

A Background Paper

Rural Ireland: Waiting for a Lift,*

Introduction

Mobility is intrinsic to life. We take our mobility for granted. Very few of us think of what it would be like to be immobile. Our lives would be very different. This paper seeks to address the issue of community mobility as a fundamental necessity for quality of life and for development. By using the term community the authors are distinguishing mobility within the local or the wider community from personal mobility. This paper seeks to set the background for discussion on community mobility and rural community mobility in particular. This paper is a background to the national seminar that will examine the current level of transport provision to meet basic community mobility needs, share the experience of those that have initiated local transport projects and identify the obstacles that limit the development of improved systems of community mobility.

Mobility as a fundamental aspect of development

The Modernisation Theory of development places mobility firmly at the center of development. This

theory argues that there is a strong correlation between transport methods that enhance mobility and economic development. The advent of the wheel is the most basic example of this, but in modern society it has become essential to have effective methods of transporting goods and people quickly and cost effectively. Globally it is possible to associate the stages of economic development of the society with the transport systems available to that society. It is also possible to associate the economic prosperity of subsections of a population with different levels of access to transport. It is logical to conclude that the less well off are less likely to own private means of transport, are more limited in the modes of transport they can afford and tend to be more dependent on public transport. At the opposite end of the spectrum the better off have more expensive private transport and use expensive means of public transport.

Mobility and Dispersion

Dispersion is a relative term. It is relative to distance, to access, to external factors and to

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Prepared by ;

Mr. Michael Kenny,
Lecturer, Center for Adult and Community
Education, National University of Ireland,
Maynooth and co-ordinator of the Rural
Renewal Pilot Project on the provision of
integrated public services in Rural Areas

and

Mr. Brendan Finn,
Managing Director, European Transport &
Telematics Systems Ltd., 55 Main Street,
Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

Is improved means of transport a product of development? Or, is improved means of transport a pre-requisite for development?- The modernisation theory argues that it is a pre-requisite!

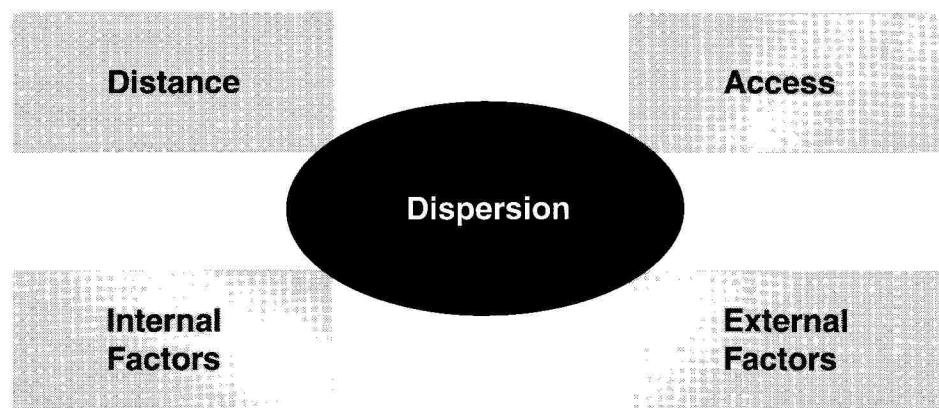
internal factors. However it can be concluded in general that the greater the level of dispersion of the population the greater the challenge of providing adequate mobility. Furthermore, the more disadvantaged the population due to both internal and external factors the greater the challenge of providing access to mobility (See Fig. 1.). Added to this is the term quality mobility. What is adequate?, what is appropriate?, what is cost effective? etc. access to means of mobility? Quality mobility according to those at the seminar should meet needs, be accessible, be professional and be safe. While accepting that dispersion is relative, the populations of rural areas are, in absolute terms, the most dispersed. If you add to this the significant internal factors such as older age groups, living alone, low family incomes, etc., and the significant external factors such as poor infrastructure, rural depopulation, reduced levels of public services, high cost of service delivery per unit, etc. then sections of the populations of rural areas are seriously disadvantaged in terms of access to transport.

