



Regeneration & Transport Select Committee

EIT Review of the Commissioning and Provision of Public and Community Transport

November 2009

Regeneration & Transport Select Committee Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
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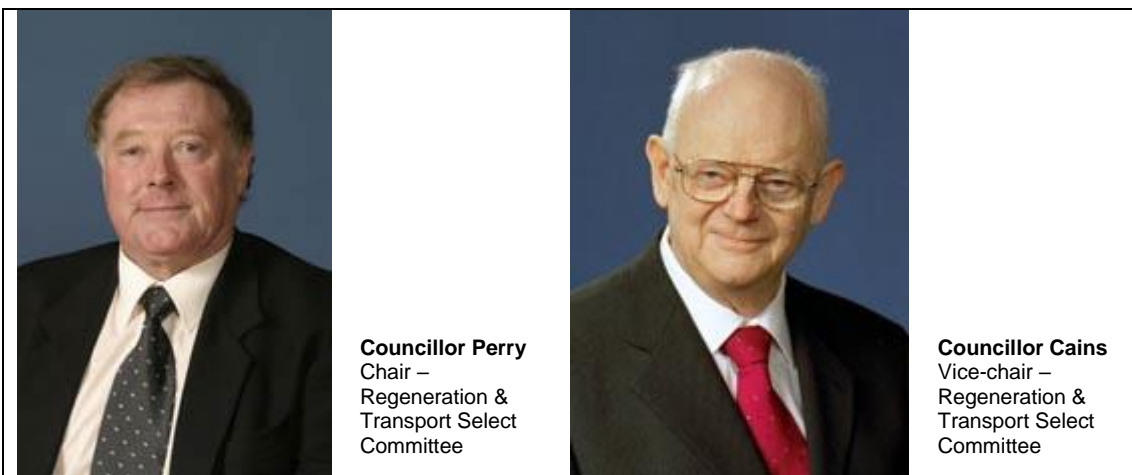
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

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Hartlepool Borough Council
Middlesbrough Borough Council
Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

Foreword



Original Brief

1. What services are included?

Concessionary Travel
Pathfinder Concessionary Travel Scheme

Supported Boroughbus Services
Challenge Bid Funding

Dial-a-Ride
Home to School
Adult Services

2. The Thematic Select Committee's / EIT Project Team overall aim / objectives in doing this work is:

To identify options for future strategy / policy / service provision that will deliver efficiency savings and sustain / improve high quality outcomes for SBC residents.

3. Expected duration of enquiry? What are the key milestones?

6 months.

Approval of Project Plan – 3 June 2009
Initial baselining and challenge – By end of July
Options appraisal – 24 August 2009
Recommendations for change – 7th September 2009
Final Agreement by Select Committee – 5 October 2009
Submission to Cabinet – 29 October 2009

4. In addition to analysis and benchmarking costs, performance, assets etc, what other processes are likely to be required to inform the review? (e.g. site visits; observations; face-to-face questioning, telephones survey, written questionnaire, co-option of expert witnesses etc).

Detailed baseline/challenge documentation

Research in to alternative practice in other Local Authorities delivered through a range of providers

Analysis of CIPFA benchmarking statistics by IDeA expert Financial witness

Evidence at meetings, including evidence from the following officers:

Elizabeth Bird, Community Transport Manager;
John Kavanagh, Public Transport Manager;
Bill Trewick, Traffic & Road Safety Manager. (Stages 1 and 2)

5. How will key partners and/or the public be involved and at what stages?

Analysis of previous consultation carried out with service users, viewpoint panel, and bus operators

6. Please give an initial indication how transformation will enable efficiencies and improvements to be delivered by this EIT review?

Reduce impact on the rising public transport costs whilst ensuring appropriate amount of accessibility for those residents that rely on such transport.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) review of the Commissioning and Provision of Public and Community Transport undertaken by the Regeneration and Transport Select Committee. The review took place between April and November 2009.
- 1.2 Stockton Borough Council supports public and community transport in three areas: provision of concessionary travel passes for public transport and provision of supported services where there were no “commercial” service, and the provision of community transport including transport to adult care facilities for those requiring it, a Dial a Ride service for those that cannot use public transport; and provision of home to school transport.
- 1.3 The Authority is able to provide bus services where no commercial bus service operates, but does not have a statutory duty to do so. The Authority has supported the continuation of the services that were deemed as non profitable by the private operators, introducing an eligibility criteria to ensure that these services provide ‘value for money’. The Council’s Contracts and Publicity Budget of £657,814 consists of three elements; the net cost of council supported Boroughbus Contracts £483,712 (after deduction of income from Rural Bus Subsidy Grant etc.), the cost of Stockton Council’s contribution towards the Joint Public Transport Group (JPTG) £140,788 and an element of Technical Officers Salaries (TOS) recharges of £33,314. In addition, the Authority uses Challenge Bid Funding to support two further services, a shuttle service from Stockton to Teesside Park via Teesdale and a Community Lynx service for rural parts of the borough.
- 1.4 The Committee noted that it was a high priority to ensure continued services. However, the Committee accepted that if further efficiencies were required then the Authority may need to consider reducing the number of subsidised services. Any decisions to do so would, however, need to be prioritised and considered against other service efficiencies.
- 1.5 The English National Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme (ENCTS) enabled free travel on all local bus services in England on weekdays after 9.30am and any time at weekends. Tees Valley operated a local enhancement on the national scheme which allowed free travel across the Tees Valley area before 9.30am. The Committee noted that negotiating on a basis of operating a partial fare before 9.30am Monday – Friday may reduce the amount of subsidy needed.
- 1.6 The Pathfinder concessionary travel scheme for 16 – 19 year olds has enabled young people to travel for half fare at any time on scheduled bus services within Tees Valley. The Pathfinder pass costs just £5 per annum for those in education and £10 per annum for those who were not in education and had not been increased for approximately 10 years. Although Government Pathfinder funding ends in 2009/10, which part funded the scheme, there were £52,500 remaining resources which could, along with funding provided by Technical Services, be used to extend the scheme beyond August 2010 for at least another year should no further Grant regime be put in place.

- 1.7 The Authority has a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for those pupils with special needs, primary school pupils residing over two miles from the school in their catchment area, secondary school pupils residing over three miles from the school in their catchment area, and those that do not have a safe walking route to the school in their catchment area. 2,722 pupils receive home to school transport provided or commissioned by Community Transport. 943 of those pupils have special needs and required individual transport assessments. All in house routes and many of the taxi routes were staffed by passenger assistants. There are a total of 180 passenger assistants, employed by the Authority on a part time basis.
- 1.8 Mainstream pupils who do not meet the criteria for free transport are offered a subsidised seat on vehicles scheduled to travel to their school. These pupils currently pay a contribution of £65 per term for their seat, in line with Government recommendation. The Authority subsidises each seat sold to a non eligible pupil travelling to Conyers School at a cost of £184 per year. The Committee believe that an increase in the cost of a seat would ensure a smaller subsidy per seat by the Authority for non-entitled pupils whilst offering a competitive fare compared to the commercial half fare per trip.
- 1.9 The Authority has a statutory duty to make transport provision for attendees of Day Care Centres or Adult Training Centres, but did not have to be the provider of the service. The Community Transport service carries 1320 passengers per week to these centres. The Committee considered outsourcing travel for less dependent passengers and staggering times for Adult Social Care services, but concluded that the implications for social care would outweigh the benefits for both the passenger and Community Transport.
- 1.10 Community Transport operate a Dial a Ride service available for any resident of the Borough who has a recognised permanent or long term impairment which prevents or makes unsuitable the use of public transport. There were 400 registered users of the service. The service operated door to door using two wheelchair accessible vehicles, and additional vehicles from the wider fleet were also used, seven days a week, 8.30am – 9.00pm Monday – Friday and 9am – 6pm Saturday and Sunday. The number of journeys taking place after 6pm and on Sundays was low. The Committee were therefore concerned that the provision of an evening and Sunday service was not economically viable.
- 1.11 Registered users paid an annual £7.50 registration fee, and £1.20 - £1.50 per trip, depending on the distance within the Borough travelled. The Committee noted that a fare increase, regardless of distance travelled within the Borough, to £1.70 would be reasonable while retaining value for money for the service.
- 1.12 Many of the journeys were taking place with a small number of passengers, and registered users were refusing alternative journey times offered. The Committee therefore examined an option to provide a semi scheduled service via one of the two vehicles, travelling to pre-determined destinations on pre-determined days and time
- 1.13 In addition, registered users of Dial a Ride were requesting a flexible door to door service at a travelling time of their choice. The Committee concluded

