MINI SWITZERLAND

A model for integrated rural public transport

How to build a rural public transport network that people choose to use

THE RURAL TRANSPORT CRISIS

Rural public transport across Britain is caught in a cycle of decline. Services are cut, ridership falls, subsidy rises, more services are cut. The result is a system that costs more and delivers less each year.

Too thin to be useful

Infrequent, irregular services that nobody can plan their life around

Too disconnected to attract riders

Buses and trains planned independently, with no coordinated connections. Just 14% of public transport journeys use two modes.

Too expensive for taxpayers

Low ridership means high subsidy per passenger and poor value for money

Car dependency locked in

Roughly a third of residents of major cities can only reach rural hinterlands by car

The core problem: rural public transport is not designed as a network. It is a collection of disconnected routes.

HOW SWITZERLAND DOES IT

200+

public transport trips per person per year in Switzerland

vs ~50 in the UK

HOURLY

Bus services to every village with 300 or more people

68

rail trips per person per year

vs 24 in the UK

The secret: every village bus meets a regional train that meets an intercity train. The entire country breathes in and out on an hourly cycle, meaning everyone is connected to everywhere.

WHAT IS MINI SWITZERLAND?

Mini Switzerland is a national demonstrator for how integrated rural public transport could work in Britain. It applies proven Swiss principles in a real British setting to generate the evidence, learning and confidence needed for rural transport transformation across the country.

Clockface timetable

Every bus and train runs at the same minutes past the hour, every hour. Easy to remember, easy to use.

Seamless connections

Buses are timed to meet trains. The bus arrives a few minutes before the train departs. Every time.

Simple, integrated ticketing

One ticket covers all modes. No navigating multiple operators, products or boundaries.

A demonstrator, not a pilot

Tests a whole system, not a single intervention. Designed to be studied, measured and replicated.

A PROVEN APPROACH: THE MINI HOLLAND PRECEDENT

A decade ago, the Mini Holland programme in London showed how Dutch-style cycling infrastructure could work on British streets. It proved the concept, generated the evidence, and created a playbook that other areas could follow.

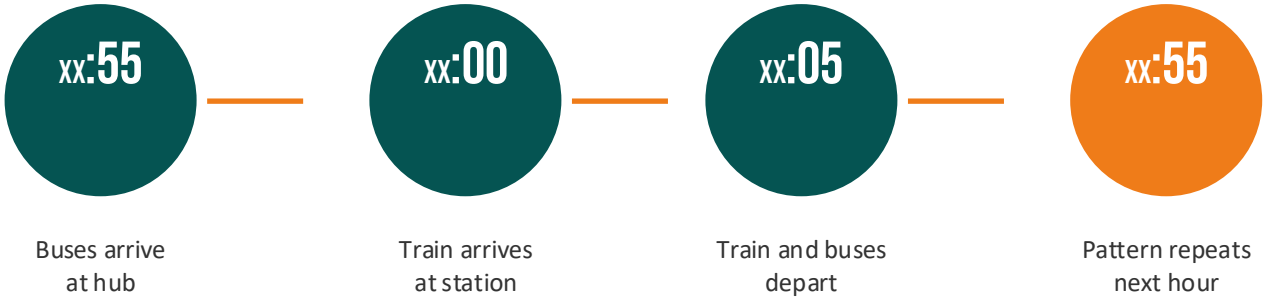
Mini Switzerland takes the same approach for rural public transport.

	Mini Holland	Mini Switzerland
Inspiration	The Netherlands	Switzerland
Focus	Active travel infrastructure	Integrated rural transport
Method	Replicate proven design in one place	Replicate proven design in one place
Purpose	Generate evidence and a replicable model	Generate evidence and a replicable model
Scale	Three London boroughs	One rural valley
Outcome	National template for LTNs and cycling	National template for rural integration

Demonstrate success in one place, then scale the learning.

HOW IT WORKS: THE STATION HUB CONCEPT

The network is built around interchange hubs where buses and trains meet on a regular, repeating pattern. For example:



WITHOUT INTEGRATION

- Buses and trains run independently
- Connections are random — often 30+ min waits
- Journey times vary wildly by time of day
- Most hours have no viable connection at all

WITH MINI SWITZERLAND

- Buses are timed to meet every train
- Maximum 5-minute connection at hub
- Consistent end-to-end journey time, every hour
- Journeys that were 2 hours become 1 hour

WHAT IT DELIVERS

FOR RESIDENTS

- Reliable access to jobs, education, healthcare and shops
- A genuine alternative to owning a car
- Sustainable, reliable connections to the visitor economy
- Evening and weekend services that actually work

FOR VISITORS

- Car-free access to rural destinations and National Parks
- Simple ticketing covering bus and rail
- Year-round, predictable services
- Reduced congestion and a better experience for everyone

FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

- Higher ridership means lower subsidy per passenger
- Real-world evidence on integrated rural transport
- A tested, replicable model for other areas
- Better value from existing transport spending

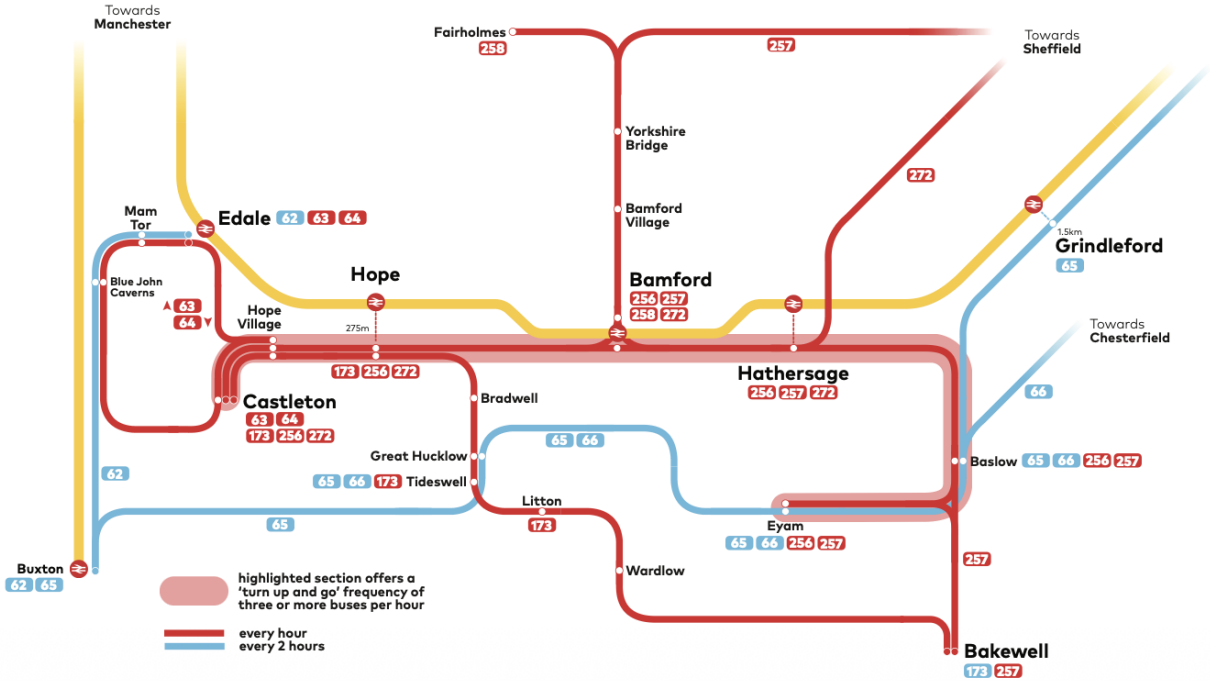
THE HOPE VALLEY DEMONSTRATOR

The first Mini Switzerland demonstrator is being delivered in the Hope Valley, Derbyshire — in the heart of the Peak District National Park, between Sheffield and Manchester. Hope Valley is an ideal location because:

1. **Existing hourly rail spine**
   An hourly stopping train service between Sheffield and Manchester already provides the clockface backbone
2. **Representative challenges**
   Narrow roads, dispersed villages, visitor surges, fragmented bus services — typical of rural Britain
3. **Strong demand potential**
   Millions of visitors per year, plus commuters, students and residents who currently have no alternative to driving
4. **Community-led momentum**
   Developed by Hope Valley Climate Action with a coalition of transport professionals, operators and national organisations
5. **Government-backed**
   Funded by the Department for Transport and the East Midlands Combined County Authority as a national demonstrator

