

NATIONAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PRICING MODEL

CASE

STUDIES

20
25



CONTENT

Case Study **One**: Technology

Case Study **Two**: Passenger Needs

Case Study **Three**: Workforce



Australian Community Transport Association



info@communitytransportaustralia.org.au



0447 712 049



<https://communitytransportaustralia.org.au>

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which ACTA's Canberra office is situated. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and honour their enduring connection to this land, as well as their rich history, culture, and spiritual heritage. In addition, we recognise the Traditional Owners of the lands across the states where our case study participants are based: the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation in Victoria; the Wangal people of the Eora Nation in New South Wales; the Narungga people in South Australia; and in Queensland, the Kombumerri people of the Yugambeh Language Region and the Barada Barna people.

**We would like to extend our
heartfelt thanks to all the
participants in our research and
case study development**



Table of Contents

Key takeaways	04
Introduction and Purpose	06
Current Situation of The Community Transport Workforce	06
People First: Beyond The Service	07
South East Volunteers Inc	08
Volunteer story	
One size does not fit all: The need of a blended workforce approach	09
Access Sydney	10
Volunteer and paid driver stories	
Volunteerism in Decline	11
Volunteering Gold Coast and Care In Motion	13
Volunteer stories	

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1.** Community transport relies on people, not just vehicles. Paid staff and volunteers do far more than drive, they provide social connection, emotional support, welfare checks, and often identify early changes in a passenger's wellbeing. The sustainability of community transport depends on attracting, supporting, and valuing both workforce types.
- 2.** Providers overwhelmingly support flexible, localised workforce models that blend volunteers and paid staff based on community need and organisational capacity. Examples include:
 - Access Sydney: fully paid drivers, with volunteers supporting social engagement for CALD community members.
 - Care In Motion, Volunteering Gold Coast and South East Volunteers Inc: both organisations operate with a predominantly volunteer-based workforce, particularly in the role of drivers, who are exclusively volunteers. This is supported by a mix of paid and volunteer staff handling administrative tasks.
 - At South East Volunteers, staff also coordinate and deliver social support programs, while volunteers assist with client calls and general engagement. Paid staff may also step in to backfill volunteer roles when needed.
- 3.** Despite the NCTPM assumption of sector-workforce composition (average of 36% volunteers and 64% paid staff), the model encourages adaptable models, rather than impose prescriptive workforce ratios.
- 4.** Both workforce types face significant challenges:
 - Volunteers: Ageing cohort (average age ~69), declining recruitment, high coordination needs, and reduced availability due to caregiving or cost-of-living pressures.
 - Paid Staff: High turnover, limited career pathways, competition from higher-paying industries, workforce shortages in thin markets, and lack of career progression pathways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

5. Both paid and volunteer roles carry costs and require structured support. Volunteers are not “free,” and paid staff cannot be retained without fair pay, clear career pathways, and targeted workforce strategies.

6. Volunteerism is in decline. Recruitment and retention are worsening due to:

- COVID-19 impacts on workforce participation
- Rising living costs keeping older adults in paid work
- Generational shifts in volunteering attitudes
- Federal policy changes have replaced local, place-based volunteer recruitment with an online-only system run by state-based organisations, making it harder for regional services to attract local volunteers.
- Chronic underfunding of volunteer infrastructure and support.

7. Community Transport drivers are not just transport providers; they are companions, listeners, and lifelines. Their roles are emotionally and socially impactful. The sector is currently advocating for investment in the wellbeing and retention of both paid and volunteer workers as part of understanding the social benefits of community transport and human capital analysis.

8. Sustainable community transport requires sustainable workforce solutions. The NCTPM acknowledges:

- The need for blended, flexible workforce models
- Culturally safe and inclusive workforce practices
- Investment in training, workforce attraction and development, and thin-market support mechanisms


Introduction

Every community transport journey begins long before a vehicle hits the road. It starts with the front-line staff, those who coordinate rosters, answer phones, navigate compliance, and sit behind the wheel. These are the faces behind the community transport service: a complex, committed workforce that blends volunteers and paid staff, experience and empathy, flexibility and structure.

As the sector evolves, these stories reveal the reality of full-service delivery explored in NCTPM Case Study 2, showing how Community Transport meets diverse, complex needs through person-centred care, with every kilometre driven powered by human effort and dedication. This case study brings together voices from organisations across Australia to show that the sustainability of community transport depends not just on funding models or trip volumes, but on valuing the workforce that makes it all possible.

Purpose of the Case Study

This case study's main purpose is to demonstrate how both volunteer and paid workforce models underpin safe, person-centred community transport and why sustainable, flexible, and well-supported workforce planning and retention strategies are essential to meet the growing needs of senior Australians.



Current Situation of The Community Transport Workforce

Through research interviews and case study development activities, the NCTPM found that workforce composition in community transport ranges from 100% paid staff to models reliant on volunteers (e.g., Care in Motion, with 151 active volunteer drivers in 2023–24, and Volunteering Gold Coast, in Queensland delivering volunteer-driven services). Other hybrid approaches have been observed, like providers that blend both workforce types, with 35% volunteer drivers and 65% paid drivers or vice versa.

