

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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BACKGROUND PAPER FOR DISABILITY SUPPORT FOR BUS USERS TOPIC GROUP

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide Members of the Scrutiny Topic Group with background information on disability support for bus users. Specifically this report will cover:

- The county council's role and responsibilities in relation to supporting local bus services.
- What support Hertfordshire County Council specifically provides for people with disabilities to access local bus services
- What support is provided by commercial bus operators

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Bus services are recognised as supporting the social and economic development of an area and are an integral part of the local public transport system. In Hertfordshire the majority (94%) of local bus services are operated on a commercial basis with no direct involvement, control or influence from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

2.2 During 2015-16 nearly 38 million bus passenger journeys were made in Hertfordshire which was the highest number since the mid 1980s. Passenger transport, of which buses are a key component, are 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.

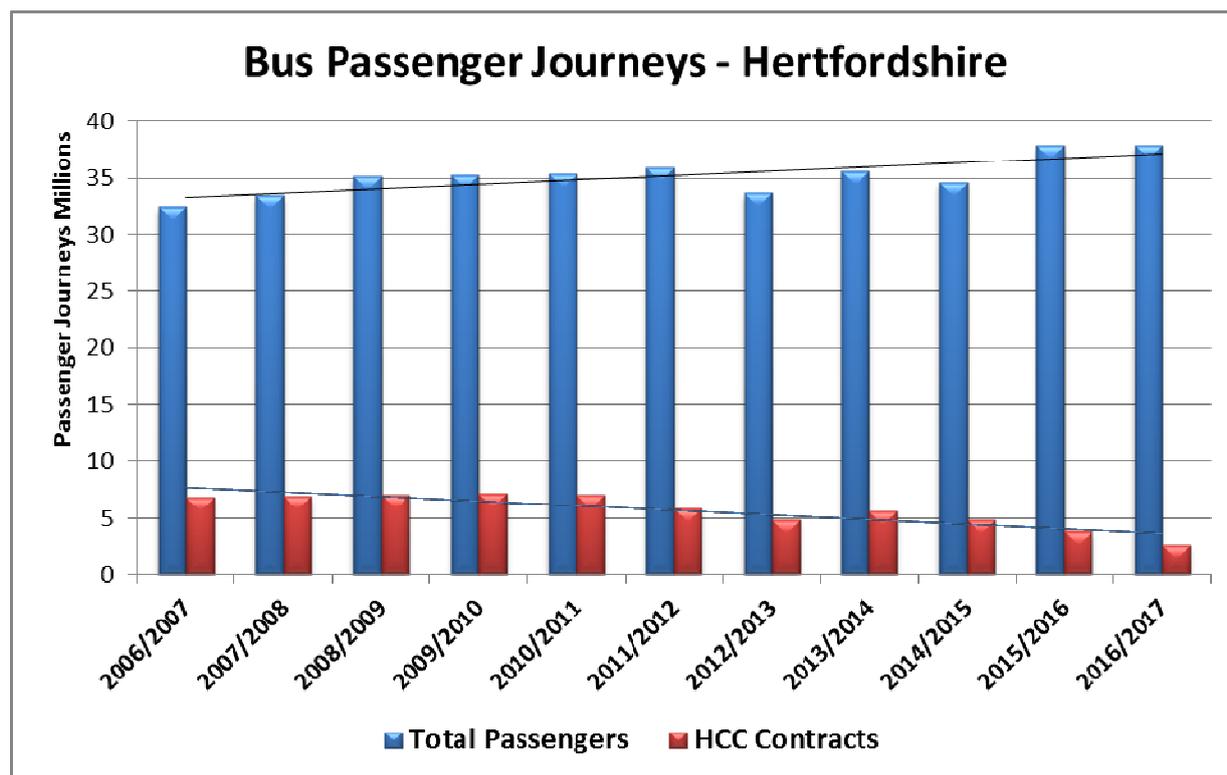
2.3 Under s63 of the Transport Act 1985 (as amended) which places the following statutory definition with the council:-

“to secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose”.

2.4 However, given the county council's financial position it has to consider the level of service that it is appropriate for it to support and prioritise accordingly. Table 1 shows that from a base line of 2008, bus passenger numbers in Hertfordshire have seen a gradual upward trend. Notwithstanding a dip in patronage across the county in 2013, passenger numbers have increased by 12% in line with the average level over the period 2008-2015.

