

# Community-led transport initiatives

Inspiring overview of a community bus project, showing how  
community scale sustainable public transport can work



# About this action pack

This action pack has been developed as part of a series produced by the Academy of Champions for Energy (Ace). Each pack has been written and reviewed by community activists with first-hand knowledge of what it takes to set up social enterprises to address the challenges of peak oil and climate change. Inside you will find practical suggestions and inspiration for setting up your own community initiative, helping those who are ready to take action to do just that.

This series of action packs was originally funded by NESTA and produced by Local United ([www.localunited.net](http://www.localunited.net)), a co-operative of social entrepreneurs which aims to speed up the rate at which good ideas are adopted by communities. These latest revisions have been produced by Ace, a sustainable energy initiative running in the UK, Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, funded by the INTERREG IVB NWE programme.

Ace aims to bring together 'Champions' of energy transition across the public, private and community sectors to share and disseminate information to increase uptake of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. The focus is on using resources already available within our communities to build sustainable futures. This means citizens working together to find collaborative solutions which integrate energy transition into our everyday lives. Citizen engagement and community-led action are therefore central to this vision, and these packs aim to demonstrate how to build projects from the bottom up for the benefit of everyone. For more information about Ace visit [www.aceforenergy.eu](http://www.aceforenergy.eu). For more guidance on citizen engagement visit [www.aceforcommunities.net](http://www.aceforcommunities.net).

Each pack provides a useful 'how to' guide, illustrated by inspirational stories of what can be achieved when communities come together to act. Many of the packs contain technical advice, links to other information, copies of legal templates or lists of regulations all of which can help communities get their projects off the ground. Of course, any information provided is only as up to date as the day it goes to print.

Downloadable versions of the packs are available on the many partner websites. If your group or organisation would be interested in sharing the packs on your own website, contact the National Energy Foundation via [ace@nef.org.uk](mailto:ace@nef.org.uk). Community groups who have used the packs to support their own projects are also invited to provide information on how useful the packs have been, what other information should be provided or any other feedback which may improve future packs.



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Tom Drutt  
The Big Lemon  
2014



## Introduction

In 2012 our total energy consumption from transport in the UK was 53 million tonnes of oil equivalent, or about 36% of the UK total ([2012 figures](#))<sup>1</sup>. The total carbon footprint of the sector was 117 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, or about a quarter of the UK total<sup>2</sup>. It is clear then, that in order to reduce our energy use and our carbon footprint we must look at ways to reduce the energy consumption of the transport sector.

But how do we do that? There are a number of things we can do: reduce the number and length of journeys we need to make (for example by moving nearer to work, working from home and shopping locally); changing the way we travel (walking and cycling more, using the bus and train instead of the car); and improving the efficiency and sustainability of the vehicles we use.

In the autumn of 2006 a group of people met up in a pub in Brighton to explore ideas for a community bus company to tackle some of these issues. It was the first time most of the people in the room had met each other, having been invited by posters and an article in the local paper, and the group included community activists, businesspeople, bus drivers, pensioners, local politicians, residents and a few journalists.

It was an interesting and fruitful discussion, and by the end of the evening there was a plan. There was even an offer from one of the bus drivers in the room to drive the first day of service for nothing.

Over the course of the next few months, The Big Lemon started taking shape, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007 the first service was launched between the university campuses and Brighton Railway Station using three buses powered by waste cooking oil from local restaurants.

Since that day The Big Lemon has become a respected local provider of sustainable transport, running all the transport for the University of Brighton as well as services for Brighton & Hove City Council. The firm is a Community Interest Company and is funded wholly by members of the community [through shares and bonds](#). As well as bus services, The Big Lemon runs private hire coaches, a music festival coach service and (new for 2014!) an alternative UK tour called [Britain By Bus](#)<sup>3</sup>.





The Big Lemon has been recognised as an innovator and change-maker with local, national and international awards such as *Best Sustainability Initiative* ([Brighton & Hove Public Service Awards 2010](#)<sup>4</sup>), *Best Social Enterprise* ([EU Ethiconomy Awards 2011](#)<sup>5</sup>), *Best in Responsible Transport* ([Responsible Tourism Awards 2012](#)<sup>6</sup>), and *Social Enterprise of the Year* ([Sussex Business Awards 2013](#)<sup>7</sup>).

Through its activities, The Big Lemon has provided a local, sustainable use for over half a million tonnes of waste cooking oil, and by using this as a fuel instead of diesel it has saved almost a million tonnes of CO2 emissions (for the benefits of biodiesel as a fuel, see [www.thebiglemon.com/aboutUs/Fuel](http://www.thebiglemon.com/aboutUs/Fuel)). Through its partnership with the [University of Brighton](#)<sup>8</sup>, it provides a free bus service for staff and students between campuses, allowing the University to have a car-free policy for students and significantly reducing the number of car journeys made between these sites.

