

*What if I told you....that you could establish a completely sustainable community transport organisation in your region, free from ongoing Government funding? **Would you be interested?***

**MORNINGTON  
PENINSULA  
SHIRE**

## INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS



*And what if I also told you, that apart from Community Buses, this service also provided volunteers using their own vehicles to provide residents with access to appointments and other essential services? **Still interested?***

# Innovative Community Transport Solutions

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## Case Study

### Background

The Frankston & Mornington Peninsula Community Transport Network<sup>1</sup> (FMPCTN) originated in 2012 with one off funding from the State Government and Bendigo Bank (\$100K). No ongoing funding was provided and therefore sustainability was paramount if this service was to succeed and continue.

With no other community transport organisations operating in the LGA's above, demand for 'Volunteer Assisted Community Transport' was premium. The region was 'Asset' rich (mini-buses) however agencies owning buses (that were underutilised) were reluctant to share them. By sharing resources, organisations can reduce their transport service costs making their programs more affordable for disadvantaged people.

A number of partner organisations, saw an opportunity to develop a sustainable resource sharing model to fill this void.

### Excerpt of Original Project Plan

#### Aim of initiative

To increase access to existing community transport assets in the region of Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula thereby enabling, community agencies/groups and residents, to participate in, and attend, appointments for social inclusion, education and health.

#### Objective

The community transport model developed will identify and utilise the spare capacity of community vehicles and volunteer resources in the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston by enabling organisations to join a resource sharing network. This will bring about better transport outcomes for individuals who need transport and agencies that provide community transport.

### The Model

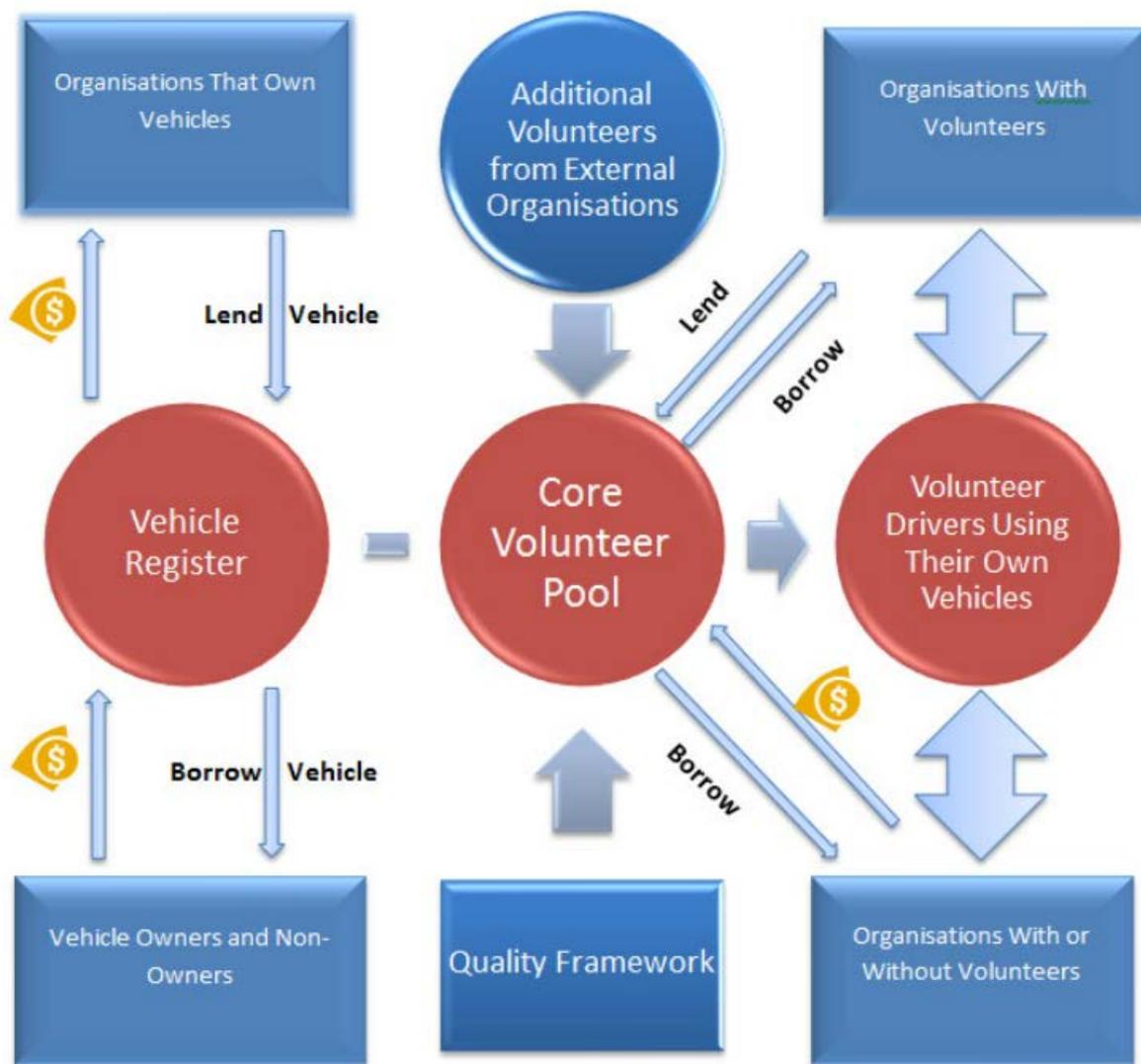
The original model of operation (next page) was used to launch the project and operated unchanged for the first 2 years.

