A vision for local transport:
Flexible, funded, individualised transport
for Mid Sussex and beyond.



Mid Sussex Community Transport Forum

COMMUNITY PEOPLE

West Sussex Brighton & Hove ageUK

June 2026

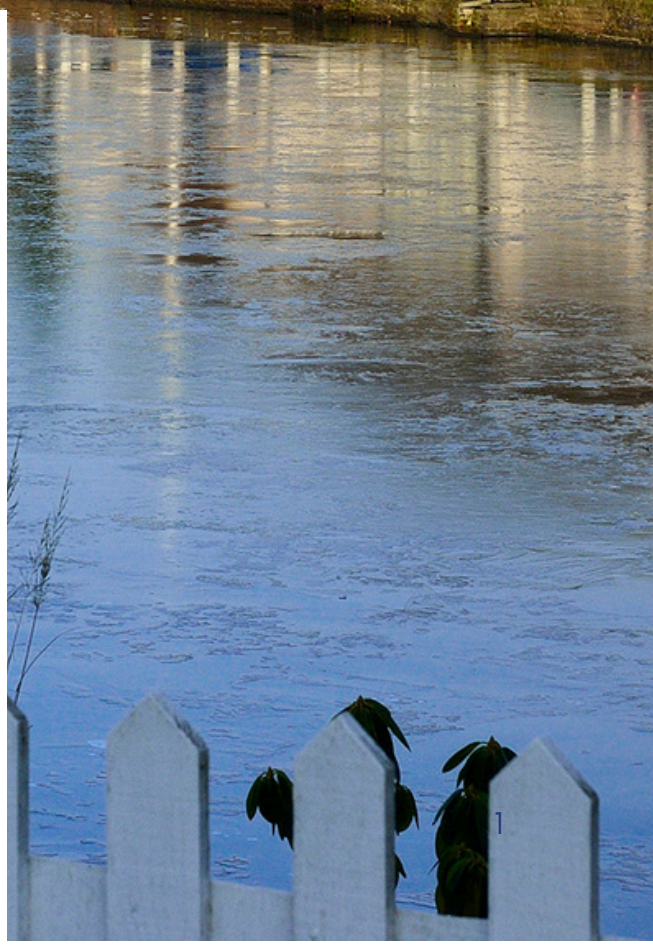


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Overview

Local community transport plays a vital role in supporting the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of Mid Sussex and wider in Sussex. Mid Sussex needs an effective and affordable transport network to connect residents with employment, education, healthcare, shopping, and leisure activities. Lack of reliable transport continues to be one of the greatest barriers older people face. As a result, many individuals experience isolation and reduced opportunities to stay connected and thrive. This can lead to poor mental health, frailty and the inevitable increase in pressures on A&E and the NHS more widely.

Demand-responsive buses, volunteer driver community initiatives and accessible transport for elderly and disabled residents, provide an essential lifeline for individuals. These schemes help to bridge gaps left by conventional public transport networks and contribute to greater social inclusion. Conventional transport provision can be limited in frequency especially in rural areas and also time restricted.

Community Transport Sussex is the main operator of community transport within the Mid Sussex area (alongside VCSE providers). The organisation has had to dramatically reduce its services and charge higher costs to existing ones due to rising operational costs such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, and staffing.

This has left many older people unable to access services whilst demand is high and increasing due to NHS services becoming more centralised, extreme weather scenarios and increase in anxiety.

Community transport (Including voluntary services) is key to health system support but lacks long-term funding in order to provide sustainable services. Research shows* that 68% of community transport organisations are making journeys to health-related destinations, but only 29% of them are in contact with health services and only 11% are in receipt of health authority funding. This underlines a lack of connectivity between organisations and institutions set up to serve older people. We need to ensure that community transport is a part of key government schemes, health partnerships and top level strategy.

Overview

Community People are committed to identifying gaps within the Mid Sussex community and to face head on challenges that affect the daily lives of the communities that our member groups serve.

Community People and Age UK West Sussex hosted a discussion on local transport within its regular Older People Forum to harvest local views and opinion from key representatives within the sector. We identified partners and key individuals who work within the sector and experience the daily effects of this lack of transport services. We set out to look at what works well in our communities as well as the realities people are facing to enable us to look at the potential and possibilities that exist to drive forward change.

We also conducted research on community transport services elsewhere (see page 19) and pulled together quantitative data from local volunteer initiatives that supply transport services.

We sought to look at the current state of local community transport in Mid Sussex, exploring its importance to the people most severely affected, the challenges faced by service providers and users, and potential solutions for improving connectivity and accessibility.



