



CRC 05/09

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Rural Advocate visits Lincolnshire to learn from transport schemes tackling rural isolation

Rural communities run the risk of missing out on job opportunities and being cut off from services because of the continuing decline in local transport services.

Dr Stuart Burgess, the Government's Rural Advocate and Chair of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC), is visiting Lincolnshire on 24 and 25 February to see how public authorities are tackling isolation faced by rural locations. The visit will feed into the CRC's transport work as live evidence from rural communities.

Recent CRC studies show that rural people are becoming increasingly dependent on the car as a result of the decline in public transport services and the CRC fears that the issue will hit remote communities hard as the recession deepens.

Dr. Stuart Burgess said: "Public transport could be the lifeline for remote communities as competition for jobs increases and as more and more people have to travel to receive advice and benefits.

"Transport is a key concern for rural communities. A lack of mobility can cause real hardship. With continuing decline in local services, rural residents need to travel greater distances and because of significant gaps in public transport much more of their travel depends on the car."

In Lincolnshire, the issue is being tackled head on by local authorities, who are running on-demand public transport links in conjunction with scheduled services to meet the travel needs of everyone in the county, not just those in busy urban centres and towns.

Devised and operated by Lincolnshire's rural transport partnership, the local authorities and the community rail partnership, the dial-a-ride service has been a great success with people in remote and rural areas, not least because of its flexibility.

The CallConnect service operates from 7am to 7pm, taking people where they need to go, when they need to.

Passengers ring a travel hotline to book their lift giving between seven days and two-hours' notice and, subject to availability, the CallConnect minibus turns up to collect them.

Dr Burgess will be seeing the service in action on 25 February in Horncastle, where CallConnect serves around 90 villages and hamlets around the market town. The service connects with the wider rail and bus network across Lincolnshire.

Dr Burgess concluded: "This is exactly the kind of innovative, bespoke solution that we would like to see more public-sector partnerships rolling out across the country to tackle issues of isolation in remote locations. It provides thought-provoking insight into the possibilities for the future of rural transport."

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Notes to editors:

1 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1st October 2006 following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic underperformance.

We have three key functions:

- Advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- Expert advisor: providing evidence-based, objective advice to government and others; and
- Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk