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## **Paralympic blog: day 0, calm before the storm?**

29 August 2012



*“Will life ever be the same again?... One thing we all recognise is that our day jobs are likely to have moved beyond recognition.”*

***A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, has been running the show. As the Paralympics continue, Anna shares her experiences in her Paralympic blog***

Hello readers, welcome to my Paralympic blog! If you want to learn more about how a social enterprise working with similar minded organisations across London is making a difference – then read on.

I thought I would try a day-in-the-life style except not just one day but several days spread across the Paralympics. What a commitment! Over the next 12 days or so I hope you can share in the fun, excitement that is in London right now.

I can hear your question: why Paralympics, why not the Olympics? Other than the obvious (that I would look pretty silly if it had gone all wrong, and transport in general had been the predicted nightmare), ECT Charity and its partner Community Transport organisations specialise in transport for people with mobility difficulties, people who are unable to use mainstream transport. The Paralympics just seem more appropriate.

Here we are on day zero, our accessible shuttles for ticketed spectators in place; our staff, including service coordinators, mobility and car park assistants, trained and briefed and our partners pleased to be again taking part in the most exciting project we have ever undertaken.

Slight nerves and apprehension – could our previous success be repeated when the stakes, for us at least, are so much higher. Most of today has been spent clearing my desk, thinking about life after Olympics when the day job will continue. Will life ever be the same again? No is our conclusion and it is important to start planning now. One thing we all recognise is that our day jobs are likely to have moved beyond recognition. We must be ready. The day in the office ends and I head out east towards Stratford for the all-important first test – the Opening Ceremony. Let the excitement and the hard work begin.

## **Paralympic blog: day 1, the opening ceremony**

30 August 2012



*“I headed towards the accessible shuttles load zone close to one of the gates... But not before the horses had left behind their calling cards.”*

***A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, has been running the show. Here she reports back from Paralympics opening ceremony***

What a spectacular opening ceremony that was. Amongst all the superlatives, for me there is only one word that describes how it felt. Humbling. If I am allowed a second, then it has to be ‘privileged’.

The story was unfolding in front of us, the messages subtly but emphatically put across to us the audience whether that be the 57,000 in the stadium or the whole world via their TV screens. Most importantly endorsed by the athletes who had joined us in the stadium.

Anything is possible if we put our minds to it. We could even fly. And so we did. Our best-known athletes flew across the stadium, including Baroness Grey-Thompson. Can't wait to ask Tanni whether the experience was terrifying or exhilarating.

As we realised that the programme was overrunning, the messaging between transport officers also began to fly. Calculating what the delay might be, to be confirmed once Team GB entered the stadium. What effect that might have on spectators getting home, let alone the volunteers and staff who have to wait till everyone else is gone. What about onward connections, you know, the stuff that keeps us awake at night. The recurring nightmare. A city full of people unable to make it home.

In the event, the cauldron lit, at just after midnight a few of us slipped out ready to observe the egress and I headed towards the accessible shuttles load zone close to one of the gates. As usual our team were doing a splendid job with the added complication of the Mounted Police using the area as a staging post. As much as we love the Mounted Police, I don't know about you, but I would have thought that it was fairly obvious that this was not a good idea. If the abundant hired mobility scooters, wheelchair users and other spectators with limited mobility were not convincing enough, fortunately our lead service co-ordinator Emma's powers of persuasion had better success. But not before the horses had left behind their calling cards rather inconveniently. I wish I was making this up.

In the event, despite being very busy in concentrated bursts of activity, our shuttles coped well and everyone was on their onward journey before the last trains had departed.

Now for the serious business – the Paralympic Games themselves, the reason we are here.

## **Paralympic blog: day 2, fulfilling big promises**

31 August 2012



*"We promised the world the most accessible Games ever. A big promise to a world that doesn't necessarily understand the proper meaning of 'accessible'."*

***A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the***

***globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, has been running the show. It's day two, and time to deliver...***

I remember the day London was named as the host city like it was yesterday. The exhilaration I felt was incredible. It was going to be the most exciting thing ever having the Olympics in London. My friends thought I was mad! All, that is, apart from Seb and David Beckham of course. The Olympics have always been one of my hobbies. I have a loft full of scrap books to prove it. Mexico, Munich – oops, that gives my age away!

It had to be a question of time therefore before I was going to be involved. The first opportunity arose when ECT's joint venture with HCT (Hackney Community Transport) was awarded the contract for transport for the construction workers on the Olympic Park. The social enterprise model was the one most favoured by the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA).

I was able to witness the transformation of a derelict industrial landscape into a lasting legacy. At times it was difficult to imagine how it would all come together but come together we all knew it would and on time. The notion that to get into the Olympic Park, you would have to walk through a shopping centre seemed ridiculous.

In the meantime, the planners were busy. We promised the world the most accessible Games ever. A big promise to a world that doesn't necessarily understand the proper meaning of 'accessible'.

Secondly, we said that this would be the public transport Games. Again a big promise – with the media and every other Londoner promising it to be a transport disaster.

London's transport system is fairly accessible but every Londoner will know that it is not always possible for a disabled person or wheelchair user to get from any point A to B.

Venues were chosen for a variety of reasons. The ease of access for disabled people was never going to be high on the priority list. But making sure that every spectator would be able to get there no matter their mobility needs was imperative.

It is with these thoughts that I arrive in Stratford, shutting my eyes as I pass the shops and connect up with my teams. The early shift had been up and about since before 5am, not that long after some of us had made it into bed after the night before.

