

**Report of the  
Interdepartmental Working  
Group on Rural Transport**

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### THE GUIDELINES AND THE FOUR PILOT COUNTY REPORTS AVAILABLE ON:

Department of Environment and Local Government Website: [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie)

County Development Boards Website: [www.cdb.ie](http://www.cdb.ie)

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In order to develop a more integrated national policy on rural transport, detailed information is required on the precise nature and scale of the underlying rural transport problem – who is most affected and how? How many people are involved? Where do they live? What might be needed to help them?

To initiate the gathering of this essential information on a nationwide basis, an Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural Transport was set up in November 2000 and chaired by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. It was asked to:

- (a) develop a standard “template” that each County Development Board can use to systematically audit existing rural transport services and to establish “reasonable rural passenger transport needs” in their counties;
- (b) pilot this new data gathering approach in four counties – Laois, Kerry, Mayo and Westmeath – prior to its rollout to all other rural counties.

The Group has overseen a series of consultations at national and county level, analysis of existing information on rural passenger transport services, and a survey of transport needs among over 1,300 rural residents in the four pilot counties. The Working Group’s work is now complete, and this report presents the results.

## Key Study Findings

- cars are crucial to peoples’ transport in rural Ireland, the vast majority of trips by rural residents are made by car;
- nine out of every ten rural people in the pilot counties live in a household with at least one car. However, not everyone has a car available to them – even if there is a car in the household. One in five people say they “rarely” or “never” have a car available;
- car availability inevitably affects the amount of travelling people do – rural residents who “always” or “often” have a car available make 70% more journeys than those who “rarely or never” have one;
- availability of public transport alternatives to cars are limited. While many rural parts of the four counties examined do have at least a basic bus or train service, large areas have none. Rural areas which have a daily morning/evening commuter-type service are in a small minority. Furthermore people with disabilities, or people who are otherwise mobility impaired, may not be able to access such services as do exist;
- taxi and hackney availability varies, and is generally concentrated in and around the larger towns. While taxis and hackneys can in principle provide a service anywhere, cost becomes a major factor for someone in a more distant rural area;
- reflecting high overall levels of car availability, at least three quarters of rural people surveyed say they have no “unmet” transport needs. However, 20-25% say they do have such needs.

## Priority Target Groups

- across most transport indicators examined, e.g. car ownership, car availability, travel frequency, and unmet needs, a number of clearly identifiable rural sub-groups emerge as having consistently greater rural transport problems than the average (see Main Report, Sections 3.2, 3.3). Further priority groups or sub-groups may emerge in more detailed research;
- from the research to date, the groups with higher than average rural transport needs are:
  - older people (especially older women);
  - people who are ill or people who have disabilities;
  - people on low incomes;
  - young people.

## **Policy Pointers**

Subject to the more widespread national investigation and analysis already planned, the Working Group's initial assessment is that:

- the short-term priority in rural transport is a safety-net to meet the needs of people who:
  - are in the worst affected target groups (see above);
  - have no or limited car availability and who live in areas with no usable public transport;
- for each group, “reasonable needs” can be established in terms of: where they need to go, e.g. essential services, work, training; how often they need to go, e.g. daily or weekly; distance to the nearest suitable service point; and type of transport service needed, e.g. scheduled or on-call, door-to-door or nearby;
- against these criteria, the priority rural target groups above fall into two broad categories of potential transport needs:
  - “weekly essential service” needs – i.e. a minimum of a weekly round trip for people (who are outside the labour force) to a suitable nearby town or village for shopping, doctor, pension collection, bank etc;
  - “daily work/training” needs, i.e. it must involve a daily morning and evening scheduled transport service for regular commuting.

The Group consider that further research is necessary in order to quantify the cost of meeting reasonable rural passenger transport needs. The issue of cost will be examined by the incoming Interdepartmental Group on Rural Transport. Among the considerations to be addressed will be the most cost effective method of meeting such needs, taking into account experience to date relating to the community sector and services in rural areas provided by Bus Éireann and other operators. The incoming Interdepartmental Group will also have regard to this Report and to the outcome from the completion of the audits of services/assessments of needs by the remaining County Development Boards.

## **Management and Delivery Issues**

There are already many players – public and private, commercial and non-commercial – involved in rural transport provision. Any future national policy and delivery framework will need sub-national co-ordination to ensure an integrated service on the ground to fill essential gaps, and to avoid any overlap or duplication.

The Working Group's view is that, within a nationally agreed framework, County Councils have a potential new co-ordination role to play in this regard, working in partnership with public and private transport providers, with other State bodies, and importantly with the community and voluntary organisations who already do much work in this area (see Main Report, Section 5.2).

## **Next Steps**

Presentation of this Report completes the work of the present Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural Transport. The standard template developed will now be rolled out to other counties in order to have the remaining rural transport audits and needs assessments completed by end-2001. The outcome of this work, together with the policy issues raised in this Report, will be considered by the incoming Interdepartmental Group on Rural Transport to be chaired by the Department of Public Enterprise.

## **Membership of the Interdepartmental Working Group**

- Mr Joe Allen, Department of the Environment and Local Government (Chair)
- Mr Frank O'Donnell, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
- Mr Tom Kavanagh, Department of Education and Science
- Ms Siobhán Barron, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Mr Liam Daly, Department of Public Enterprise
- Mr Ed O'Callaghan, Department of Public Enterprise
- Ms Orlaigh Quinn, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
- Mr Deaglán O'Briain, Department of the Taoiseach

### **Secretariat**

- Mr Paris Beausang
- Ms Anne Murray
- Mr David O' Sullivan \*

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\* Mr David O' Sullivan replaced Ms Anne Murray

# 1. Background

A number of individual Government actions underway address aspects of rural transport issues:

- the recently launched Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) – provides funding for pilot community-led rural transport projects<sup>1</sup>;
- expenditure on transport infrastructure under the NDP, which includes county roads;
- changes in the regulatory environment, including recent deregulation of taxis and current debate on liberalisation of scheduled bus services<sup>2</sup>;
- the emerging National Spatial Strategy examining *inter alia*, wider settlement and transport issues.

While such important individual initiatives are progressing, rural transport as yet lacks a fully integrated overall national approach. There is already wide consensus about the existence of a “rural transport problem”, but neither the full nature or scale have been systematically quantified, and the overall direction of policy needed to address it is not yet fully articulated.

Against this background, an Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural Transport was established in November 2000, chaired by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. It has operated in the context of three strands of rural transport policy development:

- the commitment that the County Development Boards (CDBs) will carry out rural passenger transport service audits and needs assessments, and establish reasonable needs in their counties;
- the deliberations of the Public Transport Partnership Forum and its sub-committee on rural transport established under the PPF;
- a planned follow-on Interdepartmental Group on Rural Transport, to be chaired by the Department of Public Enterprise, that will use the findings of this study and the experience of the RTI to inform their wider deliberations and to bring forward proposals to Government on rural transport.

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<sup>1</sup> Rural Transport Initiative Information Pack, Department of Public Enterprise, July 2001.

