

CABINET

Concessionary Travel March 2008

Report of Corporate Director (Finance and Performance)

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To determine the City Council Concessionary Travel Scheme from April 2008 in light of the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 and the introduction of free nationwide bus travel, and to seek authority to enter into pooling arrangements with other Lancashire Districts.			
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	March 2008		
This report is public			

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the City Council notes the national amended concessionary travel scheme which allows free travel between 0930 hours and 2300 hours for people aged 60 and over and people who are disabled and agrees to retain free travel concessions after 2300hrs up to and including the last bus on weekdays on journeys taken within the Lancaster City area.
- (2) That a report be brought back to Cabinet during autumn 2008 on the outcome of the review of Community Transport, in order that recommendations regarding the service can be fed into the 2009/10 budget and planning process.
- (3) That the City Council enters into pooling arrangements for concessionary transport costs with other local authorities within the county, and that the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to agree the detailed arrangements on behalf of the authority, subject to estimated costs being within the budget framework.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Since 1986 Lancashire County Council has managed a Joint Concessionary Travel Scheme that administers concessionary travel on behalf of all the Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs) with the county (i.e. all the districts and unitary authorities.) A Concessionary Travel Working Group, comprising of representatives from each TCA and the County Council, meet regularly to discuss and agree any issues in maintaining and improving the joint countywide scheme, called NoWcard, for the

elderly and disabled traveller. With the introduction of a new statutory scheme from April 2008, existing arrangements are being reviewed on a county-wide basis and this report seeks decisions on the way forward.

2 Concessionary Travel: Main Scheme

- 2.1 Since April 2006, free concessionary travel has been available for people aged 60 and over, and the disabled. In the main the current statutory scheme provides free travel at certain times within the TCA area. In addition to this statutory scheme though, other discretionary concessions are currently provided.
- 2.2 With the new statutory scheme being implemented from April 2008, this will provide everyone aged 60 and over and disabled people who are resident in England, free off peak travel on all local buses anywhere in England. Free travel will be available from 0930hrs until 2300hrs on weekdays and all day at weekends and Bank Holidays.
- 2.3 Under the new scheme the City Council, as local TCA, will be responsible for the costs of all journeys beginning in its area. This includes 'visitors' from other parts of the country who hold a National Concession Card, as well as eligible residents of the district. This is expected to impact on the total number of journeys a TCA must reimburse. A grant has been provided by central government to cover the costs of the scheme.
- 2.4 The new scheme will still not provide for certain discretionary elements of the existing NoWcard scheme operating in Lancashire, however. The discretionary concessions in question are:
 - Peak-time travel before 0930hrs (currently half-fare for over 60s and 50p for disabled)
 - Travel after 2300hrs on weekdays (currently generally free).

This report presents options for continuing or discontinuing the above.

3 Community Transport

- 3.1 The City Council, as TCA, also provides further discretionary concessions in the form of community transport. The objective of the service is to provide local accessible transport to enable people, who have mobility problems and suffer some social isolation, to retain a degree of independence by using community transport services such as Dial-A-Bus or Community Cars. The transport costs of the journeys made are paid for by each TCA operating the scheme within the County area.

Dial-A-Bus – provides a door to door bus service specially designed for people who cannot use prescribed route public transport, mainly in the urban area. Dial-A-Bus routes and timetables are loosely planned so that a bus can deviate from the route to pick-up customers at their door and transport them in the general direction of the planned route, the bus again deviating to drop the customer at their chosen destination. The customer has to pre-book a route journey. Up to the present time demand for the service in the Lancaster City Council area has been high, averaging approximately 5000 single journeys per month.

Community Cars – is a service provided for people who due to their condition or location and where there are no suitable transport services, usually in rural areas,

find it difficult or impossible to use the general public transport network. The service is used to complement the general public transport network.

- 3.2 Community Transport services are currently included as part of free bus travel offered by the NoWcard scheme, to those aged 60 and over and the disabled, for travel after 0930hrs Monday to Friday.
- 3.3 Lune Valley Transport operates Community Transport in the Lancaster City Council district within the remit of a permit issued under Section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 and does not require a Public Service Operators Licence. The service is designed to be non-profit making and only transports people who are elderly or disabled and hold a NoWcard.
- 3.4 The cost of providing community transport within the Lancaster City District is high. Lune Valley transport operates many routes within the area and this contributes to the high cost. The number of routes is determined by NoWcard holders requesting certain journeys; if the demand for a certain route is sufficient then Dial-A-Bus will run that particular service. The routes change from week to week.
- 3.5 In addition to receiving re-imburement based on passenger journeys, Lune Valley Transport also receive a separate small grant from the City Council. Following consideration by Budget and Performance Panel, in January Cabinet resolved that a one-year Service Level Agreement (SLA) be offered to the organisation, with a future SLA subject to consideration of further information arising from a review of Community Transport services to support the new statutory concessionary travel scheme.
- 3.6 This review will be undertaken during 2008/09, in order that recommendations can be made for the 2009/10 budget and planning process.

