# Integrating social impacts into transport optioneering in Aotearoa

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| The social benefits of transport investment are increasingly recognised as an integral area of research. Historically, the impetus for transport infrastructure focused on economic impacts, without recognising the influence it has on taha whānau (social well-being). This research, undertaken as part of a masters course at the University of Cambridge, investigated how the practice and utilisation of Social Impact Assessments (SIA), including distributional perspectives, could be integrated into options appraisals within transport projects in New Zealand (NZ) and the United Kingdom (UK). The integration of social impacts within transport options appraisal had not previously been investigated, authors having focused on how social impacts are considered in the business case process and as part of planning policy.  A comparative qualitative approach, based on grounded theory, was used to understand constraints and opportunities to integrate social impacts as part of options appraisals. To do this, similarities, and differences in the two contexts were examined. This consisted of a literature review and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with industry professionals and community groups involved in transport optioneering. The research concluded that in both NZ and the UK social impacts are generally underexamined within transport options appraisals. This is due to the focus on quantifiable benefits, project personnel’s knowledge of social impact methodologies and environmental and economic aspects being comparatively easier to identify and assess. For good practice SIA to be realised within transport options appraisals, systemic adjustments are needed to these processes in NZ and the UK. The focus of discussion at Manaaki Tāngata will be on the identified adjustments in the NZ context. These include upskilling of project teams, clarification of how “wider benefits” could be included as part of SIA within options appraisals and how social benefits (rather than adverse effects) should be integrated into decision-making.  |