

Community Transport Report

Produced for East Lammermuir Community Council

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Introduction

East Lammermuir is a rural community of 678 households comprising 4 villages (Innerwick, Oldhamstocks, Spott and Stenton) and various outlying settlements. The area also hosts a number of local employers such as Viridor (waste treatment center), Tarmac (cement works), Torness Power Station and Thurston Manor Caravan Park. There is currently just one public bus route through one of the villages and the remainder of the community has no public bus service. There is no alternative community transport service serving the area at present.

The [East Lammermuir Local Place Plan](#) (LPP) identifies access to public or community transport as a priority for the community and the community have agreed as one of 4 priority ambitions that:

A public or community transport service should be re-introduced to link the villages with Cockburnspath and Dunbar

On 22nd January 2026 East Lammermuir Community Council (ELCC) hosted a workshop on the theme of Community Transport, using the title loosely to cover a range

of possible public and community transport options. This was the 4th in a series of workshops exploring how to take forward each of the [4 community priorities](#) for the use of new community benefits.

The workshop was funded by SP Energy Networks and supported by East Lothian Climate Hub and Community Transport Association UK. It was a mapping and gapping exercise to bring together the various pieces of the “puzzle” for a possible transport solution which may already exist and to see where the gaps are, with the aim to produce a series of recommendations to act as a roadmap.

This report begins by setting out the background of local public transport and touching on the national context for rural areas. The next section reviews the workshop structure, discussion and findings. It then concludes with a set of recommendations for next steps.

Background

Public bus service

The one public bus route in the area is the 253 service operated by Borders Buses, which travels between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Dunbar, calling at Innerwick. The 235 bus used to encompass the Bilsdean Road, but in 2019 it was rerouted along the A1 missing this cluster of households from its route. The timetable change also led to the first bus of the day bypassing Innerwick altogether. Local residents campaigned against these changes at the time, holding meetings and writing to politicians, however this activity came to a halt during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The other villages are not served by a bus and the LPP calls for a bus “linking Dunbar-- Spott - Stenton - East Linton, linked to the X7 timetable, and train timetable, allowing interchange between modes” (P.28)

East L Go Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) Trial

A DRT trial took place between March and July 2024 covering the areas of Oldhamstocks, Dunglas, Bilsdean, Innerwick, Thorntonloch, Skateraw and Broxburn into Dunbar.

Passenger uptake was very positive and the service grew to 391 overall users signed up by the end of the 3 month pilot.

The service was commissioned by East Lothian Council (ELC), provided by [Eve Coaches](#) (a commercial bus company, now operated by Lothian Buses) and was facilitated by the free trial use of the [Liftango](#) app. The founder of Liftango is a local

resident who was keen to support this trial. Passengers signed up mostly via the app (94.49% of overall bookings), with only a few passengers each month signing up via contacting Eve Coaches directly.

High Level Metrics:

- 391 overall sign ups
- 1,252 bookings created overall
- 757 completed trips

Local people said that it was used for connecting to trains, attending clubs, classes and medical appointments, socialising and for getting to work.

The LPP was produced ahead of this trial and supported East L Go as the primary means to take forward this community ambition, with ELCC actively promoting the service and offering to fund the first 100 journeys (LPP, P.28). Following the trial the ambition remained for ELCC, ELC and Liftango to continue to work together to bring back the East L Go service, once further funding opportunities were explored.

Following the DRT trial ELC held a subsidised tender process to continue the service, but this received no bids from bus companies. This appears to be for a number of reasons, primarily due to it still not being commercially viable, even with the subsidy offered at the time.

Rural transport, the national context

East Lammermuir is not alone in experiencing the impacts of decreasing public transport services through public funding cuts. Rural areas generally face the issue that bus services are not commercially viable and require additional public or other funding to provide their vital service.

A [report](#) by the Institute for Public Policy in 2024, “Wheels of change: Promoting fair and green transport in rural Scotland” concluded that “people living in rural Scotland do not feel their transport needs have been considered”. It states that not only does this have an impact on people’s ability to access education and employment, but also limits opportunities for preventing loneliness and isolation. In addition the report highlights the importance of bus services to enable the Scottish Government to get back on track to meet its net zero targets, through reducing personal car use.

