

GREATER MANCHESTER INTEGRATED TRANSPORT AUTHORITY
REPORT FOR RESOLUTION / INFORMATION

COMMITTEE: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
DATE: 20 NOVEMBER 2009
SUBJECT: FLEXIBLE TRANSPORT REVIEW
REPORT OF: DEPUTY CLERK OF THE AUTHORITY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the Policy and Resources Committee of the work, findings and conclusions of the Flexible Transport Review, and to secure members' endorsement in implementing the Review's recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

1. Note and / or comment on the report;
2. Endorse the findings and key actions recommended by the Flexible Transport Review members panel as outlined in Section 4;
3. Ask officers to implement the actions such that any new arrangements are in place at the start of the new financial year, or with regard to any governance reforms from the start of the new municipal year; and
4. Receive an update at the next Policy and Resources Committee, which will form an Action Plan advising members on the actions to be taken by each of the organisations identified in this report to ensure the recommendations are delivered.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

All background documents relating to the work of the Flexible Transport Review can be found on file in Room 308.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Over the past 20 years, the Authority and Executive have funded and developed a diverse range of non-conventional transport services, referred to in this report as Flexible Transport services. These include transport services that cater for specific geographical areas where access to public transport is problematic, and also for individuals, groups or sections of the population who have specific problems using mainstream public transport, for example those with severe mobility problems.
- 1.2 Many of the initiatives and transport interventions that have emerged over this period have been responses to specific needs, to the extent that the Authority now funds a diverse array of such schemes (see Appendix 1). In addition, Board members of GMATL were keen to examine the governance and operation of the Ring and Ride service; hence the decision was taken by Lead Members to undertake a Review of all Flexible Transport Services, with a particular emphasis on Ring and Ride given it is provided with the largest budget.
- 1.3 This Review and its recommendations represent work in progress, with the further development of a Flexible Transport Strategy to be a key part of the forthcoming Local Transport Plan.

2. Review Process

- 2.1 A Review Panel was formed comprising of one GMITA member from each of the political parties represented on the Authority, namely Councillors Dickinson, McCulley and Whitmore. This panel was supported by GMITA and GMPTE officers, plus a representative from the Greater Manchester Transport Resource Unit. Terms of reference were drafted and agreed by the Panel, with the Panel undertaking its work through a series of evidence-based sessions.
- 2.2 Over seven sessions, the following Flexible Transport services were examined; Ring and Ride, Local Link Services, Community Transport and Taxi, Travel Training and other grants. To inform their work, supporting information (including summaries of performance, governance, previous research and consultations) was provided to Review Panel members, with representatives of from GMATL, GMPTE, Community Transport Operators, et al being invited to give a short presentation covering the relevant topic area followed by a question and answer session. However, the Panel was not able to examine each and every flexible transport initiative, Travel Vouchers for example, in the appropriate depth required and hence makes no specific recommendations for these areas.
- 2.3 Review Panel members visited the equivalent but differently constituted organisation to GMATL in the West Midlands to gain an informed

appreciation of how a different ITA/PTE delivers a similar service to Ring and Ride. Officers also undertook an informal consultation of current users of the Manchester Ring and Ride service, with the help of Manchester City Council Officers, to identify where users had the most concerns with the current operation and performance of Ring and Ride.

3. Key Findings

- 3.1 The duties and responsibilities laid down for the GMITA in statute provide the Authority with a large degree of discretion in terms of the extent, range and type of flexible transport services it can choose to provide, particularly now that the Local Transport Act 2008 invests the Authority with the power to promote 'well-being'. This capacity however is always going to be restricted by the availability of funding. Furthermore, there is no clear division of responsibility regarding the appropriate funding for some forms of transport provision, particularly those more specialised forms for individuals with mobility impairments. The GMITA is arguably funding some services which it would be equally appropriate for local authorities or NHS agencies to fund. Such issues, which the Integrated Social Needs Transport project was designed in part to address, are still evident.
- 3.2 Whilst the Authority and Executive have funded and promoted a diverse range of innovative flexible transport schemes and grants, greater effectiveness and social utility may be secured from these if they were more fully co-ordinated. In addition, some of the schemes have largely continued to operate in the same manner as when they were first devised, regardless of wider shifts in policy, notably for example the introduction of the free concessionary fares regime for the over 60s.
- 3.3 The component of Flexible Transport with the single largest budget attracted the most comment and discussion by Panel Members, who noted that the basic structure of Ring and Ride, operationally and in governance terms seem largely unchanged since its establishment. With regard to governance in particular, Members queried the currently complex legal forms and relationships between the Authority, the GMPTE, GMATT and GMATL, suggesting that this complexity was unnecessary and may tend to inhibit clear and transparent decision-making.
- 3.4 Following the consultation exercise with Ring and Ride users, the Review Panel identified some key operational aspects of the service which needed addressing, notably:
 1. The current booking method causes immense frustration, and appears to be a form of rationing.
 2. The current passenger liaison mechanism needs improvement.

