

Understanding and valuing the impacts of transport investment: wider impacts transport appraisal guidance (WebTAG) ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport is a leading charity and environmental campaign group that promotes sustainable transport policies. Our vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the estimation of wider economic impacts in transport appraisal guidance (WebTAG).

Critical environmental policy goals and legislative requirements – including carbon reduction, cleaning up air pollution and reversing the decline in native species biodiversity – are given insufficient weight in scheme cost appraisal, while the additional benefits in terms of change of land use and property values unlocked by improved access to homes and jobs through public transport are insufficiently valued.

We welcome the move towards looking at a wider range of impacts and reflecting this in transport appraisal. We note and welcome the recognition of the economic benefits of investment in walking and cycling provision ¹ and of rail freight ² in recent policy statements.

However, we remain concerned that the guidance still is founded on time savings, despite operating in a world where a lot of transport investment is, as the guidance says, linked to wider packages of development and regeneration.

In this world, time savings are less relevant to the objectives of such programmes and packages, and the externalities from some kinds of packages may also be under-estimated. The evidence is that people take the time gain by travelling further in the same time, meaning that the economic benefits are dispersed away from the locality that is suffering the adverse environmental impacts of the new infrastructure. ³

Labour market impacts

We welcome taking into account employment effects from new transport connections: the evidence is particularly strong in terms of the economic benefit of new railway stations and from public transport linking people to jobs. ⁴ However, we remain concerned that labour market impacts are still not fully represented.

There is literature, stretching back to SACTRA's 1999 inquiry, showing that labour market impacts of transport investment are complex and these complexities are often ignored by scheme promoters. For example promoters of road schemes providing connections to jobs assume universal access to cars or that bus services for those without cars can be provided on a new road, yet many areas with high unemployment/under-employment have low car ownership and mechanisms to provide new bus services or other public transport have not been considered.

Land use planning

We welcome the move towards looking at land use change and reflecting this in appraisal, but, like the academic reviewers, we are concerned that the foundation of appraisal remains an assumption of fixed land use with changes added on top.

¹ Cycling and walking: the economic case for action <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-the-economic-case-for-action>

² Rail Freight Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-freight-transport>

³ David Metz: the myth of travel time saving http://transportblog.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Metz_2008-2.pdf

⁴ CBT: Improving local transport helps the economy – experience from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund

This will be particularly unrealistic in relation to schemes that aim to capture development gain from transport investment, such as the recent announcement by the Transport Secretary of the East-West Rail consortium. Although the guidance does talk about economic uplift, starting from a position of fixed land uses will tend to work against this.

We welcome the focus on agglomeration: the evidence is that agglomeration of development can deliver greater economic and environmental benefits than dispersed development⁵ and this is reflected in policy priorities for concentrating new homes and jobs at transport hubs.⁶ However, this needs to be developed to include more rigorous spatial and land use planning analysis. There is substantial evidence that different patterns of development have widely differing outcomes in transport terms.⁷

There is new emerging evidence that urban extensions on market towns, if built to low densities with high levels of car parking, can have large external costs in terms of congestion and social exclusion. By contrast, dense development around railway stations and transport hubs will have different transport outcomes, and also different economic impacts. The new appraisal modules are a step forward, but further development is needed.

Further research

We believe detailed research is needed on land use change and wider economic and transport impacts of different forms of development (for example, sprawl versus condensed development).

We also support further research on other aspects including on appraising packages of investments (5.8), developing the evidence base to value 'attractiveness' (5.9) and understanding the value of 'more/less productive' jobs (5.4).

We welcome the idea of getting a context-specific economic narrative from promoters - this needs to set out all the transport impacts, not just benefits. It is important to note that "wider economic impacts" should not be taken exclusively to mean "wider economic benefits" - there may be disbenefits and costs from transport schemes as well as benefits.

There is also a need to take into account the changing patterns of work and lifestyle: more people living in cities, where there is relatively low car ownership; more working from home, supported by better broadband; more part-time and flexible work, leading to less concentrated travel patterns. It is important that transport investment is future-proofed both in terms of demographic change and in terms of growing environmental pressures (for example, the impacts of the recent ClientEarth court cases on air quality).

We urge that in future WebTAG reviews, that environmental impacts are given equal weight, particularly given the legally binding targets on carbon reduction, air quality and policy targets on obesity and biodiversity which are not currently being met.

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Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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⁵ CPRE Making the Link <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/housing/item/4345-making-the-link>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regeneration-of-stations-set-to-deliver-thousands-of-new-properties-and-jobs>

⁷ Masterplanning Checklist for Sustainable Transport in New Developments. Ian Taylor and Lynn Sloman
Transport for Quality of Life September 2008