

# **DISABILITY AND TRANSPORT: A STUDY INTO THE TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES AND TRANSPORT NEEDS OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND.**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents the results of a year long study commissioned by the Scottish Executive to look at transport from the viewpoint of disabled people. The study:

- investigated disabled people's travel patterns and compared them with those of non-disabled people; and
- identified their travel needs and priorities and what prevents people from travelling more easily, often or widely;

in order to identify:

- what might be required to move disabled people closer to achieving equality of travel opportunity with non-disabled people; and
- how recommendations could be implemented.

Disabled people and those with a long term illness were included in the study. Throughout the paper, whenever the term disabled people is used, it includes those with a long term illness as well. The approach taken was based on the Social Model of Disability which understands the concept of disability as the social restrictions confronted by disabled people living in a society which is not organised to take account of their needs.

The paper presents some of the results of the study and particularly focuses on the recommendations that emerged from it. It aims to demonstrate that these recommendations present a step change in the way the travel needs of disabled people are considered and raises some fundamental questions about wider issues of social inclusion. Before moving on to the results and recommendations, the paper highlights some of the challenges encountered while conducting the study.

## **2. CHALLENGES OF THE RESEARCH**

It might be expected that the challenging part of this research related to identifying and interviewing disabled people who are often categorized in research terms as a 'hard to reach' group, along with for example, young people, or those belonging to minority ethnic groups or the lesbian or gay community. In reality, disabled people weren't hard to reach. They were contacted through various groups for qualitative and observational elements of the research. The sample for the survey was drawn from people who had previously defined themselves as being disabled or having a long-term illness on the Scottish Household Survey. In general, people were very willing to take part in the research and provide information on their needs. Instead, the challenges related to the set-up and management of the study, and its ambition.

### **2.1. Origins of the Research**

The research developed from a commitment in the 2003 Partnership Agreement, drawn up by the new coalition government in Scotland following the last Scottish Parliament elections (Scottish Executive 2003), to assess improved concessions for older and disabled people. With expert advice, it became apparent to the Scottish Executive that concessionary fares was just one element that needed to be addressed if they wanted to make a real difference to improving the travel opportunities of disabled people. Instead of only researching concessionary fares the purpose of the study was broadened considerably before it was commissioned.

### **2.2. Research Focus**

After the research was commissioned it continued to develop, following input from the advisory group set up to guide the study. While the original title, and aim, suggested a study looking at options to improve **public** transport, this was expanded to incorporate as wide a definition of public transport as possible, really encompassing all ways of travelling. Early on in the study, while developing the questionnaire for the quantitative survey, the focus changed to trips and journey purposes rather than transport mode. This meant instead of asking people about whether they used a bus, train or car, they were asked for example about visiting a supermarket or travelling away on holiday.

### **2.3. Client and Advisory Group**

The research has involved a number of different people coming from different organisations and with different interests. It was directed by a policy officer and managed by a researcher from the Enterprise Transport and Lifelong Learning Department of the Scottish Executive. The research lasted a year, and during that time, both the policy officer and the researcher changed. Fortunately this did not have an adverse effect on the study.

An advisory group was set up to provide guidance to the researchers. As well as the transport division it also included representation from the equalities unit of the Scottish Executive. Five other organisations were involved in the group, representing different interests and bringing together expertise covering rights, mobility issues and transport provision. These were:

- Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland
- Disability Rights Commission
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers

#### **2.4. Research Collaborators**

Three research organisations collaborated on the project:

- TNS System Three, a social and market research agency, who provided expertise in conducting qualitative and quantitative research and knowledge of the Scottish Household Survey (SHS)
- Academic researchers from the Transport Research Institute at Napier who have detailed knowledge of transport issues in Scotland;
- Transport and Travel Research Ltd, a specialist consultancy, which provided knowledge of disabled issues and transport provision.

#### **2.5. Detailed objectives**

The brief developed for the study included eight detailed objectives including the very original one of reviewing concessionary fares. They were to:

- Identify disabled people's transport needs
- Collate information on disabled people's travel patterns
- Investigate barriers and how they can be removed or negated
- Investigate disabled people's priorities
- Highlight examples of good practice
- Assess the impact of concessionary fares
- Identify measures needed to meet transport needs of disabled people in Scotland
- Identify measures needed to reach parity of mobility

As mentioned earlier, the objectives were modified during the study, with an emphasis away from public transport specifically, and moving towards providing strategic level recommendations on implementation.

## **2.6. Methods Used**

To meet all of these objectives, the research incorporated 7 different methods including:

- A literature review;
- Analysis of secondary data from the SHS and other sources;
- A quantitative survey of disabled people using a sample drawn from the SHS;
- Group discussions to develop the questionnaire;
- Face to face and postal feedback from groups representing disabled people and transport operators;
- Journey audits and focus groups with disabled travellers;
- Investigation of case studies.

