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ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONNECTU: THE FIRST 12 MONTHS

INTERIM RESEARCH REPORT

HORIZON 21’S SOCIAL ENTERPRISE TRANSPORT PROJECT
(WARRNAMBOOL AND SURROUNDING DISTRICTS)

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CONNECTU: THE FIRST 12 MONTHS

Interim Research Report

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Executive summary

To address issues of transport disadvantage and social exclusion in Warrnambool and the surrounding region, the Warrnambool based Horizon 21 is piloting a two year social enterprise project under the name ConnectU. The project commenced on 6 August 2012, with the first passenger being transported on 11 September 2012.

Research into the ConnectU pilot project is being undertaken by a team of researchers from Deakin University and the Monash Sustainability Institute. The research is evaluating the ConnectU pilot project, particularly assessing outcomes in terms of costs and benefits, social inclusion, wellbeing and equity. The research project, under the auspices of Horizon 21, is primarily funded by the Bus Industry Confederation, the Bus Association of Victoria and Warrnambool Bus Lines Pty Ltd.

This interim research report examines the establishment and development of the ConnectU social enterprise in its start-up and establishment phase. A final research report to be released later this year will provide a more comprehensive examination of the full two years of the ConnectU pilot.

Some of the major findings of the research to date are as follows:

The total number of return trips undertaken by clients over the first 12 months of ConnectU's operation (October 2012 to September 2013) was 486. The program started slowly but has grown appreciably with little advertising.

As expected, the number of trips undertaken when the service first commenced was low, but this increased rapidly after ConnectU's first six months of operation. The average number of trips per month in the first three months of operation was 15 (October to December 2012), with this increasing to an average of 82 trips per month in the final three months of the initial one year period (July to September 2013).

Fifty-nine clients utilised ConnectU's services in the first 12 months of operation. The majority of clients (74.6 per cent) were female, with males representing a further 16.9 per cent of users. Other users (8.5 per cent) comprised couples and organisations.

The number of trips undertaken by any one individual client varied greatly. The majority of clients (59.3 per cent) used the service for one to five trips over the 12 month period. Slightly over one-fifth of clients used the service for six to 10 trips. At the other end of the scale, 13.6 per cent of clients used the ConnectU service for more than 20 trips over the 12 month period.

The majority of trips in the first 12 month period, being 365 of the 486 trips (75.1 per cent), were for medical purposes (doctor, dentist, optometrist, podiatrist, audiologist, physiotherapy, etc). Other higher frequency purposes were for trips to/from nursing homes (12.5 per cent) and childcare centres (5.3 per cent).

The duration of trips varied greatly, reflecting the purpose of the trip. Most commonly trips in and around Warrnambool ranged from one to three hours. Much longer times were experienced when the trip involved travelling out of town; for example to take or collect clients to visit a doctor or attend hospital in Melbourne (1 trip), Hamilton (3 trips) or Portland (2 trips).
Of the 59 clients utilising the service, 47 (79.7 per cent) resided in Warrnambool. The other 12 clients residing in the surrounding towns of Portland (2 clients) Port Fairy (5 clients), Koroit (2 clients) and Naringal, Yangery and Panmure (each with one client).

ConnectU relies primarily on volunteer drivers to deliver its services. Fourteen volunteer drivers were utilised over the first year of operation. In addition, ConnectU’s two administrative staff acted as drivers when required.

The highest number of trips undertaken by each of the 16 drivers over the 12 month period was relatively low, with most (11, or 68.8 per cent) taking less than 20 trips. At the other extreme, three drivers (18.8%) had undertaken at least 80 trips.

Interviews with clients indicated that the ConnectU service was preferable to public transport as it cost less, was prompt and because the driver could provide additional assistance. Reasons for not using public transport included the lack of public transport near the place of their appointment, the need to change buses to reach their destination, the steps on a bus being too difficult to negotiate, walking frames not being catered for, or the client being unable to walk from home to a bus stop.

Clients found the ConnectU office to be extremely helpful with staff clearly explaining the services offered. Clients found the ConnectU administrative staff to be very helpful, supportive and friendly. The drivers too were found to be very helpful, friendly, thoughtful, caring and interesting to talk to.

The clients interviewed considered that a major advantage of the ConnectU service was that multiple tasks could be completed in the one trip. Hence, while the predominant purpose of a single trip was generally for medical purposes, an ancillary benefit was that other tasks could also be completed in the course of the trip.

Volunteer drivers have found their involvement with ConnectU to be rewarding, and found their preparation for the required tasks to be suitable.

From the perspective of the families of clients, the service offered by ConnectU was seen as a valuable support, easing much of the pressure on a family, for example, when ageing parents were unwell. Clients' families appreciated the fact that the service was safe and reliable, yet flexible. It was also reported that the volunteer drivers provided additional support, in particular social and emotional support, to clients.

The ConnectU administrative staff felt that the social inclusion aspect of the service has been successful.

As ConnectU moves into the future, some areas for future development and consideration will arise. These particularly relate to issues such as flexibility and expansion of the service, promotion of the service and the training of volunteers.

In summary, this research clearly demonstrates the need for the services provided by ConnectU. The growth in the use of the service has been significant, particularly considering the minimal advertising of the services provided. The constraint to further growth will be from the supply side and the availability of vehicles, but it is highly likely that there is considerable unmet further demand for the service within the community. The process of the establishment of the service has been professional and efficient, and the professionalism of the ConnectU staff in the operation of the service, as evidenced by the positive feedback from all parties involved, is to be commended.
1. Introduction

ConnectU is an innovative pilot scheme, representing a social enterprise project, aimed at addressing issues of transport disadvantage and social exclusion in Warrnambool and the surrounding region. The two-year pilot project is being operated under the auspices of the Warrnambool based Horizon 21. ConnectU commenced in August 2012, with the first passenger being transported on 11 September 2012.

