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AT THE CROSSROADS?

TRANSPORT AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE NORTH EAST

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Executive summary

The North East faces acute economic and social challenges. Levels of worklessness are higher than the national average, disadvantaged groups face particular barriers to entering the labour market and communities across the region are blighted by social and economic disadvantage. However, the role of transport in helping to alleviate these problems is often underplayed.

Transport-related social exclusion is a wide-reaching term, and can impact upon individuals and communities in a variety of ways. Two out of every five jobseekers suggest that a lack of transport prevents them from finding employment; 31 per cent of people without a car have difficulties getting to their local hospital; 16 per cent of people without cars have difficulties accessing supermarkets. This is a cross-cutting issue which touches on a wide range of public policy issues, and there is a clear need for new thinking and new strategies to tackle mobility disadvantage.

Each region and locality faces different transport and accessibility pressures. The North East is one of the poorest of UK regions, and has the highest proportion of households without a car outside London. With the exception of London, people in the North East travel fewer miles per year than people in other English regions.

Bus travel is the main mode of transport for people on low incomes, and over 9 out of 10 public transport journeys by people in the lowest quintile are by bus. However, bus journeys in the North East fell by 46 per cent between 1987 and 2004. By contrast, London has seen increasing bus journeys in this period. Until recently, falling patronage was also a trend on the Tyne and Wear Metro, but this trend has been reversed in recent years. Furthermore, the costs of public transport have risen much more sharply than the costs of private motoring.

ippr north suggest a eight point plan to help improve connectivity in the North East in order to tackle transport-related social exclusion. These suggestions are both short- and long-term and whilst specific to the North East are applicable to other regions.

1. Rebalance debates so that the role of transport as a tool for social inclusion is given at least equal weight to its role in economic growth

As one of the UK's poorest regions, it is understandable that decision-makers in the region have a central focus on economic regeneration. Increasing economic growth is key to tackling social exclusion, but a more inclusive approach is necessary. There is too much attention on large-scale schemes, such as the A1 Gateshead Western By-Pass, and not enough attention on public transport. Decision-makers in the region need to achieve a more balanced approach.

The Department for Transport also needs to address the mismatch between capital and revenue funding mechanisms. Transport authorities need to have the flexibility to provide for general bus fare subsidy where they think it appropriate.

2. Create a North East Accessibility Forum to support the sharing of best practice and understanding, and to help engender a cross-sectoral and cross-regional approach to accessibility and connectivity policies

Accessibility planning is a relatively new concept, and transport authorities need to share best practice in its implementation. More importantly, it needs a long term commitment from a range of organisations – if it becomes the unique preserve of the transport expert, the concept will have failed.

It would be impossibly voluminous to bring together a sufficiently broad range of stakeholders at the national level, but it could be sensibly done at a regional level. Furthermore, the regional level is where two crucial strategies for this agenda are prepared: the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy. Therefore, the North East Assembly should bring together a forum to share best practice. This should help achieve integration across numerous public sector agencies.

3. Regional co-ordination of concessionary fares

The North East's system for governing concessionary fares has been widely criticised for creating a complex and inefficient bureaucracy. However, from April 2006 the system will be greatly simplified because of the decision by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide for free off-peak local bus travel in England for those aged over 60 and for disabled people. It is ironic that it took a decision taken at the national level to simplify a local problem where, for example, the six different district authorities within Northumberland operate six different concessionary travel schemes.

While welcome, the Chancellor's announcement does not mean that there will be a truly regional concessionary fares system in the North East. The North East should follow the Welsh example and move towards a system which has interoperability between authorities, where concessionary passes can be used across local government boundaries.

4. Return to sensible regulation of the bus network

The regulatory framework is crucial if we are to improve public transport, and it is clear that the decision in the 1980s to deregulate bus services outside London was a mistake. The Transport Act 2000 provided only tentative steps towards a more sensible regulation of the network.

This framework may well be the only practical way forward, but the effective use of these measures has not been sufficiently widespread. The Government needs to make it easier for local authorities to adopt 'Quality Contracts' and local authorities need to pursue this agenda, despite the bureaucratic difficulties.

5. Public transport operators must be encouraged to invest and innovate

Even if the 'Quality Contracts' agenda does not move forward, bus operators must be encouraged to invest and innovate. Customers need to see tangible signs of improvement in service and vehicles and there needs to be a more co-ordinated and proactive approach to promoting bus travel across the North East.

There also needs to be an expansion of bus priority measures such as bus-only lanes, sensitive traffic signalling and congestion management. An effective bus network across the region is fundamental in tackling social exclusion and accessibility problems.

6. Explore the possibility that the North East, or one of its conurbations, can pilot road-user charging

A road-user charging scheme, as part of wider demand management policies, can be a useful tool in combating social exclusion and disadvantage. Such a move can have numerous benefits for the North East – in terms of tackling congestion, traffic growth, harmful emissions and in generating revenue that could be invested in the public transport system.

Stakeholders and decision-makers in the North East ought to make the political case in favour of such schemes. In particular, the region should explore the possibility that it can pilot a system of road user charging. In any case, the region should widen the evidence base on the feasibility, and likely effects, of road-user charging schemes in the region.

7. A stronger decentralised approach to transport policy, with a single Transport, Housing and Planning Regional Board

It is well known that the formulation and delivery of transport policy is fragmented, involving a plethora of national, regional and local institutions. The success of much transport policy depends on effective integration. Whilst efforts to tackle transport-related social exclusion require strong local involvement through local authorities, there is scope for a more robust approach at the regional level.

In light of the moves towards decentralisation found in the Treasury's consultation on regional funding allocations, there is merit for combining housing, planning and transport policy advice at the regional level through the creation of a single 'Housing, Planning and Transport Regional Board'. This would advise Ministers on funding Local Transport Plans outside PTA areas, on spending priorities across policy areas and on switching funding between them.

There are also strong reasons for decentralisation of transport policy, with a stronger and more cogent regional approach. Linking the economic, social and environmental agendas that feed into the wider transport policy agenda can be an arduous process within the current institutional arrangements. In the medium term, the Government should decentralise responsibility for transport to local and regional institutions. In PTA areas, responsibility for strategic roads and for funding Local Transport Plans should be passed to the PTA authorities. The Government should also start developing a Passenger Transport Authority in the Tees Valley.

8. Adopt a stronger commitment to 'smart growth'

Accessibility problems cannot be solved exclusively through transport solutions. Decision-makers in the region need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to 'smart growth', and more sophisticated spatial planning which incorporates a real social inclusion dimension.

The traditional approach to planning in the UK has been for people and vehicles to be segregated, epitomised by T Dan Smith's vision of Newcastle as the 'Brasilia of the North', with a hotch-potch of spaghetti walkways around Swan House and John Dobson Street as part of the grand plan for a 'city in the sky'. A different approach, however, would be to redesign streets in favour of pedestrians and cyclists and towards the integration of traffic and people on more equal terms.

Introduction

The concept of transport-related social exclusion has traditionally sat within the remit of the Department for Transport. However, recently a more joined-up approach was adopted through the involvement of the Social Exclusion Unit (Department for Transport, 2000; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Whilst touching on some important policy debates with a national resonance this report will focus on the issue of transport-related social exclusion in the North East. However the policy recommendations that this report will advance will be applicable to regions and sub-regions beyond the North East, and will therefore retain a national significance.

The North East faces some acute economic and social challenges. Levels of worklessness are higher than the national average and other comparable regions. Various disadvantaged groups face particular barriers to entering the labour market. Communities across the North East are blighted by social and economic disadvantage. The role of transport in helping to alleviate these problems is often underplayed and needs to be considered more widely.

Alongside transport-related social exclusion, a further key concept in this debate is accessibility. Accessibility in this context describes the ability of people to achieve connectivity to key locations, whether it be an employment site, school or college, hospital or a supermarket. The Social Exclusion Unit frames accessibility through a series of key questions:

“Can people get to key services at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease? ... does transport exist between the people and the service? Do people know about the transport, trust its reliability and feel safe using it? Are people physically and financially able to access transport? Are the services and activities within a reasonable distance?” (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003)

As these questions suggest, this is an issue that reaches beyond transport solutions. Encompassed within this debate are broader issues around the spatiality of public services and other key locations, and land-use planning policy. At the heart of this debate lies a new approach which seeks to integrate transport policy with more sophisticated spatial planning and land-use policy; attempting to engender more effective joined-up thinking between these important policy areas.

It is important at this stage to provide a stronger theoretical context of the issues which will feature throughout this report. Accessibility is a concept describing the ease, or difficulty, with which people can reach key locations. This is clearly a spatial concept. Transport-related social exclusion describes a situation whereby people are disadvantaged due to inadequate transport:

“If going to a supermarket involved two changes of buses, if going to work takes an hour and a half, if leisure time on Sundays is rendered useless because of the difficulty of movement, then inadequate transport is clearly contributing to the inability of people to participate in what would be considered normal activities of today’s society” (Department for Transport, 2000)

Questioning the role of transport in this context forms only part of the problem. It is also important to question why there is such a need to travel to access in some cases crucially important public services and locations. The Department for Transport has coined this extended concept ‘socio-spatial exclusion’ (Department for Transport, 2000). This definition seeks to question the geography of services and essential locations, such as employment sites, exploring the reasons why deprived neighbourhoods (which would probably be labelled as socially excluded in a generic sense) also have to endure inadequate levels of connectivity to core and essential locations.

It is important to note the trends in spatial and land-use planning policy that have led to this predicament. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s planning policy allowed “more dispersed patterns of development” (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). There is a strong consensus that this trend has, in part, created today’s situation (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). In the North East there are several notable examples of this era in spatial planning policy. Gateshead’s Metro Centre, Europe’s largest out-of-town shopping centre, opened in 1986. In October 2004 the Metro Centre became even bigger, with the opening of a further extension. In 1993 the Doxford International Business Park was opened in Sunderland, like the Metro Centre in a peripheral location favouring access by car. Such developments clearly preceded the new agendas in urban renaissance, with the balance now tilted towards the redevelopment of urban sites.

Whilst locations such as the Metro Centre and Doxford International Business Park are served by public transport there is little doubt that this phase of development policy increased the need to travel, and there is little doubt that such sites are more easily accessible by car.

Analysing the problem

Having identified the broad trends that have in part led to the recognition of transport related social exclusion it is now important to explore how the problem can be identified, measured and what further structural factors are contributing to its advancement.

