COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
SKYE AND LOCHALSH COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

We have been operating a community transport service on the islands of Skye & Raasay since 1954. It started with a car (an old A40) and in 1976 a minibus was obtained for the outlying areas and a car used around the Portree area. The service is primarily for the elderly and those with disabilities. We have a wheelchair accessible Minibus which goes to the outlying areas to bring pensioners into the main village of Portree for their shopping, banks, post offices etc. We also provide transport for the weekly pensioners lunch club using both the Minibus and volunteers using their own cars. We also provide transport for a local church every Sunday.

All our drivers are volunteers, (currently 43), we receive an annual grant from the Local Authority (Highland Council) which has gone up and down over the years. For the past 2 years it was only £5000 which was a 50% cut on previous years, however for the new financial year we have been awarded £10,902. We have to fundraise to replace our vehicles every 5-6 years, our current bus (no 6) was purchased in 2010 costing £38,000.

We have for years been campaigning for CT schemes to be included in the concessionary fares scheme. (We operate under a Section 19 permit). Public transport is thin on the ground in this part of the world and for the majority of pensioners inaccessible. There is a great injustice on pensioners in rural areas as their bus pass is of little use to them whereas pensioners in towns and cities can hop on a bus and travel for free. We have to charge fares as part of our grant conditions (it used to be a voluntary donation) but it’s the same for all no matter where they live. If it was set according to distance many of our users couldn’t afford it. We cover a large geographical area the majority of our trips are around 80-100 miles, last year our mileage was 8844 and we carried over 1000 passengers.

There is increased demand for our services especially in the past couple of years. The withdrawal of LA support to lunch clubs meant we had to fill the gap, also we get requests for patient transport.

We don’t cover the whole area as with only one vehicle this would be impossible. There are a few other community minibuses operating a more localised service but I am aware of the need in the Lochalsh and Wester Ross areas. Transport is an issue for everybody in the remote rural areas both for service providers as well as those who need to travel to access the most basic of services such as shops, banks, hospital appointments etc, if you don’t have access to a car than life can be very difficult. Community transport schemes are a lifeline for communities such as ours.

Chrisanne MacDonald
Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations