

Rural Transport, What are the Options?

Paul Fawcett
Sheffield Hallam University
TravelWatch NW

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“Rurality” - what is “Rural”

- Can be defined with reference to an area’s economy (e.g. agriculture, forestry, quarrying, tourism) or
- Defined with reference to spatial criteria such as population density or “connectivity”

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The Rural Transport Problem 1

- Dispersed population
- Low density of settlements
- Rural depopulation (a myth? - but demographics skewed)
- Green belts and dormitory belts
- Second homes
- Unaffordable housing
- Ageing population

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The Rural Transport Problem 2

- Separation of Transport and Land Use Planning
- Consolidation/relocation of retail, health, leisure and education facilities.
- Information Technology (e.g. mail order, homeworking, web 2 etc.) can only partially allay exclusion.

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The Rural transport Problem 3

- Legacy of Station and line closures
- Infrequent or no Registered Local Services, or
- Only tendered and schools services.
- No opportunity for concessionary travel
- High (and unwanted) car ownership and usage
- Unlicenced minority (age and infirmity)

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Access v Mobility

- Lack of access defines the problem
- Lack of mobility compounds it
- Every village cannot today have a school, pub, Post Office, shop, garage, doctor, church and clergy, bank etc.
- BUT the above are drivers of social inclusion.
- Thus Mobility becomes more important than Accessibility

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Mobility Rules

- Despite Government aim
- To reduce dependence on private transport and
- To promote public transport
- *Ref “New Deal for Transport” 1998*

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The Vicious Circle

- Increased car use = less demand for public transport, i.e. less passengers = higher fares = increased car use etc etc

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Interventions 1

- 1963 Beeching closures and Jack Report
- 1968 PTEs (some surprisingly rural!)
- 1985 Transport Act:- Bus de-reg; taxi-buses; Rural Transport Development Fund (via Rural Development Commission (RDC)- “innovation trap”).
- 1993 Rail Privatisation; Post Bus ‘surge’; community rail partnerships.

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Interventions 2

- 1998 “New Deal for Transport” ; RDC + Countryside Commission = CoAg
- 2000 Rural Transport Partnerships; Parish Transport Grants; Rural Bus Grant and Rural Bus Challenge; flexible registrations to support Demand Responsive Transport .
- 2004 Haskins Report split CoAg = CRC(policy) + Natural England (delivery of policies funded by DEFRA via Regional Development Agencies)

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Interventions 3

- 2006 Commission for Rural Communities called for more funding, especially revenue funding. TOWN “Rural Transport Funding Report”
- 2007 Concessionary Travel Act and further L.G. re-organisation (more Unitaries)

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Interventions 4

- 2008 Local Transport Act :- re-regulation? ; taxi-buses ; Passenger Focus ; relaxation of Minibus Regulations for Community Transport/Buses ; Relaxation of Competition law for bus services ; ITAs (new coverages)
- 2009 Local Democracy etc. Bill - City Regions. ; end of Rural Bus Challenge.
- 2009 LTAs become TCAs

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Prognosis?

- DfT appear to be clearing their decks for a new “omnibus” public transport grant from 2011 embracing Block Transport Grant, Supplementary Transport Grant (Rate Support Grant) ; Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) ; concessionary fares ‘make up’ ; Rural Bus Grant ; “kick-start” funds ; Metropolitan Railways Grant etc. etc.

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Role of LG (ATCO)

- Still most significant supporters of rural transport
- Constrained by three factors (identified by RPCNW in May 2003) Viz:
 - Deregulation
 - Competition Law
 - Conflicting PSV and Taxi licensing regimes constrain the provision of local services by small passenger carrying vehicles at separate fares

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Possible “solutions”

- Hybrid services (passengers and goods)
- Wider Welcome “Visitor” Programmes
- Capture of Cross Sector Benefits.
- Tendered Network Zones (TNZs - ATCO)

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Hybrid Transport Examples

- Post Buses
- TVL (Town and Village Link)
- Coast to Coast Packhorse
- Linkline and Northern Fells (NHS samples)
- Isle of Arran - demountable bus body
- Highland Omnibus “freight buses”
- Border Courier
- News(papers) Bus - Callander

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Wider Welcome Examples

- Dales Rail
- Coast to Coast
- Hadrian's Wall bus
- Snowdon Sherpa
- National Park buses
- Indigenous use of Visitor Transport

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Cross Sector Benefits

- Savings in Patient Transport Services budgets e.g. independent access to clinics.
- Savings in Social Services Budget - e.g. domiciliary care (such as shopping) for isolated clients.
- Savings in Education budget - e.g. schools transport provided by RLSs at child fares.
- Savings to NHS through passengers' "well being" (as opposed to depression).

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Tendered Network Zones

- ATCO proposal
- Redress “urban centricity” of Local Transport Bill.
- Payment of BSOG to LTA would make most services non commercial
- Tendered Networks could also tender any residual commercial services at a premium
- Similar to but not the same as a QC

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References

- “Rural Transport” Jack Report DoT 1963
- “Personal Mobility and Transport Policy” Hillman, Mayer. 1973
- “Rural Transport Policy” Cullinane/Stokes 1998
- “Transport in tomorrow’s Countryside” CoAg 2003
- “Rural Transport Funding - a review of Public Transport Needs in the Countryside” TravelWatch NW August 2006
- “Integrated Transport, are we getting there?” Challis and Fawcett, RPCNW May 2003

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Still to Come in 2009

- “Bus Services Survey (NW England)” TWNW
(In progress - services to be surveyed are mainly but not exclusively rural)
- “Rural Transport - a guide, Fawcett, 2009. *(in production)*

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Conclusions

- Rural Transport will always need revenue subsidy and working capital.
- Conventional urban solutions are often not applicable.
- Scope for partnership approaches (ACORP, RTPs etc).
- Cross Sector Benefits not captured

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