



## **FUTURE OF TRANSPORT: RURAL STRATEGY – CALL FOR EVIDENCE**

### **SUBMISSION BY THE CONFEDERATION OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT**

#### **ABOUT CPT**

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) represents the operators of bus and coach services across the UK. We have more than one thousand enterprises in membership, including major PLCs, municipally-owned companies and family businesses with fewer than ten vehicles and accounting for in excess of 95% of the bus fleet and 55% of coach fleet in the UK.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Rethinking rural transport provision needs a partnership approach between Local Transport Authorities (LTAs), other public bodies, public transport operators and community groups. By working together these organisations can create an integrated approach which brings together transport service planning and management across a range of service types.
- To be cost-effective such services require pooled procurement along with new ways of using technology to combine demand from members of the public, including students and people needing non-emergency health transport. Such a project therefore requires a longer-term commitment from all parties.
- As part of this approach, in some areas Demand Responsive Transport could be beneficial in delivering services in more isolated, rural locations where standard, scheduled services are not commercially viable.
- Coaches can also play a key role in delivering governments ambition for an inclusive society.
- Local authorities should be encouraged to implement coach friendly policies and consider the role that coach travel can play when taking decisions around, for example, planning, transport, environment, economy and education.

#### **CHALLENGES FOR RURAL TRANSPORT**

The bus industry is committed to meeting passengers' needs and delivering a good service to all areas where it can. However it is clear that for some rural areas the traditional model of one or two scheduled buses a day does not meet the requirements of the residents, it is not viable for operators and not affordable for local authorities.



The industry therefore wants to work with local authority partners to find new and imaginative ways of meeting passengers' needs across the country, ensuring that people can stay connected to jobs, schools, leisure facilities and vital services.

Rethinking rural transport provision needs a partnership approach between LTA's, other public bodies, public transport operators and community groups. By working together these organisations can create an integrated approach which brings together transport service planning and management across a range of service types, optimising resources, generating new market demand, and meeting the need for socially necessary supported services. Commercial bus networks can focus on key corridors that become the backbone of the system around which other provision is organised, with smaller minibus, demand responsive, community transport services feeding into commercial routes. Education, social services, and non-emergency health transport should be an integral part of this.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, bus operators have been implementing flexible, demand-led solutions to respond to passenger demand, ranging from adding extra services to cater for NHS staff or other specific passenger demand, amending timetables and scheduling, and having buses on standby to manage unexpected capacity issues that might arise, through to providing on-demand, app-based transport solutions. Examples of such activity are set out below. All these solutions minimised and continue to minimise the cost of putting capacity where needed and lessons could be learned from these examples (and others) for transport solutions in other rural areas.

**Stagecoach Connect** – was launched in May 2020 and is the UK's first dedicated app-based demand responsive bus service for NHS workers. The service was developed in partnership with local authorities to support the NHS workers during the coronavirus pandemic. The mobile app allows healthcare workers to track the location of their bus, pre-book a service up to one week in advance and change or cancel a booking to flex around their shifts. They can select a desired pick up and drop off point allowing for quick and efficient shared trips without lengthy detours.

**Tees Flex** - a state-of-the-art on-demand service provided by Stagecoach in Tees Valley, aimed to help residents in more isolated communities across the region to access essential services along with training and employment opportunities created in the area. Passengers can pre-book their chosen bus via a smartphone app, website or over the phone. They can also request pick up or drop off points within Darlington & Stockton, Hartlepool, and Redcar & Cleveland, and to other destinations including train stations and hospitals outside of the area.

To be cost-effective such services require pooled procurement along with new ways of using technology to combine demand from members of the public, including students and people needing non-emergency health transport. Such a project therefore requires a longer-term commitment from all parties and is something that local authorities and bus operators working in partnership in certain locations might consider going forward as part of their agreed plan for bus travel post-pandemic to serve specific, hard to reach communities if they can identify and access appropriate funding streams.

Our *Moving Forward Together* paper which was published in September 2019 set out the bus industry's vision for transforming bus services in England by 2030, included some urban and suburban case studies of DRT which operators planned to learn from to identify potential solutions for rural areas where standard, scheduled services are not commercially viable. Whilst some of these trials



have demonstrated that they are able to get people out of their cars and onto public transport – for example 52% of ArrivaClick customers previously used private cars and taxis - finances for these services have proved to be a challenge. Experience has shown that the operating cost of a DRT service is broadly comparable to that of a normal local bus service at a per vehicle basis; savings on e.g. vehicle purchase price and fuel are offset by costs for the technology and a despatcher – which are as much as 13% of total operating costs - as well as higher depreciation costs for the vehicles due to their expected shorter lifespan. Go Ahead, for example, were only able to recoup around 50% of their operating costs from revenue for their PickMeUp service in Oxford, which has now had to cease due to lack of external funding sources.

