



Final Report

Evaluation of Project 505
Community Transport (Minibus) Scheme

July 2006

Val Woodward & Becky Light

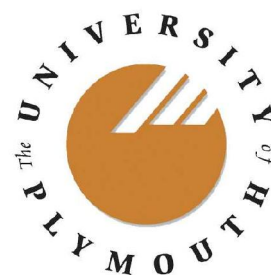
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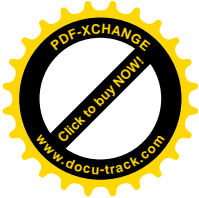
Final Report

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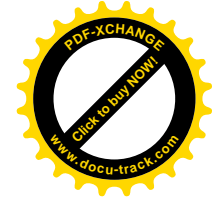
Commissioned on behalf of the
Devonport Regeneration Company Partnership

Researched by:
Val Woodward
Becky Light



Acknowledgements

We would like thank everyone who participated in and contributed to this research. Particular thanks to Tina Wilkinson at the University of Plymouth for helping out whenever she could and those at Welcome Hall and Pembroke Street, Devonport, who made it possible for the focus groups and interviews to take place on their premises.



Executive Summary

Introduction

In this evaluation the aims are to both assess the progress of the Community Transport (minibus) Project in Devonport against its stated aims and objectives, and to inform plans for future development. The aims and objectives of the Community Transport scheme have been summarised as:

'To provide and manage a community transport (minibus) scheme for use by voluntary and community groups, schools and colleges, and to provide door-to-door transport for people who are unable to use other public transport. To recruit a suitable local person to promote, develop and manage the Community Transport Scheme'.

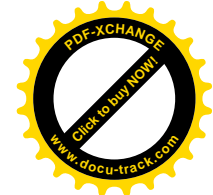
The primary research for the evaluation consisted of focus group and individual interviews within an empowering approach to the study. The participants made the evaluation team very welcome and were keen to share their knowledge and understanding generally and specifically about the community transport scheme.

The scheme has four vehicles for use by local people to facilitate community-based activities, a van plus three minibuses, one of which is specially adapted for use by people with physical disabilities. They are self drive and low cost. A local person is employed to manage the scheme.

The scheme meets local people's needs to make trips not suited to local public transport services, and who face massive barriers to accessing alternative means of transport. Users made some positive suggestions about ways to improve the service, but were overwhelmingly supportive of it, simply asking for more provision, particularly as there is a shortage of drivers. More support for potential drivers formed a key discussion point during the focus groups.

The evaluation found that the scheme clearly meets its original objectives. It also increases social inclusion and effects positive regeneration by broadening horizons and increasing participation in community activities. In general, the vehicles are used for social trips, which are extremely valuable for, and valued by, the local community. As stated by the DETR (2000):

'In socially excluded areas community transport could make a far greater contribution than simply the provision of transport from A to B. It tends to fulfil not only the access but also the social functions of public transport'.

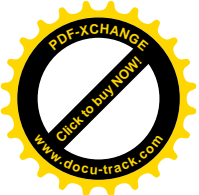


The community transport scheme in Devonport does this. However, it could be further strengthened in terms of its potential to contribute to community capacity building through greater community control and development of activities. Currently, the manager focuses on day-to-day tasks rather than developmental work, mostly because of the multitude of demands on his time and it was found that the project relies very heavily on his goodwill. Monitoring and management arrangements were identified as an area of weakness that should be re-examined as part of a re-assessment of expectations for this post.

In terms of the future, a large part of the project's success arises from the manager's enthusiasm and commitment. Counteracting this is a sense that without him, the project would falter. Such dependence on an individual leaves projects vulnerable and it is suggested that DRCP as the commissioning body will recognise the need to reconsider implementation arrangements in terms of sustainable development at an organisational level, whether related to competitive tendering or not.

Sustainability should be seen primarily in terms of the creation of a sustainable community in Devonport. By its very nature the project's sustainability has to rely on resource support. Whilst the Project Manager has ideas and a commitment to ensuring sustainability, in reality, this is well outside his remit, and needs to be reconsidered at an organisational level within a context of regeneration activities more generally. Mainstreaming can only realistically be seen as part of regeneration activities rather than local authority or commercial transport. However, better dialogue with the City Council about ways to support autonomous local community services that complement, yet integrate into, a comprehensive local authority transport plan is suggested.

It is recommended that funding for community transport be continued, but with a somewhat reconfigured scheme. Initially the aims need to be reconsidered to reflect on priorities and realities within resources available. However as a service combating social exclusion, this scheme could be greatly expanded.



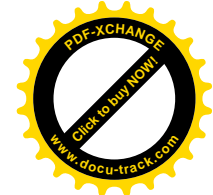
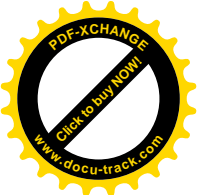
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Evaluation of Project 505 Community Transport (Minibus) Scheme

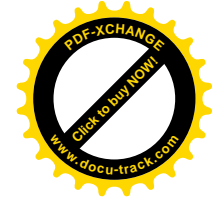
1. Introduction

The Social Research & Regeneration Unit (SRRU) at the University of Plymouth, has been commissioned by Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership (DRCP) to undertake an evaluation of project 505, Community Transport (minibus) scheme, in the Devonport New Deal for Communities (NDC) area. Such an evaluation is part of the process of DRCP's oversight of funded projects, and serves to both assess the progress of the Project against its stated aims and objectives, and to inform plans for future development.

The specific aims of the evaluation were set out in DRCP's original tender document as:

1. To comment on how the Community Transport (Minibus) Scheme project has achieved its initial aims, namely:

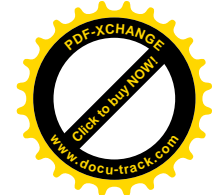
'To provide and manage a community transport (minibus) scheme for use by voluntary and community groups, schools and colleges, and to provide door-to-door transport for people who are unable to use other public transport. To recruit a suitable local person to promote, develop and manage the Community Transport Scheme'.
2. To comment on how local residents, groups and organisations have benefited from the project, in particular how the existence of the project provided affordable transport for the community.
3. To comment on how the project has engaged with disadvantaged and minority groups in the area.
4. To comment on whether the project has been value for money.
5. To assess the extent to which the project has developed to meet local need.
6. To comment on:
 - (a) Any difficulties encountered by local groups in accessing transport facilities;
 - (b) The impact the project has had within Devonport.



