

Rural Transport Futures

Transport solutions for a thriving countryside



Imagine a village or market town with frequent buses all day, and during evenings and weekends. For people living off the beaten track in the surrounding countryside, shared taxis provide a door-to-door service at any time of day, and are timed to connect with bus and train services for longer trips. A network of cycle paths and footpaths runs alongside main roads to surrounding villages, so it is safe and pleasant to walk or cycle. Visitors are encouraged to arrive in the area by public transport, with discount travel passes, courtesy taxis to transfer luggage from the station, and shuttle buses between attractions and the places they are staying.

Sounds like fantasy? In much of rural Britain, it is.

The Rural Transport Futures project set out to discover if things could be different. The project looked at rural areas of Europe, and found exciting evidence that some places are well on the way to achieving this vision. This shows what transport in rural Britain *should* be like.

What's the problem?

Transport in rural Britain is not working. Evidence from the Countryside Agency and Citizens Advice shows that poor public transport makes it difficult for some people to reach jobs or shops. Many bus services stop early in the evening, and may not run at all on Sundays, making trips to the cinema or to visit friends next to impossible. Some people on low incomes are forced to run a car – and get into debt as a result. Loss of local services means people have to make long round trips; this is a particular problem for health-care journeys and access to Jobcentres and law courts.

Villages in the commuter belt of major cities suffer from heavy, fast-moving traffic on unsuitable roads, making it dangerous to walk or cycle. Busy tourist areas may also suffer severe traffic problems at peak season, with miles of parked cars and traffic jams destroying the very qualities that make the area attractive to visitors.



Buses connecting with trains in Nordrhein-Westfalen pull up 'cheek-to-cheek', just a few paces apart.

Creative solutions

The Rural Transport Futures project examined leading examples of good rural transport in three areas of Europe:

- ▶ Friesland, in the north of the Netherlands.
- ▶ Nordrhein-Westfalen, in Germany.
- ▶ The rural area around Copenhagen, in Denmark.

The project also gathered individual examples of good practice from Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands.

While the problems described above are not unique to Britain, Rural Transport Futures found that other countries are doing much more to tackle them. This briefing summarises the full Rural Transport Futures report, and suggests how European best practice could be applied here in Britain.

'Cheek-to-cheek' buses and trains

In the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland, timetables are synchronised so that buses and trains connect. There is also strong *physical* integration: buses connecting with trains in Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, pull up 'cheek-to-cheek', just a few paces apart. Fares are integrated too. For example in rural areas of Greater Copenhagen, a passenger can buy just one ticket for

their entire journey by bus and train. In the Netherlands, the national 'strip-ticket' can be used on any bus and on local trains.

This integration of buses and trains is possible because all services are co-ordinated by a province or regional transport authority. Services may be franchised to private companies, but frequencies, timetables, information and fares are decided by the co-ordinating body.

What should happen here? The Strategic Rail Authority and local authorities should develop joint demonstration projects. These would cover all rail and bus services for an entire county (or similar area) and would involve: synchronised bus and rail timetables, regular (easy-to-understand and remember) departure times, integrated information, and integrated fares and tickets. The SRA would have to establish a 'micro-franchise' for train services in the demonstration area, and the local authority would let franchises to bus companies, or draw up a partnership agreement with all bus operators.

Fixed-route taxi-buses

In Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, bookable shared taxi-buses run on bus routes in the evenings and at weekends. This avoids buses running empty – the taxi-buses only operate if someone has phoned to request them. The money saved can be used to provide services till late at night, at times when no conventional bus service would be viable.

Some German fixed-route taxi-buses (called *Anrufsammeltaxi*) are timed to connect with conventional public transport on major routes. For example, in Nordrhein-Westfalen taxi-buses connect with night buses from the nearest town, so residents of small villages can enjoy a night out and catch the bus and taxi-bus home at two in the morning. Although both the *Anrufsammeltaxi* and the Dutch Bellbus operate on a fixed route and timetable, they will divert off the route to drop passengers at home, on request. Fares are integrated with other public transport. For example, in the rural Greater Copenhagen area Tele-buses are covered by the standard zonal fares system.

What should happen here? The Government and local authorities should develop large-scale demonstration projects in areas where most of the bus network is already tendered. Public transport operators would be contracted to provide fixed-route services, through a combination of conventional buses and sub-contracts with taxi firms for off-peak shared taxi-buses.

