



Department
for Transport

Future of Transport: Rural Strategy

Call for Evidence

Summary of Responses

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Executive summary

This document summarises the responses to the Department for Transport's Call for Evidence on the Future of Transport: Rural Transport, which ran between 23 November 2020 and 16 February 2021.

Context

The Government's Future of Transport programme aims to secure the UK's position as a world-leading innovator, creating a greener and more inclusive future transport system for us all. In 2019, we published the 'Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy', setting out our approach to maximising the benefits and managing the risks of new technology in urban areas. We now want to explore the opportunities and risks for rural areas.

In November 2020, we published this Call for Evidence to seek views on our assessment of the emerging trends that will shape rural mobility and how industry, government and rural communities could work together to help harness the opportunities.

Issues rural areas are facing

The most frequently raised issue was that the current level of car dependence is too high in rural areas and a large number of respondents identified the lack of transport options in rural villages and towns as being an important cause of social isolation. In addition, risks of reduced accessibility for older people and younger people in rural areas were highlighted in relation to accessing key services like GPs, hospital, schools, shops, cafes, libraries, community centres and places of worship.

Opportunities

The Call for Evidence identified a number of opportunities whereby innovation could improve the range of transport choices available in rural areas.

One of the strongest messages was the opportunity for e-bikes to make cycling accessible to more people in rural areas. New innovations such as digital demand responsive transport could cater to the needs of areas where currently a viable commercial model for a transport network may not exist.

Respondents recognised some of the most innovative new modes, including connected and self-driving vehicles, could make travel safer for everyone and benefit older residents who no longer drive to access amenities and reduce social isolation.

Similarly, drone delivery was mentioned by many respondents as a factor that could help better connect rural communities, unlock new economic opportunities for local businesses and cut the accidents and emissions associated with pickup and delivery by road. It was also mentioned as a mode to make delivery accessible such as in the highlands and islands during lockdown when the normal ferries were not running.

A number of barriers to realising these opportunities were raised by respondents. Effective journey integration was identified as one of the main barriers to innovation, as was the high cost of development of demand responsive transport.

The need for a proactive response and a strategic vision from the Government

Many responses submitted to the Call for Evidence commented that unless government acts to shape how this happens, it is likely that rural areas will be left behind and we will lose the opportunity for the benefits of transport innovation to reach small towns and rural areas. As a result, there were calls for proactive government intervention through the range of levers available including regulation, funding and setting out a clear strategic vision to guide the market.

1. Introduction

Background

We are witnessing technology driving a number of changes to our transport system through increasing levels of electrification, automation, and real-time data collection and analysis. Our Future of Transport Programme aims to secure the UK's position as a world-leading innovator, creating a greener and more inclusive future transport system for us all. We want to create a safe, secure and accessible transport system that is fit for the future and helps people to move around.

Recognising change is happening fastest in urban areas, the government published the Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy in 2019, setting out the approach we will take to seize the opportunities from innovation, while managing potential undesired effects. We want to ensure that benefits from innovation can be harnessed right across the country. We are now turning to focus on how the central government, local authorities, communities and the private sector can influence how these trends emerge so they can best benefit rural areas by increasing the range and choice of transport options, and helping to deliver on transport decarbonisation.

Call for evidence

The Department for Transport (DfT) ran a Call for Evidence on the Future of Transport: Rural Strategy between 24 November 2020 and 16 February 2021. The Call for Evidence invited respondents to submit their views on 10 questions.

This document summarises the points raised by respondents to the Call for Evidence. The responses will inform the development of the Future of Transport: Rural Strategy in due course.

The identification of particular suggestions within this document does not mean that DfT will necessarily take them forward. Similarly, the absence of a suggestion from this report does not mean it will not be considered.

Structure of this document

This document is divided into five sections. Section 1 provides an overview of the Call for Evidence document. Section 2 summarises the responses relating to key trends and issues facing rural areas. Section 3 summarises the responses to questions relating to the wider developments in transport innovation in rural areas. Section 4 summarises the responses to questions relating to our approach. Section 5 summarises the responses to other comments on the Call for Evidence.

Overview of respondents

Responses to the consultation were received via email, online survey and post. In total, 736 responses were received.

Responses to the consultation were submitted by a mixture of individuals and organisations, including local authorities, trade associations, transport operators, other businesses, Non-Governmental Organisations and universities.

2. Issues facing rural areas

In the Call for Evidence document we set out some of the current trends facing the transport ecosystem in rural areas, followed by our assessment of the developments in innovation that have the potential to significantly change how people and goods move around. Respondents frequently felt that the major trends identified were the correct ones, either responding as such or providing further additional perspectives or insights to add depth to our overview of the trends. Several additional trends were proposed by respondents.

Questions:

Do you have any evidence for the issues mentioned?

What are your views on:

- (a) dependence on the private car;
- (b) access to key services;
- (c) access to employment;
- (d) social isolation.

Do you think there are other issues facing rural areas that we should consider in the strategy?

Dependence on the private car

An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that there is dependence on the private car in rural areas, with significant numbers saying car dependence is too high and many linking car dependence to poor provision of public transport. A large number of respondents also identified negative impacts of car dependence, including both the effects of high car usage as well as specific demographic groups excluded by lack of access to cars.

Car dependence and its causes

Over two thirds of all respondents explicitly stated that there is dependence on the private car, with around a quarter of those who did so including an explicit statement that the current level of car dependence is too high and almost a third linking car dependence to poor provision of public transport. Only a tiny fraction of respondents explicitly stated that car dependence is not a problem, or that its negative impacts have been exaggerated.

As mentioned, aside from general statements that people do depend on cars, by far the most frequent response was to link car dependence to poor, infrequent or inaccessible public transport. The next most common response was to link car dependence to poor provision for active travel.

Negative impact of car dependence

Many respondents identified negative impacts stemming from high dependence on and usage of cars. By far the most frequently identified impact was on the environment, including both greenhouse gas emissions and air quality. The next most frequent impact was congestion on local roads. Other impacts identified included health problems and safety risks.

A significant number of respondents also identified specific groups that are car dependent, including older people, younger people, disabled people, and lower-income people. Concerns were raised that these groups are less likely to be able to access a private car, meaning high car dependence excludes them. A number of responses mentioned that cars are very expensive to buy and maintain. Among a number noting high prevalence of multi-car households, several mentioned problems faced by single-car households where the main earner takes the car to work during the working day.

Although individual respondents were far more likely to make an explicit standalone statement that people are too dependent on cars, a higher proportion of organisations identified specific negative impacts.

Access to key services

The overarching theme of responses to this question was that people lack access to services. A very large proportion of answers said that access to services is limited by lack of a car or by poor public transport links. Many people also made broader comments about the lack of services in rural areas, and a few offered solutions which included online or mobile services.

Lack of access to services

The answers make it clear that poor transport in rural areas limits access to services. The most common response was that access to services was poor for those without a car (or that a car is needed to access services), with the second-most common response being the similar point that poor public transport limits access to services (or that better public

transport would improve access to services). A number of respondents also commented that some people are dependent on others to drive them to access services.

