

**What, if anything, can  
Ageing Better Middlesbrough  
usefully do regarding transport for  
lonely and isolated older people?**



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## 1. Background and Introduction

Transport has the capacity to foster or restrain social contact and is an issue that comes up repeatedly in open consultation with older people. As such, it is very important to agendas seeking to address loneliness and social isolation.

Teesside University were commissioned to consider the question *“What, if anything, can Ageing Better Middlesbrough usefully do regarding transport for lonely and isolated older people?”* and tasked with assessing options and providing recommendations to shape the specification of a commissioned transport project.

Specific elements in carrying out this remit included:

- assessing and summarising recent restrictions on Community Transport Initiatives (especially licensing requirements)
- mapping local voluntary and community (VCS) service mini-buses; assessing local attitudes to 'sharing' provision; and identifying and analysing any legal/logistical implications of utilising spare capacity in the local VCS
- gathering the experience of local organisations (in statutory; voluntary and commercial sectors) who have sought to improve local transport provision (focusing on affordability, viability and sustainability)
- gathering the experiences of organisations in other localities seeking to improve transport for lonely and isolated older people (focusing on affordability, viability and sustainability)

Methods involved a web-based literature search and interviews. Interviewees were selected to provide local and national perspectives; to represent a range of organisations and schemes and, at a national level; and to provide a mix of ageing better and other initiatives (see Annex 1).

## 2. Community transport schemes

'Community transport' is a nebulous term. Whilst all metropolitan authorities and most unitary authorities have some form of community transport, this tells us little about what exactly is provided, for whom, or going where. Typically, key features are being non-profit making and serving needs that cannot be served by usual commercial markets. Within these broad parameters, provision varies widely and includes (sometimes large-scale) bus schemes; community car initiatives; minibus hire; and door to door (dial-a-ride) services.

### 2.1 Bus and Minibus provision

Sections 19 & 22 of the 1985 Transport Act allow organisations to operate without a PSV operator's licence when providing transport for a charge, so long as they are doing so without a view to profit. However, concerns about sustainability and viability seem to be constant and ongoing for organisations directly providing buses and mini-buses, especially for smaller schemes. Subsidy funding is so stretched that many schemes are closing. Nearly 20 schemes have come and gone in County Durham, for example, with just 4 left in existence.

Subsidy matters due to high costs. Schemes require thorough preparation (evidencing demand; consulting with residents, authorities and commercial providers); running costs (fuel and insurance); and maintenance (especially high for accessible vehicles). The prospect of saving for replacement vehicles is limited by concerns to keep passenger charges reasonable. Even those schemes large enough to competitively contract for services (such as school runs or NHS transport) or tied in directly with public bodies (typically councils) have ongoing revenue drains and uncertain long-term futures.

#### **Stockton Community Transport Service (SCTS)**

Initially, SCTS involved Stockton Council funding parish councils to commission private contractors through a tendering process to provide a service meeting the needs of local areas no longer served by the commercial sector. A condition of continuing the funding was services reaching a target number of passengers per day to show viability and sustainability. This was not achieved (although one route came close) and Stockton Council decided to bring the services back in-house.

SCTS now maximises cost effectiveness by utilising existing vehicles that are stood idle before and after school runs and making use of existing council insurances. However, although the service can demonstrate reasonable demand and affordability, without subsidy it would represent an ongoing revenue drain. Its running costs are supported by a Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG), monies only available from central to local government. This lets existing services continue and allows a small pot of money to accrue for vehicle maintenance and eventual replacement.

There was also a real concern that EU regulations threatened the basis of Section 19 licencing (see Annex 3) that would require compliance with commercial requirements, pushing costs up further still. As well as the cost of the operators' licence, this would entail appointing a fully trained transport manager, buses needing to be tested by government

centres (rather than MOT garages), and individual drivers being required to hold PSV licences. This was not only a worry for small-scale schemes; larger organisations were being affected too.