We designed it in this way so that we could validate the findings across the different methods; ensure we included as many disabled people as possible and that we didn't miss any aspects that might be important to our conclusions. A key challenge was managing the amount of information generated, as was bringing it together into a coherent set of evidence-based recommendations.

## **2.7. Why Further Research?**

As well as a complex and evolving study involving many organisations, it quickly became apparent there was one other, more fundamental challenge. While disabled people were very willing to take part, at the same time, throughout the research a number of individuals and groups representing disabled people questioned the need for the research, saying they have articulated their needs consistently over a long period. The literature review conducted by Travel and Tourism Research identified numerous studies that clearly identified needs; despite this, progress has been slow in practice, so that travel opportunities continue to be restricted and difficulties travelling remain. What was needed, people said repeatedly, was action, not more research.

## **2.8. Responding to the challenges**

The trick in conducting the study was to harness the wide range of skills and experience we had access to, and above all maintain good communications between everyone involved, especially the researchers. The researchers were fortunate that everyone involved in the study from the client and advisory group were very engaged in the research and very willing to contribute to it. In terms of the last point, that there was no need for further research, it meant the study had to be taken further than previous ones, to include consideration of what was preventing progress, so that we could provide recommendations on how progress might be better achieved in the future.

### **3. A SMALL SELECTION OF RESULTS**

#### **3.1. Investigating travel patterns**

There are some things that affect travel patterns regardless of whether someone is disabled or not. For example older people make fewer journeys than younger people and those in rural areas tend to make fewer, multipurpose journeys, more often making them by car, compared with those in urban areas. The research needed to test the hypotheses that, all other things being equal, there is a difference in travel patterns between disabled or non-disabled people, and if so, to quantify that difference. To answer these two questions the Transport Research Institute carried out analysis of existing travel data from the Scottish Household Survey.

Using data from that survey, when trips made on the previous day by non-disabled and disabled people are compared, a non-disabled adult has a 50% greater incidence of making any kind of trip in a day than a disabled adult. This demonstrates there is a problem to be addressed, and gives some idea the size of the difference in making journeys. From the analysis the biggest difference in trip making between disabled and non-disabled adults, it appears, is not the way that they make trips or the reason for the trips, but the fact that the former are much less likely to make a trip at all. In the survey TNS conducted for the study, seven in ten disabled people told us they would like to travel more, if travel was less difficult.

Assessing potential demand for particular transport services can be difficult; experience has shown that actual demand can increase on prior stated demand by up to three times, once a service is introduced. Instead, the survey investigated potential demand, or desire, to make particular journeys, rather than for particular transport services. What we found was that potential demand varied in a similar way to the way existing journey patterns varied according to the type of journey. This was due to a combination of distance, necessity to make the journey, frequency and journey type. This means that most people manage to make journeys that they *have* to make, such as attending a hospital appointment. For a leisure journey that many non-disabled people make, but not necessarily frequently, potential demand from disabled people is much greater. In between these two are journeys like visiting a supermarket; relatively local, but not as necessary as visiting a hospital or travelling to work or education. It is clear that disabled people would travel more, and be able to participate more fully in various types of activities, if their travel needs were addressed.

#### **3.2. Obstacles to Travel**

The travel audits carried out by the Transport Research Institute demonstrated vividly that, even when disabled people are able to make journeys, they still

experience a range of obstacles that make travelling difficult. Here are some extracts from just two of the audits to illustrate this.

One example involved a relatively short journey by bus from a sheltered housing development in a city suburb to a supermarket about half a mile from the participant's home. The traveller was deaf, had a very narrow field of vision and also had difficulty walking owing to a childhood illness. In undertaking this trip to the supermarket, these are some of the difficulties he experienced:

- There were no dropped kerbs within the sheltered housing development so he had to walk in the road.
- Uneven footways in several locations made walking difficult and potentially dangerous.
- The walk from the destination bus stop into the supermarket entailed crossing the wide and un-signalled junction of the car park with a major and busy road, which he found a significant barrier.
- The short length of time provided at the pelican crossing outside the supermarket was insufficient, given the participant's walking speed.

Other problems he has encountered when undertaking the journey on other occasions were:

- When boarding the bus it starts before he can sit down, even though he is unsteady on his feet. Drivers rarely lower low-floor buses for him.
- People do not tend to give up their seat for him, even if they are sitting in the older and disabled priority seats at the front of the bus.
- Uneven footway surfaces mean that he trips and falls over quite frequently.
- When he is the only person waiting at the bus stop, he sometimes fails to see the bus and it does not stop.
- He has also been hit by cars when crossing the road. This is because of his limited field of vision as well as other site-specific factors.

