



TACKLING TRANSPORT INJUSTICE

Practical advice for local authorities



Mike Tisdell, Tom Cohen and Ersilia Verlinghieri
University of Westminster
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In May 2022 we held an event at the University of Westminster entitled *Transport Justice: Putting Principles into Practice*.

The event was part of a project conceived to promote wider awareness of issues of transport justice. We were joined by leading academics in the field of transport justice, along with practitioners working across the UK in local government, including transport officers and councillors.

This report reflects upon this event, as well as the wider literature, and is intended to offer practical approaches to developing policy which redresses transport injustice. These approaches will be of particular relevance to those working in UK local government, but we hope they will be of use to anyone who has an interest in making our transport systems fairer and more socially inclusive.

We believe more can be done to tackle injustices in UK transport, but that this will require a shift of mindset in the way transport is understood and planned. This can only be achieved through a collective effort which would include policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and campaigners.

Where we use the term ‘we’ in its broadest sense, we do so to include not just the authors of this report, but also the wider community of people who would like to contribute to this collective effort.



WHAT IS TRANSPORT JUSTICE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Transport justice might most simply be understood as a situation in which our transport system, together with projects and policies being implemented, are aligned with wider principles of social and environmental justice.

We can understand transport justice as having two broad dimensions:

Distributional: where there is fairness in the distribution across society of the benefits and burdens of transport.

Procedural: where everyone has an opportunity to participate meaningfully in fair decision-making processes.

Since all people need adequate transport options to engage in a full life, those with an influence on how our transport system develops should make efforts to ensure decisions are fair and do not deepen or reinforce inequality. Transport in the UK is, however, characterised by unequal access, including to primary services such as healthcare, education, and job opportunities. Where adequate transport is unavailable, this can exacerbate **social exclusion**, and isolate individuals from social relations and activities meaningful to them, including spending time with their families and friends.¹

Where our transport system is most clearly failing, we find examples of **transport poverty**, which can be understood as a situation where one or more of the following five conditions is met:

1. There is no transport option available that is suited to the individual's physical condition and capabilities.
2. The existing transport options do not reach destinations where the individual can fulfil their daily activity needs, in order to maintain a reasonable quality of life.
3. The necessary weekly amount spent on transport leaves the household with a

residual income below the official poverty line.

4. The individual needs to spend an excessive amount of time travelling, leading to time poverty or social isolation.
5. The prevailing travel conditions are dangerous, unsafe or unhealthy for the individual.²

Injustices in our transport system expose the biases and shortcomings inherent in conventional approaches to transport and mobility, and the resulting dominant transport system, centred on facilitating private motorised mobility. The dominant methods for developing and appraising transport projects have tended to promote outcomes which worsen social, health and environmental inequality, potentially meaning that those working in transport inadvertently perpetuate injustice.

Some prominent advocates for transport justice have argued transport planning as a discipline needs to be set on an entirely new footing, with an **accessibility** perspective replacing current methods which are centred on **mobility**. Whether or not we require a wholesale reconsideration of how we approach transport planning, it is clear is that the dominant paradigm of appraising projects using standard cost-benefit analysis (which focuses on the volume and speed of movement) tells us little about projects' distributional impacts, or the extent to which they fulfil the underlying purpose of travel.

Accessibility: the relative ease with which people can get to destinations, at reasonable cost and in reasonable time. Accessibility problems may relate to the availability of transport, as well as the safety, affordability and regularity of services. Accessibility is also a function of the location of important services and activities.

The distribution of transport spending in the UK has tended to be regressive, with the benefits enjoyed more by the wealthy than those on low incomes. And the beneficiaries are overwhelmingly those already able to access individual motorised mobility options rather than those relying on other modes, including public transport. The UK transport system is also characterised by inequitable exposures to transport externalities such as road danger and air pollution, including instances of the ‘double injustice’ where those who travel the least are often the most ‘travelled-upon’.

In the UK, the richest ten per cent of society receives three times as much transport subsidy as the poorest ten per cent.³

According to 2012 analysis, the cost of fuel and Vehicle Excise Duty (“road tax”) represented 8.1% of the budget of the poorest tenth of car owners, but only 5.8% of the tenth with the highest incomes.⁴

Children in the lowest socioeconomic group are up to 28 times more likely to be killed on the roads than those in the top group.⁵

The most common approaches to the development of transport policy, as well as individual schemes, also give little space for meaningful deliberation, and exclude many people from the conversation about how we shape transport and public space, especially those already poorly represented in society, including disabled people, women, younger or older people, and people from ethnic minorities. This lack of representation can reinforce the dynamic in transport spending where the greatest benefit accrues to those relatively well-off in society and policy continues to underserve those currently disadvantaged by our transport system.

