



East Suffolk Community Partnership Board

Transport Task Group Report and Budget Request

September 6, 2021

Introduction and Background

The Community Partnerships reviewed their priorities in light of the Covid-19 response and transport issues remained a priority, particularly given the links to other key areas of activity e.g. isolation, health and wellbeing, employment and training opportunities, and youth activities.

At its meeting in September, the Board agreed to consider commissioning some expertise to work with the Board to identify potential 'quick win' transport projects and help local organisations and groups to develop these and was prepared to allocate funding from the 2020/21 Community Partnership Board budget to this priority.

The Task Group concluded that a twin track approach is appropriate:

Short Term:

- Identify, develop and seed/match fund pilots and trial projects to test 'proof of concept' and assess their viability to be scaled up across the area.
- Develop a 3-year transport work programme to be overseen by the Task Group and backed up by:
 - A programme manager
 - A programme delivery budget

Medium – Long term:

- Undertake a study of Transport and travel issues & gaps in East Suffolk
- Work with strategic partners and collectively lobby to influence for change

The purpose of this report is to outline the work completed against this approach, to highlight the recommendations emerging and to seek financial support to begin commissioning pilots for these recommendations.

Suffolk Context

Approach to short term goals

There is a lot of cross over between the various priorities, and transport tends to be an enabler linking priorities together, so they will not be addressed in isolation from each other as part of this project. For example, active travel solutions help both environmental and health and wellbeing priorities, as well as supporting the transport priority. Additionally, there is already work planned or work underway across Suffolk addressing some of these priorities, so the work of the Community Partnership Board has not been in isolation, avoiding duplication and

competing initiatives. For example, the cycling and walking strategy underway with the East Suffolk Council planning team is well underway and is looking to go to consultation on solutions imminently. This project can feed in cycling and walking solutions, and further research and findings on these topics, rather than attempt to duplicate the solutions.

Suffolk is blessed with some fantastic exemplars already, which can be used as inspiration for further expansion or replication. Suffolk has a fantastic volunteering base, which supports more than just transport. There are a multitude of Good Neighbour Schemes which provide a friendly community face and much needed support network. Additionally, the Connecting Communities services are well stocked with volunteer drivers and volunteer cars, providing an alternative to demand responsive routes. Both of these areas, like most other sections of society, have been badly affected by the pandemic, and will need to regrow as part of the country's recovery.

Active travel was an area of transport which excelled during the pandemic, as people looked for new ways to get exercise and were forced into new ways of moving around. Suffolk as a county is fortunate in its exceptional landscape and environment which makes active travel both feasible and appealing. The benefits to the environment and an individual's health and well-being are perfectly clear. The Suffolk Quiet Lanes initiative is one example of a successful implementation of a transport solution supporting active travel. Active travel should be considered in conjunction with any new transport initiative to provide linked services and avoid the propensity for car use, which is otherwise the default for the vast majority of journeys in rural areas.

Approach to short term goals

“Identify, develop and seed/match fund pilots and trial projects to test ‘proof of concept’ and assess their viability to be scaled up across the area.”

To support the Transport Task Group in its short term and medium-term approach an extensive evidence gathering exercise was conducted. This resulted in a host of potential solutions that were either provided directly by the community (as formed ideas) or were created based on community feedback. Whilst conducting this research, in addition to desk-based research, conversations were held with:

- Community Partnership chairpersons and officers
- Transport Providers
- County/District Council relevant teams

The rationale in this approach was to ensure a broad, yet specific focus on the key transport issues and opportunities around East Suffolk. In the time available, more detailed community consultation would not have been possible and may not have returned better results. Leads within Community Partnerships hear the views of their local community, so are well placed to provide a balanced and summarised view of key topics. Equally, transport providers and transport teams within the councils are aware of potential areas for improvement/blind spots based on feedback received or data obtained.

Following this extensive period of research, an objective criteria assessment framework was developed to prioritise the solutions and potential pilots. Solutions were not discounted due to cost or implementation time, as one of the key strengths of the Task and Finish group is to lobby

for support, identify funding and test and trial innovative solutions. The Community Partnership Board and its transport task group are not overly constrained in how solutions are funded, allowing alternative and new approaches to be taken. The 7 criteria used to assess the solutions are as follows:

- Cost to user
- Benefit to community partnership
- Benefit to the individual user
- Benefit to the environment
- Accessibility
- Scalability
- Benefit to the economy/levelling up

Each of these criteria were tested and consulted on before being used to assess the solutions. They were also each mapped against the priorities of Suffolk County Council, East Suffolk Council and Transport East key priorities to ensure alignment with the key objectives of Suffolk.