The Scottish Government is currently consulting on their “[Just Transition: draft plan for transport in Scotland](#)”, which again highlights the rural issue of poor public transport leading to increased car usage. It states that “A higher proportion of income is spent on transport in rural areas...This suggests that affordability is likely to be a significant issue

for people from low-income households in rural and island communities.” ([Annex D](#)). This has the potential to lead to people moving away from rural areas or, for some, becoming trapped in hidden rural poverty.

[Transport Scotland](#) is responsible for setting the national policy framework for public transport. Their bus policy aims are:

- “To provide the environment for bus to act as an effective economic enabler by providing competitive, high quality public transport
- To enable bus to provide an effective alternative to the car by improving reliability, average bus speed and encouraging improvements to the quality of services and infrastructure
- To encourage investment in more efficient vehicles that produce less greenhouse gases and contribute to the targets in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009
- To link communities, people, places of business and employment and essential services through encouraging the maintenance and development of the bus network in Scotland”

Rural revitalisation is a key ambition of the Scottish Government and in 2025 they consulted on a [Rural Delivery Plan](#). The initial results from this in September 2025 highlighted the importance of enhancing rural transport solutions.

The [Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community](#) (SRITC), supported through Inspiring Scotland by the Scottish Government Rural and Island Communities Idea into Action Fund, produced a [Rural and Island Mobility Plan](#) (RIMP) for Scotland in June 2025, which calls for better integrated rural transport planning and funding amongst other key asks. It also highlights the importance of taking a community-led approach that can “connect communities, enhance wellbeing, sustain economies and drive community wealth building.” (P.9 of executive summary)

Workshop

Introduction

The workshop was facilitated by Beth Landon, Energy Projects Partnership Manager for East Lammermuir, on behalf of ELCC, with support from East Lothian Climate Hub and Community Transport Association (CTA) UK.

In preparation for the workshop information gathering meetings were held with the ELC Transport Officer responsible for the DRT trial, Liftango, Eve Coaches, Metlen (Eastern Green Link 1 contractor) and an existing community transport service operating in the Scottish Borders, Borders Wheels (which operates Berwickshire Wheels vehicles).

A Borders Wheels minibuss (image 1) provided transport to the workshop for 10 of the participants, funded by Cockburnspath and Cove Community Council's community benefit fund.



Image 1: Borders Wheels minibuss arriving at the workshop

Participants

The workshop was attended by 33 participants: 2 from community anchor organisations, 1 ELC Officer, 1 transmission project representative, 2 local employers, 23 community members, including 6 from Cockburnspath and Cove Community Council area, and 4 transport specialists.

Workshop format

The session took place in 2 halves:

1. Presentations (image 2)

- a. Background on public transport in East Lammermuir - Paula Oliver, local resident
- b. DRT trial (East L Go) - Kevin Orr, Liftango
- c. Overview of options for possible solutions - Beth Landon
- d. Community Transport - Lara Henderson, Development Manager for Scotland, Community Transport Association UK
- e. Borders Wheels - Beth Landon (on behalf of Denise Carmichael, CEO of Borders Wheels, who was unable to attend)

[The presentations can be accessed here](#)



Image 2: Participants listening to the presentations in the first half of the workshop

2. Group work (image 3)

The groupwork was split into three parts:

- a. *Pros and cons for each option* - Participants circulated between 4 tables for facilitated discussion of the 4 options (table 1). Pros and cons were captured on flip chart paper by group facilitators and fed back to the room. The full list of pros and cons noted is available in Appendix 1.

- b. *Vote on preferred option* - Following this all community members present voted on which of the 4 options they preferred (one vote per person). The results of this vote (table 1) were used to focus discussion for the final part of the workshop. It was stressed that this vote would not be the sole means to determine the preferred option for the community and a wider community survey would follow the workshop.
- c. *Discussion on preferred option* - Participants formed small groups with those sitting near them to consider how this option could be taken forward and noted thoughts and ideas on post-its.

