



Rural Households' Experience of Accessing Key Public Services in Northern Ireland

Agricultural and Food Economics (AFBI)

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- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) funded research project
- Supported under the DARD Rural Policy Branch's 'Social & Economic Infrastructure of Rural Areas' programme of work
- Project commenced: August 2011
- Research Team: Niamh Connolly
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Main issues surrounding rural service provision

- OECD report (2010) - identifies key core 'basic' services that individuals are entitled to receive, in an equitable way, irrespective of their economic and social status and location (education and health services - identified as 'key services')
- At a Northern Ireland level there has been a trend towards the centralisation of public service provision into areas with high-density populations (i.e. large towns and cities)
- Concerns for rural dwellers
 - (i) loss of services in their area
 - (ii) accessing services will become more difficult, time consuming and expensive
- For rural dwellers, services becoming more centralised may lead to a greater reliance on private/public transport



Study Objectives

- To establish whether the experience of accessing key public services in Northern Ireland is any different for rural households compared to urban households?
- To explore, in particular, the experiences of key public service access for 'vulnerable households', namely:
 - low income households (including single parent households)
 - pensioner households; and
 - households with children / young people



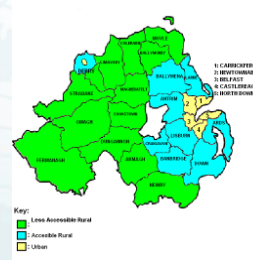
Background and Literature

- Defining what is Rural ?
- Some definitions of 'rural' make reference to
 - population density
 - settlement sizes
 - land-use patterns (agriculture & forestry)
 - distance from major urban centres
- These criteria can be applied singly or in combination
- However... no single definition of rural that is universally accepted or relevant for all purposes (a disconnect in the way rural evidence statistics are compiled)
- Some NI government departments make use of two definitions of rural; the 'Settlements' and 'LGD' definitions



Defining Rural:

The 'Local Government District' Definition



Accessible Rural	Less Accessible Rural
Armagh	Armagh
Ard	Ballymoney
Ballymena	Coleraine
Banbridge	Cookstown
Craigavon	Dungannon
Down	Fermanagh
Larne	Limavady
Lisburn	Magherafelt
	Moyle
	Newry & Mourne
	Omagh
	Strabane

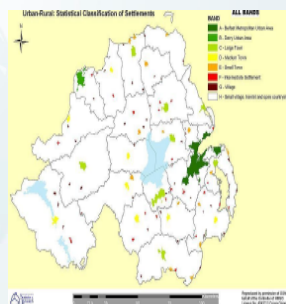
Based on 2001 Census data, **62% of the region's population lived in rural areas** (30% in accessible & 32% in less accessible rural areas)



Defining Rural:

The 'Settlements' Definition

- In 2005, the 'Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group' defined a hierarchy of urban/rural classification based on settlement size using 2001 Census data
- 'Urban' Settlements =>4,500 population (bands A-E)
- 'Rural' Settlements < 4,500 population (bands F-H)
- In 2001 **35% of the region's population lived in rural areas** and 65% lived urban areas

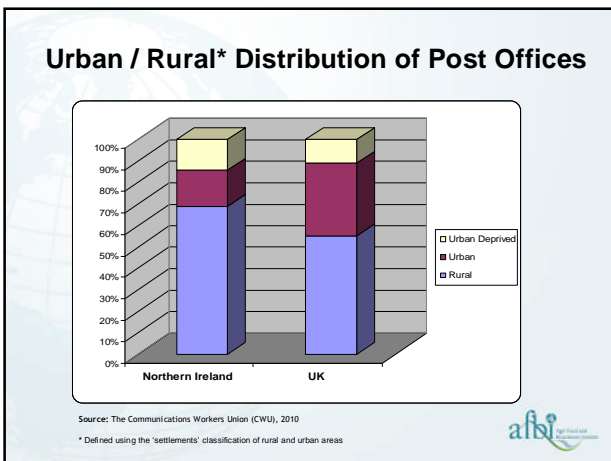
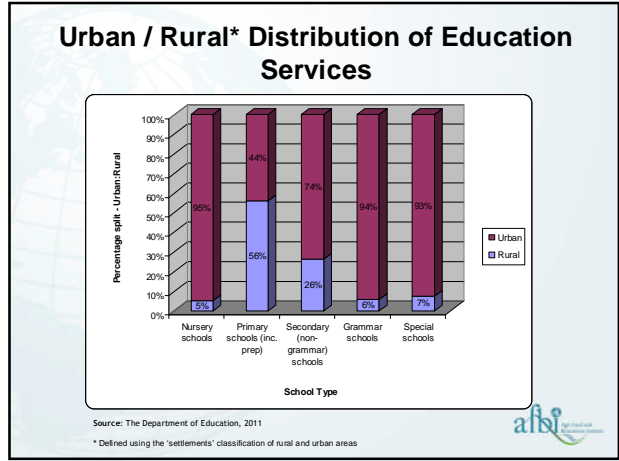
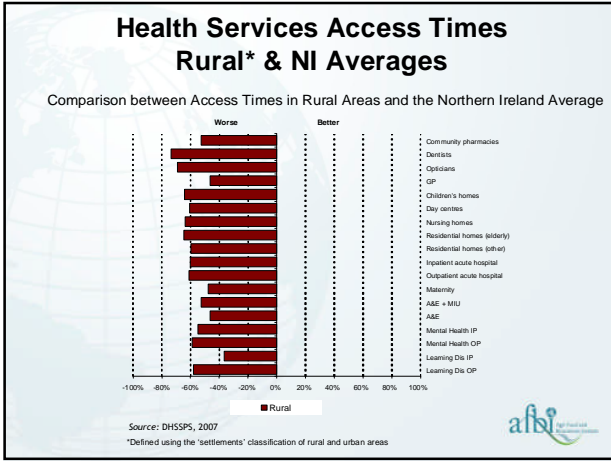


