



Transport Matters Conference 2013 Report



Preface

Frank Smith, Chair, DG Voice

Over the last three years DG Voice has organised three major events in Dumfries to bring people together to discuss a major social issue. The first event, Youth Matters, focussed on decisions affecting the lives of young disabled persons. The second event, End of Life Matters, dealt with services for the dying, their carers and family. The most recent in November 2013 dealt with Transport Matters.

What links each of these events is our wish in DG Voice to raise awareness and provide the opportunity for views, ideas and experiences to be shared on subjects deeply affecting quality of life in our region. Transport is a subject that matters.

- Transport Matters because it can enrich communities and the quality of community life.
- Transport Matters because it can allow individuals to more fully engage as valued citizens within their communities, aid social inclusion and provide access to employment.
- Transport Matters because of its impact on the economy of the region.
- Transport Matters because transport deficiencies can create disadvantage, poverty, social isolation and potential deterioration in physical and mental health impacting on family, friends and community.

We brought together representatives of our membership, legislators, and officials from voluntary bodies and public agencies and combined presentations with discussion.

The task now for all interested groups is to build from that day.

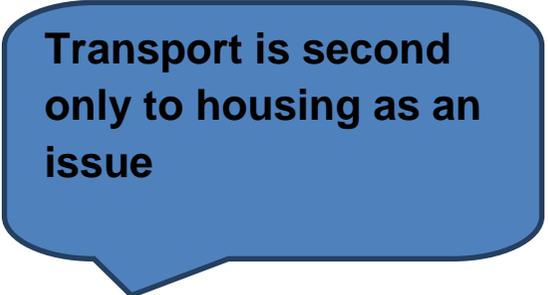
The day's agenda and speakers

The day comprised a series of short presentations (20-30 minutes) by a number of speakers from organisations involved in transport matters, locally-based and national.

During the break for a buffet lunch participants had the opportunity to browse the various information and display stands, taking advantage of the wealth of free material and advice available. Organisations which had stands at the event were: Police Scotland, Disabled Motorists Federation, Blue Badge Scheme, Buddies, and Dumfries & Galloway Royal Voluntary Service.

The presentations continued after lunch and were followed by a lively question and answer session, during which participants put many searching questions to a panel comprising some of the day's speakers.

Former DG Voice Development Manager, John Dowson welcomed participants to the conference and facilitated the day, introducing the speakers and directing the questions – which were many and varied.



Transport is second only to housing as an issue

Speakers

Councillor Colin Smyth, Chair of the Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Committee.

Harry Thompson, Head of Integrated Transport and Commissioning/Lead Officer, SWestrans

Peter Lyne, National Vice-president of Disabled Motorists' Federation

Patrick Nyamurundira, Access and Inclusion Manager, Scotrail

Colin Douglas, Passenger Transport Manager, Borders Council

Brian Masson, Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA) and Director of Multi Modal Transport Solutions Ltd

Chris Conroy, Scottish Ambulance, Acute Services and Workforce

Russell Brown, MP for Dumfries and Galloway

What they said

First speaker, **Councillor Colin Smyth** opened with a reminder of how DG Voice had campaigned so successfully to try and prevent the council charging for blue badges. He said Dumfries & Galloway Council is aware of the transport issues facing disabled people. He also mentioned the Council's need to save £36million over the next three years, posing the dilemma of maintaining investment in accessible transport while finding ways in which to cut spending. He reiterated council leader Ronnie Nicholson's statement that the priority of the Council must be to protect vulnerable people.

Statistics show twenty per cent of Dumfries & Galloway's population are disabled people. Sixty per cent of disabled people have no car, compared to only twenty per cent of non-disabled people. Walking into town on wheelie bin day highlights the difficulties for disabled people (and those with prams and pushchairs) negotiating pavement space between bins and other street furniture.

Dumfries & Galloway Council knows it is important to engage with transport user groups and to gain investment from government. The Council has a rolling seven year programme in place for accessible buses to be on the roads and he spoke of the Council's aim to better co-ordinate rural transport - including vehicle sharing and co-ordination between the ambulance services, NHS and Council.

Dumfries & Galloway Council knows it is important to engage with transport user groups

Colin Smyth

Harry Thomson, Head of Integrated Transport/Commissioning and Lead Officer SWestrans, also spoke of the importance of listening to service users and of how integrated services provide the best solutions. He talked of the importance of a transport provision which ensures people can get to work, access medical services, education, retail and meet social needs.

