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UK (except Scotland)

INSIGHT PAPER

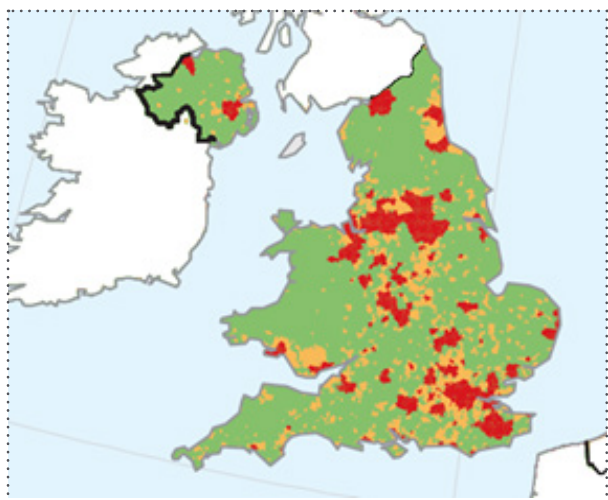
The constituent countries of the United Kingdom are England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This Insight Paper focuses on arrangements in England, Northern Ireland and Wales only. The mobility framework relating to Scotland has been described in another Insight Paper. Readers are advised to refer to that paper for further insight on arrangements in Scotland

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RURALITY (1)

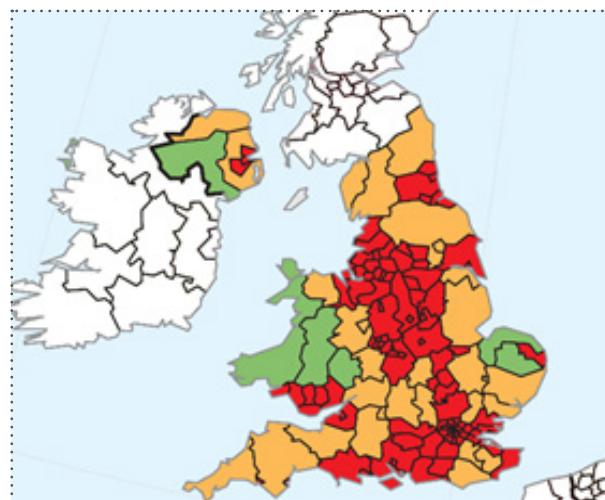
Degree of urbanisation for local administrative units level 2 (LAU2)



- Cities
- Towns and suburbs
- Rural Areas
- Data not available

Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission Directorate-General for Regional Policy, May 2016

Urban-rural typology for NUTS level 3 regions



- **Predominantly urban regions**
(rural population is less than 20% of the total population)
- **Intermediate regions**
(rural population is between 20% and 50% of the total population)
- **Predominantly rural regions**
(rural population is 50% or more of the total population)
- **Data not available**

Source: Eurostat, JRC, EFGS, REGIO-GIS, December 2016

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

36%

Share of people living in rural areas - Northern Ireland (2016)

33%

Share of people living in rural areas - Wales (2011)

17%

Share of people living in rural areas - England (2016)

Source: www.ons.gov.uk

GEOGRAPHY

According to the latest population estimates by the Office for National Statistics, the English population was 55,619,400 in June 2017. With a land area of 130,279 sq km, England has a population density of approximately 427 people per sq km. Data could not be identified that estimated the rural population of England in June 2017. However, for 2016, the rural population was identified at approximately 17.0 percent. Of the three countries considered here, England is the most urbanised. Mid-year 2017 population estimates provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency put the Northern Irish population at 1,870,800 resulting in a population density of almost 139 people per sq km (given its respective land area of 13,576 sq km).

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs estimated the rural population proportion for Northern Ireland as 36% in 2016. Of the three countries considered here, Northern Ireland has the least urbanised population. Population estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics, put the Welsh population at 3,125,200 in 2017 meaning that with a land area of 20,733 sq km, it has a significantly lower population density than England at almost 151 people per sq km. According to 2011, Census data, one-third (33%) of the Welsh population live in rural areas.

