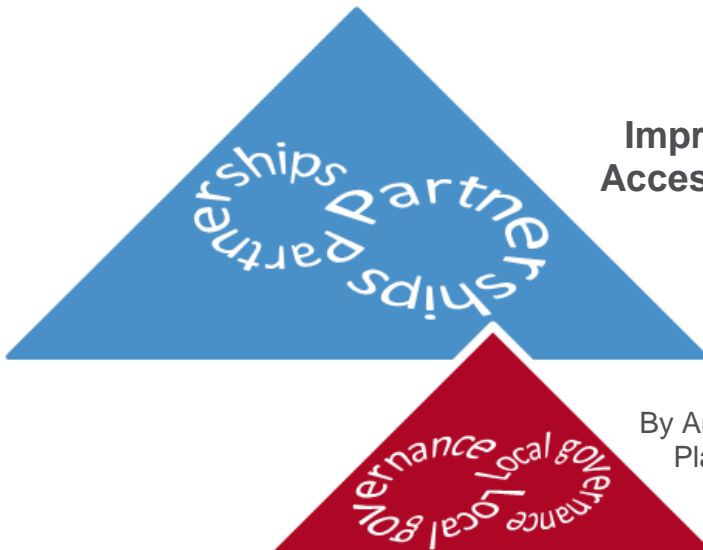




*OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance*  
**HANDBOOK no. 1**



**Improving Local Transport and  
Accessibility in Rural Areas through  
Partnerships**

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## Summary

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This Handbook provides a snapshot of the rationale for using collaborative structures such as partnerships to govern rural transport and accessibility issues, and explores the activities currently undertaken by a number of partnerships around the world.

Partnerships in transport are useful because:

- Local transport and accessibility issues are complex, intersecting with many sectors, levels of government and policy areas;
- Low population densities and resource constraints in rural areas make innovation and flexibility in local transport a necessity;
- All rural areas are different, and strategies need to take into account local problems and opportunities;
- Effective delivery of projects often depends on the expertise or capacity of multiple actors, from multiple sectors; and
- Due to their local legitimacy, they are well-placed to influence policy.

There are challenges associated with the use of partnerships, although these difficulties are outweighed by the benefits. As the partnerships operating in this area mature, there will no doubt be continuing ongoing discussion on ways in which improved local governance can assist to deliver improved local transport and accessibility to local communities.

**Target audience:** Partnership practitioners, local and regional governments.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES IN RURAL AREAS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2. WHY PARTNERSHIP APPROACH IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY IN RURAL AREAS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1 Improved co-ordination .....	5
2.2 Development of appropriate transport services.....	5
2.3 Transport service delivery.....	6
2.4 Efficient utilisation of resources .....	6
2.5 Policy improvement .....	6
<b>3. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A PARTNERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS</b> .....	<b>7</b>
3.1 Identifying and involving partners .....	7
3.2 Partners roles and responsibilities .....	8
3.3 Funding .....	8
3.4 The changing role of government .....	8
3.5 Working with transport operators .....	9
3.6 Evaluation.....	9
<b>4. LEARN MORE ON HOW PARTNERSHIPS AROUND THE WORLD IMPROVE TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY IN RURAL AREAS: EXAMPLES FROM AUSTRALIA, IRELAND AND UNITED KINGDOM</b> .....	<b>10</b>
4.1 West Sligo Rural Transport Working Group, Ireland .....	10
4.2 Let's GET Connected, Victoria, Australia .....	11
4.3 Nottinghamshire Rural Access to Services Partnership, UK .....	12
<b>5. FOR FURTHER READING</b> .....	<b>14</b>

## 1. Transport and accessibility issues in rural areas

Efforts to address local transport and accessibility issues using a partnership approach have generally been concentrated in rural areas. This is because the policy context in urban and rural areas is quite different, and different governance mechanisms are therefore appropriate in each case.

For the most part, **public transport planning in an urban context** has a relatively straightforward objective: maximise public transport patronage, in order to minimise the economic costs of road traffic congestion and the environmental damage associated with particulate and greenhouse gas emissions. To a large extent, this can be addressed by 'experts' using a range of technical skills such as demand forecasting, service planning and contracting.