ConnectU provides members of the community with access to a central hub for transport services, assistance and information. It aims to combine the transport resources of various service providers and integrate service provision to efficiently achieve improved services and improved utilisation of vehicles.

Users of the service include individuals who are unable to access public transport and those who are having difficulty finding a means of travelling to and from their destinations. ConnectU organises drivers to provide door-to-door transport for clients to attend medical appointments, shopping, social outings, or to meet other needs. The ConnectU pilot is important as Warrnambool has a relatively high incidence in the population of groups who find difficulty in achieving mobility.

The research project evaluating ConnectU’s operations was established under the auspices of Horizon 21 and is primarily funded by the Bus Industry Confederation, the Bus Association of Victoria, and Warrnambool Bus Lines Pty Ltd. The bus industry is funding the project as part of its interest in broader transport objectives and to better understand desired outcomes and possible solutions to unmet accessibility needs in the sector.

The aim of the research study is to assess and document the outcomes of the pilot transport scheme, particularly in terms of costs and benefits and the impact on social inclusion, wellbeing and equity. The research is important as the ConnectU pilot represents a unique and innovative social enterprise model for community transport.

The research project investigates the extent to which the ConnectU pilot has resulted in a better integration of existing regional mobility opportunities to improve transport opportunities where people had no means of travel before. It also examines if additional benefits arise from the project, such as increases in social capital and sense of community, a reduction in social isolation and improvements in wellbeing. The research particularly examines the extent to which better use is made of existing transport resources, resulting in more efficient and effective transport services, and the extent to which more transport opportunities are being provided to those who have low mobility.

This interim report provides information on the background to the project and the early operation of ConnectU. It is the first of two reports which will document an evaluation of the pilot project in Warrnambool.

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1 Horizon 21 was established in 2011 as ‘an innovative partnership, unifying industry via the common desire to establish integrated and innovative approaches to create a sustainable future for regional communities’ (Horizon 21, 2011). Foundation members were Wannon Water, Midfield Meats, Warrnambool Bus Lines Pty Ltd, Urbanomics, Warrnambool City Council, Deakin University, South West TAFE and Warrnambool Cheese and Butter (Horizon 21, 2011).

2 Warrnambool Bus Lines Pty Ltd operates its urban bus operation under the business name Transit South West.
2. Background:

2.1 Transport disadvantage, social exclusion and wellbeing

Prior research has developed models for, and investigated links between, transport disadvantage, social exclusion and wellbeing. The research has associated a lack of transport options with wider social disadvantage and social exclusion. Various studies have identified a mismatch between public transport supply and social need, with the mismatch having greater impacts for marginalised groups. In particular, negative impacts are apparent in terms of reduced access to jobs, education and recreational options.

Stanley et al. (2011, 2012) highlight the significant association between increased mobility (trip making and activities undertaken) and a reduced risk of social exclusion and an increased sense of community and social capital. The findings of Vella-Brodrick (2013) further indicate that the impact and benefits of transport mobility extend to psychosocial factors related to wellbeing. The above papers derive estimates of the considerable value of increased mobility, and suggest that the risk of social exclusion may be reduced by policy and program measures that foster the development of social capital.

Currie et al. (2009) point to gaps in public transport services in Australian fringe urban areas and to the link with transport disadvantaged people who tend to live in these areas, and highlight the technical challenge of identifying more viable approaches to meet the social equity gap. Improved mobility may be one way to foster the development of social capital, giving increased mobility an important role in reducing risks of exclusion (Stanley et al., 2011).

Prior research generally suggests that a mix of creative solutions is required if the travel needs of marginalised groups are to be met.

In modelling influences on risk of social exclusion and wellbeing, Stanley et al. (2011) suggest that connection with community remains a significant contributor to personal wellbeing for people in regional areas (in comparison to those in metropolitan areas) and that this high connection with community is where regional people derive much of their personal satisfaction. This finding is important in terms of considering how to improve regional mobility levels (Stanley and Stanley, 2012). It has been argued that:

Public policy initiatives that deliver cost-effective improvements in regional personal mobility are likely to be valuable to both individuals and the community generally. Where the beneficiaries are likely to be at risk of social exclusion, this value is likely to be particularly high, provided mobility solutions are provided cost-effectively. (Stanley and Stanley, 2012, p. 4)

The Victorian government has identified transport disadvantage as ‘a key factor contributing to social exclusion for a variety of different groups in Victoria’, with access to transport ‘consistently rated by rural and regional communities as one of the most significant barriers to accessing services, employment and social networks’ (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011). The specific groups identified as being more likely to experience transport disadvantage were (a) people aged over 60, (b) people living with a disability, (c) unemployed persons, (d) students (at all levels), (e) children (0 to 5 years of age), (f) people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, (g) Indigenous people,  

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3 See, for example, Cass et al., 2005; Hurni, 2006; Currie and Senbergs, 2007; Preston and Rajé, 2007; Currie et al., 2009; Delbosc and Currie, 2011; Stanley et al., 2011.

4 As measured by the Personal Well-being Index.
To improve transport options, the previous Victorian government implemented a $22.8m Transport Connections Program (TCP) that aimed to support local people and organisations, with the objective of improving local transport and access to services for transport disadvantaged communities (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011). This program has now been discontinued.

2.2 The ConnectU Social Enterprise

To address issues of transport disadvantage and social exclusion, the Warrnambool based Horizon 21 is piloting a Social Enterprise project under the name ConnectU.

ConnectU provides members of the community with access to a central hub for transport services and transport assistance information. It aims to combine the transport resources of various service providers and integrate service provision to efficiently achieve improved services with the present capital stock of vehicles.

Users of the service include individuals who are unable to access public transport and those who are having difficulty finding a means of travelling to their destinations. The major transport disadvantaged groups targeted include, but are not be limited to, (a) clients of various health and welfare agencies, (b) youth, including post-secondary and VCAL students, (c) older citizens, (d) people with a disability, (e) rurally isolated people, and (f) others with particular needs (Stanley and Stanley, 2012, p. 17).