that a service utilising taxis would offer a flexible and responsive service as well as providing it in more cost effective way. The Committee noted that North Tyneside had implemented a similar scheme. Concerns were raised with disability access and driver's disability training, therefore safeguards would be needed. A phased approach to a taxi based Dial a Ride Service was believed to be the most beneficial option for future improvement.

1.14 The Committee noted that there were areas of Community and Public Transport that could not be examined in depth in the short timescale for the review, and further work would need to take place to ensure that these issues were resolved effectively. Recommendation seven – nine reflects this need for further work.

1.15 It was estimated that the savings realised by recommendations one – five would be up to a maximum of £93,680 for year one rising to a maximum of £153,700 by year 3. A further £187,000 could be realised from other efficiency options at a later stage by Cabinet although decisions would need to be prioritised against other service efficiencies.

Recommendations

(1) That Stockton Borough Council carry out a 'Use It or Lose It' campaign to encourage residents to use public transport services with a view to increasing bus patronage thereby seeking to reduce the subsidy required to support these services.

(2) That Officers enter into dual negotiations for the English National Concessionary Scheme Concession 2010 subsidy with the alternative option of introducing a reduced fare for pass holders travelling before 9.30am Monday – Friday.

(3) That the cost of the Pathfinder 16 – 19 year old half fare concessionary pass be increased from £5/£10 to £8 per annum for all pass holders in the first instance and this be reviewed annually.

(4) That the cost of seats on Home to School transport vehicles being sold to non eligible pupils be increased on an incremental basis over a three academic year period, to commence in 2010/11, from £65 to £80.00 per term in year 1 to a maximum of £100 per term by year three and thereafter reviewed annually.

(5) That, taking into account passenger usage rates and the need to maximise vehicle occupancy whilst retaining a responsive service, the following phased approach is recommended following consultation with all relevant parties including staff, unions and customers:

(a) the hours of the Dial a Ride Service be reduced to daytime only Monday – Friday with alternative taxi arrangements on evenings, Saturdays and Sundays for those users who currently require this service to make regular journeys.

(b) the cost of the fare per trip be increased from £1.20/£1.50 to £1.70 per trip

(c) one of the two Dial a Ride vehicles to provide a semi scheduled service thereby seeking to increase vehicle occupancy

(d) That, in order to provide a more flexible and responsive service to users, Officers commence discussions with all relevant parties with a view to providing the Dial A Ride service through a registered contracted taxi scheme by October 2010, subject to appropriate safeguards being put in place to retain appropriate levels of passenger care and safety.

(6) That if further efficiency savings need to be achieved, the following options should be considered and prioritised by Cabinet against other service efficiencies:

(a) a reduction in Boroughbus subsidised services

(b) the discontinuation of the 16 – 19 year old half price concessionary fare pass after Aug 2010 if additional government funding is ceased.

(7) To ensure appropriate transport options are offered to customers, following a process of assessment that identifies this as a need, that are fair, equitable and robust.

(8) That Cabinet endorse that opportunities for Tees Valley or greater joint Authority provision of community transport services be examined in principle.

(9) That alternative management delivery models for the commissioning and providing public and community transport be explored.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) review of the Commissioning and Provision of Public and Community Transport undertaken by the Regeneration and Transport Select Committee. The review took place between April and November 2009.
- 2.2 Commission and Provision of Public and Community Transport was identified as an area meriting an EIT review at the Scrutiny Liaison meeting held on 26 February 2009. The issue was subsequently referred to the Executive Scrutiny Committee for approval as part of the work programming procedure.
- 2.3 The Authority's three year EIT programme will review all services across the Authority. As part of the process, the Committee received baseline information, and Members provided a challenge to that information. From this challenge efficiency and improvement opportunities were identified and SWOT (Strength / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats) analysis took place for each of these to aid the selection of improvement and delivery options.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A scope and project plan for the review was drafted and agreed by the Committee on 3 June 2009.
- 3.2 The scope included three areas of service being provided:
- Dial a Ride, Home to School Transport and Adult Services Transport (Community Transport)
 - Concessionary Travel and Pathfinder Concessionary Travel Scheme
 - Supported Borough Bus Services and Challenge Bid Funding
- 3.3 To ensure that all three areas were reviewed effectively, the Committee agreed to hold three sub group meetings to discuss each issue in-depth. Opportunities for efficiency and improvement were identified at these meetings and a SWOT analysis was formulated for each option identified to aid the Committee.
- 3.4 The overall objective/aims of the review were to identify options for future strategy, policy, and/or service provision that would deliver efficiency savings while sustaining, or improving, high quality outcomes for Stockton Borough residents.
- 3.5 Varying forms of consultation with public, community transport users, and Viewpoint members had taken place prior to the review, and the Committee took the resulting information into consideration during the review. The 2008 Viewpoint Survey found that satisfaction levels with cleanliness, punctuality and accessibility of public transport were high, however net satisfaction with the information provided was low (34%) and when asked if the fares were reasonable there was only a net agreement of 11%. The Place Survey 2008 found that 51.4% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with local bus services. This level of satisfaction was not significantly higher or lower than the average levels for all of England, other North East Authorities, Tees Valley Authorities, or the Authority's CIPFA Nearest neighbours. From those respondents who stated they were satisfied with the way Stockton-on-Tees

Borough Council was running the borough in the 2008 MORI Survey, 5% stated that this was due to good public transport an increase of 2% from 2006. Community Transport had also carried out user surveys for their Home to School Transport Service and found that satisfaction levels were high. Results for the 2007/8 School Transport school/college survey found that all 9 schools surveyed receiving the service stating that they were happy with the service being provided, staff were helpful, and there were no concerns with punctuality of the buses. Only 7 from over 200 respondents from the 2007 Conyers School Transport Survey stated that they were not satisfied with the vehicles used to transport them to school or the punctuality of the service. Community Transport also carried out regular site visits for all its services to ensure that users were satisfied, and services were running effectively.

- 3.6 Extensive consultation had taken place for the Scrutiny Review of Transport which was undertaken by the Environment & Regeneration Select Committee between August 2003 and March 2004. Evidence was gathered from a variety of sources, including carrying out questionnaires with students, consulting with community groups, requesting information from bus operators, holding a drop in session for the public to give comments, and travelling on public transport as mystery shoppers. Three recurring issues were identified in the Scrutiny Review of Transport: buses were often late or did not turn up/were unreliable; there were no through routes to key destinations/need to change buses to get to a destination; bus fares were expensive.
- 3.7 In addition, the Stockton-on-Tees Local Involvement Network (LINK) carried out a review of Dial a Ride during April – October 2009 and their report was presented to the Select Committee for consideration (see Appendix),. LINK made six recommendations for change within the Dial a Ride Service and the Committee considered each of the recommendations when reviewing the service.
- 3.8 The review addressed the strategic objective to provide a sustainable, effective transport network that supports regeneration and economic growth.

