



**nirwn**  
**Northern Ireland  
Rural Women's Network**

**Northern Ireland  
Rural Women's Network (NIRWN's)  
Response  
to  
Department of Regional Development (DRD)**

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT REFORM**

**Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)**

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## 1.0 **Introduction**

1.1 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established to articulate the voices of women in rural areas. It is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Social Development (DSD).

1.2 NIRWN has six key objectives:

NIRWN has six key objectives:

- Increasing the voice of rural women through giving them a voice at Policy level
- Playing an advocacy and lobbying role on behalf of rural women
- Capacity Building and Group Development for rural women
- Encouraging women in decision-making and providing representation for rural women
- Information and networking opportunities for rural women
- Working within the Women's Centres Regional Partnership to give voice to rural women's centre

1.3 NIRWN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on Public Transport Reform. We welcome the potential for improved transport solutions for rural women. NIRWN considers that through meeting transport needs for rural communities it would assist in alleviating many of the exclusion barriers that currently exist for rural women.

## 2.0 Current Situation

### 2.1 Rural Transport in Northern Ireland

We welcome and endorse DRD's clear long term vision for transportation in the North is:

*'To have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society and the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life.'*

Providing transport in rural areas is a major challenge. Much research and work is needed to address the rural transport needs. We welcome the acknowledgement of the inextricable link between social inclusion and transport accessibility. It is essential that DRD assess the impact of transport policies on equality and social inclusion. It is unlikely that the problems of disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities will be understood or addressed unless this happens.

Problems with transport provision and the location of services **reinforce** social exclusion in rural areas. They prevent people from accessing key local services or activities, such as jobs, learning, healthcare, food shopping or leisure.

Research carried out by The Social Exclusion Unit in 2003<sup>1</sup> identified people experiencing, or at risk of social exclusion, face five types of barriers accessing key services:

- the availability and physical accessibility of transport
- safety and security while travelling
- the cost of transport
- poor information and individuals' limited travel horizons and
- the location of services.

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<sup>1</sup> The Social Exclusion Unit (2003)'Making the Connections: Transport and Social Exclusion'

Those living in rural areas without a car face particularly acute problems.

Some rural areas have very limited access to bus services. Over half of the people in rural areas live more than 13 minutes' walk away from an hourly daytime bus service and 29 per cent of rural settlements have no bus service at all<sup>2</sup>. Over the past 50 years the need to travel has become greater and more complex as society has become organised around the car and average distances to work, learning, hospitals and shops increased. Car ownership allowed the majority of people to keep pace with these changes, but people without access to cars have been disadvantaged. Past policies have contributed to greater car dependency and inadequate public transport.

Research carried out in England found that a substantial proportion of rural settlements do not have either a general food store (78 per cent) or a small village shop (72 per cent). 21 per cent of rural households live more than 2.5 miles from a supermarket; a distance which would pose particular problems for people without access to a car. We believe these statistics would be reflective of the situation for rural Northern Ireland as well.

We seek to highlight and address the inequalities of rural dwellers, with a particular focus on tackling rural disadvantage, for those in most need and least choice. The invisibility and isolation stemming from rural poverty is compounded by a lack of understanding and collectivity around social exclusion in rural areas. Neighbours often do not share the same experiences and poor rural households have little or no means to join forces in order to campaign for a better future. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department of Regional Development's Public Transport Reform Consultation.

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<sup>2</sup> Countryside Agency (2001a).

## 2.2 Rural Women in Northern Ireland

The lives of rural women are affected directly and indirectly by their access to transportation. The absence of public transport in most rural areas makes the vast majority of women dependent on private automotive transportation. Rural women, like youths and seniors, are one of the groups that are most often 'transportation disadvantaged'. Research indicates that rural women have more limited access to family vehicles than do men.

The disadvantage women face in accessing reliable transportation affects their livelihoods, access to social services and impairs their ability to undertake the role of caregiver to family members. Lower incomes for women in rural communities mean that maintaining a vehicle may be beyond the reach of individuals, even when they need one to get to work<sup>3</sup>.