Three main categories of the model are:

- The vehicle register
- The volunteer (bus) drivers pool, and;
- Volunteer drivers using their own vehicle

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<sup>1</sup> Now called Peninsula Transport Assist Incorporated



Organisations who own bus/s but have spare capacity, deposit their bus/s into the vehicle register for use by other agencies. In return, they get cost recover for their bus use paid to them by the borrowing organisation. They are free to also access the vehicle register if they require additional vehicles for their programs.

The volunteer pool is made up of volunteers who wish to drive mini-buses that belong to other organisations OR mini-buses from the vehicle register.

Volunteer drivers using their own vehicles provide door to door mobility assistance for residents who need to access essential services, social inclusion events or for any other reason.

*Access to these services is provided to people who are considered 'Transport Disadvantaged' and is not subject to external assessments or doctor's recommendation.*

### Sustainability

In June 2014, the FMPCTN became an 'Incorporated Association' with DGR and PBI status, thus enabling us to apply for various community and philanthropic grants to further grow our operation. A name change was also made to Peninsula Transport Assist Inc. (PTA), [www.peninsulatransportassist.org](http://www.peninsulatransportassist.org)

## Pricing

To sustain the operation, which employs two part-time Transport Coordinators, PTA must charge 'cost-recovery' for its services. As a 'Not-for-Profit' organisation with DGR and PBI status PTA is a charity and therefore all surplus funds go straight back into growing the service.

Volunteer drivers using their own vehicles are reimbursed by PTA per km/s they drive and an additional booking fee is charged by PTA for administrative costs.

Buses in the vehicle register vary in price for hire, depending on the agency that owns them. Each agency is free to charge their own 'cost-recovery' fee. An additional booking fee is charged to the hiring organisation for PTA's administrative costs. PTA reimburses owning organisations at the end of each month for each booking of their bus.

Volunteer bus drivers are charged out at 4 hour lots to organisations who require PTA volunteers to drive their own buses, or buses hired from the PTA vehicle register.

PTA PRICING SCHEDULE as at 18 <sup>th</sup> November 2015				
Drivers using their own vehicle	Cost to Client	Driver Paid	PTA Paid	Notes
Up to 20km	\$25	\$10	\$15	
20 – 55 km	0.50c p/km + \$15	0.50c p/km	\$15	
Over 55 km	0.77c p/km	0.50c p/km	0.27c p/km	
<b>Mini Buses</b>				
				All buses must be returned fully fuelled or \$25 fee applies
PTA owned buses	\$95 per 24 hours	N/A	\$95	\$50 cancellation fee applies if cancelled within 72 hours
Buses belonging to other agencies (owning agency sets cost recovery amount)	\$95 - \$124	N/A	\$30	As above
<b>Volunteer bus drivers</b>				
Up to 4 hours	\$45 + 0.50c p/km from drivers house to bus pick up location	0.50c p k/m from house to bus pick up and drop off	\$45	
Up to 8 hours	\$75 + 0.50c p/km from drivers house to bus pick up location	0.50c p k/m from house to bus pick up and drop off	\$75	
Discounts negotiated for all regular users across all services				

\* The fee schedule is constantly monitored and altered to ensure cash flow is sufficient for operational costs. Economies of scale ensure that the more services booked, the cheaper it becomes to provide the service.

## Compliance and Insurance

Compliance with the Bus Safety Act 2009 and the Bus Safety Regulations 2010 is not negotiable.

Robust policies and procedures, codes of conduct and other procedural documents must be developed and reviewed annually (at least) to ensure continues compliance and quality control.