Option	Number of votes
1. Campaign to improve bus services	1
2. Subsidised commercial DRT service (Adapted version of East L Go)	15
3. East Lammermuir own CT service	1
4. Partner with Borders Wheels CT	5

Table 1 - The 4 options for possible transport solutions

Discussion and findings

This section of the report starts with an overview of the reflections on each option from the first part of the group work (a - pros and cons) combined with comments from the floor during the presentations.



Image 3: Participants engaging in the group work during the second half of the workshop

Option 1 - Campaign for improved public bus services

“Public transport is the fabric of a community” - a participant.

Public transport was seen as convenient for planning, with regular scheduled services. Buses often facilitate use of other forms of transport such as cycling and connections to trains and other services, if well integrated with other timetables and with capacity to transport bikes.

A public bus service does not depend on volunteers, which, for a small community with many other demands on volunteer time, is an important consideration. It also has the benefit of accepting bus passes and providing the same service for all, without needing to prioritise those without cars, for example, which might not be the case for a community transport service.

A campaign would have several issues on which to focus, following much discussion at the workshop about the current level of service, most notably:

- The 253 Borders bus through Innerwick was discussed at great length, particularly around why the route bypasses Innerwick for the first (traveling to Berwick-upon Tweed) and last (travelling to Dunbar) buses of the day.
- Interlinked timetables are important - at present the 253 does not link well with the X7 and other services.
- Several areas have no service at all, including Spott, Stenton and Oldhamstocks. The example was mentioned of the Tree Scheme, an area of social housing in Dunbar, that now has no service after the cut of the 130 along with Spott, Stenton and parts of West Barns.
- Lack of early morning and evening buses.

A follow-on survey will capture the views of the wider community on carriers they face to access public transport.

The pending introduction of parking charges in Dunbar was considered another burden to those who would rather take public transport.

Despite there being much to campaign about, most participants argued against channeling precious volunteer time and energy into this, referring to previous efforts which have not resulted in improvements in service. The main reason mentioned for this was because bus operators which run such services need them to be commercially viable, which is often not the case in rural areas, even when subsidised.

East Lothian Council is facing significant funding challenges and with difficult decisions on public spending being made for their next budget, adding to the challenging financial situation for public transport in the area.

Adding to this, such a campaign would be geographically limited in any impact by the size of buses which are used for scheduled routes, with access restricted due to unsuitable rural roads.

However, it was mentioned that if a campaign took place, even if it were not successful, it might raise the profile of the issues faced by rural communities with poor access to public transport, which could strengthen the case for other solutions being subsidised or funded.

Option 2 - Subsidised commercial DRT service (Like East L Go)

The popularity of the DRT trial was widely expressed at the workshop, which had a relatively good uptake considering the short time it was run for, as was highlighted by the ELC Officer present, Richard Kerr.

“391 sign-ups for a rural area in 4 months is a great start” - Kevin Orr, Liftango

The trial provided a reasonably affordable service, with journey costs of £3.10/£4.10 mentioned, and the ability to use bus passes.

The booking app, provided by Liftango for free for the duration of the trial, proved popular, with the ability to see updates in bookings in real time and notification of delays. There was also the option for text messages for those without smart phones. The trial took group bookings (up to 8) and operated from 7am – 8/9pm.

Some of the issues mentioned were aspects which could be changed if such a service were reintroduced, including the very limited geographical area and lack of evening service. Cockburnspath, for example, wasn't covered by the trial, it was mentioned that users from Cockburnspath would go to book from Dunglass to enable them to use the service. Any future scheme should include Cockburnspath and Cove Community Council area and other neighbouring areas, connecting people to where they want to go.

“We are a cluster of villages - why can't we be on the same network” - community participant

It was noted by some that the service could have been better publicised, especially to younger people, which again could be addressed if the service were reintroduced.

It was mentioned that the ELC survey which followed the trial was held over a wider area than the trial took place in, meaning it didn't capture the feedback well, and there was concern expressed that this may have led to the service not being continued.

DRT, like public transport, could be used to connect to other bus and train services. There is also the potential to explore mixed options, with the Liftango app acting as the user interface for a combination of different commercial, public and community transport options.

