Access to Rural Areas Action Plan

"A Catalyst for Change"

The Regional Transport Strategy for the west of Scotland 2007-2021

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
September 2009

Contents

Purpose

This Access to Rural Areas Action Plan is one of a series of Action Plans developed as part of the Regional Transport Strategy, which was approved by Scottish Ministers in June 2008. This Action Plan sets out the key issues, objectives and recommendations for transport access to rural locations in the SPT area. It summarises work undertaken in analysing the issues and challenges for rural accessibility and is intended to set out a clear programme of action to take forward improvements to transport access to rural areas.

Issues, Constraints and Opportunities

The following issues, constraints and opportunities were identified following analysis by SPT and consultation with SPT member councils and stakeholders as part of the RTS development process.

- **Transport provision**
  The frequency and reliability of transport provision in rural areas tends to be poor. The commercial viability of public transport services is often tenuous and support is usually required to provide even a basic level of service. SPT supports a number of bus services in rural areas, although funding for this is limited. The disproportionate cost of providing frequent and reliable public transport to a dispersed rural population acts as a major constraint to improving rural accessibility.

- **Diversity of the region**
  The geographical area of SPT, whilst primarily defined as "urban", does contain both the largest urban conurbation in Scotland as well as some geographically remote areas. These extremes create certain difficulties in connectivity and a lack of opportunity to access education, jobs, healthcare and recreation. Levels of accessibility can vary considerably within rural areas with the most inaccessible rural areas within the SPT area being in parts of South and East Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Argyll and Bute and the Isle of Arran. It should also be noted that many people in the rural hinterland and islands beyond the SPT area rely on services within it including health, education etc.

- **Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)**
  DRT services are often wrongly associated as being uniquely for the elderly population. However, Dial-a-Bus is available to young persons with mobility issues but there is little evidence that it is marketed as such. The uptake in that client group is poor.

  Ring'n'Ride, which is available to all where limited or no mainstream bus services operate, has had little recent investment in awareness and marketing. Capacity still exists at certain times in the network which could be utilised at little additional costs.

- **Community Transport**
  There may be opportunities to make efficiencies in the provision of Community Transport (CT) across the west of Scotland by directing funding through the West of Scotland Community Transport Forum. In addition, centralising the booking services for CT would also offer the opportunity to improve the efficient use of vehicles and potentially make cost savings for the service.

- **Access to Services**
  Everyday services such as shops, schools and health centres, tend to be located in local centres within rural areas. Frequently, these services are not within walking or cycling distance. Many people therefore depend upon cars to go about their daily business.

- **Car Ownership**
  Car ownership in rural areas tends to be higher than urban areas as there is greater dependence upon car use due to the dispersed pattern of development.

- **Variety of users**
  Different levels of personal physical mobility along with the distance from a person's residence to public transport facilities can limit the opportunities for modal shift. There are some groups that are particularly vulnerable and at risk of exclusion within rural areas especially if they do not have access to a car.

- **Social exclusion**
  Accessibility to services and transport is an issue of crucial importance in rural areas as it helps facilitate social inclusion and economic sustainability. Frequently, services are not within walking or cycling distance in rural areas and many depend on cars and public transport. Where these modes are not readily available or affordable, this can lead to social exclusion.

- **Island Communities**
  Island communities rely on ferry and air links for access to the services offered on the mainland. Frequency and reliability of services can be a problem with services at times being subject to delay or cancellation in adverse weather conditions and the more limited frequency at certain times during the year.

- **Data**
  Whilst there is data available about access to services in rural areas there are some issues over the quality of the data and some gaps in data collection that need to be addressed.

- **Availability of bus services and facilities**
  Where bus services are available in rural areas they are often considered to be infrequent and unreliable and many services do not run in the evening and weekends. There is also often a lack of public transport integration in rural areas which makes it difficult to undertake journeys that require interchange between services and can discourage people making trips by public transport.

- **Partnership working**

  The public sector has limited control over the provision of public transport and relies upon partnership working with operators to deliver services. While effective partnership working is already in evidence, there is a need for a long-term commitment to collaborative working and to identify efficiencies through joint working.

- **Integration of transport and land use planning**

  There is a need to better integrate transport and land-use planning. It is important to locate rural services close to existing or proposed walking, cycling and public transport routes to reduce dependency on the private car. Promoting a strong sustainable settlement strategy which recognises the role of transport is fundamental to improving this integration.

- **Affordability**

  The cost of supplying public transport tends to be higher in rural areas due to the small numbers of passengers using the service, combined with relatively high car ownership. When all other transport options are unavailable many are forced to rely on taxis to undertake their daily activities. Whilst providing a level of convenience, taxis are nonetheless expensive and a less sustainable mode of transport.

