

Equitable Access: No Passenger Left Behind

SESSION SUMMARY

Wednesday, 25 May 2011

Personal mobility and access to goods, services and employment are key determinants of better quality of life. Poor access to transport and reduced mobility are often linked to economic disadvantage, inequality and social exclusion. Segments of society that are particularly vulnerable to inequitable access to transport include older and disabled people, economically disadvantaged individuals, women, young adults, and those who live in remote and rural communities. This session explored transport's role in reducing inequity and promoting better living. The main focus was on why transport planning is failing to provide adequate transport services to large parts of the population.

Chair

- Ann Frye, Director, Ann Frye Ltd, UK

Panellists

- Robert Cervero, Director Transportation Center, University of California, Berkeley, USA
- Chantal Duchène, Director, ChD Mobilité Transport, France
- Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder and CEO, Policylink, USA
- David Lewis, Senior Vice President, HDR Corporation, Canada
- Geetam Tiwari, Professor and Chair, Indian Institute of Technology, India

A different paradigm is needed

Accessibility is fundamental as it concerns linking places to fulfill basic needs such as education, health services, shopping, social interactions and working. Priority has been given to increasing speeds, but, in the United-States, for example, 30 to 40 per cent of the population is left behind in accessibility terms. In developing countries it can be as high as 85 per cent of the population. In car-centre cities which are the dominant model, a large part of the population is not able to drive or afford a car. But in planning improvements to the transport system, cost- benefit analysis often reinforces the bias towards the car. According to the panel, there is an over-fascination for mega projects which place car travel at the top and pedestrian needs at the bottom. The specific requirements of women who often have non-paid (at

home) and paid tasks within their daily life are also not properly understood by planners and designers.

Promoting equal access and opportunities should be the goal and it is only possible if the real costs of car usage become visible. At the same time, high costs and high profile projects create inequalities and often displace poor populations to make room for roads and railways. The roads built often add to the safety problems of poor populations living alongside. And in developing countries, the poor cannot afford to use metro systems built through their neighbourhoods. Taking into account pedestrian and cyclist needs is a key part of providing equitable and sustainable transport. It is about recreating neighbourhood and geographic proximity. There is an obvious need to re-prioritize policy goals concerning transport projects and design them in accordance with population needs. The voice of those left behind has to be heard consistently. And non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a valuable role in constantly reminding us of the problem.

Increased opportunities provided by access to services are critical to quality of life. We need to measure well-being beyond GDP. Increased efficiency can be made consistent with improvements in quality of life when proper economic signals are in place and better indicators are used in appraisals.

In terms of policy making, long term choices have to be made compatible with equity and sustainability. Politicians have to adopt a strategic view but also consider proximity needs. Understanding co-benefits is essential.

In economic terms, subsidising car users directly and indirectly creates huge distortions between the transport modes. Correcting this and opening the market for innovative and diversified transport supply is part of keeping an efficient overall transport system. A clear vision of a functional city is a basic requirement.

Consultation with the community has to be the basis for all transport planning. Project appraisal has to start with a dialogue with all parts of the community the project is designed to serve if it is to successfully deliver improved accessibility. As Geetham Tiwari summarised, "The single most important practical measure would be to include providing pedestrian and cycling facilities as a compulsory part of any major urban transport development project".