Methodological Approach (1)

Literature Review:

- Examination of the issues rural households face when accessing the identified key public services
- Exploration of approaches and practices (including IT provision) undertaken in other countries which facilitated greater / improved access to the public services within a rural context
- Review of Northern Ireland, UK, Rol and international literature
- Preliminary work.... the evidence so far...





Health, Education and Post Office Service Reforms in NI

- Public services - under increasing pressure to rationalise and streamline in the face of ever tightening budgetary constraints
- Rural areas – especially vulnerable to public service reforms

Health Service Reforms

- Ongoing reform and modernisation of acute hospital services involves centralisation and specialisation of health care services
- Streamlining of acute hospital care, whose coverage is mainly rural, has heightened public concern in relation to emergency patient care for those in more remote rural areas of Northern Ireland
- HSCB draft Commissioning Plan (June 2011)
- Recently commissioned review of NI Health and Social Care Services - report due Nov. 2011

Health, Education and Post Office Service Reforms in NI

Education Reforms

- Challenges for primary & post-primary school sectors in NI: decline in pupil numbers, budgetary pressures & intro of the revised curriculum
- Immediate audit of every school in NI commenced in Sept. 2011
- Rural schools are smaller, therefore are more vulnerable to any potential amalgamation / closures

Post Office Reforms

- 122 post offices closed since 2004, 78 were rural (53 of which replaced by outreach services)
- An evaluation of outreach services: *"substitution of outreach for traditional branches has had a negative impact on communities (incl. less social interaction for the older people and those less mobile)"*
- Any future closures / reorganisation of the network will have the greatest impact on rural dwellers with limited transport options

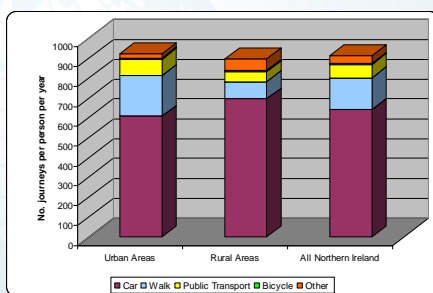


Accessing Key Services

- Transport underpins access to key services at both urban and rural levels
- However it is important to identify whether there are specific transport related issues facing rural dwellers
- Within this context, research needs to establish whether accessibility problems in rural areas are general to all dwellers, or whether specific issues emerge around certain groups e.g. those on low income, the elderly, etc.



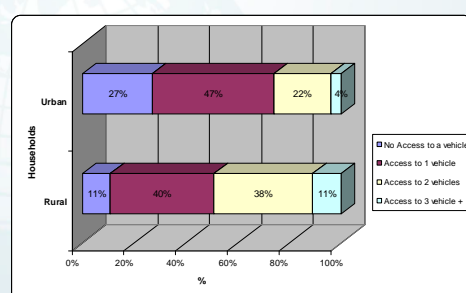
Transport in Northern Ireland: Public-v-Private Transport Usage



Source: Travel Survey for Northern Ireland



Transport in Northern Ireland: Private Transport



Source: Continuous Household Survey



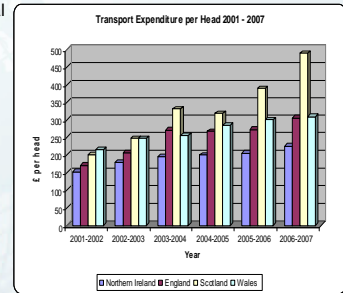
Transport in Northern Ireland: Private Transport (cont.)

