

# THE SOCIAL VALUE OF MASS TRANSIT

SYSTRA's David Carter, Director of Public Transport and Ian Bruce, Associate Director of Transport Planning highlight the importance of the social value of mass transportation through an evaluation of Nottingham Express Transit and the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Lifechanging isn't a word often bandied about by transport operators or those evaluating the social value of transport projects across the UK. However, according to research supporting the evaluation of Nottingham's £600 million tram extension, for the Department for Transport (DfT), that's exactly the conclusion that can be reached.



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# The Social Value of Mass Transit

**Line One of Nottingham's tram saw some fundamental changes in accessibility for some. One man in the Cinderhill, north-west of the city rarely left his house on his own. He had always required someone else to travel with him. Imagine the freedom of being able to leave your house and travel into town by tram – on your own – having never been able to do so.**

The evaluation, which focused on improved accessibility and the reduction of social exclusion, shows that many more than one person's life has been changed forever. Over a third of respondents stated they now travel more than they used to, which means more social interactions and more people spending in the area, and a whopping 85% of respondents said the tram system changed their lives for the better.

One particular aspect of the evaluation looked at the influence on the changes to access in the workplace for mobility impaired users. Half of the respondents who had changed jobs in the last five years identified that the accessibility offered by the tram was essential to taking their new job. In addition, Nottingham's tram service has given employers a broader pool of prospective employees to choose from. However, the accessibility and social interaction that mass transit schemes provide is not limited to wheelchair users it helps everyone, in accessing new employment, education and social opportunities which will lead to lifestyle and social improvements to all of society.



## Health rewards

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that 'health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Obviously, having easy access to hospitals and GP's means that people use these services more readily for health issues, rather than waiting until severe symptoms occur, alleviating the burden on the NHS. Other, less easily identifiable savings for our health system occur when people are less lonely, are able to socialise and feel part of a community. Transport accessibility has an enormous social benefit.

## Social rewards

Countless great examples can be seen elsewhere too. SYSTRA's work for Nexus, the Public Transport Executive for the Tyne and Wear Metro discovered; an elderly couple started to attend art classes and were able to make new friends and feel less isolated using their concessionary travel passes which allow free travel on the Metro; a derelict area of land next to Whitley Bay Metro station that had fallen into disrepair is now home to a thriving community garden and a small craft beer pub which we were proudly told raised money last year for Ukraine; and a similar story at Monkseaton Metro station where its popular 'Left Luggage Room' pub regularly hosts 'open mic' events and is used as a rehearsal space for a local folk group.

It's not just passengers who gain from the benefits of well thought out mass transit infrastructure. The above examples show that the wider local community has benefited from improved urban spaces.



## We've got to get better at thinking beyond the gateline

Mass transit doesn't necessarily always mean the benefit of a big shiny station development, but even so there are many things that can be done to better integrate transport into our neighbourhoods, offer ownership and involve the local community. Through our research we've found many practical and fun examples including; local notice boards and planters that can be promoted by parish councils, primary schools and local businesses, displays of local artwork, community book swaps, parcel lockers within stations and even using the platform space for a yoga class!

As social value gains more traction and interest, there is an opportunity to articulate the social impacts that transport schemes can generate and help justify investment. In funding bids, this can enhance the strategic argument for investment, and this has been a key element of our work supporting recent Levelling Up Fund transport bids. Additionally, there are now recognised ways of measuring and quantifying social value which has historically been more challenging. Our work with Nexus involved the Rail Safety and Standards Board's (RSSB) Rail Social Value Tool, which quantifies social value using over 500 indicators.

Our recent work for the DfT will inform future mass transit projects in cities across the UK such as the development of Manchester's Metrolink and new mass transit proposals in Glasgow and West Yorkshire. By developing robust evidence, we can use this in strategic cases elsewhere, and this can then be used to develop more formal guidance.

It is encouraging that the transport industry is looking beyond the time savings traditionally used in cost benefit analysis of transport projects to improve the collective understanding of societal impacts arising from a range of transport interventions especially those affecting vulnerable groups.



Find out how SYSTRA can assist you in Mass Transportation:

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