Female youth and seniors are doubly disadvantaged. Young women are less likely to have access to a car than their male friends, making them dependent on rides to work and social activities, sometimes with young men who have been drinking, or have already lost their licences.<sup>4</sup>

Rural women's experience of work in the "new economy" often means multiple jobholding<sup>5</sup> highlighting the need for transportation options. Without reliable access to transportation, rural women face challenges in; getting to job interviews, maintaining employment outside the home, accessing childcare, performing household tasks and taking on voluntary activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Leach 1999; Winson and Leach 2002 Contingent Work, Disrupted Lives: Labour and Community in the New Rural Economy.

<sup>4</sup> Dunkley 2004 Risky Geographies: Teens, Gender, and Rural Landscape

<sup>5</sup> Fuller 1999; Ames et al. 2006; Leach et al. 2006 "I'm Just Glad My Three Jobs Could Be During the Day": Women and Work in a Rural Community . Volume 55, Number 1, pp. 119-131(13)

Women's responsibilities for caring for others, often particularly strong in rural areas,<sup>6</sup> provide transportation challenges in a rural context<sup>7</sup>. Getting to health care services for themselves and their dependants is another challenge. Caring for dependants in the home requires access to services that can be obtained or delivered, all of which limits women's ability to take jobs outside the home. It is well documented that women isolated on farms are especially vulnerable to abuse<sup>8</sup>, a situation worsened without a means of transport to allow for a quick exit. .

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<sup>6</sup> Braithwaite 1994 The Economic Role and Striation of Women in Rural Areas

<sup>7</sup> Hallman, B. C and A. E. Joseph. 1998 'Over the Hill and Far Away: Distance as a Barrier to the Provision of Assistance to Elderly Relatives' Social Science and Medicine, Vol. 46 (6): 631-639.

<sup>8</sup> Hornosty and Doherty 2004 'Resistance and change: Building a framework for helping abused rural women'

### **3.0 Response to Questions**

#### **3.1 Do you agree that a system of performance-based contracts should be introduced for the public transport network, with a system of innovative service permits for non-contracted services? Do you agree that the public transport system should continue to be regulated?**

NIRWN welcomes the Minister's decision not to privatise a public transport system now or in the future. NIRWN believes that all decisions on transport provision in Northern Ireland should not be exclusively monetary based but based on quality and equity of provision and its ability to enhance accessibility to other services.

NIRWN believes it is important that the public transport system remains regulated and concur with the main reasons for a regulated public transport system as outlined in Pages 48-50 in Chapter 6 of the Detailed Policy Proposals<sup>9</sup>.

#### **3.2 Do you agree that the fares levels and fare structure for services on the public transport network should be regulated in the future?**

NIRWN agrees that the fare levels and structures for services on the public transport network should be regulated in the future. NIRWN adds that if fare levels and structures are to be regulated the sole focus should not be '*revenue to be generated from fares*'<sup>10</sup>.

NIRWN wants to see regulation of bus passes; Smart passes etc. across all contract providers on the public transport network in the future. Consumers, particularly those in rural areas who currently experience this difficulty, should not be disadvantaged because their local operator is not Translink.

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<sup>9</sup> Detailed Policy Proposals November 2009 DRD p.48-50

<sup>10</sup> Detailed Policy Proposals November 2009 DRD p.50

**3.3 Do you agree that the departmental agency should be responsible for specifying public transport service requirements, awarding contracts and monitoring and reporting on operator performance?**

NIRWN believes that if the departmental agency is to be responsible for specifying public transport service requirements, awarding contracts and monitoring and reporting on operator performance this needs to be done in a clear, transparent fashion. It is stated that *'the agency will have to consult with consumer representatives, local authorities and bus operators as part of the development of transport plans'*<sup>11</sup>.

NIRWN would need assurances that this consultation process would actively seek to engage with all consumers and take account of the diversity of our population by ensuring that consumer panels represent the multiplicity of Northern Irish consumers; the different needs and requirements of rural and urban dwellers and the S75<sup>12</sup> demographics of the area to ensure the voice of those most marginalised in our communities are heard and their needs provided for.

If *'over time, some existing route licences...may not be renewed'*<sup>13</sup> NIRWN seeks assurances that this will be assessed for local impact, including the potential economic impact on the current service provider.

