TheScottish
Rural & Islands
Transport Community
A Community Interest Company

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

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Get in Touch

If you want to provide feedback on this report, the team at SRITC team are happy to hear from you as it will help to shape the final report that we publish for consultation. Please e-mail your feedback to sritc@ruralmobility.scot.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

CalMac	Caledonian MacBrayne
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
RTP	Regional Transport Partnership
SRIP	Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament
SRITC	Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community

About SRITC

The Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community (SRITC) was established in 2017 and incorporated as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2021. SRITC has over 600 members across 19 countries with a mission 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 Scottish 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. The process has involved a variety of action-led activities, including workshops which were facilitated through our 2023 conference 'The Gathering' at Boat of Garten, where we had 100 attendees, the Scottish Rural & Islands Parliament, where we connected with 40 participants, and less formally through monthly Virtual Cafés which 20-30 stakeholders regularly attend.

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

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to everyone who contributed to the first stage of 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, w e want to thank the Cafe attendees on 28th June 2024, who commented on our initial findings and provided their feedback and thoughts on our work to date.

Resources

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Funding

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.

Introduction

Scotland does not have an integrated national plan for rural and island transport. Today, planning and policy development related to rural transport is led by Transport Scotland and presented in their 'National Transport Strategy 2 ' ('NTS2') and supporting delivery plans. However, the policies and commitments outlined in these publications fail to consider the unique characteristics of life in rural and island communities and the challenges this presents when accessing affordable and sustainable transport services.

In 2021, SRITC led a series of workshops on behalf of the Scottish Government where stakeholders representing rural and island community groups, local authorities, and RTPs had the opportunity to identify areas of the NTS2 that, from their perspective, needed to be refined, modified or bolstered to "rural proof" them. From these workshops emerged six recommendations that SRITC labelled as the 'Six Big Asks' to the Scottish Government. The first of these 'Six Big Asks' was for the development of an integrated Rural and Island Mobility Plan (RIMP) that captures the unique transport needs of communities across Scotland.

In early 2024, SRITC secured funding from Path for All's Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) programme to undertake an in-depth desktop and in-person research program, which would build the foundations for developing an RIMP for Scotland. This report provides a summary of the outcomes from the first stage of this research programme and is divided into four sections.

Section 1: Provides an overview of SRITC, the research and stakeholder engagement we've previously undertaken related to rural and island transport, and the context of this report within the overall RIMP project.

Section 2: Presents the key questions that underpinned the research undertaken during the first stage of this project, and outlines the methodology employed to obtain answers to these questions.

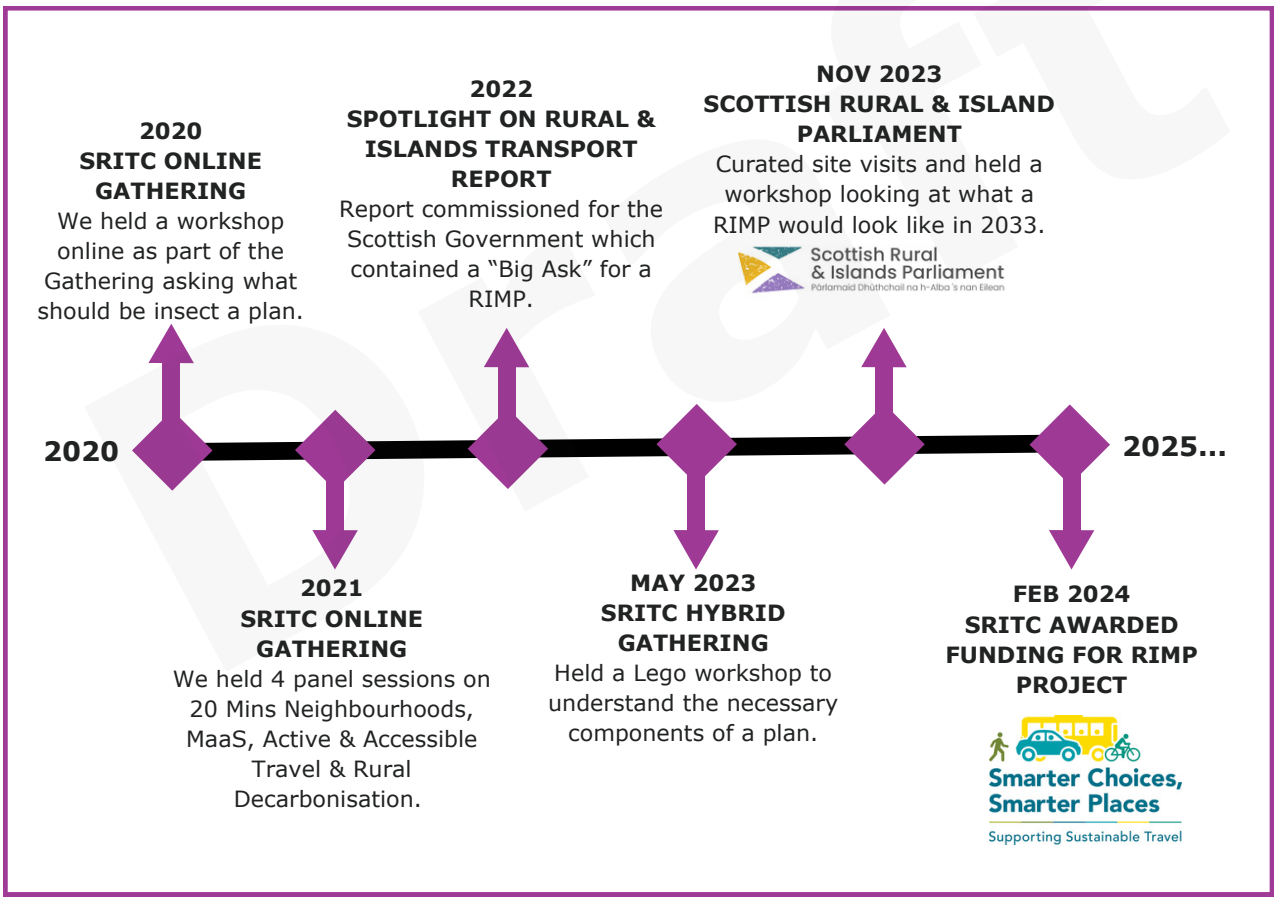
Section 3: Presents the key insights identified from the literature review & stakeholder engagement.

