



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 1 May 2013

Session 4

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INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE
10th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
- *Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
- *Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
- *Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)
- *Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab)
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Keith Brown (Minister for Transport and Veterans)
Maggie Lawson (Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company)
Peter McColl (WRVS)
John Moore (Lothian Community Transport Services)
Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)
Wayne Pearson (HcL)
Maggie Urie (South West Community Transport)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Wednesday 1 May 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Forth Road Bridge Bill: Stage 2

The Convener (Maureen Watt): Good morning, everyone. I welcome you to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee's 10th meeting in 2013. I remind everyone to switch off all their mobile devices, as they affect the broadcasting system.

We have apologies from Adam Ingram, to whom I spoke last night. He is making good progress. Gil Paterson is attending as a committee substitute.

The first item on our agenda is to consider the Forth Road Bridge Bill at stage 2. We have only one amendment to consider, so we will complete stage 2 consideration at this meeting.

I welcome Keith Brown, the Minister for Transport and Veterans, and his supporting officials: Graham Porteous, who is head of the Forth Road Bridge Bill team, from Transport Scotland; Susan Conroy from the Scottish Government legal department; and Fraser Gough from the office of the Scottish parliamentary counsel.

Section 1 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Sections 2 to 4 agreed to.

After section 4

The Convener: Amendment 1, in the name of Elaine Murray, is in a group on its own.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I apologise to the minister and his officials for dragging them along for one amendment.

The amendment seeks to address some of the concerns that the City of Edinburgh Council raised at stage 1. As we know, the bill dissolves the Forth Estuary Transport Authority and transfers its properties and liabilities to the Scottish ministers and its staff to what is likely to be a private sector bridge operator. The minister advised us on 27 February that the contract arrangements would be monitored through Transport Scotland's performance audit group and that he had initiated a forum for community interests to be represented.

However, there is no mention of a Forth crossing forum in the bill and it is unclear how its discussions and decisions will be recorded and disseminated. The minutes of meetings of FETA were available on the City of Edinburgh Council's website until the end of 2011. I am not sure why they were not there thereafter but, prior to then, the public could monitor what had been decided at those meetings.

Because the bill does not mention the forum, my amendment provides for the forum to be formalised through a negative instrument. It provides for representation on the forum from councillors on the four local authorities that are represented on FETA. It also requires that the forum's minutes be published—for example, on Transport Scotland's website.

The minister said at the committee that he was not sure what exactly the City of Edinburgh Council was asking for. Nor am I, I have to say, and I am not absolutely certain that the amendment would fully address the council's concerns. However, it would allow elected members to attend meetings that will monitor the management and maintenance of the crossing. It would also enable them to ask questions of Transport Scotland on behalf of their communities and allow the public to access minutes of those meetings.

I am interested to hear reactions to the amendment. It could be refined or changed at stage 3 if necessary.

I move amendment 1.

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): The amendment that Elaine Murray lodged seeks to give local councillors a degree of oversight of the management of the Forth road bridge—it specifically mentions the Forth road bridge. I am unsure how that would work in the forum, which is already established, given that its task is to look after the three bridges. If Elaine Murray thinks that through, she will realise that that would be difficult.

The committee has previously discussed councillor involvement in the Forth bridges forum. In its stage 1 report, the committee agreed with my view that it would not be appropriate for the membership of the forum to include elected local authority representatives. All three local authority areas are represented by their officers at a senior level on operational issues.

It is the Government's view—and, to judge by its report, the committee's view—that there is no reason for councillors to have a formal role in overseeing the management and maintenance of the Forth road bridge. The bill will make the bridge part of the trunk road network, and nowhere in Scotland do councillors have a formal role in the

management of trunk roads, including other major estuarial crossings.

The Government is happy that existing systems ensure that local issues are dealt with effectively across the trunk road network, as was the case with previous Administrations. The Government also welcomes representations that are made by councillors and indeed directly by members of the public.

On local accountability, the Scottish Government was democratically elected and it is held to account by the Parliament and its committees. We have had no representations from any of the other councils that are mentioned in the amendment seeking representation on the forum. As Elaine Murray conceded, when a representative from the City of Edinburgh Council addressed the committee, it was unclear what form the proposed representation would take.

We therefore believe that the amendment would do nothing for local accountability. All that it would do is require the Government to require councils to appoint members to a quango that would have no powers and no real purpose. In our view, there is no need to create a new statutory bureaucracy.

Councils and in particular local communities are more than welcome to make representations to me or my officials. In fact, I would go further and say that Scottish Government officials will be more than happy to go to individual councils and make presentations to them if they have particular concerns about issues that arise in relation to any of the three crossings, in so far as they can do that; of course, the rail bridge would be for Network Rail to cover. Councils can make representations to me and my officials on any matters relating to the management of the trunk road network.

For the reasons that I have outlined, I urge Elaine Murray not to press amendment 1. Failing that, I recommend that the committee rejects it.

Elaine Murray: I was interested to hear the minister's comments. The amendment has perhaps not been correctly worded in relation to the three bridges. However, I was slightly confused to hear the minister say that the body would be a quango, as I understood that he had already set up a forum of this nature. The amendment would just formalise the arrangements for that and make the minutes of its meetings public. That is important because it is still not clear how members of the public may access information on what has been discussed.

The amendment does not necessarily seek to make councillors the decision makers. The point is that they would be on a body that would be able to monitor the management, that they would be able

to ask questions of Transport Scotland and that the information would be publicly available.

I will not press the amendment, because I am not certain that it completely addresses the City of Edinburgh Council's concerns. I will reflect on whether I should lodge a similar amendment at stage 3 and whether there would be merit in doing so.

Amendment 1, by agreement, withdrawn.

Sections 5 to 8 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Convener: That ends stage 2 consideration of the Forth Road Bridge Bill. It has been one of the shortest stage 2s that we have had. I thank the minister and his officials.

I will suspend the meeting briefly to allow the minister to leave the room and the witnesses for the next item to take their seats.

10:08

Meeting suspended.

10:15

On resuming—

Community Transport Inquiry

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, we will hear evidence from community transport organisations as part of the committee's community transport inquiry. The call for views has resulted in an extensive response: we have had more than 70 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. Today's session will be an opportunity to open up a discussion on a number of the key issues that have arisen from the call for views.

I welcome Maggie Lawson, the community transport projects development manager of Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company; Peter McColl, the public affairs manager for the Women's Royal Voluntary Service; John Moore, the managing director of Lothian Community Transport Services; Wayne Pearson, the chief executive of HcL; and Maggie Urie, transport co-ordinator of South West Community Transport, Glasgow.

I welcome you all and invite you to briefly introduce yourselves and your organisations.

Maggie Lawson (Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company): I work for a charity called Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company, which in the community is known as where 2 today? We are based in the Cairngorms national park, and the majority of our work is carried out through a community car scheme with volunteers in their own cars. We have approximately 130 voluntary car drivers and we also have a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. In the rural area in which we work, there are not many such vehicles for people and there is not a lot of public transport, so door-to-door transport mainly for older and disabled people is absolutely vital. We are just about to purchase a 14-seater wheelchair-accessible vehicle as an extension to our project.

We do all sorts of things such as shopping projects, support groups and social outings. We have disability scooters and wheelchairs. A huge number of people are involved in our organisation. More than 1,300 people throughout the area have registered with the scheme and, for all the projects that we run, we have about 150 volunteers. At the moment, we have eight staff to manage all our volunteers and projects throughout Badenoch and Strathspey.