Through analysis of transport provision, community needs, and future development opportunities, the information harvested from the forum aims to identify recommendations that can help create a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient transport network for the district.

The Forum

In April 2026, Community People and Age UK led a forum that focused on transport within the Mid Sussex area. This forum focused on transport within our communities, with particular attention to the challenges faced by older people.

During the session, we explored what is currently working, identified key barriers, and discussed practical solutions to help strengthen transport access across the sector.

The aim of this session was to have an honest and thoughtful conversation listening to those from the local VCSE sector to then disseminate and influence future local decision making and increase awareness at all levels of community.

While we recognise that this is a complex issue that cannot be solved in a single discussion, the aim was to bring people together to start conversation.

In addition, it sends a clear message to older people that their experiences are being heard and that they are not invisible—this is an issue that matters, and one we are committed to addressing together.

This conversation was conducted in a safe space to process and navigate the challenges.

Who was there?

Thirty four people attended at The Cherry Tree Centre in Burgess Hill from community groups and charities such as Good Neighbours Care, Carers Support, National Trust, Age UK East Grinstead, Community Transport Sussex and Mid Sussex Older People's Council (See full list Appendix 2). We also welcome social prescribers to our forums who provide valuable community insight and perspective.

*See Appendix 1 for full list of attendee groups.

Presentations

We welcomed 4 different presentions on different perspectives on local community transport as follows:

- Zahra Dhamish, Social Prescriber - Pilot taxi project.
- Matt Roberts, CT Sussex - Current Situation CT Sussex.
- John Bines, Good Neighbours Care – Perspective of local transport provider.
- Laura Cooper, National Trust Standen – Local activity transport pilot project.

Community Engagement

Older People voice collated from Age UK West Sussex clients:

- Worry around taxi prices – These seem to be different rates and people feel vulnerable.
- Social isolation and loneliness increases with increased costs of transport.
- Always about cost.
- Taxi drivers won't provide the same kind of service as CT transport or Neighbourly group.
- Mid Sussex is remote, and bus services so limited and where the bus stops are they are not always covered or no available seats.
- Having to use multiple buses.
- Timetables are poor – evenings and weekends. People don't know how to use a bus or access the timetables.
- Bus numbers and route should be on all community services meetings and events.

One older person was taken home by a taxi but left stranded and unable to return to her house. She was left by the taxi driver on the opposite side of the road to her home which was on a steep hill, was immobile and left in an extremely vulnerable position without any support.

Discussion

Workshop questions:

- What works well in transport for older people currently in Mid Sussex?
- What are the challenges and barriers?
- What would transport in Mid Sussex look like without these barriers? What impact would that have on older people?

What currently works well for older people and transport in Mid Sussex?

- Good Neighbours Care community transport*
- Lots of people pushing who want to see improvements
- Volunteer organisations
- Sussex CT Transport
- Neighbourly Care run a great service
- Bus stops in the right places (easier to access services)
- Local groups providing transport
- Bus routes are good IF you live in a place from where they can be accessed
- Mid Sussex is a great place to live if you can get around

*See Appendix 2 for neighbourly group transport statistics.

Discussion

What are the challenges and barriers for older people regarding transport?

- No long-term sustainable funding
- Buses and timetables are poor
- Lack of volunteers in groups
- Cost of and lack of confidence in taxis
- Lack of trained volunteers and drivers (In mobility)
- Digital exclusion
- Mobility
- Anxiety and feeling unsafe
- Wider societal issues of lack of wider family support.
- Lack of transport to social activities
- Parking cost and availability
- Blue badges - complicated and lack of awareness
- Trust of who to use
- High cost
- Lack of mobile signal
- Regularity of services
- Locations of bus stops
- Postcode lottery
- Size of geographical distances between stops
- Accessilbility
- Volunteer led and under resourced organisations
- Cost of fuel for transport organisations

Discussion

What would transport look like without these barriers?

- Individualised, low cost, flexible community travel
- Free or low cost
- Frequent service
- Hop on, hop off
- Confidence in trusted services
- Mid Sussex fully accessible TO ALL
- Volunteer passport - access to a pool of community drivers
- Trained drivers (Including taxi and bus drivers)
- Timely service
- Route reviews
- Flat rate taxi tariffs
- Free dial-a-ride
- GPs to work with community transport
- Means tested
- Sustainable links between voluntary and paid for service
- Trusted and reliable joined-up service
- No surcharges for different times of day
- School services differ to other community transport

Discussion

What impact would this have on on older people?

