

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**12<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2008**

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**COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY TRANSPORT FUNDING****Purpose of Report**

1. To inform the Committee of the current position regarding funding for community and voluntary transport, as requested at a previous meeting.

**Background**

2. At the meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008 the Committee considered a report 'Transport Whole Service Inspection Action Plan – Update'. This included mention of various actions relating to developing the capacity of community transport, (CT) and it was noted that there was a risk to the continued progress of these activities as a consequence of the possible loss of South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA) funding. During the discussion Members asked (among other things) for a report to a future meeting about the current position regarding funding.
3. Members also asked for a separate report about the coverage and future development of Link schemes, and this (including an update about the funding situation regarding Link and other voluntary car schemes) was presented to Committee on 27th March. To avoid duplication, the present report does not therefore deal again with Link and voluntary car scheme funding, and refers only to other forms of community transport.

**Community Transport Services and Coverage**

4. The term 'community transport' can cover a wide range of types of service, including any form of transport service that is operated by a local community or voluntary group on a not-for-profit basis. In Wiltshire there are (in addition to voluntary car/Link schemes) five main types of services offered in various parts of the county, as listed below. Overall there are over 20 schemes in operation, between them providing for around 250,000 passenger trips a year for nearly 20,000 individuals, and details of these can be found on the Wiltshire Community Transport website [www.wiltshirecommunitytransport.org.uk](http://www.wiltshirecommunitytransport.org.uk).
  - (i) **Community Buses** – these are regular minibus services which can be used by members of the general public, operating set routes to a timetable like an ordinary bus service, but generally with a relatively low frequency (typically shopper's buses running on certain days of the week only). There are currently 3 community buses in operation in Wiltshire, each covering a single village; Urchfont, Seend and Ramsbury.

- (ii) **Community Transport** – these services are provided using minibuses to offer transport to individuals without access to public or private transport on specific journeys, for example for disabled or elderly people to luncheon clubs or for days out. These services also include ‘shopper buses’ for registered individuals without access to transport.

The type of people that are carried is defined by the social purpose for which the group has been set up - typically elderly and disabled people, although it is possible to specify other target groups including young people, or even anyone without access to alternative transport. The services are often provided door-to-door to accommodate the needs of the passengers that are carried.

- (iii) **Group Transport** - whereby community minibuses are made available to community groups (e.g. sports clubs, schools, scouts, W.I. clubs etc.) for a consideration.

Community and Group transport are the most common types of CT service in Wiltshire, with 19 groups currently running these types of service. Examples include Devizes PHAB, Calne Community Transport, Community Transport South Wiltshire (formerly Salisbury District CT) and the Tisbus.

- (iv) **Dial-a-Ride** – this service uses minibuses or accessible cars to provide a door-to-door on-demand service (either at any time or within specified periods) for individual people with disabilities or difficulties with mobility to allow them to travel to everyday activities such as work, shopping or visiting friends. They are typically found in urban areas, and due to the greater distances and less concentrated demand are very expensive to provide in more rural areas. Swindon Dial-a-Ride provide a service covering the whole of Swindon Borough, which also extends to cover Purton, Lydiard and Broad Hinton in Wiltshire.

- (v) **Wheels to Work** – these schemes provide mopeds and associated equipment on loan to people without alternative transport to help them either onto the employment ‘ladder’ for the first time or into employment having been out of work for some time.

The loan is charitable and is usually for a limited period (e.g. six months) to allow the individual time to make other more permanent travel arrangements. A countywide scheme run by Community First (known as Wiltshire Wheels to Work) was set up in Wiltshire in August 2006, and is currently using 24 mopeds to assist people without transport to access work or work-based training.

Since the scheme started, it has supported 170 people to access employment or vocational training and over two-thirds of those provided with a moped have stayed on in work or job training having returned their bike back to the scheme.

The scheme also has a strong link to the Wiltshire Credit Unions, and users are encouraged to save with them to allow them to purchase their own moped at the end of the loan period. Currently over 60% of the individuals provided with a loaned moped via the Wiltshire Wheels to Work scheme have saved sufficient funds to purchase their own transport when the support from the Wiltshire Wheels to Work scheme finishes.

## **Community Transport Development Work**

5. The Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2006/07 – 2010/11 recognises that CT plays an important role in meeting a range of needs that cannot be met by conventional public transport, and that its potential role is likely to grow as rural services become more dispersed and the increasing elderly population leads to a rise in the number of people with mobility difficulties. Although existing schemes provide a very valuable service, there is scope to expand their geographical coverage and the range of people for whom they can provide a service so that they can meet a wider range of needs. There may also be scope for them to take over the operation of some existing public transport services, although given the level of commitment that would be involved in running a comparatively frequent service this is likely to be relatively limited.
6. The Local Transport Bill currently being debated in Parliament includes some relaxations of the licensing regime that applies to CT (in particular to allow the use of paid drivers on community bus services) and this may provide an opportunity for some groups to expand their services.
7. There is therefore an ongoing need for work in CT development, covering:
  - Support for existing schemes to ensure that they are well-run, effective and financially sustainable, and to encourage them to broaden their horizons to take on new opportunities for growth and expansion
  - Encouraging existing schemes to work more closely together – for example CT and Link schemes working together to share information on local needs and how best to meet them
  - Encouraging the development of new schemes where appropriate to fill gaps in provision or to meet local needs that cannot be met in other ways.
8. In many counties, such work has traditionally been the responsibility of the County Council Passenger Transport team. However, in Wiltshire the CT development role has historically been carried out by Community First, taking advantage of its knowledge and experience of community development, its ability to access external funding from sources that may not always be available to the local authority, and because of the synergy with the Link scheme development work which originated with Community First.
9. The current arrangements in Community First originated in 1998, when new Government funding was made available (channelled through the Countryside Agency) to set up Rural Transport Partnerships (RTP) and to fund community-based projects to improve rural transport. When the Countryside Agency was disbanded in 2005, its budgets were transferred to the Regional Development Agencies. After a period of uncertainty, the SW RDA confirmed that it would continue to fund some of the previous RTP activity and that bids for transport and access projects would be considered under the 'Modernising Rural Delivery' (MRD) funding stream. Funding from this source has been used to underpin Community First's ongoing work in community transport development.