The origin for the ConnectU pilot project can be traced to a study by Stanley and Stanley (2004) titled Improving Public Transport to Meet Community Needs: A Warrnambool Case-study. That study commenced Bus Association Victoria's (BusVic's) and Transit South West's process of seeking to understand the connections between public transport service provision, social exclusion and personal wellbeing in a regional community. The aim of the study was to ‘explore travel patterns of groups that typically include many transport disadvantaged people and to identify the priorities they see for transport improvements that will reduce their disadvantage, using Warrnambool as a case study and with a focus on the role of public transport’ (Stanley and Stanley, 2004, p. 4).

In an area such as the Warrnambool region, rural isolation represents arguably the most difficult accessibility issue to resolve, with dispersed trip origins and low densities of travel demand making service provision costly (Stanley and Stanley, 2004, p. 80). The study highlighted that the various institutional arrangements for service delivery tend to occur along different lines, and that no government entity is responsible for addressing issues of accessibility. Various services, such as public transport services, school bus services and community transport services, are not part of a single service delivery system but, rather, operate in isolation from each other. As a result, a major recommendation of the study was that Regional Accessibility Planning Councils (RAPCs) should be established, based around transport/activity catchment areas and driven by local government, to undertake needs assessment and propose improvement priorities’ (Stanley and Stanley, 2004, p. 7).

The Warrnambool based Regional Accessibility Committee (RAC) represents an implementation of the study's recommendation. The committee's purpose is to 'identify transport/accessibility needs and strengthen the region's transport resources', with the primary
aim being to ‘improve transport options and to disseminate information on those options’ (RAC, 2007). Members of the RAC include public and community transport service providers, transport users (including transport disadvantaged community members), BusVic, Warrnambool City Council (WCC), Moyne Shire Council, Corangamite Shire Council, the South West Community Transport Program, the South West Local Learning and Employment Network, Rural Access, the Department of Infrastructure, the Department for Victorian Communities, the Warrnambool Liquor Licensing Accord, and other organisations as required (RAC, 2007).

In a report to BusVic by the Monash Sustainability Institute, Stanley and Stanley (2012) proposed a pilot case study designed to improve personal mobility opportunities in regional areas. The report scoped a possible case study for the Warrnambool area involving the implementation of a community transport initiative aimed at transport disadvantaged groups. Stanley and Stanley (2012) recommended a social enterprise business model involving the matching of those with mobility needs with potential mobility providers. The social enterprise model was seen to be particularly appropriate as it can result in both sides (users and providers) having a sense of ownership of the problem.

The establishment in 2007 of the Warrnambool based RAC, and its continued active involvement, establishes it as an ideal organisation to implement and coordinate a community transport social enterprise initiative. As noted by Stanley and Stanley (2012, p. 9):

... a multi-stakeholder Regional Accessibility Committee (RAC) was established by interested local stakeholders, to pursue implementation of the recommendations of that [Stanley and Stanley 2004] study and, more importantly, to provide a point for co-ordination of needs identification for regional mobility services. This initiative has not depended on external funding support but has been regionally conceived, managed and resourced. This regional initiative demonstrates that Warrnambool has the regional leadership to pursue a social enterprise approach to communal transport.

*ConnectU* represents Horizon 21’s implementation of the RAC’s vision. Horizon 21 is implementing the *ConnectU* pilot as it is an incorporated body, has the required funds and has a suitable governance structure to manage those funds.

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5 These providers comprise Warrnambool Taxis, Transit South West, V-Line, and various south west community transport providers.

6 Ideally the taxi industry would be represented on the RAC board, but it has chosen not to participate at this stage.

7 Stanley and Stanley (2012) provide a summary of the Warrnambool regional area. Warrnambool is a major regional service centre located on the coast some 260 kilometres from Melbourne. The City of Warrnambool has an estimated current population of around 34,000, with the surrounding agriculturally-based Moyne Shire having a further 15,000+ people. The report documents the relatively high incidence of groups in the population that are subject to transport disadvantage and for whom public transport, community transport, school bus and other publicly/communally-based mobility options are likely to be important.

8 A social enterprise is a business with mainly social objectives whose surpluses are primarily reinvested in the business or community, with the key ingredients for purposes of the Warrnambool social enterprise being (a) community purposes, (b) drawing on business skills and (c) re-investment of any surpluses to further the community purposes (Stanley and Stanley, 2012).

9 In contrast the RAC is an unincorporated advisory committee only, facilitated by the Warrnambool City Council. A future incorporated and funded RAC could carry out all the functions required to manage transport integration and information dissemination activities.
The potential benefits flowing from ConnectU’s operations can be summarised as follows:

- better integration of the range of existing regional mobility opportunities to improve social capital and sense of community, reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing,
- better use of existing community mobile resources (e.g. vehicles, drivers, volunteers), capturing synergies across agencies and increasing specialisation and coordination in service planning and delivery, resulting in more efficient and effective client service, and
- provision of more transport options and opportunities to a wider range of people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion from mobility origins. (Stanley and Stanley, 2012, p. 9)

Stanley and Stanley (2012) document the extensive consultation program undertaken with client service and community transport provider groups in scoping the ConnectU pilot. The consultation program included meetings with relevant individual agencies and with groups of agencies, together with administration of a survey questionnaire with potential parties. Responses to the concept of better coordination through a regional social enterprise model were generally enthusiastic. The initial scoping survey work and other research in the Warrnambool area indicated that:

- many people who were clients of an agency, and those who were not supported by an agency, were missing out on transport,
- there was a common and genuine desire on the part of many service agencies to provide better client mobility options,
- there was under-use of many vehicles in community transport applications,
- there are various current revenue streams which might be able to be pursued by a mobility focused social enterprise,
- some agencies whose clients have mobility requirements have reservations about engagement in a possible social enterprise model, but
- there is strong interest in undertaking a social enterprise trial.

