

Community Transport Policy

December 2005

Contents	Page Number
Introduction	1
What is Community Transport?	2
Community Transport in North Wiltshire	3
Community Aspirations	8
The Future of Community Transport in North Wiltshire	9
Process and Financing of Schemes	11
Bibliography	12
Appendix 1 - Community Transport Scheme Funding 2005/06	13
Appendix 2 - Funding Options	14

Introduction

A life without access to shops, leisure and other facilities, friends and family is extremely limiting and often leads to social exclusion and isolation. This is accentuated in rural areas where in comparison to urban areas the loss of facilities is greater; across England and Wales in 2001 there were 45% fewer post offices and 60% fewer general food shops in villages than there were in 1976. This is a continuing trend compounding an already difficult situation for those without their own transport. The following statistics paint a bleak image of England in 2004:

- One in four young people have not applied for a particular job in the last 12 months because of transport problems.
- 31% of people without a car have difficulties travelling to their local hospital, compared to 17% of people with a car.
- 16% of people without cars find access to supermarkets difficult.

The freedom offered by the motor car has had a major influence upon late 20th century society. During this time the need to travel became greater and more complex as society became organised around the car and facilities become concentrated in larger units. Car ownership continues to rise in Wiltshire, increasing by 92% between 1981 and 2001, and is the major mode of transport in the County. The loss of many rural railway stations as well as the cessation of uneconomic bus services means that car ownership has taken on extra significance.

The costs of providing public transport continues to rise and the most rural areas are often the first to see a reduction in service, as they are either marginally commercial or in need of financial support to maintain, and often with low levels of ridership. Indeed many places only have a weekly bus service allowing a couple of hours in the nearest large settlement. At other times, particularly evening and weekends, there is unlikely to be any service at all. The isolation caused by this situation is most likely to affect the young and the old more than most as they may not be able to afford, or drive, a car.

Historically nobody has been responsible for ensuring that people can get to key services and employment sites. As a result, services have been developed with insufficient attention to accessibility.

There are other forms of transport and initiatives that can address the needs of those with accessibility issues such as Concessionary Travel and cycling¹, but

1. The Council does have a statutory responsibility to provide bus travel to those aged 60+ or anybody with a disability at half-cost (free from April 2006). The Council also supports unviable bus services financially (via Wiltshire County Council) as well as cycling initiatives.

These are aimed at specific sections of the community, not everyone is eligible or able to use them, and with the former, there are still issues related to geographical coverage. Of course a much improved and extended bus system would help the situation, but this would require a huge level of subsidy, which is just not available, and is beyond the scope of this Policy document. Another form of transport which can meet needs, and has grown in popularity since the 1970's, is community transport.

What is Community Transport?

Understanding exactly what is meant by the term community transport can be difficult without an adequate description. A good starting point is the simple definition offered by the following statement:

‘Community transport (also known as voluntary sector transport) may be defined as local passenger transport provision which is not provided through scheduled bus or rail services, and which is organised on a not for profit basis by voluntary organisations, community transport groups, and other non-statutory bodies’

Whilst this describes the basic situation it does not cover the complexity of the issues which encompass the transport needs arising from differences of gender, ethnicity, age, isolation, poverty and people on low incomes. It also does not touch upon the geographical variation of services on offer.

A wider explanation is offered by Beecham and Associates:

‘Community transport is a sector with a diverse range of organisations carrying out many different activities at various levels of frequency.’

From this it can be seen that there is no set format for community transport; indeed it tends to arise out of a need and is tailored to that need either by the community or an organisation who is best placed (or agrees) to provide a co-ordinating role.

The other aspect of community transport to consider is the range of services offered to meet transport needs. The three most common forms of community transport are:

- Group transport bus services (more commonly known as group hire bus services). In the main, these services are operated by Community Minibus groups who make their minibus(es) available to community groups for a consideration. Many Community Minibus groups also provide group transport services on behalf of

Wiltshire County Council, for example for Social Services or special educational needs groups.

- Pre-booked services for registered individuals (more commonly known as Dial-a-Ride services). Again operated on the whole by Community Minibus groups, these services are available to individuals who have poor access to services and facilities. The services are booked in advance, and the passengers who use them are registered by the Community Minibus group that operates them.
- Voluntary social car schemes – good neighbour or Link schemes offering people lifts to undertake shopping or out-patient visits to hospital.

