

A POLICY AND FUNDING FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

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ABSTRACT

Community transport services are operated by not-for-profit organisations, usually charitable trusts. Across New Zealand, community transport provides an essential service for the most vulnerable people in society to access health care, shopping and visiting whanau. Whilst some councils – such as Waikato, Environment Canterbury, Northland, Horizons and Tasman District – are evidently active in promoting community transport, the sector is still not generally recognised as being an integral part of the public transport system. Just trying to find out what community transport services are available in some areas can be difficult.

Based on work commissioned by Greater Wellington Regional Council and Otago Regional Council, along with the Waka Eastern Bay service in Whakatāne, the paper argues that this mind set needs to change. It is impossible for traditional council-contracted fixed route bus services to provide an accessible service for everyone – the distances and population densities are just too vast in much of New Zealand. Total Mobility services are very expensive, and only affordable for occasional use for most people. App-based demand response services are popular with passengers, but relatively expensive to provide compared to the fare income they generate. The paper shows that community transport can, and does, fill the gap that other transport services leave.

This paper therefore uses real life case studies of community transport services to advocate for a national / regional policy and funding framework to support further growth in the sector. Currently, many community transport services live hand to mouth - constantly battling to secure funding and recruit mainly volunteer staff to drive vehicles. Greater policy and funding support from Ministry of Transport, Waka Kotahi and Regional / local councils would enable community transport services to be expanded and people to live more fulfilling lives. The economic benefits of community transport – for example tackling costs of poor health and social isolation – are compelling. This paper will set out clear and practical proposals for positive change.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

This paper has been produced by James Llewellyn of Taith Consulting Ltd, based on work undertaken on behalf of Greater Wellington Regional Council, Otago Regional Council and Waka Eastern Bay community transport service.

Introduction

Community transport is a mode of travel that often receives scant attention from mainstream public transport planning. Whilst traditional fixed route bus and, occasionally, app-based on-demand services are funded through local council contracts, community transport is not considered to be “integral” to the public transport network as defined by section 120 of the Land Transport Management Act (LTMA).

To understand the reasons for this situation, it is firstly necessary to define what community transport is, and the role it plays in meeting people’s accessibility needs. The importance of volunteer staff and reliance on grants, donations and fund raising is a key differential from conventional public transport. The challenges with providing community transport differ significantly from those of “mainstream” services, and the importance of support that some forward-thinking councils and national umbrella organisations are providing is highlighted. Finally, a series of recommendations, for future development of the community transport sector are provided as a way of starting the integration journey.

The research for this paper was carried out by Taith Consulting Ltd on behalf of Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), who funded a community transport study in early 2023. The work included discussions with community transport operators in New Zealand, review of research papers in the UK and Australia, and information provided by councils. Taith has also worked with a new community transport operator – Waka Eastern Bay in Whakatāne.

What is Community Transport?

The Community Transport Association UK (CTAUK)ⁱ, a representative body of operators, provides the following definition:

- Flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs.
- Often the only means of transport for vulnerable and isolated community members – in particular senior citizens, disabled people or young people.
- Can include voluntary car share / lift schemes, community buses / vans; hospital transport; dial-a-ride; wheels to work or college (subsidised bike or motorcycle provision); and group hire of vehicles.

Services can either be demand responsive, taking people from door to door on request, or scheduled along fixed routes and working to a timetable. Vehicles are usually minibuses or larger “people mover” cars which are sometimes fitted with equipment, such as hoists, required by disabled people. Most importantly, services are run for a social purpose and never a profit, which generally makes them very affordable for users. In New Zealand, if community transport services are driven by volunteers who do not have a P-endorsed licence only a donation can be accepted (and is not compulsory). Only services who employ P-endorsed drivers can charge a fare.

Both Total Mobility, which is a subsidised commercial taxi scheme, and on-demand services provided by a private operator (such as MyWay in Timaruⁱⁱ), are not classed as community transport. Instead the “purest” form of community transport is that provided by a locally based charitable or voluntary organisation whose purpose is to provide a social service.

Community transport often starts and evolves as a need identified for a specific group of people – which could include those with a disability (physical and mental) and access need (for example to a hospital or place of education). During the research for the GWRC project one community transport operator in Canterbury stated that when offering services to residents of a rest home, he realised

that some people had not left the building for over five years due to lack of transport options. In his view people were trapped and might as well have been in prison.

