

Title	Future of Transport: rural strategy – call for evidence
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Report by:	Joint response by the seven English Sub-national Transport Bodies
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Introduction

This is the joint submission from the seven English Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) in response to the Department for Transport's Future of Transport: rural strategy call for evidence.

The role of STBs as set out in the enabling legislation¹ is to develop a transport strategy that meets the needs of persons living or working in, or visiting, the area having regard to social and environmental impacts and facilitating sustainable economic growth. They bring a strength of partnership among their membership to engage with government with one voice.

STBs are working with their own partners, and with each other, to develop consistent, clear, long term outcomes contained within agreed and evidence led transport strategies looking out over a 20-30 year period. They therefore have a role in the development of the future strategy for the rural areas they represent, as well as addressing common rural mobility challenges across the STB regions, which has prompted this joint response to the call for evidence.

In view of the timescales for making submissions this response has been prepared by senior officials from the STBs.

Summary

The key points we wish to make in response to the call for evidence are as follows:

1. The traditional transport business case appraisal and delivery approach does not provide optimal outcomes for rural residents. Rural areas are extremely diverse across England, with challenges ranging across poor access to education and employment, health inequalities, high per capita carbon emissions and social isolation. STBs propose that a **place-based approach** should be adopted, based on understanding the specific challenges within a local area, and identifying appraisal principles to establish what 'good looks like', before identifying and testing solutions to address them. Working with

¹ The Local Transport Act 2008 (as amended)

DfT on the levelling up agenda so that decision makers and scheme promoters understand how to present investment in a rural context.

2. We also believe that a ‘customer’ focused **user-centric approach is critical in understanding** the needs of residents and businesses and in **achieving better outcomes for our rural communities**. Recognising that rural areas are both different from urban ones and are not all rural localities are the same.
3. As a result of high and often necessary car dependency, transport in rural areas is generally more carbon intensive than in urban areas², significantly impacting on our goal for net zero emissions. **Reducing emissions needs to be prioritised** through the development of integrated solutions for rural areas, but with due consideration for other core outcomes including social inclusion and access to employment. This will be from a range of solutions including rural hubs, digital connectivity and demand responsive transport options.
4. **New ideas and technology to reduce the need to travel** should be researched and expanded preferably based on a collective approach. Better digital connectivity and new innovations (for example rural hubs) have considerable potential to deliver place-based outcomes and should be considered alongside any mobility solutions.
5. The seven STBs fully support the development of a future of transport: rural strategy, and can offer assistance to Government in the following ways:
 - Supporting delivery of an **alternative place-based approach** for developing and appraising rural mobility solutions, **starting with the collation of data and evidence** on the national/local challenges and issues, and using this evidence to agree the strategic principles on which to base appraisal, and then identify location specific place-based solutions rather than a prescribed approach. In planning for the future, it is critical to understand the demographic, social, economic and technological trends impacting on the needs of rural communities. STB’s can work with Government on developing a programme of mobility options, which can be tailored to meet local requirements and changing transport demands. For example, adapting to increased levels of remote working and in some localities the potential for combining flexible workspace with mobility services.
 - **Helping to understand local needs in the context of national policy on rural mobility. STBs operate at sub-national scale**, developing their evidence base, transport strategies and engagement within wider local partnerships, enabling us to

² Midland Connect carbon baseline suggests that in the Midlands, rural areas account for 58% of the population, but 75% of carbon from transport is emitted in those areas.

ask people, business and users what they want from rural mobility and what their future needs are, whilst aligning with national government policy direction.

