



## **NTCOSS Conference April 2011 – Summary of Transport Session**

### **Building a Community Transport Network for the Northern Territory**

Transport is an issue which has been on the radar for NTCOSS for many years now. Transport issues affect all Territorians, and cut across all community service sectors and impact all geographical areas – urban, regional and remote. Being one of the most sparsely populated places on the planet makes provision of transport a highly complex and costly task for the NT, with roughly 220,000 people occupying an area of 1.33 million square kilometres.

There are a range of barriers to access to transport, such as the cost, availability and physical access issues. All of these impact greatly on the ability of people to access work, health, other essential services, and recreational and social activities. Basically without access to good and inexpensive transport, it is very hard to fully participate in society.

Access to transport is a vital contributor to the wellbeing of individuals and communities – and without it, people face serious 'transport disadvantage'. Those people most likely to experience transport disadvantage are from marginalised groups, such as those on low incomes, women, the elderly, Indigenous Australians, and people with disabilities (Dodson et al 2004).

The 2011 NTCOSS Conference was held in Darwin in April, and a session on transport was held which aimed to introduce models of community transport currently being used interstate with a view to providing information to support effective advocacy in this area. David Denmark, Principal of Transport Management and Planning (Queensland) gave a detailed outline of the community transport sector across a number of jurisdictions across the country.

The presentation introduced a number of concepts including 'mobility gap', which represents the gap in transport for people who are unable to access public transport for a variety of reasons (including lack of availability) and who do not qualify for special needs transport, and lack access to their own private transport. Organised community transport has introduced in many cities and towns across the country to address the 'mobility gap' in local areas.

The unmet transport needs in the Northern Territory have been well documented. NTCOSS has consulted widely with a range of stakeholders over the last few years - and a number of common themes continue to emerge:

- Many remote communities face a lack of transport between their community and the major centres. Tennant Creek and Katherine still do not have their own public transport service, with the obvious ramification that people end up paying for taxis and minibuses – or simply missing out on services.
- People on smaller remote communities and outstations need effective transport links if they are to access medical treatment, education, shops and services.
- The lack of appropriate transport services means that families from communities can't get back home after major events, increasing the risk of social issues arising through increased alcohol consumption.
- There are also additional costs to agencies that end up filling the gap left by the absence of transport.
- Where transport is available from remote communities, there are often prohibitive costs
- constraints of the Patent Assistance Travel Scheme (PATs)
- Lack of transport options for people escaping violence on remote communities
- Infrequency of public buses in Alice Springs, lack of evening coverage, limited weekend coverage; lack of linkages with a number of social services and shops

- Significant issues for people getting home from hospital, particularly late at night, especially if they have mobility issues

The conference session highlighted that the need and demand for transport exists in clusters and in scatters – and because many people who are socially excluded are scattered, it means they get left behind. The concept of ‘utility theory’ was discussed with the challenge for a community transport response to embrace the task of seeking the maximum utility of the people receiving the minimum services at the moment.

**Community Transport can take a number of forms – but often involves the following principles**

- Democratic
- Locally based
- Users make decisions
- Not-for-profit
- Voluntary-managed
- Community-based

*Community transport will at times take the form of a Social Entrepreneur model, and will also have links with subsidised commercial and fully commercial enterprises – to broker transport for clients.*

**Community Transport also involves the following characteristics:**

- Choice and flexibility and the ability to respond to passengers needs
- Being available for use by a wide range of people not just people with disability or the elderly
- Meeting needs that conventional public transport does not
- Existing where conventional public transport systems are not generally viable or appropriate
- Less formal public transport provision
- Works in partnership and cooperation with other agencies
- Leverages transport capacity from a variety of agencies and programs
- Increases service efficiency and return on investment by funders

**Community transport typically meets needs such as:**

- Shopping services
- Social outings
- Health related transport
- Group destination services
- Some community transport models provide a fixed route service within a local area - including stops for social, shopping and medical appointments

**Mobility Management** “An institutional state of mind that emphasises moving people instead of the mode of transport”

**Mobility Management allows for :**

- A market for local transport
- A clearinghouse for transactions
- Link travel modes
- Provides information

**Principles for a cooperative transport service**

- Minimise dead and duplicate running
- Partnerships with non transport providers



## **Can we make Community Transport work in the NT?**

Given the vast areas of the Northern Territory and the distance from mainstream services for a large percentage of the population, and the high costs of providing public transport – the Northern Territory must explore other means of providing transport. Community transport does exist in some form in the NT, but it is generally small scale, agency based, with specific client populations serviced. Many people still fall into the ‘mobility gap’.

Delegates at the NTCOSS Conference greeted the concepts explored in the community transport presentation with great enthusiasm, and there was significant discussion around ways that community transport could happen in the NT. There was significant interest from both the non-Government and Government representatives.

There is a real opportunity to learn from the way community transport is delivered around the country and to build on the momentum from the NTCOSS Conference. For many years there has been much discussion amongst the Non-Government sector and the Government sector in terms of looking at more creative and cost effective ways of meeting transport needs for low income and disadvantaged Territorians, but there has been limited capacity or resources to explore new ways of providing transport services.

