

MINUTES



DISABILITY SUPPORT FOR BUS USERS TOPIC GROUP held on FRIDAY, 17 MARCH 2017

ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS OF THE TOPIC GROUP

R H Beeching, D J Hewitt, A Joynes (Chairman), P A Ruffles, A S B Walkington

Other Members in attendance

T W Hone

Officers in attendance:

Simon Aries - Assistant Director, Transport, Waste and Environmental Management

Tom Hennessey – Head of Transport Access & Road Safety

Matthew Dale – Passenger Transport Manager

Nadine Raenke – Deputy Head of Service (LD & Transport), Community Wellbeing
Commissioning, Health & Community Services

Geoff Williamson – Service Development Team Leader

Theresa Baker - Democratic Services Officer

Natalie Rotherham - Scrutiny Officer

Witnesses in attendance

Leigh Hutchins – Chairman Disability Watford

Kumara Moorthy - Disability Watford

John Simmons – Chairman Herts People First

Jane Dellow - Herts People First

Alex Morris - Herts People First

David Brookes – Operations Director Centrebus Ltd

Rob Wilson - Herts Bus & Coach Association

PART I ('OPEN') BUSINESS

1. APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN

- 1.1 It was noted that A Joynes had been appointed as the Chairman of the Topic Group for the duration of its work.

2. GENERAL TOPIC GROUP INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Topic Group received a report setting out the general context for the work of scrutiny topic groups.

ACTION

3. REMIT OF THE TOPIC GROUP

- 3.1 The Group noted its remit and the Scrutiny Officer clarified that the object of the scrutiny was to understand the experience of disabled users of buses.

4. SCRUTINY OF DISABILITY SUPPORT FOR BUS USERS

- 4.1 The Topic Group took evidence from a number of witnesses during the course of the day and received a series of presentations which can be viewed at:

<http://cmis.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertfordshire/Calendarofcouncilmeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/646/Committee/79/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx>

The main points from witness evidence and Member debate are summarised below.

Matthew Lale, Hertfordshire County Council Passenger Transport Manager gave the background information and outline programme for the Disability Support for Buses Users Topic Group which can be viewed at:

[Background Information & Outline of Programme presentation](#)

- 4.2 In relation to the rise in 2008 to 2015-16, to 38 million bus passenger journeys made in Hertfordshire, the Topic Group heard that due to financial constraints the County Council was now responsible for contracting only 6% of the bus market and, although it had limited influence over the remaining commercially run 94%, it had a good relationship with the bus operators in Hertfordshire.
- 4.3 In terms of provisions made by bus operators in Hertfordshire for people with disabilities (including physical and mental health) Members noted the requirements of the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR) and:
- the improvements to physical access to buses in Hertfordshire;
 - the readiness of bus companies signed up to the Mobility Scooter Code of Conduct to carry mobility scooters on scheduled services;
 - the assistance cards issued by some bus companies and the easily identifiable orange Travel Wallet issued by Hertfordshire County Council, which made it easier for drivers to identify and support disabled customers with their needs when using the bus service, in particular those with hidden conditions;
 - extension of the travel hours to 'travel at all times of the day subject to availability', for retirement age and disabled holders of Elderly National Concessionary Transport Scheme (ENCTS) bus passes;
 - free of charge 'Companion Passes' for companions to disabled people who would be unable to travel by bus without assistance;
 - the additional County Council assisted transport services for the

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elderly/disabled i.e. Dial-a-Ride; transport to day services, voluntary community groups and contracted day service providers; contracted taxi transport for vulnerable people eligible under care assessments.

- 4.4 In relation to training provided by bus operators to support people with disabilities to access public transport, the Topic Group noted that all bus drivers received Disability Awareness training as part of their Certificate of Professional Competence. D. Brookes clarified that for Centrebus (a contracted company) drivers it comprised 10 x 3.5 hour or 5x7 hour DVD modules which had to be registered with JOUT before the driver could deliver them. Centrebus drivers also undertook special training on how to respond to customers with dementia and all bus drivers were trained on the use of the Orange Travel Wallet.
- 4.5 During discussion of the difficulties encountered by some disabled people in making cash payment on buses, Members heard that some would also experience difficulty with contactless payment and that this type of technology would incur infrastructure costs. In light of this and the issues experienced by people with invisible disabilities, e.g. deafness, it was suggested that commercial bus operators, whose bus drivers received only the minimum training on disability awareness, should offer greater training and education.
- 4.6 The conflicting demands of the disabled user to be allowed the time to inform the bus driver of their needs and carry them out, (e.g. the safety issue of being given sufficient time to move to a seat and sit down before a bus pulled away, thus avoiding being knocked over), versus the requirement for drivers to keep to a timetable and avoid fining of the company by the Traffic Commissioner for being late were highlighted. Members noted that, unlike the commercial operators, the County Council did not penalise contracted operators for being unable to keep to the bus schedule. The County Council now employed an officer to communicate road works and diversion information to the bus companies to reduce the effect on bus time keeping.
- 4.7 With respect to how people accessed information and advice and were made aware of available support when using bus transport, Members heard that the County Council website carried guidance and information on applying for the Disabled Person's bus pass and online applications for the elderly and disabled, paper copies were also available at local libraries and tourist information areas, and support for completion of application forms was available via the Customer Call Centre. The Intalink website carried all information about contracted and commercial bus services and audio announcements of departures were available on Smartphones at all of the bus stops in Hertfordshire. Personal social workers used the support planning process to advise service users in receipt of Health and Community Services (HCS), who were unable to use public transport and without their own means of transport, on how they could attend services. The Arriva and Centrebus websites carried specific information for people with