Meeting Accessibility Needs

Community transport reaches parts of New Zealand that other public transport services cannot serve, for example, rural and small-town areas where population densities are very low. Supported by \$100,000 from the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) Innovation Fund, the Waka Eastern Bay serviceⁱⁱⁱ was set up in mid-2023 because frequency and coverage of fixed bus routes simply cannot offer people without access to private transport the choice they needed (and which most of us take for granted). The door-to-door service is aimed at senior citizens and people with disabilities in the Whakatane district and surrounding rural areas. There are currently two vehicles in operation – a 12-seat minibus with a wheelchair hoist and a seven-seat people mover.

The weekday service (operating 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday) is run by a charitable trust established by Eastern Bay Villages (EBV), an organisation which helps people to age well in their own homes and communities. EBV works to reduce isolation and vulnerability among pakeke / seniors by building community connections across generations to enhance well-being, working alongside clubs, marae, community organisations and paid services. The service is on-demand, and bookable up to 24 hours in advance. There is one part time salaried driver, project manager and administrator. All other staff (including a core of half a dozen drivers) are trained and vetted volunteers. Governance and oversight is provided by a Board of experienced and highly respected citizens of Whakatāne.

The objectives of the Waka Eastern Bay service are to:

- Provide affordable, safe, and accessible transport for people in the eastern Bay of Plenty whose needs aren't currently met.
- Work with Bay of Plenty Regional Council, and other service providers, to expand the range of destinations and journey purposes available to people, so they have equality of opportunity.
- Develop a financially and environmentally sustainable operation that provides reliable transport options.
- Enable people to access health appointments and receive appropriate early interventions, which can lower subsequent costs to service providers.
- Combat social isolation and loneliness, by enabling people to regularly connect with whanau.

The service provides for a range of journey purposes, including shopping, visiting friends, health appointments and education. The following testimonial is typical of many received by Waka Eastern Bay, and gives a flavour of the benefits received by service users:

"My name is [name withheld] of Whakatane. I am a paraplegic, being a survivor from a brain stem squash in 1967, and a stroke last year. I am now 69 and now rely on the Waka Shuttle to go to my medical appointments and even shopping trips. Their service I beyond my wildest expectations. I make my appointments the day before I have or want to go. These emails are responded to within a worry-free timeframe.

As I am incredibly independent they can even accommodate taking my own wheelchair. Putting me in their hoist chair to the destination.

The driver also goes beyond expectations. As I can take up to 15 minutes to transfer from my chair into the van. She shows patience and is consideration. Aware of my mobility issues.

I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending Waka to any disabled person I know. Without them I would be stuck in my home. It allows me to make choices in my life."

The project evaluation report^{iv} provided to NZTA noted the following key outcomes:

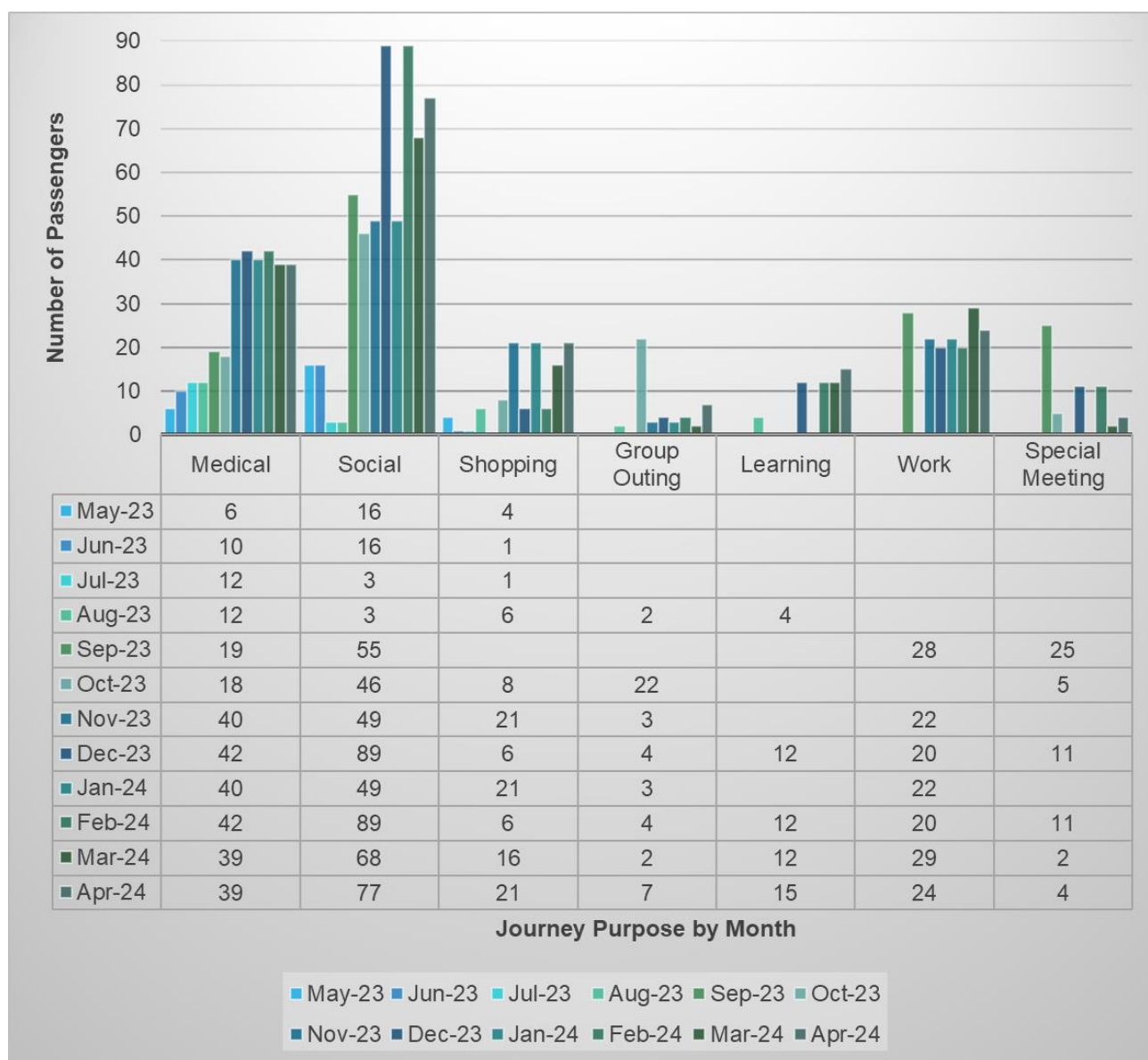
- By April 2024, there were 120 registered passengers including 87 with a disability.
- Between May 2023 and April 2024, 1,155 passengers were carried on the service, even though it had a slow start and wasn't formally launched until August 2023.
- As shown in Figure 1, since October 2023, passenger trip numbers have increased significantly. In April 2024 there were a record 187 trips in the month.
- Based on passenger evaluation data, 48% of passengers would not have travelled if the service did not exist. Another 31% would have relied on a lift in a car, perhaps at a time which was less convenient.
- Passenger feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with regular customer testimonials which highlight how the service has literally transformed people's lives.

The range of journey purposes has also expanded beyond just health and social care, which is indicative of significant demand. Figure 2 shows passenger journey purposes by each month between May 2023 and April 2024.



Source: Taith Consulting (2024)

Figure 1: Waka Eastern Bay Passengers by Month



Source: Taith Consulting (2024)

Figure 2: Waka Eastern Bay Passengers by Journey Purpose

Community transport is not limited to rural areas and small towns. Long-established operations like Sunshine Bus (Gisborne) and Ironside Society (New Plymouth) complement services provided by Hato Hone St John^v who run numerous shuttles into hospitals across both North and South Islands.

There is no national database of how many trips are taken by community transport services each year. In the Waikato region, a recent evaluation report^{vi} has provided the information on community transport operations across the region – shown in Table 1. It should be noted that the poor weather in January and February 2023, may have depressed passenger numbers.

Metric	2022/23 Performance
One-way trips	23,662
Distance travelled (vehicle kilometres)	858,000
Average passenger trip length (kilometres)	36.2
Volunteer hours donated	52,020 (approximately 5 full time equivalent staff)
Number of wheelchair accessible vehicles	10 (out of 14)

Metric	2022/23 Performance
One-way wheelchair trips	1,087
Total operating costs (\$)	1,174,195
<i>Operating cost per passenger trip (\$)</i>	<i>49.62</i>
<i>Operating cost per vehicle kilometre (\$)</i>	<i>1.37</i>
Total Waikato Regional Council grant (\$)	190,500
<i>Council grant per passenger trip (\$)</i>	<i>8.05</i>

Source: Waikato Community Transport (2024), with author calculations for some metrics (in italics).