However in a **rural context**, traffic congestion is largely absent as a policy concern. Furthermore, as population density is low, the level of public transport service is generally sufficiently low to make it an unattractive alternative to the car. It is therefore rarely realistic to advance a policy goal of shifting trips from car to public transport. Rather, transport policy in rural areas is generally focused on ensuring that local areas are inclusive of all, including those who do not have access to private transport.

Rural areas are adjusting to declining employment in agriculture, the out-migration of youth, and populations that are both ageing and declining (OECD 2006). Transport is central to the response to all of these challenges.

Firstly, transport plays a key role in responding to the problem of social exclusion. The often large distances between services and population centres in rural areas mean it is difficult for people without access to private transport. In particular, in rural areas around the world, an increasing number ageing car drivers are having to make the transition to non-driver. Alternative transport will play a key role in keeping these people engaged in mainstream society.

Transport also underpins the economic and employment development strategies of many local communities. Transport enables tourists to visit rural communities or workers to access employment. Importantly, it allows locals to remain living in town whilst accessing services or employment elsewhere.

Rural areas are also characterised by their diversity. Even across a region, rural communities can incorporate vastly different geographic, demographic and economic profiles.

## 2. Why partnership approach is needed to improve transport and accessibility in rural areas

When unique local conditions confront inevitable resource constraints, 'one size fits all' solutions developed by central governments are often ineffective. In this context, partnerships are an effective governance system, because they are able to:

- Take into account local problems and opportunities;
- Consult locally;

- Exploit local resources;
- Focus on sustainable development; and
- Integrate different programs and funding streams.

(OECD 2001a)

## **2.1 Improved co-ordination**

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A key characteristic of rural areas is the large number of agencies and organisations involved in the delivery of public transport, school transport and taxis. Furthermore, a complex mix of regional and local government, community organisations and volunteer groups are involved in the delivery of volunteer, community and medical/patient transport. The provision of accessible footpaths, civic infrastructure and cycle trails adds further complexity.

In this environment, without effective collaborative governance, there is a real risk that policy agendas will be operating at cross purposes sometimes resulting in poor outcomes.

It is also necessary to consider that there are complex intersections between transport and other policy concerns such as employment, health, education and town planning. Whilst an issue may manifest as a transport matter, the root cause may actually be the ill-considered delivery of other services, or even poor town planning. In this case, the most effective solution may not involve the delivery of transport at all. For example, if medical appointments are being scheduled for non-drivers at times when public transport is not available, rescheduling of appointments may make more sense than funding a new transport service.

Partnership approaches that are able to bring together key actors in a collaborative environment are best able to respond to the complex challenges and find suitable solutions.

## **2.2 Development of appropriate transport services**

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Many types of service delivery do not lend themselves to development by government on its own. Communities possess relevant local knowledge, while local organisations have the capacity and expertise that is in many cases crucial to effective service delivery.

For example, in response to the perceived needs of a rural community, a government may be considering the introduction of a new public transport service. Transport departments possess obvious expertise in terms of contract management, demand forecasting and timetabling. However local actors such as local government, organisations and community members possess knowledge of important factors such as significant local destinations or even of the days of the week when people are most likely to travel. This local knowledge is important, but it is not, of its own, enough to build the case for partnership, as the knowledge could be captured by the transport department through an effective community engagement strategy.

A partnership becomes essential when different actors possess the expertise or capacity vital to the project's development and delivery. Partnership is especially important in a non-commercial environment where actors' motivations and commitment levels vary. For example, if effective development of the public transport service

requires new civic infrastructure overseen by local government (such as bus stops or access paths), or if the service will most effectively be delivered using a community-owned vehicle, or if a better outcome will be obtained by rescheduling other services to match the bus timetable, then a partnership model of governance is likely to be more effective than a simple contracting model.

### **2.3 Transport service delivery**

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For the most part, area-based partnerships focus on the development – rather than delivery – of services, and are not themselves involved in direct transport service provision.

Once services are developed by partnerships, commercial or not-for-profit agencies are usually contracted to deliver the service on either a fixed-term or ongoing basis. Contracts are usually administered by government. An exception is the case of the Irish Rural Transport Initiative (described further in this publication), which provides partnerships with funds for the ongoing delivery of services, which may or may not be contracted out to third party organisations.

Area-based partnerships described in this handbook must not be confused with Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), which are increasingly being used by governments to finance transport infrastructure. PPPs ‘combine public sector experience in infrastructure development and policy making with the commercial vision and willingness to accept risks of the private entrepreneur’ (OECD 1997). They are quite different to area-based partnerships.

