

LOCKED OUT

Transport poverty in England

There is no official data on the number of jobseekers who do not have access to a car and two in five say lack of affordable transport is a barrier to getting a job.

Minimising the need for 'forced car ownership' would address growing social and environmental concerns, and would strengthen our economy.

Transport costs can also easily wipe out modest financial gains from entering or returning to work, and difficulties in accessing childcare by public transport can present a further barrier for working parents⁽¹⁰⁾.

Access to education: School choice is directly affected by transport provision and a lack of transport options limits young people's educational opportunities⁽¹¹⁾. Activities such as breakfast clubs, homework and study clubs, and outdoor activities can make a significant difference to pupils' outside of regular school transport services⁽⁵⁾. Evidence also suggests that adult learners and older people without private means of transport miss out on continuing training and lifelong learning opportunities⁽⁵⁾.

Denying access to frontline care

Hospitals are among the most difficult locations to reach without a car⁽¹²⁾. Poor access to health facilities can mean that people miss health appointments or suffer delays in being discharged from hospital – both of which incur significant costs to the NHS and can deepen health inequalities⁽⁵⁾.

Disconnecting communities

Participation in social, cultural and leisure activities is very important to people's quality of life and can play a major part in meeting wider goals like reducing crime and building cohesive communities. However, people without cars are twice as likely to miss out on these opportunities⁽⁵⁾. In addition, where access to supermarkets is restricted and high street services have been lost, higher prices can result in poor dietary habits and, consequently, poor health⁽¹³⁾.

Slowing our recovery

Our over-reliance on cars is stunting our economic recovery, preventing access to jobs and choking essential routes to supply chains and markets further afield⁽¹⁴⁾.

Greater and more efficient investment in affordable alternatives to car use is one of the most cost-effective means of adding to England's overall transport capacity⁽¹⁵⁾, stimulating investment interest, facilitating future expansion and creating new employment opportunities⁽¹⁶⁾.

However, too often the proposed solution to support people who are struggling is to reduce fuel tax and subsidise the costs of petrol and diesel. This might be attractive in the short term, but is clearly an unsustainable long-term solution – placing an additional strain on government budgets – and would further enforce car dependency, ignoring the needs of those without access to a car.

Instead the government should reinvest a significant proportion of the £1.5bn additional fuel duty revenues, expected from January 2013, creating a ring-fenced local fund to improve travel choices for all – a move supported by more than 70% of drivers in Britain⁽¹⁷⁾.

Addressing the challenge of transport poverty and developing a transport strategy to stimulate economic growth in a constrained public spending environment will require innovative thinking, collaboration and an understanding of how existing resources can be best invested⁽¹⁶⁾. This briefing outlines a number of policy calls that will support local and national government to develop an affordable, efficient and dynamic approach to the transport system in England; addressing the isolation of those without access to a car and improving the health, well-being and economic prosperity of our communities.

