Environmental Audit Committee Inquiry on Transport and Accessibility to Public Services

Statement of Evidence

1st September 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 aim to directly address the 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 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.

Access to a car

4. Based on our analysis of the National Travel Survey¹ figures roughly a quarter of UK households do not have regular access to a car or other private motor vehicle. This represents roughly 5.5 million households and as many as 12.5 million people.

5. Non car ownership is overwhelming concentrated in low income households: half of the lowest and 28% of the second lowest income quintile households do not have access to a car.

6. The amount of car driving and use of a car as a passenger is also more affected by income than other aspects of travel behaviour e.g. rail or bus travel. Nevertheless, people in the lowest income quintile have significantly increased their ownership and use of motor vehicles over the last 10 years (from 20% in to 50% in 2008), whilst this has remained relatively stable for the average population.

7. Although people with cars can and do still experience transport poverty, it is those without a car that are most likely to be affected by poor accessibility to public (and commercially-run) goods and services on a regular basis.

8. People in the lowest income quintile travel make 17% fewer trips than the average population and travel roughly a third of the distance in a year (4,300 miles per person per year compared with 11,200 miles on average).

9. Whilst much of the difference in distance travelled is related to the availability of a car within the household, there is also a clear income effect: on average the low income households with a car travel approximately 5,800 miles per person per year compared to 11,200 miles on average).

10. The majority of the people in this lowest income category are either retired or registered as permanently sick (33%) and so may not need or wish to travel as much as other sectors of the population. However, half are economically inactive adults who may need to travel more in order to access work but are prevented from doing so for a variety of reasons.

11. In fact, people on lower incomes have very similar trip patterns in terms of journey purposes to the rest of the population, although they make slightly more education trips and slightly more shopping trips, but fewer escort and leisure trips. But in all cases except education the lower use of car driving is notable, and for most purposes a higher use of walking can be noted.

12. This means that a significant proportion of people living on low incomes in the UK are finding it increasingly necessary to own and drive cars just to maintain a basic lifestyle. Those who do not have access to cars and must therefore rely on public transport might often be excluded from participating fully in the everyday activities that the majority take for granted because of the absence and/or inadequacy of such services in many deprived areas. It is likely that this situation has worsened in recent years due to further cutback in local government funding and its reduced support of subsidised and specialist transport services.

Effectiveness of public transport as an alternative

13. Many of the people who do not have cars live in urban areas and so will (theoretically) have relatively good access to both public transport services, as well good walking access to as to goods and public facilities and other amenities.

14. In fact, numerous studies² have identified that outside of Greater London and the centre of major cities in the UK, public transport is rarely a viable alternative to the car. This is most notable, in urban peripheral areas where many large social housing estates are located. The main problems in terms of providing access to services are the scheduling and routing of services, lack of services in the evenings and at weekends, the need for multiple interchanges, the cost of fares (especially when more than one person from a household is travelling), fear of crime while travelling and waiting at bus stops, lack of timetable and other information.

15. A 2008 study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation³ found that cutbacks in public transport services have been compounded by many entry-level jobs and key developments, such as hospitals, colleges and shopping and leisure centres being

² See for example Lucas, K. and Jones, P. The Car in British Society London: RAC Foundation
relocated to areas that are often not well served by public transport. In addition, many low-paid jobs involve working hours that make access difficult by any means other than the car.

16. The study involved evaluations of four new transport projects that had been specifically targeted to provide improved access to work, education and training, healthcare and facilities in deprived parts of the UK: Braystone Bus in Leicester, Wythenshaw Link in Manchester, Trevithick Link in Cornwall and Walsall Workwise.

17. Using the standard DfT WebTag evaluation methodology, the study found that the aggregate user benefit accruing from these four services was in excess of £850,000 (compared against the £3,204,974 grant funding they received). This is without considering the additional social benefits arising from the new employment uptake that result from use of the services and new education and health trips that the services generated.

18. However, the majority of similarly targeted transport schemes that were directly addressing the problem of social exclusion were funded via the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, Rural and Urban Bus Challenges, Kickstart and the EU Social Fund. In the majority of cases, the lifetime of the funding was short term and many were withdrawn because they were not seen as sufficiently commercially viable.

19. Many of these funding sources are also now no longer available, which adds to the general instability of such projects locally. The majority of the new initiatives that were funded under these programmes following the 2003 SEU report are no longer in existence and have not been replaced by other projects or taken up by public transport operators as part of their regular services.

Access to public services

20. A scanning study on transport and social equity\(^4\) undertaken as part of the UKTRC programme involved a series of workshops with academics, policy makers and service providers drawn from across a number of different policy sectors. The four workshops specifically considered i) employment and training, ii) health and wellbeing, iii) housing and sustainable communities, iv) rural connectivity.

21. The key issues identified in the Employment and Training Workshop\(^5\) in terms of access to services were:

- Trends in ‘changing places of work’ suggest that rather than focusing solely on the ‘workplace’ as a ‘site’ for work, it is important to think more broadly about an ‘activity space for work’, binding together paid work and non-paid work activities. Transport has to link these paid work and non-paid work activities.
- Moving people off benefits into paid work continues to be a major policy objective and is a key strategy in poverty reduction.
- Spatial mobility is an important component in the ‘employability mix’ – alongside skills, health, self-efficacy and a range of other factors.