Classification of Community Mobility

From the experience of the authors the following classification of community mobility or transport is suggested (See Fig. 2.). Our focus in this seminar relates to local transport systems i.e. less than 10 miles primarily and to regional travel systems secondly. However, we are also concerned about inter-linkages such as feeder/distribution systems for the inter-regional level and levels of congestion in urban/city transport.

Fig. 2. suggests that here are eight (8) modes of transport at local level. These are Bus Eireann, private coach, school bus, car, lift giving, taxi/hackney, bicycle and local initiatives. This seminar seeks to discuss the local initiatives but this cannot be done in isolation of the remainder. This seminar proposes the establishment of a national committee to discuss the integration of all eight models of local transport and to identify the unique role local initiatives can play. This paper will contribute to this in two ways. Firstly to profile the known local initiatives and secondly to reflect the

Fig. 1.



i Personal mobility and health, need, ability to pay, need for flexibility etc.

ii Quality of infrastructure, climatic conditions, existing means of transport, community support, state provision, etc.

iii National population density figure of 50 persons per square km is the lowest in the EU. However over 50% of the rural districts outside Dublin have a population density of 25 people per square km and 25% less than 19 persons per square km.

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strategic thinking and policy relating to rural transport.

Fig. 2.

Travel Range	How is the need met	Rating of Delivery	Weaknesses
Inter-Regional i.e. over 30 miles	Air Irish Rail Bus Eireann Private coach Car	Moderate to Good	Level of integration Level of information Feeder/distribution systems
Regional i.e. 10-30 miles	Bus Eireann Private coach Car Lift giving Hackney	Poor to Good	Level of coverage Level of service Lack of integration
Local i.e. less than 10 miles	Bus Eireann Private coach School bus Car Lift giving Taxi/Hackney Bicycle Local Initiatives	Non existent to Moderate	Lack of coverage Low service levels Poor connections to key destinations Inflexible services Viability of new and innovative services Lack of integration with other services Level of information
Urban/City	Dublin Bus Bus Eireann Private coach School bus Dart/Luas Car Lift giving Taxi/Hackney Bicycle Local Initiatives	Moderate to Good	Level of integration Level of information Level of congestion

iv Following an initial trawl to list local initiatives, Lorraine Dunbar and Fegal Cahill of ETTS undertook the survey presented in fig. 3. The authors are grateful for their assistance and particularly for the assistance of the project promoters themselves who contributed this information.

v Fig. 2 was composed by the authors. The classification was constructed from the range of public transport available, the rating is subjective based on experience, reports and public feedback. The weaknesses were constructed based on feedback from rural & urban communities.

Local Transport Initiatives

Nine (9) documented local transport initiatives were surveyed (Fig. 3.), of which seven (7) are currently in operation. Each local transport initiative is located within areas which are deemed locally to be poorly serviced by public transport. The local transport projects have been initiated by a section of the local community e.g. senior citizens or the wider local community and are for the most part run as a commercial venture. Drivers of the vehicles tend to be contracted by the local transport project and are in general private bus/mini-bus operators. Users pay a standard fee with Old Age Pensioners (OAP) usually traveling via their travel pass provided by the Department of Social Welfare.

The local transport projects are run initially as 6 month pilot projects, with the aim of stimulating a service and encouraging passenger patronage levels. After this period, it is expected that growth will be at an appropriate level so as to run the particular route as a commercial venture. Only three (3) of the services have been in operation for over two (2) years with the remaining 3 local transport projects currently within their pilot stage.

The most common type of vehicle used are minibuses. A novel project, catering for locals and tourists alike, operating within the North Clare region, utilises a modified postal delivery vehicle to carry passengers; as another project (now dormant) in Co. Roscommon used private vehicles.

Services are more or less evenly distributed between scheduled and on-request, with reservations being made either via phone, direct contact with the driver or standing order. Frequency of operation is quite low and usually consists of 1 or 2 return trips between two conurbations per week.

A number of interesting points emerge from the survey

- Most local transport initiatives are developed out of the concern of community leaders to provide accessible local transport
 - Most local transport projects are developed through voluntary commitment and leadership
 - There is minimal networking between local transport projects
 - There is minimal mainstream state support for local transport initiatives
 - Communities managing local transport projects are operating in policy and operational vacuums
 - The ongoing depopulation of rural Ireland is making sustainability of local transport projects increasingly difficult
 - Subvention of local transport projects is essential for their sustainability.
- A Number of interesting points

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Fig. 3.

