



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
WEST MIDLANDS



CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Improving Rural Accessibility in the Rural West Midlands



June 2008

A West Midlands CPRE Report

A report on the current accessibility of services for those living in rural areas of the West Midlands and the contents of the various Local Transport Plans in the area

by

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The author would like to acknowledge with thanks the assistance received in writing and producing this report from Gerald Kells, Peter Langley and Ray Clipson. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent national CPRE policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 **CPRE's primary concern is to preserve the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside, but as a counterpart to that it is also concerned to promote and maintain vibrant, living rural communities.**
- 1.2 **As many communities have lost vital services such as post offices, local health facilities and shops, those who live in them have become more dependent on transport.** However, although many can use their own cars to get around, a significant number of people do not own one or cannot drive, while for others the single family car is not available during the day. Many households own two or more cars, but typically upwards of one rural household in eight (in Staffordshire, for example) has no car at all.
- 1.3 To resolve individual problems of access to work, shops and services, some people without their own transport rely on neighbours for lifts. However, to do this is often not possible and is generally not practical for longer essential journeys or scheduled appointments.
- 1.4 In many villages the impact of traffic on the environment and road safety is severe and well-documented. Accidents in rural areas may appear to be rarer but they are also more likely to be serious or fatal. At the same time, despite recent trends, the real cost of motoring is likely to increase in the future. It can be anticipated, therefore, that in future years the need for alternatives to the car will increase.
- 1.5 From an economic point of view it can be argued, on the basis of a simple cost-benefit approach, that the limited funds available to councils should be spent on transport in urban areas, where the numbers affected are greatest. Socially, such an exclusive approach is in danger of creating a deprived rural underclass.
- 1.6 The relatively high cost of underwriting rural transport appears to support the case for restricting development in the countryside. In general this may be true. Nevertheless, new affordable housing in rural towns and villages will always be required for local people and will generate a need to travel.
- 1.7 Spring 2006 saw the publication of the finalized Local Transport Plans (LTPs) covering the West Midlands region for the period 2006-11. (These included a combined plan for the West Midlands Metropolitan Area which, except for the rural area of Solihull, is not of immediate concern here.) Along with a strategic framework and analysis, there were detailed treatments of a number of topics, including environment and air quality, safety, road building, congestion and traffic management, cycling and rights of way, and economic measures. In particular, councils had an obligation to formulate and present in their plans an accessibility strategy for both urban and rural areas.
- 1.8 'Accessibility' in this context is a term which covers several disparate issues. Of most importance to people who live outside towns and cities, particularly for those without a car, is their ability to reach employment, shops and services of many kinds, which are now often in distant locations, without undue difficulty.

1.9 West Midlands CPRE, therefore, felt it important to produce a report which addressed rural accessibility and the impact on it of the policies contained in the LTPs. This report does not consider matters of safety and intrusion, although for CPRE these are also vitally important. The report is also primarily concerned with rural areas, but it is accepted that shire authorities in the region also have substantial transport issues within their market towns.

