Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Sustainable transport in rural areas

Guidance for Regional Transport Planning

Why do we need to change rural transport?

We want rural communities in Wales to have sustainable and accessible public transport that connects with the services, employment, cultural, social, leisure and education opportunities to enable them to thrive, whilst also meeting our climate change goals.

Good rural transport helps people thrive. However many in rural areas are dependent on private cars, and those without access to a car can feel isolated. We need to provide safe and reliable sustainable options.
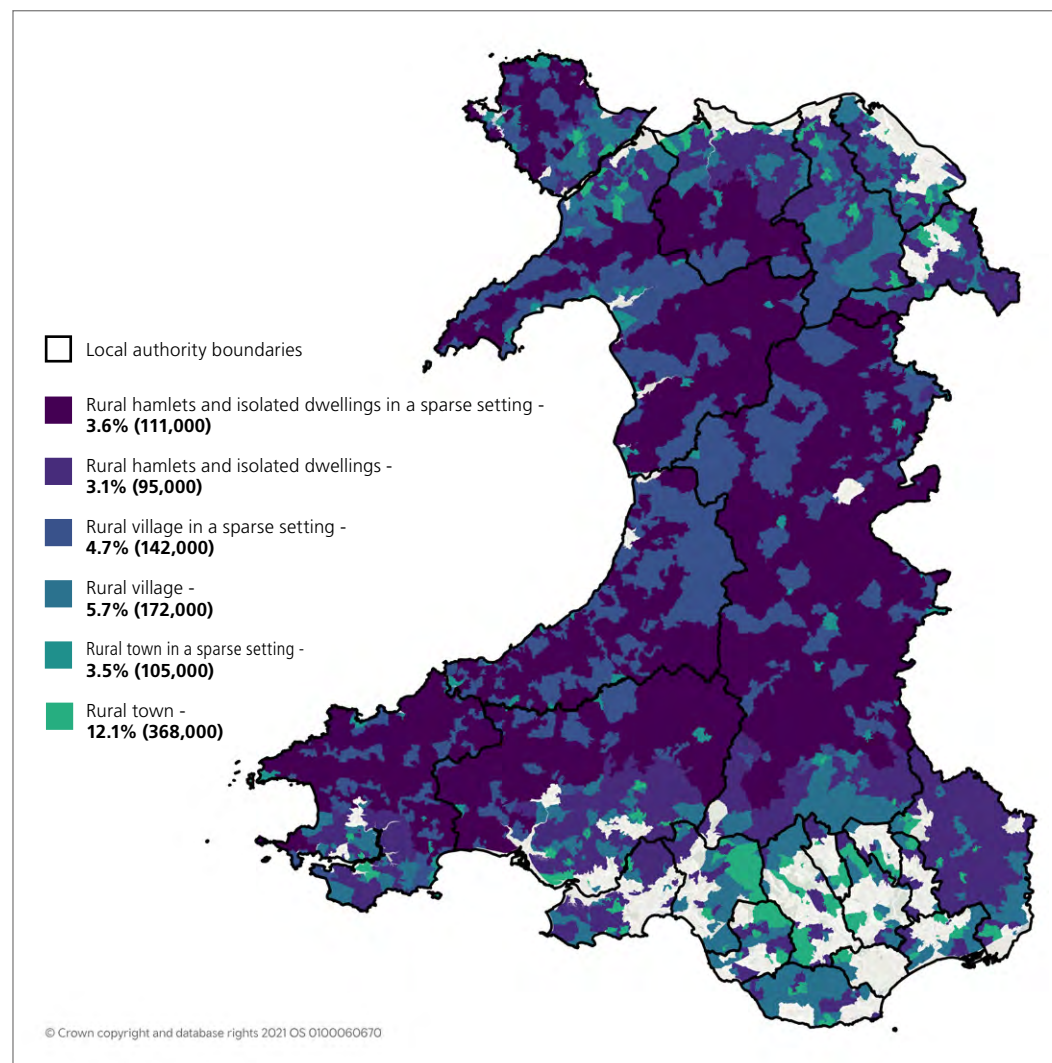
Rural transport must also help achieve our climate change goals. **We have committed to a net zero Wales by 2050** and most Local Authorities have declared Climate emergencies.

Our carbon emissions need to drastically reduce, and we need to work together to ensure rural areas contribute.

We need to think very differently about our rural transport. We need to learn the lessons from successful rural communities around the world and implement them here in Wales in a way that works for us.

We need to make the right choice the easy choice.

- Over **80%** of Wales is rural
- A **third** of our population live in rural areas
- A **quarter** of the rural population in Wales is living in poverty

Local authority boundaries

Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings in a sparse setting - **3.6% (111,000)**

Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings - **3.1% (95,000)**

Rural village in a sparse setting - **4.7% (142,000)**

Rural village - **5.7% (172,000)**

Rural town in a sparse setting - **3.5% (105,000)**

Rural town - **12.1% (368,000)**

© Crown copyright and database rights 2021 OS 0100060670

Isn't owning a car the only option for rural communities?