Making the Connections, the Social Exclusion Unit's keynote report, established a strong conceptual overview of transport-related social exclusion, exploring the factors that have contributed to the development of this concept and identifying the symptoms of the problem in a variety of public policy areas (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Transport-related social exclusion is a wide-reaching term, and can impact on both individuals and communities in a variety of ways. Keynote findings from the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) illustrate the diversity of symptoms, which indicate some form of transport-related social exclusion:

- **Employment:** *Two out of five jobseekers suggest that a 'lack of transport' is preventing them from finding employment. One in four young people have not applied for a specific job in the 'last 12 months because of transport problems'.*
- **Learning:** *6 per cent of all 16-24 year olds decline training or further education opportunities because of transport difficulties.*
- **Health:** *31 per cent of people without a car have 'difficulties' getting to their local hospital. In excess of 1.4 million people say they have 'missed, turned down, or chosen not to seek medical help' over a 12 month period because of transport problems.*
- **Affordable food shops:** *16 per cent of people without cars have difficulties accessing supermarkets, now widely accepted as the primary source of affordable and nutritious food.*
- **Social and cultural travel:** *Of people without cars 18 per cent face difficulties visiting family and friends. They also face significant difficulties accessing social, cultural and leisure sites such as libraries and leisure centres.*

As the above examples show, transport-related social exclusion is a crosscutting issue that touches on a wide range of public policy agendas. There can be no doubt that transport-related social exclusion can impact dramatically on peoples' quality of life, and can also hinder efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). The fact that transport-related social exclusion is undermining and weakening important policy agendas, such as the welfare-to-work and wider anti-poverty agendas, serves to reinforce the need for new thinking and new strategies to tackle mobility and accessibility disadvantage.

Table 1: Models of transport-related social exclusion

Model	Definition	Example
Spatial	People simply cannot get to where they want.	There are no public transport links between a low-income housing estate and a large employment site.
Temporal	People are denied adequate accessibility due to time-related causes.	Bus timetables fail to interlock with shift patterns at a major employment site.
Financial	The financial costs of travel prevent people from being able to meet their travel needs.	The cost of bus fares prevents a jobseeker from accepting a job offer.
Personal	Relates to challenges around transport faced by those with disabilities and sensory impairments. This model can also relate to the elderly, and can also include language barriers.	A wheelchair bound person is deterred from using public transport due to physical accessibility problems, and a lack of understanding from public transport staff.

(DETR, 2000; Solomon, 2003)

In seeking to identify policy solutions to transport-related social exclusion it is crucial to understand the concept in a multi-dimensional context. There are different forms of transport-related social exclusion, each demanding different policy approaches, and all linked by a complex causal relationship. Table 1 shows the four different models of transport-related social exclusion, as defined by the Department for Transport.

Beyond land-use and spatial planning issues there are two further, and interrelated, structural factors which have also led to the current position. An increase in private car ownership has greatly enhanced the mobility of many households. However, almost one in three households in the North East do not have access to a car (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). The trends in land-use planning in recent times, favouring more dispersed patterns of development, have led to more people needing to travel further. Since the 1970s the average journey length has increased by nearly 50 per cent (Department for Transport 2004a).

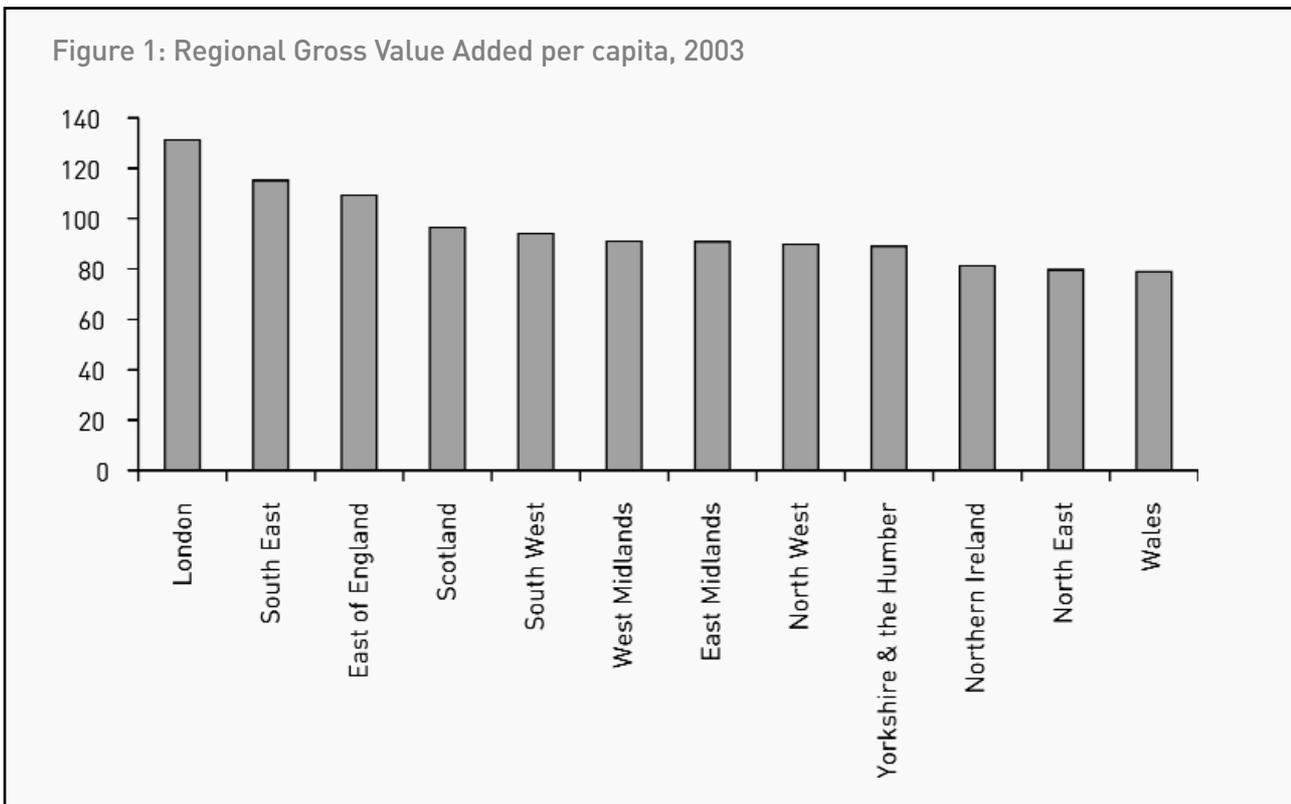
This has inevitably placed a pressure on people to become more mobile, and has undoubtedly supported the dramatic increases in car ownership. At the same time, greater car ownership has facilitated this dispersed development, creating a vicious circle. The car-owning population have been able to protect themselves from dispersed development patterns, and increasing pressures to travel greater distances to work and other key locations essential to everyday living. For those prevented from joining the car-owning movement, for reasons of cost, age, disability or choice, travel has become more and more challenging.

The consensus is that public transport networks have failed to respond to changes in spatial policy, creating swathes of people facing acute mobility and accessibility disadvantage (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

The North East

Transport-related social exclusion affects people in all regions. The complex nature of the problem is such that the effects will be different from region to region, with every region (and sub-region) facing different transport and accessibility pressures across very distinct geographical territories. This again emphasises the need for a dynamic and sophisticated policy approach that can be applied at the regional and sub-regional level.

This report will explore issues surrounding transport-related social exclusion in the North East. The North East is facing serious economic and social challenges. The region lags behind others in key economic measures, and has been the target of a plethora of economic regeneration initiatives in recent years. Evidence clearly illustrates that the economic performance of the North East compares poorly to other regions, shown here using the Gross Value Added measurement.



Decision-makers strongly agree that an effective transport system, in terms of infrastructure and network, is essential to supporting economic prosperity (North East Assembly, 2002; 2004). It is important to appreciate the regional need for effective connectivity, in relation to the movement of both people and goods. However, transport-related social exclusion is a phenomenon affecting individuals and their communities. It is therefore necessary to understand the socio-economic situation of the North East at a smaller spatial scale.

Using Travel-to-Work-Areas (TTWAs), it can be shown that even within the North East there are very real disparities in levels of employment. As Table 2 illustrates some TTWAs in the region lag significantly behind the region's overall employment level, whilst even more areas fail to reach the UK level.

In the context of transport-related social exclusion it is important to appreciate these inter-regional disparities, especially in such a key indicator as employment. It is of course accurate to suggest that the North East faces more acute economic challenges than other regions, as illustrated by the GVA measures (Figure 1) and the TTWA employment levels (Table 2). As this report will explore issues of social and economic disadvantage within the contexts of accessibility and mobility it is essential to understand how disadvantage and deprivation can become profoundly spatialised within a region. Despite economic growth and rising prosperity in some areas of the North East, there remain some distinct pockets of deprivation with low employment. In their report, *Jobs and Enterprise in Deprived Areas*, the Social Exclusion Unit discovered that more than a quarter of the streets in the North East are concentrations of worklessness, compared to just one in forty in the South East. Concentrations of worklessness are not evenly spread within England, and the North East and other northern regions have a disproportionately high level.

Table 2: Employment rates in North East Travel-to-Work Areas, as percentage of the working age population, 2002/03. Not Seasonally Adjusted.

Hartlepool	63.7
Bishop Auckland	63.7
Sunderland and Durham	66.1
Middlesbrough and Stockton	66.7
Morpeth and Ashington	69.2
Tyneside	70.0
Haltwhistle	73.3
Darlington	74.3
Alnwick and Amble	77.7
Hexham	79.1
Berwick-upon-Tweed	79.6
Barnard Castle	80.2
North East	68.6
UK	74.0

(Source: ONS, 2004a)

Note: TTWA boundaries do not exactly correlate administrative authority boundaries.

Conclusion

It is important to understand that transport solutions will not provide the full answer to these problems. As outlined in this introduction, transport-related social exclusion is brought about not just by poor transport networks, but also by wider spatial issues and planning policy. Transport has a key role to play, but solutions will only prove to be effective with a genuine commitment to joined-up policy making, which seeks to combine transport solutions with spatial policy. This more sophisticated, and integrated, approach has been given a name in the form of accessibility planning. As the Department for Transport asserts, accessibility planning is not a holistically transport-centred approach: 'Accessibility planning is not just about improving transport but about ensuring that jobs and services are delivered where and when they are needed' (Department for Transport, 2004b).

Accessibility planning describes the merging of concerns around mobility and spatial issues. At its most basic level accessibility planning should ensure a clear process for identifying social groups, or geographical areas, with accessibility problems. This should then allow for the development of localised frameworks

to deal with these problems – whether through improvements to transport networks, changing the location of key services or via longer-term shifts in land-use planning policy.

Local authorities will be statutorily obliged to include an accessibility planning caveat through their second Local Transport Plans, due for initial submission in July 2005. The success of this exercise will depend on the capacity of the local authorities to instigate effective joined-up working across their institutional structures. A serious approach to accessibility planning will require close working between those concerned with transport policy, spatial and land-use planning as well as agencies involved in the delivery of key services, including those charged with managing school transport and delivering Jobcentre Plus' initiatives, for example.

1: An analysis of transport and travel trends in the North East

With the exception of London, people in the North East travel fewer miles per year than people in all other English regions. The average annual mileage for a person living in the North East in 2002/03 was 5,902 miles (ONS, 2005b). This figure is significantly lower than the England average and the North East's neighbouring regions.

