



Business Appraisal of Cheshire's Dial-a-Ride Operators

John Atkins, TAS Partnership
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Consultation Seminar (16 April 2007)

Introduction

- ◆ **CT in Cheshire has delivered some valuable work, but must now respond to a new challenge**
- ◆ **County Council is committed to CT development**
- ◆ **All parties must recognise the need for greater collaboration in the forging of a new vision**

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CT in Cheshire today

- ◆ **County Council backs CT: £430k per year**
 - ❖ 5 Dial-a-Rides
 - ❖ 2 Women's Safe Transport schemes
 - ❖ Many Voluntary Car Schemes
 - ❖ Other smaller services
- ◆ **CT infrastructure in place, meeting some residents' needs**
- ◆ **It is a good starting point**

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Common ground

- ◆ **Charitable objectives, and a commitment to social inclusion**
- ◆ **Funding sources:**
 - ❖ County Council
 - ❖ District Councils plus other sources account for 50% of total income
- ◆ **Some resources - vehicles + IT**
- ◆ **Urban-Rural duality in delivery**

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CT Resources

- ◆ **Present Infrastructure**
 - ❖ 67 staff
 - ❖ 26 vehicles
 - ❖ 75 volunteers
- ◆ **Service Headings**
 - ❖ 28 brandings / areas of operation
- ◆ **Passenger Trips**
 - ❖ Circa 100,000 pa (all schemes)

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CT organisations in Cheshire

- ◆ **Strengths & weaknesses:**
 - ❖ In individual CT organisations
 - ❖ Looking at the CT sector as a whole
- ◆ **A local strength can be a collective weakness & v.v.**
- ◆ **A strong local focus can detract from a broader strategic vision**
- ◆ **Challenge for a CT: - balance its priorities**

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Scale of operation

◆ Growth patterns of CT

- ❖ Most CTs started small and local
- ❖ Some have grown larger and generic
- ❖ Inability to grow / resistance to growth = stagnation?
- ❖ Growth can be motivated by crisis
- ❖ In Cheshire, CT needs to think bigger

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Common characteristics

◆ Pros

- ❖ Safe and conscientious operators / good practice on the ground
- ❖ Good ability to sustain existing demand
- ❖ Some ability to respond to additional demand
- ❖ Comparatively healthy level of volunteer involvement

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Common characteristics

◆ Cons:

- ❖ Limited ability to forge innovative services
- ❖ Poor record of social enterprise / independent income generation
- ❖ Scant user involvement in planning / procurement functions
- ❖ No over-arching sense of purpose or vision & no development path

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Resources for CT in Cheshire

◆ Need to be aware of changing financial climate

- ❖ Grant aid, service level agreements unlikely to remain unchanged

◆ Little strategic thinking or action planning to forge new directions

- ❖ No O licences, but some aspirations in this direction

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Contracts and CT in Cheshire

◆ Tendering for service contracts:

- ❖ CTs not tooled up to bid for work
- ❖ Need ability to develop new services, with realistic business plan to ensure these are going to be sustainable

◆ Process has commenced

- ❖ Chester Dial-a-Ride competitive tender has been won by Ealing CT

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Common standards

◆ CTs need to adopt common standards:

- ❖ Funder confidence essential
- ❖ Enable new Service Level Agreement to be signed off
- ❖ Operational standards (including PSV Capability)
- ❖ Reporting & Data (outputs and outcomes)

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Common standards

◆ CTs' common standards and shared approach:

- ❖ Policy & Governance
- ❖ Training
- ❖ Branding & Marketing
- ❖ Geographic – rural identity
- ❖ More cohesion allows greater impact – unity is strength

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CT Strategy for Cheshire

◆ What CTs wish to gain from it:

- ❖ Commitment to continue services
- ❖ Standardised staff terms + conditions
- ❖ Consultation, Joint Planning, Integration into the mainstream
- ❖ Proper provisioning for SLAs
- ❖ More provision for under-resourced areas and wider geographic scope – filling the gaps in service delivery

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CT Strategy for Cheshire

◆ What CTs wish to gain from it:

- ❖ Volunteers (recognition of value, resources to recruit)
- ❖ Capacity-building initiatives, advice on contract negotiation, management
- ❖ Vehicles (greater flexibility, specification, procurement, deployment)
- ❖ More focus on individual needs – Dial-A-Ride as well as Dial-A-Bus

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Challenges for Cheshire

◆ CT in Cheshire

- ❖ CT "voice" needs to be found via collective planning & regional forum
- ❖ Joint operations & partnership working needs to be considered
- ❖ CTs need to actively plan for full PSV level operations via CPC and driver training
- ❖ Each CT organisation needs to commence using business planning

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Challenges for Cheshire

◆ CT modernisation

- ❖ Services that cover all needs and emphasise outcomes not just outputs
- ❖ Bookings & scheduling to be approached on a county-wide basis
- ❖ Constitutional anomalies need solving
- ❖ Common standards & training to apply

◆ Parts need to become a bigger whole to realise this vision

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