Scheme Location	Contact Details	Currently in operation and duration	Type / No. Vehicles	Routes	Service Levels	Does User Pay	Paid/Volunteer Drivers	Restriction on users	Who initiated Scheme	How is it funded	Any other Information
Aughrim Village Catchment, Co. Wicklow	Jim Healy, Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd. (WRP), The Anne Devlin Annex, Fairgreen, Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow Tel. 0404 46977 Fax. 0404 46978 Email: wrp@ol.ie Website: Http://www.wicklow.ie	Yes. 6 months pilot (and will continue if viable). Commenced 18/07/97.	1 Mercedes 7090 - 26 seater (1*36 seater also available)	Aughrim - Arklow (via Askengap, Ballinglen & Annacurragh)	One scheduled return service on a Friday. (This will increase according to demand.)	Yes (But Dept. of Social Welfare Travel Pass Holders may use their pass)	Paid (Bus owner/driver)	No	WRP in conjunction with local community group	WRP are supporting the costs to establish the service	
Co. Limerick	Erin Cotter West Limerick Resources Ltd. (WLR), The Weigh House, Market Yard, Newcastle West, Co. Limerick. Tel. 069-62222 Fax. 069-61870	Yes. 6 month pilot (but it is self-financing, so scheme is sustainable). Commenced August 1997	2 x 14 seater mini-buses	Mountcollins - Abbeyfeale Services the surrounding hinterland and village (via Seeconglass, Caherbeg, Crag & Caher)	One scheduled return service on a Friday morning. Route is designed so that it is a door-to-door service for the majority travelling.	Yes. (But Dept. of Social Welfare Travel Pass Holders may use their pass)	Paid (Private Bus Operator)	No - open to all	WLR & Mountcollins Community Council	Fee paying passengers Dept Social Welfare for the elderly & WLR	WLR facilitated the service and produced an information brochure
Co. Clare	Des Horgan, Headpostmaster, Bank Place, Ennis, Co. Clare. Tel. 065-21054 088-526555 Fax. 065-21111	Yes. Up and running for over 15 years.	1* Ford Transit modified vehicle	Ennis - North Clare (via Ruan, Corofin, Kinaboy, Kiffenora, Lisdoonvarna, Doolin, Liscannor, Lahinch, Ennistymon, Inagh, Kilnamona & Foutain Cross)	1 return trip every morning and evening on request by contacting the Post Office (Mon - Sat)	Yes	Paid (in conjunction with other work - postman)	No	An Post	Users Pay (and the vehicle is part of the An Post Fleet, undertaking its normal rounds)	

Fig. 4.

Scheme Location	Contact Details	Currently in operation and duration	Type / No. Vehicles	Routes	Service Levels	Does User Pay	Paid/ Volunteer Drivers	Restriction on users	Who initiated Scheme	How is it funded	Any other Information
Co. Roscommon 11 mile radius of Tulsk Parish,	May McCormac / Sean Moran, Tulsk Parish Services (TPS), Tulsk, Co. Roscommon. Tel. 078-39155	No. April - October 1994. However, a similar service ran until 1996.	3 cars which were financed - tax, insurance & petrol	Castlereagh - Slukestown & Roscommon - Galway Hospital	Flexible according to request/ demand via phone with 24 hour prior notice	Yes - nominal	Paid	No	TPS	Area Development Management in the beginning & fundraising	Service has now stopped but will resume should funding become available
Co. Westmeath	Helena Ennis, Golden Years Club, Killucan, Co. Westmeath. Tel. 044-74725	Yes	1* mini-bus 1* wheelchair accessible minibus	No designated route. Covers about 40% of Westmeath	Bi-weekly. Members collected at home at 10am and returned at 3pm. on request via phone or standard arrangement with club members	Yes	Paid (Private Bus Operator)	Yes, Elderly only	Golden Years Club Members	Users Payments	About 60% of Westmeath is not covered due to transport issues
Co. Limerick / Cork	Bernie Carroll / Tom Kearney, Ballyhaura Rural Transport Group (BRTG) Ballymac, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick Tel: 063 71555	Yes Six month Pilot scheme which is to be continued afterwards by the bus owners	Granagh: 15 seater bus Efrin: 25 seater bus	Granagh-Charleville & Efrin - Charleville	Scheduled service every Friday. 1 return service leaving at 10am and returning at 1pm	Yes - nominal fee (OAP can use their travel pass)	Paid (Bus owner/driver)	No	BRTG	Users pay & Dept of Social Welfare (Pilot guaranteed for 6 months by BRTG, then becomes a commercial venture)	Dept. of Social Welfare will not fund a scheme if there is a public bus service already travelling the same route.
Co. Galway	Dr. Patrick Joseph Geraghty, Glenamaddy Day Care Centre, Glenamaddy, Co. Galway Tel. 0907-59049 / 74020 Fax. 0907-59466	Yes Running for the past 14 years	2* 12 seater mini-buses	Runs between the following parishes: Glenamaddy, Williamstown, Glimsk, Creggs, Kilkerrin, Clonbern & Dunmore	9am - 5pm, Mon - Fri Scheduled & On-Request by phone or direct contact	Yes	Paid	Yes	Glenamaddy Day Care Centre	Western Health Board, Fundraising functions, individual	

