



GOOD PRACTICE WEBINAR



Highlights report

Enhancing rural mobility through local action

Introduction

This Good Practice Webinar explored the role of local communities in enhancing mobility options on their territories and contributing to a fair socio-economic development. It showcased inspiring examples of smart mobility in three main areas: supporting rural tourism; strengthening access to basic services; and strengthening territorial and social cohesion.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



20 June 2024



Online



75 participants from 23 EU Member States and 3 non-EU Members States (local practitioners, policymakers, advisors, businesses, researchers, EU-funded project representatives)



Presentations & recordings ([here](#))



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Setting the scene: EU initiatives to foster the support of mobility in rural, remote and peri-urban areas

The support for rural mobility under the long-term vision for EU's rural areas

Silvia Nanni, European Commission, DG AGRI ([PPT](#))



Rural mobility is part of one of the ten shared goals of the [EU's rural vision](#) and several of the flagship actions from the connected pillar under the [EU Rural Action Plan](#). The flagship [SMARTA-NET initiative](#) aims at developing rural mobility through support to rural municipalities with identifying best practices for mobility solutions.

Policies and initiatives supporting rural mobility

Rafal Stanekci, European Commission, DG MOVE ([PPT](#))



The EU's [Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy](#) recognises the need to improve the connectivity of rural and remote areas, by fostering a just transition towards sustainable mobility. This aim is fostered by several recent EU initiatives, including the [revised Regulation for the development of the trans-European transport network \(TEN-T\)](#), digital mobility initiatives (such as 'Mobility as a Service'), and EU projects (such as [SMARTA](#) and [SMARTA2](#), [Interreg MAMBA](#), [LAST MILE Interreg Europe](#), [Interreg Central Europe RUMOBIL](#)).

Additionally, the 2023 EU Council's [Barcelona Declaration](#) constitutes a strong commitment for accessible, affordable, and equal mobility in order to promote social and territorial cohesion.

Key lessons from community-led initiatives on mobility

Andrea Lorenzini, SMARTA-NET ([PPT](#))



[SMARTA-NET](#) supports rural municipalities as well as transport and mobility practitioners to deliver formal and informal mobility services. Shared rural mobility solutions include flexible transport services, ride sharing services, and asset sharing services. It can become more effective when those options are coordinated and combined with other services (bus, railway service, and various public transport networks).

It is essential for local authorities to both facilitate conventional transport and support the community-based approach for shared mobility services and needs which are not covered by conventional transport.



Photo by Katja

Learning from inspirational projects and practices

Rezopouce: Organising modern hitch-hiking (France)

Jacques-Léon Gout & Bénédicte Rozes, Rezopouce ([PPT](#))



[Rezo Pouce](#) is a web platform, mobile application, with a simple registration procedure, and Rezo Pouce vehicle stops. Today, Rezo Pouce offers three mobility services: hitchhiking; carpooling; and solidarity transport, bringing together 1 200 shareholders, nearly 600 000 users and 1 200 municipalities, regions and departments.

Sopotniki initiative (Slovenia)

Marko Zevnik, Sopotniki NGO (PPT)



The [Sopotniki Institute](#) is a community-based service implemented in Slovenia providing free door-to-door transportation service for elderly people. The service covers 17 municipalities and small villages outside the Ljubljana urban region, allowing its 5 700 regular users to access services, culture, and leisure at no cost.

A central management team is responsible for strategic planning, regulatory compliance, fundraising, and coordination with municipalities, and is supported by a network of 300 volunteer drivers. The service is supported by a smart infrastructure, including a volunteers' portal, reservations application, and mobile app for quick calls and easy navigation.

Transport for Ireland, Local Link Carlow Kilkenny Wicklow (Ireland)

Jackie Meally, TFI Local Link (PPT)



[Transport for Ireland](#) is managed and administered nationally by 15 transport coordination units. It operates two services: regular rural bus services and door-to-door bus services. The former operates on standard lines; are driven by contracted bus operators; and have a fixed timetable. The latter enables passenger travel at lower prices, usually associated with fixed route bus services. Challenges include continued funding, as well as staff and driver recruitment and retention.

