



Community Transport (Brighton, Hove & Area) Ltd

Preston Barracks, Lewes Road, Brighton, BN2 4GL
Tel: 01273 677559 Fax: 01273 677742

ANNUAL REPORT 2009



Community Transport aims to promote Social Inclusion and Accessibility by working in all sections of the Community to deliver high quality Transport services in a way that upholds Equality, Diversity and the wishes of Users of our services to be involved in shaping the way that they are provided.



VAT registration No. 792 4246 11
Registered Office at the address shown
Industrial and Provident Society Reg. No. 27319R

Annual Report 2009

Management Committee and Staff

Management Committee

Chair	Valerie Richards
Treasurer	Tony King
Secretary	Ed Bassford
Committee	Dave Armstrong Tom Druitt Jon Gwyn Jack Hazelgrove Peter Otto (until December 2008)
Observers	Paul Crowther, Brighton & Hove City Council Nick Mitchell, Brighton & Hove City Council

Finance

Bankers	NatWest, 55 Lewes Road, Brighton BN2 3JQ
Auditors	Friend James, 169 Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6AG

Office Staff

Ed Bassford	General Manager
Lesley Shrieves	Deputy General Manager
Emily Cochrane	Administration and Data Co-ordinator
Leroy Kryenhoff	Administrator
Carl Mulliner	Administration Assistant
Mike Pover	Depot Supervisor

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Chair's Report

I am pleased to report that Brighton and Hove Community Transport has continued to provide a very successful service over this last year. We have carried nearly 25,000 passengers on our *Easylink* service and are at present looking at ways to expand ... which is really good news.

We have also been able to take the opportunity to review the routes of *Easylink*, looking at the possibility of running a service across Brighton and Hove from east to west and west to east. We have also run a service to the garden centre in Kingston which proved to be very popular.

And it is with great pleasure that I can report at the present time General Manager and Deputy General Manager are working hard to explore the opportunities connected with obtaining 'Section 22' permits that will enable us to use our buses to their full potential and hopefully bring in some extra revenue for the organisation so that we will be able to keep the costs of hiring the minibuses to our members as cheap as possible! This has got to be good news. We would also hope that by expanding our service in this economic climate we won't need to make any changes to our complement of staff and escorts.

On this occasion I would like to thank Ed and Lesley for their hard work. Thanks to Mike, Carl, Emily and Leroy as well as the drivers and escorts who are essential for the smooth running of our service.

Valerie Richards
Chair

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Treasurer's Report

We have had a successful year financially, and we are achieving many of our goals.

With steady contract revenue and the support of Brighton & Hove City Council we are maintaining our position, and hope that we can continue to secure the revenue that we currently have to enable us to keep the charges to our members at the lowest possible level.

We continue to keep a grip on expenditure, and have maintained our reserves to the level that we need to keep the organisation stable with a firm foundation, and in a position to challenge for more contracts.

We need to keep substantial reserves to allow for moving premises, which could occur at any time depending on the future of the Preston Barracks site. Our reserves also cover difficulties that could occur with the hire of vehicles or with staff issues.

We are happy with the level of reserves as it gives us stability in the current economic climate.

Tony King
Treasurer

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General Manager's Report

Community Transport is an organisation of about 150 member groups drawn from a wide spectrum of the city of Brighton and Hove. We exist to serve those member groups, by providing them with the opportunity to use our transport services for the benefit of their members who need transport to support their activities.

We employ 40 people and operate 17 minibuses

To sustain this service to our member organisations, we operate a range of other transport services, mainly under contract to statutory organisations such as Brighton & Hove City Council, meeting their requirements for home to school transport, accessible shoppers' transport and transport required to meet health care needs.

We are a not-for-profit organisation, incorporated in 1991 as an Industrial and Provident Society. We employ 40 people and operate 17 minibuses.

This last year has presented Community Transport with a number of challenging issues to deal with. Our business depends entirely upon our customers, many of whom are facing harsh economic realities. We know that we cannot take it for granted that contracts will be extended or that member groups will continue to use our services.

We have had to be prepared for setbacks as well as success. We manage our services carefully and we seek out new opportunities to grow. We have a very loyal customer base and we fully understand the need to serve those customers well.