It seems clear from the presentation by David Denmark, at the NTCOSS Conference that what is required is a new way of thinking, a will to do things differently and mobilising of existing resources. Provision of community transport in the NT will not necessarily mean having more vehicles on the road (though in some circumstances it may). There are many vehicles which are not used to capacity – and a mobility management approach could help harness existing resources to meet the everyday transport needs of low income and disadvantaged Territorians in an efficient and cost effective manner.

### **Who could benefit from community transport in the NT?**

Discussion at the Conference led to identification of a number of groups who could benefit from the provision of community transport, including:

- People in towns without public transport – e.g. Katherine , Tennant Creek
- Older Aboriginal women in community
- People who have lost their driver’s licence
- People attending court
- People on islands
- Offenders released from custody
- Aged & disability clients - people with restricted mobility
- Seniors
- Mothers & children; Pregnant mothers
- People leaving hospital
- Domestic violence victims
- People with medical appointments
- Families without cars
- Single parents
- Town Camp Residents
- Low income earners
- People who are socially isolated/marginalised
- Disability and health clients – prior to cyclones

## **Needs which could be addressed by community transport models**

- Shopping
- Centrelink appointments
- Attending NGO service providers
- Visiting prisoners
- Funerals
- Ceremony, cultural, business
- Family visits
- Sports carnivals & big events
- Medical appointments/discharges from Hospital Emergency Departments (especially at night)

## **What might community transport look like in the NT?**

- A coordination point/centralised booking system/ call centre
- A “Mobility Hub” or Mobility Manager to match up resources and needs
- A service which exists across regions and within regions
- Multifunctional use of existing resources – Minibuses, cars, Taxi pooling, car pooling
- Integrated, flexible, cooperative, viable
- Locally managed and informed (i.e. Informed by the needs of users)
- Prioritised transport - rather than transport as an afterthought
- Informed by best practice knowledge and motivated by business plans
- NGO’s running their own transport fleets
- Contribution from all service users
- Widely advertised, clearly stipulated what/who/how the services can be used
- Inclusion of Use of planes in community transport model

*An example was proposed where Night patrol, corrections, legal services to work together to transport people in justice related issues i.e. court/legal services*

## **Opportunities for Collaboration and Partnerships**

- Partnerships between Federal, State/Territory, local Government and Council; NGOs; private business; consultant agencies; community members/consumers; other service providers (health, retail, social etc)
- Community conscious taxi companies
- Other organisations/service providers who have buses
- Funding and Service Providers partnership - pool transport capital funds; partners purchase insurance and maintenance;
- Utilisation of existing bus services - e.g. how could school buses be used more effectively – need partnership with DET/Schools
- Partnerships with local Councils & Shires
- Service clubs – Rotary, RSL, Lions Clubs

## **Risk Management, Insurance and Other Considerations**

A number of issues would need to be addressed to make a community transport network in the NT a viable option - such as managing risk, sharing of vehicles between agencies, use of volunteer drivers, and flexibility of funding. In addition there are issues around licensing and training, OH&S, asset management and issues of liability. These are significant issues, but they have been addressed and overcome in many other parts of the country, and the NT can benefit from the lessons learned in other jurisdictions as to how to manage each of these issues.

**Recommendation:**

Funding for 6 months for a full-time Project Officer to:

- Complete an audit of vehicles in the NGO (and Gov??) sector which could be utilised for community transport
- Research local examples of community transport provision across the country – to look at applicability to the NT context
- Develop a plan for the establishment of community transport initiatives in the NT – with initial trials to take place in Tennant Creek and Katherine (urban centres with the greatest need)

Funding for a reference group of experienced Community Transport providers and local NT representatives to guide the Project Officer in the development of community transport options (*which could for example include David Denmark*)

## APPENDIX 1: NTCOSS CONFERENCE – TRANSPORT SESSION: FEEDBACK FROM SMALL GROUPS

Conference delegates addressed the following questions in small groups:

- Identify groups who could most benefit from community transport options
- What might community transport look like in your area?
- Opportunities for collaboration and partnerships? (Note whether regional or remote)
- How can this happen? Why this can happen? (As opposed to why it can't happen)

- **Groups who could most benefit from community transport options**

### Rural & remote

- Remote community residents
- Older Aboriginal women in community
- People who have lost their driver's licence
- People attending court – including people going to and from Bush Court
- People on islands (Golburn, Croker, Oenpelli)
- People isolated when roads are cut off
- Repatriation of offenders released from custody - exit plans must include a transport plan
- Students who are at boarding school
- Low income earners
- People who are socially isolated/marginalised
- Domestic violence victims