Another audit involved a person with learning disabilities who uses a wheelchair, travelling with his carer from home to work by bus. The actual bus journey took approximately 1 hour (including interchange). Based on previous experience, the traveller and his carer allow for additional travel time in case they are unable to board buses due to wheelchair space already being occupied. A shorter, more convenient route is available, but past experiences of attempting to use this route found that the buses are typically full and wheelchair spaces usually occupied (at the times required), which prevents the traveller from being allowed to board. Apart from this major issue, which means the participant cannot travel using his

route and timetable of choice, many of the issues the traveller faced were similar to those outlined in the first audit. These included:

- Uneven paving
- Not enough time allowed to cross using the pedestrian crossing
- No raised kerb to facilitate access to the bus
- Feelings of fear or intimidation while waiting at the bus stop
- The bus driver did not lower the access ramp
- The bus driver pulled away before secured in wheelchair space

When asked to comment on travelling generally, the participant raised the following issues:

- Sometimes drivers do not lower the ramp, saying it is broken. In these instances, without the physical assistance of his carer the participant was not able to board buses by himself.
- When bus drivers pull away too quickly, he feels quite nervous due to being 'bumped about', causing him to bang into other passengers and poles/seats
- On some buses the internal layout makes it difficult to negotiate the wheelchair space, making it awkward to enter and secure the wheelchair.
- In many instances the designated wheelchair space is occupied by other passengers, mostly by parents/carers of children with buggies.
- The poor condition of pavement areas (unevenness, cracks) makes his journeys uncomfortable, and raises concerns over possible 'spills' from his wheelchair.
- The presence of various obstacles on pavement areas (e.g. rubbish bins, road work signs and advertising A-boards), which restricted his movement and sometimes forces him to travel too close (sometimes on) to the roadway, which increase his safety concerns.

These are particular journeys made by specific individuals and involve a limited range of travel options. They do illustrate very well some of the practical difficulties faced by disabled people in making even relatively short, simple journeys.

#### **4. SOLUTIONS - BASED ON INDIVIDUALS NOT ASPECTS OF JOURNEYS**

The results of the literature review clearly demonstrated that many solutions had been identified in existing research. For example, a report commissioned by the Scottish Executive to review progress since an earlier study published in 1999, (Reid Howie 2004), highlighted the fact that while some progress had been made, the pace of change was 'frustratingly slow for many disabled people' and such changes as had been introduced were patchy. Not surprisingly, this research did not identify a radical new set of remedies. Instead it confirmed what was still required. The details of two particular trips illustrate that journeys are

specific to individuals, based on where they live, what type of journey they are making, what their own needs might be, what type of transport they may have access to and what their financial situation is. Instead of a list of piecemeal solutions that address part of a journey, what is needed is to provide a combination of solutions that enable an individual to make a particular journey.

The issue of concessionary fares as one possible solution illustrates this. This was considered in the research in the context of other barriers and solutions. Data was limited, coming from information provided on travel pass use from two areas of Scotland, information from the survey and some evidence in the literature from previous research. Using this evidence, it appears that cost only becomes a barrier to travel when other issues are addressed. For example, if a disabled person cannot reach a bus stop or cannot get on a bus, having a free travel pass for a bus does not help. On the other hand, where a taxi that a disabled person can get into and out of is provided, subsidising fares may be beneficial. It seems clear, albeit based on limited data and supporting evidence, that providing concessionary fares alone will not improve the ability of disabled people to travel. The case studies also provided a number of examples of piecemeal solutions that addressed a particular need well, but left many other needs unmet rather than being part of a coherent package.

The study was originally designed to look at public transport. However a high proportion of survey respondents indicated that nothing could be done to public transport to enable them to use it or use it more. While for a few disabled people, making improvements to finding out about, getting to, getting on and using existing public transport would remove difficulties, solutions that would help a greater proportion of disabled people related to the provision of demand responsive door-to-door transport or accompaniment from journey start to end. This again demonstrates the need for flexibility and adaptability according to individual need.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENSURE PROGRESS**

### **5.1. The Disability Discrimination Act**

Since 1995, the rights of disabled people have been safeguarded in law in the UK by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1996, it has been unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably, for a reason related to their disability; since the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1999, service providers have had to make “reasonable adjustments” to enable disabled people to use their service. More recently – since the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2004 – service providers have had to make “reasonable adjustments” in relation to physical features of their premises in order to overcome physical barriers to access. The 1995 Act was amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which among other things removed the exemption for any service consisting of the use of a means of transport that was



contained in the 1995 act. Section 3 of the 2005 Act imposes duties on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

## **5.2. Addressing Structural Barriers**

Despite this legislative framework, structural barriers identified during the course of the research appear to have prevented better progress being made up to now. The revisions to the act, including the proposed new duty for the public sector to proactively promote equality of opportunity, are likely to have a key role in the improvement of accessibility for disabled people. At the same time, it is unlikely that this legislation alone can be relied on to actually achieve substantial progress quickly across the whole of Scotland.