The Trabocchi Cycling-tourism Network (Italy)

Carlo Ricci, LEADER LAG, Trabocchi coast (PPT)



The Trabocchi Network, launched in 2019, consists of natural cycling roads – country or low traffic roads. This covers approximately 300 km of trails in seven different rings; 90% of country roads; connections with railway stations; and an orientation system combining road signs and digital tracks. Since 2023, the Network has been extending its territorial scope and introducing a renewed concept [Costa dei Trabocchi MOB](#) combining bike-bus lines, bike stations, intermodality map explaining how to navigate the area without using a car.

Enabling local communities to take action to enhance rural mobility

– Panel debate

The panel debate highlighted the multifaceted nature of rural mobility challenges and the importance of **cooperation, innovative thinking, and strategic planning** to create sustainable and accessible mobility solutions for local communities.

Key messages

- > **Transport poverty** generally refers to situations where people lack access to essential services or work due to unaffordable or unavailable transport options. Research conducted in rural Finland by the VTT Technical Research Centre identifies key contributing factors, such as lack of transport options, poor accessibility for disabled individuals, high costs, long travel times, and unsafe travel conditions.
- > The **Smart Villages** approach can provide solutions to rural mobility issues by promoting participation and social innovation rather than relying solely on technological advances. A

Panellists

- Jenni Eckhardt ([VTT Technical Research Centre](#), Finland)
- Edina Ocsko ([Smart Villages Rural Pact Community Group](#) & [Rural Pact Coordination Group](#) Vice-Chair)
- Rafael Amorim ([Intermunicipal Community of Cávado - CIM Cávado](#), Portugal)
- Lauren Mosdale (Erasmus+ [DINAMO project](#) & [CIPRA France](#), the French office of the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps, France)

strategic and holistic Smart Villages approach can address economic and environmental impacts, while meeting the mobility needs of the most vulnerable populations.

Cooperation between rural communities and regional authorities, based on engagement and collaboration, is a critical factor in developing effective mobility solutions.

- > Structured **collaboration between rural and urban areas** can significantly improve rural mobility. An example of this is the implementation of the Public Passenger Transport Service Concession Contract by the Intermunicipal Community of Cávado in Portugal, which met government-mandated minimum service levels.
- > Shifting mindsets within municipalities to **prioritise local residents' mobility needs over those of tourists** can be supported through public-private partnership financing models. The Erasmus+ DINAMO project highlights that these enhance the financial capacity of municipalities to implement effective mobility plans.

Sharing experiences and drawing lessons and recommendations – Group discussions

Enhanced mobility for developing key economic sectors such as tourism

Regenerate

Valentina Romanin, ETIFOR Valuing Nature (Italy) ([PPT](#))



The Interreg [Regenerate project](#) explores how sustainable tourism can be strategically used to strengthen the overall local mobility systems in Austria and Italy. The project has identified practical mobility solutions, such as a mobility card with economic incentives for both local residents and tourists, and digital platforms offering customised transport services: for workers, for socio-health needs, and for tourists.

Rutas a Bocados

Pedro García Rubio, Asociación Desarrollo Tecnológico Rural (Spain) ([PPT](#))



The [Rutas a Bocados project](#) (Spain) is supported by the EU initiative [DIGITOUR](#) to promote sustainable tourism and supports the local economy. The project integrates hiking with gastronomy tours, offering trails to explore the regional culinary heritage. Developed in collaboration with local hotels, the project includes web applications that allow users to discover and personalise their experience.

Main points from the group discussion

- > **Reconcile rural mobility solutions implemented for the benefit of the local population and for seasonal visitors**, ensuring that services are designed according to respective needs. Practices such as the application of intermodality, incentives for tourists to use public transport, and use of low-traffic rural roads can contribute to this reconciliation.
- > Enhance **local community engagement** to develop tourism projects by strengthening capacity building actions for mobility solution through communication, networking and co-creation within the local community, exchange of experiences with other communities, use of innovative digital applications and platforms.
- > Rethink the **overall system of governance and funding of activities and infrastructures**, such as parking spaces, in order to strengthen available resources at the level of local communities. Public-private partnerships, tourist tax, minimum service level of mobility for rural areas provide potential sources of financing.

