



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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# Analysis of Public Library Standard two (PLS2)

## 1 Introduction: Public Library Standard 2

The current libraries strategy for Northern Ireland, *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, contains a number of targets, referred to as Public Library Standards<sup>1</sup>. The second of these, PLS2, states the following:

*Public Library Standard 2 - Percentage of households living within a specified distance of a static library or a scheduled mobile stop offering a range of library services open to the general public.*

*Target - 85% of households should have access to a library service within 2 miles. This encompasses the mobile library service so that 85% of households are within 2 miles of a library, either mobile or static. A mobile stop should be for at least half an hour and call at least every 2 weeks. All types of service outlets will be calculated on the basis of postcodes returned by library authorities.*

<sup>1</sup> Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2006. *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries: Principles and priorities for the development of public libraries in Northern Ireland*: <http://nia1.me/gp>

## 2 Analysis of the data

In order to analyse the performance of the current library service against this target, the Assembly Research and Information Service obtained (a) postcodes for all of the remaining static libraries throughout Northern Ireland, and (b) the routes and stops of the mobile library service<sup>2</sup>. In analysing this data, the following qualifications are important to note:

- The static libraries exclude the ten branches already closed in Greater Belfast following stage one of the ‘Strategic Review’ of libraries.
- Since no announcement has been made at this stage regarding the ten libraries included within stage two of this process, all of these libraries are included in the analysis.
- PLS2 states that in order to be considered eligible for the 85% coverage, mobile library stops must last for at least half an hour, and take place at least every two weeks: bearing these two qualifications in mind, although there are a total of 985 mobile stops provided by the current mobile library service, 710 were excluded from this analysis. Just 275 mobile library stops are therefore eligible for inclusion in the analysis.
- Analysis of the total population within a 2 mile ‘buffer’ of each of the library services has been carried out using 2001 census data for the number of households. The total number of households in Northern Ireland in the 2001 census equals 660,193; the percentage of households that fall within the 2 mile buffer were then calculated.
- The two mile buffer uses both a direct ‘as the crow flies’ radius of 2 miles, and also a calculation of 2 miles via the road network.

## 3 Results of the analysis

This paper includes four maps, as follows:

| Figure            | Description  |
|-------------------|--|
| <a href="#">1</a> | <a href="#">All static libraries and all mobile stops</a>  |
| <a href="#">2</a> | <a href="#">All static libraries and eligible mobile stops</a>                                       |
| <a href="#">3</a> | <a href="#">All static libraries and mobile stops with buffer zone</a>                               |
| <a href="#">4</a> | <a href="#">All static libraries and eligible mobile stops with buffer zone</a>                      |
| <a href="#">5</a> | <a href="#">All static libraries and eligible mobile stops with buffer zone via the road network</a> |

These distribution maps were then used to conduct an analysis of Public Library Standard (PLS) 2. The results of this analysis are as follows (overleaf):

