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# JUST TRANSITION WEBINAR REPORT

## Addressing urban-rural transport divisions

**PUTTING THE PERIPHERY AT THE CORE**

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# MOVING BEYOND THE CITY:
## Looking toward how more rural areas can — and must — be served by mobility agendas

Urban mobility is much more than transit across the metropolis. Journeys do not stop at the city limit, there is a continued to and from the periphery to the core and between cities themselves.

Rural areas cover more than 80 % of the total EU territory and are home to 30 % of the EU population. Mobility is the glue that binds together rural communities and helps local economies flourish. However, our peri-urban and rural communities are often left behind in sustainable mobility agendas.

Policy, funding, planning, and research are not given the same attention as in urban areas. We have seen a flurry of investment and political focus on reducing car dependency in cities and major urban areas with Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, School Streets and car-free cities, yet less focus on sustainable accessible, and affordable alternatives for suburban and rural areas.

This interactive webinar examined the challenges facing practitioners and policymakers, identifying gaps in the current research and how innovative approaches can cement long-term solutions for bridging urban-rural transport divisions.

Aided by expert input from Laurie Pickup, International Director, SLR Consulting and past chair of the International Transport Forum's global working group on Transport Innovation for the Periphery, and Jenny Milne, Founder and Director of the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community (SRITC) and who is currently conducting a PhD on Rural MaaS, the Just Transition Webinar brought the periphery centre stage, shining a spotlight on rural mobility planning.
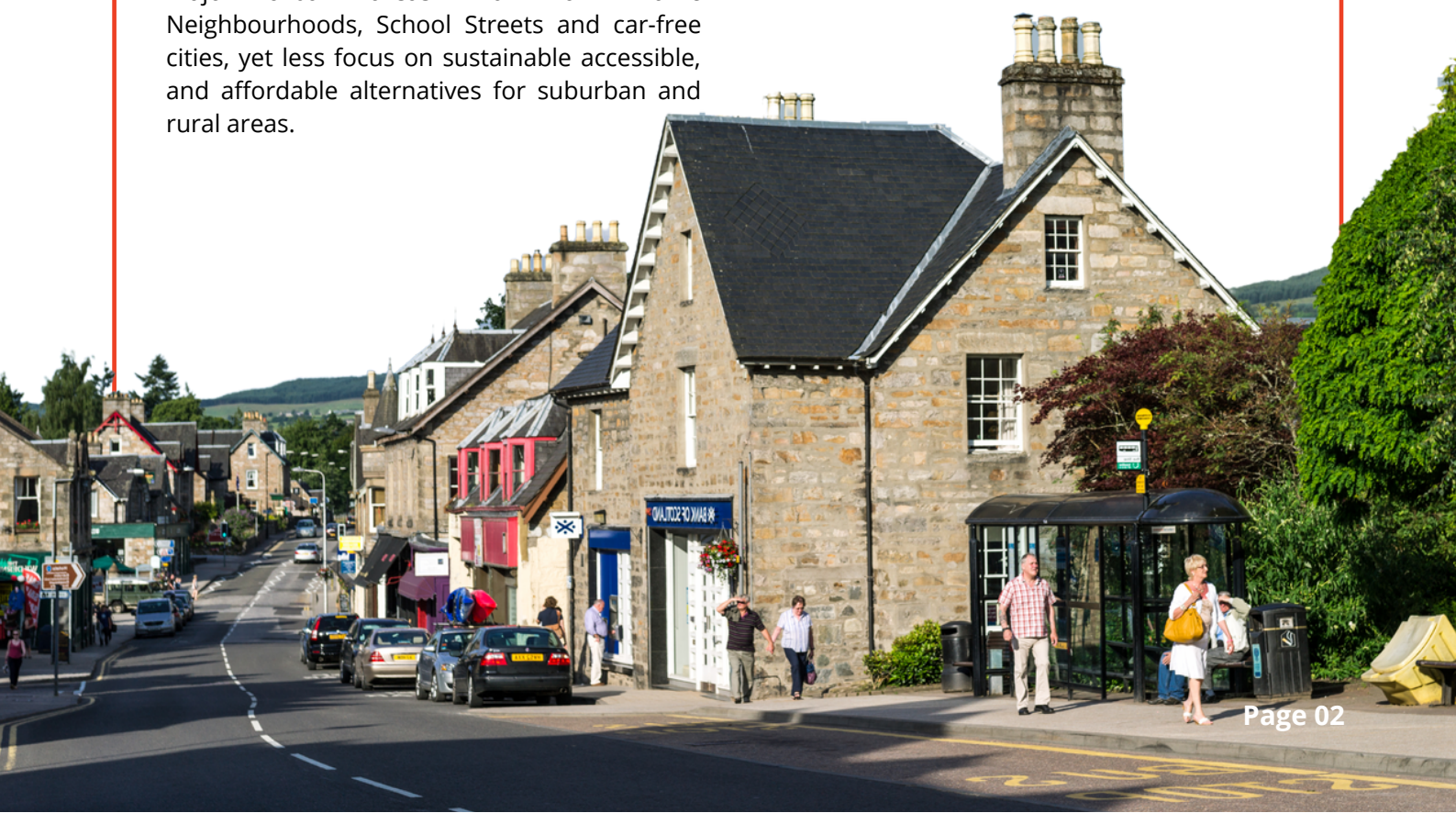
# WHAT IS 'RURALITY'?
## And if rurality is defined by "driving distance", where does this leave sustainable options?

