

Transport-related social exclusion in the North of England



Summary and key findings

Background and methods: This report sets out the causes, consequences, and extent of transport-related social exclusion (TRSE) in the North of England. This draws on primary research undertaken with over 3,000 members of the public, stakeholders, and experts across areas of the North, and on a data tool that measures the risk of TRSE across England. This tool combines accessibility analysis with a range of socioeconomic and demographic indicators to provide a systematic comparison of the risk of TRSE.

Defining TRSE: TRSE means being unable to access opportunities, key services, and community life as much as needed, and facing major obstacles in everyday life through the wider impacts of having to travel to access key destinations. These wider impacts include the cost and time entailed in using the transport system, and the impacts of stress and anxiety linked with using the transport system. Together, these impacts can contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty, isolation, and poor access to basic services.

Causes: TRSE is caused by the combination of fragmentation, unreliability, and high costs in the public transport system; poor conditions for walking, cycling, and wheeling in car-dominated environments; and the high levels of car dependency that result from this. This leads to poor access to key destinations for those primarily dependent on public transport and active travel, alongside forced car ownership, in which households are compelled to have access to a car, despite the costs of car access causing them significant hardship.

Extent and distribution: The data analysis presented in this report estimates that 3.3 million people in the North live in areas where there is a high risk of TRSE. These are areas in which there is poor access to key destinations by public transport, high levels of car dependency, and significant vulnerability to social exclusion. These areas are widely distributed across the North, but are particularly concentrated in manufacturing and mining legacy areas, in rural-urban fringes, in smaller cities and towns, and in coastal communities. On average, those in the North are more at risk of TRSE than those in the rest of England, with 23.3% of those in the North living in high risk areas, compared with 16% of those in the South and Midlands.

Population impacts: TRSE has a disproportionate effect on people with disabilities and long-term health conditions, people with caring responsibilities, and those on low incomes and in insecure work. Underlying this are physical accessibility and cost constraints, transport planning and routing decisions that prioritise commuter corridors, and increased exposure to fragmentation and unreliability. Differences in exposure to TRSE are also evident based on age, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, with TRSE reflecting and reinforcing wider patterns of social and economic inequality.

Solutions: Reducing the level of TRSE in the North and the disproportionate impacts faced by specific population groups requires significant investment in local public transport services. These services should be integrated across boundaries and modes, and provide a viable and reliable access to opportunities, key services, and community life for those travelling outside of peak periods and core commuter routes. This, along with transforming car-dominated environments to enable active travel, should support a context in which having unconstrained access to a car is not a prerequisite for social inclusion.

A vicious cycle of transport issues and social exclusion

This report describes a vicious cycle of transport issues and social exclusion in the North of England. This cycle combines aspects of the societal context, the nature of the transport system, and the disproportionate impacts of these issues on specific population groups and geographical areas. The key elements of this cycle are:

A societal context of

Poverty, multiple deprivation, and income inequality.
Inequalities relating to disability, gender, caring, ethnicity, and LGBTQ identities.

Alongside a transport system that features

Car-dominated environments with poor conditions for walking, cycling, and wheeling.
Fragmented, infrequent, and unreliable public transport services.
High costs of public transport, particularly for multi-mode and cross-boundary trips.

The combination of which leads to

A large gap in access to opportunities, key services, and community life between those with unconstrained car access, and those relying on public transport and active travel

Alongside

High levels of car dependency, including forced car ownership.

Which results in social exclusion through

Limited access to opportunities, key services, and community life for those reliant on public transport and active travel.

Alongside the wider impacts of

Using the transport system for key journeys causing significant stress and anxiety.
The money spent on transport causing significant financial hardship.
The time spent travelling for key journeys crowding out leisure & recreation.

Which reinforces and leads back to

Poverty, multiple deprivation, and income inequality.
Inequalities relating to disability, gender, caring, ethnicity, and LGBTQ identities.
Transport and spatial planning that prioritise car use.

Principles of a socially inclusive transport system

The following principles bring together key aspects of the evidence on the causes, extent, and consequences of TRSE in the North of England, and how this evidence can be translated into practical steps towards a socially inclusive transport system.

One: The role of car access

Having unconstrained access to a car should not be a prerequisite for social inclusion; including accessing opportunities, key services, and community life. Safe, convenient, reliable, and affordable public transport and active travel should be available across the diverse place and population contexts of the North.

Two: Diverse travel patterns

Public transport services should function equally well for those travelling outside of peak periods and major commuter routes as for those who fit these conventional travel patterns.

Three: Integration

Public transport planning and ticketing should be integrated across administrative boundaries and modes of transport, such that those taking multi-modal journeys across these boundaries do not face excessive costs and complexities.