Table 3: Average distance travelled per person by region, 2002/03 (miles)

London	5,224
North East	5,902
North West	6,185
Yorkshire and the Humber	6,428
West Midlands	6,716
East of England	7,591
East Midlands	7,652
South West	7,957
South East	8,021
Great Britain	6,855

(Source: ONS, 2005b; ONS, 2005c; ONS, 2005d; ONS, 2005e; ONS, 2005f; ONS, 2005g; ONS, 2005h; ONS, 2005i; ONS, 2005j)

As Table 3 shows, the North East fails to match most other regions in terms of average distance travelled per year. London should be viewed as an exception within the context of this analysis, as the boundaries of the Greater London Authority cover only the urban conurbation while London's hinterland extends into the rest of the Greater South East. However, simply showing that people in the North East travel less distance than people in most other regions provides only a very narrow analysis. This analysis fails to consider the wide variety of factors affecting peoples' travel decisions, the formulation of peoples' travel horizons and the challenges people face in meeting their travel needs.

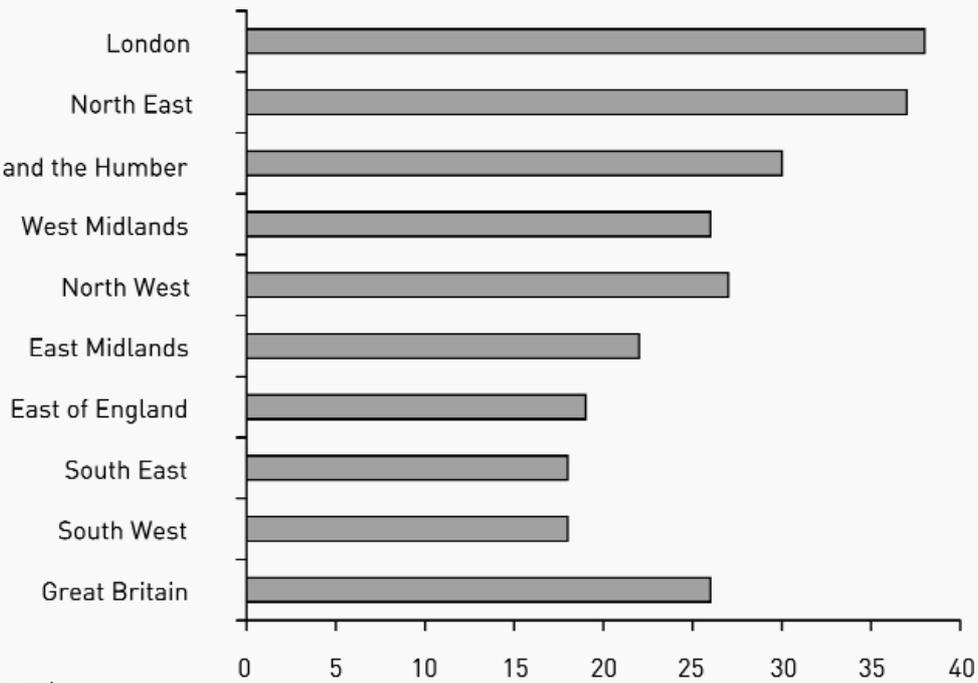
In order to develop a more robust understanding of these issues, and the policy implications of them, it is necessary to explore the North East's travel trends. This section will provide an overview of the key trends in relation to travel and transport in the North East. Possible explanations of these trends will be discussed, before the wider policy significance of transport in the North East is covered in the following section.

Car ownership is increasing in the North East, although it is unclear what basis there is for the popular claim that it is rising in the North East at a faster rate than in any other region (North East Assembly, 2002). In any case, the most recent data indicates that in 2002 the North East still had the highest percentage of households with no car outside of London.

There are obvious negative consequences to an accelerating rate of car ownership, not least the environmental impacts by way of increasing harmful emissions. Decision-makers seem content to accept this increasing rate of car ownership as an indication of rising economic prosperity across the region. It could be argued that this position is somewhat simplistic, failing to acknowledge the possibility that people may well be forced into becoming car owners due to the ineffectiveness of public transport networks. Moreover this position is also short-sighted; on the one hand decision-makers appear willing to embrace the spread of a car culture across the region, whilst on the other they readily accept that the region's road network is, in places, operating at full capacity with sections also experiencing significant congestion (North East Assembly, 2002).

Decision-makers should also be worrying about the economic effects of increasing car ownership. Evidence suggests that for people in the lowest income quintile who own a car, motoring costs account for almost a quarter of their weekly expenditure. This compares to 15 per cent of weekly expenditure for all households (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Over 25 per cent of people in the North East have an income below 60 per cent of the national median income (DWP, 2004). Combined with the relatively high levels

Figure 2: Percentage of households with no car/van, 2002

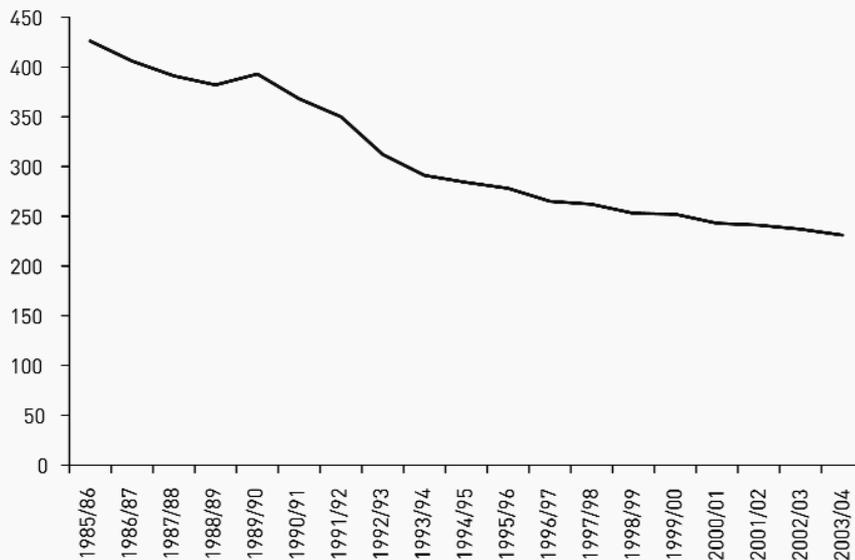


[Source: ONS, 2005; 2004b]

of worklessness, the financial impacts of car ownership on the poorest sections of the North East’s population are potentially very serious.

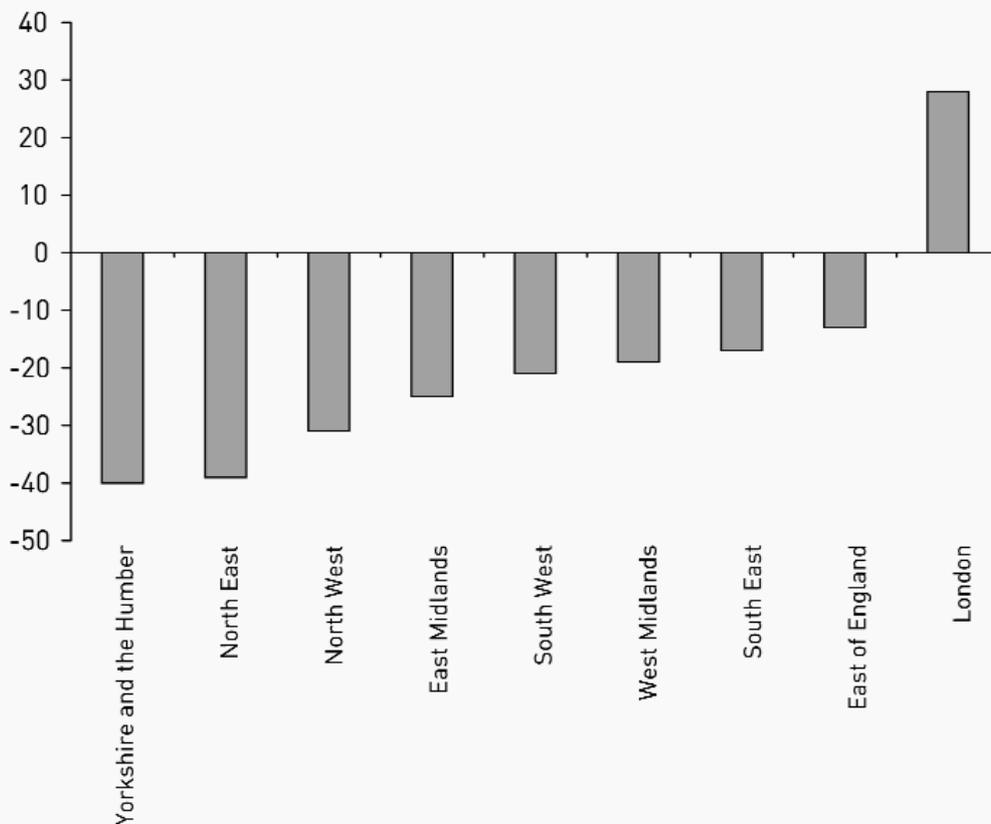
Bus travel is traditionally recognised as the main mode of transport for people on low incomes. Over nine out of ten public transport journeys made by people in the lowest income quintile are by bus (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Given the perceived importance of bus travel in the North East, evidence suggests some worrying trends. In 1985/86 426 million bus journeys were made in the region, compared to just 231 million in 2003/04 (ONS, 2004e). Over the 16-year period 1987/88 – 2003/04 bus journeys made in the North East have fallen by 46 per cent (ONS, 2003) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Bus passenger journeys in the North East, 1985/86-2003/04 (millions)



[Source: ONS, 2005; 2004b]

Figure 4: Percentage increase/ decrease in bus passenger journeys in Government Office regions, 1988-2003



(Source: ONS 2003)

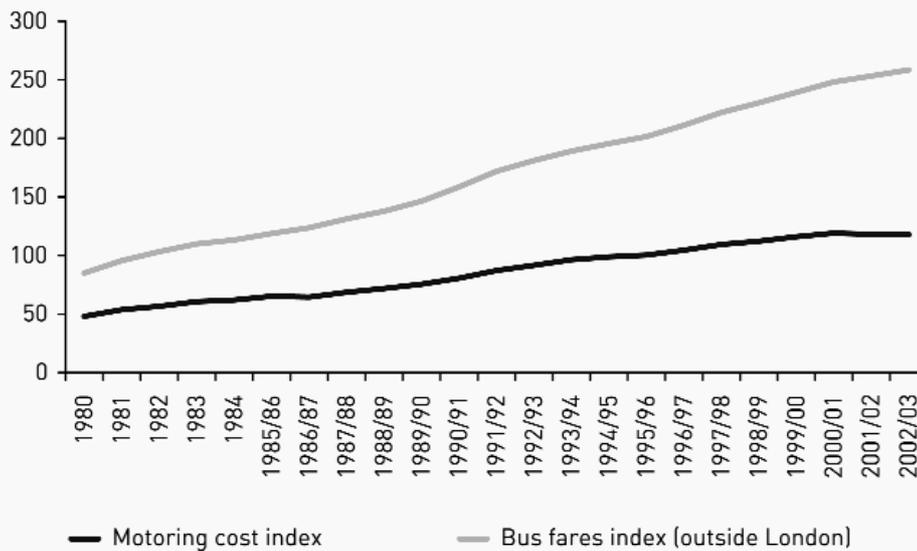
As Figure 4 illustrates falling bus patronage is a trend across all regions with the exception of London. However, it is clear this decline has been much more severe in the Northern regions, with only Yorkshire and the Humber showing a greater decline than the North East.