'How's it going?' I ask. 'Good to be back after the Olympics?'

'Brilliant!... You have no idea how I couldn't wait to come back to work, the most worthwhile job ever!' And then our attention is turned as a group of passengers arrive.

Oh good; happy staff makes for brilliant customer service. A great place to start.

## Paralympic blog: day 3, solutions not problems

1 September 2012



Enabling passengers arriving in Paddington to transfer to accessible services like the javelin at St Pancras.

*“My nerves at certain moments in the project were justified. If the numbers were wrong, we would get the blame and suffer the consequences.”*

***A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, who has been running the show, reflects on solutions rather than problems...***

‘So excited to be back!’

If I heard that message once, I heard it hundreds of times. Everyone involved with the Accessible Shuttles, in fact anyone involved with the Olympic Games feels the same.

The ECT family during Games Time had doubled that of our normal staffing levels. Adding to that our community transport cousins, we are talking about close on a thousand people. Whilst it would be tempting to take all the credit (at least if everything is going well) it is important that I acknowledge the project management team. Under the management of Toby Parsons from ECT, working in partnership with the ODA, we have strived in our mission to make this the most accessible Games ever.

Each venue, each public transport access point, each blue badge parking area was assessed in terms of its accessibility and potential need. Complicated mathematical formulae or a finger in the air? Neither was going to give us the right answer, and my Maths degree was of no use whatsoever.

How can you measure mobility needs? Is there a database of walking aids, will census information be a good indicator of public ballot ticket lottery success? How many semi-housebound, older people will have been persuaded by their families to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime experience. My nerves at certain moments in the project were justified. If the numbers were wrong, we would get the blame and suffer the consequences.

This position reflects well the untapped demand for accessible transport in general. Why community transport exists in many areas – to plug the gaps; semi housebound people unable to go about their day to day business. ‘Transport is a problem,’ they say. ‘NO, transport is part of the solution,’ I say.

From the earliest planning stages, the ODA was determined to incorporate best practice in providing transport for people with mobility difficulties, in particular passengers travelling in their wheelchairs. Making sure that everyone travels safely.

It is no surprise then, says she confidently, that the ODA approached the community transport sector. In my role as the Chair of London’s Community Transport Association committee I set about setting standards for these services and then finding a fair and equitable way of involving all London CTs in this project. Do we have enough capacity? Will I manage to persuade everyone to give up a holiday in summer 2012? Always up for a challenge and not being one to give up easily – well, here we are.

Day three is a quiet day to start with: I’m catching up in the office and a group of drivers return from their early shift at the Olympic Park. They look pretty worn out. Maybe a little foolishly I ask how it’s going: ‘Brilliant, loving it, really busy, haven’t stopped!’

‘Phew,’ I think to myself. Trevor was absolutely glowing with enthusiasm: ‘At the end of the day, it’s what it’s all about. We are giving them what they need.’ One of his passengers earlier, a wheelchair user, had commented that he would consider London to be seamless, especially in comparison to his home country Germany.

As I head out eastwards, say hello to our teams, see how things are going, a further messages was ringing in my ears:

‘Wish it was carrying on after the Olympics and Paralympics.’ Indeed.

## **Paralympic blog: day 4, naivety, pragmatism – and no parking!**

2 September 2012



*“Are we naïve not to be charging for every contractual variation or are we being pragmatic?”*

No parking for accessible shuttles!

***A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, who has been running the show, faces challenges from her mother, commissioners and no parking signs***

‘What exactly do you do all day?’ asks my mother not unreasonably when I have had so little time to see her over the last few weeks. ‘Olympics,’ I reply vaguely, which seems to do the trick when I quickly change the subject. At times I am forced to elaborate a little and I venture ‘accessible shuttles’ which probably is even less helpful.

How do I explain, that if we are talking about Stratford Station, then it means one thing, Greenwich another and Eton Dorney something else altogether. And that is why the flexible approach of the community transport sector has been so attractive to the Olympic Delivery Authority.

Commercial operators are usually very focused on the service. And the drivers. Every 10 minutes, or whatever the frequency might be. If a group of passengers turn up at the bus stop, the supervisor looks at his watch and declares a time forcing his passengers to do the maths themselves.

Whilst I may be exaggerating for effect, it illustrates well the alternative demand responsive approach. A group of spectators arrive and our service coordinators help the passengers board the bus and send them on their way.

We have also been praised for our partnership approach. If things are quiet in one area, then we are more than happy to move resources to another. No cost. Are we naïve not to be charging for every contractual variation or are we being pragmatic? My own experience in this area is that even as a charity, we are mistrusted or misunderstood by some contracting authorities. Which is why it has been so refreshing to work with the ODA.

As I make my way across London, Paddington is a good stopping off point to seek out accessible shuttles. I play my usual routine of asking the various Games Makers where I might find the accessible shuttles. I get a very detailed and helpful explanation and I move on happily. (A far cry from the early days where I was directed towards a golf buggy to take me to the train platform of choice and the only sign in the station was pointing you up an escalator. We now have a variety of signs including one helpfully pointing towards the lift.)

I catch up with the coordinator team as they change over shifts. Drivers are working well together in a fabulous example where we have a variety of community transport organisations – the “H” team – Hounslow, Hillingdon and Hammersmith & Fulham.



Good to see everyone happy. Which is more than can be said about me! Someone had attached a temporary no-parking sign to our lovely magenta monolith sign. Right next to a lamppost... in fact to every magenta monolith in the road!

