

North Somerset Community Transport Forum

7th May 2025

Meeting Notes

In attendance:

Anne Morley (Chairperson)

Tom Shaw - Clevedon Care volunteer car scheme

Martin Robertson – Yeo Valley Lions minibus scheme

Tony Wyatt – Sandford Helpline volunteer car scheme

Tracy Edwards Brown – VANS

Ian Turner – Clevedon Care volunteer car scheme

Lynda Griffith – Nailsea Availables volunteer car scheme

Jeanne Wood – Nailsea Availables volunteer car scheme

Adrian Hopkins – Wrington Minibus Society & Wrington Helpline volunteer car scheme

Dick Whittington - Chew Valley Community Transport

Sue Leighton – Nailsea & District Community Transport

Apologies: Sue Ferguson - Portishead Porters, Carol Sexton - Gordano Community cars, Trevor Smallwood - Churchill & Langford Minibus Society, Sharon - Weston & District Community Transport, Paul Spears - Congresbury Community Transport, Chris Noble - Sandford Helpline.

Anne welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the North Somerset community transport mapping project that is taking place between now and September. Each organisation represented, outlined their individual organisation.

The state of ageing report published by VANS ([Ageing Well - Voluntary Action North Somerset](#)), outlined that transport was a key area affecting older people's wellbeing and quality of life and that VANS has subsequently commissioned the mapping project and report into volunteer community car schemes and community transport in North Somerset. A nationwide mapping scheme was undertaken by the Community Transport Association in 2024 [Mapping England | Community Transport Association](#).

Group discussions regarding the benefits of volunteer led transport were held and it was identified that transport to enable people to access medical appointments was felt to be the largest amount of volunteer community transport services on offer in North Somerset - many thousands per year, although some community transport services also provide shopping and leisure trips for older people too.

Identified benefits.

- The availability of volunteer community transport and car schemes often influences whether people can access medical appointments (with assistance if needed) and if this is not available that the passenger may be unable to attend their health or

medical appointment— this can have a knock-on effect of individual people's health and wellbeing, timely access to medical services and proactive health intervention which reduces more intensive intervention in terms of medical or health intervention in the future.

- The positive effect on social care was identified, enabling people to live independently in their own home for longer. Also accessing social care services in a cost-effective way, such as day care, memory cafes etc.
- Economically, employers' benefit as family carers need to take less time of work to take a family member to hospital or medical appointments.

Another healthy discussion regarding the challenges of providing volunteer led transport in North Somerset was held.

Challenges highlighted included:

- Recruiting and retaining volunteers was felt to be the most challenging. Generally, many people are working longer, and many have less free time due to assisting members of their own families – which in turn leaves less time for volunteering.
- Parking was identified as another main challenge – particularly when taking people to central Bristol, such as the BRI or other city centre locations. Lack of parking is very difficult; it is very difficult even to drop someone off and pick them up later. Some organisations rely on blue badges but even then, a lack of suitable parking and drop off spaces is difficult. Some schemes identified that Weston General can take a list of registration numbers of volunteer driver schemes, and they are then able to park for free. It was felt that the impact that voluntary schemes have on getting patients to hospital appointments is not recognised by medical services and that if the voluntary schemes were unable to do this service that the costs to medical services and the NHS would be much higher. It would be helpful for health trusts to recognise the impact of community transport on their patient's ability to attend appointments and provide suitable parking or drop off spaces. Volunteer schemes do not get the respect they deserve considering the work they do, to assist people to access health services in a proactive fashion – without cost to the NHS.
- It has been identified by several schemes, that drivers who past their test prior to 1997 automatically had a D1 entitlement (to drive a 3.5 tonne + minibus) added to their licence, in the future less people will be entitled to drive minibuses on this provision. It was also identified that drivers over 70 have to undergo a medical test with their GP to continue driving on this entitlement but it is increasingly difficult to get a medical provided for this by GP surgeries (even when volunteers are providing a service to those GP surgeries to transport their patients).
- It was identified that joint publicity and working in an increasingly coordinated way may help recruit more volunteers to be involved with community led transport in North Somerset and increased collaboration would be beneficial for all (Anne is happy to investigate this possibility)
- Some schemes mentioned funding is being cut to their services and finances are tight, other services are wholly self-funded by passenger donations and fund-raising and can cover all costs so are not feeling so affected by recent budget cuts. There is a variation in how individual services are run and financed.

Future plans

Anne encouraged schemes to email her directly if they think of anything additional regarding benefits and challenges that they feel would be beneficial to report.

It was identified that collaboration with large employers who have staff who are planning to retire soon i.e. police, NHS, etc may help increase volunteering in North Somerset for a variety of roles.

Anne will look into ways of working that support collaboration between schemes, where schemes are interested in future possibility of this, to support their individual schemes.

A questionnaire (hard copy and online) will be available to older people over the summer months to feedback their views regarding community transport and volunteer car schemes (a copy was circulated for comments) – Anne will distribute to groups and local facilities as the voice of older people is also important in this project. If you feel able to help in any way, please let Anne know.

Anne will contact each service individually (if she hasn't already), It will be helpful for organisations to provide the following information on their transport schemes (not everything will apply to all).

- Number of journeys completed each year (and how you calculate the journey total)
- Financial income
- Number of individuals assisted.
- Number of staff/volunteers involved in the service.
- Any legal structure you work under (i.e. registered charity, CIO etc)
- Any policies you have
- How people book and pay for journeys

Any information and data shared will be used in an aggregated way in the report rather than identifying any scheme. The purpose of the exercise is to, I believe, make the case for future investment into community transport as needed and to identify qualitative data where appropriate, some schemes identified that non-financial help is far really helpful to them, such as NSC being proactive in advertising volunteering and community transport schemes, enabling support with parking (i.e. through blue badge schemes) etc

A further meeting will be held in early July – date to be confirmed.