

# Seeking solutions for transport in rural areas

## FINDING SOLUTIONS TO TRANSPORT PROBLEMS IN WEARDALE AND TEESDALE

For many living in isolated rural communities, public and community transport provides an essential lifeline. This is especially so for those on low incomes or for those too young or too old to drive or the infirm. With Councils nationwide facing on-going government cut backs, it seems inevitable that the subsidies currently on offer to support public transport in such areas will continue to be eroded. A joined up approach to the delivery of transport provision must therefore be high on the agenda for all those seeking to promote health, well being and economic growth in rural areas.

“Transport is the biggest problem here in Rookhope because there are no buses that link our village to the main road at a time when young people need them. It is almost impossible to get home from evening activities at the school in Wolsingham

Alice Bowman, age 15,  
from Rookhope:  
summer 2006



### Activities: GENERAL

Providing viable community transport schemes and linking the multiple needs of users has long proved difficult in rural areas. Now community transport groups are asking Councils to level the playing field and let them tender for contract work in order to help cover costs and keep these important services alive.

### SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT ISSUES

Particularly hard hit by the lack of transport options are the young. They are affected in terms of transport costs associated with further education, but this can also limit their choice of schools and colleges. It can also impact on their participation in after-school and other social activities.

For years, transport in Durham has been free to students (post-16) who have to travel two or more miles to get to their course. However, in September 2007 the County Council introduced a discount scheme. Although allowing greater choice for students across the county as a whole, it meant rurally-based students were only provided with a maximum of £130 a term

towards transport costs, which was less than half of the actual cost for some.

This can hit hard as one Weardale family found out. With three children aged 12, 14 and 16 all attending Samuel Kings School, Alston, no public or school transport options were found to be available from Weardale to Cumbria. The nearest feasible sixth form education provision was at Wolsingham Sixth Form Centre. Not being eligible for financial assistance, the cost of this journey worked out at £384 per term for the eldest child. However, the new discounted fare being offered by Weardale Motor Services offered the family a £144 saving per term. Whilst a considerable saving, the cost still remains significantly higher than for young people in other areas.

A transport related case study, part funded by the West Durham Rural Pathfinder (WDRP), sought to strengthen the young people's voice and give them an opportunity to suggest solutions to transport issues, empowering them to influence current ways of working and potentially affect policy.

“The role of the two youth participation workers was pivotal in assessing the likely impact of the new policy in the most rural parts of our community, and in the communication process that led to the minimisation of any unintended consequences of the policy.

Simon Owens,  
chair Teesdale LSP

## Activities: GENERAL

WDRP recently brought together County Council officers, community transport providers and private sector representatives at an event. Together they discussed community transport contracts, and why voluntary community providers are not currently considered in Durham.

The event brought in representatives from other Councils who successfully include voluntary groups in their contracting agreements. They explained how they had overcome some of the problems perceived as stumbling blocks by Durham County Council.

## SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT ISSUES

The WDRP, Teesdale and Wear Valley Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and support organisation 2D have also launched a new campaign to fight against the potentially increasing transport costs for rurally-based students.

Over the past year, the three groups have worked closely with young people in West Durham to assess the full impact of their transport difficulties, particularly regarding access to further education. Activities included:

- Surveying and analysing the responses of local college students
- The publication of a glossy magazine on young people's views on rural transport, distributed nationwide through the

“ This isn't about young people just surveying and asking questions, they are looking to find possible solutions. The project deals with their observations and experiences of rural transport and what they can do to improve it.

Robert Fothergill, 2D Participation Worker for young people in Wear Valley ”

Commission for Rural Communities

- Co-ordinated workshops for young people
- An interim presentation of work in July 2006 at the Bowes Museum
- A youth-steered presentation in October 2007 to over 30 key community and transport stakeholders and decision-makers in the County Durham area, highlighting the main issues and giving young people the opportunity to suggest real solutions

The presentation attracted the attention of representatives from a variety of key organisations including community transport, Children and Young People's Services, local schools, councils, suppliers and operators. The policy-makers were asked to propose what direct action they would be taking before leaving the meeting.

By recording and reporting the views of the young people, the three organisations have effectively given them a 'voice' and opened up a dialogue with key decision-makers. Specifically, WDRP has encouraged the transport organisations to embrace the young people's ideas and suggestions, and work together to overcome issues. This is vital in order to ensure an understanding of the specific requirements of rural areas and to initiate change.

## Next steps: GENERAL

Good progress has been made in rectifying certain county-wide transport issues. However, it is felt that the specific requirements of rural areas have not yet been fully addressed and some questions still remain unanswered. Some progress has been made in addressing the licence requirements and insurance issues which have previously been seen as detrimental to community transport providers in excluding them from eligibility for Council run contracts.

“ It is only by co-ordinating our activity that we can ensure everyone has a voice and rural areas do not suffer disadvantage. Our work with the LSP and 2D so far has revealed the benefits and laid the foundations for greater partnership working across Durham, and we hope that our continued efforts will generate a positive result for rural students in the very near future.

Robert Fothergill, 2D Participation Worker for young people in Wear Valley ”

## SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT ISSUES

For the young people's voice, activity to date has allowed a set of key 'lobbying' priorities to be established and voices to be heard. With the backing of the WDRP, the LSPs, various MPs, Councillors and local schools, young people and their parents are hoping to influence local government and private partners and secure a subsidy for all students in the west Durham dales. Although this has already been implemented by transport providers in Weardale, it has yet to be introduced by those in neighbouring Teesdale.

The Community groups will continue to press the County Council for a satisfactory resolution and to fight for a fairer transport deal for rurally-based students.

For more information on rural transport and young people in County Durham, please contact Robert Fothergill on 01388 762220 or email [r.fothergill@2d.org.uk](mailto:r.fothergill@2d.org.uk)

For more information on the Pathfinder and further case studies, please contact Bryan Rees, Chair of the West Durham Rural Pathfinder management advisory group, on 0191 202 3969, email [bryan.rees@gone.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bryan.rees@gone.gsi.gov.uk) or visit the Pathfinder website at [www.westdurhampathfinder.com](http://www.westdurhampathfinder.com)

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