

Subject: Proposal for an Investigation into Door-to-Door Transport Services

Report Number: 6

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 6 January 2010

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 **That the Committee carry out an investigation into door-to-door transport services with terms of reference as outlined at paragraph 3.18.**

2. Background

- 2.1 This paper proposes that the Committee conduct an investigation into door-to-door transport services.
- 2.2 Door-to-door transport services assist people with mobility impairments and special needs to travel. It has been estimated that there are at least half a million Londoners who are either disabled or have a health problem that makes it very difficult or impossible for them to use public transport.¹ Various schemes run by different organisations including Transport for London (TfL), London boroughs, NHS trusts, charities and private companies operate in the capital to help support them to make journeys.
- 2.3 In the last two years the Transport Committee, responding to a high number of complaints from door-to-door transport service users, has undertaken some work on these services including holding a meeting about the performance of TfL's Dial-a-Ride service in March 2009. Recently, in response to an invitation from TfL, London Councils has started developing proposals for the future integration of these services. This includes the suggestion that Dial-a-Ride could be transformed into a service operated by London boroughs.² The Mayor has proposed in his draft Transport Strategy that TfL will enhance the Dial-a-Ride service with a new fleet of buses and review of operations.³
- 2.4 This investigation provides an opportunity for the Committee to follow up its previous work. It could explore the current performance of Dial-a-Ride and other door-to-door transport services such as those operated by hospital trusts and examine the Mayor, TfL and London Councils' recent proposals to improve door-to-door transport services in London.

¹ Former Mayor's Transport Strategy, 2001, page 290

² 'Door to Door Transport in London – Future Strategy', Report to London Councils Transport and Environment Committee meeting, 15 October 2009, page 2

³ Mayor's draft Transport Strategy issued for public consultation, October 2009, page 287

3. Issues for Consideration

Purpose

- 3.1 The purpose of the investigation would be to consider the performance of TfL's Dial-a-Ride service since the Committee last discussed this with TfL and users in March 2009. The review would seek to establish whether there have been improvements to the service offered and to examine the extent to which there have been changes to the way the service is configured and delivered. The Committee would carry out this investigation in the context of the Mayor, TfL and London Councils' current work intended to develop an integrated system of door-to-door services. The Committee would therefore examine the progress towards designing such integrated services and make recommendations on how any newly integrated service might operate.
- 3.2 The investigation provides an opportunity to explore various issues including TfL's role, as a strategic transport authority, in providing door-to-door transport services for Londoners and the funding it provides for such services.

The range of door-to-door transport services in London

- 3.3 There is no definitive list of all the door-to-door transport services operating in London. The table below shows some of the main services. London boroughs provide most funding for these services, some of which are statutory.⁴ TfL has reported door-to-door transport services are worth over £200m p.a. of which it provides £44m for discretionary services.⁵

Door-to-door transport service	Provider	Cost p.a.	No. of users/trips
Dial-a-Ride - minibus service provided free of charge operating across London out of six sub-regional depots	Administered and funded by TfL	£30.5m	50,000 users making up to 1.4m trips p.a.
Taxicard – subsidised service using licensed London taxis. Operates in 32 London boroughs (Westminster operates its own similar scheme).	Administered by London Councils. Jointly funded by TfL and boroughs	£17m (TfL: £10.7m; boroughs: £6m)	86,000 members with 1.6m trips taken to date in 2009/10
CapitalCall – subsidised service to complement Taxicard using minicabs in 10 boroughs with a shortage of London taxis.	Administered by and funded by TfL	£350,000	3,380 members with 12,000 trips taken to date in 2009/10
Community Transport - local schemes providing minibuses and cars for individuals/groups to hire	Boroughs, charities or not-for-profit groups	£8m (boroughs)	Unknown
NHS Patient Transport Service (<i>statutory</i>) - transport to get to hospital/clinic appointments	Individual NHS Trust hospitals	£30m	1.7m patient journeys p.a.

⁴ Under the Education Act 1996, local authorities are obliged to provide transport to facilitate attendance of pupils at schools and colleges and under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and the National Assistance Act 1948, local authorities have a duty to provide any necessary transport to enable users to participate in services organised by the authority

⁵ 'Dial-a-Ride and Door-to-Door Services', Report to TfL Surface Transport Panel meeting, 10 November 2009

Adult Social Services/Children Services transport (<i>statutory</i>) – takes adults to borough social service facilities and activities and children with special needs to and from school	Boroughs	£100m (Social services); £103m (Education Services)	Unknown
Freedom Pass (<i>statutory</i>) – free 24 hour travel on public transport for disabled Londoners	Operated by London Councils for boroughs	£257m in 2009/10	126,947 disabled members
Blue Badge scheme (<i>statutory</i>) – free parking close to amenities	Boroughs	Unknown	250,000 badge holders ⁶
Motability/Shopmobility schemes – provides wheelchairs and scooters.	Boroughs and private providers	Unknown	Unknown