7. To assess the project's success in informing the community on Devonport Regeneration Company's (or DRCP's as it is now known) development.
8. To assess how the project has involved under-represented groups in community activities.
9. To review how local services to the elderly, disabled, black and minority ethnic residents, young people, marginalised, disadvantaged groups and individuals have increased as a direct result of the project.
10. To assess the project's strategy for volunteer development, and comment on the objectives being achieved via minibus driver qualifications for local residents and groups.
11. To comment on the adequacy of the recording procedures in place to support this evaluation, and, if appropriate, to make recommendations on how they could be improved.
12. To review the work of the Transport Coordinator and comment on the areas of work that could be developed more fully to enhance the service currently in place.
13. To advise DRCP on how best to approach competitive tendering of this service without losing its local emphasis and accessibility.

1.1 Research Methods

The research was conducted over a two month period employing a methodology agreed by the project sponsors, DRCP, including secondary and primary research methods. The secondary research comprised a desktop review of documentation held by DRCP and the Project Manager, along with a literature review relating to national and local developments in community transport. The primary research was informed by the secondary research and involved a series of qualitative face-to-face focus groups interviews. In-depth semi-structured interviews were held with key stakeholders and four focus groups were completed. One of these was with representatives of a variety of user groups, while the other three were with specific community groups and therefore consisted of users and some non-users of the minibus scheme. They varied in size from eight to 22 participants. The Project Manager and DRCP monitor were asked to provide contact details for potential



focus group participants. An outline of the topics covered is attached as Appendix One. Interviews were facilitated and recorded by the evaluation team. The research followed strict ethical procedures and participants were asked if they could be quoted. Quotes are used for illustrative purposes within the text but only when permission was obtained (and the names of individuals have been omitted from the report). Focus groups were held in Devonport at locations agreed with participants - generally where groups met anyway. Everyone suggested by DRCP was contacted.¹ Not everyone invited to focus groups participated, but a good balance of participants was achieved.

The structure of the report follows the template prescribed in the DRCP tender document while ensuring all aims above were met. Within the parameters of the brief, the evaluation has collected information from as many sources as possible in order to build up a clear picture of the work and its value to the local community. Whilst it is always possible to gather more information, and some data has been difficult to obtain, the evaluation team are confident that a robust assessment of the project has been presented within this report.

1.2 Contextual Information

1.2.1 Original Purpose of Project

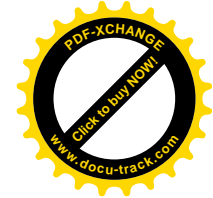
As stated in the tender document, the original purpose of the project was:

'To provide and manage a community transport (minibus) scheme for use by voluntary and community groups, schools and colleges, and to provide door-to-door transport for people who are unable to use other public transport. To recruit a suitable local person to promote, develop and manage the Community Transport Scheme'.

In addition the following aims were stated elsewhere:

- ✓ Improve opportunities for older people and socially excluded groups and individuals.
- ✓ To consider alternative sustainable fuels.

¹ Although one willing participant failed to find the focus group through unfortunate miscommunication, and was later interviewed by phone.

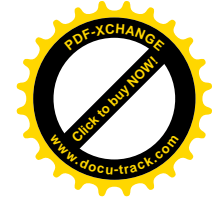


- ✓ Provide affordable transport for improved access to employment, training, education, healthcare facilities, leisure and other local services.
- ✓ Provide a means of connecting poorly served areas to existing public transport networks, which will widen opportunities for training, employment and recreation, and link people who are unemployed to areas of employment growth.
- ✓ Enable and encourage more people to become involved in activities and events arranged by or on behalf of the Devonport Regeneration Company, including Focus Groups, training and organised outings and visits.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for young people and youth groups to participate in activities/events in and outside the city.
- ✓ Provide local employment/training opportunities for minibus management.
- ✓ Provide local employment/training for passenger assistants (MIDAS Passenger Assistant Training Scheme or similar Plymouth City Council scheme).
- ✓ Provide local employment/training opportunities for minibus drivers (MIDAS Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme, or Plymouth City Council driver training scheme).
- ✓ Enhance the quality of life for people with impaired mobility (frail elderly/people with disabilities) by providing organised outings.

1.2.2 Fit with DRCP Objectives

Devonport Community Transport (Minibus) Scheme (Project 505) forms part of exemplary work by Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership within the New Deal for Communities (NDC) Programme, which nationally is targeted at relatively small local areas of deprivation, injecting extra short term resources as a catalyst for long term changes.

Devonport forms part of Plymouth, located at the mouth of the river Tamar with the sea to two sides. It is home to approximately 4,500 people. Until the 1920s Devonport was a separate town and it still retains a distinct identity. Regeneration is helping the area become an

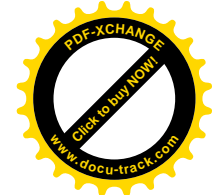


attractive place to live, but it is still dominated by underused Ministry of Defence land (South Yard) and tracts of high density, post-war council housing. The housing stock is being extensively upgraded and tenure diversified. However, Devonport historically was completely dependent on the Dockyard as a source of employment and since the Dockyard has been downsized has suffered high unemployment and low incomes.

As a part of the NDC programme, DRCP's general aim is to bridge the gap between the most deprived neighbourhood, in this case the NDC area in Devonport, and the rest of England, thus tackling multiple deprivations that are manifested in poor job prospects, high levels of crime, educational under-achievement, poor health and problems with housing and the physical environment. All DRCP projects are expected to take transport issues into consideration because transport cuts across these key themes for action. Local people are to be at the forefront of such work. The DRC Partnership's vision is to create a thriving, vibrant community that raises aspirations, grasps opportunities and which has people queuing to join.

1.2.3 Summary of Activity to Date

There are three minibuses; one with adaptations designed to allow usage by people with physical disabilities. This minibus seats 13 people while the other two seat 17 each. In addition there is a small van. These four vehicles are based at Granby Island Community Centre where there are dedicated parking bays. Local groups can borrow these vehicles to facilitate community-based activities. Charges for use of the community transport facilities are very much lower than those related to other transport providers. Priority is always given to bookings from groups in Devonport. The vehicles are used both for local and longer distance trips.



