THE SCOTTISH RURAL & ISLAND TRANSPORT COMMUNITY CIC

GATHERING 2023 REPORT

ruralmobility.scot | sritc@ruralmobility.scot

Acknowledgements

SRITC is supported by:

UN Sustainable Development Goals relevant to this report:

Key Take Aways

Three key themes emerged over the duration of the Gathering from all the participants and were informed through the discussions, events, and networking over the two days. 1) to reduce the need to travel unsustainably and reduce car kilometres 2) making use of existing capacity and assets and 3) targeted infrastructure improvements.

Reducing the need to travel unsustainably

The Gathering evidence highlights three considerations for policy makers and practitioners when reviewing travel needs and car kilometres. For example, in Ireland where the Department of Transport are developing a "sustainable and shared rural mobility plan, the approach has adopted an 'Avoid, Shift, Improve' hierarchy. In their context, 'avoid' refers to building communities around the concept of not using a vehicle to travel by developing 15 minutes neighbourhoods and making reforms to existing planning systems. The panellists and audience agreed on the worthiness of avoidance as a policy however, the motivations and purpose for the need to travel or move freight, are still poorly understood. This hampers the ability to design suitable interventions. That said, it was noted that Scotland has an ambitious national policy on 20 minute Neighbourhoods, but that motivations and purpose are seldom considered. Policy development was just one tool identified to reducing the need to travel unsustainably, Technology being the second. Unmanned Aerial Drones (UAV's) and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) were two emerging technologies which were considered as tools to reducing unsustainable travel. The 'last mile' drone for deliveries could play an important role in reducing the number of road-based deliveries of freight and medicines to rural communities. The technology is young and thus identifying business models that create new employment opportunities for rural communities without unintentionally increasing social isolation, are still to be considered. In the same way, MaaS was viewed as a tool that could encourage greater use of shared transport (public and private) including small "freight on legs". However, the user experience was seen as limited due to the lack of investment and the need to close the gap between the potential and current capabilities of MaaS.

The recommendation is for policy makers to consider and embrace fully the role of unintended consequences and new technologies in their policy development. This will require conversations with those users who will be affected by any policies or actions.

Making better use of existing capacity

Adopting a Systems Thinking approach to transport hasn't been core to the delivery of transport in the UK, but the evidence suggests it's emergence. The Postbus is a known example for combining postal mail with persons travelling on a bus and looking at existing capacity. There are opportunities to better utilise private and commercial vehicles as identified by the Swedish Government who claim that an increase in car occupancy from 1.2 to 2 people per journey, would reduce road carbon emissions by 50%. While informal car sharing in rural communities is common due to a lack of regular bus services and the cost of living, the economics of operating car-share services in less population dense areas are very challenging. Nonetheless, with higher levels of car ownership among rural households, and increasing levels of tourism, it was agreed that further research is needed to identify ways and means of better matching informal demand for journeys with the supply of private vehicles. In addition, fleets of cars, vans, buses and coaches often operate in sectorial silos (e.g. education, healthcare, and tourism) which dictate the hours and locations of operation. Breaking down these silos would unlock capacity that reduces the number of vehicles on the road.

Car sharing/pooling is only one aspect to utilising assets in a Systems Thinking approach. There are over 4,000 buses and coaches in Scotland, operated by 200 private and public sector organisations. However, most of these vehicles are underutilised in both patronage and space. Herein lies an opportunity for Systems Thinking and for contracts to permit change or integration whilst also facilitating the use of new technologies or services, such as Demand Response Transport (DRT) combined with freight.

Targeted infrastructure improvements

Accessibility, reliability, and availability underpin infrastructure in rural and island areas. For example, the need for digital connectivity or EV charging stations to be operating reliably, geographically spread whilst also affordable. Another short coming that was regularly highlighted over the two days, was the importance of data. In this context the term 'data' includes data generated by/for users, the private and public sectors. This data is hard to attain and is often siloed. There was an abundance of evidence on the practical challenges this causes with requests that standards are introduced to ensure future collaborations rather than barriers.

As mobility hubs and sustainable buildings such as train stations develop, the ability to fund new infrastructure was often asked. The example of infrastructure levies, like those seen in Nottingham City & Rother Councils in England were discussed. Here parking and house building levies are being used to successfully finance new infrastructure projects making it easier to access and afford low/zero emission public transport services.

Table of Contents

Part 1

1.1 Setting the Scene

Since its inception in 2018, the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community's ('SRITC') CIC mission has been to represent a community of stakeholders that work together to address the many transport challenges facing rural and islands communities. In doing so, SRITC facilitates the sharing of knowledge and best practices to help create a better future for the people who live, work and visit these areas.

2018	2019	2020-2021	2022	2023
SRITC Inaugural Scottish Rural Transport Convention	SRITC 2nd Scottish Rural Transport Convention	SRITC virtual events	The SRITC Virtual Gathering 2022	The SRITC Gathering 2023

SRITC Gatherings Timeline

The evidence presented in this report provides an overview of the themes discussed during the 2023 Gathering, including key concerns, insights and ideas. In turn, actions are outlined which are required to shape and direct future rural and island transport planning at a local, regional, and national level.

The evidence from the Gathering builds upon stakeholder consultations and research that SRITC has undertaken over the last 18 months in response to the National Transport Strategy (NTS)2 Delivery Plan published by Transport Scotland. SRITC CIC published a report called "Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport" setting out "Six Big Asks' of the Scottish Government and the wider transport community. These "asks" underpin the approach and themes of the Gathering.

