



ERMN
European Rural
Mobility Network

The Right to Move – the Right to Stay Tackling Rural Transport Poverty for a Fairer Europe

SUMMARY REPORT

6th November 2025 | 14:00 – 17:00 CET

European Commission, 24 rue de Mot,
Bruxelles, Belgium & Online

RURAL PACT





Event Highlights

On November 6, 2025, the European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN), in collaboration with the European Commission (DG MOVE), convened a **high-level interactive dialogue** in Brussels with **40+ in-person** and **30+ online** participants, bringing together **MEPs, national ministries, regional and local authorities, researchers, and transport stakeholders** to confront **rural transport poverty** across Europe.

The event placed **rural mobility** firmly on the political agenda as a fundamental right - the right to move as a condition for the right to stay—and explored transport poverty (including rural mobility poverty) as a multidimensional challenge shaped by availability, accessibility, affordability, and suitability of services. Discussions underscored the central role of data and planning (including the JRC Transport Poverty Hub) to diagnose gaps, monitor progress, and steer investment.

Participants highlighted the urgency of **flexible, multimodal and community-based solutions** (e.g., demand-responsive transport, shared mobility, mobility hubs, safe cycling and digital platforms, linked with public transport) and called for **measurable targets and EU-level minimum service standards** that translate the “right to mobility” into real, high-quality services.

Strong emphasis was also placed on **collaboration across governance levels** and on building effective partnerships with public and private providers to ensure delivery in dispersed and low-density areas. A core conclusion was that progress depends on **long-term, strategic funding mechanisms**—not short pilots—supported by smarter access to EU instruments (including the Social Climate Fund and Cohesion Funds), performance-based approaches, and clearer policy obligations.

The event closed with a shared call for a clear **EU roadmap** with measurable **targets**, improved data collection, enabling legislation for innovative services, and reinforced coordination from EU to local level.

ERMN positioned this event as the starting point of a sustained European process: setting the tone for stronger standards, deeper cooperation, and higher ambition—leading toward **scaled-up next events** that bring municipalities and rural communities to the centre of Europe’s mobility agenda.

Thank you for being part of it. We truly appreciated your contribution, which provided valuable insights and perceptions to the discussion. We believe there is significant work ahead to improve accessibility and mobility in rural areas across Europe. We would very much value having you with us in all the next steps of the ERMN. We remain fully available to keep in touch to explore possible future opportunities or further discuss the issues raised during the meeting.

With kindest regards,

Andrea Lorenzini – MemEx
President of the European Rural Mobility Network
on behalf of the ERMN core team members





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Figure 1 Event organisers





1. Introduction and synopsis of outcomes

The event titled “The Right to Move – the Right to Stay: Tackling Rural Transport Poverty for a fairer Europe” was organized by the newly established European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN) in collaboration with DG MOVE, in Brussels on the 6th November 2025. The event was a high-level interactive dialogue with the in-person participation of more than 40 people among which several European policymakers, national and local authorities’ representatives and key transport stakeholders on the urgent challenge of rural mobility and transport poverty. The event was also livestreamed and recorded the presence of more than 30 remote participants.

The key outcomes that emerged from the discussion are briefly summarised in the text below and described in more detail in the subsequent chapters:

Rural mobility is essential for ensuring dignity, equal opportunities, and social inclusion for people living outside urban areas. Yet many rural regions still face transport poverty, marked by limited accessibility, availability, and affordability of services. These mobility gaps are worsened by demographic trends such as ageing populations and depopulation, all of which make it harder to maintain viable transport systems. Improving rural mobility is crucial for connecting residents to jobs, education, healthcare, and social life. To achieve this, minimum service standards are needed, along with a stronger integration of mobility into broader rural development strategies. Rural mobility should be integrated into broader rural development policies and strategies; flexible, multimodal, and community-based solutions are required. Better data, monitoring, and performance-based funding are also essential for targeted and accountable investments.

