



Exeter Community Transport Association

2009

End of year round up

Introduction

2009 had proved to be a very busy and exciting year for ECTA with lots of changes and developments across our services. The purpose of this report is to keep you up to speed on what's been happening here at ECTA in 2009 and to give you an insight of what to expect in 2010.

Shopmobility

Shopmobility, our flagship service, has gone from strength to strength this year with lots of developments and improvements. The service, which provides the hire of wheelchairs and scooters to help people access the City Centre has seen a 10% increase in users during 2009, with close to 600 new users enjoying our service for the first time.

We have also been fortunate enough to make some vast improvements to our fleet of wheelchairs and scooters, through a mixture of selling donated equipment and successful fundraising. We have added 6 new scooters to the fleet, along with 1 power chair and 3 manual wheelchairs. The new additions have ensured that our fleet is able to cater for a wide range of clientele and their specific disabilities, allowing our users to access Exeter with ease. Huge thanks must go out to the generous individuals, nursing homes and the various charitable trusts for making this possible.

Many charities have faced financial difficulties during the recession, ECTA included. For this reason 2009 also saw the change from our old deposit based system to a £4 charge for the hire of our wheelchairs and scooters. This was seen as essential to ensure the financial viability and continuation of the service and has not impacted on the number of people hiring our vehicles. Almost without exception our users have been very understanding and continue to use our service on a regular basis.

We have received some wonderful feedback from our Shopmobility users this year and some of the comments are listed below:

“Very helpful staff. Very pleasant. Best mobility shop I have ever been in.”

“I always find Exeter mobility staff most helpful and they provide a vital service and support for those of us unable to get around as we need to.”

“This service is excellent, the staff are very helpful and the cost is very good.”

“Wonderful warm kind and caring staff both on the telephone and when arriving at the department. Excellent demonstration of scooters. Certainly made our day’s visit to Exeter a very memorable time.”

In 2010 we will be continuing in the same vein and planning is underway for new additions to our fleet of vehicles in order to continue to offer the best service we can for our users.

Ring & Ride

Ring & Ride, our door to door accessible bus, has had a steady year and continues to provide a valued, reliable service for people unable to use regular public transport. During 2009, the services’ user base has increased by 5%, which equates to almost 50 new passengers.

Demand has seen us increase the frequency of trips and lunch outings, which are proving very popular. At the request of our passengers, the lunch club has increased from meeting once a month to twice a month, giving them the opportunity to enjoy meals and socialise at local pubs and restaurants with a variety of venues on offer. The summer trips remain popular and this year our passengers have been able to visit places such as Buckfast Abbey, Bicton Gardens, Jack’s Patch, plus many more. 2010 will see us revisiting the most popular destinations and adding new ones, following consultation with our passengers.

Whilst it would be nice to report that 2009 has been without difficulties for Ring & Ride, unfortunately there have been some problems with our vehicle. Earlier this year, there were some maintenance problems with our bus and the quote for the repair work effectively made the vehicle a write off. Currently we are running the service using a Devon County Council spare vehicle, though a new purpose built bus is due in mid 2010.

Behind the scenes at ECTA, there has also been a lot of work going on towards the development of the service. Currently there are a number of surrounding parishes of Exeter that have no Ring & Ride services available to them. We have been visiting these parishes to talk to local residents about the possibility of extending our service to cover these areas. Research into this is ongoing and subject to interest and demand, 2010 should see us introduce new routes for the areas most in need.

The staff and volunteers here at ECTA would also like to use this space to pay our respects to Mrs Dorothy Baker, who passed away in November 2009. Mrs Baker had been using the Ring & Ride service since its earliest days and she was very popular with staff, volunteers and fellow passengers. She will be sorely missed.

Leisuremobility

It was with sadness that ECTA's Leisuremobility service came to a close in June 2009. The service which provided wheelchairs and scooters for local attractions and events, had its last outing at the Devon County Show.

Leisuremobility was always a very costly service to run and the funding it attracted rarely met the project budget. With the economic downturn, the difficult decision was reached to close Leisuremobility in the interests of ensuring the stability of ECTA's more established day to day services.

In order to ensure that wheelchairs and scooters are still available at large events such as the Devon County Show in future years, we did contact other CTAs with Leisuremobility units prior to the closure and gained assurances that the needs of disabled people at these events would be met by these other organisations.

ExeAccess

ExeAccess, our wheelchair accessible taxi service, was set up in 2008 following a successful application to the Big Lottery Fund. Having already established a steady and loyal customer base, the biggest challenge of 2009 has been securing funding to ensure the continuation of the service after the lottery grant ran out. Happily, several charitable trusts recognised the valuable contribution the service makes to our passengers' lives and awarded significant grants to cover the running costs of the service. Our heartfelt thanks go these trusts for recognising and meeting the need for accessible transport for people with mobility problems.

Over the course of 2009 ExeAccess has almost doubled its user base, with an increase of 91% of unique passengers carried since 2008. This equates to 172 new passengers and the growth of the service looks set to steadily continue.

