



Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE (NI)

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035.

DfI are currently preparing a new transport plan which will set the framework for making transport policy and investment decisions up until 2035. The ETP 2035 covers five council areas and will also support the preparation of the Local Development Plans for these councils.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☒
Adopting a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Implementing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Revising a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Designing a Public Service	☐		
Delivering a Public Service	☐		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Eastern Transport Plan 2035

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

ETP 2035 Vision:

Deliver an integrated and re-balanced transport network in favour of sustainable, efficient modes, which connects communities creating an accessible, inclusive, safe and prosperous economic region by delivering carbon reduction, improving air quality, enhancing the built and natural environment and facilitating healthy and sustainable travel choices over unnecessary private car travel.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

☒

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

☐

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

☐

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Interventions emerging through ETP objectives may have the potential to impact on people in rural areas, specifically on their accessibility to sustainable transport modes. Where such interventions are supported by the ETP, this may afford increased accessibility to employment opportunities, community and recreational amenities for those in rural communities and therefore provide a range of economic and health and wellbeing benefits to those most isolated communities.

The ETP offers the potential to affect the needs of rural communities by proposing approaches to transport that may improve access to key services and have positive and some negative implications for the rural communities and environment.

For example, interventions proposed under ETP could help improve transport provision and connectivity and help ensure access to urban areas and other centres and facilities for employment, commerce, education and health services. The ETP may also result in interventions that would help support agricultural and other land based rural businesses, perhaps by enhancing access to markets. However, some interventions proposed by the ETP could also result in interventions that have adverse implications for the rural environment, result in losses of agricultural land or result in developments that do not respect the character of the countryside.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The ETP identifies nine categories as below:

- People Places
- Traffic Free Routes
- People and Movement Places
- City and Town Centres
- Quality Mass Movement Routes
- Connecting Movement Routes
- Strategic Movement Routes
- Rural Movement Routes
- Regional Strategic Movement Routes

It is recognised that interventions arising under these different categories could impact disproportionately between those in rural and urban areas. For example, Traffic Free Routes including greenways are likely to provide a daily commuting benefit for those in closer proximity to places of employment than those in more isolated areas where reliance is more likely to remain with the private car or public transport services.

Conversely, intervention supporting Rural Movement Routes or Connecting Movement Routes may include enhancing connections that will target benefits towards the movement of people to, from, within and between rural (and urban) areas.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	☒
Rural Tourism	☒
Rural Housing	☐
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	☒
Education or Training in Rural Areas	☐
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	☐
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	☒
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	☒
Poverty in Rural Areas	☐
Deprivation in Rural Areas	☐
Rural Crime or Community Safety	☐
Rural Development	☐
Agri-Environment	☐
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	☐	Published Statistics	☐
Consultation with Other Organisations	☐	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☒

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Aligned with the development of the ETP, an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA) has been undertaken. The ISA includes Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Health Impact Assessment (HIA), Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA), Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA).

The approach taken with regard to RNIA ensures that rural needs are considered throughout the preparation of the transport plan and the assessment process. This has been established from defining the baseline and building up a picture of the area in terms rural needs, identifying the key issues, developing the ISA Framework, assessing the ETP 2035 options, preferred options, mitigation and monitoring. The results of the RNIA are fully reported in the ISA report.

The RNIA process has due regard to 'A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 for Public Authorities (revised) published by DAERA'.

Consultation to inform the RNIA has been undertaken as part of the overall ISA process. Consultation responses have been analysed to inform the RNIA.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

Public transport access also varies locationally, with only 17% of the rural population being a three minute or less walk to the nearest bust stop, compared to 38% of the urban population as reported in 2021. Approximately 8% of the rural population in 2021 are 44 minutes or longer walking distance to the nearest bus stop, and 9% 27-43 minutes, compared to 0% for both times in urban locations. In rural locations, 18% reported a bus at least once an hour and 12% once a day or less in comparison to 66% and 1% in urban locations. Accessing key services is therefore more difficult for rural than the urban population. In some rural areas, services are simply inaccessible without private transport and journey times to key services by car are on average twice as long for rural dwellers as for those living in towns and cities.

