



Transport Activists' Roundtable North West

The North West TAR CORE GROUP contact details

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Sharon Adhikari,
Local Transport Bill (Bus Partnership) Consultation,
Zone 3/11, Department for Transport,
Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street,
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Monday, October 13th, 2008

Dear Sharon Adhikari,

Local Transport Bill Consultation: Bus partnership guidance/regulations

The North West Transport Roundtable (NW TAR) welcome any increase in the control that Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) will have over services, in particular the expansion of their powers to include minimum service frequencies, maximum fares and timetable specifications in the establishment of Quality Partnership Schemes (QPSs). These changes are to be welcomed as greater influence by the LTAs over services will be to the benefit of passengers. Reform is badly needed, given the continuing decline in bus use outside London.

Although, as stated above, we welcome the power to set maximum fares for individual bus rides, we are concerned that the question of whole journeys has not been addressed. Many journeys in a large conurbation involve two or more bus rides but the cheaper weekly, monthly or annual ticketing arrangements often offered by operators are not usually interchangeable with other operators. So, for instance, a worker who has to travel across a conurbation to his place of employment may still find the cost of bus travel excessive. This question of ticketing may also affect frequency for the passenger using a route serviced by more than one operator. If he has bought, say, a weekly 'saver' ticket applicable to only one operator, he will have to wait until a bus comes along for which he has the appropriate ticket, resulting in a wait at the bus stop and a slow journey.

We are also concerned that improvements on one route as part of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) or QPS may result in deteriorations in services on others. There must be a means of ensuring an operator involved in a VPA or QPS on one route does not remove vehicles and drivers from another, substituting more polluting and less accessible buses on the non-VPA and/or non-QPS routes.

A further concern we have is the provision of adequate resources. LTAs will need extra resources to negotiate these schemes; it is unreasonable to expect them to meet these costs from their already overstretched budgets. Then there are the Traffic Commissioners who are already under-resourced, but who will be involved with various procedures connected with setting up the schemes, eg. dealing with "admissible objections", registration restrictions and enforcement. And, in respect of "admissible objections", there is mention in Annex D of the possible need for an assessor or person selected from a panel appointed by the Secretary of State and it is stated that if the Traffic Commissioner seeks such assistance, the Traffic Commissioner "must pay that person such remuneration as may be determined by the Secretary of State". It is our opinion that this payment must come from Government funds. We can envisage, if funding is inadequate to cover all the procedures involved in setting up these schemes, the whole process grinding to a halt. We trust these comments are of value.
Yours sincerely,

JANET CUFF & SANDRA DUTSON, Members of the NW TAR Core Group.