



COMMUNITY
TRANSPORT

PILOT PROJECT

2023-2025



INTRODUCTION

Access to reliable and affordable transport is a persistent challenge for many rural communities, and the IV25 postcode area is no exception. With limited public transport options and a growing number of residents facing mobility issues due to age, health, or financial constraints, the need for a local, flexible transport solution was clear. In response, the Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) launched the Dornoch Area Community Transport Pilot in April 2023. This pilot project set out to provide a donation based, community-led transport service using an electric vehicle, with the dual aim of reducing social isolation and promoting environmentally sustainable travel. Supported by a committed team of volunteers and multiple funders, the initiative was designed to help residents access medical appointments, attend essential outings, and maintain social connections.

Over the course of the two-year pilot, DACIC collected data, feedback, and stories from those who used the service—providing valuable insight into the needs of the community and the transformative impact a local transport initiative can have. This report summarises the key elements of the pilot, its outcomes, and the case for continuing and expanding the service into the future.



PROJECT SUMMARY

The pilot ran from April 2023 to March 2025, serving the IV25 postcode area.

Our main aims were:

- Enable greater participation in events and activities, reducing isolation.
- Provide low-carbon transport, encouraging a shift towards electric vehicles.
- Although we offered lifts to social outings, feedback showed that people mainly needed the car for medical appointments and essential shopping trips.

The pilot was made possible through generous support from:

- Anne Duchess of Westminster Fund (ADoW)
- Highland Council Transport (THC)
- Climate Resilience Fund (CRF)
- Green shoots Fund Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS)

We couldn't have done it without them.

- Over 20 volunteer drivers kept the wheels turning.
- Two volunteer call handlers and one part-time staff member supported bookings and admin.
- Our funders remained flexible and supportive, especially when we faced early challenges like sourcing a suitable vehicle.
- DACIC coordinated the day-to-day running, from volunteer recruitment to managing bookings and maintaining the car.



HOW WE DELIVERED IT

The transport service used a Volkswagen ID3 electric car, available on demand to anyone living in the IV25 postcode.

How it worked:

Bookings were originally tracked using a paper diary and excel sheets, we looked for a better option and found Optimise, an online booking system created for Community Transport Projects and happily switched to it.

Medical appointments were given priority, by taking bookings as soon as they came in.

Social trips could be booked up to two weeks in advance.

Airport journeys were excluded, but connections to trains and buses were supported.

Challenges faced:

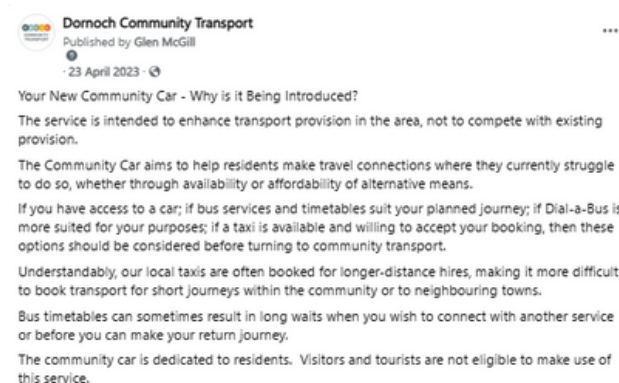
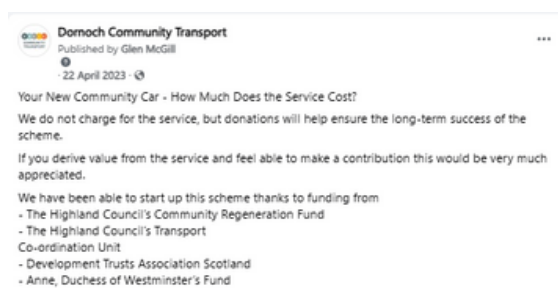
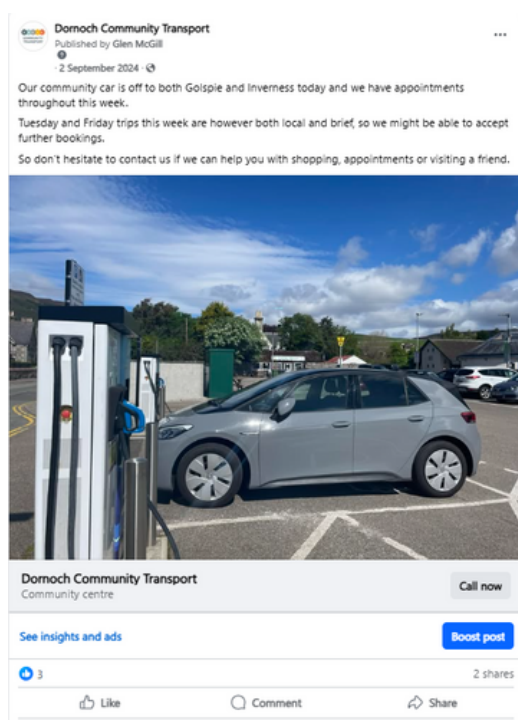
Delay in receiving the leased car delayed the service start.