Table 1: Waikato Community Transport Service Performance Metrics

The number of trips and distances travelled by community transport services are substantial, as would be expected in a region which is largely rural and with relatively long distances to the major city of Hamilton. If similar levels of patronage are repeated across other New Zealand regions, passengers are likely to number several hundreds of thousands with vehicle kilometres in the well into the millions.

It is notable that the total Waikato Regional Council (WRC) grant equates to 16% of total operating costs – and they are one of the strongest supporters of community transport in New Zealand. In contrast, depending on the level of income from passenger fares, councils across New Zealand and NZTA subsidise conventional fixed route bus services by between 50% and 90% of operating costs.

The majority of community transport service funding is raised by the operators, from a variety of sources such as donations, grants and fundraising. And of course, the volunteer labour provided to community transport operators offsets costs that would otherwise be incurred in wages (equivalent to five full time equivalent staff in the Waikato region). There is no regular central government (NZTA) funding for the community transport sector, although the Innovation Fund has supported Waka Eastern Bay.

Challenges for Community Transport

Unmet Demand

A big challenge for community transport is that demand is often unmet and therefore invisible to policy makers. Areas where fixed route buses are not seen as financially viable are therefore seen as being completely car-reliant.

MR Cagney (2020)^{vii} produced a very informative community transport study on behalf of Northland Regional Council (NRC), which includes clear indices of transport disadvantage - for example in relation to percentage of households with no vehicle and people who cannot walk or find it very difficult (as an indicator of disability). Based on a series of interviews with service commissioners, operators and users a number of conclusions about unmet demand were reached:

- Lack of affordable, accessible transport choices - especially in the Far North and Kaipara.
- Lack of choice is exacerbated by low incomes and long distances people need to travel.
- People have travel needs for local, regional and longer travel – for example getting into town from the outskirts, getting to a larger town from a smaller town, or even Auckland.
- Total Mobility may help with local trips for some people, but even a subsidised taxi would be unaffordable for many.
- Services that drop people in a big town for a full day are problematic for those who have a single appointment, and can neither afford to spend money at a café to pass the time, nor have somewhere else to wait.

- There is a lot of good will already – for example social workers driving people to the supermarket; pool drivers in the Hokianga; services who are not contracted or paid to deliver transport, doing so anyway; and people who recognise a need and meet that need in their own way.
- Any upfront costs – for example when claiming back travel expenses from Te Whatu Ora under the National Travel Assistance scheme^{viii} - can present a barrier to travel, so much so that for some people the need to claim back later can be just as much of a barrier as there being no service.