6 ASKS

Ask 1
An Integrated Rural & Islands Mobility Plan

Ask 2
A Rural and Islands Transport Innovation Fund

Ask 3
A Rural & Islands Transport Leadership Group

Ask 4
A Rural & Islands Transport Procurement Framework

Ask 5
A Sustainable Rural Transport STEM challenge

Ask 6
A Rural & Islands Open Data Framework
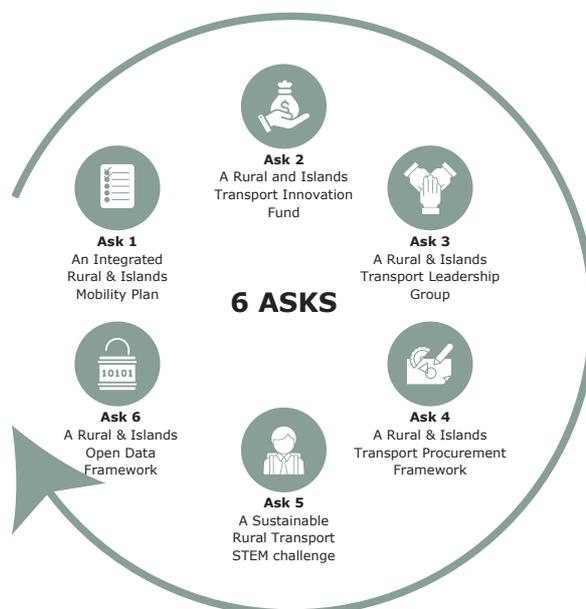
SRITC Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport Report: Response to NTS2 Consultation | June 2022

The Inaugural event (The Scottish Rural Transport Convention) took place in 2018 in Inverness, attracting over 150 attendees who discussed topics as diverse as autonomous vehicles and child care. In subsequent years, the annual gathering has grown in strength and popularity in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. After another successful in-person event in Carnoustie in 2019, The Gathering moved online in 2020 and 2021, attracting a global audience from countries including Japan, Australia, the USA, Germany & France.

Rescheduled from September 2022, the 2023 Hybrid Gathering provided those attending in-person and online the time and opportunity to explore each Big Ask in greater detail, applying their own professional and lived experiences to help inform how they can be further developed and supported.

Running over May 10-11th 2023, and across 3 locations (Tomatin, Grantown on Spey, and Boat of Garten) in Speyside in the Scottish Highlands, over 100 people attended in person, arriving by train, bus, car, and bike from a wide range of starting locations across the UK & Europe. On day 2, another 30 people joined the proceedings online from around the world.

The success of the previous online Gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the design of the 2023 edition with the decision to offer an online and hybrid event.
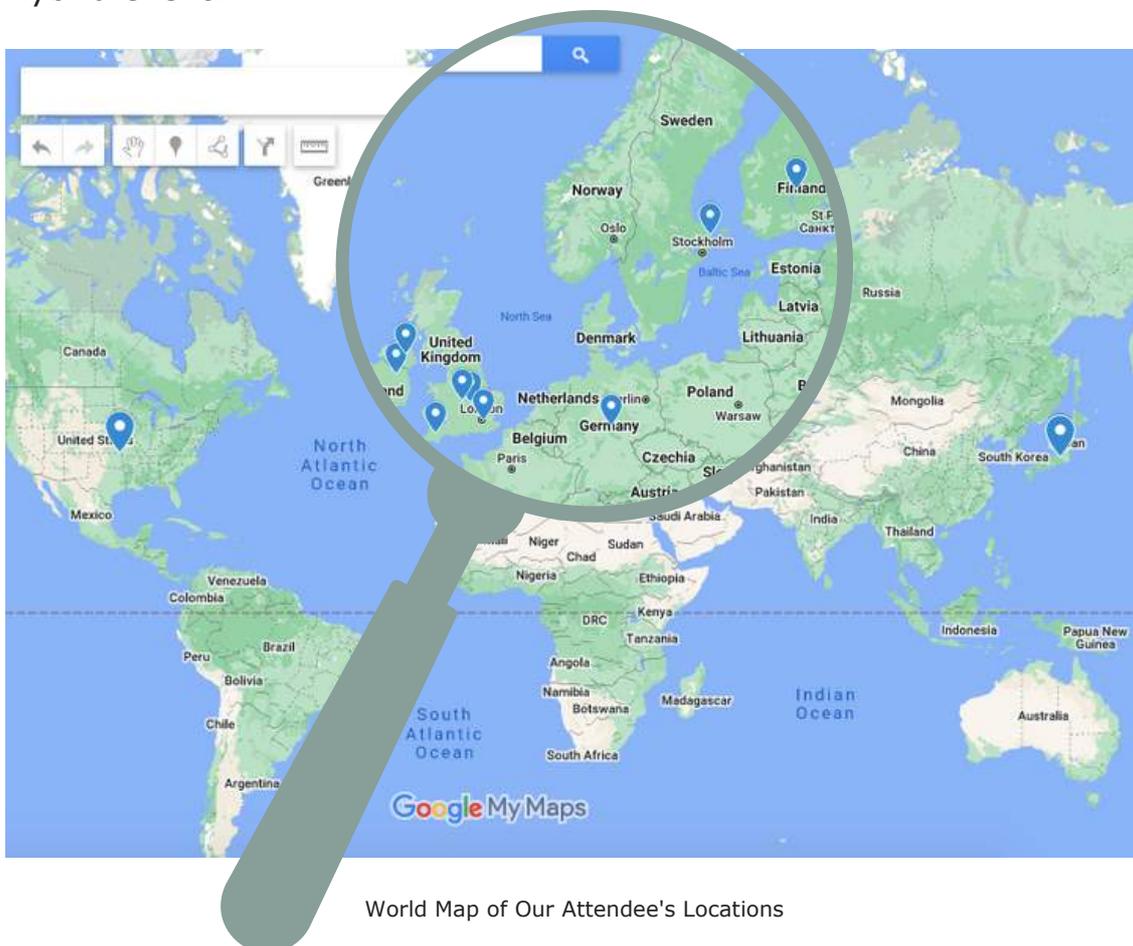
World Map of Our Attendee's Locations

