Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

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

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department for Infrastructure (DfI)

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.

Development of a new draft Moving Together: An Inclusive Mobility Framework.

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

Developing a	Policy		Strategy	X	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.

Moving Together: An Inclusive Mobility Framework (working title).

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

The development of this Framework fulfils a commitment contained within Transport Strategy 2035 to develop an inclusive transport strategy focused primarily on the needs of older, d/Deaf and disabled people. The Framework provides the structure through which the Department will improve accessibility, remove barriers to travel and support safe, confident and independent mobility. It translates the high-level ambitions of Transport Strategy 2035 into a coordinated programme of actions across transport services, infrastructure, planning, investment and policy development. The overarching purpose of the Framework is to deliver on this duty and put people at the heart of what we do by promoting inclusion.

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).	X
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 [X] 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.

The draft Moving Together: An Inclusive Mobility Framework focusses on the needs of older, d/Deaf and disabled people but seeks to improve the accessibility of the transport system and wider built environment for everyone and this will include people who live in rural areas.

It must be acknowledged, however, that while there are some commonalities, the challenges faced by older, d/Deaf, and disabled people in rural areas are different to those faced by these groups within urban areas. Less frequent or direct public transport services and greater distances to stations, bus-stops, and halts results in greater reliance on door-to-door transport services, whether through private car, taxi, or community transport services. For those people whose travel options are limited, there is a greater risk of social isolation and a reduced opportunity to contribute to the economy through work or through patronage of local commercial services.

Several actions within the Framework may help address these challenges. The commitment to review community transport provision, consider measures to improve transport services for those unable to access conventional public transport, support accessibility improvements to public transport infrastructure, and review the availability of wheelchair-accessible taxis could provide particular benefits for rural residents.

The Framework also promotes an end-to-end journey approach, improved accessibility standards, better links between transport modes, and more inclusive transport planning and investment decisions. These measures may help ensure that the needs of rural communities are more consistently considered across future transport policies, infrastructure projects and service development. Any enhancements to rural access to transport services or improvements to connectivity which result from the actions defined within the Framework will contribute towards reducing social isolation and supporting local economies through commerce and employment.

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.

As outlined at 2B, while the basic need for transportation of people in rural and urban areas is the same, access to sustainable and accessible transport solutions is more varied. In rural areas there is an increased reliance on journeys by private vehicle, limited public transport and taxi services available, difficulty promoting Active Travel on rural roads/lanes and there is a greater reliance on rural community transport in sustaining rural communities. The draft Framework seeks to identify and address the unique transport challenges which are experienced in rural 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	X
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 [X] 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	[X]	Published Statistics	[X]
Consultation with Other Organisations	[X]	Research Papers	[X]
Surveys or Questionnaires	[X]	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.

As part of the first phase of developing this Framework, a Task and Finish Group was established to identify the principal barriers to inclusion and transport challenges experienced by older, d/Deaf, and disabled people, and to consider how these barriers might be addressed. The Group engaged with a broad range of organisations and stakeholders across the wider sector through a survey, receiving responses from representative organisations across the disability, older people's, transport, and community sectors on the travel and transport issues that have the greatest impact on their members' ability to get around. Responses to the survey highlighted a number of issues specific to rural areas.

In addition, the Department engages with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) on a regular basis. Through this engagement, issues facing older, d/Deaf and disabled people, including those in rural areas, are raised. Further engagement is planned throughout the public consultation process which will include specific engagement with people and groups from rural areas.

Information Sources

Census 2021
Transport Accessibility Statistics (Northern Ireland) survey
DAERA Key Rural Issues 2025 Report
Understanding the barriers to greater public transport use in Northern Ireland
Driving Change: Shaping the Future of Community Transport in Northern Ireland
ncat (2024). 'Understanding and identifying barriers to accessing transport'

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

While there is no published data looking specifically at the transport experience of older, d/Deaf, and disabled transport users in rural areas, research does exist that differentiates between the experiences of rural and urban dwellers and also between disabled and non-disabled transport users.

Census 2021 provides urban / rural breakdowns for long-term health problem or disability which suggests a slightly higher rate for urban areas (26% reporting some limitation to day-to-day activities versus 22% in rural areas). This suggests that, statistically, there is likely to be a slightly lower proportion of people reporting a long-term health problem or disability in rural areas than in urban areas. However, the difference is not sufficiently large to negate the substantial differences identified in the research that follows.

The Transport Accessibility Statistics (Northern Ireland) survey provides some useful breakdowns in findings between those in rural and urban dwellings. There was also a significant cross-over in the survey between older and disabled respondents with 34% of 65+ people reporting a mobility difficulty. The latest edition of the Survey (published in March 2024) found that:

- 68.6% of rural dwellers were satisfied with public transport services in their area compared with 86.1% of urban dwellers (almost 20% difference).
- 78.3% of people who reported no disability were satisfied with public transport services in their area compared to 79.9% of those with a disability (negligible difference).
- 55.6% of rural dwellers were satisfied with the current provision for walking and walkers in their area compared to 75% of urban dwellers (almost 20% difference).
- 69.1% of people who reported no disability were satisfied with the current provision for walking and walkers in their area compared to 63.6% of those with a disability (almost 6% difference).

