
The Treatment of Social and Distributional Impacts in Appraisal and Evaluation – Literature Review

Background

This literature review was undertaken as Stage 1 of a project for the Department for Transport (DfT) examining the current evaluation of Social and Distributional Impacts (SDIs) in transport scheme appraisal and evaluation. The wider project is led by Atkins and involves BMRB. Stage 2 sought qualitative evidence from practitioners about how SDIs are considered in practice. Stage 3 will provide a synthesis of experience, drawing on case-study evaluations, and provide outputs relevant for the refresh of the New Approach to Appraisal (NATA).

SDIs are the 'social' effects on individuals and communities arising from transport schemes – for example changes affecting an individual's mobility, or a community's ability to access services such as healthcare. They are distinct from the economic and environmental consequences of a transport intervention, although there is overlap between the categories. They may be the result of physical change, for example in local pollution levels, or as a response to changed opportunities to access services, facilities, or social networks. Impacts can also be seen to be 'distributed', as different groups in society may potentially be affected in different ways, and to a greater or lesser extent.

The Literature Review contributed to the first stage of the project, gaining a better understanding of the range of SDIs arising from transport schemes. To achieve this, the review searched for and then considered literature on SDIs when related to transport. Wherever possible, empirical evidence of the impacts was drawn on. The overall project had three objectives:

- *To understand how to better take social and distributional impacts into account in the development of transport scheme design and appraisal;*
- *To examine how evidence from social research can best be integrated into appraisal so that it is given appropriate weight in decision-making; and*
- *To identify the implications that any proposed approach(es) for better taking social and distributional impacts into account in appraisal*

may have for subsequent post-implementation transport scheme evaluation.

The Literature Review was expected to contribute directly to the first of these, but where possible to provide input for the responses to the second and third.

Methodology

The methodology adopted was a simplified version of the rapid evidence assessment procedures, focussing primarily on the identification of relevant research from keyword searches in electronic databases. This was augmented by a request for material currently 'in publication' from academics and further experience-led gap-filling.

The keyword-relevant sources were initially checked for topic relevance, and then underwent an evaluation to see if they contained evidence of social and distributional impacts. This resulted in approximately 140 topic-relevant sources being identified, of which nearly 40 were included in the review as relevant.

The review's primary evidence presentation was organised around the NATA framework objectives in order to maximise 'read across' to Stages 2 and 3 of this project. However this did not prevent evidence of SDIs outside of this framework from being included. The review process was conscious that material might be found which did not easily 'fit' the NATA classification, but where this was the case it was still included in the report, and identified as such.

Further Information

The DfT intends to publish the review along with the findings from the overall project. The project is due to conclude in June 2008.

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