PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN RURAL IRELAND – NORTH AND SOUTH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

Transport and mobility are essential aspects of everyday life for all age groups. Accessible transport services can be especially important for older people living in rural areas to help combat social exclusion and support independent living.

The current government and community transport organisation systems for providing rural transport in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) are similar. Moves are being made toward closer integration, including centralising transport planning and services within the National Transport Authority in ROI and a possible new central agency for transport within the Department for Regional Development in NI.

High-level policy on transport in both NI and ROI aims to develop a sustainable, integrated transport system that is accessible by all. However, many of the policy initiatives were written before the economic crisis and implementation has been slow. In both jurisdictions, there is a lack of knowledge of the full economic cost of transport provision and tackling duplication in transport spending is a key issue.

This research finds that in planning public and community transport for the future, we must understand the transport patterns and transport needs of older passengers. The matching of people’s requirements with public and community transport services is essential, and these requirements may differ depending on geographical location.

A review of literature and stakeholder interviews show that integration of transport and cross-sectoral partnerships (between government, business, voluntary and community sectors) are important aspects of providing efficient and cost-effective services. They also show how important good transport links can be in rural communities, and how providing good transport can have positive health outcomes and other social benefits such as combating social exclusion in rural areas.

The literature review reveals a high dependency on cars for rural transport, while a survey of community transport providers, indicates that it is older groups who do not drive or have easy access to lifts from family or friends who use community transport. Providing a transport system that facilitates older people in getting to work, shopping, health appointments and social outings remains a key challenge.

International examples show that there can be an integration of transport and better use of existing budgets. These are cost-effective options which involve total integration of transport, innovative solutions run by not-for-profit organisations, and local authorities making efficient use of existing infrastructure and resources.

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1 This research focuses on public transport, which is funded by central government and provided through a dedicated agency, as well as community transport, which is provided by community groups although commonly with government funding.
2 This research paper presents a small-scale scoping exercise on public and community transport for older people in rural NI and ROI. It is intended to present a snapshot of the current issues in terms of policy and planning with a particular focus on providing cost-effective rural transport solutions for older people at risk of social exclusion.
KEY FINDINGS

Transport policy and service provision are not sufficiently ready for an ageing population in rural areas.

To avoid increased levels of social exclusion, public and community transport must be matched to the needs of older passengers, particularly those who do not drive and have no access to transport from family or friends.

Integration of public and community transport services such as using school buses during off-peak hours for demand-responsive transport for older people can help to develop efficient and cost-effective rural transport.

Closer integration of budgets, planning and services would be beneficial in creating an effective transport service in rural areas that meets the needs of older people. This requires co-operation and co-ordination among multiple actors. There may also be regulatory barriers to overcome.

There is a lack of clarity on the overall transport budget and the full costs of rural transport provision in both NI and ROI.

Summary of recommended policy measures for improving rural transport

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<th>Short-Term</th>
<th>Medium-Term</th>
<th>Long-Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>Arrange a high-level stakeholder meeting on integrating existing services such as non-urgent health transport, home-to-school transport and social services transport.</td>
<td>Establish and use local transport plans to allow communities have a say in transport planning for their area.</td>
<td>Facilitate the introduction of innovative solutions to rural transport such as the ITN America model.</td>
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<td>Build stakeholder collaboration and partnerships at central government and local level.</td>
<td>Establish a centralised, integrated agency with overall responsibility for transport provision and budgets.</td>
<td>Examine and implement budget and tax measures to promote sustainable public transport in rural areas, including the private sector.</td>
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<td>Introduce smart card payments for all transport, with the facility to add credit for entitlements.</td>
<td>Create incentives to expand the numbers of volunteer drivers in isolated rural areas.</td>
<td>Implement policy measures to ensure rural transport can adapt to the ageing population.</td>
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<td>Conduct research and encourage community engagement on transport needs.</td>
<td>Encourage the use of alternatives to car travel.</td>
<td>Develop a rural transport network that is sustainable and efficient, meeting the needs of all passenger groups.</td>
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<td>Provide good-quality information for passengers on how and when to use transport to get to their destination.</td>
<td>Phase out all duplicated services and invest funding in priority rural transport areas.</td>
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In ROI, 42% of people aged 65+ live in rural areas and 58% live in urban areas (Central Statistics Office, 2012).
INTRODUCTION

Transport and mobility are essential aspects of everyday life: they keep people connected and help them to live independently. There are concerns that a growing focus on strictly economic arguments may lead to a reduction in services in rural areas (Kavanagh, et al., 2005). This report focuses on how public transport and community transport can best combine in rural areas to provide transport for older people, particularly those who do not drive.

The budget document of the NI Executive for the period 2011–15 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011a) states that savings must be made in public transport. In ROI, funding for community transport in rural areas has fallen since 2009 (Pobal, 2009). While this may mean services have to be reduced, it does not necessarily mean that isolated rural areas will no longer be serviced. There are models available in providing rural transport whereby existing services can be improved with a minimum investment. There are other options which may have a relatively small cost at the set-up stage but will deliver significant long-term gains to taxpayers while improving transport for rural dwellers over the longer term. This research outlines a selection of solutions that have been implemented in other countries.

The research was conducted by CARDI and funded by OFMDFM. It examines the provision of rural transport in both Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) for older people from the point of view of policy, links between organisations providing transport and quantitative data on rural transport and rural living. It also looks at a selection of international examples of innovation which can serve as models for policy-makers, planners and rural transport providers to follow in NI and ROI.

The objectives of the research were:

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<td>1</td>
<td>To analyse policy on public transport and community transport in NI and ROI with a focus on older people, to identify potential strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improving rural transport.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>To review public and community transport in rural areas, including interviews with key stakeholders, to determine what are the current successes and challenges.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>To examine current data on rural transport across the island of Ireland.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>To provide international examples of innovation in rural transport, with a particular focus on cost-neutral or cost-effective solutions.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>To develop policy recommendations to improve transport in rural areas.</td>
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METHODOLOGY

The research\(^3\) involved a combination of stakeholder interviews, an online survey and desk research to examine rural transport in NI and ROI.

1. Desk research

   - **Rural transport provision research:** This stage involved mapping of the current provision of rural transport, particularly examining which government departments are involved with transport planning and provision, identifying the providers of transport, how it is funded and what the links are between the various organisations.

   - **Literature review:** A review of current literature on rural transport in NI and ROI concentrated on the most recent work that on the topic of rural transport. It included surveys of transport users, planning and strategy with regard to the provision of transport, academic research on the various aspects of rural transport and some international work on the challenges and solutions to rural transport issues.

   - **Policy review:** This element looked at the policies in NI and ROI which are directly relevant to transport in rural areas. It also examined the programmes for government and budget documents to determine what the overarching strategy of the two governments is for providing transport now and in the future.

   - **Innovation in transport analysis:** This element looked at international examples of innovative public or community transport provision solutions.

2. Stakeholder interviews

   Interviews were conducted with stakeholders across the island of Ireland to explore what they believe to be the barriers and opportunities in transport provision, improvements that can be made and partnerships that can be formed. Interviewees included government departments, rural organisations, consumer organisations and transport providers. The full list of interviews is available in Appendix I.

3. Online survey

   A short online survey was sent by email to 48 community transport providers; 22 responses were received. The questions focused on older passengers using community transport services, to see what they use the transport for and assess the demand for the service. The survey also gathered the opinions of community transport providers on what might improve community transport in the future.

\(^3\) Research conducted in 2012.

RURAL TRANSPORT IN IRELAND
This section sets out the provision of public transport and community transport in NI and ROI, mapping the organisations and government departments that are involved in providing transport, where funding for transport comes from and how it is distributed. It also looks at existing links between the different types of transport, e.g. education, health and social services transport.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The provision of public and community transport to rural areas and communities in NI is divided across multiple government departments and local agencies and organisations. The central provider of public transport is Translink (brand name of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), a public corporation which comprises NI Railways, Ulsterbus and Metro [buses in Belfast and the suburbs]). The board of the corporation is responsible to the Department for Regional Development.

Translink is the major partner in the Rural Transport Fund (RTF). This fund is administered by the Department for Regional Development and has been in existence since November 1998. Its primary objective is to support transport services designed to give people in rural areas improved access to work, education, healthcare, shopping and recreational activities. The RTF offers support in two main ways:

- Subsidies for public transport services provided by Translink which are economically unviable but socially necessary.
- Revenue and capital funding for Rural Community Transport Partnerships that offer a range of complementary services to the public transport network for their members.

The RTF is intended to operate as a partnership between government, community transport providers and organisations, and the general public. All projects supported by the RTF have to fulfil at least some of the following criteria:

- Target social need by improving access for rural-dwelling people to training or employment opportunities.
- Complement the work of other agencies involved in the development of rural communities.
- Support a wide range of community-based activities and have a broad base of community support.
- Encourage volunteering activity.

The RTF also provides financial support to the Community Transport Association (CTA), a network of 17 community transport partnerships. The CTA offers training, advice and information to the community transport sector as well as raising additional funding through social enterprise activities. The community transport partnerships operate the day-to-day running of the transport. The administration of the payment of the RTF is performed by the Ports and Public Transport Division within the Department for Regional Development. This division works closely with Translink’s Rural Transport Unit, the community transport partnerships and the CTA.

In November 2009, the scheme ‘Dial-a-Lift’ was introduced and funded through the RTF. It was intended to be a pilot scheme operating until March 2011 but is still running as of January 2014. Available to registered members of the rural community transport partnerships, the service is designed to allow individuals who have limited access to other transport to get to local services and facilities. While Dial-a-Lift can be used for travel to a pharmacy or some local health services, it cannot be used for travel to most health services. Instead, people must pay for their travel and be reimbursed through a claim processed by the Department of Health,
Translink also operates a number of subsidised services including ‘Hospital Link’, which brings people from rural areas to hospital appointments. Older people who hold a Translink SmartPass can travel for free on Dial-a-Lift.

The Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS) is operated through the community transport partnerships. This scheme, funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, allows eligible members of the partnerships to obtain concessionary travel when using community transport. Concessions include free travel for people over the age of 60 and half-fare for people with disabilities who hold a current SmartPass (Community Transport NI, 2012). In February 2011, a rural transport Fund Voucher Scheme was announced by the Department for Regional Development, whereby community groups and organisations who want to transport 17 or more passengers can get a £100 voucher towards the cost.

Transport of children to and from schools is operated by the five Education and Library Boards, who also issue pupil travel passes. These Boards fall under the aegis of the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2012). Pupils can also have Translink travel passes while minibuses can be run by individual schools.

Figure 1 illustrates that public and community transport in rural areas in NI can involve four separate government departments, Translink, the Education and Library Boards, the Community Transport Association and the local community transport partnerships. A fragmented system can lead to inefficiency, in terms financial savings and provision of services.