In our discussions with those working in local government, it has been apparent that there is significant appetite in many authorities to rethink transport. The increasingly urgent challenge of decarbonisation has created an impetus in many councils to promote sustainable modes of transport, with many officers and councillors recognising the need for disruptive adaptations to their transport systems. There is also significant awareness of the unfairness inherent in conventional transport planning and present transport systems. But those working in local government generally appear to have less confidence that considerations of justice are informing practice sufficiently, and are unsure how to change this. It is in this context that we offer the following introductory thoughts on how local authorities might set out on the path of tackling transport injustice.



SO WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

We present below a four-stage cycle: understanding; goal-setting; policy development; and evaluation. In all stages there will be some component of procedural justice, reflecting that both policy and practice will be strengthened by a broad range of voices. Put simply, the most effective and just policies will develop through fair decision-making processes where space is allowed for discussion, feedback and participation from across society, particularly including those typically marginalised by or excluded from traditional consultation exercises.

1. Understand

We suggest there is significant room for improvement in the understanding of how effectively people are served by transport. Many local-government stakeholders who have engaged with us during this project told us they are aware of underlying issues in local transport, for example with 'forced' car ownership, or barriers to walking, but know they lack the data or evidence to inform policy.

Local transport authorities can begin by asking themselves a simple question: does local transport policy tend to provide improvements to those with an already adequate service, rather than identifying and addressing mobility problems and unmet needs?

As a starting point, carrying out measurements based upon accessibility tends to be common to practical proposals for tackling injustice, since these tell us how the availability of transport is distributed through society and the extent to which this satisfies the underlying purpose of travel.

Professor Karel Martens presented at our event in London, arguing for a complete renewal of the processes of transport planning based upon principles of justice. To assess whether every person is served adequately by transport he proposes local authorities:

Measure accessibility. This is essentially a measure of freedom, where freedom can be for example understood as the ability to live the life that one desires. This can reveal the differences of freedom experienced by those with a car or without, or in central locations vs peripheral.

Measure mobility problems. Rather than measure travel behaviour (e.g. via surveys and models), focus on mobility/accessibility problems and their frequency and severity. A freedom of mobility survey can illuminate:

1. Hardship (trip-related difficulties)
2. Autonomy (are people dependent upon others to access services?)
3. Freedom (can people potentially conduct all desired trips?)⁶

Taking an approach such as that proposed by Martens can allow transport issues to be understood in terms of their severity, potentially revealing that travel time losses (such as those resulting from highway congestion) are a much less serious problem than, for example, transport poverty. This approach allows us to get a more detailed picture of the problems to be tackled, as well as their importance, and accentuates the most fundamental questions regarding transport - can people make the trips they would like to make? Can they access services and destinations important to them?

Sustrans conducted an analysis of transport poverty in England by drawing together three indicators:

- Areas of low income (where the costs of running a car or using public transport would place a significant strain on household budgets)
- Areas where a significant proportion of residents live more than a mile from their nearest bus or railway station
- Areas where it would take longer than an hour to access essential goods and services by walking, cycling or public transport

They found 1.5 million people in England were at high risk of suffering transport poverty, with half of all local authorities in England containing at least one high-risk area.⁷

