



Smart Villages and rural mobility

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INTRODUCTION

This leaflet is one of three being developed by the ENRD to support rural stakeholders designing Smart Village initiatives in certain key domains. The focus of this document is on **Rural Mobility**. 'Mobility' is a basic freedom; it is the possibility to access work, education, services, society and everything else that is part of a person's life. In other words, mobility is one of the vital enablers of any community, especially of rural communities where many essential things are located some distance away. Providing more sustainable forms of mobility can also make an important contribution to mitigating climate change.

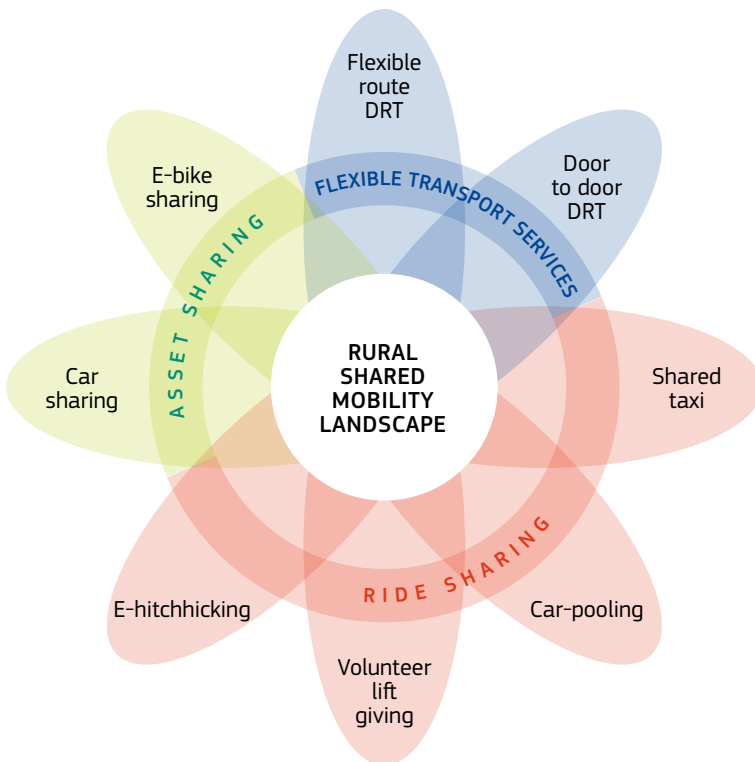
However, rural mobility has received far less attention from policy-makers than urban mobility and there is a serious lack of conventional transport and of various shared mobility options that are being deployed in many urban areas. The reality for many rural areas is few buses, even fewer train stations and an almost total dependence on cars. This obliges people to spend more on travel, and to use private transport at the expense of more sustainable alternatives.

Smart Villages strategies aim to help rural communities test new solutions to some of the fundamental challenges they

face – as well as exploring the new opportunities created by technological and other forms of innovation. Mobility is, therefore, potentially a key theme and focus for many future Smart Villages strategies.

The leaflet is targeted firstly at Managing Authorities (MAs) and other institutional actors involved in preparing the future CAP Strategic Plans as well as other policies for rural development. The aim here is simply to highlight the factors and conditions they should take into account when designing their future policies to ensure that Smart Villages strategies enable rural communities to design and test promising and potentially sustainable mobility solutions.

As Smart Villages strategies are, by definition, driven by rural communities themselves, this leaflet also identifies some of the key steps that local actors can take, as well as providing links to key sources of information and inspiring examples that can help them design and implement an effective 'smart' strategy for sustainable rural mobility.



'Shared mobility' generally refers to modes and services that are additional to the conventional route-based public transport operated by buses. It spans demand-responsive transport (DRT), shared taxis, car-pooling, car-sharing, community/volunteer schemes, etc.

The 'shared mobility services' include both the mobility services themselves and the supporting services including traveller information, reservations, payment and operations management.