- **Prioritising investment to better support outcomes in rural areas. STBs focus on place-based outcomes** ensuring that we can develop solutions which recognise the uniqueness of rural localities, whilst aligning to both local and national policy outcomes. This allows our local partnerships to more effectively **prioritise, manage and deliver** a portfolio of interventions that will work in their local 'place'.
- **Promoting levelling up in rural areas. STBs' place-based approach enables investment to 'level up' areas – including within rural communities.** By the end of 2021, each of the seven STBs in England will have a transport strategy/plan in place. Developed using robust evidence bases, in partnership with planning authorities, and through public consultation, these provide a focal point for prioritising infrastructure investment across English regions. This approach ensures improvements to rural mobility are coordinated and fully support the delivery of outcomes such as “levelling up” areas.
- **Prioritising decarbonisation for rural mobility. The DfT goal** to achieve net zero is currently promoted by STBs through the development of carbon assessment tools, identifying regional level decarbonisation pathways, and developing holistic appraisal frameworks that assess carbon impacts. Recognising decarbonisation solutions such as public transport or rollout of EV charging are often less commercially viable in rural areas, STBs can work with Government in creating the conditions that support transport innovations ensuring rural communities are not left behind.
- **Bringing together local partners through thought leadership and collaboration on innovative rural delivery - STBs act as a single voice, using the strength of their partnership,** and set a clear strategic direction for improved connectivity within their regions. Through working together STBs can share case studies, projects, prioritisation of projects that support a range of outcomes (e.g. levelling-up, decarbonisation, accessibility and public health) – not just traditional transport projects.

The following pages set out our detailed response to the questions set out in the Call for Evidence:

Current trends facing the transport ecosystem in rural areas

Question: Do you have any evidence for the issues mentioned?

Dependence on the private car

Our evidence demonstrates significant reliance on the private car in rural areas across England. Car and van accessibility data from the 2011 census showed on average across all

regions 28% of urban households did not have access to a car or van compared to 13% of rural households. On average across all regions more urban households (43%) had access to one car or van compared to 40% of rural households, however rural households had much higher access to two or more cars and vans (47% of rural households compared to 29% of urban households).

Transport for the North's User Insight research³⁴ shows that rural areas have a much higher proportion of retired people (35%), compared with the overall sample across all areas in the North (20%) and a lower proportion of people working full-time (27%, compared with 37%). The proportion of participants with access to car as driver is much higher than average (84%, compared with 72%). The level of dissatisfaction with current trips of Rural Residents was higher than average, with main reasons for dissatisfaction being traffic congestion, roadworks, poor road surfaces/potholes, and overcrowded carriages. Reported constraints to travel were the unreliability of public transport, infrequency of public transport, and public transport not being available in the evening/night.

2011 census travel to work data, showed on average across all regions 56% of travel to work journeys are carried out by driving a car or van, increasing to 60% when London is not included. Conversely, other modes for travel to work journeys are less popular, for example 10% by walking, 7% by bus, minibuss or coach, 5% as a passenger in a car or van and 3% by bicycle. This presents an opportunity to consider how technology and innovation can reduce emissions through the electrification of vehicles but to also explore how to increase consumer access to other transport options, which could include demand responsive public transport, new forms of micro mobility such as e-bikes or scooters and active travel for more local trips.

Similar to car dependency, access to services in rural areas does have local variations and these need to be understood when developing mobility solutions. The ONS Car or Van availability data highlights varying levels of car dependency ranging from the regional to local authority level, for example 22% of rural households in the North East do not have access to a car or van compared to 10% in the West Midlands and Southeast. Even amongst Local Authorities with the same rural classification, there are a different ranges of car dependency for work journeys – e.g. North Norfolk 34% compared to 50% in Forest Heath.

Transport has traditionally been the “glue” which holds rural communities together and needs to be seen in a wider context considering the needs of rural population and business to ensure the solutions developed through this strategy understand the differences between places so the most effective interventions can be deployed.

³ [TfN User Insight Phase 1, published July 2018](#)

⁴ [TfN User Insight Phase 2, published June 2019](#)

Access to key services, employment and social isolation

All seven STB Transport Strategies include policies and interventions to create an inclusive transport network, which is accessible for all and part of a wider system of connectivity. Within many rural communities, the connectivity options, both physical and digital, available to residents and businesses are often limited, bringing with it implications that extend beyond the transport sector.

Journey statistics data released by the Department for Transport shows that average minimum journey times (for 8 different services⁵) by various transport modes can take over three times longer in rural areas compared to urban. It takes over 3 times longer to access employment centres with 100-499 jobs by taking public transport or walking, over twice as long to cycle to employment centres over 500 jobs and twice as long to access further education facilities by public transport or walking in rural localities than urban. The smallest difference was between the time taken to make car journeys with these taking on average a third longer in rural areas, evidencing the current reliance on the car to make journeys within a reasonable travel time.

The Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System March 2019⁶ Report supports this, finding over half of the working-age population (57%) live in areas with low public transport access to jobs, i.e. within reach of 45 minutes travel time and 66% (7.8 million) of elderly people cannot reach a hospital within 30 minutes by public transport. The gap between accessibility for LSOA rural areas versus LSOA urban areas is clearly evidenced for employment, education and health care. These access issues disproportionately impact those without access to a car, severely impacting access to employment opportunities and key services. Key differences for employment, education and health are set out as follows:

- Employment: 19% of the LSOA urban areas have the highest accessibility to employment opportunities compared to 4% of the LSOA rural areas. The highest proportion (28%) of the rural LSOA have the lowest level of accessibility to employment.
- Education: Only 1% of the children in urban LSOAs are not within a 30 minute public transport journey of one school compared to 28% of children in rural LSOAs. 90% of children in urban LSOAs are within a 30 minute journey of two schools compared to 29% of children living in rural localities.
- Health: 91% of rural LSOA are not within a 30 minute public transport journey to a hospital compared to 55% of urban ones and less than 1% of rural LSOA have access to two hospitals.

⁵ Centres of employment, primary school, secondary school, further education, GP, hospital, food store and town centre

⁶ [Future of mobility: inequalities in mobility and access in the UK Transport System \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Accessibility by non-car modes is getting worse in many locations, as demonstrated through local case studies. For example, accessibility indicators monitored for the Norfolk Local Transport Plan show the % of the population in rural areas able to access a market town or key employment destination by public transport has declined from 77% in 2010 to 64% in 2019.

As for car dependency, access to services in rural areas does have local variations and these need to be understood when developing mobility solutions, for example, using another case study, Journey statistics data released by the Department for Transport shows it takes on average a 38 minute walk or public transport journey to the nearest town centre in North Kesteven compared to 7 minutes in Uttlesford but both have the same rural classification.

Question: Do you think there are other issues facing rural areas that we should consider in the strategy?

Digital connectivity: working from home, online services and home deliveries have increased significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy highlights the majority of commercially unviable giga bit broadband is in rural locations. Digital connectivity and infrastructure are critical for innovative services to be cost-efficient and successful.

Digital platforms may increase the reach of demand-responsive services (e.g. car/ride-sharing or demand-responsive buses) and enhance the independent mobility of people in rural locations. The uptake of digitally enabled transport services depends on the right digital infrastructure being put in place with measures to encourage the use of digital platforms, such as demonstrations or pilots, needing to be implemented alongside the services. These types of projects will need initial financial support that local authorities may not be able to offer to make the market work and services affordable in rural areas.

Ageing population: From 2016, over 80% of population growth to 2041 will be in the over-65 age group, with the number of people over 85 almost doubling from 1.6 million to 3.2 million over the same period (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). In some areas, up to 40% of the population will be over 65 by 2037 (Office for National Statistics, 2016), while people aged over 65 will become the largest population segment in rural areas by 2040.

Older people today travel more than they did 20-25 years ago, with everyday trip rates higher and activities outside the home being more common. Transport's socially enabling aspects are particularly important for older groups, and with a rural population ageing it is important to consider older people's mobility challenges and demands, which differ from other stages of life.

Younger people: It is not just the low number of public transport routes served that affects accessibility, it's also the low frequency and timing of many services makes it less likely that they meet young people's requirements for independent mobility, limiting access to work,

education and leisure activities. Without access to a car or digital alternative, the lack of regular, reliable and affordable public transport is a factor that can affect young people in rural areas, worsening their job and education prospects meaning an out migration of young skilled workers to urban locations with better access to employment opportunities and services.

The [Community Life Survey 2016-17](#) found the 'loneliest' age group were those aged 16-24 years. This finding was supported in 'the loneliness experiment' which was an online survey of 55,000 people that found that 40% of 16-24 year olds reported often feeling lonely, compared with 27% of over 75s. Highlighting the importance of young people in rural areas having access to a range of services that provide social interactions.

