



26<sup>th</sup> September 2017

## Government knee-jerk could mean death to lifeline voluntary transport links

Hundreds of thousands of isolated, vulnerable and disabled people across the UK face being stranded, unless government rethinks potentially damaging advice on community transport (CT)<sup>1</sup>.

This is the warning from a campaign group called *Mobility Matters*<sup>2</sup> - formed in a matter of weeks to prevent government from trying to overturn the way in which lifeline and door-to-door bus services are run.

Such services enable carers and members of the community who have difficulty using conventional buses to go shopping, access healthcare and social care and visit friends and family up and down the country. They are vital in preventing loneliness and isolation particularly in remote and rural areas and at least 40 million passenger journeys<sup>3</sup> could be affected, resulting in people being stranded in their own homes.

An unexpected letter from the Department for Transport on minibus permit and CT operation on 31 July 2017<sup>4</sup>, has suddenly questioned accepted practices and legislation of the last 40 years and is already resulting in some operators suspending or even withdrawing services and others thinking about closing down. The letter has huge implications for the many thousands of volunteer drivers who have always been an integral part of CT.

The government intends to consult on proposed changes in directive in the autumn. However, *Mobility Matters* is calling for a wider, holistic review of how CT operations are

Friendship

Diversity

Wellbeing

Unity

Equality

regulated in the UK and is urging the Department<sup>5</sup> to withdraw its letter before more damage is done - to enable vital, door-to-door services to continue to serve the needs of individuals and communities it has benefited for so long.

These include sisters Brenda and Hayley who live in rural areas of Dorset, are widows and over 75 years old. They reported suffering from loneliness and isolation since they are not on public transport routes, lack the confidence to drive independently and felt like they were burdening and relying too much their family. However, community transport links in Dorset have given them a new lease of life.

“It’s really helped us overcome our loneliness. We have made lots of new friends during our shopping trips and outings – the service has allowed us to get in touch with old school pals and seeing our old friends has brought back so many memories,” said Brenda.

“Our grandchildren are also allowed on the bus and we see them so much more, sometimes they join on shopping trips. On a day out on our way back, the driver often takes us on a route he knows will get us chatting and keep us alert – the nap can wait until we get home!” she concluded.

**40 million passenger trips** a year are run by a total of  
**1000 community transport groups** who operate between them  
**6,000 minibuses** – through the assistance of drivers including  
**25,000 volunteers** who donate  
**10 million hours of their time** every year

Many CT drivers are volunteers and new proposals will mean that they will have to obtain full PSV qualifications. This training costs around £1,200 per driver and it is thought that aside of the huge cost involved, many volunteers will not wish to undergo a bus driving test.

John Taylor<sup>6</sup>, director of passenger transport specialist, the TAS Partnership Ltd, who is helping to co-ordinate the aims of the campaign, explained the need for government to be challenged.

“We and others have long urged government of the need to review the regulations around community transport and so, we urge government to consult with CT operators now and to

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consider the full implications of any subsequent changes in legislation. The DfT's letter is misleading and could have a catastrophic impact for operators, for local government but most of all for the 40 million plus passengers who rely on these vital transport links.”

“It could be any one of us or our loved ones who need these services either now or in the future and as a country, we are entirely reliant on the CT sector for their safe and affordable provision. We urge ministers to stop and think before it's too late.”

To find out more about the campaign, how this might affect you and how to lend your support, please visit [www.ctpermits.org](http://www.ctpermits.org)

### **Notes to Editors**

- 1. Two high resolution images of community transport passengers and a picture of John Taylor are attached and further images available on request.**
  - 2. *Mobility Matters* is a collaboration of community transport operators across the country. The campaign sets out to raise awareness on the role and vital services of community transport; organise expert legal opinion if needed; offer clarity and advice to operators and convey the local and national evidence of the powerful social value provided.**
  - 3. All statistics contained in the press release have been drawn from a combination of sources including: Traffic Commissioner statistics; CTA and county council-level online directories and information; and extensive TAS Partnership research mapping permits and operations.**
  - 4. To download a copy of the letter the campaign responds to from the DfT's Stephen Fidler, Deputy Director of Buses & Taxis, please visit <https://ctpermits.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/170731-DfT-Letter-to-Permit-Issuers-GB.pdf>**
  - 5. John Taylor, who has been at the forefront of community transport development for nearly 40 years, met with transport minister Jesse Norman and Department officials on 12 September to discuss the need for a holistic review of the regulations around community transport permits; no further detail on the time of consultation was available.**
  - 6. For more information or to organise an interview, please contact Sarah Huntley on 07557 132775 or email her at [sarah@ctpermit.org](mailto:sarah@ctpermit.org) for more information.**
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