

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member – Environment and Transport
Date:	8 November 2011
Title:	Government Funding for Community Transport
Reference:	3403
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

Contact name: Kevin Ings

Tel: 01962 846986

Email: kevin.ings@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

1.1. The report sets out a number of proposals for using additional one-off funding which the Government has made available to support Community Transport services in Hampshire. These proposals offer a programme of measures which should empower the community transport sector and local communities to play a greater role in meeting local transport needs.

2. Contextual information

2.1 The government is providing additional funding to local authorities that receive Rural Bus Subsidy Grant to encourage the development of Community Transport. Hampshire County Council has received a grant of £269,580.

2.2 The Government's aspiration is that local authorities use this money to work in partnership with operators and local communities to examine how more flexible services might be provided, recognising that, where commercial bus services are not viable, Community Transport can play a valuable role in reducing isolation.

2.3 Whilst Government has taken the view that it is for each authority to determine how best to use community transport and assist rural communities to be able to access jobs and services, there is an expectation that councils will not use this extra funding to displace planned expenditure on community transport and supported bus services. The balance of capital and revenue expenditure is also for each authority to determine.

2.4 In order to assist local authorities in making the best use of this funding, the Government has also confirmed a partnership with the Community Transport

Association's consultancy group to provide every rural local authority with £2,600 worth of consultancy time.

3. Options for Hampshire

3.1. In putting together proposals on how this money could be used the following have been taken into consideration:

- (i) funding is one-off and therefore any proposals should not require ongoing revenue support;
- (ii) Hampshire already has a well developed and diverse community transport sector;
- (iii) a desire to build on outputs from the Community Transport Review which identified further opportunities to support, develop and build capacity within the sector; and
- (iv) the need to enable the community transport sector to play a greater role in filling any gaps which are left by the review of local bus services.

3.2. There is clearly a desire to see a community transport sector in Hampshire which offers safe and good quality transport services which are accessible to those people who have no alternative mode of travel. These services also need to offer flexibility and value for money and, in the case of the larger operators, play an increasing role in the delivery of passenger transport services which the County Council contracts.

3.3. Given all the above it is proposed that the additional Government grant could be used to encourage the development of community transport in the following areas:

- (i) building capacity within the community transport sector;
- (ii) raising standards in the community transport sector;
- (iii) promoting and supporting local transport initiatives;
- (iv) enabling the community transport sector play a greater role in providing passenger transport services; and
- (v) improving the promotion of community transport services.

The measures which could be undertaken in each of these areas is considered in more detail below.

4. Building capacity within the Community Transport Sector

4.1. If the potential for the community transport sector to play a greater role in the delivery of passenger transport services is to be realised then measures to build capacity need to be considered. Community transport is often well placed to provide local flexible and low cost services. Two measures are proposed to build capacity in the sector:

- (i) Set up additional voluntary car schemes

The County Council already provides some financial support to the Good Neighbour Support Service which supports over 100 Good

Neighbour Schemes (Voluntary Car Groups) across the county, many of which run voluntary car schemes. Additional support could be provided to set up new Good Neighbour Schemes in areas where a need has been identified. The chosen areas could be guided by those areas most affected by the local bus service review and where unmet individual journey needs may remain. As well as setting up new car schemes the approach would also bring added value as many Good Neighbour Schemes respond to the needs in their community, and therefore enhance well-being.

(ii) Volunteer Driver Recruitment

To coordinate a short term project (six to nine months) which would be aimed at proactively recruiting volunteers for community transport schemes in order to build capacity within the sector. A more proactive approach to recruitment and retention would better utilise the valuable asset of local volunteers and assist voluntary groups, many of whom struggle to find sufficient volunteers to meet the demand for transport journeys. Working on a county-wide level, but in partnership with local groups, the approach could use professional looking, well-branded recruitment methods, utilise various multi-media sources and target employee volunteering. This role would aid and complement the work of the existing Volunteer Centres and add value to the work already being done in each district. The wider context of this is that community transport offers fulfilling opportunities but is often much less able to attract volunteers than more prominent charities.

5. Raising standards in the Community Transport Sector

5.1. If the community transport sector is to play a greater role in the wider delivery of passenger transport services then there is a need to ensure that appropriate skills and expertise are being developed and applied to the delivery of services.

