

Introduction

Community and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services play an important role in enhancing accessibility and social inclusion and so will play a key part in helping to achieve the County Council's Local Transport Plan objectives. This document, which supports the Local Transport Plan, sets out how the County Council will work with its partners to ensure that community and DRT services are sustained and improved so as to meet the needs of the people of Hampshire, especially those who are isolated or disadvantaged in other ways.

Conventional bus services meet the needs of many people but there is a substantial minority who need a more specialised or individual service, for example disabled people or people who live in the more remote rural areas but who still need access to services such as healthcare, shopping and employment. Community transport and other flexible or 'demand responsive' transport services help to meet their needs.

The approach described in this document is intended to be a 'living document', which evolves over time. This will ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the organisations and individuals who use and run community and demand responsive transport services in Hampshire.

What is community transport?

The definition is quite broad. It generally means transport provided by the voluntary and community sector but not necessarily using volunteers. Some larger schemes employ paid staff. The schemes are many and varied and include:

- Car schemes – where volunteers use their own cars to provide transport, often to hospital or healthcare appointments.
- Minibus schemes – where community groups such as Age Concern or the Scouts own or use a minibus to provide transport for groups of people.
- Group hire minibus schemes – where an organisation such as a Council of Voluntary Service owns a pool of minibuses that are available for hire to local community groups.
- Community bus schemes – where timetabled local bus services in rural communities are operated and driven entirely by volunteers.
- Wheels to Work schemes – where mopeds are loaned to young people so they can gain access to employment or training opportunities.

What is demand responsive transport?

It covers any form of transport that generally is booked in advance and only runs in response to requests. Taxis are one form of demand responsive transport (DRT), other examples include:

- Dial-a-Ride – provides door to door transport specifically for older and disabled people.
- Call and Go – similar to Dial-a-Ride but aimed more specifically at older and disabled people and those who do not have their own transport or a suitable bus service.
- Cango – this is one of Hampshire’s own brand of DRT services, using low floor wheelchair accessible buses. Each journey has a start and finish point but where the bus goes in between depends on who has booked to travel and where they need to be picked up and dropped off. As well as being prebooked journeys can be made from a fixed stopping point.
- Schemes using taxis or private hire cars. Booked in advance by passengers these schemes are useful where it is no longer cost effective to replace lightly used bus services.

The need for a new approach

The need for a new approach arose partly from the Best Value review of Passenger Transport, where it became clear that while the County Council’s approach to supporting and developing community transport was thought to be soundly based, there was a need to set this down in a reference document and to explore further some of the issues that had arisen during the review.

In thinking about the County Council’s approach to community transport and the more recent involvement in DRT a number of questions arose that clearly needed answers:

- How big a role should community transport and DRT play in the overall mix of passenger transport services?
- How can the County Council ensure good value for money, especially when funding Dial-a-Ride and DRT services?
- How can the County Council work best with its partners to support and develop community transport and DRT?
- How can the County Council assess its need for new schemes and services?
- Where should resources be concentrated? What should the priorities be?

- How can the County Council stimulate innovation and encourage the adoption of best practice?
- Should the County Council enhance the range of advice, guidance and training it offers to community transport providers?

The approach will guide the County Council for the next five to ten years. It sets out how the County Council can use its expertise and funding, in partnership with other organisations, to improve transport services and better meet the needs of local people.

Who should be involved in developing the approach?

It is important that the approach represents the views not just of the County Council, but also of partner organisations and the public at large. Accordingly the County Council will be consulting widely and taking on board the comments of others before adopting the approach in its final form.

There are a number of stakeholders who have a key role in developing the approach and in funding and supporting its implementation:

- Hampshire County Council.
- District councils.
- Primary Care Trusts.
- External funding agencies.
- Local Strategic Partnerships.
- Community transport operators.
- Other transport operators including bus and taxi companies.
- Users who have a key role to play in planning and monitoring services, particularly from a perspective of local needs and service quality.

Clearly mechanisms will have to be developed to ensure that all of these partners are engaged in the development and implementation of the approach.

Policy context

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Clearly the approach to community transport needs to contribute to the County Council's second Local Transport Plan which sets out the overall strategy for transport. It also needs to relate to the Corporate Strategy which sets out the County Council's overall aims in delivering services to Hampshire's residents and businesses.

Links to the second Local Transport Plan

The overall vision for the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) is of a transport strategy that:

“Enhances quality of life and economic prosperity by connecting people, communities, employment, goods, services and amenities.”