## **Paralympic blog: day 5, when best-laid plans...**

3 September 2012



*“Where the bus drivers from a well-known bus company have tea on tap, rest rooms, TV, pavilion, lord only knows what, our guys make do with a couple of folding chairs and an umbrella.”*

***A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, who has been running the show, continues her rounds of the venues during the weekend***

‘Working at the weekend?’

It amazes me how many people seem to be surprised that I might be working at the weekend during the Olympics and Paralympics. Monday to Friday. Nine to five. Now there’s a thought.

But the weekend does give me the excuse for a slower start and I am excited at the prospect of being out and about enjoying the atmosphere.

First up will be Greenwich Park. The closest transport link is Greenwich station served by the DLR and National Rail and which is fully accessible. It is then a 20 minute walk through the centre of Greenwich before you reach the venue. Our shuttles provide an alternative for those unable to walk the distance.

At the point that I arrive from the DLR, we have quite a few people waiting during one of the busiest times of the day. I chat to a family who tell me that they have enough battery power for their wheelchair to get them one way but not return. The shuttle is a godsend to them and they are extremely appreciative of the service. The wall on the boundary of the business next door to our stop makes for makeshift seating and as the buses make their way back from their circular route, the queue quickly disappears.



Another example of a variety of community transport organisations working together, the south London team – Sutton, Bromley, Wandsworth, Bexley and Merton.

I then manage to sneak a bit of time to watch the dressage competition: next door to the Museum within the Royal Park – the setting is spectacular. As you approach the venue, it feels unusually quiet with the occasional quietly dignified clapping. It soon becomes clear that this is the most moving moment of the day. As the competitor finishes their routine, we all wave our flags quietly; once given the signal, we clap modestly; thus ensuring that the horses are not spooked by the crowds giving each competitor the opportunity to do well.

Time to move on and I make my way to Excel. Here we operate a shuttle between West Silvertown station and the transport hub near the venue. And the operative word here is 'NEAR'. The transport hub itself is not well situated and having got disabled spectators there, they still have a bit of a trek. An example of how planners didn't quite get it right, and we have to work with it. In this case we have a team of mobility assistants who offer wheelchair assistance. Another part of the service we offer that makes all the difference.

One of the wonderful aspects of the Games has been the way various agencies work together. This is especially obvious at the transport hubs and the stations.

But there are differences. Where the bus drivers from a well-known bus company have tea on tap, rest rooms, TV, pavilion, lord only knows what, our guys make do with a couple of folding chairs and an umbrella. Even those are often given up for use by waiting passengers. Whilst at times they seem to have more drivers than passengers (or maybe I just caught them at a shift change) we are quietly getting on with assisting our customers. That earns you respect and the privilege of using their facilities. Whilst their drivers seem as grumpy as ever, ours are having the time of their life. OK. Maybe slightly exaggerated for effect, says she very quickly before anyone complains.

I make my way along the scenic route passing under the cable car – a spectacular ride that I can highly recommend. I am warmly greeted by the Service Coordinators who seemed to be expecting me. Obviously my progress across London is being reported. Their working environment may not be the best, but Julian and Anita certainly make the most of it. I leave them to it with their laughter ringing in my ears. No wonder our customers are so appreciative.

## Paralympic blog: day 6, a feather in the cap

4 September 2012



**A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty, CEO of ECT Charity, reports from Eton Dorney and Picadilly**

Sunday dawns dull and overcast – a perfect day therefore for visiting Eton Dorney on its last day of competition.

We have been supplying Accessible Shuttles from Slough and Windsor stations to the transport hub at the rowing competition. Our vehicles are shadowing the mainstream double deckers providing additional capacity for wheelchair users and disabled spectators. Once everyone arrives at the hub, they are faced with quite a trek even if in pleasing surroundings. Further Accessible Shuttles take spectators that final distance.

Golf buggies supplement capacity. This time, we can't compete unless of course we have torrential rain or there are none available. The squeals of excitement make it a festive atmosphere. And festive it certainly was, even in the drizzle. I arrive at the point team GB wins the final Gold and I get to see the medal winners' laps of honour.

Our own team, meanwhile – our coordinators and drivers from our partners, People to Places and Slough CT – had drawn the long straw. And didn't they know it (occasional drizzle aside). The only members of our team to get full accreditation, they had a waterside view of the rowers passing about half way down the course.

Other than the spectacular surroundings, I would like to nominate the Eton Dorney hub (which incidentally moved from one side of the lake to the other between Olympics and Paralympics) as the best laid out and best organised, at least from our perspective.

The way the interagency teams worked together was quite inspirational. Other than the difference in uniforms, the handover between the Games Makers and our staff was seamless even when 10,000 people tried to leave at the same time.

The brass band and the Morris dancers made for wonderful background entertainment. Our gentle giant trio of Michal, Malcolm and Konrad kept the buses circulating and we soon cleared the queue.

I didn't rush off as there was a rumour circulating that Kate Lundy, the Australian Sports Minister, was about to settle her bet with the UK sports minister by rowing the Eton Dorney course in Team GB colours on account of Australia winning fewer gold medals. In true good sportsmanship typical of Australians, Kate did herself proud with "Land of Hope and Glory" playing loudly in the background cheered on by the staff and Games Makers. "Rule Britannia" followed, with Queen's "We are the Champions", as she went across the finish line. Can't imagine anything similar being undertaken with the French or, for that matter, the Americans.

