



Disability support for bus users

To scrutinise the support available to people with disabilities using buses in Hertfordshire

Report of the Topic Group

17 March 2017

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REPORT OF THE DISABILITY SUPPORT FOR BUS USERS TOPIC GROUP

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This is the report of the Disability Support For Bus Users Topic Group. The Group examined the support available to people with disabilities using buses in Hertfordshire
- 1.2 The Topic Group addressed the following questions:
- What provision do bus operators make for people with disabilities, (including physical and mental health)?
 - What training is provided by bus operators to support people with disabilities accessing public transport?
 - How do people access information and advice and how are they made aware of the available support when using bus transport?
 - When work and developments are planned for bus transport, how are user groups engaged for their input and knowledge of what the public requires?
- 1.3 The scoping document can be seen at **Appendix 1**. Associated papers issued to Members can be found [\(here\)](#)

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That officers explore opportunities to engage with people with disabilities to inform their work with Intalink and ongoing service development. (3.4, 3.7, 3.8, 3.10, 4.5)
- 2.2 That officers ensure that the needs and concerns of disabled bus users are known and regularly discussed at Intalink. (3.11, 3.12, 3.14, 3.16, 4.6)
- 2.3 That officers respond positively to the Bus Services Bill consultation to reflect the opportunities within it to deliver benefits and improvements for all bus passengers in Hertfordshire including disabled passengers. (3.17, 3.20, 3.21, 3.24, 4.7)
- 2.4 That officers through the stewardship of the Intalink Partnership raise awareness among disabled residents of the range of products available and how to access them. (3.23, 4.8)

3.0 Evidence

- 3.1 In Hertfordshire the vast majority (94%) of local bus services are operated on a commercial basis over which Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has no authority. During 2015-16 nearly 38million passenger journeys were made in Hertfordshire and this is the highest number since the mid1980s. Passenger transport, of which buses are a key component, is recognised as an enabler to help facilitate

economic and demographic growth and features prominently in the emerging Local Transport Plan 4 and the Growth Vision for Hertfordshire. They are also a means of preventing social isolation through access to social, education and work activities.

- 3.2 Comparisons were made with Transport for London (TfL) services. However, TfL has extensive powers and budget. For instance it has recently initiated a driver training programme costing £3m which is beyond the budget for neighbouring local authorities. It is useful to consider the approaches taken and it can provide evidence of good practice; however, it is not realistic to compare services and available resources in Hertfordshire with those run by TfL.
- 3.3 People with disabilities make 42% fewer trips than people with no disabilities. A number of factors account for this figure. Disabled users who attended the scrutiny outlined examples of negative travel experience. These included rude or unsupportive drivers, drivers failing to stop at bus stops (either for boarding or alighting), drivers starting off before the person was seated and confrontation with other passengers especially where someone needs time to pay or sit down, or requires the wheelchair space occupied by a pram.
- 3.4 The Transport, Access & Road Safety (TARS) Team contact with disabled people is currently limited. It generally occurs when changes to bus funding or routes consultation is taking place. Engagement with such groups would provide useful service and planning information and officers recognise the need to improve on this. The witnesses from disability groups who attended the scrutiny are a source of real life experience that TARS can utilise. They outlined the range of difficulties encountered by people with disabilities when using public transport.
- 3.5 Health & Community Services (HCS)'s Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDPB) meets monthly to discuss the issues and problems that affect people with Learning Disabilities. It has a wide range of members including self-advocates and family carers. A key priority identified by the LPDB is transport and this has led to the creation of a LDPB Transport Working Group.
- 3.6 Transport issues have also been raised at the HCS Co-Production Board. The board works with people who use care services and their carers to help HCS shape services. The board is co-chaired by the Director of Health & Community Services and the Disability Watford chairman. The following issues were identified at the board regarding bus use
 - Timetable and other relevant passenger information displays should be both visual and audio.
 - Can we be ahead of the game with training? It needs to be face to face.
 - 'Trip adviser' information on the transport providers will encourage good practice.