Decline of rural centres: Limited public transport and declining local services are major factors behind poor accessibility in rural areas and help to explain the car-dependent behaviour often found. The revival of rural centres that serve local communities offers the opportunity to concentrate demand for travel in ways that support connectivity to adjoining urban areas or areas of economic opportunity.

The Midlands Connect [Future of Rural Mobility study](#) demonstrates the concept of 'rural hubs' in more detail. It showed that integrating not just public transport but future mobility solutions and a comprehensive network of pedestrian and cycling routes within rural settlements would aid this hub concept. The potential long term changes to work patterns could help reinvigorate rural centres with more people working from home rather than travelling to urban areas, using local services improving their viability.

Sparse population: There are difficulties in integrating transport services, given the dispersed nature of residents, and the low population density in rural areas makes it difficult to operate profitable commercial local transport services. Demand is also low, due to the tendency towards car use. As a result, subsidies are often needed to run public transport services in rural areas. Maintaining subsidies becomes more challenging in times of economic constraint (and reduced demand caused recently by social distancing). A variety of different solutions needs to be considered alongside DRT, including lift shares, car shares and other non-car based transport; e-bikes and rural hubs.

Social Inequality: The [Government Office for Science The Future of Mobility report](#) found rural households on average have to spend 24% more of their income on transport costs compared to urban households. The consequences of limited transport provision are felt more severely by poorer households, as they have less financial capacity to adapt (i.e. to use alternatives). The poorest people have a greater reliance on public transport, so reductions in services have a greater impact on them with 20% of the most deprived communities being in rural areas. The impact of car dependency in rural areas is significant, without access to a car you are effectively excluded for access to economic and social opportunities, whilst households without a car are relatively rare the effect this has is enormous.

The decline in rural bus service provision: The [Campaign for Better Transport](#) highlights the decline that has occurred in rural bus service provision. Rural areas have significantly lower rates of bus use compared with urban areas. However, buses remain an important part of rural life. Over a quarter of all bus passenger journeys in England outside of London are in predominantly rural areas or towns with rural hinterlands. There has been a spiral of decline in rural public transport, which has been exacerbated by pressures on local government finances in recent years resulting in reductions in support for bus services. Between 2011/12 and 2016/17, rural bus mileage fell by over six per cent. The forthcoming National bus strategy will provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the role of buses in providing for the mobility need of those in rural areas.

Developments in innovation for rural transport: Increasing use of active travel modes, Micromobility, More effective integration of journeys, Digital models for more flexible services, Data and digital improvements unlocking market knowledge, New modes and Strong community links?

Question: Do you think there are other trends in innovation we haven't included?

Quality rural data and evidence base: The STBs recommend using an evidence led approach to understand different places have varying travel patterns and needs, ensuring solutions are the right ones required at a local and regional level. These issues can be collated and used to develop the strategy principles/approach, which lead to the most suitable place-based solution. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to rural mobility; each place needs a tailored approach to ensure its challenges are adequately addressed. This would facilitate long term planning of the transport network that takes a collective approach considering the needs of the user and the various modes available to find robust solutions.

Engaging hard to reach groups: When developing mobility solutions or new modes of transport, engagement tends to reach existing users or more affluent parts of society. Those who rely on public transport away from the larger urban areas often miss both the opportunity to share their current and future needs and benefit from transport innovations. To create a viable alternative to using a car we have to reach out to groups who may be excluded – unemployed, those on lower incomes, need assistance to access a job, training or education. When planning for rural mobility better data related to young people and working age people without cars is important to be able to identify the most appropriate travel option to meet their needs.

Mobility hubs: The establishment of 'mobility hubs' that serve local communities offers the opportunity to offer 'frictionless' interchange between modes, primarily bus, rail and active travel. In addition, mobility hubs provide an opportunity for integrated planning of modes, integrating not just public transport but future mobility solutions and a comprehensive network of pedestrian and cycling routes. These hubs will be different in rural areas

compared to urban acting more as service hubs that bring transport solutions together. Mobility hubs are locations where demand for movement can be concentrated in a way that supports local public transport services, primarily via bus-provision, ensuring greater opportunity to run services where they otherwise may not have been viable. This type of hub can also reduce the need to travel by bringing services into the community. Currently, with a lack of bus services people have no alternative but to start their journey in a car however through appropriate investment we should try to ensure they don't need to also finish their journey by car. Investing in this type of hub with a rapid transit system will get people to their final destination efficiently and without causing congestion.

