

NATIONAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PRICING MODEL

CASE

STUDIES

20
25



CONTENT

Case Study **One**: Technology

Case Study **Two**: Passenger Needs

Case Study **Three**: Workforce



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NATIONAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PRICING MODEL

CASE STUDY ONE

20
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DRIVING INNOVATION:
TECHNOLOGY'S ROLE IN
ENHANCING COMMUNITY
TRANSPORT FOR
AUSTRALIANS.



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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngunawal peoples, the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which ACTA's Canberra office is situated. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and honour their enduring connection to this land, as well as their rich history, culture, and spiritual heritage. In addition, we recognise the Traditional Owners of the lands in Chermside, Queensland - the Turrbal and Jagera peoples; Loganlea, Queensland - the Jagera and Ugarapul peoples; Ringwood, Victoria - the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation; and Mountbatten Drive, New South Wales - the Wiradjuri people. We acknowledge their Elders, ancestors, and cultures, and are committed to ensuring that our work reflects respect for their lands, peoples, and enduring cultural heritage.

**We would like to extend our
heartfelt thanks to all the
participants in our research and
case study development**



Transit *Care*



live **Better**

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1.** Community Transport (CT) serves as a lifeline, enabling access to healthcare, social connection, and essential services for thousands of Australians annually.
- 2.** CT services significantly alleviate pressure on healthcare systems through early interventions like non-clinical transport and welfare checks.
- 3.** CT services are tailored for diverse populations, including seniors, people with disabilities, First Nations communities, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups.
- 4.** Transport Management System (TMS) features, such as automatic assignment of wheelchair-accessible vehicles to clients with mobility needs and the integration of culturally sensitive support records, ensure services are tailored to individual requirements. These features enhance accessibility and inclusivity, making Community Transport solutions equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of all community members.
- 5.** Adoption of Transport Management Systems (TMS) has improved service efficiency, financial data analytics, scheduling, and resource management. For example, providers like Victoria's EV Strengthening Communities increased trips from 100 to 180 per day, while Queensland's Burnie Brae cut scheduling time by 80%. Clients benefit through reliable transport and availability for critical needs like medical appointments, reducing stress and promoting independence in community members.
- 6.** Technology enables real-time vehicle monitoring to track speed, routes, and stops, ensuring quick responses to issues and enhancing passenger safety with up-to-date client information for timely interventions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 7.** Optimised transport systems reduce administrative costs and increase service demand fulfilment in Community Transport.
- 8.** Shared trips, automated reminders such as a SMS, and enabling data-driven planning improve service delivery and client experience.
- 9.** TMS gathers social outcomes data such as loading and unloading time, level of support required for the passenger, and loyalty ratios that could be further utilised in Human Capital studies.
- 10.** Resistance to change among staff and volunteers, resource constraints, and technology integration issues with legacy systems are common barriers when Community Transport providers undergo digital transformation.
- 11.** Addressing digital transformation challenges requires leadership support, inclusive planning, and aligning internal processes with flexible, scalable software.
- 12.** There is a need for grants and funding opportunities for digital transformation to enable Community Transport providers to upgrade systems and overcome financial barriers.
- 13.** Peak Bodies and Sector Advocacy organisations should support capacity-building initiatives, including training and leadership development to address resistance to change in Community Transport when implementing new ways of working.
- 14.** There is a need for fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among CT providers, showcasing best practices in technology implementation.
- 15.** There is a need for government investment in internet and infrastructure upgrades in regional areas to support technology use for CT providers in non-metro areas.
- 16.** The value of Community Transport aligns with government priorities for equity, healthcare access, and social inclusion.
- 17.** A sustainable, technology-enhanced Community Transport sector ensures long-term benefits for vulnerable populations and communities.

Introduction

Community Transport is not just about moving people from one place to another. It is a lifeline service, a bridge that connects people to the essential services, communities, and lives they deserve.



Community Transport, at its heart, it embodies the belief that every person, regardless of ability or circumstance, has the right to accessible and dignified transport. For thousands of Australians each year, it fills the gaps left by mainstream transport systems, ensuring no one is left behind.

But Community Transport is more than a mobility solution. It provides tailored support for diverse needs, offering wheelchair-accessible vehicles, assistance for those with cognitive or mobility challenges, and an understanding of the unique requirements of diverse groups such as First Nations people and CALD communities. It also reduces isolation, fosters social connections, and promotes mental well-being, enabling people to live longer, and more independent lives.

Through compassionate drivers, trained staff, and safety standards that Australians can trust, Community Transport also alleviates the stress and pressure on Australia's healthcare system. From non-clinical transport to welfare checks, these services often act as an early intervention, preventing minor issues from becoming major health crises, especially for senior Australians.

The Role of Innovation: Bridging the Past and Future

Given the contributions of Community Transport to hundreds of Australians' lives - sustainability is key to ensuring the future of this lifeline service. To meet growing service demands, shifting market trends, and evolving government regulations, providers must embrace change and innovation. Technology has emerged as a silent hero in this journey, driving transformation and empowering providers to deliver services more effectively.

Through the **National Community Transport Pricing Model** (NCTPM) study organisations have integrated these advanced tools into their operations, achieving outstanding results, such as coordinating services across vast regions, efficient scheduling and vehicle capacity allocation, enabling aggregation for 'shared' or 'group trip', and user-friendly booking platforms. However, the road to transformation is not without challenges. Providers often encounter resistance to change, resource limitations, and the complexities of integrating new systems into established workflows. The following case study highlights the transformative power of technology within the Community Transport ecosystem. It showcases how new ways of working have directly benefited clients, through improved accessibility, more tailored services, and challenges providers have encountered in implementing technology, offering valuable lessons for the sector as it continues to evolve. This journey is a testament to the dedication of Community Transport providers, whose efforts to innovate and adapt are not only ensuring the sustainability of their services but also creating a brighter, more connected future for the communities they serve.