- We can get better by specifying more about accessibility in our contracts.
- 3.7 TARS can draw on the feedback from the Co-Production board. For example the board has offered to
- send feedback on issues faced
 - provide intelligence on who uses the buses and what for
 - ensure people know how to raise issues and where to send them
- 3.8 TARS already disseminate pertinent information to colleagues in Highways on issues such as the design and siting of bus stops. Examples were provided of new or revamped bus stops that were difficult for disabled users to access e.g. kerbs too low, difficulty in accessing, no hard standing. Closer liaison with disability user groups would provide an opportunity to test out proposals prior to installation and prevent errors.
- 3.9 Some issues which affect both disabled users and bus operators are outside HCC's powers, for instance parking in bus bays. It is imperative that such issues are raised with districts/boroughs in order to expedite a speedy resolution as in practical terms it can mean a user with mobility issues is unable to board or alight the vehicle.
- 3.10 Users are not always confident that operators will respond positively to complaints or comments on service or personnel. Consequently, the Co-Production Board had written to the Traffic Commissioner and was disappointed in the response received. Traffic Commissioners are responsible for the licensing and regulation of buses and coaches and the registration of local bus services. However, the Commissioners do not deal with single complaints and are not the ideal channel for complaints or concerns. Users were encouraged to alert the call Customer Services Centre of any issues which will be passed onto TARS to raise with a provider. The more data received the better as TARS is well placed to identify any patterns of failings to alert the Commissioner.
- 3.11 Greater understanding of the experience and needs of disabled users among operators would be beneficial. The videos submitted as evidence give a real insight into the issues facing users and the small measures that can create a positive experience ([videos](#)). These could usefully be shared with operators and drivers. This highlights that not all improvements need to be costly or high tech.
- 3.12 Bus transport has a vital role to play in the lives of people with a disability enabling them to access education and work opportunities, maintain a social life and attend medical and other appointments. Operators may not be aware that it can be the only transport option available. Examples were given of the challenges presented when the needs of disabled passenger are not recognised for instance ignoring

passengers at bus stops or failing to recognise the significance of an assistance dog or white cane. The final journey times on some routes also place limitations on work options or social engagement.

- 3.13 There have been occasions when the electronic lift on a bus fails to work making it impossible for the user to board the vehicle. It would be reassuring to disabled users if this and other measures to assist them were included in the vehicle check prior to a bus commencing its journey.
- 3.14 Witnesses identified driver training as a key area that would improve their experience of bus use (see paragraph 3.3). Whilst a driver has to undertake 35 hours of training repeated every five years to gain and retain the Certificate of Professional Certificate (CPC) each company has its own training programme. Any additional guidance issued to drivers is similarly determined by the operator. This leads to inconsistency in how passengers with disabilities are treated by the different operators in Hertfordshire or, indeed, within the same company; or what support they can expect from drivers. However, this flexibility also presents an opportunity to develop training modules that reflect the needs of users with disabilities. This is an area that discussion at Intalink Partnership could usefully focus on.
- 3.15 Alongside training for drivers an initiative working with users was described, travel training. This familiarises disabled users with the conventions of using public transport to increase confidence and willingness to use all forms of public transport.
- 3.16 The examples given by witnesses above need to be brought to the attention of the bus companies as and when they occur. As stated at 3.10 concerns and complaints can be forwarded to TARS who will log them and raise them direct with the bus company. If a pattern emerges of complaints from a particular community or users this can be forwarded to the Traffic Commissioner to review and take action which could lead to penalties of licences being withdrawn.
- 3.17 A number of concessionary cards are available: the disabled person's bus pass; companion passes if a disabled person needs assistance when travelling; and Elderly National Concessionary Transport Scheme (ENCTS) passes used by older travellers including those with disabilities. In addition the larger bus operators also offer concession cards. Each card has its specific purpose and limitations and it can lead to an individual carrying a large number of cards. This can be confusing.
- 3.18 The Bus Services Bill is currently progressing through Parliament. The main points of the Bus Services Bill are:
 - to strengthen arrangements for partnership working in the sector, introducing 'enhanced partnerships'

