

## Initial Outcome Proposal to the East Suffolk Community Partnership Board – FY2023/24

### (Stage 1 Proposal)

#### 1. Name of Project/activity that will deliver the outcome(s)

Buzzabout (Demand Responsive Transport Service)

#### 2. Key outcome(s)

It is proposed that a 12-month extension to the current pilot will:

- Provide a demand responsive transport (DRT) service for residents and visitors in Lound, Blundeston, Somerleyton and Gunton St Peters and the north of Lowestoft. The service will operate Tuesdays and Thursdays from 08.30 to 16.30, commencing Tuesday 5 September for 12 months.
- Increase usage to a minimum of 10 adult return passenger per day from the northern parishes to Lowestoft by the end of the 12 months which will reduce funding to less than £25k and should provide some long-term financial viability of the service. 30 return fares (Northern parishes to Lowestoft) per day at the following rates would make the service cost neutral.

	Lound/Blundeston/St Olaves/Somerleyton to Lowestoft	Gunton to Lowestoft
Single	£ 3.00	£ 2.50
Return	£ 6.00	£ 5.00

- Provide additional value (non-financial) to the community, with measurable outcomes against agreed targets (i.e., young people into education, people into work, access to shops and services etc.)
- Gather learnings about successful operation of a mobile application (app) which is complementary to the DRT service and can be shared with other operators.
- Provide data and intelligence to support ESC and SCC in the development of new and improved DRT rural transport services, trialling the viability of initiatives such as flexible timed pickups within a defined geography, a dynamic grant allowance incentivising higher passenger numbers, and continued use of an existing minibus rather than leasing a new vehicle.

#### 3. How has the need been identified?

**Regional context.** Transport East report that:

- Two-thirds of our rural communities live in a ‘transport desert,’ areas without an alternative transport to private vehicles. Car reliance means rural residents have higher transport costs than urban dwellers and experience greater fuel poverty.
- It is harder for rural residents to access education, training and employment by means other than car – leading to lower incomes, health inequalities and educational outcomes.
- Around half of the carbon emissions in the Transport East area are generated by non-urban areas, our regional emissions at 42% are well above the national average of 28%.

- A disproportionately high number of people in the region are over 65, creating challenges around isolation and poor access to healthcare.

**East Suffolk Context:** Transport East Rural Access Survey – in East Suffolk, no parish scored access to buses as ‘very good’ - access to rail services is valued where it exists.

The East Suffolk Community Partnership Transport and Travel (ESCPT&T) Task Group have conducted extensive research identifying transport needs and opportunities across East Suffolk. It found that demand responsive Transport (DRT) services could be a solution to rural transport issues and social isolation. Services are currently under-utilised and there is a real opportunity to expand the customer base of community transport.

**Local Context:**

By a process of data analysis and local stakeholder engagement the Lowestoft and Northern Parishes Community Partnership have identified *improve mental Health and wellbeing* and *reduce social isolation and loneliness* as two of its three priorities.

In January 2022, residents in the northern parishes were asked about access to transport. Nearly 50% of respondents to a survey rated their access to transport a 1 out of 5. 80% of respondents answered “yes” to wanting more local transport services. A clear trend within the responses was that awareness of currently available services was extremely low.

Following an initial pilot scheme in the area under the same name, lessons learned have been shared between relevant parties and a new, lower cost operating model has been established which is able to build on the areas of success from the original pilot. The introduction of an app and a renewed marketing scheme will help overcome barriers to awareness and access.

**4. Who will benefit from the outcomes?**

Residents living in and around Lound, Blundeston, Somerleyton, Gunton St Peters and the north of Lowestoft, in particular, those who:

- Do not have access to a car and need/want to access services and leisure activities.
- Require transport to bus stops and from Lowestoft or Somerleyton railway station to connect to an onward journey - for example to James Paget Hospital or to Great Yarmouth.
- Need to travel to school, college, training or employment.
- Indirectly, the wider East Suffolk population will benefit from the learnings this pilot scheme will provide to other DRT services, and the use of technology with transport services, in the district.

