

Social Impacts and Equity in Transport

Policy Briefing Note 6: Final Recommendations

Key Issues

- Local transport authorities are facing significant financial pressures in terms of funding cutbacks and the reorganisation of many public service sectors, which influence transport provision for low income and disadvantaged population groups.
- These policies and wider social trends will have major social impacts and raise huge questions about social equity. We need to find ways of assessing and gathering evidence about these impacts. The key challenge is to make the evidence available and easily comprehensible to decision makers and the wider public.
- Transport poverty results in significantly lower than average mobility, and reduced access to jobs, training and other important life-chance opportunities. It can ultimately undermine the financial and social capital of the individuals and communities that are affected.
- 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.
- There is a significant body of academic research in the area of social impacts and equity issues in transport to support this policy agenda, but this is currently fragmented across a number of different disciplines and is poorly communicated to key political decision makers.
- Lack of clarity in terms of definitions, conceptual framing and what can be considered valid methodologies are part of the problem, but also the lack of widely accepted social values within transport project appraisal.

Policy recommendations

1. Communicating the impacts of transport decisions on health, society and inequality through cost benefit and other appraisal frameworks.
2. Ensuring that research outputs have impacts on policies, e.g. through pathway mapping, statistics and quantitative research
3. Understanding who is disadvantaged in the new delivery models and providing safety nets.
4. Protecting the connectivity to labour markets of already socially disadvantage populations in the light of significant cutbacks in local and specialist transport provision.
5. Explore ways to use ICT innovation as a part of effective transport delivery, especially for demand responsive transport in rural areas and for the community transport sector.

Priorities for future research

1. Understanding the social value of collective versus individual transport in terms of their social impacts, the facilitation of other activities, their impact on health and quality of life
2. Systematic analysis of travel trend analysis and patterns of social disadvantage over time focusing on the issue of people's willingness versus their ability to travel and 'patterns of immobility', i.e. understanding why and when people don't travel.
3. Exploring the benefits and disbenefits of the digital economy on social exclusion / inclusion factors, including substitution activities.
4. Evaluating the aggregate impacts of multiple minor changes to the transport and pedestrian network when compared to the impacts of major transport investment projects
5. Maintaining lines of communication on social issues in transport across different disciplines and policy sectors.

Final dissemination event¹

1. Introduction

This Policy Briefing Note concerns the final workshop in a series aiming to:

- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity building;
- 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
- Maximise the social benefits of the transport system within the UK context, now and in the future.

This workshop was part of a series of themed events designed to explore various theoretical, policy and practical aspects of transport, social equity and social impacts of transport through a number of themed events. It brought together non-transport professionals from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, as well as representatives from central and local government and relevant NGOs, alongside the transport professionals.

2. Final dissemination event

2.1 Key aims and objectives

The workshop was designed to draw together and reflect on the key findings and recommendations of the previous workshops, in order to develop a short-list of final recommendations for future research and related policy and practical delivery.

2.2 Speakers

- Stephen Joseph , Chief Executive, Campaign for Better Transport
- Dr Karen Lucas, Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford
- Dr Anne Green, Institute for Employment Research, Warwick University
- Prof Tanja Pless-Mulloli, Institute of Health and Society
- Prof Anne Power, Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion
- Dr Mark Beecroft, Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen
- Professor Peter Jones, Centre for Transport Studies, University College London
- Nigel Dotchin, Head of Equalities and Opportunities Strategy, Department for Transport
- Ralph Smyth, Senior Transport Campaigner , Campaign for the Protection of Rural England

2.3 Workshop outputs

A workshop report, this policy briefing note and slides of the workshop presentations (along with other materials and reports from the workshop series) can be downloaded from the UKTRC website: <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/>.

3. Discussion of key themes

The event was split into two distinct but inter-related activities:

- i) Presentations from the previous workshop leaders summarised the main recommendations from those events in the morning;
- ii) Breakout group discussions and a final round-up session in the afternoon.

¹ A full report of this workshop as well as presentation materials and information about the rest of the seminar series can be found at <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/>

The key themes to emerge from these discussions are now presented, followed by a summary of research and policy recommendations that have been drawn from across the whole workshop series.

3.1 The wider context of austerity and funding withdrawal

The workshop series comes at a time when local transport is facing significant financial pressures. There have already been significant cuts in local bus services: over 1000 have gone and 77% of councils say more may follow, at least one company is planning big fares increases.

Community transport and other transport funding (e.g. schools and social service transport) has also been slashed and local authority knowledge and capability has been severely reduced. These wider trends could have huge negative social impacts and raise significant questions about the social equity of current transport policy.

Perversely, this is at a time when there is an increased need for people to travel as local job opportunities are reduced and other services close or centralise to save money. As cars become less affordable for many households in times of economic austerity, there is also a greater reliance on public transport, walking and community transport.

3.2 Measuring and communicating the social value of transport

Improved communication is a key to making substantial progress in both research and policy making, but there are major impediments and barriers. First is the need to better measure and articulate the social value of transport for individuals and communities. This was a persistent and widely discussed theme throughout the workshop series. Some fundamental academic research is needed to demonstrate people's experiences of living with certain benefits and disbenefits and the longer term social consequences of transport decisions.