- introduce new franchising powers with decision making at a local level
 - to provide for a step change in the information available to bus passengers (open data)
- 3.19 During debate the Lords several important amendments were made to the Bus Services Bill to take account of issues raised in the [Paulley Supreme court decision](#) concerning wheelchair access to buses. Disability Rights UK welcomed proposals to enforce the occupation of wheelchair spaces by wheelchair users where another passenger is behaving unreasonably.
- 3.20 HCC is well placed to utilise the powers proposed. The Intalink is recognised as already operating as an “enhanced partnership.” Moreover, the Authority already goes beyond the minimum legal duties e.g. the ENCTS has been extended to enable travel all day and HCC’s companion passes are not funded by the ENCTS.
- 3.21 The Bill also proposes a review of some of the traffic commissioners’ responsibilities. One of the duties that provide an opportunity to local authorities is the licensing of buses and registration of bus services. This would give additional powers to underpin the work of Intalink and help improve services for disabled users.
- 3.22 Consultation on the Bus Services Bill closed on 21 March 2017. An update including the county council’s response to the consultation will be taken to Environment, Planning & Transport Panel (29 March). The panel papers can be viewed [here](#).
- 3.23 The Intalink website was described as a one stop shop and it includes a plethora of resources and information. Nonetheless, its usefulness is limited to those aware of the site; moreover, the needs of disabled users are not specifically addressed. However, the site is under review and this presents an ideal opportunity to rectify these gaps.
- 3.24 HCS offers the Orange Wallet. This is easily recognised by all bus drivers. Like a card holder it has plastic pockets that can be used for headline information e.g. "I'm deaf, please look at me when you speak" and vital information such as the travel destination or an emergency contact number. It has the potential for wider application beyond travel – the messages for bus drivers are pertinent in other situations (banks, pubs etc.). Currently, take up for the wallet is low and marketing is planned.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The topic group commended the responsiveness of officers from TARS and other Highways colleagues when bus related issues are raised. Members also wanted to mention HCC’s approach of going beyond statutory requirements in areas such as the ENCTS which enables all

day travel in Hertfordshire. Witnesses also praised the easy to read consultation paper that had been produced by TARS.

- 4.2 Improved provision for disabled users will also have benefit for all users. For instance, the introduction of the illuminated “stop” sign helps alert all users that the vehicle will be braking.
- 4.3 It was clear that whilst some of the major operators are slow to engage with users other operators were commended with particular mention of Centre bus.
- 4.4 Witnesses highlighted the slow progress to achieve improvements for disabled users. For instance many of the recommendations in a study undertaken for East Herts Council (2009) still remain relevant; and the points raised in the report submitted by Disability Watford have wider relevance.
- 4.5 Officers expressed real enthusiasm to work with disability groups. TARS officers recognised that greater consideration of the needs of disabled users is an area for development and they welcomed future opportunities to take the discussion commenced at the scrutiny forward. (Rec 2.1)
- 4.6 Witnesses provided real life experiences that could inform service development and assist the work of the Intalink Partnership. (Rec 2.2)
- 4.7 The proposals contained in the Bus Services Bill gives TARS powers to initiate change in Hertfordshire, particularly the duties around HCC undertaking licensing. It is incumbent on the Intalink Partnership to grasp these opportunities and improve the experience of all users and especially those with disabilities. Particular areas of focus would include
 - the assurance from operators that training is improved and developed from a disabled person’s perspective
 - operator guidance which reflects the outcomes of the Bus Services Bill with particular relevance for disabled users
 - exploration of the advantages of one interchangeable concessionary card(Rec 2.3)
- 4.8 The Intalink website is vital in providing both up to the minute travel information and guidance for disabled users. It is anticipated that the current review of the site will include provision for the needs of users with disabilities as outlined during the scrutiny. (Rec 2.4)
- 4.9 Travel training for people with learning disabilities has been previously delivered by HCS. It would be timely to review its benefits and its cost effectiveness.

