

# Out and About, Door to Door

**A history of HcL/Handicabs (Lothian) - the first 30 years**



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**Dedicated to Ronnie Sinclair BA CA who was Treasurer and Company**

Secretary from 1987 until his untimely death in December 2012



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### Introduction

The rights of disabled people and their mobility needs achieved greater recognition around the world in the 1970s, although the history of accessible transport goes back to the 1950s in America. A report from the Swedish Royal Commission on Handicapped Persons in 1970 stressed the need for rapid and convenient transport facilities as being of the greatest importance for those who cannot use the public system. Municipalities across Sweden developed a Special Transport Service (STS) with cars and minibuses operating as taxis. There were similar ventures in France, Denmark, Holland, Australia, America and Canada.

In the UK special transport services for disabled people started up in the 1970s and 1980s operated by voluntary and community groups or by local authority social services departments. There were schemes in Edinburgh, London, Coventry, Manchester, Reading, Stockport and Wolverhampton.

There were also calls for the better coordination of transport services. An influential report '*Can I get there?*', published by the Spastics Society (now Scope), looked at transport provision across the public, private and voluntary sectors and how it failed to meet the personal mobility needs of people with disabilities and older people.

The subject was highlighted at an international conference on mobility and transport in Cambridge in July 1981 (the second in a series of such triennial conferences that have continued under the title TRANSED). Transport became a major theme in the UN's International Year of Disabled People (IYDP) that year and gave an impetus for many initiatives. In Scotland, the Scottish Committee on Mobility (established in 1976 as a committee of the

Scottish Council on Disability) held a major conference on 'Transport for Special Needs' at the Roxburghe Hotel in Edinburgh, with an exhibition of vehicles and equipment in Charlotte Square. Exhibits included a 'Telebus' with its low floor and 'kneeling' capability, brought over from West Berlin.

It was in this context of heightened awareness and activity that in 1982 HcL was born as Handicabs (Lothian) Ltd. Part 1 of this history provides an overview of the following three decades. Part 2 provides more information and Part 3 has concluding remarks. A number of documents are referenced at the end, including the company's own annual reports which contain very detailed facts and figures.

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## Part 1: overview

### 1. The beginning

The need for a door to door transport for disabled people was first recognised in Edinburgh by Edinburgh Voluntary Transport (now Lothian Community Transport Services) which was then under the umbrella of the Edinburgh Council of Social Service (now the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council or EVOC). In May 1976 a small scale 'mini-cab service' was started using at first one and then two converted minivans licensed as for private hire, each able to take one wheelchair passenger or up to three seated passengers.

In December 1979 the Edinburgh Cripple Aid Society (now Ecas) in conjunction with Radiocabs (Edinburgh) Ltd, started a 'dial-a-cab' fare subsidy scheme for its members. Later in October 1983 a new wheelchair accessible Metrocab taxi was included in the scheme as a trial on behalf of the Department of Transport.

In September 1979 a special meeting had been called by the Lothian Liaison Committee for the Disabled (LLCD) to discuss how

to mark IYDP in 1981. With the experience gained from these services and evidence from a study by Olva Ewart of Edinburgh University, it was decided that a region-wide 'dial-a-ride' transport service was the highest priority. It was estimated that between 2,000 and 4,000 severely disabled people in the Lothian Region area were largely homebound and unable to adopt a more independent way of life in the community or take advantage of opportunities for employment, sport, recreation, religious and social pursuits. They could not use public transport and they did not own or have access to private cars. They also had to rely on 'ambulance' type transport provided by statutory and voluntary agencies to get to and from health, welfare and educational centres. These forms of transport were not always available, the most suitable or cost effective for the purpose and they were not sufficiently coordinated.

As a result of consultations, George Masterton and Alastair Smith were appointed by LLCD respectively as Co-ordinator and Assistant Co-ordinator to organise a public appeal and over the two years 1980 and 1981 it raised £60,000 from 200 different sources.

In February 1982 full project proposals were finalised. It was estimated it would cost £50,000 to run in the first year 1982/83 and £72,000 was required to purchase and convert six vehicles at £12,000 each. In July an order was placed for the purchase of five Renault T800 vans converted for wheelchair passenger use by SMT Edinburgh. Two were funded by a donation of £15,500 from the 1981 Evening News Charity Walk appeal, two from the LLCD appeal fund and one by the City of Edinburgh District Council. A sixth vehicle was purchased in 1983 with a grant by the Lothian Regional Council. Some revenue funding came from the Scottish Office but the main source of funding for drivers and back-up staff was from the Manpower Services Commission under its Community Programme for the long term unemployed.

The Handicabs' Certificate of Incorporation (No 70712) is dated 10th August 1982 and the company was granted charity status by

the Inland Revenue that same year. The name Handicabs (Lothian) Ltd. was adopted and still remains the official name, although the cover name HCL is now used.

