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**"The Effects of Local Bus Deregulation in Great Britain
on Low Income Families - The Case of Merseyside"**

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THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL BUS DEREGULATION
IN GREAT BRITAIN ON LOW INCOME FAMILIES -
THE CASE OF MERSEYSIDE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 More equitable bus services?

One of the main arguments of the protagonists of local bus deregulation in the United Kingdom was that an injection of competition into local bus operations would better match services to customer needs, would reduce fares and would increase the number of bus users. The regulated system and the practice of internal cross-subsidisation were producing outcomes which were both inefficient and inequitable. The abolition of cross-subsidy under a deregulated framework would bring down fares on the most heavily used routes, thus producing a more socially equitable distribution of benefits in favour of less well-off households who are more reliant on bus services to meet their travel needs. Under regulation, the claim was that the poor were effectively subsidising the rich.

1.2 Local bus deregulation in Great Britain

Under the terms of the 1985 Transport Act, the major provisions of bus deregulation were introduced in all areas outside London in October 1986. Deregulation allows any operator to provide any service he/she wishes as long as it is provided commercially without subsidy. To cope with remaining uncommercial, 'social' services, the Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority and Executive (MPTA/E) have a duty to identify the public transport requirements of different areas of the conurbation and seek the most appropriate ways of meeting those needs which are not met by commercial services. The Executive can provide subsidised bus services by awarding contracts through competitive tendering to cater for identified unmet needs.

1.3 Less equitable bus services?

Following deregulation, the MPTA/E were concerned that the commercial bus services which predominantly served the peripheral housing estates on Merseyside were not meeting the needs of the many low income residents there, in part because fare levels had increased so significantly above pre-deregulation levels.

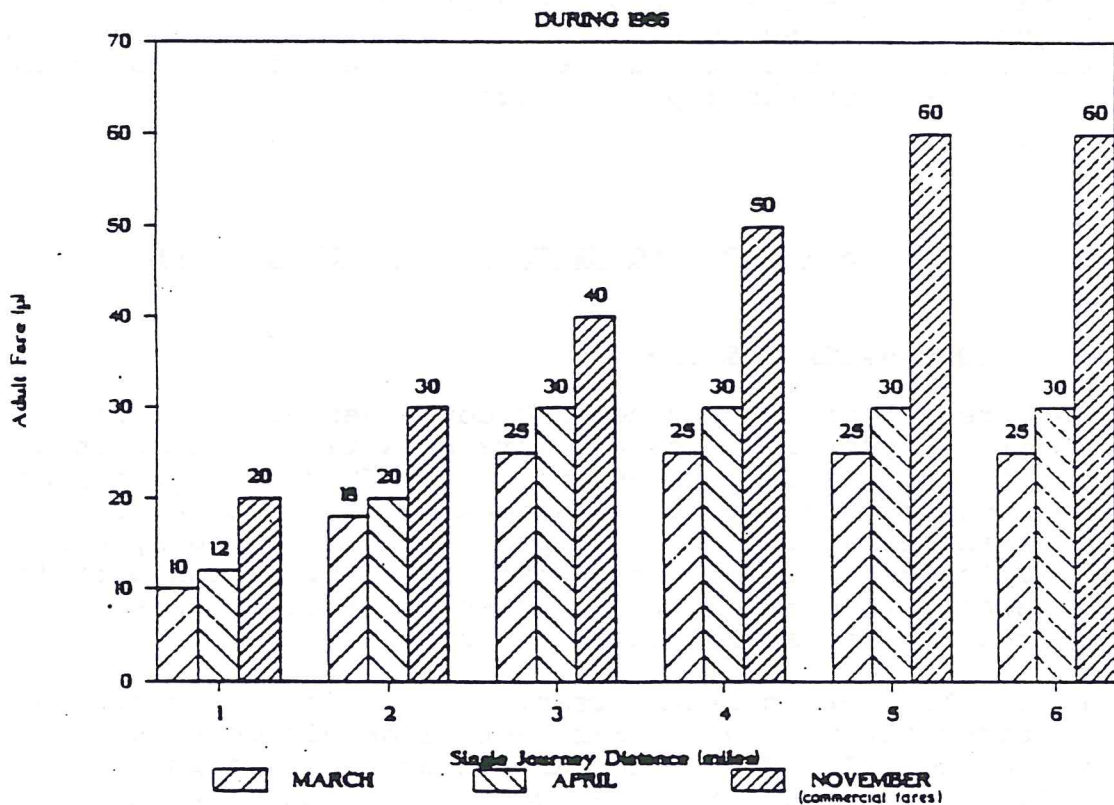
A marked decline in bus patronage following deregulation had been clearly identified at any early stage. The MPTA/E were interested in gaining an understanding of the social consequences of this decline in bus travel for low income families who were the ones most likely to be priced out of the bus market.