Peter McColl (WRVS): WRVS is a volunteering organisation that works across Scotland for older people. Community transport is one of our major

areas of activity, although it is by no means the only one. Community transport allows us to spin off positive benefits in other areas, such as onward services or meals on wheels, and we can make contact with service users by providing community transport.

That said, like the other organisations that are represented here today, we do a lot of conventional community transport, almost all of which is provided through volunteer car schemes. We do not tend to run minibuses or other such vehicles; we tend to run volunteers who use their own cars. That has some significant advantages, particularly in getting new projects up and running, because we do not have the capital costs associated with the purchase or lease of vehicles.

John Moore (Lothian Community Transport Services): Lothian Community Transport Services operates in three different local authority areas: Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian. We provide different services in those three different areas. In Edinburgh, we have a fleet of eight accessible minibuses that are available for hire on a with-driver or self-drive basis to other voluntary and community organisations in the city. There are about 130 different such groups for which we meet the transport needs. In Midlothian, we have six wheelchair-accessible minibuses operating from Dalkeith, meeting the needs of about 120 voluntary and community groups. We also operate a small network of community bus services under a section 22 permit, which are timetabled services operating on routes in isolated rural areas that do not have such a good public transport network. We pick people up and take them regularly to local shopping centres. In West Lothian, we operate in partnership with the third sector interface to deliver a community driver project in which we recruit, train and then place volunteer minibus drivers throughout West Lothian to meet the needs of local community groups.

Wayne Pearson (HcL): I work with HcL, which is a charity based in Edinburgh. We have been going since 1982, helping disabled people. We were set up as a specialist transport service, with minibuses specially adapted for disabled people. We have since progressed, because in the early days we had difficulties with funding. There was funding under the manpower services scheme, but we eventually moved over to grant funding from the former Lothian Regional Council. Now, all the local councils in the area support us, as does the national health service.

We provide three main services, one of which is the dial-a-ride service, which is mainly for people using wheelchairs or those with more severe mobility problems. It goes from A to B, wherever people want to go, seven days a week. We also do a shopper bus, which is a dial-a-bus service,

which picks up from a catchment area groups of people who have difficulties with mainline public transport who then travel to local shopping areas. People pay for the service, but it is door-to-door, with assistance, and we help them into the house with their shopping. We also provide an ambulance service that supports local national health service work, providing patient transfers and repatriation of patients who have been in for treatment from outwith Lothian.

Our current resources include about 33 vehicles, most of which are dial-a-ride. There are about six or seven dial-a-bus vehicles, which are owned by councils but given to us to use. We also have five ambulances and usually start using about two per day, with that progressing as demand increases. That is funded through the NHS.

Maggie Urie (South West Community Transport): I am from South West Community Transport. We are based in South Nitshill in Glasgow and we cover the whole south-west of the city—that is, Govan, Craigton and Kinning Park—more or less from Nitshill to the start of the Gorbals. We have five minibuses, of which we own four, with three being accessible, and one is a minibus from a wee community hall in Pollok.

Last year, we got some funding to set up a car scheme. That should have finished in November because we did not have funding to progress it, but we were able to keep it on due to fundraising that we did last year. We have not had any statutory funding since 2009, when our funding closed, so we have self-generated with our minibus for community transport for almost the past four years. All of a sudden though, this year, we managed to secure some funding from Strathclyde partnership for transport and Glasgow City Council, which meant that the staff member for the car scheme could stay with us, although on a smaller salary. Thankfully, though, as from Monday, she is back on the salary that she had as a development worker.

We have one full-time member of staff and four part-time members, two part-time drivers, a part-time admin person and a part-time development worker. We do a hoppa shoppa service, work with schools in the area and with therapeutic and other classes through the council, which has service-level agreements from Community Transport Glasgow.

The Convener: Thank you.

Elaine, would you like to start the questions?

Elaine Murray: Yes. Apologies to Peter McColl, because my questions are a bit less relevant to him. They are about capital costs, which are an issue that has been raised with us in previous evidence sessions.

When vehicles become older, they are expensive to maintain and there are sometimes problems with replacing them. How do your organisations fund the purchase of new vehicles? What assistance with vehicle purchase do you get from local authorities, the NHS or other statutory bodies? What might we do better?

Maggie Lawson: My organisation can no longer access capital funding from our local authority or the NHS. Over the past five years, we have been building up a fund to buy the new vehicle that we are about to get. We applied to various trusts for grant funding to go towards the purchase.

This will be the first time that we have had a vehicle that will operate under section 22. When we register a route, we have to offer that route and the vehicle must meet the regulations. If that vehicle is in a crash and has to go off the road, I have zero chance of replacing it in our area—it would take me a minimum of three months to replace it. We cannot afford to buy two vehicles when there is no infrastructure for building up capital. That is a problem for small groups; it is a big issue.

John Moore: Funding fleet renewal is the biggest challenge that faces my organisation—and has been for some years. We have an ageing fleet, which, as Elaine Murray said, is getting more expensive to maintain and is becoming more unreliable. The funding sources that we were traditionally able to access are no longer available to us and we have to spend a lot of time and effort applying to various trust funds, which is incredibly competitive.

Many trust funds do not fund capital and, if they do, very often they do not like funding vehicles. Community transport does not seem to fit the criteria of many trust funds, which have a particular niche. Funders want to fund a particular service for a particular client group, whereas we are trying to meet a lot of different transport needs for a lot of different communities in our area. Raising capital is incredibly difficult and, across Scotland, we are all competing with one another to do so. That is very time consuming, too.

Wayne Pearson: I concur with John Moore. We have 33 vehicles, but they are getting older and have high mileage. Many of them are running 200,000 or 300,000 miles. They are quite difficult to replace, so we have to refurbish them, replacing engines, gear boxes and so on. We can do that, but it is quite expensive.

In an ideal world, we would replace some of our dial-a-rides after five or six years and the dial-a-buses after seven or eight but, as councils' budgets have been squeezed in the past three or four years, we have found that we have not been getting the capital grants that we traditionally got

and we have had to make do with what we have. We are currently buying second-hand vehicles. All our ambulances are second hand and a lot of our dial-a-rides come in second hand and we upgrade them to the standard that we need.

It would be really good if a capital fund or leasing fund were available for replacing vehicles. These vehicles are essential. If they go off the road, they are difficult to replace because they are specialist vehicles, and there is a serious knock-on effect. People rely on the trip. They need to get out and do their shopping or go from A to B for whatever reason, and they cannot use mainstream transport and public transport. They rely on us and they cannot afford some of the private sector options that are out there.

Maggie Urie: The buses that we have are really old—we have 51 plate and X plate buses. We had three buses from Community Transport Glasgow on a long-term lease for nearly five years, but about two years ago CTG had to take them back quite quickly. We had already taken bookings for the coming year. We bought a wee bus for £1,600 from another transport organisation in Greenock—that bus has been a godsend. We have two that we bought from that organisation; the other one was £1,500, which is not a lot of money. However, the buses have been run ragged over the past couple of years. They have to be accessible so that people with disabilities can get out. We got one of our buses through community planning for Govan and Craigton for 2008—that is the youngest bus that we have.

We work with some local groups in the area that have minibuses, and when we utilise a group's bus the money that comes in obviously goes to the group. We are helping the group to generate money to keep its bus on the road, but that is not really doing us any good. Some help with replacement vehicles would be great.

10:30

Peter McColl: As I said, we do not run our own buses, but we sometimes share buses with the local authority. Colleagues have said that it would be useful if local authorities could let us know what buses they have, and if and when we can use them.

