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Environmental Audit Committee

## **Transport and the Accessibility of Public Services**

Statement of Evidence

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. **pteg** represents the six Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) which between them serve more than eleven million people in Greater Manchester (Transport for Greater Manchester), Merseyside (Merseytravel), South Yorkshire (SYPTe), Tyne and Wear (Nexus), the West Midlands (Centro) and West Yorkshire (Metro). Bristol and the West of England, Leicester and Nottingham City Councils, Transport for London and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport are associate members of **pteg** though this response does not represent their views.
- 1.2. The PTEs plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of delivering integrated public transport networks accessible to all.
- 1.3. We welcome the Environmental Audit Committee's timely follow-up to the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) 'Making the Connections' report. It has been almost ten years since the report was published. In our own 2010 report, 'Transport and Social Inclusion: Have we made the connections in our cities?' we attempted to take stock of progress since the publication of the SEU report. We concluded that there had been a loss of momentum and leadership on this agenda since 2003. We hope that this Inquiry will rejuvenate the important issue of transport and the accessibility of public services.

## 2. Summary

- Promoting equality of access to opportunity should be a key goal for transport policy, alongside creating growth and cutting carbon. The Department for Transport should provide leadership on this agenda and clearly communicate the role of stakeholders across sectors in improving the accessibility of public services and in promoting social inclusion through transport more generally.
- Current challenges facing bus services outside London are likely to affect the accessibility of public services, particularly for those on the lowest incomes. PTEs are doing all they can to mitigate the effects of these challenges, but Government also needs to take a considered look at the current levels of support for bus services if the increased potential for transport related social exclusion is to be avoided.
- In considering how to deliver, and where to locate, key services, decisions are frequently made with little consideration of how people will reach them without a car. This can result in significant long term costs. These costs could be reduced if planning decisions considered transport at their earliest stages.
- Ensuring the accessibility of public services should not be seen as primarily a transport problem requiring a transport solution. Accessibility is the responsibility of all those involved in the planning and delivery of public services and should be recognised as such.
- Accessibility Planning has not resulted in widespread partnership working to tackle accessibility problems. If, following the recent evaluation of the approach, Accessibility Planning is deemed to be of continuing value, there should be a re-emphasis across departments of the need for partnership and an issuing of refreshed guidance.
- Measuring the transport-related accessibility of public services is complex and depends on more than simply transport links being available. Those links must also be accessible, affordable and acceptable. This complexity should not be a deterrent to developing ways

to better reflect the social and accessibility impacts of transport decisions both at local and national level.

- Whilst broadband networks and the internet have an important role to play in reducing the need to travel, there will still be a need for face-to-face delivery of public services and the health and wellbeing benefits these interactions bring.

### 3. How are the Government's current transport policies affecting the accessibility of public services?

- 3.1. In our May 2010 report 'Transport and Social Inclusion: Have we made the connections in our cities?' we concluded that there had been a loss of momentum on this agenda since the publication of the SEU report in 2003 and that a clearer sense of direction from the Department for Transport (DfT) was needed.
- 3.2. This continues to be the case. Current transport priorities centre around creating growth and cutting carbon. Whilst these are both important goals, the role of public transport in promoting equality of access to opportunity has been side-lined, when it should be given stronger billing, particularly following the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.3. The SEU report remains the last clear articulation of where efforts to promote the accessibility of public services should be focused.
- 3.4. In line with recommendations in our 2010 report, we would like to see DfT provide leadership on this agenda and clearly communicate the role that PTEs and other partners (across sectors) can play locally in improving the accessibility of public services and in promoting social inclusion more generally.
- 3.5. Whilst we recognise and value the Government's localism agenda, we feel that there needs to be a clear message from Government on the importance of investing in transport measures that support access to opportunities and social inclusion. This could take the form of a new, overarching strategy to provide direction, informed by the experiences of PTEs and other partners.
- 3.6. The side-lining of work to promote social inclusion through transport at national level is reflected at local level, with resources and programmes to support social inclusion being scaled back and focus shifting towards projects aimed at creating growth and cutting carbon, in recognition of Government priorities.

