

Achieving access to work, improved social inclusion and reducing rural access costs. The potential and effectiveness of rural Transport to Employment services.

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Abstract

The paper considers the contribution that focused Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) may make to the delivery of improved access to work in rural Scottish locations.

Whilst access to employment is treated as a generic issue in policy-related discussions, transport gaps are a specific and personal issue – particularly at the local and rural scales. Employment is thus treated as an issue to be solved across a wide range of metrics, while transport, where solved on the wide scale will often fail to deliver at the local scale, with demonstrable gaps between provision and need being visible in rural communities. The differences between the generic and the specific, and a natural concentration on larger, rather than individual solutions, have led to a gap between needs identified on the micro-scale and solutions applied from a regional or council scale.

The Transport to Employment service (T2E), a project operated within the Highlands of Scotland, provides an indication of alternatives appropriate to achieving rural access to work designed with individuals' needs in mind at the local scale; and the effects of increased access to the communities served. The paper describes the background to the development of T2E and the effects that the service has had on the employment markets in the areas served.

The paper concludes by comparing the costs and effectiveness of T2E with other similar access to work schemes (e.g. wheels to work, other DRT or minibus-based schemes) and with the costs of more traditional transport services. It is identified that, when considering access to employment, significant benefits may be achieved by the use of focused DRT in preference to more traditional responses to increasing access in rural communities.

Keywords

Rural transport, transport to employment, work, DRT, Highland Scotland

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rural locations, as with many cities, share issues in employment, generally the need to develop and create work; economic performance, viability and sustainability; and a need to create, sustain and enhance opportunities for individuals and communities. The rural location differs, however, from its urban counterpart in scale and in the extent of opportunities available, as well as their accessibility. This paper focuses on the need, within rural communities, to establish employment, increase access, and reduce negative impacts tied up in exclusion, lack of transport, and the potential for intergenerational poverty. The paper directly addresses the relationships between access and employment, using the T2E Transport to Employment service in the Highlands of Scotland as a case study, and provides an analysis of the effectiveness, against cost, of transport-based projects in increasing access to work.

Rurality

The nature of a rural community differs from its urban counterparts in terms of the location, physical distribution and densities of populations, sometimes defined as relative rurality (Isserman, 2005). As communities become more rural, the issues of rurality become more fundamental, accessibility – in its traditional definition – reduces, and the individual becomes more isolated. Deep rural locations tend to suffer the most across a range of indicators (Indiana, 2007) including: reduced employment, lack of transport, personal isolation and deprivation. As the remoteness of a location increases, the relative opportunities available to its (declining) population fall. Decreasing population densities (increased rurality) also influence the effectiveness of traditional, often urban based, employment policies; transport availability, in part due to the commercialisation of transport; and effective economic sustainability of the communities themselves. Yet the rural countryside remains an idyll of urban populations as a destination for tourism, associations with retirement destinations and even provides a solution in part to a shortage of housing, within urban areas, as locations for development and destinations for new communities and new incoming populations (Bate et al. 2000).

Moreover, as industrial rent costs in cities have increased, in parallel with incentivised business location packages from rural enterprise and similar agencies, a number of high profile companies have chosen to relocate to more rural locations. This provides an increase in potential employment that may, in turn, provide opportunity within rural areas for personal and community development. Critically, infrastructure has a key role in realising the full potential of companies locating in this way, including availability of technologies - including wired solutions (mainly focused on broadband), and the more traditional concepts of space, road and transport access. To fully identify methods by which opportunities might be realised, we need to explore the barriers that have prevented access in the past, and may continue to create barriers to new employment. These include (a lack of) transport, but are also allied to the personal circumstances of the individuals seeking access to work, and are demonstrated, in the case of the Scottish Highlands, to include family structure, patterns of childcare availability and a gender imbalance in relative accessibility.

