

## UoH SMU Roundtable Mobility Hubs

This report documents the second in a series of roundtable discussions in 2023/24 commissioned and sponsored by Transport East<sup>1</sup> for the Rural Transport Learning Network and organised by the Smart Mobility Unit at the University of Hertfordshire.

The series builds on earlier roundtables<sup>2</sup> hosted by the University of Hertfordshire between 2020 and 2022 to address the shortage of research and policy on transport outside cities and in rural areas.

The format for this roundtable was a two hour online meeting in Microsoft Teams and consisted of presentations by speakers followed by questions and discussion, both verbally and via the chat function. One participant emailed their observations in lieu of attending in person. Some of these were included on their behalf by the chair.

### 1.0 Participants

There were 22 participants. Sectors represented were: sub-national and local government, manufacturing, technology/innovation, transport consultancy, academic research, community group and non-governmental organisations. Stephen Joseph chaired the discussion.

The following abbreviations indicate the sector making comments:

ACAD Academic

NGO Non-governmental organisation

CONS Consultant

CC County council or unitary authority

COM Community group

REGG Regional transport body

MNF Manufacturing sector

INNOV Innovation sector

[CHAT] denotes written contributions made in real time during the spoken dialogue.

### 2.0 Theme

The theme for this roundtable was the future of mobility hubs outside cities. Topics to consider were:

- experience in developing mobility hubs, especially outside cities
- lessons from the work so far and future plans
- ways forward for communities, operators and local authorities in developing mobility hubs in areas outside cities.

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<sup>1</sup> Transport East runs the Rural Mobility Centre of Excellence

<https://www.transporeast.org.uk/rural-mobility-centre-of-excellence/>

<sup>2</sup> Reports from previous roundtables hosted by the Smart Mobility Unit in 2020 and 2022 are available at the University of Hertfordshire website <https://www.herts.ac.uk/study/schools-of-study/life-and-medical-sciences/business-support-and-consultancy/smart-mobility-unit/Roundtable-research>

### 3.0 Summary

The meeting heard from five speakers covering diverse approaches to mobility hubs. Participants responded with questions and comments.

ComoUK specialises in shared transport and has developed standards, guidance and accreditation for mobility hubs. Hubs in rural areas with dispersed populations face particular challenges but CoMoUK's case studies include successful community-led rural schemes. A new study deploying 'pop-up' hubs around Scotland will develop an understanding of what works best in different settings.

Two sub-national transport bodies in England have developed guidance and support for local authorities to create mobility hubs. England's Economic Heartland's business case guidance enables local authority partners to design mobility hubs according to location and make a strong case for funding. Midlands Connect has developed a mobility hub toolkit and piloted the resulting guidance with two county councils. A competition culminated in a new digital platform for a rural community to share private electric charging points and electric vehicles. Hope Valley Climate Action played a key role in promoting the online platform and training local people to use it.

John Austin presented a methodology for finding locations for potential mobility hubs using mapping software. The approach can help select options with a strong sense of place, with services and infrastructure as well as transport links.

Matthew Kendrick explained how the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community brings rural communities together so they can influence legislation, the development of transport policy and get involved in design and delivery of projects. First-hand experience for policy makers is invaluable for creating buy-in so in-person meetings are held at rural hubs.

Commercial viability was mentioned by most speakers and throughout the discussion. While financial viability can seem like a barrier for mobility hubs in deep rural locations, on closer inspection some community centres are already acting as rural mobility hubs without being flagged as such.

There is a need to find ways to attribute outcomes to mobility hubs, both to make the case for funding but also to learn what works and what doesn't. In rural areas some important outcomes will not be directly financially quantifiable, such as better access to health and education or reduced social isolation.

There was a strong consensus that rural communities are highly diverse and innovative. Successful projects can often be tracked back to key organisations or individuals in the community. Studying who has been instrumental in establishing successful rural mobility projects could be valuable.

The rural mobility hub concept needs to be 'sold' to decision makers and communities alike. CoMoUK and SRITC offer free online and in person forums, meet-ups and 'try-outs' for decision makers. However, more could be done to make the concept more widely understood. Standard signage might also be worth exploring.

Rural areas often suffer from a tension between the transport needs of residents and visitors. European case studies can suggest ways to meet visitors' needs and serve local people. How car parking should be managed was also a topic of discussion.

The meeting touched on various challenges for local government: skills shortages for developing web-based platforms; wasteful competitive bidding for funding; access to revenue funding for sustaining projects in the long term.

To conclude, some priorities for action and future research were noted:

- simple promotion of rural mobility hubs to increase public understanding
- track the outcomes of 'pop-up' mobility hubs
- find ways to attribute impacts and outcomes to mobility hubs
- look at what worked and what didn't work and be honest about failures.

## 4.0 Presentations and Discussion

The following speakers circulated papers in advance:

- Robin Tyne, ComoUK
- Abigail Nichols, England's Economic Heartland – Making a business case for mobility hubs
- Renee van Baar, Midlands Connect – The future of rural mobility
- John Austin, FIT Fellow – Data issues around a methodology for identifying where potential mobility hubs should be located
- Matthew Kendrick, Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community

### 4.1 CoMoUK

Robin Tyne presented on behalf of CoMoUK, the national charity, promoting the social and environmental benefits of shared transport in the UK. CoMoUK has significant experience in Scotland following membership of the Share North<sup>3</sup> project with European partners. This led to CoMoUK developing freely accessible standards and guidance for mobility hubs. A large number of mobility hubs in the UK are already built or underway.