disabilities.

- 4.8 In relation to engagement of user groups for their input and knowledge on what the public required when work and developments were planned for bus transport, the Topic Group heard that the County Council conducted consultations before any policy changes were enacted, including liaising with appropriate bodies to ensure that the consultation reached the widest range of agencies and encompassed those for the disabled.
- 4.9 The Council's engagement with bus user groups, many members of which were elderly, was highlighted. Emphasis was given to the need for active engagement with the large number and variety of disability support groups, i.e. for mental health, learning disability and physical disability, although there was no single channel through which to engage with them to ascertain their experiences of bus use, and if they didn't use them why.
- 4.10 Members highlighted the need to understand the issues faced by young disabled people in Further Education when traveling on public buses, in view of the fact that they were encouraged to become more independent and the £5,000 versus £900 per annum cost of transporting them to college by taxi as opposed to public bus.
- 4.11 The need for further disabled person supportive improvements to bus stops, e.g. Braille instructions and auditory signals for the visually impaired, in conjunction with responsibility for funding them was raised.
- 4.12 It was emphasised that greater engagement with, and thus knowledge of, disabled bus users' issues would enable solutions to be devised and prioritisation for maximum benefit based on the funding available. In addition should new resources be required to meet the needs of disabled bus users, the data collected would provide hard evidence in pursuit of funding. In relation to this Members noted that SMART Technology in the Concessionary, Savercard and Educational Cards issued by the County Council enabled the use of buses to be monitored.
- 4.13 Members heard that the franchising of bus service networks proposed by the Bus Services Bill was unlikely to be adopted as it required the County to have an elected Mayor. However, Hertfordshire could take over bus licensing from the Traffic Commissioner, which would provide more scope to influence disability support for bus users; this would require legal support, enforcement via contractor and scholar services and potential partnership with the District councils. A Member suggested that should taxi licensing, which was already the remit of District Councils, be combined with bus licensing this would enable a more comprehensive view of driver training in relation to support for disabled bus users. The Topic Group noted that although the Bill would give automatic access to 'Open Data', time was required for the

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Department for Transport (DfT) and local authorities to develop a partnership which included Intalink.

- 4.14 During discussion of the 94% of buses run by commercial operators and over which the County Council had no control, Members heard that the role of the Traffic Commissioner, with whom County Council officers met regularly, was legally charged and was mainly that of an ombudsman. In view of the fact that there was only one Commissioner to cover the whole region, it was highlighted that complaints were best processed first through the County Council Passenger Transport Team. Their collation of complaints into types streamlined the addressing of them by the Commissioner, whilst the enforcement teams dealt with matters to prevent them, where possible, from becoming issues in the first place.
- 4.15 During discussion of making and following up passenger complaints about bus travel D. Brookes clarified that Centrebus had mystery shoppers of the bus travel experience who travelled in plain clothes; some Centrebus aligned companies gave their inspectors reports to follow up and some inspectors were paid per report; a complaint web form was available on their website and complaints could also be made by phone even if no name was given. Officers confirmed that the County Council had 4 enforcement officers on contracted services who worked both in uniform and in plain clothes, in addition to others who enforced educational routes; these inspectors liaised directly with the bus companies on complaints.
- 4.16 In relation to the inappropriate siting of some bus stops, officers agreed to work with the County Council Highways department to improve coordination on the issue and ensure they were more easily seen and access to them, e.g. hard surfaces, was suitable for the disabled e.g. wheelchairs/mobility scooters.