2. Social Exclusion, Accessibility and Transport

- 2.1 It is the Government's avowed aim to combat social exclusion resulting from deprivation or isolation. One key to achieving this aim is accessibility: to education, training and work, to health care and fresh food shops, to service centres and leisure and social facilities.** Socially excluded, disadvantaged groups in rural areas are disparate in their nature and the problems they present. As far as accessibility is concerned, they include people with poor mobility because of old age, disability or ill-health, the young who cannot drive, and the economically deprived who have no car, as well as parents and children where the single family car is unavailable during the working day. Numerically, of course, the majority of disadvantaged people are found in towns and cities, but that does not mean that rural exclusion is any less important to those who experience it.
- 2.2 There are still a significant number of disadvantaged people living in rural areas (defined as those living in communities with populations of less than 3000) who either do not possess their own car or have only limited access to one.** For these people problems of accessibility can prove particularly intractable if there is no public transport provision. Unfortunately, changes in funding have exacerbated the problem of assisting rural transport. Herefordshire in particular notes new difficulties created by the loss of funding sources.
- 2.3** The issues covered by accessibility include location of services, personal safety, information provision and infrastructure design. Planning guidance supports the retention and enhancement of local provision where public transport is poor, but our experience is that local services are still disappearing or being 'rationalized' in rural areas. In places with poor transport links, the loss of local bank and Post Office branches, the closure of local primary schools and the disappearance of village stores and pubs are not unusual events.
- 2.4** Some services, such as a part-time health clinic, a mobile library, contacts for council services or a travelling play bus, can be brought to within a reasonable distance of people in rural areas. In addition, mail-order and internet services can fill some of the gaps for shopping and other requirements. Herefordshire and Worcestershire are both committed to developing the delivery of some services remotely through technology as well as through mobile facilities, and Herefordshire has already installed a network of twenty Community Access Points in isolated communities. Shropshire too is actively moving services into community settings, with face-to-face contact points around the county and is investigating the scope for providing more local and mobile services.
- 2.5 Even so, the range of choices and facilities that many town-dwellers take for granted is often unavailable in rural areas where services, shops and employment remain. Most importantly, many essential services are not, and cannot be, located locally or provided electronically.** Examples

include acute-care hospitals (with specialist, emergency and maternity units), sixth-form and further education colleges and training facilities. Skilled, well-paid jobs and career employment are not usually conveniently situated for people living outside towns. The ability to locate jobs and services in rural areas and reduce the need for travel is necessarily limited, even with the best will in the world. (Worcestershire intends to foster employment opportunities in rural areas, but it should be noted that with an increasingly well-trained workforce local jobs will not necessarily match local skills, except for the lowest-paid.)

- 2.6 **People have to travel to get not only what they want but also what they need. Even in a predominantly car-based society, the needs of a significant number of people still have to be met by public transport.** Although spatial accessibility is about ensuring local provision wherever possible, it is also about the ability of a person who requires a service which is not available locally to get to where it is to be found without undue difficulty. As far as people living in rural areas are concerned, it is accepted (according to some LTPs at least) that everyone should be able to access the nearest market town with no difficulty and a major centre without too much further trouble.
- 2.7 **Where there is a limited pool of potential public transport users, as is usually the case in rural areas, the main problems connected with spatial accessibility are dispersed demand and divergent requirements.** The origin of the journey, time of travel, destination and purpose and length of stay vary among transport users. Employment, shopping offering good choice, healthcare, and education and training facilities may be in awkward and widely separated locations. Where there is an infrequent scheduled bus service it is likely to cater for some people but not others, since people with different purposes do not want to travel to and from the same places at the same times of day.

3. *The Local Transport Plans and the Current Situation*

- 3.1 **According to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG 11), priority in rural areas should be given to the development of public transport links (including community transport) to key local service centres.** All the West Midlands LTPs acknowledge that they should move towards developing an integrated public transport network where everyone has access to high quality and affordable services, although the term 'high quality' remains undefined. We are glad that the importance of market towns is recognized, together with the need to make them more attractive and accessible destinations for many essential services and to improve links between these towns and major centres for the services that cannot be provided there.
- 3.2 Some rural communities are served by convenient rail services serving rural stations and providing good connections to the urban areas of the region. These are almost always quicker (and have greater appeal) than alternative bus services and make an important contribution to rural accessibility. We believe that there is a case for prioritizing development (other things being equal) where there are rail services, for improving services to local stations, for reopening disused stations and rail lines and for considering new provision of stations and services. However, the areas that benefit from rail links will always be limited. The whole of Herefordshire has only four stations, and in the West Midlands overall there are probably fewer than forty stations (including those in market towns) which are of direct significance to rural communities directly. Even where they exist, rail

services may only partially solve accessibility problems, especially if the need for good onward travel connections at destination stations is not recognized.