So how does one go about developing initiatives to run local bus services and other transport on renewable energy, and how can citizens be engaged in that process? We will look at ten steps for developing your own community sustainable transport operation.

## 1. A strong vision

“Our Vision is of a future where our society is no longer reliant on the car. A future where everyone has access to affordable, convenient, comfortable and reliable public transport. A future where people care about each other and about the world we live in, and endeavour to leave the world a better place for future generations.”<sup>9</sup>

[The Big Lemon’s Vision Statement](#)



It is important to know from the start what you are aiming for. The Big Lemon made it clear it was aiming for a better future for the next generation. That gives it a sense of purpose and guides strategy. It gives a test – for everything we do, we can ask “Is this helping us provide a better future for our children?”.

A strong vision is important not only to guide people within the organisation – it is equally important to give everyone else an idea of what you are about too.

## 2. Clear messaging



“Life should be fun. We aim to enjoy everything we do, and make sure everyone involved enjoys it too. Our customers should have the best possible experience on our buses, our staff should have the best possible time at work, and our investors should feel proud that it is all possible because of them. We also try and minimise any negative effects on the environment, and ensure that we always do our best for the wider community.”

Tom Drutt, Managing Director, The Big Lemon CIC

Effective communication of your values, your brand identity and what you stand for is essential. The Big Lemon quickly became known as the local eco-friendly bus, not because thousands of pounds were spent on an advertising campaign (they were not!) but because at every opportunity it was made clear that the organisation exists to make public transport better to attract more people out of their cars, and that the buses run on waste cooking oil to minimise their carbon footprint.



### 3. Community buy-in



“Community is a big part of life at The Big Lemon. We are owned and run by members of the community and actively encourage members of the community to [buy shares in the company](#)<sup>10</sup>. We regularly get out and about to [talk to members of the community](#) and [host public meetings](#)<sup>11</sup> where people can come and discuss their thoughts, ideas and concerns with us and other members of the community.”<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned earlier, The Big Lemon started life in a pub in Brighton, where a group of strangers came together to talk about how to run buses in a more sustainable, more effective, and more community-orientated way. None of the people in that meeting had run a bus company before. What brought them together was a shared desire to see something better. A number of members of the public who attended that meeting subsequently became shareholders in the company and two became drivers (one of which is now the Director of Operations).

Public meetings are a great way to get community buy-in. The Big Lemon has held public meetings in pubs, university campuses, a church, and on the buses themselves. Public meetings are a very effective way of getting people ‘on-board’ because not only do the discussions invariably generate some brilliant ideas, meetings also show the community at large that you are serious about listening to people, involving them in decision-making and working with them to improve the service.



There are also a number of other methods available to build community support, and it is important that different methods are used in order to get buy-in from different sections of the community. The Big Lemon's meeting in Ovingdean church did not attract many people below the age of 40. On the other hand, The Big Lemon's [Facebook group](#)<sup>13</sup> does not have many members over the age of 40.

In order to get community buy-in, you need to get *embedded* in the community. Try as many different media as you can to get your message across and build support. Local pubs, churches, community centres, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, networking events, online forums and social media networks are all good places to become embedded in your community. One is not necessarily better than another; *you need to use them all!*

Once you have built a relationship with your community and you have a network of supporters you need to keep them! The best way to do this is to keep them informed. Take the email addresses of people who come to meetings and ask them if it is ok to add them to your mailing list. And do not then use your mailing list to try and flog travel passes and such like - use it to keep people with you on your journey.

In the beginning The Big Lemon sent out news every month, updating people on developments: getting the [operator's licence](#)<sup>14</sup>, the first route, the first bus, the first driver... it is all very exciting and people will want to stay in the loop all the way! Now email news is sent out less frequently, but instead The Big Lemon's Facebook group ([facebook.com/groups/friendsofthebiglemon](https://facebook.com/groups/friendsofthebiglemon)) and Twitter page ([@thebiglemon](https://twitter.com/thebiglemon)) are updated every few days with the latest news, views and other stories.





## 4. The right legal structure



“A Community Interest Company (CIC) is a limited company, with special additional features, created for the use of people who want to conduct a business or other activity for community benefit, and not purely for private advantage.”<sup>15</sup>

### [Community Interest Company Regulator](#)

The Big Lemon is a Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by shares. This means it can sell shares in the company in order to raise finance, but there are legal limits on dividend payments, and the assets of the company are only to be used to further its social objectives. The Big Lemon chose this model in order to safeguard its aims in law while also allowing it to raise finance from members of the community by selling shares.

