

BEVAN



BEVAN FOUNDATION REPORT

**Accessibility for all-
Public Transport and
Social Inclusion in
Wales**

Summer 2007



Acknowledgements

The Bevan Foundation gratefully acknowledges the support of Atkins in Wales for this project.

We are also grateful to all those who participated in the colloquium from which many of the conclusions in this report are drawn.

Published by the Bevan Foundation.

Aneurin Bevan House
40 Castle Street
Tredegar
Blaenau, Gwent
NP22 3DQ
01495 725214
info@bevanfoundation.org
www.bevanfoundation.org

Registered charity no: 1104191

ISBN 978-1-904767-25-1

Photographs courtesy of Atkins in Wales.

ATKINS

© 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recorded or otherwise without the prior express permission of the Bevan Foundation.

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
|  P 1 | Preface |
|  P 2 | Key Points |
|  P 4 | 1. Background |
|  P 6 | 2. Trends in Wales |
|  P 7 | 3. Current Policy in Wales |
|  P 13 | 4. Key Issues |
|  P 14 | 5. Policy and Politics |
|  P 16 | 6. Legislation and Regulation |
|  P 17 | 7. Reducing the Need to Travel |
|  P 19 | 8. Delivering Better Services |
|  P 21 | Annex 1: List of Colloquium Participants |

Preface

A quarter of households in Wales do not have a car. That means people from those households must get to essential services, such as hospital appointments, and go about their daily lives, such as going shopping and visiting friends, by public transport, unless they are able and willing to walk or cycle. Too often, public transport services are infrequent, unreliable, unattractive and expensive, or simply do not exist at all. As a result, inability to access services and facilities is now recognized as a central part of the social exclusion of certain groups in society.

But whilst encouraging social inclusion through improved accessibility is increasingly recognized in public policy, it is still far from being delivered on the ground. There is much still to be done, from providing a positive policy and legislative framework to developing and disseminating good practice, before change will be achieved.

The Bevan Foundation, the social justice think tank for Wales, has been working with Atkins, an international multidisciplinary consultancy, to consider how accessibility and social inclusion might be increasingly aligned in Wales. Working together, a colloquium of leading experts and practitioners, representing policy bodies, local authorities, transport operators and community interests, was held in April 2007 to share and develop new ideas about the way forward. This paper presents the outcome of the discussions at the colloquium, although the views in it are not necessarily shared by all those present.

The proposals in this report are a challenge to the transport status quo, which remains heavily predisposed towards the car. It is not a blue-print, but rather some suggestions about what could be done to rebalance policy and practice to ensure that ALL people, irrespective of their income and status in society, have access to the service and facilities that many take for granted.

General

- Access to services and facilities is central to the life chances of socially excluded groups of people and communities.
- Although tackling social exclusion has been a high priority in Wales, the importance of transport is only now being recognized, and policy and practice need further development.
- There is much more that could be done to improve accessibility for all people in society. This report presents conclusions from a colloquium held in April 2007, and provides an agenda for the future.

Policy and Politics

- Accessibility for all should be a fundamental objective of future Assembly Government policies.
- There needs to be significant investment in public transport infrastructure and services.
- The next index of Multiple Deprivation should include a measure of accessibility to services which takes account of access by public transport.
- The Welsh Assembly Government should strongly encourage Regional Transport Consortia to engage effectively and meaningfully with socially excluded groups.

Legislation and Regulation

- The Welsh Assembly Government should urgently review the regulatory and legislative constraints on public transport services to identify what changes are needed and how they may be achieved. The question of franchising public transport routes needs urgent, serious consideration by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- Legislation should be more rigorously enforced for all road users.

Reducing the Need to Travel

- The Wales Spatial Plan should encourage job creation outside the M4 corridor, across the whole of Wales.
- The status of advice in Welsh Assembly Government's planning technical advice note, TAN 18, should be strengthened.
- Accessibility should be a key component in environmental impact assessments.

- Planning policy should ensure that good public transport provision is 'designed in' to developments. Major developments should be required to draw up travel plans which take account of access for people without a car.
- Local Health Boards and NHS trusts should be required explicitly to ensure that any reconfigured services are fully accessible by public transport to all sections of the community.

Delivering Better Services

- Local authorities should be able to specify high quality standards when they purchase non-commercial services and should be encouraged to develop partnerships with operators to improve standards on commercial services.
- More work is needed to reduce transport-related crime police authorities should consider establishing a working group to develop good practice.
- Local authorities should be encouraged to adopt bus priority measures, coupled with effective traffic management of private cars.
- The Welsh Assembly Government should carefully consider introducing a half-fare scheme for 14 – 25 year olds across Wales.
- More needs to be done to encourage innovation and the sharing of good practice between local authorities, operators and community groups.
- A fund to support innovative community transport should be established in Wales.
- Alternative forms of public transport that are flexible enough to cope with low demand need to be developed further, including exploring the potential of services operated by social enterprises.

