

Social Impacts and Equity in Transport

Policy Briefing Note 1: Scope of the Problem

Key issues

- The social impacts of transport are less well understood than the economic or environmental impacts but can be significant, especially for already vulnerable population groups
- Transport 'goods and bads' are unevenly distributed across the population: the wealthiest in society tend to gain the most benefits from the transport system, whilst the poorest to suffer its worst effects
- Some social groups are more adversely affected than others, especially children and young people, older people, lone parents, disabled people and ethnic minority populations
- We have strong evidence that these uneven outcomes reduce people's ability to fully participate in society and can lead to their social exclusion
- We need to develop better ways to communicate the social consequences of 'transport poverty' to national and local decision-makers within and outside the transport delivery arena.

Policy Priorities Emerging from the Framing Event

- Early guidance and practice examples are needed of how the 'Big Society' and 'New Localism' will work for local transport authorities and how to encourage private and public sector agencies to work together. Pooling resources may deliver multiple benefits but can be difficult in practice, as past experience with Accessibility Planning has demonstrated
- How to address the apparent conflict between environmental and social goals in current transport policy. How do we reduce excessive travel without further marginalising the mobility of lower income groups, and ideally in ways to enhance their active participation in key activities?
- How to provide improved clarity on the social impacts of transport policy and better communicate the social consequences of reducing 'transport poverty' to policy-makers, i.e. in terms of life opportunity and social capital, reduced health inequalities, educational and early developmental benefits, better access to employment, community cohesion, etc. Do we need new language and definitions and/or new engagement mechanisms?
- Guidance is needed on how to measure and evaluate social impacts and distributional effects. Should we be aiming to monetarise social impacts within a cost-benefit analysis, or strengthen multi-criteria techniques?
- It is important to make the case to government and the private sector for the logic and benefits of funding targeted research. Partnership arrangements for EU funding, and securing more useful and relevant outcomes from research could help policymakers to address these issues in cost-effective ways.

This workshop series is designed to bring together academics, policy-makers and public and private sector delivery agencies across a wide range of disciplines and policy sectors and to explore social impact and equity issues through active dialogue and supported evidence-based analysis.

The project is led by Dr Karen Lucas of the Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford and Professor Anne Power who is Director of Housing and Communities at the London School of Economics.

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Initial Workshop: Executive Summary¹

1. Introduction to the Workshop series

The overall aim of the workshop series is to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity building; to better equip researchers, policymakers and practitioners across the different social science and transport disciplines to address the social challenges of providing transport and access, and to maximise the social benefits of the transport system within the UK context, now and in the future.

The series is designed to explore various theoretical, policy and practical aspects of transport, social equity and social impacts of transport through a number of themed events. This will facilitate a broad-based approach to the subject and draw on the capacity and skills of non-transport professionals who have not previously contributed to this debate to bring their different perspectives, knowledge and experiences to the subject. In this way, we will be able to generate a network of interest from across a range of disciplines, capable of advising on policy issues and participating in future research in this area.

2. Background to the Project

People on low incomes are more likely to experience 'transport poverty'. Less than half of the poorest households in the UK (47%) have access to a car and more than 18 million adults in the UK either do not or cannot drive. Already vulnerable and economically disadvantaged social groups are also more likely to suffer the worst effects of road traffic, such as pedestrian deaths and serious accidents and ill-health from noise and airborne pollution. Those most affected tend to be found in areas suffering from high levels of multiple deprivation, such as high levels of unemployment, benefit dependency and financial insecurity low skills and educational attainment and high incidences of crime and ill-health.

But in addition currently, the transport system overwhelmingly benefits car drivers, and public transport is predominantly designed to facilitate commuting to key urban centres. Public transport services are generally less frequent and less reliable in the urban periphery and in rural areas where many low income families live. Evening, late night and weekend services are also often unavailable in these areas. The cost of public transport fares is also high relative to people's income.

Changing employment and land use patterns mean that jobs, training and other important opportunities are often sparse in these areas too and so people need to travel further to access them. However, transport poverty results in significantly lower than average mobility and so reduced access to these life-chance opportunities. It can ultimately undermine the financial and social capital of the individuals and communities that are affected.