Incorporation as a CIC is subject to agreement by the CIC Regulator and must be renewed each year by means of an annual CIC Report, and if the CIC Regulator is no longer satisfied that the company is working for the benefit of the community it can withdraw its CIC status. This means that at all times the public can be confident that the organisation is being run in accordance with its mandate, true to its original vision, mission and values. Thus incorporation as a CIC makes an organisation immediately recognisable as a social enterprise working for the benefit of the community.



There are, of course, many other models available, and what works for one does not necessarily work for another. Brighton is a hotbed of successful social enterprises, some of which are CICs, some of which are [co-ops](#)<sup>16</sup> and some of which are [Industrial Provident Societies](#)<sup>17</sup>. For more information on types of social enterprise and how to set one up, see "[Setting up a social enterprise](#)" on the Government website GOV.UK<sup>18</sup>.

## 5. A good funding model



*The best things in life are free*

Anyone starting a social enterprise, or any kind of business, will soon realise that funding will be one of their biggest challenges. For start-ups, there are a number of grant-funding bodies, [UnLtd](#)<sup>19</sup> being one of the best known examples for social enterprises. These grants are very highly contested, making them very difficult to win, but if you can find a grant that looks suitable for what you have in mind and invest the time in a good application, you may get lucky!

Here are some golden rules of applying for grants:

- i. ***Don't waste time applying for grants that are not suitable.*** Most grants have very clear aims and eligibility criteria - read them thoroughly and don't be tempted to try either changing your project to fit the grant or describing your project in a misleading way to fit the grant criteria!



- ii. **Prioritise it!** Grant applications are not something you can do by candlelight a couple of hours before the deadline.
- iii. **Don't think you have to fill the word limit.** It is a maximum, not a target!
- iv. **Think positive.** If you believe in it, others will too!
- v. **Avoid 'hoping'**, e.g. "it is hoped", "we hope". It sounds a bit hopeful, doesn't it?!
- vi. **Keep answers succinct and to the point.** Assessors don't have much time for each application and don't like waffle.
- vii. **Be specific.** If the question is "what is your vision", don't just list a load of things you would like to see. Say "our vision is for X group of people to do Y and achieve Z".
- viii. **Always go the extra mile with an answer.** If the question is "who is going to be responsible for project delivery?" make sure you include in your answer the individual's name, job title, qualifications, experience, brief, who they have worked for and why they were chosen as the lead person for project delivery.
- ix. **Think about what other grant applicants are going to say and try and make yours stand out.** If the grant is for getting people back into work, don't simply say that your potential client group is largely from low income backgrounds with few opportunities. This may be true and is definitely worth pointing out, but many other applicants are going to be saying this too. What makes your group stand out? Why is your project better?
- x. **Proof-read!** Or better still, ask someone else to proof-read. You are unlikely to lose marks for poor English, but poor spelling and grammar give a bad impression and you want to make a good impression, right?!

However, there are a number of reasons why grants may *not* be the best way to fund your initiative. The downside of grants is that they are time-consuming to apply for, highly contested, and if you are lucky enough to win a grant they may have onerous conditions that are time-consuming to fulfil and reduce the time and energy available for developing the project. You should also be careful that the business model does not rely on grants for very long. Grants are very helpful at the start, but you don't want to become reliant on them.



The Big Lemon found the most effective way of raising finance to be selling shares to members of the community. Obviously this is only possible if your legal structure allows it, and this is something to consider when choosing your legal structure (see step 4 above).

What works for one project does not necessarily work for all, and there are a number of other types of funding to consider:

- i. **Loan-funding:** ex-Dragon's Den star Doug Richard's [School for Startups](#)<sup>20</sup> offers a very good Government-backed scheme giving start-ups affordable loans with mentoring, training and 24-hour business support all included in the package.
- ii. **Crowd-funding:** this has grown in popularity recently and is now responsible for some hugely successful campaigns. In a nutshell you start an online campaign and 'woo' potential investors with your offer. Campaigns are time-limited and you set yourself a target. Usually, if you fail to reach your target within the timeframe the whole thing falls. There are many sites; some of the most popular are [indiegogo.com](#), [crowdfunder.co.uk](#), [buzzbnk.org](#) and [kickstarter.com](#).
- iii. **Peer-to-peer funding:** another fast-growing sector. As with crowd-funding you bypass the banks, but unlike crowd-funding you do not need a campaign and you do not need a target. You apply in the traditional way, but because peer-to-peer investors are more accepting of risk, you might have a more sympathetic reception and the interest rate might be better than that of a bank. Popular peer-to-peer sites include [thincats.com](#), [zopa.com](#), [fundingcircle.com](#), [ratesetter.com](#) and [assetzcapital.co.uk](#).

