



**Peninsula  
Transport**



**South West Rural Mobility Strategy Pilots  
Pilot Stakeholder Reference Group Workshop**

**19/01/24**

**Panellists:**

**Mike O'Dowd Jones:**

Mike is responsible for the creation and maintenance of infrastructure in Somerset County Council. He has a background in transport planning. He put the bus service improvement plan in place in Somerset. Mobility hubs being funded and delivered as part of SIP. Involved in Peninsula transport since inception.

**Dr Michael Ireland:**

Michael is the Chair of OkeRail. OkeRail reinstated the railway from Okehampton to Exeter and beyond. Prior to this, he worked for Destination Okehampton, which was amalgamated to be a combined group working with the County Council, many other stakeholders and directly with national government.

**Oz Choudhri:**

Oz is Head of Mobility Solutions and Public Sector for Enterprise. Enterprise Mobility operates vehicle hire and car club digital solutions across the UK in both urban and rural locations. It has been operating in UK for 25 years (60 years globally). Oz works with both central and local government to deploy projects.

**Melanie Watson:**

Melanie is an independent Consultant. Previously, she led the public transport team for Cornwall Council for 10 years. This included the roll out of innovative 8 year tendered bus contract that covers half the mileage in Cornwall. She also delivered commercial mileage and school and college flows. She also led the delivery of BCIP for Cornwall. She also led on the first county wide bus fare pilot, which has led to growth and changed behaviour. She has also completed a major engagement piece of work in Cornwall, speaking to residents and visitors. These results will be publicly available in the coming months.

Prior to this, Melanie worked for Transport for London and Transport for Manchester in urban transport.

### Questions for panellists:

What are the key challenges for local authorities?

**Mike O'Dowd Jones:**

- Geography - Somerset has a big rural area with dispersed communities. Complex and expensive network to run. Few natural corridors. Results in transport deserts.
- Commercial viability of transport - lack of working age customers, a lot are concessionary travellers. Transport is expensive. A need to move from traditional approach to bus services to something more innovative - keen to hear from Enterprise. Needs to be more of a growth model to examine where demand could be created and generate a new set of customers. Big reliance on public subsidy; even the commercial routes are only marginally so.
- Pressure from financial situation of local councils to maintain these subsidies. Big concern on local authorities' capacity to support, deliver and create services and ideas. Without funding it is difficult to get traction.
- Volunteers - volunteer pool has reduced since Covid. Moved from hundreds to tens of volunteers manning community transport services. How do we build this volunteer capacity back up? Unseen part of rural mobility picture.

### **Questions and statements from audience:**

*"It's become harder to become a volunteer due to rules. It feels like you're an unpaid employee."*

Mike responded that we do need to look at the rule and regulations and make volunteering easy and more flexible.

*"Find the officers do not think outside of the box. More local buses driving out to the main centres. Campaigned for bus from Wells to Weston."*

Mike answered that the offices are dealing with huge pressures, with little funding to run innovative services. Complexity of transport operates in the UK; combining commercial demands without a lot of control and then needing to provide subsidised services to fill in the gaps. It could be different if officers had more capacity and time for innovative thinking.

*"Should we be lobbying government?"*

*"Good to have honesty or it won't change. Regarding growth; there are opportunities in rural areas to grow, but our bus network in Somerset is designed around 1960s centric town centres. In Taunton the centres have moved but the*

*bus services don't interconnect. Want to support, but government plays a big part."*

*"Live in main intersection next to bus garage. No direct bus to the station. Have been asking for better shuttle bus to integrate railway station, hospital. More buses on a smaller scale that are reliable."*

*"I live in Bude, and there hasn't been investment in the hubs. Cross boundary issues with Devon."*

### **Melanie Watson:**

- South West has a large, dispersed population with diverse needs
- Bude is a particular challenge
- Elderly population and aging population growing (25% are over 65 compared to National England/Wales average of 18%)
- Massive inequalities in health and wealth in Cornwall
- House prices 9 times the national average in Cornwall
- Rural isolation for children and young people
- Long journey distances, particularly within Cornwall
- Constrained infrastructure - narrow country lanes, no pavements
- Internet shopping and working from home has led to reduced amount of paying patronage on public transport, making it commercially less viable for local authorities
- Funding pressures have led to depleted bus networks across the UK
- Local government has been hard hit with austerity - paralysis due to pressures on local authority. Can be slow to adapt and be innovative.
- Political perspective - need to find more funding and different ways of doing things
- Building confidence and behavioural change. Need to highlight that it is a viable offer for some journeys. This will drive sustainability to keep what we have in place
- Reliability
- Austerity cuts threatening the network