#### Bus policy

- 3.7. More specifically, Government policies on bus are likely to affect the accessibility of public services, particularly for those on the lowest incomes, half of whom do not have access to a car<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.8. Outside of London, bus services are facing major challenges:
  - **20 per cent cut to bus service operators grant (BSOG):** BSOG rebates bus operators for the fuel duty they pay in running local bus services, helping to reduce the costs of providing a bus service and keeping fares lower than they otherwise would be. The BSOG

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<sup>1</sup> DfT National Travel Survey 2010, table NTS0703

cut means that bus operators may choose to increase fares or use the cut to BSOG to justify a fare rise or service reduction that they may have implemented in any case.

- **Reductions in Department for Communities and Local Government funding for local government:** this puts local authority budgets for supported bus services under pressure. Supported bus services are often evening and weekend services, or buses to isolated housing estates and rural areas that would not be profitable to run on a commercial basis. This funding pot is also used to support discretionary initiatives, such as discounted travel for young people or jobseekers.
- **Meeting the rising demand for concessionary travel from older and disabled people:** local transport authorities are required by law to fund free off-peak bus travel for older and disabled people. The need to meet this growing demand from a reduced funding pot leaves less money for spending on things like supported bus services and discounts for other groups.
- **Abolition of the Rural Bus Grant:** this grant was used to help fund non-commercial rural bus services.

3.9. We are beginning to see the impact of these cuts on the ground. Research by Campaign for Better Transport found that over two-thirds of English local authorities had decided to make cutbacks to their supported services, whilst 77 per cent could not rule out further cuts<sup>2</sup>.

3.10. Cuts to supported services have hit elderly and disabled passengers disproportionately, leading to more pressure on Community Transport services as well as increased reliance on costly taxi services, which may force these groups to limit the journeys they make.

3.11. Meanwhile, commercial fares in the metropolitan areas have long been on an upward trajectory<sup>3</sup> and the challenges outlined above seem likely to accelerate this trend. We are already seeing the scaling back of commercial and local authority offers and initiatives for particular groups, such as young people and jobseekers.

3.12. Inevitably, these challenges will affect the ability of the most vulnerable groups in society to access key public services. As fares rise, people will restrict the journeys they make and, as bus services disappear, the options of those on the lowest incomes will be increasingly limited to those within walking or cycling distance.

3.13. Some people may be forced to use expensive taxi services or run a car when they cannot really afford to do so. Meanwhile, people who use public transport by choice, rather than necessity, may also be tempted to travel by car instead, increasing congestion and negative environmental impacts. Interestingly, recent research has found that families with children increasingly report that they see a car as essential to meet a minimum acceptable standard of living<sup>4</sup>. A number of participants in the research associated this decision '*with the increasing costs of public transport and reduction in the availability of services.*'<sup>5</sup>

3.14. PTEs are doing all they can to attempt to mitigate the effects of the funding challenges currently facing bus services, including using the powers and options granted in the Local Transport Act 2008 to protect and improve bus services.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/campaigns/save-our-buses/map>

<sup>3</sup> pteg (2010) 'The effect of bus fare increases on low income families'.

<sup>4</sup> JRF (2012) 'A minimum income standard for the UK in 2012'.

<sup>5</sup> JRF (2012) 'A minimum income standard for the UK in 2012' (p.17).

3.15. However, this in itself is not enough. The Government also needs to take a considered look at the current levels of support for bus services and how this can be best deployed to make every pound count and ensure that no-one is left without access to key public services.

#### **4. Are other policies adversely affecting the accessibility of public services and the environment? Do decisions on the location of public services adequately reflect available public transport infrastructure and the environmental footprint of the transport needed to reach them? How significant are any adverse impacts for accessibility and the environment?**

4.1. The policies of other sectors have a significant impact on the accessibility of public services and on the environment. Despite this, accessibility continues to be seen as a transport problem to be solved by transport authorities.

