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Transport access and mobility needs and impediments in New Zealand

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Anatole Michael Sergejew

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Abstract

New Zealand's Land Transport Management Act 2003 places a statutory requirement on transport agencies to improve access and mobility. However, the access and mobility needs of New Zealanders, and existing impediments to access and mobility, are not well understood.

This thesis focuses on groups of people that international research suggests are at risk of social exclusion. It investigates their transport needs and impediments related to access and mobility, by reviewing the international literature and by conducting face-to-face interviews with eight people selected from these potentially at-risk groups.

The understanding gained from this present research of mobility needs and impediments, and the effects of these impediments, are discussed. This thesis suggests that mobility impediments are resulting in social exclusion in New Zealand, and that while current consideration of the transport-disadvantaged in New Zealand is largely focussed on the elderly and the disabled, other groups identified internationally, such as young people and new settlers, are also at risk of social exclusion because of impediments to their mobility. This thesis has examined what people perceive as their mobility needs, and suggests that as needs are variable, it is not possible or appropriate to identify basic mobility needs that should apply to everyone. Also, mobility impediments, rather than being a matter of can or cannot, are a matter of degree.

The ways in which identified mobility impediments might be addressed are described. It is suggested that because of the difficulties in establishing and providing for access and mobility needs, it may be more appropriate to focus on providing access and mobility opportunities instead. The usefulness and limitations of this present research are discussed, together with the prospects of subsequently applying the research method on a wider scale in order to develop a fuller understanding of the range of access and mobility needs and impediments of New Zealanders.

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Glossary

Access. The right or opportunity to reach activities using the transport system, and so participate in society.

Accessibility. The ease with which activities can be reached using the transport system.

DETR. Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. The government department which was responsible for transport policy in the UK.

Impediment. A hindrance or obstruction, e.g. "mobility impediment".

Mobility. The ability and ease of individuals to move in the greater community using the transport system for the purpose of accessing activities to participate in society.

Need. A want or requirement.

Rideline. A telephone and Internet-based service that provides information on public transport services, e.g. information on services that could be taken for a particular journey, timetables, fares, location of stops, etc.

Social exclusion. The collective processes that work to deprive people of access to opportunities and means, material or otherwise, to achieve well-being and security in the terms that are important to them.

Total Mobility. A scheme co-funded by central government and by regional councils, that funds a fifty percent discount on taxi fares for people who are unable to use public transport because of a disability.

Virtual mobility. A shorthand term for the process of accessing activities that traditionally require physical mobility, but which can now be undertaken without

recourse to physical travel by the individual undertaking the activity, for example shopping or banking by telephone or over the Internet.