

Serving the Community: Community Transport During Coronavirus

What is Community Transport?

Community transport supports people to live independently, participate in their communities and access local services and amenities.

Run by charities, community groups and other not-for-profit entities, it offers a reliable and resilient way of ensuring the broadest range of transport needs can be met. High levels of volunteer and user involvement in the creation and delivery of services are integral to this.

Services are person-centred and targeted towards those most likely to be under-served by mainstream transport, especially people who are less mobile and live in sparsely populated areas. This is made possible by services being accessible and flexible.

Demand-responsive journeys enable people to access everyday services, such as the shops or a hospital, whilst scheduled community buses connect and integrate communities with the wider transport network. It's about more than minibuses; our members use a range of vehicle types to get people where they want and need to be, whether that's school, college, work, social activities or public services.

Our members forge strong links with local public bodies and other civil society organisations enabling more coordinated and integrated support for local populations.

This leads to benefits beyond the value to the individual passengers, with community transport central to place-based approaches to creating positive change or managing complex situations, as we are today with coronavirus.

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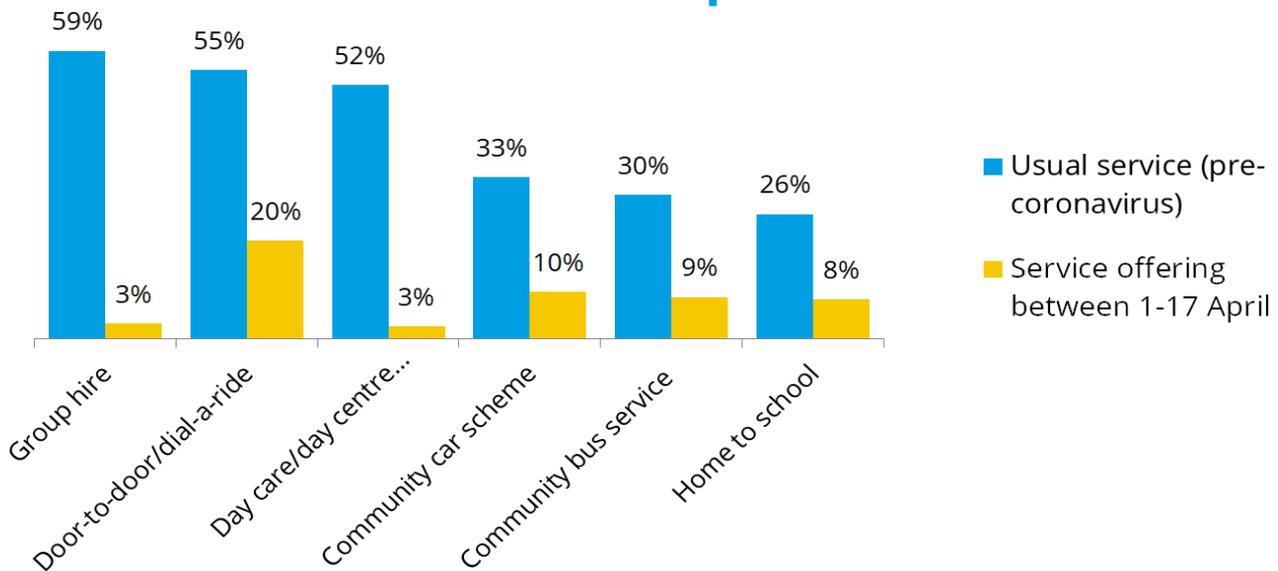
How has the landscape changed for community transport during coronavirus?

Like so many other areas of our society, coronavirus has caused a huge shift in the way that community transport is operating at the moment. Since lock-down began, we've surveyed over 200 CTA members to get a clear picture of the changes that have taken place in the sector.

Effects on traditional services

Social distancing and self-isolation measures have had a significant impact on the usual services run by community transport providers. Day care/day centre transport and group hire services have been most impacted, with only five of the organisations who ran these services prior to the coronavirus outbreak continuing to provide that service now, and only six of the 118 organisations previously running group hire services continuing to do so – a 95% decrease. We've also seen significant decreases in dial-a-ride transport (63%), school contracts (68%), community bus services (71%) and community car schemes (71%), as demonstrated below.

