# Social Impacts and Equity Issues in Transport: an Introduction

Social issues form an important part of the transport policy challenge in both the developed and developing world and yet the social impacts and distributional effects of the transport system and transport decision-making has been far less well researched and addressed than the associated economic or environmental considerations. This Special Issue brings together theoretical and case study research from a wide range of different academic disciplines including housing health, employment, education and social policy, as well as transport studies with the aim of enhancing our understanding of these issues, as well as to broaden the current policy debate.

The idea for this publication emerged from a scanning exercise, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom (UK). The exercise involved a research and evidence review, which was facilitated through a series of six themed workshops with UK academics, policy makers, non-governmental organisations and frontline delivery agencies. The workshops were designed to to identify the key social challenges in transport now and for the future drawing on state-of-the-art research and best practices across a wide range of social science disciplines. They provoked some lively discussions and generated a number of new areas for debate. It is not surprising that, given the diverse disciplinary perspectives, policy sectors and roles and responsibilities that were represented at these events, we did not always come to a consensus of opinion about the issues we were discussing.  Indeed, there were times when we might have appeared Babylonian. Nevertheless, a great deal of knowledge was exchanged, many misunderstandings laid to rest and considerable progress made in identifying a set of key priorities for future research, policy and practice. Some of the key messages to emerge from these workshops and which are also echoed in many of the papers which comprise this Special Issue were that:

- The social impacts of transport can be significant, especially for already vulnerable population groups but these effects are currently poorly accounted for within transport policy appraisal.

- Transport 'goods and bads' are unevenly distributed across the population: the wealthiest in society tend to gain the most benefits from the transport system, whilst the poorest  suffer its worst effects.

- Some social groups are more adversely affected than others, especially children and young people, older people, lone parents, disabled people and ethnic minority populations.

- We have strong research evidence that these uneven outcomes reduce people's ability to fully participate in society and can lead to their social exclusion but this is often difficult to measure and quantify.

- We need to develop better ways to communicate the social consequences of 'transport poverty' to national and local decision-makers within and outside the transport delivery arena.

Further information about the study can be sourced at http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/.


We have been unable to include everything that was presented and discussed at the workshops in this Special Issue.  It offers only a flavour of these rich narratives and is intended to be neither

wholly comprehensive nor exhaustive in its coverage of social issues in transport. Each of the papers provides a different perspective on this complex and wide-ranging topic area, with a common focus on social impacts, distributional and social equity effects of the transport system and the policy decision process. As such the papers are primarily UK-centred but we believe they will resonate with a much wider academic and practitioner audience interested in this complex and often contentious subject.

As an introduction to the Special Issue, the first paper (Jones and Lucas, 2012) offers an overarching discussion of the social impacts and distributional effects of transport. We argue the case that for sake of clarity these two issues should be considered separately from each other, recognising that economic and environmental impacts also have distributional effects which should be considered alongside any social impacts within policy appraisal. The paper predominantly focuses on five key short-term or 'immediate' categories of social impact, namely accessibility, movement and activities, health-related, financial related and community-related impacts. It then consider the spatial, temporal and socio-demographic distributional effects of transport. Based on an extensive review of the literature, we conclude that more interdisciplinary and crosscutting research is needed in order for the social impacts of transport to be paid the attention they deserve within the decision-making process. Future studies need to clarify definitions and develop improved conceptual framings of the issues, as well as provide more holistic understandings of the interactions between transport and other areas of social policy. There is also the need to produce better models and forecasts of what social impacts might result from proposed transport policy; this requires more comprehensive data on the social outcomes and distributional effects of new transport projects and transport policy decisions, including cutbacks in provision and other potential changes in patterns of demand and supply, such as the relocation of a hospital, housing redevelopment or opening a new college.