Figure 1: Summary of NI rural transport links

In 2007/08 in NI, 29% of rural households had one or more person over the pension age (Rural Development Council, 2011).
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Overall national transport in ROI is the responsibility of the Department of Transport. In a similar structure to NI, transport is operated by a statutory corporation, Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ). It has three subsidiaries, Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, and Iarnród Éireann which operates the train service.

The Board of CIÉ is appointed by the Minister for Transport and is responsible to him. A state body established in 2009, the National Transport Authority (NTA), was initially the transport authority for the Greater Dublin area (including the surrounding counties Wicklow, Meath and Kildare) and the public transport licensing agency for all of ROI.

As of April 2012, the National Transport Authority has taken over responsibility for all rural transport in a measure designed to centralise decision-making on transport and planning issues. The NTA is also introducing a ‘National Intermodal Journey Planner’, an integrated way of getting information on all public transport throughout ROI. The intention is to provide door-to-door information for all journeys, including journeys on foot and by all modes of public transport. It is also intended to provide centralised information on all public transport services, taxis, fares and timetables.

State-funded rural transport is mainly operated through the Rural Transport Programme (RTP). This was established in 2002 as a pilot initiative, but due to its success the Department of Transport provided €18.5 million in funding between 2002 and 2006, and permanently established the RTP in 2007 (Pobal, 2011). Additional funding is provided by the Department of Social Protection through the Free Travel Scheme. The budget for the RTP has been steadily decreasing, from €13 million in 2009 to €9.77 million in 2012. Community groups that apply to be part of the programme receive the bulk of funding, in addition to which the administration costs of the operator Pobal are covered (Pobal is a not-for-profit company with charitable status that administers programmes on behalf of the government, including the RTP).

Funded under the National Development Plan 2007–13, the aim of the RTP is ‘to provide a quality nationwide community-based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs’ (Pobal, 2011). It is delivered locally through 36 community-based groups which are run on a not-for-profit basis. The Rural Transport Network is the umbrella organisation for these groups. Transportation needs are identified through local knowledge and consultation within communities and with locally based agencies and organisations. Some 75% of all journeys are delivered on a door-to-door basis, collecting people from their homes and assisting them to their destination.

All journeys tend to be local in nature, with an average distance of about 15 miles. RTP services are open to everyone and people with a Free Travel Pass may travel free of charge. The RTP community-based transport services can be categorised into four main types:

- scheduled fixed services, including those that run on regular timetables with fixed departure and destination points and that do not allow deviations from the route;
- scheduled flexible services (partially demand-responsive) that run on regular timetables and have fixed departure and destination points, but which allow deviations, including advance booking and door-to-door service;
- fully demand-responsive services that respond directly to individuals’ requests, through pre-booked trips or ‘dial-a-ride’-type services, which can also be delivered by cars through either voluntary car schemes or co-ordinated hackney services;
- specialist trips – services that are usually run on short notice, for specific purposes or for a short period of time, but not on a regular, frequent basis.
The Health Service Executive (HSE) operates public health ambulance and transport services, which are free to use if the passenger is a medical card holder. There are also private ambulance and transport services which can be paid for and the cost may be reimbursed by the HSE if the passenger lives a significant distance from a hospital. Finally, community transport is available for older people who have no other way to attend health appointments. It can be used by anyone over 65 with a free travel pass and covers regular medical appointments, but not other appointments such as day procedures, GP visits or dental appointments. The Department of Education and Skills provides a school transport service for students in primary and post-primary schools. Bus Éireann administers the school transport service on behalf of the Department but does not operate all of the services.

As in NI, there have been some pilot projects which aim to integrate health transport with community transport. Cancer Connect is a service which runs to Cork city hospitals from West Cork for people requiring radiotherapy, chemotherapy or any other cancer treatment. It is operated under the West Cork Rural Transport Scheme and has made 250 journeys for 160 passengers (The Irish Examiner, 2012). Fingal’s rural bus established a transport link with Beaumont Hospital for rural dwellers that currently have to take two separate buses to reach the hospital (Fingal Independent, 2012).

Prior to August 2011, the ROI rural transport system was fractured and services were duplicated. However, following calls for greater integration of transport services, including evidence put forward from the Rural Transport Network (Rural Transport Network, 2011), changes were formally announced by Public Transport Minister Alan Kelly in 2011. Under the new system, a new ‘rural transport bus’ will replace the current dedicated school buses, community transport buses and non-emergency HSE transport. After the morning school run, school buses will be used for a variety of services before returning for the second school run. The system was piloted in six areas initially (RTE News, 2012). Another initiative is a system of low-cost hackney taxis in rural areas, a special licence for local communities to operate on-demand taxi services themselves in order to combat social isolation in rural communities (Tuam Herald, 2012).
The mapping of transport provision in NI and ROI shows that the two systems are very similar, although ROI has a dedicated Department of Transport. The new pilot ‘rural transport bus’ scheme in ROI has the potential to provide successful integration of services and avoid duplication of routes.

Figure 2 shows a summary of the ROI rural transport structure, including the proposed continuing integration of services.

**SUMMARY**

The mapping of transport provision in NI and ROI shows that the two systems are very similar, although ROI has a dedicated Department of Transport. The new pilot ‘rural transport bus’ scheme in ROI has the potential to provide successful integration of services and avoid duplication of routes.
This section provides a summary of rural transport policy in NI and ROI, with particular focus on services relevant to older people, outlining the key government documents that set out transport strategy. It is important to note that most of the high-level strategy was written before the economic crisis and subsequent reductions in government spending. As a result, the budgets to implement the policy aims may not be the same as when most policy relating to transport was developed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Several policy initiatives in NI have the aim of improving transport for older people. The Regional Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002–2012 sits within the framework of the Regional Development Strategy: shaping our future. The RTS recognises that transport is essential to provide access to employment and training opportunities, to services such as health and social services, to shops and education. Its vision is to have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system that benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life. The strategy signalled a move away from a transport system dominated by car use towards a more balanced and integrated system (Department for Regional Development, 2002). However, the effect of the strategy has been limited in terms of policy changes and integration of health, education and social services transport.

The Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015, published in March 2005, presents a vision for an accessible transport system that enables older people and disabled people to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life. Strategic Objective 3 in the strategy was ‘to develop, in partnership with key stakeholders, an integrated, fully accessible public transport system which will enable older people and people with disabilities to travel by bus, train, taxi, private and community transport services in safety and in comfort and move easily between these modes’ (Department for Regional Development, 2005).

The Programme for Government 2008–2011: building a better future explicitly recognised the importance of transport infrastructure for economic growth and social inclusion across the region. The current Programme for Government 2011–2015 has as its second priority ‘creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and well-being’. Part of this is recognising the importance of an ‘integrated transport infrastructure and improved public transport’ (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011b).

The Department of Regional Development is currently engaged in Public Transport Reform, including the introduction of the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This allows the Department to:

• Enter into service agreements and service permits for the provision of services.
• Regulate fares.
• Provide integrated ticketing arrangements.
• Designate bus stations as shared facilities.
• Regulate passenger conduct in bus stations.
• Exploit commercial opportunities arising from its public transport functions.
• Prepare a Memorandum of Understanding with the Consumer Council.

The introduction of the Act followed a public consultation exercise which was completed in February 2010. Another major reform proposed is the development of a new agency, within the Department, which would be responsible for transport provision and policy implementation.
It is intended that the agency would have a three-tier structure, consisting of:

- A top government tier responsible for policy, legislation and regulation, including the regulation of operators.
- A middle tier responsible for specifying service requirements, securing their provision and managing contracts.
- A third tier comprising transport operators to deliver public transport services (Department for Regional Development, 2012).

The necessary subordinate legislation to implement the Transport Act is currently being implemented, along with other transport reforms. In the meantime, there have been some moves to integrate health transport and community transport. On 22 May 2013, the Committee for Regional Development in NI held an inquiry into the better use of public and community sector funds for the delivery of bus transport. The concern was that services were being duplicated across the three government departments of Education, Regional Development and Health, Social Services and Public Safety and there was a lack of attempts to integrate transport provision in the public sector in NI. The Committee recommended that government departments work closer with each other and community providers to find more integrated transport solutions, including the use of bus fleets for multiple purposes (Regional Development Committee, 2013). The Committee is due to report further on comprehensive transport delivery structures in NI (NI Assembly, 2013).

The budget of the NI Executive for the period 2011–15 indicates that savings must be made in public transport. The key issue is defined as how to maintain a broad geographic network of bus and rail services during a period when revenue funding is reduced in real terms and NI remains in an economic downturn. Potential solutions outlined in the document include Translink looking at ways to reduce costs by rationalising and integrating bus and rail services; generating more income from the fare box while maintaining passenger numbers; and exploring opportunities to collaborate with the Departments of Education and Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011a). However, a reduction in service levels is likely according to news reports on Translink finances (BBC News, 2012).

### Spending on transport

Assessing exactly how much is spent on rural transport in NI is difficult. This is because there are four government departments and many other agencies that contribute to providing transport. Some available figures and estimates are detailed below.

- According to the Programme for Government budget document, the Department for Regional Development has been allocated about £200 million to spend on public transport over the budget period (five years), or a spend of £40 million per year. £1.2 billion has been allocated to be spent on roads, a ratio of 6:1 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011).
- Home-to-school transport has been estimated to cost £74 million annually (Ulster Unionist Party, 2011).
- An estimated £60 million is spent per year on health transport, comprising £53 million on the NI Ambulance Service and the remainder being the operating costs of transport by the five Health and Social Care Trusts.5
- DARD spends an estimated £300,000 annually on the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2011).

This gives a total of £178 million of the government budget spent on transport each year. By comparison, the total projected spend for 2011–12 is £10.3 billion, which means rural transport spending is in the region of 1.7% of the total spend of the NI Executive. This excludes spending on matters reserved to the Westminster government. According to Eurostat data, spending on transport in ROI was 2.6% of GDP in 2010, while the UK spent 1.7% of GDP on transport. The highest EU spending on transport was the Czech Republic at 4.8%, with the lowest being Malta at 1.1% (Eurostat, 2012).

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4 Two integrated schemes are at the pilot stage, the Easilink scheme between Enniskillen and Altnagelvin Hospital and an integrated scheme in Dungannon and Cookstown. The former is at the early stages of evaluation whilst the latter is at the very early stages of development.

5 This estimate is based on the Annual Accounts 2010–2011 of the NI Ambulance Service HSC Trust, Belfast HSC Trust, Northern HSC Trust, Western HSC Trust, South Eastern HSC Trust and Southern HSC Trust.
In ROI, the average weekly spend on transport for retired people is €75, with the vast majority spent on cars, insurance and petrol. This is 70% of the average spend among all age groups (Central Statistics Office, 2012).

**REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

The National Development Plan (NDP) is the integrated strategic development framework for regional development, for rural communities and for the protection of the environment combined with common economic and social goals. Part of the plan was the implementation of the capital investment framework Transport 21, through which the transport system in ROI was upgraded. It ran from 2006 to 2010.

Transport for older people was expressly addressed in An Action Plan to Promote More Age Friendly Transport Services, which was launched in June 2007. The Action Plan was developed and implemented by Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, the Rural Transport Programme and Veolia Transport. It focused on including the views of older people, providing age awareness training for staff and an enhanced focus on older people in transport providers' internal and external communications (Department of Transport, 2009a).

The overall transport policy in ROI is set out in A Sustainable Transport Future: a new transport policy for Ireland 2009–2020 (Department of Transport, 2009a). It recognises that transport is vital for the economy and that safe and comfortable travel is important. The document lays out plans to improve quality of life and access to transport for all, in particular for people with reduced mobility and those who may experience isolation. One action stated in the document is ‘to develop deeper integration of travel and spatial planning and to support the full integration and alignment of transport plans with the development plan process and local area planning’. Public consultation for the strategy finished in April 2008, before the worst of the economic downturn, with the document being published in February 2009. While there are references to economic difficulties, the over-arching policies do not take account of the much-reduced spending on transport.

The National Integrated Rural Transport Committee was established in 2012 to oversee moves to better integrate rural transport in ROI. The government’s long-term vision is to achieve a single point of delivery for all rural transport needs. A plan is in place to evolve the Rural Transport Network from 35 independent companies into 18 consolidated Transport Coordination Units aligned with local authorities (Rural Transport Network, 2013).

Some rural transport providers under the RTP are taking steps to better integrate rural transport in the areas falling under their remit, co-ordinating the design of and providing services under a service level agreement for the Health Service Executive. Sixteen Rural Transport Groups are providing some school and pre-school services while others provide contract services for other state supported bodies (National Transport Authority, 2013).

**Spending on transport**

Overall, the annual expenditure on state-funded transport was estimated in 2011 to be in excess of €240m (Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit, 2011).

**EUROPEAN UNION TRANSPORT POLICY**

While most transport policy is fixed at the individual member state level, there are some European Union-wide policies which affect or influence transport in NI and ROI. In 2001, the European Commission published the European Transport Policy for 2010: time to decide. It analysed the existing situation with regard to transport and set out an ambitious action programme up to 2010. It aimed to improve the sustainability of transport, put safety and service quality at the heart of transport policy while supporting economic growth and maintaining the right to mobility.
In June 2006 the Commission adopted the mid-term review of the White Paper entitled *Keep Europe Moving: sustainable mobility for our continent*. It changed the policy to take into account new factors such as globalisation, EU enlargement, energy efficiency and the diversification of transport use. One of the European Regional Development Fund objectives is to have clean urban public transport and maintain access to transport to promote competitiveness.

A white paper on transport was produced in 2001, entitled *Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system* (European Commission, 2011). As well as setting out a long-term vision for a transport system in 2050, it sets short-term goals of improving local transport services for older people and those with reduced mobility. The ultimate aim is an efficient and integrated mobility system in Europe.

**SUMMARY**

Much of the high-level policy on transport in NI and ROI focuses on the development of a sustainable, integrated transport system that is accessible to all. Many policy initiatives were written before the economic crisis and thus before budgets on transport were reduced.
CURRENT DATA ON RURAL TRANSPORT
This section sets out the findings of a quantitative data analysis of rural transport and rural living across the island of Ireland, particularly relating to the older population. It illustrates that there are gaps in our knowledge and understanding of rural transport and it is often difficult to compare data between NI and ROI.6

Population
In ROI, the population of over-65s in rural areas was 49% in 2009, while the total population in rural areas was 57% (Central Statistics Office, 2011b). In NI, 68% of the population lives in urban areas and 32% in rural areas (NISRA, 2011). In 2007/8, 29% of rural households had one or more person over pension age (Rural Development Council, 2011). ROI has a higher percentage of the population living in rural areas than NI, and a much lower population density (65 per square km. vs. 133 per square km. in NI), suggesting more people living in isolated rural areas.

Weekly spend on transport
In ROI, the average weekly spend on transport by retired people is €75, with the vast majority spent on cars, insurance and petrol. This is 70% of the average spend among all age groups (Central Statistics Office, 2012). In NI, people aged 65 to 74 spend £41 per week on transport, or 65% of the average, while the over 75s spend £16 per week, one quarter of the average (Office of National Statistics, 2009).

Income
In 2009 the weekly gross income of an older person living in an urban area in ROI was €480, compared to €377 for an older person living in a rural area. This is a difference of more than 27% (Central Statistics Office, 2011b). In NI, in 2011, people aged 65 and over living in Belfast had an average income of €450 per week. In other urban areas the average was £371 and in rural areas it was £385 (NISRA, 2012). The average weekly household income before housing costs is £381 per week in urban areas in NI, compared to £421 in rural areas (NISRA, 2011). Half of all households that earned less than 60% of the UK median household income before household charges in NI live in rural areas (NISRA, 2011). In ROI, 13% of people aged 65+ in rural areas are at risk of poverty, compared to 7% in urban areas. However, the rate of consistent poverty among over-65s is higher in urban areas: 1.4% compared to 0.8% (Central Statistics Office, 2011b). In NI, 33% of pensioners living in rural areas live in households experiencing income poverty compared to 12% in the Belfast area and 16% in other urban areas (OFMDFM, 2006).

Driving licences
Some 74% of men aged 60+ in ROI hold driving licences. For women aged 60 and over, the figure is 40% (Central Statistics Office, 2007). More older people hold driving licences in NI. In NI 85% of men and 66% of women aged 60–69 have a licence. For the over-70 age group, 81% of men and 41% of women have licences. (Department for Regional Development, 2011b).

Access to services
There are no directly comparable figures on access to services in rural areas between NI and ROI. In ROI, a 2007 Central Statistics Office survey found that one-third of rural households reported difficulty in accessing banking services and general medical practitioners, compared with 15% and 11% respectively for their urban counterparts. In addition 35% of households

headed by a person aged 65+ had difficulty accessing public transport, 34% had difficulty accessing banking services, while 29% had difficulty accessing a general practitioner (Central Statistics Office, 2007). In NI, a Department for Regional Development survey in 2011 asked passengers about difficulties in doing their shopping using public transport: 30% of people who used public transport reported difficulties, but 13% of this was due to problems carrying shopping (Department for Regional Development, 2011b). Of the remainder, 6% noted the cost of taxis or public transport as a barrier to travel, 5% said the weather was a difficulty and 4% said a personal disability caused them problems in going shopping using public transport (Department for Regional Development, 2011b).

Access to health services is essential for older people in rural areas, yet there are gaps in our understanding of how often health services are required and how easy or difficult it is for older people to access them. In ROI, the lowest quintile of people aged over 65 lives an average of 91km away from the nearest acute hospital (Kalogirou & Foley, 2006). A 2007 comparison of access times in rural areas to the NI average showed that getting to all services, including GP and Accident & Emergency services, took a longer time in rural areas. Travel times to a GP or A&E were 45% longer in rural areas while access as an inpatient in an acute hospital was 60% longer (Connolly et al, 2011).

Travel and mobility

According to the findings of The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing in ROI in 2011, 70% of the rural population aged 50+ regard their local public transport as poor, compared to fewer than 20% in Dublin (TILDA, 2011). There is no comparable data in NI.

Data on difficulty accessing transport due to a disability is not available in ROI, but in NI 19% of people in a 2011 survey said they had some difficulty with travel due to a physical disability or long-standing health problem. This figure increases to 39% among the over-60 age group (Department for Regional Development, 2011b).

Car journeys

In comparing the mode of transport for journeys between ROI and NI, it is apparent that the percentage of journeys used by car is very similar. A Central Statistics Office survey in 2011 in ROI shows that 64% of journeys are made as a car driver and 9% as a car passenger (Central Statistics Office, 2011a). Among the 50+ age group, 76% drive themselves as their main mode of transport, while 14% are primarily driven by a family member (TILDA, 2011). In NI, car journeys account for 71% of all journeys made by all age groups (Department for Regional Development, 2011b).

Transport provision for non-drivers

For the 65–74 age group in ROI, 57% of journeys are made by car; 14% as car passengers and 21% walking. For the 75+ age group, 42% of journeys are made driving a car; 22% are as a car passenger; 26% are by foot and 6% by bus (Central Statistics Office, 2011a). Further data is needed on how people who do not drive travel in rural areas. It is important to note also that many older people do not drive due to the cost of fuel, upkeep, etc. There is a broad spectrum of older people across the island of Ireland and travels needs should be understood in this context. This data is available in NI, through a survey conducted in 2004. That survey found that family (86%) and friends (79%) were the two most common providers of transport for older people in rural areas. Some 61% used their own car and 52% used taxis. The proportion of people who used bus services was 41% and community transport 32% (Rural Community Network, 2004).

Transport patterns

A 2011 survey shows that for those aged 65+ in ROI, 23% of all journeys were for personal business, 17% were for shopping/food/drink and 12% were for visits or social entertainment. The remaining journeys were for other purposes 17%, companion journeys 10%, work 3% or all purposes 11% (Central Statistics Office, 2011a). In NI, a similar survey was conducted by the Department for Regional Development but the age group surveyed is everyone aged 60+
compared to 65+ in ROI. This shows gender differences in reasons for travel within this age group. Among men in NI aged 60+, 31% used public transport for shopping, 22% for commuting and 20% for personal business. For women aged 60+, 36% used transport for shopping and 24% for personal business (Department for Regional Development, 2011b).

A Consumer Council survey of people in rural areas in NI from 2009 shows that people felt that more frequent services (34%), availability of trains (27%), more park-and-ride services (21%) and better information (14%) would encourage them to use public transport as an alternative to a private car (The Consumer Council, 2009). There is no equivalent data in ROI.

Measuring transport deprivation

In providing transport services in rural areas, identifying existing gaps in transport services is vital. In 2007, Pobal commissioned external consultants to develop a rational and impartial methodology for measuring transport deprivation in ROI. It used the time it takes to access bus and rail services in each electoral district and assigned an accessibility score between zero and ten. Eight electoral districts had zero accessibility, 22 scored one on the scale and 25 scored 2 (Pobal, 2008). There are 3,440 electoral districts in total. In NI, Kamruzzaman & Hine (2011) developed an index to identify patterns of transport disadvantage in space and time. It found that transport disadvantage is based on a number of factors which should be combined to measure disadvantage, including not driving, being older and having a low income.