Handicabs was publicly 'launched' on 9th November 1982 from the Lothian Regional Council Chambers, with the first five vehicles parked outside in Parliament Square - quite a sight! A sixth vehicle funded by the Council was presented there on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1983. The number has grown steadily since and they are now a familiar sight on urban streets and rural roads.

## **2. The first decade: 1982/3 to 1991/2**

The first Annual Report was entitled *Drive for Greater Mobility* and covered the period November 1982 to October 1993. It listed 36 individuals and 12 organisations as members, the latter including Arthritis Care, the Chest, Heart & Stroke Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Scottish Spina Bifida Society and the Thistle Foundation. The following year individual membership had risen to 68, then up to 92 in 1989 and to 175 in 1990. By 1993 it had reached 248, plus 18 corporate members.

Individual users were not officially registered in the early years and being a member of the company was not necessary to use the service.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee acting as Company Directors was on 17th August 1982. Dr Frank Stewart was the Chairman, Stephen O'Neill was Vice Chairman and Alan Rees was Company Secretary. There were representatives from Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian and councillors from Lothian Regional Council acting as 'assessors'.

The official registered address was 11 St Colme Street, the offices of the Edinburgh Council of Social Service where Alan Rees was Assistant Director. The service started from there in November 1982 but office premises for headquarters and Edinburgh district staff were then rented at 14 Braefoot Terrace and shared with

Edinburgh Voluntary Transport (EVT) now Lothian Community Transport Services (LCTS). However, there were problems with office space and vehicle access and in July 1986 both organisations moved, Handicabs to 58 Canaan Lane and EVT to 129b Willowbrae Road.

The first Manager was John Goodman. He was followed in quick succession by Bill Hogg and John Simpson. Bill left for health reasons and he and Derrick Frame, the first administrator, sadly died of cancer shortly afterwards. John went to work for the Lothian Health Board. Wayne Pearson, the present Chief Executive, was appointed in June 1985.

Some revenue funding came from local authorities and central government but the Manpower Services Commission provided the funding for staff under its Job Creation Programmes from September 1982 - initially six drivers, an administrator and a co-ordinator but soon expanding to sixteen drivers, three district organisers, two secretary/dispatchers, an assistant manager and manager.

In 1985 Handicabs faced a funding crisis. Reserves from the initial IYDP appeal were exhausted and funding for staff from the Manpower Services Commission was being phased out. Some of the original vehicles were also in need of replacement.

An urgent appeal was made to Lothian Regional Council. This was successful and after that its officials became more closely involved. In April 1988 a major breakthrough occurred when a revenue funding package from its Public Transport Unit was agreed. This was a move of great significance in itself in that it recognised that what Handicabs provided was not a social service but a public transport one. The Council also provided funding for vehicle replacement.



*Driver Ian Woodward, a Community Programme employee, helps young Joel Lynch into the Edinburgh Handicab. "It certainly makes a big difference to disabled people", he says.*

## Press cutting. SCAN February 1983

The **Dial-A-Ride** service which was set up offered personal door to door transport to people with limited mobility who were unable to use ordinary buses or without the use of a car. The term 'dial-a-ride' had come into use generally to describe demand-responsive services.

Between 8th November 1982 and 23rd October 1983, 4,006 journeys were provided of which 36% were for health related purposes, over 20% for general purposes, and nearly 19% for shopping. By 1987 this had risen to over 30,000 and by 1992 to over 40,000.



The fifth anniversary celebrations included a reception on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1987 at Ecas House attended by some seventy members, staff and guests. The guests included the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, the Convener of Lothian Regional Council and the General Manager of Lothian Health Board - a major achievement!

The support from public bodies has been a key factor in Handicabs' history. In 1987 a Joint Working Party on Transport for Disabled People was set up, chaired by Dr John Hunter of the Lothian Health Board and made up of a variety of representatives from Lothian Health Board, Lothian Regional Council departments and other statutory and voluntary agencies. In its reports it set a number of targets and an early recommendation led to the appointment in 1987 of Keith Gowenlock as Special Needs Transport Access Officer with Lothian Regional Council funded by Lothian Health Board. Keith worked closely and productively with Handicabs staff until he moved to a similar post with Central Regional Council in 1992. Keith and his successor, David Hunter, with other colleagues, made a huge difference to transport provision for disabled people at this time. A 'multi-modal' approach had been adopted to improve a spectrum of services from mainstream bus and rail services at one end, to specialised dial-a-ride services at the other.

The number of wheelchair accessible taxis was increasing and the Lothian Regional Council funded a **Lothian Taxicard** scheme to make fares more affordable for disabled people unable to use buses. By the end of 1991 there were 2,700 taxicard holders in Edinburgh and West Lothian. The following year it was expanded to East and Midlothian.

