



Transport

Affordable transport solutions for rural communities have never been more essential

Speaking up for
rural communities

Transport

Introduction

Affordable transport solutions for rural communities have never been more essential. The ACRE Network works with communities and a range of partners to highlight transport issues and promote sustainable, cost-effective solutions

Overview

Rural areas have experienced a considerable reduction of facilities and services due to cuts in funding and as a consequence of a centralisation agenda.

With the ongoing reduction in local bus services, there is increased reliance on alternative transport solutions - often car-based. This is the consequence if people in rural communities are to access a range of essential services that may now be sited a considerable distance away, e.g. access to health appointments.

The centralisation of services, such as health, does not lend itself to reducing the use of cars and hence minimising carbon emissions. There is a very clear need to develop and improve public and, increasingly importantly, community transport schemes; this should be the focus for long-term sustainable travel solutions.

As a consequence of being 'rural', many small communities do not have the wide range of services and employment concentrated in large towns and urban centres. The obvious outcome of this is that people living in rural areas travel more miles than those living in more urban areas.

For those lacking their own transport, including the young, the elderly, and those with mobility issues, access to services and facilities is a very real



challenge. These people are often the least able to afford high costs of public transport and research shows that, on average, those on lower incomes in rural areas pay a higher proportion of their income on travel costs.

The ACRE Network and local transport providers have worked in partnership for many years to develop tried and tested solutions for individual communities, including demand responsive buses, community minibuses, car-based taxis, good neighbour schemes and even community rail partnerships.

Transport in rural areas is inextricably linked with most of the other issues affecting rural communities. The availability of services and jobs in neighbouring towns is worthless to rural residents without access to appropriate forms of transport to the right place at the right time.

Traditional public transport solutions, even community minibus schemes, are not always viable. Innovation in transport means moving to solutions that more closely match individual needs.

ACRE Network members across the country work with Rural Transport Partnerships, where they exist, and where they don't, they take on the challenge of working with other stakeholders to maintain the focus on rural transport needs and solutions.

For those without their own transport, including the elderly and the young, maintaining access to services is a constant challenge



Issue: Access to services for rural communities

Increasingly for people living in rural areas, essential services are becoming inaccessible because local outlets have closed due to loss of viability. This includes education, health, retail, leisure and specialist services for children and older people. Members of the ACRE Network report that changes to Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT) are having a notable effect, reducing the amount of free hospital transport available with an increased demand on Community Transport schemes. See also our Policy Position Paper on Health

Solution: Creative community-based transport services

The ACRE Network provides a range of solutions to offer communities better access to services. However, it should be noted that community transport schemes are coming under pressure due to a number of factors, including increased running costs, difficulties in recruiting volunteers, a reduction in bus services, funding cuts and reduced support from local authorities.

ACRE Network member Humber & Wolds Rural Community Council's Voluntary Car Service provides accessible transport for rural communities to travel to health and social care appointments for those with no suitable private or public transport options. The service has enabled individuals to access essential services, improved social inclusion and increased opportunities for volunteer working.

ACRE Network member Tees Valley Rural Community Council's Vehicle Brokerage Scheme



provides organised sharing of minibuses in the community. Many groups who own minibuses do not use them all the time, meaning that often the vehicles stand idle.

There are also many groups who would like to use a minibus occasionally, but do not want, or cannot afford, to own their own vehicle.

The brokerage scheme puts these two groups in contact with each other to make better use of available vehicles.

ACRE Network member Surrey Community Action's Voluntary Car Schemes Adviser supports 86 existing schemes and helps develop new schemes.

In 2013/14, the voluntary car schemes undertook 104,500 passenger journeys and supported 8,458 clients, with 85% of requests being health-related. There are between 3,000 and 4,000 volunteers working with these voluntary schemes in Surrey, with demand increasing by 10% over the year.

Issue: Strategic transport problems

Making transport provision effective across rural areas means taking account of the different needs of individual communities

Solution: Local expertise and experience

ACRE Network members can provide the strategic planning and operational skills to overcome challenging problems and enable specialist transport solutions to be generated.

Humber & Wolds RCC works in partnership with other agencies throughout the Humber sub-region, to promote and improve public transport services in

rural areas. It is a member of the East Riding Transport Partnership, which includes representatives from local authorities, the private sector, community transport, special interest groups (cycling/countryside access and disability rights) and rail.

Continues on next page

Solution: Local expertise and experience

Continued from previous page

Its objective is to consider local and national transport and access issues and identify coordinated responses. The partnership has been highlighted as good practice by the Community Transport Association.

Gloucestershire Rural Community Council is a member of the Forest of Dean Community Transport Partnership agreement, which includes Forest Of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council and community transport providers.

The partnership has worked together to coordinate community transport services across the district and secured £300,000 of Big Lottery

funding for activities including evaluation and community consultation

The Community Council of Staffordshire is a member of the South Staffordshire Rural Transport Partnership, made up of the district council, county council, Clinical Commissioning Group and the voluntary and community sector.

The Partnership's major achievement to date has been the introduction of the South Staffordshire Connects service across the whole district, which combines the day care bus services of the county council with a dial-a-ride service using the same fleet. In addition, the partnership supports voluntary and community transport groups through a good practice forum.

Issue: Access to training and employment

For the majority of young people starting work or reaching their local college or place of employment requires travelling significant distances from locations poorly served by public transport. In addition, transport costs for private vehicles are prohibitive — especially when insurance costs are added

Solution: Wheels to Work

Wheels to Work schemes provide affordable modes of transport (often mopeds) to enable young people to travel to work, college or training. It has been estimated that, nationally, schemes save the country more than £19 million of taxpayers' money per year.

There are more than 50 Wheels to Work schemes across England, many of which are run by ACRE Network members.

Schemes such as Shropshire Wheels 2 Work delivered by The Community Council of Shropshire, SCooTS (the Community Development Agency for Hertfordshire) and Wiltshire Wheels to Work (Community First, Wiltshire) provide bespoke transport solutions.

Each project integrates its operational activity with external organisations such as JobcentrePlus, colleges of higher



education and local employers.

Such schemes provide safety training for participants and appropriate safety equipment. Many use local garages to supply and maintain the vehicles, which helps support the local economy.

Wheels to Work schemes have been instrumental in trialling new transport ideas such as electric mopeds, battery-power-assisted bicycles and enabling young disabled people to access work through provision of specialist driving tuition.

Wiltshire Wheels to Work also integrates its work with the Community First credit union so beneficiaries can save and then later take out a loan to purchase their moped. The result is that they become entirely self-sufficient in meeting their own transport needs.