

SEMINAR: SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND LOCAL RESOURCE SOLUTIONS

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TITLE: The Global Transport Knowledge Partnership (gTKP): Enabling Sustainable Rural Access

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Introduction

Some 60% of the population of developing countries and three quarters of the world's 1.4 billion very poor people live in rural areas. In terms of basic access to transport infrastructure and services, no one is worse served than the rural poor. Yet transport is a critical intermediary input into higher growth and greater equity; without access and mobility, inclusive development cannot take place. It is the means by which key basic services – health, education, justice – are delivered, connects intra-rural and rural to urban communities, links products to markets and finance, facilitates the spread of alternative rural livelihoods and work opportunities and literally provides the vehicle for social and political life.

Although not a specific MDG target itself, “ scale-up ” in rural transport provision is a necessary but not sufficient condition for practical overall progress. This paper reports on a new DFID funded, partnership initiative to help meet the multiple challenges of the title, to better enable sustainable rural access. At its core, is the belief that improving the dissemination and take up of existing transport knowledge, to better inform local investment and operational decisions, will substantially increase the development impact and sustainability of rural transport. The intent of gTKP is to provide an umbrella mechanism, in order to mainstream transport knowledge and connect local, national and international communities of practitioners.

Following this introduction, consideration is given to the nature of the transport knowledge gap argument. After questions of what and why, comment is then directed towards the current gTKP operational framework, priorities and services. Next is a summary of partnership opportunities, including the need to ensure they are user driven. The final section provides contact details.

Driving Forces

Rural transport networks and services are complex, costly and typically require locally designed and owned solutions. Even defining rural is a challenge, at best approximated by settlements or land use structures. Variations are massive. For example, rural transport services in Africa are often 2 to 3 times the cost of those in Asia; the difference being due to differing population densities, dispersion, terrain and market structures.

There is also the question of scale. Rural road networks are typically 2 to 3 times the size of main and provincial networks but carry only 10% of the traffic in vehicle

kilometres. This excludes the additional non-motorised networks of paths and trails. Investment and maintenance cost needs are correspondingly extremely large – the annual maintenance cost of existing African roads approximates to US\$ 12 billion - and difficult to finance, either via user charges or taxes or aid; sustainable solutions will require resources that are at least 80% domestic. Given such numbers, even small, knowledge based productivity gains in rural transport investment or lower maintenance costs can show major returns. Perhaps more importantly, sustainability is knowledge intensive.

Another need is to distinguish between mobility – the ease and frequency of transport – and questions of availability, proximity and affordability. Roads alone are not enough for better rural access; but on the other hand, a rural transport strategy that does not include road assets and services, is unlikely to maximise development impact. Strategies must be integrative, consultative and pro-poor, accommodating motorised and non-motorised transport.

As usual there is much more consensus on the nature of the problems than the solutions; particularly when the practical intent is to change the circle of inter-dependencies, from vicious to virtuous, and aspire to “ scale-up.” There is a broad range of functional interventions, starting with policy and strategy, continuing through finance and sustainability, regulatory and institutional frameworks and closing with technical, engineering and environmental. The menu is long and difficult to address, but it is clear that different international initiatives and programmes start from different positions and focus areas, then tend to “ silo ” knowledge and research accordingly.

Historically there has been substantial research investment in the generation of transport knowledge. The strategic gaps have been in the access to and application of this knowledge. The failure in uptake can be ascribed to various causes: a supply rather than a user driven agenda; a weak global capacity base for knowledge sharing or communication; language barriers; limited conversion of knowledge from implicit to explicit; inappropriate formats; lack of timely and low cost access; few signposts or best practice summaries; and reliance on ad hoc, pilot projects rather than a programmatic approach to knowledge management. The result is fragmentation, with few pilots that ever fly.

It is the above transport knowledge gaps, primarily in dissemination and application, that gTKP now seeks to address. It is in connecting and leveraging such knowledge, that the main potential for enabling “ scale-up ” in sustainable rural access lies.

gTKP Approach

gTKP is a partnership based approach to the systematic, pro-poor development use of available transport knowledge. It also seeks to encourage greater participation from developing countries in the current and future research agenda. It was launched in Manila in March 2005, with seed funding by DFID for two years. Thereafter it is expected to transition to an independent and more formal structure, with diverse but self-sustaining funding. In addition to DFID, signatories of the Manila letter of intent include the GRSP, ADB, ARRB, UN-HABITAT, AfDB, World Bank,

IFG, IFRTD, TRL ROADSAFE, UITP, SITRASS plus user representatives of 10 developing countries.