4.2. In considering how to deliver, and where to locate, key services, decisions are frequently made with little consideration of how people will reach them without a car.

4.3. The problem is exacerbated by trends towards the centralisation of public services, such as healthcare and education, which mean that people have to travel further or to different locations to access key services.

4.4. Site selection or method of service delivery appears to be strongly influenced by upfront cost. Often longer term costs of the decision are not taken into account, such as:

- **Costs to individual users:** including in terms of money, time and inconvenience as well as the costs of being deterred/unable to access a service. The latter can be very significant (e.g. abandoning or not taking up further education, delay in medical diagnosis).
- **Costs to service providers:** Missed outpatient appointments, for example, cost hospitals £600m a year<sup>6</sup>. There are also longer-term costs associated with, for example, delayed diagnosis of illness or reduced job opportunities because of the inaccessibility of potential employment sites.
- **Costs to other sectors** including transport authorities who may incur extra costs in providing new transport links to a poorly connected site.
- **Costs to wider society:** For example, increased congestion and emissions if people are forced to use a car to access key services and longer-term costs arising from inaccessible services, such as long-term illness, a lower skilled workforce and higher unemployment.

4.5. Such costs could be reduced if land-use planning decisions at their earliest stages looked at<sup>7</sup>:

- Locating developments so that they connect to existing public transport networks.
- Encouraging the use of accessible town centre locations where possible.
- Developing and improving walking and cycling routes to proposed developments.

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<sup>6</sup> Doctor Foster Health and the NHS Information Centre, 'Outpatient appointment no-shows cost hospitals £600m a year' <http://www.dfosterhealth.co.uk/features/outpatient-appointment-no-shows.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> pteg (2011) 'Thriving Cities: Integrated land use and transport planning.'

The volume of car parking provision should also be considered as something that has a significant influence on the uptake of public transport in urban areas.

- 4.6. Ensuring the accessibility of public services should no longer be seen as primarily a 'transport problem'. It is the responsibility of all those involved in the planning and delivery of public services. This is particularly important given that funding cuts are reducing the ability of transport authorities to step in and provide a bus service (for example) to serve a poorly connected site.
- 4.7. There needs to be greater recognition among other sectors of the importance of transport to the successful delivery of their services, and a willingness to invest in it accordingly. Furthermore, there needs to be a willingness to consider, and fund, non-transport solutions to accessibility problems.

## **5. Is the Government's current approach of requiring the accessibility of public services to be reflected in local transport plans working? How effective is the Department of Transport in furthering the accessibility agenda?**

- 5.1. The cornerstone of the 2003 SEU report was the introduction of Accessibility Planning. It provided an opportunity for local partners, from across sectors, to develop a systematic approach to improving people's access to key services and employment sites.
- 5.2. The emphasis of Accessibility Planning was intended to be on partnership working to implement both transport and non-transport solutions to accessibility problems, recognising that changes to where and how key services are delivered can be as important as the provision of transport.
- 5.3. However, perhaps because the production of an Accessibility Strategy became a Local Transport Plan requirement, the issue is still seen as the responsibility of transport authorities, undermining the recommended partnership approach that was originally envisaged.
- 5.4. In addition, whilst Accessibility Planning software is in widespread use among transport authorities, questions remain as to the extent to which it is being used to drive land-use, transport and service planning locally. Reasons for this may include:
  - Lack of consideration and buy in from other sectors (e.g. health, education) of how people will reach services and reluctance to accept, or fund, both transport and non-transport options to extend access.
  - Reluctance by decision makers in transport authorities to follow through on the findings of accessibility planning as they could lead to fundamental, and potentially unaffordable, shifts in transport strategies, policies and spending programmes.
  - Weaknesses in the software's ability to reproduce the sophistication of real-life travel patterns and the policy choices that flow from them.
  - The feeling that accessibility planning is not being given as much priority by DfT, or other departments, as was initially intended.
- 5.5. We understand that an evaluation of Accessibility Planning has recently been completed for DfT. We hope to see this research published and for it to be followed by a statement of the value, or otherwise, of the Accessibility Planning approach.