- 3.3 **For the majority of communities and their residents the only form of public transport linking town and country is, and will remain, the bus or some other form of road-based transport.** In recent years conventional rural bus services have become increasingly vulnerable and they appear to be continuing their long-term decline. Up to the present a significant number of insufficiently profitable routes have been deregistered each year, and more routes are likely to be abandoned as commercial propositions in the future. Other services, although continuing during the working day, have suffered significant reductions in the evenings and on Sundays. Financial constraints dictate that subsidies for conventional bus services are limited and under constant pressure. Because of rising costs, subsidized services are also destined to be further reduced in number. We are aware of welcome counter-examples to these general trends, but they remain exceptions.
- 3.4 **The problem is exacerbated because planning of new developments outside towns and cities has rarely favoured public transport.** New low-density housing estates in expanded villages can rarely support the introduction of a regular bus service. Employment opportunities and services in out-of-town retail and business parks, industrial estates, etc. continue to be located away from population centres to sites where there is convenient access by car but only rudimentary public transport. We acknowledge that local authorities are showing more awareness of the problems produced by patterns of development than over the last several decades. Planning guidance now encourages developments to be sited where there is, or can be, good accessibility. The LTPs promise tighter use of planning policies, with encouragement for development around local centres and public transport routes to help sustain existing services. Unfortunately, even where effect is given to the latest planning guidance, the significant impact of land-use changes on travel behaviour and greater accessibility tends to manifest themselves only in the longer term.
- 3.5 **Town centres are obviously the most accessible locations for most modes.** Nevertheless, in the shorter term hospitals and educational institutions continue to be reduced in number or downgraded. New facilities are often concentrated at large, non-local establishments. Many are on edge-of-town sites where access for many people is not straightforward. As the Staffordshire LTP points out, **accessibility is difficult if one site serves a large area or if services (especially healthcare) are distant from town centres.**
- 3.6 In fact, there is usually quite good local public transport provision (for a substantial part of the day) to existing hospitals. This is the aspect of spatial accessibility to which councils seem to have given most attention. Unfortunately, where a hospital has been moved to a new location, the journey is often more awkward than before (to the old site). This applies even for people from within the same town but is much worse for those coming from outside the town using public transport, who may formerly have enjoyed a more local provision of hospital services. A change of buses (or occasionally between train and bus, which itself is not always convenient) is typically required. This makes for a much longer and more difficult overall journey. It seems that the consequences of this Government-inspired concentration of essential services in locations with middling accessibility (for all but a few) will be with us for a generation or more.

- 3.7 The distance of educational institutions presents less of a problem than the distance of hospitals, with many students (although not all) able to use alternative forms of transport such as cycling. Over-16s who live far from their institution and for whom there is no statutory obligation to provide transport may have difficulties unless they can rely on the use of a car. The introduction of more flexibility in education with extended school and college opening hours may create new problems of accessibility that affect all age-groups in rural areas. On the positive side, these changes may also provide an opportunity for augmenting local bus services.
- 3.8 As for transport to work, even where there is public transport to or near employment locations the working hours of employees may not tally with the working hours of the bus company. Company travel plans which incorporate car sharing may solve some problems, but encouraging car sharing does not contribute to the improvement of public transport or general accessibility.
- 3.9 As far as shopping is concerned, market towns and smaller centres will always retain some outlets. However, the development of retail and leisure facilities in edge-of-town locations that can in practice only be reached easily by car means that there is less choice (and lower quality) in town centres, whose shops those without cars have to rely on. The consequence is that some market towns become less attractive destinations in their own right. **We welcome the call for regeneration of market towns and would argue that renewal should include enhanced public transport provision as a priority.**
- 3.10 We live in a car-based society, where congestion is increasing, whether in urban or rural areas. As a result, accessing essential services can be difficult even with a car. The Worcestershire LTP, for example, records that 21 per cent of households (both urban and rural) with a car report difficulties. But without a car the situation is much worse: in Worcestershire the figure for access difficulties rises to 38 per cent for those in this category. In Staffordshire only 59 per cent of rural households are within 800 metres (a ten-minute walk) of an hourly bus service (or better) during the daytime on weekdays. This makes accessibility planning an essential tool for improving the lives of many rural people.