Another key point that emerged from the discussion was the need for stronger coordination across government departments and levels, as well as the involvement of local communities in the design and implementation of mobility solutions. EU funding tools such as the Social Climate Fund and Cohesion Funds can play an important role in supporting these efforts.

2. Welcome and Opening

The event was opened by **Ms Isabelle Vandoorne**, Deputy Head of Unit at the European Commission’s DG MOVE (Unit B.3 – Innovation, Research, Urban and Rural Mobility), who welcomed participants and underlined that rural mobility is a pan-European challenge requiring coordinated action across different governance levels.

Andrea Lorenzini, Senior Transport Engineer in MemEx Srl, President of the ERMN and moderator of the event, introduced the newly created **European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN)**, which builds on the legacy of SMARTA, SMARTA2, and SMARTA-Net. The network aims to advocate for stronger rural mobility policies and funding, promote sustainable and shared mobility, and ensure that rural mobility becomes a central element of development and transport strategies. Its new website¹, currently

¹ www.ermn-network.org





under construction, was announced. Lorenzini highlighted that the ERMN will continue offering capacity-building, training, and networking opportunities—both online and on-site—with the ambition of expanding its membership and becoming a trusted reference point representing a collective European voice on rural mobility.

3. Setting the scene: high level opening interventions

The first session “*Setting the scene: high level opening interventions*” was announced with the introduction of the first speaker, **Mr Filippo Brunelli** of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission. The presentation² focused on the Transport Poverty Hub, a tool designed by the JRC to assess accessibility and transport poverty across Europe. The tool enables the analysis of reachable destinations, travel times and other relevant information across multiple transport modes (public transport, walking, cycling, driving). Future developments will integrate additional indexes and composite indicators.



Picture 1 – Mr Filippo Brunelli, JRC

The first intervention was followed by a presentation³ from **Marie Clotteau**, Regional Representative of the Grand Est region in France. Mrs Clotteau presented the regional policy “*Pacte pour les Ruralités*”⁴, a specific policy tool developed to support the rural inhabitants and territories of the Grand Est Region. The Grand Est region is a cross-border region of which 94% is rural areas and it is home to 2.2 million rural residents. The policy prioritizes the quality of life, economic attractiveness, connectivity and mobility, as well as the environmental protection of the area. Since its adoption in 2024, several measures have already been implemented ranging from rail investments to new cycling infrastructures and on-demand transport



Picture 2 – Ms Marie Clotteau, Grand Est Region, France

² The presentation with all interventions can be downloaded from the following link:

[ERMN - EC DG MOVE event - 6th November - Master-final](#)

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.grandest.fr/pacte-ruralites/pacte-ruralites-presentation/>





services; while some others related to local public transport are being planned for implementation in the near future.

4. First panel session “Mobility as a key enabler for the Right to Stay”

The first panel session, titled “Mobility as a key enabler for the Right to Stay” was moderated by Mrs **Maria Siti**, transport engineer at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) in Greece. It was joined by four members of the European Parliament, namely Ms Elena Kountoura, Vice-Chair of the TRAN Committee, and member of the Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL, from Greece; Mr Dario NARDELLA, member of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, from Italy; Mr Joachim STREIT, member of the Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, from Germany; and Ms Maria Walsh, member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) in the European Parliament from Ireland. The session was also joined by the two previous speakers, Mrs Clotteau and Mr Brunelli. The aim of the session was to foster a debate on the vision and desired level to achieve fair and sustainable mobility in rural areas. Mrs Siti introduced the session topics, reminding participants that mobility is a right and that the

European Commission recently issued recommendations to address transport poverty. She highlighted the severe consequences of limited mobility in rural areas (such as depopulation, dependency on private cars, and reduced access to essential services) and stressed the responsibility of authorities to ensure adequate and accessible mobility options.

MEP **Elena Kountoura** delivered a comprehensive intervention underlining that

mobility is not only crucial for economic growth but also a **fundamental right**, similar to housing, health, and education. It ensures access to essential services like jobs, schools, and medical care. However, millions of Europeans face **“transport poverty,”** where transport is unaffordable, unavailable, or fails to connect people to essential services. She stressed that over 20% of Europeans face serious transport barriers, with rural regions and islands being disproportionately affected.

