

Community Transport

Report of the Head of Services for Communities

1. Summary

This report responds to the suggestion of the Place Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2016, where Members identified the committee might usefully “*consider the effectiveness of Ring & Ride schemes and potential for funding of such schemes, in light of evidence gathered during recent consultations on public transport.*”

It sets out the progress which has been made by the Transport Coordination Service (TCS) in engaging Community Transport operators in Devon to assist with replacement bus services.

2. Definitions of Community Transport

The term Community Transport (CT) covers a wide variety of services. Their common feature is that they are run by local community organisations on a not-for-profit basis to meet the needs of individuals unable to access conventional Public Transport due to mobility and/or geographical constraints.

In Devon the main CT services are:

- Ring & Ride – a door to door, book-in-advance service available to defined categories of passengers, including frail elderly, disabled or those in rural isolation, which helps people to access essential shopping.
- Voluntary Car – an organised form of lift-giving whereby volunteers use their own cars to help people attend appointments, usually medical, for a mileage fee.
- Wheels 2 Work – Low-cost scooter and motorcycle loan service to help people access employment and training.
- Community Bus – regular routes operated to a published timetable, usually in more remote locations without regular conventional public bus services.

3. Context - the delivery of Community Transport provided bus services

The CT sector in Devon is vibrant, widespread and characterised by long-standing small groups running a couple of vehicles each. There are some larger groups which have larger fleets of vehicles (7-8) although these are not geographically dispersed throughout the county. Many of the groups have a wealth of experience having been in operation in excess of 25 years.

The County Council has a good track record of facilitating and supporting our local CT sector and was one of the first local authorities in the UK to appoint a Community Transport Adviser in response to the new powers afforded in the 1985 Transport Act. The CT groups have worked together to produce a briefing paper on the “Social and Economic Value of Community Transport Grants in Devon” which is attached to this report as **Appendix 1**.

As part of the proposed implementation of supported bus service reductions in July 2015, the County Council set aside £100,000 per annum over three years to support CT providers “to reassess the current provision funded by the County Council and potentially widen the

service offered to include more general access for local communities.” Any service covered by the £100,000 fund would have to be more cost-effective and sustainable than the service it replaced.

The invitation to CT groups to consider options extended beyond the proposed list of service withdrawals to the entire supported network. This broader examination of community options acted as a more definitive test of what potential there is in the sector.

As part of this consideration, we asked whether, in return for marginal additional costs being covered, any Ring & Ride might be used to cover all or part of a rural bus service (especially a weekly service) under threat of withdrawal or reduction. We queried whether there might be spare capacity on an existing day or if the Ring & Ride vehicle may be able to operate on additional days.

A summary of the responses we have had, the savings to DCC and proposals which have been considered but declined, are attached as **Appendix 2**.

4. Findings and Insight

The process of engaging with the CT groups on these matters has given us a clearer insight into the current state of the sector in Devon.

Some groups were initially cautious to get involved because of a range of concerns. However schemes which have successfully taken on new services have been a good advocate to other CT groups.

5. Issues relating to taking on local bus services

Timescales

Introducing a registered bus service is a new area of work for a group (eg different legislation and permits between Ring & Ride and a local bus service). The final decision to provide service has to go through their board of trustees. Depending on their current terms of reference, some groups will have to make changes to their governing document. This requires permission from the Charity Commission or other bodies and can take significant time to achieve.

Risk and change management

Groups are concerned about over-stretching themselves and putting their existing services at risk. Some groups have to raise in excess of £30K a year in addition to their local authority grants to keep their Ring & Ride services on the road. We work with the groups to help ensure that they have taken all costs into account when putting in a price for delivering a service. It does not make sense to replace an unsustainable bus service with an equally unsustainable community-based service.

Vehicle and Scheme Capacity

CT groups have to weigh up the cost of buying/bidding for grants for an extra vehicle to take on additional work. Vehicles used have to take into account the removal of seats to accommodate wheelchairs, walking frames, shopping trolleys and bags, making capacity on a standard 15 seater Ring & Ride accessible minibus limited. Most Ring & Ride schemes also operate school transport contracts. This is a valuable source of income to the schemes but it does restrict the times when additional bus services can operate.