What a way to end my visit. Laughing – which I seem to be doing a lot these days. My day was rounded off very nicely with the Regent St festival and a bit of time off. The Piccadilly Secret Circus was intended to surprise anyone already in the area and the grand finale scheduled for 8pm was in Piccadilly Circus itself. People began congregating and bemused tourists and shoppers wondered why. Zip wires in every conceivable direction gave us a bit of a clue as to what to expect. At one point there was a rumour that one of the feather clad people on the rooftops was Boris himself. That kept me chuckling for a while.

If anyone had told me that feather clad zip wire artists would be sprinkling feathers over the crowds, I would have stayed at home. What a ridiculous proposition. But with the accompanying music, it worked superbly. The scene was reminiscent of that from the film *Holiday Inn* and Bing Crosby "Dreaming of a White Christmas" as feathers fell from above and were blasted from below.

My colleagues from London Underground were already scripting press releases along the lines of "wrong kind of feather" and Westminster's street cleaners were waiting around the corner to start the clear up. Rumour had it though that no sooner the feathers had been swept up into piles, people having fun would be scattering them again.

## Paralympic blog: day 7, Stratford, Segways and safety

6 September 2012



**A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. Anna Whitty reflects on the non-stop flow of customers**

The records are tumbling on the tracks and so are ours.

More passengers on the Accessible Shuttles on Saturday than any day during the Olympics. And as the public's excitement and interest in the Paralympics grows, the same could be said about Accessible Shuttles. The Stratford route is our showcase, the most highly profiled, originating at the end of the Jubilee line platforms, and the drop-off area being next to the southern PSA (Passenger Screening Area) – the entrance to the Olympic Park to you or I.

The shuttle was originally planned to alleviate pressure on the lift system at Stratford station. The planners didn't really take it very seriously in the early days as the drop off zone was a long way from the entrance to the Park. Pointless in my opinion and was not going to do the cause of accessibility any favours. I dug my heels in, upset a few people and eventually with the various road closures, we almost stumbled upon the perfect spot at a junction right by one of the emergency gates used extensively at exit.

I have grown to love Stratford station. Yes I know, I need to get out more or at least when I do, not spend it hanging around transport hubs. The station is a maze of tunnels, platforms, stairs, bridges. It is easy to get lost. But fortunately most people who arrive are all heading in the same direction and you follow the crowds.

Which is all very well, if you are fully mobile. In the case of anyone with a mobility difficulty it becomes daunting. By the time you have reached Stratford or any other venue for that matter, you are likely to have already done a fair bit of walking. As the Games have continued, more and more people have

used the Stratford shuttle, nearly doubling our Olympics numbers. We get repeat customers who have such an incredible experience, the transport works well for them and they come back, sometimes again and again, often bringing back family members as in the case of one gentleman who hadn't left his house in years.

The flow of customers is relentless. Non-stop. Each person is treated like they are the only person we have seen all day. Like I have said before, our service coordinators are totally focused on the customer and not a timetable. Just to be clear, the shuttle is not the fastest option of getting to the Park even if you walk slowly. The minibus journey does go round the houses and sometimes gets stuck at security but I am told that it "adds to the experience".

This is the point of accessibility. How many times have we heard that for instance coaches don't need to be accessible as no one with disabilities uses them. We have proven here that as people become aware, more and more will use the service and encourage others to use it too. No wonder our customers are so happy and so appreciative.

But not every customer will always be happy, as one lady from overseas arrived on what is best described as a "sitting Segway" discovered. Sometimes no matter how hard you try, common sense and customer care is not the primary focus – safety has to be. The potential for accidents is huge, the vulnerability of some of our passengers demands additional care.

That is why the community transport sector gives safety and training so much attention. We were unable to accommodate this particular customer as there was no mechanism of securing the machine safely in the bus. It would also defy every safety rule that is part of MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme). And if these Segways become a hit in this country I am sure that proper restraining devices will follow. CTs must lead the way in safety on accessible transport.

## Paralympic blog: day 8, OMG it's the minister and 300 wheelchairs

7 September 2012



**A remarkable partnership of 24 community transport operators have been hard at work ensuring a fantastic transport experience during London 2012 for mobility impaired visitors from around the globe. As the Prime Minister reshuffles his team, the social enterprise transport team at London 2012 prepares for a ministerial visit**

One of the most interesting aspects about the Games has been the unexpected, the unknown. The challenge then is to make it work. Our can-do approach will always succeed.

Today's mild excitement was a "state visit" from a political figure. With the Prime Minister's reshuffle of government in the air it is always good for politicians to be associated with success stories.

So we came to be hosting Norman Baker. In the event, Norman himself went nowhere, though we have yet another Secretary of State and two other Junior Ministers to impress upon the benefits of Community Transport.

Looking for a good news story, the Accessible Shuttles were an obvious fit our politician and his media circus and the ODA. "One of the transport success stories," the subsequent news release said. Expected to carry 100,000 people on 37 routes throughout the Olympics and Paralympics, was the quoted figure. 100,000 passengers.

Wow.

To be honest, I don't think any of us really considered what the total might be. Our focus has always been the accessibility, where the gaps might be. Putting it into perspective, the Olympic Park expects over 200,000 visitors every day. Those of you who have been in the Park know how busy it is, the crowds everywhere. Even half of that is some number. A lot of spectators. A lot of passengers on our buses.

Next time a local authority doesn't take us seriously when tendering for transport services (like asking for some ridiculous minimum turnover somehow to prove our capabilities but in fact causing us not to qualify), we will mention the great triumph of London 2012 and see where that gets us. If that doesn't work, we could always mention G4S and how that went spectacularly wrong.