Without doubt, however, the best funding model is *revenue*. Social enterprises are *enterprises*, and need to be funded in the long term by *selling*, just like any other enterprise. You should plan for the business to be funded from revenue as early as possible, and if you borrow less (or not at all!) at the beginning it will make life much easier later on.

A relatively low-risk funding model is to work with partners to provide services on their behalf. There are many organisations that may be interested in outsourcing their transport, and with sustainability higher up on the public sector and corporate agendas, a sustainable transport organisation may be just what they are looking for.





However, the biggest problem with this approach in the early days will be credibility. With no track record you will have difficulty convincing partners that you are up to the job, unless you have some good industry people on your team. The best strategy would be to start with something very modest and manageable, make an impact, get a name for yourselves and then get ambitious!

## 6. The right people



“I want to compliment you on a fab service. The bus driver was particularly helpful. Thanks again and please do let the driver know what a great job he's doing, the personal service makes all the difference and I will be using you as often as possible in the future”

Kelle Kingsley, Passenger

When The Big Lemon started out, it was clear that the unique selling point was not going to be the brand new fleet of vehicles, or the state-of-the-art visitor's centre at the depot. The company operated three rather old vehicles (only one of which actually belonged to The Big Lemon) from a car park on the edge of an industrial estate. There was no office, workshop, power or running water on site, just an old van with fuel, oil, water and an assortment of cleaning materials, tools and spares in the back. What was lacking in finance, facilities and equipment had to be made up for tenfold by offering the best customer service in town.



During recruitment, the first thing that The Big Lemon looked for was the right attitude. If people have an open mind and a positive outlook, everything else can be taught.

Your team is your best asset, and whether or not you provide a good service will depend on them. You should look for people who:

- are positive and enthusiastic
- have an understanding of what you are trying to achieve and are willing to work towards the same aims
- enjoy working with the public
- are good team players
- take pride in their work
- smile a lot

You should try and avoid people who

- know it all
- have done it all before
- talk about passengers as if they are a problem
- do not enjoy their work

The Big Lemon has an amazing team. Drivers are trained to give the best possible customer service, and make a point of greeting everyone when they get on and acknowledging them when they leave. It is so easy nowadays to complete a transaction with a shop assistant or a bus driver without even making eye contact, so when you make a point of doing these little things it makes a world of difference to the service.



## 7. A good marketing plan



### Positioning

Price – how does your price compare with competitors?

Product – what is your level of product quality?

Market – how do you describe your customers?

Service – what degree of service do you provide?

[Darren Shirlaw's Blog](#)<sup>21</sup>

The first thing you need to think about is positioning your service. Is it a high-end service, budget, or somewhere in the middle? The point Darren Shirlaw makes in his blog is that what matters most is that your positioning is *aligned*.

Travelodge has been very successful providing a low quality product at a low price, targeted at people on a low budget. Conversely, the Ritz has been very successful at providing a luxury service aimed at very wealthy people willing to pay a lot of money. If a hotel chain tried to offer a Ritz service at a Travelodge price, they would go bust very quickly even if their hotels were always full, simply because the revenue would not be enough to cover the costs of the quality of services they provide.

What you should also consider is *leading* on one of these. It is too complicated to communicate your position in all areas – you need to choose one and make sure the others are aligned with it. Ryanair, for example, is all about Price. Apple, on the other hand, is all about Product. STA Travel is a good example of a market-focused business, offering flights, accommodation, insurance and all manner of other things specifically to students and young people. And as for service businesses, high-end hotels like the Ritz are among the best examples. Some businesses have a



combination. Long-haul flights for example will have Economy, where price is the most important thing, and First or Business Class, where service is most important.

Positioning is not fixed, however. The Big Lemon initially positioned itself at the budget end of the market, and was very successful at growing market share amongst price-conscious students. In 2011 this was noticed by the major competitor, who responded by cutting their fares on routes competing with The Big Lemon. The Big Lemon had to change, and change quickly. A price-war was out of the question, as the competitors had deeper pockets and would be able to run loss-making services for longer. After a lot of experimenting and a very difficult year, The Big Lemon stabilised its services with a slightly different model, and revised positioning. Now the company runs services on contract to the University of Brighton and to Brighton & Hove City Council, and has positioned itself closer to the middle of the spectrum because that is where the demand is from the funding partners.

Once you have decided on where to position your service, you need to identify good marketing and distribution channels. How and where will you advertise your services? Where will you sell them and how will people pay for them?

