TheScottish
Rural & Islands
Transport Community
A Community Interest Company

DEVELOPING A NATIONAL RURAL & ISLANDS MOBILITY PLAN (RIMP) FOR SCOTLAND

FINAL REPORT

ruralmobility.scot | sritc@ruralmobility.scot

List of Abbreviations

CalMac	Caledonian MacBrayne
DRT	Demand-responsive transport
DESC	Digital Evidence Sharing Capability
DDRT	Digital Demand Responsive Transport
HITRANS	Highland & Islands Transport Partnership
EV	Electric Vehicle
LA	Local Authority
MaaS	Mobility as a Service
NPF4	National Planning Framework 4
NTS2	National Transport Strategy 2
RIMP	Rural and Islands Mobility Plan
RMaaS	Rural Mobility as a Service
RTAP	Rural Transit Assistance Program
RTP	Regional Transport Partnership
SIMP	Sustainable Mobility Island Plan
SMARTA	"Smart Rural Transport Areas" EU-funded project
SRIP	Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament
SRITC	Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community (CIC)
SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan

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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 (CIC) connects, supports and facilitates stakeholders from individuals to national bodies, shaping rural and island transport policy by contributing to Scottish Government consultations and parliamentary committees.

Since 2020, SRITC (CIC) 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. The exploration process has taken place in a variety of environments, including in-person and online workshops which were facilitated through the 2023 conference 'The Gathering' at Boat of Garten (with 100 attendees), the Scottish Rural & Islands Parliament (40 attendees), and less formally through monthly Virtual Cafes (Figure 1).

- These stakeholders, representing private, public, academic, third-sector organisations and communities, have shared valuable insights and contributed to validating demand for a RIMP and specifying the priorities. These are summarised in three reports published by SRITC: "Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport" (2022) and "A Rural & Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks" (2023) and Sustainable Transport STEM Challenge: SRITC report for Rural Communities Fund" (2023).

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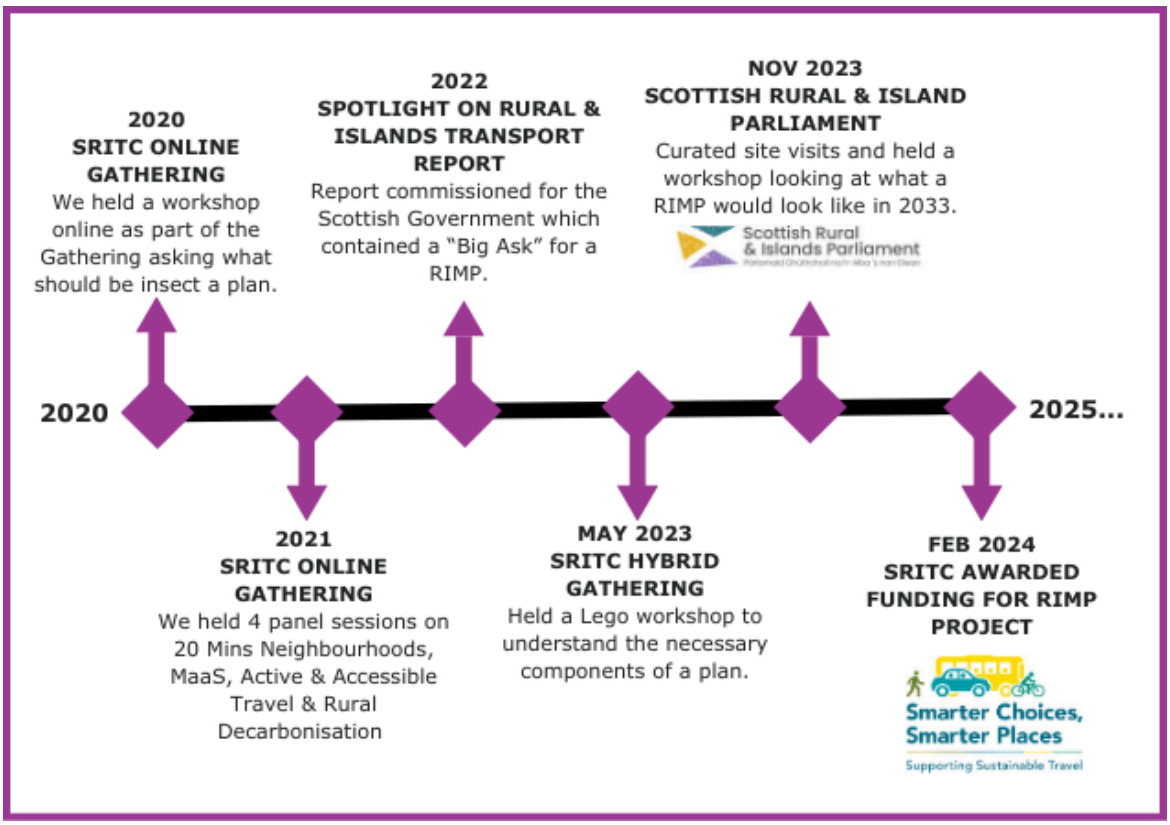

Figure 1 - The Evolution of SRITC

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Executive Summary

This report brings together the insights, findings, and recommendations since 2020, but more specifically from three interlinked stages 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 purpose of the RIMP 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 traditional transport policy and infrastructure.

The development process, which has been supported by extensive stakeholder engagement, desk-based analysis, and international benchmarking, reveals not only the necessity of a dedicated RIMP but also a practical pathway for its implementation through a collaborative, community-enabled framework.

Background and Context

SRITC, a Community Interest Company (CIC) with over 600 members across 19 countries, has spent several years gathering evidence to support the case for a RIMP. The initiative responds to the lack of a coherent, integrated national rural transport plan in Scotland a finding from the EU SMARTA project. While the National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) and other supporting frameworks offer broad objectives, they fail to fully account for the distinct lived experiences and transport needs of rural and island residents.

This evidence base was established through a multi-phase process. Phase One comprised a review of Scottish policies and extensive stakeholder engagement via workshops, forums, and consultations. Phase Two examined international case studies, identifying best practices and innovation in rural mobility from jurisdictions such as Ireland, the USA and Greece. The final stage converts the findings into a practical, adaptable framework for developing and delivering a RIMP tailored to Scotland's communities.

Key Findings

Across all stages of the research, several consistent themes emerged:

1. Lack of Dedicated Rural Mobility Strategies

Globally, few nations have dedicated rural or island mobility plans. Ireland's "Connecting Ireland" stands out as a notable exception, offering a comprehensive vision that includes demand-responsive transport (DRT), better rural-urban connections, and targeted service improvements. In the United States, support programmes like the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) enable community co-design and delivery of local solutions. These examples illustrate the importance of context-specific planning, yet also underscore Scotland's current gap in this area.

2. Governance and Delivery Challenges

A persistent issue identified is the mismatch between national policy ambitions and the local capacity to deliver them. 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 key 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.

3. Transport Framed Primarily as Economic Infrastructure

Transport planning for rural areas is frequently framed in terms of economic development—enabling access to markets, promoting tourism or supporting agriculture. While these are valid, this narrow framing overlooks critical social outcomes such as access to healthcare, social inclusion, digital connectivity and educational opportunities. This report argues that a successful RIMP must be grounded in a broader understanding of social value and wellbeing.

4. Limited Innovation Beyond DRT

While DRT was commonly cited in international and local plans as a flexible and cost-effective solution, other transport 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 a significant opportunity to scale-up technology-led solutions in rural areas, particularly when developed in collaboration with local communities to meet their specific needs.

5. Social Value and Local Visioning Underpin Success

A clear theme throughout the research was the need to shift focus from operational outputs (e.g., number of buses or miles of road resurfaced) to lived experiences and community-defined success. Communities should be empowered to set the vision for their transport futures, supported by data, scenario planning and meaningful consultation. Metrics of success must prioritise accessibility, wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability, and be transparently monitored with community input.

Recommendations and Framework

Based on these findings, a flexible and iterative RIMP framework has been proposed. The framework is 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.

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 the framework are several critical building blocks:

1. Governance That Enables Co-creation

A RIMP must be developed and implemented through governance models that include community representatives 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 Reality

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.

3. 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.

4. Shared 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.

5. Social Value Framework

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.

6. Success Indicators and Transparent Monitoring

The RIMP should include clear, locally relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are co-developed with the community. These 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.

7. Practical Delivery Plans

Finally, RIMPs must be accompanied by delivery plans 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.

Conclusion

The development of a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan represents 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—they can connect communities, enhance wellbeing and drive inclusive sustainability.

Scotland has the opportunity to lead internationally by designing a model that embraces diversity in geography, need, and aspiration, while building common frameworks for collaboration and accountability. As planning begins in earnest for alignment with the 2026 Rural Delivery Plan, the RIMP framework provides both a foundation and a roadmap for action.