4.0 Evidence/Findings

- 4.1 Stockton Borough Council supports public and community transport in three areas: provision of concessionary travel passes and re-imburement of the cost of concessionary travel passengers on public transport; purchasing of bus services from operators when there were no “commercial” service (Boroughbus services); provision of transport to adult care facilities for those that require it and the operation of a Dial a Ride service for those that cannot use public transport; and provision of home to school transport.
- 4.2 Technical Services are responsible for management of concessionary travel schemes, Bus Challenge bids and commissioning Boroughbus services. The Community Transport unit are responsible for adult social care transport, Dial a Ride, and Home to School Transport.

Supported Services

Boroughbus and De minimis Services

- 4.3 Under the Transport Act 1985 the Authority has the power to provide bus services where no commercial bus service operates, but do not have a statutory duty to do so. The Act required that if contracted services were awarded, this must be done via a competitive tendering process.
- 4.4 Other public bodies, i.e. NHS Trusts, Town Councils etc, also have the power to contract operators to provide services where there were no commercial bus services. These public bodies do not need to involve the Authority in their arrangements.
- 4.5 As the commercial bus network reduced, the Authority had been under pressure by residents to support the continuation of the services that were deemed as non profitable by the private operators. These routes are referred to as ‘Boroughbus’ routes. As the cost and level of demand for some services were uncertain, eligibility criteria for supported services had been introduced in 2002 to ensure that these services provided ‘value for money’. Contracts were not automatically awarded to those that met the eligibility criteria, but an assessment was made.
- 4.6 The Authority supports two school routes, four early morning routes, four daytime routes, and six evening/Sunday routes. As well as Boroughbus services, the Authority funds ‘de minimis’ diversions on commercial routes to guarantee access to services. There are eight services that have ‘de minimis’ diversions. The number of supported routes has been reduced in previous years without causing significant accessibility issues. The number of weekly passengers travelling on these routes varied from 25 to 3560, depending on the service. The Authority’s budget for these services in 2009/10 is £483,712. Additionally, the total contracts and publicity budget of £657,814 covers the cost of the Authority’s contribution towards the cost of the Joint Public Transport Group (JPTG) of £140,788 and an element for technical officers’ salaries of £33,314.
- 4.7 Two Boroughbus contracts for school services were inherited from Cleveland Council at reorganisation in 1996; namely the 876 to Ian Ramsey School and the 897/898 to Northfield School. The Boroughbus budget also provides towards the cost of non-entitled students travelling to Conyers School. The

service to St. Michaels School now operates on a commercial basis as the 87 service. The 876 and 897/898 services run term time only. The service to Ian Ramsey is over 3 miles and carries entitled as well as non-entitled students. The route of the 897/898 services to Northfield is less than 3 miles and there are safe walking routes to the school. Non-entitled students who travel on these services pay the commercial half fare, and the services are also available for any member of the public to use.

- 4.8 Subsidies were focussed towards services that enabled residents to access employment, health services, and shopping centres. Due to this focus, some links to Middlesbrough are provided by Boroughbus services.
- 4.9 The Committee noted that the provision of the subsidies was a high priority to ensure that services were in place, thereby preventing residents becoming isolated due to poor transport links. Removing such services may affect public satisfaction with the Authority and would also affect the Authority's performance under National Indicator 175 Access to Services and Facilities by Public Transport, Walking and Cycling. In addition there was a possibility that without the De minimis subsidy underpinning some routes, these would be withdrawn by the operator and replacing any essential daytime routes would prove costly. Therefore, although providing subsidised services was not a statutory requirement, removing the subsidy for Boroughbus/De minimis services was not believed to be a viable option.
- 4.10 It was believed that measures to raise patronage on public transport could increase revenue for operators and subsequently reduce the subsidy that the Authority pays. In addition increasing patronage would reduce the number of vehicles on the road, reducing the Authority's carbon footprint.

R1 That Stockton Borough Council carry out a 'Use It or Lose It' campaign to encourage residents to use public transport services with a view to increasing bus patronage thereby seeking to reduce the subsidy required to support these services.

- 4.11 However, the Committee accepted that if further efficiencies were needed to be made in future then the Authority may need to consider reducing the number of subsidised Boroughbus and De minimis services, and that they should be prioritised and considered against other service area efficiencies. A reduction in the net budget of £483,712 for supported services would achieve the following savings:

Reduction	Potential Saving
%	£
5%	24,186
10%	48,371
15%	72,557
20%	96,742

R6a That if further efficiency savings need to be achieved, a reduction in Boroughbus subsidised services should be considered and prioritised by Cabinet against other service efficiencies

Challenge Bid Funding

- 4.12 Announcements regarding funding for non statutory transport service were made irregularly. When announcements were made the Authority endeavoured to make a bid to support transport schemes. Currently there was no Challenge Bid Funding available for the Authority to bid for.
- 4.13 Previous schemes that had received funding included the Hospital Links scheme (extension of 37 and 1 services), and X6 MIBuS scheme. The funding for both these schemes had ended and the areas serviced by these schemes were integrated within commercial routes by the operators, with the exception of the 1 service extension from Middlesbrough Bus Station to James Cook University Hospital which was cancelled shortly after funding ended.
- 4.14 Funding from the Urban Bus Challenge supported a 525 Stockton Shuttle service to Teesdale. However, low numbers using the service outside term times made the service unsustainable, and the opening of a new footbridge added to the decline in patronage. The Department of Transport gave permission to use the remaining balance for the Stockton Shuttle Service for a successor service through Teesdale to Teesside Shopping Park. Patronage for this service was approaching 60,000 a year.

Community Lynx

- 4.15 In June 2009 the provision of supported services in the western villages of the Borough changed to a Community Lynx service, initially on a three month trial basis. This service operates on an evening and weekends when commercial services are not available. Those living in western villages must register to use the service.
- 4.16 The service covers the villages of Stillington, Thorpe Thewles, Whitton, Bishopton, Carlton, Redmarshall, Long Newton and Elton. This route was the most cost effective route for running a demand responsive service. There would be a fleet capacity issue with replacing the busier urban Boroughbus routes with similar schemes in other areas and it would not be cost effective to do so.
- 4.17 A small balance from the Rural Bus Challenge (RBC) Village Bus scheme has been used towards the cost of the service, with the permission of the Department for Transport. Combined with funding from the Rural Bus Challenge Village Links scheme, it was expected that funding would sustain the Community Lynx service for approximately three years on the present basis.
- 4.18 The fare per trip on the Community Lynx bus was £1 per adult and £0.50p per child. Those with an English National Concessionary Travel pass travel free. Figures from the three month trial predicted that the service would generate an income of approximately £2,000 per annum.

Concessionary Travel

English National Concessionary Bus Travel

- 4.19 The statutory English National Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme (ENCTS) enables free travel on all local bus services in England on weekdays after 9.30am and any time at weekends. Tees Valley operates a local enhancement on the national scheme which allows those over 60 and those who met the disability criteria to travel free of charge across the Tees Valley area before 9.30am. Over 32,000 passes have been issued by the Authority, 2314 of which were issued on the grounds of disability. Categories for individuals receiving the pass were as follows (figures for September 2009):

Stockton Card Type	Disability type	Number of Cards
Disabled	Blind or Partially Sighted	151
Disabled	Has a Learning disability	352
Disabled	Long Term Disability / injury	1001
Disabled	No Arms or Lack of use of arms	1
Disabled	Not Specified	346
Disabled	Profoundly or Severely deaf	97
Disabled	Unfit to drive due to physical disability	346
Disabled	Without Speech	20
	Total	2314
Elderly		30401

- 4.20 A small number of Elderly passes (34) have a recorded disability. The 'not specified' passes are those where a ENCTS pass was issued because the applicant was already in receipt of higher rate mobility component of DLA and/or Blue Badge and was, therefore, 'passported' the ENCTS concession according to DfT guidance.
- 4.21 The Authority acts as the lead Authority in negotiating concessionary payments to the operator on behalf of the four Tees Valley authorities. A fixed payment is negotiated based on the number of journeys made in the previous year and the average fare. Assumptions regarding growth, inflation, fare increases and service changes are included in negotiated payments. This payment is made in 13 instalments, every four weeks.
- 4.22 Many areas across the country do not offer concessionary travel before 9.30am Monday - Friday. Some of these areas experienced issues with passengers with concessionary passes waiting till 9.30am before making their journey. This can lead to problems of overload and altercations with bus drivers over the time a passenger boarded the bus. Darlington Borough Council offers an alternative option of £50 taxis vouchers to the concessionary pass for residents aged 75 or over, residents living in nursing homes and eligible disabled. There were approximately 1756 residents who had opted for the taxis vouchers.
- 4.23 Negotiations for the subsidy paid by the Authority for ENCT travel to operators for 2010/11 were due to begin Winter 2009/10. The Committee believe that operating a partial fare before 9.30am Monday – Friday may alleviate the issues experienced in other areas, and the subsidy might be reduced. However, the savings realised would be dependent upon

negotiations with operators and passenger numbers travelling before 9.30 after any charges were introduced.

R2 That Officers enter into dual negotiations for the English National Concessionary Scheme Concession 2010 subsidy with the alternative option of introducing a reduced fare for pass holders travelling before 9.30am Monday – Friday.

- 4.24 GP's were responsible for confirming eligibility for a concessionary pass under the disability criteria and were paid for each request received. This process was subject to a Cabinet review in 2009/10, and there was a possibility that this would be taken in-house with the responsibility aligned to an occupational therapist. This would give the Authority greater control over who was receiving the pass, and savings could be made through a decrease in fraudulent use. However it had not been confirmed whether the cost of an in-house service would be cheaper than the current service, and there was a risk that it would increase the pressure on occupational therapy services.
- 4.25 ENCTS passes were smartcard passes containing a microchip, which could be read by suitable readers installed on vehicles. There were no vehicles operating in Tees Valley that had readers installed, and there was no statutory duty for operators to install the technology. The Authority purchased portable readers for use by inspectors on Stagecoach vehicles as part of a pilot scheme to detect fraudulent passes. There had been only one reported case of a fraudulent pass being used in Tees Valley. The smartcard passes were easily identifiable for operators so can be used as a 'flash pass' on buses not equipped with smartcard readers, which is the current situation in the Tees Valley.
- 4.26 When a resident applied for a pass, checks were made on eligibility and a digital photograph was taken. This photograph and the resident's details were logged on to a Card Management System (CMS) database which was provided under contract. Passes were printed by a bureau and posted to the resident via first class post. Each pass registered under the CMS would cost £2.68 to produce based on the new smartcard chips being introduced this autumn. There were also additional costs for the administration of the pass by the Authority.
- 4.27 Smartcard passes could be credited with money and used for other forms of travel and/or services. The time delay technology installed on to the pass system prevented travel being over recorded by cards being registered more than once when passengers boarded.
- 4.28 The Committee discussed whether a retender process for the card management system would be advantageous, which would create an opportunity to change the specifications of the pass so that it could be used across all Authority services e.g. libraries, leisure centres etc. However, savings could not be guaranteed by re-tendering and substantial capital investment would be needed to implement a multi-function smartcard. Current ENCT passes were due to expire in 2013 and there had been no confirmation from government regarding the format of future passes. Therefore the Committee did not believe that to pre-empt the issue by retendering would be in the Authority's interest at this time particularly following the recent announcement by the GO-NE of £10m to fund a regional Smartcard scheme by 2011/12 (the NESTI project).

- 4.29 During the review Oxera published a report regarding the ENCT concessionary fare scheme. The Committee noted that the report provided both beneficial and ineffective recommendations. This report should be considered for future reference.

Pathfinder Concessionary Travel Scheme

- 4.30 The Pathfinder concessionary travel scheme for 16 – 19 year olds, which enables young people to travel for half fare at any time on scheduled bus services within Tees Valley (although travel in Darlington is restricted to term time only), has been running in its present format for five years. The scheme, which is not a statutory requirement, is open to all young people in the age range, regardless of whether they were in full time education, training or employment.
- 4.31 At the time of writing this report Middlesbrough Borough Council was intending to operate a similar half price concessionary fare scheme similar to Stockton for one year only in 2009/10, the starting date of which was to be confirmed. Their scheme, if introduced, would also allowed 16 – 19 year olds to travel at any time on scheduled bus services within the confines of the old Cleveland County boundaries. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council also offers a concessionary half fare pass but this is only open to those in education, living over three miles from their place of education, for use during term time and before 6pm. Darlington Borough Council offer a grant of £180 for those attending educational courses three miles from their home requiring help with travel costs. Hartlepool Borough Council offer free travel to those with Special Educational Need (SEN) post 16, and discounted travel in a form of a Megarider ticket for 16 – 19's studying in the Tees Valley.
- 4.32 The Stockton Pathfinder passes can be obtained on site at each of the three main colleges, major operators' travel offices in Stockton and via email sent from other participating colleges. The pass is a credit card sized plastic pass with the pass holders photograph. This pass is not a smartcard, which would cost considerably more to produce.
- 4.33 Restricting the entitlement of the pass on basis of distance, time of operation, and education status similar to other authorities, was discussed by the Committee. While these restrictions would reduce the use of the pass and therefore the subsidy paid by the Authority, not all were believed to be enforceable and might be problematical to administer. The Committee believed that restricting time of operation, similar to Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, would be difficult to enforce due to the flexibility of differing educational courses timetables. In addition, the Committee did not wish to penalise those in training and apprenticeships by removing the offer of the pass and restricting it to those in education only in line with neighbouring Authorities.
- 4.34 Restricting the pass by distance was seen as a viable option as this would encourage walking and cycling, thereby reducing health inequalities and tackling obesity. The savings that could be realised by restricting distance would be dependent on negotiations. The Committee raised concern that such a restriction may possibly penalise individuals travelling long distances when there was no direct bus route to their destination. While the distance travelled on the overall journey could be over the specified distance, the

distance travelled on each bus may not be. Consequently the individual would not be able to use their pass. Therefore the Committee accepted that 'through ticketing', where one ticket was issued to the final destination on the first bus journey, would need to be developed before this option could be considered, and asked officers to reassess imposing a distance based restriction if and when smartcard technology was introduced within the Tees Valley.

- 4.35 The pass cost £5 per annum for those in education (1742 passes issued in 2008/9), and £10 per annum for those who were not in education (13 passes issued in 2008/9). The cost of a concessionary pass for 16 – 19 year olds in Stockton had not been increased for approximately 10 years. Redcar and Cleveland charged pass holders £25. Raising the cost of the pass for those in education and introducing a one tier system for both education and non education pass holders, would reduce the Authority's subsidy for each pass, saving £5,200 if the pass was charge at £8, while still maintaining value for money for the pass holders.

R3 That the cost of the Pathfinder 16 – 19 year old half fare concessionary pass be increased from £5/£10 to £8 per annum for all pass holders in the first instance and this be reviewed annually.