Gaps in data

While some aspects of rural transport can be compared between NI and ROI directly using current data, there are many gaps in our knowledge and understanding of transport. Some of the areas where further information could be useful to planning and policy in public and community transport include:

- Difficulties experienced by rural dwellers in accessing health and other essential services.
- Information on how often older people need to get to health services and how they currently travel to health appointments.
- The relationship between physical disability and access to transport.
- The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing includes an assessment of public transport in urban areas compared to rural areas. As it is a longitudinal study, this will enable continual evaluation of how public transport is performing in the opinion of older people over time. A similar theme/question in the Northern Ireland Cohort for the Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NICOLA) would be beneficial in assessing the performance of public transport.
- More information on how older people in rural who do not drive travel.
- Older people’s reasons for travel and transport patterns.
- Gender differences on reasons for travel.
- Data are available in NI encouraging people to use public transport more comparable data for ROI would be useful.
- An all-island measurement of transport deprivation in rural areas would help to identify areas which are most lacking in services.

SUMMARY

Understanding the individual needs of passengers who use rural transport – how they use it and what they use it for – is essential in providing a transport system that takes account of the requirements of the people it serves. Current data on rural transport indicate that it is small groups of people, particularly older people on low incomes who do not drive, who depend most on public and community transport to access essential services. Further research on the needs of these groups is required.
LITERATURE REVIEW
This section presents the findings from a review of the current literature on rural transport, focusing on how transport affects groups, especially older people in rural areas who do not drive. It includes information gathered from NI, ROI and other international sources.

**THE RURAL TRANSPORT CHALLENGE**

Providing transport to rural communities is challenging because the low population density makes providing adequate and sustainable transport links expensive, yet people living in these communities who do not drive have a need for transport. High levels of car ownership can help to reduce the problem, but then vulnerable groups such as older people who do not drive or are driving less may be left with a diminished service which not enough people use to make economically viable. People who drive are then dissuaded from switching to the diminished public transport service, compounding the problem (Hoyle & Knowles, 2001).

As our population ages, more and more people will be living well into old age and maintaining active lives within society. Adequate transport provision in rural areas may help to combat social exclusion (CARDI, 2010). Transport systems must also be based on an understanding of mobility and accessibility needs (Alsnih & Hensher, 2003). Vulnerable households in rural areas should be a key target of successful rural transport initiatives. In NI, these vulnerable households have been identified as people with low incomes, households with children and older people who do not drive (Connolly et al, 2011). Older people over the age of 75 are particularly at risk of social exclusion and isolation. The mobility needs of older people change as they age, and transport planning and policy must understand changing mobility needs to better cater for these, and other, vulnerable groups (Alsnih & Hensher, 2003).

**Long-term benefits**

In examining current literature on transport provision in rural areas, several common themes emerge which highlight both the difficulties and the potential solutions to the challenge of providing sustainable services. One of the major difficulties is that if rural transport is examined purely from a costs basis, it will rarely be judged as economically feasible. However, Kavanagh et al (2005) argue that it is a public good to provide transport to economically vulnerable groups, and that health and social benefits arise from better public transport provision in rural areas, particularly in combating social exclusion and developing rural communities (Kavanagh et al, 2005) (Walsh et al, 2012). As such, the additional public funding required to support rural transport provision can reap long-term benefits in savings on healthcare and elsewhere. Weir & McCabe (2008) argue that closing or limiting services based purely on economies of scale is short-sighted. In NI, there is a current trend towards the centralisation of public services (Connolly et al, 2011) and in view of this they argue that rural transport must be linked to these services in an appropriate manner so that people can access them.

**Social and mental health benefits**

Transport is one of a range of social, environmental and economic factors outside the healthcare sector which are known to influence health (Kavanagh et al., 2005). Rural transport networks that are catering for the needs of older people can provide mental health and social benefits to people living in rural areas. Transport is also vital for accessing other resources which form the basis of social inclusion as well as physical and mental well-being. These include travel to work or school, visiting family and friends, access to a GP or hospital, shopping, and access to recreational facilities (Kavanagh et al., 2005).

Maximising the participation, capacity and inclusion of older people in rural communities is essential in tackling social exclusion. Research funded by CARDI in 2012 showed how transport and mobility were key factors in combating social exclusion (Walsh et al., 2012).
Demand-responsive transport

Weir & McCabe (2008) recognise that a door-to-door public transport service cannot be provided to every household in rural areas, particularly in the more remote areas. It has therefore been argued that a combination of services at different levels of frequency is needed (Weir & McCabe, 2008). Evidence from the Commission for Integrated Transport in the UK suggests that demand-responsive transport services are less effective at meeting the transport needs of rural dwellers than their continental European counterparts. The Commission for Integrated Transport research found that region-wide and nationwide operations in the Netherlands and Switzerland have lower subsidy costs per trip than schemes in the UK, which are restricted to local authority areas or even smaller localities. The report from the Commission proposes that operators should be allowed to run schemes involving similar economies of scale to those operating in continental Europe, where a fleet of small vehicles that provide shared transport to passengers who pre-book would provide transport to everyone, the wider public as well as the restricted mobility groups that already use local on-demand services (Commission for Integrated Transport, 2008).

As taxis are demand-responsive, providing vouchers to certain disadvantaged groups, such as older people without cars, to pay for taxi journeys has been proposed as a solution to transport in rural areas (Rural Community Network, 2004) (Community Technical Aid, 2006). Schemes make use of existing taxi operators and therefore have low overheads and require little start-up investment. The vouchers are issued to people who meet the eligibility criteria and provide the means for their travel at a time of their choosing (Community Technical Aid, 2006). Taxi voucher schemes are operated by some councils in the UK and there have been calls to introduce such schemes in NI and ROI. In England, the National Concessionary Travel Scheme was introduced in 2008; this allows for concessionary fares on buses for people of state pension age and those with a disability. The scheme is administered at county council level, and county councils can use their discretion to offer taxi vouchers in place of bus passes for people who can prove they are unable to use any other means of public transport and do not drive themselves (Department for Transport, 2010). Some county councils have discontinued offering taxi vouchers due to reduced budgets and the high cost of individual taxis, using alternatives such as a demand-responsive minibus in Durham County Council (Durham County Council, 2012).

Travel information

Good information on travel options is essential, particularly for older or disabled people. According to a 2007 report, the lack of suitable, accessible information is one of the barriers that makes travel difficult for disabled people and older people in NI (IMTAC, 2007). It found additional problems including a lack of knowledge among transport providers about how to provide accessible information, particularly in the community sector. A 2012 progress update showed that while steps had been taken to improve the accessibility of information on transport in NI, more could be done to promote concessionary fares, improve website content and make accessing travel information easier (IMTAC, 2012).

Car dependency

Walsh et al (2012) found that for older people access to a car, or the ability to drive, has a significant impact on their quality of life. This is especially true in rural areas. This is why giving up driving is regarded by many older people as a watershed event in their lives; one which they envisage will reduce their quality of life and their ability to participate in activities (Gilhooly, Hamilton, & O’Neill, 2002). Men are particularly negatively disposed to giving up driving as they are more likely to have driven for longer and to be less able or willing to adapt to life without a car (Alsnih & Hensher, 2003).

The importance of private transport as an economic and social link for older people within rural communities should not be underestimated. The car may be viewed as being indispensable for maintaining a sense of independence and social connection (Walsh et al, 2012). Hence the challenge is to ensure adequate rural transport for vulnerable groups, particularly older people who do not drive or have access to lifts from friends or family (CARDI, 2010).
Encouraging more public transport use

Encouraging more use of public transport is one way of trying to make the services more economically sustainable. Research conducted in 2009 by the NI Consumer Council shows that in rural areas people felt that more frequent services (34%), availability of trains (27%), more park-and-ride services (21%) and better information (14%) would encourage them to use public transport as an alternative to a private car (The Consumer Council, 2009). A survey of travel pass usage in NI conducted by the Department for Regional Development in 2011 shows that the main reasons why people did not use their pass at all or more often were that they have access to a car and prefer to use it (25%), public transport in the area did not suit their needs (24%) or they had difficulty in boarding buses or trains (14%). The same survey shows that travel pass usage for all groups is higher in urban than in rural areas. In Belfast, four out of five respondents (80%) used their pass more than once a fortnight, compared to 58% of respondents living in the East of NI and less than half of respondents (47%) living in the more rural west of NI (Department for Regional Development, 2011a).

A case study conducted by Coughlan et al (2011) of a rural transport initiative in County Cork in ROI suggested that the use of the public transport could be made more appealing to 63% of respondents if financial support was provided to make it cheaper. For people who were in employment, employer support for the transport scheme was also important (Coughlan et al, 2011). Another ROI study noted that the uptake and value of the Free Travel Scheme varies greatly depending on individual circumstances such as mobility, income, general health and lifestyle (Quinn, 2000). Other research shows that the attitudes of people toward public transport vary by gender, health status and personal outlook, including views on independence and reciprocity (Davey, 2007).

Quality of life and transport

As well as taking individual factors into account when providing for rural transport, it is also important to note that journeys are taken for different reasons. For example, if an older person has to take a journey to travel for a health appointment, they may be more likely to get a lift from family or friends than if it is for a discretionary journey. However, the discretionary trips may contribute significantly to quality of life, and that quality may be lost when private transport is unavailable (Davey, 2007). The benefits of community transport in one study, conducted by a community transport provider in ROI, were not found to be related to accessing services, but more for things that increased quality of life, such as greater independence (96%), opportunity to meet friends and neighbours (96%), hear the local news (76%) or have a chat (72%) (McKenna, 2006). It has also been found by rural groups in NI that community transport increases people’s ability to participate in social activities (Rural Community Network, 2004).

Professional planning

Another major issue to emerge from a review of transport literature is that better and more professional planning of services is required so that they may serve communities effectively and can be sustained (Mackey & Hine, 2004) (Weir & McCabe, 2008). If expertise is not available to local authorities, it can be difficult for them to understand issues such as the relationship between transport and social exclusion, and thus difficult to target resources (Mackey & Hine, 2004). The Community Transport Association in NI argues that community transport should be about providing flexible and responsive solutions to unmet transport needs (Community Transport Association, 2010).

Kamruzzaman & Hine (2011) studied travel diaries collected from three case study areas in NI and used the findings to identify patterns of transport disadvantage. In tracking the transport needs of passengers, Kamruzzaman & Hine used six indicators:

- Number of unique locations visited.
- Distance travelled.
- Area of activity spaces.
- Frequency of activity participation.
- Types of activity participated in.
- Duration of participation (Kamruzzaman & Hine, 2011).
Integration and rural transport

Efficiently integrated transport services can be a cornerstone of successful rural transport policy, particularly in times when funding is reduced and savings need to be found (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2005). It can be difficult to optimise services operated by multiple service providers, each with overlapping objectives (Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit, 2011). In ROI, a review of expenditure on publicly funded local transport in 2011 suggested a consensus that greater co-ordination and integration of local transport services should deliver efficiencies and productivity. However, progress on integration was deemed to be poor due to the lack of central direction and practical barriers (Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit, 2011).

