

Every village, every hour

A comprehensive bus network for rural England

Executive summary

March 2021



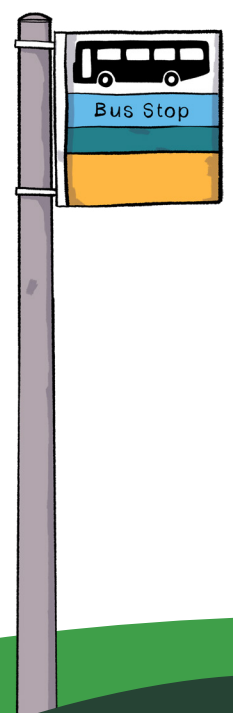
Executive summary

This report builds upon previous research from CPRE, the countryside charity into rural ‘transport deserts’ to set out what a comprehensive bus network for England would look like, with services to every village every hour, and the scale of investment we need to make this vision a reality.

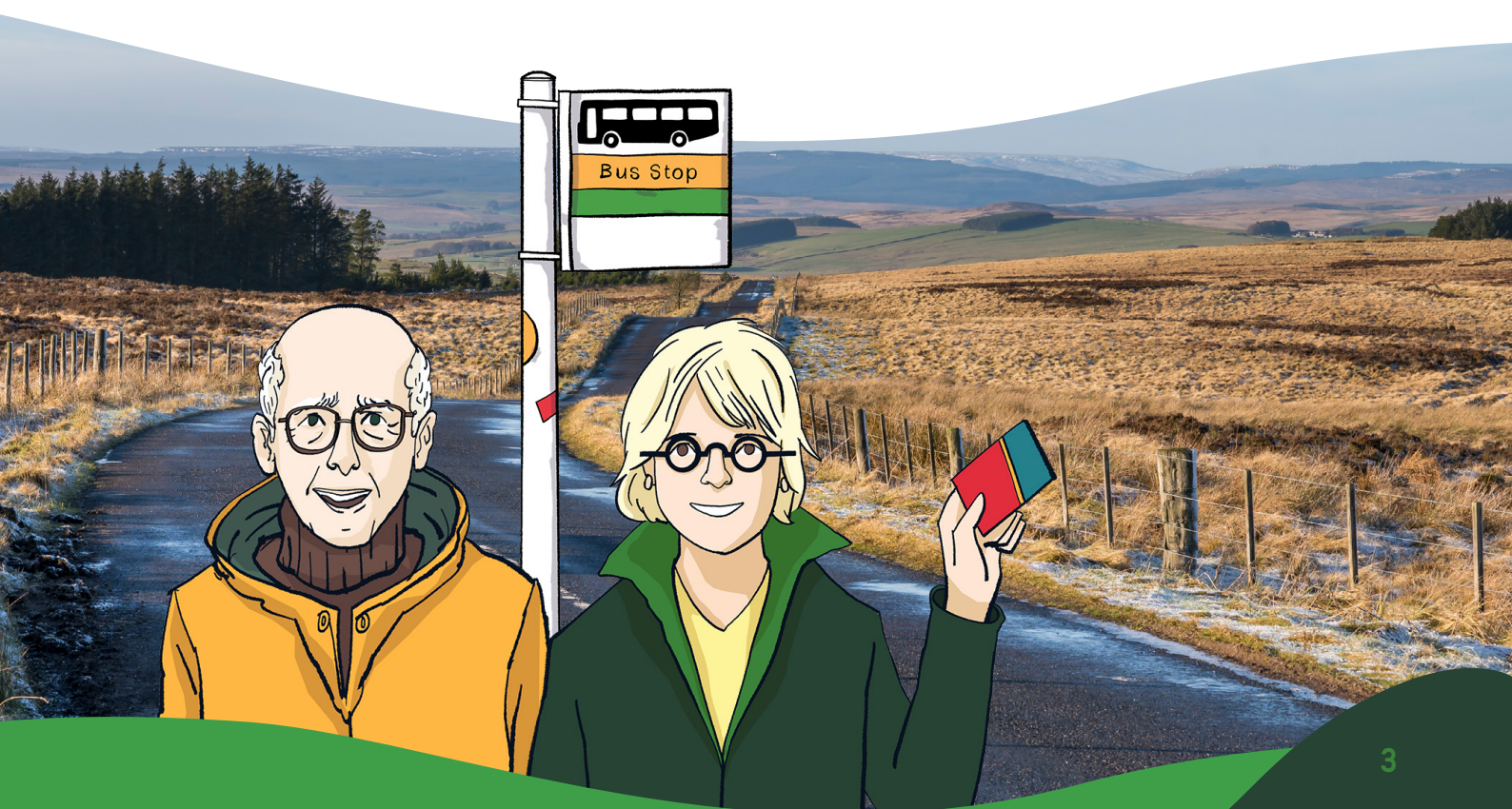
The aim of this report is to show how we can have a bus system that is fit for the climate emergency and that will put an end to the inequality and social exclusion caused by the current car dominance of rural life.

