

Future of Transport: rural strategy – Call For Evidence.

Response from the National Motorcyclists Council (NMC)

Introduction.

The National Motorcyclists Council (NMC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DfT's consultation on the Future of Transport Rural Strategy. The NMC, founded in 2021, draws together the UK's motorcyclists' representative national organisations, which covers a wide spectrum of motorcycle use from road riding, green road riding, motorcycle sport and motorcycle safety. The collective membership of these organisations and its numerous affiliates, approaches 100,000 individual motorcyclists. The NMC's mission is to work together to help assure a positive and sustainable future for motorcycling.

Context – Motorcycling in the UK.

Motorcycles are an important mode of transport, with approximately 1.3million machines in use, covering approximately 2.7billion miles per annum. Annual registrations of new motorcycles, scooters and mopeds rose by 124% between 1993 and 2020.

Although there is a public perception of motorcycling being mainly focused on leisure activities and the sport, the DfT has previously estimated that over half of motorcycle use is for commuting, education and other practical purposes. The DfT National Travel Survey (NTS) has estimated that for the period 2002 to 2016, over half of motorcycle trips were for commuting and business trips. This is a significantly higher proportion than the 19% of such trips for all other modes combined.

Commuter motorcycling is notable feature, with the proportion of people switching to motorcycle and scooters having increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to this mode of transport offering 'Covid-safe' socially distanced travel. This has been noted in both urban and rural areas.

Statistics issued to the media by the Motor Cycle Industry Association reveal that moped (50cc) registrations increased by 14.6% during 2020, with registrations of scooters larger than 50cc increasing by 10%. These are machines that fall directly within the commuter space, with this increase set against a backdrop of significant falls in sales across the automotive sector due to the pandemic.

In general terms, motorcycles as a whole contribute very little to overall emissions from vehicles. This was noted by DEFRA in the 2017 draft air quality control plan. This means that motorcycles and scooters, particularly those compliant with the latest emissions standards, offer part of the 'pathway' towards overall emissions reduction from road transport. It is also notable that older machines with often low fuel consumption, particularly in the commuter segment, can be part of the 'drive' to reduce Co2 emissions.

It is also notable that the number of zero emission motorcycles is beginning to increase. Electric and low emission motorcycles have not received significant incentivisation in the United Kingdom compared to the incentives applied to cars. The 'Plug in Grant' incentivising zero emission uptake, was not extended to the PTW sector until 2015. As a result, the UK is not yet a well-established

info@uknmc.org / 07979 757484.

C/O Business Box, 3 Oswin Rd, Brailsford Industrial Estate, Braunstone, Leicester, LE3 1HR

market for electric motorcycles and new registrations of road going machines have, until recently, been slow, despite the obvious potential. However, electric ‘powered two wheeler’ registrations are starting to see notable percentage increases, with a 1643% increase since 2014, though this is against a low base of numbers. However, during 2020 sales of zero emission models rose by 51.2%, with nearly 2,500 units sold (MCIA Press Statistics).

The zero contribution of PTWs towards road congestion also helps towards this end, as PTWs spend less time on the road during a given commuter journey in particular.

Studies have shown that modal shift from single-occupancy cars to motorcycles significantly reduces congestion. The Eddington Transport Study of 2006 stated; “a 5 per cent reduction in travel time for all business travel on the roads could generate around £2.5 billion of cost savings.”

A 2011 study by Transport and Mobility Leuven showed that a modal shift of 10% from private cars to motorcycles reduced lost vehicle hours in congestion on a trunk road by 63% for all vehicles using that route. A modal shift of 25% (one quarter of all cars replaced by motorcycles) eliminated congestion altogether.

Rural Motorcycling

Under the Rural Urban Classification referred to in the consultation, large swathes of the country, which also encompasses small to medium sized towns, are described as ‘Rural’. Indeed, the 2011 RUCALD Assignments suggest that the fully ‘urban’ context represents only a minor part of England’s land mass. Many population centres of over 10,000 people are immediately adjacent to rural areas. Therefore, there will be significant ‘line blurring’ between what is appropriate transport policy for urban areas and rural areas.