Transport Availability

Traditional public transport has, in the UK, faced a number of challenges in providing access in areas of low demand. A lasting legacy of the 1985 Transport Act (TA85) has been the commercial and competitive structures of bus ownership and operation. Non-commercial services, where felt socially desirable, have been accommodated with support from local authorities allocated on the basis of value, minimum cost or minimum subsidy, from a limited resource. Communities with low levels of demand, including rural communities, suffer unduly as commercial pressures on operator (and value pressures on authorities) reduce the levels of services available and have (Cooper et al 2005) resulted in a move to greater car ownership – hastening the decline of public transport services, and effectively making services worse for remaining passengers. Indeed the extent to which public transport has been discounted is visible in the planning guidance (DRD, 2006), determining rural planning guidance without reference to public transport availability.

The response from local authorities, facing conflicting pressures of underwriting non-commercial services and reducing costs appears (Brake and Nelson, 2007) to be one of ‘filling gaps’ as commercial services become pressured or withdrawn. While some include the use of innovative and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) schemes, achieved in Scotland with significant support from the Scottish Government, few apply fundamental review of all transport options – filling gaps being evolutionary, fundamental review, revolutionary. Moreover, as transport support moves to rely on filling gaps, cumulative problems emerge, decreasing commercial supply placing increased reliance on support for existing services, while those existing may not actually be delivering services appropriate to a changing need. Employment needs may differ from traditional patterns of work and while traditional public transport may be in decline, expectations of mobility may actually be increasing; these include preconceptions of the availability of services (itself an indication of waiting times and acceptable delay), reliability, including concerns of dependability (a prerequisite not guaranteed where DRT services cover numerous routes with single vehicles), as well as the fundamental barrier of cost.

Work Availability

The second element, relates to the nature and availability of work. Employment has (Frota, 2008) a direct link to the social and economic status of the individual, but is complicated by the nature of employment available, and may also be influenced by the demands and attitudes of the employers themselves.

Employment opportunities do exist, and are well illustrated in Highland Scotland by the range of opportunities in both high technology and service jobs available, particularly on the Eastern Seaboard in locations including Alness and Brora (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Map of T2E service area in East Sutherland



Moreover, close residential populations exist, often located in inland communities such as Bonar Bridge and Lairg, with individuals seeking employment. Yet limitations in transport may well create an insuperable barrier to taking up employment. Shift start and end times are often set to meet the needs of the employer rather than to match the bus timetable; contributing to the perception that public transport provides a poor or inappropriate method of accessing work and, in some views negating public modes altogether. A worrying trend can be observed that employers choose to turn down potential employees on the basis that an individual does not have access to a car, rather than that the individual is not suitable or qualified to undertake the job. This is reinforced by the approach adopted by Jobcentre Plus identifying that ‘no transport available’ is a legitimate reason for not taking up employment. The same may be true of policy makers outwith transport spheres not acknowledging the significance of transport for example on take up of jobs, or benefit to family and economic circumstance (the same being true of transport planners not fully identifying the impacts of transport policy on other policy domains).

Individual personal circumstances also affect the ability to take up work described variously to include lack of child minding to much stronger welfare dependencies and the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Frota, 2008), though the latter is rejected by Lee et al (2007) preferring the concept of opportunity to be a reflection of

skill, education, training and job experience, as well as (the curiously named) ‘childbearing activities’.

Personal Circumstances

For the individual seeking employment, the availability and ability to work may be better defined in terms of barriers. Transport, or rather the lack of transport, is a fundamental barrier to work, but not the only one. Access to training and appropriate courses contribute to the ability of the individual to take up employment, as does the availability of childcare facilities, and their cost; Press et al (2003) identify a positive effect of child care subsidy on employment. Cost of transport may also act to deter take up of employment and will, at a specific point, become an absolute barrier in its own right.

Gender also plays a role in availability to take up employment, allied to the gender roles within a household (Whatmore, 1988), and more significantly access to a family car within a single car household.

2. TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS

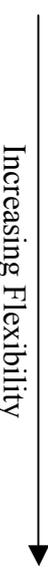
Despite the complexity of differing policies and departmental responsibilities in the development of rural locations, a fundamental need continues to be that individuals seeking employment are able to access opportunities. This is inherently an issue in the transport domain, as well as being an issue in the domain of local economic development, and social welfare departments. The transport solution may not, in isolation, provide the panacea for employment, but might, in combination with joined-up governance contribute to a locally based solution.

A series of employment related transport schemes have, over the past decade, emerged as potential contributions to the achieving access to work and reducing social exclusion. These may generically be labelled access to employment schemes, most bearing similar titles of ‘Transport to Employment’, ‘Access to Work’ and ‘Wheels to Work’ etc., and in addition to more traditional DRT and community transport, each seeks to address the shortfall in accessibility in areas poorly served by traditional public transport.

Transport Ontology

Brake and Nelson (2007) provide a hierarchy of public transport allied to vehicle flexibility and demand responsiveness of vehicle (see Figure 2). The concept of flexibility is significant and allied both to vehicle size, regulated and operational planning requirements. Large and fixed route vehicles, collectively traditional bus, have been slow or unable to meet changing demand, and poorly suited to low demand areas, not least of the available seat to passenger ratio.

Figure 2 Public transport vehicle flexibility

Increasing Flexibility 	Registered Bus options	Non-registered bus options	Taxi Options	Car Options
	Traditional Bus	Restricted user education transport	Single operator shared ride taxi	<i>Wheels to work (Scooter)</i>
	Non-restricted user school bus	Shoppers bus	Multiple operator shared ride taxi	Social Car
	Semi fixed DRT	Social services transport	Planned shared transport <i>T2E Transport to Employment</i>	Car Pool
	Flexible area DRT	Community Transport <i>Access to work</i>	Single ride taxi	Car Club
	 Increasing Flexibility			

After Brake and Nelson (2007)

Flexibility increases in line with vehicle flexibility, size and booking requirement. Vehicle impacts may also change in line with the same factors, but do not always produce increased benefit with increased flexibility. To identify impacts in terms of individual and community benefit we need to explore further the extent of accessibility, cost and societal benefit.

Transport Effectiveness

In its simplest form, the measure of unit cost, or cost against benefit provides a method of analysis against which positive (financial) benefits may be analysed. Per journey subsidy costs (Table 1) provide an indication of the per user costs, while the use of Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) to relate investment to return is also widely developed, particularly in road transport, and is often included to determine the most effective transport schemes, as those creating the highest positive Net Present Values (NPV). Positive NPV figures indicate a greater income to monies invested, negative values (below 1:1) are those projects returning less than invested.

Table 1: Estimated subsidy costs per trip for flexible transport markets

MARKET	SUBSIDY COSTS PER TRIP (£)			
	0-2	2-5	5-10	10-20
Premium Service	Target for Commuter service (e.g. Yellow Taxibus)			
High Value to Agency				Joblink Social and geographical Ambulance Service PTS
High Care Needs			Typical dial-a-ride / dial-a-bus LA Social Work / Education services	Medical Ambulance Service PTS
Best Value Public Transport		Typical shared taxi – based bus replacement		

Source: Scotland, 2006

The simple application of costs per journey or CBA does not, however, account for the full range of financial or social impacts of a project, simply those that are identifiable and measured attributable to it. Brathen and Hervik (1997) identify a widespread scepticism in the use of CBA as a main instrument in decision making, pointing toward use of non-quantitative factors as decisive, these falling outwith the traditional CBA approach.

Benefits arise from transport significantly beyond the immediate measurable income, and include individual and community gains arising from residents being able to access work, spend locally, and invest in property to a greater extent, sometimes called local economic gain (Euijtne, 1998). Other gains may also be attributable to the provision of access to work, though not directly recoverable, including gains to the state as individuals move from state support to employment, and the additional income raised to the state from tax revenue.

