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Funding of Transport Schemes for People with Disabilities

1 Overview

In the context of budgetary pressures currently being experienced by the Department for Regional Development (DRD) this paper explores the impact of reduced funding on transport services for people with disabilities. Consideration is also given to the financial support of these services in GB.

2 Legislative and policy context

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) is responsible for implementation of the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities (TPPD). Established in 1991, The TPPD seeks to make transport accessible by developing a range of specialised transport services for people with disabilities. The DRD also implements the Accessible Transport Strategy 2005 (ATS). The vision of the ATS is:

“to have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life”¹

¹ DRD (2005) An accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland [online] available from: <http://nia1.me/2mw>

Additionally the DRD can, in accordance with the Transport (NI) Act 2011, provide grant funding to bodies that provide transport services that are “*wholly or mainly for the benefit of members of the public who have a disability or are elderly or live in rural areas*”.²

3 Funding of rural/disability transport services

In 2014/15 the total funding allocated to support rural/disability (community transport) services totalled £7.45m³ (this represents the end of year spend including in-year allocations⁴). The starting budget for the 2015/16 financial year totals £4.99m; this represents a reduction of 33%.⁵

Table one: Grant funded programmes, funded organisations and levels of funding 2014/15

Programme	Organisation Funded	Funding
Rural Transport Fund (RTF)	*Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPS)	£3,627,519.00
	Community Transport Association (CTA)	£100,000.00
Transport Programme for People with Disabilities (TPPD)	Disability Action	£3,200,190.00
	Shopmobility	£377,015.52
	Inclusive Mobility Transport Committee (IMTAC)	£68,000.00
	Volunteer Now	£82,114.00
TOTAL		£7,454,838.52

* DARD also provide grant support to RCTPS by way of support for the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS). In 2014/15 this will be in the region of £500,000.

As table one shows, the primary recipients of this support are the eight Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) and Disability Action who operate the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS).

Table two below shows a 33% reduction in grant to the RCTPs over the financial year 2015/16, although the level of change varies from partnership to partnership⁶. Disability Action has received a 21% cut to its funding for DATS.⁷

² Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (Part 5) Clause 33 (1) available from: <http://nia1.me/2mv>

³ [AQW 39693/11-15](#)

⁴ [AQW 44973/11-15](#)

⁵ [AQW 44966/11-15](#)

⁶ [AQW 44973/11-15](#)

⁷ [AQW 44966/11-15](#)

Table two: Comparison of community/disabled transport budget allocation 2015/16 v. 2014/15 spend

	2014/15	2015/16	£ Reduction	% Reduction
Disability Action	£2.95m	£2.32m	£0.63m	21%
RCTPs	£3.63m	£2.43m	£1.2m	33%
Other	£0.57m	£0.24m	£0.33m	58%
Total	£7.15m	£4.99m	£2.16m	30%

Source: AQW 44966/11-15

The £3.2m allocation for Disability Action (in table one) during 2014/15 includes £249,000 funding allocated to two other schemes delivered by Disability Action. These are:

- Group Transport Services; and
- Mobility Centre.

These are discussed in more depth below.

4 Grant funded services provided by Disability Action

DATS is distinct from the rural community transport services in that it is a local **urban** transport service for people with disabilities or for those who find it difficult using mainstream public transport.⁸ Services provided under DATS are targeted at those over 80, registered blind and/or in receipt of either the Mobility or Care component of Disability Living Allowance. This service is provided in 29 towns and cities across Northern Ireland. In addition to DATS Disability Action provides two further programmes grant funded by the DRD. These are:

- Group Transport Services; and
- Mobility Centre.

On 12 March 2015 Disability Action was advised by the DRD of funding reductions totalling £880,000 across these three service areas, this is laid out in table two:

Table three: Comparison of funding provided to Disability Action's mobility programmes is 2014/15 v 2015/16

Programme	2014/15 Funding Level	2015/16 Funding allocation	2015/16 Reduction	Percentage reduction
DATS Service	£2,947,000	£2,316,000	£631,000	21%
Group Service	£168,000	£0	£168,000	100%
Mobility Centre	£81,000	£0	£81,000	100%
Total	£3,196,000	£2,316,000	£880,000	28%

Source: Disability Action

DATS services are faced with a 21% reduction in funding which according to Disability Action will lead to increased fares and a reduced level of service. In terms of the other two schemes the impact of this allocation is more severe:

- The Group Transport Service ceased on the 1 April 2015 due to a 100% funding cut;

⁸ Disability Action [online] Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) available from: <http://nia1.me/2mx>

- The 100% cut to the Mobility centre will have the following impacts:
 - The number of driving assessment service centres will be reduced from 8 to 3;
 - one driving instructor position will be lost;
 - driving lessons will no longer be delivered from a person's home;
 - the price of a driving lesson will increase from £25 to £35;
 - the number of theory courses offered will reduce and the price will increase; and
 - one administration post from the Mobility Centre will be made redundant.