2. THE TRANSITION TO BUS DEREGULATION ON MERSEYSIDE

2.1 Fares

Prior to deregulation, local authorities had the powers to set fares on all bus services. In the period 1981 to 1985, this power was used by the Merseyside County Council to reduce fares twice with fares held steady at other times. The Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority replaced the Merseyside County Council in April 1986 as the authority responsible for public transport. Due to financial constraints* the new authority increased bus fares by 15 per cent in April 1986. These fares were retained at deregulation on subsidised services but operators increased fares by a further 55 per cent on average on commercial services. The off peak adult fare increases are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: MERSEYSIDE OFF PEAK BUS FARES



* With the formation of the MPTA in April 1986, central Government imposed expenditure limits on all metropolitan PTAs in Great Britain for a three year period. In Merseyside, expenditure in 1986/87 was set 15 per cent lower than the year 1985/86.

2.2 Bus services

In November 1986, overall bus mileage in Merseyside was virtually the same as before deregulation although some redistribution of mileage had occurred between different hours of the day and different days of the week. Eighty per cent of bus mileage operated on a commercial basis and these services carried 90 per cent of passenger journeys (Donald, 1987). Immediately following deregulation, bus services were very unreliable. In addition, passengers were confused by the many changes to services which occurred. This confusion was compounded by a lack of detailed information on service changes in the weeks immediately following deregulation.

2.3 Bus use

Bus patronage on Merseyside is measured by regular on-bus surveys. Comparing bus patronage in the year following deregulation with the year before, after allowing for the impact of pre-deregulation fare increases in April 1986 (section 2.1), shows a decline of 90 million passengers had occurred, representing 29 per cent of all bus passengers and 34 per cent of those paying fares.

3.1 LOW INCOME ESTATES ON MERSEYSIDE

3.1 Population dispersal

As a result of low income, and consequent lower relative mobility, poor families are more sensitive to changes in public transport services and fares. This sensitivity and reliance of the poor towards public transport services has been exacerbated by certain past land use changes, planning policies and housing market factors. Public transport is more necessary to gain access to essential facilities and for many to receive necessary social support.

Like other metropolitan areas, Merseyside has witnessed considerable peripheral residential development in the post-war period. The Merseyside Area Land-use Transport Study (MALTS), completed in 1969, was a major attempt "to accommodate increases in population and employment during a period in which rising productivity and income will increase traffic levels". Resulting planning strategies were based on a combined dispersal of population and employment to large peripheral public housing estimates. Underlined by the economic recession of the 1970s, it soon became recognised that urban growth was no longer a problem, resources now switched emphasis to the social and physical decay within the inner cities. This transfer of resources combined with the effects of recession have generated problems for resident in

the outer public housing estates It is these types of areas that were chosen for this study.

3.2 Deprivation

The areas chosen for the study were Croxteth, Speke, Kirkby, Netherley and Seaforth; their locations are shown in Figure 2 and the characteristics of each area are shown in Table 1. All the areas lie between four and nine miles from Liverpool City Centre. All of the areas have suffered badly from the economic recession. In the 1981 Census, unemployment in the five areas average 27 per cent of the working population relative to a conurbation average of 16 per cent. Levels of unemployment have risen further since the census. The study areas have a high incidence of social problems associated with high unemployment (eg. youth delinquency, drug abuse, marital breakdown, depression and stress induced illness). The areas also contain high proportions of single parent families. Dependence on public transport is high, with three out of four of households in the study areas not owning a car in 1981. Car ownership on Merseyside has increased only marginally since 1981.

3.3 Public transport provision in the study area

The areas provide a cross-section of all the major bus operators in Merseyside and include examples of new bus operators and minibus services. The areas also show a mixture in the ratio of commercial and tendered services (eg. 90:10 in Seaforth and 70:30 in Kirkby and Netherley). Only two of the areas, Kirkby and Seaforth, have a railway station nearby.

A comparison of the bus service levels operated between November 1985 and November 1987 is shown in Figure 3. The areas show different changes in levels of service. Over the two year period, all of the areas had suffered a reduction in bus service levels save Netherley where levels had remained unchanged. The extent of reductions varied from a 16 per cent fall in Croxteth to a 4 per cent fall in Kirkby. However, since deregulation, bus departures have risen in Seaforth and Croxteth and fallen in the other three areas. In all areas service changes were unevenly distributed within different parts of the estates, at different times of the day and on different days of the week.

