

ANGUS COUNCIL

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE

28 NOVEMBER 1996

**SUBJECT: EMPLOYMENT OF A RURAL TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT OFFICER BY
THE ANGUS TRANSPORT FORUM**

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, TRANSPORT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: This report outlines the work of the Angus Transport Forum, its success in securing Scottish Office Rural Challenge funding towards the employment of a Rural transport Development Officer and the Council's contribution towards this project.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee -

1. Note the work of the Angus Transport Forum and their success in the award of Scottish Office Rural Challenge Funding towards the employment of a Rural Transport Development Officer.
2. Note the support proposed from Angus Council towards this project.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Angus Transport Forum first met on 28 March 1995 bringing together representatives from Community Councils, Voluntary Organisations, public transport operators, users and representatives from various Council Sections including Transport, Social Work and Education. The meeting was initiated in response to a Community Seminar in Letham held by the Social Work Department the previous year when instead of Social Work issues dominating the discussion most of the problems raised were transport related.

2.2 Since the initial meeting the Transport Forum, which has a membership in excess of 60, has met approximately every two months and continues to be well attended by all interested parties. The Forum aims to address the problems associated with a decline in transport provision in rural areas. Its objectives are :

- to identify the transport needs of individuals and groups in all communities throughout Angus
- to increase awareness and share information on public transport provision

- to liaise with statutory authorities and transport providers in developing appropriate responses to the needs identified

- 2.3 The Forum has encouraged communities to assist in identifying their transport needs and the response to date has been encouraging with Auchmithie Community Association taking the lead in being the first to undertake a study in their area. The needs identified in Auchmithie of providing public transport to meet the requirements of both workers and scholars could easily be achieved by retiming existing bus services. They also requested an evening service to Arbroath and this was provided by the Council at little cost by extending existing contracted services. These public transport improvements have been well supported by the local community.
- 2.4 Following on from the Auchmithie study a Transport Survey has been undertaken in Arbroath by the Community Council, the results of which will be published shortly, and further Community Councils have approached the Council for assistance for studies in their areas.
- 2.5 Since their initial meeting the Forum have been united in their belief that a full time post of Rural Transport Development Officer could assist them in looking at public transport issues, identifying need and working with the Transport Team to find ways to meet these needs which have been identified.

3 THE EMPLOYMENT BY THE ANGUS TRANSPORT FORUM OF A RURAL TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT OFFICER AND FUNDING FOR THE POST

- 3.1 Angus Council through the Angus Transport Forum have been working to see if there are unmet transport needs in Angus and to establish whether or not a Rural Transport Development Officer could be beneficial. It is envisaged that the Rural Transport Development Officer will work on an area by area basis throughout Angus over a three year period encouraging and assisting communities to assess their needs. As a pilot study the Transport Team held a public meeting in Kirriemuir in March to establish if there was any interest in setting up a group to look at the transport requirements in the Kirriemuir and the Glens area. There was a very positive response to this meeting and groundwork has been undertaken onto which the Rural Transport Development Officer can build.
- 3.2 While the Council consults with Community Councils and other interested parties when there are changes to the commercial bus service network or when contracted services are due for renewal and undertakes on-bus interviews of passengers, little work is currently undertaken in trying to establish unmet need. The employment of a Rural Transport Development Officer would be invaluable in filling this gap as the staff resources of the Transport Team do not permit them getting so closely involved at a local level.

