



Council of Social Service of New South Wales

66 Albion St, Surry Hills NSW
phone 02 9211 2599 fax 02 9281 1968
email info@ncoss.org.au web www.ncoss.org.au

abn 85001 797 137

Cathryn Cummins
Principal Council Officer
Legislative Council
Select Committee on the NSW Taxi Industry
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
taxicommittee@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms. Cummins,

NCOSS would like to thank you for opportunity to appear before the Select Committee on the NSW Taxi Industry on the 3 February 2010.

At the Hearing we were given a number of questions on notice. Following are NCOSS response to these questions.

Ms Lee Rhiannon (Page 20 of the transcript)

Comment on the trading of (WATs) plates and whether or not that has led to a reduction in the availability of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis as opposed to the intention, which was to encourage their use.

NCOSS spoke with a number of its members and consulted with its Transport Policy Advice Group. They informed us that initially there was no response from the taxi industry as no one wanted the plates. The plates were provided free of charge as a way of getting them into the market place. NCOSS was told that there should be no impact on the availability of plates as drivers can now see the worth of the plates, especially in terms of guaranteed customers.

The Hon. Trevor Khan (Page 20 of the transcript)

Using the phone to book a taxi and incurring a booking fee: Who is subsidised: is it the user or the operator/driver who receives the subsidy? How do you achieve that equivalence? Where do you put the money?

NCOSS supports payment directly to the individual possibly through the use of a voucher scheme.

NCOSS was informed that community transport groups often make a booking on a person's behalf and the organisation is charged a booking fee. The person could provide the community transport provider the voucher for the booking fee.

However, it was noted that often people who use wheelchairs or are sight impaired deal directly with their preferred driver and by-pass the booking system.

Chair (Page 20 of the transcript)

One of the main complaints is that taxi drivers picking up passengers or exiting passengers are stopping in no-stopping zones or things of that nature and are suddenly confronted with a situation where they want to do the right thing by the passenger but are terrified they are going to end up with a \$150 fine or some other amount. Have you looked at whether taxi drivers in those circumstances should be given exemptions? The second part of the question relates to the use of bus lanes and transit lanes and stopping at bus stops. Has your organisation looked at whether taxi drivers should be given that privilege or exemption to allow them to be of more assistance to their passengers and more accessible to their passengers?

NCOSS was unable to obtain a consensus view about taxi drivers stopping in no-stopping zones. There was a general view that no-stopping zones are usually there for a traffic safety reason and that if you permit one group to stop there it may open the issue up to a range of people wanting to be able to stop in these zones.

One member stated that they have never heard of any taxi driver being booked for dropping a person with a disability in a no-stopping zone. However, this would appear to be a choice made by those policing these zones.

In regards to loading zones NCOSS believes that these should be made available for taxi drivers who are transporting people who use wheelchairs as long as they have the right permits etc. The taxi should be able to stop in the zone and leave the vehicle for up to 15 minutes in order to assist the passenger before being fined. The difficulty comes when taxi drivers are transporting older frail people or people with other types of disability or impairment. Consideration has to be given as to how these taxis can identify that they are providing transport to someone who needs support and assistance.

The Hon. Penny Sharpe (Page 21 of the transcript)

Demand Responsive Transport: Can you tell the committee more about the opportunities you see for taxis as a provider or provide examples of where you know that is happening? How do you think it could work?

NCOSS refers the Committee to the work of academics and others who can provide much greater depth and knowledge about Demand Responsive Transport:

- David Denmark - Principal of Transport Planning and Management, a firm that specialises in accessible transport planning, management, research and policy development.
- Prof Julian Hine - Professor of Transport, University of Ulster, UK
- Prof Graham Currie - Chair of Public Transport, Monash University
- John Stanley - Executive Director of Bus Association Victoria

Attached to this letter is a copy of 'Report on the Passengers' Choice Project' a project run by Great Community Transport in the Blue Mountains, Penrith and Hawkesbury Local Government Areas. The aim of this project was to address a range of transport problems with a view to using the results as a model for implementation in other parts of the State.

The Hon. Penny Sharpe (Page 21 of the transcript)

In relation to customer performance and complaints handling, is your preference for the Government to conduct the surveys or should the networks be required to do more customer service satisfaction survey themselves as part of their reporting?

NCOSS supports the Government conducting the surveys. There are a number of reasons for this:

- It maintains the independence of the survey – people are more likely to be open and honest if their responses are given to a body independent of a service or industry they are commenting on. People can have the perception that they will be 'punished' in some way if it is the provider themselves doing the survey and the person is negative about the service.
- Some taxi operators, especially in regional, rural and remote areas may be very small (i.e. one to two people). This means that the operator will not have the resources to do the survey. People in these areas may not be willing to be open as the operator may be able to easily identify who said what.

NCOSS argues that the Government must release the findings from any customer satisfaction survey, including the name of the taxi operator, and the steps that the taxi operator is taking to address any concerns raised in the survey. A follow-up evaluation must also be provided to demonstrate that the taxi operator has addressed the issues.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Hearing.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Samantha Edmonds on (02)

Yours sincerely



Alison Peters
Director

15th February, 2010.

Report on the Passengers Choice Project

Prepared for Great Community Transport

By

Transport Planning and Management

July 2009

Project reference

Project Name: Passenger Choices Project

Project Number: Pn 9008505

Organisation : Great Community Transport Inc.

