

Sustainable Visitor Transport and Community Cargo Bikes

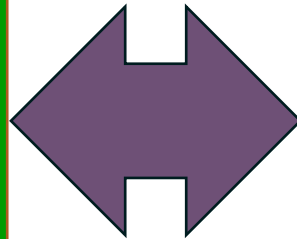
18th September 2025

Dr Natalie Partridge, Researcher at NICRE

National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise: What we do

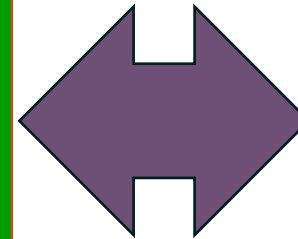
We research

to increase our knowledge, change the way we think about rural enterprises, how we address their challenges and identify new opportunities



We innovate

with our partners, to encourage new ways of thinking and supporting innovations that provide tangible benefits to rural businesses and communities



We inform

by sharing knowledge, best practice and practical experience to inform local, regional and national policy and support for rural enterprise

National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise: How we work

- NICRE founding HEI partners
- NI & Scottish partners



Regional and local engagement:
e.g. Local, combined and mayoral authorities, LEPs, National Parks and AONBs, community groups, business and sector networks, third sector organisations, community enterprise, etc.

National business collaboration:
e.g. Strutt & Parker (founding business partner), Federation of Small Businesses, Country Land & Business Association, Plunkett Foundation, Commsworld etc.

Policy collaboration:
e.g. DEFRA, BDUK, Scottish Gov't, Rural Services Network, Rural England, Action with Communities in Rural England, Innovate UK, OECD etc.

Rural transport comes up as an issue through almost every area of NICRE's work...

Poor transport restricts business growth (data from our state of rural enterprise survey):

- 39% of rural businesses cite lack of transport services/infrastructure as a barrier to growth, compared to 26% of urban businesses
- 39% of rural businesses also say that poor public transport for employees is a barrier to recruitment and retention, compared to 16% of urban businesses

Poor transport limits opportunities and drives inequalities for rural communities in a whole range of areas – from education and employment, to access to health and care and social activities

Poor transport drives reliance on private vehicles and associated **environmental impacts**.

NICRE works with a wide range of partners to identify, blueprint and share solutions for rural places. Two current areas of focus are **sustainable visitor transport** and **community cargo bikes**.

Sustainable Visitor Transport – context



What were your main methods of travel to this National Trust place?*

National Trust

*2024 responses, based on more than 150 million visits annually

Cycle 0.3%
Walked 1.8%
Public transport 1.6%



Car	529	90.76%
Bus	30	5.05%
Light rail (Tram)	2	0.34%
Tube/Metro	0	0.00%
Train	2	0.34%
Taxi/Uber/hire car	6	1.01%
Walking	4	0.67%
Cycling	0	0.00%
Coach	4	0.67%
Motorcycle	1	0.17%
Ferry/riverboat	1	0.17%
Domestic flight	0	0.00%
Short-haul flight	0	0.00%
Long-haul flight	0	0.00%
Another form of transport	2	0.34%

What was your main mode of transport to the venue?

News > North East News > Northumberland

Plea for more trains amid warnings Northumberland villages 'can't cope' with tourist traffic



60% of an attraction's carbon footprint comes from cars, when accounting for scope 3 emissions



22% of households don't have a car



A bigger visitor economy.

We have a **ten-year plan to double GVA** of the visitor economy, including by significantly increasing the number of international visitors (leisure and business) and the duration of their visits.

How might we improve the offer and uptake of inclusive, sustainable, visitor transport to leisure destinations in the North East?

Key questions for future mobility*...

Who is the target?

behaviours, habits, needs,
fears, knowledge

What are the options?

mode, infrastructure,
operational considerations,
commercial viability

How do you support the transition?

usable information,
exploration, integration
with familiar travel

* Future Mobility Research Group,
Newcastle University



Good! It's safer than when we went and your driver dropped us off at the side of the main road and we had to walk along the road (no path) dodging cars and ended up walking up the hill at cragpie rather than riding walking further along to the entrance and being knocked down. So glad there's now a safe place to stop and be dropped off.