Section 4: Contains the main conclusions that can be t from the insights collected.

Section 1 - Background & Context

SRITC was inspired by the work conducted by the EU project SMARTA. In 2019 SMARTA examined European rural transport policies and discovered a gap in dedicated rural transport policies. Building on this insight, since 2020, SRITC has undertaken extensive engagement activities to confirm the levels of interest and demand across stakeholders for a rural and islands mobility plan for Scotland to be developed.

Figure 1 - Evolution of SRITC



October 2020 - SRITC Online Conference ('The Gathering') 2020

150 attendees explored policy gaps and issues related to rural and island transport. Three key findings emerged: (1) the need for better integration of transport and land-use planning, (2) a shift in focus to outcomes over outputs, and (3) the need for improved national procurement frameworks to support rural communities. From this initial conference, SRITC identified a strong appetite in the community to explore this topic in more detail.

October 2021 - SRITC Online Gathering 2021

Due to the ongoing effects of the COVID pandemic, in 2021 The Gathering was held online and focused the consequences of the pandemic on rural communities. It produced valuable insights on the barriers implementation barriers facing these communities across active and accessible travel, decarbonisation, MaaS, and 20 minute neighbourhoods. These insights were used as a catalyst to secure funding to undertake a strategic review of the National Transport Strategy 2 via consultation with stakeholders in rural and island communities.

June 2022 - Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport Report

The Scottish Government commissioned SRITC to engage rural and island stakeholders on the NTS2. Based on feedback from three targeted workshops in 2021, SRITC published the report, presenting six recommendations called the "Six Big Asks" for the Scottish Government. One of the 'asks' that emerged from these workshops was to develop a Rural and Island Mobility (RIMP) plan for Scotland.

May 2023 - Lego Workshop at SRITC Conference

This hybrid event involved a multi-stakeholder workshop using a simplified version of the Lego "Serious Play" method to identify the core pillars of a RIMP, namely: flexibility; data-driven; accessibility; holistic planning, promotion, long-term impact, modal priorities, and secure funding. These insights support building a business case for RIMP.

November 2023 - Scottish Rural & Islands Parliament (SRIP) 2023

At the SRIP conference, SRITC facilitated a "Transport Forum" workshop to delve deeper into the themes identified in the "Building Blocks" report and refine these themes. This provided the level of detail needed to develop a proposal to secure funding to undertake a 1-year in-depth research programme centred around the development of a RIMP.

After developing a proposal, in early 2024, SRITC were successful in securing funding from Path for All's Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) programme to undertake this in-depth study using desktop and in-person research methods to examine rural and island transport policies and strategies across Scotland, the UK and internationally. The project is divided into four phases, which are highlighted below.

Figure 2 - RIMP Project Roadmap

This report focuses on the activities and findings from phase 1 of the project, during which, for the first time, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken of transport strategies, policies, and initiatives originating from national, regional, local, and community-level organisations. The objective is to identify gaps between top-down and bottom-up strategies and policies related to rural and island transport, differences in terminologies and language used by stakeholders at different organisational levels, and innovative ideas that deserve more attention.

An in-person workshop complemented the literature review during the MaaS Scotland 2024 conference. A cross-section of transport sector stakeholders participated in the workshop using design thinking and co-creation principles to develop a methodology for designing, implementing and evaluating a rural MaaS solution.

A report called "Defining and Designing Rural MaaS that summarises the outcomes from the workshop can be viewed here.

Section 2 - Research Questions & Methodology

2.1 Research Questions

Three strategic questions underpinned the research undertaken during phase 1, the answers to which would support the development of a rural and islands mobility plan framework in the final stage of the project.

Question 1 - What gaps are there between national and regional transport strategies and policies, and local needs?

The evidence that SRITC has collected from stakeholders in the community through regular engagement highlights that there are numerous gaps. However, only by comparing published national and regional policies against local authority and community trust plans can confident assessments be made on the breadth and depth of these gaps.

Question 2 - How effectively are transport policies and their supporting delivery plans communicated across all of the publications reviewed?

Translating national strategies and policies into deliverables that can be successfully implemented depends on the use of appropriate language that is universally understood. Through analysis of the content of each publication, insights can be gleaned on the words, phrases and terminologies conceived by national policy makers that are most likely to confuse or alienate local stakeholders and compromise their ability to take meaningful actions within their community.

Question 3 - How do attitudes and approaches to innovations in transport vary at different spatial levels?

Digital technologies have the potential to improve the integration and provision of transport services to all users while advances in engineering and materials sciences can reduce carbon emissions. Understanding the degree to which technologies promoted by national policy makers are understood and being successfully adopted within rural and island communities will reveal the amount of work needed to "rural proof" them.

In other words, modify each technology so that it can be successfully operationalised in rural and island locations.

2.2 Research Methodology

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

Step 1 - Publication Search

To address the lack of a central resource centre where publications related to national, regional, local, and community-level transport and economic development strategies and policies could be accessed, a rigorous search process was undertaken to identify publications containing information that would help to answer the research questions. This resulted in 78 publications (Table 1) that discuss, in whole or in part, issues related to rural and island transport and present interventions that aim to resolve them. Publishers included the Scottish Government, RTPs, Regional Economic Development organisations, Local Authorities, and Community Trusts.

National, regional, and Local Authority publications (Figure 2) were easy to locate online, with support from the SRITC community, community-level documents published by community trusts and independent consultants opened up a window through which rural and island communities' practical day-to-day transport issues could be viewed and contrasted against national policies and regional strategies.

