

Consultation Seminar Community Transport Strategy for Cheshire



Crewe Alexandra Football Club, 16 April 2007 Proceedings

1 PRESENT

- 1.1 There were 65 delegates signed up for the Consultation Seminar, including voluntary and community organisations, community transport operators, local government, the National Health Service, (NHS) and other public sector agencies.

2 WELCOME

- 2.1 County Councillor Eveleigh Moore Dutton welcomed delegates on behalf of Cheshire County Council. She emphasised that this is a genuine consultation exercise and that she would be listening carefully to what delegates had to say. There are increasing demands for community transport, and rising expectations; but, at the same time, budgets are being tightened.
- 2.2 Cllr Moore Dutton will sit on the County's Environment Policy Development Panel at its July 2007 meeting, when Community Transport will be discussed.

3 PRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 The Seminar commenced with three presentations from Gerard Rhodes (Cheshire County Council), John Atkins (TAS Partnership), and Richard Armitage (Richard Armitage Transport Consultancy). The slides were published in the delegate pack, and are available on the RATC website (visit: www.ratransport.co.uk/news.html).
- 3.2 JA added: The average shire county council contribution to CT and DAR was about £200,000, with a couple of counties (e.g. Northumberland) spending nothing at all. So, Cheshire's current contribution, together with the match from the District Councils, is well above the average and this forms a solid base on which to build future provision.
- 3.3 Although no operator currently has a PSV 'O' licence, CT Macclesfield has a Restricted one, and Crewe & Nantwich DAR expects to get one shortly.

4 QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

- 4.1 Mike Skinner, North Shropshire CT: getting an Operator's Licence, PSV certified vehicles, and fixed brandings could mean a loss of flexibility; he has been told that he cannot use a PSV vehicle with a section 19 permit.

Secondly, will PSV operation be so important if the changes being proposed by the Department for Transport (see *Putting Passengers First*) to s19 and s22 operation are approved?

- 4.2 John Atkins (JA): Traffic Commissioners and VOSA inspectors have been known to interpret things differently, from area to area, but he was unaware that switching to s19 operation was a problem.
- 4.3 Richard Armitage (RA): The law has not been changed yet and the implementation date if it were to be changed is unknown, so for the time being the CT Strategy has to assume the current law applies.
- 4.4 Gerard Rhodes (GR): In any case, from the point of view of tendering processes and so on, the County's view is that it needs the flexibility of PSV operation! Cheshire County Council is seeking clarification regards whether a vehicle can change between Permit & Operator licence operation.
- 4.5 Eric Nightingale (Congleton District CVS): volunteer drivers would prefer the vehicles to be smaller, especially in areas with narrow rural roads. Can we get advice from RATC and TAS? (Yes).
- 4.6 Gill Clough (Age Concern Cheshire): We merged several Age Concern organisations, and are pleased to say we have gained from being larger and becoming more professional. But take care to lose your locality, and your local connections.
- 4.7 GR: I agree, and you will have seen that all three presentations emphasised the need to avoid losing the benefits of local knowledge and contact.
- 4.8 Tom Unsworth (Disabled Resource Exchange, Crewe): low-floor buses have been an important advance, but we need to be sure that they stick to the timetable and do not leave people stranded at the bus stop. Dial-a-ride is OK, but not everyone has can access it, when it mainly operates between the hours of 08:30 and 17:00. I like the sound of Option 3, bringing all different types of CT together: this would enable CT to operate with a greater variety of vehicles, and to provide better rural coverage, and to tackle the issue of coordination of the different types of accessible transport.
- 4.9 GR: this is why we think it is worth pursuing the 'umbrella' concept.
- 4.10 Viv Woodburn (Older People's Network): is there going to be a dedicated user's group.
- 4.11 GR: Yes. For instance, in the new specification for Chester Dial-a-Ride, the new contractor is expected to work with user representatives. We will convene some user group meetings to discuss the CT Strategy itself.
- 4.12 RA: We have not concluded yet what we would recommend as the best way to do it around the county, as there are many different ways of users being involved in service design and evaluation.