1.2 Key Objectives

This Gathering was the first in-person meeting since October 2019, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 4 key objectives. Firstly the ability to offer attendees an opportunity to meet face to face particularly as the SRITC CIC community has expanded online during this time. Secondly, to deliver and showcase a sustainable rural transport event, with reference to the UN Sustainable Goals. Thirdly, to provide a practical aspect to rural transport from visiting a community mobility hub, ebike demonstrations, the use of a smoothie bike for engagement or to hear from Practitioners from Europe. This ensured a no 'powerpoint' approach. Finally, to gather insights and evidence from participants for the 6BigAsks, but in particular, BigAsk 1 a future Rural and Island Mobility Plan.

1.3 Sustainability Goals

Below we present a detailed overview of the success with which specific sustainability measures were implemented and how they align with UN Sustainability Goals. Steps taken range from using local catering and supplies through to working with a local foodbank and utilising reusable table cloths and providing each participant with a mug for the event. In-person attendees were also actively encouraged to use public transport to travel to the area, and while there, car share or utilise the free electric shuttle bus.

All of the leftover meals were divided and packaged into reheatable portions. These meals were then donated to the local food drive in Aviemore. The impact of this collaboration was so effective that the caterer for the Gathering now partners with the foodbank permanently.
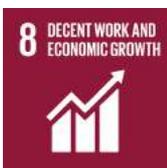
The Gathering was spread across three locations in Scotland's Highlands: Tomatin, Boat of Garton and Granton-on-Spey. This decision aimed to boost the economic benefit of conference participants and event spending across the region.

The Gathering provided a platform for domestic and international innovators to showcase their work and explain rural transport issues that they are solving.

All the suppliers used were based in Scotland with most within a few miles of the locations where the Gathering took place. This including the Ceilidh Band and the catering company. The Gathering was delivered on a hybrid method with a live stream allowing anyone, anywhere to join irrespective of their economic circumstances.

The Strathdearn Community Hub, which attendees visited on Day 1, has an air source heat pump, underfloor heating, solar thermal to provide hot water and solar photovoltaic to provide on-site electricity generation, coupled with a battery storage system (to provide emergency power during a grid power failure). The Boat of Garten Community Hall have set themselves the "BoGZero" goal of the venue becoming carbon neutral. It has a new hot composter, and work had been done to install a new low carbon heating system. It was partially solar-powered and offered two electric charging points for EV cars.

Reusable and writable table cloths were used to cover tables and provided an imaginative way to communicate as participants could write on the material. Table displays were upcycled jam jars with locally sourced foliage; Lego vehicles for the tables were built by local young people and the awards were locally produced by a community group. Even the cardboard 'cut outs' were upcycled from household waste. Lanyards were borrowed from our members and the individual business cards inserted in them printed in-house. All attendees were provided with their own SRITC branded mug to use during the event and take home with them. This meant that no disposable//single use cups were used.

SRITC partnered with Stagecoach to provide an electric bus service for all attendees, transporting them between Aviemore train station. the venues, and their accommodation. This partnership made an important contribution in reducing the level of CO2e emissions generated during the event.

While challenging to quantify exactly, based on our analysis of how in-person attendees travelled to the Gathering, and where they travelled from, we were encouraged to discover the following:

- 56% of people used a train and/or bus for part or all of their journey
- 40% used a car for part or all of their journey
- Less than 5% of people used a plane or ferry for part of their journey.

By including a train or bus for part or all of their journey to the Gathering instead of driving, we estimate that 600 Kg of CO2e were saved. In addition, those who joined online instead of travelling to the Gathering saved an additional 530 Kg of CO2e. Using the electric Stagecoach bus during the event will have saved CO2e emissions and reduced the number of participants bringing a car.

While a total saving of just over 1 Tonne of CO2e is very small when compared to total Scottish transport emissions of 13.9 million Tonnes of CO2 (2019), it demonstrates the positive effect of SRITC encouraging and supporting attendees to travel more sustainably to the Gathering.

1.4 Format and Themes

The locations & venues provided a stimulus for conversations about the deep rooted mobility challenges while also inspiring ideas for solutions. Three rural mobility themes were woven into the proceedings;

- Innovations in Rural Mobility
- Decarbonisation of Rural & Island Transport
- Sustainable Rural & Island Travel

Participants had the opportunity to discuss these themes in informal and formal environments. This included The Strathdearn Hub in Tomatin, the Speyside Hotel in Grantown-on-Spey, the shuttle bus while transferring between venues as well as during panel sessions at the community hall in Boat of Garten.

Part 2

2.1 Event Programme

With the support from Stagecoach, an electric bus was used to collect participants from accommodation locations in the Aviemore to Grantown on Spey area to the events outlined in Figure 1.