Changes to CT service offerings between 01 - 17 April 2020

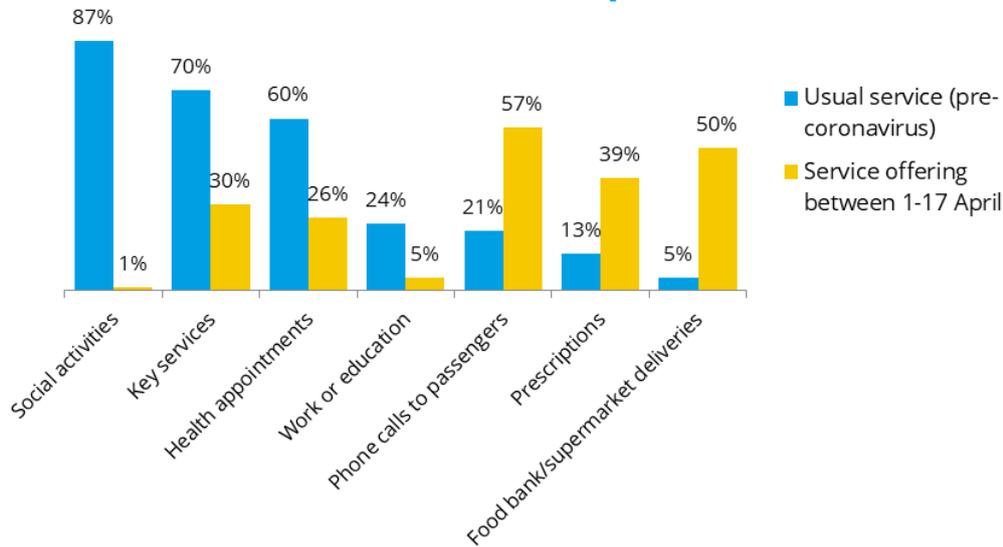


Adapting their services

All core community transport activities, including transport to social activities, key public services, work or education have been detrimentally affected by coronavirus. However, whilst the amount of journeys taking people to essential medical appointments, and to key services such as supermarkets and pharmacies have decreased, they suffered the least negative impact - a clear demonstration of the vital role community transport plays in providing these sorts of essential journeys.

The sector has also been adapting to offer those who are isolating or unable to leave their homes the support they need. Activities including collecting and delivering food and prescriptions have seen a significant increase, as has checking on the well-being of passengers by phone and offering deliveries on behalf of foodbanks, showing how the sector is adapting and offering new services to support their communities.

Comparison of organisational activity before coronavirus and in the period between 01 - 17 April 2020



Effects on funding

We surveyed members on their funding streams and whether they expected any to be impacted by the changes resulting from the suspension of services because of coronavirus.

Respondents consistently felt most confident that local authority grants would continue to be honoured but that fare income and donations would be most likely to end or reduce heavily.

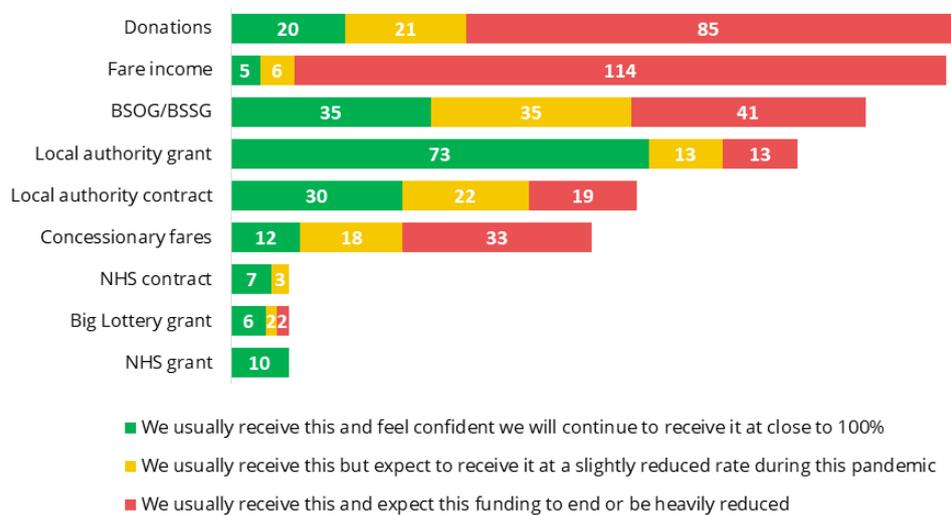
To manage the impact of this significant risk to funding, organisations are turning to a range of methods to sustain themselves.

Almost 80% of respondents indicated that they would be relying on their own reserves to see them through the crisis, while another 43% stated that they would have to furlough staff using the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme.