Whole journey approach: Decisions on rural mobility should be made that improve the whole transport system and considering all modes of transport together will help to achieve government goals and wider benefits. Alongside measures that maximise the use of transport infrastructure managing demand is also important. The improvements in supporting infrastructure such as digital are necessary for on-demand travel with real-time information that could remove problems encountered when changing between modes, and optimisation of the last mile. It may also create new opportunities in rural areas to run services that are more commercially viable and deliver more affordable mobility to users.

Coordination of freight: The last mile of freight to its final destination (usually smaller retailers or consumers) is labour intensive, accounting for 30-50% of supply chain costs, it also generates the most CO2 per tonne moved. Last-mile delivery is becoming increasingly important with consumers' demands for faster, more frequent and more precisely timed deliveries having environmental and economic consequences. In rural areas with smaller and more frequent deliveries alternative business models such as freight sharing could be trialled.

Our approach

Question: Do you think the Future of Transport: rural strategy should include the Urban Strategy principles? Which additional principles would you like to see in the strategy?

The same principles can be applied to the Rural Mobility Strategy to an extent however as outlined in the 'developments in innovation' section, a key principle for the Rural Mobility Strategy should be to start with the creation of a high quality data and evidence base that identifies the needs of a rural population, businesses and users to ensure the most effective solutions are provided.

The principles and approach of the strategy need to be developed before the solutions and be evidence led. In-depth engagement with a range of stakeholders is required to understand rural travel patterns, users current and future needs and ensure hard to reach groups are represented. This evidence is then used to reframe the rural mobility challenge

and a toolkit of the types of solution that are brought out of this covering: accessibility to services and jobs, supporting skills and education, decarbonisation and digital connectivity.

The Urban Strategy refers to active travel remaining the best options for short journeys; however, the rural strategy should acknowledge the rural residents make longer journeys than urban residents and travel 118% more miles per person than someone living in London.⁷ It will need to consider the challenges rural locations face in the first and last miles of their journey and how improvements to cycle and walking routes will be required to encourage active travel. The strategy should ensure improved accessibility by active travel is considered for everyday activities such as journeys to work and key services, and not just for leisure purposes.

The strategy should seek to understand the consequences of changes in connectivity. There is evidence from Cornwall that improved digital connectivity has led to increased migration to the area, subsequently creating housing affordability issues for local people. Similarly, automation of vehicles may lead to increased congestion and the need for reskilling the workforce, and a reliance on digital connectivity may further isolate those who are digitally excluded or who use journeys to their local centre for social interaction, unless mitigation is put in place.

Encouraging transport innovation in rural areas: Testing and trialling

Question: Are there specific considerations for testing and trialling new technologies in rural areas that you think we should consider?

The decline in the viability of traditional public transport solutions, combined with continued challenges in accessing reliable digital connectivity, emphasises the need to encourage new models of connectivity for rural communities and the businesses that operate in them.

Digital coverage: Digital connectivity is a driver of social change and presents new opportunities to integrate transport modes, however as evidenced in the National Infrastructure Strategy, large areas of predominantly rural localities have a much higher percentage of premises which are uncommercial for gigabit-capable roll-out. The Shared Rural Network will also have to meet its target to deliver high-quality 4G mobile coverage from at least one operator across 95% of the UK by 2025. Testing and trialling new technology in rural areas will need to consider the outcomes using existing coverage and what can be achieved as coverage improves.

⁷ The Midlands Connect carbon baseline work suggests that 70% of car emissions made by urban dwellers are from 1-5 miles (i.e. cycleable length); but this is only 19% in rural areas. 50% of car emissions made by rural dwellers are from journeys over 10 miles.