The causes of transport poverty include low incomes, rising fuel costs, geographic isolation, poor public service coverage, and the high costs of green infrastructure investments. Rural areas suffer more, where lack of mobility can isolate communities and worsen social exclusion. In some regions, **individuals without cars cannot access basic services** like healthcare, education, or groceries. This situation worsens the demographic decline in islands and rural areas. The European Commission’s recommendations on transport poverty, while a step forward, do not go far enough. There are no



Picture 3 – MEP Elena Kountoura, Vice-Chair of the TRAN Committee, and member of the Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL, Greece





binding social service obligations for rural transport coverage. Mrs Kountoura called for **clear minimum service obligations, stronger cohesion funding, targeted support for vulnerable territories,** and the creation of a **connectivity compensation mechanism for islands and peripheral regions.** Cohesion and regional funds must prioritize **mobility justice** in the new Multiannual Financial Framework, focusing on **community-based solutions.** She finally urged the EU to adopt a **concrete roadmap ensuring mobility as a measurable right for all citizens** and to ensure greater EU financial support to make public transport more flexible, multimodal, and regionally tailored.

The panel discussion overall focused on the political responsibility to tackle transport poverty and reaffirmed that mobility is essential for societal participation, democratic inclusion, and the vitality of rural and sparsely populated areas.

MEP Dario Nardella highlighted the importance of public transport in contemporary political debates. Drawing on his experience as Mayor of Florence and President of Eurocities, he stressed that public transport should be considered as a core component of the welfare system, alongside health and security as it represents a fundamental right for citizens. He focused in particular on rural areas, which in Italy cover 60% of the territory and host 23% of the population. Millions of people depend on daily access to



Picture 4 - MEP Dario Nardella member of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Italy

essential services, and mobility is crucial for rural development. MEP Nardella called for stronger integration between rural and transport policies, encouraging more exchanges between the DG AGRI and TRAN committees. He suggested including specific measures for rural public transport in the post-2027 CAP to support innovation and youth engagement.

He also emphasized the need to strengthen connections between urban and rural areas. Beyond high-speed networks linking major European cities, everyday mobility for people living in peripheral areas had to be improved. In Florence, European funds (ERDF, ESF, and Next Generation EU) had been used to support student transport and to develop multimodal mobility hubs integrating trains, buses, bicycles, and private transport options.

In conclusion, MEP Nardella called for a coherent strategic vision combining rural development, mobility, and urban-rural connectivity. He referenced Mario Draghi's report on competitiveness, suggesting that instruments such as green Eurobonds could finance the substantial investments needed to enhance public transport. A reliable and accessible mobility system was, in his view, essential for a more cohesive and competitive Europe.

MEP Joachim Streit emphasized that rural communities urgently needed practical solutions. Drawing on his experience as mayor of Bitburg and later as county commissioner of a sparsely populated rural district, he highlighted the central role of mobility in enabling people to remain in their home





communities. Despite demographic challenges—low population density, limited public transport, and many residents without driving licences—people consistently stated that they wished to stay in their rural areas.

He presented six key points:

1. **Mobility as a Public Service and a Pillar of Democracy:** he stressed that mobility is a fundamental public service and a prerequisite for democratic participation; without adequate transport, citizens cannot fully engage in community and political life
2. **Flexible New Solutions Instead of Rigid Timetables:** he argued for flexible mobility solutions, such as on-demand buses and app-based shuttles, rather than rigid, inefficient timetables;
3. **Reactivating Rail Lines:** he called for the reactivation of closed rail lines, noting that restored train connections benefited both climate policy and rural communities
4. **Businesses as Partners in Rural Mobility:** he proposed involving local businesses by opening company vehicle fleets to the public and fostering initiatives such as “young drives old,” which supported social cohesion.
5. **Short Distances – Safe Cycling Routes – Modern Technology:** he underscored the importance of safe cycling routes, e-bike support, and digital mobility platforms integrating all means of transport.
6. **Right to Mobility = Right to a Home:** he underlined that the right to mobility was inseparable from the right to remain in one’s homeland. No one, he argued, should be forced to move to the city due to a lack of transport options.