**3.4 What are your views on the best approach to develop local transport plans and who needs to be involved?**

NIRWN believes it is imperative that for Regional Transport Reform to be effective; monitoring and evaluation of the strategy must include consumers. DRD, Translink and new local council structures must establish a mechanism for actively engaging with the public.

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<sup>11</sup> Detailed Policy Proposals November 2009 DRD p51

<sup>12</sup> Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

<sup>13</sup> Detailed Policy Proposals November 2009 DRD p51

The Rural White Paper for Northern Ireland as proposed by DARD has engaged rural stakeholders to develop reports for the Minister on 5 key sub areas as agreed by the Executive: Vision, People, Places, Services and Governance. The draft sub group reports were presented to Minister Gildernew on January 27<sup>th</sup>.

NIRWN recommends that DRD utilise the proposed 'Rural Forum' (see below) detailed in the 'Governance' sub group draft report as a potential way to engage meaningfully with rural dwellers on their experiences of rural transport provision and developing and maintaining local transport plans in the future.

**'Rural Forum:** For the purpose of this paper the term 'Rural Forum' is used to describe some form of body to facilitate the bridging of 'bottom up' and 'top down' approaches. To be effective this Forum would require a statutory remit to be consulted with and on policies that may impact on rural. It is important that the Forum reflects the broad rural affairs agenda making connections between rural people, the environment and land. It is also important that the Forum brings together the community, voluntary, private and public sector interests of rural development. The Forum should be gender balanced (taking account of CEDAW<sup>14</sup> and UN Security Resolution 1325<sup>15</sup>), and reflect the multiplicity of rural society in NI. It should act as a sounding board and be recognised as a conduit for rural views and contribute to the direction, leadership and co-ordination of the rural affairs agenda. It should have the statutory ability to be represented on community planning partnerships'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html> UNSC 1325 emphasises the distinct position of women in conflict and post conflict situations. It calls on member states to act in several areas, including the promotion of women in decision making institutions

<sup>16</sup> Final Governance sub Group Stakeholder Report for the Rural White Paper (Jan 2010) p20

### **3.5 Do you agree with the proposed future role of the Consumer Council?**

NIRWN believes that public transport consumers in Northern Ireland require representation of their interests. NIRWN would argue that Northern Ireland requires a Transport Watchdog such as London TravelWatch<sup>17</sup>. Consumers prefer to have one clear port of call to contact if they have a concern.

NIRWN believes this could be part of the Consumer Council duties but it must be clear that their role is to represent consumer interests and they must be independent from Translink and other service operators. It would be important that they liaise with, transport regulators and local authorities to advocate for consumers. It needs to be clearer what will happen in the future if Translink and other service providers are deemed to have failed consumers. NIRWN would like clarity on this.

### **3.6 Do you agree with the proposals on the future arrangements for the provision of rail services?**

NIRWN agrees that one body, (Translink as proposed by this consultation) should be responsible for all public transport delivery, if the consumer is to receive integrated, fair, regional provision.

NIRWN would advocate that when assessing customer satisfaction levels that it should be very clear who is responsible for ensuring that customers are happy with delivery. If consumers are not happy; it needs to be clear which organisation is responsible for implementing change. Transport users do not want to be liaising with: NIR, Translink, DRD, The Consumer Council, and potentially their local council in order to resolve any issues they have. This will need clarity and should, NIRWN argue, form part of the new information provision.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/>

**3.7 Do you agree that there is a need for integrated and off-vehicle ticketing across all forms of public transport?**

NIRWN agrees that an integrated ticketing system that reduces inconvenience to the passenger and reduces bureaucracy overall is to be welcomed. It is important that if the newly empowered Translink are to contract other providers and integrate the rural and community transport provision that this is followed through seamlessly for all. NIRWN believe that it should be irrelevant to consumers who the contract provider of their service is when they are purchasing their ticket. This becomes even more significant for those transport users who qualify for school bus passes; Smart passes etc.

NIRWN believes DRD need to ensure that **all** new and current contract providers accept all valid travel passes and that information on the services and systems are clear and easy to follow for those wishing to avail of public transportation.

