

## Briefing Paper for Community Transport Organisations

This document outlines the key challenges faced by Community Transport (CT) operators across the UK, with a particular focus on those serving rural, isolated, and low-income communities. It is designed for you as Community Transport Operator, to use when engaging with local decision makers. It will help you highlight the key issues that you believe your elected representatives need to hear about based on your direct experience and local knowledge. The issues presented here, drawn from the CTA research and manifesto work compiled as part of the Mapping CT research, are shared by many organisations. However, not all of these challenges may directly apply to your specific service.

You are the expert in this situation. You understand not only how your service operates, but also the unique needs of your local community and the passengers you serve. This knowledge is critical when engaging with local elected representatives. It allows you to go beyond just presenting data and statistics, providing a clear picture of the real, human impact of Community Transport services on the people who rely on them.

Be honest and confident about what you know and what you need. You don't need to have all the answers or speak in technical terms - what matters most is your real world experience. Your day-to-day work gives you a powerful insight into what your community needs. You know your community better than anyone. You see every day how Community Transport changes lives: helping people get to medical appointments, stay connected with loved ones, access work or education, and remain independent.

Your insights from the ground are exactly what decision-makers want to hear. Policies and budgets often get decided by people far removed from the day-to-day reality of rural and community transport. That's why your perspective is so important. You are best placed to explain what's working, what's not, and how policy and funding decisions affect your passengers and your ability to deliver services.

**Don't underestimate the power of your voice.** It's your lived experience—and the stories of your passengers and volunteers—that will cut through. These conversations are your opportunity to speak openly about the pressures you face, the support you need, and the value your service brings. By sharing these stories, you can make a lasting impression and help decision-makers truly understand what's at stake. Your voice can help shape decisions, influence change, and secure the future of Community Transport in your area.



Using this information, you can ensure your locally elected representative fully understands the specific needs of your community and the vital role your service plays in addressing these needs. The CTA research provides a clear framework for discussing key issues such as securing stable, long-term funding, modernising fleets, tackling workforce challenges, and ensuring CT is integrated into broader public transport systems. By sharing your expert insights and first-hand knowledge, you will be able to effectively communicate why these challenges must be addressed, and advocate for the support needed to sustain and strengthen the essential work your service provides.

## Community Transport: Summary and Key Asks

As Community Transport operators, we deliver essential services that keep older, disabled, and isolated people connected to healthcare, education, employment, and their communities. Yet our sector faces growing pressures: insecure funding that prevents long-term planning, ageing fleets that are costly to maintain, severe recruitment and retention challenges, and outdated regulations that restrict our flexibility. To protect these lifeline services, we urgently need sustained investment, regulatory reform, and committed support from decision-makers who recognise the vital role Community Transport plays in society.

Below are **10 key asks** you can share with your elected representatives to help address these challenges:

### 1. Introduce fair, inflation-proof, multi-year core funding

Provide 3–5-year funding cycles that cover the real cost of services and allow for strategic planning and investment.

### 2. Fully integrate Community Transport into public transport strategies

Recognise CT as a key part of transport planning, procurement, and funding across health, social care, education, and employment.

### 3. Fund a phased fleet replacement strategy

Create dedicated capital grants to help operators replace ageing diesel vehicles with electric, hybrid, or low-emission models.

### 4. Develop a rural-ready low-emission infrastructure plan

Ensure charging and refuelling infrastructure is available in rural and remote areas, not just urban centres.

### 5. Improve pay and conditions for Community Transport staff

Offer fair, competitive pay to attract and retain skilled drivers and support staff.

### 6. Stabilise volunteer engagement and review volunteer expenses

Develop retention strategies and update the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment to reflect real fuel costs.

### 7. Provide clearer guidance on operator licensing

Update and simplify the operator licensing framework, especially around Section 19 permits, to better reflect today's needs.



## 8. Modernise D1 licensing rules

Reform D1 licence requirements to help recruit more drivers without compromising safety.