- 5.6. If Accessibility Planning is deemed to be of continuing value, there should be a re-emphasis, across departments, of the need for a partnership approach. To underline this, all relevant government departments should issue or update their own their own Accessibility Planning guidance.
- 6. How should the transport-related accessibility of public services be measured? How can decision making in government better reflect ‘social’ and accessibility impacts? Do social and accessibility concerns conflict with environmental considerations? Would a measure of transport accessibility of key public services, in a similar manner as ‘fuel poverty’, be useful for policy-making (and if so, how should it be defined?)**
- 6.1. DfT accessibility statistics are available, providing a local-level measure of the availability of transport to key services (food stores, education, healthcare, town centres and employment centres) and the time it would take to reach them by various transport modes.
- 6.2. These statistics are used in the Accessibility Planning process to identify areas where action is required. There are tools available to perform this task, in particular Accession and PTALS. However, both tools have their limitations.
- 6.3. Accession measures the time taken to get to a particular amenity or service, but takes little account of transport service frequency. Meanwhile, PTALS measures access to the public transport network rather than to the ultimate destination.
- 6.4. Existing measures are limited in that they only provide a partial picture of the accessibility of public services. For example, the statistics may show us that most people are within easy reach of a food store but they say nothing about whether this is the food store people would choose to use, whether it is affordable or whether it stocks a wide selection of healthy foods.
- 6.5. Being able to access public services depends on more than simply transport links being available. Those links must also:
- Connect people to the places they want to go.
  - As far as possible, follow routes that minimise journey times to key destinations.
  - Operate at times and frequencies that correspond to patterns of working and social life.
  - Be well publicised and easy to use.
  - Be physically accessible, regardless of age, ability or confidence.
  - Be affordable.
  - Be acceptable – a service that is perceived to be comfortable, safe and convenient.
- 6.6. Devising a measure of transport accessibility, in a similar manner as ‘fuel poverty’ could be challenging because of these complexities.
- 6.7. However, this complexity should not be a deterrent to developing ways to better reflect the social and accessibility impacts of transport decisions both at local and national level. There is a continuing need to build the evidence base in this respect in order to better understand what works and where best to focus resources to achieve the greatest social inclusion impacts.



## **7. The impact of broadband networks and the Internet in mitigating the need for transport infrastructure to access public services.**

- 7.1. Broadband networks and the Internet have an important role to play in reducing the need to travel.
- 7.2. However, currently, many people still lack access to a high quality internet connection or lack the skills to make best use of it. Even if everyone were to have such access there would, of course, still be a need for public transport infrastructure to access public services.
- 7.3. Many public services are still best delivered face-to-face and that social interaction is very valuable, helping people to feel a part of their community and reducing isolation. For people at risk of loneliness, a journey in itself can be a valuable opportunity for social contact and connections.
- 7.4. As well as benefits to wellbeing, there are also physical health benefits in walking, cycling or taking public transport to key services. US studies, for example, have noted that those who use public transport have a much greater likelihood of achieving the minimum recommendation of 30 minutes of physical activity, five days a week<sup>8</sup>.

## **8. Further information**

- 8.1. Further information on many of the points covered in this response can be found in our 2010 report 'Transport and Social Inclusion: Have we made the connections in our cities?' available from: <http://www.pteg.net/NR/rdonlyres/570FF969-98D6-4C06-B9DB-9837A732E835/0/ptegTransportandSocialInclusionreportMay10.pdf>
- 8.2. The report takes stock of progress since the publication of the 2003 SEU 'Making the connections' report.

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<sup>8</sup> Besser, L. and Dannenberg, A. (2005) 'Walking to public transit: Steps to help meet physical activity recommendations' in American Journal of Preventative Medicine 29(4) 273-280.