



## **Policy Position Paper: Transport**

### **ACRE's rural vision**

Our vision is that rural communities will increasingly take a leading role in ensuring the social, environmental and economic well-being of all their residents. They will do this in a way that provides for the present generation and also plans for future needs and future challenges. RCAN members will be there to stimulate their thinking, support their work and help turn their aspirations into a reality.

### **Rural vision for transport in rural areas**

Rural communities need affordable transport solutions that deliver services to places and at times communities need. These solutions are best when they are developed by the community, often in partnership with a range of providers.

The weight of evidence shows that the amount of car use in rural areas and the rest of the country is unsustainable and must fall. To minimise carbon emissions there is a need to reduce travel, especially by car, and develop and improve public and community transport schemes that accord with rural communities' needs and provide viable long term travel solutions. Rural areas have experienced an erosion of facilities and services and a concentration in fewer centres. As such the need for transport is an inevitable consequence of living in rural areas if people are to access a range of essential services in neighbouring towns and further afield.

People in rural areas travel more miles compared to the English population overall and the reason is obvious. Small communities cannot support the range of jobs and services that more urban populations enjoy. For those without their own transport, including the elderly, the young and those with mobility problems, maintaining access to services is a constant challenge. These are often the least able to afford high costs of public transport and research shows that, on average, people on lower incomes in rural areas pay a higher proportion of their income on travel costs. Also of great concern is that death rates from road accidents tend to be higher in rural areas, whilst walking and cycling on rural roads carry significant risks.

RCAN 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 mini-buses, 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. RCAN 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.

### **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

### **Solution: Creative community based transport services**

RCAN provides a range of solutions to offer communities better access to services. 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.

Tees Valley Vehicle Brokerage Scheme from the Rural Community Council 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. Brokerage is simply getting the maximum amount of usage, by as many people as possible, of the available local minibuses.

Surrey Community Action is the lead body for a Concessionary Travel Club which has been created to help bus pass holders in Surrey to maximise the use of their passes and to remain active and healthy and save money. The Travel Club provides a user friendly website, helps promote tourism and supports local businesses.

### **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 especially 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 over 50 Wheels to Work schemes across England, many of which are run by RCAN members. Schemes like 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 their 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.

### **Issue: strategic transport problems**

Making transport provision effective in rural areas means taking account of the very different context of individual communities. The same can also apply to overcome difficult strategic challenges.

### **Solution: Local expertise and experience**

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

On behalf of the unitary authority, the Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council Rail Team took over the public relations and management of the impact of the 11 weeks closure of the South Pennine Rail Route in North East Lincolnshire. It was a project that the local authority could not have undertaken without considerable expenditure beyond their budget restraints. Apart from minimising the effects of the closure, the Team raised the profile of public transport and access to services for those without private cars. More importantly, it encouraged a long term shift to rail and public transport and significant public interest and community involvement in maintaining it so it benefits local people. This has also helped to sustain a vibrant coastal resort without the negatives of increased pollution and car travel.

Tees Valley Rural Community Council led a Task and Finish Group for Redcar and Cleveland Local Strategic Partnership. Their enquiry investigated transport issues across the Borough and identified the key areas where action needed to be addressed. It raised awareness about the concerns expressed within the community about their travel needs and gave evidence of the work being undertaken in other areas including by other RCAN members.

### **Issue: road safety**

The number of deaths from road accidents is higher in rural areas, one of the reasons being the excessive speed of motorists. Research has shown that many local residents speed in their own area without realising they are doing so, and, in many cases an awareness of speed is needed to slow drivers down and make our roads safer.

### **Solution: Community action helping to enforce local speed limits**

Following pilots, Community Speed Watch was launched in April 2005. It is a partnership project involving RCAN member, Northamptonshire ACRE alongside the police, county council and local communities.

Community Speed Watch is only undertaken with community support and involves residents of a village being trained in the use of hand held speed guns. The information gathered is then sent to the police. Its main purpose is to promote a culture change among drivers not to provide evidence for prosecution.

Community Speed Watch encourages local people to take action and to become involved in making safe the roads in their village community. It fosters community spirit and strengthens links between the parish and local authorities. The idea is that if just a few drivers become more aware of their speed and slow down to obey the limits, motorists following them will also slow down, thereby reducing risk, or at the very least, the residents' perception of risk of accidents. Community Speed Watch is a positive and proactive way in which local residents can work together to tackle this important issue.

## **About ACRE**

Action with Communities in Rural England is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country. We aim to promote a healthy, vibrant and sustainable rural community sector that is well connected to policy and decision-makers who play a part in delivering this aim. ACRE is nationally recognised for its expertise in ensuring rural community-led solutions are central to public policy debate.

ACRE is a member of:

- Homes & Communities Agency Rural Housing Advisory Group
- Age UK Rural Advisory Group
- Ministerial Task Force on climate change, the environment and sustainable development
- The new national rural coalition, under the chairmanship of Matthew Taylor MP, which aims to take forward his 2008 proposals to government on a Living, Working, Countryside.

## **RCAN Rural Community Action Network**

The Rural Community Action Network comprises 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) at local level, RCC regional groupings and their national arm in ACRE, providing coverage of all rural areas throughout England. RCCs are county-based, independent, local development agencies that, for decades, have been delivering support on the ground to enable rural communities to improve quality of life for all. They act as a strategic voice for rural communities, allowing grassroots issues to be championed and solutions worked out in partnership between statutory, voluntary and private sector providers. Their strength lies in their ability to work within communities in an inclusive and holistic way, helping local people to develop local solutions and identify unmet needs through a unique approach to community-led planning. Alongside this, RCCs provide a trusted local support network for rural community groups, including dedicated expertise in arenas such as transport, housing, the management of community-owned facilities, social enterprise and rural services.

## **RCAN National coverage, local reach**

Members of the Rural Community Action Network have a long history of supporting communities to find solutions to their needs. We do this by supporting all sections of the community to plan for the future and by developing relevant services that meet the needs of all generations. We do this with a passion for social inclusion, and high standards throughout the network.

Network members

- Provide genuine reach into rural communities across England, linking national, regional and local policy with community action at the grassroots
- Promote and develop local solutions that benefit the social, environmental and economic well-being of communities
- Act as a focal point for partners across statutory, private and voluntary sectors, working together to benefit rural communities
- Tackle disadvantage by ensuring their work within rural communities reaches out to marginalised groups and encourages the development of local services for those least able to travel

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**This document is one of a series covering the following topics, Rural Challenges, Community Led Planning, Climate Change, Rural Community Buildings, Housing, Rural Services, Transport, Sustainable Communities, Social Inclusion, Older People, Children & Young People, Healthcare and Digital Inclusion.**

**Published on 22<sup>th</sup> September 2009**