



A RURAL & ISLANDS MOBILITY PLAN (RIMP) FOR SCOTLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ruralmobility.scot | sritc@ruralmobility.scot

About SRITC

Established in 2017 and incorporated as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2021, the Scottish Rural and Island Transport Community (SRITC) has over 600 members across 19 countries. SRITC's mission is to create a space to share insights, collaborate and support members in addressing rural and island transport and mobility challenges.

SRITC connects, supports and facilitates stakeholders from individuals to national bodies, shaping rural and island transport policy by contributing to government consultations and parliamentary committees.

Since 2020, SRITC has been exploring demand from across Scotland's rural and island communities for a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan (RIMP) and how it would align with the Scottish Government's commitment to publish a Rural Delivery Plan in 2026, as well as a new National Islands Plan. The exploration process has taken place in a variety of environments, including in-person and online workshops which were facilitated through SRITC's 2023 conference 'The Gathering' at Boat of Garten, the 2023 Scottish Rural & Islands Parliament, and through monthly Virtual Cafes in 2024 and 2025.

Hundreds of stakeholders, representing private, public, academic, third-sector organisations and communities, have shared valuable insights and contributed to validating demand for a RIMP tailored to the Scottish context. In addition to the current report on "A Rural & Islands Mobility Plan (RIMP) for Scotland", SRITC has published three interlinked reports: "[Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport](#)" (2022) "[A Rural & Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks](#)" (2023) and "[Sustainable Transport STEM Challenge: SRITC report for Rural Communities Fund](#)" (2023).

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Executive Summary

The purpose of a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan (RIMP) for Scotland is to address the long-standing and unique mobility challenges facing rural and island communities - areas that comprise 97% of Scotland's landmass and are often underserved by transport policy and infrastructure. A RIMP applies a rural lens to strategies, such as the National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2), and supporting delivery plans, all of which offer broad objectives, but do not fully account for the distinct lived experiences and transport needs of rural and island residents.

This report synthesises findings, and recommendations from three interlinked phases of research conducted by the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community (SRITC) as part of the development of a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan (RIMP) for Scotland.

The methodology, supported by extensive stakeholder engagement, desk-based analysis, and international benchmarking, reveals the necessity of a dedicated RIMP but also of a practical pathway for its implementation through a collaborative, community-enabled framework with a dual focus on passenger and freight logistics.

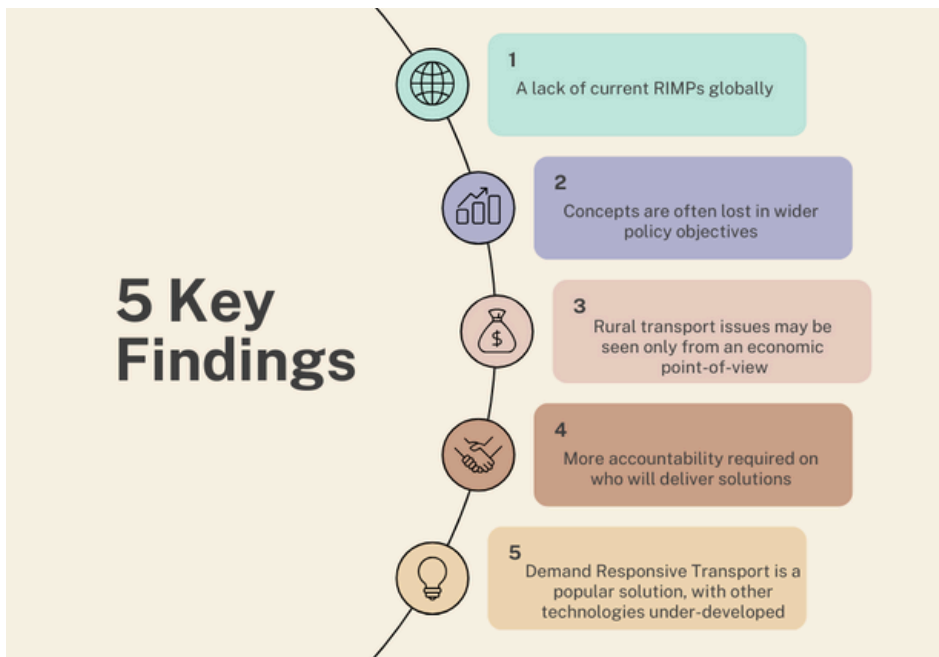
Methodology

An evidence base has been established through a multi-phase process:

- **Phase 1** comprised a review of Scottish policies and extensive stakeholder engagement via workshops, forums, and consultations ([Phase 1 Report](#)).
- **Phase 2** examined international case studies, identifying best practices and innovation in rural mobility from jurisdictions such as Ireland, the USA, and Greece ([Phase 2 Report](#)).
- **Phase 3** synthesised the findings into a practical, adaptable framework for developing and delivering a RIMP tailored to Scotland.