The biggest excitement of the day was at our Accessible Shuttles stop outside West Silvertown station. Our team there has been used to a fairly steady but not too busy stream of customers. Suddenly within half an hour, several coach loads of French and Danish spectators arrived: 300 people plus another 50-70 spectators travelling in their wheelchairs – essentially too many to count. OMG.

A disaster? Of course not! A brilliant example of how we can turn a potential disaster into a success story. Brice and Marc, our service coordinators set about (with the aid of their schoolboy French) allocating as many as possible onto the buses. The Danish group was more than happy, with some help, to make their way along the scenic route to Excel. Via our control centre, they then made arrangements for future coach parties to be dropped at the transport hub, which is closer to the venue and where we have a team of mobility assistants to help.

Marc, our lead coordinator was still mopping his brow the next day when I passed through.

This was not the only venue that was busy. At Greenwich, we also found ourselves extremely busy at the end of the day. The area managers between them arranged for temporary cover by moving vehicles from one venue to another. Management energy is focused on helping colleagues rather than fighting the ODA for additional payment. The can-do philosophy pervades the whole team, especially the drivers who as usual in these situations are very happy to help out and indeed do a fantastic job. The CT drivers never forget that it is all about the customer.



## Paralympic blog: day 9, changing fundamental habits

8 September 2012



**Social enterprise transport leader Anna Whitty is having the time of her life at London 2012 – convinced that it is possible to change people’s travel habits**

As the week goes by, the feel-good factor in London increases.

The way that London has embraced the Paralympics has set a benchmark for future Paralympic Games. I know that everyone that I have been working closely with never really did see any difference between the two events and certainly from an organisational point of view they were always seen as Games Time, one big event. And I am having the time of my life, but struggling to convince my family that I am still “working”.

I am determined not to forget our teams, who really ARE delivering our services on the ground, no matter how remotely.

Today I headed out to Woolwich Arsenal, from where we are operating Accessible Shuttles to the Royal Artillery Barracks, home of Archery and Shooting. The public transport option involves local buses and some walking.

The venue does feel like it is in the middle of nowhere and the buildings glistened against the gorgeous blue skies. Our load zone area is in the blue-badge car park next door. This venue has been one with the least operational issues for us. The load zones at either end were deemed acceptable early on in the planning process.

Yet to our amusement, a local resident dog walker, a bit of a character, has been espousing on a daily basis his opinion about the positioning of our zone nearer to the venue entrance. Why is it so far away? Why can’t it be closer? Health and Safety gone mad! You know that sort of thing.

He certainly had a point. We just enjoyed the squirming by local officials.

Every day, the planners told us that the blue badge parking was going to be busy. “Fully booked”, they said. Every day we looked at the space in the car park and thought to ourselves, “no it isn’t”. Though to be fair, the disparity was within the assumptions of how long people would stay.

We also came across a handful of disabled spectators who came more than once and as soon as they realised that there was an accessible alternative within public transport, they were very happy to leave their cars at home.

The messages here are simple. We can change people’s travel habits. If there is a suitable alternative, people will use it. Secondly, there is no better experience than first-hand on-the-ground experience particularly by those with responsibility who will have the opportunity to influence planning in the future.

## **Paralympic blog: day 10 – stars of the service**

9 September 2012



**Recruiting nearly 170 extra people was a big risk – but they have been the stars of the service, says London 2012 social enterprise transport chief Anna Whitty**

Taking on a large number of staff for short-term contracts can be fraught with difficulties as G4S have so publicly discovered.

In the early stages of planning there was talk about providing escorts on the vehicles. I insisted that the real need was on the ground, assisting passengers, helping to speed up boarding so that we are well placed to deal with lots of people at a time. The idea of service coordinators was born.

We have recruited 106 service coordinators and 63 mobility assistants and blue badge parking attendants. That is a lot of people. Whilst not detracting from the incredible work our drivers have done, they have been the unexpected stars. Whilst many of them are still in higher education or recently finished, they have succeeded in earning the respect of drivers and other transport colleagues despite their relative youth and inexperience.

Recognising that, we set about an extensive training course that included elements of our MiDAS (Minibus Drivers Awareness Scheme) training, disability awareness, customer service and real-life experience on some of our PlusBus/Dial-a-ride services. They also received detailed training in the correct procedures in securing wheelchairs on minibuses. This clearly worked.

According to some of the feedback I have had, it also created an opportunity to get to know colleagues. Maybe that is why they all worked so well together.

I have had many emails and lots of messages saying that this job has been such a fantastic experience. Several have said that it is the most worthwhile job they have ever had. Teaching these coordinators real skills in supervision and leadership has been quite a privilege. This is an age group that is often supervised in temporary holiday jobs by whoever happens to have been around the longest rather than being suitable or having the right skills.

I would like to highlight the team at Stratford. All our teams were fantastic, but the relentless flows of spectators, 2,581 on our busiest day, meant that this team in particular had their work cut out more than others.

Their passion, dedication, and belief in what they were doing was an inspiration to me too.

Whenever I passed through, I would always come and say hello. They probably thought I was checking up on them, or put more charitably, being friendly. But if the truth be known, I was captivated by the incredible job they were doing. The feeling was similar to the pride you feel supporting your children in their sports activities and school plays, and I have done plenty of that in my time.