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Fig. 5.

Scheme Location	Contact Details	Currently in operation and duration	Type / No. Vehicles	Routes	Service Levels	Does User Pay	Paid/Volunteer Drivers	Restriction on users	Who initiated Scheme	How is it funded	Any other Information	
Co. Galway	Yvonne Keane / John Coyne Forum Connemara Transport Project (FCTP), Ellis Hall, Letterfrack, Connemara, Co. Galway. Tel. 095-41116 / 7 Fax. 095-41198	No. Pilot project took place in 1995		10 Community areas in North & West Connemara						FCTP		A Community Transport Study in North & West Connemara was the subject of a report (April 95) which is available from the Forum Project.
	Kilrush/Kilkee	Yes	Contractors minibus	Feeder service connecting to Ennis/Limerick Services Feeder service connecting to Waterford		Fares & Passes for all	Contracted or paid by Bus Eireann	No	Bus Eireann based on need expressed	Fares pay delivery costs within Bus Eireann parameters		
Bus Eireann	Talow/Lismore/Cappaquin /Dungarvan		Contractors minibus	Feeder service connecting to Galway	Wednesday Tuesday/Thursday							
	Ceggan/Clifden Maam Bridge/Cornamona/Cong		School bus Contractors minibus									
	Lorrha/Nanagh Monaghan/Glaslough/ Carrickroe Emyvale		School bus Bus Eireann Vehicle		Friday Tuesday/Saturday							
	Monaghan/Balybay Monaghan Scotstown Feakle/Ennis		" " " "		Thursday Friday Thursday							
	Clonmeillon to Dublin via Mullingar		"		Thursday							

Policy Development Relating to Local Transport

40% of the Population of the Republic of Ireland is rural based, i.e. towns less than 1,500 people. However when the greater Dublin area is taken out of the calculations this figure goes up to 60%. Population statistics drawn from the census of 1986 and the census of 1991 show that rural districts in all nine regions except the East lost population. While the myth is that the population drain was to Dublin the reality is that the perimeter counties to Dublin are the real population growth centers. It is interesting to note also that the urban districts and boroughs outside the five eastern counties focused on Dublin city did not expand to maintain the populations being lost to rural districts. The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report concludes that "If the maintenance of rural population levels is to be taken as a criterion for judging the efficacy of Irish public policy, then it has been singularly unsuccessful in recent years."

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report (1994) defines rural development on p.19 as "... multidimensional and complex process incorporating both conventional economic development activity and a range of other actions aimed at enhancing human capacities and powers of self determination among rural people."

One of the essential ingredients in this process is public service and within this is public transport services. While there is a strategy document on Sustainable Development (Dept. of the Environment, 1997) and an Operational Programme for Transport 1994/1999, (Application for assistance from the EU Regional Development Fund Operational Programme for Transport) the standing policy paper is the Transport Policy Green Paper published by the Department of Communications in November 1985.

