



Fingal County Council Community Car Service



Fingal County Council partnered with Local Link and GoCar to launch a 'Community Car' service pilot in 2019, marking the first of its kind in a local authority in Ireland. Initially, the service operated in the Howth and Skerries areas, using two electric vehicles. This has expanded in 2022 to include trips from Donabate, Portrane, Rush and Lusk.

The project involves volunteer drivers providing essential door to door transport for passengers which struggle to access other forms of transport for hospital visits, access to health services, access to shops and other important services. In June 2022 the project had 20 volunteers signed up.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you as project partners agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

The objectives of the Fingal Community Car Scheme have been collectively agreed by the project partners, which include Fingal County Council, GoCar, the Skerries Age Friendly group and the TFI Local Link Louth Meath Fingal.

The objectives of the scheme were shaped by the mission of the Rural Transport Programme / TFI Local Link to provide a quality nationwide community based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs.

The community car scheme is needed to provide greater links for older members of the community to access local and regional health and social services in Skerries and Dublin.

How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?

Fingal County Council wanted to launch a pilot to understand its initial effectiveness over a 6 month basis before making a long-term commitment. Fingal County Council had the existing responsibility and funding to implement the parking spaces and charging infrastructure, driven by the Director of Environment, Climate Action and Active Travel.

In parallel, GoCar already had infrastructure and cars within County Fingal, alongside a strong existing relationship with Fingal County Council.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?

Challenge to the scheme has been minimal due to the large costs involved in travelling to Dublin hospitals from Skerries, costing potentially between €100 – €120 for a return journey.



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Consensus within Skerries has been primarily enabled by the Skerries Age Friendly who worked with the community to get support for the Scheme and with TFI Local Link. Meetings with potential volunteers regularly to understand improvements and development of the service on a continuous basis.

How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

Every partner has a role in the project. Fingal County Council are responsible for providing infrastructure, GoCar provide electric car, technology and insurance on the car, Skerries Age Friendly attract the volunteers and feedback, and the TFI Local Link connect volunteers and drivers.

In the initial stages, all partners met very frequently however following the successful launch and delivery of the pilot, partners connect on an ad-hoc basis.

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

This partnership approach has worked very effectively and when plans for the project had to be adjusted, each partner is responsible for their own project activity. The project is open to change as demand increases.

How did you identify a funding need?

Fingal County Council had a strong interest in EV charging infrastructure and identified Skerries as a location with an ageing population with an opportunity to launch a pilot project in partnership with GoCar, TFI Local Link and Skerries Age Friendly.

GoCar has taken a positive corporate responsibility approach and provided the electric vehicle to the scheme on a voluntary basis, therefore minimal funding was required aside from the investment of Fingal County Council into EV charging infrastructure and normal TFI Local Link staff costs.

There is a service level agreement between Fingal County Council and GoCar for the scheme, TFI Local Link manage the service internally and Skerries Age Friendly provide services on a voluntary basis.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project? If so how did you handle that and approach experts?

GoCar were the specialised expertise for the project and were approached by officers in Fingal County Council using existing working relationships. Local Link had the experience in scheduling and training. Age Friendly had local knowledge and connections.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

Ensuring the availability of volunteers is the hardest difficulty. This has been overcome by Skerries Age Friendly and TFI Local Link meeting with volunteers regularly to discuss problems and sharing volunteer stories with the wider community to attract new volunteers.

In addition, partners have ensured the EV car is very visible in Skerries, adjacent to a popular coastal walking route. This has prompted the interest of the community and acted as a catalyst for new volunteers.

Have the partners managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

All project partners have stayed true to the original vision, highlighted by the project is going beyond the original 6 month timeframe. This has been achieved by close partnership working in the early stages and building upon existing organisational relationships.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

Key lessons include:

- Establish a strong volunteer base.
- Begin with an accessible car which could be supported by an employed community worker with a paid part time or full time contract.
- Create a booking system which suits the size and scope of the potential scheme.
- Have clear aims and objectives of the car, age demographic, purpose, maximum distance of journeys and overall rules of the car.

What decisions have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

All partners agreed to ensure the scheme was open as possible. For example, this has been achieved by supporting journeys to both public and private hospitals from Skerries to Dublin. Local social trips are also encouraged.

Establishing a centralised booking system and database for managing user requests and organising future volunteer activity initially via a WhatsApp group, and then moving to creating larger Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance as you moved through the different phases of the project?

The Fingal Community Car Scheme is an exemplar in its field within Ireland. However, the TFI Local Link have networks with organisations such as the Irish Cancer Society to understand the use of potential booking systems. This enabled the partners to design a booking system which suited the scheme's size and scale.

Key contact

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Links

Website: <https://www.fingal.ie/fingal-community-car>

Website article: <https://www.fingal.ie/news/fingal-county-council-expand-vital-community-car-service>