## 2. Group's Terms of Reference

Underlying the Group's work is the view that a key prerequisite for developing overall national policy on rural transport is better information on the nature and scale of the underlying problem around the country. When it was decided that the County/City Development Boards were to be established on foot of recommendations from the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems<sup>3</sup>, it was recognised that they provide a good mechanism through which this better information base can be gained on a nationwide basis. The 1999 White Paper on Rural Development therefore contained a commitment that, in the preparation of the County Development Strategies, *"each County Development Board will carry out an audit of local transport needs and services as a priority and will identify, with the relevant partners, the most appropriate co-ordination and delivery mechanism to ensure effective local transport provision in its area"*<sup>4</sup>.

The present Working Group on Rural Transport was established primarily to activate the White Paper's commitment. The objectives of the Working Group were to:

- "• develop a template for use by each County Development Board in carrying out a comprehensive county-wide audit of rural passenger transport services and to establish the extent to which people in rural Ireland have or do not have access to such services and to establish reasonable rural passenger transport needs;***
- work with the Directors of Community and Enterprise in the proposed counties of Kerry, Laois, Mayo and Westmeath in developing this pilot template and to carry out the services audits and the establishment of reasonable needs specified above in these counties, as well as refining or modifying the template in the light of practical experience;***
- consider how best to draw conclusions from the service audits and establishment of reasonable rural passenger transport needs. The major issues that emerge from the application of the template will be identified and the results will, in due course, be considered by an Interdepartmental Group on Rural Transport, to be chaired by the Department of Public Enterprise".***

To assist with its work, the Group retained the services of Fitzpatrick Associates, Economic Consultants with Steer Davies Gleave, Transportation Consultants. Key elements of the consultants' work programme were:

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<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems*, Department of the Environment and Local Government, August 1998.

<sup>4</sup> *Ensuring the Future – A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland*, A White Paper on Rural Development, Department of

- a survey of rural residents across the four pilot counties – Kerry, Laois, Mayo, Westmeath. These four were selected by the Working Group as representative of a mix of different types of rural counties;
- consultative workshops with CDBs and other key stakeholders in each pilot county<sup>5</sup>;
- analysis of relevant existing information on rural passenger transport services;
- consideration of relevant rural transport experience in other countries;
- consultations at national level with key relevant organisations.

The survey constituted the main primary research. It involved a postal questionnaire sent to a random sample of approximately 2,000 adults in all rural District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) in each of the four pilot counties, i.e. 8,000 in total<sup>6</sup>. The sample was drawn randomly from the electoral register.

A total response of 1,363 was obtained. The response rates were Kerry 18.4%, Laois 16.9%, Mayo 17.5%, Westmeath 15.8%, giving an overall rate of 17.04%. Corrective weightings were applied to age and gender profiles to produce a weighted data-set similar to the profile of the underlying rural populations. Considerable consistency across counties and checks against other information sources confirms the broad validity of the survey findings and the aggregate results as broadly representative of the rural population in the four counties. However, the absolute number of responses at individual county level limited the ability to do detailed cross-tabulations at individual county-level.

The survey, and the study in general, has concentrated on local transport services in the pilot counties rather than on inter-urban transport. The study has also not focused on specialist and emergency transport services in rural areas, e.g. ambulances.

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<sup>5</sup> Written submissions on rural transport issues were also invited from all other CDBs.

<sup>6</sup> Rural was defined in accordance with NSS background research on rural structures, i.e. a DED which is not an urban DED as defined by the CSO, has a population density of less than 150 people per sq. km, and does not contain a town with a population of 1,500 or over (see Fitzpatrick Associates, *Irish Rural Structure and Gaeltacht Areas*, Background Report for



### **3. Key Findings from the Four Pilot Counties**

#### **3.1 Existing Rural Passenger Transport Services**

In relation to existing transport services and their usage in rural areas key findings from the four counties are that:

- as the Census of Population already shows, private cars are by far the main form of passenger transport in rural Ireland. While across the State as a whole only 9% of people went to work or school by public transport in 1996 (latest year available), this fell to just 3% in all rural areas, and to 1% in one of our pilot counties – Kerry. The survey confirms that rural Ireland is a car-based society. In the four pilot counties over 80% of people say they normally use their own car for travel, and most of the rest cite “lifts” as their main form of transport. The other main types of transport – motorcycle, bicycle, public transport, and walking – were each cited as a main means of transport by 5% of people or less;
- the audits of existing services show that many people in rural counties have no access to any scheduled public transport services<sup>7</sup>. In three of the four pilot counties (Kerry, Mayo, Westmeath) about 40% of the rural population live in DEDs without any kind of scheduled public transport service, i.e. even on a weekly basis. The situation in Laois is worse, with 60% having no service of any kind;
- across all four counties availability of services becomes much poorer when we focus on daily morning and evening services which could be used for commuting to work, education, training, etc. Here the share of people in DEDs with such a service drops to below 20% in Westmeath and Mayo – Kerry and Laois are somewhat better (26% and 35% respectively). It is important to note that many residents within these DEDs also live beyond walking distance from such services;
- the situation is more acute for people with disabilities or people who are otherwise mobility impaired, both for reasons of distance to any service and for reasons of physical access to vehicles;
- in terms of the pattern of scheduled services available, the four counties display both similarities and differences. All four have some rail services and stations, and all have considerable Bus Éireann “Expressway” services – although in Kerry and Mayo these

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<sup>7</sup> A service here refers to one which has a scheduled stop within the DED (not just to one “passing through”) or one which

tend not to extend westwards to the coastal areas (except for some summer seasonal services);

- significant differences are evident in terms of Bus Éireann's local (stage carriage) services – with Mayo and Kerry better served than the two midland counties. Laois has only one local Bus Éireann service. Against that, private operators have filled the gap relatively well in Laois;
- in terms of non-scheduled services, all counties have a local stock of taxis, hackneys and coaches. These are generally small businesses, and are generally concentrated in the main towns. However, data on licences show variations in availability. Kerry has more coaches per capita than the other counties (probably reflecting its tourism role). Westmeath has more taxis/hackneys per capita, two-thirds more again than its fellow midland county – Laois. Taxis/hackneys seem to be somewhat better distributed around the county in Kerry and Mayo than in the two midland counties, mainly reflecting the fact that they are geographically much bigger counties. However, in all cases large rural areas have no locally-based taxis/hackneys.

### **3.2 Private Car Ownership and Availability**

Availability of a car is clearly key to peoples' transport situation in a rural county:

- in our survey across the four pilot counties, about 90% of all households now have at least one car. In most counties about 50% have at least two, and about 10% have three or more. About one in ten rural respondents therefore live in households where there is no car;
  - turning to car availability, which is crucial in practice, about 20% of respondents say they “rarely” or “never” have use of a household car – except in Westmeath where the figure is lower – 13%. The balance of 80+% of people therefore state that they “frequently” or “always” have use of a car;
  - car availability has a key relationship with usage of other forms of transport. As previously cited, over 80% (83%) of all respondents report that their own car is their primary form of transport. However, for those who “rarely/never” have a car available this falls to 45%, and is replaced by other forms of transport – especially public transport. Of those who rarely/never have a car available, about a quarter cite public transport (bus, rail, taxi/hackney) as their main form of transport;
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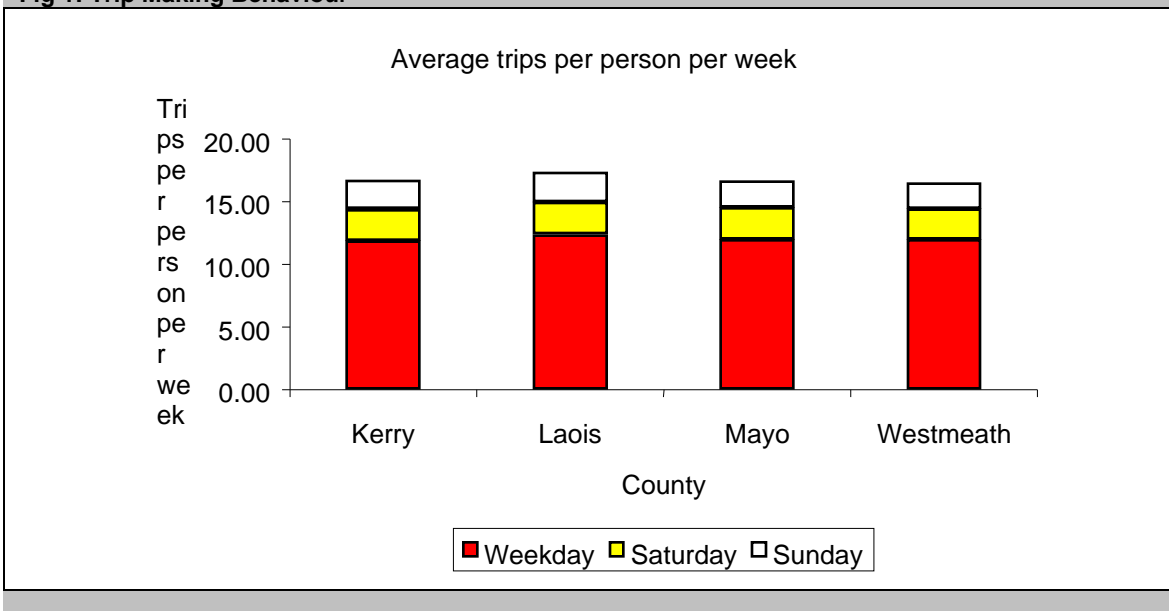
- in terms of both car ownership and car availability, a clear pattern emerges across socio-economic groups in rural areas. Those with least access to cars are older people (especially women), people who are ill or people who have disabilities, young people, and those in lower income groups. This finding and these groups become key in relation to our later approach to “reasonable needs”. The groups as specified in the survey are shown in the box below.

#### Box 1: Definition of Key Social Groups

| Group                                   | Survey Definition  |
|---|--|
| Older people                            | Those stating they are 65+   |
| People who are ill or have a disability | Those who responded “yes” to the question: “do you have a long-term illness or disability”   |
| Young people                            | Those stating they are 18-24 (Note: questionnaire went to persons on the electoral register) |
| People on low incomes                   | Those stating that they have a medical card  |

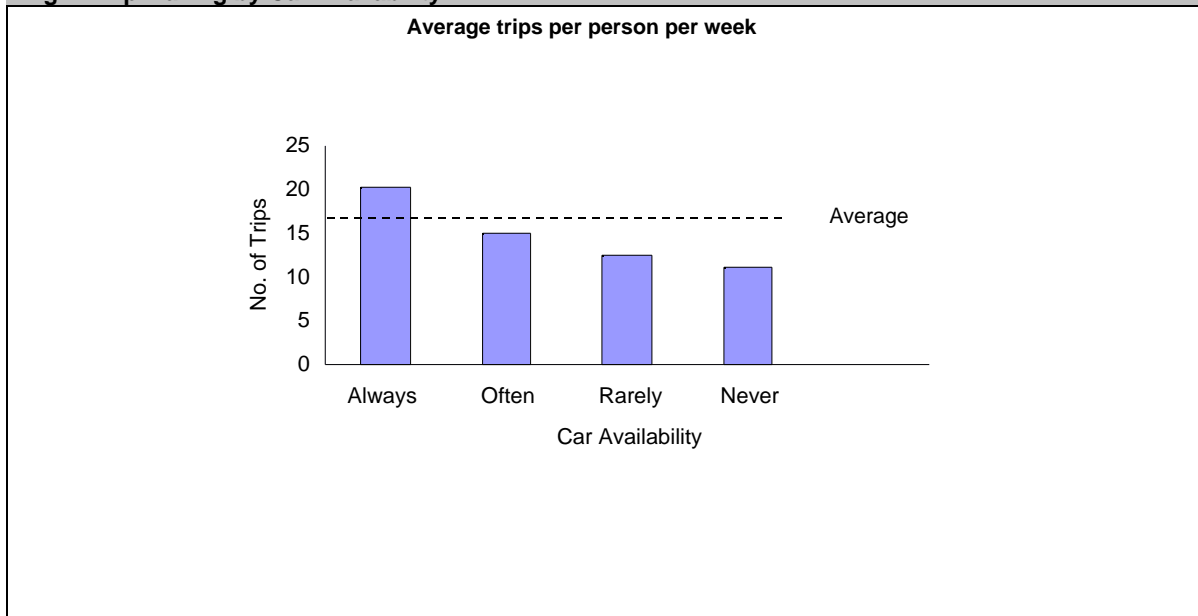
### 3.3 Patterns of Trip Making

Fig 1: Trip Making Behaviour



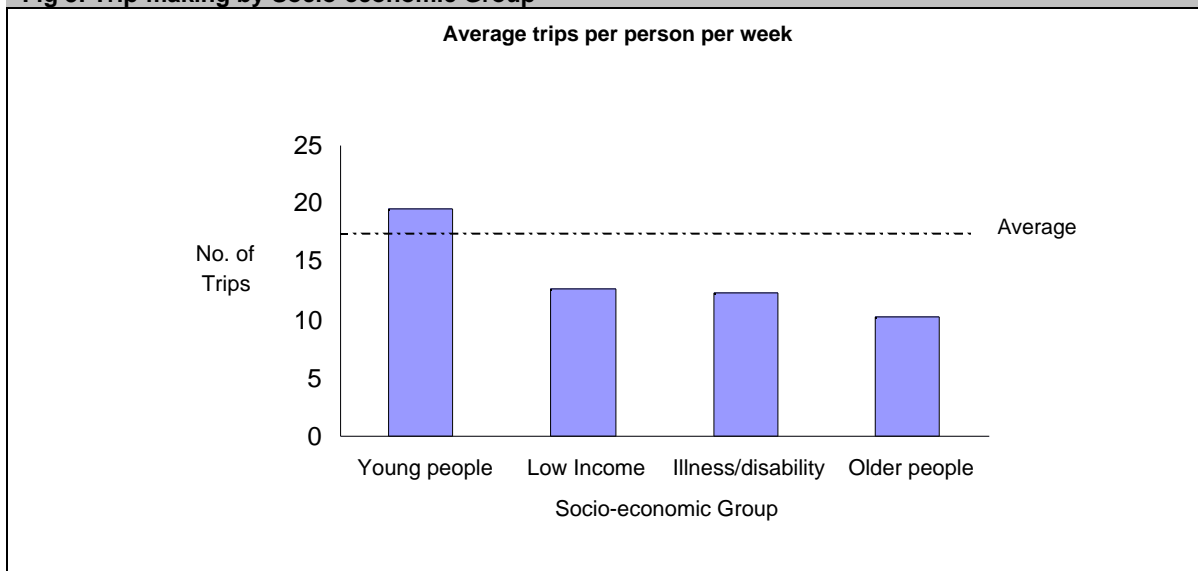
- including all trips of whatever length and by whatever means (i.e. car, bus, rail, motorbike, bicycle, walking), rural respondents in the pilot counties typically make 17 trips weekly (treating a “trip” as a round journey), see Fig. 1. In the case of those who “always/often” have use of a car, this rises to 19-20 while it falls to 11-12 for those who “rarely/never” have car availability, i.e. those having ready car availability typically make approximately 70% more trips than those without it (see Fig. 2):