The NI Audit Office examined the integration of education, health and social services transport (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2005). It noted several different ways in which these services could be integrated. Co-operation arrangements – for example, between an education board and a health trust – could include joint purchasing of maintenance, fuel or insurance to improve services. A joint-use agreement might be an arrangement whereby two different entities would share resources, such as vehicles, but maintain separate management and operations. Finally, as the NI Audit Office points out, complete integration of services would exist where one lead agency would consolidate health, education and social services, and assume responsibility for operations. The report noted some key factors involved with co-ordinating services in NI, such as vehicle design and insurance, maintenance and availability of a transport fleet and driver arrangements. It strongly recommended the co-ordination of transport services in NI, particularly given budgetary challenges and constraints (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2005).

It is not just research which indicates that integration will improve transport services, as a survey of passengers in NI showed that lack of co-ordination between buses and trains was a common complaint (The Consumer Council, 2009). However, when services are integrated, good-quality information, particularly accurate timetables, is needed for passengers to enable travel across a range of transport services (Weir & McCabe, 2008).

CASE STUDY- BYABUSSEN, SWEDEN

The results of a pilot project involving an integrated bus service, ‘Byabussen’ in rural Sweden, show that integration and co-ordination are important factors in the success of a new transport service, especially in rural areas (Transport Research Knowledge Centre, 2010). The Swedish project shows that integration must be about key players participating from an early stage and about continuously teaching and informing each other about the areas of responsibilities. The ‘Byabussen’ project claimed that further research or a best practice guide in integration of transport service is needed for rural areas to overcome issues such as expense increases, problems with shared responsibilities between institutions and a lack of accessibility (Transport Research Knowledge Centre, 2010).
Effective transport policy
The World Bank has a Rural Transport Knowledge Base which aims to gather information on rural transport around the world. The emphasis is on providing transport in developing countries but many lessons can be learned and applied in NI and ROI as well.

RURAL TRANSPORT KNOWLEDGE BASE
The knowledge base lists three requirements developed by the World Bank which rural transport must meet in order to be effective:

1. It must ensure that a continuing capability exists to support an improved material standard of living. This corresponds to the concept of economic and financial sustainability.

2. It must generate the greatest possible improvement in the general quality of life, not merely an increase in traded goods. This relates to the concept of environmental and ecological sustainability.

3. The benefits that transport produces must be shared equitably by all sections of the community. This can be termed social sustainability (World Bank, 2012).

SUMMARY
Much of the current literature argues that integration of transport and working partnerships are important aspects of saving costs and providing efficient services. Current research shows how fundamental good transport links can be in rural communities for people who do not drive, and how providing good transport now can have positive health outcomes and other social benefits such as combating social exclusion. The research and literature underscores the importance of other factors when analysing the benefits of transport services.
STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW FINDINGS
CARDI conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in NI and ROI,7 with the aim of gathering opinions on the challenges in providing rural transport, opportunities and potential solutions. The stakeholders were drawn from private companies, government and the voluntary and community sectors (community transport, rural and health agencies). The discussion focused on how best to use existing funding and infrastructure in providing transport to rural communities. There were also questions which dealt specifically with the challenge of providing transport for older people who do not drive. This section presents the findings from these interviews. It summarises the opinions of the stakeholders grouped together by themes.

Key challenges

There was a strong consensus from interviewees that the key challenge in providing rural transport is that Ireland, ROI and NI, is a society in which the majority of journeys are made by private car. This means that there is a small demand for public transport. While this does not pose a problem for people who want to continue driving, it is a challenge for people who do not drive or have no access to lifts from family or friends. Services such as hospitals are increasingly being centralised and the public transport network may be inadequate for people without a car to reach these services. Current transport solutions are considered unsuitable, and a central challenge is in providing a public transport system that is based on where people who use the system want to go and when.

The message from the majority of interviewees was that there is no overarching plan to deal with or co-ordinate rural transport at the local level. Some interviewees felt that transport solutions are devised centrally and imposed on communities rather than being based on local knowledge and experience of what is likely to work. It was also felt that stronger partnerships could exist between government departments, transport providers and other agencies. The message from interviewees in NI was that there is insufficient integration between transport for education, health appointments and other systems such as community transport. The transport provided by rural community organisations is broadly considered effective by stakeholders in both NI and ROI, but limited in what it can provide. Another challenge identified was the lack of a good information technology system whereby passengers can get information on what services are available.

Barriers and pitfalls

Interviewees were asked for their opinions on the potential barriers and pitfalls involved with setting up new rural transport initiatives. Responses were based either on initiatives that have been tried without success, or on initiatives currently operating that are facing major challenges.

All participants agreed that for services to be successful they need to be designed for the target consumer group, i.e. the travel requirements of groups such as older people who do not drive and who depend on public or community transport.

One interviewee felt that new services in rural areas are largely promoted through word of mouth, or a recommendation from someone who has used them. This gives people the confidence to use the service, but it takes a long time to build up this promotion of a new service. One interviewee suggested that new initiatives need to be supported by sufficient resources and developed properly over time. Otherwise, it can be difficult to build momentum or gain any learning from the experience.

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7 The full list of interviewees is available in Appendix 1.
Opportunities for improving rural transport

Joining up services was identified by all interviewees as a major opportunity for improving rural transport. Pilot projects for doing this have already been launched in ROI, but in NI some interviewees expressed a feeling that health transport is not included in general transport planning and that buses used for one purpose, e.g. home-to-school transport, could be used during the day for other transport needs. It was argued by some interviewees that community transport needs to link in with the main transport network provided by Translink. One interviewee in NI felt that integration of services will not happen overnight, but starting on a project-by-project basis could be the path toward its implementation.

Several interviewees felt that a goal of public and community transport could be to bring people who do not drive from a rural area to a provincial town with sufficient transport links using a combination of transport methods, integrated and working efficiently together. Most interviewees suggested that we need to understand better what the demand for services in rural areas is and respond to that, with one interviewee mentioning the Local Transport Plan model in England as a way of achieving this.

The establishment of a unilateral decision-making agency within the Department for Regional Development was seen by several NI interviewees as a potentially good opportunity for rural transport, but the delivery is all-important: it must fulfil the need for an integrated transport system planned in accordance with community needs. A culture of silo mentality and lack of will to think about shared resources between departments were cited as barriers to this integration. Transparency of information regarding the transport budget was seen as a future opportunity to determine where savings could be made.

Rural transport and the ageing population

Interviewees in both ROI and NI felt that transport policy is not ready for the ageing population across the island of Ireland, although one interviewee in NI felt that the policy itself is good in aspiration, but not in delivery. In NI, it was felt by some that transport policy is designed for getting people to and from work. In ROI, one interviewee noted that while the government has the facts and figures on demographics and knows the ageing population is a major challenge, there has been no advance planning for this in terms of transport policy.

One ROI interviewee pointed out that older people are increasingly capable of defining their own transport needs, claiming that older retirees are more and more active in their communities. Nevertheless, older people in isolated rural areas who do not drive themselves are a vulnerable group in terms of access to transport, according to some of the stakeholders.

It was felt by some interviewees that older drivers tend to prefer much shorter journeys and may not be comfortable in driving long distances, for example, into Belfast for hospital appointments, shopping, etc. Interviewees recognised that older people are also not a homogenous group and should not be considered as such, as some older people may value their independence in travelling to appointments or other purposes, while others may like the interaction with friends and family when they are driven.

Rural transport partnerships

The stakeholder groups taking part in the interviews were in general agreement that providing good rural transport requires stronger co-operation and partnerships, at central government and local levels. With rural transport being an issue that affects at least three government departments in both NI and ROI, building a culture of co-operation between them is a long process, but a necessary one if the best transport system possible is to be provided within the budget constraints.

As well as interaction at a central government level, interviewees felt that at a local level partnerships need to be built up between community transport providers, public transport operators (CIE and Translink) and commercial operators. The input of operators in charge of home-to-school transport and health transport is also essential in avoiding duplication (whereby multiple buses may be operating on the same route but for different purposes).
**Table 1: Analysis of stakeholder interview transport issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transport issue</th>
<th>Analysis of interviewee responses</th>
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| Ageing population                | • Transport policy in NI and ROI is not sufficiently prepared for the needs of an ageing population.  
• Demand for community transport services among older age groups is increasing.  
• Advance planning for the increasing numbers of older people is essential.  
• Many older people will define their own transport needs in the future, while others may remain vulnerable to social exclusion.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Future steps                     | • A new centralised agency for transport operations and transport planning in NI could work with co-operation from stakeholders.  
• Pilot projects using school buses to transport older people in rural areas in ROI are a new approach.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Integrated transport services    | • Strong agreement on the need for integration.  
• Reservations about how difficult integration may prove in practice.  
• ‘Silo mentality’ in government departments cited as a barrier in NI and ROI.  
• Partnerships with private operators at the local level are important.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Transport budgets                | • Stronger partnerships and integrated transport would yield budget savings.  
• Sharing vehicles and joint agreements for maintenance are cost-effective solutions.  
• Departments of Health should be involved in order to save costs on non-emergency health appointments.  
• Clarity of information on what is being spent on transport is needed.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

**SUMMARY**

As with the literature review, the need for closer working partnerships, particularly between government departments, emerged as a key issue from the interviews. Integration of transport, in terms of budgets, infrastructure and other resources was considered to be a potential solution to reduced funding. Most stakeholders believed that savings could be made through more effective use of budgets and taking advantage of opportunities for working across departments and sectors
INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION IN RURAL TRANSPORT
A number of international examples of innovation in community and public transport in rural areas are identified in this section.

It is important to note that there is no one solution to providing rural transport that can be implemented immediately. Much can be learned about successful transport provision from international examples, while providers in ROI and NI can learn from the transport initiatives and measures implemented by each other.

Each example was selected for its innovation in providing a potential solution to an issue of rural transport which has arisen in the literature review, desk research or interviews:

- Integration of planning and policy.
- Encouraging volunteer drivers.
- Use of vehicles for multiple purposes.
- Efficient use of resources through IT solutions.
- Partnership agreements to achieve savings.
- Demand-responsive transport for isolated areas.

**AN INTEGRATED TRANSPORT SOLUTION: TRANSPORT FOR NSW, AUSTRALIA**

*(New South Wales Department of Transport, 2011a)*

In 2011, the legislative assembly in New South Wales in Australia passed legislation which created a new agency with sole responsibility for transport in the state, Transport for NSW. The vision of the NSW government is for an integrated transport authority which drives better transport outcomes for the NSW community. All decision-making for planning and policy is centralised within the new agency. The organisation is responsible for improving the customer experience, planning, programme administration, policy, regulation, procuring transport services, infrastructure and freight. It has control over all forms of transport, including taxis, buses, trains, ferries and tourist vehicles. The agency was formed specifically to challenge the silo mentality of transport provision in New South Wales, achieving cost savings and avoiding duplication of services. The total cost for transport in NSW in 2011–12 was projected to be Aus$9.8 billion *(New South Wales Department of Transport, 2011b)*.

