



CHAR VALLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Future of Transport: rural strategy – call for evidence

Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC) Response, 15th February 2021.

Issues facing Rural Areas:

Question

Do you have any evidence for the issues mentioned?

Answer: Background: The Char Valley civil parishes have a combined population of approximately 1200 occupying 500 dwellings, covering an area of 37 square kilometres in West Dorset AONB. At its furthest points it is 10kms East to West and 8kms North to South. There are three villages and 2 or 3 smaller conurbations. There are no medical services, post offices, or libraries in the parishes. There is one shop at the south east boundary, three village halls, and one pub.

The local town of Bridport provides a good selection of services approximately 5kms from the east boundary. There is a bus service, the X51/53, which runs along a major trunk road, the A35, at the southern end of our parishes, and a bus service on alternate Wednesday mornings to our villages linking to Bridport. The X51/53 runs hourly between 7am and 6pm on weekdays, two-hourly on Saturdays, and two hourly on summer Sundays. There is no other public transport. For commercial reasons, the bus service has been steadily reduced and, according to the operators, may reduce further. As a result, local residents rely on private transport, primarily cars, with occasional taxis.

Key services can only be accessed by car.

There are school buses running along the A35 but roads from our villages are narrow without footways, and so families must drive to the bus stops to drop off and pick up children, or drive to school.

Our local employment is primarily farming or tourist accommodation. All other employment is outside our parishes and so requires car transport. Tourist accommodation operations require cars to transport materials and supplies, and the lack of public transport infrastructure means that ALL visitors must travel by private transport. Similarly, farming is only possible through the use of private transport to support farm operations.

We have a higher proportion of two car families than national average as both adults require personal transport for working and family commitments. Local occupations, such as farm worker, labouring, and tourist services, are generally lower paid.

Social isolation is a major challenge as our roads are narrow and hilly, without pavements, so car transport is essential. Our population is above average age so mobility becomes a bigger challenge. With fewer local amenities and services, there is less opportunity to identify or break cases of isolation.

CVPC

Char Valley Parish Council

www.charvalley.org

Whitchurch Canonicorum (North & South), Wootton Fitzpaine, Stanton St Gabriel

CVPC response continued

Question

Do you think there are other issues facing rural areas that we should consider in the strategy?

Answer: Yes.

- 1) Road design – our roads are narrow, winding, and steep in places without footways. They can be flooded and are not gritted in bad weather. This limits walking, cycling, or other exposed travel options such as e-scooters etc. Generally, only smaller vehicles are practical, cycling is dangerous, and there is no safe refuge for pedestrians.*
- 2) It is unknown whether the Local Electricity Grid would support electric vehicle charging points.*
- 3) Our population is older than the average.*
- 4) There is little opportunity for major new employment developments as we are in an AONB. Furthermore, farming is no longer a large employer, so local residents need to be able to reliably access employment further afield. Currently, this can only be done by car as Public Transport is not consistent and subject to change driven by commercial profit targets.*
- 5) Working from home is only possible with a good digital communications infrastructure - both reliable and with high bandwidth. We do not have this.*
- 6) We are not a wealthy area and so the cost of Public Transport, even when available, is highly relevant.*
- 7) Tourist influx has a major effect on our transport networks. Currently, all local tourists use private transport.*
- 8) Access to social events is as important as access to employment and schools etc. This means being able to travel safely in the evening, eg to theatres, restaurants, pubs, etc This becomes even more important if there is more 'home-working'.*
- 9) The future of rural public transport is critically linked to the future developments of rural life, and both Central and Local Government policies on housing and social well-being in rural areas. There are short term fixes but the longer term needs must be integrated into an overall strategy for rural life and the purpose of rural villages.*
- 10) Our network of local footpaths and bridleways are inappropriate for functional journeys (eg a 5 mile, 2.5hr, walk through fields and over hills to access our local town centre for services, a 3 mile drive away)and are often severed by the local trunk road. Attempts to make use of these, would require considerable re-engineering for Active travel and potentially damage their existing purpose.*

Developments and Innovation for rural transport

Question

What examples do you have of the transport trends in rural areas of:

increasing use of active travel modes

micro-mobility

more effective integration of journeys

digital models for more effective services

data and digital improvements unlocking market knowledge

new modes of transport

CVPC response continued

strong community links?

Answer: None of these transport trends have appeared in our areas. We have access to a dial-up bus service for the disabled and the bus service on alternate Wednesdays requires pre-booking. The attempt at bus timetable signing and mobile app access proved too unreliable and inaccurate.

Question

Do you think there are other trends in innovation we haven't included?

Answer: Yes, the funding to appropriately manage, maintain and sensitively improve the Public Rights of Way Network (PROW), offers an opportunity to provide a community network for walking, horse riding and cycling for all ages, needs and abilities for both active travel and leisure.

However, an Active Travel network such as the provision of commuter, or functional journeys, where the main objective is the destination rather than the journey should not compromise the natural, rural character and distinct role of the PROW network which as green infrastructure, provides essential social, economic and environmental benefits. This network should not be over-engineered and urbanised.

Managed sensitively, developing the proW network can provide 'slow active travel' routes that appeal to the wider community. "Fast" active travel commuter routes and community PROW networks are distinct but can link up where appropriate and carefully managed without compromising the PROW and associated user groups.

Development of "fast" Active Travel commuter routes will require significant investment in acquiring land, engineering routes, and maintenance but could potentially be a better solution than subsidised public transport and isolation through no transport – as we are facing now.