2.5 The upward trend in passenger figures has continued despite a downward trend in the value of supported bus contracts financed by the county council since 2010-11.

Table 1:



- 2.6 The county council currently contracts local bus services worth approximately £4.5m a year, of which the council makes a net contribution of £1.7m which caters for approximately 2.4m passenger journeys. This is on top of £12.2m provided to bus companies to support the statutory entitlement for elderly concession transport by bus and contributions negotiated from s106 agreements which account for a further approximate £544,631 of investment.
- 2.7 The county council established the Intalink Quality Partnership in 1999 which includes (commercial and contracted) bus and rail operators, district and borough councils. The Partnership is led by officers from the Transport Access and Road Safety Unit and seeks to improve:
- the quality of bus services
 - patronage take up
 - access to services, and
 - the quality of information made available to the bus travelling public.
- 2.8 The Partnership discusses cross cutting issues and works together to identify possible solutions. It is well attended and there exists a strong and positive working relationship between the county council and partners who are all working to the same objective - to improve local bus services and customer experiences.
- 2.9 Colleagues in Health and Community Services (HCS) facilitate the Learning Disability Partnership Board which has a Transport subgroup that meets quarterly. The sub group discuss current public transport challenges faced by people with a learning disability and seek ways to improve travel for these users.
- 2.10 In 2014 and 2015 the county council conducted two public consultations on proposals to make efficiencies in the way the Authority supports non-commercial local bus services. Careful consideration was given to the feedback from the public

consultation; the council's statutory duties under the Transport Act 1985; the council's equalities duties and the contents of the Equalities Impact Assessment alongside the financial position and available resources.

- 2.11 As part of the consultation officers met with the Learning Disability Partnership Board to discuss the proposals and to encourage its members to respond to the consultation. The consultation was available online and in paper form as well as an easy read version. 61 easy read responses were received from the first consultation and 19 from the second consultation from the Partnership.

3 What provision do bus operators make for people with disabilities (including physical and mental health)?

- 3.1 Since 2000, all low-floor buses must meet the requirements of the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR) and have a designated space for wheelchair users and there are priority seats for older and disabled people.
- 3.2 Physical access to buses in Hertfordshire is improving, with all buses having lower steps or no steps at all, easy-to-grip high visibility handholds, non-slip floors, improved lighting, easy-to-use bell pushes, clear 'stopping' signs and easy-to-read destination signs.
- 3.3 The PSVAR made a requirement that all single-decker buses be accessible by 2016 and all double-deckers by 2017. All bus companies have a statutory obligation to carry registered assistance dogs.

3.3 Mobility scooters

- 3.3.1 Bus companies in Hertfordshire are committed to making scheduled bus services accessible to as many people as possible, and whilst there is no legal requirement to carry mobility scooters, they are keen to welcome customers who use a scooter, whenever it is safe to do so.
- 3.3.2 A Code of Conduct has been developed jointly by the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), the trade body representing bus operators in the UK) and the Department for Transport, and it is designed to be the industry standard for England, excluding London, for the carriage of mobility scooters on scheduled bus services.
- 3.3.3 Unfortunately, as mobility scooters are not built to recognised common standards, anyone wishing to travel by bus in a scooter will need to have their individual scooter approved as suitable.
- 3.3.4 Once approved, customers will be issued with a "scooter permit" from the operator for travel. This standard permit will be accepted, on buses able to carry scooters, by all other bus companies who have signed up to the code, subject to space being available and to the company's normal terms and conditions of travel. Both Arriva and Centrebus have started running permit schemes.

3.4 Assistance Cards

- 3.4.1 Arriva is the largest commercial bus operator in Hertfordshire serving approximately 60% of the bus market. Arriva have produced Assistance Cards to make it easier for customers with disabilities, particularly those that are hidden or not easy to recognise, to use its bus services.

3.4.2 Although the card has Arriva's name and logo on it, there is an expectation that all other operators will recognise and accept the card (just as Arriva will recognise those of other companies) because it is not a ticket or a pass.

3.4.3 Centrebus have worked with local authorities and supportive agencies to create a "Better Journey Cards" in order to assist passengers who have physical or mental impairments on their services.

3.5 **The Hertfordshire Travel Wallet**

3.5.1 The Hertfordshire Travel Wallet is a scheme delivered by the county council in partnership with Intalink members. The scheme provides users with a bright orange wallet and contains crucial headline information for bus drivers to support passengers with disabilities to access and use public buses, e.g. '*please don't drive off until I sit down*'.