4. Predictions and Prospects

- 4.1 **By 2010-11 it appears that over one quarter of the rural population without a car will in practice still have problems accessing commercial centres.** Even by the end of the LTP period, Shropshire envisages that only 69 per cent of the rural population will be within 30 minutes of a market town or major centre by public transport, and the corresponding target for rural Staffordshire is only 64 per cent. For a similar standard of access Worcestershire proposes a no-change target of 72 per cent for its rural population. Herefordshire intends to maintain 60-minute access for 91 per cent of its rural population without a car, while Warwickshire offers the hardly meaningful target of 90-minute access to a major centre for 98 per cent of its total population by 2010.
- 4.2 **Health-care targets for accessibility similarly leave a significant part of the rural population with continuing difficulties.** By the end of the LTP period, 85 % of Shropshire's rural population dependent on public transport will be within 30 minutes of a GP but only 60 per cent within 60 minutes of an acute-care hospital, while for Worcestershire the corresponding figures are 83 and 84 per

cent respectively, and for Staffordshire 76 and 70 per cent. Similar figures apply across other areas. It should be emphasized that the calculated journey times appear to be based on best-case calculations using published timetables and may not represent the actual experience of travellers.

- 4.3 **The worrying conclusion to be drawn from the figures above, which are representative of the predictions of the shire authorities, is that outside the Metropolitan Area the West Midlands Region will remain a car-reliant society in 2011. Outside Birmingham and the Black Country, with only piecemeal improvements promised, there seems little prospect of a move away from the expectation that the car is the normal way of accessing non-local services.**

5. *What the Councils Plan to Do*

- 5.1 **The plans purport to address the problem of congestion and accept that congestion can only be reduced by decreasing reliance on the car, yet as far as public transport is concerned, the plans offer little which will make a serious contribution to achieving this aim.** We have found few specific proposals in the shire counties' LTPs which appear designed to promote public transport by actively encouraging modal shift beyond attempts to 'influence hearts and minds'. The major exceptions (if projects come to fruition) are plans for the Nuneaton-Coventry-Leamington and Leamington-Warwick corridors and Worcester city. For the future, in the face of the Government's exhortation to promote less use of the car and more of public transport, and despite the possibility of individual initiatives here and there, the rise in the number of bus passenger journeys by 2011 is forecast to be no more than about five per cent for Warwickshire and Staffordshire (the best outside the West Midlands Metropolitan Area) but perhaps as low as one per cent for Worcestershire (and, incidentally, nil for the predominantly urban area covered by the North Staffordshire LTP).
- 5.2 **Of great concern is that even if such an unambitious increase in bus usage is achieved, a much greater growth in road usage than in public transport patronage is predicted and planned for.** As far as the LTPs are concerned, addressing the accessibility problem often means planning for better access to urban centres and market towns by car. This involves not only making general environmental improvements but also constructing new roads and augmenting car parking to facilitate continued use of private cars. We suggest that the implications for sustainable transport initiatives outside major urban areas are for this reason alone not encouraging.
- 5.3 **With forecast growth in bus usage overall of no more than around five per cent at best, despite a number of individual bus initiatives on urban and interurban routes, most 'old-fashioned' rural bus services could be no more viable in five years' time than they are now.** This would imply that the decline of the traditional rural bus linking villages with each other and the nearest town is set to continue.
- 5.4 Aside from enhanced interurban services, some old-style rural bus services may survive as commercial services against the odds for local reasons. A few will merit a continuing subsidy, but if the present funding situation continues or worsens, or becomes more competitive, many are likely to succumb to financial forces. This poses the question: how is the rural transport problem to be **funds**. If the guiding principle is to spend money where it will be of most benefit, then it is understandable that counties with significant urban areas such as Staffordshire and Warwickshire

solved for those who will continue to be unable to travel by car (never mind those who would prefer not to)?