5.0 Members and Witnesses

Members of the Topic Group

Roger Beeching
Dave Hewitt
Anne Joynes (Chairman)
Peter Ruffles
Sandy Walkington

Other Members in Attendance

Terry Hone

Witnesses

Simon Aries	HCC Assistant Director Transport, Waste & Environment Management
David Brookes	Centrebuss Operator rep
Jane Dellow	Herts People First
Tom Hennessey	HCC Head of Transport Access & Road Safety
Leigh Hutchins	Chairman Disability Watford
Matt Lale	HCC Passenger Transport Manager
Kumara Moorthy	Disability Watford
Alex Morris	Herts People First
Nadine Raenke	HCC Deputy Head of Service (LD & Transport), Community Wellbeing Commissioning
John Simmons	Herts People First Group
Rob Wilson	Hertfordshire Bus and Coach Association Representative
Geoff Williamson	HCC Service Development Team Leader

Officers

Theresa Baker Democratic Services Officer
Natalie Rotherham Scrutiny Officer

APPENDIX 1

SCRUTINY REMIT: DISABILITY SUPPORT FOR BUS USERS

OBJECTIVE:

To scrutinise the support available to people with disabilities using buses in Hertfordshire

QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED:

1. What provision do bus operators make for people with disabilities, (including physical and mental health)?
2. What training is provided by bus operators to support people with disabilities accessing public transport?
3. How do people access information and advice and how are they made aware of the available support when using bus transport?
4. When work and developments are planned for bus transport, how are user groups engaged for their input and knowledge of what the public requires?

OUTCOMES:

That members are clear what arrangements are in place for people with disabilities and what improvements are planned..

CONSTRAINTS:

The scrutiny will not include

- a review of the transport service provision across the county
- taxis
- trains

WITNESSES i.e. individuals	EVIDENCE i.e. organisations
Celia Saunders, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Access Advisory Group	Arriva
Traffic Commissioner	
Tom Hennessey HCC Head of Transport, Access & Road Safety	Disability Watford
Matthew Lale HCC Passenger Transport Manager	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFgQjBx8SDQ
Simon Aries HCC Assistant Director Transport, Waste & Environment Management	

METHOD: 1 day topic group

DATE: 17 March 2017

MEMBERSHIP: Roger Beeching, Dave Hewitt, Anne Joynes (chairman), Peter Ruffles, Sandy Walkington

SUPPORT:

Scrutiny Officer: Natalie Rotherham

Lead Officers: Matt Lale Passenger Transport Manager & Tom Hennessey Head of Transport Access & Road Safety

Democratic Services Officer: Theresa Baker

HCC Priorities for Action: how this item helps deliver the Priorities
delete as appropriate

1. Opportunity To Thrive ✓
2. Opportunity To Prosper ✓
3. Opportunity To Be Healthy And Safe ✓
4. Opportunity To Take Part ✓

CfPS ACCOUNTABILITY OBJECTIVES: *delete as appropriate*

1. Transparent – opening up data, information and governance ✓
2. Inclusive – listening, understanding and changing ✓
3. Accountable – demonstrating credibility ✓

Appendix 2**Glossary**

CPC	Certificate of Professional Certificate
ENCTS	Elderly National Concessionary Transport Scheme
HCC	Hertfordshire County Council
HCS	Health & Community Services
LDPB	Learning Disability Partnership Board
OSC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
PSVAR	Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000
TARS	Transport, Access & Road Safety
TfL	Transport for London