He gave an overview of the situation as it is now and what steps are being taken to improve transport matters, both in general and specifically for disabled people. The Scottish National Transport Strategy (2005) made a number of references to unreliable and irregular bus services in rural areas. The local transport strategy (2012), still in draft form, is in progress. In the meantime, free and concessionary travel is available but is limited to buses.

Accessibility regulations for public transport vehicles state by January 2015 all single deck buses under 7.5 tonnes must be accessible while all single deck buses capable of carrying standing passengers must be accessible by January 2016. January 2017 will see the requirement for all double deck buses capable of carrying standing passengers to be fully accessible. Not until January 2020 is there a requirement for all buses over 22 seats to be accessible.

Four major players are involved in commissioning and delivery of transport services: SWestrans; Dumfries & Galloway Council; NHS/SAS and the voluntary sector. SWestrans is responsible for strategic transport planning for the region and works in partnership with the Council, NHS and local community transport initiatives to deliver transport solutions. It is involved in sustainable and active travel development and commissions socially necessary local bus services, which are not provided commercially.

SWestrans Transport

The cost to SWestrans for providing local bus services is £3.9 million. Subsidised services are specified by SWestrans after consulting with local communities. Around 66 per cent of services are subsidised by SWestrans and 34 per cent are run commercially, mainly in and around Dumfries. Some services may require pre-booking and there can be conflict between wheelchairs and buggies for the spaces available.

Council Transport

The cost of commissioning school bus services is around £3.9 million plus £0.8 million delivered in-house. Local bus services are delivered by the in-house fleet, especially in rural areas. The Council also takes on responsibility for sport and leisure and social care transport.

Both are responsible for bus shelters, passenger information, raised kerbs at bus stops and dropped kerbs at crossings. They also talk with commercial bus operators and train operating companies with the aim of sustaining or improving services.

A bus user survey conducted in the summer of 2013 showed 43.2 per cent of bus users were aged over 60 and 46.3 per cent were concessionary pass holders. Over 62 per cent use the bus at least weekly while 20.4 per cent said they used bus transport on a daily basis. A fairly high level of customer satisfaction was demonstrated with 67 per cent agreeing buses are reliable and 18 per cent strongly agreeing.

On the subject of accessibility 78 per cent agreed or strongly agreed the buses are easily accessible – though there is no figure to say how many disabled people were amongst the respondents.

In a national survey in 2013 Dumfries & Galloway came out best overall in the UK with respect to bus fares and community transport fares. It performed below average on the availability of community transport, reliability and availability of taxis and the number of bus stops.

Rural Transport Solutions is an EU funded project to develop new and innovative solutions to rural transport issues. In Wigtown this includes Wigtownshire Community Transport having access to Council vehicles. For Stranraer Adult Resource Centre (ARC) it has led to reduced management input, reduced costs and improved reliability. For service users and carers it means consistent pick-up and drop-off as well as increased hours in the ARC.

There is a need to develop better intelligence on transport needs across user groups and better co-ordination of supply

Harry Thompson

Low levels of demand do not mean no demand

Harry Thompson

The project may be extended to the Stewartry using Glenkens Community Transport and the Castle Douglas ARC. A funding bid has gone to Scottish Government to pay for a project co-ordinator for two years. Work with Community Transport is required to increase sustainability.

A number of community initiatives are working to solve some of the transport problems in the region. There are Car Club initiatives in Dumfries, Mid/Upper Annandale and Creetown.

Peter Lyne vice-president of the Disabled Motorist Federation (DMF) linked his presentation to songs from the musicals, which he felt often reflected issues within our lives.

The organisation was established over 40 years ago to address the needs of disabled motorists. Over the last eight years, however, it has begun addressing matters of social inclusion, equality and diversity. It receives no financial support from regional or national development grants and exists by charging its members an annual fee of £14 and through advertising revenue from commercial companies who advertise in the DMF's quarterly magazine and on its website.

The DMF's work is carried out by a team of volunteers who can advise disabled drivers on insurance, vehicle and home travel, vehicle adaptations, holiday planning, how to acquire a vehicle, and much more.

