COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1  CT in Aberdeenshire

1.1 Transport in general, and community transport specifically, is mentioned regularly at Community Planning Partnership meetings, and it is a theme that runs throughout Aberdeenshire’s Single Outcome Agreement.

1.2 Within Aberdeenshire there are at least 20 community or voluntary transport groups. These groups range significantly in terms of: the level and type of service(s) offered; whether they provide transport for individuals or only for groups; the size of geographical area they cover; their number of volunteers and/or paid employees; how well established they are; what type of organisation they are, e.g. informal group, registered charity, etc; how widely they promote their services; whether or not they are members of the Community Transport Association (CTA); and their level of knowledge of legal matters and good practice.

1.3 Despite the number of groups operating it would be fair to say that CT coverage is patchy with some areas having no CT, and even where there is some voluntary transport it may be very limited, e.g. offering transport to the local medical practice on one or two afternoons per week when a volunteer is available.

2  Support for CT from Aberdeenshire Council

2.1 The Council, through its Public Transport Unit (PTU) provides support to community transport by providing advice and funding.

2.2 The Council established the Aberdeenshire Community Transport Forum (ACTF) in 2001 to improve communication between the Council and the CT sector and to provide a forum for the exchange of best practice. Meetings, which are held three times per year, are open to CT groups and anyone with an interest in community transport.

2.3 The Aberdeenshire Community Transport Initiative (ACTI) was established in April 2008, following the transfer of responsibilities for such funding from the Scottish Government to local authorities. Grants of up to 75% of project costs are awarded for the provision of community based rural passenger transport such as community buses, dial-a-trip services, and voluntary car schemes. ACTI provides grant
funding to seven local groups who were previously funded by the Scottish Government. Initially 3-year funding was awarded, but more recently only 1-year has been granted. The budget was reduced by 10% in 2012/13. ACTI funding has not been extended beyond the original 7 groups.

2.4 Funding allocations for financial year 2013/14 are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballater Royal Deeside Ltd</td>
<td>Community minibus</td>
<td>£6,560</td>
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<tr>
<td>Banffshire Partnership Ltd</td>
<td>Dial-a-bus Community minibuses MiDAS training</td>
<td>£123,441</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buchan dial-a-community bus</td>
<td>Dial-a-bus Volunteer car scheme Community minibuses MiDAS training (provided by social enterprise arm)</td>
<td>£125,940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mearns Community Transport</td>
<td>Community minibus MiDAS training</td>
<td>£11,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Deeside Ltd (DCTG)</td>
<td>Supports local bus services Community minibuses</td>
<td>£65,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Circle</td>
<td>Dial-a-bus Volunteer car scheme.</td>
<td>£11,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRVS Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>Dial-a-bus Volunteer car scheme.</td>
<td>£24,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>£369,095</td>
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2.5 For over a decade the Council has provided concessionary travel reimbursement to CT groups for scheduled dial-a-bus services. This enables the four groups who operate such services to offer free travel to older and disabled passengers.

2.6 Some financial support has been available for CT through other funds administered by the Council, for example Buchan dial-a-community bus has received funding from the Fairer Scotland Fund and Alford Car Transport has been awarded funding from the Change Fund.

2.7 In addition to supporting the groups mentioned above, the Council operates its own demand responsive transport (DRT) services (Aberdeenshire A2B dial-a-bus) providing local door-to-door transport, mainly providing shopping trips for older and disabled residents. In doing so, the Council utilises 10 in-house vehicles providing over 38,000 passenger trips in 2012/13 and contracts in bus and taxi operators providing over 30,000 passenger trips. It also operates a
travel despatch centre (TDC) utilising e-scheduling and despatch software, taking approximately 26,000 calls per annum, and this facility is available to any CT group should they wish to use it.

2.8 The Council has a fleet of vehicles for use on school transport, social work transport and DRT services. The majority of the minibuses (60 in total) are made available to community groups for hire at weekends and during school holidays. In 2012/13 there were 316 hires to non-Council affiliated groups.

2.9 The PTU operates an Electronic Ticket Machine (ETM) back-office, providing hardware and software systems and support, on behalf of smaller operators of local bus services in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. This includes the bus company which operates local bus services on behalf of Mid Deeside Ltd. This service is available to any CT operators who may choose to operate registered local bus services in the future.

2.10 The Council is represented on the Steering Group of Nestrans’ Health and Transport Action Plan. This group is seeking to improve access to healthcare and has recently established an information hub in Elgin which aims to provide transport information for individuals with hospital appointments in the Grampian area. Currently the information service is operating on a limited basis, serving a small number of clinics, but it is proposed to extend the service to cover all Grampian hospitals. To date the majority of those people who have been “signposted” to a transport operator have been referred to the WRVS in Moray.

3 How can CT systems be improved?

3.1 The main issues that tend to be raised at ACTF meetings are:

- recruitment and retention of volunteers;
- the recruitment of minibus drivers who have D1 on their driving license (or the costs, at approximately £1,000 per person, of training younger drivers)
- concerns regarding the expectation that CT should provide health-related transport in response to changes to Patient Transport Service eligibility criteria and the relocation of health facilities;
- concerns regarding actual or potential funding reductions and difficulty in securing funding for vehicle replacement
- requests that funding be provided for longer durations (e.g. 3 years), and concerns regarding the amount of time that co-ordinators need to spend in sourcing funding rather than providing services

3.2 From a Council perspective the following observations are worthy of note:
• in our experience some smaller groups don't want to make connections with the Council or other organisations, perhaps because they want to operate informally
• the Aberdeenshire Community Transport Forum (ACTF) has been a useful mechanism for networking – even if a group only sends a representative to a meeting on a single occasion it provides an opportunity to make contact with similar groups and exchange contact details
• changes to the BSOG system have been beneficial to groups operating eligible minibus services in Aberdeenshire
• the Council supports the provision of free concessionary travel for scheduled dial-a-bus services operated under Section 19 Permits and would welcome the introduction of a national scheme
• it is recognised that, where funding is provided, longer-term funding can provide groups with greater stability
• there is some evidence that changes to the application of eligibility criteria for the Scottish Ambulance Service’s non-emergency patient transport is increasing demand and pressure for community transport
• there is some evidence that the relocation of medical services from Aberdeen to local hospitals is increasing demand and pressure for community transport because local hospitals are not served by the Scottish Ambulance Service’s non-emergency patient transport service.
• in our experience CT groups do not wish to utilise a centralised TDC but prefer to retain local trip booking arrangements
• the Council values the contribution that CT makes to the overall mix of passenger transport services, particularly in addressing social inclusion.

3.3 It is considered that the ICI inquiry would benefit from considering the following:

• an increase in the number of CTA support officers in Scotland would be beneficial to provide local impartial advice and support to groups
• the availability of local training is important – e.g. for MiDAS, PATS, D1 driver licence
• for CT groups considering the operation of registered local bus services it is important that they have access to affordable electronic ticketing machines (ETM) back-offices
• the extension of concessionary travel, either free or discounted, to voluntary car schemes would address current inequalities in charges
• any proposals to extend free concessionary travel to voluntary car schemes could lead to significant increased demand for transport which could overburden some schemes who have limited numbers of volunteers, so further consultation with groups would be beneficial prior to the introduction of any such initiative
• the difficulty in “policing” the use of Section 19 Permits is a concern and the lack of progress by the DfT regarding a proposed Designated Bodies Charter and associated training is disappointing.
• CT groups find it difficult to access funding from the NHS for patient transport
• any expectations that the CT sector should become a main provider of non-emergency patient transport may be unrealistic and/or unfair.

Aberdeenshire Council
19 April 2013