



Community Transport Newsletter No.6 February 2021

TAS has provided expert advice, guidance and support for the CT sector for over 30 years. This general newsletter follows from our well-received COVID-19 coverage between April & September 2020. Please let us know of any items that might of interest to the wider CT sector.

COVID-19 Guidance for Ambulance Trusts

The NHS guidance for safe travel by ambulance was updated in late January and remains a useful baseline of good practice in so far as some details are applicable to CT services.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-ambulance-trusts/covid-19-guidance-for-ambulance-trusts>

DRT Pilot Project for Deeside and Inverurie

Grampian Online: "A revised approach to supported bus service delivery will come under scrutiny from [Aberdeenshire Council] councillors next week as the Passenger Transport Network Review Member Officer Working Group (MOWG) announces the results of its 'Clean Sheet Review' of the network. It is set to propose a revised approach for bus service delivery and a timeline for implementation which would involve the development of a Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) pilot project in Deeside and Inverurie... Following review of the pilot schemes, the service model would be expanded to other areas in

2022 and run through to 2023 with a service conversion period which would continue to support fixed route town services in major towns where appropriate and mainline corridor service enhancements where necessary. If the pilot projects prove successful it is proposed that a programme of conversion of timetabled feeder services to more comprehensive DRT feeder services be instigated. Linked to this where appropriate, the council would convert town services (primarily those in smaller towns) to DRT operation through integration of service delivery with the relevant wider catchment area DRT feeder service, retaining timetabled town services in larger towns where deemed best value. They would also only provide cross-country services where the benefits can be demonstrated to outweigh that achieved through the provision of more intensive DRT feeder services. They would however continue to provide dial-a-bus services and/or support Community Transport services where specific identified travel needs, for example of the mobility impaired, are not catered for by feeder or town services."

<https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/council-contemplates-changes-to-community-bus-services-224966/> See also:

<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/aberdeenshire/2836084/trial-of-uber-style-community-transport-booking-system-given-go-ahead-in-two-aberdeenshire-areas>



Increased Support for Isolated Rural Dwellers in NI

Coleraine Chronicle: "Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon and Rural Affairs Minister Edwin Poots have put measures in place to support isolated rural dwellers to access the COVID vaccine. Community transport operators funded by the Department for Infrastructure to deliver the Dial-A-Lift service, will have the flexibility to transport both members and non-members to their nearest vaccination centre for their scheduled COVID vaccine. Dial-A-Lift services provide essential services for vulnerable people living in rural

areas and are supported by the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme funded by the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs. Minister Mallon said: 'Community Transport Operators have demonstrated admirable agility in transitioning their services to meet the needs of their communities during the COVID response period. They have consistently stepped up to play their part in connecting our rural communities and now they will be able to support those communities again by transporting those with a transport need to their local COVID vaccination appointment. At this critical time in the fight against COVID-19 I want to do all I can to support wider efforts and this is a small but important way that I can support those who are among our most vulnerable. These are very difficult and worrying times. I continue to ask everyone to play their part and to follow all the public health advice and guidance on travel, social distancing and the wearing of face coverings. I will continue to play my part and work in partnership to find new solutions to the challenges our communities continue to face.' Minister Poots said: 'I am pleased, through my Department's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme, to support the transport of vulnerable rural dwellers to vaccine appointments, and to cover the cost of these appointment journeys undertaken by those in possession of a valid SmartPass. I urge everyone to keep their scheduled appointment and avail of the vaccine. The rollout of the vaccinations and adhering to the public health guidelines and restrictions is key to reducing the impact of COVID and will help us all return to normality as early as possible.'

<https://www.colerainechronicle.co.uk/news/2021/01/20/news/increased-support-for-isolated-rural-dwellers-12885/> See also:

<https://www.agriland.co.uk/farming-news/ni-to-provide-vaccination-centre-transport-for-isolated-rural-dwellers/> and <https://www.farminglife.com/country-and-farming/mcaleer-welcomes-covid-vaccination-plans-3132501>



Community Energy Funding helps TRIP Coordinate Thousands of Requests for Support

Exmouth Journal: "Loneliness-fighting Devon charity TRIP Community Transport has met over 4,000 requests for community support during the pandemic thanks in part to the Exeter Community Energy (ECO) community fund. ECO awarded TRIP, which coordinates transport requests for the Budleigh Voluntary Car Service, £500 to cover staffing costs from its community fund, which accepted new applications until 5pm Friday, January 15. 'The grant from ECO could not have come at a more important time for TRIP,' said TRIP deputy manager Sharon Thorne. 'The money has helped us keep the "doors open" and help the community during the current pandemic.' ECO chairman Andy Extance added: 'All our community fund recipients have faced unprecedented challenges this year, and ECO is proud to help them. Over the next 20 years ECO expects to give over £170,000 to local groups using income from our solar power generation sites.'"

<https://www.exmouthjournal.co.uk/news/trip-gets-500-boost-from-eco-6886384>



FACT Delighted Thanks to Generous Donation

Cambridge Times: The Fenland Association for Community Transport has received a generous donation to help continue supporting the elderly and vulnerable during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The Fenland Association of Community Transport, which has helped elderly and vulnerable people throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, has received a generous donation to keep its service going. The charity has received £1,000

from David Wilson Homes as part of its community fund scheme, a monthly initiative that supports local charities towards supporting their area. Nicola Christy, hub co-ordinator at FACT, said the charity is averaging 60-70 shops a day and hopes the grant can help them carry on their work. She said: "I think it is fantastic that a local business is willing to donate each month to help support the local community and improve the quality of life for those living in the area. So, a big thank you for donating to us, it means a lot to us and our members. We went above and beyond to make sure they were all OK and the donation from David Wilson Homes helps us continue."

<https://www.cambstimes.co.uk/news/fact-receives-generous-donation-6913832>



Community Transport West Sussex 7 COVID Vaccination Rollout

West Sussex County Times: "Horsham District Council's Community Development and Voluntary Sector Support says that volunteers have been helping in the Covid-19 vaccination rollout by taking up steward roles...Community Transport West Sussex are helping with transport to some vaccination sites and Horsham District Council is helping to plan for an increase in transport requirements. 'However,' [a] spokesman added: 'If any residents with a

scheduled vaccination appointment need transport to attend, the first point of contact should be their surgery to organise this."

<https://www.wscountytimes.co.uk/health/volunteers-flock-help-horshams-fight-against-coronavirus-3100393>



Community Wheels in Share of £3,000 raised by Christmas Appeal

Ledbury Reporter: "In one of the most difficult years any of us have known, we asked readers to join us in supporting seven local charities nominated by the county's mayors. [Among] the seven nominated charities were Leominster's Community Wheels...a vitally important community transport service, providing users of all ages and needs with door-to-door travel," said Cllr Clive Thomas, nominating the charity."

