



## RaKAT Community Transport, Richmond and Kingston



### Location

Richmond and Kingston, London

### Founded

1997

### Legal structure

Richmond and Kingston Accessible Transport (RaKAT) is a registered charity (No 1102302) and UK company (No 4673954)

### Description of activity

RaKAT provides accessible and affordable transport, servicing residents, especially the frail, elderly and other groups that have mobility difficulties or disabilities. It works in partnership with other voluntary organisations by providing transport to those who face mobility difficulties in accessing social and welfare services.

### Key assets

A fleet of over 36 minibuses (of which 27 are wheelchair accessible) and access to a depot and office facility.

### Staff and volunteers

There are 11 employees. There are 115 volunteers (volunteer drivers and passenger assistants).

## Overview

RaKAT was formed in 1997 to give voluntary groups in the boroughs of Kingston and Richmond access to minibuses for the benefit of community groups that need accessible and affordable transport. It is a member of the Community Transport Association umbrella body, and its origins were similar to many other organisations: *“it was difficult for [community and voluntary] organisations to financially run their own bus ... and to have the skill base needed ... and for each group to have an understanding of the legal and other regulations.”* Hence RaKAT raises money to run and maintain community-owned minibuses with a service tailored to the communities it serves. It trains and accredits volunteer drivers and passenger assistants (184 people in the year ending 2018) and makes its specialist expertise in transport available to communities that need its service. In short, as a second tier organisation it provides a collective resource to enable community organisations to support local groups of people disadvantaged by lack of mobility. RaKAT combines work across a breadth of groups with quality of service.

RaKAT’s specialist work means that each individual community organisation does not need to fundraise for its own mini-bus, or to acquire all the associated technical and legal knowledge needed for maintaining buses and training drivers.

They have a membership of about 180 not-for-profit organisations across the two boroughs. In the year 2017–18, 164 community and voluntary (and some statutory) organisations used the service. They completed over 6,700 bookings of a day or half day, and enabled over 161,000 passenger journeys. There were 164 people trained and assessed over the year and voluntary drivers made 615 outings possible for people who would not have been able to access a driver.

A major challenge is raising money for new vehicles. Many funders exclude mini-buses from their criteria. RaKAT's approach has been to employ a mechanic, regularly service buses, and fundraise from local trusts for new buses. Buses are written off by 33 percent each year, so the fiscal value of their assets appears low, but their use value remains high.

## Financial health

RaKAT remains financially healthy, although its position has a degree of precariousness. A major challenge is the lack of recognition by many funders of the value of a pooled resource, such as community transport, for use by a wide range of voluntary organisations. This service takes away from each front-line organisation the need to gain expertise and devote time to the specialist task of running community transport: these groups can stay focused on their key goals. The lease on the current depot from the local authority is due to end soon and this may pose a threat. Space to store and service vehicles is a key necessity for RaKAT.

At a national level, there have been legal moves on competitiveness by the commercial bus and coach sector that, if successful, could damage community transport. This is being challenged by the national network of community transport.

Some community transport organisations have diversified into other areas (including recycling) or have engaged in contract funding that poses risks (and can engage significant staff time) when regular re-contracting occurs. So far, RaKAT has sought to maintain a focus on the core mission and resist time-hungry contracting processes. Extensive, regular contract work to public authorities has been undertaken by some community transport organisations, but this may reduce capacity for the core group: community organisations. RaKAT has, therefore, decided not to take this route. However, there are sound relations between RaKAT and the local authorities – although this changes in style with different governing administrations.

## Three key factors that have affected its development and financial health:

### 1. Charges to community groups for use of the bus

RaKAT has a business model to support affordable use of minibuses for community use. Organisations pay a fee for use of a minibus and in turn receive a community focused service with trained drivers and passenger assistants who are attentive to users' needs. RaKAT provides more than just transport: on occasions volunteers may help elderly people into their home, or carry their shopping into the house, or have skills in working with young people or migrants. Ideally, some surplus is generated to fund repairs. Additionally, some of the costs of van use can be added to project funding by RaKAT or groups.

### 2. Close networks with local foundations

RaKAT is involved in a complex local eco-system of long-standing trusts that periodically raise money to provide either revenue or capital: these include the Richmond Parish Lands Charity, Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity and The Victoria Foundation. The two local authorities have supported RaKAT, particularly by offering the long-term lease (due to expire) of a depot that has seen better days.

### 3. Maintenance and fleet management

The value of each bus is written off by one third each year. Overall the value of the fleet is, notionally, around £180,000. This has remained stable for over five years, although it would be unlikely that this could ever be realised.

High attention is paid to maintaining and servicing the fleet, so vehicles that are five to 10 years old are still in excellent working order. The fleet ranges from vehicles that are new or a few months old to those which are 15 years old.



### Future direction

The long-term direction remains to balance a service that is relevant and affordable for communities in need of accessible transport with a financial model that can provide it. Nevertheless, certain demographic and policy trends may be moving in RaKAT’s direction.

The beneficiaries of the service are both people with mobility problems and local voluntary organisations. These include the frail, the housebound and elderly, and those with disabilities of any age, as well as people that require or want a group experience (for example, transport for sports teams of young people, such as the sea cadets, or visits for the housebound to the seaside – or even a local café – to provide vital social contact).

Hiring a commercial coach is not affordable for many sports teams or community groups. For some groups of people it is about access to services but for others, *“it’s a quality of life issue.”* National policy (such as loneliness strategies) suggests that access to events that break down isolation are important. *“The bus enables activities but for the elderly the outing itself is good.”* Meeting the needs of people with mental health problems, dementia or disability may require supported access to medical or social venues. *“Imagine saying, ‘You can’t go out for six weeks’ to a disabled child in the summer.”* Similarly, RaKAT’s work with organisations supporting newly arrived migrants suggests community transport may provide guided access to social, welfare, and local events relevant to integration. *“They have a two-year visa and have to integrate, learn English, so we can help them get access.”*

These areas all provide opportunities where community transport has an important role to play.

### Financial information

The following table provides an overview of RaKAT Community Transport income, expenditure and assets for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

<b>Income</b>	<b>£577,132</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£605,885</b>
<b>Difference between income and expenditure</b>	<b>-£28,753</b>
<b>Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation</b>	<b>Not available</b>
<b>Annual income from grant or subsidy</b>	<b>£85,000</b>
<b>Fixed assets</b>	<b>£180,974</b>
<b>Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)</b>	<b>Debtors £118,342 Cash at bank in hand £199,988</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£263,277</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>£444,251</b>

Source: RaKAT Community Transport Financial Accounts 2018, Charity Commission