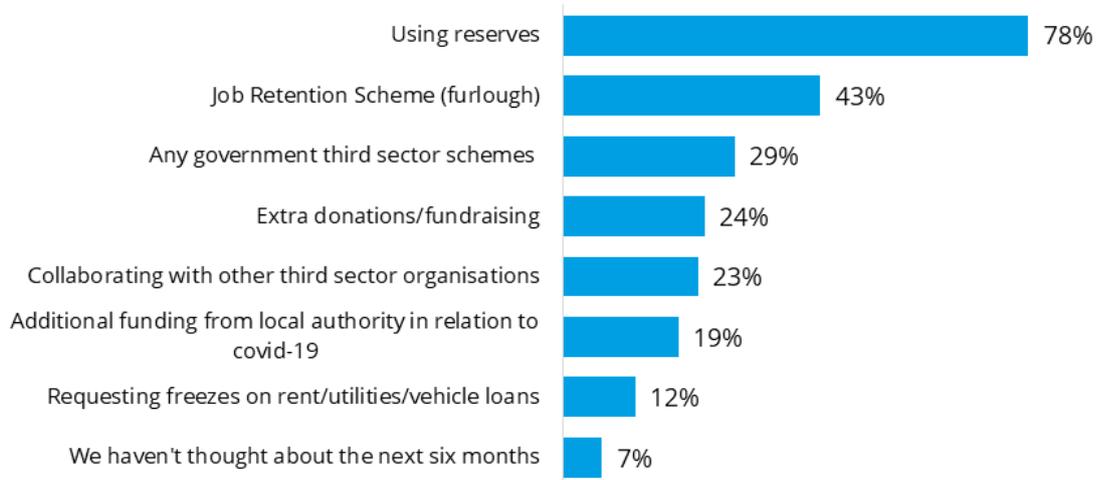
Effects on staffing

In terms of staffing, organisations have been most affected by staff, particularly volunteers, having to stop working because of self-isolation. 74% reported that this was the case. Almost two thirds of respondents (64%) stated that they were working remotely where possible.

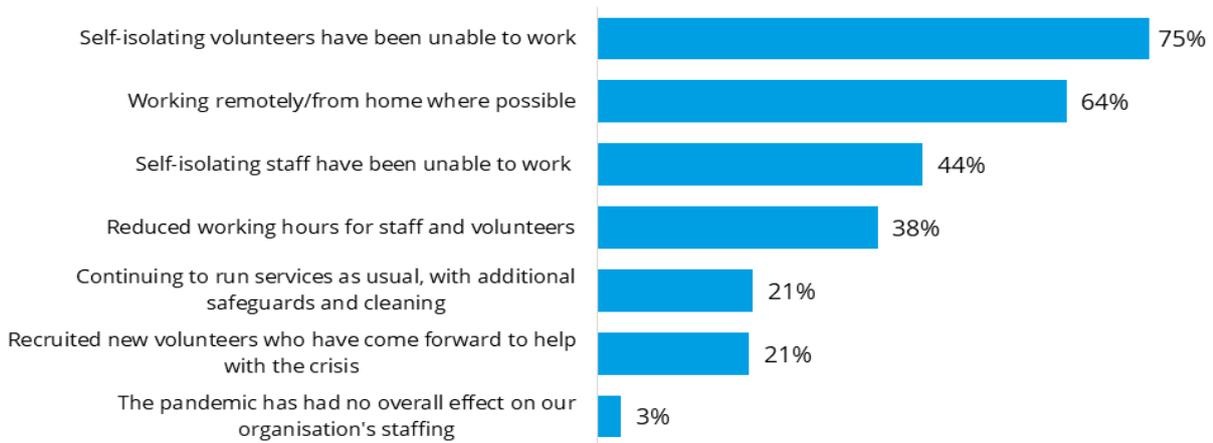
Organisations receiving each funding types and assessment of future prospects



Additional measures taken to sustain organisations between 01 - 17 April 2020



Effect on staffing between 01-17 April 2020



Confidence for the future

We also asked members how confident they were that they could sustain their services if self-isolation and business closures extended beyond a period of six months. The responses show a significant amount of uncertainty amongst CTA members, with 47% saying they were either very or quite confident and 53% saying they were not so confident, or not confident at all.