## 9. Strengthen cross-departmental partnerships

Encourage collaboration between government departments, local authorities, and CT organisations to tackle transport barriers and improve social inclusion.

## 10. Recognise and invest in the wider social value of Community Transport

Ensure funding and policies reflect CT's proven role in reducing isolation, improving health, supporting rural economies, and promoting sustainability.

**Your voice matters.** Sharing your local experience and the impact of your service will help decision-makers understand why these actions are urgently needed to keep Community Transport strong and sustainable.

### 1. Ensuring Fair and Equitable Funding

As a sector, Community Transport plays an essential and often irreplaceable role in society. We provide the only means of transport for many isolated, older, and disabled people, helping them stay connected to essential services and to their communities.

However, the current funding environment presents significant and growing challenges for Community Transport organisations. We remain heavily reliant on fragmented, short-term funding streams that create constant uncertainty and undermine our ability to plan for the future. This lack of long-term financial stability compromises the sustainability of our services and makes it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the skilled staff our work depends on.

Without consistent, long-term investment, Community Transport is at serious risk particularly in rural, isolated, or low-income areas where our services are often the only option available. The absence of secure funding jeopardises the continuity of critical support for the many vulnerable individuals who rely on us to access healthcare, employment, education, and social opportunities.

As a sector, we urgently need a more stable funding settlement to safeguard and strengthen the services that so many people depend on every day.

### Our Calls to Action:

#### Introduce fair, inflation-proof, multi-year core funding

We urge decision makers to move towards funding cycles with three-to-five-year cycles that cover the full cost of delivering services, adapt to inflation, and provide the stability needed for strategic planning, staff retention, and fleet investment.

#### Fully integrate Community Transport into public transport strategies and funding opportunities

We call on policymakers to ensure Community Transport is fully included in transport planning, procurement, and funding decisions, recognising the sector's essential role in delivering accessible and inclusive services for people who would otherwise be left behind.



## 2. Addressing Ageing Fleets and Supporting a Phased Transition to Low-Emission Vehicles

Community Transport operators are under increasing pressure to modernise our ageing diesel fleets to help meet net-zero targets. While we fully support the transition to more sustainable transport, the reality is that many rural areas and small-scale operators simply do not have the capital, infrastructure, or tailored support needed to adopt low and zero emission vehicles.

Without long term investment and realistic pathways for transition, there is a real risk that Community Transport services will become less reliable, more expensive, or completely unavailable in areas that need them most. Dedicated capital support is urgently needed to help Community Transport organisations replace ageing fleets and invest in low emission vehicles. This investment is essential to maintain reliable services and secure the long-term sustainability of our sector.

When engaging with local councillors or officers, Community Transport operators can make a practical, specific ask for example, exploring a Community Minibus Transfer Scheme to help renew local fleets.

One example is the partnership between the Community Transport Association and Perth & Kinross Council, who are piloting a scheme to transfer surplus council minibuses to community groups. This provides a cost effective and practical way to modernise fleets and keep vital services running. Other Scottish local authorities are now considering similar models. By raising this with your local council, you can help encourage simple, impactful action that supports sustainable and inclusive transport in your area [Community Minibus Transfer - Perth & Kinross Council](#)

### **Calls to Action:**

#### **Fund a phased fleet replacement strategy tailored to Community Transport**

We call for the creation of targeted capital grants to help Community Transport operators replace ageing diesel vehicles with electric, hybrid, or low-emission alternatives. This must include funding for wheelchair accessible minibuses, depot upgrades, and long-term maintenance support to ensure services remain safe and reliable.

#### **Develop a rural-ready infrastructure plan for low-emission Community Transport**

We urge decision makers to work with local authorities, utility providers, and the Community Transport sector to install charging infrastructure in rural and remote areas not just in urban centres. This plan should also support innovation partnerships to explore alternative fuels such as hydrogen and biofuels where electric vehicles are not a viable option.