Exploring the core aspects of Technology Adoption in Community Transport

The following case study has been developed based on the NCTPM Technology Implementation framework (**figure 1**), which explores four key dimensions: Service Delivery, Meeting Customer Needs, Reporting Requirements, and Challenges. This structure highlights how technology transformed community transport by enhancing operational efficiency, addressing diverse user needs, improving compliance through data-driven reporting, and overcoming internal business barriers like resistance to change.

With insights from four pilot participants who recently underwent technology changeovers or implementations, this case study provides real-life testimonies to support its statements, and the figures presented throughout the paper.

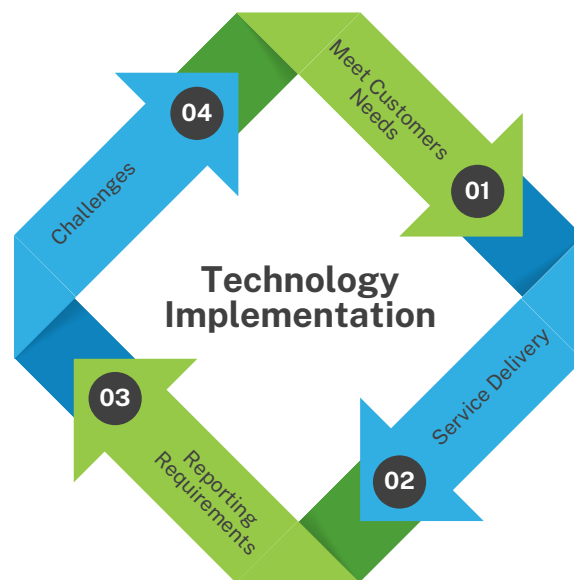


Figure 1: NCTPM Technology Implementation Framework

ACTA Statement:

Digital transformation for Community Transport providers is more than a technical upgrade it's about connecting communities, strengthening service delivery models, and ensuring sector sustainability. With determination and collaboration, Community Transport providers can turn technology implementation challenges into opportunities towards a better service delivery for Australians.

TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNITY TRANSPORT: MEET CUSTOMER NEEDS



CLIENT STORY

Before joining EV's transport service, getting to medical appointments was a real struggle for Claire. Traveling over 60 km each way to places like Box Hill Hospital or Carlton wasn't just tiring, it was expensive and stressful to manage on her own. Public transport wasn't a realistic option, and the whole process felt overwhelming.

Since starting with EV, the Claire's life has become much easier. They can now get to their appointments without worrying about the costs or

logistics. The service has made a huge difference, giving them the freedom to focus on their health without the added stress of figuring out how to get there. This was possible by EV's adoption of new software that improved their capacity allocation. With better tools to manage resources and routes, EV can now meet the growing demand for transport in the community, ensuring that more people like Claire can get the support they need.

EV's transport service isn't just about getting from one place to another, it's about helping people stay connected to the care they need and making life better for those who need it most.

Source: EV Strengthening Communities. (2024, October 23). Client story provided by Mariyam Millwala and Elizabeth McFarlin

From the growing aging population and economic inequality impacting vehicle ownership, to the challenges faced by rural communities with limited public transport, and the essential inclusion of people with disabilities in society, the need for reliable and efficient transport services has never been more demanded. The demand continues to rise as new developments occur beyond metropolitan areas and as more Australians depend on transport services for a better quality of life. Community Transport Providers are stepping up to meet this need, and technology is playing a pivotal role in empowering them to do so. Transport Management Systems (TMS) have transformed how these organisations operate. Victoria's EV Strengthening Communities, for example: their use of innovative software increased their daily trips from 100 to an impressive 180 scheduled trips per day.

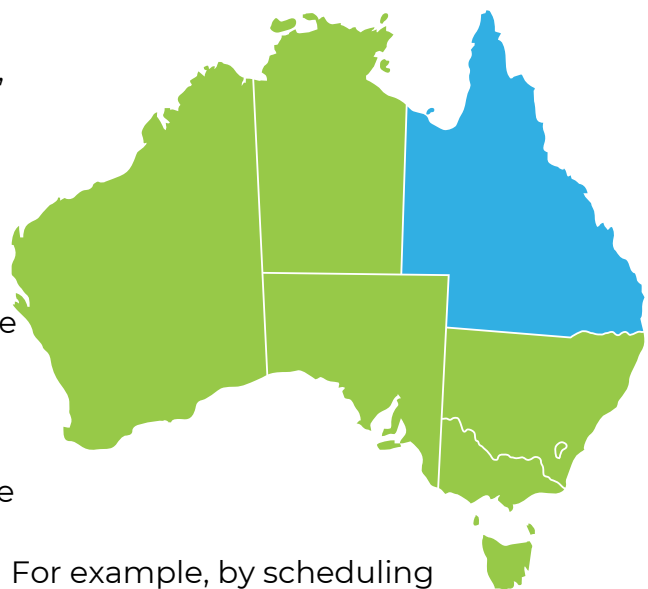
Similarly, **Queensland's Community Service organisation, Burnie Brae** reduced the time spent scheduling and monitoring trips by 80%, enabling their staff to focus more on serving the community. Across the nation, technology has allowed providers to optimise trip planning, improve vehicle capacity management, streamline data management, as well as reduce administrative costs.

Most importantly, these advancements mean fewer people face the heartbreak of being told, **“We can’t help you today. Would you perhaps like to reschedule your service for later this week?”**. For someone unable to attend a doctor’s appointment or urgent medical help such a rejection can have life-altering consequences. Without robust systems in place, providers are often overwhelmed by manual processes, leading to missed opportunities to serve those in need.

TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNITY TRANSPORT: SERVICE DELIVERY

Community Transport serves a diverse range of clients, each with unique needs, health conditions, and personal preferences. To meet these varied demands with the care they deserve, a well-structured process for client allocation is essential. Technology has become a powerful tool in ensuring these services are not only efficient but thoroughly allocated. Through software, providers can create mechanisms that elevate the quality of service, improve the client experience, and deliver services

tailored to those who rely on it the most. For example, by scheduling 'shared trips,' providers can optimise resources when multiple clients are heading to the same destination. This thoughtful approach reduces unnecessary travel and offers a sense of shared community. Sending text messages to remind clients of their bookings also helps prevent last-minute cancellations and 'no-shows' ensuring that every trip counts and avoid incurring in sunk costs. **TransitCare in Queensland** has embraced this technology, reducing their vehicle loading time by almost 50% because people are ready to go when the vehicle arrives at their place of pick-up.



When it comes to health and disability, technology plays an even more crucial role. Systems like TMS allow providers to allocate the right vehicle and the right driver to meet each client’s specific needs.

For example, a Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) is automatically assigned to a client in a wheelchair (if the condition is recorded on the system), ensuring their comfort and safety.



LiveBetter in Regional NSW has gone further, embracing technology to provide an exceptional experience. From sending timely text reminders 24 hours and just 10 minutes before pick-up, to equipping drivers with tablets that access client records, every aspect of service is designed to offer the highest quality care.

These steps ensure that the service is not just functional, but personal, fostering trust and understanding between the provider and the client.

Community Transport providers don't just move Australians from point A to point B, they move them with dignity, respect, and care. To maintain this level of service, technology is essential. For providers, it offers efficiency and reliability. For clients, it offers the comfort of knowing they can depend on the service to meet their needs, right when they need it most.

ENHANCING SAFETY WITH TECHNOLOGY

Technology enables CT organisations to deliver a safer and more efficient service by providing real-time insights into road operations. Vehicles can be tracked and monitored from the base, ensuring oversight of critical aspects such as speed, route adherence, and unplanned stops. This capability allows organisations to respond promptly, either by communicating directly with the driver or, in emergencies, by locating the vehicle to dispatch assistance.

Additionally, technology improves safety by maintaining up-to-date information about passengers. In cases where a passenger is a 'no-show,' the system can provide:

1. Their phone number,
2. Next of kin, with their name, relationship, and contact details;
3. Any relevant medical conditions, such as allergies or chronic illnesses.

This ensures timely and informed responses to potential issues. For instance, if a driver finds a passenger who has fallen at home, the organisation can promptly provide ambulance staff with the passenger's current medication details, facilitating swift and accurate medical intervention.

TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNITY TRANSPORT: REPORTING REQUIREMENTS



Community Transport is a service that is always on the move, responding to the constantly changing needs of its clients. Given the large and diverse demographic, it serves, data analytics becomes a silent but powerful enabler behind cost analysis, continuous improvement, and data-driven decision-making.

In **Queensland**, providers have successfully integrated tools like **PowerBI** and **Microsoft Dynamics AX** to bring this data to dashboards and executive reports. **Burnie Brae's CEO, Andrew Watson**, highlighted how real-time data reporting allows them to plan with accuracy, understand demand trends, and act when needed to ensure service availability while controlling costs. For government data exchange reporting, particularly **DEX**, TMS provides more valuable insights into trip deliveries, such as loading times, social engagement, support needs, and client loyalty metrics that could help inform Human Capital studies. In the CHSP space, technology has significantly enhanced the process, with providers now able to export DEX reports monthly without manual intervention and send them to the **Department of Health, Disability and Ageing** by the monthly reporting deadlines. This technology-driven approach ensures providers can focus on what truly matters, caring for clients and a high-quality service delivery.

TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNITY TRANSPORT: CHALLENGES

The road to transformation is not without challenges. Providers often encounter resistance to change, resource limitations, and the complexities of integrating new systems into established workflows. This resistance often comes from the very heart of these organisations: their dedicated volunteer staff. Their deep familiarity with current processes and limited availability can make adapting to new ways of working feel overwhelming.

For many providers, the journey is further complicated by a lack of understanding about what successful technology implementation requires. This often leads to unforeseen costs, additional software development, extended training for staff, and struggles with slower internet connectivity in non-metro areas. Financial constraints only deepen the challenge, as organisations frequently lack the resources to undertake large-scale transformations.

Government-required outputs on state and federal contracts, tendering processes, and the limited visibility of grant opportunities add to the financial constrain. On top of this, data migration and infrastructure adjustments are also pressing concerns. Yet, transformation is not just about technology, it's about people and purpose. A clear understanding of what the organisation needs, accompanied with flexible software that grows alongside the business, is key.

TransitCare's CEO, Terry O'Toole stated

"Visiting other sites where similar systems are in action offers inspiration and a chance to see what's possible. Engaging change champions, those influential voices within the organisation can help promoting enthusiasm and guide the transition."

Successful change begins with inclusion. By involving staff early and making them active participants rather than passive observers, organisations can foster a sense of ownership and shared purpose.

Alanna Gallagher from LiveBetter and Andrew Watson from Burnie Brae pointed out

"Aligning internal processes to fit the right software avoids costly customisations and builds efficiency, do not expect positive changes if you bring old habits into the new software. Leadership and board support is crucial, as is a shared focus on the goal: creating sustainable services that profoundly impact clients' lives."