Melanie mentioned some positives. Cornwall has strong political support for public transport which has translated into a commitment to spend money on it. It has made a massive investment, with 50% of mileage funded by Cornwall Council. Spending is on a par with city regions. It has worked with Network Rail and GWR to get a good local rail service to plan the bus network around this to make integration possible. Also integrated school and tourist services, with the aim being to provide a service that operates year-round and copes with peak demand in tourist season. Delivered long term bus contract for 8 years, aiding security. 102

new bus services. In first year of bus fares pilot it grew the proportion of fare paying passengers by reducing fares. This brought more money into the system , which can be reinvested. It brought marketing and information provision together under one brand - Transport for Cornwall. One map, one information provision and one website.

Start by building and marketing a core set of viable, reliable services and build confidence in using these first, then expand from that base - get bus on people's radar. But LAs need to accept that rural services are going to need substantial ongoing funding into the future.

Melanie mentioned that they have recently completed an engagement programme to better understand changing attitudes towards the bus by residents.

### **Michael Ireland:**

Through the Town Council, in 2009 we started a group called Destination Okehampton to bring together different partners made up of local authority people and those that represented the community. We learned from experience of the group in Tavistock (slow progress) and decided to directly lobby central government. Not just about Okehampton, it is a gateway to the rail desert in North Devon and Cornwall (Bude, Launceston). In 2014, the Dawlish sea wall collapsed and cut off the Cornwall rail connection, reinvigorating the campaign for a complimentary route. We hope in the longer term to complete the route to link to Plymouth, offering a viable alternative route to Cornwall. We continue to work with County Council. We are now doing cross-border work to resolve the rail desert, with Okehampton being the nearest link (the oasis in the rail desert). It's important to bring bus and rail together to achieve this, having both available from the outset.

### **Questions and statements:**

*"Are there many passengers on the train?"*

Michael replied yes! Patronage over the first two years of opening has exceeded projections.

The dialogue between Michael and the audience member highlighted the problem with connectivity of buses to Okehampton station which needs to be improved.

Melanie responded that rail projects go ahead and bus links are thought about afterwards. Bus connections need to be there as part of the business case.

*"Rail is the backbone and attracts money, but we need to work with local authorities to bring rail and buses together. New passengers to rail on OkeRail and people are travelling beyond Exeter."*

### **Oz Choudhri:**

This is my perspective as private operator. I will use the example of the Highlands initiative called HiTrans. They are responsible for buses and rail. They approached Enterprise, as car club services had been initiated in and around the Highlands, and asked us to be part of a joint application for funding from Transport Scotland to deploy a MaaS (Mobility as a Service) project to integrate transport in rural area and make it easy for consumers to access it. My role was to not only deliver the expanded car club and vehicle hire, but to also bring other partners on board and improve connectivity. We brought some tech companies on board and put in an application which was successful and won the bid. The project is called Go Hi and connects transport around the area. It provides a digital platform integrating transport information across all modes (28 operators) to enable consumers to effectively plan end-to-end journeys in the Highlands and Islands combining different modes, including ferries and air services. It has been live for two years.

Challenges highlighted:

- It is not easy to integrate all forms of transport. Ferries and LoganAir were a credible form of public transport to consumer - the challenge is how you bring them into a project like this
- 28 different transport operators integrated into the platform, including 19 different regional bus operators. They needed to work together to understand each others' services and opportunities and co-market options.
- Data identified gaps in provision and provided evidence for future projects.
- We need to look to diversify the consumer base and have an eye to future market potential. We're focusing on the existing commuter, but other avenues to generate demand are businesses, or local authorities that don't use the practises they're preaching
- Marketing - there is an application for additional funding into marketing, as we have been too focused on the technical capability and meeting deadlines. Naively assumed that it would be digital marketing rather than traditional marketing methods, but the old skool methods proved vital. We made use of posters, radio etc. Over 5,000 users of the app and just won Scottish Transport Award for best innovative rural project
- Needs to be easy, accessible and has to evolve
- Application for stage 2 is how do we expand services and make it more relevant
- Maybe ways around limited funding is to attract private sector, who can make investments and are skilled at identifying future markets

### Questions and statements:

Statement made by audience member regarding demand responsive travel.