Key Findings

From phases 1 and 2, five key findings emerged:



1. A lack of current Rural Mobility Plans globally

Globally, few nations have a dedicated RIMP. Ireland's "Connecting Ireland" is an exception, offering a comprehensive vision that includes demand-responsive transport (DRT), better rural-urban connections, and targeted service improvements. In the United States, the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) enables community co-design and delivery of local solutions. These examples illustrate the importance of context-specific planning, and underscore Scotland's gap in this area.

2. Concepts are often lost in wider policy objectives

A clear theme throughout the research was the need to shift focus from broad policy objectives (e.g. economic development) and quantitative operational outputs (e.g. number of buses or miles of road resurfaced) to lived experiences and community-defined success. It is notable that in places where mobility plans have a rural focus, such as in Ireland and the USA, the mobility offer is much more rounded and "bottom up", focusing on enhancing local connectivity and improving community resilience by providing access to key services.

3. Rural transport issues are often seen only from an economic point of view

Rural transport issues are often framed in policy documents as economic issues - namely, that poor access to urban areas, and to national and global markets, are the most significant policy problem facing rural areas.

While this may be true in part, it does not reflect the breadth of policy issues faced in rural areas, notably poor access to essential services, such as healthcare, leisure and education. Strategy documents need to recognise the complex nature of policy issues affecting rural transport outside of limited markets and market access.

4. Accountability is required on who will deliver solutions

A persistent issue identified is the mismatch between national policy ambitions and the local capacity to deliver. Governance frameworks often lack clarity over roles and responsibilities, especially where transport responsibilities are split between national agencies, local authorities, and private stakeholders. In some cases, private ownership of infrastructure (e.g. ferry ports) introduces further complexity. The lack of dedicated funding streams and statutory powers for Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) was also found to inhibit cross-boundary collaboration.

By contrast, community-enabled governance models, as found in some US states, empower local groups to co-design and deliver services based on locally-identified needs, often with flexible templates and support from state agencies. This model was seen as particularly effective in aligning transport services with local health, employment, and social priorities.

5. Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is a popular solution with other technologies under-developed

While DRT was commonly cited in transport plans as a flexible and cost-effective solution, other innovations—such as Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS), app-based ticketing, and electric vehicle integration—were mentioned less frequently and often only in pilot form. This points to an opportunity to scale up technology-led solutions in rural areas, particularly when developed in collaboration with communities to meet local needs.

A RIMP for Scotland - Building Blocks

Overall, the research indicates that given Scotland is 97% rural, yet is also highly centralised, and urban centric, with regards transport planning, **a model of regional or localised Rural and Island Mobility Plans would be most suitable**, enabling meaningful collaboration between the public and private sectors and local communities to deliver across a wide range of policy outcomes.

A flexible and iterative RIMP framework has been proposed, designed to be approached from two complementary directions:

- **Top-down** – where national or regional authorities initiate planning.
- **Bottom-up** – where community organisations, local businesses, or voluntary groups take the lead in design and delivery.

The goal is a process of convergence, where both streams meet to co-create a strategy that is locally relevant, practical, and widely supported.

At the heart of this process are **two critical building blocks**:

1. Governance That Enables Co-creation

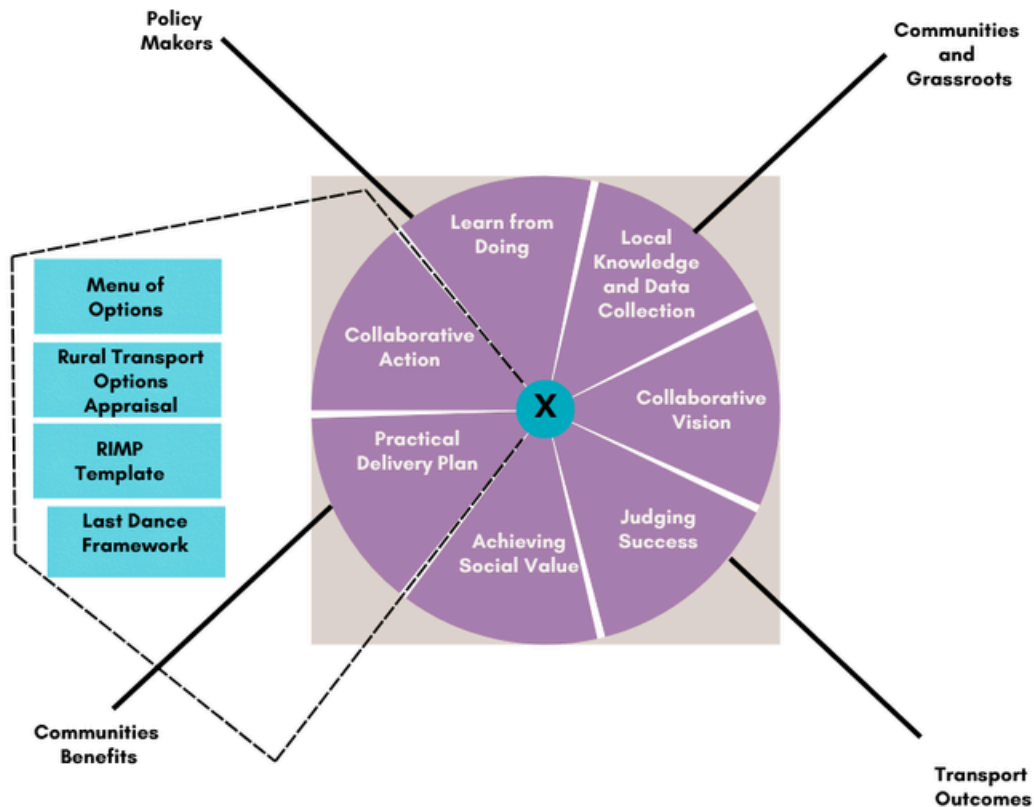
A RIMP must be developed and implemented through governance models that include community leads in decision-making roles. This requires devolving authority, resources, and responsibility closer to where services are delivered. Local government or RTPs may retain overall accountability, but meaningful input must be embedded from local stakeholders.