1. Background

The importance of transport in improving the life chances of socially excluded groups and communities is increasingly being recognized in public policy.

Making the Connections, a report by the Prime Minister's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), explored the ways in which the location of services, and the quality of transport to those services, is affected by and reinforces social exclusion. Using real life case studies the report described how people are often unable to access services as a result of social exclusion, e.g. low income means that they are unable to afford to run a car, and how problems with transport can reinforce social exclusion e.g. because people cannot access key local services or activities by bus or train.

The SEU report argued that the problem arises because the need to travel has become greater and more complex as society has changed. The location of certain activities has dispersed, e.g. the growth of out-of-town shopping centres, and changes in lifestyles e.g. late night opening which means people start / finish work outside a typical 9 – 5 pattern, and women's greater participation in employment, which has created more complex journeys involving childcare, school, shopping and work.

Yet certain groups in society, such as households on low incomes, women, the elderly and people with some disabilities, are less likely to have access to a car than other groups. They tend to travel less often and for shorter distances, and when they do travel most often use the bus.

The Social Exclusion Unit report went on to identify five different types of barriers to travel that people who are socially excluded face:

1. Background

The availability of transport and its physical accessibility

Some areas have no transport services at all, whilst others have no services early in the morning, after 6 p.m. or on Sundays. There has been a marked contraction of services over the last 20 years. Networks are dominated by radial routes making access to services on the edge of town difficult.

The safety and security of transport

Fear of crime can deter people from walking or using public transport services, and is especially acute for women and older people and people travelling in the early morning and evening.

Cost

The cost of public transport services is high in the UK compared with other EU countries, and the cost of local bus fares has risen faster than the cost of motoring over the last 25 years. Both public transport costs and motoring costs can count for a disproportionate amount of a low income household's budget.

Limited travel horizons

The Social Exclusion Unit report pointed out that people on low incomes can be reluctant to travel for long distances or for a long time, because they lack confidence in the service and knowledge about what services are available, and prefer familiar routes and destinations.

The location of services

Problems of poor transport are exacerbated by dispersed development of services and employment opportunities, with relatively few local services and facilities in disadvantaged communities whilst new developments are often situated on the edge of towns e.g. leisure centres, shopping centres.

2. Trends in Wales

The ways in which people are socially excluded by lack of access to services is evident in Wales, as in England. The following is mostly drawn from the recent study of poverty and social exclusion in Wales.

Overall, 25% of households in Wales in 2004 do not have a car. Levels of car ownership are closely linked with the age and number of adults in the households. Half of lone parents lack a car and two thirds of single pensioners do so. By contrast, fewer than a tenth of working-age couples lack a car, and only a fifth of pensioner couples. The proportion of working-age households without a car varies from 26% in Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent to 10% in Monmouthshire and Powys.

Among households without a car, two-fifths describe the local bus service as failing to meet their needs for travel to the town centre or the shops while two thirds say it does not meet the need for travel to hospital appointments. Local bus services do not meet the need for weekday travel for the majority of the population in any part of Wales. Dissatisfaction is highest in the Valleys, at 80% yet the proportion of people with daily access to a car is lowest here at 55%. Almost all households - 90% - say that the bus service does not meet their needs for travel at night or on Sundays.

The distance covered by local bus services has fallen from an average of 123 million vehicle kilometres in the period 1991/92 – 1996/97 to 118 million vehicle kilometres for 2001/02 – 2005/06. The number of passenger journeys is also in long term decline, from 155 million trips in 1986/87 to 115 million in 2005/06, although the trend in the last five years has been upwards. Similarly, the proportion of households in Wales within 13 minutes walk of a bus stop in 2004/2005 was the lowest of UK countries at 89 percent, but the proportion has risen over the last decade against trends elsewhere. At the same time, bus service costs have risen by 31% over the last 20 years: since 1991, the cost per passenger journey has increased more in Wales than in other parts of Great Britain.

The impact on people's lives is not just one of theory or statistics. Being unable to reach local services is a very real constraint on people's participation in everyday life – being able to get to work, go shopping, attend a medical appointment, or go to an evening class can all be impossible for people who rely on public transport.

3. Current Policy in Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government is strongly committed to tackling social exclusion, as set out for example in *Wales: A Better Country*. However, the role of transport in tackling social exclusion has barely featured until recently, in the publication of its new draft transport strategy – *Connecting Wales*.