Demand on the Dial-a-Ride service was far outstripping supply and so to meet the need for shopping trips a **Dial-a-Bus** service was started in Mid/East Lothian in 1990. It was fully funded by the Lothian Regional Council, Handicabs acting as its agents responsible for delivery. Three 'Omni' midi-buses were purchased by the Council and over the year from April 1990 to March 1991 the service carried 9,225 passengers and their escorts. A full region-

wide service which included Edinburgh was started in 1991, the number of passengers and their escorts doubling to some 18,000 over the year. To ease the increasing pressure on the staff despatch team, a computerised booking system was initiated.

An '**All Aboard**' service was introduced in rural parts of East Lothian and new offices were leased in Dalkeith for the Mid/East Lothian operations.

A newsletter '**Out and About**' was started in February 1989 by Rod MacDonald (Broxburn). Further issues followed through the 1990s, edited in succession by Katie Rutledge (Dalkeith), Bob Scott (Edinburgh) and Tom Porter (Edinburgh).

In 1990/91 there were 31 members of staff and 10 vehicles, 7 owned by the company and used for the Dial-a-Ride service (4 on the front line and 3 as back up).

### 3. The second decade: 1992/3 to 2001/2

In 1992 Handicabs celebrated its 10th anniversary and the early part of the decade saw a number of changes in management. Dr Frank Stewart retired as Chairman after ten years and was succeeded by Professor Jim Hughes who was in post until 1997. Alan Rees retired as Company Secretary and was succeeded by Irene Lavery (1993-95). Alan became Vice Chairman in 1993 and Chairman in 1997. Ronnie Sinclair became Company Secretary in 1995 having been Treasurer since 1987.

At the AGM in 1993 the Memorandum and Articles of Association were amended to allow members of staff to join the Executive Committee and Wayne Pearson was elected. At this time there were 248 individual members and 18 corporate members.



Vehicles in Parliament Square representing taxi services, the All Aboard service (East Lothian), Shopmobility, Dial-a-Bus and Dial-a-Ride. January 1992

The Lothian Regional Council estimated that some 20,000 disabled people in Lothian could not use conventional buses and the Council was giving increasing priority to meeting their transport needs. Its annual expenditure on specific initiatives to meet these needs then exceeded £1.5 million. In particular the three door-to-door services funded by the Council - Taxicard, Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Bus - provided about 30,000 trips each month. In 1992/93 the Dial-a-Ride service in Edinburgh was expanded with a fourth vehicle funded by the Council.

It was not surprising that Handicabs was the subject of various reports.

In response to a report by David Hunter of Lothian Regional Council in 1993, Handicabs manager, Wayne Pearson, prepared a paper on the cost effectiveness of Handicabs services. Both made a number of recommendations for improvements.

A MORI poll commissioned by the Council in 1994 into consumer

perceptions of the three transport services for disabled people funded by the Council, showed a 55% satisfaction level but there was need for much better publicity to increase awareness. This included Handicabs, although amongst its users there was a 92-95% satisfaction rate. A follow-up report by MORI in 1998 into the services in Edinburgh, showed marked improvements in awareness and similar levels of satisfaction.

In 1994/95 a three year agreement with Lothian Regional Council was concluded. This was timely, because in April 1996 local government was reorganised. The Lothian Regional Council and the three District Councils were replaced by four unitary councils, Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian. The transition was by and large smooth with new relationships being forged with new council officials and elected members. The three year grant meeting 80% of the budget which had been negotiated with the Regional Council was honoured by the new Councils on a population basis.

In 1994/5 an agreement was reached with the Scottish Ambulance Service for Handicabs to provide disability awareness training for its drivers.

In the BT/Disability Scotland Awards 1995 Handicabs received a special commendation for the part it played in promoting independent living. The awards panel said Handicabs service was "one of the finest in GB and well used by customers."

A three year Handicabs East Lothian Project (H.E.L.P.) was started in April 1997 with funding from the National Lottery Charities Board and cooperation from East Lothian Council to provide an extra vehicle and two drivers on a mixed Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Bus service in the Dunbar, Haddington and North Berwick areas. Further three year funding allowed it to continue throughout East Lothian until March 2002.

In 1999 David Chambers undertook a review for East Lothian Council into all the services Handicabs provided in the area and

recommended that there should be a development plan, better publicity and various other improvements.

#### **4. The third decade: 2002/3 to 2011/12**

The AGM in October 2003 marked Handicabs' twenty one years of service. In that period it was recorded that its vehicles had covered 8 million miles and a total of 117,772 passengers and escorts carried (average of 2,265 every week). There were 472 members, 7,881 registered users, 24 vehicles, 26 drivers, and 12 despatch and managerial and administrative staff working from three offices.