In addition to this, the third and fourth most common responses were that there are few services available in rural areas in general, and that cuts and centralisation force people to travel further to reach key services like GPs, hospital, shops, cafes, libraries, community centres and places of worship. This contributes to a picture of rural people struggling to access services, with some respondents commenting on the negative impact for people's health and wellbeing. A number of respondents commented that with good internet connections some services could be accessed remotely, although a few said that this would not provide a sufficient level of service. In addition, a number of respondents proposed 'mobile' services as a possible solution to the current lack of access.

Some answers, especially from organisations, commented that older people in particular lack access to services, with smaller numbers identifying younger people, disabled people and lower-income people as lacking access to services.

Access to education

Respondents stated their views in relation to the access to education in rural areas. It was mentioned that further education colleges and sixth forms were often very far displaced from rural areas and difficult to access by young people without frequent lifts or being late due to disjointed rural transport. Access to education from rural areas can prove problematic, particularly for users who are not entitled to free home to school transport because of their location and nearest school proximity. A small number of respondents also noted the shortage of operators for pupil transport.

Access to employment

Similar themes were evident, and in some cases even more pronounced, with a very large number of people reporting that poor transport limits access to employment. Many people also identified a general lack of job opportunities, especially for young people in rural areas. A number of responses also discussed possibilities for home working to form part of the solution.

Lack of access to employment

The consensus on this question was even more overwhelming than on the question about access to services, with an even higher proportion of respondents making points about poor transport limiting access to employment. Answers to this question were more likely to put the focus on public transport, with the most common response being that poor public transport limits access to employment (or that better public transport would increase access to employment). A common issue with public transport was that even where it exists, timetables are unsuitable for many people's working patterns. Answers putting the focus on a car being needed to access employment were the second-most frequent response, underscoring the fact that those without a car are especially disadvantaged.

Many respondents identified an increase in working from home as a way to reduce car dependence and need for public transport to access employment, although a significant number of answers also said that for home working to be viable better internet connectivity is needed. A few answers also pointed to the need for housing development to occur in areas where there are job opportunities.

Social isolation

Once again, by far the most common answers were those explicitly identifying lack of transport as a major contributor to social isolation. A large number of people were also concerned that older people, and to a lesser extent, younger people are particularly vulnerable to isolation. There were also a number of responses which focused on possible solutions to the problem of social isolation.

Lack of transport causes social isolation

In keeping with answers to the previous question, a very large number of respondents identified lack of transport as being an important cause of social isolation. Here, the focus on public transport was most pronounced, with the most common answer being that lack of transport options causes social isolation (or that better public transport would reduce social isolation). Again, the second-most common answer was a similar point with a different focus: those without cars are especially likely to experience social isolation.

Respondents were especially likely to identify specific groups as being vulnerable to social isolation. The third-most common response was that older people are at risk of social isolation, and the fifth-most common was that younger people are at risk of social isolation, with each of these being more common responses among organisations than among individuals. A few respondents also said that disabled people are at risk of isolation.

The vast majority of those who answered this question acknowledged either explicitly or implicitly that social isolation is a problem, with a number saying it is an increasing problem. Despite this, a number of respondents identified that rural areas have a strong sense of community, and a few also added that isolation is not a problem for them.

Social isolation was the issue for which respondents were most likely to identify potential solutions. The most commonly suggested solution was that an increase in active travel could increase social interaction. Other possible solutions were better internet connectivity and usage, and more community activities or groups. A few respondents also expressed the view that social isolation cannot be solved just by better transport links, as it is a complex and deeply rooted issue.

Other issues

Current provision of public transport and active travel

Many of the responses to the four sub-questions above discussed public transport and active travel, either in relation to the topics raised or as standalone issues.

Many respondents identified public transport as being poor, with the most common specific reasons being that services are not frequent enough; that timetables are unsuitable; that it is too expensive and that cuts have made public transport worse over time. Some suggested there is a vicious cycle where those who can avoid public transport, making the commercial viability worse for those who remain dependent. Some respondents made the point that it is difficult for rural public transport to be commercially viable, but it was more common for solutions to be suggested. These included more demand responsive transport and better integration of the network, as well as demands for more funding and investment.

Many people also pointed to a need for improved active travel provision. Many answers of this type were not mode-specific, but of those that were, almost twice as many mentioned cycling as mentioned walking, and six times as many mentioned cycling as mentioned horse riding. In addition to the need for better provision, a number of respondents raised specific concerns that rural roads are not currently safe for active travel.

A number of respondents proposed increased car sharing or car clubs as an alternative to public transport which could mitigate the issues mentioned in the sub-questions. There were also a few responses identifying community transport as a possible solution which needs better promotion. There were also a few responses about the need for housing and planning policy to promote active travel rather than being designed exclusively for access by car. Finally, a few respondents made the point that taxis are too expensive.

Impacts of tourism

Respondents provided a mixed review with regards to the effects and impact that tourism has on transport in rural areas. Some respondents highlighted the opportunity of increasing tourism in rural areas to boost and regenerate the rural economy. However, it was stated that if and when tourists did utilise rural transport networks, this would often lead to overcrowding during certain seasons making it difficult for local residents to travel. On a related note, many other respondents suggested that many rural transport links fail to meet visitors' needs which simply increases the number of private vehicles on rural roads, contributing to heavy traffic and excessive emissions.

Poor integration of transport services

Many respondents mentioned poor integration of transport services in rural areas. Some respondents discussed the future development of demand responsive transport (DRT) and mobility as a service (MaaS) to facilitate improved integration of services. Some respondents included successful case studies of where MaaS has been beneficial to urban areas and ways in which this technology could be adopted to suit rural travel.

Vulnerable road users

Many respondents voiced their concerns regarding the need for consideration of vulnerable road users. It was often mentioned that the lack of safe, effective and integrated travel for vulnerable users furthered social isolation. Respondents also highlighted the social disparity in what encompasses the term 'vulnerable road user', stating that those

with accessibility issues e.g. wheelchair users, people who are blind etc. were often excluded in the planning and development of transport infrastructure. Similar sentiments were also made concerning horse riders. The overarching issue concerning vulnerable road users, mentioned several times by many respondents, was the lack of safe infrastructure for all.

3. Developments in innovation for rural transport

Our Call for Evidence outlined several emerging trends in transport innovation that have the potential to improve transport options in rural areas. Respondents frequently felt that the major transport trends identified were the right ones. However, many respondents offered additional perspectives or insights to add depth to our overview of developments in innovation for rural transport. Some respondents provided further trends that were not identified in the Call for Evidence document.

Questions:

What examples do you have of the transport trends in rural areas of:

- increasing use of active travel modes
- micromobility
- more effective integration of journeys
- digital models for more effective services
- data and digital improvements unlocking market knowledge
- new modes of transport
- strong community links?

Do you think there are other trends in innovation we haven't included?

Increasing use of active travel modes

The most common response was the potential for e-bikes to make cycling accessible to more people in rural areas. Some respondents described how active travel was enhanced by newly built cycle routes connecting towns and villages and many respondents strongly supported an increase in cycling infrastructure, reduced speed limits on rural roads and including horse riding in active travel.

E-bikes

Frequent references were made to the role of e-bikes in rural areas, an overwhelming majority of respondents described an increase in the uptake of e-bikes during the Covid-19

pandemic. Many comments were received on the reasons for increased interest in e-bikes. These described how e-bikes could be a viable alternative to private cars, they were good for hilly terrain and for connecting into mass transit for last mile journeys. Many respondents said e-bikes could also contribute to enabling more cycling by older people and women. However, many respondents felt that too few e-bikes were available in their areas and there was generally a lack of shared bike schemes in small towns, villages and rural areas.

