

## **RSN DRAFT**

### **REVITALISING RURAL – REALISING THE VISION**

#### **Transport and access to jobs and opportunities**

##### **Why it matters**

Transport options provide communities with better access to employment opportunities and vital services, as well as to leisure or social opportunities. This matters most of all to those individuals without ready access to their own means of transport, whether because of their age, health or income.

The inverse is equally true. Transport options provide employers with access to a workforce and make retail outlets, service providers and others accessible to all their customers or clients. They are important for local economies and improved transport networks can help rural areas to level up.

One group for whom transport matters a great deal is young people who, from age 16 to 18, must attend further education, an apprenticeship or work based learning. Rural young people (who are unlikely to own their own transport) require other realistic options to give them a chance to follow their career or education ambitions.

A lack of transport options can also contribute towards loneliness, not least among older people, where it leaves them physically isolated in smaller rural communities. Transport options often assist wellbeing and social inclusion.

A lack of transport options encourages car dependency (and for some makes it all but essential). This is detrimental to the environment, adding to air pollution and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

Transport is likely to undergo massive change over the next decade or two, as explored by the Government's Future of Mobility grand challenge. This may embrace a rapid shift to electric and ultra-low emission vehicles, self driving vehicles and micro vehicles. Enabling innovation to happen outside large urban centres may be key to its nationwide success.

##### **The national policy context**

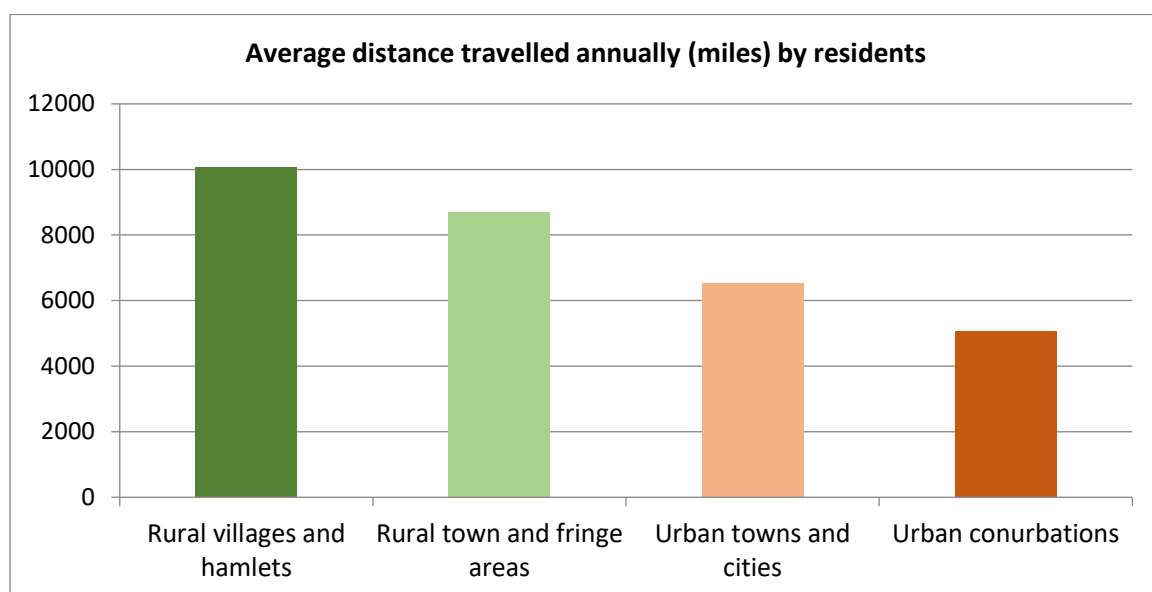
Key elements of national policy include:

- Bus services – since deregulation in the 1980s bus routes and timetables have largely been set by bus operators. The majority of routes are run on a commercial basis by those operators. However, local authorities (county or unitary councils) can subsidise loss making routes or services that run at loss making times of the day. Subsidised services have been an important feature of rural provision, where passenger numbers are generally lower.

