

Appendix B - Evidence Review

Summary

Transport accessibility creates public value across several policy areas. It supports access to employment and education, enables access to healthcare and preventative services, helps residents to remain independent and sustains participation in community life. The benefits and costs of transport interventions extend beyond transport budgets alone and should be considered across Dorset and its partners.

Five themes emerge consistently throughout the evidence reviewed:

- **Transport is an enabler of economic opportunity.** Access to transport influences access to employment, education, skills and wider economic participation.
- **Transport is a determinant of health and wellbeing.** Public and community transport support access to healthcare, physical activity, social participation and mental wellbeing.
- **Transport supports prevention and independent living.** Accessible transport enables people to remain connected to their communities and reduces the risk of social isolation and escalating support needs.
- **Rural communities derive particularly high value from transport accessibility.** Where alternatives are limited, transport often acts as a critical enabler of access to services and opportunities.
- **Integrated transport systems deliver greater public value than fragmented approaches.** Growing evidence supports the coordination of public transport, community transport, demand responsive transport and wider public service transport assets.

Evidence finding	Strength of evidence	Relevant FBC objective	Relevant package	Implication for delivery or monitoring
Reliable transport improves access to employment and education	Strong	Objectives 1, 2 and 5	A and D	Monitor access to key destinations, participation and service reliability
Community Transport supports healthcare access and independence	Strong for accessibility; less certain for avoided costs	Objectives 2 and 3	C and E	Strengthen referral pathways and monitor healthcare journeys
Integrated planning may improve asset utilisation	Emerging and context-dependent	Objective 4	B and C	Test through pilots before assuming efficiencies
DRT can address defined rural accessibility gaps	Mixed and context-dependent	Objectives 1, 2 and 3	F	Use targeted pilots with clear affordability thresholds

Introduction

Purpose of this Review

The purpose of this review is to assess whether the available evidence supports the investment rationale, intended outcomes and preferred Integrated Transport Model developed through Dorset Council's Public Buses and Community Transport Transformation Programme.

Transport plays a fundamental role in connecting people to employment, education, healthcare, services and community life. Whilst transport interventions are often assessed through traditional measures such as passenger numbers, journey times and operating costs, there is increasing recognition that the wider impacts of transport investment extend far beyond the transport sector itself. Contemporary transport policy and research increasingly view transport accessibility as a key determinant of economic participation, health outcomes, independence, social mobility and quality of life (National Audit Office, 2025).

The purpose of this review is to establish the evidence base underpinning the council's preferred Integrated Transport Model and the proposals developed through the Public and Community Transport Transformation Programme.

The review seeks to answer a series of strategic questions that sit at the heart of the Full Business Case:

- What contribution does public and community transport make to wider economic, social and health outcomes?
- What is the evidence linking transport accessibility to employment, wellbeing and community resilience?
- What role should public and community transport play within rural areas?
- How can transport interventions support wider council priorities around prevention, independence and economic prosperity?
- What evidence exists to support more integrated approaches to transport delivery?

By addressing these questions, the review provides the strategic justification for investment in public buses, community transport, demand responsive transport and wider transport integration initiatives.

The review does not seek to demonstrate that transport investment alone will deliver each of these outcomes. Rather, it examines whether improved accessibility is a credible contributing mechanism and identifies the conditions under which benefits are most likely to arise.

The review also seeks to ensure that Dorset's preferred approach is grounded in national evidence and best practice rather than being developed solely in response to local circumstances. It is intended to demonstrate that the direction of travel identified through the Outline Business Case is consistent with a substantial body of research, national evaluation findings and Government policy developed over the last two decades.

Context

In January 2026 Dorset Council commissioned the development of a business case to explore how public and community transport services could evolve to better meet the needs of residents whilst delivering improved value for money and supporting wider Council priorities.

The Outline Business Case concluded that Dorset's transport challenges are driven by a combination of factors including:

- A large and predominantly rural geography.
- A dispersed settlement pattern.
- An ageing population.
- Significant levels of transport dependency amongst some communities.
- Increasing pressure on public services.
- Continuing financial constraints affecting both public transport and community transport provision.

The OBC identified an Integrated Transport Model as the preferred direction of travel. The model is built around three complementary components:

1. **Reshaping Demand:** enabling people to use the most appropriate, proportionate and independent travel option available. .

2. **System Integration:** improving coordination between transport providers, public services and other stakeholders to create a more joined-up and efficient transport system.
3. **Flexible Supply:** developing a transport network that combines public buses, community transport, demand responsive transport and other flexible transport solutions to better meet the needs of different communities.

This review examines the extent to which these components are supported by evidence from across the United Kingdom and assesses the likely contribution of integrated transport approaches towards Dorset's strategic objectives.

The three components are intended to operate as a single system. Reshaping Demand concerns how residents are enabled and supported to travel; System Integration concerns how services, assets, information and commissioning arrangements are coordinated; and Flexible Supply concerns the mix of provision required to meet different levels and patterns of demand. The FBC should therefore test both the case for each component and the additional value potentially created by their interaction.

Methodology

The literature relating to transport accessibility, public transport and community transport is extensive and spans multiple disciplines including transport planning, economics, public health, social policy, rural studies and community development.

Rather than undertaking full review of hundreds of individual studies, this document adopts an evidence synthesis approach. The review draws primarily upon major national evidence reviews, Government evaluations and research programmes that have themselves reviewed substantial bodies of underlying literature.

Particular emphasis has been given to evidence sources that:

- Focus specifically on transport accessibility and inclusion.
- Examine wider economic and social outcomes rather than transport outputs alone.
- Include rural or semi-rural case studies relevant to Dorset.
- Draw upon robust evaluation methodologies.
- Are widely cited within transport policy and appraisal guidance.

The review therefore synthesises findings from:

- Department for Transport research and evaluation programmes.
- Bus Back Better: The National Bus Strategy.
- National Audit Office reviews of local bus services.
- Rural Mobility Fund evaluations.
- Greener Journeys and University of Leeds research.
- Transport for Quality of Life evidence reviews.
- Campaign for Better Transport research.
- Community Transport sector evidence.
- Public health and transport research.
- Academic research from leading UK universities.

Where possible, findings have been triangulated across multiple sources to identify recurring themes and areas of consensus. Priority has been given to conclusions that emerge consistently across different studies, methodologies and policy contexts.

Scope of the Review

The review focuses on evidence published between approximately 2006 and 2026. This period captures significant developments in transport policy and includes:

- Growing recognition of transport as a determinant of social inclusion.
- The emergence of integrated transport and total transport approaches.
- The development of Community Transport as a strategic transport sector.
- Demand Responsive Transport trials and evaluations.
- Increasing focus on preventative public services.
- Bus Back Better and subsequent public transport reforms.

The review concentrates primarily on evidence from England and the wider United Kingdom, although internationally recognised research is referenced where it contributes relevant insights.

The analysis is organised around the key outcomes that transport investment is intended to support

These themes reflect both the evidence gathered through the Outline Business Case and the strategic objectives identified through Dorset Council's Corporate Plan and Local Transport Plan.

