

Transport and social justice

Why sustainable transport is the only route to a socially just transport system

INFORMATION SHEET FF46

Foreword

At Citizens Advice we already help hundreds of thousands of people who are fuel poor claim benefits and sort out consumer problems with fuel. With rising gas and electricity prices we are seeing more and more people coming into bureaux struggling to pay their household bills and cope with rising fuel costs.

But now oil prices are also reaching record highs. As a consequence we are seeing many low-income households spending as much as 25% of their income on owning and running a car. People on low-incomes are being driven into transport poverty more and more.

This is not a question of choice, but necessity. Over the past decades jobs, shops, schools, and many other destinations have increasingly become accessible only by car. Public transport alternatives are often thin on the ground or expensive, and distance and an unsafe environment can make walking and cycling impossible even over short distances.

The simplistic solution suggested by some will be to reduce the cost of motoring. But, as this information sheet reveals, there are other consequences of our car centred travel system on those on low incomes. The least well-off in our society also experience the greatest impact of roads and traffic on their health and communities.

A much more socially just, equitable and forward-looking solution is to focus on increasing access to all destinations by affordable public transport, and a greatly improved environment for those travelling on foot and by bike. This is the norm in leading European nations. Public and essential services such as benefit offices, post offices, GPs, dentists, courts must also be fully accessible by public transport.

For the benefit of social inclusion, people's health, our environment and our communities, we join Sustrans in urging for much more investment in greatly improving public transport and the environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Only when we achieve improved access over increased mobility will we have a transport culture that is inclusive and of service to everyone in our society.

Sue Edwards, Head of Consumer Policy Citizens Advice



Introduction

It is a commonly held assumption that the freedom to travel where we like, when we like, has liberated us socially and economically. Our towns, suburbs and countryside have, as a result, been

re-shaped to accommodate mass car ownership, all made possible by a ready supply of fuel sold at the pumps for roughly the price of mineral water.

Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity and works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to benefit health and the environment.

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In addition, for the last fifty years the building of new roads has been seen as the way to bring prosperity to deprived communities.

But is this true? Oil prices are now reaching record highs, exposing our vulnerability to a transport system dependent on this finite resource. The combined challenges of energy security, climate change and obesity should be forcing a rapid re-think of existing transport policy. It is Sustrans' view that much more investment in delivering truly sustainable travel will not only help solve these major challenges, but will also bring about a much more socially just transport system.

What are the social consequences of existing transport policy?

Transport poverty

The last three decades have seen the cost of motoring fall by 10% in real terms, while average household disposable income has more than doubled.⁽¹⁾ It might therefore be expected that we would be in the midst of a period in which everyone is able to enjoy freedom of movement and all the benefits of individual car ownership.

In practice, this is far from being the case. Amongst the poorest fifth of households, those who do own cars spend nearly a quarter of their income on the cost of motoring⁽²⁾ There is no official definition of transport poverty, but the same family would officially be defined as experiencing 'fuel poverty' if heating their house costs more than 10% of their income.⁽³⁾

Because of the access difficulties experienced by people when they do not have a car, there is a tendency for people to seek to run a car even when they cannot really afford to do so. Consequently, buying and running a car is a major cause of people getting

into trouble with debts.⁽⁴⁾ Citizens Advice have documented some of the cases where being obliged to have a car has led to unmanageable indebtedness. For example:

A client on a low wage contacted a Citizen Advice Bureau. They lived in a rural area ill-served by public transport and needed a car to reach their part-time job. As a consequence they were spending 95% of their wages on owning and running a car and they were facing unmanageable debt problems.

Significant "transport poverty" already exists in the UK, and this despite access to relatively cheap oil. Oil prices have risen steeply since 2002, and Sadad Al-Huseini, former head of Exploration and Production at Saudi Aramco and therefore uniquely placed to assess the state of the key middle eastern oil fields, predicts that oil prices will continue to rise at the same rate over the coming years.⁽⁵⁾

Reliance on a car is the worst position financially when there is a significant rise in the price of oil. All transport in the UK is extremely vulnerable to oil price shocks, but people who are car-dependent are the most vulnerable. A study that looked at the effects of fuel price increases concluded:

Poorer households...that do run cars...are particularly hard-hit by fuel price increases. For instance,... in order to preserve the volume of fuel they buy, a person living on their own on a state pension and paying for petrol would have to spend [as additional expenditure on fuel] twice the proportion of household income as a two-adult family or a retired couple not on a state pension.⁽⁶⁾

Social exclusion

Those individuals who do not have access to a car, either because they cannot afford one or for reasons related to ill-health, disability or age, are at a disadvantage in a society in



which jobs, shops, health care and leisure facilities are planned and located on the assumption that everyone can drive.

