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Working Plymouth

Monday 18 November 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Murphy, in the Chair.
Councillors Mrs Aspinall, Darcy and Wheeler.

Also in attendance: Ralph Ellis (Public Transport Officer), Phil Heseltine (Head of Integrated Transport), Debbie Newcombe (Public Transport Officer), Gill Peele (Lead Officer), Helen Rickman (Democratic Support Officer) and Andy Sharp (Public Transport Manager).

The meeting started at 3.00 pm and finished at 5.15 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

49. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the code of conduct.

50. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of 28 October 2013 were approved as a correct record.

51. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

52. **PARK AND RIDE BUS SERVICE - FURTHER ANALYSIS OF RESULTS.**

The panel noted the further analysis of results from the Park and Ride Bus Service survey. It was noted that the comments received as part of the survey had been condensed down due to repetition and that the percentages of users of the Park and Ride Service from outside of Plymouth had been further split to highlight users from Cornwall, Devon and Somerset.

53. **COMPARATIVE DATA FOR PARK AND RIDE BUS SERVICES AND CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL PASSES**

The panel considered the comparative data for the Park and Ride Bus Services and concessionary travel passes.

Members were informed that –

- (a) the report contained more information, as requested at a previous meeting, regarding the Concessionary Travel passes, an examination of what other Local Authorities had done since the eligible services amendment had been introduced and the possibility of removing the acceptance of concessionary passes on Park and Ride Bus Services in Plymouth;
- (b) both Norwich and Chester had amended entitlement, since the introduction of the Travel Concessions Amendment in 2009, to no longer accept concessionary bus passes;
- (c) officers had been in contact with the Department for Transport to discuss the amenity element in relation to the Park and Ride Bus Service;
- (d) in 2011 Norfolk received approval to have concessionary bus passes removed from their Park and Ride Service. There was a charge of £1 for concessionary pass holders to use the service;
- (e) in Chester it was similarly agreed that the concessionary bus passes would no longer be accepted on the Park and Ride; specific data was not supplied as to the percentages of complaints however it was confirmed that it was seen as a positive financial change;
- (f) officers were still awaiting legal advice however in principle, subject to legal approval, it was considered that Plymouth's Park and Ride would fall under the eligible services amendment; negotiations would need to take place with the operators if reduced fares were to be considered as this was a commercial service;
- (g) Cambridge introduced a charge on top of the bus fare ticket for parking however parking was at a greater premium.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (h) toilets were not defined as an amenity however it was considered that there was no reason why this was not the case;
- (i) Cambridge accepted concessionary bus passes on the Park and Ride Bus Service and there were proposals to charge for car parking from January 2014; it was not known if Stagecoach would withdraw their service having strongly objected to this proposed decision;
- (j) Oxford accepted concessionary passes on their Park and Ride Bus Service after 9.30am;
- (k) officers were unaware of the specific Park and Ride Fares for each of the sites however would provide this information to Members.

Agreed that a table of charges for Plymouth's Park and Ride Bus Service would be provided to Members; this would include concessionary fare prices.

54. **WITNESSES**

The Chair advised the panel that several witnesses, from the Life Centre, Derriford Hospital, TravelWatch South West, Target Travel and First Group PLC, were in attendance at the meeting to answer Members' questions and provide feedback on Plymouth's Park and Ride Service.

All witnesses were informed that the Park and Ride Bus Service had been operating in Plymouth for 20 years and had never been reviewed therefore panel members wanted to scrutinise the service to ensure it was fit for purpose.

Julian Egan, Life Centre Manager, informed Members that –

- (a) he had seen a few people parking at the Life Centre and then walking away to catch a bus however this was not considered to be a big problem at the present time;
- (b) it was considered that Life Centre customers were using the Milehouse Park and Ride car park in the evening as an overspill area due to the popularity of the Life Centre;
- (c) Life Centre customers were also considered to be parking in the Park and Ride car park, catching the bus to go to work and then attending the Life Centre after work whilst keeping their car in the Park and Ride car park;

In response to questions raised Julian informed Members that –

- (d) the Life Centre car park catered for Life Centre customers, dog walkers, users of Central Park recreation field and the bowls club;
- (e) customers had not approached Life Centre staff to inform them that there was a problem with parking however difficulties were experienced when Plymouth Argyle were playing at home as there was displacement of supporters;
- (f) he considered it to be difficult to charge for parking at the Life Centre as it was not only Life Centre customers that used the car park; he had been informed by the Council that the car park was for all park users;
- (g) the new development at Home Park would have a charging car park therefore it was considered that this would cause customers to the site to use nearby free parking spaces available;
- (h) a joined up approach to parking by the Council, Life Centre and the Home Park developers was required;

- (i) he considered that charging to park was the only way forward to curb potential problems with parking in the future however this could affect customers at the Life Centre who attend events for several days;
- (j) approximately 120,000 customers used the Life Centre on a monthly basis; it would not be feasible to go to the reception desk to reimburse Life Centre customers for their parking ticket as this would cause delays;
- (k) Life Centre management were in talks with the Home Park developers to discuss the potential issues with parking once the development was completed.