Source: SMARTA Project

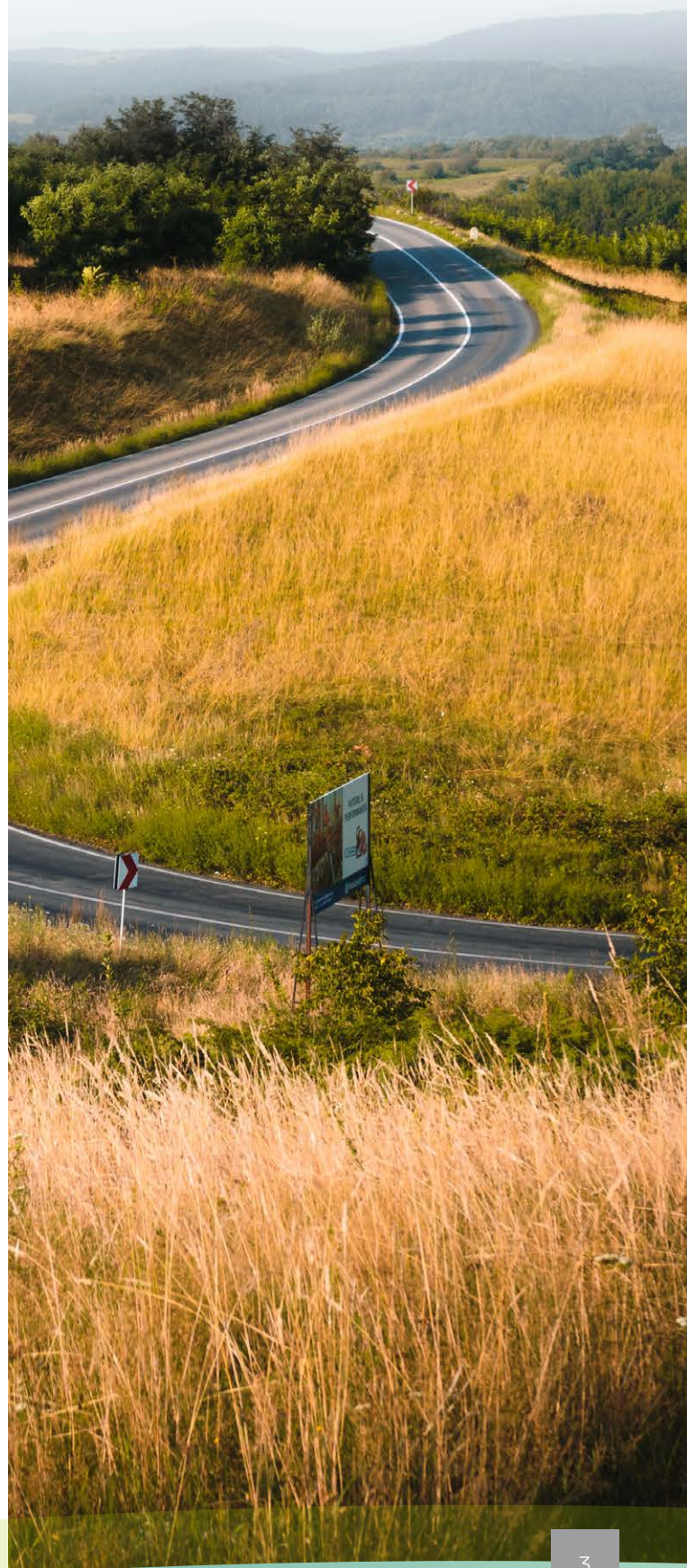
USING EU RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY TO SUPPORT SMART LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL MOBILITY

One of the three general objectives of the future CAP Strategic Plans is 'to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas'. This is further described in Specific Objective 8 for creating 'Vibrant Rural Areas' by 'promoting employment, growth, social inclusion and local development...'. Rural mobility can be viewed as a cross-cutting 'multiplier' that can allow or improve outcomes and enhance the value of other investments. In many cases it will be a value-adding component to other economic, social, tourism or environmental projects. So, if a rural mobility initiative increases the connectivity of a village or rural area, or increases the number of people that can access a business/activity, it may be worthy of support from Rural Development policy.

However, the classic opinion is that 'in rural areas, everyone has a car'. Of course, this is not true. Many people cannot drive, due to age, condition or affordability. When the household car is in use, other household members do not have access to it. Low-/no-income households and individuals may not have a car. In the absence of good public transport or shared mobility services, many people cannot get around. This serious gap limits their participation in society, their earning potential and their contribution to the economy. Secondly, all communities, businesses and activity points need a reasonable level of connectivity to attract both local and visiting clients. This is especially important for ventures seeking to attract visitors/tourists from urban areas. Agri-business and related ventures need affordable mobility for their workers, who are typically low-waged and may be seasonal.