3.5.2 Because of the design of the wallet it can be easily recognised by the bus driver without the passenger having to explain this to the driver (which might be challenging for passengers with communication needs).

3.5.3 Travel wallets can be requested by passengers with:

- a learning disability
- a physical disability
- a hearing or sight impairment.

3.6 **Bus passes for disabled people**

3.6.1 The county council has a statutory requirement to implement the Elderly National Concessionary Transport Scheme (ENCTS) for residents over the retirement age or for residents with a disability. This national concessionary scheme offers free bus travel to pass holders between 9.30am and 11pm weekdays and all day during the weekend and bank holidays. However, Hertfordshire is one of the few local authority areas in the country to extend the ENCTS to enable travel at all times of the day subject to the availability of the service.

3.6.2 Disabled residents in Hertfordshire can apply for a Companion Pass if they are unable to travel by bus without the assistance of another person due to a medical or mental health condition. Companion passes are not a statutory requirement and therefore are not funded from the ENCTS. The county council provides companion passes free of charge as an additional benefit to encourage disabled bus travellers. Currently there are 9,800 disability passes produced in Hertfordshire in circulation with a further 2,500 passes which are companion disability passes.

3.7 **HCC assisted transport**

3.7.1 Deregulation of the bus network under the Transport Act 1985 allowed for local authorities to support transport services for people who are elderly or disabled. Based on this premise the county council runs the following additional services:

- A centrally coordinated Dial-a-Ride service for people aged 75 or over and / or for people with a disability to travel to specific destinations.
- An in-house fleet of vehicles to offer transport to day services as well as to voluntary community groups and other contracted day service providers. This service is for eligible people with a care needs assessment and who have no other means to access services that meet their needs.
- Contracted taxi transport for those vulnerable people eligible under the care needs assessments who cannot take advantage of other transport services.

3.7.2 Hertfordshire County Council supports 11 local Community and Voluntary Transport Schemes, with the Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups providing matched funding to 8 of these schemes. A capital contribution is also available towards the cost of accessible vehicles including MPVs and minibuses (not confirmed for 2017-18); such schemes offer transport to elderly, frail and rural residents who cannot get to or onto any other means of travel. Provision of these schemes is reliant on the available numbers of volunteer drivers.

3.8 **The Buses Services Bill**

3.8.1 A Bus Services Bill is currently progressing through Parliament which if adopted would make it possible for certain Local Transport Authorities to franchise networks of bus services. Franchising would allow bus services to be provided in the same way as in London and as national rail services. It would give Local Transport Authorities the powers to plan, develop and regulate bus services, for example, offering passengers simpler, integrated Oyster-style ticketing and guarantees on service quality.

3.8.2 The emerging Bill also appears to offer the opportunity to remove barriers to improving services and providing simpler fares in areas which do not wish to move to a franchise model or cannot do so because they do not meet the specified requirements (for example because they do not have a directly elected Mayor).

3.8.3 The main benefits of the Bill are described as:

- providing the option to franchise bus services to areas willing to strengthen governance with a directly elected Mayor
- supporting a thriving local bus market with the passenger at its centre
- allowing cities to promote an integrated transport system, supporting the growth and development of their areas

3.8.4 The draft Buses Bill proposes to amend section 181 of the Equality Act 2010, to include regulations requiring operators of local services to make available information about a local service to persons travelling on the service. It is still not clear how the information will be presented but the Government is keen to ensure that all data and information is available in all formats.

3.8.5 The Bill is fully supportive of the principle of all drivers being trained in disability awareness and the majority already receive such training as part of their Certificate of Professional Competence. The Government will work with the bus industry and disabled people to develop and embed the use of best practice guidance on providing disability awareness training in the transport sector.

4 **What training is provided by bus operators to support people with disabilities accessing public transport?**

4.1 As stated above operators are required to ensure drivers receive Disability Awareness training as part of their Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC), which covers how to correctly load a wheelchair onto the bus, being prepared to offer reasonable help and assistance to customers and also to be aware of different disabilities and how to assist them including what to look out for.

4.2 Centrebus are part of dementiafriends.org.uk/ which involves special training and awareness for their staff to respond appropriately to customers who may have dementia.

4.3 All Hertfordshire operators are required to train their drivers on use of the Orange Travel Wallet. Passengers receive an information sheet on how to use their Travel Wallets that they can go through with assistance if necessary.