**3.8 Do you agree that the Department should formalise and take forward legal arrangements to provide funding to transport advisory-type bodies?**

NIRWN believes it is imperative that the Department formalises and takes forward legal arrangements to provide funding to: the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities; the Rural Transport Fund and the Community Transport Association. NIRWN welcomes the fact that DRD acknowledges the role they have to play in ensuring cohesive, equitable transport provision and information for the people of Northern Ireland.

**3.9 Do you believe that service provision and information should be provided in languages other than English by Translink and other operators, where a clear demand is evident?**

NIRWN advocates that a Transport system that is accessible for all of Northern Ireland's citizens will require service provision and information provided in other languages; where a clear demand is evident.

NIRWN would expect that there will be a robust system developed and equality checked to ensure that the terminology, '*clear demand is evident*' can be applied consistently and equitably and it is very transparent what will constitute as evidence of a 'clear demand'.

NIRWN assumes that Translink will provide for those with a disability as part of their Section 75<sup>18</sup> and Disability Discrimination Act<sup>19</sup> obligations; making adequate amendments to their service provision and information to ensure that the services they provide are accessible to people with disabilities.

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<sup>18</sup> Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

<sup>19</sup> Disability Discrimination Act October 2004

#### **4.0 Questions on Rural Impact Assessment**

##### **4.1 Do you have any general comments on the approach that was taken in completing this Rural Impact Assessment including identification of relevant stakeholders?**

NIRWN is the only regional organisation representing rural women and as women represent over half of the rural population of Northern Ireland, NIRWN should have been identified as a relevant stakeholder. It is imperative that Public Transport Reform delivers for rural women.

Research carried out to date indicates that one of the main obstacles for rural women accessing employment is transport<sup>20</sup>. The Grass Ceiling Audit of Women in Rural Areas in the North of Ireland<sup>21</sup> carried out in 2006 indicates that of those women who work in rural areas only 5.25% utilise public transport as their method of travel to work. NIRWN argue that clearly lack of appropriate public transport in rural areas is inhibiting rural women accessing employment.

Research has shown that rural women are less likely to have access to a car<sup>22</sup>. Transport is inextricably linked to accessing other key services. Meeting rural transport needs would overcome access to vital services including, childcare, education, employment, as well as helping to address the issue of social marginalisation that many rural women face.

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<sup>20</sup> Little, 1991, Kilmurray and Bradley, 1989, Shorthall, 2002

<sup>21</sup> Marie Crawley, 'The Grass Ceiling-Audit of Women in Rural Areas in The North of Ireland', 2006

<sup>22</sup> Fawcett (May, 2002) Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 'On the Move: Attitudes to Transport in Northern Ireland'

**4.2 Do you agree that the public transport reform policy will have a positive impact on rural communities? If not and you wish to give reasons for your view, please state why.**

Rural communities are often marginalised due to geography and this frequently impedes access to services. A cohesive transport system that delivers for rural people in Northern Ireland is clearly needed. NIRWN welcomes DRD's plans under the understanding they will be continuously monitored for effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

**4.3 Do you consider that we have identified all of the issues arising from this policy that may have an impact on rural communities? If not, please confirm what other areas you feel should have been included.**

NIRWN believes issues with potential impact on Rural Communities include:

**Rural women in Northern Ireland**

Rural women in Northern Ireland account for 29% of the population as a whole.

Mobility is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of accessing and retaining employment for working rural women. From a rural development policy perspective, measures designed to enhance the mobility of rural dwellers are therefore a priority<sup>23</sup>.

Women are less likely to have their own transport than men, depend more on public transport, and are at an economic disadvantage to men, the accessibility of education, training and work and the cost of public transport are key factors in determining women's participation, particularly, but not exclusively for those in rural areas.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Moss & Wallace (2004) 'A New Deal for Children? Re-forming Education and Care in England, Scotland and Sweden, Bristol: The Policy Press

<sup>24</sup> Mc Laughlin, (2009) 'Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation'

There are a number of features of transport policy and behaviour in Northern Ireland which set it apart from the rest of the United Kingdom. Among the most significant is the fact that public transport in Northern Ireland has suffered from serious under-investment over many years, relative to the rest of the United Kingdom. It is, therefore, not surprising that Northern Ireland has become a very car-dependent society with a higher proportion of people commuting to work by car than in Great Britain<sup>25</sup>.