- Car ownership - the norm amongst rural dwellers, 'a necessity rather than a luxury'
- Evidence shows: longer travel distances coupled with higher fuel prices in rural areas.....the cost of accessing key public services by vehicle is greater for rural households compared to urban households
- Rural dwellers typically spend 10-20% more than their urban counterparts to reach minimum acceptable living standard...one of the main factors responsible for the disparity is transport costs (representing 60-100% of disparity) (The Poverty Website, 2010)
- Recent House of Commons debate - rising fuel prices and impact on rural communities

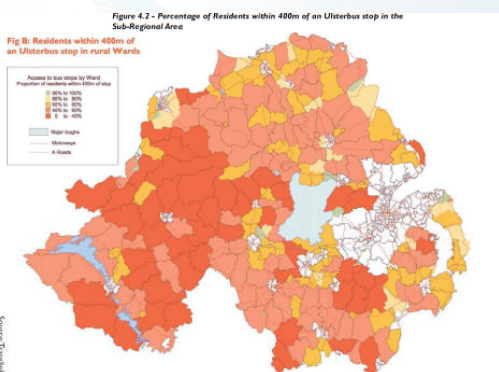


Transport in Northern Ireland: Public Transport Infrastructure

- The Department for Regional Development is responsible for NI's public transport policy, the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company oversees the provision of public transport in NI
- The 'Rural Transport Programme' supports transport services designed to give people in rural areas improved access to work, education, healthcare, shopping and recreational activities



Source: Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2007



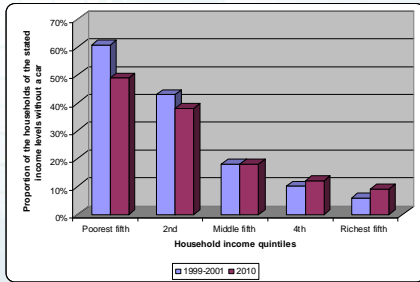
Access to Key Public Services: Vulnerable Groups in a Rural Setting

Low income households

- Given the role the car plays in facilitating travel in rural households – for many car costs prioritised as 'essential' or 'non-negotiable'
- Transport costs can be significant for low-income households: risk poverty and financial hardship
- Motoring costs account for almost 25% of weekly household expenditure in the lowest income quintile compared with 15% for all UK households (Lucas et al., 2001)
- No official definition of 'transport poverty' however... a family is defined as experiencing 'fuel poverty' if their home heating costs >10% of household income (Sustrans 2008; Scottish Government, 2002)



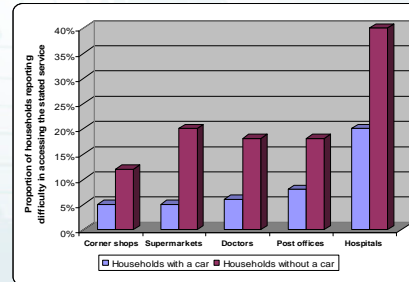
Proportion of households without a car by household income quintile 1999-2001 & 2010



Source: The Poverty Website



Proportion of households (with & without a car) reporting difficulty accessing key services



Source: The Poverty Website



Access to Key Public Services: Vulnerable Groups in a Rural Setting

Older people

- Top three essential services for older people: GP surgeries, the Post Office and public transport (RCN, 2004)
- Poor public transport and low levels of car ownership among older people means many rely on family and friends for lifts
- Access to health services becomes increasingly important for well-being as people age
- Centralisation of health disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, particularly older people
 - *‘increased travel times create barriers in accessing health care, particularly in the cost and difficulty in obtaining transport, as well as enduring the rigours of long journeys’* (Reif et al., 1998)
- Heenan (2006) identified transport as a key barrier to older people’s access to social and health care in the farming communities of a remote area in County Down



Access to Key Public Services: Vulnerable Groups

Children and young people

- *‘Transport is one of the most substantial obstacles to providing a broad and balanced education for all pupils and students in rural educational settings’* (ATL, 2008)
- Travel distance to schools coupled with transport arrangements impacts young rural dwellers’:
 - choice of school
 - involvement in after-school activities
 - continuation of education post-16
 - participation at college / university / choice of course



Next Steps...Methodological Approach (2)

- **Household Survey:** urban and rural households across Northern Ireland
- Survey Aim:
- establish households' experience of how transport impacts on accessibility to key public services, particularly focusing on the experiences of economically vulnerable groups
 - The survey questionnaire will focus on:
 - accessibility to health, education and post office services,
 - provision of public and private transport and
 - the cost of travel



Household Survey

- Telephone survey – to be undertaken by a third body research organisation
- Due to commence in Jan '12
- Target population - urban and rural households (target respondent: the head of household)
- Target sample size: 2,000 – 2,500 households
- Telephone interviews (on average) 8–10 minutes long



END

Thank you!

Comments / suggestions are welcome!