The outsourcing of public transport operations to commercial operators is also sometimes described as a partnership, as depending on the nature of the contract it may involve ongoing collaboration between government and the private operator (see, for example, DOI 2007). Again, these are quite different to the area-based partnerships under consideration.

### **2.4 Efficient utilisation of resources**

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A partnership approach is an ideal way for local communities to respond to their transport and accessibility needs. However it also provides an ideal solution for governments who, faced with resource constraints, need innovative, effective and preferably low cost solutions. These types of solutions cannot often be achieved by central government using a contracting model.

### **2.5 Policy improvement**

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Because partnerships addressing local transport and accessibility issues often traverse multiple sectors, multiple tiers of government and multiple policy areas, partnerships often seek to do things differently to the way they have been done before. Many partnerships involved in transport and accessibility issues therefore find that transport service development invariably demands extensive discussions with key government stakeholders and a certain degree of policy ‘bending,’ if not wholesale policy change. Pushing for policy change is therefore regarded by many partnerships as core area of business.

For example, in Victoria, Australia, school buses are the only form of public transport available in many rural communities. However regulations have historically prevented

people other than school students accessing them, even when spare seats are available. Working closely with the Departments of Infrastructure and Education, as well as the Local Learning and Employment Network, the Let's GET Connected partnership successfully implemented a demonstration project in the small (approximately 50 people) coastal community of Bemm River (East Gippsland Shire Council 2007), allowing the whole community access to the school bus. The success of this project means that new 'Instructions to Principals' will be issued to school across the state clarifying arrangements for public access to school buses.

### **3. Building and maintaining a partnership: challenges and solutions**

#### **3.1 Identifying and involving partners**

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It is important that partnerships involve the relevant actors able to contribute towards the development and implementation of local transport and accessibility solutions. Because of the nature of the challenge, it is important that the membership of partnerships traverses multiple sectors (government, private and third sector), multiple levels of government (local, regional and national) and multiple policy areas (transport, civil infrastructure, education, health, economic development etc).

- **Local government** is a critically important partner. However, as with other levels of government it is difficult to engage local government across multiple policy areas. While local government may contribute only a single representative to the governance group, it is important that efforts are made to engage the entire organisation, and ultimately to embed consideration transport and accessibility issues into mainstream local government activity.

Ideally, the partnership will have the involvement of representatives from all relevant levels of government, as well as relevant policy areas. Particularly when large distances are involved, this can be quite demanding for government representatives, and there can be a risk of 'burn out'. It may be smarter for the partnership to tactically engage some government representatives on an 'as needed' basis rather than asking that they attend every partnership meeting.

- **Local residents** may or may not form part of the partnership governance group. Local residents bring detailed knowledge of local communities, and are able to connect with dense local networks critical to the success of some projects. However when the partnership covers a large area, with dispersed population centres, it can be challenging to determine appropriate resident representation. In this case, a small number of residents are not able to represent the entire partnership area, while a large number of representatives are unwieldy. Ultimately, partnerships will decide this issue on a case-by-case basis.
- **Co-ordination with other initiatives:** The partnership may not be the only partnership or network operating in the area. Others may be focused on economic development, skills and training, education or health services. These are all issues that intersect significantly with transport and accessibility issues. To maximise the potential for collaboration and to avoid duplication of activity, it is therefore useful to have other partnerships represented on the governance group.

### **3.2 Partners roles and responsibilities**

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It is important that there is an agreement between partners on the aims and objectives of the partnership, and the way in which the partnership will be governed. This can be documented in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by all partners.

There will necessarily be a contract between the partnership and any funding body. This will require that the partnership is a legal entity capable of entering into such a contract. Some partnerships may incorporate, while others will utilise an 'auspice' organisation to administer funds and manage the contract with funding bodies.

It can be difficult to identify which outcomes are the direct results of partnership activity. In many cases – particularly where a partnership advocate for policy change or a new public transport service – the outcome can occur on the margins of partnership activity.

In the case of success this can cause tension over which parties claim credit, or whether effort is appropriately acknowledged. In the case of failure, it can lead to blame shifting.

Documenting roles and responsibilities in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between partners (and between the partnership and government) can assist to ameliorate these issues. It is a good idea to include a set of communication protocols which specifically make reference to the ways in which the contribution of the various parties will be acknowledged in various communication materials.

