

The benefits of providing new public transport in deprived areas

Findings
Informing change

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This study assesses the social and monetary value of public transport initiatives in four deprived areas of England in order to identify who benefits and how they benefit in relation to wider social inclusion objectives.

Key points

- The travel needs of people in the deprived areas studied could not be wholly met by traditional commercial public transport.
- New bus services enabled people to take up job opportunities, access health appointments and make shopping trips that were previously not possible. Participation in leisure and social activities also increased.
- Improving public transport information and helping with the cost of fares was as important as improved bus services in helping people on low incomes move from welfare into work.
- On the basis of total fare and journey time savings alone, the services studied had an aggregate social benefit of between £21,000 and £661,000 a year. These figures do not take account of any wider social benefit from wholly new trips.
- People in the deprived areas studied agreed that more needs to be done to support transport services if regeneration is to be successful. A lack of systematic evaluation of new transport services means local authorities and other agencies lack vital evidence to secure further funding once initial funding ends.
- The study recommends a comprehensive review of the commercial bus network and publicly subsidised services in deprived areas. This would help identify shortfalls in provision and show where public spending on transport could be most effectively targeted.

The research

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Background

The 2003 *Making the Connections* report by the Government's Social Exclusion Unit (now the Social Exclusion Task Force) highlighted how poor transport contributes to social exclusion in deprived neighbourhoods. It recommended improvements to the bus network to address wider social inclusion objectives. This study was designed to assess what happened when new public transport initiatives were introduced in four deprived areas in England: who benefited, how and why?

The UK Government has recognised the importance of public transport in ensuring access to jobs, health services, shopping and leisure facilities. Local authorities in England (outside London) are now obliged to assess whether people living in their area are able to reach key services by public transport, as part of Local Transport Plans for 2006-2011. However, there is no longer any specific funding for public transport initiatives in deprived areas.

Funding for new transport services was available from the Department for Transport's Urban Bus Challenge Fund, which ended in 2003. Other projects have been part funded by New Deal for Communities programmes or other Neighbourhood Renewal funds, which will come to an end by 2010.

This study reports on four transport projects: the Braunstone Bus in Leicester, the Trevithick Link in Cornwall, Walsall WorkWise and the Wythenshawe Local Link in Manchester.

Views of local professionals

Those running the schemes and those working towards wider regeneration objectives considered the projects highly valuable to individuals and to the overall vibrancy of the area. They highlighted the need to look at the physical availability of services in connection with other barriers, such as affording fares or having the confidence to travel. They recognised that improvements to public transport alone cannot address the difficulties of a "workless" culture, which requires a number of complementary interventions.

All the local professionals interviewed agreed that the bus services were important to the sustainable

regeneration of low-income areas. For example, a representative of an Urban Regeneration Company in Cornwall commented:

".. this is the start of a good network of public transport in the area that can allow people access to good jobs and be environmentally responsible at the same time."

Professionals were worried by the lack of secure future funding. The Department for Transport's Urban Bus Challenge funded the first few years of operation for three of the four projects, but it was clear the requirement of commercial viability would not be met by the time this funding ended. The officers involved felt this was not a realistic expectation and that it would be a challenge to find money elsewhere. Withdrawing or cutting back services would have a negative impact on local communities:

"If we end up with a diminished bus service we'll have more excluded people, there's just little doubt about it..."

Social Inclusion Team representative, Braunstone

Views of service users

Service users were in unanimous support of the projects. Benefits to them included:

- Expanding choice and horizons – people can simply get out and about more. This allows more opportunities for social networking, improves people's confidence and expands their travel horizons.
- Shopping – both the Braunstone Bus and the Trevithick Link are popular for shopping and allow a greater choice of shopping location. Fifty-six per cent and 49 per cent respectively of those surveyed stated that shopping was their primary reason for using these services.
- Getting to hospital – the Braunstone Bus and the Wythenshawe Local Link enable trips to local hospitals that would otherwise be costly and time consuming. Forty-two per cent of those surveyed on the Braunstone Bus and 23 per cent of those using the Wythenshawe Local Link said they would not be able to access healthcare without the bus.

"Yes the hospital's actually a nightmare to get to and it always has been, there's never been a decent bus route to the hospital and I've had to use the hospital quite a lot fairly recently, so it was either relying on taxis to get me there or using the Local Link."

Employed man, Wythenshawe Local Link, Manchester

- Getting to work – a number of people are using the Trevithick Link and the Wythenshawe Local Link services primarily to get to work. Most are totally dependent on the services to keep their jobs.

“I wouldn’t be able to get to work otherwise.... I don’t know, I’d probably have to change jobs.... I’d have to find another job... I love my job.”
Employed woman, Trevithick Link, Cornwall

Walsall WorkWise had helped users expand the area in which they searched for work.

