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Mobility: Rights, obligations and equity in an ageing society

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Mobility: Rights Obligations and Equity in an Ageing Society

05

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Mobility

Rights, Obligations and Equity in an Ageing Society

Discussion Paper No. 2011-5

Ann Frye
Ann Frye Ltd

April 2011

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT FORUM

The International Transport Forum at the OECD is an intergovernmental organisation with 52 member countries. It acts as a strategic think tank with the objective of helping shape the transport policy agenda on a global level and ensuring that it contributes to economic growth, environmental protection, social inclusion and the preservation of human life and well-being. The International Transport Forum organizes an annual summit of Ministers along with leading representatives from industry, civil society and academia.

The International Transport Forum was created under a Declaration issued by the Council of Ministers of the ECMT (European Conference of Ministers of Transport) at its Ministerial Session in May 2006 under the legal authority of the Protocol of the ECMT, signed in Brussels on 17 October 1953, and legal instruments of the OECD.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Demographic trends worldwide indicate significant increases in the number of older people in the population in the coming years. There is a close link between age and disability, and the longer people live the more likely they are to become disabled to some degree. Disability takes many forms: physical, sensory and cognitive and all potentially affect people's ability to go out and about independently.

The social and economic implications of sustaining the growing population of older people are enormous. Land use planning and transport development and operation have a key role to play in enabling older and disabled people to retain independent mobility and to reduce their need for costly support from the state in more developed regions or to alleviate poverty and isolation in some developing countries.

The global trends towards urbanisation mean that the number of older people in many towns and cities is growing and policy agendas such as "liveability" and "age friendly cities" are pushing authorities towards greater engagement with what older and disabled people want. At the same time, those in rural areas, particularly in developing countries, face equally severe but very different problems that are not yet fully recognised.

There is a range of tools available to promote greater accessibility including legislation and funding. At the global level the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities may prove to be a catalyst for change – or provide an excuse for inertia.

The concept of giving "rights" to consumers is now common in many parts of the world. But the "right" to accessible public transport or a barrier free pedestrian environment cannot be achieved without imposing obligations on those responsible for transport delivery and highway management. These include technical understanding of accessibility requirements, engagement with end users at a detailed level and investment in upgrading or replacing vehicles and infrastructure and in staff training.

National and regional laws and guidelines on discrimination and rights and technical guidance are available. But there are differing views on the benefits of global standardisation and the importance of regional and local differences based on expressed needs and preferences of local people.

There is currently a significant gap in many parts of the world between the overarching legal and policy frameworks and the progress on the ground. Changing political priorities, budget constraints and a simple lack of understanding of the scale and implications of the problem are all contributory factors.

An absence of evaluation of the real life benefits of initiatives adds both to costs and frustrations. This is linked in part to a continuing perception that accessibility is about welfare and is therefore outside normal economic scrutiny. Policies such as the widespread availability of free travel to older and disabled people regardless of their means need to be re-examined.

The concept of universal design which provides more cost-effective solutions for the population as a whole together with the economic driver of tourism among older and disabled people are helping to promote greater recognition of the need for accessibility to be an integral part of transport planning and delivery rather than a costly afterthought. However, the question of how far the transport sector can and should be held responsible for delivering and funding the necessary changes must also be explored.

1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Global trends

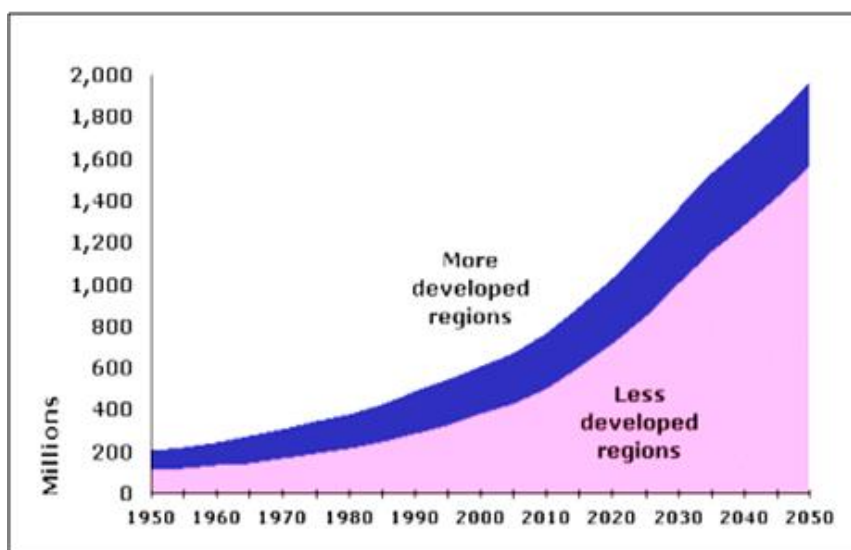
The demographic trends common to both developed and developing countries are beginning to have a profound social and economic impact in many countries. United Nations data¹ on worldwide demographic trends show that:

- 11 percent of the global population is now more than 60 years old;
- By 2050, this figure is expected to be 22%; rising from 700 million people in 2009 to 2 billion;
- The number of people aged over 80 is growing at 4% per annum; the population as a whole is growing at 1% per annum.

Distribution

The pace of population ageing is faster in developing than in developed countries (see Figure 1 below):

Figure 1: **The Population over 60 by region**



Source: HelpAge International.

1. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Report on World Population Ageing, 2009.