The Big Lemon's experience is that the best place to start answering these questions is to identify the community you are planning to work with. At the beginning it was the student community. This was a lively and open-minded community, mostly living in the same areas with the same travel needs. The community had clubs and societies, a weekly newspaper and its own radio station. It had Freshers' Fair and a huge number of other events throughout the year. It was a well-networked community, with online groups on Facebook and other sites, and a number of well-read blogs. The Big Lemon got stuck into all of these things, building relationships with as many groups as possible. The key message was 'cheap, eco-friendly bus with a cool bus driver' and it worked.

Once you have identified your target community, you need to think about whether you are going to sell direct to the passenger, or establish a partnership with a funder to provide the service on their behalf. If you sell direct to the passenger you should think about the ticket types you will offer, and where and how to sell them. The Big Lemon had a membership who paid annually, and then on top of that sold a range of different types of ticket, in a number of different types of outlet. There were daily and weekly tickets available on the bus, six-journey passes sold in campus shops, and three month and twelve month passes available on the internet. Paying daily on





the bus was the most expensive option, and then the more passengers were willing to commit the cheaper the deal became. Advertising the service and the deals on offer was done on the buses (both outside and in), on our website, Facebook group, Twitter page, at Freshers' Fair, in the student shops, and in student newspapers and magazines. The company also took advantage of cross-selling opportunities; for example selling coach tickets to music festivals to the student audience already using the bus services, and private coach hire services to the student clubs and societies.

Now, with its new model, the bulk of The Big Lemon's business is not sold directly to the passenger but instead the company provides bus services on behalf of both the [University of Brighton](#)<sup>22</sup> and [Brighton & Hove City Council](#)<sup>23</sup>. This is more secure and enables better planning, as revenues are guaranteed as long as the service is provided as contracted. The downside is that there is less freedom, but in reality you can still run the service in your own style so it is a small price to pay and well worth exploring.

In the case of The Big Lemon's services for University of Brighton students and staff, funding from the University allows the company to operate the service free at the point of use. This significantly increases take-up and allows The Big Lemon to better fulfil its aims in terms of reducing the number of car journeys and thereby reducing energy use, pollution and CO2 emissions.



## 8. Premises, vehicles and fuel



The Big Lemon started operations with three buses and a van parked in a lorry park, and although not ideal, it worked for a short while. So it is possible to start simple, and then improve as resources allow. Ideally there should be some kind of security, so a unit in an industrial estate is ideal, or if in a rural area, it may be possible to find a nearby farm that has some space to rent. Requirements can be registered with local commercial lettings agents, particularly for industrial units.

For vehicles, there are a couple of options. Once the size of vehicle you need for your service has been identified, it can either be leased or bought. Leasing is more convenient, and usually it should be possible to get a better vehicle, but it is more expensive in the long run. Buying provides more control and gives the project an asset. Care should be taken when buying - don't be tempted by the cheapness of an old rust bucket on eBay. Take an engineer to a dealership and get proper advice, take vehicles for a test drive, have a look underneath them, and remember that usually the more money spent at the beginning, the more money will be saved on maintenance in the long run.

The chosen fuel will make a huge difference to the sustainability of the operation. Using biodiesel from waste oil is one of the greenest methods, and there is an online database of most of the biodiesel suppliers in the country at [www.biodieselfillingstations.co.uk](http://www.biodieselfillingstations.co.uk). Most diesel engines will run on 100% biodiesel without any modifications, but there are a few things to be aware of:

