Study on the social dimension of the future EU transport system regarding users and passengers

Executive summary

steer

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of the study on the social dimension of the future EU transport system regarding users and passengers. The European Pillar of Social Rights, jointly proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017, places transport among the essential services to which everyone has the right to access (Principle 20). It stresses that such services should be of good quality and that support for access – intended in broad terms – shall be available for those in need.

Different groups of people have different needs as transport users and it is important to ensure that the transport system is inclusive and available to all. The issues are complex and have multiple overlapping dimensions as different users, needs, geographies, Member States/legal contexts, modes, business models and wider trends all interact. With the aim of ensuring that the future transport system will be inclusive and equitable, it is important to consider the system from the perspective of users in terms of affordability, reliability, and accessibility.

The general objectives of the study are to:

- map the challenges and opportunities posed by the modernisation of the transport system to different groups of transport users/passengers in terms of affordability, reliability and accessibility; and
- review and propose possible solutions that ensure users are at the centre of the future transport system, so that benefits can reach all societal groups.

Most research and decision-making on this subject are undertaken at a national, regional or local level. This study brings together the needs, challenges and opportunities of users across all Member States and identifies common themes and/or potential policy gaps.

The Terms of Reference specify six different groups of transport users/passengers most likely to be affected by the modernisation of the transport system which may have particular needs or face particular challenges as mobility and transport evolve. The six user groups of the study are:

- Women;
- Citizens with poor IT literacy or with limited access to the internet;
- Persons with disabilities and with reduced mobility (e.g. older people);
- People living in remote areas (notably rural areas), segregated localities or in less developed regions;
- Young people and children; and
- People on low income and in particular at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Additionally, in considering the social dimension of the future EU transport system, citizens falling outside the above categories may also have to change their mobility habits.

Transport evolves and modernises along major trends, including:

- Decarbonisation and digitalisation, both of which can be said to predominantly be bringing about changes to the transport system itself (i.e. in the way transport is organised and provided); and

- An ageing population and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which can be said to predominantly be bringing about changes in the profile of users' needs (i.e. behavioural changes), which the transport system ought to adapt to.

These trends will have a considerable impact on transport with profound consequences for users.

Methodological approach

The methodology for responding to the Terms of Reference included the following elements:

- Stakeholder consultation using a number of approaches to engage with relevant stakeholders and collect information about their specific situation.
    - On the user side, we were looking to understand the challenges and opportunities that users may face, as well as their views on engagement with authorities/operators and the level of awareness towards major trends.
    - On the authority/operator side, we were aiming to understand the extent to which they take equity and inclusion into account in planning and delivering transport, the approaches used to engage with users, and the level of preparedness with respect to the major trends.
    In both cases, we were asking stakeholders to share good practices they are aware of.
- Desktop research to develop an inventory of relevant existing information and data with respect to the social dimension of transport regarding users/passengers, particularly information that provides insight at Member State level, followed by literature review of this material to identify the challenges and opportunities by user group.
- The identification of at least 10 good practices from EU Member States and 5 from non-EU countries, as well as the review of good practices available in guidance from multilateral organisations.
- A participatory workshop with over 60 stakeholders at which the study's draft recommendations were discussed.

The study team was able to obtain inputs from a range of stakeholders in all of the relevant stakeholder categories, including from transport user representatives; social inclusion and equality experts or networks; Member States; local transport authorities/companies; transport operators; and others (e.g. transport staff representatives). However, the overall response rate to the consultation was relatively limited, as result of a combination of factors, including the complexity of the issues explored, the impact of COVID-19 on resources to respond to the consultation, and in some cases a lack of knowledge or mandate with respect to transport for organisations representing different users.

More than 100 projects, studies and guidance, policy and other documents were identified covering the challenges and opportunities posed by the modernisation of the transport system. These included publicly available data and evidence collected in the framework of relevant research projects, and material from a wide range of European and multilateral organisations. Nevertheless, information on certain user groups (e.g. people with low IT literacy) was sourced from a narrower range of sources and contributors than others (such as PRMs). Practical limitations also meant that the study focuses on the most prominent themes in the context of transport, but it acknowledges that strong links exist with wider socioeconomic considerations.

Key findings

Current challenges, future challenges and future opportunities that are faced by the different user groups were brought together and summarised across Member States. The inventory and mapping provided many valuable insights, but the level of detail available across Member States varied significantly. This exercise also highlighted users that may not be captured within current definitions, and emphasised the overlaps or intersectionality between different groups.

While a significant number of current challenges for users was identified, there was a limited amount of information on anticipated future challenges. Where present, the way future opportunities were identified did not appear to be actionable in many cases. They were often identified in aspirational vision or strategy documents, with focus on stating bold goals rather than outlining clear and actionable steps towards implementation.

It was found that, in many documents discussing future trends, mention of the social dimension of transport (if any) is made at a very high-level, and infrequently discussed for disaggregated user groups. This creates a gap in understanding how trends may impact or exclude members of different user groups, or how they could be leveraged to address existing challenges faced by users.

Clustering some of the themes that emerged from the inventory and mapping identified a number of findings which highlight intersections between different user groups. These themes included:

- The concentration of ageing, populations on low income in rural areas poses a growing number of mobility challenges;
- Lack of coordination in transport comes at the expense of users, particularly for PRMs;
- Suburbanisation driven by unaffordability can result in higher transport costs for users and undermine progress towards decarbonisation;
- Mobility challenges for children and young people are more severe in rural areas;
- Having easily accessible and up-to-date information is important for transport users, but may be particularly impactful for individuals belonging to the different user groups considered in this study.