Specialised insurances exist within the community services sector to ensure buses belonging to other organisations are covered for additional things like, replacement vehicle (up to 5 weeks), refund of insurance excess and refund of any premium hike due to an 'at fault' accident.

This will be the main objection when attempting to encourage bus owners to contribute their vehicle to the vehicle pool!!

## Challenges to Recruit Buses

When marketing your innovative 'model' to potential stakeholders to encourage buses to be shared amongst community groups, you will be challenged with the 'BUT' word.

"BUT what happens if my bus is involved in an accident whilst being used by PTA?"

As we mentioned above, this is a completely unfounded fear as specialised insurance is available to cover this risk. Called 'Non-Owned Vehicle Insurance' (AON Insurance) this product will replace a bus/car involved in at 'at-fault' accident for up to 5 weeks whilst being used by PTA (or other community transport organisation). Additional benefits include;

- Refund of insurance excess payable by owning organisation to have the bus repaired under their comprehensive vehicle insurance policy (up to \$2000)
- Refund of premium difference should their insurance company increase their premium due to accident

"BUT what do I get out of it?" OR "What's in it for me (my organisation)?"

Organisations who contribute their vehicle to the PTA pool when they are not using it, get a \$\$\$\$ amount paid monthly each time their vehicle is used by a third party. Owning organisations can set their own 'cost-recovery' amount as this will vary between agencies. Beats having an asset sitting idle in the car park! Some organisations are earning in excess of \$700 per month that they can put right back into their programmed activities or other operational costs.

## Recruiting Volunteer Drivers

PTA currently has 50 volunteer drivers of which 15 are willing to drive both buses and their vehicles to provide access for clients.

Whilst many volunteers have expressed a selfless desire to make themselves (and their car) available to ensure transport disadvantaged community members have affordable access to essential services, others look at it as a great way to earn some (non-taxable) pocket money. The reimbursement offered to volunteer drivers who use their own vehicles is categorised by the ATO as 'cost recovery' and therefore not taxable.

PTA has not experienced difficulty with recruiting volunteers and receives a steady flow of requests to join. During the establishment phase, PTA advertised for volunteers through print media, visits to clubs such as RSL's, Lions and Rotary and posters placed in community noticeboards at shopping centres.

A vigorous volunteer driver training and vetting procedure must be established prior to launching such a service. Ensuring someone with volunteer management skills is available as part of the project is essential.

Volunteers want to be treated and valued exactly the same way a paid employee would expect to be treated. Job satisfaction is almost guaranteed, as strong reports are quickly established between clients and volunteers.

### **Launching and Servicing the Community**

After PTA developed the model and their foundation policies and procedures they found that they had already established partnerships with community groups and organisations due to their vehicle and volunteer pool recruitment.

Networking and word of mouth quickly spread and the phone started ringing..... and ringing. The flexibility with our recruitment of a Transport Coordinator meant that staff hours could be built up slowly as needed.

We were careful not to engage in full scale advertising and marketing to begin with as the staff member was basically starting from scratch in unknown territory. They were developing the operating procedure for the day to day coordination of client requests with volunteer matching and bus bookings.

### **Usage & Marketing of Services**

Current usage is strong across both the bus hire bookings and the volunteer drivers using their own vehicles service.

There has been an even 300% increase across both areas since January 2015. This exponential growth is largely due to the skills of our new Transport Coordinator who started in November 2014 and the work of the Committee of Management through their strategic planning to ensure growth across these areas. Regular visits to clubs and organisations to market PTA services have also provided low cost advertising.

PTA currently assists over 450 transport disadvantaged community members monthly, with access to medical appointments, programmed activity groups, educational activities and social inclusion events.

Little, if any, print media advertising was undertaken during 2015, as this year PTA concentrated on streamlining their operational procedures and increasing their volunteer driver intake to meet demand.

### **Conclusion**

Was this a giant leap of faith? Of course it was. We were developing an ideological concept based on a belief that community transport resources could be better utilised within our community by sharing them amongst agencies and residents.

We started as a small group of people representing a variety of different organisations but sharing and believing that we could make this happen.

The 'Transport Assist' model is being developed to allow for implementation in other regions. Why can't there be a Casey Transport Assist, or a Melton Transport Assist? There can, and with the right investment and continued improvement, members of Peninsula Transport Assist Inc., will be well placed to assist with this duplication across other areas in Victoria.

The information provided in this handout is brief and clearly not intended to provide a sound foundation to develop a community transport project independently.