Consequently, mobility should be taken into account in the SWOT analysis and the prioritisation of needs for the CAP Specific Objective 8 for Vibrant Rural Areas. To do this, some Member States can draw on fairly detailed statistics which identify the 'deserts' and 'white spots' in terms of accessibility to population centres and certain basic services (see for example the Italian Inner Areas Strategy⁽¹⁾). However, there are usually huge differences in needs and provision between different types of area, making it essential to collect local stakeholder views at an early stage in the programming and to ensure that these are reflected in the prioritisation of needs.

(1) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/tg_smart-villages_case-study_it.pdf



MAPPING THE POLICY LANDSCAPE FOR RURAL MOBILITY

As with other key domains for Smart Villages, such as energy and digitalisation, mobility is a highly regulated and complex field. Competences tend to be divided among national, regional and local public and private actors in different ways across Europe. In this context, it is often difficult for the authorities responsible for rural development and for local actors to assess where they have the most chances of successfully intervening and adding value.

The **SMARTA** project has **produced 28 insight papers**⁽²⁾ explaining the 'Policy frameworks' for mobility in all EU Member States. These set out the intentions of government – vision, goals, responsibilities, participation, funding mechanisms, etc.

The insight papers show that virtually no European countries have an explicit policy on rural mobility that combines a vision with practical measures such as obligations on mobility services provision, specified targets/objectives, assignment of responsibility, or the role that local actors can play. The excellent efforts on promotion of sustainable mobility solutions for urban and metropolitan areas have not been matched by any such effort for rural mobility, although around 55 % of Europe's population lives in predominantly rural and intermediate areas.

The insight papers can help MAs and other rural stakeholders to identify the regulatory background and scope for action at different levels as well as who is responsible for what and who should be involved in developing new solutions.

DESIGNING RURAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

The ENRD Thematic Group, has argued that Smart Villages strategies should add value to other policies by putting in place flexible packages of interventions that respond to the needs of rural communities. For example, Managing Authorities (MAs) should consider how Smart Villages strategies can provide:

1. More support for local facilitation and animation;
2. Better access to sources of knowledge;
3. Faster and more flexible finance for local innovation;
4. Stronger and more flexible cooperation;
5. Better alignment with other investment policies and funds.

Previous policy briefs produced by the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages have shown that there is a wide range of interventions foreseen in the future CAP Strategic Plans that can be used to support Smart Villages strategies.⁽³⁾ These include LEADER/CLLD and other forms of cooperation, knowledge transfer, and various types of investment. While these cannot on their own solve the underlying problems of rural mobility, they can play two important roles. Firstly, through a Smart Village approach, LEADER and other forms of cooperation support can bring together local and national stakeholders to develop a community vision and a business case for the solutions required. Secondly, they can be used to test new or alternative solutions and to invest in small-scale, but vital, last-mile connections which can create the conditions for leveraging further public and private funding.



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NATIONAL RURAL TRANSPORT PROGRAMME, IRELAND

Based on the belief that ensuring shared mobility options in rural areas is of primary importance, the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was established in Ireland in 2002 to enable (and sustain) local communities to provide targeted mobility services in rural areas. Seventeen Transport Coordination Units branded as 'LocalLink' offices are currently operating throughout Ireland, providing a mix of services, including demand-responsive transport for general use, scheduled fixed routes and special services for vulnerable users (e.g. to daycare facilities). At the very local level, the service is managed by a community-led group with a high level of voluntary participation. In all cases, they have established a local not-for-profit entity for planning and delivery of the mobility services. The RTP is supported by a central government grant, which is distributed by the National Transport Authority to the LocalLink offices. The allocation for 2018 was € 14.3 million across the 17 LocalLink offices.

More info: www.nationaltransport.ie/public-transport-services/rural-transport-programme

(2) <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/insight-papers-page/>

(3) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/smart-villages_orientations_sv-strategies.pdf

WHAT COULD A SMART VILLAGE POTENTIALLY LOOK LIKE IN TERMS OF MOBILITY?

The future vision for a 'Smart Mobility Village' could consist of several complementary features adapted to local circumstances, all under the same coordination 'umbrella':

1. the presence of shared mobility solutions (including demand-responsive transport services and car-pooling offered by a single point/coordination unit managing the transport services of different (small) municipalities;
2. conventional public transport routes with stops and frequencies based on the needs of the local population, operating mostly during high demand period;
3. mini-hub/interchange points, close to the railway stations or main bus stops, offering different bike/ car-sharing services and where multimodal travel information and payment systems are available; and
4. local retired and other people engaged on a voluntary basis as drivers or in other supporting roles, to provide additional community mobility at minimal cost.