RURality (2)

Broadly speaking, the issues facing the rural areas in the respective three countries are similar, although they may identify different priorities. England is the most urbanised country, with a population density of approximately 427 people per sq km. Northern Ireland has the least urbanised population (approximately 139 people per sq km), whilst Wales has a population density of about 151 people per sq km. At the time of writing, the issue of bus services in rural areas in light of public funding austerity cuts was being raised to political prominence in the UK Parliament by the government's political opposition party. Research by the charity, Campaign for Better Transport noted that local authority bus budgets in England and Wales were cut by £20.5 million in 2017, the eighth year in a row that budgets have been cut.

Rural England has a need for business support and infrastructure to facilitate rural economic growth, job creation, social service delivery and additional support for social action in rural communities.

In Northern Ireland, poor housing affordability, poor access to public transport and a lack of a rural transport policy are identified as key challenges for sustainable living in rural communities. In Wales, as other areas of the UK, there is uncertainty regarding future financing of economic development that had previously been largely driven by EU funding channels.

This includes expected restructuring of agricultural works and the rural competitive disadvantage in terms of private sector-led infrastructure development. The unemployment rate of economically active people in rural areas of England in 2016 was recorded as 3.4%, rather in Northern Ireland and Wales it was respectively 5% and 4%. With the exception of Northern Ireland, rural populations in the constituent countries have a higher proportion of older people (aged 65 years or more) than urban populations.

NATIONAL POLICIES RELATING TO RURAL MOBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The government notes that safe and dependable transport is essential to UK society and the economy and it seeks to make various modes of transport efficient, effective and available. However, the policy arrangements for transport, and specifically for rural mobility, vary in the constituent countries given the differences afforded to each due to devolution (or not), responsibilities and remits of authorities within each country, etc.

There is no single strategic transport policy document that covers the entire UK for modes most likely to be used in rural areas such as bus, community transport and rail.

England

England does not have a devolved administration and therefore, legislation relating to local government is determined by the UK Parliament. The overall policy and direction for transport is led by the Department for Transport which also provides funding to English local authorities to help them run and maintain road networks, improve passenger travel and develop major transport schemes. As per the UK, there is no single strategic transport policy document that covers England for modes most likely to be used in rural areas. Local authorities generally have responsibility as transport authorities for the development of community transport and bus services outside of London. Transport authorities are expected to prepare Local Transport Plans which are statutory documents resulting from the Transport Act 2000. In London, they are known as Local Implementation Plans and are derived from the GLA Act 1999.

Local Transport Plans set out a forward vision for developing transport within the wider framework of socio-economic development. Local Transport Plans which are drafted must be submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport (in London, the document is submitted to the Mayor) to ensure that the plans are prepared in accordance with Central Government guidelines.

Government Departments are encouraged to rural proof their policies. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published Rural Proofing Guidelines in 2017, which identified the following four stage process for rural proofing:

1. What are the direct or indirect impacts of the policy on rural areas;
2. What is the scale of these impacts;
3. What actions can you take to tailor your policy to work best in rural areas;
4. What effect has your policy had on rural areas and how can it be further adapted.

Wales

At the Welsh national level, the key transport strategy document is One Wales: Connecting the Nation (2008), which was prepared by the Welsh Assembly. The key themes underpinning the document are:

- Achieving a more effective and efficient transport system;
- Achieving greater use of the more sustainable and healthy forms of travel; and
- Minimising demands on the transport system.

The Transport Strategy recognises that poor access, particularly in the rural areas of Wales, is a major barrier to employment as people tend to be more reliant on the car and they spend a higher proportion of their income on transport than those in urban areas. In particular, the Welsh Assembly stated that 'our country's terrain and sparsity of population have posed a particular challenge for the provision of cost effective public transport services'. The Welsh Assembly noted that in rural areas, good access to services is available to most with cars hence the need to prioritise the development of public transport. Local authorities in Wales are also required to publish local transport plans which are approved by the Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is responsible for regional strategic and local development policy, transport strategy and sustainable transport policy, public transport policy and performance and road safety and vehicle regulation policy. Local authorities in Northern Ireland have no responsibility for transport.

The DfI has retained the published Regional Transportation Strategy 2002 – 2012 on its website. However, it is currently developing a new transport plan to replace the outdated strategy document. There is no published draft transport strategy document to reference.

