

# THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF ACCESSIBILITY: A DECISION SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTH ASIA

David **Lewis** PhD FCIT  
Senior Vice President  
HDR Corporation  
410- 1545 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1Z 8P9  
Telephone: 001-613-234-5391  
Facsimile: 001-613-238-6096  
Email: david.lewis@hdrinc.com

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

At TRANSED 2010 in Hong Kong, Lewis, Suen and Federing presented a framework within which the economic and social benefits of accessibility policies, programs and investments can be comprehensively identified and assessed. The paper indicated how the framework may be used in the framing of policy and regulation, and in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The need for a comprehensive framework was shown to stem from the reality that even in nations committed to accessibility as a human right, governments and courts ask whether the benefits of proposed accessibility policies and programs are sufficient to justify their costs, a process called cost-benefit balancing. Because costs are much easier to identify and quantify than benefits, the doctrine of cost-benefit balancing creates a material risk of erroneously limiting the degree of accessibility introduced into a nation's transportation systems and built environment. The paper proposed here for TRANSED 2012 completes work on the framework and applies it to South Asia.

## APPROACH AND/OR METHODOLOGY

The paper will employ state-of-the-art economic analysis and governance analysis methods in order to:

1. Make the benefits-identification framework relevant and operational for South Asia;
2. Make the process of adapting the framework to different political cultures operational in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and
3. To describe key technical developments in the framework's evolution.

## RESULTS OR EXPECTED RESULTS

**South Asia Context:** While at a general level the framework is broadly applicable, making it operational requires its adaptation to the cultural, constitutional, legislative, economic development, and policy context of the nations in which it is to be employed. The paper will develop and present a version of the framework that aligns with these factors in the context of South Asia.

**United Nations Context:** The process of adapting the framework to specific cultural, constitutional, legislative, economic development and policy contexts will be documented as a basis for guiding its application in different regions under the provisions of the U.N convention.

**Evolution:** The paper will describe various developments in the evolution of the framework, including the identification and measurement of reduced discomfort, pain and humiliation as benefits of accessibility provisions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Accessibility statutes and policies in Europe, Australia, the United States and Canada, and South Asia invoke, in one form or another, the formal doctrine of “reasonable accommodation” as a check against the establishment of binding accessibility standards that might impose undue financial and economic hardships on parties, both public and private (including taxpayers), who bear the costs of bringing facilities and equipment into line with such standards. It is the reasonable accommodation doctrine which thus brings cost-benefit balancing into play as a basis for determining the scope of accessibility policies and programs. The framework for comprehensively identifying benefits presented in this paper will provide a means by which to counter the risk that cost-benefit balancing distorts decision making towards under-provision of accessibility.