Digital transformation for Community Transport providers is more than a technical upgrade it's about connecting communities, strengthening service delivery models, and ensuring sector sustainability. With determination and collaboration, Community Transport providers can turn technology implementation challenges into opportunities towards a better service delivery for Australians.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Email us at **info@communitytransportaustralia.org.au**

NATIONAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PRICING MODEL

CASE STUDY TWO

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Community Transport Beyond the Ride: Understanding Passenger Needs



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**Dementia
Australia®**



**CHUNG WAH
COMMUNITY CARE**



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1.** Community transport is not just about moving people but is a person-centered service that plays a crucial role in fostering inclusion, access to essential services, and social connection for senior Australians, people with disabilities, and those in rural or remote areas.
- 2.** Community transport services are essential for supporting older and diverse populations, yet they remain underfunded due to a lack of recognition of their full social value. Providers often cross-subsidise and rely on fundraising to maintain operations, but as demand increases, sustainable funding becomes crucial. To ensure equitable access to high-quality services, especially as the population becomes more diverse with varied care needs, the government should invest in studies on the social benefits of community transport. These studies will provide valuable insights to guide future policymaking and funding allocations, ensuring the long-term viability of the community transport sector.
- 3.** The NCTPM groups individuals requiring higher support, such as those needing physical assistance or who do not speak English at home (CALD) communities, into a single "High Support Needs" category. This means that, for costing purposes, it does not matter whether a client falls into one, two, or all three of these high support needs categories, the model assigns the same cost loading regardless.
- 4.** The NCTPM Pilot Project found that High Support Needs passengers incur an additional cost of \$36.40 per client compared to those with Low Support Needs. These costs stem from additional staff time to support clients with higher care needs, tailoring services to meet diverse and complex client needs, and/or offering translation services, which current government funding does not fully cover.
- 5.** The Basic Delivery Model (commercial transport) is primarily used for clients without mobility or cognitive impairments.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

6. Client Stories demonstrate the significant positive impact community transport has on individuals:

- **Ms. To:** A Cantonese-speaking senior woman who overcame isolation and accessed medical and social support services.
- **Mr. Costello:** An elderly Aboriginal man who benefited from reliable transport to essential medical appointments.
- **Ron:** A man living with dementia, whose dignity and social connection were supported through tailored transport services.

7. The value of community transport includes services like wheelchair-accessible vehicles, reduction of isolation and foster social connection, translation assistance for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, and tailored care for complex needs such as dementia and Indigenous groups. However, these benefits often go unrecognised or unaccounted for on funding and policy decisions.

8. The Full-Service Delivery Model Provides comprehensive support, including door-to-door assistance, translation services, and personalised care. This model ensures accessibility, safety, and compliance with the Code of Conduct for Aged Care.

9. Despite issues when using taxis and rideshare services, those services still serve a role in specific situations. However, the passenger preference remains for full-service delivery model, offered by community transport providers.

10. To meet increasing demand and evolving client needs, community transport requires ongoing government support, research, and financial investment to remain viable and equitable.

11. Passenger needs must be considered equitably in relation to both cost and volume of services provided. Under current models, individuals living in remote or rural areas might be disadvantaged, as they typically need to travel longer distances and therefore incur higher costs. This means that, based on their individual budgets under Support at Home (SaH), they often have access to fewer trips than someone in an urban area. ACTA recommends that providers should be funded per kilometre based on the NCTPM, while passengers should have access to a capped number of trips tailored to their individual need, for example, people living with cancer or severe kidney failure may require frequent transport to attend chemotherapy or dialysis. This approach will ensure equity and service affordability for senior Australians.

Introduction

Community transport is often perceived as an extension of public transport or services like taxis, Ubers, and rideshares. However, it is much more than simply moving people from point A to point B. Community transport is a person-centered service, offering vital support where other transport options are limited. It plays a crucial role in fostering inclusion, providing high-quality service, and ensuring safety, access to essential health, social connection, social isolation reduction and community services.

While senior Australians, people living with disabilities, and those in rural and remote areas are the primary users, it also serves transport disadvantaged individuals in urban, rural and remote settings. Despite its importance, community transport is frequently underfunded due to a lack of awareness of its full benefits and contributions as well as the 'full service' delivery model that community transport providers follow to meet passenger needs.

The ACTA National Community Transport Pricing Model (NCTPM) Pilot Project, led in partnership with the University of South Australia, has prioritised understanding passenger needs. By analysing how and why passengers receive the services they do, the pilot project aim to design a policy arrangement and a sustainable pricing model for the community transport sector. This case study will highlight client stories to showcase the diverse needs of users and then will move onto the need for deeper insights into the hidden benefits of community transport, which highlights some of the challenges providers face when tailoring service for diverse client groups.



The Service Delivery Models Tested Under The National Community Transport Pricing Model (NCTPM)

Basic Delivery Model

A basic delivery service model refers when a client utilises taxis and/or Ubers for travelling from point A to point B. This approach is predominantly used in metropolitan regions and some regional cities and is seen as appropriate in certain circumstances:

- When the client has no mobility or cognitive issues
- When the client prefers to use this service.

This model is more commonly used in metro and regional cities rather than in rural and remote locations. However, consumers have expressed dissatisfaction with taxis due to reliability issues and concerns about driver behaviour, including overcharging and instances of misconduct or assault. Additionally, during the NCTPM qualitative interviews some community transport providers cited severe complaints, including reports of drivers “taking money from the client, holding them hostage.”

Client Story



Community Transport Helping Frank Stay on Track for Vital Health Appointments

Mr. Costello, 78, has lived in Murray Bridge for 50 years and is part of the Arunta Tribe. After moving to Murray Bridge, he began facing challenges accessing transport for crucial medical appointments in Adelaide such as cancer treatment and other health concerns. Public transport options required exhausting transfers. On the other hand, rideshare or taxi did not offer him the level of care and comfort he required.

Frank struggled with the complexity of the journey.

Thanks to the Murray Mallee Community Passenger Network (MMCPN) managed by the Tailem Bend Community Centre (TBCC), Frank now has access to reliable, subsidised transport for medical appointments. The service allows him to travel to Adelaide with his wife, Trotti, or a friend for support, at a fraction of the cost of rideshare or taxi services. Frank shared that MMCPN's services have made his life much easier, removing the worry of how to get to appointments and easing the stress of navigating the city while unwell. Grateful for the service, Frank says MMCPN has truly helped him.

Equitable access is not just about availability. It's about ensuring that no one is limited to access transport services for where they live. Consider the example of Mr. Costello, living in a rural town 100km from his regular medical specialist, and Ms. To, based in a metropolitan area just 10km from hers in Perth. If both are allocated the same number of 'trips' under a support package but are charged based on distance, Mr. Costello can only afford a fraction of the trips Ms. To can. This undermines true equity in service access.