### **3.3 Funding**

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Partnership funding need not be large, but it needs to be sizeable enough to provide for the employment of partnership staff (the extent of which will vary with the size and scope of the partnership) and administration costs. It is also important that partnerships have access to a small to moderate budget that provides them with the agility necessary to respond quickly to local challenges, and to act as a catalyst for new projects.

There is a role for central or regional government in the provision of funding. This funding is recognition that partnership approaches are an appropriate way to secure transport/accessibility outcomes that government could not otherwise achieve.

As well as the provision of funding for partnership operation, governments will ideally also make available a budget for the delivery of transport services. This could either be for a fixed term (i.e. on a pilot basis) or ongoing. These funds could be held and administered by government itself (as is the case in Victoria, Australia) or by the partnership (e.g. Ireland).

### **3.4 The changing role of government**

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It can be challenging for government to be flexible enough to respond to the challenges posed by partnerships and to be open enough to regard policy input from partnerships as an asset rather than an annoyance. This difficulty is indicative of the general transition taking place within government, whereby public servants are increasingly having to play the role of policy brokers, rather than just administrators. The changing role of government is particularly challenging for many agencies involved in the delivery of transport and infrastructure services, which often contain deeply embedded cultures that value technical expertise over all else.



The establishment of ‘whole of government’ governance groups within government that are dedicated to working with transport partnerships can help government to become more collaborative in its approach. This type of approach can assist it to become better able to respond to the policy issues raised by partnerships. This, in turn, can result in genuine improvements to policy that reflect the needs of local communities, and minimise the risk of public conflict between partnerships and government.

It is particularly challenging for government members of partnerships engaging in policy advocacy with government, especially when this results in conflict. In times of conflict, it is difficult to act as both partner and government representative, and in these circumstances many government representatives find that they participate in the partnership at arm’s length.

### **3.5 Working with transport operators**

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Commercial transport operators in rural areas are often small family business running a small number of taxis or buses. They are sometimes only marginally profitable. In this context, operators can feel vulnerable to change, with their livelihood at stake. This can lead to tensions between different transport modes – particularly between commercial transport and transport operated by not-for-profit agencies. Working collaboratively in a partnership can be a way to resolve these issues in innovative ways that are in the interests of all.

It can nevertheless be difficult for commercial operators to work collaboratively in partnership. Firstly, small commercial operators do not often have the time to attend partnership meetings, and secondly, it can be difficult for them to reconcile their interests as both a partnership member and profit-maximising commercial operator. A solution to this dilemma can be found by involving operators in the partnership in an informal manner, such as meeting periodically with the partnership staff. Whatever model is adopted, commercial operators are important partnership stakeholders, and it is important that the relationship is maintained.

### **3.6 Evaluation**

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Evaluating the success or otherwise of partnership approaches remains a difficult challenge, but ongoing support for the partnership will ultimately be determined by the evidence available. Processes to rigorously measure and evaluate outcomes need to be built in from the start of the project.

Partnerships focused on improving local transport and accessibility must clearly be able to evaluate their success in these terms. This is no easy task.

It would be a mistake to assume that quantitative assessment alone will be able to capture the true effect of the partnership activity. In rural areas, patronage will by definition be low, but the difference it can make to people’s lives is significant. Case studies and qualitative evaluation undoubtedly has a role to play. It is important, too, to capture the impact that partnership activity has had in other related areas, such as enabling improved participation in employment, healthcare or education.

## 4. Learn more on how partnerships around the world improve transport and accessibility in rural areas: examples from Australia, Ireland and United Kingdom

### 4.1 West Sligo Rural Transport Working Group, Ireland

**Institutional framework:** Overall responsibility for transport in Ireland resides with the National Government. The Irish Government has funded the Rural Transport Initiative since 2002. It provides funding for community organisations and community partnerships. The initiative's aim is to encourage 'innovative community-based initiatives to provide transport services in rural areas, with a view to addressing the issue of social exclusion in rural Ireland, which is caused by lack of access to transport' (Transport 21 2007). Initially operating on a pilot basis, the initiative is now funded on a permanent basis and is now known as the Rural Transport Programme. The programme is administered by a non-for-profit company on behalf of the government. There are currently projects in virtually every county in the country. Projects provide a mixture of transport services, from regular public transport, to fully demand-responsive services. To do this, the projects contract services to others, operate their own vehicles, co-ordinate car-share schemes or broker services with other organisations (Transport 21 2007).