5.2. Specific training opportunities for community transport providers are limited. The main opportunities have until recently been provided by the Community Transport Association through a main event in Manchester, although this has now been discontinued. However, few Hampshire groups attended this event due to the distance. Three training initiatives are therefore proposed to help raise standards in the sector in this area:

(i) Community Transport Training

A programme of training courses to be held over the next nine months for people involved in setting up and operating community transport services. The training programme could provide specific training for community transport operators on the legal and best practice elements of operating a high quality community transport service, e.g. legal aspects of operating a minibus, assisting passengers with disabilities, emergency evacuation, etc.

(ii) Minibus Event

To hold a one-off minibus exhibition and training event for community groups and schools that own or use minibuses. Such an event was last held in Hampshire six years ago but has not been repeated owing to lack of staff resources. The event would be held in conjunction with Hampshire Transport Management who would help to recruit minibus exhibitors.

The event would give community groups and schools the opportunity to see the range of new vehicles on offer, including minibuses adapted to transport passengers with disabilities. It would also provide relevant training to support (i) above, to ensure that organisations owning or using minibuses - of which there are around 500 in Hampshire - are fully aware of the law and good practice for owning and using a minibus. Changes in the law which affect driver licensing, the permit system and health & safety means that groups may not be operating in accordance with the latest regulations.

Transport is often the catalyst to community activity – the ability to get older people to a lunch club or day care, or take young people on a day trip. Clearly minibuses provide many benefits to the local community. Any such transport needs to be run legally and professionally. A Minibus Event would be of great value in achieving this. It would also benefit groups which were considering purchasing a minibus, perhaps encouraging them to share with those who already have vehicles locally.

(iii) Minibus Operator's Manual

Hampshire has already developed comprehensive training materials (MiDAS), which are now used nationally, to help minibus operators assess and train their minibus drivers. No similar material exists for those who have the responsibility for managing and operating their minibus. A training manual for minibus operators would be produced to complement the existing MiDAS training materials. This could be launched at the Minibus Event.

5.3. It is proposed that the consultancy time (£2,600) which is available from the Community Transport Association (CTA) is converted to training days and used to part fund these training proposals. Preliminary discussions with the CTA would suggest that using the consultancy time in this way would be acceptable.

6. Promoting and supporting local transport initiatives

6.1. Two initiatives are proposed to encourage the development of new local transport initiatives whilst also supporting key existing projects:

(i) Transport Challenge Fund

To establish a Transport Challenge Fund that could help local communities to develop and implement their own solutions to local transport needs. The County Council has recently produced a Transport Self-help kit to assist local communities in setting up their own local transport initiatives. This will take local communities through the process of identifying local travel needs, choosing the most appropriate option, and step by step guidance on how to implement their chosen option.

The kit has been co-designed with a number of partners including parish and district councils, councils for voluntary service and community transport providers. The kit has been partly funded with monies provided through the Hampshire Rural Delivery Strategy and a further £5,000 has now been allocated to support transport initiatives which are developed through the use of the self-help kit. Money received from Government could be used to increase the fund.

The fund would be used to support local communities that take responsibility for solving their own local transport issues and this approach is very much in line with Government thinking at this time and the localism agenda. It may also enable local communities to proactively respond to any gaps in service provision which may be left following the implementation of the Council's Bus Subsidy Review. The fund could provide non-recurring match funding or in some cases 'pump priming' money.

(ii) Vehicle Purchase

To offer grants to the Community Transport Group Hire Minibus Schemes or village minibuses to help with the purchase of new or replacement minibuses. Many community transport operators find it difficult to obtain capital funding for new or replacement vehicles. The County Council has in recent years provided significant support through the Local Transport Plan Capital Plan but this funding stream has now come to an end. Whilst alternative funding sources are sought, some of this funding could be used to support future replacements. The cost of vehicles would depend on the required individual specification and/or whether the vehicle is new or second hand.