The year 2003 marked the sixth and final year of the East Lothian Project (H.E.L.P) but it was followed by a further phase of development. A 'Rural Project' was funded by the Scottish Executive under its Rural Community Transport Initiative (RCTI) with three vehicles covering rural areas in West Lothian and Midlothian as well as East Lothian. The Scottish Executive also funded two new urban projects - an additional Dial-a-Ride vehicle and driver in Edinburgh and an additional Dial-a-Bus vehicle for West Lothian.

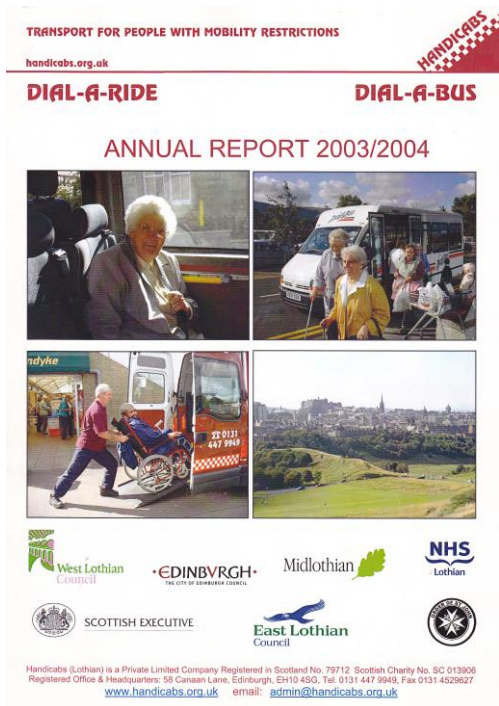
A Charter Mark award was applied for and granted to Handicabs in 2004 by the Cabinet Office for customer service excellence. It recognises outstanding quality in providing what customers want and expect. Handicabs is one of the few voluntary organisations in Scotland to have received the award. It was re-assessed and qualified again in subsequent years at higher ratings. Service standards have been set and customer feedback invited.

From April 2006 in cooperation with NHS Lothian and West Lothian Council, Handicabs started running a **Health Link** service to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary for people in the West Lothian area. An ambulance vehicle was made available by the Order of St John. In response to further demand it was by 2007 providing regular ambulance and patient transport services for the oncology wards at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh. Patient discharge and transfer transport for the Western General, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and St John's Hospital, Livingstone, was also supplied. In addition,

occasional ambulance and first aid cover was provided at public events with staff numbers and qualifications as appropriate.

All this did not impinge on the Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Bus services but became referred to as the **Ambulance Service**. It provided an additional and welcome source of income from the NHS.

On 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008 the City of Edinburgh Council gave a civic reception in the City Chambers to mark Handicabs' 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Demand for its services continued to rise. In the following year the cover name **Hcl** was adopted for general use. A full change of name for the company had been proposed and considered in 1998 but rejected after consultation with members. So this was a working solution.



The annual report goes into colour and displays sponsor logos

In its annual report for 2011/12, HcL recorded its vehicles had covered over 17.5 million miles over the past thirty years. In that year the number of registered users was 14,554 of whom 7,715 were with Dial-a-Ride and 6,839 with Dial-a-Bus. A total of 101,512 passengers and their escorts was carried, 42,510 on the Dial-a-Ride service, 53,848 on Dial-a-Bus and 5,163 by ambulance. On average this amounted to 1,952 passengers every week.

In May 2012 the City of Edinburgh Council published a *Review of Community and Accessible Transport* which included Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Bus. It found that over the past ten years demand for these services overall had been growing. But the number of Dial-a-Ride trips taken had been in steady decline and Dial-a-Bus trips had seen a short term drop in 2010/2011, possibly due to bad weather.

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## Part 2: additional information

### 1. Members

Handicabs was established as a charitable company limited by guarantee. It is a membership-based organisation which elects office bearers and executive committee members annually. Members pay an annual subscription but honorary membership is also awarded.

The first subscribing members to the Memorandum and Articles of Association were Alexander Hunter, Robert Low, Maureen O'Neill, Stephen O'Neill, Alan Rees, Frank Stewart and Sarah Tennent. The upper limit of registered members was initially set at 200 but an increase was allowable and was exceeded for the first time in 1991/2 when there was a 30% increase from 172 to 223. Corporate membership also rose that year from 13 to 16.

Figures over the three decades are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Members</b>		
	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Corporate</b>	<b>Total</b>
1982/3	36	12	8
1992/3	248	18	66
2002/3	457	15	472
2012/13	398	9	407

## 2. Registered users

Being a member of the company was not necessary to use the service but a separate register of users was introduced and categorised according to the service used. Numbers were not quoted in early reports but available figures are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Registered users</b>		
	<b>Dial-a-Ride</b>	<b>Dial-a-Bus</b>	<b>Total</b>
1982/3	900	-	900
1996/7	5,537	4,728	10,265
2003/4	5,597	4,169	9,766
2011/12	7,715	6,839	14,554

## 3. Management and staff

The company is managed by an Executive Committee made up of four office bearers (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer/Company Secretary) and up to a further six members. All are elected annually by subscribing members at the Annual General Meeting.

