



Executive Summary: Evaluation of Travel Connections Programme

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Department
for Transport

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum



**Travel
Connections**

From B to A the friendly way

Background

Travel Connections (TC) is a Department for Transport funded programme via the Tackling Loneliness with Transport fund, delivered by Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF). In May 2022, LOPF were awarded a grant of £447,500 to deliver the TC programme which is made up of 11 projects under five themes: active travel, community transport, buses, taxis and travel conversations.

This independent evaluation of the TC programme sought to explore the achievements of the TC programme, identifying what worked well, challenges faced and capturing learning to inform future provision. The evaluation also explored the impact on project participants, including a focus on loneliness and those factors which can contribute to feelings of loneliness such as; social connections, access to social activities, staying active. Exploring the role and contribution of the transport element to achieving these outcomes was a key consideration.

Loneliness and Transport

Loneliness presents a significant public health challenge¹ and reducing loneliness is now seen as an important outcome for several areas of policy and practice including better ageing and transport. Older adults experience higher levels of loneliness and are also more likely to experience recognised triggers for loneliness such as retirement, bereavement, illness and disability.

A systematic review for Sustrans² found consistent evidence that transport was associated with loneliness. Staying mobile and being able to get out and about helps people retain their independence, stay connected to friends and family, maintain a healthy and active life, and take part in social activities³. The review for Sustrans highlights three key themes related to transport and loneliness:

1. Transport can be a means of reaching destinations where you meet with other people
2. Transport as a 'third space' in which you meet other people
3. Transport as a positive source of isolation

The evaluation found TC projects had a focus related to the first two of these identified themes.

Barriers to transport use can be practical, such as lack of affordable transport, inadequate access to information, limited bus routes, lack of seating at bus stops, gaps in driver awareness. Other psychological barriers include lack of confidence or motivation, safety concerns or being made to feel they are an inconvenience. Some older people also face barriers to using transport as a result of their health (e.g. reduced mobility, frailty) or situation (e.g. caring responsibilities).

¹ [Loneliness and Health: Campaign to End Loneliness](#)

² Williams, McHale and Chow (2021), Final report on loneliness and transport systematic review, University of St Andrews (for Sustrans and Transport Scotland)

³ Williams, J. et al (2022). [Ageing Better: Inclusive transport approaches and active travel research](#). Ecorys for National Lottery Community Fund

What's been achieved? Benefits and Impact

In total, 909 older people participated in activities delivered across the 11 projects. Projects delivered a range of approaches working with older people in different ways e.g. engaging them in activities using transport, training volunteer walk leaders, influencing transport provision, and promoting use of transport.

Some key reported benefits for older people have been increased awareness of, and confidence in using, public transport. For many, engagement in the project activities had led to increased social connections and the development of friendships, contributing to a reduction of loneliness. Improvements in the mental well-being of older people were also reported e.g. reduced anxiety, increased confidence, increased knowledge/skills, purpose and structure. Projects also offered opportunities older people to improve physical mobility and fitness through active travel.

A key benefit for delivery organisations was an increased understanding of the barriers and enablers to using public transport for older people. Some organisations also benefitted from increased reach and membership (as older people accessed / were signposted to other community activities) and from increased opportunities for partnership working with other Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSO) and wider stakeholders such as local businesses and organisations.

In terms of benefits for the wider system, projects had influenced the increased use of existing public transport and use active transport options (i.e. walking /cycling), leading to potential environmental and health benefits. Through activities and trips out, older people had increased awareness of local businesses and community assets (e.g. cafes, restaurants) leading to potential economic benefits from increased use of these. Projects also made progress towards influencing improvements to transport provision (e.g. availability of Age/Dementia friendly taxis) through capturing views and experiences of older people, sharing learning and highlighting good practice.



How did TC projects address barriers to transport use?

Projects worked to address some of the key barriers to transport use for older people through various approaches and activities, both at project level (e.g. shared journeys) and through influencing and campaigning. Some examples are described below.

