

DIAL-A-RIDE DIAL-A-BUS
Reducing Inequalities. Increasing Mobility.

HcL
Handicabs (Lothian)

**HcL Strategic Plan
2021-2026**



Foreword by Kenneth Brown

HcL has a wealth of experience in meeting the transport needs of people with disabilities, elderly and others who have limited mobility. We want to ensure that this experience is used to meet the needs of our users in the future. Thirty eight years after the Charity was founded, we find accessible transport and equality in mobility still has a long way to go. This strategy is designed to guide the development of HcL and its services over the next 5 years. It is important that our users, funders, staff and other stakeholders all have a clear and coherent view of where HcL is heading, and why.

We want to build on our history not only to develop and improve our existing services, but also to look creatively at finding new ways to enhance the mobility and independence of everyone in the Lothians. This will mean considerable change over the next 5 years, and change always presents challenges; however change also brings opportunities and the exciting

prospect of developing HcL in new and imaginative ways, while staying true to the values that have served us well in the past. We are confident that this is the right approach for the interests of HcL, and most importantly, for our users and potential users.

This strategy document is a live working document. We would like to hear what people think of our proposals for the future, and I invite members of the public, our service users, our funders and anybody with an interest in promoting the mobility and independences of people with disabilities, mobility challenges and elderly people to send us their comments and thoughts. In the meantime we will use this strategy to guide and develop our work, to improve services and get the most out of our available resources, for the benefit of those in the Lothians who continue to face barriers to their mobility and participation in our communities.

Kenneth Brown, Chair, December 2020



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Introduction: Our history and vision

HcL is one of the longest established and highest regarded community transport organisations in Scotland. It has the resources to sustain and grow its services in terms of a fleet of 29 vehicles, 36 staff, 39 years of experience and priceless goodwill and reputation for the quality of its service to people with mobility challenges over its history.

HcL has provided Dial-A-Ride services since it was set up in 1982, taking passengers to a destination of their choice 7 days a week, 365 days a year. In 1991, this was supplemented by Dial-A-Bus, providing a semi-scheduled service to local shopping centres and large supermarkets. Our services provide not only door-to-door transport, but a “door-through-door” service, ensuring that our users have whatever assistance they need at the start and end of their journey. This level of personal attention to individual needs is, we believe, unparalleled in Scotland.

HcL has always been largely dependent on annual grants and Service Level Agreements from the 4 Lothian Councils (The City of Edinburgh, West Lothian, Midlothian and East Lothian Councils), with additional funding from central government, charitable trusts, fares and voluntary sources. Local councils (our principal funders) have faced unprecedented pressure over recent years on their resources, and we believe that a more strategic approach is needed now more than ever.

This document provides direction and the

strategic objectives to support growth over the next 5 years. This is based on our wish to build on the traditional strengths of HcL and its core services providing door-through-door transport for people of all ages who have limited mobility. But, at the same time, we want to respond to the very real need in Edinburgh and the Lothians and adapt with an innovative, proactive and ‘can-do’ approach, using our resources and expertise to promote equality, inclusion and independence for all in new ways.

Achieving this will require considerable change. We must attract new sources of income in order to maintain and expand services and to reduce our dependence on our Local Authority grants. We may need to adopt new models for operations and licensing. We may need to deepen our collaboration with other services in order to enhance integration.

In developing our services and operational plans, we incorporate our vision that all Lothian residents should have the best possible opportunity to travel around, regardless of disability or other mobility impairment. Central to this vision is the role performed by HcL as a provider of ‘parallel public transport’ for people who cannot use conventional bus, train, taxi and tram services. HcL is therefore as much an integral part of the public transport mix as a community transport service and we want to take advantage of this position to maximise the impact that we make.



HcL Today

HcL carried approximately 87,000 passengers in 2019-20 on our 2 principal services.

The Dial-A-Ride service is designed to offer as wide a choice as possible to users: it operates every day of the year and bookings are accepted whenever they can be accommodated - there are no restrictions to operating hours.