Various explanations have been applied to the trends in bus patronage. In the North East the increasing level of car ownership is commonly cited (North East Assembly, 2002; Nexus/ Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority, 2003). There is clearly a relationship between falling bus use and increasing levels of car ownership. A rapidly increasing rate of car ownership may be pleasing to those who see it as a direct indication of rising economic prosperity, however it is not sustainable in environmental terms and is of no help to those who cannot, or choose not to, join the region's growing car society.

The costs of public transport have risen much more sharply than the costs of private motoring (see Figure 5). For those who rely on public transport, and especially bus travel, this trend has compounded economic injustice. Since the restructuring of the UK's bus industry, following the 1985 Transport Act, services have been operated under a system commonly known as deregulation (except in London, where services operate under different legislation and were not deregulated, although they were privatised). Prior to this development local bus services came under the jurisdiction of local authorities, with councils or Passenger Transport Authorities in metropolitan centres holding responsibility for network planning and fares policy.

Following deregulation local authorities, or PTAs, exercise no control over commercial bus services and have no power over fares other than concessionary fares. In 2003/04 78 per cent of the nation's local bus services outside London were run on a commercial basis (Department for Transport 2004a). In the North East bus services are run largely by an oligarchic triangle of operating companies, comprising of Arriva North East, GO North East and Stagecoach North East. One explanation for the overall decline in the region's bus patronage is a disproportionate decline in concessionary travel, especially amongst the pensioner population. Until 1990 most concessionary travel for pensioners was free in Tyne and Wear. When fares were introduced for concessionary travellers they were significantly cheaper than standard fares, in most cases such fares were just a few pence.

Figure 5: Motoring cost index and bus fare index (UK outside London), 1980-2002/03 (current prices) 1995 = 100

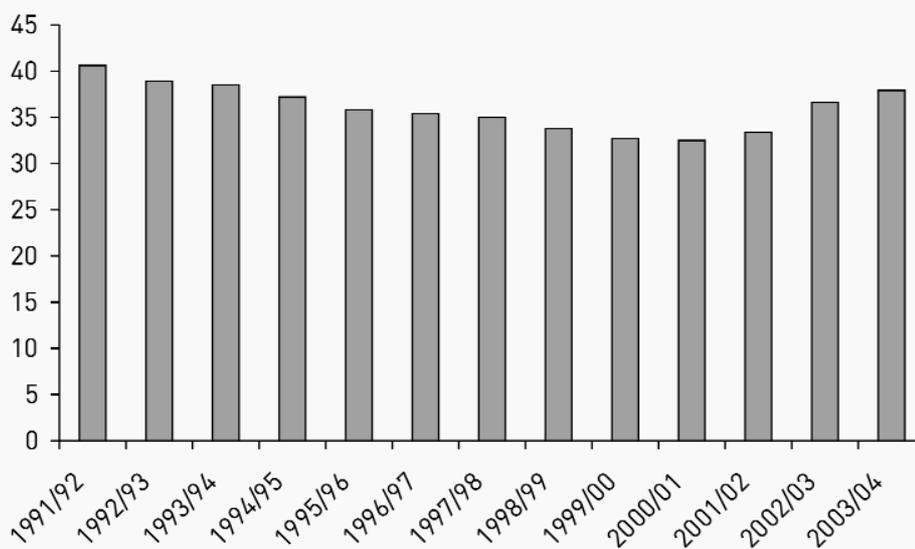


[Source: ONS 2003]

As concessionary fares for pensioners, the disabled and young people have increased, along with fares in general, and car ownership has risen, a sharp decline in the number of concessionary bus travellers has been observed. It should be noted that the fall in pensioners travelling by bus in the North East is reflective of a national trend. Despite a lack of evidential data, anecdotal evidence suggests that this marked decline in concessionary travel has not been seen in areas where free travel is still afforded to pensioners. Such areas include London, Scotland and Wales (operating under devolved institutional structures) and the Merseyside and West Midlands PTA areas. Bus operators in the region are reluctant to disclose data relating to this trend due to commercial sensitivities.

Bus operating companies cite the complex and bureaucratic system that governs concessionary travel as a possible explanation for this situation. Under present arrangements bus operators have to negotiate with each individual local authority or Passenger Transport Executive to reach agreement on the terms of concessionary travel.

Figure 6: Passenger journeys, Tyne and Wear Metro, 1991/92-2002/03



[Source: ONS 2004b]

Until very recently falling patronage was also a trend prevailing on the Tyne and Wear Metro, the urban light rail system covering the immediate Tyne and Wear conurbation. Despite providing coverage only to the immediate Tyne and Wear sub-region, the Metro is widely seen as a key component of the North East's public transport infrastructure. There is little doubt that those governing transport in the Tyne and Wear area see the Metro as their flagship asset. Tyne and Wear's Local Transport Plan 2001–2006 defines the Metro as 'the backbone of an integrated network of public transport' (Newcastle City Council *et al*, 2001). Patronage had been in gradual decline from the early 1990s until 2002/03, falling by 6 per cent over the period 1991/92–2001/02 (ONS, 2003).

Some of the increases can be attributed to the extensions of the Metro network. Between 2001/02 and 2002/03 an additional 19 kilometres of track were opened for passenger traffic, coupled with the opening of a further 12 stations (ONS, 2003). The extension of the Metro to Sunderland, and to conurbations on the south side of the River Wear, accounts for this additional infrastructure and the increase in patronage. In the period 2001/02–2003/04 Metro ridership increased to 37.9 million journeys, representing a 13 per cent jump on the 2001/02 total (ONS, 2003).

Conclusion

People in the North East travel fewer miles than people in most other regions. Public transport usage is generally in decline, with recent increases on the Tyne and Wear Metro providing an exception. Car ownership is increasing at a faster rate than in any other region. All this amounts to an interesting backdrop for those concerned with improving connectivity and accessibility in the North East. There are real challenges to be faced in devising effective policies that improve connectivity and accessibility, whilst also being environmentally responsible and integrating with social inclusion agendas.

2: Policy debates

At first glance transport policy is arranged with a simple logic, within a framework that is clear and easy to navigate. Central government policy feeds down into Regional Transport Strategies, with Local Transport Plans accommodating the bottom rung of this policy hierarchy. However, this simplistic policy framework is not reflected in reality. Transport policy is crafted, and delivered, through a complex web including central government, devolved institutions including the Greater London Authority, regional assemblies, local authorities, Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives, the Highways Agency, the Strategic Rail Authority and private transport operators. This makes for a highly centralised policy-making process, whilst delivery is extremely fragmented and shared between a plethora of public bodies, agencies and private operators (Ayres and Pearce, 2003).

Institutional arrangements

Whilst this is not the place for an in-depth discussion on the policy networks which frame transport policy in the UK, it is important to provide an overview of the institutional framework of the UK's transport policy. This is especially pertinent in discussions focussing on transport-related social exclusion and accessibility. Even after the establishment of the accessibility policy framework, which is fairly rudimentary at present, there is no defined institution or body responsible for issues of accessibility. Planning authorities were responsible for issues of spatial planning, transport bodies were responsible for mobility and transport network planning and the relevant agencies were responsible for the delivery of key public services (in a locational sense). This lack of policy co-ordination was pointed out by the Social Exclusion Unit, in its keynote report into transport-related social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

Following this report the Government has addressed this vacuum and has come forward with an initial policy structure for accessibility planning. Local authorities will be responsible for incorporating a distinct accessibility narrative into their next Local Transport Plans, due for initial submission in July 2005. Guidance issued by the Department for Transport makes clear that the accessibility planning component to the Local Transport Plan should be fully integrated and support wider objectives set out in the plan (Department for Transport, 2004b). The DfT's guidance sets out three key objectives for the accessibility agenda within Local Transport Plans:

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

This new joined-up vision is also clear in the move to integrate Regional Transport Strategies into the wider reaching Regional Spatial Strategies. This development provides an opportunity for decision-makers to provide a strategic fusion between their visions for spatial planning and mobility. Furthermore, this also paves the way for a regional level approach to accessibility. Unlike neighbouring states in the EU, the UK has historically failed to establish the structures which would allow for a robust regional level approach to transport policy making (Ayres and Pearce, 2003). Not only does the UK not have the institutional capacity at the regional level to formulate and deliver strategic transport policy, regional institutions also have very little power in the deployment of resources for the delivery of transport policy.

In seeking to explore the scope for more sophisticated, and socially inclusive focussed, transport planning it is important to consider the current institutional arrangements, and the functions performed by the current structures. In the North East the central co-ordinating institution in transport policy is the North East Assembly. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body and is responsible for the formulation of numerous strategies, such as the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Transport Strategy. The Government Office for the North East essentially acts as the Department for Transport's proxy in the region, but the North East Assembly is the only institution in the right position to provide a broad strategic vision for transport and connectivity across the region. In line with the Transport Act 2000 the region's

local authorities produce Local Transport Plans. The first Local Transport Plans cover the period 2001 – 2006; the second plans are currently being finalised and will cover the period 2006–2011.

In the Tyne and Wear sub-region the Local Transport Plan is produced by a partnership comprising of the five local authorities that constitute the Tyne and Wear conurbation, along with the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority (as represented by the Passenger Transport Executive Nexus). As a Passenger Transport Executive, Nexus is unique in being the only such body to own and operate a major portion of its area's public transport network. With the exception of the Glasgow Metro, the Tyne and Wear Metro is the only publicly owned and operated light rail system in the UK. Beyond Nexus, and the Tyne and Wear metropolitan sub-region, public transport planning in the North East relies on co-ordination and co-operation between local authorities and private transport operators and on 'Quality Partnerships'.

There are some inherent problems with this current institutional set up, especially in a region like the North East. Decision-makers in the North East readily admit that the current transport network, including public transport, has a radial nature, with networks converging into the key urban centres of Newcastle/Gateshead, Darlington, Durham and Middlesbrough. Recent assertions indicate that this pattern is also the preference for the future, and will form the region's future vision for transport network arrangements (North East Assembly, 2004). This approach has undoubtedly been spurred on by the Northern Way initiative, which encourages transport networks to be shaped in a radial fashion towards the so-called most accessible centres (North East Assembly, 2004; Northern Way Steering Group, 2004). It could be argued that this is a common sense approach. The key urban centres obviously account for a large proportion of the region's population, as well as being a logical nuclei for economic and commercial development. Most regeneration initiatives also centre on the major urban conurbations. This radial model is also consistent with the urban renaissance agenda, and the city-region approach, something which is again strongly advocated in the Northern Way strategy (Northern Way Steering Group, 2004).

