SOCIAL IMPACTS AND SOCIAL EQUITY ISSUES IN TRANSPORT WORKSHOP SERIES

Workshop 4 Report: Connectivity of Rural Communities

October 26th, 2011

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**Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to Linda Critchley and John Farrington for their assistance in organising the Workshop. I thank the Centre for Transport Research for hosting the event.

I must also thank all of the speakers who came along and presented with fascinating insights.

Paul Thomas and Peter Jones chaired plenary sessions and Jillian Anable, Steve Wright and Kate Pangbourne facilitated breakout sessions. Rob Craig, Craig Morton and Angela Curl assisted by taking notes during workshop sessions.
1. Overview of the Workshop Series

Social issues form an important element of the transport policy challenge, but have been much less well explored and articulated than areas such as the economy and the environment. The social sciences have collectively carried out a wide range of research into social impacts and social equity, from a variety of different perspectives. Take up of this work in transport policy and research has been limited and patchy, however. Hence the priority under this theme is to expose and synthesise this diversity of work, and consider its applicability to contemporary policy and practice, by holding a series of linked Research into Practice events. Each one will have a different focus and be led by a different institution, with the overall project being led by Dr Karen Lucas at the TSU.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the series is to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity building to better equip researchers, policymakers and practitioners to address the social challenges in transport now and in the future within the UK context. It will draw on state-of-the-art research and best practices across a wide range of disciplines both here and abroad, to identify gaps in knowledge and the appropriate methodologies and evidence base for addressing these.

1.2 The full programme of Events

1. Framing Event - University of Oxford, 14-15 September 2010
2. Employment and Training Workshop - Warwick University, 2 December 2010
3. Transport and Health Workshop - 17-18 March 2011
4. Housing and Sustainable Communities Workshop - London School of Economics, 21 June 2011
5. Connectivity of Rural Communities Workshop – University of Aberdeen, 3-4 October 2011

1.3 Research Outputs

Slides of all the workshop presentations and reports for the series can be found on the project website: http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse

1.4 The scope of this report

This report concerns the fourth workshop. The report and an accompanying policy briefing note are the two main outputs from workshop 4: Connectivity of Rural Communities.
2. Workshop 4: Connectivity of rural communities

Workshop Four was hosted by the Centre for Transport Research at the University of Aberdeen on Monday 3rd and Tuesday 4th October 2011. Workshop participants came from a wide range of academic disciplines and policy areas and included representatives of local government, central government departments and NGOs.

2.1 Key aims and objectives

Workshop 4 examined the enormous social challenges of supporting the connectivity of rural communities. Workshop participants were encouraged to interpret connectivity broadly. Clearly transport planning and provision in rural areas and the impact of this on the exclusion of vulnerable groups is a key aspect of connectivity. However, connectivity also incorporates a range of other issues (including, but not exclusively) economic, social, political and technological factors, each of which has implications for rural transport and accessibility. Participants were also encouraged to consider connectivity over a range of spatial scales from the internal connectivity of individual rural communities to their relationship with neighbouring rural communities as well as with urban centres and connectivity at the local, regional and national level.

A set of key themes were developed to be explored at the workshop through both presentations and discussion sessions:
1. Rural accessibility and social exclusion
2. The dynamics of deprivation
3. The role of transport in the future sustainability of rural communities
4. Sectoral integration of policies in rural communities
5. The potential for a digital economy and virtual transportation to improve rural connectivity

2.2 List of Speakers

- Mark Shucksmith (Professor of Planning, Newcastle University) An overview of rural accessibility
- Rachel Milne (General Manager, Buchan Dial-a-Community Bus) Community provision for rural connectivity: the challenges and opportunities of providing a community transport service in rural areas
- Noel Smith (Director of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University) Establishing a Rural Minimum Income Standard (Rural MIS): the Role of Transport
- Haydn Davies (Localism and Rural Transport Policy Lead, Department for Transport) The challenges of connecting rural communities - a policy perspective
- John Nelson (Professor of Transport Studies and Director of the Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen) Transport poverty meets the Digital Divide: accessibility and connectivity in rural communities
2.3 Workshop outputs

A workshop report, this policy briefing note and slides of all the workshop presentations can be downloaded from the UKTRC website: http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse/

The project will also produce a final report in December 2011 and a Special Issue of the Journal of Transport Geography in spring 2012.
3. *Researching the Issues*

The workshop was designed to bring together participants from academic, policy and practice backgrounds. The presentations were designed to showcase different disciplinary perspectives with presenters from backgrounds in planning and rural sociology, the community transport sector, social policy, the UK Department for Transport and transport studies, but all focused on how transport impacts upon and is impacted by the Connectivity of Rural Communities.

Participants were selected to offer a range of interesting perspectives to add to the debates around transport and social impacts and social equity issues. Each speaker was asked to prepare a 750 word summary of their presentation and these are presented below. All references in these summaries can be found in Section 6.