Background

In 2005 Great Community Transport received funding through the Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme (WSAAS) to pilot a four year project called Passengers Choice in the Blue Mountains, Penrith and Hawkesbury Local Government Areas. The aim of this project was to address a range of transport problems with a view to using the results as a model for implementation in other parts of the State.

The project fitted with the proposed reforms of the Australian community care system flagged in "A New Strategy for Community Care- The Way Forward" by:

- addressing gaps and overlaps in service delivery;
- providing easier access to services;
- enhancing service management;
- streamlining Australian Government programs; and
- developing a partnership approach to transport issues.

Purpose

Passengers Choice was to establish a Transport Clearing House, which was to be a one-stop-shop for transport information, a booking service (spare seat sharing scheme) and a bus brokerage scheme with a view to expanding transport options for the "transport disadvantaged" people in the three LGAs. This included indigenous people, people with disabilities, hostel and nursing home residents and those people who are isolated.

Objectives

The objectives of the Project were defined as:

- better access by individuals and communities to commercial, government and community services and increased community involvement by isolated people.
- increased use of transport service capacity and more efficient services.

The primary products/services produced by the Project were to be:

- an interactive website designed to facilitate a transport clearinghouse function;
- a transport register scheme/service; and
- a vehicle spare seat sharing scheme/service.

Strategies to achieve the objectives and develop the products and services as outlined in the funding application were to be:

- establish advisory group for the project to include stakeholders;
- design clearinghouse for transport services; and
- develop specifications for multi-modal demand responsive transport scheme.

The target groups specified in the funding application were those people considered to be transport disadvantaged including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, people with a disability, youth, single parents, geographically isolated communities, low income groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Review and Evaluation

The project was reviewed on seven occasions in order to produce returns for the funding program, the Area Assistance Scheme. The returns were made in December 2005, June 2006, November 2006, February 2007, November 2007, May 2008 and December 2008.

In addition a mid-term evaluation was undertaken by an independent Transport Behaviour Consultant in February 2007.

This report is not a formal evaluation per se but a description of the project activities and its achievements in relation to its aims and objectives over its life.

Early narrative

The Passengers Choice project submission was one of the recommendations from the Wentworth Transport Research project¹, in which extensive consultations with services, transport providers and clients identified the need to establish a one-stop-shop for local transport information, a booking service for local transports (spare seat sharing scheme) and a bus brokerage scheme.

This project aimed to benefit residents of the Blue Mountains, Penrith and Hawkesbury who are transport disadvantaged in that they are people who, because of physical or mental disability, income status, isolation or age are unable to transport themselves or to purchase transport and are, therefore, dependent upon others to obtain access to health care, employment, education, shopping, social activities, or other life-sustaining activities.

An Advisory Committee was established comprising TRI Community Exchange, Penrith Disabilities Resource Centre, Western Sydney Community Forum, Blue Mountains, Penrith and Hawkesbury Councils, Blue Mountains Commuter Association, Westbus and Blue Mountains Bus Companies, Peppercorn Place, Better Service Delivery program (NSW Department of Commerce), Vic's Maxi Transport, Sydney West Area Health Services, NSW Ministry of Transport, Regional HACC Access Worker and Gilgai Aboriginal Services.

Role of the Advisory Committee

The Role of the Advisory Committee was to :

- advise the development and oversee the project;
- monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the project;
- disseminate information about the project; and
- ensure access to the services for transport disadvantaged people by Aboriginal and Torres Straits islander and CALD communities.

Minutes of the meetings and recommendations were tabled for acceptance at the GCT Board meetings. Input was sought from other key stakeholders including State and Federal Governments as appropriate.

¹Transport Planning and Management (2005) The Wentworth Community Transport Plan, prepared for Great Community Transport, Lawson NSW.

The Transport Clearinghouse

The project was implemented in a number of stages under the umbrella of a Transport Clearinghouse which would provide a one-stop-shop for transport information and access to services and which would also enhance cooperation between existing transport providers, referral agencies, service providers and passengers. The Clearinghouse was to facilitate the following activities in order to realise the objectives:

Consultations

Much of the basic transport information had already been gathered through the Wentworth Transport Project. This was to be followed up by additional consultations among the Passengers Choice Project (PCP) target group in the form of focus groups and surveys and with transport operators in the form of individual discussions and meetings.

In addition the interactive web site (SmartLink Transport) was to offer transport solutions under convenient headings with an area designated for feedback "Tell us your transport problem".

Website development

An interactive website was to be developed with a number of features including:

- transport service information;
- links to a Transport Register;
- a feedback function; and
- links to other relevant information

Increasing the use of transport service capacity and more effective usage of spare seats

This was to be addressed in two ways:

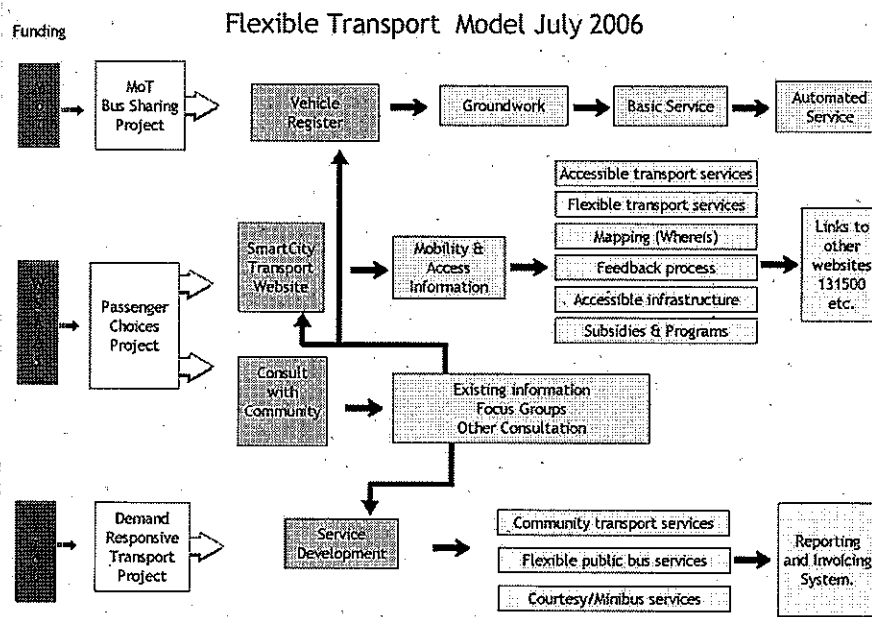
1. The establishment of a Vehicle Brokerage scheme (subsequently call the Transport Register). This would include the development of a refreshable web-site (supported by a data-base) that displays available community and public transport vehicles for hire by eligible, registered community groups. Vehicles were to be categorised by their location and their seating capacity as well as their availability for hire by eligible and registered groups. Groups that could benefit are youth, non-profit community groups, ATSI and CALD groups.
2. The development of a spare seat sharing approach which would involve the definition of specifications for an automated demand responsive transport scheme.

This project was to endeavour to maximise the use of both technology and collaboration thereby assuring the more efficient use of existing transport resources through improved capacity management and making access to transport services easier and more appropriate for the "transport disadvantaged" of the region.

Arrangements were made to employ a Mobility and Access worker in early 2006 and someone was employed on the 1st May 2006. This worker started by developing a business plan which was to include future networking opportunities with relevant groups and Councils. However, he resigned without notice two months later and his role was subsumed into that of the Manager of GCT rather than delay the project with a second employment process.

By June 2006 a Business Plan for the project was published and a Flexible Transport model developed (see figure below).

Figure 1. Flexible Transport Model showing funding streams and activities



In late 2006 a SmartCity Transport Report was distributed to interested parties in order to retain interest prior to the launch of the website.

In mid 2008 the position of Transport Project Worker was advertised. A candidate was selected but withdrew at the last moment so the existing structure involving project management by the Great Community Transport manager was retained with other tasks being the responsibility of an Administrative Worker who was employed from mid-2007.

Activity Stream 1 – continuing consultations

The PCP built upon the consultations which occurred during the Wentworth Transport Project.

One of the aims of the Passengers Choice project was to organise and hold specifically targeted focus groups, bringing together representatives from the 3 LGAs and involving them through a facilitated process of questions and information sharing to gather their thoughts on this project. This was seen as a priority to attract target population involvement in the establishment of the web-based one-stop-shop.

The direction changed slightly with a new focus on collecting information on local transport needs, providing links to local transport information and services and identifying the possibilities for establishing a spare seat sharing scheme and a vehicle brokerage scheme (a transport register).

This was achieved by holding focus groups, undertaking a survey, a youth consultation and meeting with bus operators.

Focus groups

A range of people who are at risk of transport disadvantage were given the opportunity to voice their opinions through Focus Groups on their mobility and transport needs. These included senior citizens, people living with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, members of CALD communities and young people. Groups such as the Penrith Disabilities Resource

Centre, Gilgai Aboriginal Services and TRI Community Exchange HACC Access Workers helped recruit participants for these groups.

Except in the case of young people, consultations were held with representatives of these groups from the three LGAs in focus groups held at a central location (transport was provided). The focus groups were facilitated by professionals working in the transport field including Helen Battelino (Transport Behaviour Consultant), Anne Hurni (University of Western Sydney Transport Researcher) and David Denmark (Independent Transport Planner). They allowed participants to share their experiences of transport (good and bad), to discuss the particular issues confronting their group in accessing transport and to offer their input into the solutions proposed by this project.

The first focus group, called Seniors Choice, was held at the Penrith Library in Senior Citizens week on 3rd April 2006 with 18 seniors representing the 3 LGAs attending, contributing and eager for further involvement as the project develops. The session was documented and captured on video as well.

The Seniors Choice Focus group was an example of a useful partnership with Jane Holdsworth from the Penrith Valley Economic Development Corporation facilitating the event and a Seniors week grant from Penrith City Council paying for the venue and the catering.

All of the results from the Focus groups were written up as formal reports.

People who work with the identified target groups were also targeted for input and information. Presentations of the project were given to the Nepean Regional Disabilities Forum in May 2006 and the Hawkesbury HACC Forum in June.

Youth Consultation

Following preliminary discussions with youth workers, a different strategy was used to canvass the opinions of young people within the area whereby the youth workers collected the information through discussions with the local youth members and reported back to the project team.

A report on the consultation was prepared in early 2007.

Survey of community groups

During the second half of 2006 a survey about transport needs of residents was sent to over 260 local community groups. Over a quarter were returned with a range of specific client groups being well represented among the respondents.

