COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
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WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1.0 Key Points

- Many transport authorities in Scotland are unclear about their policies towards CT, and there is a much greater need for these authorities to use their leadership role within community planning partnerships to ensure that all community planning partners, including the NHS, engage constructively with the CT sector on which they depend but often do not recognise.

- The CT sector is complex with added value from volunteering and fundraising, skills development, and personal support services differentiating it from other transport providers. The need for these services is growing.

- The need for CT to own and operate suitable vehicles for people with mobility difficulties remains important in some areas, but this role is becoming less important as public and commercial providers are increasingly able to make suitable vehicles available which can be commissioned by CT providers.

- The NHS could save many tens £millions on transport each year and offer better transport solutions by engaging better with the CT sector. The Scottish Government Improvement Unit Transport with Care Pilots demonstrated such improvements in practice, but there has been a lack of commitment to follow these through into mainstream delivery. Transport improvements have been regarded as low priority compared to health issues in the NHS, and community transport development has been seen as more of a community than transport issue by transport authorities.

- The CT sector has been damaged by the national concessionary fares scheme which has created unfair competition from buses undermining the viability of some CT services.

2.0 Evidence base for this response

2.1 This response draws evidence from professional practice over 20 years helping communities solve their transport problems including participation in the transport with care pilots led by the Scottish Government Joint Improvement Unit.

2.2 Short responses are provided below under three of the inquiry themes, and references are given to fuller discussion of these issues in other reports analysis.
3.0 A strategic approach

3.1 CT has evolved over the last 30 years from being a sector defined by providing gap filling transport services complementing public transport, to innovators in community development. The sector pioneered concepts like wheels to work, specialist cancer patient transport services, and personal travel planning which have all been adopted within some mainstream delivery.

3.2 A full review of the CT sector with an overview of the services provided by each CT operator in Scotland was undertaken by DHC and TAS in 2005 for Scottish Government (as part of a more general review of demand responsive transport available from http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/05/18112606/0). This emphasised that CT was well placed to deliver many of the goals of community planning, strengthening communities, tackling exclusion, improving employability and skills, and ensuring access for all. The strategic approach recommended in this review has not been fully followed through, particularly:

- Clear accountability is needed on who pays for what user needs. The statutory community planning process was established to help local authorities work effectively with their partners to ensure access for all. Without clarity on which public agency pays for each travel need there is both a risk of poor value delivery and gaps in provision. In recent work we showed that small reductions in funding for CT could result in costs for organisations like the NHS many times greater than any savings (see http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Value_of_Community_Transport_Economic_Analysis.pdf).

- The CT sector is complex, and community planning partners need to ensure that people are informed about the services available. Most CTs market their services well when they start, but over time many find that they are supporting a narrowing client base. Simple promotion activities such as GPs informing patients about the availability of a hospital car scheme have helped the viability of the CT provision and provided savings for the NHS.

- CT is often a best value provider of services but other services like Council run Dial-a-Journey/SPT MyBus, and commercial bus and taxi operators can also deliver best value in some situations. Procurement needs to be significantly improved to overcome barriers to good value CT service provision, to integrate CT provision with Council and commercial services, and to better recognise the added value of community involvement.

- CT has potential to be a best value provider of patient transport services since the sector specialises in high care personalised transport support. Pilot projects have shown that NHS patient
transport, social work transport, commercial taxi and CT provision working together provide better value, higher quality provision. Delivering these changes requires leadership to drive forward the changes, but it has been recognised that this has been lacking. The Joint Improvement Team need to follow through the good work that they started to demonstrate good practice by tackling perverse incentives for community planning partners that undermine joint working.

- The free national concessionary fares scheme for buses offers benefits for some users that directly compete with services available from CT. Only some CT users are able to take up free bus travel as they need greater personal support when travelling. In recognition of the competition to CT from the national bus travel scheme, additional national funding was given to CT but this was discontinued in 2008 when the CT budget was devolved to local authorities but the concessionary travel budget was retained nationally.
- CT serves travel needs that no other provider supports, so the presence of CT in every part of Scotland is a good indicator that action is being taken to overcome social exclusion.

3.3 To drive forward these changes leadership by local authorities is needed. However most local authority transport strategies make limited reference to CT and the needs of the CT sector are rarely allocated a high priority within community planning. Additional action is needed to ensure that authorities have the incentives needed to nurture and promote the CT sector.

4.0 Growing Demand

4.1 The demography of Scotland is changing and this has wide ranging implications, including for all types of transport. The CT sector is complex but adds the greatest value to transport through volunteering and fundraising, skills development, and personal support services. Vehicles suitable for people with a range of mobility needs are increasingly available in the public and commercial sectors but CT also plays an important role in ensuring a supply of appropriate vehicles in many parts of the country. Key points are:

- CT is a growing training provider and delivering training for drivers and passengers in the commercial sector is an important funding source for CT.
- The taxi sector is the largest provider of services for people who are unable to use public transport, and some CT operators manage taxicard schemes, organise shared taxis to enable vulnerable people to travel and provide passenger assistants.
- Fundraising and volunteering activities are becoming more important and time consuming but less easy as society changes. The nationally funded and promoted programme to raise the profile of volunteering for the commonwealth games in Glasgow
shows that demand can be stimulated if it is approached as a unique opportunity and lessons need to be learned about how to make volunteering more fulfilling.

- The need for CT providers to own and operate their own vehicles is probably becoming less important, particularly in urban areas where there is an increasingly good supply of suitable vehicles which can be commissioned by CT providers. (see our work in Dundee - http://www.dhc1.co.uk/services/community_transport.html)

4.2 In our work for MACS we showed how self-assessment for transport benefits could improve efficiency, support the capabilities of travellers, and help to manage budgets within a climate of growing demand. CT has an important role to play in supporting the implementation of self-assessment approaches for transport support using personal assistance to ensuring that scarce funding is used to help people make the most of their abilities.

5.0 Funding

5.1 The process of organising, funding and delivering community transport helps to explain how communities can tackle the transport challenges ahead. (e.g. see http://www.dhc1.co.uk/projects/cilt_communitytransport.pdf).

5.2 By standing back from the narrow budgets of transport, health, employability, environmental improvement, education, social work, culture, and justice, the needs of communities can be best agreed by jointly. There is potential to pay less and get more, but perverse incentives currently discourage joint working, undermining community planning, and leading to a defensive culture which undermines core values in the CT sector. Overcoming obstacles to the practical delivery of community planning aims will ensure that CT can thrive into the future.

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