5 FURTHER DISCUSSION AFTER THE COFFEE BREAK

- 5.1 Hugh Emerson (Northern Pensioners Association, Crewe): Before we discuss the supply, we need to know what the demand for CT is and what users require.

- 5.2 RA: We have not analysed unmet demand, because we know from work done over many years around the country that it far exceeds current supply. However, we will provide some indicative figures in the draft Strategy document. It could be considered a misuse of funds if the consultation were to concentrate resources on needs assessment.
- 5.3 GR: In any case, the CT Strategy forms but one part of the Route and Branch Review of all passenger transport in Cheshire, which is looking at demand for transport as a whole across the county.
- 5.4 HE: the new Rope Lane Health Centre is going to be difficult for some patients to get to (who were accustomed to getting to the previous facility at Wells Green). What transport is going to be provided? There are opportunities for consulting people about the CT Strategy, such as the 14th May 2007 public transport liaison committee meeting in Crewe (17:30 hours).
- 5.5 Richard Turley (Cheshire County Council): the CT Strategy will need to mention the importance of improving accessibility, and this includes such items as physical accessibility to vehicles, and accessing travel information.
- 5.6 Mike Bridges (East Cheshire Primary Care Trust (PCT)): we need to remember that the NHS is not a single organisation, and the difficult task is getting each one on board. There is significant potential for joint working, so how do persuade these NHS organisations collectively to sign up to the CT Strategy?
- 5.7 RA: one way in could be through the mechanism of the Local Area Agreement and the Community Strategy. Also, need to bear in mind that there are significant changes afoot in respect of providing non-urgent patient transport to primary care facilities.
- 5.8 Kevan Larkin (Northern Counties Residents Council): I support the idea of joint purchasing and procurement. For instance, housing associations in Greater Manchester and Merseyside are getting together to purchase services jointly. Tendering for services is the best way forward.
- 5.9 MS: working with the NHS can be frustrating. Through Market Drayton Community Car Scheme we regularly take people to a particular health centre; but we cannot make a driver available on a Friday. So, our users now refuse to accept appointments there on a Friday. This is a bottom up solution to matching user demand with resource availability.
- 5.10 Noel Markey (CT Macclesfield): we would like to have larger vehicles, so we can take more passengers, and the vehicle maintenance arrangements need to be improved. We already have a PCT funded hospital car scheme. We are in the process of getting a PSV licence. We recognise the need to strengthen our Committee, and look forward to more discussion about the CT Strategy. We would like more involvement in the specification of the vehicles we get through Cheshire TCS.
- 5.11 Neil Duncalf (Crewe & Nantwich Dial-a-Ride): We already are involved in buying and specifying our TCS vehicles. I think we are pro-active, and are trying to take up opportunities as they arise. For instance, we have picked up on MiDAS driver training; we are organising uniforms for our drivers; we have

taken on the provision of new services that have been dropped by private operators. We will be considering the issues raised by the CT Strategy at our Board.

