

Annual Report & Report on Public Benefit

Armagh Rural Transport Ltd (ART)

REPORTING PERIOD

1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023

TRUSTEES

Dermot Mooney	<i>Chairperson</i>
Bridget Smith	<i>Vice Chairperson</i>
David McMullen	<i>Secretary & Company Secretary</i>
Eileen Stewart	<i>Treasurer</i>
Sylvia McRoberts	
Sheila Curry	
Sam Nicholson	
James Clifford	

BANKERS

Bank of Ireland
11 Upper English Street
Armagh
Co. Armagh
BT61 7BH

AUDITORS

WHR Accountants Ltd
Chartered Certified Accountants
Statutory Auditors
56 English Street
Armagh
Co. Armagh
BT61 7LG

TRUSTEES REPORT

The trustees, who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, submit their Annual Report and the audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Companies Act 2006 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) effective 1 January 2015) (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), in preparing the annual report and financial statements of the charity.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

Armagh Rural Transport Ltd (ART) was first established in 2000 as a Company Limited by Guarantee No. NI 37744 governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association under the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 on 19th January 2000.

ART is registered as a Charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland No: NIC103125.

The registered office address is Armagh Business Centre, Office Suite 1, 2 Loughgall Road, Armagh, Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland, BT61 7NH.

ART is funded by the Department of Infrastructure (DfI) under their Rural Transport Fund for Northern Ireland.

The trustees of the company are its directors for the purposes of charity law and are collectively referred to as committee members. The number of trustees must not be less than 3 for a committee meeting to proceed. ART is managed by a board of voluntary trustees elected every year from across Armagh and surrounding areas. After each election, an induction session is held for new members of the board to explain the services we provide, guidance on the governance aspects of a trustee's role, an introduction to the strategic aims over the year ahead and an examination of the main threat and opportunities facing the charity.

The day-to-day management of the organisation is delegated to a staff team headed by Diane Irwin (Project Manager), which reports to the Board of trustees 10 to 12 times per year. Sub-committees are created to oversee aspects of work on Southern Area Partnership (SAP), Human Resources matters or purchasing of a bus as the need arises and reports from the sub-committees are presented back to the full board meeting as they occur.

Written policies and procedures detail the decision-making powers which are delegated to staff and those which are retained by the trustees. The project manager has committed to working with the Board on an ongoing programme of review of policies which are used within the organisation.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have a duty to identify and review the risks to which the charity is exposed and to ensure appropriate controls are in place to provide reasonable assurance against fraud and error. Therefore, they have taken a detailed review of the major risks to which the charity is exposed. Risks include the Rural Transport Fund for NI if proposed changes to the 10b permits progress. This funding stream provides the essential key source of the organisation's income to ensure retention of core activities including the office and essential staffing resources. The Board believes the organisation has considered this risk and made provision under the Reserves Policy but will be vigilant of the organisation's risks as developments arise and new funding streams are sought in the coming months. This situation is true for all community transport organisations in Northern Ireland at this point in time, however, ART Trustees are confident that they will be able to sustain the organisation with both current grant, current reserves and new opportunities.

PURPOSES

In ensuring that the activities of ART provide a public benefit, all our activities are related to one or more of the following charitable objects:

To provide relief to the inhabitants of Armagh, Craigavon, Banbridge Council area and its environs (within the geographical area of the Armagh legacy council) who have need because of age, learning or physical disability, or poverty, and in particular because not so as to limit the generality of the foregoing

- a) to provide and maintain non-profit community transport services; and
- b) to assist the charitable work of the organisations and bodies engaged in promoting the relief of such person through the provision of appropriate services.

Objectives and Activities / Public Benefit

During the reporting period the organisation carried out its operations under the following three categories:

1. Dial a Lift (DAL);
2. Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS);
3. Group Hire.

CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REVIEW

As I sit here on a beautiful sunny afternoon in early June attempting to draft a forward to our 23rd Annual report I'm afraid experience over the last year does not match the weather! From facing almost extinction around Easter and the pressures that resulted due to a funding crisis. Our main funder DFI could not allocate funding, as a result we had to suspend services over the Easter week and ask staff to take leave and to issue protective notice to staff.

