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

CARDI
Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland
Acknowledgements
This research forms part of a programme of independent research commissioned by Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister OFMDFM to inform the policy development process and consequently the views expressed and conclusions drawn are those of the author and not necessarily those of OFMDFM.

The research has benefited from the expertise, guidance and time of many people, to whom we are grateful.

Conor Breen, CARDI

January 2014
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transport and mobility are essential aspects of everyday life. Older people who do not drive need access to health services, shopping, social activities, community centres and other facilities – public transport must be sufficient to support this access. For older people, accessible transport services can help combat social exclusion and support independent living.

CARDI has conducted research into public and community transport in Ireland, North and South to examine how transport services could better meet the needs of older people in the future, this summary document presents the main findings and policy recommendations from the research.

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 connected with 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 costs of transport and in particular the cost of rural transport provision in both NI and ROI.

---

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.
RURAL TRANSPORT IN IRELAND

Transport policy and service provision are not sufficiently ready for an ageing population in rural areas (TILDA, 2011) (Rural Transport Network, 2011) (IMTAC, 2012). As detailed below, moves are being made to better integrate transport services and meet the needs of passengers, including older passengers who do not drive.

Northern Ireland

The provision of public and community transport to rural areas and communities in Northern Ireland (NI) is divided across four government departments and other local agencies and organisations.

The central provider of public transport in Northern Ireland (NI) is Translink, 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 also the major partner in the Rural Transport Fund (RTF), administered by the Department for Regional Development, which supports transport services designed to give people in rural areas improved access to work, education, healthcare, shopping and recreational activities.

The RTF is also used to fund 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 providing additional funding through social enterprise activities. The community transport partnerships operate the day to day running of the transport.

Transport for school pupils in NI is administered by the Education and Library Boards while health and social services transport is overseen by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. In rural areas, the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development funds an Assisted Rural Transport Scheme.

Republic of Ireland

In April 2012, the National Transport Authority took over responsibility for all rural transport in a measure designed to centralise decision making on transport and planning issues. This includes administration of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP), which provides transport services to people whose travel needs and transportation are not met by existing bus or train services. Thirty five groups covering thirty six geographical areas across Ireland are currently funded under the programme. The 2013 Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport allocation to the Programme is €9.133million. The programme is administered by Pobal, a not-for-profit organisation that manages various programmes for the ROI government as well as the European Union.

In April 2012, the National Integrated Rural Transport (NIRT) Committee was established. The Committee is chaired by the National Transport Authority and includes representatives from government departments as well as county and city managers. The aim is to oversee a more focused and coherent approach to transport integration.
STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

Ageing and place

In ROI, 42% of people aged 65+ live in rural areas and 58% live in urban areas (Central Statistics Office, 2012). In 2007/08 in NI, 29% of rural households had one or more person over the pension age (Rural Development Council, 2011).

Income

In ROI, one third of rural households reported difficulty in accessing banking services and general medical practitioners. 35% of households headed by a person aged 65 and over had difficulty accessing public transport. 34% had difficulty accessing banking services, and 29% had difficulty accessing a general practitioner (Central Statistics Office, 2007).

SPENDING ON TRANSPORT AND INCOME

AVERAGE WEEKLY INCOME FOR OLDER PEOPLE - RURAL & URBAN AREAS

**ROI**

- €338
- £385

**NI**

- €461
- £450

**BMUA***

- €450
- £371

* Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area

Spending 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).

Driving licences

74% of men aged 60 and over 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 than ROI. For the over 70 age group, 81% of men and 41% of women have licences. 85% of men and 66% of women aged 60-69 have a licence in NI (Department for Regional Development, 2011).
CASE STUDY 01 - TRANSPORT FOR NSW
Transport for NSW is an integrated transport authority in New South Wales, Australia, which aims to provide better transport outcomes for the community. All decision making for planning and policy is centralised within the 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” (where government departments and agencies were not co-operating fully) of transport provision in New South Wales, with the aim of achieving cost savings and avoiding duplication of services. A 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 (Transport for NSW, 2012).

CASE STUDY 02 - ITN AMERICA
ITN America (Independent Transport Network America) is a not-for-profit organisation which provides door-to-door transport for thousands of older people across the US. It is an innovative solution which interacts with local and state government to provide on-demand tailored driving service. The system is built around credits which older people can earn and store up in order to provide for their own future transport needs. Credits can be earned by volunteering to drive other older people or trading in cars. Family can also purchase gift certificates for credits for older relatives. The credits can be honoured at any branch of ITN across the country. 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, 7 days a week. Additional funding comes from corporate sponsorship, and assistance is available for older people with low incomes.
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 conceal the problem, but then vulnerable groups such as older people who do not drive or are driving less are left with a diminished, under-used service which is not economically viable. People who drive are then dissuaded from switching to the diminished public transport service, compounding the problem (Hoyle & Knowles, 2001). Providing a transport system that facilitates older people in getting to work, shopping, health appointments and social outings is a key challenge.

Walsh et al. (2012) found that for older people in particular, access to a car, or the ability to drive, have a positive impact on their quality of life. Driving or being driven provides mobility, independence and flexibility and this is particularly true in rural areas where amenities are often at greater distances. For this reason, for many older people, giving up driving is seen as a watershed event in their lives, where they envisage that their quality of life will decrease and their ability to participate in activities will decline (Gilhooly et al., 2002).

Much of the current literature and research states that integration of transport and working partnerships are important aspects of saving costs and providing efficient services (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2005) (Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit, 2011). Current research also shows how important 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 (Kavanagh, Doyle, & Metcalfe, 2005).

CARDI conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in both NI and ROI, 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). There was a strong consensus from interviewees that the key challenge in providing rural transport is that, in both ROI and NI, the majority of journeys are made by private car. This means that there is a low 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 a lift from family or friends. Furthermore, services such as hospitals are being increasingly centralised and the public transport network is inadequate for people without a car to reach these services.

Interviewees identified the provision of a public transport system that adequately meets the needs of key target groups such as older and disabled people as a central task. A better understanding of older people as a target consumer group was viewed as an important step. The need for closer working partnerships, particularly between government departments, emerged as an important 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.
RECENT POLICY INITIATIVES

High-level policy on transport in both NI and ROI aspires to the development of a sustainable, integrated and accessible transport system. However, many of the policy initiatives were written before the economic crisis and implementation has been slow as a result of reduced resources. There is a lack of knowledge about the full economic cost of transport provision and tackling duplication in transport spending remains an issue. This research found that in planning public transport and community transport for the future, it is important to 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.

Northern Ireland

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).

Republic of Ireland

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 Co-Ordination 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).

---

2 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.
Policy options for developing rural transport in NI and ROI are presented below.

**Figure 1: Policy options for developing rural transport**  
© Breen (2012)

<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 allow communities to 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 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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCLUSION**

The integration of public and community transport services in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has the potential to improve rural transport provision. The current government and community transport organisation systems for providing rural transport in NI and 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. However, the needs of passengers should be assessed and incorporated into planning for service provision, particularly the needs of groups at risk of social exclusion such as older people who do not drive. In the long-term, using innovative solutions, learning from international experience and working to integrate rural transport can lead to the development of a sustainable and efficient rural transport network that will meet the needs of all passenger groups.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Rural Transport Network. (2013). Speech by Minister of State Alan Kelly to the RTN Meeting. Rural Transport Network.