Picture 5 – MEP Joachim Streit, member of the Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, Germany

He concluded by reaffirming his commitment, in the European Parliament, to securing fair cohesion funding for rural regions and safeguarding democratic participation through improved mobility.

MEP Maria Walsh stressed that all citizens—whether they live in cities or in remote rural areas—deserve real mobility choices. She highlighted persistent territorial disparities and insisted that mobility must be affordable, accessible, and available, as it underpins daily life and social participation. Drawing on examples from her constituency in the rural West of Ireland, she illustrated how low population density and limited public transport restrict access to education, childcare, healthcare, employment, financial services, and even mental health support. One case she shared, involving a





young woman unable to reach essential services due to a reduced bus route, underscored the human impact of mobility deprivation.

Mrs Clotteau and Mr Brunelli were then invited to add some remarks. Mrs Clotteau reflected on the Commission's recent strategy on generational renewal in farming, emphasizing that the EU needs people in rural areas for strategic reasons. She noted innovative mobility initiatives in rural and mountain area, such as demand-responsive transport and mixed service models, and



Picture 6 – MEP Maria Walsh, member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) in the European Parliament, Ireland

encouraged continued dissemination of good practices to regional and local authorities.

Filippo Brunelli built on earlier points about data. Speaking from a research perspective, he stated that although much analytical work was possible, the biggest barrier remains data availability. Public transport data, collected through national access points, are incomplete or missing in several countries. He argued that stronger Member State commitment to high-quality, publicly available data would allow for more accurate Europe-wide assessments of accessibility.

The debate among participants followed. Innovation emerged as a strong theme, with rural and mountain regions developing promising solutions such as demand-responsive transport and multimodal services. Participants encouraged wider dissemination of these good practices. There was broad consensus that the EU should move towards defining minimum mobility service standards, ensuring that mobility as a fundamental right is translated into high-quality services rather than minimal provisions.

The debate also examined the link between tourism and mobility poverty. A contribution from **Mrs Liesbet de Wit**, from the Province of Antwerp's tourism department showed that even when tourist services are accessible, mobility to reach them remains a major barrier for vulnerable groups. A project proposal on this topic was submitted under the last call of the INTERREG NWE program, aiming to develop integrated mobility services beyond transport modes alone, acknowledging barriers such as digital exclusion. Ultimately, the project seeks to produce an evidence-based framework for inclusive mobility to and within rural tourist destinations, to be shared widely with stakeholders.

Mrs Hana Rihovsky-Hoffmeister, advisor to the Greens Group in the European Parliament highlighted the political sensitivity of mobility issues. She noted that campaigning on public transport required unusual courage and she warned that defining mobility poverty simply by car ownership risked masking political failures: in rural areas a car might be essential, whereas in cities it is not. She encouraged continued debate.





5. Setting the scene: What future opportunities for policy and funding

The second part of the event started with two presentations, the first from **Mr Enrique Nieto of the Rural Pact Support Office** and the second from **Mr Cristian Garcia from the Ministry of ecological transition and demographic challenge in Spain**. Mr Nieto presented⁵ the work of the Rural Pact within the framework of the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)⁶, adopted in 2021 and outlining objectives for 2040. He emphasized that the vision promotes stronger, more prosperous, resilient, and connected rural areas, with rural mobility and access to services forming a key component of the "connected" pillar. He explained that the Rural Action Plan, currently being updated, involved multiple DGs working in an integrated manner, an example of cross-administrative coordination that rural issues often lack. He highlighted two cross-cutting actions relevant to mobility:



Picture 7 – Mr Enrique Nieto from the Rural Pact Support Office and Mr Brendan Finn, ETTS Ltd, ERMN

- **Functional Rural Areas**⁷: a concept developed by the Commission to better understand how territories function in terms of services and mobility.
- **The Rural Pact**⁸: a multi-level, multi-actor platform designed to place rural issues on political agendas beyond agriculture. Mr Nieto stressed that traditional rural development tools under the CAP were insufficient; therefore, the Rural Pact aimed to engage other sectors—transport, energy, education, digitalization—to "think rural."