The **rurality** of a wider area can be measured in various ways such as:



### POPULATION DENSITY
### OF THE REGION
**(MOST COMMON MEASURE)**



### SIZE OF THE NEAREST
### ACCESSIBLE SETTLEMENT



### TOTAL POPULATION WITHIN
### A DEFINED TRAVEL TIME

For example, in Scotland, settlements that are a 30-60-minute drive from a community of at least 10,000 inhabitants are considered remote, while settlements that are more than a 60-minute drive away from such communities are considered very remote (Scottish Government, 2018). On the other hand, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that rural areas present a density below 300 inhabitants per km2.

Therefore, a key question remaining for transport planners is, if rurality is defined by "driving distance", where does this leave more sustainable options?

However, behind this, both Pickup and Milne pressed for a recognition of the diversity of needs and the dynamism of rural areas, warning against replicating solutions without understanding contextual specificities.

"We have so many different actors here, especially now, with increasing connectivity and flexibility of work; there are locals, incomers, those 'returning' to rural life, migrant communities, and of course tourists," said Pickup.

While definitions were recognised as important, at the same time, Milne stressed that preoccupation with definitions cannot delay action on the ground.

# THE GREAT DIVIDE: WHY RURALITY MATTERS?

Once we move beyond the city core, car dependency rockets. For example, Eurostat figures reveal that in Greater Manchester, the share of people using a car to get to work was 18.3% higher in the surrounding region than in the city centre — a whopping 71.1% vs 52.8%).

This is underpinned by multiple, complex components, including territorial, socio-economic, and demographic factors; yet, at the heart of this division, there is a Europe-wide underinvestment in more sustainable and accessible alternatives in rural and peri-urban areas.

"In rural areas, low mobility hurts much more," asserted Pickup. "Cities may be focused on carbon zero, which is important to regions, but not as much as accessibility right now!"

**Rural transport is a concern not just for regions, but cities too.**

It is estimated that each day, more than a million people commute into the city of Paris, while Lisbon, Madrid, and Brussels see more than half a million commuters arriving per day. In Greater Manchester, 60% of commuter trips to the centre are from rural areas outside the city — figures which have not been significantly affected by the pandemic.
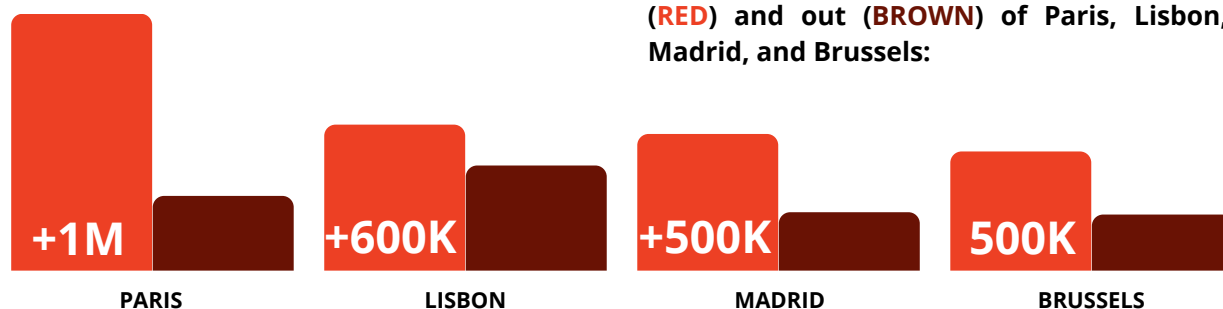
Indeed, as previous POLIS Regions Working Group meetings have revealed (POLIS members-only link), without channelling investment into rural areas, decarbonisation, decongestion, and modal split goals everywhere are jeopardised.

The Future of Transport Outside Cities report, exposed that areas outside major cities account for over 70% of national transport emissions, paired with public transport cuts in rural areas across Europe leaving "Transport Deserts" where many are left without affordable or accessible options, action is needed — fast!

"Lack of transport hurts those in rural areas the most, we are seeing a growing interest and pressure for action at national and EU level on this, but there is still much to be done," said Pickup.

From Catalonia's on-demand bus services to FrankfurtReinMain's integrated cycleway network and Stavanger's multi-modal integration — regions across Europe are endeavouring to enhance and expand public transport and active travel provisions. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go.

**Eurostat — Flows of people commuting into (RED) and out (BROWN) of Paris, Lisbon, Madrid, and Brussels:**



| +1M | +600K | +500K | 500K |
|-----|-------|-------|------|
| **PARIS** | **LISBON** | **MADRID** | **BRUSSELS** |

**POLIS**
CITIES AND REGIONS FOR TRANSPORT INNOVATION

# A TRANSPORT...

## DESERT?

## WHY IS THERE SUCH A DIVISION?

Rural transport faces a series of critical challenges which make services both physically and economically challenging to coordinate and deliver.

In many cases, the term **"Transport Desert"** has been used to describe many rural settlements which are inappropriately served by public transport in a way that is likely to limit choices and opportunities for the people who live there.

The economic case — particularly post-pandemic as transport operators struggle to recover lost revenue, is (to put it mildly) tricky. It is estimated that, globally, 85% of rural bus operators run below the break-even point. However, passenger numbers remain low; in Scotland, the number of bus journeys dropped by 65% in 2020-21 following on from a generally declining trend which had seen bus passenger numbers drop by 21% in the ten years leading up to 2019-20.

At the same time, limited supply of services, timetabling, vehicle design and poor integration of transport with local services has left many rural areas cut off — and Milne presented a range of cases from Scotland where this is causing significant challenges for locals and visitors alike.

**UNDERINVESTMENT IN SUSTAINABLE AND ACCESSIBLE ALTERNATIVES IN RURAL AREAS** + **PUBLIC TRANSPORT CUTS IN RURAL AREAS** = **TRANSPORT DESERTS**

Distance is a major challenge, particularly for active travel infrastructure. With far greater distances between services, where more active modes are being successfully used to replace short car trips in urban districts, this solution is far harder to deploy in more dispersed areas.

As the UK's travel time statistics reveal, the average minimum cycle time to key services in rural areas is 30 minutes, compared to just 15 minutes in urban areas, while the average walking time in rural areas is almost 1 hour. Given that the rural population are, on average, older than in urban areas, distance and complexity of travel are key in shaping transit choices.

Yet, as Milne reminded the webinar, this is not a justification for under-investment- quite the opposite, the investment pays.

"Rural areas make up just 20% of the population, yet they contribute to 25% of the country's GDP," she asserted. "We need to invest in our rural areas, and fully recognise their value."

**AVAILABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY**

**VEHICLE DESIGN**

**ACTIVE TRAVEL MODES ARE UNSAFE**

**IMPORTANCE OF TIMETABLE SCHEDULING**

**INFORMATION IS KEY**

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT**

**TRANSPORT OPERATORS ARE WILLING TO LISTEN**

**COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION IS KEY AS CURRENTLY SILOED**

**Findings from SRITC research into challenges in rural transport. Information based on research conducted with end users when talking about rural transport**
*Source: Jenny Milne*

# TACKLING THE DIVISION
## A crucial moment for action?

Jenny Milne presented the work being conducted by SRITC in creating a collective voice for rural and island communities, organisations, and businesses, building a network that can deliver a better transport future, represent the transport needs of residents to those who can facilitate change, and facilitate knowledge and best practice exchange to support innovative solutions to key transport challenges.

She revealed how COVID-19 has undoubtedly transformed the conversation. The onset of more flexible working conditions has, in many regions, seen a "return" to rural living; while this influx of new residents has in many cases placed a strain on communities (rising house prices, etc.), it has opened the door for new approaches to more flexible rural connectivity.

The pandemic also opened up new channels for those working on these issues to be able to share ideas and experiences — bringing rural mobility challenges to the fore of national and international agendas.

"The explosion in digitally enabled ways of working has transformed how we can discuss these issues, the forums we can access, and the exchange of ideas we, in rural areas, can have," said Milne.

# FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE CORE!
## A new language for rural mobility

As part of a more comprehensive planning process, both speakers called for a move away from the copy-and-paste approach to rural mobility so often adopted.

"It is not a competition of rural *vs* urban — we need to view the issues as a whole, beyond the current siloed approach," stated Milne.

The webinar presented a clear necessity for a specific focus on rural areas within mobility planning; however, critically, both Pickup and Milne were not advocating a bifurcation of urban and rural planning, but rather an improved integration of transport agendas, with stakeholders working together more comprehensively.

"We need a complete change of language we use," echoed Pickup. "Away from rural areas simply being the 'periphery', towards independent areas with their own unique needs and demands."

Indeed, the urgency for this is clear when examining urban mobility planning. A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) is a strategic plan designed to satisfy the mobility needs of people and businesses in cities and their surroundings for a better quality of life. Most cities in Europe have one, yet, we do not treat our regions with quite the same strategic approach.

Pickup presented some key findings from the SMARTA project, which explored the key challenges of mobility in Europe's rural areas and the existing frameworks available, before pressing for EU action.

"We looked at how we currently plan for mobility in rural areas," described Pickup, "And the answer is... we don't!"

Several POLIS member regions have or are in the process of developing such plans.

National Transport Authority Ireland's (NTA) Connecting Ireland Plan seeks to bridge gaps, address uneven connectivity, and integrate timetables, while FrankfurtRheinMain's SUMP aims to boost sustainable modes of transport up to 65% by 2030, helping to reach the EU climate goal of reducing $CO_2$ emissions by 55% by the same year.

Yet, as Pickup noted, there is a clear necessity to create more comprehensive planning and investment strategies, which work from the bottom up, moving from the needs of rural inhabitants to the types of mobility solutions which are developed.

"There are a lot of assumptions about what rural mobility should be, and how it should be configured, often emanating from decision-makers in urban areas," asserted Milne.

This has been a large part of the work being done at SRITC, which has been endeavouring to move rural mobility needs further up the national agenda. It submitted 6 "big asks" to the Scottish Government, which, if supported, will bring much greater focus to the work that needs to be done to "level up" and decarbonise rural and island communities:

**1** **An Integrated Rural & Islands Mobility Plan**

**2** **A Rural and Islands Transport Innovation Fund**

**3** **A Rural & Islands Transport Leadership Group**

**4** **A Rural & Islands Transport Procurement Framework**

**5** **A Sustainable Rural Transport STEM challenge**

**6** **A Rural & Islands Open Data Framework**

Through these actions, SRITC seeks to secure additional support for rural mobility planning, yet retain local actors at the heart of design and decision-making.
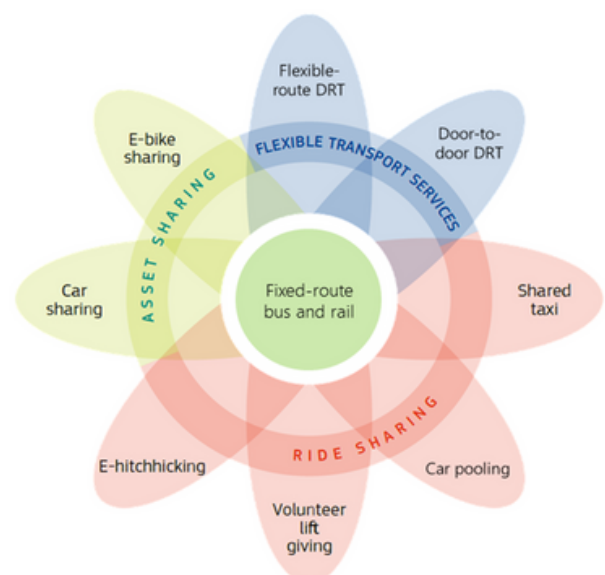


**The SMARTA Atomium**
Source: *SMARTA Project*

# INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION IS GROWING

"Rural territories require policy frameworks that improve mobility in EU regions. The 'Time to Act' is now, through an initiative at the European policy-making level to develop a common European framework that encompasses a shared future vision for rural mobility and at the same time takes into account the emphasis on the specificities of rural areas and their populations" — SMARTA Project Final Report

From the 2021 Long term vision for Europe's rural areas to the 2022 Rural Pact, there is growing attention from the Commission and the Parliament. Yet, while Pickup saw this as reassuring, he noted, much of this attention, and levelling up agenda, focuses largely on agriculture and other economic aspects of rural life, failing to trickle down comprehensively to rural mobility.

The SMARTA project lays out a range of pathways (Supportive, Persuasive, and Mandatory), which would see a structured set of measures for rural mobility, to be established with funding from both the EU and the Member States.

"However, continued efforts need to be underpinned by improved education and training which channels human resources towards rural mobility innovation and governance," noted Pickup.
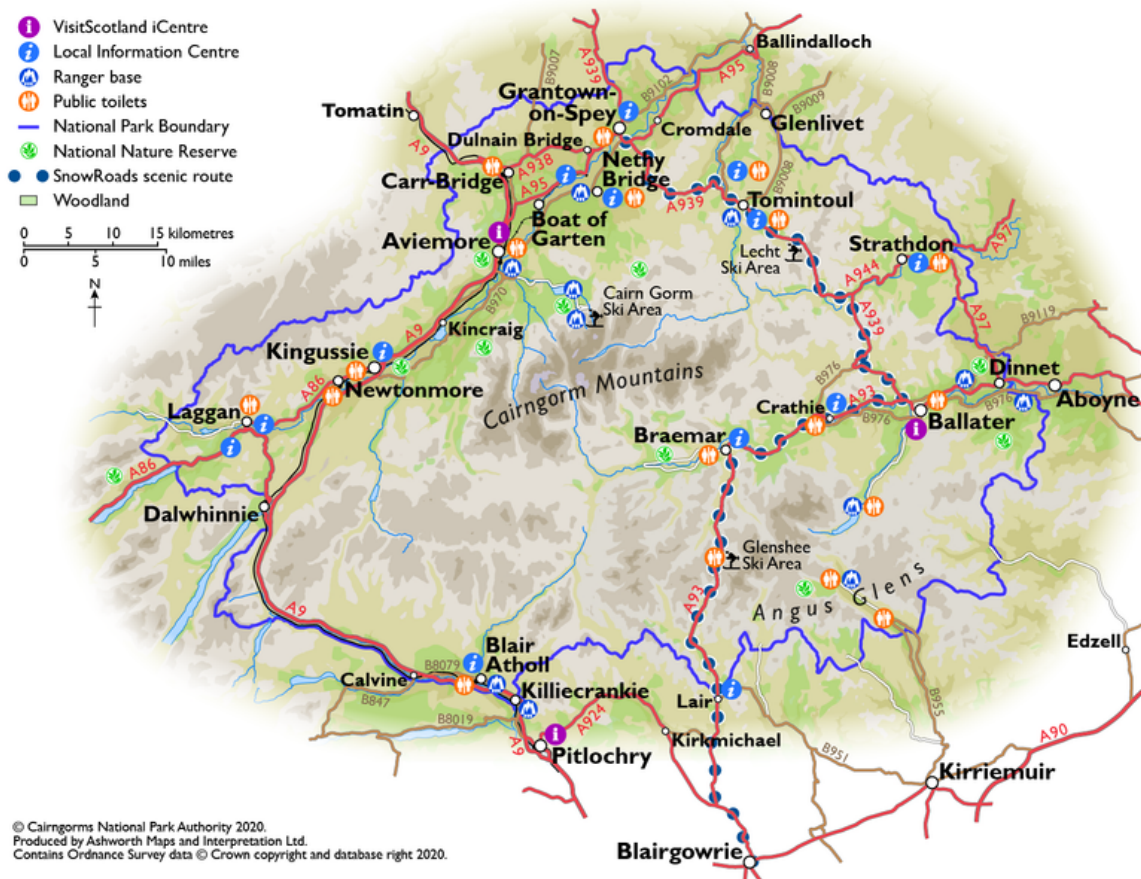
# THE ROLE OF INNOVATION & POTENTIAL FOR MaaS?