A mobility hub usually includes components of active travel, shared transport and place making. CoMoUK's standards cover seven types of hub, of which four are especially applicable to settings outside cities: New Housing, Suburban, Rural and Tourism.

#### Challenges and opportunities

There are a number of challenges to developing rural mobility hubs. Political attention is focussed firmly on urban areas. Rural areas have highly diverse needs. Funding, especially revenue funding for ongoing maintenance, is a challenge. Car clubs or bike share schemes which succeed in urban settings would never be commercially viable in rural settings. However there are ways to address this. The wider political context is very important. New hubs need political 'buy-in' and support from a favourable local transport policy environment, for example slower speeds and pavements for small rural lanes.

CoMoUK's experience suggests there are many opportunities which support the development of rural mobility hubs. Community-led schemes work very well. A good example is the Tisbury e-car club<sup>4</sup> in Wiltshire where a local community energy company<sup>5</sup> has cross-subsidised an electric car club for local residents. The Energy Saving Trust<sup>6</sup> funded e-bike clubs in Scotland for over five years.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://share-north.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tisburyelectriccarclub.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://nadderce.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/grants-and-loans/ebike-grant-fund/>

The cost of living crisis is an important factor in rural mobility hubs. Liftshare and car-pooling offer opportunities to make use of existing cars in the rural community. They can sometimes allow families to give up their second car.

Digital demand responsive transport (DDRT) is a growing field. PINGO<sup>7</sup> is a DDRT service operated by The Routing Company<sup>8</sup> for Borders Buses in and around Berwick. This scheme has a large geographical coverage, the majority of which previously had no fixed bus services. The scheme provides flexible connections to the new railway station at Reston<sup>9</sup> on the East Coast Main Line, opened in 2022.

DDRT operators are busy exploring the potential of service aggregation, combining transport services for different passenger groups (school, patient transport, delivery services). These can be linked into rural mobility hubs.

Density is key and some schemes which are not financially viable in a very rural area can have more success on the edges of cities and larger towns in semi-rural areas.

### Accreditation

CoMoUK has developed an accreditation scheme for mobility hubs in the UK, including a special accreditation for community mobility hubs. This recognises the special value of community-led hubs which usually lack the benefit of developer funding.

Maybole<sup>10</sup> is a small town in South West Scotland with a population of 4500. It sits near a railway line with an hourly service to Ayr and has some fixed bus services. There is a thriving community centre with a crèche, café, foodbank, church, classes, community minibus and e-bike loan. So it has many of the components of a mobility hub, only lacking signage and way-finding for people not aware of the mobility services on offer. This is a common problem for community hubs. There is now funding to extend some of the services to tourists and include electric vehicle charging facilities.

There are many schemes similar to Maybole.

### Pop-up mobility hubs

CoMoUK has secured funding to develop two portable 'pop-up' mobility hubs which incorporate bike stands and a bike repair and maintenance station, seating, planting and signposting to nearby services such as bike sharing and bike libraries. These will be deployed using a 'try/modify' approach to see what works and what doesn't. Pop-up hubs will be moved around areas of transport poverty and deprivation in Scotland, including rural areas. In 2023/24 the focus will be on Inverness and the Forth Valley. Open days will be publicised for visitors. CoMoUK is very keen to collaborate and have input from any interested parties.

Questions and Comments

### HUBS AS CATALYSTS

CONS4 [CHAT]: Is there evidence (yet) of rural mobility hubs **leading to development** of services rather than existing services gathering around them or to enhancing use of services?

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bordersbuses.co.uk/pingo-berwickshire>

<sup>8</sup> <https://theroutingcompany.com/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/reston-station-set-to-open-in-may-2022/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.regeneratingmaybole.scot/about/>

Robin Tyne: Generally at the moment mobility hubs are based on existing services and seek to enhance them. In time, mobility hubs may be catalysts for a virtuous circles of change.

CONS1 [CHAT]: We have an unofficial e-cargo bike hub in Hebden Bridge which has a number of different users both voluntary sector and for delivery for shops. I think this works in Ilkley too to bring more people using e-cargo bikes.

#### SIGNAGE

CONS6 [CHAT]: How about agreeing a sign for OS and Google maps to denote a mobility hub?

CONS4 [CHAT]: ...and a standard road sign?

#### KEY COMMUNITY PLAYERS

NGO5 [CHAT]: How much insight do we have on the people within the communities who are driving the development of hubs? Are there people long standing residents or newer to the community? What common skills and knowledge do they share? How do we cross-fertilise their knowledge on wider (pan UK) basis?

Robin Tyne [CHAT]: We run a free quarterly forum for community bike and car share (car club) schemes as well as mobility hubs - this is a good resource for groups from around the UK to share knowledge and learning. A key role for CoMoUK is to provide a regular convening space for stakeholders actively developing shared transport schemes. We run regular webinars and forums for authorities and members. We also have a range of case studies<sup>11</sup> of community schemes.

But yes it would be interesting to know more about the people involved and what makes the schemes a success (in terms of people).

#### MARKETING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CC8 [CHAT]: Are there any plans for CoMoUK to publish guidance on how to market/promote the concept of mobility hubs? Local authorities are well placed to deliver components on the ground, but without the ability to 'sell' the principle of hubs to the general public and provide a level of education, these components can sit in isolation and not fulfill their potential to encourage shared/multi-modal travel.

Robin Tyne [CHAT]: That's a good point - we don't have any specific guidance but it is mentioned within our guidance on mobility hubs<sup>12</sup>.