2. Summary of the Problems the Project Seeks to Address and its Stakeholders

Transport is a fundamental element of daily life. Transport problems contribute:

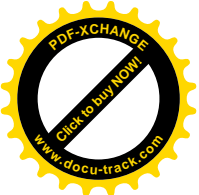
'... to social exclusion where they make it difficult for people to get to work or to access critical services on which they may depend, including healthcare, learning and shops. They can also contribute powerfully to feelings of isolation and insecurity and prevent people taking part in a wide variety of everyday activities.' (SEU, 2001).

The Government has identified four ways transport links with social exclusion:

- ✓ Spatial - not being able to get there;
- ✓ Temporal - being unable to get there at an appropriate time;
- ✓ Financial - not being able to afford to get there;
- ✓ Personal - lacking the physical or mental capabilities to use the available means of mobility (DETR/TraC, 2000).

Community transport can contribute to combating each of these. The specially adapted minibus meets some of the needs of those with personal mobility restrictions. Most of those interviewed did not have a car, and therefore were particularly affected by the spatial and temporal components. Public transport tends to focus on trips in and out of the city centre and therefore many desired trips are not feasible. Financially, Devonport is an NDC area because so many residents have low incomes. People in low-income households spend significant proportions of household expenditure on travel. Community groups interviewed particularly identified the prohibitive cost of hiring transport. It was claimed that hiring one Plymouth City Council minibus for a weekend would cost a group more than it would to hire two Devonport buses. The research found that local residents do however tend to hire taxis for food shopping and for many journeys made by those with physical disabilities. They find this financially prohibitive, but necessary. This has dire financial consequences in an already low income area.

Public transport is not specifically identified as poor in Devonport, but like public transport in other areas, is unable to meet many local needs



for group travel, trips involving people with poor personal mobility and everyday family trips such as for food shopping. Supermarkets are able to sell food more cheaply than local shops and are increasingly located on the outskirts of cities along with other retail outlets. Getting there, or more importantly, returning with a lot of heavy bags is extremely difficult. Also, as identified during focus group discussions, for those living in the Pottery Quays area of Devonport, for example, it is particularly difficult to access a doctor's surgery. People living in Pembroke Street also identified problems accessing a post office. It is becoming clear from recent studies that failings in the transport system act as a significant barrier to equitable uptake of services across the United Kingdom (Ruston 2002, McCray 2000).

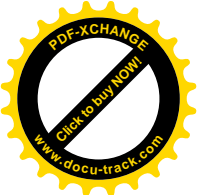
As well as these issues, public transport is also often perceived as unsafe, especially for vulnerable residents such as children, ethnic minority groups and women. As a member from the 'Fata He' group explained, parents of children attending their activities gain peace of mind knowing that transport is provided on dedicated minibuses. This was reiterated by other participants of the focus groups who pointed out that parents would also worry about children getting to and from public transport stops.

There are also issues for elderly residents. Whilst they can travel on Plymouth buses for free, participants reported that so many of the journeys they wished to make were impossible by Plymouth City Council managed buses, especially when travelling in a family group (although they did, however, emphasise how much they valued and appreciated the free travel on City Council buses).

For local schools costs were clearly identified as the major barrier to accessing alternative transport, as did groups needing vehicles adapted for use for those with disabilities.

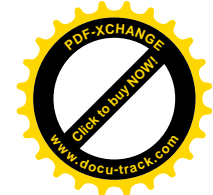
As stated in the Social Exclusion and Public Transport report (DETR/TraC, 2000):

'In socially excluded areas community transport could make a far greater contribution than simply the provision of transport from A to B. It tends to fulfil not only the access but also the social functions of public transport'.



2.1 Stakeholders

As with all NDC area initiatives, the primary stakeholders must be the local community whether or not they currently use the minibus service. However, users clearly have a particularly strong interest in the running and development of the scheme. Other clear stakeholders are the Project Manager and DRCP who fund the project.



3. Local Context

3.1 How the Project dovetails with other Providers' Objectives and Working Practices in Devonport

The evaluation has shown that no other organisations are currently providing the accessible transport that communities and individuals rely on to participate in community activities. The project underpins local regeneration work that is supported by local people and public agencies, including the local authority that has responsibility for transport planning but little scope to directly provide services such as a community transport scheme.

Sustainable community regeneration depends on local people leading, not just contributing. New Deal for Communities acknowledge the barriers for people in areas such as Devonport taking on this role, and therefore social capital and capacity building becomes a pivotal part of the process. Such community development work builds on a motivation to improve the everyday realities of local people. Successful regeneration in Devonport will adopt a bottom up approach, complementing enhanced top down service provision reflecting the statement in the 1998 Government (Social Exclusion Unit) report on neighbourhood renewal that:

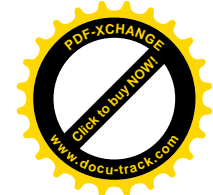
'Too much has been imposed from above, when experience shows that success depends on communities themselves having the power and taking the responsibility to make things better.'

3.2 How the Project meets Local Need

Capacity building needs to start by building the confidence of individuals and communities. It was explained that:

'People like going out together, particularly sharing experiences and responsibilities'.

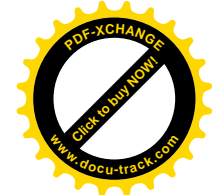
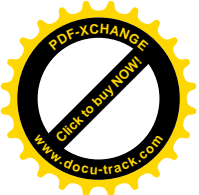
Restricted mobility is a massive barrier to this, therefore increased mobility and all that it encompasses (new experiences, broadening of horizons, increased participation in wider community activity) forms a key factor in building social capital and regeneration. For example, two families experienced their first ever trip to the seaside in a DRCP minibus. As Devonport is almost surrounded by sea, this is an especially poignant statement. Another person left Plymouth for the first time in



their life to go to the Eden Project, approximately fifty miles away. As stated in a focus group:

'Parents talk about trips out for ages. People don't always realise how little people explore if they don't have a car and/or are on a low income'.

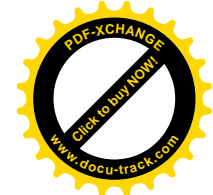
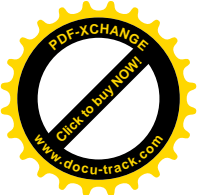
The scheme meets local people's needs to make trips not suited to local public transport services, and who face massive barriers to accessing alternative means of transport. This contributes to the area's need to build community capacity, increase social inclusion and effect positive regeneration.



