
How will rural people be travelling in 2030? – Scenarios and implications for transport policy

(A Futures exercise co-ordinated by
the Commission for Rural Communities)

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This report considers the possible nature of rural dwellers' travel and transport in 20 years' time, and potential implications for national and rural transport policy. It uses recognised forms of 'futures thinking' and scenario building. It starts with a review of the major trends that have affected travel behaviour and how rural travel differs from urban, and how different rural areas and different people have different travel patterns and needs.

Drivers of change for the future are distilled into five themes – demographics, economic conditions, lifestyle, travel / transport conditions and the nature of the rural area and are discussed in terms of how stable and predictable they are and the impacts they are likely to have on rural travel. The most significant drivers are taken to be: an ageing population, technological developments, economic performance, spatial planning, and policy reaction to climate change (including transport policy) and. The first two are assumed to have a fair degree of predictability and constancy, while the remaining three are seen as more likely to change in ways we cannot predict:

Three scenarios are discussed based on differences in direction of the economy (in relation to climate change considerations) and in the nature of the degree to which planning policy shapes rural areas.

Scenario 1: Economic growth at all costs

Rural issues become marginalised. Investment goes almost entirely into the major urban areas. By 2030 Road User Charging has not been introduced and fuel duty has not been significantly increased for many years. Traffic levels have risen above those of 2010 despite the cost of petrol rising as oil prices go up. Congestion and associated pollution / carbon emissions have also increased. Public transport declines further in rural areas, and rural service outlets continue to decrease. Widening income disparities and more older residents means an increased need for 'social transport', but this is met even more by informal lift giving as many local public transport services dry up.

Scenario 2: The 'green' countryside

Recovery from recession is built around preparing the world and economy for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Perceptions of the 'role' of rural areas are based more on production than leisure, with intensive agriculture encouraged by issues such as reducing food miles seen as increasingly important. By 2030 a national Road User Charging scheme with a policy focus on reducing carbon emissions is in place. Engine efficiency has improved and new non-fossil technologies progress but the global fuel price increase is not cancelled out. A switch to non car travel, and less travel, is made. The level of 2+ car ownership also falls. The trend of counter-urbanisation that has

existed since the 1960s is reversed. Air travel reduces, meaning that rural England increases its attraction as a holiday and leisure destination.

Scenario 3: Strong economy, strong rural growth

Planning policy starts to view the idea of 'rural' in a different way. Manufacturing industry remains concentrated in urban and transport corridor locations, but most other activity can thrive in rural areas and employment opportunities have increased significantly as a result. More housing is allowed in rural areas, with an emphasis on affordable housing – the bulk of this is concentrated in large villages and small. By 2030 rural areas are more homogeneous, with 'rich commuter belts' and 'poor peripheral' areas largely a thing of the past. Better local facilities and high fuel costs mean that most activity is carried out locally. There is greater investment in public transport in rural areas, with capital investment in rural transport providing forms of light rail, as well as bus priorities and facilities for intermodal local journeys.

Implications for future rural transport policy

Rural transport is of course a minor part of transport as a whole – and transport is only one aspect of society. So it is unrealistic to think that the consequences of as yet unknown futures for rural transport could alter strategic national policy thinking today. The scenarios do not envisage radical change. To a large extent current problems still persist, albeit in different forms. So it is argued that in planning now for the rural transport future, then, key themes would seem to include:

- An acceptance that the car will remain the dominant form of travel in rural areas, but that there should be no 'need' for households to have more than one car.
- At the same time there should be alternatives for rural residents. A credible rural and interurban public transport network that enables intermodal links to local walking, cycling, taxi, demand responsive transport and other transport options will need to be a policy priority.
- The maintenance of service outlets in rural areas must be viewed as important. This is not least because ICTs are likely to remain an incomplete solution.

1 Introduction

The Commission for Rural Communities' main concern is with life for rural residents. In this report we consider the possible nature of rural dwellers' travel and transport in 20 years' time, and the potential implications of this for national and rural transport policy. Patterns of travel in rural areas are complex and a result of more than just travel by rural residents. Inter-urban travel, for example, accounts for around half of all travel in rural areas, and many people travel to rural areas for economic, social and leisure activities. But our focus on rural dwellers' travel leads us to consider such movement only in terms of how it impacts upon the transport experiences and behaviour of those living in villages and small towns.

Our brief is to help stimulate debate within and between the wide range of national, regional and local stakeholders with an interest in rural issues, rather than to provide a detailed analysis on which to base final policy decisions. As such, we paint a broad-brush picture, but we are keen to emphasise the heterogeneity of England's rural areas to guard against the often-made assumption that a 'blanket of rurality' exists beyond cities.

The report uses recognised forms of 'futures thinking' and scenario building, and is structured along these lines. After an introduction the report is divided into four sections:

- *The story so far* – trends in rural transport over recent decades.
- *Drivers and trends that affect rural travel* – key issues which have impacted upon the nature and extent of travel by rural dwellers, and which are likely to continue so doing.
- *Transport futures* – three scenarios are outlined based on significantly different assumptions regarding the potential influence of particular trends and issues identified in the previous section.
- *Implications* – each of the three scenarios, although quite different in character, identifies the need for a robust and holistic vision for transport in rural areas if positive outcomes for rural dwellers are to be achieved.