- 4.36 Government Pathfinder funding ends in August 2010, which part funds the scheme, and outside funding has to be secured for future years. However there would be £52,500 remaining from the current funding which could, along with funding provided by Technical Services, be used to extend the scheme beyond August 2010 for at least one further year. The scheme was popular with residents and was an example of best practice. Also government legislation was increasing Local Authority responsibility for post 16 education and travel to education/training may be included in this responsibility. Therefore ceasing the service while funding was still available was not considered to be a desirable option. If Grant funding ceased, however, then additional Council revenue costs would need to be found for it to continue, and the scheme would have to be reconsidered against other service priorities.

R6b That if further efficiency savings need to be achieved, the discontinuation of the 16 – 19 year old half price concessionary fare pass, if additional government funding is ceased, should be considered and prioritised by Cabinet against other service efficiencies.

Community Transport

- 4.37 The Community Transport unit is responsible for adult social care transport, Dial a Ride, and Home to School Transport. The unit provides community transport driver training, with one full time trainer to cover in house training of 200+ staff. The income in 2008/9 was approximately £4,000. The unit planned to extend to D1/D Training where the rates could be around £500 per candidate. The unit also provides the opportunity for organisations and group to procure vehicles and drivers on a not for profit basis during the units less busy periods, or 'down time'.

Home to School Transport

- 4.38 The Authority has a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for those pupils with special needs, primary school pupils residing over two miles from the school in their catchment area, and secondary school pupils residing over three miles from the school in their catchment area. The Authority also has a statutory duty to provide transport for those pupils that do not have a safe walking route to the school in their catchment area.
- 4.39 2,722 pupils receive home to school transport provided or commissioned by Community Transport. 943 of those pupils have special needs and require individual transport assessments.
- 4.40 Community Transport has 31 mini buses, of which 21 transported wheelchair users, to provide home to school transport. There are also 62 taxi operators covering approximately 150 routes and 18 commercial bus operators that were contracted by Community Transport to provide home to school transport. Contracts are negotiated on a three year renewal programme.
- 4.41 All in house routes and many of the taxi routes are staffed by passenger assistants. Taxi routes requiring passenger assistants are determined by individual risk assessment. All 180 passenger assistants on home to school transport are employed by the Authority on a part time basis. The Committee considered the outsourcing of passenger assistants, as Durham County Council had done. However, the Committee believed that possible financial savings made would be outweighed by the effect on the service passengers received and implications for monitoring the outsourced contracts.
- 4.42 Mainstream pupils who do not meet the criteria for free transport are offered a subsidised seat on vehicles that are scheduled to travel to their school. This includes three buses that have been contracted to transport ineligible pupils to Conyers School and approximately one third of the seats on the two buses travelling to St Patrick's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School. These pupils pay a contribution of £65 per term for their seat. This contribution is in line with Government recommendation that pupils should pay £1 per day for such transport, however, does not cover the full cost of the seat. The Authority subsidises each seat sold to a non eligible pupil travelling to Conyers School at a cost of £184 per year. The cost of the seat has not increased since 2005. Redcar and Cleveland and Darlington Borough Councils both provide a similar service to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, with Darlington Borough Council providing the seat for free.
- 4.43 The Committee had concerns that there would potentially be safety issues if the transport to Conyers School was either removed or delivered in a different way, and therefore agreed that this would not be an option. However, the Committee believed that an increase in the cost of a seat to non entitled pupils over a three year period, beginning at an increase to £80 per term in the first year to a maximum of £100 per term in year three should be implemented, and increases to be reviewed on an annual basis thereafter. This would ensure a smaller subsidy per seat by the Authority, realising an estimated £17,640 in the first year, while remaining at a competitive rate compared to the commercial half fare per trip.

R4 That the cost of seats on Home to School transport vehicles being sold to non eligible pupils be increased on an incremental basis over a three

academic year period, to commence in 2010/11, from £65 to £80.00 per term in year 1 to a maximum of £100 per term by year three and thereafter reviewed annually.

- 4.44 The Committee were also aware of the Building School for the Future (BSF) programme which would have considerable impact on Home to School transport. BSF was a long term programme and transport issues would need to be addressed once decisions had been made. The Committee however needed to address current home to school transport so that improvements could be made in the short term.

Adult Services Transport

- 4.45 The Authority has a duty to make transport provision for attendees of Day Care Centres or Adult Training Centres, but do not have to be the provider of the service. Community Transport was asked to transport a number of clients from their home to day care facilities following individual needs assessment which formed part of a broader assessment of care, and this transport was provided in the most economic way possible.
- 4.46 The unit transports a total of 1320 passengers per week to one of the five Day Care centres and four Adult Training centres across the Borough.
- 4.47 The unit uses a total of 12 vehicles to transport these passengers, all of which have been designed to meet the specialist needs of the passengers. It could take up to 15 minutes for some passengers to board the vehicles, and this had to be included in to the timeframe for transporting passengers from their home to their care facility, and return travel. All vehicles were staffed by a Driver and a Passenger Assistant who were required to undertake specialist training including NVQ level 2 in health care.
- 4.48 The estimated average cost per trip for each recipient is £7.39, however, this cost varied dependent on individual needs.
- 4.49 New social care legislation is introducing single personal budgets, which will enable individuals to buy services that are most appropriate for them. This may have an affect on community transport with users selecting their own transport and paying for it out of their personalised budget. Individuals will be able to choose services from community transport and pay for this from their budget.
- 4.50 The Committee considered outsourcing travel for less dependent passengers and staggering times for Adult Social Care services. This would allow more flexibility for individuals and carers, while utilising the community transport fleet more effectively and reducing journey time on vehicles. However, the possible increase in the number of vehicles arriving at services would increase congestion and thereby affect passenger safety when boarding and alighting the vehicles. Staggering Social Care services times would have wider implications on social care, including staff, which would outweigh the benefit to both the passenger and community transport. These options were therefore not considered to be viable. The Committee inquired whether there was a possible opportunity for joint working with the Ambulance Service, utilizing vehicles at off peak times. However it was noted that the off peak time for both the Authority and the Ambulance Service coincided and therefore this not a feasible option.

Dial a Ride

4.51 The Dial a Ride service is available for any resident of the Borough who has a recognised permanent or long term impairment which prevents or makes unsuitable the use of public transport. Those wishing to use the service must register and there were currently 400 registered users of the service, with 35 differing medical/mobility problems e.g. Arthritis, Spinal problems/injuries, Parkinson Disease and depression. 102 members were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. The Authority has no statutory duty to provide or commission this service.

4.52 The service operates door to door using two wheelchair accessible vehicles, and additional vehicles from the wider fleet are also used. Dial a Ride employ six drivers, who work without a passenger assistant. The service operates seven days a week, 8.30am – 9.00pm Monday – Friday and 9am – 6pm Saturday and Sunday. The number of journeys taking place after 6pm and on Sundays were low, some evenings only two journeys for one passenger were made. This cost the Authority £20,000 per annum. The Committee were therefore concerned that the provision of an evening and Sunday service was not economically viable.

R5a That, taking into account passenger usage rates and the need to maximise vehicle occupancy whilst retaining a responsive service, the following phased approach is recommended following consultation with all relevant parties including staff, unions and customers: the hours of the Dial a Ride Service be reduced to daytime only Monday – Friday with alternative taxi arrangements on evenings, Saturdays and Sundays for those users who currently require this service to make regular journeys.

4.53 Registered users pay an annual £7.50 registration fee, and £1.20 - £1.50 per trip, depending on the distance within the Borough travelled. The Committee noted that a fare increase, regardless of distance travelled within the Borough, to £1.70 would be reasonable while retaining value for money for the service.

