

Information Note

Project Title:	TACTRAN Regional Bus Information Strategy (RBIS)
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Subject:	Consultation Note - On-Street Survey and Stakeholder focus groups
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1 Background

- 1.1 In order to comply with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, a consultation exercise was undertaken with statutory consultees including the traffic commissioner, member authorities, local bus operators, organisations representatives of local bus users, and other relevant organisations.
- 1.2 Due to the large and diverse number of groups, a consultation strategy was adopted blending three distinct consultation approaches in order to best serve the goals of the RBIS. Consultation techniques adopted were as follows:
- **Approach 1** – consultation and strategy review with local authorities and the Scottish Traffic Commissioner;
 - **Approach 2** – consultation with the general public in the form of an interviewer led questionnaire; and
 - **Approach 3** – focus groups convened across the TACTRAN area comprising bus operators and representatives of local bus users including equality groups.

2 Strategic Review

- 2.1.1 Initially, we undertook standard statutory consultations with each of the member authorities regarding the content of the draft RBIS. This was undertaken in 2008, with all responses collated and used to guide the formation of the updated draft document.

3 On Street Survey – (Public Consultation)

- 3.1 A total of 252 on-street interviews were carried out during the months of February and March 2010 in the TACTRAN region which encompasses the local authority areas of Angus, Dundee City, Perth & Kinross and Stirling Council.

- 3.2 Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of the number of interviews achieved in each of the local authority locations.

Table 2.1 Interviews Achieved in each of the Local Authority Locations

Location	Number
Angus	
Arbroath	22
Forfar	22
Montrose	22
Dundee City	
Dundee	62
Perth and Kinross	
Crieff	20
Perth	22
Pitlochry	20
Stirling Council	
Stirling	62
TOTAL	252

- 3.3 Of the 248 respondents that disclosed their gender, just over half of them were female (54%) while 46% were male.
- 3.4 Table 2.2 shows the distribution across the different age categories of the 250 respondents that disclosed which age group they belong to.

Table 2.2 Age Groups

	N	%
16-24	53	21
25-34	39	16
35-44	41	16
45-54	34	14
55-64	51	20
65 and over	32	13
TOTAL	250	100

- 3.5 Of those respondents that indicated how often they currently use the bus almost half (48%) stated that they used it frequently, 29% said that they use it occasionally and the remaining respondents (23%) stated that they never use it at all.

4 Key Findings

Bus Usage

- 4.1 On the day that they were surveyed, just over half of the respondents had travelled by bus (51%, n=127), a quarter (25%, n=62) had walked and the other quarter (25%, n=62) had either driven alone or as a car passenger or travelled by rail, taxi or bike. Only one person failed to give a response.
- 4.2 All respondents who had not travelled by bus on the day that they were surveyed were asked why they had decided to travel by their chosen mode and not by bus. Many respondents gave more than one reason with the most common being that the bus takes too long (n=25). A total of 16 respondents had chosen not to travel by bus because they lived locally, and infrequent services was also cited by a number of respondents (n=11) as the reason they chose not to travel by bus.

For the purposes of analysis, respondents who said that they use the bus either frequently or occasionally have been classed as 'bus users' (77%, n= 194) while the remainder (23%, n=57) have been classed as 'non- bus users'.

- 4.3 Bus users were asked what types of journeys they normally use the bus for and many gave multiple responses. The most common journeys made by bus were between rural areas/villages and nearest local town. This was closely followed by journeys made within cities/towns.
- 4.4 Bus users were also asked for what purpose they usually use the bus and, again, many respondents gave multiple responses. Leisure was the most common purpose for using the bus closely followed by shopping. Using the bus to travel to work/education and for social reasons was also cited by many respondents as the reason they travel by bus. Travelling for personal business was the least common reason for using the bus.

