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Assessing the Effects of Road Infrastructure on Rural Mobility and Development: A Bibliometric Review

Vulthari Rikhotso, Trynos Gumbo, George Okechukwu Onatu

(Vulthari Rikhotso, PhD Candidate, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg PO Box 524 Auckland Park, 2006, South Africa: vutlhar96@gmail.com)
(Trynos Gumbo, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg PO Box 524 Auckland Park, 2006, South Africa: gumbot@uj.ac.za)
(George Okechukwu Onatu, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg PO Box 524 Auckland Park, 2006, South Africa: gonatu@uj.ac.za)

1 ABSTRACT

A critical issue developing countries globally face is insufficient investment in road infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, where the lack of reliable road networks significantly makes development in these areas almost stagnant. Rural roads in these regions are often poorly constructed, predominantly consisting of gravel surfaces, unlike the paved roads commonly found in urban centres. This disparity creates substantial challenges in attracting private-sector funding or forming effective public-private partnerships for infrastructure development. Rural roads frequently lack proper signage and are inadequate for large-scale public transport, restricting mobility and accessibility. The absence of high-quality road networks not only limits public transport industry growth but also exacerbates transport challenges in these areas. Moreover, rural road infrastructure is often disconnected from national or regional networks, further isolating rural populations from urban centres and marginalizing them from opportunities for development. This paper explores the negative consequences of neglecting rural road infrastructure, focusing on its impact on rural development and economic growth. It also identifies key issues such as the lack of threshold densities for collective public transport and explores alternative solutions, including pilot projects implemented in developing countries. A bibliometric analysis will be conducted to uncover key research trends, identify gaps in existing literature, and highlight policy recommendations to address systemic inadequacies in rural road infrastructure. The study emphasizes the need for enhanced connectivity between rural and national/regional transport networks to support the rural economy, create development opportunities, and improve access to essential services like healthcare and education. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of community empowerment in ensuring road development projects meet quality standards and are maintained properly.

Keywords: infrastructure neglect, transport challenges, rural road infrastructure, public transport, Community empowerment

2 INTRODUCTION

The development of any region relies heavily on well-developed road infrastructure particularly in rural areas which need frontier accessibility and connectivity as essential elements for economic expansion and social improvement (Bacior and Prus 2018). However, several obstacles exist within the scope of rural road infrastructure. Rural roads within developing countries fail to achieve basic development standards because they receive inadequate construction and maintenance services (Hemson et al., 2004). These situations worsen transportation difficulties, especially for people who reside in sparsely populated areas because they lack proper access to basic amenities such as healthcare services, educational opportunities, and economic prospects. Therefore, the paper reviews the literature of rural road infrastructure problems and the significant matter regarding inadequate threshold densities in collective public transport systems. We will examine proposed alternative solutions which have been implemented together with pilot projects developed in rural areas with local communities involved in transport planning activities.

3 DEFICIENCIES IN RURAL ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

This section discusses the analysis of rural road infrastructure problems because road networks form the basis that determines rural transport system outcomes.

3.1 Poor Construction and Maintenance of Rural Roads

The major problems with rural road infrastructure include inadequate road construction quality and insufficient maintenance practices (Hauya, 2019). Developing countries maintain poor-quality road

infrastructure, and some contain gravel surfaces which fail to support significant vehicle traffic. These paths remain exposed to all environmental hazards. Severe deterioration through erosion flooding and multiple other degradation processes that shorten their operational time and reduce their effectiveness is being experienced (Zhang and Alipour, 2020). Several regions experience premium road deterioration combined with landslides because their drainage systems are insufficient, their soil stabilization methods are weak, and their structural designs insufficient. The heavy rains of rainy seasons make unpaved roads impossible to travel, causing extensive mobility challenges. The problem runs severe in distant or mountainous areas because natural climate events, including heavy precipitation and snowy conditions, cause roads to disappear or develop deep tracking, which leads to unsafe travel conditions.

