



TRANSPORTEAST

University of  
Hertfordshire **UH**

## Rural Transport Learning Network Roundtables 2023-24

Roundtable Three: Leisure and Tourism

# Summary

This report summarises the third in a series of roundtable discussions in 2023/24 commissioned and sponsored by Transport East<sup>1</sup> for the Rural Transport Learning Network and organised by the Smart Mobility Unit at the University of Hertfordshire.

The series builds on earlier roundtables hosted by the University of Hertfordshire between 2020 and 2022 to address the shortage of research and policy on transport outside cities and in rural areas.

The format for this roundtable was a two hour online meeting via Microsoft Teams and consisted of presentations by speakers followed by questions and discussion, both verbally and via the chat function.

The theme for this roundtable was the future of transport for leisure and tourism outside cities in rural areas. Topics considered were:

- What are the lessons from these and other initiatives to promote sustainable tourism in rural areas?
- What are the opportunities, benefits and barriers for less car-based tourism and leisure travel and access?
- Ways forward for local authorities, tourism and leisure groups, transport operators and bodies such as National Parks in promoting less car-based tourism.

There were 29 participants. Sectors represented were: sub-national and local government, technology/innovation, transport consultancy, academic research, non-governmental organisations, statutory bodies, visitor attractions and destination management organisations. Stephen Joseph chaired the discussion. The meeting heard from four speakers with expertise in transport for leisure outside cities. Three of these had a primary focus on making leisure and tourism travel more sustainable. The fourth represented an organisation involved in community engagement with the rail sector whose work results in behaviour change for sustainable travel. Participants responded with questions and comments and discussion followed.

1. **Alistair Kirkbride, consultant**, made the case for the right governance structures and empowered local leadership to decarbonise transport for leisure in rural areas. Visitor travel can be broken down into six main components. Travel to the destination has the largest carbon impact and is the hardest component to tackle. Best practice for 'within destination' travel can be found overseas, including the Austrian and Swiss Alps. With the correct governance and funding these models can be applied to UK locations so that car-free travel becomes an integral part of the visitor experience.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Transport East runs the Rural Mobility Centre of Excellence  
<https://www.transporteast.org.uk/rural-mobility-centre-of-excellence/>

<sup>2</sup> Alistair posted the following links/references for his presentation:  
- <https://www.churchillfellowship.org/ideas-experts/fellows-directory/alistair-kirkbride/>  
- <http://lowcarbontourism.org/>  
- <https://integratedtransport.org.uk/project/alistair-kirkbride>  
- <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/documents/conservation/new-forest-national-park-greenhouse-gas-emissions-assessment-report/>  
- <https://www.zermatt.ch/en/Media/Attractions/Matterhorn-Terminal-Taesch>  
- <https://www.werfenweng.eu/en/>  
- <https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/fees>.

2. **Nat Taplin, founder/director, Good Journey**, explained how Good Journey enables destinations to attract car-free visitors. Good Journey provides advice and support to communicate travel information, design discount schemes and develop infrastructure and services for visitors to navigate the ‘last mile’. Good Journey works closely with The National Trust, RHS and other major destinations and is also now working with local authorities eager to promote sustainable leisure travel<sup>3</sup>.
3. **Jools Townsend, Chief Executive, Community Rail Network**, showed how Community Rail Partnerships build community resilience and social capital by engaging people with their local stations and railways. This work takes many forms and involves a wide range of people who are often new to or lacking confidence in travelling by train. The Community Rail Network brings partners together locally to improve transport infrastructure, services, ticketing and accessibility. Communities with a strong sense of pride and cultural connection to their local railway make more sustainable travel choices<sup>4</sup>.
4. **Roger Clarke, secretary of the Hope Valley Climate Action** described HVCA’s nationally significant sustainable transport pilot work. The HVCA is a community led project in the Peak District National Park. With the sustainable transport project, Travelling Light, community engagement and co-creating solutions are central aspects. With the benefit of DfT funding and strong political support, the group has obtained improvements to rail timetabling and ticketing and, by raising awareness of bus service shortcomings, persuaded the County Council to install real time bus information. Travelling Light helped the subnational transport body Midlands Connect promote a