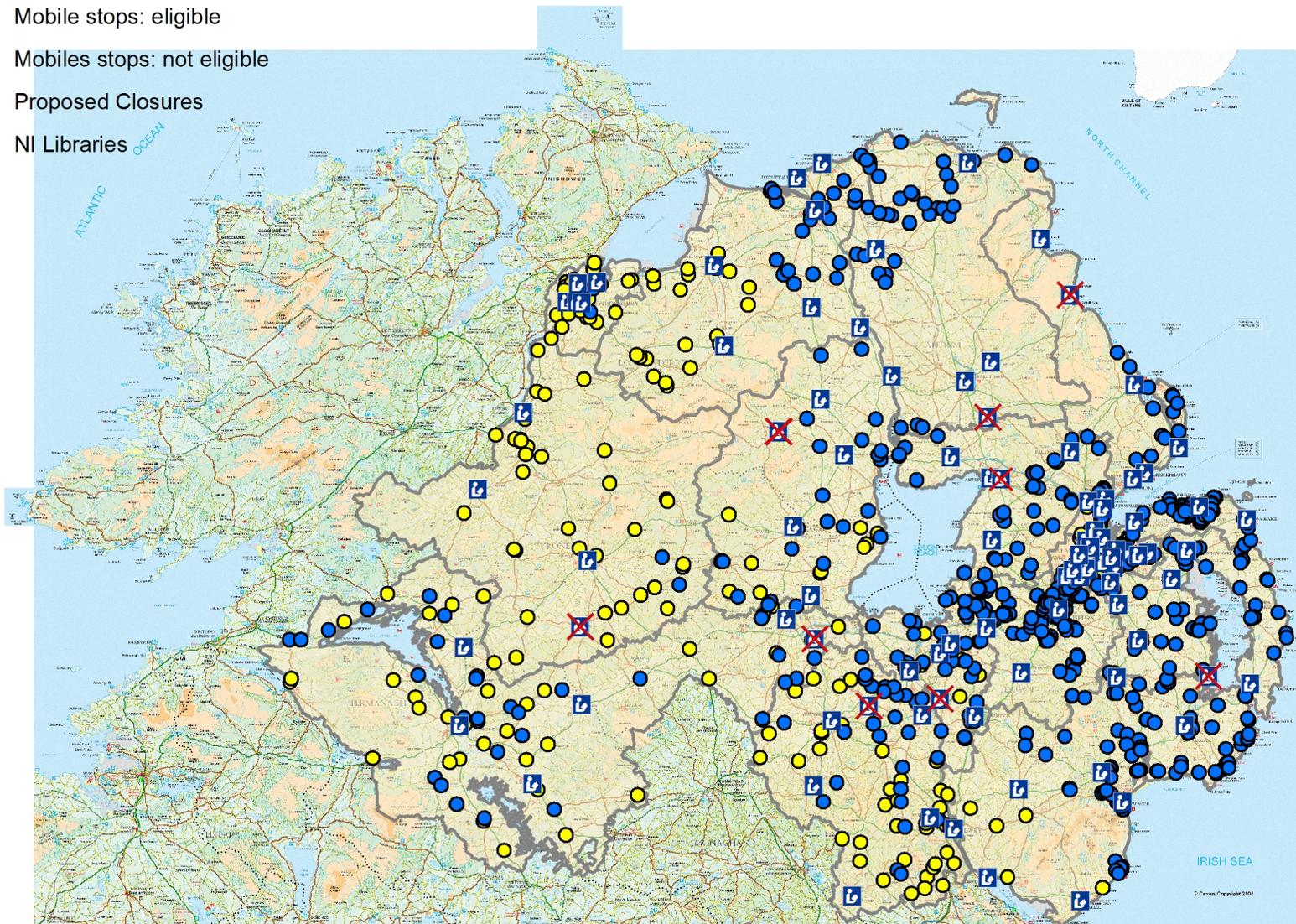
<sup>2</sup> Postcode information for static libraries was derived from the list provided on the Libraries NI website: <http://www.ni-libraries.net/libraries> Information on mobile libraries was provided directly by Libraries NI staff following a request for information.

- Analysis was carried out firstly on the basis of static libraries and **all** mobile stops alongside the total number of households: these services cover 634,738 households, which is 96% of those in Northern Ireland.
- However, as described above, 710 of the mobile library stops were disqualified as either stopping too infrequently or for too short a time, leaving just 275 stops eligible for inclusion in analysis of PLS2.
- Analysis was then carried out on the distribution of the eligible mobile stops alongside the static libraries. The total number of households covered within this area was 582,702, which is 88%. However, this figure is derived from a distance of 2 miles as the crow flies. **If a 'network analysis' is used, calculating 2 miles as a road distance instead of as the crow flies, the result produces a figure of 84% for the total number of households covered.** This figures *includes* libraries at Moy and Moneymore, both of which were announced for closure on 20 October 2011.
- It is important to state that the distribution of mobile services across Northern Ireland is varied, particularly regarding the frequency and duration of stops.
- For example, services around Ballymena generally run on a three-week cycle, so do not conform to the criteria set out in PLS2 that mobile stops must be at least every two weeks. This is in contrast to services in Fermanagh, for example, which generally run every two weeks and therefore do conform to PLS2.
- Furthermore, over half of the mobile stops in Armagh do not conform to PLS2 because the duration of stops is less than half an hour, compared with Tyrone where almost all stops are equal to or greater than half an hour.
- This variation in the character of mobile library services suggests that further analysis may be needed, as a Northern Ireland-wide analysis of the PLS2 target may be masking more localised problems within specific constituencies.