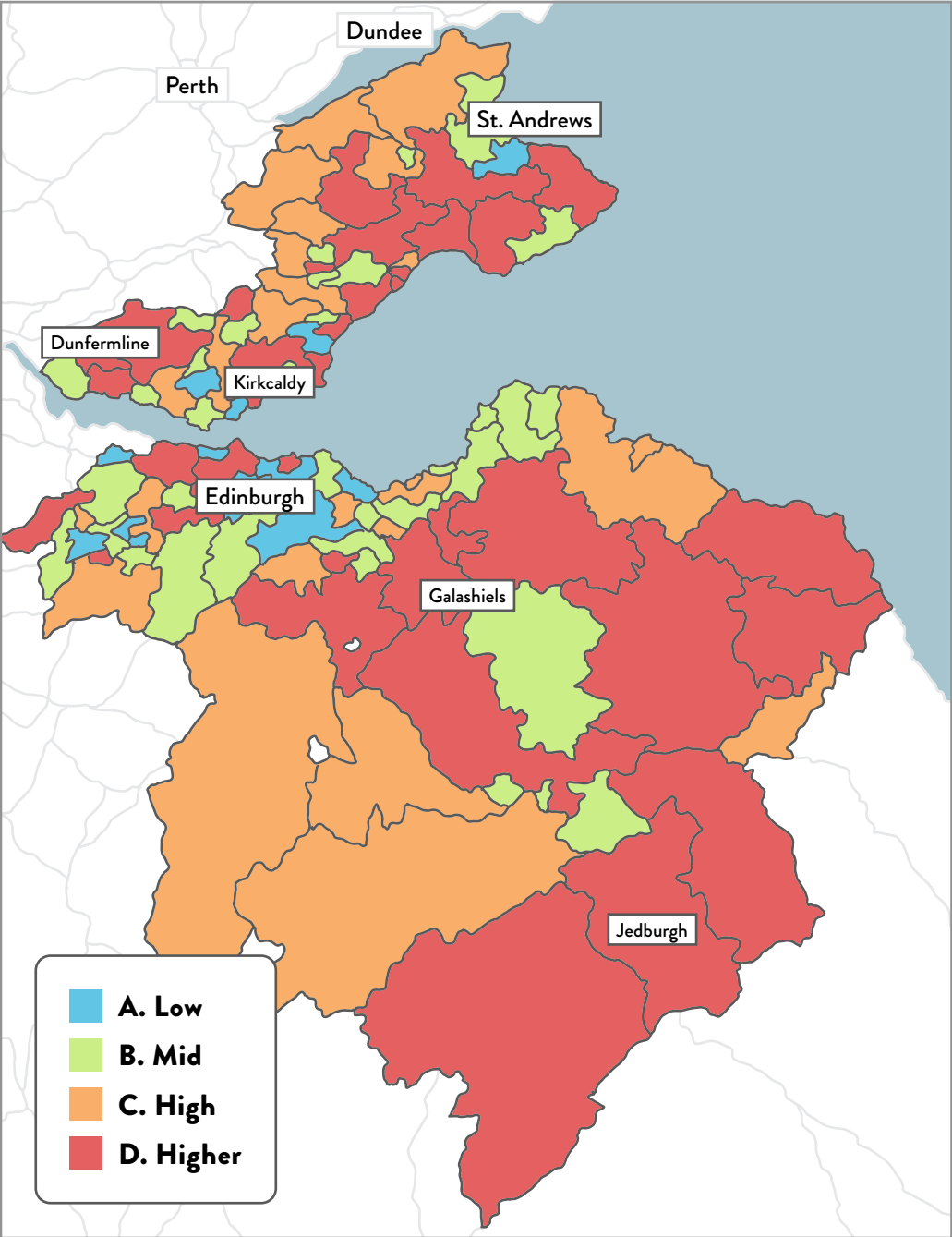
Understanding who is underserved by transport might also include undertaking more targeted assessments designed to identify particular forms of hardship or exclusion. A number of such exercises have been undertaken, including analyses of transport poverty (see box above), what have been called ‘transport deserts’ (where little or no service exists for those without a car)⁸, or specifically on the connectivity issues faced by ‘left-behind’ communities⁹.

What these examples have in common is that the focus of assessment has been identifying where the available transport is insufficient for community need, often by speaking with individuals about the details of their travel requirements. This is in contrast with traditional, economics-based methods which are centred upon use of the existing system, with priorities identified and justified either as making the system more efficient (for example by reducing congestion), or improving the experience of those already travelling on busy corridors.



The Regional Prosperity Framework for Edinburgh and South-East Scotland uses a Workforce Mobility Deprivation Index (see Figure 1), based on a combination of four indicators from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation which measure citizen access to employment, training and education. This index has allowed authorities to develop a clearer picture of where transport conditions present a barrier to employment for deprived communities, supporting the case for investment towards a coordinated, flexible and affordable public transport network in the region.¹⁰

Figure 1: Workforce Mobility Deprivation Index¹⁰



2. Set goals

Adopting explicit goals to make transport more equitable is a natural next step for authorities aiming to reduce transport injustice. The primary benefit of such goals will lie in enabling authorities to identify local priorities which transport policy could address, but they will also serve to demonstrate the authority's commitment to making improvements. Setting goals can help to ensure that new investment enables trips which people would like to make but currently do not for reasons of cost, safety, lack of service, or insufficient physical accessibility, rather than being spent upon incremental improvements for those already relatively well-served by the system. Furthermore, setting goals in collaboration with the communities who stand to benefit may mean both that they are better targeted and that they have broader support.