- Better Deal for Bus Users – this Government initiative announced a package of measures and £220 million for actions aiming to meet the needs of bus service users. It includes £30 million for local authorities, so they can improve existing or restore lost services, plus funding for a Rural Mobility Fund (see below). It also announced that a National Buses Strategy for England would be produced, which is expected to review the way that services are funded and how local authorities and bus operators can work better together.
- Concessionary fares – the national statutory concessionary fares scheme provides free travel on local buses to those aged 65 or over or with a disability (outside peak times). Children up to age 16 are also eligible for free bus travel to school for journeys over 3 miles. Local authorities may fund extensions to the concessionary fares scheme, though this has become less frequent as their budgets have reduced. 17 and 18 year olds are not covered by any statutory scheme, despite now having to remain in education or training.
- Community transport – services run by community transport providers can provide complementary services or routes, typically using minibuses or cars to assist particular groups (such as older people). They often rely on grants and use volunteer drivers to reduce operating costs. In early 2020 the Government announced a £20 million Rural Mobility Fund, offering grants to local projects which will pilot demand-responsive transport solutions in areas where there is a dispersed settlement pattern.
- Future of Mobility – this is one of the grand challenges within the Government’s Industrial Strategy. It seeks to support innovative transport technologies which improve accessibility, make travel safer and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the sector.

### The rural dimension

Rural residents travel further than their urban counterparts. Those living in small rural settlements (villages and hamlets) on average travelled 10,055 miles in 2016/17. That is 54% more than the average resident from an urban town or city<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> National Travel Survey 2017 statistics, Department for Transport.

Travel times required to reach a workplace or services are typically longer for rural than for urban residents. This time difference is most marked for those who rely upon public transport, as the statistics below for the year 2017 show<sup>2</sup>.

***Average minimum travel time by public transport or walking to reach nearest service or centre***

To reach the nearest:	From rural areas	From urban areas
Employment centre (with 5,000+ jobs)	56 minutes	27 minutes
GP surgery	23 minutes	11 minutes
Further education institution	37 minutes	18 minutes

In 2017/18 passengers made 1,223 million journeys by bus in non-metropolitan areas of England<sup>3</sup>, down by 7% since 2009/10. Over the same period bus vehicle mileage has remained fairly stable for commercially run services, but has more than halved for local authority subsidised services.

This trend coincides with a 43% reduction in local authority expenditure on subsidy for bus services. Furthermore, local authorities in predominantly rural areas have less funding available to them for spend on bus services<sup>4</sup> (than equivalent urban local authorities).

***Budgeted local authority expenditure per resident on bus service provision (2019/20)***

Budgeted spend on:	Predominantly rural local authority areas	Predominantly urban local authority areas
Subsidised bus routes	£7.53	£39.41
Concessionary bus fares	£13.84	£25.38

Many bus routes financially supported by local authorities have been withdrawn or reduced<sup>5</sup>. This is thought to have affected over 3,000 services since 2009. Disaggregated figures for shire areas (alone) are available for 2016/17, showing that:

- 202 services were withdrawn altogether; and
- 191 services were in some other way reduced.

Research in two English regions concluded that many small rural towns were at risk of becoming transport deserts, with infrequent bus, rail or public transport services. 72 out of 110 small towns in the South West and 20 out of 50 small towns in the North East met the transport desert definition<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Travel time statistics 2017 (revised), Department for Transport.

<sup>3</sup> *The Future of Bus Funding*, Campaign for Better Transport (2019), using Department for Transport statistics.

<sup>4</sup> Analysis of Local Authority Revenue Account Budget data set, RSN (2020)

<sup>5</sup> *Buses in Crisis* annual reports, Campaign for Better Transport.

<sup>6</sup> *Transport Deserts*, CPRE – The Countryside Charity (2020).

A good half (52%) of all community transport organisations either wholly or mostly serve rural communities<sup>7</sup>. However, those serving rural areas tend to be smaller in scale and to rely more heavily on fares revenue (as they receive comparatively less grant income).

### **Policy solutions**

TO BE IDENTIFIED AND ADDED AT A LATER PROJECT STAGE: three or four practical policy ideas.

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<sup>7</sup> *State of the Sector - England*, Community Transport Association (2014).