3. The cross boundary service is not working efficiently, and criteria may need rationalising such that its use is not dominated by few, frequent users.
 4. GMATL should focus efforts on delivering transport services for those residents who genuinely cannot use conventional public transport. The current target-oriented basis for R&R performance (ie a strong focus on reducing the overall cost per passenger) may be inhibiting the delivery of a high quality service for those who absolutely rely on it (ie those with mobility impairments and with no alternative forms of transport).
- 3.5 The Panel also noted that the Authority had previously successfully lobbied Government such that GMATL was entitled to receive Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) for its Ring and Ride activities. Currently, these funds are directed to help provide support to Greater Manchester Community Transport operators via the Community Transport Trust fund.
- 3.6 The Review Panel also examined the Local Link / Demand Responsive Transport services funded by the Authority. These were judged to be a successful innovation, in terms of providing accessibility to individuals living in communities poorly served by conventional bus services in a cost-effective manner. That said Members proposed a number of suggestions to improve these services (see para 4.4).
- 3.7 The GMPTE had recently appointed consultants Matt MacDonald to review the effectiveness of the current grant system and potential approaches to supporting the voluntary sector. Their review examined the existing forms of grant support, namely: Small Travel Grants; Public Transport Access Grants; Publicity and Training; Community Transport Trust; Travel Support Aid. Chris Hardwick from Mott MacDonald who conducted this work presented the conclusions of his review to the Panel. The key findings, endorsed by the Review Panel, were that it was unclear how successful, or otherwise, the current grant system was in meeting the objectives of the Authority and Executive, partly as a result of the various grants having emerged and developed in an ad hoc basis over time. In addition, the administration of the grants regime and monitoring of outputs needed to be improved.

4. Key Actions

- 4.1 Given the relatively short period of time that Members were able to dedicate to this Review, further work on finessing individual Flexible Transport measures and on co-ordinating them more effectively is required. Therefore, it is recommended that Officers should continue to develop a Flexible Transport Strategy, and better co-ordinate the current range of transport services, as a key part of the Third Local Transport Plan process. That notwithstanding, Members also determined and agreed a number of specific actions intended to

improve the governance, performance, operation and administration of specific Flexible Transport initiatives. These are outlined below.

4.2 **Ring and Ride / GMATL.** The Review Panel believe that a reform of the current governance arrangements relating to Ring and Ride is required to simplify relationships between GMITA, GMPTE and GMATL, and to make clear the appropriate roles of members, particularly with regard to overseeing the activities of GMATL. In addition, establishing a clearer relationship between the GMPTE and GMATL will assist in helping co-ordinate both organisations' activities and initiatives with regard to Flexible Transport provision. It is considered that these goals can best be achieved by dissolving GMATT, and establishing a Service Level Agreement between the GMPTE and GMATL. In addition, it is recommended that by extending the Board membership of GMATL, a broader range of expertise and expert scrutiny will be permitted by allowing members to be drawn from a wider pool, including for example, a Director or equivalent from a District Social Services department, a representative from the local Community Transport sector, a representative from a local NHS Primary Care Trust, etc. The majority of GMATL Board members however will continue to be drawn from the Authority.

4.3 With regard to the operation of Ring and Ride services:

1. The booking service must be improved, increasing flexibility so permitting bookings to be made further in advance. It is suggested that the complete implementation of a single Booking, Scheduling and Dispatch system across Ring and Ride be undertaken which would permit the use of just one contact phone number, advance booking, such as booking up to 1 hour in advance of journey, 7 days in advance, call centre opening 0800 to 2000, 7 days per week and use of wider forms of ICT.
2. A continuous consultation / feedback regime is required (with current and potential users as well as partner agencies, eg PCTs, local authorities, Age Concern, etc) to ensure that the service is constantly challenged to improve by the actual experience of users.
3. Allied with the changes outlined above, ask GMATL to consider whether to dissolve the current boundaries for the service and adopt new criteria of limiting trips to 5 miles radius of passenger home, with an exception made for hospital trips which may be longer.
4. Encourage GMATL to focus its services on those GM residents who genuinely cannot use conventional forms of public transport.

