

# **Understanding the Evolution of Community Severance and its Consequences on Mobility and Social Cohesion over the Past Century**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of community severance has been recognised as an environmental impact of transport since the 1920s (Guo et al, 2001). Initially, in the 1920s and 1930s, community severance was seen purely as the separation of homes and work places. With the introduction of large urban highways from the 1950s onwards, practitioners started to recognise both the social and psychological dimensions of community severance. The social dimensions of community severance were thought to include factors that affected community cohesion, such as the reduction of community interaction caused by the presence of a physical barrier (e.g. a road or railway line). Psychological dimensions were related to an individual's perceptions of the barrier and included the perceived unpleasantness and difficulty of making a journey along or across a road.

More recent empirical research and theoretical work on understanding community severance focused on defining both its causes and impacts in greater detail. This paper reports on a research study undertaken by TRL for the Department for Transport in response to the UK Government's report 'Transport and Social Exclusion: Making the Connections' (2003). The main objective of the study was to analyse the severance assessment methods used by other European countries that use monetisation techniques to assess severance. Research was also undertaken to explore how communities experience severance and how practitioners deal with it.

This paper will introduce the historical background and evolution of the concept of community severance and its consequences. It will examine lessons learnt from implementing mitigation measures (for example underpasses and footbridges) and ways in which accessibility planning guidance can benefit from a historical perspective to ensure that mitigation strategies alleviate, and not exacerbate, the symptoms of community severance, for a more inclusive society.

Guo, X. Black, J. and Dunne, M. (2001). Crossing pedestrians and dynamic severance on main roads. *Road and Transport Research, September 2001*

Social Exclusion Unit (2003). Making the connections: final report on transport and social exclusion. *London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*