	TOMATIN	GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY	BOAT OF GARTEN
May 10th	**Afternoon** Visit to The Strathdearn Community Hub in Tomatin including tour of hub and presentations on active & sustainable travel	**Evening** Welcome reception at The Speyside Hotel including local gin tasting session.	No activities scheduled
May 11th	No activities scheduled	No activities scheduled	**Daytime** Main plenary session where in-person and online delegates joined together at the Community Hall in Boat of Garten where they watched an opening address from Scotland's Transport Minister, and explored the major mobility challenges facing rural and island communities via facilitated panel discussions and workshops. **Evening** The 2023 Gathering wrapped up with a drinks reception followed by dinner, the inaugural SRITC Rural Transport Awards Ceremony, and live music.

Figure 1. Event Programme

2.2 Day One

2.2.1 The Strathdearn Community Hub - site visit and discussions

During the afternoon, participants were transported to The Strathdearn, community hub in Tomatin, north of Aviemore for an afternoon which included a tour of the facility and an informal session on Active Travel. The hub was built and is operated by Strathdearn Community Development and provides a cafe, electric vehicle charging, office and event space along with an outside covered court.

The initial informal session, organised by Cycling UK and CoMoUK, showcased the Golspie Bothy Project, experiences of Active Travel in Germany and Finland from a researcher and municipality representative, and a practical demonstration of an electric folding bike created by one of the SRITC CIC community members. The participants were then divided into two groups which rotated between a tour of the hub (which explained the design of the building, from the use of renewable energy to providing a central meeting space for local people) and further demonstrations of e-cargo bikes and a range of e-bikes in the hall. In keeping with the ethos of SRITC CIC, coffee and cake were provided along with the opportunity to network.

2.2.2 The Speyside Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey - Welcome reception

Day 1 concluded with a networking evening reception at the Speyside Hotel in Grantown on Spey where participants from the afternoon met those just arriving for the Gathering. A local piper welcomed the bus and over a few hours, the community met face to face whilst sampling local gins, whisky and a selection of locally sourced canapés.

The event concluded with a short presentation to two Award winners, who were unable to attend the Thursday evening ceilidh and awards presentation (see section 2.3.2.5 Ceilidh, Awards & Recognition). The Stagecoach bus then provided a service home for the participants with the same enthusiasm and banter on board as experienced during the day.

2.3 Day Two

Day 2 was based at the community hall in the village of Boat of Garten, located a few miles from Aviemore. For the few that drove to the Gathering, there was an electric vehicle (EV) charging point available and for those who cycled, secure storage and shower facilities. For the majority of participants the electric bus collected them from their accommodation where they were welcomed with a bacon roll and a cup of tea.

The day unfolded with over 100 excited and energised people in person and a further 30 registered online. The founder Jenny Milne formally welcomed everyone and explained the proceedings of the day along with the announcement of 2 new local bus services by Stagecoach, to the local area. This was followed by a recorded keynote speech from Scotland's Transport Minister Kevin Stewart, and by was three interactive and informal panel sessions discussing (1) Innovations in Rural Mobility; (2) Decarbonisation of Rural & Island Transport; and (3) Sustainable Rural & Island Travel.

2.3.1 Ministerial Address

The Gathering opened with remarks from the Transport Minister, Mr Kevin Stewart. The Minister expressed how pleased he was to see a focus on innovation, decarbonisation and sustainability which he considered critical to supporting a fair and just transition to net zero.

Mr Stewart acknowledged the importance of transport connectivity across the rural and island communities, highlighting the work of the Scottish Government working with members of communities to influence strategic infrastructure planning, island connectivity, project Neptune and concessionary travel. Mr Stewart also acknowledged the challenges across all sectors in Scotland due to the impact of COVID-19, the cost of living crisis and the unprecedented rise in interest rates.

The Minister highlighted what the government is doing to meet the need to develop sustainability, innovation, and decarbonisation practices in the transport sector, most notably;

1. Work to deliver digital concessionary ferry tickets that will link with back office systems in the government and reduce the need for paper tickets. This digital service will be rolled out between 2023 and 2024.
2. Integrating North Link Ferry services with a MaaS application.
3. Budget commitments to electrifying the bus network; and
4. An overview of the current fair fares review.

The full Address can be watched here.

2.3.2 Panel Discussions

The panels were a deliberate mix of transport practitioners, innovators, researchers, and supporters working across Scotland, Ireland & Europe. More generally, participants used the panel sessions to share their own first-hand experiences on the rural mobility challenges that they are confronting and their relevance to the strategic themes, with plenty of time for discussion and questions both from those in person and online. Each session had a welcome speaker providing insight into practical examples and a session chair, in addition to the panellists.

2.3.2.1 Panel Session 1 - Innovations in Rural Mobility

WELCOME

AOIFE FLEMING
Department of Transport, Ireland

SESSION CHAIR

ALASTAIR MCINROY
CEO, Technology Scotland

PANELLISTS

ANDREW RONIE
Principle Consultant,
Alco Consulting

JAMIE DUFFY
Co-Founder,
Tronius Limited

IAIN MCNEIL
Managing Director,
Whereverly

ETIENNE LOUVET DE VERCHÈRE
CEO & Co-Founder,
IONA

JOSHUA RYAN-SAHA
Director,
Traveltech for Scotland

Aoife Fleming welcomed the panel discussion on innovation in rural mobility by showcasing the innovative policy work conducted by the Irish Government. The Irish Department of Transport (DoT) is developing a sustainable and shared rural mobility plan that employs an "Avoid, Shift, Improve" hierarchy.

