

The Canadian Perspective on Transport Planning

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Summary

This paper discusses the concept of social exclusion as it relates to transport, how it is currently incorporated in Canadian transport planning, and the research needed to better address social exclusion. Social exclusion refers to constraints that prevent people from participating adequately in society, including education, employment, public services and activities. Inadequate transport sometimes contributes to social exclusion, particularly for people who live in an automobile dependent community and are physically disabled, low income or unable to own and drive a personal automobile. About 20% of Canadian households do not own an automobile, about 10% are low-income, and about 10% of the population has a disability that constrains mobility. Probably a third or more of households have at least one member who is transport disadvantaged. The term social exclusion is not widely used in Canada, but most transport officials are concerned with providing basic mobility to disadvantaged groups. Efforts to address transport-related social exclusion are mostly implemented at the local level. A wide range of transport and land use policies and programs can help improve social inclusion, many of which are often

overlooked as possible solutions to this problem. Further research is needed to better evaluate the problem and potential solutions.

Planning Goals

Social inclusion helps achieve two major transport planning goals: equity and economic development.

Transport Equity

Transportation confers benefits and imposes costs, and affects people's opportunities to access goods, services and activities. Equity is often a transport planning goal. Even Adam Smith, the patriarch of market economic theory, wrote in 1776, "When the toll upon carriages of luxury coaches, post chaises, etc. is made somewhat higher in proportion to their weight than upon carriages of necessary use, such as carts, waggons, the indolence and vanity of the rich is made to contribute in a very easy manner to relief of the poor, by rendering cheaper the transportation of heavy goods to all the different parts of the country." Most transportation policy decisions are evaluated with regard to equity impacts, and equity is often a primary goal of particular transport policies and projects.

However, people don't always mean the same thing when they think or talk

about equity. There are three general types of equity related to transport, described below, and these are interpreted, evaluated and applied in many different ways.

1. Horizontal Equity (also called "fairness") This is concerned with the fairness of cost and benefit allocation between individuals and groups who are considered comparable in wealth and ability. Horizontal equity implies that consumers should "get what they pay for and pay for what they get," unless there is a specific reason to do otherwise. Horizontal equity is often cited when communities compete for transportation resources, such as state or federal funding, and is the basis for cost allocation studies that compare how the costs imposed by different vehicle classes compare with their



user payments.

2. *Vertical Equity With Regard to Income and Social Class*

This focuses on the allocation of costs between income and social classes. According to this definition, transport is most equitable if it provides the greatest benefit at the least cost to disadvantaged groups, therefore compensating for overall social inequity. This definition is often used to support transport subsidies and oppose price increases.

3. *Vertical Equity With Regard to Mobility Need and Ability*

This is a measure of how well an individual's transport needs are met compared with others in their community. It assumes that everyone should enjoy at least a basic level of access, even if people with special needs require extra resources. Applying this concept can be difficult because there are no universally accepted standards for transport need, nor a consistent way to measure access. Vertical equity by need/ability tends to focus on two issues: access for physically disabled people and support for transit and special mobility services.

There are often conflicts between these different types of equity. For example, vertical equity often justifies subsidies to benefit a disadvantaged group (such as discounted transit fares for student and elderly riders, and special mobility services for people who are physically disabled) which contradicts horizontal equity objectives. People's experience and values tend to affect their perspective of transport equity. Certain ideologies tend to emphasize certain equity issues over others. For example, a "conservative" political ideology tends to emphasize horizontal equity, a "socialist" ideology tends to emphasize vertical equity with respect to income, while a "social progressive" ideology tends to emphasize vertical equity with respect to need and ability. Some perspectives emphasize the relative position of society's least advantaged members, suggesting that special consideration should be given to the few percent who are most economically, physically and socially disadvantaged (Rawls, 1972). Another ideological issue is whether equity should be evaluated based on an equity

of opportunity (meaning that society ensures that disadvantaged people have equal access to education and employment opportunities) or equity of outcome (meaning that society ensures that disadvantaged people actually succeed in these activities). Equity of opportunity is a narrower standard that tends to appeal to political conservatives, while equity of outcome is a broader standard that tends to appeal to political progressives. To the degree that transport is required for equity of opportunity, it reflects a basic requirement of social equity that even political conservatives can respect.

Economic Productivity

Social inclusion affects economic productivity and development goals as well as equity. For example, physical constraints that prevent an individual from obtaining an optimal education or employment reduce overall economic productivity and development. Social exclusion that contributes to problems such as crime, alcoholism and drug addiction reduce economic productivity directly by reducing employment, and indirectly by increasing demand on social and security services. This suggests that social inclusion for young people, unemployed and underemployed people, and people who are at risk for social problems, may have a particularly high value to society by increasing economic productivity. Targeted social inclusion programs can be justified to help reduce dependency on social assistance and unemployment programs, and as ways to help undeveloped geographic regions and blighted communities. The fact that social inclusion can help achieve economic productivity as well as equity goals broadens the potential support. For example, social inclusion evaluation can be applied to economic development planning, and economic development funding can be used to support some social inclusion programs, such as those that help overcome barriers to education and employment by otherwise capable people.