We believe it is achievable to give most of the 'rural' population additional non-car travel options for at least some of their trips.

People who live or work in deeply rural settings, like isolated farmhouses, will continue to be heavy vehicle users. However most of the 'rural' population live on transport corridors near settlements with shops and facilities. For these, we can sustainably provide good ways to get to local towns and villages without relying on a car.

This means concentrating effort on public transport improvements to significant 'hub' towns, and on safe active travel infrastructure.

It means encouraging people to walk and cycle within the settlements they drive around. Plus growing electric, or e-bike, use over distances and terrain that limits conventional cycling.

This isn't about forcing people from cars. It is about giving them more options. Studies have shown that, in rural settings such as the Dyfi Valley, around 40% of trips could be made by sustainable options now, 40% would need relatively small improvements to public transport or active travel to switch, and just 20% could only be made by private vehicle. And even then there are alternative – such as community car clubs.

This is the natural sequencing to a 'rural pathway'.

What can we learn from other countries?

Rural communities around the world have found ways to meet their transport needs through walking, cycling, shared mobility and public transport – reducing their dependency on the private car.

Co-ordinated Public transport

- In Germany, the AST (Anruf Sameln Taxi) is a low-charge taxi-bus service that plugs gaps for times of day or rural locations where public transport is unavailable[1].

- In Bern canton, Switzerland, small villages are guaranteed local bus services that link up with a national 'pulse' timetable[2].

Integrated, affordable tickets

- The German 'Deutschlandticket' covers all bus, tram and local rail at a cost of just 49 Euros a month.

Safe ways to walk, wheel and cycle in rural Wales

- Many rural communities are growing their active travel network, making it is safe and pleasant to walk, wheel or cycle between villages and towns. Later in the pathway we share the great example of Bow Street in Ceredigion.

- Strathaven in Scotland have a bike repair workshop, e-bike hire and an e-cargo delivery bike (as well as an electric car club and an online car sharing platform!).

Vibrant shared spaces that help people avoid long unnecessary commutes, and act as community-based transport hubs when you do need to travel

- Hook Norton in Oxfordshire has a co-working space that also offers e-bikes and an electric car-club.

- Lund in Sweden is changing streets and public spaces to reduce the need for travel, promoting healthy lifestyles and social interaction[3].

Community Transport schemes providing safe and sustainable services

- In Ireland, 'Ring a Link' has 33 demand-responsive minibuses serving remote locations[4].

A network of electric car clubs that allows people to access to cars and vans for work and leisure

- In Switzerland nearly 170 rural communities have car clubs, with over 50,000 members.

Technology and data support people to plan and pay for their journeys on the go

- In Tartu, Estonia, mobile phone technology allows simple contactless bus payment on the go. The system also helps improve the design of connecting bus services and bike hire stations[5].

How do we make this a reality for rural Wales?

A 'hub-and-spoke' approach to active travel, public transport and shared transport will help rural communities better access their local village or town. Effective interchanges will then connect people to larger towns and cities, making the best use of the backbone of the rail and Traws Cymru networks.

Bow Street, Ceredigion

A 'hub-and-spoke' approach has been successfully used around Bow Street in Ceredigion to make sustainable travel a convenient and desirable option.

- A shared use path links the rail station to the Aberystwyth Innovation and Enterprise Campus.
- A walking and cycling route connects to the nearby rural community of Penrhyn-coch.
- To the north of Bow Street, new walking and cycling links have been built to connect Llandre and further expand sustainable transport options for rural communities.
- By combining active travel and public transport, rural communities are connected to the larger settlements of Aberystwyth and Machynlleth and onwards vis cross-border connections to Birmingham.
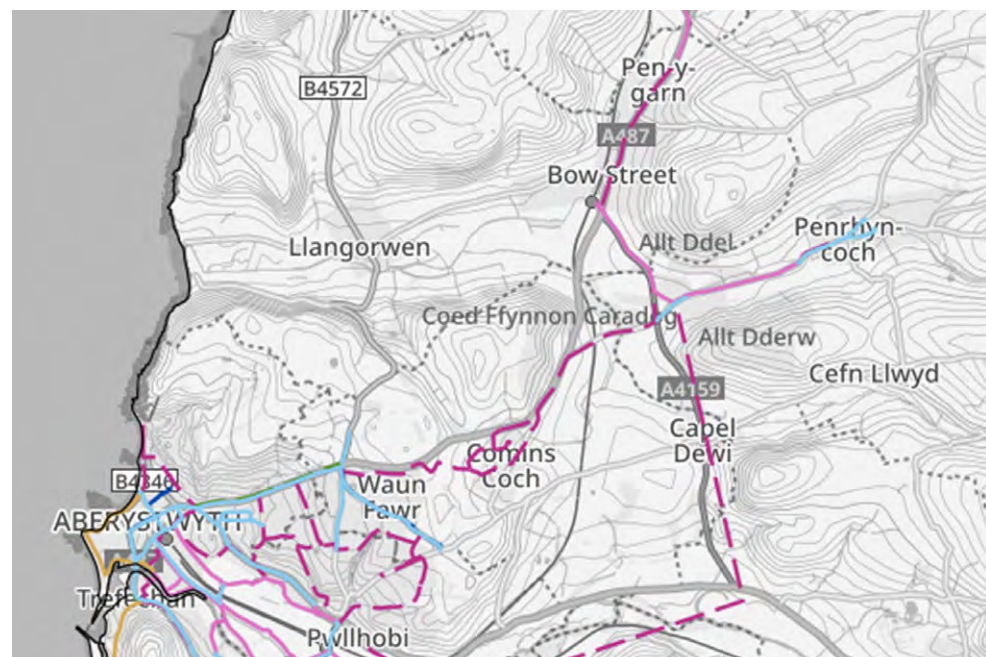
| Existing walking routes | Existing cycling routes | Existing walking and cycling routes |
| Future walking routes | Future cycling routes | Future walking and cycling routes |