Peter stressed the need for better co-ordination to enhance and support the work of the Disabled Motorist Federation and the charity sees networking and relationship-building as one of the main ways to achieve its aims. It has accepted invitations to attend stakeholder meetings at Westminster addressing a range of issues from accessible rail travel for disabled passengers to improvements in the National Ambulance Service network.

He expressed the hope that, following DG Voice's Transport Matters conference, DMF would be able to increase networking with Scottish-based charities, local government and departments within the Scottish Parliament which promote good practice in supporting disabled people and carers in their communities throughout Scotland.

Patrick Nyamurundira, Scotrail's Access and Inclusion Manager, was the final speaker of the morning's session. He told participants Scotrail is committed to providing all passengers with good level of service and to complying with legislation relating to disabled people and transport.

He explained that Scotrail operates 95 per cent of passenger services in Scotland plus sleeper services to London. It runs 2,300 services a day and operates 347 stations many of which were built when the railways network was expanding. Of those stations, 207 are not staffed and of the 140 which are staffed, no staff remain

until the last train. This creates further challenges in the provision of an accessible service for disabled people.

Scotrail has ten different kinds of train, many of which were designed before the Disability Discrimination Act

Patrick Nyamurundira

Scotrail has ten different kinds of train, many of which were designed before the Disability Discrimination Act, which causes a number of issues. Most of the older trains have been refurbished. All Scotrail trains can carry wheelchairs although they are not always fully compliant, as not all wheelchairs can drive into the space provided. He acknowledged there are also issues with the accessibility of the toilets, which must be beside the space for the wheelchair user.

Having outlined some of the problems facing disabled train users, Mr Nyamurundira talked about how ScotRail tries to resolve problems. As Access and Inclusion Manager his role covers all matters of concern to disabled people and how ScotRail looks after them. This includes engagement with panels, dealings with Westminster, input into train design and looking after train stations in terms of accessibility. ScotRail links its policies with those set by National Government and the European

Community. A Disabled Person Policy document is available from local stations or by writing to customer relations.

On the topic of assistance at stations, Mr Nyamurundira said assistance is provided at staffed accessible stations. Assistance at unstaffed stations is provided by the crew on board the train.

At stations with automatic ticket barriers a manual gate is manned and people are there to help.

Luggage assistance can be provided but depends on staff ability to lift the customer's piece of luggage.

He said that although disabled passengers must still book in advance he has reduced the requirement to a four hour advance notice rather than the previous twenty four hours.

Challenges:

- Balancing needs – wheelchairs vs buggies vs motorised scooters
- Regulation – scooters are not covered under interoperability/health and safety regulation – luggage assistance
- Compliance – old rolling stock does not allow a great deal of change without full modification
- Performance – time a train is standing at the station does not take into consideration assistance to be provided
- Limited resources
- Demand
- Infrastructure – old and challenging locations

For the future, there will be a continuation of Access For All funding to make stations accessible. The Scottish Government has a Station Investment Fund of £30 million, to which local authorities can apply. Community rail partnerships and alliances between stakeholders will continue.

One comment Mr Nyamurundira made was that there are answers to the problems but not the will and the funding to resolve them. He also urged people to register any complaint as soon as it happens so that Scotrail can investigate.

Do register any complaint as soon as it happens so Scotrail can investigate

Patrick Nyamurundira

There are answers to the problems but not the will and the funding to resolve them

Patrick Nyamurundira

In answer to a question from the floor, Mr Nyamurundira said disability awareness training for staff is enshrined in ScotRail's guidance. ScotRail uses disabled facilitators from DeafBlind Scotland to deliver training to staff.

Colin Douglas, Passenger Transport Manager, Scottish Borders Council was the first speaker of the afternoon.

He began with a brief description of the demographic of the Scottish Borders, which in many ways is similar to that of Dumfries and Galloway. The Borders has a population of 106,500 with a high proportion of elderly people and with young people tending to move out of the region. The main hospital is in Melrose with cottage hospitals in other towns.

A new railway line will open in 2015. The 30-mile track will run from Tweedbank to Edinburgh, with a journey time of under an hour. Four new stations are being built in Midlothian and three in the Scottish Borders.

He talked about the importance of bus services in the Borders and said there has been heavy investment by bus companies in accessible buses going from the Borders to Edinburgh. Following a consultation road trip several improvements have been introduced including new timetables and new services. A number of initiatives have also been introduced for a trial period, after which decisions will be made as to whether to continue them.