NATIONAL POLICIES RELATING TO RURAL MOBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The Regional Transportation Strategy is delivered through three plans: Regional Strategic Transport Network Plan; Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and Sub-Regional Transport Plan. The Regional Transportation Strategy included the introduction of rural, demand responsive transport (including bus services with sections of flexible routing), acknowledgement and acceptance of the dominant role of the private car in rural areas, challenging rural transport poverty and social exclusion.

Rural transport initiatives fall outside the scope of the Regional Strategic Transport Network Plan.

The Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015 notes that the principal issues in rural areas include limited walking and cycling facilities in small settlements; limited public transport services and insufficient road maintenance investment.

The Sub-Regional Transport Plan notes proposals for Demand Responsive Transport in open countryside areas, provision of bus stops at each rural settlement and improved pedestrian facilities.



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INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The arrangements for transport infrastructure and the provision of transport services varies in the constituent countries. Transport is substantially devolved in the UK with different devolution settlements in the constituent countries (England does not have a devolved administration).

The DfT specifies that (DfT 2017, p.42): '*proposals for the devolution of transport functions and responsibilities should be rooted in providing better journeys for the travelling public and meeting users' needs. Devolution of transport powers is about making sure decisions are made at the right level.*'

England

The Department for Transport (DfT) is the national department in England responsible for policy, planning, guidance and funding to support the transport network and fund transport infrastructure. DfT works in concert with 22 agencies and public bodies in developing and delivering transport policy. Highways England and Network Rail are two key agencies at the national level, each of whom have their own delivery plans.

DfT also provides guidance and funding to upper tier local councils (Unitary and County Councils) to help maintain roads, improve bus services and promote cycling and walking. Local councils have a significant

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

role in planning strategically for transport in their areas. At this level there is likely to be a stronger focus on rural transport and mobility requirements, reflecting, where appropriate, the rural nature of some councils' areas. Local Transport Plans are the essential policy tool at this level, setting out policy and plans to achieve place making and delivery of transport services at the local level in relation to roads, public transport and sustainable transport alternatives (walking and cycling, electric vehicles, etc). In 2013, DfT introduced Local Transport Boards (LTBs) across England outside London, as a means of devolving decision making on local major transport infrastructure spending.

Action with Communities in Rural England - the ACRE Network – set out in a policy paper in 2014 that “... *there is a very clear need to develop and improve public and increasingly importantly community transport schemes: this should be the focus for long term sustainable travel solutions*”.

England also has a limited number of Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) designed to bridge the gap in regional transport planning. There are some major transport schemes that are larger than the boundaries of LEPs, but not large enough to be of national importance.



LTBs are groupings of Local Transport Authorities and can also include Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). At the local authority level, the DfT provides guidance and funding to local councils, and through LTBs for local strategic transport planning and delivery. It is at this level that rural transport mobility policies to meet needs are being delivered. County and unitary councils have a duty to identify gaps in public transport provision in their areas but no duty to do anything to try to close those gaps.

Additionally, there are a range of community and voluntary led rural transport initiatives. These are not specifically coordinated through any national framework but have arisen because of the lack of rural transport options through the main public transport systems. Some areas have established Rural Transport Partnerships to address issues of mobility and accessibility. For example, the East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership (a registered charity).

The roles of STBs vary, but they do have the ability to develop pan-regional transport strategies.

Wales

The Wales Act 2017 set a new devolution settlement for Wales, further to provisions in the Government of Wales Act 2006. The following additional powers devolved to Wales include, among other things: i) Complete powers over the bus network including the power to legislate on re-regulation; and ii) Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing.

The Welsh Assembly, the legislature, cannot legislate on road, rail, marine and waterway transport as these are powers reserved for the United Kingdom Parliament. The Welsh Government, the executive, is responsible for developing the 2008 Transport Strategy and the National Transport Finance Plan.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Transport for Wales is the not-for-profit company wholly owned by the Welsh Government to push the government's transport vision and provide support on transport projects.

In Wales, local authorities act as transport and highways authorities, with responsibilities including provision for active travel, public transport and community transport. Under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, local authorities are required to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and map current and potential future routes. The needs of pedestrians and cyclists must also be considered for new road schemes. Welsh local authorities also have responsibility for preparing Local Transport Plans for submission to the Welsh Government.