There are lots of guides<sup>13</sup> from Sustrans and others about making the case/bringing the community with you for wider active travel/sustainable travel schemes, which will apply for mobility hubs, but definitely worth considering developing something specific for mobility hubs.

CC8 [CHAT]: Thanks. In my experience, marketing is very much a forgotten element in the hub process. Funding is prominently allocated to the delivery of the physical attributes but without the product 'sell' there's a real danger that hubs sit in isolation. It's particularly relevant to rural hubs as residents don't have the same exposure as urban dwellers to new ways of travelling. Local communities are a good way to 'spread the word' but they can lack resource and knowledge of how to promote schemes. Community engagement may work in a small village but in larger market towns not everybody engages with their respective town/parish council. It would great to see a

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.como.org.uk/community-car-sharing> and <https://www.como.org.uk/community-bike-sharing>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.como.org.uk/documents/comouk-mobility-hubs-toolkit>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.showcase-sustrans.org.uk/guidance/> and <https://www.showcase-sustrans.org.uk/news/community-engagement-behaviour-change-in-places-for-everyone/>

funding condition where a proportion is 'ring fenced' to promote what mobility hubs are and their benefits, as many local transport authorities don't have dedicated budget for this. I think we need to take a more commercial view and sell hubs like any business would sell their product.

Robin Tyne [CHAT]: Yes that's true. We did some work last year with some influencers to promote shared transport in Scotland and that worked very well. But that needs funding as you say.

CONS1 [CHAT]: One of the successful models for engagement I've seen in demand responsive transport is where a community transport provider has been involved. I expect it would be a good idea to get community transport involved in hubs.

## 4.2 Making a business case for mobility hubs

Abigail Nichols is a transport lead at England's Economic Heartland (EEH). This is a sub-national transport body serving 13 local authorities from Swindon to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire south to Hertfordshire. With a population of 5 million, the region includes a large and diverse geography with shire counties and many rural areas. The role of EEH is to develop a transport strategy for the region, provide an evidence base to support local authorities, prioritise regional infrastructure and develop strategy.

EEH has developed practical support and guidance for local authorities to build business cases for mobility hubs. EEH wanted to understand the challenges faced by partners and found that they wanted very practical guidance. This covers the existing guidance from HM Treasury, case studies and next steps, plus a guide to further information and sources of funding.

Three place types in the guidance cover a good range of locations found in the region outside cities: Rural Village, Rural Station and Peri-Urban. Detailed case studies have been developed for each location type. The Rural Village example is assumed to have a main road with a low frequency bus service to a rural town or a major conurbation. It is largely residential and has a village shop, primary school and a pub, but typically quite rural. The Rural Station example is set on the edge of a market town centre, with semi-frequent bus services, possibly with a bus stop serving the train station. The town would have more shops than the rural village, maybe a GP surgery and coffee shop. The Peri-Urban case study reflects the outer areas of EEH's towns and cities. We know that one size does not fit all so even within these categories there will be differences in services and facilities.

Within each place type there is a description of each area, a vision for what a mobility hub could deliver, an outline of the needs of the area, the problems to be solved and a statement of the need for intervention. There is also a set of components for the mobility hub which would be scalable from basic services in a very rural setting to a more extensive offer in a peri-urban location with higher density. The model also covers delivery models, roles and responsibilities, funding sources and also risks and dependencies in each of these settings.

The new components that a mobility hub could bring to an area include: community car club, e-bike hire, liftshare, infrastructure at the hub plus lighting and other things to make it more attractive for people to walk or cycle to the mobility hub.

The role of the business case guidance is to take what is already available in terms of transport appraisal and try and apply it to mobility hubs in a proportionate manner according to location type. It is sometimes hard to fit things to the business case guidance if they are innovative or at very different scales. So this is a practical tool to take people through the process step by step, help them to consider the right questions and do the best possible job of complying with DfT guidance. We know there are challenges for more rural areas in terms of making a strong case at lower population densities.

There are a number of challenges the guidance aims to address, particularly quantifying the non-financial benefits. The goal is to make it easier to identify the wider social benefits of mobility hubs in areas of lower density and bring these into the narrative. It is also important to collect evidence from existing good practice at emerging successful mobility hubs.

The guidance has an optioneering diagram for mobility hubs. This supports decision makers with a comprehensive logic map which the user navigates from start to finish to produce a business case. High level strategic objectives (economic growth, health and wellbeing, net zero, enhanced built and natural environment) flow through scheme objectives to assessment components and assessment factors.

The big challenge is to quantify impacts for mobility hubs and this is not always straightforward. The guidance therefore provides signposts to the right tools to draw upon for each of the elements of a mobility hub. There is a lot of applicable guidance, including the government Transport Analysis Group's<sup>14</sup> resources for appraising the wider economic impacts of transport<sup>15</sup>.

The guidance also provides additional information, including for example checklists for what to include in each of the businesses cases in the Treasury 5-case model.

The next step is use an evidence-based approach to map the region from the data upwards to find the most promising locations for mobility hubs. The intention is to cover the whole region but not to exclude the challenge of rural sites. Results from this should be available soon.

Questions and comments

CC6 [CHAT]: I would like to find out more about next steps - the location suitability process/methodology you mentioned at the end. Can you pass this on to Trevor? Thanks

Abi Nichols [CHAT]: Will do! This is the full mobility hubs business case guidance:

<https://eeh-prod-media.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Item 7 Annex 1 EEH Mobility Hubs Strategic Transport Leadership Board 03 March 2023 .pdf> [DOES EEH want this public?]