Barrier	Example project feature, approaches and activities
Lack of confidence and motivation to use transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered opportunities to gain confidence in using transport independently • Arranged shared journeys – allowing connection with others • Provided community transport with convenient timing • Gave a choice of destinations and encouraging independence
Inadequate access to information and knowledge about transport and routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge and awareness of transport options • Increased digital confidence and skills in using transport Apps • Enabled access to free bus travel • Increased awareness of new places and community activities
Psychological barriers e.g. anxiety, fear, feeling alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided a safe environment, and informal space to connect and relax • Offered door to door pick up by friendly supportive drivers • Facilitated social connections, helping to reduce loneliness e.g. walking groups as a relaxed way to meet new people and chat • Planned shared journeys allowing people to connect and feel safer • Set up groups that met regularly - giving a sense of purpose
Poor health e.g. reduced mobility, frailty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible vehicles, door to door transport, friendly supportive drivers • Supportive and skilled volunteers and staff • Combined use of public transport with active travel • Increased awareness and confidence to take part in physical activities • Connected people with green spaces and benefits of being in nature
Circumstances (e.g. carers).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabled peer support opportunities through shared experiences • Allowed carers to bring the person they cared for on trips
Lack of affordable transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded transport and trips for older people, access to bus passes, subsidised taxi trips
Lack of public transport provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided door to door service, accessible vehicles, links with other organisations
Gaps in driver awareness , skills and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used friendly supportive drivers • Captured older people’s good and bad experiences of transport e.g. use of taxis
Lack of transport Provision: Lack of awareness of barriers and enablers. Lack of voice of older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored views and experiences to help overcome barriers for older people in using public transport and accessing venues • Consulted with and involved older people as campaigners • Development of older people led transport group • Raised awareness with taxi and licensing firms e.g. Training of drivers in being Age/Dementia friendly • Created materials and campaigning resources • Developed partnerships allowing for influencing opportunities to shape transport use going forward e.g. First Bus, taxi firms / licensing

What's helped?

- Having skilled, experienced and flexible staff and volunteers to deliver the work
- Using existing networks and relationships to engage groups and individuals
- Flexibility of funding allowing for test and learn and creativity
- Working in person centred ways, having a good understanding the needs of the older people
- Addressing the barriers and enablers to engagement and use of transport

What's been hard?

- Short time frame led to delayed start up and delays in sourcing delivery partners
- Staff and volunteer recruitment (programme and project level) for short term contracts
- Identifying and recruiting older people to participate
- Lack of a clear project brief (for one project)
- Amount of funding - felt to be too small for some and too big for another
- Timing and weather conditions
- Lack of suitable facilities and resources (e.g. bikes) for older people
- Measuring impact on loneliness



Conclusions and Recommendations:

Having access to transport and travel options that work for older people is vital for maintaining their social connections, health and well-being and ability to get out and about. Through varied approaches, TC projects have addressed some of the known practical/physical and psychological barriers to transport use and learnt more about the enablers for older people. The findings and learning from this evaluation present a number of opportunities, some which are captured in the recommendations below.

Recommendations - Project & Programme level

- a. **Address the practical and psychological barriers** older people face in relation to travel and using transport
- b. **Encourage and support co-production** - involving older people in design and delivery of projects - and in influencing work - recognise and value their contribution
- c. Be **inclusive and accessible** - use knowledge of target communities to tailor provision and meet the needs of specific groups and work in **person-centred ways**
- d. Target those **most at risk of social isolation**
- e. **Work in partnership** to enable sharing of skills, knowledge and resources - preventing duplication and making best use of community assets
- f. Provide **more clarity, guidance and training** to projects about key deliverables, measuring impact and capturing learning
- g. Ensure **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements are proportionate** to the funding awarded
- h. **Allow adequate time** for projects to get up and running - to design, plan, recruit staff and participants and embed processes (e.g. M&E). Be realistic about what can be achieved

Recommendations - Wider system

Whilst some progress towards influencing the provision of transport was made by the programme, work remains to be done at a strategic level. Specific recommendations are:

- a. **Actively involve older people** in decision-making, developing policies and transport options and planning at a local level
- b. Transport and travel policies and provision need to **address the practical and psychological barriers** older people face in using transport
- c. Give consideration to the **design and features of places that promote use of transport** by older people (e.g. seating and shelters at bus stops)
- d. Support and fund **community-led transport options** e.g. shared journeys, travel buddy schemes
- e. Ensure **information about travel options and schemes is accessible** and inclusive
- f. **Continue to work with the VCSO sector** across the city and with LOPF on transport and travel solutions as a means to reduce social isolation and loneliness for older people as a key part of the work towards becoming an age friendly city



This executive summary was produced by independent evaluation consultants, Kerry Swain and Sarah Frost, for Leeds Older People's Forum in July 2023.