**5. How will the outcomes(s) be sustained after the funding period (if appropriate)?**

Information gathered indicates that there is not a commercial market left in the area. Commercial operators are not able to run a service for the amount we could pay. We are therefore working with BACT, the community transport provider operating in the area, to test a new financially sustainable service model.

As the service becomes more established and awareness amongst residents increases, the aim is for the service to be almost self-sustaining through fares collected. Some additional funding may be sought to tackle specific blockers to self-sustainability, but the service revenue and costs will be reviewed quarterly to determine the feasibility of continuing the service. The Community Transport provider is a non-profit organisation, so any revenue generated is put back into the business and finding successful outcomes for local people.

Subject to confirmation of fare increases (which the operator has confirmed would be palatable to the customer base), and to be financially sustainable on the proposed journey prices, Buzzabout needs to have 30 adult return passengers per day from the northern villages to Lowestoft.

Additional, non-financial benefit targets will be set and measured to understand the true value that these services provide in reducing social isolation and loneliness and improving mental health and wellbeing to those who use it.

BACT receive and act upon feedback from passengers to ensure that the service meets local people's needs and adapts the service, wherever possible, to suit demand where required.

#### **6. Brief description of the project / activity that will deliver the outcome(s).**

A demand responsive bus pilot scheme is already being delivered to meet the identified needs of the community around Lound, Blundeston, Somerleyton, Gunton St Peters and the north of Lowestoft, particularly regarding access to transport and tackling rural isolation and loneliness. The service:

- allows passengers to book their journey (no waiting at bus stops)
- Takes passengers exactly where they need to go within the service area at the time they need to travel (subject to other bookings).
- Is fully accessible: including for wheelchair users.
- Reduces the need for single occupancy car journeys by offering shared, on-demand transport.

The pilot set out to determine whether a demand responsive service can receive enough bookings to become near self-sustaining. To increase patronage on the service, in addition to the increased booking options, targeted marketing was conducted to raise awareness of the service and to break perception of “who the service is for.”

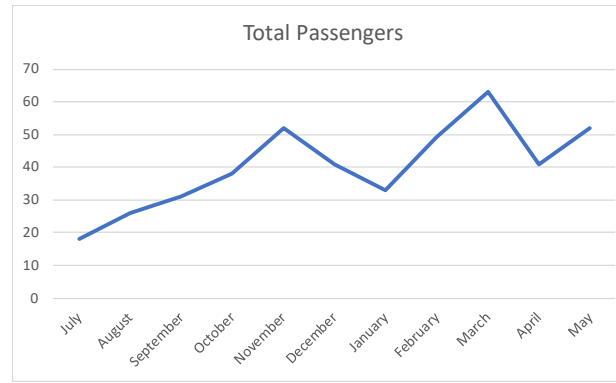
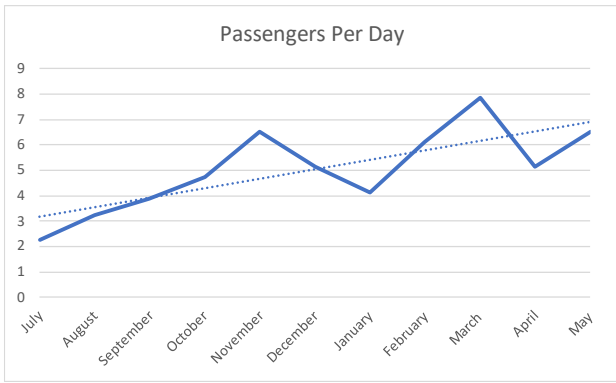
The service has seen an upward trend in passenger numbers since it launched and is yet to find its peak. With the introduction of an app and optimisation of the service days and area coverage, passenger numbers are likely to increase. The initial pilot has highlighted successful forms of marketing, which can be replicated. The pilot also demonstrated the importance of community buy-in and ownership, which is yet to be fully utilised.