The approach acknowledges uncertainty and the large number of possible future pathways in any given policy (or other) arena. While we can be fairly certain about past trends, all later stages are tenuous. We present what we hope are plausible and most likely futures, and to draw conclusions that are relevant to policy makers today. But readers should bear the above caveats in mind; space does not permit their restatement later in the text.

The report incorporates ideas and views from the wide variety of people consulted during the research. It does not represent views or expectations of the Commission for Rural Communities.

2 The story so far

There are certain trends held by many transport professionals as ‘givens’, and these apply to both rural and urban areas. They are built around the notions that travel is a ‘derived demand’ – i.e. People generally travel in order to do something else when they arrive at their destination – and that we tend to budget our use of time in fairly predictable ways. Many studies over several decades have observed across many different cultures that:

- The average number of journeys made per person has remained more or less constant, at about three per day, and
- The average amount of time each person spends travelling has also stayed more or less the same, at around an hour per day.

Retired people, for example, do make fewer trips and spend less time travelling, and children may make more shorter journeys, but for society as a whole these ‘constants’ are nearly always observed.

In the long term, the largest changes have been in the choice of travel mode used and in distance travelled. Technology, relative costs, and speed of travel have been the main determinants. The last major technological leap forward was the invention and development of the private motor car around the start of the 20th century, but it was the significant decline in its relative cost that resulted in the car becoming the dominant means of travel in the United States (from the 1920s) and in the UK (from the 1950s and 1960s). Since the car’s rise to prominence in the UK, the major changes have been that:

- The distance travelled per person has increased because of the greater speed and flexibility of the car over public transport, and
- The relative cost of travelling by car has decreased while the equivalent cost of using public transport has increased (Figure 1).

Over the last ten years or so we have seen some minor changes in the ‘givens’. The number of trips per person has fallen, possibly due to an ageing population. Time spent travelling has increased by about four minutes per person per day, possibly due to increased congestion and the greater ability to be ‘productive’ while travelling, associated with improvements in information and

communications technologies (ICTs). The mileage travelled per person seems to have plateaued, although there is uncertainty as to whether this is a temporary phase or whether ‘saturation’ has been reached. Overall, however, these changes are relatively small and the general pattern remains fairly clear.

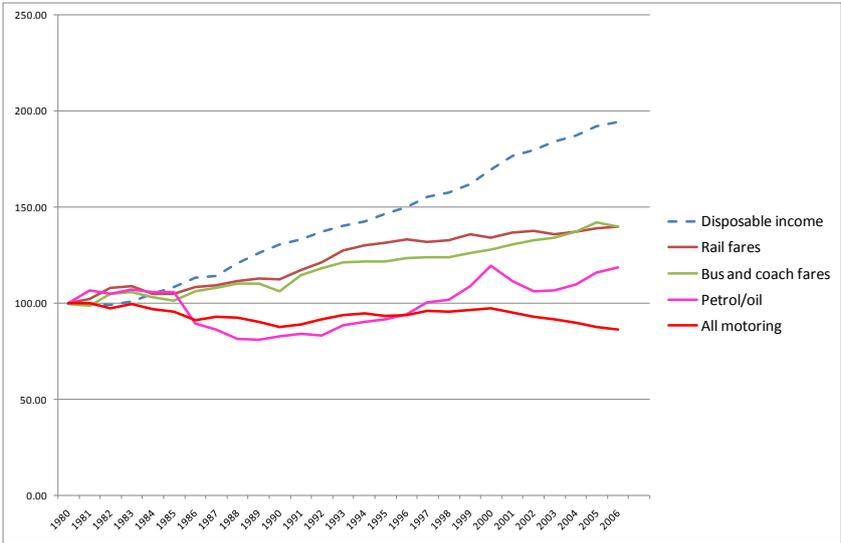


Figure 1. Relative costs of private and public transport in Great Britain, 1980-2006.
Source: dft (2009) Transport Statistics Great Britain, 2008.

In terms of numbers of trips and time spent travelling, rural travel varies little from the national picture, but other differences are worth highlighting. Rural residents travel further because of greater distances, although travel speeds are higher. There is greater reliance on cars because of the difficulty in providing public transport for dispersed populations, but running costs are similar because there is less congestion and a tendency for shops and jobs to be available at ‘edge of town’ locations - the higher ownership and access to cars in rural areas (Figure 2), is a function both of a lack of travel alternatives and higher average incomes. Traffic has been growing at a much faster rate in rural areas than in urban areas, and continues to grow.

People’s travel behaviour varies depending on the type of area in which they live and their access to a car (Figure 3). While the number of trips per person per week is constant across different area types within each car access group, those without access to a car make fewer trips than those who are main drivers. There is also a considerable difference in distance travelled across the area types. The difference in mileage between those with and without car access is greater in rural areas than in towns and cities. Disaggregating the number of trips made and the distance travelled by mode reveals that the bulk travel by the main driver of a household car is as a car driver, while for those in

a household with no car it is as a pedestrian. Lift giving is generally more significant than public transport in conferring mobility on people without access to a car in rural areas.

