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# TfN Rural Mobility Policy Position Statement

February 2022



## Context

Transport for the North (TfN) is a Statutory Transport Body (STB) of elected leaders and a partnership of business leaders who collectively represent the region's 15 million people. As a partnership, TfN brings 20 Local Transport Authorities and 11 Local Enterprise Partnerships together with Network Rail, National Highways, HS2 Ltd, and UK Government.

Through its statutory powers, TfN provides a single voice for the North to support the development and implementation of transport strategies across the region, determining investment decisions and working with Government to enable northern priorities to be included within national priorities. Operating within this strategic position, TfN and partners work collaboratively to identify the transport infrastructure and policy measures that are required to achieve the North's ambition.

Our Strategic Transport Plan (STP) is a formally adopted plan which recognises the importance of the rural economy in the North of England. More than 2.1 million people in the North reside in communities classified as rural, accounting for around 14% of the total population, and more than 121,000 businesses operate from the rural North.<sup>1</sup>

Rural areas are extremely diverse across the North, with challenges including poor access to education and employment, health inequalities, high per capita carbon emissions, shortage of affordable homes, older population profiles, and social isolation. There are also areas which are significantly more affluent, with higher-than-average levels of car ownership and distance travelled. However, zero emission vehicle infrastructure is limited in rural areas, making it more difficult for private car users to shift towards more sustainable fuel sources.

We recognise there are different types of rural areas across the North, such as hamlets and isolated dwellings, villages, town and fringe, some of which are then also located in sparse settings. For rural mobility, this means there is no 'one fits all' solution, and instead our thinking in this space must adopt a more place-based and targeted approach for individual rural communities.

Rural communities tend to have limited access to local services via active travel or by public transport and are therefore more reliant on the private car to access everyday activities, with distance travelled by car per person significantly higher than in urban areas. Through car dominance, services and businesses are often encouraged to relocate from rural localities and cluster in car-accessible locations.

The STP sets out TfN's vision of 'A thriving North of England, where world class transport supports sustainable economic growth, excellent quality of life and improved opportunities for all.' A key element of this is to understand and deliver upon the needs of rural communities, ensuring that transport networks

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<sup>1</sup> TfN, Strategic Transport Plan (2019) <https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/TfN-final-strategic-transport-plan-2019.pdf>

support good access to jobs, education and services for people living in rural areas, including those without access to a private car.

To support this, TfN is also collaborating with the other six Sub national Transport Bodies (STBs) to identify common issues, develop solutions and define and how STBs can facilitate delivery of improved connectivity and access for rural communities.

TfN's primary remit has focused on the identification and recommendation of pan-Northern strategic transport interventions that are generally longer distance trips between other economic centres. However, there needs to be complementary and supporting investment at a local level as well as a pan-Northern level to provide a 'whole journey' and 'total network' approach to improving transport. This includes the need to identify and articulate policies aimed at improving connectivity and access for rural communities across the North.

Initial research from TfN's User Insight into Pan Northern Travel<sup>2</sup> produced a robust evidence base detailing how different groups of people travel within the North of England, thus providing a better understanding into the travel behaviour and motivations of individuals across the North. The research identified that rural residents often travel greater distances than other groups in the North, a result of a need to travel further to access employment and basic services. They are also more car dependent, with a smaller proportion of trips by rail or bus, but these journeys are typically longer in distance.

Rural residents, reflecting their location and existing transport infrastructure, make approximately 88% more longer-distance trips (trips over 50 miles) than the Northern average of 146 long-distance trips per year. This is primarily accounted for by additional car trips, with the average rural resident making 253 long-distance car trips per year, compared to the Northern average of 127.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, several rural areas across the North are also recognised national tourism assets such as the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales. TfN's recent work on the North's Visitor Economy<sup>4</sup> identifies the importance and potential future growth for tourism and leisure experiences across the North such as within our National Parks. The report recognises that good transport access is critical to underpinning the success of the visitor economy, with the visitor economy sector attracting £21bn of visitor spending and directly supporting approximately 600,000 jobs in the North pre-pandemic. The North of England attracted 420 million visitors in 2019, comprising 385 million domestic day visits, 29 million domestic overnight visits, and 6 million international visits."