Outcome	Overall evidence assessment	Principal mechanism	Relevance to the model
Employment and education access	Strong	More opportunities become reachable at acceptable time and cost	Flexible Supply; System Integration
Healthcare access	Strong for access; weaker for avoided healthcare cost	More reliable access to appointments and services	All three components
Social participation and independence	Strong association and plausible causal mechanism	Enables participation and reduces mobility-related exclusion	Reshaping Demand; Flexible Supply
Productivity and local economic growth	Moderate	Wider labour markets and improved connectivity	System Integration; Flexible Supply
Reduced public service demand	Emerging	Earlier access and maintained independence may reduce escalation	Reshaping Demand
Integrated asset efficiencies	Emerging and context-dependent	Coordination may reduce duplication and improve utilisation	System Integration
Rural DRT sustainability	Mixed and context-dependent	Flexible routing can improve access where fixed routes are unsuitable	Flexible Supply

Limitations

- Transport interventions rarely operate in isolation. Economic, health and social outcomes are influenced by a wide range of factors, making it challenging to attribute outcomes solely to transport improvements
 - Many of the benefits associated with transport are indirect and occur over long time periods. Whilst economic outputs such as employment participation are often measurable, wider outcomes such as wellbeing, independence and community resilience can be more difficult to quantify.
- Much of the evidence reviewed identifies associations rather than direct causation. For example, areas with stronger public transport often exhibit better economic outcomes, but transport is only one of several factors contributing to those outcomes.

Whilst individual studies vary in methodology and focus, there is a striking consistency across the evidence base.

Government reviews, academic research, sector studies and national evaluations repeatedly identify similar conclusions regarding the wider value of public and community transport. This consistency provides a strong basis for drawing strategic conclusions about the role transport can play in supporting wider public policy objectives.

Public Transport and Economic Prosperity

Employment and Labour Market Participation

Overview

A recurring theme throughout UK transport policy, economic research and accessibility studies is the strong relationship between transport accessibility and labour market participation. Over the last two decades, evidence has increasingly demonstrated that access to affordable and reliable public transport influences not only an individual's ability to access employment, but also wider labour market efficiency, workforce productivity and economic inclusion. Public transport is therefore increasingly regarded as a component of economic infrastructure rather than solely a transport service.

For Dorset, these findings are particularly relevant given the county's dispersed settlement pattern, ageing population, seasonal economy and concentration of employment opportunities within a relatively limited number of larger towns and service centres.

Does Access to Transport Influence Employment?

The evidence consistently suggests that access to transport influences both whether individuals can access employment and the range of employment opportunities available to them.

Research undertaken by the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds identified a statistically significant relationship between public transport accessibility and employment rates. Areas with stronger transport connectivity tend to experience higher labour market participation and lower levels of transport-related exclusion. The research concluded that bus services play a critical role in connecting people to employment opportunities and supporting economic activity.

(KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies, 2016)

Transport barriers can affect employment in several ways:

- Limiting the number of jobs accessible within reasonable travel times.
- Restricting access to shift work and non-standard working hours.
- Increasing the cost of travel to employment.
- Reducing flexibility in responding to employment opportunities.
- Limiting access to training and skills development opportunities.

For individuals without access to private vehicles, public transport often defines the practical extent of the labour market available to them. As a result, poor transport connectivity can create a significant barrier to employment even where jobs are available. (KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies, 2016)

Written evidence submitted by Greener Journeys submitted to a Parliamentary inquiry in 2019 reported that 77% of jobseekers and 87% of jobseekers aged 16-24 did not have access to a car. These groups therefore rely disproportionately on public transport to access employment opportunities.

The National Bus Strategy, published in 2021, similarly highlights that buses remain essential in connecting people to jobs and supporting social mobility, particularly outside major urban areas where transport options may be more limited.

Does Improved Accessibility Increase Economic Participation?

The evidence suggests that improved accessibility contributes positively to economic participation at both an individual and system-wide level.

Public transport improvements increase the number of employment opportunities that can be reached within acceptable travel times. This improves labour market matching, enabling employers to recruit from a wider pool of workers whilst also increasing opportunities available to residents.

Research reviewed by (KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies, 2016) concluded that accessibility improvements can support:

- Increased employment participation.
- Improved job retention.
- Better matching between jobs and skills.

- Greater workforce mobility.
- Reduced economic exclusion.

The Department for Transport increasingly recognises transport accessibility as a determinant of economic opportunity. The National Bus Strategy (2021) explicitly positions buses as critical enablers of economic growth and widening access to opportunity.

For Dorset, improved accessibility may be particularly important in supporting:

- Health and care sector recruitment.
- Tourism and hospitality employment.
- Access to education and training.
- Rural workforce participation.
- Access to employment opportunities for younger people.

These outcomes align closely with wider council priorities relating to economic growth, prosperity and inclusive communities.

Which Groups Benefit Most?

Whilst improvements to public transport benefit all users, the evidence demonstrates that some groups derive disproportionately high benefits.

Young People

Young people consistently emerge as one of the groups most dependent on public transport.

Access to reliable transport influences:

- Educational participation.
- Apprenticeships.
- Entry-level employment.
- Access to training.
- Social mobility.

Poor transport can restrict life opportunities and contribute to inequalities in access to education and employment.

Low-Income Households

Lower-income households are less likely to own private vehicles and more likely to rely on public transport.

The KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies (2016) review found that transport accessibility is closely linked to deprivation levels and economic inclusion. Improvements in public transport therefore often generate greater benefits for lower-income communities than for higher-income households.

Older People

Although older people are often associated with healthcare and social journeys, transport also supports economic participation through volunteering, caring responsibilities, part-time employment and community activities. Public transport can therefore support continued participation and independence later in life (National Audit Office, 2025).

Rural Communities

Rural communities typically experience fewer transport options and greater transport dependency.

As a result, improvements in accessibility often generate larger marginal benefits than similar improvements in urban areas. The Rural Mobility Fund evaluation (DfT, 2025) found that accessibility improvements frequently enabled access to opportunities that were previously unavailable.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests that investment in public transport can contribute directly to several strategic priorities by:

- Improving access to employment opportunities.
- Supporting workforce recruitment and retention.
- Reducing transport-related exclusion.
- Supporting younger people into education and employment.
- Increasing economic participation amongst rural communities.

Transport should therefore be viewed not solely as a service supporting mobility, but as an important component of Dorset's wider economic infrastructure.

Economic Growth and Productivity

Overview

Historically, transport investment has been justified primarily through journey time savings and transport efficiency. More recently, however, research has increasingly recognised the wider economic impacts generated by transport connectivity.

Current evidence suggests that transport investment can contribute to:

- Productivity growth.
- Labour market efficiency.
- Business competitiveness.
- Economic resilience.
- Regeneration and place-making.

As a result, transport is increasingly viewed as a catalyst for economic development rather than merely a supporting service (England's Economic Heartland, 2025).

Do Buses Contribute to Productivity?

The evidence indicates that buses contribute to productivity in several ways.

Research undertaken by KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies (2016) found that approximately 2.5 million people travel to work by bus and that bus users collectively contribute in excess of £64 billion annually in economic output. The study concluded that buses play an important role in enabling economic activity and supporting national productivity.

Productivity benefits arise through:

- Access to larger labour markets.
- Improved workforce reliability.
- Better matching of labour and employment opportunities.
- Reduced recruitment constraints.
- Increased participation in economic activity.

