

## Rural Transport Briefing (1) Sustainable Transport and the Local Transport Plan

In July 2009, Cheshire Community Action (CCA) held one of its most well attended member events yet. The topic was Rural Transport, an issue that regularly arises as a major priority for rural communities. We know from past events that transport is a key element in improving access to services and tackling rural isolation.

The aim of the evening was to share information on rural transport and develop an understanding amongst those that attended about the issues associated with transport in rural areas and help prioritise those issues that are most important for Local Authorities and other organisations and agencies to act upon.

**Lillian Burns**, from the **North West CPRE** gave a presentation from a strategic perspective on Sustainable Transport and the Cheshire Local Transport Plan. **Tony Hurst**, who is a **Volunteer Driver** for the **Chester Community Car Scheme, run by CCA** gave a presentation from the grassroots perspective and enlightened our audience on the huge benefits and added value that community transport provides.



The key points from Lillian's presentation are summarised below.

**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.



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Cheshire Community Action (formerly Cheshire Community Council)

### Road Safety

Road safety is a major issue for car owners in rural areas where there is a heavier reliance on private motor vehicles due to patchy provision of public transport.

#### Facts and figures on rural road safety:

- **Traffic on rural roads has grown by 17% since 2002, compared to 5% on all roads.**
- **Almost two thirds of road deaths are on rural roads.**
- **Single carriageway 'A' roads account for 62% of all road deaths.**
- The Road Safety Foundation has produced a risk assessment of Britain's 'A' roads. **Four of Cheshire's roads are amongst the worst-rated in the country;** seven are amongst the next-worst (contact CCA for details).

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Highway Authorities are obliged by Government to reduce their road traffic accident figures. Providing more highway capacity is not necessarily the best or most effective way of tackling this.

A series of **'soft measures'** can make a significant difference as can less obvious and more indirect ones, such as the provision of a good quality school bus service, reducing signage 'clutter' and road markings. **'Quiet Lanes' and 'Greenways' have a role to play** in encouraging walking and cycling.

Major scheme bids by Local Authorities need not necessarily include major infrastructure projects. If the political will existed, they could comprise a series of small schemes rolled into a package such as a network of quiet lanes and greenways, a fleet of yellow school buses or a series of 20 mph zones. For example, Project Rural Matters, run by CCA has worked with many rural communities surrounding Chester to discourage speeding and raise awareness amongst motorists about the dangers of speeding.

## Reducing Car Use and Reducing Carbon

Local Authorities have to play their part in achieving carbon reduction targets in line with the Climate Change Act. **Transport is responsible for a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions.** We are all part of the problems we are suffering and we can all play our part in finding the solutions. If we reduced our car use, we would be reducing our carbon footprints.

Public transport concessions for senior citizens has already had a substantial effect on reducing car use. Ironically, though, it has led to some bus services being cut back because the Rural Bus Service Grant has not kept pace with the increase in service costs and the reduction in income. It is necessary to come up with imaginative ideas for different local areas and **Parish Councils can help facilitate ideas and unlock further funding by offering some pump-priming for schemes that meet local need.**

## So what are the solutions?

In rural areas the solution is rarely going to be scheduled bus services. It is no advantage to anyone to have empty buses cluttering up rural roads. There are lots of examples of imaginative ideas such as Lincolnshire's award-winning 'Interconnect' project, the Wiltshire Wigglybus and the Polegate Taxi-Rider, Chester Community Car Scheme (contact CCA for further details).

Increasingly, taxi-buses and shared taxi services have found success in rural areas and the Department for Transport has just produced a publication called Flexible Transport Services, particularly promoting shared taxis. **Parish Plans are a useful way of formulating ideas relevant to particular areas.** 'Adopt-a-Station' came out of one recently. **Sometimes it may be about importing services into an area rather than transporting people out to the services.**

***"It is no advantage to anyone to have empty buses cluttering up rural roads."***



Department for Transport guidance is due out in July 2009 for the next (third) Cheshire Local Transport Plan (LTP). This next LTP round, which will offer consultation opportunities, will see the first LTP for the two new Cheshire Unitary Authorities. Cheshire West & Chester will be taking early soundings in parallel with their Local Development Framework 'Issues and Options' work. **There is a need for people to engage with these processes – in a well-informed, positive way.** Warrington already has a good record – it won a Centre of Excellence award for its first LTP, partly because it changed its major scheme bid as a result of public consultation.

Further information on the Cheshire Local Transport Plan can be found by visiting: <http://www.cheshire.gov.uk/localtransportplan/>

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