3.1 **Mark Shucksmith, An overview of rural accessibility**

Rural deprivation emerged as a concept in the 1970s in response to a shift of resources towards urban local authorities to tackle inner city deprivation. One of the central themes of rural deprivation studies was rural accessibility, seen by Moseley (1979) as the rural challenge. By 2000, Moseley had refined his argument in terms of a ‘trilemma’ of how to provide rural services which at the same time offered good geographical coverage, high quality and low cost.

The concept of rural deprivation was criticised during the 1980s, however, and by the 1990s a new concept of social exclusion had emerged, which purported to focus on relational aspects of the dynamic, multi-dimensional processes underlying inequality and disadvantage (Room 1995; Shucksmith and Chapman 1998). Reimer (2004) and Philip and Shucksmith (2003) suggested that a helpful means of conceptualising social exclusion is in terms of the market, state, associative and reciprocal processes by which people gain resources (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) and so are integrated into or excluded from society. The concept remains contested, but it did shift the focus of enquiry towards accessibility’s role in these underlying processes.

Analysis of rural households in the British Household Panel Survey from 1991-96 (Chapman et al 1998; Shucksmith 2000) revealed some of the dynamics of rural poverty, with 1 in 3 people in rural Britain experiencing poverty at some point, typically for short spells. Key events associated with falling into poverty were loss of work, changes in household composition, marital break-up, or (for older people) changes in state benefits.

A study of pre-school education in rural Scotland (Shucksmith, Shucksmith and Watt 2006) raised broader issues about the provision of rural services. Access to this basic educational service was frustrated or diluted by distance, transport costs, the high costs of providing for small dispersed populations, and concerns about the quality of provision. Many accepted that in sparse areas they have to bear some of the cost (e.g. transport to distant services) or that services may be inferior (e.g. emergency services), but others insisted as taxpayers on equal entitlement. An external perspective was that people who ‘choose’ to live in sparsely populated regions must expect poorer services: why should taxpayers elsewhere meet the cost of this ‘lifestyle’ choice? Should the policy offer poorer services, a minimum standard, or equal entitlement?

Difficulties of access, time and cost may prevent some people from accessing basic services, leading to real hardship or educational disadvantage. Some 3 and 4 year olds could not benefit from pre-school education due to lack of two cars, cost of travel or other barriers. For such young children, long distances (>20 miles each way) on a bus
without parents was problematic or just unacceptable. In order to take their children, some mothers had to give up their jobs, so falling into poverty – an ironic outcome of a scheme whose objective was to reduce social exclusion.

Young people are a heterogeneous group: some are privileged and others disadvantaged by gender, by ethnicity, by social class, or by disability. Young people in rural areas may be additionally disadvantaged and excluded, by access to transport and leisure, issues of identity and the visibility of living in small communities. In navigating these landscapes of opportunity and exclusion, young people and children in rural areas nevertheless exhibit agency as competent and active members of society.

Two particularly striking findings emerged from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Action in Rural Areas programme in relation to young people (Rugg and Jones 1999; Storey and Brannen 2000; Furlong and Cartmel 1999; Pavis et al 2000). The first is that young people from rural areas become integrated into one of two quite separate labour markets – the national (distant, well-paid, with career opportunities) and the local (poorly paid, insecure, unrewarding and with fewer prospects). Education, and of course social class, are the elements which allow some young people to access national job opportunities, in the same way as those from urban areas. But for those whose educational credentials trap them within local labour markets, access to further education and training is much less than for their counterparts in towns, and their life-chances are reduced.

The second key point is the interplay between transport, employment and housing. Young people in rural areas, earning low wages, must have a car to get to work, but this together with the shortage of affordable housing leaves them unable to afford to live independently. There is also an initial problem of needing a job in order to afford a car, which they need to secure a job, and help at this crucial stage in the youth transition, for example from Wheels2Work schemes, was invaluable. The class and gender dimensions of access to transport were profound: Storey and Brannen showed that in rural England the age at which young people first gained access to a vehicle, and the age at which they gained their driving licence, was two years later for working-class than middle-class young people, and also two years later for women than men. These issues are both crucial to young people’s labour market integration and opportunities.

Older people are disproportionately present in rural Britain, and they are particularly prone to poverty, deprivation and exclusion. Service availability in some rural areas is a concern for older people as many rely on local shops, post offices, public transport and primary care services (40% say access to a service is difficult). Access to a car – generally regarded as essential – drops off considerably after retirement for older people on low incomes, and especially after reaching 75. Paradoxically, though, social isolation is worse for older people in commuting areas where social change and unaffordable housing has ruptured networks of family and friends, leaving older people “adrift on a sea of incomers.” Fewer older people receive help from social services to live at home in rural areas than urban. Take up of benefit entitlements is lower in rural areas: older people are reluctant to claim benefit entitlements, and they may not have full access to information about support and financial help.