Mr. Nieto also outlined the Pact's three roles:

1. **Policy activation**: encouraging administrations managing different funds to integrate rural considerations into their policies;
2. **Capacity building**: addressing the significant knowledge gaps of local actors and administrations on new rural challenges, including mobility;
3. **Action**: encouraging the Pact's members (more than 4.000) to implement the long-term vision.

⁵ The presentation with all interventions can be downloaded from the following link:

[ERMN - EC DG MOVE event - 6th November - Master-final](#)

⁶ https://rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-vision_en

⁷ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC135599>

⁸ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-pact_en





He described ongoing practical work: a dedicated Rural Mobility Community on the Pact's online platform, a good-practice webinar co-organized with supporting networks, and new synergies with the European Rural Parliament, which recently recognized mobility as a right in its declaration. He invited all participants to join the Rural Pact to strengthen cross-sector and cross-level cooperation on rural mobility.

Mr Christian Garcia outlined Spain's approach to rural mobility within its wider demographic challenge. He stressed Spain's extremely low rural population density and strong territorial imbalances, with large areas facing depopulation, ageing and loss of services. This justified a national priority focused on territorial equity and the right to access services.

He presented⁹ Spain's new 2025 strategic framework: a national strategy, a cross-ministerial "30-Minute Country Plan," and a

Territorial Equity Observatory. A major study identified 600 functional areas and mapped "functionality gaps," supporting better service planning and cooperation across regions.

Mr. Garcia described advances in policy and legislation. Mobility emerged as a top rural priority in citizen consultations. The national mobility strategy shifted attention from infrastructure to mobility services, including a dedicated rural mobility line. The 2025 Sustainable Mobility Law¹⁰ defined mobility as a basic social right, legalized on-demand and shared mobility, and required national guidelines with specific rural provisions.

Spain's transport-poverty analysis showed long distances to public transport, high car dependence and higher household transport costs. These findings shaped Spain's proposals for the Social Climate Fund, promoting measures such as on-demand and shared mobility.

He concluded that mobility is essential for living conditions in rural areas and that innovation, data and an updated legal framework offer significant opportunities for improvement.



Picture 8 – Mr Christian Garcia, RP50

6. Second Panel Session "What shall be done in the future: what should change in terms of policy and funding"

Mr Brendan Finn, moderator of the second panel session, introduced the focus of the discussion, explaining that it would explore future needs in policy and funding for rural mobility, building on the discussions from earlier sessions. The issue encompassed the multiple dimensions of transport

⁹ The presentation with all interventions can be downloaded from the following link:

[ERMN - EC DG MOVE event - 6th November - Master-final](#)

¹⁰ https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2025-24545





poverty—availability, accessibility, affordability, and suitability—all contributing to unequal mobility opportunities in rural areas. The moderator recalled that “*Connected*” was one of the four pillars of the European Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, but emphasized that the challenge lay in determining how to make this pillar a reality on the ground.

The composition of the panel was presented as particularly valuable:

- two national ministries, including the earlier contribution from Mr Christian Garcia,
- a national transport authority,
- a member of a national parliament, and
- a Member of the European Parliament (MEP).

This mix reflected different levels of governance—EU, national, and parliamentary—and provided complementary perspectives. Despite the importance of European and national frameworks, the moderator stressed that implementation would ultimately occur at the local level, since mobility services must be organized and delivered locally, whether by national, regional, or municipal authorities.

Two structural factors were noted as essential for progress:

1. Policy obligations, creating clear responsibilities;
2. Adequate funding, drawn from instruments such as the Social Climate Fund¹¹, which could help but might not be sufficient without additional mobilisation of resources.



