

Annual Report Report on Public Benefit

Armagh Rural Transport Ltd

(ART)

REPORTING PERIOD

1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024

TRUSTEES

Dermot Mooney	Chairperson
Bridget Smith	Vice Chairperson
David McMullen	Secretary & Company Secretary
Eileen Stewart	Treasurer
Sylvia McRoberts	
Sheila Curry	
Sam Nicholson	
Denise Hayward	
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: NICI 03125.

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 Joanne Curran (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

Welcome everyone to our 24th AGM. As I draft this forward to our annual report, I have to say it has been the most difficult year post covid for the organisation.

It is now approaching mid-August and in tune with the weather it is hard to be optimistic about the long-term future of services provided by community transport organisations throughout NI.

The situation funding wise is almost identical to the previous with no increase and effectively a cut of 15% from the previous year, despite appeals from various political representatives and advocacy bodies (notably CTA – community transport association) across the region there was no uplift in funding from DFI (Department of Infrastructure) however we do have the opportunity to meet with the department in late September and impress upon the minister (John O'Dowd) the urgent need for realistic funding.

Looking briefly at expenditure for 24/25 for the first three months (April to June 24) we have an overspend of approx. £6000. Clearly this situation cannot continue as our depleted reserves will be further eroded and we would be breaking the law in continuing to trade so we will have to consider a cut in service, staff numbers, hours, increase fares or a combination of all three unless more funding comes to hand fairly soon.

We were advised by Diane Irwin (project manager) in late October that she was resigning from her post (having been with the organisation over 20 years) Dianes resignation caught us by surprise and as Christmas was approaching, we had to delay applicant interviews until the new year, but no one suitable could be found and we had to re-advertise with an increase in salary. We eventually managed to appoint Joanne Curran in early March who although had no experience in community transport proved to be a worthy successor. In very recent times (Aug 24) Frances Toner (Senior Admin) also resigned having been with us for 20 years. Frances has now moved on to other employment. Peter Colvin also resigned from the Board for health reasons and Denise Hayward (CEO of volunteer now) was appointed some months ago to the

Board. We are seeking new Board members particularly with skills in finances / accounts fundraising, IT and HR. if you or someone you know might be interested and live in the old legacy area of Armagh City and District could you please drop a line to Joanne Curran outlining why you would like to be a Board member and what skills you feel you have which would prove to be an asset to the organisation. We are seeking social car drivers – volunteers who use their own vehicles to transport members. Volunteers can decide how much or how little time they feel they can contribute. As with Board membership no remuneration is payable but all out of pocket expenses will be reimbursed. If you know of anyone who would be interested could you please contact Joanne. The social car scheme is very popular with members and allows ART to provide transport to many in a cost-effective way.

The timing of Dianes departure was unfortunate as it coincided with a funding bid to another organisation and although Diane and David (Board member) had put a lot of work into the application it was not deemed sufficient to convince the funders that sufficient thought had been given to forging sufficient strong links with network partners particularly the SHSST. However we remain positive and are making every effort to forge stronger links and resubmit a similar application in due course. The second issue also relates to funding particularly to our main funder DFI and the need to submit bids post-Christmas this proved extremely difficult to those Board members tasked with completing the application form, most if not all had scant knowledge of realistic costings and it proved extremely stressful to get figures to the department by the deadline. I would estimate for the period Nov 23 to March 24 (5 months) I provided at least 200 voluntary hours in pursuance of the objectives of ART and I'm sure it was similar for some other board members.

It was particularly annoying when some surplus funds over £13 million became available to the Department (DFI) it was all awarded to Translink. £2 – 3 million extras would have made a tremendous difference to services provided by community transport partnerships. We (CTA and the 11 community transport partnerships) had asked the department to uplift their funding to over £5 million (currently £2.25 million) to take account of inflation and cuts imposed over

the last 10 years. However I remain fully committed to ARTS vision statement and to pursue for its members all resources for this necessary service. I would sincerely hope that funding can be secured for a minimum of 3 years (5 years would be ideal) in order to eliminate the yearly crisis. I would pay tribute to all current staff for their dedication and loyalty, Board members particularly Eileen, James and David, admin staff, full time drivers, zero hours drivers and volunteer drivers finally to our new manager Joanne who is a visionary looking at issues from a different perspective and has worked very closely with myself in progressing / reviewing issues. It is hoped we would be successful in obtaining additional funding even from other sources and that our members need can be accommodated in a realistic way. As the saying goes “the darkest hour is just before dawn” we hope for a better tomorrow and that members will feel satisfied in the service we provide.