Hodgson's paper (2012) presents an in-depth exploration of everyday practices, as a contribution to the discourse on everyday mobility and social connectivity. She argues that the competencies needed to travel and negotiate the transport system are developing and changing alongside changes in mobility patterns, communication technologies and social organisation. Yet very little is known about how these changing social practices affect transport-poor populations. Her research used a mixed methods qualitative approach involving the residents of a low income estate in-depth 'mobility interviews' carried out by walking around their areas, and a three day communication diary to identify their mobility needs from a grounded perspective. Her study demonstrates a mismatch between the principles of inclusive design which are embedded within UK walking policies and the perceptions and experiences of the people who rely on walking as their main mode of travel.

In the next paper, Urry (2012) builds on this thesis to describe how low levels of 'network capital' and transport resources can lead to low social capital and the exacerbation of existing social inequalities. He argues that movement itself is less important in this relationship than how the transport system connects people to each other and allows them to extend and/or maintain their social networks and that these network formations and reformations are essential to relations of power and place. The greater a person's informal networks, the more opportunity they have to create, circulate and share tacit knowledge, so developing and building new social capital. In this context, the ability to connect with people both physically and virtually becomes significant to the operation of power. By implication, people who are denied such connectivity through the absence of transport and/or information technology are denied the opportunity to network and so are unable to access new capital.

Picking up on the theme of virtual mobility and changing social practices, Felstead's paper (2012), explores the incidence and impact of teleworking on employees' working practices and coping strategies. Drawing on data from a number of diverse employer and worker surveys, his paper explores 'the spatial fluidity of work' and the extent to which employment is becoming detached from the traditional workplace. It then discusses some of the implications of such

changes for how individuals pass on knowledge and skills and how they cope with working in a variety of contrasting locations. Interestingly, he finds that the prevalence of teleworking in the UK is still relatively low (less than 5 percent) and that nine out of ten people still carry out their work in conventional working environments. He also identifies a strong need for physical connectivity with other co-workers amongst those who do work at a distance from their place of work. Furthermore, working at a distance requires considerable self-discipline and a clear sense of how to function effectively in different environments.

The five papers which follow each take a policy sectoral approach, focusing on the impacts of transport on urban renewal, health, and the education and training of young people in rural areas. In the first of the two urban renewal papers, Power and Lane (2012) build the general case that slum clearance and the drive to build new large, low-density housing estates in the urban periphery has locked urban communities into settlement patterns and travel behaviours that are both environmentally and socially unsustainable. They propose that, although there is no panacea for tackling the challenges faced by people living in these disadvantaged neighbourhoods, there is a distinct link between the built environment, social connectedness and environmental sustainability. They argue the case that compact, high density urban form with a priority for public transport and walking and cycling, not only improves accessibility and the integration of activities, but also reduces the social inequalities that have arisen from low density development and car dependent urban design.

In a case study of Belfast, Hackett, who is an architect by training and also a lead member of an activist urban design group based in the City of Belfast, explores how the design and layout of the urban environment can have significant social impacts on religiously segregated, working class communities whose access to employment and other necessary services depends largely on public transport and safe walkable streets (Hackett, 2012). He argues that major areas of derelict land around Belfast's city core, combined with the severance created by major roads have create a doughnut effect, which facilitates an outer suburbs, car commuting, middle class but discriminates against the poorest communities within the inner city. The paper reports on an action-research study that was undertaken with some residents of these inner city communities to address the problems they experience from this disconnection from activities in the city centre.

In the first of two papers looking at the research and policy interface between transport and health, Milne (2012), who is a public health officer in the National Health Service (NHS), considers the consequences of the reorganisation of the health sector in the UK on transport policy, as one key determinant of health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on the significant rise in obesity. His paper offers an interesting chronology of the rise of transport externalities as a problem within public health circles. He finds that, whilst the human protection aspects of public health are well developed where transport and traffic are concerned, particularly in relation to traffic injuries, health promotion through walking and cycling is a relatively new departure. From a health practitioner's perspective, he confirms the argument that the loss of opportunities for casual physical activity in our society as a result of growing car ownership and use, has increased the likelihood of weight gain in children, and substitute activities (TV, computer games) tend to exacerbate the problem. He concludes that, although it is possible to encourage people to achieve better health outcomes through transport solutions, to succeed policy needs to go much further than the current 'persuasion tactics' and must address fundamental issues of infrastructure and service provision. This is likely to be expensive and would require a prolonged continuum of coordinated action, which is unlikely in the present 'arms length' policy climate.