Similarly, there are no restrictions on where passengers can travel - although the fares for long distance travel out with the Lothians are set at a level which is designed to cover costs. This level of passenger choice is almost unique to Dial-A-Ride services in the UK. Fares start at

£4.75 for a single trip of one mile, rising by 50p per mile. 26% of passengers use wheelchairs. Edinburgh accounted for 44% of trips, West Lothian 33%, Midlothian 14% and East Lothian 9% in 2019-20.

For the City of Edinburgh Council, HcL began delivering "door-through-door" transport for elderly and people with disabilities to attend day care centres and third sector care provision. HcL is one of the members of the Public Social Partnership between the City of Edinburgh Council and third sector suppliers of community transport services in Edinburgh - Community Transport PSP Vision.

"To develop a genuine and lasting partnership between The City of Edinburgh Council and the Community Transport sector in Edinburgh to support the remodelling and development of innovative, integrated and flexible transport solutions and to build the capacity of the Community Transport sector so as to be able to deliver these solutions in the future."

Our Dial-A-Bus service provides a structured choice of time and destination, aiming to provide at least one slot, and in many cases two slots per week through a semi-scheduled, door-through-door service to local shopping centres and large

supermarkets. We take passengers to The Gyle, The Centre Livingston and Cameron Toll, depending on the area covered. We also take passengers to many large Morrisons, Tescos, Sainsburys and Asdas across the Lothians. There is a flat fare of £2.00. This service model means that we can carry more people together to a common destination, at a relatively low unit cost. In 2019-20 Edinburgh accounted for 45% of trips, West Lothian 36%, Midlothian 16% and East Lothian 3%. 2% of passengers use wheelchairs.

As of 31 March 2020, the total annual income for HcL was £1,387,332, of which £944,204



was provided by local council funding. Other significant income streams are fares and the Bus Service Operators Grant. Over the past 5 years, we have also acquired 22 vehicles (10 new and 12 second hand) through accessing charitable and special government funds, bringing valuable additional resources and capacity to the Lothians.

HcL is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity (SC013906). It is managed by an Executive Committee which is composed largely of service users and is elected by the members of the charity each year (there were 189 members as of March 2020). 'User accountability' has been an important part of HcL's ethos since it was founded. We see this as a key strength which will be maintained and nurtured in the future.

Operational challenges

As we have noted, the environment that HcL works in is ever changing. The increase in the ageing population in the 4 Lothians is at a rate that is higher than the national average. People are living longer, the need to maintain people's independence in their own home and community are all needs that our services can help support. However, we recognise that there are also some challenges which require to be addressed. The objectives that we define in the following section are designed to respond to these challenges.

- Despite the contribution that HcL makes to the policies outlined above, it is an ongoing challenge to maintain funding levels from local councils which all face tough spending choices.
- Demand for HcL Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus services has been declining, albeit slowly, over the past 10 years or more, a pattern that appears to be shared by many UK Dial-A-Rides.
- Our average cost per trip is currently around £10.00 (for Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus combined). This is a lower figure than in many areas of the UK, but it is also higher than some metropolitan areas, which often focus on short, local journeys and on more mobile passengers.

We will continue to review costs and increase efficiencies.

- As buses, taxis, trams and trains become more accessible, some people with mobility challenges who would before have needed door-through-door transport can now get about independently on public transport.
- Many people who face considerable barriers to their mobility and preferred lifestyle still do not know about HcL and how it may be able to help them.
- Users can find it hard to make bookings at the time they want and may be discouraged at having booking requests turned down because of unavailability.
- Although HcL tries to keep fares as affordable as possible, some passengers will nonetheless be deterred from travelling owing to the cost. As of October 2020 work is underway to begin a trial in West Lothian for concessionary travel passes being accepted on our Dial-A-Bus service.
- Maintaining an up to date, reliable and suitable vehicle fleet is a constant challenge with capital funding scarce.





The policy environment

Supporting National and Local Policy Priorities

Community transport is a form of Demand Responsive Transport which “is about providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs, and which is often aimed at the most vulnerable and isolated individuals in the community.” (Community Transport Association).

The services that HCL provide, support people across the Lothians with mobility challenges to maintain independence, stay in their own home longer, to get out and about and access local facilities and amenities. Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus help reduce social isolation for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

These services directly support both national and local objectives.