FIGURE 2. LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREAS

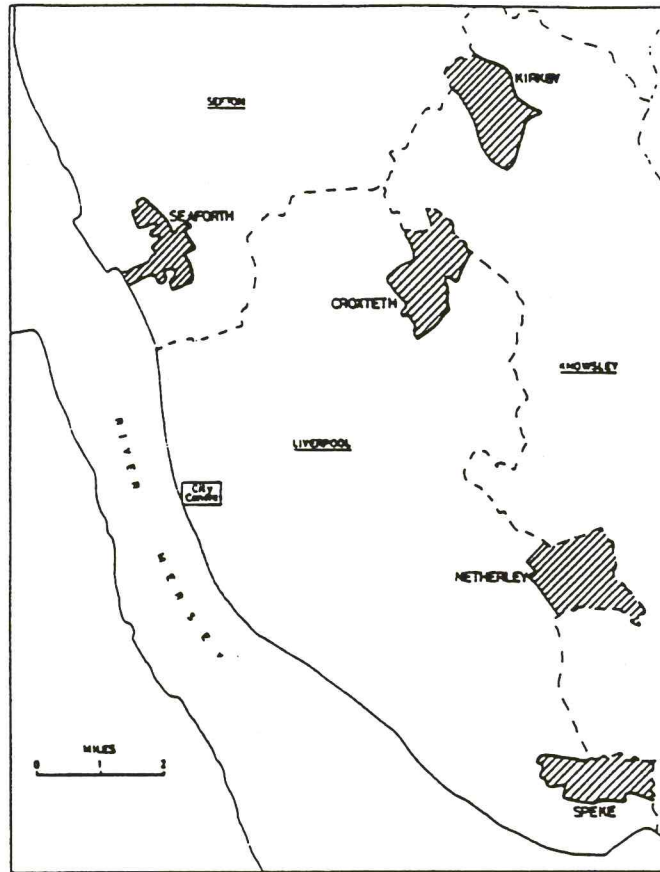
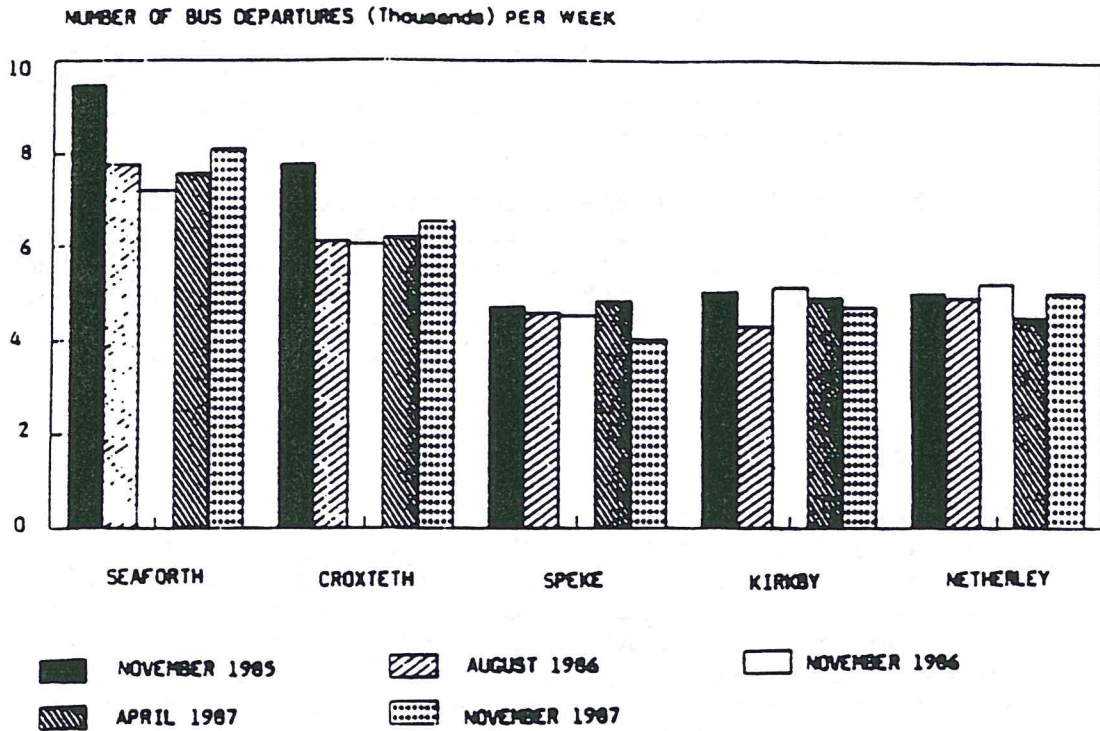


TABLE 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY AREAS

AREA	POPULATION	% NON CAR OWNING HOUSEHOLDS	% UNEMPLOYED	% OLD AGED PENSIONERS	% JOURNEYS TO WORK BY BUS	COMMENTS
Seaforth	14,250	74	24	18	38	An area of mixed housing stock and generally older housing than other study areas. An area adjacent to northern Liverpool docks which has suffered considerable decline in recent decades.
Kirkby	18,533	71	33	7	33	Public sector housing estates typical of those constructed in 1950s and 1960s with high rise accommodation and parkland. Part of the satellite town of Kirkby.
Croxteth	14,399	74	27	17	52	Part of immediate post-war suburban development. Initially, public sector housing but now mixed housing stock. High rise blocks recently demolished or converted.
Netherley	16,845	65	23	11	46	Large suburban public sector housing estate built in the 1960s with own purpose built shopping centre. A mix of high rise and semi-detached dwellings.
Speke	16,796	69	28	15	42	An earlier peripheral development of public sector, largely semi-detached, housing with some high rise blocks. Cut off from adjacent suburbs by industry, notably the Ford works at Halewood.