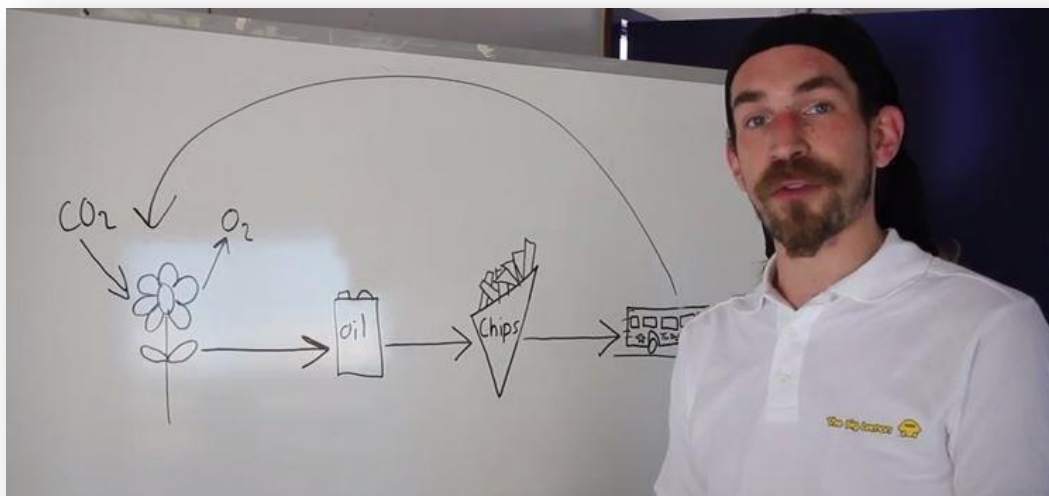


- a. Biodiesel is a solvent, so it cleans out the carbon deposits that have built up over time in your fuel lines. This sounds great, as you end up with a cleaner engine. However, the muck will end up in your fuel filter(s) so you need to change the filter(s) after the first hundred miles or so of using biodiesel, and then again about a thousand miles later.
- b. As a solvent, biodiesel can erode rubber washers and seals, so one must be aware of this. Injector pump failure has also been associated with biodiesel, and it is important to have a heavy duty one.
- c. In the winter, biodiesel will start to solidify at approximately  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Even before that, it will thicken, and may reduce performance as the fuel pump struggles to pump it through. Starting the vehicles may be difficult in winter, and it will help considerably if the vehicles can be housed indoors, although this may not be possible in the early days. Always use the 'cold start'/choke if possible to give the best chance! There are additives that can be added to biodiesel to stop it thickening in winter, but these need to be tested properly and mixed correctly. If it is not mixed properly bits of sediment may build up in the fuel tank and block outlets, stopping fuel from getting to the engine. Particles may also end up in the pump, and damage it. It is possible to get a fairly good idea of the quality of the biodiesel simply by looking at it. If it is light and clear it is good; if it is dark and/or cloudy or has particulates in it, it is poison to the engine!

There are of course other sustainable fuels to choose from, and The Big Lemon is currently doing a lot of work on researching the relative benefits of each with a view to trialling new fuels in the near future. The main sustainable alternatives to biodiesel are [biogas](#)<sup>24</sup> and renewably-sourced [electricity](#)<sup>25</sup>. Electric buses are becoming popular in the UK!



## 9. Consistently good service delivery



The key is for the service to be ‘consistent’ and ‘good’. It must be good, or people won’t use it, but most importantly it must be good *all the time*. That, you might say, is impossible – there are always unforeseen issues like traffic delays or breakdowns that will affect your service. This is true. However, it is also true that as long as the passengers are *looked after* and *well-informed*, they will forgive you for all of these things, and may even praise you for how you deal with the situation. So even if the bus turns up late and then breaks down, if you respond to the situation quickly and professionally, while looking after the passengers and keeping them informed, they will be happy.

For example, on one of The Big Lemon’s festival trips to the Isle of Wight the coaches arrived at the port to find out that the next ferry we could get on was in two hours’ time. Passengers were disappointed as soon as they heard this, but when they also heard that there was a pub next door and The Big Lemon was buying the first round of drinks... suddenly everyone was very happy again and the feedback from the trip was fantastic.

Planning needs to start with the end goal - the passenger experience. At The Big Lemon, drivers are trained in delivering the best customer experience every time by following ten key rules:

1. Be clean and smart (but not too formal), and make sure the bus is clean too. Walk up and down the bus between trips and pick up the rubbish





2. Pull up as close to the kerb as possible
3. Greet everyone as they board, *looking them in the eye*. If you wear sunglasses, remove them when talking to people
4. When talking to passengers give them your full attention, not doing anything else (e.g. listening to music/chewing gum) at the same time
5. Ensure they are seated before leaving the bus stop
6. Always look for 'runners' (people running for the bus) and wait for them
7. Triple check blind spots, especially for cyclists
8. Drive smoothly, minimising acceleration and braking. Not only does this improve passenger comfort, it also saves fuel and wear-and-tear on the vehicle
9. Be courteous to all other road users. Apart from the obvious benefit of this, they may one day become customers
10. Acknowledge people as they get off the bus, with a 'Thank you', 'Cheerio' 'Good night' or similar, depending on what is appropriate at the time

In order to provide the service, staff must obviously be trained. But training is not simply a routine to be gone through. Training is an opportunity to instil the values of the business in the team. It is an opportunity to communicate exactly what the aims of the project are and how it is possible to achieve them. Training must be regular too; people need to be updated on new procedures and given feedback on how they are doing. They need to be enthused, and always reminded about the bigger picture. They might think they are just driving up and down the same road all day, but what they are actually doing is providing a vital public service, contributing to the local economy, reducing congestion and pollution, giving hundreds of people a pleasurable experience, and developing the company's expertise to enable the business to improve the service, grow and make more of a difference in the future.