**Figure 1: All static libraries and all mobile stops**

**Legend**

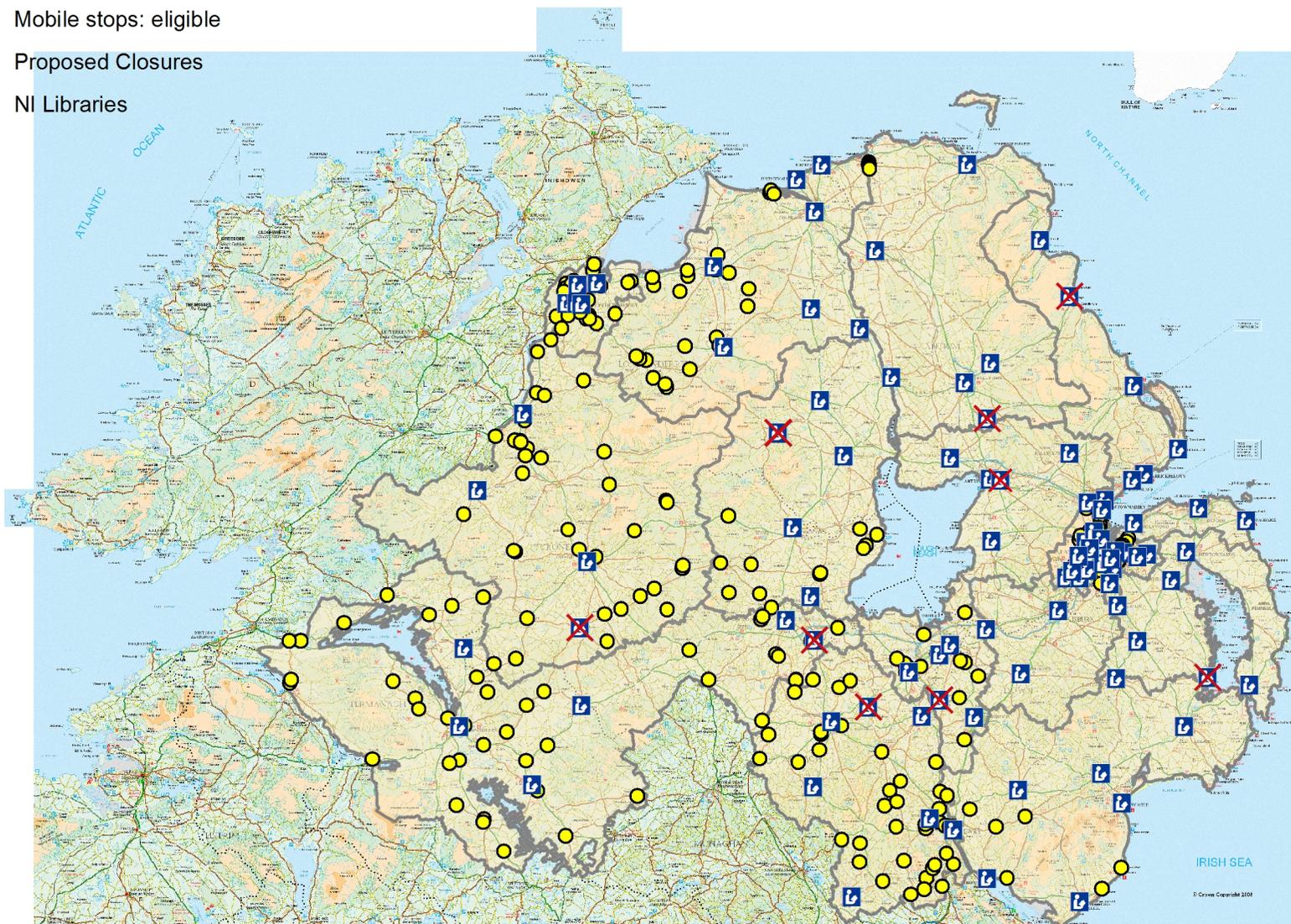
- Mobile stops: eligible
- Mobile stops: not eligible
- ✗ Proposed Closures
- 📖 NI Libraries