NOTES: 1. The above figures are from the 1981 Census.
 2. In 1981, Merseyside figures for % of non car owning households and % unemployed were 50% and 16% respectively. Estimates of current (1988) figures for these statistics are 45% and 19%.

FIGURE 3
 BUS SERVICE CHANGES IN THE STUDY AREAS
 NOVEMBER 1985 TO 1987



4. STUDY METHODOLOGY

4.1 Phases

Despite a considerable body of research into the travel requirements of different social groups, there has been relatively little analyses of travel issues affecting low income households (Pickup, 1987). The Transport Studies Unit research strategy was based on qualitative research. This form of investigation served three main purposes.

- (i) To uncover the range of relevant issues.
- (ii) To provide deeper insights into particular aspects of the subject.
- (iii) To provide the basis for developing quantitative research.

The study was undertaken in two phases*:

* In addition, two other exercises were undertaken. First, a 1 per cent sample survey of Merseyside households was undertaken during Autumn 1987/Spring 1988 on attitudes to bus services and deregulation. Secondly, Professor Bradshaw of York University produced a report to assess bus expenditure amongst low income households (Bradshaw, 1988) through analysis of Family Expenditure and Family Finances Survey data.

- (a) Interviews with local community workers and group discussions with people on low incomes in five chosen study areas and two additional suburbs (Woolton, Thornton), one of which was a more affluent 'control' area. These discussions were held between May and August 1987.
- (b) In-depth semi-structured household interviews with forty-one households in the five chosen case study areas were undertaken during November/December 1987. In addition, all households completed four day travel diaries and provided information on household income and benefits received.

4.2 Sample composition

Some group discussions in Phase One of the TSU study were of mixed social composition. Others were positively targeted at certain groups such as married women and the unemployed. In Phase Two, subject households were selected from a doorstep screening interview. All were to be in receipt of Family Income Supplement, Supplementary Benefit or Unemployment Benefit; all household heads were aged between 16 years and retirement age and a mix of household types were interviewed in each area. A majority of the households interviewed had members who were unemployed. Those unemployed were mainly women working part-time, many of whom were single parents. The general characteristics of the respondent households are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLDS INTERVIEWED IN PHASE TWO OF THE STUDY

STUDY AREAS	HOUSEHOLD TYPE				SEX		WORKING STATUS						AGE						CAR OWNERSHIP			DRIVING LICENCE STATUS			
	SINGLE PERSON	SINGLE PARENTS	COUPLE	FAMILY	MALE	FEMALE	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	PRE-SCHOOL/STUDENT	RETIRED/SICK	HOUSEWIFE	UNEMPLOYED	5 - 15	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 59	60 AND OVER	0	1	2 OR MORE	FULL	PROVISIONAL	MOTORCYCLE	NONE
CROXTETH	1	5	0	2	10	10	1	2	6	0	3	0	5	5	6	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	10
KIRKBY	1	3	0	4	12	19	1	0	15	1	0	6	14	3	9	2	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	20
METHERLEY	1	3	0	5	12	16	3	5	0	0	6	6	7	6	9	2	2	2	9	0	0	4	5	1	10
SEAFORTH	0	4	1	5	12	15	2	2	12	2	3	6	13	1	0	4	0	1	0	2	0	3	2	0	22
SPEKE	0	2	1	3	13	0	1	0	0	2	3	7	7	5	4	1	3	1	5	1	0	1	2	0	10
TOTAL ALL AREAS	3	17	2	19	59	60	0	9	49	5	23	33	46	20	36	10	11	4	30	3	0	13	9	2	100

5. RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The following section outlines the key results of the interviews illustrated with typical responses from local residents.

5.1 General lifestyles

Among those interviewed, unemployment, low income and lack of access to a car had resulted in the development of narrower horizons and a more localised lifestyle. Most subjects had relatives living locally who could be relied upon for day to day social and financial support. Daily life revolved around trips to local shopping centres, visits to friends and relatives living on the estate and visits to local pubs and clubs. Other longer journeys were less frequently made. Most commonly cited of these were trips to visit relatives in other Merseyside suburbs and to Liverpool city centre. Trips out as a family group were rare. In addition to these journeys, most households also relied on buses to visit social security offices, job centres to look for work and to pay household bills.

5.2 Dependence on bus services

The need for public transport services to be provided at a price low income families could afford was clear from the study. The low income families interviewed were almost totally reliant on public transport services to meet all of their travel requirements beyond a tolerable walking distance. Local facilities in the areas studied were often lacking, many local shops had closed and even where they did exist, households felt there was a lack of choice.

"You know, years ago when they decided that a grammar school in every area or a secondary school, or a library; they couldn't afford it. I bet if we could have a look at the minutes, one of the main points in favour of merging was that they had a frequent and cheap bus service. I bet you anything you like. Now the same at the schools when they decided to take the secondary school from this area; I bet the same argument was put forward. Because here, we have to travel to get anywhere, the smallest facility; and it's hit people in this area I think." (Young mother, Seaforth/Bootle).

