

# My Transport Vision Blog – Transport users are people too

Entry for CIHT Young Professionals T&I challenge - My Transport Vision

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## My vision of the future

Thinking about our future is quite exciting – so much opportunity, and with new transport technologies accessing these opportunities should be faster and easier. In this blog I share my vision of a new and improved journey we might make in the future. But the CIHT Futures work has reminded us that the future is far from certain, so I think about our return journey in an alternative scenario. There is one certainty which I use for this scenario, namely in the future we'll be older and with that our needs will have changed.

My second vision, where I consider the journey from an older person's perspective, isn't very inspiring – it's a world where many perceive that they have few realistic travel options. As a result, their ability to access opportunities are reduced compared to those around them. To counter this, I've had three ideas which, as a profession, we can do to avoid making my gloomy vision a reality. These ideas are for us to;

- Work in teams which represent *all* the travelling publics<sup>1</sup>.
- Recognise that today's transport offerings do not give everyone the same opportunities.
- Engage more effectively and more often; ask, not tell and listen to the feedback.

## Our outbound journey

Whilst I describe my vision, imagine it with me. It's a Saturday afternoon and we're off to meet some friends in the nearby town. We take out our phone and enter our destination; we're presented with a few options – are we after speed and the luxury of a private driverless car? Or do we want the cheaper option of using a combination of mass transit modes?

We've plenty of time, so choose the second option. We're collected by an autonomous bus, which has selected its route based on the passengers and transported us to the station. The beauty of not driving but treating our mobility as a pay as you go service, is that whilst on this journey we can enjoy the good views of countryside on the way to the Rail Station. The train isn't running on time, but the app has considered this, and we arrive with the optimum connection time based on our average walking speed. A short train journey later and we've arrived at our destination ready to enjoy our afternoon.

I've made some assumptions about the future which we can't rely upon. However, I can reliably say we'll be older and with that, our abilities will have changed. It is also likely we'll have developed an impairment<sup>2</sup>. Either way, the way we interact with our surroundings will have altered. Bearing that in mind, let's continue our vision, specifically our return journey.

## Our return journey

We're glad it is only a short wait at the Victorian built rail station as we need the toilet, but there isn't one here<sup>3</sup>. We're also particularly cold on this winter's day standing on the open-air platform. Once we're back to our town's station, we're reminded of suggested improvements to the rail-bus interchange which were part of a proposal for a

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<sup>1</sup> Publics, plural is used following one of the findings from CIHT Futures which found that the current representation of the public can be skewed.

<sup>2</sup> 80% of disabled people develop their impairment later in life. <http://www.disabilitysport.org.uk/facts-and-figures-about-disabled-people-in-the-uk.html>

<sup>3</sup> Category D, E and F stations (2177 of 2520) are not required to have a toilet.

new housing development in the town. I thought it was a good idea but some people in the village didn't agree, they set up a campaign group and Planning Permission was rejected<sup>4</sup>. That means our interchange still involves steps<sup>5</sup>.

Assuming in the future we can still use steps, we get to the second part of our journey, which is the bus. It's quite confusing - the route is different to earlier and the last time we used this service. We can't look at a route map, or count the number of stops until ours, because this changes as we are being driven along. Other people in the vehicle are chatting so we don't hear the announcement – by the time we do hear it the doors are closing again, there isn't a driver to notice this, so we miss the stop. Luckily a fellow passenger notices and presses the emergency stop button – the autonomous bus jerks to a halt and we get off. It was all quite stressful and a bit embarrassing – I don't think I'll use it again. The walk from the bus stop home is particularly difficult now it's dark and the street lights have been turned off as part of the council's efficiency programme<sup>6</sup>.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself, to plan and order this journey we were required to use an app. Realistically, when we're older you or I may not be able to use our phones as adeptly as we can now – we may not be able to hold it in one hand, see the screen, understand the app or type on the tiny buttons. Picturing the changing network as a graphical representation may be confusing. Furthermore, the app was rolled out by a private company, who targeted high growth areas with potentially large profit margins – it was rolled out in the city, not our small town.

### Our brighter travel future?

Whether it be because the app isn't available in my area, because I don't feel comfortable using the autonomous vehicle or because I can't physically get between modes; I've seen a future scenario where my travel options haven't changed at all. This means I have less opportunities to work or socialise than others who are benefitting from transport advancements.

To travel I'm left with only one option - the private taxi. The number of those I can ring (rather than summon by app) has reduced and the remaining few have reacted to demand and increased their prices. In this version of the future the cost of travel means it's now only something I do on special occasions.