In the second health-focused paper, Hodgson et al (2012) use school travel as a case study to exemplify two key aspects of the wider health and transport debates, First, the increasing trend towards reliance on car travel, described here in the context of sedentary lifestyles, traffic congestion, pollution, and protective parental attitudes; second, school travel occurs at a critical life-stage during which behaviour patterns are formed that are likely to be influential in later

life, thus making it an important target point for interventions. Combining four different theoretical perspectives from the vast and diverse literatures pertaining to transport and health (transport, exposure, behaviour and sustainability), the authors develop an integrated conceptual framework of the many links between transport and health. They argue that to tackle this important issue properly, we need to move beyond the current 'silos' of research and, as with all trans-disciplinary research, there are considerable challenges to overcome in terms of definitional and conceptual divides, diverse methodological approaches, data sharing and knowledge production and dissemination across disciplinary boundaries.

With a broader perspective on the education and employment sector, Owen et al's paper (2012), explores the impact of low population density and transport constraints on skills development and the take up of learning and training opportunities in a rural area of eastern England. Through secondary analysis of survey data, a survey of young people in their penultimate year of compulsory education, and qualitative interviews and focus groups with employers, trainers and other actors in the labour market, the authors discuss how transport and travel play a crucial role in the 'low skills equilibrium' of some rural areas. The paper demonstrates that transport and travel constraints have a major impact both on employers' likelihood to train people and upon their choice of training provider. Employers of all sizes were affected, but transport constraints were of particular significance for small employers who found it most costly, both financially and in terms of time, to release their staff for training. The higher travel costs increased the costs of training and made employers less willing to invest in training.

The final two papers in the Special Issue also offer a rural perspective, but looking more broadly at patterns of mobility. In the first of these, Smith et al (2012) expand upon the theme of the higher rural travel costs and the essential role this plays in determining the need for a higher minimum income standard (MIS) of households living in rural areas. The paper reports on a research study conducted with rural residents in three different types of rural settlements in England: rural town/town and fringe, village (less sparse); and dispersed/hamlet. The research did not set out to measure transport disadvantage but its finding effectively communicate the message that a car is essential for maintaining a minimum standard of living in all but pensioner households in rural towns, despite the high costs of ownership and use.

In the last paper, Velaga et al (2012) identify the accessibility and connectivity challenges that are particularly associated with the rural context. In particular, their paper considers the potential to bring together new models of demand responsive public transport delivery in conjunction with with new information technologies to address the mobility needs of rural communities. The authors highlight the need for technical adaptation, increased transport and technology provision and supporting policies if such innovations are to be brought about and succeed.

It is hard to draw simple conclusions from such a far-reaching and ambitious set of papers. Our initial intention in bringing together the workshops and subsequently this Special Issue was to raise the profile of social issues in transport both among the transport community and with other academics and practitioners and to identify the key priorities for research and policy. The authors of this Special Issue are united in their conviction that by overlooking the social impacts and social equity implications, we fundamentally undermine the quality of life and social well-being of citizens in our towns, cities and rural settlements. It is also clear from an overview of these papers that transport provision and how we connect with each other, both physically and virtually, is hugely important (if not vital) to other areas of economic and social policy, including housing, planning, employment, health, education social welfare, as well for sustainable development.

The behavioural and social sciences have developed a growing interest in researching particular aspects of these relationships and interactions with transport disadvantage in recent years. There is now a substantial body of researchers worldwide who seek to make evident the role of transport in social processes. Collectively they exploit a wide range of potentially

complementary but hitherto largely discrete theoretical and methodological approaches, but their research is still largely 'siloed' and fairly disparately disseminated. We hope that this Special Issue further encourages their inquiries and begins a wider process of cross-fertilization, networking and debate, not only between different academic disciplines and different nations, but also between academics, policy makers and other delivery agencies.

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