*“One in NE Lincolnshire, West Midlands and Milton Keynes. In Milton Keynes you can ring and there's a vehicle within 15 minutes. It is impractical in more rural areas. Most of direct travel response need to know a day before, not ad hoc.”*

Oz answered that there is a DRT project called Dial M. It is a challenging service and they didn't always get a good level of service. It has been suspended and will be reintroduced to make it more intuitive and with the opportunity to operate out of limited core services. DRT within the UK is a challenge and is a commercial model that's hard to sustain.

*"Does the app integrate ticketing from start to finish?"*

Oz answered that you can pay for integrated tickets through the app. This was a challenge to achieve due to the variety of back-office systems and the capability of the operator. Systems and capability are inconsistent across the UK.

*"19 different operators is very inefficient, plus unfeasibility of cycling for some people."*

Oz said that last project worked with Motability operations. Ran trial in Highlands and Islands for 19 days with subsidised travel to learn about the challenges. There were over 100 members from Motability on the trial, it was very successful. They logged all the challenges, such as the limited journey planner for accessibility. Diversification is a challenge.

#### **General discussion, Questions and statements:**

*"There is a cultural change missing in priorities."*

*"The community sector is so important and that localised knowledge is important for awareness spreading and usage."*

*"Tavistock change to local bus services. Blown up due to poor communication. Loop route is difficult to figure out. Students doing graphic design courses could be challenged to create timetables."*

*"Bus timetables are confusing to interpret in both rural and urban environments."*

*"Not always timetables or clear instructions on where bus stops."*

*"Bus is the biggest advertiser in the county and it should be utilised to sell its own services."*

**Workshop session feedback:**

**1) What skills, experience and resources could each sector bring to pilots?**

	Public	Private	Community
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding from central gov't/DfT</li> <li>• Coordinate bids and technical knowledge - some rural smaller councils have lack of capacity for funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can bring innovation and the ability to open different doors to thinking and funding</li> <li>• Commercially attract investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary resource and skills</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with stakeholders</li> <li>• Convening role of bringing organisations to the table</li> <li>• Linkage with community</li> <li>• Public engagement</li> <li>• Ability to work cross-agency</li> <li>• Stakeholders - skill set</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to universities</li> <li>• Developer contributions - involvement of private sectors in planning earlier in the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local contacts and influence</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge &amp; data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of local area</li> <li>• Understanding of local needs</li> <li>• Data sharing</li> <li>• Data and evidence</li> <li>• Data intelligence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience and knowledge from previous pilots</li> <li>• Invest in research and methodology</li> <li>• Open data e.g. from Amazon / data sharing</li> <li>• Direct feedback/accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding social value of the project</li> <li>• Understand the need</li> <li>• Fine grain knowledge of routes</li> <li>• Sense of history</li> <li>• The community fully understand the local needs and need to be engaged. There is time, knowledge and experience that could be used to work with all the P&amp;P sector</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation service and bring knowledge and deliver through voluntary drivers</li> <li>• Lived experience and know problems</li> </ul>
<b>Influence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to influence central government</li> <li>• Powers and ability to make decisions</li> <li>• Personal approach</li> <li>• Accountable body/recognised</li> <li>• Power to incentivise behavioural change</li> <li>• To protect the services for the most vulnerable</li> <li>• Local democracy/networks knowledge</li> <li>• Landlord of infrastructure</li> <li>• Policy and vision must be aligned - e.g. Decarbonisation</li> <li>• The public sector know all the service needs within their boundaries. The public section (transport, health, education, social care etc) has the ability or access to inform and influence government)</li> <li>• Sections of society with no other choice - protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to influence central government</li> <li>• Networks</li> <li>• National/global reach</li> <li>• The private sector can also influence (Amazon for example about delivery and community could extrapolate transport needs. The mass data held by the companies and business could help)</li> <li>• Not authority bound</li> <li>• Greater opportunity to focus on passenger needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local support</li> <li>• Local buy in and knowledge</li> <li>• Marketing/awareness - getting people on board - peer promotion/word of mouth/trusted source of info</li> <li>• Holding public and private to account</li> </ul>
<b>Skills &amp; expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation skills</li> <li>• Land planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialised in marketing/project management and setting up projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteering</li> <li>• Diversity/specialist charities</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project management skills</li> <li>• Commercial experience</li> <li>• Experience of delivering that service/expertise - but may not be innovative without other service bodies</li> <li>• Technical skills</li> <li>• Ability to scale up</li> <li>• Experience and learning from elsewhere</li> <li>• Capacity to drive projects forward</li> <li>• Market awareness</li> <li>• Bespoke solutions</li> <li>• Commercial awareness</li> <li>• Innovation/ideas</li> <li>• Ability to disrupt</li> <li>• Act quicker - pragmatism</li> <li>• Ability to apply across the country</li> <li>• Technical expertise / wider skills base</li> </ul>	
<b>Mindset &amp; approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Liability</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Policy making/framework</li> <li>• Regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility of service provision and over landholding</li> <li>• Less risk adverse</li> <li>• Capacity for creativity and innovation and look beyond constraints of what has traditionally been successful</li> <li>• Driven by competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passion</li> <li>• Story telling</li> <li>• Activation</li> <li>• Enthusiasm/passion</li> <li>• Long term interest and engagement</li> <li>• Demographic</li> <li>• ‘Stories sell’</li> </ul>