The allocation of funds by the department was delayed due to having no Government at Stormont and senior civil servants having no certainty of what the block grant would be from the UK Government. Very late in the day we got confirmation of funding for April (having to use our own limited reserves to keep going). This was eventually extended to June and finally July. The valiant efforts of board, members and staff (I sincerely thank them all for their dedication and co-operation) made strenuous efforts through the CTA (Community Transport Association) local political representatives, local press, and radio/TV to appeal for sanity and provide funding for this much needed service.

As regards funding post July nothing is certain, the allocation will probably be based on last years allocation with possibly 5-10% cut and with no allowance for inflation further cuts to the service are envisaged and possible staff reductions which would obviously seriously affect transport provision for our members. We would appeal to all members to strongly raise the issue with political representatives in the area.

Over the past year we have made arduous efforts to maintain the service using our resources to continue in so far as possible transport provision, but we can only do that for a short time. As directors we are legally obliged to maintain sufficient funds for an orderly rundown should no further funding be available. We have made various applications to other funding bodies in an attempt to supplement the funding provided by DFI, but we were not successful however our efforts continue, and I trust that we will be successful.

We were disappointed that we were unable to obtain an electric powered minibus due to the company which took our order going into liquidation. Lower running costs and environmental factors would have been an advantage. We have as far as possible been able to meet requests for transport but there remains a gap in transport provision to hospitals (Craigavon/Daisy Hill/South Tyrone and perhaps Belfast). We are trying to source a funder to meet this specific need who would hopefully provide the much-needed funds.

Overall, the situation does not look great in terms of community transport provision. When we look at the budget for Northern Ireland almost £7.5 Billion goes on health and over £2.5 Billion on Education (A total of £10 Billion) that does not leave a lot to be allocated to other departments. When we look at Community Transport funding for all Northern Ireland it is £2.5 Million – a very small amount.

As I have stressed in previous reports, we are a vital link in community cohesion and we would ask you, our members to make your voices heard. While on that topic I would remind you that DFI are currently carrying out two consultations. The first one in is seeking views of those within the Section 75 groups (Elderly, Disabled, Women) to respond to how you would be affected if funding was cut to Community Transport. Response sheets were issued to everyone, and we strongly urge you to respond. This closes on 7th August 2023. The second consultation is in respect of the Translink public transport pass (entitlement to free/discounted fares on buses/trains including transport provided by ART). Many of our members avail of this scheme and we (ART) can claim some money from the Department when members use their pass when travelling with us. This closes on 24th August 2023 and again we strongly urge you to respond.

This has been a difficult report to write with little positive to say, but one thing remains, we are still here and we are still fighting!

Dermot Mooney, Chairperson of Armagh Rural Transport

PROJECT MANAGER'S REVIEW

As Manager of Armagh Rural Transport (ART) I am delighted to welcome everyone here today to our Twenty-third Annual General Meeting. I present our Annual Review for 2022/23.

Dial a Lift and Assisted Rural Transport Scheme

Dial a Lift (DAL) and the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS) have now been in operation for almost 14 years which allows individual members to travel between the hours of 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday. Over the year ART have completed 9,541 passenger trips and supported 894 users, 49 of which were new members. Within the DAL service members can avail of the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS) project which allows individuals who have a Smart Pass to receive concessionary fares while they travel.

Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS)

ART have a service level agreement with Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) and have delivered transport to our urban members in the Armagh area for the past 10 years. We have welcomed this opportunity to serve the urban population which enables us to provide a cohesive service and make better use of our resources. A total of 1280 trips were completed supporting 368 people.

Group Hire

Our group hire continues to recover from the COVID19 pandemic as it was paused initially and has had a slow start with many groups only beginning to return. We completed 4740 trips between April 2022 to March 2023. Of the 4740 trips the main purpose of using ART's transport was to avail of Religion 39%, followed by Recreation activities 34%. As we put the pandemic behind us it is hoped that groups will avail of ART's transport options that we provide with using ART's driver or training their own volunteer driver to complete trips on their behalf despite the cost-of-living crisis that we have now moved into!

Ulster Farmers Union Donation

ART were quite simply delighted to receive a donation from the Ulster Farmers Union under their Agency Giving Fund of £6,379. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis with fuel and electricity costs rocketing we were overjoyed to receive this which helped us to bridge the gap in our finances.