Several benefits of pursuing this option going forward were mentioned, including:

- No reliance on volunteers to operate and administer the service
- Flexibility of the service - routes, times and operators
- Appropriately sized vehicles for the rural road network
- Building on a proven trial
- The social nature of sharing transport, for users and drivers

The issue of reliance on volunteers was a recurring subject throughout the workshop, giving this option an advantage over community transport, which usually relies on volunteers to some extent, even if utilising paid drivers, for example for a board of trustees or charity shop volunteers. However, it was noted that this handing over of responsibility also brought with it the loss of control of a genuinely community-led service.

Other concerns were raised, most notably how this could be funded. It would rely on being subsidised, but even though a publicly subsidised tender followed the trial, no tender bids were received. Could community benefits be added into the equation to make this viable? Would the grey area of the traditional restriction to non-statutory duties for community benefit spending be a barrier? And what happens if community benefits run out? It was mentioned that the benefits to wellbeing and connectivity while the service was operating would make it worthwhile, even if community benefits was not a long-term solution. One option suggested was for community benefits to be restricted to capital spending, for example to purchase an additional vehicle. Other funding options were mentioned such as SESTran, NHS Scotland (for healthcare appointments) and Transport Scotland.

Another significant issue discussed regarding funding was whether cross-border collaboration between Local Authorities might be a challenge, with Cockburnspath and Cove being in the Scottish Borders and the rest of the area being in East Lothian.

Option 3 - East Lammermuir own CT service

Community Transport can empower local communities, putting control and decision making firmly in their hands. It offers the flexibility of a service tailored to local needs, with freedom to define the geographical area alongside neighbouring communities and can give independence from reliance on public budgets.

If sufficient volunteers came forward to launch a new community-run transport service, this could build local capacity through training, upskilling and potentially provide employment, for example as paid drivers, over time.

However, despite those in the workshop potentially being more engaged on the issue than most, there was a clear message expressed that there isn't currently the level of community capacity required to make this happen. This is understandable in a small community where so much volunteer time is already channeled into keeping on top of the multiple applications for energy infrastructure and into working with developers and transmission owners to minimise impacts of the developments. The follow-on survey

from the workshop asks participants whether they would be willing to volunteer, in what capacity and over what timeframe.

Other than the amount of volunteer time and energy required, the level of skills and the responsibility (e.g. safety, vehicle maintenance) of running a transport service were raised as considerations.

The potential for a minibus to be available for group bookings was mentioned as a more viable option than the offering of an on-demand community service. A community bus is something which could be very attractive to funders, such as [this example](#) from the SP Energy networks Net Zero Fund.

East Lammermuir Community Council has joined CTA UK as a member, giving access to free support to consider and pursue this option if it is well supported. CTA UK support Community Transport services through 1-2-1 development support, advice resources, access to permits and guidance on where to look for funding.. CTA UK also helped with the design of the follow-on survey.

Option 4 - partner with Borders Wheels

The final option considered was to seek to partner with the most local existing community transport (CT) service, Borders Wheels, to extend their service into East Lammermuir and Dunbar. This has the benefit of already existing as a successful service and they are open to expanding beyond the Borders.

Borders Wheels was formed combining several CT services in the Borders, including Berwickshire Wheels, between 2023 and 2024. They serve anyone who has trouble using public transport due to accessibility and location. They also have minibuses available to hire with or without a driver. The minibus provided for this workshop was one of theirs, funded by Cockburnspath and Cove Community Benefit Fund.

They are not currently able to take bus passes and have a charging structure (available in the presentation). Although they charge, they are not-for-profit and rely on income from their 3 charity shops to operate.

The pricing for group hire was considered reasonable, with the 16-seater minibus, plus driver, for the workshop costing £80. However, the pricing structure for individuals was seen as complicated, expensive and restrictive, for example it wasn't clear whether owning a car would preclude use of the service as an option.

The service for medical trips was seen as important, with the door-to-door service and option for wheelchairs available.

Concerns were raised about the service being Borders based, such as whether that would lead to potential geographical restrictions and about how much influence the East Lammermuir community might be able to have on the type of service.

The individual nature of some of the booking options was raised as a downside, compared to the more social nature of lift sharing experienced by some in the DRT trial.