Heavy early promotion was needed to build awareness.

Growing demand meant we sometimes had to turn away bookings.

Recruiting enough volunteer drivers remains a challenge, although we are lucky with the group we have.

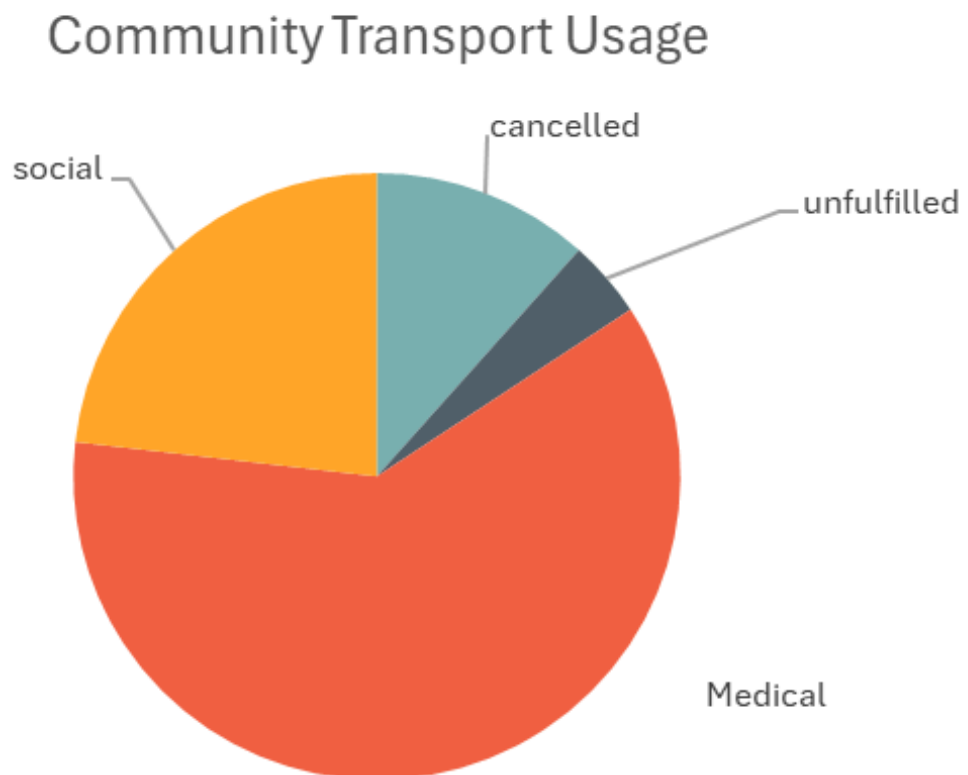
Despite these bumps, the service quickly became trusted and relied upon.



USAGE AND DATA

During the pilot:

- 90 users were recorded in the Optimise system.
- 407 journeys were completed.
- 56 journeys were cancelled by clients, and 20 journeys were logged as unfulfilled (not counting those we couldn't book in the first place).
- 295 trips were for medical appointments.
- 112 trips were for social needs like shopping, hairdressers, visiting relatives, or visiting friends/relatives in hospital.
- All tracked clients were over 50 years old, though we only have full age data for 28 users.



Cancelled trips are those where the client declined transport, either because the journey was no longer required or they found another means of travel.

Unfulfilled trips refer to transport we could not provide, due to reasons such as no vehicle being available or no driver being found. In many cases, we did not take a booking if it was already clear the car was in use, so the recorded number of unfulfilled trips understates the true demand.

IMPACT AND STORIES

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Many users said they would have struggled — or simply not managed — without the service.

