COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Aberdeen City Council provides Demand Responsive Transport in the form of a Dial-a-bus service, called “Community Transport” utilising the in-house passenger transport fleet. This operates in most areas of the city, Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 14:30 and in the Lower Deeside area of the city on a Monday and Thursday between 10:30 and 14:00.

The service is operated on fully accessible vehicles under s19 permit, whereby users sign up to be members of the scheme before using the service. The service is for those unable to use conventional bus services. Fares are charged at £3.50 for a single and £5.00 return with a 10 journey ticket cost £20.

The service undertook 3,918 journeys in 2012/13 (this figures relates to booked journeys and does not differentiate between single and return trips). This number of journeys booked has more than doubled during the 3 years of the services operation.

By Other Groups:

A number of charities and voluntary organisations do provide some transport and activities such as shopping, collecting pensions, going on outings, assistance to medical appointments etc. These services are not “promoted” services and do not have particular advertising.

Some charities and voluntary organisations do provide transport assistance to their own client groups.

What is missing:

Aberdeen City Council does not have any budgetary provision to assist Community Transport providers. There are no apparent Community Transport providers operating in Aberdeen other than detailed above, however other charities and groups do have their own vehicles which they use to assist their clients, the extent of which is not recorded. There is also no formal Community Transport liaison between Aberdeen City Council and any providers / potential providers.
Work ongoing:

- **Health Transport Action Plan**


As part of this group there is a sub-committee whose remit is “Access to Healthcare”. The group has introduced a transport to healthcare information centre (THInC). This is a pilot call centre, operated by the Scottish Ambulance Service and it provides transport guidance and information to people accessing healthcare appointments and advises them what transport options there are to get them to their appointments. At present in the Aberdeen area this is for patients attending 2 clinics only but in time will be rolled out.

The hope is that the THInC will pull together a database of transport providers, including Community Transport providers, in the Aberdeen City, Shire and Moray regions and with the eventual aim that it will identify where there is demand for transport provision and where there are areas which have a need for more or new transport provision to assist people to access healthcare services.

- **Other partnership working**

Aberdeen City Council has recently started meeting with the Aberdeen Council for Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) and a number of transport providers to try and identify where there are areas in the city where there is a need for more social transport and what can be done to assist these people along with identifying where people are trying to go and finding it difficult to get to. As part of this group there will be investigation as to whether funding for Community Transport should be introduced in Aberdeen City and where such funding could come from.

**In terms of the Committee’s key questions:**

**What are the key issues?**

In Aberdeen City the key issue is identifying what need there is out there and what demand there is for further assisted transport across the City.

We would also have to undertake more analysis as to what funding may be required and how we progress this to introducing more forms of Community Transport into the City. With this there will be a learning curve into the benefits and difficulties of the Community Transport remit.

We have anecdotal evidence that there are people, who are unable to access conventional bus services and other forms of transport, but we do not have any concrete evidence or knowledge on what level of need there is and where this is.
As noted there is no funding support from Aberdeen City Council for Community Transport providers and this would be an issue to any group looking to undertake Community Transport in the area.

1. Community Transport, do we need a more strategic approach?

There is a general misconception among many as to what Community Transport actually is. The services available across the country are quite variable, with some local authorities providing more support than others and there being more communities and voluntary groups willing to provide assistance in some areas over others.

2. Are you seeing a growing demand for community transport provision?

It is hard to determine whether there is a growing demand, empirically we know that there are people who require more assistance with their travel needs, but we do not have any real data or sufficient evidence as to the level of need. Also with the ageing population it is clear that there will be more demand for assisted travel.

There are a number of factors which would suggest there would be a growing demand in the city:

- Aberdeen City Council ceased all assisted travel (other than the Community Transport service) in 2009/2010, when the Council’s TaxiCard scheme was removed and the City’s 7 day a week from 07:00 – 22:00, Dial-a-bus service was also removed.

- Aberdeen City Council removed their budget for supported bus services in 2011, which means when commercial operators do not serve particular parts of the City, as has happened in evenings and Sundays, there is currently no provision to financially support bus services.

- From surveys undertaken following removal of TaxiCard, 45% of those who responded noted that their ability to access transport had deteriorated.

- From surveys conducted on our Dial-a-bus service, 60% noted they would use taxis if we were unable to accommodate their journey.

- Local bus services have reduced in frequency and areas of operation in the last year and this will likely have an impact on people particularly in the evenings and Sundays where some areas have no public transport provision.
NHS Patient Transport has introduced more stringent eligibility criteria which results in a number of displaced patients. We have seen an increase in requests through our own DRT service and through Social Work Transport. Through the THInC we will hopefully get a clearer idea on the numbers of people affected.

As noted we are working closely with the voluntary sector to try and establish more of an evidence base as to what assistance people need, where there is a demand for assisted transport and where people are trying to get to. This will provide us with a better idea and platform to work from.

3. Do your local NHS bodies work closely with community transport providers?

As noted above, through the Health Transport Action Plan, there is a level of partnership working and the introduction of the THInC should see a closer working relationship with Community Transport providers, with the hope that in the future THInC staff can broker trips on Community Transport and work with NHS colleagues to amend appointment times to fit in with available transport. This may put a strain on Community Transport providers.

4. Do you think Community Transport should fall within concessionary fare schemes?

We accept the argument from both viewpoints a) that such services should be free to concession card holders as this is often their only method of transport and b) that these are premium services and therefore a fare should apply.

Operators and volunteers providing Community Transport services need to cover their costs, but do usually try to keep fares to a minimum as far as possible, especially as they are not profit making.

Aberdeen City Council has traditionally taken the viewpoint that Demand Responsive Transport services are premium services and a fare should apply to cover costs.

Aberdeen City Council
8 April 2013