

Report to Partnership Meeting 7 October 2011

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND DELIVERY

DRT/BSOG Consultation

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Scottish Government has initiated a consultation exercise titled Consultation on Extending Local Bus Registration and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)
- 1.2 The full consultation document can be found on Extending Local Bus Registration and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)
- 1.3 The deadline for responding is 30 September 2011, and a response has been submitted by the Partnership Director following consideration by the Permanent Advisors as per this report. The response has been submitted subject to amendment following considered by the Partnership at their meeting if necessary.

2. LOCAL BUS SERVICE REGISTRATION; CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 At present, a bus service in Scotland can in general only be registered as a Local Bus Service if it is operated to a strict timetable with defined stopping places (or specified roads where the bus can be hailed) and is available for the general public at the payment of a set fare.
- 2.2 Operators are then entitled to receive BSOG from the Government, payable at a rate of 41.21p/litre of fuel consumed (57.19p/litre for bio fuel and 82.42p/litre for Low Carbon emission Vehicles (LCV)).
- 2.3 Local Bus Services are also entitled to participate in the Government free concessionary travel scheme for elderly and people with disabilities, where the operator is reimbursed 67% of the full fare applicable.
- 2.4 The Traffic Commissioner has so far accepted Flexible Demand Responsive Bus Services with no fixed route and operated on demand (but available to the general public at the payment of a fare) as Local Bus Services as long as the flexible routes and the period of operation are clearly defined. However, in these cases, the operator is not entitled to

BSOG but can participate in the Government's free concessionary travel scheme.

- 2.5 On the other hand, BSOG (but not travel concession reimbursement) is currently payable for local authority schools/ local services and for not-for-profit bus services operated under 'Section 19 Permits' that serves special categories of the public (but not the general public) such as those over 60, disabled persons and persons suffering a degree of social exclusion (including geographical remoteness).

3. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The Government has proposed, identified as Option 1 in the Consultation Document, that DRT Services that are available to the general public at the payment of a fare should also be eligible to be registered as Local Bus Services and full entitlement of BSOG (and, thereby qualifying for the Scotland wide concessionary travel scheme) but only if they fulfil several criteria, including ..

- The service must be available to members of the general public at the payment of a set fare
- The area of operation must be such that members of the general public may take advantage of them with reasonable frequency
- The advanced booking arrangements are such that they do not act as a deterrent to members of the general public wishing to make use of the service
- The arrangements for determining when and where passengers may be taken up or set down are such that members of the general public may take advantage of them with reasonable frequency

Option 2 identified in the Consultation is to 'do nothing'

4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 The proposals by the Government will put Demand Responsive Transport services (when available to members of the general public) on a level footing with fixed route/timetable services in respect of financial support by the Government.
- 4.2 This proposal should therefore be welcomed but it is nevertheless the case that BSOG (unless operated under a 'Section 19 permit') and Concession reimbursement will still not be available for 'specialist' restricted use DRT services that are provided only for people with disabilities that makes it difficult for them to use registered Local Bus Services as available.

5 .RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The Partnership agree the detailed response as submitted by the Partnership Director, and included in the Appendix to this report.

Risk	impact	comment
RTS delivery	√	A change in Government Policy as proposed will support delivery of the RTS Horizontal themes regarding Mainstream Public Transport in improving accessibility around the region, making transport more affordable for all, and achieving equity and consistency in application of the concessionary fares scheme.
Policy	-	
Financial	-	
Equality	√	The proposed change in Government Policy will potentially provide those living in remote and rural areas, and particularly those unable to use private transport for whatever reason, with an increased level of equitable access to services and employment.

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Designation: Partnership Director
Date: 2nd September 2011

Appendix to Report

HITRANS Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on Extending Local Bus Registration and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)

The Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) is a statutory body covering all forms of public transport in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland encompassing not only road, rail, sea and air travel, but also cycling and walking.

HITRANS, working with its five constituent Councils, is charged with supporting the Scottish Government in delivering the National Transport Strategy and developing and delivering a strategy and promoting improvements to the transport services and infrastructure network that serve the region. The organisation takes an integrated and inclusive approach by consulting with the local communities and companies to achieve its objective of “enhancing the region’s viability by improving the interconnectivity of the whole region to strategic services and destinations”.

HITRANS covers just under half of Scotland’s land mass but with only 410,000 residents – less than 10% of Scotland’s population. It includes over 80 island communities. The major challenge to maximising the effectiveness of the region is to improve accessibility and connectivity for people who live and work in the area. Given the sparsity of population within the region, unique within the UK, the availability and effectiveness of commercial and fixed route Council supported bus services in meeting the needs of our communities is limited. Reliance on more flexible forms of transport available for use by the general public and those with specific needs is greater than elsewhere. It is therefore important from an equity perspective that operators that provide these more flexible forms of transport, and are a key element in ensuring continued access to communities with inadequate fixed route services, are treated equally to fixed route bus service operators.

HITRANS supports implementation of Option 1, ‘to enable DRT services available to the general public to be registered as local services, thereby qualifying for the Scotland-wide concessionary travel scheme. Also extending the Bus Service Operators Grant to such DRT services’.

This response has been submitted by Officers of the Partnership and will be subject to confirmation of the Partnership Board at their Meeting on 7 October 2011

Dave Duthie
Partnership Director
HITRANS