



MOBILITY STRATEGY UPDATE – MAY 2103

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SCHEMES

Introduction

The Mobility Strategy was first envisaged in late 2009 and after consultation and consequent revision was approved by the County Council in April 2011.

Since the Mobility Strategy was adopted, a substantial number of the actions contained within it have been achieved, and thus the Strategy could be revised to take account of those achievements.

In summer 2012, during discussions about the support offered to Community Transport operators, some concerns about the Mobility Strategy were expressed and an opportunity presented to the Community Transport sector to offer suggestions about how this could be revised. In September 2012 a formal request was issued for feedback from schemes. This resulted in responses from five of the twenty two schemes currently supported by the Council. These were:

- Bassetlaw Action Centre
- Gedling CVS
- Newark and Sherwood CVS
- Our Centre
- Rushcliffe CVS

There have been some additional developments, which may affect how the Mobility Strategy is delivered.

Department for Transport Supporting Rural Community Transport Funding

In 2011 the government announced additional funding for community transport which included £158,455 for Nottinghamshire. The funding was to 'kick-start development of community transport services in rural local authorities, with an additional £2,600 consultancy credit. A second round of this kick start funding was awarded in March 2011 with a further £158,455 allocated in December 2011. This presented an opportunity to complete aspects of the Strategy.

TITAN (Towards Integrated Transport Across Nottinghamshire)

The Mobility Strategy was developed in the context of the Transport Transformation improvement programme, which has now been superseded by TITAN (Towards Integrated Transport Across Nottinghamshire) as part of the Council's Improvement Programme. This initiative has incorporated several of the Mobility Strategy planned activities, such as mapping unmet need, the introduction of Demand Responsive services and Flexibus operations.

Engagement with Health

The references to engagement with PCT's and with the Ambulance services has been overtaken by the changes from PCT to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) and the award of the non-emergency ambulance service tender to Arriva Passenger Services. These new arrangements need to be reflected in the way the Mobility Strategy develops.

Subsidy for Community Transport Services

There is an ongoing challenge to the European Union regarding the issue of Illegal State Aid. This is being co-ordinated by a group of Private Hire operators locally and subject to the outcome of evidence provided to Department for Transport lawyers, might affect the future delivery of community transport services.

The Mobility Strategy is divided into six sections and a summary of the feedback received is based around the following themes:

- Planning and Development
- Training and Skills Development
- Funding and Finance
- Customer Service
- Delivery
- Evaluation

Outlined below is the feedback received from the five schemes, which reflect how the CT sector perceive the Mobility Strategy and their role within it.

Planning and Delivery

- The need for schemes to have a Business Plan was recognised, but the perception was that extra resources should be given to enable it to happen.
- The references to Transport Transformation and Flexibus introduction were recognised as being issues for TITAN and concern about the ability of CT schemes to meet the tendering criteria.
- The comments also included some scepticism about merging schemes into District based consortia, where the benefits of doing so were not clear.
- The references to Health and Wellbeing Partnerships echoed the concerns about eligibility criteria and whose responsibility it was to fund transport to hospital and medical appointments.
- Previous engagement with EMAS was also regarded as problematic, especially with the changed landscape of CCGs and the new commercial operators.
- The Mobility Needs Register was recognised as being a valuable tool, but felt to be difficult to access, as was the electronic updating of TATA (Transport Accessible to All)

Funding and Finance

- There was a reluctance to seek additional funding from other sources, as there was a perception that if it is a service for County Council residents, it should be paid for by the County Council, albeit delegated to the voluntary sector.