Active travel not practicable

Many respondents considered that the focus of the strategy needed to take into account that active travel was not always practicable for many due to physical geography, inclement weather, distance, fitness, disability and age.

Cycling used mainly for leisure and health purposes

Many respondents also commented that cycling was currently used mainly for leisure purposes rather than a mode of transport to access goods and services. It was also said that cycling is an increasingly popular form of exercise.

Micromobility

Many respondents discussed micromobility as an acceptable and good concept that they would like to see more of in rural areas. Micromobility options that were most referenced included e-scooters, e-bikes and e-cargo bikes. Many respondents to this question noted that there were often none or very few examples of micromobility in rural areas.

Lack of safe infrastructure

It was noted that there is a lack of infrastructure on the rural road network, with rural roads and tracks were not suitable for micromobility. To take advantage of micromobility more dedicated infrastructure would be needed to connect travel between villages and more remote areas.

Suitability for larger villages and towns

Some respondents felt that the potential role for e-scooters was for short journeys around villages and towns. Respondents said while e-scooter trials are beginning in some towns, it seemed more suited to the more urban areas within rural counties.

More effective integration of journeys

Many respondents addressed issues surrounding effective journey integration to be quite challenging, stating that previous government and community-led initiatives had very little success in certain rural areas. Multiple suggestions were provided, regarding the integration of public transport modes under a “mobility hub” in order to create better transport links and connectivity across modes to help aid the effectiveness of journey integration.

Joined up planning across modes and services

Frequent references were made to the lack of a joined-up approach across different travel modes. Some respondents said that transport should be considered as one journey from door-to-door and it should be possible to type your journey into a journey planner app and be presented with a series of options including all public and private transport modes such as DRT, taxis, private hire, shared e-bikes and others.

Service levels

Respondents noted the current lack of integration in public transport services. The increase in service levels amongst some operators had been found to be successful in decreasing the number of missed connections as a result. Respondents stated that missed connections could often lead to very long delays, discouraging future use of public transport. Thus, proving that better service levels could help to mitigate this barrier. It was also mentioned that the restoration of Sunday services for rural areas with urban connections had proven to be effective in linking bus journeys to rail connections, whilst improving access to urban areas during the weekend.

Improving existing transport services

Respondents suggested that effective journey integration should not be a replacement to a well-planned public transport network and would only improve through strengthening the demand in public transport.

Lack of funding and investments in infrastructure to facilitate effective integration of journeys were addressed. This included discussions concerning the lack in variety of bus routes and links to other villages without the need to travel into an urban area first. Many respondents mentioned the lack of safe and comfortable stops and stations appropriate for all-weathers, with the provision of waiting rooms where possible.

Transport Infrastructure to support multi-modal journeys

Respondents frequently mentioned concerns regarding the integration of active travel routes alongside rural transport. One of the main issues raised was the mention of barriers to cyclists boarding public transport with minimal space for cycles or carriage of cycles denied.

Digital models for more flexible services

An overwhelming majority of respondents made mention of DRT. Many respondents felt that DRT has helped in some cases to provide public transport to rural areas. Some respondents mentioned that an application or platform digital model is essential for managing DRT buses routes and enabling passengers to book rides. It was said that services that can respond quickly to demand would be welcomed. It was felt that empty buses are not sustainable. Some respondents also made mention of the high cost of running DRT services.

Digital inclusion

Respondents mentioned a need for digital models to ensure digital inclusion to avoid a sector of left-behind people who were unable to access such services. Some respondents said dial-a-ride services provided by community transport operators have been successful and digital models could potentially improve their planning and integration

Mini buses and taxis

Many respondents felt that ride hailing apps for low cost taxis or mini buses should be considered. Some respondents favoured a rural on-demand-style booking and request system. It was said that these types of services do not exist in rural areas.

Data and digital improvements unlocking market knowledge

The most common response was that there were few examples of data and digital improvements to unlock market knowledge in rural areas. It was said that digital displays at bus stops and live information on a digital portal/application and digital functionality with the ability to provide advance notice to operators would enhance the passenger experience. Some respondents said that apps and social media have made it much easier to spread the word about bus and train times. Many respondents felt that artificial intelligence and machine learning will play a major part in the future planning and operation of shared services.

Digital options/platforms to show available transport options

Many respondents felt that there was a potential role for using digital platforms to share data and information about transport options. It was said that integration of DRT and shared transport systems on a local basis could make the use of mass or shared transport much more attractive. Many respondents felt that it was essential that bus users knew if a bus was delayed or not coming. If roadside information on bus stops was too expensive in rural areas, there needed to be a digital option that everyone could use.

More joined up integrated solutions

Many respondents felt that digital improvements could improve accessibility to services and assist with more joined-up and integrated solutions by having a service which plans, books and accepts payment for multi-mode transport without having to consider every stage as a separate operation. Respondents said this could provide some valuable insight into demand for services and how this could be met. It was noted that non-digital DRT is already in existence in some rural areas, but it is not supported by any digital connectivity.

Inclusive accessibility

Some respondents said that those who would benefit the most from digital improvements are the elderly and isolated and may not be able to access digital technology unless other booking modes such as telephone were also available.

New transport modes

Other new mode options that were referenced included electric vehicles, drones and self-driving vehicles.

Electric vehicles

Many respondents said electric vehicles were becoming popular in their towns and villages. Some respondents felt that electric vehicles were less visible as there were few charging points available for electric cars in rural areas. Some respondents also made mention of the lack of electric minibuses. Some respondents referred to safety of electric vehicles in rural areas. They said silent electric vehicles presented a risk to vulnerable road users, particularly pedestrians with impaired hearing or sight.

Drones

An increased preference for drone delivery was mentioned by many respondents as a factor that can help to better connect our rural communities, unlock new economic opportunities for local businesses and cut the accidents and emissions associated with pickup and delivery by road. Other respondents said that drone innovations were to be cautiously welcomed provided they were safe and transport costs would be reduced. Some respondents noted there was a role for drones in remote areas and in niche areas such as medical deliveries. Many respondents noted that the potential role of drone service deliveries was not sufficiently analysed.

Self-driving vehicles

Many respondents discussed the importance of self-driving vehicles and emphasised their opportunities and risks. Frequent references were made to benefits such as their potential to reduce overall car ownership and their potential use as delivery vehicles. Some respondents felt automatic scheduling of journeys could reduce congestion and avoid

accidents. In addition, removing human drivers would make travelling safer for everyone and benefit older residents who no longer drive by helping them to access amenities and reduce social isolation. Some respondents felt that self-driving vehicles presented risks, for example, they could be more dangerous in rural areas where speeds are higher, the potential for accidents greater and navigating the complexities of narrow rural roads would be challenging. It was also said that they would not reduce traffic congestion and environmental impact.

Rural community identity

Many comments were received on the nature of rural community identity and the impacts on transport. These included the effects of community bus transport services, shared transport, shared car ownership, carpooling and electric vehicle car clubs. Some respondents felt that they depended on volunteers and relied on the goodwill of the community to get to hospital appointments and neighbours to help with shopping.