The level of preparedness was assessed for both users and authorities/operators. Responses from stakeholders indicated that the level of preparedness of authorities/operators is highly variable across the EU. Differences in terms of how the social dimension of transport was taken into account were noted at different levels (local, regional, national, EU) and across different cities, regions, and countries.

Other key findings included that:

- There is increasing recognition that equity and inclusion are important in the context of mobility, although stakeholders observed that this may sometimes be impeded by advocacy gaps for some user groups (e.g. citizens with poor IT literacy or with limited access to the internet, and people on low income);
- Policy frameworks which mainstream the needs of different transport users (e.g. PRMs) have demonstrated the ability to deliver meaningful improvements for transport users, including through the development of sophisticated networks of user representatives; and that

- Context-specific solutions are more effective for ensuring that the needs of different users are addressed properly, particularly where the user groups and intersectionalities that are identified are also appropriate for the context.

Good practices were identified which correspond to some of the key challenges identified for the different user groups, and/or to prominent changes to the transport system driven by the major trends. Good practices were explored across ten topics (i.e. challenges and/or prominent changes) drawing on evidence from the EU, and touching on the design and planning of transport, new forms of mobility, and innovations to support different users. An additional five relevant good practices from non-EU countries were also presented.

Overall, a number of common messages emerged across the good practices:

- Widespread awareness of different users' and their specific and diverse needs throughout all levels of transport governance and operations (from national to local, from boardroom to frontline staff) is key in helping advance equity and inclusion in transport;
- Stakeholder engagement is critical to better understand and meet users' specific needs and secure stakeholder buy-in; and
- Knowledge-building through the identification and collection of user-specific data is necessary for providing relevant insights into the different experiences of different users.

A review of guidance from multilateral organisations found that this mainly focused on two user groups: PRMs (e.g. older people); and women and girls. The guidance covered mainstreaming activities, supporting tools and practices relating to stakeholder engagement and knowledge-building (data), and more operational guidelines. The importance of knowledge-building through establishing a suitable framework for the identification, collection and analysis of data was highlighted, and examples of inclusivity indicators were provided with reference to Sustainable Urban Mobility Indicators (SUMIs), which stakeholders cited as a good example of a comprehensive and standardised approach to specifying relevant metrics.

Recommendations

The findings of the study included structural challenges and policy gaps that were identified through the analysis of the detailed challenges/opportunities for different user groups and in different Member States, and the analysis of the level of preparedness of different stakeholders to adapt to change.

The table below summarises the recommendations and the level at which these are aimed. The recommendations cover how structural challenges may be tackled and how the identified policy gaps may be addressed to ensure that the evolving transport system will be inclusive and foster connectivity and access to transport for all, and are grouped into four themes:

1. Improving coordination;
2. Building knowledge and evidence;
3. Integrating the social dimension when reviewing existing practice; and
4. Providing resources.

Summary of recommendations

Theme	Recommendation	European Union level	Member State level	Regional level	Transport sector level	Company level
Improve coordination	**1**: Strengthen coordination between different decision-makers	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Build knowledge and evidence	**2**: Develop an improved understanding of the needs of different user groups and the challenges they face	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
	3: Develop a preferred methodology for building inclusion and equity considerations into transport appraisal, and specify relevant indicators	✔				
Integrate the social dimension when reviewing existing practice	**4**: Identify gaps with respect to inclusion and equity of different groups of transport users when reviewing existing policy and legal frameworks	✔	✔	✔		
	5: Identify gaps or constraints with respect to governance for the social dimension of transport when reviewing existing policy and legal frameworks	✔	✔	✔		
	6: Take the social dimension better into account from the perspective of users in relevant projects and operations	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
	7: Review contingency plans to build resilience into the transport system that accounts for different users' needs	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Provide resources	**8**: Support awareness-raising and capacity-building	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
	9: Provide consolidated guidance in an actionable toolkit	✔	✔			
	10: Address advocacy gaps and strengthen users' ability to engage	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Source: Steer

Recommendations at EU level that include the involvement of the European Commission have been prioritised based on their added value and costs and benefits.

- Recommendations 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are ranked first in terms of priority. The implementation of these recommendations is considered to be where value is created and benefits are expected to outweigh costs. The positive cost-benefit ratio is based on the fact that the Commission can build on existing initiatives.
- Recommendations 1, 4, 5 and 7 are ranked second in terms of priority. Although the costs of implementing these recommendations in full is considered to be high as a result of complex or time-consuming processes, intermediate steps are identified (such as focused coordination on key issues and the provision of guidance) that would contribute towards delivering improved outcomes without incurring higher costs.

- Recommendation 3 is ranked third in terms of priority. Developing a preferred methodology for building inclusion and equity considerations into transport appraisal, and specifying relevant indicators, could be a lengthy and time-consuming process. The application of such a methodology would also rely on relevant data being collected, for which capacity would need to be developed at the local level.

The degree to which different user groups are already recognised and their needs accounted for in transport varies. As an example, drawing on the advocacy gap analysis of stakeholder engagement in this study and the inventory of evidence collected, inclusion considerations in transport are relatively more advanced for PRMs, women, and people living in remote areas than for citizens with poor IT literacy or limited access to the internet, young people and children, and people on low income. However, this will also vary between different levels and places.

The extent and urgency with which the recommended actions might be undertaken will depend on the relative 'starting position' of the user groups being considered in each case and the level of ambition of different stakeholders (particularly authorities and operators). Overall, despite increasing recognition that equity and inclusion are important in the context of transport, steps have to be taken to ensure that the social dimension of transport from the perspective of users forms an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that different user groups benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

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