

An Evaluation of Accessibility Strategies in Second Local Transport Plans

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Abstract

Since the publication of the Social Exclusion Unit report “Making the Connections” in the spring of 2003 which outlined the relationship between transport, accessibility and social exclusion, and promoted the concept of accessibility planning, there has been considerable progress in England on the accessibility planning agenda, culminating in the publication of accessibility planning guidance by the Department for Transport and parallel guidance from five other government departments and the formal submission by local transport authorities of a full accessibility strategy in the spring of 2006.

However important questions remain as to the extent of overall progress to date in respect of the development and delivery of accessibility planning across the country and the long-term sustainability of the accessibility planning process. Now with completed accessibility strategies having been submitted it is an ideal opportunity to take stock and evaluate where we are now, evaluate the progress that has been made and that is being made in the development and delivery of accessibility planning nationally.

In this paper we contend that in order for the process to be ultimately sustainable the most successful and proactive local authorities must be rewarded for the delivery of integrated accessibility planning through the local transport plan and related performance review assessment processes as well as the Audit Commission’s Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). A necessary prerequisite to achieving this is the existence of a robust criteria for the evaluation of accessibility strategies, which encourages and supports successful authorities and provides a mechanism against which the less successful authorities can develop and improve their accessibility planning over time.

At present there is currently no available mechanism by which local transport authorities and their partners can benchmark and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of their accessibility strategies. In this paper we present an accessibility strategy evaluation framework which bridges the gap between the accessibility planning guidance, the withinreach support programme and the Department for Transport’s assessment criteria for second local transport plans.

Whilst performance monitoring is an important and integral element of the accessibility planning process, local authorities and their partners are effectively faced with an interval of one or two years before they are able to evaluate their performance against their locally set targets and trajectories, best value performance indicators and performance monitoring regimes. The detailed evaluation of accessibility strategies early on by local authorities, their partners and others, offered by the framework provides a timely opportunity to

benchmark the strategy, identify and address weaknesses and build on the strengths of the accessibility strategy.

In the paper we outline and subsequently apply a fifteen point criteria and five related sub-criteria, evaluation framework to a selection of complete accessibility strategies encompassing a diverse range of authorities from predominately rural shire counties to urban unitary authorities. We then outline the findings of the evaluation and suggest a number of improvements to the accessibility planning process and related support programme.

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