Digital technologies — and particularly smartphones — are opening new opportunities for transport innovation in sparsely populated areas.

Independently from SRITC, Milne is conducting a PhD on Rural MaaS. Milne's research focuses on establishing user requirements (for both residents and visitors) and technical opportunities/barriers for regional MaaS, investigating many areas- including the Cairngorm National Park.



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# WHAT IS MₐₐS? A QUICK RECAP

Mobility as a Service (MaaS) involves a digital interface to source and manage mobility services, combined with a journey planner and a booking system. The paradigm shift offered by MaaS is the ability for transport users and providers to communicate their needs in real-time via a digital service platform.

MaaS could offer multimodal route planners and different services under one fare and on the same ticket. MaaS could also cover various rental and sharing services, as well as — potentially — urban delivery and distribution in rural areas.

The project, **Cairngorms Connected**, is a Rural Mobility as a Service (R-MaaS) or rural transport/mobility project, exploring the potential for MaaS in the under-studied rural context, encompassing both user and provider perspectives.

It is a collaboration of stakeholders ranging from local authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), and local and national transport providers creating a business case and working with the University of Aberdeen to undertake further research.

Attention to this is critical for the future of sustainable mobility in Scotland, where 98% of the country's land mass is rural, and 20% of the population lives in rural areas, a figure growing faster than that in urban areas.

The work here builds on findings from previous pilots and projects which have sought to develop user-oriented and ecological mobility services to provide consumers with flexible, efficient and user-friendly services covering multiple modes of transport.

"I've interviewed international bodies and governments on the subject but it's fair to say that over the last five years of doing the PhD, there is now an acknowledgement that Rural MaaS will look different to that found in cities. There are many factors and characteristics which separate the two areas and in turn, the technology requirements and these all start with the user," says Milne.
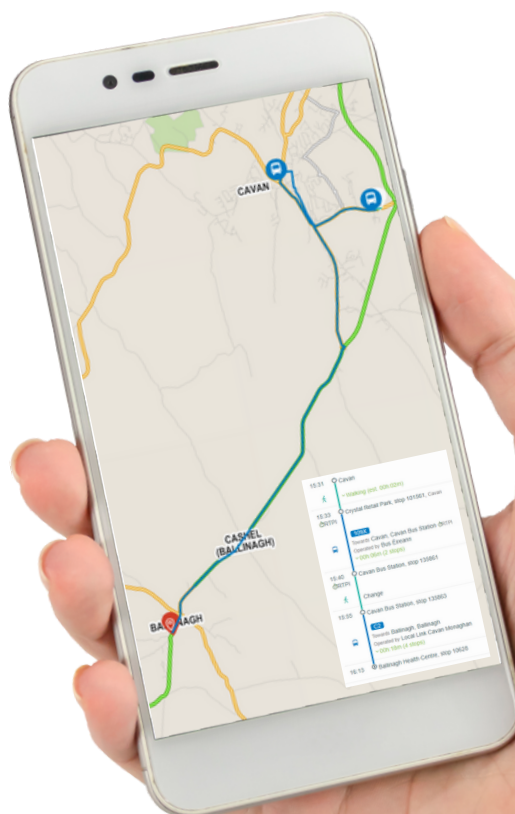


**Transport for Ireland's Rural Bus Services App (Rural Transport Program) example was one of the good practices of the SMARTA project**
**Source: *POLIS Network (TFI app screen)***

# MOVING FROM PILOTS TO LONG-TERM PROCESSES

Yet, one of the biggest challenges is how to develop mobility approaches that can be sustained in the long term. Scaling up and transferring products and approaches demands political and financial viability, and too often pilot projects do not result in a wider, systematic shift in how mobility is designed and delivered.