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Hennessey

Nadine Raenke, Deputy Head of Service (LD and Transport) Community Wellbeing Commissioning gave a presentation from the perspective of Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Community Services - Commissioning, which can be viewed at: [Herts County Council Health and Community Services – Commissioning presentation](#)

- 4.17 The Topic Group noted that people with mobility difficulties made 42% fewer bus trips than people with no mobility difficulties and that Health and Community Services (HCS) used forums such as the learning Disability Partnership, the Transport Working Group and Coproduction Board to hear directly from disabled users of buses what their experience and needs were in relation to this issue.
- 4.18 During discussion of the variety of assistance cards available in Hertfordshire and potential benefits of having only a single one, Members heard that although the orange travel wallet could be used

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across all bus services there had been a very low uptake of it in comparison to the number of concessionary bus passes issued to people with a disability. To remedy this officers confirmed that improvements were being made to the orange travel wallet application process; marketing would be improved by sending out an updated flyer with every concessionary pass issued; a new easy read version of the guide to it was in production; it would be linked to the Intalink Website and bus company awareness of it was being raised at Intalink Partnership meetings. Although part of a national scheme the wallet was administered differently by each authority and officers agreed to investigate linking it to other authorities.

N Raenke

David Brookes, Operations Director Centrebus Ltd gave a response to the scrutiny scope from an operator perspective; the tabled presentation of which can be viewed at:

[Centrebus Disability Support for Bus Users presentation](#)

- 4.19 It was highlighted that, in addition to 37 hours of CPC training, Stevenage bus drivers underwent a further day of training which included disability awareness. This involved physically putting them in the position of the disabled passenger with wheelchairs and raised curbs, also special glasses to mimic the difficulties inherent to the sight disabled. Drivers were also signed up to Dementia Friends; this involved watching a DVD, group discussion of the disability issues observed and writing of pledge cards detailing what they would do differently. A publicity campaign and posters were used in ongoing education of the drivers on how to deal with people with learning difficulties and feedback from bus user meetings for further improvement.
- 4.20 During discussion of the problem of pushchairs taking up space needed by wheelchair users Members heard that general guidance to drivers was to ask the pushchair user to move but, if the passenger did not comply, to avoid a confrontation. It was noted that although newer drivers were asked to be more forceful in their request and not move the bus until complied with, guidance would be provided following the Bus Bill and consequent operator guidance.
- 4.21 In response to questions the Topic Group heard that where passengers had difficulty in ascending or descending, bus drivers were expected to offer assistance where they could. Centrebus drivers were not restricted to staying in the cab and could offer physical assistance if their own health/safety allowed, and could also undertake other actions e.g. if a bus stop lacked a hard standing suitable for wheel chairs to descend to the bus could be stopped at a more suitable point on the road.
- 4.22 In the context of bus improvements which benefited all bus users, Members heard that to address issues of fluency in English of some bus drivers of foreign origin, Centrebus had implemented English For

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Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) courses in Luton and also offered adult apprenticeships. To avoid confusion over when to ring the bell to get a bus to stop at standard and request stops, Members heard that Centrebus buses carried stickers advising passengers to press the button for their stop. It was noted that many websites also carried the information on which scooters models were suitable for carriage on what buses.

Rob Wilson - Herts Bus & Coach Association representative gave a brief talk in response to the scrutiny scope from the point of view of the Hertfordshire Bus and Coach Association.

4.23 Members heard that the Association lobbied with Intalink and highlighted concerns and issues in Hertfordshire, including those of the disabled bus user. It was noted that to deal with the current problem of cars parking on bus stop zones restriction to access by traffic at was required them; efforts were being made to highlight this to the District Councils in whose jurisdiction it lay. Operators were encouraged to report infringements including parking on hatched areas, so that they could be dealt with via the District Council's parking enforcement. Members suggested that double yellow lines would be more effective than white lines which were only advisory and that officers could work more with District Council enforcement.

4.24 During discussion the Topic Group heard that the Association was recognised by the DfT and Hertfordshire was working towards its enhancement; it was open to all companies via subscription however not all operators were members. The Association were amenable to a single assistance card but some operators were national and had their own cards.

Geoff Williamson – Service Development Team Leader gave a presentation from the perspective of Hertfordshire County council Passenger Transport Publicity and Marketing which can be viewed at: [Herts County Council Passenger Transport Publicity and Marketing - Local Bus Service Publicity and Information](#)

4.25 The Topic Group heard that all publicity, as well as being available in hard copy format, was also located on Intalink, a 'one stop shop' for all bus travel related information i.e. timetables and maps for all services under contract to the County Council and related leaflets. Real time information on departures was currently available from 250 bus stop screens and the website which now included Arriva, whilst audio announcements were available from screens at all 4,500 bus stops. From the testimony of disabled witnesses at the meeting, Members noted the personal safety issues which arose from having to hold a smart phone in open view within millimetres of the Near Field Communication Chip (NFC) or Quick Response Code (QR) at standard locations on bus stop timetables to receive audio announcements of departures on their phone, also the problems experienced by the sight

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disabled in pinpointing this location.