However, due to its complexity, community transport workforce plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of service providers across the nation, common workforce issues are:



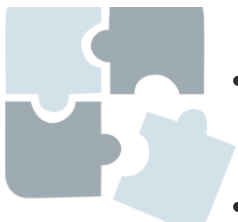
Challenges Facing Volunteer Workforce:

- Ageing volunteer base.
- Declining recruitment, particularly in thin markets (regional/rural areas and high-cost metro pockets).



Challenges Facing Volunteer Workforce:

- Increasing cost of living reduces volunteer availability, more senior Australians remain in paid work or caregiving roles.
- Limited availability, most volunteers commit 1–2 days per week, often with seasonal gaps.
- Lack of funding to support management of volunteered-based workforce, common costs are insurance, training, uniforms, coordination, and volunteer management, retention incentives and professional development. These expenses are not unique to volunteers and apply broadly to the delivery of aged care government-funded services. However, in practice, many providers still report challenges in resourcing these functions adequately, especially in volunteer-based models where the intensity and complexity of management requirements can be underestimated.
- Growing complexity of participant needs means both volunteers and paid staff require higher levels of training (e.g., dementia awareness, first aid, aged care services compliance).



Challenges Facing Paid Workforce:

- High turnover in the broader aged care sector and difficulty attracting staff in an undervalued, usually perceived as low-status industry.
- Competition from other industries with higher wages and better job security.
- Limited career pathways, transport roles (drivers) often lack progression opportunities.
- Increased regulatory requirements without corresponding workforce development funding.
- Shortage of skilled workers in thin markets, with housing affordability impacting recruitment.
- Emotional demands of the role often unrecognised; transport staff regularly act as companions, welfare checkers, and first responders for vulnerable Australians. Both volunteers and paid staff drivers often feel this value is not acknowledged or considered in operational aged care programs and reform.



People First: Beyond the Service

Community transport workforce, especially drivers are often more than just that, they are often companions, mental health supports, welfare checks and the nexus between the service provider and senior Australians.

From volunteers to paid drivers and staff in general, every single team member has a commitment to provide a person-centred service that ensures diverse and complex needs are met in the community. Providers across the country have expressed that the real value of community transport is the emotional connection and the ability to build long-term trust over the years. Nowadays, community transport is being supported by volunteers and paid staff, which often come from different paths of life, but with one objective, serve the senior Australians in our community.

Joanne's Story - The Gift of the Passenger Seat



For Joanne Burns, volunteering with South East Volunteers Inc is more than driving, it's connection, purpose, and compassion. After retiring, she saw a small ad looking for drivers. ***"I enjoy driving,"*** she thought. ***"Maybe I can help."*** - Years later, she's still behind the wheel, helping in ways that go far beyond transport.

She offers her passengers time, kindness, and a listening ear. Sometimes, she's the only person a senior Australian has spoken to in days. And that, she shared, is what reassures her commitment to continue helping the community. ***"When I go home after a shift, I feel like I've made someone's life a little easier. That's fulfilment."*** Joanne's passengers often share stories they haven't told anyone in years.

"Sometimes all they need is someone to listen" - she says. ***"That little moment in the car can mean everything."*** She's met people from all walks of life, each ride a window into someone's world. For many, it's not just about getting to an appointment it's about feeling seen, respected, and independent. There are challenges, but Joanne sees them as growth. ***"Volunteering gives back more than it takes. You give a little, and you get so much more in return."***

ACTA's Advocacy Position:

Both paid staff and volunteers are essential to community transport each brings unique strengths and skills, and both face distinct challenges. Volunteers may reduce direct wage costs but, like paid staff, they still require coordination, training, and ongoing support. Paid staff provide in some cases more availability and coverage of complex service delivery for high support needs trips. An adequate pricing model must include the costs of holistic human resources practices to attract, retain and develop, both paid staff and volunteers.

There is no sustainable transport without a sustainable workforce. Flexible workforce models, realistic pricing, targeted workforce investment, and policies that reflect the true cost of service delivery are essential.



One Size Does Not Fit All:

The need of a blended workforce approach

Community transport services rely on both volunteers and paid staff, each bringing unique strengths, but both requiring structured support, investment, and management. While volunteer-led models can help reduce direct wage costs, they still involve significant operational expenses, including:

1

Dedicated volunteer coordination and management oversight.

2

Mandatory training and compliance requirements (e.g., dementia awareness, first aid, manual handling).

3

Insurance, uniforms, and meal or mileage reimbursements.

4

Coordination overhead due to limited volunteer availability, with many volunteers working two shifts a week.

5

Ongoing attraction, recruitment, retention, and development to maintain a sustainable volunteer base.

