



# **SCOTTISH RURAL AND ISLAND PARLIAMENT - TRANSPORT FORUM REPORT**

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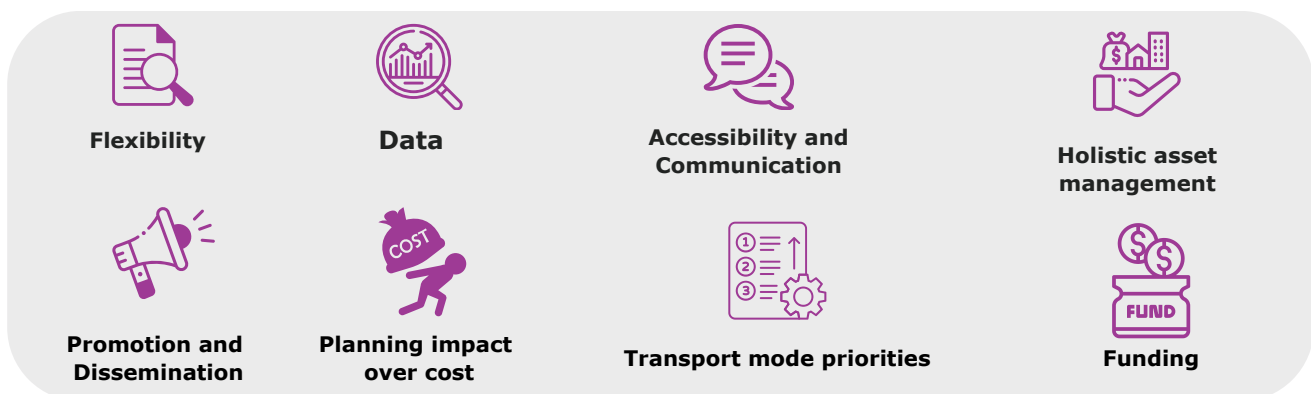
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# 1. Introduction

The Scottish Rural and Island Transport Community ('SRITC') CIC was founded in 2018 to champion rural voices in transport policy discussions and highlight the grassroots work achieved by rural communities in solving rural problems.

In particular, over the last three years, SRITC has led the development of a Rural and Island Mobility Plan (RIMP) to address the unique challenges and opportunities present in rural living. Through the 'Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport', a report commissioned by the Scottish Government to review the National Transport Strategy (NTS2), SRITC highlighted gaps and opportunities for rural and island transport. It was identified in the report that Scotland should develop a RIMP. SRITC hosted 'The Gathering' in 2023, a unique conference that brought together various rural transport stakeholders and industry practitioners. During the event, SRITC hosted a workshop with the participants to identify the themes that should feature in a Scottish RIMP. The report 'A Rural and Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks' presents the findings of this workshop.

A Rural and Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks identifies eight key themes that the stakeholders involved in the workshop felt any RIMP should incorporate.



In November 2023, SRITC curated the 'Transport Forum' at the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament ('SRIP')—an event attended by 500 people with in excess of 60 curators across 20 venues, based in Fort William. The SRIP is a platform that empowers rural and island communities in Scotland by amplifying their unique voices and building stronger connections between them, organisations, and decision-makers in Scotland, the UK, and Europe. This participatory democratic assembly occurs every two years and attracts hundreds of people, allowing them to collectively influence policy-making and improve the lives of those living in rural and island Scotland.

This is not just an event but a two-year process involving the citizens of rural Scotland and policymakers. The focus is on enhancing understanding, developing better policies, and taking action to address rural issues.

For the Transport Forum, SRITC embraced the passion and expertise of the SRIP attendees to delve further into the themes identified in the 'A Rural and Island Mobility Plan, Building Blocks' report by looking at the potential outcomes of a successful Scottish RIMP.

# 2. Workshop structure

The workshop structure encouraged open thinking and allowed participants to use their imagination to generate creative solutions to rural transport problems. To facilitate this mind frame, the tables at the workshop were covered in reusable white material, allowing for drawing and writing. The participants were divided into smaller groups (6) and were asked to complete three tasks:

## Task One

The participants were invited to draw or describe their journey to the event - either to Duror (venue) that day or Fort William for the Parliament. This allowed people to reflect on their travel experiences.