- "Avoid" refers to building communities around the idea of not needing to travel by vehicle by developing 15-minute neighbourhoods and reforms to their planning system.
- "Shift" means changing journey types to more sustainable modes of transport; and
- "Improve" means further technological developments to vehicles that reduce their negative impacts on the environment.

Aoife emphasised that while the magnitude of the tasks required to achieve these transitions and improvements is considerable, there is a narrow pathway to success.

In Ireland's Climate Action Plan, it has binding targets that it needs to meet by 2030 when compared to 2018 levels:

Reduce fossil fuels by 50%

Reduce vehicle miles by 20% across all vehicles

Reduce commuting miles by 25%

Increase sustainable school travel by 30%

Public transport journey increase by 130 %

Following Aoife's opening remarks, the panel, chaired by Alastair McInroy, shared their insights and opinions on how different types of technological innovations can help rural communities deliver more accessible, affordable and sustainable transport services. Six areas of note emerged;

"Last Mile" Delivery Drones

Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) aka drones to deliver parcels and medication to remote locations offers many benefits relative to road vehicles from an economic and environmental standpoint. However, the founder of Iona Drones, Etienne Louvet, highlighted that to achieve these benefits fully, further innovations and considerations are required. For example, feedback from attendees highlighted the social impact of replacing vehicle drivers with unmanned drones. It was recognised that a delivery driver can often be one of the few people that those living remotely, and without access to a car or regular bus service, can speak with during their week and that a drone providing this service could further isolate individuals and communities.

EV Charging Infrastructure

While levels of electric vehicle (EV) ownership are rapidly increasing across Scotland year-on-year, the charging infrastructure to support them is not on target, none more so in rural locations. Further innovations in EV charging technologies and service models are needed. Jamie Duffy, the founder of Tronius, provided an overview of the "Highlander Pod", a mobile EV charging product that can be deployed in any rural location (including off-grid). The underlying business model will empower rural communities to generate revenue directly from the Pod, which can then be used to fund other community projects.

Rural Mobility as a Service (MaaS)

Closing the gap between the potential of Rural MaaS (RMaaS) and the current capabilities was a subject greatly discussed at the Gathering. Via Transport Scotland's MaaS Investment Fund (MIF), MaaS projects happening in rural loca happening in rural locations across Scotland. Further afield, in other areas of the UK, and internationally, pilots provide insights into a range of digital, business and service delivery models.

Andrew Ronie, of ALCO Consulting, shared his experiences of leading international MaaS and digital ticketing projects, emphasising that while technology has an important role to play, better connection points between the new digital applications, the legacy public services underpinning the transport network, and end users within rural communities is required.

To illustrate this point, Andy highlighted a project in Sub-Saharan Africa where among its 1.1 billion population there are over 1 billion smartphones in circulation. As part of this project, an analysis of the levels of connectivity between the members of rural communities and rural transport service providers was undertaken. This led to the discovery that through deep rooted networks and a culture of trust, the members of rural Sub-Saharan communities have developed grass roots MaaS solutions that leverage smartphones to overcome the distances that separate them from other communities and essential services.

Data

Improvements to the availability, accessibility and quality of rural transport data is one of the 6 SRITC BigAsks outlined in the Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport report and was a hot topic.

Jamie Duffy, highlighted how all the data generated from the EV charging sessions at their Highlander Pods will provide insights to Local Authorities. These will help identify where further targeted interventions are required to improve access to charging infrastructure.

A tourism example of data application and impact was presented by Ian McNeill, Managing Director of Travel-Tech business Whereverly. He outlined how CIVTECH funding enabled his business to partner with Loch Lomond Trust and National Park (LLTNP) to develop a smarter approach to managing issues associated with over-tourism and sustainability. A digital platform was created to collect data from sensors installed within car parks and from reports from Rangers and Trust employees.

In a similar vein, Josh Ryan-Saha, Director of Travel Tech Scotland, stressed the need for a wider deployment of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies across rural Scotland to support more effective short-, medium- and long-planning within Scotland's tourist sector. In addition to better infrastructure planning, the data generated from IoT devices would help planners to accurately understand the real-time locations of tourists, nudge them to other (less visited) locations of interest, and more accurately forecast future volumes.

Attendees agreed that while further investments and more work is needed in Scotland to deliver integrated transport services, the case studies shared from other less developed countries should empower stakeholders within rural communities that successful "bottom" innovations can take place that don't require huge amounts of financial resources.

2.3.2.2 Panel Session 2 - Decarbonisation of Rural & Islands Transport

WELCOME

SESSION CHAIR

JEFF PYRAH
Planning Policy Manager,
Rother District Council

MAGNUS FREDRICSON
Project Leader KomILand,
Skaraborgs Kommunalförbund

PANELLISTS

RACHAEL MURPHY
Director for Scotland,
CoMoUK

PAUL FINCH
NESTRANS Strategic
Manager

ANDY HYDE
Founder,
Go Upstream

JONATHAN CHATFIELD
Head of Policy,
Rail Delivery Group

MORAG ROBERTSON
Senior Logistics Specialist,
Jacobs

JACK HOLLAND
Head of Northern Europe,
Padam Mobility

Jeff Pyrah, Planning Policy Manager at Rother District Council on the South Coast of England, welcomed Session Two and expressed his desire to learn about the steps taken by Scotland to decarbonise the transport network. Jeff highlighted the importance of communication between the land use planning team and the transportation planning team and how this collaboration is needed to build sustainable communities. One of the initiatives highlighted by Jeff was the Community Infrastructure Levy; a tax on newly built houses. This fund pays for gaps in infrastructure with 20% dedicated to a climate emergency fund. This fund paid for the insulation and solar panels installed in 39 village halls.