2. Geographical Boundaries Based on Community Realities

RIMPs should be developed around real travel patterns and community identities, not administrative borders. For islands in particular, boundaries should include both the islands and their mainland links. Such definitions can only be formed through close engagement and data sharing between public and community sectors.

A RIMP for Scotland - Framework

The **RIMP framework** sets out that policy makers and communities and grass roots must converge on a RIMP 'cycle' to achieve shared, desired outcomes. The cycle elements are summarised below:



1. Local Knowledge and Data Collection

Effective RIMPs require robust baseline data—both quantitative and qualitative. While existing transport statistics provide a foundation, they must be supplemented with local insights through surveys, interviews, ethnographic methods, and community mapping. This ensures that planning is evidence-based but also reflective of lived experience.

2. Collaborative Vision and Scenario Planning

Developing a collective vision for the future is essential. This includes scenario planning to test how proposed strategies might perform under different conditions, such as demographic change or climate disruption. Communities should guide this process to ensure that the outcomes reflect local aspirations—whether that's becoming carbon neutral, reducing car dependency, or supporting inclusive economic growth.

3. Judging Success and Transparent Monitoring

A RIMP should include clear, locally relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are co-developed with the community, and clear processes for monitoring progress. KPIs may include measures such as reduced isolation, increased service accessibility, or uptake of active travel. Crucially, monitoring must be public, regular, and adaptable — building trust and ensuring accountability.

4. Achieving Social Value

Transport services in rural and island areas must be designed to maximise social value. This includes health outcomes, social connections, educational access, and economic inclusion. Procurement and commissioning processes should require service providers to demonstrate social return on investment, use local supply chains, and support community wealth building.

5. Practical Delivery Plans

RIMPs must be accompanied by delivery plans that are living documents and that detail responsibilities, timelines, and funding sources. These should be developed with the same collaborative principles and be tailored to the realities of local resource availability.

6. Collaborative Action

Successful delivery of a RIMP will rely on sustained collaboration between community groups, private and public sector bodies, particularly local government and healthcare services. These partnerships are essential to ensure transport solutions are well-integrated, people-focused, and capable of addressing wider social outcomes.

7. Learning from Doing

A RIMP, particularly those led or shaped by communities, should work best when approached as learning experiences rather than as 'one-off' solutions. Learning-by-doing allows communities to trial different ideas—such as DRT shared car schemes, or new walking and cycling links—on a small scale before committing to long-term investment.

Tools to design a RIMP

To support design of a RIMP, and of the delivery plans that underpin it, the report presents a Menu of Options summarising rural and islands specific tools for planners and practitioners including a Common Appraisal Framework for Rural Transport; a RIMP template; and the Last Dance Framework, which guides exploration around policy delivery drivers and governance arrangements.

Further work is required to refine the Menu of Options and to test the tools themselves in different local and regional contexts.

Conclusion

The development of a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan (RIMP) presents a transformative opportunity for Scotland to reset its approach to rural transport. By adopting a community-led, values-driven, and evidence-informed strategy, policymakers can deliver mobility services that go beyond moving people and freight — they can connect communities, enhance wellbeing, sustain economies and drive community wealth building.

The forthcoming Rural Delivery Plan for Scotland, and the next National Islands Plan, provide opportunity to lay foundations for testing and refining a Rural & Island Mobility Plan framework that will drive economic development, wellbeing and environmental sustainability in rural and island places, in turn contributing to national economic, wellbeing and environmental outcomes.

SRITC issues a challenge to policy makers and to communities to grasp this opportunity and to continue working with its members on the RIMP learning journey, putting Scotland at the forefront of rural and island transport delivery for the benefit of all.

Contact SRITC



sritc@ruralmobility.scot



www.ruralmobility.scot



The Scottish
Rural & Islands
Transport Community

A Community Interest Company