



## Health, Social Care and Sport Committee inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 outbreak and its management, on health and social care in Wales

### A response from the Community Transport Association

*This response is submitted by the Community Transport Association (CTA), a UK-wide charity working with thousands of other charities and community groups across the UK which provide local transport services that fulfil a social purpose and community benefit. We support community transport operators across Wales and work with a range of key stakeholders to champion the sector and raise standards. Community transport helps to address the quality, affordability and accessibility of transport options for people who cannot drive and do not have access to conventional public transport. It 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.*

#### **How do community transport operators usually work with patients and others receiving care or treatment in both clinical settings and the community?**

Community transport offers lifeline services for thousands of people in Wales who have no other means of accessing transport. Our members provide essential transport services for people accessing health appointments and work with the Welsh Ambulance (NHS) Service Trust to deliver Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS).

In a report published by the NHS Confederation in Wales, *Community Transport & Health – Making Health Accessible to All*, the breadth of support provided by community transport operators to ensure people can access health services is evident and the benefits of those services are felt by both passengers and services.

The types of journeys provided by community transport include:

- Support for patients who are ineligible for formal NEPTS but are unable to travel to health settings without a third party providing the journey;
- Support for patients with life-sustaining care needs who need to attend a care setting, such as for dialysis;
- Support for patients who have been discharged and need to be transported from one care setting to another, or home;
- Support for discharged patients with home settling services to maintain wellbeing in the community (e.g. safety checks and essential food shopping).

### **What has been the impact of Covid-19 on this provision?**

Covid-19 has a significant impact on the community transport sector given that many drivers and passengers are over 70 and in March, they were asked to self-isolate for 12 weeks. The situation for our members is similar to lots of organisations right now in that they have lost opportunities to generate any commercial income or charitable donations. Currently, the Welsh Government has recommended that Local Authorities continue to pay for grant funded services a minimum of 75% based on last years' financial claims. How long this advice will be in place is unknown and we fear that as community transport passengers are generally from vulnerable groups, it is likely to be a while before they are looking to travel again.

Once the lockdown began, the sector quickly sprang into action, adapting services to meet emerging needs. This has included a range of services and support such as 'shop & drop' services, prescription collection and delivery, telephone befriending and maintaining transport provision for essential journeys. It has always been clear that community transport is a social service delivered through the medium of transport but this is even more clear in the current crisis.

In terms of transport to health, many services remain with operators working with WAST to ensure patients can access oncology and dialysis services for example. We have also worked with the sector and Welsh Government to identify opportunities for our members to transport key workers so that essential services can continue to be delivered.

Whilst the value of community transport is clear, there is uncertainty regarding future funding and action will need to be taken to ensure operators receive the core funding required to maintain their operations so that they can continue delivering their support for health services.

## **What challenges and risks have CTA identified that require policy attention?**

It is clear that with significantly reduced capacity across the whole of the transport sector, the current funding model is unsustainable and action must be taken to address this challenge. In rural areas in particular, services were struggling to survive before the lockdown and face an even more precarious future now. However, we must not forget that transport is a public service and community transport is often described as a 'lifeline'. If there is a reduction in transport services, peoples' ability to access services will also be reduced. People will also be unable to access jobs and leisure facilities which will have a further negative impact on health outcomes.

The community transport sector specialises in accessible transport with the majority of vehicles in the fleet being wheelchair accessible. Many passengers require assistance to board the vehicle and as yet, there is no guidance for supporting vulnerable or disabled transport users and our members would welcome clarity so that they can be confident in ensuring driver and passenger safety.

### **Final recommendations:**

- Community transport is a lifeline and even in these times with reduced need for passenger transport services, operators are working hard to make sure their beneficiaries are safe at home by providing telephone befriending and delivery of essential goods. This shift in service provision along with the disappearance of any commercial income, makes the funding model for community transport very precarious. **The Welsh Government should ensure that the sector is supported financially in order to secure transport services for vulnerable people now and in the future.**
- With a predominantly wheelchair accessible fleet and predominance of vulnerable passengers, guidance is required to ensure passengers and operators are safe for essential journeys. **The Welsh Government should ensure specialist guidance is available for operators providing transport services for vulnerable groups.**

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For further information, please contact:

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