## 10. Effective systems



### *Administration*

The administration of the business must be organised so that everything has its place, geographical and chronological, and that the systems and routines are adhered to. Ensure there is a plan: such and such lives here, this gets done on a Wednesday morning, and this is what happens at the end of the week/month/year. The systems need to be written down, as they are constantly changing as the business grows, and everyone needs to be clear what the system is. Then when the administrator is ill, someone else can jump in and the routine is clear: this happens today, this is how it is done and this is where it is filed afterwards.

### *Accounting & Finance*

The most important thing here is information and accountability. To succeed, the business needs to have up-to-date information available at all times to aid decision-making and financial planning. Budgets must be set, and individuals must be accountable for their budgets.

### *Information Technology*

Information Technology is very important in a bus company, underpinning everything from client and staff records to ticket machine functionality, data collection and analysis, accounts, payroll and communication. There is a huge amount of cloud-based software available that will do all these things for you, but choosing what is right for your business is the tricky bit. The most important thing is to make sure that



whatever you choose, all your systems can ‘talk’ to each other. For example, if you sell online (which you ought to!) your online shop needs to be integrated with both your marketing software and your accounting software. This will enable you to input data once only, and when someone buys something your system should be able to send them a Thank You message and also record the sale in your accounts.

### *Human Resources*

As a member of the Federation of Small Businesses, The Big Lemon can download contracts and policies from their website, and is also able to make use of a legal advice line for advice on employment matters. Larger businesses may do this in-house, but for a small company this system works well. The key is to ensure that systems are in place to help staff perform, and to provide help, support and training where there is underperformance. It shouldn’t matter who they are or where they come from, the system should work regardless; some people may need more help than others, some may require less. If the system is fair, legal, well-communicated and well-documented, it will work, and with the benefit of experience, it will always improve. Occasionally there will be people who simply aren’t quite right for the business, but that is life and it shouldn’t be seen as a failure. For everyone else, if the deal is clear and fair, the system will develop individuals into the role and the staff team will always be the business’s most valuable asset.

### *Legal & Compliance*

The bus industry is closely regulated by the Traffic Commissioner and the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency, as well as by HMRC, the Health & Safety Executive and Companies House. As a Community Interest Company, The Big Lemon is also regulated by the CIC Regulator. Building good relationships with regulators is very important. For any project like this it is important to learn the rules, and to stick to them as much as humanly possible. Regulators don’t expect you to get everything right all the time, but they expect you to have a system for everything and to have evidence of action in cases where systems have not delivered. Importantly, someone in the organisation must be accountable for each area of legislation, for knowing it and ensuring that the organisation complies. The Managing Director and the Board are ultimately responsible, so they must make sure that the person responsible is doing their job properly. Regulators love to see records, and it always helps the business if these are up-to-date, accurate and easily accessible. Even if they show occasional misdemeanours, these should never be covered up. It is dishonest, and will probably be noticed anyway and you will fare much worse than if you had been open about them in the first place. If a mistake is made, then it is always best to be



proactive, to inform the regulator concerned, and let them know what is being done about it. They are not stupid; they know people break the rules sometimes by accident and they will appreciate you being honest about it.

### *Premises Management*

Premises management sounds pretty dull but is actually very exciting. If you walk into Subway (for example) you join a queue, and when you are at the front of the queue you choose your bread, then walk along the counter as your bread is toasted (if you want) and decorated with your chosen topping, salad and dressing. At the end is the till, a load of cookies and a fridge full of drinks, and you are offered a meal deal. The layout of Subway is designed to maximise efficiency and sales, *and so must the layout of your office, your depot and your equipment.* For example, if drivers have to fuel up the bus at the end of the shift, the position of the fuel supply (if this is on site) is very important, as is the location of the stores and cleaning materials. If by placing them close to where they are being used you can save three minutes at the start and finish of each shift, you can save six minutes per shift, and if there are twenty shifts per day, that is two hours' work saved per day. Over a year that will add a lot to the bottom line. Likewise you can define the order in which tasks are done by the layout of the equipment. If you want drivers to fuel up before cleaning the vehicles, you put the fuel supply by the gate and the cleaning store by the parking area.

### *Vehicle Management*

The aim of the game here is to account for every mile driven by every vehicle: who the driver was, what time they started, what time they finished, what the mileage was at the start and finish, how much fuel they used, whether they checked the vehicle before and after they used it, what (if any) defects were found, whether the defects were rectified, who by, when and so on. With full information on maintenance and fuel usage of each vehicle, costs can be managed and accurately guide pricing of services, and with a full history of each vehicle the examiner from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) will have the best day of their life so far.