### Urban Centres

- Towns without public transport – e.g. Katherine , Tennant Creek
- Aged & disability clients - people with restricted mobility
- Seniors
- Mothers & children
- Pregnant mothers
- People leaving hospital
- Domestic violence victims
- People with medical appointments
- People who have lost their driver's licence
- Families without cars
- Youth & children
- Single parents
- People attending court – including people going to and from Bush Court
- People isolated when roads are cut off
- Repatriation of offenders released from custody - exit plans must include a transport plan
- Students who are at boarding school
- Workers/shiftworkers
- Tourists

- Town Camp Residents
- Low income earners
- People who are socially isolated/marginalised
- Disability and health clients – prior to cyclones

#### **Needs which could be addressed by community transport models**

- Shopping
- Centrelink appointments
- Attending NGO service providers
- Visiting prisoners
- Funerals
- Ceremony, cultural, business
- Family visits
- Sports carnivals & big events
- Medical patients in towns & travelling to hospitals in major centres
- People leaving hospital emergency departments at night
- Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Clients?

#### **What is required?**

- Regional transport system for regional Towns such as Tennant Creek, Katherine, Manigrida etc – plus growth towns
- Open transport for all members of communities (regardless of intoxicated/disruptive etc) – remove prejudice

#### **Community Transport in local areas – what might it look like?**

- Multifunctional use of existing resources
- A coordination point/centralised booking system/ call centre
- “Mobility Hub” to match up resources and needs – transport hub (agency)
- Mobility Manager
- Mini bus set up
- Bus stop supplemented by bikes? Bicycle pooled runs?
- Fleet of cars/converted taxis
- Car hire
- Taxi pooling, car pooling
- Across regions and within regions
- Night patrol, corrections, legal services to work together to transport people in justice related issues i.e. court/legal services
- NGO’s running their own transport fleets
- Flexible drivers – involvement at ground level of community
- Integrated, Flexible, cooperative
- Locally managed and informed
- Viable
- Informed by best practice knowledge and motivated by business plans
- Informed by what users want
- Satellite infrastructure – i.e. bus stops and interchanges which are weatherproof)

- Prioritised transport - rather than transport as an afterthought
- Widely advertised, clearly stipulated what/who/how the services can be used
- Collect and coordinate fragments which reflect the present model
- Contribution from all service users
- Regional solutions - e.g. Sanderson mobility partnership, for example utilising 10 buses; shuttle bus from Palmerston to Darwin Hospital

### **Opportunities for Collaboration and Partnerships**

- Partnerships between Federal, State/Territory, local Government and Council; NGOs/service providers; private business; consultant agencies; community members/consumers; other service providers (health, retail, social etc)
- Funding and Service Providers partnership - pool transport capital funds; partners purchase insurance and maintenance;
- Existing bus services - e.g. how could school buses be used more effectively – need partnership with DET/Schools
- Service clubs – Rotary, RSL, Lions Clubs
- Partnerships and collaboration between organisations – Gov services -e.g. health
- Communities working together
- **Shires to consider capacity in each region to pool transport resources and coordinate -e.g. Katherine buses used infrequently for school and Ghan - could be used at other times**
- It can happen if sufficient capacity time and priority and good will
- Contract organisations

### **What is required to support this development of community transport**

- Bring agencies together
- Mobility management coordinator
- Risk management plans – OH&S, asset management, liability
- Training for heavy vehicle drivers licenced to utilize vehicles in the community
- Licensing and training
- Community commitment
- Community budgeting
- Flexibility of funding
- Working in conjunction with other agencies – collaborative partnerships
- Approaching other organisations – convincing of merits of being involved
- Remote/Interagency Meetings
- Need for support – not just a bus
- Pool of buses and drivers
- Increase access to operational/running costs and change focus from ‘asset’
- Communication and cooperation
- Sufficient allocation of time by organisations
- Stakeholders and community consultation
- Seed funding & funding from other sources
- Shire councils auspice [remote] community transport
- Everyone to be informed of services available
- Whole of community to coordinate

- Talk and write to councils

#### **Air travel**

- Use of planes in community transport model
- Cross subsidisation for plane trips and more coordination –planes as community transport model
- Centralised booking service for flights to and from destinations
- Use of IT to coordinate trips
- Charter planes - use empty seats on planes – e.g if court plane has a spare seat - sell it to community transport
- Layna Homelands – own their own planes
- Extend length of airstrips - so larger planes can land

#### **Other Issues**

- National & state agencies need to map transport related resources and services to look at opportunities
- Share transport stories among different communities and regions
- Service providers would benefit from development of community transport options
- Buses could run more frequently and for longer - and more bus stops required
- Road conditions so poor that vehicles are not suited and very soon become roadworthy
- Left over funding money before getting seed funding

#### **Concerns/other**

- Community/Bush Taxis hold key cards
- Consumers protection
- No competition/no alternative
- Timetables are confusing – you need to work out times vs locations (hard if you don't know the area well)
- Not all bus shelters have been upgraded
- Current long wait times between bus services
- Use of alternate transport options beside road (e.g. light aircraft) involved in the scheme as road travel is simply not viable to some communities

**Recommendation: For NTCOSS to undertake an audit of resources, work with providers, establish collaboration and facilitate a community transport system**