One major issue with voluntary sector transport is that as it straddles a number of different public authority functions - local authority social services, planning and transportation, health authorities and health trusts - then it is difficult to persuade a single body to take ownership. This also presents problems surrounding the funding of schemes, creating uncertainty and long term instability. One thing is certain, in many areas it provides a valuable service and is, for many, the only mode of transport available to them.

Community transport has benefits that may not be present with standard public transport modes including:

- local investment (time and money) and therefore 'ownership'
- Meeting specific needs
- Feeling of safety and care (drivers are usually local and known to passengers)
- Flexibility (services are often door to door)
- Reasonably priced
- Cause less noise and air pollution and less road damage as vehicles are often smaller

Community Transport in North Wiltshire

There are many community transport schemes in operation in North Wiltshire (see Appendix 1) some with, and some without, financial support from the Council. The following paragraphs give a brief overview of all the community transport schemes in operation in the District. Details of funding for all the schemes is given in Appendix 1.

[Link](#)

A good overview of Link Schemes is given by the following Mission Statement:

‘Link Schemes believe that in recent years the quality of life in rural areas, both towns and villages, has been adversely affected by the loss of facilities and services such as shops, post offices, buses and schools.

This results in an increasing number of vulnerable people: the elderly, the poor, the disabled and those with a temporary problem who become isolated and lonely.

Link Schemes aim to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged residents in their area by drawing on the goodwill already existing in the community to provide a voluntary good neighbour service.

Link Schemes provide a free confidential service but welcomes donations from their users. All donations are used in the provision of the service, which is run entirely by volunteers’.

There are eight Link Schemes operating, and two in development, in North Wiltshire as shown in Table 1 below.

Link Scheme	Geographical coverage
Box, Colerne & Rudloe	Box, Colerne & Rudloe
Calne & District Community Link	Calne, Calne Without, Bremhill, Cherhill, Compton Bassett, Heddington and Hilmarton
Chippenham Transport Link	Chippenham, Chippenham Without, Foxham, Langley Burrell, Sutton Benger and Tytherton
Chippenham Good Neighbour Link	Chippenham, Chippenham Without, Foxham, Langley Burrell, Sutton Benger and Tytherton
Corsham Link	Corsham, Neston & Gastard
Lydiards Link	Lydiard Millicent, Lydiard Tregoze, Hook, Washpool, Common Platt, Greenhall and Greatfield
Malmesbury & District Link	Malmesbury, Brokenborough, Charlton, Corston, Crudwell, Easton Grey, Great Somerford, Hankerton, Hullavington, Lea & Cleverton, Little Somerford, Luckington, Minety, Norton, Oaksey, Seagry, Sherston and Stanton St Quintin

The Villages Link	Badminton, Biddestone, Burton, Castle Combe, Grittleton, Kington Langley, Kington St Micheal, Luckington, Nettleton, North Wraxall, Sopworth, The Gibb, West Kington and Yatton Keynall
Wootton Bassett (in development)	Wootton Bassett, Brinkworth and Tockenham
Cricklade (in development)	Cricklade

Table 1: Link Schemes in North Wiltshire.

The Link Project

As well as the individual Link Schemes there is also the Link Project. The aim is to support existing Link Schemes in their everyday running and also develop their operation. It also assists communities to develop new schemes in areas where there is a demand. The project is hosted by Community First and employs the equivalent of two full time staff.

The Council funds both the Link Project and the individual Link Schemes via Community First with whom a Service Level Agreement is in place. Funding is also given by Wiltshire County Council, other district councils, and the Primary Care Trust. Officer time is also given in attending Link meetings.

