Future models for community transport in Victoria

Victorian Community Transport Association
Bendigo, 23-24 May

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1. Introduction
2. Community Transport and the accessibility gap
3. Challenges for Community Transport
4. Changing times
5. Options for the future
1. Introduction

› My perspective of Community Transport in Australia
   - Based on a reasonable knowledge of CT in the UK and US
   - Based on a growing knowledge of the CT sector in NSW
   - Based on an ‘interested’ but not ‘involved’ perspective

› This conference takes place at a time of uncertainty
   - Possible changes at the Commonwealth level could have big impact on the sector
   - Changes within public mass transport could have on-going consequences

› Presentation covers general principles to highlight possible ways forward
2. Community Transport and the accessibility gap

› Understanding
  - The role of transport generally
  - The role of conventional public transport
› Identifying the ‘accessibility gap’ which Community Transport fills

Source: Parramatta Advertiser, 13 Jan 2009
Role of transport

› Transport is an enabler
  - Provides access to allow participation in society and life opportunities: work, education, health, shopping, social/recreation, volunteering

› Transport provides accessibility
  - Provides independence and choice in social inclusion

› Public transport has a wider role
  - Health and environmental benefits
  - For all members of society
Accessibility is multi-dimensional – and gaps exist

**Conventional public transport**
- Spatial gap
- Time gap
- Cost gap
- Physical accessibility gap
- Information gap
- Attitudinal, Cultural and Behavioural gap

**Community Transport**

Source: Bankstown Community Transport
Spatial gap

The gap between conventional public transport and community transport

Conventional public transport and rules for provision in Victoria
- For metropolitan areas, population within 400m with a frequency of at least one hour between 6.00am and 9.00pm as notional targets. Government sets timetables and frequency
  - But not everyone can walk 400 m in metropolitan areas
- For regional and rural areas, standards are not so high and no agreed service standard
  - Rules for provision and available funds are strongly related

Community transport
- Eligibility criteria
Scale of the “spatial” gap

› 80% of Melbourne’s population do not live within 400m of rail or tram – this is over 700,000 people

› Bus network crucially important for spatial accessibility

› Regional and rural networks are less good than the metropolitan areas?

Source: John Stanley: Transport Policy lecture notes
Spatial gap – topography

www.walksydneystreets.net

RTA
- Frequency of services
- Hours of operation: night time and weekend services
- Travel time: length of trip
There are still many parts of Melbourne without evening and/or weekend services.

Regional and rural worse?

Note: map does not include all 2009 network extensions

Source: John Stanley’s Transport Policy lecture notes
Cost gap
Physical accessibility gap

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RailCorp
About Metlink

Metlink is the face of public transport in Melbourne.

RailCorp

State Transit
Commuters uneasy about using night trains
Clay Lucas
August 14, 2010.... The Age
MELBOURNE commuters are increasingly scared about using the city's trains at night, with only 40 per cent of commuters saying they are happy with the number of staff on the rail system, new research shows.
Community Transport

Community transport

› Closes the accessibility gap where provided
  - Door-to-door transport
  - Personal assistance
  - Truly flexible transport service

› Very specific program
  - HACC eligibility + “transport disadvantaged”
  - For specific types of travel

› Very small program as compared to conventional bus

Source: GREAT Community Transport

Source: www.easytransport.org.au
The accessibility gap

Accessibility issues can still exist, even with Community Transport operating

**Conventional public transport**
- Spatial gap
- Time gap
- Cost gap
- Physical accessibility gap
- Information gap
- Attitudinal, Cultural and Behavioural gap

**Community Transport**

Source: Bankstown Community Transport
3. Challenges of Community Transport

› Community Transport is not considered ‘regular’ or ‘conventional’ transport
› Community Transport is based in the local community
› Community Transport – features of demand
› Community Transport – features of supply

Source: Tablelands Community Transport
• Community Transport as ‘bus operators’

- Community Transport providers are often not recognised as transport operators
- Community Transport providers are typically not accredited (although increasingly registered in Victoria?)
  - a perception/reality of insufficient safety standards in CT although this will be less if buses are ‘tested’ but this adds to expense
  - Much of the ‘business’ of Community Transport is restricted to mainly HACC clients
  - Much unmet demand stays ‘unmet’ because of
    - Issues to do with funding
    - Ability to maximise vehicle utilisation
Grass roots origins means
- Community Transport groups understand and relate to community needs
- A large number of groups relative to number of conventional bus operators
- Groups vary in size, operation (including scheduling), throughput/scale, expertise
- From a HACC perspective, Community Transport associated with social care, not with transport provision