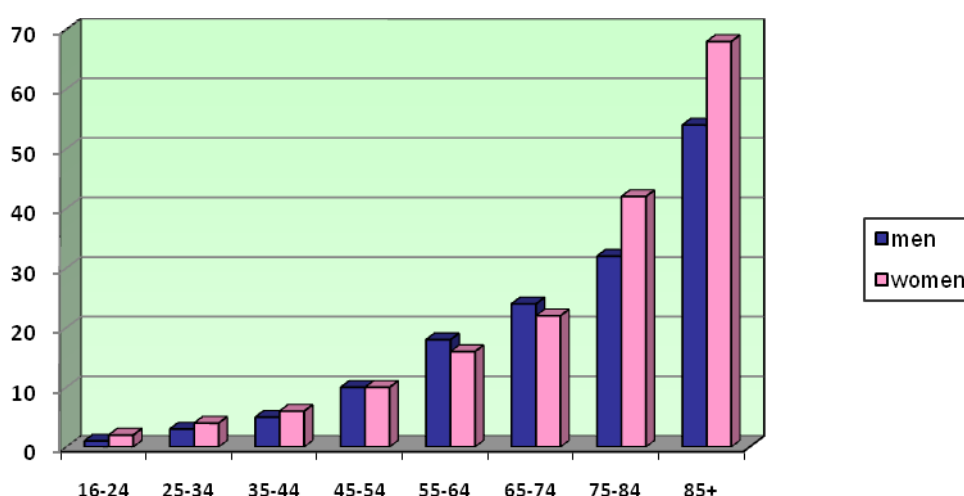
Currently 64% of older people live in less developed regions; by 2050 this figure will rise to 80%. 3.5 million people will be over 100 years old by 2050: over half will live in Asia.

The Link between Age and Disability

It is also clear that there is a strong correlation between age and disability (see Figure 2 below). There is evidence² that:

- About 10% of the world's population has a disability;
- About one third of older people have a disability and in some countries as many as two thirds of disabled people are also elderly.

Figure 2. **Correlation between age and disability**



Source: Metz & Underwood, "Older, Richer, Fitter".

Data and opinions on whether the link between age and disability will continue in future are divided. There is some evidence from the USA that improved public and environmental health policies as well as better personal medical care are reducing the incidence of disability in some industrialised societies³. However, a 2007 OECD study⁴ which looks specifically at whether there is evidence of a reduction in severe disability among elderly people in 12 OECD countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, comments that:

"It would not seem prudent for policy-makers to count on future reductions in the prevalence of severe disability among elderly people..."

2. UN Enable Programme.
3. Disability Trends among Elderly Persons and Implications for the Future; Waldmann, T, Korbin L, 2000.
4. Trends in Severe Disability among Elderly People: Assessing the Evidence in 12 OECD Countries and the Future Implications; Lafortune, G, Balestat, G, and the Disability Study Expert Group Members. OECD 2007.

The report continues:

“Even though disability prevalence rates have declined to some extent in recent years in some countries, the ageing of the population and the greater longevity of individuals can be expected to lead to increasing numbers of people at older ages with a severe disability.”

Defining Disability

Disability comes in many forms and in old age people are likely to be affected by a range of limiting factors, for example, low vision, hearing loss and pain and stiffness in joints. Research over the past 30 years has helped to identify key design and operational changes in the transport scene to meet the needs of people with physical or sensory problems. Features such as low floors, colour contrast on stanchions and step edges and non-slip surfaces can make a significant difference to many older and disabled people.

It is also important to recognise in a transport context that disability is not only about physical or sensory impairment. Cognitive impairment is also closely linked with age-related conditions. Dementia and related neurological conditions affect 10% of people aged over 65. Stroke is another major cause of neurological impairment and as survival rates improve growing numbers of people are living with the effects. In Sweden, for example, between 25 000 and 30 000 people every year have a stroke⁵.

Mental health problems are another major issue with one in four individuals (according to World Health Organisation data⁶) experiencing mental health problems at some time in their lives. One of the most effective ways to support the rehabilitation and recovery of people with mental health problems is to give them the confidence to get out and to travel independently. In a transport context, this means paying attention to situations that create stress such as poor information (visual or audible) or signage. An ITF report published in 2009⁷ deals with these issues.

The Link between Disability & Poverty

UN sources show that 80% of the world's 500 million disabled people live in developing countries⁸. The World Bank estimates that one in five of the world's poorest people are disabled and live in a family with a disabled member⁹. This means not only that disabled peoples are twice as likely to live in poverty, they will also often be among the poorest of poor people.

Poor road safety, lack of health care and conflict are all major contributory factors to disability.

5. Karolinska Institutet, Sweden.

6. Investing in Mental Health, World Health Organisation, 2003.

7. Cognitive Impairment, Mental Health & Transport International Transport Forum, 2009.

8. www.un.org/disabilities/convention/facts.shtml

9. Poverty & Disability: A Survey of the Literature, Elwan, A World Bank, 1999.

In many developing countries, for those who become disabled the opportunities for even the most basic rehabilitation (such as the availability of useable wheelchairs) are scarce. The World Health Organisation¹⁰ estimates that there are 20 million people who need a wheelchair and don't have one.

For those born with a disability, a lack of access to education is a major contributory factor to poverty. It is estimated that more than 90% of disabled children in developing countries still do not attend school¹¹. As a result, the employment rate of people with disabilities in India, for example, is 60% lower than that of the general population¹². An estimated 470 million of the world's working age population are disabled¹³.

In many cases at the root of the problem of lack of education and lack of employment is simply lack of access and mobility. If disabled children cannot get to school or disabled adults to employment, the spiral of disability and poverty is likely to continue.

It could be argued that improving the living standards and economic status of these countries would help to lift disabled people out of poverty. However, this is clearly a long term goal and in the short and medium terms targeting lack of mobility as one of the major obstacles to economic self sufficiency could begin to address the problem.