3.2 Lack of Connectivity to National and Regional Networks

The insufficient connection between rural road systems with national and regional road networks is another problem (Kanuganti et al., 2017). Rural roads face a significant problem because they do not link properly with the larger national and regional road networks. Personnel in rural areas face transportation hurdles because their roads lack connections to central transportation systems, which creates barriers to urban service access (Yu and Zhao, 2021). The absence of integration between rural road networks leads to deepening regional isolation because rural areas cannot execute economic processes or reach markets for their products (Aduda and Kalunda, 2012). The limited road connections to wider transportation networks create significant challenges to rural businesses. Farmers encounter transportation challenges when trying to move goods to urban markets because of poor road conditions, leading to price increases, wasted perishable products, and lost business prospects. This further hinders access to economic regional growth opportunities which restricts business expansion. Only limited access to extensive supply chains prevents rural industries from becoming large-scale operation.

3.3 Insufficient Infrastructure for Collective Public Transport

The transportation infrastructure shortfalls in rural regions negatively influence the implementation of public collective transportation networks (Pojani and Stead, 2015). The operation of public transport needs extensive roads that enable buses together with minibuses and alternative mass transit options. The road deficiencies, insufficient signage, and limited road capacity prevent collective transportation development, thus blocking mobility improvement and affordable public transit options for rural residents (Cervero et al., 2017). Economically sustainable public transportation becomes impossible to maintain because rural areas lack threshold densities (Hauya, 2019). Rural areas with low populations face such expensive bus and other public transit operation costs that small investments become unlikely to recover while maintaining dependable transport services remains challenging (Kanuganti et al., 2017).

3.4 Road Safety and Limited Infrastructure for Non-Motorized Transport

The absence of proper signage combined with insufficient road markings diminishes pedestrian infrastructure at rural areas thus causing severe road safety problems (Hauya, 2019). Deficiencies in road safety systems result in more accidents since pedestrians and cyclists, along with motorcycles, endure the highest risk on these roads. Lack of safety infrastructure discourages people from using present roads or public transport, which eventually restricts mobility in rural areas and deepens isolation for residents (Porter, 2014).

4 CAUSES OF THE DEFICIENCIES IN RURAL ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

This section covers the causes of the deficits in rural road infrastructure. Once the root causes are understood, very targeted and effective solutions can be applied to overcome such problems; otherwise, most interventions will either be superficial or misdirected in nature.

4.1 Limited Investment and Budget Constraints

Budgetary constraints combined with low financial support create the main reason behind rural road infrastructure deficiencies in developing nations especially (Briceño-Garmendia et al., 2009). Governments make budget decisions to fund urban infrastructure instead of funding rural areas because they deem urban centres to generate better direct contributions towards GDP growth. The funding dedicated to building and maintaining rural roads is usually insufficient or entirely absent which produces subpar infrastructure

capability for rural growth (Magolie, 2024). However, the DRT systems in rural areas have failed to maintain financial stability as their main operational challenge. DRT systems were designed to cost less than public transportation, but the actual monetary gains are normally insufficient to cover operational expenses (Briceño-Garmendia et al., 2009). With low and unreliable rider numbers in rural areas, the fare-based revenue is inadequate to sustain the ongoing operations of the service.

4.2 Geographic and Economic Isolation of Rural Areas

Rural locations frequently exist in distant regions limiting their ability to obtain private investments. Lower population density, together with small markets in rural areas, reduces private firms' motivation to construct transport infrastructure (Hauya, F.K., 2019). Rural populations spread thinly across the land create challenges to building public transport networks because insufficient ridership numbers fail to match viability requirements.

4.3 Political and Institutional Challenges

Political mirrors, together with other factors, drive the limited growth of rural road networks. Rural regions throughout numerous nations typically receive little favours from political forces because these areas lack sufficient political power, so infrastructure development suffers as a result (Nelson, 2017). The combination of deficient institutional structures with weak governance practices and corrupt practices stops funds from reaching their intended purpose which blocks rural road development and upkeep.

