How can community transport systems be improved?

Transport for Tongue (T4T) was delighted that the YouTube video clip chosen to demonstrate Community Transport in Scotland was our community transport organisation, Transport for Tongue, which was showcased in Brussels when O4O (Older People for Older People) won the prestigious Regios Stars Award in 2012 for Successful Innovative Practice in Rural Communities.

Case Study of a Community Transport Organisation

Why: No Public Transport infrastructure in our community on the North Coast of Mainland Scotland (Highland): the Post Bus transport provision had recently been withdrawn. Subsequently the Day Care provision by the Local Authority was withdrawn, including the transport to it, with implications for the continued well-being of the older, most vulnerable and isolated members of our community. Already, people had started to move out of the area because they had no access to transport. Lack of public transport provision was identified as the priority need in every community survey carried out.

What: Within 4 years of beginning operation, T4T, an incorporated not for profit community organisation, now has 3 vehicles all with wheelchair/disabled access providing transport for people of all ages and abilities:

1. Under a Section 19 transport permit provides a Door to Door car service for transport to services, amenities and opportunities for social interaction within the community: passengers pay a charge per mile. The service is provided by volunteers using their own cars or using the T4T wheelchair access car if required.

   Also provides transport to nearest rail link and Dentist (40 miles)

2. Under a Section 22 Transport permit operates 5 routes, 3 of which link the scattered crofting townships of the parish and enable people to attend the Community Well-being Hub and local amenities.

   A 4th route provides a weekly service to the nearest rail link and dentist 40 miles south.
A 5th route provides a monthly service to the nearest city, Inverness, 100 miles south.

Those who qualify for a Concessionary Bus pass can use it on these registered routes. T4T employs 4 MIDAS trained P/T drivers to service these routes.

3. Transport to Hospital appointments (non-emergency transport) T4T is trialling this service providing transport to our nearest community hospitals for outpatient clinics 40 miles East and 55 miles South using volunteer drivers. Passengers pay £20 /£25 for the journey but can reclaim part of this cost.

Virtually all those who use T4T have told us via our customer survey (See Appendix 1) that they would like us to provide this service to enable them to attend hospital appointments. Many have had negative experiences with the SAS provided service. For example, the transport is often cancelled at the last minute resulting in a cancelled appointment (too late for that appointment to be offered to anyone else) and a long wait for another appointment.

4. Car Sharing: We are in the process of implementing this initiative in order to:

a. Reduce expenses for all concerned – We have very high fuel costs

(Petrol 159.9p per litre Diesel 164.7p per litre (as at 10.04.2013))

b. To reduce carbon footprint by multiple occupancy

Statistics for 2012/13 (April to March)

Number of people using Door to Door Car service: 612 (all return journeys)
Journey miles: 5280
Number of passengers using S 22 Minibus service: 1922
Journey Miles: 13,187
98% of passengers carried used their Concessionary Bus pass on Section 22 journeys.
Volunteer Hours = 2981 (driving and non-driving tasks)

Current Outstanding Transport Problems:

1. Reduction in Percentage National Concessionary Travel Scheme Reimbursement
98% of those who access the transport we provide people under a Section 22 permit use their Concessionary Bus Pass. Unlike Public Transport Operators we do not get funding from Government or Local Authority contracts to provide the service. We are being urged by our Local Authority to become sustainable but this is unachievable with the current percentage reimbursement. Furthermore, in the last financial year the scheme ran out of money and we did not receive the agreed reimbursement. This is an impossible situation for community groups who have extremely tight margins. Our fares have to be reasonable and affordable.

2. Very high local fuel costs as outlined above.

3. No public transport provision available for people to work in the nearest town (40-45 miles east).

4. No public transport provision for people to study at the nearest College. This mainly affects school leavers wishing to undertake further studies but also adults wishing to continue further education.

But this problem also affects students at the local Secondary School who wish to study courses at the College which are not offered at their school. For example, there is no provision to study IT after S 2, which is unacceptable in the 21st Century.

5. No public transport provision to enable people to complete a journey to and from the nearest city and main hospital on the same day. This means that people have no means of using public transport to get to and from hospital for Out Patient Appointments. The SAS advises people with hospital appointments who do not meet their criteria for patient transport to use public transport OR Community Transport but community transport groups are not funded to provide this transport.

6. Funding for vehicles is a major challenge: Government recommendations will soon require all public transport vehicles to have wheelchair access. The adaptations required almost double the purchase price of a minibus. We almost always need to purchase new vehicles as there is very little available with low to medium mileage in the second hand range with the appropriate adaptation for disabled access.

The 1 year grant assistance from the Local authority precludes leasing vehicles which require a 3 year funding guarantee.

7. Local Authority Funding on a 1 year basis is virtually impossible for business planning.
8. D1 licence issue: There are very few drivers under the age of 32 who have a licence to drive a minibus. Most of our drivers are volunteers or are P/T paid reaching retirement age or the DVLA cut off age for D1 of 70. The current D1 training and test is very onerous and expensive for either the person or the community group. It would require a 200 mile round trip to the testing centre and 3 night’s accommodation and subsistence. A more relevant, simplified test would be more appropriate.

Recommendations

1. Reimburse Community Transport Groups providing transport under the NCT scheme with 100% of the fare: not the 60% for the current year reducing to 58.1% in 2014/15.

2. Enable users of the Section 19 services to use bus passes.

3. Community Transport Groups to be funded to provide non-emergency Patient Transport.

4. Enable our Local Authority to fund transport provision for vital transport links e.g. to nearest rail link for the benefit of local residents as well as to facilitate tourism.

5. Extend the fuel duty rebate scheme to cover remote & rural areas in the Highlands such as ours. The price of fuel at the pump is more expensive here than in many of the islands covered by the rebate scheme.

