

Creating Connections: Reimagining inclusive transport for disabled children and young people

Funded by



Making all journeys accessible

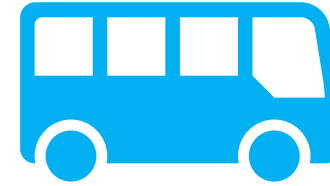
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About the Community Transport Association

We are a charity providing leadership, training, advice, and operational support to transport related charities, community groups and social enterprises in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

We support and represent over 1300 organisations throughout the UK.

<https://ctauk.org/>



Membership



Advice and Support



Policy and Research



Training and Capacity Building

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Rural Community Transport

- **45% of Community Transport** operators in England run their services in **entirely rural or predominantly rural** areas.
- Operators in rural areas have a **lower average income than their urban counterparts** and are more likely to rely on volunteers. They are less likely to have paid staff and will have fewer paid staff if they do have them.
- Rural Community Transport operators are more likely to be running **volunteer car schemes and community bus routes** than urban operators.
- Rural operators make **fewer trips per month** than on average than urban operators and take fewer passengers (most likely because they are smaller organisations). However, **those trips are likely to be considerably longer in distance.**
- More passengers using rural Community Transport are likely to be able to **use a concessionary pass.**

<https://ctauk.org/mapping-england>



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Creating Connections: What is the research about?

- This research aims to explore how Community Transport can address the travel barriers faced by disabled children and young people.
- We will work with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), and Community Transport Operators (CTOs) to understand transport needs and experiences and operator challenges, throughout the UK. Disabled children and young people, their families, will be partners in the research, paid in advance for their involvement.
- The insights gathered will allow us to provide evidence-based recommendations and share practical solutions to enhance Community Transport services for disabled children and young people.

Why are we doing this?

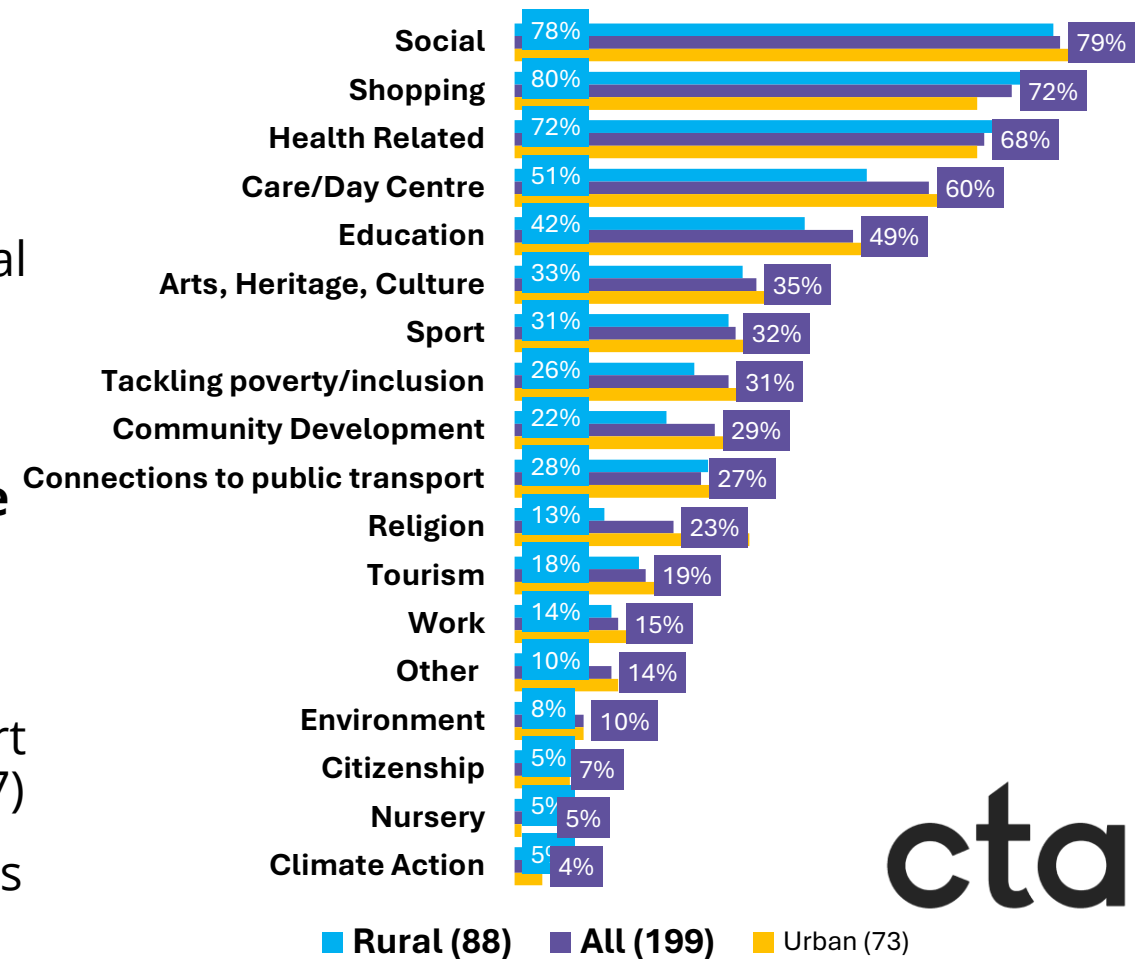
- 1.6 million disabled children and young people throughout the UK (aged 0 to 24) (Census 2021).
- Disabled people made **34% fewer trips** than non-disabled adults of the same age (NTS 2023).
- **Impact on well-being:** 77% reported that transport barriers negatively affected their physical or mental well-being and 75% reported feeling stressed when travelling (NCAT, 2024).
- Disabled children are twice as likely to experience **loneliness** compared to their non-disabled peers and are more prone to **feelings of isolation** (Activity Alliance, 2020).
- Disabled children are **less active** than children without a disability but want to be more active. 23% list 'getting there and back' as a barrier to activity (Activity Alliance, 2020).

