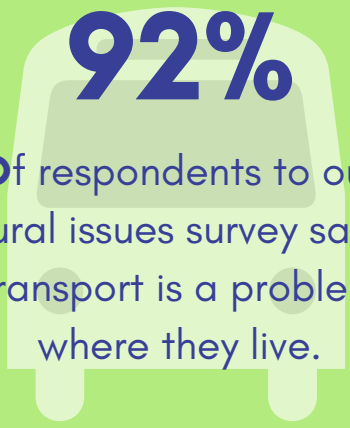


Rural Transport: An Opportunity

An integrated and affordable rural transport system is the key to delivering **economic growth**, improved **health and wellbeing**, reduced **carbon emissions**, and **sustainable communities**.

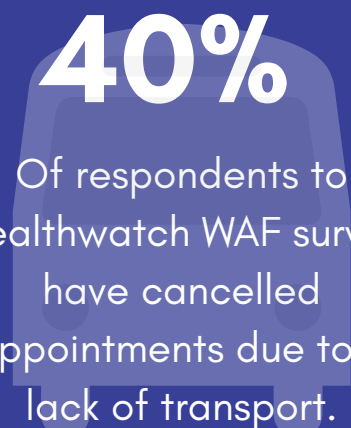
Yet, rural people in Cumbria consistently describe a transport system which:

- Is **lacking, or non-existent** in places
- **Operates at the wrong times** to be useful
- Is **unaffordable**, particularly for those making journeys encompassing multiple changes.
- **Lacks integration** with other transport services
- Is **unreliable**
- Is **inaccessible** or hard to use.



92%

Of respondents to our rural issues survey said transport is a problem where they live.



40%

Of respondents to Healthwatch WAF survey have cancelled appointments due to a lack of transport.



50%

Rural households pay nearly 50% more on travel on average than their urban counterparts.

Transport is the key

Economic Growth

“ To get the bus from Kendal to Brockhole where I did a summer job I had to get a bus into the town centre (£1.70) then another bus from the bus station (£9.50) (single) which was about 15% of what I was being paid for a day's work. ”

Rural people are being prevented from accessing employment, or getting to work on time with knock-on effects for businesses' recruitment. Transport costs reduce disposable income, impacting the local economy.

- **Over 30%** of rural LSOAs in Cumbria are in the top 10% of areas in England with the worst access to employment. Decreasing travel times to the nearest employment centre by 1% can reduce employment deprivation by **0.91%**.
- Travel costs **50% more** and uses **a higher percentage** of disposable income (12.3% versus 9.9%) in rural versus urban households. These costs are straining households with knock-on effects for spending in local businesses.

Lowered economic inactivity. More talent. Greater support for local businesses.

Health & Wellbeing

“ I had the occasion where I had to call an ambulance to go through to Carlisle Hospital for a heart attack [...] when it was time to be released, because I'm on my own, I've got no family close by, I haven't got a lot of friends that actually drive now because of their age and their own health it did actually cost me £60 to get a taxi back from the hospital. ”

A lack of transport is limiting access to healthcare and contributing to social isolation.

- Transport deprivation leads to poor access to medical treatment and missed appointments. **40%** of respondents surveyed by Westmorland & Furness Healthwatch had missed an appointment due to transport issues, with an estimated cost to the NHS of **£2300** for this sample alone.
- Transport is linked to mental wellbeing in rural areas. Loneliness increases by **5%** with every 20% drop in satisfaction with public transport services.

Fewer missed appointments. Greater mental well being. Reduced social isolation.

Transport is the key

Rural young people

“My child travels to their secondary school on a very limited public bus service. The timings of the bus often means at some times of the year they have to wait an hour after school to even start their bus journey home, and in the mornings they have to start their journey extremely early to ensure they get to school. [...] If my child misses a bus by 5 minutes [...] my child could be left standing at night, in the dark at a bus stop for an hour alone”

Rural young people are being prevented from accessing education and training opportunities with many leaving the county as a result.

- In Cumbria, **over 30%** of rural LSOAs are in the top 10% of areas in England with the worst access to education.
- **48.8%** Of Cumberland residents and **26.5%** of Westmorland & Furness residents live in areas with a high risk of transport-related social exclusion, ranking **2nd** and **28th** respectively out of all Combined Authorities in England for overall TRSE risk

Lowered outward migration. Improved talent retention. More skilled workers.

Net zero and the environment

“It prevents me from making sustainable choices and using public transport as often as I would like, as there simply aren't enough services, at the right times to fit in with commitments and to avoid making journeys too time-consuming to be realistic”

A lack of transport options is forcing car reliance, increasing congestion and moving against net zero targets.