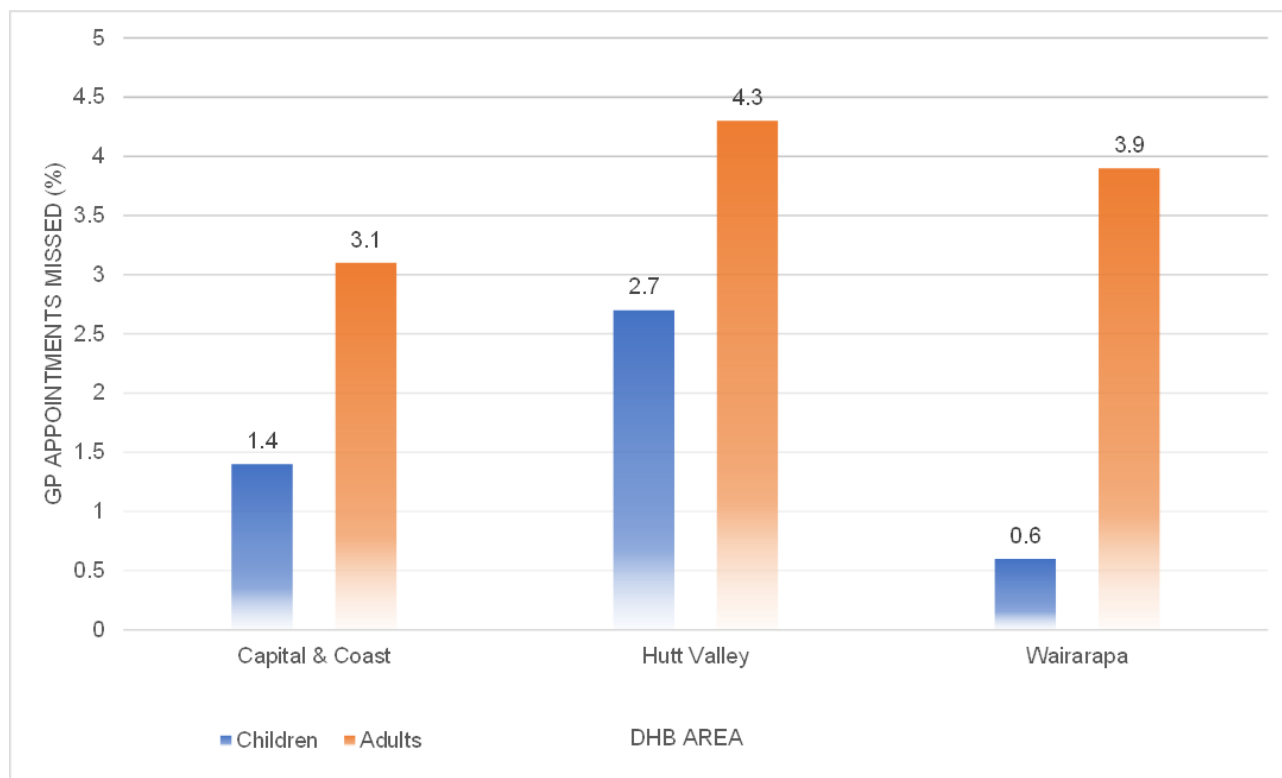
An assessment by Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand (EHINZ)^{ix} on failure to attend a General Practitioner (GP) appointment because of a lack of transport access is based on a survey which asked:

“In the last 12 months, was there a time when you had a medical problem but did not visit or talk to a GP because you had no transport to get there?”

Based on the survey results, across New Zealand as a whole EHINZ has estimated that over one-year unmet demand for GP services – where someone had a medical problem but did not visit or talk to a GP due to a lack of transport – is as follows:

- 101,000 adults (2.4% of the adult population) and a further 9,000 children aged 0 to 14 years (1.0% of all children in that age group).
- The highest unmet demand prevalence was found in young adults aged 15 to 24 years and young children aged 0 to 4.
- 7.6% of disabled adults (equivalent to an estimated 28,000 people). After adjusting for age and gender differences, disabled adults were nearly five times more likely than non-disabled adults to experience an unmet demand.
- Among adults, Māori and Pacific peoples had the highest prevalence, with 5.5% and 4.8% respectively. Among children, the greatest prevalence was experienced by Pacific people (3.2%).

Unmade GP appointments for the three Greater Wellington DHB areas are shown in Figure 3.



Source: Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand

Figure 3: Unmade GP Appointments Resulting from Lack of Transport

These are concerning figures for the health a sector which, compared to other journey purposes, is relatively well served by community transport (and in a region with relatively good public transport). The costs to the people themselves, and wider impact on demand for acute care when health conditions are not diagnosed in a timely fashion, are likely to be substantial.

The value of community transport is created by people (mainly volunteers) going out of their way to do the right thing and drive people around, often for no monetary reward. This behaviour rarely makes it into any economic evaluation for transport investment which remains wedded to assumptions around “rational actors” who all maximise benefits to themselves. And yet without community transport taking people to health appointments, costs of future care from unmet demand would be significantly higher.

Service Set up and Operation

Traditional fixed route bus services are let through long-term contracts to private operators - funded by Waka Kotahi and Regional Councils, and based on a legislative framework for the planning, procurement, and delivery of public transport services. In the Bay of Plenty region for example, the budget for such services exceeds \$25 million per year.

A significant challenge is setting up and operating community transport services is the absence of similar policy and funding framework. Whilst some far-sighted councils provide policy support and funding (discussed below), most community transport operators start up when an individual or group of people decide they want to help others less fortunate than themselves. In some cases this is a result of religious faith, with the Presbyterian Church particularly active.