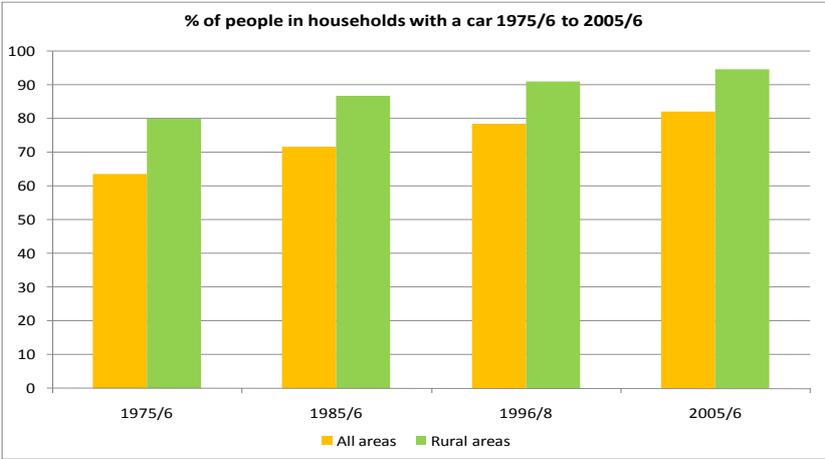


Figure 2. Per cent of households with one or more cars 1975/6 to 2005/6 in rural areas, compared to all areas.

Source: National Travel Survey.

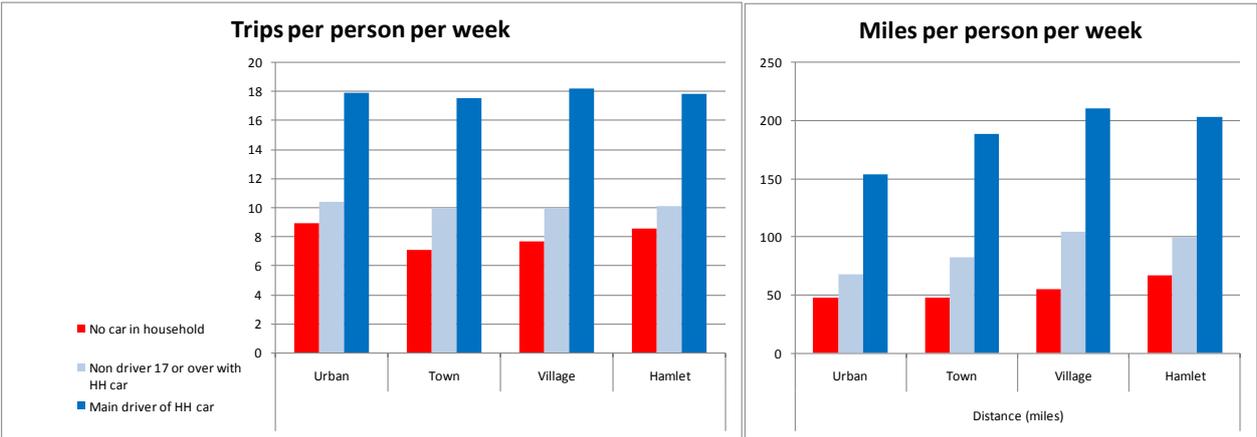


Figure 3. Trips per person per week and total distance travelled by type of area and car availability (people aged over 17).

Source: National Travel Survey, 2002-2006.

Not all rural areas or rural people are the same. Many rural areas have high numbers of commuters with relatively well-paid jobs who have moved from towns and cities in search of a better quality of life. In such areas average car ownership and use is high, whereas other places – for example, small villages in ‘sparse’ rural areas or areas that used to have industries such as mining – have much lower average incomes and car ownership / use levels. But even in the most affluent rural areas there are those who do not own or have access to a car.

3 Drivers, trends and impacts

There is a very wide range of factors that influence the travel behaviour of rural residents. Here we discuss the most significant of these and identify whether they may be 'drivers of change' in the future, in order to inform the scenarios we present in the next section. Their relevance to the aims of this paper relates to their importance in influencing travel behaviour, their foreseeable trends, and the extent to which different changes in the factor(s) would produce different scenarios in the future.

We have distilled the drivers and trends into five themes – demographics, economic conditions, lifestyle, travel / transport conditions and the nature of the rural area. Inevitably there is some overlap and contradiction. Some are drivers / trends we observe at the moment, whereas some we might expect to become more significant in the future.

Further details underpinning what follows – especially in the form of specific facts, figures and considered analysis – can be found in key publications such as *The State of Countryside Report*, *Transport Statistics Great Britain*, the *National Travel Survey*, Commission for Rural Communities' *Transport Thinkpiece* reports, Department for Transport publications, the RAC Foundation's *Car in British society* (see References for more details of these sources).

A) Demographics and society (What type of rural dwellers will be travelling in rural areas?)

- Rural population growth – population is growing faster in rural areas than urban areas, due mainly to migration from cities to rural areas. Some rural areas / settlements experience this more than others, especially those within commuting distance of major cities and areas popular for second homes. Recent trends of re-urbanisation associated with city centre redevelopment could impact upon rural demographics in the future and climate change mitigation policy could also have major impacts.
- Ageing population – the average age of rural dwellers is six years higher than in urban areas (44 as opposed to 38), and the population is ageing more rapidly in rural areas. All expectations are that this will continue into the future.
- Migrant workers – the recent influx of migrant workers is diminishing as a result of economic changes, both here and in central and eastern Europe. Further fluctuations are likely to be the result of broader economic and geopolitical conditions.
- Social policy – government efforts to address social problems are currently directed towards urban areas: the biggest problems tend to be found in urban areas, and the spatial concentration of these problems often makes them easier to address. But this can mean

that problems such as poverty are almost perceived not to exist in rural areas. Whether or not this changes is likely to relate to wider economic and planning policy towards rural areas.

