Focus

Tackling Social Exclusion
The Role of Public Transport

THE TRANSPORT & URBAN LIFE COMMISSION INVITES
UITP AND ITS MEMBERS TO TAKE ACTIONS TO RAISE THE
PROFILE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AS A KEY FACTOR OF
SOCIAL INCLUSION.
REGIONAL DIVISIONS ARE INVITED TO DEVELOP THEIR
RESPECTIVE AGENDA OF ACTIONS BASED ON A PROPOSED
COMMON FRAMEWORK.

Background and rationale
Social exclusion can be described as a process
through which individuals, groups or communities are
progressively prevented from participation in the labour
market, access to healthcare services and education, etc.
Social exclusion is correlated to a combination
of unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor
housing, high crime environment, bad health and
family breakdown. The elderly, citizens with physical
or learning disabilities, and cultural minorities are
particularly concerned.
An essential component of the social inclusion agenda
is to re-connect socially excluded citizens to the social
and economic structures of society.

Where there is mobility, there is social inclusion

The ability to access – in the spatial sense – jobs,
education, health services, and other facilities is a key
factor of social inclusion. “Accessibility is important,
not only for its role in facilitating regular and stable
income-earning employment but also for its role as
part of the social capital that maintains the social
relations forming the safety net of poor people in many
societies” says the World Bank.

Barriers to spatial mobility include problems of
awareness, availability, physical accessibility, and
affordability.

In general, industrialised countries have been
successful in developing transport initiatives aimed
at ensuring public transport facilities and services
become more accessible to all. For instance, real time
information systems, integrated ticketing schemes,
interchange facilities, the introduction of low-floor and

\[1\] This definition of social exclusion was coined by the UK
government’s Social Exclusion Unit.
\[2\] World Bank, 2002, Cities on the Move – A World Bank Urban
accessible vehicles, and the development of demand-responsive services are all good examples of improved accessibility. In a number of countries, a range of concessionary fares have been designed to facilitate access to citizens with a lower income.

A remaining challenge in industrialised countries is to generalise efforts to extend the travel horizons of socially excluded citizens. Studies show that people on low income travel shorter distances to work than the general population. So jobseekers without access to a car may be unwilling to look for job vacancies outside a narrow geographical area, which significantly limits their opportunities.

Tackling this issue requires a holistic approach, which involves partnerships between public transport and social policy makers (cf. good practice below).

The challenges are different in developing and transition countries. In rapidly growing cities, deprived populations usually have to settle in outer suburbs where rents are more affordable. As this ever growing part of the population relies solely on walking and public transport for its mobility, public transport can contribute both to social inclusion and economic development by providing access to jobs. A key challenge for public transport to effectively play this role is to connect poor neighborhoods at the fringes of the cities with areas where jobs opportunities are.

**Good practice**

**Access to employment (West Midlands, UK)**

West Midlands’ Passenger Transport Executive (Centro) is working closely with a local network of employment agencies which are publicly funded by the UK central government. These agencies acknowledge problems when trying to provide public transport information to job seekers. They also admit that even when employed, people cannot afford travel costs at least until they receive their first week/monthly payment. The employment agencies currently provide tickets for travel to interviews (available to clients with more than six months unemployment). Under the 1985 Transport Act, transport authorities in England are not allowed to subsidise travel for the unemployed. With this scheme, called WorkWise, the costs of providing staff and public transport tailored information packages are met by the transport authority, whilst the costs for travel tickets/monthly passes are met by regional agencies and European development funds. In an evaluation of WorkWise, 80% of the users of the job centres who obtained a new job said they would not have obtained it without that scheme.

**Good practice in Latin America**

The Bus Rapid Transit system of Curitiba (Brazil) has received international recognition and is often considered as a leading example worldwide. The metropolitan area of Curitiba has 2.95 million inhabitants and a transport system based on bus services. It has a single fare for the entire metropolitan area. Its Master Plan dating back to 1966 organises urban growth and land use in the city. This type of integrated planning has been the main success factor in the development of a transport network which takes social inclusion into account. Other examples of good practice in the region include the development of Line 4 of the metro of Sao Paulo, which connects a number of mostly deprived areas in the suburbs of Sao Paulo with employment areas, and the Metro Cable project (a type of funicular) in Medellin (Colombia) with a similar purpose. Those projects help reduce the inequality gaps between the different areas of the city, contribute to improving the ‘habitat’ for the poor and play a role in the alleviation of poverty. Regarding the issue of the affordability of public transport, it has to be noted that in a few cities such as Caracas, Lima or Quito, the fares can be as low as USD 0.25.
Recommendations

The Transport & Urban Life Commission recommends developing actions at international, national and local level and puts forwards a number of tools for the implementation of these actions.

Actions at international level

- To engage with supranational organisations developing global or regional programmes aiming to tackle social exclusion and to ensure that the contribution of public transport to social inclusion is duly acknowledged in the guidelines and recommendations provided to national or local governments.

Examples of actions:

- To highlight the contribution which public transport could make in achieving some of the UN Millennium Development Goals, notably those on poverty eradication, access to primary education, and health improvement.
- To ensure that public transport is (more) visible in the guidelines provided by the European Union to its Member States for the development of National Action Plans on social inclusion, notably through contacts with the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee.

**Actions at national level**

- To ensure that public transport is concretely taken into account at an early stage of the development of social inclusion policies.

**Actions at local level**

- To encourage public transport authorities and operators to take initiatives and to establish stronger and more regular links to central government and other local organisations to make sure all stakeholders are pulling in the same direction – fighting poverty and social exclusion.

**Tools**

- Information channels to monitor successful public transport-related projects aiming at tackling social exclusion. Case studies should focus on the planning and the implementation of the measures and highlight success factors.

- Impact assessment based on a set of standard ‘transport’ indicators which could be used to measure and monitor accessibility with an attached ‘social outcome’.

* The direct contribution which the public transport sector can make to social inclusion through the employment of socially fragile citizens is also to be mentioned as it is very significant.

Highlighting the contribution of public transport to social inclusion is a win-win process: it will provide recognition and support to the sector for the role it plays towards the achievement of a more inclusive society, as well as more passengers. Simultaneously, it will improve the delivery of social inclusion policies to the benefit of all citizens.