5 ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS AND PILOT PROJECTS

Several pilot and alternative solutions across the globe were tested to overcome the perennial challenges that beset road infrastructure. These ranged from increasing road access to rural areas and other neglected niches to cutting down transportation costs and enhancing their overall quality. Many such pilot projects, therefore, focus on learning from possible ways to overcome the limitations that have traditionally dogged infrastructure development by venturing on innovative paths such as Demand- Responsive Transport, community-driven projects, Non-Motorized Transport Infrastructure, public-private partnerships and other sustainable construction methods. Therefore, this section investigates some of these initiatives.

5.1 Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) Systems

The problem of low rural population density makes Demand-Responsive Transport systems (DRT) stand out as a flexible and budget-friendly answer. The transportation system operates using small vehicles including minibuses and shared taxis which adapt their operations based on immediate passenger requests instead of using predetermined schedules (Bacior and Prus, 2018). DRT systems provide suitable solutions for rural areas because they can operate efficiently based on inconsistent ridership patterns and the density of populations that do not support mass public transportation (Junaid and Ferretti, 2022). DRT pilot initiatives implemented in South Africa and Kenya have proven that these systems work effectively in rural areas, thus providing expanded mobility solutions to rural inhabitants.

5.2 Community-Based Transport Systems

Transport systems that rely on community management offer solutions for rural transport deficiencies. Local communities oversee systems that use minibuses, tuk-tuks, and local shuttle services for community management (Chondo, 2021). These transport systems use local insights and resources to provide rural populations with flexible but inexpensive modes of transport. Local community-based transport solutions in Tanzania and Uganda clarify that both community stakeholders and system administrators need active support from national administrators for centralized transport control to succeed (Rwigema, 2022)

5.3 Non-Motorized Transport Infrastructure

Basic walking and cycling infrastructure development constitutes an economical sustainability method for rural transportation systems. Public transport shortages lead people to choose non-motorized transport solutions to move over short distances. Rural pilot projects have installed bicycle-sharing schemes while building pedestrian-friendly roads to increase mobility between essential services such as educational facilities and healthcare facilities.

5.4 Public-Private Partnerships

The development of rural road infrastructure receives major benefits through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives. Private investments in public programs create benefits that let governments strengthen rural roadway development programs and maintenance systems (Nallathiga, 2022). Public-private partnerships have become extensively successful in Latin America and numerous African regions through their improvements of road infrastructure and public transit systems (Kang et al., 2019). The framework elements established by rural stakeholder partnerships must include proper restrictions to ensure better services and access delivery to rural communities.

6 EFFECTIVENESS OF PILOT PROJECTS IN RURAL AREAS

Implementing pilot projects seeking rural transport improvements in developing countries has resulted in multiple outcomes, with some succeeding and others facing challenges. Two notable transport systems, Kenya's DRT system and Tanzania's shared minibus services, receive recognition because they solve problems of rural communities regarding mobility restrictions, market accessibility, and economic separation (Karema, 2021). The implemented projects activated wider access to vital public services, including healthcare facilities, medical care educational establishments and employment benefits. The transport system has produced money-making possibilities by employing drivers alongside conductors and other technical staff, which supports the local economy (Karema, 2019).

The initiatives encounter substantial barriers while trying to sustain their operations and make them scalable (Jackson, 2022). Most pilot projects survive through temporary grants and donor funding but face continued operation challenges after the external support ends. These services risk becoming unsustainable because they lack proper funding strategies and weak financial management systems. When a pilot project succeeds in a particular geographic area, expansion to new regions demands a successful resolution of logistical difficulties that include building necessary infrastructure and purchasing equipment (Siemens, 2010). Rural regions heavily depend on transportation systems that exist beyond official planning systems, including motorbike taxis and private vehicles. A new system should merge with informal networks yet maintain affordability to serve the rural population. The design of minibuses and DRT systems should focus on serving rural communities because their mobility patterns diverge substantially from urban areas (Bacior and Prus, 2018).

7 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSPORT PLANNING

Various experts claim that rural transport infrastructure failed due to the absence of rural community participation during planning decisions (Hauya, 2019). Rural populations receive inadequate participation in transport project planning steps, which leads to their development without proper consultation. When communities are not involved in the decision-making process, the infrastructure does not fulfil genuine rural needs; therefore, adoption levels decrease, and services become ineffective.