Work to improve rural transport in Wales is already underway

- Our **E-Move pilot** has loaned e-bikes and e-cargo bikes to local communities. E-bikes can increasingly help with local journeys across rural Wales.

- The new **Sherpa service** in the Eryri National Park, is providing visitors and local residents a high quality, reliable bus service connecting where they want to go. This could be replicated in other tourist hot spots across Wales to reduce car congestion.

- Transport for Wales are working with rural authorities across North and Mid Wales to **redesign bus networks** and refresh contracts in preparation for franchising.

- Our **Fflecsi bus pilot scheme** has shown that demand-responsive travel can provide a flexible service, with particular success in rural communities.

- **Electric car clubs** offer a new way of driving for people who want to use a car less and for those who struggle to afford the high cost of running a car.

- **Partneriaeth Ogwen** has created a community working space in Bethesda which accommodates staff working on a range of projects from business support to energy generation.

What more can we all do in the next 3 years?

- Bus Reform will enable us to work together to create a bus system better serving rural Wales, and not just routes which are commercially stronger.

- Welsh Government will continue to work with Local Authorities and communities to help people work more flexibly in rural areas, reducing the need for long-distance travel and expanding access to high-quality employment in rural areas.

- Welsh Government will develop its Road Safety Strategy and work with rural Local Authorities on Regional Road Safety plans.

- Local Authorities can continue to develop active travel network maps, identifying and delivering routes that link rural communities to services and facilities in their nearest town.

- We can all build on the E-move pilot projects to explore ways in which e-bikes and e-cargo bikes can be made more accessible.

- Welsh Government and Local Authorities can work with a range of partners to increase the number of community-based car clubs in Wales.

- Transport for Wales can support integration across all forms of rural transport, from active travel and public transport through to car clubs and community transport partnerships.

What can we do in the longer term?

- We can take a more ambitious approach to improving active travel infrastructure in, and between, rural communities, taking advantage of the opportunities created through electric bikes.

- We can create active travel and public transport demonstrator towns to showcase good practice.

- We are committed to decarbonise the whole bus fleet across Wales.

- We can better co-ordinate our bus and rail services to provide more convenient interchanges.

- Welsh Government will work with the private sector to deliver the Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle charging infrastructure required in rural areas.

- We can support rural Wales's potential to develop and utilise new technologies including digital and hydrogen to transition to both a green economy and sustainable transport.

Car Clubs in Switzerland

Nearly 170 rural communities in Switzerland have car clubs.
Car clubs offer people a flexible, convenient, affordable and environmentally sustainable alternative to car ownership.

In Switzerland, car clubs took off once several regional clubs merged to form a single national organisation, Mobility.

Mobility now has over 50,000 members who can pick up a vehicle anywhere in the country. In rural tourist areas like the Tessin, the club's cars are heavily used by visiting club members.

In Wales, TripTo is the non-profit social enterprise overseeing four electric car clubs in Llanidloes, Machynlleth, Penrhyncoch and Llandrindod Wells. An online calendar allows members to book a car anytime, for only the time that it is needed, at a reasonable cost.

Membership of car clubs is growing as an alternative to having a second car.

TripTo are working with TrydaNi on growing 4 other car clubs in Southwest Wales. These cars have a keyless access system, access is via an app which is also used to book and pay for the trips.

You can visit the TripTo website here:
Welcome to TripTo - Mid-Wales Electric Car Clubs

Case study | **Guaranteed bus services in Bern**

In Bern canton, Switzerland, public bus service frequencies are guaranteed by law. Residents must also be able to reach their nearest major centre with at most one change.