Second, is the issue of how to effectively articulate the findings of academic research to the wide array of relevant policy maker and practitioner communities? All three breakout groups at the final event identified this as one of their key priorities for future work. It was recommended that future research should seek to:

- Provide a 'lexicon' of terminology, definitions and key concepts
- Develop meaningful indicators for measuring and evaluating transport choices and the social outcomes of different transport and activity behaviours
- Develop overarching frameworks to understand the social and distributional impacts (SDIs) of future transport policy spending decisions (e.g. HSR2, road tolling, smarter choices) but also policy cutbacks (e.g. bus subsidies and operator grants, school closures).
- Provide better systematic evidence and data for the analysis of social impacts and equity effects of transport systems
- Build social impact and equity scenarios for changing population and institutional structures

3.3 Recognising the important interactions between transport disadvantage and other area of social welfare delivery

Social equity issues in transport are helped when they are linked to other issues (environment and urban sustainability; housing in relation to transport, health and equity). Participants at the workshop reflected that they had benefitted greatly from the opportunity to interact with different disciplines and policy sectors outside of their usual field of activity.

There are significant and varied interactions between transport provision and other areas of social welfare policy. In particular, employment, job search and training, health and quality of life and housing and communities were noted, but also potentially other areas, such as crime and community safety, education, sustainable development and climate change.

Spatial inequality is a reflection of inequality; people with less choice tend to live in places that are less desirable, and have fewer services and worse transport provision. These aspects can be self-perpetuating, with policy mistakes repeated and exacerbated. There are links between social and transport disadvantage; we need to sift out the generic from the specific.

As such, it was felt that both research and policy should seek to find more opportunities for networking and ideas sharing between academic, policy maker and practitioner communities, as well as between different areas of academic research. A constant engagement mechanism for information exchange is needed and, in general, academia is not set up to orchestrate this. The suggestions were to:

- Develop a research communication plan linked to previous and current policy relevant research (instead of reinventing the wheel)
- Encourage academic research conclusions to be more grounded in the real world and in policy
- Create networking and collaboration opportunities for researchers, policy makers, frontline delivery agencies and other relevant organisations
- Use lessons from other sectors (and internationally) to develop integrated research and policy interventions

However, it was noted that while many people recognise the potential benefits from closer working across disciplines, it is hard work and there are currently few incentives to do so.

3.4 Developing context specific solutions

It is important to recognise the spatial and geographical contexts in which transport inequalities occur. The transport needs of people living in rural settlements can be very different from urban ones, but it is also important to recognise urban and rural interdependencies.

There are also very different conditions of provision in different types of areas e.g. public transport might be plentiful in inner metropolitan areas but almost non-existent on some outer-ring estates. Different parts of the country also vary greatly in terms of their social demography, accessibility to jobs, health care delivery systems, and may require different solutions in some cases.

3.5 Recognising social diversity

Currently, many measures of social disadvantage are based on area-based statistics, such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). It is important to recognise that people living within the same area are not homogenous in their transport and activity needs and that transport inequalities are experienced and prioritised differently by different population groups.

The incidence of lower overall travel (distances and/or frequency of trips) does not necessarily denote that people are disadvantaged, particularly if they can easily carry out their activities locally. Conversely, people on low incomes recording higher than average travel distances may be significantly disadvantaged by the cost of that travel or

because it prevents them undertaking other essential activities. The issue of time poverty amongst certain socially disadvantaged groups, such as lone parents, is an important, but currently under-researched area.

Whilst we know quite a lot about the transport behaviours needs and concerns of some socially disadvantaged groups, such as children, teenagers older and disabled people, there is very little available research about others. This is particularly the case for BME populations and young men (particularly those not in employment, education or training – NEETS).

3.6 Developing future research and policy agendas

A number of key priorities for future research and policy emerged from the breakout group discussions and feedback presentations, as identified above. These are ongoing and will be taken forward as part of the final reporting process.

The Environmental Audit Committee for the House of Commons will shortly be gathering evidence for a cross-government enquiry on the issue of transport poverty. For further information on how to participate in this exercise contact Lee Nicholson nicholsonla@parliament.uk

The project has also led to new collaborations, PhD projects and additional funding opportunities in the five collaborating institutions:

- Dr Lucas continues her research of the relationships between transport poverty and social disadvantage through a two-year ESRC-funded mid-career fellowship. <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/mrtpsd/>
- The Transport Studies Unit (TSU) has secured further funding from the European Union to facilitate a series of further researcher and policy-maker exchanges with the Universities of Ghent in Belgium and Concepcion in Chile on the subject of transport and social exclusion. <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/TranSENDaNC/>
- The overarching theme for this year's annual TSU seminar series is Socio-spatial inequity, transport and mobilities. There will be 8 evening seminars 5-7pm from 18th January – 7th March 2012 each by a different prominent expert in the field. The full programme can be found at http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/events/ht12_seminars/
- The Faculty of Medicine and Transport at Newcastle University has jointly awarded a PhD fellowship on *Understanding Transport Choices*.
- The Institute of Health and Society at Newcastle University are working towards proposal under National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Sustainable Transport Call with Tyne and Wear Sustainable Transport Authority.
- A Special Issue of the Journal of Transport Geography entitled *Social Impacts and Equity Issues in Transport* will be published in March 2012 with papers by presenters from the workshop series.

4. Further information

For further details about this ongoing research or about this workshop series please contact Dr. Karen Lucas, Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford, karen.lucas@ouce.ox.ac.uk