Thamesdown and District Dial a Ride Community Transport

Thamesdown and District Dial a Ride Community Transport (TDDARCT) is an independent voluntary organisation owned and governed by its members and aims to provide safe, affordable, accessible transport for individuals with mobility impairment. Services offered include:

- Dial a Ride bus service
- Dial a Ride car service
- Shopperbus service
- Access car service
- MiDAS driver training

TDDARCT started as a purely urban Swindon scheme with funding from the Countryside Agency and Swindon Borough Council. In 2001, after successfully securing an increase in the amount of grant aid, the service extended into rural Swindon as well as the Lydiards and Purton areas of North Wiltshire. The North Wiltshire service was not specifically funded at that stage. In 2003 Countryside Agency funding came to an end and TDDARCT sought funds from this Council to continue the North Wiltshire part of the service. Funding was found for 2003/04 and 2005/06 as a short-term

measure; there was not a long-term commitment to fund the service, although it is realised that without funding the service is unlikely to continue.

Wiltshire Rural Transport Partnership (WRTP)

The WRTP is not specifically a community transport scheme but rather a partnership established in 2000 and comprising of representatives from organisations that either rely on or provide rural transport, to develop co-operation, partnership and joint working and to address transport related issues across Wiltshire. The aim of the Partnership is:

“to improve access to services and facilities in a way which is sustainable, does not discriminate against people without access to a car and achieves social inclusion in rural areas”.

The Partnership has been primarily funded by the Countryside Agency and Wiltshire County Council with support contributions from district authorities and the primary care trusts. In April 2005 Defra core funding responsibilities to support the Partnership passed from the Countryside Agency to the South West RDA and they have committed themselves to continue core WRTP support through to March 2007. Defra funding support for the community transport sector has yet to be clarified for post 2007. It is likely that funding support will either be devolved through the local transport authority (WCC) and linked to Local Transport Plan 2 targets or through the South West RDA grant fund arm, Rural Renaissance. This lack of clarity with regard to funding has also placed some uncertainty over the future of the WRTP but there seems to be the desire from the partner organisations to continue.

The Partnership employs two officers and again these are hosted by Community First. The Partnership has been responsible for some innovative solutions to rural transport problems and lately is promoting community transport Hubs as a Community Area approach.

The Council supports the WRTP financially at £3,000 per annum and through officer time and involvement in both the Steering Group and Partnership meetings.

Community Buses

There are a number of minibus schemes operating in the District, some for specific sections of the community and others (available for hire by any group) for the wider community. The list is as follows:

- Calne Community Transport - provides minibus transport to social clubs, for shopping trips, day centres and for excursions

throughout Calne and surrounding villages for the elderly. The minibuses are fully accessible for wheelchair users. Transport is also available to community groups.

- Cartmell Community Minibus - provides minibus transport to community groups, sports clubs and schools in Malmesbury and the surrounding area. The minibuses are fully accessible for wheelchair users. Groups must supply their own driver.
- Chippenham & District Transport for the Disabled - provides transport throughout Chippenham & District and Corsham for the elderly, disabled people and community groups. The minibuses are fully accessible for wheelchair users and are also available to community groups.
- Lyneham Community Bus - provides transport in a 14 seat minibus for local community groups in Lyneham and surrounding areas. The minibuses are not accessible for wheelchair users but are available to community groups.
- Malmesbury & District Community Transport - provides transport for elderly and disabled people and community groups in Malmesbury and surrounding areas. The minibus is accessible for wheelchair users and is also available to community groups.
- Purton & District Age Concern Minibus - provides transport for the elderly throughout Purton and district. The minibuses are fully accessible for wheelchair users and are available for use by community groups at other times.

The Council has had no involvement in the on-going financing or running of these schemes.

Wootton Bassett Hub (Transport 4u)

The Transport 4u scheme in Wootton Bassett is an example of a community transport Hub scheme – a scheme which is a model for community transport that has been developed by the community transport team at Community First.

At the foundation of the Hub scheme model is a one-stop shop for local transport information about buses, trains, taxis or community transport schemes. The rationale is that by creating a facility which promotes existing transport resources, the usage and integration of these resources is encouraged, and additionally schemes can be developed to fill gaps in provision where they are identified through an interactive transport information facility such as a phone line or website. Hubs may become more popular if they are proved as an efficient method of sharing information and therefore meeting needs.

Whilst most of the concerns and priorities cover wider issues such as car parking and road maintenance there are concerns with the lack of accessible public transport. Some of these concerns are listed below.