<https://www.ledburyreporter.co.uk/news/19014644.magnificent-seven-share-3-000-raised-christmas-appeal/>

Thanet Community Transport Association Appeal for Funds

Ile of Thanet News: "Thanet Community Transport is providing a transport service for those unable to get to a vaccine hub for their Covid injections. We are very keen to help as many people as possible including those who are unable to pay anything to get to the hub. Our costs do not go down but we feel it is critical to help everyone we can to prevent Covid. We have asked a minimal fee to those who can afford it but are trying to raise a little money to cover those who are finding things very difficult at these times of hardship. If you could help we would be so

very grateful and we will continue to support as many people as possible." Just Giving link:

https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/jayne-cribbs-1?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=Yimbyprojectpage&utm_content=jayne-cribbs-1&utm_campaign=projectpage-share-owner&utm_term=V9d5Q3Aba&fbclid=IwAR3crNVjPIy40e2KecZe-rDqkPbyb-xcw4bn6_ADJFBox_zKvxpAMqk6HnY
<https://theisleofthanetnews.com/2021/01/24/thanet-community-news-cakes-nhs-snack-bags-ramsgate-rotary-transport-fundraiserteen-business-award-and-appeal>

Meanwhile: "A total of 1,000 Covid vaccines were administered at Minster GP surgery yesterday (January 16) to patients aged over 80 from across Westgate Surgery, Minster Surgery, St Peter's Surgery, Birchington Medical Practice, Broadstairs Medical Practice and Ash Surgery...

Hundreds of patients were taken to the surgery by Thanet Community Transport. The company charges £3 each way anywhere in Thanet. Drivers will wait to take customers straight back home, Call 01843 602030."

<https://theisleofthanetnews.com/2021/01/17/amazing-gp-staff-vaccinate-1000-people-in-one-day-at-minster-surgery/>



Downham Market Coronavirus Vaccine Hub

Eastern Daily Press: Older people are being signposted to CT for transport to receive vaccinations Norfolk. Eastern Daily Press: "South West Norfolk MP Liz Truss announced today that Downham Market will have Covid-19 vaccine provision available next month. She added: 'If there are any over 80's still waiting to hear about their vaccine, I know that GPs and the CCG are currently working through their patient lists and you will be contacted either via letter or phone inviting you to a vaccine site. If there are any concerns in relation to transport, this should be raised at time of

booking and the option of community transport can be made available.'"

<https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/health/liz-truss-announces-vaccination-hub-downham-market-6924380>

Service Members Rate Cambridge Dial-a-Ride as 'Excellent'

In Your Area: "Providers of an essential minibus service transporting people with mobility issues in Cambridge, are delighted to report that it offers an 'excellent' service to its members. The 'not for profit' organisation, Cambridge Dial-a-Ride, carries out an annual customer survey, required as a condition of the grant it receives from Cambridgeshire County Council. This is to establish if the service offered is fit for purpose and whether operations could be enhanced in any way. Its latest survey, which was carried out during the last quarter of 2020, revealed that 91 per cent of members rated the service as 'excellent', 94 per cent stated that it was 'vital or very important' to them and 71 per cent quoted that Cambridge Dial-a-Ride gave them their independence and reduced feelings of isolation. Bill Hughes, chair of the charity, said: 'Although Cambridge Dial-a-ride had to suspend its services during the National Lockdowns implemented by the Government, it remains an invaluable service to its members. Our staff and volunteers work hard to ensure that our Community Transport Service is the best it can be, but seeing this in writing from our members themselves is both gratifying and rewarding for all the team at Cambridge Dial-a-Ride. These survey results are very welcoming particularly after what has been a very difficult time for many of our members who have been worried about using public transport due to the pandemic. We were very proactive during the first lockdown however, by quickly reconfiguring our bus layouts to allow for social distancing, installing screens behind the drivers, enhancing sanitising of seats and touch points, providing PPE and carrying out temperature screening before each journey.' Cambridge Dial-a-Ride is offering a reduced service at present to support the Government's 'Stay Home and Stay Safe' messaging, however, they are able to offer free transport to Covid-19 vaccination appointments to both members and non-

members who have difficulty with public transport due to age, infirmity or disability or do not have transport of their own. <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/service-members-rate-cambridge-mobility-transport-providers-as-excellent/>



CT & COVID Vaccinations in Wales

Penarth Times: "For residents in Penarth, Cogan and Llandough volunteer drivers for East Vale Community Transport (EVCT) are providing lifts for the vulnerable who have a vaccination appointment. For residents in Dinas Powys, Michaelston-le-Pit and St Andrews Major drivers are volunteering for Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern (DPVC). All drivers have been fully trained to be compliant with Covid-19 rules. EVCT's wheelchair-friendly minibuses have been adapted with Perspex screens between driver and passenger and are sanitised every journey. People who need personal assistance will need their own escorts, as drivers will not be able to accompany people into the surgery. EVCT coordinator Steve Thomas explained: 'Sadly Covid regulations have made our usual group trips impossible in the last months but we are now ready to take individuals and any escort to their local surgery for vaccinations. "We will need notice in order to organise your journey but drivers will be able to pick you up from your home and wait at the surgery before taking you back. We only ask for a donation to defray costs.' Despite their office at Murchfield Community Centre being badly flooded over Christmas, one of the DPVC organisers Cllr John Fanshaw says volunteers Judith Anderson and Wendy Lees have 'worked incredibly hard every single day' to make sure people can get to their vaccination appointments. 'We are

using two vehicles and we have plenty of Covid-trained volunteers driving people to Dinas Powys medical centre,' he said. 'The dedication of our volunteers has really blown me away.' <https://www.penarthtimes.co.uk/news/19031679.team-transporting-vulnerable-vaccines-penarth-vale/>



New CT Service in Carterton
Oxford Mail: "A new bus service is set to launch, linking a town centre with its outskirts. West Oxfordshire Community Transport (WOCT) has announced its Carterton Connector service will begin on March 2. The service will link the north and south edges of the town with the centre, via two new routes – the 345 North Circular and the 355 South Circular. The Carterton Connector becomes the third route offered by WOCT, a not-for-profit co-operative formed in 2017. It follows Witney Town Services and the 210 service, which links Witney to the Wychwoods. The two new Carterton routes, which are supported by Carterton Town Council, will begin at the Asda supermarket and will run hourly on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. The 345 route will depart on the hour from 9am to 1pm, and the 355 at 35 minutes past the hour from 9.35am to 12.35pm. WOCT director Margaret Burden said: 'This service has been such a long time coming. "After all the hard work put in by residents of the Carterton community and the support from Carterton Town Council, we are really excited that it is happening at last. Residents of Carterton – particularly those who do not have access to their own transport – will benefit from this route by linking them to essential services in Carterton town centre. We believe that a community where people are

interconnected is a strong and healthy one, and bus services are one of the keys for helping this to happen.' Carterton mayor Nick Leverton said: 'The new bus service will increase the mobility of our residents and will enable them to access our wide range of local shops and amenities, such as the library, local support groups, places of worship and the health centre.'

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19106918.new-bus-service-link-carterton-town-centre-outskirts/>



CTA Online AGM

Twitter: "A big thank you to everyone who joined us at this morning's Annual General Meeting - a great opportunity to talk about the amazing work our members have been doing over the last year and to look ahead at our plans to support the Community Transport sector over the next year."

<https://twitter.com/CTAUK1/status/1360180898767978497/photo/1> #CommunityTransport



CTA explains Permit exemptions here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq_DRxcGUqs



Free Transport to Vaccination Centres for Vulnerable Residents in Hinckley

Leicester Mercury: "Vulnerable residents in Hinckley can get free transport to their coronavirus vaccination. Local transport service Dial a Ride has joined forces with Hinckley & Bosworth Community Transport and Westfield Community Centre to respond to concerns about getting elderly and disabled relatives and neighbours to a vaccination centre. Lifts are available to centres in the area for those who otherwise would not be able to attend.