Performance of door-to-door transport services

3.4 There has been considerable criticism of the wide variation in the provision and quality of door-to-door transport services across London. There have been many reports of poor service, insufficient service to meet demand and confusion amongst users because schemes operate differently.⁷ This was highlighted in a recent report to London Councils:

“Each of the [door-to-door transport] services has its own eligibility criteria, trip entitlements, budgets and administrative processes. There is no clear or co-ordinated vision, aims or objectives that link service provision, and there is a lack of consistency leading to a user perception of a ‘postcode lottery’.”⁸

3.5 In November 2009, TfL referred to several reports about discretionary door-to-door services having highlighted the same broad issues. These included

“that generally services are supply led rather than demand led; that there is a lack of real clarity as to what the services are and who they are for and; there is a lack of co-ordination between services and regions leading to increased costs and differing standards and supply levels in different boroughs.”⁹

Performance of TfL’s Dial-a-Ride service

3.6 There has been particular criticism of TfL’s Dial-a-Ride service. In December 2008, the Assembly passed a motion deploring the standard of this service, noting a continuing volume of complaints from users. These covered: long delays in getting through to the call centre; difficulty in booking trips for pairs or groups in the same household; users being offered timings involving waits of more than an hour for return trips; and vulnerable passengers left stranded in unsafe locations in bad weather.¹⁰

3.7 The Transport Committee considered the performance of Dial-a-Ride at a meeting in March 2009. In advance, it conducted a survey of 200 users, which showed 40 per cent of respondents rated the service ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. The Committee brought together around 30 users and TfL at its meeting to discuss complaints and ways to improve the service. Following the meeting, it wrote to the Mayor setting out its concerns. These related to: a lack of availability to take users where

⁶ Estimated figure from ‘Blue Badges...’, Report to London Councils Transport and Environment Committee, 12 February 2009

⁷ Former Mayor of London, Transport Strategy, July 2001, para 40.16

⁸ ‘Door to Door Transport in London – Future Strategy’, Report to London Councils Transport and Environment Committee meeting, 15 October 2009, Appendix 1: eo consulting’s report: a future door to door transport strategy, page 31

⁹ ‘Dial-a-Ride and Door-to-Door Services’, Report to TfL Surface Transport Panel meeting, 10 November 2009, page 2

¹⁰ Minutes of Assembly Plenary meeting on 3 December 2008

they need to go; poor efficiency with several minibuses used to transport groups of users rather than just one minibus; a lack of flexibility; poor punctuality with minibuses arriving late; long call waiting times when booking minibuses; insufficient recording of users' views about the service; and a lack of consultation with users on ways the service might be changed.¹¹

- 3.8 The Committee received written responses from TfL in April 2009 and August 2009 about improvements to Dial-a-Ride and its latest performance. In August, TfL highlighted that: Computer Cab had been contracted to set up and manage a network of taxi and private hire vehicles to support Dial-a-Ride; that there had been an increase in the number of Dial-a-Ride trips in 2008/09 compared to previous year; and that the average call waiting time and number of complaints had decreased in 2008/09 compared to previous years. TfL reported that it was mindful that the service had not performed to the standard expected. It was now working hard to resolve the issues and would continue to strive for further improvements.¹²
- 3.9 In December 2009, TfL reported below target performance for the number of Dial-a-Ride trips this year. In quarter 2 2009/10, 284,200 trips were undertaken compared to a target of 322,200 (a variance of 12 per cent). TfL stated "work is in progress to convert repeat bookings into regular trips, smooth peak demand, provide more flexibility in vehicle availability and establish an on-line booking facility."¹³ It expected booking stability to improve steadily and operational efficiencies to be achieved so that the total number of trips for 2009/10 would rise to 1.34m. The annual target is 1.4m. In recent months, individual Assembly Members have questioned the Mayor about the number of Dial-a-Ride trips and other performance issues including an increase in the number of refusals over recent years and problems when users want to offer feedback about the service.¹⁴

Proposals for integration of door-to-door transport services

- 3.10 Since before the GLA was created, there was an aspiration for co-ordinated door-to-door transport services in London. In 1999 the Commission for Accessible Transport (CAT) reported on the need for improved co-ordination and four pilot projects were set up to test this.¹⁵ The former Mayor's Transport Strategy (2001) took up this issue, setting out various policies and proposals to improve door-to-door transport services but little progress was made. Since at least 2004 TfL has reported at various times that it is reviewing door-to-door transport services but has never published any proposals for consultation.
- 3.11 In December 2008 London Councils reported "a shift in emphasis in TfL's thinking on door-to-door with the arrival of a new Mayor." TfL had shown more willingness to consider a wider range of options for governance and scope of integrated services and had invited London Councils to make a proposal on the future provision of these services.¹⁶
- 3.12 Subsequently London Councils has worked on developing a proposal for integrating door-to-door transport services, commissioning consultants to help develop a strategy. In October 2009, it