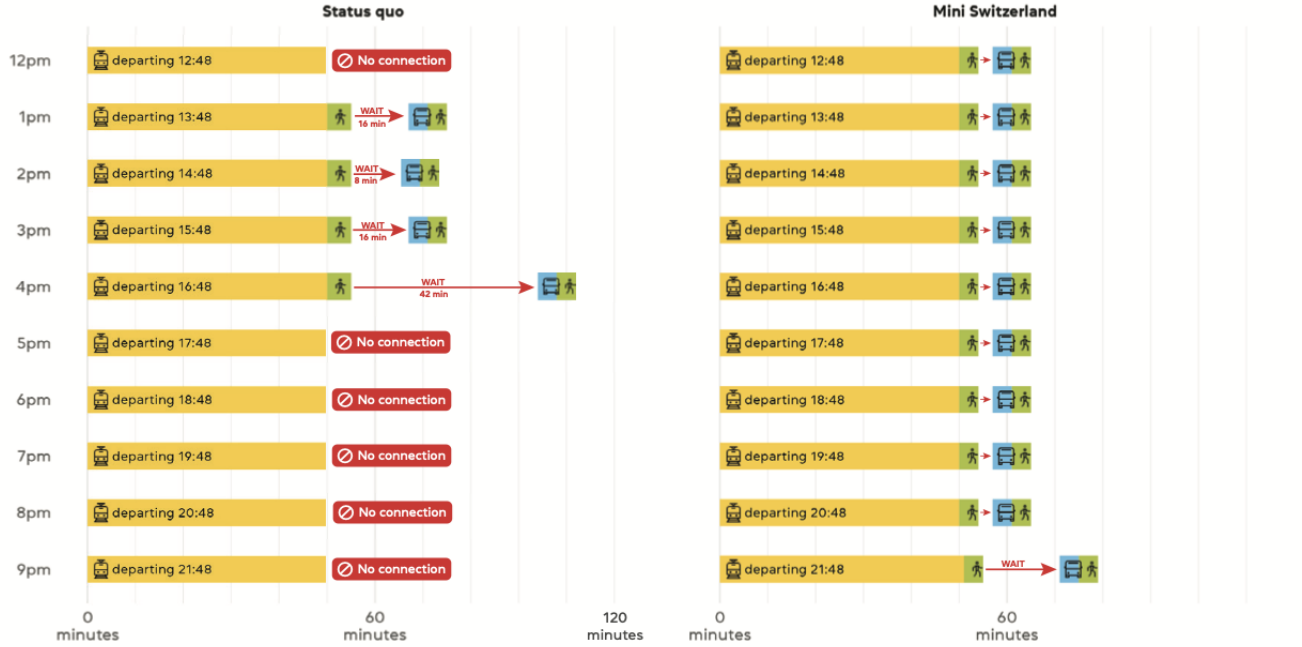
THE CHANGE IT WILL BRING

Mini Switzerland replaces an infrequent collection of routes designed as a ‘social safety net’ with a coordinated network designed to connect every village to railway station hubs every hour.



MINI SWITZERLAND MAKES JOURNEYS POSSIBLE

The diagram shows connections from Manchester to Bradwell (in the Peak District) today, and with Mini Switzerland. There are currently only a few hours with credible journeys. In future, every hour will be possible.



Timings from Travelline (Friday 5 December 2025) and the Mini-Switzerland proposal.

WHAT IT COSTS

Mini Switzerland is designed to be affordable. It requires no new railways, no road widening, no major construction. It delivers transformation through better coordination of existing assets.

~£1M

Capital investment

Bus stop improvements, minor highway changes, interchange upgrades, signage and information. No large capital projects.

~£4M

Year 1 additional revenue cost

Enhanced bus services, integrated ticketing, marketing, reliability measures. Falling to ~£2m as ridership grows.

5 YEARS

Demonstrator period

Long enough to build ridership, generate robust evidence, and test what works and what needs adjustment.

For context: this is comparable to a typical local highways scheme — but with the potential to transform rural mobility and generate nationally significant evidence.

COULD YOUR AREA BE NEXT?

Mini Switzerland is designed to be replicated. Any area with these characteristics is a potential candidate:

- **An existing rail service**
  Ideally an hourly or better stopping service that can serve as the clockface backbone
- **A bus network that could be reorganised**
  Existing routes - even infrequent ones - that can be retimed around rail connections
- **Multiple settlements disconnected from the railway network**
  Villages, towns or destinations that would benefit from being linked into a network
- **Visitor or commuter demand**
  A market of potential users who currently drive because the public transport offer is not viable
- **Political leadership willing to act**
  Integration requires decisions - on timetables, ticketing, priorities - that need political backing

WHAT POLITICAL LEADERS CAN DO

1

Identify your location

Find a rural area with an existing rail service and bus routes that could be integrated. Look for places with unmet demand: commuters, visitors, students or households with unfulfilled economic potential.

2

Commission the design work

Map your existing services. Identify where bus timetables could be adjusted to connect with trains. Assess what modest infrastructure improvements are needed at interchange points.

3

Build the partnership

Integration requires cooperation between bus operators, train operators, local authorities and communities.

4

Learn from the Hope Valley

Follow the evidence from the Hope Valley demonstrator. Use its data on ridership, costs and behaviour to build the case for investment in your area.

5

Make the decision

The biggest risk to projects like this is hesitation. Mini Switzerland is deliverable within existing powers and structures. It just needs someone to decide to do it.

HERE TO HELP

Mini Switzerland was developed by a volunteer team of transport professionals and community activists. We are happy to share what we have learned and to help other areas explore whether a Mini Switzerland approach could work for them.

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National Leadership

Roger Clarke

Local Leadership

Anne Robinson

Local Engagement

Matt Harrison

Communications

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MINI SWITZERLAND

Rural public transport works when it is planned as a network.
Mini Switzerland shows how.

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