COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY

THE PRINCESS ROYAL TRUST FOR CARERS (PART OF CARERS TRUST)

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers in Scotland (part of Carers Trust) provides support to people who care, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. With local Network Partners we work to improve support, services and recognition for carers in communities across Scotland by offering practical help, desperately needed breaks, information and advice.

1. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers (PRTC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence. Older and disabled people in Scotland deserve high-quality and convenient transport that is fit for purpose to enable them to live fuller, richer lives. Many people, particularly older people, would like to be more independent but are reluctant to use public transport because of a fear of falling or other problems with mobility, or because the public transport available in their area is not suited to their needs. When there is a lack of appropriate transport, unpaid carers will often end up driving the people they care for to the places and activities they need to access, which can impact on the carer’s own employment opportunities, finances, social life and the need for a break from caring. A regular break from caring, alongside other support, helps carers to sustain their caring role and avoid crisis.

2. A more strategic approach to the provision of community transport services would be welcomed, as the current system where transport for older people and those with disabilities is handled by local authorities, Scottish Government and the UK Government, with different responsibilities for each strand and significant differences between local authorities can cause confusion and frustration for service users, their carers and volunteer service providers. Differing provision in different areas of Scotland can be inefficient as well as inconsistent, and there is a real need to establish a more integrated national approach to community transport infrastructure. PRTC supports the recommendation of Age Scotland and other organisations to extend the National Concessionary Transport scheme to include community transport operators, as promoting and assisting access to transport is to be welcomed, especially where it helps improve the sustainability of that service to the community. We would also welcome greater transparency in the eligibility criteria for community transport, and information about the types of transport that are available in different areas of Scotland – this would hopefully be achieved through a more strategic approach.

3. The security provided by community transport that is reliable and geared towards people who are frail, less mobile or who have disabilities can mean that unpaid carers also benefit from the support that is provided to the person they care for. There are around 657,000 unpaid carers in Scotland who
provide care and support to a family member or friend who could not manage without that support. Knowing that the person they care for can be safely and efficiently transported to the places they need or want to visit can be reassuring to a carer, and good-quality community transport also gives carers a break, allowing them more time for other activities related or unrelated to their caring role. Community transport can be a lot more suitable than public transport for many people whose conditions or disabilities mean that they need to be supported to travel (for example, needing medication or equipment) or if they are unable to get to a bus stop and need a door-to-door service due to mobility issues or frailty.

4. Lack of transport to access the services they need can be the tipping point for older people to enter residential care settings, an intervention which is vastly more expensive than subsidising transport. Many of the reasons for travelling by public transport, such as going shopping or attending social activities, are not easily supported by social care services due to the immense pressure that these services are under, so these tasks often fall to the carer. In situations where the carer is unable to provide transport – such as full time employment, inability to drive or lack of car ownership, or because of their own health needs, community transport can be the key to sustainability of the caring situation and maintain people’s ability to live more independently.

5. Scotland’s numerous rural and island communities that do not have frequent or easily accessible public transport means that community transport is a vital service for people who live in more isolated areas. Research has demonstrated that access to suitable transport options can help increase mobility and facilitate older people’s involvement in community affairs or participation in social activities. Reducing isolation for older and disabled people can also relieve the pressure on their carers, particularly in caring situations where the lack of appropriate transport is the only barrier to attending a social activity or group.

6. Carers and their families are often on low incomes due to the extra costs incurred by having a disability or long-term condition, or the requirement to reduce working hours or give up paid work; having to then pay out for expensive alternative transport such as taxis can make a real difference to the household income. The National Concessionary Travel scheme makes a real difference to those who could not afford regular journeys on public transport, but as carers often live in the same household as those they care for, any costs incurred by the person they care for are also the responsibility of the carer. The requirement for carers to accompany those they care for is recognised by a number of public transport services (and increasingly by commercial enterprises) that provide free or discounted passes to carers when they are accompanying someone who needs their support. PRTC would welcome a more consistent approach to providing concessionary travel to carers where the person they care for is unable to travel without assistance, and would encourage best practice in this area to be researched further and promoted.

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Driving Change: The case for investing in community transport. Age Scotland 2013: 31
7. Community transport is a good example of preventative spending, and fits in well with the vision of the Reshaping Care for Older People Agenda, where older people are supported to live in their own homes and where services are planned and delivered in a much more integrated manner. It is also a preventative support to carers, as support for carers provided at the right time and in the right way can prevent crisis and subsequent breakdown of care, and can prevent carers from having to give up paid employment and wellbeing-enhancing activities that sustain their life outside caring.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers in Scotland
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