Local Transport Plans ensure that transport policy is localised within each key centre, along with the same process occurring in the more outlying hinterlands. This allows for local strategies to be devised in line with national policy priorities. Whilst this focus on transport and accessibility within sub-regions is valuable, there is little significant focus on accessibility between sub-regions. It would be wrong to suggest that the current arrangements for regional-level transport planning have no merit whatsoever. However, the current focus at the regional level appears to neglect public transport in favour of a more prominent focus on private road travel. An effective road network is of course essential for a successful bus network, but focussing on creating a road network which seeks to accommodate an increasing level of private car journeys is not sustainable or socially inclusive.

This illustrates a critical tension facing regional transport policy-makers, and more specifically those concerned with accessibility issues. Decision-makers appear resolute in their position that developing an effective road network, with increased capacity, is crucial in stimulating much-needed economic growth and regeneration. Indeed the North East Assembly suggests several highway developments it views as initiators of economic growth. These include developing the A66 Trans-Pennine link road, the A19 and the A69 (North East Assembly, 2004). In their consultation draft of the Regional Economic Strategy One NorthEast added a number of different priorities: the A1 Gateshead Western By-pass, the planned second Tyne Tunnel and the A66 (ONE, 2005).

The most high profile debate in terms of highway development in the North East centres on the A1 north of Tyneside. The A1 dissects the region, running parallel to the East Coast Main Line railway, and is viewed a key strategic corridor. North of Tyneside the A1 is not a motorway standard road, and there has been a lengthy and ongoing campaign to get the stretch leading from North Tyneside to the Scottish Borders dualled and upgraded to motorway standard. This campaign is based partly on road safety grounds, however there can be little doubt that this issue has garnered such a high profile because it is believed that the scheme would be exploited as an infrastructure asset in attracting economic investment. The development of the A1 was the subject of a major piece of Government-supported research and is frequently featured in the local press (Department for Transport/ Government Office for the North East, 2002; *The Journal*, 2004). It should be noted that the links between investment in transport infrastructure and economic growth are not as robust as many assume, with evidence suggesting that such links are not only overplayed but can be at times tenuous (Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999).

It would be unfair to suggest that regional-level decision-makers totally discount the importance of public transport. In fact, it should be anticipated that the Regional Transport Strategy (as an ambit of the

Regional Spatial Strategy) will address public transport across the North East, potentially embracing the importance of accessibility, connectivity and combating transport-related social exclusion. Overcoming the tension outlined earlier should be a priority for regional decision-makers. Whilst an effective and modern transport infrastructure is important in attracting investment and supporting much-needed economic growth, it is equally as important in providing connectivity across all parts of the region for all sections of society, especially those who might be categorised as socially excluded.

Whilst advancing a strong and appropriate vision for public transport in the region is important, delivering it on the ground presents difficulties. A Regional Transport Strategy cannot be delivered as a regional strategy. Institutional limitations prevent this and lead to a dislocated structure of delivery, which can arguably weaken the strategy's vision. At the regional level there is no capacity for the direct delivery of transport policy. The delivery of transport policy, and especially priorities identified at the regional level, face some profound institutional difficulties in terms of delivery.

Most aspects of public transport are administered at the local authority level, or by Nexus in the Tyne and Wear metropolitan sub-regional area. This means that the co-ordination of networks, fares policy and ticketing arrangements where journeys and travel patterns transcend administrative boundaries can be difficult. This can also hinder efforts to provide integrated services.

Some aspects of transport policy are best suited to localised formulation and delivery, especially where measures to combat transport-related social exclusion within a specific area are concerned. Crime and anti-social behaviour on, and around, public transport can be a real deterrent to people using it especially in deprived areas. Initiatives to combat such crime are a good example of something best dealt with at the local level, where the relevant local authority, transport operator and the local police can form a close partnership to deal with the problems, using their strong understanding of the local circumstances as an advantage.

Spatial policy

It is intended that the Regional Spatial Strategy should provide a hub of convergence between other key regional strategies, including the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Housing Strategy, and the Integrated Regional Framework. The Regional Transport Strategy will sit within the Regional Spatial Strategy, underlining the Government's drive for strategic regional-level integration between transport and spatial policy. In line with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, local authorities design Local Development Frameworks which should complement the broad principles set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy. As previously stated, local authorities have a statutory obligation to prepare Local Transport Plans, which again, should conform to the Regional Transport Strategy.

The Regional Spatial Strategy should set out strategies to deal with the spatial implications of other strategies and policies in the region. Therefore its objectives are not exclusively spatial, but seek to reflect the inter-dependent relationships between spatial policy with economic development, urban regeneration, transport policy and sustainable development. There is little doubt that this is a complex set of agendas to reconcile in a single strategic vision. The North East Regional Spatial Strategy carries four key policy themes: 'Delivering Economic Prosperity and Growth, Creating Sustainable Communities, Environment, Transport Connections' (North East Assembly, 2005).

Accessibility is seen in two distinct ways in the North East's Regional Spatial Strategy. Firstly, there is what can be described as economic accessibility; concerned with the ability of companies in the region to access markets, and the peripheral position of the region in geographic terms to the rest of England. This approach clearly views accessibility as a key component to driving economic growth and improving the prosperity of the region. Whilst this may be true to an extent, evidence also suggests that improved accessibility and connectivity will not automatically enhance economic prosperity or competitiveness (Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999).

The second view of accessibility in the Regional Spatial Strategy is more socially focussed, and is more relevant to the issues being explored in this report. The Strategy explicitly acknowledges that the recent "decentralisation of jobs, services and facilities" is impacting on people's accessibility, and that this is a trend which can particularly affect those living in deprived areas (North East Assembly, 2004, p14). The situation is such that people need to travel more and greater distances, to access employment, educational institutions, shops, public services and leisure and cultural venues. On the one hand, this is causing increased travel by private car, causing congestion and environmental degradation, whilst on the other

those who choose not to, or cannot, join the region's car culture are left facing accessibility challenges and suffering from what can be described as 'mobility deprivation' (Department for Transport, 2000). The region's public transport networks have struggled to keep pace with these more dislocated locational patterns.

Resolving these issues is the responsibility of both spatial and transport policy. As the Regional Spatial Strategy makes clear, "packaged approaches are needed, which focus new development in the more accessible locations, particularly by public transport, cycling and walking and reduce the need to travel" (North East Assembly, 2004, p14). Whilst this approach is correct in principle it could be read as having a pre-determined view of what defines an 'accessible location'. In practice this can probably be translated into strategies focussed on driving forward economic development in the key urban centres, an approach consistent with other regional strategies and the Northern Way policy. Furthermore, this approach is long-term. The Regional Spatial Strategy is designed to bring forward policies that, notwithstanding extreme unforeseen events, should reach beyond the next twenty-five years.

Whilst making fundamental shifts in development and planning policy, adopting a new accessibility-orientated approach will not reap results for a number of years (the timeframe being dictated by the pace of developments). However, there are packages which should, and can, be implemented in the immediate term. Such packages can complement long-term strategies in easing the region's accessibility challenges, helping to encourage modal shift towards public transport, and enabling moves towards greater social inclusion. Improvements to the provision and quality of public transport networks, better promotion of public transport and changes to fare structures may form such policy packages.

In spatial terms, the North East is arranged by the geography of the former industries, including the coal, steel, shipbuilding, and chemical industries. The onset of this post-industrial era has seen the progression of new spatial patterns. Industrial changes in the region, along with increased private car ownership, have provided a challenging backdrop for those concerned with the accessibility agenda. There are of course other factors as well that have contributed to this situation. There have been changes in the delivery of public services, with the modern concept of choice meaning that people may have the option to travel a greater distance to their choice of school or hospital for example. Changes in the retail sector have seen large out-of-town supermarkets become the most popular choice for domestic shopping, and developments such as the Metro Centre at Gateshead typify the modern trend of American-style out-of-town retail and entertainment complexes.

Those charged with developing a modern spatial policy in the North East must take into account these fundamental changes. Whilst the cultural geography of the region may remain tied to former patterns of industry, accessibility deprivation and tackling social exclusion demands an approach that challenges today's accessibility problems, and sets in train a long-term spatial vision that places accessibility at its heart.

The importance of policy integration

Integration will be crucial in the delivery of such a strategy, and this means overcoming some of the institutional barriers outlined earlier in this section in relation to transport policy. The North East Assembly is the North East's Regional Planning Body, and this perhaps creates an immediate institutional difficulty. Research commissioned by the Department for Transport found that where Regional Assemblies are charged with mapping integrated strategies for spatial planning, transport and economic development, decisions are rarely made which genuinely prioritise the regional interest. Assembly members will often base their decisions on the interests of the local electorates to which they are accountable, meaning that a holistically regional position is avoided (Department for Transport/ MVA Ltd, 2004). In such situations, there is also a critical question of certain sub-regional territories potentially acquiring a dominant position. This territorial imbalance can hinder important strategic decisions, and can again prevent the formulation of a truly regional vision. In the North East, the Tyne and Wear sub-region is widely seen as the natural key centre of the region, and this is reflected in the various regional strategies (North East Assembly, 2002, 2004; ONE, 2002).

It should be noted that this is not necessarily a bad thing in itself. Virtually all regions have certain sub-regions that convey a strong and domineering identity as the region's strategic centre; so long as regional-level decision-making is managed so not to allow a particular sub-region to dominate at the expense of a true regional vision. If the North East adopts a city-region approach, as suggested in the Regional Spatial

Strategy and advocated by the Northern Way strategy, such sub-regional territorial imbalances may be eased (North East Assembly, 2004; Northern Way Steering Group, 2004).

Evidence suggests that the North East's institutions are not good at integration, especially in reconciling the spatial, transport, and economic development triangle. In the first instance there is the issue of sub-regional tensions, as previously outlined. Tensions between local authorities can seriously damage a region's capacity to put forward a coherent policy linking land-use, transport, and economic development policy. As the Department for Transport's research found: 'Even in the North East, which has been a strong advocate of regional devolution, the identity and independence of the four sub-regions remains a powerful force inhibiting regional strategic coherence' (Department for Transport/ MVA Ltd, 2004). This research also suggests that the technical capacity of the North East Assembly was not up to appreciating the importance of the inter-linked relationship between spatial, transport and economic development policy (Department for Transport/ MVA Ltd, 2004).

If strategies and policies are to be delivered in an integrated way, then it would make sense that they are produced in an integrated way. In relation to spatial, transport, and economic strategies this has not been the case in the North East. Indeed there is little evidence of cyclical working and integration during the formulation of key regional strategies (Department for Transport/ MVA Ltd, 2004).

Whilst decision-makers in the North East have a clear determination to present a coherent programme of integrated regional strategies, there is evidence to suggest that there is much room for improvement in the future. The Regional Spatial Strategy written by the North East Assembly, which also contains the Regional Transport Strategy, has to be submitted to the Secretary of State for ODPM in July 2005. The Government Office for the North East leads on the production of the Regional Housing Strategy, and this was to be submitted to the same Secretary of State in early June 2005. The Regional Economic Strategy is, of course, written by One NorthEast and has to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by mid-November 2005 (although a draft was issued for consultation in June 2005).