Figure 3 - Publication Hierarchy

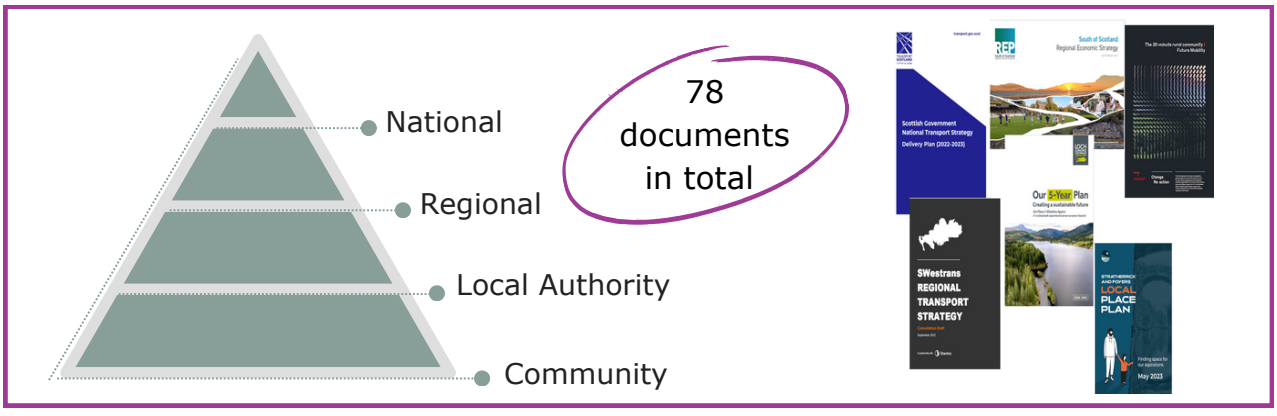


Table 1 - Level, Type and Number of Publications Reviewed

Geographic Level	Publication Type	Number of Publications
National	Policy	4
	Delivery Plan	4
	Research	2
Regional	Strategy	12
Local	Delivery Plan	1
	Strategy	33
	Research	3
Community	Local Place Plan	20
	Delivery Plan	1
Total		**78**

Step 2 - Publication Review

After sourcing and cataloguing the 78 publications, a a list of keywords was created that could be used to search for relevant content in each publication. The keywords were specifically chosen based on insights from stakeholder workshops facilitated by SRITC at the 2023 Gathering and Scottish Rural & Islands Parliament (SRIP) 2023.

Step 2 - Content Categorisation

Content from within each publication linked to each keyword was organised into the following categories to support the objective of identifying policy and innovation gaps, and differences in the language that stakeholders at different spatial levels use to describe specific aspects of transport planning and delivery.

Figure 4 - Content Categories

Spatial
> Urban/Rural

Governance
> Policy/Regulations

Sentiment
> Positive/Negative

Modal
> Car/Bus/Train/Ferry/Plane/ Bike

Technology
> DDRT/MaaS/EVs

Infrastructure
> Roads/Paths/Stations/Tunnels

Spatial

How much weight is placed on urban transport planning and provision versus rural? That was the central question that the literature review aimed to answer and was driven by the hypothesis that urban centric policies have been shoehorned into rural and island communities.

Governance

How well designed and relevant are regulations, policies and budgets set at national level by the Government to rural and island communities? How appropriate is the language used to describe them? Answering these questions provides the evidence needed to support the development of a rural and islands mobility plan?

Sentiment

Are positive sentiments related to specific rural and island transport strategies, policies and projects universally shared by stakeholders at all levels based on the content of the literature reviewed? Are negative sentiments expressed by stakeholders in local communities understood and reflected in national and regional publications?

Modal

As illustrated in Figure 3 cars and buses receive the most focus across all of the publications reviewed, and trains and ferries somewhat less so. How satisfactorily are national policies related to each mode meeting the needs of stakeholders in rural and island communities? Are policies and funding developed specifically for the people in these communities fit for purpose?

Technology

Through the lens of rural and island communities, how well designed and communicated are the technologies that are viewed as central to improving the accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of transport services? Are technologists designing the right services that solve the distinct challenges faced by these communities, and do Government bodies understand their role in ensuring that their technology investment policies respect these distinctions?

Infrastructure

Urban and rural communities across Scotland are all demanding greater levels of investment in upgrades to and construction of critical transport infrastructure including roads, bridges, mobility hubs, and walking, cycling and wheeling paths. How effectively are investment strategies set at a national level, and planning policies administered by Local Authorities meeting the needs of people in rural and island communities who have to contend with the issues caused by underinvestment?

