

ADAPT GREATER MANCHESTER - SUMMARY OF POINTS IN RESPONSE TO THE WHITE PAPER "BUSES"

1. We totally oppose the main assumption behind the White Paper - that a better transport service can come from within totally free competition without any transport planning.
2. We want to see developed a system of public mobility provision which is based upon people's needs rather than demand expressed in purely monetary terms.
3. People with mobility handicap are perceived by operators to be a small minority, and therefore little thought will be given to providing services geared towards them.
4. Because of this, when local authorities decide to put on appropriate services for persons with mobility handicap under the new tendering system, they will be forced to pay full cost for a special service, at least initially, rather than the marginal cost of infrastructure improvements.
5. People with mobility handicap tend to have low incomes, and therefore have less purchasing power with which to express their market demand under the new system.
6. People with mobility handicap tend not to have their own cars, or access to cars, and therefore they are particularly liable to service cuts and poor public transport provision.
7. Our conviction that a system based on consumer demand will not react to demand from those who are mobility handicapped is shown by what happened when Mobility Allowance was introduced. Not one dial-a-ride or similar special transport service sprang up in response to the new consumer power.
8. Even the Secretary of State has agreed that the implementation of the White Paper proposals will lead to a period of substantial disruption, whilst "the market sorts itself out". (Or some such phrase). A high proportion of those with mobility handicap are elderly, and may increasingly find it difficult to adapt to change. They are thus particularly vulnerable to disruption, and will stop using the public transport system altogether when they cannot completely understand the changes which will be taking place. A fast phase in time, which is uncontrolled, will thus lose passengers from the public transport system.
9. We can find no proposals within the White Paper for there to be a body in every area responsible for producing comprehensive, accurate, up to date, and above all understandable information about timetabling and so on. If this is left up to each individual operator, there will be further confusion, and more passengers will be lost. The likelihood of individual operators making information available to those with sensory difficulties, such as large print timetables for those with partial sight, is extremely remote.
10. The current system of a network is extremely advantageous to people with mobility handicap who are able to use buses. Various services are timetabled and routes planned so that interchange can be made easily and without delay from one vehicle to another. In future, we do not accept that there will be enough incentive for this to happen in an unplanned environment. This once again particularly affects people with a handicap, who will not want to stand waiting for the next bus, or walk from one operator's terminus to another. We do not believe that public interchange buildings, such as the Altrincham Bus/Rail interchange in our area, will be financed by the operators in future.
11. One of the reasons for high costs attached to urban bus operation is that the local authority bus services try to reach high standards of reliability. In a large fleet this may mean a number of buses held in reserve to cope with breakdowns. If the average fleet size contracts, and, in particular, if a lot of small operators come into stage carriage operation, this will not be the case. Once again, people with mobility handicap are particularly vulnerable to breakdowns, because of their inability to gain access to alternative modes of travel.

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12. The Secretary of State clearly indicates that he wants to see as little laid down as possible in the 'tender' documents, on the basis that this would restrict competition. There is therefore little likelihood of local authorities being able to specify maximum step heights, seat spacing requirements and so on, which are necessary to improve the travel possibilities of people with mobility handicap.
 13. At present, where there are local authority bus services, there is some understanding by the operators of a 'social duty'. This understanding will disappear when private operators take over. In addition, the passenger with a particular problem will no longer be able to approach a local councillor to have the problem sorted out.
 14. We are particularly worried about the likely lack of standardisation in the immediate future of buses being operated. Private operators coming into this field will be unlikely to be able to afford new vehicles. We anticipate a number of second-hand older vehicles being operated, and are particularly worried about the use, now undertaken by some private operators, of high floor coaches for stage carriage operation. These vehicles cause great difficulty for people with physical disabilities because of the large step heights. We are also worried that blind travellers will not know what type of bus is coming, whether it has a front entrance or a rear entrance, how many steps there are, and so on. At the moment, in urban areas, there is a reasonable standardisation, and in addition, some public operators have been marking the outside of their vehicles with raised plans of the interior layout.
 15. There are no proposals for private operators to continue the process of 'bus acclimatisation' which a number of public operators have just begun with blind and mentally handicapped travellers, so that they can learn how to use the bus in a friendly, non-stressful situation.
 16. There are no proposals for planning authorities to have more power than at present over bus operations. Bus operators should be forced to use bus stations where they are provided. They should not be allowed to pick up and set down on the street. Once again, it is likely that this practice will increase. This is dangerous, and causes particular problems for people with visual or physical disabilities.
 17. The Secretary of State calls for more co-ordination of health, social services, education and other similar transport. This has been undertaken recently in the pioneering ESCORT scheme in East Sussex. However, the viability of such a service depends absolutely on the local authority, a shire council in this case, being able effectively to plan the public transport network. But it is proposed to remove half their power. We fear that this will endanger initiatives like ESCORT, and prevent any further development of new schemes. Such schemes have particular advantages for people with mobility handicap. They operate using accessible vehicles.
 18. The Secretary of State makes a number of references to the need to reconsider support for local rail services. A significant number of people with mobility handicap are able to use rail services when they are unable to use bus services because of access. We do not believe that this has been taken into account in the evaluation, and would support retention of rail services where possible. If replaced, it must be on a true like by like basis with buses which are fully accessible to passengers in wheelchairs. The Secretary of State has made a number of commitments to maintaining replacement bus services. We ask for these commitments to be extended to include the need for full accessibility.
 19. There is a reference in one of the supporting documents to the Taxis consultation paper to the forthcoming range of taxis (CR6/Metrocab) which will be accessible to passengers in wheelchairs. On the other hand, there is no suggestion that it will be mandatory for taxi operators purchasing new taxis to purchase these vehicles. On the contrary, it is specifically suggested that the Secretary of State for Scotland considers it unnecessary to invoke any powers under The Civic Government (Scotland) Act to determine construction standards for local authority taxi licencing in Scotland, and we are worried that the same attitude may prevail in England and Wales. The Department of Transport should have the power, and should implement it, to insist on accessibility for a wheelchair user as a construction standard for taxis.