- 5.5 **Subsidies for conventional rural buses are squeezed from two directions: increasing costs and reducing** tend to concentrate on developing services and improving accessibility where each pound spent will benefit the largest number. Warwickshire focuses on the semi-urban North-South corridor from Nuneaton to Leamington and Warwick, links within and between the urban areas of the northern part of the county around Nuneaton and Coleshill, and services around Stratford. Worcestershire gives most attention to the City of Worcester, its Technology Belt running from Bromsgrove through Worcester to Malvern, and regeneration around Kidderminster. Staffordshire intends to implement improvements largely through area transport strategies for Burton, Stafford, Lichfield and Uttoxeter. Even the rural shires of Shropshire and Herefordshire place an emphasis on transport developments for Shrewsbury and Hereford respectively, although also giving serious attention to developments within their market towns. While this is praiseworthy in itself, it does little to improve the situation for rural residents without a car.

6. *Specific Proposals and Their Impact on Rural Accessibility*

- 6.1 **The different approaches to improving rural accessibility taken by the LTPs, where these can be identified, do not identify a coherent way forward in dealing with the rural transport problem and suggest that comprehensive solutions have yet to be found.**
- 6.2 In line with Government requirements, all the LTPs have policies to promote walking and cycling, with improvements of pedestrian rights of way and provision of cycle ways figuring prominently under the heading of 'accessibility'. We agree that both walking and cycling, as well as promoting health and reducing traffic congestion, have a role to play in improving rural accessibility at the local level and are essential for the support of local services. Cycling also has a wider role to play in supporting accessibility to schools, colleges and places of work over longer distances, and it is important that funds are provided both for dedicated cycle ways and to ensure cyclists can safely use roads without cycle ways. Better cycle storage facilities at stations and transport interchanges would also help to solve accessibility problems for those who can make use of a cycle to cover part of their journey.
- 6.3 However, measures to improve rights of way and provide new cycle ways can make only a modest contribution to solving the problem of long-distance accessibility. Nor do they provide a solution over shorter distances for many people who wish to reach shops or other services, since many of those without a car and in need of public transport cannot cycle or walk.
- 6.4 All the LTPs also incorporate continuing implementation of the Safer Routes to Schools schemes and envisage completion of school travel plans as required by the Government. These can improve accessibility for children at a local level and also help reduce congestion and improve safety. However, addressing accessibility to schools over greater distances requires support for bus and rail

services beyond the minimum that is statutorily required. In some cases, improved services for schoolchildren may be of benefit to other sectors of the rural population.

- 6.5 As far as travel to and from work is concerned, there are limited moves towards encouraging public transport provision for employees by getting companies at the same location to support new transport measures, but most emphasis is on requiring travel plans from individual companies, developing car-sharing databases and promoting car clubs, together with expanding Travelwise and Wheels to Work schemes. Only the last-named scheme has much potential for improving rural access to work for those who do not have a car or cannot drive, with the others directed more towards tackling congestion and reducing carbon emissions than improving accessibility for people with difficult journeys to make.

7. *The Alternatives: A Regular Bus Service or Demand-Responsive Transport*

- 7.1 **The solution to the rural accessibility problem emerging from the West Midlands LTPs is the development of two distinct types of rural public transport service.**
- 7.2 **One type, typically based on bus quality partnerships, is the key interurban route using standard buses and running at regular intervals of at least once an hour throughout the day, but not always with evening or Sunday provision, intended to link market towns and major centres.** There have been some striking successes with increased patronage on enhanced routes, e.g. Stafford–Telford and Shrewsbury–Oswestry. At present, routes like these have to be introduced or improved one by one because of the constraints on providing start-up or enhancement funding and a reluctance on the part of bus companies to take commercial risks.
- 7.3 **The other type is demand-responsive transport (DRT). This takes a variety of forms, from flexibility in a scheduled bus service to a fully demand-responsive taxibus collecting people at or near their home as and when required and delivering them to their destination or to a transport interchange.** Under the heading DRT we also include community transport services which are selective in their availability to potential users and do not substitute for a bus service open to all. The diversity of provision suggests that while the general idea of a demand-responsive service is clear enough, its implementation is not.
- 7.4 **Interurban services may generate growth through new and switched journeys as well as modal change.** Indeed, since any substantial financial assistance is likely to be time-limited, they will depend for their long-term viability on their success in winning additional users. By contrast, DRT, which in one form or another is coming increasingly to be seen as a viable transport solution for dispersed rural populations, largely provides what may be termed last-resort accessibility. It cannot provide a service that is either immediate or reasonably quick and is therefore unlikely to find increasing patronage from modal switching or discretionary journeys. Consequently, unlike interurban services which, given initial support, are intended to become and remain commercial (with only occasional subsidized journeys) we consider that DRT in general can rarely be a commercial operation at affordable fares.

