

MAKING THE CASE FOR RURAL INVESTMENT

England's rural areas are being failed, lacking the support needed to provide our countryside and coastal communities with the opportunities they need to grow and prosper.



The rural challenge

For many of the **9.7 million residents** of rural England, more than 1 in 6 of the population, mobility is restricted by a lack of recognition of the specific accessibility and connectivity challenges rural places face. Consequently, rural communities suffer with poor access to daily essentials, increasing social isolation and reducing opportunities, as well as seeing greater impacts from the cost-of-living crisis.

With **85% of England's land** mass being rural, rural places have diverse geographies, from well-connected greenbelts to remote upland, coastal and island communities. It is time to unlock the potential of this diverse range of countryside and coastal place and enhance their ability to deliver significant benefits to the wider national economic, social and environmental wellbeing.



Key areas of focus

There are six key areas of focus that England's seven Sub-national Transport Bodies believe could be transformational for mobility in rural England.

- 1. Giving recognition:** A commitment to understand, plan for and prioritise the specific needs of our rural communities and recognise the diversity of our countryside and coastal places.
- 2. Delivering infrastructure:** Delivering both physical and digital rural community and mobility infrastructure to support local service delivery and enhance rural accessibility.
- 3. Rebalancing funding:** Rural places deserve equal access to long term funding at levels that recognise the extra costs rural places face.
- 4. Co-operation:** Driving and supporting joined up working, planning and thinking between publicly funded organisations and Government departments will support integration of services across sectors and administrative boundaries.
- 5. Harnessing communities:** Providing support to provide rural communities with the skills, knowledge, tools and funding to take a lead in rural service provision that is focused on their specific needs and priorities.

- 6. Living better locally:** Using the 30-minute rural communities concept to allow rural communities to work together and share services, providing greater accessibility and stronger mobility.

Half of the rural population live in areas with poor accessibility, compared with 2% of the urban population.

46% of rural areas have access to adequate 4G coverage.

On average it takes a rural resident twice as long to access key services than urban residents.¹



¹ https://www.cla.org.uk/documents/502/Levelling_up_the_rural_economy_-_APPG_report_2022_ONLINE_pdf.pdf

Our Rural Places

Rural jobs pay less, rural homes are less affordable and the average fuel poverty gap in the deep rural settlements is triple that of urban areas. There are six key challenges investment in rural places can help tackle:

Productivity

Rural jobs pay less than urban jobs. Our rural areas contribute hugely to the national economy but could do so much more if we can drive up productivity.

Deprivation

Poverty is dispersed in rural places, with pockets of deprivation making it harder to identify in rural areas. From fuel poverty in homes and transport, rural areas are being disproportionately impacted of the cost-of-living crisis. This is exacerbated by poorer educational attainment and access to high paid jobs.

Accessibility and Connectivity

Many rural areas are digitally and physically disconnected from everyday opportunities and services including education, and health and social care.

Car Dependency

A high dependence on car travel, for both residents and visitors has resulted from a lack of travel choice, poor (and often reducing) public transport and fewer active travel networks in rural communities.

Carbon emissions:

Rural car dependency is exacerbating the challenge of tackling climate change with those living in rural areas often travelling further to access services.

Funding:

Rural places are financially left behind, unable to fund mobility solutions and increasing transport deserts.

The rural economy is worth £260billion (15% of England's output) but rural economies are 18% less productive than the national average.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Rural Powerhouse found that closing the gap would be worth up to £43billion.¹

Rural households need double the support of urban households to take them out of fuel poverty.

Rural households on lower incomes spend 47% of their earnings on rent and 12% of their disposable income on transport.²



¹ https://www.cla.org.uk/documents/502/Levelling_up_the_rural_economy_-_APPG_report_2022_ONLINE_pdf.pdf

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistical-digest-of-rural-england> (Statistical Digest of Rural England Data Tables)

Rural Benefits

Though our rural places face many challenges, their benefits to the nation are unmatched, and deserve the investment to allow them to thrive:

Net Zero and Climate Resilience

From supporting offshore, coastal and inland renewable energy generation to providing flood protection and resilience to our homes, industries and infrastructure, rural areas are pivotal to tackling the climate crisis.

Nature and Environmental Net Gain

Our rural areas will be central to the drive to deliver landscape level changes to nature and secure major environmental net gain but the new green economy that supports this change need better connectivity to reap the wider benefits.

Food Production and Resource Security

Our countryside and coastal areas provide nationally vital resources; from food and drinking water supporting the health of our communities to land and raw materials to support our industries and economy.

Tourism

Though the rural economy is more seasonal, our rural areas play a key role in our national tourism industry. In 2018, GVA from tourism in predominantly rural areas was worth an estimated £11.5 billion. Tourism accounts for 11% of employment

in rural areas but nearly a quarter in more remote rural locations.

