



## Transport Studies Unit Oxford University Centre for the Environment



### Youth Select Committee Inquiry on Public Transport

#### Statement of Evidence

31<sup>st</sup> May 2012

1. The Transport Studies Unit (TSU) is a research centre based at the School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/>. TSU takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of transport futures, drawing on relevant, state-of-the-art developments in geography, environmental and transport studies, economics, sociology, psychology and the engineering sciences. We also draw on the full spectrum of available methods and underpinning philosophies for our research projects.
2. Although we do not currently have any research projects that directly address young people's experience of public travel within their local area and the other related issues raised by this Inquiry, we do have relevant research evidence from some of our other transport projects and projects carried out in the recent past that may be of interest to the Youth Select Committee.
3. This report is prepared on behalf of the TSU by Dr Karen Lucas, who is one of its senior research fellows <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/people/klucas.html>. It presents four separate themes of research: on the perceptions of public transport; on perceptions of low carbon approaches; on transport for the young rural unemployed in rural areas; and some brief notes changes in access to cars for young people.

#### Perceptions of public transport

4. A focus group with young drivers living and around in Banbury in Oxfordshire who had just acquired a licence<sup>1</sup> found that roughly half of the group's twelve participants described themselves a 'reluctant drivers'. They said they only used their cars because the public transport was not available in their area when they needed to use it.
5. Participants were particularly concerned about getting back from the town centre to rural villages in the early evening and at night. There was considerable resentment from a number of the participants in the group about being thought of as a taxi service as soon as they became drivers because they represented the only available transport option for their friends to get around and socialise at night.
6. One young women in the group commented on the quality of her local public transport: *'I don't expect it to be on time all the time, I don't expect to be able to get a seat because I've quite an experience of using the train, I used to use it seven days a week before I had my car so yes, I don't expect anything from it and so I don't find it disappointing'*.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of a study for the RAC Foundation - Lucas, K., Jones, P., Polak, J. and Gilliard, G (2009) *The Car in British Society* [http://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac\\_foundation/content/downloadables/car\\_in\\_british\\_society-lucas\\_et\\_al-170409.pdf](http://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/car_in_british_society-lucas_et_al-170409.pdf)

7. In another focus group for the same study, two banned drivers (between 17 and 25 years) from Nottingham said that there was little of the public transport options they would carry with them once their ban was lifted and their car use would *'pick up where it left off'*.

#### Transport for the Young Unemployed in Rural Areas

8. This project<sup>2</sup> examined the extent to which transport, skills and rural isolation influence the ability of the young unemployed (16-24 years) to access job and learning opportunities. A comprehensive statistical analysis in four rural case study areas was undertaken in the denser rural areas in England and the more sparse rural areas of Wales, and this was supplemented by empirical evidence from a study that used interviews with professionals and the unemployed in one of the areas (the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire).
9. The young rural unemployed are excluded from labour market participation because of a combination of poor transport provision in rural areas, the lack of suitable qualifications and skills, and the poor job opportunities in the local labour markets. In summary, this seems to be occurring because of:
  - a. The narrow industrial base and the predominance of the SMEs mean that there tends to be limited job opportunities, leading to low skilled and temporary jobs in the rural areas;
  - b. Problems with transport provision not only prevent the young rural unemployed from accessing jobs and learning directly, but it also reinforces the position of the young rural unemployed in the low skilled and temporary jobs within a small spatial area. This in turn may result in the young rural unemployed having low expectations and being excluded from participation in the wider labour market due to bad working conditions, low pay and unaffordable costs of travels.
  - c. The young rural unemployed are more likely to be trapped into low skilled and temporary jobs because of lack of acquired skills and working experience, and the perception that they are unreliable workers.
10. Accessibility is a key constraint for the young rural unemployed (YRU), and it is important to extend conventional accessibility models so that they more realistically represent the choices available in the rural labour markets. It is normally assumed that all jobs are available to all individuals and so accessibility analysis rather crudely matches up supply and demand according to the availability of suitable transport. Such an analysis is really only a starting point in that process and a more sensitive supplementary investigation is required that takes account of the skills profile of the YRU and the characteristics (and constraints) of the job itself.
11. In addition, it would help if a wider range of transport options can be included in the assessment. Further research needs to be directed at subdividing the demand from the YRU by skills levels, principally through level of qualification. The job market is defined as where the job is located and the occupational group, which in turn relates to the skills

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<sup>2</sup> The aim of the TRANTEL project was to evaluate to what extent the transport and ICT solutions can contribute to reducing youth unemployment in rural areas. An important element in the project was to learn from best practice on rural transport and ICT projects and to see whether schemes being tried elsewhere in England are suitable for implementation in the Forest of Dean. The research is funded by the EPSRC under their FIT programme.

levels. The transport options include private transport, which would be able to access all jobs, existing public transport, which would be able to access jobs in the main towns, and new forms of transport that would supplement existing services and perhaps access new destinations. The use of ICT is important in two respects. One is to obtain better information about where job opportunities are located, and the other would be to gain new skills so that more jobs would be suitable.