\(^4\) See [http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note1.pdf](http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note1.pdf) for more information and policy briefing notes

\(^5\) Run by TSU in collaboration with Professor Anne Green and her colleagues at Institute of Employment Research, University of Warwick [http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note2.pdf](http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note2.pdf)
• Having a car enhances individuals’ abilities to access work through greater mobility, since cars provide greater flexibility in time and space compared with public transport.
• There is increasing interest in the extent to which ‘mobility’ and ‘immobility’ are learned behaviours – with important implications for access to and participation in employment and training.

22. The key issues identified in the Health and Wellbeing Workshop⁶ in terms of access to services were:
• There are inequalities in transport and health, some of which are likely to be exacerbated in the current economic climate.
• Measuring health impacts in terms of mortality or much of morbidity measures is too crude to be meaningful to inform policy; there is a need to find appropriate measures of health to better acknowledge the health costs/benefit of transport policy.
• We need to think more about context; travel is not just about getting from A to B, unpacking this context is still at an early stage. Health and wellbeing benefits associated with travel are difficult to articulate, for example some walking to school is likely to be healthful others not.
• Transport needs to be ‘inclusive’ whatever the mode; there are compelling economic arguments for pursuing this agenda, especially if health benefits are appropriately measured.
• Transport and health fall into different silos within academia and government, but people’s lives are not separated in this way. Methods to enable these different communities to work together in a more holistic way need to be developed.
• Encouraging/facilitating behaviour change is a challenge that spans the transport and sustainability agendas, and will involve multi-partnership working.
• Active transport is healthy, sustainable, and desirable, but is not a panacea, and can exacerbate the exclusion of some groups. Active transport enforced due to lack of alternatives may not be healthful.
• For many the urban landscape has become a disjointed and un-social place; we need to rethink our approach to planning urban space to better balance the populations needs.

23. The key issues identified in the Housing and Sustainable Communities Workshop⁷ in terms of access to services were:
• There are tensions between accessibility, strategy and environment within urban neighbourhoods and these tensions are more acute in deprived communities than in more affluent neighbourhoods. Land use and density is a starting point – housing developments are built around the car so to what extent is it a housing issue rather than a transport one?

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⁶ Run by TSU in collaboration with Professor Tanja Pleass-Mulloli and her colleagues at the Centre for Health and Society at Newcastle University http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note3.pdf
⁷ Run by TSU in collaboration with Professor Anne Power and her colleagues Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note4.pdf
• Accessibility is a complex issue that goes beyond existence of provision. Accessibility is about more than cost and availability. Transport accessibility is about urban form. Income inequality is mirrored in inequality in access to transport. Distance is not the only issue. There are other complexities around riding a bike and cycling is virtually unknown to lots of deprived communities because of issues of safety and space to store bike.

• There are functional and cultural meanings of different forms of transport, for example, car mobility culture goes against limiting cars. Transport is an aspirational good. Breaking the car culture is difficult as cars have acquired cultural symbolism. What does it mean to own a car? There is both a physical and psychological attachment to the car.

• Linking people to jobs is vital. Access to work is key and while transport connectivity and access are necessary – they are not sufficient. Low income communities rely more on local goods and services and also rely on walking and buses. We need to convince people that quality of life and standards of living don't have to be far away.

• The system should encourage those with mobility and good access to travel less e.g. fewer flights for holidays, shift from private car to public transport where possible while simultaneously increasing mobility for those who lack mobility and access to opportunities such as work and education.

• What are the cumulative effects of lots of small neighbourhood projects? We need to monitor their value and secure funding and we also need to analyse the role of soft measures versus infrastructure, for example: bike loan schemes, cycle training.

24. The key issues identified in the Rural Connectivity Workshop in terms of access to services were:

• In the UK there is a diversity of rurality, with varying degrees of remoteness and connectivity. This can create difficulties in terms of understanding problems of connectivity and developing transferable solutions, particularly in a political context of increasingly devolved decision making.

• When seeking to address issues of rural connectivity a ‘trilemma’ involving the factors of cost, coverage and quality is faced. It is possible to achieve any two of these factors, but at the expense of the third e.g. you can provide a low cost, high quality solution, but the range of coverage would then be poor.

• Providing connectivity to rural communities presents significant challenges because they often face problems of transport poverty and digital exclusion.

• Alongside social and economic aspects, these problems include a strong technological/technical component common to both the transport and digital spheres in terms of the quality and availability of infrastructure and services.

• Prevailing methods of appraisal such as conventional cost-benefit analysis do not effectively capture and value the social benefits of interventions designed to promote rural connectivity.

• There is considerable potential for land use planning to better support the connectivity and sustainability of rural communities through better location of facilities and services.