- Community capacity – social capital and social networks tend to be stronger in many, but not all, rural communities. Change in local activity is difficult to predict, but impacts on travel for the elderly and not so well off will vary quite significantly depending on the ability of communities to help their less fortunate.

While many of these demographic drivers can be regarded as relatively predictable, broader economic drivers, and policies that change the attractiveness of rural and urban living could affect them. Even assuming a widespread adoption of accessibility planning the transport implications of these factors include a continuing reliance on the car, pressure on health transport services, and an ongoing reliance on lift-giving and public transport.

B) Economic conditions (What type of travel will rural dwellers be able to afford?)

- National economic growth or decline – the economy tends to influence the level of transport demand, so the depth of recession and rate and nature of recovery will be significant, even though we assume that current difficulties will be a distant memory by 2030. The impact of recovery on different employment sectors is also important. The timing and nature of recovery, would seem to be a key driver that could bring about different scenarios.
- Income inequalities – jobs located in rural areas are generally poorly paid but urban workers living in rural areas tend to have higher incomes. Many poorer rural dwellers spend a high proportion of their income on maintaining and running a car. Income disparities will of course persist but a range of factors including economic recovery and government policy will influence their nature and extent.
- Transport costs – changes in the absolute and relative price of using different modes of transport will influence demand. In the medium to long term oil prices are very likely to rise (and be unstable), but increases in travel costs are often absorbed by rural residents, especially because of limited alternatives to the car. Bus use has risen since the introduction of concessionary fares for the over-60s, but there are other difficult-to-predict changes that could have an impact – not least because of government policy the introduction of new technology, which we discuss later.

- Housing costs – the price of houses in rural England has been more expensive than in urban areas, especially in places with high levels of second home ownership and / or counter-urbanisation. Future price differentials are likely to be affected by the relative attractiveness of living in rural areas, combined with the supply of different types of housing. Policy could have a large effect here.
- Service outlet locations – the number of rural shops and services is currently declining, not least because their cheaper and more comprehensive competitors in urban areas attract car users. This can result in a vicious circle whereby local services lose further trade. Only a significant shift in planning and other policies (e.g. Accessibility-based measures) would effect change here.

The state and *nature* of the national economy and relative prices are key in determining the demand for transport. The likely continued closure of local services will also undermine the provision of local public transport. Housing costs have a wider impact, also affecting where people live and what travel they need to make. Most see travel becoming more expensive, but the supply and relative price of different modes is open to influence by policy direction in planning, housing and transport, as well as other economic stimuli.

C) Lifestyle (Why will rural dwellers need and want to travel?)

- Dispersing locations for jobs, shopping and leisure – the trend towards edge of town locations has favoured rural dwelling, with such places often easier to access from the countryside. People often settle in rural places as ‘halfway’ locations if different members of the same household work in different places. Change in travel costs could have a major impact here.
- Work-life balance – strongly associated with notions of ‘rural idyll’, people trade-off home location with the amount of time and money they are prepared to spend on travelling. Other drivers could alter this relative attractiveness.
- Leisure travel – people travel to access leisure activities (in both rural and urban areas), but also make journeys for the sake of the journey itself (a drive in the country or to ride on a steam railway). Disposable income is a major determinant of the amount of such travel people make.

Economic factors appear to be key in determining lifestyle choices at the societal level. The relative cheapness of car travel combined with the attractiveness of rural areas has led to lifestyles that are dependent on the car. But these lifestyle choices also promote car use. Such car reliance will not

necessarily carry on into the future, but change is likely to be the result of policies or market conditions leading to re-evaluations of people's lifestyle choices (such as an urgency to tackle climate change, higher costs of travel, or a conscious attempt to reverse the 'decline' of city living).

D) Travel / transport conditions (What will be the key transport factors?)

- Congestion – although most congestion is found in urban areas, inter-urban corridors and edge of town locations, key market towns and 'honey-pot' sites can also be affected. Traffic has been growing faster in rural areas than in urban areas for the last 40 years due to general traffic increases, but also because many urban areas are near 'capacity' with little room for traffic growth. But most rural areas still experience little serious congestion and, besides inter-urban traffic, it is difficult to see congestion in rural areas itself being a driver of change, except perhaps in and around 'edge' locations, park and ride sites and the like. It is congestion levels in urban areas that will have a bigger impact.
- New propulsion methods for vehicles – engine efficiency will improve steadily. Experience suggests that widespread take-up of new technologies will not be especially rapid unless a significant imperative emerges such as strong political leadership or a significant market shift. The electric car could become viable reasonably quickly although any switch to a hydrogen fleet is likely to be very long term. It is also unlikely that these technologies will radically alter the relative availability and price of cars in the medium term – there are still likely to be those unable to afford them. New uses of technology, for example electric bicycles or driverless cars, probably have the potential to have a larger impact on the way people travel – especially for certain sections of the population – than the method of propulsion of four wheeled vehicles designed for four people.
- Road pricing and traffic management technologies – Road User Charging is likely to be seriously considered by the government when increasing take-up of electric vehicles begins to erode fuel tax revenues. This could impact on rural areas in a variety of ways depending on its particularities; the general expectation is that a revenue neutral scheme would make motoring relatively cheaper for rural dwellers. Active Traffic Management on inter-urban corridors might promote car travel if reliability improvements result from the capacity enhancements such schemes can bring.
- Communications Technology – the internet is likely to play an increasing role in the delivery of goods and services to rural people, but whether this will reduce the need or desire to travel is a moot point. For example, while transport disadvantaged households could benefit from home deliveries, social, economic and digital exclusion tend to go together, and increasing use could further undermine local shops. Video-phones can further instil the

virtues of being together, and satnav make private travel easier. The relationship between ICTs and transport use is complex and it should not be assumed that better communications technologies will result in less travel.