12. The underlying rationale here is that not all jobs are available to all individuals, and that this fact needs to be recognised in the analysis. Secondly, that as skills levels, particularly in ICT are raised, then more jobs and better jobs become available. The concern here is not just to reduce levels of YRU, but also to ensure that these individuals are fully engaged in the labour force. This means that there should be the opportunity to make the best use of their skills levels in a permanent and reasonably paid job.
13. The conclusions from this project can be summarised in five points:
  1. Transport is important, both in acquiring a job in terms of the job search process, and in being able to keep a good job. There are high levels of transport dependency in rural areas and young people need to have independence;
  2. Much of the training and support is contingent upon the ability to drive and in having a driving licence;
  3. There is a need to engage young people in identifying opportunities as very few schemes are directly targeted at them or their requirements;
  4. Public transport is not attractive and needs to be branded and sold to young people, and it needs to be made more appropriate to their requirements, and better packaged;
  5. There is some feeling that the YRU are a rural underclass that lacks independence and that they can always rely on parents and others to take them where and when they want. But the work journey is different in both its function and role, as it requires greater independence and self reliance. It is a major change from the lifestyle that is organised for the individual to one in which they take control.

#### National level changes in access to cars for young people

14. At the national level, time series analysis of the National Travel Survey<sup>3</sup> shows that since the 1990s the likelihood of young men to have access to a car either as the 'main' driver of the vehicle, or as another driver has fallen. For men aged between 17 and 30 years, the proportion classified as 'main drivers' has fallen from 51% in 1996-1998, to 39% in 2008-2010, and was 43% between 2002-2004. For women of the same age, the level has stayed roughly the same at about 40%. Car access as a main driver for this age group (17-30) is now similar for men and women.
15. The changes have been much more marked in major cities (especially London) than elsewhere. In rural areas (see comments above), male car access has fallen very slightly, but that for women continues to grow. It seems likely that public transport availability has been an important factor in discouraging car use, though there are many other

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<sup>3</sup> Ongoing research is being carried out, and preliminary results can be seen graphically at <http://www.gordonstokes.co.uk/transport/peakcar.html>.

trends that are influencing the fall in car access and use, such as the cost of learning and insurance, and the rise of the smart-phone as a status symbol in place of a car.

#### Ideas for alternative low carbon transport

16. In a project about attitudes to walking and cycling funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)<sup>4</sup>, a focus group with schoolchildren found that many children do walk and cycle, but this tends to be for leisure on quiet roads/parks and largely supervised.
17. Children didn't walk or cycle to school for various reasons, including: long distances, a general dislike of walking, fear for personal safety – both from traffic and 'stranger danger', lack of compatibility with parents' routines and work travel, and parental refusal to allow them to walk or cycle. They were positive about walking, offering their 'own' reasons as to why they enjoyed it – such as "you can see the shops" – to opinions about health and environmental benefits.
18. A number of measures to increase children's active travel were mentioned by parents, with several particularly positive about the idea of a walking bus, albeit requiring trustworthy adults. Other interventions which would encourage parents to allow children to walk and cycle independently were: safer cycle paths, more police, more CCTV, a decrease in road traffic, and shorter trip distances.
19. An evaluation of Merseytravel's Neighbourhood Travel Team programme<sup>5</sup> identified that transport affordability the first priority for most young people who are transitioning from welfare into work.
20. Public transport connectivity with employment opportunity is generally good across the Merseyside region but there are still some inaccessible hotspots which prevent people getting to some jobs, particularly on peripheral housing estates in Birkenhead and to large employment sites on industrial estates in Speke, Skelmersdale and Kirkby.
21. In these places and other circumstances where public transport was not an option, Wheels to Work schemes provided motor scooters and bicycles on long term loans proved a popular option with young people taking up employment or training. Electric scooters and e-bikes could provide an effective low carbon alternative.

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<sup>4</sup> Visions 2030 - The research assesses the potential in the UK for achieving substantial increases in walking and cycling by 2030 <http://www.visions2030.org.uk>

<sup>5</sup> This programme was funded by the European Social Fund and has now been disbanded due to the cessation of this programme. A full report of the evaluation can be found at <http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/merseytravel/NTT-evaluation-final-report110905.pdf>