Awareness of Bus Information

- 4.5 Both bus users and non bus users were asked to list all types of bus information provision that they were aware of.
- 4.6 Of the 120 frequent bus users that provided an answer almost all were aware of printed timetables (99%, n=119). Three quarters of frequent bus users (75%, n=90) were aware of roadside information boards at bus stops and just over half (51%, n=61) were aware of information points at bus stops. Frequent bus users were least aware of city centre bus information points (reflecting that people were interviewed in both city centres and town centres) and telephone information services.
- 4.7 Similarly, of the 73 occasional bus users that provided an answer, almost all of them were aware of printed timetables (93%, n=68), 63% (n=46) were aware of roadside information boards at bus stops and just over half (52%, n=38) were aware of information points at bus stops.

- 4.8 Non bus users were most aware of printed timetables (66%, n=35) and information points at bus stops (28%, n=15). They were also equally aware of roadside information boards at bus stops and the internet (23%, n=12 respectively).

Bus Information

- 4.9 Many bus users obtained bus information from multiple sources with the most popular being printed timetables (69%). Information points at bus stations (40%) and roadside information boards at bus stops (40%) were equally popular sources of obtaining information. Of those people who had used the internet to obtain bus information (24%), many stated that they had used Stagecoach's website.
- 4.10 Bus users were then asked to state their level of satisfaction with the quality of timetables, information displays at bus stops and telephone information services/websites in terms of each of the following:
- easy to understand;
 - usefulness;
 - accuracy; and
 - ease of access
- 4.11 On the whole, respondents were generally satisfied with the quality of timetables with just under three quarters (74%) of those who provided an answer stating that they were either very or fairly satisfied with the ease of understanding timetables and similarly, 72% of those who provided an answer stated that they were either very or fairly satisfied with the accuracy of timetables. More than three quarters (77%) of those respondents who provided an answer were either very or fairly satisfied with the usefulness of timetables and also the ease of accessing timetable information.
- 4.12 Levels of satisfaction with the quality of information displays at bus stops were also high. Of the respondents who provided an answer, three quarters or more were either very or fairly satisfied with the ease of understanding information displays at bus stops (79%); the usefulness the information (77%); the accuracy of the information (75%); and the ease of accessing the information (77%).
- 4.13 Although satisfaction with the quality of information provided via telephone information services and websites appears to be lower than that of timetables and information displays at bus stops, many respondents actually stated that they didn't know about the ease of understanding, usefulness, accuracy and ease of access of telephone information services and websites. Despite this, of those respondents who provided an answer just under half (49%) were either very or fairly satisfied with the ease of accessing telephone information services/websites while over half of the respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with the ease of understanding the information (57%); the usefulness of the information (56%); and accuracy of the information (56%).

Gaps in Existing Information Provision

4.14 Many respondents (85%) either provided no comment or stated that there were no gaps in existing information provision. Those who provided a response identified the following gaps in existing bus information provision:

- information about a direct service from Montrose to Forfar;
- there is a difference between stated internet times and times of when the bus actually operates/appears at the bus stop;
- no information if a low floor bus is available on different routes;
- there are sometimes numbers on buses, but no information as to the destination;
- tighter reliability from Arbroath to Forfar;
- information at bus stops is often not up-to-date;
- actual bus times often don't link up to timetable; and
- information is often difficult to understand.

Suggestions for Improving Bus Information Provision

4.15 Again, many respondents made no comment on suggestions for improving bus information provision. Timetables that are easy to understand (too many abbreviations used, do not use 24hr clock) and more accurate/up-to-date information were cited by a number of respondents as a way to improve bus information provision.

4.16 Other suggestions included:

- better availability of timetables;
- clearer information;
- information point in town centre and not just on the outskirts;
- information about buses that lower;
- make different services tie in with each other;
- put both the bus number and destination on the front of the bus; and
- more information about bus timetables at bus stops.

4.17 Respondents were asked to identify what their three key priorities for improvements to bus information would be. Of the bus users that use the bus frequently, information regarding services (eg destination of bus) was the most commonly selected key priority (63%). A more coordinated approach across all operators/local authorities areas was selected by over half of the respondents (55%) as one of their three key priorities, closely followed by information regarding fares which was selected by half (50%) of frequent bus users.