Wellbeing

Rural places provided solace during the pandemic, with their wellbeing benefits sought by many. Around 9 out of 10 people surveyed in the People and Nature Survey for England agreed that natural spaces are good for their mental health and wellbeing. However, people need easy and affordable access to these areas to gain their benefits.



**An
estimated
3,000 rural
buses lost or
reduced in the
last 10 years.³**

**CO₂ emissions from
transport reach between
1,200 to 1,500 ktCO₂ in
some rural local authority
areas. This is significantly
higher than the UK local
authority average of
326.3 ktCO₂.⁴**

³ <https://integratedtransport.org.uk/the-time-is-right-for-free-fare-public-transport> (Foundation for Integrated Transport)

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2019> (UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics: 2005 to 2019)

How we make the case

Our rural places have been largely forgotten and disregarded in our approaches to policy-making and investment. The case for supporting rural areas is unheard and undervalued. Our centralised, city-centric system has marginalised and undervalued the benefits our rural economies generate.

They suffer the consequences of historic and systemic failings that have put less value on investing into rural communities and economies. A conventional approach for developing the economic case for investment results in rural areas being outperformed by urban areas on 'like-for-like' interventions based on journey times, trips distances and less quantum beneficiaries in rural areas. The urban bias portrayed in the conventional approach neglects rural communities and underplays the rural mobility challenges. As a result, rural communities are falling behind; not being 'levelled-up'.

The conventional approach needs to change, now. The economic benefits of proposals should be set against a separate measure of cost effectiveness of investment in rural mobility to enable comparison between both transport and non-transport proposals that support improved accessibility. This would provide equal opportunities for conventional and innovative approaches to supporting

communities to access their everyday needs that go beyond simply transport.

The diverse rural geography needs a holistic investment approach, where investment into rural mobility considers both the physical and digital provision of services closer to rural communities. However, there can be no 'one size fits all' approach for our rural places. They are unique in location, people and scale, so we need to rethink the future of rural funding. We need to apply more rounded thinking to focus on the different users who will benefit from the investment and how it contributes to overall levels of accessibility in rural areas. This will drive inclusive mobility, whether this be locally, further afield, physically or digitally.



The starting point has to be at the national level and there is an opportunity in the emerging policy to consider planning for rural places separately from urban. This needs to recognise the differences and disparity of challenges between them, including digital connectivity, poor public transport services and levels of car dependency, to name a few. The Department for Transport's anticipated Future of Transport: Rural Strategy could play a key role in how we make the case for investment in our rural places, bringing new approaches that recognise the unique challenges in our countryside and coastal areas.

Rural areas have been systematically and historically underfunded with rural authorities often going into bidding stages at a disadvantage due to urban slanted bidding criteria and lack of resources.⁵

⁵ <https://ruralfairshare.org.uk/> (Rural Fair Share Campaign)

KEY THEME	WHAT WE NEED NOW	WHAT WE NEED TO WORK TOWARDS	WHO SHOULD LEAD
Giving recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publication of the Department for Transport's rural mobility strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring rural issues are appropriately considered within emerging Local Transport Plans and Local Plans Funding for pilots on rural mobility bundles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Government to provide guidance on national plans for rural places and allow for rural mobility pilot funding opportunities Sub-National Transport Bodies (STBs) to provide a regional voice for wider planning and delivery of transport in their areas Local authorities to embed rural in their mobility and cross-sectoral policy
Delivering infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To deliver on commitments on rural digital connectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening the scope of funding to include delivery of social and community facilities (GP practices, local schools, shops, community halls etc.) alongside mobility infrastructure (including Electric Vehicle infrastructure), to increase local rural accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Government to deliver on commitments and drive cross-sectoral policy and funding supported by STBs and local government
Rebalancing funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of bid criteria to allow rural places to enter the bidding stage on an equal basis to urban places Provide guidance on how the Government's Greenbook should adapt to consider rural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering multi-year funding settlements to provide more certainty in planning and operating rural mobility Reviewing funding controls to give greater flexibility for cross sectoral use of budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Government to deliver a new approach to bidding and appraisal, and providing longer term rural funding certainty
Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-operation across public sector policy making and the development of rural mobility policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requiring cross-sectoral engagement and a duty to co-operate on the delivery of rural services and mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STBs and local government leading cross-sectoral co-operation with the Department for Transport, Department for Education, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Department of Health and Social Care.
Harnessing communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To set a clear framework for rural communities to play a greater role in the delivery of rural services, including mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide funding to support the development of local community-led rural service delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STBs to provide support guidance to community organisations to take some leadership on rural mobility.
Living better locally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the adoption of the 30-minute rural community concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop cross-sectoral policy and planning to deliver 30-minute rural communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-operation between public, private and third sector / community organisations. STBs and Local Authorities to adopt the concept into policy and guidance.