Where there are a high proportion of car drivers, some trial services are less likely to be successful.

The Harrier summer bus service from central Borders to holiday destinations such as Berwick has been running successfully for some years. It is a simple and effective service which people like and bus passes can be used on the journeys.

To fill in some of the gaps in transport services community transport coverage is very good. One problem, though, is the difficulty in finding enough bus drivers. The council funds community transport, providing grants for administration and running costs. Grants are also given for social car schemes.

One example is Teviot Wheels which is a community transport project for residents in the Roxburgh area who have difficulties with public transport or other mobility problems. It provides four wheelchair-accessible vehicles for self-drive hire or with a volunteer driver.

A social car scheme is used by a number of people who have difficulties with public transport and it will continue to be enhanced. The cost is 45pence a mile, of which 20pence is paid by the client and 25pence by the council.

Four services to provide transport to healthcare and hospitals are being trialled in the Borders from March 2013. These have been launched in conjunction with NHS Borders and the Reshaping Care Change Fund to improve access to healthcare for residents in parts of the Borders.

- Hawick to Borders General Hospital in Melrose via Selkirk. The bus has a low floor and is wheelchair accessible. It is operated by a community transport scheme (The Bridge Community Transport) and the trial seems to have been successful. It runs four times a day, Monday to Friday and is used by workers at the hospital; by people with appointments and by visitors.
- Newcastleton Health Car Scheme. Run by Newcastleton Social Car Scheme this scheme operates in the Newcastleton area and connects with a bus to Hawick allowing elderly people to travel to Hawick for hospital appointments, visits to the opticians and to dentists in Carlisle. Users pay 20 pence per mile.

Four services to provide transport to healthcare and hospitals are being trialled in the Borders from March 2013

Colin Douglas

- Peebles to Haylodge - Hospital bus. This service is run by Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders covering Peebles and surrounding area to Haylodge Hospital. Its use is by arrangement and details are given when an appointment is made. The scheme uses a council vehicle with a wheelchair lift with driver and escort. People at the hospital and day centre are happy with the service and feel it is working well. This is a free service but there are questions as to how it will be funded in the future.
- Berwickshire Taxi to Healthcare scheme provides free door-to-door taxi which is reducing the number of missed appointments. It is for residents in rural areas or those with mobility problems allowing them to attend GP appointments, community hospital or day centre. There are 70 people registered and it does ten trips a month. The NHS has been paying but they want to cascade the costs to the Council.

How can community transport systems be improved? Colin Douglas mentioned a £1million fund for community transport which could allow funding to enable people to guide local groups. He suggested new community transport agencies be established, especially in areas of wind farms where community funds could be used.

Living well with a Disability is a strategy document, which focuses on the needs of physically disabled people and how services should be delivered. It includes key areas of service development such as health and wellbeing, access to accessible accommodation, active involvement in the community, greater choice and control and access to information. It is a joint agreement with the NHS, Scottish Borders Council and the Borders Voluntary Community Care Forum. Colin Douglas commented that this kind of community planning can work – it takes time but it is going forward.

He touched on minibus access issues with high floors and steps. Only one manufacturer makes low floor mini busses but there are huge reliability issues.

Brian Masson, Development Worker with Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA) has spent almost 40 years in the public transport sector. He was Special Needs Transport Officer for Tayside Regional Council, Projects Manager at the Centre for Transport Research, Aberdeen University and has also had considerable involvement internationally. He has worked on ten European Union projects covering accessible transport in 25 countries; all of which enables him to bring to the day a wide perspective of transport issues and considerable expertise.

It seems to be in some countries there is the will to provide services to meet the needs of disabled people

Brian Masson

SATA was launched in Glasgow in 1995 following a conference on accessible transport in Edinburgh which concluded that users of transport services, the providers and the planners of those services needed to act together to make progress in accessible transport. SATA aims to work for the provision of accessible transport in Scotland as a right for all people; not only for the provision of accessible modes of transport but also for the provision of an integrated system of public transport, accessible services and information.

Regular meetings are held in which transport providers and users discuss policy and service issues and identify action to be taken.

Awarded a one-off grant by the Office of Disability Issues, SATA appointed Brian Masson as development worker to develop a three-strand project. Its objectives are to increase and engage new members, improve SATA's database of information and dissemination and review and stimulate research into transport accessibility/inaccessibility.