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP in the UK was contracted to provide the Core Management Group (CMG) for gTKP for the two year start-up period. The CMG themselves report to the Interim Board, chaired by Peter O'Neill of DFID. The next gTKP Members Assembly is planned for Tunis in February 2006. Membership is open and based on agreement with the objectives of gTKP, as defined in the letter of intent.

The overall approach is to:

- Identify where gTKP can add value, cooperating not competing with other institutions and programmes;
- Directly address gaps and remove barriers to transport knowledge via a portfolio of projects and disseminating the outcomes via a premier web based knowledge portal, signposting, linking, translating and summarising as required;
- Use the gTKP framework to provide coherent budgetary support to core partner organisations, including GRSP, IFRTD and IFG;
- Similarly, provide programmatic support through regional evidence based research and pre-investment advisory initiatives like SEACAP and AFCAP; and
- Proactively develop in-country and international user communities to drive knowledge demand and application.

gTKP Priorities

As set by the Interim Board, the initial modal priority of gTKP is to facilitate better use of knowledge in **roads and road transport services**. Here there are four thematic or "breadth" areas:

- Health;
- Exclusion;
- Demand management; and
- Employment and income activities.

There are also four in-depth work streams, chosen to give practical focus. These cover **vulnerable road users; rural transport access; urban demand management; and transport governance**. Geographic focus is global, but for the start-up period, the regional concentration covers Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

gTKP Services

In terms of gTKP progress, the mobilisation stage is now complete. The website is refreshed and the content adjusted for relevance and format. There are now 645 links to 51 organisations and rising. Interlinked activities include dissemination, knowledge management, capacity strengthening, communication and accessibility. Transport knowledge products include the portal, news bulletins, help desk and issue papers. A portfolio of dissemination / take up projects is emerging; these are undertaken by partners, independent experts and the CMG.

In addition, the four in-depth work streams, one of which is rural transport access, are being finalised. This growth and development stage of gTKP, must be directly driven by the demands of the practitioner and user communities. In this context, PIARC Conferences offer excellent “kick-start” networking opportunities.

Budgetary support for core gTKP partners will also commence in the current quarter. The gTKP umbrella is also available to programmes like SEACAP and, from April 2006, AFCAP. Here a pre-investment, evidence based research and knowledge assistance programme model has been successfully developed. Like gTKP, the aim is to help local key rural development and transport institutions find better ways of actually doing things. In doing so, the impact, sustainability and “scale-up” potential are all maximised. The process of loading and showcasing appropriate SEACAP outputs, via the gTKP portal, is now advanced.

Partnership Opportunities

There is an immediate opportunity for Conference participants to help build a user community around the rural transport access and vulnerable road users work streams. It would be useful to have feedback on gap research priorities, issues and joint projects / replication opportunities.

The gTKP portal could also serve as a rapid dissemination platform for PIARC TC 2.5 papers and Conference materials.

More generally, there is the opportunity to improve the coherence and impact of existing transport knowledge management, and hence promote effective standardisation as well as proven, best fit practices. How do we best break down barriers to knowledge access and take up? Individual experts could also deepen and widen the regional / international resources of the help desk facility via subscriber lists.

Looking longer term, there is the future structure, funding and governance of gTKP organisation itself, particularly the role of regional anchor institution(s). There is also the shorter term question of joining gTKP and participating in the Tunis Assembly meeting.

The above list of partnership opportunities is not exhaustive and others can be suggested and developed. The strategic focus is however clear: improved access and application of transport knowledge, will allow all stakeholders to make better informed decisions about meeting rural access and other transport needs. This in-country model will enhance sustainability, affordability and the possibility of “scale-up.”

Contacts

The gTKP website can be accessed at: www.gtkp.com. Further information is available at info@gtkp.org.

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Abbreviations:

AFCAP	Africa Community Access Programme
AfDB	African Development Bank
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARRB	ARRB Transport Research Limited
CMG	Core management Group
DFID	UK Department for International Development
GRSP	Global Road Safety Partnership
gTKP	global Transport Knowledge Partnership
IFG	International Focus Group on Rural Road Engineering
IFRTD	International Forum for Rural Transport and Development
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
SEACAP	South East Asia Community Access Programme
SITRASS	Solidarite Internationale Sur Les Transports Et La Recherche En Afrique Sub-Saharienne
TRL	TRL Limited
World Bank	The World Bank Group
UITP	International Union of Public Transport
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Settlement Program