For instance, we run an assisted shopping scheme in Inverurie, using a school bus during the day and in school holidays when it is not in use by the schools. I suspect that there are other resources out there that we could use, but we are not getting access to them because the local authorities do not share the information with us.

Maggie Urie: There are loads of local authority buses in Glasgow that are not being used during the summer when the kids are off. We could make

use of them—it would be an advantage to us even just over the summer—because we are working with children and the elderly, but there are rules and regulations that say that we cannot use them.

Elaine Murray: I have made inquiries about the same issue for voluntary sector organisations in my constituency.

There used to be a Government rural community transport initiative, and there was also a pilot urban initiative. Did you have any experience of using those schemes? Would it be useful to reintroduce a scheme of that sort?

Maggie Lawson: The rural community transport initiative fund was a huge benefit. I have been with our organisation for 16 years and my post was initially funded through the RCTI. There were three three-year funding rounds, and the funding was much easier to access than local authority funding.

The fund was handed to the local authority, and now it has just disappeared into other funding or has been top sliced. It is just not the same, and it is not working.

Elaine Murray: At one stage, money was available for things such as minibuses.

Maggie Urie: We used RCTI money in 2004—I think we got £200,000-odd—to buy four minibuses. There were five or six operators in Glasgow at the time, and four buses is not a lot. My organisation had just been set up as a transport initiative, so we were not involved in the distribution of the buses.

Two of the buses that we had taken off us by Community Transport Glasgow were bought with that money back in 2004, and all four buses are still on the road. Community Transport Glasgow has them at its base now. The initiative was a great idea, but four buses is not a lot.

Wayne Pearson: We have had experience of the RCTI for one vehicle in East Lothian, one in Midlothian and one in West Lothian, and that funding has continued—we have managed to keep it coming from the councils. There is also an urban scheme under which we are operating in Edinburgh.

In our experience, the RCTI was a good scheme in that it helped small communities throughout Scotland and got right down to the grass roots. For small amounts of money, it pump-primed very useful local initiatives throughout Scotland. It was a really good scheme, but unfortunately it has disappeared a wee bit.

John Moore: A good point about the RCTI and the urban demand-responsive transport scheme was that they had both capital and revenue. We have been fortunate in Edinburgh and Midlothian, as both local authorities have been able to

preserve the revenue side of the funding that we used to receive, but the capital has gone, and that is the difficulty. The capacity no longer exists in local authority budgets, whereas with the RCTI and the urban DRT scheme there was an opportunity to look at capital as well as the on-going revenue in three-year funding packages. That was the other good point about both those schemes: they had three-year funding attached to them.

Elaine Murray: The other alternative—which has been mentioned—would be to lease vehicles. Have you leased vehicles or considered leasing and its pros and cons?

Maggie Lawson: Leasing is just not possible when we are on one-year funding, as nobody would take us on for a loan.

Maggie Urie: The leasing companies look for leases of at least three years. It might be better to buy a vehicle, because it costs between £800 and £900 a month over three years to lease one, which is a lot of money. It is true that the leasing company will do the repairs and pay the road tax, but it is still necessary to cover the insurance.

Wayne Pearson: We have had vehicles that have been leased by the council, so it has been a hands-off arrangement. In some cases, the leases have run out but the vehicles are still going—I am not quite sure how those arrangements were arrived at. We have resisted going down the route of leasing, for the reasons that Maggie Urie mentioned. The costs are still high, the mileage is limited and, at the end of the day, the vehicle does not belong to us. At least we have been able to keep hold of vehicles and thereby maintain a service.

However, we would not rule out leasing, if it were a viable option.

John Moore: As Maggie Lawson said, while we are on one-year funding agreements, it is impossible to look at commercial leases, but in my organisation—in much the same way as Wayne Pearson described—we have been fortunate to get a small number of vehicles from the local authority, which are provided through its leasing arrangements. It pays those leasing costs as part of our funding package. Someone has to pay for the leases.

From our perspective, one of the positive aspects of a leasing arrangement is that, if capital can be converted to revenue, that provides the opportunity to have a fleet renewal programme—all other things being equal—in the revenue budget, although there are sometimes difficulties to do with the budget decision to replace a vehicle, which might mean that it ends up being operated for 10 years rather than five or six years. However, such an arrangement means—at least, in

principle—that there is a way of replacing the vehicle.

Elaine Murray: Thanks very much.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I want to clarify an aspect of the RCTI that a number of the witnesses have touched on. My understanding is that the responsibility for funding such transport was transferred to local authorities and that the money was to come from their block grant.

Aberdeenshire Council said in its submission:

“The Aberdeenshire Community Transport Initiative ... was established in April 2008, following the transfer of responsibilities for such funding from the Scottish Government to local authorities. Grants of up to 75% of project costs are awarded for the provision of community based rural passenger transport such as community buses, dial-a-trip services, and voluntary car schemes.”

In 2013-14, that amounted to £369,000 for seven projects. Are you saying that that does not happen in other local authority areas? Is Aberdeenshire unique in that regard? What is the situation?

Maggie Lawson: In the Highland area, the pot was initially worth about £350,000. I am led to believe that about 32 projects now receive such funding. Access was provided to funding of up to about 75 per cent of project costs. Over the past three years, our organisation has received about 38 per cent of costs. This year, we face a 20 per cent cut—our funding is down to 18 per cent.

A question that the groups are asking is how the formula works when they are funded by a vertically structured local authority transport department. Through the Highland Council, we are asked to achieve what is in the single outcome agreement, but we are not allowed to participate in non-transport activities. We are achieving the social inclusion target, but the council will not fund that. We have to say what our spend is to get the 18 per cent. We do lots of things. We are part funded by the Big Lottery Fund, which is about social inclusion. We do many activities for older people's services. We provide a lot of added value in addition to the basic core of transport. We face a constant battle because we are funded under the vertically structured transport department, but the way in which we have developed means that we provide a great deal of added value. That is a big problem.

Wayne Pearson: The RCTI money has not increased—we have not noticed an increase in it. The amount that is provided to councils might have increased, but it has certainly not been passed on.

The advantage of the old scheme was that it was administered nationally. Some councils have difficulty in generating local transport projects, given the way in which the money is put out to

them. Working with a body such as Transport Scotland might be a good way to focus action nationally. Examples of good practice can then be copied throughout the country, rather than being hidden in one little local authority area. That was the advantage before, I think.

The Convener: My understanding is that the money that used to be distributed by the Scottish Government was handed to all the councils, on the understanding that they would still use it for community transport. You are saying that that is not happening in many areas—the money has just gone into a big black hole, or a big pot, and is not used for community transport. Are you saying that that devolution to local authorities has not worked?

Wayne Pearson: No, it has not worked.

Maggie Lawson: Our local authority tells us that we should go to other departments within the council, yet when someone tries to go to other departments they just get pushed somewhere else.

The Convener: So there is no joined-up thinking within the council.

Maggie Lawson: No, there is no joined-up thinking. We still have to achieve the single outcome agreement on health and wellbeing, but doing that is difficult.

The Convener: Do you find that with the health boards, too?

Peter McColl: It is worth saying that there is some good work out there, although some areas are not so good. That is the picture that I have had reflected back across the country. Aberdeenshire is a good example of a place in which the council has chosen to invest in community transport. Other areas have left community transport at a standstill or have reduced the funding year on year. That decision is being made by each local authority.

Sometimes the change fund has come in to supplement funding from local authorities and in other places the fund seems to have replaced funding from local authorities. There is a certain level of anxiety about that.

