Transport and Social Inclusion

Transport has a vital role to play in connecting people to opportunities, improving quality of life and accelerating our transition to net zero emissions. The transport choices we make (or are able to make) have a huge impact on our individual and collective ability to fully participate in society. Whether it is being able to afford to travel to work, feeling safe to use our streets or being free to breathe clean air. This UTG briefing explores the role of transport in supporting social inclusion.

What is social inclusion?

Social inclusion is about ensuring that all people are able to take part in society and access opportunities regardless of their background or specific characteristics (e.g. gender, race, income, geography).

Designing socially inclusive policies and services involves removing barriers to participation, ideally informed by the lived experiences of different groups.

There are often considerable overlaps in the challenges that marginalised groups face and designing for those groups tends to ultimately result in a better policies and services for all users.

However, across a wide range of policy areas, not least transport policy, there has been a tendency to design around what has been termed the 'reference man' or 'default male' – that is a young, healthy, financially secure male.

Whilst often not intentional, this has had the effect of marginalising the experiences and needs of other groups, not least those of women, who comprise half the UK population.

What are the connections between transport and social inclusion?

Transport is intrinsically linked to our ability to live a full and healthy life. The transport choices we make (or are able to make) affect the extent to which we as individuals are able to participate fully in society. Those choices also affect the ability of others to live a good life – from the local right through to the global scale.

For example, being able to choose to walk or cycle a journey has benefits for both the individual and for wider society. As individuals it means we can access opportunities to work, care for others, shop, go to school or visit friends. It also supports our physical and mental health and wellbeing, making it more likely we can carry on doing the things we enjoy for longer.

The benefits also ripple outwards to wider society. Being able to access employment, education, shops and services – as well as to fulfil caring responsibilities - brings economic benefits for society. Furthermore, the health benefits of walking and cycling mean individuals can continue to contribute to the collective good for longer.

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More walking and cycling make streets safer and more pleasant for all, making it more likely that others will also choose to walk or cycle, multiplying the benefits. These journeys also generate zero harmful emissions, contributing to cleaner air, improving population health and helping to tackle the global climate emergency.

The extent to which we can make sustainable transport choices and unlock these wider benefits for society is, however, determined by the extent to which our transport services and policies are designed with inclusivity in mind.

Introducing the 4 A's

To support social inclusion, transport options should strive to reflect the needs of the diverse communities that they serve, as well as fulfil what can be described as 'the Four A's'.

- Available: transport options should be within easy reach of where people live, at times and frequencies that correspond to patterns of family, social and working life.

- Accessible: as far as is safe and possible, everyone regardless of ability, age or dexterity (for example), is able to use and understand transport services without unreasonable difficulty.

- Affordable: people should not be 'priced out' of using services and see their mobility restricted as a result. It should also be easy for people to find and access a range of transport options that meet their needs and offer the best value.

- Acceptable: people should feel that transport options, services and infrastructure are equipped to meet their needs as well as welcoming, safe and convenient. It should be designed to make for an attractive user experience.

Applying the 4 A's

The Four A's can be used to assess the inclusivity of any transport service, infrastructure or mode. For example, if we were to apply them to bus services in a community, we might ask, for availability, where and when the services run and whether that corresponds with where and how the full diversity of people in the community want to travel. Do they accommodate shift workers or those who need to trip chain (as opposed to completing a simple A to B journey)?

For accessibility, we could look at whether the routes to bus stops, the bus stops themselves and the vehicles are clear of obstructions. Can wheelchairs and buggies board with ease? Is there space for luggage and shopping? Is timetable information easy to read and understand? Are staff trained to offer appropriate assistance?

For affordability, we could look at fare levels and whether the best value fares are available to all – including those who cannot afford the upfront cost of a season ticket or those without a smart phone or bank account.

Finally, considering acceptability, we might look at things like whether key routes to the bus are well lit, whether people feel welcome on board and whether the service affords dignity to its users. Is it clean and well cared for?

To ensure that a range of perspectives are bought to light, the answers to these questions should be informed by people's varied lived experiences, gathered through data and consultation as well as by employing a diverse workforce.

Why is it important to have an inclusive transport system?

In the midst of a climate emergency, it is essential that as many people as possible are able to access the most sustainable transport modes – walking, cycling, public transport as well as innovations such as Mobility as a Service and e-scooters. It is imperative that these modes are open to all and able to attract new users. To achieve this, they must be available, affordable, accessible and acceptable to the full range of people in our communities.

Sustainable transport options, infrastructure and services that fulfil the Four A's are also important for social justice – it means that as many people as possible – regardless of their background or access to a car - can have access to opportunities that allow them to move 'onwards and upwards', improving their quality of life as well as contributing to wider economic growth.

Sustainable transport also tends to be healthy transport, meaning that people can maximise their contribution to society, living longer and healthier lives. Even simply walking to a bus stop gets people moving in a way that taking two steps to the car in the drive cannot.

An inclusive, sustainable transport system unlocks opportunity, makes it more likely that we will achieve climate goals and improve quality of life for all.

The role of transport authorities

We cannot take it for granted that equitable outcomes will evolve naturally, particularly in what is a rapidly evolving transport market of new mobility services and private operators. In this environment, there is always a danger that the bottom line will ultimately take precedence over a desire to serve the full diversity of people, places and journeys in our communities.

This is where locally accountable transport authorities have a vital role to play in ensuring that wider goals for people and place are protected and that a just transition to net zero is achieved.

Transport authorities will continue to work towards ensuring that the widest range of green transport options are available, affordable, accessible and acceptable to as many people as possible.

Version: September 2022
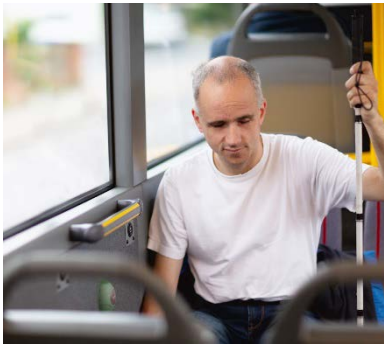
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Further reading

If you would like to find out more about this topic, take a look at 'Equitable Future Mobility: Ensuring a just transition to net zero transport'– a report jointly prepared by UTG and Arup.

The report is intended as a starter for collaborative discussions between transport authorities, operators and users about the human dimension of the decarbonisation agenda, aiming to make our future transport system fulfil the Four A's. It includes useful tools and checklists to assist in this process.

Find out more about our work on social inclusion on our website:
http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/social-inclusion