Four of the seven LTP2 objectives are of particular relevance to passenger transport and, in turn, to the Community Transport and DRT Approach. These are:

- To increase accessibility.
- To widen travel choice.
- To support wider quality of life objectives.
- To encourage value for money and efficient asset management.

These objectives will be achieved by a balanced approach that seeks to meet the needs of all residents. The core philosophy of the LTP2 is that transport problems should be addressed by a process to reduce, manage and invest. In the context of community transport and DRT this means:

Reduce: Reduce unnecessary duplication of transport services, for example by enabling a rural Dial-a-Ride service to take the place of a lightly used bus service, by widening its eligibility criteria for use.

Manage: Improve the utilisation of existing vehicle fleets, for example by making use of vehicles which would otherwise lie idle at certain times of day.

Invest: Where areas of deprivation have been identified and where community transport and DRT could have a clear role to play in enhancing accessibility and social inclusion, to invest in additional vehicle resources and/or revenue support of services, in partnership with other funding agencies.

Links to wider corporate objectives

The work of community and DRT services supports the aims and priorities of the County Council's Corporate Strategy:

- Aim 1 - Maximising Life Opportunities
- Aim 4 - Building Strong and Safe Communities
- Aim 5 - Improving Services

It will also contribute towards the key themes of the Hampshire's Community Strategy - “innovation, added value and action”.

The approach will also help to deliver the aim of the Environment Department that links to the Corporate Strategy, which is to “develop the quality of life for everyone by linking spaces, improving places and sustaining resources”.

Accessibility and Accession

Improving accessibility is a key objective of the Local Transport Plan. This reflects the Government's wish that inadequate transport should not lead to the social exclusion of groups of people. It is important to realise that transport is not an end in itself, it is a means of reaching the facilities and services we need to carry out our daily lives: access to employment, education, shops and healthcare, for example. For some people these facilities may be within walking distance but for most people transport will be needed to access some or all. To try to measure access and highlight problem areas the Government sponsored the development of a computer software package called Accession. This can produce accessibility scores and illustrate where there needs to be an improvement in accessibility. Local authorities are expected to use Accession and to develop an Accessibility Strategy to show how they will tackle problem areas and improve their accessibility scores.

Clearly community transport and DRT have a significant role to play in improving accessibility, especially for people who may otherwise be socially excluded, such as older and disabled people, those living in isolated areas, people who need to get to healthcare appointments and young people who need to access training and employment opportunities. Accessibility and Accession will clearly influence the development of the Passenger Transport Approach and in particular the Community Transport and DRT Approach. Accession will highlight the problem areas, where facilities cannot easily be reached and where the conventional passenger transport network cannot readily meet the needs. It may be that community transport and DRT are already meeting these needs to some extent or it may be that new schemes need to be developed to target specific needs.

Current position and key issues

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This section looks at current community transport and DRT provision, the County Council's role, and highlights the current issues and opportunities that the approach will need to take account of.

Existing provision

Hampshire has a very active and well developed community and DRT sector in comparison with other shire counties. This is in part due to the partnership approach which the authority has developed in this area since the early 1980s. The sector is diverse with a wide range of organisations providing transport in the county, this includes:

Community transport – key facts:

- Over 100 voluntary organisations use volunteers driving their own cars to provide individual passenger journeys. These schemes provide over 100,000 passenger trips per year.
- Over 450 minibuses are owned and operated by voluntary organisations, local schools and colleges experienced at meeting their own transport needs, which can be available for other groups to hire or borrow.
- Community transport schemes in each district council area provide a pool of ‘group hire’ accessible minibuses. These offer affordable transport to local groups. Many of these schemes also operate Dial-a-Ride services and provide transport to day clubs and day care facilities, either for voluntary or statutory day care providers.
- Two ‘wheels to work’ schemes in the New Forest and Test Valley enable young people to access training and employment opportunities.

DRT – key facts:

- 10 Dial-a-Ride services provide door to door transport for older and disabled people who cannot use conventional bus services. Services provide over 90,000 passenger trips per year.
- Two Call and Go services provide transport for people who meet the criteria for using Dial-a-Ride and for other members of the public who do not have access to a conventional bus service.
- Six Cango demand responsive services provide registered local bus services to the general public. They are operated by commercial bus operators.
- 11 taxi share schemes providing journey opportunities in those areas where demand is low and a fixed route regular bus service is not sustainable

Community transport services are provided solely by organisations in the voluntary and community sector, whilst DRT services are provided through a mixture of community transport and commercial operators.