Canadian Conditions

Factors that affect social exclusion as a transport issue in Canada are discussed below.

Geography and Climate

Canada is geographically diverse and unique. It is the second largest country in the world (9,971,000 square kilometres), with cosmopolitan cities, growing suburbs, huge rural farming regions, small towns, mountains, shoreline, islands, and extreme wilderness, each of which presents unique social exclusion transport issues. It is a northern country with areas of severe winter cold and one of the lowest national population densities in the world, although these factors are somewhat deceiving, since the majority of the country's population is located close to the southern border, mostly in a few large urban regions (Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary and Vancouver). As a result, most Canadians live in urban communities similar to those in northern U.S. and European areas, while a small minority experience climatic extremes and geographic isolation.

Canadian cities are more multi-modal than in the U.S., with relatively walkable neighborhoods and high levels of per capita public transit use. Canadian wages are somewhat lower and fuel prices somewhat higher than in the U.S., resulting in lower per capita vehicle ownership and annual mileage. However, automobile ownership has increased, communities are increasingly automobile-dependent and transit use has declined, so Canadian travel patterns are converging with those in the U.S. In major Canadian cities, social exclusion is primarily associated with poverty, physical disabilities and immigrant populations.

Like the rest of North America, a growing portion of the Canadian population lives in automobile-dependent suburbs. In these areas social exclusion is associated with various combinations of poverty and inability to drive. Some parts of Canada are rural, with small, dispersed settlements. These include the Maritime, Pacific Coast and mountain regions, where development occurred in small and often isolated fishing, lumber and mining communities, and the Prairies, where farms are large and dispersed. In these areas social exclusion is associated with

physical isolation between homes and settlements, and between settlements, compounded in the winter by cold weather, frost and snow.

A small portion of the Canadian population lives in extremely isolated wilderness areas in the far north and Rocky Mountains. These include First Nations (i.e., American Indian and Eskimo or Inuit) communities, various outposts and resorts, and some settlements that develop around special isolated resources, such as mines. In these areas, most residents experience some degree of social exclusion, at least compared with most other Canadian communities. Residents of rural First Nations communities tend to be particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, due to a combination of physical isolation, poverty, limited education and employment options, and social problems such as alcoholism.

Public Policy

Canada has a strong tradition of social programs, particularly compared with the U.S., including provincial healthcare, relatively generous education and welfare services, and various types of local community planning. However, Canadian governments tend to spend relatively little on public transit and related services per capita.

The federal government is much less involved in planning and funding personal transport in Canada than in most developed countries. Federal transport policy is primarily concerned with rail, marine and air travel, and is

divesting itself of direct services (such as passenger rail) and facilities (such as airports). The federal government occasionally provides special infrastructure grants, which may include some local transport projects, but has no ongoing planning or funding. Transport Canada recently developed a national urban transit vision (TC, 2001), but the federal government has done little to implement improvements or provide services or funding to address social exclusion.

Provincial governments manage major highways. Local roads and most transit services are funded and managed at the local level. As a result, social exclusion is primarily considered at the local level, as a component of local transport planning, and sometimes by provincial agencies dealing with special client groups or communities. Canada does not have a national standard for universal design, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, but many jurisdictions are implementing improvements to better accommodate people with disabilities.

Summary: Extent of the Problem

Canada is a wealthy, mobile and diverse country, resulting in large disparities in the quality of accessibility between different geographic areas and demographic groups. Automobile dependency is increasing in many Canadian communities, which tends to increase transport-related social exclusion problems.

A number of specific factors contribute to social exclusion. About 20% of

Canadian households do not own a motor vehicle, about 10% of households are both low-income and do not own an automobile, and about 10% of the population has disabilities that tend to limit mobility. At any one point in time some households experience temporary mobility problems due to vehicle failures or disabled drivers. Residents of more isolated communities tend to experience problems accessing basic activities and services. Lower income residents of automobile dependent communities are likely to spend an excessive portion of their household budgets on transport. Many of these groups overlap, resulting in various degrees of transport-related social exclusion problems that affect 10-30% of the Canadian population, and indicating that probably a third or more of households have at least one member who is transport disadvantaged. Some groups, such as Minority and Aboriginal people, and low-income single parents, are particularly likely to have multiple factors that contribute to transport-related social exclusion.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that every person in these categories faces significant transport-related social exclusion problems, or that transport improvements are necessarily the best way to improve social inclusion. The exact extent of these problems, how these impacts compare between groups within Canada and with other countries, is difficult to determine due to limited and inconsistent data.

Canada generally has strong social programs, but there is little national effort to coordinate local transport planning or address transport-related social exclusion problems. Most solutions to this problem are implemented at the local level, resulting in diverse types and quality.



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