



Community Transport Project

June 2012

About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges that Canberra has been built on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respects to their elders and recognise the displacement and disadvantage they have suffered as a result of European settlement. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, people living with disadvantage and low-income citizens of the Territory.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' objectives are a community in which all people have the opportunities and resources needed to participate in and benefit from social and economic life and the development of a dynamic, collaborative and viable community sector.

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

The ACT HACC Program is a joint Commonwealth and State/Territory Program providing funding and assistance for Australians in need. ACTCOSS receives funding from the ACT Health Directorate under HACC.

ACTCOSS advises that this document may be publicly distributed, including by placing a copy on our website.

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Table of contents

About ACTCOSS	2
Table of contents.....	3
Acronyms	4
Introduction	5
About the HACC program.....	5
The importance of transport.....	6
Transport in the ACT	7
HACC transport providers	7
Belconnen Community Service Inc.....	7
Communities@Work.....	8
Gungahlin Regional Community Service	8
Northside Community Service	9
Southside Community Services Inc.	9
Woden Community Service Inc.	9
Other HACC transport providers.....	10
Community Buses	10
Community Transport Forum.....	10
Strengths	11
Gaps	11
Opportunities.....	12
Community Transport Working Group	12
ACT Budget	13
Transport for Canberra	13
Transport Review.....	13
Questions for further research and consideration:	13
Conclusion.....	14
Reference list.....	15

Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
HACC	Home and Community Care
SDoH	Social Determinants of Health
UNSW	University of New South Wales
BCS	Belconnen Community Service Inc.
NCS	Northside Community Service
GRCS	Gungahlin Regional Community Service
SSCS	Southside Community Services Inc.
WCS	Woden Community Service Inc.

Introduction

Transport systems are crucial in a city's development and play a vital role in the everyday lives of its citizens. Transport is a way to provide access to goods and services as well as helping to create a more liveable, active and safer environment for people.¹ Additionally, transport helps support and create a stronger, more inclusive economy.

In late 2011, the ACT Government requested comments on two policies – the draft Transport for Canberra policy paper, and the Draft ACT Planning Strategy. Both policy papers recognised transport as an integral part of the development of the ACT. Now is an opportune time for the community sector to help shape thinking about transport in a more holistic and collaborative manner. In particular, areas such as the Home and Community Care (HACC) sector which provide transport to people experiencing disadvantage can identify where the gaps lie, and potential ways in which these can be addressed.

This paper will draw together information about the main HACC transport providers in the ACT; examine areas where there are gaps in the provision of such services; and provide a list of questions to take discussions forward.

About the HACC program

The HACC Program is a joint Australian, State and Territory initiative, managed in the ACT through the Health Directorate. The management of the program is changing in 2012 with the Department of Health and Ageing taking direct oversight for areas working with older Australians (over 65 years, or 50 years for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders).

The ACT HACC Sector consists of 32 service delivery organisations and in 2010-11 there were a total of 13,012 clients who accessed HACC services in the ACT.² The sector has expanded rapidly over the past 10 years, which has been particularly driven by demographic change and demand will continue to grow in the coming decades.

The HACC Program aims to provide community care services to frail aged and younger people with disabilities, as well as their carers, enabling them to live as independently as possible in the community. Consumers can receive a variety of services from the HACC Program including nursing care, personal care, meals and other food services, home modification and maintenance, counselling, allied health care, respite care and transport. The aim of the program is to promote independence and to assist frail older people and people with disabilities to continue living in the community.

ACTCOSS provides sector development programs and support to HACC agencies.

1 ACT Government, *Transport for Canberra*, ACT, 2012.

2 ACTCOSS, *HACC Celebration Day Report 2011*, September 2011.

The importance of transport

Transport is inextricably linked to the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). Cycling, walking and the use of public transport promote health through exercise, and reducing car accidents and air pollution. More importantly however, transport is vital in allowing people to access employment and education, areas which have an impact on the SDoH. The Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity at the University of New South Wales explored the links between public transport and health and found long term unemployed people identified transport as one of the main factors which prevented them from obtaining work.³

There is also a strong link between social exclusion and a lack of transport. People who do not own a vehicle, live in outer suburbs, work irregular hours or are experiencing disadvantage in some way can be prevented by inadequate transport from accessing key local services or attending meetings and social activities such as jobs, learning, healthcare, food shopping or leisure.

