**Overview**

I work within Citizens and Advice and Rights Fife as a member of the Pop Up team (CARF’s name for outreach). Fife is a vast area, covering nearly all the rurality index from large towns like Dunfermline to small remote villages like Luthrie. The Pop Up team was set up to make CARF’s services accessible to as many people as possible within Fife. We run approx 15 outreach clinics per week in the smaller rural towns and villages ranging from 2 to 9 miles from their nearest service location. Each clinic is always well attended and we are aware from speaking to clients that the reason for this is a lack of accessibility to our main bureaux. This inaccessibility is not due so much to the lack of transport links within the region but more the inconvenience, stress and cost of a client’s journeys and this research project has highlighted this.

**Research Findings**

Two locations where we hold pop up clinics are Lochgelly and Oakley which are 2.3 and 4.8 miles from their nearest larger town centre. Although both these small towns are an extremely short distance from their service locations both pop up clinics are always well attended.

The remit for Pop Ups is welfare and benefits and although we advise on other queries, including debt and consumer issues, most of our clients visit us in relation to ongoing benefit and debt related issues and the majority are surviving on low incomes where every penny counts, including that extra couple of pound for a bus journey. This is highlighted by the need to introduce Standby Boxes of food by the South West Community Plan. These are an alternative to the usual food bank system for residents of smaller towns like High Valleyfield and Oakley, where the main service area of Dunfermline is accessible but costly. For example the small town of Oakley may only be 9.6 miles return journey to Dunfermline but a return journey costs £4.90, a significant amount to a client on a low income and especially a client who is requiring travelling there for the sole purpose of visiting the foodbank.

Another location where we have set up a pop up clinic is in the small town of Lochhgelly. Lochgelly is one of our regularly busy clinics and is only 2.3 miles away from our main bureau in the town of Cowdenbeath. A return journey of 4.6 miles costs £3.40, this calculates as 73p per mile and is substantially higher than the 7p to 10p per mile highlighted in other areas of Scotland by the CAS report.

The small Fife town of Luthrie was mentioned in the CAS report as having one of the most expensive journeys, return journey from Luthrie to the main service area of Cupar costs £7.60. This is for a total of 10 miles which calculates at 76p per mile. A JSA claimant living in Luthrie who has to travel to Cupar to sign on every two weeks to receive their fortnightly payment will have used 5.2% of their entitlement on that journey.

The research also highlighted that the most inaccessible places for clients to travel to who live in smaller areas with rurality index of 3, 4 and 5 was their nearest hospital. Journeys from all smaller areas to their nearest hospital often require a change of transport whether it be bus to bus or bus to train, or bus to train to bus, with waiting times between changeover ranging from 24-42 minutes. For example if you lived in Luthrie and needed to travel to your nearest hospital your first journey would be by bus. Followed by a 7 min walk to the train station to continue the journey by train. Then you would have another 7 minute wait before completing the journey again by bus to get to the hospital. This 19 mile journey would take you 1hr and 23 minutes and cost £17.20 return journey. Attending hospital whether it is to attend an appointment yourself or to visit relatives can be an anxious and stressful experience. The inconvenience and length of this journey can only add to this.

The above examples clearly highlight that lack of access to affordable and flexible transport affects people within Fife by:

* Reducing access to employment opportunities as people cannot get to and from work at requisite times.
* Reducing access to Job Centre Meetings which may lead to sanctions as claimants may be perceived as not meeting their claimant commitment if they find it difficult to get to a meeting on time. Sanctions involve a cut in benefits of three months or more with subsequent need to access welfare support meetings and food banks.
* Reducing access for health care and hospital appointments
* Reducing access for social contact and support which reduces isolation and supports and sustains good mental and physical health.

**Possible Options**

* More support for those on welfare benefits to make essential journeys is needed. At present clients can only claim travel expenses when attending interviews. Can the entitlement to full travel expenses not be extended to any journey the client undertakes in relation to jobseeking e.g. travelling to library for internet access, jobclubs, to sign on. Means test on tickets for workers on low income.
* Better connections are needed to local healthcare facilities to reduce the stress of attending hospital either as a patient or visitor, clearer timetables, regular departures, shorter journeys and no changes.
* Rolling out local standby food boxes throughout all rural areas, where the main foodbank is inaccessible to some families due to physical distance.
* Our model of local pop up CAB sessions show how successful outreach work can be in reaching remote and rural communities. Explore the idea of other organisations e.g. DWP, LA etc all providing pop up services to rural communities simultaneously, Providing a one stop shop for clients.

With a growing elderly population and falling incomes due to changes in employment patterns, such as an increase in the numbers of people in more insecure part time and temporary working it is likely that the reliance on public transport is going to increase to support social inclusion, employment, training and attendance at medical and other essential appointments. For this reason our transport network needs to be as cost effective and accessible as possible.