

Cabinet

Title:	Community Transport Pathfinder
Purpose:	To provide Cabinet with an update on the Community Transport Pathfinder work and proposed next steps.
Recommendation:	That Cabinet notes the update and approves the next steps outlined at paragraph 2.15.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 30 May 2023, Cabinet approved the next steps for a community pathfinder project which included commissioning of community surveys, an in-depth travel needs analysis for Garnock Valley, and the testing of an initial ‘dayhopper’ service within North Ayrshire. Alongside these steps, further scoping work of a community transport offer was also to be undertaken.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the work to develop an expanded community transport offer within North Ayrshire, along with proposed next steps and timescales at paragraph 2.15.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Community Transport Association defines community transport as “providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs”. There is no fixed model or vehicle used for community transport, and it can serve a vital role in addressing loneliness and social isolation, and in providing access to services, training and employment opportunities. Often those who utilise community transport opportunities are those who are vulnerable or isolated in some way and it can help them to maintain or develop independence. Community transport schemes are usually supported by volunteers within communities and they may provide services such as hospital transport, vehicles available for lease by local groups, or community bus schemes.
- 2.2 Following budget engagement activity undertaken earlier this year, coupled with mini-enquiries which took place around various themes associated with the cost of living and child poverty, transport was again confirmed as an issue within many North Ayrshire communities. The cost and availability of both public transport and vehicles for hire meant that vulnerable and more rural residents in particular were limited in their abilities to get from place to place, and it was reported that this in turn limited their ability to be involved in community life, get to vital appointments or take up learning and employment opportunities.

- 2.3 An allocation of £0.100m was made as part of the Council's budget setting process in March 2023 for a community pathfinder project, and a Cabinet report was approved on 30 May 2023 outlining the proposed next steps to develop a project. This included commissioning of community surveys, an in-depth travel needs analysis for Garnock Valley, and the testing of an initial 'dayhopper' service within North Ayrshire. Alongside these steps, further scoping work of a community transport offer was to be undertaken. It was agreed that a further update to Cabinet would be provided before the end of the year.
- 2.4 An update on each aspect of the next steps agreed at Cabinet in May 2023 is provided as follows, along with additional updates on other opportunities that have arisen:

Garnock Valley Travel Needs Analysis

- 2.5 Consultancy support is in the process of being procured to undertake the Travel Needs Analysis for the Garnock Valley. This is being led by the Garnock Valley Locality Partnership and funded by the Community Investment Fund. The Garnock Valley Locality Action Plan identified moving around as a priority and potential solutions to address travel issues.
- 2.6 The information available around the transport challenges experienced in the area was recognised as being anecdotal. The Moving Around working group identified the need to quantify and analyse transport challenges and patterns. This would thereafter provide an evidence base to inform potential projects and to ensure that any solutions were effective and would have the biggest impact for the community. The study will capture patterns of travel by the local community, the issues and barriers to travel within the area, and their impact on the community.
- 2.7 The study will also identify potential solutions to assist in easing transport issues and tackling inequalities including community-based solutions. These will be prioritised into short, medium and long-term actions. This will include consideration of micro improvements and low-cost interventions, which could potentially have a significant impact and benefit. Potential local and national partners and funding opportunities will be identified to assist in the delivery of the solutions. This will include exploring the scope, potential and demand for community transport and identification of real-life examples of any potential solutions. Work is expected to be complete by spring 2024.

Community Surveys

- 2.8 Consultancy support is also in the process of being procured, alongside the Garnock Valley Travel Needs Analysis, to undertake a North Ayrshire wide community engagement exercise. This aims to establish the demand for a community transport scheme across North Ayrshire, including how this would be shaped to meet the needs of the community. The programme and methodology will be agreed with the successful contractor; however, a broad range of engagement methods will be utilised to maximise engagement in the survey. The output will then be analysed to identify next steps. It is envisaged that this work will be complete by spring 2024.

Dayhopper Service

- 2.9 In partnership with Coalfield Community Transport (CCT), demand was tested for an initial trial of their 'Dayhopper' excursion service over the summer period. Interested residents were invited to register with CCT and sign-up for the day trip. A trip to Largs

was planned during July 2023 and information disseminated to older people in a selected number of sheltered housing complexes, however insufficient demand meant that the trip could not go ahead.

- 2.10 Officers have been exploring an alternative offer to a wider number of groups through CCT with a view to re-trialling the service in early 2024, including through the provision of a potential participatory budgeting approach using part of the £0.100m funding.

Pathfinder Scoping

- 2.11 An initial review has identified several examples of community transport models across Scotland. These are summarised at Appendix 1 and will be further considered through the survey and analysis work identified above. Initial findings have identified that there are a range of approaches adopted across Scotland, from providing a complementary service to existing bus services covering a direct route between specific destinations, to providing a specially adapted vehicle that can be self-driven. None of the schemes identified are currently self-sufficient due to funding mechanisms being short-term resulting in a reliance on external funding sources, often from local authorities, for continued operation.