Other options

It was mentioned during the discussions that combinations of the presented options might be worth considering.

In addition, other previous examples of bus services were mentioned:

- Torness used to supply a bus for workers but it was stopped because of low uptake, with people preferring to drive by car.
- A village service called Gaberlunzie, which even served Oldhamstocks, existed, but was very short lived
- A post bus service.

How could a new DRT service be implemented?

This section draws on the discussion for the final part of the group work (*c -Discussion on preferred option*), where focused consideration was given to how to take forward the option preferred by those attending the workshop, namely to reinstate an evolved DRT service.

Workshop participants were asked to discuss in groups of 3 or 4 to consider how the preferred option might be taken forward, what they could contribute and to note any other ideas for a transport solution.

The key points noted on the post-its covered the following themes:

Who should be involved?

- Local community
- Commercial bus operators and taxi services
- East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils (get them together!)
- Workforce Mobility Project (can do analysis)
- Funders e.g. SEStrans (operate cross border), NHS (funding for healthcare appointments)

- Cockburnspath and Cove Community Council
- Community Transport Association UK (survey support and advice)
- Confederation of Passenger Transport (are lobbying to use school transport when not in use for schools)
- Method of booking e.g. Liftango (app was seen as important)

Next steps:

- Further work is required to determine what kind and shape of service is required (type of vehicles, method of booking, options for volunteer drivers as well as paid, service area, times, types of journeys etc.) using surveys, community engagement, modelling work and lessons drawn from the East L Go trial.
- Determine costs and charges
- Determine funding available
- Clarify appetite for involvement from ELC and SBC
- Establish an MoU between partners
- Run another pilot?
- Awareness raising campaign for new service

Other options mentioned:

- Whatsapp local group for sharing lifts within local area and beyond
- Subsidised taxi service more suitable?
- Hybrid? Control of having our own bus, outsource risk

Recommendations

The following recommendations seek to strike a balance between community involvement in the co-production of a suitable service and the evident appetite for the operation of the service to not rely on volunteers.

First is a set of “must-haves” for whichever solution is sought, drawing from the key messages heard from residents during the workshop. This is followed by a set of recommended next steps to take forward this community ambition.

Both are caveated by the importance of ongoing community engagement, starting with combining these recommendations with the findings from the follow-on survey, which is open until the end of February. They are to remain flexible and are intended only to guide and not restrict the way forward.

Must-haves

1. The potential to serve all the villages in East Lammermuir, Cockburnspath and Cove and connect these to Dunbar.
2. Able to take bus passes and be affordable.
3. The transport solution itself is a valuable social activity, so shared travel should form part of the service.
4. The service should not be reliant on volunteers but should be co-designed with the local community.
5. The service should be easy to book, reliable and well publicised.

Next steps

Action	Purpose	Lead body	Support from
Follow-on survey (live at the time of writing this report)	Ascertain demand and shape of a service and determine the preferred option to pursue.	East Lammermuir Community Council (ELCC)	East Lothian Climate Hub Community Transport Association UK Beth Landon
DRT modelling work	Build on data from the East L Go trial to model zones for a wider area, giving an idea of the cost of such a service.	Liftango	Community Benefit funding East Lothian Council (ELC)
Recruit a Development Officer	To drive this ambition forward through community co-production, building strong supportive connections and attracting funding.	ELCC (not as employer)	East Lothian Climate Hub (likely host organisation for the role) Community Benefit funding (to fund role) Beth Landon
Establish a community steering group	To ensure community co-production of the chosen option.	ELCC and Development Officer	Host organisation ELCC Beth Landon
Determine partner bodies and establish an MoU	To maximise opportunities available and harness the power of partnership working.	Steering group and Development Officer	Host organisation ELCC ELC Beth Landon

Table 2 - Recommendations

Conclusion

East Lammermuir and the surrounding area are not alone in experiencing increasing challenges with rural public transport. This is recognised nationally as priority issue in Scotland. Addressing this issue will have multiple benefits, including supporting efforts to meet climate targets (for example through reduced private car use), addressing loneliness, social isolation and hidden rural poverty and revitalising rural communities. As such there are many organisations offering support and funding to assist with rural transport solutions.