They made the job look dead easy – so unless you knew better it would be hard to appreciate how efficient they were. But despite this, we did overhear comments like “I can’t believe how well organised it is”. The comments were so deserved. During normal community transport operations, we would allow a good 15 minutes to board a bus with passengers and secure those travelling in their wheelchairs but here we had to be much quicker.

The team managed a fleet of 15 minibuses each with different seating capacities, different lifts etc, turning them round as quickly as possible. The busiest time was at the end of the day when thousands of people left the Olympic Park at once. They had the fleet lined up ready and waiting and worked extraordinarily hard to make sure that our group of spectators returned to the station as quickly as possible.

Tom, the lead coordinator, had developed a positive relationship with the LOCOG Games Mobility team and spectators were able to return their hired scooters to our load zone right up to the minibus door. A seamless service.

Our Mobility Assistants had a far less glamorous role. They spent much of their time hanging around car parks offering assistance to people who would struggle to walk that last distance from, for example, blue badge parking. Whilst they were only relatively busy, I was so heartened by how worthwhile they thought their role was. Thanks to them, there were many people who were able to reach the venue with dignity and in comfort

But I would like to give Anna (not me) – one of the service coordinators at Stratford – the last word:

“London 2012 was an amazing experience and being a part of the Games – making it happen – was a great feeling. I have so many memories from the customers we were helping, especially a 5 year old kid in a wheelchair who was coming back from athletics at the Paralympics. He is beaming – so, so happy and he said to me and his mother 'I am going to be like those athletes one day'.”

### **Paralympic blog: day 11, community transport visits Brands Hatch!**

10 September 2012



**As the days and hours race by, London 2012 social enterprise transport boss Anna Whitty asks how the 24 delivery organisations can continue to make such a difference**

The days are flying by now, and there is a definite feeling that we must enjoy it to the maximum before it is too late. The atmosphere across London is electrifying and hot as the mercury moves upwards. A good day then to leave the heat of the city for a few hours and visit Brands Hatch.

A Paralympic venue only (not used during the Olympics), hosting a variety of cycling events, it had come together in the previous few days. Our own team had transferred from Eton Dorney. Very experienced, our area manager was quick to point out during the preparations that a half done path of matting for wheelchair users who then had a choice of long grass or gravel was not really acceptable. They had obviously listened as the following day, our fortunes had vastly improved – two half-finished paths side by side! Priceless.

Brands Hatch can be reached via Sevenoaks station and upon arrival I detected a bit of excitement. A wheelchair user had already got off the train and he and I watched very bemused as a young lad got dispatched with a set of ramps under his arm. We then had the comical scene of watching him run up and down the platform looking for a passenger still with the ramp under his arm, Laurel and Hardy like. None emerged. Exaggerating (only) slightly for effect, it was good to see the system work – sort of.

In the meantime, my new friend (a Canadian) had made his way to the lift with the station manager in hot pursuit with his camera. “May I take a picture for our staff magazine?” he asked.

But all we had was a blur, as our Canadian friend had no intention of hanging around and our driving team from Bromley CT was so efficient that before our station manager had managed to press the shutter on his camera, we were well on our way. The drive through beautiful Kent countryside took half an hour and we had an enjoyable time discussing the virtues of our respective weather systems.

Suffice to say that numbers of spectators using these shuttles are very low but it is critical that they are there.

Upon arrival I was pleased to note that we had one fully functioning, whole pathway and a miniature transport hub. Unusually, our designated load zone was closest to the entrance to the security area. The Paralympic cyclists passed right next to our load zone and the sun was shining too!

Beyond security the venue was buzzing. Spectators everywhere with their picnics and blankets, it could have been Epsom Derby if it were not for the multitude of school groups and lack of fairground amusements. Wheelchair users everywhere, the most we've seen in such a small space at any venue. But, blue badge parking and park&ride have been the transport method of choice. Our passengers have been almost exclusively foreign (ie. with no car) travelling from London.

I start to make my way in reverse back to London. As we are during the quiet time, we have time to chat. Everyone is talking about the legacy, especially those who have worked in community transport for some time. It is obvious how much individuals who work for the sector really care. Not just about the journey they provide for the passenger but also about how the organisation they represent will be able to benefit in the future.

How we can do more of the same, making a difference?

## Paralympic blog: day12 – the last full day

17 September 2012



**London 2012 social enterprise transport chief Anna Whitty experiences the sadness and happiness of an Olympic community transport victory**

You know the feeling on holiday, on your last full day: trying not to be sad, trying to fit everything in, bottling it all up and going back to favourite places one last time.

Well, today is one of those days. Very bravely I keep on smiling, relishing every moment. Fortunately the weather is absolutely glorious which helps keep my spirits up.

On their last day too, the team at Excel continue to deliver but as I see them again, they too are sensing the end of this extraordinary time.

Already some venues have closed so, yet again, I am drawn to Stratford and the Olympic Park. Still a full day of sports here. I am very conscious that the clock is ticking and the most exciting project I have done in my career will shortly come to an end. I find comfort in the 200,000 or so who are in the Park today. It is heaving and I like it when we are busy.

One of the great things about these Games has been the way, on the ground, everyone has been working together. Stratford is a fantastic example where the demarcation lines have just disappeared. One big happy family. We are after all “One Team Transport”. For once, a slogan that wasn’t just PR-speak but actually came true.

We are particularly grateful to Howard Collins, Chief Operating Officer of London Underground who took our Stratford team under his wing, and provided overnight safekeeping for our fleet. Two previously unrelated organisations working together – a hallmark of these Games and a friendship forever.