Project Overview

The development of a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan (RIMP) aims to address the unique transport challenges faced by rural and island communities in Scotland by learning from international experiences. The concept of a RIMP was first discovered through the work of SMARTA, an EU rural mobility project. The concept was then shared throughout the SRITC community and the demand emerged from a series of workshops held in 2020 and 2021, led by SRITC as part of two online "Gatherings".

Furthermore, research undertaken in 2022 to review Scotland's National Transport Strategy through a rural and island lens, led to the first of the resulting 'Six Big Asks'. This 'Ask' focused upon the need to develop an integrated plan that captures the unique transport needs of communities across rural and island Scotland, encompassing the unique characteristics of life in these places that are often underrepresented within traditional policy and planning. The 'Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport' report produced for the Scottish Government in 2022 contains all the 'Big Asks'.

Curated site visits as part of the 2023 Scottish Rural & Island Parliament (SRIP) involved an in-person workshop to brainstorm what a RIMP could look like in 2033. This theme was then continued at an in-person-online-hybrid Gathering in 2023 where a Lego workshop was held to aid understanding of the necessary components of the plan.

Then in 2024, SRITC secured funding from Paths for All's Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme to undertake a desktop and in-person study of rural and island plans, policies and strategies worldwide. To achieve the RIMP project aims, the plan was divided into four phases:

- Phase One: Review of Scottish transport policies and initiatives.
- Phase Two: Review of international transport policies and initiatives.
- Phase Three: Community and stakeholder engagement.
- Phase Four: International study visits.

Figure 2 - RIMP Project Phases

This four-phase approach (Figure 2) resulted in the production of two interim reports, RIMP Phase One and RIMP Phase Two, which were circulated in draft for consultation and feedback.

RIMP Phase One focused on the requirement for an integrated national plan for rural and island Scotland, involving in-depth research and stakeholder engagement, and a comprehensive literature review to inform unique insights and conclusions.

RIMP Phase Two focused on a review of international rural transport policies, examining examples from countries such as the United States, Republic of Ireland and Greece. The objective was to identify best practice, governance structures and innovative solutions that could inform the development of a tailored mobility plan for Scotland's rural and island areas. The analysis revealed key themes in governance, service delivery, innovation and sustainability, while highlighting several gaps and opportunities.

Methodology

Phase One

Phase One employed a desktop literature review of Scotland's transport policies as an initial discovery phase. The process addressed three strategic questions, underpinning the research and to support the development of a rural and islands mobility plan framework in the final stage of the project. These questions asked:

- What gaps are there between national and regional transport strategies, policies and local needs?
- How effectively are transport policies and their supporting delivery plans communicated across all of the publications reviewed?
- How do attitudes and approaches to innovations in transport vary at different spatial levels?

To comprehensively answer the three core research questions, a three-step methodology was used. This aimed to ensure that the literature review was comprehensive, providing breadth and depth, and enabled relevant content to be easily tagged and categorised.

- Step one was a publication search of Scottish national, regional, local and community-level transport and economic development strategies and policies.
- Step two was the publication review - downloading and cataloguing a total of 78 publications.
- Step three was content categorisation, linking content keywords from within each publication to support the objective of identifying policy and innovation gaps, and language differences.

Phase Two

Phase Two went on to gather and analyse rural and island mobility plans that have been published internationally - this formed the basis for the key research objectives of the report.

Desktop research was undertaken between September and December 2024. This involved two primary methods of internet web searches (search engines/grey literature and academic literature), using common search terms such as "rural mobility plan", "rural connectivity" and others.

Different search engines were used (e.g., Google and DuckDuckGo), where possible excluding UK-based websites to maximise international results; academic literature search engines were also used. The third web search involved dedicated websites sign-posted by either the wider SRITC community or the first two web searches.

These searches were supplemented by crowdsourcing documents from the SRITC community. This was through social media posts, primarily on LinkedIn, and issuing a call for documents through the bi-weekly newsletter. This evidence call was also mentioned at the regular monthly virtual cafés.

The net result of this search was the identification of 142 documents, each of which was reviewed. In addition to the strategies themselves, other types of documents were identified including research reports, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and delivery plans. Each providing some indication to the challenges faced, primarily by public sector authorities, in the delivery of the respective strategies.

Relevant passages from the literature were collated, and similar to Phase One, these were categorised to assist with the analysis and synthesising stages.

Key Insights

Phase One

The objective of Phase One of the project was to review publicly available literature and use stakeholder engagement to build a detailed picture of how and where Scottish transport policies and strategies are falling short in meeting the needs of rural and island communities. In total, 78 documents were reviewed with the following five insights emerging:

Governance Policies

Rural and island communities are significantly underserved by the national policies that are designed to make transport more affordable, accessible and sustainable. The actions that need to be undertaken to address the gaps between these policies are broadly agreed-on, based on the analysis of local and community plans. The requirement is for greater emphasis on decentralising powers and funds to local organisations to make small improvements to services and infrastructure based on the plans that they have developed.

This is viewed as a faster pathway to achieve long-term health and wellbeing, equality and inclusive growth goals. Transport services that are owned and managed by rural organisations who are deeply connected to residents, and highly knowledgeable about their transport needs, must sit at the centre of changes to governance processes. Government support will always be needed, but that should not be through greater centralisation of decision making.

Sentiment

There is most positive alignment across stakeholders at all levels when discussing the benefits of long-term policy goals such as improving health and wellbeing, reducing inequalities and taking climate action. Collectively, they aspire to do the right things because of the benefits that they expect to see in their own community. Offering more opportunities to safely walk, wheel and cycle sits at the top of the Scottish Government's sustainable transport hierarchy and is endorsed in local development plans.

However, positivity within rural and island communities is tempered by implementation challenges. Negative emotions are expressed when there is frustration that "must dos" don't turn into "have dones" because of red tape, and a lack of funding.

This misalignment between national policies and local realities manifests itself through a lack of community participation within bus, rail and ferry governing processes, a growing number of accidents and deaths on roads such as the A9 where long promised dualling projects are continually delayed, and cuts to local authority transport budgets that compromise the ability to deliver new active travel infrastructure.

Modal Shift

The modal shift interventions that have been developed are of 'one size', designed to 'suit all'. However, these interventions are not suitable outside densely populated areas because they often prioritise profit over people. The innovation approach starts with a capital "I" and from a technology-led perspective, rather than a lower-case "i" bottom-up perspective.

The latter is led by community groups who tend to understand small, lower-cost innovations better and have the biggest practical impact on communities. A number of rural communities have introduced grassroots programmes that reward residents for choosing active travel, such as community challenges, discount schemes for local shops, and are using innovative educational campaigns that raise awareness about the benefits of active travel.

Reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030 is a headline target at a national level as a pathway to reduce carbon emissions. However, a general lack of demand management interventions and specific support for rural and island communities that recognises higher levels of car dependency mean the target is disregarded by stakeholders in these communities and, indeed, this target was dropped by the Scottish Government in April 2025.

Changes to national funding and legal statutes for rural bus services would delegate more power to local authorities and rural organisations that, when supported by ring-fenced funding, facilitate the design, procurement and operation of community transport services that encourage modal shift through improved connectivity from bus-to-train stations, and inter-urban express coach services.

More immediately, increasing positive attitudes to bus travel within rural communities as a means to support modal shift would be improved by ensuring that bus operators comply with the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 which began rolling-out in October 2024. This will enhance accessibility of services not only for rural resident passengers, but also tourists visiting from other areas.

The movement of freight is a fundamental building block of sustainable rural communities and requires supporting infrastructure that enables locally produced products to be efficiently distributed by road, rail, sea and air. The Infrastructure Commission for Scotland concluded in their report that the UK should make the most of its existing assets stating that "Most of the underlying infrastructure that will be used in 30 years' time already exists today".

Rethinking how freight is moved to better match the physical constraints of rural road, rail and port infrastructure, including using smaller containers that can be easily transferred from larger to smaller vehicles and vessels, will open up more opportunities to reduce freight-generated emissions.

Technology

Strategic technologies that aim to integrate different modes of transport that remove the need to use different planning and payment applications and are responsive to passenger demand are supported through national policies and funding for pilot programmes. However, these technologies have been lightly adopted and still to be proven in the eyes of end users.

Locally, within development plans, investments in Mobility as a Service (MaaS), and integrated ticketing receive limited attention with much greater emphasis placed on more mature technologies that deliver immediate improvements to everyday travel experiences. This includes making digital signage, notifications and passenger assistance at bus stops and train stations universally available, and improving mobile connections so that the benefits offered by travel applications can be enjoyed in any area of the country.

These insights suggest that a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan should identify and endorse approaches that enable stakeholders within communities to use proven technology pragmatically to improve local transport service provision.

Infrastructure

National policies and funding programmes to support improvements to, and the development of, new road, rail and port infrastructure presented in the NTS2 and NPF4 focus on active travel, EV-charging networks and bus-priority lanes. These investments are intended to create a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport network.