The complete involvement of local communities proves essential to creating transport solutions that fit population requirements, sustain them over time, and earn their acceptance (Roseland, 2012). Community participation in rural transport system planning and management demonstrated its effectiveness based on Ugandan and Ghanaian pilot experience. Transport system delivery becomes more successful through community involvement because people help shape services according to regional requirements while developing community ownership and commitment to lasting outcomes.

8 METHODOLOGY

This research investigates literature development through bibliometric review based on academic data from web of science databases. The research depends on organized methodologies for collecting data that involves both analysis of networks and data processing to reveal details about road infrastructure academic work (Donthu et al., 2021).

The authors starts by doing a database search for academic articles through Web of Science. The field identification uses multiple keywords that include "road infrastructure," "rural development," "transport challenges," and "public transport." The data processing stage involves cleaning irrelevant items such as editorials and book reviews and non-academic articles after obtaining relevant article lists. The final

collection includes 1496 publications. The noted bibliometric elements containing titles and authors and citations and keywords become eligible for subsequent research analysis.

The author uses VOSviewer for network visualization to show interactions between authors and publications and research themes. The software platform enables researchers to detect network patterns for co-authored, co-occurrences and co-citation networks and their spatial connections. Study findings revealed core aspects that appeared multiple times in these academic papers as well as key figures in the field of transportation.

9 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This section will present the findings of the study.

9.1 Publication and Citation Trend

The bibliometric review regarding road infrastructure and rural mobility grows more important due to its rising significance for developing areas. The scholarly interest during 1993 to 2013 rose significantly which led to higher publication rates and increased citations because research became theoretically grounded and interdisciplinary relevant. Overall expansion in the research field occurred despite temporarily fluctuating publication numbers between 2014 and 2019 because of changing priorities and novel transportation trends. 2020 marked the revival of rising trends that could have been triggered by extended research periods created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The steady increase in research citations demonstrates wider adoption of rural mobility findings by policymakers for developing transportation policies and resolving economic and sustainability problems. Road access plays an essential role in delivering linkages between rural settlements and enhances their economic bases while enhancing the standard of living for citizens in underdeveloped regions.