The chair for the session was Magnus Fredricson, representing the Skaraborg Municipal Association in Sweden, who highlighted a lot of parallels between Scotland and Sweden. In particular, he discovered that the Scots and the Swedes produce the same amount of CO2 per annum: 47.8 megatonnes. In Sweden, the largest source of CO2 is transportation, in Scotland, heating has historically been the largest emitter but it is now transport. Transport for both countries accounts for 30% of the emissions, however where other sectors are decreasing, transport emissions are not.

Six areas of interest emerged from the session:

Integration of Land Use & Transport Planning

Jeff Pyrah highlighted how Rother District Council stressed that transforming transport provision quality requires full integration of land and transport planning. To achieve this goal, Rother Council has developed a simple scoring system to inform where future budgets should be best targeted to support their rural communities on the path to net-zero.

The system consists of 5 metrics that cover land, transport and the economy: current levels of sustainability; ease of access to public transport; quality of local services; quality of employment opportunities; and quality of broadband connectivity.

Infrastructure Levies

Nottingham City & Rother Councils were cited as examples of Local Authorities that have successfully implemented levies on parking (Nottingham) and house building (Rother) to finance new infrastructure projects that make it much easier to fund projects that increase the availability and accessibility of low/zero emission public transport services. The success of these levies is down in large part to the public supporting the ambition of their Local Authority to improve the provision of public transport services that improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.

Reducing/Removing the Need to Travel

"Untravel" is receiving more focus from a research standpoint. However, in spite of the contribution it can make to decarbonising transport, the motivations that trigger the need to travel are still poorly understood from a rural perspective which in turn hampers the ability to design alternative non-travel based solutions.

Vehicle Utilisation

The Swedish Government is pushing to increase the efficiency with which cars are used by encouraging greater levels of car sharing (less solo journeys). Increasing the average number of vehicle passengers per journey from 1.2 to 2, will, they estimate, cut road carbon emissions by 50%. Greater adoption of car clubs and utilisation of existing bus fleets (using digital technologies) are two pathways to achieving this goal.

Movement of People & Freight

Opportunities to better integrate the movement of people and freight need to be supported by greater levels of investment into understanding the underlying behaviours that motivate people to use transport to access the services and purchase these goods.

Sustainable Stations

The Rail Delivery Group are spearheading the development of sustainable train stations (big and small) through incremental initiatives that include the deployment of green walls and solar panels, and the roll out of water fountains that help to reduce the use of single use plastic bottles.
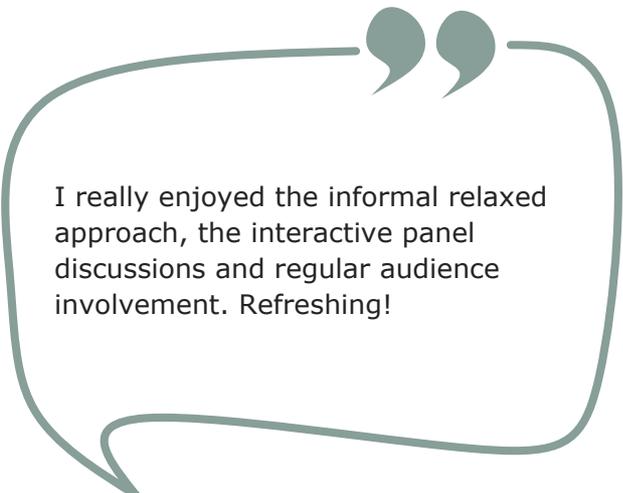
I really enjoyed the informal relaxed approach, the interactive panel discussions and regular audience involvement. Refreshing!
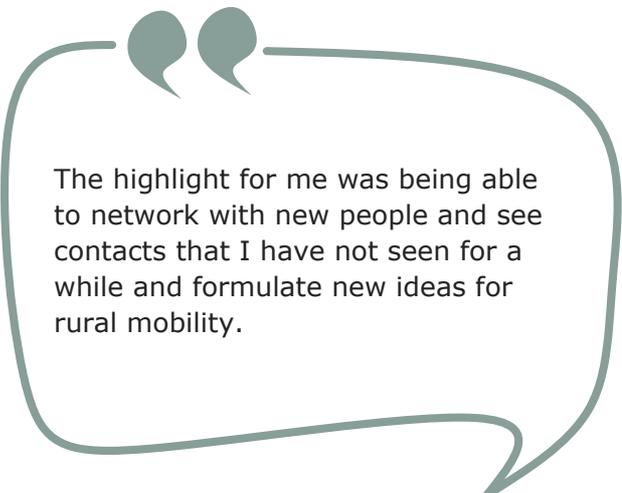
The highlight for me was being able to network with new people and see contacts that I have not seen for a while and formulate new ideas for rural mobility.

2.3.2.3 Panel Session 3 - Sustainable Rural & Island Travel

WELCOME

MARTIN SCHIEFELBUSCH
Competence Centre for New
Mobility Concepts,
NVPW Germany

SESSION CHAIR

DUNCAN BRYDEN
Chairman of the Outdoor
Access Trust for Scotland

PANELLISTS

AOIFE FLEMING
Department of Transport,
Ireland

JENNI ECKHART
Research Team Leader,
VTT

JEFF PYRAH
Planning Policy Manager,
Rother District Council

DAMI ADEBAYO
Partnerships Lead,
The Routing Company

SHEILA GILMORE
Chief Executive,
VisitArran

NEIL MORRISON
Socialtrack

Martin Schiefelbusch representing NVBW, a public transport operator based in Baden-Württemberg in South West Germany, welcomed the final session panel and provided some highlights of sustainable rural travel programmes taking place across Germany.