However, people in rural and island communities remain disconnected from many of these benefits. When budgets are set, and funds made available, the incremental costs associated with road repair, cycle lane construction, and the installation of public EV-charging stations in rural and island locations are not always considered.

Furthermore, as stressed in Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) strategy publications, the authority for managing local infrastructure projects is delegated to local authorities and the private operators of ports and public EV-charging stations. Red tape related to planning legislation also constrains the pace of planning new roads and cycle paths.

Whether it's physical or digital infrastructure, the evidence gained through this phase of the project confirms that a RIMP must present new approaches and practical steps related to the design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure in rural and island communities. By design, they must account for the impact of climate change on critical infrastructure, and rapidly ageing populations which shrink the number of working age people in rural and island communities.

Phase Two

Phase Two of the RIMP project focused on a review of international rural transport policies, examining examples from countries such as the United States, Republic of Ireland and Greece. The objective was to identify best practice, governance structures, and innovative solutions that could inform the development of a tailored mobility plan for Scotland's rural and island areas.

The study's conclusions point to the necessity of clear metrics for measuring the success of mobility plans. These should encompass accessibility improvements, carbon reduction, social inclusion and economic development. Ensuring regular evaluation will allow policymakers to adapt and refine the plan over time. The analysis revealed key themes in governance, service delivery, innovation and sustainability, while highlighting several gaps and opportunities.

Limited Number of Rural & Islands Mobility Plans

One significant finding is the limited number of dedicated rural and/or island mobility plans globally. The Republic of Ireland's Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan stood out as a robust example, aiming to improve rural connectivity through enhanced public transport services and demand-responsive transport (DRT).

Other countries have adopted region-specific strategies and support programmes such as the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) to support rural and tribal transit operators in the United States. These examples demonstrate the importance of flexible, locally driven solutions that address the unique geographical and social characteristics of rural areas.

Governance Models

The analysis also identified governance as a critical factor in the success of rural and island mobility strategies. Two dominant governance models emerged: public sector delivery agents and community-enabled services.

The public sector model, common in Europe, involves government agencies directly managing transport services, while the community-enabled approach, prevalent in the United States, encourages collaboration between local authorities, community groups and voluntary organisations to deliver services. Both models underscore the importance of adapting governance structures to local needs and available support, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

Demand Responsive Transport

Demand-responsive transport (DRT) was highlighted as a key solution for filling accessibility gaps in rural areas. Traditional DRT services, such as those provided by local operators, have long been essential in rural transport networks. More recently, technological innovations, including app-based booking and integrated service platforms, have enhanced the efficiency and reach of DRT services. These innovations offer scalable solutions for improving rural accessibility at a lower cost than traditional fixed-route public transport.

Active Travel

Active travel modes, such as walking and cycling, received limited attention in the reviewed plans, primarily being framed as leisure activities rather than core transport options. However, integrating active travel into rural mobility plans could promote public health, reduce carbon emissions and boost tourism.

Sustainable Island Mobility Plans

The analysis identified the need to consider separate Sustainable Island Mobility Plans (SIMPs) to address the specific needs of island communities, focusing on seasonal demand fluctuations, inter-island connectivity, and sustainable transport solutions.

Figure 3 - Word Cloud Analysis

In Figure 3, the reviewed international rural and island mobility plans and strategies shows there is significant variation in wording within rural mobility plans, compared to the analysis of the entirety of the literature. The findings show that there is little in the way of common themes emerging. This may be because many of the rural mobility plans studied were somewhat technical documents using traditionally non-policy terms, notably variables and publications.

Testing Potential RIMP Frameworks

Since 2020, SRITC has been exploring demand from across Scotland's rural and island communities for a RIMP and how it would align with the Scottish Government's commitment to publish a Rural Delivery Plan in 2026. Hundreds of stakeholders representing all shapes and sizes of organisations from across the private, public, academic and third sectors have shared insights that have contributed to validating demand for a RIMP and specifying what it should prioritise.

The Mobility as a Service (MaaS) Scotland conference, held in Glasgow on 6th June 2024, aimed to assist a range of stakeholders from the private, public and community sectors in defining and designing Rural Mobility as a Service (RMaaS).

Employing design thinking and co-creation principles, an in-person workshop at the conference enabled a cross-section of transport sector stakeholders to participate in developing a methodology to support the design, implementation and evaluation of a RMaaS solution.

The workshop challenged participants to view MaaS through a rural lens, help define the processes and outcomes of RMaaS, and enable participants to modify the "Last Dance Framework" as a tool for designing, implementing and evaluating RMaaS. This framework was co-designed and produced as an output by all those attending the Scottish Rural and Island Parliament (2023). Furthermore the Framework has been adopted by parts of the Scottish Government.

A report called "Defining and Designing Rural MaaS" that summarises the outcomes from the workshop is available to view and download from the SRITC website.

MaaS Scotland Conference (2024)

Workshop Outputs

The core workshop output was a thorough sense-check of the Last Dance Framework for designing Rural MaaS (RMaaS) strategy/plan and implementation, involving practitioners interested in contributing to the RMaaS debate. The details of each driver in the Framework were then taken to help develop a co-produced Framework which would contribute to the MaaS route map by MaaS Scotland. When developing the framework, workshop participants highlighted the following points for further consideration.

1. RMaaS and MaaS offerings, in general, need to be flexible in places and consumer groups, not just in transport modes.
2. A new evaluation framework for MaaS is needed that recognises a wider measure of value (including social value) outside of traditional cost-benefit analyses and sets realistic policy objectives.
3. Community-led RMaaS has been piloted alongside major RMaaS demonstration projects led by the transport industry.
4. Linked to the above, governance, decision making and budgets for MaaS must be developed to be as close to user communities as possible.

Conclusion

Overall, the MaaS Scotland workshop was a critical part of the RIMP research and development process. Rather than identifying 'what' rural areas need (e.g., more housing, better transport), this reframed the focus on the 'how' of delivery. A key outcome was that practitioners can use the Framework to identify assets, resources and mechanisms that can underpin successful policy or service delivery in specific rural and island contexts.

Findings

This section outlines the 5 key findings based upon the following published draft reports:

- Phase One: Developing a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan for Scotland - UK Study
- Phase Two: Developing a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan for Scotland - International Study

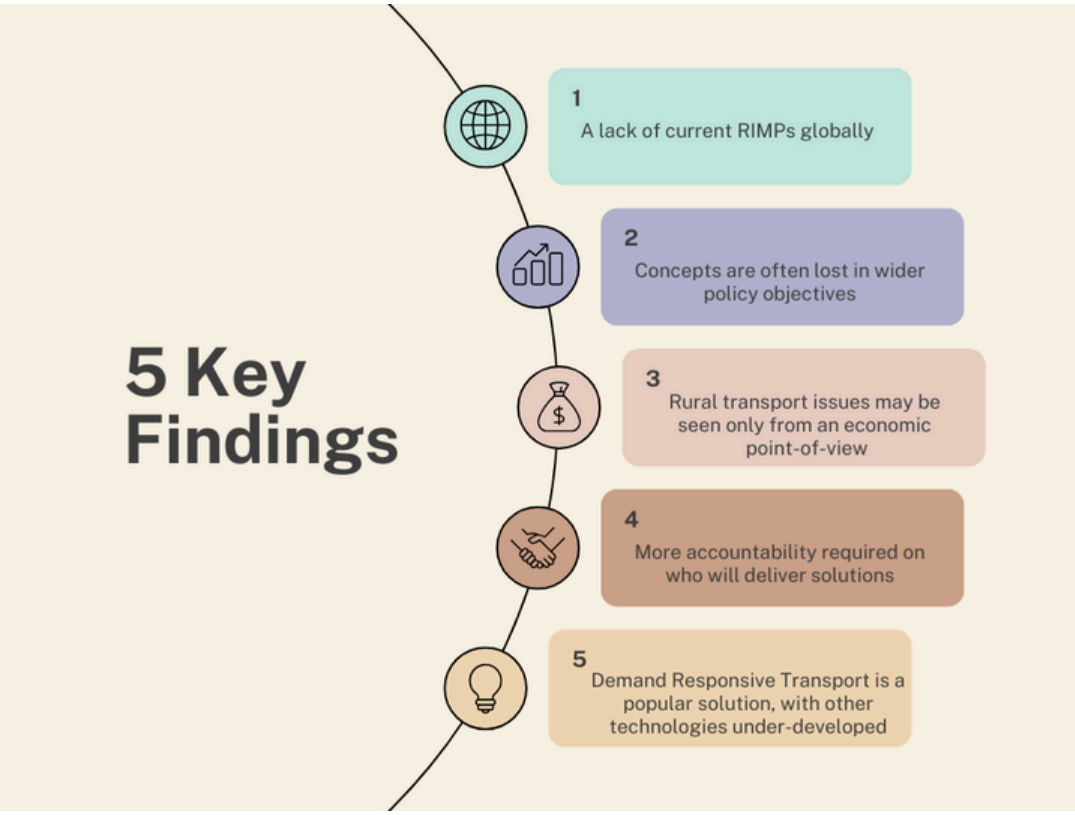

Figure 4 - Key Findings

1. A lack of current RIMPs globally

One of the most significant findings is the relative lack of rural or island-specific mobility plans globally, particularly when compared to urban or even regional mobility plans. Where there are such documents, they broadly resulted from one of three situations:

1. A dedicated national policy commitment to improving rural access, the most notable example being the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan;
2. A regional-specific approach in predominantly rural regions, for example strategies adopted in mostly rural states in the USA;
3. Where administrative boundaries (and subsequently transport policy responsibilities) and geography so happen to align. For example, administrative boundaries just happening to be islands, e.g., Shetland.