Transport integration is the central tenet of the ConnectU pilot. The two-year project aims to combine the transport resources of various service providers and integrate service provision to more efficiently achieve improved services. This model ‘provides the opportunity to change the way mobility needs are currently conceived in regional areas, by breaking down silos’ (Stanley and Stanley, 2012, p. 14). The project aims to remove the many administrative and governance barriers between transport modes. ConnectU is based on the philosophy that the existing system makes it difficult to understand the true needs of the travelling public and that the lack of choice for passengers in the existing community transport system is less than ideal for people who may already feel excluded.

ConnectU’s public face is a transport hub, including a shopfront, providing transport information for all groups of the travelling public. The ConnectU hub plays a central role in coordinating transport options. In the longer term, ConnectU will enable, for example, the recognition of deficiencies affecting a critical number of people, in turn forming the basis for recommendations that some services could be provided by a regular public transport (e.g. route bus) service. This is important as it can move people from special purpose ‘exclusionary transport’ to an environment where there is greater mixing with the general travelling public. In this way, the ConnectU pilot will be able to monitor transport needs and service gaps, thereby enabling an improved understanding of passenger movements and preferences.
In particular, the ConnectU hub also aims to provide benefits in identifying how transport coordination can be improved. This will enable negotiations between various providers of services accessed by transport disadvantaged persons (e.g. hospitals, doctors, educational institutions) to ensure the better timing of accessed services.

ConnectU clients must satisfy specific eligibility criteria. These criteria are based on rules regarding accessibility of other public transport options, affordability of other options, intended use of the transport, and eligibility for other local community transport programs. It is important to highlight that ConnectU is not attempting to create a transport empire at the expense of taxis and other private and public transport options.

Stanley and Stanley (2012, p. 17) summarised the role of projects such as ConnectU as being to:

- provide transport, gaining synergies by coordinating regional resources (this may be achieved by the entity owning vehicles and/or sourcing vehicles from others),
- provide personal assistance to people with specific travel needs,
- provide an information service to advise regional residents/visitors of regional transport options,
- provide volunteering opportunities, and
- provide possible job training.

Given the lack of prior experience with a social enterprise business model for the provision of integrated mobility services in Victoria, the two year ConnectU pilot enables confirmation of the potential size of the market for mobility services for such a regional social enterprise. The pilot will also inform any implementation of this type of scheme in other locations.

2.3 Research into ConnectU

This interim research report is the first output from a research study evaluating the ConnectU pilot. The research project will aim to assess and document the outcomes of the ConnectU pilot, particularly in terms of costs and benefits, social inclusion, and wellbeing and equity.

The research questions addressed by the research are:

1. To what extent does the ConnectU transport hub contribute to an increase in the number of trips being undertaken by transport disadvantaged community transport users, and what is the economic and social value of those additional trips?
2. What advantages and disadvantages do transport disadvantaged community transport users perceive arise from the ConnectU pilot in terms of improved transport options, reduced perceptions of social disadvantage and exclusion, and improved feelings of wellbeing and equity?
3. What advantages and disadvantages do community service providers involved in, or reliant on, community and public transport options consider to arise from the ConnectU pilot project?
4. Do the operators of ConnectU consider that net benefits arise from the pilot project? What advantages and disadvantages arise from the social enterprise model employed? Is there potential for ‘add-on’ value, such as support for travellers and community volunteers and further training options?
5. To what extent has the pilot project resulted in the identification of potential improvements in the provision of community and public transport services, especially
from the viewpoint of transport disadvantaged groups? What is the nature of these improvements and how can they be categorised?

6. Based on the ConnectU pilot, can any improvements be identified in the manner in which a social enterprise aimed at improving community transport provision could be administered and operated?

The research project applies well-established transport research methods and models to evaluate the net economic and social benefits arising from the ConnectU pilot transport hub project. These issues will be reported on more fully in the second report. This report provides information on all trips undertaken that is being collected from the booking system employed by the transport hub, including data from transport users on the nature of their trip and, in particular, whether the trip was one that they would not have taken in the absence of the ConnectU transport hub. In addition, semi-structured interviews have been undertaken with ConnectU’s staff, clients and volunteers, as well as some family members, to gauge their responses to the pilot program.

In the second stage of the project, the results from relevant prior research studies will be used to estimate a dollar value for the ConnectU trips undertaken. The value of the benefits attained from these trips will be compared with the costs of operating the ConnectU service. Cost-effectiveness data on asset productivity will be obtained. This data will allow undertaking of an economic cost-benefit analysis of the social enterprise project and will complement the qualitative data gathered from research interviews.
3. **ConnectU: Establishment and services delivered in the first 12 months**

The narrative and analysis in this section explains how the ConnectU service was established and provides a preliminary evaluation of the delivery of the service over the first 12 months of operation.

### 3.1 Establishing ConnectU

As noted above, research carried out prior to the commencement of the ConnectU pilot project (by John and Janet Stanley and Brenda Hampson of Transit South West) demonstrated a lack of services for some people in Warrnambool who were transport poor; that is, people who were socially isolated and/or have difficulty accessing suitable transport. There was perceived to be a need for a ‘one stop shop’ delivering community transport services together with transport information and assistance.

To meet this need, ConnectU was established on 6 August 2012 from a single room office in the Warrnambool CBD with a single member of staff (the Operations Manager). The Bus Industry Confederation, Bus Association of Victoria and Warrnambool Bus Lines Pty Ltd have funded the two-year ConnectU pilot project.

The scheme uses a ConnectU vehicle (a medium sized sedan donated by an interested party) every day, and Warrnambool City Council (WCC) makes a vehicle available for two days per week.\(^{10}\) The ConnectU operations manager’s car, provided by Transit South West, is also used for two days per week on average. In addition, the service can enquire and use vehicles available from Mpower,\(^{11}\) although these have been used on only very limited occasions. Finally, at times, the cars of the ConnectU volunteers are also utilised.

ConnectU services Warrnambool and district and has occasionally offered a service beyond Warrnambool, including to Ballarat, Geelong and Melbourne. The service is available between 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday, with clients incurring a small charge for each trip. The charge amounts to $6.50 for a return trip, with a smaller or no charge for those with limited capacity to pay and some users offering a larger donation.

ConnectU staff also advise potential clients about the availability of public transport options, and will not take on an individual as a client if, given that individual’s mobility, they are able to avail themselves of an alternative public transport option, principally a bus service, or a taxi. As part of the service, ConnectU staff or volunteers take these individuals on one or two trips on the appropriate service to assist them to get to know how the service operates and to make them comfortable with such an option. This reflects the philosophy of ConnectU – to coordinate alternative transport options where possible if the client is fit and able to use them and if the service is available at the right time and location.

In relation to transporting clients, the operation of ConnectU depends on volunteer drivers. The service provided often extends beyond vehicle transportation. For example, the service frequently assists clients from the car and into a medical clinic for their appointment and assists in familiarising clients with public transport. In partnership with Volunteers Warrnambool, organised by Warrnambool City Council, and a more recent addition of the Moyne Health

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\(^{10}\) WCC charge 25 cents per kilometre for use of their vehicles.

\(^{11}\) Mpower Inc. is an accredited, community-based agency servicing South West Victoria. It provides support to individuals with a disability and their families and assists other disadvantaged members of the community.
Services volunteer system, ConnectU volunteers have completed a police check, have a *Working with Children Certificate* and are covered for insurance.

Demand for ConnectU services grew rapidly and a second administrative position, on a part time basis, was created and filled at the end of October 2013. The staff member was appointed to assist in the office and to drive clients when volunteers were unavailable to do so. The Western District Employment Agency (WDEA) provided initial funding for this training position, thus showing ConnectU meeting its employment training ambition early. Subsequent costs for this position have been met by the ConnectU funding organisations. A Board has been appointed to advise on the project. Members comprise the Directors of South West Transit, ConnectU’s Operations Manager, a representative of Warrnambool City Council, a representative from BusVic, and representatives from Mpower, ASPIRE and Brophy Family and Youth Services.

Potential clients are made aware of the service through the distribution of a brochure to medical centres and local agencies and through the ConnectU website. The service has also been drawn to the attention of potential users through articles in the local media. Word of mouth and referral by some agencies also generates users. ConnectU has not been very active in seeking users as it operates at near capacity, being limited by vehicle availability.

To be eligible to access the ConnectU community transport scheme, clients must meet at least one criterion in one access category from the following table (Table 1).

### Table 1: ConnectU Eligibility Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Category</th>
<th>Eligibility Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accessibility</td>
<td>1.1 Public transport does not service the local area or the frequency and routes are not compatible with the needs of the user.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 That the person is unable to access public transport options independently and that the individual has no means of personal support to assist in accessing an available transport option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Affordability</td>
<td>2.1 The person has a degree of financial hardship. This will need to be demonstrated via evidence that the person is currently a Health Card holder, disability pensioner or aged pensioner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intended Use</td>
<td>3.1 To attend medical appointments, essential shopping needs, employment, studies or social programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 To visit family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 To reduce social isolation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other options</td>
<td>4.1 Not eligible to access any other local community transport program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Other local programs for which the person is eligible but for which that program is unable to provide the service (e.g. through high demand for that service).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Quantitative Data: Extent of Use of ConnectU Services

The following two sections provide an evaluation of ConnectU’s operations in its first 12 months from October 2012 until September 2013.\(^{12}\)

The database collated by the administrators of ConnectU was used to extract quantitative data to determine the extent to which the service was used in the first 12 months of operation from October 2012. The database contained, for each trip, details relating to the date of travel, the client, the volunteer driver, and details relating to the trip such as destination, the time the client was to be collected from their home, any appointment time and the cost of the trip. In addition, technical details such as vehicle odometer reading and vehicle registration were recorded. Any special needs of the client were also recorded for the driver’s information.

The following observations and statistical summaries have been derived from the ConnectU data.

Table 2 below illustrates the breakdown of trips undertaken each month in the first 12 months of operation. The total number of trips undertaken by clients over the first year of ConnectU’s operation (from October 2012 to September 2013) was 486 return trips, with this being approximately 972 one-way trips.

**TABLE 2: SERVICE DEMAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Number of return trips per month</th>
<th>Approximate number of one-way trips(^ {13})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{12}\) The authors thank the ConnectU staff, clients and volunteers for assistance in compiling this information. Information indicates that ConnectU took its first client on 11 September 2012. While a small number of trips were provided in the month of September 2012, this report is based on trips for which more detailed information was collected, commencing from the month of October 2012.

\(^{13}\) Single trips are reported by the local Community Transport Agencies.
As illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 1, the number of trips undertaken has been steadily rising over the 12 months. Demand was low in December and January, which may have been a reflection of the holiday period. The lower demand possibly resulted from additional family members being on holiday and hence available to offer transport to those in need. ConnectU was also closed for a short time over the Christmas period. The increase in demand over the final three months of the 12 month period is clearly illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 1, and is indicative of ConnectU becoming established in the community.

As depicted in Table 3 following, the total number of clients using ConnectU’s services in its first 12 months of operation was 59. The number of female clients far exceeded the number of males utilising the service. As shown in the table, 44 clients (74.6 per cent) were females, while 10 (16.9 per cent) were males. Two couples utilised the service, while three individual residential organisations used the service for their residents. The policy of ConnectU is to offer a regular transport service once a person has been registered as a client.

