

Rural Transport Briefing (2) The Community Perspective...

During the July member's event, Cheshire Community Action (CCA) was keen to give both sides of the story when it comes to rural transport issues. To follow on from the strategic presentation by Lillian Burns on Sustainable Transport and the Local Transport Plan, **Tony Hurst, (Volunteer Driver for the Chester Community Car Scheme, run by CCA)** informed our audience about the personal benefits he has derived from being a volunteer driver himself, as well as the added value that community transport provides for its customers.



The Chester Community Car Scheme has been run by CCA for 10 years and Tony is one of our most active drivers. The scheme has over 30 volunteer drivers with over 200 elderly passengers that do not have access to public transport either due to lack of transport provision in their area, poor mobility or disability, being housebound and/or vulnerable. The service provides a lifeline for many vulnerable elderly people that would otherwise be very isolated. Journeys range from trips to the shops to visiting friends and relatives, or any journey except those carried out by the Ambulance or Social Services. *(Photograph courtesy of Chester Chronicle)*

Last year the scheme clocked up over 40,000 passenger miles from local journeys and we at CCA and our volunteer drivers are regularly reminded by passengers of how important the service is to them.

Cheshire Community Action, formerly Cheshire Community Council, is a local charity dedicated to helping you develop your local communities through self-help, encouragement and support.

We are committed to providing funding advice and support for projects which will protect and enhance the communities of Cheshire, Warrington and Halton, building strong and active communities.

Established in 1930.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Cheshire Community Action (formerly Cheshire Community Council)

Here are some quotes from our recent passenger survey:

"This service is of great value to me as it enables me to get out to the local shops otherwise I would find difficulty in getting out and meeting people due to where I live. It gives me a sense of freedom."

"Could not visit my husband without it. Drivers are very kind"

"Just Brilliant"

Source: CCA Passenger Survey 2009

Workshops

Following presentations we gave attendees an opportunity to have their say on rural transport. Each table was given one of four topics (see overleaf).

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In groups people were asked to identify the priority issues in relation to their topic and then put forward one call to action or recommendation to the Local Authority. These discussions are summarised below.

Transport for Young People

A range of issues were discussed in relation to transport for young people. Some key points are summarised below:

- **Timetables and meeting the needs of young people.** Surveys don't always illustrate the necessary demand to justify public transport services. Working with young people and the services they use e.g. cinemas, youth clubs and centres and other leisure facilities will help identify need.
- **Safety** came up as a major issue for young people, particularly for those who drive on dangerous rural roads at night. Poor safety on rural roads is also a barrier to cycling. Encouraging cycling by creating safe cycle routes not only helps reduce dependence on cars but reduces carbon emissions.

Transport for Older People

For older people the main issue is **rural isolation**. In Cheshire and Warrington we know that there are many housebound and vulnerable elderly people that depend on others for transport and accessing services. With dwindling services in rural communities including closure of shops and post offices and the amalgamation of some health services in rural areas (which could leave some already isolated rural communities without a GP surgery) it is vital that service providers work with local people to ensure the best possible access for all.

Bus services are unlikely to be the answer for those in greatest need, but **community transport** schemes such as the Chester Community Car Scheme run by CCA offer an added value and care that a bus service cannot. **With relatively modest financial resources** (relative to subsidising a failing bus scheme), **community transport can fill a huge gap in service access for older people**. The coordination of community based services and recruitment of community volunteers is essential for the success of community transport.

Commuter Transport

Groups discussing commuter transport highlighted the **role of employers** who have a responsibility to facilitate car sharing amongst employees. It was also felt that transport service providers need to work more closely with employers to coordinate services. Employers are being urged by Government to discourage individual car use and encourage use of public transport and car sharing. The general consensus is that **there cannot be enough Park and Ride Schemes**.

There are numerous good practice examples of innovative commuter transport initiatives including **wheels to work** and the **Cheshire Car Share Scheme**. The strong message coming through from these discussions was the need for more coordinated car sharing initiatives and designated park and ride sites.

Commercial Transport / Freight

Regarding commercial transport, major issues for rural areas included weight restrictions not being adhered to, overnight parking of HGV's in rural areas close to residential properties and the large quantity of HGV's on rural roads causing a nuisance. **Lorry Watch** is a national scheme that can be set up locally with the support of your Local Authority and the **Rural Road Hierarchy for Speed Management** is an initiative by the Department for Transport to address the issue of speed limits on small or narrow rural roads that are currently at the "National Speed Limit" of 60 mph but need to be reclassified and given specific consideration with regards to speed limits.

Key Messages for Cheshire and Warrington Local Authorities

- *Use local agencies and service users themselves to assess local transport need*
- *Community transport initiatives are the answer to many rural transport and access issues. Community transport initiatives give far better added value from relatively modest financial investments compared to public transport contracts. However, there is a need for stronger leadership, coordination and marketing of community transport across the sub-region, particularly for rural community transport.*
- *Overall better integration of all transport services across the sub-region was seen as a problem that should take priority.*

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