2. Concepts are often lost in wider policy objectives

In addition, rural and island mobility is often subsumed within wider policy objectives, notably economic development. Investment in rural transport infrastructure is a means of promoting economic development for rural regions, with particular focus upon opening access to markets for agriculture and forestry and promoting tourism.

However, these industries only form part of the approach to developing rural and island areas. 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 more "bottom-up", focusing on enhancing local connectivity and improving community resilience by providing access to key services.

3. Rural transport issues may be seen only from an economic point-of-view

Rural transport issues are often framed in policy documents in terms of being an economic issue, namely that poor access to urban areas, national and global markets is the most significant policy problem facing rural areas.

While this may be true in part, it does not reflect the variety of policy issues faced in rural areas, notably poor access to essential services, such as healthcare, broadband and employment. Strategy documents need to recognise this complex nature or at least recognise that there are a number of policy issues affecting rural transport outside of limited markets and market access.

4. More accountability required on who will deliver solutions

Having determined the context for existing rural and island mobility plans, the evidence was plentiful on ideas for tackling rural transport challenges. Solutions proposed included demand responsive transport, fixed-line public transport services, community transport, walking and cycling, developing mobility hubs, and establishing community-based facilities for key services.

The contradiction then lies within, as the challenge identified is the deliverability of the solution, for which findings from this research showed was lacking. This leads to sometimes strange variations in policies and plans, with some a mix of aspirational projects and schemes combined with those currently being delivered (e.g., the work of Area Commissions in Oregon, USA).

Most identify visions and objectives but lack delivery detail so consequently implementation plans form separate documents (for example many English Local Transport Plans). A recurring theme is the lack of detail and accountability on who will deliver solutions, and the reader is left assuming that the agency behind the plan would lead the delivery.

It is important to note, that without the knowledge shared by the EU SMARTA project (and others) on governance arrangements in different countries, the variety of delivery agencies within different places would not be understood.

A significant challenge is grounded in the role of governance, particularly who is responsible for developing strategy and who is responsible for delivery of the strategy. Across Europe, the public sector model is most common. Here the public sector sets the strategy and delivers or procures the infrastructure and the services whether at local, regional or national level.

However, the roles of governance vary between countries and can conflict, requiring close collaboration. For example, central government can fund local governments to deliver pilot projects in rural areas, with the intention that the service either becomes commercially viable or is controlled by the local authority.

This contrasts strongly with an increasingly-common model in rural areas across the USA, which favours a community-enabled approach. From our research, the public sector - often the state government - works collaboratively with local communities, local transport service providers, and often the health sector (e.g., Medicaid) to develop local strategies and solutions to local transport needs, which are often identified by communities.

In some instances, the state government co-designs the solutions with local communities based upon common templates, so solutions may have the same core characteristics, but are adapted for local areas. An example is the adaptation of paratransit services to serve non-healthcare markets based upon local demand for services, including transport to employers and major tourist attractions.

This is an example of place-making and although the governance and funding model is different in Scotland, communities have the opportunity to create and implement (subject to funding availability) Community Action Plans which include transport and mobility.

5. DRT is a popular solution, with other technologies under-developed

The most mentioned solution was demand responsive transport (DRT) which demonstrates the importance of flexible, locally driven solutions that address the unique geographical and social characteristics of rural areas.

This was especially where fixed-line public transport services (whether bus or rail) may not be supported by sufficient demand. Interestingly, there were a variety of DRT solutions proposed in plans, from community transport and paratransit to ride-hailing platforms.

This reflects, in part, the different regulatory regimes, where DRT is classified in another way depending on location. For example, in some jurisdictions, Uber might be considered a ride-hailing service, but in others it is a taxi service and hence subject to the relevant regulations.

Few other technologies are mentioned in rural transport strategies. Where they are discussed, they often mention locally-based initiatives. Examples of this include alternative fuels for ferries in island plans, and the deployment of app-based ticketing and MaaS in locations where this is being trialled. The opportunity of new technological solutions to deliver community-developed solutions to pressing rural transport issues is consequently under-developed.

Some work is being undertaken at a state level in the USA to identify how different technological solutions could fit within different rural contexts. This has identified potential roles that technological solutions can play, not only in terms of providing direct services, but also in improving the efficiency of rural transport operations. Notable examples being brokerage and common booking systems.

The research did not indicate which model was the most effective method in achieving wider policy goals and this is probably due, in part, to the inconsistencies in the monitoring of progress against delivery of projects, making comparisons difficult.

Regardless, a more community-enabled approach has the potential to enable policy makers to work with community groups, voluntary organisations, and local operators to develop and deliver solutions tailored towards local needs and local wealth building opportunities, even if the core aspect of the services may be similar across geographies. This is a critical difference to urban areas, where such organisations and individuals are not involved in the delivery of transport and mobility services.

Overall, the research indicates that despite 97% of Scotland being rural, transport planning is highly centralised, and urban centric, so 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.

The evidence from the 'Defining and Designing Rural Mobility as a Service (RMaaS)' (2024) report, highlights the Last Dance Framework.

The design thinking and a co-creation workshop explored the framework as a tool for designing and implementing and evaluating RMaaS finding that RMaaS offerings need to be flexible in places and consumer group, not just in transport modes; a new evaluation framework is required to recognise wider measure of value outside of the tradition cost-benefit analysis; community-led RMaaS has been piloted alongside major RMaaS demonstrations and finally that governance, decision-making and budgets must be developed to be as close to user communities as possible (see Appendices B-D). The evidence also highlighted that the tool (the framework) can and should be used place based.

Figure 5 - Last Dance Framework

Developing and delivering a RIMP needs to be a truly collaborative effort between the public sector, community groups, voluntary groups, operators of transport services and other community representatives (such as local businesses). The plan needs to be built upon not only sound data analysis, but local intelligence on key transport issues, an approach similar to that used in the USA.

This will necessitate a reform of transport governance, moving governance away from centralised control of all aspects of transport planning to a more "bottom-up" approach where rural and island communities not only develop the plan, but have the opportunity to deliver it in partnership. The exact nature of such reforms is outwith the scope of this work. In the meantime, the next section focuses upon the recommendations and approach to RIMP development in Scotland.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings, SRITC have been able to identify two frameworks and practical tools for developing a RIMP which also incorporates evidence from other SRITC publications, namely the Spotlight on Rural and Islands Transport Report and the Scottish Rural and Island Parliament 2023 Report.

Framework One - RIMP

The RIMP framework is intended to be flexible and learning in nature, and can thus be approached from one of two directions:

Direction 1 - The policy maker working in national, regional or local government seeking to develop a RIMP for their country, region or local community (top-down model).

Direction 2 - Community groups or councils working collaboratively with others in their area to identify and deliver solutions to improve the lives of those in rural or island communities (bottom-up model).

Regardless of the direction, at the core of the framework is the idea of convergence. Namely that through intensive collaborative working and trust between policy makers and community makers, through the process of the development of the RIMP, what results is a mutually-agreed plan that has gained commitment, is practical and deliverable.

Before embarking on developing a RIMP, based upon the findings from our research, there are two prerequisites required in order to deliver success and maximise the chances of a successful delivery of a RIMP.

1. Governance based on a commitment to co-create with communities

Governance of RIMP development and delivery can take many different forms, and one or more organisations may, ultimately, have responsibility for creating the RIMP document and for overseeing its delivery. It is, however, anticipated that in most cases, this will be the responsibility of the local, regional, or national government.

Critically, the development and delivery of a RIMP needs to have communities at its heart and thus included within the governance structure and decision making. As a minimum, local community and voluntary organisations should be part of decision making processes in the development of the RIMP, even if the ultimate "sign off" authority rests with the public sector.

2. Clear definition of geographical boundaries

Any effective plan necessarily needs to have a geographical limit, to provide focus to the strategy on a set region. In some cases, the boundary may be an obvious one, notably islands which focus on the island(s) in question plus connecting links.

It is important that these boundaries are based on a strong sense of community as opposed to being constrained by administrative boundaries, which in themselves can often vary between public services. Travel patterns and communities tend not to be constrained by such artificial boundaries, and any RIMP needs to reflect this. Such a boundary can only be defined through working closely with communities and public and private sector organisations. This process needs to balance the need for a strategy to have a focus with the need to have a boundary that is meaningful to communities.