Picture 9 – Mr Harris Mamoulakis, member of the Greek parliament and Mrs Alžběta Rychnovska, Ministry of Environment of Czech Republic

Ms Alžběta Rychnovska from the **Ministry of Environment of Czech Republic** highlighted how defining transport poverty nationally had allowed authorities to bring stakeholders together and to engage local action groups and regional partners through the public consultation of the Social Climate Fund (SCF). In this process, they had gained valuable experience with transport poverty and rural mobility, which motivated them to continue working on these issues in the future. She added that Czechia had faced several challenges in defining transport poverty, such as limited data availability, lack of experience

with possible solutions like transport-on-demand, and the absence of appropriate legislation. She acknowledged that, in some cases, they had relied on workarounds rather than perfect solutions. For the future, she hoped the definition of transport poverty would remain dynamic and that they would continue receiving support to refine it. She stressed that the experience they now possessed was what

¹¹ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/funding/social-climate-fund_en





they would have needed two years earlier, and therefore asked the Commission and Parliament to continue supporting them.

Mr Harris Mamoulakis, member of the Greek Parliament and former deputy mayor of Heraklion in Crete focused on future-oriented guidelines, greener and more flexible mobility systems, and the need for funding reforms and dedicated governance structures. He outlined three key pillars for future rural mobility policy and funding. First, he emphasized integrating flexible mobility systems, promoting e-bikes, and developing green infrastructure, noting Southern Europe's lag. He called for shifting focus from urban to regional mobility, with guaranteed funding and local collaboration.

Second, he stressed the need for long-term, sustainable funding through dedicated rural mobility or innovation funds, with social inclusion as a core goal.

Third, he proposed permanent rural mobility funds financed by fuel taxes or carbon credits, public-private-community partnerships, and performance-based grants to motivate local authorities to improve accessibility and reduce transport poverty.

In conclusion, he stressed that rural transport in the future should not become a reduced version of urban transit but should be redesigned as a flexible, sustainable, and technologically enabled network suitable for dispersed populations. He referred to the 2040 target as a reminder of the urgency of action. He reaffirmed that achieving mobility justice meant ensuring that people's opportunities were not determined by where they lived. He closed by congratulating the European Rural Mobility Network and expressing the hope that it would gain institutional consistency and permanence to achieve its goals.

Mr John Nott, from the **National Transport Authority in Ireland**, urged Member States to quickly develop specific five- to ten-year rural mobility plans based on service levels and network principles, identifying areas where flexible solutions like DRT should apply. These plans should be flexible but have realistic implementation measures.

He emphasized that funding was available but needed smarter access, guided by clear long-term goals. He called for shifting focus from costs alone to value-for-money assessments and suggested the Commission help with toolkits.

On governance, he recommended national authorities set overall plans and work closely with local operators who have local knowledge, that is a successful model in Ireland. National authorities should also manage journey planners and data integration.

He warned against relying on temporary pilots, advocating for permanent, long-term investments. Finally, he stressed engaging the commercial transport sector, noting many rural services were run by private operators who needed support for socially necessary but unprofitable routes, potentially requiring European legislation.



Picture 10 – Mr John Nott, National Transport Authority, Ireland





MEP Cynthia Ni Mhurchù highlighted that across Europe, rural communities face real barriers in simply getting where they need to go to work, to education, to healthcare, to childcare. She stressed the fact that reliable, affordable, and safe public transport is not a luxury or an environmental extra but rather it is a social necessity. In Ireland, for example, men have significantly higher rates of car ownership than women, meaning that women, older people, and lower-income groups depend more on public transport. When that transport doesn't exist, they are effectively locked out of full participation in society and the workforce. Talking about tackling transport poverty is not just about reducing emissions but enabling equality, inclusion, and economic opportunity. She highlighted her key points:



Picture 11 - MEP Cynthia Ni Mhurchù, Renew Europe Group, Ireland

1. Encouraging Member State commitment and EU-level initiatives

The EU can do more to mainstream rural mobility within cohesion, regional, and social policy, not treat it as an afterthought to climate or urban transport goals. Possible initiatives to be considered might be:

- a European Rural Mobility Pact, bringing together regions, local authorities, and stakeholders to share good practices.
- dedicated rural mobility funding windows within existing instruments – such as the Connecting Europe Facility¹², Cohesion Funds¹³, and the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)¹⁴.
- inclusion of rural accessibility targets in the European Semester or national reform programmes.
- encouraging Member States to view investment in local transport as both climate action and social infrastructure.