In 1992 staff representatives were included on the committee and the Manager/Chief Executive has become a permanent



member. There are Assessors and Observers from Edinburgh, East, Mid and West Lothian local authorities and (most recently) from NHS Lothian.

The first Chairman was Dr Frank Stewart. He retired in 1992 after ten years and was succeeded by Professor Jim Hughes (1993 to 1997) and Alan Rees (1997 to 2001). Muriel Williams, the current Chairman, was elected in 2001 having previously been Vice Chairman since 1997. Alan Rees retired as Company Secretary after ten years and was succeeded by Irene Lavery (1994-95) and Ronnie Sinclair (1995-2012) who was also Treasurer. Alan became Vice Chairman in 1993 and Chairman in 1997, retiring in 2001.

The staff team is made up of drivers and despatchers, management, administrative and finance officers. At the start all staff were employed under the Manpower Services Commission's Community Programme for the long term unemployed. Only those in supervisory posts could be employed for more than 52 weeks, and many left earlier for permanent jobs. This meant a high turnover. So it was vitally important to get funding from elsewhere and this has largely been achieved by obtaining grants, first from the Lothian Regional Council and then from the four successor councils that made up the region.

The figures are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Staff Number</b>
1982/3	25
1992/3	38
2002/3	38
2012/13	51

The majority of staff became employed on terms and conditions similar to those in local government, either full or part time. Some worked on a casual basis or in a voluntary capacity. It is

noteworthy that in 2012 eleven had more than twenty years' service and eighteen had more than ten years' service.

The longest serving staff member, Ian Greig, retired in 2012 having started as a driver in Midlothian in 1983. He became District Organiser for East/Midlothian, Assistant Manager and Operations Manager (East). Wayne Pearson, the Chief Executive, is not far behind having started as Manager in June 1985 replacing John Simpson who went to work for the Lothian Health Board. In recognition of his long and distinguished service he was awarded an Achievement Award by the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA) in 2012.

Joe Norman was another long serving staff member, being appointed as the District Organiser for West Lothian from the start. He retired in 1999 and joined the Executive Committee but died in 2009. Kelvin Cochrane succeeded Joe and was promoted to be Operations Manager (West) and then overall Operations Manager, now having over twenty six years of service.

The quality of staff performance has been constantly recognised in coping with passenger needs, schedule pressures, vehicle breakdowns, traffic jams, accidents and severe weather. Training has been provided for Midas (minibus driver awareness), PCV and First Aid certificates. Long service awards have been made.

## 4. Services

The '**Dial-a-Ride**' service now provides a personal 'door-through-door' transport for people with various mobility challenges travelling as individuals or groups, every day of the week throughout the year including public holidays. Some 34% are wheelchair users. Destinations are unrestricted and can include visits to social and recreational facilities, friends and family.

Edinburgh currently accounts for some 42% of trips, West Lothian 28%, Midlothian 17% and East Lothian 13%. Numbers on special

trips and the East Lothian H.E.L.P. service are included in the following figures

<b>Year</b>	<b>Trips</b>
1982/3	10,000 (est)
1992/3	26,371
2003/4	53,962
2011/12	42,848

The '**Dial-a-Bus**' service provides a Monday-Friday service from home to local major shopping centres for people who have difficulty using public transport. All areas of Lothian have at least one and often two routes available during the week, either morning or afternoon. Currently Edinburgh accounts for 55% of passenger trips, West Lothian 31%, Midlothian 11% and East Lothian 3%.

The service started in 1991 and the following number of trips are recorded:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Trips</b>
1992/3	20,703
2003/4	65,973
2011/12	53,848

In the early years '**Summer Special**' trips to places of interest were organised at weekends. This was discontinued in 1991 but individuals and groups were still able to book transport for day or holiday trips, or for respite care, beyond Lothian Region under the normal booking system. It became the '**Out-of-Region**' or '**Special Trips**' service during the year 1994/5 when new funding by the Lothian Regional Council did not cover the cost. Being

unsubsidised, fares were charged at a higher rate to cover most of the travel costs. Popular destinations have included Glasgow, Largs, Grantown-on-Spey, Perth and Stirling.

**'All Aboard'** was the name of the first fully accessible fixed-route service started in August 1991 to provide a once or twice weekly link for small rural communities in East Lothian. Between April 1992 and March 1993 it carried 98 passengers and 86 escorts. A low-floor 'midibus' vehicle with a tail lift was used, operated by SMT under contract by the Regional Council. The service was linked to the Dial-a-Bus services provided by Handicabs which also registered the users and provided the bookings.