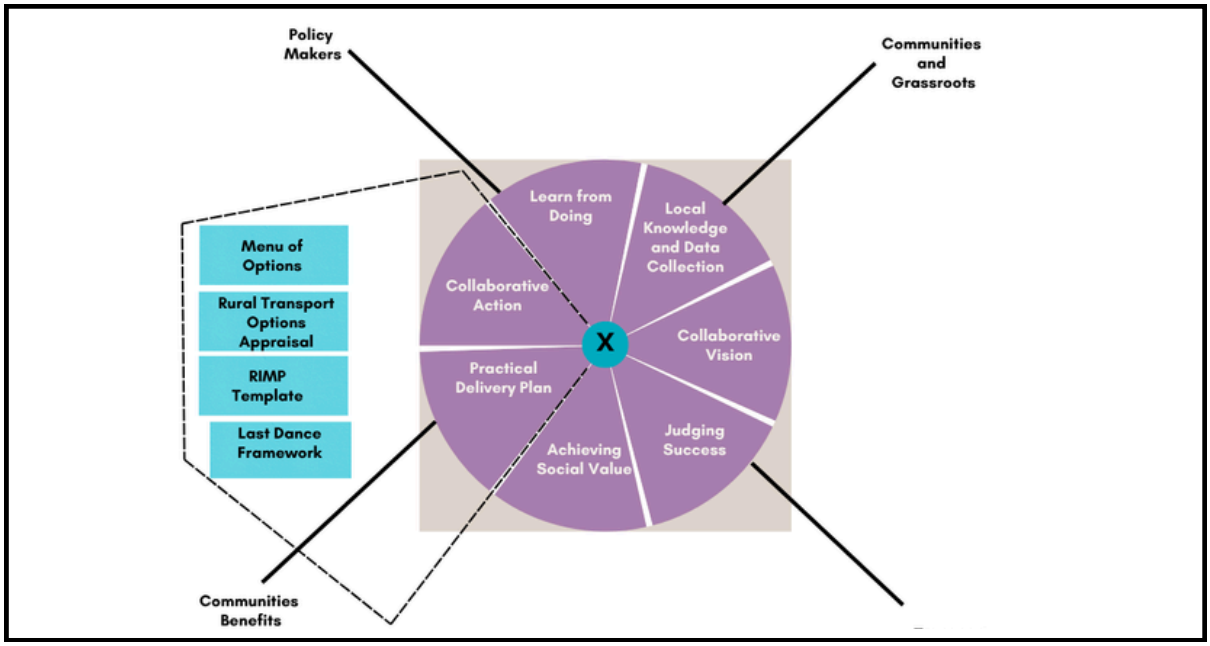

Figure 6 - RIMP Framework

Using the Framework to Develop a RIMP

The RIMP framework sets out that, ultimately, policy makers and communities and grass roots must converge on a RIMP 'cycle' to achieve the desired outcomes. These outcomes, in the broadest terms, are set out as follows:

	Outcomes sought
Policy makers	Achieving transport outcomes (e.g. improving public transport access). Either as an outcome in its own right, or as a means of achieving other policy outcomes (e.g., lower carbon emissions)
Communities and grassroots	Achieving community and social value benefits that improve lives for those in the community, and contribute towards communal well being and prosperity. Either as outcomes in their own right, or as a means of achieving other outcomes (e.g., supporting local businesses).

The RIMP cycle acts as the convergence point, where policy makers and communities and grassroot groups work together to develop and deliver a RIMP ultimately leading to achieving all desired outcomes.

The following section outlines in detail each of the 7 stages of the RIMP cycle, as featured in the RIMP Framework, providing practical suggestions and recommendations.

1. Local Knowledge and Data Collection

RIMPs need to be underpinned by evidence, and it is at this stage that the evidence that will underpin the RIMP is collected. The purpose of this evidence collection should be the following:

- To identify and bring out the nature of the rural transport-related issues facing the area;
- To provide evidence of the wider impacts of these issues on the community, economy, and environment of the local area;
- To identify the baseline transport operations of the area, covering all modes of transport.

Much of this may use traditional transport data collection methods. Data on local transport operations may already be freely available from others, including road traffic counts, the number of people using local bus and community transport services, data on traffic congestion, road casualties, and the use of railway stations to name but a few. There may also be wider socio-economic data from the likes of the Census, government, and public services.

A number of local partners are likely to have data on the use of their services. You should ask them whether you can look at it and analyse it. Note that this may necessitate signing a data sharing agreement with them, and only presenting summary data, as some of the data may be commercially confidential.

You should also look at data associated with key trip origins and destinations. For example, how many appointments are offered at the local GP surgery, or how many customers does the local shop get during a week.

You can collect data yourself. Where you do so, it should be published openly, along with details of the method that you used.

Where a RIMP is unique to other transport strategies is that this data collection must be supplemented with local knowledge of transport issues (including freight) and the community. Doing so provides a rich level of insight that provides evidence of the link between transport issues and their impact on communities.

This is currently done through close engagement with community groups as part of the strategy development process, but this can be taken further. Techniques used in ethnographic research, where communities are observed or provide feedback as part of their everyday lives, should be considered. This can include the use of interviews, experience mapping, and short surveys in the places used by people in the community.

Finally, to understand the social value of transport in the area, a Local Needs Assessment should be undertaken as part of a Social Value Framework.

2. Collaborative Vision

Collaborative visioning is a powerful and inclusive process through which communities come together to imagine and define the kind of place they want their area to become. It focuses upon forging a shared sense of direction that reflects local values, priorities and opportunities. At its heart, it identifies a desired future state—perhaps a greener, more connected, economically vibrant, or culturally rich place—and sets the groundwork for achieving it.

In many cases, collective visioning draws on an existing vision that has been shaped by previous evidence such as consultations, strategic plans or local policy. For example, there might be a long-term ambition for the area to be carbon-neutral by 2040, a hub for creative industries, or a healthy, walkable community with thriving public spaces. Revisiting and refreshing such visions through inclusive processes ensures they remain relevant, responsive, and widely supported.

Secondly, scenario planning is a useful tool within collective visioning, particularly when preparing for uncertainty. It allows stakeholders to explore how different trends and external forces—such as climate change, demographic shifts, or technological advancement—might influence the future. Through this process, communities can test how their vision might fare under a variety of circumstances and identify choices that might prove resilient regardless of what the future will hold. Rather than trying to predict a single future, scenario planning helps people prepare for several plausible ones.

In contrast, forecasting is a more technical exercise, best reserved for specific areas of interest where data and modelling can provide deeper insight. For example, understanding future transport demand and energy use might involve sophisticated forecasting to inform infrastructure planning. However, forecasting should not drive the visioning process, rather it supports it by offering evidence on what may be needed to realise the vision or to mitigate risks.

Ultimately, collective visioning is a collaborative journey that draws together local authorities, businesses, community groups, and residents in shaping a shared future. It blends aspiration with realism, inspiration with analysis. By integrating scenario planning and targeted forecasting, communities can build robust, dynamic plans that guide decision-making, attract investment, and foster a strong sense of local ownership and pride. It is through this kind of purposeful, inclusive dialogue that places become not only planned but truly co-created.

3. Judging Success

When communities develop a RIMP, it is essential to plan not just for implementation but also for how success will be measured. Judging whether the strategy has worked should focus less on technical achievements—such as the number of bus routes added or timetables improved—and more on the lived experiences of those the transport serves. This approach ensures that the strategy is grounded in real, social value impact, rather than purely operational outputs.

Success should be understood through the lens of community wellbeing and inclusion, for example, a successful strategy might mean that older residents now feel confident to travel independently to appointments, or that families find it easier to access ferry services for school and shopping trips. It could mean young people are better able to reach employment or educational opportunities without relying on private vehicles. These experience-based outcomes reflect a shift in how mobility contributes to people's quality of life and ability to participate fully in their community.

To assess such outcomes effectively, communities should develop clear, measurable indicators that are meaningful to local people. These key performance indicators (KPIs) might include the percentage of residents who say they find it easier to travel to key services, the number of people reporting improved access to social or leisure activities, or reductions in travel-related social isolation. The focus should always be on how transport enables connection, inclusion, accessibility and opportunity.

Crucially, KPIs should be made publicly available and be regularly updated. This transparency helps build trust and accountability, allowing communities to track progress and keep decision-makers accountable where necessary. Publicly shared KPIs also invite local residents to remain engaged with the strategy over time, supporting a culture of continuous transparent improvement.

When determining 'what success looks like', involving communities is key. This could involve consultation exercises, participatory evaluation methods, or community panels that help shape both the KPIs and the methods for collecting feedback. People are more likely to support and believe in a strategy (have "buy-in") if they've helped determine how it will be judged.