5.3 The importance of bus services

The community workers and families interviewed felt that the effects of bus deregulation could not be analysed in isolation but were part of a wider set of constraints effecting daily life. There had been a trend toward increasing feelings of social isolation among people living on the estates which some felt were being exacerbated by bus

THE IMPACT OF THE FARE INCREASES

Think twice
now -

"If a bus was coming you'd think nothing of jumping on it cos it only used to be 10p from South Road to here. It's only about 4 bus stops. I mean it's 33p now, a big difference. It was 10p, it went to 12, then it just jumped to 20 and now it's gone to 33 and I believe they're going up again." (S8)

Walking more -

"I used to go to Wavertree (from South Netherley) but not now, it's the fares." (N5)

"I'd like to be able to go out more often. If I go into town you know it's over £1.20 and if I wanted to go and look around and that; it's a waste of money really to window shop. It used to be a day out, to buy some chips and walk around, but now it's too expensive. I walk down to South Road now, if I walk I save 44p." (S1)

"The fares have gone up. Well, it's made me start walking; I walk more now than what I ever have done." (C3)

"I'd rather have better bus services but it's too dear, they want to lower the fares. You can't afford to go where you want now. You've gotta think twice. There's more people walking now. I mean, I meet lots of people on me way. We all walk to the shops now cos we can't afford the bus fares." (K6)

Don't travel -

"I never go now (Liverpool). I used to go every Saturday." (M6)

Fares not
important -

"It doesn't really matter to me. I mean I'll take any bus, the first one that comes" (F4 or 14 (C5)

Fares evasion -

"Fares went up. I carry on paying the same fare." (K8)

Aggravating
other problems -

"Let's put it this way, when I suggest in work (voluntary community work) that somebody goes somewhere to get help, and they actually have to get a bus to go; they say, I've got no money, how am I supposed to get there. This is one thing I come across quite often."

deregulation. It was generally felt that adequate access to public transport services was a vital ingredient to alleviating social and economic pressures in these areas.

"Transport affects your whole way of life; it's part of the whole thing, it's interwoven with everything, the social life, the way of life." (R1) "It becomes an enclosed community doesn't it?" (R2) "You can't have one without the other, if you've got bad bus fares and services, every other part of your life is going to be hampered by it." (R1) "Geographical mobility is a necessity. Now all right, we've got sports facilities and that type of thing but then, by having that sort of mentality, you're a prisoner and I think the only means we've got is the bus services for getting out of the estate." (R3) (Speke discussants.)

5.4 Reduced bus use

The main effect of bus deregulation on low income families had been to reduce the number of bus journeys they made (see table of quotes relating to hardship). In general, these journeys were either no longer made or, where possible, were being made on foot instead. Social and recreation trips were those most likely to be cut out. The overall number of people using buses in the study areas had probably remained fairly constant but existing bus users were making fewer bus journeys.

5.5 Pre-purchased tickets

The Executive operates two pre-purchased discount ticket schemes which have proved to be popular among the travelling public. These have been retained following deregulation. The Zone ticket is a season ticket (weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually) allowing unlimited bus, rail and ferry travel across a specified number of zones in the Merseyside area, thus providing a useful discount for regular travellers. The MPTE also administer a non-transferable Saveaway ticket, valid for one day providing cheap travel during off-peak periods on buses, trains and ferries throughout the county or in parts of the conurbation.

Zone tickets were rarely used by members of the households interviewed due to a majority being unemployed. However, among those who were employed examples arose where individuals could have saved money by purchasing Zone tickets but were unaware of the discount which these tickets offered.

In all the study areas, Saveaway tickets were purchased by low income families for the great majority of bus journeys made outside the local area. The characteristics of the tickets were seen as very convenient, with the exception of the time constraints on the use of these tickets which caused

some difficulties. The fare discount was widely recognised as being beneficial. These tickets were chiefly used for trips to Liverpool City Centre, journeys between suburbs to visit friends and relatives and less frequent days out, usually during summer months.

One important change since deregulation had been that households were now maximising the use of Saveaway tickets. Respondents were saving up trips and planning several journeys on one day when a Saveaway ticket would be fully used.