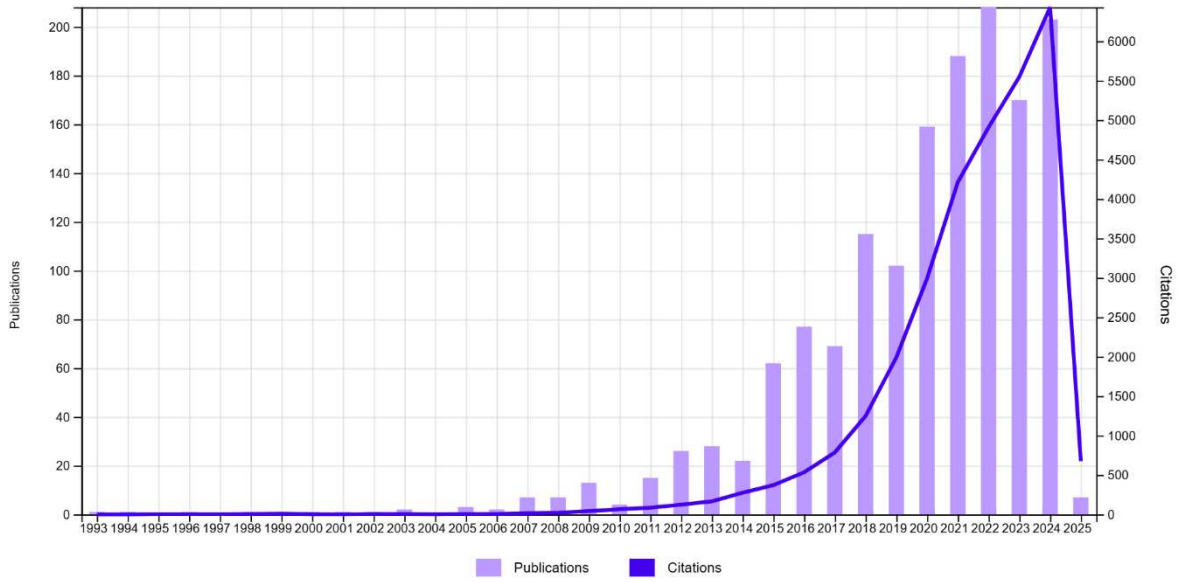

Figure 1: Publication and citation trend

9.2 Author Co-citation Analysis

The authors also focused on co-citation analysis to establish key research directions and contributions of the main authors in the field by the authors. Understanding the intellectual structure of knowledge demands the evaluation of influential authors and their network connections in this field (Song, Wu & Ma, 2021). The authors performed their analysis through co-citation methods while analysing cited authors as the basic units. The authors chose a minimum number of citations in this study of 5. The research included 1694 authors while meeting the criterion of 60 publications minimum. The obtained results present different levels of academic influence together with network connections between authors.

Research within the framework of co-citation network analysis is outlined into separate research clusters which correspond to rural road infrastructure and development topics studied in this paper. Studies on rural transport accessibility challenges to marginalized communities are represented by the red cluster, which centres on De Vos and Ettema, along with additional authors. Research pertaining to transport planning and

behavioural studies by Bamberg alongside Axhausen appears in the green cluster. Researchers Currie and Hickman operate within the blue cluster that investigates public transportation viability in low-density rural areas to address threshold density issues directly. Research on rural region economic development following infrastructure investment is represented by the studies conducted by Guzman and Borjesson who make up the purple cluster. Through this interpretation, the paper gains access to multiple intellectual structures, which enables it to conduct an all-encompassing analysis of rural road infrastructure betterment and development needs. These research fronts found in these clusters provide essential knowledge about community transportation solutions as well as community participation which help solve fundamental problems in the paper. This paper merges various theoretical approaches to advance a sophisticated comprehension of rural development challenges that can offer specific policy recommendations for sustainability.