The project aims to highlight the mobility needs of disabled people:

Where can you access advice on mobility and transport issues? What advice can disabled people receive relating to purchasing mobility aids such as walking frames, scooters, wheelchairs? Why are there no standard guidelines to assist people, operators and manufacturers? Some have bought expensive wheelchairs and scooters only to find they cannot use them on buses and trains.

On service design in rural areas it is recognised that despite investment in accessible vehicles and infrastructure throughout Scotland, there is a wide variance in different parts of the country. While most cities have low floor buses and accessible taxis, in rural areas the old multi-step buses are still in use and the lack of accessible taxis is an issue.

Disability awareness training for transport staff is the single most important requirement for any disabled person using public transport. They want to be confident they will not be faced with embarrassing situations when travelling. The more confident people are when travelling by public transport, the more trips they will make. They will feel better. This will help the economy and give operators more revenue. It is a win/win scenario.

SATA's project will include research into the cost of providing an accessible transport system. To illustrate the points he was making, Brian Masson drew on his European experiences to show how other countries succeed in providing an effective, accessible public transport system for disabled people. He talked about 'demand responsive transport' which works very well in Finland and Denmark.



Finland has seen 30 per cent savings in costs by carrying 20 per cent more people

Brian Masson

The delivery of any transport solution is dependent on understanding the real needs of people regardless of age

Brian Masson

Finland invested in demand responsive transport by setting up and staffing call centres. Sounds like a high investment but now almost all those call centres have gone because they allowed policy makers and transport providers to identify where and when people required transport and they were able to set up transport systems which met people's needs. In the same way a store loyalty card allows a supermarket to predict what people will purchase, the call centre system provided a means of knowing where people would want to go and when and design the appropriate services. This approach is not used for passengers in the UK.

In appraising the costs of accessible transport provision the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) is used as a means of identifying all associated costs. In other EU countries, however, they also look at the cost of NOT providing accessible services – the hidden costs to the country of not investing. One example was the cost of £100 for a doctor having to make a home visit because accessible transport was not available compared to £20 for the patient to be seen in the surgery.

SATA is looking forward to working with stakeholders in the coming months to increase membership, gather information and form new alliances which can benefit disabled people and operators throughout Scotland.

Everyone is entitled to have the ability to lead an independent life

Brian Masson

Chris Conroy spoke about the Scottish Ambulance Service and the improvements being made to its scheduled care services.

Patient Transport Service provides ambulances to patients who need support to reach their healthcare appointment, or for their admission to and discharge from hospital. In 2012/13 across Scotland 1,170,105 patient transport journeys were made.

In 2009 the Scottish Ambulance Service carried out a consultation with colleagues and patients about where the service was and should be going. As Chris pointed out: “Transport matters to patients. It is an emotional time for patients going into a health care centre and transport should not be an issue.”

Further consultation highlighted the need for access to health appointments with no restrictions, arriving on time for appointments and for patients to be picked up as soon as possible after an appointment to return home. This second consultation indicated several problems: the first time staff had a conversation with a patient was at the time of pick up; there were eight different ways to contact the service requesting transport; there was no needs assessment of the patients to be transported.

A five-year programme was established to make the Patient Transport Service a more professional, efficient and responsive service for patients.

The key objectives of the programme are:

- Consistently apply a clinically focussed patient needs assessment
- Roll out internal service re-design of the 30 Area Service Offices and develop three Regional Contact Centres in Inverness, Cardonald and South Queensferry.
- To make information available to patients on non-clinical healthcare transport providers

- Provide national and standardised communication to the public around the programme
- Control resources and information in real time through the use of computers in ambulances

The first phase of the programme has been completed with the three regional centres now operational. A national direct booking line is in place allowing the ambulance staff to find out what support a patient needs – for example, does the patient live upstairs. The regional centres allow for more effective planning. Staff are being trained in the use of the new systems including the mobile technology.

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Chris Conroy

The second phase of the programme is now underway. Chris said: “We know where some of the gaps are. Patients who don’t have clinical needs put pressure on our services. In phase two the programme will be working closely with other transport providers to be able to signpost alternative services for patients who do not have a clinical need for transport.”

Also, in phase two the Scottish Ambulance Service will be focusing on enhancements to the use of the mobile data terminals; continue to develop how they plan journeys and manage resources and ensure the correct patient transport service resources are available when patients need them.

