

**TRANSPORT FOR LONDON**

**SURFACE TRANSPORT PANEL**

**SUBJECT: DIAL-A-RIDE AND DOOR TO DOOR SERVICES**

**DATE: 10 NOVEMBER 2009**

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**1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED**

- 1.1 This paper updates the Surface Transport Panel on the performance of Dial-a-Ride and its current improvement plans. The paper also updates the Panel on London Councils' (LC) proposals for a Door to Door strategy which impacts upon Dial-a-Ride.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 There are two types of door to door services: statutory and discretionary. Statutory door to door services exist for the NHS Patient Transport Services and Borough Transport for Special Education Needs and Social Services. These services are not funded by TfL and are not dealt with specifically in this paper. Discretionary door to door services are Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard, Capital Call and Community Transport. Community Transport services are also not funded by TfL.
- 2.2 Dial-a-ride is a door to door service, generally to pick up multiple occupants. The service is free of charge to its users and there is no limit to trip numbers, subject to availability. Taxicard is a kerb to kerb service. Each trip comprises a single member and their guest(s). The vehicles are provided by licensed taxi operators and members pay a flat fee of £1.50 per trip plus taxi meter costs above a limit which varies between boroughs (typically £10.30). Trip limits also vary by borough, but are typically 104 trips per person per year. Capital Call is also a kerb to kerb service that provides additional private hire vehicles in those boroughs where there are insufficient available licensed taxis operating under the Taxicard scheme to meet existing demand. Members apply separately to this service, which operates with a fixed annual travel budget (£200) for each member, with the option to pay additional costs to extend trips beyond the maximum subsidised length. Community Transport is operated by a range of individual charities with differing rules and functions. All of these services are intended for social and recreational journeys.
- 2.3 Door to door services throughout London are estimated to be worth over £200m per annum of which TfL funds £44m. TfL fully funds Capital Call and Dial-a-Ride, as well as directly operating Dial-a-Ride. Taxicard is jointly funded by TfL (two thirds) and the London boroughs (one third) with London Councils commissioning the service on behalf of the boroughs.
- 2.4 Several reports about the discretionary door to door services, that TfL either provides directly or funds, have all broadly highlighted the same key issues: that

generally services are supply led rather than demand led; that there is a lack of real clarity as to what the services are and who they are for and; there is a lack of coordination between services and regions leading to increased costs and differing standards and supply levels in different boroughs.

- 2.5 While TfL has been working closely with LC and the NHS to explore the possibility for integration, in July 2008 the TfL Commissioner also invited LC to provide its view of other options for the future management of door to door services in London.

### **3 DIAL-A-RIDE PERFORMANCE**

- 3.1 Dial-a-Ride has continued to make improvements to its service and has introduced a new call centre and a computer booking system that is delivering benefits for users. Free fares for users were introduced in January 2008 and its specialised vehicle fleet has been refreshed with a third of the vehicles now being low floor minibuses. In addition, Dial-a-Ride is delivering a series of improvements providing real benefits for its users and an increase in overall trips. Following an increase of completed trips by 51,000 (4.5 per cent) in 2008/09 compared with 2007/08, trips have now increased by a further 36,000 (6.6 per cent) in the first two quarters of 2009/10 compared to the same period in the previous year. Dial-a-Ride now schedules 93 out of every 100 requests. New computer hardware has brought stability to the booking system enabling average call answer times to be reduced to 76 seconds with a significant increase in customer satisfaction with the booking process. These improvements are:

- (a) the outsourcing of some “difficult fit” trips to a taxi/private hire vehicle consolidator facility has been implemented and will allow Dial-a-Ride to re-focus vital resources to the critical core operational hours;
- (b) improved telephony for the call centre will be introduced at the end of this month, making the service easier to use for users. The benefits will include self service options to help users avoid call queues and will allow users to speak to a reservationist more quickly;
- (c) internet booking is under development for go-live in the first quarter of 2010;
- (d) marketing of trip availability to bring more effective use of drivers’ time during times of lower demand in the day to generate more trips; and
- (e) improving the overall quality of standards and business process by obtaining Contact Centre Accreditation for Dial-a-Ride.

### **4 LONDON COUNCILS’ PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 LC commissioned a consultant to help prepare its response on proposals for how it would like to see future door to door services working in London.
- 4.2 Its proposed approach provides a vision and strategy that places boroughs at the centre of managing and operating door to door services set within a holistic framework and supported by funding from TfL. The proposed strategy would keep Taxicard as a stand-alone premium service with Capital Call absorbed in a

new Taxicard contract. Dial-a-Ride would be transformed into borough bus-based services managed and operated either by boroughs or sub-regionally with a concept of integration with Adult Social Services and Children's Special Educational Needs transport. Boroughs could develop their supply-side operations with NHS Primary Care Trust Patient Transport Services.

- 4.3 The LC Transport and Environment Committee on 15 October approved the following:
- (a) the approach set out in the consultant's report should be used as a basis for a medium to longer term strategy for door-to-door transport in London;
  - (b) LC officers should consult more widely on the proposals and develop the proposed strategy in more detail with a view to returning to a future LC TEC with more detailed proposals;
  - (c) extend the current Taxicard contract by one year until 30 September 2011;
  - (d) note the work that has taken place with TfL and the NHS on a potential integrated door to door services pilot project and agree that this work continue in the meanwhile; and
  - (e) note the current Taxicard budget position and agree that any further consultancy work required in further developing LC's proposed approach towards door to door services in London is to be funded through LC's research budget.
- 4.4 In its report, LC recognises the complex nature and diversity of door to door services and highlights the considerable amount of work that will be required to achieve the vision outlined in its approach. Even if every stakeholder (including boroughs) were to agree with the general approach set out in the report, there will be difficult issues that need to be addressed, such as:
- (a) demonstrating a good business case and value for money for all aspects of the strategy;
  - (b) dealing with current service provision and transition issues;
  - (c) how to fund the cost of the transition and capital costs for the new approach; and
  - (d) ensuring that any changes in the ways services are provided during the transition period are carried out as seamlessly as possible with minimum impact on users.
- 4.5 London Councils now expect to commission a consultant to develop the details of its proposed strategy.

## **5 NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 TfL will work with London Councils to establish the viability of their proposals. A paper will also be prepared for the Mayor to outline the current status of door to door services in London.

## **6 RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 The Surface Transport Panel is asked to NOTE the content of this report.

## **5 CONTACT**

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