The Path Less Travelled notes the four main ways people can be excluded by transport from the activities they wish to undertake as:

- Spatially- they cannot get there at all;
- Temporally- They cannot get there at the appropriate time;
- Financially- They cannot afford to get there;
- Personally- They lack the mental or physical capacities to use the available means of mobility.⁴

For transport systems to operate in a socially inclusive manner, they must consider the life circumstances of a range of people. Transport options for people experiencing disadvantage may need to be specifically targeted, servicing only a small number of people or operating during non-peak periods.

3 B Christl, P Harris and M Wise, *A review of the Evidence of the Impact of Public Transport on Health in Australia*, University of New South Wales, Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation, UNSW, Australia, 2009, accessed 12 November 2011, http://www.hiaconnect.edu.au/files/Impact_of_Public_Transport_on%20Health_in_Australia.pdf

4 ACTCOSS, *The Path Less Travelled – Transport and Social Inclusion in the ACT*, August 2009.

Transport in the ACT

Geographically, the ACT is a challenging city. Although small, with new satellite suburbs undergoing development, Canberra is increasingly becoming a spread-out city and the public transport system is yet to catch up to expanding need.

In 2009, 84.5% of Canberra's population used a car as the major form of transport⁵ and the ACT had the second highest rate of passenger vehicle registrations with 596 registrations per 1000 people.⁶

However, there are ACT residents who are not able to use a car as their major form of transport, leaving them reliant on public transport. This may be due to the inability to physically drive a car; because they cannot afford a car; or because they do not or cannot have a license to drive a car.

People who are eligible for HACC services often fall under the category of being reliant on public transport as their main form of transport, often because of an inability to drive a car due to disability or age.

HACC transport providers

The ACT's six Regional Community Services (listed below) are funded to provide transport to clients who are eligible for HACC services. Clients do not need to be receiving any other HACC service to use HACC Transport.⁷

Belconnen Community Service Inc.⁸

Belconnen Community Service (BCS) provide community transport as funded by the HACC program for medical and paramedical appointments, social, recreational and adult educational activities, shopping trips and various group activities.

Transport is available for the frail aged and those living with a disability and their carers living independently in the Canberra community and is focused on promoting the independence and community involvement of program participants. The community transport program operates seven days per week, with bookings and administration available Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

In the financial year 2010-11, BCS coordinated 327,000 km of community transport supported by 10 staff, four BCS-owned vehicles and a team of

5 ACT Government, *Canberra Quick Stats: 2009-2010*, Australian Capital Territory, Canberra, April 2010, viewed 2 December 2011, http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/154501/canberra-quickstats-2009-10.pdf

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 7 December 2011, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1370.0~2010~Chapter~State%20and%20territory%20differences%20%284.9.3.1%29>

7 ACT Government, Community Services, viewed 7 December 2011, http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/wac/ageing/ACT_Seniors_Directory/transport_and_mobility#hacc

8 Information from Belconnen Community Service website: <http://www.bcsact.com.au/community-transport>

volunteers who donated 7,300 hours to the program. BCS estimates an average of 339 people per month are able to remain independent in their own homes through the transport program.⁹

Communities@Work¹⁰

The HACC transport program at Communities@Work provides a vehicle and driver to HACC clients who are unable to use public transport.

Staff and volunteers assist clients to get to medical or social appointments, with qualified drivers able to be booked from between 7.00 am and 7.00 pm Monday to Friday. There are limited trips available on weekends.

During the financial year 2010-11, the HACC transport program at Communities @Work provided 18,517 trips and purchased a new commuter bus with a wheel-chair lifter.¹¹

Gungahlin Regional Community Service¹²

Community transport is a HACC funded service which is available for eligible Gungahlin residents. A GRCS Case Manager is available to assess specific needs.

There are three different services available to the community. Primarily, transport is provided for medical, paramedical (including injury) appointments and for social activities. This transport is provided in different ways, including three HACC specific sedans which carry up to three clients at a time; a HACC HiAce which carries up to eight clients; and volunteer drivers who sometimes use their own cars.

Existing HACC eligible clients needing to access transport are assessed to determine the most appropriate vehicle relevant to their level of mobility and other needs. Many clients have mobility limitations which restricts their use of the HiAce due to their inability to enter or exit the vehicle. The HACC cars have limited space in the boot area for wheelchairs and wheelie walkers. As these aids are used by many clients, this limitation is a challenge to be addressed daily.