Ultimately, a community transport strategy should not be judged solely by how many miles of road have been upgraded or how punctual the buses are, but whether it has enabled people to live better, more connected, and more fulfilling lives. By keeping the focus on social outcomes, communities ensure that transport serves its true purpose: to connect people to what matters most.

4. Achieving Social Value

Applying the concept of social value to a RIMP offers a powerful way to design and deliver services that go beyond traditional cost-benefit analysis. It encourages decision-makers to consider the broader positive impacts that transport solutions can have on people's lives, communities and the environment—particularly important in rural areas where connectivity challenges often intersect with social isolation, ageing populations and limited access to services.

In rural settings, transport is not just about mobility; it's about enabling participation in society. By embedding social value into procurement, planning and delivery, public authorities can prioritise outcomes such as improved health and wellbeing, increased volunteering, or stronger local economies. For example, when commissioning a rural community transport service, a local authority could require operators to demonstrate how they will support social value which is tied into community wealth building - for example by using local drivers, partnering with voluntary groups or providing training opportunities for young people.

One practical example might involve integrating a community minibus service with local health and wellbeing initiatives. A service designed around social value might not only help older residents get to GP appointments but also offer transport to social groups or exercise classes. This would reduce loneliness, support preventative healthcare and strengthen community ties—all benefits that can be measured and valued.

To make this approach work, social value needs to be clearly defined, measured and embedded in decision-making processes. Tools such as social return on investment (SROI) or community benefit clauses in contracts can help ensure accountability and transparency as long as these are delivered and monitored..

Applying social value to a RIMP shifts the focus from minimal cost delivery to maximum community impact. It offers a route to more sustainable, inclusive services that reflect the true role of transport in supporting rural life and wellbeing.

5. Practical Delivery Plan

Developing a delivery plan is a vital step in turning shared aspirations into practical action. Done well, it builds upon community engagement and sets out a clear, realistic programme to meet agreed targets. By involving the community in this stage not only strengthens "buy-in" but ensures the plan reflects local needs and knowledge.

The level of detail in the delivery plan will vary depending on the time available, the complexity of the strategy, and the degree of community involvement secured. Where time is limited, a high-level plan outlining key actions and responsibilities may be sufficient to begin with, allowing more detail to be added as the work progresses. Where there is strong community interest and capacity, a more detailed programme—possibly co-designed with residents, local groups, and service providers—can be developed from the outset.

At its core, the delivery plan should lay out what needs to be done, when, by whom, and how progress will be measured. It should clearly link actions to the targets set in the strategy, including social outcomes such as improved access to services, reduced isolation, or increased participation in local life.

Milestones and timescales should be realistic but ambitious, with clear responsibilities assigned to ensure accountability. Community input can shape both the priorities for delivery and the practical steps to be taken. This might include helping to design new services, trialling local travel initiatives, or identifying potential barriers early on. Ongoing dialogue is crucial, with opportunities for regular feedback and adjustment built into the plan.

Ultimately, a good delivery plan is a living document—co-owned by the community and partners—that translates vision into action, and ensures the strategy delivers meaningful change on the ground.

6. Collaborative Action

Successful delivery of a RIMP will rely on strong, sustained collaboration between community groups 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 the wider social determinants of health and wellbeing. In addition, this needs capacity with community development officers and mobility practitioners.

Local authorities/municipalities play a pivotal role in convening and co-ordinating delivery, providing strategic oversight, funding, and connections to wider policy agendas such as climate resilience, regeneration and public health. However, their work is greatly strengthened when collaborating with community groups who hold deep, place-based knowledge of local needs, barriers and opportunities.

These groups can bring insight into the day-to-day practicalities and realities of transport access for marginalised or isolated residents, and offer creative, community-led approaches to service design and delivery.

Healthcare providers, including in the National Health Service and Integrated Care Systems (ICS), are also key partners. Poor transport access often limits people's ability to attend medical appointments or participate in preventative care, which can lead to worsening health outcomes and increased pressure on services.

Working with healthcare partners ensures that the transport strategy supports wider goals of health equity, patient access, and community wellbeing. For example, transport routes could be aligned with health hubs, clinics or support services, and joint funding models explored. The USA provides good examples and a different model for healthcare and transport.

Finally, collaboration should go beyond consultation and become a genuine co-production process. This means jointly setting priorities, designing services and sharing responsibility for outcomes. Community-based transport forums, multi-agency working groups, and local delivery partnerships are all mechanisms that can support this joined-up working.

7. Learning from Doing

A RIMP, particularly those led or shaped by communities, should work best when approached as learning experiences rather than 'one-off' solutions. The principle of "learning by doing" encourages experimentation, reflection and adaptation—allowing both communities and policy makers to test what works in real-world conditions, gather insight, and refine approaches over time. This process is especially valuable in rural communities where traditional top-down planning may miss the nuances of local need.

Learning-by-doing allows communities to trial different ideas—such as demand-responsive transport, shared car schemes, or new walking and cycling links—on a small scale before committing to long-term investment. This helps reduce risk while building confidence, both among residents and decision-makers. It also creates space for innovation, where ideas can emerge from lived experience rather than relying solely on models or forecasts. For policy makers, this approach enables a more flexible and responsive way of working. Rather than delivering a fixed plan, a "test and learn" pilot approach can be implemented and supported by real-time feedback loops.

For example, if a new community minibus route is underused, the reasons can be explored—perhaps timings do not suit users, or promotion has not reached the right audience—and adjustments made. This agile mindset supports smarter investment and more inclusive service design rather than the removal of a service.

It is crucial that the insights gained from these local experiments must be captured and fed back into strategy. This can be done through structured evaluation, community storytelling and participatory monitoring processes, as making time for reflection sessions with local stakeholders or publishing regular learning updates helps embed a culture of continuous improvement.

Local authorities/municipalities and partners should also create mechanisms for scaling successful pilots and sharing learning across places. Peer learning between communities—through networks, events or case studies—can accelerate progress by highlighting transferable ideas and avoiding duplication of effort.

Ultimately, learning-by-doing empowers communities and policy makers to co-create more effective, resilient and people-centred transport strategies. It shifts the focus from rigid delivery to collaborative progress, where strategies evolve in response to evidence and experience. In doing so, transport planning becomes not just a technical process, but a shared journey of discovery that is better able to meet local aspirations and adapt to changing needs.

Tools to Deliver a RIMP

The previous chapter sets out a process by which a RIMP can be developed, and many parts of this process use established techniques to deliver each phase, such as data analysis, scenario planning and visioning. However, the evidence gathered suggests there is a gap in tools and there is a requirement to develop "rural and island specific" tools to support the development of a RIMP.

A 'Menu of Options' is presented below to assist in the short term, as creating the tools was out with the scope of this project. Further learning from the experience of developing RIMPs, and testing of these tools is required, but nonetheless they are worthy of sharing in the interim.

1. Menu of Options

To support the development and delivery of RIMPs, an external organisation—such as the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community CIC—should develop a structured, easy-to-use menu of intervention options. This resource would provide communities and local authorities with a practical framework for identifying, appraising, and selecting appropriate actions tailored to local context.

The menu should be organised around a series of typologies that reflect the range of interventions commonly used in rural mobility. These could include:

- Infrastructure options – physical improvements to enable active and sustainable travel, such as new cycle tracks, upgraded footpaths or improved bus shelters.
- Transport service options – enhancements or introductions of services like demand-responsive transport (DRT), community car schemes, or flexible minibus routes tailored to rural needs.
- Partnership working options – collaborative solutions that combine transport with other sectors or local resources, such as EV-charge points powered by local solar or wind farms, or shared logistics with local businesses.

- Place-based options – initiatives that improve the social and functional fabric of rural areas, such as the development of multi-use community hubs that combine transport access with local services, digital access or meeting spaces.

The menu should also include brief, accessible summaries of the expected impacts of each intervention. This might cover social, economic, and environmental outcomes, as well as practical considerations such as ease of implementation, indicative cost and potential partners. The aim is to offer a quick-reference guide to support informed decision-making and help communities and planners understand what might work best in their area.

Finally, the menu should include delivery drivers and governance arrangements. Tools including the Last Dance Framework developed at the 2023 Scottish Rural & Islands Parliament provide a template to guide this exercise. They and can be adapted to enable stakeholders identify what actions communities/local areas themselves can take to further a RIMP, for example through place planning processes; what actions require support and investment from other institutions (government, enterprise agencies, RTPs etc.) and what actions require policy or institutional change, for example in regulation or procurement frameworks.