2. Ensuring Social Climate Fund & regional partnership plans reach local level

The Social Climate Fund should be more than a compensation mechanism; it should directly enable access to jobs, education, and opportunity. To achieve this, it might be worth:

- considering gender and social inclusion analysis in national SCF plans;
- ensuring local authorities and community organisations have a say in identifying mobility gaps and designing solutions;

¹² https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/connecting-europe-facility_en

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/cohesion-fund_en

¹⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en





- funding criteria should measure success not just in CO₂ saved, but in people connected and communities included.

3. Integrating Mobility into Rural Development Policy

Mobility should not be a separate policy silo. Rural development programmes already support housing, digital access, and community services. This could include:

- LEADER programmes supporting community-led transport initiatives;
- CAP strategic plans linking farm diversification or tourism projects to local transport;
- Smart Village strategies using technology to coordinate shared transport and local services.

Improving rural mobility also addresses a critical long-term challenge: brain drain and generational renewal. Young people are more likely to stay in or return to rural areas if they have access to education, work, and cultural opportunities. Reliable transport is essential for keeping rural communities vibrant and sustainable.

7. Closing session

A synopsis of the outcomes of the two panel sessions was given by **Mr Declan Turnbull**, from **Mayo Community Transport – ERMN**. He summarized the following key points emerging from the discussions:

- **Rural Mobility as a Right:** Rural mobility was consistently framed not as a luxury but as a fundamental right. It was described as essential to dignity, enabling people to remain in rural communities with real freedom of movement. Speakers stressed that citizens deserve genuine choice and that their well-being depends on accessible mobility. Underlying this discussion were themes of equality, inclusion, and justice.
- **Rural Mobility Poverty:** Rural mobility poverty was portrayed as a multidimensional issue. It is not merely about whether mobility is affordable; the availability, accessibility, and long-term sustainability of transport services are just as important. Several contributors highlighted these interconnected aspects.
- **Data and Planning:** The role of solid data in planning and funding mobility services was emphasised throughout the session. Reference was made to the work of Philippe Brunelli, along with the broader need for standardised EU-wide data requirements, given that data is often incomplete or simply unavailable.
- **Flexible Solutions:** Flexibility emerged as a key principle for rural mobility solutions. Shared mobility models were discussed, alongside the observation that many bus services still operate in isolation rather than as part of a coherent system. Participants noted that solutions must reflect local realities; what succeeds in one region or country may not translate directly to another.
- **Measurable Targets:** The idea of establishing minimum service standards for mobility across the EU received considerable interest. Several participants welcomed this as a constructive step forward and suggested it as a topic for further exploration.
- **Collaboration with Private Providers:** The discussion underscored the need for deeper engagement with private transport providers. This was identified as an area that warrants further development and experimentation.





- **Funding:** Although multiple funding streams are already available, participants stressed the need for a more strategic approach to accessing them. One proposal involved setting minimum spending floors for rural mobility in each EU member state.
- **European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN):** Attendees were invited to connect with the ERMN and consider membership as a way to continue meaningful dialogue at local, national, and European levels.
- **Notable Quote:** “*If we cannot move, we cannot participate.*” This statement was highlighted as a central message of the session.

The discussion was concluded with a call for a clear EU roadmap with measurable targets to tackle transport poverty, dedicated long-term funding streams, and comprehensive rural mobility plans developed by member states. Ms Isabelle Vandoorne identified as priorities improving data collection, enabling innovative and flexible services through legislative changes, and strengthening cooperation across governance levels. Overall, enhancing rural mobility is vital for social inclusion and sustainable development across Europe’s rural areas.