4. Policy Fit

As previously stated, the Community Transport Scheme responds to Government objectives, and has a good degree of fit with DRCP's priorities. However, the evaluation found that there is a general lack of understanding about its aims/objectives at the community level. Whilst participants clearly identified a demand for accessible transport for group activities, they were less clear about broader aims, despite recognising the problems faced by those without a car especially when making trips involving people with disabilities, children and/or heavy goods. Further, participants had little knowledge of community transport schemes elsewhere in Britain. This is not uncommon and could be due to the limited networking that tends to occur between NDC initiatives or with other broader based community transport schemes <http://www.communitytransport.org>. Other NDC community transport schemes, such as in Hartlepool, report similar problems and confusions to those experienced in Devonport, particularly around clarity of purpose, value for money and sustainability. In Hartlepool, the project focuses on enabling all NDC residents to have fair and equal access to the full range of activities and processes connected to a resident-led regeneration, but particularly NDC functions and meetings. Devonport focuses more on supporting community based social activities.

Devonport is a vibrant community with which participants clearly identified despite some obvious fractures. However, Devonport, like any other geographically defined area, does not form a homogeneous community. The Naval Base and Dockyard were responsible for creating and shaping the area historically, and continue to do so today. A significant part of the NDC area remains closed off behind barbed wire topped walls and the reclamation of this land is a major priority. The land currently lies mostly redundant. Once this land is reclaimed there will be a good opportunity to better link the sections of the community currently divided by this physical boundary.



5. Project Progression

5.1 The Progression of the Project to Date

In summer 2001 DRC and Granby Island purchased two minibuses. These became the property of DRC as the local NDC in summer 2003. Strong community feeling dictated that the buses should not be owned or operated by Plymouth City Council. An additional minibus, specially adapted for physically disabled users, has been added to the original two vehicles. It was purchased in summer 2003. A van has also been donated to the project.

'It has moved with the times, especially through providing the bus for disabled people'.

A manager was appointed during November 2002 on a temporary secondment through Granby Island Community Centre. This contract has been repeatedly extended. He initially designed and set up booking and costing systems and now essentially runs the entire project. The Project Manager also carries out day-to-day maintenance and repairs, although larger jobs are taken to commercial operators. His mobile phone number is widely advertised so that he can be contacted at any time. Whilst he is happy with this arrangement, it should be noted that such a system does not sit well with good working practices especially in terms of hours carried out as the responsible person. This was a concern for some focus group participants who suggested that someone else was needed to provide back up to the manager. The following comments are illustrative of this point:

'I don't think people realise how much he does';

'We don't know if he ever takes holidays'.

Participants explained that he always returned missed calls and was generally very easy to get hold of, approachable, friendly and helpful. Such dedication and willingness to put in far more to a project than is strictly needed is of course very common amongst those involved in community-based services and activities both at DRCP, and more widely across the country. Contact with the manager is reported to be a



pleasant experience and this adds to the attraction of the service. There was no disagreement when a participant stated *'he's as good as gold'*.

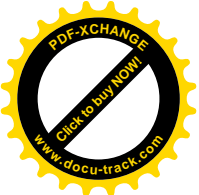
More generally, drivers must be over 25 years old and have no more than six points on their licence. There is also an upper restriction of 70 years of age, although this used to be 65, leading to some confusion. A copy of each driver's licence is stored in the project office at Granby Island Community Centre. 20 people have qualified as minibus drivers, however, it is evident that drivers move on and the available drivers currently make up a list of only 12. Four of those on the list are not local residents. The manager is one of the local drivers listed. However, as a very active citizen in his own right, he drives in his personal capacity rather than as Project Manager. 10 people have completed the MIDAS training course offered by Plymouth City Council in relation to disabled people and transport use.

Advertisement and publicity for the scheme relies heavily on word of mouth backed up by the community newsletter. In close knit communities such as Devonport this can work really well, but may still miss those not currently part of the core of community activity. Participants in the focus groups also suggested that residents may know the scheme exists but little about the details of operation or reasons for its existence. Greater publicity about the project's operation plus its history and how it fits with local regeneration and the work of DRCP would therefore be welcomed.

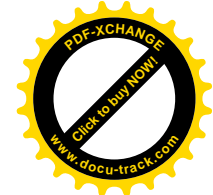
Currently there appear to be some tensions with regard to the location of the project at one community centre. People tend to associate more with their own local community centre. The manager is aware of this and does everything he can to overcome any real or perceived barriers caused through the project's location. Granby Island is easy to physically access so any problems are associated with perceptions of boundaries around communities.

5.2 Plans for Future Development

Evidence suggests that there is currently insufficient capacity within the project for further expansion. The project has suffered from an uncertain future for so long that there has been little planning other than to try and keep the existing service. The Project Manager inevitably prioritises day to day rather than developmental tasks, although he is undertaking



personal professional development by studying for a NVQ qualification in community development. The Project Manager is particularly keen to develop more sustainable transport alternatives, initially through the use of alternative fuels.



6. Policies, Procedures and Delivery

The research found that there is no formal steering group for this project. The manager reports directly to the DRCP Board. The manager is left very much to himself with little policy, guidance or support. It is suggested that the Minibus Scheme would benefit from having its own constitution and management committee feeding into DRCP structures, ensuring tasks and targets are achievable and achieved.

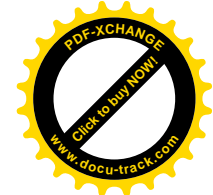
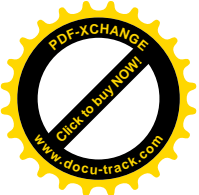
Details about policies and procedures have been publicised through the DRCP newsletter and the manager is happy to repeat and extend this. However, participants at focus groups reported considerable confusion about these details. Users tend to therefore rely on the Project Manager's communication, interpretation and implementation. There are very high expectations that are mutually sustained based on goodwill between users and the manager. This is common across community based projects. The manager *'does this as a favour'* was stated on several occasions during focus groups.

Unlike other focus group participants, the one who used to be a professional driver was clear about rules such as those relating to bus-lanes. He also knew details about insurance and licences and claimed that generally such rules and regulations created a *'nightmare'*. These rules and regulations are covered in the city council minibus course but leaflets clarifying and reminding users may well be useful, especially as drivers using the Devonport scheme do not need to take this course.

'It's relatively easy to pass the minibus test if you are a confident driver but it's expensive and difficult to hire council buses and I never actually have.'

