



Public participation in transport planning amongst the socially excluded: An analysis of 3rd generation local transport plans



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online 26 June 2014

Keywords:

Local transport planning
Social exclusion
Public participation

ABSTRACT

This paper explores current approaches to the engagement of socially excluded or at risk groups and individuals within the 3rd generation local transport planning (LTP3) process and the policies that resulted. A quantitative content analysis of current policies and engagement techniques found that just over half of the 32 English LTP3s assessed outlined at least one instance where a single 'at risk' group was targeted using a specific participation instrument. People with disabilities, children and young people were better represented in these instances than older people and ethnic minorities. No evidence was found of specific initiatives aimed at lone parents or people on low incomes. Within these findings significant regional variation was observed with more initiatives in the North East and East Midlands and fewer initiatives in the East and South East. Notable progress has been made in terms of policy rhetoric however, with many plans containing policies which were aimed at social exclusion in general or 'at risk' groups in particular. The link between the participation carried out and the eventual policy was not clear, partly because the LTP3s assessed were not explicit about the links between instances of participation and specific policies. This paper considers the implications of these findings on UK policy and suggests that much more needs to be done to engage with socially excluded groups, especially when their reliance on local authority supported transport services is so critical.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore current approaches to the engagement of socially excluded or at risk groups and individuals within the 3rd generation local transport planning (LTP3) process and the policies that resulted. This paper briefly explores the problem of transport-related social exclusion and the potential role of public participation in tackling that problem. Following a brief outline of the UK local transport planning process, this paper then focusses on previous research into participatory local transport planning and identifies gaps in the literature. This paper then considers the findings of a content analysis of 32 English LTP3 plans which assesses both the participatory techniques and the policies aimed at individuals at risk of transport-related social exclusion. Finally, this paper considers the potential implications of these findings on future approaches to public engagement within the transport planning process and outlines some directions for future research. The research contained within this paper

represents part of a larger study into the relationship between transport-related social exclusion and the participation of socially excluded groups and individuals in the transport planning process.

1.1. Transport-related social exclusion

Transport-related social exclusion can occur when people are unable to participate in the everyday activities of their community, wholly or partially because of their insufficient mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of high mobility (Kenyon, 2003, p. 210). Those disadvantaged groups and individuals who have been identified as being most at risk include older people, children and young people, ethnic minorities, lone parents, people with disabilities [19% of the UK population (DWP, 2011)], people on low incomes, and future generations (SEU, 2003; SDC, 2011). The number of people who may be at risk is not insignificant. For instance, individuals from the groups identified above without access to a car are particularly at risk of transport-related social exclusion (SDU, 2011) and the number of households across England without a car in the 2011 Census was 25.8%. Previous research also found that 40% of job seekers claimed that a lack of transport was a barrier to getting a job and 1.4 million people over a 12-month period cited transport problems as their

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reason for missing medical appointments or not seeking medical help (SEU, 2003).

Previous research has suggested that the uneven distribution of transport 'outcomes' can lead to negative social impacts and ultimately social exclusion amongst disadvantaged groups (Lucas and Jones, 2012). For instance, people on low incomes effectively receive a quarter of the public spending on transport that the richest 10% receive (SDC, 2011). These impacts are poorly integrated into existing approaches to transport planning, so a challenge for future research is to better understand and articulate the impacts of transport policy and decision making processes on socially excluded groups and individuals (Lucas and Jones, 2012; Lucas and Currie, 2012).

1.1.1. Policy context

The final Social Exclusion Unit (2003) report '*making the connections*' had an important influence on transport and social exclusion policy in the UK, as it identified key barriers to accessing services, measures to tackle those barriers, key disadvantaged groups, and a framework for accessibility planning which was subsequently built into the LTP process (SEU, 2003; Lucas, 2012). In the 10 years since the final SEU report, some progress has been made in terms of tackling transport and social exclusion, particularly through public transport improvements in deprived areas (Lucas, 2012). The Sustainable Development Commission (2011) report '*fairness in a car-dependent society*' challenged many aspects of current policy thinking by identifying that a new approach was needed which took into account the complexity of individual travel, particularly amongst the socially excluded (SDC, 2011; Jones and Lucas, 2012). However, the advent of economic austerity measures has made it virtually impossible to maintain such initiatives if they cannot be politically and economically supported (Lucas, 2012). Whilst the Localism Act 2011 gives greater attention to locally determined projects, there is a "potential danger that communities with the greatest political leverage will benefit whilst those with less capacity will lose out" (Lucas, 2012, p. 111). As Hodgson and Turner (2003) previously stated, political capital and engagement amongst socially excluded groups is relatively poor. It can be argued that the new localism agenda will not benefit them unless more can be done to get those groups more actively engaged in all aspects of social policy decision making (Ercan and Hendriks, 2013), and could even further exclude those individuals who do not agree with the local majority (Parvin, 2009; Clarke and Cochrane, 2013).