Thematic Highlights

Rural Mobility: Reaffirmed as a basic right tied to dignity, choice, and general welfare.

Mobility Poverty and Accessibility: Rural mobility poverty understood as broader than affordability alone.

Data: Clear need for improved, harmonised data to support planning and resourcing.

Flexibility: Mobility solutions must be adaptable and sensitive to context.

Targets and Standards: Interest in developing EU-wide minimum mobility standards.

Funding: Importance of strategic use of funds and consideration of spending floors.

Collaboration: Encouragement of stronger engagement with private providers and the ERMN.

Future Actions: Commitment to ongoing dialogue and preparations for a 2026 Europe-wide event.

The European Rural Mobility Network viewed this event as the beginning of a long-term, collaborative dialogue. The goal was to encourage cross-sector engagement involving the European Parliament, the European Commission, national ministries, and other key actors. By 2026, the ambition is to organise a pan-European event centred on municipalities and rural communities. The network aims to sustain discussions both at high institutional levels and within local communities, ensuring that shared challenges and opportunities can be converted into practical policies and targeted funding initiatives.







Annex: Event Agenda

Time	Theme
13:30 – 14:00	Registration & welcome coffee
14:00 – 14:10	Welcome and opening <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Welcome speech Isabelle VANDOORNE, Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission - DG Mobility and Transport, Unit B.3 Innovation, Research, Urban and Rural mobility○ Building the future of rural mobility: towards the European Rural Mobility Network Andrea LORENZINI, MemEx, European Rural Mobility Network
14:10 – 14:20	Setting the scene: high level opening interventions <p><i>What is the “Right to Stay” for rural areas and how is mobility linked with it?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Assessing rural accessibility across Europe: The Transport Poverty Hub Filippo BRUNELLI, European Commission, Joint Research Centre○ Supporting Rural Mobility: Insights from the Grand Est Pacte des ruralités Marie CLOTTEAU, Grand Est-Europe Region, France
14:20 – 15:20	Panel Session #1 <p>“Mobility as a key enabler for the Right to Stay”, fostering a debate on the vision and desired level to achieve</p> <p>Panel debate moderated by Ms Maria SITI, National Technical University of Athens (GR), joined by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ms Elena KOUNTOURA, MEP, Vice-Chair of the TRAN Committee, The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL, GreeceMr Dario NARDELLA, MEP, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, ItalyMr Joachim STREIT, MEP, Renew Europe Group, GermanyMs Maria WALSH, MEP, Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), Ireland <p>and session's speakers Filippo BRUNELLI and Marie CLOTTEAU</p>
15:20 – 15:35	Short break





15:35 – 15:45 Setting the scene: What future opportunities for policy and funding?

- **Increasing connectivity with the EU Rural Vision & Pact**
Enrique NIETO, Rural Pact Support Office Team Leader
- **Rural Mobility and access to Services: Spain's 30-Minute Approach**
Cristian GARCIA, Ministry of ecological transition and demographic challenge, Spain

15:45 – 16:45 Panel Session #2

What shall be done in the future: what should change in terms of policy and funding?

Panel debate joined by:

Ms Cynthia NÍ MHURCHÚ

MEP, Renew Europe Group, Ireland

Mr Harris MAMOULAKIS

Member of the Greek Parliament, Greece

Ms Alžběta RYCHNOVSKA

Ministry of Environment, Czech Republic

Mr John NOTT

National Transport Authority, Ireland

and session's speakers **Enrique NIETO** and **Cristian GARCIA**

Moderated by Mr. **Brendan FINN**, ETTS Ltd, Ireland

16:45 – 17:00 Closing session

Key recommendations for the future

- **Synopsis of the outcomes of the two panel sessions**
Declan TURNBULL, Ballina Municipal District, Mayo County Council, Ireland
- **Final remarks and next steps**
Isabelle VANDOORNE, Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission - DG Mobility and Transport, Unit B.3 Innovation, Research, Urban and Rural mobility

Recognising mobility not as a privilege, but as a key enabler for fundamental rights for all citizens.