**Fig 2: Trip Making by Car Availability**



- the “socio-economic” groups reporting lower levels of trip-making are similar to the low car availability groups above, i.e. older people (especially older women), people with disabilities and people on low incomes – but not young people (18-24 age group). This latter finding probably points to high levels of ad hoc and informal transport arrangements among young people in rural areas, (see Fig. 3);

**Fig 3: Trip-making by Socio-economic Group**

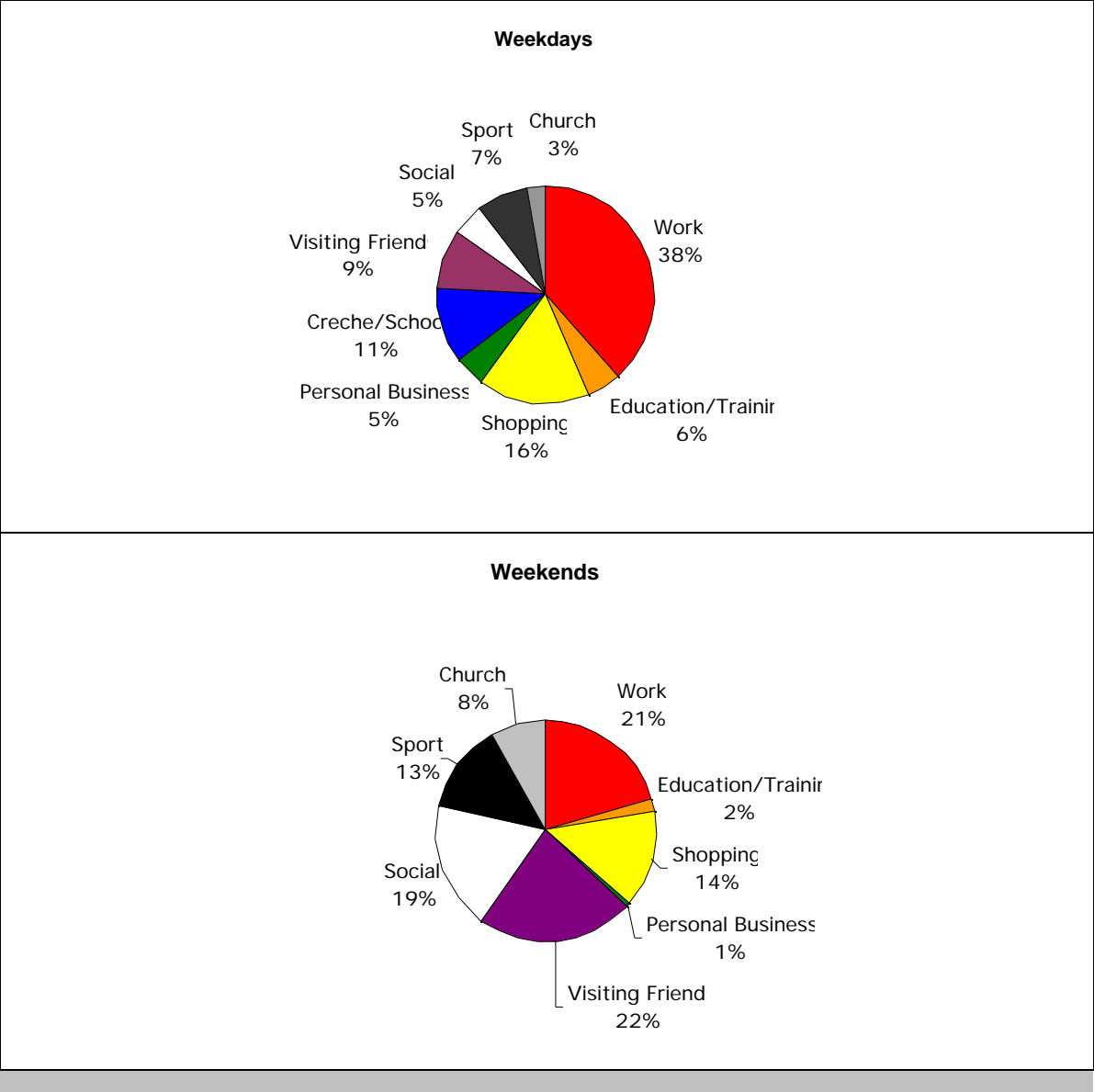


- the survey shows that, as would be expected, journey purposes in rural Ireland vary between weekday and weekend. While in each case work and shopping are very

important, school/crèche runs are also very important on weekdays and social activities more so on the weekends (see Fig. 4);

- survey respondents were also asked about the incidence of long-term illness and of disability and the impact on their travel patterns. About 10% of respondents said they have a long-term illness or have a disability. Asked whether they experience travel difficulties as a result, about half of these said “none”, one-third said “slight”, and 20% said “serious”. On this basis, about 2 in 10 of those rural residents in the pilot counties who have a long-term illness or have a disability experience serious transport difficulties as a result.

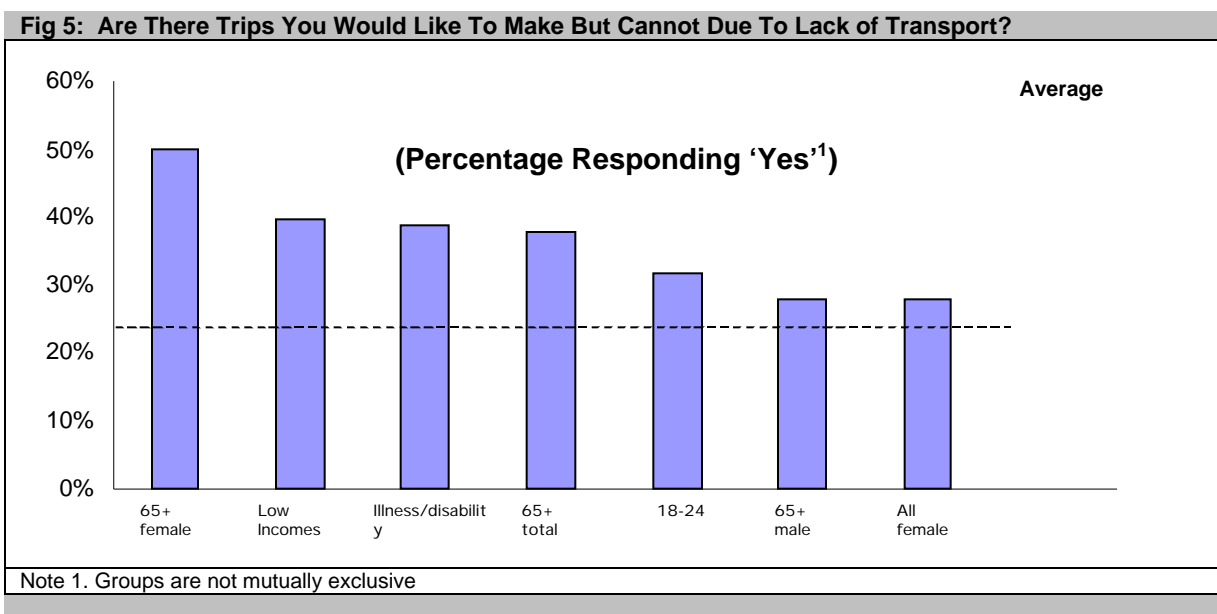
**Fig 4: Relative Frequency of Journey Purposes**