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<sup>2</sup> TfN, User Insight into Pan Northern Travel (July, 2018) <https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/User-Insight-in-to-Pan-Northern-Travel-Report-min.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> TfN, User Insight into Pan Northern Travel (July, 2018) <https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/User-Insight-in-to-Pan-Northern-Travel-Report-min.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> TfN, Visitor Economy and Transport in the North of England, (July 2021) [https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Visitor-Economy-and-Transport-in-the-North-of-England\\_Full.pdf](https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Visitor-Economy-and-Transport-in-the-North-of-England_Full.pdf)

However, it is critical any future tourism growth is managed sustainably, to ensure the transport network can support the visitor economy and does not have an adverse impact upon local communities in these areas. Many rural tourism destinations are poorly served by public transport, encouraging car travel and exacerbating parking issues at honeypot sites.

Therefore, rural mobility must work for all, considering the adoption of a place-based approach which will ensure local communities are well-connected to services and opportunities, whilst ensuring any future tourism growth in rural areas across the North is sustainable.

We also recognise the importance of freight and logistics within rural mobility, considering not just the movement of people, but also the fast, efficient and sustainable movement of goods for the benefit of people and businesses in rural areas. Our User Insight research considered the differences in connectivity needs between urban and rural businesses, recognising the importance of digital connectivity for rural areas as well as traditional infrastructure delivery.

The Government's forthcoming Future of Transport: Rural Strategy<sup>5</sup> follows the Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy<sup>6</sup> published in March 2019, in which the Government will set out a series of principles to improve mobility for rural users in a similar way to the urban strategy. This includes how future transport solutions and interventions can tackle rural mobility issues, improve connectivity and accessibility, increase low carbon travel options and deliver more integrated transport services. The strategy aims to make it easier for rural communities to access jobs, education or healthcare, as well as social and leisure opportunities.

TfN recognise the importance of Government's work within rural mobility and through our work to develop a policy position for rural mobility in the North, we will coordinate national and regional ambitions, with our local partners' experience and aspirations to enhance rural mobility for local communities across the North.

## Challenges

For TfN, there are several challenges to address as we develop our rural mobility policy, which are:

- Rural communities experience costly bus services and limited public transport facilities, creating transport deserts for some rural communities. The degree of these challenges has become increasingly difficult due to cuts to public transport services in rural areas and the declining commercial viability of services.
- Rural communities feature high car dependency, with many rural populations experiencing transport poverty. Increased car dependency also results in rural travel generating on average three times the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-transport-rural-strategy-call-for-evidence/future-of-transport-rural-strategy-call-for-evidence>

<sup>6</sup> Department for Transport, Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy (March, 2019)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-mobility-urban-strategy>

emissions of urban travel, presenting a real challenge for decarbonisation targets.

- Poor rural public transport connectivity reduces accessibility to employment, exacerbating labour shortages in key, lower-paid rural sectors, such as hospitality and the visitor economy, harming rural economies.
- Rural communities do not have dense public transport networks meaning multi modal integration is difficult, with many communities relying on private car transportation to access their rail stations. Station car parking is often at capacity from early in the day, which can inhibit off-peak journeys, and combined parking and ticket prices can make rail travel less financially competitive versus private car.
- There is limited active travel infrastructure for many rural communities which also contributes to social isolation for parts of the North and severance for those with limited car access.
- Making the case for investment in rural areas is difficult using traditional cost benefit analysis based primarily on the economic benefits of transport and infrastructure schemes.

Within the remainder of this policy statement, we outline our position on rural mobility which aims to overcome the challenges as outlined within this section.

## Role of TfN

As a sub national transport body, TfN's role is to set the overall transport vision for the North and to provide statutory advice on planning and priorities for large scale transport investment. Within this context, TfN will collaborate with national STBs and our local partners across the North, to enhance rural mobility for communities across the North.

### **STP Policy position**

In the Strategic Transport Plan, which was adopted in 2019, the following statements are made which relate to rural mobility, specifically that TfN would:

- Work with partners to identify transport interventions that deliver inclusive economic growth by improving access to employment and skills opportunities for all.
- Support growth of the visitor economy by making the case for transport investments, which improve access to and between the North's key visitor attractions.
- Support partners to improve bus journey times and reliability, by making use of any powers included in the Bus Services Act 2017, as well as existing powers and alliances. In some areas of the North this will include factoring in the demand and accessibility of coach parking.
- Work with partners and stakeholders to make the North's public transport system easier and more pleasant to use, with a focus on improving passenger comfort, confidence, reliability, safety and security.

This policy position statement aims to provide more detail to define TfN's role and to integrate the above aims of our STP within rural mobility. TfN's role is to

set out the case and priorities for connecting different economic clusters, local communities and international gateways across the whole of the North. Through the STP, the focus is to identify and secure the investment needed to provide the North of England with a transport network which links local transport infrastructure with strategic national schemes such as HS2.