¹¹ See <http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/scrutiny/dial-a-ride-service.jsp#survey-results>

¹² Letter from David Brown of TfL to Chair of the Committee, 27 August 2009

¹³ 'Operational and financial performance...reports – quarter 2 2009/10', TfL Board meeting on 10 December 2009

¹⁴ See, in particular, the following questions from Caroline Pigeon AM to the Mayor and his responses: 1145/2009, 1543/2009, 1544/2009, 2117/2009, 3050/2009, 3052/2009, 3326/2009 and 3328/2009

¹⁵ The pilot projects were set up in the London Boroughs of Lewisham, Havering, Hackney and Newham. See 'TfL's Door to Door Strategy', Report to London Councils (formerly ALG)'s Transport and Environment Committee, 14 September 2006, p.1

¹⁶ 'Options for the Taxicard budget 2009/10 and for the future of Door to Door services in London', Report to London Councils Transport and Environment Committee, 11 December 2008, page 8

published eo consulting¹⁷'s report, 'A Future Door to Door Strategy for London', which set out findings based on a review of seven different door-to-door transport services in London, best practice from elsewhere in the UK, and consultation with eight London boroughs, the Community Transport Association, Transport for All, TfL and Computer Cab (as the operator of Taxicard).¹⁸ This report highlighted various factors prompting change including funding pressures such as TfL's decision to cap its funding for Taxicard and Dial-a-Ride from 2009/10.

- 3.13 The report from eo consulting set out a recommended strategy for future door-to-door transport services and the arrangements needed to support the strategy. The main points include:
- The strategy should set out a vision and overarching plan that places London Boroughs at the centre of managing and operating door-to-door transport services, set within a holistic framework and supported by funding from TfL;
 - Taxicard is the premium service and should remain as a stand-alone service;
 - TfL should consider whether it is appropriate for it, as a strategic transport authority, to operate door-to-door services for disabled people. Dial-a-Ride could be transformed into borough-based services managed and operated by London boroughs and possibly integrated with Adult Social Services and Children Services' transport;
 - London boroughs could develop their other door-to-door transport services with NHS Patient Transport Services;
 - The statutory provision of transport services should be the starting point in determining the most appropriate governance and management framework;
 - Any restructuring of services should build on mainstream public transport becoming more accessible. Travel training and travel buddies can be appropriate solutions for some users; and
 - London boroughs should develop their own bus-based door-to-door schemes to meet local needs through an Integrated Transport Unit. There could be a single pan-London call centre and a core set of criteria to which all boroughs adhere but which can be adapted locally.¹⁹
- 3.14 London Councils is now progressing its strategy by setting up a Project Board. This will comprise representatives of London Councils, London boroughs (from the London Association of Directors of Adult Social Services), TfL, the NHS and Transport for All. The Board will develop a more detailed operational plan for future door-to-door transport services, considering the costs and revenue options and drawing up a business case for a new structure. It may appoint consultants to undertake further work including: fact finding to establish in detail the provision and cost of door-to-door transport services in each London borough; liaison with potential pilot London boroughs to assess their suitability for in-depth pilots; and developing a methodology for consulting with service users. The Board is due to start meeting shortly and report by July 2010.
- 3.15 In November 2009, TfL reported that it would work with London Councils to establish the viability of its proposals for integrating door-to-door transport services. It also reported that a paper would be prepared for the Mayor to outline the current status of these services.²⁰

The Mayor's position on door-to-door transport services

- 3.16 In the Mayor's draft Transport Strategy issued for public consultation in October 2009 there is no reference to London Councils' work on door-to-door transport services. The draft Strategy refers

¹⁷ eo consulting (UK) Ltd

¹⁸ 'Door to Door Transport in London – Future Strategy', Report to London Councils Transport and Environment Committee meeting, 15 October 2009, Appendix 1: eo consulting's report: a future door to door transport strategy

¹⁹ 'Door to Door Transport in London – Future Strategy', Report to London Councils Transport and Environment Committee meeting, 15 October 2009, page 3

²⁰ 'Dial-a-Ride and Door-to-Door Services', Report to TfL Surface Transport Panel meeting, 10 November 2009, page 3

only to the Dial-a-Ride and Taxicard services and has one specific proposal: that the Mayor will, through TfL, support Dial-a-Ride services.²¹ In support of this proposal, there is a specific scheme to enhance Dial-a-Ride with a new fleet and review of operations. This scheme is due to be completed in 2010-2012 with an anticipated cost of up to £100 million.²² Recently the Mayor has reported that TfL is not planning “any reductions to the 2009 Business Plan for Dial-a-Ride, which sets out expenditure for the service through to 2017.”²³