Lack of access to bus services is more acute in rural areas than in urban areas, it is a much more serious problem in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain; 42% of rural respondents in Northern Ireland said there were no bus services which could take them to local shops and services, compared to just 16% of rural respondents in Great Britain<sup>26</sup>.

### **Review of Public Administration**

NIRWN believes that the future RPA structures, in particular the local council clusters, will potentially have the greatest impact on those areas outside of Belfast and Derry. It is with this in mind that we believe that whilst the new responsibilities of local councils has great potential for positive impact in relation to delivery of effective transport solutions for rural people; it may create difficulties when people aren't satisfied or, experience difficulties with their provision.

NIRWN would like DRD to have mechanisms in place to ensure that rural people know who ultimately has final responsibility for their provision and to whom they need to take their concerns if they require their provision reviewed. It would be entirely unacceptable if individual's had their issues passed from local council to DRD; back and forth with neither prepared to take responsibility. I refer you also to our earlier comments regarding the role of the Consumer Council in

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<sup>25</sup> NISRA 2000

<sup>26</sup> Fawcett (May, 2002) Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 'On the Move: Attitudes to Transport in Northern Ireland'

liaising between consumers and DRD; this becomes more complex with potential for difficulty when local council decisions on transport provision are taken into consideration. Rural people need to know; who to approach regarding their transport issues and who ultimately will take responsibility for addressing those issues.

### **Age**

The rural population is aging with 39% of pensioners living in rural Northern Ireland and 41% of farmers aged 55 and over<sup>27</sup>. Our population is ageing and evidence indicates that older people in Northern Ireland face many barriers that inhibit their quality of life and equitable participation in Northern Irish society. Some of these barriers have been highlighted by OFMDFM and include; health care, poverty, social exclusion, fear of crime, housing and transport<sup>28</sup>.

NIRWN would argue that often these barriers are further exacerbated by gender and geography and research indicates that a higher percentage of older people in Northern Ireland will be older women<sup>29</sup>. Research shows that where a person lives has a bearing on exclusion as, for example, older women living in remoter rural areas experience some of the highest rates of exclusion as do older people living in disadvantaged urban housing estates<sup>30</sup>.

### **Cross Departmental Issues**

NIRWN welcomes DRD's consideration of the existing Government policies and programmes affecting rural transport. NIRWN argue that this will require constant updating and monitoring to maintain cohesive, improved delivery for rural people.

DRD has clearly worked with DARD when assessing the Rural Impact of Public Transport Reform. DARD however is not the only department

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<sup>27</sup> Age Concern/Help the Aged

<sup>28</sup> OFMDFM (2009) A Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland: A Strong Independent Voice for Older People p 21

<sup>29</sup> OFMDFM (2005) Ageing in an Inclusive Society, p 34

<sup>30</sup> Walker, A. (2003) *Social Exclusion and Growing Older*, Ageing in an Inclusive Society Conference, Europa Hotel, 28th March 2003.

with rural remit nor, is DRD the only department coordinating transport provision in rural areas. A comment from a Community Transport worker clearly exemplifies the challenges of cohesive and efficient transport delivery in rural areas: *'The yellow bus (ELB) comes in with a few kids on it, the white bus (HSS) comes in with some older people, the blue bus (Ulsterbus) has no one on it and then in comes the community transport bus in the middle of it all'*<sup>31</sup>.

DRD needs to lead all our government departments to work together to deliver the transport service and information that will meet the current needs of NI citizens, particularly those in rural areas.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

NIRWN welcome Public Transport Reform. It is very clear that public transport at present is inadequate and does not provide the service rural women require. **All** the focus groups and consultations NIRWN have facilitated since our inception in September 2006 have highlighted inadequate transport as the joint top issue\* rural women identify as creating a barrier to their full participation and inclusion in society. DRD need to lead to deliver on their vision of *'a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society and the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life'*<sup>32</sup>; particularly for women in rural areas who are most marginalised.

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<sup>31</sup> Rural Childcare Report, DARD (2008)

<sup>32</sup> Detailed Policy Proposals DRD p5

\*Lack of adequate childcare is the other major barrier rural women identify as inhibiting social inclusion.