The National Context:

■ **Scottish Government Age, Home and Community 2011 Strategy** was updated in 2018 with a clear key priority “*We want older people in Scotland to enjoy full and positive lives in homes that meet their needs.*”

One of the 3 aims underpinning this strategy is Right Support: “*We want to ensure that all older people in Scotland have the support they need to enjoy full and positive lives at home or in a homely setting*”. Included within this aim: “*Accessible transport is vital to communities so that people can stay socially active, particularly for those in rural areas or later in life.*”

■ Current **National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes** include the following: “*People are able to look after and improve their own health and wellbeing and live in good health*”



for longer.” And “People, including those with disabilities or long term conditions, or who are frail, are able to live, as far as reasonably practicable, independently and at home or in a homely setting in their community.”

■ The Scottish Government’s first national strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness and build stronger social connections (2018). Priority 4 – Support an infrastructure that fosters connections, which includes transport: *“Accessible transport is vital to people being able to meet face-to-face and stay socially active, particularly for those in rural areas or later in life.”*

■ **2020 National Transport Strategy** vision: *“We will have a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors.”* Priorities include ‘Reducing inequalities’ and ‘Improves our health and wellbeing’.



Key Challenges

Scotland's population is ageing. In 2018, 455,000 people in Scotland were aged 75 or over. By 2043, this figure is projected to grow to 776,000, an increase of just over 70%.

Many people with disabilities feel trapped due to the lack of accessible transport, particularly in remote and rural areas. There is increasing recognition of social isolation and loneliness as major public health issues that can have significant impacts on a person's physical and mental wellbeing. Evidence shows that social isolation and loneliness are experienced across Scotland. Transport clearly has a role to play in reducing levels of social isolation.

Evidence suggests that 98% of disabled people have experienced a problem either booking or getting transport to medical and healthcare appointments.

Affordability is also an issue for disabled people. While there is a National Concessionary Travel Scheme for those eligible, disabled people are more likely to experience affordability barriers to transport relative to people without disabilities. A lower proportion of disabled people are in employment compared to those who are not disabled, and so are more likely to be affected by poverty. These barriers lead to lower levels of travel amongst disabled people and contribute to a range of impacts.



Local Context

■ Edinburgh Public and Accessible Transport

Action Plan 2013-2020: The overall aim is to achieve: *“an integrated, safe, modern, sustainable, top quality public transport system, providing for all major medium and longer distance movement to, from and around Edinburgh; accessible to all”*. One of the objectives to meet this aim is *“high-quality, cost effective Community and Accessible Transport.”*

■ West Lothian Community Planning Partnership 2013-2023 - Achieving Positive Outcomes.

One objective is *“Older people are able to live independently in the community with an improved quality of life”*. People in West Lothian are living longer. Whilst this is good news, it provides challenges in terms of an ageing population and the increasing incidence of frailty, dementia and other long term conditions. Supported door-through-door transport supports older people living in their community for longer.

■ **Midlothian Transport Strategy:** *“Community transport services are a vital service to people with mobility difficulties and provide not only a transport service, but also increased opportunities for social interaction and inclusion. Community transport services are currently well used in Midlothian, however there are opportunities to increase awareness of them and expand on the services provided.”*

■ East Lothian Council Local Transport Strategy

2018-24: One of its 7 objectives: *“To maximise accessibility for all and reduce social exclusion.”*

■ The Lothian Joint Physical and Complex Disability Strategy

recognises that disabled people require an accessible environment. Transport recommendations include:

- The need for accessible, flexible and affordable public transport
- The provision of transport for the purposes of care
- The provision of transport for the purposes of employment and lifelong learning
- Ensure that people know what is available and how to access it.

■ The SEStran Regional Transport Strategy

2008 – 2023 recognises the invaluable role the community transport sector plays in meeting the transport needs of many (both urban and rural, and including the increasing numbers of elderly) in the SEStran area including those who cannot use conventional public transport and who need a fully accessible door-to-door service (in both urban and rural areas)

It is clear that HcL services support all these objectives and there is the demand for more of our services, for continuing to raise profile of our services so that more people know of Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus, and that the demand is set to increase. Our strategy for the next 5 years must focus on how we support our stakeholders meet this need and demand.



