COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY COMMUNITY TRANSPORT COMPANY
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

In response to your request, I am writing on behalf of our organisation which has been providing transport solutions for socially isolated people in Badenoch & Strathspey in the Highlands, for the past 16 years. We have certainly seen a growing demand for community transport with an ever increasing ageing population. Since we became computerised in 2000, we have registered over 1300 people who have a transport need in Badenoch & Strathspey, this currently equates to 10% of our population. From the 2010 NRS stats, 49.1% of the population of B & S are over 50 years of age.

The majority of our community transport is supplied with volunteers using their own cars, we currently have 130 drivers and 11 volunteer telephonists organising the 600-700 car scheme journeys per month for socially isolated people. The majority of these journeys are health related, but as the scheme has grown, there has been a notable increase in the demand for leisure and social journeys. Through evaluations being carried out BSCTC have identified an improvement in people’s health and also identifying that without the inclusion of our services, many of the older people would not be able to remain independently in their own homes.

Our Charity has taken on a more holistic approach to its services and has included services such as supported shopping with volunteers; prescription collection; support group outings (e.g. Visually Impaired Groups); Transport to Social Events; Tea Dance Afternoons; Short-term loan of wheelchairs and disability scooters; Skills Audit for Volunteers and the latest addition we have included is a Friendship Project, to support socially isolated people in their own homes.

Initially the charity started off with a very small community car scheme, but it was soon recognised the need was more than just transport for people living in a rural area, so we have developed the services accordingly. BSCTC now has a 7-seater wheelchair accessible vehicle operating locally in Aviemore and is about to receive delivery of a 14-seater wheelchair accessible vehicle, which will hopefully deliver DRT services under a section 22 permit. The development of our services have been made possible, when 4 years ago, the Charity won a large Lottery Award through a BBC Television programme and were awarded just under £0.5m over 5 years. Without this funding we would not have been able to achieve the recognition we are so often given for our services. In 2009 our volunteers received The Queens Award for Voluntary Service, this made us very proud.

With only 1 year to go until our funding runs out, we are very concerned that we cannot continue such valuable services, as our services are non-profit making. The staff team who manage the organisation consist of myself as a full-time Development Manager; a part-time Car Scheme Co-ordinator; Office Manager, Volunteer Recruitment Officer, Social Development Officer and a minibus driver. Almost 200 volunteers are involved in a variety of duties under the charity, the majority of these people being over 60 years themselves. As you can imagine, quite a considerable
amount of our time is taken up managing volunteers as they are also treated as “staff”. Now, many community transport groups are facing the problem of having very few drivers coming on board who have a D1 on their licence to enable them to volunteer to drive minibuses. This is an issue for CT operators Scotland wide.

BSCTC also receive grant funding from their Local Authority – The Highland Council, unfortunately this year we will face a 20% reduction in grant, only giving us 18% of the cost to run all of our projects. This is going to prove impossible for us, as under legislation for CT, we are not allowed to gain profit on the services we supply (i.e. no profit can be made on the cost of running a car within the car scheme or our minibus transport). This means, we spend a huge amount of our time trying to raise money to pay for other costs, rather than supporting our older population, majority of whom have health and mobility problems and are unable to access public transport. This we believe will have a big knock on effect on the public purse if we cannot continue at our current level. Investment from Government is a must if voluntary organisations are to be expected to take on more of the responsibility which the public sector are no longer providing or supporting. The voluntary sector does have a huge amount to offer, but do need financial support.

**You ask what we would like to see in our area**, we would like to answer in bullet points, the things we believe are a priority:

- A recognition from public bodies that CT is a necessity not an “add-on”
- Improved joint working with public agencies
- Guarantee of longer term funding – 1 year puts restrictions on rent of premises, loans, leasing of vehicles etc.
- S22 registered bus services - Guarantees that our concessionary fare claims are reimbursed in full and not reduced in the last payment period because the budget has been capped. Large commercial bus operators can take this hit but not for profit organisations cannot.
- Social enterprise – realistic tendering opportunities. The work that we are best placed to do is usually tendered in a way that enables big bus operators to tender at marginal cost between school contracts. We as small charities cannot compete with this.
- If our local authority (THC) continue to make cutbacks in our funding, it will seriously jeopardising our ability to operate
- Funding through a “single tier” public organisation (THC TECS) restricts our ability to develop and could have a serious knock-on consequence to the public purse
- The very small contribution we receive from NHS Highland (2.75% of our total costs) requires to be substantially increased if we are to provide essential support for Social Care transport in our communities
- Investment in training for volunteers to enable them to carry out their duties is vital

It must be noted that BSCTC already has a strategic approach which recognises that transport is key to being part of social care plans for older people and is a necessity in rural areas where public transport is very limited and we believe DRT involving CT is the way forward.
Q: Does NHS bodies work closely with CT providers? – Not really, they do not appreciate/understand the value of CT, it is more of a “taken for granted” service, with very little contact.

Q: How do you access non-emergency patient transport? - With great difficulty, we have heard from people that they have been trying the phone line for 3 days without success, often to be told NO. Our funders – THC do not allow our service to operate transport into our main hospital which is Raigmore in Inverness, some of our clients have been known to cancel appointments if they are unable to access patient transport.

Q: Has your CT group experienced funding difficulties? YES, we are facing a 20% cut this year and we may also have no premises to operate from at the end of May when our current sub-lease runs out (i.e. if we cannot find sufficient funding to take over the lease). Also, we are asked to sign a lease for a minimum of 3 years with only a 1 year funding promise – very risky.

Q: Do you think CT should fall within the concessionary fare scheme? YES I think S19 licences should be covered by the concessionary fare scheme. BSCTC surveyed our community car scheme clients, they do not mind paying a small fee as they feel the service makes them independent; more confident in travelling alone; gives them choices and they are supported by trained volunteers (Therefore, we do not wish car Schemes included). S22 registered services should also be receiving 100% reimbursement for fares foregone and not the current 60% which may not be paid in full because the annual budget has been capped. Note: Dave Thompson MSP has signed up to the Age Scotland Campaign regarding this point.

Our Board would very much welcome a representative from your committee visiting our project to see the good work which is being carried out in Badenoch & Strathspey. You may also want to take a moment to look at our web site which identifies all the projects we deliver. On the site, there is a lot of photographic evidence showing the work involving both clients and volunteers of the service. www.ct4u.co.uk

I do hope this has been helpful and if you require further information, we are only too happy to provide it.

Maggie Lawson
(on behalf of the Board of BSCTC)
11 April 2013