SUFFOLK LINKS – COMMUNITY DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT

Country: UK

OVERVIEW

Suffolk Links is a Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service which provides connections to bus and train links in rural areas.

Suffolk Links serves a rural area in Suffolk County including Yoxford, Badingham, Earl Soham, Parham, Great Glemham and Rendham.

The service provides direct connections to Framlingham, Saxmundham, Wickham Market, Darsham Railway Station, local bus stops or any of the villages within the service area. Connections for onwards travel to places further afield such as Ipswich, Diss, Woodbridge or Lowestoft are also possible, if no other bus service is available.

The service operates Monday to Saturday 7am until 7pm and the journey is charged as a bus fare. Journeys are booked on a first come first served basis, up to 7 days in advance.

The service is currently run by Coastal Accessible Transport Service (CATS), which is a provider of community transport services including Connecting Community Bus Service, Door to Door Service and Community Car Schemes for Suffolk Coastal District.

Notably, since June 2016 a number of community transport services have been operating in Suffolk under the name of "Connecting Communities" including the former Dial a Ride, Community Cars and Suffolk Links.

Source: www.transport-network.co.uk/Watchdog-backs-on-demand-transport-to-plug-service-gaps/12906

Connecting Communities services currently serve 7 geographical service areas by district in Suffolk with services having reported a demand of 178,000 passengers during 2017. It is also worth noting that journeys are charged in line with bus fares unless private volunteers are used in which case passengers are charged at a statutory rate of 45p per mile.

Main aspect/issue addressed by the good practice

- Limited public transport options.
- Service can help passengers visit the countryside, go shopping, attend medical journeys, also connecting to the railway and bus stations in order to allow for onward travel.

Main objectives of the good practice

- Ensure rural communities in Suffolk have daily access to transport services such as railway station and bus services as well as to local villages within the service area.
- Make carbon savings in terms of replacement miles.
- Enable mobility while providing an alternative to households instead of owning a second vehicle.

SMARTA
smart rural transport areas

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Region	*Target area*	*Population*	*Population density*
Suffolk County	The area served covers Yoxford, Badingham, Earl Soham, Parham, Great Glemham and Rendham.	According to 2011 Census population the total service area accounts for a total of 5,237 persons.	According to 2011 Census data: Yoxford, Parham, Great Glemham and Rendham – 0.3 persons per hectare Badingham and Earl Soham – 0.4 persons per hectare

Target user groups and needs

The main needs and requirements of people living in the area is the need for mobility in light of limited public transport.

Access to private vehicles is high and Suffolk County Council seek to encourage people to consider alternative means of mobility.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Timeframe(s)

- It could not be established when the service was started.

Bodies involved

- The service is operated by CATS (Coastal Accessible Transport Scheme).

Mobility services provided/addressed

- The service provides connections to transport links in rural areas.
- It can also provide a more door-to-door service if transport connections are unavailable.
- The service can be booked up to a week in advance, and is booked by phone.
- The service costs the same as a bus fare, and a free bus travel pass also gives free transport on this service.

Legal Framework

- No information on legal framework could be found.

Cost and Financing sources

- Travel on Suffolk Links is charged the same as a bus fare.
- Free Travel Bus Pass holders are entitled to free travel on all journeys made within the statutory scheme hours.
- No information could be found on financing sources.

Organizational set-up

- No information on the organisational set-up could be found.

Supporting technologies

- The Suffolk Links service is booked by phone, therefore no supporting technologies are required.

SMARTA
smart rural transport areas

INNOVATION ASPECTS

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

N/A

LEVEL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

N/A

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SHARED AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

This service provides links to transport connections in rural areas.

ICT CONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

N/A

OTHER (E.G. SOCIAL INNOVATION, ETC.)

N/A

ASSESSMENT

Ridership and other key metrics/results (through key-indicators, where applicable)

- This is a good example of community driven efforts and engagement. It appears that the scheme has been popular. However, it is not clear that the scheme is yet profitable or self-sustaining.
- It is a medium-size community focused scheme which could be replicated elsewhere. However, importantly, it requires access to funding in order to purchase vehicles and developing the underlying IT booking system.

Good Governance

- With the limited information available, the Suffolk Links governance model could not be investigated in detail.

Success factors/strengths

- The initiative is driven by locals and tailored towards local needs. CATS appears to understand the requirements of their local population.
- The DRT service is not free of charge, but is relatively low cost to encourage use of the scheme.
- The service introduces DRT to households in an area which is likely to have been overlooked by a conventional public transport operator.

Difficulties encountered/weakness

- With the limited information available, it could not be established whether the service encountered any barriers during the deployment phase.

**FEATURES THAT ARE CONSIDERED TO BE GOOD PRACTICE
(LESSON(S) LEARNT)**

The Suffolk Links service connects those in rural areas to other public transport services, and can be used door-to-door if public transport is unavailable.

Key references

- www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/default/files/scd14_combined.pdf
- www.nomisweb.co.uk
- www.transport-network.co.uk/Watchdog-backs-on-demand-transport-to-plug-service-gaps/12906
- http://old.brandonsuffolk.com/the-voluntary-network.asp
- www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Environment/Green-Issues/ESG-Forum-Minutes-04-07.pdf

Websites

- www.suffolkonboard.com