Under a fair and sustainable model, funding to providers should be calculated based on actual distance and cost, but passengers should be charged based on a unit of service a trip, regardless of how far they travel. This ensures clients in rural and remote areas like Mr. Costello are not disadvantaged simply because of their location, allowing all clients to engage equally in medical, social, and community activities.



VOICE FROM THE COMMUNITY

At 82, Margaret found daily errands and medical trips increasingly challenging. Public transport was exhausting, and the long travel times made worse by frequent rest stops and the need to take earlier buses in case later ones didn't arrive, significantly reduced her social activities. Over time, she became isolated, and many of her friendships faded.

That changed when a neighbour introduced her to Community Transport, which quickly became a lifeline. Now, she has a trusted driver who not only ensures she gets to her medical appointments safely but also provides companionship on longer trips. With this support, Margaret has been able to reconnect with friends, reducing her sense of isolation and staying motivated to keep up with her medical care.

Full-Service Delivery Model

The full-service delivery model is overwhelmingly preferred by most clients in most situations. Community transport providers consistently emphasise that this model differentiates them from taxis or Uber services. Small to medium organisations in metro and regional areas underscore a commitment to holistic, full-service transport, which goes beyond simply moving clients from one location to another.

Key Features of the Full-Service Model

Many providers view their role as more than just transport, offering additional assistance such as:

1. Helping clients with mobility issues, e.g., assisting clients downstairs when using walkers, assisting clients to get in and off the vehicle, etc.
2. Conducting welfare checks if a client does not answer the door.
3. Translation assistance for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.
4. Engaging in social interaction during bookings, recognising that the driver or scheduler (Backoffice staff) may be the only person the client speaks with that day.
5. Observing and noting changes in a client's functioning or behaviour, which may indicate a need for additional support.
6. Providing information on other services or connecting clients to necessary resources.
7. Offering transport as a social opportunity, enabling interaction with drivers, other passengers, and the wider community.



Cost Implications of the Full-Service Model

While passenger needs are highly complex and encompass a wide range of factors, the NCTPM Pilot Project categorises these needs into two groups: Low Support Needs and High Support Needs. This classification is based on the criteria outlined in the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing, and Carers (SDAC). Data collected from 31 pilot participants indicates that serving clients with High Support needs, including physical, psychological, or a combination of both as well as and/or non-English-speaking clients, incurs an additional cost of \$36.40 per client compared to those in the 'Low Support Needs' category. This cost increase stems from the additional activities required to deliver a dignified and inclusive service, such as:

1

Tailor the service to cater for diverse and complex client needs

2

Providing extra time and staff to assist clients with higher care needs

3

Providing translation services and ensuring well-trained staff in CALD affairs.

As demand in Aged Care services grows, sustainable funding is essential to ensure clients can continue accessing high-quality, equitable services when they need them most. As highlighted in the Final Report of the Aged Care Taskforce (2023, Australian Government):

“Over the next few decades, the cohort of people is expected to become more diverse, with varied care needs and expectations.”

Many clients rely on community transport for safe, affordable, and dignified travel, yet funding challenges threaten the sustainability of these vital services. To sustain these services, providers often cross-subsidise by using funds from other programs, as well as relying on fundraising and donations through charitable and philanthropic events. Despite limited compensation and underfunding, community transport providers continue to support older and diverse populations with reliable transport.

The need for deeper insights into the hidden benefits of community

The NCTPM Pilot Project has highlighted key factors that differentiate community transport from other services. Unlike a one-size-fits-all model, community transport is a person-centered service, addressing individual needs and promoting social connection, reduction of social isolation, independence, healthcare access, reablement and dignified care.

Passenger needs are central to community transport, and a deeper understanding of these needs will help the sector and government build a financially sustainable operating model to meet the evolving demands of senior Australians.

Skilled frontline staff and volunteers are essential to delivering high-quality, personalised service, embodying the concept of 'human capital', the expertise that shapes outcomes (Borland & Smedes, 2024, p.1). This analysis is part of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework, embedded in a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA). ACTA continues to advocate for government funding to support further research on this topic and help the community transport sector continue meeting passenger needs.

Client Story

Finding Connection Through Community Support.



Ms. To, 85, immigrated to Perth from Vietnam in the 1980s. As her mother's carer, she had little opportunity to build social connections. After her mother and later her brother passed away, Ms To lived alone, relying on her sister-in-law for support. However, language barriers and unfamiliarity with transport made her increasingly isolated.

Concerned about missed medical appointments, her sister-in-law reached out to Chung Wah Community Care. Chung Wah's Cantonese-speaking staff helped Ms. To register with My Aged Care, securing transport and social support services. Weekly trips to our community hub transformed her life, she formed friendships, engaged in activities, and regained a sense of belonging in the community.



Ms. To shared with us: “我從來都無諗過可以再交到朋友”，Ms. Muoi 住親切嘅笑容同我哋嘅員工講，“而家我真係好期待去中華社區中心，感覺就好似我喺度有個新屋企。



Translation: "I never thought I could make friends again," Ms. Muoi told our staff with a warm smile, "Now I really look forward to visiting Chung Wah Hub. It feels like I have a new family."

To prevent missed appointments, Chung Wah Community Care coordinated with her healthcare providers and ensured transport services were arranged. Now, Ms. To attends all medical visits with ease, supported by caring drivers and staff. The staff also accommodate her language needs and are able to assist with translation from English to her native language when necessary.