60% of our passengers during the Paralympics travelling on Accessible Shuttles were on the Stratford route. No wonder they were always busy. Occasionally I worried that everyone was so exhausted

working so hard that they wouldn't last until the end. Just because I was so driven on the adrenalin, surviving on average on just six hours' sleep every night, didn't mean that others could or should too.

"How are you doing?" I ask Abou, one of the drivers. "The busier, I am, the more excited I am," he answered simply.

I have to say, that the drivers across all the community transport organisations have proved to be fantastic ambassadors for their organisations. As one of my CT colleagues likes to remind me: small is beautiful. And very professional. When assessing capabilities, it was sometimes said that the smaller organisations would struggle to deliver anything on a larger scale. As part of our One Team Accessible Shuttles Transport, we have shown the world just how capable we all are.

We have often talked about the remarkable partnership between the 24 Community Transport organisations. It has been a real privilege to be entrusted to represent the sector's interests and make sure that the work was fairly and logically allocated despite the ever-changing requirements – sometimes at short notice. The co-operation was outstanding.

Wandering around the Park that afternoon, there were people everywhere and incredibly the Games Makers were still full of their usual enthusiasm. It was widely believed that, along with the uniforms, LOCOG was handing out happy pills to all their volunteers though if the truth be known, London was one big happy city.

Having a bit of time out, I was lucky enough to see one of the semi-finals in the wheelchair rugby, "murder ball" as it became known. The hope was that we would get to see a bit of murdering, but in the event all we saw was the Canadians thrashing the US team by all of one point.

That evening, the final events of the Paralympics were being played out in the stadium. The crowds were hugely generous in their accolade for Oscar Pistorius who won the final gold. This was our cue to get ahead of the crowds for the big egress.

The sight of a stadium emptying, indeed several stadia, and these huge crowds dispersing onto public transport, is a sight to behold. The fast flowing stream of people being subtly sorted first into different parts of Stratford transport network and then between the various lines is so impressive – our shuttles available at the Park gate and dropping off right by the Jubilee Line platforms.

Not too far though to miss a blast from Howard's megaphone urging passengers onto the correct platform for the next departing train as well as general helpful information like 'first class carriage at the front of the train'.

No doubt he was talking to our Accessible Shuttles passengers.



## Paralympic blog: day 13 – and then it was over

18 September 2012



**Something ‘extraordinarily special’ happened at London 2012, says social enterprise community transport boss Anna Whitty, as she reflects on the closing events**

The final day of London 2012 is unfortunately upon us. Despite the beautiful warm weather, the melancholy is slowly taking over. None of us can quite believe it is nearly over.

But duty calls. We provided some shuttles for the marathon event in central London and at the Olympic Park we were very quiet during the day with only a handful of finals going on. Then a small flurry of activity as the Closing Ceremony approached.

In the meantime, I had started on my mission of spreading the word, working on the Legacy, making sure that we were not overlooked in the rush for credit over the success of the Games and transport in particular. I got to speak to Boris, Nick Clegg, Ken (in no order of importance please note) and a variety of others, not that I am name dropping in any way. Hard work this networking.

I was extremely fortunate to be in receipt of a ticket for the Closing Ceremony. And what a magnificent ceremony it was. You had to be there to really appreciate it, the beauty, the poignancy. Oh and a Coldplay concert, though we thought that the inclusion of Rihanna and Jay Z was a bit random. The moment when the whole crowd sang along to Viva la Vida was especially lovely as we all tried not to choke on our tears.

Then it ended. Suddenly it was all over. And everyone just sat there disbelievingly.

But it was time to go and walk through the Park one last time at the greatest Games ever. We walked out in dignified silence, but the Games Makers had a final dose of their happy pills. There was much singing and communal hugging going on.

I waited till the Park gates were shut, our final passengers had gone and walked to a now empty Stratford station. Who said that bureaucracy didn't have a sense of humour? A big sign – “Goodbye from London, next stop Rio 2016” – greeted us and we had some fun with photos.

And then the final goodbyes from our team – we were all there – top down. Hugs all round. We were all too choked to be saying much. The Accessible Shuttles project had come to an end and we headed home on our respective last trains...

But before I finally sign off, I would like to thank those of you who have been reading my blogs, sharing some of the fun and spirit of London 2012. And of course thank the whole team involved in the project – nearly 1,000 people. A very big THANK YOU and congratulations. Without a doubt Accessible Shuttles have been a huge success: nearly 100,000 passenger trips, very happy customers and no incidents.

Those of us who have spent a long time planning, those of us who enjoyed every day, every hour every minute, are truly disconsolate. What will we be doing next? I know that I shall be very busy! The Legacy: making sure that Community Transport's profile remains high; that no one forgets what we have achieved. Spreading the word...

But I would like to give Gary, one of the drivers on the Stratford route the final say:

'How are you feeling?' I ask. 'Terrible!' Gary answers.

'I could have done it every day for ever and ever,' ... 'And ever and ever,' he added. 'It wasn't work, it was fun; it was something extraordinarily special.'

We would all agree.

PRESS RELEASE

5 September 2012

## **Social enterprise buses carry 100,000 during London 2012**



*"I am extraordinarily proud of how successfully the accessible shuttles project has gone and the number of people that were able to attend the events. It's a big success for community transport and for social enterprise."*

**Anna Whitty, CEO, ECT Charity**

A social enterprise bus service for London 2012 spectators with mobility requirements has been hailed as one of the transport success stories of the Games – with the number of passengers exceeding all expectations.