- Transport infrastructure and investment – large scale capital investment in infrastructure is almost certain to be concentrated on urban and interurban projects, although targeted expenditure on specific rural bus, DRT and rail fleets will be made and could impact locally by, for example, opening up new markets or journey opportunities. A significant realignment of transport strategy and supporting policies could see the focus and amount of capital investment changing in a number of ways.
- Wider transport and accessibility policy – central, but also regional and local, government thinking on transport can significantly alter people’s transport behaviour. At one extreme, Swiss rural public transport is extremely extensive, underpinned by a socio-political expectation that widespread rural rail, bus and post-bus networks are necessary. Successive governments in the UK have taken a different view, although there have been many recent initiatives such as Community Rail Partnerships and the Rural Bus Challenge that have promoted public transport patronage in rural areas. Dynamic and innovative councils are capable of delivering real change at the local level, which could be especially effective when combined with high levels of community engagement and enterprise.

These transport factors obviously have an effect on the overall demand for and impact of travel, as well as its nature and modal split. Change is likely to be quite complex and difficult to predict but there is scope for a significant, if not major, shift in rural travel patterns due to the availability of travel itself.

E) Nature of the rural environment (What kind of rural area will people live in?)

- Spatial planning – although there has been some large-scale development (e.g. Distribution centres and housing estates), planning legislation has traditionally not favoured development in rural areas. In large part this is to do with concerns over protecting the countryside. Recent changes (in the wake of the Barker and Taylor Reports, etc.) May well increase the amount of permitted development in a range of locations. Such changes could have major impacts on rural travel, perhaps by focusing more journeys around local origin / destination points.
- Local environmental degradation – more traffic and congestion or new development in rural areas may result in increased localised air and noise pollution, but this is unlikely to significantly undermine wider rural tranquillity and notions of the ‘rural idyll’.

- Climate change mitigation and environmental policy – the government’s response to climate change, could be significant for rural dwellers, but the actual responses are difficult to predict. Rural residents do not emit excessively high absolute levels of carbon compared with urban residents, but would be affected by far higher fuel prices, as well as other interventions connected with a ‘sustainable’ transport approach such as Road User Charging, increasing public transport quality / quantity, and improving the availability of and accessibility to local services and more services.

The principal transport impacts of decisions taken on the rural environment tend to be on the volume, location and nature of travel. Policy to mitigate climate change could be significant but how this will affect rural areas is not clear cut. Promoting development might reduce the need for local rural travel if local services improve and if travel costs encourage shorter journeys.

4 Transport futures

The previous section showed that a large number of drivers is likely to impact on rural dwellers’ travel and transport activity over the next 20 years. Consideration of current imperatives and the rate of change in other factors over the last forty years, leads us to the view that the most significant of these are likely to be: an ageing population, economic performance, spatial planning, policy reaction to climate change (including transport policy) and technological developments.

Two of these drivers have a ‘constancy’ and are unlikely to change greatly in ways other than currently predicted:

- An ageing population (for many years this has been a reliable trend); and
- The impact of engine technology and improving fuel efficiency – current knowledge would suggest that the rate of roll-out / take-up is unlikely to experience a significant transformation in the timescale.

The remaining three are more likely to change in ways we cannot predict:

- Economic performance – the depth and duration of the current recession, along with the likely trajectory of a recovery, is very difficult to judge;
- Government policy reaction to climate change – this could have major impacts on the costs of travel in all areas, as well as investment in public transport and other alternatives; and

- The spatial planning regime – there could be a relaxation of planning laws, or there could be a positive attempt to steer sustainable development into both urban and rural settings.

There are several ways in which we could construct scenarios from any number of combinations of outcomes from these drivers / trends. Here we use the idea that there are variables capable of ‘tipping’ events one way or another into considerably different futures. We have based our scenarios around the three ‘less predictable’ drivers. This approach complements the ‘axes of uncertainty’ adopted in other (transport) scenarios work – see, for example, the Government Office of Science and Innovation’s *Foresight* projects.

The scenarios chosen and how the key drivers affect them are shown below:

	Scenario 1 - Economic growth at all costs	Scenario 2 - The Green Countryside	Scenario 3 - Rural Growth
Nature of economic recovery	Reliance on monetarist policy	Recovery built around climate change mitigation	<i>Mixed</i>
Climate change mitigation policy	Weak policy – ‘do minimum’	Strong – what’s good for the environment makes money	<i>Relatively strong</i>
Development policy for rural areas	<i>Laissez faire but with assumption against development</i>	<i>Planned around localisation policy</i>	Planned in key settlement around transport corridors

Bold (factors distinguishing scenarios). *Italics* (likely changes but not defining the scenario)

Within each broad scenario there are a large number of variations which we do not discuss in the space available. We have avoided extreme scenarios and there are a number of ‘wild card’ factors which are not included here. But mindful that rural areas are not all the same, we have sought to illustrate ways in which each scenario could play by short ‘case studies’.