GRCS manages a community bus which can carry up to 20 passengers. This bus is not a HACC vehicle and eligibility is much less rigid with a broader range of options for use. This vehicle is wheelchair friendly and has a lifter at the back for wheelchairs and people with mobility issues. The vehicle is used by many groups for social transport and shopping.

9 Belconnen Community Service, Annual Report 2010-2011, viewed 20 January 2012, <http://bcsact.com.au/annualreport2011/#>

10 Information from Communities@Work website: <http://www.commsatwork.org/CommunityServices/TransportServices/tabid/98/Default.aspx>

11 Communities@Work, *Building our Capacity: Annual Report 2010/2011*, p.67.

12 Information from Gungahlin Regional Community Service website: <http://www.grcs.org.au/node/20>

The number of trips as the agreed output annually is 9,572. In the period 2010-2011, GRCS completed 10,599 trips.

GRCS has travelled approximately 69,848 kilometres in the past six months for 27 clients from 50 countries. This reflects the census data that reports that 25% of persons residing in the area do not speak English at home.

Northside Community Service¹³

Northside Community Service (NCS) provides a transport service for HACC eligible clients who are unable to access public transport. Transport is provided for medical appointments, shopping trips and community-based social activities. The NCS fleet consists of a wheel chair accessible van, two 12-seater mini buses for multiple passengers, three station wagons for single person trips and the Government funded mini bus for community use.

For the 2010-2011 financial year Northside Community Service provided 19,511 trips to clients residing in the inner north of Canberra.

Southside Community Services Inc.¹⁴

The Special Care Transport program is designed to assist frail aged, younger people with disabilities, and their carers, with transport to medical appointments, social and shopping activities. This service is available between the hours of 8.00am – 6.30pm weekdays and limited hours during the weekend.

Woden Community Service Inc.¹⁵

Woden Community Service provide community transport to HACC clients who are unable to access public transport and need to attend medical and other appointments, with a \$3 fee applying.

In their 2010-11 annual report, WCS reported their three HACC funded vehicles travelled over 79,562 km over 14,014 trips for 324 clients.¹⁶

To complement the HACC service, WCS provides a regional community bus service. The 22-seater community bus is wheelchair accessible and is for people who are socially isolated, older people who live in nursing/retirement villages, parents with young children, people who are not eligible for HACC transport and not able to access ACTION buses. This service is available Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3.30pm and a gold coin donation is requested from passengers.

13 Information from Northside Community Service website: <http://www.northside.asn.au/seniors/transport>

14 Information from Southside Community Services Inc. website: http://www.sscs.org.au/page.php?page_id=7

15 Information from Woden Community Service Inc. website: http://www.wcs.org.au/programs/aged_care/

16 Woden Community Service Inc., Annual Report 2010-2011, viewed 20 January 2012, http://www.wcs.org.au/WCS_AnnualReport2011_WEB_201011.pdf

In the past 12 months the community bus has provided 3,073 trips for 282 people.

Other HACC transport providers

In addition to the six main regional service providers, there are several other organisations who provide HACC transport to clients. However this service is usually connected to in-house programs the organisation runs, to allow clients to attend the programs. This 'frees up' the six main regional services to provide transport to other, non-HACC clients in the community.

Community Buses

Each of the six regional community service organisations have been provided with a 22-seater mini bus to provide transport for people who are socially isolated because of a lack of transport options, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who lack support networks; parents with young children; and people experiencing health problems who cannot access other bus services.¹⁷ The services have also been provided with funding for a bus driver and transport coordination.

The buses leases come up for renewal in February 2013. The Regionals are currently in negotiations with the ACT Government on vehicle leases for the future.

Community Transport Forum

On 6 March 2012 a Community Transport Forum gathering took place to discuss issues associated with community transport in Canberra. The forum was facilitated by ACTCOSS and staff members from each of Canberra's six regional community services were present.

The need for discussion around community transport became apparent following the services being called together by the Community Services Directorate to look at the mini bus schedule. The need for better, accessible transport remains a pressing issue nationally and locally.

