

# Transport and social exclusion

*"Transport is a tool for living and working; it provides a level of mobility and accessibility to meet activity requirements. Mobility is seen as a basic freedom and one indicator of the quality of life we experience. One feature of the travel patterns of socially excluded groups is the limited travel horizons of people ... usually those without access to car travel."*<sup>1</sup>

European societies have altered dramatically within just a few generations. One of the most significant changes is an increase in demand for transport to match citizens' evolving lifestyles. As a result transport is now accounting for a greater percentage of household expenditure: in Finland, for example, this figure is 17%.<sup>2</sup>

## What is social exclusion?

On one hand the rise in transport demand suggests that society is becoming increasingly mobile and accessing a greater choice of services. Problems arise, however, when this growth in demand is not matched by a credible and inclusive transport strategy. The increase in disposable income over the past 30 years has been accompanied by a rapid rise in car ownership and a centralisation of services. More recently, the largest supermarkets have shown a propensity to relocate or open new stores at large greenfield sites on the edges of urban areas.<sup>3</sup> All these changes have generated significant extra travel demand and public transport has been unable to keep pace. The result is that as people start to travel further to fulfil their daily needs, a large proportion of society simply cannot access the health, shopping or employment facilities that so many of us take for granted. This group is socially excluded.

The situation has been compounded by a lack of understanding of how transport policies relate to social inclusion. New social housing may, for example, be cheaper to build on the edge of town, but this type of development is often cut off from services and poorly served by public transport. As a result, those without a car would find themselves at a disadvantage and unable to easily access key services.

The EU has a certain responsibility for this state of affairs. Serious flaws in past EU transport policies have, for example, encouraged large-scale infrastructure projects or policies that catered for the liberalisation of road and passenger transport, without ensuring that these policies met the needs of transport users across the board. Such policies can exacerbate social exclusion.

A key issue in this debate is how we measure accessibility: can citizens access local services and activities, at a reasonable cost and with reasonable ease? Is there enough awareness of services and do people have faith in their transport system? <sup>4</sup>

## Who is affected by social exclusion?

Research indicates that social exclusion can affect whole social, racial and geographical communities and lead to isolation, or, even "ghettoisation". Poverty is viewed as the root cause of this, but issues such as whether facilities are physically accessible also play a key role.<sup>5</sup> Transport policies can disproportionately affect the social activities of the following groups:

- Unemployed/Low income
- Pregnant women/Parents with children
- Residents in rural areas/periphery of towns
- People with disabilities
- Frail or ill people
- Ethnic minorities
- Teenagers
- Young men.<sup>6</sup>

The following scenarios typify the sorts of problems that these groups often face.



**Martine** lives in a low opportunity, rural area and has been offered an interview for a job in the city. She discovers that she would be unable to accept the post if it were offered to her because the local bus service she had planned to use to get home from work in the evening has just been cut. Martine is reliant on public transport as she is too young to drive, and would find the cost of running a car prohibitive anyway. As she cannot afford to move to the city, Martine is forced to withdraw her application for the job.

**Rajin** studies law. He receives a basic grant. His course requires him to study late at the university library but his public transport links do not run at those hours. He used to walk home, but was beaten up once. As a consequence he now takes taxis home after working late, an expense he cannot really afford, but one that he feels is necessary if he is to make the most of his university education.



**Dano** is disabled and confined to a wheelchair. He comes from a wealthy family and could afford to have a car modified to his needs, but he lives in a big city and feels uncomfortable driving. He experiences great difficulty when using the public transport system, as ramps, or lifts, are only located in a few train and underground stations, and these are rarely the ones serving the places he needs to access.

**Isabelle** is six months pregnant and has a child of two years. She works locally but has to attend a hospital some distance away for her maternity check-ups. To do so she must walk 2km with her pram to the bus stop and then change buses at least once on her journey. One of these bus stops is without a shelter and Isabelle has often stood in heavy rain while waiting for a bus that is frequently late or fails to turn up at all.

**Olga** is a pensioner. She doesn't feel comfortable driving, as her eyesight isn't what it used to be, and sold her car a few years ago. She has had a replacement hip for the past two years and it causes her difficulty when travelling for sustained periods, particularly if she has to stand on the bus. This pain and the fear of suffering a knock when public transport is busy has caused her to cancel some of her social events, leaving her feeling sad and isolated.

These examples highlight how many citizens, from a range of backgrounds, are excluded by present transport policies. These problems can be boiled down to one word: **access**. They are all examples of how present transport policies deny certain groups of people access to goods and services that they should have a right to expect as part of society.