Northern Ireland

As noted earlier, the DfI is responsible for transport development in Northern Ireland. Aviation and shipping legislation and policy are matters reserved to the UK Parliament in Westminster. The DfI has five executive business areas of which Transport and Resources is one. The various divisions within the Transport and Resources Group include: i) Safe and Sustainable Travel; ii) Transport Strategy; and iii) Public Transport. Further to the above, the Transport and Resources Group also has other support divisions not directly related to transport. The Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company is a public organisation responsible to the DfI for operating public transport subsidiary companies such as Ulsterbus, Metro and Northern Ireland Railways. Together these subsidiary companies operate under the trade name, Translink. Local authorities do not have transport responsibilities in Northern Ireland.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Rural travel in the constituent countries is dominated by the private car. However, where public transport is used the bus is typically the most popular mode as buses and community transport modes can offer flexibility for any necessary changes in service provision.

Bus Services in England were privatised and de-regulated during the 1980s with the assumption that competition between private companies would lead to increased services. In practice, many rural bus routes now depend on local authority subsidy to survive, but with public funding being reduced, these subsidies have fallen by 45% since 2010, and some counties have stopped paying subsidies. This has led to bus reviews and service reductions across England, which has resulted in less profitable routes being under threat or cut, leading to a reduction in services often associated with rural areas, and leaving just the commercial routes along main roads between larger rural towns. Also, mergers between bus companies has led to a limited number of larger private sector bus operators such as Aviva and FirstGroup. There are concessionary bus fares in rural areas after 9.30 am, but with the reduced rural services this can mean that there are no services to use them on.

Alternative approaches have developed through community-based or not-for-profit operators or local authority arm's length municipal bus companies, providing locally tailored alternative responses. Some rural areas have benefited from these more local actions to mobility issues to the extent that a few areas have vitally important transport services available to communities. Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) such as Dial a Ride, which provides a public transport service for areas of low passenger demand, such as rural areas where a regular bus service would not be viable, is one such initiative. The funding of demand responsive transport has been used by some authorities as a means of providing public transport in light of cuts to bus service funding.

In the constituent countries, shared mobility services, such as car sharing (including peer-to-peer sharing), carpooling and bike sharing are generally the domain of private operators. Typically, sharing services are located in urban areas where there is sufficient population density to secure commercial viability. Sharing mobility schemes are poorly integrated into existing public transport networks in the constituent countries. Route and location advice may be given on public journey planning tools where there are public bike hire schemes.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

However, fare payment generally does not encompass sharing modes.

The constituent countries share similarities in that they use mobility services in rural areas to support access to work, education, healthcare, retail and recreational activities with an emphasis on reducing social exclusion. However, the arrangements for mobility services vary in the countries and across local authorities. Oftentimes, rural transport, particularly community transport, is operated by volunteers with a lower rate of paid employees compared to their urban counterparts. Local authorities have a responsibility to identify socially necessary services. However, their subsidy of such rural transport services is discretionary. There is no single public transport operator with general responsibility to provide mobility coverage, noting that in Northern Ireland, public transport is more centralised via the DfI compared to Wales or England, which delivers much public transport through the local transport authorities in collaboration with commercial operators.

This includes looking at opportunities to restore capacity lost under these cuts where this enables new housing or economic growth, or eases congestion on the transport system, and offers value for money. In the meantime, some rural services have been improved through community rail partnerships (which often include local authorities as partners), such as the Heart of Wessex line from Bristol to Weymouth.

Transport providing access to healthcare: Some non-emergency patient transport services are organised at a local level through Clinical Commissioning Groups. However, largely the transport support for non-emergency visits to primary and secondary health care is arranged through voluntary transport schemes managed and delivered at the local level, which is highly variable between areas.

Transport providing access to schools: Local authorities have a statutory duty to make transport arrangements from home to school for eligible children and to promote sustainable school travel and transport.



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The set-up of the DfI and various local authorities in England and Wales differs. Typically, there are policy officers and transport officers with responsibility for public transport at local transport authorities.

One of the big issues with rail services in England is that many rural ones are unprofitable and many branch lines serving rural areas were shut in the 1960s. A government policy paper in November 2017 (Connecting People, a Strategic Vision for Rail) is now looking at ways to increase capacity and connections on the network.