Urban and Rural issues

Taken together the number of disabled and older people amount to between 25 and 30% of the world's population.

A majority of people now live in urban areas (already more than half and by 2025 nearly 60% according to UNFPA¹⁴). The fastest rate of urbanisation is in developing countries so these trends on age and disability are particularly relevant to urban environments. Population growth may strain the fiscal capacity of urban areas in the developing world to respond to new infrastructure needs.

However there are also acute problems facing disabled and older people in rural areas. In the developed world these include lack of access to public transport services and to local facilities such as shops and medical centres. In the developing world a complete absence of paved roads or other basic facilities (exacerbated by a lack of appropriate mobility aids) mean that large numbers of disabled and older people experience extreme isolation and poverty.

The Economic impact of ageing populations

Ageing presents significant economic challenges, as existing workers will have to support a greater number of non-workers if overall living standards are to be maintained. The ratio of public pension expenditure to GDP will rise in most developed countries. According to the

10. Guidelines on the provision of Manual Wheelchairs in less resourced settings, WHO, 2008.

11. www.sightsavers.org.uk/our_work/how_we_help/education/11138.html.

12. Disability & International Co-Operation & Development: A Review of Policies & Practices, World Bank, 2010.

13. The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities, International Labour Organisation, 2007.

14. State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth, UNFPA, 2007.

European Commission¹⁵ the average rise across the EU 27 between 2007 and 2060 will be 8.79 percentage points. In some countries it will be significantly higher. In Romania, for example, the increase is predicted to be 13.6 percentage points.

Ageing populations are also likely to place growing pressures on areas of age-related public expenditure like healthcare and social care. The same report notes that across the EU, age-related public expenditure is anticipated to rise from 23.1% of GDP in 2007 to 27.8% in 2060.

Publically funded systems to support disabled and older people are available in many countries and territories, though their coverage varies greatly. It is estimated that formal public programmes cover only 30% of the world's population over the age of 60. Some 40% of the world's working-age population are making contributions to that support.¹⁶

This raises the question whether the working age population in future (the children and grand children of the baby boomers) will be willing to share a larger part of their productive output with the growing population of older people. Fiscal and other measures may need to play an increasing part in sustaining this position.

The UNFPA report also notes that:

“Projections of the increases in population at older ages and of their needs for services challenge the ability of public, private and community institutions to respond with a commitment to equity among social groups over time. Decisions about the allocation of public services and the burden of financing them are fundamentally political and moral decisions.”

Transport implications

The way that transport services are planned and delivered, the design and maintenance of the pedestrian environment and land use planning policies can all contribute significantly to the problems that disabled and older people face and can limit their ability to regain or retain independent daily living.

Transport and land use planning can also play a major part in identifying and delivering solutions. This important link was identified in recommendations agreed by the Council of Ministers of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) in 2001 in conclusions drawn from work on “Transport & the Ageing of the Population” which stressed that *“All policy options in transport and land-use planning should systematically include an evaluation of their potential impact on the safety and accessibility of older people.”*¹⁷

The availability, accessibility and affordability of transport all have a major impact on people's ability to find and retain work, to take up opportunities for education, to reach healthcare and to buy food and other necessities. They are also fundamental to social interaction with family and friends which, in turn, are important for health and wellbeing. These issues have a particular resonance for many disabled and older people who are often dependent on public transport.

15. 2009 Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 Member States (2008-2060), European Commission.

16. Population Issues 1999, UNFPA.

17. www.internationaltransportforum.org/IntOrg/ecmt/accessibility/pdf/CM200114Fe.pdf.

The Fear Factor

For older and disabled people confidence is a key factor in determining their ability to remain independent. To take just one example, a fear of falling is a major reason why older people give up travelling by bus¹⁸. They may not actually have experienced a fall but concern that they may do so is a deterrent in itself. Similarly, many older people give up local outdoor mobility (walking to a local shop for example) because they are nervous of tripping on uneven paving or not having enough time to cross a busy street. These factors do not appear as statistics because they are not recorded as accidents. Older people simply change their travel patterns and their horizons shrink as they ask a neighbour to fetch their bread and newspaper rather than going out themselves.

Similar, often unrecorded, negative impacts can affect disabled people. One example current in many parts of Europe is the introduction of shared space facilities in which pedestrians and motorists mingle in an area without definition of kerbs, traffic signals or designated crossing points. The logic of such developments is that there will be greater mutual respect and traffic speeds will be reduced. The difficulty for many people who are blind or partially sighted is that reliance on making eye contact with a driver is simply not an option and anecdotal evidence suggests that many are simply avoiding such areas because they do not feel safe. Such changes in behaviours are not documented by those carrying out surveys into the public perception of developments such as shared space. They interview those who are still in the street but not those who have lost the confidence to be there.

Alternatives to Public Transport

In many countries in both the developed and developing world, the availability and reliability of public transport are magnets that draw people to a particular area. There are also clear links between an absence of transport – for example in rural areas – and poverty and social isolation. This is particularly true for disabled and older people. The sustainability and affordability of public transport services in remote rural areas is a key debate in many areas. There is a growing divide between those who choose to live in rural areas and have access to cars and those who – for reasons of disability, poverty or age – or all three – find themselves trapped in rural areas without transport links.

Providing cars on a subsidised basis could provide a solution for some. The UK's Motability scheme, for example, uses the Government benefit to which severely disabled people are entitled as a basis for supplying cars on lease or hire purchase on very favourable terms to those people. Some 2.5 million vehicles have been provided since the Scheme began in 1978.

For those unable to drive – or without a family member to drive them – the lack of door to door mobility remains a major problem for many and can hasten the point at which an older or disabled person is forced to give up their own home.