Latest forecasts suggest that accessible bus shuttles run by community transport enterprises for the Olympic Delivery Authority could carry close to 100,000 passengers during the Olympics and

Paralympics – on as many as 37 different routes serving almost all venues inside and outside London during the Olympics.

Unlike other Games-time services run by major commercial bus, coach and rail operators, the accessible shuttles are being provided for the ODA by 24 community transport operators – producing vital income, additional skills, and the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise, professionalism and capacity to deliver transport services.

During the Olympic Games, there were more than 10,000 journeys on the accessible vehicles, carrying more than 60,000 passengers, with as many as 1,700 passengers a day being taken to the Olympic Park itself. At venues outside London over 17,500 passengers were carried – almost 12,000 of them to and from Eton Dorney, staging the Rowing and Canoe Sprint competition.

During the Paralympic Games there are fewer venues and therefore only 11 routes operating, but the demand for the accessible shuttles has been much higher – with over 2,500 passengers on the Olympic Park route on a single day. By the end of Monday, already over 20,000 had used the shuttle services – suggesting that the final number of passengers from a total of 3,000 journeys could top the 40,000 mark.

The accessible shuttles, carrying ticketed spectators from as early as 6am to as late as 2am, do not need to be booked in advance. The ODA has aimed to ensure a maximum waiting time for passengers of 20 minutes, including the time taken to get wheelchair users on and off board – but waiting times of less than five minutes are the norm.

As well as linking railway stations with venues, the network also includes buses connecting London mainline train terminals with St Pancras International and Javelin services to Stratford International, one of the main gateways for the Olympic Park.

Norman Baker, the Transport Minister with responsibility for buses and accessible transport, visited the Olympic Park yesterday to see for himself how the services are making getting to the Games easier for disabled spectators and others with mobility requirements.

“It is great to see that our transport system has risen to the challenge of the Paralympics by providing a first rate bus service for disabled passengers. This is a shining example of what can be achieved when accessibility is put at the centre of transport planning,” said Mr Baker. “The Paralympics has been an inspiration to us all in so many ways. I am delighted the transport system has worked so robustly and would like to build on this in the future.”

Hugh Sumner, Director of Transport for the Olympic Delivery Authority, said: “These accessible shuttle buses have been a big hit, bridging the gap between public transport and venues for people who

cannot walk at all, or those who cannot manage long distances, to get easily, speedily and conveniently to their Olympic and Paralympic events.

“This has been an important step forward in the provision of transport to big sports and other major events – and has given real practical experience and new skills not just to the London 2012 team, but to the community businesses that have been providing the buses and the drivers. This is another powerful legacy benefit from London and the UK hosting the world’s biggest sporting events.”

The lead operator of the accessible shuttle network is [Ealing Community Transport \(ECT\)](#), a charity and social enterprise that operates services including transport for groups, individual door-to-door services, home-to-school transport and local buses. In total 24 different social enterprises, including 14 London based community transport organisations, are contributing buses and drivers.

Thanks to the project, more than 500 drivers from community transport schemes in London alone have received advanced training, significantly raising skills and awareness of safety. This will have built on the existing training they receive from the Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS).

Anna Whitty, project director and CEO of ECT Charity, said: “When the Olympic Delivery Authority set us the challenge to provide accessible services, we wanted to demonstrate to an international audience what accessible transport should look like. During the last few months, ECT has planned, trained, recruited and worked with 1,000 staff and volunteers to ensure the customers got the transport service they needed, no matter what their mobility requirements are.

“I am extraordinarily proud of how successfully the accessible shuttles project has gone and the number of people that were able to attend the events. It’s a big success for community transport and for social enterprise.”



## Media release

- As many as 100,000 Olympic and Paralympic spectators set to use accessible bus shuttle services to get to the Games
- Transport Minister calls service “a shining example of what can be achieved”
- “Powerful legacy” for the future for local communities and non-profit operators, says London 2012 transport chief

A free bus service for disabled people and other spectators with mobility requirements, including older people, has been hailed as one of the success stories of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games – with the number of passengers exceeding all expectations.

With still five days to go in the Paralympic Games, latest forecasts suggest that accessible bus shuttles managed and funded by the Olympic Delivery Authority could carry close to 100,000 passengers during the two events – on as many as 37 different routes serving almost all venues inside and outside London during the Olympics.

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– Ends –

Notes to Editors:

1. The accessible bus shuttle services were provided by:
  - For Box Hill, Milton Keynes Community Transport (MKCT)
  - For Coventry, Community Transport (Birmingham)
  - For Eton Dorney, People to Places (Windsor and Maidenhead) and Slough Community Transport
  - For Hampden Park, Community Transport Glasgow, and Order of Malta Community Transport (Stirling)
  - For Lee Valley White Water Centre, Essex County Council
  - For London, BATH (Bromley Community Transport), Bexley Accessible Transport (BATS), Brent Community Transport, Croydon Accessible Transport (CAT), Ealing Community Transport (ECT), Hammersmith and Fulham CT, HCT Group (Hackney), Hillingdon Community Transport, Hounslow Community Transport, Merton Community Transport, Sutton Community Transport, Waltham Forest Community Transport, Wandsworth Community Transport, Westway Community Transport.
  - For Old Trafford, Manchester, Community Transport (Manchester) and Easy Go Community Transport (Stockport).
  - For Weymouth and Portland, Dorset Community Transport (DCT).

For further information please contact Government Olympic Communications on 020 7271 1700 or [mediaenquiries@goc2012.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:mediaenquiries@goc2012.qsi.gov.uk)