Ray Bentley, Director for TravelWatch South West, informed Members that –

- (l) Plymouth's Park and Ride Bus Service was appreciated and valued by its passengers and was an integral part of the city's transport strategy;
- (m) he considered it to be illegal to exclude concessionary pass holders from the Park and Ride Bus Service and highlighted to Members that the Travel Concessions (Eligible Services) (Amendment) 2009 legislation had been selectively quoted from and possible conclusions to exclude concessionary passes from the bus service would be wrong;
- (n) he confirmed that, as stated in the legislation, a bus service would be eligible under section 146 of the Transport Act 2000 to remove the concessionary bus pass holders if 'the fare for the service includes a special amenity element'; however he advised Members that the legislation also stated that a fare would be regarded as including a special amenity element if it was significantly high in relation to the general level of fares for comparable journeys;
- (o) he confirmed that a special amenity element could be demonstrated for the Park and Ride Bus Service with the parking available however he did not agree that this could be applied as the bus fares of comparable journeys was not significantly high in relation to the general level of fares; the cost of the Park and Ride tickets were significantly cheaper than other bus services doing a comparable route;
- (p) with relation to the possibility of passengers being made to pay for parking at the Park and Rides sites, he highlighted that there would be a cost to installing ticket machines and paying someone to monitor them;
- (q) one of the positive attributes of the Park and Rides Bus Service was that it was a streamlined service that was hassle free;
- (r) he considered it would be beneficial for the Council to encourage people living within the vicinity of a Park and Ride site to be encouraged to use this service as it would result in lower overall fares;

- (s) PR3 was an excellent service which was valued by its customers;
- (t) the Park and Ride bus waited for several minutes at a time at Milehouse which was considered to be unnecessary and frustrating;

In response to questions raised, Ray informed Members that –

- (u) he considered it a preferable option to receive a ticket on entry via a machine and barrier at a Park and Ride site however this was still not an ideal solution as the sites would have to have a lot of disruptive building work to put this in place; he confirmed that he represented TravelWatch South West that was a community interest company promoting public transport and looking after the interest of public transport users;
- (v) he accepted that Chester and Norwich had removed the requirement to accept concessionary bus tickets on their Park and Ride services however said that this could have been justified by comparable bus journeys being significantly higher than the Park and Ride; this would be confirmed to Members at the next meeting;
- (w) in Taunton the acceptance of concessionary bus tickets had been removed however it was considered that this was likely to be the subject of a judicial review made by Age Concern;
- (x) the bus timetable information contained within the George Park and Ride Bus Service site was not easy to read, was not contained within a timetable case and often did not reflect buses that stopped at the George Hotel;

Andrew Davies, Service Line Lead for Derriford Hospital and Stuart Windsor, Facilities Operations Manager for Derriford Hospital, informed Members that –

- (y) the PR3 bus service was very successful;
- (z) since the implementation of the PR3 they had recognised a change in the number of staff using the service as well as the number of patients who preferred catching the bus to parking at the hospital;
- (aa) it was considered that patients preferred the PR3 due to the fact that the service was hassle free, they didn't have to pay to park and those patients eligible for the concessionary bus pass could use their ticket to get free travel;
- (bb) it was expected that parking at the hospital would be affected with the construction of the helipad; several spaces would be lost;
- (cc) Plymouth City Council opted to purchase back the land off Brest Road which contained a staff car park with over 700 spaces; this was expected to have an adverse effect on parking at Derriford hospital and would encourage people to use the PR3;