Given the pivotal role that transport plays - and will increasingly play – in the social and economic wellbeing of society, it is important to look at what is being done – or could be done – to maximise the potential for our ageing populations to live and function independently.

18. AENEAS project www.aeneas-project.eu/?page=salzburgmeasure2.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS: GIVING RIGHTS, SETTING STANDARDS

At national and at international levels, legislation is increasingly used as a means to require access features to be included in transport infrastructure and vehicles (as well as in public buildings and many other facets of public life).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

At the global level the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹⁹ is a key catalyst for change. The Convention places an obligation on signatories to provide access to the physical environment and to transport. There is a clear stated link in the Convention between access to transport and the ability of disabled people to use basic services including health, education and employment.

The Convention has been signed to date by some 147 countries and ratified by nearly 100. In some countries, particularly in developing regions, it has successfully been used as political leverage to bring about policy changes at national or local levels in the transport field among others. For example, the USA builds the Convention into its Memoranda of Understanding in working with other countries on disability and accessibility issues.

However, there are examples from many other countries in which signing and ratifying has meant little more than a political gesture. Without additional and clearer rules at a national, regional or local level, it is unlikely that the Convention will bring about the major changes that many activists have hoped for. UN Enable point out that only some 45 countries currently have anti-discrimination and disability specific laws²⁰.

The UN Convention refers to “progressive realisation” of the goal of accessibility. It must be seen not as a one off but as a step by step process. To get that process started, it is important to build up sufficient momentum among stakeholders, including disabled people, technical experts and policy makers to think innovatively and to implement change. This is particularly important as the Convention does not define what accessibility should look like: only that it should be achieved.

Civil Rights: are they relevant in transport?

This highlights one of the key debates in the area of accessibility. Can broad ranging “civil rights” legislation be enough in isolation to deliver real practical improvements to the day to day mobility of disabled and older people? There are certainly strong examples, from the USA among others, of the power of civil rights to drive change. Others would argue, however, that civil rights laws alone will not change attitudes or promote understanding. It could also be argued that the concept of “rights” is not really appropriate to the transport scene in which few passengers travelling in busy urban conditions would lay claim to any rights!

19. www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml.

20. www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18.

There is also an interesting question of whether a “right” to transport access also confers priority over other passengers. This is a live and current issue in many European cities in which passengers with ever larger baby buggies vie for space with wheelchair users on buses and the driver is left with the difficult job of resolving the conflict. A similar set of conflicts is also common on many train services in which the space for cyclists to leave bicycles is also the space in which wheelchair users need to sit. It could be argued that with equality of opportunity comes equality of disadvantage. In other words if every bus or train is wheelchair accessible, disabled people should take their chance with the rest of the travelling public that the vehicle they want to get on is already full and they will have to wait for the next. There are of course those who would argue the contrary point that disability brings so many inherent disadvantages with it that it is entirely proper to give disabled people precedence over, for example, cyclists or parents with small children.

One interesting – and hotly contested – example of this dilemma comes from the UK where legal requirements for parking equipment to be accessible to disabled people have resulted in many authorities removing the concession for disabled people to park free.

Comparing progress towards accessible public transport in the USA and Europe provides one illustration of the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. In the USA, civil rights laws brought lift equipped buses on to the streets long before access was commonplace in most of Europe. However, access was very strongly focused on the needs of wheelchair users. There was little attention paid to the needs of other disabled or older people. There was also significant resentment on the part both of operators and non-disabled passengers of the time taken to get a wheelchair user on board and the chair secured.

In Europe, by contrast, it was not legislation but the introduction of low floor bus technology which began the process. Nor was that process driven primarily by the disability access agenda. The first low floor vehicles were developed for airside transfers at German airports – on the premise that they were easier for people with baggage. Seeing the benefit in an airport context, an enlightened bus operator in Germany (Vestische Strassenbahn) recognised the wider benefits of a vehicle which put passengers rather than engineers first. Once the vehicles began to be seen in service – first in Germany (from 1979) and then increasingly across Europe - accessibility became an easy part of the package. The greatest benefit of low floor vehicles is that everyone gets on and off more easily and as a result ridership among people travelling with small children and shopping has increased significantly.

A major bonus for disabled people is that access is independent (without the need for intervention from the driver). Now that the majority of buses in many major cities in Europe are low floor and accessible, it is increasingly possible for a wheelchair user, for example, to travel around with reasonable confidence and spontaneity. Similarly where real time audible and visual on-bus announcements have been introduced, people with hearing or vision loss have also been able to regain the freedom to travel.

In Europe as a whole the legislation has tended to follow technology rather than driving it. Design standards for accessibility, based on research and practice, are now in place both at national and European levels, often enshrined in legislation.

Much more recently, Europe has started to introduce the concept of passenger rights with which the US started back in the 1970s. In the fields of air and sea travel, rail and most recently bus and coach, passenger rights legislation is driving forward to need for staff training and other services and facilities (accessible information for example). It is very clear that even the most

accessible system or vehicle is only useable by disabled and older people if those responsible for it – at every level – are also sensitive to their needs and trained to deliver them.

It could also be argued that to be talking still in terms of rights (certainly in the developed world) suggests that this is, even after thirty years or more, a campaigning issue rather than a concept firmly embedded in the culture of service delivery. If that is the case then how long must it take for accessibility to become part of the norm so that it isn't even considered as a separate question? It is interesting to note that in some of the cities in Europe with the most accessible transport systems (for example Berlin) the cost of accessibility is not recorded or counted separately, It is simply an integral part of the running costs for the city.

Obligations: Implementation, enforcement and evaluation

Attitudes towards the importance of upholding rights vary widely. For some countries, the introduction of a new set of rights or technical standards is followed by intensive monitoring and, if necessary enforcement. In others there is a growing trend to reduce resources and efforts devoted to implementation and enforcement once the box marked "legislation" has been ticked.