Maggie Urie: I do not think that that is so. On the change fund, South West Community Transport managed to secure money in September for our hoppa shoppa service. We got money for a driver to extend the service to Govan. I do not think that the change fund has taken over, as it were—it is just a new pot of money. There is no real evidence of whether it will work. We were fortunate to secure funds. We are submitting our reports and we hope that by September, if the powers that be are happy with those reports, our funding will be extended for a longer time—perhaps two or three years.

Peter McColl: I will give you an example. My organisation lost funding for a community transport scheme in Fife. We were given funding to wind up the scheme, which we stretched to last for 12 months, although it was a six-month wind-up. We were able to get funding from the People's Health Trust to keep running that service and we are now looking at applying to the change fund to keep the service going. That is a de facto replacement of local authority funding with change fund funding. I do not doubt what Maggie Urie is saying, but the picture is different in different areas.

Maggie Urie: That is probably right. Even in Glasgow, although the money is from the change fund, it is like a transition fund. It is a new name, but it is still the same money. We have got a year to make our project work, if the funding is to continue in years to come.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I was listening intently to what Maggie Urie and Peter McColl were saying. What Maggie outlined is very much what the change fund was meant to do, which was not to replace existing funding but to provide additional funding for current services. I am concerned about the evidence that we have heard from Peter McColl. The committee will want to reflect on that and perhaps pursue the matter with local authorities and the Scottish Government. My understanding is that that situation should not be happening.

Maggie Urie: The funding that we received helped to get people out of their homes and out and about. That helped to ensure that people could stay in their homes and not go into care.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I want to explore a specific issue of which I was completely unaware until we started taking evidence for this inquiry, although many people have raised it. I refer to the licensing requirements on many bus drivers. Older drivers have the D1 entitlement on their licence automatically, but many younger drivers simply do not have it. That could already be a problem, which is likely to build. I ask anyone with the relevant expertise to give us some background on that problem and on how you are dealing with it.

10:45

John Moore: The difficulty is that the pool of drivers who are eligible to drive minibuses is getting older and smaller. It is to do with European Union driving licensing legislation, so we are unlikely to be able to change it. That is an issue not just for the community transport sector, but for local authorities in finding new, younger drivers to drive their vehicles. The cost of getting the D1 entitlement on someone's driving licence depends on how much on-road training they need, but it

could easily be between £800 and £1,200. It is not cheap. The difficulty, particularly if many volunteer drivers are used, lies in where the investment will come from and whether the people concerned might use that qualification to go and get employment somewhere else. That will be good for that person, but not for the organisations that invested in the training.

Alex Johnstone: That would be typical of what happens in such areas.

Where are we in the process? Do you view that as a problem for the future, or are we already at crisis point with regard to qualified drivers?

Wayne Pearson: The D1 requirement is a necessary thing for the industry. It represents an improvement in driver standards, and it professionalises the work. We try to run our service as closely as possible to being a passenger-carrying vehicle operation, although we are not a PCV licence holder. All our drivers have a minimum D1 licence, and many of them have full category D licences. That professionalises them. Either we invest in their training, or the drivers come to us with one of those licences.

Fortunately, we do not have to rely on having a lot of volunteer drivers, who might come without the D1 licence, and that is where organisations might have a crisis—if they do not have enough D1 drivers. However, it is a good thing to professionalise drivers. They are transporting groups of people in large vehicles, and it is a skilled job. People need more than just a car licence to do that. It is a good idea.

Alex Johnstone: There are some exceptions, and the rules can be worked around to some extent. Is the list of exceptions right? Is there any way in which it could be changed so as to improve your experience with the legislation?

Maggie Urie: You mention exceptions, and volunteers can still drive minibuses, but as far as weight is concerned, the vehicles have to be 3.5 tonnes or under. People must be volunteers in order to drive without a D1—no one can be paid to drive a bus if they do not have D1 on their licence. As well as being volunteers, drivers must be over 25, in our case.

The problem lies in the cost that we have had to pay to put one of our drivers through her D1. We were fortunate that another organisation helped us out, but it still cost us nearly £500. The cost is going through the roof.

Alex Johnstone: Is the list of exceptions of value to you? Could changes be made to it? Do you view it as a challenge that you simply have to master?

John Moore: The list of exceptions is not very helpful, because of the weight issue. That is the

key factor, especially for people who operate accessible minibuses. Given the latest access and safety requirements, it is very difficult if not impossible to find a vehicle below that weight. There is a real pressure to trade off on the access and safety design features of the vehicle in order to come below that weight, meet the criteria and get an exception for the D1 licence. There is a tension there.

To answer your original question, we are almost reaching the tipping point. It has not been too much of a problem for some time, but our organisation tries to provide vehicles that can be hired on a self-drive basis by other voluntary organisations that have their own drivers, and those organisations are struggling to find people to hire vehicles. There are very few drivers with D1 driving entitlement under the age of 33. Traditionally, there have been a lot of young volunteers, but that arrangement is becoming difficult. We are probably just getting to the tipping point, at which there will start to be a serious problem.

Alex Johnstone: From what has been said so far, I get the impression that you feel that you have to bite the bullet and that there is no way of backing down from this responsibility. Is that correct?

Maggie Urie: It is too expensive for us to put people through their D1 test, but something has to be done. Our young drivers are 25 years old. We could possibly use them on accessible work, but we cannot afford to train them.

Peter McColl: The issue does not particularly affect us, partly because we do not own our vehicles and partly because our volunteers tend to be over the age of 33. There might be an opportunity to fund the qualifications as part of a broader skills training programme for younger people, or through other methods; that might be the way in which we can begin to solve the problem. As Wayne Pearson said, licensing is a good thing. We simply need to find ways of funding people to qualify.

Alex Johnstone: Given that the organisations that are represented here are vital to many public services, is it time that services such as the NHS and perhaps even Transport Scotland did something to assist organisations with training?

Maggie Urie: Yes.

Alex Johnstone: What kind of assistance would you require—grant or practical assistance?

Wayne Pearson: Targeted grants, specifically for training in the driving area. Given the work that drivers will be doing, it is critical that they have skills that are of a higher standard than those that are needed to get a basic driving licence.

Gordon MacDonald: If there were targeted £1,000 grants to help volunteers get their D1 licence, what would stop your organisations becoming, in essence, training bodies that people use in order to get a career driving a bus for a bus company? Would you have a training bond?

Wayne Pearson: We are fortunate in being able to keep our staff for a long time—many of our staff have been with us for 20 or 30 years. However, that is also a problem for us, as it means that we have an ageing workforce. We build into our provisions of service the notion that someone who leaves within a year will have to repay half of the cost of the training, but that is up to each organisation. That has not been a problem for us, because we have found that people tend to stay with us. However, it could be a problem, particularly with volunteers because they will leave after giving an organisation a certain amount of time. Organisations have to value and nurture their volunteers, but they will come and go. However, volunteers' skills will become an asset in the community and they will go on to another community organisation or be of benefit to the country by joining a private organisation.

Elaine Murray: Maggie Urie said that her organisation had received training through another organisation. Coalfield Community Transport in Cumnock said that it could provide some of the training for other community transport organisations at a lower cost than the training that is provided by professional organisations. Is there scope for that to be done?

Maggie Urie: In Glasgow, there is the North Area Transport Association, which gave one of our drivers D1 training. There is also Coalfield, which did a lot of our training when we were set up. If such organisations could provide D1 training at lower cost—while we covered costs and expenses, or whatever—that would be beneficial, because £1,000 is a lot of money to ask for as a grant. That would ensure that we had more people with the right accreditation working for us, and that there were more qualified people working outside the community transport area, too.