In 2003, the Social Exclusion Unit pioneered a cross-government initiative to provided better evidence of the social consequences of transport poverty. It concluded that lack of transport can be a significant causal factor in the social exclusion of certain population groups including jobseekers, 16-18 year olds not in education, training or employment, lone parents, older people and people with physical and mental disabilities. It most negatively affects their employment and educational opportunity and can lead to health inequalities and reduced well-being.

¹ Full Report: Social Impacts and Social Equity Issues in Transport Workshop Series. Two Day Framing Event Workshop Report. September 14 and 15, 2010

In 2006, new multi-stakeholder driven policy tools (Accessibility Planning) were introduced at the local level to enhance the accessibility of disadvantaged populations and areas. The response on the ground has been patchy, with some authorities mainstreaming the agenda whilst others appear to have ignored it almost entirely.

There is now new governmental interest in ensuring equity and fairness within the Liberal/Conservative 'Big Society' policy agenda. However, cutbacks in local authority funded bus and voluntary and community sector transport services are almost certain to occur under the austerity measures. It is likely that the poorest and most vulnerable people in society will be most adversely affected by this reduced spending.

Many policy-makers feel that it is time to reinvigorate the transport poverty agenda and to bring the social consequences of transport policy decisions and spending to the fore.

3. Two-Day Framing Event

An initial Framing Event was held at St Anne's College, Oxford over two days: 14th and 15th September 2010 to discuss these issues and to explore the need and potential for future research into policy and practice. Workshop participants came from a wide range of academic disciplines and policy sectors, including transport, employment, health, environment, urban planning, rural communities, regeneration, housing, and social policy.

3.1 Key aims and objectives

The framing event was designed to:

- Present key research on this topic to date and to identify current policy approaches to social impacts and equity in transport;
- Explore links between travel behaviour and developments in transport in relation to other social activity;
- Identify key issues and concerns in relation to theories, methods, data and analytical approaches used in transport planning;
- Identify key issues and concerns in relation to policy and practice;
- Allow a full and frank exchange of ideas and knowledge between different disciplinary perspectives and policy making and practical experiences;
- Promulgate discussion about how to identify, assess and communicate the social factors in transport and other policy sectors;
- Identify a set of key issues and priorities for future research.

3.2 Guest speakers

The guest speakers at the event were:

- Professor John Hills, (Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics)
- Professor John Urry (Lancaster University)
- Frances Hodgson, (Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Transport Studies, Leeds University)
- Nigel Dotchin, (Department for Transport)
- Lee Smith, (Department for Transport)
- Derek Halden (DHC Consultancy)
- John Smith, (Merseyside Local Transport Partnership)

2.2 Workshop outputs

A workshop report, this policy briefing note and slides of all the workshop presentations can be downloaded from the UKTRC website². The project will

² <http://www.uktrc.ac.uk/research/researchprogramme/scanningexercises/exercise1/146>

also produce a final report in December 2011 and a Special Issue of the Journal of Transport Geography in early 2012.

3. Discussion of definitions, theories, and methods

Day one of the event primarily focused on key issues for research. Key issues arising included the following.

3.1 Definitions and theoretical considerations

There is a need to develop a lexicon of definitions to ensure that we are talking about the same issues when we use terms like accessibility and connectivity since they mean different things to different disciplines.

The social impacts of transport are less well recognised within the academic literature than economic and environmental ones, and there is a lot of ambiguity about what is meant by a social impact and precisely what their distributional effects are.

The distributional effects of economic and environmental impacts were identified as poorly recognised within current environmental appraisal. The policy interface between social, economic and environmental impacts is also largely overlooked within current definitions of social impacts.

There is an important theoretical distinction between recorded behavioural outcomes and people's perceptions of transport and it was felt that that research is lacking in this respect. Do researchers and policy makers miss-perceive issues relative to how 'the public' do?

There is a general lack of cross-fertilisation between different theoretical perspectives, so that economic, environmental and social considerations are poorly integrated within the literature. Disciplines tend to try to add in issues from the others within the thinking of their own discipline.

We need to be clearer about the types of impacts that we want to identify as important and measure. Monetary costs are relatively easy to quantify but many social benefits are more qualitative and so more difficult to incorporate within existing policy assessment frameworks.

Some areas of social research relating to transport are not being picked up by the professional, private and academic transport sector. For example, the role of transport in early socialisation, maintaining social networks and social capital and the issue of immobility: some people don't want to travel but their way of life is not valued within current value frameworks.