VOICE FROM THE COMMUNITY

Carlos, 74, moved to Australia from Chile 30 years ago and speaks little English. After his wife's passing, he felt isolated and struggled to attend appointments. Public transport was overwhelming, and taxis offered no translation support, making travel even more difficult. Community Transport changed that. With the help of Spanish-speaking staff, Carlos received assistance with bookings, translations, and companionship during trips. As he had little English, he often avoided answering the phone and stayed inside his home after negative experiences in the community where he couldn't respond to conversations. His Community Transport provider built his confidence by offering translation support before, during and after the trip. For Carlos, Community Transport means more than just getting from one place to another, it has restored his social connection, reduced his loneliness, and provided him with dignified care and independence.

Client Story



**Dementia
Australia®**

Dementia Australia: Ron's Story



Ron lives with vascular dementia, which affects his daily life by causing challenges with thinking, reasoning, memory, and concentration. He also experiences physical symptoms, including balance issues and an unsteady gait.

He joined Dementia Australia's Respite program after his wife, Carol, noticed his growing isolation. As his condition progressed, he attended the Men's Group, where up to six men with dementia enjoy BBQs, walks, and games.

Community transport ensures Ron can participate, giving Carol much-needed respite. Without this service, Ron would face increased isolation and faster cognitive decline, while Carol would struggle with fewer breaks, increasing her risk of caregiver burnout. Losing transport could ultimately force an earlier move to institutional care. More than just a ride, this personalised service provides mobility support and reassurance. For Carol, it means dignity and care for Ron, and the ability to keep him at home longer. Community transport is a lifeline, keeping people connected, independent, and supported.

NATIONAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PRICING MODEL

CASE STUDY THREE

20
25

Behind Every Ride :
The People Who Make It
Possible



Australian Community Transport Association



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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which ACTA's Canberra office is situated. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and honour their enduring connection to this land, as well as their rich history, culture, and spiritual heritage. In addition, we recognise the Traditional Owners of the lands across the states where our case study participants are based: the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation in Victoria; the Wangal people of the Eora Nation in New South Wales; the Narungga people in South Australia; and in Queensland, the Kombumerri people of the Yugambeh Language Region and the Barada Barna people.

**We would like to extend our
heartfelt thanks to all the
participants in our research and
case study development**



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1.** Community transport relies on people, not just vehicles. Paid staff and volunteers do far more than drive, they provide social connection, emotional support, welfare checks, and often identify early changes in a passenger's wellbeing. The sustainability of community transport depends on attracting, supporting, and valuing both workforce types.
- 2.** Providers overwhelmingly support flexible, localised workforce models that blend volunteers and paid staff based on community need and organisational capacity. Examples include:
 - Access Sydney: fully paid drivers, with volunteers supporting social engagement for CALD community members.
 - Care In Motion, Volunteering Gold Coast and South East Volunteers Inc: both organisations operate with a predominantly volunteer-based workforce, particularly in the role of drivers, who are exclusively volunteers. This is supported by a mix of paid and volunteer staff handling administrative tasks.
 - At South East Volunteers, staff also coordinate and deliver social support programs, while volunteers assist with client calls and general engagement. Paid staff may also step in to backfill volunteer roles when needed.
- 3.** Despite the NCTPM assumption of sector-workforce composition (average of 36% volunteers and 64% paid staff), the model encourages adaptable models, rather than impose prescriptive workforce ratios.
- 4.** Both workforce types face significant challenges:
 - Volunteers: Ageing cohort (average age ~69), declining recruitment, high coordination needs, and reduced availability due to caregiving or cost-of-living pressures.
 - Paid Staff: High turnover, limited career pathways, competition from higher-paying industries, workforce shortages in thin markets, and lack of career progression pathways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

5. Both paid and volunteer roles carry costs and require structured support. Volunteers are not “free,” and paid staff cannot be retained without fair pay, clear career pathways, and targeted workforce strategies.

6. Volunteerism is in decline. Recruitment and retention are worsening due to:

- COVID-19 impacts on workforce participation
- Rising living costs keeping older adults in paid work
- Generational shifts in volunteering attitudes
- Federal policy changes have replaced local, place-based volunteer recruitment with an online-only system run by state-based organisations, making it harder for regional services to attract local volunteers.
- Chronic underfunding of volunteer infrastructure and support.

7. Community Transport drivers are not just transport providers; they are companions, listeners, and lifelines. Their roles are emotionally and socially impactful. The sector is currently advocating for investment in the wellbeing and retention of both paid and volunteer workers as part of understanding the social benefits of community transport and human capital analysis.

8. Sustainable community transport requires sustainable workforce solutions. The NCTPM acknowledges:

- The need for blended, flexible workforce models
- Culturally safe and inclusive workforce practices
- Investment in training, workforce attraction and development, and thin-market support mechanisms

Introduction

Every community transport journey begins long before a vehicle hits the road. It starts with the front-line staff, those who coordinate rosters, answer phones, navigate compliance, and sit behind the wheel. These are the faces behind the community transport service: a complex, committed workforce that blends volunteers and paid staff, experience and empathy, flexibility and structure.

As the sector evolves, these stories reveal the reality of full-service delivery explored in NCTPM Case Study 2, showing how Community Transport meets diverse, complex needs through person-centred care, with every kilometre driven powered by human effort and dedication. This case study brings together voices from organisations across Australia to show that the sustainability of community transport depends not just on funding models or trip volumes, but on valuing the workforce that makes it all possible.

Purpose of the Case Study

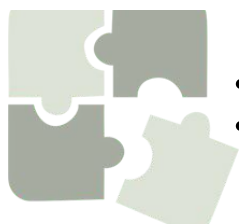
This case study's main purpose is to demonstrate how both volunteer and paid workforce models underpin safe, person-centred community transport and why sustainable, flexible, and well-supported workforce planning and retention strategies are essential to meet the growing needs of senior Australians.



Current Situation of The Community Transport Workforce

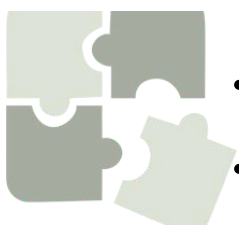
Through research interviews and case study development activities, the NCTPM found that workforce composition in community transport ranges from 100% paid staff to models reliant on volunteers (e.g., Care in Motion, with 151 active volunteer drivers in 2023–24, and Volunteering Gold Coast, in Queensland delivering volunteer-driven services). Other hybrid approaches have been observed, like providers that blend both workforce types, with 35% volunteer drivers and 65% paid drivers or vice versa.