Elaine Murray: I think that some of the cost comes from the need to have a supervisor and a bus—

Maggie Urie: You have to pay for fuel and the trainer's time, and I think that it can take five to seven days, depending on how quickly the driver picks it up.

Wayne Pearson: There is not a lot of difference between the cost of training for the D1 and D licences, but the D licence gives better entitlement, as it allows a driver to drive a bus. We therefore tend to put our drivers through the training for the full D licence. If someone has only

a D1 licence, that is not a great asset—the full D licence is the asset. With the introduction of continuing professional development, there is ongoing professionalisation of the qualification. There is not much difference in the cost, but the full D licence has a lot more value.

Gordon MacDonald: I understand that, at present, community transport operators are eligible for the concessionary travel scheme if they operate services under a section 22 permit. Does any of the witnesses directly operate that type of service? If so, what is your experience of that?

John Moore: We operate five community bus services in Midlothian, on which 95 per cent of the passengers are concessionary card holders. The challenge is that the costs of participating in the scheme have been transferred from Transport Scotland to us as the operator. That is becoming increasingly onerous. For example, we will eventually have to bear the cost of replacing the ticket machines and the depot reader. We are already bearing the cost of repairs when machines break down and, in our experience, they are not particularly reliable. There is also the cost of the dedicated line to Transport Scotland for the back office. All those costs are coming to us, and we expect them to increase, which is a concern.

Gordon MacDonald: What is your estimate of the cost to your organisation of replacing the ticket machines? How many ticket machines do you have?

John Moore: We have four ticket machines and one depot reader. We understand that, if we had to replace them all now, it would cost more than £5,000 and possibly up to £10,000.

Gordon MacDonald: Does anyone else have experience of operating section 22 permits?

Wayne Pearson: We tried to get on board the concessionary fares scheme when it first came out, as we felt that it was not fair that the general public could access public transport for free but our users, who are often unemployed or on low incomes, had to pay to get on specialist services. We tried to go through the hoops that are involved in joining the concessionary fares scheme, particularly for our dial-a-bus service, which kind of suited the scheme. However, certain aspects of the scheme are difficult. One is that the operator gets back only a certain percentage of the fare—originally, it was 80 per cent, but it has changed since those days. That means that the operator has to generate the additional income that they would have got, by increasing numbers. That is fine for operators that have empty seats or more vehicle capacity, but those that do not will not generate income; in fact, they will lose income.

Another factor that prevented us from joining the scheme was that the traffic commissioner felt that

we were not running national routes, although we felt that that was a bit of a red herring, because initially they said that we could do it. However, for us, the main stopper was the local councils, who said that, if we had concessionary fares and everyone could get on board for free, we would be flooded by demand. The councils were not able to provide additional resourcing, in capital or revenue, to allow us to uplift. Obviously, if people could get on for free on our services, which take people from door to door, with assistance with shopping, they would take that option rather than have to walk to a bus stop even if they can do so.

However, it is right that the issue should be revisited, and that would be timely. The money is pretty much all going into private sector buses. It should be targeted at those who can least afford public transport. There has been an effect, in that people are not going out so much—our dial-a-bus figures have dropped a bit with the economic downturn. It is not right that those people are having to pay high transport costs when they should be getting transport for free or for a nominal amount.

Gordon MacDonald: I agree that we have to consider the whole issue. A number of local authorities throughout Scotland provide local concession schemes. For example, Scottish Borders Council has a pilot scheme for free transport to health appointments for people who hold a concession pass; Aberdeenshire Council provides a local concessionary scheme that has been running for the past 10 years for scheduled dial-a-bus services; and the City of Edinburgh Council has recently announced that it will run a local scheme for the Edinburgh trams system. There is a lot of scope for local authorities to do more. Would that not be the better route to take, as you would not be involved with the traffic commissioner and the other issues under section 22 permits, or even section 19 permits, if the scheme was brought in house?

11:00

Wayne Pearson: I think so, but sufficient funding is not coming into services such as dial-a-ride or dial-a-bus to reduce the fare costs. Grants have been lowered over the past few years, and we must have a break-even budget or slightly above that. Often the only way to break even is to increase fares or reduce services; we cannot run at a loss. Unfortunately, costs have had to be passed on to passengers, who are now paying pretty high fares that some of them cannot afford. Instead of going out twice a week, they might do their shopping one day a week; previously, they had the option of going out a second time for a cup of coffee or just for an outing. Such outings are important for people to get involved in their

communities and to get out of their four walls. Many people have had to reduce their outings because of the increasing costs to them. It has been a hard road for that element of society.

Peter McColl: We would be anxious about an extension of the existing concessionary fare scheme to the community transport that we provide. We would find that quite difficult to implement, because we use volunteer cars and we would therefore have to have more than four ticket machines. We are convinced that extending concessionary fares is the right and just thing to do, but we would want to ensure that the system could work for community transport as well as for the existing larger-scale providers.

The system has to change if it is to be extended so that there is a lighter-touch scheme that confers fewer costs on the provider in order to allow us to do the vital work of transferring patients and taking people to appointments with general practitioners. We save the national health service and GP surgeries substantial sums of money by avoiding people missing appointments, for example. When we look at the costs in the round, we see that it would almost certainly be cheaper to provide those journeys for free, but things must be done in a way that allows us to do that, particularly at a time when it is difficult for us to source grant income.

Gordon MacDonald: On a practical basis, how do you see the incorporation of section 19 services into the national concessionary scheme, given the nature of the reimbursement formula that is in place, which depends on a standard fare being charged to the public? Operators that take part will get 60 per cent of the standard fare. How do you see those services being incorporated if you do not carry fare-paying passengers? Many section 19 services are hired out to local organisations, which take passengers from their groups to day centres or on day outings. Is there a practical way of incorporating those services into the national concessionary scheme?

John Moore: It would not be practical for group travel under section 19 to be part of the national concessionary fare scheme, because it involves hiring a vehicle for a group activity. That is different from the main purpose of the scheme. It might be more appropriate to look at other community transport services that are operated under section 19, which Wayne Pearson described, entering the scheme, but they would get only 58.1 per cent of the fare. Whether there would need to be a different way of calculating the reimbursement for those section 19 services would have to be looked at, otherwise the operation would have no incentive, as it would lose money.

Gordon MacDonald: What are your views on Age Scotland's still waiting campaign, which aims to extend community transport? I assume that you support it, but where do you see the practical difficulties?

Maggie Urie: Age Scotland identified that community transport operators would need to get 100 per cent of the fares, because we could not afford to get 60 per cent. That is what CT operators are looking for. If the CT operators are brought into the concessionary travel scheme, we will need that money to keep our businesses afloat and to keep our buses on the road. It is okay to give 60 per cent to First or whoever, because they have backup. We have five buses and 60 per cent is no good to us—unless we put up our prices.

We charge £1.30 a mile if we take a group out. We do a hoppa shoppa two days a week in Govan, in the south-west area. It is £5 a head and pensioners pay that, but it gets them picked up from the door and brought home safely with their shopping. They go away on a day trip every Saturday, which they enjoy—again, for £5. If we were taking a concessionary rate—if we could get 100 per cent of the concessionary fare—that would save that wee pensioner money, but the Government would have to ensure that that money was in the bank for us to be able to keep our businesses running and to keep our buses on the road.

Peter McColl: If I understand the reasoning behind the 80 per cent and then 60 per cent payment to transport operators, it is because it is anticipated that they will increase the volume. If you have a bus with 60 or 80 seats, you can afford to fill more of those seats. With the schemes that we provide, we are only ever going to carry one passenger at a time. There is no real way that we could increase volume and therefore it would have to be at 100 per cent in order that we could reclaim our costs and make it worth while for ourselves. There is no feasible way that we can increase volume on the trips that we do.