Transport to Hospital

We wanted to continue to support as many from our local community as we could including offering transport to hospitals. A total of 127 trips were completed to hospitals outside of our operational area.

Changes Vehicles

At the beginning of April 2022, we were delighted to finally take delivery of a long awaited new 10-seater minibus from TBC. There were numerous delays due to COVID, floods and fires in factories to name the most startling! We also sold an older 10-seater minibus which had started giving mechanical bother. This resulted in remaining static, and we therefore still have a fleet of 5 vehicles, made up of 3x 16-seater minibuses and 2x 10-seater minibuses which are all fully accessible.

Changes Staff

There have been no changes to our staff team throughout the year.

Thanks

There have been many challenges and uncertainties this past year however we in ART can pride ourselves on having a reliable, efficient organisation that continues to provide a safe essential transport service for our local community largely thanks to our small but dedicated team of staff and volunteers who offer enthusiasm, hard work, on-going commitment, and loyalty. Therefore, we cannot let this opportunity go by without saying a Big Thank you to all Staff Members: Frances,

Majella, Gerrard, Diane W, Sharon, Robert, John, Martin & Glenn. Also, our Volunteers: Jim, Eugene, Alan, Pamela and Peter. Thanks also go to our Management Committee for the time, commitment and experience they bring to the organisation. I would like to acknowledge our core Funders: DfI through the Rural Transport Fund and DEARA who have been extremely invaluable and played a vital part in the provision of the services we provide.

Future

In Armagh, like all other Community Transport operators' threats, uncertainties and worries have been our bed mate from February 2023 where we were first advised that it was uncertain if we would receive funding for the 2023/24 financial year. I'd like to offer our sincere thanks to everyone who supported our #SaveOurCT campaign by calling or writing letters of support to DFI, MPs, MLAs and local councillors to highlight how valuable and vital the service is to the local community. We fully intend to keep pressure on DfI for adequate levels of continuous funding for the remainder of this year and in the future. #SaveOurCT campaign still has lots to do!

DfI will continue to provide funding for 2023-24 at the same level as last year up to the end of July 2023, we are still anxious given recent press around budget cuts and what that translates to in terms of funding for the remainder of the year, however we are hopeful clarity will be provided soon. Meanwhile, its 'business as usual'! One thing remains sure we will continue to do our utmost to get the best possible outcomes for our members!

Diane Irwin - Project Manager

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

The overall aim of ART's work is to improve the quality of life through the provision of affordable, flexible, and accessible transport to our members.

Key Activities for the year:

Southern Area Partnership (SAP)

Armagh Rural Transport (ART) in conjunction with Down Armagh Rural Transport (DART) and Newry and Mourne Community Transport (NMCT) continue to work in close partnership. We jointly deliver the Dial-A-Lift (DAL) Transport Services to our members in the rural areas of Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Newry and Mourne. With the aim to reduce Rural Isolation by providing an Affordable, Accessible, Safe and Reliable service.

Community Transport Association NI (CTA NI)

The Community Transport Association (CTA) is a national charity that represents and supports providers of community transport: thousands of local charities and community groups across the UK including ART. CTA NI offer advice, guidance, and training, contribute to the formation of public policy and champion the work of the CT sector. We meet bi-monthly.

Armagh Foodbank

ART has been involved with Armagh Foodbank from 2015. Armagh foodbank is a crisis foodbank where you are referred by an agency to receive help of 3 days emergency food supplies. ART support this local charity by offering a collection point to accept donations from the community. To date 875.95Kg has been donated via ART.

ART - Snapshot of the Year

Armagh Rural Transport delivered across Armagh:

1. Dial A Lift (DAL): Individual Transport Services to Rural Dwellers

- o 894 members including 49 new members
- o 107 regular and active users
- o 9544 passenger trips completed

2. Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS): Individual Transport Services to Urban Dwellers

- o 18 regular and active users
- o 1280 passenger trips completed

3. Group Hire:

- o 183 group members
- o 4,788 passenger trips completed

3. Training:

- o We provided MIDAS, and MiDAS Car & MPV Driver Training with 8 Nominated Drivers
- o We trained our Manager in Adult Safeguarding Champion and Keeping Adults Safe: Recruitment, Selection & Management; Minute Taking and Basic 1st Aid
- o We trained our Committee, Staff and Volunteers in Safeguarding Awareness
- o We trained our deputy safeguarding champion Dermot Mooney in Adult Safeguarding Champion.
- o We trained our drivers in periodic Driver CPC & Epilepsy Management

ART Strategy for Sustainability

ART board of directors and management take the strategy and sustainability very seriously. The funding and political future remains extremely uncertain in Northern Ireland within the current climate however ART has successfully built up a firm foundation and a reserve base to ensure we can weather the tough times.