An overwhelming majority (84%) rated the importance of transport to their clients as high or very high and 56% indicated that more than half of their clients suffered from transport disadvantage. Respondents reported that the results of transport disadvantage were poor access to services and opportunities, social and geographic isolation and cost and inconvenience. More than half of the respondents (59%) indicated that they gave some assistance with transport to their clients.

Forty-six respondents (72%) recorded interest in using a transport access scheme with cost, availability, suitability and accessibility determining their participation. Respondents expected that a transport access scheme would enable clients to make more use of their services with resultant better client outcomes and enable the organization to save costs and offer a better service.

In early 2008 another survey was prepared in conjunction with TRI Community Exchange to gather information about local groups and their transport needs.

Public transport operators

Discussions were held with several of the taxi companies in the area about the project and transport providers from the 3 LGAs were invited to provide representation on the Advisory committee. Westbus and Blue Mountains Bus Service took up the offer and were also involved in specific consultations in the development of the demand responsive transport project.

In addition David Denmark conducted separate interviews with the Managing Directors of Westbus and the Blue Mountains Bus Service and a round table discussion with Hawkesbury bus operators including BusWays at Richmond.

The results of these consultations were written up in a formal report for the Advisory Group.

Activity Stream 2 – website

The purpose of the website was to provide a central point for information provision and a feedback facility where transport issues and gaps can be registered for future transport planning and consultations.

The web-site was also to be developed to accommodate a spare seat sharing facility as well as incorporating links to the web sites of other transport providers.

Support for the development of the website, originally called SmartCity Transport, was provided by Penrith City Council Information Technology Department, University of Western Sydney, Penrith Valley Economic Development Corporation, White River designs and the Better Service Delivery Program Webmaster.

Involvement of University of Western Sydney IT Students

Some of the work on the website was undertaken by IT students from the University of Western Sydney, supervised by the manager of the IT section of Penrith City Council.

Another step forward occurred with a second group of University of Western Sydney, IT students integrating the *WhereIs?* program to validate addresses (a special arrangement was made with *WhereIs?* for 3 months to access higher level of service at a lesser cost) and to incorporate a reporting format to collect transport needs data. Penrith City Council hosted the web-site while it was being developed.

A third group of students were assigned in late 2006, this time under the full direction of lecturer George Bryan, and they produced a working model of the site. This was demonstrated to the Advisory Committee in December of that year.

Website hosting

The NSW Department of Commerce agree to host the website through the HSNet program and the manager of this program remained a member of the Advisory Committee throughout the Passengers Choice Project.

Ann Hurni, a University of Western Sydney transport researcher, developed a selection of questions to be incorporated in the web-site to enable the collection of information that would be relevant to furthering the aims of the program.

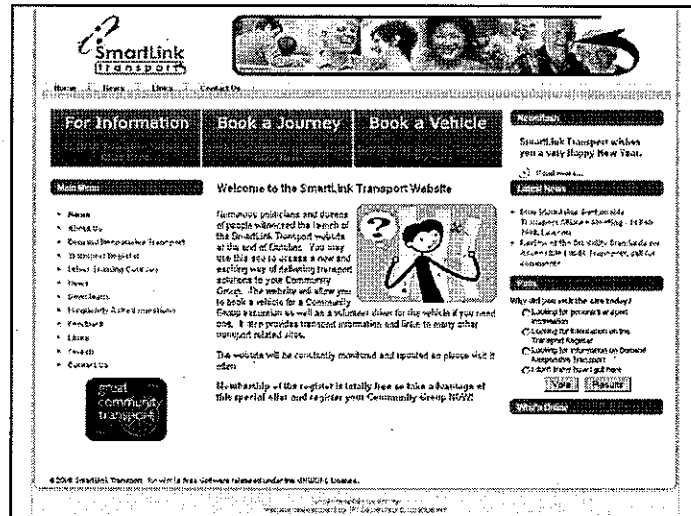
To ensure that the web pages would be user friendly, White River Designs, a local graphic designer redesigned the web-page presentation with the design taking into consideration those people who are vision impaired.

Final development of website

In early 2007 it was decided that the student version of the website was not robust enough for operational use leading to the engagement of a commercial webpage development service to complete the work.

At this time there was also recognition that the use of the name "SmartCity Transport" was subject to cancellation on notice. It was also thought that the name may not be appropriate for the application of the scheme to a wider area. The name was consequently changed to "SmartLink Transport".

Figure 2. Screenshot of website



The website launch took place in mid-2007 and was attended by the Mayors and Councillors from both Penrith and Hawkesbury Councils.

In 2008 the hosting of the web site was taken over by Tri Community Exchange in Penrith who also manage the transport information on the site.

Promotion of the website continued in 2008 with more presentations being given at Inter-agencies and forums in the 3 LGAs. There were problems with the website for two weeks in the middle of 2008 but these were resolved.

In early 2009 the web-site was continuing to receive a lot of visitors with TRI Community Exchange providing a valuable service with current transport stories being regularly added.

The site currently provides transport information, links to the Transport Register, Driver Training Courses, news, information about the Demand Responsive Transport project, links to other information sources and other relevant sites.

Activity Stream 3 – Increase use of transport service capacity and more efficient spare seat usage.