New South Wales is the most populous state in Australia, with over 60% of the population living in the Sydney metropolitan region. The remainder of the population is spread out over a vast distance, with many isolated areas lacking access to main transport corridors. To combat social exclusion in these areas, the Community Transport Programme within Transport for NSW aims to address transport disadvantage at the local level, primarily by promoting efficient use of transport resources that exist within the community. They define transport disadvantage as ‘a circumstance or set of circumstances that leaves those that are affected by it in a situation where they have limited or no access to private transport and they have difficulty in gaining access to conventional transport systems’.

The Community Transport programme targets people whose access to mainstream transport services is limited by physical, social or geographical factors, with funding from the state and federal governments. It is centrally co-ordinated by Transport for NSW but local providers operate the services.

Another important innovation of Transport for NSW is the Home and Community Care (HACC) transport sub-programme. The HACC programme provides community care services to frail people of all age groups with disabilities, and their carers. The aim of the programme is to enhance the independence of people in these groups and avoid premature admission to long-term residential care. Transport for NSW takes charge of transport for people under the HACC programme where required. It achieves efficiencies in this through the use of spare capacity from other services under its remit.

Transport for NSW is a very recently introduced solution, therefore no external performance evaluations of the success of the project have taken place to date. A discussion paper and public consultation on the future of transport was launched in February 2012, and there is
a strong emphasis on research and consultation with customers, communities, transport specialists, private industry and all levels of government (Government of New South Wales, 2012). Initial concerns have been raised about how the agency will interact with other government departments following its establishment. Transport for NSW is devising the state’s next transport plan, but other relevant government agencies such as Infrastructure NSW have their own priorities (Sydney Morning Herald, 2011). Representatives of private business have praised the innovation as ‘a significant change of culture within the NSW public service from competition to cooperation’ (Sydney Business Chamber, 2011).

- **Cost:** While in the initial integration phase individual transport providers and groups may have to cede some budget, the Transport for NSW model is intended to bring long-term savings while maintaining the same standard of services. Hence, it is a cost-neutral solution to rural transport, using existing resources and infrastructure.

**AN INNOVATIVE, VOLUNTEER-DRIVEN SOLUTION: ITN AMERICA, USA**

(ITN America, 2012)

Mobility is ranked as the third-highest issue for older people in America. A not-for-profit organisation called ITN America, based in Portland, Maine, aims to provide door-to-door transport to thousands of older people across the US. This is an innovative solution which interacts with local and state government to provide an on-demand tailored driving service. Older people can trade in their own cars to pay for transport, and volunteer drivers can store up credits to provide for their own future transport needs. This may serve as a means to encourage more volunteer drivers for older people in rural areas in ROI and NI. Volunteer credits are also used to fund older people with low incomes in using the programme. Adult children can also buy gift certificates for older relatives to use the system. As with budget airlines, trips booked in advance for off-peak hours are cheaper than last-minute journeys in rush hour. The organisers have also linked with shopping and health centres to co-fund trips made by older people.

Research conducted by ITN America shows that the transition from driving to not driving can be made easier if preparations are made early and alternative transport is discussed. The system provides a way whereby older people can earn the transport that they require when they are no longer driving through volunteering. It provides a door-to-door service that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Additional funding comes from corporate sponsorship, and assistance is available for older people with low incomes. Furthermore, the software system used for booking transport and volunteering is available for use.

Many of the interviewees in both NI and ROI were aware of ITN America and its potential benefits. While they were enthusiastic about the innovation, some potential drawbacks were identified if it were to be established in NI and ROI. These include the costs of setting up the system initially, the lack of accessible vehicles, given that people would be using their own cars, and the question of whether or not it would work in isolated rural areas given that the system depends on having sufficient volunteers. There may also be issues relating to insurance cover for volunteer drivers.

An evaluation of the programme, funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies, was undertaken in 2007–10 to determine the impact on quality of life for customers and their families. It found that transport difficulties among customers decreased from 64% before membership to 43% one year after membership. Worry among family members that their relative did not have access to adequate transport decreased from 65% to 19% after membership of the programme. Finally, two-thirds of the volunteer drivers said that volunteering for the programme had positively affected their quality of life in terms of social and personal benefits (ITN America, 2010).

- **Cost:** ITN America is a cost-effective solution, but one which incurs initial set-up costs. The US organisation has proprietary software which can be used to set up a similar system elsewhere. Users store up credit through their own contribution to the system – whether through donating a vehicle or volunteering as a driver. The one potential drawback is that the system may incur costs if there are too few volunteer drivers.
A LOCAL SOLUTION TO RURAL TRANSPORT: INTERCONNECT, LINCOLNSHIRE, ENGLAND
(Lincolnshire County Council, 2012)

Lincolnshire, one of the largest counties in England, has one of the lowest population densities. The low population density means that the number of railway stations and train services is low considering the size of the area, and the scattered population means that bus services in the more isolated regions are expensive to operate. In many parts of the county, access to a private car is considered the only practical means of transport.

The Lincolnshire County Council introduced a localised bus service, Interconnect, designed to connect isolated rural areas to the main transport network. The service is driven by local demand, with the needs of the rural communities at the centre of planning. There are local buses running at frequent intervals which are fully accessible to all. In addition to this, passengers can pre-book an auxiliary service, CallConnect, which will collect them at a convenient location and bring them to a point where they can access other transport. The CallConnect service, which operates from Monday to Saturday, can collect passengers from their home if they have mobility problems or live in very isolated rural areas. CallConnect is funded through passenger fares while concessionary bus passes for the over-60s or people with disabilities can be used for travel.

A major advantage with the Interconnect service in Lincolnshire is the ease of use and the level of information available. It is possible to book by telephone or online, and ‘Interchange’ bus shelters have been introduced to help people plan a route using the interconnecting services. Real-time information is available on all buses through the website.

The central achievement of the Interconnect service is that it is based on the demand of local communities. The service can be used for any purpose, including health appointments, and concessionary fares are available for older people. It has been designed with the needs of passengers in mind, and appropriate vehicles are used, e.g. people-carriers for CallConnect services in isolated areas and larger buses for areas where there is more demand. One drawback of the service is that it is not integrated with other services such as school buses, so there may be duplication of buses on some routes.

As Interconnect is subsidised by Lincolnshire County Council, it has been affected by budget cuts, with reductions in some services due to reductions in local government funding (Lincolnshire County Council, 2011). One assessment of the Interconnect scheme in 2005 stated that ‘the result of the investment has been more people using bus services, fewer car journeys and less pollution, as well as vastly enhanced transport opportunities for people living on these routes. Interconnect has won national recognition and Lincolnshire receives visitors from home and abroad to see how this innovative scheme operates’ (Wise, 2005).

- Cost: Interconnect is a way of using existing resources wisely and ensures that the demand exists for the localised bus service. It may, for example, reduce spending on individual taxis for health appointments. Further integration with education transport may help to bring additional savings.

MULTI-PURPOSE USE OF BUSES: SIILINJÄRVI SERVICE LINE, FINLAND
(VIRGIL, 2000)

An important aspect of an efficient rural transport system is that buses are not lying idle during off-peak times where there are secondary services that they can fulfil. In Siilinjärvi, a very isolated part of eastern Finland, an accessible minibus has been put in place which spends four hours per day bringing people to two day centres: a work centre for disabled people and a day centre for older people. Outside of the times it is used for this purpose, the minibus becomes a dial-a-ride service for public users. It brings people from their homes to bus stations where they can access other forms of transport. The only fixed stop during the dial-a-ride operation is the bus station, which is visited once an hour. Bookings are made in advance.
using a central dispatch centre, which then produces an efficient route for the driver and a timetable. The staff enter bookings into a specially devised software program which schedules the trips and organises routes and informs the vehicle’s driver using a vehicle data terminal. The bus is owned by a private bus company which provides the drivers. The vehicle has 16 seats plus accommodation for two wheelchair users. There is also one extra wheelchair in the bus, to be used, for example, to move elderly or physically disabled people who have difficulty walking (perhaps on icy ground). In addition, passengers can use any normal bus ticket, or the national and regional smart card systems to pay for their travel.

The most common reasons for using the service are shopping (57%), banks, pharmacy and offices (29%), medical (7%), recreation (4%) and day-care centres (3%). Over half of passengers state that their mobility has increased as a result of the service’s introduction (VIRGIL, 2000).

The Siilinjärvi bus service is an example of how a bus can be used for regular transport in an isolated area at fixed times, but is then freed up to provide a more demand-responsive service rather than lying idle when not in use for its central service. The technology used is also an important consideration, in that it can devise efficient routes for the driver to take and keep people well informed of when they will be collected by the service. A major drawback is that fare revenue only covers about 30% of costs, with the remaining cost covered by public funds.

- **Cost:** The total gross operating cost of the Siilinjärvi bus service was estimated at €77,366 per year in 2000 (VIRGIL, 2000). As 70% of the cost needs to be covered by public funds, this would require a budget of €54,000 each year for each bus operating.

### COMBATING SOCIAL EXCLUSION: STRATHCLYDE PARTNERSHIP FOR TRANSPORT, SCOTLAND

*(Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, 2012)*

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is one of six regional transport partnerships set up in Scotland in 2006 with the aim of strengthening the planning and delivery of transport projects and services. It was formed by bringing together the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and Executive and the WESTRANS voluntary partnership. The partnership integrates subway, bus, ferry and rail transport services. It includes home-to-school transport in partnership with 11 local education authorities, delivering 50,000 pupils to and from school using public transport services, plus contract buses, cars and taxis.

The Strathclyde Partnership for Transport has developed strong working links with providers, agencies and councils, including Transport Scotland, the bus and rail industry, health boards, the enterprise network and other stakeholders. It is these partnerships which give the operation the ability to provide transport for all those who need it in the communities it serves.

In order to provide transport for people with disabilities or people in isolated rural areas, the partnership runs a ‘MyBus’ service. This is a demand-responsive service that operates using nine minibuses. Passengers must register for the service beforehand and it is open to all holders of the National Entitlement Card. It is not possible to use the service for hospital appointments, which must be organised using other means through a GP.

Several stakeholders in interviews mentioned that Strathclyde has served as a potential model for NI among policy-makers in the past. While the strong integration, partnerships and specialised service for isolated rural areas are very positive steps, the drawback is the cost as the partnership spends £10 million annually in subsidising transport services. There have also been governance issues, with deficiencies found in the control of travel expenses (Audit Scotland, 2011). There has been criticism of large payments by the partnership to external consultants, although savings of £3 million have been achieved in the 18 months prior to November 2011 (The Herald Scotland, 2011).

