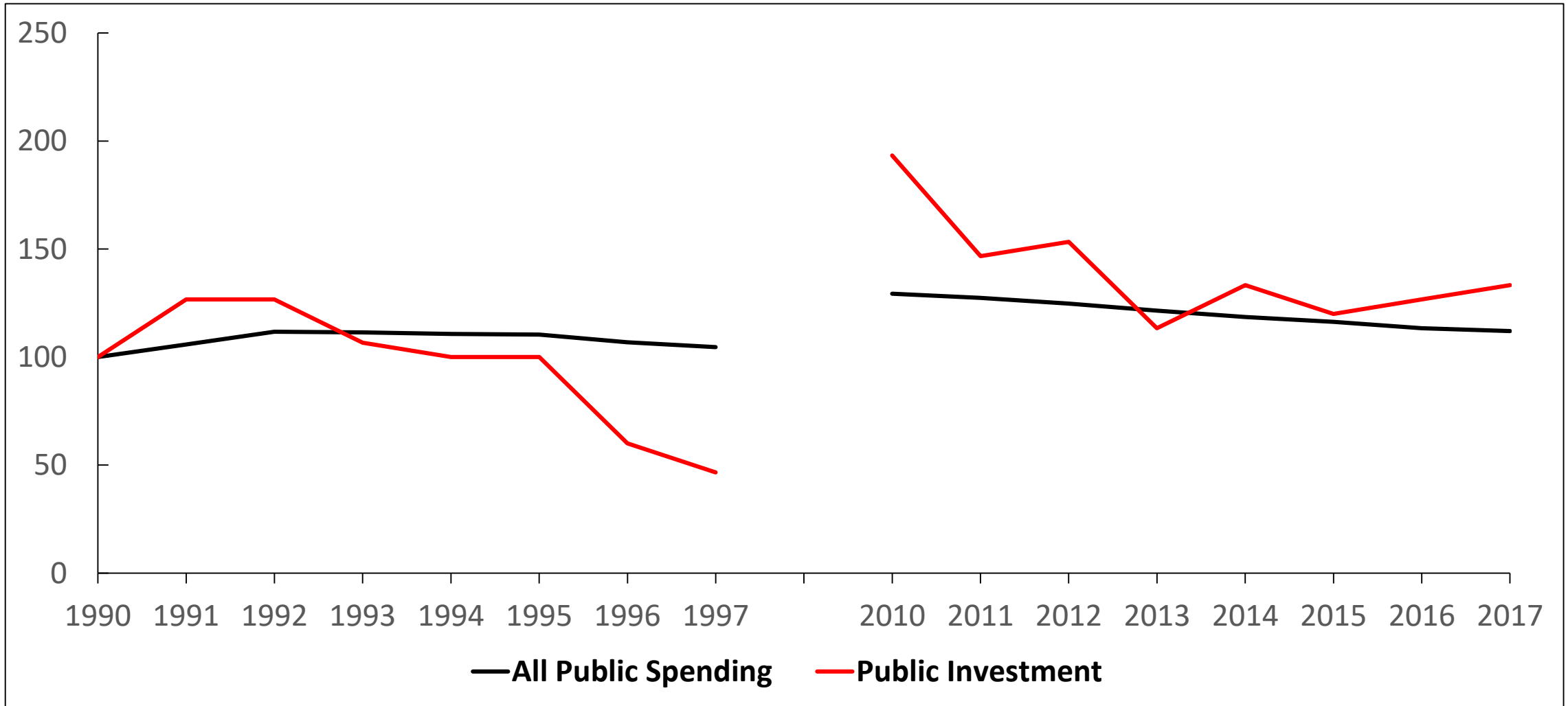


# The Economic Ideology Mechanism



See Clift (2018) on IMF influence

# **BUT: Roads (& HS2) were a special case – there was no general increase in public investment post-2011**



**Trends in Public Spending and Net Public Investment as a Proportion of GDP 1990 – 1997 and 2010 – 17 (1990= 100)**  
Excluding public sector banks. (ONS, 2017, H M Treasury, 2018). The years shown are the financial years, so 1990 is actually 1990/1

# Conclusions

- Economic mechanism important, but it's not 'all about the economy'
- Individual agency matters – George Osborn was particularly influential
- Anti-roads protests exerted important, mainly indirect influence during the 1990s
- Critical realist insights – the same circumstances wouldn't necessarily produce the same outcome, so are any causes any more "important" than any others?

# References

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