Benefits of improving accessibility
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Every day, many people face barriers and problems when moving around in public spaces and on public transport. Among them are, for example: people with disabilities, older people (especially those older than 75 years), children, and people accompanying small children.

But this group of PRM – people with reduced mobility – also includes people with learning difficulties, people carrying heavy bags or bulky luggage, people with non average stature, people with little knowledge of the local language, people with orientation problems, people who have problems reading, people with mental health problems, colour blind people, people with arthritis, hip problems or coronary problems, people recovering from surgery or illness, and people with temporary impairments such as broken legs, etc.

Experts estimate that about 35-40%1 of the European population are PRM (people with reduced mobility).

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Because of the barriers that exist, for many people it is difficult or even impossible to move around independently in our public spaces or use public transport. Thus many of these people are less mobile: they make fewer and shorter trips than the average population [see graphs below]. Because of the barriers that exist, many PRM have to depend on a car or mobility service for much of their regular travel. Furthermore, a lot of day-to-day services such as shops, kindergartens, sports and leisure facilities are not easily accessible for pedestrians, wheelchair users, cyclists and public transport users, and thus people depend on a car to reach these destinations.

A more detailed description of barriers frequently encountered in public spaces and public transport can be found in the brochure “Accessibility – why we need it” downloadable from http://www.isemoa.eu

On average PRM are less mobile: they make fewer and shorter trips

By considering available figures regarding the mobility behaviour of people in Europe, TU-Dresden found that: on average PRM make 2.76 trips per day, while non-PRM make 2.87 trips per day. Furthermore the average trip-length of PRM is 6.65 km, while the average trip-length of non-PRM is 9.2 km.

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Main benefits of improving accessibility

Consequently municipalities, cities, and regions can help their inhabitants and visitors to adopt a less car dependent lifestyle by ensuring that public spaces and public transport services are fully accessible, and by improving the accessibility, for non motorists, of day to day services. A policy to improve accessibility brings about many benefits both for individuals and for society:

- Reduced car dependency and also increased independent mobility for non motorists
- More active mobility (walking, cycling)
- Less car use/less motorised traffic
- Ability to cope better with future challenges [e.g. ageing population, increasing fuel costs, etc]
Improving accessibility may bring about ...

- better health
- more independence
- social inclusion
- increased "social capital"
- increased quality of life
- energy savings
- cost savings
- less pollution
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Reduced car dependency and independent mobility

- children do not need a “parent taxi” for all their trips
- older people can travel by themselves independently
- families do not need to have a second car
- social inclusion/social equality is strengthened
- lower demand for special transport and senior care services

Accessible public spaces and public transport services, and improved accessibility of day to day services for non motorists, reduces car dependency of both inhabitants and visitors significantly. Improved accessibility of day-to-day services for pedestrians, wheelchair users, cyclists and public transport users enables people, who do not have access to a car or cannot drive a car, to reach many of their desired destinations on their own. Thus improved accessibility increases independence of non motorists, since they need not always rely on others to give them a lift. This contributes to social inclusion and social equality, since quite often, in car orientated communities and areas, people who do not have access to a car or cannot drive a car, are socially isolated and deprived as they only have limited access to work, education, shops, health care and leisure facilities. A fully accessible travel chain means freedom and more independence for people with reduced mobility (PRM), since it gives them the opportunity of independent mobility. Thus it is likely that by improving accessibility the differences in mobility behaviour of PRM and non PRM that exist today, will become smaller or will even disappear completely: this means that, in an accessible environment, PRM will most probably make more trips and travel longer distances than they do today.
The fact that improved accessibility gives PRM the opportunity for independent mobility leads to lower demand for special transport services therefore bringing economic benefits to society.

In an accessible, fair environment, people can care for themselves and live independently for much longer. Accessibility supports active ageing and thus helps to reduce the burden of care work and the cost of senior care services to the benefit of society.

If day to day services are easily and safely accessible for non motorists, children do not need a “parent taxi” for all trips, and this is also of benefit to their parents who can spend less time chauffeuring their children.

Improved accessibility of day to day services for pedestrians, wheelchair users, cyclists and public transport users, enables many households to save costs since on the one hand they can cut fuel costs by reducing car-trips and on the other hand families do not need to have a second car.

Accessible environments enable people with reduced mobility to move around independently, and this motivates and encourages them to leave their homes more often, meet other people and participate in social life. This helps to prevent social isolation.