This latter approach seems to miss the point that rights cannot exist without obligations on those responsible for delivering them to ensure that they have become embedded not just in law or practice but also in national culture. It seems counter-intuitive that the importance of enforcement and monitoring are being neglected at a time when the impact of ageing populations is beginning to be widely felt and the correlation between loss of mobility and loss of independence is well established.

Costs

But, of course, cost is a major factor and accessibility is not always easy or cheap to deliver. Infrastructure, in particular, can be costly and difficult to bring up to modern standards – whether a bus stop in a rural area or a historic railway terminus in a major city. And who pays? Is it for the transport provider (and ultimately the bus passenger) to meet the cost of accessibility or should that cost properly fall on the taxpayer?

It could be argued that where the improvements made will benefit the travelling public as a whole and so have the potential to generate additional ridership, it is appropriate for the provider to meet the cost, perhaps with the help of some initial "pump priming" or encouragement from the state. There are a variety of models that have been adopted across Europe and North America both before and since the introduction of legislation requiring vehicles and infrastructure to be accessible. In some countries, funding was available to operators only if they chose to buy an accessible vehicle. In others subsidy bridged the gap where low floor vehicles were initially more costly than high floor versions.

A joint study carried out by the ECMT and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) in 2007 on economic aspects of taxi accessibility²¹ started from the premise that the taxi trade should provide a service to meet the needs of disabled and older people provided that by doing so they did not lose out financially. The report concluded that subsidy is essential to achieve this goal and considered the options for both user-side and supply-side subsidy to increase the availability of accessible taxis.

21. www.internationaltransportforum.org/IntOrg/ecmt/pubpdf/01TaxiAccess.pdf.

In the case of specialised door to door services to meet the needs of disabled and older people unable to reach or access mainstream transport, the cost is almost always met by governments at local or national levels. However, the high costs of such services are increasingly bringing them under the scrutiny of those responsible for budgets. An extreme option – and one unlikely to find favour politically – at least in the short term – would be that all of us (in the developed world) should insure against the additional costs of old age or disability so that there is less burden on society as a whole as the numbers of older people grows. Current headlines in the UK press, for example suggest that *“Baby boomers wealth must fund their old age care”*. While the focus of such calls is primarily on the high costs of residential and nursing care, the same argument could be extended to the costs of mobility.

The question of striking the right balance between obligations and rights is also the subject of growing debate in many developed countries. One common example is the issue of how many spaces should be provided for wheelchair users on a bus or train. In many countries the requirement is for a minimum of one space, particularly on a bus. However some wheelchair users would argue that this infringes their right to travel with another person using a wheelchair. From the operator’s point of view, each additional wheelchair space means a significant loss of seating which in turn may mean loss of revenue. And of course loss of seats can be a problem for many frail older people for whom trying to balance while standing on a moving vehicle is difficult and potentially dangerous.

In developing countries the problems tend to be much more basic. There are many reports of disabled people being denied access to vehicles on the grounds that they would take too long to get on board or would impede other passengers. Even in countries which have signed up to the UN Convention and/or introduced domestic civil rights legislation, there is little evidence of recognition or accommodation of their needs at a practical level. Driver attitude is the most commonly cited problem.

Evaluating progress

Few areas that have invested in making public transport more accessible or upgrading and improving transport infrastructure (dropped kerbs, raised bus stops etc) have developed any meaningful way of measuring the impact of the changes. For the most part, any evaluation that is done is based on counting how many bus stops have been upgraded or tactile surfaces installed. There is still an absence of measures which look at the difference changes make to the day to day mobility of disabled or older people in the area. It could be argued that if accessibility is seen as a non-negotiable requirement, then evaluation becomes unnecessary. The reality, however, is that it is quite easy to spend money in the wrong place or on the wrong facility or feature so that there is no improvement to mobility and resources are simply being wasted.

In the cities that are most successful at delivering accessibility there is a significant level of commitment to engaging with disabled and older users (and non-users) of the system to get feedback and address shortcomings. Vienna, Barcelona and Nürnberg are three such examples.

This problem is often further exacerbated by a fragmented approach to delivering accessibility. In many countries in both the developed and developing world, those responsible for the operation of public transport are quite separate from those responsible for the streets and pedestrian environment. In many cases the former may now be a commercial operator while the latter remains a state or city owned enterprise. The result in many cases is that investment in more accessible buses is not matched by investment in improved access to bus stops so even though disabled and older people could get on the bus they cannot get to it! The absence of monitoring often conceals this major flaw.

A similar problem arises where there is little or no investment in driver training. There are common reports of drivers failing to pull a low floor vehicle into the kerb to allow a disabled person to board or refusing to deploy a ramp for a wheelchair user. Generally it is lack of training rather than lack of willingness at the root of these problems.

The best results in improving accessibility have been seen, not surprisingly, where operators and authorities have worked together to assess and prioritise improvements and where the “joined up” approach has extended beyond the vehicles and infrastructure to issues of information, signage and – above all – of training.

The vital role of partnership was developed in a 2004 report produced jointly by the ECMT and the International Association of Public Transport (UITP)²². The report noted that “*Lack of co-ordination between local authorities and public transport operators has been in many cities one of the key barriers to improving accessibility in public transport*”. The report looked at 4 cities which have demonstrated the value of collaborative working to address the needs of disabled and older people more effectively: Grenoble, Prague, Göteborg and Liverpool (Merseyside).

So why is it so unusual to see a properly co-ordinated approach to accessibility? Ironically one reason may be the very fact of rights based and other legislation which prescribe what needs to be done in a way that encourages providers to work down to a legal minimum rather than up to an optimum standard.