This institutional make-up poses a real challenge for the triumvirate of regional institutions to mark out a real integrated approach. Tackling accessibility problems, and transport-related social exclusion, can only be successful through an approach of genuine integration. In order for this to happen the North East requires a new rationalization across its key regional strategies, coupled with a genuine commitment to integrated delivery from the local authorities and other concerned agencies.

Road user charging

It has been regularly cited throughout this report, and is frequently mentioned in official documents, that the North East has the fastest rate of car ownership of all the UK's regions (North East Assembly, 2002; 2004). As discussed earlier, this is not a trend to automatically take pride in. Those who seek to hold the trend up as an indicator of increasing prosperity should adopt a more cautionary stance, and take note of the negative externalities of a growing car society across the region. Increasing car ownership is not environmentally sustainable.

Moreover those living in deprived areas and on low incomes are more likely to suffer the negative effects of this trend than people on higher incomes and living in more prosperous areas. Those on low incomes who do own a car will spend a substantially higher proportion of their income on motoring costs than people on middle and high incomes. Deprived areas and people on low incomes are also affected disproportionately by the negative externalities of car use. There is a clear link between social deprivation and child road injuries, with children in the most deprived ten per cent of wards in England more than three times as likely to be pedestrian casualties as their counterparts in the least deprived ten per cent of wards, an issue compounded by the larger number of children living in deprived areas (Grayling *et al*, 2002). Furthermore the Acheson Report found that deprived communities suffer significantly more from traffic pollution (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

In seeking to tackle transport-related social exclusion, framing an appropriate policy response to this trend is crucial. In order to encourage investment in public transport, ridership figures need to increase. Bus patronage has been decreasing and the recent increase in Metro patronage can be largely attributed to the extension to Sunderland and the opening of 12 extra stations. The nature of public transport is such that improvements in service and vehicle quality need to be justified commercially. In the simplest terms, more people need to be encouraged to use public transport on a regular basis, and this means public transport needs to reach out to new audiences. Modal shift from the car to public transport needs to be stimulated.

The increasing rate of car ownership is beginning to cause congestion in a small number of areas on the North East's road network. Congestion hotspots are becoming recognised, especially around the key urban centres. This not only frustrates car drivers, but it also slows down buses, reinforcing perceptions that buses are unreliable and slow. In some parts of the region successful bus priority measures have been implemented, such as the Superoute network across Tyne and Wear, and the bus-only lanes through central Newcastle (or at least no-car lanes).

In June 2005, the Transport Secretary Alistair Darling announced that he wanted to build a political consensus in tackling congestion, and in particular to examine moves towards a national system of road pricing (Darling 2005). The reforms would introduce 'pay-as-you-go' road charges, and every vehicle would have a black box to allow a satellite system to track their journey with lower prices for driving on a quiet road out of the rush hour as compared to motorways at peak times. The charges could replace road tax and petrol duty, and would not necessarily raise extra revenue for the government.

The DfT conducted a major feasibility study into a national road-user charging scheme, which reported in July 2004 and its recommendations fed directly into the Government's transport White Paper (Department for Transport 2004c, 2004d). Following the success of the London Congestion Charging scheme and the opening of the M6 Toll Road – the UK's first tolled motorway – in the West Midlands in December 2003, there is a growing consensus around the merits of road-user charging. It would of course be ludicrous to suggest that the congestion in areas of the North East is similar to the chronic gridlock seen in pre-Red Zone London. However, the controversy and political bickering witnessed when the London scheme was being introduced, should tell us that it is more sophisticated and more politically astute to be preventative rather than reactive. Surely, the motorists in the North East would prefer that congestion problems are dealt with before parts of the region become chronically gridlocked?

The success of the London Congestion Charging scheme enforces the fact that such schemes can work. Since the London scheme was introduced congestion in central London has fallen by 30 per cent, whilst peak-time bus patronage has increased by 38 per cent (Transport for London, 2003; 2004). Whilst London dominates the literature in relation to congestion and road-user charging it should not be forgotten that the UK's first road-user charging scheme was pioneered in the North East. The Durham scheme has been highly successful, and evidence suggests that traffic entering the area around Durham's historical cathedral has fallen by 90 per cent (igreens, 2003).

Table 4: Forecast changes in road traffic (as a percentage of current levels) following implementation of a national road-user charging scheme in 2010

	Revenue neutral	Revenue raising
London	-10.7	-17.1
North East	+4.7	-9.2
West Midlands	+5.3	-7.8
East Midlands	+6.9	-7.5
South East	+7.4	-6.7
North West	+8.6	-6.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	+8.7	-6.3
Eastern	+9.6	-6.1
South West	+10.9	-5.7

(Source: Grayling *et al*, 2004)

Depending on the level of charges, research shows that the introduction of a national road-user charging scheme would create revenues that could fund improvements to the transport infrastructure. Revenue raising describes a system which is deliberately designed to raise money for the public purse, whereas a revenue neutral scheme matches any revenue raised with reductions in Vehicle Excise Duty and /or fuel duty. A revenue neutral scheme would reduce congestion, but a revenue raising scheme would reduce congestion, cut traffic (and in cutting traffic reduce harmful emissions) and raise revenue to fund transport projects. Transport modelling, commissioned for ippr, suggests that a national revenue raising road-user charge could raise more than £16 billion per year, at 2010 prices (Grayling *et al*, 2004).

The Government's Feasibility Study into the future of road pricing and charging has arguably paved the way for revenues raised to be reinvested into transport (Department for Transport, 2004c). If this was not the case the political argument in favour of road-charging would be significantly damaged. The 2004 Transport White Paper committed the Government to 'develop proposals on how receipts from road users would be governed, managed and accounted for' (Department for Transport, 2004d). ippr's research, based on advanced modelling, suggests while that a revenue neutral scheme would have a significant impact in tackling congestion, as measured by journey delays, it leads to a redistribution and overall increase in traffic levels, as the reductions in peak hours in congested areas are outweighed by the growth in off-peak and free-flow areas.

As the data suggests the North East would see the most significant fall in road traffic, with the exception of London, following the introduction of a revenue-raising scheme. Furthermore, evidence also predicts that the fall in road traffic would be even greater in the North East's metropolitan areas, namely the Tyne and Wear area. ippr's figures suggest a 13.5 per cent fall in road traffic in the metropolitan centre on the introduction of a revenue raising scheme (Grayling *et al*, 2004).

Given the predicted revenues from a national revenue-raising scheme, forecast to be over £16 billion by the ippr's modelling (at 2010 prices) the North East could see a useful windfall to invest in transport. This is of course assuming that legislation ring fences such revenues exclusively for transport investment, which should be the case. However there is a debate about how such revenues will be managed and distributed. The Department for Transport's Feasibility Study brought forward two possibilities. Firstly revenues would be accounted for nationally and distributed from the centre. The second option would be for more regional or local management. The latter option appears preferable from a progressive viewpoint. If the first, highly centralised option, were adopted the status quo in the fiscal structure of transport spending would be continued. At present more prosperous regions benefit disproportionately well from Government transport spending. Spending analyses from the first year of the Government's Ten Year Plan show that London received more than double the national average (Grayling, 2004a).

A more decentralised model of revenue redistribution should theoretically enable investment in more localised priorities, and would also incentivise regional and local institutions to manage road-user charging effectively in their respective territories. The benefits of a national road-user charging scheme, implemented on a revenue-raising basis, are clear. In the North East road traffic volume would fall, clearing congestion and public transport use would increase. ippr's modelling suggests that bus ridership in the North East's metropolitan areas would increase by almost 28 per cent on the back of revenue-raising road-user charging (Grayling *et al*, 2004). This not only presents clear environmental benefits but also has clear advantages in helping to tackle social exclusion.

A national road-user charging programme would take at least a decade to become operational. It would require investment in an advanced technological infrastructure based around a Global Positioning Satellite system. Changes would also need to be made to current vehicle tax structures, in order to ensure that car owners on low incomes who need to drive regularly, such as those living in remote or rural areas, are not heavily penalised. The success of the Central London congestion charge has helped build some political momentum for the use of price signals in reducing demand for road transport, but the failure of the referendum held by Edinburgh City Council in February 2005 on the question of introducing a congestion charge into the Scottish capital indicates that the public are yet to be convinced of the case for managing traffic growth. Arguably the biggest challenge in the immediate term is for the Government to make the political case for managing traffic growth.

Research clearly illustrates that the North East can benefit significantly from the introduction of road-user charging. Decision-makers in the region should be prepared to make the political case for this and ensure the role that such a scheme can play in helping to tackle social exclusion is central to their argument. In his speech of June 2005, Transport Secretary Alistair Darling stated that the scheme would 'need a pilot somewhere in the UK – probably in a major conurbation or region of the country' (Darling, 2005). North East decision-makers should rise to this challenge.

Fares policy

The advantages of road-user charging, in both environmental and social terms, are in the medium to long-term. It is an obvious priority to make public transport more attractive in the immediate term. Whilst cost ranks below overall quality when it comes to people's transport problems, there is little doubt that a coherent fares policy makes it easier for people to use public transport (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

Evidence shows a direct link between lower fares, when accompanied with improved quality, and increased patronage (Goodwin and Dargay, 2001). There are of course some high profile examples of this, such as the Greater London Council's 'Fares Fair' episode. Evidence also indicates a direct correlation between lower fares and car ownership figures (Goodwin and Dargay, 2001). Furthermore evidence also suggests a degree of intergenerational patronage, whereby children are attracted to bus travel by low fares become the next generation of adult travellers (Goodwin and Dargay, 2001).

As lower fares increase bus ridership figures, the nature of today's bus industry dictates that fare increases are given the merit of being commercially viable. Operators can justify increased fares on the basis that investment will be made in their vehicle stock and other service improvements. However evidence also shows that this assumption, is to an extent, insecure and in the long-run sustained fares increases lead to larger than anticipated demand drops, creating a self-defeating exercise (Goodwin and Dargay, 2001).

Beyond simply arguing for public transport fares to be lower, more sophisticated suggestions can be made in relation to fares policy that will make life easier for customers, and make public transport more attractive. It was earlier stated that the decline in bus patronage in the North East can be largely attributed to declines in concessionary travel. Although data is difficult to come by on this issue, due to commercial sensitivities, explanations for this can be extrapolated. Until 1990 pensioners bus travel was free in the North East. Following the introduction of fares, which are subsidised at the local authority level, a complex bureaucratic situation has arisen.

Bus operators in the North East have to negotiate with every local authority or with Nexus in the Tyne and Wear area, on the issue of concessionary travel. Each local authority can enforce different time restrictions on concessionary travel; concessions passes will be different colours from different local authorities. This creates a situation that is time consuming and arduous for bus operators, and is clearly not user-friendly for the travelling public.

Changes have also been made in recent years to the concessionary travel entitlements of young people. The introduction of choice into the post-16 education sector means that young people can now choose to attend a post-16 education institution outside their home local authority. Local authorities may be disinclined to subsidise travel to institutions that are not within their area.

Whilst it is easy to suggest that lower fares are the answer to all public transport's problems, it should also be remembered that drastic changes in fares structures can only be achieved through a massive overhaul of the England's bus industry. Progress needs to be made in the area of concessionary travel.