### 3.4 People's Perception of Their Unmet Transport Needs

Establishing “reasonable” rural passenger transport needs is a central requirement of the Working Group’s Terms of Reference. Section 3.2 has already identified survey responses on comparative levels of trip making between those with and those without ready car availability (i.e. “comparative” need). The second approach to transport “needs” is rural residents’ own perception of their unfulfilled travel expectations (i.e. “felt” need). Key survey findings for the four pilot counties are:

- asked if there are trips they can’t make due to lack of transport, at least three-quarters of rural residents in the four counties say “no”, i.e. for most people there is no immediate transport gap. However, a sizeable minority of about a quarter (a fifth in Westmeath) said “yes”;
- within the 25% of respondents reporting a transport gap, similar groups again emerge with a higher than average “yes” response – older people, people with illness and people with disabilities, young people, and people on low incomes. As shown in Figure 5, some groups have over twice the “yes” response level to this question than the average. *It should be noted that these groups are not mutually exclusive, since someone can be in more than one group, e.g. both over 65 and on a low income;*



- in terms of numbers of additional trips people with unmet needs wish to make, the average was just under two round trips weekly (1.8). As would be expected, this figure

was lower (1.4) for “always/often” and higher (2.6) for “rare/never” car availability respondents;

- as shown in Fig. 6, unmet transport needs vary by social group. Among all those with “rarely/never” car availability, additional trip requirements are: 1 average extra weekly trip for older people; 1-2 trips on average for people with illness and people with disabilities; and over 3 trips for young people. Figures here refer, of course, to average needs. Some individuals within these groups will have higher and some will have lower perceived needs.

**Fig 6: Reported Unmet Transport Needs by Sub-group and Car Availability**

| Average Number of Additional Trips Desired Per Week |                  |              |  |
|---|------------------|--------------|--|
| Sub-group   | Car Availability |              |  |
|   | Always/often     | Rarely/never |  |
| Young people  | 1.7              | 3.3          |  |
| Older people  | 0.9              | 1.1          |  |
| Ill/disabled  | 0.9              | 1.5          |  |
| Low income  | 1.0              | 2.0          |  |
| Free Travel Pass                                    | 0.8              | 1.8          |  |
| Average of all Respondents                          | 1.4              | 2.6          |  |

### 3.5 Perceptions of Ways of Meeting Needs and Costs

The survey also asked respondents about the type of transport solutions they could envisage for meeting their own perceived needs:

- in terms of future service types, on average people favour services akin to taxis/hackneys. As would be expected, this is especially so among older people and people with disabilities. There is also a preference for direct services rather than interchanges;
- the survey asked the question “For any type of new local transport service, to which extent will cost affect your willingness to use it?” Responses were:

|                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| greatly:       | 25% |
| somewhat:      | 38% |
| not very much: | 37% |

This response did not vary much across age and social group, and would confirm general perceptions that transport has a relatively low “price elasticity of demand”,

i.e. the extent of people's trip making is on average not that sensitive to its cost.

### **3.6 Feedback from Workshops in the Four Pilot Counties**

County desk research and surveys were supplemented by a series of consultative workshops – one per county – organised through the four County Development Boards (CDBs). These were attended by CDB members, community and voluntary organisations, public and private transport operators, and by local authority officials.

Key points emerging from the Workshops were:

- a strong focus on excluded people living alone without transport in remote areas – especially older people;
- a lack of information about the considerable numbers of scheduled services that already exist – especially where run by private operators;
- an emphasis on the important role of the community and voluntary sector in rural transport issues, and awareness of the major contribution that pilot community-led transport schemes have already made<sup>8</sup>;
- there was also a view that the key roles of the community and voluntary sector are in assessing needs, in piloting innovative transport approaches, and in ensuring community support for schemes, but less so in long-term ongoing transport service provision;
- awareness that any national framework must also apply across all rural areas, irrespective of whether local community structures exist or not;
- an emphasis on the importance of planning and co-ordination. There was a general view that County Councils should become involved at this level, while not displacing successful community, voluntary and informal effort;
- a view that, outside emergency situations, a minimum of a single weekly combined trip to the nearest town or large village is essential (e.g. for pension, shopping, etc), and that this needs to be door to door for people with disabilities and older people;
- continuing problems of accessibility to public transport for people with disabilities;
- emphasis on the need to consider rural transport in the context of wider transport issues, and the difficulty of isolating “rural” transport and other transport issues in most Irish counties;

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<sup>8</sup> This experience is summarised in *Rural Transport: A National Study from A Community Perspective*, Commissioned by



- the need to also consider rural transport issues in the context of wider spatial planning at national, regional and county level, i.e. policy on location of housing, of employment and of public services.

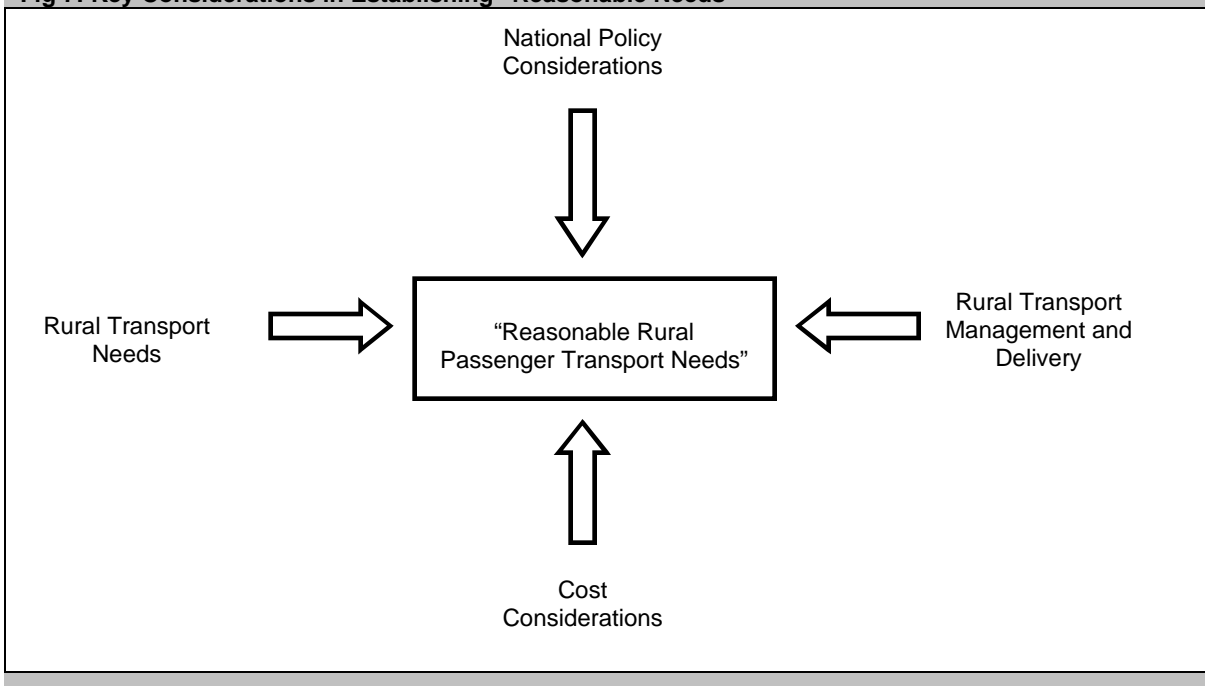
## 4. Reasonable Rural Passenger Transport Needs