1.2. The role of public participation in tackling transport-related social exclusion

The ideological shift in the late 1990s towards third way politics (Giddens, 1998), democratic renewal and pluralistic governance (where multiple processes inform decision making) has led to a rise in popularity of public participation as a process for enhancing local government decision making (Baker et al., 2007). This has created "new opportunities for people from disadvantaged communities to participate in the decisions that affect them" (Taylor, 2007, p. 297). However, evidence suggests that socially excluded groups and individuals remain on the margins of the decision making processes in local transport planning (Hodgson and Turner, 2003; Dibben, 2006; Taylor, 2007; Baker et al., 2007). Whether or not public participation in local government decision making actually leads to the best planning outcomes has been the subject of a much wider debate in both the planning literature in general (cf. Hoggett, 1995; Prachett, 1999; Wilson, 1999; Leach and Wingfield, 1999; Barnes, 2000), and the transport planning literature in particular (cf. Ward, 2001; Hodgson and Turner, 2003; Bickerstaff and Walker, 2005; Dibben, 2006; Michels and De Graaf, 2010).

Nevertheless, participation is widely regarded as an exercise with merit even by those who critique existing practices and frameworks (cf. Bickerstaff and Walker, 2005). There is still a need to look at the transport planning process to ensure that the consequences of transport-related social exclusion are better communicated and understood, and for decision makers to recognise the "abilities, skills, resources, capacities and past experiences of affected individuals in the design of policy solutions" (Lucas, 2012, p. 106).

1.3. Local transport planning in the UK

If enhanced public participation amongst socially excluded groups and individuals is to be fed into the transport planning process at the local level, then it needs to be incorporated into the design and implementation of local transport plans (LTPs). LTPs were introduced in the late 1990s as part of the New Labour reforms to the English local transport planning system. The Transport Act 2000 required local transport authorities (outside of London) to produce a plan every 5 years, with the first generation of LTPs (LTP1) covering the period 2001–2006 and the second generation LTPs (LTP2) covering the period 2006–2011. The Local Transport Act 2008 modified LTPs by giving local authorities more autonomy and flexibility for third generation LTPs (LTP3) in terms of their objectives, indicators, timescales and policy instruments (DfT, 2009; May, 2013). This means that there will potentially be greater diversity between local authorities from LTP3 onwards in terms of the design and implementation of transport policy, which presents both opportunities and risks in tackling broad issues such as social exclusion.

Whilst LTP3 plans represent the current generation of UK transport plans, much has changed since 2010 when the coalition government came to power. The 'localism' agenda has meant that central government have passed greater responsibility and autonomy onto local government in a number of policy areas including transport. The implications of this for local transport planning has been that LTP guidance would no longer be updated and local authorities will be left to make their own decisions without relying on central government advice (May, 2013; DfT, 2011). This coincided with significant funding cuts of 35% on integrated transport and 28% on local authority personnel, albeit alongside the introduction of the £560 million Local Sustainable Transport Fund (DfT, 2011; May, 2013). May (2013) argues that these funding cuts have disproportionately affected the same low-cost and locally derived interventions that the coalition government wishes to promote.

1.4. Participatory local transport planning in the UK

Local authorities tend to engage heavily with stakeholders, partner organisations and interest groups but less well with individual members of the 'general public' (Lowndes et al., 2001a; Bickerstaff et al., 2002). There is a particular danger that 'ordinary people' can be easily ignored, particularly amongst disadvantaged groups (Bickerstaff et al., 2002; Hodgson and Turner, 2003). Some clarification and strengthening of participatory processes in local government occurred as a result of the 'duty to involve' introduced as part of the statutory guidance on Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities (DCLG, 2008; Involve, 2012). However, in 2011 the Coalition government repealed the 'duty to involve' and replaced the 2008 statutory guidance with a much shorter Best Value Statutory Guidance which instead retained a 'duty to consult' (DCLG, 2011; Involve, 2012).

Of the LTPs assessed by Bickerstaff et al. (2002), 47% contained evidence that public participation was used to develop specific

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