The rationale behind this task was to get people thinking about rural transportation from a personal perspective and inform the later topics covered in Tasks 2 and 3. The groups were then asked to share their experiences and arrange reflections on what worked well and what could be improved.

Taking these insights, the groups were asked to match the 'good experiences' and the 'needs improvement experiences' using the deck of cards provided. The cards contained the themes identified in the 'A Rural and Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks' report. This task aimed to connect the points identified in a structured manner and sense-check the previously identified pillars.

## Task Two

The groups were then asked to think about the future and what life will be like in 2033. In particular, they were asked to imagine what transportation would look like through a 'utopian' lens (e.g. rural transport was perfect, all of the problems identified in task one were solved, and the positive aspects of transportation were enhanced).

## Task Three

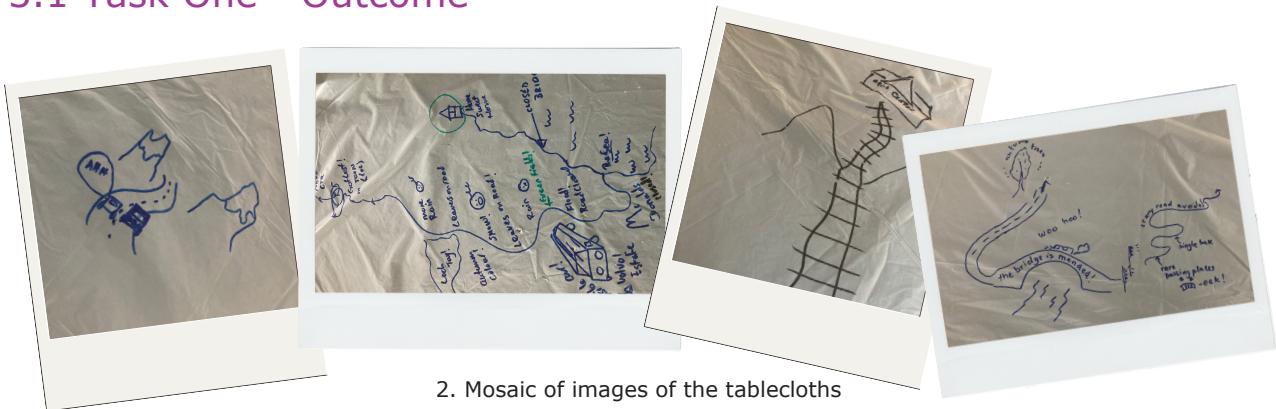
Finally, the groups were asked how this utopian vision was achieved and how the 'six big asks' identified by the original SRITC report from 2022 contributed to this future. This exercise allowed the groups to determine what themes would be the most valuable for the RIMP to include - what would lead to the most positive action taken in the present to step towards the 'utopian future' imagined by the groups.



1. Rural and Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks topic cards

# 3. Outcomes

## 3.1 Task One - Outcome



2. Mosaic of images of the tablecloths

As seen from the mosaic above, three journey experiences emerged from the exercise. These are categorised as car-sharing, multi-modal travel, and public transport.

1. Car-sharing: Many participants carpooled to Fort William; one group even carshared an electric car. The event organisers of SRIP had set up a group What's App chat for the participants to facilitate car sharing, which impacted the popularity of this travel decision. The positive aspects discussed by the participants included their ability to self-organise and connect with others to facilitate carsharing. There was a clear awareness that driving to the venue alone was not sustainable and that, where possible, they should engage in car sharing.

2. Multi-modal travel: The other highlight from the drawings was the use of multimodal forms of transport to reach Fort William. Some participants combined bus and train while others even cycled for a portion of their journey to the venue.

3. Public Transport: The venue for SRIP was across from the train station, and nearby was a set of electric vehicle charging points. The proximity of public transport infrastructure to the venue gave attendees the confidence to book and attend through public transport.

There were, however, two challenges to participants journeys:

Transport scheduling: Several participants noted that they had extended wait times at transport interchanges as the timetables of different modes of transport weren't aligned. One participant highlighted that they had to stay overnight at a node because there was no connection on the day of arrival.

Infrastructure vulnerability: Several participants noted that the roads and rail tracks were impacted by the adverse weather experienced in the region around the time of the event. One participant outlined a car accident on the way to the venue, and others pointed out that a bridge was inaccessible, extending their journey time. Additionally, one group noted that the roads were single-track in place, slowing their journey times.