Scenario 1: Economic growth at all costs

The recession / depression lasts for considerably longer than government forecasts – a minimum of three years and potentially into the second half of the next decade – on the basis that a series of economic stimulation packages are misdirected, that confidence remains accordingly low and that credit remains difficult to obtain. As such, governments become increasingly preoccupied with ‘economic growth at all costs’ and marginalise considerations of the environment from policy. By 2030 this recession will be history, but others will have followed and monetarist policies are retained. Oil prices begin to rise as demand picks up once global economic recovery kicks in. Research and development into alternative fuel sources stagnates during the recession / depression.

This leads to a marginalisation of rural issues, despite local authorities vigorously trying to boost inward investment. Such investment during the recession that there is – across a range of sectors, including transport but also other significant infrastructure – goes almost entirely into the major urban areas, especially London and the south east. Redevelopment activity is focused on the same areas as it is felt that they offer the best potential for wealth generation. There is a significant net outflow of employment to cities and entrenched issues of rural economic disadvantage and social exclusion remain largely untackled. Rural house prices fall and service provision declines, but the needs of the population increase as it ages further. Greenfield edge of town locations develop significantly – especially for office, light manufacturing / assembly, retail and distribution activities – as land is cheaper and construction times quicker than for brownfield sites.

This means that by 2030:

- Road User Charging has not been introduced and fuel duty has not been significantly increased for many years. Combined with the lack of a credible plan to stabilise traffic, levels have risen above those of 2010 despite the cost of petrol rising as oil prices go up. Congestion and associated pollution / carbon emissions have also increased, especially along inter-urban corridors and at edge locations, although accessibility improvements brought about by ICT and the increasing cost of oil ameliorate the impact.
- Public transport declines further in rural areas, with very little investment and service reductions – except that some corridor services improve as a result of the long distance commuting that built up.
- The number of rural service outlets continues to decrease, leaving more villages with no services and increasing the need to travel accordingly. In some cases, community-run ‘one-stop shops’ develop.
- Widening income disparities and more older residents means an increased need for ‘social transport’, but this is met even more by informal lift giving as many local public transport services dry up.
- At least one member of most lower income households still has access to a car, but these tend to be older, less efficient vehicles. While less fuel-hungry than today’s cars, they still run beyond their designed lifetime.

Case study 1a: Small village in a sparsely populated rural area

May Smith, a retiree living on her own, lives in a small village in a sparsely populated area of Northumberland. She doesn't own a car. May has witnessed the closure of the local pub and post office, as well as the last remaining shop. Most of her basic accessibility needs can be met online but deliveries can be costly and she misses the social aspect of interacting with others in her local shops / services and so perceives her mobility needs to have increased.

Since 2025, May has been heavily involved in a community action group. Using contacts and knowhow, a local doctor was able to establish a good working relationship with the local authority and key individuals in several neighbouring villages to identify the mobility needs of the communities and persuade a commercial transport operator to set up a DRT service using taxicabs. This has worked reasonably well but is under threat of withdrawal. May now helps to organise volunteers who agree to provide lifts for those needing to travel. Unfortunately, other villages in the area that share similar geographical and socio-economic characteristics have been less successful at initiating such bottom-up schemes.

Case study 1b: Large village in the urban fringe

Corin and Sally Dawson live with their two pre-teenage daughters in a housing estate in a sizeable village in Staffordshire, close to an edge of town business and retail park. They know their neighbours to talk to but most of their social circle remains in the city. Both used to commute by bus from the village along a major radial route, but Corin's office recently moved to an 'edge' location and he now has to use the family's only car. This is problematic for Sally because she now has to walk the children two miles to school and the range of services available in the village is limited.

The family has become very reliant on its car. Feeling deprived of mobility during the day, Sally insists that they go to the 'big box' retailers on the edge of town for most of their groceries and other shopping needs. Corin already has to drive there and back each weekday and deal with the increasing traffic congestion. He spends about an hour and a half each week sitting in traffic jams. Also, having moved out of the city perceiving that village life would be a better place to raise a family, Corin and Sally now discover that most of the children's activities are either at the 'edge' location or in the city. Even the city-based pastimes are difficult to access outside of normal working / school hours, given the bus schedules.

Ongoing rises in interest rates and fuel prices are making running the car more expensive, and sacrifices in other areas are increasingly being required. Sally has tried to use her free time in the middle of the day to organise a community lift-share scheme but people in the village are uninterested, citing inflexibility and spatially disparate work locations.

Scenario 2: The 'green' countryside

The recession is shorter-lived than in Scenario 1, and much of the recovery is built around preparing the world and economy for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Economic activity and policy measures that encourage less fossil fuel use are therefore encouraged and bring tangible returns, and investment is made in systems that reduce the need for fossil fuel using travel. There is a return

to urbanism, with the notion of the 'rural idyll' losing appeal as cities once again assert themselves as areas of regeneration and vitality.

Perceptions of the 'role' of rural areas are based more on production than leisure, with intensive agriculture encouraged by issues such as reducing food miles seen as increasingly important. Local industry in rural areas is encouraged to reduce travel demands and is able to achieve this in part due to greater reliance on ICTs. Some people still commute from rural areas, and likewise still visit rural areas for leisure and tourism, although modal split is different than today.

