

# PROGRESSING RURAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN IRELAND

A Discussion Paper July 2006

## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study for the Department of Transport by Fitzpatrick Associates, assisted by Steer Davies Gleave, on options for progressing rural public transport in Ireland. The report has been prepared in the context of the Minister for Transport's decision to:

- (a) put the pilot Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) on a permanent financial footing from 2007, making it part of the Department of Transport's normal annual current financial allocation;
- (b) increase the Department's core funding for rural transport initiatives, from €4.5 mn in 2005 to €9mn in 2007, with funding thereafter increasing gradually to about €18 mn;
- (c) extend the geographical coverage of rural transport services to a nationwide basis covering all rural areas where genuine unmet needs exist;
- (d) roll out this national coverage on a phased basis, with full geographical coverage built up over time but with a significant expansion of activity in 2007.

The objective of the report is to develop options for the future roll-out of a national rural public transport within these parameters and to identify the consultants' preferred option.

### 2. Rural Transport Needs in Ireland

Transport is a serious unmet need for many people living in rural Ireland and it has been identified as a key factor underlying levels of exclusion in rural areas. Estimates derived from the 2002 National Rural Transport Survey suggest that as many as 380,000 people in rural areas perceive themselves as having unmet transport needs. Certain key target groups are also especially vulnerable to a lack of transport, including older people, young people, people on low incomes, and people with mobility, sensory or cognitive impairments. Combined, these groups alone account for an estimated 200,000 people of the persons reporting unmet needs.

Demographic trends, in particular overall population growth and changes in the age profile, suggest that the numbers of people with unmet rural transport needs are likely to persist. Projections indicate that an estimated 450,000 rural dwellers could have unmet transport needs by 2021, for example, including 250,000 people in key target groups.

### 3. Rural Transport Services in Ireland

Rural public transport services have two main elements - "conventional" services and "non-conventional" services

In a rural context, conventional bus-based scheduled services typically link rural areas to important urban centres or link major urban centres while also serving rural areas situated on their routes.

Conventional services operate on fixed routes, with fixed departure and pick-up points, which can often be inaccessible for people who have difficulty getting to

these points, e.g. people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments, older people.

Non-conventional services, on the other hand, generally provide more demand-responsive or semi-scheduled alternatives, using smaller vehicles, which can collect rural residents directly from their homes, bring them to local service centres or transport hubs, and return them home afterwards.

Unlike conventional services, these services are also more easily accessible to a wider range of user groups because of their ability to facilitate door-to-door service, passenger assistance etc.

The level of service that conventional services provide in rural areas is patchy, and can vary widely both in terms of geographical coverage and service frequency. Conventional services in Ireland are also constrained by the country's low population density and by its highly dispersed population, which limits the commercial viability of scheduled services and contributes to very high levels of car dependence in rural areas.

Non-conventional services in rural areas are also limited, though there have been definite improvements in recent years. In particular, the lack of conventional services and the growing evidence of unmet transport needs stimulated increased interest in non-conventional services, to the extent that they are emerging as an increasingly significant element of rural transport services in Ireland. The most tangible evidence of this to date has been the emergence of the RTI.

### **Key Findings**

Nearly 1.6 mn people in Ireland live in rural areas, or 40% of the total population. Population density in rural areas is low and very widely dispersed, and the rural share of the population has also been declining slightly in recent years.

About 200,000 rural dwellers in Ireland are aged 65 and over, while another 350,000 people in rural Ireland are aged 14 and under. People aged 65 or over are also expected to increase quite significantly as a share of the total population in the next 10-15 years (from about 11% to 15%).

Females are another often cited group with unmet transport needs, and about 750,000 rural dwellers are women. Older women are a particularly vulnerable group with transport needs, and their share of the population is expected to increase from 6% to 8% in the next 10-15 years.

The rural share of the population can vary widely from county to county, ranging from as low as 35%-40% in some counties to as high as 75%-80% in others. Local variation in levels of car availability and age profile are also common.

<http://www.pobal.ie/media/Publications/RTI/progress%20rural%20public.pdf>

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<http://www.pobal.ie/>

## ***Links***

### **Clare Accessible Transport**

<http://www.catconnects.ie/>

### **The Community Transport Association of Ireland**

<http://www.communitytransport.ie/>

### **Bus Éireann**

<http://www.buseireann.ie/>

### **Iarnród Éireann**

<http://www.irishrail.ie/home/>

### **Rural Initiative Social Economy**

<http://www.rise.ie/>

### **Rural Transport Programme**

<http://www.transport.ie/>

### **Irish Rural Link**

<http://www.irishrurallink.ie/>

### **The Wheel**

<http://www.wheel.ie/>

### **European Commission - Transport**

<http://ec.europa.eu/transport/>

### **CIVITAS Initiative**

<http://www.civitas-initiative.eu/>

### **ELTIS - European Local Transport Information Service**

<http://www.eltis.org/>

### **Smile: The Gateway to Sustainable Mobility**

<http://www.smile-europe.org/>

### ***More Information...***

*Suggest a Link and/or Reading Material*

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