**The partnership:** Sligo is a county in Ireland's North West. The Sligo LEADER Partnership Company operates a range of development programs funded by European Union and the Irish Government. The partnership has had in place a Local Transport Working Group since 1997. This group includes agency, public and private sector representation, disability interest groups, community and voluntary organisations. Responsibility for contractual and financial management resides with the Sligo LEADER Partnership Company.

**Objectives:** The working group's aim is 'to create opportunities to enable those who are, or who are at risk of becoming socially excluded as a consequence of their rural location or lack of accessibility to transport provision to express and realise their full potential, guided by principles of equity and fairness' (West Sligo Forum 2007). To achieve this, it works to the following objectives:

- To put in place a demand responsive house to house pick up minibus service;
- To provide all ability accessible transport;
- To use a local development approach in the design of transport routes based on local need;
- To develop service's which meet the transport needs of passengers with physical and intellectual disabilities;
- To promote the transport services in a manner, which is accessible and understandable to all passengers; and
- To inform rural public passenger transport policy.

**Funding:** In 2003, the group's application to the Rural Transport Initiative was successful, and it received funding of approximately €80,000 per year. From 2007, funding was expanded and provided on an ongoing basis (West Sligo Forum 2007). With concern about the future of funding for the Rural Transport Initiative, the working group was able to have the matter raised in Parliament by the local member (Perry

2004). This elicited a comprehensive response, and the matter was ultimately resolved with the confirmation of ongoing funding.

**Highlight on the results:** A significant achievement of the group has been to develop a household pick up service which is bookable in advance and which is fully accessible. Passengers are picked up and dropped off at their homes or can also meet the minibus at points along the route. There are a range of services to link passengers with villages and towns in the area, and these now carry more than 800 passengers per month (West Sligo Forum 2007).

To learn more: <http://www.westsligo.com/Transport/ruraltransport.htm>.

## **4.2 Let's GET Connected, Victoria, Australia**

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**Institutional framework:** Responsibility for public transport in Australia resides with State Governments. To respond to the challenge of rural transport disadvantage, the Victorian Government established the Transport Connections program, which funds local partnerships to find practical solutions to improve existing transport services. This program builds upon a successful pilot program which was first funded in 2003 (see Wear 2006 and KPMG 2006).

A dedicated funding pool is also available to help pilot small-scale transport projects developed by the Transport Connections projects. Partnerships additionally seek to assemble funding from a range of other sources.

A key element of the program is cross-government collaboration. A multi-agency working group has overseen program development. Supporting departments are also involved with project assessment, and ongoing project support in the regions. To respond to cross-government policy and regulatory issues raised by the Transport Connections projects, a dedicated policy position has recently been established.

The partnership: Let's Get Connected is a partnership based in the Shires of Wellington and East Gippsland, a remote, rural area in Victoria. The partnership has a large membership, comprising of: local government, Victorian Government departments (covering the policy areas of transport, roads, human services, education and training, and community development); central government (veterans affairs); representatives from other partnerships and networks (e.g. The Gippsland Local Learning and Employment Network); the local aboriginal co-operative and corporation; transport operators (e.g. the bus association, taxi association, train operator); and community health providers and services. (McHugh and James 2006).

**Objectives:** The partnership aims 'to develop creative sustainable solutions to transport disadvantage'.

**Funding:** The partnership receives funding of approximately A\$190,000 (€115,000) per annum from the Transport Connections program. This covers administrative costs, the employment of two full-time co-ordinators and a small discretionary budget. Funding for significant transport initiatives (such as new bus routes) is generally secured from other government sources.

**Highlight on the results:** Since its establishment in 2003, Let's GET Connected has accumulated a very impressive list of achievements. For example:

The partnership worked with the small mountain community of Dargo (population of approximately 150) to develop a sustainable model of establishing, servicing and maintaining an accredited community bus (Wellington Shire Council 2007).

The partnership also developed and implemented a new service that uses a high-occupancy taxi to assist visitors to Fulham Correctional Centre, located 10km from Sale train station.

Together with a number of other partnerships, Let's GET Connected formed a working group to consider issues associated with the operation of taxis in rural Victoria. Together they prepared a submission to the 'Victorian Country Taxi Industry Review' (Sanderson 2006). As a result, the government has made numerous regulatory changes, many explicitly acknowledging the input of the Transport Connections projects. Most notable is that rural taxi operators are now able to negotiate fares for regulator or contracted bookings (rather than being required to accept the metered fare). This is expected to allow for more innovative services involving taxis (DOI 2006).