Experience shows that such services perform most strongly when partnered with other streams of support such as from local authorities, other public bodies, and businesses. As well as providing a 'total transport' solution in rural areas, with adequate sources of funding a DRT scheme could be used to facilitate a bus priority scheme or help transition to a demand management scheme such as a Workplace Parking Levy or road user charging. The latter might provide a revenue stream to fund the DRT in the longer term. The Rural Mobility Fund could provide a funding source for DRT to be trialled as a rural mobility solution in some areas.

Therefore, we do not expect DRT to replace standard, scheduled services, however it could provide a niche solution in areas of the country that are extremely rural, on the routes which currently are not commercially viable, with the correct partnership in place.

Examples of where this approach has worked well include:

**Devon's Total Transport Pilot** - The pilot, which started in May 2016, brought together the management of NHS non-emergency patient transport and Devon County Council's public and community transport, education, social care, and fleet management within a single Transport Coordination Service. The combined spend covered by the Council and the NHS, of £50 million a year provides considerable scope to provide a better integrated solution. There is a good working relationship with commercial bus companies, through council support and external funding such as Section 106 funding, with the aim of developing services so they are eventually able to be taken on commercially. The scheme has led to improved service frequencies and increases in passenger numbers.

**InterConnect and CallConnect services in Lincolnshire** - Demand responsive CallConnect services were introduced in Lincolnshire to cover the village and to provide interchange with scheduled, inter-urban (InterConnect) services. Other InterConnect and CallConnect services were gradually added to the network, with common branding and service standards. Results showed that Lincolnshire County Council had reduced its bus service budget by £1,000,000, 27 routes covered 90% of Lincolnshire and there had been a 52% growth in the CallConnect passenger numbers between 2009 and 2011. The network provides good connectivity across a very rural area and has demonstrated that with the appropriate frequency enhancements, it can be a viable alternative to car travel.



## **CREATING A CONNECTED NETWORK TO ENCOURAGE ACTIVE TRAVEL**

Travelling by bus can have a positive effect on passenger health by increasing their level of active travel. The average bus user walks for at least 20 minutes as part of their commute and there is a clear link between using public transport and a lower Body Mass Index.

Bus fulfils journeys where walking or cycling are not feasible, however in rural areas first and last mile solutions to get people to bus stops should be considered; providing supportive measures such as cycle racks at bus stops and ensuring safe pedestrian access to bus stops will increase bus accessibility, and could encourage more passengers to leave their car at home.

## **COACH CAN ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO RURAL TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS AND HELP DELIVER AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY**

Coach travel can play an important role in sustainable, accessible transport across the country, including in rural areas. They provide a safe and convenient form of transport which is often door to door for people who might otherwise be reluctant to travel, and therefore provide a valuable contribution to the government's social inclusion goals. Coaches also transport around 600,000 children to school each day and are often essential for getting children to school in rural areas.

It is important that local authorities recognise the important role that the coach industry can play in such transport and support their local operators to deliver, for example, local authority-contracted services. Using coaches for home to school transport rather than relying on parents transporting children in individual cars can improve inclusivity, reduce congestion and air pollution at the school gates and improve safety (with less vehicles travelling around schools).

## **DECARBONISATION**

Bus operators have led the way in decarbonising road transport and have invested £2bn in new cleaner and greener buses over the last five years, meaning the UK now has its cleanest ever bus fleet. In our bus strategy *Moving Forward Together* published in September 2019 the bus industry committed to only buying zero emission or ultra- low emission buses from 2025, in return for Government support for the extra purchase cost of ultra-low and zero emission buses until prices progressively align with comparators, and support for delivery of the necessary infrastructure. We also stressed the need for Government to put in place a clear plan, under its Industrial Strategy, to support the UK's manufacturing and supply chain in improving and developing technologies around ultra-low and zero emission vehicles.

Our *Moving Forward Together* commitment included ultra-low as well as zero emission buses. The battery range of fully electric vehicles is still not adequate for some longer/more rural routes and so, if battery electric were used on these routes, more electric buses will be needed than their equivalent ultra-low or diesel options to cope with higher mileage operations/longer working days, etc. Whilst the emergence of hydrogen vehicles can help with this, for the deployment of any type of zero



emission bus on e.g. school, rural and SME operations more time is needed for issues around infrastructure and price to be worked through.

We therefore suggest that transition to zero emission buses focuses in the first instance on heavily used urban services where economies of scale and air quality benefits can be achieved, and where there is scope to encourage significant modal shift from private car to public transport. Getting people out of their cars and onto the bus would have a dramatic impact on carbon emissions and air quality. If everyone took one more bus journey a month there would be a billion fewer car journeys and we would reduce the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by 2 million tonnes a year.<sup>1</sup>

***CPT***

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<sup>1</sup> Greener Journeys (2013) [greenerjourneys.com/blog/help-us-take-one-billion-car-journeys-off-the-road/](https://greenerjourneys.com/blog/help-us-take-one-billion-car-journeys-off-the-road/)