Accessibility of Employment and Training Opportunities in Greater Nottingham

July 2007

Executive Summary

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1. Introduction

The objective of this study is to identify and improve understanding of the barriers to accessing employment and training experienced by people living within Greater Nottingham. This study focuses on transport-related aspects of accessibility, although these have been considered in the context of wider accessibility issues. Recommendations from the study are intended to inform strategic planning of services and information provision. The study encompassed Greater Nottingham conurbation, including: the City of Nottingham, the surrounding districts of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe, and the Hucknall electoral wards of Ashfield.

2. Methods and Approach

The research included the following 4 elements:

2.1 Desktop Research to Identify Available Information Sources and Stakeholders

The research team reviewed the existing Accession model and supporting data for Nottinghamshire, including previous accessibility studies. The data included:

- Crime data
- Demographic information – Census and Indices of Deprivation
- Locations of Job Centre Plus outreach centres
- Employer data from the Annual Business Inquiry
- Bus Service information

2.2 Gap Analysis and Quality of Existing Data

This material was then analysed in order to produce accessibility mapping and journey times for trips from different parts of the area. This information was sufficient for the study. A series of accessibility maps and data tables were produced using the ACCESSION software package. The maps show travel time ‘isochrones’ (depicted on the maps as a series of contour lines) of 10, 20 and 30 minutes between areas where unemployment was high and key employment sites as well as Job Centre Plus Outreach centres.

Bus route data was presented showing all the bus stops in the City and County as point locations for routes with a ‘frequent’ service (i.e. every 10 minutes between the hours of 0600 and 1800 Monday to Saturday). In line with the Greater Nottingham Accessibility Strategy Indicators, a maximum distance of 400 metres or a 5 minute walk was set from each origin point to all surrounding bus stops. This means that bus stops which lie beyond this 400m ‘buffer’ are excluded from the analysis even though they may offer better service frequencies and hence faster overall journey times. A 50m interchange limit was also used to restrict the distance that users would have to walk when interchanging between public transport services.

Crime data was also examined for the Greater Nottingham area. These maps were based on crimes per thousand population / households and were used with public transport route data to show bus routes which pass through ‘high crime’ areas.

Finally, key cycle routes were mapped.

Additional information that may have been useful to the project but which was not available includes **future** employment developments by industrial sector. This information would enable detailed accessibility analyses of future employment sites to areas of high unemployment, or of areas where the skills of the local labour force do not match the skills level required by local employers.

2.3 Contacting and Interviewing Key Stakeholders

The qualitative research focused upon understanding the barriers to accessing employment and training from the perspective of formal stakeholders and community members. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the viewpoints of stakeholders involved in delivering training and employment services. In total, 30 stakeholders were interviewed. These included: representatives of County and City Council services, whose remit covered employment and training, transport, disabilities and youth; Community Development Officers and/or representatives of local partnerships for each of the city centre areas and districts studied to obtain a view of local-specific issues and circumstances.

2.4 Group Discussions and Interviews in the Community

This last phase of the study was intended firstly, to gain a better understanding of people's own perceptions in the communities targeted and to prioritise the accessibility issues identified in earlier research stages. Secondly, it was intended to further explore differences between groups. Thirdly, it tested the likely impacts of possible strategies from the perspectives of key client groups. A flexible approach was adopted to secure participation in the study within a limited timeframe. A combination of semi-structured individual interviews, group discussions and self-complete questionnaires was employed to encompass a wide range of people, including: carers and single parents, people in their teens and early twenties as well as older job seekers, ex-offenders, people with disabilities and a range of ethnic groups.

2.5 Interpretation of the Results

Sometimes the opinions of stakeholders and local people are based on perceptions or lack of knowledge rather than reality. Nevertheless it is important to take these views into account since it is perceptions that influence behaviour and so there are important lessons for the dissemination of marketing and information as well as specific actions recommended.

3. Barriers to Accessibility – Broad Findings

Accessibility mapping demonstrated significant areas, particularly of the City, where car ownership is very limited. This leads to a high degree of reliance on public transport to access opportunities outside of the immediate area. The main barriers to accessibility for non-drivers related to: public transport services (routes, frequencies and timetables), cost factors, physical access issues, personal security concerns, safety, information and communication issues, and people's aspirations or travel horizons. Of these, cost was generally perceived to be the biggest barrier, followed by service-related barriers and aspirations.