However, due to its complexity, community transport workforce plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of service providers across the nation, common workforce issues are:



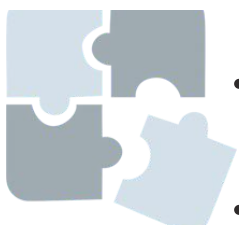
Challenges Facing Volunteer Workforce:

- Ageing volunteer base.
- Declining recruitment, particularly in thin markets (regional/rural areas and high-cost metro pockets).



Challenges Facing Volunteer Workforce:

- Increasing cost of living reduces volunteer availability, more senior Australians remain in paid work or caregiving roles.
- Limited availability, most volunteers commit 1–2 days per week, often with seasonal gaps.
- Lack of funding to support management of volunteered-based workforce, common costs are insurance, training, uniforms, coordination, and volunteer management, retention incentives and professional development. These expenses are not unique to volunteers and apply broadly to the delivery of aged care government-funded services. However, in practice, many providers still report challenges in resourcing these functions adequately, especially in volunteer-based models where the intensity and complexity of management requirements can be underestimated.
- Growing complexity of participant needs means both volunteers and paid staff require higher levels of training (e.g., dementia awareness, first aid, aged care services compliance).



Challenges Facing Paid Workforce:

- High turnover in the broader aged care sector and difficulty attracting staff in an undervalued, usually perceived as low-status industry.
- Competition from other industries with higher wages and better job security.
- Limited career pathways, transport roles (drivers) often lack progression opportunities.
- Increased regulatory requirements without corresponding workforce development funding.
- Shortage of skilled workers in thin markets, with housing affordability impacting recruitment.
- Emotional demands of the role often unrecognised; transport staff regularly act as companions, welfare checkers, and first responders for vulnerable Australians. Both volunteers and paid staff drivers often feel this value is not acknowledged or considered in operational aged care programs and reform.



People First: Beyond the Service

Community transport workforce, especially drivers are often more than just that, they are often companions, mental health supports, welfare checks and the nexus between the service provider and senior Australians.

From volunteers to paid drivers and staff in general, every single team member has a commitment to provide a person-centred service that ensures diverse and complex needs are met in the community. Providers across the country have expressed that the real value of community transport is the emotional connection and the ability to build long-term trust over the years. Nowadays, community transport is being supported by volunteers and paid staff, which often come from different paths of life, but with one objective, serve the senior Australians in our community.

Joanne's Story - The Gift of the Passenger Seat



For Joanne Burns, volunteering with South East Volunteers Inc is more than driving, it's connection, purpose, and compassion. After retiring, she saw a small ad looking for drivers. ***"I enjoy driving,"*** she thought. ***"Maybe I can help."*** - Years later, she's still behind the wheel, helping in ways that go far beyond transport.

She offers her passengers time, kindness, and a listening ear. Sometimes, she's the only person a senior Australian has spoken to in days. And that, she shared, is what reassures her commitment to continue helping the community. ***"When I go home after a shift, I feel like I've made someone's life a little easier. That's fulfilment."*** Joanne's passengers often share stories they haven't told anyone in years.

"Sometimes all they need is someone to listen" - she says. ***"That little moment in the car can mean everything."*** She's met people from all walks of life, each ride a window into someone's world. For many, it's not just about getting to an appointment it's about feeling seen, respected, and independent. There are challenges, but Joanne sees them as growth. ***"Volunteering gives back more than it takes. You give a little, and you get so much more in return."***

ACTA's Advocacy Position:

Both paid staff and volunteers are essential to community transport each brings unique strengths and skills, and both face distinct challenges. Volunteers may reduce direct wage costs but, like paid staff, they still require coordination, training, and ongoing support. Paid staff provide in some cases more availability and coverage of complex service delivery for high support needs trips. An adequate pricing model must include the costs of holistic human resources practices to attract, retain and develop, both paid staff and volunteers.

There is no sustainable transport without a sustainable workforce. Flexible workforce models, realistic pricing, targeted workforce investment, and policies that reflect the true cost of service delivery are essential.

One Size Does Not Fit All: The need of a blended workforce approach

Community transport services rely on both volunteers and paid staff, each bringing unique strengths, but both requiring structured support, investment, and management. While volunteer-led models can help reduce direct wage costs, they still involve significant operational expenses, including:

- 1 Dedicated volunteer coordination and management oversight.
- 2 Mandatory training and compliance requirements (e.g., dementia awareness, first aid, manual handling).
- 3 Insurance, uniforms, and meal or mileage reimbursements.
- 4 Coordination overhead due to limited volunteer availability, with many volunteers working two shifts a week.
- 5 Ongoing attraction, recruitment, retention, and development to maintain a sustainable volunteer base.

Providers overwhelmingly advocate for diversified and flexible workforce models, rather than a one-size-fits-all mandate. For example:

- **Care in Motion** operates with a mixed workforce comprising both volunteers and paid staff. All drivers are volunteers, while administrative duties are carried out by paid staff.

- **Access Sydney** operates with a fully paid workforce model, supplemented by volunteers who assist in coordinating social outings and gatherings, particularly with culturally diverse community members. To learn more about this business model please read Angela and Paula's story on page 10 and 11.

It is worth noting that several organisations stress the need to clearly separate paid and volunteer roles to reduce liability, training burden, and burnout.

The National Community Transport Pricing Model (NCTPM) recognises that volunteers are not "free", their contribution requires real investment, just like paid staff. The model proposes a blended workforce benchmark (36% volunteer, 64% paid) as a guide, not a mandate.