Community Bus Fund

- 2.12 The establishment of a Community Bus Fund (CBF) formed part of the Bute House agreement signed in August 2021. The fund is available to support transport authorities to explore the full range of options set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act. It aims to support this reform by enabling local transport authorities to improve local public transport, with a focus on rural deprived areas where lower population density means bus services can be less commercially viable. The CBF has been allocated £5 million capital funding and £0.75 million in resource funding for 2023-24. The objectives for spend for the capital funding are:
- Connectivity to improve access to bus services, for example by upgrading bus stops and installing real time information electronic timetables.
 - Integration between transport modes, for example by installing infrastructure to support integration between modes, such as mobility hubs.
 - Trialling innovative transport solutions or improvements to encourage patronage or create efficiencies, for example by purchasing digital platforms to support Demand Responsive Transport.
- 2.13 The £0.75m resource is available to local authorities and is aimed at supporting completion of initial feasibility and preparatory work required for the 2019 Act. North Ayrshire Council has been allocated £0.146m of the capital funding which requires to be expended by 31 March 2024. It is proposed to use this allocation to upgrade bus stops in the Garnock Valley and other rural areas. These priorities were identified with reference to the potential for delivery given the timescales for expenditure of the funding. The Garnock Valley and other rural areas have been identified as a priority due to the impact caused by the reduction of services. These proposals will meet the funds' objective of connectivity to improve access to bus services.
- 2.14 Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), on behalf of its 12 constituent local authorities, which includes North Ayrshire, are submitting an expression of interest to the £0.75m resource fund. The project aims to carry out a study into rural transport

needs and a technical assessment of municipal bus operation. It also includes further data gathering work to develop the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy. If successful, this will complement the Garnock Valley Travel Needs Analysis work.

Next Steps

2.15 The following programme of work is proposed for the next stages of the Community Transport Pathfinder:

Item	Action	Timescale	Lead
Garnock Valley Travel Needs Analysis	Finalise procurement, appoint contract and complete study	Spring 2024	Connected Communities
Community Surveys	Finalise procurement, appoint contract and complete surveys	Spring 2024	Connected Communities
Locality Partnership Engagement	Undertake engagement with locality partnerships in relation to community transport needs and potential delivery models	Spring 2024	Connected Communities
Dayhopper Service	Work with identified community groups and re-scope trial, including exploration of a potential participatory budgeting approach	February 2024	Connected Communities/ Coalfield Community Transport
Pathfinder Scoping	Continue research on delivery models	Ongoing	Economic Development & Regeneration
Community Bus Fund-Bus Stop Upgrades	Identify locations, specify and complete upgrades	March 2024	Economic Development & Regeneration
Community Bus Fund-Regional Study	Subject to funding outcome. Work with SPT to develop the specification for the study	July 2024	Economic Development & Regeneration/ SPT

3. Proposals

3.1 That Cabinet notes the update and approves the next steps outlined at paragraph 2.15.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 A total of £0.100m funding is aligned to the community transport pathfinder project, and proposals for expenditure of this funding will be clarified as the actions at paragraph 2.15 are developed further.

Human Resources

4.2 There are no human resources implications arising from the report.

Legal

4.3 There are no legal implications arising from the report.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 The proposal is designed to provide socio-economic benefits through the provision of low-cost transport particularly to vulnerable people on low incomes and/or who are experiencing the effects of social isolation.

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5 The provision of community transport can help reduce carbon emissions by reducing reliance on private transport.

Key Priorities

4.6 The aims of the community transport pathfinder link directly the Council Plan priority of supporting communities and local democracy and fostering community wellbeing.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 The proposal reflects community wealth building principles, for example through a potential partnership approach with an existing Ayrshire based community transport provider, and scope to offer excursions to our own tourism destinations to help support the local economy.

5. Consultation

5.1 No consultation was required in the preparation of this report.

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For further information please contact **David W. Hammond, Head of Sustainability, Corporate Property & Transport**, on (01294) 324514.

Background Papers

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Appendix 1: Initial Review of Community Transport Models

The following provides a summary of the initial review of community transport models across Scotland. This will be further analysed through the survey work referenced within the report.

Arran Council for Voluntary Services Community Transport

The Community Transport Scheme is a low-cost door to door transport service for the local community who are unable to access existing transport, or where appropriate transport does not exist. The scheme operated a pilot phase since January 2022 in partnership with island medical providers to transport residents to medical appointments as well as liaising with and supporting social isolation and mental wellbeing groups. Transport was provided by volunteer drivers using their own vehicles.

The project has recently secured two new wheelchair accessible vehicles to expand the service through a grant from Motability, the Charity. Volunteer drivers can now use the vehicles for community transport journeys, providing easy access for their users, especially disabled passengers. As well as attending medical appointments, the service can now be used to attend social activities, helping to improve mental well-being and reduce any mobility barriers.

Coalfield Community Transport

Operating in East Ayrshire this scheme has as ten minibuses, seven of which are fully accessible by anyone who uses a wheelchair. The scheme is operated by Coalfield Community Transport (CCT), a registered charity and non-profit distributing company.