### 3.1.1 RIMP themes



3. brainstorming notes of workshop teams

The themes from 'A Rural and Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks' (SRITC, 2023) that resonated with participants in the SRIP workshop were (1) Data, (2) accessibility, and (3) Agility and flexibility.

Data: A recurring issue presented by participants related to internet connectivity. For example, participants highlighted their desire to use the train as a mode of transport due to its ability to allow them to work/relax on their devices. However, this was often not possible due to poor internet connectivity.

It was also highlighted that the lack of real-time data on delays and road conditions created blindspots in decision-making for participants. Many participants experienced unexpected delays due to information gaps about road conditions and train/bus schedule delays that affected their onward journey.

Accessibility: Participants noted accessibility as an essential aspect of their journeys. One group highlighted the desire to see more digital solutions for ticketing to help make purchasing tickets easier. However, they underscored the need to be still able to access paper tickets for people without smartphones. Another group highlighted issues about accessing facilities, including toilets, and the need for certainty about access made them reluctant to use public transport.

Agility and Flexibility: All the groups noted that driving was the transport mode of choice due to its flexibility and agility. All of the decisions on breaks, routes and reliability were under their control. They also highlighted the ability of personal vehicles to facilitate the movement of their goods such as bikes and pets.

It was also highlighted that the public transport connections between locations in some areas is poor. Some participants did not have any other choice but to drive. For others, to travel by public transport would have required multiple bus changes that would have taken most of a day to complete, so the value of time became important to the decision-making process.

Additional comments: One group suggested a new theme, 'comfort'. They highlighted how comfort drives a lot of decision-making in travelling. The argument was that while comfort may be a luxury, it was one of the significant factors in the travel choices made by the attendees to SRIP.

The other comment that did not fall into one of the already established themes was using a journey to achieve different outcomes. Some attendees used the journey to visit family, see sights or relax from work.

## 3.2 Task Two - Outcome

The participants were asked to write and draw their 'utopian' 2033 transport vision. The common characteristics that emerged are: (1) a modal shift to public transport, (2) Integrated transport, (3) Greater friction to travel by car, (4) Affordable/free public transport, (5) A9 dual road; (6) Door-to-door public journeys; (7) Consider international models; (8) Decarbonisation (9) Community ownership.

1. Modal shift to public transport: several groups highlighted that public transport in 2033 would be the primary mode of transport in rural areas. The groups focused on how public transport could support low-cost travel options and access to essential services like healthcare. Using public transport was viewed as more important than zero-emission/driverless cars.

2. Integrated Transport: Several groups highlighted the integration of transport planning across modes, including aviation. In particular, participants wanted to see seamless journeys between buses, trains, and ferries without the extended wait times they are currently experiencing. A few participants suggested new modes of flight to support rural areas where the road infrastructure was less developed.

3. Greater friction to travel by car: Many groups highlighted that making public transport more affordable and convenient would only achieve the modal shift they wanted for 2033, if using personal vehicles was more difficult. Suggestions included introducing additional taxes, low-emission zones, or personal vehicle-free zones.

4. Affordable/free public transport: All groups highlighted the need for public transport to be affordable or free. Many participants favoured free bus travel across rural and island regions.

5. A9 dual road: Despite the desire to reduce car usage, another recurring point from the groups was that the A9 would be a dual carriageway by 2033.

6. Door-to-door public journeys: Door-to-door and Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) were popular concepts in the groups, and many envisioned its implementation across rural and island regions.

7. Consider international models: The Scandinavian region was referenced by multiple groups as a role model for Scotland. In particular, the integration and affordability of public transport in the region were highlighted as a 'north-star outcome'.

8. Decarbonisation: In various forms, groups visualised electrification/zero-emission conversion of various modes of transport. The groups highlighted the need for comprehensive transition plans that ensured the accompanying infrastructure was available in rural and island regions to support the conversion.

9. Community-owned: Two groups suggested that public transport would be community-owned. Participants wanted to see the expansion and promotion of community assets to ensure the sustainability of regional services.

### 3.3 Task Three - Outcome

Finally, the groups were asked to answer two questions through the lens of current discussions:

1. What was in the RIMP that achieved the 2033 outcomes?
2. How did the 'Six Asks' help to make this happen?

#### 3.3.1 What was in the RIMP that achieved the 2033 outcomes?



##### **Individual planning for communities**

The rural and island regions are acknowledged in the RIMP to contain different needs and characteristics that require bespoke transport ecosystems.



##### **Flexibility in the delivery of services and innovation**

The RIMP will promote diverse thinking and planning to promote door-to-door public transport systems.



##### **Prioritising transport modes for rural and island challenges**

Transport modes like ferries and planes, which are crucial in some remote regions, will form the focus of the RIMP.



##### **Promote integrated ticketing**

Ticketing will be digital with support for people without access to smartphone technology and utilisable across modes.



##### **Setting out funding commitments**

A commitment that ring-fenced funding will be made available for rural transport challenges.



##### **Holistic asset management**

Transport infrastructure will be owned by and utilised by communities to solve multiple transport problems.



### 3.3.2 How did the six asks help to make this happen?



#### **Innovation fund**

- The innovation fund contributes to the technology referred to in the vision
- Helps small and local business scale



#### **Transport government working group**

- Highlights the rural perspective and voice
- Bring people together
- Keeps policy and legislation up-to-date with needs and developments



#### **Procurement framework**

- Buying solutions focused on rural problems
- Smaller projects more quickly launched
- Source locally



#### **STEM**

- Creating skilled rural workforce
- Injects new ways of thinking



#### **Open data framework**

- Enables integrated mobility



4. 6 Asks by SRITC

# 4. Youth Parliament

The SRIP Youth Parliament, run parallel to the event, brought together 75 young people from across rural & islands areas and the rural third sector. Together, with the help of Mairi Gougeon MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands), they created 10 demands for each area of rural & islands policy.

The SRIP Youth Parliament's Transport Demand:

**"We want a public transport service (using all modes) that is more sustainable, reliable, and frequent for everyone in Scotland."**

Next steps:



In January, Ms Mhairi Gougeon held a parliamentary debate on the 10 demands conceived at the Scottish Rural and Islands Youth Parliament. The young people, supported by Scottish Rural Action (SRA), spoke with the First Minister and Cabinet to discuss their demands and propose future actions.



In 2024, Rural & Islands youth will engage with the design of the upcoming Rural Delivery Plan, ensuring their 10 demands are integrated into the plan.



Until the next Rural & Islands Parliament, the youth delegates will continue to feed into policy design, delivery, and consultation processes.



It is hoped that, at SRIP 2026, the Youth will reconvene to update their policy demands. This will allow the meaningful consultation of rural & islands youth to continue into the future.

The 10 demands can be found below\*:



5. Youth Parliament 10 demands

\*Click [here](#) to see the original image.

# 5. The Way Forward

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This report has built upon the findings presented in 'Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport' (2022) and then subsequently 'A Rural and Island Mobility Plan; Building Blocks' (2023). Over 250 participants have contributed to this process to date through a series of co-designed and co-created workshops. This adopted methodology ensures validity at all stages whilst providing depth to the details and visions shared. This has been achieved through a huge amount of volunteer time and financial support from Scottish Rural Action and Smarter Choices Smarter Places.

SRITC will take forward the 6 themes envisioned for 2033:



Individual planning for communities



Flexibility in services



Support a transport modes hierarchy



Encourage integrated ticketing



Aspire to ring fenced funding for rural and island transport



Encourage community and partnership asset owning

All 6 themes to be considered at all opportunities similar to rural proofing.

# 6. Useful Resources

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Scottish Rural and Island Transport Community (2023) The SRITC Gathering 2023 Report available at

[https://ruralmobility.scot/images/SRITC\\_Gathering\\_2023\\_Report.pdf](https://ruralmobility.scot/images/SRITC_Gathering_2023_Report.pdf).

Scottish Rural and Island Transport Community (2022) Spotlight on Rural & Islands Transport Report 2022 available at

[https://ruralmobility.scot/images/NTS2\\_Spotlight\\_on\\_Rural\\_Islands\\_Transport.pdf](https://ruralmobility.scot/images/NTS2_Spotlight_on_Rural_Islands_Transport.pdf).



## Acknowledgements

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Rural & Islands  
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A Community Interest Company