COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY

GALA WHEELS

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Gala Wheels project:

Gala Wheels was formed around 10 years ago to provide affordable, accessible transport for disabled and elderly members of the (central) Scottish Borders. We are a membership scheme, and offer social transport to individuals and care homes, disability organisations etc. Individuals register free, groups are £12 per year, and charges are currently 20p mile up to 80 miles, then 50p mile.

The size of the project is one part time co-ordinator (16 hours), 3 x 7 seater vehicles (each carry 1 or 2 wheelchairs) and a small number of dedicated volunteer drivers. Groups and organisations can register their own drivers, as can individuals if they have a relative or friend wishing to drive.

The types of journey we do for our disabled and elderly customers are coffee trips and days out, shopping and visiting, lunch clubs and activity groups, and dental, optical and GP appointments, and transport to respite. We help wheelchair users take part in sports and activities, and we run regular trips out for care home residents. A number of our clients only get out of their homes once a week, with us. Several had not been outside for long periods of time before they joined our service.

In short this is a tiny organisation, but it has a huge benefit to the area with many clients delighted to be able to get out and keep active for a relatively small cost. Reducing social isolation by keeping people engaged in the community is not a nice to have, it is an essential service.

Funding

We are completely reliant on donations and fundraising to buy new vehicles and our small fleet is aging and it is a struggle to replace vehicles. Maintenance costs increase with the age of the car.

For day to day running we rely on Scottish Borders Council who give us an annual grant, and fund our mileage via the Social Car Scheme at 25p mile.

This funding and our client charges normally take us to a break even point over the year, though with fuel costs and maintenance costs increasing, it is becoming harder.

The Transport Department at Scottish Borders Council have been incredibly supportive in the past, but clearly are up against it with budgets every year.
We have had the scheme cut and capped previously and this year we were facing a 25k budget cut (across all the schemes in the Scottish Borders). This was waived at the last minute, though it promises to be back again next year. Transport projects are fighting for survival.

There is increased focus every year on the costs to the Council of Community Transport, and not enough focus on the huge benefits we deliver, and the cost savings of keeping our residents in their own homes, joining in groups and lunch clubs, and getting their own shopping with our help. We help some people stay independent in their homes, who would otherwise have to consider residential care.

What we need
Ideally Community Transport needs a commitment to funding for several years ahead, so we can properly plan our service and the resources we will need. We can clearly demonstrate the need for this service, and an increased demand, so a set amount to operate and a fund based on miles done is required, with potential to increase this as we develop the service to meet the needs of the Scottish Borders.

Gala Wheels
19 April 2013