- Most isolated rural areas make **17%** more journeys in cars/vans than those in urban areas and have a **54% higher mileage** when they travel. 53.9% of economically active people in Cumbria commute by car, compared to 44.5% nationally.
- If every person in Great Britain switched one car trip per month to the bus, this would save 2 million tonnes of CO_{2e} by 2030.

Reduced car dependency. Increased active travel. Lowered emissions.

Five ideas for ACTION

1

Make rural issues a central consideration in transport policy, not an afterthought.

Rural proof transport policy and consider rural needs from the outset.

2

Use data to build intuition into the transport system.

Diversify the service offer and plan services around demand.

3

Use Mayoral powers to develop an integrated transport offer.

Join-up services, ticketing, and timetabling.

4

Hold operators accountable.

Develop clear delivery standards and reduce reliance on a single operator.

5

Ensure affordable transport for all.

Expand fare support and introduce targeted discount schemes.

Ideas for ACTion

Make rural issues a central consideration in transport policy, not an afterthought.

- **Consult and collaborate:** Recognise that the challenges facing rural communities are unique and commit to engaging in true consultation and collaboration with rural communities and the organisations who support them to understand the issues they face.
- **Clear and transparent delivery plans:** Set clear rural transport outcomes and publish progress against them, including service reliability, journey times, access to services, and levels of transport-related social exclusion.
- **Long-term vision:** Use the Local Transport Plan to lead the way on transport innovation for rural regions. Commit to a long-term funding plan for rural transport which protects and supports non-statutory services operating in areas where fixed-route buses are not viable and provides smaller operators and community transport services with the funding certainty needed to expand and plan ahead.
- **Explore alternative funding avenues:** Investigate possible means of obtaining additional funding to support a sustainable rural transport system, including a potential road user levy.

Use data to build intuition into the transport system.

- **Analyse demand:** Use data to understand travelling habits of residents, including where people typically travel and what times. Use this data to build timetables which get people to where they need to be, at the times they need to be there.
- **Increase frequency:** Design timetables around the needs of those who depend on buses the most. Introduce early/late services along commuter routes to support access to employment and promote the rural evening economy.
- **Diversify the transport offer:** Use Mayoral powers and funding to consider how a more diverse transport offer, including demand-responsive transport and community transport, may help to service areas/operating hours where a service may be critical for access to employment, healthcare etc., for the small user base it serves.
- **Promote active travel:** Review the active travel strategy to frame active travel not only as a healthy and environmentally-friendly alternative, but as a vital link in the transport system where other services may not be viable. Consider where the provision of safe active travel routes may solve the 'first/last leg problem' and prioritise their development. Ensure bus services provide options for transporting bicycles wherever possible.

Ideas for ACTion

Use Mayoral powers to develop an integrated transport offer.

- **Integrated ticketing:** Integrated ticketing systems would ensure rural passengers do not have to pay more simply because they need to use multiple buses or operators to complete a single journey.
- **Include non-statutory services:** Integrate the full transport system, including community transport operators wherever possible to support vital services in areas where public transport is neither provided or not commercially viable.
- **Ensure continuous onwards travel:** An integrated timetable which offers continuous onwards travel wherever possible will promote better transport links and encourage more people out of their cars when making longer journeys.

Hold operators accountable.

- **Enhance trust in the transport system:** Use Mayoral powers around Enhanced Bus Partnerships and/or franchising to agree operating standards and expectations with providers. Engage in monitoring and evaluation of compliance with stronger repercussions for those not meeting contractual obligations.
- **Diversify the operator market:** Promote healthy competition in the supply chain by supporting smaller operators to bid for contracts, helping to reduce over-reliance on a single operator and improve service quality.

Ensure affordable transport for all.

- **Maintain and expand subsidised fares:** Consider an expanded fare cap for rural routes with low commercial viability but high social need. Ensure fare caps account for passengers who must make multiple changes to complete a single journey so rural residents are not penalised for their remote location.
- **Target transport-related social exclusion:** Provide targeted support for those most at risk of being excluded from education or employment due to transport costs, including discounted travel, sponsored places, and day passes for those travelling to education centres.
- **Support young people:** Recognise that transport costs can prevent young people from accessing employment, education and training, worsen social isolation and mental health difficulties, and contribute to youth outward migration. Develop targeted travel schemes or packages that help young people access opportunities and contribute to the local economy, including youth bus pass schemes.