COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY

SCOTTISH AMBULANCE SERVICE

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Introduction:
The Scottish Ambulance Service provides a Patient Transport Service to patients who need support to reach their healthcare appointments, due to their medical or mobility needs. Requests can be made by the patient, their carer, relative or clinician by calling a Booking Line where trained staff will then ask a series of questions designed to identify the individual needs of the patient, this system is called the Patient Needs Assessment.

Ambulance transport and support is available for patients who;

- require assistance from skilled ambulance staff
- have a medical condition that would prevent them from travelling to hospital by any other means
- have a medical condition that might put them at risk from harm if they were to travel independently
- have mobility difficulties that require the assistance of ambulance care staff
- are attending hospital for treatment that might have side effects and require ambulance care on the return journey

Where appropriate, patients may be accompanied on their journey by a carer, examples of when this is considered appropriate include;

- if the patient is under 16 years old
- if the patient has learning difficulties
- if the patient requires more specialist personal support from a carer due to their medical condition or a mental health condition

Where it is decided that the patient does not require ambulance transport or care, staff in our centres will advise the caller on the NHS Travel Scheme and Traveline Scotland as options for alternative support and advice, and also signpost the callers to Integrated Transport Pilot Hubs where these have been established.

The Scottish Ambulance Service Patient Transport Service transports approximately 1.3 million patients per year, including those who attend pre-arranged hospital appointments, admission to hospital, inter hospital transfer and discharge.
Community Transport, do we need a more strategic approach?

From a Scottish Ambulance Service perspective, our organisation recognises the considerable strategic direction and support of successive parliaments to make Community Transport a sustainable resource for the communities of Scotland.

With an ageing population who will over the coming years, increasingly require locally accessible transport to allow attendance at healthcare appointments, now is an ideal time to review the strategic approach to Community Transport, in particular, how the overall funding is applied to ensure that those communities with limited or no local transport provision are provided with sufficient recurring funds to develop sustainable transport models.

Our service works closely on a regional basis with colleagues in the Regional Transport Partnerships, Health Boards and Local Authorities on transport strategy and service delivery, and believe that by taking an informed and strategic approach to supporting Community Transport, it may be possible to deliver a more person centred service which also has the potential to make the locally based service more sustainable.

An example of where aligned strategic direction might assist greatly is when funding Community Based Transport Schemes. Often, the funding body writes into their contract a clause which precludes the scheme from transporting people to hospital for an appointment, but will allow a person to be conveyed to hospital for the purpose of a visit. Some transport providers have reported that they would be willing to undertake such patient journeys if the rules were relaxed, and also indicate that patients wanting to attend a hospital appointment have asked to be transported as a social journey and dropped off as close as possible to the hospital, that way getting round the restrictions.

Are you seeing a growing demand for Community Transport provision?

As part of our commitment to support patients attend healthcare appointments, we offer a signposting service to those who do not require ambulance transport, but still require to attend a healthcare related appointment. Our experience since starting this service has highlighted the increasing difficulty patients from certain parts of Scotland have in accessing transport such as scheduled bus and train services which will allow them to travel to their appointment. Where these services either do not exist, or their timetables are not suitable for the individual, the alternative is more often than not, a Community Transport Scheme or local taxi operator.

In Highland, the Scottish Ambulance Service are partners in a pilot scheme which will deliver a Transport Advice and Booking Service to the Lochaber area. Preparation for this pilot has demonstrated a significant interest in Community Transport, not just for transport to healthcare appointments, but also in support of wider social inclusion and wellbeing.
Does your local NHS bodies work closely with Community Transport providers?

Patient Transport Service bookings and journey planning is undertaken in three Booking Centres throughout Scotland. Staff in these centres have databases of Community Transport Providers for their operating region, and signpost callers to those services as appropriate. In the Grampian area, the Scottish Ambulance Service operate a pilot Integrated Transport Advice Line on behalf of the Grampian Health Transport Action Plan partnership, giving telephone advice to callers on alternative transport options, or if necessary, liaising with the NHS Grampian Patient Focused Booking Team to rearrange the patients appointment to allow them to travel on locally available transport.

An important element of the work of the centre is to build a relationship with transport providers, identify the use of alternative transport providers, and to identify locations where it has not been possible to signpost to such a provider. Such data will then be used to influence future service planning and the funding of transport resources.

How do you access non-emergency patient transport?

As described in the introduction to this document, patients requesting the use of the Patient Transport Service are required to contact the Patient Transport Service Booking Line on a dedicated telephone number; 0300 123 1236. Callers will be taken through a series of questions (Patient Needs Assessment) designed to help our call takers identify the callers need for ambulance service transport and care. This person centred approach means that the service better understand the needs of the patient by conducting a one to one discussion with the patient or their carer / relative. The direct patient booking service aims to answer 80% calls from patients service within a one minute standard and retains the provision for GP's and clinicians to order transport on behalf of their patient.

Has your Community Transport Group experienced funding difficulties?

The Scottish Ambulance Service do not directly fund Community Transport Groups, but continue to fund a Volunteer Ambulance Car Service which provides a transport resource, particularly in the remote and rural areas, where in some cases, no suitable alternative transport provision is available.

This non clinical service has sustainability challenges, the availability of Volunteer Car Drivers is limited due to the effect of HMRC taxation rules which means that once drivers have completed 10,000 miles worth of journeys, they find it is not financially viable for them to continue operating. In some locations, there are few drivers available, and if they volunteer for the SAS, Community Car Schemes can find it difficult sustaining their service due to a limited pool of drivers.

As the Patient Transport Service focuses on the clinical and mobility needs of our patients, the dichotomy of the SAS funding and delivering a service which
does not require the patient to meet the clinical and mobility criteria of the Patient Needs Assessment, purely because no alternative is available, yet declines transport from others who similarly do not meet the PNA but can access alternative transport locally clearly exists.

Over the last few years, there have been calls from some communities for the SAS to make a financial contribution towards Community Car Scheme provision, possibly on a pro-rata basis in areas where there are no SAS resources, and Community Car Schemes either do not exist or are under financial pressure. Perhaps now is an ideal time to review the use of the Volunteer Ambulance Car Service and either invest in it, or to consider disinvesting by transferring its annual budget to the Third Sector where it is possible that economies of scale might allow the money to have a greater impact for communities, and those communities to have greater ownership of their locally based resources.

**Do you think that Community Transport should fall within concessionary fare schemes?**

The Scottish Ambulance Service firmly believes that there would be significant benefit to members of the public and the system as a whole if community transport were to fall within the Concessionary Fare Scheme. Any action which promotes and assists access to locally based transport resource is to be welcomed, especially where it helps improve the sustainability of that service to the community.

**Scottish Ambulance Service**

**15 April 2013**