Transport Policy

Connecting Wales, published in July 2006, aims to maximise the contribution transport can make to a series of social outcomes:

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Improving access to healthcare | To identify and tackle the access barriers which prevent people getting the health services they need (including access to hospitals, GPs, dentists and specialist facilities) at the times they need, and thereby to reduce social exclusion, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups. |
| 2 | Improving access to education, training and life long learning | To identify and tackle the access barriers which prevent people of all ages from being able to increase their skills base, thereby reducing economic inactivity and social exclusion and helping raise their opportunities in the labour market, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups. |
| 3 | Improving access to shopping and leisure facilities | To identify and tackle the access barriers which prevent people getting to a reasonable range of shopping and leisure facilities at the times they need to do so, thereby enhancing social interaction and reducing social exclusion, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups. |
| 4 | Encouraging healthy lifestyles | To promote higher levels of walking and cycling through the provision of facilities that will encourage greater use, thereby leading to a healthier population and improved quality of life both through reducing obesity levels and associated health impacts and reducing air pollution levels which are harmful to health. |
| 5 | Improving the actual and perceived safety of travel | To reduce injury accident rates, particularly for the most vulnerable road users, as well as addressing perceived safety concerns. |

3. Current Policy in Wales

Connecting Wales also includes a common set of key messages which should be taken forward:

- **Identifying areas of poor access:** through accessibility planning, identification of locations and groups that have poor access, to enable improvements to be targeted on the most disadvantaged groups;
- **Understanding reasons for poor access:** transport may not be the cause or indeed the solution for poor access and this needs to be understood by undertaking local accessibility audits;
- **Joined-up co-ordination and planning:** transport considerations should be taken fully into account at an early stage of planning decisions across all disciplines;
- **Improving walking and cycling infrastructure:** these modes have a key role to play in increasing social inclusion and improving the health of the nation;
- **Technology:** the role of ICT should not be underestimated in increasing access to key services and facilities;
- **Public transport services:** innovative schemes and co-ordination of community services need to be provided in areas where access needs are greatest;
- **Smarter choices:** travel planning and publicity are key tools to promote the use of more sustainable modes to access services and facilities; and
- **Safety:** by improving the perceived and actual safety of more sustainable modes of transport and interchange facilities, the other levels of access to key services and facilities is increased.

Responsibility for local transport planning rests with local authorities in Wales. Following the Transport (Wales) Act 2006 and the subsequent Regional Transport (Wales) Order 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government has the power to direct local authorities to establish a Joint Transport Authority for a specified area. There are four groups of local authorities - known as Regional Transport Consortia, which works together in this way: TAITH covers North Wales, TraCC covers Mid Wales, SWWITCH covers South West Wales whilst SEWTA covers South East Wales. In reality however, the four regional consortia, formed voluntarily by the 22 local authorities, have worked together very effectively for a number of years.

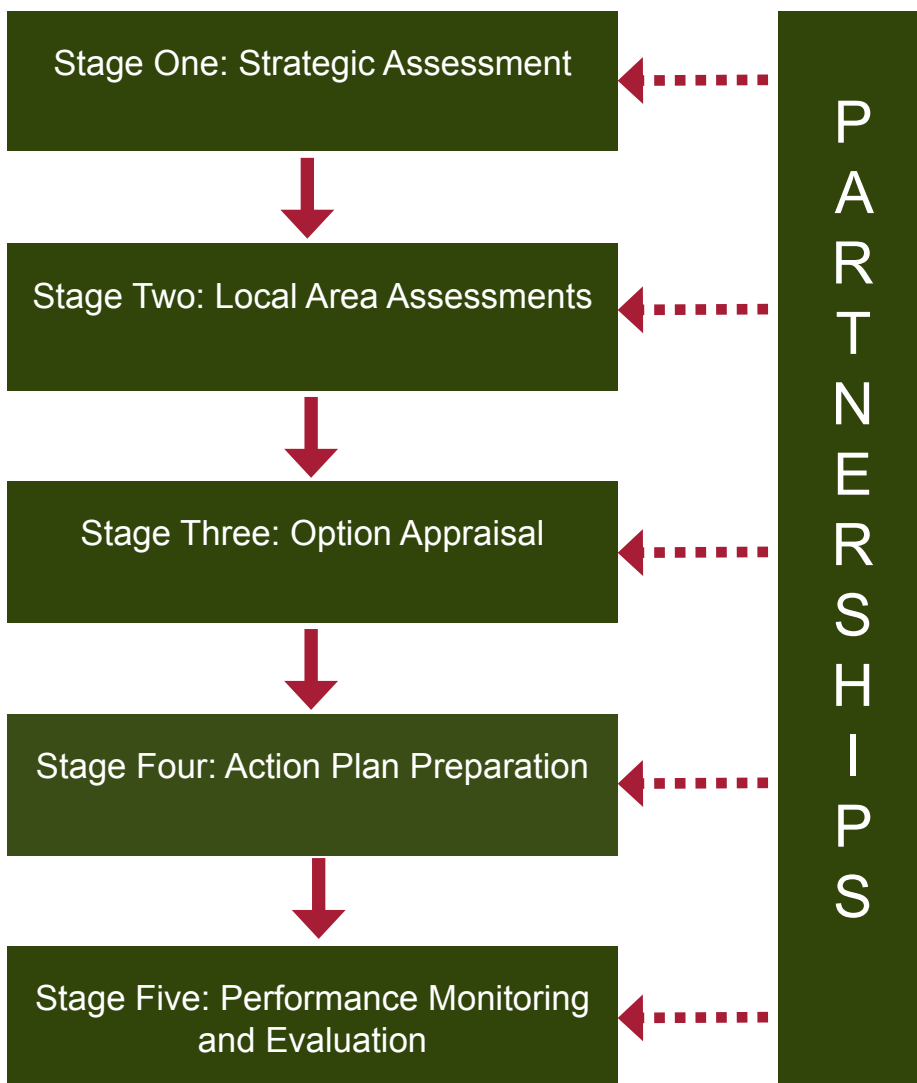
The Consortia are required to produce Regional Transport Plans by April 2008. However despite many requests, the Welsh Assembly Government has, to date, failed to provide a clear indication of the level of resource that could be available to implement strategies and schemes that are contained within the RTPs. This is a major concern and, unless it is addressed, it will undermine the potential credibility of the Regional Transport Plan as a process. *We therefore recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government give the regional consortia long term (five year) indicative capital and revenue budgets that can be invested in the priority schemes and activities identified in each Regional Transport Plan.*