The rural element of commuting, business and utility motorcycling is often overlooked. The NTS notes that while motorcyclists in urban conurbations made more trips per year on average over 2002-2016, motorcyclists in the most rural areas travelled a greater distance. Motorcyclists in the most rural areas travelled around 5,200 miles a year on average, compared to around 4,000 miles in other areas. The same data reveals that for rural town and fringe, plus rural village, hamlet and isolated areas, there was an average of over one trip per day, per motorcycle.

The rural economic profile can often be very ‘fragile’ in transport terms, with small changes to provision having a disproportionate impact in individuals and business. This is particularly the case in more isolated areas, where bus services can be prone to cuts. Walking and cycling is mostly not an option for people in such areas, who are then left with little option but to use private powered transport. Low wages often mean that the running costs of a car represent a difficult option.

This is where motorcycles have a notable role to play. The low purchase costs of commuter models, low fuel consumption and other running costs, means that a motorcycle or scooter represents the only viable option where regular and reliable bus services are not available and walking/cycling not feasible.

In recognition of this, several ‘Wheels 2 Work’ programmes exist to serve rural transport demand, particularly among young people. These programmes offer subsidised small motorcycle and scooter loans to those who cannot access transport for work or education. Programmes are run on various non-profit business models, such as CIC, CIO or charitable and are often supported by local authority

grants. Nationally, Wheels 2 Work is supported by a charitable national association – Wheels 2 Work UK.

Rural motorcycling as part of transport is therefore an established feature of the rural transport network and the Future of Transport Rural Strategy will need to fully encompass this mode of transport as part of aims to secure improvements in rural transport accessibility and resilience.

The Consultation.

Introductory Assumptions.

The NMC notes the points raised in the introductory section of the consultation.

The last year has marked an extraordinary period where many assumptions about work, life and travel have been largely turned on their heads. The Pandemic has accelerated some trends, introduced unexpected new factors and questioned the relationship between individuals, work, travel and expectations of the ‘new normal’ going forward.

A very significant feature of this has been the shift to home working for those professions and business which do not rely on an office style environment within which to operate successfully. Technology such as ‘Teams’ and ‘Zoom’ which were almost unheard of a year ago, are now part of the normal lexicon and have become a major feature of people’s lives. Urban offices have been vacated and real questions have arisen about the future of business real estate, particularly as many the new population of home workers are questioning the need for offices at all, aside from being venues for team meetings, or external gatherings from time to time. Economic recovery as we emerge from the pandemic, will include business owners reappraising their business models in light of the success that many have noted with home working, assisted by modern communications technology.

A very notable indicator is the reduction of London’s population by 700,000 over the last year. Sales of rural properties have increased and house prices have risen, particularly in high profile rural areas in the west and the north. Trends and business practices that have emerged during 2020 may well become entrenched and any expectation that workers will ‘flood back to city offices’ would be premature.

This indicates that the demographic assumptions in the consultation may need to be revisited. These include the percentage under age 65 living in rural areas and the average ages of people in rural and urban areas – already only 5 years different from each other.

Another area NMC members noted was that the consultation appears to lack an overarching vision of who will live in rural areas and what they will be doing. There is no great sense of how the Government wants rural areas to ‘look’ in the longer term. There is a focus on new technologies, developments in transport services and new forms of transport. These areas are of course important, but the NMC has gained the impression from the consultation that such considerations are being ‘bolted on’ to known-knowns of rural transport as of early 2021, without necessarily taking a longer view of the evolution of the rural economy, working practices and population demographics.

It is appreciated that such things are difficult to predict. But given that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to lead to longer term changes to rural areas, the NMC recommends that this call for evidence is followed up by a further call for evidence once the longer term effects on the rural economy from

the pandemic start to emerge. This may represent a delay towards achieving the desired strategy, but a clearer picture of what trends are being established longer term is likely to start emerging over the next 12 to 18 months, meaning such a delay would be both reasonable and sensible. The NMC cites the increase in registrations of new commuter motorcycles as an example of an emerging trend.