In 2024, although more than half (58%) of NI businesses were in rural areas, rural businesses accounted for less than a quarter (21%) of employees. Rural workers (90%) were also much more likely to use their own transport to commute than those from urban areas (82%), though this gap has narrowed.

Rural dwellers wait longer for emergency service response than their urban counterparts, with ambulance waiting times continuing to increase in rural areas. Similar proportions of urban and rural households are in relative poverty (19% urban, 16% rural) or absolute poverty (16% urban, 11% rural).

If the response to Section 3A was **YES** GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

A key aspect of life in rural areas of Northern Ireland that accessing key services is, in general, more difficult for the rural than the urban population, particularly for those who are further from major urban areas. Public transport access varies locationally, with only 17% of the rural population being a three minute or less walk to the nearest bust stop, compared to 38% of the urban population as reported in 2021. Approximately 8% of the rural population in 2021 are 44 minutes or longer walking distance to the nearest bus stop, and 9% 27-43 minutes, compared to 0% for both times in urban locations. In rural locations, 18% reported a bus at least once an hour and 12% once a day or less in comparison to 66% and 1% in urban locations. Accessing key services is therefore more difficult for the rural than the urban population. In some rural areas, services are simply inaccessible without private transport, and journey times to key services by car are on average twice as long for rural dwellers as for those living in towns and cities.

In 2024, although more than half (58%) of NI businesses were in rural areas, rural businesses accounted for less than a quarter (21%) of employees. Rural workers (90%) were also much more likely to use their own transport to commute than those from urban areas (82%), though this gap has narrowed.

Rural dwellers wait longer for emergency service response than their urban counterparts, with ambulance waiting times continuing to increase in rural areas. Similar proportions of urban and rural households are in relative poverty (19% urban, 16% rural) or absolute poverty (16% urban, 11% rural).

The ETP offers the potential to affect the needs of rural communities. For example, interventions proposed under ETP could improve transport provision and connectivity and help ensure access to urban areas and other centres and facilities for employment, commerce, education and health services. The ETP may also result in interventions that would support agricultural and other land based rural businesses, perhaps by enhancing access to markets.

It is also possible that schemes such as the introduction of new Park & Ride sites in edge of town locations may be proposed through the ETP. While these will provide a transport connectivity benefit to rural communities, these kinds of interventions may have adverse implications for the rural environment, result in losses of agricultural land or result in developments that do not respect the character of the countryside, for example.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The RNIA objectives considered have been developed in the light of government guidance and identified rural issues, as well as the consultation that has taken place. The approach to the RNIA has ensured that all relevant topics have been considered throughout the assessment process from establishing the baseline and building up the regions rural profile, identifying the key issues, developing the ISA Framework, assessing the ETP, mitigation and monitoring.

In defining and addressing the issues in respect of rural needs, the ISA considered the following:

- What are the objectives of ETP?
- What are the needs of rural areas?
- What impact is ETP likely to have in rural areas?
- How would a fair outcome be ensured for rural areas?
- How has the ISA ensured consideration of rural areas and influenced ETP in this regard?

Consultation to inform the RNIA has been undertaken as part of the overall SA/SEA process. Consultation responses have been analysed to inform the RNIA (see reporting and consultation as part of the ISA process).

The ISA RNIA Assessment Framework below has been used to assess the ETP and inform its development. Please see the ISA Report for full details.

Rural Needs Objective	Rural Needs sub-objectives	Assessment aid questions
Promote greater transport connectivity and accessibility for rural areas	Increase access via a range of transport modes for rural communities.	<i>Will the ETP...</i> ▪ Improve the sustainable transport network in rural areas (i.e. improvements to public transport and 'walk, wheel or cycle' active travel) whilst also recognising that for some in rural areas the car is still essential for accessibility? ▪ Better enable people with specific needs to access transport and day to day activities?
	Enable economic growth, and employment diversification in rural areas.	<i>Will the ETP...</i> ▪ Support diversified economic activities in rural areas? ▪ Enhance access to rural employment opportunities? ▪ Improve people's ability to work or run a business from home?
	Connecting people with nature	<i>Will the ETP...</i> ▪ Impact those wishing to visit the countryside for recreation and enjoyment? ▪ Protect and enhance natural capital assets?

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

N/A

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled. ☒

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