A further reason may be linked to the fact that accessibility improvements are still widely regarded as social rather than commercial matters so the same criteria for success are not applied.

This thinking is outdated and unhelpful both to those responsible for making improvements and for end users.

Common standards

There is also an interesting area for debate about the universality of access standards and rights. While the UN Convention provides an overarching framework for legislation, the detail of what is done and to what standard is left to national or other levels of government.

Inevitably as countries have progressed over the past thirty years or so towards better understanding of access needs, different standards and approaches have been adopted. One key example is in the field of audible and tactile signals at pedestrian crossings to help blind people navigate in safety. A number of countries have developed their own very effective systems. The problem is that they are different from each other so that if a blind person travels to another country they run the risk of hearing a signal or finding a surface that may mean “safe to cross” in their own culture but may mean “danger, stop” in another. Attempts over many years to agree a common system of tactile warnings have foundered because everyone wants to start with their own standard rather than compromise on someone else’s.

On the other hand, it could be argued that where systems have been developed in close co-operation with disabled people locally, they are meeting the needs of local people and should not have to be adjusted to a common standard which may be less satisfactory. The highly

22. Improving Access to Public Transport,
www.internationaltransportforum.org/IntOrg/ecmt/pubpdf/04Access.pdf.

developed systems of audible and tactile warnings and guidance for blind people in Spain are one such example. Wholly intuitive to local visually impaired people, but visitors who are blind or partially sighted may not be familiar with how they operate.

Agreeing common standards, for example on rail interoperability across the Member States of the European Union, is another case in point. Here the ability to make a seamless journey across national boundaries outweighed national and regional concerns to protect the status quo. Compromises were made by those countries with well advanced and well established access standards in the interests of a common set of access parameters which would enable disabled people to travel across Europe by rail confident that their needs would be met across the whole network.

Universal design

The concept of Universal Design potentially provides a solution to differences of approach. If we start from the premise of design which is easier for everyone then differences of approach will be outweighed by consistency of purpose.

The Barcelona Metro system provides one strong example. The Metro operator invited blind people to design the ticket machines. As a result the machines are intuitive to use and the number of staff who used to be employed to stand next to the machines to help bemused tourists understand how to buy a ticket has been significantly reduced.

The Norwegian Government has taken the Universal Design concept a stage further and has adopted it as a policy across 16 Government ministries including those responsible for including planning, buildings and transport, with the goal of complete implementation by 2025²³.

Legal Jurisdiction

Taking the issue of common standards a step further opens the question of jurisdiction. For some countries, the right to protect their citizens will override normal conventions of international law. The imposition of the US Air Carriers Access Act on non-US airlines flying into and out of the US and airlines on code share flights with a US carrier anywhere in the world is one such example. In some areas, the US law cuts across or conflicts with European law introduced after protracted negotiations in the European Parliament and input from disability organisations to agree how best to meet the needs of disabled European air travellers. At a wider international level, American practices on the carriage of assistance animals (trained to support the needs of severely disabled people) are causing significant concern for cultural reasons in countries of the Far and Middle East.

The potential upshot is confusion for the airlines and airports caught between two systems. But is it better for passengers? It could be argued that air travel is such a global business that anything less than global standards of accessibility are unacceptable. On the other hand, since travel is all about experiencing other cultures and traditions is this going too far?

23. www.universal-design.environment.no/the-plan-of-action/1057 -the-governments-commitment-to-universal-design-is-greater-than-ever.

Tourism

A strong economic driver in many countries in both the developed and developing world is tourism. The demographic trends are making an impact here as elsewhere and it is clear that accessibility is a key factor for many people in deciding a holiday destination.

A study from the German Federal Ministry of Economics & Technology in 2008²⁴ looked at the travel behaviour of German disabled tourists and established that the current net turnover generated at that time was 2.5 billion Euros and that some 65 000 jobs were sustained by it. The study estimated a potential additional economic impact from the buying power of this market sector of up to 4.8 billion Euros and a further 90 000 jobs.

This emerging market can bring about significant social benefits too in areas which might not otherwise have seen investment for its own disabled and older communities. For example, in a speech to the 11th Caribbean Conference on Sustainable Tourism Development in 2010²⁵ a Barbadian senator noted that:

“Collectively 75% of Canadians, Americans & Europeans with disabilities who are physically and financially able to travel do so with their caregivers, family and friends. The current economic climate dictates that we target this emerging market.”

In this case, it could be argued that legislation is not needed because economics are driving the necessary improvements. There must still be a case, however, for technical standards which ensure that the term “accessible” at least has some minimum standards attached to it. Without that assurance, the most alluring holiday destination will not attract those for whom the width of the hotel bathroom door or the height of the bus step is critical to basic functioning.

3. FUNDING: AN EFFECTIVE POLICY LEVER TO DELIVER ACCESSIBILITY?

The field of international funding support, whether through bodies such as the European Union, or international or national aid organisations working in developing countries, is another area in which rights and obligations are used as leverage for achieving particular political or social outcomes.

For example, linking funding for transport infrastructure to a requirement that the facilities be made accessible to disabled people is now a common practice although some major funding bodies still prefer encouragement to enforcement: carrot rather than stick.

24. Analysis of Success Factors & Action to Improve Quality in Accessible Tourism for All in Germany, Study Commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economics & Technology, 2008.

25. www.caribbean360.com/index.php/travel/25982.html.

Conditional Funding

Back in 1999 a Charter on Access to Transport Services & Infrastructure²⁶ was drawn up by the ECMT and agreed by Member States and the European Commission at that time. The Charter set out fundamental access principles that must be followed as a non-negotiable condition of funding. In spite of enthusiastic political support at the time, evidence of progress since then has been scarce.