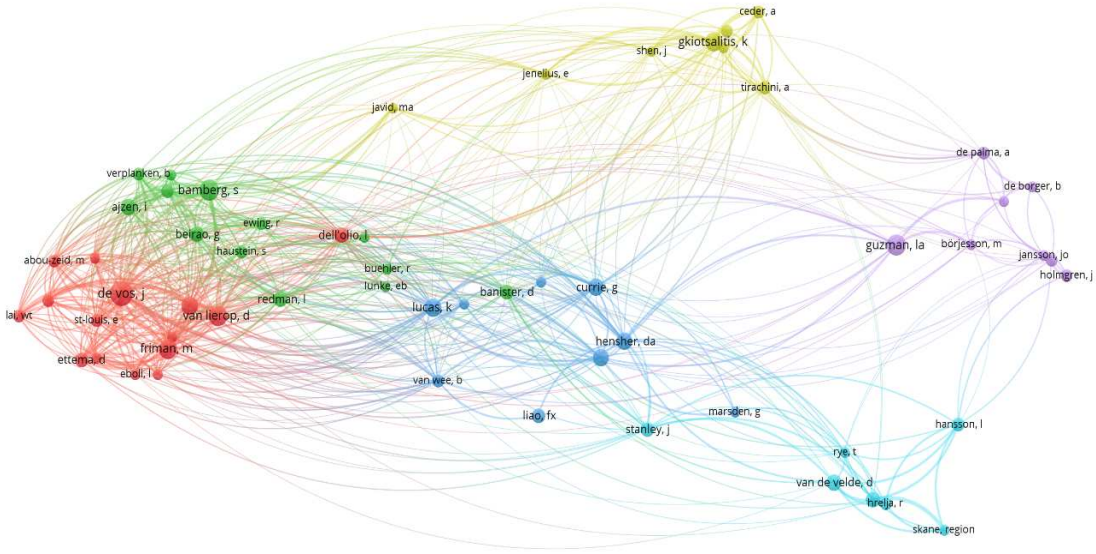

Figure 2: Author Co-citation Analysis

9.3 Co-citation of documents

Publication nodes possess a colour marking which identifies their assigned cluster affiliation, as indicated in Figure 3, which indicates the co-citation of document references. VOS viewer analysis shows that publications sharing identical colours in the network are co-cited frequently because they research related topics. VOS viewer implements computational methods to separate network items by analyzing how often they co-cite each other. The seven publications in Cluster 1 include AJZEN I, de Oña J, Dell'Olio I, Lai, W T, St-Louis E, Van Lierop D, and Ye, R. Cluster 2 features five publications with Beirão G, Ewing R, Lucas K, Redman I and Steg I. Cluster 3 comprises of three publications with Bamberg S, Shen J and Tirachini A.

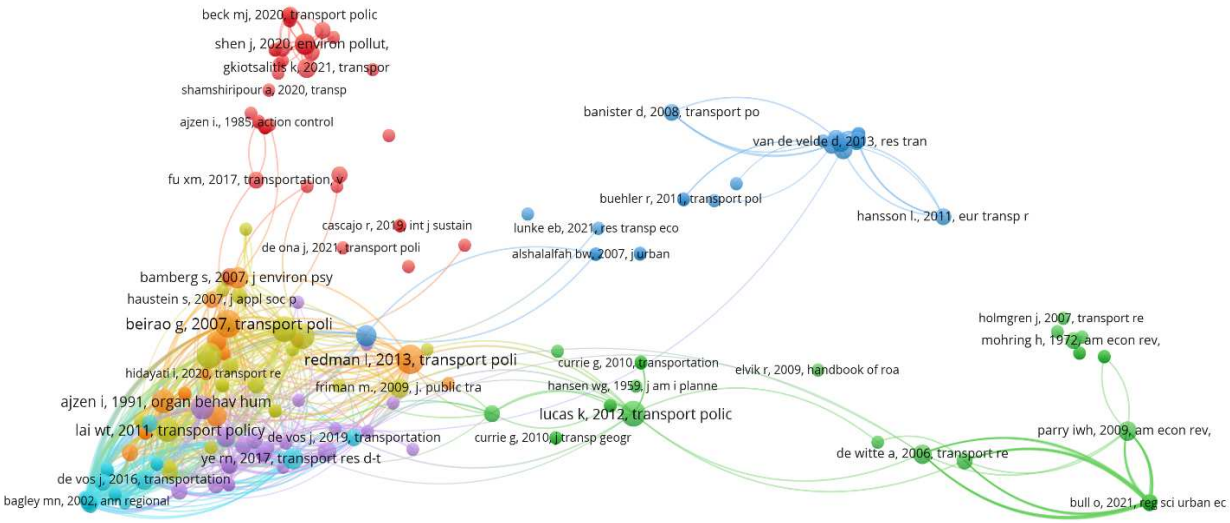

Figure 3: Co-citation of documents references

The co- document network analysis shows intellectual structures in the provided table that focus on public transport and travel behaviour within the rural road infrastructure development context of the paper. The total link strength between Beirão and Cabral (2007) and De Oña et al. (2013) indicates strong focus on investigating public transport attitudes and service quality perceptions because these elements are essential for addressing rural public transport challenges. Research from Van Lierop et al. (2018) and Dell'Olio et al. (2011) demonstrates how public transport service quality, together with the customer satisfaction factors, strongly influences public transport usage behaviour as well as addresses low threshold density problems. Research on behavioural intentions (Lai & Chen, 2011) and travel behaviour (Ye & Titheridge, 2017; Steg, 2005) offers valuable insights into how people make decisions because this knowledge is essential for developing suitable transport answers in rural areas. The paper reinforces its argument about rural population marginalization through an examination of social exclusion (Lucas, 2012) as well as the COVID-19 effects on public transportation systems (Shen et al., 2020). Therefore, the paper demonstrates its ability to utilize these theoretical frameworks to study the complex rural road infrastructure problems and develop solutions that evaluate user conduct together with wider economic effects. Such a combination of research areas within the paper will enable a wide-ranging examination of the issue followed by specific sustainability-oriented policies for rural development.

