

Winter/Spring 2026

Community Transport Newsletter

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Message from the Team

Highland Council's Transport Team are delighted to present this second issue of our Community Transport newsletter. It has taken shape with contributions from Highland CT organisations, for which we are so thankful.

Paula White from the Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) is looking to see if anyone has a volunteer handbook, they would be willing to share. She is also inviting CT groups to join the WhatsApp group for sharing ideas and

solutions; this was discussed at the CT event held at Highland Council Headquarters on 13 August 2025. If you are interested in joining the WhatsApp group or have a volunteer handbook to share, please email paula.white@dacic.org.uk

Thank you for reading, and, regardless of your role within the realm of CT, thank you profoundly for your contributions to facilitating these precious connections within a challenging landscape.

What's On: Recent Events

At a glance:

- Highland Community Transport Workshop -Lairg – 03 December
- Community Transport Association (CTA): Highland CT Network Meeting with NHS Highland – 21 January

HIGHLAND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT WORKSHOP -LAIRG – 03 DECEMBER

- **Driver Training:** D1 volunteer training begins in February, with MiDAS delivered by the same trainer. Full details will be circulated. D-category training planned for later in the year.
- **Communities in Motion:** A council vehicle will support a pilot school-run model, with NHS Highland using it during off-peak times. Other groups can express interest for similar operating.
- **Partnership Work:** NHS Highland is identifying high taxi-use areas; Highland Council continues work with ScotRail on better timetable alignment. A further stakeholder session will take place in March.

- **Wheelchair-Accessible Transport:** Inverness continues to face a shortage; a Dundee-style licensing model is being explored as a potential approach.
- **Rail Updates:** ScotRail looking at Kyle line timetable issues and forming a Highland-wide stakeholder group. Scotrail may attend our March meeting.
- **EV Charging:** Concerns raised about charger access, especially at Raigmore. Highland Council is moving to the EZO system, resulting in extra charging options available locally
- **CTA Resources:** Updated Social Value Toolkit available, plus new reports and support for operators. CTA exploring whether operator-level data can be collected for more insight, including the possibility of quarterly updates.
- **HITRANS MooveFlexi:** Robert Wilson @ HITRANS showcased MooveFlexi; a flexible bookings app with real-time tracking and automated planning. It's already used in several regions, and more training/demo sessions are available.
- **Funding:** A discussion about the current Highland Council 3-year funding cycle: some like the stability, but others prefer a rolling application option. Funding issues, especially around wheelchair-accessible vehicles, will be followed up. Dialogue about how commercial bus companies should fit into the wider community transport network.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION (CTA): HIGHLAND CT NETWORK MEETING WITH NHS HIGHLAND – 21 JANUARY

A productive and encouraging discussion between NHS Highland (NHS) and Community Transport Operators (CTOs), several themes emerged to help strengthen partnership working across the region.

- **Strengthening Dialogue and Communication:** All agreed on the need for closer, ongoing communication between NHS and CTOs.

- **Transport Opportunities:** The NHS renal dialysis taxi contract ends in July, creating a possible opportunity for CTOs to support this service. CTA will share names of interested operators with NHS, who will arrange a follow-up meeting.
- **Positive Narrative and Recognition:** NHS acknowledged the great work CTOs do across the Highlands and highlighted the need for wider recognition internally.
- **Cost Savings & Value for Money:** NHS is inviting ideas from CTOs on how transport services could be delivered more efficiently.
- **Highlands & Islands Patient Travel Scheme:** A range of improvement suggestions were raised for future consideration.
- **Potential NHS Highland Grant Funding:** Strong support was expressed for early proposals around a potential NHS grant-funding model for CTOs.
- **Training Opportunities:** Interest in exploring whether NHS could offer access to some of its staff training as an in-kind partnership benefit.

CTA encouraged operators to share any further thoughts.

Additional CTA Updates

- CTA has released an update on the D1 licensing campaign and welcomes member feedback ahead of the upcoming consultation.
- CTA has launched its "Our Communities, Our Transport" 2026 manifesto
- The annual CTA Membership Survey will be shared soon.

What's On: Upcoming Events

(Aberdeenshire Council led) **Meet the Movement**, Woodhill House in Aberdeen 11 March 2026

(Highland Council led event) **Community Transport Day**– 13 March 2026
Highland Council Chambers, Headquarters, Inverness or via Teams.

Partnerships for Wellbeing @ Inverness Castle Experience



A nice story from us. Our PFW community transport service alerted Inverness Castle to the fact that one of our regular clients - 98 year old Beatrice Ingram - was actually born in the castle and lived there when her father was a senior police chief back in 1927. They invited her to see how her home now looked after the big refurbishment project. Our volunteer driver John also revealed that she had had a sneak preview of the building while it was still being completed. He'd taken her up to the site gate and the foreman let our community transport car come up to the front of the building. He then informed all the workers on the site who lined up to give her a round of applause and wave her goodbye.