4.4 **Demand Responsive Services.** The Review Panel considered that Local Link / Demand Responsive Services that had been developed by the GMPTE over the past 10 years represented a valuable and cost-effective addition to the transport policy measures available to the Authority. However, a number of areas for improvement were identified, including:

1. The development of a tool that can help identify where Demand Responsive Transport services may be most appropriate, eg when replacing deregistered conventional bus services in areas of relatively low demand.
2. Where Local Link services are used predominantly by employees of an external organisation, for example the NHS or Manchester Airport, then contributions from these partners should be sought.
3. GMPTE should endeavour to ensure that the current form of procuring taxi services for DRT contracts do secure full and demonstrable value for money, and this should be reported to the Bus Network Committee.

4.5 **Community Transport.** Over recent years the Community Transport (CT) sector has flourished in Greater Manchester, assisted in part by the various forms of support provided by GMITA/GMPTE, and now provides a diverse range of transport services throughout Greater Manchester. Currently 14 CT operators provide transport services in Greater Manchester with a total of 115 CT vehicles. However, whilst there are CT organisations operating in all GM Districts, not all areas are covered, eg just Hattersley in Tameside. Demand for CT services plainly outstrips supply and the sector is also growing, but whilst some CTs will continue to grow, take on contract work and diversify, others will remain content to remain as they are, albeit working to improve their services.

4.6 **Grants.** Review Panel members endorsed the recommendations offered by Mott MacDonald in their review of grants, notably for:

1. GMPTE to recast its approach to grant funding along the following lines:
 - a. Grant One – support to vulnerable individuals
 - b. Grant Two – support to groups in the community
 - c. Grant Three – support to constituted VCS organisations
2. These moves should be accompanied by improvements in: grant administration, marketing and links to policy and strategic Objectives
3. The criteria for the allocation of grants needed to be explored, to ensure cost-effectiveness and to ascertain whether other bodies were not better placed to provide such funding
4. Dedicated staff resources were required to administer the grants.
5. Promote and publicise those grants available and the outcome of such from recipients
6. Officers to devise a programme of reform of the current grant regime to be implemented over time so as to minimise any disruption to current individual or group beneficiaries.

4.7 Performance information - in terms of punctuality, reliability, satisfaction and patronage - for all Flexible Transport services, including GMATL services, provided by GMITA funds should be reported at regular (six

monthly) intervals to the Bus Network and GMPTE Services Committee.

5. Recommendations

5.1 A full set of recommendations appears on the front page of this report.

Appendix 1 Flexible Transport Review – Funding Summary

Name	Resources pa	Administered / Funded by	Description
Ring and Ride	£6,079,000	GMATL / GMATT (GMPTE/ITA)	Door to door accessible minibus for people who cannot use conventional public transport. Company runs 72 vehicles, 319 staff (including 177 drivers) from 9 depots.
Ring and Ride	£430,000	GMPTE / GMITA	Annual capital grant for new vehicles
Cross Boundary Ring and Ride	£265,000	GMATL / GMATT (GMPTE/ITA)	As above, but operating cross boundary trips with 9 vehicles.
Travel Support Aid	£30,000	GMATL / GMATT (BSOG)	Allocated to the 10 local authority districts on population basis, Travel Support Aid is given if an individual or group is unable to make a journey by any other means (public transport, Ring and Ride, Social Services, Health Services, Education Services etc).
CT Trust Fund	£150,000	GMPTE / GMATT (BSOG)	To provide financial support, both revenue and capital, to the GM CT sector.
Local Link	£1,148,000	GMPTE / GMITA	Affordable, flexibly timed, shared use, door to door transport services available to specific groups in a set area. Two broad types; dedicated minibus all day area wide services and service using spare resource within existing taxi operations covering a small area / time bands. Current usage is 348k on 35 services.
Travel Vouchers	£483,000	GMPTE / GMITA	A concession for people who cannot use conventional public transport and have serious mobility problems or are registered blind, introduced in 1994. Scheme provides up to £120 worth of vouchers for £30, for use in taxis, R&R and CT in exchange for Concessionary Pass.

Access Grants	£85,700	GMPTE / GMITA	Are provided to voluntary sector organisations to help develop Travel Training initiatives.
Small Travel Grants	£26,000	GMPTE / GMITA	Grants of up to £150 are provided to voluntary organisations of older or disabled people to cover transport costs to events. 148 groups benefited in 2008.
Shopmobility / Publicity and training	£1,000	GMPTE / GMITA	Provides funding to Shopmobility organisations in GM for publicity and training purposes of up to £150 - £300 per group per annum)
Community Transport	As below	As below	There are 14 Community Transport operators in GM, operating a fleet of 115 vehicles and undertaking a very diverse range of transport services.
	£85,000	GMPTE / GMITA	Direct grant
	£150,000	GMPTE / GMATT (BSOG)	CT Trust Fund
	£739,000 + income	Various external	Various sources, including local authorities, Big Lottery Fund, etc