- 3.3 The Rural Transport Development Officer would talk to local groups such as WRI's and Voluntary Groups, set up local area meetings and help work with the communities to identify their needs and feed all transport requests and comments back to the Transport Team. It may be that people are unaware of existing bus services and further publicity is required or communities may want additional bus stops or a bus shelter at a particular point. It may be that they have particular transport needs which are currently not being met. It is this type of information and dialogue which the Council needs in order to provide the public with the optimum public transport services within the financial resources available.
- 3.4 The Angus Transport Forum recently submitted bids to the Scottish Office Rural Challenge Fund and European Leader II for funding to assist in the employment of a Rural Transport Development Officer. The success of the challenge application was reported to the Council's Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 10 September 1996 (Report 739/96 refers) and it is anticipated that approval of the Leader II bid will be announced at the beginning of December 1996. The Rural Challenge and Leader II funding will cover 55% of the project costs with the remaining monies coming from matched funding mainly assistance "in kind" from Angus Council, Community Councils and Voluntary Groups. Having secured funding the Angus Transport Forum can shortly advertise the post.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The assistance given to the Angus Transport Forum is mainly "in kind" with Community Councils and Voluntary Organisations assisting with surveys, provision of meeting rooms, advertising as well as increasing public transport awareness and helping to find practical solutions to transport problems. If the Transport Team can identify no solutions to a particular transport problem it may be that local groups will decide to initiate a community bus or a community car scheme in their area.
- 4.2 Angus Council have offered assistance in the provision of office space, administrative support and technical support from the Transport Team. In addition it is intended that Angus Council will meet telephone, postage, fax and photocopying expenses to a maximum of £1,400 in the first year with this being increased in line with inflation for the subsequent two years of the project.
- 4.3 Angus Council has offered assistance in the printing of survey forms, a financial limit being set on this expenditure of £1,000 per annum. In practice the Council has previously met these types of costs with, for example, all the questionnaires for the Auchmithie and Arbroath surveys having been compiled and printed by the Council. This assistance will therefore not have additional budgetary implications.

- 4.4 The Council has also offered support to the Forum in respect of service developments in response to the public transport needs studies. The Council will only support initiatives which it considers to represent good value for money these being measured by subsidy per passenger or subsidy per mile criteria outlined in the Council's Public Transport Policy Statement approved by Committee on 25 April 1996 (Report 261/96 refers). A limit of £5,000 expenditure per annum by the Council is suggested in respect of service developments. However in practice it is anticipated that many of the service developments would have been made in any event in response to the needs identified as was the case with the service changes and improvements in the Auchmithie Area. The employment of the Rural Transport Development Officer does not hinge on this financial commitment and therefore should there be insufficient resources in the Planning, Transport and Economic Development Department's Revenue Budget then expenditure in this respect could be deferred.
- 4.5 In some instances new services need not require assistance from the Council as there are other sources of finance such as the Scottish Office Rural Transport Innovation Grant Scheme whereby revenue grants are available for new services in rural areas. Capital grants are also available to operators to assist with vehicle purchase. In all cases the best use must be made of existing public, private and voluntary sector transport available in order to meet the transport needs identified.
- 4.6 In summary the total cost of this project over a three year period is estimated at £117,600, with Rural Challenge funding and the Leader II bid providing £49,400 and £16,100 respectively. Angus Council's contribution is valued at a maximum of £28,600 with the bulk of this provided by assistance in kind and provision for potential service developments. The remaining £23,500 is made up from contributions in kind from the voluntary sector.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law and Administration, Director of Education and Director of Social Work have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Angus Transport Forum has been meeting successfully for the last 18 months and the employment of a Rural Transport Development Officer by the Forum is a natural extension of their work. This new post could be of great benefit to the Council in establishing unmet transport needs and looking at innovative approaches to solve transport problems.
- 6.2 The work of the Transport Forum is outlined in the council's Public Transport Policy Statement and the employment of a Rural Transport Development Officer will assist the Council in its policies of improving public awareness (Section 4.9), identifying the needs of specific groups such as the elderly and disabled (Section 4.10) and in its consultation in developing either conventional or innovative approaches to solve transport problems (Section 4.11).

- 6.3 The work of the Forum and this project are unique in Scotland and have aroused considerable interest from other local authorities. The Forum has been the only body so far to receive support for a rural transport project from the Rural Challenge Fund. Funding from Leader II is also anticipated having gained this support the Forum can now proceed with the employment of a Rural Transport Development Officer. Committee is asked to note the assistance offered from the Council in relation to this project.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/LEM/PC/KW
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