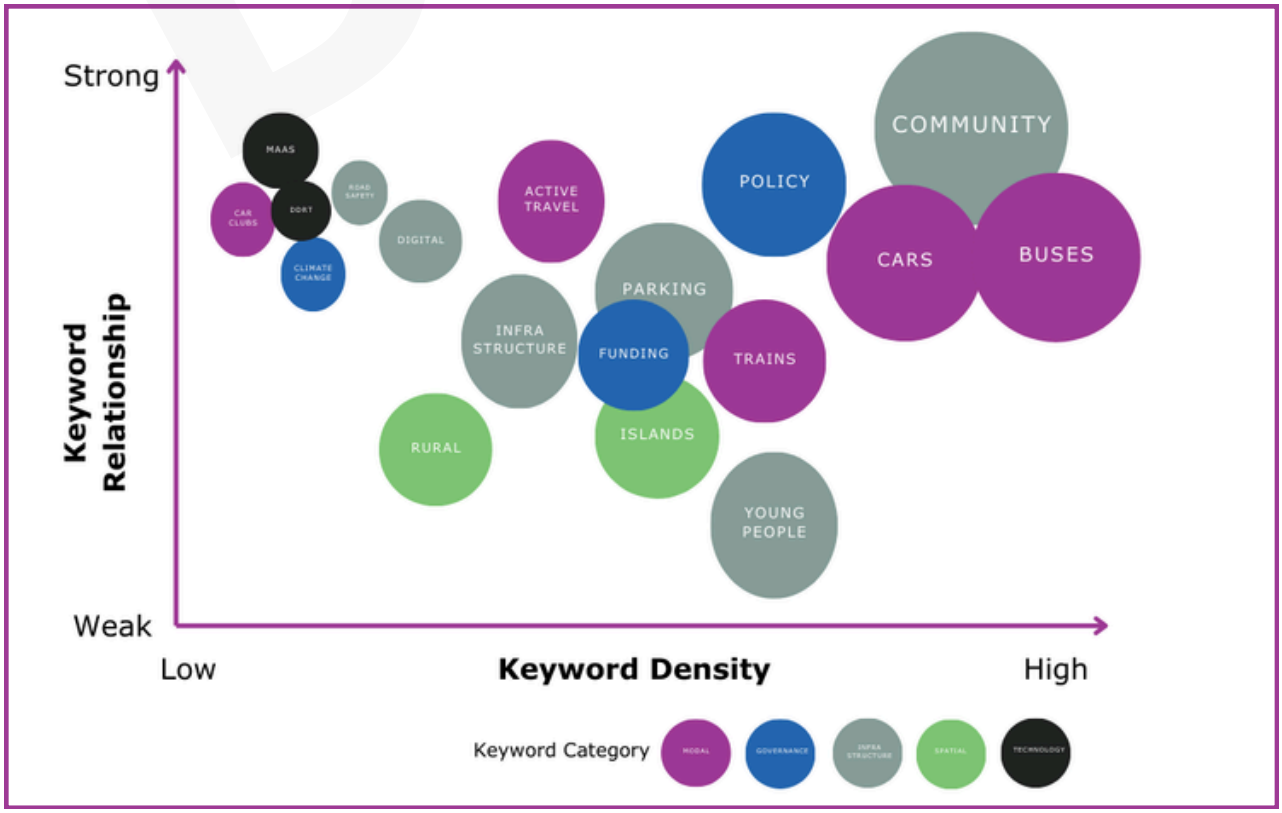
Section 3 - Key Insights

The review of publications across the 4 spatial levels revealed insights that carry value in the context of informing the actions that needed to be taken to successfully develop an integrated rural and island mobility plan for Scotland. At a high level, these insights relate to the frequency with which keywords feature in the publication, and how strongly it's related at a spatial level. When complemented by deeper analysis of the content associated with these keywords, a clearer picture emerges of where interventions on behalf of rural and island communities are most needed.

3.1 Keyword Density

Undertaking keyword driven research across all 78 publications enabled data to be collected on the frequency with which each keyword appeared, and their strength of relationship across all four spatial levels of planning. In Figure 5, the keyword density (x axis) represents the total number of times it appears within all publications while keyword relationship (y axis) represents how strongly the keyword is related across spatial levels. The coloured bubbles represent each of the content categories, and the size of each bubble signifies the prominence of the keyword relative to others.

Figure 5 - Keyword Map



Community, cars and buses have the highest density and strongest spatial relationship indicating that across all stakeholders there is agreement that policies that focus on these areas are of most importance.

MaaS, DDRT, and car clubs appear with much less frequency in all publications (low keyword density) but are strongly related meaning that as possible ways of improving access to sustainable transport, they are recognised by communities as well as national policy makers even if they are not viewed as a top priority.

References to rural and island related policies and deliverables are moderately represented within all publications but more so at a national and regional level. While seemingly paradoxical, this can be explained by the wide breadth of subjects related to rural and island policies that are covered at these levels compared to local plans that are more narrowly focused.

3.2 Content Analysis

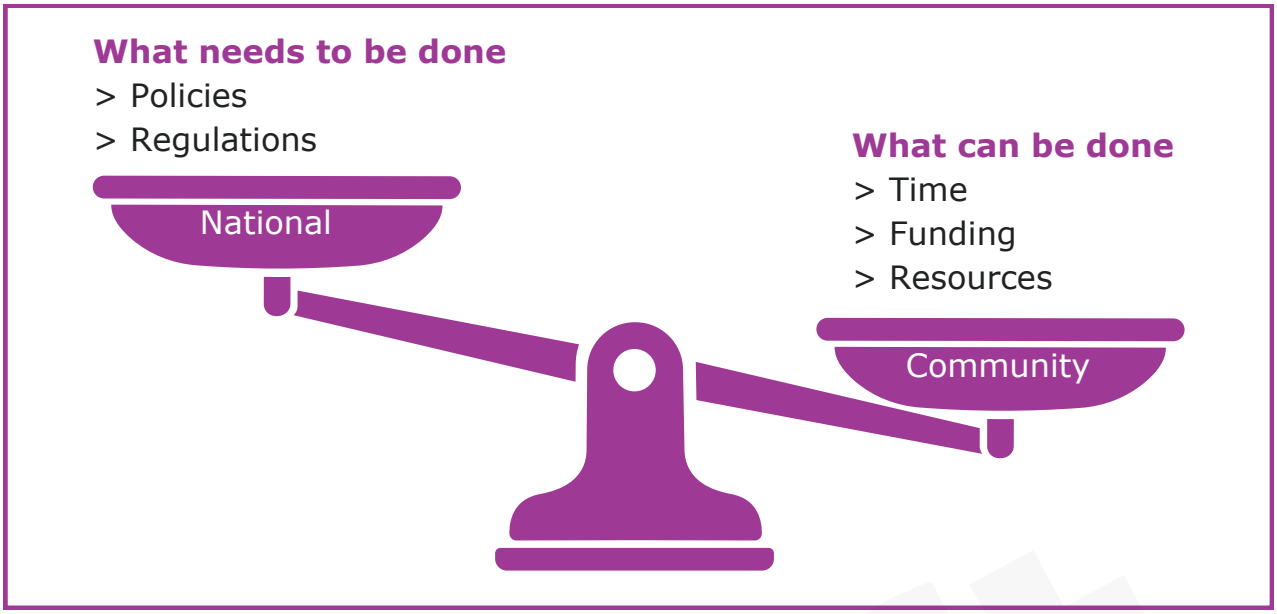
Question 1 - What gaps are there between national and regional transport strategies and policies, and local plans?

Governance Gaps

At a national level, strategy documents, including the NTS2, and NPF4 set out long-term ambitions for the planning and operating transport services across all localities in Scotland. Some of these ambitions have been formalised into commitments. For example, reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030 and a car demand management framework.

While these commitments are welcome, important questions remain about how successful implementation can be based on the time, funding, and resource constraints that local authorities and community groups commonly face. Whether it is climate change, road safety, or active travel targets, the literature review confirms significant gaps exist between what needs to be done and what can be done (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - National Policies versus local resources



A RIMP needs to be flexible and in tune with the diverse requirements of rural and island communities. In practical terms, to achieve maximum impact, a RIMP needs to provide space for every community to determine how and over what timescale national transport policies and targets can be achieved.