### 4.1 Overall Approach

One of the core components of the Working Group's Terms of Reference is the requirement to establish "reasonable rural passenger transport needs". As shown in Figure 7, the Group sees four key considerations as informing the reasonable needs issue:

- (a) the national **policy considerations** in terms of what could be achieved in relation to the rural transport issue, and what policy-makers may wish to achieve in the short and medium terms;
- (b) the **needs** on the ground in rural Ireland as evidenced through the four pilot county surveys, consultations, research and other information;
- (c) **cost considerations** – including issues of cost effectiveness, the total cost of any intervention, experience to date in providing public transport services in rural areas, and the question of annual cost "certainty";
- (d) **management and delivery** considerations, covering both the issue of actual transport service provision on the ground, and how this is to be planned, managed and organised locally within a national policy framework.

**Fig 7: Key Considerations in Establishing "Reasonable Needs"**



The following parts of this section of the Report deal with national policy considerations (Section 4.2), rural transport needs (4.3) and cost considerations (4.4), respectively. This latter issue is dealt with in a preliminary way only, pending the completion of audits of services/needs' assessments by County Development Boards for the remaining counties. Section 5 then deals with Management and Delivery issues.

## **4.2 National Policy Considerations**

A crucial starting point for establishing reasonable needs is to identify key national policy considerations and possible policy options and priorities, i.e. are there emerging priorities already and does this point to an approach to “reasonable needs”?

The view of the Working Group is that from a policy perspective there are two distinct dimensions to the rural transport issue:

Issue No. (1) **the “social inclusion” issue of access to essential services and activities primarily for people in rural areas who do not have use of, or access to, private cars, e.g. services such as shopping, training, pension collection;**

Issue No. (2) **the “sustainability” issue surrounding very heavy reliance on private cars in rural Ireland – issues of increased commuting, of environmental impact, and of spatial planning generally.**

The Working Group's assessment is that Issue No. 1 is its primary focus. This does not involve any downgrading of Issue No. 2 but the view, consistent with the Working Group's Terms of Reference, that it is not the rural transport focus of this Group.

The two issues, however, are also inter-related. Absence of adequate spatial planning policies can, through dispersed and uncoordinated housing and service patterns, store up major rural access and transport problems in the future, especially as current rural populations age. This linkage was heavily emphasised in feedback from the consultative workshops undertaken as part of the study (see Section 3.6).

## **4.3 Rural Transport Needs**

### **4.3.1 Identifying Key Target Groups**

The choice of Issue No. 1, i.e. “social inclusion” needs, as the Group’s focus provides a key starting point in establishing “reasonable needs”. It means that, in the immediate future, the “rural transport problem” is about access to services for people in rural areas who have no car available to them. Following from this, the Working Group’s proposal is that “reasonable needs” be seen in terms of:

- (i) identifying priority target groups in rural areas;
- (ii) establishing an appropriate norm of the level of transport service to which they should ideally have access.

With regard to identifying these groups in practice we propose that:

- following from the proposed policy focus, all those with adequate car availability can be “filtered out” as a first step. Their needs are met in the short term – leaving aside issues of medium term sustainability;
- those people in rural areas with a reasonable level of public transport already available to them can also be “filtered out”, i.e. a majority of the population of a DED which has a scheduled bus or train stop with suitable connections;
- within this “rarely/never” car and “no public transport” availability group, the survey in the four pilot counties identifies a series of potential priority groups (with overlap between them). These, in no order of importance, are:
  - older people, especially older women;
  - people with illness and people with disabilities;
  - people on low incomes;
  - young people.

These four groups consistently emerge, on the basis of various indicators, as having somewhat greater transport gaps than the average rural resident. As previously stated, there is overlap between these groups. The survey definition of the groups is given in Section 3.2 above.

Some other possible rural groups may also exist, e.g. unemployed persons and persons outside the labour force who cannot commute to work or training because of lack of transport. However, the numbers of such people identified in the survey (reflecting in part low unemployment) did not make separate analysis possible.

#### 4.3.2 Target Groups' Reasonable Travel Needs

Taking the four groups of rural residents above as potential key target groups for short-term attention, the next questions in establishing their "reasonable" needs are:

- \_ where do they need to go and why?
- \_ how frequently do they need to travel?

**Fig 8: Towards Identifying Reasonable Rural Passenger Transport Needs by Priority Group<sup>1</sup>**

| Priority Group<br>(1)   | Travel Purposes<br>(2)    | Type of Destination<br>(3)    | Frequency<br>(4) | Type of Transport Service<br>(5) |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| (i) Older people <sup>1,2</sup>   | Shops, Health, etc.       | All types                     | Weekly, Monthly  | Door-to-door                     |
| (ii) People with disabilities <sup>1,2</sup>                                  | Various                   | All types                     | Weekly, Monthly  | Door-to-door                     |
| (iii) People on low incomes <sup>1,2</sup>                                    | Shops, Health, etc.       | All types                     | Weekly, Monthly  | Nearby                           |
| (iv) Young People   | Work, Education, Training | County town, Other large town | Daily            | Nearby                           |
| <sup>1</sup> Refer to people in these groups who are outside the labour force |                           |                               |                  |                                  |
| <sup>2</sup> Groups are not mutually exclusive                                |                           |                               |                  |                                  |

Figure 8 summarises our approach to answering these questions in a "stylised" matrix fashion. The following text explains the five columns in sequence and then presents (in bold) the implications for establishing reasonable needs.

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Fig 8: Column 1 | <p>this is the list of target groups as defined in Section 4.3.1 above;</p> <p><b>Reasonable Need:</b> These are the potential priority key target rural groups with the most pressing transport need.</p>  |
| Fig 8: Column 2 | <p>this shows the type of travel purposes (excluding emergencies) which might be seen as a minimum essential for reasonable quality of life;</p> <p><b>Reasonable Need:</b> A basic service must ensure that people in the target group can get to the locations where these services are available.</p>  |
| Fig 8: Column 3 | <p>the type of destination, in terms of towns within a county, in which these services will typically be located. Four categories or "levels" of typical destination can be envisaged:</p> <p>Level 1: County town<br/> Level 2: Other large town (greater than 5,000 people)<br/> Level 3: Medium town (1,500-5,000 people)<br/> Level 4: Small town/village (less than 1,500 people)<sup>9</sup></p> <p><b>Reasonable Need:</b> Reasonable need could constitute access to the nearest appropriate-sized town in which peoples' essential needs can be met.</p> |

Fig 8: Column 4

this addresses the crucial issue of frequency, which has major implications for the type of solution needed and its cost. The basic distinction is between:

- daily services needed for regular work or training;
- less than daily services needed for other purposes.