The concept of a Social Return and its assessment is reported in the work of the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and is based on the premise (REDF 2000) that ‘Social and Economic value created by the non-profit sector has not been appropriately tracked, calculated and attributed’. The concept is expanded (REDF 2001) to a series of methodological steps, and applied to UK procurement, expenditure and social economic settings by the New Economics Foundation (See Aeron-Thomas et al 2004). Social Return on Investment (SROI) has also been applied to specific employment projects (Mackenzie and Nicholls 2004), which in turn may provide a base line comparator for other schemes, which improve access to work.

The need to identify, and establish appropriate metrics to measure and compare transport solutions to issues of rural isolation is identified (Hine, 2000) as a method of developing new, revolutionary, approaches to the development of such communities, and may contribute to enhanced rural sustainability (Taylor, 2006) beyond the costs of

implementation, and interestingly at a lower cost than achievable using more traditional transport options.

3. CASE STUDY: TRANSPORT TO EMPLOYMENT (T2E)

The Transport to Employment Service (T2E) operates a shared planned service in the Highlands of Scotland, focused on communities in East Sutherland, Easter Ross and Caithness, with similar services operating in Skye and Lochalsh, Dumfries and Galloway, and Northern Ireland. The various areas share similar characteristics, low numbers and dispersed populations, East Sutherland having a population of 8,000.

Issues in transport supply

The presence of both employment opportunity and lack of employment within quite close proximity forms something of a paradox, which does not translate to other, more urban, environments. Whereas an equivalent distance in an urban area (10 – 16 kms) would present less of an issue, the distance between home and workplace remain a significant barrier in instances where transport is not available.

Public transport remains severely limited by the imperatives of need to make money or need to minimise costs in supported services, and often fail to provide services where demand is considered to be low. Communities can thus be isolated spatially, where no public transport service exists at all; or temporally, where services do run but not at the times appropriate to the needs of those seeking employment. Many communities are affected as a result of no services, but consideration also needs to be given to those affected by no services appropriate to time of travel. Early morning shift starts and late evening shift ends are the least likely to be served by traditional forms of public transport, and may give rise to an individual's ability to get to work but not from it (and vice versa) thus continuing to prevent job uptake. Other gaps exist in relation to transport on particular days of the week, many operators offering a lower level of service (if any) on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Seasonality is also apparent, both in terms of differences between summer and winter transport provision, much being aimed at a tourist market, and seasonality in employment, resulting for the same reason.

Even where available, questions of public transport service reliability remain and have resulted in an increased reliance on private transport. This to the extent (Gray et al. 1998) that 'many rural residents were making financial sacrifices in order to retain their [private] transport means'.

Transport Solutions

T2E has emerged as a potential solution to some of the issues of lack of transport availability in the case study area. In common with a number of other access to employment projects, the service is focused on the ability of an individual to gain access to work, but differs from most in its use of contracted transport, vehicles

supplied locally by taxi companies, but operating as contracted vehicles at negotiated rates.

The typical vehicle size accommodates between 4 and 6 passengers, and this contributes significantly to matching seat availability to demand. Vehicles operate on a planned shared basis, and are thus available to advanced booking, and detours appropriate to maximising vehicle occupancy, a pre-requisite in achieving low vehicle passenger costs.

T2E Cost model and service delivery

At the core of the T2E service model are two parallel objectives, to achieve an affordable low cost transport service available to all, in which the cost of travel does not prohibit use, and the desire to develop a service with reducing external funding and the potential for routes to operate sustainably over time. To this end, the service has applied a two stage charging model with a lower, supported, rate in the initial three months of use, and a higher rate (cost recovery) thereafter that would, in the instance of a full vehicle allow the service to operate without support.

Service delivery is based on the use of contracted third party transport suppliers, mainly taxi operators, providing vehicles contracted to T2E on a negotiated rate, which has been developed over time and currently is set at 50% of the Highland taxi rate. Suppliers have the ability to accept or decline runs, but have strict contracted requirements once a route is accepted to ensure its delivery. For the suppliers, contracted delivery provides an element of certainty of business and longer-term route development, and for T2E significant vehicle overheads are avoided. Moreover, the vehicle returns to taxi use following T2E service ensuring a high level of vehicle efficiency.