However, the European Commission has now introduced a legal requirement in the general Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund²⁷ to include accessibility as a non-negotiable condition of funding. In addition the European Union Public Procurement Directive states that the use of “design for all” and other accessibility requirements should be included whenever possible in the technical documentation for public bids.

To support this requirement, the Commission produced a Toolkit in 2009²⁸ for those using European Union Structural and Cohesion Funds. The Toolkit clearly states that:

“Accessibility should be a characteristic of all those products and services that are offered to the public and are financed through Structural Funds. In particular, accessibility to the built environment, transport, information and communication technologies is key to inclusion for people with disabilities.”

The Toolkit also provides guidance and examples on integrating accessibility into the mainstream.

In spite of the excellent principles contained both in statute and in guidance, the Commission notes that there is difficulty both in monitoring and enforcing compliance.

Where conditions are not included – either by international funding bodies or national governments – inaccessible infrastructure can leave a long term and potentially hugely damaging legacy. Sometimes these omissions are in direct contravention of an existing law or requirement and sometimes simply the result of a lack of awareness.

To give one example, footbridges constructed to provide a safe means of crossing the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway (on which there have been many fatalities) have been fitted with barricades to stop bikers using them. The result is that wheelchair users can no longer access them and have to risk their lives crossing the highway.

The growing field of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is also an interesting one. Numerous schemes have already been set up in Latin America, China, Africa and India, many with international funding support. The best demonstrate real understanding of the need for accessibility not just within the system itself but also in the pedestrian environment and other access to and from it. In Curitiba, Brazil access to vehicles has been built in from the design stage of the express bus system, stops have raised platforms served by ramps for all passengers or by lifts, where these

26. Charter on Access to Transport Services and Infrastructure,
www.internationaltransportforum.org/IntOrg/ecmt/accessibility/pdf/tphCharter.pdf.

27. Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

28. Ensuring Accessibility & Non-discrimination of People with Disabilities: Toolkit for Using EU Structural & Cohesion Funds, 2009.

are needed, for wheelchair users. Passengers board the buses at floor level via bridge plates that are automatically lowered as buses pull up to the stop. The World Bank has funded guidance to help to promote good practice of this kind.

Similar success can be found in New Delhi where a major national disability organisation has been engaged from the earliest planning stage and has significantly influenced the design criteria.

By contrast reports from Jakarta indicate that ten years after the introduction of laws guaranteeing equal access for disabled people in the city little has changed. The Transjakarta busway features long flights of stairs at stations with no alternative means of access. Similarly in Lagos, investment in BRT has failed to provide for even the most basic mobility needs such as handholds to help with climbing steps.

So what lessons can we take from this? Making accessibility a non-negotiable condition of funding must surely make sense in both economic and social terms. There seems little reason not to make it a standard requirement. However, even where accessibility is required, it can only be effective if the obligation is backed up by clear technical standards that define what accessibility looks like and by monitoring on behalf of the funding body to ensure that the work has been done and that accessibility continues to be delivered. The airports of Europe are full of accessible toilets used as cleaners' cupboards for storing mops and buckets!

Concessionary fares: the best use of limited funds?

The growing numbers of older people in the populations around the world are putting increasing pressure on budgets in many areas. One area of expenditure which throws up some interesting issues for debate in a transport context is concessionary fares.

For many years - and in many countries (both developed and developing) - concessionary fares – giving reduced price or free travel to disabled and older people have been common²⁹. In many cases the availability of cheap travel significantly preceded the availability of accessible transport. With more and more options to use public transport now available in many countries, the number of disabled and older people keen to travel has, unsurprisingly, risen significantly.

It is, however, a complex issue. While it is true to say that there is a close link between disability and poverty, particularly in developing countries, the policy of giving entitlement to concessions on grounds of age or disability alone is putting significant financial pressure on transport budgets both central and local in many areas. In England, for example, the annual cost of free travel to all those over 60 and disabled people is in excess of 1.19 billion Euros³⁰.

There is also an interesting question of equity. Given the pressure on funds and the urgent need in many areas to invest in new vehicles or to upgrade or replace ageing and inaccessible infrastructure, is it the best use of funds to subsidise travel among those who could afford to pay for it simply because they are over a certain age? Wouldn't money be better spent addressing issues such as the availability of bus services or bus stops in rural areas so that those currently without any access to public transport could have the possibility to travel?

29. ECMT Report on Concessionary Fares,
www.internationaltransportforum.org/IntOrg/ecmt/accessibility/pdf/TPH200009rev1e.pdf.

30. Consultation on Reimbursement Arrangements for the Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme in England: Interim consultation response, Department for Transport, 2010.

It is, of course a chicken and egg argument to some extent. For those disabled and older people for whom cheap or free travel is an essential component of retaining independent living – the benefits are clear to see. But to extend that concession regardless of financial need across a population whose numbers will be swelling for some years to come – calls into question whether political reluctance to raise the spectre of means testing is preventing worthwhile investment being re-allocated to improve the frequency, availability and accessibility of services and infrastructure.

4. REDUCING THE NEED FOR TRAVEL: AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO MEET SOCIAL OBJECTIVES?

With increasing pressure for transport services to operate commercially, there will be a growing loss of services that cannot operate on a profitable basis. This means that for governments wishing to pursue a social agenda – for example to support disabled people unable to access mainstream services - a high and continuing level of subsidy is likely to be necessary.

Dealing with the legacy of bad land use planning

In many communities in Europe, North America and elsewhere, planning policies and trends over the past 30 years or so have created an increasingly car dependent society. Shops, healthcare and other vital facilities have been moved to out of town locations, often poorly served by public transport. Housing developments too have been moved to the suburbs and outskirts of cities isolating those without access to private transport.