**Handicabs East Lothian Project (H.E.L.P.)** was a three year project started in April 1997 with funding from the National Lottery Charities Board's Community Fund. It provided an extra vehicle and two drivers for a mix of Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Bus travel in the Dunbar, Haddington and North Berwick areas. Further three year funding allowed it to continue throughout East Lothian until March 2002. After that it was funded by the Scottish Executive.

**'Connect 4'** is a feeder transport service for people with limited mobility which allows them access and connection to the 400/X400 bus service. The service runs hourly from St. John's Hospital in Livingston to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and is operated by E & M Horsburgh Limited. Journeys must be booked at least one day in advance. HcL can provide information on the timetable and will arrange a pick-up from home and transport to St. John's Hospital where a connection can be made with the service to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

The **'Ambulance Service'** provides stretcher, wheelchair or ambulant transfers for patients and their escorts, on demand and subject to availability. It operates seven days a week and is staffed by one or two people. Oxygen, immobilisation, monitoring and specialist equipment are carried to UK accident and emergency standards. Longer distance journeys can be undertaken but as much notice as possible is requested. The service started in 2006

and the number of patients and their escorts carried has dramatically increased as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number</b>
2009/10	2,938
2011/12	5,163

## 5. Passengers and escorts carried

The first annual report *Drive for Greater Mobility'* ,covering the period November 1982 to October 1983, recorded that 4006 'rides' were provided, 36.05 % for health purposes, 18.82% for shopping purposes. By the end of the three year 'action research' project period in October 1995, 32,141 passenger journeys had been undertaken, 17,000 in the previous twelve months. In 1985/86 the number of escorts carried was also recorded, the numbers being 22,519 passengers and 6,334 escorts. It was clear that Handicabs had taken off!

Figures for passengers and escorts over the three decades are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Dial-a-Ride</b>	<b>Dial-a-Bus</b>	<b>Total</b>
1982/3	4,006	-	4,006
1992/3	43,876	25,342	69,218
2002/3	53,162	64,824	117,986
2012/13	42,510	53,848	96,358

The percentage of passengers in the four local authority areas using the Dial-a-Ride service has not significantly changed over the year being Edinburgh 50%, West Lothian 25%, Midlothian 15% and East Lothian 10%. Percentages for the Dial-a-Bus service have been similar - Edinburgh 51%, West Lothian 33%, Midlothian 12%

and East Lothian 4%.

The reasons for travel have also changed little overall, although the introduction of the Dial-a-Bus service to shopping centres in 1990/91 altered the balance between shopping and other reasons. Wheelchair users are the main users of the Dial-a-Ride service: ambulant passengers are the predominant users of the Dial-a-Bus service.

Demand has regularly outstripped available resources by some 20%. The difficulty in getting bookings was the main problem. A survey of 20 passengers in 1998 showed that the majority were also taxicard holders and used taxis when unable to get a Handicabs booking which was their preferred mode of transport. Further survey results in 2003/4, 2006 and 2008 showed continued high satisfaction rates amongst users.

## 6. Vehicles

Operating in Edinburgh and the surrounding region, the company needed to have vehicles operating in each local authority area and serving both urban and rural communities. Vehicles also needed to be kept in reserve to cover breakdowns. Due to high mileage and heavy wear and tear, the policy from the start was to try to replace two vehicles every year and a third every two years.

This meant constant fundraising but the cost of maintenance was reduced.

The average vehicle mileage was 50,000 miles a year and over 150,000 miles before sale. Redundant vehicles were sold to other organisations and some were gifted. Two went to Romanian charities, one of which in 1995 was delivered in person by Wayne Pearson, Tom Porter and Neil Sutherland, together with donated computer equipment and medical supplies.

The maroon and white livery colour was deliberately chosen at the outset to replicate the colour on Edinburgh buses, conveying the

message that services for disabled people should be part of mainstream provision. Changes made subsequently moved away from this in the light of local government reorganisation and varied



sponsorship.

### Ambulance and Dial-a-Ride service vehicles

It was important that vehicles were of high quality and met accessibility specifications, PSV and safety standards. The early ones were Renault Trafic van conversions with back and side

ramps. Subsequently a mix of larger Renault Master, Volkswagen, and other midi buses with rear lifts were used on both Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Bus services.

When the Dial-a-Bus services started in 1990/91 there were 10 vehicles in all, 7 owned by Handicabs for the Dial-a-Ride services (4 on the front line and 3 as back up) and 3 'Omni' midi-buses purchased and owned by Lothian Regional Council. In 2001 a new Rohill Osprey vehicle was funded by West Lothian Council for the West Lothian Dial-a-Bus services.

In 2012 HcL operated with 33 vehicles, 19 on Dial-a-Ride, 9 on Dial-a-Bus (5 of which were not owned) and 5 on the ambulance service. It was becoming increasingly hard to keep, maintain and replace the fleet. Sixteen were over 5 years old with depreciation down to nil. Dial-a-Ride vehicles now cost over £36,000 to purchase and equip, Dial-a-Bus vehicles over £60,000.