5 How do people access information and advice and how are they made aware of the available support when using bus transport?

5.1 The County Council's website¹ aims to support older people and disabled people to apply for their passes online. There are also paper copies of applications at local libraries and tourist information areas. The customer call centre is on hand for anyone who needs support to complete the application.

5.2 All information about contracted and commercial bus services can be found on the Intalink website. Currently there are no specific pages on the Intalink website (<http://www.intalink.org.uk/>) on what operators do to support people with disabilities; however, this is under review and presents opportunities to improve access to information.

5.3 Hertfordshire County Council recently launched audio announcements on Smartphones of departures at all 4,500 bus stops in Hertfordshire. The user just needs to place their phone in the proximity of the Near Field Communication (NFC) chip or to scan the Quick Response (QR) code at the bus stop to receive scheduled and real time bus information for that stop on their phone. Associated promotional and marketing material is currently being developed.

5.4 The guidance and information about the application process for the Disabled Person's bus pass have been updated on the new Hertfordshire County Council website².

5.5 Service users with eligible needs (i.e. in receipt of HCS services) who cannot use public transport or do not have their own means of traveling will receive advice from their social worker during a support planning process of how they can attend services.

5.6 Information about the Orange Travel Wallet is available online³. Members may find it helpful to have viewed the video prior to the topic group.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFgQjBx8SDQ>) Hertfordshire County Council is currently updating all information and carrying out the following:

- Improvements made to application process
- Information about orange wallets will be sent out with concessionary bus passes for people with a disability from April 2017
- New easy read version of the guide is being produced. A link to Orange Wallets information has been added to the Intalink Website.
- A new flyer is produced to promote the Orange Travel Wallet
- Awareness with bus companies is raised at Intalink Partnership meeting

5.7 Two of the main operators in Hertfordshire (Arriva and Centrebus) publish specific information for people with disabilities on their websites. Arriva has a dedicated page which is titled: *Arriva Making bus travel easier: guidance for customers with disabilities*: (<https://www.arrivabus.co.uk/travel-help-and-accessibility/making-bus-travel-easier-guidance-for-customers-with-disabilities/>) It details Arriva's policy on

¹ https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/ufs/ufsmain?ebz=1_1486399250453&ebd=0

² <https://beta.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/adult-social-services/transport-for-older-people-and-disabled-people/bus-passes-for-disabled-people.aspx>

³ <https://beta.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/adult-social-services/transport-for-older-people-and-disabled-people/travel-wallet.aspx>

helping customers who have disabilities as well as information on assistant cards and mobility scooters. Similarly Centrebus have a travel advice page which promotes 'Better Journey Cards' and mobility scooters. These are the only two operators that have a dedicated webpage for supporting customers with disabilities. This is another area of improvement that can be championed by the Intalink Quality Partnership.

6 When work and developments are planned for bus transport, how are user groups engaged for their input and knowledge of what the public requires?

- 6.1 Local Authorities must take Article 16 of EU Regulation 181/2011 into account when designing or accepting plans for new bus stations.

In deciding on the design of new terminals, and as part of major refurbishments, terminal managing bodies should endeavour to take into account the needs of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility, in accordance with 'design for all' requirements. In any case, terminal managing bodies should designate points where such persons can notify their arrival and need for assistance.

- 6.2 In terms of infrastructure, Hertfordshire County Council also seeks to upgrade busstops to include easy access, with raised kerbing. The county council's guidance (e.g. "Passenger Transport in New Developments" and "Quality Bus Infrastructure in Herts") typically draws on national guidance from the Department for Transport (DfT) including the 400 metre walking distance which will have been developed with the relevant user groups at a national level.

- 6.3 The county council is obliged to conduct thorough consultation before any policy changes take effect. In 2015 Hertfordshire County Council conducted an extensive consultation exercise to make amendments to its Bus Strategy and Value for Money criteria⁴ to determine which local bus services to support. In order to inform the discussions a comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was conducted to propose mitigations to potential adverse impacts on particularly characteristics including people with disabilities. Part of the preparation of the EqIA involved meeting with the Learning Disability Partnership and liaison with Hertfordshire Community Development Association to support the public consultation exercise in reaching as wide a range as possible of agencies that support a variety of services including for people with disabilities.

⁴ <http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/transtreets/ltplive/supporting/bus/>