Organisations must retain the flexibility to design workforce structures that reflect:

- ▶ Local demographics and cultural needs.
- ▶ The realities of thin markets, where workforce attraction is more challenging.
- ▶ The equal importance of both paid staff and volunteers in service delivery.

The message is clear:

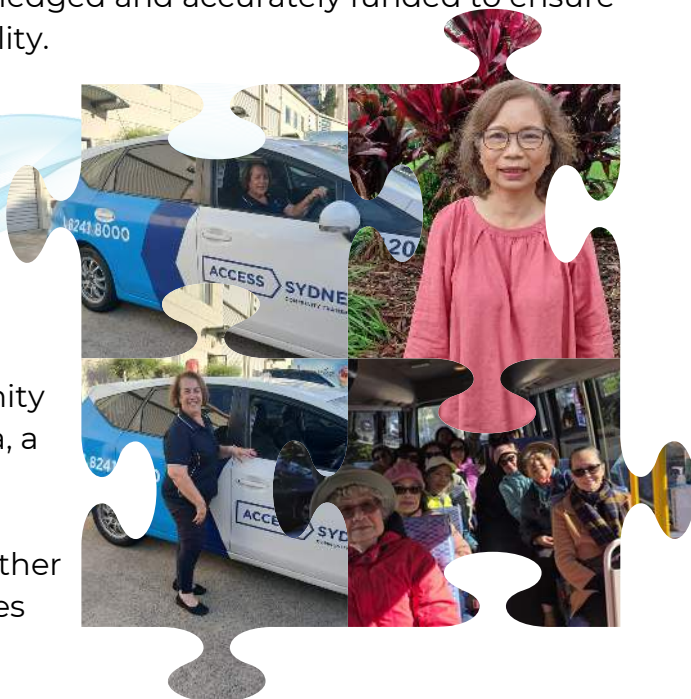
if we want safe, reliable, person-centred transport for senior Australians, we must invest in the people who deliver it, both paid and volunteer workforce.

Regardless of workforce composition, providers face costs and compliance responsibilities that must be acknowledged and accurately funded to ensure safety, service quality, and sustainability.

Angela and Paula: Two Paths, One Purpose

On the left is Angela, a paid community transport driver. On the right is Paula, a dedicated volunteer.

Their journeys are different, but together they embody the heart of what makes community transport possible.



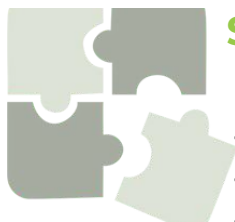
After being made redundant, Angela was uncertain about her next step; until a friend suggested a driver role with Access Sydney. What began as a job quickly became a calling. ***“From the very first day,”*** she says, ***“I found this job incredibly rewarding.”*** For Angela, it’s not just about driving, it’s about care, connection, and consistency. Helping a client to the car, finding them a shopping trolley for balance, these small acts, she highlighted, ***“make a world of difference.”***

Paula’s path began over a decade ago through her local multicultural group. What started as helping others make bookings at Access Sydney, evolved into leading community outings for Vietnamese seniors. ***“Volunteering gives me purpose,”*** she expressed. ***“It makes the city feel smaller and safer.”*** Once, she helped alert a client’s son after she found her unresponsive during a community transport pick-up. ***“Some people are alone for a long time,”*** Paula reflects. ***“Just showing up can change someone’s life.”***

Angela and Paula are a testament to why a blended workforce matters. Paid staff bring structure, safety, and daily reliability. Volunteers bring community, culture, and trust. Both need support. Both need investment. And together, they keep community transport moving.

Volunteerism in Decline

The sector is experiencing a concerning decline in volunteer recruitment and retention, with providers reporting increasing difficulty in maintaining a reliable, sustainable volunteer base.



Several interlinked factors are driving this trend, such as:

- The lasting impacts of COVID-19,
- The cost-of-living crisis
- A generational shift in attitudes toward volunteering
- Significant federal policy changes, which have replaced long-standing, place-based volunteer recruitment models with predominantly online-only systems managed by state-based organisations.
- Chronic underinvestment in volunteer infrastructure, including the services, resources, and support systems that enable organisations to recruit, train, and retain volunteers effectively, as well as enhance their overall volunteer experience.

“It’s incredibly tricky to find volunteers now. People who would have volunteered are looking after grandkids or still working. And the younger generation just isn’t interested.”

-Anonymous Community Transport Provider Representative

Some areas report stable numbers, while others struggle to fill a single roster. Where volunteers were once the lifeblood of community transport, some organisations now say their survival depends on transitioning to a fully paid workforce; if funding could support it.

"If we had to replace volunteers with paid staff, our service wouldn't be viable. Not without full funding for wages, vehicles, insurance — everything."

-Anonymous Community Transport Provider Representative

Volunteers' Stories from the Front Seat of Community Transport



For two community transport volunteers, one from a coastal city with Volunteering Gold Coast (VGC) and the other from a small town on the Yorke Peninsula with Care in Motion, volunteering behind the wheel isn't just about transport. It's about connection, compassion, and community.

After 18 months with VGC, Jim reflects:

"It's an honour to support some of our most vulnerable getting them to medical appointments, shopping, or social outings they'd otherwise miss. Over time, I've built deep, meaningful connections, especially with clients who have speech impairments. Learning to understand and support them has left a lasting impact."



South Australia, Care In Motion

In regional South Australia, Karen, volunteer driver at Care In Motion shares a more personal motivation:

"My father was a volunteer driver over 30 years ago. As retirement approached, I knew this was how I wanted to give back."

“One client, fleeing domestic violence, opened up during a three-hour trip. Just being a calm, non-judgemental listener made all the difference.”

Both volunteer drivers speak of how the role has transformed their lives, connecting them more deeply with their communities and reinforcing the importance of empathy and trust.

Their advice to others?

“Just do it. There are so many good people who need a helping hand, and you might just find it’s the best thing you do for yourself, too.”



QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Email us at **info@communitytransportaustralia.org.au**