A vaccination hub is running at Hinckley Leisure Centre as well as at all 132 GP practices across Leicestershire and Rutland. You do not need to book in your vaccination as you will be notified by your doctor.

Councillor Keith Lynch, Executive Member for the voluntary sector at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, said: 'This service is another illustration of the great community spirit in our borough. It can be difficult for our elderly and disabled to get from one place to another at any time but receiving this vaccination is vitally important. So please share these details of this service to anyone who may benefit from it. It may not be the first vaccination a resident needs help with but the second. Thank you to all those involved.' All volunteers are DBS checked and follow the Covid-19 guidelines."

<https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/free-transport-vaccination-centres-vulnerable-4913897>



Uttlesford Community Travel provides Minibus Service to Covid-19 Vaccination Centres Bishop Stortford Independent: "A charity is providing a shot in the arm for the Covid-19 vaccination programme. Uttlesford Community Travel (UCT) is laying on transport to three vaccination centres for residents of the district: over-60s, the disabled and those unable to access public transport because of rural isolation. Using minibuses that have undergone the necessary conversions to ensure passenger safety at all times, the charity is offering to transport people to appointments at Stansted Surgery, the Lord Butler Leisure Centre in Saffron Walden and Basildon Hospital. UCT is also available to take people to other medical appointments and other transport needs such as shopping and transporting key workers. General manager Malcolm Barrell said: 'We don't want people worrying about getting to their appointments, so our minibuses are standing by to provide transport to them for our residents. We're here to help in these unprecedented times.' For further information on the services UCT provides, and how to book a journey, call 01371 875787 or 01799 519008."

<https://www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/minibus-charity-gets-on-board-with-covid-programme-9148653/>



Halesworth Area Community Transport & Coronavirus Vaccine Rollout

Lowestoft Journal: "A Reydon community leader has praised residents after more than 100 people answered a social media call for help in the coronavirus vaccine rollout. Sole Bay Health Centre, in Teal Close, was flooded with offers of assistance from the community last week, with neighbours offering help with tasks such as taking patients inside and handing out masks. A total of 110 people offered to help with the operation, with 18 volunteers working every day for the foreseeable future. The Halesworth Area Community Transport minibus has also been mobilised to transport patients to the health centre..." <https://www.lowestoftjournal.co.uk/news/health/reydon-health-centre-thanks-covid-vaccination-6914330>



South West Community Transport – Group asks drivers to volunteer services

Glasgow Evening Times: "A South Side volunteer group is appealing for drivers to help transport vulnerable residents to vaccine appointments. South West Community Transport, which offers a pick up and drop off service for elderly residents needing transport to medical centres and hospitals, have put a call out to locals with cars willing to help others get to vital appointments. Bob Millar, from South West Community Transport, said: 'We originally started 10 years ago and we cater to people aged over 55 with mobility or health issues living local to Pollok, although we transport patients to hospitals and medical centres throughout the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board."

"Before Covid-19, we were able to fulfil around 75% of requests for transport. We are looking for volunteers to drive our minibuses and their own car to help as the demand increases with vaccine appointments starting to ramp up.' South West Community Transport has seen volunteers have to shield and isolate which has stripped back resources for those using the service. The group is following stringent Covid-safe guidelines, including the use of masks and gloves by volunteers and passengers and frequent cleaning of vehicles, as well as requiring that volunteers undergo a Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) check. Bob said: 'One of the biggest issues is that the Scottish Ambulance Service would normally be able to carry a few passengers at a time but with social distancing at the moment, they can only take one per ambulance. Because we have the minibus and a bit more space, we are able to take six people at a time. Covid has cancelled a lot of appointments but a lot of people forget that there are patients who still have to attend in person and they need transport to get there.' Anyone interested in taking part in the volunteer group should contact Bob via email at bob@southwestct.org.uk." <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/19089660.call-volunteers-transport-patients/>



Glenkens Community Groups Join Forces to Launch New Green Transport Scheme

Daily Record: "Galloway Community Transport and Connecting in Communities are already seeing their new all-electric car boosting travel options for locals. Two Glenkens-based community projects have teamed up to get a new green transport scheme on the road. And Galloway Community Transport and Connecting in Communities are already

seeing their new all-electric car boosting travel options for locals. With full wheelchair access and four passenger seats, the e-car will be managed by GCT to ferry around small groups and people with disabilities. Early indications suggest that people needing conveyance to healthcare appointments are among top users of the vehicle. The service is also likely to prove popular with young people needing transport to learning and recreational activities. GCT manager and driver Glen Murray told the News: 'Where communities are relatively dispersed, as they are in the Stewartry, being able to transport small groups of people for purposes such as healthcare, education and recreation is essential. Being able to do so economically and environmentally sustainably is now also vital.' The Castle Douglas-based Golden Day Club has already signed up to use the e-car. 'The club has been a member of GCT for a long time,' Mr Murray said. 'Before Covid, GCT operated a weekly minibus service to get people from Glenkens to the club's activities in Castle Douglas Community Centre.' The GCT/CiC electric car and a range of minibuses are available to not-for-profit organisations who become members of GCT. For more information see www.gallowaycommunitytransport.org or email gct@catstrand.com. The Glenkens is part of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere which supports the scheme through its strong environmental credentials. Mr Murray said: 'This joint initiative between Connecting in Communities (CiC) and GCT to move into carbon-zero transport aims to support the Biosphere's commitment to address climate change.' CiC was established to tackle rural social isolation in the Glenkens. It aims to help people make new friends, learn new skills and take part in new activities. Galloway Community Transport (GCT), formerly Glenkens Transport Initiative, has been providing a range of transport services in the Glenkens and further afield for over a decade, mainly using a small fleet of minibuses. The Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme, part of the European Commission and Scottish Government funded Scottish Rural Development Fund 2014-2020, provided grants to enable the purchase of the car. Both CiC and GCT are part of Glenkens Community

Arts Trust, based at the CatStrand in New Galloway."

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/glenkens-community-groups-join-forces-23512009>



Rural Residents continue to be Disadvantaged following loss of Transport Connections

Charity Today: "Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) has responded to the government's proposed rural transport strategy with recommendations for joining up policy initiatives to achieve greater impact. Isolation and access to services and employment has been a perennial concern for many rural communities. However, over the past decade, these issues have been exacerbated by the loss of public transport connections combined with the centralisation of public and commercial services – often to urban centres. In its public consultation, Future of Transport: Rural Strategy, The Department for Transport acknowledges that a reliance on the car in rural areas means that those without private transport can find themselves cut off from various opportunities, whilst hindering the government's broader ambitions for decarbonisation and levelling-up opportunities for everyone. The draft strategy proposes that various innovations in transport planning and delivery can address these concerns, such as promoting more active travel, flexible and demand-responsive services, as well as embracing new technologies such as e-scooters, self-drive vehicles and drone deliveries. ACRE welcomed the recognition that rural areas need transport solutions appropriate to their unique circumstances but is concerned that more needs to be done. Jeremy

Leggett, ACRE's Policy Adviser said: 'We applaud the government for recognising that a different approach is needed to improve rural mobilities. However, the strategy is limited insofar as it relies on distant technological innovations which may do little in the short to medium term to address the barriers those without cars face in terms of accessing services and employment. To achieve this, we would like to see a more joined-up and a 'rural proofed' approach to policymaking which places individuals and families, wherever they live, at the centre of government initiatives.' The charity makes several recommendations in its response to the consultation, including: a high-level government commitment for ensuring nobody living in a rural area will be unreasonably disadvantaged in gaining access to public services, a requirement for service providers to factor in the financial costs and carbon footprint of users travel when making decisions, backing existing social enterprise approaches to community transport and the delivery of gigabit-capable broadband and 5G."

