COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
CREICH, CROIK AND ARDGAY DAY CARE ASSOCIATION
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your inquiry.

We are a small organisation founded in the 90s with the intention of giving older people in our rural community a place where they could receive day care and attend lunch club without having to travel long distances.

At the outset we had no intention of becoming involved in transport but we soon found out that people from our very large catchment area had little or no transport to get them to the Centre. Public transport is virtually non-existent.

At the start we asked the local authority to help by introducing transport that was more local and demand responsive. They introduced a dial a bus which continues to this day but unfortunately it is limited because it cannot cater for all of our demand and there are time restrictions because the service only operates between school contracts. This means that clients come in later than we would ideally like and are often asked to leave directly after lunch. Sometimes the bus would arrive while people were still eating and because they knew the bus was there they were having to bolt their food.

As a solution we sourced money to buy in additional transport from a local bus operator. Initially this was a grant from the Scottish Government but the Concordat led to the funding being transferred to Highland Council, specifically their transport department. When we applied to them for continuation funding they claimed we were ineligible and that another Highland Council department should be grant funding our service. The other department said no and our funding was withdrawn.

Without transport our day care/lunch club was not viable and we were faced with the prospect of having to close the facility because nobody could access it. We went for a radical solution, purchasing our own bus, applying for a Section 22 permit and registering our own bus routes. We have 3 routes and we operate transport services 4 days a week. So far we have managed to run these sustainably but we are constantly faced with challenges. The latest is the Scottish Government (Transport Scotland) decision to reduce the reimbursement rate for concessionary travel. Last year we received 67p in the £, this year it will be 60p and next year 58.8p. In addition the budget has been capped and we will only be given 20% of what we are entitled to in the last period of 2012/13. Would it be possible for S22 services to be treated differently in the concessionary fares scheme from registered services run by big bus operators? If we received 100% of the fare foregone we would be sustainable.
The answers to the queries set out on your flyer are as follows:

- A lack of a strategic approach to community transport and the impact which a lack of transport has on people’s lives

Care has to be taken when talking about a strategic approach. As mentioned above we have suffered at the hands of council officers who have decided to provide a service that fits between school contracts rather than a service that provides what the community needs.

We were encouraged to tender for the local dial a bus but from the outset we were at a disadvantage because the tender was designed to enable the local bus company to fit the dial a bus between school contracts. We submitted a conforming and alternative tender that offered to run the dial a bus 5 days a week from 9am to 5pm. The Council took the lowest price for a minimum service which they feel the community has to fit in with. The awarded contract does not fit the needs of the people coming to our Centre let alone the needs of the broader community.

If a strategic approach is the way forward then it should perhaps be via Community Planning and separate from the individual departments in the Council and NHS and Scottish Ambulance Service budget holders.

- The growing demand for community transport provision

Demand is growing because we have a rapidly ageing population many of whom live alone. Many have no family, others have family who have moved to work away from their local area. Without transport to get to the shops, medical appointments and to socialise in centres such as ours, these people are isolated. There seems to be no account taken of this and no priority given to solving the problem.

Providing transport is a costly business and we are catering for people most of whom have an entitlement to free bus travel. At the moment we run 3 registered bus services but as the percentage reimbursement from Transport Scotland reduces we are having to think seriously about whether or not we can continue to be sustainable. We hope that the inquiry can find a way to ensure continuation of community transport provision across the country and would urge that those community transport groups who operate registered services receive reimbursement at 100%.

We also claim Bus Service Operators Grant at 14.4p per km, but we live in an area where fuel prices are a lot higher than in urban areas.

- A lack of a coordinated approach with NHS bodies and community transport providers
Our bus services can be used by people wanting to attend appointments at the local medical centre but none of our routes extend to the main hospitals. These are at great distance from us.

- Eligibility criteria for non-emergency patient transport and the cost to NHS of taxi use

We know of people who have been refused non-emergency patient transport and told to use public transport, however some of these people find it virtually impossible to use public transport because they have mobility problems that make it impossible for them to step up on to the bus and worse still cross the pedestrian bridges at Ardgay and Lairg stations.

- Replacing community transport vehicles and funding planning

We try to include for vehicle replacement in our fares and charges but such things as reduction in the concessionary fares reimbursement rate make this more and more difficult.

- Access to concessionary fares schemes

Ideally we would like to run our services on our S19 permit and not as registered routes. This would give us a lot more flexibility. The downside for the general community would be that we could only carry people who had become members and not the general public.

We agree with the Age Scotland campaign and would urge that this is taken forward and that reimbursement for fares foregone would be at 100%.

Thank you for allowing us to submit our views to your inquiry.

Lorraine Askew
Manager, Bradbury Day Care Centre
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