



## Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion. Report by the Social Exclusion Unit 2003

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**Although some may argue that there is not yet an accurate definition of 'social exclusion' and of those who fall into this category, this briefing examines the issues of how transport has contributed to such problems. The author gives a brief résumé of each of the 13 chapters of the Transport and Social Exclusion report before moving on to discuss wider issues such as value judgements and land-use policies. Finally, the briefing considers the implications of these various processes for the report and for lasting solutions.**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The entry in the glossary to the Transport and Social Exclusion report<sup>1</sup> explains social exclusion in the following terms

The term 'social exclusion' refers to more than poverty or low income, but is closely related to them. It has previously been defined as 'a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown'. These problems tend to have a cumulative and reinforcing effect on each other, preventing people from fully participating in society.

Some readers may be concerned about the laxity of this as a definition and the lack of discussion on the matter elsewhere; they may have mental images of people who they regard as being socially excluded who do not fit in well with this description. However, a more comprehensive definition of the socially excluded would be likely to identify many people who do not have much in common in terms of how they are affected by transport issues. Transport issues, as they affect the people defined as being socially excluded in the above terms, are a reasonable subject for study; in fact, the study could have been written without using the term 'social exclusion' but rather under a title such as 'accessibility issues, policies and initiatives'.

The lack of a comprehensive and precise definition of social exclusion does, however, preclude monitoring of the policies intended to reduce it; how monitoring will be carried out is not covered in the report.

### 2. THE REPORT

This report examines the issues of how transport has con-

tributed to such problems as those listed in the quotation above and how it might help to solve them. Quite rightly, accessibility is the focus of attention throughout. This is a welcome improvement on most previous Government transport policy documents since the White Paper of July 1998<sup>2</sup> which have tended to confuse accessibility with mobility, such as has been reflected in targets for travel by public transport, cycling and walking in the 10 Year Plan<sup>3</sup> and elsewhere.

There are 13 chapters containing a wealth of information and analysis about accessibility issues and useful references to recent good practice. A brief résumé of the chapters now follows.

- *Chapter 1 The problem.* This is a useful survey of the main accessibility needs to work, learning, health, food shopping and social activities and some of the main problems experienced.
- *Chapter 2 Why does it happen?* The second chapter examines five types of barrier to obtaining services: the availability and physical accessibility of transport; safety and security while travelling; the cost of transport; poor information and individuals' limited travel horizons; and the location of services. There is recognition of the significance of changes in the locations of activities and the increasing need to travel over recent decades. The analysis of travel habits implies a lot of common ground between social exclusion and low income or disability and is sensitive to geographical variations in the occurrence of travel problems in Britain.
- *Chapter 3 Causes.* This chapter emphasises the lack of a single public body with overall responsibility for accessibility and analyses the reasons why past arrangements and practice of transport policies have not resulted in public transport being as effective in providing accessibility as it might have been.
- *Chapter 4 Solutions to the problem.* Local and national progress on the five barriers to progress on accessibility identified in Chapter 2 is examined. The first four are concerned with improving the availability of transport, the last one with the causes of the need for it. While it is recognised that the location of services affects transport needs, there is no acknowledgement of the reverse, namely that availability of transport can affect the location of services, which in turn affects the need to travel.

- *Chapter 5 Accessibility planning: a new approach.* This is a particularly useful chapter which develops and responds to a number of issues which have been well-known for some time—the incompatibility of policies of government agencies including those relating to schools and the NHS. The focus on accessibility, rather than mobility, is right; the advice is sound and useful.
- *Chapter 6 Improving transport services.* This is mainly concerned with bus services. Policies are reviewed under three headings: flexibility to respond to local needs; better partnership working; and review of funding. Railway services and car clubs are also briefly reviewed.
- *Chapter 7 Land-use planning.* Chapter 7 is an optimistic representation of the efficacy of the town and country planning system in guiding the locations of activities. There is a need to be aware that the planning process has little influence over the decline of local services—a decline at the heart of the accessibility problems described at length in this report. Also, local planning authorities must be conscious of the need to gain development for economic and employment reasons, as well as to gain wanted services; their negotiating powers with developers are not always as strong as is implied here.
- *Chapter 8 Safer streets.* This is a useful summary of good practice covering measures to tackle crime and fear of crime around public transport, tackling concentrations of road casualties in disadvantaged communities and the walking and cycling environments.
- *Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Access to work, learning, healthcare and to healthy affordable food.* These four chapters contain concise statements of the problems, reviews of current practice and policy proposals.
- *Chapter 13 What happens next?* The final chapter summarises the policies set out earlier in the report and who is responsible for implementation.