### **Sheffield Community Transport (SCT)**

SCT is separated into distinct functions: traditional group travel (including a shopper bus) and a dial-a-ride service (which encompasses adult social care transport). They have a fleet of 79 vehicles, 61 mini-buses and 18 large buses that service contracts they have won through tendering (including hospital buses). These operate with an 'O' Licence (an operator's licence) whereas their CT operates under a section 19 permit (see Annex 3).

Last year, their scheduled bus services carried out over a 1 million passenger journeys, and their community transport 800,000. They have around 100 drivers, 60 of them paid and the rest volunteers, and a mixture of paid and voluntary passenger assistants. They also operate a 'wheels to work' scooter scheme, and a car scheme with volunteers driving their own cars. In addition, SCT have a large training department that delivers courses nation-wide (using a driver course they developed themselves) which raises revenue used to cross-subsidise core operations.

SCT's plans for their future are to some extent contingent upon growing their contracts, some of which are at an individual level through personal transport budgets. However, the uncertainty about Section 19 permits means they are not currently responding to invitations to tender.

One way in which costs are kept down, and fares made affordable, is the reliance on volunteer drivers. However, the difficulties encountered in recruiting and/or retaining them was also a common theme.

### **Dene Valley Community Transport (DVCT)**

Seen as sustainable, viable and affordable to users, this is partly premised on voluntary input and public funding. DVCT owns six 16-seater minibuses, with access to a seventh owned by another organisation; all are run under a section 19 licence. When 2 buses were funded by the Department of Transport, this let them sell a couple of the older buses, raising 30% of the cost of other new vehicles. The remaining 70% of the cost was made up by a grant from the local council.

Some buses are out at fixed times for contract work and used for other purposes in between. On average, buses are used to 63% capacity but occasionally, buses have been borrowed from other community transport organisations. Buses are self-funding in that revenue coming in covers running costs, driver expenses, and a small amount of money for the reserve. They have their own garage to maintain the buses with a part-paid, part-volunteer mechanic which helps keep costs down. Training provided to other organisations also helps put money into reserve funds.

All drivers have undergone MiDAS training (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme), a nationally recognised standard organised by the Community Transport Association (CTA), and are able to cater for people with physical/mental impairments. Mostly volunteers, there are 2 part-time paid drivers and 2 casual paid drivers who also volunteer. They struggle to maintain a long enough volunteer list.

Finally, there are sometimes complications in matching capital and revenue subsidies.

#### **Tees Valley Rural Community Council (TVRCC)**

TVRCC has two 16-seat, fully accessible minibuses which can be booked with or without a driver for varying time-scales by voluntary organisations and various community groups. Government delays in providing the vehicles meant revenue support ran out before they arrived. TVRCC now use existing staff and reserves to keep the buses running but are now a much smaller outfit, focussing on basics. They get no external funding and have been unable to generate enough revenue to make the service sustainable. A review is underway and the future will be determined in early 2019.

Middlesbrough-based community and voluntary sector organisations did not seem overly aware of this provision, possibly because of TVRCC's sub-regional remit and rural focus.

#### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

Given current difficulties that community transport schemes are facing, both in terms of funding and operations, it seems unwise for ABM to seek to set up any project that involves the direct provision of transport services or vehicles.

However, given the under-used resource held by TVRCC, one possibility may be for ABM to offer support in order to promote and facilitate Middlesbrough-based use of TVRCC's minibuses. Potentially, this could improve local provision, make use of a currently under-utilised resource, and aid future sustainability.

## **2.2 Minibus brokerage**

Community transport organisations may also loan, or co-ordinate the loan, of mini-buses to community groups, and/or offer accredited training for volunteer drivers.