Involve local community in development

Many respondents discussed the importance of involving the community in co-design of transport services, listening to local communities and acting on the evidence. Some respondents noted that more needed to be done to engage with younger travellers' needs. It was also said that rural communities themselves are best placed to decide their transport priorities.

Shared transport

Many respondents supported community car schemes and said community groups provided an added layer of transport options for individuals who do not have access to a traditional bus service. Some respondents said cities seem to have better and more innovative options in place, in particular for car shares and car hire. It was said that lift sharing can also help people to access education, healthcare and essential services. Many respondents favoured small regular electric shuttles between villages and towns. Some respondents suggested that we should consider the potential of community (peer to peer) car sharing in rural areas.

Other trends in innovation

Many respondents referenced a range of trends in innovation mobility hubs (combining people and freight), and online events reducing the need to travel.

Mobility hubs

Many respondents suggested that focus should be given to mobility hubs and community hubs or nodes. Alongside different transport services these could include non-transport

services such as a post office, hair dresser, vet, and bike repair services. Some respondents suggested developing work and social hubs in local communities to tackle the need for long commutes and social isolation. It was also suggested mobility hubs could be used for primary medical care in villages with doctors travelling to hold specialist clinics.

Online events reduce travel needs

It was noted that the increased ability to work and learn from home and the confidence of the population to use online meeting software was reducing the need to travel. Some respondents said people no longer needed to relocate to urban areas for employment and could live in rural areas and access their work remotely. Some respondents mentioned such an increase in online events, with a corresponding decrease in travel demand, could fundamentally change the face of transportation need. It was suggested that a better understanding of the implications of this for future travel demand was needed.

4. Our approach

We want to be able to harness these opportunities to encourage the availability of a greater range of transport services across rural areas. Our Call for Evidence asked for ideas on approaches the government can take, along with local government partners and the private sector to turn these opportunities into reality.

Building upon Future of Transport Principles

Our Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy set out nine principles to guide our approach to new transport technologies. Through the Call for Evidence, we sought views on whether these are appropriate for rural areas, and whether further principles should be created.

Questions:

Do you think the Future of Transport: rural strategy should include the existing Future of Transport principles?

Which additional principles would you like to see in the strategy?

Inclusion of existing Future of Transport principles

Overall there was strong levels of support for the existing Future of Transport principles to be included in the rural strategy, with between 50 and 74% of respondents agreeing with each principle. However, whilst there was a strong level of support for these principles in theory many reported that they needed to be reframed to be more applicable to rural areas and the challenges of rural transport provision. Respondents also provided a number of specific areas that needed to be covered under each principle, detail of which are provided below. Despite this there were a number a small number of respondents who felt that the current Future of Transport principles do not apply to rural areas as the issues that they are trying to address are not applicable to rural transport.

Principle 1: New modes of transport and new mobility services must be safe and secure by design

This was the principle that was most agreed with, with 74% saying that this principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 2% disagreeing. Regarding this principle there were two main themes that were identified, both relating to safe infrastructure. Firstly, there needs to be a particular emphasis on ensuring safe and secure active travel infrastructure (i.e., walking, cycling and horse-riding) in rural areas. In addition, infrastructure needs to ensure the safety of all users with particular attention paid to the requirements of the most vulnerable active travellers such as children, older adults and those with disabilities. In addition, this principle should emphasise that a key part of safe and secure mobility is the maintenance of the infrastructure.

Principle 2: The benefits of innovation in mobility must be available to all parts of the UK and all segments of society

There were high levels of support for this principle, with 70% of respondent saying that this principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 5% disagreeing.

There were a number of specific areas that needed to be covered by this principle, but overall respondents felt that there was a need to reframe this to refer more specifically to accessibility and to reflect all forms of transport not just innovation. Firstly, and the most cited theme, was that transport must be affordable for all to ensure it can truly be accessible to all. There were concerns that increased innovation might lead to increased cost of mobility in rural areas and this should be avoided. There should also be some guarantees that current subsidies for travel (for example, family discounts; free bus passes for the elderly) would be maintained for new forms of mobility. The second most cited theme was that transport and infrastructure must be inclusive and accessible to all regardless of age, capability and disability and that the entirety of a journey must be fully accessible not just parts of it. There was particular emphasis on the importance of recognising the needs of an ageing population and the challenges they may encounter in more rural areas. This should also include requirements around ensuring the accessibility of travel and transport information.

In order for mobility to be truly accessible and available to all there is a need to address issues of connectivity so that new forms of mobility can be implemented in more rural areas. Until this has been addressed transport, and relevant information, cannot solely rely on new technology and should include non-digital alternatives to avoid risk of digital and transport exclusion. Finally, there is a need to ensure that transport is accessible to all in rural areas, but especially those who don't drive or don't have access to a private vehicle to reduce the risk of social exclusion.

Principle 3: Walking, cycling and active travel must remain the best options for short journeys

There were high levels of support for this principle with 69% agreeing that a similar principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 7% disagreeing.

However, many felt that this needed to be reframed to the following: 'Walking, cycling and active travel must be promoted as the best options for short rural journeys'. The changes

reflect that as it stands active travel is not the best option for short journeys and as currently written assumes pre-existing infrastructure or proximity to facilities that is often not the case in rural areas. In terms of the types of journey that should be included there was strong emphasis that horse-riding should be directly referenced in this principle as well as new forms of mobility such as e-bikes and e-scooters.

One of the core requirements for this principle was to increase cycling, walking and horse-riding infrastructure that is safe. This must include infrastructure that is able to account for new forms of active travel. One way to achieve this could be to introduce requirements for a minimum amount of road space dedicated to active travel. In addition, to the greatest extent this infrastructure should be fully segregated from vehicles. This could be through repurposing current infrastructure or building new infrastructure (e.g. new pavements; fully segregated cycle lanes; repurposing farm land to create shorter pedestrian routes; creation of bridges to avoid key busy roads). To begin with the focus should be on developing safe routes to and from key services and locations such as schools, workplaces and healthcare to encourage uptake of active travel. To implement this principle some suggested the development of 15 minutes neighbourhoods in rural areas to make it easier for active travel to be the best option for short journeys. In addition, this principle should encourage linking up active travel infrastructure such as bridleways, footpaths, cycle-paths and byways and enable multiple modes to use the same paths to further facilitate active travel modes becoming the best option for short rural journeys. As per earlier themes this principle should ensure that active travel is accessible to all particularly those with disabilities or additional mobility requirements.

Principle 4: Mass transit must remain fundamental to an efficient transport system principle

While there was a majority of respondents who wanted to see this principle in a rural strategy it was one of the ones with the lowest levels of agreement, with only 57% agreeing. This was partly due to the use of the term 'mass transit' which was felt to poorly reflect the population density of rural areas. Many suggested that this principle should use the terms 'public or shared transport' instead of mass transport. However, there was overall agreement that public transport should be considered in all rural communities and all rural communities must be accessible by public transport.

The most reported theme for this principle was that public transport requires appropriate levels of subsidy to remain fundamental. Unlike urban areas public/mass transport is often not profitable but provides significant societal benefits that must not be overlooked and therefore in order to remain a fundamental part of the transport system these services require both investment equal to other parts of the country and continuous subsidy.