It was planned that the second stage of the web-site development would involve the development of a Transport Register and facilitate the establishment a spare seat sharing scheme where approved members (transport providers) will be able to register their spare seats on transports being provided.

Transport Register

The purpose of the Passengers Choice Transport Register was to provide an effective co-ordination model for community vehicle lenders and borrowers that could improve options


for those “transport disadvantaged” and non-profit community groups needing to access minibuses. By mid-2006 the development of a Passengers Choice Transport Register was under way. A significant step forward in mid-2006 was the approval of \$20,000 funding from the NSW Ministry of Transport for the purchase of a computer program that allows the Register, based on a Victorian model, to be web-based. This would allow bookings to be made online both during and after office hours thus avoiding the need to employ a booking clerk. It was intended that the online booking system would operate via the SmartLink website.

Ensuring that community groups were aware of this new project was seen as a priority so advertisements were placed in the relevant local papers as well as contact with community groups being made by mail, email and telephone about the new service and the establishment of the web-based Transport Register. The development of the Transport Register was seen as a community building and strengthening process improving access for the transport disadvantaged groups.

In mid-2006 transport operators were surveyed to discover the level of interest in being involved in the vehicle brokerage model and four meetings with potential borrower and lender groups were held in different locations.

The Passengers Choice Transport Register prototype was completed in late 2006 and was being demonstrated to interested stakeholders. Focus groups were used gain their feedback. All of the issues they raised were documented and addressed.

Figure 3. Booking form from Transport Register Website



Ring 1300 557 346

SMARTLINK TRANSPORT REGISTER
Group Registration Form

Name of the group :

Address:

Mail address (if different)

Email address:.....

ABN:

Phone No. Fax Number.....

Contact Person:
Name..... Role.....

Contact No..... e-mail.....

In early 2007 groups were invited to become members of the Register.

Legal advice relating to the interface between owners vehicle comprehensive insurance and the Transport Register insurance was also sought at this time in order to ensure that there would be no gaps in insurance coverage. This was important as concerns about insurance coverage is the most commonly identified problem that prospective vehicle providers raise.

In mid-2007 the Transport Register software was trialled.

Discussions also took place with the State Emergency Management Services regarding possible co-operation in compiling and providing up-to-date data on local community groups with vehicles and their details in times of emergency.

The SmartLink Transport Register started in November 2007 but didn't really attract much interest over the holiday period. Interest increased from January 2008. After negotiations with Inner West Community Transport the LGA of Canterbury was added to the register.

In early 2008 work started on three operating manuals for the Transport Register Borrower groups.

By February 2008 there were 22 member groups which grew to 56 by mid-year including Blue Mountains City Council. Participants were able to book vehicles online from the beginning of July and the numbers continued to grow.

By August 2008 there were 109 member groups on the Vehicle Register although there were still problems with attracting enough lender agencies. Most groups continue to ring up to book vehicles but an increasing number were doing this online.

Table 1. Use of SmartLink Transport Register

Measure	Jan 08 To April 08	May 08 to Oct 08
# of Borrowers registered	38	140
# of Lenders registered	3	16
# of Borrower/Lenders currently registered	10	-
Total # of organisations registered	51	156
# of vehicles registered in Blue Mountains LGA	6	6
# of vehicles registered in Penrith LGA	3	3
# of vehicles registered in Hawkesbury LGA	2	2
# of vehicles registered in Canterbury LGA	4	7
Total # of vehicles registered	15	18

At the same time a proposal to run a vehicle register on behalf of Inner West Community Transport for Canterbury Council was approved and the first information session was held in Canterbury on 10th March 2008.

In July 2008 Blue Mountains City Council agreed to their two Access Buses being added to the Register. The community groups that used these vehicles were advised of the additional web-based service which improved their access to available vehicles.

By October 2008 the Register was being used by groups that provide transport or other services to a wide range of people.

Table 2. Age of Transport Register vehicle users

Client Age Groups	Number
0-17	257
18-64	346
64+	462

The age of vehicle users varied but was slightly skewed towards older people. Children and those who are geographically isolated were also significant users of vehicles borrowed through the scheme.

Table 3. Types of users of Transport Register vehicles

Passengers by client type for Transport Register (NB clients may select multiple choices)		
Client type	Jan 08 – April 08	May 08 – Oct 08
Children	39	267
Culturally & Linguistically Diverse	29	210
Geographically Isolated	41	387
Indigenous Australians	40	140
Low Income	133	190
People Living with Disabilities	110	151
Transport Disadvantaged	232	814
Youth	166	545

Around this time the first vehicle hire through the Register took place in the Hawkesbury area and the first bookings in the Canterbury area took place. The Transport Development Worker at Inner West Community Transport continued to work to promote the service in the Canterbury area.

Later in the year improvements were made to the financial reporting aspects of the Vehicle Register software.

Negotiations took place in late 2008 with the Volunteer Centre to resolve issues about a need for consistency when vetting drivers in relation to RTA Driver records and Criminal and Working with Children Checks.

BMCC Access buses bookings through the Register slowly increased but many of the original groups continued to call the office rather than use the online service.

In early 2009 Canterbury Council agreed to provide a further year's funding and the project will continue with SmartLink transport concentrating on volunteer recruitment for the groups needing drivers.

A transport coordination project in Caboolture, Qld expressed interest in joining the SmartLink Transport Register. A quote was been requested to create a "mirror" website from Alliance Software and an agreement was about to be signed in mid-2009. Negotiations have also commenced with groups in Sutherland for the use of the Register in their region.

Driver pool and driver training

One area of concern raised in the consultations was the need for groups that hire vehicles through the Register to be able to access suitable drivers. In order to address this and to build community resources and enhance access for community groups to the vehicles on the Transport Register, applications were prepared for the late 2006 Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme funding round to establish a Volunteer Driver Pool. People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds were targeted in line with the PCP objectives.

Discussions subsequently took place to develop accredited driver Customer Service training modules with TAFE, the NSW Ministry of Transport, Westbus and the Blue Mountains Bus Co. A new partnership was developed with these local bus companies and TAFE/OTEN to

train drivers to Medium Rigid (MR) licence level and to provide customer service training. (This initiative was separate from and additional to the Transport Register volunteer driver pool scheme for which funding has been sought from WSAAS.) TAFE indicated that they had funding to train one group of students beginning in late April, and it was hoped that some or all of these would reinforce their training by becoming volunteer drivers.



In late 2007 The partnership numbers continued to grow with TAFE/Nirimba, Westbus, Busways and Hansons Trucks joining together to train unemployed people, 25 years and over with a current car licence to obtain their bus licences. This met with astonishing success with a pass rate of nearly 90%. The third course started on October 2007. The target groups for this initiative remained women, people who are from CALD communities and Aboriginal people and Torres Strait

Islanders. In the fifth group of trainees there were three refugees.

Penrith Disabilities Resource Centre was also involved in the driver training module – “Transporting People with Disabilities”. The partnership group was subsequently joined by BusWays.

During 2007, 45 unemployed people in three courses upgraded their car licences to Light, Medium and Heavy Rigid licences and gained customer service skills. Many of the participants were able to gain employment at the completion of the 8 week course in the Bus and Truck industries.

By December 2008, 66 people on five courses had upgraded their licences. The following table summarises the status of licences from the first five courses:

Table 4. Types of driving licences obtained by trainees

Group	Heavy Rigid	Medium Rigid	Light Rigid	Withdrawn or did not obtain licence	TOTAL
1 – 2007	1	14	0	1	16
2 – 2007	0	10	2	1	13
3 – 2007	6	4	2	2	14
4 – 2008	0	9	1	2	12
5 – 2008	0	9	0	2	11
TOTAL	7	46	5	8	66

Overall, the percentage of attendees who gained an upgraded licence was an impressive 87.9%.

The training project was suspended in 2008 due to a lack of funding. However, GCT continued to receive ongoing requests from people wanting to do the course. It was suggested that GCT lobby the local politicians seeking their support. WSCF was also keen to support more funding for the program.



Representations were made through Karyn Paluzzano MP to John Dela Bosca, the Minister and GCT received notification that another course could be run as long as there were

enough interested people and it could be completed before the end of the June term. In the event two courses were run involving 12 and 14 participants. These courses were aimed at recent migrants and refugees. Vehicles were provided by both Westbus and Busways. This brings the total number of successful trainees to nearly 100.

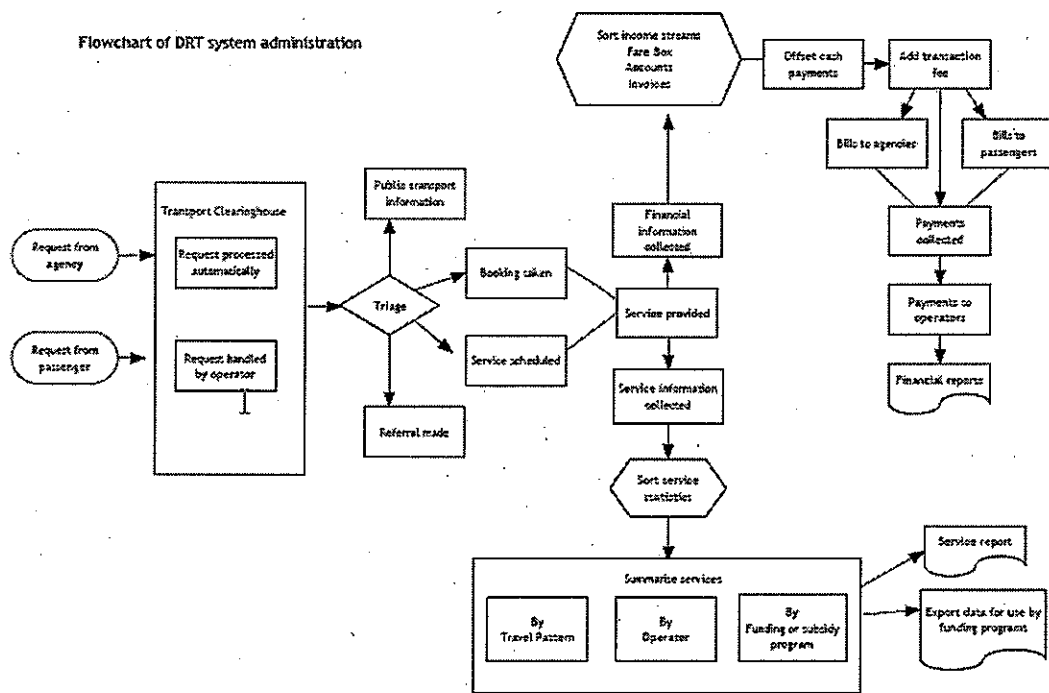
Later in the year CDSE (Clubs) funding was approved for 5 Youth workers to be trained to their Light Rigid (LR) licences in the Penrith area. They were also to become volunteers with SmartLink once trained. These courses had nearly been completed at the time of writing.