Bottom up organisation does not lend itself to efficient organisation
- Community Transport needs to work harder to be efficient
- Different socio-economic catchments means different client mix so sharing of best practice more difficult
Demand for services mainly one client group: HACC clients
- A perception/reality that clients are not assessed uniformly leading to inequity in provision

Community Transport is specialised in the needs of HACC clients
- Reinforces the ‘social care’ categorisation
- Makes it more difficult to ‘outsource’ trips when capacity is reached
Community Transport – features of demand

› Are all the trips provided ‘right’ for Community Transport?
  - Medical trips – do some require ‘unreasonable’ level of care?

› Significant evidence of unmet demand
  - Difficulties of prioritisation
  - Situation likely to worsen with ageing population

Source: www.w3.org/WAI/WAI-AGE/Drafts/slides/AU-pop.png
Source: Sutherland Council Annual Report
Community Transport – features of supply

› Evolving over time and in response to needs
  - Vehicle size/fleet mix may not be best matched to demand
  - Groups vary in how they operate – taxis, shuttles, dedicated services

› Understanding of costs
  - True costs of volunteer versus paid drivers
  - Identification of cost variation – by time, by vehicle, by distance

› ‘Spare’ capacity at certain times of day
  - Difficulties of vehicle sharing and brokerage
4. Changing times

› Changes in HACC funding have been proposed
  - How will this operate in Victoria?
  - How much difference will this make?

› Will the funding model focus on the care of the individual?
  - Community Transport groups will have different and maybe multiple ‘funders’
  - Some Community Transport groups will be able to adapt more easily as closer to existing funding model
  - May need to contract with care providers directly
Different existing models of operation

Funding sources: Wimmera Volunteers

Funding sources: Brimbank City Council

Funding sources: Hamilton Community Transport

Source: Community Transport Snapshot Project VCOSS 2008
Community Transport groups need to take charge of their own destiny
- Management Committees need to think seriously about their objectives

- Focussing on a majority client group makes viability sensitive to changes in demand (although there is great variability)
  - Groups may need to become more business focussed
    - Diversifying income implies diversifying customer base
    - Outcome good for both Community Transport groups and passengers
  - Groups may need to become bigger spatially
    - To exploit economies of scale
    - To become recognised as more ‘professional’ with more specialised functions
Operational Models

- Forming alliances
  - Agency model
  - Social enterprise
Operational Models – Forming alliances

Joining groups with adjacent geographical boundaries

› Advantage
  - Fewer groups in gives the larger group a ‘market’ advantage in provision

› Disadvantages
  - Difficulty of multi-management committees with potentially different objectives
  - A cohesive ‘front’ would be required to be convincing to the Commonwealth
  - How much bigger does bigger need to be?

› Practical aspects
  - How would scheduling and allocation of passengers be carried out? Would technology help?
  - Effective sharing of vehicles may be needed
  - How would the revenue be allocated to the groups?
Area based agency approach

› Requires technology to be successful
› Requires strong governance model between different providers making up the virtual enterprise
› Requires education and culture shift on demand side for passengers to understand

Flexible Transport Agency in Florence

Social enterprise is well established in UK and emerging in Australia

- Key message is the use of ‘enterprise’ to provide for community need

“... Social enterprise is a means by which people come together and use market–based ventures to achieve agreed social ends. It is characterised by creativity, entrepreneurship, and a focus on community rather than individual profit. It is a creative endeavour that results in social, financial, service, educational, employment, or other community benefits.”

Could Community Transport be a Social Enterprise?

Community Transport is
- Non-profit making
- Has a social purpose

Could be structured to be owned with profits for social purpose
- A governance feature, but very important

Source: http://www.socialenterpriseworks.org/resources/thinking-of-social-enterprise-2/
Issues in becoming a Social Enterprise

› Main mission is providing community based transport to
  - HACC clients
  - Transport disadvantaged (filling in accessibility gap)

› Main issues
  - What alternative ‘business’ could be developed to support core aims?
  - What alternative skills might be necessary?
  - Would Government might support the transfer to social enterprise?

Conclusions

› Should Community Transport be responsible for filling the accessibility gap?
› The future requires decisions – no change is not an option
› There are models for future working but no ‘one size will fit all’