Barriers to social opportunities and education

- 84% of families with disabled children are **going without days out or leisure time**. 55% of young disabled people agree that it is difficult to get to and from social events. (Seventa 2025)
- Community Transport Operators specialise in **travel to social opportunities**. 4 out of 5 rural operators were providing journeys for this purpose.
- 39% of young disabled people agree that it's **challenging to get to and from their college or university** using public transport. (Seventa 2025)
- Variable **home to school provision** for children aged 8-16, some evidence of transport restrictions for children post 16 (Contact, 2017)
- Massive financial pressure on Local Authorities to provide transport for SEND children.

Journey purposes for Community Transport Operators

(Mapping England 2024)



Barriers to public transport

- **Limited Public Transport options:** In rural areas, public transport services are often infrequent or non-existent. Only about 50% of rural residents live within 13 minutes of a regular (hourly) bus service, compared to 95% in urban areas (Department for Transport, 2019) and over the past decade, more than one in four bus services in rural areas have been discontinued (Countryside Alliance, 2024). This scarcity of services often limits mobility for young disabled people.
- **Reliability issues:** Even when public transport services are available, they may be unreliable, leading to missed appointments and increased stress. 43% cite overcrowding and 30% mention unreliable services as significant barriers (Sense, 2024).
- **Cost barriers:** The cost of transport in rural areas can be prohibitive, especially for young people with limited financial resources. High fares prevent 65% of disabled individuals from using transport as needed (NCAT, 2024) and nearly a third (31%) of young disabled people deliberately reduce their journeys to save money (Savanta, 2025).