2. Common Appraisal Framework for Rural Transport Projects

A common appraisal framework for rural transport projects is essential to ensure consistent, fair, and meaningful evaluation of proposals across different areas. Any framework should go beyond traditional transport metrics and place social value and community wealth building at its core, recognising the broader role transport plays in supporting rural livelihoods, inclusion, and wellbeing, as presented by the Last Dance Framework. There are four key characteristics to this exercise:

1. Incorporating a social value assessment means appraising projects not only on how efficiently they move people, but also on how they contribute to improved health outcomes, reduced isolation, increased access to services and enhanced community resilience. It encourages planners and funders to value the full range of benefits that rural transport can deliver—especially for disadvantaged groups.
2. Community wealth building should also be included. This involves prioritising local economic benefit and encouraging models that retain value within the community. For example, projects could be appraised for how they support local employment, use local supply chains or build community capacity. A minibus service run by a local social enterprise may score more highly than one delivered by an external commercial provider, even if the operational cost is slightly higher.
3. Transport objectives and wider assessments of value for money should be part of this appraisal. The framework should still assess whether a project improves connectivity, reduces journey times, enhances accessibility and contributes to decarbonisation goals. However, these objectives should sit alongside, not above, the wider social and economic impacts.
4. Developing such a framework requires collaboration between national and local government, communities and transport providers. It should be easy to use, transparent, and flexible enough to reflect different rural contexts. Ultimately, a common appraisal framework that values social impact and local benefit as highly as technical performance will lead to more inclusive, sustainable and locally embedded rural transport solutions.

In addition, the publication 'Making impacts of decision-making on rural transport visible: rural transport impact assessment form' by Siirilä from the University of Vaasa should also be considered.

3. A RIMP Template

While each RIMP needs to reflect the area which it covers, and subsequently there will be a uniqueness to each, a common template can be useful in establishing a baseline for anyone wishing to write their own. Based upon our review of policy documents, SRITC has developed a template to be used as a starting point, which can also be viewed as a proposed contents page with chapters. This can be found in Appendix A.

Furthermore, it is important that a RIMP is accessible to all, so anyone can pick it up and understand the key points of the RIMP quickly. It is therefore recommended that any RIMP:

- Is written in non-technical, accessible language. Technical language may be required in some instances, for example explaining the differences between types of transport services but this should be kept to a minimum, and any technical language is clearly explained. In addition a glossary of terms can be included.

- Is no more than 20 pages long. A RIMP should be able to explain clearly what it hopes to achieve, what it plans to do, who should be responsible, and how it will judge success. Any technical details, such as full details of data collection, should be contained within technical appendices and diagrams and figures should be used regularly - visualising words assists all.

Section 1: Introduction

This section should be short, and provide a basic background to the area and why a RIMP has been developed. It should also include the main partners in the RIMP. It should be the first section that is written.

Section 2: Methodology and Engagement approach

This section of the RIMP should highlight the collaborative nature of the document, to demonstrate that this document has a sense of shared ownership. It should highlight the community engagement and collaboration that has gone into the development of the document. It does not need to provide details on all engagement activity that was undertaken, but it should highlight the engagement philosophy taken.

This section should outline who has been involved in the process, so a stakeholder map (Figure X) could be presented. The map provided is for guidance and inspiration and if used should attributed to Jenny Milne, University of Aberdeen.

Section 3: Challenges

This should provide a brief summary of the key transport-related challenges in the RIMP area, based upon the data collection and local intelligence. This can be done by way of stating several challenge statements with supporting evidence. This does not need to go into the detail of all data collection undertaken. A data collection report can be added as an appendix.

Section 4: Vision and Opportunity

This is possibly the shortest section. Simply write here the vision statement agreed upon. Any identified supporting objectives can also be written here.

Section 5: Delivery Plan

This section should set out clearly, as a minimum, the following:

- What projects and programmes will be delivered
- When they will be delivered - month and year
- Who has the responsibility to deliver them - be specific
- Who will fund them, and if that funding is committed already
- How it will achieve your vision or objectives?
- How will the plan be monitored and evaluated

he level of detail depends upon the detail of the work that is undertaken as part of developing the RIMP. The evidence gathered would advise against including lots of detail, such as detailed project plans and risk registers, however it may be required to give the reader a better understanding of key projects or programmes. The use of tables may be useful in this section.

Section 6: Judging Success

This section will set out how success will be measured in delivering the RIMP. SRITC recommend two sections:

- Transport-specific Key Performance Indicators – This could include numbers of people walking, cycling, using buses, as well as delays on roads, or a reduction in the number and severity of collisions.
- Key Performance Indicators showing Social Value Impact – This could include, for example, how the work has helped to improve access to healthcare or jobs, as well as environmental indicators such as reducing carbon emissions or biodiversity net gain.
- Unintended Consequences - It is important to consider impacts, new partnerships etc. that were not intended or previously identified prior to the work commencing

Section 7: Conclusions

This section should pull together the core themes and highlights future actions or recommendations

Section 8: References / Bibliography

It is important to include any literature identified from website to academic papers to newspaper articles. This is a rich resource for any RIMP and should be shared with a wider audience as part of the dissemination.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Building upon an analysis of rural and island mobility plans, strategies, and policies both within the UK and internationally, SRITC have established both a process for developing a RIMP, and a template for a RIMP along with a few practitioner tools. Further work needs to be undertaken to fill in identified gaps, and more testing of the Last Dance Framework.

The two most significant gaps are the Menu of Options and the Rural Transport Projects Appraisal Framework. Further research is needed to fully develop and maintain these, based upon the principles outlined in this report. A third gap is linking the outcomes of RIMPs to social value. This is an area of work currently being explored by SRITC. Fourthly, the RIMP process and template needs to be tested in Scotland. RIMP has been presented as a flexible tool which can be applied in any number of circumstances or locations, regardless of whether it is community-led or led by policy makers. It is place based.

The evidence SRITC have gathered points the fact that what is required is not an addition to or subset of existing policy frameworks in Scotland, but rather something new – a collective voice and approach to transport-policy-making in rural and island areas, based on community development and community wealth building principles. This is not just a change for policy makers, but also a change for rural and island communities who are regularly consulted but often not part of the process.

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 model 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 issue an exciting challenge to policy makers and to communities to grasp this opportunity and to continue working with us on the RIMP learning journey, putting Scotland at the forefront of rural and island transport delivery for the benefit of all.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to everyone who contributed to the project, including members of the SRITC team, volunteers, and wider members of our community who supplied literature that was reviewed as part of the desktop research. In particular, we want to thank the Virtual Café attendees on 28th June 2024, who commented on the initial findings and provided feedback and reflections.

Lead Authors

- Jenny Milne – Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community
- James Gleave – Mobility Policy Lab UK

Co-Authors

- Irina Protasova – Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community
- Nikki Brown – Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community
- Abigail Betney – Independent transport consultant
- Matt Kendrick - Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community
- Alex Reid – Director, Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community
- Sweyn Hunter – Independent Consultant

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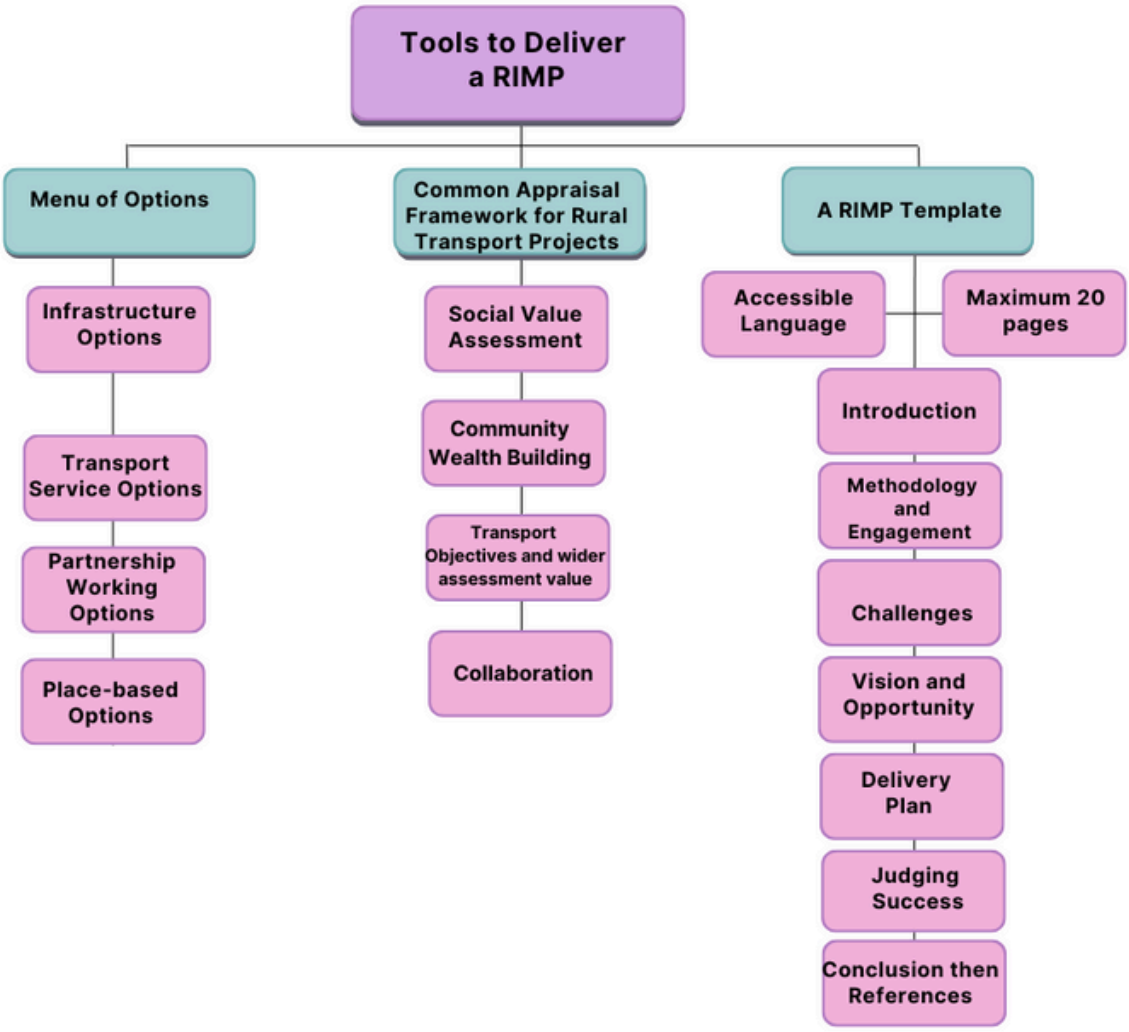
The Smarter Choices, Smarter Places (SCSP) funding programme operated by Paths for All has been pivotal in developing SRITC as an organisation since 2021. The funding has allowed SRITC to build the community and consequently undertake all the stakeholder engagement activities that produced the evidence needed to demonstrate demand for a Scottish rural and islands mobility plan. In March 2024, Paths for All approved the funding application for this 12-month project, which focuses on desktop and in-person research.

