



**Community
Transport
Association**

Community Transport Association

Response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Inquiry into Loneliness and Isolation

Introduction and Executive Summary

1. In all parts of the UK, on every day of the year - including Christmas Day – thousands of community transport staff and volunteers are helping people to stay independent, participate in their communities and to access vital services and employment.
2. Community transport is about providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs, and often represents the only means of transport for many vulnerable and isolated people. Significant user groups are older people and disabled people with a majority of services and projects working in rural areas.
3. Using everything from minibuses to mopeds, typical services include voluntary car schemes, community bus services, school transport, hospital transport, dial-a-ride, wheels to work and group hire services. Most services are demand-responsive, taking people from door to door, but a growing number are offering scheduled services along fixed routes where conventional bus services are not available.
4. As community transport works to a different business model to commercial passenger transport services it is always run for a social purpose and community benefit, but never for a profit - it often a more reliable and resilient way of ensuring a broader range of transport needs can be met.
5. The Community Transport Association is the national body working with the providers of community transport helping them to remain relevant and responsive to key areas of public policy and make a big difference for people and families in the communities they work in.
6. In Wales, community transport providers provide trips to many socially isolated individuals. Their services make a huge difference to how people feel about their own loneliness and sense of isolation. In compiling our response we have surveyed members across Wales to gather their views, and ensure that their lived experience is at the heart of this work.

Based on members views we have a number of recommendations that we would like the Committee to consider:

7. The Welsh Government should work closely with the providers of community transport to better understand the transport needs of lonely and isolated people.
8. The Welsh Government should work with CTA to help community transport operators in Wales to develop new relationships with healthcare providers, and provide a broad range of services to members across Wales.
9. The Welsh Government should support a training programme for community transport operators to identify a greater range of needs and provide effective signposting to health and social care services.

Community Transport's Role in Alleviating Loneliness and Isolation

10. Community transport operators across Wales work with some of the most isolated communities in the country. Their footprint tends to be rural, and the demographic of service users tends to be older people and often people with disabilities.
11. In our surveying to look at the scale of the work community transport does to alleviate isolation, we heard from community transport operators who work to alleviate isolation as part of their day-to-day activity, as well as groups who have been engaged in specific project work across the country. Specific projects includes running luncheon clubs supported by county councils, the creation of Wheels to Meals schemes, projects funded by charitable umbrella bodies concerning specific projects, as well as the employment of staff specifically to work on areas of isolation.
12. Owing to their specific focus on inclusivity and accessibility, community transport works with individuals who struggle to access other forms of transport. In particular, CTA's latest State of the Sector Report for Wales found that 94% of community transport organisations reported that their service included older people, 84% of services provided transport to people with disabilities, and 60% to people living in rural areas.
13. Around 60% of community transport organisations in Wales are membership-based or have passengers registered to use their services. There are approximately 140,000 individuals and 3,500 groups registered to use community transport services¹.
14. In our recent survey, our members told us that they see the alleviation of isolation and loneliness as key to everything they do. They spoke about how their services are;
 - "for people who have no other means of getting about."
 - "a lifeline to many rurally isolated, lonely individuals."
 - "doing our utmost to carry out requests of lonely people for transport."
 - "indispensable as a hands on service which alleviates isolation and loneliness."
15. In addition, members who responded to our survey are regularly monitoring the impact they have on alleviating loneliness and isolation. They found their passengers stated they would have no other way of getting out if it wasn't for community transport: one single car scheme reported making 70 vital trips in a four month period, while one member spoke to us about specific funding they were awarded in recognition of the work they were doing around alleviating social isolation.
16. It is clear from the survey responses we have gathered that there a large number of older people, and people with disabilities, across Wales whose levels of loneliness and isolation are extenuated by Wales' disperse population and predominantly rural geography but which is alleviated by the work of community transport

¹<http://www.ctauk.org/UserFiles/Documents/In%20Your%20Area/Wales/State%20of%20the%20Sector%20Wales%20English%20version.pdf>

Supporting Community Transport to Support Isolated and Lonely People in Wales

17. Our members across Wales also provided us with feedback on how their relationships with other agencies, such as public services, other passenger transport organisations, and charities and community groups, impact their ability to alleviate isolation and loneliness in their communities.
18. They informed us that they work closely with a number of sectors including health, and children and young people. In particular, a number of respondents were keen to emphasise that they worked closely with local councils.
19. One of the unique things about community transport is the positive relationships that develop between service providers, and service users. Many of the respondents noted that they work closely with their users to provide a service that is tailored to their needs, helping them to feel comfortable in using community transport services.
20. **We recommend:** that the Welsh Government work with CTA to reach out to community transport providers and further discuss the ways in which their unique services alleviate loneliness and isolation in their communities.
21. Many organisations suggested to us that their work could be more impactful if they enjoyed a better relationship with their local day centre and GPs surgery. We have seen a benefit of this relationship with Hackney Community Transport (HCT) in England and their CCG programme. Through developing a close relationship between HCT, their local CCG, and their local Council for Voluntary Service, they have been able to provide access to health and social setting which in turn have promoted emotional and physical wellbeing.
22. **We recommend:** that the Welsh Government work closely with the CTA in Wales to support organisations to develop these relationships which will in turn allow service users to access a broader range of opportunities.
23. Finally, community transport operators can often be a key support to many lonely people with the community transport journey providing a key means of social interaction.
24. **We recommend:** that the Welsh Government provides support delivering training to community transport operators to signpost service users to other support they need, either in a medical, or social setting.

Conclusions

25. It is clear that community transport not only plays a key role in alleviating loneliness and isolation, particularly for older people in rural communities, but that community transport operators can provide a unique insight into the lives of those who suffer most acutely from loneliness and isolation.
26. The work our members do throughout Wales is an invaluable lifeline to thousands of people. Without these services people would be unable to get around, to get to medical and social appointments, and ultimately to live their lives to the full.
27. In particular, the survey of our members demonstrates that they consider a key part of their role to provide social opportunities for people in their community. With their particular emphasis on providing inclusive and accessible transport, providing social opportunity to some of Wales' most isolated citizens is truly at the heart of everything they do.
28. We hope that the above submission provides a useful insight into the extensive work that community transport operators do in providing inclusive and accessible transport to lonely and isolated people across Wales. In addition, we hope the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee consider our recommendations as useful mechanisms to help support the already vital work that is going on throughout Wales.

For further information contact should be made to:

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