- 4.26 Discussion of the work still required to make this travel information available to disabled bus users centred on comparison to equivalent infrastructure in London and the level of funding required from Transport for London to achieve it, and funding limitations in Hertfordshire.
- 4.27 Members heard that to educate the public on how to use and stop buses, a new version of the guide on how to catch a bus or train was being produced.

Leigh Hutchins – Chairman Disability Watford (accompanied by Kumara Moorthy (PA)) gave an overview of the response to the scrutiny scope from a disability representative perspective which can be viewed at: [Watford Disability Group Transport Survey report](#)

- 4.28 L. Hutchins commented that Disability Watford was one of the few disability groups remaining in the county. It was highlighted that over 50% of disabled people approached to complete the Watford Disability Group Transport Survey of November 2015 refused to or did not fill it in, whilst some would not leave their homes due to transport issues i.e. drivers failing to stop for the disabled; fear of being left stranded; humiliation; falling on the floor when buses moved off too soon; locating the bus stop if blind. The survey had not covered the orange travel wallet and it was suggested that social workers could publicise it to their disabled clients.
- 4.29 As the commercial operator Arriva ran 60% approx. of buses in Watford, its non-engagement with the disability group's offer to help make the most important routes accessible to the disabled was highlighted, along with the fact it no longer held quarterly public forums. The level of assistance given to the disabled bus user was unfavourably compared to that in parts of Europe where drivers lowered the ramp, ensured that wheel chair users knew where to go and even engaged the brakes on wheelchairs before setting off. It was noted that the change in bus services at 6pm made it difficult to ensure getting home later in the evening and led to isolation of the disabled at home. Suggestion was made that to enable the disabled to go out in pairs, e.g. friends / partners, Arriva could set the specification for buses for two wheelchair spaces such as those on buses in Reading. As the elderly and disabled needed reliable bus services all day, not just at peak hours, and the motor vehicles to which the disabled resorted were not environmentally friendly, the witness suggested that Arriva could supply a disabled user friendly bus for night time use.
- 4.30 Officers acknowledged the need for redirection of resources to sustainable transport as some old stock was incapable of lowering to ground level and so incompatible with town centre shared spaces. It was however noted that the County Council did not have the powers to

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enforce this and smaller operators would have difficulty in complying.

- 4.31 During discussion of the need for drivers to be aware of the presence of sight impaired and blind people at bus stops who would be unaware of the bus's approach at hail and ride stops, Members heard that Arriva buses would stop a bus at any stop where a person was waiting with a cane or dog and the driver would advise on where the bus was going. The Topic Group suggested that drivers should also be required to announce each stop for the benefit of all on board bus users.
- 4.32 In terms of design improvements Members heard that all old bus stop poles had been replaced with a new design which differentiated them from other traffic sign poles and made them more visible from a bus. During discussion suggestion was made that bus shelters with seating needed to be easily identifiable and bus stops could have Braille instructions and auditory signals for the visually impaired. A Member suggested that district, town and parish council Members could use their locality budgets to fund seating in bus stops.
- 4.33 The Topic Group heard that should the Bus Bill enable the County Council to take over licensing powers from the Traffic Commissioner, adherence to standards (e.g. checking that all equipment such as bus ramps was in working order before leaving the depot) could be used as an incentive when agreeing bus operators' licences. Members heard however that bus operators would request funding for this.
- 4.44 Officers confirmed they would present the collated comments from the topic group to the bus operators via Intalink, however the operators would query who would fund these improvements.

John Simmons – Herts People First Group (supported by Jane Dellow & Alex Morris) gave a response to the scrutiny scope from a disability representative perspective of people with learning disabilities which can be viewed at [Herts People First - Evidence](#).

- 4.45 All of J. Simmons's comments were collated into [Herts People First - Evidence](#) which was written and provided subsequent to the meeting; Members did not comment.

Matthew Lale, Hertfordshire County Council Passenger Transport Manager listed the observations noted in relation to disability support for bus users as highlighted by the Topic Group and commented that there was much for the County Council to target and work on.

- 4.46 Members heard that although realism was required in respect of what could be achieved within current budgetary constraints, there were many cost neutral improvements that could be achieved.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

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As a result of its scrutiny the Topic Group agreed the following recommendations:

- 5.1
 - 1.1. 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)
 - 1.2. 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)
 - 1.3. That officers respond positively to the Bus Services Bill consultation to reflect the opportunities within in 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)
 - 1.4. That officers through the stewardship of the Intalink Partnership raise awareness among disabled. (3.23, 4.8).
- 6. The Chairman thanked the members of the Topic Group and witnesses for their valuable contributions to the meeting.

KATHRYN PETTITT
CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

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