Another theme that emerged was that it is important not to impose regulatory or service models in rural areas as each area will have different needs and mandating service models may lead to a reduction in uptake. Instead, there should be a focus on encouraging more innovative modes of shared mobility that are place-based and therefore more appropriate to meet the needs of those living in rural areas (for example, smaller hopper buses to transport hubs; shared demand responsive transport).

Similar to other principles, this principle should ensure that rural residents have access to accessible and affordable public transport. Affordability was particularly important to

shared mobility and mass transport must ensure subsidies are available to those who already have access to subsidised transport. In addition, mass transit must be physically accessible to all including those with additional mobility needs or travelling with luggage. More generally this principle should ensure that services are frequent and reliable to ensure their uptake as well as reduce reliance on private vehicles. In addition, this principle must ensure that it takes into consideration the long-term impacts of Covid-19 particularly on uptake of mass transit.

Principle 5: New mobility services must lead the transition to zero emissions principle

Once again, this principle had high levels of support with 65% agreeing that this principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 7% disagreeing. Like other principles however many felt that this principle needed to be reframed slightly. Firstly, respondents felt that this should include all transport and not just new mobility, particular mention was made towards buses and taxis. Secondly, respondents felt that this needed to go beyond just zero-emission and be reframed to cover decarbonisation and sustainability. Respondents felt it was particularly important to recognise the environmental impacts of transport and transport infrastructure and identify ways to minimise these.

Respondents felt that this principle shouldn't just rely on electric vehicles but instead should focus on reducing car use altogether to meet the net zero ambitions, including encouraging active travel and shared mobility and reducing the ease of driving and dominance of the private car for certain journeys. This principle should also look to encourage the use of new low emission technologies to substitute traditional logistics (e.g. cargo bikes). In addition, this principle should encourage the installation of shared electric vehicle charging infrastructure to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles in rural areas.

Finally, respondents felt this principle should include government providing transport authorities with clear decarbonisation policies and targets that need to be met to achieve net zero and ways through which these can be delivered and monitored.

Principle 6: Mobility innovation must help to reduce congestion through more efficient use of limited road space, for example through sharing rides, increasing occupancy or consolidating freight

There were high levels of support for this principle with 66% agreeing that a similar principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 5% disagreeing.

However, as with other principles it was suggested this needed reframing to recognise that congestion isn't an issue in some rural areas and could be re-focussed on reducing the number of journeys being made. The most reported theme was the need to coordinate logistics in rural areas this could be done through the introduction of delivery hubs to reduce congestion and greenhouse emissions. Other ways included the use of innovative or non-road modes of transport to reduce freight (e.g. use of rail and waterways) and imposing restrictions on when freight can travel to minimise disruption.

It was suggested that this principle should include focusing on increasing car-share or community car-share schemes with a particular focus on encouraging community-based

schemes to and from key services, such as encouraging workplaces to develop car-sharing schemes or encourage flexible working to reduce overall congestion.

Principle 7: The marketplace for mobility must be open to stimulate innovation and give the best deal to consumers

This principle was the one with the least levels of agreement, with only 50% agreeing that this should be included in a rural strategy and the highest level of uncertainty with 17% not knowing whether this should be included.

An open marketplace was seen as beneficial but had to be done with local authorities to ensure that new mobility can complement existing subsidised public and community services. This will ensure that local authorities have oversight of the process and delivery of their services. However, there was still a need for government to collaborate to help overcome barriers to implementing an open marketplace.

The most frequently reported theme was the importance of recognising that mobility in rural areas can't and shouldn't be for profit and should focus on the end user. Therefore, an open marketplace must take this into consideration and where relevant mobility options may require government subsidy to ensure it is the best deal for the consumer.

Principle 8: New mobility services must be designed to operate as part of an integrated transport system combining public, private and multiple modes for transport users

There were high levels of support for this principle with 67% agreeing that a similar principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 4% disagreeing.

Respondents saw this as a key principle for rural areas however did feel it needed reframing to cover both existing and new mobility services. This principle was seen as particularly important due to the high prevalence of community led transport schemes and the need for their integration with public transport and active travel. This principle should include the integration of informal and/or private transport services set up by local groups and community transport groups with more formal transport. Integration of transport also requires centralised journey planning, booking and payment facilities to enable multi-modal and multi-operator journeys. In order for transport to be truly integrated this principle must also include improved and accessible information provision. A priority should be to integrate transport to and from key locations and services (for example, healthcare facilities, workplaces and education) to ensure accessibility, reduce social isolation and reduce car dependency.

This principle should also look to integrate transport modes across different local authorities to enable longer journeys and facilitate rural to urban and rural to rural journeys. In addition, this principle should look to integrate local passenger transport and freight to reduce the number of vehicles on the road (for example, using school buses as delivery vehicles).

Principle 9: Data from new mobility services must be shared where appropriate to improve choice and the operation of the transport system

There were high levels of support for this principle with 64% agreeing that a similar principle should be included in the rural strategy and only 3% disagreeing.

There were not as many details specified or changes required to this principle. The main themes raised focused on ensuring that there were clear regulations in place and transparency over the process for data sharing and data use whilst ensuring there was a right to maintain privacy for end users. In addition, this principle should ensure that all data can be freely available as open data. Finally, respondents felt that data should not just be collected for new forms of mobility but existing modes too and should be collected and shared in a format that can allow for analysis to improve overall service provision.

Additional principles for the rural strategy

In addition to the nine Future of Transport principles respondents suggested additional principles that could be included in the rural strategy.

Joined-up approach to maximise benefits

Respondents felt that interventions required increased joined-up thinking, both in terms of the local authority teams working to develop and deliver the interventions but more importantly joining up different policy areas to maximise the benefits and the impacts that can be achieved. Particular policy areas that should join up include transport and planning; transport and education policy to increase active travel and public transport use and reduce private car use; transport and levelling up to ensure that transport funding for rural areas compare to that of urban areas to enable transport innovation; transport and wider net zero policy.

Reducing the overall need for travel

In addition to the principles above respondents felt that an additional principle focusing on reducing travel overall for those living in rural areas should be included. Firstly, this should focus on ensuring that facilities and businesses are available in rural areas so that people don't have to travel to urban areas and are able to travel using active and mass transport. There should be a greater focus on improving flexible working to reduce the need for commuting. More generally this principle could also focus on reducing private car use and ownership through a number of policies incentivising other modes of transport and reducing the attractiveness of car travel.

Designed with needs of end users in local communities

An additional principle suggested was to ensure that new forms of mobility were dependent on and answered the needs of end users. Respondents believed that mobility needs to focus on the user and the technology must be user centred. This principle should focus on ensuring that interventions and mobility solutions are place based and built around communities. Interventions should be evidence based and designed on a location per location basis. It is key to remember that in rural areas one size doesn't not fit all and

therefore policies and practices must be sensitive to the demography and infrastructure of rural areas as well as the diverse needs of those who use it.

In addition, this principle should focus on improving engagement with local communities to understand the needs, concerns and barriers that need to be addressed as well as applicable solutions. This engagement should be carried out with all end users and not just a sub-segment of communities. This should also include community organisations such as charities and parish councils.