Future of Transport Principles

There are principles stated in the Urban strategy – are these relevant to rural areas?:

“In facilitating innovation in urban mobility for freight, passengers and services, the Government’s approach will be underpinned as far as possible by the following Principles:

- 1 New modes of transport and new mobility services must be safe and secure by design.
- 2 The benefits of innovation in mobility must be available to all parts of the UK and all segments of society.
- 3 Walking, cycling and active travel must remain the best options for short urban journeys.
- 4 Mass transit must remain fundamental to an efficient transport system.
- 5 New mobility services must lead the transition to zero emissions.
- 6 Mobility innovation must help to reduce congestion through more efficient use of limited road space, for example through sharing rides, increasing occupancy or consolidating freight.
- 7 The marketplace for mobility must be open to stimulate innovation and give the best deal to consumers.
- 8 New mobility services must be designed to operate as part of an integrated transport system combining public, private and multiple modes for transport users.

CVPC response continued

9 Data from new mobility services must be shared where appropriate to improve choice and the operation of the transport system.”

Question

Do you think the Future of Transport: rural strategy should include the above principles? Which additional principles would you like to see in the strategy?

Answer: Generally yes, but with the following caveats, exceptions, and additions:

*Principle 3 is only possible if there is a major investment in enablement and safety to recognise the limitations of existing rural road networks and the significant mobility challenges for an ageing population caused by the topography. **Active Travel** is not appropriate where the roads are too narrow to accommodate more than ONE vehicle, making walking, horse riding, or cycling along existing traffic routes very dangerous for all. Our rural major road is also narrow passing through our area, and, because it's the only major road, it is crowded with a high percentage of commercial and holiday traffic. One local village is classified as being the most polluted by traffic fumes, in this country. This is hardly a route for 'Active Travel', but it is the ONLY route to our local town to access shops and services.*

Principle 4 should be removed or modified for rural transport. Mass Transport is not relevant to rural networks and although efficiency is important, it is not the over-riding factor. It is health and well-being that is fundamental.

Principle 10: The technologies deployed must be appropriate to the population being served, taking into account digital awareness, income, health, and environmental constraints.

Encouraging transport innovation in rural areas

Question

Are there specific considerations for testing and trialling new technologies in rural areas that you think we should consider?

Answer: The road system consists of narrow roadways with high hedges and sharp turns, and many are single lane width. Road travel relies on drivers' abilities to recognise and use passing places. There is often insufficient room for vehicles to pass cyclists. Roads are used by farm vehicles travelling slowly, can be muddy, and may have livestock being moved along them. The high hedgerows are essential and rightly protected as wildlife corridors and so the nature of our road system is unlikely to change.

Mobile phone reception is intermittent and unreliable so transport services that rely on real-time (or sometimes 'any') communication are challenging (eg Mobility as a Service, Demand Responsive Transport, autonomous transport vehicles).

Last mile solutions that rely on e-scooters and e-bikes will be challenging along our rural lanes with steep rises and drops, narrow lanes, and unexpected farm vehicles, especially with an aging population.

Question

In your view, what should the role of:

CVPC response continued

central government

sub-national transport bodies

local authorities

be in encouraging innovation in rural areas?

Answer: Central Government should define the regulatory frameworks that allow the development of many forms of local public transport services that can be used to support existing scheduled services alongside innovations such as Mobility as a Service and localised alternatives, without the need for rural public transport to be commercially viable. The framework should offer guidelines that can be used to define stakeholder value in a non-financial sense and recognise imperatives such as reliable access to services that support physical and mental well being – this includes health services, social services, shopping, restaurants, and access to social events in local hubs beyond walking range.

Central Government should set standards for safety, accessibility, reliability, and environmental impact.

Central Government should provide financial structures that allow local governments AND local civil organisations to access funds to support mobility as a service.

Central Government should be providing grants and funding for tests of various solutions in different environments.

Central Government should take the lead in providing guidelines to determine what is to be considered a viable rural environment for provision of transport services.

Central Government can provide a central purchasing service to ensure all local implementations achieve the best value through accumulation of orders.

Sub-national transport bodies should ensure transport services are provided in a linked up and coherent form to link both commercial and non-commercial systems to a standard that ensures safety, reliability, and accessibility. They should be accountable to local residents for the effectiveness of transport solutions, both public and private.

Local authorities have the authority to distribute funds both from Central Government and from local taxes to ensure that all communities have access to a standard of public transport service that meets the needs of their constituents.

Where funds are finite, there should be a means by which local authorities can determine priorities.

Local residents should be able to access the knowledge and information available to local and central Government to enable local 'groups' to take actions to resolve transport issues, and where possible integrate with other local transport services. A mechanism for funding or grants should be available to suitable schemes.

Question

Do you think government can encourage the private sector to develop innovative new transport services in rural areas?

Answer: yes, Central Government can sponsor, grant, or seed development of innovative services – both setting the criteria for success, defining the parameters of trials, engaging rural areas, and

CVPC response continued

setting standards for service levels, safety, and environment impact, and supporting wider rollout of successful schemes.

Question

How do you think government should encourage the private sector?

Answer: through competition and the promise of centrally managed purchase contracts financed by Central Government.

Question

Do you have any other comments on this call for evidence?

Answer: The current planning policies, along with the assumption that public transport has to be profitable, has led to the deterioration of rural life and the heavy dependence on personal cars. This has led to a self-reinforcing spiral of lower use of public transport leading to less services leading to more reliance on cars leading to less public transport and then causing isolation for local residents and an increasing issue with well-being. There should be a fundamental review of the purpose of English rural habitations and identification of all the strong reasons for maintaining and supporting the continued presence of rural villages. This should be used, among other evaluations (housing, employment, data services etc), to determine the stakeholder values associated with providing transport services to rural communities.