### 4.3 Midlands Connect

Renee van Baar is the Midlands Connect lead for rural mobility. The region covers the Midlands, extending from Skegness on the East Coast to Ross-on-Wye in the South West.

#### Rural Mobility Toolkit

Midlands Connect began to look at Rural Mobility in 2019 by studying rural needs, potential solutions and creating a Rural Mobility Toolkit and guidance for local authorities. Two local authorities tested out the guidance. This work culminated during 2021/22 in a Rural Mobility competition to select and fund promising projects. The winning project was a digital mobility hub.

Midlands Connect wants the mobility hub concept to be wider than just transport, aiming to provide alternatives for the 'last mile' which in rural settings can be in effect 10-15 miles. Hubs should combine diverse facilities and enable new potential services and find ways to link the multiple layers of transport services. We need to see the village as the last mile of the transport system.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/transport-analysis-guidance-tag>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tag-unit-a2-1-wider-economic-impacts>

Different villages vary. Some may have bus services. One village in an area could be a hub for demand responsive transport services or fixed bus services accessed by short links from surrounding settlements.

Operational models were studied to find a range of possible locations for a mobility hub. This included exploring the existing legislation governing potential services and the optimum location. The guidance is very detailed which is why it is not in the public domain.

Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire county councils tested the guidance. Nottinghamshire looked at a single location and Derbyshire studied one location but also explored more sites with a follow up study.

### The competition

There were various selection stages. Funding was available for developing shortlisted proposals, culminating in a 'dragons den' type panel. The winner was awarded £100K to develop the proposal further. The aim was to encourage a specific focus on solving rural problems and developing solutions which could be delivered at scale elsewhere.

Midlands Connect worked with the Connected Places Catapult for transport innovation. The challenge was getting the word out about the competition because of data controls required by the Catapult. There was lots of to-ing and fro-ing. The timing was difficult because by the time the competition was ready to launch it was year-end when local authorities were very busy. Procurement was also tricky and had to take place through the framework contractors<sup>16</sup> of EEH.

It was good because we attracted different perspectives and especially different businesses and types of people on the competition judging panel.

The winning project, HopeMovingTogether<sup>17</sup>, was launched in July 2023. This is an online platform for electric vehicle charging and car sharing, a peer to peer car club and lift share for residents of the market town of Buxton and the six villages in the Hope Valley in Derbyshire. The proposal was put forward by Cenex<sup>18</sup>.

The platform allows electric vehicle owners to hire out their private charging points and electric cars to local people in the community. In this way electric vehicles can be available to people with no off-street parking.

Midlands Connect is the funder and Derbyshire County Council is responsible for delivery. The aim is for the online platform to be a community resource. In the longer term the app could be extended to visitors and provide links to other transport modes including Derbyshire County Council bus services.

The panel wanted a publicly owned, scalable application with the ability to extend into smaller village settings and which could be licenced to or replicated in other local authorities. One requirement is that there is no intellectual property or licence payable to 3rd party organisations or businesses.

Hope Valley Climate Action<sup>19</sup> received some funding to promote the initiative at local events, demonstrating and explaining the tool to the public to get engagement. Local community groups are

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/financial-resilience-and-economic-growth/procurement/national-procurement-strategy-3>

<sup>17</sup> <https://hopemovingtogether.co.uk/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cenex.co.uk/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://hopevalleyclimateaction.org.uk/>



very important as they often have very good connections, for example at parish councils. Feedback suggested that the app needed to be fine-tuned to improve privacy and trust. Endorsements from local notable people will be used to increase credibility.

After setting up an account and completing an online questionnaire HopeMovingTogether connects the user to the various service and information providers. This includes Kinto Liftshare, Enterprise Car Club, Hiya Car peer-to-peer car share, Co-charger neighbourhood eV charge share scheme, Cycling UK, Travel Line and Derbyshire Bus information.

### **The following contribution from a community partner to the project adds useful context**

Anne Robinson: I am a member of Hope Valley Climate Action (HVCA), and coordinate the bus campaigning side of the Travelling Light<sup>20</sup> project. I was a guinea pig for the platform so I can endorse the challenges Renee has described. It was quite a superficial platform and didn't go into great depth. I think it's a great idea, as do the whole of Travelling Light, and we wait with great anticipation to see it put into effect. HVCA are doing a lot of work with communities in settlements and villages along the Hope Valley. We have carried out a survey<sup>21</sup> using the Commonplace platform to understand people's travel habits in greater detail, attracting about equal response from residents and visitors. From the survey we are going to be able to identify some key issues. One of the key issues for us is that Hope Valley is an enormous visitor attraction with 8000 residents and 2 to 3 million visitors a year. Hope railway station is a great location for a transport hub and spoke setup for visitors but it doesn't work for the local community. Amenities and residents are strung out along the valley so people are travelling each day between small villages and settlements to get to the pharmacy, doctor or school for example. So hub-and-spoke for residents won't work and because there are so few residents compared to visitors there is a real tension in terms of what needs to be done.

ACAD1: This tension between residents and visitors will be covered in the next roundtable on leisure travel.

### Questions and Comments

#### RECRUITMENT AND SKILLS

REGG2: This is a very interesting project. However, recently at our sub-national transport body Future of Mobility Forum meetings, officers are saying that there is a lack of digital skills in local government and it is very hard to procure or recruit at local authority level. Could you say something about the need to upskill local authorities as at the moment they are not able to do some of these projects?