Maggie Lawson: In our area, because it is very rural, the passengers we pick up are the most vulnerable and they are very elderly and disabled. Able-bodied people will not book on to that bus that goes via so many places. They want a direct route so they will go to public transport. It is very unlikely that we would make up the difference in additional fares. That is the problem.

Gordon MacDonald: Am I right in saying that it is obvious that you need some support to address social exclusion issues but that the national concessionary scheme is not the right vehicle because of the additional costs involved, the unreliability of the equipment, and the fact that you are not carrying the public on the same vehicles and you are not getting 100 per cent of the fare?

However, there should be something in place to support community transport. Do you agree with that?

Maggie Lawson: Yes.

Peter McColl: Yes.

John Moore: Yes.

Wayne Pearson: Yes.

Maggie Urie: Yes.

Gordon MacDonald: Thanks for that. Peter McColl talked about car-based services earlier. How can we support car-based services in terms of concessionary travel? If we need a new scheme rather than a national concessionary scheme, how do you see us moving forward to try to provide support for car-based services?

Peter McColl: We already have a charging model in place that allows us to identify what the cost is per mile. We would still need revenue costs in order to provide the support to make the transport demand responsive. We would need somebody at the end of a phone to book a journey. I assume that that would require additional funding, but at the moment we could easily provide the charging details for what we have done to Transport Scotland or to another agency.

It is important to note that, as the Scottish Ambulance Service moves out of patient transfer, we have noticed that a lot of patient transfer is now happening by taxi. That is substantially more expensive than what we would offer. Quite substantial savings can therefore be made by replacing current patient transfer to and from hospital, which is done by taxi, with a concessionary fares scheme on car-delivered community transport or indeed other community transport schemes. A quite substantial sum of money could be unlocked to provide the type of service that we provide.

When we did some work on one of our patient transport services in England, we discovered that there was huge benefit to patient transfer being done in a community transport scheme, because the individuals going to an oncology unit were getting the same driver there and back every time. They were picked up from their home by somebody whom they knew and could talk to. Although it is not often a problem getting a taxi driver whom you can talk to, those patients got the same individual every time, who also provided support and could signpost them to other services. There are benefits from patient transfer being done in that way.

We have done other work on the cost savings generated by providing transport to GP appointments, which can prevent appointments

from being missed. There are huge savings to unlock there too.

It is unlikely that this would cost money, but a scheme whereby we could reclaim the costs using our own charging models would be ideal.

The Convener: I should say for the record that the Health and Sport Committee is looking into that part of community transport for us and it will be feeding into our report.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I return to financing. You have given the committee a good understanding of the impact of local authority funding, or the lack of it in some cases, and you touched on the other sources that you are trying to tap into. Will you expand on that? I am not excluding you from talking more about local authority funding, but I would like to get an understanding of how else you are making the finances stack up and what the impact of finding that funding is on your resources, such as staff and time.

Maggie Lawson: Our organisation was lucky enough to get a Big Lottery award five years ago. It was a grant over five years, which has allowed us to develop the social side of the organisation. Transport was the core, but we have done lots of development on the social side. That funding runs out next March. We have our one-year local authority funding, but if we do not find a major funder or more sustainable funding, we will not be able to operate next year at all. It is such a big issue. With community transport you are not allowed to make the profit margin that you would need to invest back in. We are very restricted in what we can do. There is not enough to sustain us. Given what we have built up over five years on the social inclusion side, we have made lots of changes to people's lives, so there would be a huge knock-on effect on the health side for both volunteers and clients. We find that the volunteers are every bit as important to invest in as the clients, because they sometimes have as many needs as the clients. It works both ways.

Wayne Pearson: One of the advantages of our sector is that we are mostly charities or not-for-profit organisations, so we are able to look outwith traditional sources of funding. We either work in partnership with other charities or actively look for sources of funding that might not otherwise be available. We have for example worked with the Order of St John in Scotland, which has given us some money towards our revenue funding and recently indicated that it would provide funding for a new vehicle for us. We have also developed work with the local NHS in providing an ambulance service, for which we charge the NHS on a per-use basis. Any residue from that is used to help us with our transport for the disabled. That has been a very useful source of funding for us.

Another windfall, if I can put it that way, has been the changes to the bus service operators grant. In the past year, the changes have helped us substantially. We do high mileages and go all over the country, which has transferred into an increase in our BSOG income. We did not really expect that, because we do a lot of dead mileage going to places, but we are able to claim on that.

We have had quite an uplift through the BSOG and the NHS, which has turned round a significant deficit that we had three or four years ago. We are now able to use some of those funds towards our capital or to start to consider improving services or taking on additional staff. We have had quite a good benefit from that.

11:15

John Moore: We rely entirely for our core funding on the grants—although they are not always called grants—from local authorities. However, a number of years ago, we set up a wholly owned trading company that provides training throughout Scotland for other community transport, local authority and even private sector organisations. We provide on-road driver training and training in emergency evacuation procedures. We have provided disability awareness training for taxi drivers in Edinburgh for more than 10 years.

We have examined those income-earning opportunities, but they are not huge. For example, the surplus that our trading company made last year was just about £16,000. The market to make vast sums does not exist, but we are considering what we can do.

Peter McColl: We have gone to all the places that you would expect. In addition to local authority funding, we have looked at funding from the NHS, the change fund, the People's Health Trust and the lottery. All those sources have been highly competitive and, if they existed before, have been getting much more competitive.

Although we still enjoy a level of success, I suspect that that is sometimes at the cost of other organisations that provide good and worthwhile services. There is a need to focus on the sorts of services that all our organisations provide, which are preventative and allow people to get out and be involved in their community, which we know has huge knock-on positive impacts on their mental and physical health. At the moment, many organisations find it difficult to fund such services. In three years, we have not had a new service that was funded by the local authority; we have had to look elsewhere for that funding. This is not what we would expect over that period.

Maggie Urie: As I explained before, we had no funding over the past four years, so we were self-generating until last year, when we managed to

set up the pilot for the car scheme. This year, we have managed to secure a year's funding from SPT and we have some money from the integrated grants fund from Glasgow City Council.

That is the funding for this year and, we hope, the following year. As with the Robertson Trust, they are not big pots of money, but it is money that we have not had over the past few years. Despite that, we have managed to keep the service running and keep our members of staff in post.

This will be a good year for our organisation, which is small, because we will be able to consider going into new areas with the car scheme that we set up as a pilot last year and with our minibuses. We got a grant for £10,000 from the Priesthill Barratt Community Development Trust, so we are in the process of getting a second-hand accessible vehicle and getting it set up over the next few weeks.

There are wee pots of money but, if we had decent, three-year funding, we could work wonders with it.

Gil Paterson: Thank you very much for that. Does anyone want to put on record the impact that that situation has on staff time and the real cost, particularly to small organisations? Is it onerous? I have no idea. I am involved in a voluntary organisation and it takes that organisation an awful lot of time and energy to find money. Does anyone want to comment on that?

Wayne Pearson: We are a membership organisation. Although people do not need to be a member to use our organisation, they need to register with us. We have a core of about 500 members, who renew their membership annually and elect a committee at an annual general meeting. Many of our members give of their time voluntarily and put their own money into the organisation. We get a lot of donations outwith that, but many of the members form general purpose sub-committees to try to raise money.