R5b That, taking into account passenger usage rates and the need to maximise vehicle occupancy whilst retaining a responsive service, the following phased approach is recommended following consultation with all relevant parties including staff, unions and customers the: cost of the fare per trip be increased from £1.20/£1.50 to £1.70 per trip

4.54 Bookings are made 24 hours in advance, or up to seven days in advance for journeys to medical appointments and a term in advance for college courses. The booking line is closed at the weekend and bookings for Saturday – Monday are taken on Fridays. Trips are allocated on a first come first served basis, although alternatives bookings are offered if the time requested is not available. The computer booking system has been custom built for the Authority and is a web based system. If issues with the system occur, a paper based booking system was operated.

4.55 The LINK raised concerns with the booking system in their report, which impacted on vehicle capacity. They made several recommendations for improvements to the system, as follows:

- The system be revised to clients being requested to ring 48 hours before requiring the service instead of the existing 24 hours to facilitate improved planning of the bus routes.

(Based on the above the dispatcher would be able to plan to pick up a larger number of people in the most economical way.)

- Install a dedicated telephone line for the Dial-a-Ride system. Call waiting system required to inform people how the queue is progressing and everyone be responded to promptly, as well as informed what current situation is. A full time dispatcher/ telephone attendance would assist with this.
- New software be acquired to facilitate postcode entries and to increase efficiency.
- Educational trips be booked separately on a separate system to free up capacity for disability groups.

4.56 The Committee considered these recommendations, however noted that without an increase in fleet these would not alleviate the issue of journey availability, and passenger receiving the journey times they request. Also, further investment would be needed to increase the number of telephone lines and extra dispatcher time in receiving and returning calls with confirmation of a booking. There would also be a possibility that passengers would miss return calls, causing confusion. Therefore the Committee agreed that any changes to the system would incur further costs, and there were no guarantees that this could be outweighed by an increase in the efficiency of the system allowing more passengers to use the service.

4.57 The majority of activity took place during daytime hours, by a low number of individual users making the same journey each week. Many journeys were taking place with a small number of passengers, and the Committee received evidence that some registered users were refusing alternative journeys offered. The LINK had noted this issue in their report and recommended that a specific route be planned in order to provide adequate provision for known disability groups i.e. blind and disabled people, this would enable people to be picked up in a timely and economical manner. Therefore the Committee examined an option to provide a semi scheduled service via one of the two vehicles, travelling to pre-determined destinations on pre-determined days and time. Once the service was established, it was envisaged that the numbers of passengers travelling on each journey would increase.

R5c That, taking into account passenger usage rates and the need to maximise vehicle occupancy whilst retaining a responsive service, the following phased approach is recommended following consultation with all relevant parties including staff, unions and customers: one of the two Dial a Ride vehicles to provide a semi scheduled service thereby seeking to increase vehicle occupancy

4.58 The LINK report also recommended that school buses be commissioned at off peak times for Dial-a-Ride. The Committee noted that many of the in house educational vehicles were specifically configured for the transportation of individuals based on their needs, and therefore not best placed to be used by other groups. However, additional vehicles from the wider fleet were available

to hire by groups and organisations on a not for profit basis during off peak times.

4.59 Other Tees Valley Authorities provide Dial a Ride Services similar to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Councils ran in house Dial a Ride Schemes. Both Authorities have previously contracted private operators to run a Dial a Ride service, but made the decision to take it in house. Middlesbrough's Dial a Ride Scheme, along with Adult Services Transport, is delivered via a partnership with Ayresome Industries. Darlington Borough Council do not provide a Dial a Ride service, but have a Service Level Agreement with a local charity, and provide them with a grant which the charity use with their revenue to maintain a Ring a Ride Service, similar to Stockton's Dial a Ride scheme.

4.60 However, North Tyneside contracted taxi services to deliver an alternative to Dial a Ride. Smartcards were credited with a monthly allowance for passengers to make journeys, for which a level of credit was taken from the card by a reader in each taxi. The passenger paid a 'top up' cost of each journey. Drivers took their readers into the operator's office each week to receive the income and this was claimed back by the operator from North Tyneside. The development of this scheme took substantial capital investment, but was believed to be a more cost effective way of providing a flexible service.

4.61 The Committee noted that a move to a taxi based service could be implemented without the use of smartcard technology, which would decrease the investment costs. There were concerns with the number of taxi vehicles in Stockton-on-Tees that had adequate disability access was low and drivers may need disability training, therefore safeguards would be needed. This issue had been successfully resolved for Home to School transport by contracting taxi operator to provide the service. In addition, registered users of Dial a Ride were requesting a flexible door to door service. The Committee believed that a scheme utilising taxis would provide a more cost effective service, providing that when introducing the scheme expenditure was limited to £50,000 to prevent unlimited journeys by Dial a Ride users. Registered users would not experience the level of disappointment of being turned down for the journey requested, as fleet capacity would not be limited to two vehicles, and would spend less time on travelling as the taxi would not have to pick up other passengers. Therefore the Committee believed that a phased approach to a taxi based Dial a Ride Service would be the most beneficial option for future improvement.

R5d That, taking into account passenger usage rates and the need to maximise vehicle occupancy whilst retaining a responsive service, the following phased approach is recommended following consultation with all relevant parties including staff, unions and customers: that, in order provide a more flexible and responsive service to users, Officers commence discussions with all relevant parties with a view to providing the Dial A Ride service through a registered contracted taxi scheme by October 2010, subject to appropriate safeguards being put in place to retain appropriate levels of passenger care and safety.

Further Areas for Review

4.62 The Committee noted that there were areas of Community and Public Transport that could not be examined in depth in the short timescales for the review, and further work would need to take place to ensure that these issues were resolved effectively. The Committee was aware that two EIT reviews were taking place regarding Social Care: Fair Access to Care and Adult Operations and that the outcomes of these reviews may impact on the provision of Adult Social Care transport. It was important that needs assessment for Adult Social Care transport were appropriately carried out.

R7 To ensure appropriate transport options are offered to customers, following a process of assessment that identifies this as a need, that are fair, equitable and robust.

4.63 The Committee were also aware of the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements, based on the core routes throughout the sub region. These improvements may impact upon the needs for community transport, and provide an opportunity for greater partnership working within this service in the future.

R8 That Cabinet endorse that opportunities for Tees Valley or greater joint Authority provision of community transport services be examined in principle.

4.64 Currently commissioning and providing public and community transport is shared between Technical Services in Development and Neighbourhood Services and the Community Transport Unit in Children, Education, and Social Care. The Committee has not explored alternative management structures of the two services and believe that this is an area for further investigation following the review, especially in view of the wider policy changes which will impact on the delivery of services.

R9 That alternative management delivery models for the commissioning and providing public and community transport be explored.

4.65 Opportunities for partnership work with outside bodies and the Community Transport Unit have been identified by officers. Negotiations with both Thornaby Town Council and Five Lamps to procure and provide Dial a Ride services are ongoing.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The Committee concluded that reasonable fare increases were appropriate and would increase revenue to the Authority whilst still providing a value for money service for users.
- 5.2 The Committee also concluded that the Dial a Ride Service was no longer sustainable in its current format and did not represent a cost effective service taking into account user numbers. However, the Committee still believed that providing a service for those who were unable to access public transport was essential, to ensure residents physical and emotional well being and prevent isolation of individuals. The Committee concluded that moving to a taxi based provision would hopefully offer a more flexible and responsive service for users
- 5.3 It was estimated that the savings realised by the recommendations one – five would be up to a maximum of £93,680 for year one, as outlined below, rising to a maximum of £153,700 by year 3. A further £187,000 could be realised from other efficiency options at a later stage by Cabinet although decisions would need to be prioritised against other service efficiencies.