4.1 Disability Action Group Transport Service

The Group Transport Service offered by Disability Action enables disability groups and organisations to transport members on group excursions and to social and business functions around the UK. Disability Action's membership base alone consists of over 180 disability organisations, over 40% of who rely exclusively on the Group Service for their transport needs.

The group service is highly specialised, offering trained drivers and four new leased Volkswagen Crafter CR50 16 seater minibuses, each capable of carrying up to four wheelchair users; no other operator in Northern Ireland can provide this capacity.⁹

Disability Action's Group Transport Business Plan for 2015/16 estimated that, subject to funding, the service would have carried 1380 groups or 9100 individuals over the year. In order to deliver this service Disability Action submitted a bid for funding of £151,733 for the financial year 2015/16. Table three (below) provides a detailed breakdown of this funding bid.

This bid was unsuccessful however, with no funding allocated to the Grant Transport Service in 2015/16, as a result, the Group Transport Service ceased on the 1st April 2015. The most obvious impact of this will be the loss of service to the 9100 users.

⁹ Disability Action (2015) Group Transport Service Business Plan 2015-16.

Table four: Breakdown of funding bid submitted by Disability Action for Group Transport Service

Expenditure	2015/16 Bid (£)
Salaries & Wages	
Drivers Salaries	87,479
Training	500
Sub Total	87,979
Transport Costs	
Vehicle Insurance	4,835
Vehicle Repairs	0
Vehicle Fuel	14,000
Sundry Transport Expenses	750
Vehicle Leasing Costs (Translink)	0
Vehicle Leasing Costs (New) *	51,296
Annual Maintenance Costs	10,073
Sub Total	80,954
Sundry Project Costs	800
Support Service Costs	24,000
Total Costs	193,733
Less: Fare Income	42,000
Total Funding Bid	151,733

5 Support for Bus Services in Great Britain

It was not possible within the time given to prepare this paper to source data that would enable a meaningful comparison of the support given to operators for the provision of group transport services. That said, it is a service that is commonly provided by community transport groups. In the absence of specific data, the following subsections will discuss the types and level of funding provided to community transport operators in England, Wales and Scotland.

5.1 Regulatory framework

The arrangements for the control and regulation of transport in Northern Ireland are markedly different from the rest of the UK outside London. Apart from the deregulation and widespread privatisation of public transport services in the UK the role of Transport Authority is delivered at a local government level, where funding levels are also decided. Local policy is guided by overarching national policy.

A permit system for community transport has operated in Great Britain (GB) for more than 30 years. Section 19 and section 22 of the Transport Act 1985 give name to the permits which allow not-for-profit organisations in GB to operate without the need to

hold a PSV operator's licence when providing transport for a charge.¹⁰ The section 19 permit is the most widely used and the one which most closely resembles the 10b permit required by Community Transport operators in Northern Ireland. The main difference between the section 19 and 22 permits, of which there is no equivalent in Northern Ireland, is that the section 22 permit enables holders to carry fare paying members of the general public.

5.2 England

Local authorities in England (outside of London) provide subsidy on around 19% of their routes where a service is required but no commercially operated route exists.¹¹ However, austerity measures by the UK Government are having an impact on local authority budgets, limiting the amount available to many of these vital subsidised services, which include local community transport services.