Migration patterns and changing cultural norms have exacerbated the problem of isolation with children moving away to other areas leaving ageing parents without support. Some cultures, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, still retain strong family support networks which enable older people to remain in their own homes but these are increasingly rare in much of the developed world.

Creating liveable communities

“A liveable community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life.” (AARP)

Governments around the world are increasingly aware of these problems and are looking at a range of “affordable” solutions. The concept of “ageing in place” is a simple one: to enable people to retain independent mobility into old age without the need to relocate or become dependent on state or other support. The Government of Singapore is one of a growing number investing in creating neighbourhoods in which people can continue to be independent for as long as possible. In Japan too clear policies to group restaurants, shops and health care facilities around neighbourhoods with ageing populations are much in evidence.

The definition of a liveable community given by the US National Council on Disability is one that:

- ensures accessible, affordable, reliable and safe transport, and
- adjusts the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility.

In a happy co-incidence of policy objectives, recreating the local neighbourhoods and communities in which many previous generations lived out their lives also meets broader environmental aims. Curtailing traffic speeds, giving priority to pedestrians, reducing the need for travel all meet both goals.

In many cases it is simple low cost changes that enable older people to remain in their own homes and communities. Initiatives like the World Health Organisation's "Age Friendly Cities"³¹ are encouraging city authorities to look at a range of policy and practical steps that can help to sustain local outdoor mobility among older people. Talking to older people about what they want produces simple suggestions such as clearing snow and ice from pavements in winter time and putting more seats and toilets in public places.

This same emphasis on talking to people about what they want is also producing excellent results in parts of China, for example. Here city authorities are required to consult older people regularly about their problems and priorities and to act on their comments. This seems an obvious way to ensure that limited resources deliver maximum benefit.

In the USA the concept of "liveability" is moving on similar lines. Government Departments responsible for transport, planning and housing are coming together under the common agenda of creating communities within which disabled and older people can live independently and can move about safely and with confidence.

For policies like this to succeed it is vital to take a holistic approach to identifying and meeting people's needs. Too often transport policy makers and providers – at both national and local levels – have been left out of discussion of social issues. New housing developments with roads too narrow for buses to get down are just one result of planners not thinking about the realities of people's daily lives – and not talking to the bus operator until it is too late! Similarly, policies to give disabled people more choice and control over their own lives need to recognise that access to mobility is a fundamental part of that control.

Engaging with disabled and older people about their own needs and priorities both at a practical level (as practiced in China) and at a more strategic level is essential to delivering appropriate solutions. Some countries have appointed national level advisory bodies of disabled people specifically focussed on transport and mobility issues. Such bodies provide a good way for Governments to ensure that policies and plans are being considered at the earliest stage and influenced by those most directly affected. ECMT drew up recommendations for establishing such bodies after studying the models in a number of countries³².

The costs of losing mobility

The consequences of losing mobility in old age are wide ranging and complex. There is, of course, the straightforward economic cost that will arise – in developed countries – from the care that will need to be brought into the home of an older or disabled person unable to get out. This can include medical as well as domiciliary care (cleaning, shopping etc). Not only is this expensive, the health impact on the older or disabled person is also a significant issue. If the doctor or healthcare worker comes to the home, the range of available equipment, the quality of lighting and the level of hygiene are all severely reduced. If someone else is doing your basic food shopping, it is well documented that nutrition suffers as horizons shrink and diet becomes less balanced.

31. Global Age Friendly Cities: A Guide, WHO, 2007.

32. www.internationaltransportforum.org/IntOrg/ecmt/accessibility/pdf/TPH200008rev1e.pdf.

In addition, of course, the impact of a loss of mobility on mental health can also be significant. Those people who no longer see a need to put on outdoor shoes because they no longer go out of doors, can experience a rapid and severe decline in both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, the clear link between spend on transport and highways and benefits in the health and other support services is seldom recognised or it is deemed too difficult to find a way to break out of the spending silos.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The changing age profile of our populations across the world – and the link with loss of mobility that change brings - is clear and is already being felt.

There are strong economic and social imperatives to ensure that we enable older and disabled people to be as independent as possible for as long as possible. The way that we plan and maintain our urban and rural environments and the way that we design and operate our transport services will have a profound impact on how well we can achieve that goal.

It is clear that legislation can play an important part – not least in setting technical standards for accessibility. It is equally clear however that legislation (whether civil rights based or technical) is not enough in isolation. It must be implemented and enforced and it must – above all- be understood by all those responsible for it at both policy and practical levels. This is true for both developed and developing countries: although the progress towards accessibility may be at very different rates, the underlying factors that need to be in place for successful delivery are the same.

For developing countries, however, efforts to support disabled and older people need to start at a more fundamental level of providing basic wheelchairs and other aids and, even where there are not paved roads, creating safe pedestrian routes that enable people to move about within their local communities and to contribute to supporting their families or reducing the burden of care on others.

The concept of rights can have little value without a practical basis of understanding and knowledge of the obligations that are part of the package. Integral to that understanding is recognition that meeting the mobility needs of disabled and older people is not a matter of welfare or social policy alone. It is also a matter of good economic sense when it is done on a collaborative basis with other delivery agents (highway authorities etc) and with disabled and older people.

Nonetheless in the economic climate prevailing in many developed countries, the issue of who pays will continue to be debated at both national and local levels. To make sense, however, such a debate needs to take place in the context of the costs of losing mobility in both economic and social terms.

Finally, it is important to recognise that investing in accessibility – when such investment is based on sound design principles that can benefit everyone – is not a luxury that cannot be afforded. It is a necessity that cannot be ignored.

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