We use the expertise that our volunteers have gained over many years, which is given to us for free. The difficulty for us is to use our staff time, because all our staff are producing—they are driving or taking calls or dealing with administration. To free up their time costs the organisation. It is essential to do that, but it is hard to allocate their time. Therefore, we rely on volunteers and citizens, who are involved in the organisation and who make their expertise, time and effort available to us.

Peter McColl: Something that vastly increases the time spent on fundraising is the practice of one-year funding, which is now very common, unfortunately. Over the past three, four or five years, a range of our projects have been funded on a roll-on of one year. That requires a lot more

staff time in reapplying for the funding every year, and it creates attrition among our staff, because we have to issue a redundancy notice every January. At some point, people will think, "Maybe this year I will go and find something else to do," so that also requires more recruitment time. There are other problems for lease arrangements, as it is not necessarily possible to enter into a lease arrangement if we have only one-year funding.

Many of our projects have been funded year on year through a series of one-year funding arrangements. Obviously, that is better than not being funded, but it looks as though they could have been funded for three, four or even five years—that is the planning window that we would like. A much better way of working would be to have three, four or five-year funding in place as the norm rather than one-year funding.

Gil Paterson: I have another question on an issue that was raised earlier. Maggie Lawson and Peter McColl mentioned that most or all of what they do involves volunteers using their own vehicles. For my own knowledge rather than for the committee's benefit—I am ignorant about this—are the volunteers paid back a mileage expense?

Maggie Lawson: Yes, our volunteers are paid 43p per mile for every mile that their wheels turn from when they leave home.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): Is there any organisation—for example, the Community Transport Association—that provides advice and assistance on how to access funding, or do you do all that yourself?

Maggie Lawson: The CTA is hugely supportive in Scotland, but its funding has been cut this year, unfortunately. Our representative's post has now been cut to half time, but she still has to cover quite a bit of Scotland and a large number of groups—there are 32 groups in Highland. She is just really stretched. The CTA staff do not know what their future holds now, as there have been so many staff pay-offs. Over the years that they have been in post, John MacDonald and Sheila Fletcher have been a huge support to us in providing advice and information, but they are finding it difficult now.

Margaret McCulloch: Is that your main source of advice on how to access funding?

Wayne Pearson: We find the CTA really good. As an umbrella body that covers not just Scotland but the UK, the CTA provides advice lines, holds conferences and offers training and the like.

Another useful source of funding tips and help is the local voluntary organisation councils. We have relied on the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisation Council—originally the Edinburgh Council of

Social Service—which provides supportive training for management committees and gives indications of where grants are available. I imagine that that is replicated by the voluntary organisation councils throughout Scotland, such as in Midlothian, which play a really useful role. However, the CTA is also important because it specifically represents the transport side.

John Moore: I think that the CTA offers a lot of support across Scotland to grass-roots community transport providers, but it does not have the resources to come in and help you look for the funding that you need on a one-to-one basis.

Wayne Pearson: What it has been good at is representing the sector in the Scottish Parliament. That has been very useful, because our time is precious; we as individuals do not have the time to do that. The CTA has been useful in approaching the Parliament and raising issues that we might not have been able to raise ourselves.

Margaret McCulloch: How much experience do your organisations have of accessing public sector contracts?

Maggie Urie: We actually have experience with service level agreements. Community Transport Glasgow gets SPT money and NHS money for the likes of hospital visiting. We have the SLAs for the transport to therapeutic and falls classes. Through the urban community transport initiative, we have been funded for a driver for 16 hours a week for the past six years with DRT money. That is most of what we get at present. Community Transport Glasgow seems to take on the contracts and distribute the work.

Margaret McCulloch: Do any of your organisations access the public sector for any tenders?

Wayne Pearson: We have registered, but we have not taken any up. We are looking at health ones in particular. We do casual work with the NHS at the moment, but we would like to formalise that with contracts, which would mean that we could allocate resources and have a fixed income, which would help the organisation. It is quite difficult to do that, but it is something that we should actively look at, because it could supplement our income streams and we could probably provide services of good quality at a reasonable price.

Maggie Urie: We are a small organisation, but ideally we could get some small school contracts. You have to get someone to come into your organisation to explain how the tendering process works and how you fill in the forms. You are taking the community out of community transport if you go to big organisations to look for work. You do not want the people who use the transport to lose

out—it is community transport after all—although we do need to generate money to keep us going.

Wayne Pearson: West Lothian had a problem getting visitors to the Edinburgh royal infirmary. We piloted the health link service from St John's hospital to the royal infirmary—one bus five days a week. That developed and the private sector took it over. It was put out to tender and a bus contractor took it over and now the service operates seven days a week with several runs. We started something that went on to the private sector. I felt that we could have carried it on, but the political decision was taken at that time to move it on from our control.

Margaret McCulloch: In order to access various contracts and to put in tenders, you need staff who have the right experience. Do any of your organisations have anybody with that expertise?

Maggie Lawson: We tried a couple of times to go through procurement processes for contracts for a special needs school and social work, but we were up against lots of taxi operators, which pay someone all day anyway. We have to submit the price that it would cost us for the small amount of time involved, but the taxi operators are paying someone anyway, which makes it very difficult for us to compete. It is quite a process to go through, given all the paperwork. For small organisations, it is very difficult.

Margaret McCulloch: I suggest that it would be worth your while going on to the website of the supplier development programme, which runs two-day courses for organisations on how to put in tenders. There is a technique and a knack to it.

John Moore: On Maggie Lawson's point, if an organisation has the capacity within current resources to submit a tender, will it stop doing its core business to do something else? Organisations have to understand the impact on their core business of submitting a tender. Alternatively, are organisations looking to set up in a trading company environment to do additional business in order to fund their core business? If so, it is a question of the size of the market and what part of that market they have to capture to meet their objectives. I think that the answer will be different for different community transport groups in different parts of Scotland, and I do not think that it is a panacea for the funding of community transport.

11:30

Wayne Pearson: That is right. Charities must consider whether something falls within their aims and objectives and section 19 operations. I agree with John Moore that we must be cautious about the commitments that we take on, because they

might be too much for small charities. Committing to providing a tendered service might be an opportunity, but it might also be a millstone.

John Moore: It could be the tail that wags the dog, if you like: the commercial tail wagging the charity dog. If a charity has a contract that it must deliver, would it cancel a group hire for a local voluntary organisation to deliver that contract? Such issues must be considered.

Maggie Urie: If it does not deliver, there will be penalties.

John Moore: Exactly.

Peter McColl: As a larger organisation, we tend to deal a lot in this area. I understand what has been said, but our anxieties are less about that area and more about building up big contracts and letting those nationally through groupings such as Scotland Excel. Although not a community transport initiative, there was a Scotland Excel tender for meals on wheels that functioned in a way that made it almost entirely impossible for us to bid for it. We would have had to put in infrastructure in 27 local authority areas, and then the local authorities would have had the opportunity to opt out once the tender had been let. We would have had to put in kitchens in each of those 27 local authority areas, and the local authorities could then have said, "Actually, we don't want to use that service. We're going to use another provider."

We have an anxiety that the procurement processes that were set up under the McClelland report act sometimes to exclude organisations such as ours but also to encourage organisations that can afford to do so to set up trading arms that they can allow to go bust if the contract does not work out for them. That cannot be done by organisations such as ours that are based on reputation.

The Convener: You might want to watch out for the procurement bill. It will come to this committee in the autumn, and you might want to submit some evidence to us on that.