Finally, the concept of sustainability is increasingly presented in terms of reducing emissions and car use, leading planning policies to deny investment and affordable housing to settlements without services and frequent buses. Research has shown how discursive power is exercised in covert and insidious ways, for example by the Council to Protect Rural England (Murdoch and Lowe (2003), such that people acquiesce in their own oppression (Sturzaker and Shucksmith 2011; Shucksmith 2011). By masking the power relations implicit in the process and making it appear legitimate to those adversely affected, this symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1993) furthers the interests of the middle classes to ensure that only they can afford to live in certain rural areas, boosting their property values, and making the countryside more exclusive.
3.2 Rachel Milne, Community provision for rural connectivity: the challenges and opportunities of providing a community transport service in rural areas

Community Transport (CT) may be defined as: "local passenger transport provision which is not provided through scheduled bus or rail services and which is organised on a non-profit basis by voluntary organisations, community transport groups, and other non-statutory bodies". This definition is from the Community Transport Association, but Buchan Dial-A-Community-Bus (BDCAB) prefers a wee bit of a simpler analogy “CT is the net that catches all those who fall through the sieve of conventional services.”

CT is not a stand alone “cure all” but a partner in many areas of transport providing over 2.6 million passenger journeys per year thanks to the commitment of thousands of employees and volunteers. CT operators are more than just transport providers, we connect communities in more ways than might be imagined, we turn over stones no-one else looks under, we identify issues to do with lack of access, and have in depth involvement in community development, inclusion, independent living, etc. because they all have a transport implication.

Our major challenge is not what to do, it is where to stop. Providing CT can be likened to opening a tin of worms, where every worm in that tin has its own tin...and so it continues. The more CT addresses a need, the more need is uncovered. This is supported by a recent study into Rural Deprivation and Isolation in Aberdeenshire (EKOS 2010) which showed that 14% of single adults and 20% of couples were living in poverty. 6% of people had no access to a car and 9% reported some or great difficulty accessing health care services. The percentages could be seen as low but convert them into population figures (245,780 people in Aberdeenshire according to the National Records of midyear population estimates) and the 6% becomes over 14,740 people. 9% is over 22,000 people. Please note these are Aberdeenshire figures and do not include the City.

Across Great Britain, 16 per cent of people aged 70 and over report difficulty with travel to a doctor or hospital. The number of older people in Scotland is projected to rise by 12 per cent between 2010 and 2015 (from 881,000 in 2010 to 991,000 in 2015), with an 18 per cent increase in the number of people aged 85 and over (from 106,000 to 125,000). (Audit Scotland 2011).

Demographic changes like these are a major challenge for CT operators since we deal with the most vulnerable in society; clients with dementia / special needs / disabilities etc. Every one of these groups require a level of specialist care such as; specific accessibility requirements, manual handling, managing difficult behaviours, personal spillages etc and we are expected to be able to manage their needs with very few resources. On a daily basis BDCAB is faced with constant lack of resources and over subscription. Short term funding, legislation, lack of perception and acknowledgement from statutory organisation and govt etc all affects our ability to support our levels of services.

Running CT services is time and labour intensive and many groups have a tiny workforce. Getting and retaining committed staff and volunteers is difficult and it’s all too easy to work people into the ground because of their dedication. The current economic climate has brought both challenge and opportunity to the sector as a whole with new and potentially exciting partnership opportunities developing between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The economic and social value of integration of the public and voluntary sectors was acknowledged by Audit Scotland in their report on Transport for Health and Social Care (2011) with a recommendation that there is scope for better use of resources and money
with more use of integrated services and partnership working. However that recommendation must be qualified with a realism that CT is not “cheap transport”; in fact often we have a higher unit cost than conventional routed services, especially in rural areas. However our vulnerable clients have a reduced ability to pay.

This is a stimulating time for CT operators and our partners in statutory organisations, with the optimism of new beginnings, opportunities to explore and chances to develop and work in partnership never offered before. However, there are also great challenges to be faced to confront and change perceptions and encourage growth and long term sustainability whilst maintaining the beliefs and ethos of CT and encouraging equality for those most disadvantaged in our society.

3.3 Noel Smith, Establishing a Rural Minimum Income Standard (Rural MIS): the Role of Transport

How much more do rural families need in order to achieve the same standard of living as their urban counterparts? And how much do transport costs account for this difference? This presentation discusses research to establish a Rural Minimum Income Standard (MIS), with a particular focus on how transport costs were identified, and what impact they have on overall household income need. The research was undertaken in 2009-2010 by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University for the Commission for Rural Communities. It has been published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and is available on their website.

The Minimum Income Standard is the income that people need in order to reach a minimum, socially acceptable standard of living in the United Kingdom today, based on what members of the public think. It is calculated by specifying baskets of goods and services required by different types of household in order to meet these needs and to participate in society. A sequence of groups of members of the public negotiate consensus about what should be included in these baskets, informed by experts on particular issues such as nutrition and domestic fuel. The Minimum Income Standard, which is updated annually, is designed to be used as social policy tool to measure and think about income adequacy.

The first UK MIS was launched in 2008. A limitation of the main MIS model is that it is based on research into households in urban areas, and does not focus on the needs of rural families. In order to provide complementary information on rural needs, the Commission for Rural Communities asked CRSP to identify what rural households in England need in order to achieve the same minimum living standard as their urban counterparts. The research distinguishes how household costs vary across different household types – working-age and pensioner households, single people and couples, and households with and without children (taking into account the number and ages of children. The research also distinguishes how costs vary across three different types of rural area: rural town, village and hamlet. The research involved 15 in-depth focus groups in nine local authorities across England.