In rural areas these issues are compounded as illustrated by Barnardo's Cymru and NCH Wales research highlighting the impossible choice faced by a mother working part time in the nearest town:

"I spend all my spare money getting the bus into town. I'd rather be closer. It's £1.70 each time. We can't run a car. I could probably get a cheap one through my friend, but no way could we afford to run one. And driving lessons are really expensive."⁽⁷⁾

Passive driving

People who make relatively little use of a car (and therefore cause less pollution, noise and congestion within communities as a result of their travel) are still exposed to the pollution, noise and damage to communities caused by other people's car use. By analogy with tobacco smoking, these people are experiencing 'passive driving', living with the consequences of other people's travel behaviour. People who live close to busy main roads are more likely to suffer chronic ill-health, as evidenced by symptoms such as runny or blocked nose, sore eyes or sore throat, coughs, or lack of energy, even when other factors such as income are controlled for.⁽⁸⁾ It is also well documented that people in the poorest households are more likely to be injured or killed by a car, and this is especially true of children.⁽⁹⁾

In addition the recent Foresight report 'Tackling Obesities: Future Choices', produced by the Government Office for Science, showed how disadvantaged households are more likely to experience an 'obesogenic environment', which includes reduced opportunities to travel actively by walking or cycling. The report predicts that a majority of UK adults could be clinically obese by 2050, at an annual cost to society of £49.9 billion in today's money.⁽¹⁰⁾

The myth that new roads stimulate economic renewal

Despite these clear links between road-based development transport poverty, social exclusion and ill health, investment in roads is still seen as a solution to economic decline, unemployment and improved access in deprived areas. The truth is that the often-repeated mantra that 'roads bring jobs' has little basis in fact.

Over a decade ago a study of 34 local authority areas ('travel-to-work areas') examined whether there was a correlation between economic performance (measured by changes in indices of unemployment and job centre vacancies over a six year period) and accessibility to the motorway network and other significant destinations (measured by journey times),⁽¹¹⁾ found that there was no statistically significant correlation. In other words, travel time to the nearest motorway or dual carriageway had no influence on economic performance.

More recently Sir Rod Eddington's detailed study for the UK Government on the role transport could play in sustaining productivity and competitiveness concluded that 'transport is unlikely to be the answer to regenerating an area or region'. In areas where economic performance is relatively weak, Eddington sees little, if any, justification for investment in new roads as a means to stimulate the economy.⁽¹²⁾

Planning and development specialist, Alan Wenban-Smith, formerly responsible for transport, planning and urban regeneration in Birmingham, goes further. His work suggests that less car-based town planning and better non-car options offer a far more effective path to regeneration of depressed urban areas than the 20th century roads-based approach. Equity of access to vital facilities through good public transport and cycle routes, coupled with a better local street environment, creates the 'feel

Rural areas – opportunities and solutions

One survey of car journeys to work in the rural Dyfi Valley in mid-Wales showed that a good alternative existed for a third of journeys – either the trip was short enough to cycle or walk on a safe route, or there was a convenient public transport service.

For a quarter of car trips simple improvements to public transport or walking/cycling provision would have made the journey possible.

Another 20% of car trips were exact matches with another car trip and were suitable for car-sharing. Only 20% of car trips were very difficult to make by any other means.⁽²²⁾

In rural areas of Denmark the Ministry of Transport recommends e cycle tracks at a grid spacing of 3-5km. These follow the main roads and give cyclists direct, safe routes connecting to schools, public buildings and health-care facilities.

A number of European public transport services provide a high standard of access in remote areas. They combine public transport with dedicated health services, school services or special needs services to create an on-demand door-to-door shared taxibus service for all.

Features include:

- conventional timetabled bus (or train) services on key routes
- services that run in response to a phone call, generally offering the option to pick up and set down at people's homes
- full availability of services during off-peak periods, evenings and week-ends, becoming demand-responsive during periods of low demand
- reasonably priced fares
- integrated ticketing so passengers pay once even if they change vehicles

In Friesland province in the Netherlands bus operators are required to run a three-tier network by settlement size, with the lowest level guaranteeing villages of more than 250 people a regular daily service up to 11pm. Some services can be taxis that operate only on demand backed up by the option of a door-to-door taxi operating 7am to 11pm.⁽²³⁾

good factor' which attracts residents and businesses. This leads to more investment and more jobs.

This should not surprise us. John Whitelegg, professor of sustainable transport at John Moores University, Liverpool, argues that as our economy has moved away from a manufacturing and industrial base dependent on the transport of raw materials and finished goods, so the importance of environmental quality (as opposed to investment in roads) in generating economic success has become much more important.

Many local economies have ceased to be dependent on the flow of materials as a major component of their economic life support systems. Their locational decision making and their strategic thinking are dominated by the availability of skilled and/or professional labour, by the availability of good schools and attractive housing and by a number of 'feel-good' factors related to environmental quality and the availability of rich cultural, social and recreational opportunities. Dominant flows now consist of information, ideas, technology and innovation and a highly motivated and flexible labour force attracted by a high quality environment will be an important factor in economic success.⁽¹¹⁾

How do we create a socially just transport system?