Trading: contracts vs grants

The County Council assists some schemes by means of annual grants as well as providing legal, financial and operational advice. We believe that grants give us better value for money

and it helps to give CT groups leverage to draw in match funding. Charities are subject to a threshold on what they can earn from contracts and other work which is not deemed 'core objectives' in their governing document. To take account of any potential distortion of competition they are also bound by E.U. State Aid rules which determine the amount the groups are permitted to receive from public bodies by way of grant support.

Permit legislation

Whilst we prefer CT groups to register any bus services which they can take on (Section 22 Community Bus permit), we can consider Ring & Ride-type options (Section 19 permit) although the concessionary pass is not valid on these services¹. This means that in cases where a Section 19 Ring & Ride type of service replaces a supported local bus service, passengers formerly enjoying free concessionary travel lose this facility. They do however retain a transport service where it might otherwise have been entirely lost.

Mixed use of services

There has been some concern about the different travel needs and expectations of a Ring & Ride passenger compared with a rural bus user eg the Ring & Ride passenger requires door to door support; the rural bus user cannot travel spontaneously and must book in advance. Minibuses are designed with the needs of elderly and disabled passengers in mind and they are not easy to get on and off with pushchairs plus there is nowhere to store them on-board.

Ring & Ride schemes have also reported having to adapt to the needs of an older clientele. As public bus design and accessibility has improved, passengers may be able to use these services for longer but then transfer to Ring & Ride with increased fragility. Ring & Rides are dealing with more passengers with dementia and other age-related conditions. It can make it difficult to increase journey times for this group of passengers to accommodate others.

Volunteers vs paid staff

Significant savings can be made if voluntary drivers are used. This may be acceptable for a short, once a week service, but there is a big difference between this level of provision and a regular round town service. There are also management costs involved in running a team of volunteer drivers plus expenses which are often overlooked as a nil cost.

Totnes Community Bus (Bob the Bus) is a-typical of CT schemes locally with a large pool of volunteers to share the driving rota. However, they would probably not be able to provide the service which Ilfracombe Community Transport Association did which was a late night 10:30pm service. This illustrates the wide diversity in what is provided; it comes down to what individuals can offer within their community.

Skills

Not all CT groups are set up for the new challenges operating bus services may pose. The demand for good financial planning, business management skills and the requirement for legal expertise may be beyond some smaller providers. The CT groups need trustees who will take on the responsibility of running additional services, employing appropriate staff and overseeing projects.

¹ Community Transport buses and minibuses operate under Section 19 or Section 22 of the Transport Act 1985. The basis of community transport operations is either Section 22 (Community Bus) or Section 19 (usually in the form of Ring & Ride, available to defined categories of passengers, such as frail elderly or disabled or those in rural isolation). Section 22 Community Buses are directly equivalent to other local bus services and as such are part of the statutory free concessionary travel scheme. On Section 19 services, however, the concessionary pass is not valid. Authorities have the discretion to extend the concessionary scheme to Section 19, but to date Devon has opted not to do so on grounds of cost and it is not proposed to change this position. (Section 19 services are normally flexibly routed and bookable, which, under statutory regulations gives further grounds for exclusion of a service from the concessionary scheme). A Section 19 community service in some ways offers a superior service by virtue of picking passengers up at their home address and offering some flexibility on travel times. Community car schemes operate under Section 1(4) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981.

Sustainability

Some groups in the sector have viability concerns. We have seen the closure of three major CT groups in the past 2 years. These were all long-standing providers who had been running for over 20 years. All three had financial management issues at the centre of their failings. DCC has specific monitoring criteria for the grants it awards. This is invaluable in helping identify potential financial problems.

In addition, we are looking to undertake some on-bus surveys into usage on the Ring & Ride schemes to give us accurate data on the use of our supported schemes. This will enable us to consider the level of service that DCC wants to maintain.

6. Conclusion

CT providers in Devon have been involved in the provision of transport for many years. It is important to take into account how much they are doing already when we approach them to do more.

Recent press coverage has suggested that Community Transport 'could save the public sector up to £1 billion'. Across the UK, local authorities are anticipating savings by means of converting routes to CT operation. There is huge pressure on the sector in terms of expectations of delivering services more efficiently than the public sector, more cheaply and with more 'social value'. The danger is that CT solutions are seen as the panacea to all transport budget issues when they have their own issues and challenges.