The research found that although some things could be cheaper for rural households than for urban households, these lower costs were relatively small. Most household requirements were the same in rural and urban areas. However, there were critical differences that meant, overall, rural households faced additional costs.

Most rural households face a minimum cost of living of the order of 10 to 20 per cent higher than their counterparts in urban areas. These costs are concentrated in two particular areas of household budgets – transport and domestic fuel. Transport costs make up the single largest element of the additional costs – between 60 and 100 per cent of differences. This reflects the shift from reliance on buses as the main mode of transport in urban budgets to the need for cars in most rural households. Cars were
deemed essential in locales where bus services were inadequate or unavailable. Motoring budgets were constructed by taking into account the purpose and number of trips households need to make as a minimum, the average distances to services from each rural area type, and the per mile motoring cost for specified vehicles.

3.4 Haydn Davies, The challenges of connecting rural communities - a policy perspective

The Coalition Government’s vision is for transport that helps create growth and tackles climate change by cutting carbon. In the White Paper Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon - Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen the main reference to rural transport is: “Public transport services remain important for both the sustainability and independence of rural communities. Where commercial bus services are not viable, this may mean local authority tendered bus services, but it may be that other more flexible services provided by the council or the voluntary sector (e.g. dial-a-ride) are more sustainable” (DfT 2011).

For many in rural areas the car has become the mode of first choice. The 2010 National Travel Survey shows the percentage of households not owning a car/van was 9% in 2008/09 whilst for Great Britain as a whole it was 25%. The percentage of all trips by private transport is 80% compared with 55% nationally. Public transport makes up 5% with 3% by bus. Rural distances travelled are 9,750 miles per-person/per-year, compared with 6,850 across Great Britain. The percentage of people in rural areas with an hourly or more frequent bus within 13 minute walk increased to 57% in 2010 from 45% 1998/2000.

The Government’s goal in the White Paper is supporting and promoting bus use to:

- contribute to economic growth – by linking people to goods, jobs, education and services and by reducing time delays due to congestion through encouraging mode switch from cars;
- make transport greener – by removing car traffic especially from urban areas, thereby reducing noise pollution and carbon emissions and improving air quality; and
- improve quality of life – in particular, by providing access to goods, jobs, education, services and social activities for those without access to a private car, and for the elderly and disabled.

The Government spent £800m on the national concessionary travel scheme and £318m on BSOG in 2009/10, plus the £400m spent by local authorities supporting services. The Government is committed to the national concessionary fare scheme but identified potential savings in the way it is administered.

The Bus Service Operators Grant helps ensure that outside London, fares are 7% lower and service levels 7% higher than otherwise. The rate will be reduced by 20% in 2012. DfT estimates in rural areas this will cause a 2% decrease in services and 2% increase in fares. The Government have choices to make about how to achieve objectives through changing the distribution of what is effectively a subsidy to operators.

This Government has commitments to ending top-down decision making and one-size fits all solutions. We are however keen on encouraging partnerships between bus companies and Local Authorities. Partnership working and improved tendering were identified by the Competition Commission as ways to address its provisional findings. Government remains keen to share knowledge and best practice and The Rural Transport - Knowledge Base remains available.

Community Transport is an exemplar of Big Society in action and the government will work closely to support it. With the financial situation it is well placed to fill gaps in rural
transport. The government provided £10m one-off funding for rural authorities to kick-start and support community transport. Wheels to Work benefits people in isolated rural communities and plays an important part in helping people to come off benefits and regain independence. The DfT will continue to encourage them in the transport planning process.

Rail plays a small role in rural transport because there are a few stations in rural areas. Stations in towns and urban areas close to rural areas provide for longer distance travel by residents that do not have access to, or choose not to use a car. The links from rural areas to such stations are important.

A £560 million local sustainable transport fund established in 2010 is contributing to packages of local transport interventions supporting economic growth and reducing carbon emissions. Some of the successful first round schemes and second round schemes being progressed will benefit rural areas.

For many wishing to travel to work or training in rural areas, opportunities available can only be accessed by car. People have no choice but to travel by private transport, and this requires buying and running a motor vehicle. Wages in rural jobs are low, but because employees or trainees have to travel by car they spend a disproportionate share of their income on travel. This has been referred to as rural transport poverty and has been described in similar terms to fuel poverty. There have been calls for assistance but the government has no current proposals to subsidise the cost of fuel for transport in certain areas.

3.5 John Nelson, Transport poverty meets the Digital Divide: accessibility and connectivity in rural communities

Rural communities face a range of challenges associated with accessibility and connectivity which apply in both the physical and virtual sphere. Limitations in transport infrastructure and services can diminish travel horizons and hinder access to opportunities such as employment, education, social networks, etc. Technology has long been heralded as offering the potential to mitigate some of these barriers, by providing alternative means of access and connectivity. However, there are limitations in the development and resilience of technological infrastructures, which can compound the disparity in transport infrastructure and services between urban and rural communities. Similarly, it must also be recognised that there are disparities in the level and performance of transport and technology infrastructures between different rural contexts. Here degrees of ‘remoteness’ are significant factors.