To fund both set-up and operating costs, including purchase of vehicles, community transport operators are heavily reliant on a mixture of grant applications (often from charitable foundations) and direct fund-raising through events and requests for donations. By their nature, these sources require constant work to keep money coming in to pay for vehicle maintenance / renewal, fuel, insurance, training, telephone / internet, and staff remuneration (even if it is only volunteer expenses). Most services rely primarily on volunteer drivers because there is insufficient funding to recruit and pay people who have a P-endorsed licence. Budgets for community transport services vary depending on hours operated and distance travelled, but a typical two-vehicle operation can comfortably consume \$80,000 per year.

As part of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) community transport study^x, existing operators from a number of regions were asked to respond to two questions, as summarised in Table 2:

“What are the most significant barriers and challenges when setting up a community transport service?”	“What are the most significant day-to-day barriers and challenges when running a community transport service?”
Setting up the Trust entity takes between three and six months to obtain signatories, bank accounts and documents.	Finding available drivers especially at short notice.
Getting buy-in and funding.	The need to promote the service continuously without a large communications budget.
Legal issues of setting up the Trust (helped significantly by local council advisor and other Trusts).	An incredibly manual business, with multiple vehicles, volunteer drivers to collate, relying on memory a lot and more paperwork than is ideal.
Protocols for scenarios – unwell clients, dementia clients, transport of children – driver being left with sleeping child while mother	With the aftereffects of COVID-19 still lingering throughout the health systems, there are still late notice appointment cancellations.

“What are the most significant barriers and challenges when setting up a community transport service?”	“What are the most significant day-to-day barriers and challenges when running a community transport service?”
leaves the car etc.	
Driver health and safety protocols.	Having to deal with the local township taxi service and other commercial operators who saw the services as unfair competition.
Accident protocols and insurance issues.	Getting the community transport concept across to the community.
Getting enough volunteer drivers.	
Advertising the service.	

Source: Taith Consulting (2023)

Table 2: Challenges in Setting Up and Running Community Transport Services

Respondents to this survey were generally volunteers or paid part time staff, and they struggled to distinguish between set-up and day-to-day challenges – they were often seen as one and the same.

In a presentation to the Regional Councils Transport Special Interest Group (TSIG) in March 2021, Community Waikato and MR Cagney provided an overview of the challenges currently being faced by the sector in New Zealand:

- Community transport is fragile.
- It’s “nobody’s job” in the transport sector, no one seems to have the mandate for community transport.
- There are policies in government agencies but very little resourcing for the operators.
- Transport services are overwhelmingly run by volunteers.
- Government services are being centralised but transport options remain unavailable.

The funding challenge is a significant one. As one of the speakers observed, it is not a good sign when your transport system is being funded by raffles and quiz nights!

The above challenges notwithstanding, there are a number of Regional Councils who have taken the lead in providing both policy support and funding for community transport services.

Waikato Regional Council (WRC) employs a Community Transport Lead officer, and this is proving highly effective in keeping matters moving forward at an operational and advisory level, in particular getting all the key stakeholders (agencies and operators) working closely together. Supported by both Waikato Regional Council and Trust Waikato (a philanthropic organisation), the Waikato Community Transport Forum^{xi} provides details both for service users and operators. Service provision is split into council areas, with basic details for each service provided along with contact information. Guidance for operators^{xii} is particularly comprehensive with links to key documents (such as fact sheets produced by Community Waikato), policies (such as safe driving) and templates for administrative use – including for volunteer agreements.

Waikato are one of the community transport market leaders in New Zealand, and this is evident from sections of the website which provide details of symposiums which have been held in 2019 and 2022, as well as links to research reports and policy documents (such as the Regional Public Transport Plan).

Environment Canterbury (ECan) also employs a member of staff who has specific responsibility for the 15 Community Vehicle Trusts (CVTs) which have been established across the region. Included in the ECan role is provision of oversight and administrative support to CVTs; provision of an annual

grant to operators; liaison between trusts; and assistance with setting up new services. The CVT approach, and ECan's support for it, is a highly effective and professional operation. ECan summarises the main challenges in planning community transport services as follows:

- Population for funding the service for council rates and obtaining enough money.
- Obtaining volunteer drivers in small rural populations.
- Identification of willing and able board members / volunteers to govern the individual CVTs.

