

Investigate the Rural Mobility and Accessibility Challenges of Seniors

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Abstract : This paper investigates the rural mobility and accessibility challenges of a specific target group - Seniors. The target group is those over 66 years of age who are entitled to use the Public Transport (PT) Free Travel Scheme in rural Ireland. The paper explores at a high level some of the projected rural PT challenges and requirements over the next 10-15 years, noting that statistical predictions show that there will be a significant population demographic shift within the Senior's age profile. Using the PESTEL framework, the literature review explored existing research concerning mobility, accessibility challenges, and the opportunities Seniors face. Twenty-seven qualitative in-depth interviews with stakeholders within the ecosystem were undertaken. The stakeholders included: rural PT customers, Local-Link managers, NTA senior management, a Minister of State, and a European parliament policymaker. Tier 1 interviewee feedback spotlights that the PT network system does not exist for rural patients to access hospital facilities. There was no evidence from the Tier 2 research findings to show that health policymakers and transport planners are working to deliver a national solution to support patients getting access to hospital appointments. Several research interviewees discussed the theme of isolation and the perceived stigma of senior males utilising PT. The findings indicated that MaaS is potentially revolutionary in the PT arena. Finally, this paper suggests several short-, medium- and long-term recommendations based on the research findings. These recommendations are a potential springboard to ensure that rural PT is suitable for future Irish generations.

Keywords : accessibility, active ageing, car dependence, isolation, seniors health issues, behavioural changes, environmental challenges, internet of things, demand responsive, mobility as a service

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