Many rural areas have limited or no connection to public transport; and traditionally rural transport has been based predominantly on road vehicles (Gray et al., 2001). The lack of transport accessibility and connectivity in rural areas has a strong impact on those with limited access to private motorised transport such as children, older people, people with disabilities and the mobility impaired (Kenyon et al., 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

The use of transport telematics that encompass a range of advanced computer, Information and Communication Technologies, navigation and positioning systems and digital technologies in the field of transport can improve the efficiency and service quality of transport systems (Giannopoulos, 2004; Sussman, 2005; Deeter, 2009). Though such transport technologies have been widely deployed in urban and suburban areas in the developed world, their application in rural and remote rural areas has been very limited (Nalevanko and Henry, 2001). Potential exists for these technologies to contribute to the alleviation of accessibility and inclusion problems in such areas.

In Scotland, approximately 19% of the population live in rural areas (National Statistics, 2010). Figures presented show accessibility and connectivity conditions in Scotland in
the form of road travel time to different amenities (such as hospitals and shopping centres) for each postcode sector. It can be seen that in many rural areas in Scotland, patients need to travel more than one hour to reach a maternity hospital and accident & emergency centre. Public transport provision in rural areas is very limited compared to the rest of Scotland in terms of accessibility to bus stops and connectivity to key services.

Digital technologies are often used to make mainstream public services more effective and efficient (Boulton, 2010). Examples of such digital technologies include broadband internet access, smart mobile phones and personal computers. Varying levels of access to digital infrastructure, technologies, knowledge and the skills required to use digital systems have led to notions of ‘digital divide’ with gender, age, income, race and location being identified as significant factors in identifying ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in the digital sphere (Digital Britain, 2009; Boulton, 2010).

Scottish rural communities have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion (Scottish Executive, 2002). People who live in rural locations across the UK are less likely to have access to super-fast broadband, a 3G phone signal, or a choice of suppliers through their local fixed telephone exchange than urban residents. Average broadband speeds are typically lower in rural than in urban areas (Ofcom 2010). A recent consultation by the Scottish Government on rural Scotland identified broadband coverage as the key issue for rural communities and a vital measure to support economic growth in rural areas (Scottish Government 2011).

The Informed Rural Passenger research activity being undertaken in the RCUK dot.rural Digital Economy Research Hub at the University of Aberdeen is exploring how advanced technologies might help in developing and enhancing passenger information systems in rural areas where basic transport technology infrastructures are not available; the objective is to demonstrate how passengers may become producers as well as consumers of passenger information. In this scenario, passengers with smart mobile phones can update real-time information about the public transport vehicle delays and service conditions; and they can also permit a control station to track location (i.e., vehicle location information) during their journey using the GPS in their smart phone. This real-time vehicle location and delay information is transferred to a control station where other information, such as revised schedules and road network conditions, is available. At the control centre this information is analysed and further passenger information will be disseminated to all users through mobile devices. Moreover, information on transport service conditions (e.g., noisy, crowded etc), provided by users (e.g. at the time of travel or subsequently including by social networking media), could be used by transport operators and government agencies to improve public transport services.

A smartphone application (known as GetThere) has been developed incorporating some of the features outlined above and we are shortly to begin a pilot study for a one week duration with around 15-20 users on a bus route in the Aberdeen area. A more extensive study in the Scottish borders is planned.

Providing accessibility and connectivity to rural communities presents significant challenges. These challenges are formidable because they combine the problems of transport poverty and digital exclusion. Alongside social and economic aspects, these problems include a strong technological/technical component common to both the transport and digital spheres in terms of the quality and availability of infrastructure and services. Addressing these challenges and mitigating negative effects will require both technical adaptation and innovation by service providers and a supportive policy agenda pursued by decision-makers.
4. Discussion of policy and research issues

This section of the report brings together the key policy and research issues that emerged during the workshop during panel discussions in presentation sessions and during breakout and plenary feedback sessions (see Appendix 1: Workshop Programme).

4.1 Themes for research and policy

Ten key themes have been identified for research and policy

4.1.1. What (and who) is the countryside for?

It was suggested that the major policy imperative in the UK in relation to rural communities reflected an ecologist, preservationist interpretation of sustainability. This was seen to be at the expense of socio-economic, inter-generational sustainability. This was seen to have led to a planning strategy that limited development (particularly housing) in rural areas, such that gentrification had led to the poor being priced out of rural living. This strategy was not viewed as sustainable in terms of supporting the rural (agricultural) economy and had serious implications for transport poverty as the prevalent culture of car dependence in rural living increased social exclusion for those without access to the car and unable to access diminishing or non-existent public transport services. In this context, housing and development policy was seen to be a crucial determinant of rural connectivity.