"Post-funding and training schemes might also be needed to give project outcomes a stronger base, allowing them to be sustained over time," asserted one participant on the interactive board.

Indeed, this has been a challenge raised not just by POLIS' regional members, but by small and medium-sized cities (SMCs), too. Maintaining momentum once a project has concluded, learning from the findings and using these for comprehensive new approaches to mobility governance is concern cities and regions are confronting. Time to work together?

# KEY TAKEWAYS

**1 Collect data:**
Better data can help transport authorities understand commuters' behaviour, provide targeted information and identify policy interventions. Île-de-France has developed a Regional Mobility Information Platform (PRIM) which is a one-stop shop that centralises data (60+ static datasets, 5+ API) and services around mobility to help feed the ecosystem's MaaS applications and tools.

**2 Understand replicability potential:**
There might be difficulty replicating successful models in other areas — successes in one area may not translate directly into another area where there are different resources and needs.

**3 Invest in community transport:**
In Germany, the state of Baden-Württemberg has introduced several programmes to support initiatives, including digitalisation and integration. The state mobility agency (Nahverkehrsgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg, NVBW) has its competence centre for "unconventional" forms of public transport, which supports local authorities.

**4 Balancing technology vs physical infrastructure:**
New digital technologies have propelled the availability and viability of shared and on-demand services, however, ensuring citizens have access to these is critical.

**5 Break the siloes:**
Rural mobility does not exist in isolation from its urban counterpart! Local, national and international decision-makers need to more actively address how agendas can be harmonised and how plans can complement one another.

**6 Ensure longevity:**
There has been a range of pilot projects including MaaS, car sharing, DRT and others which have sought to find innovative new approaches to rural mobility planning. However, the webinar revealed the focus now needs to turn to ensure findings (successes and failures) are built on and addressed comprehensively.

# FIND OUT MORE

- Rural car dependence: An emerging barrier to community activity for older people- (PDF) Rural car dependence: An emerging barrier to community activity for older people (researchgate.net)
- Sustainable transport infrastructure in the strategic urban region Eurodelta- PowerPoint Presentation (polisnetwork.eu)
- The future of transport outside cities: a report on roundtables held by the University of Hertfordshire Smart Mobility Uni 1107-UH-Roundtable-Report_P5.pdf (herts.ac.uk)
- Mobility in the Suburbs: Trends and Challenges in Europe, an interview with Gustave Eiffel University- Mobility in the Suburbs: Trends and Challenges in Europe | Arval Mobility Observatory
- Is cargo hitching the answer to a more efficient last mile?- Is cargo hitching the answer to a more efficient last mile? - Parcel and Postal Technology International
- Mpact: Rural to urban, Cities in Motion article- Rural to urban - POLIS Network
- The role of shared transport in sustainable rural mobility: Presentation to the Co-MO-UK annual conference
- Presentation to the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community (SRITC) webinar programme
- Destroying the urban myopia: Toward a positive rural vision for Europe- Keynote speech to the final European MAMBA conference
- Locals, incomers, homecomers and visitors - changing mobility lifestyles within rural areas in Europe: Presentation to the SMARTA international webinar (from minute 10.30)
- Who will be the first local authority to cross the Rubicon? Article published in Transport Times, January

## ABOUT THE JUST TRANSITION WEBINAR SERIES

At the 2021 Annual POLIS Conference in Gothenburg, we launched the Just Transition Agenda.

This webinar series traverses the multifaceted ways affordability, gender-related mobility patterns, age, cognitive capacities (and more), can guide the future of our cities and regions.

From freight to parking, traffic efficiency to active travel, electromobility to safety- and everything in between- we begin to discuss how each sector has its part to play, the challenges ahead, and how cities and regions are treading new ground.