The ECan CVT website^{xiii} is an excellent community transport resource both for users and operators (both current and prospective). There is a "latest news" section which is very useful for keeping up to date, and generating confidence that services are moving forward. The "Find a Service" drop-down menu takes the user to each CVT area, and the landing page provides a good level of detail as to when and where the service runs, drops off and picks up. There is also a link to a page for people who wish to volunteer, as well as a very informative section on how to set up a new trust which provides a summary of the practical, legal, financial, business planning, administrative and governance requirements.

National Umbrella Organisations

The role of a national umbrella organisation is to provide both advocacy for the community transport sector; and practical advice to current and future operators. There is currently no such national body in New Zealand.

The Community Transport Association UK (CTAUK)^{xiv} is a national charity that represents and supports operators of community transport: thousands of local charities and community groups across the UK that provide transport services fulfilling a social purpose and community benefit. CTAUK vision is:

"...of a world where people can shape and create their own accessible and inclusive transport solutions and our mission is to achieve this through championing accessible and inclusive transport, connecting people and ideas, and by strengthening our members and raising standards."

Key functions to deliver this vision include:

- Contributing to the formation of public policy that affects members and the community transport sector.
- Demonstrating how better outcomes are achieved for people and communities when they have access to accessible and inclusive transport.
- Creating partnerships with likeminded organisations across all sectors.
- Managing a national programme of quality assured education and training.
- Providing comprehensive advice and guidance to people delivering community transport, and championing the vital and indispensable work of members.

The Australian Community Transport Association (ACTA)^{xv} was founded in February 2011 comprising representatives from Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria with a view to providing a national voice for community transport sector on a national level. The ACTA remit has since extended to other States in Australia, and it is the national peak body representing the community transport sector. The States also have their own community transport associations, which are affiliated to ACTA.

The role of ACTA is to:

- Provide a forum for the State Associations and the State Representatives to meet and to discuss matters of mutual interest.
- Represent community transport operators within Australia.

- Make representations to government, non-government and the private sector on behalf of its membership.
- Provide information and support to community transport operators in Australia.
- Develop policy and standards that promote best practice in community transport organisations.
- Promote community transport issues within throughout Australia.
- Build a strong membership base to generate income and political influence.

Conclusions: Towards a Policy and Funding Framework

As might be expected, there are a wide range of community transport challenges and barriers which have been reported by governments, operators, and researchers. To summarise these succinctly in the New Zealand context, it is helpful to think of the “four Ps” - people, policy, process, and publicity.

People are at the heart of community transport. Nothing works well without having enough of the right people in the right roles. At government level, having people with the commitment and skills needed to navigate a complex environment of personal relationships and regulatory issues makes a huge difference to what can be achieved, as is clearly seen in Waikato, Canterbury and Northland. Discussions with the Canterbury CVTs emphasise what a positive role ECan plays, and indirect feedback from Waikato operators confirms the same.

At operator level, generating and regularly refreshing the pool of talented volunteer staff to perform all the necessary roles (especially driving) is essential to ensure a safe, efficient, effective and financially sustainable service. With staff generally of a relatively advanced age, this is easier said than done. But it is very clear that community transport operations are often very professionally run organisations, and so part of the challenge is maintaining that standard over time. Issues such as safe driving and vetting of volunteers who work with vulnerable people are taken very seriously.

The ability to obtain funding is partly the result of policy but there is also a strong argument that it should be a key skill required by at least one staff member at every operator. At least in some parts of New Zealand, the challenge is not the shortage of willing donors but rather the ability to make a convincing case for funding compared with other organisations. That said, there is a danger of fundraising taking too much time and effort for the reward obtained. There is a strong case for establishing a stable long term funding arrangement for community transport which means that operators can get on with providing existing services and planning new ones.

At local government level in New Zealand, policy priority and funding given to community transport is mixed. All councils appear to recognise the need for effective community transport, and there is willingness to consider greater involvement. Those councils which have traditionally given community transport a higher policy priority appear to be able to sustain more effective services. The good news is that there is plenty of good practice (as well as lessons learned) which can be used by councils to develop effective community transport frameworks.

At national government level, New Zealand policy priority and funding for community transport is well behind other countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom. Producing a national government policy on support for community transport – including advice on options for funding – should therefore be a high priority. However, this does not mean that councils should wait until that policy is drafted. Waikato and ECan have shown that plenty can be done at regional level.

