

Transport: a critical catalyst

Kate Czuczman of the Transport Resource Centre Scheme explains the role of transport in the MDG...

Traditionally, investment in transport has been justified on the basis that it supports general economic growth and trade. Under the shifting spotlight of development aid, growing bodies of evidence have emerged to highlight the pro-poor benefits of reduced transport costs and the impact of improved mobility on the livelihoods of the poor.

The relationship between transport and poverty is not always explicitly acknowledged; more often than not, it is implicitly assumed in the need to create greater access to employment opportunities, educational and health facilities, agricultural development, social inclusion and networking. It is this cross-sectoral nature that makes transport investment such a critical catalyst in the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

At the Millennium Summit September 2000, the states of the United Nations agreed upon the MDG as a framework for measuring development progress. The goals focus the efforts of the world community on achieving significant, measurable improvements in people's lives, establishing yardsticks for measuring results, not just for developing countries but for rich countries that help to fund development programmes, and for the multilateral institutions that assist in their implementation.

Despite the pervasive influence of transport on the efficiency and effectiveness of other sectors, its contribution to economic growth, and its significance in terms of government and donor spending (transport is the largest sector in EU and World Bank operations), the MDG make scant reference to its importance in the development process. Here we highlight some of the key contributions that transport can make in the realisation of each of the goals.

Goal 1: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Three quarters of the chronically hungry live in rural areas, and enabling poor farmers to grow more food is an effective means of reducing hunger and poverty. Transport infrastructure investments and improved access to transport services can be effective in lowering input prices and increasing agricultural production. Such investments also have a direct impact on market price variability. Improved transport enables producers to reduce the

monopoly power of agricultural traders by facilitating better access to markets for farmers and small-scale artisans.

Food security is also determined by purchasing power and, therefore, by the level and location of employment opportunities. Transport investments not only facilitate access to employment, they also create employment, both through the construction of infrastructure and in the operation of transport services. For example, in Bangladesh, the rickshaw industry alone accounts for the employment of 1.25 million people.

Goal 2: achieve universal primary education

Getting to school in rural areas is costly in time, effort and money. Drop-out rates are often high, and attracting quality staff is difficult. The distance between home and school, the lack of appropriate affordable infrastructure and transport services to make the journey, and the time required to do so, are all constraints to the realisation of this goal.

A study in Morocco shows that the presence of a paved road in the community influences the school attendance of rural children. In the absence of a paved road, only 21% of girls and 58% of boys attended school. Where a paved road exists, the participation rate increased to 48% for girls and 76% for boys.

Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women

Women, who represent approximately 70% of the 1.3 billion poor people, have different transport needs and different access to transport technologies and services from men. It is accepted that by focusing more investments in infrastructure and services used by and appropriate to women, the time women invest in transport activities can be dramatically reduced, with significant implications for poverty reduction. When women organise themselves and use this saved time productively, the benefits can be seen in all areas of their livelihoods, including agriculture, education, improved shelter, and equality in gender relations.

Simple transport interventions make a difference; for example, Masaai women in Kenya have been encouraged to make more productive use of donkeys for water and firewood collection, and transporting harvested grain and farm supplies. As envisaged, the women were able to use the time saved to attend group meetings, to cultivate fields

and kitchen gardens, and to engage in group activities. Alleviating their time poverty has strengthened both the group and their livelihoods.

Goals 4 and 5: reduce child mortality and improve maternal health

More than 60% of people in poor countries live more than 8km from a healthcare facility and there is a clear association between infant, child, and maternal mortality rates and distance to healthcare services. In a study from Cebu in the Philippines, a 10% increase in distance from a hospital was associated with a 2% increase in all three mortality rates.

Where roads are poor, vehicles are scarce and distances to health services considerable, it can be difficult if not impossible for women to use even a routine service. Community-based approaches have been successful in identifying and prioritising health-related transport concerns. For example in Matlab, Bangladesh, a decline in maternal mortality is thought to be due not only to community midwives making appropriate referrals to a hospital with obstetric services, but also to their ability to facilitate transport for their patients.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases

Transport costs are a major impediment to seeking and supplying sustained treatment. The success of immunisation and disease-control programmes is compromised by disruption to the safe and timely delivery of vaccines to healthcare facilities, and poor access prohibiting the repeat attendance of patients.

It is widely believed that HIV/Aids has been exacerbated by the increased mobility of individuals and transport employees. Rural communities are vulnerable to the spread of HIV from urban areas where prevalence rates are higher because of high-risk practices. Although transport has contributed to the epidemic it also has a role to play in the societal response to it. Transport responses have focused on educating and counselling truckers through, for example, the Healthy Highways project and the National Aids Control Organisation in India.

Although transport safety is not explicitly addressed by the MDG, the WHO's injury chart book for 2002 lists deaths from automobile accidents at 1.194 million, higher than the estimated 1.124 million deaths from malaria.

Goal 7: ensure environmental sustainability

An unwanted externality of transport is the environmental damage that it inflicts. Environmental degradation generally has a greater impact upon the livelihoods of the poor, and has implications for equity.

The effects of transport on the environment are markedly different in urban and rural areas. In urban areas it creates congestion, air pollution and noise, and can contribute to uncontrolled urban sprawl. A World Bank report suggests that over 500,000 people die prematurely in developing countries (equivalent to an economic loss of 2% of GDP)

as a result of urban air pollution, contributed in large part by transport. In rural areas, the construction of roads can affect more than the environment on which they are built. The construction of the Trans-Amazonian highway paved the way for vast areas of virgin forest to be cleared, with many consequent environmental effects.

Yet transport also provides huge potential for minimising its externalities and developing environmentally sustainable technologies. The promotion of more sustainable public transport and non-motorised transport, and development of waterway use can all contribute to reducing negative environmental impacts.

Goal 8: develop a global partnership for development

Transport contributes to a global partnership by providing and sustaining opportunities for access. It provides outside links for land-locked countries, provides the lifeline between rural communities and their markets, puts isolated communities in touch with their representatives, and in general helps to empower communities and individuals by giving them freedom of movement.

So what next for transport?

Although the Millennium Development Goals do not explicitly identify transport as either a cause or potential solution to poverty, its demonstrable influence across all sectors clearly demands multi sectoral engagement with access and mobility issues. The challenge now is to prioritise transport investments that reflect the poverty targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

To do this, the transport sector itself needs to sharpen the focus of its research on poverty reduction, and promote a new perspective within which transport is quantifiably and qualitatively identifiable as a means to an end, rather than just an end in itself.

The Transport Resource Centre has four partner organisations: TRL, IFRTD, ITC and NRI. It provides specialised transport-related advice to DFID and to recipients of development assistance.



Kate Czuczman
Communications and
Publications, IFRTD

Transport Resource Centre
Scheme

Tel: +44 (0)20 7713 6699

www.transport-links.org/trcs