Service performance and effectiveness

The previous sections explored a number of indices used in the analysis of transport projects. In that many (most) rural public transport services operate at a loss, the use of a public subsidy comparison, which assumes a per passenger cost of production, met by public expenditure, may provide a useful comparison between projects (see: Table 1 and Scotland, 2006).

T2E is identified (from Table 1) report, as a High Value to Agency service, whose mean costs per passenger trip are identified as between £10 and £20. The observed performance of T2E is somewhat better than this suggests, with a falling typical subsidy cost, reflecting improving levels of performance over time. A review completed in 2006 by Newcastle University (see: Wright et al, 2008) identified T2E operating at a rate of £7.25 per passenger journey - somewhat lower than the identified mid-range categories set out for High Value to Agency services, while action taken by T2E in response to the report has reduced this level further in its current submission to the Highland Council. The effective need for support now more consistent with the typical subsidy costs of Dial-a-bus services (£5-10), reducing as increasing numbers of T2E users move to cost recovery.

The comparison does not, however, provide for full analysis, not least that typical journey costs do not allow for a comparison of mile-based costs. T2E journeys typically range between 12 and 16 miles, and can extend to 22 miles in the longest incidence. These are felt to be longer than those typical to bus based DRT and this in turn may indicate a more effective service delivery than initially apparent.

Per passenger cost comparison may also fail to fully identify the positive impacts of a targeted transport service. CBA provides a more detailed tool for assessment, particularly where this includes an element of social impact analysis (see: Field 2006). Social returns relate to, among other things, increased local economic activity, and could be argued to include reductions in state expenditure (on benefit) as a result of increasing employment.

While investment in equipment has a pay off to individuals, its benefits (De Long and Summers 1991) have a 'social rate of return' interpreted by Field (2006) as 'largely uncompensated', and 'warranting subsidization'. It follows that support may be justified on the basis of the totality of its return, not purely the return to its investors.

In the case of social transport, benefits and effects may be felt beyond the immediate investment, whether by investor (community, council or private undertaking), by user (benefiting, in the case of T2E from access to new employment), or by community (benefiting from increased local economic activity). This includes reductions in other expenditures, reduced payments through social benefits, unemployment support; but can also be allied to increasing levels of income to the public exchequer, increased tax revenue arising from employed individuals (rather than unemployed), and increased production levels of corporate gain, and tax revenues from employers. These benefits, while tangible accrue away from the immediate transport service, and revenues so created do not return to the original investors in the transport service to which they may be allied.

SROI Analysis

Social Return analysis has been applied to the T2E project at various points (Cooper et al, 2006; Wright et al., 2008), each updating in the light of operational experience the metrics applied. In each the project has demonstrated a positive social return ratio - indicating a greater level of social output than cost. The most recent (see: Wright et al., 2008), include the 'value added' which measures the value that the project has created through its activities (the difference between the NPV of benefits and the NPV of investment), and the 'SROI ratio' which measures the value of the benefits relative to the costs of achieving those benefits (the ratio between the NPV of benefits to the NPV of investment). These calculations have been estimated over a 5 year period with 3 years investment funding and may be summarised as:

- NPV of benefits = £658,014
- NPV of costs for 3 years investment is $3 \times £68,000 = £204,000$
- Value Added = $£658,014 - £204,000 = £454,014$
- The total number of clients = 100
(40 initially in year1 + 30 replenishment year1 + 30 replenishment year2)

- Value Added per client = £4,540
- SROI ratio = £658,014 ÷ £204,000 = 3.2
(i.e. for every £1 of investment, £3.20 worth of social benefit is generated; any SROI ratio above 1 is generally attractive from an investment viewpoint)

3. INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1, alongside the discussion in the previous section illustrates that the subsidy costs per passenger journey for T2E are significantly cheaper than those of high value to agency job-link type services and compare favourably with the high care needs dial-a-bus type services.