The National Bus Strategy (2021) similarly identifies buses as a driver of economic productivity, enabling people to access employment, education and services while supporting economic growth.

Do Transport Improvements Widen Labour Markets?

Transport improvements effectively increase the size of functional labour markets by reducing barriers to travel.

This generates benefits for both residents and employers:

Benefits for Residents

- More jobs become accessible.
- Greater employment choice.
- Better access to higher-skilled roles.

- Increased opportunities for career progression.

Benefits for Employers

- Larger labour pools.
- Improved recruitment.
- Increased workforce resilience.
- Reduced labour shortages.

Research consistently finds that accessibility improvements can strengthen local economies by increasing effective connectivity between population centres and employment locations.

For Dorset, this is particularly relevant given the geographical separation between many communities and key employment locations including Weymouth, Dorchester, Bournemouth, Poole, Salisbury, Yeovil and Exeter.

What is the Economic Return on Investment?

Evidence increasingly demonstrates that bus investment generates substantial economic returns beyond direct transport benefits.

A recent KPMG (2025) assessment of local bus services found:

- £2.6 billion annual expenditure associated with bus passengers.
- £580 million annual direct and indirect economic activity.
- £951 million annual social and environmental benefits.

Most significantly, the report estimated that every £1 invested in bus services could generate up to £4.55 in wider economic and social benefits.

Although these figures relate to a wider regional geography rather than Dorset specifically, they provide strong evidence that transport investment generates significant wider benefits.

Wider Economic Benefits

Research also identifies several economic benefits that are often poorly captured through traditional transport appraisal:

- Increased consumer spending.
- Improved town centre vitality.
- Better access to skills and education.
- Enhanced visitor economy performance.
- Increased social and economic inclusion.

These wider benefits are particularly important when considering transport investment within predominantly rural areas.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence demonstrates that bus investment should be viewed as a mechanism for supporting economic growth and productivity rather than simply maintaining transport provision.

Investment in Dorset's public transport network has the potential to:

- Improve labour market accessibility.
- Support local business growth.
- Expand employment catchments.
- Support economic resilience.
- Enhance the viability of rural communities.

Town Centres, High Streets and Visitor Economy

Overview

Public transport plays an important role in supporting town centres, local economies and visitor destinations.

Whilst often overlooked in transport appraisal, access to retail, leisure, cultural and tourism activities generates significant economic activity and contributes to the vitality of places.

The evidence suggests that public transport investment can support economic development by improving access to town centres and visitor destinations whilst reducing barriers to participation.

What Impact Does Public Transport Have on Town Centres?

Research indicates that buses play a significant role in supporting town and city centre economies.

KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies (2016) found that buses facilitate approximately 29% of expenditure in many town and city centres and are often the primary mode of access for significant numbers of customers.

Public transport supports town centres by:

- Enabling access for non-drivers.
- Supporting footfall.
- Supporting local retail businesses.
- Improving access to public services.
- Connecting surrounding communities to service centres.

For Dorset, these effects are particularly relevant to market towns such as Dorchester, Bridport, Sherborne, Wimborne, Blandford Forum, Shaftesbury and Gillingham.

What Impact Does Public Transport Have on Local Spending?

Bus users make a significant contribution to local economies through spending in:

- Retail centres.
- Hospitality businesses.
- Leisure venues.
- Local services.
- Community facilities.

Public transport therefore contributes not only through direct transport benefits but also by supporting local economic activity and consumer spending.

Research suggests that the economic importance of bus passengers is often underestimated because many wider spending impacts occur outside transport appraisal frameworks (England's Economic Heartland, 2025).

What Impact Does Public Transport Have on the Visitor Economy?

Transport accessibility is an important determinant of visitor activity.

Improved transport can support tourism by:

- Increasing access to destinations.
- Reducing reliance on private cars.
- Supporting sustainable tourism.
- Improving connectivity with rail services and transport hubs.
- Improving access to events and attractions (Transport for London, 2024).

Health, Wellbeing and Prevention

Access to Healthcare

Overview

The relationship between transport and healthcare access has become increasingly prominent within both transport policy and public health research over the last two decades. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that access to transport is a significant determinant of access to healthcare, particularly for older people, disabled people, rural communities and those without access to a private vehicle. Increasingly, transport is being recognised as a "wider determinant of health", influencing an individual's ability to access treatment, preventative services and support networks.

As healthcare services have become more specialised and geographically concentrated, the availability of reliable transport has become increasingly important. This is particularly relevant within Dorset where residents often travel significant distances to access acute, specialist and outpatient services.

What Happens When Transport is Unavailable?

The evidence consistently indicates that poor transport accessibility creates barriers to healthcare access.

Research reviewed by KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies (2016), Transport for Quality of Life (2023) and the Department for Transport (2025) identifies transport barriers as contributing to:

- Missed appointments.
- Delayed treatment.
- Reduced access to preventative healthcare.
- Lower uptake of screening programmes.
- Reduced engagement with community-based support services.
- Poorer health outcomes.

Transport barriers have the greatest impact on:

- Older people.
- Disabled residents.
- Rural communities.
- People on lower incomes.
- Individuals without access to private vehicles.

For many residents, particularly within rural areas, transport availability determines whether healthcare can be accessed independently, with support from family members, or not at all.

The National Audit Office (2025) observed that buses remain an essential means of accessing healthcare services and highlighted the disproportionate reliance placed upon public transport by vulnerable populations.

Impact on Missed Appointments

Transport has emerged as a key factor influencing attendance at healthcare appointments.

A lack of available transport can result in:

- Missed outpatient appointments.
- Delayed diagnosis.
- Reduced compliance with treatment pathways.
- Increased pressure on carers and families.

- Deteriorating health conditions.

Whilst the direct costs of missed appointments are often borne by health services, the underlying cause may be transport-related rather than healthcare-related.

The Dorset Community Transport Roundtable provided strong local evidence supporting these national findings. Multiple operators reported substantial growth in healthcare journeys and highlighted increasing demand linked to difficulties accessing hospital appointments through conventional transport options. Several providers noted that healthcare transport now represents the majority of journeys undertaken by their organisations.

Particularly noteworthy was the concern expressed by participants regarding changing eligibility criteria for non-emergency patient transport and the resulting transfer of demand into Community Transport services. Providers reported that Community Transport is increasingly acting as an informal extension of the healthcare transport system.

Access to Preventative Services

Evidence from Transport for London (2024) and through the Department for Transport's Social, Behavioural and Evaluation Research programme suggests that transport plays a particularly important role in supporting preventative healthcare.

Preventative interventions typically rely upon regular and timely access to services such as:

- GP surgeries.
- Community clinics.
- Screening programmes.
- Rehabilitation services.
- Day opportunities.
- Social prescribing initiatives.
- Community wellbeing services.

Poor transport accessibility can therefore reduce engagement with preventative services, increasing the likelihood that health issues will escalate and require more resource-intensive interventions at a later stage.

This finding aligns closely with Dorset's emerging Integrated Transport Model, particularly the "Reshaping Demand" component which seeks to support individuals to remain independent and access services earlier and more effectively.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence reviewed suggests that transport accessibility should be recognised as a component of healthcare accessibility.