Appendix A

Tools to Develop a RIMP

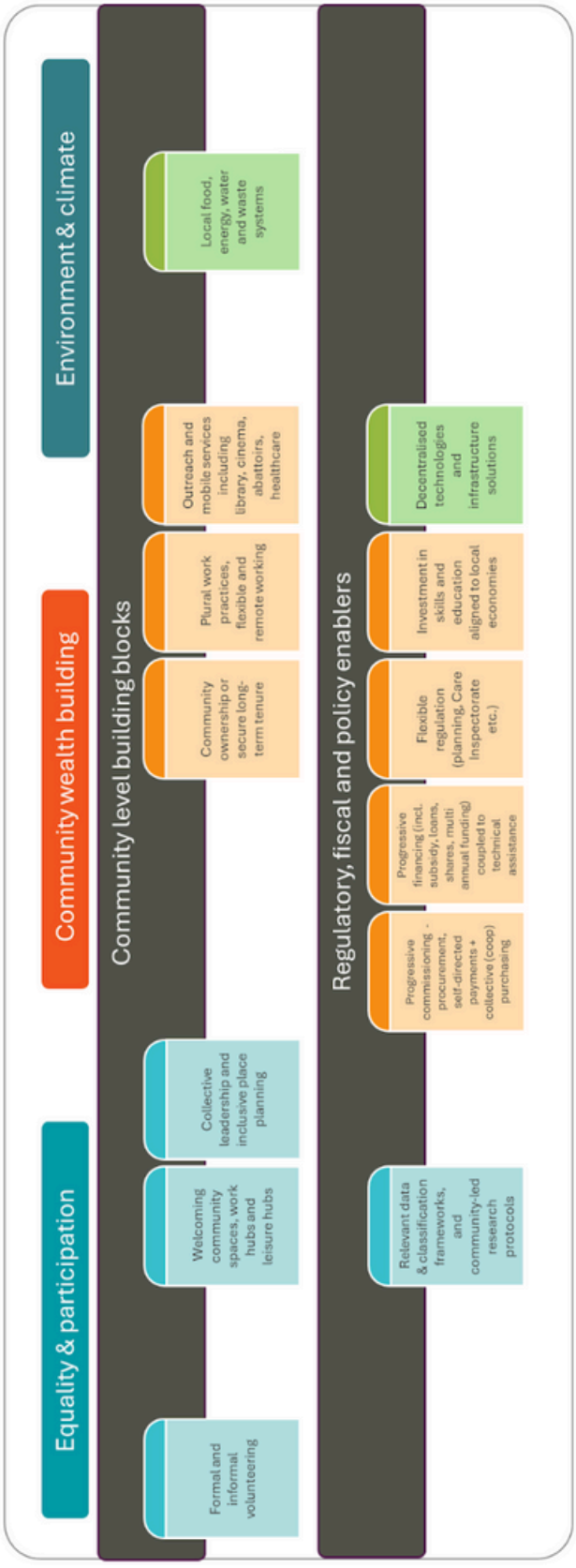


Appendix B

Community level delivery drivers identified as relevant to RMaaS

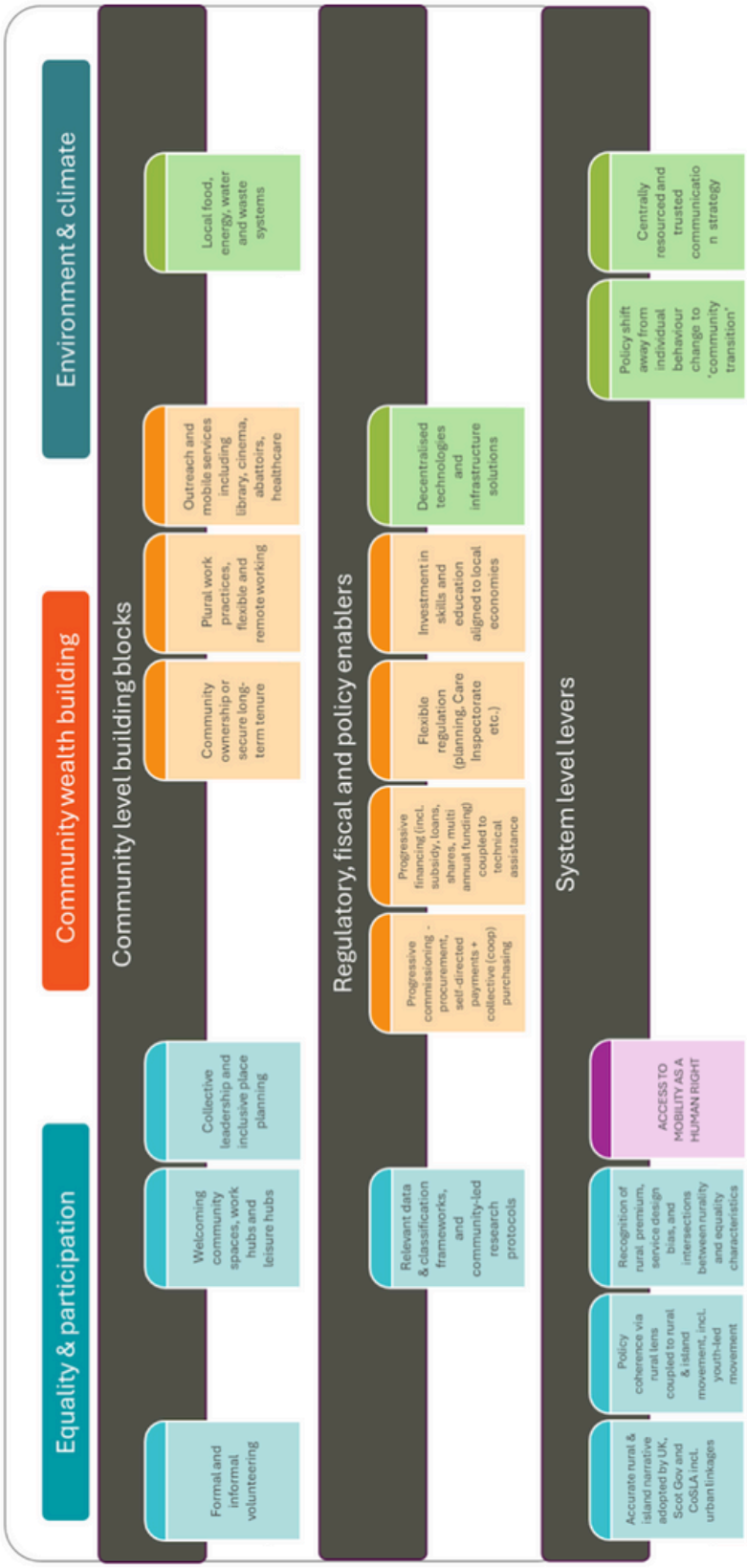
Appendix C

Regulatory, fiscal and policy drivers identified as relevant to RMaaS



Appendix D

System level drivers identified as relevant to RMaaS



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Contact SRITC

sritc@ruralmobility.scot

www.ruralmobility.scot

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