COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
NORTH ARGYLL VOLUNTEER CAR SCHEME
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Community Transport: do we need a more strategic approach?
Yes, we think more strategic planning, either at government level with a mandate to councils, or even more strategic planning at council level would be beneficial.
Even identifying the gaps is useful, but then what? You can't magic up a voluntary group just because there is a gap in transport provision. Nor can you magic one up when a bus service is reduced, or cut altogether. A group like ours cannot undertake any form of contract with anyone; we can never guarantee a volunteer driver will be available for any particular journey.

Are you seeing a growing demand for community transport provision?
Yes, as the population ages and other public services are reduced, eg supported bus services in decline, and change in the eligibility criteria for patient transport.

Do your local NHS bodies work closely with community transport providers?
Yes, on a local level – local medical practices, and yes we have had funds in the past from the Health Improvement Fund – but not really with the local hospital. All our dealings are with the passenger. We are occasionally phoned and asked to eg take a patient from Oban to Paisley, ‘today’, but we don’t go that far, we don’t take passengers who are not in our area, or who aren’t already risk assessed members of the scheme, and we don’t do ‘today’. There are of course always exceptions and if a local person asks if it is possible to be taken to the surgery ‘today’ – we always manage that. But that is the ‘community aspect’, we will know this person and not want to let them down.

Has your community transport group experienced funding difficulties?
Of course! It’s a roller coaster. Historically many funders were interested only in ‘New and exciting projects’, but we have noticed a slight change in attitude over the last year or so. Funders now ask questions to find out how stable and secure we are, and are keen to know about any council funding – which seems to add authority to our case.
Most importantly: The Scottish Government Rural Community Transport Initiative used to pass RING-FENCED funds to the council, but this ring-fencing stopped in 2008, and the council could spend the funds anywhere it liked. Returning to a reasonable amount of ring fenced funds, with a ‘guarantee’ of repeat grants would encourage more groups to set up and operate. Setting up is costly in time, energy and money and if there is no security of continuation funding .. questionable.

Councils are increasingly looking to the community transport sector to deliver locally-based services which are cost-effective, and geared to the needs of the individual – but without decent, long term secure funding it just won’t happen this way.

Do you think that Community Transport should fall within concessionary fare schemes?
Only four passengers – in over 10 years – have asked about this. We are more like a taxi service than a bus: door to door, help in and out, sometimes accompanying passengers as far as hospital department waiting rooms, pushing a shopping trolley etc.

Summing up: the govt needs to understand what a small volunteer scheme like the North Argyll Volunteer Car Scheme is, how and why it works, why we need security of funding (for
employment of co-ordinator), that that security allows us to access third party grants, (which can double the value to the council), that we are not a statutory provider of transport, nor do we have a contract with anyone. We are totally dependent on volunteers, and that’s what they are – volunteers, and a volunteer doesn’t always have to do what is asked of them. (although they almost always do!).

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Chair North Argyll Volunteer Car Scheme
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