In Dorset, where healthcare provision is often concentrated within a relatively small number of centres and where an ageing population generates increasing healthcare demand, transport has the potential to influence:

- Healthcare equity.
- Patient experience.
- Access to treatment.
- Independent living.
- Demand for specialist transport services.

Consequently, investment in transport can reasonably be expected to generate benefits extending well beyond the transport sector itself.

Physical Health

Overview

The link between transport and physical health is increasingly recognised within UK public health policy.

Whilst public transport is rarely viewed primarily as a health intervention, evidence demonstrates that public transport use contributes positively to health outcomes through physical activity, reduced inactivity and increased mobility. Public transport therefore supports wider public health objectives relating to healthy lifestyles and healthy ageing (Transport for Quality of Life, 2023).

Contribution of Public Transport to Daily Activity

Unlike private car journeys, almost all public transport journeys incorporate some form of active travel.

Users typically walk between:

- Homes and bus stops.
- Interchange points.
- Transport hubs.
- Final destinations.

Transport for London (2024) and wider public health evidence suggest that these walking elements can make a significant contribution towards recommended daily activity levels.

Research consistently finds that public transport users:

- Walk more frequently.
- Undertake more incidental physical activity.
- Exhibit lower dependence on fully sedentary travel modes.

This is particularly important in an environment where inactivity represents a major public health challenge.

Health Outcomes Associated with Public Transport Use

Evidence suggests a range of positive health outcomes are associated with public transport accessibility and use.

These include:

- Increased physical activity.
- Improved cardiovascular health.
- Reduced sedentary behaviour.
- Increased community mobility.
- Improved wellbeing through greater independence.

Transport can therefore contribute indirectly towards wider public health priorities by creating opportunities for everyday physical activity.

Healthy Ageing

The relationship between mobility and healthy ageing is particularly relevant to Dorset.

Maintaining the ability to travel independently supports:

- Continued community participation.
- Ongoing access to services.
- Physical activity.
- Mental wellbeing.
- Social interaction.

Evidence consistently suggests that mobility is closely linked to quality of life in later life and that transport accessibility can support healthier, more independent ageing.

Implications for Dorset

The health benefits associated with public transport are rarely captured within traditional transport appraisal yet may generate significant value.

For Dorset's ageing population, accessible and convenient public and community transport has the potential to contribute not only to mobility objectives but also to health and wellbeing outcomes.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Overview

Over the last decade growing attention has been paid to the relationship between transport accessibility and wellbeing.

Research increasingly recognises that transport affects an individual's ability to participate in community life, maintain relationships and access activities that contribute positively to wellbeing. Consequently, transport is now widely viewed as a determinant of social wellbeing rather than solely a transport service (Campaign for Better Transport, 2023).

Relationship Between Transport and Social Participation

The ability to travel influences an individual's capacity to participate in social, community and civic life.

Evidence reviewed by KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies (2016) demonstrates that transport accessibility supports participation in:

- Community activities.
- Volunteering.
- Social groups.
- Leisure activities.
- Cultural events.
- Family and social networks.

Transport barriers can therefore result in gradual withdrawal from community life and increased risk of exclusion.

The Dorset Community Transport Roundtable strongly reinforced this theme. Participants repeatedly highlighted that many journeys are not simply transport journeys but opportunities to maintain social connections, attend community activities and remain connected to local support networks.

Relationship Between Transport and Loneliness

A substantial body of evidence links transport accessibility with loneliness and social isolation.

The Campaign for Better Transport (2023) identifies buses as an important tool for reducing social exclusion and enabling residents to remain connected with communities and support networks.

Similarly, the Community Transport Roundtable highlighted concerns that increasing healthcare demand is displacing social journeys, potentially undermining the preventative benefits associated with social participation. Providers expressed concern that reductions in access to lunch clubs, community events and social activities can contribute to loneliness and declining wellbeing.

The evidence suggests that transport interventions supporting social participation may deliver wider wellbeing benefits that are not readily visible within traditional transport metrics.

Community Resilience and Wellbeing

Transport also contributes to community resilience.

Through enabling participation, volunteering and mutual support, transport infrastructure helps sustain social networks that support vulnerable residents and strengthen communities.

This role is particularly important within rural communities where opportunities for social interaction may be more limited and distances between services are greater.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence indicates that transport accessibility contributes directly to wider wellbeing outcomes.

Investment in transport should therefore be viewed not solely in terms of mobility benefits but also through its contribution to:

- Community participation.
- Reduced loneliness.
- Stronger social networks.
- Improved wellbeing.
- Community resilience.

These outcomes align closely with Dorset Council priorities relating to healthy communities and prevention.

Preventative Value and Reduced Public Service Demand

Overview

Perhaps the strongest emerging theme within recent transport research is the concept of transport as a preventative intervention.

Traditionally, transport and public services have operated largely independently. However, increasing evidence suggests that transport accessibility can influence demand for health, social care and other public services by enabling individuals to remain independent and engaged within their communities.

Does Transport Delay or Prevent Escalation into More Costly Services?

The evidence increasingly suggests that it does.

Transport accessibility supports early intervention by enabling access to:

- Healthcare services.
- Preventative support.
- Community activities.
- Informal support networks.
- Volunteering and social participation.

By maintaining these connections, transport may help prevent deterioration in health and wellbeing and reduce reliance on more intensive public services.

Whilst the precise scale of these benefits remains difficult to quantify, there is growing consensus that they are significant.

The DfT's Rural Mobility Fund evaluation (2025), Community Transport evidence and wider accessibility research all indicate that improved transport contributes to wider outcomes that extend beyond mobility itself.

Rural Communities and Inclusive Growth

Overview

The relationship between transport accessibility and rural prosperity has become an increasingly important area of policy, research and investment over the last two decades. Whilst transport challenges exist across all geographies, evidence consistently shows that rural communities experience disproportionately high impacts from transport disadvantage due to lower population densities, longer travel distances, reduced service frequencies and fewer alternatives to private car travel (DfT, 2023)

In rural areas, transport is often more than a means of travel. It acts as an enabling mechanism that underpins access to employment, education, healthcare, retail services, social networks and community life. Consequently, transport accessibility is increasingly recognised as a key determinant of inclusive growth and rural sustainability.

For Dorset, these findings are particularly significant. The county's dispersed settlement pattern, ageing population, nationally significant visitor economy and extensive rural geography mean that transport accessibility plays a critical role in determining opportunities available to residents and businesses alike.

Rural Accessibility

Overview

Rural accessibility has emerged as one of the strongest themes within recent transport policy and evaluation work.

Research by Chatterjee, Beyazit, and Shergold (2025) demonstrates that the consequences of transport disadvantage are more significant in rural areas because residents often have fewer alternatives available. Where transport services are withdrawn or unavailable, the effects can extend beyond mobility to influence economic participation, social inclusion, health outcomes and community resilience.

The evidence increasingly suggests that traditional approaches to transport appraisal can underestimate the value of rural transport because benefits are often realised through accessibility, inclusion and opportunity rather than high passenger volumes alone (DfT, 2025)

What Happens When Rural Communities Lose Transport?

