

**C|A|R|D|I** **GRANTS**  
PROGRAMME

# Research Brief

**Transport &  
Rural Ageing**

## NI Transport policy

### **NI Transport policy**

Several policy initiatives in NI have the aim of improving transport for older people:

- *The Programme for Government 2008-2011: Building a Better Future* explicitly recognises the importance of transport infrastructure in relation to economic growth and social inclusion across the region.
- *The Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015 (ATS)* was published in March 2005 and its vision is 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.

- The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) 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 which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life.

## ROI Transport policy

Similar to NI, a number of initiatives have been introduced in ROI to improve transport for older people:

- *A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020* recognises that transport is vital for the economy and that safe and comfortable travel is important. It plans to improve the quality of life and access to transport for all, in particular for people with reduced mobility and those who may experience isolation.
- *Transport 21* is the ten-year capital investment framework agreed by the Government for the development of transport

infrastructure 2006-2015.

It aims to increase access by making it easier to travel and enhance quality by improving safety, accessibility, integration, reliability, speed and comfort.

- *An Action Plan to Promote More Age Friendly Transport Services* was launched in June 2007. The Action Plan was developed and implemented by Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, Rural Transport Programme and Veolia Transport. It focuses on dialogue with older people, providing age awareness training for staff and an enhanced focus on older people in their internal and external communications.

## Transport & rural ageing

### December 2010

Personal mobility allows older people to live more independently. It gives them the choice to remain in their own homes and in their own communities. It also allows them access to activities and services which contribute to improved well-being. Rural Ireland – North and South – is characterised by a high dependence on private cars. This is particularly significant for two groups: those who do not drive and those who have no access to family or friends who can meet their transport requirements.

This research briefing examines the travel needs of older people, barriers to travel and travel costs in rural areas. It compares the different systems of rural transport in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and describes the experiences of older people in relation to these services. The briefing draws on a number of sources including: national statistical reports, government rural and transport strategies, examples of international best practice and research reports including a qualitative study by Ahern and Hine (2010)<sup>1</sup>, funded under CARDI's grants programme.

### Key findings

- In ROI, 37% of older people living in rural areas have a need for transport that is not being met by public or private means.
- In NI, 71% of people regard lack of access to public transport as a key disadvantage for older people living in a rural community.
- Rural transport provision in ROI and NI is not sufficient for older people who do not drive. This is due to the lack of public transport, the cost of private transport for older people and the lack of integration with other services such as health.
- High quality, integrated transport in rural areas can help combat social exclusion among older people and improve their quality of life.
- Two groups of older people are at a particular risk of social exclusion in rural areas: those who do not drive and those who have no access to a network of family or friends who meet their transport needs.
- In ROI, retired people spend €70.19 per week on transport on average, (15% of total expenditure). In NI, the average weekly spend of those aged 65-74 is £41.20 (12% of total expenditure).
- In ROI, only 39.7% of women aged 60+ have a driving licence in comparison to 73.9% of men over 60. In NI there is a similar situation with 66% of men over 60 and just 35% of women over 60 driving.

<sup>1</sup> Copies of this report may be requested from [info@cardi.ie](mailto:info@cardi.ie)

## Travel needs of older people

A study by the Department for Rural Development in NI shows that the most popular reason to travel for people aged 60+ is shopping. The next most popular reason to travel is for “personal business” which includes health appointments. 20% of journeys for men and 23% of journeys for women over 60 per year fall into this category.