Indeed the improvements in efficiency made to T2E services since the 2006-2007 evaluation of T2E (Wright et al, 2008) have resulted in per passenger subsidies of less than £6 per passenger journey, based on the current details at Highland Council. This is approaching typical levels of subsidy for local DRT services in rural areas (e.g. both the Wiltshire Wigglybus and the Lincolnshire CallConnect Plus service experienced an average subsidy payment of around £5.00 / passenger journey once well established; see Brake et al, 2004). In line with this, the subsidy costs per passenger journey (including booking centre costs) on the Phone and Go DRT service in Lower Coquet, Northumberland were £5.75 on average (2004?). However only 8% of the passengers using this service did so for work related trips with just over 15% of these gaining access to (part-time) work as a direct result of the bus service. There are severe limitations of local DRT bus services providing suitable and reliable access to employment when the bus is also being used to provide education, leisure, shopping and social trips for the whole community.

In terms of subsidy costs on shared taxi schemes Enoch (2004) reports that the subsidy per passenger trip on the rural 'Fare Car' scheme in Devon costs £10 per trip. Scotland (2006) reports that a taxi-based DRT service in south east Fife, not served by conventional public transport, costs approximately £7.40 per passenger. Both these services operate in relatively compact communities and the technology, staff and vehicle costs are minimal. However, neither of these services restrict themselves to targeting employment and are provided for social inclusion reasons.

It is therefore more appropriate to compare the operational (subsidy) costs of T2E with other targeted access to work schemes. Indeed, even better to compare the SROI ratio for T2E with that of alternative access to work schemes.

However, it is difficult to find comparable schemes anywhere in the UK due to the extreme remote nature of the East Sutherland area. The only other comparable access to employment type schemes implemented in remote rural areas (albeit not as remote as East Sutherland) are Wheels to Work (W2W) initiatives (see Countryside Agency, 2002).

Transport initiatives provided as a part of a W2W scheme generally comprise provision of a personal mode of transport to an individual e.g. loan of a moped, electric bike or bicycle; or provision of the means for an individual to make their

journey by either public or private transport. The first W2W schemes were initiated in the UK about ten years ago and by 2002 there were over twenty established W2W schemes in England. SDG (2005) conducted an evaluation of 12 rural W2W schemes in 2005 for the Countryside Agency and the cost figures presented below are extracted from this document.

The W2W schemes are designed to assist individuals for only a limited period (6 – 9 months) after which they are expected to be able to afford their own vehicle. Unfortunately, to the authors' knowledge, no results stating the success of the schemes in terms of on-going job retention of former W2W users have been published. As the level of social benefit over time depends on the ability of the user to obtain their own transport at the end of the W2W moped loan, as well as their ability to remain in employment, it is impossible to provide an accurate longer term (5 year) SROI comparison with T2E.

Nevertheless, assuming that average benefits attributable to each individual while still being supported are similar between W2W and T2E (i.e. similar wages, hours of employment and social circumstances) then a comparison of the costs of supply per user over a 6 month period gives some indication of relative value for money.

Based on the Wright et al (2008) evaluation of T2E, the average number of users of T2E between June 2006 and May 2007 was 40 (accounting for drop-off and replenishment). The annual subsidy required to support these users including all management costs was £68,000. This works out at an average cost of £1,700 for each user per year, or £850 each for a 6 month period.

According to the SDG (2005) evaluation of W2W schemes the average cost of a six month moped loan benefiting one person was £1,910 (2004 prices; uplifted to £2,133 in 2007 using average Annual Earnings Index). Note that this cost assumes W2W users remain in employment for the whole six months which will not always be the case and significant additional management costs and delays are incurred in finding replacement users.