The average journey lengths for 11 to 16 year olds living in rural villages and hamlets is 7 miles, compared to an average of 2.8 miles for those living in an urban conurbation. 'Moorlands Connect', a demand responsive service in Staffordshire was established in 2010 and is still running to provide home to school transport to two village schools, covering an area of around 125 square miles. Outside school transport times the vehicles could be booked as a door to door service to transport people to work, appointments or other essential journeys.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Transport providing access for young people: Access to affordable transport for young people to access further education and training, and to employment, is a specific issue, and is particularly more important now that young people are required to stay in full time education or training until the age of 17.

Initiatives have been developed at the local level, notably 'Wheels to Work' schemes, which are operated by local voluntary groups, social enterprises or similar. In 2014, it was estimated that there were about 50 such schemes. These include, for example, Wiltshire 'Wheels to Work', a moped loan scheme run by 'Community First', an organisation supporting rural communities across Wiltshire and Swindon.

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

All constituent countries receive a budget from the UK government which is determined by the Spending Review and any subsequent adjustments. The 'Barnett Formula' is the mechanism used to automatically adjust the amounts of public expenditure allocated to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to reflect changes in spending levels allocated to public services within the countries and across Great Britain as appropriate. The formula applies to a large proportion, but not the whole of the constituent countries' budgets.

The arrangements for transport infrastructure and the provision of transport services varies in the constituent countries. Transport is substantially devolved in the UK with different devolution settlements in the constituent countries (England does not have a devolved administration). Rail investment, for example is devolved in Northern Ireland (and Scotland), but reserved by the UK government for Wales.

At local levels, much of the decision-making in relation to transport is devolved. Devolved funding is also supplemented by specific competitive investment (e.g. Access Fund for Sustainable Travel).

In all constituent countries, local authorities source direct funding contributions from the private sector, such as levying charges on development to pay for infrastructure as well as retain a portion of business rates raised locally (hypothecation) for investment in infrastructure. It is understood that these can be used to invest in local transport.

The UK government has recently been challenged on the way "community transport" is set up in the UK. True community transport can be provided using volunteer

or paid drivers in a closed environment where use is restricted to certain "member" people (Section 19 permit) or more widely to the public (Section 22 permit). Applications for permits are under Transport Act 1985. This exempts the community transport operator from the need to hold a Public Service Vehicle operator's license.

England

Central government gives funding to English local transport authorities to develop local services. This funding is allocated in different ways such as using formulas to calculate how much local authorities should be given to deliver particular services as well as through competitive bids.

Bus services are deregulated outside London and any licensed operator is free to run commercial services when and where they choose with few restrictions. Local authorities are required by the 1985 Transport Act to assess where the commercial bus provision does not meet social need for bus services. However, they are not required to act on their findings. Funding local bus services is therefore discretionary spend. Most local authorities have a budget for this and it can be spent in two ways – competitive tender, and De Minimis payments. Under competitive tender the authority picks the best bidder (usually on a balance of quality and price) or elects not to award if all bids are too expensive. Under De Minimis, the authority can enter negotiations with an operator about modifications to their service to cover the unmet demand. For authorities with an annual budget of £600k or more, up to 25% can be spent on De Minimis payments. Those falling below that threshold are restricted to a limit of £29,999 per annum.

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

The Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) is a partial rebate of fuel duty, which is not paid by rail or air services. The rebate is less than 50% of total duty paid with potential enhanced rates for using the least carbon emitting vehicles, providing real time information and use of smart ticketing. This rebate is only payable for commercial services and not those that receive local authority support. The BSOG started in the 1960s as a means of keeping fares lower in rural areas. At the time, the BSOG was a full rebate of all fuel duty on all bus services. The BSOG scheme benefits some community transport providers.

Concessionary bus passes, in which eligible groups (people with a disability or senior citizens) can travel for free on bus services can be used on community transport services within Section 22 permits. This has caused some financial difficulties for community transport operators who are required to be not-for-profit. These operators charge fares that cover their expenses with no profit. However, for journeys made using a concessionary bus pass, the operator is only reimbursed a percentage of the average single fare.

Some community transport organisations also rely on funding from trusts, foundations and grants.



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Wales

Discretionary funding is allocated to Welsh local authorities under the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) depending on the characteristics of their urban or rural areas. The grant is a supplement to local authorities' own budgets for bus and community transport services. The BSSG is paid for commercial services that meet certain quality criteria defined by the Welsh Government, although there are (anti-competitive) derogations for smaller operators not meeting all these.