Transport should focus on delivering societal impacts and improving quality of life

As mentioned in the current Future of Transport principles transport in rural areas deliver a significant number of societal benefits but cannot guarantee profits similar to the services delivered in urban areas. This principle should focus on ensuring that transport services focus on improving overall quality of life for those in rural areas by reducing social exclusion, improving access to education and should focus on promoting both physical and mental health. In addition, leisure trips make up a substantial proportion of journeys undertaken in rural areas. Therefore, this principle should also focus on enhancing and supporting tourism and leisure-based journeys. In order for this principle to be achieved it was suggested this may require consistent and long-term government investment to ensure the development and maintenance of both services and infrastructure.

Innovation must be fully trialled and tested in rural environments and mustn't take away from getting the transport basics right

Innovation was seen as an important part of the Future of Transport and was welcomed by those in rural areas. However, respondents reported that it has to deliver long term benefits in order to be sustainable. To demonstrate its applicability the technology should be extensively trialled and tested in rural areas. This could be done through the development of demonstrator or trial zones where the technology can be trialled and piloted to ensure its applicability (for example, rural towns being used to pilot fully electric bus fleets).

However, whilst many recognised the benefits of innovation there was a feeling that the basics needed to be addressed before more technology was introduced. Some respondents suggested that this could be done by reducing investment in new road infrastructure and instead focusing on improving current road and public transport infrastructure.

All interventions should be evaluated to measure the impact in rural areas

It was suggested that an additional principle should focus on measuring and monitoring the impact of interventions in rural areas, but more specifically the measures of success need to be adapted to rural settings with clear expectations of what can be achieved and realistic timeframes for delivery. This needs to include a range of both quantitative and qualitative measures as well as requiring clear processes to be put in place to monitor the impact of any intervention.

Encouraging transport innovation in rural areas

Beyond a principles-based approach to innovation in rural areas, we also recognise the importance of testing, trialling and governance to enable new technologies to emerge.

Testing and Trialling

This section asked respondents to outline specific considerations for testing and trialling new technologies in rural areas.

Question:

Are there specific considerations for testing and trialling new technologies in rural areas that you think we should consider?

There were several themes raised by respondents relating to who should be consulted, where testing should take place, how trials should be set up, what technologies could be tested, how these should be funded, and the importance of evaluation.

Community engagement

One of the most common considerations mentioned by respondents was the need for engagement with local communities. Respondents mentioned the necessity of speaking with local communities early in the development of any trials and speaking to all levels of the community.

A number of participants raised the importance of building upon existing local knowledge, noting local communities have knowledge and imagination that can contribute to tailoring trials to local places. Building on this, several participants also suggested trials should work with local community groups, employers, businesses and key services to help embed trials in communities and help to define the particular needs and travel demand in local places.

A small number of respondents also mentioned the importance of providing education for local communities to aid understanding of the proposals. Trusted local community groups could also assist in building community confidence in any trials. Some respondents also raised the importance of attracting the widest possible range of users to participate in trials to encourage those who might not normally take part to do so.

Finally, a small number of participants noted that schemes should not be imposed on local communities.

Local infrastructure, geography and demographics

Many respondents noted that any testing and trialling should take into consideration the local geography and demographics, which can vary greatly across rural areas.

Several respondents noted aspects of the physical terrain that should be taken into consideration when developing trials. Specific aspects included that rural areas are often hillier, the weather can be more extreme, and they can be very remote making the average distance travelled longer.

A large number of respondents noted that there is often a lack of digital infrastructure in many rural areas, with limited coverage and reliability being the most common cited issues. There were several respondents who suggested that testing of new technologies could be tied to improving connectivity, through either investing in infrastructure while trials were taking place or testing new models of connectivity.

A large number of respondents also noted that the current physical transport infrastructure may not be well suited to trialling a wider range of transport types. The most common issue identified was the current road infrastructure, specifically the narrow nature of many roads, they can be poorly lit and can be commonly blocked or flooded. While some respondents noted if there are a greater variety of vehicles being used, there would need to be greater provision of roads and cycle ways, some suggested greater use of existing paths, for example by clearing footpaths and tow paths. A few participants noted that there are areas of deprivation with poor infrastructure and limited public transport services, which should also be considered for trialling of new technologies to improve services offered in these areas.

A small number of respondents noted that access to electric vehicle charge points can be an issue in rural areas, which could impact trialling. A small number also suggested that fuelling needs to be available for the long term, with some respondents noting that community power generation could be harnessed.

A small number of respondents noted population changes, both seasonal and longer-term. These included populations multiplying in tourist destinations in peak seasons, altering the demand for transport significantly. Longer term changes included an overall increase in population.

Several participants suggested that when designing and implementing trials, the elderly and young people should be given special consideration, while a small number of respondents noted that it should be ensured that all age groups are taken into consideration.

Structure of tests and trials

A significant number of respondents commented on how trials should be structured. Several respondents suggested that zones set up for trials should be created, and these could test interactions between complimentary interventions. A large number of respondents commented on the location of trials. Specifically, it was noted they should be located all across the country using a variety of representative locations.

Several respondents commented that tests and trials need to be undertaken for a significant period, some suggesting up to three years. A small number of respondents suggested they should be established in response to specific use cases, such as connecting local communities or commuting.

A small number of respondents stated that any trials must be available to all, and that ease of access, both physical and digital, was important. Some participants noted that there needs to be consideration given to those with a range of disabilities. A larger number of respondents noted that there is a significant proportion of the population who do not have access to technology or who are not digitally literate, and that this should be taken into consideration when designing trials.

A large number of respondents mentioned that safety was a high priority for any testing and trialling. The most common issue raised was road safety, with a number of respondents suggesting that where trials are taking place the speed limit should be reduced.

A small number of respondents suggested that safety and protection of personal data needs to be assured, with appropriate governance structures in place.

Impacts of testing and trialling

A small number of respondents raised quantifying the benefits to the environment and society, both negative and positive that should be taken into account as part of testing or trialling. Several respondents raised environmental impacts that should be taken into account, including negative effects on CO2 emissions, noise and biodiversity. A small number of respondents also suggested the impacts to horse riders should be taken into account. Several respondents stated that economic, social and environmental benefits should be identified, for example, opportunities for job seekers.

Innovations to test

A large number of respondents provided suggestions of different innovations that could be trialled. The most common suggestion was using innovation to integrate services, with specific suggestions such as multimodal ticketing, Mobility as a Service platforms and hubs to connect public transport, shared transport and active transport. A number of respondents also suggested that to facilitate this, buses and trains should increase bicycle storage facilities. One respondent expanded the idea of integration to include integrating transport services with other services, such as accommodation.

Another common suggestion was that trials should include shared and electric vehicles, including e-bikes, cars and motorbikes. A number of suggestions were made about how these services could be encouraged, including free testing of electric vehicles, 'EV Experience' centres or free charging locations. A number of respondents also suggested using shared transport for community services.

While a small number of respondents noted that any trials must co-exist with current services, some noted that existing services could use digital improvements such as real time information on services being available.

A small number of respondents noted that trials should include innovative freight services, with specific examples identified such as combining bus and freight services, and using narrow gauge railways for freight.

A minority of respondents suggested that trials should include provision of infrastructure such as broadband to facilitate working from home, to support a reduction in the need to travel.