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3 CATCH Fact sheet “Health” in: www.carbonaware.eu
4 “Check out the KOLLA-project – public transport for everybody” in: www.eltis.org/docs/studies/EROA8DEC96.pdf
6 According to a UK-study (for esure.com) the average child is driven by parents 3,500 miles a year to school, parties, and leisure activities. In fact, 40% of the driving time of mothers is dedicated to transporting their children (in: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1513238/Parents-taxi-service-worth-10000-a-year.html and http://www.thefreelibrary.com/PARENTS+TAKEN+FOR+A+pounds+10k+RIDE%3B+Mum%27s+taxi+clocks+up+3500+miles--a0143600124)
More active mobility

- personal health benefits due to more physical activity
- reduced societal costs (less sick leave, reduced health care costs, ...)
- increased safety for cyclists and pedestrians
- more social interaction

Improved accessibility of day to day services for pedestrians, wheelchair users, cyclists and public transport users enables all people to make more of their daily trips by active transport modes such as walking and cycling rather than by car. This increase in regular physical activity brings about health benefits, reducing the risk of diseases such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, stroke, type 2 diabetes, etc. Thus on the one hand more active mobility results in increased personal well-being, and on the other hand reduces societal costs due to less sick leave and lower health-care costs.
If people make a higher share of their daily trips by active transport modes, this results in an increased number of pedestrians and cyclists on the roads. Since safety in walking and cycling increases as the number of pedestrians and cyclists increases, this will lead to fewer accidents and reduced safety related costs borne by society.

Increased walking and cycling also results in more social interaction amongst citizens. This not only has a positive effect on the social networks of each individual, but it also strengthens the community and increases “social capital”. This is essential for vibrant communities and also helps to prevent crime.

Furthermore better accessible public spaces attract more pedestrians and cyclists and this increases shopping at local retailers and boosts local economies.

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Improved accessibility of day to day services for pedestrians, wheelchair users, cyclists and public transport users enables all people to adopt a less car dependent lifestyle. In an accessible environment even PRM, who have been dependent on a car for all their trips due to the barriers that they have encountered in public spaces and on public transport, can replace car trips by more sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling or public transport.

Less car use helps to achieve energy savings in transport, and brings about environmental benefits such as less air pollution, less greenhouse gas emissions and less noise pollution. In fact the reductions in transport related energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions that can be achieved by improving accessibility are quite substantial.
For example: Experts estimate that about 35-40%\(^{12}\) of the European population are PRM who encounter barriers in public spaces and public transport. Thus in a city with 100,000 inhabitants, more than 35,000 people experience difficulties moving around independently in public spaces due to existing barriers. When accessibility is improved, we can assume that PRM can substitute at least about 5%\(^{13}\) of their car trips with walking, cycling or public transport trips. Thus due to improved accessibility about 4.8 million car km per year\(^{14}\) may be shifted by PRM to other more sustainable transport modes and thus more than 316,000 litres of fossil fuel may be saved each year in a city with 100,000 inhabitants.

In addition to the environmental benefits, the positive effects of reduced motorised traffic such as better air quality and less traffic noise also bring about health benefits and contribute to an increased quality of life. Furthermore, another positive effect of reduced car traffic is that this creates more attractive public spaces\(^{15}\) for cycling and walking and results in more pleasant environments for people to live in.

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13 According to studies conducted by SOCIALDATA in German cities, about 5% of the trips done by car are not "captive", i.e. these trips could have been made by other modes of transport as well.

14 By considering available figures regarding the mobility behaviour of PRM in Europe, TU-Dresden found that PRM make about 2.76 trips per day with an average trip-lengths of 6.65 km. (Refer to report "Relationship of energy efficiency in transport and accessibility of the whole mobility chain" in: http://www.isemoa.eu/index.php?id1=7&id7=7 )

Tackle future challenges

- Fulfilling the needs of an increasing part of the population in an ageing society
- Facilitating the integration of immigrants by improving accessibility
- Mitigating the trend towards rural exodus by provision of accessible basic services
- Complying with (forthcoming) legal requirements by adopting “access for all” strategies in all investments
- Avoiding costly corrections by taking into account accessibility requirements right from the start
All over Europe demographic changes such as an ageing society, rural migration, etc. impose strong pressure on local and regional governments. Improving accessibility is a clear-sighted policy that helps to tackle these challenges. Furthermore, accessibility aspects become more and more important on a legislative and regulatory level: most European countries do have some kind of accessibility legislation addressing the built environment and transport. It is expected that in the process of implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the national governments will continue to further develop their accessibility legislation. In addition, at EU-level a European Accessibility Act is currently being prepared.

Therefore, in view of these future developments and changes, it is essential to adopt “access for all” strategies in all investments right from the start, since this helps to avoid expensive corrective measures to remove barriers in the future.