Jim Eadie: I want to ask about a national community transport strategy and the co-ordination of community transport, which were highlighted in evidence to the committee. The submission from Lothian Community Transport Services states:

"The drafting of a national strategy for community and accessible transport could also provide a mechanism for resolving the barriers that undermine the long-term sustainability of"

community transport across Scotland. The issue has been touched on, but can the witnesses tell us, at the risk of repetition, what they think the

current barriers are to a national strategy and what its benefits would be?

John Moore: I will start with the last part of your question. The benefits of Scottish Government leadership on a national strategy would be that it would give local funders—whether local authorities or others—a framework and a context. The development of a strategy would provide an opportunity to look at the barriers, including, in particular, the lack of capital funding so that we can better understand how that issue might be addressed. We could also look at the barriers to participation in the concessionary fares scheme and perhaps get a better understanding of the nature of the community transport projects that could access the national concessionary fares scheme, but which are not accessing it at the moment.

There are a number of areas that could be unpicked and perhaps resolved through the development of a national strategy.

Jim Eadie: Okay. Would having a national strategy equate to centralisation? What role do you see for national organisations such as the Community Transport Association and Transport Scotland?

John Moore: I do not think that having a national strategy would equate to centralisation. Community transport is local—it operates at grass-roots level on a bottom-up basis. The CTA supports that process, and it is unfortunate that it has lost funding at a time when the CT sector across Scotland needs more support. If Transport Scotland and the CTA were to work together to develop such a strategy, to unpick some of the issues that we have talked about and to identify practical solutions to the barriers that exist, that would be extremely helpful to the wider sector.

Jim Eadie: Do any of the other witnesses want to talk about the barriers to the sustainability of community transport and the benefits of a national strategy?

Wayne Pearson: There are some good examples of community transport, but that is not the case throughout Scotland. That is where a national strategy could help—it could help areas in which community transport is poor. I agree with John Moore that such a strategy need not be centrally directed. The replication in other places of good examples and their encouragement would benefit all of Scotland, not just certain pockets.

Peter McColl: I think that opportunities exist to deliver the services that I have talked about, such as patient transfer and the transporting of people to GP appointments. The creation of a national framework that would give statutory agencies and GPs a level of awareness of such services would be welcome. That is not about centralising things; it is about raising awareness and creating a

situation in which people are aware of what can be provided and how transport can be integrated into other services.

Jim Eadie: What would such a national strategy look like? How would it be different from what we have at the moment? I am struggling to grasp what it would mean in practice.

John Moore: It would help to identify the role of community transport in the shared services agenda, for example, which we feel is quite difficult to engage in at the moment, and it would highlight the need for funding to be provided for more than just one year, so that we could engage at that level. Those are some areas that I see a national strategy focusing on. Those are reasons for having such a strategy.

Peter McColl: I think that a national strategy might also contribute to health and social care integration. Transport has not been given particular consideration as part of that process, but we see it as being fundamental to achieving a shift in the balance of care from acute services to care in the community. Allowing people to have transport that they can rely on is extremely important. That is not really a transport issue; it is a health and social care issue.

The Convener: I will play devil's advocate. If there was a national strategy, it might act as a straitjacket. John Moore said that community transport was inherently bottom up. It responds to needs, depending on whether there are volunteers around to provide it. There are gaps—that is why we are holding our inquiry—but I am not sure that a national strategy would allow the witnesses to get what they want. I hope that our report will highlight good practice throughout the country and will identify where there are gaps.

The great thing about community transport is how diverse it is and the fact that it meets needs differently in each area, so why would you want a national strategy?

John Moore: Part of the answer to that is that it would capture all that diversity and identify where good practice exists. There is a bit of a postcode lottery across the country when it comes to community transport provision. A national strategy would provide a framework for people to better understand how community transport can contribute to the meeting of local outcomes.

The Convener: But you are almost saying that you want a statutory body to fill the gap. You might find yourselves competing with that statutory body.

Maggie Urie: I am not sure. Excuse me if I do not understand some of the jargon, but we are maybe looking for a committee that would act as a back-up, like CTA and Transport Scotland—maybe a committee that we could go to for help in

securing funding or downloading work that we could do for the NHS or for Glasgow City Council, for example. The committee could supply the work that it felt that we could do in our various areas. It would mean having somebody to go to. We all have a board of directors, who come along and help us, but having an official body would help.

The Convener: Is that not what the CTA does?

Maggie Urie: The CTA does a brilliant job, so maybe something like the CTA and Transport Scotland—but not another board of directors. The CTA benefits all of us. If we have any problems at all, we just lift up the phone, and if John MacDonald can help, he will. He has the right experience, and there may be somebody from Transport Scotland who also knows a lot about this area. Really, CT organisations just need back-up.

The Convener: Maggie Urie and some of the other witnesses mentioned what happens when an organisation's vehicle goes off the road. There is no vehicle for it to use, but it knows that other voluntary organisations and charities in that community might have a vehicle that is used only at night for youth groups, for example. Is there a need for a vehicle pool so that organisations know that they can use vehicles during the day that other groups use at night?

Maggie Urie: When we were set up, we put out a certificate of acknowledgement to the wee user groups in our area because we did not have any buses. In fact, I was brought in to set something like that up. We utilised the buses in the area and then gradually buses were given to us, but using buses from other groups is like using the council buses: loads of buses sit there and do nothing all day, so surely there could be some arrangement.

The problem is the insurance and so on. We pay insurance on our buses, but the council may turn round and say, "You cannae use our buses because you're no insured." The Government pays for the leasing of those buses every year that it has them. We could utilise those buses as well and, along the way, help wee groups that have one bus. If they can be helped to generate income, that keeps their bus on the road for the school in the morning or the wee pensioners group in the afternoon, and we could utilise it during their downtime.

Wayne Pearson: We have not touched on the integration of transport and the trips themselves—the movements that people want to make. Our chairman and I went to Holland a couple of years ago and looked at the set-up there, which involves disabled users, other groups and the Government coming together to say, "Right, people need to travel and they have a right to a trip within a certain time." That approach is resourced right

through the country. There is a central booking system and all sorts of operators go into that pot—taxis, ambulances, local authorities and the voluntary sector and volunteers. From that central point, decisions are made about the appropriate means of transport, who is the closest and who is available to do it, and trips are recompensed nationally.

Holland has a long history of that sort of approach, and such schemes are probably expensive to set up, but it means that the users know that someone will come for them in the most appropriate form of transport. It also means that—given that transport is extremely expensive—it is the most affordable form of transport for their particular trip. It may not be appropriate to send a dial-a-ride vehicle at a high local authority trip cost. It might be more appropriate to send a car or to share resources more—to share trips so that one vehicle would do several trips. People have different needs. People who need additional help because of health problems might need a health trip one day, but on another day, they might be able to get on a bus or some other form of transport—the bus is probably the cheapest. That is an interesting model to look at.

The Convener: Are there any other issues that witnesses think the committee should address during the inquiry that we have not already covered this morning? We have been right round the houses.

Maggie Lawson: I agree with you, convener—one size does not fit all. If it is a choice between national or local, I always like keeping it local because the population in Highland is quite dispersed and we sometimes have to go huge distances just to access another accessible vehicle. Even then, although the care homes have accessible vehicles—there are two that we can access—we cannot use them because of insurance and legislation issues. There are other minibuses but they are not accessible, and 95 per cent of our clients need accessible vehicles with low steps or lifts. Grass roots up is always my policy.

The Convener: I thank you all very much for taking the time to come and answer our questions—it has been very helpful. If you think of anything else on your way home that you wish you had said, just write in and let us know.

That concludes our business for today. There will be no meeting next week. The next meeting will be on 15 May, when we will hear from community transport co-ordinators.

Meeting closed at 11:45.

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