Renee van Baar: Yes, this is very true especially on electric vehicle projects. It wasn't a problem on this project because the local authority was really savvy and interested doing this. But yes for MaaS going forward this will be an interesting dynamic. As a sub-national transport body one of our strengths is we do research, develop solutions and share these with our local authority partners. Upskilling staff forms part of this. There are also digital skills in the local community. Community groups have shown people how to use the app, open and unlock cars in car shares and generally hold people's hands as they start to use the services. This is a very interesting and probably a crucial part of the project.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://hopevalleyclimateaction.org.uk/travel/travelling-light/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://hopevalleytravellinglight.commonplace.is/>

## FUNDING AND PROCUREMENT

REGG1: Can you please clarify how much funding was awarded to projects at the proposal stage? A development grant of £33K seems like a large amount.

Renee van Baar: We had wanted five short listed project proposals but one dropped out and because local authority officers had to contribute a minimum number of hours to quality (8 days work) we ended up with only three proposals. Having initially set aside £100k for five proposals we decided to share this between the three bids, followed by an £100k prize.

We procured the winning project in the usual way, going through scoring with the 'dragons den' panel in effect being a live project appraisal. We had to satisfy a lot of rules and regulations through our procurement which was very challenging. For example, we chose the winning project in June 2022 but the grant agreement wasn't signed and the funding released until February 2023. We learned many lessons from this process. In future we would work with a partner like Innovate UK<sup>22</sup> to get direct access to innovating businesses. Instead we had to go through our frameworks which meant that we had to use consultancies already in our framework. We required them to produce projects with another smaller business. This definitely reduced the number of organisations that could bid at the initial stages. This was a barrier to small businesses to join in.

Looking outside framework consultants would have been good but it would have made things harder in other ways because of how the project had to meet procurement rules. This was the best we could do at the time.

### 4.4 Methodology for locating potential mobility hubs

John Austin is a Foundation for Integrated Transport<sup>23</sup> (FIT) Fellow and a former researcher at University of Plymouth. John is currently Public Transport Manager at Southend-on-Sea City Council where mobility hubs are included in the local authority bus service improvement plan. John founded and runs the transport consultancy MobiHub. Twenty years ago John worked with Peter Warman on the mobility hub concept for Plymouth City Council and Watford Borough Council in Hertfordshire.

The work presented here was funded by FIT and used University of Plymouth computer facilities, access to data and software tools.

#### Defining the hub concept

There is currently an intellectual battle in the urban mobility sector over how to define a mobility hub. In urban areas car park providers are pushing for a mobility hub to mean a car park with e-vehicle charging and micromobility services. Controversially, this definition means that little else sustainable is involved and there is no public transport dimension.

Mobility Hubs are a geographical concept related to proximity, access, location and networks. There is good work to refer to in Europe and Canada, where different transport modes are being integrated. Mobility as a Service (MaaS) can be seen as the digital mirror of mobility hub networks. Mobility hubs need a strong sense of place to be viable with the presence of economic activity and outreach to other geographies. Geographies and transport networks change slowly over time, displaying a 'stickiness' which means that key corridors remain important especially in urban areas. In rural areas key locations remain important over a long period of time.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://integratedtransport.org.uk/>

## Model development

This research project sought to devise a methodology to identify potential fruitful locations for mobility hubs with suitable public transport services and facilities. Useful facilities include shared work stations and parcel collection points (particularly at rural rail stations). The aim was to develop a scalable model with national applicability.

Public transport core networks were mapped using NaPTAN<sup>24</sup> data (national database of bus stops, railway stations and ferry terminals) and clustered using ArcGIS Pro software. The concept of a Built up Area (BuA) is well developed in England and Wales and similar concepts exist in Scotland and Northern Ireland. A way to identify potential mobility hubs is to look for clusters of NaPTANS within Built up Areas. Some isolated NaPTANS within BuAs should also be included such as railway stations, park and ride sites, superstores, large schools and business parks.

Each potential mobility hub was then scored according to key features including the resident population and the level of public transport service and economic activity.

It is not straightforward to measure public transport service level. Factors to consider include frequency, number of departures in given a time band and the number of large communities directly served. A rural railway station with direct services to major cities will score high. For example Cam and Dursley station on the line between Bristol and Gloucester will score highly line even though it is not located in a built up area.

## Data issues and practical barriers

There are a number of key data issues and national strategy questions.

Potential hosts for mobility hubs are easy to list: grocery stores, schools, sports and leisure centres, health facilities, offices and business parks, motorway service stations and existing major transport hubs. However, finding these from data alone is difficult because the relevant data sources are neither consistent nor comprehensive and sometimes positively misleading.

Car park data, if collected well, is a useful proxy for features with economic activity. However there is currently no free source for this data. TransportDirect, which operated from 2009 to 2014, did attempt to build a free data set of car park sites.

The NaPTAN database relies on local authorities submitting accurate and timely information.

National government could take action to address these data shortcomings.

There are also practical barriers to siting a mobility hub even at promising locations. For example many car parks have restrictions and impose fines on long or overnight stays. Many service stations allow access for national coach services but not local bus services so they remain inaccessible without a car.

A full report of the research will be published in due course.

Questions and Comments

## PRIORITISE MODAL SHIFT

NGO3 [CHAT]: We also face the same discussions/issues that John mentions around car parks. Some mobility hubs could have a secondary car parking/private EV charging component, but the focus should always be on encouraging a modal shift away from private car usage as much as possible and towards sustainable transport.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-public-transport-access-node-schema/html-version-of-schema>

## 4.5 Scotland Rural and Islands Transport Community

Matthew Kendrick presented in place of Jenny Milne<sup>25</sup>, founder and director of SRITC.

