TriCoast: Unified Urban Mobility & Retail Platform

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

TriCoast reimagines the high street as an integrated, low-carbon transit and retail corridor connecting Poole, Bournemouth, and Christchurch.

By combining smart park-and-ride schemes, trams, and micro-mobility with rent-free local shop spaces, it fosters year-round economic activity and sustainable movement.

This dossier outlines how a collaborative test can prove the demand for this unified transit-retail ecosystem by 2030.

The Better Everyday

What if navigating the coastal stretch from Poole to Christchurch felt like a single, seamless journey through leafy, active retail corridors rather than a series of disconnected car trips?

TriCoast is an integrated mobility and local commerce network that links regional transit—park-and-ride schemes, trams, micro-mobility, and green walking corridors—directly to revitalised high streets featuring rent-free community hubs and cafes. It transforms physical transport infrastructure into a destination itself, turning the space between Poole, Bournemouth, and Christchurch into an active, sustainable pathway.

By 2030, a visitor arriving at a park-and-ride on the edge of Poole easily hops onto an electric tram or grabs a cargo bike to explore the leafy high street in Boscombe. They browse pop-up stalls and local cafes operating from rent-free incubator spaces, completely bypassing congested arterial roads and the stressful search for town-centre parking spaces.

People want to support local traders and explore their coastal region, but they currently face congested routes, fragmented public transport, and hollowed-out high streets. The current workaround involves driving between isolated retail parks, which worsens congestion, increases emissions, and disconnects residents from the unique character of individual neighbourhoods.

This integrated platform could change how residents view local travel, making them expect transit stops to double as vibrant community spaces rather than mere waiting areas. This expectation could soon spread to healthcare, library services, and education, prompting these facilities to co-locate along active travel corridors.

Who It Could Matter To

Connecting the three coastal towns with sustainable mobility unlocks new opportunities for independent traders, car-free commuters, and local families alike.

The Disconnected Independent Maker

A creative artisan based in Boscombe who wants to sell their goods across the BCP region but cannot afford high rents.

They encounter TriCoast when searching for flexible, low-cost physical retail space to test their products.

They benefit from rent-free incubator shops linked to the transit hub, allowing them to reach steady foot traffic safely.

The Congestion-Weary Commuter

A financial services worker at a large employer in Bournemouth who is tired of spending their daily commute stuck in traffic.

They encounter the TriCoast platform when planning their morning journey and looking for a more reliable, stress-free route.

They benefit from the seamless park-and-ride and tram connection, gaining a productive, relaxing commute that keeps cars off congested roads.

The Eco-Conscious Family

A young family living in Christchurch who want to spend their weekends exploring the coast without relying on a private car.

They look for weekend activities and find the integrated TriCoast map showing safe, tree-lined walking and bike paths.

They enjoy a safe, active day out with young children, trusting the continuous micro-mobility infrastructure and pedestrian-friendly zones.

What This Could Change for BCP

A unified transit and retail corridor can shift BCP from a car-dependent seasonal destination to a highly connected, year-round coastal economy.

This concept aligns directly with BCP Council's stated regeneration ambition to deliver sustainable regeneration that strengthens town centres and supports year-round economic growth. By linking Poole Quay, Bournemouth town centre, and Christchurch via a single green transit corridor, it celebrates their unique identities rather than treating them as interchangeable.

High streets could see a dramatic rise in foot traffic as transport hubs funnel passengers directly into local retail zones. The availability of rent-free incubator spaces lowers the barrier to entry, filling empty shopfronts with diverse local start-ups and community-focused cafes.

This shift could spark a major expansion of BCP's established digital and tech sector, as local developers design hyper-local routing and retail reward apps. These digital solutions could eventually be exported to other coastal regions facing similar seasonal transit and commercial challenges.

While pedestrians and independent traders benefit, motorists would have to adapt to reduced road space and slower speeds along the central corridors. Navigating the transition would require careful balancing of commuter needs with pedestrian safety, ensuring no neighborhood feels isolated by the new routing.

Who Must Connect

Transforming the high street into an active transit destination requires coordination between local government, transport providers, and community curators.

A regional transport operator, partnering with a local community land trust, would lead the physical delivery of the park-and-ride and high-street hubs. The operator would manage the transit links, while the trust would curate the retail spaces to ensure a vibrant mix of independent businesses.

High street business associations and local residents would actively shape the layout of the green corridors and the selection of rent-free retailers. Regular neighbourhood forums would allow them to co-design the public spaces, ensuring they meet everyday community needs rather than just tourist demands.

BCP Council would provide the necessary planning permissions, highway access, and temporary use of vacant municipal properties for the rent-free incubator shops. Their involvement ensures the infrastructure aligns with regional development plans and transport safety standards.

Local business improvement districts (BIDs) and commercial sponsors would fund the ongoing maintenance of the green spaces and smart hubs through a shared-benefit levy. This ensures the public spaces remain clean, safe, and attractive without placing a permanent burden on council taxpayers.

The critical missing link is a formal partnership between regional transit operators and local commercial landlords, who rarely collaborate on spatial planning. A digital network like Silicon South could help bridge this gap by bringing both sides together to explore how integrated routing drives foot traffic to physical storefronts.

Why This Fails

Even the most imaginative transport-retail network will stall without clear operational ownership, developer buy-in, and sustained public use.

Deserted shopfronts could occur if the rent-free retail model lacks a clear long-term funding strategy, leaving spaces vacant once initial grants run dry. An early warning sign would be high turnover and long vacancies in the incubator pods, accompanied by a decline in volunteer maintenance.

Stranded hubs will result if independent private transport operators refuse to integrate their ticketing systems, rendering the unified routing platform useless. You would notice this early if passengers are forced to buy multiple tickets for a single journey across Poole, Bournemouth, and Christchurch.

Winter ghost lanes could emerge if the active travel corridors fail to attract users during wet, cold winter months, reverting to empty spaces. The first sign of trouble would be a sharp drop-off in micro-mobility rentals and foot traffic as soon as the summer season ends, leaving high streets deserted.

One Experiment to Start

Testing the appetite for combined transport and retail hubs requires a small-scale, real-world pilot before committing to major regional infrastructure.

The single most important uncertainty to resolve is whether commuters will actually choose to park on the town outskirts and use active, retail-lined travel routes instead of driving directly to their destination. If people refuse to leave their cars for the final mile, the expensive tramway and high-street retail hubs will lack the foot traffic needed to survive.

Establish a temporary, two-weekend "Green Hub" at a single underused suburban car park on the boundary of Bournemouth and Poole during the autumn. Offer free parking, direct cargo bike rentals, and host a cluster of local pop-up food stalls and makers inside temporary timber cabins along a marked walking route into the nearest high street.

Keep going if commuters actively use the park-and-ride, borrow the bikes, and report spending money at both the pop-up cabins and existing high-street shops. Stop or rethink if drivers bypass the hub entirely, or if the pop-up stalls fail to attract foot traffic, indicating that transit convenience alone cannot change deep-seated driving habits.

Next step: A BCP transport planner could convene a 90-day working group with local bike-share operators and a town-centre business chamber to map out the exact site and secure temporary use permits for the autumn pilot.