'Any time, anywhere' demand-responsive transport

Door-to-door services operate in many rural areas of the Netherlands and Switzerland. Passengers phone a booking line 30 to 60 minutes before they wish to travel. Services run from early in the morning until late at night, seven days a week, and some even operate around the clock. In the Netherlands, door-to-door 'CVV' or Regio Taxi services are fully accessible to disabled people, and available to everyone. In some areas disabled people pay the standard public transport fare, while non-disabled people pay a higher rate. The services are run by consortia of local bus companies and taxi firms. In Switzerland, door-to-door services are run by the main public transport operator, Swiss Post, under the name Publicar. The fares are based on the rates for conventional public transport, but with a surcharge of about £1.50 for the door-to-door service.

These services are on a much larger scale than demand-responsive transport in Britain, serving millions of people a year. In the Netherlands, they may be funded by merging mainstream transport budgets and budgets for 'special needs' transport (including health, education and social services transport).

What should happen here? The Government and local authorities should develop some large-scale (county-wide or similar) demonstration projects, combining special needs transport and conventional public transport in a door-to-door service available to all.



Local control has transformed the Düren County Railway.

Rural railways under local control

Some rural branch railway lines in Nordrhein-Westfalen are being transferred to local control. Lines which were run down and neglected when under national control have now been transformed. The Regiobahn network, which runs from Kaarst to Mettmann through the city of Düsseldorf, had just five train services and 500 passengers a day in 1998. After a local authority consortium took it over, new trains and a 20-minute-frequency service meant passenger numbers rocketed to 15,000 per day. On the Düren County Railway passengers tripled from 1300 to 3900 per day, as a result of new trains, a more frequent (hourly) service, new stations, passing loops and extension of the line.

Passenger numbers on many rural lines in Britain have increased as a result of marketing and promotion by local Community Rail Partnerships. However, the German examples show much more could be achieved. One of the constraints for rural railways here is the low priority given to small infrastructure schemes like line re-openings, passing loops and new halts. This makes it difficult to improve services.

What should happen here? The Strategic Rail Authority should pilot different types of 'micro-franchises' covering, say, a single branch line or a group of lines. As in Germany, these might ultimately be let by local consortia of county councils and, perhaps, future regional assemblies. The Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail should give higher priority to small infrastructure schemes on rural lines.

Safe walking and cycling routes between settlements

Friesland, in the Netherlands, and Greater Copenhagen both have safe, connected networks for pedestrians and cyclists. In Friesland, many main roads have a parallel

access road, used mainly by cyclists. In the Greater Copenhagen region, towns like Roskilde have fully segregated cycle paths radiating from them for distances of up to 30 kilometres. Both areas recognise that high-speed traffic on rural roads makes people afraid to cycle. Safe tracks are essential to enable people to travel from outlying villages into the nearest town. Substantial sums are spent on improving cycle infrastructure, in the form of cycle crossings over main roads, segregated cycle routes and cycle bridges over canals.

Germany has historically been less active in providing the infrastructure for people to cycle, but as part of its national cycling plan the German government recently doubled the funding for cycleways along Federal roads, to £62 million.

What should happen here? The Highways Agency should develop a programme and funding for cycle tracks adjacent to trunk roads. Local councils should develop walking and cycling plans for rural areas, so that journeys between villages and the nearest town can be made safely on foot (up to 2 miles) or by bike (up to 6 miles) on fully segregated cycle tracks and footpaths. These could take the form of 'hub and spoke' plans for the main corridors radiating from each town.

Traffic calming in villages

Roads in villages and small towns in Friesland are being re-designed so they are in sympathy with the local landscape. Instead of road humps, chicanes, signs and white lines, the design is attractive and understated, and acknowledges local landmarks like the church or a former toll booth. Junctions may be repaved in attractive red brick; there may be no distinction between pavement and road, and no traffic lights at junctions. The result – a village *looks* like a village. And the uncertainty has a 'socialising' effect, so that motorists drive with care. Cars, cyclists, pedestrians, buses and lorries negotiate their way through with waves, nods, eye contact and common sense.

Even where Friesland's villages have not been treated in this way, they are safer. About 60 per cent are 20mph zones.

What should happen here? The Government and local councils should develop a pilot programme of 'socialised' road design in villages and market towns, to find out if the Friesland approach could work here. This should monitor the effects on safety (numbers of collisions), on how the road is used by drivers, pedestrians and cyclists, and on rural regeneration.

