

Policy Position Statement

Rural Transport

High quality, affordable, rural transport is fundamental in ensuring equal access to services for people living in rural Sussex; enabling them to access food, work, education, healthcare, retail and leisure opportunities.

Introduction

The ability to move between places on a regular basis is essential for the majority of the rural population of Sussex, whether it is for work, pleasure or everyday tasks such as the school run or visiting the shops. However, an individual's ability to access these various services and facilities varies greatly and is dependent on financial, social and geographical circumstances as well as nature of the transport services available.

Despite increases in rural car ownership¹, there is still a widespread need for transport services in rural areas. Many people cannot drive, due to financial constraints, disability or age. Others might not have access to a car when they need to travel. Many rural people do rely on their cars² and feel that owning a car is a costly necessity because of a lack of transport alternatives; more so than in urban areas. However for rural people who do not have cars, (non-drivers, older people, young people, people with disabilities or less mobile, people on low incomes) there are often limited transport services, leading to isolation and a deterioration in their quality of life.

Transport issues remains one of the principle issues raised in community led Plans across the two counties. The detail of this is usually concerned with the frequency and accessibility of local transport services and the lack of funding for community schemes that seek to fill the gaps in public and private sector provision.

What is rural transport?

Rural transport is a mixture of public transport and community transport. Public transport consists of commercial bus and rail services and those 'socially necessary services' that

receive subsidised support from East or West Sussex County Council. Where public transport is not available community transport may be able to help.

Community transport in Sussex fills some gaps in the rural transport network at a very local level where for a number of reasons there is little or no public transport; or where these services are inaccessible. Community transport services can be flexible and varied because they respond to a local community's needs. They are non-profit making and often rely on volunteers. Community transport services can benefit anyone and everyone, although in Sussex they tend to cater for older people, people with disabilities and sometimes young people with special, educational needs. Community transport takes many forms, e.g. voluntary car schemes, community minibus services, car clubs.³

Rural transport issues in Sussex

AirS believes that no-one should be disadvantaged by where they live. Yet in parts of East and West Sussex, rural people do not have access to reliable, accessible and affordable transport to access basic necessities and those services that enhance our quality of life.

The higher cost per journey in providing transport to rural areas (given the lower number of passengers and the often longer travel distances) means that public transport services are often prime targets for cuts by operators and subsidisers. In turn, this fragments the transport network and limits the usage of the remaining services, which makes them less economically viable and forces up costs. This leads to further transport reductions, which detrimentally impact on those individuals for whom rural transport is an essential lifeline.

¹ The State of the Countryside 2008

² Nine in 10 people living in rural areas use the car for their main food shopping trips and for travel to hospital; this compares with 7 in 10 adults in urban areas. Office for National Statistics (2002)

³ Further information on the types of Community Transport can be found on AirS website - www.ruralsussex.org.uk

Within community transport provision there are also inequalities and gaps in service provision across Sussex, both geographically and for specific users.

In general, rural areas have a greater proportion of older residents and this is the case in both East and West Sussex. This will have a growing impact on service needs and demands for rural transport services in the future.

As identified by AirS in 2005 young people living in rural areas commonly cannot access transport services that take them conveniently to urban centres, colleges, cinema, clubs etc. This is not just socially isolating but can also have serious repercussions for education, training and access to jobs and employment opportunities.

"I don't drive and buses in Laughton are few and far between, often I have to use a school bus to travel into Lewes for work."

Laughton Resident, 2008

"I can get the bus into town in the morning, but I can't get a bus back home in the afternoon, this means that I have to rush to do all my shopping, health appointments, pay bills etc. Often I can't get a morning appointment and have to get a taxi home, which is expensive"

Sheltered Housing Resident, 2007

Rural Transport Issues

Rural transport issues can be summarised under four headings:

1 Availability

- None or infrequent public transport, especially evenings & weekends;
- Rural transport does not link rural communities with the urban centres where essential services are now located;
- Poor planning and integration of transport provision;
- Limited transport infrastructure, e.g. suitable vehicles, bus shelters, etc;
- The dispersed, low populations in many rural communities make it exceedingly difficult for organisations to identify and address people's transport needs;
- Most community transport providers are already working at capacity, often providing existing services that are unsupported by the public sector. To enable these organisations to undertake additional work, often requires a capacity and investment 'step change', e.g. another vehicle, larger

premises, increased technology etc, which needs financial support.

2 Accessibility

- There is insufficient accessible transport for people with disabilities;
- A lack of centralised, accurate information on all types of rural transport providers across Sussex;
- A lack of integration between different transport modes e.g. community transport does not readily connect with public transport and buses do not connect with trains to give a 'seamless journey';
- Organisations with limited funding tend to invest it in urban areas, where there are large concentrations of need in close proximity. The effect of this is often to centralise services. This saves money for the provider but transfers the cost of accessing services disproportionately on the rural dweller.

3 Attitudes

- There is a presumption that since 'people chose to live in a rural area they should expect less services';
- People need to regain their faith in public transport, particularly vulnerable groups, so that they are confident that transport meets their needs.
- Service providers assume that consumers can afford to, and will be able to, travel to the services they need to access;
- Public sector targeting of resources is based on concentrations of need and largely ignores the dispersed nature of the needs in rural areas that official methods of statistical analysis tend to hide.