Other Trends.

The NMC notes the areas considered. The points made are all recognised as key deficiencies which need to be addressed.

Of concern is that the role of motorcycles as transport is not considered within the document. As outlined above, this transport mode can offer a notable part of the rural transport 'toolbox', particularly in those areas where resilient connectivity within and between small towns, plus very rural areas and locations of work and education are vital. This is evidenced by the demand for services that are provided by Wheels 2 Work.

As already mentioned, with regard to key services and employment, public transport services can be fragile, irregular and subject to change or cuts. The future of public transport provision has also come under focus during the pandemic. The consultation rightly points to public transport related issues as a factor behind dependence on the private car. But unfortunately, the consultation fails to consider how motorcycling for transport fits in with the picture. Safe walking and cycling between (and within) towns and villages is mentioned, but opportunities to support safe motorcycling are overlooked. This area will need to be considered further by the DfT if a fully rounded strategy is to emerge. In any case, walking and cycling can only offer a partial solution for shorter journeys, whereas the rural commute can often be over quite long distances, over areas not served by any public transport to individually specific routes and timescales. Motorcycling has a key role to play on such commutes.

With regard to social isolation, this links directly with mental health. Motorcycle use brings many personal benefits in this area. Stress reduction, social interaction with others and reduction in social isolation. The mental health benefits have been considered in a number of studies, including those by the University of California and Tohoku University, Japan. [Kawashima - Japan](#) [UCL](#).

Motorcycling provides quality of life through: access to jobs and services, affordable mobility and the enjoyment of sports, leisure, and tourism. (Motorcycle tourism in the UK was valued at £562 million annually in 2015). The contribution to the economic and social vitality of the countryside through sporting activities, events and leisure motorcycling on various road types should not be underestimated.

Developments in innovation for rural transport

The increase in the use of e-bikes has been noted countrywide. These are increasingly popular products and an important component of the two wheeled paradigm of transport. E-bikes are in themselves 'powered two wheelers' and there is a continuing need to ensure that product safety and performance regulations are observed, given the ease with which power enhancements can be made to these products.

The smallest sector of the motorcycle market, mopeds, should be considered alongside e-bikes as the performance envelope between these machines is not dissimilar in real terms. Additionally, the market for electric powered mopeds has notably increased over the last year and such products can easily and safely share dedicated space with e-bikes.

Access to bus lanes specifically should be opened to all motorcycles by default. Numerous current access schemes do not reveal any disbenefits from this initiative, but the accessibility benefits are clear, as is the potential for vulnerability reduction.

Although motorcycles are not an 'active' transport mode as cycling is, the dynamics of motorcycle use do make it a 'more active' mode, with associated benefits that public transport or car use does not bring. This is particularly the case in the area of wellbeing as identified above.

As the proportion of zero emission vehicles, including motorcycles, increases the rural strategy must include full consideration to the roll-out of supporting technologies. In particular, the provision of vehicle charging stations to the extent that caters for real world rural journey demands. Such facilities will need to include the ability to charge electric motorcycles by default.

But it must be borne in mind that by nature of journey types, distances involved and charging times, the zero emission roll out will be slower than for urban areas. It will also be dependent on improvements to current zero emission vehicle technologies for both two and four wheeled vehicles.

Micromobility

With regard to micromobility, this is an area where the jury is very much still out. The NMC has concerns that policy in this area has been very much led by what is fashionable at one moment in time and that public policy matters relating to the current shared e-scooter trials need to be approached with greater care than has been the case.

There has yet to be established a proven technical framework for product safety and quality. Several matters relating to safe use, training and education have yet to be resolved, with incidents involving micro mobility products gaining attention in the media.