Each of the solutions were reviewed and analysed critically against the framework to provide a prioritised list of solutions.

A broad range of “impact scores” were achieved for the solutions following assessment against the criteria.

Broadly, solutions which supported or expanded currently available services scored well. Additionally, and not unexpectedly, solutions which benefit the environment scored highly. However, solutions which required new infrastructure or were completely new services scored lower, with some exceptions.

The highest scoring solutions were generally new demand responsive services or financial support/expansions to current services and were grouped as prioritised solutions for further consultation with the Task Group.

“Develop a 3-year transport work programme to be overseen by the Task Group”

The strategy report has been completed in conjunction and in parallel with the period of research. This report details the research approach, findings, and the approach to idea prioritisation ahead of funding requests.

The end of the document outlines the following outcomes, which are to be put forward to the board as recommendations for funding, and longer-term thematic areas for focus from the task-group, to demonstrate how the Task Group and Community Partnership Board can have an impact on transport issues longer term.

Outcomes:

The top 10 solutions were further critiqued in a workshop with the wider Transport Task Group, to select the solutions which would be taken forward for detailed design and budget requests.

The group settled on 3 solutions to investigate and develop further:

- 1) An expansion of BACT to Lowestoft, particularly a new route supporting the northern most villages.
- 2) A new demand responsive transport (DRT) service supporting either the Southwold area, connecting to the main rail network and servicing the tourist community, or the villages around the Leiston area, linking to Leiston and Saxmundham, or another DRT service.
- 3) An expansion to the Katch service, extending the service to more villages on its route

Alongside each of these will be the desire to combine an active travel trial which links these solutions to other sustainable travel options. The case for this is particularly strong with idea 1, where there is already a good cycle network connecting Lowestoft to Lound/Blunderston.

Idea (1) is ready for funding immediately to begin shaping and forging the implementation.

Idea (2) requires some further development, but we are confident that the funding requested will be appropriate for the service development and implementation and provide much needed benefit to a rural community.

Similarly, idea (3) requires some time before funding is allocated. The Katch service is currently within a pilot period, but once it reaches a reflection point on its success, it would be a very sensible approach to expand the coverage of local villages using this service. Until then, survey work will be conducted to better understand the key areas for demand and what other ways the Katch service could be adapted, in addition to some marketing support.

Alongside the funding requests for specific pilot schemes, it has become clear that for a successful DRT service, offering phone booking and mobile app booking is key. Katch currently receives around half of its mobile bookings through the app route. For this reason, a request will be made to support the development of a mobile routing app which will service the DRT pilots. Initially this will support the BACT expansion, but if successful, the app could service further DRT pilots and, potentially, be adopted and licenced to services being created outside of the scope of this group. By offering dual booking routes, the service is opened up to a much wider demographic audience and helps people engage and support the service.

The Transport Task group will continue to work with the idea leads to develop the projects and provide them project support and a network of useful contacts and connections to ensure successful implementation and establishment of pilots.

Considerations

The following details the ideas selected, which will form the request for funding from the Community Partnerships Board.

BACT have already tried to establish themselves in the Lowestoft area previously, but for a mixture of factors have not been successful. BACT note that dial-a-ride is their most used service, but DRT may be successful if the conditions are right.

The idea is to establish a new demand responsive app which connects Lowestoft and Somerleyton to the rest of the Northern Parishes (Lound, Blunderston, Corton).

This new pilot would utilise an app and trial different operating hours, to test where the service is most required.

The current knowledge of the demand in the northern parishes is quite limited, but BACT already has registered dial-a-ride users in some areas (roughly 10 in Somerleyton, 10 in Lound) and experience can be sought from the community to understand the demand better. For example, a weekly bus service to the northern parishes shuttling the community to a local Tesco, utilising the local rugby club mini-bus, has been quite successful and has identified some demand.

Apps have been explored in the past by BACT, but it is thought these aren't utilised by the current demographic. To expand the demographic using the service, an app will be explored, retaining the phone booking system.

Anecdotally, KATCH receives around 50% of its bookings through the app, which provides an indication of the potential which could be unlocked should an app be provided for the new BACT service. This app could then be implemented to support the wider connecting communities service, once proven successful.