SAVEAWAY AND ZONE TICKETS

- Day out - "That's a £1.50 Saveaway. Takes you all the way to Birkenhead, Wallasey, New Brighton; make a good day out of it over there, different scenery you know for the kiddies."
(S7)
- Regular weekly visits - "Oh yes, I use a Saveaway every Thursday."(N4)
- Saving up trips - "On a Thursday when I got me cheap ticket. I try and do all what I can. I go to granma's I go to town, I go and buy something if I've got the money, sometimes I have to go to the hospital. If I go there I also try and fit in a visit to me mother-in-law's as well the same day...No it's not nearby it's out of me way going to me mother-in-law's, but because I can use the cheap bus tickets I can go and visit cos I only get one once a week. Well I'm not getting home here till eleven o'clock at night."
- Signing on- "If I go to the unemployment centre in Garston I need a Saveaway cos you come from the dole to the job centre and come back here you see."(Sp1)
- Disadvantage- "The kids use them to joyride, it drives you mad."(SP3)
- Regular commuting - "Me daughter got a Zonie done. She was finding it a pound each way into town before. She gets a weekly or monthly ticket."(Sp1)
- Fraudulent transfer- "You're not supposed to say this are you, but sometimes you cheat. You know, I say to him, here to save you getting one you go a bit earlier or I'll go a bit earlier."(S10)
- Saving money- "Samantha, she's got a bus pass. About £7 a week I was paying on her bus fares. I spend about £3 a week. So it's about £10 a week between the two or us... (As a proportion of income) It's about a third of my money."(S2)

5.6 Spending on fares

Preliminary figures show that, on average, the households spend 10 per cent of their income on bus and train fares relative to a national average 2 per cent (Bradshaw, 1988) and some households spend considerably more. For many of those interviewed, this represented a significant proportion of income and in many households examples of hardship occurred where people had to either cancel trips due to a lack of money or borrow money to pay for bus fares. Households were adjusting their travel behaviour rather than foregoing other items of household expenditure. In general, most households did not budget for bus fares.

All of the households complained of higher bus fares and begrudged paying them. Families felt that low paid households were being penalised by current regimes which charged relatively higher fares for short journeys. The magnitude of the fares increase introduced at deregulation had also been instrumental in changing people's attitudes towards using buses.

5.7 Appreciation of lower subsidised fares

The Passenger Transport Authority and Executive had endeavoured to keep subsidised bus fares at their deregulation levels and had withstood court action from operators aimed at raising fares on tendered services nearer to those being charged on commercial bus services. Most respondents were aware of these differences in fares between tendered and commercial services on routes they regularly used. Whilst there was some evidence of household planning journeys to catch tendered services, experience of unreliable and infrequent services were such that most people caught the first bus to arrive even if it was a more expensive one. The availability of discounted Zone and Saveaway tickets were more highly valued by low income families than were cheaper on-bus fares. It must be remembered that tendered bus services only carry a tenth of bus passengers on Merseyside.

5.8 Information on services

There was widespread confusion about exactly where services operated following deregulation (see table of quotes). Households voiced problems planning longer bus journeys or journeys where interchange was involved. This situation was contrasted with a pattern of well-known stable services before deregulation. Whilst this situation was particularly difficult in the early months of deregulation, many services have continued to change in all of the areas studied and the problem persists despite the efforts of the Executive to publicise changes.

BUDGETING FOR BUS FARES

Hardship

Borrow money - "Well you know how it is, say I've got a few pounds left if I've got to go into town; Well I scrape what coppers I've got on me and I may go to me mothers and she'll give me a couple of bob for me bus fares to go the next day" (N6)

No money - "I do a lot of walking now, at the weekends mostly. I get me benefit on a Thursday but fortnightly. So in other words the following week, say I got no money that week, I do a lot more walking than the week before cos I had money then. In that week I get me money, I travel around on buses but when it starts getting low I do walk it the following week.) walk from here to me mothers (Aintree). I've timed it, a hour and 10 minutes. I walk to Fazakerley but that only takes me 25 minutes. If I had the money I'd get the buses but you see I can't afford some of the bus fares. When me money comes through I get Zone tickets (i.e. Saveaway tickets) make me visits (Do you find it difficult budgeting for bus fares) well, that's where the walking comes into it see." (C1)

"I wanted to change to weekly but he wanted to know why I said I couldn't cope with it. He said put it in the bank. The first week you're OK for the 2nd week you're paupers. I've had to walk cos I've had no money, but very often though." (Sp4)

No budgeting

"I couldn't pay I put anything aside for bus fares. I can't even think like that." (N4)

Budgeting

Slum jar -

"Well like we're on benefit but like I say you gotta pay them if you want to go somewhere haven't you. I get benefit every 2 weeks, that's why I shop you see with the taxi. I've always got pence in me pocket, I'm a very good budgeter. All the slum you get just put all that away in a jar and you manage." (K2)

Zone and Saveaway

"If I go into town I buy Saveaways. I go to the Vale Tuesday and Friday, and Saturday I go into Liverpool. So I get three Saveaway Tickets at the beginning of the week" (K8)

Typical comments about service information

Unreliable information-

"It's not worth it (getting timetables) cos you can't rely on them." (C5)

"We've been told they're at certain times, you get a whole lot together. At first they were in that Kirkby Challenge that came round; a timetable. Now you went by that and got to the stop at that time and the bus didn't turn up." (K7)

No local information-

"There's nothing here. No timetables, nothing. The closest I know is town: Williamson Square. (Had she ever used MPTC timetables?) You've just gotta guess. My friend had a Merseymart and she said they're every 5 minutes but they're not. It's every 15 or 20." (N6)

Confused-

"You don't know where they're going. The only ones I know are as far as the town centre; you don't go much further any other time. There's a 192 - where does that go now? Oh yes, the Strand. Well that's where it used to go. There's an F1, I couldn't tell you where that goes. The F9 yes, into town. But even when you ask the drivers, half of them don't know where they go either." (K1)

Information on the grapevine-

"Word of mouth, people tell you, we don't know where they go, some people do but we haven't got any timetables." (SP3)

No need for information-

"I don't travel very far really, just local. I haven't got any timetables I just go up there. I don't need any information." (K4)

Local information-

"The lack of information is the problem getting there; finding timetables. I think what they could do with is a Merseybus Travel Centre locally."