Consumer experience

Many respondents stated that it was also important to understand the user experience in any testing and trialling. When designing tests and trials, a number of respondents noted it was important to provide education on the services being trialled, and to give time for users to adapt to change. A small number of respondents noted the whole user experience, from 'door to door' needs to be taken into account. Respondents suggested that trials should not try too much at once, existing services should not be compromised, and any new services need to be reliable.

A small number of respondents suggested that to assist uptake of services being tested, there may need to be disincentives to using private cars.

Funding and financing

A large number of respondents commented on the funding and financing of trials. Some respondents noted that any trials should be fully funded, with ringfenced funds. A small number of participants also noted that rural areas should receive the same amount of funding as urban areas. There were mixed views on whether trials should be placed in areas where they would likely be commercially viable easily, or to invest in areas that were less profitable and therefore likely to miss out otherwise. Some participants noted that the longer-term market and financial sustainability needs to be considered when developing trials. A small number of participants also noted consideration needs to be given to how the costs and benefits are analysed.

When it came to the cost for the end user, several respondents noted that it should be affordable, with a very small number suggesting it should be free.

Evaluation

A small number of respondents noted the importance of evaluation of any testing and trialling. Tests and trials should be fully evaluated, with lessons captured and shared. It was also noted that the community should also be consulted after trials take place, to understand attitudes following the trial. One respondent noted that lessons from trials could be incorporated into any future legislation changes.

Do not test and trial

A minority of respondents suggested that testing and trialling should not take place. Reasons given for this included that focus should be placed on improving existing services, and that new technology is not required.

Roles for government, sub-national bodies and local authorities

There are several layers of governance within our transport framework. Many powers relating to transport and land use planning are devolved to local and combined authorities. We want to see local and regional authorities equipped to shape the development of new technologies within their places, aligning to local needs and identities, and supporting local growth and development.

We recognise that central government has a role to play in ensuring there is a flexible, innovation-friendly regulatory framework, and that local leaders have a strong role in decisions on transport needs and deployment of new services in their areas. Government can also help shape the conditions for the private sector to invest in rural areas.

Questions:

In your view, what should the role of: Central government, sub-national transport bodies local authorities be in encouraging innovation in rural areas?

Do you think government can encourage the private sector to develop innovative new transport services in rural areas? How do you think government should encourage the private sector?

Role for Government

An overwhelming majority of respondents feel that the Government has a key role to play in encouraging innovation in rural areas, especially through funding and leadership. Most of the respondents provided a positive view of the Government's role, but a small minority, of mostly individuals, were negative or felt that the government should do nothing to support innovation.

Funding

The most common response to this question was that the central Government should support innovation through funding. This was either through directly funding innovation or through subsidies and grants or other monetary incentives. This view was held by both individuals and organisations, and the organisations were mostly charities and NGOs, small enterprises and local governments. Specific areas where respondents felt funding should be directed were through supporting research and development, running pilots and trials and through the development of new technology and other areas which would encourage innovation in the long term.

Leadership

The second most common theme among respondents was that the central Government should provide leadership. Some common examples were to give policy direction, to support with high level planning, and to set objectives and goals. Providing guidance and

information was also strongly viewed by respondents as a way of encouraging innovation in rural areas. A small handful of individuals felt that the role of the Government is to enable new initiatives, and some organisations believed the government should run pilots and trials in rural areas. Finally, promoting best practice and setting a regulatory framework was provided by mostly organisations as a key way in which the central Government should encourage innovation in rural areas.

Supportive role

A large number of respondents felt that the central Government should play a role by encouraging local authorities and providing them more support. Individuals mainly felt that the central Government should support innovation by engaging directly with rural residents and stakeholders and taking a bottom-up approach. Some respondents also felt that the central Government should give more control to the local authorities. Respondents also felt that it was important that the central Government ensure that they create a level playing field and that their support provides an equal access for all. A small number of individuals thought it was important that the government does not take a one-size-fits all approach and supports the specific needs of those in rural areas.

Support transport modes

A common theme among responses was that the central Government's role is to support transport modes which should encourage innovation. Facilitating active travel was the most common response, and supporting electric vehicles, Mobility as a Service and shared transport were also popular opinions among both individuals and organisations. Similarly, incentivising innovating forms of transport and new transport technologies was a common response. Some respondents believed that the central Government should provide better infrastructure and that they should reopen old rail or canal routes to increase connectivity in rural areas. Undoing the effects of privatisation and nationalising the public transport sector was also highlighted by many respondents.

Environment and sustainability

Among respondents, many felt that the Government's role was to promote sustainability and protect the environment through decarbonising transport. This view was held equally among individuals and organisations.

Role for sub-national transport bodies

Of respondents, there was a strong majority view that sub-national transport bodies (STB) should encourage innovation in rural areas and that they should play a key role. Some respondents did however view that that STBs should play no role and provided negative opinions of them such as their profit motive or lack of specific local awareness. There were also a minority of respondents who had little to no awareness of the role of STBs.

Leading role

Of respondents who viewed that STBs should encourage innovation, the main theme was that they should exhibit a leading and strategic role. More organisations than individuals stated that STBs should be involved in design, coordination and identifying areas in need of support, whereas more individuals than organisations believed STBs should be involved in encouraging trials or pilots to foster innovation. A number of both organisations and individuals stated that STBs could encourage innovation by sharing their knowledge and expertise and providing a platform for education and discussion. Similarly, many respondents believed the key role of STBs is to provide support, guidance or advice.

Collaboration and inclusion

A majority of respondents stated that to encourage innovation, joined up working would be the best option. Many stated that STBs should work with local authorities and engage with local residents or stakeholders to meet local demand and work from the bottom up. This view was equally split between organisations and individuals. Similarly, a large number of respondents answered that STBs should work closely with the central government or other agencies. Respondents also viewed that STBs should ensure their approach is pan-regional and goes across borders to encourage innovation to benefit as many people as possible. Providing access for all was preferred by organisations, whereas providing integrated services was more commonly reported by individuals.

Funding

A number of respondents (mostly individuals) stated that STBs should encourage innovation through funding. Some provided specific areas where funding could be directed, such as through research and development or promoting new design and technology. A minority of respondents were worried about the appropriate use of funds and stated that it was important funds were directed in the correct areas.

Transport modes

Promoting different transport modes were seen as ways STBs can encourage innovation. Common responses were to provide affordable public transport, promote active travel and to prioritise buses. Reducing car dependency was also provided as a response by a handful of organisations. Providing resources and local infrastructure was also seen as a way STBs could encourage innovation by organisations and individuals.

Role for local authorities

The majority of respondents were positive about the role of local authorities in encouraging innovation. An overwhelming majority reported that they believed local authorities are in the strongest position to promote innovation as they can easily engage with locals and have the best knowledge about the local area, meaning that they can encourage innovation from the bottom up. On the other hand, there was some negativity about local authorities from respondents stating that they should do nothing or that they will have an insignificant overall impact.

Specific roles

Of the respondents who said local authorities should support innovation in rural areas, there were a range of descriptions of the type of role they should play, including educating, planning or designing innovative strategies, and monitoring. A popular view was that local authorities should provide leadership, direction, and should implement ideas and strategies. Of the organisations who provided this answer, the majority were from local or regional government. A second common theme was that local authorities should give guidance and support. Both organisations and individuals also believed the role of the Local Authorities is to provide funding for innovation or to delegate funds received by the central government. A higher number of organisations than individuals believed local government should support and encourage innovation from the private sector.

