

BUS PARTNERSHIPS, SCHEMES AND CONTRACTS

Overview



INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the various options available for public transport systems as set out under The Local Transport Act 2008. The report specifically looks at:

- Voluntary Partnership Agreements;
- Quality Partnership Schemes; and
- Quality Contract Schemes

The report takes its base information from the Department for Transport's publications *The Local Transport Act 2008: Creating the right public transport system for your area* and *The Local Transport Act 2008 Quality partnership schemes: statutory guidance to English local transport authorities and metropolitan district councils*.

DEFINITIONS

Voluntary Partnership Agreements: an agreement where a local transport authority undertake to provide particular facilities or to do other things of benefit to passengers, and an operator, or operators, undertake to provide services to a particular standard.

Quality Partnership Schemes (QPS): A QPS involves the council providing "facilities", and operators wishing to use those facilities must undertake to provide "services" to a particular standard specified. A QPS is a statutory scheme, and the Traffic Commissioners have powers to impose sanctions on operators who use the facilities without meeting the standard. QPSs are able to include requirements about service frequencies, timings or maximum fares as part of the specified standard of service.

The definition of facilities is varied examples include: off site buildings such as the George Park & Ride, bus stops, accessible raised bus boarders, real time information, bus stop clearways, signal priority for buses, bus lanes, and enforcement of restrictions which benefit bus operators.

Services can be specified relating to the minimum standards required to operate under the QPS. These can include; vehicle quality, age, emissions and facilities, frequencies, timetabling, driver training, punctuality, reliability, customer care standards, maximum fares (if not objected to by an Operator) and data sharing.

Quality Contract Schemes: A QCS involves replacing the existing deregulated market with a system of contracts – as currently operates in London. Under a QCS, the local authority specifies the bus services that are to be provided in the area of the scheme, and invites tenders from operators to provide those services under contract

There are five public interest tests which need to be applied in order to demonstrate why a QCS is required, they are:

- increased patronage;

- passenger benefits
- achieving the Authority's policy objectives;
- economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- the proportionality of the benefits identified in relation to the first four tests to any dis-benefits to incumbent operators.

Despite a number of reports in the media since legislation was first introduced in 2000 there have been no Quality Contracts implemented outside of London. Metro, in West Yorkshire, is the closest to introducing a quality contract following a number of years of consultation and research. Work on this scheme commenced in 2009 and a forecast date for contracted services to start is June 2014.