Enhanced mobility for strengthening access to basic services (e.g. health, education, leisure)

Mobitwin

Isaura Lips, Mpact, shared and inclusive mobility (Belgium) ([PPT](#))



Mobitwin is a service by the Belgian nonprofit organisation Mpact, which facilitates social transport for individuals with limited mobility and financial means. Operating in over 200 municipalities, Mobitwin employs 3 000 volunteer drivers and assists around 40 000 people annually. Volunteers use their private or shared cars to provide rides, costs are kept low thanks to membership and a regulated kilometre fee.

Main points from the group discussion

- > Introduce **flexible transport options** such as on-demand buses and shared taxis – which require investments by local authorities – and car-pooling and (e-)hitchhiking which are cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional transport methods.
- > Foster **community engagement** to support and manage these services, ensuring they align with the **specific demands of rural populations**. Trained volunteers help organising and operating these community-driven initiatives.
- > Instil **shared ownership and responsibility among the private and public sectors** to create a comprehensive, sustainable and legal transport network.

Enhanced mobility for territorial and social cohesion

Mobirural

Patricia Mora, Innogestiona Ambiental ([PPT](#))



The Erasmus+ [Mobirural project](#), involving partners from Italy, Spain, Germany and Romania, works to enhance rural mobility. Its online [platform](#), providing vocational e-training, helps local development agents plan and optimises local mobility resources. The project identifies good and bad practices in rural mobility services, focusing on digital and physical infrastructure, shared and e-mobility mobility solutions, and relevant regulations.

CIPRA France Initiatives

Lauren Mosdale, CIPRA France



The [Mountain Wilderness France](#) initiative raises awareness of modes of transport other than private cars to access mountain areas. The [Protect Our Winters France](#) initiative offers low-carbon mobility solutions to reach ski resorts. Additionally, the [Savoie BlablaCar Daily](#) provides car-sharing possibilities to passengers, while drivers are compensated for their resources.

Main points from the group discussion

- > Improve **understanding of local population needs**: when, where, and why people are moving and who is moving. Rural communities, and particularly vulnerable groups – elderly, disabled, low-income families, unemployed, single parents, teenagers, migrants, newcomers – are impacted by mobility deficits.
- > Develop **strategic and participatory rural mobility plans based on a holistic approach**. Municipalities and regions can emulate the example set by the Smart Villages approach of linking mobility with several other sectors (e.g. social and health services).
- > Enhance **rural mobility assets** at the community and individual levels by making funding resources available (for infrastructure, car ownership), and skills (drivers and drivers' license). **Develop capacity building** to stimulate new ways of collaboration (e.g. public-private-civil society partnerships), mobilise volunteers, use shared mobility solutions.

More information from group discussions is available on the whiteboards uploaded on the [website](#).

Concluding remarks

Keynote listener

Carla Lostrangio, European Association for Innovation in Local Development - AEIDL

Mobility is not an end in itself, but is a **crucial challenge to access basic services** and secure basic rights: to education; health; jobs; social inclusion. Lack of mobility affects several categories of people in rural areas, with some groups, such as the elderly and young people, being more affected than others.

The **main challenges related to rural mobility** include rural depopulation, quality of road infrastructure, funding source availability, alignment between rural mobility and climate objectives, link with tourism sector, and legal framework for volunteers' work.

Community-based solutions can help to overcome mobility gaps by offering practical solutions, such as: mobility-asset sharing; on-demand transport services; different types of financial systems; ways of cooperating with public authorities and the private sector. There is no need for high-tech solutions – social innovation, i.e. how the communities get organised, accept solutions and are empowered, is key.

Interesting **concepts and approaches** – such as addressing transport poverty, the integrated and participatory approaches of Smart Villages, minimum level of transport service – could be explored to support new mobility solutions in rural areas.

Next steps for the Rural Pact Support Office [\(PPT\)](#)

The RPSO outlined the upcoming Rural Pact activities and events followed by Silvia Nanni (DG AGRI) who thanked all those who contributed to this successful event.

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en



<https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu>



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