Provision of bus services by CT operators has limited budget savings. There are a few examples where savings are reasonable, but not significant (See Appendix 2). To put it in context, whilst the number of passenger trips per year on the public bus network totalled 26 million (5 million of which were on the DCC supported network), in 2014/15 the Ring & Ride schemes undertook 30,308 return passenger journeys and voluntary car schemes 53,173 trips (1.67% compared to public bus journeys).

In Devon, we work in partnership with our local CT groups and have received accolades from the Community Transport Association UK and the Department for Transport for our work. We have been consulted about our policies regarding support for CT from both Dorset and Somerset CCs among others and from further afield including visits from Northern Ireland and South Korea.

CT groups have access to on-going opportunities to undertake more services in Devon. Our procurement Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) affords any CT group who register, the opportunity to compete for contract work whilst preserving a level playing field for all providers. This has recently been extended to include work for volunteer drivers. The DPS will help inform us whether what CT is able to provide offers value for money.

John Smith
Head of Services for Communities

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Highway Management and Flood Prevention

Strategic Director, Place: Heather Barnes

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Contact for enquiries: Damien Jones

Room No. Matford Offices, County Hall, Exeter. EX2 4QD

Tel No: 01392) 383000

Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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Nil

dj200516psc Community Transport
hk 03 030616

Report from Devon Community Transport groups – Social & Economic Value of
Community Transport grants in Devon.



Social & economic value of community transport grants in Devon

What is community transport?



Community transport (CT) is for the many people, especially in rural Devon, who live miles from their nearest bus route, are unable to afford taxi fares or are otherwise unable to use public transport.

Across Devon community transport groups provide transport to shops, health appointments, services and leisure activities where no alternative suitable transport is available. Their passengers cannot travel any other way – they often have no family or friends who live locally who they can rely on.

Typically these passengers are 65 or over, and are often frail or otherwise vulnerable, and their numbers are increasing. They are also on low incomes and unable to afford taxis. Although they may get financial assistance with travel to medical appointments, such support is not available for social or shopping trips. This is the gap filled by Community Transport where the community help each other by supporting themselves.

Social value – how many people are enabled to get out and about?

During 2014-15 Ring & Ride buses completed 30,308 return passenger journeys, community buses on scheduled routes (Section 22) 41,667 return passenger journeys. In addition 41 Community Car Schemes provided 124,794 Passenger journeys.

This is a total of 196,769 journeys provided across Devon during 2014-15. These figures do not include the added value to local communities who are able to use Community Transport minibuses for group and/or private hires.

Such journeys are a vital part of reducing social isolation and contributing to people's wellbeing by enabling people who would otherwise remain isolated in their own homes to get out, socialise and keep active. There is a wealth of research that demonstrates that such activity is vital for people's health and contributes to the wellbeing of people suffering from dementia and memory loss. CT is actively keeping people fit and well by enabling them to socialise, while Community Car

Schemes also contribute to keeping them well and living in their own homes for longer by transporting them to vital medical appointments.

"The relationship between mental health and transport goes deeper than many people realise" said Transport Minister Andrew Jones at a Mental Health and Transport Summit in London (25 February 2016). He spoke about how accessible and inclusive transport is a vital component of maintaining mental health in the UK.

Economic impact:

Community Transport organisations, even those run by volunteers, cost money to run. As organisations they need, at the very least, insurance, telephone line, DBS checks for their drivers, possibly an office and other sundry overheads. For example, the 41 Community Car Schemes who contributed data for 2014-15 spent over £1,000,000 providing their services and most of this expenditure goes straight back into the local economy. The passengers contributed £609,000 of this directly to the drivers as payment for the actual journey undertaken.

Within the local economy the money pays staff, volunteer drivers' expenses, fuel payments at local garages, vehicle maintenance and servicing, insurance brokers, database providers and HR and accountancy services. Fuel bought at local garages to cover driving the:

- 1,432,063 miles travelled by approximately 2,000 voluntary car drivers.
- 230,631 miles travelled by Ring & Ride buses.
- 89,482 miles travelled by scheduled Community buses (called 'Section 22').