3.1 Areas with Specific Access Problems

Areas identified in the study as having particular access problems include: rural villages in Rushcliffe District; Clifton; and estates in Aspley, Bilborough**,** Broxtowe, Sherwood and Gedling. Mapping demonstrated that many areas with access to the city centre within 30 mins had

access to only a limited number of employment sites by public transport within this timeframe, due to the lack of orbital services and the increasing location of employers on peripheral sites. People living in inner city areas with high levels of unemployment such as St Ann's and the Meadows also experienced difficulty accessing employment and training centres on the outskirts. High crime rates are a disincentive to travel in these areas, particularly after dark, while those living towards the edges of these areas experienced some obstacles to travelling to the city centre on foot, including: hilly terrain, safety concerns and time pressure associated with childcare.

3.2 Differential Impact of Accessibility Barriers

Accessibility barriers are experienced differentially. The greatest difference is between people on low incomes and those with moderate to high incomes. This is reinforced by inability to drive, lack of access to a personal vehicle, mobility problems, disability, gender issues, age, poor language ability, low educational attainment and limited life aspirations.

There are large variations between different people regarding their perceptions of 'acceptable distance'. Interchange, cost of travel and journey time are more important factors than actual distance. Confidence and aspirations also influence willingness to travel outside of a person's known local area.

People will travel further for better paid positions and/or positions they see as having prospect for future development, but not for low wage/low prospect positions. Acceptable travel distance for education and training opportunities is lower than for work. However, many job seekers are prepared to undertake difficult and lengthy journeys in the short term to access a good opportunity for training or a necessary qualification.

3.3 Aspirational Barriers

Aspirational barriers were repeatedly encountered in the qualitative research. Within disadvantaged communities there is reluctance to travel to take up employment and training opportunities. This is in part due to misconceptions about the length and cost of journeys but is also due to a 'culture' of people not wanting – and lacking confidence – to travel outside of their known home area. Aspirational barriers are less tangible than other barriers and tend to compound their effect. It appears that different sub-groups of the population have different 'mental maps' of travel horizons which also vary by journey purpose. The link between infrastructure, knowledge and travel horizons is complex and requires further research.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Cost of Transport

There was consensus that £2.70 for a bus day ticket is 'too much' for people on low incomes. It is perceived to be more expensive to use the bus than a car for the same trip.

Recommendation
Cost of public transport was perceived to be a priority area for improvement and is a significant barrier to people on low incomes. Cost is also a deterrent to using public transport for people who have the option of personal transport. There is scope to build on existing initiatives such as WorkWise, providing **concessionary fares, free passes for jobseekers or particular grants**

for disabled people to travel to work. As well as targeting short term barriers, this would have a longer term impact by promoting public transport as a means of getting to work. Use of the smart card system could also provide valuable data on transport use and unemployment.

A further possibility is a **post 16 travel scheme for young people** to encourage bus use for leisure as well as for work and training.

4.2 Service-related Barriers

Service-related barriers predominantly affect people relying on local bus services. In contrast, the tram network received praise in interviews for its frequent and efficient service. Particular barriers are associated with service frequencies, times and routes. They primarily affect people living in peripheral estates and rural areas. Infrequent services are more of an issue for County rural areas than for City areas. Infrequent early morning and late evening services stand out as a particular issue for people wishing to commute to work. A number of bus services do not start until 9am or later and end in the middle of the afternoon so are of no use to the majority of commuters. Early and late shift workers often have very poor or no access by public transport. The hub and spoke system (i.e. series of bus route corridors – 'spokes' – spanning out from the city centre 'hub') is problematic due to the lack of orbital routes and cross-city through routes linking peripheral points. Having to use two or more buses to get to a destination is generally considered too time-consuming and unreliable.

Recommendation
Key aspects to focus on in improving bus services are: **routes, frequencies, interchange and integrated ticketing**. It is not feasible to suddenly overhaul the Hub & Spoke transport system as a whole. However, work has recently started on the strategy for 2013 for 'NET2' which will introduce 2 cross city routes. It would be desirable to consider **joined-up routing options** with a view to minimising the need for interchange.

Integrated travel planning is a key area of current activity with plenty of scope for growth and improvement. Current schemes already include trialling routes and increased service frequencies. Integrated ticketing would also be highly beneficial. Greater overall early involvement of targeted local user groups could enhance this process.

Demand responsive transport is already a key aspect of Community Transport, which combines fixed routes with flexibility on demand. This is an area that can be built on to increase accessibility in the future for disadvantaged groups.

Staff training and awareness-raising is a secondary area of concern in the context of accessibility but is nonetheless important for particular disadvantaged groups such as disabled, elderly and less confident/articulate younger people. Improved frontline staff communication with the public and understanding of service needs for disabled people, especially people whose disabilities are not 'obvious' such as learning difficulties, is a key factor in attaining public goodwill and continued service use.

