

Rural Lift for South West Fermanagh

Introduction

Rural Lift is a Community Transport project funded through the Rural Transport Fund and our aim is "to create a linked transport system to provide access to community services and activities, educational and employment opportunities and enable social integration and regeneration of the region"

We provide affordable, accessible transport in this very rural area to alleviate the social exclusion faced by people due to lack of public transport or being unable to access a car.

We operate in a number of different ways:

- Door to door services provide transport for individual members to access local services such as post offices, shops, doctors etc
- We work in Partnership with Translink to provide a Demand Responsive Service for people in the area with the Rural Rover
- Our group hire enables local community groups and voluntary groups to hire our minibuses at an affordable rate and the fact that they are fully accessible means that anyone from the community can travel regardless of disability.
- We provide a high standard of training for all our staff and volunteers particularly our drivers.
- The staff of Rural Lift work hard to promote the concept of Community Transport not only in this area but throughout N. Ireland to encourage people to become more independent and let everyone have the opportunity to participate in their own community.

Comments on the Policy Context

There appears to have been a lot of research undertaken in relation to this document and the plan clearly takes its lead from the Regional Transportation Strategy. The plan does identify other policies but we feel that there may have been better co-ordination of services that the plan aims to introduce with services that are already in operation particularly Community Transport services that are funded by the same Department.

The plan mentions the Accessible Transport Strategy and as the Department is aware many people from rural areas took part in the consultation for this strategy. It is a requirement for all Departments to look to the ATS when producing policy and as the DRD is the Department that actually instigated the policy then there is even more reasoning why they should take it on board to a high level.

We feel that the SRTP does not fully reflect the strategic objectives or policies of the ATS and there is little or no mention of accessible transport chains particularly for people from deep rural areas.

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Company Registration Number: 5
Accepted as a charity by the
Revenue under reference XR43027
Vat reg no. 805 7003 59



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Comments on proposals for Other Urban Areas

While Rural Lift for South West Fermanagh is ultimately responsible for rural transport we cannot help but be aware of the transport needs of people in the urban areas through requests for transport and for many years we have been providing advice and support and a voice for people in these areas. We therefore welcome the proposals for additional services within these areas and are awaiting the launch of the new TPPD services with anticipation. We are concerned however that many people living in urban area live in very small housing estates and have limited mobility problems and will not be eligible for TPPD services. We know from experience that public transport vehicles are limited as to where the vehicles can go eg into housing estates, close to shops etc to make lift easier for people. We would have thought that this plan would have given more thought to a range of transport services to solve these problems.

We are also delighted to see that a minimum standard is being introduced and town services shall operate on a more frequent basis for longer. We have concerns however as to what will happen to these services if they are deemed not commercially viable. Will the services be stopped? What is the time scale before this happens? What happens to the people using the services? Will an alternative be given eg if someone manages to get a job because the transport is now available – what will happen to them?

Comments on the proposals for Rural Areas.

As highlighted in the report, 34.7% of the population live in the rural areas and 22% of the population live in open countryside so we are very concerned as to the lack of planning in this report for the people living in the countryside. As we provide transport in the rural areas we are more that aware of the isolation and exclusion faced by people in rural areas. We feel that the level of investigation in rural areas was not as high as that for urban areas and there appears to be very little information gathered from the Department who fund the Rural Community Transport Partnerships. The Rural Transport Fund has been instrumental in setting up the Partnerships and these have resulted in an improved quality of life for many many rural dwellers as well as increased opportunities for people to travel, to access work, training, health, and many other social events. Many groups in rural areas have discovered the benefits of Community Development and working together to improve their local communities since the introduction of rural transport so it is a huge disappointment that this plan has very little mention of the Rural Transport Fund and the Rural Community Transport Partnerships and in fact there appears to be no mention of co-ordination services and creating more joined up transport services from rural areas.

We like the idea of minimum service levels for rural settlements but we have a number of concerns in relation to these.....

- Many people would find it difficult to travel to the local bus stop either due to distance or mobility problems

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- How long will these services continue if it appears that they are not commercially viable? We have seen in the past where rural services are introduced and then withdrawn in 6 months.

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- What systems and procedures will be in place to ensure that people who use the services will not be left without transport after 6 months?

We believe that Community Transport is ideally positioned within the local rural communities to provide these services at better value for money, more flexible and adaptable as we currently provide more than just transport services. We provide a signposting service and organising role for people who need to travel from A-B. We try to ensure they have a seamless journey with information on what time services depart. We also provide a high standard of training and advice and are involved in many local networks and agencies. The main benefit with Community Transport is they have the confidence of the whole community.

We also feel that the concessionary fare scheme which is mentioned briefly in the plan should review the number of people from rural areas who are availing of these concessions. When it is discovered that many people cannot use a smart pass then these concessionary fares should be extended to Community Transport.

Conclusion

Rural Lift for South West Fermanagh are glad to see the Department attempt to improve services for all people outside of Belfast and we agreed with the principle that more accessible transport should be available to people particularly those who live in rural areas.

We are disappointed that the Community Transport sector has been largely ignored throughout the document and the plans for the future. We feel that we offer value for money, a caring and professional service and above all, the ear of all the people in the local community because regardless of who you speak to in a rural area they know of someone who uses Community Transport and how it has improved their quality of life.

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