TVRCC previously had funding for a minibus brokerage project in East Cleveland. This involved compiling a register of community groups with a minibus being maintained just for their own use, logging availability, and matching with a community group wanting use of a minibus. The group owning the minibus received an income from the group that wanted to use it and TVRCC took an administration fee. Volunteers were also recruited and put through MIDAS training. The scheme worked well, with many organisations signing up.

For local interviewees from community resources without their own transport provision, affordability was a key issue. Although nominal charges were generally applied, this rarely covered the costs of vehicle hire, meaning usage was rare and reliant on grant or project funding. Specific problems were faced when accessibility was required because of the higher costs applied. One community centre, for example, had reduced their hire expenses by more than 20% through arranging a separate taxi for a disabled passenger – but at the cost of the person being excluded from the social interaction whilst travelling as a group. Interviewees indicated that they would welcome more information about what minibus

options were available and they were open to exploring the idea of sharing if this could reduce costs and bring opportunities for better transport solutions.

Amongst interviewees, there were also organisations who did have their own provision who were already offering their vehicle for hire (Friends of Newport Settlement, whose running costs are met by charges) or willing to countenance the idea of sharing when their vehicles were not in use (Baden Powell Scout Group, whose running costs are met by fund-raising). Neither of these bodies have accessible mini-buses, and both are concerned about how they will fund a replacement vehicle; both buses are over 4 years old. They would value some sort of transport mapping to allow them to see what is available locally, with a view to sharing vehicles or services. Also, the Newport scheme does not provide a drive and is sometimes approached by groups who also lack someone to drive. They believe it would be hugely valuable to have a list of voluntary drivers.

### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

ABM could investigate the possibility of 'low-key' brokerage in Middlesbrough. This could be a borough-wide scheme (perhaps in conjunction with TVRCC?) or it could be lower level still, perhaps matching existing mini-buses with groups in their immediate locality or simply producing an information resource. Taking on a recruitment initiative for volunteer drivers – perhaps targeting men over 50? - could potentially boost the sustainability of existing provision.

## **2.3 Community car schemes**

In this sort of project, users are partnered with people who have vehicles and, if needed, who can lift wheelchairs. Booked in advance, journeys can be for any purpose but are mostly local. Drivers usually receive mileage, with fees charged by the mile. For transport outside usual boundaries, some schemes offer a 'plus' dimension such as guaranteeing a regular weekly journey without booking or providing for journeys further afield. This is the case for Sheffield Community Transport, for example.

TVRCC operates a Community Car Share Scheme. Volunteer drivers use their own cars to provide a door to door car service for members with a mobility problem who cannot access public transport. Advance booking is required, and certain times can be very busy. Individual fares are based on mileage travelled to cover volunteers' expenses. The scheme has struggled to recruit/retain volunteers, especially since charitable subsidy ended.

### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

Whilst it seems unwise for ABM to seek to replicate this scheme, it could consider offering TVRCC support to promote/facilitate Middlesbrough-based activity which might help the scheme to achieve sustainability. Again, this could be tied in to a major recruitment drive for volunteer drivers, perhaps targeting men over 50.

## 2.4 Dial-a-ride

This is one of the most common types of community transport service, offering a door-to-door facility, often run by charities and supported by local councils. As well as the vehicle itself, the service often includes assistance into and out of accessible vehicles, some with storage for mobility scooters. Users need to register for membership and charges may apply. Journeys can usually be for any purpose within designated area, sometimes with weekly limits on the number of trips taken.

In Middlesbrough, Ayresome Community Transport previously ran a dial a ride service, which was combined with the council's school and adult social care transport in 2009. In 2012, lack of central government subsidy and apparent under-usage led to its closure and replacement with a voucher-based scheme for eligible people to use with private sector operators

### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

It seems unlikely that ABM could sustainably fill what may be considered as a major gap in local provision.

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### 3. Other Collective Provision

#### 3.1 Shop buses

Big supermarkets – such as Asda and Tesco – sometimes operate free bus services to enable footfall in their larger stores. This can also be done on a collective basis for travel to shopping centres.

