



CRC 10/08

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Government watchdog calls for urgent new solutions for rural transport

Today (Monday, September 15, 2008), the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is publishing five studies putting the spotlight on transport challenges facing rural areas, ranging from accessibility to key services, the effects of technological change and implications of road pricing. Rural people travel around 10,000 miles each year compared with around 7,000 for all residents, and use of cars is significantly higher in rural areas.

Graham Russell, Director of Practice at the CRC said: "Transport is a key concern for rural communities. With a 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 is by car. What's more, rising fuel prices are hitting rural areas hardest, especially less well-off households where a higher proportion of income goes on essentials including transport costs. Greater car use in rural areas also contributes to higher overall carbon production rate per person than in urban areas.

"The studies we are publishing today provide a much-needed reminder of the critical transport challenges that face rural communities and the urgent need to find new solutions. More efficient and environmentally beneficial ways for rural people to move around in our rural areas now need to be found. Community collaboration must play a crucial part, and there are already excellent examples of initiatives taking place around the country some of which are highlighted in the studies.

"We are anxious for these studies to provide thought-provoking insight into the possibilities for the future of rural transport and to stimulate further interest and discussion — one of the studies, for example, suggests the possibility of 'rural life without carbon'. We want to position transport at the heart of the debate on climate change and the creation of sustainable rural communities. As part of our continuing dialogue with policy-makers across government we will take forward these contributions to ensure that transport policies and practices take account of the needs of rural communities."

The series of studies or 'think-pieces' comprises:

- 'The contribution of transport to sustainable rural communities' — in collaboration with Transport Research Laboratory.
- 'Sustainable rural accessibility' — is it really possible? — in collaboration with Integrated Transport Planning.
- 'Rural life without carbon' — in collaboration with MVA Consultancy.
- 'The implications of technological change for rural transport' — in collaboration with University of West of England.
- 'The potential impacts of road pricing on rural areas' — in collaboration with Universities of Plymouth and Aberdeen.

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For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for editors:

1. A special seminar is being held in London on Friday 26 September bringing together experts from transport, environmental and rural affairs backgrounds.
2. The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 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 under-performance.

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

Transport 'think-pieces' – summaries

The contribution of transport to sustainable rural communities

This think-piece looks in particular at the relationship between recent legislation affecting rural transport provision and other relevant policy areas. It considers emerging social trends and the barriers relating to mobility and accessibility in rural areas which impinge on social inclusion and the quality of life for rural communities. A range of case studies is described that help to assist with the delivery of new approaches to transport solutions in rural areas.

It is observed that recent reports from government about long-term links between transport, sustainable development and climate change largely ignore rural issues, notably how emission reductions will impact on rural areas. Concern is expressed regarding future funding in the face of the withdrawal in recent years of a number of schemes which were directed towards improving rural transport provision.

The importance of accessibility to key services has important implications for the sustainability of rural communities. Public transport provision as a means of improving accessibility to these services must form part of the policy mix otherwise dependence on the private car will not diminish.

Some of the barriers preventing a more sustainable transport system are described, such as distance, the costs of transport, road safety (real and perceived), physical severance (e.g. a motorway) and lack of adequate information about the travel options. The reliability and convenience of alternatives are often not sufficiently attractive to encourage people to relinquish use of the car.

These factors have an effect on the environmental quality of rural areas with traffic noise, visual intrusion and pollution on the increase.

Tourism is also an important factor in many rural areas with as many as nine out of 10 visitors arriving by private car in some cases. Nevertheless, rural areas should contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions in order to meet government targets.

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/thinkingaboutruraltransportthecontributionoftransporttosustainableluralcommunities

Sustainable rural accessibility – is it really possible?

This think-piece challenges the car dependency prevalent in rural areas. It considers the policy background, including recent changes to policy delivery in rural areas, and the broad role of both sustainable transport measures and accessibility planning in improving the efficiency and sustainability of rural communities.

A variety of public transport solutions is explored together with the role that Smarter Choices can play in changing travel behaviour. The paper includes a review of good practice examples of partnership working leading to sustainable rural transport solutions, with evidence drawn from both the literature and discussions with practitioners. The variety of schemes highlighted include: flexibly routed bus services, car clubs, community transport schemes, and, school and employer travel plans.

The paper concludes that, for those without a car or members of households without access to the car, there is the potential for worsening isolation and social exclusion. In addition the paper posits that accessibility partnerships are a positive way of enabling improved rural accessibility, providing they are delivered in an effective way.

Features that help to make up a successful partnership are highlighted alongside barriers that can hinder their development and implementation. Finally, attention is drawn to inadequate joint working across service delivery agents, poor engagement with communities and lack of funding, as key barriers in the achievement of sustainable rural accessibility.

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/thinkingaboutruraltransportsustainable rural accessibility is it really possible

Rural life without carbon

This paper attempts to model the contribution that different transport interventions could make towards attaining the government's target of a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 (there is also an interim goal of reducing emissions by 20% by 2020).