3: Conclusions and recommendations

Set against the challenging socio-economic backdrop of the region, those charged with transport and connectivity policy in the North East face some key issues to confront. The spatial arrangement of the region has changed dramatically in recent times, with development becoming more and more dispersed. This serves to increase people's need to travel, and to travel greater distances.

Perceptions of the region's spatiality are, in some cases, still rooted in the geography of the region's former industrial era. The post-industrial age has profoundly changed the region's geography. People no longer work in a heavy industrial plant which is within walking distance, or a short bus journey, from their homes. Large out-of-town supermarkets now dominate the domestic retail sector, which are significantly easier to access by car. Choice in core public services means that people can travel greater distances to schools and hospitals.

Public transport use in the North East remains in steady decline. Bus patronage has fallen in the region by 39 per cent in the past 15 years (ONS, 2003). The trend does not bode well for environmental sustainability or social inclusion.

Accessibility planning is a relatively new concept, only achieving significant policy prominence in the Social Exclusion Unit's keynote report into transport-related social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Local authorities are required to build an explicit accessibility narrative into their second Local Transport Plans. It remains to be seen how local authorities will approach this, and how robust their policies in relation to local accessibility will be.

As Section 2 discussed, mapping accessibility and connectivity at the regional level is a process hindered by institutional structures and boundaries of responsibility. Furthermore, the consensus is that accessibility planning and achieving social inclusion focussed connectivity rests on the scope of integration between the key strategies, and institutions, within the region. Evidence suggests that the North East has room for improvement in relation to its cross-strategy integration at the regional level (Department for Transport/ MVA Ltd, 2004).

Several problems have been identified in this report which, if confronted, can contribute positively to improving connectivity and tackling transport-related social exclusion in the North East. These suggestions sit on both short- and long-term timescales, and whilst specific to the North East, are applicable to other regions.

Eight Recommendations for Better Accessibility Planning in North East England

1. Rebalance debates so that the role of transport as a tool for social inclusion is given at least equal weight to its role in economic growth.
2. Create a North East Accessibility Forum to support the sharing of best practice and understanding, and to help engender a cross-sectoral and cross-regional approach to accessibility and connectivity policies.
3. Regional co-ordination of concessionary fares.
4. Return to sensible regulation of the bus network.
5. Public transport operators must be encouraged to invest and innovate.
6. Explore the possibility that the North East, or one of its conurbations, can pilot road-user charging.
7. A stronger decentralised approach to transport policy, with a single 'Transport, Housing and Planning Regional Board.'
8. Adopt a stronger commitment to 'smart growth'.

1. Rebalance debates so that the role of transport as a tool for social inclusion is given at least equal weight to its role in economic growth

In exploring the North East's key strategies it is difficult to avoid the central focus on economic regeneration. This is of course purely natural and it should be welcomed that the region's decision-makers are

determinedly focussed on devising strategies which aim to attract investment, stimulate economic growth and support regeneration across the region. The region has, of course, been truly battered by industrial decline, especially through the 1980s and early 1990s. Managing the region's smooth transition into the post-industrial economy is crucially important in making the region prosperous, and putting the region on to a trajectory towards sustained prosperity.

However, in relation to transport policy especially, this central focus on economic regeneration is perhaps too overbearing. Certainly in the Regional Spatial Strategy the priority of transport, accessibility and connectivity is clearly to support wider objectives connected to economic growth. As the Regional Spatial Strategy asserts: '...it will be important to ensure that the North East has a high quality, integrated, safe and robust network of transport infrastructure and services that will support the Region's regeneration and economic growth' (North East Assembly, 2004). Furthermore, the consultation draft of the Regional Economic Strategy highlighted large-scale infrastructure projects – the A1 Gateshead Western By-pass and the planned second Tyne tunnel – but barely mentioned the bus network (ONE 2005).

This means that many of the transport priorities identified in these strategies are geared towards creating a transport network that is attractive to potential inward investors, such as the prominent focus on road improvements and expansions in the Regional Spatial Strategy and the forthcoming Regional Economic Strategy (North East Assembly 2004, ONE 2005). The consequence of this is that the key regional strategies sometimes appear to consider public transport as a sub-issue to the broader economic growth focussed initiatives. Increasing economic growth is of course key in tackling social exclusion and creating opportunity across the region. However in relation to accessibility and tackling transport-related social exclusion, a more inclusive focus is required.

Fostering an effective transport strategy for the region, which seeks to improve accessibility and connectivity, requires an integrated approach: integration between broad economic growth objectives and strategies to tackle social exclusion. In relation to transport policy and accessibility, a more balanced approach is required which places these two important priorities on a more even footing.

At the same time, central government needs to reassess transport funding mechanisms. Recent years have seen a more rapid increase in capital funding and expenditure than revenue, and this situation seems incompatible with the broader objectives of transport policy. Local authority officers often remark that they feel 'capital-rich and revenue-poor'. **The Department for Transport needs to readdress the mismatch between capital and revenue funding mechanisms.**

This financial technical change is important, because it is necessary to ensure that transport authorities have the flexibility to provide for general bus fare subsidies where they think it appropriate. Buses are presently subsidised far less in Britain than in other European countries with better bus services. It is more difficult to make the case for higher train fare subsidies, which disproportionately benefit well paid long-distance London commuters, or for increased public expenditure on building roads to tackle congestion, which benefits car owners who are disproportionately the better off.

2. Create a North East Accessibility Forum to support the sharing of best practice and understanding, and to help engender a cross-sectoral and cross-regional approach to accessibility and connectivity policies

As previously stated, accessibility planning is a relatively new concept. It is understandable that those charged with delivering accessibility planning, especially in relation to connectivity issues, will face problems. This is a new policy discipline, and with the requirement for local authorities to integrate an accessibility element into their second Local Transport Plans, responsibility for policy delivery lies in the remit of institutions that may not have the capacity to deliver policies in this area. This is not to criticise local authorities, and with the new political consensus emerging around decentralised responsibilities and enhanced localism, it should be welcomed that local authorities have been handed key responsibilities in this important policy area. It should be remembered that accessibility planning is a technically intensive discipline, requiring sophisticated computer software and staff capable of operating this and initiating the required joined-up thinking across their institutions. Larger local authorities may not encounter these problems, but it should be anticipated that smaller authorities might.

Furthermore, if accessibility planning is to be successful it will need a long term commitment from a range of organisations – if it becomes the unique preserve of the transport expert, the concept will have failed. Organisations which need to integrate accessibility planning with their work include local planning

authorities, Primary Care Trusts, local education authorities, the Learning and Skills Councils, Jobcentre Plus offices, Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and the Regional Development Agencies. It would be impossibly voluminous to bring together this range of stakeholders at the national level, but it could be sensibly done at a regional level. Furthermore, the regional level is where two crucial strategies for this agenda are prepared: the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy.

Therefore the region should endeavour to establish a forum for the sharing of experiences and best practice. This would allow for local authorities to learn from each other's experiences and could also facilitate resource sharing. Furthermore such a forum may also help to promote integration of this agenda across numerous public sector agencies and also to engender cross-regional thinking in relation to accessibility planning and connectivity. Whilst local approaches are crucial in terms of accessibility and tackling transport-related social exclusion, there is also a need for a coherent regional approach. Efforts to approach this issue cannot afford to be hindered by sub-regional tensions and competition. The sub-regions should be prepared to work together on this issue to ensure their specific localised strategies are feasible and robust, and to also work towards a regional vision that is also feasible and cogent.

In the first instance the North East Assembly should convene this forum. Its membership would include the relevant transport and planning officials from each local authority and the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive, relevant representatives from One NorthEast, the Government Office for the North East and transport operators. Representatives from the other agencies concerned with transport-related social exclusion and specialised transport planning need to fully participate in the forum.

Whenever new policy concepts arise, or where there is a new call for joined-up thinking, the inevitable response is to set up a new committee or forum. Needless bureaucracy should always be avoided, especially when local institutions become ever more bombarded with delivery targets. It should be stated that this suggested forum should not become a burdensome exercise, it should be seen as a dynamic and flexible forum for knowledge and experience sharing for policy practitioners charged with delivering policies in accessibility planning and connectivity. The frequency of its meetings, and the workload it might generate, should be minimised with meetings dictated by need and not by a needless constitutional requirement. This forum should of course operate in an open and transparent way, and should maintain a strong commitment to accountability.

3. Regional co-ordination of concessionary fares

The North East's system for governing concessionary bus travel has been widely criticised for creating a complex and inefficient bureaucracy. The bus operators have to liaise with each local and unitary authority, along with the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive, in defining the arrangements for concessionary travel. This takes a great deal of staff time and resource, for both the local authorities and the bus operators.

However, from April 2006 the system will be much simplified because of the decision by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide for free off peak local bus travel in England for those aged over 60 and for disabled people (HMT 2005). The Budget statement estimated that this would reduce the cost of travel for approximately 11 million people aged over 60 and approximately 2 million disabled people. Previously the Transport Act 2000 had required an authority to provide a minimum of half fare travel for elderly and disabled people on off peak local buses. The Budget Statement estimated that this would cost £420m in 2006/07 and £440m in 2007/08.

This decision will stand a good chance of stemming the dramatic decline in the number of concessionary fare travellers over the last decade, especially amongst older people, and therefore of helping stem the decline in the North East's bus patronage. It is ironic that it took a decision taken at the national level to simplify a local problem where, for example, the six different district authorities within Northumberland operate six different concessionary travel schemes. As a universal benefit this is also well targeted: the main beneficiaries are people on low incomes who use buses (Grayling 2004b).

While welcome, the Chancellor's announcement does not mean that there will be a truly regional concessionary fares system in the North East. However, the changes in concessionary travel do provide an opportunity for North East decision-makers to move towards a truly regional scheme. The North East should follow the Welsh example and move towards a system which has interoperability between authorities, where concessionary passes can be used across local government boundaries. This would make for a

more efficient system, as well as providing much more coherency and convenience for those who rely on bus travel across the North East. A key merit in seeking to move towards a regional level of co-ordination is that it would logically receive the support of the bus operators. There is also a strong case for developing a region-wide approach to concessionary fares for job seekers and children in full-time education.

At this stage it would be unwise to make specific suggestions about the institutional arrangements for administering this system might be. The Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive is the only institution in the North East with experience of centrally co-ordinating all aspects of the public transport network in a specific locality. Although it would represent quite a radical development, the Tyne and Wear PTE could feasibly adopt responsibility for administering a regional concessionary fares programme. However this development would be vulnerable to accusations of Tyne and Wear dominance.

In the first instance efforts should be spent on building a consensus amongst the relevant stakeholders that a regional concessionary fares programme is a feasible possibility, and that it carries real social merits. It would also represent a good first step towards a full regional fares system, which was aspired to in the initial regional transport strategy (North East Assembly, 2002).

4. Return to sensible regulation of the bus network

Getting the right regulatory framework is crucial if we are to improve public transport. London with its regulated bus network has seen year on year growth in bus use since the mid-1980s, but outside London, where bus services were deregulated under the 1985 Transport Act, there has been year on year decline (see Figure 4). A study for the European Commission of different systems across Europe concluded that regulated systems (such as London's route franchising, with public planning but private operation of bus services) were on the whole better value than either deregulated systems or publicly owned and operated systems (Grayling 2004b).

The Government made some tentative steps in this direction in the Transport Act 2000, which contains provisions for local authorities to introduce 'Quality Bus Partnerships' or 'Quality Contract' schemes. These are permissive schemes, and local authorities are not required to use either of these new powers.

A 'Quality Bus Partnership' is a voluntary agreement in which the local authority can prescribe quality standards to be met by bus operators when using facilities provided by the authority (bus stops, shelters, bus lanes, information, *etc*). Bus operators must agree to meet certain standards, and the local authority needs to maintain their services to a high standard. As a voluntary scheme there is no recourse if one party fails to deliver on its commitments.

Under a 'Quality Contract' local authorities can be given more control over bus services. The authority would be able to, for example, specify bus routes, service frequencies and fares. Operators would bid for exclusive rights to operate within the scheme and the freedom to run commercial bus services would cease to apply. The Government regard Quality Contracts as a last resort, and prior to Ministerial approval they would require evidence as to why alternate approaches have not worked. Quality Contracts can only come into force only after at least 21 months after the date of initially establishing the scheme. Many local authorities considered this long lead-in time a hindrance to pursuing Quality Contracts, and to date no local authority has actually made a formal application for a Quality Contract

In the current political climate, this framework may well be the best compromise between the two extremes of a total free market or complete re-regulation. However, the effective uses of these measures have not been sufficiently widespread. **The Government needs to make it easier for local authorities to adopt Quality Contracts and local authorities need to pursue this agenda, despite the bureaucratic difficulties.**

5. Public transport operators must be encouraged to invest and innovate

The costs of public transport have risen much more sharply in recent years than the costs of private motoring. This trend is very serious given that it is those on the lowest incomes that are most reliant on public transport. The structure of the public transport industry in England is such that services need to generate commercial viability. The bus industry is consolidated in a small cabal of major companies. In the North East the market is carved up between an oligarchic triangle comprising of Arriva North East, GO North East and Stagecoach North East.

Even if the 'Quality Contracts' agenda does not move forward, **bus operators must be encouraged to invest and innovate.** Customers will simply not stomach fares increases without any tangible signs of

improvement in service and vehicles. Operators appear keen to invest in new, modern vehicles. This should be encouraged and welcomed. Innovation should also be encouraged. Technology is changing the way public transport works, and can make life significantly easier for passengers. The Oyster smart card system, now operational on London buses and the London Underground is a good example. This allows passengers to pre-pay for their journeys and enables them to quickly swipe on and off buses and the Tube.

Such initiatives require significant capital investment. Operators will judge the merits of such investments against the commercial viability of their services. There needs to be a more co-ordinated and proactive approach to promoting bus travel across the North East. Included in this is the expansion of bus priority measures such as bus-only lanes, sensitive traffic signalling and congestion management. This will increase the commercial viability of the bus industry in the region and will thereby help to encourage investment and innovation. An effective bus network across the region is fundamental in tackling social exclusion and accessibility problems.

6. Explore the possibility that the North East, or one of its conurbations, can pilot road-user charging

In the previous section the advantages of a road-user charging scheme in the North East were set out. They include obvious environmental benefits in cutting congestion and harmful emissions, but also more social benefits in generating revenue that could be invested in the public transport system. ippr research, based on sophisticated transport modelling, showed that a revenue-raising road-user charging scheme would see a 9 per cent decrease in traffic volume across the region, along with an increase in bus use of over 12 per cent (Grayling *et al*, 2004).

Following the success of the London congestion charging scheme, and the M6 toll road in the West Midlands, the political case for a wider programme of road-user charging is becoming ever more convincing. Whilst large-scale road-user charging schemes require a lead-time of around a decade, in relation to the development of the technological infrastructure, this should not be a reason for avoiding the debate now. Decision-makers in the North East should not rule out road-user charging schemes as possible cures for road congestion and as potential revenue streams for transport improvements. They should not seek to shy away from the debate, and they should be prepared to make the political case in favour of such schemes. The case should also be made that road-user charging schemes, as part of wider demand management policies, can be a useful tool in combating social exclusion and disadvantage. Firstly, the negative environmental effects associated with road traffic disproportionately impacts on people in deprived areas. Furthermore, the income generated from road-user charging should be used to fund transport improvements that incorporate a distinct social inclusion agenda, such as public transport developments.

To this end decision-makers in the North East should explore the possibility that the region pilot a system of road user charging. In any case, the region should to widen the evidence base on the feasibility of, and likely effects, of road-user charging schemes in the region. This will help to develop understanding and ensure the public debate, which should be instigated, is informed and based on credible evidence. The Government's feasibility study into national road-user charging (published in the summer of 2004; Department for Transport, 2004c) should be used as the starting point and research and modelling specific to the North East should be enacted.

7. A stronger decentralised approach to transport policy, with a single 'Transport, Housing and Planning Regional Board'

The formulation and delivery of transport policy is fragmented. A plethora of national and local institutions and agencies are involved in implementing transport policy. The success of much transport policy, and now accessibility policy as well, depends on effective integration at every institutional level.

Whilst regional institutions are currently obliged to produce key regional strategies, such as regional economic and spatial strategies, there is little scope for direct regional-level involvement in delivering such strategies. Regional Transport Boards, with indicative budgets, are being piloted in the South East and Yorkshire and the Humber regions, with the hope they will encourage a strengthening of regional approaches to connectivity issues. **Whilst efforts to tackle transport-related social exclusion require strong local involvement, through local authorities, there is scope for a more robust approach at the regional level.**

In December 2004, HM Treasury, DfT, ODPM and the DTI issued a joint consultation: *Devolved Decision Making: A Consultation on Regional Funding Allocations*. It examines how regional funding allocations for transport, housing and economic development should be developed for the period 2005/06 to 2007/08. It proposes that the regions should advise ministers on spending priorities within each of the three funding areas. However, Whitehall officials have stressed on numerous occasions that 'this is about regions giving advice to the Government – it is not about regions taking decisions'.

Nevertheless, this consultation does hold out the potential for the English regions taking a greater role in determining the distribution of funding between transport, housing and economic development. The consultation document states that "in some cases a region may want to re-profile spending – by proposing changes to the funding in the three policy areas that off-set each other over a period of years – for example if there were a large transport scheme in an early period, and then a large housing scheme in a later period" (HMT/DfT/ODPM/DTI 2004).

Bearing this in mind, there is merit for combining housing, planning and transport policy advice at the regional level through the creation of a single 'Housing, Planning and Transport Regional Board'. As it has been decided that the Regional Planning Bodies and the Regional Housing Boards will be merged by September of 2005, the inclusion of transport in this new institutional system would have the merit of joining-up policy making, streamlining governance arrangements and through 'economies of scale' help strengthen policy-making capacity.

Following the strong 'No' vote in the North East in the referendum on 4 November 2004 on a directly elected regional assembly, it may seem strange to call for devolved powers and a strengthening of regional institutions. However in relation to transport and accessibility there are strong reasons, discussed in the previous section of this paper, as to why a stronger and more cogent regional approach will reap benefits in terms of policy creation and delivery. Linking the economic, social and environmental agendas that feed into the wider transport policy agenda can be an arduous process within the current institutional arrangements. This is not helped by the tensions between different sub-regions (Wenban-Smith, 2002).

The crafting of regional strategies currently lies in the hands of indirectly elected politicians, who are inclined to advocate policies that will benefit their respective sub-region, as oppose to the region as a whole. An enhancement of regional institutions in relation to transport and accessibility policy should move towards a reduction of these tensions. **In the medium term, the Government should move to decentralise responsibility for transport to local and regional institutions.** In PTA areas, responsibility for strategic roads and for funding Local Transport Plans should be passed to the PTA authorities. **The Government should also start developing a Passenger Transport Authority in the Tees Valley.** In the short term, the Government should create a single 'Housing, Planning and Transport Regional Board' to advise Ministers on funding Local Transport Plans outside PTA areas and for advising on spending priorities across policy areas and switching funding between them.

8. Adopt a stronger commitment to 'smart growth'

Accessibility problems cannot be solved exclusively through transport solutions. To guarantee good accessibility across the region in the future strategies will have to look beyond transport. This means adopting a stronger commitment to smart growth, which seeks to connect spatial, economic, transport and environmental policy. Growth needs to be sustainable and considerate of accessibility and connectivity issues.

The importance of this agenda cannot be over-estimated. In Britain in 2003, the police recorded over 12,000 child pedestrian casualties (up to 15 years old), including more than 2,300 serious injuries and 74 deaths. Research from ippr showed that children from the ten per cent most deprived wards in England were more than three times as likely to be pedestrian casualties as their counterparts from the least deprived ten per cent of wards (Grayling *et al* 2002).

In spite of the received wisdom that development planning is important in generating transport (or alternatively in reducing the need for travel), there are few empirical studies about the relationship between land use patterns and traffic growth in Britain. Recent literature suggests that the effect of land-use policies have often been exaggerated and that the significant growth in road traffic over recent decades far outweighs anything that could be attributed to changing patterns of land use (Headicar 2003).

This is not to negate the importance of development planning, but rather to recognise its limitations. Some planning policies have clearly encouraged the growth in traffic, particularly the relaxation of plan-

ning controls during the 1980s that led to the proliferation of out-of-town commercial and retail developments. Tackling this means focussing on the redevelopment of urban sites and bringing to a halt so-called urban sprawl. In reality this means thinking seriously about the merits of developments such as out of town retail parks or new schools which may be in areas with poor accessibility. Recent trends, which have allowed urban sprawl to take hold have led not only to accessibility problems but has also contributed to the social erosion of many urban communities.

The traditional approach to planning in the UK has been for people and vehicles to be segregated, epitomised by the Buchanan report of 1963 on traffic in towns that set the agenda for generations of traffic engineers. This approach involved corralling pedestrians behind barriers or in tunnels underground. In the North East, T Dan Smith pushed the boundaries of this agenda with his vision of Newcastle as the 'Brasilia of the North', and created a hotch-potch of spaghetti walkways around Swan House and John Dobson Street as part of the grand plan for a 'city in the sky'.

A different approach, however, would be to redesign streets in favour of pedestrians and cyclists and towards the integration of traffic and people on more equal terms. The development of 'home zones', based on the Dutch woonerf, represents the beginning of this movement in Britain.

Decision-makers in the region need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to 'smart growth', and more sophisticated spatial planning which incorporates a real social inclusion dimension. Shifting the approach to spatial planning in the region will help to ease some accessibility and connectivity problems, and in the long-term will ensure the North East develops, and grows, in a sustainable fashion. This commitment should be brought forward in the Regional Spatial Strategy, however decision-makers should make it a continuous exercise to analyse their spatial decisions within the contexts of accessibility, connectivity and sustainability.

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