<https://www.charitytoday.co.uk/rural-residents-continue-to-be-disadvantaged-following-loss-of-transport-connections/>



Community Link in Stafford was able to keep the School Minibuses Running during Recent Floods with the help of a Supermarket

In Your Area: "The home of Community Link on Doxey Road in Stafford, Staffordshire was under water and the nearby Tesco Extra store allowed the charity to park their fleet of 25 vehicles there on Thursday, January 20 until flooding receded over the weekend.

Graham Wright Chief Executive said: 'When the floods hit Stafford we were looking to house the fleet for a few days and we were very grateful for Tesco for responding immediately to our plea and allowing us to park the fleet at Newport Road Tesco Extra store. 'We were able to continue to transport school children to Special Needs schools and also for those Key Workers' children to mainstream schools. Our huge thanks goes to Shaun Rathbone Tesco Extra Store Manager and Customer Services Manager Voni Dawkins for their speedy and supportive response when we needed it most.' The fleet was moved back to their original home on Doxey Road when all schools were closed due to inclement snow and rain on the week commencing January 25 2021. To find out about the services available or if you are interested in volunteering as a Community Link Stafford & District driver visit www.communitylinkstafford.co.uk or call Rachel on 01785 252050. <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/community-transport-charity-helped-by-supermarket-following-flood/>



3,500 Deliveries of Food and Medicine made to Town's most Vulnerable in Halesworth
 Eastern Daily Press: "Thousands of deliveries of shopping for food and medicine were made by Halesworth Volunteer Centre to help the town's most vulnerable in the first month of lockdown. The centre has been a co-ordinating hub for shopping and prescription deliveries to families, the elderly and the vulnerable during the third national coronavirus lockdown, which began in January to protect people from the spread of

Coronavirus. It is currently helping 44 households in the town and surrounding villages, making 3,500 deliveries in January alone to those unable to get out of the house. Volunteers also provide telephone support to more than 60 people living alone, to check up on people's health and well-being, while they have also made regular deliveries of cakes and treats to people on their own. Its latest initiative will see volunteers support Halesworth Area Community Transport, by taking vulnerable elderly people with no vehicle to their Coronavirus vaccination appointments. Emma Healey, Halesworth Volunteer Centre manager, said: 'It's fantastic to have support from a local business and we are really grateful to them for helping us to support HACT.'" Joe Maynard, chief executive at Spectra, said: 'Local services are the lifeblood of our community. We understand the important role they play because they have proved invaluable to many family members and friends of staff at Spectra. As a local company, we are truly honoured to help in any way we can and applaud the fantastic work by Halesworth Volunteer Centre.' Halesworth Volunteer Centre is currently shopping for 44 households in the town and the surrounding rural communities. It also supports nearby pharmacies and dispensaries by picking up and delivering medication. Anyone who needs support can call Halesworth Volunteer Centre on 01986 875600 or email covid@halesworthvc.co.uk." <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/halesworth-volunteer-centre-lockdown-3-donations-7392440>



Tenbury Transport Trust Offers Free Transport Service for Members to Travel to Covid-19 Vaccine Centres

In Your Area: "A charity committed to providing a transport lifeline for people in

parts of Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire has launched a new service - ferrying members to Covid vaccinations free of charge. Tenbury Transport Trust has served the local community for more than 10 years and has established an excellent reputation for providing a safe, professional service for people who don't have adequate transport of their own. Wendy White, Chair of trustees, said: 'The trust is very much open for business, despite the pandemic, and keen to ensure members get to their Covid vaccination safely and on time. We know this is a worrying time for everyone so as part of our service to the area, we are providing free transport at this time is the best way we can contribute and help our members. It's really important for people to accept their vaccination appointment when it's offered and they shouldn't have to rely on a family member possibly travelling into the area to take them or maybe having to leave frontline work to do so. Tenbury Transport volunteers can collect them from their door, ensure they arrive safely and return them back home too. Members can always have confidence that the charity is fully insured, professionally run and reliable. We operate under strict Covid rules because our clients are not just clients - they are our friends and we want to keep them safe. It's important to thank all those who continue to support us with grants and donations as without that support we wouldn't be able to provide such an amazing service. Also the volunteers who give their time for others will now be helping to get our members to their all-important Covid vaccination.'

Tenbury Transport Trust, based in Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire is a not-for-profit charity and members include people of all ages and transport needs. It could mean taking them shopping, keeping hospital appointments or anything else where they need to get from A to B and don't have access to public transport or have adequate transport of their own. 'Users must register with us and can sign-up for £5 to become members. If anyone would like to become a member and have access to our wonderful volunteer drivers, they can phone us on 01584 810491 or call in and see us at our office in Teme Street, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire' Wendy added. 'We cover destinations over a wide area including Worcester, Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Hereford, Ludlow, Birmingham and

Oswestry, Shropshire. It's a service which is providing a lifeline for many in our community who just can't get about as they need to. We are available to people of all ages but a lot of our clients are in their 80s..." <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/tenbury-wells-charity-offers-free-transport-service-for-members-to-travel-to-covid-19-vaccine-centres/>



Action Plan will Tackle Decline of Rural Bus Services in Scottish Highlands & Islands

Press & Journal: "An action plan to halt the sharp decline in the use of rural and island bus services is being drawn up. Hitrans is looking to tackle the problem, which has been heightened by the impacts of Covid-19. The regional transport partnership for the Highlands and Islands wants more funding from the Scottish Government to be targeted on sustaining rural and island bus service. It believes that lessons can be learned from the pandemic to tailor future services more closely to the needs of local communities, with major input from community transport groups. Mary Jean Devon, 75, is a councillor who is wheelchair-bound as a result of MS and lives in Tobermory, on the Isle of Mull. She said: 'It is a bit like the ferries. Buses are working on a skeleton timetable because of the pandemic. It is really important that we get these services back when the pandemic ends, particularly in tourist time when lot of people come over here for the day and they have no car. We have to protect what we have got, especially for elderly people who don't drive any more. It can be a manoeuvre to get off the island sometimes. West Coast Motors have helped with delivery of food boxes from the council to vulnerable people. They do play a big part

in island life but they are operating on a restricted time table. So many of us depend on the bus to get to the boat." HiTrans is advocating the reinstatement of a Rural Transport Fund and the Regional Transport Partnership capital passenger transport grant to support improvements to infrastructure and public transport capital assets. Also recommended is the introduction of an Enhanced Demand Responsive Transport funding stream – managed at Regional Transport Partnership level and developed with local authorities and community anchor groups. Partnership board chairman Councillor Allan Henderson will be writing to Michael Matheson, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport Infrastructure and Connectivity, to recommend the new measures to better support rural and island communities which he says have been hit hardest by the pandemic. He said: 'Many residents who were very reliant on subsidised local bus services and Community Transport for access have become increasingly isolated through lockdown and the Covid experience, and we now have the challenge (with partners) to support these residents, often younger residents and older people, to become socially active again, to regain their mobility and improve their wellbeing. This is a major challenge for the coming months and years, and one in which local bus services and community transport should have a significant role if it is supported. This is a prime example of where transport affords benefits far beyond transport itself, benefitting wider health and social care services.' Covid-19 has seen the adoption of more home working and working closer to home across the public and private sectors. This presents the opportunity to reshape rural bus services and community transport. He added: 'There is potential to benefit from community involvement on the back of the strength of the community response through the Covid experience – growth in, and growth of, Community Anchor Organisations with a will to shape and deliver change and services within their communities. There is a real opportunity in the current context to deliver services in new ways.'"