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8 Run by TSU in collaboration with Dr Mark Beecroft and his colleagues at the Centre for Transport Studies, Aberdeen University [http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note5.pdf]
Access to services in rural areas

25. Successive "State of the Countryside" reports by the Countryside Agency and the now disbanded Commission for Rural Communities reported on changes in the percentages of the population living within set distances of service outlets by road. Some show increases while others show reductions. Between 2000 and 2010 the following changes were recorded for people living in rural areas.

- GP surgeries saw a rise from 68.3% to 79.5% within 4kms
- Job centres saw a fall from 46.9% to 39.0% within 8kms
- Post Offices saw a fall from 79.9% to 75.4% within 2kms
- Primary schools saw a very slight fall from 82.5% to 82.1% within 2kms
- Secondary schools also saw a small fall from 50.0% to 48.4% within 4kms

26. For all these services around 99% of urban residents were within the chosen distances. For privately provided services there was also variation with falls for bank branches and petrol stations, but rises for cashpoints and for supermarkets. These figures imply that public policy is capable of maintaining access to services in rural areas. There was generally stability in access to services between 2000 and 2006, but policies on post office and primary school provision from about 2007 led to falls.

27. Issues of access to services for rural residents tend to be more strongly driven by distance to services, but specifically where a lack of access to a car, or an income which makes car use expensive, combined with a lack of public transport makes those more distant facilities difficult to reach.

Transport and young people in rural areas

28. In a study for the RAC Foundation\(^9\), a focus group with young drivers living and around in Banbury in Oxfordshire who had just acquired a licence 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.

29. 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.

30. The TRANTEL project\(^10\) 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

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\(^10\) 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.
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).

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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 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.

34. 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.

The Internet as an alternative to physical access in rural areas
35. Successive State of the Countryside reports have found that access to the Internet in rural areas lagged behind urban areas. Over the 10 or more years that report was produced the technology changes but in each case broadband, and then higher speed access came to urban before rural areas, and new technology was generally being put in place in urban areas before the last improvement had worked through to rural areas. Levels of household access also varied.

36. In 2010 it was reported that while 70% of urban households had access to the internet, fewer that 50% in rural areas did. And in rural areas 5% were using dial-up to access (which equated to over 10% of those accessing the internet). For urban areas the corresponding figure was 2% (or about 3% of users). There were also local variations in access levels with much lower levels recorded in (generally) less affluent areas, such as the North Pennines.

**Governance issues**

37. Key issues identified at the UKTRC Workshop 1\(^{11}\) were as follows:

- The methodologies employed (primarily cost-benefit analysis) are limited in identifying what priorities are/should be. Costs are easy to quantify. Benefits are more qualitative. It is not easy to measure benefits such as quality of life – economic simplification is not effective as a measure of accessibility because everything is netted out and therefore misleading. This links to point 40 regarding frameworks employed in different government departments.
- The links between transport and social cohesion: need to be considered in decision making. These are currently not quantified in policy making terms or are completely missing.
- Mixed policy priorities across departments often conflict which can lead to fragmented or contradictory policy.

38. Framing decisions around a single agenda is unhelpful. Identifying policies which aim to deliver against multiple policy objectives (as in the case of smarter choice measures whereby health, accessibility and environmental objectives can be achieved) are more likely to succeed in delivering outcomes.

39. Research shows that communication between divisions within transport departments responsible for infrastructure provision and those for so-called ‘soft’ measures – sustainable transport, accessibility, walking and cycling, social impacts – is missing, which leads to contradictory policymaking. Moreover the research demonstrates that often in transport-related decision making there is a disconnect between the overarching government strategy and the policies which are subsequently adopted to deliver against these policies. Consideration of matching outcomes against objectives would minimise this ‘strategy-action deficit’.\(^{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) Social Impacts and Equity Issues in Transport Policy Briefing Note 1  
http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note1.pdf  
\(^{12}\) Anderton, K. (2012), *Sub-national government responses to reducing the climate impact of cars*, (D.Phil thesis; Oxford Research Archive)
Fragmentation across Departmental siloes

40. The UKTRC Workshop 13 highlighted that whilst DfT requirements to quantify and value the outcomes of a policy or project in economic/cost effective terms, this is less an emphasis for other departments (health/education) which may lead to areas, such as accessibility, where the ‘economic’ value of projects is hard to quantify are marginalised in favour of areas where the cost/economic benefit relationship is easier to determine.

41. Accessibility policy is compounded by institutional and organisational factors, as responsibilities for land use (planning) and transport are frequently split across levels of government. Either land use is the purview of local authorities, or there are multiple agencies at the same level of government often involved, with no department taking overall control.

42. Departments concerned with the environment (e.g. Defra, DECC) have also become increasingly involved with certain issues linked to transport and land-use planning. This means that relationships, roles and responsibilities are dispersing further.

43. These relationships often work according to different rules and put more emphasis on collaborative and open approaches to planning, which contrasts with the more much more institutionalized and rigid systems of control traditionally associated with transport planning. They often don’t take accessibility into consideration at all, with environmental considerations dominating14.

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13 Social Impacts and Equity Issues in Transport Policy Briefing Note 1
http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/UKTRC-policy_briefing_note1.pdf