COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY

COALFIELD COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Coalfield Community Transport (CCT) is a registered charity and non-profit distributing company wholly owned by the Coalfield Communities Federation.

The origins of the initiative lie in the People’s Jury, which was held in June 2000 in the Coalfield Area of East Ayrshire to identify ways in which people within the community could be encouraged to play a more active role. The report highlighted infrequent and inaccessible transport as a major barrier to participation in a wide range of areas including the economic, social and cultural regeneration of the area.

CCT was launched in May 2002 to provide community and voluntary groups in the Coalfield Area with affordable and accessible transport to enable them to participate in community activities. In addition, it works to improve access to services and jobs.

Membership is open to all community and voluntary groups, with an appropriate constitution, within East Ayrshire.

CCT currently operates a fleet of ten minibuses, the majority with full accessibility for people with disabilities and employs 14 staff.

The services provided are available 7 days a week, 363 days each year.

**Group Transport** is the main service provided and there are 183 groups from across East Ayrshire in membership who use the services regularly. This service relies on volunteers drivers and the project has 265 MiDAS trained volunteers. Most of these drive for their own group, but there is a core of 20 drivers who will drive for any group.

The **Dayhopper Club** was launched in June 2003 and provides a shopping and excursion service to individuals in receipt of benefit, older or unemployed people, lone parents, and people with a disability or who are geographically disadvantaged. Dayhopper members are the most vulnerable and excluded in our society. The club has over 800 members ranging from 2–100 years in age, with the majority aged over 70 years. Trips are organized on 4 days a week.

In 2006 we introduced the **Awayhopper**, a service which offers the opportunity to holiday for a few days at an affordable cost. We run 4 of these a year.

The project currently operates a DRT service in the Cumnock area funded by SPT and an Early Years’ service taking children with special and social needs into a local Nursery, which is funded through East Ayrshire Council.

Funding for the project is provided through grant aid from East Ayrshire Council and SPT. The project contributes over 50% of running costs from income generated from services provided.
Issues

Capital Investment.
The project is unable to generate enough resources to fund vehicle replacement and relies on funding applications to charity and grant making bodied for new vehicles. The cost of a fully accessible minibus is in the region of £80k. Older minibuses are costly to maintain, use more fuel and are less reliable. This is a major issue for many community transport projects.

A lack of vehicle resources inhibits the projects growth. East Ayrshire covers 487 sq. miles and has 41 towns and villages; many of which are very small and isolated. For elderly and less mobile residents this poses a major problem. With an aging population this will only get worse and the demand for our services is growing.

Volunteer Drivers.
The project relies on volunteer drivers for group transport services the mainstay of the project. Many of our volunteers are older and or retired. We are not able to recruit younger volunteer drivers because they do not have a D1 category on their driving licence. While training is available the cost is prohibitive and requires a volunteer to devote 5 working days to achieve this qualification.

Some form of simpler qualification to assess driving skills would alleviate this problem.

Reluctance of grant making bodied to fund current projects.
One of the major problems for any community transport group is a lack of financial resources. While it is possible to find grants for a minibus it is almost impossible to find grants for funding or expanding an existing service. Everybody wants to fund something new.

Longer term funding.
Many community transport projects operate on an annual grants basis, as we do. This does not allow the project to plan, as a business would for 3-5 years in advance. It reduces the ability to negotiate on rent of premises, applying for loans and overdrafts and leasing of vehicles. Cuts in Local Authority budgets inevitably reduce grant aid as our funding is not ring fenced. Grant reductions mean a reduction in service provision at a time when there is a growing need for more services.

Engagement with the NHS.
There seems to be a reluctance to engage with community transport. The geography of East Ayrshire makes it difficult for residents to access hospital services. Accessing the hospitals in Kilmarnock and Ayr is difficult from many villages and usually requires three different bus services if there is no access to personal transport. Opportunities need to be opened up for dialogue between the NHS and community transport.

Concessionary Fares
If concessionary fares where made available to community transport operators there
needs to be a recognition that reimbursements are made in full and timely as this could impact on cash flow.

**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. As small charities it is difficult to compete with at this level.

**Strategic Approach**
This is difficult because every community transport project is different and provides a different range of services. Projects grow from local need and aim to meet these local needs. Some are run completely by volunteers and others employ staff.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport has recently introduced a three tiered approach to the development of community transports in South West Scotland setting out a range of criteria for the delivery of a quality service. This might be an approach that could be considered across Scotland. It allows a community transport project to provide the local services needed but the project would operate within a quality approved framework.

The Community Transport Association could play a more effective role in Scotland. Most of their resources seem to be devoted to the rest of the UK and the Scottish element has lost the major part of its funding over the last few years. While information about running a community transport is available on line through the CTA a more visible service in Scotland could assist with a more strategic approach to the development of new community transport projects.

The demise of the RCTI was a major blow to the development of new community transport schemes; the development of projects and the introduction of new services. Since this money was devolved to Transport Partnerships for distribution, the community transport sector has suffered in many areas of Scotland. If something along the lines of the RCTI could be resurrected this would assist the sector to grow its services and could give a more strategic approach to the development of services to meet a growing demand.

**Sheila White**
Project Coordinator
Coalfield Community Transport
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