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** is an example of strategic policy that explicitly embraces justice. It comprises seven well-being goals, supported by national milestones set against selected indicators (see Figure 2). One that relates to the goal “*A more equal Wales*” is: elimination of the pay gap for gender, disability and ethnicity by 2050.¹¹

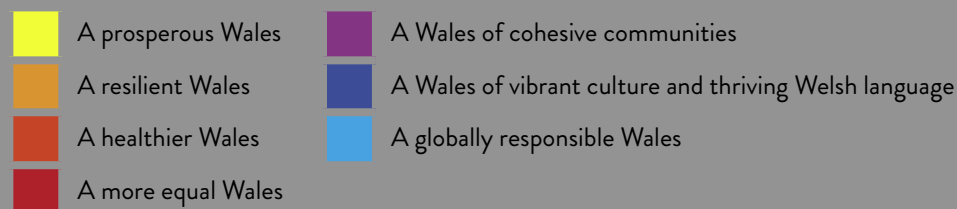
The Act has allowed new criteria to be applied to transport projects, both for the re-appraisal of existing schemes and the development of new projects. For example, a £1.6 billion relief road for the M4 motorway, designed to tackle a problem of congestion around Newport, was cancelled with reference to the Act, the Welsh Government arguing that the money would be better spent on public transport projects.¹²

Figure 2: Indicators and goals associated with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (excerpt) ¹¹

Progress against the well-being goals

Data and summaries for each of the national well-being indicators

The national indicators help tell a story of progress against more than one of the well-being goals, and to help you to navigate these links we have highlighted the links between indicators and goals. Where an indicator is used to measure the progress towards a national milestone, this has also been highlighted.



		Goals							
National Well-being Indicators		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	National milestone
01	Percentage of live single births with a birth weight of under 2,500g	•	•			•	•	•	
02	Healthy life expectancy at birth including the gap between the least and most deprived	•	•			•	•	•	
03	Percentage of adults with two or more healthy lifestyle behaviours	•	•					•	
04	Levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) pollution in the air				•	•	•		
05	Percentage of children with two or more healthy lifestyle behaviours	•	•				•	•	✓

It should be the case that goals addressing equity and justice can complement, or at least be reconciled with, other strategic priorities. In some instances, fairness considerations may form a component of strategic policy across all responsibilities of local government, which then informs decision-making on local transport. In others, consideration can be given to how a justice framework can be embedded in local transport strategy, which will then inform responses to other priorities relevant to transport policy such as decarbonisation or improving road safety.

Adopting strategic goals based upon principles of justice also presents authorities with an opportunity to reconsider existing policies and/or projects. There are many examples of major schemes being re-evaluated, exposing the limitations of conventional appraisal methods, but considerations of equity and fairness (see box below) can also inform more routine yet critical aspects of local transport policy such as periodic maintenance or parking.

Social impact assessment is one means of complementing conventional appraisal in order to capture the equity effects of projects. Combining quantitative analysis of existing government-held datasets with qualitative fieldwork which engages with local communities, this approach provides a clear picture of the distributional impacts of transport projects, and allows for the identification and mitigation of negative social outcomes. An application of the method to a by-pass in a deprived part of Wales provided a rich understanding of the distribution of social benefits and disbenefits and revealed the potential for local voices significantly to enhance the project's design and, as a result, its positive impacts.¹³

3. Develop policies/projects that tackle injustice

Having set strategic transport-justice goals, authorities can then use them to inform both new policy initiatives and existing programmes of work. There have been numerous policy initiatives in the UK aimed at reducing transport injustice and these can take many forms, from interventions targeted at a specific form of injustice, to embedding considerations of justice within the everyday functions of a transport authority. Several authorities have, for example, shaped their parking policy around considerations of equity and fairness, whilst others have prioritised investment in deprived wards or neighbourhoods.