3. Current Policy in Wales

The Accessibility Planning Guidance, published by the Department for Transport in England in December 2004, encourages local authorities and other agencies to assess systematically whether people can get to places of work, healthcare facilities, education food shops and other destinations that are important to local residents. It also provides a framework for local authorities and other relevant agencies to work together to develop and deliver solutions to accessibility problems.

The preliminary Assembly Government Regional Transport Planning Guidance closely follows the English Guidance in recommending a five stage process for the development of an Accessibility Strategy as summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1- The Five Stage Accessibility Planning process
(DfT Guidance on Accessibility Planning, 2004)



The guidance also states that accessibility strategies should:

- be set in the context of the wider vision and objectives for that area;
- aim to improve accessibility for all, but particularly for disadvantaged groups and areas; and
- focus on accessibility to employment, learning, health care and food shops, together with other services and opportunities of local importance.

However Regional Transport Consortia will only need to complete the stage one strategic assessment for inclusion in the Regional Transport Plan.

Land Use Planning Policy

In the 2002 *Planning Policy Wales* document, it was stated that the Welsh Assembly Government aims to extend choice in transport and secure accessibility in a way which supports sustainable development by encouraging the establishment of an integrated transport system which is safe, efficient, clean and fair. This objective includes an indication of how this may be achieved i.e. through integration between, amongst other things, transport measures and policies for education, health, social inclusion and wealth creation. For example, ensuring that development is accessible by means other than private car will help Welsh Assembly Government objectives for social inclusion. This objective relies heavily on land use planning, Local Transport Plans, Unitary Development Plans, and promotion of public transport by local authorities. However it is unclear how social inclusion can be improved in the areas which need it most as a result of this objective.

Spatial Planning

The more recent *Wales Spatial Plan* examined the interaction of different policies in particular places as well as the role of places in a wider context; it intended to provide the strategic spatial context for related policy documents such as *Wales a Better Country* and *Wales a Vibrant Economy* etc. The plan acknowledged that access to essential facilities and services is an important determinant of social inclusion and that securing equality of access is a particular challenge.....and that services need to be focused and carefully planned and related to key settlements with good links to help build sustainable communities and maximize the number of people that can be reached.

References were made to the differing levels of prosperity between the M4 corridor and deprived areas such as the upper valleys, and the need for spatially targeted actions to address access and inequality through focused investment in affordable housing, health, education and jobs etc. On the other hand, "Area Hubs" were identified as important economic drivers and service providers which would be attractive to private investors and as places where people want to live and work. In overall terms, the Welsh Assembly Government has yet to reconcile the differing spatial aspirations set out in the plan although the Heads of the Valleys Framework initiative should provide a useful pointer for the future.

Health Policy

The location and configuration of health facilities remains a topical issue and in many instances exemplifies the difficulties in balancing access against concentrating some facilities in fewer locations on the interests of operational efficiency and financial sustainability.

The *2003 Review of Health and Social Care in Wales* by Derek Wanless concluded that the acute sector in particular was facing financially unsustainable pressure and that the service was inherently inefficient and unstable. Among the recommended actions were the following: more effective use of community hospitals as step down facilities; new models for primary care to reduce hospital intakes; new service delivery models with some specialist services in primary and community settings. The main implication was that the range of services provided in major acute hospitals needs to change with some specialist services provided centrally (regionally) and others more locally, with Welsh Assembly Government's *Designed for Life* report identifying a clear hierarchy of health provision based on those requiring everyday access and those less frequently accessed.