Despite a future that appears to remain new and quite uncertain, we remain very positive and proactive to ensure our financial resources are maximised for our members.

PUBLIC BENEFIT

The direct benefits which flow from our purposes and activities include:

- Strengthened ability of groups and individuals to avail of work, volunteering, recreational, health and personal activities through transport provision in the Armagh Area which will improve their circumstances and opportunities;
- Maximising Access in Rural Areas to Services.
- Access to Rural Transport Funding to tackle poverty and rural needs;
- Access to micro-grants to tackle poverty and rural needs.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

FINANCIAL POSITION AT END OF YEAR

For the year 2023 our income is £212,282 (2022: £233,897) a decrease of £21,615. Our organisation remains in a relatively strong financial position.

OUTSTANDING DEBTS OR LIABILITIES

£94,179 will fall due within one year.

RESERVES POLICY

A Reserves Policy is in place which allows for an annual reserve to be held to ensure that 6 months of the organisations core activity could continue during a period of unforeseen difficulty. For the current year this is estimated to equate to £260,443. The actual reserves at 31 March 2023 are £112,943. To ensure that the organisation holds sufficient reserves to meet any potential scenarios ART aim to add a minimum of £5,000 to our reserves each year however this has not been possible in recent years.

ART's Reserves Policy details why reserves are held, and the level of reserves appropriate for the charity. Designated reserves for various purposes are detailed and a cash flow fund is held to bridge any potential gaps or shortfalls in funding streams and to underpin services that are experiencing cash flow problems. A staffing fund is held to cover all redundancy costs in addition to a designated reserve for the purpose of vehicle replacement.

The trustees review the level of free reserves required (that is those funds not tied up in fixed assets, designated and restricted funds) on an annual basis to ensure continuity of charitable operations.

FINANCIAL MITIGATION

The Trustees of ART acknowledge and understand the current financial, environmental and political situation and are taking steps to both control and manage the situation in this current year. The Trustees are confident of the performance of the organisation for the coming 12-month period and will keep a watching brief on the accounts in these austere times. ART receives core funding from the Department for Infrastructure's Rural Transport Fund in addition to seeking funding from a range of government and charitable organisations and discharges these funds in pursuit of its charitable objectives and the particular services we provide.

FUNDS HELD BY THE CHARITY AS A CUSTODIAN TRUSTEE

The Charity holds no funds as custodian trustees on behalf of others.

FUTURE STRATEGY

The Company plans to continue in developing its services in line with its strategic priorities outlined above and it will seek to develop collaborative partnerships within the Southern Area and other Community Transport Partnerships. Funding arrangements will be kept under review in relation to demands for the service and constraints on public expenditure. As a Community Transport organisation, we take seriously our role in supporting the local rural and community infrastructure, disseminating best practice, and sharing opportunities so that communities can move away from loneliness and isolation.

BENEFICIARIES

The charity's beneficiaries are people living in rural and urban Armagh who meet our criteria and become members.

RESTRICTIONS ON WHO CAN BENEFIT

Only Members may avail of our services.

Fares vary depending on the service availed off.

PRIVATE BENEFIT

Volunteers receive valuable experience and satisfaction in addition to out of pocket expenses.

HARM

No harm has flowed from any of our Purposes.

SERIOUS INCIDENT REPORTING

There are no serious incidents to report.

VULNERABLE BENEFICIARIES

Appropriate Policies, Procedures and Training are in place such as Safeguarding and POCVA Policies and Procedures.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The Trustees have complied with their duty to have due regard to the Charity Commission NI's Public Benefit Guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

By order of the Board:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Murray', written over a horizontal line.

Chairperson (For the accounting period)
1st August 2023