In addition to the government's 28% cut in funding for local authorities, the bus service operators grant (BSOG), which provides a fuel duty rebate to bus service operators, has also been cut by 20%. This has resulted in local authorities reducing their funding for bus services by £44m (15%), with the loss of more than 2,000 routes or services.¹²

According to the Community Transport Association in England, community transport funding has is coming under closer scrutiny in light of these cuts and many areas have seen funding reduced or cut completely. However, there are areas where community transport is seen as a solution to transport problems, for example reductions in subsidised services and has it has proved itself a very cost-effective solution in such circumstances.¹³

The House of Commons Transport Select Committee has challenged the idea that community transport schemes run by volunteers can compensate for decreased bus services in isolated communities.¹⁴ Louise Ellman, transport select committee chair, has said that while the committee recognised their value, "*many community transport schemes are tiny and only serve particular groups in the community*" and that it was "*unrealistic to expect volunteers to replace local bus services*". She also highlighted the need for a "total transport" (integrated) approach to bus provision: "*If, for example,*

¹⁰ DVA [online] Section 19 and 22 permits: not for profit passenger transport. Available from: <http://nia1.me/2n0>

¹¹ Jefferies, D. (2015) What will the next government do to end the bus cuts crisis? Guardian, 16th March, 2015 [online] available from: http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/mar/16/next-government-end-bus-cuts-crisis?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Gmail

¹² Campaign for Better Transport (2014) Buses in crisis: A report on bus funding across England and Wales 2010 - 2015 [online] available from: http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/Buses_In_Crisis_Report_2014_Final.pdf

¹³ CTA (2014) State of the Sector Report: England [online] available from: <http://www.ctauk.org/UserFiles/Documents/In%20Your%20Area/England/State%20of%20the%20Sector%20for%20inhouse%20print.pdf>

¹⁴ Transport Select Committee (2014) Passenger transport in isolated communities [online] available from: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmtran/288/288.pdf>

*hospital transport were combined with local bus services, it might revolutionise services for isolated communities”.*¹⁵

5.3 Wales

The Welsh Government provides funding for community transport although the way in which this is delivered has experienced considerable changes since in the last couple of years. In January 2013, the Welsh Government changed the funding regime for bus and community transport services from the Local Transport Services Grant (LTSG) to the Regional Transport Services Grant (RTSG). There was also a Community Transport Capital Enhancement Grant available for vehicle replacement. Both funding pots were administered by the four Regional Transport Consortia in Wales.

In January 2014, the Welsh Government announced further changes which included the replacement of RTSG with the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) for 2014/15. At the same time the Regional Transport Consortia were disbanded and the BSSG was allocated to each of the 22 local authorities to be administered.

A total of £25m was made available for the BSSG in 2014/15 of which 5% or (£1.25m) was ring-fenced for community transport. The CTA has voiced concerns over the level of funding available, suggesting a minimum of 10% (of the total BSSG) should be made available, particularly where community transport is being lined up as a replacement for normal services. CTA Wales has also pointed to inconsistencies across the local authorities (N.B. local authorities are continuing to work together regionally).

*The rurality of the operating areas for community transport organisations in Wales creates the additional challenge of increased ‘dead mileage’, i.e. greater distances before passenger pick-up or a greater mileage between pick-ups. Some local authorities base the BSSG on live mileage, i.e. claims cannot include dead mileage.*¹⁶

Another concern of the sector is that there is no longer any capital funding available for vehicle replacement.¹⁷

5.4 Scotland

The Scottish Government nor local authorities have any statutory requirement to provide, assist or fund community transport. There is currently no specific Scottish Government financial support for community transport operators or a national strategy for community transport provision. However, community transport operators providing

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ CTA (2014) State of the sector: Wales [online] available from: <http://www.ctauk.org/UserFiles/Documents/In%20Your%20Area/Wales/State%20of%20the%20Sector%20Wales%20English%20Version.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

minibus and/or bus services under a Section 19 or Section 22 Permit can claim Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) from Transport Scotland.

BSOG is a distance based payment to bus operators to assist them in keeping fares low. Also, eligible passengers travelling on community bus services provided under a Section 22 Permit can travel for free under the provisions of the national concessionary travel scheme for elderly and disabled people.

The Community Transport Association receives a grant from the Scottish Government to enable it to support community transport operators in Scotland. Local authority support for community transport operators across Scotland is a matter for individual councils and varies widely. Such support can range from the provision of vehicles to community transport operators, e.g. to Lothian Community Transport Services by City of Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils, to no specific support for community transport as happens in several councils.

