

POLICY ESSENTIALS: TRANSPORT





ABOUT

The County Councils Network (CCN) represents 39 county and unitary councils across England. We are a councillor-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of our member councils and their communities to ensure they have a strong voice with national government, and to help deliver positive change for those authorities and the residents they serve.

The CCN aims to articulate the challenges and opportunities of its member councils, alongside their priorities, to the government and other key organisations. This is primarily done through original and impactful research across areas such as adult social care, children's services, housing and planning, and local government finance.


Building on our **Guide to CCN**, our updated series of **Policy Essentials** aims to give county and unitary councillors a short and concise overview of the most important policy issues facing their councils. This includes an overview of the key service responsibilities of councils; why it is a national advocacy priority for CCN; key developments in the national policy landscape; and CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities.

This Policy Essentials is focused on **Transport**. For more information on our policy work in this area, contact:



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What role do councils play in transport?

CCN's member councils play a crucial role in planning, managing, and delivering transport services and associated infrastructure. The highways that run through county areas are crucial to economic growth – connecting people and businesses, facilitating trade and promoting investment, and the bus services that run through our market towns and villages support social mobility by connecting communities and providing access to jobs and training.

There are a number of legal duties placed on CCN member councils, applying to both county and unitary authorities. These include:

- **Highway maintenance** – established by Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, which places a duty on councils to:
 - Maintain highways – applies to highways maintainable at public expense.
 - This includes roads, footways and cycle tracks.
 - Failure to comply with the duty can result in legal action, such as from pot-hole related damage.
- **Road safety** – established by Section 39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, which places duties on councils to:
 - Prepare and carry out measures to promote road safety.
 - Take steps to reduce accidents.
 - Provide road safety education, training and publicity.
 - Conduct studies into accidents and take preventative measures.
- **Network Management** – established by Part 2 of the Traffic Management Act 2004, which places duties on councils to:
 - Ensure the expeditious movement of traffic, including pedestrians, on the authority's network.
 - Manage roadworks, congestion and incidents effectively.
 - Co-ordinate with utilities and other highway authorities.



- **Local Transport Plans** – established by Sections 108 – 109 of the Transport Act 2000, which places duties on councils to:
 - Produce and update a Local Transport Plan.
 - Include policies for promoting safe, integrated, efficient and sustainable transport.
- **Concessionary travel** – established by Section 145 and 149 of the Transport Act 2000, which places a duty on councils to:
 - Provide free off-peak bus travel for eligible older and disabled people.
- **Air Quality and Active Travel** – established by the Environment Act 1995, which places a duty on councils to:
 - Take action where air quality exceeds legal limits.

There are other legal duties placed on our member councils in relation to home-to-school transport (including transport for those with special educational needs & disabilities), and the issues facing our members in this area are discussed in our separate Policy Essentials documents on Home to School Transport and on Special Educational Needs & Disabilities.



What are the key issues facing CCN members in transport?

- Funding for road maintenance has been disproportionately skewed towards urban areas leaving county motorists the poor relation compared to those in major cities. **CCN analysis found that county areas were able to spend £20,885 per mile on road repairs, pothole filling and constructing new junctions**, compared to £41,929 per mile in England's 36 urban metropolitan councils, £57,241 per mile in England's eight core cities and £62,350 per miles for each of London's 31 councils.
- At the same time, county leaders have identified **some 13,000 miles of road network that were in need of requiring maintenance**, representing 9% of the total mileage in counties, and this is over fifteen times higher, in mileage terms, than the figure for London where 730 miles required some sort of maintenance.
- **The quantum of funding received from central government has not kept up with need and inflationary pressures** have driven up the cost of major capital schemes meaning that funding does not go as far. This leaves authorities with difficult choices to make, having to prioritise road improvement works whilst dealing with reduced overall funding.
- Another key issue for highways authorities is the lack of powers to ensure that utility companies do not undermine council efforts to maintain their local road network in the best condition possible. **At present, works by utility companies are uncoordinated causing disruption to the highway network and leaving a patchwork of repairs, and a more co-ordinated approach is needed.**
- Members have also been working to expand infrastructure to support the charging of electric vehicles, but due to funding constraints the number of charging stations in county areas is significantly lower than in urban areas. **CCN research has found that county areas have one publicly available charge point for every ten miles, compared to one every three quarters of a mile in London, and one every 4.5 miles in the country's major cities and towns.**



- Bus services in rural areas are also facing challenges as ridership continues to decline. Reduced funding and increasing operator costs has meant that many bus routes in county areas have been cut. Indeed, new **CCN research has found that one in five rural bus routes – 18% – have been removed from the network between 2023/24 and the pre-pandemic year of 2018/19, despite pledges from government of a ‘bus revolution’.**
- **This cut is higher than anywhere else in England, with 70 fewer miles in county areas being driven compared to 2019.** The previous government’s National Bus Strategy has failed to arrest this decline, with services down 5% between the launch of the funds from the strategy in 2022, and 2024.
- The funds for Bus Service Improvement Plans amounted to £2.1 billion, but they have been unevenly spread across the country and have been focused mainly on urban areas. Our analysis shows that county and unitary authorities within CCN’s county and unitary councils in the **CCN membership have received just £31 per person on average to improve their buses since 2022**, compared to £58 per person for councils or combined authorities which cover England’s large cities and towns.
- **Bus journeys are down for county and rural areas by 16% compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019 – a fall of 100m journeys.** However, there is evidence that the funding made available to local areas from successive governments since 2022 has worked in increasing journeys. Taking the period from 2022 to 2024, journeys have risen by 32% in counties – up 211m, suggesting there is a clear demand for better buses in county areas. This is why we are calling on the government to prioritise counties in future funding rounds.
- **CCN know that members have been working on a range of schemes to combat the reduction in bus routes and mileage through demand responsive schemes and community transport schemes.** This often helps to plug a gap for services but is not a long-term financially viable option for councils as the running costs for these services are high.



What is the national policy context for transport?

- The Government continues to focus on fixing potholes, providing a boost to bus services and boosting rail capacity for passengers and freight. There have been numerous announcements around funding for roads maintenance and transport, most recently £7.3 billion for local roads maintenance over 4 years for highways authorities to fix potholes, resurface roads and maintain major and local roads.
- While this funding is welcome, the government has imposed new tougher rules requiring local authorities to prove they are fixing potholes, or they will face losing up to a third of funding for future years. Councils must publish reports proving they are spending all of their highways cash purely on road maintenance, showing long-term plans for looking after roads and better training for their highways teams.
- Most recently, a £1 billion Structures Fund has also been announced to help councils fix bridges, flyovers and tunnels after decades of neglect. This fund is open to bids from councils, and it is hoped that it will enable repairs that ensure transport infrastructure is more resilient to extreme weather, making everyday journeys safer, smoother and more dependable.
- The Government has also continued its pursuit of improving bus services, and in November 2024 a further £1 billion of funding was announced for bus services across England. Some 55% of this funding was allocated to county and rural authorities for 2025/26 which marked a significant increase from previous funding rounds, but as our data has shown, bus services in county areas are still struggling. Alongside this, the government has committed to continue the national £3 fare cap for bus services which is set to run until 'at least' March 2027.
- The Bus Services Act became law in October 2025. The legislation gives local transport authorities greater control over bus routes, timetables, connections and fares. It also lifts the ban on authorities establishing their own bus companies and empowers authorities to work alongside operators if they chose not to pursue full ownership.
- The Spending Review also provided a commitment to deliver 100,000 more EV charging points across England with £381 million allocated through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund. This followed an earlier announcement in May 2025 which confirmed that drivers no longer need to submit a planning application to install electric vehicle chargepoints.



What are CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities?

CCN's Business Plan 2026/27 sets out the networks priorities for transport over the coming year. This sets out that we will advocate for fairer funding for road maintenance and highlight challenges facing rural transport. In particular we will:

- **Secure fair and sustainable transport funding for county areas**, ensuring allocations reflect the **scale, rurality, and extent of road and transport networks** managed by councils.
- **Address long-term pressures on road maintenance**, highlighting the funding gap for maintaining extensive road networks and using evidence (e.g. research with WSP) to influence national policy and investment.
- **Support sustainable and viable bus services**, continuing to highlight the decline in rural routes and advocating for **funding and reform that reflect the higher costs of delivering services in dispersed areas**.
- **Influence implementation of transport legislation**, particularly the Bus Services Act, ensuring reforms are **flexible and workable for county councils**, many of whom cannot pursue franchising models.
- **Promote transport connectivity as a driver of economic growth**, making the case for investment in transport infrastructure to support **jobs, access to services, and productivity** in county areas.
- **Influence wider transport policy and regulation**, including parking policy and advocating **for greater local flexibility (e.g. use of ANPR technology)** to support efficient management.
- **Support investment in future transport infrastructure**, including **electric vehicle charging networks**, ensuring county areas are not left behind in the transition to net zero.

[Read more about our advocacy and research in the CCN Business Plan & Work Programme 2026/27.](#)





Reports

- [County Councils Network – CCN Analysis on Electric Vehicle Infrastructure \(2023\)](#)
- [SYSTRA – The state of county buses: recovering services post pandemic \(2023\)](#)
- [County Councils Network – County Spotlight: Transport & Infrastructure \(2022\)](#)

Press Releases



- [7 June 2025 – ‘One in five rural bus routes have vanished despite pledges of a ‘bus revolution’](#)
- [18 November 2024 – CCN Response: Allocation of funding for Local Bus Services](#)
- [28 October 2024 – Government announces extension and increase to bus fare cap: CCN responds](#)