



SOUTH WEST RURAL MOBILITY STRATEGY

March 2022



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

This strategy, developed jointly by the Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) sets out mobility policy for the whole South West of England to support the levelling-up of our local rural communities and economies. It identifies an ambitious vision for the future of rural mobility and a set of policies and proposals to achieve it.

Our definition of rural encompasses all places outside of major urban centres that are in the countryside or coastal areas, including on estuaries. In developing this strategy, we have taken an evidence-led, people and place-centric approach, ensuring that the needs of different rural communities are taken into account.

After London, rural areas face amongst the highest house prices as a multiple of earnings.

OUR RURAL PLACES

Together the two STBs cover the whole of the South West of England amounting to nearly 20,000km² of land outside of the major urban centres. Analysis of our rural places has revealed that not only do they have diverse geographies but their communities and economies are equally diverse. Some of our rural communities are very affluent, more so in the Western Gateway than in the Peninsula, but others suffer from significant economic challenges. Furthermore, even where there is significant wealth, there can be pockets of deprivation.

The challenges faced by our rural areas are varied and complex and we need to consider travel by people and freight, for consumers and organisations. Poor access to publicly-available and shared transport and long journey distances mean that rural areas are far more reliant on private cars than their urban counterparts. This leads to transport deserts and social isolation for those without cars, alongside higher levels of expenditure on transport.

Rural areas, particularly rural villages, have higher transport costs as a percentage of disposable income than urban areas.

THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN RURAL MOBILITY

The case for investment in mobility for our rural places is clear and unequivocal. They are at the forefront of the climate change challenge and our need to meet Net Zero targets. Without support for mobility, we cannot reduce carbon emissions from rural transport, we cannot provide alternatives to the dominance of private cars in our countryside and we cannot give communities the opportunity not to travel, including through digital communications. We also need investment to mitigate the impacts of climate change including making our rural transport infrastructure resilient to its effects.

Our future rural economy also needs support from transport investment to deliver growth and diversification. Our tourism sector in the South West is vital to the industry as a whole across England but this presents challenges and we need to find new ways to move our visitors around the region. Our agricultural industry is changing and the increasing need for food security and productivity means more transport of produce. Our growing environment economy needs transport to support the movement of resources and employees.

Those living in the most rural areas made 87% of their journeys by car, compared with 67% of those living in the most urban.

However, alongside our coming challenges are those faced now by our rural communities across the South West. Our rural residents have higher transport costs than their urban friends and they experience greater fuel poverty, now compounded by rising fuel and energy bills. We have an ageing population who rely more greatly on publicly-available transport but our bus networks have drastically declined over the last decade by reduced local authority budgets. Our

young people, who generally secure lower qualifications in rural areas, are forced into driving to access education and employment whilst also struggling to find higher paid opportunities and affordable housing where they have grown up.

Rural settlements in the South West are home to 1.8 million residents, equating to 33% of the population.

Our rural economies pay our employees less, have less investment and are less productive. They are also facing shortages of the right skills, particularly in the agriculture and tourism sectors, due to poor transport connections, low housing affordability, an ageing population and the impact of Brexit. Our residents have to travel for longer to access employment as well as daily needs of goods, education and healthcare. As services have continued to decline in our rural areas, the ability of people to live locally and to access their needs within easy reach has become much more rare.

Of our total population in the South West, one third live within the rural area, amounting to 1.8m people. Without investment in rural mobility, a substantial proportion of the South West, the population and the economies they support, will continue to be hindered by poor accessibility and connectivity holding back not only the rural areas but the region as a whole.

Some 29% of rural residents in the South West live in small hamlets or in the open countryside.

OUR VISION

Using future rural scenarios we have formulated, the wider policy context and our understanding of key challenges, we have developed a vision for rural mobility:

“By 2040, rural mobility will have transformed physical and digital connectivity and accessibility, levelling-up our countryside and coastal communities.

Our targets for net zero will be being met through reducing the need to travel through improved digital and local services, better active, publicly-available and shared travel and the decarbonisation of transport. Our communities and economies will be stronger with better connectivity between rural places as well as with our major urban centres.

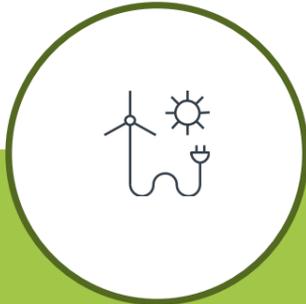
*Communities will be working with public and private sectors to deliver **operationally and financially sustainable** commercial models which provide practical, and affordable mobility.*

This transformation will be leading towards a basic universal level of accessibility for our countryside and coastal residents and visitors.”

