

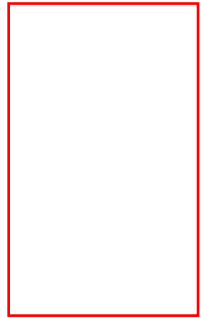
Enterprise Innovation and Networks Committee

EIN(2) 07-06(p.3)

Date: Thursday 5 October 2006

Venue: Committee Room 2, Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Title: Review of Economic Inactivity: Community Transport Association



1 Background

1.1 During 2004/05, the Enterprise, Innovation and Networks Committee, previously known as the Economic Development and Transport Committee, conducted a review of economic inactivity in Wales to which the Community Transport Association (CTA) presented evidence.

1.2 Over a year on from the report's completion in April 2005, the EIN Committee is reviewing progress with the proposals it put forward. This paper outlines CTA's response to the four recommendations which are of particular relevance to the community transport sector in Wales.

2 About the Community Transport Association

2.1 The CTA is a rapidly growing UK-wide charity giving voice and providing leadership, learning and enterprise support to member organisations across the third sector which are delivering innovative transport solutions to achieve social change. It promotes excellence through providing training, publications, advice, events and project support on voluntary, community and local accessible transport.

2.2 The CTA's vision is one of "a society free of social exclusion and injustice where everyone has mobility and access to the services they require". The CTA's mission is "to deliver social change through leadership, learning and enterprise"

2.3 Voluntary and Community Transport (CT) exists to meet the travel and social needs of people in both urban and rural areas to whom access, mobility and choice would otherwise be denied, providing accessible and affordable transport to achieve social inclusion. It therefore has particular relevance to addressing the challenge of economic inactivity in Wales.

3 CTA's response to the Committee Recommendations 2005

3.1 Recommendation 19: "The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) looks for ways to develop links between community transport schemes and the private sector to deliver a service that more closely fits customer needs, particularly those of people getting back into work."

3.1.2 The CTA believes that partnership between the voluntary and private, as well as statutory sectors is important if an effective and sustainable public transport network is to be established. The development of partnership working is already starting to occur through several mechanisms:

- CT co-ordinators are in place in many local authority areas and these staff are working to bring together the different sectors of the network.
- CTA is involved in a number of forums across Wales which also seek to involve commercial operators.
- Many local authorities have combined transport functions and CT responsibilities into a single department.
- Some authorities now incorporate information on all CT schemes and contact numbers into their bus timetable booklets and websites.

3.1.3 In addition to continuing and expanding the above work, CTA recommends that:

- Wherever possible and appropriate, public transport information includes details of CT, and that CT e-information services which are emerging in other areas of the UK (such as the www.A2Binfo.net service) are rolled out to Wales.
- Whilst there is some reference to CT in the draft Wales Transport Strategy, there needs to be specific recognition of the broader contribution that CT could make to several of the outcomes identified, bringing social, economic and environmental benefits. Equally, this should be reflected in the emerging Regional Transport Consortia's Transport Plans.

3.2 Recommendation 20: "The Committee recommends that WAG considers how it might provide more active support to community transport to realise indirect savings e.g. from fewer missed NHS outpatient appointments, as well as through its direct contribution to the economy."

3.2.1 CT operators already make an important and wide ranging contribution to health service transport. However, a number of improvements could be made to increase the flexibility and sustainability of these services as well as others:

- The availability of integrated transport schemes, including CT, should underpin the current re-configuration of the NHS in Wales. The move towards "super-surgeries", particularly those

serving some valley communities as well as rural areas, is an example which could benefit from closer links with CT schemes.

- CTA recommends that transport departments should liaise directly with health and social services departments to ascertain how to make best use of existing resources.
- CTA would like to see an imminent conclusion to WAG's review of non-emergency patient transport services and the implementation of any recommendations arising from it.
- CTA would like to see health trusts and agencies, who currently utilise the services of CT operators, pay for such services on a 'full-cost recovery' basis.
- Although there are some good examples of schemes where CT links into employer travel plans effectively in enterprise or business parks, more needs to be done to promote the benefits to the private sector and gain their support.

CTA urges WAG to review the operator licensing regime governing CT in order to allow for:

- the more flexible deployment of a wider range of vehicles and the payment of drivers on Section 22 Community Bus Services
- a review of car-sharing legislation to allow the increased use of private cars driven by volunteers

The importance of volunteering to sustaining CT schemes as well as often providing a confidence-boosting first step towards re-entry into the labour market for many, cannot be underestimated. CTA believes that more could be done to promote and improve access to volunteering by people from all sectors of society.

3.3 Recommendation 21: "The Committee recommends that WAG undertakes a thorough review of the funding options available to CT organisations."

3.3.1 The CTA welcomes the recommendation to review CT funding options. It recognises, in particular, the role played to date by WAG funding which has been delivered by local authorities via the Local Transport Services Grant (LTSG). However, CTA is acutely aware that with the transfer of the LTSG to the Regional Transport Consortia from 2008 that changes in both policy and emphasis may occur.

3.3.1 CTA therefore recommends that WAG considers in detail a number of ways to strengthen voluntary transport delivery and improve parity and sustainability of funding:

WAG currently issues guidance to local authorities on the LTSG, recommending that a minimum of 5% is spent on CT. Despite some excellent examples, the degree of spend on CT is variable. The CTA recommends that similar guidance should be transferred to the Regional Consortia, but should become compulsory. Additionally, appropriate coverage of each local authority area should be maintained under the new structure.

CTA recommends that WAG adopts and promotes best practice in CT funding by ensuring that grant funding:

- is available for both capital and revenue
- is awarded on a genuine 'full-cost recovery' basis
- is paid quarterly in advance, in order to prevent voluntary organisations falling into negative cash flow
- is for a minimum duration of three years but preferably longer

Increased opportunities and support are needed to develop more social enterprise based CT schemes to ensure sustainability, and CTA would like to see WAG promote and support best practice in this area. Local Authorities should also be encouraged to develop Service Level Agreements with the sector to provide a constant source of revenue.

CTA applauds the innovative pilot Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative (CTCFI) set up by WAG in 2005. However, we recommend that WAG now moves forward this initiative by working with the CTA, local authorities and others to increase the range of CT services which can claim reimbursement for the provision of concessionary travel to eligible passengers.

CTA would be keen to work with WAG and other partners to develop opportunities for CT to draw down EU Convergence funds as part of the new Strategic Frameworks, as well as contribute to the area actions being developed under the Wales Spatial Plan, particularly those relating to key settlements, transport and economic inactivity .

3.4 Recommendation 22: "The Committee recommends that WAG works with CT organisations and LA's to consider ways through which CT schemes might be able to use LA vehicles when they are not in normal service."

3.4.1 CTA feels there is limited evidence of improvements in this field taking place. It recommends a strategic approach to the development of integrated transport solutions which involve a wider range of stakeholders. Such an approach should comprise a number of elements:

Regional fora based on the four Consortia areas with a remit to promote integrated transport solutions and the ability to feed CT user needs and experiences directly into the Consortia at a strategic level.

A requirement that all local authorities develop policies and procedures which ensure voluntary sector access to their fleets, subject to operational requirements. This could include staff pool cars at weekends as well as vehicles used by social services.

CTA is aware that there is also a significant number of vehicles owned by various interest groups which are currently under-utilised due to lack of revenue funding, that could be used at appropriate

times.

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