**Reasonable Need:** In the case of regular work/training, reasonable need must by definition involve a daily trip suitable for working hours, i.e. 5 round trips weekly. In the case of other needs, 1 trip weekly to the nearest appropriate level of town could be taken as a minimum reasonable level of service. Support for this comes from our survey where this is the lowest level of additional need which was expressed. It was also referred to in the consultative workshops as a minimum level of provision.

Fig 8: Column 5

this refers to types of services. Key distinctions are:

- whether services are scheduled – needed for any regular daily activity;
- whether they are “door-to-door” or just “nearby”.

**Reasonable Need:** In rural situations services will have to be in appropriate vehicles in terms of size (e.g. on minor roads) and accessibility, and to be useful will have to be door-to-door in many instances.

A feature of this approach to reasonable needs is avoidance of any attempt to sharply classify journey purposes into “reasonable” or “unreasonable”. Outside such obvious cases as medical emergencies, (which are seen as primarily a health rather than a rural transport issue) the Working Group feels that any such classification would prove impossible.

#### 4.4 Cost Considerations

A key input to establishing “reasonable” rural passenger transport needs from a national policy perspective will be costs, especially any potential Exchequer costs. Costs here can refer to: unit costs per passenger; overall costs to the Exchequer; annual cost certainty (as opposed to any potentially open-ended commitment). This section explores cost considerations in a preliminary way.

A broad approach to costs of “reasonable” rural passenger transport needs will have to take into account a number of key parameters including:

- persons in priority target groups;
- their level of car availability;
- their level of public transport availability;
- typical journey length to destination;
- frequency of trip.

A clearer picture regarding these parameters will emerge when the planned research has been carried out on a nation-wide basis by the remaining County Development Boards. Other key considerations will be the typical costs of any service provided e.g. cost per mile, cost per passenger etc.

In developing an approach to costs, the Group has explored in a preliminary way two broad scenarios based on the work in the four pilot counties:

- a “low” scenario which would focus only on rural residents in our target groups (and living in DEDs with no suitable public transport) who “**never**” have a car available;
- a “high” scenario which would focus on those in our target groups (and living in DEDs with no suitable public transport) who either “**rarely**” or “**never**” have car availability.

Figure 9 sets out examples of key parameters under both of these scenarios.

| Fig 9: Cost Considerations; possible scenarios. |                    |              |                   |                                      |
|---|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Scenario  | Type of Need       | Car          |                   | Average Round Trip Length<br>(miles) |
|   |                    | Availability | Trips per<br>Week |                                      |
| “Low” Scenario                                  | Essential service: | Never        | 1                 | 7.5                                  |
|   | Work/training:     | Never        | 5                 | 15                                   |
| “High” Scenario                                 | Essential service: | Rare/never   | 1                 | 7.5                                  |
|   | Work/training:     | Rare/never   | 5                 | 15                                   |

We consider at this point that further research is necessary in order to quantify the cost of “reasonable” rural passenger transport needs. The issue of cost will be examined by the incoming Interdepartmental Group on Rural Transport. Among the considerations to be addressed will be the most cost-effective method of meeting such needs, taking account of experience to date with the community and voluntary sector schemes and existing services in rural areas provided by Bus Éireann and other operators.

Some of the other issues to be considered will be:

- it is likely that any rural transport intervention would probably need some Exchequer support. Rural scheduled services are unlikely to be operable on a fully commercial basis. Non-scheduled services, where commercially viable, will already be available;
- on the other hand, it should not be assumed that any rural transport intervention need be 100% Exchequer funded. In principle, many users will be in a position to contribute, and survey results suggest that a majority of people have no objection to doing so;
- a significant part of the potential primary target groups will already be holders of the Free Travel Pass (FTP). There will be a need to reconcile any emerging rural transport policy framework with the FTP Scheme (see also Section 6.1);
- if Exchequer subvention were to occur, a crucial issue will be ability to target any subvention at priority groups.



## **5. Rural Transport Management and Delivery**

### **5.1 Approaches to Service Delivery**

#### **5.1.1 Mix of Solutions**

A key implication of the findings of this study is that there is probably no one single delivery solution to rural transport in Ireland. Instead, a mix of solutions will apply to varying degrees both in individual counties and for individual groups:

- existing scheduled services (public and private) could “pick up” some current needs – especially with better information, improved co-ordination, some occasional route adjustments and improved vehicle accessibility;
- new scheduled services, while not a comprehensive solution, may have potential in some areas, e.g. feeder services between smaller and larger towns;
- dedicated services will be necessary in many cases of specific need, such as serious disability;
- various community-based schemes, such as those previously and currently being piloted, will offer innovative approaches in locations where strong community structures exist;
- co-ordinated use of local taxi and hackney services, and expansion of their availability, may be the only realistic option in specific circumstances.

#### **5.1.2 “Semi-Scheduled” Services**

In relation to services for the three “essential service” target groups (older people, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes) more individualised, tailored door-to-door and less than daily services, are likely to be required. We envisage a “semi-scheduled” rural transport concept as a potentially appropriate model. Subject to local circumstances this would involve:

- regular availability to eligible users in specific parts of a county at set times on set days of the week;
- a fixed approximate “run”, with potential for deviation;
- the need for users to “call in” if the service is actually needed on any scheduled day;
- vehicle-wise, use of either conventional saloon cars, wheelchair accessible taxis, people carriers or small mini-buses depending on numbers of travellers involved;

- actual vehicle operation mostly by contracted transport operators;
- availability on any subsidised basis to defined eligible users only.

## **5.2 Need for Sub-National Co-ordination**

### **5.2.1 Background**

The complexity of local situations suggests a need for co-ordination below the national level. This is because while the national level can potentially provide a policy framework, i.e. national objectives, priorities, parameters and possibly funding, this will need tailoring at the level of local or regional implementation.

This need reflects a view, widely expressed in the consultative process, that the rural transport problem is partially one of lack of co-ordination and integration, and that addressing it will certainly need an improvement on these fronts. Many bodies – including health boards, FÁS, individual large employers, and above all community groups – have become involved in order to meet the needs of their individual clientèle. Further proliferation of individual sector-specific rural transport solutions is not the way forward – rather it needs hands-on local level co-ordination to ensure maximum efficiency, effectiveness and service quality.

### **5.2.2 Role for County Councils**

The Working Group notes the general view that County Councils are the most appropriate bodies in this regard. The candidature of County Councils is suggested by:

- their statutory basis;
- their national coverage;
- the synergy with their existing role in regulation (taxis, hackneys, parking);
- their role in roads transport infrastructure;
- their County Development Plan's role as the local settlement strategy;
- their experience in implementing local targeting of public interventions;
- their potential to provide Exchequer cost certainty via any fixed annual Exchequer allocations.

A regional dimension to co-ordination will also be necessary. This may involve some combination of: co-ordination between County Councils where rural services cross county boundaries; possible pooling of resources, including administrative resources, especially

among smaller counties; co-ordination with appropriate cross-county or regional strategies, e.g. land use and transportation plans, and any new regional land use and transportation structures.