Some of their comments included:

“I had a blackout so my licence was revoked. Now I have it back but while receiving dental treatment I feel safer with the community car. It’s a fabulous service and I’m very grateful for it. We have no public transport in Embo.”

One lady was able to visit her husband in hospital every day for two weeks – something that wouldn’t have been possible without our car and volunteers.

Another visually disabled lady, who hadn’t been out since Covid, was overjoyed to finally visit the hairdresser and even stop for fish and chips on the way home – a simple day out that made a big difference to her wellbeing.

Beyond individual stories, the overall impact was clear:

- Reduced isolation.
- Better access to essential services.
- A boost to community resilience.
- Growing community confidence in electric vehicles.



LESSONS LEARNED

We're proud of what we achieved, but we also learned valuable lessons:

What worked well:

- The demand for the service proved the need.
- Switching to the Optimise booking system improved efficiency.
- The electric car performed better than expected, with drivers gaining confidence over time.
- We installed a car charger with thanks to the Royal Dornoch Golf Club and Highland Council, which then meant we could access power generated by our solar panels.

What could be improved:

- Managing volunteer availability remains a challenge.
- We'd like to explore employing a driver in the future.
- We're also considering allowing volunteers to use their own cars with mileage reimbursements.
- Offering small tokens of thanks for volunteers on longer trips (like a coffee or meal) could support retention — if funding allows.



OUTCOME

The Dornoch Area Community Transport Pilot has only been possible thanks to the incredible support of our funders, dedicated volunteers, and the wider community. This project began with a simple idea – to provide accessible, reliable, and friendly transport for those who need it most – and it has grown into a lifeline for many in our area.

To our funders - thank you for believing in our vision from the beginning. Your financial support has given us the foundation to create something meaningful, and your trust has allowed us to innovate and grow. With your help, we've not only delivered essential transport but also installed our own electric vehicle charger, moving toward a more sustainable future.

To our volunteers - your time, energy, and kindness are the heart of this project. Whether you've been behind the wheel or behind the scenes, your dedication has made a real and lasting difference. Our passengers consistently tell us how much they appreciate your patience, conversation, and care. You do far more than drive – you brighten someone's day and bring reassurance to those who might otherwise feel isolated.

To our community members - thank you for embracing this service. Every journey taken, every story shared, and every bit of feedback we've received has helped shape what the service is today. Your willingness to try something new and your enthusiasm for its continuation prove just how vital community transport is in our area. You remind us why this work matters.

Together, we have shown what can be achieved when a community comes together with compassion and purpose. This pilot has laid a strong foundation, and we are excited for what comes next – from sustaining the service to expanding our reach with more vehicles and drivers.

Your continued support is essential, and we look forward to building the future of Dornoch Area Community Transport – together.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The pilot has been a great success, clearly demonstrating the value and need for this service within our community.

During the pilot phase, we raised £6,880 through public and local donations, including generous contributions from customers, the Royal Dornoch Golf Hotel coffee mornings, and St Finbarr's charity shop. This also includes grants from The Highland Council and the Royal Dornoch Golf Club to help fund the installation of our own electric charger.

However, this funding is not sufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project. We are therefore actively seeking further grant support to continue and develop the service.

Our ambition is to expand – adding a second car or even a minibus, and increasing our pool of volunteer drivers.

This pilot has shown that a simple, community-led initiative, delivered with care and commitment, can have a transformative impact. We are determined to build on this strong foundation and continue making a difference.



**DORNOCH
AREA
COMMUNITY
INTEREST
COMPANY**

APPENDIX-FINANCE

| Transport Project expenses | ADoW | CRF | DTAS | THC | Total |
|------------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Total grant income | 5000 | 16000 | 7000 | 10878 | 38878 |
| Car expenses fuel and upkeep | 1991 | 374 | 548 | 864 | 3777 |
| Novuna car lease | 389 | 4160 | 3240 | 2337 | 10126 |
| Admin | 37 | 175 | | 135 | 347 |
| Insurance | | 983 | | 1102 | 2085 |
| Memberships | | 212 | | | 212 |
| Nest pension | 79 | 188 | | 72 | 340 |
| Wages | 2499 | 9826 | 3211 | 2562 | 18100 |
| Marketing | 41 | 82 | | | 122 |
| Outstanding b/f to extension | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3806 | |