Figures for the total number of vehicles over the three decades are as follows:

1982/3	6
1992/3	11
2002/3	24
2012/13	33

## 7. Premises

Handicabs was intended to serve the whole Lothian Regional Council area. For operational reasons there was therefore need for a central base in the city and also offices in East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian close to where services were delivered. Local staff could be recruited and after local government reorganisation it was also politically expedient to localise services.

As already mentioned, in **Edinburgh** the first registered address was



Ainslie House, 11 St Colme Street, Edinburgh, the offices of the Edinburgh Council of Social Service (now EVOC) but a three year lease was taken out on premises at 14 Braefoot Terrace, Edinburgh shared with Edinburgh Voluntary Transport - now Lothian Community Transport Services (LCTS) - which were occupied in January 1983. In July 1986 both organisations moved, Handicabs to 58 Canaan Lane and EVT to 129b Willowbrae Road, Edinburgh.

The Canaan Lane property was a Listed B two-storey building located at the western entrance to the Astley Ainslie Hospital and was formally the Head Porter's Lodge. As a National Health Service property, it was leased from the Scottish Government through the Lothian Health Board. Initially the lease was for five years from June 1986 at a peppercorn rent. A grant of £7,500 from the Lothian Health Board paid for redecoration, furnishings and a new telephone system. This office has remained as Handicabs' HQ and operational base for Edinburgh. In 2010 it also became the base for East and Midlothian and has remained so since then.

In **East Lothian and Midlothian** a District Office and operational base for East Lothian was opened in Haddington in 1983 and one for Midlothian in Gorebridge. They were then combined at the Whitehill Business Centre, Dalkeith. The office was closed in 2010 and was combined with the Edinburgh office.

In **West Lothian** the West Lothian District Office and operational base started in Bathgate but then moved to Blackburn. Since 2002 it has been at 17A Inchmuir Road, Whitehill Industrial Estate, Bathgate.

## 8. Finance

Some early **public sources** of revenue funding came from local authorities and central government but the Manpower Services Commission provided the funding for staff under its job creation programmes from September 1982. Initially there were six drivers, an administrator and a co-ordinator but this increased to sixteen

drivers, three district organisers, two secretary/dispatchers, an assistant manager and manager by October 1983.

As noted in Part 1, there was a major breakthrough in April 1988 when Lothian Regional Council agreed to a revenue funding package from its Public Transport Unit. Of equal significance was a three year Service Agreement negotiated in 1995 and this was carried over to the four new unitary authorities after reorganisation. Edinburgh and West Lothian agreed to a further three year funding package from 1998.

Grants from local and central government have continued since and have remained at around 70% of the company's income.

Regarding **private sources**, Handicabs has applied for and received funds from a wide variety of Trusts and other charitable sources. Notable among these has been the Order of St John in Scotland which has funded the upkeep of Dial-a-Ride vehicles.

Membership subscriptions, personal donations and legacies have made up a relatively small but most important and welcome part of the income mix. On 1st March 1992 a BBC TV appeal was made from Murrayfield Stadium by folk singer Ronnie Browne of The Corries. Filming had taken place at the Cameron Toll shopping Centre and the Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, earlier in the week.



Handicabs members Gerry Austin, Beryl Maguire and Jay Joshi took leading roles. As well as generating good publicity, the appeal raised £2,745.

### Filming at Murrayfield

In the year 2012-2013 unrestricted income amounted to £1,440,748, 69% from operating grants, 25% from fares, 4% from a Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) and 2% from membership,

donations and bank interest. Unrestricted outgoings amounted to £1,313,283 of which 68% was on staff wages, 27% on vehicle costs, 4% on office administration and 1% on governance.

## 9. Events

Handicabs has provided transport for disabled people to attend a variety of events, large and small. It helped to provide transport for disabled people to venues during the 1986 Commonwealth Games which were held in Edinburgh. Meadowbank Stadium was the main venue and a special stand was provided for wheelchair users.

**DISABILITY SCOTLAND**

**4<sup>TH</sup>**  
SCOTLAND'S PREMIER MOBILITY EXHIBITION

**MOBILITY ROADSHOW**

**Royal Highland Centre**  
Thurs. 28 May until Sat. 30 May 1998

Roadshow catalogue & complimentary Disability News

DISABILITY SCOTLAND

In 1991 the first of four biennial Scottish Mobility Roadshows was organised by the Scottish Council on Disability and Disability Scotland at the Royal Highland Centre at Ingliston, Edinburgh. Handicabs had a stand at the early shows and provided shuttle services from Edinburgh when the shows were later organised there by Mobility Choice. First aid cover has also been provided.

In 1995 the company provided a shuttle service for the Tall Ships event at the port of Leith using Dial-

a-Bus vehicles. Some 3,750 people were carried. It has participated in the 'Try a Bus' events organised by Ecas at Ocean Terminal.