While 4 options were presented at the workshop, a combination of solutions is possible. This report should be combined with the findings from the follow-on survey currently open to the community to determine the best solution to pursue.

Pursuing any solution will require the community to take a lead on driving forward the ambition that a ***public or community transport service should be re-introduced to link the villages with Cockburnspath and Dunbar*** forward. The main recommendation is to recruit a Development Officer to enable this community ambition to be realised through partnership working between community, public bodies and commercial businesses.

Appendix 1 - Pros and cons for each option

Table 1 - campaign to improve bus services	
Pros	Cons
Bus service with regular timetable is convenient and helpful for appointments (if it sticks to the timetable!)	Easier to campaign "should be provided, but isn't" - proven to be of little interest to commercial operators therefore Council / Government liability (responsibility?) - People and Places Plan / rural proofing
Can diary plan around it. Convenient for planning.	Lack of interest from commercial operators in the tenders
Makes other modes of transport more viable and realistic e.g. bike, trains etc	Tipping point when buses become so infrequent / unreliable, to be a non-starter
Was great when more frequent and went past more villages	Campaigns drain on time / resources - uncertain outcome
Doesn't require volunteers / rely on people's free time and good will	Ineffective up to now - no response to either CC email concerns about simplest matters
Has the possibility of linking and adding value	Takes efforts that shouldn't need to be expended
Non-discriminatory - same service for all	Difficult to coordinate around other timetables (roadworks)
Free / concession options on fares	Council spending deficit over next 3 years - can't be relied upon
A "campaign" would raise profile of the issue	Won't allow it cross- Border
Campaign should ask for integrated service	Current timetables unworkable - no evening buses
	Overlooked on bigger network - bigger centres / routes of population
	Very difficult to plan around height-restrict and narrow bridges
	Large 30 seaters not suited to road. Need smaller 16 seaters / accessible

Table 2 - Subsidised commercial DRT service (Like East L Go)

Pros	Cons
Doesn't require volunteers	Needs subsidised
Better vehicles for smaller roads	Handing over "control"
Social connection / wellbeing	What happens when community benefits run out?
Could design to suit - smaller vehicles available / include Co'path / later times	Might be problematic being in partnership with the Council, which has competing budget pressures
Overheads all organised centrally (less admin)	Might need a change of vehicle sizes
Have had good trial, proven experience	Might struggle to make it cross border?
Could make capital investment for bus etc and use mixed drivers (paid and volunteer?) - cross border cooperation?	Can't get at short notice, need to book the day before
Flexible routes	Didn't run late enough - could coordinate with the last train (into Dunbar?)
Local knowledge, local drivers	Weather issues - will it keep running in bad weather?
	Need internet connection / tech competence to book (phone support was available)

Table 3 - East Lammermuir own CT service

Pros	Cons
Community-led - freedom to decide on service	Level of community engagement required
Opportunity for flexible routes	Reliant on volunteers
Paid / controlled salary cost / capital investment not reliant on Council budgets	Works better for regular requirement (e.g. East Linton Day Centre)
Easier co-operation across Council (boundaries?)	May not be financially viable
Potential support / partnership with commercial transport providers (e.g. training)	Concerns around safety and maintenance
Opportunities for upskilling local people	Skills shortages

Table 4 - partner with Borders Wheels CT

Pros	Cons
Maybe more responsive	Complicated pricing structure
Maybe would link to the Borders, outside East Lammermuir	Would they cancel in poor weather?
Already exists	Maybe not well known - a local Borders resident hasn't heard of them
Successful option	If it is dependent on volunteers - too important
Must cover medical trips, e.g. Haddington. Prefer something that goes to Edinburgh too.	Not sure if could be matched to actual needs
Reasonable pricing for groups	Unknown if Borders Buses is applicable
Must be "anyone can use it"	Like a taxi - expensive (for individuals)
	Not sure if it can be tailored
	Does it need to travel from the Borders?
	Are they flexible to change their types of transport? Can we influence what they do or are they committed to their model?
	What if I have a car, but don't want to use it?
	Maybe doesn't enable as much sharing as DRT
	Maintenance?