VOSA requires that all public service vehicles have a regular inspection routine by a certified workshop. The frequency of inspections depends on the age of the vehicle, and varies between every four weeks for older vehicles to every six weeks for new ones. In addition, vehicles must have daily inspections by the driver. Unless you have new vehicles, vehicle maintenance is likely to be your biggest cost after wages and fuel, so it is important to be realistic with your projections.



### *Supplies*

Always have a spare! In order to do this accurate information is needed on usage of supplies, lead times for different things, preferred supplier lists, and a clear procurement policy which defines what the parameters are. Remember that a procurement policy is always a chance to shape policy for the community group. It is a chance to support specific external suppliers. Clear research is required here to ensure that supplies come from organisations with similar ethos. Remember for this kind of project a sustainable sourcing policy may be a marketing tool. It can let customers know what ingredients are in the product.

### *Records*

Record-keeping is a statutory obligation, but it is also a commercial necessity. The better your records, the better the information available to you, and the better your decisions.

It is worth finding out for all the different areas what the minimum statutory requirement is for record-keeping, and then making a decision as to whether there is any benefit in keeping them for longer. Vehicle inspection records, for example, might be worth keeping for the life of the vehicle, not just for the statutory minimum period. And from a marketing perspective it may be very advantageous for you to know what proportion of the people enquiring about hiring a bus actually *do* hire a bus, although there is no statutory requirement to keep these records at all.

One of the roles of the Chief Executive/Chair/Managing Director is to create a culture of continuous improvement where in conjunction with your team you decide what key performance indicators are relevant to you, and then collect the records you need, analyse them and use the data to improve your systems... and then do it all over again, and again, and again!





## Conclusion



We have been looking here at the role citizens play in the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency in the transport sector. Transport is not the first thing that comes to mind when people think of energy generation, energy use and energy efficiency, but as we saw at the beginning, transport is responsible for [36% of total energy consumption in the UK](#). If we are serious about reducing our energy use and moving to more sustainable sources, the transport sector must play its part. And just as communities up and down the UK are launching [community-owned renewable energy schemes](#)<sup>26</sup>, they are also ideally placed to launch community-owned sustainable transport initiatives too.

In order to give such initiatives the best chance of success, they need:

1. A strong vision
2. Clear messaging
3. Community buy-in
4. The right legal structure
5. A good funding model
6. The right people
7. A good marketing plan
8. Premises, vehicles and fuel
9. Consistently good service delivery
10. Effective systems

Whether for interest or practical use, hopefully you have found this informative and useful. Feel free to share, and if you have any questions the team at [The Big Lemon](#)<sup>27</sup> will be very happy to help.



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## Resources:

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  - a. Social Enterprise UK: [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)
  - b. Co-operatives UK: [www.uk.coop](http://www.uk.coop)
  - c. Local United: [www.localunited.net](http://www.localunited.net)
  - d. Transition Network: [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org)
  - e. REconomy Project: [www.reconomy.org](http://www.reconomy.org)
  - f. Social Enterprise Mark: [www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk)
2. Grants:
  - a. UnLtd: [www.unltd.org.uk](http://www.unltd.org.uk)
  - b. School for Startups: [www.schoolforstartups.co.uk](http://www.schoolforstartups.co.uk)
  - c. Ashden Awards: [www.ashden.org](http://www.ashden.org)
  - d. Awards for All: [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/Awards-For-All](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/Awards-For-All)
  - e. The Big Lemon: [www.thebiglemon.com/Grants](http://www.thebiglemon.com/Grants)
3. Crowd-funding:
  - a. Indiegogo: [www.indiegogo.com](http://www.indiegogo.com)
  - b. Crowdfunder: [www.crowdfunder.co.uk](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk)
  - c. Kickstarter: [www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com)
  - d. Buzzbnk: [www.buzzbnk.org](http://www.buzzbnk.org)
4. Peer-to-peer lending:
  - a. ThinCats: [www.ThinCats.com](http://www.ThinCats.com)
  - b. Zopa: [www.zopa.com](http://www.zopa.com)
  - c. Funding Circle: [www.fundingcircle.com](http://www.fundingcircle.com)
  - d. Rate Setter: [www.ratesetter.com](http://www.ratesetter.com)
  - e. Assetz SME Capital: [www.assetzcapital.co.uk](http://www.assetzcapital.co.uk)
5. Regulatory:
  - a. Traffic Commissioner: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/traffic-commissioners](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/traffic-commissioners)
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  - d. Health & Safety Executive: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)
  - e. Companies House: [www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)
  - f. CIC Regulator: [www.cicregulator.gov.uk](http://www.cicregulator.gov.uk)





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