Objectives

The objectives of the Access to Rural Areas Action Plan are to:

- Improve the access to, and the coverage and convenience of, sustainable transport for people of all ages and abilities
- Facilitate social inclusion by the provision of safe walking, cycling and public transport routes to local services
- Improve integration of transport services and partnership working between all the bodies involved in transport delivery in rural areas
- Improve the efficiency of transport delivery and maximise the usage of available resources
- Seek to ensure the transport network is capable of meeting its demand

Recommendations

The following recommendations will be developed in partnership with member councils and key stakeholders.

- **Consultation Forum**

  Establishing a forum will enhance co-ordination and help achieve a more efficient provision of transport as well as helping to address specific problems and take forward initiatives.

- **Service Integration**
  Greater co-ordination in the booking and usage of fleet vehicles available to provide transport services in rural areas could improve the service on offer to the public. Co-ordination with Community Transport Groups and other providers of minibus-based transport services could improve service integration.

- **Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)**
  Expansion of DRT services may provide opportunities to improve rural accessibility. Procurement of smaller vehicles may make expansion of DRT more feasible and cost effective. Relaxing the eligibility criteria for Dial-a-Bus and Ring n Ride may allow more people to use the services provided that this does not adversely affect the accessibility of those who are currently entitled to use the DRT services.

  Consideration should be given to the re-branding and re-launch of SPT's and associated partners' DRT services under a more appealing new brand - "MyBus" having been used very successfully elsewhere as an example.

- **Partnership Working**
  Efficiencies could be derived from closer integration between the organisations involved in delivering transport in rural areas. By improving co-ordination between public, private and voluntary agencies, better use can be made of the limited resources available.

- **Transport Interchanges**
  Development of small scale interchange facilities could provide users with greater assurance of minimum quality provision and more certainty of onward connections. This will also require improved integration between existing services and any proposed new services and infrastructure.

- **Land-use Planning**
  Integration with land-use planning is vital to ensure that the transport and accessibility aspects of a development are considered from the outset. The availability of services such as local shops, health centres, schools etc and the location of new developments, should take into consideration the catchment area and the accessibility issues faced by rural residents.

- **Data Collection**
  The gap in the knowledge base in relation to the accessibility of services in rural areas inhibits the ability to target areas of poor accessibility. An accessibility analysis exercise to identify gap areas and social groups requires to be undertaken.

- **Timetable Integration**
  There may be scope to improve timetable integration in rural areas given the high number of supported services that operate within the SPT area. Closer integration of timetables between services operating in the same local area could be achieved, firstly by a review of existing services which could then be fed into the tendering process as and when contracts expire and are re-let.

- **Rural Ticketing**
  Amendments to ticketing arrangements may make public transport more accessible and affordable for people in rural areas. The expansion of ZoneCard into rural areas could be considered although this has to be linked with a more efficient level of public transport.

- **Community Planning Partnerships**
  Closer partnership working should be encouraged across all sectors to tackle issues in rural areas in an integrated manner. Such partnership working would be helpful in establishing accessibility analysis as a basis for targeting improvements.

- **Community Transport**
  SPT should consider providing a bureau service to all Community Transport Partnerships to schedule and assist in the booking of CT services thereby reducing the cost burden on these schemes. Ideally funding directly to CT schemes should be referred to the West of Scotland Community Transport Forum to ensure maximisation of service delivery by utilising central scheduling and booking resource and channelling funding directly toward the provision of CT vehicles.

- **Information Systems**
  It is important that good information regarding public transport services is available. This information should be available in local centres, shops and community facilities to ensure people become more aware of walking and cycling routes along with public transport timetables.

- **Transport Services**
  Achieve a better understanding of the way in which existing public transport information systems are currently used and identify and implement measures to improve information provision.

- **Bus Quality Partnerships**
  There is scope to improve the availability of bus services by developing a Quality Partnership between SPT, local authorities and bus operators. A Quality Partnership could help deliver improvements in service coverage, frequencies and infrastructure provision.

- **Accessibility Planning**
  Undertake a planning audit of existing service locations and current travel patterns at both the local and regional level, including consideration of socio-demographic factors that may contribute to these travel patterns (for example, health needs of different groups within the population). Develop an index of communities experiencing isolation and carry out an analysis of community profiles and alternatives for improving access.

Target

To develop a programme for the implementation of the Access to Rural Areas Action Plan through SPT's and member Councils Capital Plans by March 2010.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the agreed programme will be incorporated within SPT's Business Plan monitoring process.

Further Information

Related reports are available on our website www.spt.co.uk and further information is available from rts@spt.co.uk or by contacting:

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SPT

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