In Wales, community transport organisations rely on several sources to fund their activities. This includes funding from the Welsh government via the BSSG and local authority funding via their budgets. Local authority funding is often given in exchange for core function, such as social services transport.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland bus services are under state control with most (not far off all) being provided by the State owned Translink undertaking which trades as Metro in Belfast and Ulsterbus elsewhere. Almost all services receive some form of state funding. Competition, other than to a limited extent on long distance express services, is prohibited as licenses to operate are simply not granted to others.

Northern Ireland currently has 11 community transport schemes which are centrally funded by the DfI. This is a different set up to that for England and Wales which has more variable, local provision which may be funded in part or whole by local authorities.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Transport Act 2000 gave local authorities in England and Wales power to establish statutory or voluntary quality partnership schemes. Quality partnership schemes are essentially agreements between the local transport authority (or more than one authority acting jointly) and local bus operators to improve service and infrastructure quality in an area. This could take the form of infrastructure improvements by the local authority to a bus corridor, such as bus priority, enhanced bus stops and provision of real-time information. In return, the operator may provide new vehicles, enhanced driving training, better accessibility for wheelchairs and the mobility impaired, etc.

In Northern Ireland, the Commercial Bus Service Permit scheme gives licensed operators the prospect of applying to provide a new service where they have identified a market gap and where the DfI does not believe a new service would significantly have an adverse effect on other existing services. This is administered by the DfI and is additional to services provided by Translink.

In England and Wales, Network Rail's board of directors is answerable to the Secretary of State for Transport. The organisation is subject to independent regulation by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).



Photo from Envato Elements

The Bus Services Act 2017 includes provisions for advanced quality partnership schemes in England only. The advanced schemes provide more flexibility to cover larger networks or geographical areas. It also allows local transport authorities to specify ticketing requirements as well as how bus services are marketed and how information is provided to passengers. *"It also removes the requirement that local authorities should always provide 'facilities' and introduces the new concept of local authority 'measures' that can be taken to directly or indirectly encourage bus use"*.

In Northern Ireland, passenger transport is regulated by the government. The Transport Act (NI) 1967 was updated by the Transport Act (NI) 2011 which provides the legislative framework for securing the provision of public passenger transport services in Northern Ireland. The main purposes of the legislative update were to facilitate more accessible public transport and to take account of requirements to comply with European legislation.

The ORR operate within the economic and safety legislative framework set out in the Railways Acts 1993 and 2005; the Railways and other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations 2006; the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2010 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. ORR also has a role with respect to the Northern Ireland network via the Railways Infrastructure (Access, Management and Licensing of Railway Undertakings) (Northern Ireland) 2016.

There are no notable differences in the regulation of rural public transport services as compared to urban and intercity services. Operators of service buses and coaches (PSVs) need to hold an operating licence (an 'O' licence). Under an O licence, operators are registered with the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) and are allocated a maximum fleet size to be stored at nominated operating centres. An O licence is required for each of the eight national Traffic Areas where an operator has an operating centre.

OTHER INFORMATION

- Responsibility for providing local and rural mobility is generally devolved to local authorities with a more centralised framework in Northern Ireland (via the DfI). The DfT typically retains responsibilities in strategic areas affecting aviation and maritime matters.
- There are no national, public shared transport schemes. However, there are schemes that facilitate general mobility for eligible groups, such as concessionary fares for bus travel. These are currently separate schemes for local bus travel in the constituent countries rather than UK-wide.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND MINISTRIES ADDRESSING RURAL AREAS

TITLE	ROLE
Department for Education	Home to school travel and transport guidance
Department for Transport	Responsible for national transport policy in England
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Rural proofing, Practical guidance to assess impacts of policies on rural areas
Rural England	Independent Research, Networking and Information Exchange across Rural England
Rural Services Network	RSN is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice, and fight for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole
Transport for Wales	Transport for Wales is the not-for-profit company wholly owned by the Welsh Government to push the government's transport vision and provide support on transport projects.
Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company	Public organisation responsible to the DfI for operating public transport subsidiary companies such as Ulsterbus, Metro and Northern Ireland Railways
Northern Ireland's Department for Infrastructure (DfI)	is responsible for regional strategic and local development policy, transport strategy and sustainable transport policy, public transport policy and performance and road safety and vehicle regulation policy

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