Governance Gaps

1.Take Climate Action

The design of national policies related to sustainable transport including decreasing journeys made by car and increasing instances of walking, cycling, and wheeling does not fully consider the practicalities of implementation within rural and island communities. As expressed through the local plans that were analysed, the desire of local people to be more active and less car dependent is constrained by governance frameworks that create red tape (planning regulations) and limit the resources and funding needed to implement sustainability programmes.

2.Reduce Inequalities

The benefits of interventions designed by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland with the aim of removing barriers to accessing transport services are not being experienced to their full extent in rural and island communities. From a governance perspective, local authorities and community groups lack the powers to implement improvements that local people see as a priority. An example cited in several local plans is providing step-free access to platforms at rural train stations.

The required funds and resources are owned by Network Rail with local authorities required to bid to secure funding. This model can often mean that rural stations miss out because of lower passenger numbers and the higher construction costs. Improvements to passenger facilities at West coast ferry ports provides a further illustration of the issues caused by disjointed governance frameworks.

Where ports are managed by private organisations, for example Peel Ports, but the ferries by a public operator (CalMac) this leads to conflicts of interest when each party has different long-term objectives for the port infrastructure. This leads to long delays in the delivery of the work needed to improve access to the ports and ferries.

3.Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth

At a national level, long standing commitments to construct the infrastructure needed to achieve the inclusive growth ambitions set out by the Scottish Government remain unfulfilled and this is reflected through the voices of the people in rural and island communities responsible for the development of local plans.

The glaring gap is a failure of governance at the national level where the targets to complete major programmes such as the dualling of the A9, replacement of ferries, and upgrades to port and rail infrastructure are consistently missed. Instead of economic growth developing inclusively, failure to upgrade ageing infrastructure is widening inequalities as the costs of travel to and from rural and island communities increase.

4.Coordination of Cross Boundary Programmes

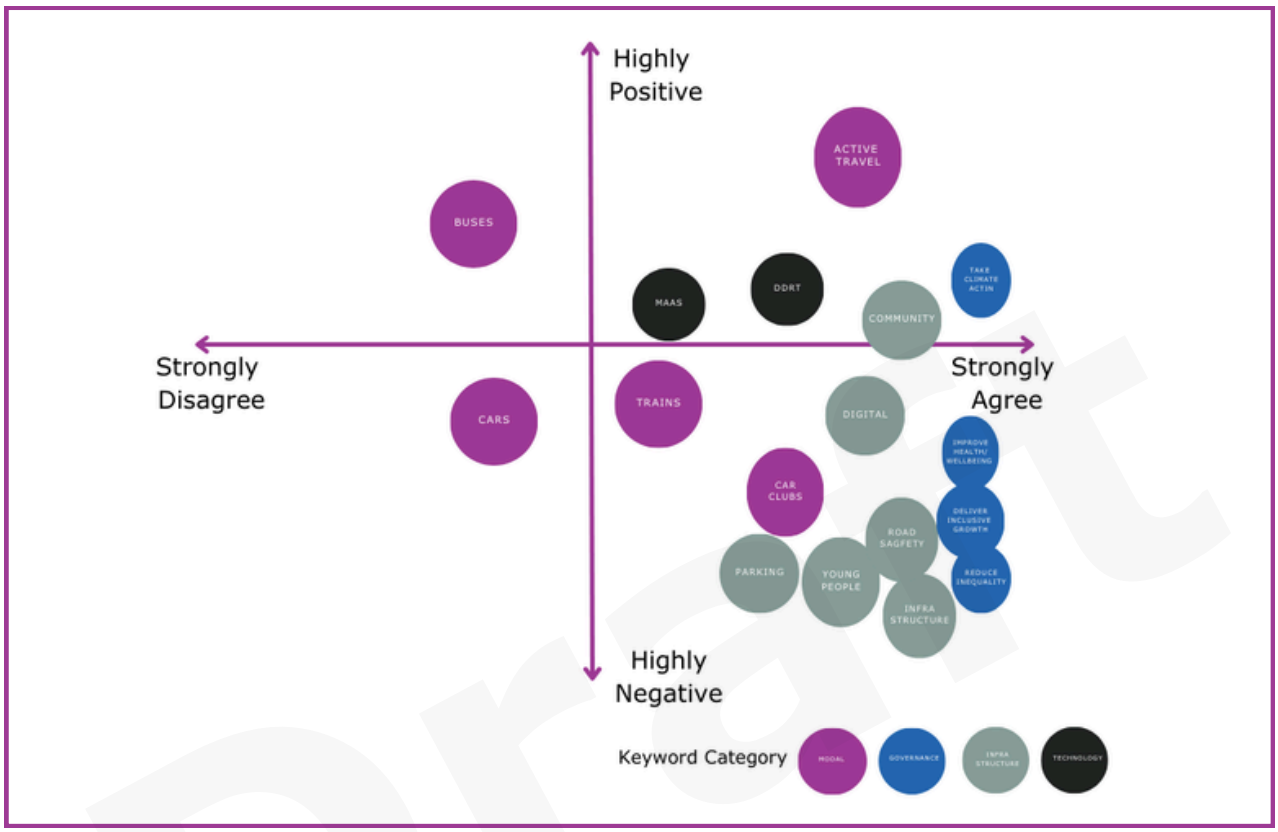
At a regional level, the ability of Scotland's RTPs to implement and coordinate transport programmes connected to long term strategies that cross the borders of local authorities within their region continues to be constrained due to the limited statutory powers and a lack of dedicated funding to RTPs.

5.Sentiment Gaps

Establishing the levels of positivity and agreement associated with the current and future direction of transport service provision and investment in Scotland through the literature review enables insights to be drawn on where the biggest sentiment gaps lie.

Across all four spatial levels of publications inferences on sentiment can be made based on analysis of statements related to specific keywords. When aggregated, this enables a sentiment map (see Figure 7) to be created that plots positivity and agreement levels.

Figure 7 - Sentiment Analysis



The two most notable observations from the sentiment map of value to the development of a rural and island mobility plan are as follows:

- Organisations at all four spatial levels are more agreeable than disagreeable that the right actions are being taken to deliver improvements to transport service provision. The exceptions being buses and cars which through the local plans produced by rural or island community organisations can be explained by the lack of policies that balance the long term transition to electric vehicles. This set against the short term needs of local people who due to their financial situation will be later adopters of EVs and where they don't own a car, expect more buses to be available even if they are fuelled by diesel.
- In spite of higher levels of agreeableness on the actions being taken, stakeholders representing regional, local and community groups have a more negative than positive view on the likelihood of success.