Key findings

- Bus services are essential for allowing us to decarbonise the transport sector by providing an alternative to private car travel.
- Bus services also provide numerous public goods and are essential for the many people across England who do not have access to a car. By providing an alternative to private car travel, local bus services can reduce traffic and air pollution, while boosting high street spending, employment, social mobility and equality. That is why properly funded bus services should be a priority for rural policy in the coming years.
- The inadequate statutory framework for ensuring the provision of bus services for every community, and the cuts to bus funding imposed by the government over the past decade, have left a serious lack of services to meet the needs of rural towns and villages. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic now means that emergency funding should be invested into rural bus services to stop the remaining network from collapsing completely.
- Examples from public transport systems across Switzerland, Austria and Germany show that it is possible to deliver a comprehensive bus network that offers excellent connectivity to rural communities. Despite being considerably less densely populated than every region of England, the region of North Hesse in Germany has a bus system that ensures services reach every village, every hour for at least 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. A similar level of bus services would be transformational for rural England.



- Rural communities in these countries enjoy a far more comprehensive bus network than England because decent public transport is regarded as a basic right, even in remote areas. In Switzerland, minimum service frequency standards for communities of different sizes are enshrined in law. England, too, should recognise a universal basic right to public transport, backed up with guaranteed service frequency standards, and the government should fund local transport authorities to achieve that level of service.
- We also need bus services that are fully publicly funded with regulated contracts and timetabling designed to integrate with rail and other forms of public transport. An integrated approach to network planning, timetabling and ticketing is essential to making public transport in rural areas of England a practicable, convenient and attractive option for residents of rural areas. With regulated services, we can make public transport travel a convenient and competitive alternative to driving a private car, as is essential for tackling the climate emergency.
- Our groundbreaking modelling finds that the government could deliver a bus to every village, every hour across England from 6am to midnight, 7 days per week, for £2.7 billion annually.
- There is a range of options the government could use to make a comprehensive bus network revenue neutral. By redirecting funding currently earmarked for environmentally damaging and unnecessary road building, the government could release enough money to invest in a bus service for every village, every hour.



Recommendations

CPRE is calling on the government to:

1. Continue emergency funding for bus operations, ensuring that the contractual terms are a fit basis for a transformed and fully regulated rural bus system.
2. Recognise a universal basic right to public transport and back it with statutory duties for local transport authorities to provide Swiss-style legal minimum service frequency standards to villages and towns, according to their size.
3. Legislate to establish bus regulation under the 'guiding mind' of local or regional transport authorities in all areas, with the option for local transport authorities to contract services or to provide them directly so as to reinvest the shareholder dividend savings.
4. Establish revenue funding at national level in the order of £2.7 bn per year to enable an 'every village, every hour' bus network.
5. Redirect funding from current road building schemes to fund the 'every village, every hour' network. Review the range of fundraising powers deployed by local transport authorities in other countries and assess the best ways to enable England's transport authorities to access similar powers.
6. Ensure that the transformed rural public transport network is affordable or free, to put an end to rural transport poverty and to provide an alternative to car use sufficiently attractive to address the climate emergency.
7. Investigate how England, including all of rural England, could move to a Swiss-style single national public transport timetable, aligning all trains and buses on a 'pulse' model of repeated hourly services.