The **age-friendly transport** project in Greater Manchester is an example of how the needs of older people in society can be successfully integrated into transport planning. A series of engagement exercises in which researchers worked alongside charities, NGOs and local communities resulted in a co-produced action plan for Transport for Greater Manchester on transport and mobility for older people. Recommendations included interventions specific to this group such as training transport staff in older people's needs, but also measures likely to improve conditions for other groups too, such as extended green times at pedestrian crossings and removing local obstructions to footways.¹⁴

As well as supporting the development of new programmes, a transport-justice goal or target can act as a criterion against which to appraise individual policies. In doing this, it is important that consideration is given to the potential for unintended impacts, to ensure that work to increase transport justice supports and does not conflict with other priorities such as environmental improvements, but there is also considerable scope for policies that tackle injustice to bring co-benefits across policy areas. For example, there are numerous good examples of transport initiatives which reduce barriers to accessing employment, resulting in increased economic participation. There are also good examples of local authorities placing equity at the heart of the planning and design of active-travel schemes, widening the benefits to public health and wellbeing.

Exercises in co-creation can also be productive in developing new policy or guiding existing programmes of work, to ensure the diverse needs of local people are being properly taken into account at the level of an individual project. Being able to demonstrate that policy has resulted from a fair decision-making process, where all local people have a chance to contribute meaningfully, may also help to build support and trust amongst communities. Moreover, showing that policy has been clearly informed by considerations of fairness and equity may win authorities some credit with local stakeholders, particularly where interventions attract some degree of opposition.

4. Evaluate

It is important to understand of any transport policy whether or not it is meeting its objectives, and this is of course also true of policies designed to reduce injustice. A sound approach to monitoring and evaluation will enable authorities to identify lessons to inform future policy-making, allowing them to address shortcomings and unintended negative consequences, and improve outcomes over time. And, in the event that a policy is meeting its objectives, good evidence from evaluation allows an authority to make this widely known (see boxes in this section). A wide range of evaluation methods can be used, many of which can complement standard approaches focused on the volume and speed of travel with, for example, qualitative in-depth analysis, providing a more detailed picture of the distributional impacts of policy. It is not always necessary to collect new data: authorities can often use existing datasets to track the spread of burdens and benefits of new policies, for example. One such dataset is the Department for Transport's spatially detailed estimates of key services accessible within specified journey times.¹⁵

Transport for London's policy of providing free bus travel for under-18s is designed to reduce social exclusion and remove barriers to accessing education. Evaluation combining quantitative analysis with qualitative data collection (including interviews and focus groups) provided a rich picture of the policy's impacts, particularly emphasising its enabling effect upon discretionary travel, for example in visiting friends, and promoting independence.¹⁶

The Treasury's guidance suggests evaluation should cover three main areas: the process of delivery, the impact of schemes, and their value for money.¹⁷ There is also transport-specific guidance on conducting evaluation.¹⁸

Transport for West Midlands' longstanding **Workwise** scheme is designed to remove travel barriers to employment across the region. Evaluation has shown 70% of people who find jobs using the free or reduced-price travel provided by the scheme remain in employment, whilst 90% continue to use sustainable modes to travel to work.¹⁹

When the spend on supporting travel for jobseekers was compared with the savings in Jobseeker's Allowance payments, the scheme was estimated to provide net savings of £180-£230 per client.²⁰

IS THIS PRACTICAL?

We recognise that local authorities in the UK are under huge pressure. Scarce funding, a bleak economic outlook, the unprecedented challenge presented by climate change, as well as the disruption to travel patterns wrought by COVID-19 and its after-effects, all place a huge burden on the limited resources of local government. There is a clear danger that, in the face of such pressures, justice could remain an afterthought.

Practical steps to reduce transport injustice need not be overly onerous, however, and may even produce cost savings, particularly where benefits to public health or the wider economy are properly accounted for. We should also consider whether a failure to embed principles of transport justice can lead to the misallocation of scarce resources. By adopting an approach which seeks actively to reduce injustice, transport authorities can ensure limited funds make significant and tangible improvements, delivering large benefits for those currently marginalised or excluded, rather than minor and incremental improvements to the journey times of those already best served by the transport system.



CONTACT DETAILS

Tom Cohen: t.cohen@westminster.ac.uk

Ersilia Verlinghieri: e.verlinghieri@westminster.ac.uk

<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/research/groups-and-centres/transport-studies-research-group>

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