In 2010, once disability-related costs were taken into account the numbers of households with a disabled occupant assessed as living in poverty rose from 23% to around half<sup>7</sup>. In a future with an increased reliance on expensive private hire vehicles, this figure could grow even more.

### How to avoid this vision

The CIHT Futures project found people tend to think about extremes when considering future scenarios, and I may have described an extreme vision. Nevertheless, without proactive action, this could become some people's reality – even yours. I've three suggestions of things we can do as a profession to avoid realising this vision.

### One team of many minds

When we considered our vision, naturally we considered it from our perspective. The same thing happens when we consider transport interventions – whether we are appraising them, designing them or managing them; it'll be from our own perspective<sup>8</sup>.

If our team, policy makers, funders and designers all have a similar perspective – typically university educated, car drivers, who work traditional office hours with minimal health issues – we are less likely to recognise when proposals are unsuitable for some of the community. **As a profession we should represent the publics for whom we provide.**

In its simplest form this would see a diverse mix of people, but ideally would mean teams who live and travel all over the region we cover, throughout the day using all methods. This may be unrealistic – in the main we need to be in

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<sup>4</sup> This part of my vision is based on CIHT Futures finding that “Silent support is overshadowed by vocal opposition”.

<sup>5</sup> 1 in 4 rail journeys in the UK involve steps. DfT, The Inclusive Transport Strategy: achieving equal access for disabled people. 2018

<sup>6</sup> 39 councils are turning their lights off completely and 74 are dimming them

<sup>7</sup> Demos (2010) Counting the Cost

<sup>8</sup> Extensive research and the differing perspectives between the pup, dolphin and owls in the Futures workshops show perspectives can influence how we see matters.

office space with our team at regular times of the day. Acknowledging that we'll never have a team which has real user experience of all transport problems in an area, my second suggestion looks to address this.

### Audit, record and monitor transport gaps as viewed by the public

In our two visions, we saw how the same journey can be drastically different for two people. However, we don't need to look to the future for this to be true – we already live in a world where, due to physical or mental health, economic status or the amount of luggage you have; we don't all have the same transport options, even when starting in the same place. As transport professionals we need to identify this and **acknowledge that one solution is not equally usable by all.**

We need to remember that there are people who live and work close to public transport stops, who do not consider them actual options. Equally, 1 in 4 adults (and trends indicate this will rise<sup>9</sup>) cannot drive.

I think we need to audit the transport options people perceive as realistic compared to the options we assume they have based on their location and profile. This would extend beyond audits of infrastructure and number of services, to analysing the full breadth of reasons some people cannot or do not use some options.

Once we understand the current baseline of gaps in people's transport options – perceived or real, these can be monitored. Ideally interventions will start to close these gaps. Or we may find that proposed interventions usually only add option(s) to those who have them, rather than close the existing gaps.

### User and non-user engagement

Assuming we've adopted suggestion one and have a more varied mix of people undertaking suggestions 2's gap analysis, we still won't identify all the reasons people don't travel how we would expect or like them to. This brings me on to my final and most important suggestion.

Whilst research can imply how interventions will affect people's travel behaviours, these vary in each situation and place – and minimal revealed preference data exists for some new options. To really know why people travel as they do, we need to ask. Not just ask how they travel but, understand their thought process as to why.

I doubt many would argue that public consultation isn't necessary, however I think some still don't see the value it could add. I think we should move away from the idea of presenting solutions to the public, ready to defend them at all costs. Then move towards a model where we continually check what users, and potential users want or need. The Futures project found that it is often a vocal few who respond to consultations. **It is important that we proactively seek input from all, especially potential users.** With new technology, communicating ideas and gathering opinions should be getting easier. In embracing this we have an opportunity to ask new questions and gather additional information not previously available to us.

### My closing thoughts

When transport professionals think about the future of transport, they may be tempted to see a series of network diagrams, a list of technologies or a new model for financing transport. But I'd like us instead to think about people and their opportunities. Transport can currently offer some of us a world of opportunity. But there are some people who have less travel options than others. I've then painted a picture of how this number could rise as the population ages and gains more impairments.

Let's not allow it to get to that point. I've offered three simple solutions which could help us create a world in which no one is denied an opportunity because they can't get to them.

- Work in teams which represent all the travelling publics.
- Recognise that today's transport offering does not give everyone the same opportunities.
- Engage more effectively and more often; ask not tell, and listen to the feedback.

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<sup>9</sup> DfT, National Travel Survey: England 2017, 2018