7.5 **The disadvantages of DRT for the intending user are that it often requires pre-booking (sometimes a working day in advance), has limited availability and may be slow because of diversions to pick up or set down some passengers.** Like many conventional bus services it is likely to exclude evenings and Sundays and often Saturdays too. Community transport, in particular, usually requires pre-*The Future for Demand-Responsive and Community Transport* registration and frequently has restrictive eligibility criteria. It is often on offer only for people resident in a particular locality, with defined needs and for defined purposes (as has to be the case, for example, if it is provided by a charity or a social services department), although exceptions may be made in cases of special need.

8. *The Future for Demand-Responsive and Community Transport*

8.1 **DRT will almost always require subsidies.** Although a number of well-designed DRT schemes have shown encouraging usage figures it is in the nature of DRT that the number of passengers per journey is likely to be low. Few schemes are going to attract serious commercial investment or even cover more than their immediate running costs. Subsidies may be openly financial and limited at best. Alternatively, they may be hidden in the dependence of a service on volunteers or assistance provided at non-commercial rates.

8.2 **It appears that new revenue-funded schemes will be increasingly unlikely.** Worcestershire, for example, suggests the possibility of supporting community initiatives and funding pilot schemes, with the implication that they must soon become self-supporting. Shropshire promises unspecified support for community transport initiatives. Herefordshire, which currently provides extensive support from revenue funding, intimates that future expansion of community transport will require other sources of funds. A reluctance to commit funds perhaps explains why, for example, Warwickshire's proposals on developing community transport are limited to 'investigations' and 'seeking opportunities'. It proposes taxibuses for Warwick, Rugby and Nuneaton (which, up and running, might require little assistance by way of subsidy) but for rural areas offers little beyond suggestions of a flexibus service based on Southam.

8.3 **Throughout the region, the funding situation presents not only a serious obstacle to the development of new services of whatever kind in rural areas but also, even more seriously, threatens the loss of an existing service with no provision for replacement.** For the most part, it seems, local authority finance for DRT may be available only for start-up purposes with a time-limited call on funds. Nevertheless, we hold that where an existing conventional service is abandoned serious consideration must be given to its direct replacement with some form of DRT service open to all.

8.4 **At present, community transport varies considerably, and perhaps too much, in what is available, who is eligible, and what area is covered.** As well as services that are not too dissimilar from conventional timetabled routes, there are dial-a-ride schemes, social car schemes, taxi-sharing arrangements, groups-only transport, day-centre minibuses, 'shopmobility' services and taxi-voucher schemes. Staffordshire, for example, supports at least six kinds of community and rural transport schemes: several voluntary car schemes (chiefly, but not exclusively, health-related), a fixed Gnosall Ruralink minibus service connecting with the Stafford – Telford interurban service, a demand

– responsive ‘Border Car’ service to the east of Market Drayton connecting with the Hanley–Shrewsbury service, Postbus services linking rural communities with Eccleshall and Rugeley, a Moorlands Traveller service to and from Leek operating (at different times) as a demand-responsive service and as a fixed-route service which diverts on request, and a South Staffordshire Ruralink inter-village taxibus.