<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands/2886322/action-plan-will-tackle-decline-of-rural-bus-services/>



Havens Community Cars launches appeal to help people get to vaccine centres

Brighton & Hove Independent: "A volunteer driver charity that has seen its bookings increase fourfold since the rollout of the vaccine appointments has launched an appeal called 'Fuel Injection' to help people get to a vaccination centre. Inspired by the Brighton based 'Cabs 4 Jobs' campaign, the appeal will part-fund taxi journeys for people unable to use public transport, when the Havens Community Cars volunteer drivers are fully booked. Chair of Trustees, Paula Woolven, said: 'The demand for our services sky rocketed in January when the first injections were given to those over 80 - many of whom did not have the mobility to use public transport and who had no other options to get to the centres in Brighton or Eastbourne. This week, the only other Community Transport organisation in the District offering transport support, CTLA, had to temporarily halt their services and we are now attempting to fit in many clients who would have used their minibuses in with our amazing volunteer car drivers.' Brighton and Hove Bus and Coach Company have supported the appeal with a grant donation to Havens Community Cars of £250. The charity has been supporting people from as far away as Seaford. Your donation will assist a journey to receive a vaccine for someone unable to use public transport or meet the full cost of a private journey, when all the volunteer drivers are already booked. Any surplus after all the vaccine runs have been completed will be ring-fenced in a bursary fund for people unable to pay for their normal medical journeys to reach treatment at hospitals, doctors surgeries and cancer centres."

<https://www.brightonandhoveindependent.co.uk/news/people/sussex-volunteer-driver-charity-launches-appeal-help-people-get-vaccine-centres-3127957>



Bassetlaw Community Car Scheme seeking volunteer drivers to support Covid vaccination patients

Worksop Guardian: "A grassroots transport organisation in Bassetlaw is seeking more volunteer drivers to help vulnerable residents attend COVID-19 vaccination appointments. Bassetlaw Community Car Scheme is one of several in Nottinghamshire which are helping residents who have difficulty using public transport and no other means of travel. Throughout the pandemic, drivers have been ferrying people to medical appointments, collecting shopping and prescriptions, and most recently, making sure they can attend vaccination appointments. Councillor John Cottee, chairman of the communities and place committee at Nottinghamshire County Council, said: 'Community transport schemes are often a lifeline to those more vulnerable in our communities. Without the support of dedicated volunteers, it would not be possible to deliver these vital transport links across Nottinghamshire, and now, with vaccination centres opening across the county, they will be joining the fight against coronavirus in their communities. We have seen so many examples of people going the extra mile for others throughout the pandemic, and those who can spare a few hours a week are encouraged to contact their local community transport organisation. While these schemes are not run by the county council, we recognise the value they have

in our communities and would like to residents in need of support should register with their local scheme.' Bassetlaw Community Car Scheme is particularly seeking drivers who can volunteer with their own vehicle, but there may also be opportunities to drive the group's minibus or wheelchair accessible vehicles. If using your own vehicle, you would be paid 45p for every mile that you drive on behalf of the scheme. Full training, including for minibuses, will be given to all volunteer drivers. NHS Bassetlaw has established vaccination services at community centres in Kilton and Kilton Forest, Retford Hospital, and Newgate Medical Group in Worksop. For more information, contact Bassetlaw Action Centre by writing to carscheme@bassetlawactioncentre.org.uk or call 01777 709650, Monday to Friday, 9am to 3pm."

<https://www.worksopguardian.co.uk/health/coronaviruses/bassetlaw-community-transport-scheme-seeking-volunteer-drivers-support-covid-vaccination-patients-3113546>

This is part of a countywide initiative detailed here:

<https://www.eastwoodadvertiser.co.uk/news/people/si-gn-be-transport-volunteer-nottinghamshire-3108182>



Community Transport Sussex is given funding to provide free journeys for people needing help to get Covid-19 vaccinations.

Mid Sussex Times: "Community Transport Sussex, which covers Haywards Heath, Burgess Hill, Henfield, Hassocks and East Grinstead, has received funding from Charities Aid Foundation Resilience Fund and the Sussex Community Foundation. This funding allows the service to provide 1,500 free journeys. If you or someone you know has been contacted with an appointment, and are unable to arrange transportation to attend, you can contact them on 01444 471919 to

book. The minibuses are thoroughly cleaned between passengers and drivers will be wearing appropriate PPE. The organisation has put safety procedures in place to ensure the journeys are as safe as possible for passengers and drivers. Transport is available to and from your home address, and most of the availability is between 10am and 2pm, due to driver schedules. If your appointment is outside of these times, you can still get in touch with the team at Community Transport Sussex to discuss options..."

<https://www.midsussextimes.co.uk/news/people/community-transport-service-given-more-funds-3112787>



Carse of Gowrie volunteers playing a starring role in getting vulnerable people to their COVID vaccine appointment

Daily Record: "St Madoes and Kinfauns Parish Church, using its registered community transport scheme, has taken to driving residents to get their jab using its brand new electric car... Errol's oldest resident Mrs Elizabeth Coutts, who is 100 this year, was the first person to receive the vaccine at the Carse Medical Practice after being driven there last week. The car was added to the Madoch Community Transport service fleet after securing a grant of £22,616 from Scottish Government's Community Climate Asset Fund. Utilising a minivan, the service has been up and running since October 2019 to help older Carse residents get out and about, and now its new electric-run Nissan Leaf will also be used for

COVID response deliveries of meals and groceries. Madoch Centre community development co-ordinator Anthea Bircham commented: 'We are delighted that our deliveries can be made using this eco-friendly vehicle. It has been an added bonus that we were also able to use the car for taking some of our oldest residents to their vaccine appointments. We already have an MPV for transporting people to appointments but it has a step and the car is easier for some people to get in to.' St Madoes and Kinfauns Parish Church and the Madoch Centre have already been involved in coordinating COVID response activities and supplying food to the vulnerable throughout the pandemic. The church hopes that, as well as reducing emissions and supporting food distribution, the car will also provide a springboard for a community climate change action plan for their area..."

