**Pensioner Poverty & NPC Transport Group**

**Briefing Paper - September 2022**

**Introduction**

Pensioner poverty is rising in the UK, and this has been further exacerbated by the drastic price rises in fuel prices. One measure, proposed by Sustrans, puts 1.5 million people in England at high risk of being transport poor. It uses the three factors:

• Proportion of households with low income that would spend 10% or more of income to run a car

• Proportion of households that are more than one mile from the nearest bus stop or railway station

• Proportion of households that would need to travel for more than one hour to reach essential services

Transport poverty means people are at serious risk of being cut off from accessing the services they need as well as healthcare, because of the rising costs of owning and running a car and a lack of alternative, accessible and affordable transport methods. It has been shown that women, lone parents, families with children, and young people along with older people in receipt of a pension can be at particular risk of transport poverty. Indeed two-thirds of single pensioners do not have access to a car.

**Impact on health and wellbeing**

For older people in receipt of age-related entitlements and pension payments, cost is a big factor. Where transport is affordable, it can help connect older people with their wider social networks. Bus networks tend to be of greatest service to the most vulnerable groups in society including older and disabled people. The increased access to opportunities which bus networks provide can make a powerful contribution to reduced government spending on social care and welfare payments and has a wider economic benefit of tens of billions of pounds each year.

When we think about inequality, we are now not just thinking about income, unemployment, or level of education. It is about social inclusion, being able to participate in and being connected to the community. In terms of health, we are not just looking at it in the physical sense; we are also talking about mental health and wellbeing.

Transport is an important facilitator of social inclusion and therefore wellbeing which can affect economic and social outcomes, and therefore inequality. Social inclusion can reduce inequality and positively affect physical and mental health wellbeing. Strong social connections and family relationships can foster social inclusion and wellbeing alongside accessible health and social care services. Transport plays a central role in enabling people to come together and connect. Conversely, those who do not have good transport links and/or people without cars are likely to miss out on these positives.

Where access to supermarkets is restricted by requiring use of a car and where high street services have been lost, higher prices can result in poor dietary habits and, consequently, poor health.

**Rural Areas**

The impacts of transport poverty are worst for poor people in rural areas. This is worsened by the fact that low rural population density means that well designed and joined up public transport do not always function well in these areas. Recent reduction in services and frequency of services, train, bus and dial-a-ride, has only made the situation worse, resulting in a reliance on using a car, if people have them, or using public transport services that are inadequate for user need, or not using the service except only when it is strictly needed. This in turn can lead to social exclusion.

A poorly timed bus timetable for example could mean someone going to their nearby town to do shopping and having perhaps just 10-20 minutes before they would need to get the return service back. The alternative could be having to wait a few hours for the next return service. This could lead to them deciding to not use public transport and instead shop at a local corner shop, if there is one, which may have less choice, not stock fresh fruit and vegetables and be more expensive, further worsening their poverty cycle.

**Access to Transport**

Many train services and train stations are not truly accessible, particularly for those with mobility issues. A lack of lifts, gaps between platform and train, the closure of ticketing offices, a drive to digital only tickets, a lack of staff at stations and on the trains, puts off many from travelling. On buses, changes to routes can mean that bus stops are now potentially hundreds of metres away, this can be particularly troublesome for those with mobility issues, where people need to change and get an onward service at a different bus stop/stand and the scheduling.

**Concessionary Travel**

Older people, of state pension age, are by law entitled to a bus pass that offers them free travel from, 9:30am to 11pm weekdays and anytime at weekends and Bank Holidays. Yet those living in areas without regular bus services use their passes much less frequently than their counterparts in areas with good bus service levels. Concessionary travel pass policies have been shown to be effective in making transport more affordable. Discounts on travel can help alleviate the strain of transport costs. Concessionary travel schemes thus need to go together with an adequate supply of public transport services.

There are however anomalies in the age at when people can access the bus pass, concessionary travel start times (some local councils offer more concessions/extend the timespan passes can be used), council boundaries and devolved nation border areas that may mean people are not able to access services when they need them or the services that are closest to them. For example, hospitals may offer patients appointments before or close to the concessionary start time and whilst they can get exemption letters and use their bus pass, timetables may mean that it is impractical to make very early appointments. Just because there is an administrative boundary or start time on a bus pass, doesn’t mean that a person’s life works in the same way.

**Conclusion**

Transport and poverty are issues that affects today’s and tomorrow’s pensioner, and lack of affordable and accessible transport can impact negatively on people’s health & wellbeing, and their social inclusion and cohesion. Despite this, there is an apparent relative reluctance on the part of successive governments in the problem of transport affordability. There are undoubted benefits to individuals and society as a whole, to have an affordable and well designed and run transport network.

That is why the NPC campaigns against:

* ticket / booking office closures
* the removal of staff from train stations and staff from trains
* degradation / withdrawal of bus & train services
* the proposed removal of ticket machines and move to digital only tickets

**Further Information / References**

Mattioli et al 2017 - Transport poverty and fuel poverty in the UK: From analogy to comparison

[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X17304869](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X17304869)

Campaign for Better Transport - Transport and Poverty: A Literature Review

<https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/transport-and-poverty-literature-review.pdf>

Department for Transport - Transport and inequality: An evidence review

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953951/Transport_and_inequality_report_document.pdf>

Future of Mobility: Evidence Review - Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf>

Age UK - Free bus pass and transport concessions

[www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/money-legal/benefits-entitlements/free-bus-pass-and-transport-concessions/](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/money-legal/benefits-entitlements/free-bus-pass-and-transport-concessions/)

**National Pensioners Convention**

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