This means that by 2030:

- A national Road User Charging scheme started out as revenue neutral in 2015, but increased with a policy focus on reducing carbon emissions, and maintaining a tax revenue stream from private travel, since fewer vehicles have petrol and diesel engines. While engine efficiency has improved and new non-fossil technologies progress in development and rollout, the global fuel price increase is not cancelled out, though cars are no longer designed with built-in obsolescence which reduces effective emissions over their lifetime.
- A switch to non car travel, and less travel, is made. This is easier to achieve in urban and interurban travel, but also affects rural areas, through investment in smartcard technology which stimulates accessibility measures and public transport. Walking and cycling is promoted in the more densely populated rural areas. Around 50% of journeys are made by car in rural areas more easily served by public transport and 80% in peripheral areas less well served. The level of 2+ car ownership also falls, while electric bikes are a major mode of transport, since they avoid the road user charge and can be safely parked at inter-urban travel nodes.
- Online service access increases which, coupled with higher travel costs and better public transport, leads to a slight reduction in journeys made (though travel remains the main means of accessing services). There are rural residents who benefit little from ICT, generally the very elderly, the mentally or physically infirm and a small group of 'rural poor'.
- The trend of counter-urbanisation that has existed since the 1960s is reversed. There is less long distance commuting, and the attraction of rural areas as an area to commute from exists only for those in very well paid jobs.
- Air travel for leisure (and business) reduces, meaning that rural England increases its attraction as a holiday and leisure destination.

Case study 2a: small well-off village

Richard and Mary Lincoln grew up in the countryside and always had every intention of returning once they finished in full-time education. Their now well-established law practice is based in their small village but ongoing preference of many clients to meet face-to-face, means they frequently have to travel to a number of cities within a 50-mile radius rather than communicate by videophone. Their village is not well served by public transport being some eight miles off a major transport corridor - booking a seat on demand responsive transport can be difficult. The electric bikes are OK for going to towns within about 10 miles and accessing the trunk public transport routes where they park them safely, but not for the more distant places off the main routes.

Mercia Regional Council has invested heavily in both LRT and heavy rail in three of its major cities. A key feature of these networks is parkway stations beyond city boundaries. Richard and Mary take advantage of this whenever they travel into these cities. They are pleased to be able to reduce their carbon emissions by using public transport.

Case study 2b: Small village close to a major town

Bill Smith is an IT consultant who, although preferring urban life and having found a job in a firm of solar panel manufacturers in the nearest city, has moved back to his home village for a short while in order to help his elderly parents.

Following on from the successful 'smarter choices' initiative designed to increase people's awareness of existing alternatives to the car, wider rollout of this programme combined with considerable public transport investment has greatly benefited non-car modes in the village. While at first concerned that his transport options would be limited – because he does not own a car – Bill has discovered through his online personalised travel planner that his mobility is actually better. Immediate needs can be met by cycling or walking as local shops have remained vibrant despite static population. A network of bus lanes and supporting infrastructure along main radial routes into the city makes Bill's commute fast and comfortable.

Scenario 3: Strong economy, strong rural growth

As a result of a number of different pressures, planning policy starts to view the idea of 'rural' in a different way. After 2015 there is a considerable increase in rural economic activity and population as a consequence of a more liberal attitude to development in rural areas, especially in small and medium sized towns. The ability to serve these areas by transport is a key concern: most development is concentrated in corridors of connected settlements, although there is some increase in dispersed settlement across the countryside. While this development affects all rural areas, it has more impact on the less sparse areas.

This is against a background of oil prices rising in real terms over time due to limited supply, leading to increased costs of motoring. At the same time, though, a fairly vibrant ICT-based economy

develops – not dissimilar to that currently being driven by ‘modern cowboys’ in parts of the American West – and this enables rural areas to compete successfully with towns and cities in terms of wealth generation. Manufacturing industry (which increased following a shift in economic thinking in the 2010s) remains concentrated in urban and transport corridor locations, but most other activity can thrive in rural areas and employment opportunities have increased significantly as a result. More housing is allowed in rural areas, with an emphasis on affordable housing – the bulk of this is concentrated in large villages and small. The population of rural England grows, accounting for 28% of the total (compared with 19% in 2010). More services are available locally, and greater local use of these services reduces the cost differential between urban and rural prices.

This means that by 2030:

- Rural areas are more homogeneous, with ‘rich commuter belts’ and ‘poor peripheral’ areas largely a thing of the past. The social and economic make up is more like urban areas.
- There is more travel ‘within’ rural areas, although much of this will be more local than currently. People living in rural areas are very much more likely to work in the same small town that they live in. Better local facilities and high fuel costs mean that most activity is carried out locally.
- There is more of a two-way flow (between urban and rural) instead of the current predominant movement from rural to urban, which helps make public transport more viable (and commercial) especially on main corridors.
- There is greater investment in public transport in rural areas, with capital investment in rural transport providing forms of light rail, as well as bus priorities and facilities for intermodal local journeys. This mainly benefits the rural towns and larger villages still leaving some areas isolated from the main transport networks, but increased revenue spend also makes much rural transport eventually commercially viable.

Case Study 3a: typical ‘counter-urbanisation’ village

Vlad and Kylie Slodovica moved from Swindon to South Molton in Devon in 2020 when Vlad got a well paid job with a phone component manufacturer there. Vlad walks to work (about a mile) and Kylie splits her time between looking after the three young children and doing some building work on a new housing estate. They have a two year old electric car which they bought after the inefficient 2014 hybrid Tata got too costly to run last year. The oldest children both cycle to the primary school and Kylie takes the youngest to nursery either on foot or by car if it’s raining.

