
Local Strategic Partnerships, Transport and Accessibility

Accessibility planning is a new process required of local authorities to improve access to everyday facilities in local communities, especially for defined disadvantaged groups in society. One of the challenges for local authorities will be to coordinate the activities of different bodies in this process. This briefing sheet describes a research project conducted for Department for Transport (DfT) and the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to assess what role can be played by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in the accessibility planning process.

Background

Improving accessibility is one of the Government's five overarching policy objectives for transport. It can be achieved in different ways: providing transport; making services available when and where they are needed; and delivering services to people. The 2003 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) 'Making the Connections' report highlighted the difficulties many people face in accessing key opportunities and services. DfT was given responsibility to develop and implement accessibility planning, a formalised process to be carried out by local transport authorities (LTAs). LTAs will be required to include accessibility planning as part of their 2005 Local Transport Plans (LTPs).



Research Justification

A key finding of the 2003 SEU report was that the problem of inaccessible services and activities has arisen in part because no single public body has had overall responsibility for accessibility. Accessibility is not just a question of transport and therefore needs to draw upon a wider set of expertise, responsibilities and interests from a number of agencies. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are a recent initiative intended to play an important role in the coordination of public services at a local level, focused through community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies. While partnership working already forms a valuable part of the LTP development process in most LTAs, LSPs potentially offer a useful basis for enhanced cooperation, over information and action, with and between a wider circle of bodies having expertise in healthcare, employment, education and local services.

CTS was commissioned to carry out research on LSPs, transport and accessibility planning. The research formed part of an ODPM national research programme evaluating LSPs but received extra sponsorship from DfT, who wished to use the results in preparing guidance to local authorities on the process of accessibility planning in the next round of LTPs. The aim of the research was to explore and make recommendations concerning the potential role of LSPs in the accessibility planning process.

Methodology

In order to obtain robust results the research involved the following three elements: (i) a review of existing research and information; (ii) a detailed study of ten selected LSPs and LTAs accompanied by further 'mini' case

studies; and (iii) a stakeholders' seminar to discuss preliminary findings.

Outcomes and Benefits

The review of existing research and information found that transport issues do not feature strongly in the work of LSPs, although transport in general, and certain aspects of accessibility, are widely seen as important but challenging issues. In the DfT's research on developing and piloting accessibility planning, only one of the eight pilot projects had involved direct links with an LSP. However, the formation of new partnerships has played an important role during most of the pilots.

The case study work examined the development of LSPs, their approach to addressing transport issues and the relationship between LSPs and the corresponding LTAs. A number of key issues were identified in which it was found there were differing current practices and associated benefits and limitations. These key issues led to a series of recommendations being developed regarding the role of LSPs in the LTP and accessibility planning processes.

1. While current LTA partnership arrangements may exist, LSPs represent a mechanism for potentially effective partnership working that can help rationalise existing arrangements.
2. If LSPs are to make an added-value contribution to accessibility planning then a clear, positive and timely commitment is needed by both the LTA and the LSP.
3. Accessibility should be an explicit linking theme between the LTP, community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy.
4. The LTA should ensure that the LSP board is aware of the accessibility planning agenda and the benefits and responsibilities it brings to partners.
5. LSPs should explicitly address accessibility in their work but different models can be used for this purpose: (i) accessibility theme group; (ii) accessibility sub-group; or (iii) treating accessibility as a cross-cutting theme.
6. Those tasked with addressing accessibility on the LSP should critically appraise the factors governing accessibility, in which they should be guided by the LTA.

7. Those tasked with addressing accessibility on the LSP should draw upon and guide other exercises that the LTA is engaged in - notably the LTP consultation.
8. There is a need to ensure that LSPs in districts which lie within a sub-regional functional transport area adopt preferably joint, but at least consistent, approaches to improving accessibility, and appropriate LSPs should collaborate in this.
9. Both the LTA and LSP should work to ensure that any newly established working partnership arrangements stemming from recommendations 1-8 are maintained and further developed beyond completion of the 2005 LTP.
10. All documents related to accessibility planning should be written in a clear, readable way, avoiding jargon.

The recommendations will need to be interpreted according to local circumstances by each LTA (and its associated LSPs). Furthermore, LSPs are relatively new and most of them continue to develop their methods of working. In consequence both the process of accessibility planning and the contribution of LSPs are likely to take time to develop.

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