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-<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review> -  
[https://integratedtransport.org.uk/downloads/Alistair\\_Kirkbride\\_final\\_fellowship\\_report\\_December\\_2021.pdf](https://integratedtransport.org.uk/downloads/Alistair_Kirkbride_final_fellowship_report_December_2021.pdf) and <https://integratedtransport.org.uk/could-different-governance-unblock-long-standing-national-park-access-and-transport-problems>  
<https://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/news/23404978.calls-tourism-tax-criticised-business-boss-jonathan-denby/>  
<https://snowdonia.gov.wales/visit/snowdon/pen-y-pass-car-park/>  
<https://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/what-we-do/transport> and  
<https://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/news-events/news-there-is-an-appetite-to-travel-differently-in-the-lake-district-2023-11-28>  
<https://www.alpine-pearls.com/en/die-perlen/italy/cogne>

<sup>3</sup> Nat posted the following links /references to his presentation:

-<https://www.goodjourney.org.uk>  
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/wallington>  
<https://www.goodjourney.org.uk/attractions/wallington/>  
<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/walking-cycling-and-wheeling/view-walking-cycling-and-wheeling-routes-2/waddesdon-greenway/>  
<https://waddesdon.org.uk/your-visit/getting-here-parking-access/>  
<https://www.goodjourney.org.uk/norfolk-good-journey-county/>

<sup>4</sup> Jools posted the following links to her presentation:

-<https://platformrail.org/>  
<https://communityrail.org.uk/reports-and-research/tackling-loneliness-with-transport/>  
<https://communityraillancashire.co.uk/news/rivington-rambler-bus-to-run-again-this-summer/>  
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/bridgewater/plan-your-visit/shuttle-bus-frequently-asked-questions>  
<https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/about-us/news-desk/news-articles/all-special-event-trains-running-in-essex-in-2023> <https://esscrp.org.uk/events/bucket-and-spade-trains/>

project for peer-to-peer car sharing and EV charging and is now involved in an Active Travel Masterplan with the County Council. Key to the HVCA vision is reducing vehicle use and the group favours exploring options for traffic management in the National Park<sup>5</sup>.

Barriers which emerged from discussion ranged from transport taxation (VAT on combined travel and entry tickets) to the meandering rivers of the Broads making bus travel difficult, especially across county boundaries. Devolution was seen as a double edged sword. More local control of rail would allow innovative services for tourists. However, it was suggested that concentration of transport powers at subnational level can mean a loss of resources and skills for meaningful local community engagement. On the whole there was agreement that transport for leisure is poorly addressed in transport planning and more should be done to find synergies between resident and visitor travel needs.

There was wide agreement that viewing transport through the lens of the visitor experience is transformational. Sustainable travel is an easy sell when it is enjoyable and integrated into a holiday experience, for example by including guestcards for free local travel with hotel bookings. Enabling car-free travel to rural leisure and tourism destinations is increasingly important because younger cohorts are driving less. Affordable and convenient alternatives to the private car would also reduce the recruitment problems faced by the rural leisure economy.

Cornwall, Wales and Scotland offer lessons for managing transport for leisure in rural areas which can be applied elsewhere in the UK. Promised new funding for non-metropolitan areas in the Midlands and North of England was welcomed, as was a new duty on public bodies to seek to further the purposes of National Parks. Likewise the forthcoming general election was seen as an opportunity for positive change.

Overall there was a sense of a vacuum in leadership and management of the leisure and tourism sector. This may explain why this roundtable generated such active discussion and participants were unusually eager to share contact details.

By contrast there was strong feeling that communities are a rich resource with the skills and knowledge to find innovative solutions and inspire behavioural change if given the opportunity. People are willing to embrace new ideas and create a sense of vision and new possibilities. Local communities therefore need to be invited to engage in developing new governance structures for managing visitor travel.

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<sup>5</sup> Roger posted the following links/references to his presentation:

-<https://hopevalleyclimateaction.org.uk/about-hvca/>  
- <https://hopevalleyclimateaction.org.uk/travel/travelling-light/>  
-<https://www.commonplace.is/>