



Poverty and social exclusion: Review of transport disadvantage

Background

The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) was commissioned by the Welsh Government to conduct a review of international poverty and social exclusion strategies, programmes and interventions. As part of this work, the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the LSE was commissioned to conduct a review of the international evidence on promising policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and social exclusion across twelve key policy areas. This briefing summarises the findings on transport disadvantage.

Introduction

Poor or lack of access to transport increases the risk of poverty and social exclusion through limiting access to job opportunities, education and training. It also restricts the ability to balance caring responsibilities with work commitments, enjoy a social life and spend time with wider family. Transport disadvantage has a negative impact on livelihoods, participation, and the overall quality of life of those affected.

Focusing on estimating the social value of community transport rather than more narrow quantitative assessments has the potential to increase investment in line with impact.

Evidence of policy effectiveness

This review focuses on three inter-linked areas relating to transport disadvantage:

1. Community transport;
2. Shared transport; and
3. Demand-responsive transport.

Although community transport is only one small element of the transport system, it can play a key role in reducing transport disadvantage among some groups.

Shared transport is going through a period of rapid growth and has the potential to reduce travel costs for lower income households.

Demand-responsive technologies and provision can be coupled with community transport or shared transport as well as public buses to help reduce transport disadvantage.

Community transport

Community transport includes:

- Voluntary car schemes;
- Group travel services and door-to-door 'dial-a-ride' services for individuals;
- 'Wheels to work', involving leased vehicles;
- Contracted 'assisted travel' services; and
- Demand-responsive or fixed rate transport services, which operate where commercial bus routes are not viable.

Community transport services play a unique role in addressing the accessibility gap which

conventional public transport does not fill due to funding, accessibility or spatial constraints. Community transport can also provide a crucial link between people's homes and the public bus and rail networks, increasing connectivity overall. For people with particular types of impairment and older people, community transport can be a key service in providing seamless journeys between home and final destinations that is not available on the public transport network.

In rural areas, lack of public transport leads to greater car dependence, with higher transport costs which can result in low-income households experiencing economic stress. Shared mobility schemes, such as car and bike hire, can work well in densely populated areas (see the following section) but in sparsely populated areas and rural areas with longer journey times, these schemes are less effective. Community transport plays an important role in meeting transport needs of disadvantaged groups living in rural communities.

There are examples of community transport in many countries, although the international evidence suggests that community transport is most organised in the UK, the US and Australia. The context in which they operate and the funding available can be key factors. For example, in Australia community transport is organised on a state basis and targeted at disabled and frail populations. This is due to funding constraints which limit the ability of community transport groups to meet the wider needs of the community in the context of the lower density land use of Australia.

New technologies have helped to improve how flexible and responsive community transport can be. The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has allowed improvements in booking systems, payment, real time communication and real time positioning of vehicles. All of these improvements make for a better service, but digital exclusion can limit the extent to which consumers benefit.

Five case studies from across Scotland were evaluated as part of research into the social and economic benefits of community transport on behalf of Transport Scotland. The results found considerable economic and social benefits including supporting independence; promoting well-being, quality of life and mental health; and helping to reduce missed medical appointments and domiciliary provision. Community transport also contributed to the sustainability of rural communities.

Despite these benefits a number of funding issues were identified. These include lack of funding centralisation; lack of co-ordination between capital and revenue budgets; and time-limited funding packages which made long-term investment planning difficult. Grant funding can both be considered vital for the financial viability of community transport organisations and a threat to their financial stability due to the dependence on funding decisions made by external organisations.

An assessment of Transport to Employment (T2E), which offers subsidised on-demand community-based transport and shared taxi services in rural Scotland, was found to move people into employment, with social and economic benefits that outweighed the investment by 3:1.

Estimating the value of community transport is complex due to the prevalence of secondary and cross-cutting benefits across a range of policy areas. The overall magnitude of benefits across policy areas can be difficult to identify.

Core benefits are derived from better health, greater social inclusion, improved access to employment, education and training opportunities and building cohesive communities. It can lead to cost savings for local authorities (e.g. through reducing the costs of social care if older people are able to continue to live independently in their own homes), the health service (for example, through reducing the number of missed appointments and the health benefits of reducing social isolation and loneliness) and other public bodies.

Community transport can also be important for rural sustainability and tackling a range of inequalities. There are also potential benefits for family and friends who might otherwise have to provide assistance.