View the full report

cpre.org.uk/everyvillageeveryhour

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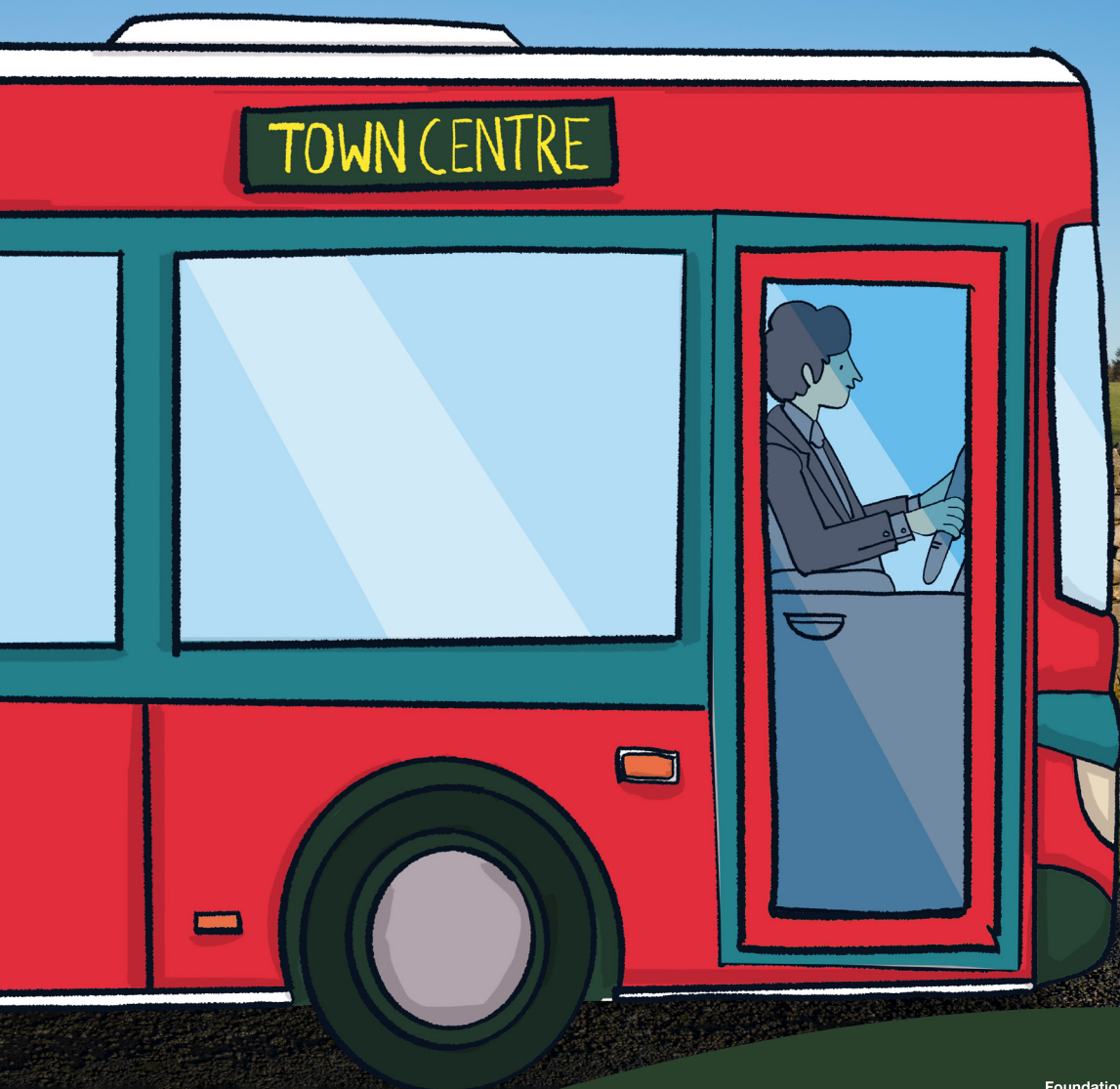
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