- More independence
- Sense of worth
- Impact on mental health
- Reduced isolation
- Active in the community
- Social interaction leads to happier lifestyle
- Better quality of life overall with less restrictions
- Lower costs to health/NHS
- Reduced isolation
- Feeling more part of the community and being able to have an impact on the local community
- Community spirit - improve mental health and loneliness
- Less missed appointments and lateness



Further General Points and Opinion

- MSDC Taxi voucher scheme is £30 per year which is unrealistic.

- Uber need to be let into the Mid Sussex area to drive taxi costs down.

- Requests for hard-copy bus timetables are consistently among the most common enquiries at the Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath council offices. This demonstrates that many residents still depend on non-digital sources of information and underlines the critical role that bus transport plays in maintaining independence, connectivity and access to essential services, especially for older people.

- Transport will sit with the new mayoral authority as a strategic bus partnership and it will be a priority.

- Dire financial outlook for charities that support essential services such as transport and health. NCVO Report states that 1/3 of charities are non sustainable: The Road Ahead

Summary

What currently works well?
Strong community and volunteer-led transport services, including Good Neighbours Care, Neighbourly Care and Sussex Community Transport. Local groups provide valuable support, and existing bus routes and stops work well where they are accessible. There is also strong local commitment to improving transport.

What are the main challenges?
Limited and unreliable public transport, lack of sustainable funding, volunteer shortages, high transport costs, accessibility and mobility barriers, digital exclusion, and difficulties accessing social activities. Rural geography, poor mobile coverage, and inconsistent services create a postcode lottery for many older people.

What would transport look like without these barriers?
A trusted, accessible and joined-up transport system that is affordable, flexible and reliable. Services would be frequent, low-cost, accessible to all, supported by trained drivers, sustainable funding, stronger links between health and transport services, and greater volunteer capacity.
What impact would this have on older people?

Greater independence, reduced isolation and loneliness, improved mental health and wellbeing, better access to services and social activities, fewer missed appointments, stronger community connections, and an overall better quality of life. It could also reduce pressure on health and care services

Transport Initiatives elsewhere

- **Somerset Slinky** Somerset Council created the Slinky service as a flexible demand responsive transport option to address a lack of conventional public transport in a largely rural county. The council funds the Slinky scheme. They are trialling a more digital version of the service, a demand responsive transport model. This introduces app based booking and more dynamic scheduling alongside the traditional pre book model.

- **FYT Bus** The Solent Future Transport Zone was an innovation programme funded by the Department for Transport, which supported trials of demand responsive transport and other new mobility models. The DDRT service on the Isle of Wight included FYT Bus who were a key community transport operator involved in delivering the trial. This provides a clear example of a pilot DDRT (Digital demand responsive transport) scheme in a rural area and the role community transport can play in delivering it. MOre information here (Page 7).

- **WESTlink** is a large scale, digital demand responsive transport service commissioned by the West of England Combined Authority and delivered through commercial partners across the WECA region.

National Community Transport Association
https://ctauk.org/

Transport Initiatives elsewhere

- **Flexibus East Sussex** - Connecting rural areas, with many users praising it as a reliable "lifeline" for travel, friendly drivers, and easy booking via the Ride Pingo app or phone. https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/public/flexibus

- **Hampshire CC - Local "Connect Local Transport on Demand"** flexible bus journeys. Areas with no public transport. Connect Transport on Demand is a pre-bookable, limited-stopping local minibus service that operates in areas of Northern Test Valley without other bus connections. Minibuses do not follow a fixed route or timetable but link up around 370 bus stops. ·https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/alternativetransport/transport-on-demand

- **Surrey Connect** is a council commissioned digital demand responsive transport service funded primarily through Surrey County Council with significant support from central government, Bus Service Improvement Plan funding. It's delivered through a mixed model, with services contracted out in geographic zones to a combination of community transport providers and commercial operators, while a central technology platform manages booking and routing across the network. East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership (a CT operator) runs a part of the DDRT scheme: Surrey Connect — ESRTP Community Transport.