4.3 Physical Access Issues

There has been a lot of improvement in physical access to services. However, some bus services were reported to have retained a mixture of more and less accessible buses. This

effectively limits the reliability of the service for wheelchair users in particular as the frequency of accessible buses on these routes is variable. Overcrowding also causes access problems at peak times. On the trams the handrails are positioned too high for many people to use effectively.

Recommendation
Major bus operators in conjunction with Nottingham City Council are working towards a fully accessible fleet but in the meantime are focusing on those routes which are most likely to be used by disabled people, such as hospitals. These could also be considered in the light of employment opportunities and there could be better information about those routes that are reliably accessible. Secondly, overcrowding could be addressed by more interventionist demand management initiatives such as working with companies to stagger working hours.

4.4 Information and Support

There is a lot of information available but it is not always accessible. More affluent households and those with higher levels of education tend to have better knowledge of where to gain information and assistance and greater confidence to access it. The format in which information is provided is often unfriendly for dyslexics, people with learning difficulties or low literacy levels. Tailor made information would be helpful to many people.

Recommendations
The provision of travel information and support is another area in which improvements have been made. Several area-based and personal travel/journey plans initiatives have been implemented. Increasing the levels of active engagement of local users in planning, testing and monitoring the impacts of such schemes would promote local ownership. It would also provide a strong evidence base to modify or extend existing schemes and to feed into funding bids for future initiatives. **Maps customised** for public transport links between areas of high unemployment and major employment centres would be helpful in extending knowledge and horizons.

Evidence from the study identifies a sizeable population of disadvantaged people who could greatly benefit from access to localised, user-friendly **real time information hubs (mobihubs) and face-to-face support systems**. In particular, work through local community groups to introduce community **Travelwise** programmes. Over and above providing travel information, these facilities would help to build confidence and reduce isolation as an important first step towards engaging in training and employment opportunities.

Work with local people to **audit timetables** to check links for integrated journeys by bus and train. In addition, record **mystery shopping** experiences, especially for new home—work journeys.

4.5 Security Issues and Concerns

Crime data mapping demonstrated that services from communities which experience relatively low levels of violence against the person pass through ‘high crime’ areas on route to the city centre. Safety was an important issue for women in particular. Disabled people also feel vulnerable. Late shift workers and people taking evening courses are perceived to be the most affected by security concerns. Many people do not feel safe walking short distances after dark

in some areas e.g. estates with subways and alleyways. CCTV at bus and tram stops makes people feel more secure but there are still some blind spots.

Recommendations
Rather than routing services away from high crime areas of the city, thus increasing the isolation of these areas, the study advocates tackling security issues head on. The City Council have already applied for funding to install CCTV in 200 bus shelters across the City. Perceptions of transport security are also monitored quarterly in public satisfaction surveys and these have shown perceptions of insecurity are diminishing overall. This approach provides a good basis for further action designed to actively engage local people and highlight local specific issues and variations. Recommended actions include undertaking **community audits and local initiatives** to tackle vandalism.

Work with police to **identify and target linear routes** where crime rates are high.

4.6 Personal Transport

Many of the unemployed people interviewed were interested in cycling and already walked long distances, often to save money. There was interest in better conditions for walking and in particular, better conditions for cycling. Finally, schemes that address mobility issues by providing or facilitating access to personal forms of transport were highly rated by job seekers as a priority area for development. There was enthusiasm for bicycle reconditioning schemes (with a safe cycling support package) for a wide range of job seekers who saw cycling as a means of improving general health and well being as well as accessibility. It is also the only form of personal transport (other than walking) available to people who have been banned from driving, either due to medical conditions or past driving offences.

Recommendations
Introduce **cycle reconditioning schemes (with support package)** linked to job opportunities. Customised information maps for walking, cycling and travel for disabled people. Cycling would however clearly not be the most appropriate form of personal transport for everyone or in all circumstances and **grants for mopeds** such as under the Wheels2Work scheme and/or **support in obtaining a driving license** were also very popular options. Such schemes were seen as means of opening up a much wider range of opportunities for employment – both in terms of location but, more crucially, in terms of type of work that could be undertaken. Motorised transport options have particular appeal for disadvantaged young males and could benefit people living in urban as well as more rural areas.

5. Next Steps

This research will now be considered by One Nottingham in partnership with other stakeholders. Some of the recommendations are already in progress. Implementing others will require more engagement with stakeholders and especially with local people.