COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY
STRATHEARN BUILDING BRIDGES
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

We are a small community based organisation working on behalf of residents within the Strathearn area who have Learning or other disabilities. Key to our objectives is overcoming the barriers to Social Integration and Inclusion. We work to find local solutions to local problems and engage local organisations, voluntary, statutory or commercial in delivery.

As residents in a rural area, access to transport is one of the key factors in determining whether or not individuals can access any element of local services. There is a heavy reliance on Council run services for access to day services etc. However outside of council service provision times, weekends and holidays the opportunity to attend any local activity or appointment is heavily dependent on private forms of transport, community based transport schemes being only one element of this.

We have taken a broad view in considering what community transport means to our members but have restricted our comments to transport for social or private purposes. We therefore look to a range of options which are to a lesser or greater extent available (or should be). These include local, community transport schemes, community mini bus hire schemes and the use of council vehicles based at community campuses or other locations, all of which rely heavily on volunteer drivers.

Community based transport schemes have the advantage, as far as those with a disability are concerned, in that they tend to be tailored to this section of the community’s needs, whether by virtue of vehicle design or the understanding of the drivers. This overcomes a range of obstacles to using public transport which in rural areas is in itself inflexible, infrequent and inconvenient as far as stops are concerned. These obstacles range from a lack of understanding of timetables to the physical difficulties in accessing the vehicle and can include elements such as fear of the unfamiliar or communication problems.

Accessing available community transport can be hindered by a number of problems.
1. There is an effort needed to discover what transport is available and the degree to which it is available to the community.

2. There can be reticence on the part of operators (schools, residential centres, day centres etc) to loan out vehicles, particularly where the vehicles are utilised daily and therefore concern regarding breakdowns etc.

3. Where there are transport options available then the supply of volunteer drivers is a key constraint.

4. Where the community transport is provided through a voluntary, grant funded arrangement the need to recover costs from users makes some options unaffordable to the least well off groups.

To overcome these issues we believe that:

1. Local transport options could be better utilised if access to them were more coordinated and cover was provided for vehicles which fail in service. This would best be undertaken by council transport offices who already undertake operational control in many cases. This would introduce resilience and provide a central point for users to identify the location of suitable vehicles.

2. Drivers of council funded transport generally have to undertake training (Midas) to be covered by the Council insurance policies. This training costs around £150.00 per driver and does introduce a barrier to uptake. For drivers who are intending to operate for bone fide organisations working to support those with a disability or the elderly this should be waived.

3. Where charges are made for vehicle hire, then these should reflect the public transport travel status of the proposed passengers, with concessionary rates as appropriate. This would need to be supported by reimbursement for self funded operations. For services provided through community transport initiatives, whether this is “Dial a Bus” or “Dial a Ride” schemes the concessionary principle should be extended to include these services.
I hope that this submission adequately outlines the problems encountered by our members and highlights the fact that a more co ordinate approach would be helpful. Additionally a level playing field in terms of costs would be beneficial to groups who attempt to develop local solutions to their transport problems.

I have taken the liberty of including the result of one of our initiatives in attempting to make a complex local timetable more understandable to our membership. The graphic representation has produced a positive response and some 500 copies of this format have been distributed to residents and organisations in our area.
No.45  
Our Magical Mystery Town Bus

Hail and Ride:  Except for the town centre where bus stops should be used this is a Hail and Ride bus service.

Operator: Sweeney's Garage, enquiries 01764 681231

Service Runs: Monday to Saturday
Saturday incorporates additional times
No service on Sundays

Times Correct: 1st January 2012

Travel Information: Traveline Scotland 0871 200 22 33
(8p landline calls 10p/min)
Web site http://www.travelinescotland.com
Mobile phone site http://mobile.travelinescotland.com
Free app download for smart phones

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