Service Area	Possible for Immediate Action	Potential Saving
English National Concessionary Travel Scheme	Charging a reduced fare pre 9.30am - dual negotiation for 2010	To be determined
Pathfinder Concessionary Travel	Introduce single tier charge at £8 per pass	Based on number of passes issued in 2008/9 £14,040
Boroughbus Contracts	Carry out a 'Use it or lose it' campaign	£0
Home to School Transport –	Increase cost of seat on school transport over a three year period, from £65 to £80 per term in the first year to a maximum of £100 term in year three	£17,640 for year 1 rising to £41,160 in year 3
Dial A Ride	Replace service with Taxi Scheme by October 2010	£36,500 in year 1 rising to £73,000 – excluding potential implementation costs
	Reduce Service to daytime only Monday to Saturday	£20,000
	Fare Increase from £1.20/£1.50 to £1.70 per trip	Based on number of journeys in 2008/9, and dependent on number of journeys previously charged at £1.20/£1.50 £2,200 - £5,500
	Semi Scheduled Service	Minimal

- 5.4 An equality impact assessment in respect of the recommendations to be implemented has been carried out. Recommendations one to four and seven to nine have been assessed as having a neutral impact, while recommendation five, regarding changes to Dial a Ride, has been assessed at this stage as having a positive impact due to increasing the accessibility to services. It will be important, however, to review the impact of the recommendations as part of the monitoring of the review.
- 5.5 Recommendation six has not been included in the equality impact assessment, and a separate assessment will be required if Cabinet decide further efficiency savings are needed.



Stockton-on-Tees

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Appendix

LAW & DEMOCRACY

Democratic Services

www.stockton.gov.uk

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2 November 2009

Dear Mr Newton

DIAL A RIDE REPORT

Thank you for attending the Regeneration & Transport Select Committee meeting on 5 October to present the Local Involvement Network's report on Dial a Ride.

The Committee met today to agree its findings and recommendations following its review of Commissioning and Provision of Public and Community Transport. As you are aware Dial a Ride has been considered as part of this review and your report has proven very useful as evidence in assessing the service.

Whilst taking into account the recommendations put forward by the LINK, the Committee's review has established that registered users of Dial a Ride are requesting a flexible door to door service at a travelling time of their choice, which cannot be met via the current service provision. The Committee are therefore proposing a phased transition from the current Dial a Ride service to a taxi based Dial a Ride Service, with the appropriate safeguards in place to protect vulnerable adults, which would offer the flexible and responsive service requested as well as providing a service in a more cost effective way. This approach would supersede the recommendations for improvement proposed in the LINK report. In addition the Committee have made the following observation in respect of the individual recommendations from the LINK.

- The system be revised to clients being requested to ring 48 hours before requiring the service:

The Committee noted that additional funding would be needed for the extra dispatch time which would be required to receive initial booking and make return calls with confirmation of booking. There is also scope that passengers may miss the confirmation call and be unaware of whether they have a booking. In addition, the Committee believe that this recommendation would not necessarily alleviate the issue of passengers receiving the exact journey time they request and, if they accept the booking, their journeys may be extended to fit in with scheduling.

- Install a dedicated Dial a Ride telephone line and call waiting system

The Committee believe that journey availability would not be increased as, without extra vehicles, capacity would remain the same. Furthermore, extra funding would be required for

the installation and upkeep of the extra line, and for extra dispatcher time allocated to operate the line.

- Specific route planned in order to provide adequate provision for known disability groups:

The Committee accepts this recommendation and will consider the viability of a semi schedule service, while still maintaining a demand responsive service for those who need it. This is likely, however, to be superseded in due course by a taxi based service.

- Commission educational fleet at off peak times for Dial a Ride:

The Committee acknowledged that the in house educational vehicles are specifically configured for the transportation of individuals based on their needs, and therefore are not the most appropriate vehicles to be used by other groups. However, the Committee can confirm that additional vehicles from the wider fleet are already available to hire by groups and organisations on a not for profit basis during off peak times.

- New software be acquired for Dial a Ride to facilitate postcode entries and to increase efficiency:

The Committee has considered changes to Dial a Ride's computer system, linking it direct with the server in Newcastle, however the current system had been custom built for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and changes to the system would require extra funding, without guarantee that this would increase efficiency.

- Educational trips be booked on a separate system to free up capacity for disability groups:

The Committee believe that without an increase in the number of vehicles, a separate system would not allow for more trips to be booked and therefore would not increase capacity.

The final report of the review of Commissioning and Provision of Public and Community Transport. will be forwarded to Cabinet on 26 November and we will send a copy to you when it is submitted to this meeting. We intend to append your report to the Committees report so that Cabinet can consider both reports together before making a final decision.

Once again, the Committee thanks Stockton-on-Tees Local Involvement Network for its contribution to the review.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Maurice Perry
Chair
Regeneration & Transport Select Committee



Stockton-On-Tees Local Involvement Network

STOCKTON-ON-TEES LINK

Report on findings following issues raised around the Stockton-on-Tees Dial-a-Ride Service

Content:

Introduction
The booking system
Pre-booked journeys
Demand responsive journeys
Capacity
Vehicle Usage
Recommendations
Conclusions

Appendix A - Data provided by the Dial-a-Ride Service marked by *
in the text of the report

Introduction

Concerns have been raised with the Stockton-on-Tees Local Involvement Network around the Dial-a-Ride service provided by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The concerns have been expressed by both individuals and organisations.

When the concerns were raised around the Dial-a-Ride Service, the LINK made enquiries to ensure that an investigation into the service by the LINK would not duplicate any other work being undertaken in the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council area. This highlighted that the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Regeneration and Transport Select Committee were proposing a review of all transport services in the area. The LINK notified the Select Committee of their intention to investigate further. It was agreed that the LINK would table a report at the beginning of September 2009.

The LINK undertook investigation of the concerns raised by

- holding discussions with local organisations whose members were registered users of the service
- holding an open LINK Meeting at which the Dial-a-Ride Service made a presentation and answered questions
- visiting the premises of the Dial-a-Ride Service to see how the day to day operations work and for discussions with the Service Manager and other members of the staff.

On analysis the main concerns were found to fall into three categories:

1. the booking system
2. the capacity of the Dial-a-Ride Service
3. the utilisation of service vehicles

The Dial-a-Ride Service is funded through Stockton Borough Council; in 2009-2010 this will be in the region of £182,000. As it is not a statutory duty for the Council to fund this service, the Council are able to set its own Terms of Reference and Criteria for operation. The Dial-a-Ride Service also receives small amount of funding through the registration of service users and fare charges. The cost of the service Dispatcher is shared between the Stockton-on-Tees Dial-a-Ride Service and the Middlesbrough Transporter Service.

The Dial-a-Ride Service is a door-to-door accessible transport service for people who have some form of physical, mental or sensory problem, which makes it difficult or impossible for them to independently use public transport. It provides a transport service anywhere within the Stockton-on-Tees Borough and also to the Teesside Retail Park. Journeys may be taken between 8.30am and 9pm each day. The service operates every day of the year except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day. The Dial-a-Ride Service sets itself the standard of arriving for a booked pick-up within ten minutes either side of the booking time.

People wishing to use the service become registered members only after a risk assessment has taken place in accordance with Health and Safety Legislation.