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/volunteers-playing-starring-role-getting-23378763>



Older Londoners facing a 45-minute walk to get to their nearest vaccine centre

My London: "Residents are calling for more accessible centres at local GPs and community centres. One of the biggest issues being talked about on vaccinations at the moment is whether vaccination centres are easy enough to get to for elderly and vulnerable people. There's a lot of concerns flying around on social media that they are not. It's emerged that many people are facing a gruelling walk or long bus journey to get to their nearest centre. One place this is certainly true is at the Lord's Cricket Ground vaccination centre in Westminster, and council leader Rachael Robathan

doesn't think it's good enough. It takes eight minutes by car, 14 minutes by bike, 26 minutes by bus and 39 minutes to walk from Queen's Park to Lord's and a taxi costs around £8 to £11. And it takes 15 minutes by bus from Paddington station or a 39 minute walk and four minute taxi ride which costs between £7-9. Councillor Rothbathan said she's been trying to arrange transport to get people to the mass vaccine centre at Lord's Cricket Ground - one of two mass centres in Westminster. She had also hoped to use the army of Westminster Connects volunteers to help. However she said the council was told it couldn't because of the risk of transmission. She said: 'I have bashed my head against a brick wall on this one. We have all of these people. Why are we saying they should take taxis or whatever? They need support, they need help. We have been told categorically that we cannot provide transport for them because of the risk of transmission. We cannot go against this as a local authority very clearly expressed opinion.' Councillor Robathan said the council is looking into helping people to get onto public transport. 'To me it feels awful that outside Lord's Cricket Ground you see rows of black cabs which cost a fortune and wouldn't it be so much better if the army of volunteers who we have would be able to do this.' She said it was particularly difficult for elderly residents in the first cohorts of priority to get out and about in the middle of winter, especially if they don't have family or friends to help them. However she said there is a community transport option and the council has told people there is help to walk or use public transport. Her comments come as community leaders are calling for more local vaccine centres to make them more accessible for harder-to-reach communities. Concia Albert, head of social prescribing at One Westminster who helped as a warden at Lord's said: 'There are issues about access to the vaccine centres. Lord's is not so accessible for people who live in Queen's Park. There's no buses.' She has been vaccinated and has added her voice to the campaign to help overcome the concerns of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who have also been targeted with vaccine misinformation. She added: 'There needs to be vaccine centres more localised to Harrow Road and Queen's Park where Black people are.'..."

<https://www.mylondon.news/news/health/elderly-londoners-facing-45-minute-19805431>



New Community Bus Service to be launched in Broxburn and Uphall

Daily Record: "A new community bus service is to be introduced in Broxburn and Uphall to restore missing transport links to facilities in the community. Public transport manager, Nicola Gill, told a meeting of West Lothian Council's Executive that partner operator HcL had agreed to use spare resources to operate a fare-taking service in the area. A report to the committee highlighted: 'Public engagement has identified a feeling of isolation due to mobility issues and lack of public transport options for this target group. It is intended that the pilot would promote independence amongst this group and ultimately improve mental health by providing more accessible links back into the community. Users of the service would be surveyed on their views to measure the success of the pilot. Publicity and promotion of the service will be key feature in ensuring we reach the target group, and it is intended that the pilot service will be promoted locally via the council website and social media outlets, as well as via local press and community groups. How users found out about the service can also be built in to the survey to gauge which media had the biggest impact on service usage. The pilot will test the public appetite for the provision of a town service in Broxburn. The pilot would ideally support local business and services by providing direct links from residential areas to 'main street', where this is currently not possible within the current bus network. This is especially significant under the current restrictions that are in place as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, as this service will provide a means of accessing

essential amenities for those who would benefit from this support."

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/new-community-bus-service-launched-23481942>

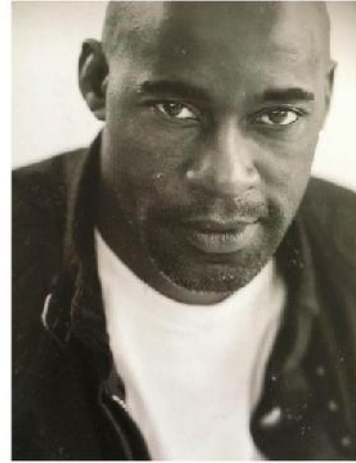


VASA Welcomes Actor Patrick Robinson as its New Patron

Leamington Courier: "A Warwickshire-based charity has welcomed actor Patrick Robinson as its new patron. Patrick joins VASA at a crucial moment in the charity's history. VASA's volunteer-led community transport service takes passengers to medical and social inclusion appointments and, critically now, VASA's volunteers are also driving the most vulnerable amongst us to their Coronavirus vaccination appointments. Patrick Robinson has strong connections to the area, having moved to Stratford in 1986, after being offered a contract with the RSC and it is where his children and grandchildren still live. Born in London to Jamaican parents and the youngest of seven, Patrick said the move to Warwickshire was 'a huge step not only in my career as it was my first job, but also in relocating, having never left London'. Most people will know Patrick from his time on Casualty, his 2013 appearance on Strictly Come Dancing and most recently the BBC film Sitting in Limbo about the Windrush scandal. Patrick was introduced to the work of VASA by Janis, the Communities Manager and he was very moved by what he saw. He said: 'I'm so impressed with the friendly and safe door-to-door transport service which enables people to get to medical and social appointments too. This service sits brilliantly with the work done out in the community to help reduce loneliness and isolation with Memory Clubs offered for people with early Dementia. VASA works so hard to make sure clients have a fun and stimulating day, whilst giving their carers some extremely valuable time off.' Patrick said he will bring energy and drive to the role of Patron and plans to 'support all those who need it, to do the work needed to make a huge positive difference to all those people who need our help'. He has already got stuck in, spending a day helping to resurrect an overgrown

allotment that VASA is turning into a community allotment. To book a volunteer driver or for general VASA enquiries call 01789 262889."

<https://www.leamingtoncourier.co.uk/news/people/warwickshire-based-charity-welcomes-actor-patrick-robinson-its-new-patron-3128878>



West Devon COVID-19 Heroes – we thank you

The Moorlander: "The Moorlander thanks everyone for their help in making people's lockdown a little happier and something they can perhaps cope with better. Thank you to all for staying safe and for keeping this horrible disease from getting out of control. Last year, West Devon residents voted for their local heroes who had selflessly helped others during the pandemic. After considering the nominations, the judging panel at West Devon Borough Council has announced that all the nominees are winners [including] Okehampton and District Community Transport Group Drivers' Organisation. The volunteer drivers of this already vital service worked throughout the pandemic to make sure that existing and new clients could get to medical appointments safely. The drivers took every precaution with PPE and even supplied it to their clients who couldn't obtain their own for a wide range of reasons. The service received many new requests from people who needed a safe way to travel, including many pregnant women needing to get to appointments. Brian Wood, a volunteer driver, said: 'It was a privilege to drive the shuttle bus for all those from the war generation to get their inoculations. There was a sense of relief that they were the first to receive these and their gratitude for the service given to them by the Transport