Like all transport operators, we have been hit by cost increases. Between 2006 and 2008, we managed to avoid increasing our charges for group hire work, despite a rapid rise in the cost of fuel over that period. Inevitably, however, we had to put up our charges with effect from the beginning of 2009. We also withdrew some of the discounts

that had previously been on offer to groups in East Brighton, but were no longer appropriate once we ceased to receive funding for our contribution to the eB4U project.

Despite obvious concerns that an increase in charges might lead to a downturn in the number of bookings, we have not seen a reduction in the volume of work that we do on behalf of our member organisations. Indeed, in some areas of our activity, there has been significant growth. This is very gratifying.

The biggest long-term challenge that we face is to find permanent premises to operate from. Since 2006, we have enjoyed a series of short-term tenancies that allow us to operate from Preston Barracks until vacant possession is required by the developer. In March 2009, the City Council withdrew from its previous agreement with a preferred developer and decided to review development opportunities for the site. This gives us a little more breathing space, but the eventual need to vacate Preston Barracks still needs to be addressed.

Critical to the future is our relationship with Brighton & Hove City Council. The Council is our landlord. The major part of our operational income comes from contracts we have with the Council. We also receive a small amount of funding from the Council to support our office activity. The close partnership working with the Council can be seen in the fact that, in 2008, they supplied us with five new minibuses.

In return for this support, Community Transport is endeavouring to expand the scope of the *Easylink* shopping bus service in the city. This work is still in progress, with new services being introduced to serve the Holmbush Centre, Worthing, Eastbourne and Paradise Park at Newhaven. The viability of such new routes will depend upon the numbers travelling, but early signs are very promising.



In summary ... this has been another successful year. We are in good shape and looking forward to further success.

Our Main Activities

Services operated under contract to statutory authorities represent the largest part of our transport work.

In the area of education, we operate home to school transport services, serving Hillside School, Portslade, Chailey Heritage School and Northease Manor School, on behalf of Brighton & Hove City Council, as well as running the 'Pathfinder' minibus service for college students living in East Brighton.

We also provide home to school transport services on behalf of East Sussex County Council, for children attending Chailey Heritage School and Glyne Gap School, Bexhill.

Until April 2009, we ran a service tailored to meet the needs of users of the Medical Centre at 179 Preston Road, Brighton. This was funded by developer contributions achieved when the planning permission was granted for the 179 Centre to be built. Unfortunately, that funding has now come to an end and the service has had to cease.



Community Transport also operates a range of 'Easylink' services, providing door-to-door shopping transport for people who, as a result of personal mobility difficulties, are unable to use conventional public

transport. *Easylink* services use the vehicles that are used for providing school transport, at times when the school services are not running. Most *Easylink* services have operated in Brighton and Hove.

Until March 2009, we also ran an *Easylink* service in the North Wealden area of East Sussex that received funding from a group of town and parish councils in the area. Operation of the service transferred to Community Transport for the Lewes Area in April 2009, as part of a programme of development that will eventually lead to the establishment of an independent community transport operation in the Crowborough area.

1,555 bookings made by 93 different groups in 2008/09

Our Group Hire transport services are tailored to meet the needs of our member groups, with 1,555 bookings being made by 93 different groups in 2008/09. Whilst most of the member groups using our services represent older people and people with disabilities, almost a third of our active groups have a special interest in the activities of young people.

Group Hire services are provided either by using drivers employed by Community Transport, or using drivers provided by the groups themselves. All drivers are trained and assessed through the Community Transport Association's nationally recognised MiDAS minibus driver assessment scheme.



Service Developments

The contracts for our school transport services that operate to Hillside School, Portslade, Chailey Heritage School and Northease Manor School were secured in 2007, when Brighton & Hove City Council completed a comprehensive review of its home to school transport arrangements for pupils with special needs.

As part of this review, the Council acknowledged that the current arrangement with Community Transport, to provide school transport and *Easylink* as an integrated service, brought a significant social benefit to the city. The Council therefore decided to continue to use Community Transport to run the Hillside and Chailey Heritage school transport for a further three years at least. We also submitted a successful tender to run the school transport contract that serves Northease Manor School until 2011.

The operation of these long-term contracts enables us to plan future levels of activity with the knowledge that jobs are safe and vehicle leasing arrangements can be made securely.

The City Council provides us with five vehicles, fitted with tail-lifts, that are proving popular with both passengers and our operational staff.

