Details about the policy / decision to be rural proofed

Title of policy / decision to be rural proofed:
Accessible Transport Strategy 2025

Brief description of policy / decision to be rural proofed:
The Department's Accessible Transport Strategy was first published in 2005 having been developed within the context of the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 - 2012, which acknowledged that many people in Northern Ireland were unable to use, or make full use of, the transportation system because of barriers they face.

It expires in 2015 and the Department is consulting on a new Accessible Transport Strategy to agree the vision and high strategic themes to be taken forward to deliver a transport network that is inclusive and accessible to all.

Aims and objectives of the policy / decision to be rural proofed:
The vision of an Accessible Transport Strategy 2025 is to have a transport network in Northern Ireland that is inclusive and accessible to all.
SECTION B

Policy Impact on Rural Communities

1. Are there any rural specific impacts of this policy?
   Higher dependency on private car in rural areas because of less frequent public transport service and distance to bus stops, leading in some cases to rural isolation.

2. Are there any potential indirect impacts?
   Improvements in the accessibility of transport infrastructure or transport services could benefit those from rural areas, reducing social isolation and improving access to goods and services.

3. Are there potential local impacts that will differ from the regional impact?
   Yes. If actions specific to rural areas are highlighted in the public consultation they can be addressed in subsequent action plans that will implement the new Strategy.

4. Is there a need for pre-consultation with rural stakeholders to get better insight into potential rural impacts?
   No, as there was extensive pre consultation engagement. This took the form of a series of focus groups incorporating a range of stakeholders which included those from rural locations. Events were held in larger rural towns such as Coleraine, Omagh, and Enniskillen and from this pre consultation we obtained views from people from rural communities on the transport difficulties they face.

   An Attitudes of Disabled and Older People to Public Transport survey was commissioned to obtain the views of older people and people with disabilities towards public transport. This survey noted that 33% of respondents came from areas considered as rural.

5. Is there a need for actions to mitigate the impacts of the policy in rural areas?
   The public consultation will affirm the strategic themes of the new Accessible Transport Strategy. If actions specific to rural areas are highlighted in the public consultation they can be addressed in subsequent action plans and more targeted engagement carried out with rural communities.
SECTION C

Evidential Requirements
(Questions for consideration to assess the evidence used in assessing the impact of the policy on the rural community)

1. Are the predicted impacts supported by evidence?
   Yes, see question 2 below.

2. What types of evidence have you considered in your policy development? (statistics/research/stakeholder advice)

   In the pre-consultation stage we met with a range of stakeholders, mainly older people and people with a disability, including those that are from rural areas, to establish their views on the barriers faced, when using public transport. We sought their proposals for improvements to the public transport service. From this engagement a Stakeholder Engagement - Emerging Issues paper has been prepared which have used as part of the evidence gathering for the Accessible Transport Strategy 2025 consultation paper.

   The Department for Regional Development in conjunction with IMTAC carried out an "Attitudes of Disabled and Older People to Public Transport, November 2014 - January 2015" survey which was published in April 2015.

   In response to this attitudinal survey of older people and people with disabilities, 33% of respondents were from a rural area and the results of the attitudinal survey indicates an urban/rural split for each of the responses. The analysis of this survey can be found at http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/statistics/recent-stats-categories/traffic_and_transport_research.htm

   Although the main findings of the survey was the availability of public transport services, bus/train times not meeting needs and lack of bus services were significant concerns for those living in rural areas (41% and 43% of rural respondents respectively), accessibility also was an issue for all respondents including those in rural areas, with 15% of rural passengers finding difficulty getting on and off vehicles.

   41% of rural respondents stated that "Boarding closer to home" was a measure that would encourage travel on public transport, as opposed to 20% of respondents living in urban areas.

   According to the Travel Survey for Northern Ireland(TSNI) Urban- Rural Report 2011 – 2013 just over a third (35%) of rural households were less likely to know how often they could get a bus from their nearest bus stop, with 44% of rural households had at least a 44 minute walk to their nearest bus stop.
Rural residents spend more time travelling by car and have a higher number of journeys per year with average journey times being longer than in urban areas with the average journey time being 21 minutes in rural areas.

9% of the total distance travelled by urban residents was on public transport, compared to 6% of rural residents however, average distance travelled by public transport per person per year is similar to those living in urban areas (449 miles) and those living in rural areas (419 miles).

3. Are there any other areas of uncertainty, where further evidence would be useful?

None

4. Have any design features already been implemented as a result of the evidence obtained?

No.