##### **Parkway Community Bus**

Since 2016, this has given a free service for people in South Middlesbrough to get to Coulby Newham's Shopping Centre. The wheelchair accessible bus and driver are hired from GL Coaches. Running once weekly and funded by the shopping centre's marketing budget (ultimately by the tenants' service charges), its popularity saw it extend temporarily to a second day, funded privately by a local business.

#### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

Where ABM has successfully established private sector connections (such as 'café-meet-ups'), there may be some scope to explore the prospect of services to match up with these; and where people are unable to manage with mainstream transport, there may be scope for businesses to collectively resource transport. However, complications may arise since the centre of Middlesbrough is relatively well-served by mainstream public transport

#### 3.2 Mainstream transport

Some areas/companies offer awareness training for drivers and other staff to understand the needs of older and disabled passengers, including those with sensory impairments. These can be an important dimension of developing 'age friendly' places.

##### **Age UK Isle of Wight**

Age UK Isle of Wight have developed training to help service providers become more age-friendly, including the main bus operator, Southern Vectis. This is now part of the company's compulsory training programme for all drivers. The training involves developing understanding of the challenges that people might have as they get older (sensory impairments, speech and mobility) and setting these in the context of the relevant workplace or service. It encompasses using an age simulation suit and glasses to give participants a practical insight into common physical challenges in later life. This equipment costs in the region of £2,000 and some companies, including Southern Vectis, have invested in their own.

The training was originally developed for the police and the fire brigade; Ageing Better funding has allowed the model to be rolled out to lots of organisations on the island – from Tesco staff to prison officers. They hope to generate income when the funding ends, by charging for sessions. They have also invested in accreditation from 'train the trainer' to embed sustainability.

Specific schemes for buses or trains are not known to operate in Middlesbrough but Falcon taxis, relative newcomers to local cab services, have recently become 'dementia friendly'.

### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

Given ABM's future focus and proposed legacy, there is a strong argument to pursue 'Age Friendly Middlesbrough' accreditation with local bus, train and taxi companies. This could go beyond simply requiring them to meet certain standards by taking the sort of approach used on the Isle of Wight and instigating a cross-sector age-awareness programme.

### **3.3 Advice and information**

Bespoke advice can be difficult to deliver effectively, and comprehensive information can be expensive to produce and update on an ongoing basis, particularly if commercial transport routes are encompassed. For example, the Isle of Wight's advice line for people planning journeys has been decommissioned because of lack of use. Whilst they are now considering a revamped scheme, this is likely to focus specifically on medical-related journeys and link in with existing personal support (care navigators and community navigators).

However, it was notable amongst local interviewees – and not only amongst those without their own transport – how many would welcome more information about what was available locally.

### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

Nationally, there are some good examples of directories that focus specifically on provision within the voluntary and community sector. Given the relative sparsity of provision within Middlesbrough and given the value that would be placed on a directory, ABM may wish to consider producing an information resource focussing on local non-commercial services which offer any type of transport-related services. Although this would represent a snapshot in time, it would offer an overview of available transport and transport-related services which might be useful for identifying gaps and advocacy, as well as for day-to-day practical use.

## 4. Individual-based initiatives

### 4.1 Financial Support

There are a range of schemes that offer a travel subsidy to individuals. For disabled people under 65, there is the possibility (however distant) of qualifying for the mobility element of Personal Independence Payment via the welfare benefit system. Local authorities may also provide financial support, particularly when it facilitates carrying people to their own services and do not directly provide transport. This might include taxi tokens, for example, or it might involve a travel-related element in a personal budget. Other areas (such as Darlington, locally) provide a free second bus pass to the companion of a disabled person, enabling them to travel alongside them without charge.