In terms of physical investments, some rural areas are also exploring combinations of electric vehicles and renewable energy generation.

LOCAL STEPS FOR BUILDING SMART VILLAGE INITIATIVES ON MOBILITY



How can local actors get involved?

We observe two main types of mobility initiative: 'top-down', which is initiated by some layer of government or by a public agency (which could be on application from the community). The Rural Transport Initiative ([Local Link](#)⁽⁴⁾) in Ireland is a good example.

'Bottom-up' is where the community itself takes all the initiative, perhaps following a methodology that has been shared. These are the kinds of initiatives that are likely to be supported by Smart Villages strategies. But it is important to be realistic about what can be achieved at local level. [Bürgerbus](#)⁽⁵⁾ in Germany, [Go-Mobil](#)⁽⁶⁾ in Austria, [Badenoch & Strathspey](#)⁽⁷⁾ in Scotland and various car-sharing schemes are good examples. Local actors will invariably need to form some type of partnership within which they can develop, implement and sustain a scheme. The form of partnership will need to become more formal if they are applying for funding, if they are taking on public liability, or must qualify as license-holders/operators of mobility services. Local actors play a key role in the governance of schemes, even in top-down initiatives.



How to assess local mobility needs?

Many methodologies to assess local mobility needs have been developed and tested in European-sponsored projects such as [SAMPO](#)⁽⁸⁾, [SAMPLUS](#)⁽⁹⁾, [SUNRISE](#)⁽¹⁰⁾, [FLIPPER](#)⁽¹¹⁾, [MINDSETS](#)⁽¹²⁾. Relevant materials are now available on the [SMARTA](#) website. There may also be national/local resources with valuable reference data. Whatever tools are used, the fundamental approach is to talk to people. However, this must be done in a structured way so that the results are reliable. The main tools are focus groups, surveys, interviews and travel diaries.

For villages and rural areas, it is also important to communicate with local businesses, activity points, clinics, etc., as they also have a core need – that people can reach them. They will often have very good insights into the needs and patterns of people who visit them. User needs analysis from other projects can offer a good checklist. It is always advisable to consult with the community on the initial findings, to see if anything has been missed. These methodologies are very effective at identifying needs, and slightly less effective when it comes to quantifying demand.

(4) <https://www.locallink.ie>

(5) <https://www.buergerbus-bw.de/info/englisch/>

(6) <http://www.gomobil-kaernten.at/index.php?id=127>

(7) <http://www.ct4u.co.uk/about-us.aspx>

(8) <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/resources/sampo-1996-1997/>

(9) <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/resources/samplus-1998-1999/>

(10) <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/resources/sunrise-2004-2005/>

(11) <http://www.memexitaly.it/trasporto-pubblico-progetto/interreg-ivc-flipper/>

(12) <http://www.mind-sets.eu>



How to identify what works best in specific contexts?

First, map out the context – what mobility services are already available? Are there local resources that can be used? Are local government and other agencies interested and willing to provide support? This will help to identify the main gaps and possible building blocks for any solution. Examine good practices in other areas. There are good solutions out there which can inspire what could be done at local level in rural communities.

The websites of [SMARTA](https://www.euromontana.org/en/project/move-on-green-2/), [Euromontana](https://www.euromontana.org/en/project/move-on-green-2/)⁽¹³⁾, [LAST-MILE](https://www.interregeurope.eu/lastmile/)⁽¹⁴⁾, [MAMBA](https://www.mambaproject.eu)⁽¹⁵⁾, [HiReach](https://hireach-project.eu)⁽¹⁶⁾, [RuMobil](https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/rumobil.html)⁽¹⁷⁾ projects describe around 200 case studies of rural mobility services. They include information about how they were implemented, what proved effective in what context, and site contacts. Sift through these and make a long-list of potential options to consider on the basis of identified needs. It may be better to consider a package of measures rather than a single ‘magic bullet’. Develop a set of concepts or packages, then test how your community could implement them. Select from among the possible options and consult with stakeholders. If resources permit, carry out a feasibility study.

(13) <https://www.euromontana.org/en/project/move-on-green-2/>

(14) <https://www.interregeurope.eu/lastmile/>

(15) <https://www.mambaproject.eu>

(16) <https://hireach-project.eu>

(17) <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/rumobil.html>



How to prioritise among competing needs?

This is a decision for the community to take. There are three basic approaches: **(1) Social**: Prioritise those most in need, for example those experiencing social exclusion; **(2) Functional**: Focus on the mobility service, connection to the local public transport network/hubs, the number of activities that can be served; or **(3) Pragmatic**: Focus on what can be done immediately, get some ‘quick wins’ and build up as opportunities arise. If the main goal is to improve connectivity of the community itself, then a combination of **(2) Functional** and **(3) Pragmatic** is likely to be most effective.

Establishing new local mobility services is invariably dependent on what funding sources can be tapped into. This may in any case predetermine the purposes or targets for which the funding is used. In the Smart Villages context, it is likely that a holistic approach to needs is being followed. The priorities for mobility would fit with the broader plan. Whatever approach is taken, it is essential to consult, seek consensus, gain buy-in and seek the patience of those who are not served immediately. A roadmap will be helpful, both for planning and for buy-in. Smart Villages strategies can support the design and implementation of the roadmap.



Where to find examples of implementation, scale-up and evaluation?

Despite rural mobility challenges, solutions are possible! From the experiences collected by European initiatives like SMARTA, MAMBA, LAST-MILE, Euromontana and RuMobil, it appears that ‘top-down’ initiatives (coordinated by national/regional agencies of rural municipalities), and ‘bottom-up’ initiatives (developed at the level of the local communities) have been successfully developed. This includes group-based car-pooling services, demand-responsive transport services organised by a single coordination unit grouping different municipalities, and community-based transport services. Some of the following examples present promising initiatives in rural mobility. These aim to inspire anyone who would like to know more about mobility solutions and improve the mobility experience in villages and rural communities. Once again Smart Villages strategies can be used to achieve a better coordination between top-down and bottom-up initiatives.

EU wide projects



SMARTA is a project funded by the European Commission – DG MOVE, focused on shared mobility and public transport. In 2018 and early 2019, the project has made a comprehensive overview of good practices, covering mobility services, rural policies and governance initiatives, from across Europe and beyond. More info: <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/good-practices/>



From 2012 to 2014, the Move on Green Project, co-financed by the ERDF and the INTERREG IVC programme, collected 51 successful initiatives in greening or improving mobility in rural and mountain areas. These good practices have been clustered into nine different types depending on their main objectives. A summary of each case is available in English, Spanish, Polish and Latvian. More info: <https://www.euromontana.org/en/project/move-on-green-2/mog-good-practices/>



mamba is an INTERREG Baltic Sea Region project that started in 2017 focused on mobility in rural areas facing demographic changes such as aging and declining population. They implemented nine innovative pilot actions and developed an online database with best practice examples from 11 countries in Europe. More info: <https://www.mambaproject.eu/products/>

Community-based solutions

There are many shared mobility initiatives in Europe where the local communities play an active role and/or are engaged on a voluntary basis. Different services can be offered: a conventional bus dedicated to vulnerable user groups (and usually bookable in advance), general purpose service by bus or car, car-sharing, etc.



Is a successful hitch-hiking service developed in France. The service is organised by the municipality with the support of the RezoPouce association. It is currently active in more than 1 800 areas. More info: <https://www.rezopouce.fr>



Bürgerbus is a volunteer-based community transport service operating in different areas of Germany, mainly in Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony and North-Rhine Westphalia. Volunteers are used as drivers or for other tasks related to the transport service. It is financially supported both by the state and private funding. More info: <https://www.buergerbus-bw.de>

Evaluation

Over the last 20 years, several methodologies for assessing and evaluating mobility solutions have been successfully developed and tested. A good evaluation methodology should certainly comprise both quantitative (including ridership, environmental impacts, etc.) and qualitative indicators (such as users acceptance, quality of the service perceived, etc.), in order to have a good, cost-efficient and reliable evaluation approach. A good mix of data collection methods and measurement, interviews, focus groups and surveys should always be used.



SMARTA evaluation framework was developed for assessing and evaluating site demonstration of innovative mobility solutions for rural areas. More info: <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SMARTA-Evaluation-Framework-1.pdf>



MIND-SETS Knowledge Centre is an intelligence facility to enable policy-makers, planners and researchers to better understand mobility and the role it plays in people’s lives. More info: <http://www.mind-sets.eu>



MASCARA, FLIPPER and SUNRISE projects deal mainly with demand-responsive transport services in rural areas. They have developed an evaluation methodology, including evaluation planning, indicators, measurements and methods, specifically tailored for rural areas. More info: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/best-practices/italy/2121