Demand responsive transport system

The idea of a Spare Seat Sharing Scheme was implemented through the development of Demand Responsive Transport Software. The initial development was funded through the Federal Government via an application developed by Transport Planning and Management on behalf of Great Community Transport. The application involved the creation of a consortium to bid for funding from the Information Technology On Line program of the federal Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Consortium members included GCT, eVolution Pty Ltd (software developers), Transport Planning and Management (project managers), , HSNet (NSW Department of Commerce), Westbus, the Blue Mountains Bus Company and other parties. The NSW Department of Commerce (HSNet) agreed to purchase the servers to house the program which was to be delivered as Software as a Service.

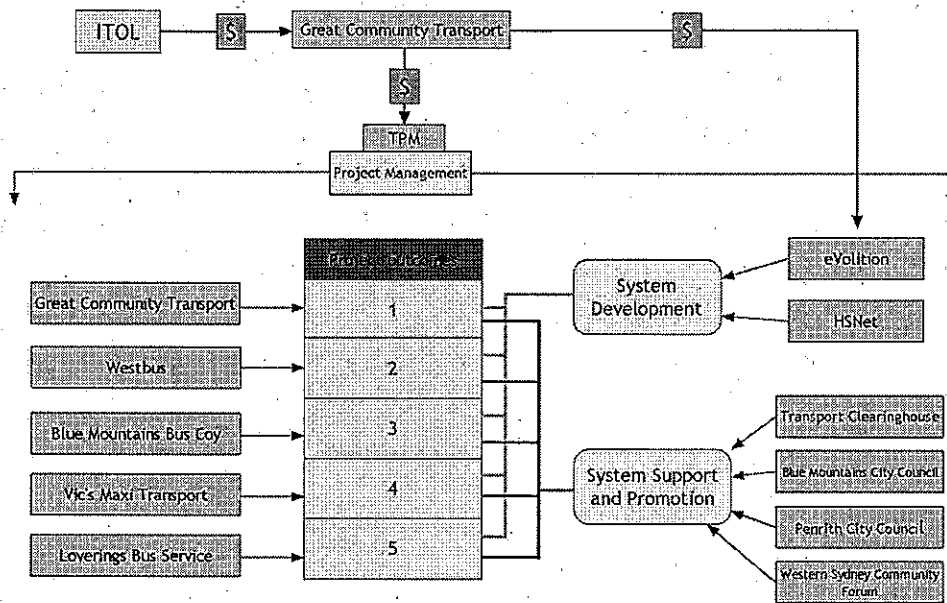
The proposed operation of the application is described in the figure below:

Figure 4. Flowchart of DRT system administration



The roles of the different partners are described in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Roles of partners in the ITOL demand responsive transport project



In early 2008 the Demand Responsive Transport software development has reached the stage of simulations for GCT being run regularly. This took the project well beyond the initial objectives of developing specifications for such a system to actually building the application from scratch.

Westbus and Blue Mountains Bus Service, members of the Passengers Choice Committee, were involved in specific consultations about the development of the application in relation to use by bus companies. However, work with bus companies suffered delays due to barriers in the regulations and the contracts between bus operators and the NSW Government. Demonstrations of the DRT system were held at the Ministry of Transport and a tentative agreement to trial the system has currently been reached.

The development stage was also delayed until there was clarification about the ownership of Intellectual Property pertaining to the system. Professional advice on this matter was sought from Redlich, Holding and Associates. In August GCT signed over the Intellectual Property rights to the Demand Responsive Transport software to eVolution Pty Ltd (the developers) in return for access to the system at no charge within a set limit on the number of bookings processed.

A new company, Interactive Transport Pty Ltd, (www.interactive-transport.com.au) was established in 2008 to oversee the development of the software as a service. Customers for the new software as a service are being sought at this time. GCT's trialling of the new DRT system was temporarily ceased whilst the new company is being formed. The future of the application now depends on its successful commercialisation.

Sydney West Area Health Service also indicated their interest in the DRT Project as they identified the efficiencies that could be gained by improved co-ordination and co-operation with other transport operators through the DRT software. In mid-2007 GCT entered into further talks with the Area Health Service regarding improved use of existing transport resources through the Demand Responsive Transport program.

In late 2007 this developed into discussions about a scoping study into the feasibility of providing non-emergency transport between patients' homes and Area Health facilities using a consolidated fleet and drivers (Area Health and GCT) and the DRT software for

booking, scheduling, reporting and cross-billing. This study was approved and partly funded by Area Health in 2008. Transport Planning and Management, who undertook the study for a nominal fee. The study was to concentrate on the identification of strategic improvements in non-emergency health related transport and the establishment of a consistent reporting framework.

At about the same time the NSW Ministry of Transport approved a one-off grant of \$58,000 for an Innovative Brokerage Project which will assist with the set-up costs of any arrangement with SWAHS to use the Demand Responsive Transport application for joint booking and scheduling of GCT and SWAHS patient transport vehicles.