17 ACT Government, *Canberra Quick Stats: 2009-2010*, Australian Capital Territory, Canberra, April 2010, viewed 2 December 2011, http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/28710/Community_Bus_Brochure_26_June_08.pdf

Strengths

During the forum, service providers discussed the strengths of community transport, as follows:

- Effective
- Affordable
- Responsive
- Reliable
- Provides respite for carers
- Gives clients independence
- Door-to-door service
- Committed Staff
- Relationships (with drivers)
- Drivers are responsive and attentive
- Flexible – not saying ‘no’
- Creative
- Creating new social networks for people
- Accessible
- Providing travel around Canberra for people
- Buses – good for groups
- Resource sharing

Gaps

HACC transport providers have also indicated a number of gaps in the system, including:

- A shortage of wheelchair accessible taxis available in Canberra
- A perceived lack of public transport drivers (taxis and buses) who are aware of the specific needs of HACC clients
- A shortage of volunteer drivers due to the rising cost of petrol and costs associated with insurance
- The prioritisation of medical appointments over social activities as the need for transport services rise, impacting on community inclusion
- Problems with off-street parking around apartment blocks for HACC service providers when picking up or dropping off clients who require wheelchairs or additional support getting into or out of the building

- Issues with parking at hospitals and shopping centres including the increased cost of parking in the City and Woden areas
- The jurisdictional limitations of Canberra which results in clients often living far away from the services they need and spending a substantial amount of time on public transport, or being reliant on HACC providers for their every day transport needs.

Opportunities

The Community Transport Forum identified several opportunities to progress community transport in Canberra. The opportunities which were identified as most important and most urgent were working together as community services including the sharing of resources, and improving relationships with government to create better services with better use of funds.

Additionally, the forum formulated the idea of a peak body, industry association or Working Group (see Community Transport Working Group *below*) to support information sharing and programs to address current gaps in the system. This group would also support the identified opportunity for the integration of community services to coordinate what transport they already have as a way of addressing limitations.

Another opportunity identified at the forum was the potential to collect data with regard to service provision from each regional community service. This data was identified as useful, especially in providing evidence and figures in relation to the extent of service delivery. Forum members agreed collecting common data would assist in creating a collective front for communicating with the government, and that the Working Group would clarify exactly what data is to be collected, during what period of time, and why that specific data will be useful.

Other opportunities identified include a centralised booking system to better streamline community transport options, and a more robust pool of volunteers with specific skill sets and a targeted campaign to attract such volunteers to the community transport area.

Community Transport Working Group

Members of the forum agreed to form an ongoing Community Transport Working Group, which comprises generally of one or two representatives from each of the six regional services. ACTCOSS will support the Working Group in its early stages. The Working Group will meet regularly to discuss issues around community transport more broadly, and to work to implement the identified ways in which Regionals can work together to address transport needs. The Working Group has met three times as of 22 June 2012 and is working together and with the ACT Government to negotiate vehicle leases for the next three years. The Working Group is also in discussions around data

collection and other collaboration opportunities, as well as investigating options with Government for a centralised booking system.

ACT Budget

The ACT Budget for 2012-13 contained a substantial amount of money for public transport, namely the updating of ACTION buses, but was sorely lacking in any mention of community transport. This is despite ACTCOSS and other community organisations calling repeatedly for an increased and ongoing investment in community transport as a viable alternative to public transport.

Transport for Canberra

Transport for Canberra, the ACT Government's overarching policy for transport planning for the next 20 years, was released in March 2012. Developed after consultation with the community, the policy mentioned community transport and community organisations under the heading 'Flexible Transport' but did not go into any great depth on the subject.

In a letter to Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Simon Corbell MLA, ACTCOSS recommended the Government consult closely with community transport providers, in particular the six main providers, to ensure community needs are considered in the roll-out of *Transport for Canberra*. ACTCOSS is noted it was willing to support this engagement.

Transport Review

The ACT Government has hired an external assessor to perform a review of Canberra's transport system. While this review has been in the works for a while, it has recently come to the forefront and is expected to be conducted within the next 12 months. The review is a welcome step in identifying areas for improvement as well as collecting hard evidence which can be used to implement future change.

The community sector welcomes the review as a way to shed light on gaps in community transport, but also acknowledges the many decisions and amount of service provision which will take place before the results of the review will be known and can be used to incite change.

Questions for further research and consideration:

- What is currently working well for the services?
- What are the opportunities to progress?
- What are other jurisdictions (e.g. NSW, QLD) doing?

- How can organisations better utilise the resources they have available?

Conclusion

Transport is a pertinent issue for the ACT, and something which should remain on the agenda for the community sector and government. There are a number of ways in which Canberra can move forward in creating better, more accessible community transport to ensure citizens of the ACT do not suffer from disadvantage due to inadequate transport provision. Working collaboratively as a community sector and with government can further progress the issue of community transport and continue to fill the gaps of unmet need as well as take advantage of opportunities arising.

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