Older Better: Improving transport – practical options for Leeds

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Project Aims

• To investigate how accessibility problems impact on older people’s independence

• To determine the extent to which currently available data sources and modelling tools reflect older people’s stated accessibility needs

• To understand how the gap between actual and perceived accessibility problems varies across different categories of older people
Methods

- Literature Review
- Focus Groups
- Pilot Methodologies
- Data Sources
- External Input
Focus Group Participants

• Ten groups in Leeds:
  – 81 participants, more female than male
  – From 60 to 90 years, all living independently

• Wide range of mobility, from the fit to the frail:
  – Conditions included visual impairments, mental health problems, osteoarthritis, Parkinson’s

• Activity levels ranged from travelling “all over” to “the sitting brigade”:
  – Ability to “just get out of the 4 walls and see people” more important than specific activities
  – Shopping; functional, gives structure to the week and an activity in itself “it’s a day out, it’s a social thing”
1. Physical Ability

- The accessibility / acceptability of Public Transport affects:
  - How long people wish to remain driving
  - When they start needing assisted transport

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**Less acceptable:**
- Independent
- Able to use Public Transport
- Require assisted transport

Declining physical ability

**More acceptable:**
- Independent
- Able to use Public Transport
- Require assisted transport

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2. Individual Characteristics

- Feeling of a lack of control over transport provision
- “Ill thought out” decisions particularly irritating

- Three typographies:
  1. The Resigned Acceptors
     “we can’t change the bus route, we can’t change the fact we can’t walk as well as we did, we just have to accept is as best we can”
  2. The Frustrated Acceptors
     Frustrated but aren’t aware of how / feel unable to influence
  3. The involved. “Fighters!”
     Actively trying to influence decisions at a local or city level
3. The Transport Environment

- Feeling of being “pushed out” or “out of step” with the environment

- Comprises 3 main elements:
  - Transport - often described in very harsh / aggressive terms “rough”, “flung” “jerked”. Desire comfort / security.
  - Built environment
  - People - can soften the environment or make it harsher

- Familiarity or a common culture can make the environment more conducive
  - Discomfort when disturbed
Older People as Pedestrians

• Walking – vital for quality of life
• Many walk very slowly, suffer balance problems and pain
• Less able to deal with hazards

Specifically:
• Carrying becomes a problem
• Steps and contorted journeys act as barriers
• Lack places to rest
• Anxious about being knocked or falling over
The Pedestrian Environment

• Crossing roads major difficulty:
  – Wide lines of sight, long crossing widths and a number of roads joining caused problems at informal crossings

• Other people’s use of pavement space:
  – A car park, bicycle lane, scooter racing track, a place for bins, overgrown gardens etc….

• Condition of pavements:
  – Maintenance principally. Plus issues with tactile paving / sloping pavements made to create dropped curbs
Public Buses

• Extensive use by the more mobile. Concessionary fare popular

• Less mobile / more frail experience more problems:
  – Getting on and off significant issue – “kneeling” inconsistent
  – Unreliability = long waits
  – “Long” walks

• Safety a key concern. Bad falls - “don’t dare” to use
  – Drivers setting off before they were seated
  – Having to get up before the bus stop
  – Front tipping seats and no grab rail
  – General rough driving (great variability)
Public Buses Cont.

• Security at bus stops problem for all
• Re-scheduling unsettling
• Method of information provision, often does not suit their needs
  – Tend to rely on previous experience, word of mouth or drivers
  – “New” communication methods disliked / inaccessible (internet / text messaging)
  – Prefer real-time information at bus stops or information on buses
Accessibility by public transport

- Access to services is a major barrier to participation
- Department for Transport tasked with developing “Accessibility Planning”
- Identify areas for investigation
- Collect more detailed data
- Work with partners to find solutions
Harehills to Seacroft Hospital
Harehills to Seacroft - slower & walk distance limited
Other Forms of Transport

• Taxis:
  – Critical for some “I’d be lost without them”. Fills gaps in public transport service
  – However, concerns about driver behaviour, security concerns plus high cost and fear of over-charging

• Trains:
  – Less commonly used by our participants
  – Preferable to buses: more comfortable and getting on / off easier
  – Difficulties accessing stations main problem
In Summary

- The importance of being connected and of independent travel emphasised

- Bus travel particularly vital – but off-limits to the more frail and less mobile

- Significant hazards in the pedestrian environment

- More supportive services not sufficient to compensate – leads to inequity and social exclusion