We have also made some changes to the service to ensure its financial viability. Due to poor usage on the weekends, we withdrew the regular Saturday and Sunday service. Bookings at weekends still may be made by prior agreement, but we are no longer on call during these days.

After assessment of usage figures, it was also decided that the work that ExeAccess undertakes could be accomplished using just one taxi. We therefore made the decision to sell our second, underused vehicle in order to raise revenue to contribute to the running costs of the service. The service has been running successfully with our current vehicle which remains popular with passengers. The electronic swivel seat fitted in December 2008 remains the only one of its kind on the Exeter taxi circuit and rear loading hydraulic ramp allows wheelchairs to be pushed straight into the vehicle with ease.

City Sights

City Sights is a new string to ECTA's bow, launched in May 2009. The service has been set up to provide volunteer sighted guides to blind and partially sighted people, to enable them to access Exeter's shops and attractions.

The launch party took place at the ECTA offices on May 1st and was well attended by local interest groups, local politicians, volunteers and service users and the service was officially launched by Emily Wood, the weather presenter from BBC Spotlight.

City Sights has initially seen a slow take up, with the biggest challenge of 2009 being publicising the service to the people who need it. As with any project like this, often the most difficult part of the initial set up is ensuring the information reaches these people. City Sights continues to receive excellent support from the Express & Echo and Exeter FM and with their continued support 2010 will see further marketing.

There are a number of people that ECTA would like to thank for the invaluable help and support with the set up of City Sights. Much of the research and development of the service was undertaken by a group of Social Work students on placement from the University of Plymouth. Huge thanks must go to the students, June Barney, Jackie Berry, Sarah Hames and Lauren Wood for all of their hard work. Thanks also to Mike Taun and John Barrington-Rowell for their invaluable advice and experience. Finally, ECTA would like to thank the fantastic teams of Volunteer Sighted Guides, without which the service would not be able to run.

Taxicard

Taxicard remains a valuable support to disabled people in Exeter relying on taxis for their travel. Available to people with a permanent, severe disability and in receipt of either the higher rate of disability living allowance or attendance allowance, the service provides refunds of half of all taxi fares to a maximum amount of £125 a year.

2009 has seen 41 new Taxicards issued, increasing the number of Taxicard holders by 13%. Over £7,000 of taxi fares have been refunded, making it more affordable for disabled people to travel in Exeter.

The Taxicard scheme is funded by Exeter City Council and Devon County Council and we thank them for their ongoing support in ensuring that the needs of disabled people are met.

Other Developments

Aside from the services themselves, 2009 has also seen a number of other developments. The most notable one is the opening in April 2009 of our Charity Shop, Shop 4 ECTA. The shop, based opposite our office in Paris Street has been set up to raise revenue to support our existing services and enable the development of new ones. The shop has proved very

popular with both our service users and members of the general public, with an ever changing variety of stock keeping the shop fresh and interesting. As ever, donations are very welcome and gratefully received.

2009 has also seen a raft of successful events to raise ECTA's profile and raise funds. July saw the introduction of what will now be an annual boat cruise, sailing from Exmouth up the Exe Estuary. The event, which had a live band and an on board barbeque, was well attended and helped to raise over £400. We will be doing the same in 2010 and the date for your diaries is 3rd July 2010.

Another high profile event for ECTA was the Gig in the Garden, a one day music festival which took place in September at the Woodleigh Coach House in Cheriton Bishop. There were 10 different bands performing, a sumo arena and gladiator jousting, not forgetting the sponsored baked bean bath. It was a thoroughly enjoyable day which made over £2,000 profit and this was split evenly between ECTA and Devon Air Ambulance. This is also an event you can expect to see again in 2010.

Mid 2009 also saw the set up of a dedicated ECTA Volunteer Fundraising Team, who have been working extremely hard at researching and organising events in the Exeter area. There have been two Scooter Taster Days raising awareness of our Shopmobility service which have taken place in Exeter's Guildhall and Princesshay Shopping Centre. There is also now a monthly coffee morning which takes place on the third Wednesday of every month and this is proving to be popular with service users (though all are welcome). There have also been lots of ideas in discussion for events to take place in 2010, including the introduction of a regular quiz night, sponsored events and there is even talk of putting on a production on an in-house written play. Watch this space!

Conclusion

2009 has been a busy and exciting year, with plenty of developments across our services and lots more to have been keeping us busy. Our aim for 2010 is to keep working hard to develop and improve our services to ensure that we are providing first class mobility solutions to people with disabilities. Our focus has and always will be on our service users and ensuring that we are providing services that meet their needs.

ECTA would like to offer thanks to our staff, volunteers and service users for their dedication throughout 2009. Thanks also to our funders who make everything possible. Without them there wouldn't be the excellent range of services we currently have on offer. Finally thank you to anybody that has had any involvement with the organisation, whether it is at service level, as an advisor or even an attendee at one of our events. We couldn't have done it without you. From everyone at ECTA, we wish you a very merry Christmas and a prosperous 2010.