Sparser densities: Rural areas have a lower population density compared to urban areas, which means there is often a lack of critical mass for both population and businesses to make testing new technologies viable for the private sector. Innovation should consider how outcomes can be shared and boosted through collaboration with other projects and services. The way schemes are currently assessed through traditional methods are often not suitable for untried territories, excludes latent demand and disadvantages sparser populations, a new minimum service standard model could be trialled for assessing the impact of schemes in rural areas.

Non-transport related outcomes: When trialling and testing new innovation, we should ensure it is designed to support other outcomes relating to health, education and social exclusion, and ensure this is measured. As set out in the trends section, the population living in rural areas are some of the most deprived, have to travel further to access services and may struggle with exclusion. A number of STBs have identified that improving active travel options in rural areas would contribute towards achieving these types of outcomes.

Increasing visibility: Rural users often have difficulties in seeing the transport services on offer, with low exposure outside of core passenger groups. It can be difficult for people to know what journeys are being run and how these join up to destinations. Making information on these services easy to view and better online booking and payment needs to be considered when trying to attract new passengers. Visibility needs to improve across all transport modes with a comprehensive programme of awareness raising and behaviour change covering all forms of transport including more informal and community focussed solutions.

Roles for government, sub-national bodies and local authorities

Question: In your view, what should the role of the below be in encouraging innovation in rural areas?

Central Government: Outline a clear long-term national vision and goals that are mindful of diverse local priorities, clear and consistent messaging, taking a whole system approach to transport, funding aligns with strategy outcomes, be clear on roles and responsibilities.

Sub-national Transport Bodies: STBs provide a Single voice and evidence base for their regions, taking a place-based tailored approach to local and regional transport planning. They link strategy to funding, drive knowledge sharing (e.g. by coordinating regional case studies) and join up opportunities to replicate projects. The partnerships enable collaborative approach, promoting public and private sector interventions, and prioritisation of projects that support a range of outcomes.

Local Authorities: Community engagement, local planning, responsibility for delivery of transport (important to differentiate between Local Authorities and Local Transport

Authorities in 2-tier areas - different roles and remits), detailed knowledge of place, monitor local indicators, plan and promote active travel options.

Question: Do you think government can encourage the private sector to develop innovative new transport services in rural areas?

The National Infrastructure Strategy states that where it is less certain what technology will provide the most effective route to decarbonisation or where it is unclear how the technology can be scaled commercially, the government will fund R&D programmes to support innovation, given the challenges of rural areas a fund set up for rural mobility would support the private sector and enable new innovations to be trialled.

Government plays a role in spurring innovation and can support technology development in areas where barriers inhibit private sector investment in innovation, or there is a wider social benefit from directing innovation (which is a key priority of the Government's Industrial Strategy). There are already examples of Government facilitating innovation through grants supporting infrastructure for hydrogen fuelling and electric charging points and funding for electric buses, electric scooters and subsidies for electric cars, but these projects are often focussed on urban areas with dense populations and are not meeting the challenges found in rural areas. Through place-based solutions the public sector can promote opportunities to the private sector and utilise the regional role of STBs to bring projects together at a scale that makes them commercially viable.

The share of data collected, analysed and managed by the private sector is growing and its value is increasing. Having access to this data is of importance to local, regional and central government and other companies, who could use it to plan, operate, better integrate and provide services.

Question: How do you think government should encourage the private sector?

The STBs would propose that options include:

- Implement a set of rural mobility demonstration/pilot projects where learning can be shared across regions and where appropriate replicated in other areas. Support this innovation with a long-term funding plan as rural services take longer to become commercially viable.
- Find and promote synergies with urban areas to expand innovation into rural areas.
- Supporting rural innovation clusters where networks of skills, learning and resource can be shared.
- Provide a clear pathway for example on alternative fuels and electric vehicles to give confidence to the private sector to invest.
- Capture the value of investment that generates non-transport related outcomes, for example linking to elderly care or providing real time information to users or



attracting new businesses to rural hubs. Creating additional incentives to invest in infrastructure as a means of delivery for new innovative services.

Question: Do you have any other comments on this call for evidence?

No further comments.