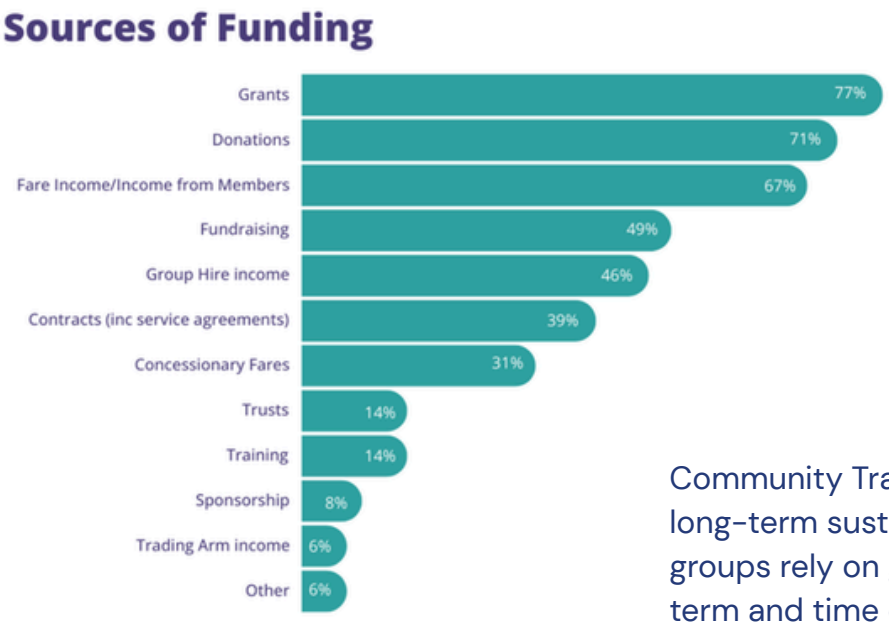
- **Book–a-Bus** -Travel to key destinations around West Sussex with "Book-a-Bus", a flexible and on-demand bus service in the rural areas in Chichester and Petworth (more zones to be launched soon). https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/travelling-around/book-a-bus/

Conclusion

Transport for older people in Mid Sussex is held together by Community Transport Sussex and community organisations, but strained by structural, financial and accessibility challenges.

We live in a rural area and this is a major issue for people of all ages and demographics particularly affecting those who are older, vulnerable or not able to afford their own transportation therefore creating a inequalities across our area.

With investment, coordination and long-term support, the area could deliver a truly inclusive, flexible and life-enhancing transport system that dramatically improves the lives of older residents.



Community Transport organisations need long-term sustainable funding. Most groups rely on grants which are short - term and time consuming to prepare and monitor. This graph represents the national picture*

Next steps and possibilities

- Relay findings to Mid Sussex District Council
- Disseminate findings to West Sussex County Council, councillors and appropriate MPs.
- Analyse how to demonstrate the value and impact that community transport has on NHS resources, costs and services.
- Potentially create a follow up forum with councils and decision makers involved to discuss and put forward ideas for going forward.
- Community People to advocate for the Mid Sussex community with information gathered.

Vision for local transport: Flexible, funded, individualised transport for Mid Sussex and beyond.



Appendix 1

List of Organisations that attended:

Organisation
Good Neighbours CARE
Community People
Mid Sussex Older Peoples Council
Community People
National Trust (Nymans & Standen)
Cuckfield Medical Practice
Mid Sussex health Care
A Touch of Gentleness
Mid Sussex Food Partnership
Care UK
National Trust
Age UK
Dolphins Practice
Age UK West Sussex
Mid Sussex District Council
Age UK East Grinstead and District
Lindfield Medical Practice
Horsham Community Link
Neighbourly Care
Age UK West Sussex
Health and Independent Living Support (HILS) West Sussex
Community Transport Sussex CIO
northlands wood practice
Community Transport Sussex CIO
Age UK East Grinstead & District
Hourglass
Volunteer SSAFA Caseworker
Burgess Hill u3a
Handcross Rosemary Club
MSOPC
Age Concern Hassocks
Carers Support West Sussex (CSWS)
Here - Sussex MSK Service
Abbeyfield, Westall House

Appendix 2

Neighbourly groups transport data:

2025 stats	Neighbourly Care in Hassocks, Hurst and Burgess Hill	Good Neighbours Care Haywards Heath and surrounding	Being Neighbourly (East Grinstead and surrounding)
Number of volunteers	40	95	27 (Those that drive)
Medical trips	133	1761	792*
Escorted shopping	172	419	*
Social appointments	29 (demential choir)	Plan to grow capacity here as seen as crucial.	*
Notes:			*Average 66 per month across all 3 needs i.e medical/shopping/social. Trips are dependant on need.
			Care provides transport for medical, covering East Grinstead & into Surrey, but not surrounding villages to EG in West Sussex. BN has an agreement with Care, if they are unable to support or if transport is required within a time frame of less than 48 hours, we can then use our volunteersto ensure non duplication of services.



*Source: Community Transport Organsiation Mapping England Survey: https://ctauk.org/mapping-england-headline-findings

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