4.1.2. The cost of connectivity in diverse rural communities

The diversity of rurality in the UK, with varying degrees of remoteness and connectivity can create difficulties in terms of understanding problems of connectivity and developing transferable solutions, particularly in a political context of increasingly devolved decision making. However, research on Minimum Income Standards in rural England has demonstrated that most rural households face a minimum cost of living of the order of 10 to 20 per cent higher than their counterparts in urban areas. These costs are concentrated in two particular areas of household budgets – transport and domestic fuel. Transport costs make up the single largest element of the additional costs – between 60 and 100 per cent of differences. Given the greater connectivity challenges faced by many rural communities elsewhere in the UK, it is likely that the differential in cost of living is considerably higher.

4.1.3. Is localism compatible with joined up thinking?

A call for joined up thinking underpinned many of the research and policy priorities generated at the workshop (particularly in relation to service delivery). It was suggested that this approach conflicts with the prevailing localism policy agenda and model of governance based on decentralisation and fragmentation. Rural communities require a clear strategic lead from central government with a consistent policy framework, minimum, enforceable standards of provision and a transparent evaluation process. This will enable action at the local community level which is accountable. Local authorities are responding very differently to cuts and there is a lack of awareness of different approaches being taken and their impacts. Open data and best practice knowledge transfer are critically important in this context.

4.1.4. How resilient are rural transport networks?

Rural communities can be dependent upon fragile transport infrastructure and services. This relates to the vulnerability of commercial transport services, the uncertainty of funding for community transport and the reliance upon local champions and volunteers to sustain services. We need to better understand the vulnerability of transport networks in rural areas and consider how they could be made more resilient.
4.1.5. What are the costs and benefits of delivering services via telepresence?
Advances in the digital economy have enabled an ever increasing range of services to be provided by telepresence in rural areas. The social implications of these opportunities in terms of inclusion and service quality remain unclear (see Section 4.3). We need also to better understand if there is added economic value of teleworking in rural communities. Microbusinesses in rural areas have been enabled by developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and these offer diversification opportunities for agricultural communities and act as incubators for rural business.

4.1.6. How can new data sources be best exploited?
Advances in the availability and range of data sources brought by the digital economy (open data, data sharing, crowd sourcing, etc.) offer the prospect of better identifying and responding to connectivity needs in rural communities and a better understanding of interactions between social networks, transport networks and social inclusion. This arena would also benefit from a strategic approach to (geo coded) data collection, open data sharing, greater appreciation of issues surrounding data provenance, and knowledge transfer to support evidence based policy making, action taking and outcome evaluation.

4.1.7. How can the social benefits of rural connectivity services be better valued?
When considering policy interventions to support rural connectivity we need to move away from a conventional Cost Benefit Analysis appraisal to a more socially inclusive indicator set which effectively considers and values the social return on investment in terms of quality of life, well being and the wider social costs/benefits of transport interventions.

4.1.8. Can land use planning enable more sustainable rural form?
The potential development of multi-functional village hubs as consolidation centres for co-located services (public sector services, internet connectivity, shops, fuel, car clubs, freight/delivery collection points, etc.) should be further explored along with associated regulatory, commercial and social issues. The lack of a robust evidence base on sustainable rural form (see Section 4.3) is a major associated deficiency.

4.1.9. Reviewing funding models for public transport
It was widely agreed that a fundamental review of the funding model for public transport was needed. In particular, a review of policy on concessionary fares was advocated in terms of its purpose, effectiveness and fairness. It was widely felt that maximum benefit for public transport users was not being achieved from the money invested through the current funding model. It was argued that planning and funding whole transport networks based on an holistic needs based approach was desirable. Greater focus on alternative forms of flexible shared transport (lift sharing, car clubs, shared taxis etc) is also required.

4.1.10 Achieving social connectivity
Social capital and social connectivity were raised as important issues linked to shared knowledge and shared ownership of resources. Rural communities often have a well defined sense of shared experience leading to a strong sense of connectedness. Within rural areas, residents have a reduced ability to choose who they interact with. This lack of choice can act as a way of connecting the community as it is in everyone’s interest for there to be harmony. Further investigation into the importance of and interaction between social capital, transport networks and social networks in rural areas is needed. The relationships may not be implicit e.g. some accessible rural areas can suffer from higher levels of social exclusion than remote rural areas especially for the elderly, as friends are forced out by house prices and social networks are lost.
4.2. Methodologies

- The utility of establishing a rural minimum income standard and its deployment of Citizen’s Juries - a participatory action research method was a major focus of the workshop. The potential roll-out of this approach to rural contexts across the UK was identified as a future priority.
- Methodologies for the appraisal of transport interventions were a key aspect of workshop discussion with better incorporation of social metrics (see Section 4.1.7) and the need to reconsider existing funding models for rural transport (Section 4.1.9) being high research and policy priorities.
- Social network analysis was identified as a key methodological tool that was emerging and had significant potential in the field of rural connectivity.
- Advances in the availability and range of data sources brought by the digital economy (open data, data sharing, crowd sourcing, etc.) offered considerable research opportunities and challenges.
- An increasing role for visual methodologies (with parallel advances in analytical techniques) was anticipated.