- 5.12 Maria Smith (Cheshire Disability Foundation): What support and training is going to be made available to enable all the proposed changes to happen, especially for trustees?
- 5.13 RA: There is technical support available from several sources: the County Council Transport Coordination Service (e.g. vehicle fleet management); the Cheshire and Warrington Social Enterprise Partnership can assist with business planning and structural/constitutional change related to social enterprise; assistance will be available from RATC and TAS, and we have enabled many CTs to develop all around the country; and Cheshire Community Council is working on a scheme to assist with the policy and governance issues highlighted in John's presentation earlier.
- 5.14 Ray Dodd (Cheshire Community Council): Yes, we are looking at a 'Tyremark' scheme, a kite-marked governance and policy scheme that indicates that your CT or DAR organisations is fit for purpose, with three levels (1 = basic). Vivien Ellis, our Chief Executive, could not be here today; she has been contributing to the consultants' reference group. I would observe that it may be premature to conclude on the CT Strategy before the Local Government Review is over.
- 5.15 Betty Wright (Older People's Network): please can we have some consistency across the county? At present, different DARs apply different rules about whether or not they take people to NHS clinics or hospital appointments.
- 5.16 ND: There are historical reasons for these different approaches, going back many years. We are now taking patients to Leighton Hospital once more.
- 5.17 Julie Crawford (Community Partners - Vale Royal DAR): From what we have heard so far, it all sounds quite frightening and worrying; the pace of change is fast; we are going to need support with this (especially regarding tendering), but this does not mean we are opposed to making useful changes.
- 5.18 Steve Williams (Cheshire County Council TCS): There are over 50 routes now with low-floor buses. There are now examples of "gaps" left by conventional bus service networks that are being filled by CTs. TCS manages over 1,000 contracts every weekday. There is potentially a much greater role for CT operators if they are structured properly. Significant opportunities are going to become available to those CT operators that wish to take advantage of them. There are going to be tenders that CT operators can win and operate successfully. But you will need to be geared up for them.
- 5.19 Bill Scragg (Crewe & Nantwich DAR): We are willing to change; recently we have been able to appoint a deputy coordinator, covering administration and personnel issues. But one of our problems is that the current vehicle maintenance arrangements provided through the County's TCS are not

working properly, with one instance of an MoT taking 3 weeks. So perhaps the job of providing vehicle maintenance and back-up should be put out to tender?

- 5.20 Craig Wallace (Macclesfield Borough Council): there has been no mention of Wheels to Work (W2W) schemes yet, which elsewhere in the country many CT operators provide. For the last 30 months, in Macclesfield we have provided mopeds for hire to people having difficulty getting to work or training. Last October (2006), with Connexions (Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire) and the North West Development Agency, we agreed a package that will make 270 mopeds available in the region; the funds for this will run out in 2 years' time and we need to start now thinking about how to continue the service. Wheels to Work should be seen as 'Community Transport' in the broad sense.
- 5.21 RA: we will be including a section in the CT Strategy about the non-transport policy areas in which CT has a contribution to make, and there is no doubt the W2W schemes are a useful way of improving accessibility to jobs and education. This work also ties in neatly with the Accessibility Strategy contained in the County Local Transport Plan 2006-2011.
- 5.22 TU: Please can we also address cross-boundary passenger transport problems? We also need priority for CT vehicles (alongside buses and taxis) in crowded roads and streets in the county.
- 5.23 NM: I think you will find that some of the DARs provide cross-boundary services already.
- 5.24 Dennis Murphy (Congleton Town Council): is it correct that Congleton Borough Council has not been included in the W2W scheme? (Yes).
- 5.25 Hugh Emerson (Northern Pensioners Association, Crewe): I would like to give thanks to the CT operators for the services they currently provide. I would prefer to use the phrase 'opportunity' rather than 'challenge', which we've heard a lot of today. In John Atkins' presentation, we learnt there are about 100,000 trips provided at present - when the changes are implemented how many more trips will there be?
- 5.26 GR: there is an opportunity to reduce the cost per passenger by reducing overhead costs through enhanced contract specification.
- 5.27 RA: we will offer more detail on this in the CT Strategy.

6 CLOSING REMARKS

- 6.1 Cllr Moore Dutton thanked everyone for their active participation and looked forward to seeing the draft CT Strategy.
- 6.2 The draft CT Strategy will be finalised over the next two weeks and widely circulated; it will include a timetable for responses. RATC and TAS will be meeting with CT operators and other key interested parties over the next period. An electronic copy of the draft CT Strategy, taking account of comments made today, will be sent to delegates who provided an e mail address, or a hard copy will be posted to those delegates without an e mail address.