### Overview

The Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community<sup>26</sup> (SRITC) has a three part structure, with directors, an advisory board of transport professionals with experience of third party collaboration and a team of volunteers from the mobility sector (called the musketeers). The vision is to collaborate to bring about change for rural communities, users and providers of transport and mobility. SRITC wants to highlight the voice of rural communities in the design of rural transport projects and systems. Priorities for 2023 include stakeholder engagement and design, networking and knowledge exchange and delivering on three of the six 'big asks'<sup>27</sup> submitted in response to Scottish Government's 2022 consultation on the National Transport Strategy 2 Delivery Plan.

### Funding

The second of the 'big asks' is for a Rural and Islands Transport Innovation Fund. SRITC is eager that this fund is set up correctly, which links to the points made by Midlands Connect that there can be lots of 'shoe-horning' to get a project off the ground. We need to get better at speeding up access to funding to support new projects.

We need to broaden our concept of a mobility hub.

### Mobility hub case studies

The Strathdearn Community Hall<sup>28</sup> in Tomatin in Invernesshire does not call itself a mobility hub but is has many of the features and characteristics of one. It is located near the A9 with bus services to Inverness and Aviemore and offers e-bike hire, e-vehicle charging, café, meeting rooms and offices to hire, catering and sports facilities.

The Angus Rural Mobility Hub<sup>29</sup> is currently under development at Brechin, on the A90 between Dundee and Aberdeen. This comes under the Angus Fund in the Tay Cities Region Deal and aims to decarbonise transport and increase access to services for the local community. The location is on a busy arterial road at a business park, allowing the co-mingling of services for work, transport and community activities.

E-Hub Inverness<sup>30</sup> is a European project to create a series of mobility hubs in the city. The hubs offer e-bike, e-car and e-cargo bike hire with the option of booking through the HITRANS GoHi<sup>31</sup> app which integrates with public transport ticketing and travel planning. The MaaS service providers are HiBike, Enterprise Car Club and LinkaGo. The e-cargo bike hire was previously unavailable in the city so the hubs have not only aggregated existing services but also added new services.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://jennymilne.com/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ruralmobility.scot/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://ruralmobility.scot/resources.html>

<sup>28</sup> <https://thestrathdearn.org/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://investinangus.com/tay-cities-deal/the-angus-fund/low-carbon/the-concept/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://ehubinverness.co.uk/> and <https://vb.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/ehubs-smart-shared-green-mobility-hubs/news/the-city-of-inverness-ehubs-plans-seek-to-complement-its-go-hi-maas-platform/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://gohi.app/>

### Key conclusions

Language is important but it doesn't matter what a rural mobility hub is called. Many good examples aren't identified as such and forward thinking communities are extending the services based at their village halls.

In all cases good signage is required. When we see a motorway services sign we know what roughly to expect the café services to be like, although different concessions will all be slightly different. We need to achieve a similar level of public understanding about the basic services which can be found at any mobility hub.

It is essential for policy makers to get out and see mobility hubs. A recent SRITC meeting at Tomatin was the first time some members had ever visited a rural mobility hub.

Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament<sup>32</sup> (SRIP) is a good place for exchanging ideas. Their meetings are free, open to all and use a hybrid format. SRITC hosts virtual café<sup>33</sup> meetups for communities. SRIP hosts STEM cafés.

### Recommendations for the future

Rural people should be allowed to be involved in the design and co-create services and facilities. The emphasis should be on collaboration across and avoiding silos between departments, policies and people.

We should resist the fascination with business models and how government will fund rural areas and the islands.

There needs to be political buy-in and changes to legislation which will assist achieving policy objectives.

People working in urban areas or developing urban products should stop trying to make one-size fit all.

Rural areas are highly innovative and there are many well-documented examples, including the way business models changed to survive Covid. The high diversity of rural areas is what makes them attractive.

### Questions and comments

Robin Tyne: CoMoUK developed accreditation for community mobility hubs because these are just as important (or more so) for communities than commercial or local authority hubs. Signage and wayfinding is still important to allow visitors and new residents to know what is on offer.

### SELLING THE CONCEPT

CC6: Expanding on the point about political buy-in, sub-national transport strategies are highly political and the language is hard to communicate to elected members. How can we promote the benefits of rural mobility hubs to them?

Matthew Kendrick: It is very helpful to take elected members and officers out to visit rural hubs. If they can experience the way that these centres form heart of a village community, the benefits speak for themselves. CoMoUK events and resources are also very helpful for communicating with local politicians.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://srip.scot/scottish-rural-parliaments/scottish-rural-islands-parliament-23/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://ruralmobility.scot/events.html>

Robin Tyne [CHAT]: Speaking of finding your nearest hub, check out our map<sup>34</sup>. If you know of a hub that should or would like to be on there, please get in touch.

CC6: I know where I live my local community centre has been rebuilt and there's some EV charging points in the car park which are open to the community. And also there's a bus stop right outside. Suddenly you think with a little bit more work this is actually a mobility hub. But it doesn't market itself as that. If I mentioned it to the people who run the community centre they wouldn't know what I was talking about. So, yes I can now see how my local community centre has elements of the mobility hub already.

Robin Tyne: CoMoUK offers 'try out' events. A recent event in Salford was very successful. There may be another one in the Highlands and in London in the near future. CoMoUK is happy to help any authorities or organisations keen to host a 'try out' event.

Robin Tyne [CHAT]: We are planning to run 'try-out' events around the UK as more are built. To be notified about the events, you can be added to our mailing list<sup>35</sup>. And local authorities and sub-national transport bodies can join quarterly mobility hub or shared transport forums.<sup>36</sup>

#### COMMERCIAL VIABILITY

CONS4: I have been looking at examples of best practice for mobility hubs at tourist destinations in the EU which would never reach the criteria for economic viability serving residents alone.