Previous relevant work by the Transport Committee

- 3.17 In addition to its work on Dial-a-Ride, the Committee has undertaken other relevant work.
- In early 2008, former Transport Committee member, Darren Johnson AM, undertook a rapporteurship to respond to TfL’s anticipated consultation on integrated door-to-door transport services. Although the consultation did not take place, the rapporteur met representatives of service users to see what they would like from these services. Subsequently he wrote to TfL setting out his findings and calling on TfL to stop delaying and draw up plans for integrated services. A copy of the letter to TfL and detailed findings from the meeting are available on the Assembly’s web site at:
http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/transport/door_to_door.pdf; and
http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/transport/door_to_door_principles.pdf
 - In July 2009, when responding to the Mayor’s Transport Strategy Statement of Intent, the Committee expressed support for schemes that improve access to public transport for mobility impaired Londoners. It commented, “care should be taken to ensure schemes to improve accessibility are not the first to go when funding is constrained.”²⁴

Proposed terms of reference

- 3.18 The proposed terms of reference for this investigation are:
- To consider the recent performance of door-to-door transport services particularly Dial-a-Ride;
 - To examine the recent proposals for door-to-door transport services to see if these will address the issues faced by users of the services; and
 - In light of the findings, to make recommendations to the Mayor, TfL and London Councils as appropriate for any further action to take to help improve door-to-door transport services.

Key stakeholders

- 3.19 The following will be asked for views and information as per the method(s) listed:
- Mayor and TfL – in writing and at a formal meeting;
 - London Councils – in writing and at a formal meeting;
 - London boroughs – in writing;
 - Transport for All – in writing;
 - NHS London/trusts – in writing and at a formal meeting;
 - Community Transport Association – in writing;
 - User representative organisations including those consulted as part of Darren Johnson AM’s rapporteurship i.e. Age Concern London, Tower Hamlets Accessible Transport Forum, Leonard Cheshire Disability – in writing;
 - Users of door-to-door transport services – via visits or other methods (see below); and
 - London TravelWatch – in writing.

²¹ Mayor’s draft Transport Strategy issued for public consultation, October 2009, page 168

²² Mayor’s draft Transport Strategy issued for public consultation, October 2009, page 287

²³ Response from TfL Chair and Commissioner to question 218/2009 asked by Valerie Shawcross AM on 9 December 2009

²⁴ Response to the Mayor’s Transport Strategy Statement of Intent, July 2009, page 13

Methodology and timetable

- 3.20 The proposed timetable for this investigation is:
- Agreement of terms of reference: 6 January 2010;
 - Desk based research: January – March 2010;
 - Gathering written views and information: 6 January – February 2010;
 - Possible visits to consult service users – January/February 2010;
 - Formal meeting to gather views and information – 2 March 2010;
 - Drafting scrutiny report and recommendations – March-May 2010; and
 - Publication and formal approval of report – May/June 2010.
- 3.21 The proposed first stage in this investigation is to gather detailed information in early 2010 on the performance of door-to-door transport services including from service users. Users are already consulted about services in various ways including via meetings of local mobility forums and disability groups and surveys. The scope to obtain relevant information from this existing consultation will be explored. In addition there could be an opportunity to follow up the Committee's previous survey of Dial-a-Ride users and seek an update from these users about their recent experiences. To build on this, further consultation could be undertaken. Members could visit local mobility forum and disability group meetings in London to hear at first hand from users. Detailed proposals for this work would be developed in conjunction with service user groups.
- 3.22 The proposed second stage in the investigation is a formal meeting on 2 March 2010. This meeting could be in two parts. The first part could concentrate on the current performance of door-to-door transport services such as Dial-a-Ride and the NHS Patient Transport Service with representatives of service operators such as TfL and a London Hospital Trust invited to attend to answer questions. The second part of the meeting could focus on the Mayor and London Boroughs' future approach to these services given the recent proposals. Representatives of TfL and London Councils could be invited to attend to answer questions.
- 3.23 The Committee could then produce a report setting out its findings and recommendations by June 2010 so it might inform the work of the London Councils' Project Board which is due to report by July 2010.

4. Strategy Implications

- 4.1 This investigation is relevant to the Mayor's Transport Strategy. The Greater London Authority Act 1999 places a duty on the Mayor to include in his Transport Strategy 'proposals for the provision of transport which is accessible to persons with mobility problems', and to 'specify a timetable for the implementation of the proposals' (Section 142).

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any costs incurred during the completion of this investigation will be met from within the existing scrutiny budget for 2009/10.

Background Papers: As listed in the report's footnotes.

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