PROJECT MANAGER'S REVIEW

As Manager of Armagh Rural Transport (ART) I am delighted to welcome everyone here today to our Twenty-fourth Annual General Meeting. I present our Annual Review for 2023/24.

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 15 years which allows individual members to travel between the hours of 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday. Over the year ART have completed 9,398 passenger trips and supported 897 users, 29 of which were new members. Within the DAL service members you 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 11 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 1398 trips were completed supporting 370 people.

Group Hire

Our group hire continues to recover from the COVID19. . We completed 6620 trips between April 2023 to March 2024. Of the 6620 trips the main purpose of using ART's transport was to avail of Religion 53%, followed by Recreation activities 22%. This service has seen a 39 percent increase on last year. We hope that groups will continue to 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 are in the middle of.

Transport to Hospital

We continue to want to support as many from our local community as we could including offering transport to hospitals. A total of 52 trips were completed to hospitals outside of our operational area. This service has seen a significant reduction in demand from last year.

Vehicles update

Our fleet of 5 vehicles has remained static this year. Made up of 3x 16-seater minibuses and 2x 10-seater minibuses which are all fully accessible.

Changes to Staffing

This year Diane Irwin project manager decided after 20 years' service to move on, having obtained more secure alternative employment. After two recruitment attempts a new project manager – Joanne Curran was appointed and commenced employment at the beginning of March 24. Frances Toner – senior admin terminated her employment after 20 years with the organisation. Frances left the organisation at the end of August. We have recruited a new admin person Sinead who will commence employment at the beginning of October. We continue to recruit zero-hour minibus drivers.

Additional funding

This year additional funding from the Community Foundation (ARN) to the value of £10000 was secured to provide 12 trips. Its aim was to provide those who are socially isolated or elderly to attend day trips where they could interact with others in addition to enjoying a meal. This project commenced in August 23 and finished in July 24. A range of day trips were provided which included trips to the cinema, seaside, Christmas shopping, a talk on financial management as well as mood and food. Feedback from these activities was very positive.

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: Majella, Gerrard, Diane W, Sharon, Robert, John, Martin & Eamon. Also, our Volunteers: Jim, Patricia and , Pamela. Thanks also go to our Management Committee for the time, commitment and experience they bring to the organisation. For the support and commitment, they provided in the absence of a manager and for the support they continue to provide. 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. We along with CTA continue to lobby MLAs and minister John O'Dowd to press for more realistic funding. A priority this year is to seek additional funding that will enable us to reduce our over heads and to develop and enhance our services. We are currently working on an application to the Motability foundation, this will if successful enable us to grow our fleet of buses and increase our passenger journeys. We remain hopeful for the future and committed to overcoming the challenges that lie ahead.

Joanne Curran - 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. We also provide a delivery service for the foodbank.

ART - Snapshot of the Year

Armagh Rural Transport delivered across Armagh:

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

897 members including 29 new members

87 regular and active users

9398 passenger trips completed

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

23 regular and active users

1389 passenger trips completed

3. Group Hire:

32 active groups

6620 passenger trips completed

3. Training:

We provided MIDAS, and MiDAS Car & MPV Driver Training with 7 Nominated Drivers

We trained our Manager in Adult Safeguarding Champion and Keeping Adults Safe: We provided

health and safety refresher training to all our staff and drivers. We provided all our staff and

admin staff with GDPR refresher training. All drivers took part in a deaf awareness session.

ART Strategy for Sustainability

ART board of directors and management take the strategy and sustainability very seriously. With Stormont back in operation, we continue to lobby our local MLAs and politicians for support. We remain hopeful for the future and that in the long term more secure funding can be obtained.

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 2024 our income is £218,193 (2023: £212,282) an increase of £5,911.00. Our expenditure rose from £104,510 in 2023 to £117,978 in 2024 as a result for the year end of 23/24 we had a deficit of £7,691. In comparison to last year, we have reduced our deficit from £22,966.

The majority of our funding was derived from the DFI, other funding was derived from Disability Actions. group hire, fares and membership. Interest on our bank accounts generated £2,467 in income. During the year we spend £225,884. With £135,095 being spend on salaries. We spend £26,520 on fuel and vehicle repairs. £6,448 was spent on insurance. For a full break down refer to income and expenditure reports attached.

Our organisation remains in a relatively strong financial position.

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 £108,256.62. The actual reserves at 31 March 2024 are £115,413.16 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 discharge 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:

Chairperson (For the accounting period)
12th September 2024

