

Community Transport Update Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26 September 2024

Presented by

Tim Taylor, Director of Public Transport Operations



Background

- CT services operate across the whole of South Yorkshire, delivered by four separate CT operators (one for each Local Authority)
- SYMCA currently provides a grant of £1.657m per year of revenue funding to ensure there is continued service availability for passengers who are unable, or do not have access to the general bus network. These services use fully accessible vehicles and can take passengers from home to local destinations like supermarkets or town centres without the need to get to a bus stop.
- Services cover:
 - **Dial-a-ride:** passengers with long-term disabilities who cannot use public transport must register and pre-book the service
 - **Shopper Bus:** supports eligible passengers to access their weekly shopping for essential goods
 - **Group Travel:** provides group transport for local lunch clubs
- Passengers pay a subsidised fare for trips which is significantly lower than using a taxi but still higher than the free ENCTS travel that the majority of passengers would have if they able to access the general bus network.
- In order to receive the grant, CT operators need to submit an annual business plan to SYMCA for approval, outlining how the grant award will be spent.

Progress

- We now have in place a quarterly performance review process with each CT operator to see where they are relative to targets and wider business plan commitments.
- Patronage for 2024/25 show the service to be on target to meet targets set out in this years business plan. However usage is at 59% of pre-Covid levels due to lower passengers per journey. The number of new customers registering is slowly rising but further marketing by the operators is still required.
- We have seen the annual fare increase for Community Transport services applied from 1 September. We need to agree the process for setting fares for 2025/26 which will be incorporated into the Business Plan.
- We have produced a draft Community Transport Marketing Plan which looks to improve awareness of their services. This needs agreeing and delivering by the operators.
- We will approve the 2025/26 Business Plan and associated grant award as part of wider SYMCA budget setting processes finalised in Q4 2024/25.
- We will be piloting demand responsive services in 2025 which will make use of technology booking solutions for passengers. We can use our learning from this pilot to implement improvements with Community Transport operators in 2025/26.
- We have had eleven electric vehicle minibuses which are now in active use across operators. These went into service starting from 13 August.
- We have plans for some promotional activity linked to the launch of the electric minibuses to again raise awareness with potential new passengers.

Questions

- What are OSC members views on the future setting of Community Transport fares? We could;
 - Leave the setting of fares with operators (the last increase on Dial-a-Ride fares averaged 10% in September 2024; the first fare increase since 2018)
 - Link fare rises to RPI/inflation and potentially cap the increase so there is a more transparent approach to why fares increase
 - Explore making trips free (for ENCTS pass holders as a minimum) through greater grant allocation
- What are OSC members views on potential changes in scope of operations? Options we could consider include;
 - Change the types of journeys provided
 - Change the hours of operations to give coverage at earlier, later and even at evenings and weekends
 - Provide longer journeys, possibly including cross-boundary journeys
 - Provide more medical appointments, noting the risk that appointment times are often subject to delays.
 - Increase usage and availability by reducing driver and vehicle resources that have to be utilised for longer periods by individuals with additional/complex travel needs. Focus could be on catering for all or growth in patronage
- How quickly would OSC members expect operators to migrate to a fully zero-emission fleet?
- How would OSC like to be informed on the final approved Community Transport Business Plan?

Thank you

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