6.1 Training for Drivers

In terms of the use of the vehicles in Devonport, most drivers consider the training on offer through MIDAS and Plymouth City Council to be unnecessary. They simply wish to drive their own group. They do not see themselves as part of a *'team'* of volunteer drivers to be drawn upon. However, there is some confusion as to whether drivers have to have completed a MiDAS course before hiring the specially adapted minibus with a tail-lift.



Participating in such training led to greater confidence for drivers but also for passengers and the families of passengers. Focus group participants suggested that further training to ensure drivers feel confident handling a larger vehicle would prove beneficial for many. *'It is very different to driving a car'*.

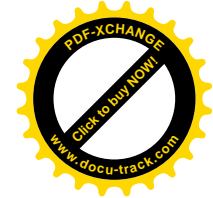
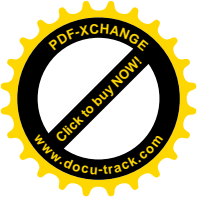
While the buses have power steering and generally very good visibility through the mirrors, seeing out of the back window can be impeded by passengers. *'Confidence using the mirrors comes with experience'*.

A short course for potential drivers to familiarise themselves with handling a larger vehicle such as a minibus was suggested. Such a course may boost the confidence of potential future volunteers. Focus group participants further optimistically suggested that people may be willing to volunteer as buddy or shadow drivers for short journeys, rather than being the person taking prime responsibility. Two drivers are required anyway for long trips. As stated in a focus group, it can seem like a big responsibility driving groups of people, especially children, in an unfamiliar vehicle. *'Driving is very stressful'*.

6.2 Group and Driver Responsibilities

Most groups do ensure there is an adult who takes responsibility for the passengers to take some of the burden away from the driver. Volunteering as a support driver may produce networking possibilities thus further building community capacity. However, as even finding one driver is so often problematic finding a buddy may not be a realistic proposition. There is a general shortage of drivers as evidenced by the number of adverts for professional drivers. Also, the organisation of such a scheme may be time consuming, involving considerable paperwork and therefore prove too much for the Project Manager to look after.

Most community groups have their own drivers. This means the groups know the driver and a trusting relationship can be built up. However, reliance on regular voluntary drivers creates inevitable problems. If that driver is unavailable the group cannot travel. Likewise, once someone volunteers to drive for a group they often feel obliged to do this every week - creating a massive demand on their time and goodwill. For example, during a focus group it was claimed that one of the reasons for



not wishing to take the Plymouth City Council test was that gaining this certificate led to being included on a list of city wide available drivers.

There are rules and regulations for people taking responsibility for groups in addition to those related to driver qualifications. In particular groups working with children now require vetting to check suitability. Current recommendations around best practice include Criminal Record Bureau Checks for all drivers of groups involving children. Volunteer drivers/helpers may reduce feelings of security for trips taken using the Devonport Community Transport scheme. As one participant said:

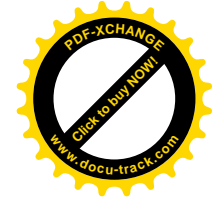
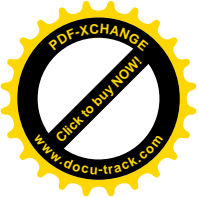
'... it wouldn't be a good idea to send a bus with an unknown driver'.

In Hartlepool the bus is usually 'hired' with a driver, who might be the project organiser, or another volunteer who has been given the appropriate training. The Devonport manager apparently found drivers for some groups. However, the need for a pool of drivers was raised as a major issue throughout the focus groups.

Some groups are prevented from doing things because of a lack of drivers. In particular, the BOSS group reported difficulties particularly because so many of their members could not drive the bus because of their age. BOSS is a very lively group of elderly people. Members sometimes have to resort to using taxis just to attend BOSS meetings.

Focus group participants were under the impression that the Project Manager also carries out day-to-day maintenance and repairs, although larger jobs are taken to commercial operators. Breakdown arrangements are dependent on where the breakdown occurs. If a tow is needed it is the group's responsibility to get the vehicle repaired and they are reimbursed by DRCP at a later date. All the vehicles are RAC covered however, the manager still provides the pivotal point of contact.

Users are required to clean up after themselves and the bus is usually very clean and tidy. This of course increases the tasks for those driving or accompanying a driver, possibly making volunteering even more daunting. However, the manager cleans, or arranges for the vehicle to be cleaned, if the vehicle is returned in an unsatisfactory state. The most recent user then has to be chased to discuss the unsatisfactory state of the vehicle. As stated in a focus group:



'If I've ever had a problem, a couple of times I've taken it back and said it's absolutely filthy and he has sorted it'.

6.3 Primary Users of the Transport

The Devonport minibuses are used predominantly for group trips by community associations, but also by schools. Priority is given to local people although there is some confusion about actual boundaries as well as what constitution is needed for a group to be an eligible user. A full list of users was provided as part of the evaluation process. 67 groups are registered as local users, with 50 outside groups and 26 individuals. Outside groups include: Devon Air Ambulance, Keyham Green Places, Morice Town Forum, Plymouth Foyer, Torpoint Youth Club and St Matthews Church. There is no hire charge for local groups although all fuel must be paid for. Individuals and outside groups pay for hire. One bus is often booked well in advance although the manager keeps the other available for more immediate need. This of course makes it very difficult for larger groups to rely on using the community transport scheme. In particular, during the school summer holiday's buses tend to be booked up very quickly. Groups are encouraged to use the DRCP buses to travel to and from the destination, but return the bus to Devonport in-between the outward and return trip.

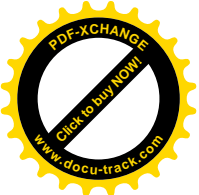
In addition, the buses are used to show visiting groups around, such as people from government agencies. The vehicles are rarely used for employment-related activities or personal ones. However, the bus could be used to take a group to a job fair for example.

As a focus group participant explained:

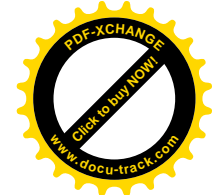
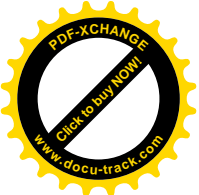
'If the minibus was to be used to help people get jobs the groups eligible to hire the minibus would have to be expanded too as community groups don't tend to form around that sort of thing'.

