

NATIONAL VARIABLE PRICING MATRIX PILOT

CASE STUDY ONE

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



Australian Community Transport Association



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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**



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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 loading 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 Variable Pricing Matrix** (NVPM) 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 NVPM 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.

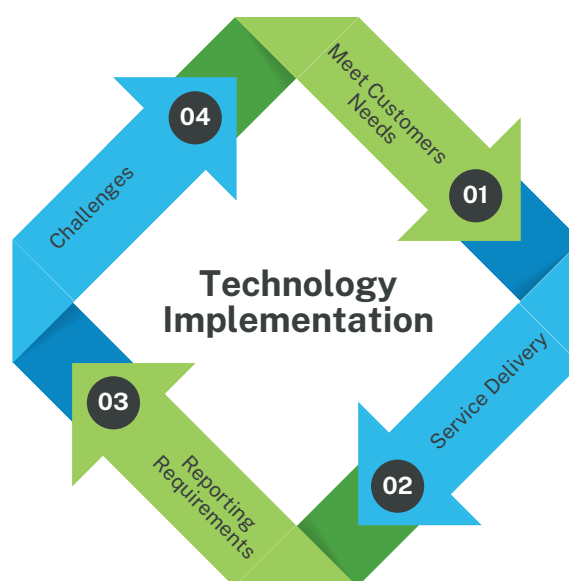


Figure 1: NVPM Technology Implementation Framework

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

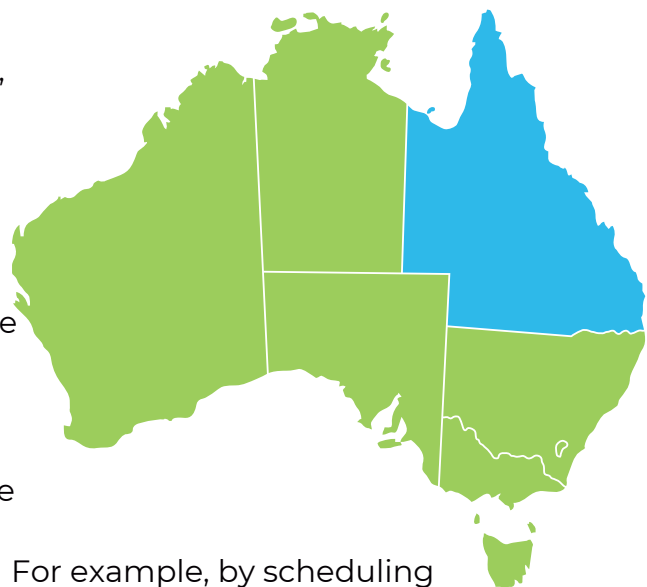
From the growing aging population and economic inequality impacting vehicle ownership, to the challenges faced by rural communities with limited public transport, and the essential inclusion of people with disabilities in society, the need for reliable and efficient transport services has never been 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 and Aged Care** (DoHAC) 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.

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