The Booking System

The main concern around the booking system is that from the time that the phone lines open, the one line is constantly busy and people spend a long dialling the call and receiving only the engaged tone. People who have paid a fee to register as a user of Dial-a-Ride find this not only an indignity but also very frustrating.

Journeys may only be booked by telephone, except in the case of block bookings for educational courses, when a written application, is preferred.

There is one telephone line taking bookings for the Dial-a-Ride Service from 10am to 3pm and for the Middlesbrough Transporter Service from 1 pm to 3.30 pm. Callers who telephone for a service outside of its call hours are asked to call again at the correct time so that the line is used for the correct service in the correct time frame. The only exception to this would be if the caller was advising of a cancellation, in that instance the call would be taken and the cancellation logged, so that a journey became free for re-booking. During the visit to the Dial-a-Ride Service, the Dial-Ride Dispatcher said that there are very few people who call at the wrong time, and because the call time rules are strictly applied, generally people only do it once.

There are two elements to the booking system:

- Pre-booked journeys
- Demand responsive journeys

Pre-booked Journeys

Certain journeys may be pre-booked, these include:

- for educational courses

Block bookings may be accepted subject to availability for training courses, evening classes, and similar. These applications are preferred in writing.

- medical appointments

Bookings for doctors, dentist and opticians can be booked up to one week in advance, but calls for these bookings will only be taken after midday so that they do not interfere with the demand responsive booking system

Although everyday is different, on average 10% ^{*1} of the day's capacity is taken by pre-booked journeys. Pre-booked journeys may be cancelled by telephone at any time, including out of office hours through an answer machine system.

Demand Responsive Journeys

The earliest a journey may be booked if it does not meet the pre-booked journey criteria is the day before the journey is required; journeys for a Monday may be booked on the previous Friday. As booking allocations are made on a first come first served basis, there is a rush of calls at 10am as users try to make their bookings for the following day.

During the LINK visit to the Dial-a-Ride premises operation of the telephone booking system.

Observations:

- a) The main computer booking system is held on a server in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and is accessed by Dial-a-Ride by a hard wired connection through the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council server.
- b) There is only one station for taking the Dial-a-Ride bookings.
- c) Telephone calls were picked up promptly by the Dial-a-Ride Main Dispatcher, and the information of the journey requirements were input into the computer system as the conversation was taking place.
- d) The computer then searched for a match in requirement and availability. This was quite a slow process. The LINK was advised that recently the line from the server to the site at Billingham had been upgraded but was still slow. The LINK watched two calls being taken and the search on each occasion took approximately two minutes.
- e) When the search showed that there was not availability to match requirements, the Main Dispatcher offered an alternative to the caller. On the instance seen during the LINK visit, the alternative was 20 minutes later than the requested time. The caller would not accept that and left without a booking. The Dispatcher commented that the majority of offers of alternative times are not taken up. ²

Capacity

The main concern around the capacity is the number of journeys that the Dial-a-Ride Service is not able to fulfil.

The Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council specifies that the funding it provides for the Dial-a-Ride Service is to provide two buses. The seating capacity of each bus can vary between 5 and 16 seats depending on the requirements of the passengers; whether they are travelling with a wheel chair, or a support dog, etc. Both buses have been modified to a very high specification, the floors have been lowered, the doors are higher and wider than standard, there are handrails, an inboard stretcher lift and each bus has a storage cage.

The buses made 894 passenger journeys in the month of June. It was noted that this compares with 993 journeys in June 2008.

On an average, the journeys for the bus are allocated within about twenty minutes of the booking line opening, although it is possible that later callers may be added into booked journeys.

Vehicle Usage

Concerns have been raised that the capacity of the service is limited because of the number of occasions the bus, with a capacity of between 5 – 16 passengers, travels with only one or two people on board. This has been estimated at 80% of journeys are undertaken with only one passenger. During the visit to the Dial-a-Ride premises the operation of the vehicle allocation was observed.

- a) As the booking system works on a first come, first served basis – a bus is allocated to the first caller.
- b) The booking system calculates when this vehicle will be available to be re-booked.
- c) If a further caller is able to travel on the same route, they will be allocated a seat on the journey booked by the first caller; if not then they will be allocated a journey for the time the bus is calculated to become free.
- d) If it is not possible to tie any subsequent caller into the route of the first caller, then the bus travels with only one passenger.

In the evenings and at the weekend the vehicles would appear to be under utilised.

Evenings: During the 21 weekday evenings in June 2009, only 37 trips were undertaken of which 21 were made by the same passenger. ^{*3}

Weekends: During the 4 weekends in June 2009, a total of 42 journeys were made, carrying 62 passengers in total. ^{*4}

Conclusions

The Stockton-on-Tees Dial-a-Ride Service works very well for some and less well for others.

- The service works well for users who:
 - a) Are able to pre-book journeys for a term for education and training courses
 - b) Are able to book a week in advance for medical appointments
 - c) For those users who wish to travel at low demand times, say in the early evening
- For other registered users, the frustration of the booking system and the disappointment at the low availability of journeys causes challenges for people in the Borough with physical, mental and sensory issues
- The service does not appear to have the capacity to cope with demand during weekdays, but appears to be under utilised at evenings and weekends.
- Whilst the Dial-a-Ride Service is for individuals, organisation may not use other parts of the Stockton-on-Tees Integrated Transport Service in order to move groups of people to events, socials, meetings, etc. The service provides the opportunity for groups of people within the community to access spare capacity to enable them to attend events. It is possible to schedule pickups to arrive at a designated time. This service is provided at a not for profit cost based on drivers hours and fuel.

Recommendations

- We would recommend the system be revised to clients being requested to ring 48 hours before requiring the service instead of the existing 24 hours to facilitate improved planning of the bus routes.

(Based on the above the dispatcher would be able to plan to pick up a larger number of people in the most economical way.)

- Install a dedicated telephone line for the Dial-a-Ride system. Call waiting system required to inform people how the queue is progressing and everyone be responded to promptly, as well as informed what current situation is. A full time dispatcher/ telephone attendance would assist with this.
- A specific route planned in order to provide adequate provision for known disability groups i.e. blind and disabled people, this would enable people to be picked up in a timely and economical manner.
- Commission school buses at off peak times for Dial-a-Ride.
- New software be acquired to facilitate postcode entries and to increase efficiency.
- Educational trips be booked separately on a separate system to free up capacity for disability groups.

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Appendix A

Data provided by the Dial-a-Ride Service

For the purpose of clarity unless otherwise specified “a trip” is an each way journey

- 1 The computer software does not store historical reports for a pre-booked journey. A manual check of drivers’ sheets would indicate that, of the 894 journeys undertaken in June, 39 health appointment and 48 education journeys were booked. It would be reasonable to assume these would be pre-booked were booked and 48 education.

- 2 Refused journeys: During the month of June 2009, 6 passengers refused journeys at weekends due to times available.

- 3 Weekday Evening Services: A total of 37 trips were made
 1/6 3 trips 2/6 2 trips 4/6 2 trips 5/6 2 trips
 8/6 1 trips 9/6 2 trips 10/6 2 trips 11/6 4 trips
 12/6 1 trip 15/6 4 trips 16/6 1 trip 17/6 2 trips
 22/6 3 trips 23/6 1 trip 24/6 2 trips 25/6 2 trips
 29/6 2 trips 30/6 1 trip

Of these journeys, 21 were by one passenger (this same passenger had a total of 61 trips on the service during this 21 day period)

- 4 Weekend Service: Over the four weekends in June the trips made were:

Date	No of trips	2 passengers	1 passenger
6-7 th	11	4	7
13-14 th	11	4	7
20-21 st	10	3	7
27-28 th	10	2	8

All but one trip in the weekend 27-28th were return journeys.