In Devonport, another section of DRCP provides support for people applying for jobs, including some financial help for taxis when appropriate.

Unlike the scheme in Hartlepool, neither is Devonport Community Transport used to enable residents to access DRCP meetings or city-wide



forums. In Hartlepool it is thought that such trips encourage community capacity building through participation in NDC management activities and greater networking.



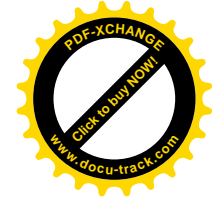
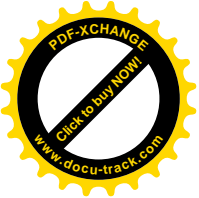
7. Outputs and Monitoring

The Project Manager is responsible for monitoring, like all other aspects of this project. The principal means of monitoring is through reporting to DRCP committees but there is no direct mechanism in place for this. The Project Monitor at DRCP stated in October 2005 in an internal report that:

'This project has never been monitored properly in the past. Quarterly reports have not been completed internally or by the Project Co-ordinator'.

The DRCP Project Monitor in a quarterly report (not dated but estimated to be during the autumn of 2005) identified a lack of targets for the project along with poor data collection. The evaluation process likewise has been weakened by a lack of targets and concrete data.

It was mentioned earlier that the Minibus Scheme would benefit from having its own management committee. It is further suggested that the committee could have oversight of the monitoring functions.



8. Sustainability and Mainstreaming

Sustainability should be seen primarily in terms of the creation of a sustainable community in Devonport. By its very nature the project's sustainability has to rely on resource support. Whilst the Project Manager has ideas and a commitment to ensuring sustainability, in reality, this is well outside his remit, and needs to be reconsidered at an organisational level within a context of regeneration activities more generally. The service delivered by this project is well outside the scope of mainstream public transport provision.

'We wouldn't expect public transport to provide the service this scheme does'.

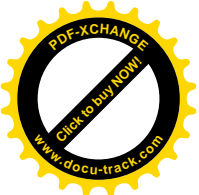
Also as recognised in the national report *Making the connection: final report on transport and social exclusion* (2003, 16):

'The development of non-mainstream transport should be facilitated and resourced in order to meet demand which cannot reasonably be met by commercial operators or tendered services'.

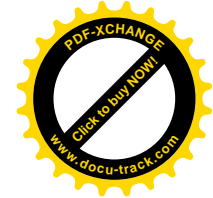
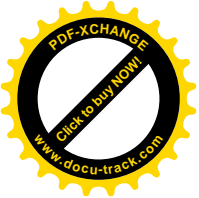
To reiterate, a community transport scheme is much more than physical transport provision. As stated in the *Social Exclusion and Public Transport report* (DETR/TraC, 2000):

'In socially excluded areas community transport could make a far greater contribution than simply the provision of transport from A to B. It tends to fulfil not only the access but also the social functions of public transport'.

While Plymouth City Council may aspire to integrate this project into its services and diversify transport provision, within the context of national policies, this is not currently feasible. The Government's 1998 strategy *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone* (p147) identifies Community Transport as an important element within an integrated transport strategy which Plymouth City Council recognises and supports.



However, necessary resources to implement such a strategy are less forthcoming.



9. Implementation Arrangements

9.1 Management Arrangements and their Effectiveness

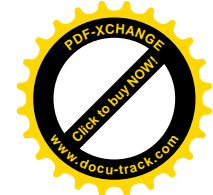
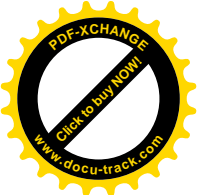
A large part of the project's success arises from the manager's enthusiasm and commitment. Counteracting this is a sense that without him, the project would falter. This is often the case with community projects. However, such dependence on an individual leaves projects vulnerable. Therefore, in light of this, DRCP as the commissioning body will recognise the need to reconsider implementation arrangements in terms of sustainable development at an organisational level, whether related to competitive tendering or not.

9.2. Quality of Service and how it could be improved

Overall, users are happy with the quality of service - the main criticism being that *'there's not enough of it'*.

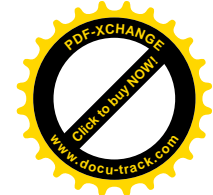
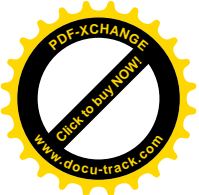
However a few minor points were raised:

- ✓ User cleansing of buses;
- ✓ The aisles in the specifically adapted minibus are not wide enough for wheelchair users;
- ✓ Safe baby seats should be available;
- ✓ No room for luggage, making longer trips more difficult;
- ✓ The back seats tend to be used for luggage thus reducing the seating capacity;
- ✓ A roof rack, false roof or trailer may provide suitable luggage storage space;
- ✓ Tow hitches could allow the use of trailers and this could solve the problem;
- ✓ Longer journeys are problematic anyway because the buses are basic and therefore not very comfortable;
- ✓ Not being able to book enough in advance for one of the buses;
- ✓ Not being able to book two buses;
- ✓ Buses not being available;
- ✓ The buses being too small for many groups to travel together;



- ✓ Weak sense of ownership outside the micro-community where the buses are kept;
- ✓ Lack of direct involvement of community groups in management of the project;
- ✓ Lack of available drivers and lack of alternatives when regular volunteer drivers are not available;
- ✓ The need to have two drivers for longer trips;
- ✓ Driver responsibilities;
- ✓ Confusion around policies and procedures to do with drivers;
- ✓ More information leaflets;
- ✓ Better publicity;
- ✓ Better publicity/logos/imagery on the vehicles;
- ✓ Better distribution of information and publicity leaflets. Delivery to every door in Devonport?

Taken as a whole the points above could be remedied by having a larger fleet of various sized buses, with appropriate adaptations. This would allow buses to be located throughout the Devonport area, with stronger shared community group management of the day-to-day use of buses. In turn, this would allow the Project Manager to co-ordinate and develop the services more as a community development resource under community control therefore strengthening the overall work of DRCP. However, such a development would have clear resource implications.