Office bearers and staff members have attended numerous exhibitions and conferences organised by the Community Transport Association (CTA) in Manchester. They have attended meetings and events run by CTA in Scotland and the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA).

Internationally, members have attended conferences of TRANSED (formerly known as the International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled People) in Stockholm (1989), Lyon (1992), Reading (1995) and Warsaw (2001).

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## Part 3: Conclusion

Across Scotland there have been many initiatives and improvements to door-to-door transport provision over this thirty year period, as well as big advances in mainstream transport provision and public policy.

The Strathclyde Regional Council introduced its first fixed route accessible bus service and its dial-a-bus services in 1983. Its successor authority, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), now has 46 vehicles on its 'MyBus' urban and rural services for elderly and disabled people, providing on average 10,170 trips each week.

Using HCL as a model, and with Richard Gregory of the Margaret Blackwood Housing Association a prime mover, Dial-a-Journey started in 1986 to provide affordable and accessible transport in the Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannan area. It started with two buses and staff employed under the Manpower Services Commission scheme. It is supported by the local authorities and the Order of Malta and now has 40 full time and part time staff. It

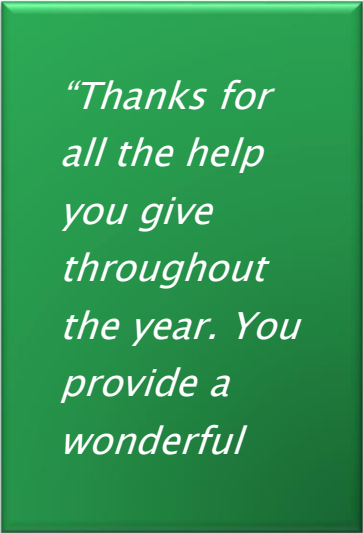
also runs a Shopmobility scheme, such schemes being provided in many other parts of Scotland.

Wheelchair accessible 'black cab' taxis have gradually been introduced by local authorities, mainly in cities and urban centres, even though the UK Government has failed to produce regulations under the 1995 DDA. Edinburgh became the first local authority to have achieved a 100% accessible fleet, with Glasgow and Dundee following on. 'Taxicard' subsidy schemes were introduced by a number of Regional Councils to make fares more affordable and have been continued by successor councils, though by no means all.

Members of the Community Transport Association in Scotland have played a significant role in providing accessible and affordable transport for groups and individuals, especially in rural areas.

The Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA) was established in 1986 to bring together users and operators. SATA has campaigned on a wide range of issues and has supported the establishment and continued existence of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) which respectively advise Scottish and UK Government Ministers on public policy.

These and other developments have been assisted by regulations under equality and human rights legislation. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 and the UK Disability Discrimination Act in 1995, the latter being replaced by the Equalities Act in 2010. These have led to more accessible public



*"Thanks for  
all the help  
you give  
throughout  
the year. You  
provide a  
wonderful*

transport generally on all modes of transport by road, rail, sea and air. Having said that, in many areas progress has stalled and much remains still to do.

With current pressures on public funds there is a continuing danger of cut backs. Local authorities regularly review their commitments, including the support they give to transport services for disabled people. The latest by the City of Edinburgh Council was in May 2012.

This insecurity applies to HcL as it relies so heavily on public funding. But over its thirty years it has demonstrated what an essential service it provides and research confirms how great the need still is.

*“Without  
Handicabs I  
would be  
housebound.  
To do my own*

*“I do hope  
this service  
will always be  
available: we  
couldn't do*

*“Another year  
of excellent  
service. Thank  
you very  
much.”*

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For further information about HcL/Handicabs Ltd get in touch with the company at 24/3A Dryden Road, Bilston Glen Industrial Estate, Loanhead EH20 9HX

Or visit the website [www.hcltransport.org.uk](http://www.hcltransport.org.uk)

The author is grateful for help received from Wayne Pearson (Chief Executive Officer, HcL/Handicabs), Muriel Williams (Chairman, HcL/Handicabs), Mike Harrison (Secretary, Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance) and John Moore (Managing Director, Lothian Community Transport Services).

The author alone is responsible for this history and comments should be sent to him at 20 Seaforth Drive, Edinburgh EH4 2BZ.

A copy has been lodged with the Edinburgh City Library, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, together with annual reports and other reference documents.

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**DIAL-A-RIDE**

**DIAL-A-BUS**

**TRANSPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY CHALLENGES**



**DIAL-A-RIDE**



**DIAL-A-BUS**

**EDINBURGH, MIDLOTHIAN  
& EAST LOTHIAN**

**DIAL-A-RIDE 0131 447 9949**  
**DIAL-A-BUS 0131 447 1718**

**WEST LOTHIAN**

**DIAL-A-RIDE 01506 633953**  
**DIAL-A-BUS 01506 633336**



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