OUR STRATEGY

To support the vision and associated policy objectives we have developed a framework for the delivery of future mobility that can be flexed to meet the specifics of each place. We believe the future of rural mobility should be built around the framework presented overleaf (without applying specific priorities to each element).

Rural mobility should be underpinned by **strong digital connectivity** supporting e-commerce and online services, enabling more to be done without the need to travel



Realistically, car and vans will remain vital to many journeys in rural areas but **the sharing and electrification of cars and vans** need to be priorities to support those without access to them and meet net zero targets.

Settlements to support **more local services** where people need them to strengthen communities and economies and reduce the number and length of journeys



Strengthening larger rural settlements should provide stronger economic drivers of socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural development through greater investment

Integration of activity and mobility, including rural hubs, should be central to our future rural mobility system bringing together better interchange with local community and commercial activity.



When needs cannot be met locally within rural areas, there should be **better strategic connections** to larger urban centres by inter-urban bus, coach and rail. These should be connected to local areas by active and shared modes.

Adapting the 15-minute city concept, networks of settlements should work together, sharing facilities, services and resources to form **30-minute rural communities**, supported by improved intra-rural connectivity



Operationally and financially sustainable delivery should be supported through **cross-sectoral partnership and funding** across the public, private and community sectors.

Decarbonised, active, publicly-available and shared transport should be central to improving rural mobility, increasing choice and affordability and providing alternatives to single occupancy private car journeys

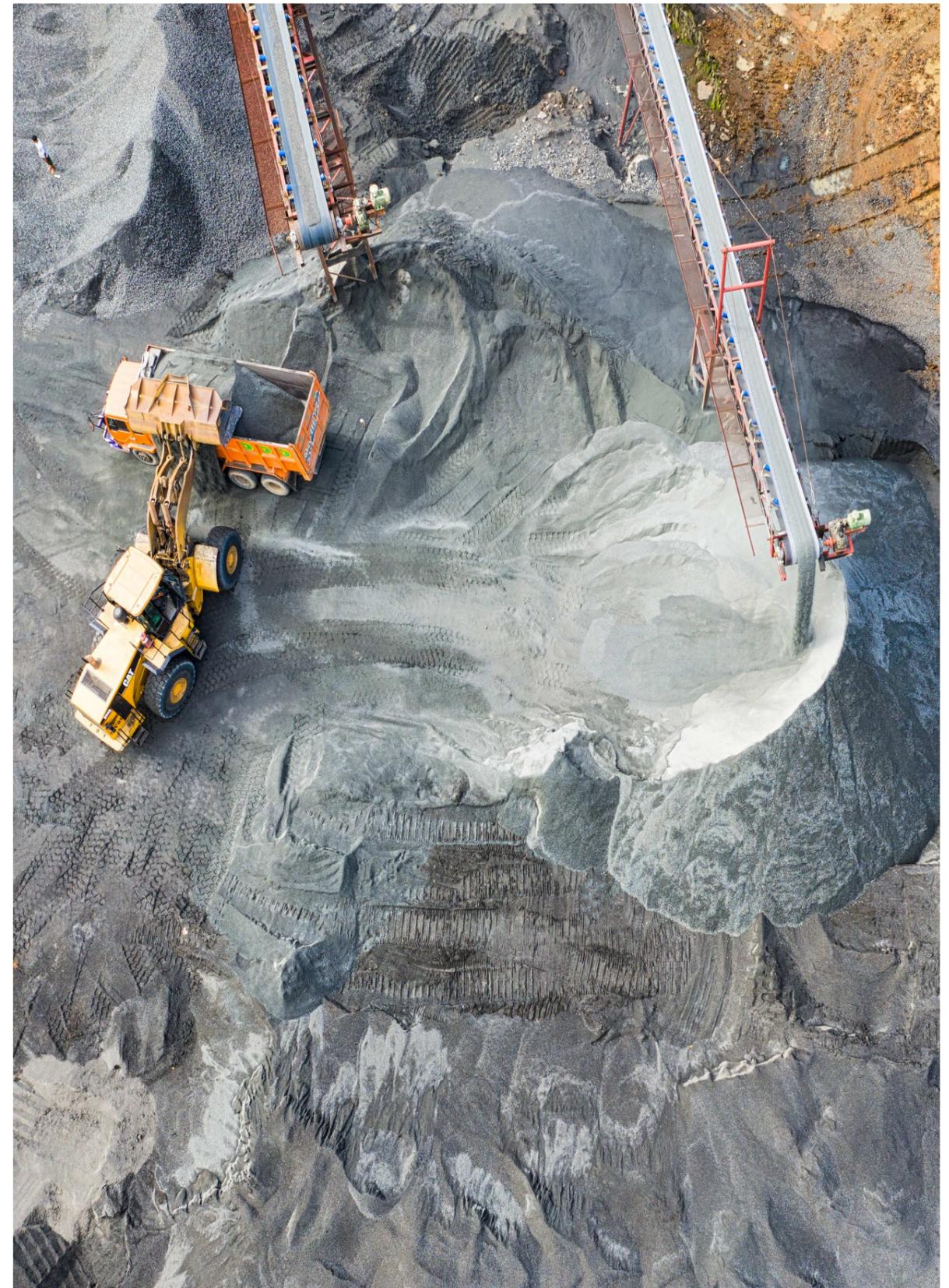


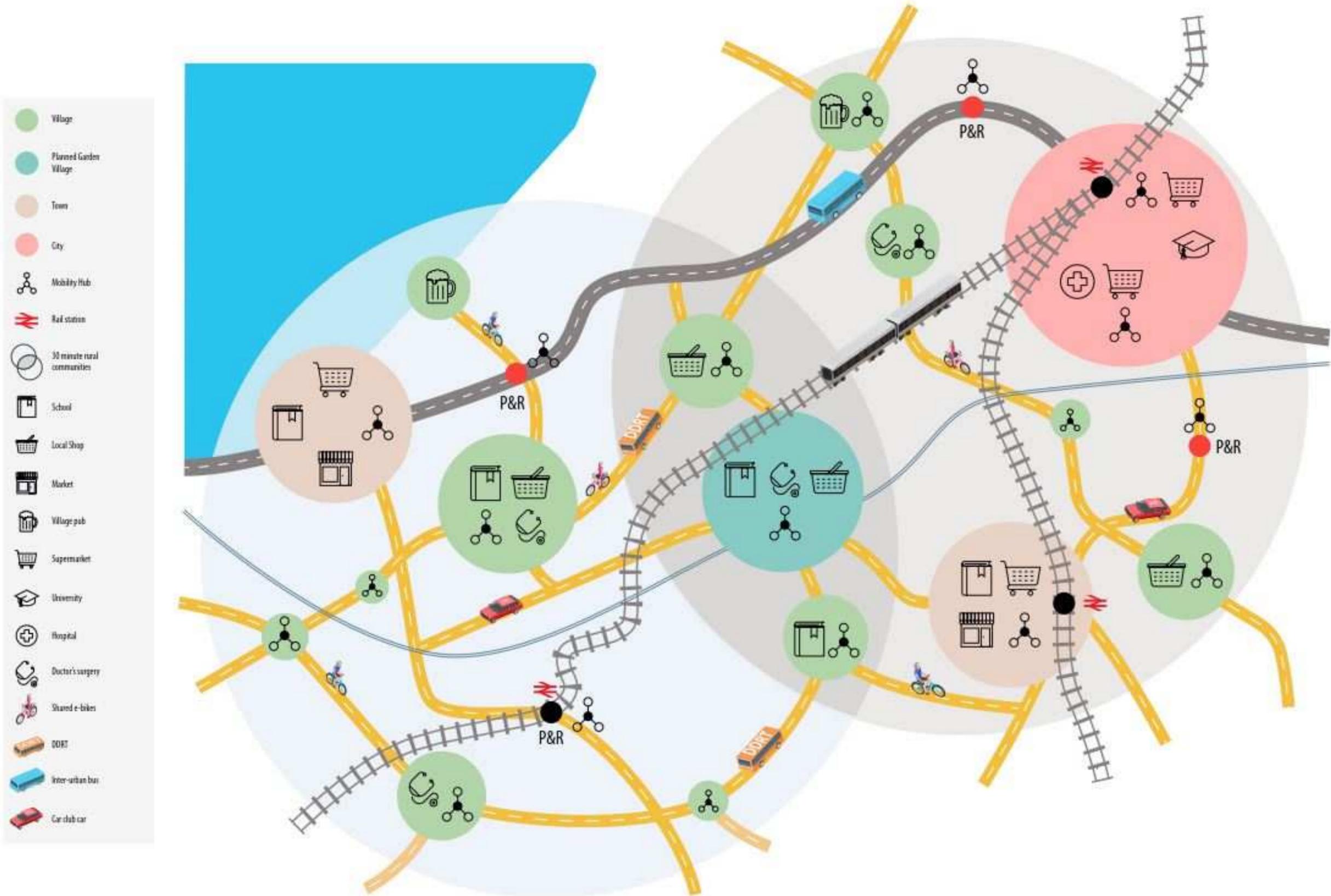
Increasing resilience of mobility networks including generation and security of energy.