- 8.5 As the most sparsely populated English county after Northumberland, and with around half its population ‘rural’ in character, Herefordshire faces special challenges. Like Staffordshire, it provides a mix of rural transport. For the general public the Council, in partnership, has augmented levels of conventional bus services. For a target group identified as ‘people without access to conventional public transport or private transport’ it has introduced measures to boost community transport services and improve the quality of training and administrative support for them. Examples include the rolling out of a social car scheme intended eventually to cover 39 parishes surrounding the city of Hereford and four pilot DRT schemes. One of these, the Mortimer Link service in the northwest of the county, uses minibuses to provide a mixture of fixed route, contract and fully demand-responsive services. At the time of the LTP’s publication these pilot services were still awaiting evaluation. In addition to ‘open’ services, of course, there are many restricted-use services from transport providers in Herefordshire and Staffordshire, as there are in other counties.
- 8.6 **Some flexibility in approach is important. To be sustainable, much DRT will have to be based on ideas originating within communities themselves.** Although at first sight the variety of community transport is confusing, a ‘horses-for-courses’ approach with local support may be what is required to be successful. We believe that communities themselves should decide on the sort of service that will most benefit them, bearing in mind that retention or reinstatement of a conventional bus service may not be the best solution to their own particular transport problem.
- 8.7 **Much of what is needed in rural areas must be provided on a non-commercial basis.** New initiatives and, increasingly, existing services will rely on wholly or partly local voluntary support, transport provision by charities, organized community self-help through car-sharing, or some sort of association with statutorily required transport such as that supplied by social services departments. Besides the ever-present financial difficulties, which mean that some schemes may still struggle to cover their costs even with a subsidy, constraints on community transport include practical problems like finding volunteers and other staff to run the services (an obstacle to widening the availability of community transport). In addition, there are legal problems such as the complex and restrictive legislation (including licensing) which may be applicable to community transport operation, as well as, in a few places, obstruction by parties with vested interests.
- 8.8 **In some cases communities who lobby for a service need to be reminded that they must use it or lose it.** Subsidized conventional services are subject to regular review and evening services are particularly vulnerable. Both Worcestershire and Herefordshire have recently scaled back their provision because of low usage as well as financial constraints. The latter council, after one unsuccessful community transport initiative, points out that a more sophisticated approach to providing an innovative service is required than simply asking people whether they would like one.

8.9 If rural transport is to survive and develop, proper market research and publicity will be essential in order to encourage usage. One obstacle to success with rural transport services is that people may not be aware of them. Not everyone who needs, or could use, a community transport service will know about it. A survey found that 50 per cent of North Warwickshire's residents had never heard of their Beeline (community transport) service.

8.10 Deliberate targeting of potential passenger groups is called for: Worcestershire proposes targeting new developments to capture new transport users. Exceptionally, Telford and Wrekin sets an example by providing every rural household with a package of transport information specific to its parish, supplemented by a six-monthly rural transport newsletter. **Public transport using small or special vehicles may also need to be given more appeal.** Herefordshire has found that rural residents are less inclined to use community transport than 'proper buses'.

8.11 Unfortunately, if active promotion of rural transport is essential for users of it, this puts councils and other providers in a dilemma, for success in promotion is likely to result not only in increased calls on funds for subsidies but also in increased difficulties with recruiting and retaining sufficient staff. Paid drivers are hard to recruit and may not be affordable at market rates, while volunteer drivers may be unable to offer additional services beyond their present commitment. Finding additional volunteers in the locations that need them may be an especially hard task. In addition to vehicles and drivers, flexible and demand-responsive services require active organization and management by reliable co-ordinators.

8.12 **It is worth pointing out that one consequence of a two-pronged approach to rural transport is that it divides people living in the countryside without their own car into two categories. Some will be fortunate enough to live on or near a good interurban bus service. Others, remaining deprived, will find travelling anywhere difficult or expensive unless the situation is remedied through the provision of some kind of local transport service which provides, where necessary, a co-ordinated link with the wider conventional transport network.**

9. Conclusions

9.1 **This report has argued that the location of services and new development is fundamental to ensuring good accessibility for rural people. We would like to see the accessibility of development play a far greater role in the planning processes for service providers, as well as sensible controls on housing and other development in less accessible rural areas. However, even if everything is done to reduce the amount people have to travel, improving general accessibility for people in rural communities will require specific actions to prove the Government's commitment to integrated transport. CPRE West Midlands believes the following need to be pursued:**