Confidence Levels	Responses	Count
Very confident	11%	21
Quite confident	36%	70
Not so confident	37%	72
Not confident at all	16%	31

The Story on the Ground

Despite the challenges and uncertainty faced by the sector, our members are still doing what they do best – stepping up and serving their communities.

While catering to unserved needs has always been the bread and butter of community transport, from the provision of lifeline services, health transport and community bus services, to door-to-door accessible transport and community car schemes, this dedication to the community has never been so apparent now that we are in the midst of a global pandemic.



Even in the face of reducing resources and threats to funding, community transport organisations are adapting their services so that they can continue to reach those most in need. The small number of examples we share below are a fraction of all the organisations working in all parts of the UK to make a difference during the coronavirus crisis.

Delivering essentials

With social distancing in place and vulnerable people being unable to do their shopping themselves, community transport organisations have been instrumental in delivering food and other essential supplies to those in lock-down. In April, CTA issued a joint letter with the Trussell Trust to encourage its members to partner with their local foodbanks, where they were able to do so.

Like many CTA members, South Pennine Community Transport is one provider who has been on the frontline, making deliveries to individuals and families, as well as offering pickups of bread and potatoes on every one of their buses, all free of charge.

Similarly, Brighton and Hove CT are helping with home food deliveries, having launched their 'community transport food delivery service' at the end of March to help people gain access to fresh, affordable produce in the Brighton area. Our members have also been partnering with other community organisations to pool resources and respond to need more efficiently.

Beccles and Bungay Area Community Transport (BACT), for example, are delivering meals to vulnerable residents in Lowestoft in cooperation with the Salvation Army. Out and About CT in Northern Ireland have teamed up with Mid Ulster Volunteer Centre to do the same, while Lincoln Dial-a-Ride are working with their local foodbank to deliver food parcels.

All across the UK, community transport is working for local communities, delivering the essentials to keep people going.

"Thank you so much for collecting my medicine and a loaf of bread this morning. I've been really stressing about how to get medicine for a while and I never thought I'd be so grateful to have my morning toast! You're doing a great job, stay safe."

A passenger from Burtonwood and Winwick Community Transport

Medicines and vital health journeys

Ensuring that residents can continue to access medical care has been similarly vital during this time, with CTs either delivering and collecting prescriptions and medicines on behalf of their passengers, or transporting them to vital health appointments and bringing them back home. For its part, CTA has asked members in England what capacity they could offer to their local NHS trusts to support patient discharge. Information from those who responded has been shared with NHS England.



In Suffolk, Felixstowe Area Community Transport Service has been delivering medicine to local residents. They've teamed up with the Day Lewis Pharmacy who thanked them for their "hard work in helping us deliver medication to our most vulnerable and self-isolating patients in the local community."

Meanwhile, South East Dorset Community Accessible Transport have been using their 'Hospital Hop' service to take patients home from local hospitals and, in Scotland, Community Transport Glasgow have been continuing to run their Transport Hub for NHS Lanarkshire so that medical transport can continue to be co-ordinated effectively.

Jo Beaumont of CT Passenger Service, operating across the West Midlands and northeast of England, has described how demand for transport to dialysis clinics for renal patients has actually increased in frequency during lock-down, owing to the limited number of people that can now safely travel on each vehicle due to social distancing restrictions. "More journeys are needed to enable only two patients to travel together," she said, "instead of the seven or eight who would normally travel to the same clinic."

At a time when we are all concerned about the health and wellbeing of our families and neighbours, community transport is helping to deliver real healthcare benefits, ensuring communities can stay well.

Adapting vehicles for safety

Now and in normal times, the safety and wellbeing of drivers, volunteers and passengers is always front and centre for community transport. To ensure that lifeline journeys can still be delivered without putting people's health at risk, community transport operators have been adapting their vehicles and investing in personal protective equipment to adhere to Government guidelines on safety and social distancing.

Ryedale Community Transport, for example, have recently invested £600 into PPE for their staff and another £2,600 to install shields between the driver and passenger areas to minimise any risks. Similarly, South East Dorset Community Accessible Transport have also installed a bulkhead screen on their 'Hospital Hop' service to protect vulnerable patient passengers at a higher risk of infection.

Safety is always paramount and CTA, with support from the TAS Partnership, have been releasing guidance looking at how community transport providers can run these sorts of services safely and under the Government's guidelines. But whilst community transport is working to deliver the safest transport possible, it is imperative that government and local authorities work with CT to ensure staff, drivers and passengers are kept safe and have access to the PPE they need.