Evidence suggests that loss of transport services can have far-reaching consequences for rural communities.

The DfT's Rural Mobility Fund evaluation (2025) found that transport services in rural areas frequently perform a social and economic function beyond their immediate transport role. In many communities, transport services represent the primary means of connecting residents to employment, healthcare, education and essential services.

Research identifies several common impacts associated with declining rural transport provision:

Increased Social Isolation

Residents without access to private vehicles may become increasingly isolated from services, social networks and community activities. This can have implications for wellbeing, independence and quality of life.

Reduced Access to Services

Transport withdrawal can reduce access to:

- Healthcare.
- Education.
- Employment.
- Retail facilities.
- Financial services.

- Community support services.

Increased Car Dependency

Where alternatives are unavailable, households become increasingly dependent on private vehicles. Whilst this may be manageable for some residents, it can create significant challenges for:

- Younger people.
- Older people.
- Lower-income households.
- People unable to drive.

Declining Community Resilience

Evidence suggests transport contributes to the viability and resilience of rural communities by enabling access to services and facilitating participation in community life. Loss of connectivity may therefore undermine wider community sustainability.

What Are the Economic Consequences?

Transport accessibility influences rural economies through several mechanisms.

Employment Access

Poor transport can limit access to employment opportunities and increase labour market constraints. Research suggests that residents of poorly connected rural communities may face reduced employment options and longer travel times, potentially limiting participation in the labour market (University of the West of England, 2024)

Business Competitiveness

Businesses operating in rural areas often rely on transport networks to access workers, customers and supply chains. Limited transport can increase recruitment difficulties and restrict business growth (KPMG and Institute for Transport Studies, 2016)

Access to Town Centres

Many rural communities rely on nearby towns for access to retail, leisure and professional services. Transport connectivity therefore supports wider local economic activity and spending patterns (England's Economic Heartland, 2025).

Tourism and Visitor Economy

Areas dependent on tourism may benefit from improved accessibility through increased visitation and reduced reliance on private vehicles (Transport for London, 2024). This is particularly relevant within Dorset's visitor economy.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests that maintaining and improving accessibility in rural areas should be viewed as an economic and social investment rather than solely a transport intervention.

For Dorset this implies that transport investment should be assessed against its contribution to:

- Economic participation.
- Community sustainability.
- Service accessibility.
- Social inclusion.
- Rural resilience.

Such outcomes align closely with the objectives of the Integrated Transport Model and Dorset's wider growth ambitions.

Social Mobility and Young People

Overview

Transport accessibility is recognised as a determinant of social mobility.

For many young people, particularly those living in rural areas, transport availability influences educational opportunities, access to employment, participation in training and wider life chances. The evidence suggests that transport barriers can constrain social mobility by limiting access to opportunities beyond an individual's immediate locality.

What Is the Impact on Post-16 Education?

Research consistently identifies transport as an important factor influencing participation in post-16 education.

Accessible transport supports attendance at:

- Further education colleges.
- Sixth forms.
- Apprenticeships.
- Skills training programmes.
- Higher education opportunities.

Transport limitations may result in:

- Reduced educational choice.
- Increased travel costs.
- Longer journey times.
- Barriers to participation.

The impact is often greatest in rural areas where destinations are more dispersed and transport options more limited.

What Is the Impact on Access to Employment?

For young people entering the labour market, transport often determines which employment opportunities are realistically accessible.

The evidence suggests transport can influence:

- Access to first jobs.
- Apprenticeship participation.
- Entry-level employment.
- Work experience opportunities.
- Career progression.

Research has shown that young people are among the groups most reliant on public transport due to lower levels of car ownership and financial resources. As a result, transport accessibility plays a disproportionately important role in shaping economic opportunities (National Audit Office, 2025).

What Is the Impact on Opportunities for Young People?

Transport affects much more than employment and education.

Evidence from Campaign for Better Transport (2023) indicates transport accessibility supports:

- Access to leisure activities.
- Participation in sport.
- Cultural engagement.

- Volunteering.
- Social interaction.

These experiences contribute to personal development, wellbeing and long-term social mobility.

DfT's National Bus Strategy (2021) explicitly identifies transport as an enabler of opportunity and social mobility, particularly for those who would otherwise face barriers to participation.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests that public transport investment can support young people by widening access to:

- Education.
- Skills development.
- Employment.
- Community participation.
- Social opportunities.

This provides a strong rationale for considering the needs of younger people when designing Dorset's future transport system.

Ageing Population

Overview

Dorset has one of the oldest population profiles in England, making the relationship between transport, ageing and independence particularly important.

Transport accessibility is increasingly recognised as a factor supporting healthy ageing, social participation and independent living. Evidence from Transport for London (2024) suggests that mobility and quality of life become increasingly interconnected as people age.

How Does Transport Support Ageing Well?

Research identifies several mechanisms through which transport contributes to healthy ageing.

Maintaining Independence

The ability to travel independently allows individuals to continue accessing services, activities and opportunities without relying entirely on family members or carers.

Access to Healthcare

Older residents typically have higher healthcare needs. Accessible transport therefore becomes increasingly important in supporting attendance at appointments and maintaining continuity of care.

Supporting Physical Activity

Public transport use often incorporates walking and other forms of active travel, contributing positively to health and wellbeing.

Enabling Social Participation

Transport enables continued engagement with community activities, volunteering, social groups and family networks, all of which contribute positively to wellbeing.

Community Transport

Overview

Whilst public bus services form the backbone of most transport systems, Community Transport provides an equally important, but often less visible, role in enabling accessibility, independence and inclusion. Across the UK, Community Transport has evolved from a collection of local volunteer-led initiatives into a recognised part of the wider transport ecosystem, particularly within rural areas and for those residents whose needs cannot be met effectively through conventional public transport services alone.

Increasingly, it is recognised that Community Transport generates value extending far beyond the transport journeys delivered. Community Transport contributes to healthcare access, social inclusion, independent living, community resilience and prevention outcomes, often acting as a critical safety net for vulnerable residents and communities (University of the West of England, 2024).

This is particularly relevant in Dorset, where rural geography, dispersed settlements and an ageing population create transport challenges that cannot always be addressed through conventional fixed-route services alone.

Community Transport as Social Infrastructure

Overview

A strong theme emerging from both national evidence and Dorset's engagement activity is that Community Transport should not be viewed solely as a transport service.

Instead, Community Transport increasingly functions as a form of social infrastructure that enables access to opportunities, services and support networks that would otherwise be inaccessible for many residents. This broader interpretation is becoming increasingly common within transport policy, health policy and rural development literature.

What Role Does Community Transport Play?

The evidence indicates that Community Transport performs multiple functions simultaneously.

Accessibility Function

Community Transport provides access where conventional services are absent, infrequent or unsuitable.

This includes:

- Healthcare appointments.
- Shopping trips.
- Social activities.
- Education and training opportunities.
- Employment journeys.
- Access to community services.

The DfT's Rural Mobility Fund evaluation (2025) highlighted that transport interventions in rural areas are often valued not because they deliver large passenger volumes, but because they enable access to opportunities that would otherwise not exist.

Social Inclusion Function

Community Transport plays an important role in reducing exclusion.