Support from the County Council

Hampshire has a long history of providing funding, support and guidance to this sector and the authority is recognised nationally as both a leader and innovator through its approaches which have included:

- A structured system of support for Dial-a-Ride services utilising a mixture of service level agreements with community transport providers and a small number of contracts with commercial operators.

- Development of the nationally recognised training schemes, including the Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS).
- A strong advisory and enabling function provided by a specialist team within the Passenger Transport Group, to support and develop the community transport and DRT sector.
- Development of Cango services with a strong brand image and effective marketing.

This has led to a wide range of voluntary and commercial organisations providing transport in the county, many with financial assistance from the County Council. In many cases, the activities of these providers offer flexible and cost effective solutions which respond to the specific needs of people living in the local community. Together these voluntary schemes and their respective commercial providers play an important role in the overall transport mix in Hampshire and complement the work of the conventional transport market (bus, rail and ferry).

Issues for community transport services

Whilst Hampshire County Council has a long history of providing funding, support and guidance there are nevertheless a number of issues which need to be addressed:

- There is substantial geographical inequity of community transport provision. In general, urban areas tend to be well served, rural areas much less so.
- The lack of a coherent approach for developing community transport facilities in those areas which are currently poorly served or which need refocusing.
- Provision is not well matched to need, owing to the way in which schemes have developed over time, often due to initiatives undertaken by local community groups.
- There is currently no needs-based rationale for how the County Council's community transport budget should be allocated – an approach should be developed to link funding priorities to needs and value for money.
- The lack of long-term stability of funding. Some schemes receive ongoing support towards their infrastructure costs from the financial supporters whilst other do not, often for historical reasons. Some schemes are hampered by funding that is short-term or has to be reapplied for on an annual basis.
- Some schemes have been forced to withdraw minibuses, reducing journey opportunities in their area, because the finance has not been available to replace these vehicles.

- Many of the voluntary transport groups which use volunteers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit them. A more coordinated approach is required to the recruitment, training and use of volunteer drivers.
- The need to engage with the health sector as many community transport journeys are health related. There could be a case for funding from health agencies

Issues for DRT services

Many forms of DRT services in Hampshire represent the County Council's more innovative approach to providing passenger transport services but nevertheless there are a number of issues associated with the provision of these services in the longer term. DRT includes a range of different transport services, each with different issues:

- There is an inequity of Dial-a-Ride provision with urban areas having services on at least five days a week, whilst rural areas generally have an infrequent service, primarily resourced by volunteers. The inequity also exists in terms of the choice of journey destinations. Providing a service which meets people's needs whilst at the same time is cost effective is a challenging balance to maintain.
- A longer term approach for providing Cango services needs to be developed. Whilst very effective in terms of strong brand image, public awareness, accessibility and social inclusion, these services have significantly higher costs than conventional bus services. There is a need to learn from the experience to date – what makes a scheme successful?

Opportunities for community transport and DRT services

There are a number of opportunities which merit detailed investigation:

- Potentially greater use of **taxi based transport** schemes, particularly in deep rural areas. As the use of taxis and private hire cars for demand responsive services usually only incurs costs when journeys need to run, taxi based DRT can offer a greater choice of journey times, giving more journey opportunities and better access to facilities, at comparable costs to an infrequent conventional bus service.
- Opportunities for **closer working with the health sector** in arranging transport. Primary Care Trusts are now responsible for commissioning the non emergency patient transport services to routine hospital admissions, out-patients appointments and day hospitals. The County Council, through its Passenger Transport Group, arranges transport for many Social Services clients. Clearly there could be benefits through coordination of these two roles. Related to this, a significant number of community transport journeys in Hampshire are to hospitals or GPs and so consequently the community

transport sector as a whole is helping to meet the objectives of the health agencies. An approach could also be used to help make the case for funding from this statutory sector.

- Opportunities for larger group hire minibus schemes to set up ‘trading arms’ and bid for work in the commercial sector. Under these arrangements, Community Transport schemes could set up separate business units, obtain Public Service Vehicle Operator’s licences and bids for contract work, such as home to school transport or local bus services. This would help them to generate additional income and help to spread their overheads. In certain areas of Hampshire there is a shortage of wheelchair accessible minibuses so additional contractors would help the County Council and other statutory agencies, as well as benefiting the groups financially.

The approach

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The section looks at the actual approach itself. The aim of the approach is “to promote a vibrant, innovative community transport and DRT sector, offering a range of transport services that respond to local needs, enhance social inclusion and offer value for money”.