20. Regarding concessionary fares, we are particularly worried that the emphasis in the consultation document swings heavily towards introducing a system of tokens. We are opposed to this. Tokens introduce further complications and are easily misunderstood. There is a history of their misuse to pay for non transport items. They have caused confusion to people with visual problems. They are stigmatising. They particularly discriminate against anyone who travels above the nominal average figure by which the allocation of tokens is calculated. This will certainly lead to fewer trips being made. For someone who is using a pass on a daily basis, the introduction of tokens on a level similar in financial terms to the levels used by those authorities which employ tokens could lead to them having to pay several hundred pounds per year extra. At the moment, the finance for tokens comes from the budgets of Social Services Departments, whereas it should come from the Transport Department. The only good thing about them is that they may be used on different modes of transport and on a nationwide basis. But if other countries can manage a nationwide pass system, why cannot the United Kingdom? It is obviously to be supported that if a concessionary fare scheme is to be offered by a local authority it should be open to all operators to participate in. We are less happy about the possibility of operators deciding to 'opt out'. How will a visually handicapped traveller waiting at a bus stop be aware of whether the bus approaching is a service on which they can use their pass or tokens, or is a so-called 'premium service'?

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT WHITE PAPER "BUSES" Cmnd 9300 - 12 JULY 1984

MAIN POINTS OF GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS

1. Bus services freed from restrictions of Road Service Licensing throughout England, Wales and Scotland (except London).
2. Supervision of quality and safety of PSVs and operators will be tightened (and extended to taxis). Extra resources.
3. Many essential bus routes not viable. LAs will be able to support but need to seek tenders.
4. Concessionary fare schemes continue - available to all operators.
5. Public transport in rural areas - more help (£20M saved from conurbations), grants for innovative schemes.
6. Structure of bus industry must be changed to meet market needs - NBC broken up into small units, employees able to buy.

PTEs to break down operations into small independent companies - after suitable period to compete.

Similar proposals apply to Municipal (District) operations.
7. Taxis/hire cars able to charge fares for individuals - need also to co-ordinate with community transport and other agencies (e.g. education, social services and health authorities).

Apparently "free" competition on routes, by licensed operators.

Reduce subsidies in Greater London and metropolitan counties from £400M to £200M (with additional resources to go to shire areas).

Co-ordinated ticketing apparently out.

Co-ordination with rail not covered.

Role of PTAs (presently Metropolitan Counties) and PTEs will be changed - from providing an integrated public transport system (bus and rail), efficiently and effectively to meet the travel needs of the area, having regard to planning, highway and traffic policies - to "securing the efficient provision of such transport services as they believe necessary but are not provided by a free market".

Metropolitan Districts given greater opportunity to remove bus services from PTA/PTE but will then have to set up (private) company to compete with all other operators (including any adjoining "District" companies).

Operation of bus stations - private and public - must be open to all and operated on a "commercial basis"; bus operators will tend to stop and park on street.

Philosophy of White Paper

Believes free competition and market fares will (because small is manageable, efficient and competitive):-

- (1) reduce costs, including labour, and hence increase efficiency, with lower fares and/or subsidies;
- (ii) enable revenue support to be cut in metropolitan areas from £400M to £200M, by improving efficiency.

(Backed by report of three consultants - Beesley, Buchanan, Glaister - extolling virtues of competition).

Considers costs can be reduced, particularly of PTEs by up to 30%. Need to end "cosy relation with unions" - refers to Merseyside, where PTE has been unable to improve productivity.

Uses (selectively) results of Hereford and Worcester experiments - quotes fares down (in towns) and productivity up.

Quotes (selectively) from Monopolies and Mergers Commission on efficiency of large operators.

Cross-subsidy - which allows "profitable" well-used route to "subsidise" less well-used routes, and ensure uniform fares - attacked - "Users of bus amongst poorer in community - should not be required to subsidise others".

Completely ignores:-

- (1) Rail Support;
- (ii) Co-ordination with rail in interests of passengers;
- (iii) Through ticketing, season tickets, etc;
- (iv) Provision of bus stations, etc.

Could well decimate services in outer areas, or require far higher fares, and also potentially remove early morning, evening and Sunday services (which are not "viable").

Major impact also on children's fares and on schools services - could throw additional major costs onto Education Budgets.