The analysis is based on two actual rural settlements (one sparse located in a deep rural area and one less sparse satellite settlement close to a market town), using estimates of 1990 carbon emissions.

The modelling uses three scenarios:

- 'do nothing' based on current transport growth predictions and DfT predictions of vehicle fuel efficiency improvements;
- enhanced vehicle and fuel technology as presented in the King Review of Low Carbon Cars; and
- a package of measures incorporating the King Review predictions to 2030 (but not the potential 2050 zero carbon transport scenario) coupled with a range of interventions to encourage travel reduction and modal shift.

Factors taken into account are location, demographics, socio-economic characteristics, local facilities, transport links and transport use. Emphasis is on personal travel, including inward bound trips. The effects of tourism are included and show this can be a significant influence on the carbon footprint.

To counter the possibility that carbon free vehicles may not be universal by 2050, a range of additional measures to reduce travel such as increased teleworking, food deliveries to the settlements replacing individual shopping trips, more mobile services (e.g. healthcare), improved local education provision coupled with a further series of initiatives to change modal split (including visitors) amongst which are incentives to increase walking and cycling and small-scale local public transport improvements.

The analysis concludes that neither community will meet its target for transport carbon reductions when transport is considered in isolation from other possible carbon reduction measures such as zero-carbon electricity generation.

It is also pointed out that voluntary behavioural change alone is unlikely to bring about the desired effects and that there will additionally be a need for a series of 'sticks' (e.g. carbon allowances) to influence the desired outcomes.

These factors have an effect on the environmental quality of rural areas with traffic noise, visual intrusion and pollution on the increase.

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/thinkingaboutruraltransportrurallifewithoutcarbon

The implications of technological change for rural transport

This contribution examines the likely impacts of emerging technologies on transport and related sectors over the next 15 to 20 years and how transport can adapt to the demands of climate change, including the avoidance of the need to travel.

Topics covered include the implications of alternative fuels, how developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and broadband may affect the need for travel and use of new technologies in the provision of public transport. The current rural transport context is described starting with a discussion on what is 'rurality'.

The car is expected to remain the dominant means of transport over the forthcoming 15 years or so with changes in technology seeing a movement away from reliance on fossil fuels to greater use of low-carbon cars. The short to medium term is likely to see continued efficiency improvements in existing technology coupled with increasing adoption of alternative fuels (such as Liquid Petroleum Gas and Compressed Natural Gas). This will increase the cost of new vehicles but reduce running costs. This raises a question about affordability for those people on lower incomes, pending the appearance of these vehicles on the second-hand market and particularly if accompanied by increases in fuel prices.

In the rather longer term, alternative fuel technologies will assume more significance in the form of biofuels, electricity and hydrogen (the latter leading to 'fuel cell' vehicles, subject to the necessary technical development).

The use of new fuels will depend on the operating conditions. Electric vehicles are currently more suited to shorter distances in an urban environment but improvements in battery and other technology could alter this picture. Hybrid vehicles are available and more adaptable to longer journeys.

The report outlines the potential benefits and disadvantages of the various fuel options. An expansion in the use of biofuels has wider implications for rural areas. There will be competition between the use of land for food production and the growing of crops for manufacturing the fuel but opportunities to create employment through biofuel production. Production of biogas (from for example animal waste) is growing in certain countries and has the potential for localised/community production. Rural areas could become net exporters of fuel and so gain economically as a result.

The report concludes that a 30-year timeframe is probably too short to see a single major change in transport technology. More likely the period will witness a series of simultaneous technological advancements.

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/thinkingaboutruraltransporttheimplicationsoftechnologicalchangeformruraltransport

The potential impacts of road pricing on rural areas

This paper considers the impacts that road pricing might have on rural areas which it says have been largely neglected, the debate having focussed in the past on urban areas and inter-urban corridors where congestion is more of a problem.

Although rural motorists might expect to pay less than their urban counterparts, especially if combined with a reduction in fuel duty, it is stressed that this will partly depend upon the type of road pricing scheme concerned. There will be 'first' order impacts related directly to the costs of motoring and 'second' order (indirect) impacts such as house prices and quality of life measures (e.g. tranquility, rural vitality). The impacts are also likely to vary between different types of rural areas and various social groups.

An important consideration for any road pricing scheme is whether it is intended to be 'revenue neutral' or 'revenue raising'. A neutral scheme would aim to redistribute the amounts raised amongst those responsible for the costs of say, pollution, and should mean a transfer of the amount paid by rural to urban motorists.

A revenue raising scheme would involve an overall additional charge levied on motorists (as in London) with the money raised being invested in additional transport (e.g. public transport).

Not only should consideration be given to people who live in the countryside but also those who travel to the area, notably for leisure purposes.

The potential impacts of the types of schemes on different types of area are detailed.

Finally the paper calls for the government to ensure any analysis of schemes incorporates rural proofing and so redress the emphasis that has previously been paid to urban and inter-urban corridors.

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