4 Financial Arrangements for Concessionary Travel

- 4.1 With regard to the costs of concessionary travel, at present bus operators charge Lancashire County Council for income 'lost' as a result of granting travel concessions. This is then recharged onto individual districts, albeit on an old and outdated basis. Shortly, however, the re-charging basis is to change. Data from the use of NoWcards will be used, and this will mean that recharges to individual authorities will be much more accurate. It could mean, however, significant changes in costs (favourable or adverse) from those previously recharged.
- 4.2 With regard to the financing aspects, at present funding for the current statutory scheme is provided through the Finance Settlement. This means that the exact amount of funding is unknown.
- 4.3 From 2008/09 onwards, however, as well as receiving funding through the Settlement, the Council (as with other TCAs) will also receive a special grant towards meeting the costs of the new statutory scheme. In 2008/09 the grant amounts to £487K, with similar amounts in 2009/10 and 2010/11. Thereafter, responsibilities for concessionary travel may well change again.
- 4.4 The Council receives no other specific funding for the discretionary elements of the scheme though, including community transport, and therefore any costs associated with these are essentially met through Council Tax.

- 4.5 From a county-wide perspective, there is concern that the additional funding given through special grant will be insufficient to meet the extra costs of the new scheme. Furthermore the change in recharging adds further risks for individual authorities and there have been some difficulties in the recharging process, and in authorities in reaching agreement on costs.
- 4.6 As a response to the above, the County Council has put forward that from next year onwards, pooling arrangements should apply and this was considered at a meeting of Lancashire Leaders' Group recently. The principles put forward were:
- Initially, pooling would apply for three years from 2008/09.
 - Contributions from TCAs would be based on:
 - actual scheme costs for 2007/08 for commercial & contracted services (i.e. the main scheme);
 - the amount of Special Grant awarded; and
 - adjustments for inflation.
 - Costs charged against the pool would be:
 - costs for the main county-wide scheme; and
 - discretionary concessions relating to Blackpool Tramway and Knott End Ferry.
 - Concessionary transport costs would not be chargeable against the pool; they would be funded separately by each TCA.
- 4.7 Most authorities have indicated (either formally or informally) that they would be willing to enter into pooling arrangements, but several concerns have also been raised regarding the principles put forward.
- 4.8 In response, the County Council has now contacted all councils again to confirm it wishes to implement pooling with effect from 01 April 2008, as set out at **Appendix A**. A formal decision is now sought regarding the City Council's position.

5 **Details of Consultation**

- 5.1 The new National Concession Scheme has been discussed at length by Lancashire Leaders and also by Lancashire Chief Financial Officers. Broadly these groups support the proposals as set out, but with one or two exceptions and some issues of concern.
- 5.2 The Concessionary Travel Working Group and the County Council have met regularly since the original NoWcard scheme was introduced in April 2006. Officers from Property Services and Financial Services have been in attendance at these meetings. The group supports the National Concession, and agrees that passholders should only be entitled to the statutory scheme in essence.

6 **Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

6.1 **Concessionary Travel: Main Scheme**

Note the national amended concessionary travel scheme which allows free travel between 0930 hours and 2300 hours for people aged 60 and over and people who are disabled, and

Option 1 – Retain the peak time concession on journeys taken within the Lancaster City area before 0930hrs and after 2300hrs on weekdays for people aged 60 and over and people who are disabled. This option is expected to place the City Council out of line with other districts within the County and therefore cause some confusion for some travellers. It would not provide any extra incentive for Nowcard holders to travel outside morning peak times when possible, nor would it simplify the scheme. It may also result in extra costs being incurred by the City Council, depending on whether / how pooling arrangements are taken forward.

Option 2 – Remove the peak time concession on journeys taken within the Lancaster City area before 0930 hrs but retain the concession after 2300hrs on weekdays for people aged 60 and over and people who are disabled (i.e. retain concessions up to and including ‘the last bus’). This option is inline with the proposals put forward on a county-wide basis for Lancashire, and it is expected to match other Schemes operating in the Northwest Region. As concessions are changing under the new scheme anyway, now would seem a sensible time to bring in changes to the discretionary elements, to encourage some changes in travel patterns where possible. This may result in some savings to the City Council, but again this depends on the pooling arrangements. At the very least, if pooling goes ahead, it should avoid the City Council incurring related additional costs.