4.3. Gaps in knowledge

- The importance of freight and related goods movement in supporting rural connectivity was identified as a neglected area. It was felt that advances in the digital economy offered considerable potential to improve service provision and indeed to better integrate freight and passenger movements in rural areas. Research evidence on tracing goods distribution and the delivery implications of online purchasing was available, but it was almost wholly focussed on urban areas.
- Whilst there was an established international evidence base on the sustainable urban form, a parallel evidence base on sustainable rural form does not exist.
- A better evidence base on accessibility interventions was identified as a key knowledge gap that needed to be addressed to inform strategy and investment decisions.
- Partnership working was strongly advocated in workshop discussions. What have been the outcomes from successful partnership working that justify the faith in this approach? Work is needed to evaluate experience of partnership working with international examples - are issues centrally or locally driven? What are the drivers on the ground to collaboration?
- The transport and social equity impacts of Information and Communication Technologies are still not clearly understood. This is due to a number of factors including:
  - The lack of unified analysis; research is undertaken in many diverse domains, but findings have not been effectively consolidated
  - Whilst the evidence base is growing, findings are inconsistent in terms of travel impacts and social benefits
  - Findings suggest impacts are varied and context dependent and the subject would clearly benefit from longitudinal analysis at a national scale.

4.4. Future priorities

The following five future priorities have been identified based on the presentations and discussion at the workshop:

1. A localism policy agenda for rural communities requires a clear strategic lead from central government with a consistent policy framework, minimum, enforceable standards of provision and a transparent evaluation process. This will enable action at the local community level which is accountable. Local authorities are responding very differently to cuts and there is a lack of awareness of different approaches being taken and their impacts.
2. Rural communities can be dependent upon fragile transport infrastructure and services due to funding uncertainties and dependence upon volunteers. System failure may lead to transport poverty with significant social and economic implications. We need to evaluate the resilience and reliability of rural transport networks and identify means of mitigating vulnerabilities.

3. The potential for the digital economy to support the connectivity of rural communities remains poorly understood and the digital divide between urban and rural communities may grow without policy intervention. Particular areas of concern relate to the costs and benefits of providing services via telepresence and the role of data collection and sharing in supporting evidence based policy making.

4. When considering policy interventions to support rural connectivity we need to move away from a conventional Cost Benefit Analysis appraisal to a more socially inclusive indicator set which effectively considers and values the social return on investment.

5. The potential development of multi-functional village hubs as consolidation centres for co-located services (public sector services, internet connectivity, shops, fuel, car clubs, freight/delivery collection points, etc.) should be explored along with associated regulatory, commercial and social issues.
5. Further information

Slides of the presentations from the Framing event and from this Workshop can be downloaded from the project website: http://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/research/uktrcse

For further details of the workshop series and general queries about the programme please contact Karen Lucas at karen.lucas@ouce.ac.uk
6. References


**Websites**

British Household Panel Survey: [http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps) (accessed 20/10/11)


Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University: [http://www.crsp.ac.uk/](http://www.crsp.ac.uk/) (accessed 20/10/11)


Joseph Rowntree Foundation: [http://www.jrf.org.uk/] (accessed 20/10/11)

Minimum Income Standard for the UK: [http://www.minimumincomestandard.org/] (accessed 20/10/11)


Appendix 1: Workshop Programme

Workshop 4: Connectivity of Rural Communities
3rd and 4th October, 2011
MacRobert Building (Rooms 027-029)
Old Aberdeen Campus
University of Aberdeen

DAY 1  Monday 3rd October 2011

12.00 ARRIVAL AND BUFFET LUNCH

13:15-15:30 SESSION 1: Introductions and Presentation of papers by key experts

(Session Chair: Paul Thomas, Managing Director of First Scotland East)

13:15 Introductions, welcome and workshop overview

Dr Karen Lucas, Principal Investigator for Workshop Series, Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford
Professor John Farrington and Dr Mark Beecroft, Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen

13.30 An overview of rural accessibility

Professor Mark Shucksmith, Professor of Planning, Newcastle University

14.00 Community provision for rural connectivity: the challenges and opportunities of providing a community transport service in rural areas.

Rachel Milne, General Manager, Buchan Dial-a-Community Bus

14.30 Establishing a Rural Minimum Income Standard (Rural MIS): the Role of Transport

Dr Noel Smith, Director of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University

15.00 Discussion of papers

15:30 COFFEE BREAK

16.00-18:00 SESSION 2: SWOT analysis of the Connectivity of Rural Communities

16:00 Introduction to exercise (Dr Mark Beecroft)

16:10 Break out session
18.00 Free time, attendees room check-in, etc.

19.30 EVENING MEAL, Doubletree by Hilton hotel: http://www.doubletreeaberdeen.com/

DAY 2 Tuesday 4th October

08.45-9:00 Tea/coffee available

09.00-10:35 SESSION 3: Plenary feedback and discussion on Session 2 activities

(Session Chair: Dr Mark Beecroft)

09.00 Introduction

09:05 Breakout groups feedback

09.35 Plenary discussion – identifying key findings from SWOT exercise and determining policy and research implications from these findings

10.35 COFFEE BREAK

11:00-12:45 SESSION 4: Presentation of papers by key experts

(Session Chair: Professor Peter Jones, University College London)

11:00 The challenges of connecting rural communities - a policy perspective.