However, much evaluation evidence concentrates on output data – such as the number of journeys – which don't reflect the derived social value (such as health or wellbeing outcomes) of community transport. In addition, in transport projects' appraisal, the costs of providing access are monetised, but not the benefits. Distribution effects, equity, and social exclusion are poorly addressed in transport appraisal in general, and cost-benefit analyses in particular. This is important because investment decisions based purely on costs without considering the value of benefits will rule out crucial investment, including investment in community transport.

Whole transport systems can help address fragmentation and improve integration of community transport, shared transport, and demand-responsive transport services.

Shared transport

Shared transport includes private vehicle sharing, taxi ridesharing, carpooling, van pooling, scooter sharing, short-term vehicle rental and bike sharing.

The main benefit of shared transport is that users do not incur the expense of owning and maintaining vehicles, only paying for journeys as and when required, thereby reducing travel costs. ICT provides solutions to users and owners through facilitating booking systems, GPS tracking of vehicles and alerts letting owners know when maintenance is required.

Shared transport is most common in cities as these systems are based on an economic model

of high population density and demand for short journeys. A recent comprehensive review of the international literature on shared transportation concludes that it has made a significant, positive impact on the lives of many individuals alongside providing benefits to the economy, environment and wider society.

One type of shared transport is ridesharing which, on an informal basis (through friends, neighbours and colleagues), has a long history and extends the reach of shared transport beyond cities and into rural areas. Digitalisation has allowed this practice to expand and become more organised through the use of apps which connect private drivers with passengers wanting to make the same journey and share the cost.

Successful examples include the French Blablacar which was founded in 2006 and now operates in 22 countries, mainly in Europe and Latin America, and the Green Raiteros rideshare programme which operates in California which is a not-for-profit scheme providing transport using green (electric) vehicles for workers living in rural communities; predominately connecting Latino and agricultural families in central California to Fresno. Volunteer drivers are compensated for the number of miles they drive.

The Green Raiteros programme highlights that investment in transport infrastructure could also help the Welsh Government meet its carbon emission reduction targets. One option is to provide grants to community transport providers to purchase energy efficient vehicles and/or a scrappage programme for older, more polluting vehicles. Investing in energy efficient community transport could also have the added advantage of reducing the costs of running services.

Demand-responsive transport

Demand-responsive transport services include ridesharing and carpooling.

Ridesharing and carpooling are forms of demand-responsive services. Demand-responsive services can also be run for profit by private sector companies or be provided as a form of subsidised public transport. This form of

transport usually uses smaller vehicles (including taxis) in place of conventional buses (although this isn't always the case in higher population density areas). Passengers are charged fares, but the route and timetable, can vary according to passenger demand.

Demand-responsive transport has a number of advantages over Dial-A-Ride services which have been criticised for their relatively high cost of provision, their lack of flexibility in route planning (with bookings typically needing to be made days in advance) and their inability to manage high demand. The greater flexibility of demand-responsive transport has a number of advantages, but the lack of a fixed timetable can create difficulties for passengers needing to plan and reach a destination by a set time (for example, for work, for health appointments, to catch a scheduled onward journey).

Promising actions

The review concludes with promising actions to consider in the Welsh context as emerging from the analysis of the international literature:

1. Increasing **demand-responsive transport provision offers greater flexibility than fixed routes/timetables**. However, digital exclusion can mean that not everyone has access to this type of provision.
2. Use of **green vehicles**, whether for community transport, shared transport or more generally for public transport, can help reduce carbon emissions.
3. **Whole transport systems** can help address fragmentation and improve integration of community, shared and demand-responsive transport services.
4. Focusing on estimating the **social value of community transport** rather than more narrow quantitative assessments (e.g. number of journeys) has the potential to increase investment in line with impact.

Find out more

For the full report see Bucelli, I., and McKnight, A. (2022). *Poverty and social exclusion: review of international evidence on transport disadvantage*. Cardiff: WCPP.

About the Wales Centre for Public Policy

Here at the Centre, we collaborate with leading policy experts to provide ministers, the civil service and Welsh public services with high quality evidence and independent advice that helps them to improve policy decisions and outcomes.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Welsh Government, the Centre is

based at Cardiff University and a member of the UK's What Works Network.

For further information contact:

Dan Bristow

+44 (0)29 2087 5345

dan.bristow@wcpp.org.uk

Wales Centre for Public Policy

Cardiff University, Sbarc/Spark, Maindy Road, Cardiff CF24 4HQ



www.wcpp.org.uk



029 2087 5345



info@wcpp.org.uk



@WCfPP