In South West Germany, the target is for every town to have hourly public transport services up until midnight. However, the target is set at a state level and delegated to the provincial bodies to implement which creates the familiar debates about where the funding needed to achieve this target is going to come from.

Steps to address the challenges of access to rural public transport are being taken in Germany through collaboration between state and provincial transport planners to improve the quality and quantity of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services. While most provinces in Germany have offered some form of DRT service for many years, they have been delivered to specific niche locations by a wide variety of private operators meaning there is a lack of technical standards and interoperability.

The three highlights out of the panel on sustainable rural and Island travel were person centred programmes and thinking, data availability and integrating transport options.

Person centred programmes and thinking

Panel members highlighted the various ways to improve on person centred planning and thinking.

An example centred on how to make active travel modes fun (such as through fostering a passion for skateboarding in teenagers) which can develop lifelong attachment to active travel and alternative modes of transportation. Skateboarding is a low cost means of active travel that avoids the issues presented by larger active travel modes on buses and trains.

Furthermore, the panel and audience agreed on the importance of placing local communities at the forefront of designing and planning transport services. An example of this type of thinking that was given is in Finland where priority is given on ferries to local vehicles and public transport vehicles to ensure that they are able to conduct their journeys with minimal interruption from tourists and inter-regional transport.

Marketing lies at the heart of this issue. Panel and audience members agreed that even the best designed and most well delivered active travel and DRT services struggle to connect with end users when they are competing with car manufacturers' multi-million pound marketing budgets.

Data

A theme that cut across the panels was the importance of quality data. Dami Adebayo from The Routing Company, an on-demand vehicle routing and management platform developer, highlighted that to make services relevant for communities they will serve, access to more granular and better quality data on their journey patterns is needed.

Public Transport Integration

The consequences of a lack of integration between buses, trains and ferries were vividly highlighted by Sheila Gilmore, the Chief Executive of Visit Arran. She shared stories of local people from the Isle of Arran, and tourists visiting the island who have missed ferry connections because the operators of each transport service have poor level of integration. These missed connections mean businesses on Arran are losing trade, and islanders are unable to make mainland hospital appointments that very often have been arranged months beforehand.

2.3.2.4 Workshop - Developing a Rural Mobility Plan

At the conclusion of the themed panel session discussions, in-person and online participants were divided into groups and joined a facilitated Lego workshop. This interactive method helped to provoke conversation, providing an ice breaker whilst also being a tool for developing a rural and island mobility plan for Scotland. A separate report that explains the methodology, findings and discussion will be available soon.

2.3.2.5 Ceilidh, Awards & Recognition

Sponsor of the Awards:

The Gathering concluded with an evening of food, music, dancing and the inaugural rural transport awards.

Improvements to rural and island transport within and across communities only happens through the hard work of many paid and unpaid people and it is important to recognise these individuals or organisations. The awards were based on nominations with the winners being announced at the event.

- Maggie Lawson - Community Connexions, Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport
- Steve Cassidy - Fuse Mobility
- Tony Archer - Co-wheels Car Club
- Lynda Johnson - Highlands & Islands Airports
- Neil & Sarah Fuller - The Durness Bus
- Jackson Dalgliesh

In addition to the Rural Transport Awards, Maggie Lawson received a Lifetime Achievement from the CILT (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport). The team and community at SRITC offer our congratulations to all the winners while not forgetting the contributions that many other members of our community are making to rural transport.

Part 3 - Beyond The Gathering

3.1 Participant Experience Goals

From the formal feedback provided to SRITC via our post-Gathering survey, attendees highlighted the following experiences as being most valuable and impactful to them.

- The Location: The scenic locations where the Gathering took place received praise from attendees, in large part because it contrasted favourably with the less than inspiring locations where transport conferences are normally held.

- Free Electric Shuttle Bus: This was seen to be a huge success, making it easy and convenient for attendees to move between venues and overnight accommodation without needing to drive or use a private taxi. The simple act of chatting on the shuttle bus offered the opportunity to start and build new relationships that would otherwise have been missed.

- Networking: Participants appreciated the chance to connect with professionals from various sectors, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing.

- Learning: The Gathering served as an excellent learning platform, with attendees gaining insights into new case studies, innovative concepts, and solutions for addressing rural mobility challenges.

- Collaboration: Many participants engaged in fruitful collaborations with others during the event as it offered the time and space for them to work together in a deeper and more meaningful way when compared to other in-person or online events.

A small number of attendees based outside of Scotland who used public transport to travel to the Gathering faced disruptions and delays due to strikes, cancellations and missed connections. As they were part of an SRITC WhatsApp Group formed for the event, they exchanged experiences and created unique bonds. This is a legacy that remains.

3.2 Dissemination

Following on from the announcement of 2 new bus services by Stagecoach, the Gathering was featured in the Press and Journal and Badenoch and Strathspey Herald newspapers.

During the SRITC Gathering 2023 in May, there was exceptional progress in terms of awareness and engagement on social media platforms. The actual number of followers exceeded the target, and the engagement rates far surpassed expectations across all platforms.

In June, while the awareness targets were met and even exceeded, the engagement rates remained commendable, continuing to demonstrate a strong online presence for SRITC Gathering 2023.

LinkedIn saw steady growth in followers, organic impressions, and custom button clicks in both months. Twitter experienced an increase in new followers, profile visits, and tweet impressions. Facebook saw moderate growth in followers and maintained a consistent level of page reach and engagement.

