Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport is the leading professional body representing the supply of freight and passenger transport services. Our membership includes many of Scotland’s most successful community organisations which provide community transport services, community hubs, retail, employability programmes, parcel collection and distribution points, patient and social work transport, and many other related services.

We have been keen supporters of the Community Planning processes which have been managed across Scotland over the last decade and share the government’s concern about weak delivery of the 32 Community Plans. Most of the current Plans identify barriers which communities face accessing essential opportunities and services, but links to effective funded programmes are only partially made. In many cases the relationship is therefore not clear between the Community Plan and the investment which is made in logistics and transport systems.

Our scrutiny of the Bill has therefore viewed the plans through the lens of how much practical delivery of much needed community connections will be enhanced as a result of the new legislation. In particular we have asked whether the Bill becoming an Act will overcome long standing barriers which have frustrated community based delivery. Our answers are below under each of the questions asked in the Committee’s Call for Evidence.

Managing the Transition from Community Aims to Practical Delivery

Q1. To what extent do you consider the Bill will empower communities, please give reasons for your answer?

The plans for managed delivery of outcomes are very welcome. We would expect that these will become increasingly important in organising local delivery of community based transport and logistics. This will encourage a wider range of enterprises to become involved.

We recognise the difficulties that commercial and social enterprises have faced in the past when engaging with Community Planning. Therefore the Act needs to be accompanied with guidance and training to explain how enterprises, including all parts of the business community, can be more involved. The explanatory notes refer to co-design approaches, and a similar expansion of how to deliver co-production of transport solutions would be very beneficial to follow through to delivery.

The powers to establish corporate bodies are very welcome. The long standing problems which have been experienced overcoming barriers to more efficient social transport delivery may well be overcome by setting up new corporate bodies offering third party social transport services. We cannot see any problems with the proposed legislation being used in this way, but it would be worth
working through the details of some of the logistics and transport objectives of Community Plans to ensure that the Act includes all of the necessary provisions to secure delivery. The lack of logistics and transport examples in the policy memorandum contrast with other policy areas where there appears to have been more attention paid to details. Ensuring that the details are clear at this stage will be important to ensure that the Bill empowers communities to make the necessary connections.

Q2. What will be the benefits and disadvantages for public sector organisations as a consequence of the provisions in the Bill?

There are great opportunities for public sector organisations to demonstrate their community leadership role, and threats for public sector organisations that perceive themselves as having a monopoly on building stronger communities.

We welcome the widening of the definition of community to make it easier for communities to define their community in a greater variety of ways, not just by postcode. This will now include many types of transport body working to make local connections.

However the business relationships that define the ability of a community to deliver socially desirable changes involves supply chains that cross geographical boundaries. If we look at a typical community transport operation then their activities interface at many geographical levels and across public and private sectors. Access to hospital is identified as a problem in many Community Plans but action to date through these Plans to overcome the problems has been weak. Successful delivery ‘communities’ include elements of nationally funded programmes such as the services of the Scottish Ambulance Service, alongside local authority, community and private providers of health transport services, including for high care transport. Some public sector organisations may perceive disadvantages from working with this broader community but the advantages of doing so will greatly exceed the costs as pilot projects have shown.

If a Community Plan in one local authority area identifies gaps in access, but these issues are not recognised in the Community Plans of other areas who need to be involved in overcoming problems, then there will need to be mechanisms for resolving these differences of perspective. These mechanisms could include arbitration proceedings or hearings to determine whether the proposed community action was reasonable. If community organisations do not think they will be treated fairly when these conflicts need resolution then they will not be empowered.

Mind the gap

Q3. Do you consider communities across Scotland have the capabilities to take advantage of the provisions in the Bill? If not, what requires to be done to the Bill, or to assist communities, to ensure this happens?

In order to breed a better understanding between communities and the statutory bodies there is a big cultural gap to overcome. Participating in dozens of meetings will stifle the involvement of doers, and there is a real danger that the new procedures for action plans and progress reporting could lead to “death by planning”. There will need to be pathfinder projects in the logistics and transport sector to demonstrate how the new powers can be used to overcome old problems.
Public bodies are highly skilled at ensuring that only optimal delivery approaches are delivered. Community activists are highly skilled at making good things happen, whether or not they are the optimal solutions. Under the proposed Act the Community Plan should be able to frame the good things needed, whilst ensuring social and political accountability, but whether it can achieve this without stifling community energy is perhaps the greatest challenge for Community Planning.

There are many examples over the last decade where innovative joint working solutions have been designed but when faced with the narrower accountability structures of public bodies they have failed to be sustained leading to losses in both efficiency and effectiveness over time.

Q4. Are you content with the specific provisions in the Bill, if not what changes would you like to see, to which part of the Bill and why?

As noted above the specific provisions of the Bill need to be worked through with specific examples to check how delivery might work in practice for projects like community logistics hubs, social transport, social transport commitments, managed improvements in access to fresh food and many of the types of projects that have been suggested through Community Planning but have failed to overcome obstacles to delivery due to a lack of community empowerment.

Q5. What are your views on the assessment of equal rights, impacts on island communities and sustainable development as set out in the Policy memorandum?

When assessing community need there are four essential lenses needed for the outcome measures: stated need, social needs, expressed need and comparative/distributional needs. There are weaknesses in many of the current outcome measures being used by authorities as they rely excessively on measures of stated and expressed need which tends to benefit wealthy groups who demand the most.

More attention is needed to understanding social benefits and how these are distributes.

Conclusion

Logistics and transport connects up the economy and society and needs to be enabled by the new Act, as much as for the current focus in the policy memorandum on people and places. The broad definition of community is welcome, but it is difficult to see how the Act will be worked through in practical delivery. As part of the scrutiny of the Bill, the detail of the community empowerment enabled through the Bill should be explained for desirable projects such as community hubs, social transport services, community parcel delivery and other logistics and transport provision identified as needed in Community Plans. Without this detail there is a danger that the Bill may not enable as intended if some barriers still cannot be overcome.

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5 September 2014