The Government's approach to micro mobility is surprising and also inconsistent, given that these products are effectively very small motorcycles. The NMC notes with concern that these unregulated products are receiving government support where better built and highly regulated motorcycles and scooters are ignored in transport policy.

The NMC also seeks assurances that injury accident incidents involving micromobility devices are reported separately in the safety statistics and RCGB – with such incidents not added to the motorcycle statistics. This will help establish whether these products are safe for longer term highway use, considering especially that there are currently no requirements for safety equipment using these products.

The above said, the NMC does see the potential for micromobility for ultra-local trips in urban areas and continues to follow developments in this area with interest.

The Government's Approach

The NMC refers the Government to remarks made about rural transport assumptions which were outlined earlier in this document.

With regard to the urban principles within the wider principles of the future of transport, the NMC cautions against taking these and attempting to 'photocopy' them onto the rural context.

Some principles may indeed apply directly to those larger population centres which are still classed as 'rural', but these will need to be carefully considered against the context of real journeys and demands of individuals and business in areas of the country where transport use can be more dynamic and personal choice and flexibility of transport is paramount.

The urban principles also lacks consideration of motorcycle use. This is an important omission which needs to be corrected, but in rural areas, the role of the motorcycle is in some cases more important for certain types of journey and for the individuals involved.

Walking, cycling and active travel so have a role to play for shorter semi-rural areas, or within population centres, but the definition will need to be extended to encompass commuter, education and business use of motorcycles and scooters. This is where the Wheels 2 Work model will be an important component of the rural principles for transport's future.

The role of local authorities in delivering new transport frameworks is clear. However, local transport plans will need to include all modes of transport, including motorcycles, and not be limited to the traditionally supported alternatives in government policy - which in the rural context are much less relevant given the very different transport needs and patterns for many people.

With regard to the encouragement of innovation, testing and trialling, the NMC welcomes the remarks made in the consultation. However, it is noted that a number of proposed solutions are heavily dependent on a rural digital infrastructure which is not yet fully developed in rural areas – indeed in some parts of the UK barely extant.

Other Comments – Creating Positive Change in Future Rural Transport.

Policy focus, driven by the environment and traffic congestion has moved decisively away from acceptance of the private car as a means of transport for commuting in particular. Alternatives such as walking, cycling and public transport have a key role to play in transforming travel and transport, but fail to offer the flexibility and practicality that a notable proportion of vehicle users need and rightly demand from their transport choices. This is particularly the case in the rural context This leaves many wedded to their cars.

Doubling down on the traditional alternatives and making car use ever more difficult and expensive, can only go so far, as public transport capacity/provision is finite and walking and cycling offers only limited potential in the rural context. Although 'exotic' modes such as micro scooters may have a role to play as an alternative to cycling or walking for ultra local journeys in rural population centres, they will not plug the gap in alternative mode provision which is needed.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought the problem into sharp focus, with people less willing to use public transport and instead looking to find Covid-safe alternatives. This has fuelled motorcycle sales in particular. Interestingly, as demonstrated elsewhere in this document, a notable proportion of this demand has been targeted at zero emission models.

As also outlined above, motorcycling offers a desirable low congesting or polluting alternative that is already well developed and regulated, but has never been properly considered as a transport mode in its own right. Perceived downsides of motorcycle use are directly related to lack of policy support for the mode and its users.

As the UK emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic, there is an ideal opportunity to recognise motorcycling as a travel alternative and develop its role as transport. They should be considered as a more sustainable, more active mode of transport, vital in addressing all three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental, and social. The following initiatives should be considered as next steps.

- **1. Policy.** The first step will be to recognise the role of motorcycles and scooters in transport policy as a sustainable alternative for travel. From this, other initiatives will flow

info@uknmc.org / 07979 757484.

C/O Business Box, 3 Oswin Rd, Brailsford Industrial Estate, Braunstone, Leicester, LE3 1HR

that will see the mode of transport accepted at a policy and planning level. Assuming that motorised transport factors are universal and apply equally to all forms of motorised transport is a mistake. From parking provision to the need for charging facilities for electric models, the needs for motorcycles and cars are different. Guidance should also be provided for inclusion of motorcycling in travel plans. Just as with other forms of sustainable transport, motorcycling needs to be fully integrated into the planning process and considerations for travel to and from any new development.

- Planning policy should include a comprehensive consideration of motorcyclists, their needs and requirements. By embedding this consideration at initial stages, synergies between cycling and motorcycling can be introduced to deliver infrastructure that delivers for both modes at considerably less cost. The ability to deliver private motorised transport in a more sustainable way will equally influence spatial planning decisions by removing the restrictions imposed due to relying solely on active travel and public transport. These considerations do not remove the need to consider these factors, but rather complement and enhance the choices available to planners.
- **2. Economic, Environmental and Technical.** Tens of thousands of jobs are supported both directly and indirectly by both the motorcycle industry and those who use their products. A significant number of businesses are located in rural areas. These jobs should be supported through including the role of motorcycling as transport within the rural transport strategy.
- The consultation puts emphasis on technological development. More open support is needed for efforts to place the UK at the centre of new innovation for motorcycles, from electrification to other areas of R&D and also sport. The rural context will be an important part of this.
- Developments of advanced technologies such as telematics applications, driverless vehicles and other related initiatives need to include a consideration of their impact on motorcycles as part of core R&D. This to both ensure safety and also to make sure that motorcycles are recognised when such technologies are used in practice.
- **Access.** In common with cyclists, motorcyclists naturally display both a will and ability to access all parts of available road space. This should be both normalised and encouraged, as a means to increase the congestion-busting aspect of motorcycling and its inherent benefits, and also to increase safety for riders. The segregation of road space in the form of bus lanes, some types of cycle 'highway' and advanced stop lines brings benefits to those permitted access to that space. The inclusion of motorcycles in the list of permitted vehicles is, in all cases, beneficial to riders without impacting other user groups or diminishing the intended benefit to those groups. Exclusion of riders from these segregated areas pushes riders into increased conflict with cars and other heavy vehicles whilst simultaneously diminishing the benefits yielded from the filtering capability of motorcycles in congested locations.
- **3. Wellbeing.** Just as with cycling, the activity of motorcycling is also a leisure activity for many. There are wider social benefits of motorcycling as a leisure activity. By acknowledging and supporting the role of riding, there will be a natural translation to the benefits of modal shift to motorcycling for commuting. The health and wellbeing benefits that arise from riding will translate into the daily commute, where currently the car is the only option available to those for whom walking, cycling or public transport are not viable.

- **4. Barriers to Modal Shift.** There are a number of barriers to modal shift to motorcycles, even amongst those that are looking to make this behavioural change. These include theft, parking, safety and stigma. To be effective in promoting modal shift to motorcycles, these barriers must be established, examined and removed. Theft is closely related to parking. Many existing riders will be discouraged from as a result of the fear of motorcycle theft. One immediate solution to this theft issue is the provision of fit-for-purpose secure parking facilities.
- **Safety.** Road casualty statistics, selectively used, are often quoted as a reason to discourage motorcycling. This approach needs to be reappraised. Studies have shown that the simple act of increasing the prevalence of motorcycles on the roads will in itself reduce the risk of collisions occurring. The concept of safety in numbers is widely accepted for the cycling community, but needs to be applied to the motorcycle transport mode. In addition to continued support for safety campaigns and support for motorcycle training in both the pre and post test phase, a fresh approach to motorcycle road safety needs to expand to increased training and awareness of motorcyclists' needs and vulnerabilities among other road users. This also applies to roads and infrastructure design which improves safety for motorcyclists.

The National Motorcyclists Council

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NMC Members

- Autocycle Union (ACU)
- British Motorcyclists Federation (BMF)
- IAM RoadSmart
- The Motorcycle Action Group (MAG)
- The Trail Riders Fellowship