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POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN EU PUBLIC TRANSPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Abstract

This report describes the links between transport and social inclusion according to the recent literature and provides evidence regarding the population groups at greater risk of social and transport exclusion. It also provides examples of good practice in improving public transport accessibility for the most vulnerable users, in order to derive some indications for improvement of the EU role in facilitating the mainstreaming of social inclusion issues in public transport policies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For a long time the social dimension of public transport has received relatively little attention in the academic literature and policy-making. In the near future the social and transport challenges represented by demographic ageing, poverty, migration and geographical disadvantage will increase. The social role of transport needs to be incorporated into transport policies, with closer attention to the specific mobility needs of the most vulnerable user groups. Improved accessibility for the elderly and people with reduced mobility, as well as higher quality services and lower fares for all, must be considered, together with improved efficiency to keep public transport financially viable. In addition, new environmentally and energy-efficient public transport services and the promotion of their use are essential in order to reduce the negative impact of car use.

This report provides an overview of the literature and empirical evidence of the links between public transport and social inclusion. The main results are the following:

- Public transport plays a crucial role in exacerbating or mitigating the social exclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, affecting their access to basic services, as well as employment and social relationships. The negative effects of the transport system on the environment, safety and public health are also likely to affect disadvantaged groups disproportionately.
- The disadvantaged/vulnerable groups present different needs (access to education, work, healthcare, etc.), and are affected in different ways by the existing transport barriers. Public transport policies/actions must therefore be specifically tailored to user needs and criticalities. There is, however, still too little research on and attention to the mobility needs of disadvantaged population groups.
- Public transport is not the only way to reduce the mobility problems of disadvantaged groups. Addressing mobility issues related to social inclusion requires interaction between transport and welfare policies, which could mean more complex and lengthy decision-making processes.
- New transport technologies may support public transport policies in mitigating social exclusion and provide flexible cost-effective services. Increasing the involvement of private providers and NGOs with voluntary work may also yield low-cost solutions to specific needs.
- Given the increasing demand for greater attention towards the mobility and accessibility needs of disadvantaged population groups and territorial areas, there is greater awareness at EU and national/local level of the importance of transport to social inclusion. Some measures have been implemented in recent years to address the specific needs of these groups, in most cases with the support of EU funds and programmes.

In order to develop an inclusive public transport system it is necessary for accessibility, safety and comfort in transportation modes to become a priority in transport policy. This means improving:

- all stages of the journey, including the walking environment, so that people with mobility impairment can reach and use public transport services;
- the design of transport facilities, addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups;

- safety and security in public transport, crucial issues which disproportionately affect women and the elderly. The issue of safety should also be considered with regard to the design of car parks and transport stations;
- service provision and pricing structures;
- the capacity of the public authorities to find innovative solutions for transport services, activating and coordinating different transport operators at different levels in order to provide integrated and flexible transport services reaching different destinations and enabling the most vulnerable user groups to arrange both short- and long-distance and cross-border travel;
- technological devices to support networking and coordination activities and improve transport efficiency and flexibility in responding to different mobility needs and patterns at relatively low cost.

The EU institutions can play a very important role in addressing all these issues:

- The EU institutions could play a more prominent coordination role in the field of social and transport policies on the basis of Article 9 of the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU), e.g. the horizontal social clause of the Lisbon Treaty calling for intensified focus on the social dimension of EU policies.
- They can mainstream an inclusive approach in public transport by supporting capacity-building with specific guidelines and common EU standards, and by developing an accessibility certification system for vehicles, transport infrastructure, information and transport pricing.
- They can promote and financially support awareness-raising measures and the exchange of good practices.
- They can improve the European statistical system with data disaggregated by type of transport user in order to monitor the evolution of public transport systems, and support technical and policy evaluation research designed to assess the economic and social benefits (costs) of public transport in European countries.
- Finally, they should promote participation by citizens in decision-making in order to take into account the needs of groups and areas at risk of marginalisation and social exclusion. It is essential to involve them in consultation, project-planning and decision-making processes, at least in the procedures applicable to projects/programmes co-financed with European funds.

Various tools are available to support these policies, for example:

- Legislation may require accessibility to be considered in transport regulation, and EU standards could become mandatory when European Funds are being used, as in the case of the Structural Funds, where legal requirements include accessibility as a non-negotiable condition of funding.
- European Structural Funds can be used to promote integrated planning of transport and social inclusion policies and to support pilot programmes/projects addressing the accessibility needs of disadvantaged groups and areas. EU programmes for innovation in the transport system (e.g. Horizon 2020) could prioritise EU funding to transport-related research projects aimed at enhancing transport accessibility for vulnerable groups and promoting the dissemination of applied research results on transport planning.