

Ryedale delivers



A new community transport scheme is being set up in Ryedale District in North Yorkshire. Ryedale Voluntary Action started with a voluntary car scheme 16 years ago, and other services have been added since. Now it is bringing them all together under the RYECAT banner and hiving them off into a new independent organisation. **Lucy Tennyson** investigates.



Lucy Tennyson

A local council for voluntary service has great hopes for its fledgling community transport project that is being developed out of a successful voluntary car scheme. Ryedale Voluntary Action (RVA), based in Malton, has run a

car scheme for 16 years.

But in the last three years things have really started to happen in terms of community transport, with the car scheme being joined by a minibus brokerage and a wheels to work project. Plans are now 26→

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underway to move onto the next stage: RVA is bringing in its first demand responsive services and setting up a fully-fledged independent CT operation.

RYECAT Transport Solutions, as the new project is known, can be seen as a good example of how a community transport scheme can be set up under the umbrella of an existing CVS, and then pushed out of the nest when hanging onto it would otherwise restrict its growth.

Chair of the Trustees of Ryedale Voluntary Action, Jill Knight, has played an influential role, first by identifying the need for better transport links, and then by taking action to meet those needs.

“Three years ago we employed a graduate to carry out a survey, looking at the car scheme, and the journeys it was making. It showed how health patterns are changing. We didn’t realise that we were taking people to 16 different hospitals, as far apart as Middlesbrough and Hull.”

“It also revealed what had been a hidden problem, the numbers of young



people living in rural areas who didn’t have the money to get to work.”

Peter Oxley, the Ryedale & North East Yorkshire RTP officer, has worked tirelessly to ensure that all community transport projects across the district have been able to develop. His support includes the acquisition of funds from the Countryside Agency through the

RTP. This has enabled the establishment of both the Wheels to Work and Rural Miles projects, plus support for the Ryedale car scheme. RVA provided the financial and the administrative structure to launch these services.

Current total annual funding, including income from charges and bookings is £171,000. One of their major achievements was securing £100,000 of core funding from Ryedale District Council for the 2004-06 period. Bringing the district council onside has been key to the new development, helped along by strong links built up by RVA’s Manager, Paul Hayward.

Another key milestone was when Ryedale District Council provided funds for a Community Transport Manager from its transport budget. Ken Watherington was appointed by RVA six months ago to head the newly developing CT scheme.

Ken says: “Ryedale District Council is like a breath of fresh air. If community transport nationally received this level of support then we would all be in a much stronger position to deliver an effective and reliable service that is able to link into the main public transport provision”.

Previously, Ken worked for two and a half years as Rural Transport Partnership Officer for Craven District in the Yorkshire Dales, and prior to that for Community Wheels in North Herefordshire.

“I have been brought in to bring all the transport projects together and move things forward,” he says. “Securing our own building will be the first vital step.” The two car scheme organisers, Margaret Jefferson and Julie Bracewell, are based in one small office; Dave Young, in charge of the brokerage and the mopeds, shares a general

Right:
Jill Knight,
Chair of the
Trustees, Ryedale
Voluntary Action

Below:
Ryedale’s
voluntary car
drivers carried
16,000 passengers
last year



“ Demand responsive services, will free up some of the car scheme drivers to carry out more of the longer trips ”

office with six other RVA staff; and Ken is tucked away in a tiny room in the basement.

The car scheme is well established, but has stopped growing, says Ken. There are 55 volunteer drivers, around 30 of them very active, making 16,000 passenger journeys a year, and covering 136,000 miles.

Although this is a fantastic achievement, its success masks gaps in transport cover, especially in the more rural and isolated areas away from the cluster of Ryedale's market towns: Malton/Norton, Pickering, Kirkbymoorside and Helmsley. Volunteer drivers are few on the ground in the North York Moors, or the Yorkshire Wolds to the south, he says.

"We seem to have reached a plateau of 50 or 60 drivers, and it is becoming very difficult to recruit more, especially in the areas where we need them."

“ Starting with three minibuses, I see no reason why, we shouldn't increase the number significantly. ”

"We really only cover about one third of Ryedale, where two thirds of the population live," he says. "We want to reach the other parts by bringing in demand responsive services, which will free up some of the car scheme drivers to carry out more of the longer trips."

"For example, at the moment, a volunteer driver might have to drive 20 miles just to make a two or three mile trip. Our aim is to make better use of our volunteer drivers, mostly on longer journeys, including the trips to hospitals in Hull or Leeds."

Ken plans to run semi-scheduled services, using PCV drivers, to cover the more rural areas. These will be available not only to the usual passengers that are helped by community transport groups but also to the general public. The plan is to link a circular route through villages to a main town. For example: a bus would start in



Left:
The RYECAT team
Back row (L to R)
Dave Young (Rural Miles & Wheels to Work), Peter Oxley (Rural Transport Partnership Officer), Paul Hayward (Ryedale Voluntary Action)
Front row (L to R)
Margaret Jefferson (Car Scheme), Ken Watherington (Community Transport Manager), Julie Bracewell (Car Scheme), and Jill Knight (RVA Chair)

Pickering and do a one-hour route, being able to divert off route to pick up passengers.