Research by the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland published in September 2025 also found:

- 34% of rural dwellers reported they were dependent on public transport compared with 48% of urban dwellers.
- 30% of rural dwellers reported that they used public transport frequently (daily or weekly) compared with just 48% of urban dwellers.
- 52% of disabled consumers reported they were dependent on public transport compared with 38% of non-disabled consumers.
- 37% of rural consumers are less than a quarter mile from their nearest bus or train stop as compared to 53% of urban consumers (highest: 75% in Belfast / lowest 23% in Fermanagh and Omagh).

The research further rated both positive and negative impacts of public transport from both urban and rural respondents. The mean number of positive impacts for urban respondents was 3.1 compared with 2.5 for rural dwellers and the mean number of negative impacts for urban dwellers was 0.6 compared with 1.6 for rural dwellers. These findings suggest that rural dwellers rate their positive benefits from public transport in accessing services 21% lower than urban dwellers and rate their negative experiences 166% higher than urban dwellers. Feedback from stakeholders identified a number of challenges and barriers faced by older, d/Deaf and disabled people accessing transport including some specific to rural areas:

- Eliminating high-floor coaches from the Translink fleet.
- Limited availability of community transport options due to funding levels.
- Greater need for strategic planning within public transport network (including community transport services).
- Relative lack of public transport options and low frequency in rural areas.
- Distance to public transport nodes (particularly in rural areas).
- Lack of accessible public transport options in smaller towns.

While not specific to rural areas, key findings from the NCAT UK-wide report includes:

- Disabled people do not think transport is accessible. Most do not think this will change in the next 10 years
- Disabled people experience barriers when travelling. 92% face barrier(s) on at least one mode of transport
- Inaccessible transport makes disabled people travel less, and it makes journeys take longer

- Disabled people face many barriers when they travel. These include badly designed and cluttered streets, unreliable step-free access, and poor staff assistance.

Whilst all of these figures would require some further cross-tabulation between rural dwellers and people who report disabilities to reveal reliable statistics for that particular cross-grouping, it may still be possible to reasonably infer some basic concepts from the information above:

- Disabled people are typically more reliant on public transport services than people who do not have disabilities.
- Disabled people face barriers when they travel.
- There is limited public transport availability and frequency in rural areas.
- People who live in rural areas (including disabled people) are significantly less satisfied with public transport services than urban counterparts.
- People who live in rural areas (including disabled people) are significantly less satisfied with provision for walking / wheeling than urban counterparts.
- People who live in rural areas (including disabled people) have to travel significantly further to reach public transport services than urban counterparts.

Thes facts combine to suggest that it is reasonable to infer that this inter-sectional group (older, d/Deaf, and disabled people who live in rural settings) faces greater challenges to getting around than urban counterparts.

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

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

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.

In developing the Framework, consideration was given to the particular challenges faced by older d/Deaf, and disabled transport users in rural areas with less availability of scheduled public transport services and increased challenges in accessing the network with greater distances to stations, bus-stops, and halts often made more challenging with unpaved and / or unlit roads. This results in a greater reliance on door-to-door transport methods and reduces transport independence.

Key issues considered included:

- **Greater risk of transport disadvantage and social isolation.** Older people and disabled people are more likely to rely on public transport and community transport services. Where services are limited or inaccessible, there is an increased risk of isolation, reduced independence and exclusion from community life.
- **Accessibility barriers within the transport network.** Stakeholders highlighted concerns including the continued use of some high-floor coaches, limited accessible transport options in smaller towns and rural areas, and a lack of integrated transport planning.
- **Limited community transport provision.** Community transport plays an important role in connecting rural communities, particularly for those who cannot drive or access mainstream public transport.

- **Walking, wheeling and first/last mile connectivity.** Rural residents report lower satisfaction with walking infrastructure, reflecting challenges such as the absence of footways, poor road crossings, longer travel distances and limited connections between transport services and final destinations.
- **Intersectional disadvantage.** Although specific data on older, d/Deaf and disabled people living in rural areas is limited, the available evidence suggests that the combination of disability, age and rural residence may compound existing transport barriers. Disabled people are generally more dependent on public transport and experience more barriers when travelling, while rural residents experience lower service availability and accessibility. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that people who fall within both groups may face greater challenges accessing opportunities and services than either urban residents or non-disabled rural residents.

Overall, the evidence highlighted the importance of improving accessibility, availability, affordability and inclusivity across the transport network to help address the social and economic disadvantages experienced by people living in rural areas, particularly those who are older, d/Deaf or disabled.

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 [X] **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 Framework recognises the important role of public and community transport in addressing rural isolation and supporting independent living. It therefore places emphasis on improving accessibility across the transport network, strengthening integration between transport services, and ensuring that the needs of users with disabilities, including those in rural areas, are considered in the design and delivery of transport policies and services.

The evidence also highlighted the importance of improving first and last mile connectivity and creating safer, more accessible environments for walking, wheeling and accessing public transport. As a result, the Framework seeks to encourage a joined-up approach to accessibility that considers the entire journey experience rather than individual transport modes in isolation. Stakeholder feedback regarding the concerns of high-floor coaches in rural areas and concerns around community transport provision and the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis has further influenced the Framework's priorities and proposed actions.

There will undoubtedly remain challenges related to budgetary pressures particularly in respect of levels of provision of public transport services in rural areas.

In addition to engagement carried out in the first phase of this work, the draft Framework will be subjected to planned public consultation in the form of survey research and direct engagement through focus group research which will be designed to reach rural transport users. The feedback from this consultation will further inform the objectives and action points which will feature in the final Framework.

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. X

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Date:	05 November 2026
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