Support requested from The Community Partnership Board T&T task group could also include comms (particularly on social media to further unlock different demographics), support in driver recruitment and marketing.

BACT's current assets are generally available weekends and weeknights, but due to the current service offering, they are busier during the day. However, it is not envisaged that new bus leasing is required. It should be noted that BACT's current fleet are not electric vehicles. One driver is currently employed full time who is based in Lowestoft, otherwise volunteer drivers could support the service.

BACT are currently awaiting feedback on a 1-year contract extension, which is crucial to the running of the service. They have ambitions to be a part of Bus Back Better Strategy and BACT's 10 trustees are happy for the service to explore new service options.

The requested budget to support this service expansion is £50k to initiate the pilot.

Breakdown:

- Marketing for new service and driver recruitment - £10k
- Service implementation - £10k
- Comms support - £10k
- Recruitment of admin/driver required - £20k

As mentioned previously, the current Katch pilot is being monitored, but currently seems a prime candidate for support and expansion. The Community Partnership it is within (and even the Community Partnership to the South) sees great value in expansion. However, the time has to be right, as the conclusions on the current conditions for the pilot are yet to be made. Until the time is right, a funding request of £10k will be made to support marketing and comms of this service, to further ensure its success and the communities it serves within the East Suffolk district.

Using the breakdown above for the expansion of the BACT service, a further £50k will be requested to support the development of another DRT pilot, in another area of East Suffolk. There are two very promising locations, but both need further development before funding is committed. However, there is certainty around the need to test another pilot in this space, with a slightly different geography or operating model, which will benefit the communities and

provide an example case study for the wider national transport agenda of the most appropriate route forward.

As highlighted in the previous section, a mobile app is critical to the success of any of these pilots, so £50k is requested to properly explore and develop a bus routing and booking app. with a strong emphasis on using a local supplier, where at all possible.

Finally, key to the transition to a more environmentally friendly travel portfolio, is the implementation of further active travel. £20k is requested to support further active travel pilots, which will be explored in conjunction to the DRT pilots. This could fund e-bike or e-scooter schemes, for example. Similarly, this pilot needs further development, but the need is very clear.

Conclusion and recommendation

The implementation of the Transport and Travel Task Group to support the board in identifying transport and travel issues & gaps in East Suffolk has been successful. A model has been found which ensures a transparent and object review of transport solutions and enables the selection and implementation of ideas which are impactful and tackle issues and gaps in transport provision.

A strategy report has been created outlining the Transport Task Group's approach, both in the short term (including the implementation of the prioritised solutions) and in the long-term.

Three very promising pilot projects have been identified for the Community Partnerships Board to fund and support the development of to tackle known issues with access to transport. These ideas also support the wider objectives with the environment and tackling social and rural isolation.

The prioritised pilots are all under the umbrella of "demand responsive" solutions, which also means they fit squarely with the wider transport agenda for the country. Transport East are represented on the Transport and Travel task group and can see a lot of value in exploring different operating models for demand responsive solutions. The pilots could become exemplars for rural transport and have the scope to receive further financial backing and to be expanded further. To increase the success of these DRT pilots, and to create the most learnings, the development of a booking app is required, which could be licenced and support each of the DRT pilots.

In addition to these, it is clear there is need to support active travel pilots to further connect up journeys, to continue to meet our green agenda priorities and to give the community the greatest portfolio of choice.

The Board is recommended to support the shortlisted ideas to enable their development and implementation

It is recommended that the Board agrees to:

- a) support the expansion of the BACT service, extending the service to the Lowestoft and the Northern Parishes -£50k
- b) support a further DRT pilot, in another area of East Suffolk not currently served by existing or proposed pilot schemes- £50k

- c) To allow funds to support marketing and comms for the Katch service, and with the view to assessing more villages to be served on its route - £10k
- d) Consider supporting the ringfencing of funds to set up active travel pilots as an accompaniment to the suggested DRT pilots - £20k
- e) To provide funds for the development of a mobile app which will support the aforementioned pilots and allow further expansion of DRT solutions into new areas of East Suffolk and beyond - £50k
- f) Note the match funded element provided by EDF for continued project support from Jack Raven
- g) To note and support the Transport and Travel Task Group's continuation in terms of championing and delivering against this theme
- h) To support the revised outcome proposal as appended to this report

Transport and Travel Task Group