This arises from a commonly expressed opinion in the related publications that good policies are being poorly implemented due to deficiencies in governance that include a "one size fits all" approach to transport and spatial planning. Rural and island communities are at the sharp end of these failures due to the wide variations in population density, social deprivation, and remoteness from larger population centres.

Sentiment Gaps

1.Bus Journeys

National policies centre on the decarbonisation of bus journeys, increasing passenger numbers and empowering Local Authorities outside of Edinburgh to assume greater operational control. These longer term ambitions stand in contrast to the immediate wishes of rural and island community groups who see reversing cuts to services, re-connecting neighbouring villages, upgrading bus stop infrastructure, and making them safer and more accessible as priorities that are not being satisfactorily addressed at higher levels of governance.

2.Car Journeys

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. Missing from national transport strategies are rural specific interventions that are designed in ways that gradually reduce car use without damaging health and wellbeing and widening inequalities.

3.Train Journeys

Electrifying semi-urban and rural train lines competes with the cost of rail fares and infrequency of services at rural stations for attention and funding. Stakeholders in rural communities believe that trains can play a vital role in delivering inclusive economic growth but only if they are available when needed to travel to and from larger population centres. This means the trains are more affordable at peak times, better connected to local bus services, accessible to all, and more resilient to climate change driven weather extremes through which services are more reliable.

4.Ferry Journeys

National policies, most consequently, the Ferries Plan (2013-2022), and specific legislation (National Islands Plan 2018) are designed to improve social, economic, and environmental outcomes for island communities. However, the slow pace at which investments in vessel replacement and port infrastructure has progressed is highlighted by regional, local, and community stakeholders.

Their frustration is hinged on the inability to accelerate the pace, and anger at the impact that delays and spending reviews are having on the livelihoods of the people who live and work on the islands. As the popularity of Scotland's islands as tourist destinations continues to increase, and the populations rapidly age, the islands component of a rural and islands mobility plan must put forward proposals on how passenger and freight journeys to and from islands can be made more resilient, sustainable and better integrated with other transport services.

5.Plane Journeys

From a national and regional perspective, flights to and from rural and island airports are discussed at most length in the wider context of improving the resiliency and sustainability of lifeline transport services. The viability of these short duration flights is only possible through Government subsidies. The most significant concern from stakeholders in rural and island communities is that as the populations age, and some of the costs of transitioning to electric or low carbon fuelled planes are potentially passed to passengers in higher ticket prices, this will reduce the number of people who are able to fly which in turn will accelerate depopulation rates.

6.Active Travel Journeys

There is broad agreement at all spatial levels that increasing levels of active travel will make a significant contribution to improving health and wellbeing and support climate adaptation strategies. Nationally, as outlined in NTS2 and NPF4, levels of investment in active travel programmes as a percentage of national transport budget has increased in recent years. However, across the country, and specifically within rural and island communities this hasn't been reflected in increases in the number of regular walkers, cyclists and wheelers.

The largest gaps between the intentions that underpin national policies, and the implementation are at grassroots level, where the lack of permissions, funding, and resources is needed to rapidly construct new active travel infrastructure. These pains are particularly acute in rural communities where negotiation with land owners can often be protracted, and the resources to undertake construction most scarce.

7.Freight Journeys

Long term national goals to decarbonise the movement of freight through the electrification of light and heavy goods vehicles, and substitution of road freight to rail are confronted by the immediate challenges that haulage businesses located in rural and island communities have delivering freight to customers in other parts of the country. For island businesses and the RTPs, and Local Authorities who support them, the growing unreliability of ferries reduces their ongoing financial viability.

Technology Gaps

1.Electrification

The electrification of all modes of road vehicles from bikes to heavy goods vehicles, trains, ferries and planes is a core pillar of national strategies to reduce carbon emissions and reach net-zero. The Scottish Government has invested over £65 million in the roll out of Charge Place Scotland , the nationwide electric vehicle charging network which has been supplemented by grants for homeowners and businesses to install charge points. An additional £110 million has been spent supporting the electrification of buses via 2 phases of the Zero Emission Bus Challenge Fund.

While these investments are welcomed by the recipients of the funding, the impact within communities has largely been limited to urban areas. Large gaps in the coverage of public charge points remain in rural Scotland and the islands, and most electric buses operate on the most profitable routes. Analysis of local plans confirms that within rural and island communities the need for more charge points to be installed is growing in urgency, driven by demand from tourists. The introduction of electric buses is viewed as a lesser priority to increasing the frequency and reliability of services.

Upgrades to and reinforcement of electricity transmission infrastructure across rural and island locations, and the development of local energy networks (microgrids) are recognised within local development plans as necessary precursors to the widespread adoption of electric vehicles but there is concern about the speed at which this work will take place, and where the investment will come from.

With higher than average levels of car dependency and fuel poverty in many rural communities, the affordability of electric vehicles remains out of reach for many locals. However, as referenced within the review of local plans steps are being taken to introduce electric vehicles to local authority, community transport and car club fleets. Furthermore, an increasing number of e-bikes are being added by local hire businesses to encourage more locals and visitors to cycle.

2.Digitalisation

Within the domain of transport, digitalisation is embedding itself in the daily lived experiences of drivers and passengers. This includes smartphone applications, digital departure board, signage, and contactless payment terminals. Nationally, strategy documents focus on long term investments in the expansion of digital infrastructure to fill in fixed and mobile broadband coverage gaps, the development of smart ticketing services, and MaaS pilots.

The benefits of the digitisation of transport services are not experienced equally. It remains the case that the value of smartphone application is limited where mobile phone signal strength is weak. This is the case in rural and island locations that are popular with visitors. Practically, this can prevent payment for electric vehicle charging sessions being made using a companion app. Local plans also bemoan the lack of basic digital information at rural bus stops and train stations provides a further illustration of why the passenger experience is inferior to journeys made in urban areas.

Limited attention is given within national transport and planning strategies on how these passengers who depend on public transport will be supported as more services become digitised, and less funding is directed to in-person support at rural train stations and via telephone customer services.