1. Invest in small-scale and 'smart' measures, rather than roads, to improve non-car transport

Thousands of small-scale improvements in transport infrastructure and services spread right across cities, towns and rural areas should include:

- Re-design of residential streets to improve the environment for pedestrians, children at play, and cyclists, including widespread well-enforced speed limits of at least 20mph or less

- Development of safe routes to schools networks around every school supported by training and information.
- A programme to make the existing road network cycle-friendly and to put in place dedicated pedestrian and cycle core routes to enable most trips to be made on foot or by bike.⁽¹³⁾
- A progressive programme of road capacity reallocation towards more efficient use in congested urban areas, backed by congestion charging.
- Reallocating parking space and road space to enhance civic environments.
- Investment in a step-change in bus provision aiming at reliable high-quality high-frequency bus networks in urban areas, supported by extensive bus-priority measures, and a combination of frequent main-route bus services and demand-responsive provision to more rural areas.
- Cheaper bus travel. Higher public expenditure is required, coupled with targeted promotions of better services with lower fares, service efficiencies such as demand-responsive off-peak provision, and discounted fares for people on low incomes.
- A large-scale 'smart choices' programme to publicise and promote these improvements in non-car alternatives and stimulate travel behaviour change.

2. Make new developments more accessible and less car dependent

The present phase of major housebuilding is an opportunity to achieve higher standards of accessibility and less car dependency. Planning policy guidance should require regional authorities, local authorities and developers to adopt the following masterplanning checklist for all new housing developments.⁽¹⁴⁾

- Non-car-dependent location (*not* close to motorway junctions or high speed roads)

Urban areas - opportunities and solutions

Most UK urban centres were built in an era before the private car and are appropriately scaled for journeys on foot or bike. Suburban areas were often planned around commuter travel hubs including rail stations that still operate. This means that most car journeys in urban areas are actually very short. Research by Sustrans and Socialdata in Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester found that between 60% and 86% of car trips within those towns were shorter than five kilometres - about a 20 minute cycle ride. Between 7% and 11% were less than a kilometre - a 10 minute walk.⁽²⁴⁾

Vauban development in Freiburg, Germany, has been designed as a 'district of short distances' housing 5,000 people with a school, nurseries, a shopping centre, a food co-op, a farmers' market, recreation areas, and approximately 600 jobs all within walking and cycling distance. Longer journeys are served by trams and buses running every 5 -15 minutes and a local train station is planned.^(25,26)

Cars are parked in one of the multi-storey car parks on the edge of the residential area, run by a council-owned company. Residents who own a car must buy a parking space.

The streets are designed to be 'a playground for kids and places for social interaction', and cars picking up or setting down must travel at walking pace. For residents without a car a pay-as-you-go car club fleet is stationed in car park.

45% of residents belong to the car club.⁽²⁷⁾ Of the households that do not own cars, 57% did own a car until they moved to Vauban. Amongst car owners, 61% choose to cycle to work, and 91% of the non-car householders commute by bike.⁽²⁸⁾

Vauban offers both a blueprint for new housing development in the UK and shows what can be done in existing residential suburbs to provide people with an attractive alternative to using a car.

- Good quality frequent public transport services
- High development densities
- Good range of local facilities available
- Street design to favour walking and cycling
- Limited car parking provision, and some car-free housing
- Implement 'smart' programmes to change people's travel behaviour

A modal shift target should be set for all new developments. For example, Northamptonshire council has recently adopted a Modal Shift Strategy which states that new housing developments must achieve a minimum of 20% modal shift away from car trips in comparison with housing in nearby areas.⁽¹⁵⁾

Conclusion

It has been estimated that the spending required for an effective nationwide programme as outlined in 1 (above) would be of the order of an additional £40 per citizen per year (in addition to present expenditure on these sorts of measures)⁽¹⁶⁾

By contrast the total Highways Agency budget for 2007-8 is £127 per English citizen, of which only £17 is earmarked for maintenance. This does not include spending on roads by local authorities.⁽¹⁷⁾

The Scottish Government plans to spend £75 per citizen on motorways and trunk roads in 2007-2008, also excluding local authority spending on roads.⁽¹⁸⁾ The Welsh Assembly budget for all types of road for 2007-8 was forecast to be £200 per Welsh citizen.⁽¹⁹⁾ Northern Ireland has been spending an average of £154 per citizen on roads in recent years.⁽²⁰⁾

Rather than continue to allocate monies to major road projects that, on the evidence of past schemes, tend to generate more traffic and lead to further car-dependency⁽²¹⁾ and social exclusion, these projects should be cancelled and the funding re-allocated to a programme of solutions appropriate to the UK's 21st

century challenges. This will help to bring about a low carbon transport system better insulated against potential oil shocks whilst improving social inclusion and health and creating a more socially just transport system to the benefit of all.



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This information sheet draws upon analysis of a report for Sustrans written by Ian Taylor and Lynn Sloman of Transport for Quality of Life, www.transportforqualityoflife.com



Further information

Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity. Our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. We work on practical, innovative solutions to the transport challenges facing us all. Sustrans is the charity behind the award winning National Cycle Network, Safe Routes to Schools, Bike It, TravelSmart, Active Travel, Connect2 and Liveable Neighbourhoods, all projects that are changing our world one mile at a time.

To find out more visit or call: www.sustrans.org.uk 0845 113 00 65

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