**Figure 1: Purpose of journey for people aged 60+**

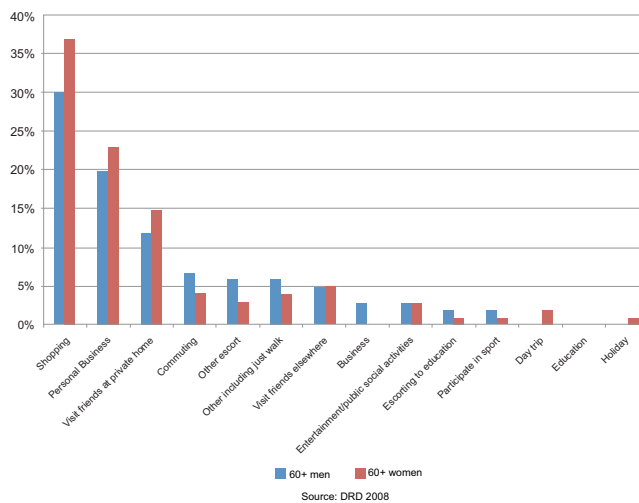
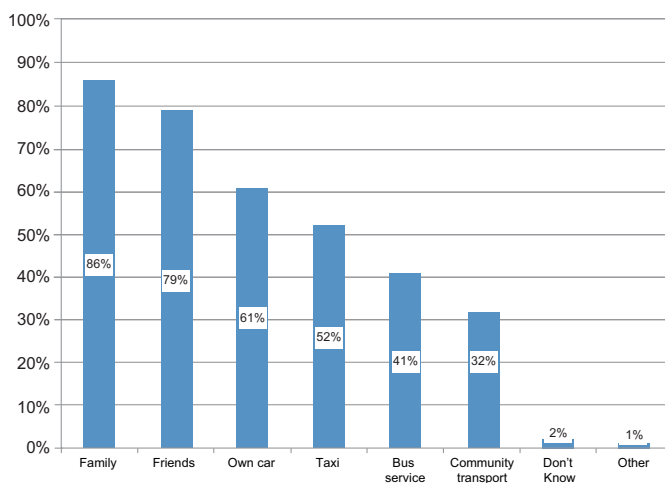


Figure 2 shows that in NI, family (86%) and friends (79%) are the two most popular providers of transport for older people in rural areas. 61% use their own car and 52% avail of taxis. The proportion of people who use bus services is 41% and community transport 32%. 2% don't know and 1% use other transport.

**Figure 2: How older people get around in rural areas (NI)**





Accessible and affordable public transportation services are needed in both rural and urban areas so that people of all ages can fully participate in family and community life. This is especially important for older persons who have mobility problems. World Health Organisation (2002) *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*. Geneva: WHO.

Where community transport is available, 48% of older people have availed of the service<sup>2</sup>. Evidence indicates that the role families play in rural areas is vital for the mobility of older people, particularly for people who have no access to their own car.

In the ROI, research<sup>3</sup> shows that:

- One third of rural households report difficulty in accessing banking services and general medical practitioners, compared with 15% and 11% respectively for their urban counterparts.
- 35% of households headed by a person aged 65 and over have difficulty accessing public transport.
- 34% have difficulty accessing banking services, and 29% have difficulty accessing a general practitioner.

## Barriers to travel

Four main factors have been identified as contributing to accessibility problems for disadvantaged and socially excluded people<sup>4</sup>:

1. Poverty and low income.
2. Lack of access to a car.
3. Inadequate and / or inaccessible transport services.
4. Location of services and opportunities.

Ageing in a rural setting amplifies the experience of transport deficiencies. For example, in ROI nearly two fifths (37%) of people living in rural areas who are aged 65 or over have a need for transport that is not being met by public or private means<sup>5</sup>.

## Travel costs

In ROI, the average weekly spend on transport per household is €122.74, or 16% of all expenditure. For retired people, the average spend is €70.19, or 57% of the average of all households.

<sup>2</sup> Rural Community Network, *Ageing and Rural Poverty* (2004)

<sup>3</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (2007)

<sup>4</sup> Community Technical Aid, *Western Health Action Zone: Accessing services through transport* (2003)

<sup>5</sup> A contributory factor is that population density is low compared to other countries, at just 56 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. The population in Irish rural areas is also very dispersed: the population density is somewhat similar to Scotland and higher than in Sweden, but ROI has a much higher proportion of people living in settlements of less than 500 people (36%) than either of these countries (9% and 19%). Department of Transport, *Progressing Rural Public Transport in Ireland: A discussion paper* (2006)

**Table 1: ROI total weekly spend on transport**

	<b>Self employed</b>	<b>Employee</b>	<b>Out of work</b>	<b>Retired</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Total weekly spend on transport (€)</b>	<b>155.09</b>	<b>161.42</b>	<b>80.08</b>	<b>70.19</b>	<b>71.92</b>

Source: CSO Household Budget Survey 2004-2005

In NI, the average weekly expenditure on transport is £63.40. People aged 65 to 74 spend £41.20 per week on transport, or 65% of the average, while the over 75s spend £16 per week, one quarter of the average.