Supporting different transport modes

Many respondents provided examples of how local authorities can support innovation with different transport modes. The most common theme was to promote active travel, which includes providing safer walking and cycling routes. Other common responses focussed on reducing car dependency, promoting shared transport and encouraging other areas which can support innovation such as Mobility as a Service, Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and electric vehicles. Creating an integrated transport system was favoured by organisations and improving the existing public transport network and making it more affordable was more commonly answered by individuals.

Capacity and capability of Local Authorities

There were a number of respondents who were concerned that local authorities would not be able to support innovation on their own. Many stated that local authorities do not have the available funds to allow them to focus on innovation, while a number of others also specified that local authorities should not promote innovation alone and instead should work closely with the central Government or other organisations such as subnational transport bodies. Both of these views were mostly provided by individuals. Some respondents also held the view that local authorities have failed in supporting innovation or that they should not do anything to promote innovation in rural areas.

Long term goals

A further key theme was that local authorities should encourage innovation through specific long-term policies. One such policy, which was mostly highlighted by organisations, was to introduce trials and pilots to foster innovation. Similarly, it was mostly organisations who believed local authorities should promote new technology in order to foster innovation. It was also highlighted by some respondents that local authorities should aim to improve the transport options available to rural residents and strive to connect rural communities and provide equal access to all.

Environment

A small number of respondents (mostly individuals) provided answers which featured sustainable transport modes or decarbonisation. These respondents argued that the role of local authorities was to encourage innovation in this area. A handful of respondents also stated that the focus should be on protecting the environment rather than encouraging innovation.

Encouraging the private sector

The Call for Evidence also sought views on if and how the Government could encourage the private sector to bring forward innovation in rural areas. The majority of respondents to this question thought that the Government should encourage the private sector to develop innovative transport services in rural areas. Those responding on behalf of an organisation felt strongly that Government should play a role, amounting to two thirds of those responses, compared to half of individual respondents. Academia, SMEs and local government overwhelmingly supported the role of government in encouraging innovation, while over half of responses from charities and non-governmental organisations were supportive. The type of respondent most likely to oppose government intervention were individuals, of which a quarter of respondents expressed opposition.

Funding and financing

Funding was the main theme cited in the responses by both individuals and organisations, with a similar number of responses from both which touched on elements of funding. Subsidies and grants were the most common funding types cited. The idea of partnerships and joint ventures were also commonly raised, noting the benefit of sharing risk and reducing the exposure of business in trialling innovative new transport services in rural areas, particularly where it is less profitable. It was often unclear as to whether these partnerships would be between the private sector and central government or local government. This theme has some overlap with the idea of urban-rural partnerships which was cited in several responses, where it was suggested that local rural areas should be packaged with urban areas for business deals to enable local or regional cross-subsidisation. Pump-priming or seed funding, and then long-term funding were the next most frequently cited sub themes. A small minority of respondents urged government to reallocate funding from unpopular or unsuitable projects towards innovation.

Organisations preferred to cite awarding contracts as a key mechanism by which government can encourage transport innovation in rural areas. There was broad support across individuals and government for a robust tendering or procurement process, while more individuals than organisations urge government to call out to the public for ideas.

Incentives and business

Incentives were the second most frequently cited theme amongst respondents, of which tax breaks were the main sub-theme. Although organisations were more likely to mention incentives in the broad sense, individuals were more supportive of tax breaks. A small minority of respondents mentioned tax rebates, venture capital trusts and specifically reducing business rates.

A reference to the importance of business, or how business should operate to facilitate innovation was a prominent theme. The expertise provided by business was seen as essential in realising potential innovation in the transport sector. Many respondents thought that any strategy should involve SMEs, and local business or operators. Some respondents showed a distrust in business, with charities and individuals being the most likely to think that businesses were not best placed to provide solutions to transport innovation in rural areas. Some responses indicated that competition was key to ensuring that business would develop innovative transport services in rural areas, while others thought that businesses should pay for local initiatives when operating in rural areas. A minority of organisations stressed the importance of home working in a post-Covid world, reducing the demand for travel and in turn reducing carbon emissions. This was tied with a need for robust broadband infrastructure in rural areas.

Community, localism and oversight

Environmentalism and sustainability was the key sub-theme pertaining to community and the public good, and included mentions of decarbonisation, climate change and pollution. This was followed by arguments for focusing on public good and not on making profit. Community transport schemes were often cited as either possible solutions in rural areas, or as examples of what has worked well in such areas.

Organisations pointed to the importance of taking a regional approach to transport innovation in rural areas, including through the use of sub-national transport bodies and local enterprise partnerships. Both individuals and organisations suggested that local authorities should be given more power with respect to encouraging innovation in their areas. It was not elaborated on what powers, but presumably this would include delegated spending and programme management. There was also a desire to see local authorities better supported by central government.

Organisations in particular supported the idea that oversight could help encourage innovation. This took the form of targets, monitoring and planning. Another very popular idea was that contracts, or funding arrangements should be conditional on business fulfilling stated aims or conditions. Tied to this was the idea of rewards, prizes or recognition of good business practice. A minority of individual respondents added that there should be a system which can penalise or fine businesses for failing to meet pre-agreed conditions.

Education

Respondents were supportive of the idea that government should use communication campaigns to advertise or educate the public on key issues relating to innovative transport in rural areas. There was also support for research and development, and university involvement or collaboration to aid innovation. A popular idea put forward by several different local and regional government respondents was to create skills hubs or innovation clusters in rural areas to facilitate discussion and information sharing. A minority of individual respondents thought that universities in rural areas could attract talent through offering distance learning, bursaries or scholarships, in the hope that graduates would have an interest in staying to work in that area after studying.

5. Other comments

The majority of issues raised by respondents to this question echoed themes highlighted throughout the previous questions. However, some respondents made broad comments about the scope of the Strategy.

Scope of the Strategy

The first main theme was around the definition of 'rural'. A small number of respondents suggested that there needs to be a clearer definition of 'rural'. Some respondents proposed 'rural' and 'urban' areas should not be separated, however other views contended that they are quite different, with applications applied in urban areas not being able to be simply copied to rural areas.

Several respondents noted that there are two different segments of many rural populations: year-round residents and holiday visitors. In general, these respondents suggested that both segments should be taken into account when developing the Strategy. Of note, a small number of participants suggested the Strategy should include a focus on accessing the countryside and National Parks.

A number of respondents noted the changing nature of rural communities, and this should be taken into consideration when developing the strategy. Specific aspects of change included an ageing population and changing lifestyles. On a related note, a small number of respondents suggested that changing travel behaviours following the pandemic should be considered when developing the strategy.

A small number of respondents suggested that the Strategy should take a holistic approach, linking improved mobility with aspects such as sustainability and the loneliness agenda. A small number of respondents also noted that there should be a clear link with land use and planning policy.

6. Next steps

We will use the evidence provided in these responses to the Call for Evidence, along with further engagement with stakeholders to develop a Future of Transport: Rural Strategy in due course.