Article	Tot Link Strength
Beirão, G. and Cabral, J.S., 2007. Understanding attitudes towards public transport and private car: A qualitative study. Transport policy, 14(6), pp.478-489.	38
De Oña, J., De Oña, R., Eboli, L. and Mazzulla, G., 2013. Perceived service quality in bus transit service: a structural equation approach. Transport Policy, 29, pp.219-226.	37
St-Louis, E., Manaugh, K., van Lierop, D. and El-Geneidy, A., 2014. The happy commuter: A comparison of commuter satisfaction across modes. Transportation research part F: traffic psychology and behaviour, 26, pp.160-170.	34
Van Lierop, D., Badami, M.G. and El-Geneidy, A.M., 2018. What influences satisfaction and loyalty in public transport? A review of the literature. Transport Reviews, 38(1), pp.52-72.	34
Dell'Olio, L., Ibeas, A. and Cecin, P., 2011. The quality of service desired by public transport users. Transport Policy, 18(1), pp.217-227.	33
AJZEN, I., 1991. ORGAN BEHAV HUM DEC, V50, P179. DOI 10.1016/0749-5978 (91) 90020-T.	32
Lai, W.T. and Chen, C.F., 2011. Behavioral intentions of public transit passengers – The roles of service quality, perceived value, satisfaction and involvement. Transport policy, 18(2), pp.318-325.	32
Redman, L., Friman, M., Gärling, T. and Hartig, T., 2013. Quality attributes of public transport that attract car users: A research review. Transport policy, 25, pp.119-127.	31
Ye, R. and Titheridge, H., 2017. Satisfaction with the commute: The role of travel mode choice, built environment and attitudes. Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment, 52, pp.535-547.	29
Steg, L., 2005. Car use: lust and must. Instrumental, symbolic and affective motives for car use. Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice, 39(2-3), pp.147-162.	25
Bamberg, S., Hunecke, M. and Blöbaum, A., 2007. Social context, personal norms and the use of public transportation: Two field studies. Journal of environmental psychology, 27(3), pp.190-203.	21
Ewing, R. and Cervero, R., 2010. Travel and the built environment: A meta-analysis. Journal of the American planning association, 76(3), pp.265-294.	18
Lucas, K., 2012. Transport and social exclusion: Where are we now?. Transport policy, 20, pp.105-113.	10
Shen, J., Duan, H., Zhang, B., Wang, J., Ji, J.S., Wang, J., Pan, L., Wang, X., Zhao, K., Ying, B. and Tang, S., 2020. Prevention and control of COVID-19 in public transportation: Experience from China. Environmental pollution, 266, p.115291.	8
Tirachini, A., 2020. Ride-hailing, travel behaviour and sustainable mobility: an international review. Transportation, 47(4), pp.2011-2047.	8

Table 1: Co- document citation

9.4 Country collaboration analysis

Extended research on road infrastructure along with rural mobility development makes Sweden and England the leading powers in transportation studies as developed countries. The scholarly research reveals that Sweden has 10 documents and 192 citations and a total link strength of 14, following Canadian research composed of 4 documents with 460 citations and a total link strength of 12. The Netherlands became third with 7 documents, 376 citations and a total link strength of 11. There are 9 documents in England with a total of 155 citations and a link strength measurement of 8. Norway ranks fifth with 4 documents that accumulate 156 citations, while the total ink strength reaches 7.

The country collaboration network traces its primary connections to European countries which include Sweden together with Germany and Belgium along with the Netherlands. This intellectual framework demonstrates proven research connections among European nations that focus on transportation development regarding infrastructure development. The strong partnership among these countries demonstrates their mutual dedication to solving transportation problems which may include the rural road infrastructure issues evaluated in the paper. This international interest in the field extends beyond Europe since researchers from

Canada and Australia and China maintain relationships with their European counterparts. The paper would enhance its findings by studying European rural road infrastructure through case studies and policy analysis because these nations potentially achieved more sophisticated or delicate approaches in this field. The research demonstrates gaps in partnership alongside knowledge exchange with developing nations through its emphasis on European entities. The paper could enhance its value by studying and reporting regional linkages and knowledge transfer activities with developing world entities dealing with rural road infrastructure problems. Such an expanded knowledge base would enable better solutions that fit the specific requirements of developing nations.