The 2006 Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) briefing, *Hospital Configuration* also concluded that the moves to bring the health service up to world class standards will affect around one in four general hospitals through the closure of A&E units and with the provision of high quality care in specialist centres and routine care closer to people's homes. A further 2007 report of the IPPR, *The Future Hospital: The Progressive Case for Change*, stated that more important than local access to hospitals is ensuring that primary care is easily accessible, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

Education Policy

Education policy is another policy area in which there are tensions between ensuring sustainable access whilst also ensuring that schools have viable catchments. Welsh Assembly Government's strategy document, *The Learning Country*, requires local authorities to develop plans for capital investment in schools which take account of the sharp decline in pupil numbers while at the same time ensuring that investment is directed towards schools that are viable and, crucially, can provide a community focus for capacity building and related activities. The Welsh Local Government Association's report, *Planning School Places*, predicts a reduction in pupil numbers of 46,000 between 2004 -2013, which is in addition to the current numbers of surplus places in the secondary (18%) and primary (11%) sectors. The trend is towards further closures and amalgamation of smaller schools, and, contrary to Welsh Assembly Government's aspirations, the loss of the community focus, especially in smaller communities. However, the recent lowering of the nursery entrance age to 3 years may in a limited number of situations help to maintain viable units. In the field of higher education, *Reaching Higher*, sees the creation of clusters, brought about by reconfiguration and collaboration, as a key mechanism to build institutional strength through more effective prioritisation of investment and greater specialization.

Location of Employment

Journey to work patterns provide a useful indicator of the relationship between place of residence and place of work, although separating the dynamics of the housing market from access to jobs is problematical. Reference to recent reports of the Office of National Statistics shows the latest trends. *Commuting in Wales*, for example, describes how the largest in-commuting flows per 1000 residents are in Cardiff, Newport and Gwynedd, whilst the largest out commuting flows, not surprisingly are in the adjacent areas of the Vale of Glamorgan, Anglesey, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Those areas where people are least likely to work within their authority of residence include Blaenau Gwent (63%), Neath Port Talbot (60%) and Caerphilly (53%).

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *The Geography of Poor Skills and Access to Work*, shows that geography does matter for people with poor skills and that those with low qualifications travel shorter distances to work on average. Job density within a local authority area, the ratio between the total numbers of jobs to the working age population, is a key indicator of local job availability. *NOMIS Labour Market Profiles* for the period 2000 -2004 show that the most significant increases in job density have been in areas such as Carmarthenshire, Powys and Flintshire, albeit from a relatively low base, whilst the only area showing a decrease is Blaenau Gwent. Initiatives set out in *Making the Connections*, are helping to redress some of these imbalances under the general heading of bringing the full range of Assembly services closer to the community. For example, by 2008, three new regionally based offices in Merthyr, Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction will employ 1600 Welsh Assembly staff in support of this objective.

Retail

Since the mid 1980s a significant proportion of new retail space has been located in out of town and edge of town locations, which has impacted on the viability of both town centre and neighbourhood facilities, raising a wide range of issues relating to access and choice particularly for disadvantaged communities. *The Future of Retail Property: In Town or Out?* (British Council Shopping Centres 2006) looks at trends between 1999 and 2005 and states that 35% of new retail space in the UK was provided in town centres compared to 14% in 1994. Furthermore, the proportion of new retail development in town centres is expected to exceed 40% over the next 5 years, leaving some 60% for other locations but likely to be edge of centre. Maintenance of what is described as the Government's/local authorities 'Town Centre First Approach', is seen as being critical for maintaining developer confidence in town centres. Current Welsh Assembly Government policy, as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance*, is that town, district, local and village centres are the most appropriate locations for retailing activities.

The following issues arise from this summary of the current position:

4.1. Understanding transport and social exclusion?

How well do we understand the causes and consequences of transport and social exclusion in Wales? What mechanisms are in place to listen to the views and experiences of people who are socially excluded? How best can local authorities and transport operators engage with socially excluded groups?

4.2 Reconciling the spatial implications of non-transport policies with accessibility?

It is clear that health, education and employment trends are still continuing to emphasise concentration of activities into fewer, larger centres with consequent loss of local services, and that those services are often situated away from town centres in locations which are not necessarily served by good public transport. Land use planning policies may aim to achieve greater accessibility and social inclusion but it is a moot point whether they are successful on the ground. There is also a legacy of decades of relatively inaccessible development. How can service planners and providers be encouraged to take account of accessibility and the needs of socially excluded groups?

4.3 Accessibility planning

The current work of the Regional Transport Consortia includes accessibility planning as a key tool. This work is at a relatively early stage and it is not yet clear how effective it is at identifying which communities and / or groups of people experience the lowest levels of accessibility and whether accessibility planning can respond to issues other than distance, e.g. cost of using public transport, reliability and timing of services, provision of information, and ensuring access for all users e.g. wheelchair users.

4.4 Effective delivery?

What matters most of all is ensuring that people who are dependent on public transport have access to essential services and activities 'at a reasonable cost, in a reasonable time and with reasonable ease' (to quote the Social Exclusion Unit) Do Regional Transport Consortia – and the local authorities which comprise them – have sufficient powers and resources to meet people's accessibility needs? Can Regional Transport Consortia ensure effective co-ordination between different transport operators? Do they have sufficient funding to encourage and support new approaches – is the Welsh Assembly Government willing to fund any new transport services? What can transport operators bring to the table? What new approaches or services need to be developed in order to improve accessibility? Are there any examples of successful schemes which have demonstrably improved non-car access?