_Haydn Davies, Localism and Rural Transport Policy Lead, Department for Transport._

11.30 Transport poverty meets the Digital Divide: accessibility and connectivity in rural communities.

_Professor John Nelson, Professor of Transport Studies and Director of the Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen_

12:00 Discussion

12.30 Workshop Round up – Ralph Smyth, Senior Transport Campaigner, Council for the Protection of Rural England and Dr Mark Beecroft

12.45 LUNCH

14.00 CLOSE
## Appendix 2: List of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jillian Anable</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Beecroft</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Chamberlain</td>
<td>Corporate Partnerships</td>
<td>Merseytravel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rob Craig</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Curl</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydn Davies</td>
<td>Localism and Rural</td>
<td>Department for Transport</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transport Policy Lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigel Dotchin</td>
<td>Head of Equalities Policy and Regional and Local Strategy</td>
<td>Department for Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dave Duthie</td>
<td>Partnership Director</td>
<td>HITRANS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donna Easterlow</td>
<td>Principal Research Officer</td>
<td>Transport Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Farrington</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Green</td>
<td>Principal Research Fellow</td>
<td>Institute of Employment Research, University of Warwick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Jones</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Studies, University College London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Kent</td>
<td>Transport Executive</td>
<td>NESTRANS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neil Lindsey</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>CPR Regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Lucas</td>
<td>Senior Research Fellow</td>
<td>Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Mackay</td>
<td>Planning Officer</td>
<td>Aberdeenshire Council Public Transport Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregor McAbery</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Transform Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard McKenzie</td>
<td>Public Transport Manager</td>
<td>Aberdeenshire Council Public Transport Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel Milne</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Buchan Dial-a-Community Bus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Craig Morton</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Nelson</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate Pangbourne</td>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td>Geography and Environment, University of Aberdeen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Konstantinos Papangelis</td>
<td>PhD Student</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lorna Philip</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Geography and Environment, University of Aberdeen</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Scott</td>
<td>Network Manager</td>
<td>First Scotland East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Shergold</td>
<td>Research Associate</td>
<td>Centre for Transport and Society, University of the West of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Shucksmith</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noel Smith</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ralph Smyth</td>
<td>Senior Transport Campaigner</td>
<td>Campaign to Protect Rural England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Thomas</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>First Scotland East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nagendra Velaga</td>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve Wright</td>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td>Centre for Transport Research, University of Aberdeen</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Speaker biographies

**Mark Shucksmith** is Professor of Planning in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at Newcastle University. Prior to this he was Professor of Land Economy at the University of Aberdeen from 1993 to 2004. His research interests include: poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, sustainable ruralism, rural development, agricultural policy, and affordable rural housing. He was awarded an OBE in 2009 for services to rural development and crofting.

**Rachel Milne** is General Manager of Buchan Dial-a-Community Bus which incorporates DAB Plus c.i.c. Originally qualified in Communication Studies (including marketing, marketing research, advertising and public relations), Rachel worked in the oil industry for many years until her move into the voluntary sector in March 2000. Rachel is the current Chair of the Community Transport Association’s Scottish Committee and is a Board member of the Go Skills Community Transport Industry Board.

**Dr Noel Smith** is the Director of the Centre for Social Policy at Loughborough University. Noel joined CRSP in 1999, following a doctorate in social anthropology at Queen’s University and, before that, a stint in social work. Noel’s interests fall under two themes, poverty and income studies, and accessibility-related social exclusion. He has been involved in budget standard research for the last eight years and, as part of the Minimum Income Standard programme team, he was responsible for ‘MIS Rural’. This looked at the additional needs and costs of rural households in England, compared with their urban counterparts. New to rural research, this project took Noel on unfamiliar forays into social geography and fieldwork in some very pleasant places.

**Haydn Davies** is a Transportation Planner and Traffic Engineer with extensive UK and overseas experience in both the private and public sector. He held a Directorial role at WSP and had Regional Director responsibilities at Faber Maunsell (now AECOM) and Colin Buchanan, having started his career in Local Government. Haydn has been responsible for consultancy commissions undertaken for the public and private sector and has worked on a range of transport studies including transport appraisals, policy development, traffic engineering and environmental improvement schemes in many parts of the UK and abroad. He returned to public sector in 2008 as Transport Lead in the Government Office for the East of England before transferring to the central Department for Transport. He is a Prince2 Practitioner and is a keen and still occasionally competitive cyclist.

**Professor John Nelson** holds the Sixth Century Chair of Transport Studies at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland and is Director of the Centre for Transport Research (CTR). He is particularly interested in the application and evaluation of new technologies to improve public transport as well as the policy frameworks and regulatory regimes necessary to achieve sustainable transport systems. His current projects cover many aspects of mobility management including investigations of internet-based journey planners, flexible transport systems and Bus Rapid Transit. John is the theme leader for Accessibility and Mobilities in the RCUK-funded DOT.RURAL Digital Economy Hub at Aberdeen University.