Few of the households questioned had ever used published timetable or service information either before or after deregulation. Timetables were now generally dismissed either because bus services did not run in accordance with stated times or because they quickly became out of date. Telephone help lines were not readily accessible to low income families. With the continuing instability in services, acquiring up-to-date information had become more necessary. Most people simply turned up at stops to catch buses. Knowledge of bus service changes were generally obtained through word of mouth.

5.9 Unreliability

Most families had encountered long delays due to services being unreliable following deregulation (see table of quotes). One or two bad experiences had been enough to alter a whole household's perception of using bus services. It was generally felt that unreliability had improved since the introduction of deregulation. However, respondents were still having problems particularly at fringe times of the day and at weekends when headways were longer. Social and recreation trips formerly made with the bus trip being part of the enjoyment of an outing were often no longer made because of bad experiences of unreliability. Longer journeys, especially those involving a change of bus route, were now being cut out as being too much trouble. On short journeys where buses were perceived as being unreliable, respondents now often walked instead.

5.10 Attitudes to operators

On balance, it was felt that standards of driving and conduct towards passengers had deteriorated although the increased pressures drivers were working under were understood and many people sympathised with them. New operators were generally popular; respondents generally liked the types of service provided, such as limited stop and hail and ride minibus services.

5.11 Understanding of deregulation

The 'privatised' nature of bus services and the role of the Government in introducing the changes were generally recognised. The role of the Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority and Executive was not generally understood. Many thought the Executive still ran buses now operated by the ex-PTE company, trading as Merseybus. This confusion was exacerbated by the PTE marketing its services under the similarly named Merseytravel and the different numbering of tendered services. Most respondents did not have a clear idea about where to complain about aspects of public transport if the need arose. This lack of understanding of the work of the

Typical comments about bus reliability

Unreliability or information?-

"The 14's have changed, you do wait a bit longer for them. A couple of times, none's turned up I've waited over 15 minutes. (What frequency do they operate?) I'm not too sure really, my sister said every 10 minutes but I don't think they're that often (Have you got any timetables?) No, just hope for best. I've got a rough idea." (C7)

Walking instead-

"If you got to the bus stop and you think about walking it, it's even longer (wrong direction). So if you're walking, you think about it here (at home)." (C6)

"Well it never came; now we're that fed up we don't even wait do we (to husband); we automatically walk. You get quite a way before the bus passes you." (K2)

Frustrating-

"At home you feel cut off from everybody. It disheartens you when you try to go out and you have to wait an hour (wife). You get so fed up sometimes you have to go out" (husband). (C3)

Unreliability or scheduled bunching-

"Well they're very erratic. You used to know the times of the buses but when they changed you just had to go and hope you'd get one and even now they all come together so if you miss one you've missed the lot." (SP4)

Evening trips-

"They're hopeless, they never come on time. The 14's not so bad during the day but it's terrible of a night. I've had to get a taxi quite often." (K3)

Executive and Authority is undoubtedly not confined to Merseyside and is particularly worrying for these bodies given proposed changes in their financing arrangements which could encourage district councils to secede from their Passenger Transport Authority.

CONCLUSIONS

General

The increasing fare levels, continuing service alterations, lack of information and unreliability of services have resulted in a changed attitude towards using buses by those on low incomes, leading to a reduction in bus use. Bus deregulation is seen by low income families as compounding other long-standing social pressures and there is now a general lack of confidence in bus services. The situation was contrasted with that before deregulation when services were regarded as stable, well known, reliable and cheaper.

In a society where the reliance on access to cars continues to increase, the reduction in the mobility of low income families identified by this study is disturbing. The potential implications of this trend for the social isolation of these peripheral areas were underlined by the comments of local community workers interviewed in Phase One of the study.

Bus deregulation has affected the travel patterns of low income families on Merseyside. Households are coping by travelling less by bus but the price paid is a reduction in their mobility. Bus operators thus face a situation of shrinking bus use and increasing competition for passengers which will increase the upward pressure on fares. The research has shown that low income families require cheaper bus services to restore their lost mobility and more reliable and stable services than those which are currently provided on Merseyside.

Fare levels

The significant increase in commercial fares has undoubtedly been the single major cause of reduced bus use in the peripheral areas of Merseyside. Some fare increase was probably inevitable given the background of low fares policies on Merseyside since 1981, but it was the decisions of established operators to register 80% of the network commercially and to operate these services at a common fare scale countywide which led to the significant increase in fares which has occurred in the study areas.