CONS4 [CHAT]: Seefeld (population c. 3,000), in Austria's Tyrol region, have recently re-designed its tired station to become a key visitor-focused mobility hub<sup>37</sup>, with a whole cascade of smaller hubs around the area – right down to a bench at bike/walking path junctions (but with directions & timing route finding information). They see this approach as a model for other visitor areas in the Tyrol.

CONS4: In Cumbria, where we have a very poor (sub-skeletal) bus service, we have old bus shelters which now serve as places for food hubs and book swaps. The commercial case is not so important in deep rural locations because there is a lot of rethinking about repurposing the available facilities.

CONS4 [CHAT]: SRITC invited Rezo Pouce<sup>38</sup> to explain their secure hitching system in rural areas - who implicitly described rural mobility hubs - bus shelters (active or not) used as hitch-hiking posts.

#### INTERMODAL INTEGRATION & SAFETY

NGO6: [via ACAD1] Very basic intermodal integration is often missing outside London and walking connections are poor or unsafe. Small adjustments like timetable changes or lighting a path to a station can make a big difference.

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

NGO6: [via ACAD1] The involvement of local communities is important. Some Community Rail Partnerships do a lot of community involvement at stations but it takes a lot of work to get local bus operators to collaborate.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.como.org.uk/mobility-hubs/built-and-planned-hubs>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.como.org.uk/newsletter>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.como.org.uk/forums>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.seefeld.com/en/infrastructures/seefeld-railway-station.html>

<sup>38</sup> <https://rezopouce.fr>

Matthew Kendrick [CHAT]: The link for the Rural and Island Parliament<sup>39</sup>, it's a free event and hybrid. In 2023, the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament is taking place in Fort William from the 1st to the 3rd of November.

NGO3 [CHAT]: Stagecoach 'Aviemore Adventurer' Bus Service<sup>40</sup> - Visit Cairngorms. Travel between Aviemore Train Station and Cairngorm Mountain using the Aviemore Adventurer bus service carrying bikes and skis. Interesting example of sustainable transport provision in a national park - but still very much carrot-y rather than stick-y!

Matthew Kendrick [CHAT]: We announced that route at the SRITC Gathering with Stagecoach. It was great to see.

REGG3 [CHAT]: Snowdonia is a good example of being more strict around cars I think, and providing bus services in a park and ride arrangement.

## 4.6 Additional Discussion

The following additional points were shared following the presentations.

### COMMERCIAL VIABILITY

CONS4 [CHAT]: Do hubs have to be commercial? In deeper rural areas, networks of shelters with bike racks and information, possibly a bus route (the super-bus stop), hitching point (c.f. rezopouce.fr), ideally associated with a café, pub or shop (or book swap, foodswap etc) are likely to be appropriate - but aren't "commercial". Bottom-up flavoured. How do these fit?

CONS1 [CHAT]: For hubs I've worked on the business case is about making sure that the authority doesn't face any revenue implications - their financial rules meant not taking on any ongoing costs. To be honest that has made them tricky to get off the ground.

CC6 [CHAT]: There appears to be a number of successful non-commercial hubs (even if they don't consider themselves to be a hub). Using or relying on commercial partners may help to boost these, but may affect long term sustainability (although volunteers also have similar impact?). In previous work, costing up mobility hubs for potential S106 funding ends up being incredibly expensive due to ongoing revenue costs as **BK** also says.

NGO5 [CHAT]: In terms of the business case for hubs, are there case studies outside of Scotland of LAs and their community partners leveraging local renewables (wind, solar) to reduce costs of operating the hub and supplying services (e.g. EV charging) to end users?

NGO3 [CHAT]: Not sure about mobility hubs, but there are for e-car clubs so no reason to think the same principle couldn't be applied to mobility hubs. E.g. Tilton on the Hill e-car club<sup>41</sup> and Tisbury e-car club<sup>42</sup> that I mentioned in my presentation.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://srip.scot/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.visitcairngorms.com/plan-your-visit/travel-getting-around/stagecoach-aviemore-adventurer-bus-service/>

<sup>41</sup>

<https://www.harborough.gov.uk/news/article/1657/tilton-on-the-hill-accelerates-into-the-future-with-launch-of-leicestershire-s-first-electric-car-club>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.tisburyelectriccarclub.com/>

NGO5 [CHAT]: We're seeing more community run pubs popping up so opportunity for them to be natural hubs. Helps to support their economic viability.

NGO5 [CHAT]: In terms of physical sites for hubs, what role is there for turning churches that have closed their doors (lots of them) into hubs? On the Isle of Arran (where I grew up and where parents live) the village church is closing next month and community is starting to explore possibility of turning into a hub. Trouble is churches are costly to renovate and repurpose.

CC6 [CHAT]: The STB (sub-national transport bodies) rural group has produced this document<sup>43</sup> on making the case for investment.

#### GRANULARITY

CONS4 [CHAT]: "The village is the last mile of the transport system" discuss (sounds like an essay title).

CONS4: Transport services go way below the village scale. There are many rural communities which function below the scale of the village.

REGG3 [CHAT]: They should! It was more that a village is often the most rural level served by traditional transport services.

#### LAND USE PLANNING

REGG1 [CHAT]: What do you think are the main issues here for better integration with local planning, in order to get this ideal mix of transport connections and local service provision?