**Table 2: NI total weekly spend on transport**

<b>Age of household reference person</b>	<b>Less than 30</b>	<b>30 to 49</b>	<b>50 to 64</b>	<b>65 to 74</b>	<b>Over 75</b>
<b>Total weekly spend on transport (£)</b>	<b>55.80</b>	<b>77.90</b>	<b>80.30</b>	<b>41.20</b>	<b>16.00</b>

Source: ONS, Family spending 2009

Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>6</sup> suggests that in the UK, pensioner couples need more income to live on in rural areas than pensioner couples in urban areas. In a rural town, the minimum income standard is 1% higher than urban areas, but in a village it is 19% higher and in a hamlet, 22% higher. The research shows that transport is the major factor in the additional cost of living – 60-100% of the additional costs in rural areas are due to transport.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *A minimum income standard for rural areas* (2010)

## Rural mobility and gender

Older women are less likely to drive than older men, are more likely to never have driven and more likely to give up driving prematurely. In ROI, 73.9% of men aged 60 and over hold driving licences and for women aged 60 and over the figure is 39.7%<sup>7</sup>. In NI, 66% of men over 60 drive a car and 35% of women over 60 drive a car<sup>8</sup>.

### International best practice 1: ITNAmerica, USA.

Mobility is ranked as the third highest issue for older people in America. A not-for-profit organisation called ITNAmerica, 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 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. 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.

### International best practice 2: Siilinjarvi Service Line, Finland.

Siilinjarvi is an area of eastern Finland with a low population density. Prior to the introduction of the Service Line, the area was served by dial-a-ride taxis three times a week during summer holidays only. The Service Line is a single accessible minibus, reserved for day centre use for four hours per day, and then used as a dial-a-ride service for public users. The service feeds into other public transport services at the bus station. Bookings are made by telephoning a dispatch centre which then produces the most efficient route and timetable. The scheme has been publicised in local newspapers, and by leaflets distributed to households. 75% of scheme users are over 70. The most popular reasons for using the service are shopping (57%), banks, pharmacy and offices (29%), medical (7%), recreation (4%) and day-care centres (3%). Fare revenue covers about 30% of costs. The government contributes to the dispatch centre's costs while the remaining costs are met in equal share by the municipality and the provincial government. Over half of passengers state that their mobility has increased as a result of the service's introduction.

<sup>7</sup> CSO, *Ageing in Ireland* (2007)

<sup>8</sup> Northern Ireland Travel Survey

## NI rural transport

A Rural Transport Fund was established in 1998 and is administered by the Department for Regional Development. It supports services operated by Translink and community-based Rural Transport Partnerships. NI has 17 Rural Community Transport Partnerships which aim to provide accessible individual and group travel services to community groups, older people and people with disabilities on a non-profit making basis.

“Dial a lift” is a demand-responsive transport service for people living in rural areas who cannot access public transport due to reduced mobility. It can be used for a variety of purposes including accessing local facilities and services, visiting hospitals or for training and employment.

It can also be used to link to public transport. It is operated by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships.

The Assisted Rural Transport Scheme is an initiative, launched by the Department for Regional Development in 2009, which allows smart pass holders who use “Dial a lift” to be able to avail of free or half fare travel using their smart pass. These services are provided using a mix of accessible minibuses, volunteer car drivers and local taxi operators.

Translink also operates a number of new subsidised services including “Hospital Link”, which brings people from rural areas of North Down to the Ulster Hospital at Dundonald.<sup>9</sup>

## ROI rural transport

The Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) was introduced for people in rural areas who are excluded because transport is not available, accessible or affordable to them locally. Following its success, a new Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was launched in 2007. In 2009, 1.29 million passenger journeys were recorded on 157,000 transport services funded under the RTP.