All the study areas are 'good bus territory' and there can be little doubt that services in these areas are cross

-subsidising services elsewhere in more affluent areas. This is socially inequitable. A more equitable situation would be for cross-subsidy to be reduced and fares set to reflect the financial situation on individual routes. In reality, such an approach would probably lead to a deregistration of less profitable services and whilst these might be put out to tender as subsidised services, there would be no guarantee that the existing operator would win the contract. The potential impact on the scale of operations, income and jobs may mean that such an approach is unlikely to be followed by operators.

The Authority and Executive are very constrained in what they can do to ameliorate the effects of commercial fares on low income families. Providing duplicate subsidised services at lower fares would undoubtedly be challenged by operators claiming inhibition of competition. The use of existing discounted season tickets and travelcards is clearly beneficial to low income families but operators are pressing the Executive to increase the prices of these tickets. There is potential to improve the availability of Saveaway tickets and to extend the times within which they can be used. The latter is currently under active consideration by the Authority/Executive.

Stability and Unreliability

Operators appear to have underestimated the value passengers place on stable and reliable services. It may be that instability is a permanent feature of bus deregulation. While new operators are seen as a positive impact of deregulation, the bunching of services which on the road competition has produced is not providing what the passenger prefers - stable, reliable and equally spaced services.

Information on Services

Better information at a local level would improve passengers' ability to use local bus services. MPTE and bus operators will firstly need to overcome the general reluctance of households in these areas to use published information by making it more understandable to them and to produce it in forms which are most appropriate to their travel needs. Furthermore, there is a need to overcome a belief, which has arisen since deregulation, that published information was unreliable because it was often out of date or misleading in relation to unreliable services.

More work needs to be done in the area of travel information following deregulation. The greater passenger needs for information is frustrated by the problems transport authorities have in providing it. In some low income areas, there may be a possibility for using the network of local community groups and social support organisations to help disseminate information.

Passenger Complaints

Community organisations could also be approached as a further channel to receive passenger complaints, provide feedback on the value of bus services and information on unmet travel needs. Past research has shown this form of 'active' participation to produce benefits. This is in contrast to the 'passive' approach to participation adopted by a majority of transport agencies where the onus is on the passenger to complain rather than on the agency to ask. In the study areas, there was a general reluctance to complain and a feeling that 'little would come of it'.

Image and Identity

If the Authority/Executive wish passengers to know that certain routes receive subsidy, then the difference between commercial and tendered services will need more active marketing as would other facilities currently provided by MPTE under the MerseyTravel name. The same is true of Merseybus operations; most respondents still associated Merseyside Transport bus services with 'the Corporation' or 'MPTE'. Many of the popular successes of the Authority and Executive (travelcards, concessionary travel scheme, supported rail network) are perhaps taken for granted by the travelling public. The Authority/Executive could usefully do more to highlight its role in such areas.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Authority/Executive

Action which could usefully be considered by the Passenger Transport Authority/Executive arising from this study of low income families are:

- retain Saveaway tickets at current prices and, if possible, improve them by extending their available times of travel and more localised outlets;
- review the subsidised fares policy and consider a fares policy specifically targeted at low income families including, in conjunction with operators, special tickets aimed at the unemployed and those on benefit;
- involve local community groups more directly in the identification of unmet requirements and the planning of subsidised services;
- consider the introduction of relatively high frequency local subsidised services in areas of high social deprivation where commercial services are considered to be inadequate;
- publicise the work of the Authority and Executive by emphasising its roles in respect of subsidised bus and rail services, concessionary travel arrangements, service information and Zone and Saveaway tickets;

- consider ways of better publicising bus services, perhaps by producing localised leaflets and generally making more use of local community groups in the dissemination of information.

Bus Operators

Operators need to attract back custom lost since deregulation. As far as low income families are concerned, the following steps should be considered:

- publicising improved reliability and performance;
- operating special 'try-us-out' days operating at specially reduced fares to demonstrate better reliability and performance;
- cooperating with the Authority/Executive in the introduction of special tickets aimed at the unemployed and those on benefit;
- considering operating at lower fares in areas of high social deprivation rather than operating at blanket fares countywide regardless of ability of potential passengers to pay;
- consider ways of improving driver/passenger relations (this applies especially to the larger established operators).

Government

There are lessons to be learnt from the study for Government, particularly one planning to extend deregulation into London where there are many low income families. Problems and changes in legislation which might usefully be considered are:

- the threat to pre-purchase ticket schemes brought about by deregulation;
- the polarisation of transport benefits and disbenefits in certain localities and social groups;
- adding the unemployed and low income groups to those which can be covered by a concessionary travel scheme;
- the instability of services and problems of providing adequate information on services changes brought about by deregulation;
- the concentration of competition at particular times of the day and in particular localities;
- competition leading to wasteful duplication of services and bus bunching rather than improved frequencies.

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