#### **Ageless Thanet**

Ageless Thanet offers a free 'reward card' to anyone 50 years old and above which enables people to receive a discount from local businesses signing up to the scheme. Over 300 businesses have done so, including two taxi firms. They operate via a website, an app and a booklet to let people know what the scheme offers, and businesses are asked to provide a discount to reward card holders in return for being listed. One taxi firm offers a 10% reduction in fares; the other 12%.

### ***Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough***

ABM might want to pursue a taxi discount scheme for older passengers, particularly if they decide to adopt reward cards as part of their Age Friendly Middlesbrough agenda.

### 4.2 Personal assistance

Schemes to provide personal assistance to help people get out and about. This might include using public transport or accompanying people on taxi rides. Schemes to provide personal assistance to help people get out and about in different ways. This might include walking, cycling, using public transport, or using mobility vehicles.

#### **Access Ambassadors, South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA)**

SYHA changed their 'travel buddy' scheme because it was performing better at buddying than it was on transport. The model worked on matching a volunteer with a participant with the aim of increasing confidence in and efficiency of getting about. People who were keen really bought into it and the scheme received very positive feedback. However, there was more demand than they could meet because of the time taken to match people up, and the time taken to find volunteers. Also, amongst the 20 people a year who were matched, some wanted to maintain their friendship beyond the envisaged 6 months; again, this meant that replacement volunteers were needed. Despite this, SYHA believes that a more informal scheme that took less time to co-ordinate would be worthwhile. Sheffield Community Transport runs a similar scheme but charges a levy (£10 per hour) to keep the service sustainable.

**Walking with Confidence, Age UK Leeds**

This project trained volunteers to offer support and a reassuring presence for up to 12 weeks to help older people get out and about on foot, mobility scooter or public transport. The scheme targeted people who had lost the confidence to go out for some reason - perhaps because of a chronic condition, because they had just come out of hospital, or for some other reason – but who had the prospect of going out independently in the future. The beneficiary and volunteer worked together around a set specific goal - such as calling on a friend, going to the pub or visiting a shop. The project employed a part-time co-ordinator and, over the course of 2 years, engaged around 60 older people (some achieving very positive outcomes) and 20-30 volunteers. Although Ageing Better funding has now ended, Age UK Leeds are looking to build some of the features of Walking with Confidence into their continuing befriending service.

**Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough**

This sort of personal assistance may be already be covered by ABM to some extent by the outreach service. However, promoting outreach as giving the ‘confidence to get out and about’ might tap into a different cohort of demand. The experience of these schemes suggests that this combination of promoting travel and facilitating volunteering/ befriending can work well, albeit not always in the way intended.

**4.3 Safe Driving Schemes**

Previous research for Ageing Better Middlesbrough highlighted that one of the issues that concerns older people who have had a car is no longer being able to drive. Being reassured that their driving is safe – or advised that they should no longer be behind the wheel - is therefore potentially valuable.

**Isle of Wight older driver assessments**

The fire service on the island have developed an assessment tool because of the ageing demographic. Assessors have ‘advanced driver’ status and they assess older drivers as ‘red’, ‘amber’ or ‘green’ depending on ability and safety. Amber might mean a driver needs to address specific aspects of their driving; red means that the service thinks s/he should stop driving. Whatever the result, the assessors do **not** report appraisals to DVLA.

A charge for the service of approximately £40 covers costs. People can self-refer or concerned relatives and friends can refer in, providing the driver agrees to assessment.

**Conclusions/implications for Ageing Better Middlesbrough**

ABM could potentially take on, or forge a partnership to take on, the application of a similar assessment tool that would confidentially appraise the safety of ‘older drivers’.

**4.4 Shopmobility**

In the words of their web-site *“Shopmobility is a service that helps all people who consider themselves to have mobility problems (whether through disability, illness or injury) to*

*continue to get around city and town centres independently, with freedom, confidence and dignity.*” Shopmobility schemes provide wheelchairs and mobility scooters to cater for all sizes, and users are generally not required to ‘prove’ disability or mobility problems. There is usually a small fee for the loan of the wheelchairs and scooters.