All services provided operate 363 days per year. Group Transport is the main service provided where drivers mainly drive for their own group however there is a core of 20 drivers who will drive for any group. Membership of the Group Transport service is open to all community and voluntary groups within East Ayrshire. The scheme also has a Dayhopper Club that provides a shopping and excursion service to individuals in receipt of benefit, older or unemployed people, lone parents, and people with a disability or who are geographically disadvantaged.

The project relies on funding applications to charity and grant making bodied for new vehicles. These variable annual grants allow the scheme to continue to operate but make planning for the future difficult. Any reductions in grant can result in a reduction in service provision.

The project relies on volunteer drivers for group transport services which is the mainstay of the project. These tend to be older drivers with the appropriate class of driving licence. There are difficulties in recruiting younger volunteer drivers because they do not have a D1 category on their driving licence.

South Ayrshire Community Transport

South Ayrshire Community Transport (SACT Ayr) was formed in 2016 by a consortium of local community transport operators and third sector organisations. The need for SACT Ayr was informed by the organisations' recognition that several unmet transport needs across South Ayrshire. The member organisations are involved in the joint planning of services to meet these needs.

It is a member of the West of Scotland Community Transport Network and has signed up to a quality assurance framework covering all aspects of vehicle and customer care. It offers the following services. All group or organisational drivers must be registered with SACT before driving any hired vehicle.

- Minibus hire using a range of wheelchair accessible minibuses including the provision of drivers where required.
- Barr to Girvan scheduled service operating five times a day on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.
- Out and about excursion club offering free individual membership and providing one excursion a week for a modest charge.
- E-bike Club offering 12 electric bikes in four different forms for 2 or 4 week hires at discounted rates.
- A Car Club with two electric Nissan Leafs and an electric 7 seat Nissan available to hire as a member or Pay As You Go by Ayrshire residents and businesses.
- Mini Bus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) training for volunteers and larger groups.

Carrick Community Transport Group a partner organisation CCTG and operates mainly in the Carrick area. It has three 16-seater minibuses for hire, one in Maybole and two in Girvan. These are not wheelchair accessible and drivers are not supplied. However, they can be used by voluntary groups and community organisations in Carrick.

3C Bus Service, Strathaven

The 3C Bus Service is operated by Climate Action Strathaven and is an express bus service between Strathaven, Stonehouse and Glasgow. It runs 12 times a day between Strathaven and Glasgow. The scheme was created because there was no direct bus route into Glasgow for around 15 years meaning an inconvenient two stage journey with a change in either Hamilton or East Kilbride.

To develop the scheme market research was carried out locally to establish whether a direct bus service would be desirable. Through crowd funding, a new Mercedes Tourismo coach was purchased to run the service. They have the equivalent of 1.5 full time drivers as well as other part timers with a PCV licence. Passenger numbers appear sufficient to maintain the 3C service as a regular route into Glasgow with fare cost set to maintain sufficient reserves to operate the service sustainably. Various funders are involved to ensure the service continues to operate.

m.connect, Moray

An accessible door to door bus service for anyone, regardless of age or disability, who is unable to use existing forms of transport or does not have access to a regular bus service. The service aims to compliment Stagecoach services by addressing the gaps in services across Moray where public transport is poor or non-existent. The service is funded by the Scottish and UK Governments, as part of the growth deal, and Moray Council and operates in five areas across Moray. It is a door-to-door bus service using 14 vehicles pre-booked through an app.

Scottish Borders

This service consists of several community transport organisations operating in local areas that tailor the transport services they provide for the needs of the specific communities.

- Berwickshire Wheels provides door to door transport for health-related appointments, shopping trips and social gatherings. The service is aimed at older and disabled residents of Berwickshire and relies on volunteer drivers.
- Gala Wheels offers accessible and affordable community transport for anyone who has difficulty using public transport through ill health, disability or age and for whom no private transport is available. The service is generally self-drive with volunteer drivers and uses two minibuses.
- Tweed Wheels is a community car specially adapted can be used by anyone living in Tweeddale who has difficulty using public transport because of a disability, ill health or age, and hasn't got access to a car.
- Teviot Wheels is a community transport service for residents of the Roxburgh area of the Scottish Borders. Their vehicles are based locally in Hawick, Jedburgh and Kelso. Currently their Hawick vehicle can take up to seven people including the driver. All the vehicles are wheelchair accessible with reduced passenger numbers.

Summary

From an initial review each scheme looks to address the issues in the community it serves, with no one solution fitting all circumstances. The current schemes range from providing a complementary service to existing bus services that provides a direct route between specific destinations, to providing a specially adapted vehicle that can be self-driven. In all cases an easy-to-use booking system is required to enable use.

No scheme appears to be entirely self-sufficient, and they rely on external funding sources, often from local authorities, for continued operation and maintenance of vehicles. Funding mechanisms are usually short-term therefore making long-term planning challenging. Each scheme has its own dedicated vehicles and community buy-in and volunteering are critical to success and to support delivery.