In conclusion, Chris stressed the need for engagement with service users. If ambulance transport users have suggestions for ways in which the service could be better they should get in touch.

Question and Answer session

Participants had been invited to post questions in a box at any time during the morning and by the time of the question and answer session a wide range of questions had been posted in the box. John Dowson facilitated the session, which was a lively one and could have gone on for much longer had time allowed.

A sample of the questions:

- Why does the No 5 bus to Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary pass close to the rear door, where there is no access for disabled people but not stop at the front door?
- Where can someone access information about bus routes and easy read timetables? Not everyone is online.
- How can we get to DGRI with a wheelchair in the rain if we have to cross town for a connection?
- How can we do evening events with the last bus to the village at 8 pm?
- How can we do a 25-mile trip to church on a Sunday in a reasonable time?
- Should we be calling for nationalisation/re-nationalisation of public transport because it is too important to be left in private hands?
- Demand responsive transport should be supported but am I right in thinking it doesn't currently allow the use of the concessionary travel card?
- How can we ensure that our taxis in Dumfries & Galloway are fully accessible?
- Regarding the taxi card: when this was introduced its value was £100. It is still £100 but taxi fares have doubled – any answer?
- With the introduction of PIP and the very real danger of many disabled people losing their mobility cars – how is public transport going to step up and meet the challenge of more disabled people needing it, especially in outlying areas?

Russell Brown MP concluded the day's programme. He began by paying tribute to DG Voice and the sterling work it has done fighting for equal rights for disabled people, with the day's event being no exception as it had brought together a cross section of organisations which, by working together, can come up with solutions for tackling transport problems.

Being disabled should not prevent anyone from being able to access transport yet around one fifth of disabled people have reported having difficulties in accessing transport

Russell Brown

Being disabled should not prevent anyone from being able to access transport, yet around one fifth of disabled people have reported having difficulties in accessing transport. This is disappointingly high and it needs to be addressed. Enabling and encouraging access to transport for disabled people delivers a number of benefits: it gives them greater employment opportunities which is important when you consider that the employment rate of disabled people was 48.8 per cent compared with 77.5 per cent of non-disabled people. Better access to transport can give disabled people greater access to healthcare and education and allows them to participate more in society. The importance of accessible transport will grow as the number of disabled people is expected to rise over time.

Car ownership: in Dumfries & Galloway car ownership, at 80.1 per cent is higher than Scotland as a whole (69 per cent). Last year 3,369 blue badges were distributed, a 15 per cent increase on the previous year, highlighting the importance of cars for disabled people in our region. Increasing fuel costs make running a car more prohibitive, especially for those on a fixed income.

Russell Brown is lobbying the UK Government to lower petrol prices in the region. This could be done by including Dumfries & Galloway in the fuel discount scheme which would make petrol cheaper by five per cent. He is also lobbying supermarkets about the price difference in petrol – i.e. the cost of petrol is three pence higher at Morrisons Dumfries store than at Morrisons in Carlisle.

For many people, however, a car is not an option, which means having a decent public transport in the region is vital. The battle to improve railway services from Dumfries and Lockerbie is important. A Council survey showed only one per cent of respondents use the train daily with 87 per cent saying they never use the train. We need to question why local people do not want to use these services. The cost of a ticket plays a part as well as frequency of the service.

As well as improving services, we need to improve accessibility at all train stations in the region. The installation of a lift at Lockerbie station has made it more accessible but it did take a long time.

Maintaining public transport is a challenge in a rural area at any time but even more so when budgets are under pressure. Around two thirds of bus services in Dumfries & Galloway are subsidised by the council via SWestrans at a cost of £3.9 million. The council also runs the taxi card scheme with some 850 residents making use of the scheme up to the maximum level of £100, even though, in some case, availability can be very poor.

The Council and local community transport organisations can work together to ensure they are providing users with the best possible service

Russell Brown

The big question over the next few years is the extent to which all this can be sustained. This challenge is one of the reasons why the Transport Matters conference is so timely. More and more we need to find innovative solutions to meet everyone's transport needs.

Community transport can play a key role in this. Already community transport can be a lifeline for individuals.

