

Improving social access beyond the inner city

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Improving suburban public transport access has a societal benefit through better health, increased employment and reduced crime, according to a new study from the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies at the University of Sydney Business School.

The paper, published in *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, makes the case that the [financial benefit](#) of improved mobility for those experiencing disadvantage because of where they live should be factored into the cost-benefit analysis of transport infrastructure projects.

Lead author Professor John Stanley has been researching sustainable transport and [social inclusion](#) for nearly 20 years. This paper builds on his previous research, with colleagues from ITLS and the University of Melbourne, which found that mobility has a significant positive impact on inclusion.

Improving access to [public transport](#) as well as walking and cycling infrastructure helps people participate in society, lowering the risk of, and societal costs associated with, social exclusion.

"Investment in local public transport is a valuable way to improve inclusion and, as such, inclusion benefits which are currently ignored in transport evaluation should be factored into government infrastructure spending decisions," Professor Stanley said.

Indirect benefits for all

Professor Stanley explains public transport serves either a [mass transit](#) or social transit market.

"Mass transit, such as peak-hour train and light rail services, delivers benefits for users and the wider society, including reduced road congestion costs, cleaner air, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and productivity improvements from denser urban places," he said.

"All of these benefits are relatively easy to quantify in dollar terms, which is important when doing a cost-benefit analysis of a major mass

transit project. The same is true of road improvements—which is why we tend to spend so much on major new roads."

"Social transit, such as more frequent local bus routes and active travel infrastructure, does not deliver these external benefits. But it indirectly benefits society in the form of lower unemployment, lower crime rates and better health, which reduces legal system costs, health system costs and adds to productivity."

"These initiatives are particularly important in [outer suburbs](#), where local transport options are typically few in Australian cities."

Measuring the social benefit

This latest paper considers place-based disadvantage—how your risk of [social exclusion](#) is not only impacted by individual characteristics such as income, employment status and social connections, but also by where you live.

Factoring in characteristics of the neighborhood adds a new dimension for evaluating the value of [transport](#) infrastructure.

The authors added a measure of relative socio-economic disadvantage to an equation created to determine the monetary value of a trip, which can form part of a cost-benefit analysis.

"Equity is getting much higher priority in cities such as London and Vancouver. In personal mobility terms, it's very much about improving access to travel opportunities and thereby removing a significant potential barrier to social inclusion."

"The research also shows the importance and high value of subjective well-being, [social capital](#) and sense of community for social

inclusion—particularly for those at most risk of exclusion. The monetary values we have developed can be used to help make the case for measures that can deliver a more inclusive society."

More information: John K. Stanley et al, Place-based disadvantage, social exclusion and the value of mobility, *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.tra.2022.04.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2022.04.005)

Provided by University of Sydney

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