**Middlesbrough Shopmobility**

The local Shopmobility scheme is run by Middlesbrough Environment City and has been very successful, to the point of over-use. Success has partly been attributed to its location in the bus centre and to the flexibility of allowing scooters and wheelchairs to be rented for a full day if required.

In general, shopmobility has proved very successful for town centre shopping malls, and there may be some scope to replicate the model in community settings. One possibility might be considering investment to equip community hubs with hired wheelchairs and mobility vehicles. This offers the prospect of reaching out to people unable to leave their homes without such provision.

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## 5. Assessment and recommendations

In arriving at conclusions, consideration was given to the following factors:

- Results of, and messages from, the research undertaken for this commission
- Awareness that some of the most lonely and isolated older people may not be capable of leaving their home, let alone using mainstream public transport
- Knowledge that Ageing Better Middlesbrough faces limitations in terms of the time and financial resources available

The resulting assessment is overleaf; summary recommendations are as follows:

- That at a **strategic** level, ABM should pursue/facilitate Age Friendly accreditation with local companies/transport planners. This could involve instigating a cross-sector age-awareness programme.
- That at a **pragmatic** level, ABM should support existing local resources. This could include:
  - producing an information resource about local non-commercial services
  - developing 'low-key' brokerage to maximise the shared use of VCS mini-buses
  - promoting/facilitating use of Tees Valley Rural Community Council's under-utilised mini-buses
  - leading a recruitment drive for volunteer drivers who would link to existing schemes
- That at a **targeted** level, ABM should focus on people unable to leave their home. This might mean:
  - Offering personal assistance for people to get out and about
  - Replicating the sort of provision offered by Shopmobility at a community level

Assessment >		<i>positive</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>negative</i>
<b>TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT</b>	<b>Bus and mini-bus provision</b>		promote/facilitate use of TVRCC's under-utilised mini-buses	directly provide community transport
	<b>Mini-bus brokerage</b>	develop 'low-key' brokerage to maximise shared use of mini-buses	lead recruitment drive for volunteer drivers to link to existing schemes	
	<b>Community car scheme</b>		lead recruitment drive for volunteer drivers to link to existing schemes	
	<b>Dial-a-ride</b>			engagement in developing/delivering dial-a-ride services
<b>OTHER COLLECTIVE PROVISION</b>	<b>Shop buses</b>		investigate scope to engage town centre management/existing business connections	
	<b>Mainstream public transport</b>	pursue/facilitate Age Friendly accreditation with local companies/transport planners	advocate for overall service improvement	direct campaigns that advocate for specific routes/service upgrades
	<b>Advice and information</b>	produce information about local non-commercial services		directly provide advice/information to individuals
<b>INDIVIDUAL TRANSPORT INITIATIVES</b>	<b>Financial support</b>		pursue taxi discount scheme for older passengers	directly provide financial subsidy
	<b>Personal assistance</b>	promote outreach as giving 'confidence to get out and about'	<i>see content relating to community car scheme</i>	
	<b>Safe driving schemes</b>		forge partnership to apply tool that can confidentially assess older driver safety	
	<b>Shopmobility</b>		investigate scope to equip community hubs with on-loan mobility vehicles/wheelchairs	

## ANNEX 1

Interviews were conducted with representatives of the following bodies:

Tees Valley-based	Outside Tees Valley
Baden Powell Scout Group Easterside and Grove Hill Community Hubs Friends of Newport Settlement Langridge and Breckon Hill Centres Middlesbrough Council Executive Parkway Community Bus Service Stockton on Tees Community Bus Tees Valley Community Transport	Access Ambassadors. South Yorkshire Housing Association Ageless Thanet Centre for Ageing Better in Leeds Dene Valley Community Transport Isle of Wight Ageing Better Leeds 'Walking with Confidence' scheme Sheffield Community Transport

## ANNEX 2

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