This amounts to at least 1,752,176 miles travelled by vehicles that are serviced locally. Without Community Transport this benefit would be lost.

The volunteer hours gifted to the service across the county also have a value with Community Car Schemes reporting over 111,650 volunteer hours contributed in 2014-15. Even at the minimum wage at the time (£6.50ph) this amounts to a value in kind of over £725,725. For a Community Transport organisation, to take one route alone, the Exe Valley scheduled route which takes 1,508 volunteer hours a year to deliver, would equate to £9,802.

In addition to this at least £2.1 million was spent by community transport users in local high streets across Devon in 2015 (Devon County Council).

The future for Community Transport and the services it provides

If Community Transport organisations fail due to lack of funding or volunteer time, over 200,000 journeys would no longer happen. Although the infrastructure exists, organisations are struggling to raise funds and to recruit volunteers. As grant funding decreases, many volunteers are struggling to find the time and energy to provide the service and raise money. This at a time when demand for their services is increasing as the population of older, frailer people continues to grow and the volunteers themselves are now ageing.

Take away grants, and all their already stretched time and energy is spent raising funds to keep existing services running at the same time as they are overwhelmed by a constantly expanding ageing population.

Alan Hutson, Ivybridge & District Community Transport quotes “The role of the committee has changed from the one which I originally signed up for over 20 years ago. I for one would happily walk away if I thought that there was someone else happy to take over but sadly this is not the case. If myself and our treasurer were to resign, then the scheme would fold”.

For many, volunteering for their local Community Transport organisation is now almost too difficult, there is too much work and they cannot cope. If it gets too difficult, these organisations will fold. They would like to recruit new drivers and to respond to the increasing need, but are increasingly worried about money and because the time spent raising funds, find it difficult to promote their services and attract new volunteers.

Keep supporting us to support you

Community Transport is facing a funding crisis whilst at the same time delivering very good value for money for its funders. With Car Schemes, the passengers pay 60% of the costs with most of that money staying to be spent in Devon. Prices could be increased but this would risk excluding the very people they are trying to assist, many of whom on fixed incomes. They are also bound by the legislation and are not operating commercial services.

Organisations can and do search for alternative sources of funding, but fundraising is hugely time consuming and demanding for an ageing, diminishing pool of volunteers. As CT groups fold there is the potential for a whole range of activities to fail with them, an infrastructure that it will be difficult to replace.

It is known that 40% of CT organisations in Devon are in deficit, many of them local Community Car Schemes. With the reduction of grants and the increasing stress placed on such groups by the growing demand from both passengers and the NHS (short notice appointments, late appointments, week end appointments etc.) the pressure will become unmanageable and many voluntary management teams will just leave. In some cases it may be possible to find another CT group to take it on their work, but this takes time and negotiation.

For example Exmouth CT have reported that: “A lady rang from a village who noted our bus passed her home. She asked if the bus was available for her. I asked her some questions and eventually she said that she was sitting in her wheelchair in her kitchen and had not been out of her home for six months. I said it was for her and we would send the bus round to her home so she could try it and make sure how we fit her wheelchair safely. The conversation ended with her in tears. This lady now regularly uses the bus.” If the service folded she would again be trapped in her home.

This prospect is no surprise; Community Transport schemes have been facing cuts and warning about the consequences for a while. The support they receive from Devon County Council has been welcome and has enabled them to keep running in difficult times. This vital funding and support has also provided leverage to attract local District Council and Trust matched funding.

Despite the support of Devon County Council, some organisations have ceased operation in the last couple of years. This places additional pressure on the remaining services and/or on those who take on setting up new organisations, developing their governance and finding new Trustees in a time when volunteers are hard to find. All of this places huge pressure on those who put themselves forward to do such work.

More information on the impact of Community Car Schemes, the valuable work they do, the huge, often invisible, contribution they make to their communities and the significant challenges they face can be found at: www.tfyc.org.uk/social-kindness-papers .



Transport for Your Community (TfYC) is an umbrella organisation, which represents and provides support to a range of community transport providers, primarily across Devon. Our key objective is to promote and improve access to these services as well as reduce outgoings and develop sustainability within our member organisations in order to ensure that community transport remains with local operators who understand the needs of the local community.