Today she got the VIP treatment as she and her granddaughter Leanne were invited inside and greeted by Inverness Councillor Ian Brown and High Life Highland Chief

Executive Steve Walsh. She shared childhood memories of riding her tiny tricycle along the dark corridors and of her and her brother playing on the old iron cannons that used to sit on the courtyard.

-Jeff Zycinski, Partnerships for Wellbeing

Community Transport fond farewells



Spotlight on North West Community Bus Association: Nearly Three Decades of Service to Remote Communities

Supporting a Remote and Resilient Community

Kinlochbervie and the surrounding villages sit along the remote northwest coast of Scotland, where even basic services — a supermarket, dentist, or optician — can require a round trip of 120 miles or more. These are fragile, close-knit communities with a growing elderly population, and access to transport has always been essential.

How It All Began

The North West Community Bus Association (NWCBA) was established in 1997 by local residents who recognised that neither public transport nor private operators were meeting the community's needs.

In the early years, the bus operated mainly for group travel under a Section 19 permit.

Expanding Services to Meet Local Needs

- 2011: A Section 22 licence was granted, and the first registered route was launched from Kinlochbervie to Ullapool, running twice monthly (1st and 3rd Thursday).
- 2012: The Association became a private limited company.
- 2013: A new monthly route to Dingwall was introduced (4th Thursday).
- Alongside registered routes, the Association continued to support:
 - Community hires
 - School hires
 - A weekly Wednesday trip to Durness, transporting pupils to and from Kinlochbervie High School (later discontinued when school days changed).

Becoming a Charity

In September 2020, the NWCBA became a registered charity, reinforcing its commitment to supporting people across the area.

Changing Needs and Declining Passenger Numbers

Passenger numbers remained steady up to early 2020, but began to decline due to:

- The impact of COVID-19
- Reduced mobility and poorer health among long-standing passengers

To understand community needs, questionnaires were issued and local advertising carried out. This identified interest in a route to Tain, which was approved — but usage remained too low to sustain it. Over time, it became clear that the need for community transport was diminishing as more potential passengers had their own transport and greater mobility.

A Difficult but Necessary Decision

Despite falling numbers, the Association continued to run routes with as few as 2–3 passengers, but this model quickly became financially unsustainable. By 2025, both the Chair and Transport Coordinator planned to retire, and despite invitations to the community, no new volunteers came forward. After careful consideration, the committee agreed to dissolve the Association, with remaining financial reserves donated to community organisations.

A Legacy of Dedication

For nearly 30 years, the NWCBA has been a lifeline — connecting people, supporting education, enabling access to essential services, and reducing isolation across one of Scotland's most remote areas.

Their work has made a lasting difference, and their contribution to the community will be sincerely remembered.

The Highland Council would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at NWCBA for everything they have done and wish them all the best for the future.

Spotlight on Volunteers

In each issue we will be featuring at least one amazing volunteer – for this edition, that focus is with **Badenoch & Strathspey Community Connexions** where we highlight both Alan and Dorothy McIntosh, who are both longtime volunteers with the group.

Alan Brown has been a committed volunteer for 15 years, making a significant impact both as a driver and behind the scenes. His dedication and professionalism have strengthened BSCX and inspired those around him.

Using his ICT expertise, Alan designed and manages the group's Microsoft Access booking system and created valuable reporting tools that help measure social value—work that has improved efficiency and supported future funding.

As a frontline volunteer, he has also driven hundreds of service users to medical appointments, social activities, and essential shopping, providing vital support to the community.

Dorothy McIntosh has been a true pioneer in the organisation for the past 17 years. When she joined BSCX, it had only a small team and a handful of volunteers using their own cars. She played a central role in its growth, bringing an exceptional knowledge of Community Transport.

Starting as Office Manager, she soon used her finance expertise to become Finance Manager, and she has also been a vital support to the Board as Company Secretary. Her work in governance and strategic planning helped guide the organisation's development, always with service users and communities at the heart of her decisions.

Dorothy has generously shared her expertise with many other Community Transport groups, helping them to form, develop, and thrive. Her contributions have supported several local and national awards, raising the organisation's profile. Her passion for the sector remains as strong as ever.

If you would like to nominate someone who is really making a difference, let us know! We will be happy to feature them in upcoming issues of the newsletter.

Have Your Say!

To ensure that content remains relevant, interesting and useful, we are so keen to include **your** input as much as possible. Please let us know what you think, and what information would be most. Don't be shy: what binds us all is our interest in and passion for Community Transport, which by its very nature is about **community** – so we are delighted to hear from you and for this newsletter to reflect all your diverse voices, experiences and contributions. 😊