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Keeping in touch

Combating loneliness and isolation is at the heart of our sector's commitment to its passengers, and now, more than ever, as we all stay in our homes and recognise the effects of a lack of social connectedness, community transport organisations have been working to ensure that none of their users feel left behind.

With fewer physical trips to make, CT workers have been transporting their positive spirit to passengers over the phone to bridge the distance that can feel so far. In Wales, Llanwrtyd Wells Community Transport have been regularly calling their users. "One of our volunteers, John, is making his calls," said Dave Brown, Managing Director. "He's phoning vulnerable members and making sure they're ok, checking if they need anything and just having a chat. He might be the only person they speak to at the moment, and he's going above and beyond - a real community champion."

Other CTs have set up specific befriending services to reach out to passengers. The Friendly Bus, based in Shropshire, have set up 'Friendly Voice Volunteers' to stay updated with passengers, while the Little Green Bus in Lancashire have launched 'operation keep in touch' to maintain passengers' self-confidence while they are unable to be physically and socially active. Donna Atkinson, CEO, explained that "It's vitally important that we keep confidence levels high by showing them that we really care, supporting them through this, and letting them know that we'll still be there for them to get out and about when this is all over."

Doing what's needed

On top of these core services, community transport providers across the UK have been continuing to do what they do best - responding to need wherever it's required. During a time of widespread hardship, community transport continues to help people through their difficulties; whether it be to take family members to funeral services, as Lincoln Dial-a-Ride are doing alongside Lincolnshire Co-operative Funeral Service; or enabling key workers to support frontline services, like CT Glasgow's efforts in enabling train drivers to continue operating the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport Subway service; or transporting refuse collectors who are no longer able to travel together in their collection vehicles.

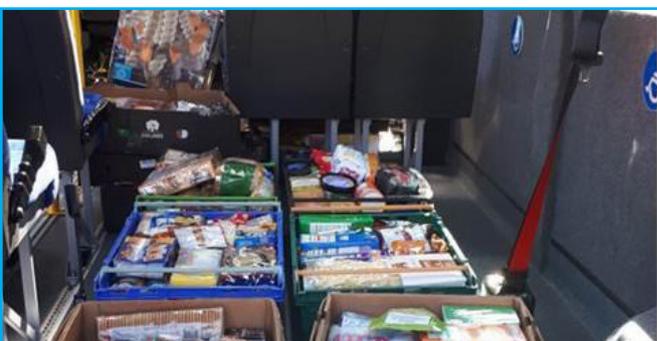
CTA have been working for our members, liaising with the Department for Transport and the devolved administrations to ensure that regulatory burdens are relaxed and that organisations are given greater freedom to help their communities through this public emergency.

Through these challenging times community transport is continuing to deliver vital services for all.



"It's vitally important that we keep confidence levels high by showing passengers that we really care, supporting them through this, and letting them know that we'll still be there for them to get out and about when this is all over."

Donna Atkinson, Little Green Bus



Looking to the future



“We don't know how long these difficult and challenging times will last. What we do know, is that for as long as they can, in whatever way they can, our members will be using every resource at their disposal to support their communities. We continue to be inspired by their resourcefulness, tenacity and dedication to improving people's lives.

I am so proud of what CTA members are doing each and every day. In the face of challenging circumstances, community transport is working hard to deliver whatever support is needed. That is the reason community transport started in cities, towns and villages all over the UK, and that's why our members are stepping up, adapting their services and delivering for their communities at this crucial time.

Already there are discussions about finding ways to continue these sorts of services once normality resumes, as well as getting back to connecting their passengers with the people and places they love. But this relies on our members being able to get the guidance and support they need during these uncertain times to come out the other side ready to connect our communities. When things start to get back to normal, when schools return, when shops and businesses start to open their doors, the community transport sector will be there, ready to play the invaluable role that is at the heart of our sector. That's what we're working for at the Community Transport Association. If you want to find out more please do get in touch”.

Bill Freeman, Chief Executive, Community Transport Association

More information

For more examples of the work being done by community transport and regular updates on changes to guidance, be sure to follow CTA on twitter and keep up to date with our blog.

Details of both, and how to get in touch with us if you want more information, are below.

 ctauk.org  [@CTAUK1](https://twitter.com/CTAUK1)  hello@ctauk.org

If you need support

If you're a community transport provider who needs support, or if you have any questions about what the Government's guidance means for your organisation, you can find our latest guidance at ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/ or email our advice team via advice@ctauk.org.