Transfer of Bus Services to Community Transport – Actual and Proposed. Actual as at May 2016.

District	CT Provider approached	Route	Response	Saving to DCC pa	Date
East Devon	Honiton TRIP CTA	347/350/381/607	Being considered by CT group (while services supported on interim basis by DCC)		
	Sidmouth Hopper Bus	157	No response from CT group		
Exeter	Exeter CTA	U	Declined by CT group		
	Exeter CTA	M	Declined by CT group		
	Exeter CTA	T	Declined by CT group		
Mid Devon	Crediton / Tiverton CTA	350, 607 town services	Declined by CT group (while services supported on interim basis by DCC)		
	Exe Valley Market Bus	307	Declined by CT group		
	Exe Valley Market Bus	696	Declined by CT group		
	Exe Valley Market Bus	657	Declined by CT group		
	Exe Valley Market Bus	696/873	Declined by CT group		
	Exe Valley Market Bus	F9	Declined by CT group		
	Exe Valley Market Bus	F10	Declined by CT group		
North Devon	Ilfracombe CTA	33/34/35/36	Town services to be reduced to two days a week. CTA submitted best price compared with bus company	£6,914	29/05/2016
	Go North Devon	10 (part)	Agreed with group but at high cost. Supported local bus service therefore retained		

District	CT Provider approached	Route	Response	Saving to DCC pa	Date
South Hams	Bob the Bus (Totnes Community Bus)	25	Declined by CT group		
	Bob the Bus (Totnes Community Bus)	165	No response from CT group		
	Bob the Bus (Totnes Community Bus)	672	No response from CT group		
	Bob the Bus (Totnes Community Bus)	Gold (Westonfields/ Bridgetown Hill)	Declined by CT group		
	Ivybridge CTA	612	Declined by CT group		
	Ivybridge CTA	F7	Declined by CT group		
	Ivybridge CTA	F17	Declined by CT group		
	Totnes & Dartmouth Ring & Ride	90B	No response from CT group		
	Totnes & Dartmouth Ring & Ride	91	Investigated but no satisfactory arrangement available		
	Various Voluntary Car Schemes	F7	No like-for-like replacement but car schemes offer some alternative		
	Various Voluntary Car Schemes	F17	No like-for-like replacement but car schemes offer some alternative		
Teignbridge	Newton Abbot CTA	672	On basis of quotation, operating service at level of support lower than previously, bringing service within support criteria	£6,050	02/12/2015
	East Teignbridge CTA	187	Contract won through competitive tender @ £17,275 (compared with other tender submission @ £36,422	£19,147 (though not DCC budget; is Section 106 developer funding)	17/09/2012

District	CT Provider approached	Route	Response	Saving to DCC pa	Date
	East Teignbridge CTA	886	On basis of quotation, operating service at level of support which enables DCC to provide service on two days a week instead of one	£7,709	21/09/2015
	Newton Abbot CTA	91	Declined by CT group		
Torrige	Torrige CTA	14/16	One -off grant of £80,000 from DfT CT Fund for vehicle	Projected £42,000 minus one-off £80,000 from DfT fund but CTA ceased trading, so services now covered by new contract with bus company	06/01/2014
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	F6	Declined by CT group		
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	F8	Declined by CT group		
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	637	Declined by DCC due to group prices being too high in competitive tender		
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	638	Declined by CT group		
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	188	Declined by CT group		
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	630/631	Declined by CT group		
	Holsworthy Rural CTA	639	Declined by CT group		
	Torrige CTA	F6	Investigated but no satisfactory arrangement available		
	Torrige CTA	F8	Investigated but no satisfactory arrangement available		

District	CT Provider approached	Route	Response	Saving to DCC pa	Date
	Torrige CTA	634	Investigated but no satisfactory arrangement available		
	Torrige CTA	636	Investigated but no satisfactory arrangement available		
West Devon	Tavistock Community Bus	94/95	One-off grant of £80,000 from DfT CT Fund. In return, CT operates services previously costing £7,958 pa. Following early review, Community Bus required support of £2,000 pa	£5,958 minus one-off £80,000 from DfT Fund	28/05/2014