- Also there was a recognition that applying for additional funding took extra staff time, which was difficult as staff are engaged in delivery for most or all of their time

Training and Skills Development

- There was some divergence in the issue on Quality Standards. Most schemes who responded were quite positive about them as some were already using other Quality Standard devices,(e.g. PQASSO) but one scheme felt it was not necessary or appropriate.
- Whether or not to adhere to the proposed County wide Quality Standard or to use the new CTA Quality Mark was an area of confusion.
- MiDAS Driver Training was similarly conflicted - again most schemes recognised that training for volunteers is essential and part of a Health and Safety Policy and a Volunteer Policy, but one scheme felt very strongly that it was too great a demand on volunteers' time and would not be welcome.
- The relationship between MiDAS and Permit to Drive was recognised as in need of urgent clarification
- A Wheelchair Passport scheme was recognised as a useful tool for Minibus Drivers, but one scheme felt it was a waste of time
- A Taxi Quality Partnership was also welcomed, but the issue of Taxi Vouchers was regarded with some scepticism as the previous trail had led to some degree of misuse.
- Independent Travel Training was universally welcomed
- Identity badges for volunteers was both regarded as a good idea, but one scheme felt it to be unnecessary, as they were using their own system.

Customer Service

- The introduction of ICT solutions such as Single Point of Contact was not well received as it was felt that there would be a loss of local contact.
- Trapeze Scheduling systems was mainly not very popular, as it had been on the agenda for such a long time and were now thought to be 'unoperable'. However, one scheme felt that it would be worth trying as a pilot, to see whether it was fit for purpose
- ITSO Ticket machines on Section 22 routes was proving problematic, largely from the supplier of the machines, but also with issues around the information management systems
- There was concern about the issue of affordability for transport and regret at the discretionary Concessionary half fare provision for Car Schemes had been withdrawn, resulting in the doubling of charges.
- Electronic TATA was welcomed, with the reservation that some older people would not be able to access the website as they were not computer literate.

Delivery

- The development of social entrepreneurial business practices was also recognised as a valid way forward, with the constraint that the making of 'profit' was not desirable, although operating surplus was possible
- Publicity and the potential for there to be videos to help promote what the sector provides was regarded very positively, but felt the message needed to be simply scripted for best dissemination
- Performance related funding appeared not to be well understood and the concept of targets for volunteer recruitment was unwelcome, as it was regarded as something which a scheme had little direct control over.
- Incentives for volunteers was regarded as being a good idea, but the provision of things like key fobs and pens were thought to be ineffective and a waste of time.
- Exploring local and county based incentives (e.g. free access to leisure facilities) were seen as a positive move but might have to be part of a larger project for all volunteers.) Some schemes already offered flu jabs for their volunteers.
- Tendering for Services was also regarded as possibly diverting resources away from perceived core activity.

Monitoring

- The compilation of operational data was seen as a necessary part of the Grant Aid agreement, and support to assist in this process would be welcome.
- The independent Service Evaluation was regarded as a positive move, as one scheme recognised that this is part of an effective monitoring process

Conclusion

There is some scope for revision of the Mobility Strategy to take account of some of the feedback from Schemes, while recognising that there is widely differing responses between schemes.

The extra factors of TITAN, DfT monies for the CT sector, the changes in Health Commissioning and Ambulance transport and other external factors (over which the County Council and the CT sector have little control) will also contribute to the success implementation of a revised Mobility Strategy.

A number of the concerns expressed by the CT sector about the Mobility Strategy have been recognised and, in response to several of the issues raised, a Development Fund of almost £100,000 was made available to the CT sector in late 2012. Fourteen schemes applied for funding and grants awarded, which enabled several aspects of the Mobility Strategy to be realised. Principally, these were:

- Quality Standard – Five schemes applied for resources to enable them to achieve the CTA quality Standard at Level 1
- MiDAS Training – there has been significant changes in acceptability, with most schemes now recognising the value of training and driver development opportunities that MiDAS brings, not only for Minibus Drivers, but for Passenger Assistants and Car Scheme Drivers

- Business Plans – Four of the schemes have pledged to develop Business Plans and are bringing in external support to enable them to do this. This will enable them to identify new opportunities to develop and meet additional unmet need
- Recruitment and Rewards for Volunteers – Virtually all schemes have accessed the funds to enable them to provide additional resources for targeted volunteer recruitment. This will include publicity materials, and a variety of items of use to volunteers including diaries, umbrellas, embroidered polo and sweat shirts as uniforms and high visibility jackets

This funding will enable schemes to further develop their activities within the context of the Mobility Strategy, therefore contributing towards the continuous improvement in the quality of community and voluntary transport services provided to Nottinghamshire residents.