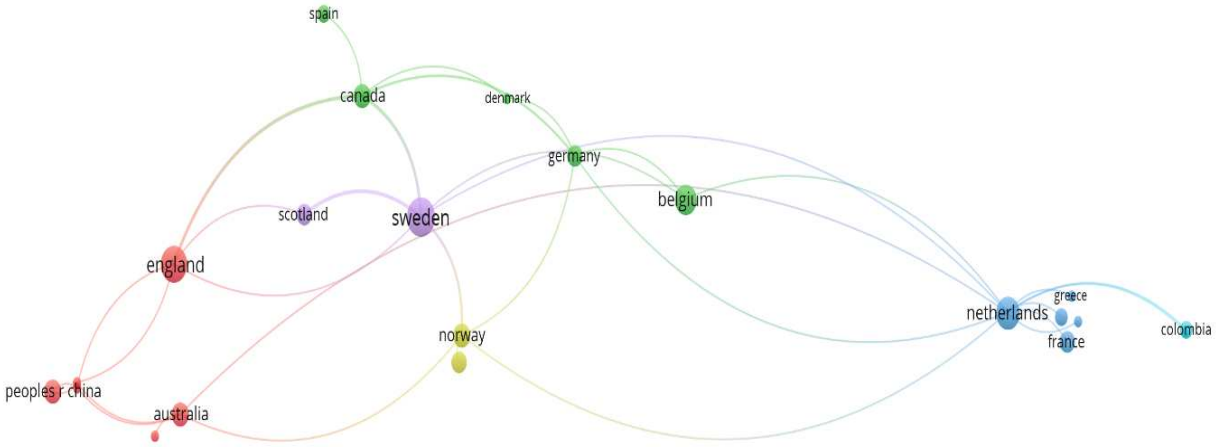

Figure 4: Country collaboration analysis

10 CONCLUSION

The poor condition of rural roads functions as an enormous obstacle for both mobility and regional economic expansion throughout rural developing regions. The lack of investment in construction and maintenance, poor connectivity to national and regional networks, and the absence of proper infrastructure for collective public transport all contribute to the isolation of rural populations. The effectiveness of alternative solutions like Demand-Responsive Transport and community-based systems and non-motorized transport infrastructure for rural areas depends on their local conditions as well as sustainability and proper implementation standards.

Rural testing projects achieve modest results but these initiatives do not deliver broad effects across many locations because services receive insufficient funding and designers fail to develop sound plans while rural inhabitants remain outside implementation stages. Community involvement at every stage of rural transport project planning and execution determines the success of new transport initiatives. Project design that includes rural populations from the start leads to better results in improving rural accessibility along with mobility options and communitywide development progress.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for this study are discussed below.

11.1 Integrated Rural Transport Infrastructure Investment

National and regional budgets must establish highway development and restoration for rural areas as their top expenditure priority. The budget should contain designated funds for rural road maintenance which both maintains their condition and extends their longevity. The use of materials and technologies that demonstrate resistance to climate change should be applied during road building activities to minimize environmental threats. Local communities should take part in road condition monitoring alongside reporting activities to establish local ownership allowing timely response interventions.

11.2 Capacity Building and Technical Assistance for Local Transport Stakeholders

The government should invest resources toward establishing local expertise for proper rural transport system planning and management operations.A training program should be created to improve local government abilities alongside transport operator and community knowledge in transport planning with additional skills

in management and maintenance. Platform development aimed at distributing rural transport best practices to local situations while finding purposes of localized adaptations. Technical support should assist governmental entities by helping them deploy and expand observed prototype programs especially in data gathering and budget control operations.

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