Providers overwhelmingly advocate for diversified and flexible workforce models, rather than a one-size-fits-all mandate. For example:

- **Care in Motion** operates with a mixed workforce comprising both volunteers and paid staff. All drivers are volunteers, while administrative duties are carried out by paid staff.

- **Access Sydney** operates with a fully paid workforce model, supplemented by volunteers who assist in coordinating social outings and gatherings, particularly with culturally diverse community members. To learn more about this business model please read Angela and Paula's story on page 10 and 11.

It is worth noting that several organisations stress the need to clearly separate paid and volunteer roles to reduce liability, training burden, and burnout.

The National Community Transport Pricing Model (NCTPM) recognises that volunteers are not "free", their contribution requires real investment, just like paid staff. The model proposes a blended workforce benchmark (36% volunteer, 64% paid) as a guide, not a mandate.

Organisations must retain the flexibility to design workforce structures that reflect:

- ▶ Local demographics and cultural needs.
- ▶ The realities of thin markets, where workforce attraction is more challenging.
- ▶ The equal importance of both paid staff and volunteers in service delivery.

The message is clear:

if we want safe, reliable, person-centred transport for senior Australians, we must invest in the people who deliver it, both paid and volunteer workforce.

Regardless of workforce composition, providers face costs and compliance responsibilities that must be acknowledged and accurately funded to ensure safety, service quality, and sustainability.

Angela and Paula: Two Paths, One Purpose

On the left is Angela, a paid community transport driver. On the right is Paula, a dedicated volunteer.

Their journeys are different, but together they embody the heart of what makes community transport possible.



After being made redundant, Angela was uncertain about her next step; until a friend suggested a driver role with Access Sydney. What began as a job quickly became a calling. ***“From the very first day,”*** she says, ***“I found this job incredibly rewarding.”*** For Angela, it’s not just about driving, it’s about care, connection, and consistency. Helping a client to the car, finding them a shopping trolley for balance, these small acts, she highlighted, ***“make a world of difference.”***

Paula’s path began over a decade ago through her local multicultural group. What started as helping others make bookings at Access Sydney, evolved into leading community outings for Vietnamese seniors. ***“Volunteering gives me purpose,”*** she expressed. ***“It makes the city feel smaller and safer.”*** Once, she helped alert a client’s son after she found her unresponsive during a community transport pick-up. ***“Some people are alone for a long time,”*** Paula reflects. ***“Just showing up can change someone’s life.”***

Angela and Paula are a testament to why a blended workforce matters. Paid staff bring structure, safety, and daily reliability. Volunteers bring community, culture, and trust. Both need support. Both need investment. And together, they keep community transport moving.

Volunteerism in **Decline**

The sector is experiencing a concerning decline in volunteer recruitment and retention, with providers reporting increasing difficulty in maintaining a reliable, sustainable volunteer base.



Several interlinked factors are driving this trend, such as:

- The lasting impacts of COVID-19,
- The cost-of-living crisis
- A generational shift in attitudes toward volunteering
- Significant federal policy changes, which have replaced long-standing, place-based volunteer recruitment models with predominantly online-only systems managed by state-based organisations.
- Chronic underinvestment in volunteer infrastructure, including the services, resources, and support systems that enable organisations to recruit, train, and retain volunteers effectively, as well as enhance their overall volunteer experience.

“It’s incredibly tricky to find volunteers now. People who would have volunteered are looking after grandkids or still working. And the younger generation just isn’t interested.”

-Anonymous Community Transport Provider Representative

Some areas report stable numbers, while others struggle to fill a single roster. Where volunteers were once the lifeblood of community transport, some organisations now say their survival depends on transitioning to a fully paid workforce; if funding could support it.

"If we had to replace volunteers with paid staff, our service wouldn't be viable. Not without full funding for wages, vehicles, insurance — everything."

-Anonymous Community Transport Provider Representative

Volunteers' Stories from the Front Seat of Community Transport



For two community transport volunteers, one from a coastal city with Volunteering Gold Coast (VGC) and the other from a small town on the Yorke Peninsula with Care in Motion, volunteering behind the wheel isn't just about transport. It's about connection, compassion, and community.

After 18 months with VGC, Jim reflects:

"It's an honour to support some of our most vulnerable getting them to medical appointments, shopping, or social outings they'd otherwise miss. Over time, I've built deep, meaningful connections, especially with clients who have speech impairments. Learning to understand and support them has left a lasting impact."



South Australia, Care In Motion

In regional South Australia, Karen, volunteer driver at Care In Motion shares a more personal motivation:

"My father was a volunteer driver over 30 years ago. As retirement approached, I knew this was how I wanted to give back."

“One client, fleeing domestic violence, opened up during a three-hour trip. Just being a calm, non-judgemental listener made all the difference.”

Both volunteer drivers speak of how the role has transformed their lives, connecting them more deeply with their communities and reinforcing the importance of empathy and trust.

Their advice to others?

“Just do it. There are so many good people who need a helping hand, and you might just find it’s the best thing you do for yourself, too.”



QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Email us at **info@communitytransportaustralia.org.au**