- **specific integration between community transport and mainstream public transport (trains and conventional buses);**
- **better provision of information, more joint ticketing arrangements, and, above all, better timed connections;**
- **improved advertising and more active promotion of services by both councils and operators;**

- **greater consistency in the community transport offered throughout the West Midlands region;**
 - **elimination of duplication within council services themselves and between council-provided transport services and those provided by other agencies;**
 - **more practical co-operation between councils to bring into effect better cross-boundary arrangements. (The cross-boundary problem has special significance for a large number of patients and others who need to travel to hospitals in the PTA area from elsewhere in the region.)**
- 9.2 We acknowledge that these are areas where many of the councils themselves already see possibilities for improvement. However, **successful changes may require significant rethinking of arrangements affecting their own departments (such as social services, special needs, and education) and those of other service providers such as primary care trusts.**
- 9.3 We welcome development of the community transport sector, which plays a vital role in providing transport for the most vulnerable in society and addresses access issues, albeit sometimes selectively, in rural areas where conventional public transport is not viable. **We believe that there is a case for thinking progressively and considering how dial-a-ride, taxi-buses and other demand-responsive services may be better integrated with commercial taxi and bus services, particularly in rural areas, where they are often poorly linked and in some cases operate at odds with one another.** CPRE has argued in response to the Local Transport Bill that the licensing of transport in rural areas should be reviewed and brought under one control so that there can be better integration of conventional services, demand-responsive transport and taxis.
- 9.4 **We suggest that one way forward would be for trials to be carried out in a range of local areas (with varying population characteristics) implementing different types of community travel schemes where conventional bus services are clearly not viable.** Parish councils and other rural groups working with district councils (using local community partnerships) could be effective in devising and managing such schemes. They could also engage key businesses, colleges, health and other public-service providers and developers to ensure rural accessibility was properly considered in each sector's decision-making processes. The results of these trials should be evaluated at a regional level and the best schemes identified.
- 9.5 Clearly all the actions outlined above can improve rural accessibility in the West Midlands region, but both levels and long-term security of funding remain critical. We accept that increased ring-fenced funding measures for rural bus services can only be introduced by central Government, but **issues surrounding financial support must be addressed if we are to ensure that adequate measures are in place guaranteeing reasonable access to jobs and services for as many people as possible who have no transport of their own.**
- 9.6 As argued before, CPRE supports better controls over further development in the countryside. However, **where growth is planned and specifically where significant new affordable housing is being provided, there is a need for robust studies of associated transport requirements with clear proactive measures to confront accessibility issues, including advance funding.** Such studies are urgent where housing and other new developments are already in progress.

9.7 Finally, we note that the best options for rural transport may change because of external factors, including increases in fuel prices, road-user charging schemes and other demand-management measures. LTPs need to be flexible enough in their implementation to ensure the best responses to changes which have the potential to make rural services more viable.

10. Recommendations

10.1 Whether DRT, CT or a conventional bus service is the best option will vary from location to location. As far as is reasonable, the option chosen must provide the best service for users. Criteria need to be developed to determine in a transparent way the feasibility of a service. Where a DRT or CT service replaces a conventional bus service it should be open to all, at no more than bus-equivalent fares wherever possible.

10.2 There should be consistency in CT provision across the region and restrictions on usage should be removed as far as possible. Current legislative proposals allowing a limited expansion of community transport must not lead to a deterioration in the quality of vehicles or other aspects of an existing service.

10.3 Where a direct link to a market town or other centre cannot be provided there must be proper integration with conventional public transport at a railway station or bus interchange. This must cover both outward and return journeys. Integration should be supported by such measures as through-ticketing and adequate information and publicity, as well as joint timetabling wherever possible.

10.4 Local initiatives should be encouraged, with advice and expertise readily available from a central source on practical and legal matters. In the region as a whole there must be an expansion in the sharing of information and experience. This can only be done with the active co-operation of transport operators, local authorities and other agencies.

10.5 There must be more publicity about community transport generally and how rural communities may help themselves to provide it. There should be better local information about services which are already in operation. Where council material is circulated to rural households, this should regularly and prominently include local transport information.

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