TfN links local transport authorities work in managing and investing in local transport networks with the pan-Northern investments led by Government to support enhanced connectivity across the UK. This includes ensuring rural communities are well connected to places and opportunities across the North. We will support our partners particularly those representing rural communities across the North to enhance rural mobility, in a way that is proportional to the resources available to TfN.

## Links to other workstreams

Rural mobility also sits across several other TfN workstreams:

- **Decarbonisation:** Policy measures to ensure rural mobility recognises TfN's decarbonisation trajectories and pre-agreed targets. The evidence base generated by our activities in this area, including our proposed Clean Mobility Visions workstream will inform the development of a vision for effective and low carbon rural mobility whilst reducing car dependency. We will prioritise analysis in rural areas as part of this workstream.
- **Multi Modal Hubs:** Promoting opportunities for greater public transport use and car sharing opportunities at hubs which can serve rural communities. Through integrating transport connectivity at these hubs, this can concentrate community and commercial services to form focal points for local communities.
- **Citizen Engagement:** Ensuring that the views of residents of the North on key issues relating to rural mobility, such as the quality of buses and decarbonisation, are given appropriate consideration in policy development, improving the evidence base across these areas and ensuring policymaking is aligned with the views of the North's citizens.
- **Active Travel:** Enabling more opportunities for walking and cycling within rural communities, with recommendations for improved active travel infrastructure and communications on routes for travel to work, services and for social purposes.
- **Spatial Planning:** TfN's spatial planning policy recognises the importance of integrated transport connectivity for rural areas whilst maintaining the natural character of places across the North, with focus on new development which supports a shift away from car dependency.
- **Transport-Related Social Exclusion (TRSE) Research:** TfN's research on transport-related social exclusion provides a robust evidence base on the causes and consequences of TRSE across the diverse geographical and population contexts of the North. This includes the consequences of rural mobility and isolated communities that lock residents into car dependency and forced car ownership.

- **Health and Wellbeing Research:** TfN are undertaking research to expand evidence on the impacts of transport on health and wellbeing in the North, including the issues of severance, physical inactivity, and access to green space. This will enhance the evidence base on the consequences of different rural mobility interventions.
- **Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI):** Application of the TfN modelling suite to build an EVCI model which will enhance assessment of EVCI requirements and associated sustainability, spatial and social considerations. This includes assessment of optimum timing for implementation of various charging infrastructure across different spatial typologies such as in rural areas.
- **Hydrogen Refuelling Infrastructure:** Application of TfN Local Freight Tool and modelling data, in partnership with utility providers and partners to assess requirements for servicing rural rail with hydrogen where appropriate.
- Through the **Major Road Network (MRN)** Regional Evidence Base: TfN are promoting the delivery of several improvement schemes, including schemes that may support rural mobility, as well as considering the first and last mile of journeys and how they can be facilitated within rural areas.
- **TfN Strategic Rail:** Working in partnership with the Community Rail Network to support the activity of local Community Rail Partnerships, with many operating on rural rail lines in the North. This places local communities at the centre of decision making and brings partners together to support job creation, local enterprise opportunities and create social cohesion. TfN recognise improvements to station buildings with more commercial and non-commercial facilities could transform and revitalise the communities which they are located, particularly in rural areas in which rail stations can form focal points for services and activity.
- **Technical Assurance, Modelling and Economics (TAME):** TfN's TAME team, through the Analytical Framework have the capabilities to enhance the evidence base for rural mobility. This includes opportunities within digital mobility to proactively support partners in commercial modelling and integrated ticketing.
- **Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review (NPIER):** The NPIER (2016) set out a vision for the North's economy by 2050. This work is planned to be refreshed in 2022/23, with an understanding that economic growth and employment cannot be concentrated exclusively in urban areas and must benefit all parts of the North to support opportunities for all and Government's Levelling up agenda.

## TfN's suggested role in rural mobility

***TfN will work with our partners to develop the evidence base for rural mobility and work collaboratively to share best practice, theoretical evidence and innovative solutions. We will also collaborate with Government and wider stakeholders such as other STBs on common issues relating to rural mobility.***

TfN's ambition to work with our partners within rural mobility will identify and collate the innovative work partners are undertaking in this space on a local level such as within demand responsive transport, zero emission car shares and use of electric bicycles. We will also consider the collaborative work we have undertaken to date with other national STB partners to develop a rural mobility workplan. This will establish an evidence base within rural mobility that will provide theoretical evidence underpinned by best practice and case studies to support partners in developing rural proposals in their areas.