These issues were discussed at a colloquium of more than thirty stakeholders in Wales, held on 23rd April 2007. The next sections summarise the key conclusions and recommendations that emerged about ways in which transport planning and provision can be improved to enhance social inclusion.

Accessibility for all

There was a widespread view that social inclusion in transport is a real Cinderella issue – not only did stakeholders feel that transport itself has a relatively low priority compared with, for example, reducing hospital waiting times, but within transport, accessibility and public transport were seen to be of lesser concern than improving roads and economic efficiency. This was felt to be the case at national level as well as local and regional level.

Instead, *promoting accessibility for all should be a fundamental objective of future policies* across Wales as a whole, as well as regionally and locally. It should be at least equally important as economic growth. This objective does not necessarily conflict with other key policy drivers, such as reducing CO2 emissions. However, it does call for *strong political vision and leadership at all-Wales and local level, to take decisions that may be unpopular with the car lobby, at least in the short term*. There also needs to be *significant investment in public transport infrastructure and services, not least to rebalance a century of investment in car use*.

Putting social inclusion first demands a rethink of a range of policies. Most obviously, transport policy itself needs to be re-orientated so that accessibility for all is not 'bolted on' to current ways of thinking. But other policies, such as land-use planning policy, and education and health policies need to be much more robust on accessibility (see section 7).

The *focus on social inclusion should also be reflected in the tools that are used in transport planning* so that, for example, in cost benefit analysis less emphasis is given to reductions in journey time and more weight is given to improved reliability of public transport services or safety for cyclists.

More say for socially excluded groups

One reason that social exclusion is low down the transport agenda is that the severe impact of lack of accessibility on people's lives is not articulated, either in measures of deprivation or in the planning process. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation is the standard way in which deprivation is measured in Wales. The index does include a measure of access to services, but as this is assessed solely in terms of distance the areas which appear to be most 'deprived' are overwhelmingly rural, simply because they are further from essential services than urban and semi-urban areas. The needs of, for example, people living in estates on the edge of towns with no bus service after 6 p.m. or on Sundays are therefore overlooked. *The next Index of Multiple Deprivation should include a measure of accessibility to services which takes account of public transport, not distance alone*.

Almost all transport planning involves some liaison and consultation with the public on draft transport plans. A huge concern amongst the colloquium participants was that socially excluded people are not involved in the consultation process, especially compared with the more vocal car lobby.

5. Policy and Politics

Current consultation methods were seen as part of the problem, for example consulting mainstream stakeholder groups - 'the usual suspects' as one participant put it – rather than reaching out to, for example, single parents or young people. *The Welsh Assembly Government should strongly encourage Regional Transport Consortia to engage effectively and meaningfully with communities in their areas, and provide clear guidance to this effect.*

As part of this, *transport planners need to develop new and innovative ways of engaging socially excluded people.* 'Planning for real' is already used in community consultation and was suggested as a way of engaging with people about transport, and similarly Communities First groups were suggested as a useful vehicle for liaison with people living in disadvantaged areas. Work is also underway in England on developing appropriate assessment and appraisal tools, and to quantify the financial benefits of better liaison with socially excluded groups. *This work should be drawn upon where appropriate.*

6. Legislation and Regulation

A number of the difficulties improving accessibility for socially excluded groups of people arise because of the legislative and regulatory framework that govern provision of transport services, not least the de-regulation of transport itself.

Our participants felt that franchising of public transport routes is potentially an extremely valuable way of improving public transport provision. In particular, as it gives government bodies more control over services franchising can help to improve reliability (as performance would be monitored and enforced), promote stability of services (with less frequent changes to fares, times and frequencies), encourage integration of services (through one brand, one network, one ticket - with services connecting rather than duplicating), and enhance quality of services (as cleaner buses would be specified, and maintenance would be monitored and enforced). The cost of a franchising system was seen as minimal with the existing public subsidy simply being redeployed. Many of our participants pointed with envy to London, where franchising had raised investment levels and provided 'a world leader bus network'. *The question of franchising public transport routes needs urgent, serious consideration by the Welsh Assembly Government.*

Some participants expressed concern that other legislation also inhibited improvements to public transport. Concerns included:

- the constraints on local authorities' purchase of socially necessary bus services, which require the acceptance of the cheapest tender and prohibit co-operation with commercial services, with the result that socially necessary services – usually evening or Sunday services – are usually poor quality and have a different operator to commercial services.
- Restrictions on local authorities' operation of "community buses" and other similar transport services.
- Relaxation of the regulations that prevent car sharing.

Again, these issues need further consideration and we therefore suggest that the *Welsh Assembly Government should urgently review the regulatory and legislative constraints on public transport services to identify what changes are needed and how they may be achieved.* Some participants pointed out that there are major differences in the way in which constraints on private and public transport are enforced.