Our outcomes and objectives

Taking account of this context, HcL has identified the 4 key strategic goals that we aim to achieve over the next 5 years. Our work in the future will primarily be geared around their achievement.

- Maintain and improve our current Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus services
- Develop new services which enhance mobility
- Develop the organisation
- Raise our profile

Maintain and Improve Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus services

These services provide approximately 87,000 passenger trips a year for our users. They will therefore remain a core part of HcL activities. However, we also see scope to improve them incrementally in response to user needs. We monitor the balance between these services so we can review the scale of operations which may need to change as we develop and introduce new models of service delivery. In particular we aim to:

- increase the number of trips we can offer through both Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus;
- reduce the percentage of booking requests that are turned down;
- attract new users, targeting under-represented groups such as younger people;
- reduce the number of cancellations from passengers who have already made bookings;
- improve awareness of our services among both our registered users and potential users.





Develop new services which enhance Mobility

Alongside maintaining Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Bus services, we intend to expand into other activity which meets the needs of people with disabilities and mobility challenges in an inclusive and innovative way. The national concessionary travel scheme is one potential source of new funding, which could bring in new income to HcL and at the same time allow many people who currently pay a fare to use their entitlement to free concessionary travel, providing an inclusive service for the public as well as our existing users. Despite relatively good public and community transport provision in some areas of the Lothians, more rural locations have very little accessible transport. Thousands of people have lives which are restricted by lack of mobility. We need to find creative ways to combat isolation. We aim to:

- explore opportunities to deliver Dial-A-Bus or develop new community bus services under Section 22 licences;
- investigate the scope for expanding PCV contract work to enable people to access health, social care or educational opportunities;
- explore the potential to contribute to wider policy goals such as the environment (eg through low carbon vehicles), skills digital literacy;
- explore other means of support for example supporting other charities where staff are working with vulnerable people with mobility challenges on building confidence to travel through buddying to help encourage people to use mainstream buses;
- pilot services in response to changing stakeholder priorities and potential income

Develop the Organisation

In order to develop our services (new or existing), HcL will need to adapt and grow as an organisation. This will require change at all levels of the organisation - the Executive, management and staff. We will aim to improve accountability to our users and our capacity to manage and successfully deliver change. We will review our requirements for staff and management, premises and vehicles, so that we are equipped with the necessary resources (human, financial and physical) to deliver the aims of the strategy. We aim to:

- develop and monitor realistic and proportionate annual plans and performance measures;
- acquire the resources we need, developing new income streams and investing effort in productive fundraising activity;
- ensure that we have appropriate premises for operating in the area;
- improve our governance, increasing the effectiveness of our committee and its engagement with our users and staff;
- encourage more people to become members of HcL, and encourage our members to participate more actively in HcL;
- explore the potential for volunteers to enhance our services;
- increase efficiency, through minimising vehicle and administrative overheads and exploiting new

Raise Our Profile

As well as developing the organisation itself, we need to look outward to collaborate and communicate effectively with the many people outside HcL who are vital to achievement of our strategic goals. These include our users, our funders, other transport providers and a wide range of other public, voluntary and private bodies. We aim to:

- develop a structured communications plan raise awareness of how our services can help our users and potential users;
- continue to engage with funders to fully understand their current and future policy priorities, and to communicate effectively the contribution that HcL makes in meeting these policies;
- collaborate with partner organisations in the public, voluntary or private sectors whose service users fit the profile of our service users.



Implementing the strategy

While this document sets out our broad approach to developing services and the organisation, it does not set targets or define the practical action that we will take in order to achieve them. We will therefore complement this strategy with an annual business plan that sets out more specific actions needed to achieve these strategic aims, and ensures that these are matched to our available resources - staff, finance vehicles and so on.

Business plans will be designed so that they can be monitored effectively by the Executive Committee which is ultimately responsible for HcL's performance. We will review what indicators and measures are required to provide useful insight into progress, and will seek to understand the reasons for any difficulty in achieving our planned objectives.

The annual plan will also identify the key risks to the organisation and the achievement of the objectives it contains. The annual plan will also identify the key risks to the organisation and to the achievement of the objectives it contains.

Comments on this strategy are welcome: please send them to Kelvin Cochrane, Chief Executive, at the contact details below:

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