68% of journeys on RTP services are made by women. In addition, the majority of passenger journeys, 58%, are made by people aged 66 and over. For some areas, 90% of passengers are in this age group. Free travel pass holders account for around 64% of RTP passengers. In terms of accessing the RTP services, 86% of journeys are pre-booked while 14% are “hail and ride” journeys. 78% of all journeys are made on a door to door basis.<sup>10</sup>

Around half of RTP service trips are designed to link directly with key public services such as health, education, social activities and other public transport. Over one quarter of service trips link in with health care services. One fifth of RTP trips link up directly with the service timetables of other public transport providers such as Bus Éireann or Irish Rail.

Bus Éireann has worked with the RTP, the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Departments of Education and Science and Transport on improving integration in local and rural transport services. The aim is to provide a better service in a more effective manner through network planning and better utilisation of resources. Pilot projects in rural areas have seen RTP and HSE services link-in with existing Bus Éireann services<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Department for Regional Development

<sup>10</sup> Pobal, *Rural Transport Programme performance and impact report* (2009)

<sup>11</sup> Bus Éireann, *Annual Report* (2009)



For those of us who can drive, we get worried about when we won't be able to drive any more. Either we'll have to move somewhere else or you are depending on somebody to ... you know... they are the only options.  
(Female, remote rural area, ROI)

## North / South comparisons

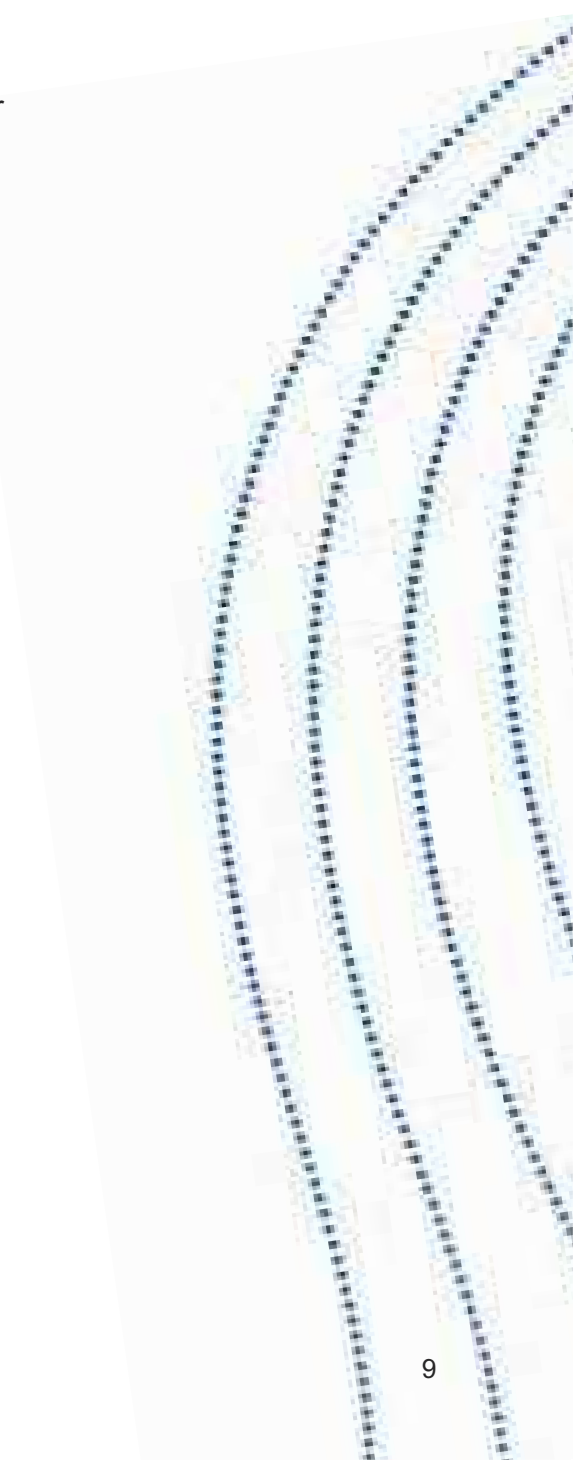
In both NI and ROI, transport policy aims to provide an accessible transport system that can be used by older people to increase their mobility without the use of a car. However, rural areas in both jurisdictions show significant car dependency, which puts older people who do not drive at a disadvantage in terms of access and finance.