According to Wright et al (2008) the combined benefit to the client and the State for each new employee using T2E is approximately £9,000 per annum (based upon net increased income, i.e. client's wages minus lost welfare benefits and increased taxes and reduction in welfare payments offset against increased tax contribution for the State). However, only 50% of T2E users are new employees while the other 50% were in prior employment and already paying tax and National Insurance (NI) contributions. So allowance has to be made for the fact that only 50% of users are contributing increased tax and NI as a direct result of gaining paid employment due to T2E. That said, there is evidence from the evaluation surveys that many of the users in prior employment would have lost their jobs without T2E but this has not been considered in the analysis.

Hence the average benefits per user for T2E for a 6 month period is $£9000/2 \times 50\% = £2,250$. The equivalent for W2W is £4,500 per user (as all W2W clients are new employees).

- the social return on investment ratio of T2E per individual while they are being supported and remain in work is $£2250/£850 = 2.65$.

- the social return on investment ratio of W2W per individual while they are being supported and remain in work is $\text{£}4500/\text{£}2133 = 2.1$.

As W2W schemes allow use of mopeds for trips other than the journey to work, this undoubtedly provides some additional benefits over T2E for certain users in terms of offering greater independence and the ability to increase their participation in the community and maintain an active social life. However, the use of mopeds can be an insurmountable barrier for large sections of the community. The vast majority of users are males under the age of 25. Females have concerns related to the personal security of mopeds and a feeling of vulnerability on the road.

Since two of the key objectives in rural areas are to improve access to work for women and access to childcare, moped based W2W schemes clearly are not appropriate. Furthermore providing access to employment for older job seekers can help break long-term cycles of unemployment/unemployability. Again, mopeds are rarely suitable options in such instances.

From the above analysis it can be concluded that the T2E service can provide a more cost effective solution to problems of accessing work in rural areas for a greater number and range of users than W2W schemes. However, it is still the case that W2W schemes work well, especially for young males, and also offer additional social benefits outside the home to work journey to those clients.

4. CONCLUSION

The development of a new transport concept, focused on accessing employment, in Highland Scotland appears to provide a number of positive indicators appropriate to the development of future, revolutionary, local development policy. The T2E scheme addresses a number of issues apparent in transport, employment and local economic development domains, and this multi-disciplinary approach should provide a direction in the analysis and decision-making processes appropriate to rural communities.

While it remains true that the majority of rural public transport cannot be provided commercially or profitably, including those operated by 'access to employment' type services such as T2E or W2W, this should not deter the development of such services where positive values are achieved. Moreover, the potential positive benefits, demonstrated in comparative SROI values should indicate a potential within the development of transport for wider community benefit in excess of the cost of provision. This is the case in the T2E case study, and is likely also to be the case for other forms of transport.

Where T2E differs from more traditional services, is in the focus of provision and extent of financial impacts attributable in employment gain. This does not reduce the significance of transport on the cohesion of a community, nor take away from the vital roles of social access demonstrated in other transport services. It does, however, provide for a local economic gain arising from the increased ability to work, which has been poorly served by other forms of public transport service in rural

communities. Moreover, while the current 'commercial' nature of deregulated public transport places extended emphasis on the ability of transport to deliver profitably or at reducing levels of support, a need arises to address the delivery of transport in terms of absolute costs and measurable benefits including, where they can be identified, the wider community social benefits.

While it is inevitable that rural transport services will remain within the financial controls and demand commercial approaches to supply, this paper argues that benefits extend beyond the financial return of the service, and even beyond the measurable financial benefits attributable to service provision. The provision of services, and their analysis should, therefore, accommodate both benefits in the financial and social spheres. Schemes delivering positive social returns such as T2E and W2W, appear appropriate for development and potentially in terms of support, using a comparative analysis in the case of multiple competing schemes. Indeed, the potential exists for replacing tendered supported big bus services with supported focused DRT, such as T2E, may in time provide a revolutionary method of reducing overall transport costs and improving rural access.

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