Across the South West, there is a greater proportion of residents aged 66+ in rural areas (32%) compared to urban areas (26%).

The following schematic representation of this framework demonstrates the overall approach. It demonstrates networks of rural communities working together to provide a range of local services and facilities. This is supported by strong digital connectivity and provision of mobile services travelling between communities. Rural hubs are central to both the provision of local services and connectivity to the wider rural areas and beyond. They provide access to shared modes and are the stops for inter-urban transport including bus, coach and rail. Within the rural communities, decarbonised, active, publicly-available and shared modes (including e-bikes, e-scooters, Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport and car club vehicles) are used to move around locally but also connect to inter-urban transport at the hubs. Each settlement also has facilities for charging electric vehicles, either at charging hubs or through peer-to-peer projects, and car and van-sharing increases the utilisation of vehicles whilst also providing alternatives where publicly-available transport does not support a particular journey.

The shortage of labour and skills is a significant challenge facing rural businesses across the South West.





RURAL MOBILITY BUNDLES

Fundamental to this strategy is taking a holistic approach to delivering improvements. Implementing individual interventions may generate some benefits but a whole system approach with individual new interventions working together with the existing mobility network may be more likely to support a more integrated and consequently better functioning rural mobility system.

This strategy therefore presents a set of bundles of rural mobility interventions, including modes, services and supporting infrastructure. These bundles are focused on different types of rural place which can be used to develop comprehensive plans for improving mobility within specific local areas.

These bundles will form the basis for the development of rural mobility pilots. As the bundles are focused on the pilots, those interventions that are more deliverable within shorter periods of time have been prioritised, these primarily being service-related interventions.

Through delivering bundles of interventions it would be expected that they would integrate modes, services and infrastructure both physically and operationally to support interchange and delivery. Therefore, some infrastructure interventions have been prioritised where they provide integration and wider community/economic functions, most notably rural hubs and related interventions.

Average download speeds are substantially lower in rural areas (25 Mbps) compared to urban areas (36Mbps) across the South West.

In addition to those interventions prioritised for the pilot bundles, over 30 others were identified as potential rural mobility interventions which could have a significant role to play in the future of our countryside and coastal places. Depending on the specific locations, these could also be included in the pilots but are lower priority based on meeting general needs and deliverability within the context of short-term pilot programmes. These further interventions include:

- § Active travel infrastructure
- § Road safety improvements
- § Tourism-related support
- § Low level air freight

RURAL MOBILITY POLICY

Whilst this strategy sets out a broad policy framework for the rural South West, there are specific policy interventions which could be considered in delivering our rural mobility vision.

- § 30-minute rural communities
- § Rural proofing of local authority mobility policy
- § Investment in our market towns as centres of rural services and employment growth
- § Making rural development socially, environmentally and economically sustainable
- § Minimum standard of community services
- § Supporting rural neighbourhood plan-making and delivery
- § Working towards a policy providing universal basic accessibility

SUPPORTING INTERVENTIONS

In addition to the policy interventions and the bundles there is a set of other options that could support the achievement of the vision and objectives.

- § Behaviour change
- § Better use of railways including line and station reopening
- § Electrification of publicly-available and shared modes
- § Freight on passenger transport
- § Automated and autonomous modes

MOBILITY'S DEPENDENCIES

To support wider improvements, the dependencies of rural mobility also need further development in rural areas in terms of energy and digital connectivity.

- § Electricity generation and distribution
- § Digital communications enhancements

ENGAGING WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIES

A high level communications plan has been developed as part of a suite of supporting technical documents but there is a range of other engagement and partnership activities that could be undertaken.