Whilst car drivers routinely improved their own accessibility by flouting the law, such as speeding and parking on double yellow lines, similar behaviour by bus operators was rare and heavily penalized if it did occur. Participants in the colloquium therefore called for much *more rigorous enforcement of legislation for all road users.*

7. Reducing The Need to Travel

One of the reasons that people are unable to access services and facilities is that those services and facilities are some distance away rather than being local, and are frequently in locations which are poorly served by public transport, e.g. on out-of-town and edge of town sites. In addition, many developments are not planned for public transport access e.g. bus stops are farthest away from the entrance to a building whilst the car park is immediately adjacent.

Spatial planning

A number of those participating in the colloquium considered that the current Wales Spatial Plan perpetuated the separation of home and work by encouraging employment provision along the M4 corridor at the same time as supporting house building in valleys communities – making medium distance travel to work inevitable for residents of valleys communities who are able and willing to take up employment elsewhere whilst further excluding those who were only prepared or able to work locally. Participants concluded that the *Wales Spatial Plan should encourage job creation outside the M4 corridor, across the whole of Wales.*

Land use planning

In respect of specific sites, some participants in the colloquium considered that ‘the damage had already been done’ as many inaccessible locations were already developed or had planning permission for development– for example it was claimed that almost all M4 junctions are now fully developed. Given this, the focus, at least in the short term, needs to be on the ‘amelioration’ of inaccessible locations, for example through the provision of transport to work by employers themselves (such as that provided by the 118118 call centre), or help for job-seekers to reach work through car loan schemes or subsidized taxi fares (such as that provided by Working Links).

That said, there are many development sites in Wales which do not yet have planning permission and colloquium participants were unanimous that there was a great deal more that the land use planning system could do to improve accessibility. A key step would be to *strengthen the status of advice in Welsh Assembly Government’s planning technical advice note, TAN 18.* TAN 18 provides guidance to local authorities on the transport issues that need to be considered when appraising a planning application, but the contents are not mandatory and can be and indeed are sometimes ignored. In addition, participants suggested that *accessibility should be a key component in environmental impact assessments* which are undertaken for major developments. As a condition of planning permission, all *major developments should also be required to draw up travel plans* which take account of access for people without a car, and *steps should be taken to ensure the plans are delivered.*

Participants were also vocal that *planning policy should ensure that good public transport provision is ‘designed in’ to developments*, e.g. to plan roads with raised ‘aprons’ at bus stops, to ensure bus stops are close to main entrances, and to provide effective shelter and information about services. This is vital as small mistakes at the design stage can have a massive impact on the relative

ease of use of public transport. As part of their planning for public transport, developers should be expected to hold early discussions with local transport operators about their requirements.

Health and education services

The colloquium paid particular attention to the provision of health and education services. Not only is access to these services vital, but transport difficulties are thought to cost the public purse a great deal e.g. through missed appointments and non-completion of education courses. Poor access can also affect individuals, who may delay seeking help with a condition, or miss routine screening and vital follow-up appointments.

The current reconfiguration and reorganization of services was felt to be both a threat and an opportunity for change. However, the strong focus on achieving targets and tight budgets across the board meant that most service planners paid little if any attention to accessibility. Only one NHS Trust was said to have a travel co-ordinator in post. Participants said that *Local Health Boards and NHS trusts should be required explicitly to ensure that any reconfigured services are fully accessible by public transport to all sections of the community.*

Sometimes very minor changes to services can greatly improve accessibility, for example retiming college start / finish times can enable students to use local public transport services, whilst choice of hospital outpatient appointment times can enable patients to travel by bus who might otherwise have to get a taxi. *Good practice on this issue needs to be exchanged between organizations. Similarly, more thought needs to be given to reducing the need to travel altogether by increasing the number of services that can be accessed by phone or on-line, such as tele-consultations with GPs.*

8. Delivering Better Services

Whilst better services will not necessarily immediately change people's travel behaviour and encourage car drivers to switch to the bus overnight, better services would make a huge difference to the quality of life and mobility of people who are dependent on public transport. The benefits of improving services should therefore not simply be considered as a means of encouraging modal shift. However, greater use of public transport by all sections of the population in addition, could lead to more frequent and extensive public transport services and reduce cost in the long term.

Quality

The quality of some public transport services is a national disgrace – filthy 'bread van' style buses, steep steps on / off buses, high prices, bumpy rides in overheated vehicles, long waits at wind-swept bus stops, and no information are all too common across Wales' towns and cities. Participants in our discussion groups all had stories to tell about the poor quality of services in their area.