Four: Equality of access

Public transport and active travel infrastructure should be accessible to those with disabilities and limited physical mobility. This accessibility should be fundamental to the design of infrastructure, and offer equality of access.

Five: Technology

The introduction and use of technology in public transport should be inclusive of those with limited or no access to the internet and to banking services, both at the point of use and in the provision of information.

Six: Local access

Transport, spatial planning, and digital connectivity policies should combine to expand local access to services, opportunities, and community life, and thereby reduce the impacts of limited access to transport on social inclusion.

Seven: Affordability

The level of transport use necessary to access opportunities, key services and community life should be affordable to those on low incomes, those out of work, and those unable to access work and social welfare.

Eight: Safety

Journeys on, to, and from public transport access points should be safe and be perceived to be safe, particularly for women, LGBTQ people, ethnic minority communities, and people with disabilities.

Shared experiences of TRSE

This report demonstrates how the range of issues with the transport system in the North have widespread and fundamental impacts on the everyday life, and are a cause of social exclusion. As well as quantitative data, this conclusion is supported by qualitative evidence of the lived experiences of TRSE across diverse population groups and area types. Below are five illustrative examples of the ways that TRSE is experienced. Each example combines the experiences of several of those who participated in the qualitative research.

Rob

Rob is in his early 20s, and lives in a small town in the North East. He has struggled to hold down regular work since leaving school, and while he has a driving licence, he cannot afford to own and run a car. Since COVID-19 restrictions eased, he has been looking for work in hotels and restaurants, most of which are a few miles away on the coast. While he has found a few vacancies, with the bus services available it is impossible for him to make it in time for early morning shifts or to make it back from many late evening shifts, and this is proving a major barrier to him finding work. He has lost work before after bus cancellations caused him to repeatedly run late for his shifts, and knows that with the insecure work available to him, there is a risk he could end up paying the bus fare only to find there is no work available if he is late.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi lives in a suburb of a city in Yorkshire, with her husband and two-year-old son. She is the main carer for her mother, who lives on the other side of the city. Her husband commutes in their car, so she balances her caring responsibilities using public transport most of the time. Her mother's house is only a few miles away, but getting there requires a bus to the city centre and then a tram out, with a typical wait of 20 minutes in between. It should only be a five-minute walk to the bus stop, but there are more and more cars parked on the pavement, and it can take a long time to safely cross the main road to her stop when she has the pushchair. Because of this, she often ends up leaving 15 minutes before the bus is due, to avoid missing her connection. This extra time really adds up, and she has recently had to give up her part time job to make these journeys work. She also has to buy two return tickets to complete the journey – one for the tram and another for the bus – which with the drop in her income is putting major pressure on her finances.

Mahomed

Mahomed lives in a town in the North West, and works on an industrial estate on the outskirts of the town. He starts work at 7AM, and with the public transport options in the area he has no option but to drive to work. His car recently failed an MOT, and while he was able to borrow a car from a friend while his car was off the road, the cost of the repairs have caused him major financial hardship. He had to cut down on his food shop and fall behind on bill payments to get his car back on the road, and knows he will have to do the same again when the insurance is up for renewal. He can walk to see friends and family nearby, and only really uses his car for travelling to work, but it is almost impossible for him to lead an active social and community life with the money he has left after paying for his car.

June

June has lived all of her life in a rural village in the North West, and is in her 80s. Her husband has recently had to enter residential care after being diagnosed with dementia, and as her eyesight has worsened, she has reluctantly given up driving. She uses a community transport service to visit her husband, and has her shopping delivered, but she feels increasingly isolated from friends in the area. The bus service in her village only operates one return journey to the nearby town per day, and there are no connecting services out to other areas that she can use and still get the return bus home. She can afford to take a taxi some of the time, and uses these for hospital appointments, but her fixed income means this is not an option for most trips she would like to take. She is also finding the walk to the bus stop in her village increasingly difficult, as part of this involves crossing an unlit rural road with national speed limit, and no pavement on one side. Because of this, she does not feel able to use the bus during winter months.

Katie

Katie lives in a suburb of a city in Yorkshire. She has a progressive health condition which limits her mobility, and has recently started using a wheelchair. Katie moved to her neighbourhood because it was close to local shops and services, as well as to a regular rail route, but she feels increasingly isolated. Cars parked on the pavement, increasing amounts of traffic on the roads, and a lack of safe pedestrian crossings in her area means that she is unable to access local services in her wheelchair – even though the distance itself is manageable. Her local rail station is wheelchair accessible, but many of the stations she would like to travel to are not, and the requirement to book assistance well in advance restricts her from using rail at short notice. She has also faced anti-social behaviour from other passengers when travelling by rail, particularly when she has attempted to use the designated wheelchair space at busy times, and the lack of staff available while travelling makes her feel vulnerable. This stress and anxiety add to her feelings of isolation.



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