

Transport

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Adapted from The Case for Universal Basic Services (2020), Polity Books, p. 87-93

Motorised transport belongs to 'a set of universal, irreducible and essential material conditions for achieving basic human wellbeing'¹. There are free local transport schemes (mainly buses) in more than 100 towns and cities worldwide, including more than 30 in the USA and 20 in France, as well as in Poland, Sweden, Italy, Slovenia, Estonia, Australia and elsewhere. Some are restricted to certain social groups and times of day. They've been adopted for a range of reasons – to reduce social and economic inequalities, encourage social participation, discourage private car use, cut levels of air pollution and eliminate administrative costs associated with ticketing.

Infrequent, poorly connected services plague much of the UK, where local buses have been deregulated since 1985². In London, where a strategic authority has kept control of public transport, bus travel has rapidly increased, while it has declined everywhere else in the UK. Extending free bus passes to the whole UK population has been estimated to cost around £5.2 billion a year (0.26% GDP), while extending London's level of public transport service would cost £12.3 billion (0.63% GDP)³.

Most European countries have regulated bus services with co-ordinated routes and timetables, as well as better links between town and country, and higher levels of public subsidy. They are more affordable and their users are more satisfied⁴. The French pay for public transport through a payroll levy called Versement Transport (VT). More than 80% of France's urban transport authorities apply the levy, which pays for more than half of their infrastructure investment and subsidies to operators. A huge variety of taxes are levied by local authorities around the world to pay for their public transport systems, ranging from local income and property taxes, to sales and tourism taxes, corporation tax and road user charges⁵.

Free bus travel, as part of a well regulated, inter-connected, frequent, reliable and adequately funded scheme that also discourages car use and encourages safe walking and cycling is likely to yield a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

A 2016 evaluation of free bus travel for older and disabled people in England found that pass holders found it easier to access to services, had more opportunities for social interaction and were left with more disposable income; all this disproportionately benefited poorer people⁶.

Greenhouse gas emissions from use of cars and taxis are more than seven times higher than from use of buses⁷. A study in one German town suggests the best way to cut private traffic is to combine free public transport with strong disincentives for other road users, such as a congestion charge⁸.

An analysis by KPMG of the impacts of local bus services in the UK found that 'investment in local bus markets generates significant benefits to passengers, other road users and the wider community'. Each £1 spent by government on these services produced economic, social and environmental returns ranging from £2.00 to £3.80 for revenue expenditure and from £4.20 to £8.10 for capital expenditure⁹.

End Notes

¹Rao, N.D. & Min, J. (2017). 'Decent Living Standards: Material Requisites for Human Well Being'. *Journal of Social Indicators Research*, 138 (no.1): 138-225.

²Bayliss, K., and Mattioli, G. (2018). 'Privatisation, Inequality and Poverty in the UK: Briefing prepared for UN Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights'. *SRI Working Paper Series*, no.116: 13-14.

³Social Prosperity Network. (2017). 'Social prosperity for the future: A proposal for Universal Basic Services'. UCL: IGP, p. 26; 35-36.

⁴Op cit, Bayliss and Mattioli, p.14.

⁵Taylor, I. and Sloman, L. (2016). 'Building a world class bus service for Britain'. London: Transport for Quality of Life, p.115-6.

⁶Department for Transport. (2016). 'Evaluation of Concessionary Bus Travel: The impacts of the free bus pass'. London: Department for Transport.

⁷Department for Transport. (2017). 'Transport Statistics Great Britain 2017: Energy and Environment'. London: Department for Transport, p6.

⁸Storchmann, K. (2003). 'Externalities by Automobiles and Fare-Free Transit in Germany — A Paradigm Shift?'. *Journal of Public Transportation*, 6 (4): 89-105.

⁹KPMG. (2017). 'The 'true value' of local bus services: A report to Greener Journeys', p.12