Malmesbury and the Villages Community Plan:

- Public transport is very limited
- Accessibility
- Improve bus services and make them a practical way to get to work
- Support is essential for those groups who do not have access to a car e.g. the young and the elderly

Chippenham and Villages Community Plan:

- Lack of public transport especially in rural areas
- More small buses for rural areas
- More co-ordinated timetables on bus services
- Poor link between bus and rail services
- Provide services from rural areas at evenings and weekends

Calne Community Area Community Plan:

- Frequency and extent of conventional public transport
- Lack of access to transport for people with mobility issues

Northern Community Area Community Plan:

- Poor local public transport

Corsham Area Community Plan:

- Increase the number and frequency of bus services

The common theme here is the lack of an adequate public transport service, rather than requests for specific community transport schemes. This is bound to be the case as people would rather see a regular, funded, network rather than having to rely on the goodwill of a community scheme. However, they would rather have a community transport scheme than no transport at all.

The Local Strategic Plan supports this by recognising that many issues facing the residents of North Wiltshire are caused by a lack of accessibility, compounded by many services (e.g. health facilities) being re-located.

The Future of Community Transport in North Wiltshire

Over recent years the community transport sector has increasingly been expected to provide more of the transport provision, but without any widespread coherent or strategic framework provided by either central or local government. Certainly until now the Council has not had any mechanism in place to effectively direct its policy on community transport. This is most likely due to there being no statutory duty on the Council to support community transport schemes financially and has led to an ad hoc and often reactionary, approach. The situation is muddled by the split in roles between County and District Councils. Whilst the former is the transport authority the District Council should still bear some responsibility in helping meet the needs of its citizens, including transport. It could be argued that perhaps there is a 'social responsibility' to assist the citizens of the District where they are having problems accessing services. Support could be financial, through other mechanisms such as officer time, or the Council 'signing-up' to a project.

Given the massive past, and continuing, increases in the costs of running standard passenger transport services, there is no doubt that non-standard solutions (e.g. community transport) will play an increasing role in meeting transport needs. Indeed, more alternative solutions will be needed to address the variety of needs and differing funding streams. It is unlikely that there will be a set formula for any scheme as they will most likely address very local issues, and this should be the case, as for success, any scheme needs support locally.

The Council does give financial support to some schemes (see Appendix 1), and would like to continue to do so, and yet there has never been any criteria against which a fair assessment of a project could be made. Consequently, this Policy puts forward a number of criteria to enable a fair judgement to take place and allow the Council to decide whether funding should be made available. The criteria are listed below and are not in any order of importance:

- Need
- Connectivity
- Effectiveness
- Support
- Sustainability
- Cost

Need

The Council should be satisfied that there is a proven need for a scheme based on provided evidence following a robust assessment of the local community, or area, to be served. Value for money would not be gained by supporting schemes that are not required or are highly likely to fail due to lack of users. Research should also highlight whether there would be any overlap, and therefore possible conflict, with any other scheme or service. In assessing need views should be sought from other agencies who that are better placed to judge.

Connectivity

Schemes that connect to, improve, or build upon existing services (standard or non-standard) should be favoured above those that work in isolation. For example a minibus scheme that ties into an existing bus service or makes a drop at a railway station will not only be more effective at reducing social isolation but also help in providing more transport opportunities than one that does not. Equally, a scheme that offers a variety of services, whether actual services or information regarding services, will provide added value. It would also be expected that schemes would make use of the Council's Concessionary Travel Scheme where relevant.

Effectiveness

Any scheme will need to set targets for specific outcomes such as the geographical coverage, the number of users expected. Schemes that effectively tackle multiple accessibility issues (i.e. provide access to either shops, healthcare, education or work) and serve the wider community will be more successful than those that do not and should, therefore, be given support.

Support

For any project to succeed it will need considerable support from a wide range of participants which may include local authorities and other statutory agencies, transport providers, voluntary groups and the community that it is intended to serve. In particular the support of Wiltshire County Council and Community First is likely to be key. Without support any scheme will fail and would, therefore, be a waste of public money. Evidence (letter of support or financial commitment) should be required.