When they visit their parents in Swindon the public transport (elevated tramway then the train) is easy to use and cheap to use – it takes about 2 hours door to door. Since they moved they have their three summer breaks of about a week each quite locally in places like Woolacombe and

Lynton. But these places are getting busy now as people from Spain and Italy like to come to avoid the heat.

Case study 3.b: Expanding village in a wealthy commuter area

George and Charlotte Marshall live ten miles outside Cambridge as they have done since the 1980s when they set up their craft workshop there. Now in their seventies they still do some craft making to top up the income they now get from renting 80% of the workspace to a local manufacturer of traditional games consoles, but like to think of themselves as retired. The growth of the local village into a small town with a good supermarket, shops and other services has meant that they have been able to thrive there even though George is no longer able to drive. They had to give up the car because of the cost of running it in 2025. They hire one when they need one but can do most things locally.

The village hopper bus runs every half hour into a neighbouring small town where they can get an express bus into Cambridge. George's worsening arthritis means they worry that they'll find waiting for the bus difficult soon, and they can't rely on lifts as much of the community spirit has gone from the area since so many new people have moved in, and people move on quickly.

5 Implications for future rural transport policy

Our first aim in this paper was to consider the possible nature of rural dwellers' travel and transport in 20 years' time. Accordingly, we have established the base conditions of rural transport, discussed a series of key transport drivers, and set out three scenarios based on unpredictable variables.

Our scenarios are 'recognisable' rather than radical in nature, but they nevertheless suggest quite different outcomes. The implications for rural England are very different in terms of the main 'role' for rural areas, the type of people living there and what they would be doing, and the way in which they would travel. In many ways more protection of the notion of a rural idyll is envisaged in the first scenario, although this might result in an 'exclusive' countryside. A greater functionality for rural areas is outlined in scenarios two and three, but much of what many appreciate about rural England would be under threat. In the second scenario rurality would be valued for its ability to sustain the country, while in the third more people would benefit from living in smaller settlements. What is perhaps interesting is that the differences in the travel patterns we set out are not so great as the wider implications for society.

Our second aim in the paper was to consider the potential implications of rural dwellers' future travel and transport for policy. Rural transport is of course a minor part of transport as a whole – and

transport is only one aspect of society. So it is unrealistic to think that the consequences of as yet unknown futures for rural transport could alter strategic national policy thinking today. And while the kind of futures thinking adopted in this paper does not result in solid predictions or forecasts, scenarios can be used to look for rural transport policies that are robust to all likely scenarios, as part of the process of identifying a broad vision of how rural transport could or should develop.

Our scenarios do not envisage radical change. Rural areas will still exist in a fairly recognisable form – private transport still dominates, and there are those who do not have access to private transport. To a large extent current problems still persist, albeit in different forms. Recurring themes emerge and in this sense it is possible for stakeholders to define, on the basis of futures thinking, a vision for the desired trajectory of transport policy for rural areas. This vision is crucial in helping to determine a strategy for minimising the probability of arriving at scenarios that are deemed best avoided ‘at all costs’.

In planning now for the rural transport future, then, key themes would seem to include:

- An acceptance that the car will remain the dominant form of travel in rural areas, but that there should be no ‘need’ for households to have more than one car. Car travel should also be available – perhaps predominantly through lift-giving – to those who have no, or limited, access to their own car. This requires that policy is better able to support community-based, private transport cooperation and initiative.
- At the same time there should be alternatives for rural residents. A credible rural and interurban public transport network that enables intermodal links to local walking, cycling, taxi, demand responsive transport and other transport options will need to be a policy priority.
- The maintenance of service outlets in rural areas must be viewed as important, and will probably need planning to provide efficient provision of basic services in some form of ‘one stop shops’. This is not least because ICTs are likely to remain an incomplete solution for those rural residents experiencing social exclusion through a ‘poverty of access’.

That our scenarios all result in a ‘recognisable’ rural future does not imply that policy should simply continue as it is. The continued existence in 2030 of problems that currently exist – and are generally well understood – would imply some degree of policy failure over the next two decades. Developing a vision for rural areas that contains policy elements capable of addressing any of the possibilities outlined in scenarios is what therefore becomes important. We do not claim this will be a straightforward exercise – section three of this report identifies a host of factors that in some way or

another will impact upon transport and travel trends. But one thing is certain. The discussion and debate we seek to provoke with this report should not go on for too long. Much of what we would see as a vision for transport in rural areas has already been expressed, and in some cases experimented with by individuals and communities, local authorities, charitable trusts and government departments and their agencies. All too often it is the wider delivery stage that has failed us. The UK is acknowledged as having led the way in rural transport innovation and experimentation and innovation, but it is in other European countries where long term success – resulting from an established and sustained commitment to, and funding of, rural mobility and accessibility – is more often in evidence. While mid 2010 is not a time when this is likely to change it is worth remembering that things do change and opportunities will arise.

References and Sources

Commission for Rural Communities “State of the Countryside Reports” are available at: <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/stateofthecountryside/overview>

Department for Transport ‘Transport Statistics’ pages:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/> has links to National Travel Survey reports, “Transport Statistics” and other statistical publications.

Commission for Rural Communities’ Transport Thinkpiece reports are available at

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