Infrastructure Gaps

1.Roads

Emerging with great strength of voice from local development plans is the poor state of repair of the roads and paving surfaces in rural and island communities. Year on year cuts to local authority budgets are referenced as the root cause of the issue. The consequences affect anyone who lives, works or visits these communities. From unrepaired or poorly repaired potholes, cracked paving stones, and obscured or damaged signposts, all are leading to more vehicle damage and accidents.

With an increasing number of larger private and commercial vehicles using rural roads, there is real concern that without suitable investments in maintenance and traffic calming, matters will continue to deteriorate. National and regional strategic planning documents put a very limited amount of focus on these issues, largely because responsibility is delegated to local authorities. Mentioned with much greater frequency are measures to support the implementation of 20mph speed limits and improve the resilience of trunk roads to the effects of climate change.

2.Paths

Connecting neighbouring villages via walking and cycling paths was frequently highlighted in local plans to improve health and well-being by enabling more people to access essential services like education, employment and healthcare sustainably. While the Government shares this goal with RTPs and local authorities, there are distinct gaps in how the ambition can be realised in low population density areas where standard planning and business case development processes don’t fit.

In addition to ground infrastructure (pavements, roads, and paths), the local plans highlight that people who would like to travel more actively by bike are deterred by the scarcity of bike racks on buses, bike storage at rural train stations, and signage. These issues are off-putting for locals and tourists who aspire to enjoy an active holiday.

3.Railways

Within rural and island communities, the most notable issues related to infrastructure. As expressed through local development plans there is concern at a lack of suitable pedestrian access and signage at train stations. Residents who live in proximity to these stations and would consider walking are deterred from doing so due to the poor quality of pavements and signage. For those with mobility limitations, a lack of step free access to platforms is cited as a major reason why they won't use train services. The NTS2 stresses the actions that have been taken by Transport Scotland and Network Rail to improve infrastructure at rural stations, using Nairn, Pitlochry, and Kingussie as examples where step free platform access has been delivered.

However, Transport Scotland's own research undertaken in 2021 confirmed that of the 360 stations across Scotland, only 37% had step free access at all platforms . Without additional funding commitments, many people who would choose to travel by train rather than car will be deterred from doing so. Securing funds for station improvements is a reserved matter meaning that Transport Scotland have to compete with transport authorities from across the UK via Network Rail's "Access for All" programme.

4.Ports & Ferries

While Government policies and funding commitments to replace ageing ferries, build fixed links between islands, upgrade port infrastructure are welcomed by local communities, uncertainty over when and indeed if, these commitments are delivered is reflected in the sentiments of the people who are directly representing these communities.

Most significantly, rural and island community groups are demanding that long term policies are balanced with more efforts to solve short term resilience pains such as a lack of private and commercial vehicle tonnage on ferries and strengthening the verges on rural rail tracks to mitigate the risk of landslides.

Summary of Infrastructure Gaps

In summary, across all forms of infrastructure, a RIMP must address the cost, resource, planning and knowledge gaps that are obstacles to successfully achieving the national vision of making transport more accessible and sustainable. New approaches to the design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure in rural and island communities will be required that accounts for the effects of climate change, and rapidly ageing populations which shrink the number of working age people in these communities.

Question 2 - How effectively are transport policies and their supporting delivery plans communicated across all of the publications reviewed?

Across the six categories of content analysed, some noteworthy observations were made on how effectively policies and deliverables related to improvements in the provision of transport services are communicated in writing to stakeholders at different spatial levels. This recognises that using descriptive words, phrases and terms that are unfamiliar to readers, or infer some form of intention without a supporting commitment compromise the speed and success with which policies can be implemented within communities.

Governance

When reviewing governance content at each spatial level, most attention was paid to the language relating to policies and regulations and where the differences between intention and action were most distinctive. Through this lens, the following insights emerged.

"Could Do" References

A common feature of all of the publications that were analysed is the prevalence of the word "could", appearing 839 times. This indicates that the successful implementation of transport policies have many dependencies attached to them and are tentative. These dependencies centre on the availability of funding, implementation of legislation, or availability of resources. More specifically, for rural and island stakeholders, the list of "could dos" includes interventions that are not currently fully captured at a national level and are even less likely to be prioritised.

Developing integrated bus routes that connect neighbouring villages, boosting the sustainable tourist economy, and offering more opportunities to sustainably access employment, education and training are one example. Another being better integration between investments in community transport and renewable energy programmes where revenue capture from the latter helps to fund the expansion of the former.

"Must Do" References

The word "must" appears on 320 occasions across all publications reviewed. Similar to "could do" references, the value in understanding "must dos" lies in the context in which it's used. In this regard, many are associated with national policies that have a target date and/or specific quantified measure connected to it. Most notably, targets related to net zero such as reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2035 and stopping the sale of new fossil fuel vehicles have a "must" attached to them.

While these "musts" are designed to inject a sense of urgency among stakeholders, the value is diluted when the people responsible for taking action within local communities lack the power and resources. For those in rural and island communities most distant from policy development, frustrations are particularly acute.

"Have Done" References

Understanding what actions have been taken to move "could dos" and "must dos" to "have done" provides insights on how successfully policies are being implemented and who the primary beneficiaries are. At a national level, references to "have done" actions related to transport policies and initiatives centre on funding direct to active travel, decarbonisation, and road, rail and ferry infrastructure improvements.

The introduction of new legislation, most relevantly, the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and programmes such as Carbon Neutral Islands, and the Rural Delivery Plan are evidence that the Scottish Government is delivering on behalf of local people. However, the degree to which all of these policies, programmes, and projects have actually been done varies hugely across the country. Within many rural and island communities the reality is some way from being fulfilled with many barriers standing in the way as highlighted in local development plans.

Infrastructure

20 Minute Neighbourhoods

Across the national and regional publications reviewed, the word "neighbourhood" is mentioned 167 times in the context of liveable, low traffic and "20 minute" community policies. However, the word is used generically with very little context given to what a neighbourhood actually looks like spatially and socially from a rural and island perspective.