Key principles

The approach itself is guided by a number of key principles:

- To ensure that the role of community transport and DRT within the overall mix of passenger transport services is clearly recognised and complements that of conventional bus and train services.
- To ensure that the provision of community transport and DRT more closely matches the needs of local communities and enhances social inclusion.
- To provide the community transport sector with a sound basis for future service development through:
 - Long-term secure funding to help meet core infrastructure costs, underpinned by service level agreements.
 - Access to high quality advice, information and guidance.
- To ensure that the commercial sector provides a full and effective part in providing innovative transport services.
- To stimulate innovation and encourage the adoption of best practice.
- To develop effective partnerships with other stakeholders, including funding partnerships

- To monitor the effectiveness of the services provided in terms of passenger use, service quality and value for money.
- To ensure that consultation with stakeholders forms an integral part of the ongoing development and implementation of the approach and the local action plans that arise from it.

Objectives

In order to meet the aim of the approach and the key principles the County Council has identified a number of objectives which are as follows:

- To improve accessibility in Hampshire by offering travel opportunities which are not available through conventional services, for groups and individuals which enable people, regardless of age, access to retail, health, training, employment, leisure and social activities.
- To assist the County Council's corporate objective to "promote involvement, participation and partnership to achieve the development of strong communities in Hampshire".
- To set out a developmental policy for community transport and DRT services in Hampshire.
- To identify and confirm the links between the various statutory functions and community transport.
- To establish a framework which will ensure a sustainable funding and support structure for community transport and DRT schemes and assist them in the delivery of services to improve accessibility and reduce social exclusion, particularly for disadvantaged groups.
- To ensure that the outcomes contribute towards achieving the overall objectives and targets in the County Council's second Local Transport Plan.
- To establish a framework for evaluating community transport performance and value for money

At a practical level, the approach will need to:

- Identify gaps (modal, geographical, service level) in current provision.
- Ensure that the appropriate infrastructure (vehicles, administrative and support structure) is in place to sustain the required current and future service levels.
- Be structured so that it enables financial support from different partners.

At the core of any support system will be a reference to needs. It is a commonly stated intention of community transport that it should be 'needs led'. So the challenge is to set out an overall vision, both for Hampshire as a whole and for the sub-divisions within it, be they districts or health areas, which makes it clear to the community transport sector what the financial supporters priorities are.

Delivering the approach

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This section looks at those actions which will be taken to implement the approach.

How the County Council will deliver the approach

The County Council will deliver the approach through the following actions:

Developing a strong community transport infrastructure which can act as a catalyst for providing, developing and coordinating transport services. This will involve:

- Setting up, supporting and developing a district-wide community transport scheme in each district council area.
- Resourcing the employment of paid staff to organise these schemes.
- Providing funds towards the costs of purchasing new and replacement minibuses.

Supporting the replacement of existing and the acquisition of new minibuses based at districtwide community transport schemes and other local transport schemes using monies available from the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme. The Community Transport Development Plan, amongst other things, proposes the number of vehicles that should be available on a district wide basis to meet the identified need. Available monies will be allocated on an annual basis taking into account:

- The age/profile of the vehicle fleet currently owned by schemes.
- The level of need identified in the development plan.
- The opportunities to develop the sector as a whole.
- As many schemes as possible should benefit.

Developing and supporting the operation of transport services including:

- Joint funding Dial-a-Ride/Call and Go schemes with district councils.
- Grant aiding voluntary car schemes.

- Contributing towards the replacement of vehicles for Community Bus Schemes provided by local volunteers.
- Supporting “Wheels to Work” and other schemes for young people.
- Supporting demand responsive transport services.
- Facilitating the provision of education and social care contract work by community transport schemes.

The value of contributing with other partners towards the costs of providing and enhancing the availability of Dial-a-Ride, and in particular community transport services which provide semi scheduled accessible transport services to public destinations such as shopping centres, is seen as a key approach.

- Allocating funding for schemes in the longer term, for example on a rolling three or five year basis, to ensure the sustainability of these schemes and encourage operators to invest in the service.
- Working with the community transport sector to provide safe, cost effective and quality transport services through:
 - Providing advice, information and support through the Community Transport Team.
 - Offering training opportunities through schemes like Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS), Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) and other bespoke training events.
 - Promoting good practice through various publications and training forums.
 - Continuing to develop good quality training schemes like MiDAS and PATS will be key actions.

By promoting coordination in the sector and with other sectors through:

- Identifying and developing opportunities for brokerage, eg minibuses, bookings procedures, combining services, etc.
- Working with county-wide schemes which support local car schemes eg Care Group Advisory Service.
- Developing opportunities for joined-up working with health, education and social services.
- Exploring with district-wide community transport schemes the role which they could play in providing transport under contract to help the County Council meet its social care and educational responsibilities.
- Maintaining the Travel Demand Centre in Winchester to facilitate the development of new demand responsive transport services and improve the cost efficiency of existing services.