2) What gaps in capability in pilots does each sector have and how might they be filled?

	Public	Private	Community
<b>Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training needed</li> <li>• Lack of leadership/vision</li> <li>• Capability gaps</li> <li>• Expertise</li> <li>• Evidence based ideas</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology innovation issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources to make change</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity where budgets are limited</li> <li>• Different budgets/structures across councils</li> <li>• Funding - fairer allocation of resources and understanding rural need</li> <li>• Funding - DfT/levelling up</li> <li>• Security of future funding</li> <li>• Revenue, not capital funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding certainty</li> <li>• Shareholders/profit</li> <li>• Motivated by profits/shareholders, less focus on social need. Solution could be for local government to subsidise pilot or help private companies see benefit of social value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding gap - and lack of understanding of where fit in bigger picture or what strategic priorities are</li> <li>• Not knowing what levels to pull of where to go for help or funding. May need different funding pots. Answer is improved communication</li> <li>• Community understanding of how to attract investment</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-engagement to contribute to solution development and ongoing engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus/rail shareholder challenges</li> <li>• 'Doors open' with public sector to discuss ideas</li> <li>• Sharing management of projects</li> <li>• Sharing data across parties/departments/private sector</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Risk to shareholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative working across all sectors</li> <li>• Representing all age groups</li> <li>• Community buy in</li> <li>• Gap in communication between communities - solution is to make consultation have more accountability</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclination to engage with public sector on routes to engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led by community but facilitated and supported by other sectors</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure</li> <li>• Will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political disconnect</li> </ul>	
<b>Knowledge &amp; data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information data sets</li> <li>• How it might affect existing bus services</li> <li>• Knowledge of what rural needs are - data/info</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence based ideas</li> <li>• Lack of rural understanding</li> <li>• Knowledge of delivery</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information/data sets</li> </ul>
<b>Mindset &amp; approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to think beyond urban environment</li> <li>• Different place/states/priorities</li> <li>• Collaboration between partnerships</li> <li>• Fear of giving advantage/procurement rules. Less siloed thinking</li> <li>• Energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impartiality</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Ability to engage without any commercial return</li> <li>• Be open to concept of risk and accepting failure</li> <li>• Equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise and resources to make the case 'buying power'</li> <li>• Mistrust</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Feedback skewed towards negative</li> <li>• Limit bureaucracy</li> <li>• Valuing social benefits of schemes</li> <li>• Demographic challenge of community engagement - time for younger people</li> <li>• Volunteering is more informal and unstructured</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

<b>Situation and protocols</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaps in planning application</li> <li>• Time to manage</li> <li>• Agility in reaction to project changes and requirements</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Competitvity - will you potentially lose <i>out/business</i></li> <li>• Longer evaluation period for project benefits</li> <li>• Volunteering red tape/bureaucracy. Remove barriers - risk basis</li> <li>• Recruitment issue</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDPR</li> <li>• Time to manage</li> <li>• Capacity of people to volunteer - cost of living, childcare responsibilities</li> <li>• Availability of local volunteers</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention</li> <li>• Scale - can small third sector orgs manage/deliver at a large enough scale? Living/scaffolding</li> <li>• Fear of liability</li> <li>• Need to invest in volunteer development</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Influence</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand protection (post office)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community demand</li> </ul>

**Additional notes:**

- Collaboration is key - time and funding
- Rigidity of procurement process in public sector problematic
- Need consensus on what local need and priorities are - can be going in different directions
- In an ideal world...we already have a fixed rail network as a backbone and should be the basis for our pilot.