**Table 3: Users of the Service**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations¹⁴</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁴ Organisations include Lyndoch Warrnambool, Lyndoch Portland and Moyne Health.
The number of trips undertaken by any one individual client varied greatly. As shown in Table 4 below, 35 clients (59.3 per cent) made minimal use of the service, with one to five trips taken in total over the 12 month period. By contrast, eight clients (13.6 per cent) used the service extensively with more than 20 trips in total over the 12 month period.

Table 4 also indicates that the main purpose for trips undertaken was to attend medical appointments.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{TABLE 4: NUMBER OF RETURN TRIPS AND CLIENT TYPE}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of return trips</th>
<th>Client Type</th>
<th>Number of Clients</th>
<th>Purpose of Trip</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>35 clients (59.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>12 clients (20.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>2 clients (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>2 clients (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Medical, Childcare and Aquazone</td>
<td>8 clients (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical, Aged Care Facility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 provides further details on the purpose of trips. Of the 486 return trips undertaken, 365 (75.1\%) were primarily related to a medical need.

\textsuperscript{15} Medical appointments cover appointments at a doctor, dentist, optometrist, podiatrist, audiologist, as well as for physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and transporting a patient from hospital to home.
The duration of a trip varied greatly, reflecting the purpose of the trip. Most commonly, return trips in and around Warrnambool ranged from one to two or three hours, depending on the need. Much longer times were experienced when the trip involved travelling out of town, for example, to take or collect clients to visit a doctor or attend hospital in Melbourne (1 trip), Hamilton (3 trips) or Portland (2 trips).

Of the 59 clients utilising the service, 47 resided in Warrnambool, with the other 12 clients residing in the surrounding towns of Portland (2 clients) Port Fairy (5 clients), Koroit (2 clients) and Naringal, Yangery and Panmure (each with one client).

To service this demand, ConnectU relied upon volunteer drivers. Throughout the first year of operation, there were 14 volunteer drivers who, combined with the two administration staff, provided a total of 16 drivers. Of the 14 volunteer drivers, nine were males and five were female.

Table 6 below shows the frequency of trips undertaken by drivers.

**Table 5: Purpose of Trips**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of trip</th>
<th>Number of Trips</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquazone Swimming Facility</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare centre</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health organisation (eg Aspire)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing homes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VicRoads</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>486</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Number of Trips Undertaken by Volunteer Drivers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Trips</th>
<th>Number of Drivers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trips undertaken by each driver was generally low, with most (11, or 68.8 per cent) taking less than 20 trips.16 The majority of volunteers had less than 20 trips, reflecting the fact that many are newer recruits who have volunteered more recently as the service has become established and as community awareness has increased, thus a greater need for drivers. The number also includes one volunteer who has only taken one trip, another four volunteers that are no longer involved plus three who are available only as a last resort. Hence, of the 14 volunteers listed over the first year of operation, eight are still active.

16 The category of less than 10 trips included a volunteer from Moyne Shire. Moyne Health joined the program in September 2013 and draws volunteers from Moyne Shire, particularly Port Fairy.
3.3 Qualitative Data: Perceptions of ConnectU

In-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 13 clients, five volunteer drivers and the two administrators to gain some additional insights into the operation of the service. Four family members of clients also volunteered to be interviewed. Ethics approval from Deakin University was attained prior to the commencement of the interviews.

To arrange the interviews, ConnectU administrative staff mailed out a letter informing clients and volunteer drivers of the purpose of the research and inviting them to participate. Participation in the research was voluntary and involved a face-to-face interview with the research project officer at a time and place convenient to the participants.

ConnectU administrative staff followed up the initial letter with a phone call to clients to ascertain their willingness to participate. Names and phone numbers of willing participants were then given to the research project officer who made contact with them to arrange a suitable interview time. All clients were interviewed in their homes except one who was interviewed at a driver’s home. All drivers were interviewed in their homes except for one where the meeting took place in a coffee shop. The administrative staff were interviewed in the boardroom of their office block. Telephone interviews were conducted with the family members, who had indicated to the administrative staff that they were keen to be involved in the evaluation process.

3.3.1 Clients

Thirteen clients were interviewed for purposes of this interim report. The clients interviewed had become aware of the ConnectU service predominantly through community service agencies, in particular MPower, or through friends or family. Brochures at doctors’ rooms and articles in the newspaper were also a source of information for a very small number of clients.

Clients indicated that the ConnectU service was preferable to public transport as it cost less, was prompt and because the driver could assist them. Other reasons for not using public transport included the lack of public transport near the place of their appointment, the need to change buses to reach their destination, the difficulty of entering a bus, walking frames not being catered for, or the client being unable to walk from home to a bus stop. ConnectU was preferable to taxis as it was claimed taxis often ran late and did not offer the additional assistance in and out of the car.

The clients found the staff at the ConnectU office clearly explained the service offered and the need to book the trip in advance where possible. The pamphlet outlining the service offered was clear and the clients found the administration staff very helpful, supportive and friendly. The drivers too were found to be very helpful, friendly, thoughtful, caring and interesting to talk to. Drivers were seen to be obliging and aware of when assistance might be needed. The assistance offered included assisting getting into the car, meeting the client at the front door and collecting their bag etc, helping at the destination, and enabling other tasks such as stopping at the chemist, milk bar, bank, and shopping to be completed on the trip. The interviews with clients revealed that a major advantage of the ConnectU service was that multiple tasks could be completed in the one trip. Hence, while the predominant purpose of a single trip was generally, as noted earlier, for medical purposes, an ancillary benefit was that other tasks could also be completed in the course of a trip.

Clients found the service offered by ConnectU to be convenient, prompt and reliable. In particular, it allowed for independence from family and friends and the extra services offered
were appreciated. Communication with ConnectU staff and with volunteer drivers was found to be easy.

The following represent some quotes from clients in the interviews:

In relation to assistance offered by the drivers:
- willingness to assist,
- makes life easier.

In relation to drivers in general
- all brilliant,
- very kind and friendly,
- family like.