One approach could be to target the allocation of this funding to the district-wide Community Transport Group Hire Minibus Schemes in those rural areas most affected by any reduction in local bus services as part of a longer term initiative to filling the gaps which are left. Priority

should be given to grant applications where vehicles will provide journey opportunities to health facilities and retail over journeys to leisure activities. These schemes provide an important resource which local communities and groups can use to meet their own transport needs on a self-help basis. Given the current grants and procurement approaches careful consideration would need to be given to the mechanism to achieve this.

7. Enabling the community transport sector to play a greater role in providing passenger transport services

7.1. Adopting alternative service delivery options may provide further opportunities for community transport operators to play a greater role in providing passenger transport services and promote greater financial sustainability for schemes longer term. These non-profit making schemes can tender for local bus services, home to school and social care transport and other contracts in Hampshire. The following is proposed:

Business Development of Community Transport Schemes

Provide designated support to one or more schemes as part of a targeted initiative to increase the scope of work and the journey opportunities provided by district-wide Community Transport Group Hire Minibus Schemes supported by the County Council. This would seek to increase trip productivity and involvement in contract work and offer practical guidance towards the adoption of a trading ethos to help promote greater financial sustainability for schemes in the longer term. The chosen scheme(s) could again be guided by those areas most affected by local bus service changes and could be supported by the earlier proposal to offer vehicle grants to schemes for new vehicles.

8. Improved Promotion of Community Transport Services

8.1. There is a need to make people aware of the scope of community transport services available in Hampshire. Equally there is a desire to ensure that the County Council receives the appropriate recognition for the support which it provides to the community transport sector and for those services which it directly contracts. Two initiatives are proposed in this area:

(i) Website Improvements

To review and make improvements to the information currently held on the Passenger Transport Group's website. Following recent budget reductions a number of community transport information publications are no longer being printed. Consequently, there is an increasing need to modernise the website to improve the usability for members of the public who may be looking for information about community transport services.

(ii) Promotion and Marketing

To implement promotional and marketing initiatives which will help to better promote services for users, aid volunteer recruitment, and reinforce the profile of funding from stakeholders. Through the Community Transport Review a draft strategy which sets out how this could be achieved has been developed. This could include converting all Dial-A-Ride services to Call and Go and the service branding for those services operated directly under contract to the County Council. This would allow some progress on those actions in the strategy identified for early implementation.

9. Conclusion

9.1. This report sets out a rationale for using the additional funding for community transport which the Government has made available. Funding will be allocated across each of the five development areas identified.

9.2. The government has confirmed that there are no timescale restrictions for using this funding and that any carry over of funding between financial years is a local matter. It is proposed therefore to use this funding during 2011/12 and 2012/13 to implement the initiatives outlined in this report. This would include an initial allocation for vehicle replacement and this will be supplemented by any balance of funding which remains unused towards the end of the funding period.

10. Recommendation

10.1 That the additional one-off government funding for community transport be used during 2011/12 and 2012/13 to implement the following initiatives which are detailed in Sections 4-8 of this report:

- (i) set up additional voluntary car schemes in partnership with the Good Neighbour Support Service;
- (ii) co-ordinate volunteer driver recruitment in partnership with the voluntary sector;
- (iii) provide specific training initiatives including a programme of community transport training courses, a minibus event and the development of a Minibus Operator's Manual for community transport operators;
- (iv) provide a Transport Challenge Fund to help local communities develop and implement their own solutions to local transport needs;
- (v) provide grants to the Community Transport Group Hire Minibus Schemes or village minibuses to help with the purchase of new or replacement minibuses;
- (vi) provide designated support to one or more of the Community Transport Group Hire Minibus Schemes as part of a targeted initiative to increase

the scope of work and the journey opportunities provided by these schemes;

- (vii) to review and make improvements to the information currently held on the Passenger Transport Group's website; and
- (viii) to implement promotional and marketing initiatives which will help to better promote services for users, aid volunteer recruitment, and reinforce the profile of funding from stakeholders.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.1. The proposed initiatives in this report seek to improve accessibility and community involvement for hard to reach and disadvantaged members of the community.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. Many community transport schemes offer transport for youth groups and support wider community involvement.

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

Use of demand responsive transport services and group transport reflects users requirements and reduces need for individual car journeys.

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

Introduction of newer vehicles allows the latest emission standards to be met.