That transport is generally overlooked as an area of research within social policy study needs to be urgently rectified. We first need the social science research then the transportation research, not the other way around.

3.2 Methodological considerations

One of the main questions raised was how to evaluate social considerations ("impacts") of plans and actions - in particular how to measure quality of life and social benefits. These include the value of people's personal relationships and social networks, loss of childhood 'freedom' caused by fears about traffic, virtual versus actual interactions and access to services, amongst others.

We need new indicators of social impact that are not over-complex and not necessarily monetary values. Is there an alternative accepted knowledge system for understanding the social consequences of policy decisions within other disciplines that we can learn from?

Journey time savings can be positive, negative, or of no value, but this is not recognised within transport cost benefit analysis. Some sociologists say travel is

good, others see it as a constraint. What is the 'value' of travel? If it increases income or increased business activity or social interaction it might be good. If it causes stress or is unnecessary travel, it might be seen as bad.

There is also a need for more Life Cycle Analysis of social impacts to consider the lifetime term effects of transport on, e.g. older people who stop driving, young people who may or may not start and to examine geographical/behavioural patterns and long term impacts on people of reduced accessibility.

4. Research into Policy and Practice

Day two of the Framing Event focused on the ways in which state-of-the art research knowledge can be more effectively communicated to policy-makers and the other key relevant stakeholders who are responsible for policy delivery within and outside the transport sector.

4.1 General discussion

It was felt to be a difficult time to be having these discussions since the Spending Review was due about one month after the seminar. Later in the series it might be easier to frame policy issues within the context of what is likely to be a major change in the policy landscape.

4.2 Policy aims – strategic and local/ specific levels

Issues were raised such as whether there are currently any high level policy aims, or whether policy has become more reactive, specific and based on delivery. There was discussion of the localism agenda and how this would impact on the level at which transport decisions were taken.

Specific issues around which social impacts and equity were important in policy making but were often missing from mainstream consideration included:

- Walking – its role as the 'mode of the poor', against its scope for improving sociability – the issues surrounding fear of walking alone.
- Cycling – younger cyclists being the 'same market' as new car drivers: the social connotations of cycling.
- Links between transport and health – fitness and obesity, walking, cycling, pollution and contribution to delivering on other agendas.
- Child poverty – although not specifically a transport issue, it has a transport dimension.
- Social networks and community strength.
- Links between transport and social cohesion: need to be considered in decision making.
- Links between transport and gentrification or neighbourhood decline – in urban and rural areas.
- Reducing the need to travel/promoting alternatives to travel: what are the implications of this priority?
- Links between localism and central government and questions over what the new role of central government is.
- Government and local authority priorities in accessibility planning are often different. Is accessibility going to be a focal point in the future? What will happen when Local Authorities are not required to write Accessibility Strategies?

4.3 The role of social factors in appraisal and policy formulation methodologies

Translating evidence on social impacts and equities into methodologies that feed into transport policy and measures on the ground seems an area where work is needed. It was felt that current transport modelling and cost benefit analysis fell

far short of their potential in this area. The fundamental debate seemed to revolve around whether an attempt to monetise all impacts, or multi criteria analysis was the best approach.

For social impacts it is important to evaluate wider policies rather than individual schemes. Also, there were often too many generalisations and assumptions made about social impacts which are often quite complex.

There is need for greater understanding of the importance of dialogue between academics and practitioners. Cuts in budgets will lead to issues such as a lack of training in how best to use funds available coming to the fore, as well as how to deal with issues such as equality duty evaluation. 'Big Society' considerations may also change how value for money of government and local authority spend is viewed with social impacts being more valued.

4.3 Geographical – rural areas

There is little sign of travel distance per person plateauing out in rural areas, as seems to be the case elsewhere. Car ownership is high and still growing with the majority of those on low incomes having cars. The social issues are not so much about a lack of transport, but the need for a large amount of travel and the cost of this for households on low incomes.

4.4 Climate change

Climate change related policy may offer a good way to get social impacts considered – in this field of policy there is a history of social impacts being at the heart of considerations. Climate change is a high level issue, but has local implications and will need mitigation and adaptation at international, national and local level. It is a relatively new field and in developing policy there may be scope for synergies of addressing the different issues.

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