Increasing the general awareness of services provided by the community transport sector through the:

- Continued production of Getting About Guides.
- Development of the Passenger Transport Group website.
- Use of local media.

Use the Accession model, the results of the Area Passenger Transport Reviews and the Community Transport Development Plan needs assessment and funding to review the scope for either developing or rationalising community transport services on a district by district basis. This will include:

- Mapping the current provision.
- Liaising with local communities regarding their perceived needs and gaps in current provision.
- Examining the appropriate balance between public bus and community transport services taking into account value for money factors.
- Identifying any scope for rationalisation.
- Highlighting the need for additional services.
- Identifying any appropriate alternatives for delivering existing services.

By gaining the support of and working in partnership with other potential partners who will benefit from a more developed community transport sector and consequently an improved wider transport network in Hampshire.

To work with others partners to streamline service delivery and identify other potential funding streams. For example the selection of Hampshire as the Rural Pathfinder for the South East of England in October 2004 will bring together local stakeholders to develop simpler, more effective, means to deliver local public services in rural areas. Creating sustainable and successful rural communities, and tackling disadvantage and social exclusion will create a crucial role for rural transport. Local Area Agreements provide a further opportunity for practical partnership working.

Developing a funding approach for Cango to ensure the sustainability of existing services and to explore other opportunities where appropriate and cost effective.

Developing an effective system for monitoring the performance of community transport services against the Community Transport Approach and Passenger Transport Approach. Comprehensive service agreements have been in place with Dial a Ride schemes for a number of years now. A similar system will be developed for district-wide community transport schemes. A reporting system is also being developed to capture the journeys provided as a whole by the sector to monitor the progress of this.

Recognising that resources for passenger transport are always limited, therefore it is essential to continue to ensure value for money and improve service quality through:

- Helping schemes consolidate and develop so that they can deliver scale efficiencies.
- Supporting innovation through challenge funding.
- Identifying and supporting investment to save opportunities, particularly in the field of information and communication technology Providing an efficiency and value for money benchmark framework against which scheme progress can be measured.
- Extending the Service Level Agreement system across the CT sector and introducing new Conditions of Contract for DRT services.
- Regular testing of services in the commercial market, to ensure that the CT sector maintains its competitiveness, but also to identify the potential for greater involvement of the taxi sector in service delivery.
- Central coordination of staff and volunteer training, both for frontline staff and for management.
- A focus on improved vehicle utilisation, both within schemes and between schemes. A particular emphasis will be played on the potential for CT vehicles to be fully utilised at weekday morning and evening travel peaks.
- Ensuring that equalities are an integral part of the ethos and service delivery of Community Transport and DRT.
- Developing a system of whole project environmental assessment for Community Transport and DRT schemes in Hampshire, and supporting changes to vehicles and operation that will minimise any negative impact on the environment.

Monitoring and maintaining the approach

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‘Maintaining the approach’ means a number of things. In particular it means ensuring that the approach:

- Assures effective delivery and value for money.
- Delivers the planned outcomes.

- Delivers measurable improvements in community transport and DRT provision.
- Makes effective use of resources and delivers value for money services.
- Reflects the changing needs and priorities of service users and stakeholders – ie it evolves over time and is a ‘living approach’.
- Is effectively publicised to ensure community and stakeholder involvement in its on going development.

Assuring effective delivery and value for money

One of the guiding principles of the Community Transport and DRT Approach is making effective use of available resources. To do so needs a framework for monitoring and evaluation that:

- Measures value for money
- Monitors performance against targets
- Monitors progress against objectives
- Evaluates and reviews progress, looks at what has worked well and what has not and suggests how the approach needs to evolve

Stakeholder involvement

It will be important for the approach to have the full support of all the stakeholders involved in the planning, provision, funding and use of community transport and DRT services.

Involvement will take a number of forms:

- Input to the approach itself. This will continue until the approach is finalised and adopted. There has already been consultation with community transport schemes in the development of the needs assessment model for community transport.
- Consultation on the draft approach. This will take place once the draft approach has been approved in outline by the County Council. Consultation will be in accordance with the principles of the Hampshire Compact and will be accompanied by a questionnaire for people to express their views. Consultation will include community transport operators, commercial operators, user groups and a sample of users.
- Continued involvement through the development and implementation of local action plans.