10. Value for Money

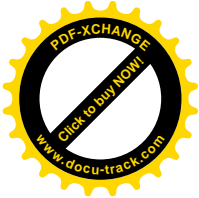
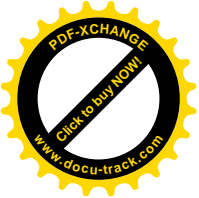
The value of regeneration and community development processes is notoriously difficult to measure especially in the short term. Community transport as a concept eschews operating for profit. Total funding is by DRCP, with the low charges generating only a small income. Money earned goes towards repairs and maintenance costs. Money put into the project has been piecemeal with a *'quick gain'* spend at the beginning purchasing two minibuses.

All users are charged 25 pence per mile to cover fuel costs. Any profit made through this goes into a fund for maintenance and upkeep. Outside community groups are charged £20 per day hire charges. Outside residents are charged £25 per day hire charges. Individuals are charged £10 per day hire charge.

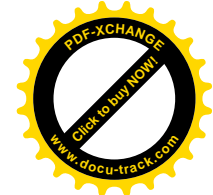
One participant in a focus group suggested the scheme could be regarded as unfair competition with other transport providers because it was funded by DRCP rather than directly by users. However, other people in that group countered this by talking about the broader nature of the scheme around community needs. Whilst transport provides the *'product'* of this project, the *'process'* in terms of community capacity building and regeneration is arguably more important. An alternative to funding the provision of community transport vehicles could be the subsidy of hire from commercial operators. However, participants at focus groups were not only very doubtful that this would prove cheaper to agencies providing financial support, they felt such a move would lose so much of broader community value associated with this minibus scheme.

Within the restrictions posed for a manager with such a breadth of responsibility, it is inevitable that *'product'* takes priority over *'process'*, diluting the long-term regeneration agenda. Team support would allow a redirection, focusing on the potential community development skills of the manager, thus ensuring that the project fully integrates with NDC and DRCP agendas.

In the meantime, DRCP appears to receive very good value for money in terms of hours and energy put into the project by the manager. For example, it was noted in the Project Monitor's quarterly report of 22nd November 2004 that the manager had not had a salary increase since November 2002. Far better monitoring is needed before actual value for



money can be accurately ascertained. As stated elsewhere, the goodwill of the manager is relied upon far too much. There are insufficient structures in place to ensure all stakeholders, including the manager, are gaining reasonable value related to what they put into and expect from the project.



11. Involvement of Minority and Excluded Groups

Some community transport schemes focus primarily on transport provision for those with physical mobility restrictions. Community transport is about far more than this, although such a service is extremely valuable to a community, especially through increased social inclusion of residents with disabilities.

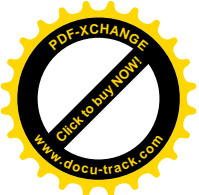
Pivotal to the ethos of NDC and DRCP is regeneration with excluded communities. Poverty is still rife in Devonport, creating exclusion from the wider community. As stated earlier, forming part of the NDC programme, DRCP's general aim is to bridge the gap between the most deprived neighbourhood, in this case the NDC area in Devonport, and the rest of England. Thus tackling multiple deprivation that is manifested in poor job prospects, high levels of crime, educational under-achievement, poor health and problems with housing and the physical environment. All DRCP projects are expected to take transport issues into consideration because transport cuts across the key themes for action. Local people are to be at the forefront of such work. The DRCP's vision is to create a thriving, vibrant community that raises aspirations, grasps opportunities and which has people queuing to join.

The project is therefore for the whole of Devonport, as a marginalised community:

'People who are disadvantaged often experience serious difficulties in getting around. They are much less likely to have access to a car than the general population' (SEU, 2001).

Within this, Fata He, an umbrella organisation for Black and Minority Ethnic (B&ME) individuals and groups, are major users of the project. In particular, they use the buses to bring together young people who have traditionally experienced exclusion related to their B&ME status. This includes asylum seekers who have severe financial problems. Fata He is based in Devonport, although the young participants live all over the City of Plymouth. The aim of Fata He is inclusion, and workers strongly assert the impossibility of much of their work without this resource. Fata He is one of the few organisations developing much needed anti-racist work.

Exclusion and isolation are also all too common for people living in the many tower blocks in Devonport. Mobility problems are exacerbated by

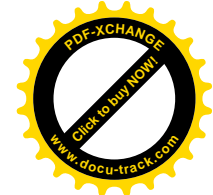
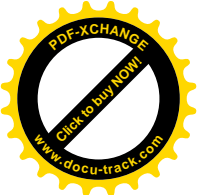


such a physical environment so that, for example, participating in a focus group is problematic without use of specialised transport.

'Easier access to community transport would greatly improve my quality of life'.

Older people in the area are major beneficiaries of the community transport project enabling them to attend regular community group meetings and special events. An example was also given of a group of older people living in a residential home that had literally not been out for years. Community transport broadened their horizons and capacities.

'Once they started, they were queuing up to go out and re-engage with their community'.



12. Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the evaluation has established that:

- ✓ The scheme meets local people's need to make trips not suited to local public transport services, and who face massive barriers to accessing alternative means of transport. This contributes to the area's community capacity, increases social inclusion and effects positive regeneration. Most of the users find the service easy to access and are happy with the administrative arrangements. Users confirmed the multi-faceted value of this project, indeed vociferously expressing the need for expansion yet regard the service as one primarily meeting the need for group trips. As stated:

'There are two alternatives. Private hire or don't go'.

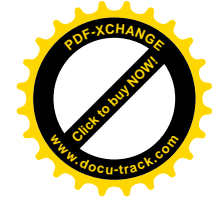
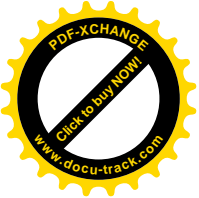
'Private hire is expensive and so it is likely that people simply wouldn't go'.

- ✓ The project has clearly engaged with disadvantaged and minority groups in the area. As stated in a focus group:

'We've been without for long enough'.

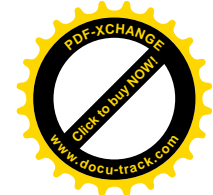
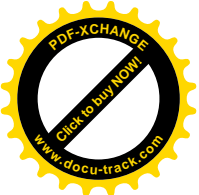
- ✓ However, currently the aims are far grander than the reality. A minibus for local group use is obviously extremely highly valued as a resource mostly because hire is financially prohibitive. The trips made are not ones that realistically can be expected to form part of local transport infrastructure planning within the current financial and political environment.
- ✓ Need for affordable transport is pervasive and a community project can only contribute to altering unequal relationships in demand and supply. Needs are almost infinite especially when tied to reducing inequalities. The society we live in is unable to meet all needs entirely, but changes can be made to reduce restrictions related to unequal unmet needs.