In relation to ConnectU administrative staff:
- nothing is too hard for them,
- (they) try to squeeze you in.

In relation to the ConnectU service overall:
- best thing ever,
- great service for the town to have,
- would have liked the service a long time ago,
- first class service,
- wonderful service,
- found a family.

3.3.2 Volunteer Drivers

Five volunteer drivers were interviewed for purposes of the interim report. The volunteer drivers interviewed had become aware of the ConnectU service either through other agencies with whom they were already volunteering or by way of friends, family or the media. Most drivers were volunteering because they saw the need for the service, wanted to be busy or have the opportunity to meet people, or because they had a Centrelink obligation.

The drivers interviewed considered that their preparation, involving police checks, interview with administrative staff and information provided (verbal and pamphlet) was adequate (for example with respect to such items as expected travel distance, health and safety issues, etc). The drivers did not consider a routine de-briefing to be required.

Volunteer drivers considered the information sheet provided to them by ConnectU prior to an engagement was considered to be adequate. The information sheet provided details such as the client’s home address for the pick-up, appointment or destination details (time, place, phone number) and any special needs (walking frame etc). The additional services provided to clients included stopping at shops (chemist, bank, milkbar), taking the client for a short drive or a coffee, organising a wheelchair for use from car to appointment place, assisting the client into and out of the car, assisting in getting them into their home, and assisting with walking frames.

No problems were experienced with carrying more than one client in a vehicle. Most clients liked the opportunity to meet someone else and preferred sharing the trip than being left
Many clients liked to chat and desired companionship. They appreciated seeing a friendly face and arriving at their destination on time was a priority for them.

The following represent some quotes from the volunteer drivers in the interviews:

In relation to reasons for volunteering:
- good service,
- good programme,
- may need it myself one day,
- opportunity to put back into the community,
- good for the community,
- provide a service – feel valued,

In relation to communicating with clients:
- clients want to talk, want your view on things.

3.3.3 Clients’ families

A family member for each of four clients was interviewed for the purpose of this report. From the perspective of the families of clients, the service offered by ConnectU was seen as a valuable support, easing much of the pressure on a family when ageing parents were unwell. The service was felt to be particularly good for those where the family was not close by.

Clients’ families appreciated the fact that the service was safe and reliable, yet flexible. The administrative staff were thought to be very approachable and flexible even when appointment times had to be changed. It was also reported that the volunteer drivers provided additional support, in particular social and emotional support, to the client.

The following represent some quotes from family members in the interviews:
- service is a great support for the whole family,
- eases the pressure,
- fantastic service,
- mother is safe and in good hands
- trustworthy people,
- the routine (is) good for …. my sister,
- good to know (the) driver is looking after my father,

3.3.4 Administrators

The administrative staff reported that they appreciate the opportunity to interact with both the clients and the drivers. Many clients utilising the service are regular bookings. The administrative staff felt that many of the users were isolated and they indicated that both they and the volunteer drivers are getting to know clients and friendships have developed. Given that the number of people who are transport poor and have been able to use the service has increased, it was anecdotally felt by administrative staff that the social inclusion aspect of the ConnectU service has been successful.

The staff acknowledged that the ConnectU service is not well known among the general public, but feel that advertising the service would result in the organisation not being able to handle
the demand. The availability of vehicles is a limiting factor for the current operations. The fee charged for a trip within the Warrnambool catchment area was felt to be reasonably priced but the administrators believe that the value of the service is not about its low cost but rather the extra care and services offered to enable the users to be mobile.

The staff felt that the training of administrative staff and volunteer drivers is important. Client needs are currently assessed by the administrative staff, but they are not necessarily trained for such assessments. Training for volunteer drivers include first aid training and correct manual handling procedures. As opportunities arise, it is hoped to apply for funding to cover these training courses.
4. Preliminary observations and future directions

4.1 Preliminary observations

The research undertaken to date clearly demonstrates the need for the services provided by ConnectU. The growth in the use of the service has been significant, particularly considering the minimal advertising of the services provided. The constraint to further growth has been from the supply side and the availability of vehicles, and it is highly likely that there is considerable unmet further demand for the service within the community.

The process of the establishment of the service has been professional and efficient. The staff have developed efficient processes for service delivery, record keeping and ongoing management of the delivery of ConnectU services. Their professionalism in the operation of the service, as evidenced by the positive feedback from all parties involved, is to be commended.

The service has developed from concept to reality with limited resources, relying on significant voluntary contributions and generous funding and assistance from various parties. This is a significant achievement. Prior research highlights the negative impact of transport disadvantage on social wellbeing. As the impact of lack of transport and social exclusion is particularly evident in regional and rural areas, the service has contributed to an increase in the wellbeing of clients, their families and volunteers. While the major purpose of trips has predominantly been for medical appointments, the interim research documented here clearly shows the additional benefits to clients and volunteers from the associated social interactions. The service illustrates the potential gains to be achieved from a social enterprise initiative.

4.2 Future issues and considerations

As ConnectU moves into second year of its pilot, the following section outlines some areas for future development or consideration arising from our initial research.

4.2.1 Flexibility and expansion of the service

The ConnectU service was considered by clients to be flexible, particularly as they were generally able to change a booking if required. Clients also felt that ConnectU works in well with the services offered by MPower. Evening and/or weekend travel was not needed by the majority of clients. However, for some, travel was restricted due to the service not being available before 8.30 am or after 4.30 pm on weekdays or on weekends. Although, as stated in the ConnectU information brochure, the service commences at 8.30 am, there have been occasions when it has commenced earlier. Hospital admissions are generally at 7.00 am and hence clients who are to be admitted to hospital may require the service well before the published time. Where an early start or weekend trip was viewed as important, ConnectU staff arranged an exception. The ability to extend the hours would depend on the resources available, both physical and human, and the cost.