Barriers to public transport

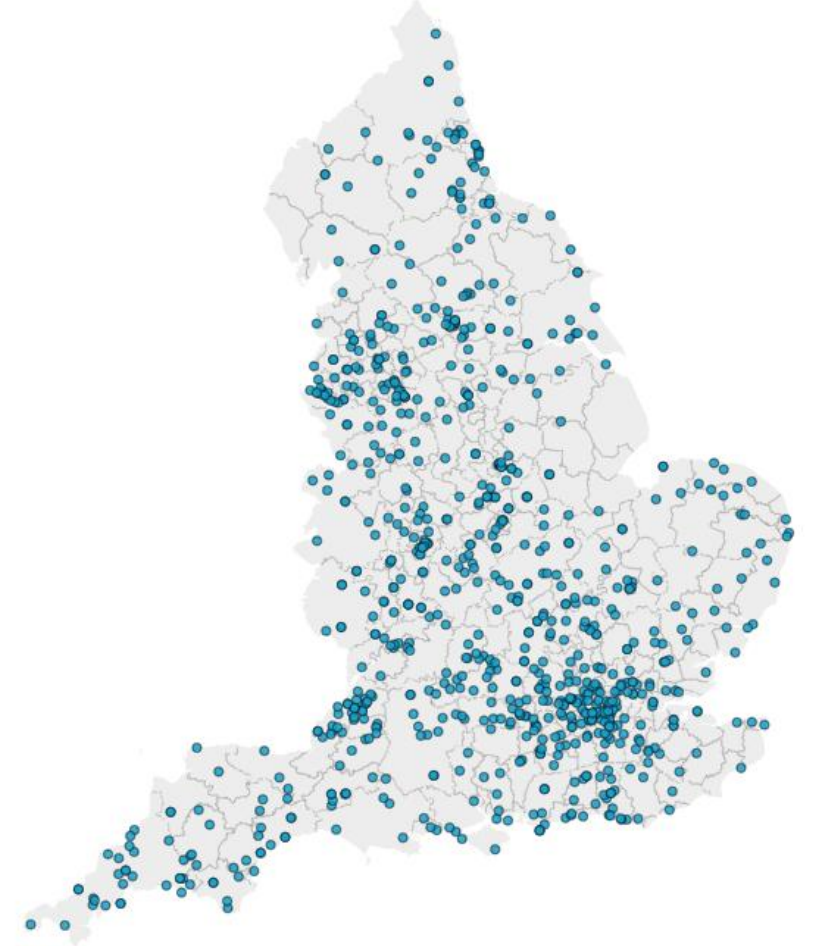
- **Lack of safety and security:** Over half (63%) of young disabled people report feeling unsafe using public transport and particularly in rural areas, the absence of other passengers and limited staff can make young disabled people feel at risk during their journeys (Savanta, 2025).
- **Infrastructure barriers:** Infrastructure may not be designed with accessibility in mind. For example, 43% identified lack of step-free access as barrier (NCAT, 2024), limited priority seating (47% of young disabled people feel they cannot use priority seating on public transport without being challenged) (Savanta, 2025) and inadequate room for mobility aids, making travel challenging.
- **Poor staff assistance:** Inadequate support from transport staff is a recurring problem, with 62% of respondents highlighting this as a barrier (NCAT, 2024).

Relevant CT provision

CTA England Not for Profit Members

- **55% of Community Transport operators currently take children as passengers** 31% and 38% take teenagers and youth groups respectively. This doesn't vary significantly by rural or urban focus.
- **Services include a mixture** of contracted services such home to school or transport to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and group hire to local VCSE organisations, as well as dial a ride and community bus services.
- **4 out of 5 operators are providing services for passengers with limited mobility.** Three-quarters of minibuses are wheelchair accessible.
- MiDAS Accessible training provides driver guidance for passengers with disabilities. MiDAS PATS is training for passenger assistants.