“I wouldn’t have gone looking for a job that far and that, that’s simple that is. I wouldn’t even attempt going 15 mile for a job for that money and transport.”
Unemployed man in a couple with children, Walsall WorkWise

Cost savings to individuals

Unfortunately, this study was not able to identify a suitable approach for calculating the full range of social benefits to the Government of the job take-ups, new health visits or shopping, leisure and social trips that the projects facilitated. This is an important area of further research. The Department for Transport is working on a method for calculating the monetary benefits of these new trips, which it is due to report in 2009.

This study’s calculation of wider social benefit is based on the Department for Transport’s WebTAG guidance for transport project appraisal. It uses either:

- the aggregate fare savings to individuals where they were existing public transport users and would have had to pay an additional (bus or taxi) fare to get to the same destination; or
- the aggregate value of their journey time saving, if they previously had to walk.

Applying this method does not capture any additional value to society of new trip opportunities. However, by comparing the usage of each bus service with what would be expected for a new service it has been possible to calculate the percentage of trips due to better accessibility of key destinations. The results of both sets of calculations (individual user benefits and new trips due to better accessibility) are summarised in Table 1.

Recommendations for the UK Government

This study highlights how public transport can be vital in the social inclusion of individuals and the vitality of low-income neighbourhoods. Smaller initiatives offering travel training and advice and help with costs also encourage socially excluded people to use public transport more.

The travel needs of socially excluded groups cannot be wholly met through the traditional commercial bus network. Relevant service routes are unlikely to be commercially viable and will require revenue subsidies to support them. All four projects studied are threatened by a lack of continued funding. This limits the opportunity to roll out good practice, despite the clear need for this throughout the UK.

If the Government is serious about reducing social exclusion through improved transport then it needs to do more to support socially necessary bus services. The authors recommend:

- a comprehensive national review of the commercial bus network and publicly subsidised buses, to clearly identify shortfalls in services and how these might be addressed. The next HM Treasury spending review could then consider dedicated resources in this area;

Table 1: Performance figures for case studies based on patronage data 2005/6 and surveys conducted in 2006/7

	Total grant awarded	Total annual trips	User annual benefits	Patronage growth	Employment uptake	New health trips	Other new trips	Current subsidy
Braunstone Bus	£1.595m	282,466	£661,000	15%	7%	42%	41%	52p per trip
Trevithick Link	£800,000	59,017	£80,000	5%	67%	17%	29%	£1.48 per trip
Walsall Workwise	£127,974	732 referrals	£21,000	n/a	53%	n/a	n/a	£123 per client
Wythenshawe Local Link	£682,000	43,946	£88,000	40%	0.6%	23%	44%	£4.46 per trip

- reconsideration by HM Treasury of the national framework for the provision of concessionary fares and school transport alongside new funding streams for supported public transport services in deprived areas and fare subsidy of essential trips for low-income individuals and households.

Recommendations for local authorities and local practitioners

At the local level, the social benefits of new transport projects need to be systematically evaluated and articulated in policy objectives. This would involve:

- better data collection regarding the use of services supported by annual user surveys to determine the social characteristics of users, their journey purposes and the social benefits derived;
- developing benchmarks from these evaluations to refine local criteria for supporting socially necessary services and upgrading local services;
- better integrating the provision of socially necessary bus services with the Local Transport Plan and, in particular, their Bus Strategies and Accessibility Plans;
- improved liaison with non-transport agencies and local partnerships that could help fund transport services in deprived areas, such as Jobcentre Plus, NHS Hospital and Primary Care Trusts, Local Education Authorities and Learning and Skills Councils, as well as local regeneration and economic development partnerships.

Finally, this study encourages local practitioners to examine the following when delivering transport projects in deprived areas:

- Ensure frequent, reliable and affordable public transport services to key destinations (not just during weekday peaks but also into the evenings and weekends, especially Sunday). For shift workers, very early morning and late night services are required.

- Provide help with the cost of transport to make travel more affordable for people on low incomes, e.g. the newly introduced Transport for London scheme for people on income support (and/or set low standard fares generally).
- Offer (personally) tailored travel information and advice about what services are available and in some cases skills training to use these.
- Provide flexibly routed, door-to-door (or taxi) services around estates in some instances, e.g. for night workers, mobility-impaired travellers and in very high crime areas.
- Consider car and taxi-sharing and car club options in low-income areas to supplement the public transport network.

About the project

This study examined four transport projects in deprived areas in different parts of England. The Braunstone Bus and Trevithick Link are fixed route bus services. Walsall WorkWise provides free bus passes and travel advice to those starting a new job. Wythenshawe Local Link is a flexibly routed, door-to-door bus service, using a customer booking service.

The study included interviews with key professional stakeholders involved in service delivery or wider administration in the areas of operation; a mix of on-board bus, telephone and postal user surveys and 81 in-depth interviews with service users across the four case study projects. An analysis of survey, interview and service monitoring data was used to calculate the overall cost, benefits and cost effectiveness of each initiative.

For further information

The full report, **The value of new public transport in deprived areas: Who benefits, how and why?**, by Karen Lucas, Sophie Tyler and Georgina Christodoulou, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is available as a free download from www.jrf.org.uk.

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