The drivers like the use of emails as a means of contact with the administration. From the viewpoint of the volunteer drivers, the flexibility of the volunteer service was appreciated in that they were not committed to a particular day each week and could always decline when asked if they were unable to volunteer on a particular day. However, as the service moves into the future, any expansion will obviously require additional resources, and the flexibility currently provided may become difficult to maintain without scheduling software to manage the complexity. The issue of the geographic boundaries to be serviced by ConnectU is
something that might be considered in the future. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a need for provision of the type of service offered by ConnectU over a wider geographic area.

4.2.2 Promoting the service

The need to increase awareness of the service was raised by both clients and volunteers. It was generally felt that more advertising was needed to inform the community of the service. It was also felt that the doctors could be more helpful to patients in providing information about the different transport services available. It was claimed by some respondents that self-funded retirees in particular can find it hard knowing what services exist. Information about ConnectU should be readily available at rehabilitation services and pre-admission areas of hospitals.

Further promotion of the service, however, is only recommended if the capacity to meet the extra demand can be made available. Currently, the physical capacity, particularly in terms of vehicles, is fully utilised.

4.2.3 Vehicles used: Size and parking

The size of the vehicle currently in use was felt to be a limiting factor by some respondents. In particular, the ConnectU vehicle, being a small car, is limiting when a baby seat is required to be used. The WCC vehicles are bigger, and in particular the extra boot space allows for walking frames, etc to be catered for more easily and better fits the needs of the service.

The issue of parking fees and the ability to park close to the ConnectU office represents an area of difficulty. In this respect, the location of the office, currently in the CBD, might also need to be considered. While offering convenience in many respects, a central city location is perhaps not necessary as most contact with clients and volunteers is by telephone and email respectively. A location outside of the CBD could remove some of the issues associated with parking. Alternatively, it would be a very welcome offer if the WCC were able to make two parking spaces available free of charge in the adjacent car park.

4.2.4 Vehicles used: The availability of vehicles

A critical feature of the design of the Social Enterprise was that the scheme would take advantage of the under-utilised vehicles available in agencies that provide Community Transport, as identified in previous research (Stanley and Stanley 2004, 2012). The design of ConnectU was that there would be a sharing of vehicles. For example, this would allow the picking up of ConnectU clients when a community transport vehicle is following a similar route to that required by the ConnectU client. It would also allow ConnectU to use the other agency’s vehicle when not needed for that agency’s clients. Similarly, ConnectU would assist as needed with transport for the agency’s clients. While there has been some sharing of passengers and vehicles, this component of the ConnectU project is considerably under-developed. Thus, the ConnectU staff and volunteers have largely relied on the ConnectU car, two WCC vehicles and private vehicles of staff and some volunteers.

The researchers believe that if the Social Enterprise is to be independently financially viable it is important that the sharing of vehicles is achieved. It is unclear as to why this part of the enterprise is under-developed and the researchers hope to investigate this aspect further in stage two of the research project.
4.2.5 Training of Volunteers

All volunteers have a background of working with people and come to ConnectU through WCC or Moyne Health. Volunteers register with WCC and select which group or groups they would like to work with. The ConnectU administration staff then interview those who select ConnectU.

Both WCC and Moyne Health undertake police checks and provide insurance, but do not provide training. ConnectU applied for funding for first aid training but was unsuccessful. The training of volunteers is generally felt to be lacking and is an issue that needs to be addressed as ConnectU develops.

The need for a formal induction process, outlining the goals and philosophy of the service and the driver’s general responsibilities, was raised as a possibility by some volunteers.

A newsletter (emailed) and opportunities to meet other drivers were mentioned as ways for drivers to be kept in contact with the service. Informal meetings could also provide an opportunity for volunteers to exchange and share experiences and provide various tips arising from their experiences. This would also assist in introducing new volunteers to the service.
5. Summary

The ConnectU community transport social enterprise project has completed one year of a two year pilot. This interim research report examines the establishment and development of ConnectU in its start-up and establishment phase over the first 12 months. A final research report to be released later this year will provide a more comprehensive examination of the full two years of the ConnectU pilot.

During the first year of its operations, the ConnectU service has been successfully established, vehicles have been procured, administration staff employed, office space acquired and volunteers enlisted so that the service is now fully operational. Organisational structures and processes have been developed, including data recording, so that the service provided is efficient and compliant with relevant legislation and guidelines.

The number of clients has increased steadily over the first twelve months, indicating a community need for the services provided by ConnectU. Given that the service has not been advertised, it is also highly likely that there is further unmet demand within the community for the services provided by ConnectU. The service has been limited predominantly to the Warrnambool community in the first 12 months. However, anecdotal evidence suggests there is a need for similar services to be provided to a wider geographic area with the region. This highlights the transport limitations for rural and regional communities which prior research shows are correlated with social exclusion and reduced social well-being.

The responses of interviews conducted with both clients and volunteers clearly indicate that there was a high level of satisfaction with the service provided. Clients find the service to be convenient, prompt and reliable. They were particularly appreciative of the extra services offered by volunteers and the independence from family and friends that the service enabled. Volunteer drivers found the service to be well organised and flexible in terms of managing their time.

In developing the service in the future, this research has identified a number of issues that will need consideration. These particularly include consideration of the flexibility of the operating times of the service, promotion of the service, the provision of vehicles and the training of volunteers.

The second stage of this research project will use relevant prior research to quantify the benefits of the ConnectU service. An economic cost-benefit analysis of the ConnectU pilot will also complement the qualitative data gathered from research interviews. Finally, an exploration as to why the sharing of vehicles is proving difficult to achieve will be investigated.
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Regional Accessibility Committee. 2007. Draft Terms of Reference, Regional Accessibility Committee, Warrnambool.

Stanley, J.R. 2011. Overview on Research on Community Transport using Warrnambool and Surrounding Districts as a Case-study, Monash Sustainability Institute, Monash University, Melbourne.