For TfN, we will coordinate Government proposals, STB best practice and local partner case studies to provide strategic direction within rural mobility. This will ensure rural proposals are aligned with the wider policy aspirations for the North, in the context of the STP as well as the NPIER and core TfN workstreams.

We recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to rural mobility and that the definition and geography of rural differs between places across the North. Therefore, we will embed a place-based approach for partners serving rural communities, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities specific to an individual rural locale. To achieve this, we will:

- **Develop the evidence base and modelling capabilities:** Collaborating with the Department for Transport (DfT), other STBs and local partners, TfN will develop the theoretical evidence for rural mobility. This will explore reducing car dependency, enhancing access to opportunities and understanding funding requirements for public transport to serve rural communities. We will utilise the capabilities of TfN's Analytical Framework to enrich the evidence base e.g. Clean Mobility Visions, TRSE, digital mobility workstreams.
- **Assist partners to identify schemes:** Collating best practice within rural mobility through drawing on local partner and community experience and work undertaken by other STBs, we can develop a library of case studies which can support scheme development and innovative ideas to enhance rural mobility. As part of this, we will support innovative trials and pilots with our partners to identify suitable schemes and interventions. This will support partners in identifying the viability of schemes, exploring what may work in their areas and helping to make a clear case for investment in rural transport schemes.
- **Collaborate with other STBs:** Sharing knowledge and learning with STB networks nationally to identify best practice and understand place-based solutions that can improve rural mobility for rural communities in the North. Within this, we will explore opportunities to collaborate with the private sector to enhance the rural evidence base and consider innovative solutions in this space.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** We will utilise TfN's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to monitor improvements in pan-Northern rural mobility. TfN can also support the evaluation of any pilot schemes on rural mobility to further develop evidence of best practice. We will use the Benefits Mapping process to consider a suitable approach to measure

TfN's progress within rural mobility and supporting our partners in progressing key ambitions.

TfN recognise the value of real case studies and examples of best practice which can illustrate successful interventions for rural mobility, taking a place based approach to identify the best solutions for specific geographies. Through enriching the theoretical evidence base and illustrating the 'rural need', we can collaborate with partners on potential options and schemes to enhance rural mobility. It is essential in developing our evidence base, to understand what type of interventions work for a certain rural area, but to accept this may not work in another area, recognising the different rural typologies across the North. This will support a targeted approach to rural mobility, adopting solutions designed for specific rural areas.

To enrich the theoretical evidence base for rural mobility, we will coordinate partner experience, STB engagement and collaboration with Government, establishing a central evidence base for rural mobility in the North. We can also support in the evaluation of ongoing pilot schemes on rural mobility, utilising our own monitoring and evaluation resources to measure levels of success of pilots and enrich case studies in the North.

**Action: To facilitate a TfN partner working group focused on rural mobility in the North.**

**Action: To undertake a call for evidence with TfN partners to collate existing evidence and case studies of rural mobility projects which are currently ongoing in partner areas across the North.**

**Action: To collate the results of the call for evidence to identify potential interventions which partners can develop in their own areas, considering the various rural typologies across the North.**

**Action: To support the evaluation of ongoing and future pilot schemes on rural mobility utilising TfN's monitoring and evaluation resources.**

As shown in the section on links to other workstreams, rural mobility relates to many wider workstreams that TfN are currently working on or are proposing in our future pipeline. As we collate and develop the evidence base for rural mobility across the North, we will utilise wider TfN workstreams to improve evidence of various concepts and ideas relating to rural mobility. This includes embedding the importance of rural mobility within our Freight and Logistics Strategy and Multi Modal Hubs Policy Position to ensure the different solutions required in rural areas compared to urban areas are considered in full.

We will consider the challenges of proposed interventions for rural areas in these workstreams as well as including requirements to analyse and develop rural case studies for future Research and Economics commissions. There are also further modelling opportunities we can undertake for several of our workstreams. Within TRSE, we can focus specifically on rural communities to explore the consequences of public transport funding gaps and isolated communities that lock residents into car dependency and forced car ownership.

Following our research on the North's Visitor Economy, we will explore the study's transport-related recommendations and how this can support the future growth of the visitor economy in the North, whilst also strengthening rural mobility for local communities where tourism is a key contributor to the local economy.

We recognise the importance of developing stronger evidence within rural mobility to strengthen the case for investment in targeted schemes that will enhance connectivity for rural communities and improving access to opportunities and services. In developing our evidence base, we will ensure analysis and key findings are presented in clear and interpretable formats to illustrate the case for investment.