As there is no specific Scottish Government budget for community transport or any systematic financial support provided by local authorities, community transport operators generally raise both capital and revenue funds through a combination of charitable fundraising, fares, and vehicle hire, BSOG and concessionary fares income and contracts.¹⁸

6 The Northern Ireland Mobility Centre

The Northern Ireland Mobility Centre was established in the early 1980's. It is the only Centre of its kind in Northern Ireland and is accredited by the Forum of Mobility Centres now rebranded Driving Mobility, the umbrella body for all accredited Mobility Centres across the UK. In common with Centres across the UK, the Northern Ireland Mobility Centre's purpose is to:

- Assist and advise disabled people on gaining, regaining or retaining their independence as drivers and passengers; and
- Provide comprehensive information and advice to clients on all aspects of personal mobility

6.1 Location

The Mobility Centre currently operates from eight locations across Northern Ireland, from Disability Action's Belfast and Derry/Londonderry offices and from six satellite centres in Dungannon, Newry, Ballymena, Coleraine, Omagh and Enniskillen. The mobile assessment unit enables the Mobility Centre to conduct assessments throughout in Northern Ireland.

¹⁸ Rehfish, A. (2013) An Introduction to Community Transport. SPICE Briefing [online] available from: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_13-24.pdf

6.2 Services

The 'core' activity of the Northern Ireland Mobility Centre involves the provision of:

- Driving Assessments for people who wish to continue to drive after acquiring a disability;
- Driving lessons for people with disabilities who wish to learn to drive;
- Training courses for people with a learning disability to help them with their road craft/awareness and to achieve a pass with their theory test; and
- Information and advice around issues such as the Motability Scheme, Disability Living Allowance, Access to Work, driving assessment procedures, door to door service, location of vehicle dealerships and adaptation specialists.

6.3 Output and Funding in 2014/15

The mobility centre received core funding of £81,587 in 2014/15. However, it generates most of its operating revenue through charging for its main services; assessments and driving lessons. Table five (below) shows clearly the large number of people (8,238) who make use of the services provided by the mobility centre. The contribution from the public purse amounts to less than 10 pence per customer (grant income/total outputs).

Table 5: Income and Outputs for Northern Ireland Mobility Centre in 2014/15

Income Streams	Income (£)	Outputs	
Grant Income	81,587	Number of Assessments	1,084
Assessment income	188,000	Number of Information enquiries	5,472
Driving Lesson Income	42,025	Number of Driving Lessons	1681
Total	311,612	Total	8,237

Source: Disability Action

6.4 2015/16 Business Plan and planned outputs

Disability Action submitted a business plan to the DRD in support of a request for core funding of £86,219 for the Northern Ireland Mobility Centre for the financial years 2015/16 – an increase of £4,632 on 2014/15. The Business Plan outlines the operational and strategic objectives of the Mobility Centre. Table six below summarises the projected outputs of the Northern Ireland Mobility Centre over the next three years:

Table 6: Operational objectives for Northern Ireland Mobility Centre 2014/15

Financial Year	Driving Assessments	Driving Lessons	Information & Advice Enquiries
2015 / 16	1050	1700	5000
2016/17	1100	1800	5200
2017/18	1150	1850	5400
Total	3300	5350	15600

Source: Disability Action

6.5 Comparison with rest of the UK

Table 7 details the income streams and service outputs for the for mobility centres in each of the four UK regions.¹⁹ Looking simply in terms of grant income, this table shows Welsh mobility services attracted £287,851 in 2014/15, this compares to £81,587 awarded to Disability Action by the DRD.

Table 7: Comparison of income streams and service outputs of Mobility Centres across the UK

England			
Grant Income	-	Number of Assessments	-
Assessment income	-	Number of Information enquiries	-
Total	-	Total	-
Scotland			
Grant Income	-	Number of Assessments	-
Assessment income	-	Number of Information enquiries	-
Total	-	Total	-
Wales			
Grant Income	287,851	Number of Assessments	1,033
Assessment income	104,931	Number of Information enquiries	9,000
Total	392,782	Total	10,033
UK Total (excluding NI)			
Grant Income	287,851	Number of Assessments	1,033
Assessment income	104,931	Number of Information enquiries	9,000
Total	392,782	Total	10,033
Northern Ireland(2014/15)			
Grant Income	81,587	Number of Assessments	1,084
Assessment income	188,000	Number of Information enquiries	5,472
Driving Lesson Income	42025	Number of Driving Lessons	1681
Total	311,612	Total	8,237
Northern Ireland(2015/16)			
Grant Income	0	Number of Assessments	1,084
Assessment income	188,000	Number of Information enquiries	5,472
Driving Lesson Income	42025	Number of Driving Lessons	1681
Total	230,025	Total	8,237

¹⁹ At the time of publication the data was for England and Wales had not been received. This will be updated