In response to questions raised, Andrew and Stuart informed Members that –

- (dd) it was considered that there were enough disabled spaces at Derriford to cope with demand however the availability of other parking spaces was likely to be a problem in the future;
- (ee) it was highlighted that if Derriford Hospital staff members only used one bus operator then a single operator bus ticket would help to save them money; the NHS were looking at Single Operator schemes as the price of the Green Travel Pass Scheme had risen steeply;
- (ff) increasing numbers of staff were cycling to work at Derriford;
- (gg) Derriford Hospital promoted the car share scheme to cut down the number of car visits to the hospital;
- (hh) Andrew was still in the process of finding out the viability of promoting the PR3 on hospital literature; there were 236 different types of letter at the hospital and a simple message was required to put at the bottom of the letter to fit within the allocated space available;
- (ii) Andrew confirmed that the last PR3 service was at 6.30pm; for several members of staff this did not accommodate their later working hours therefore taxis were required to transport people from the hospital to the George once they had finished their shift;
- (jj) permits were issued for the Seaton Barracks car park therefore it could be identified where staff members lived and if this would have a potential to increase traffic congestion in Plymouth when driving to the George Park and Ride;
- (kk) it was not yet known if parking charges would increase at Derriford Hospital however it was confirmed that the Hospital's charges aligned with Plymouth City Council charges across Plymouth.

Ashley Taylor, Transport Manager for Target Travel, informed Members that –

- (ll) Target Travel ran the PR3 bus service and confirmed that concessionary bus passes were accepted after 09.30 however the busiest period for concessionary journey's was between 09.30 and 16.30; section 106 funds were used to help run the service however these were coming to an end;
- (mm) the PR3 bus service was re-launched in November; since this time passenger numbers had increased specifically between 9.30 – 15.30hrs;
- (nn) the PR3 bus service was advertised on Heart Radio and Radio Plymouth; it was considered that by not accepting the concessionary bus passes would adversely affect the service;

In response to questions raised, Ashley informed Members that –

- (oo) Target Travel was unaware that the car park closure (off Brest Road) was expected to take place in May 2014; it was not considered that the capacity of the George car park would not be suitable for the numbers of staff expected to move to the car park;
- (pp) the PR3 would be reducing to a 20 minute service, as a result larger vehicles may need to be used to accommodate increased passenger numbers;
- (qq) concessionary pass holders were the greater percentage of passenger numbers for the PR3; if the concessionary passes were not accepted then this would result in revenue loss;

Robbie Lamerton, General Manager of First South West, informed Members that –

- (rr) First South West took over the Park and Ride Bus Service in 2005 having successfully won the tender; First PLC experienced financial difficulties in recent years due to the economic crisis and were required to sell businesses to raise funds;
- (ss) First South West covered Somerset, Devon and Cornwall however due to depleted revenue streams and changes to grant regimes initiated by central Government, additional changes were required; specifically in Plymouth newer vehicles had to be taken off the Park and Ride Bus Service in order to support other services facing competition;
- (tt) the bus fleet UK wide was required to be DDA compliant by 2015, this was using up valuable funds;
- (uu) he had taken on board the comments made regarding the Park and Ride Service and would visit the George Park and Ride site himself to check that the information posted was correct.

In response to questions raised, Robbie informed Members that –

- (vv) he would work with the Council if he was required to no longer accept concessionary bus passes however he did not consider that this would have an adverse effect on the service;
- (ww) it was considered that the Park and Ride Bus Service was generally used for commuters or shoppers and was considered to be far cheaper than the cost of parking;
- (xx) to install parking metres at the Park and Ride sites would defeat the object of the Park and Ride Service to be quick and efficient as passengers would be required to make several journeys to and from their car before they caught the bus;
- (yy) First South West were currently undertaking a trial of accepting concessionary bus passes before by 9.30am at the cost of £1; it was not yet known if this was successful as the data had yet to be analysed however the

trial had no known end date; if concessionary pass passes were not to be accepted it was not known if this trial would continue as the total transport strategy would need to be analysed;

- (zz) he was not involved with the current network changes, specifically with regards to bus number 15 that departed from the George Park and Ride but did not return there.

Officers informed Members that it was not the fault of the operator that there were no information display cases at the George Park and Ride site as this was due to the infrastructure of the building. Steel cable ties had been ordered to help display information.

The Chair thanked all witnesses for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided.

Agreed that –

- (1) Members would be provided with the Council's parking policy for the Life Centre car park;
- (2) Members would be provided with the data regarding comparable rates for similar bus journeys at Norwich and Chester to assess if they were significantly higher than the Park and Ride fares;
- (3) officers would investigate the legality of no longer accepting concessionary bus passes at Plymouth's Park and Rides sites as part of the Travel Concessions (Eligible Services) (Amendment) 2009;
- (4) officers would confirm the closure date for the car park at Derriford (off Brest Road);
- (5) Officers would confirm if a public consultation was required to take place if concessionary bus passes were to be no longer accepted.

55. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.