Rural car clubs

Car clubs give people access to a car without having to own one. Members of the club are able to book a car for long or short journeys as required, but do not have the hassle or expense of having to maintain a car the rest of the time. This offers benefits for people on low incomes. Car club members tend to mix and match their travel patterns, using buses and bikes much more than if they owned a car.

In Switzerland, car clubs took off once several regional clubs merged to form a single national organisation, Mobility. Mobility now has more than 50,000 members. It finds that car clubs work well in small towns and villages provided a core group of at least 20 people is interested. Nearly 170 rural communities in Switzerland have one or more shared club cars. Members of Mobility can pick up a car club vehicle anywhere in the country. In rural tourist areas like the Tessine, the club's cars are heavily used by visiting club members. Convertibles are especially popular!

What should happen here? The Government should support the development of a national car club through start-up grants and tax breaks. Voluntary organisations and commercial operators should continue to develop rural car clubs.

Community traffic-reduction projects

Projects to encourage people to think twice about their car use have been successful in Germany and Austria. The Traffic-Saving (*Verkehrsparen*) project in Austria cut car mode share by 14 per cent in Langenlois, a town of 7000 people in a rural wine-growing area. It included a 'buy local' scheme, lift sharing, cycle facilities and events to celebrate Car-Free Day. A project in Nordrhein-Westfalen has set up mobility centres to distribute travel information, and has created a cycle route that runs close to train stations to encourage leisure cyclists to use the train instead of their cars.

In both Austria and Germany these projects have concentrated on information, marketing and small-scale infrastructure schemes. These are sometimes called 'soft' measures. The projects were partnerships involving the local council and public transport operators, as well as the local community.

What should happen here? Local authorities should work with community organisations, schools and businesses to develop traffic-saving projects in rural areas, and to monitor their effects on car use.

Car-free tourism packages

In Austria, the Soft Mobility Network links tourist resorts that are trying to reduce the impact of car traffic. Initiatives include: guest cards which give visitors free use of frequent bus services; taxi-buses from the station to hotels and chalets; and car-free tourism packages marketed through travel agents. Areas like the Veluwe, in the Netherlands, are encouraging more car-free tourism through high-quality cycle networks between attractions, a visitor travel pass, and parking and traffic management.

What should happen here? Local councils and tourist boards should work together to encourage car-free tourism. Ingredients might include: shuttle buses between visitor attractions and caravan sites; high-quality cycle networks suitable for family cycling; discounts at attractions for visitors arriving by public transport or bike; and courtesy taxis to transfer luggage from the station.

Regional co-ordination

Some of the ideas described here can easily be adopted in Britain. Others are made more difficult by our current piecemeal approach to public transport. In the case study areas transport is strongly integrated:

- ▶ The regional authority decides appropriate service levels, based on population size.

- ▶ Train and bus routes and timetables are designed to connect.
- ▶ Zonal ticketing systems mean one ticket for a complete journey.
- ▶ Land development is strictly focused on sites which can be well served by public transport.

Funding is also higher, although not dramatically so. For example, Friesland spends about £28 per capita on public transport, roughly double the spending in a typical English county. For this it gets better value for money, because services are much better used.

What should happen here? We need to reform the way rural transport is organised. The current system is too disjointed, with no one in overall control of how services connect together in a particular area. Local authorities should be given powers to establish regional joint passenger transport authorities, responsible for area franchising of bus and local rail. Competition rules should be reformed to allow public transport operators to provide area-wide tickets valid on all local buses and trains. The rules on taxi licensing should be reviewed to enable integration of buses and shared taxi services. Local councils should explore the potential of Quality Contracts for improving bus services. Funding should be increased to provide more services and bring down fares. Public bodies should 'rural proof' their services to ensure that rural residents are not put at a disadvantage through rationalisation.

In the Netherlands, high-quality cycle networks in the Veluwe encourage tourists to leave their cars behind.



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This is a summary of the full Rural Transport Futures report, which is a detailed 72-page examination of the ways in which transport in Britain's countryside could be transformed. The full report (ISBN 0-907347-63-0) is available from Transport 2000, The Impact Centre, 12-18 Hoxton Street, London N1 6NG. Telephone 020 7613 0743. Fax 020 7613 5280. Please use the order form below.

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