32
 80% of London's National Trust properties are now road accessible by bus or train. We're proud to be one of the first National Trust properties to be road accessible by bus or train. It's like a small gesture on any day, but we know it makes a difference to our visitors.



RHS Garden Wisley shuttle bus service



Sustainable and Integrated Transport for Wiltswater

Encouraging modal shifts In practice....


- Information and incentives for visitors
- Engagement with local bus and rail providers
- Making sustainable options more convenient
- Shuttle services connecting to transport hubs and/or drop off points
- Improved cycle infrastructure (paths, bike racks and e-bike charging, local hire)
- Community action



Community Cargo Bikes - context

- Initially seen as an ‘urban’ innovation
- Electric capabilities unlock opportunities in rural areas with longer travel distances and more challenging terrain. Also allow use by people of different ages and fitness levels.
- NICRE’s is working with businesses and communities to:
 - Test out different ways of using e-cargo bikes in rural places
 - Capture learning and demonstrating the potential of this mode of transport



 Berwick upon Tweed
31st August 2023

Community Cargo Bikes in action



2023 – Berwick upon Tweed

Users include:

- The Green Shop – Organics, wholefoods and refill shop
- Greener Berwick – Climate action group
- Berwick Community Trust and Food bank
- Berwick Food & Drink festival
- Berwick Youth Hostel
- Community Recycling
- Guerilla gardening



2024 – Hexham

Users include:

- Bicycle Mayor
- Hexham Farmers Market
- Hexham Community Garden
- Community 28 – community drop in space
- Active Travel Tynedale
- Hexham Town Council for Net zero and community engagement events
- Hexham Library - library outreach activities



2025 – NICRE Newcastle

This summer we became the proud owners of a **Gazelle Cabby Long tail**

Rural communities in the North East will be able to access the bike for their 'everyday journeys'

Watch this space www.nicre.co.uk

Innovation portal

E-cargo bikes: Potential for rural innovation

Overview

Electric cargo (e-cargo) bikes are a 'green logistics' opportunity for last mile delivery in rural areas. This module showcases case studies from businesses operating in rural settings and a review of research evidence considering the role of e-cargo bikes to reduce carbon emissions.

Use the links to explore the research and case studies and read an introductory blog post from NICRE Innovation Associate Steven Morrison Cairns.

We also feature a report from independent think tank and charity Green Alliance explaining the potential of e-cargo bikes as an alternative, less polluting vehicle option to vans.

[NICRE INNOVATION CONCEPT REVIEW - E-CARGO BIKES AND RURAL GREEN LOGISTICS](#)

[GREEN ALLIANCE - SHARING THE LOAD: THE POTENTIAL OF E-CARGO BIKES](#)

29th March 2023

Blog

E-cargo bikes: Potential for rural innovation

[Estarli](#)

[Keert](#)

[Intelligen](#)

[Community cargo bikes](#)

[Hexham library cargo bike](#)

[Cargodale](#)

[Woolly Saddle](#)

Rural operations using e-cargo bikes are growing across the UK – from Calder Valley (Cargodale) to Shropshire (Bike Drop), Colchester, the Isle of Wight (KEERT), and Auchencairn, Dumfries and Galloway...

Our Innovation Portal module brings together research, learning and practical case studies from these areas, as well as our projects in the North East.

To find out more – and share your own experiences - visit <https://nicre.co.uk/innovation-portal/e-cargo-bikes/>.

NICRE
National Innovation Centre
Rural Enterprise

Contact:

Dr Natalie Partridge

Natalie.Partridge@newcastle.ac.uk

Steven Morrison-Cairns

steve.morrisoncairns@newcastle.ac.uk

www.nicre.co.uk

  @NICRErural

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