The pilot has served over 400 passengers since launch, with an average of 5 passengers per service day. The local community transport provider is unlikely to have had the capacity to serve these passengers without the service, and they would have required taxis or friends/family to get where they needed to.

During the initial pilot, passengers were asked to provide feedback on the service, which was all wholly positive. To the question “How has Buzzabout made a difference to your life,” respondents said:

- “Great difference. Since losing our school bus it has cost us a great deal of money on taxis (if you can get one)”
- “My husband’s mobility is poor and the bus to the door is excellent for him”.
- “My husband is able to get into Lowestoft”.
- “Can go out [on the bus] the same day you book!”

Monthly passenger numbers per day and in total July 2022 – May 2023:



The success of the initial 1-year pilot and the changes we propose making to improve the service, has informed this proposal to extend the pilot.

The service launched operating on Mondays and Thursdays, between 08:30 – 16:30, which matched the demand identified through surveys we conducted. The service currently supports the communities of Lound, Blundeston, Somerleyton and Gunton St Peters and the north of Lowestoft. It is proposed to change the operating days to Tuesdays and Thursdays and extend the operating area as a result of passenger numbers and user feedback. Currently, Thursdays see c.3 times the number of passengers compared to Mondays. Through customer feedback, Tuesday is now deemed to be a more suitable service day. Additionally, the initial service area did not include some key pick-up and drop off points in Lowestoft shopping areas (such as North Quay retail park) which are proposed to be included in the new service area.

The new pilot will also include app booking functionality, to increase the accessibility of the service and to test whether there is untapped demand (as expected). We hope that an app will make the service appeal more to younger people and also decrease admin costs.

To make the service more financially viable, a new fare model will be trialled. The initial pilot was subsidised to reduce the fare value. Now the service is established, the approach will be to increase fares to determine how financially self-sufficient the service can be.

The service is operated by BACT using a 16-seater accessible minibus and it is proposed that will continue for the next 12 months.

The importance of a high profile and consistent marketing campaign was demonstrated during the initial pilot, and it is proposed that this be repeated to advertise the new operating days and the availability of an app, starting with a ‘relaunch’ September.

Start September 2023 - End August 2024

**7. Who is involved?**

**Who is involved in developing this outcome proposal?**

**Who will deliver the project/activity?**

- East Suffolk Council will continue to be responsible for the service contract and have employed a Project Manager.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EDF have been providing Programme Management for the Transport and travel Programme. This function has now transferred to East Suffolk Council.</li> <li>BACT will continue to deliver the service under contract with East Suffolk Council</li> </ul>
<b>Board Member supporting the project:</b>	Caroline Topping

**8. Give information about match funding here:**

Source of match funding:	Funding confirmed?	Amount (£)
Lowestoft and Northern Parishes Community Partnership	No	2,000

Total project / activity cost	32,000
Total of confirmed match funding	
Total amount of Strategic funding that may be required if fare revenue is reduced (This figure will be less if the fare revenue grant reduces in line with increased passenger numbers)	30,000

**9. Identify where the Community Partnership Board Strategic Budget will be spent:**

Description of activity or item (by who and by when where appropriate)	Cost (£)
12-month Marketing campaign	5,000
12-month service operation	25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,000</b>

**10. How will the project / activity be monitored, and outcomes reported (including project risks)?**

Information gathered through the feedback from users and directly from the service operator. These will be reported via quarterly monitoring returns. Data will be collected on:

- Single fares by day and week
- Return fares by day and week
- Fare origin by week
- Revenue collected by week
- Feedback/complaints by week
- Adult/child split by week
- Method of booking (n/a until app launched) by week
- Multiple occupancy journeys by week
- Subsidy used per passenger by week
- Journey purpose

Outcomes will be reported quarterly to the Transport and Travel Steering groups and annually to the Community Partnership Board.

Community Partnership Board Member Declaration:

I confirm that I support this proposal:

Name: Caroline Topping

Signature: Confirmed by email

Date: 16.06.2023