The City Council provides us with five vehicles, fitted with tail-lifts, that are proving popular with both passengers and our operational staff. This package of support has given us an opportunity to expand *Easylink* operations in Brighton and Hove. Over the past year, we have been promoting *Easylink* services across the city and have introduced new services to destinations such as Holmbush Farm, Worthing, Eastbourne and Paradise Park, Newhaven. These new destinations are proving popular and offer greater choice to our customers, as well as attracting new users to the service.

The promotional work we have undertaken has succeeded in turning round the performance of *Easylink*. The decline in passenger numbers that has been happening over the past few years, partly as a result of greater accessibility of local bus and taxi services, combined with the availability of free travel concessions on local buses, has been halted. In the last few months of 2008/09, *Easylink* patronage increased by over 4 per cent, compared with the equivalent period the previous year.

This is a success story. One service that has a less certain future is the 'Pathfinder' shuttle bus that serves students who live in East Brighton and attend City College Brighton, BHASVIC College or Varndean College. Through careful promotion of the service, in partnership with the three colleges, patronage has risen significantly over the past two years, and it is clear from our own market research that students are happy with the service. Funding for the shuttle bus comes through the City Council, but ultimately from a central government budget administered by the Learning and Skills Council, who are reviewing their spending. We would very much like to continue running the service, but it is possible that the funding required will not be available from September 2009.

Group Hire transport continues to develop, with a number of organisations registering as new members during the past year. A year ago, we were expressing concern about some voluntary sector

organisations that were facing funding problems and whether this might result in a falling off in the number of bookings that they make. In 2008/09, however, the number of organisations booking our transport rose by 8 per cent, compared with the previous year, and the number of hirings increased by 6 per cent. The organisations that made hirings were, on average, making longer journeys, resulting in the number of hours our minibuses were in use for Group Hire work increasing by 12 per cent. Total income from Group Hire work increased by almost 16 per cent, over the whole year, only part of which is attributable to the increase in charges that came into effect on 1 January 2009.

Our aim is not to make a surplus on Group Hire services, since our reason for existence is to serve member organisations by providing economical transport to meet their needs. The new charging structure is set to be consistent with the fundamental not-for-profit objective that guides us.

Member organisations can save money on Group Hire work if they can provide their own drivers. As most members will know, we support this by providing driver assessment and training through the nationally recognised *Minibus Driver Assessment Scheme (MiDAS)* that has been developed by the Community Transport Association, in partnership with Hampshire County Council.

All Community Transport drivers – whether they are paid or drive as volunteers for our member groups – undergo a MiDAS assessment before they can drive our buses, with a refresher assessment every four years thereafter. This fulfils our commitment to ensure that our buses are driven to the highest standards and reassures passengers that they can be confident about the quality of our services.

It is our intention over the coming year to expand our training activities and improve the quality of support that our paid staff and volunteers can provide to the people who use our services. As an example of this, we are obtaining accreditation as a Trainer in Minibus Emergency Evacuation Procedures and will use this expertise to “cascade” awareness of good practice throughout our staff and volunteers.



As well as providing their own volunteer drivers, some of our member organisations are able to support our activities by arranging for Community Transport to manage vehicles on their behalf, under a vehicle brokerage arrangement. In the past year, one more new vehicle has come to us in this way. Our partner organisations find vehicle brokerage to be a very successful way to ensure that a minibus is professionally looked after and put to good use, while the organisation that owns the vehicle is assured that it is there for their own use whenever they require it.

Promotional Work

Promoting the work of Community Transport is an important activity. Our website – www.bhct.co.uk – is now fully functional, with easily accessible information about all of our services and links to other sites that are likely to be of interest to our users.



We have also revamped our leaflets about the *Easylink* services and ensured that these have been widely distributed throughout the city. Local leaflets are now available for three zones (East, Central and West) and this has enabled us to give more detailed information to users and potential users about the services that are available to them. The new services that we are introducing are being promoted through special fliers that are designed to attract first time users to the service.

We have also prepared publicity material that has been dispatched to a large number of voluntary sector organisations and churches in Brighton

and Hove, inviting them to include it in their local newsletters. All of this is intended to make more people aware of the services that we offer and the benefits to them of using those services.

