

WORKSHOP on Innovation in Accessible Transport For All

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World Bank Headquarters
1818 H Street, NW
USA-Washington DC

Objective

The objective of this note is to set the scene for discussions and debate that will take place first at a one day Workshop sponsored jointly by the International Transport Forum and the World Bank to be held in Washington DC on January 14th 2010, and then at the International Transport Forum to be held in Leipzig, Germany from May 26th - 28th 2010. The focus is the role of innovation in promoting effective solutions to the transport needs of disabled and older people in both developed and less developed economies.

What do we mean by innovation?

Innovation means challenging traditional ways of thinking and working. In the transport field innovation is key to delivering solutions to the global challenges of sustainability, social inclusion and accessibility.

Innovation isn't only relevant to developed economies and high tech options. It is about identifying problems and applying "smart" thinking to find appropriate ways of working.

Why is it important?

In many countries there is and will continue to be a significant increase in the number of older people. At the same time birth rates are falling. This means that there will be fewer working age people to sustain an ageing population who are not able to remain independently mobile. There is a strong correlation between age and disability. In less developed countries the proportion of disabled people is high with lack of accessible transport exacerbating problems of poverty and unemployment.

Who needs to be engaged?

The greatest need for innovation is in understanding and application. For change to happen, high level political engagement is the starting point. Without that we cannot create a climate within which these issues are seen as an integral part of transport planning and delivery. However, to make change happen, there must also be engagement of all transport professionals as well as NGOs and other stakeholders in creating a common vision of accessibility.

Key areas

Innovation can take many forms and can impact both directly on disabled and older people's ability to travel (for example through more accessible vehicles, better information, cheaper fares) and indirectly (for example through legislation, standards, planning, political focus).

Among the areas that could usefully be explored are:

■ Policy and Governance

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability points to the need for standards to be developed and implemented in addition to general rights provisions. It also specifies that requirements must apply to private entities delivering public services as well as to those in the public sector. The Convention calls on signatory States to develop new ideas and new technology to facilitate the mobility and independent living of disabled people. This broad legal mandate is additional to both general and specific legislation dealing with rights in general and transport in particular in many developed countries.

There is a key role for Governments in both developed and less developed countries to create a climate within which accessibility can be introduced for the first time or better integrated into legal and other structures. The Convention is also a valuable policy lever to stimulate and monitor progress.

Government and administrative structures both at national and local levels also need a new focus on joint work and collaboration to produce results. This can be as diverse as recognizing that investment in transport accessibility can bring benefits to health and welfare programmes through to ensuring that when an accessible bus route or BRT is introduced, the sidewalks are also made accessible so that people can reach the transport system.

The engagement of people with disabilities in developing and delivering accessibility improvements is also crucial. New thinking is needed to ensure that their voice is an integral and non-negotiable part of the policy making process.

Financial and fiscal innovation has an important role both in stimulating development and investment and in enabling disabled and older people (many of whom are on low incomes) to travel.

It is important too that research funding is targeted at finding simple low cost solutions that can help large numbers of people achieve basic mobility as well as at larger scale technology focussed developments.

■ Planning

There is too often a disconnect between the planning processes and the realities of daily living for those with mobility difficulties. Innovative approaches to land use planning could shift the

focus onto neighbourhood living and communities which bring environmental benefits as well as enabling disabled and older people to live independently and to be self sufficient. Initiatives of this kind also link in with the broader agenda for livable and sustainable communities which many Governments are pursuing. . The UN Convention supports this growing connectivity between independent living, livable and sustainable communities

The universal introduction of training for all transport and associated professionals in understanding and respecting the needs of disabled and older people would also bring significant benefits.

■ Design & Technology

Advances in technology have brought “spin off” benefits to disabled and older people in many areas including real time information, low floor vehicles and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which has made a major impact in many cities in less developed countries. However, there is scope for more focussed innovation in understanding what the needs of disabled and older people are and targeting innovation more directly to those needs.

Key to this is a clearer recognition that concern for accessibility, like concern for the environment, benefits everyone and that its costs should be built into transport investment from the outset. Universal design is a highly innovative approach that can be applied both to the built environment and to transport vehicles and infrastructure and should be given greater prominence at every level.

Implementation and Barriers to Progress

There is, currently a significant gap between rhetoric and reality. There is an urgent need for innovation in the political and governance processes to translate legislation and policy frameworks into defined standards and work programmes with measurable targets for implementation. Such innovation might include targeted incentives to promote and encourage accessibility.

There is scope too for re-thinking how best to ensure that the costs of accessibility are balanced against the benefits which go far beyond the transport sector into health and welfare programmes. Further research is needed to provide quantitative data to support this thesis.

Accessibility does not yet have the high profile of other global issues and the far reaching consequences to society of transport policies that exclude growing numbers of disabled and older people are often not understood at political or professional levels. As a result investment is lagging significantly behind need.

Contacts:

Mary Crass

International Transport Forum
mary.crass@oecd.org
Phone (+33 1) 45 24 13 24

Marco Nicoli

The World Bank
Disability & Development Team
mnicoli@worldbank.org
Phone (+1 202) 473 0304

Julie Babinard

The World Bank
Transport and Social Responsibility
jbabinard@worldbank.org
Phone (+1 202) 458 8075