Group, Medical Centre and the Lions was warmly felt. I am looking forward to helping the younger generations to do the same as the programme of vaccinations is rolled out. It was a great team effort, and I was pleased to be an integral part of it.' He also spoke of how it was obvious that many of the clients had not been out much, if at all, during the year and they really enjoyed seeing friends from the community and have a catch up and natter over the welcomed cups of tea provided by the Lions, whilst they waited for the returning bus. Driver Ann Wood commented: "I really enjoy doing transport runs for ODCTG. All the people I have spoken to are so grateful that the vaccinations have started, and they were having theirs; a light at the end of the tunnel. Hopefully, we can get back to normal was the most common thing said to me; it made getting cold hands and feet all worthwhile!" Some comments from clients of the Okehampton Community and District Transport Group read: 'Thank you to everyone involved, who took care of our elderly during the whole process. For many of them it was the first time out since March. It was a well-thought out and smoothly run process. My relatives used the shuttle bus on their own from the off-site car park where I met them. So efficient and safe. They felt great as they had some independent social interaction and spotted friends to wave to as well We are lucky to have such a forward-thinking medical practice and community who have come together to get our elderly residents vaccinated so early in the process. Can't wait for the second jab in January now.' 'I would like to put on record my appreciation of the service you provide with the hospital car, Ring and Ride and local hospital and Doctors' drivers. A lifeline for me.'" <https://themoorlander.co.uk/west-devon-covid-19-heroes-we-thank-you/>



Barra charity are Delighted to Learn they've been Granted Funding

Stornoway Gazette: "The Energy Saving Trust has announced that a successful applicant for the £270,000 Islands Green Recovery Programme: Sustainable Transport Fund is based on Barra. Funded by the Scottish Government and administered by Energy Saving Trust, the fund forms part of the £2 million Islands Green Recovery Programme / Program Ath-Shlànachaidh Uaine nan Eilean (IGRP) and aims to deliver investment in active and low carbon transport projects in island communities and support economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The first successful applicant, Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay, is a local charity that seeks to promote the long-term social, economic and environmental prosperity of the islands of Barra and Vatersay. The project's objectives are to deliver low carbon community transport, including the introduction of an electric minibus. It will also facilitate active travel through measures such as the installation of a bus bike rack and support the expansion of the island's sustainable transport network through the development of the Castlebay mobility hub. This will result in investment in low carbon transport infrastructure, including a rapid electric vehicle (EV) chargepoint and e-bike charging and the provision of training to upskill local mechanics in EV maintenance. Islands Minister Paul Wheelhouse said: 'The Islands Green Recovery Programme: Sustainable Transport Fund will enable the communities of Barra and Vatersay to deliver low-carbon approaches to community transport which will improve the provision, reliability and flexibility of sustainable and active transport.'

<https://www.stornowaygazette.co.uk/business/local-island-charity-are-delighted-learn-theyve-been-granted-funding-3122590>

**energy
saving
trust**

Covid-19: Volunteers Step Forward as Vaccination Taxis in Chippenham

BBC: "With the Covid-19 vaccination rollout in full swing, people are stepping forward to volunteer to take people for their jabs. But this service can be more than just a car journey, a connection is being made with some of the most vulnerable in our communities. Carolyn Carter, 56, chairwoman of Chippenham Link Transport in Wiltshire, regularly drives clients to their medical appointments and is now helping with vaccination runs. She said: 'I thought long and hard about doing it, but...I can do good by doing this. Wednesday we were all just backwards and forwards to the surgery. Between the 11 of us we did about 40 trips over two days. Everyone has been fantastic. They are just helping with whatever they can to get this done.' Ms Carter said while people could potentially get to Bath Racecourse or the hospital by public transport, many of the people they see have hardly left their houses in 12 months and are either 'not capable' or 'scared'. 'One lady is 92 and hasn't been out of her house since last March,' she said. She was unsteady on her feet as she hasn't really done much activity...and we were a bit concerned about how she would get through. It is rewarding and you very often get their whole life story, sometimes because they haven't spoken to anybody else. People are a bit nervous...one woman I took last week was telling me "I wasn't going to have it, but I feel I should so I'm going for it", then when she came out she said "that was easy." Ms Carter said while she can understand some concerns over the safety of the journeys, they have been working within guidance set out by the council and take all possible precautions including wearing masks, ventilating the car and also limiting the number of different people drivers come into contact with on each shift. Wiltshire Council said it had been working with the Link schemes to develop safety guidance and also to understand the demand being placed on them."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-55827124>



Council boost for Fermanagh food initiative

Impartial Reporter: "Rural Housing Association has been awarded funding through Fermanagh and Omagh District Council for its Covid-19 Food Support initiative, which has been running across the Council area over the Winter months. The initiative focuses on the provision of essential food hampers to Rural Housing Association tenants in the Council area, with each hamper containing fresh fruit, vegetables and meat, all designed to help tenants cook nutritious meals in their own homes during the lockdown. In total, the initiative supported more than 80 families in the Council area, who all received a fresh food hamper to their home. Food hampers were prepared by local businesses, Rooney's Spar Enniskillen, and Spar, Derry Road, Omagh. Fermanagh Community Transport also stepped in to deliver food hampers to residents throughout County Fermanagh. The rural transport service is based in Fermanagh, and has been working hard throughout the pandemic to support rural residents through the delivery of food shopping, prescriptions and transporting residents to Covid-19 vaccination appointments. Rural Housing Association's Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Fisher, said: 'The funding provided by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has enabled us to support our tenants with essential food hampers throughout this lockdown period. We are delighted to be able to offer our tenants a much-needed helping hand at this extremely difficult time for many isolated rural residents. We would like to extend our thanks to the Council for the support it have provided during the pandemic.' For further information, contact Ruth Montgomery, Rural Housing Association, by emailing rmontgomery@ruralhousing.co.uk."

<https://www.impartialreporter.com/news/19093423.co-uncil-boost-fermanagh-food-initiative/>

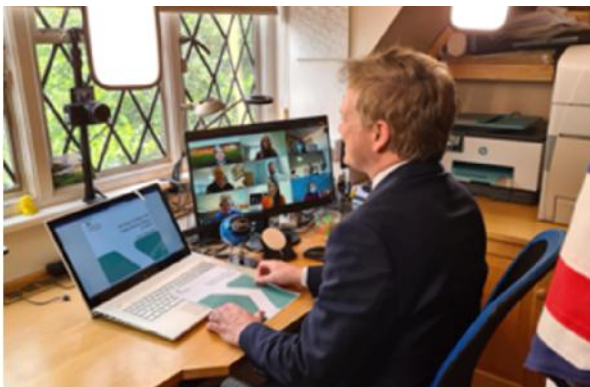


Grant Shapps Praises Transport Operators Working on the Frontline to Help People get their COVID-19 Vaccinations...but CT isn't Mentioned!

DfT: "Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: 'Throughout this pandemic, our transport heroes have been at the frontline keeping the country moving. Now they are stepping up yet again to help deliver the vaccinations and get people to vaccination centres, helping us fight back from COVID-19.'" DfT lists a range of examples:

Metrobus, Great Western Railway, Stagecoach, Go North East, Nexus, Go Ahead, Oxford Bus Company, Arriva, Harrogate Bus Company and LNER but not a single CT operation. It does, however, mention that "local and national firms have offered free travel to vaccination centres including in Burnley, Shrewsbury, while Uber is offering free rides so people can get their job right across the country."

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-secretary-hails-work-of-transport-industry-in-vaccination-roll-out>



TAS Director John Taylor Writes...