'I couldn't do without it'.



'Don't stop it'.

- ✓ Related to the above point, *'more please'* was the overwhelming opinion of many focus group participants. The impact the project has had within Devonport. The project's impact is fairly invisible to those with good access to suitable transport but crucial to those without. While the scheme does not really *'provide affordable transport for improved access to employment, training, education, healthcare facilities, leisure and other local services'*, it allows members of the community to come together to form bottom up groups, working to improve local health, for example. Likewise, the scheme has not really enabled and encouraged more people to become involved in activities and events arranged by or on behalf of the DRCP.
- ✓ The project is clearly seen as a crucial part of DRCP work, but more in terms of a desirable service being provided rather than community led activity contributing directly to community capacity building measures. The evaluation has found that there is not a clear or consistent picture in the minds of users and potential users of the value and purpose of this project, although users tend to describe it as *'invaluable'*. There is no doubt that the service provided is highly thought of and valued in terms of providing access to vehicles allowing group trips, but in terms of the wider aims of the project, benefits are less tangible.
- ✓ Further publicity and information dissemination is needed. This should outline issues relating social exclusion to transport, encouraging new trips as part of building community capacity. Responsibilities should be better publicised in a positive way so as to boost confidence for potential drivers rather than being seen as an impossible task to take on. If there were a system of buddy drivers this could be advertised through such publicity. Also, publicity through media wider than the local community newsletter, such as the local radio and TV stations, should be considered.
- ✓ The project has involved under represented groups in community activities. Devonport forms an NDC because it is a disadvantaged area and the project engages with

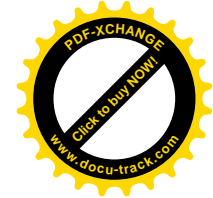
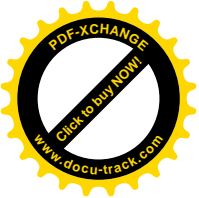


disadvantaged people. As summed up by one focus group participant:

'We've been without for too long'.

Also, the project engages specifically with one of the very few local groups who work with black and ethnic minorities, Fate He, as well as, for example, the elderly and disabled. However, despite a dramatic increase in car usage amongst women, robust inequalities in transport remain between men and women that this project does not specifically address (Reid-Howie Associates, 2000).

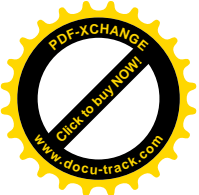
- ✓ The scheme has also provided access to local services for the elderly, disabled, black and minority ethnic residents and young people; and marginalised, disadvantaged groups and individuals have increased as a direct result of the project.
- ✓ The project's strategy for volunteer development is an underdeveloped area. No evidence was provided to show progression routes for those involved in driver training. As stated earlier there is a shortage of professional drivers so gaining a licence to drive a minibus might well open up employment prospects. Potential drivers should be encouraged and informal confidence boosting training offered. It was also suggested that having a buddy system for drivers could help those nervous about reversing, for example.
- ✓ Recording procedures need to be revised. While the manager knows what is happening, and in no way tried to hide any aspects of the project, it is very difficult to access written proof about many of the details of the scheme.
- ✓ Confusion also exists about the job title of the person referred to as Project Manager throughout this report, which is indicative of confusion about the boundaries of his post. He currently provides very good value for money in terms of the time and effort he dedicates to this service, but is prioritising day to day demands over developmental aspects. The project aims are broad and targets have not been set to transform these into achievable outcomes. The actual project has been left to the discretion of one person employed on short-term contracts



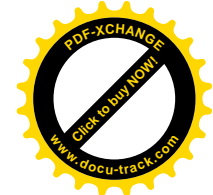
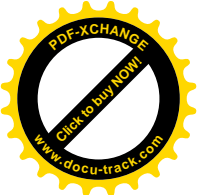
and located at some distance from the main offices of DRCP. It is suggested that the project is therefore in urgent need of a management overhaul. The Project Manager has plans to use more environmentally friendly fuels, and is obviously committed to development and improvement more generally, but that would be outside the capacity of the project as it stands. Therefore, the development of this vibrant, evolving project depends on a re-examination of its position within DRCP.

- ✓ As will be clear from the report, the evaluators regard competitive tendering for this project to be a non-starter unless substantial financial support is provided. City Council or commercial provision would be unable to meet the broader needs of a community transport scheme. However, local groups could bid for a variety of vehicles to be based at various points throughout Devonport, to be managed locally but overseen by a Project Manager and feeding into DRCP structures. The Minibus scheme could become an organisation project with its own constitution and management committee feeding into DRCP structures, ensuring tasks and targets are achievable and achieved. With sufficient support and resources, the project has much deeper potential to fully contribute to regeneration in Devonport.
- ✓ The broad aims cut across the main areas of work of the NDC project. The links between social exclusion and transport are widely accepted nationally (and internationally), but solutions cannot simply be tied to the physical provision of transport infrastructure. The travel needs of those living in Devonport cannot be solved through transport provision alone. A community transport scheme therefore has to be evaluated as far more than a transport service.

It is recommended that funding for community transport be continued, but with a somewhat reconfigured scheme. Initially, the aims need to be reconsidered to reflect on priorities and realities within the resources available. However, as a service combating social exclusion, this scheme needs to be greatly expanded. Mainstreaming can only realistically be seen as part of regeneration activities rather than local authority or

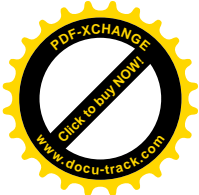


commercial transport. However, better dialogue with the City Council about ways to support autonomous local community services that complement, yet integrate into, a comprehensive local authority transport plan is recommended.

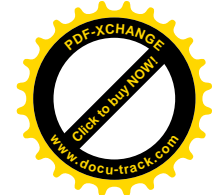
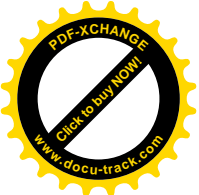


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Appendix



Appendix A

Focus Group Topics for Project 505 Community Transport (Minibus) Scheme Devonport Regeneration Company Partnership

- ✓ Local public transport.
- ✓ Commercial transport.
- ✓ Local needs.
- ✓ Local control.
- ✓ Uses and users.
- ✓ Drivers, the buses, accessibility, publicity.