Option 3 – Remove all extra concessions, including those after 2300 hours. This option is different to the county-wide proposals, and so could cause confusion for travellers around the county district. The main reason why this has not been taken forward as the county-wide option is because travel after this time is not considered really as ‘peak-time’. Very few concessions are actually taken up after 2300 hours. As the current concession is free, it is simple to administer and does not involve other charging rates and the resulting scope for confusion.

6.2 **Community Transport**

Given that the Council has already offered a one year SLA and a review of the Community Transport service is to be undertaken, there are no alternative options put forward at this time. It is proposed that Cabinet receive a report back on the outcome of the review, however, in order that recommendations can be made regarding future years’ service provision and any associated funding issues.

6.3 **Pooling of Funding:**

Option 1- Enter into pooling arrangements with other local authorities within the county, with the detail being delegated to the Chief Executive, subject to it being within the budget. This would help manage the financial risks associated with concessionary travel, in that any overall surpluses or deficits would be shared amongst all districts. (This could mean that the Council faces a smaller share of any extra costs arising, but it could also mean that the Council receives a smaller share of any savings – the outcome is as yet unknown.) It would also mean that the Council could benefit from the current central, shared service for concessionary

travel administration, the costs of which are also already budgeted for. There are still risks, however, that not all districts will sign up to pooling arrangements, though the implications for this are not fully known.

Option 2 – Not enter into pooling arrangements with other local authorities (in principle). This would mean that the Council would accept its full share of the financial risk (or opportunity) attached. In the event that the County Council ceases to provide a central administrative team, the City Council would need to arrange an alternative and this could have serious financial, operational and reputational risks.

7 **Officer Preferred Options**

7.1 **Concessionary Travel: Main Scheme**

Note the national amended concessionary travel scheme which allows free travel between 0930 hours and 2300 hours for people aged 60 and over and people who are disabled and

Option 2 – Remove the peak time concessions on journeys taken within the Lancaster City area before 0930 hrs but retain free travel concessions after 2300hrs (until the last bus of the day has run) on weekdays for people aged 60 and over and people who are disabled. This option would entitle all National Concession passholders to the statutory requirement set out by the Government with the extra concession after 2300hrs.

7.2 **Pooling Arrangements**

Option 1 – Enter into pooling arrangements with other authorities within the county. As detailed arrangements have not yet been finalised, it is proposed that the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to agree the detailed arrangements on behalf of the authority, subject to estimated costs being within the budget framework.

8 **Conclusion**

The introduction of the new statutory concessionary travel scheme from 01 April onwards presents an opportunity to rationalise elements of the scheme on a county-wide basis. Furthermore entering into pooling arrangements on a county-wide basis would support management of financial risks, whilst avoiding the potential need to establish alternative administrative arrangements for the concessionary travel.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Council Core Values: Sound Financial Management, Sustainable Development and Improving Services

Council key priorities:

Provision of customer focused, accessible services; and supporting sustainable communities.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Direct links with the Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – Travel and Access

Community Transport supports the Council's policies on equal opportunities and diversity for older people and people with disabilities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

For next year, the total budget for concessionary travel amounts to £2.2M, of which £487K is being funded through special grant. Similar amounts are provided for in future years, adjusted for inflation.

The table below shows the estimated costs of discretionary concessions per year for the district. These amounts are included in the total budget referred to above.

TCA	Peak Travel	Community Transport
	£'000	£'000
Lancaster	40	140

For options on the main scheme removing peak time concessions:

The financial implications are difficult to quantify precisely, as they will be affected by any changes in passholders' travel patterns. For example:

Where passholders choose to continue travelling before 9.30, they would pay full fare and the Council would save through no concession being granted.

Where passholders choose to travel later, after 9.30, they would travel for free and the Council would see an increase in costs, as a full concession would be granted.

Taking into account the County Council's initial principles for pooling, Option 1 could result in extra costs being incurred, over and above the existing budget framework. This would depend on the final agreed pooling arrangements, however.

Options 2 (the officer preferred option) and 3 are expected to be within existing budgets.

For options regarding pooling:

Option 1 (the officer preferred option) is expected to be in line with existing budgets. Furthermore if concessionary travel costs are higher than estimated, then the extra costs would be shared amongst other districts, although the exact basis has yet to be agreed. Conversely, however, if costs are lower than estimated, any savings would also be shared.

Option 2 would depend on whether the County Council ceased to provide a central administration team. If it did cease the service, there would be significant financial implications arising and therefore if Members are minded to support this option, then a further report would be needed, to assess more fully the options and implications.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The section 151 Officer has been involved in the production of this report. The Deputy Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A

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