Evidence from Dorset's Community Transport Roundtable demonstrated that transport is often the critical factor allowing residents to:

- Remain connected to communities.
- Participate in social activities.
- Maintain friendships and family relationships.
- Volunteer.
- Access support services.

These findings closely mirror national research linking transport accessibility with improved social inclusion and reduced isolation.

Health and Wellbeing Function

Increasingly, Community Transport acts as an important component of wider health systems.

Many providers now deliver large volumes of healthcare-related journeys and support access to:

- Hospital appointments.
- GP appointments.
- Dentistry.
- Rehabilitation services.
- Community health programmes.

The Roundtable revealed that healthcare transport had become the dominant activity for a number of Dorset operators, indicating the extent to which Community Transport is supporting broader healthcare outcomes.

Community Resilience Function

Community Transport also contributes to resilience at a local level.

Evidence suggests Community Transport organisations often act as trusted local institutions with strong relationships across communities. Their local knowledge and flexibility can enable highly tailored responses to community needs that would be difficult to deliver through larger transport systems (Department for Transport, 2025).

Where Does Community Transport Add Most Value?

The evidence suggests Community Transport generates particularly high value where transport challenges are complex and conventional services struggle to respond.

Rural Areas

Community Transport often provides the only realistic transport option for many rural residents. This is particularly important where population densities are insufficient to support frequent conventional bus services.

Older People

Community Transport supports access to healthcare, social activities and essential services for older residents, helping to maintain independence and wellbeing.

Disabled Residents

Flexible and personalised transport provision can support accessibility needs that are difficult to accommodate through standard public transport services.

Healthcare Accessibility

Perhaps the strongest evidence relates to healthcare access.

Community Transport increasingly acts as a bridge between public transport and formal patient transport services, filling accessibility gaps and enabling residents to attend appointments that might otherwise be inaccessible.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests Community Transport should be recognised as a strategic component of Dorset's future transport system rather than as a supplementary or residual service.

The combination of rurality, demography and healthcare demand means that Community Transport is likely to play an increasingly important role in meeting local accessibility needs.

Volunteer Models and Sustainability

Overview

Whilst Community Transport delivers significant social value, national and local evidence suggests that many organisations face significant sustainability challenges.

A common theme is that Community Transport's greatest strengths, namely its local roots, volunteer involvement and community-led approach, can also create vulnerabilities when organisations become overly dependent on a relatively small number of volunteers or coordinators.

What Are the Current Pressures?

The Dorset Community Transport Roundtable identified four major challenges that are also reflected within national Community Transport evidence.

Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment emerged as one of the most significant concerns.

Many organisations reported:

- Ageing volunteer driver populations.
- Difficulties replacing volunteers.
- Increasing competition for volunteers.
- Growing service demand.

Several Dorset schemes highlighted concerns about their ability to maintain current service levels over the next five to ten years unless recruitment improves.

Succession Planning

Many schemes rely heavily on a small number of individuals performing key coordination and management roles.

Participants expressed concerns that organisations often lack the capacity to undertake longer-term succession planning because of operational pressures and uncertainty regarding future funding.

This issue appears particularly acute amongst smaller volunteer-led organisations.

Financial Pressures

Community Transport providers reported increasing costs relating to:

- Insurance.
- Vehicle maintenance.
- Fuel.
- Administration.
- Vehicle replacement.
- DBS checks.
- Volunteer reimbursement.

Research consistently shows that coordination and administration are frequently underfunded despite being essential for successful service delivery.

Increasing Demand

Many operators described increasing demand driven by:

- Healthcare journeys.
- Population ageing.
- Closure of neighbouring schemes.
- Reduction in alternative transport options.

At least one Dorset operator reported declining approximately 13% of requested journeys due to insufficient driver availability, indicating that unmet demand already exists within the system.

What Support Mechanisms Are Effective?

Evidence suggests several approaches can strengthen Community Transport sustainability.

Sustainable Funding

Research consistently highlights the importance of funding not only vehicles and services but also coordination, administration and organisational resilience.

Shared Support Services

There is growing support for shared approaches relating to:

- DBS processing.
- Insurance.
- Training.
- Procurement.
- Technology platforms.

These approaches can reduce duplication and release organisational capacity.

Volunteer Development

Examples include:

- Volunteer recruitment campaigns.
- Links with businesses.
- Partnership working with GP surgeries.
- Community volunteering initiatives.

Technology

Several organisations highlighted the role technology can play in:

- Scheduling.
- Booking management.
- Volunteer coordination.
- Demand management.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests that strengthening Community Transport capacity and resilience may deliver significant value.

Given the sector's increasing role in supporting healthcare access, rural accessibility and independent living, investment in organisational sustainability may generate benefits beyond the transport sector itself.

Healthcare and Community Transport

Overview

Healthcare transport emerged as the single strongest theme during Dorset's Community Transport Roundtable and is increasingly prominent within national discussions regarding transport accessibility.

Evidence suggests Community Transport is playing an expanding role in supporting healthcare access, particularly in rural areas and for residents who fall outside eligibility criteria for traditional patient transport services.

Non-Emergency Patient Transport

Participants reported significant growth in healthcare-related journeys over recent years.

Examples included:

- Volunteer car schemes where healthcare journeys now represent the majority of activity.
- Increasing demand for hospital transport.
- Growing pressure associated with specialist appointments requiring longer-distance travel.

Several operators expressed concern regarding changing NHS transport eligibility arrangements and the extent to which Community Transport has become the default solution for residents unable to access alternative transport options.

Community Transport and Healthcare Access

The evidence suggests Community Transport generates value for healthcare systems by:

- Supporting appointment attendance.
- Reducing missed appointments.
- Enabling access to treatment.
- Supporting preventative healthcare.
- Maintaining independence.

Several participants argued that the value of Community Transport to health systems is not currently fully recognised within commissioning arrangements.

Integrated Care and Partnership Working

One of the strongest messages arising from the Roundtable was the need for closer NHS involvement.

Participants consistently called for:

- Greater NHS engagement.
- Involvement of the Integrated Care Board.
- Better communication regarding transport policy changes.
- Exploration of healthcare funding opportunities.
- More integrated planning and commissioning.

The evidence indicates that healthcare and transport outcomes are increasingly interconnected and that there may be significant opportunities for improved coordination between transport and health systems.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests Community Transport should be viewed as part of Dorset's wider health and care infrastructure as well as its transport system.

Future opportunities may include:

- Better integration between Community Transport and healthcare provision.
- Shared planning arrangements.
- Joint commissioning approaches.
- Improved coordination with NHS partners.
- Stronger recognition of transport's role in supporting healthcare outcomes.

Summary of Findings: Community Transport

The evidence reviewed demonstrates that Community Transport delivers substantial social, economic and health value beyond the transport journeys provided.

Key findings include:

- Community Transport functions as social infrastructure as well as transport infrastructure.
- The sector plays a significant role in supporting healthcare access, social inclusion and independent living.
- Community Transport provides particularly high value in rural areas and for vulnerable groups.
- Volunteer recruitment, succession planning and funding sustainability represent major strategic risks.
- The healthcare role of Community Transport is growing and increasingly important.
- Greater integration with health systems, public transport and wider transport planning could enhance outcomes and improve system efficiency.