6. D1 - A more relevant, simplified test to be devised that doesn’t take 5 working days to complete.

Ngaire Mingham
Chairperson/Director
Transport for Tongue Limited
15 April 2013
Appendix 1

T4T Customer Satisfaction Survey Report 2012

1. User Feedback: (Names of respondents have been omitted)

2. What additional services would you like T4T to provide?

“I would like T4T to be able to take me to medical appointments at Golspie, Dunbar and Wick. I would like T4T to take me to visit my sister at Achvarisdal when my wife is no longer able to drive that distance.” – AC, Talmine.

“I would like the service (T4T) to be able to take me for medical appointments to Dunbar Hospital, Wick, Golspie and to Achvarasdal House, Reay” JC, Talmine.

“I have had bad experiences with the hospital transport not getting me to appointments. I would be happy if T4T could provide that service as I know they would come at the appointed time and not cancel at the last minute as S.A.S. has done on several occasions.” – CM, Melness.

“I would like transport to NCLC (North Coast Leisure Centre) Physio class currently on a Friday 12 and 2pm – if Care Alliance has to withdraw this service. Transport route to Lairg if it can be co-ordinated with train timetable. Would like occasional shopping trip to Thurso – would need a little more support than is offered through Stagecoach transport.” – YB, Talmine

“I would like T4T to be able to drive me to my hospital appointments if feasible. At present the hospital car comes from Kinlochbervie or Thurso and that can’t be cost effective. They also sometimes cancel the day before.” MM, Tongue.

“I would like to be able to use T4T for hospital appointments to the Dunbar.” – JB, Talmine.

“To Thurso for shopping as I have a disability that makes public transport impossible. The local Stagecoach transport doesn’t have wheel chair facility. I would like transport to Golspie, Dunbar, Wick and Raigmore to attend hospital appointments.” – DD, Talmine

“To Thurso for shopping as I have a disability. Require wheelchair so can’t go on other public transport. I would like transport to attend hospital appointments at Golspie, Dunbar, Wick and Raigmore. Occasional social visiting to places like Shin Falls. If Care Alliance folds I would need transport to NCLC.” – AD, Talmine.
“It could be helpful to have ambulance services for hospital appointments.” – MM, Tongue

“Hospital appointments – Dunbar, Wick and Raigmore. Travel to Inverness for appointments.” – FM, Talmine

“Rail link to Lairg. Would be helpful to have transport to Wick, Thurso and Golspie for hospital and dental appointments.” – IJ, Talmine.

Appendix 2

Additional Comments/Complaints:

I am always very happy with the service and the consideration shown when inadvertent problems arise.” – J M Talmine.

“Happy with what is on offer. It’s good to have this service as I no longer have a car. It enables me to get to the chiropodist and doctor.” – M M, Brae Tongue.

“T4T personnel have always been very helpful and considerate.” – I J, Talmine.

“I have no complaints. I am happy with the service offered.” – A M, Caladh Sona, Talmine.

“Very pleased with the service.” – J W, Midfield, Talmine.

“I am happy with the service provided.” – GM, Achininver, Talmine

“No complaints about T4T. I am happy with the service provided.” – C M, Melness.

“Services always pleasant and punctual.” – MM, Tongue.

“I am very satisfied with the service and am very glad to get it.” – N R, Tongue.

“Nothing but compliments for the current service provided.” – D D, Talmine.

“No complaints.” – A C. Talmine.

“No complaints. I like the warm, comfortable vehicle. It is clean. The driver (AW) drives smoothly.” – E M, Blandy, Tongue.

“T4T is providing an essential service as there is currently no public transport in the area.” – M M, Tongue

“Service is excellent” – JD, Tongue.
“Very grateful for all the work which has been necessary to provide these services for us. Thank you.” – J T, Tongue

“The T4T service is very valuable to me”. – S T, Vagastie

“A highly useful facility” - B M, Skerray

“T4T provide an extremely valuable, reliable and courteous service. The volunteers and paid drivers are a credit” – M M, Tongue

**Conclusion of T4T Customer Satisfaction Survey Report 2012**

Overall there was a very positive response to how T4T performs. Staff and drivers received full marks for always being courteous and pleasant while providing a community service which is punctual and reliable as well as offering realistic fares. T4T’s performance overall was rated extremely highly.

Respondents were generous with their compliments and most offered additional comments regarding which services they would like to see added with particular interest in journeys to Thurso, Wick, Golspie and Raigmore, to accommodate hospital/dentist appointments there.

**Appendix 3**

**Letter of Support from the Local G.P.**

I am delighted to be given this opportunity to say how important the service provided by T4T is to the communities in this remote part of North Sutherland: an area ranked within the top 15% of most access deprived areas.

T4T have quickly become indispensable: enabling my most vulnerable patients to access local services, stay in touch with friends and families and in doing so allowing many to remain a part of this fragile community. Without T4T, the alternative for many would have been to move away, nearer larger centres of population in order to access the services they require.

Many studies have demonstrated that regular social contact helps older people stay healthy and preserves their cognitive function. In my practice area, without the service provided by T4T, this social interaction would be unachievable for many. And this is over and above the vital service T4T provides for those who need to access the Health Centre in Tongue. I am very pleased that T4T have recently started a pilot to provide transport to our nearest outpatient clinics. I am hopeful that this service will be extended to cover the main clinics at Wick and Inverness. This would make such a difference to so many of my patients, many of whom are currently being denied treatment, as they cannot access the present patient transport service.
Small community transport organisations such as T4T are working towards a number of Scotland’s National Outcomes: they are addressing inequality, improving community sustainability and helping to build a stronger, more resilient community. Providing assistance to these organisations should be a priority.

Dr Marion Macdougall MB ChB
General Practitioner Tongue Medical Practice