**Figure 2: All static libraries and eligible mobile stops**

**Legend**

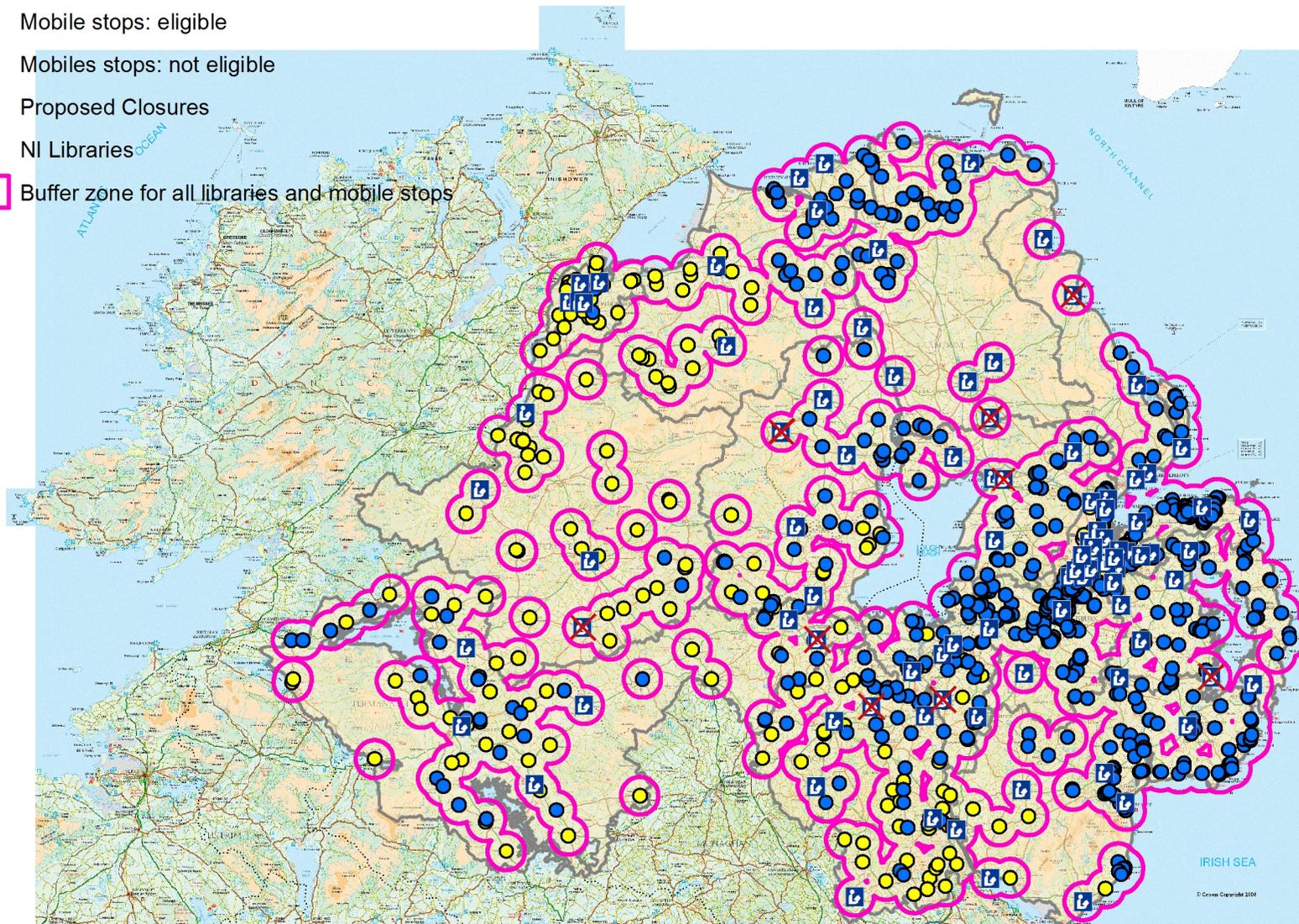
- Mobile stops: eligible
- ✗ Proposed Closures
- 📖 NI Libraries



**Figure 3: All static libraries and mobiles stops with 2 mile buffer zone**

**Legend**

- Mobile stops: eligible
- Mobile stops: not eligible
- ✗ Proposed Closures
- 📖 NI Libraries
- Buffer zone for all libraries and mobile stops



**Figure 4: All static libraries and eligible mobiles stops with 2 mile buffer zone**

**Legend**

- Mobile stops: eligible
- ✗ Proposed Closures
- 📖 NI Libraries
- Buffer: eligible area

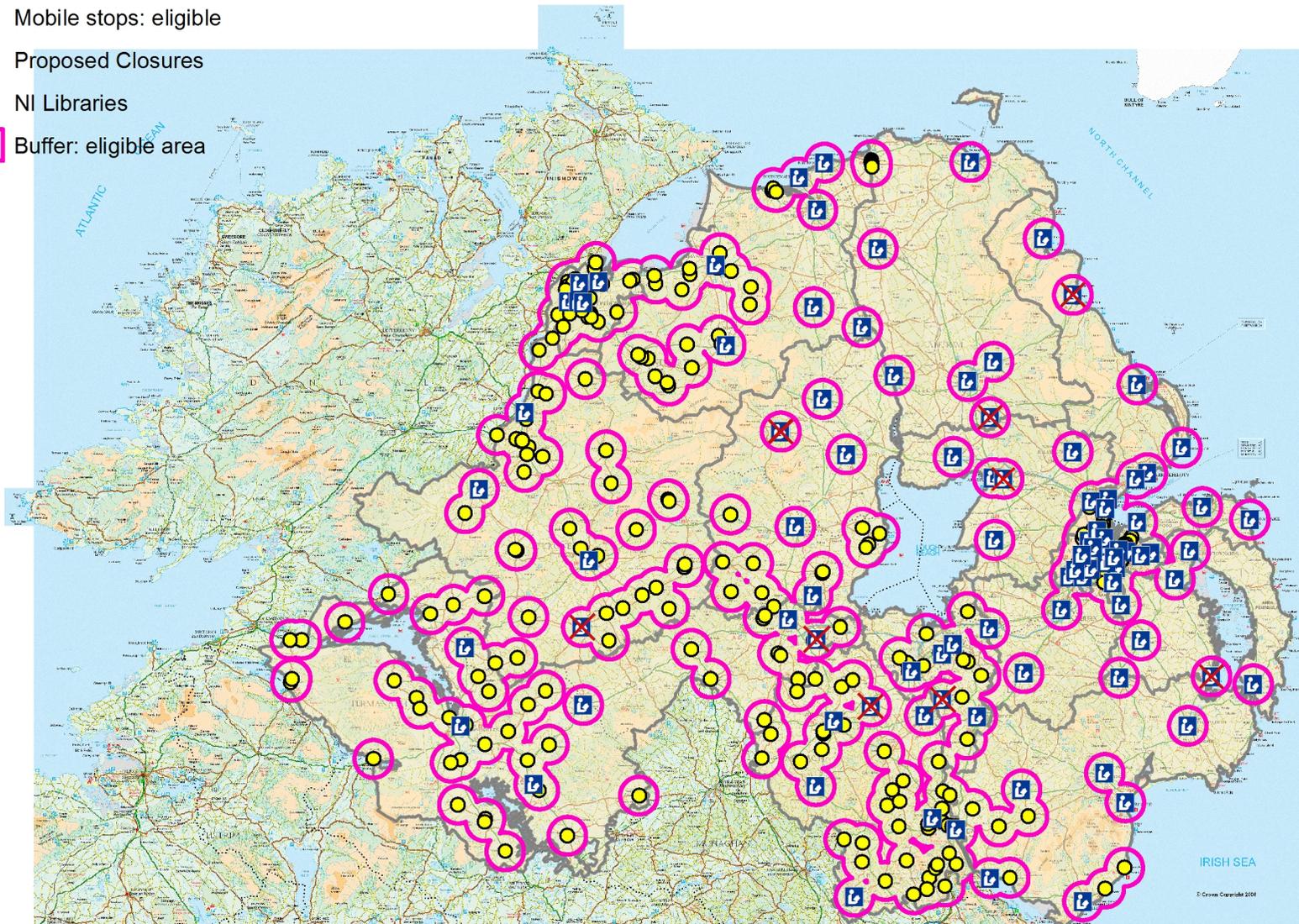


Figure 5: All static libraries and eligible mobiles stops with 2 mile buffer (road network analysis)