One major aim will be to get these smaller, local demand responsive bus services to feed passengers into existing public service routes. The main routes are relatively well served by public transport, so the minibus services will endeavour to pick up passengers from outlying areas, and take them onto bus routes. Peter Shipp, Chairman and Chief Executive of key local bus operator East Yorkshire Motor Services, has expressed interest in this kind of development, provided it does not abstract any passengers from existing commercial bus services.

Ken is confident of growing. He aims to tender for North Yorkshire County Council Special Needs Transport contracts, which will provide the core operating costs for the vehicles. Outside the contract times, the minibuses will be used for the demand responsive services, so making maximum use of resources.

RYECAT will be set up as a charity and company limited by guarantee, and will run its existing transport projects within that structure. In a further development, it is intended a separate trading company (a wholly-owned subsidiary of the charitable company) will be set up to handle contracts and other income generating activities. In turn, any profit will be transferred to the charity in the form of Gift Aid, for

reinvestment in RYECAT's other community transport projects. The aim is to reduce the organisation's overall dependence on statutory and charitable funding bodies.

Ken says, "Starting with three minibuses, I see no reason why, in time, we shouldn't increase the number significantly to meet the needs of the communities of Ryedale."

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About Ryedale District

Ryedale Voluntary Action covers the Ryedale District Council area, which has a population of 50,872 (2001 Census), the majority living in a cluster of market towns in the central area including Malton/Norton, Pickering, Kirkbymoorside and Helmsley. It covers 575 square miles of rural North Yorkshire, and has very sparsely populated areas of the North York Moors to the north, and the Wolds to the south.

Local government reorganisation is currently a hot topic in the area, and it is widely predicted that Yorkshire will vote yes to a regional assembly this autumn.

If local government reorganisation goes ahead, it is likely to bring with it a Regional Assembly, to see the end of the County tier of local government, and Ryedale Councillors have backed plans to merge with Scarborough.

"Although Ryedale would much prefer local government to continue as it is in North Yorkshire, if the referendum in October does produce a yes vote and reorganisation has to go ahead we favour the option to merge with Scarborough to form a new unitary authority", said Cllr Robert Wainwright, Chairman of Ryedale District Council's Policy and Resources Committee. The other main option is the formation of a larger North Yorkshire unitary.

Providing Wheels to Work and Rural Miles

TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS in the RAF Regiment may not be the typical background for a community transport worker.

Yet, when it comes to organising 17 mopeds, and 17 young people scattered across the wilds of Yorkshire, it is clear that Dave Young is able to carry out his task with military precision.

As well as providing much needed 'wheels to work' for young people, he also provides help and support, and a firm guiding hand, at what can be a difficult time for many of these youngsters.

"I've got two grown-up children of my own – and 17 others," Dave jokes. Wheels to Work is a very simple, yet effective, way of injecting a bit of hope and prosperity into their lives."

“ In the first year, we had 366 volunteer hours, and last year 770 volunteer hours. We couldn't do it without the drivers. ”

"Each moped costs £1,500, and over an eight-year lifetime can be used by at least 16 different youngsters, providing employment opportunities and proving to be excellent value for money."



The system works as follows: anyone aged between 16 and 26, who is unable to access work or training, usually because of the lack of transport, can apply to hire a moped. They pay £3 a week, and are expected to start saving for their own vehicle when they join the scheme. The package includes training, safety equipment and regular monthly 'inspection' visits from Dave, when he collects mileage forms, and ensures that the moped is being used as instructed.

Since the scheme was launched in September 2002, he has helped 52 young people. His 50th customer was a young potter, Tim Bobker, who needed to travel from Whitby to a garden centre at Goathland where he had a chance of work.

Dave also runs Rural Miles, a brokerage project he set up in April 2002, which now has access to 13 minibuses. These belong to eight different organisations including the Red Cross, County Care North Yorkshire (part of the local authority fleet) and the YMCA.

He has a pool of volunteer drivers, all MiDAS qualified, and can usually respond quickly to requests by the 25 groups who belong to Rural Miles thanks to the wide geographical spread of the vehicles. He is currently averaging 20 journeys a month; treble the number in the first year. "Users are charged 80p per mile, 60p of which goes to the owner of the vehicle, so both sides are happy," says Dave.

"In the first year, we had 366 volunteer hours, and last year 770 volunteer hours. We couldn't do it without the drivers," he says.

"For example, I've just arranged to take a wheelchair user back to her home in Essex. She had been visiting relatives near York and Social Services passed her request for help to us. We will be using two of our volunteer drivers and a Scarborough Dial-a-Ride vehicle."

Dave is a MiDAS DAT, and provides training for PATS, MEEPS and Car Scheme driver training. "We also organise training for drivers and volunteers in the neighbouring districts of Scarborough and Whitby" ■

Above:
After six months' successful commuting between Farndale and Thorton-le-Dale, Vicky Sly hands the keys to her scooter back to Dave Young, Ryedale Wheels to Work manager,

Left:
Ryedale's Rural Miles brokerage enables others to use the YMCA Malton Foyer Project minibus