 <p>Need Transport for a Trip Out?</p> <p>There's an easy way . . .</p> <p>Your organisation can join Community Transport and have the use of a minibus that will suit your needs.</p>  <p>Hiring a Minibus for your Group</p>	<p>How to book an Easylink Journey</p> <p>It's EASY! Just telephone Community Transport on (01273) 677559 to register as a new user and book a journey that suits you.</p>  <p>Our Contact Details</p> <p>Community Transport (Brighton, Hove & Area) Ltd Preston Barracks Lewes Road Brighton BN2 4GL</p> <p>Telephone: 01273 677559 Fax: 01273 677742</p> <p>Email: easylink@bhct.co.uk www.bhct.co.uk</p> 	 <p>Do you find it difficult to get to the shops?</p> <p>There's an easy way . . .</p> <p>It's called Easylink -</p> <p>Brighton & Hove's door-to-door minibus service.</p>  <p>From home to the shops and back again</p> <p>Book a journey by phoning 01273 677559</p>
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The Chair of the Management Committee is leading a project for the current year, which is to produce a DVD to promote the work of Community Transport. This will be launched in the coming months.

Our aim is to get our work better known. This is an example, prepared for a conference of community and voluntary sector organisations, of the message that we are trying to get across:-

What we can do for you ...

We can help you solve your transport problem ...

Community Transport has a fleet of affordable, accessible minibuses that can be hired by groups in all sections of the community.

Our users include local residents' associations, statutory agencies, schools, youth groups, day centres, social clubs, sports teams, organisations with an interest in health care or social welfare. We can provide a driver or groups can use their own driver. We are happy to take regular bookings or one-off hirings.

If you have a transport need, you can discuss it with us. If you are running a project or bidding for funding and there is a need for transport, think about involving Community Transport as a partner.

External Developments

In the past year, the Local Transport Act 2008 has brought about some significant changes to the law on community transport. These changes include amendments to Sections 19 and 22 of the Transport Act 1985, which regulate community transport and community buses, operated with permits.

The new law allows community transport operators, such as ourselves, to run vehicles with fewer than nine seats, using community transport permits, and also to provide services to the 'general public' (as opposed to 'members only'), using paid staff to do so, provided certain conditions are met. Responsibility for issuing vehicle permits will in future rest exclusively with the Traffic Commissioner.

The new legislation is an endorsement by central government of the value of the community transport movement in the wider passenger transport system. That is most welcome. It is an opportunity to look at our business with a view to developing new forms of service. The first step that we are taking is to obtain two "Section 22 Permits" that will authorise us to register scheduled local services for use by the general public and to expand the scope of private hire work. Our intention is not to become a "bus company", but to complement our existing core activities and support them by enhancing our potential earnings.

Premises

We have occupied our current premises at Preston Barracks since 2005. This is a short-term arrangement, pending a major redevelopment of the site which will not include the retention of use by the mix of small businesses that are currently based here.

Assuming that the City Council is willing to let us stay on site while the planning process for the future development scheme continues, we do not yet know when we will have to move out. Nor have we yet found anywhere to go to. The likelihood is, though, that we will have to be intensifying our efforts to find a new base for our operations. It is to be hoped that, as in the past, the Council can help us find somewhere suitable.

Through the Preston Barracks Business Forum, we continue to work well with the neighbouring businesses who share the site. The Forum meets regularly and, when relevant issues have been on the agenda, meetings have been attended by representatives of the City Council, the Police and the Saunders Park Estate management. As well as being an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest, such as on-site facilities, security and parking arrangements, the meetings have provided a focus for information to be provided by the Council on progress relating to the future development of the site.

Community Transport Staff & Management Committee

Community Transport owes its success to our staff, who are dedicated to serving our customers by maintaining the high quality service that they rely on. Our office staff, Lesley Shrieves, Emily Cochrane, Leroy Kryenhoff, Carl Mulliner and Mike Pover work hard to keep the show on the road.

Our drivers and escorts continue to show extraordinary dedication to their work and the people they come into contact with on a daily basis – the many users of our services, who let us know how important we are to them. Our users are vital to us as well. We thank them for their support.

Our Management Committee provides strategic direction, hard work and vital support that is greatly appreciated by the paid staff.

My thanks (and, I am sure, the thanks of everyone associated with Community Transport) go to all of the team – staff, customers, committee members and representatives of our funding partners – who make it such a pleasure to work here.

Ed Bassford
General Manager