Small villages are guaranteed at least 4, and up to 15 return bus services per day, which then link up with the national 'pulse' rail and bus timetable. This co-ordination reduces interchange times and gives people more confidence to use public transport as a competitive alternative to the car.

In Wales we are working on bus reform legislation that will allow the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to work with Local Authorities to better direct bus services across the country to more equitably serve rural areas.

Ring a Link, Ireland

Ring a Link was established in 2001 as a community-based provider of local transport services with focus on combatting social exclusion.

It operates over 30 vehicles daily serving rural communities that otherwise have poor public transport options. Over time, Ring a Link has also introduced demand-responsive services rather than fixed route ones.

In Wales, we've had successful trials of the demand responsive Fflecsi service, operated by Transport for Wales, in areas including Ruthin, Conwy and Pembrokeshire. Fflecsi allows people in rural areas to book journeys, on an app or through a call centre, with pick up and drop off anywhere within the service area rather than only at assigned bus stops.

Wales has a number of excellent community transport organisations operating in rural areas such as Dolen Teifi, where a non-profit making organisation provides affordable and accessible transport across Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion. During covid it supported Hywel Dda Health Board by running a shuttle bus from Llanelli town centre to a Mass Vaccination Centre.

Community focussed, and demand responsive, public transport can be valuable pieces of the puzzle for rural areas.

Case study Hub working

Local Working Hubs can help those in rural communities access high quality jobs, whilst also reducing commuting mileage.

Hubs also provide people with a more suitable and sustainable working environment than home working.

MSParc on Ynys Mon offers flexible working space as well as venture capital and business support.

Partneriaeth Ogwen has created a community working space in Bethesda with support from Gwynedd Council. It accommodates staff working on a range of projects from business support to energy generation.

The Dove Workshops in Banwen combines a working space with adult learning, volunteering, work experience, IT drop-in services, employment support, CV writing and even childcare.

Public sector bodies across Wales are starting to share work spaces to give people more options, closer to their community.

Whilst not all sectors can work remotely, doing so when we can not only has transport benefits, it can also benefit local rural economies, the environment, culture and society.

E-Move

E-Move is an electric cycle loan scheme in Aberystwyth, Rhyl, Barry, Swansea and Newtown, funded by Welsh Government and delivered by Sustrans.

The scheme offers people, businesses and organisations a four-week loan of an electric bike, or cargo bike, to test out if it can work for them before they invest in buying them.

E-Move aims to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality by replacing some of the journeys usually made by car.

E-bikes and e-cargo bikes significantly widen the range and type of journeys that can be made by cycle, and make cycling an option for many more people. The longer distances and steeper topography that can be easily covered this way, is particularly valuable to unlocking cycling potential in more rural areas.

Using e-cargo bikes to move goods around can reduce operating costs for organisations. This approach creates an opportunity for positive publicity and can be a great way of engaging customers from the surrounding community.

Further details can be found at:
Switching to sustainable travel in rural Wales: Tim's story - Sustrans.org.uk

Case study | Sherpa'r Wyddfa

A 2019 study identified that a tailored bus service could improve transport options for the 8 million visitors to the Eryri National Park each year, catering for the increasing demand on narrow roads without need for implementing deterrents to driving or building new roads.

The Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus service, developed by Transport for Wales (TfW), Gwynedd Council, Eryri National Park and Welsh Government, links the main walking paths, car parks, villages, and attractions in the area.

TrawsCymru, Fflecsi, Rail and Active Travel, connect to the Sherpa service, linking Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Bangor and Betws-y-Coed, substantially reducing the number of vehicles in the area.

Bucking general bus patronage trends in recent years, Sherpa'r Wyddfa passenger numbers have dramatically increased since it was launched, rising past a rate of over half a million passengers a year in 2023. There will also be wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

This demonstrates the benefits of thinking differently about tourism transport in rural areas.

You can visit the Sherpa webpage here:
Sherpa'r Wyddfa | Snowdonia National Park (gov.wales)

Endnotes

1 Anrufsammeltaxis im VOR **www.vor.at/fahrplan-mobilitaet/fahrrad-sammeltaxi-co/anrufsammeltaxi**
2 Bern canton Every village, every hour: A comprehensive bus network for rural England (**cpre.org.uk**)
3 Lundamats III Strategy for a Sustainable Transport System in Lund Municipality Lundamats III Strategy for a Sustainable Transport System in Lund Municipality Foreword Contents - DocsLib
4 Ring a link case study, SMARTA **https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SMARTA-GP-Ring-a-Link.pdf**
5 Tartu's Approach to Climate Goals Through Sustainable Mobility Planning, 2022: **www.itdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/MOBILIZE-TARTU-Case-Study.pdf**