Sustainability

The Council has a limited financial resource and therefore a responsibility to use council tax-payers money wisely, whilst at the same time remembering that it is their money. The transport budget is already fully committed and could easily be spent many times over, consequently, new projects that seek on-going support should not normally be considered. Therefore, any bid to secure financial support for projects that have not considered the long-term viability would not be acceptable in the majority of new cases. Of course, there will be fixed-period projects or those that need pump-priming, and these should be considered if they meet the majority of the criteria.

Cost

Wiltshire County Council work on £3 maximum per person per journey as a suitable level of subsidy for supported services. Whilst it may be more difficult

to apply this to community transport schemes some evaluation of the cost effectiveness should be undertaken to ensure that value for money is achieved. However, it should be realised that community transport can, in some instances, be an expensive solution and that it is difficult (and not very popular) to put a price on social need.

Process and Financing of Schemes

Potential applicants for funding should discuss their project with the officer responsible for community transport, whether the application is to be centrally funded or funded via the Area Committee. Proposals should meet as many of the above criteria as possible, and should reach a minimum score (as determined by applying a matrix system to the criteria) to determine whether a project is supported or not. The matrix should allow the overall merit of a scheme to be taken into account, rather than being totally statistically based.

Those looking for support should not view the Council as the main funder for their project as, already stated, this is not the Council's role. Therefore evidence of adequate funding should be illustrated. Appendix 2 gives more detail on funding options.

Bibliography

The State of the Countryside 2020. The Countryside Agency, 2005.

Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion. ODPM, 2003.

Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2006 – 2011, Strategic Environmental Assessment Environment Report. WCC, 2005 (unpublished).

Review of Voluntary Transport. Steer, Gleave & Davis, 1999.

Voluntary Sector Transport Provision. A report prepared as part of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Accessible Transport Study. Beecham and Associates. 1995.

Wiltshire and Swindon Link Schemes: An Introduction. Link Project, undated.

The Future of Transport - White Paper. DfT, 2004.

Appendix 1.

Community Transport Scheme Funding 2005/06

Table 2 below summarises those community transport schemes operating in the District and the level (if any) of funding from the Council for the financial year 2005/06.

Scheme	Funded
Link Schemes	£10,500 annually
Link Project	£5,000 annually from 2004/05
Thamesdown & District Dial a Ride	£2,000 in 2004/05 & £3,000 in 2005/06
Wiltshire Rural Transport Partnership	£3,000 annually
Wootton Bassett Hub	Nil
Calne Community Area Transport (Calne CAT)	Two separate grants from Area Committee totalling £2,150
Calne Area Transport	Nil*
Cartmell Community Minibus	Nil*

Chippenham & District Transport for the Disabled	Nil*
Lyneham Community Bus	Nil*
Malmesbury & District Community Transport	Nil*
Purton & District Age Concern Minibus	Nil*

Table 2: Council Funding for community transport schemes Operating in North Wiltshire. *May have received funding from Area Committee in the past for capital expenditure i.e. minibus purchase.

Appendix 2

Funding Options

The Council aims to continue supporting the Link Schemes, the Link Project and the WRTP at the current levels, subject to the overall budgetary situation and contractual obligations. This funding currently totals £18,850 per annum (subject to an annual inflationary rise) and accounts for all of the community transport budget (excluding the temporary funding of TDDARCT at £3,000 for 2005/06). This does not leave any central funds for new schemes that may come forward in the future that the Council would like to assist and therefore limits flexibility during any given financial year. Therefore, this Policy recommends that more funds should be made available to support schemes. As it is unlikely that a budget growth bid would be successful in the current financial climate (although bids should be made) then another source needs to be identified. The most likely source would be the bus revenue support budget which currently stands (2005/06) at £47,600. This money is paid to Wiltshire County Council to support unviable (commercially speaking) bus services in the District e.g. evening services. Small amounts of funds (to a maximum of £3,000) could be vired from this budget to support community transport schemes without affecting the funding of bus services significantly. If no schemes were forth coming in the year then the full £47,600 would be paid to Wiltshire County Council. This would allow two potential internal sources of funding:

- Area Committees – revenue (currently £10,000 per annum) and capital (currently £40,000 per annum) for one-off projects
- Central funds – revenue; either for one-off or continuing projects

In future years budgetary constraints may diminish allowing even more flexibility without having to rely on making virements from other budgets.