Taken together, the evidence provides a strong justification for recognising Community Transport as a core component of Dorset's future Integrated Transport Model and supports investment in capacity, resilience and closer integration with wider transport and health systems.

Integrated Transport Systems

Overview

Transport policy has shifted away from viewing individual transport services in isolation and towards considering transport as an integrated system. Increasingly, Government policy, academic research and transport evaluations suggest that accessibility outcomes are improved when transport services are planned and managed as connected networks rather than separate modes, organisations or funding streams.

This shift reflects growing recognition that residents do not generally experience transport as a collection of individual services. Instead, they experience a journey. Access to that journey may involve a combination of public buses, community transport, rail, walking, cycling, demand responsive transport, patient transport services and private travel arrangements. Where these services are poorly coordinated, transport becomes fragmented and difficult to navigate. Conversely, where services are integrated, accessibility, efficiency and customer experience tend to improve.

The concept of integration sits at the heart of the council's preferred Integrated Transport Model and therefore warrants separate consideration.

Integrated Transport

Overview

Transport integration can occur at several levels:

- Integration between transport modes.
- Integration between transport providers.
- Integration between transport and wider public services.
- Integration through information, ticketing and journey planning.
- Integration through coordinated commissioning and governance.

Whilst approaches vary, the evidence consistently suggests that integrated systems are better able to deliver customer-focused outcomes than fragmented approaches.

Do Integrated Systems Perform Better?

The evidence strongly suggests that they do.

National Policy Evidence

The DfT's national Bus Strategy (2021) identifies fragmentation as a significant barrier to improving public transport performance. The National Bus Strategy argues that transport services should operate as coordinated networks rather than isolated services and promotes greater integration between local authorities, operators and wider transport services.

The strategy highlights that passengers are primarily concerned with:

- Reliability.
- Ease of use.
- Connectivity.
- Accessibility.
- Simplicity.

Integrated systems are generally better able to deliver these outcomes because planning takes account of the whole journey rather than individual services.

Evidence from Rural Mobility Fund Evaluations

The Rural Mobility Fund Evaluation (2025) provides some of the strongest contemporary evidence relating to transport integration within rural areas.

A recurring finding was that successful transport schemes frequently acted as part of a broader network rather than operating independently. Demand Responsive Transport was often most effective when connecting residents to:

- Mainline bus services.
- Rail stations.
- Healthcare facilities.
- Town centres.
- Education opportunities.

The DfT evaluation concluded that accessibility outcomes improved where services complemented one another rather than competed with one another.

Community Transport Evidence

The Community Transport Roundtable produced similarly strong findings.

Participants consistently advocated for:

- Better integration between Community Transport schemes.
- Closer links with bus services.
- Improved rail connectivity.
- Stronger links with health services.
- Better strategic coordination across providers.

Importantly, providers generally did not see Community Transport as a replacement for public transport. Instead, Community Transport was viewed as part of a wider transport network serving different but complementary functions.

Customer Benefits of Integration

Research identifies several advantages associated with integrated transport systems:

Improved Accessibility

Residents have access to a wider range of destinations through coordinated services and connections.

Improved Customer Experience

Integrated information, consistent standards and clearer journey planning can make transport systems easier to understand and use.

Increased Public Transport Use

Evidence suggests that better connections and reduced complexity can increase the attractiveness of public transport and support mode shift.

Better Outcomes for Vulnerable Groups

Integration is particularly valuable for residents who rely on multiple services to complete journeys, including:

- Older people.
- Disabled residents.
- Rural communities.
- People without access to private vehicles.

Can Transport Assets Be Used More Efficiently?

A substantial body of evidence suggests opportunities exist to improve utilisation of existing transport resources through greater coordination.

Total Transport and Shared Resource Approaches

A theme within transport policy over the last decade has been the concept of "Total Transport", whereby transport assets funded through different programmes are coordinated more effectively.

Examples frequently explored include:

- School transport vehicles.
- Adult Social Care transport.
- Community Transport fleets.
- Patient transport.
- Council-operated vehicles.
- Demand Responsive Transport services.

The rationale is that many vehicles are only utilised for limited periods despite significant investment. Greater coordination can potentially improve utilisation and generate better value from existing assets.

Public Sector Efficiency

An internal officer workshop undertaken identified several opportunities linked to transport integration including:

- Improved coordination between Adults' and Children's Services.
- Better alignment with NHS transport.
- Shared use of transport assets.
- Better information sharing.
- Improved commissioning arrangements.

However, practitioners also highlighted that delivering these benefits can be complex due to governance, funding and operational constraints.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests there is merit in pursuing greater transport integration across Dorset.

Potential opportunities include:

- Improved coordination between public buses and Community Transport.
- Better integration with healthcare transport.
- Enhanced journey planning.
- Improved use of public sector transport assets.
- More joined-up commissioning and planning.

The evidence also suggests that integration should be viewed as a long-term transformation programme rather than a single discrete intervention.

Demand Responsive Transport

Overview

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) has become one of the most significant developments in rural transport policy over the last decade.

Rather than operating fixed routes and timetables, DRT services use technology-enabled booking systems to provide flexible transport within defined operating areas.

DRT has attracted increasing policy attention because it has the potential to address accessibility challenges in areas where conventional bus services may be difficult to sustain.

For Dorset, DRT is particularly relevant given ongoing discussions with Wiltshire Council regarding potential expansion of Wiltshire Connect services into neighbouring parts of Dorset.

When Does DRT Work?

The DfT's Rural Mobility Fund programme provides the most comprehensive evidence currently available regarding DRT performance within rural England.

The evaluation found that DRT is most likely to be effective where:

Population Density is Low

Traditional fixed-route services often struggle to achieve sufficient passenger demand in sparsely populated areas.

DRT can provide an alternative approach where accessibility objectives remain important despite lower demand levels.

Travel Demand is Dispersed

DRT appears particularly effective where journeys originate from multiple locations and are directed towards a range of destinations.

Examples include:

- Healthcare trips.
- Shopping journeys.
- Leisure activities.
- First-mile and last-mile connections.

Conventional Services are Limited

Evidence suggests DRT generates the greatest value where residents would otherwise experience poor accessibility.

Several Rural Mobility Fund schemes operated in areas with little or no conventional transport and were judged successful primarily because they provided access where alternatives were absent.

DRT is Part of a Wider Network

Perhaps the most important finding from the evaluation is that DRT often performs best when it complements rather than replaces fixed-route public transport.

Successful schemes frequently acted as feeders into:

- Bus networks.
- Rail stations.
- Service centres.
- Healthcare facilities.

This finding aligns strongly with Dorset's emerging Integrated Transport Model.

What Outcomes Does DRT Achieve?

Improved Accessibility

The strongest evidence relates to improved accessibility.

DRT has been shown to improve access to:

- Employment.
- Healthcare.
- Education.
- Retail services.
- Community activities.

Improved Social Inclusion

Research suggests DRT can reduce transport-related exclusion by providing opportunities for residents who would otherwise struggle to travel.

This appears particularly valuable for:

- Older residents.
- Disabled residents.
- Rural communities.
- Non-drivers.

Support for Independent Living

Like Community Transport, DRT can support independent living by enabling residents to continue accessing essential services and activities.