Both systems have rural transport initiatives which aim to combat the problems encountered in areas which are not serviced by the national public transport networks. In NI, the Rural Transport Fund receives around £3.75 million per year from the Department of Regional Development, while in ROI, the Rural Transport Programme receives around €11 million in funding per year from the Department of Transport.

## Older people's voices on rural transport

A qualitative study involving focus groups by Ahern and Hine (2010)<sup>12</sup>, funded under CARDI's grants programme, into older people's travel experiences in rural areas in both ROI and NI suggests that transport services at present do not provide an adequate alternative to the car. This can lead to rural isolation and an inability to engage in an active social life.

<sup>12</sup> Copies of this report may be requested from [info@cardi.ie](mailto:info@cardi.ie)



Key findings from the study include:

- **Impact of the recession:** The recession and cost-cutting budgets in both NI and ROI have led older people to worry that the already inadequate transport in their rural areas is going to be further curtailed. There were concerns that services are under-used may be dropped. However, participants made the point that the services were under-used because they were irregular and infrequent and that a better service might generate a higher level of demand.
- **Time restrictions:** Older people in rural areas are time-restricted. The lack of available transport at weekends or evenings means that those without cars can only make trips during the day time.
- **Dependence on taxis:** The unavailability of public transport means that older people without alternative support are forced to pay for taxis. They will pay for taxis and make sacrifices to make what are seen as essential trips (food shopping and health) but will not do the same for other trips (leisure, social, other shopping) even though these trips can be very important for mental health and social well-being.
- **Health services and transport:** One of the key issues cited by participants was the importance of transport to attend health services. However, a recurring theme was that health services and transport services should be more closely integrated and clinics should take account of the transport needs of older people when arranging appointments. Participants said that the government and health service providers should co-ordinate and integrate health services and health policy with transport services.
- **Social inclusion:** Participants felt that the lack of public transport can lead to rural isolation for those who do not have access to a car. The lack of transport provision in rural areas at the weekend was also cited as an issue. Participants found community transport services play a vital role in enabling older people to participate in a range of activities. If older people become ill and need to spend time in hospitals or long-term care and their partners do not drive, it can lead to a situation where they cannot visit.



One ROI focus group participant noted that “living in a rural area is like an additional [disadvantage]; you are so cut off.

## Policy implications

Rural transport in both NI and ROI is currently inadequate for older people who do not drive. There is a lack of transport options and lack of integration with other services such as health. This leads to increased social isolation amongst older people in rural areas.

It is necessary to provide a transport system in rural areas which provides access to activities and services and allows older people to remain independent. In particular, provision should be made for the groups who are most at risk. Transport services should be better integrated, and also integrated with other services, particularly those related to health.

### Providing rural transport for at-risk groups

The central policy implication suggested by current research is that particular groups of older people in NI and ROI are at a greater risk of exclusion. These are older women and the over 70s who do not drive. Future policy and practice in the area of rural transport for older people should consider how a transport system can best service these groups.

It is recognised that door-to-door public transport service cannot be provided to every single household in rural areas. This is particularly true with decreasing budgets available as a result of the recession. To best provide transport for at-risk groups, a menu of services at different levels of frequency is needed. In addition to community and public transport, supplementary means of transport could be provided such as taxi vouchers or volunteer driver schemes.

While it is crucial to provide adequate transport services for at-risk groups of older people, it is also important that these groups have access to information on how they can best reach their destination using different modes of transport. A central point for journey planning could provide links between different transport solutions providers and enable travel across the different transport services.

### Further integration of services

An integrated transport network enables older people to travel from isolated rural areas to towns and villages which have more developed transport links. International best practice illustrates how greater co-ordination of transport services in line with the needs of our ageing population.

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While transport services should be better integrated, it is also important that strong links be forged between transport and health services. Health service providers should also bear the transport needs of older people in mind when making appointments. A more efficient integration with health services can make it easier for older people in rural areas to attend their health-related appointments.

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