The Transport Policy Green Paper addresses inter-regional, regional and city transport issues but gives minimal attention to local transport issues. On page 21 the document states that:-

"There is no obvious reason why.....bus services should continue to be organised as they are at present" and notes that "more flexible transport arrangements might be considered using a combination of buses currently in-use, post buses, taxi/hackney

The document does discuss the use of post-buses, taxi/hackney and school buses but is weak on concrete proposals. The policy document refers in the introduction to Section 3 (provincial bus services) to the problem of providing adequate transport services for the old, the young, the infirm and those who cannot afford a car as "... a significant one" and calls for a central role for the provincial bus services in

"...imaginative methods of providing public transport services which will be adequate in terms of speed, frequency, reliability and comfort, while economic in terms of their burden on the exchequer."

The concern of policy makers for the mobility needs of the disadvantaged and dispersed populations is notable by its absence in more recent reports. Even though recent reports relating to rural development and social exclusion specifically note the needs for local transport provision, there is no policy response. Despite the outcome of the consultation/planning process for the 16 LEADER initiatives, the 18 rural partnership initiatives and the EU Poverty 3 (Forum) programme, which in the majority of cases identify accessible transport initiatives as a priority to address disadvantage and support local development, there is no specific policy response.

Though recent transport reports (e.g. Operational Programme for Transport 1994 /1999) or reports relating to sustainable development (e.g. Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland, Department of the Environment, 1997) emphasise the need for sustainable initiatives, for integration and for modernisation, there is little or no reference to practical steps that will address local transport

needs. For example the Operational Programme for Transport 1994 /1999 document notes that;

- The internal transport system in Ireland is underdeveloped and generally of poor quality
- Road transport accounts for 89% of freight transport and 96% of passenger transport
- The national road network, rail network and national port (air and sea) require investment.

This document does not address the concern of this seminar relating to local public transport provision or indeed the transport needs of the disadvantaged and dispersed populations.

A Report by the Transport Research Institute, UCD, to the Irish Energy Center "Energy Efficiency Opportunities for Transport in Ireland"(June, 1996) does make a number of practical proposals relating to transport in a general sense. However the absence of a connection between the proposal and the policy, is resulting in the same lack of integration that those leading local transport initiatives are presently feeling. The NESF Report (1994) identified that the absence of a national policy frustrates local and regional policy development. This is certainly evident in the area of rural transport. Community leaders are investing time and locally raised resources into a valuable initiative that cannot be sustained due to absence of a policy. Further the lessons for improved local transport systems arising from the initiative are not learned and used for local development. The situation is summed up clearly in the position paper of the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications (Policies and Programmes in Relation to Rural Areas, 1996) submitted to the Department of Agriculture and Food, Rural Development Policy Committee. The Department first notes that it is responsible for National Policy (P1) but

"...the public transport divisions do not have, in effect, any policies or programmes aimed specifically at rural areas"

vii NESF Report No. 12, Rural Renewal - Combating Social Exclusion, March 1997

Conclusions & Recommendations

Viability and sustainability is closely linked to mobility. This paper highlights the centrality of mobility for development in general and rural development in particular. The matrix of transport levels, presented in this paper, identifies the inadequate-to-absent level of local transport provision in rural Ireland. The paper profiles projects promoted by agencies, organisations and individuals who are at the cutting edge of innovating more efficient and more inclusive modes of public transport.

This paper reflects the feedback from the first rural transport seminar on September 3rd, 1997, where those actively promoting projects identified the need for good community development practice, the need for co-ordination, and the need for effective marketing for successful local transport development.

This paper reviews policy relating to rural transport and finds that it is dated, incomplete and only looks at the macro picture. There is no policy for how a rural person without private transport can increase their mobility for economic or social reasons and there is no integrated policy of transport provision for those in rural Ireland who are dependent or carers of dependents.

Overall this paper shows that there is much to be done to provide access to a basic level of public transport at local level and to integrate a range of local services with the regional and inter-regional services. We who are concerned on this issue must ensure that we have maximum participation and partnership and that the public sector plays the leading role in provision of transport. This paper is a contribution and this seminar is very important in the debate.

It is clear that the provision of better local transport would have a significant knock on benefit for rural development. Is that not what we all want?