Evidence from the cases studies demonstrated there are many examples of schemes that have been well-received by users and successful against other measures, but which have then folded or are under threat because they were reliant on one or two enthusiastic people or short-term funding. If such schemes are to continue to provide benefits, they need the certainty of being part of an authority or operator's core functions. While we didn't set out to review every example of provision across the UK, of the ones we investigated we only found one example of such integration into core functions, that of demand responsive services provided by Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT). The services are fully incorporated within SPT's activities, because they can be seen to clearly assist in the organisation's strategic objectives, as set out in the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Strategy.

It is clear that, in future, improvements need to be planned strategically within existing transport planning frameworks at the appropriate geographical level. While some services are best planned nationally or regionally, most should be developed at the local level as most journeys are made locally. Package of initiatives need to be tailored to both the local physical environment and the needs of specific people in any local area, to cover all elements of a journey and dovetail with existing transport opportunities. All service planning should be based on a thorough analysis of need. Local authorities should specifically have a duty to audit need and arrange supply, although this, to some extent, goes against current transport policy, where, in some cases at least, there will be some transfer of functions from constituent councils to regional transport partnerships, and guidance on preparing local transport strategies does not explicitly state that authorities should set out policies and measures to improve the way the transport system meets the needs of disabled people.

To ensure progress is made, the duty to produce integrated, strategic plans and realistic targets for implementation needs to be statutory, progress needs to be regulated according to a national monitoring framework and there needs to be some penalty for poor performance for both public and private sector operators. Monitoring of targets has to be linked to outcomes such as a reduction of

difference in average numbers of trips made by disabled and non-disabled people, rather than outputs, such as numbers of journeys or passes provided. Without such integration, monitoring and penalty, progress most likely will continue to be slow.

### **5.3. The Question Of Funding**

With the legislative framework in place, and issues relating to transport and disability mainstreaming and regulation addressed, the speed at which progress is made will still depend on the priority given to addressing the equality of travel opportunities within all of the competing priorities in transport strategies. This is clearly strongly linked to the amount of funding available overall, and specifically to enabling disabled people to travel. Service combinations and tailored solutions such as demand responsive transport often have a high unit cost. At the same time, spending on such services is at best remaining static, and at worst reducing. Better strategically planned services will allow for prioritisation and enable best use to be made of limited resources. However, there are clearly some important debates to be had about priorities and funding allocation. These discussions should take place in the context of strategic transport provision, rather than being sidelined into tactical discussions about particular services that will meet the needs of some disabled people for a short time in a particular geographical area. This would mean that there is some chance that progress would be faster and there would be more success in improving equality of travel opportunity than has been achieved up to now.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

Previous sections have demonstrated that disabled people make fewer trips than non-disabled people and that they would like to travel more. Disabled people face specific barriers according to a combination of circumstances that are particular to them and the journey they are undertaking. To address these barriers, combinations rather than single solutions need to be available that are tailored to individual need. Demand responsive transport and accompaniment door-to-door will help many disabled people travel more, especially those for whom existing public transport is inadequate. Solutions have been identified in previous research, but progress in implementing them has been slow. They have been introduced in a piecemeal way and are susceptible to short term funding as they are not part of a strategic approach.

To address this, this research has identified four elements that need to be in place to make real progress in achieving equality of travel opportunity. These include:

- Consideration of whole journeys or trips made by individuals rather than focusing on separate services or actions.

- The legislative framework of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Equality Duty;
- Mainstreaming of transport provision for disabled people into national, regional and local transport strategies and monitoring of progress against outcomes, with penalties imposed when targets aren't met;
- Adequate funding and prioritisation;

If these were all in place real progress, and a step change in the way travel needs of disabled people are addressed, could be made.

Concepts of social inclusion and equality are an important element in government policy in Scotland and the UK as a whole. In this study we were only considering what was required to move towards equality of transport opportunity between disabled and non-disabled people. There are other, non-transport related, issues that mean that disabled people are socially excluded that the study did not explore. There are also non-disabled people who are socially excluded for different reasons – the study did not cover these other types of social inclusion. The debate about funding and competing priorities that needs to be undertaken about transport for disabled people also must take place in the context of wider issues of social inclusion. This research does highlight a fundamental question about how quickly, and to what extent, Scotland's commendable ambitions in relation to social inclusion can be achieved.

### Bibliography

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