

## Much More Than Just Community Transport April 2022

### Article for publication

**Last year I started working at CTLA community transport and admit I was one of those people who naturally assumed the obvious... Community transport is all about providing bus transport for local people who didn't have transport of their own.**

On arrival, I soon learned CTLA is a long-established independent and award-winning local transport charity operating 18 buses providing a wide variety of public transport services out of Newhaven across East Sussex from Saltdean, Peacehaven and Newhaven, to Uckfield, Lewes and Hastings.

In an ever-increasing social environment of uncertainty, rising fuel costs, and increased operating costs, some public transport companies were forced to cut their services and routes leaving many rural towns and villages without any public transport. This places enormous financial pressures on local and regional councils (already dealing with grant cuts) to fulfil those transport voids themselves to provide public transport required which they were ill-equipped and underfunded to provide. CTLA is then frequently called upon to work closely with local councils, people's charities and social services to step in to provide those missing transport services.

But that's not all that community transport is about. Community transport is a charity and therefore CTLA is much more about care... caring about our communities to provide the means for people to leave the confines of their accommodation, isolation and loneliness to travel... and we all know the first rule of wellbeing is to 'remove yourself from any difficult situation'.

The people in our communities most benefiting from community transport are the elderly for whom CTLA is an essential part of their life enabling them to travel to shops, attend medical appointments, socialise, and maintain contact with family and friends. Most CTLA passengers are older citizens and with the CTLA Dial-A-Ride (door-to-door) facility is greatly valued..

Jenny Milne\* wrote "It cannot be overestimated how much value rural communities place on services such as the DRT or the bus. These transport options are more than just a mode. More often than not, the driver and passengers provide a social dynamic to what may be a non-eventful day, social inclusion for the passenger or indeed support on the way to or from the doctor. In addition, for young people living in rural areas, it introduces travelling on a public service, booking the travel, and also a sense of independence. Something that 'mum taxi' cannot provide." [link](#)

\*Founder and Director of the Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community CIC.

Travel and transport are all about giving people the ability and freedom to leave (escape) their physical or inner confinement, to leave and travel outdoors to see places, to socialise, and just with be with other people. Being able to travel, with the means of transport, enables people to attend events and meet up with family and friends.

Working closely with social services, charities and local councils, I learned CTLA provides transport for people greatly needing to escape confinement, isolation and loneliness which is proven to contribute to social unrest, family unrest, anger, frustration and addiction.

This ability to escape isolation and to be outdoors and travel to be somewhere else with other people, is especially important (crucial) for people's wellbeing, exercise, happiness, contentment and immensely contributes to a person's mental health. We cannot underestimate just how important the role public and community transport plays in our lives and health.

According to the National Institute of Health (2022), The definitions of loneliness and social isolation are different but related... Loneliness is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated. Social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly.



**Most people have heard of 'community transport' and most people naturally assume community transport is about transporting local people from A to B. But look deeper into what community transport is really all about, and you soon discover community transport is much more than passengers and buses. And the more I learned about community transport, the more I asked myself... Could we really imagine a world without community transport?**



About the author, Gary Weston

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In this respect, I learned CTLA provides other community transport services such as Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT) enabling people to attend important medical appointments at hospitals and clinics. This is an especially much-needed service with hospital patient care transport considerably in demand and under pressure.

Mark Evans\*, General Manager at CTLA said "Being a responsible community transport service, company and also a charity, our fundamental focus is on the service and not profit, although we do need to ensure we can cover our operating costs, or we would fail to exist at all." Mark went on to say, "All our services are carefully planned and managed in collaboration with local communities to provide the best community transport service we can and they need."

It was reassuring CTLA is a longstanding member of the nationwide Community Transport Association (CTA). I was impressed further to learn Mark Evans (CTLA general manager) is a board member of the CTA contributing to the planning and safe running of community transport services across the UK.

CTLA buses driver are all MiDAS-trained and experienced, licenced drivers. The buses are equipped with lifts for wheelchairs and scooters. There is also passenger support staff available for school transport runs transporting vulnerable children and adults with physical impairments attending school or daycare centres.

I was further surprised and delighted in this respect to see CTLA also provides transport and drivers for Club and Group hire and even runs a popular CTLA Travel Club taking local people to wonderful places across East Sussex such as local eateries and shopping centres, to events, or to lovely beaches and charming villages.

With this important insight, I now realised that community transport is much more than just about transporting nice people to nice places. Community transport allows people to retain control of their lives and not let life control them. More importantly, this enables people to enjoy life and escape any woes by meeting fellow passengers, making new friends, chatting, laughing and socialising on (and after) their travels.

*Ruby Budd\* wrote... "For some passengers, especially elderly ones, conversations on the bus with others and the driver can form a crucial part of their social interactions with their community."*

\*Ruby is an associate principal at Via community transport logistics.

So important is the recognition of loneliness and isolation today effecting our community's elderly and young people's wellbeing and mental health, that in February 2023, the widely attended international online conference and campaign (Tackling Loneliness in a New Era of Connection) was organised, bringing together experts and health workers from across the world to discuss this important issue and especially loneliness and isolation in the wake of the pandemic. Highlighted in the conference from across the world was the importance of community transport services and all services that bring people together.

With some insight into what community transport is all about, I hope you agree with the enormous contributions of community transport providers such as CTLA, that it is hard to imagine a world without community transport services in our community... and that they are much more than just a bus service!



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I was staggered to learn from the CTLA website that CTLA had covered over 350,000 vehicle miles to over 480 local destinations, providing over 80,000 passenger journeys in 2021 alone.

Based in Newhaven, CTLA is a long-established independent award-winning charity serving East Sussex for over 20 years. CTLA is professionally managed by a dedicated team of over 50 volunteer drivers, administration staff, skilled technicians, and trustees. Behind CTLA are local companies, sponsors, and partners supporting the efforts to keep the services running.

When you stop to think, those 20 years have seen CTLA face repeated periods of inflation, pandemics, fuel crisis, energy crisis, Brexit, and more yet they are still here and still operating. With the current enormous rise in costs, your local community transport services such as CTLA are all 'running on gas' trying to keep services going and trying not to make service cuts to save on operating costs.

**Speaking by chance with a businessman in Lewes, he said *"Oh my mother uses CTLA... Loves it. Can't do without them."*... and I think that says it all about community transport.**

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For more information regarding this article and CTLA, please contact  
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