**Action: To consider how we can more effectively embed rural mobility within wider TfN workstreams to identify potential solutions and add real value to rural communities across the North.**

**Action: To undertake further research into rural mobility utilising TfN's Research and Economics capabilities, to develop case studies of innovative solutions and better practice within rural mobility, as well as better articulating the 'rural need' to our partners and stakeholders.**

Working with DfT, TfN will consider the outputs of the call for evidence and forthcoming publication of the Future of Transport: Rural Strategy and how it will support our local partners in serving rural communities across the North. Our successful request to DfT for additional funding will support partners across the North, particularly outside of metropolitan areas including many of the North's rural communities.

Through our proposals, TfN will establish a new 'Digital Mobility Hub' pilot for the North, which would proactively support partners within digital mobility, commercial modelling and integrated ticketing across multi-operators and modes. We also recognise the opportunity for demand responsive transport schemes which have been piloted in areas of the North such as Yorkshire and the Northeast. Therefore, as part of this pilot, we will explore the viability of demand responsive transport for a rural area as a project under this hub.

**Action: To progress work on a new 'Digital Mobility Hub' pilot with a clear focus on improving rural mobility. We will explore the viability of demand responsive transport and how this compares with the commercial viability of traditional bus services, considering the appropriate pilot studies to progress this work.**

Whilst exploring the opportunities for digital mobility and demand responsive transport, we will also support partners to deliver on the commitments in Bus Back Better: National Bus Strategy for England and develop an effective intra-regional bus network. We recognise the importance in supporting local partners in the implementation of Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) and to overcome the challenges bus services face across the North. This includes issues around the commercial viability of services, the decline in funding for critical rural services and the artificial barriers to service provision cross-border between

local transport authorities. There is scope to utilise TfN's Analytical Framework for strategic network development and market analysis, as well as strengthening the business cases for key transport projects through capturing wider associated social and economic impacts.

**Action: To support partners in the implementation of Bus Service Improvement Plans, utilising TfN's existing workstreams and exploring the opportunities to use our analytical capabilities to deliver bespoke support to individual rural areas.**

TfN recognises that it is the local communities across the North who best understand the mobility challenges for their areas, as well the potential solutions to these challenges. We believe through our Citizen Engagement workstream, we can better reflect the views of residents within rural areas in future policy-making whilst also improving TfN's own evidence base for rural mobility.

**Action: To utilise our Citizens Engagement workstream to further TfN's understanding of the 'rural need', engaging with rural communities to reflect the challenges and opportunities particular to their area.**

In addition to our local collaboration across the North, we also recognise the value of collaboration with other STBs across England to create one unified voice to Government within rural mobility. Collectively, through our STB rural mobility working group we have worked to highlight current mobility issues rural communities face and to present potential solutions that can enhance rural mobility in the North, and across England overall. This has culminated in a workplan developed by the working group that will support our partners to identify schemes, provide strategic direction, enhance the rural evidence base and share knowledge and best practice, including opportunities with the private sector.

In addition to our collaboration with other STBs, we will also explore how to effectively collaborate with other devolved administrations representing Wales and Scotland, to understand the rural mobility schemes progressed within their areas. Through our national collaboration, we will build on our own work in the North and present clear evidence and recommendations to DfT, which will shape national policy for rural mobility. TfN has its own All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and we will explore the possibility to organise an event to discuss rural mobility.

**Action: To continue our collaboration with other STBs and support the actions identified in the 2021/22 STB workplan. TfN will work with other STBs and DfT to present clear evidence and recommendations to enhance rural mobility nationally and to strengthen the case for investment for rural communities in the North.**

**Action: To explore opportunities to arrange an APPG event focused on rural mobility.**

## Next steps

The next steps for TfN's rural mobility are to progress engagement with partners and wider stakeholders to ensure that the policy actions are effective and will add real value to rural mobility across the North. We will continue to work with other STBs through our rural mobility working group to deliver upon the actions of our workplan collectively, defining what the key tasks and milestones as well as how we will achieve our ambitions.

TfN will work closely with partners representing rural communities across the North to establish the place-based pilots and innovative trials that can enhance rural mobility for these communities. This includes supporting partners in the implementation of BSIPs and exploring how TfN can utilise our modelling capabilities to provide effective and viable solutions for bus services in the North.

Our rural mobility policy will be underpinned by a robust evidence base collated by TfN showcasing innovative best practice partners are progressing across the North, whilst also collating outputs from key TfN workstreams that relate to rural mobility. This includes our recent proposals to DfT to undertake further work within digital mobility, as well as ongoing workstreams within TRSE and Freight and Logistics.



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