

Briefing: Defra's work on Rural Transport

July 2014

The Energy and Transport Team within Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU) works to identify the impacts of transport policies; gather and analyse evidence to inform policy influencing; engage with rural stakeholders; influence DfT to ensure that rural needs and interests are reflected in its policies; and monitor and evaluate policy outcomes. Current priority work areas include:

Working Group on Rural Transport for Young People:

The 2012 Youth Select Committee report, 'Transport and Young People' identified particular barriers to access in rural areas. As part of the Government's response to the report, Defra and DfT have established a joint Working Group to bring together community and commercial transport operators and other interested parties to develop practical, achievable, sector-led solutions to the problems identified in the Report. The Group is due to report its findings during 2014.

Rural Transport Reference Group:

Defra supports the important contribution of community-led transport schemes in rural areas. Through our Reference Group, we meet regularly with DfT and other Government departments, the Community Transport Association (CTA), Wheels to Work Association (W2WA), ACRE, RCCs, and other parties to discuss key issues facing the sector and look for practical ways to improve transport provision in rural areas. The Reference Group's current work programme is focussed on two priorities:

1. *Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT)* - access to healthcare is a significant issue for those without access to private transport and is a core use of rural community transport, especially for older and more vulnerable people. Despite this, there is little or no national strategic overview of access to health appointments for patients in rural communities.

Through analysis of existing local guidance and by drawing on Reference Group members' own experiences, we have developed a clearer picture of the issue. The Reference Group is now considering existing models of effective transport provision for health, with a view to producing an updated resource to encourage partnerships between Clinical Commissioning Groups, transport operators and local authorities.

2. *Wheels to Work* – the Reference Group has also undertaken work to build a more complete picture of support for, and barriers to, Wheels to Work schemes. The Group carried out a survey of local authorities' knowledge of, and engagement with, W2W and has used the contacts established thereby to disseminate the new Wheels to Work Handbook and toolkit.

Community Transport Association (CTA):

Defra believes that the CTA is an important ally in helping Government to encourage locally based solutions to transport problems. DfT provides financial support for the work of the CTA as the advocacy body representing community transport schemes in the UK. As part of their funding agreement with the Department for Transport, the Community Transport Association (CTA) produce periodic 'State of the Sector' reports which have provided useful intelligence on the community transport sector.

In 2012, Defra provided additional funding to allow the CTA to produce its report with a rural perspective in order to better understand some of the specific issues facing community transport operators in rural areas. These insights have been valuable in providing a snapshot of the possibilities and problems faced by rural CT operators. Defra and DfT are currently considering with the CTA how to reflect the rural initiatives and issues identified above in a new State of the Sector report.

Wheels to Work Association (W2WA):

W2W schemes allow people living in isolated rural areas to access education, employment and training through the loan of private transport (usually a scooter or moped). We work closely with the national W2W Co-ordinator as she focusses on increasing the number of W2W schemes and developing sustainability and mentoring tools for existing schemes.

Defra and DfT have in principal agreed to jointly fund the W2WA in 2014/15. Subject to final agreement on a work programme, key outputs for the W2WA this year will be extending the number of schemes, developing tools and resources for existing schemes, and collecting robust data which demonstrates the economic and social impact of W2W.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF):

Under the LSTF local transport authorities in England were invited to apply for funding to support the cost of a range of sustainable travel measures. In total, DfT awarded £600m for 96 packages to 77 authorities to deliver their schemes between 2011 and 2015.

Through the LSTF, Government has funded more than 20 W2W schemes as well as numerous other projects of benefit to rural communities and businesses. For example, in Cornwall, LSTF money is being used to achieve significant modal shift in a rural area through frequent services and targeted promotion; in Hereford, projects are underway to improve rural access through public transport improvements and car sharing options; and in Lowestoft, LSTF money has delivered rural demand responsive transport services.

A further £100 million capital funding for the Fund has been made available through the Local Growth Fund for 2015 to 2016. Local authorities were invited to bid and successful schemes were recently announced: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/local-sustainable-transport-fund-2015-to-2016>