**To learn more:** [http://www.wellington.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page\\_Id=631&h=0](http://www.wellington.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page_Id=631&h=0)

### **4.3 Nottinghamshire Rural Access to Services Partnership, England, UK**

**Institutional framework:** In England, responsibility for transport resides with the central government, although much responsibility for local planning and implementation is devolved to local government. The Rural Transport Partnership Scheme commenced operation in 1998. Through this scheme the central government provided funding to community-based transport initiatives in order to secure 'a long term improvement in rural people's access to jobs, services and social activities and which enhance visitors' access to the countryside.' (Countryside Agency 2001). It provided particular incentives for the formation of partnerships to enable 'a joint strategic view of the transport needs of local communities'. The Rural Partnership Scheme concluded in 2006, and was largely subsumed by the government's Accessibility Planning strategy.

Local governments outside of London are required to produce Local Transport Plans. These set out the authority's local transport strategies and policies, and an implementation program. On the basis of these plans, central government allocates money to each authority for the five year period of the plan. Authorities then have flexibility on how they spend this money. As part of their plans for 2006-2011, authorities are required to include an accessibility strategy. Based on a partnership approach, accessibility planning 'aims to ensure that there is a clearer, more systematic approach to identifying and tackling the barriers that prevent people, especially those from disadvantaged areas, accessing the jobs and key services that they need.' (Bailey 2004).

As part of the accessibility planning process, authorities are encouraged to build on, or mainstreaming accessibility into the responsibilities of, existing partnerships, such as Rural Transport Partnerships.

**The partnership:** The Nottinghamshire Rural Access to Services Partnership (formally known as the Nottingham Rural Transport Partnership) is based in Nottinghamshire in the East Midlands area of England. Members of the partnership include the Rural Community Council (an independent voluntary organisation), the County Council, a district council, the Greater Nottingham Partnership (which co-ordinates and facilitates the delivery of economic regeneration in the area) (NRCC 2007a).

**Objective:** the Partnership aims to work with parishes and rural communities on local transport solutions.

**Funding:** The partnership was originally funded by the Countryside Agency through its Rural Transport Partnership Programme. This funding concluded in 2006, and the partnership currently receives annual funding of £14,500 (€20,000) from the central government's Rural Social and Community Programme (NRCC 2007a) £2000 (€2800) from the Shire Council and £2000 from the Rural Community Council. It also takes on paid contracts where possible. This funding covers a part time officer for 2.5 days per week, and concludes in March 2008. Funding beyond 2008 is uncertain.

**Highlight on the results:** One of the many projects delivered by the partnership has been the Nottinghamshire Wheels to Work scheme, which offers the leasing of a moped (at a notional rate) to young people or the long term unemployed living within rural areas of Nottinghamshire so that they can gain access to employment/ education or training (EMRA 2007). More than 220 people have benefited since the scheme commenced in 2002 (NRCC 2007b).

During 2005, with uncertainty over future arrangements for rural transport, the partnership organised a conference in the East Midlands to celebrate achievements of the Rural Transport Partnerships, to identify a way forward, and to influence policy. In organising the conference, the partnership worked closely with the other Rural Transport Partnerships of the East Midlands and the East Midlands Regional Affairs Forum. (Honeyman-Smith 2006).

Since then, the partnership officer has been a member of Nottinghamshire's Accessibility Planning Steering Group and was involved in the development of the accessibility strategy, and was able to ensure that rural transport needs were addressed (NRCC 2007a).

**To learn more:** [http://www.nottsccc.org.uk/viewpage.php?page\\_id=4](http://www.nottsccc.org.uk/viewpage.php?page_id=4)

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## **OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance**

The OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance is a worldwide network of local development practitioners. The Forum informs its members on local development innovations, organises capacity building seminars and study visits, releases handbooks and training materials, and provides networking opportunities through international conferences and an Annual Meeting held in Vienna. Today the Forum has over 2.600 members in some 53 countries. All institutions and organisations involved in local development may join the Forum. The activities of the Forum are supported by the European Commission, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour and Pobal, Ireland.

**To learn more on the Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance:**

[www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/forum/partnerships](http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/forum/partnerships)