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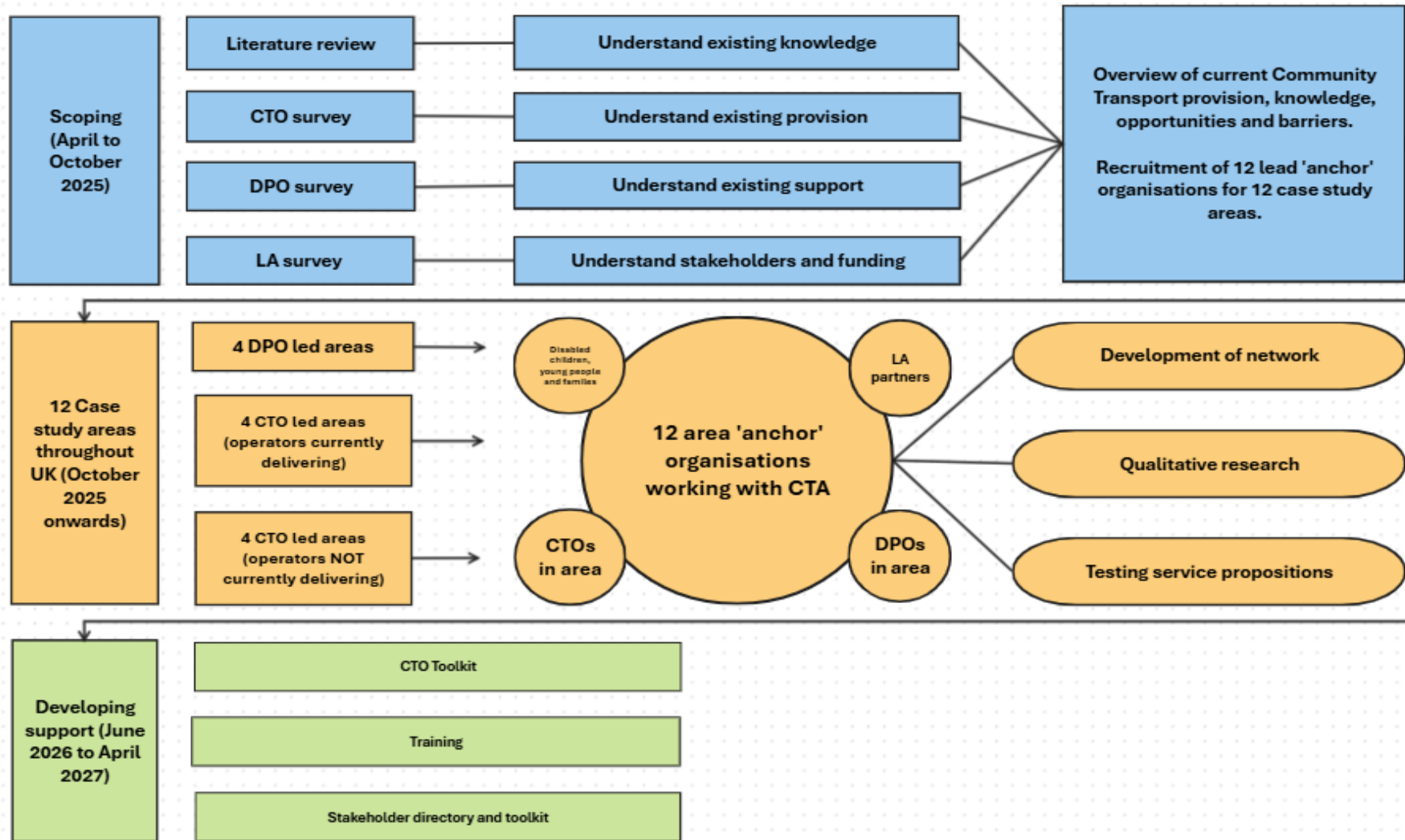


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Supporting future provision

- Community Transport operators are experienced in providing accessible transport for passengers with a range of disabilities.
- Several community transport operators are already supporting disabled children and their families, but provision of these services is variable.
- Only 11% of disabled young people had ever used Community Transport services (Sevanta, 2025)
- Previous research has identified the potential of Community Transport to provide wider services for disabled people. (Collaborate Research, 2021)
- There is potential to support Community Transport operators to provide for unmet travel needs of disabled children and young people in some areas.
- Creating Connections will provide research to understand details of current provision and need, as well as 12 areas in which solutions can co-produced.

How will the project work?



Getting involved

We are looking for partners in this research, including Community Transport Operators, Disabled People's Organisations, Local Authorities, and other local stakeholders.

- Complete a LA or Operator survey in July.
- Be a partner in one of the 12 case study areas from Autumn 2025.

Contact **nick@ctauk.org** or **charlotte@ctauk.org** for further details or to register your interest.

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