Process is a double-edged sword. On the one hand legal, financial, safety and user care responsibilities understandably require strong adherence to process. There is absolutely nothing to be gained by tolerating cowboy operators, and there appear to be very few of those in the community transport sector. However, on the other hand, navigation of regulatory requirements can be a challenge for any organisation – never mind one staffed primarily or completely by volunteers. Advisory support provided by councils is critical to reduce barriers to entry, which isn't just a challenge faced by market-based systems.

Whilst regulatory frameworks can always be improved, the clear imperative is to make navigation of existing process easier through provision of well-structured, timely and user-friendly resources. There is a trove of experience both within well-established community transport operators, community sector organisations, local government, and specialist consultants. Pretty much every challenge encountered by a community transport operator has already been encountered and solved by someone else.

Operators make the point that it is a challenge to get the message across that community transport exists, and can make a real difference to people who use it. Again, there is plenty of good practice and example of lives being transformed. The challenge is to get all areas and operators up to a common basic standard, and to evaluate potential user receptiveness to the messaging being given. There is a balance between promoting community transport for people who need it most, versus giving the misleading impression that it is a cheap taxi service which anyone can use.

The position of taxis is interesting, as several operators report that commercial firms are very unhappy with what they see as “unfair competition” from community transport services. This appears to be especially the case where no regular bus services exist, and taxi operators are clearly used to having a monopoly. Transport is a “public good” and is necessary to access other public goods such as health care. This means that it should not just be left to the market to decide what services to provide, and how much to charge.

Recommendations

At the start of this paper, it was noted that community transport is not part of the Sustainable Public Transport Framework (SPTF) which provides policy and funding and guidance for conventional bus services. The “obvious” conclusion – that community transport should be brought into the SPTF – ignores the unique mode of operation whereby services are developed by local people for local people. They are not tendered to commercial organisations and, as a result of their voluntary and charitable status, the focus for operators is on delivering social benefits.

Therefore this paper strongly advocates developing a policy and funding framework which is tailored to the needs of community transport operators and service users; and developed in partnership with people who work in the sector. Imposing a framework from above will not be appropriate for a sector which is based on meeting diverse and challenging transport needs.

At the council level, policy recommendations include:

- Produce an accessibility charter and action plan (as undertaken by Metlink^{xvi}) which provides a clear commitment to address transport disadvantage in all its forms.
- Undertake stakeholder and user engagement to test different community transport options and operating models to see what works best in different circumstances.
- Implement a community transport framework which supports identification, assessment, prioritisation and funding of service proposals based on greatest need.
- Establish community transport as a programme within a council’s public transport portfolio, and ensure that integration is real through (for example) including links to community transport services on the public transport web pages.
- Develop a community transport policy within the Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) which commits to funding staff who can manage the programme and grants to operators.
- Work with spatial planning colleagues to ensure that accessibility through community transport is appropriately reflected in planning documents.
- Work with Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners to develop a community transport framework which aligns to new and existing papakāinga developments and existing marae.

In terms of local funding, the most significant proposal would be to levy a dedicated rate to establish a community transport fund (as happens in Waikato and parts of Canterbury) to assist operators with key financial challenges such as vehicle purchase and recruitment of at least one paid driver who

can provide the core services (with volunteers providing additional capacity).

To supplement direct funding, councils could also provide resources “in-kind” which can include:

- Donations of any council equipment or assets that, whilst still serviceable, are no longer required.
- Brokering deals with vehicle suppliers to obtain better financial terms.
- Assisting with marketing and publicity of the community transport services.
- Assisting with identification and grant opportunities, and completion of grant applications.
- Helping with recruitment and training of volunteer drivers.
- Assisting with purchase and set up of technology solutions, including an app-based booking system.

At national level, the setting up of an umbrella body for community transport would significantly raise the profile of the sector and help both operators and councils in obtaining political support and ultimately funding. The New Zealand government, in the form of the Ministry of Transport (MOT) should consider providing policy and financial support to assist with setting up and running the umbrella body, at least until it can generate its own funding through charitable status.

Community transport has operated under the radar for too long, and the above proposals will go a long way to provide long overdue policy and funding recognition of the value that the sector provides.

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