### 3. Acknowledging the Vital Contributions of Staff and Volunteers

Community Transport is driven by the unwavering dedication of staff and volunteers. Their commitment ensures that transport is available to those who need it most older people, disabled passengers, and individuals who are otherwise isolated. However, to sustain a skilled and compassionate workforce, urgent action is needed. Many Community Transport operators face significant difficulties recruiting both staff and volunteers. Our workforce is ageing, with many older employees working well beyond retirement age, particularly in driving roles. Without effective succession planning, we risk losing decades of experience and the capacity to meet growing demand.

Volunteers remain a vital part of our delivery model, but their availability must be managed alongside increasing service pressures. Volunteers cannot be expected to fill staff gaps created by recruitment constraints, especially when passengers have complex mobility and support needs.

One specific barrier to sustaining volunteer engagement is the outdated Approved Mileage Allowance Payment (AMAP) rate. Rising fuel costs mean many volunteers are effectively subsidising their involvement out of their own pockets. This discourages long-term commitment and undermines the resilience of our services. As a sector, we have been actively campaigning for a review of the AMAP rate, and we encourage local elected representatives to help move this issue up the agenda.

#### **Calls to Action:**

##### **Improve pay and conditions for Community Transport staff**

We call for competitive pay and conditions to attract and retain skilled staff, ensuring they are fairly recognised and compensated for their vital role in safeguarding and supporting vulnerable passengers.

##### **Stabilise volunteer engagement**

To develop strategies that support volunteer retention, including appropriate recognition, training, and clear pathways for involvement that reflect the growing demands on the sector. Including reviewing the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment to reflect the true costs of volunteering and prevent financial barriers to participation.



## 4. Recognising the Cross-Cutting Benefits of Community Transport

While Community Transport's impact is often viewed through the lens of health and social care, its social value extends much further. By addressing mobility challenges, our sector plays a crucial role in reducing social isolation and fostering inclusion. We provide vital connections to education, employment, social activities, and essential public services, enabling people to participate fully in their communities.

Community Transport also contributes to broader social goals improving mental health, reducing loneliness, supporting rural economies, and promoting sustainability. Despite these wide-ranging benefits, our contributions are not always fully recognised, valued, or embedded within policy and funding frameworks.

Greater cross-departmental collaboration and stronger engagement with the sector are essential to unlock innovative, integrated solutions that meet the diverse needs of the communities we serve.

### **Calls to Action:**

#### **Fully Integrate Community Transport into Public Transport and Social Infrastructure**

We call for Community Transport to be recognised and embedded as a key component in cross-departmental strategies not only in health and social care but also in housing, education, and employment policy. Recognising its crucial role in enhancing social inclusion and reducing isolation.

#### **Strengthen Partnerships Across Departments to Maximise Social Benefits**

We urge government departments and local authorities to collaborate more closely with Community Transport organisations to develop joint solutions that tackle transport-related barriers, improve public services, and enhance social inclusion.

## 5. Addressing Barriers to Community Transport Growth and Sustainability

Since the introduction of the Transport Act 1985, Community Transport has proven its ability to adapt and grow to meet the evolving needs of communities. Despite this track record of success, we continue to operate within an outdated regulatory environment that limits flexibility and contributes to workforce shortages.

One example is the D1 licensing requirement for driving larger, heavier minibuses, which makes it harder to recruit and retain drivers. Without modernisation, we risk undermining our capacity to deliver essential services for vulnerable and isolated groups, including older people, disabled passengers, and rural residents.

As a sector, we are leading the call for regulatory reform. The Community Transport Association is engaging with government, Parliament, and stakeholders to maintain safety standards while supporting more people to work and volunteer in Community Transport.



**Calls to Action:****Provide clearer guidance on operator licensing**

To review and update the operator licensing framework, particularly regarding Section 19 small vehicle permits, to ensure it reflects current needs and supports effective governance.

**Modernise the regulatory framework to facilitate growth**

To introduce reforms that enable sustainable growth in Community Transport. This must include updating regulations to improve flexibility and efficiency and progressing D1 licensing reform to remove unnecessary barriers to recruitment and service delivery.