10. Examples of the sort of activities that have been funded by SW RDA are:
- **Community Transport Development** – funding for the CT development worker, including provision of support and advice to individual CT groups; training activities for CT groups; assistance with volunteer recruitment; encouragement to develop alternative income streams and new services; support for the development of the Wiltshire and Swindon Community Transport Association; working to develop CT ‘hubs’ in Malmesbury, Warminster and Devizes; holding an annual CT conference; investigating use of community minibuses for extended schools activities.
  - **Wheels to Work** – 90% funding to set up the Wiltshire Wheels to Work scheme.
  - **Melksham Community Transport** – funding for a new minibus to expand the services provided by the CT group in Melksham.
  - **Link Scheme Development** – funding for development work to set up two new Link schemes.

### **Funding Issues and Risks**

11. Funding for the operation of the existing CT minibus schemes is relatively stable. The groups each run as independent charities, drawing income from a variety of sources including passenger fares and group hires, fundraising and charitable donations, and in some cases income from contract operation. Wiltshire County Council provides an annual grant of up to £5,250 per vehicle providing various qualifying conditions are met, including a requirement to operate at least 120 miles per week on CT work. There are currently 17 vehicles in receipt of grant, operated by 10 separate groups, with a total grant expenditure of £79,000 per annum. Some schemes also receive grant funding from their local District Council, and it will be important to identify these grants and ensure that they continue under ‘One Council’. Kennet District Council have traditionally taken a particularly proactive approach to funding community minibuses, including a policy of providing replacement vehicles when required, and there may be an issue with this in future as the same has not applied to schemes in the other Districts. There is also some concern among CT groups that the current Review of Voluntary Sector Funding may lead to changes in the way CT Grants are administered that could make them more difficult to access and increase the administrative burden on small groups.
12. Funding for the ongoing community development work undertaken by Community First is more problematic. A significant proportion of funding has in the past come from the Countryside Agency and later SW RDA. However, the MRD programme ended on 31st March 2008 and the SW RDA has indicated that it will no longer fund the continuation of previous RTP activity. Funding for 2008-09 has been secured through match funding contributions from existing partners (primarily the County and District Councils), use of accumulated reserves, and a special transition payment from WCC. Efforts are continuing to secure ongoing funding for future years, referring in particular to the contribution it will make to the new Local Area Agreement (LAA) ambition for Stronger and More Resilient Communities.

13. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure external funding for ongoing core activities and it is likely that it will fall to Wiltshire Council to provide the majority of the funding needed to allow this important activity to continue. The shortfall, assuming that existing County and District Council funding continues post 'One Council', is around £40,000. This has been identified as a budget pressure in the Medium Term Financial Plan.
14. Funding for new project development will also be increasingly difficult in future. The new SW RDA funding streams replacing MRD are focussed primarily on economic rather than social objectives, and initial indications are that there will be very few opportunities to bid successfully for transport and access projects. Whilst it has always been difficult to develop sustainable bids for transport projects given that RTP and then MRD funding were time-limited, the absence of any identifiable alternative source of funding will limit the scope for pump-priming or piloting new approaches. Development activity will therefore have to increasingly focus on building sustainable extensions to the activities of existing schemes.
15. There is a particular issue concerning funding for Wheels to Work. The project was initially set up with 90% funding from SW RDA, initially for 2 years but with an 'in principle' agreement to extend this for a further year. The project was therefore set up in the expectation that it would have three years to develop a continuation strategy. However, SW RDA subsequently announced that funding would in fact end after 2 years on 31st March 2008. Although progress has been made with identifying two potential alternative sources of funding from 2009 onwards, there remains a funding gap of £35,000 in 2008-09 which has so far been impossible to fill from external sources.

## **Conclusions**

16. Community transport in Wiltshire provides for around 250,000 passenger trips a year by nearly 20,000 individuals, on community minibus, community/group transport, dial-a-ride and wheels to work schemes. Many of the schemes in operation are relatively small scale and cater for the local needs of particular groups within the community, particularly elderly, disabled and mobility impaired people. They often provide an essential means of access for people who have no other means of getting around, and as such are highly valued by those who use them. Apart from Wiltshire Wheels to Work, funding for these existing schemes is relatively stable but there are concerns about the potential impact of 'One Council' and the current Review of Voluntary Sector funding.
17. There is scope for CT to play a wider role in the future, although this will require a considerable amount of development work and capacity building over a long period of time. This work is being carried out by Community First, and there are questions over how this will be funded in the medium to long term now that previous SW RDA/Countryside Agency funding is no longer available. Community transport development is an important element of the Council's Public Transport Strategy (part of the LTP) and also supports key ambitions of the new LAA. It will be important to ensure that the work is able to continue.

18. Funding for the relatively new Wheels to Work scheme is currently at greatest risk following the unexpected ending of funding from the SW RDA in March 2008. Potential funding sources for 2009 onwards have been identified, but there is currently a funding gap of £35,000 in 2008-09 that it has so far not been possible to fill from external sources. Every effort is being made to bridge the gap so that the scheme is able to continue meanwhile.

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**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:**

Various documents held in Passenger Transport Unit.