To conclude this newsletter, TAS Director John Taylor has contributed another 'Think Piece'. We would welcome any comments or feedback. John has been one of the pre-eminent practitioners of accessible, flexible and community-based transport in UK since 1977, with early experience encompassing the design, operational, legal and technical aspects of CT. His consultancy career stretches back to 1986; before joining TAS in 1994, John was a freelance consultant specialising in community, rural and accessible transport.

State Aid - Not Quite Dead!

Long-suffering community transport operators and those in local authorities who are managing grant funding and contracts with community transport groups will recall that the dreaded phrase "State Aid" started to occur in conversations with increasing frequency over the past ten years. State Aid is an EU term and shorthand for the regulations that are designed to prevent state agencies, such as government or local authorities, offering funding in a way that discriminates between market suppliers and which may therefore distort the market. The rules are complex as they have to allow for: situations where there may not be a functioning market; support between public sector bodies; support designed to improve skill levels in the general employee base; support that does discriminate but on certain specified grounds such as security. There are also minimum thresholds so that very small-scale funding support that discriminates may be exempt from State Aid concerns.

Whilst in principle State Aid only became a concern where it affected potential cross-

border trade, which might seem to take CT out of the mix, in practice public procurement requires markets to be open to all. One only needs to examine who is running large parts of GB's bus and rail network to acknowledge the interest of companies from France, Germany and Italy in operating transport services here. This raised questions from commercial PSV operators about whether the 'level playing field' principle was breached where either there was selective granting of contract work to CTs or whether CTs were using resources that had been funded in full or part through selective grant aid to compete in open tenders. The onus is on public sector agencies to prevent such breaches of the State Aid rules.

This culminated in 2012 with JA Travel (founder of the Bus & Coach Association) making a complaint to the European Commission about a long list (60) of alleged State Aid breaches involving CTs. To make it practical for the Commission to investigate, the BCA was forced to narrow down its focus to two authorities: Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire County Councils. After much correspondence between the Commission, the DfT and the councils concerned, the Commission finally made a decision in June 2015: in Nottinghamshire's case, the amounts of money involved were below the threshold, so no breach occurred; however, in Derbyshire's case, the fact that it had grant-aided its CTs to provide dial-a-ride services for disabled people without going through an open competitive tender process, was deemed a breach of the State Aid rules.

Earlier (January 2015), no doubt having had advance notice of the likely outcome, the DfT published and distributed to local authorities "Guidelines on Community Transport Funding and EU State Aid rules" which recommended a prudent approach to grant-making that has the potential to distort competition. Unless absolutely clear that the CT is not operating in a potentially competitive market, authorities should ensure that any grants made by them, taking into account all other selective public funding the CT may have received, do not result in the CT receiving support that exceeds the State Aid threshold. To enable this to be assessed, CTs are required to

declare their receipt of public funds, including National Lottery funding, during any application. There is a lower basic financial threshold and a higher threshold for certain types of services. These would include services for the public or subsections of the public where there is market failure - dial-a-rides come within this group, but in Derbyshire's case the higher threshold was breached. There are further exemptions for public transport services commissioned under some specific circumstances and where there are clear contractual obligations on behalf of the operator and it can be demonstrated that they are being paid at no more than market rates. How this last set of rules (Public Service Obligations under Regulation (EC) 1370/2007 as applied to UK CTs has never been tested. Finally, the DfT asks local authorities to write into any grant aid agreements that the resources so financed shall not be used to provide any services provided following competitive tenders.

As we have now left the EU you would be forgiven thinking that I have just wasted your time reminding you of the above. However, for the time being, and in the absence of any developed alternative, the State Aid principles (although not necessarily the exact thresholds) will continue to be followed. In Northern Ireland, the effect of the NI Protocol is that they do still apply in respect of public passenger transport services (1370/2007), but they could still apply anywhere in the UK in the case where the funding came originally through the EU.

From an international perspective, we now fall under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules which, fortunately, do not apply to 'services'. However, we are also subject to various other bilateral Free Trade Agreements including the UK - EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) which requires the UK to have a system of subsidy control in place. However, of more relevance is the fact that the UK's governments are all in general signed up to the principles of open (not selective) competition as a means of ensuring best market value. Consequently, a domestic equivalent of State Aid rules needs to be developed. The working name for this is "Subsidy Control" and BEIS (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy)

has just opened a consultation on what this should look like across the UK. [Subsidy control: designing a new approach for the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). This opens with a homage to Adam Smith - the freer the trade the better - and generally doesn't seem to propose anything much in the way of loosening existing controls.

After setting out some straightforward principles (matching those deployed by the EU) to define a relevant 'subsidy', it asks for views on a number of possible subsidy control principles (i.e. those that would enable public authorities to distinguish between lawful and unlawful subsidies), including that subsidies must:

-) meet a specific public policy objective;
-) be the minimum necessary to achieve this;
-) bring about a change in the behaviour of the beneficiary;
-) not cover costs that would have been incurred anyway;
-) be a last resort i.e. alternative less-distorting policy levers must have been considered first;
-) be minimised so as not to unduly favour one firm to the detriment of a competitor or new entrants to the UK market, or unduly reduce competition within the UK market and
-) provide for positive effects that outweigh their negative effects on domestic competition.

It considers de-minimis arrangements (i.e. thresholds below which the control system will not apply). The general agreement under the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) with the EU is for subsidies under ca. £340,000 over three years to be exempt. A lower threshold could be introduced under domestic law but not a higher one. However, Services of Public Economic Interest (SPEI) - the example is given of 'rural public transport services' - have a higher threshold under the TCA of ca. £790,000 over three years. Again, a lower threshold could be introduced. Article 3.3 of the TCA specifically requires that: "The Parties shall ensure that the compensation granted is not used to cross-subsidise activities falling outside the scope of the assigned task." (i.e. this replicates the requirement under

the DfT's State Aid for CT Guidelines that resources funded for one service should not be applied to a different service that is potentially subject to competition). SPEI subsidies below ca. £15.7m are not subject to mandatory publication under transparency rules. A joint declaration under the TCA also permits certain transport-related subsidies relating to airports, ports and road infrastructure projects, and as with State Aid subsidies may be permitted up to certain thresholds when relating to R&D or employee skills development.

The government is committed to establishing an independent body to oversee the workings of subsidy control and asks for comments on its scope and its powers. If this is anything like the Competitions and Markets Authority, the combination of lawyers and economists (that's me done for) will turn this into a 'sledgehammer to crack a nut' entity which takes forever to make a decision (i.e. not dissimilar to the 3+ years that the EU Commission took to determine the JA Travel case) and is generally inconsistent. The potential for a special 'court' like the Competition Appeals Tribunal is considered.

So, for those who are really keen, you have an opportunity to respond to the consultation before 11.45pm on 31 March. Until then, in the absence of a more detailed regime, most public authorities will still be aligning with the old State Aid regime as the only source of authority for how to comply.

However, it may be more fruitful to avoid subsidy control by actually obtaining your funding through open contracting. At the same time as the consultation on subsidies, the government is consulting on public procurement - this one open only until 10 March -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/green-paper-transforming-public-procurement>. This does hold out the potential for greater weight to be placed upon social value within the procurement process. More on this next time.



If you require any advice or support please contact us on 01772-204988 or email john.atkins@taspartnership.com