- **Cost:** The cost of the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is the main disadvantage, as £10 million is spent annually from public funds on paying for the service.
Table 2: Summary of international rural transport examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Service Line</th>
<th>Cost-neutral</th>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Key features</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport for NSW</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Total integration of transport planning and policy</td>
<td>Central agency</td>
<td>Fully integrated agency making unilateral decisions on transport provision</td>
<td>Centralised planning of transport policy and planning</td>
<td>Considerable political will required for implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All transport services integrated under one agency</td>
<td>May involve redundancies or reduced resources for some groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITN America</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New system to encourage volunteer drivers and store credits for transport in old age</td>
<td>Not-for-profit organisation</td>
<td>Innovative solution of storing volunteer credits for later life</td>
<td>No government funding required</td>
<td>Vehicles may not be accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Older people empowered to provide for transport in retirement</td>
<td>Dependent on volunteers, which may be difficult in isolated rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnect, Lincolnshire</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Demand-responsive transport which connects with the main transport network</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>Demand-responsive bus service that links in with main transport network</td>
<td>Fully based on the requirements of local communities</td>
<td>Transport from towns and villages may only be at certain times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good use of technology for providing information on transport services</td>
<td>No integration with education or health transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siilinjärvi Service Line</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Use of bus for multiple purposes plus IT system making most efficient routes and journeys possible</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>Day centre bus used as demand-responsive transport in off-peak times</td>
<td>Multiple use of resource to ensure optimum value for money</td>
<td>Fare income covers only 30% of costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Simple, effective technology for booking the service</td>
<td>Has not been implemented on a wide scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathclyde Partnership for Transport</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Use of partnerships with private companies and joint working agreements</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>Transport partnership which integrates subway, bus, ferry and rail transport services</td>
<td>Integrates home to school transport services</td>
<td>Large (£10m) annual cost involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong working links with stakeholders, including private transport providers</td>
<td>No use of MyBus service for hospital appointments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The European Commission Vision for Transport in 2020 stresses environmental sustainability and argues for fully integrated transport systems that meet the demands of passengers. Thus innovation in transport is seen as a system which matches supply with demand in a cost-effective way using all modes of transport available working in co-ordination (EurActiv, 2009). An integrated transport system that combines accessible mainstream transport such as bus and rail from large transport hubs with specialised services such as demand-responsive transport in isolated rural areas will encourage social inclusion and will be more cost-effective than multiple systems operating independently of each other (European Conference of Ministers of Transport, 2006).

The core features of innovation in a transport system are the combination of centralised partnerships in policy and planning of the main transport system with local partnerships and co-ordination for providing special services, e.g. buses in isolated areas which can fulfil multiple functions at different times during a day, linking to the main transport. The examples in this section can be the building blocks for developing such an innovative system.

Aspects of the international examples cited can provide potential options for the future of public and community transport in rural areas across the island of Ireland. ITN America is an innovative way to encourage more volunteer drivers, who help to transport vulnerable groups but then save up credit for their own transport when they no longer drive. It is unclear whether the system would work in an isolated rural area and there may also be issues with vehicle insurance for the volunteers.

Transport for NSW is an example of a centralised agency where all decision-making and transport budgets are simplified by being controlled by one authority. This is a newer innovation, having been established in 2011, but future assessments of the progress and success of the agency will be helpful to governments in deciding whether the solution could be applicable elsewhere.

The Strathclyde Partnership for Transport in Scotland is another system for centralising decision-making and transport budgets. While the solution is expensive, strong working links with private providers can bring savings in terms of joint purchase or joint maintenance agreements. Integrating home-to-school transport and using school buses that are idle during off-peak hours are also key innovations. There are likely to be significant capital savings in future arising from the use of fewer buses and joint purchase and maintenance.

The concept of using vehicles, drivers and other aspects of transport services for multiple purposes is important. The example from Siilinjärvi in Finland shows how a fixed-route bus can also be used as demand-responsive transport for older people during periods when it is not needed. This example also shows how technology can be used to generate the most efficient routes through isolated rural areas for the transport can take, based on the bookings it receives. CallConnect in Lincolnshire is an example of a demand-responsive transport system that can bring people from isolated rural areas to towns or villages where they can access fixed-route bus or train services.

**SUMMARY**

Examining international examples of innovation in providing rural transport is a positive step in developing a successful public and community transport system on the island of Ireland. This section illustrates that there are cost-neutral options which involve total integration of transport, innovative solutions run by not-for-profit organisations, and local authorities making efficient use of existing infrastructure and resources.
DISCUSSION
Rural transport is a policy area which affects many different aspects of people’s lives, crosses the remits of several different government departments and presents complex challenges in trying to develop solutions. Nevertheless, it is a crucial challenge to address, as it can help to address a wide range of policy areas associated with rural living. These include:

- Population decline in rural areas.
- Ageing population.
- Social exclusion in rural communities.
- Promoting independent living.
- Unemployment and underemployment in rural areas.
- Rural poverty.
- Centralisation of services such as hospitals.
- Poor access to services.
- Reduced life opportunities for people who do not drive.

What emerges from the literature review, the stakeholder interviews and the online survey findings in this research is that it is possible for governments, transport planners, providers and community and rural organisations to achieve a high level of service using existing resources, as long as services and budgets can be better integrated.

This section discusses the main themes arising from the interviews, survey and desk research, with a particular focus on how they can apply to NI and ROI.

**INTEGRATION**

The current research indicates that more can be done to integrate transport services. There is the potential for school transport, health transport and community transport to be merged so that the same vehicles are not driving the same route for different reasons. A pilot project whereby school buses will be used for community transport in rural areas is being launched in ROI. There was substantial support among stakeholders in NI to launch similar pilots and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the system. Non-emergency health appointment transport could also be integrated in this way, and appointments in hospitals could be timed to coincide with transport arrivals.

As well as integration between education, health and community transport, services in isolated areas must be timed and integrated with main transport networks. Where feasible, providing connections from rural areas to the main transport networks is an opportunity which could be tested. As buses in towns and villages have been downgraded in many areas, services could be timed to co-ordinate with each other where possible. Accessibility of vehicles is also important, as is providing full information on the transport links to people using the service. This will ensure that they have confidence that they can get to where they are going using the public transport options available.

Local co-ordination and the delivery of integrated services would require time, collective commitment and investment (Pobal, 2011). In NI, some stakeholders expressed the view that integration of services would actually save money, rather than require more funding. This is borne out by the NI Audit Office report, which shows that savings can be made through joint purchasing and joint maintenance agreements, as well as eradicating duplication on routes (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2005). However, the integration of transport services in rural areas is a complex process involving multiple actors and interests and to date progress has been limited.
PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships across sectors are a vital part of developing a streamlined, efficient transport service for rural communities. It is necessary that these partnerships are formed at government and local levels. Community planning in NI provides the potential for strengthening these partnerships.

In NI and ROI, many interviewees mentioned the ‘silo mentality’, whereby it was difficult to get government departments to work together. There are many reasons for this including issues of budgets and responsibilities within departments and ministries. It is also sometimes difficult for interest groups to work together where there is competition for limited funding from governments and other sources.

At the local level, too, partnerships need to be formed with local councils, community transport providers, national providers, taxi companies, voluntary and community groups that operate transport and representatives of the local communities. This can ensure that everyone is working together to provide the best transport possible and help put passenger needs at the forefront of transport planning.

There are opportunities arising in the near future for building partnerships, with rural transport having been taken over by the National Transport Authority in ROI, and a proposed centralised agency within the Department for Regional Development in NI which would link in to all government departments involved with transport.8

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Several stakeholders in NI and ROI argued that transport services should take account of regional variation while assessing the travel requirements of passengers. Public and community transport could cater for groups who need it most, such as older people who do not drive, while transporting others such as schoolchildren and commuters. Research could examine the individual journeys of people in isolated rural areas, what they use transport for and how they use it, then cater for their requirements using the resources available. The key to ensuring access to transport for all is to determine the best way to get people connected to main transport hubs from their local communities, using a variety of options such as school buses that become demand responsive transport services when not in use, or people-carriers that can collect people from their homes and bring them to a local village or bus station where they can continue their journey. Understanding why people need rural transport and what they need from it will also ensure that a convincing case can be made to base policy and planning changes on need, rather than on what group can lobby the hardest for better services.

Each local authority (29 in ROI and 26 in NI) will have different needs and transport planning should be conducted in a way that provides a solution for local communities that suits them, as opposed to a solution which is planned centrally. Local Transport Plans, or LTPs, are an important part of transport planning in England. Local authorities in NI and ROI could benefit from a similar approach, where a local area such as a county can have a plan for providing transport at the local level, but the strategic direction of transport planning is the responsibility of central government.

While advertising what is available and providing timetables is important, an integrated information service which shows people how they can get from their rural community to a centralised service using a combination of transport services will build confidence in a service.

8 A new agency within the Department for Regional Development is currently at the discussion and planning stage.
TRANSPORT BUDGETS

There are many different departments funding rural transport in both NI and ROI, through the Rural Transport Programme (ROI) and the Rural Transport Fund (NI), free travel and concessionary fares, the two departments of health overseeing transport for health appointments, departments of education overseeing home-to-school transport, and others. This makes it difficult to determine exactly what is being spent on rural transport in each jurisdiction. However, a clear picture of what is being spent on providing rural transport, and how it is being spent, is an essential step in improving the system. This would involve conducting an analysis and deciding where money can be saved by tackling the duplication of services, and giving up part of a budget for the greater good of more streamlined and efficient rural transport provision.

It is also important to learn from cost-neutral or cost-effective transport innovations, such as that introduced by ITN America, and to work toward the introduction of successful innovations across the island of Ireland to help prepare for our ageing population.

BARRIERS TO TRANSPORT

Currently, a number of barriers to rural transport provision make travel more difficult for passengers. For example, it is not always possible to use community transport for non-emergency health appointments. A lack of information on the connections between community or other social services transport and the main transport network in NI or ROI can also be a barrier which affects the confidence and ability of people, including older age groups, to rely on rural transport for important appointments. Accessibility of vehicles can also be an issue, as can the suitability of using larger buses on rural roads when a smaller people-carrier could be more effective.

There are also barriers to groups who want to provide community transport, but face stumbling blocks due to regulations or conditions of funding. Vehicle insurance in NI can also be prohibitively expensive in some cases, which may deter people from volunteering as drivers for others.