- § Cross-boundary partnerships
- § Cross-sectoral public sector working
- § Rural mobility champions in local authorities and rural communities
- § Community capability and capacity enhancement
- § Best practice guidance

There are fewer bus stops and fewer bus services per hour in rural areas compared to urban areas across the South West.

RURAL PILOTS

A set of primarily mobility service and infrastructure interventions have been formed into bundles specific to different types of rural places (rural towns, villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings). The bundles have been developed through an assessment of user needs, how different interventions support those needs and how deliverable interventions are in those places.

The overall concept for the pilots focuses on delivering trials of bundled projects in different types of rural place, within either individual or groups of settlements, led by different sectors, and either within or across rural local authority boundaries. By operating a varied set of pilots, we believe that there are more

opportunities to learn and to develop operationally and financially sustainable models for long term delivery of mobility in rural areas.

Of the potential pilots, six have been selected by the strategy leadership team for further consideration and high level business cases have been developed and are presented in the accompanying technical documentation. The six were chosen on the basis that together they provide a broad range of different structures within which to pilot rural mobility interventions. They test a range of leadership types and importantly, test how well local authority areas can work individually or together to deliver rural mobility. The pilots also range in scale, from a small community led pilot in a single settlement to a much wider pilot covering both rural and urban local authorities.

The shortlisted pilots include:

- § Community-led pilot for a single settlement
- § Local authority-led pilot for a network of settlements within a single local authority boundary.
- § Community sector-led pilot for a network of settlements within a single local authority boundary.
- § Private sector-led pilot for a network of settlements within a single local authority boundary.
- § Local authority-led pilot for a network of settlements across the boundaries of two rural authorities.
- § Local authority-led pilot for a network of settlements across the boundaries of two authorities, one rural and one urban.

Road transport energy consumption (in tonnes of oil equivalent) per thousand individuals is greater in the South West (639) than the UK average (587), and substantially greater in rural areas (766).

Each pilot will develop its own unique set of proposals, based on the bundles identified by the strategy but also, vitally, taking into account the existing

services, infrastructure and partnerships currently operating in their respective areas.

However, a typical bundle of interventions for a pilot could be as follows, using community-led pilot within a small rural town and surrounding area as an example:

- § A community volunteer bus, car or taxi service and delivery service
- § A network of rural hubs
- § An EV changing hub and peer-to-peer EV charging
- § Mobile service delivery (e.g. banking, retail, food, etc)
- § E-bike, e-cargo bike and e-scooter sharing and wheels-to-work
- § Car club
- § Local freight consolidation and parcel lockers
- § Ride sharing including for vulnerable groups

This bundle could be supported by existing inter-urban bus, coach and rail services for strategic movements, with connections locally by the modes set out above.

PARTNERSHIPS

The delivery of this strategy and the pilot studies will be reliant on not only Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway but a significant range of public, private and community sector organisations. The STBs cannot deliver this strategy alone; it is a strategy for the whole of the South West, both in terms of geography and the organisations with responsibilities for and stakes in the delivery of mobility in rural areas.

NEXT STEPS

The key next steps in delivering this strategy are focused on developing the pilots into live trials of rural mobility in the South West. Following the publication of this strategy, Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway will work to secure

funding to support the development and delivery of the pilots. Once funding has been secured, we will put in place the following steps to develop the pilots:

- § We will work with key major stakeholders across the region to secure their support and seed funding for the pilots, both generally across the South West and within the areas where we consider pilots should be delivered.
- § Identify and agree actual places to act as the pilots.
- § Develop a prospectus for the pilots setting out our proposed approach and the priority areas.
- § Launch a competition for initial proposals for potential pilots.
- § From the Expressions of Interest, we will select a shortlist of projects to receive initial exploratory STB funding and specialist rural mobility consultancy support to develop the outline business cases for their pilots.
- § On receipt of all those submissions, the STBs will make a final selection of pilots to receive funding from the STBs.

SUMMARY

The current approach to rural mobility has not worked for many local communities and economies in the South West. They suffer from disconnection, lack of access to everyday services, poor affordability and restrictions in choice. In facing the climate emergency, rural areas are also, comparatively, higher generators of harmful emissions.

This strategy has set out a range of proposals that could help to turn around rural mobility and build new approaches to support our countryside and coastal communities to become more connected, more accessible and more prosperous.

We believe piloting some new approaches will be a first major step in delivering more for our rural areas. Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway cannot deliver these pilots alone and we look to work with our partners, stakeholders and communities to set those pilots on their way.