

## Annex F

### Accessibility

As noted elsewhere in this report (Annex E), a major aspect of an urban settlement is the services that it provides. A key issue of this is accessibility and this section examines this issue. Excellent services are of limited value if the user cannot conveniently reach them, and the Scottish classification of settlements recognizes this by incorporating travel times to larger settlements.

In England and Wales the Office for National Statistics, in defining survey respondents' local areas, currently do so using a travel time on foot of 15 to 20 minutes or an equivalent (shorter) travel time by car, but it is not possible for all services to lie within the local area. Studies in the United States show that the usage of public libraries drops notably beyond this limit. The Post Office seems to have adopted approximately such a limit.

The furthest legally acceptable distance for travel to an English market in the middle ages, when adjusted to take account of modern transport technology (modern-medieval equivalent), corresponds to about 15 minutes travel time by car. In practice, users of service do not always demand the full improvement in access times that might be expected given the improvement in modern technology, but nonetheless, a travel time much in excess of 15 minutes is definitely indicative of relative inconvenience and deprivation. The Association of Town Centre Managers suggests that 20 minutes travel be considered the limit for a catchment area. On this basis, the Scottish criterion of remoteness, 30 minutes travel, would be perhaps quite severe. There is a need to assess the ease of access to services.

This is not simply a matter of examining travel times by road. It should be borne in mind that car users are independent - able to travel at their own time, by their own route. However, substantial numbers of people do not use a car and lack such freedom. In assessing the accessibility of services, account must be taken of public transport provision. By way of illustration, social security regulations exempt claimants from attendance to sign on at a benefit office, where the travel time involved is in excess of one hour in each direction. In Fermanagh, a great many claimants avail themselves of this exemption - although no part of Fermanagh would be outside this travel time by car, many parts are by public transport.

Examining travel times to services by road and then adjusting for the impact of public transport services on accessibility is important in determining the effective remoteness of rural areas and small settlements, which are dependent on other, larger, settlements for their services. This impacts on the classification of settlements and the Group therefore recommended that a project be established to assess access to settlement services for the population of Northern Ireland, taking account of the location of these services and the means of transport available.

In the circumstances of Northern Ireland, however, travel times are not always the most important issue in an intra-settlement context. Neighbourhood effects are likely in larger settlements. These are sometimes sectarian in nature, the geography of retail and consumption can be less to do with distance and more to do with avoidance strategies.