ACAD1: What about mobility hubs and links with local planning authorities? I have seen recent cases of local plans talking about mobility hubs at housing developments and mobility hubs appearing in local plans. Is it more useful that lots of housing development goes in rural but not remote rural places?

CONS6: The planning concept of Key Villages was tried out in Devon in the 1960s/70s and may be useful to revisit. The idea was to have hub villages as the focus for new housing and development encouraging incomers to settle here rather than in remote locations. These would be perfect locations for rural mobility hubs.

CONS6 [CHAT]: Remembering the 'key village' concept whereby planning supported the hub and gave permissions for planning such as new housing, care homes and schools and then suggested people move there if these were their needs. I think Devon had a go at doing it in the 1960/70s?

ACAD1: Developing a mix of services and amenities, including sustainable transport alongside housing and jobs growth in smaller towns and key villages is a strategic objective (SO8)<sup>44</sup> within the Plymouth and West Devon local plan (2019). However communities generally resist any idea of concentrating housing development in their village.

#### ROLE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

ACAD1: DfT has looked at mobility hubs so perhaps central government can help? Or sub-national transport bodies can provide policy guidance and expertise. Is national government irrelevant? The Scottish government has been hugely helpful with funding for mobility hubs.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.transporteast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Case-for-Rural-Investment-v-6-1.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/JLPAadoptedVersion.pdf>



NGO3: Scotland is very good at transport policy compared to the other national governments in the UK. But there are still issues with delivery. There has been some very good work with SRITC to develop mobility as a service (GoHi app from HITRANS) with lots of funding from the Scottish government. However government funding is time limited and usually restricted to pilots with no plan for long term operation. This presents a systemic problem.

NGO4: Federated systems are very powerful. Sub-national bodies are a great level to work at, allowing small councils access to bigger facilities, specialist skills and funding. But they are not so big that they are blind to the detail on the ground. So national government should work at the biggest scale, feeding funding to the subnational bodies. Policy priorities can be passed upwards from the locally federated structures via the subnational bodies. National government has a role but is shouldn't bog people down with regulations and controls. Communities need gentle support.

CC6: Agrees there is nothing worse than having national policy which is stifled by a impossible bidding requirements and hoops to jump through. Why do local authorities need to compete to bid against each other for funding? We all want the same outcome which is good services for our communities. Regulation stifles innovation. Community hubs can grow organically in response to local need without any political and policy intervention at all.

#### ACCESSIBILITY

REGG3 [CHAT]: On the use of train stations... I wonder if accessibility is an issue there. On the Wolverhampton-Shrewsbury line, about half the stations do not have step free access to one of the platforms and that is of course, the more rural half. When my little one was still reliant on a pram this was tricky for me - but if you're unable to climb stairs at all it would be impossible. Just a thought...

CC6 [CHAT]: Is there a published list of these?

REGG3 [CHAT]: Not sure - I know DfT commissioned an accessibility audit which was completed this year, but I've not managed to get access to it.

CONS1 [CHAT]: We had a lot of feedback from women about lighting being important for accessing car club vehicles at mobility hubs. [*this point received many 'likes' from other participants*]

ACAD1: Some combined authorities have carried out access audits but this has not happened at a national level.

#### PARKING

CONS6 [CHAT]: The approaches are all very based on persuasion - what about 'sticks' such as park and ride to enforce use?

CONS6: I specialise in public engagement work. We are missing a trick by looking at mobility hubs from the wrong end. David Metz in a recent article in Local Transport Today argues we are unrealistic about how willing people are to give up using their cars. People in rural areas who have cars may form a customer base for mobility hubs when they drive to conurbations and are forced to transfer to other modes due to measures to limit traffic in city centres. So mobility hubs could provide alternatives for rural dwellers to access city centres.

ACAD1: Sticks and carrots debate. Probably in rural areas measures have to be carrots not sticks.

REGG3: My local council is paid to ensure parking is free.

REGG3 [CHAT]: My small town council actually pays the county to retain its free parking [*emoji: smilingfacewithtear*]

ACAD1: A park and share project<sup>45</sup> near Gaernwen and Llanfairpwll on Anglesey, near the Menai Science Park was a proposal to reduce traffic congestion on the island.

CONS6: Leicester City Council had a proposal for a park and share site but this has been abandoned due to the cost of living crisis along with the entire proposal for a workplace parking levy.

COM1: This event has been fantastic which has opened my eyes. We need a real vision. It's tricky to resolve the tension between residents and visitors. We have been so focussed on rail I now realise we need to look for mini-hubs to provide shuttle services to the rail station or forget rail entirely. We have a big attraction near but not at the rail station. If we provide car parking at the station how do we stop cars driving there? There should be no public car parks within the National Park. Surveys show that if you manage car parking it does change people's views and they will use a bike or a combination of bus and bike. We need a mix of all the alternatives to be available.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

CONS4 [CHAT]: ...something on attributing impacts to the hubs themselves? Whether hubs nurture and trigger new services and activities.

CONS6 [CHAT]: What didn't work and why?

REGG3 [CHAT]: From a selfish reason - how to monitor impacts in particular what reduction in car kms or switch away from personal car will be essential in integrating it into the decarbonisation policy playbook.

CC6: We need more roundtables like this especially for English local authorities needing to develop the next generation of Local Transport Plans with rural access. We have not seen the draft guidance yet but mobility hubs could prove useful.

*SD/9/10/23*

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<sup>45</sup> <https://m-sparc.com/our-location/> and <https://www.anglesey.gov.wales/en/newsroom/news/work-to-start-on-new-park-and-share-facility/>