Overall, the SRITC Gathering 2023 experienced substantial success in building awareness and engaging with its audience on social media during and after the event, which undoubtedly contributed to the event's impact and reach.

LinkedIn			
119 Followers	**10,157** Impressions	**501** Page views	**3,224** Button clicks

Twitter			
20 Followers	**590** Impressions	**12,746** Profile visits	**3.8%** Engag-t rate

| Facebook			
12 Followers	**2,356** Page reach	**295** Page visits	**9** Page new likes

3.3 The Future

Beyond the 2023 Gathering, to maximise the value of the many insights, case studies and ideas collected via all of our stakeholder engagement, SRITC CIC are in the early stages of developing a digital knowledge sharing and learning hub for use by members of our community. The hub will help reduce the information silos and encourage best practices and the development of new collaboration.

In parallel to the above funded activities, we are in active discussions to secure new funding to support the work needed to develop a fully comprehensive rural and island mobility plan for Scotland. The evidence from the Gatherings' Lego workshop will be expanded upon at the 5th Scottish Rural and Island Parliament (SRIP) in Fort William from 1 to 3 November 2023, where we are partnering with Scottish Rural Action (SRA) to organise and deliver the transport visits and workshops. The output from that event will provide extensive evidence for the Scottish Governments' Rural Delivery Plan due in 2025. Furthermore the success of the Stagecoach/SRITC partnership to operate an electric bus for the Gathering, has resulted in the SRIP commissioning SRITC to deliver a similar service for their event.

SRITC will also continue to progress our strategy of building deeper levels of engagement with stakeholders across our community and politically. In June 2023, we joined forces with Change Mental Health to promote their National Rural Mental Health Forum over all four days of the Royal Highland Show in Edinburgh. Since the Gathering, SRITC have been invited to several Scottish Government Cross-Party Groups and to present at conferences.

I enjoyed meeting with like-minded individuals and discussing opportunities to transition beyond the deployment of new community centred technologies.
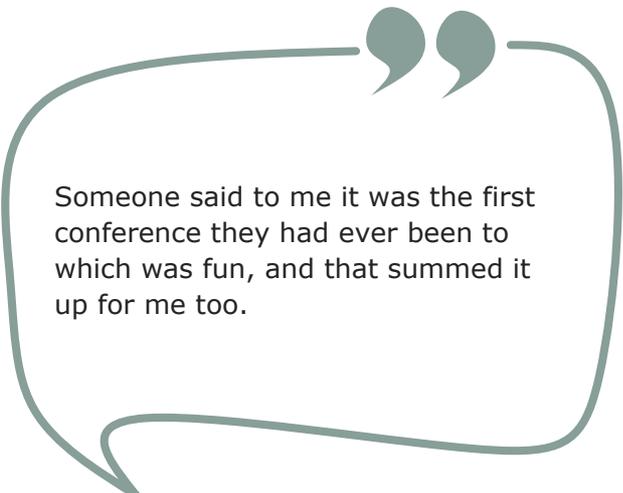
Someone said to me it was the first conference they had ever been to which was fun, and that summed it up for me too.

Part 4 - Conclusion

4.1 Participant Experience Goals

With the support of many volunteers, local organisations and businesses, this event was able to finally take place after not only a pandemic, but also the passing of a Monarch in September 2022. The event is a large logistical operation with a small team behind it who were able to show that rural areas can be a venue for larger Gatherings/conferences whilst also being mindful of sustainability in supply chains.

Delegates and contributors alike have returned to their homes and their professional lives, both stimulated and re-energised. They have expanded their connections and identified future collaborators to enable them to take action. Due to the uniqueness of the event it will take place every 3-4 years, but the momentum to deliver on actions remains. The passion, enthusiasm and drive of all those involved in SRITC CIC, ensures that practical challenges case studies and key takeaways will be progressed through collaboration, online cafes and the SRITC CIC 6 BigAsks. Further Next Steps are outlined in the Rural and Island Mobility Plan Report: Lego which will be published soon.

I really enjoyed the Lego serious play workshop session plus there was a great balance of talks and audience interaction.
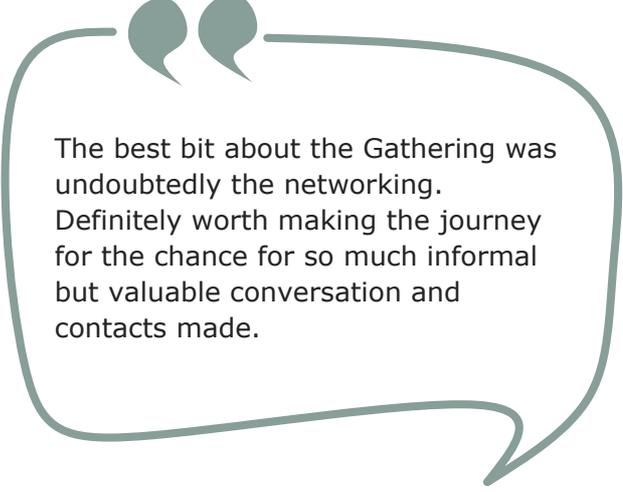
The best bit about the Gathering was undoubtedly the networking. Definitely worth making the journey for the chance for so much informal but valuable conversation and contacts made.

Contact SRITC

✉ sritc@ruralmobility.scot

🌐 www.ruralmobility.scot

TheScottish
Rural & Islands
Transport Community

A Community Interest Company