As a concept "20 minute neighbourhoods" is advocated in the NP4 and from analysis of the community level local plans included within the scope of this project, it's evident that it's been adopted in spirit by many as the term is mentioned 153 times. However, within these same plans, there are marked differences in how to approach the translation of the concept into words and actions that are immediately reliable to local people.

Technology

The rapid pace of technological change across the transport sector brings with it an array of technical terms and acronyms that originate from technology developers and universities and are enthusiastically adopted by policy makers. Through the literature review, at a national and regional level, terms such as MaaS, Digital, (DDRT, Smart Ticketing, Autonomous Vehicles, and Alternative Fuels are discussed in terms of the long-term potential.

However, aside from an occasional reference in local authority and community development plans, these technologies are not featured inferring that these technologies are not seen as priority. By extension investing time in supporting residents to become more familiar with them is not seen as worthwhile investment of resources.

Question 3 - How do attitudes and approaches to innovations in transport vary at each spatial level?

Innovation is a broad term that is discussed in different ways and in different contexts by stakeholders associated with the four levels of publications that were reviewed. While innovation is often most closely associated with technology, attention was also paid to process related innovations. In other words, are there examples within rural and island communities of improvements in transport services achieved not by the adoption of a new technology but doing things a little differently?

For the purposes of simplicity, the review focused on innovations that are broadly connected to the electrification and digitisation of transport services and supporting infrastructure.

Electrification

Across all four spatial levels attitudes to the broad range of benefits that electrification offers from a climate change and health and well-being perspective are generally positive. Key points of distinction between the levels orient around differences between the promise and practical application of the innovations connected to electrification technologies.

At a national level innovations in battery and alternative fuel technologies are presented in the NTS2 and NPF4 as promising pathways to remove CO2 emissions. Reference is made to the research taking place within Scotland's universities and R&D centres, and the need for further investment. Policies designed to make good on Scotland's potential as a producer and exporter of large amount of green electricity, and the associated job creation potential create an expectation that rural and island areas that are experiencing economic and social decline will be significant beneficiaries of new innovation in electrification.

Meanwhile, at a local level, community groups are primarily concerned about near term opportunities to use proven "off the shelf" electrification technologies to create customised solutions on behalf of residents. This includes developing micro grids that combine wind and solar renewable energy with battery storage to reduce dependency on the grid and provide low cost electric vehicle charging to locals and the operators of community car clubs.

For the residents of rural and island communities, finding innovative and creative solutions to the challenges they face living in harsh environments where access to utilities and lifeline services is not guaranteed is second nature. The review of local development plans confirms that local people can with more empowerment and resources, demonstrate the benefits that grass roots innovations can deliver.

Digitisation

For most drivers and passengers, experiences of innovations in digital technologies centre on smartphones applications that have been designed to improve the travel experience. These including travel planning and payment applications.

While they have been well adopted, the universal value remains constrained by gaps in mobile coverage, most noticeably in rural areas. Furthermore, many of these applications are specific to transport operators creating a paradoxical situation where the technology to facilitate integration is mature and available but the willingness to do is limited and dependent on Government incentives.

National ambitions to make MaaS, DDRT, and autonomous vehicles a reality for all travellers are expressed within the NTS2 and RTP strategies. These are seen as innovative solutions that can resolve failures in the provision of scheduled bus services and reduce the volume of car journeys. However, to deliver and achieve wide spread adoption, innovations in processes as much as technology are required. Today, where these are deployed, it is through pilots that are limited by geography and funding. Thus, the longevity depends on demonstrating commercial viability, replicable, and scalable.

Attitudes to these innovations within rural and island communities are limited to the small number of people who have experience, and their evaluation of whether the innovation lives up to expectations. Irrespective of the specific technical innovation, there are based on the review of local plans, scepticism about how relevant and fit for purpose when made available. This speaks to a concern that little time is taken by technology developers to gather the insights needed to design services that work effectively in rural and island communities and thus users.

More pragmatically, and of greater importance there are lower-cost, proven technologies that through process innovation can make a meaningful difference to the lives of people in rural and island communities.

Local development plans ask for more attention to be placed on resolving the barriers to implementing digital signage and passenger information systems at rural bus stops and train stations and widening the deployment of Internet of Things ('IoT') sensors on roads and car parks that enable much more granular real-time level data to be gathered on the volume, mode and speed of vehicles and changes in air quality.

One example of a pragmatic digital innovation that addresses a "hear and now" issue experienced by the inhabitants of rural and island communities and championed by the Scottish Government is an online reporting system for dangerous driving. This makes it easier for road users to submit digital evidence to report poor road user behaviour and help make Scotland's roads safer for all. The Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) Programme was developed by Police Scotland and Scottish Government Justice teams, piloted in Dundee, and is now being rolled out across Scotland.

Section 4 - Conclusions

The objective of the first phase of this project was to review publicly available literature and use stakeholder engagement to build a detailed picture of how and where national transport policies and strategies are falling short in meeting the needs of rural and island communities. When supplemented with evidence collected in the later stages of the project, this will provide the stimulus needed to direct the development of a Rural and Islands Mobility Plan for Scotland.

Distilling the insights gained from the first phase, the following conclusions pertaining to the keywords and six categories of content that were analysed.

Governance

Rural and island communities are significantly underserved by the national policies that are designed to make transport more affordable, accessible and sustainable. The action 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 ask 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.

Sentiment

Attitudinally. 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 benefit will 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 lack of community participation within bus, rail and ferry governing processes, 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 "small 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.

Technology

Strategic technologies that aim to integrate different modes of transport, remove the need to use different applications, and be responsive to demand are supported through national policies. Funding programmes are narrowly adopted and still to be proven in the eyes of end users. Locally, within development plans, investments in 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 s 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 major 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 considered.

Furthermore, as stressed in 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 Rural and Islands Mobility Plan must present practical steps that can be taken to reduce the time and costs associated with construction projects in rural and island communities._

Bibliography

The table below contains links to SRITC's knowledge library where all of the publications reviewed during phase 1 of the project. Publications have been organised based on their spatial level. Most of them are publicly available and published from 2017 to 2023. As discussed in this report, the content in some of the older publications will be refreshed over the coming years as part of standard policy and strategy development processes.

Spatial Level	Publication Source
National	View and download documents
Regional	View and download documents
Local Authority	View and dpwnload documents
Community	View and downlaod dpcuments

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