Within nationally agreed parameters, the potential County Council role could involve a combination of:

- establishing and monitoring both local needs and local service availability;
- identifying county situations and needs;
- establishing county goals and targets;
- planning county and sub-county delivery;
- working closely with community, voluntary and other relevant local interests;
- ensuring adequate public information on availability of existing scheduled services;
- co-ordinating the local roles of transport providers;
- channelling any public subvention to appropriate operators;
- use of their existing regulatory functions, especially vis-à-vis taxi/hackney licensing;
- operating a county-based rural transport consultative forum, possibly as a sub-committee of the County Development Board;
- addressing the key issue of appropriate service standards, including vehicle accessibility for people with disabilities and disability awareness and training for local and rural transport providers.

The proposed co-ordination role for County Councils would involve some administrative costs, for which local authorities would have to be adequately resourced. It is important to emphasise that the co-ordination role of the County Councils would not involve actual vehicle operation by local authorities.

## 6. Wider Context

### 6.1 Relationship with Existing Transport Schemes

An important issue in relation to any future rural passenger transport proposals are its link with existing schemes in this area.

The Working Group's overall approach to this is that, while the issue is an important one, it raises a large number of policy, regulatory and financial complexities which are outside the Group's remit. Furthermore, these do not all need to be resolved before initiating an approach to dealing with the more acute transport dimensions of rural exclusion. The status of this section is therefore one of observations rather than recommendations:

- **Bus Éireann** is the operator of most existing scheduled passenger transport services in rural areas, using both its own vehicles and in some cases sub-contracted private operators. (Bus Éireann also operates the school transport scheme, see below). The Working Group's view is that, in the run-up to wider transport liberalisation and deregulation, it is important that such services be initiated on an open competitive basis and with a level playing field for private sector operators;
- in relation to the **school transport scheme**, this meets the needs of most school children in rural areas up to secondary school level. While there will be potential to use school bus transport to provide other services during down time, our assessment is that this may be exaggerated in practice. This is particularly so as the school bus services themselves are being increasingly operated by private transport companies with non-dedicated vehicles. It is also important that a scheme which is operating reasonably effectively should not be unnecessarily disturbed, at least during any start-up period of a new rural transport service. Thereafter, this is an issue which can be explored at local level in each specific situation;
- The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs is responsible for the **Free Travel Scheme**. This scheme is generally available to all people living in the State aged 66 years or over. It is also available to carers and people with disabilities who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments. Approximately 580,000 Free Travel Passes have been issued providing for free travel on the main public and private transport services. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by semi-State companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as

services provided by some 80 private transport operators. The vast majority of these private contractors operate in rural areas.

A Review of the Free Schemes<sup>10</sup>, including the Free Travel Scheme, was published in April 2000 by the Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin. The Review considered the difficulties involved in access to public transport services, both in terms of disability and rural deficits. These difficulties, which are unrelated to the Free Travel Scheme, are part of a wider social and infrastructure problem, affecting all those who are disadvantaged and who can neither afford their own transport or avail of access to public transport.

The Review notes that a fundamental aspect of the scheme is to use existing spare capacity on public transport. Therefore, while the Department pays transport providers to operate the Free Travel Scheme, it is not within its remit to provide services where none exist, nor is it in a position to provide vehicles accessible to people with disabilities.

However, in view of the Department's wider responsibilities in the area of social inclusion, the Review recommends that a "Social Transport Fund" be supported and made available to voluntary and community based organisations for the provision of local transport initiatives that would be unlikely to operate without a subsidy. Such a fund would be mainly social in nature and could facilitate the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles. The Review considered it appropriate that such a fund could be managed locally, perhaps by the local authorities, in view of their knowledge of local services and to maintain community autonomy.

The Working Group noted the recommendations of this Review in the wider context of developing future policy in this area;

- in relation to **health board transport**, most non-emergency Health Board transport provision, at least in the four pilot counties, would appear to be provided through privately-contracted rather than Health Board vehicles. On this basis there would be no major "stock" of general purpose Health Board passenger vehicles that can be drawn upon. However, the position will

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<sup>10</sup> A Review of the Free Schemes operated by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Orlaigh Quinn,

become clearer when the planned research has been carried out on a nationwide basis by the remaining County Development Boards. In this context, scope for extended use of Health Board transport vehicles should be considered by the follow-on Interdepartmental Working Group;

- the **Rural Transport Initiative**, launched by the Minister for Public Enterprise on 2 July, will provide funding for community-led pilot rural transport projects. The Initiative is designed to encourage and facilitate the emergence of public transport services in rural areas provided by community-led organisations. The primary objectives of the Initiative are to promote and support the development of innovative, community-based public transport projects in rural areas and to use the experience from these projects in the development of rural public transport policy;
- in relation to **community-based transport schemes**, these are generally attempting to provide innovative, locally-based initiatives at sub-county level. They also generally involve planning and co-ordination rather than necessarily ownership or direct operation of vehicles (this being left to Bus Éireann or private operators). We feel that where they exist, these initiatives can continue within the county structures being proposed by the Working Group;
- in relation to transport for **people with disabilities**, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform initiated two pilot accessible transport projects as the focus of community action plans in 1998 in Counties Meath and Mayo which are rural and urban in nature. The Department provided funding for the projects which involved the establishment of local advisory groups inclusive of people with disabilities; local service users and providers; collation of a profile of people with disabilities in the local area; analysis of local transport provision; identification of user needs and resulted in a range of recommendations for local and national level. These projects continued and advanced to a stage involving exploration of possible responses to identified needs and the development of pilot initiatives.

## **6.2 Link to Wider Policy Considerations**

An important conclusion emerging from this study, and which receives widespread support in the consultation workshops, was an emphasis on the need not to consider rural

passenger transport in isolation from other issues, but to see it as part of its wider context<sup>11</sup>. The Working Group concurs with this. Among these wider considerations are:

- developing public transport policy generally, including issues such as public transport investment, public transport liberalisation, new regulatory structures and the development of public service contracts for the public transport sector;
- in relation to spatial planning, there was a strong emphasis particularly among the local authorities in the four pilot counties on the need to link rural and other local transport services, with decisions about the location of housing, employment and services within counties. There was an explicit view expressed that existing County Development Plans deal both with settlement patterns, and with the transport infrastructure network between these, thus making it a logical extension that it should also deal with the transport services utilising this transport infrastructure. There is also a need for greater realisation of the transport implications of decisions about the location of various services at national, regional and local level, and the possibility that some location decisions may inadvertently give rise to creation of increased journey requirements, including journeys to essential services;
- in relation to exclusion measures more generally, an emphasis arising during this study was the fact that while rural transport is an important contributor to easing rural isolation, it is not the only one. Other considerations here include decisions about the location of traditionally rural services, e.g. post offices, the potential for the use of information technology to deliver services both locally and indeed in the home, and the need for other services such as information and counselling;
- in relation to people with disabilities, the view of the Working Group is that this is an area of crucial national importance within social inclusion policy development. It requires a focus on the means of improving accessibility to existing public transport systems which may require tailored solutions in many instances and consideration of community-based initiatives in the context of mainstreaming policy. The Department of Public Enterprise recently launched the Rural Transport Initiative and this will provide funding for the development and implementation of innovative local and rural community-based transport solutions, including approaches to disability issues.

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<sup>11</sup> Most other countries who do not have explicit "rural transport" policies would tend to regard this as part of wider public