Different payment methods and different means of allocating benefits such as taxi vouchers or concessionary fares can also be confusing to passengers. In ROI, a smart card for contactless payment called the ‘Leap’ card was introduced in 2012 for payments on the Dublin Luas, Bus, DART and commuter rail services. There are plans to make payments in taxis possible using the same card and to integrate the Leap card with the free travel scheme. This system could be extended to rural areas for payment on all forms of transport. As it is possible to register the card to an address, it would also be feasible to add credit to the card instead of distributing paper taxi vouchers, and information on entitlement to concessionary fares could also be digitally stored on the card. Contactless payment using a mobile phone app instead of a separate smart card is currently possible in Japan and South Korea (CBS News, 2009), and this technology could be explored in the future.

For older people, accessibility can be a barrier and buses should be wheelchair-accessible. Driver training is also important for the specific needs of older passengers, e.g. slower acceleration and deceleration in order to minimise falls. In combating social exclusion, evening and weekend services are important for older people to allow them partake in social activities (CARDI, 2010).
8.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
A number of policy recommendations have been identified from an analysis of the current literature, the stakeholder interviews and the online survey undertaken for this project. They are relevant to NI and ROI, although steps may have already been taken in one or other of the jurisdictions to implement some of the recommendations, e.g. closer integration of education and community transport services is at the pilot stage in ROI.

1. Integration of existing services

Integrate existing rural transport services, including health transport, home-to-school transport and social services transport with services offered by community transport and other organisations.

Steps can be taken to use existing resources better in serving older people who do not drive. Government departments could explore the use of school buses for providing demand-responsive transport for older people during off-peak times. Savings can be made in the form of shared resources and infrastructure, joint purchase and joint maintenance agreements, as outlined by the NI Audit Office (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2005).

The first step toward integration could be the establishment of a minister-led forum involving transport planners from government departments covering health, education, regional development and rural affairs to determine what resources can be shared and what joint agreements can be formed. Community transport providers, transport operators and other agencies can then be involved in the next stage, with a review each year to develop integration of services.

It is important that all options to use existing transport methods, including community transport, minibuses, taxis, bus and train services, are explored with the aim of improving the mobility of older people in rural areas who do not drive in the most cost-effective and efficient way.

2. Integrate information, payment and accessibility in rural transport

Develop a transport system that is fully integrated in terms of information, payment and accessibility.

With restricted transport budgets, removing any unnecessary barriers is vital. A number of steps can be taken to enable greater and wider usage by older age groups, including better and integrated information on transport options; using the same payment system for all transport (taxis, community transport, private buses, etc.), along the lines of the ‘Leap card’ in ROI; and making all transport vehicles accessible.

3. Working partnerships at government and local level

In planning and policy-making for transport services, greater cross-sectoral working between government, business, and the voluntary and community sector is required.

Current research indicates that rural transport should be overseen centrally at a strategic level, in a way that facilitates working between government departments and building working partnerships at a local level. This could take the form of a centralised agency with links to all relevant government departments, or a working committee.

An Integrated Rural Transport Committee involving the National Transport Authority, Department of Education, Department of the Environment, the Health Services Executive, the Rural Transport Network, Pobal, Irish Rural Link, the City and County Managers Association and Bus Éireann is now up and running in ROI (Merrion Street, 2012). This is a major step toward building partnerships on the issue of rural transport and a similar committee could be of benefit in NI.
4. Community and passenger involvement in planning of services

Public and community transport in rural areas should be designed to meet the needs of the people who need it most, i.e. groups who do not drive. Local transport plans which take account of the needs of local communities could be developed in order to match the demand for services with the supply.

Public and community transport should be designed with the needs of older people who do not drive in mind. Mapping and identifying areas of transport disadvantage, as in the research conducted by Kamruzzaman & Hine (2011) and Pobal (2008), can help to identify disadvantaged groups in terms of transport provision, thus helping to provide a service for the people who most need it.

Local development plans should assess transport needs for each area and could be an effective mechanism for ensuring that community needs are taken account of in transport planning. In 2012, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in ROI launched www.myplan.ie. The website makes it possible to consult all local development plans in ROI through an interactive map, facilitating the comparison of transport plans and links between local areas.
5. Clear analysis and alignment of transport budgets

The full budget spent by all government departments, agencies, community associations and voluntary and community organisations should be collated and analysed. This will facilitate a plan to target duplication and inefficiencies, transferring money to where it can most effectively build public and community transport in rural areas.

A full analysis of all money spent on transport in NI and ROI, is the first stage, followed by identifying duplication in transport provision and savings in terms of joint administration of services or joint working agreements.

Table 3 below summarises some recommended policy measures in the short, medium and long term that may improve the delivery of cost-effective rural transport. These measures are based on the research conducted for this report.

Table 3: Summary of policy measures for improving rural transport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short-term</th>
<th>Medium-term</th>
<th>Long-term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrange a high-level stakeholder meeting on integrating existing services such as non-urgent health transport, home-to-school transport and social services transport.</td>
<td>Establish and use local transport plans to help communities have a say in transport planning for their area.</td>
<td>Facilitate the introduction of innovative solutions to rural transport such as the ITN America model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build stakeholder collaboration and partnerships at central government and local level.</td>
<td>Establish a centralised, integrated agency with overall responsibility for transport provision and budgets.</td>
<td>Examine and implement budget and tax measures to promote sustainable public transport in rural areas, including the private sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce smart card payments for all transport, with the facility to add credit for entitlements.</td>
<td>Create incentives to expand the numbers of volunteer drivers in isolated rural areas.</td>
<td>Implement policy measures to ensure rural transport can adapt to the ageing population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct locally-focused research and encourage community engagement on transport needs.</td>
<td>Encourage the use of alternatives to car travel.</td>
<td>Develop a rural transport network that is sustainable and efficient, meeting the needs of all passenger groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide good-quality information for passengers on how and when to use transport to get to their destination.</td>
<td>Phase out all duplicated services and invest funding in priority rural transport areas.</td>
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</table>
CONCLUSION

The economic crisis has caused governments to re-examine spending in many areas, transport included. With an ageing population, achieving a cost-efficient and effective transport system is now more important than ever. This research highlights that it requires a joint effort, with closer working partnerships between government departments, local authorities, community transport providers, voluntary and community organisations, transport operators and all other interested stakeholders.

This research, conducted by CARDI, has shown that there are steps that each of these groups can take to improve rural transport. These include integrating education transport and transport for older age groups in the short term or developing a centralised agency for decision-making on all transport issues over the longer term. It is important that all parties involved with rural transport are flexible in their approach to providing services. This will ensure that it is the passengers who use and depend on transport in rural areas who get the best possible service.

Encouraging steps are already being taken in both NI and ROI to integrate transport and these should be built on. They include the pilot ‘rural transport bus’ in six counties in ROI and attempts to integrate community transport services with non-emergency health appointments in NI. International examples of efficiently operating rural transport systems serve as models for the development of transport policy and planning across the island of Ireland, while lessons can also be learned from unsuccessful transport initiatives.

Closer integration of budgets, planning and services can be a long process which involves sacrifices in terms of giving up control of particular areas or ceding some budget to another department or agency. There can also be regulatory barriers to overcome. However, a rural transport system which meets passenger and community needs with the most efficient use of budgets is a significant goal to strive for.

Given the benefits in having an accessible transport network for all, including improving health outcomes and combating social exclusion for our ageing population, it is important that policy and planning uses the best available evidence on what works best to implement the changes. This can be done on a step-by-step basis, with the ultimate aim of a sustainable, cost-efficient yet effective rural transport system that has the needs of communities and passengers at its core.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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IMTAC. (2007). *Improving Travel Information for Older People and Disabled People*. Belfast: IMTAC.


APPENDIX 1: LIST OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms Kellie Armstrong</td>
<td>Community Transport Association NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Seamus Boland</td>
<td>Irish Rural Link ROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Colette Brolly</td>
<td>Public Health Agency NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Paul Donnelly</td>
<td>Department for Agriculture and Rural Development NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Seamus Donnelly</td>
<td>Rural Community Network NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Anne Graham</td>
<td>National Transport Authority ROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Martha Kavanagh</td>
<td>Drury Communications ROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Scott Kennerley</td>
<td>The Consumer Council NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Michael Lorimer</td>
<td>IMTAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Tony McConnell</td>
<td>Department for Regional Development NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Miriam McKenna</td>
<td>Meath Accessible Transport ROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Michelle Rafferty</td>
<td>Translink</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2: SURVEY OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORT GROUPS

In addition to the stakeholder interviews, a short internet survey was conducted of community transport associations in both NI and ROI. There are 12 community transport associations in NI and 36 in ROI.

48 questionnaires were distributed to community transport providers by email and 22 responses received, giving a response rate of 46%. The questionnaire focused on older age groups as users of community transport as well as ways in which community transport could be made more effective for older users. The survey was developed so that community transport associations could help to inform the research rather than as a general study of views and attitudes toward community transport. The results from this survey are presented in this section.

Older passengers

Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of passengers on their transport service who were older people (aged 60 or over). The results are presented in Figure 3 below. Most community transport providers estimated that older people made up 70–79% of their passengers.

Figure 4: Estimated percentage of rural transport users who are aged 60 or over, NI and ROI

In addition to estimating the proportion of older passengers, respondents were asked if they believed that the demand for their transport services among older people had increased, decreased or stayed the same over the past five years; 21 of the 22 respondents said that demand had increased and one felt that the demand had stayed the same.
Reasons for use
The community transport providers responding to the survey were asked, based on their knowledge of their own passengers and experience of their transport use, why older people used their transport services. As can be seen in Figure 4, shopping and health appointments were the two most common reasons why providers believed older people used community transport.

All of the respondents to the survey felt that the older people who use their community services are people who are dependent on public or community means of getting around. This may indicate that it is only older people who have no access to a car who will use community transport, and if people can drive their own car, they will do so. Thus, planning of community transport addresses a small user group that is spread out over a wide geographic area, rather than trying to cater for the needs of people who prefer to drive themselves or have access to a lift from family or friends.

More effective community transport
The community transport providers were also asked for their opinions on what measures might provide effective transport for older people in rural areas. These could be measures that are already in place in some areas or steps that policy-makers could take to improve the rural transport system. Figure 5 shows that the two measures considered most important in providing transport to older people in rural areas were ‘door-to-door transport’ and community transport services that can travel longer distances outside their own areas for health appointments. More collaboration and partnerships were also considered to be an important measure. These responses reflect the views of community transport providers themselves, whereas other groups may consider different measures to be more important in providing transport solutions.
The results of the short survey show that in the experience of community transport providers in Ireland, North and South. It indicates that older people who do not have their own car or easy access to lifts from family and friends who tend to use their services. Shopping and health appointments were the most common reasons for taking community transport, and demand for services among older age groups was considered to have risen overall in the past five years. Door-to-door transport and community transport that can leave the area were the most frequently suggested measures to improve services, according to the operators.