This report contains a very well-written analysis of current issues, useful summaries of recent good practice and a concise summary of policies that will make a significant contribution to the well-being of many people who experience transport problems. There are good reasons to commend it.

### 3. ISSUES

In addition, however, there are other issues concerning social exclusion and transport which merit attention. Some of them are steeped in value judgements. Making such judgements is the job of the politician but identification of where they are needed and the prediction of their consequences is that of the professional officer.

Should it be national policy to ensure that public transport is available everywhere? Or should it be recognised that some areas are so expensive to serve that resources would be better concentrated elsewhere? Is it acceptable to expect that people who choose to live in certain areas will be responsible for their own transport? How much concentration should there be?

Where is the balance to be drawn between public assistance with transport and self-help? Some readers of the report, especially those with a political leaning towards the right, may be more inclined to think in terms of something closer to an 'on

your bike and find a job' approach than is prevalent in this report. To get away from politics and metaphor, there is, indeed, remarkably little reference to the bicycle as a means of accessibility for the socially excluded. Perhaps these issues were settled before the report was written, to reflect the views of political masters.

How are transport needs to be defined? And distinguished from demands? What is a need to be met by public assistance and a demand whose provision is to be left to self-help? Deriving norms of accessibility is a sensitive issue and a task permeated with value judgements, but one which can not be avoided in planning for accessibility.

Less involved in politics and value judgements, there are the relationships between the locations of activities and transport provision. As the report says, land-use policies can complement transport policies to improve accessibility.

6.45 This chapter has shown how the Government will improve bus services and how other modes of transport can be more effectively used. However, improving mainstream transport alone will not address all the barriers to accessibility. The next chapter details how changes to land-use planning policies will complement these steps.

The complementary relationship between transport and land-use policies is only part of the story: transport policies can also undermine land-use policies and cause accessibility to deteriorate.

In outline, the problem is this: during the past 50 years there has been an almost threefold increase in personal travel per person in Britain. It might be expected that this would solve, or at least reduce, any accessibility problems of 50 years ago. This has not happened. Problems have not been solved; perhaps they have even increased. The Social Exclusion Unit report bears ample testimony to their continuation.

As total mobility has increased, some services have been bypassed and have decayed; other have become stronger.<sup>3</sup> Increasing mobility results in attractive services becoming stronger and unattractive services becoming weaker. As some services have failed, the need to travel has increased. The increase in mobility has not been available to everyone. So some people (now described as the socially excluded) have been left behind and suffer from increasing problems of accessibility. As greater mobility is strived for, either privately such as by acquisition of a car, or publicly by public transport improvements, local services are further undermined and the need to travel is exacerbated. In this way, increased mobility does not necessarily result in improved accessibility. By undermining local services, increasing travel causes a need for even more travel; travel is self-perpetuating. While the private car has been the main culprit in undermining local services, where there are ample public transport services, these too can make a contribution.<sup>4</sup>

### 4. IMPLICATIONS

The implications of these processes for the Social Exclusion Unit report are as follows.

There will be a need to carefully target the proposals to make

transport more widely available to avoid undermining the local activities which are proposed to reduce the need to travel. In particular, in Chapter 4, the first four measures to overcome barriers to progress in accessibility are liable to be in conflict with the fifth; similarly, the proposals in Chapter 6 on improving transport services are liable to conflict with those in Chapter 7 on land-use planning. Some of the proposals for local activities in Chapters 9–12 could be undermined by proposals to make travel more widely available; in particular, the initiatives for local shops described in paragraphs 12.5–12.7 seem vulnerable.

We should also consider the relationship between policies to improve accessibility and policies to develop sustainable communities such as those in the recent report from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.<sup>5</sup> Policies which have helped to generate more travel in the past have very likely contributed to instability and decline of local community spirit; certainly the socially cohesive urban villages of the past involved little travel.<sup>6,7</sup> Policies which result in an increase in travel will allow inclusion in more distant relationships but will support social disintegration locally.

In order to develop a stable, some would say sustainable, land-use/transportation system, with a minimum of policy conflict and the resulting wasted investment, the interactions between

land use and transport policy need sedulous and unvarnished consideration. Otherwise, many improvements in accessibility will prove to be only short-term palliatives, not lasting solutions.

## REFERENCES

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6. DAMER S. *Glasgow: Going for a Song*. Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990.
7. MCARTHUR A. Rebuilding sustainable communities. Assessing Glasgow's urban village experiment. *Town Planning Review*, 2000, 71, No. 1, 51–69.

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