Across the country 100,000 people use it and this figure will rise as more of Scotland's population ages. More than 80 per cent of its users are elderly and/or disabled people. In rural areas like ours, it can be difficult to get to, community transport plays a key role in meeting their transport needs and also helps meet a social need as it prevents users from becoming socially isolated. Users get to see a driver they know on a regular basis as well as meeting other users. It must not be forgotten that the majority of these drivers are volunteers and he wanted to publicly thank them for the work they do.



I want to thank DG Voice for bringing us all together

Russell Brown

Governments at every level must continue to support community transport programmes. The Council and local community transport organisations can work together to ensure they are providing users with the best possible service. In Wigtown the council worked with local organisations to co-ordinate the sharing of vehicles. This benefitted both sides: it gave groups access to a greater number of vehicles, saw the use of council vehicles rise from 20 per cent to 67 per cent and helped the council cut costs.

Today's event has been about different people and organisations coming together to find innovative solutions as to how we make transport more accessible and discussions have led to some great ideas. We now need to work together in order to take these ideas forward. Russell Brown thanked DG Voice for bringing us all together.

What now? The way forward

Frank Morgan, DG Voice Development Manager

“The subject of transport for many people can be an emotive and frustrating matter. Transport is a vital area for many people residing in Dumfries and Galloway and not only extremely important from an economic perspective but also in terms of education, health and well-being, access to employment, inclusion and healthy communities.

“Restrictions to transport can create disadvantage, poverty, social isolation and potential deterioration in physical and mental health impacting on family, friendship networks and community.

“The recommendations outlined below can help diminish significantly those areas which can debilitate and exclude disabled people from participating and engaging in day to day experiences that many of us enjoy.”

Recommendation 1: **Communication**

The considerable improvements and progress made within transport services and provision across Dumfries and Galloway cannot be understated. We recognise significant measures have been made to introduce a more responsive and creative approach to solutions for disabled people across the region. Furthermore, the predominant and extensive rurality of our region highlights the challenges faced by our transport services in designing provision that meets the needs of people in more isolated or remote areas. However, we find that many disabled people are not informed as to what currently is available, exists within their locality or is accessible for meeting their needs. **Improved communication on accessible Transport Provision can be a vital lifeline for enabling disabled people to participate fully in community and accessing services.**

Recommendation 2: **Consultation and engagement**

Service design should be in consultation and through engagement with local people and communities.

We should strive to recognise the benefits and advantages gained through the process of cooperation, empowering local people in matters that affect them directly.

Recommendation 3: **Responding to the existing economic environment**

We need to be alert to the opportunities available for further investment through government and joint bodies.

Recommendation 4: **Rural Transport Solutions**

Consideration to be given to further promote the success of community transport initiatives taking place across the region. We should aim to draw on and expand on this success as a template to complement existing provisions while helping to address local need.

Recommendation 5: **Rail Transport Network**

The process of change within the rail network is highly complex due in part to their rail stock consisting of older refurbished trains and issues of compliance, in addition to the basic rail infrastructure. Also problematic is the old and challenging locations and performance issues for trains and times in stations. **The Scottish Rail Network is expanding and this presents an open opportunity for dialogue with Scotrail in respect of the Disability Discrimination Act and what it means. A joined up approach should be made for carrying out this dialogue.**

Recommendation 6: **Sustainable Transport Solutions**

We need to develop transport provision that meets the needs and requirements of disabled people. **Therefore, we should strive for a fully integrated and accessible transport system including taxis, buses, trains and ferries.** This will require contact between Council, transport providers and bodies representing the public to continue.

Recommendation 7: **European Partners**

We should study and reflect upon how other countries can and do deliver accessible public transport systems for disabled people. This should be a regular element in our thinking about transport provision, whether that thinking is by public agencies or voluntary.

Recommendation 8: **Review & Monitoring**

We must maintain dialogue with our partner public agencies to express the views and concerns regarding accessible transport. Dumfries and Galloway Council and the Regional Transport Partnership are committed to improving and developing local transport provision. Organisations in the third sector must engage with, stimulate, and if necessary challenge the Council on this issue.

DG Voice has the central belief that ‘Social justice is the ability people have to realise their potential in the society where they live’. To attain this aim, disabled people should have appropriate transport solutions to be able to engage as valued citizens within their towns and communities. This continues to be true even in times of economic constraint, in fact, such times of constraint should trigger imaginative thinking by all of us to achieve that social justice.