Better Connectivity

Many successful DRT schemes operate as connectors into wider transport networks, improving access to services that may already exist rather than duplicating provision.

Financial Sustainability Challenges

Whilst outcomes were generally positive, the rural mobility evaluation also found that DRT can be relatively expensive compared with conventional public transport.

Consequently, DRT appears most effective where it is targeted towards accessibility objectives rather than viewed as a universal replacement for fixed-route services.

Implications for Dorset

The evidence suggests DRT may have an important role within Dorset's future transport system but should be viewed as a targeted solution rather than a universal answer.

The strongest opportunities appear to be:

- Rural accessibility gaps.
- Healthcare accessibility.
- First-mile / last-mile journeys.
- Connections to strategic public transport corridors.

- Integration with Community Transport.

This aligns closely with the findings of both the Rural Mobility Fund evaluation (2025) and discussions undertaken through the Outline Business Case and Full Business Case development process.

Summary of Findings: Integrated Transport Systems

The evidence reviewed demonstrates strong support for integrated approaches to transport delivery.

Key findings include:

- Transport systems generally perform better when services are planned and managed as networks rather than isolated services.
- Integration improves accessibility, customer experience and journey opportunities.
- Public buses, Community Transport, DRT and healthcare transport are most effective when operating as complementary services.
- Joint planning and improved coordination have the potential to improve efficiency and outcomes.
- DRT has an important role in improving accessibility within rural areas, particularly where conventional bus services are difficult to sustain.
- DRT is most effective when integrated with wider transport networks rather than operating as a standalone service.

Taken together, the evidence provides strong support for the council's preferred Integrated Transport Model and suggests that future transport improvements are likely to deliver the greatest value when public buses, Community Transport, DRT and wider public services are planned and operated as a coordinated system.

Strategic Implications for Dorset Council and the Case for Investment

The purpose of the Full Business Case is not simply to determine how transport services should be organised in the future, but whether additional investment is justified and what outcomes that investment is intended to achieve.

The evidence reviewed throughout this document demonstrates that public and community transport are not standalone services operating in isolation from wider council objectives. Rather, they act as enabling infrastructure that supports economic activity, healthy communities, social mobility, independent living and access to essential services. The evidence therefore suggests that investment decisions should be assessed against their contribution to wider corporate outcomes rather than against transport outputs alone.

The key implication for Dorset Council is that investment in transport should be viewed as a cross-cutting strategic intervention capable of delivering benefits across multiple service areas simultaneously.

The Cost of Inaction

A consistent message emerging from the evidence is that there are costs associated with failing to invest.

Whilst transport expenditure is often highly visible, the consequences of transport decline are frequently absorbed elsewhere within the system through:

- Reduced labour market participation.
- Increased social isolation.
- Reduced access to education and training.
- Greater healthcare transport pressures.
- Increased pressure on Community Transport organisations.
- Reduced independence amongst older residents.
- Increased reliance on informal carers.
- Reduced vitality of towns and service centres.

The National Audit Office (2025) concluded that despite substantial Government intervention, long-term decline in bus services outside London continues to present significant challenges for accessibility and opportunity.

For Dorset, demographic projections suggest these pressures are likely to increase over time. An ageing population, growing healthcare demand and persistent rural accessibility challenges mean that maintaining the status quo is unlikely to deliver the outcomes sought through the Council Plan, Local Transport Plan or wider prevention agenda.

Consequently, the question facing the council is not simply whether additional investment is affordable, but whether the council can afford not to invest given the wider costs likely to arise from worsening accessibility and transport exclusion.

Alignment with Dorset Council Priorities

The evidence review demonstrates a strong alignment between transport investment and the council's wider strategic objectives.

Economic Growth and Prosperity

Investment in transport supports:

- Access to employment.
- Workforce recruitment.

- Labour market participation.
- Town centre vitality.
- Visitor economy performance.
- Business productivity.

This aligns directly with ambitions to support economic growth and create sustainable, prosperous communities across Dorset.

Healthy Communities

The evidence demonstrates that transport accessibility contributes to:

- Healthcare access.
- Increased physical activity.
- Reduced social isolation.
- Improved wellbeing.
- Healthy ageing.

Public and Community Transport therefore support outcomes traditionally associated with health and wellbeing policy rather than transport policy alone.

Prevention and Independence

One of the strongest themes emerging from the literature is the preventative value of transport.

Transport enables individuals to:

- Maintain independence.
- Access preventative services.
- Remain active within their communities.
- Avoid social isolation.
- Delay or prevent escalation into more costly interventions.

These benefits are particularly relevant given increasing pressures across health and social care systems.

Tackling Inequalities

Evidence suggests the benefits of improved transport are greatest amongst:

- Young people.
- Older residents.
- People without access to private vehicles.
- Rural communities.
- People on lower incomes.
- Disabled residents. Investment therefore has the potential to contribute positively towards reducing inequalities and improving access to opportunities.

Supporting the Preferred Integrated Transport Model

The evidence review provides strong support for the strategic direction established through the Outline Business Case.

Importantly, the evidence does not point towards a single transport solution capable of meeting all needs. Instead, the strongest performing systems tend to combine a range of transport interventions that work together as part of a coherent network.

This supports Dorset's proposed Integrated Transport Model, which brings together:

Reshaping Demand

Evidence relating to prevention, accessibility and independent living supports a greater focus on enabling residents to use mainstream transport where appropriate and reducing unnecessary dependence on specialist transport arrangements.

System Integration

The evidence consistently identifies benefits from stronger coordination between transport services, health services, community organisations and public sector partners.

Flexible Supply

Evidence from the Rural Mobility Fund, Community Transport sector and wider transport policy demonstrates the importance of combining:

- Strategic bus networks.
- Community Transport.
- Demand Responsive Transport.
- Healthcare transport.
- Rail connectivity.

The preferred option emerging through this business case is therefore strongly aligned with contemporary evidence and national best practice.

Why Additional Investment is Justified

Taken collectively, the evidence supports a clear conclusion:

Additional investment in Dorset's public and community transport network should be viewed as an investment in wider social, economic and health outcomes rather than solely an investment in transport.

The evidence demonstrates that transport improvements can contribute to:

- Stronger economic performance.
- Better employment outcomes.
- Improved access to healthcare.
- Healthier and more active communities.
- Reduced loneliness and isolation.
- Greater independence.
- More resilient rural communities.
- Improved social mobility.
- Better value from existing public sector resources.

Importantly, many of these benefits accrue across multiple organisations and service areas rather than solely within transport budgets. This suggests that transport investment should be considered as part of a broader place-based and whole-system approach to improving outcomes for our residents.

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed for this Full Business Case provides a robust and consistent foundation for further investment in Dorset's transport system.

Across Government policy, national evaluations, academic research and local stakeholder engagement there is broad agreement that accessible and integrated transport systems deliver benefits far beyond mobility alone. Public buses, Community Transport and Demand Responsive Transport contribute to economic prosperity, healthy communities, social inclusion and independent living, whilst helping to address the challenges associated with rurality and demographic change.

The evidence therefore supports the conclusion that additional investment by Dorset Council is both justified and necessary if the Council is to realise its wider ambitions for inclusive growth, prevention, healthy communities

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