The scoping project faced some ongoing obstacles in accessing relevant information about AHS transport services. This was the first step that had to be completed before any consideration can be given to formally signing the funding agreement for the development of Innovative Brokerage Model with the Ministry of transport for \$58,000 (non-recurrent). The MOT, however agreed to extend the time for this project to start.

Activity Stream 5 – Promotion of the project

A branding strategy and marketing campaign was planned in order to ensure the “transport disadvantaged” people in the 3 LGAs became aware of the website.

The SmartCity logo was developed with funding from the Penrith Valley Economic Development Council which also assisted the project with marketing and promotional strategies.



Promotion of the project was furthered by the involvement of a Regional High School Work experience program for Year 11 students through the BMHP School Industry Partnership. The students were involved in developing a marketing strategy and then implementing it through their schools and other agreed areas. Contact was also made with Penrith Panthers and they agreed to work with the project in the area of promotion with an application being submitted to the CDSE funding to help with promotional material.

In mid-2007 consultations took place with workers from Western Sydney Community Forum regarding strategies to promote the Passengers Choice Project.

In 2007 the project was specifically noted in the North West Sub-regional Strategy and Penrith City Council strategic planning.

Other Activities

Motor Accidents Authority Report – People with Brain and Spinal Cord Injury

In 2006 Transport Planning and Management developed an application for funding on behalf of GCT from the Motor Accidents Authority for a project aimed at:

- Mapping and recording the availability of vehicles and staff that are suitable for the provision of transport for people with brain injury and spinal cord injury;
- Identifying appropriate training and trainers for transport providers involved in the scheme around the transport and transport support needs of people with brain injury and spinal cord injury; and
- Ensuring the needs of people with spinal cord and brain injury are included in the development of the computer based transport booking and scheduling system.

The research task was contracted to the University of Sydney Faculty of Health Sciences. A final report was published in 2007 titled: "Western Sydney Transport on Demand Project: Final report for an attendant care project"².

Bids for continued funding

Representations have been made to Federal and State Governments to provide continued support for the SmartLink Transport Program. There is no growth funding in appropriate programs such as the Community Transport program (MoT). As things stand the project ceases in mid-2009 although a number of important activities will continue albeit independently rather than under the umbrella of a Transport Clearinghouse.

Key performance indicators for the project

A number of key performance indicators were developed for the project by Helen Battelino, Transport Behaviour Consultant. The results against these indicators are described in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Performance in relation to Key Indicators for Passengers Choice Project

Indicator	Outcome
Quantity	
Number of stakeholders represented on Advisory Committee	17 including Great Community Transport which is hosting the project
Number of key community groups involved in formal consultations	5
Number of community agencies invited to participate in the survey	250
Booking system – website, hardware and software - developed on time and within budget (other funding is being used for the hardware)	Booking system components developed
Number of additional funding sources explored for the Project	5
Quality	
Percentage of Advisory Committee representatives actively contributing to the Project	94%
Percentage of LGAs represented in community consultations	100%
Percentage of community agencies responding to the survey	26%
Percentage of booking system components developed on time and percentage of booking system components developed within budget	67% on time 100% within budget
Percentage of successful additional funding applications sought	60%

² Transport Planning and Management (2007) Western Sydney Transport on Demand Project: Final Report for an Attendant Care Project, Research by University of Sydney Faculty of Health Sciences, for Great Community Transport Lawson NSW.

Project Achievements

The project has achieved a great deal over its life and, significantly, many project activities will outlive the project itself – in itself a measure of success. In addition the project was responsible for a number of spin-off projects such as the Driver Training, the MAA Report and the development of a demand responsive transport system which is available for use by both the community and commercial transport sectors. Key ongoing activities include:

- The Website - still very much in use with content revised regularly. It continues to be managed by TRI Community Exchange.
- The Transport Register - active and providing a vehicle booking service in the Blue Mountains, Penrith and Canterbury. Negotiations continue with Caboolture and Sutherland to extend this model to other areas.
- The Driver Pool - still active. Recently seven volunteer drivers completed their First Aid and OH&S training and a further 12 are due to complete the same training on a weekend course in the near future.
- The demand responsive transport application – attracted over \$600,000 in government funding and in-kind support and is now commercially available. Implementation trials will commence at GCT shortly. This goes well beyond the original objective of just developing specifications for such a system.

Table 6. List of active project partners

Great Community Transport Penrith Disability Resource Centre Westbus Blue Mountains Bus Company Blue Mountains Commuter Assoc. Busways Hansons Trucks Penrith Valley Economic Development Corporation	Transport Planning and Management Interactive Transport P/L Penrith City Council Blue Mountains City Council Hawkesbury Council TRI Community Exchange eVolution P/L Gilgai Aboriginal Services	University of Western Sydney University of Sydney Faculty of Health Sciences TAFE Nerimba NSW Ministry of Transport HSNet (NSW Dept Commerce) NSW HACC Program Sydney West Area Health Service Wentworth Area Health Service
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Table 7. List of major project funders

NSW Department of Community Services (Area Assistance Scheme) Federal Dept of Communications Information Technology and the Arts (ITOL program)	NSW Ministry of Transport (Community Transport and HACC) TAFE	NSW Department of Commerce (HSNet) NSW Motor Accidents Authority
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Prepared by David Denmark
Transport Planning and Management

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