4 Affordability

- Service providers need to recognise that it costs more to deliver transport services in rural areas;
- Concessionary fares exist in Sussex for people with disabilities, young people and older people, but there are restrictions on when the concessions are used, that can limit their effectiveness. These concessionary fares are not available to people on low incomes and cannot be used on most forms of community transport.

Current role of Action in rural Sussex

Currently AirS has a number of roles to play in identifying and influencing how rural transport services are provided and developed across Sussex. These include the following:-

- Influencing those organisations involved in transport services in Sussex, to ensure access for everyone and that the impact of policy decisions on rural areas is fully understood at local, regional or national level.
- Being a strong rural voice for Sussex communities and representing the transport needs of rural Sussex communities at a local, regional and national level.
- Promoting the delivery of more services in the rural areas by optimising the use of community buildings as multi service delivery points.
- Assisting rural communities to access employment, retail facilities, health and care facilities, education and training, leisure and social activities, and information and advice services.
- Encouraging the use of existing public and community transport.
- Developing and supporting community transport services to deliver local solutions e.g. voluntary car schemes, taxi voucher schemes etc.
- Working in partnership with other organisations to deliver an integrated and coordinated rural transport service.
- Encouraging alternative transport solutions to reduce car use, by raising the profile of public and community transport, cycling and walking.

Action in rural Sussex recommendations

1. Integration and co-ordination of existing services

High quality transport services are provided to remote rural areas in many European Countries. Their success is achieved through the integrated planning and delivery of transport services between public, private and voluntary sector to provide access for everyone irrespective of their location and needs. This helps retain and expand transport networks and reduces private car use because better alternatives exist, whilst ensuring that people without cars are not disadvantaged.

In the UK, current transport approaches focus on only providing public transport for those people whose need is undeniable as a result of rigorous means testing to qualify for education or healthcare support. This fragments and undermines any existing transport structure with the inevitable result that the overwhelming majority rely heavily on private cars and increasingly do not experience public transport. The minority on the other hand are faced with increasing isolation and difficulty in accessing even basic services.

In Sussex rural transport planning and provision should move towards a more integrated approach to transport services. This in turn will encourage individuals to reduce their carbon footprint and provide equality of access for everyone.

In the longer term, AirS would like to see better planning of transport and service delivery at the Regional, County and local level to maximise transport integration and co-ordination. This strategic work would be supported by more local clusters or zones of local transport delivery partners that work together to improve services.

2. Co-operation

Closer co-operation, and joint working amongst service providers on the planning and delivery of services in rural areas, through the establishment of a strategic transport group, which is supported by catchment clusters of local transport delivery partners. The Partnership approach / recognition of role of community transport and need for investment. Projects such as Down your Way which is encouraging joint working and providing additional support to community transport providers to complement public transport provision should be supported.

3. Resourcing rural transport

Additional resources are needed to develop and maintain rural transport initiatives and to encourage community organisations to come forward to help improve local delivery.

4. Rural Evidence Base

There is a pressing need to develop a rural evidence base, by mapping provision of services and activity in Sussex rural communities, in conjunction with feedback from community led action plans on specific needs. This will enable AirS and other service planners to better understand and provide for the needs of rural communities.

5. Service delivery in rural areas

Service providers should work more closely with rural communities through the increased use of existing community assets where these are available. The current Rural Access to Services Programme (RASP) will usefully explore this approach with a number of rural communities over the next three years and will seek to transfer successful outcomes to other communities in the Counties. Part of the programme will also explore ways of integrating transport services with rural service and information centres.

6. Market Towns

Market Towns need to be recognised as transport interchanges within the rural areas. They enable people to access those services still located in larger urban areas. Services and resources need to be planned accordingly.

7. Rural proofing

Airs will provide support to the Rural Partnership to rural proof local transport services in order to raise rural issues and ensure equity of provision. From this the service commissioners must be encouraged to build in the higher cost of providing services in rural areas to their service level agreements and contracts.

What Parish & Town Councils and rural communities can do:

Find out what the transport needs are in your rural community. You can do this as part of a village action plan or market town health-check.

- Actively promote and support your existing rural community transport schemes.
- Remember that Section 106 agreements are valuable sources of funding to support new and existing community transport services.

- Work in partnership with others. For example it may be more viable to set up a brokerage scheme with 3 other rural communities than go it alone.
- Develop new rural community transport schemes, e.g. a car club, or a walking school bus.
- Promote the benefits of non-car travel to your community – the health benefits, environmental benefits, cost benefits and social benefits.

What individuals can do:

The transport choices that we make affect us all. There are lots of ways you can make a difference. You could...

- Find out what the transport needs are in your rural community
- Become a community champion and raise awareness of the issues facing vulnerable people in your community
- Become a volunteer with your local community transport group
- Think about your own travel choices, can you do something differently? For example, give up your car 1 day a week or share a journey with a friend or use public transport?
- Set up or join a car club (see www.ruralsussex.org.uk)
- Take responsibility for your local transport information by ensuring community transport information is up to date and available. For example is it displayed in key locations in your community, e.g. Drs surgery, the school, the pub, the village shop, parish notice-boards, the village website?

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