There needs to be a sea-change in the quality of public transport – especially bus services. Improvements in quality are required in the vehicles themselves - one participant pointed out that whilst air conditioning is standard in cars, it is not even standard in the very newest buses, whilst others noted that most vehicles are still non-compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act and it will be many years before they are required to comply. Improvements are also needed to the immediate environment at bus stops and railway stations, to reduce passengers' concerns about safety and crime. *Local authorities should be able to specify high quality standards when they purchase non-commercial services and should be encouraged to develop Quality Partnerships with operators as a way of driving up standards on commercial services.*

Crime – or the fear of crime – is a specific concern of some bus and train passengers, both whilst travelling and whilst waiting. Crime is also a concern of bus operators, many of whom withdraw routes following incidents to protect their staff and vehicles. However, transport crime is not a priority for the police because it is not an indicator of performance, hence response times are often slow and preventative measures non-existent. Whilst 'bobbies on buses' may have appeal, some participants concluded that partnership with the local community was more effective at reducing transport crime. One participant said that the introduction of new, attractive 'bendy buses' to serve a large housing estate in Cardiff had been accompanied by a reduction in attacks on buses. *More work is needed to identify effective interventions to tackle and reduce transport-related crime and it was suggested that police authorities should establish a working group to develop good practice.*

Reliability

Within towns and cities, local authorities need to give far more serious consideration to effective bus priority measures – these were said by a bus operator to be key to success. Congestion not only lengthens journey times and reduces reliability, it also affects operators' costs. *Local authorities should be encouraged to adopt bus priority measures, coupled with effective traffic management of private cars.*

Cost

There are also serious issues about the costs of using public transport, which can be prohibitive especially for families or people on low incomes. The Welsh Assembly Government's concessionary fares scheme was broadly welcomed by those in the colloquium, and the Assembly Government's pilot scheme which offers half-fare travel for 16 – 18 year olds was also welcomed. However some participants felt that the half-fare concession should be extended from age 14 to 25 years, providing a consistent reduced fare from age 5 to 25. This proposal would greatly help the inclusion of teenagers and young adults, who currently must pay full adult fare from age fourteen, despite having no or very low incomes *The Welsh Assembly Government should carefully consider introducing a half-fare scheme for 14 – 25 year olds across Wales.*

Innovation

There was strong agreement in the colloquium that *more needs to be done to encourage innovation and the sharing of good practice.* Innovation needs to be encouraged amongst public transport operators, service providers and community groups, as well as local authorities. Several participants gave examples of how local 'pump-priming' funding had allowed transport operators to develop new services, which could take up to six months to become established and attract sufficient passengers to be self-sustaining. They suggested that a fund should be established to support innovative community transport services in Wales.

Alternative forms of public transport

Participants recognized that public transport may not always be feasible. If there is insufficient demand from the public for services, especially in the evenings, then it is simply not cost-effective to operate a conventional bus. A number of examples were cited of local surveys that had shown that there was demand for a particular service, but when it was provided there were very few passengers. However, there are *alternative forms of public transport that are flexible enough to cope with low demand which need to be developed further.*

Great efforts have been made at both national and local level, and for many years, to promote community transport. Community transport can also take a variety of forms, including community taxis, on demand bus services and hospital transport, and also varies considerably across Wales. Experience in England has indicated that there is considerable potential to develop community transport provision, for example through sponsorship of community buses by local businesses such as supermarkets or cinemas, whilst some local examples in Wales have also highlighted potentially innovative use of community transport e.g. liaison with Job Centre Plus to provide transport for jobseekers, or to provide transport on discharge from hospital. Participants also concluded that *there is considerable potential to develop social enterprises which provide transport services – this should be actively explored.* Such enterprises may be able to be supported by the forthcoming round of EU convergence funding. However, the development of community transport is seriously constrained by legislation which prohibits generation of profits by community transport operators. Lastly, although there were a number of examples of good practice, there needed to be *more exchange of experience between organisations.*

Annex 1: List of Colloquium Participants

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Chris Ashman | Welsh Assembly Government |
| Steve Barrett | Cardiff County Council |
| Adele Baumgardt | Equal Opportunity Commission |
| Will Bee | Disability Rights Commission |
| Ian Benbow | GelliDeg Foundation |
| David Blainey | ATCO Wales / Flintshire County Council |
| Bob Brierley | Secretary to SEWTA |
| David Brown | Cardiff Bus |
| Angela Carey | Atkins in Wales |
| Richard Essex | RICS Wales |
| Paul Harley | Bus Users UK |
| Kelly Harris | Atkins in Wales |
| Chris Hartwell | Wales TUC |
| Mari James | M J Associates Ltd |
| Martin Jones | South Wales Police |
| Tomi Jones | Ceredigion County Council |
| Denys Morgan | Institute of Civil Engineers |
| Cath Mullin | Welsh Assembly Government |
| Oliver Newcombe | Atkins in Wales |
| Geoff Ogden | Atkins in Wales |
| Jessica Osborn | Communities First Tredegar Central & West and Sirhowy |
| Lesley Punter | Welsh Assembly Government |
| Gareth Roach | The Bevan Foundation |
| Peter Slater | Peter Slater Consultancy |
| Sarah Stone | Age Concern Cymru |
| Dafydd Thomas | Sustrans |
| Michael Whittaker | Taith |
| Krysta Williams | Working Links |
| Victoria Winckler | The Bevan Foundation |

NOTE

BEVANA
LAD