## How does social exclusion conflict with EU policy?

The EU has become more aware of the causes and effects of social exclusion over the last three years – the Lisbon Summit in 2000 saw the EU adopt a five-year programme specifically aimed at defeating social exclusion. Member states are to work together towards a common goal of social inclusion and prepare national action plans (NAPs) to assist with this. Certain benchmarks and indicators have been set to monitor progress. These NAPs were first published in 2001 and were due to be revised by the European Commission in Autumn 2003, although this timetable appears to have slipped.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Transport strategies to combat social exclusion - Final report (part 1) by the Matisse consortium to the European Commission Directorate General for employment and social affairs. (June 2003)

<sup>2</sup> 2002: The social situation in the EU. Eurostat.

<sup>3</sup> The average length of a journey has increased by 42 per cent since the early 1970s but the average number of journeys per person has only increased by 8 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.socialinclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/transportfinal/index.html](http://www.socialinclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/transportfinal/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> Matisse discussion draft - Manual for assessing the impacts of transport policy on social exclusion P1. (60 million people in the EU are living under the poverty line. This is one in five of the EU population). The reports of the UK social exclusion unit support the findings of the Matisse consortium.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm\\_832213.html?menu](http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_832213.html?menu) Road crashes are the leading cause of death and hospital admissions for EU citizens until middle age. They cost about 2% of the GDP of EU member states – around twice the EU budget for all its activity in this area. <http://www.elsc.be/stats.htm>. The statis-

tics clearly show that road traffic deaths predominantly affect young males. Out of 40,000 car crash fatalities in EU countries every year, 8,500 involve the 18-25 year age group, mostly male.

To date however, the NAPs have paid very little attention to the role of transport policies. Their focus is on goals such as combating poverty and homelessness and promoting employment – transport's role as an underlying cause of social exclusion and a barrier to employment is barely tackled. Unless this situation changes, policies to reduce poverty may well lead to worse social conditions for those without a private car<sup>7</sup>.

Although there are no concrete EU goals for transport and society, and they are not dealt with in the context of the Lisbon process, the European Commission has not ignored the issue altogether. The Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs has financed the Matisse<sup>8</sup> project, which has produced valuable reports clearly demonstrating how transport policies can both cause and combat social exclusion. The project also aims to give practical guidance to transport planners and policy makers on how to design appropriate strategies to improve access for socially excluded groups.

In broader terms, the Common Transport Policy white paper (CTP) explicitly aims to place users at the heart of transport policy. To this end it recognises the need for integration and effective pricing to internalise external costs. Despite the limitations inherent in focussing on transport users rather than the benefit of society as a whole, it is an interesting approach. The CTP remains extremely general, however, and largely lacks specific timetables for action. It concentrates on issues such as improving road safety while setting out no concrete proposals to address social exclusion, making only a brief mention of the social impacts that policies such as land use can have on mobility and transport demand. Overall, it does not do enough to reduce the appeal of and reliance on cars (a major contributor to social exclusion) and to promote public transport.<sup>9</sup>

## What should Europe do?<sup>10</sup>

The Matisse reports are to be welcomed; they highlight the problems inherent in flawed transport policies and outline solutions to remedy them. Europe should now implement the policies they suggest. Ensuring a system is in place to review the NAPs regularly, using a proven set of benchmark indicators and concrete targets is also important<sup>11</sup>. The Commission is due to undertake a detailed revision of the CTP in 2005. In that review, it should ensure that the CTP adopts concrete social and environmental targets for the transport sector.

<sup>7</sup> This is because less sustainable forms of transport are often more highly valued. In this context, the private car is seen as a symbol of success, particularly in socio-economically less powerful groups, and is a socially acceptable way of indicating social worth. For more information see T&E's 2002 publication, 'Transport and society: Sustainability's poor cousin.'

<sup>8</sup> Methodology for Assessment of Transport ImpactS of Social Exclusion.

<sup>9</sup> The conclusions can be seen at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy\\_transport/library/conclusions-lb-en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy_transport/library/conclusions-lb-en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> An interesting and informative national action plan, including positive recommendations, such as flexibly-routed bus services can be seen at [www.socialinclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/transportfinal/chapter13.html](http://www.socialinclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/transportfinal/chapter13.html)

<sup>11</sup> An initial set of ten primary and eight secondary commonly agreed indicators was adopted at the EU Council in Laeken in December 2001

T&E is Europe's primary NGO campaigning on a Europe wide level for an environmentally responsible approach to transport.

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