4.18 The most commonly selected three key priorities for improvements to bus information for occasional bus users was the same as for frequent bus users, however, by contrast, information regarding fares was their top priority with 65% of occasional users selecting this. Information regarding services and a more coordinated approach across all operators/local authorities' areas was selected by 41% of occasional users respectively.

- 4.19 The top key priorities for improving bus information were also similar amongst non bus users, however, the most commonly selected key priority was information regarding timetables (58%). Information regarding services and information regarding fares were selected by 52% and 45% of non bus users respectively.
- 4.20 All respondents were asked if improvements in bus information provision would encourage them to use the bus more often. Of the 73 occasional bus users that provided an answer 38% (n=28) said yes, 30% (n=22) said no and 30% (n=22) said maybe. Of the 57 non bus users that provided an answer the majority (68%, n=39) said that improvements in bus information provision would not encourage them to use the bus more often, 14% (n=8) said that it would encourage them to use the bus more often and 16% (n=9) said maybe.

5 Focus Groups

- 5.1 Focus groups were arranged with the specific purpose of stimulating debate between bus operators and representatives of equality groups. Whilst the focus group was not intended for the general public, each session was designed to provide the opportunity for informed input between bus operators and those who represent groups who would wish to travel on the bus but often find information and facilities lacking. The key purpose of each focus group was to elicit opinions on the needs and requirements of bus users in the area. Particular emphasis was placed upon providing adequate bus information to all users and potential users regardless of disability or special need.
- 5.2 Focus groups were convened in the following locations:
- Apex Centre, Dundee;
 - Stirling Business Centre;
 - Dewar Centre, Perth; and
 - Royal Hotel, Forfar.
- 5.3 A supplementary consultation was held within Stirling Bus Station as part of the Stirlingshire Bus Operators forum which captured views of local operators who were unable to attend the respective regional focus group.
- 5.4 Consultation contacts were provided by TACTRAN and agreed by member councils.
- 5.5 Attendance at Focus groups included:
- TACTRAN;
 - Representatives of member authorities;
 - Angus Access Panel;
 - Angus Transport Forum;
 - Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance;
 - Guide Dogs Scotland;
 - National Express Dundee;

- The University of Dundee;
- Dundee Access Group;
- The League of the Blind;
- Dundee Access Transport Action Group (DATAG) (Access and Transport);
- Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority;
- Traveline Scotland;
- Perth and Kinross Association of Voluntary Services;
- The Scottish Government Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS); and
- First Scotland East.

5.6 MVA Consultancy also attended the Stirlingshire Bus Operators meeting, allowing any operators within the Stirling authority area who were unable to attend the relevant focus group, the chance to input into the study.

Common themes arising from focus groups

5.7 Focus groups were moderated by MVA Consultancy staff following a pre agreed topic guide which would stimulate debate between all attendees. Whilst each focus group produced its own unique issues and discussions, common themes arose across the majority of groups; these can be summarised as follows:

- Requirements for universal standard formats for information provision, particularly at bus stops;
- Standard protocols informing both the public and local authorities of service disruptions;
- Increased marketing efforts about available online services;
- Accessibility information both pre journey and on the vehicles;
- Improved availability of fares and ticketing information; and
- Real time information.

Requirements for universal standard formats for information provision

5.8 One of the key themes to emerge from the majority of focus groups was the need to improve and standardise information provision available at the bus stop. Whilst representative groups and operators agreed that technology should be utilised to enhance information provision, the most useful form of information is the timetable available at the bus stop. Suggestions were varied upon what improvements should be made in terms of text size, presentation and information presented however **all agreed that a standard format should be selected and utilised consistently across the region.**

5.9 A standardised format would be particularly useful for certain groups within society such as those with sight problems or learning difficulties. It was felt that a consistent format would also benefit the average bus user. The London example was cited, whereby regardless of area or borough within the city, standard formats are used to display bus information.

Service Disruptions

- 5.10 Service disruption issues were continually cited within each focus group, representatives from all parties noted particular issues with service disruptions which they would like to see addressed.
- 5.11 Local Authorities noted that if service disruptions are planned well in advance, they generally issue announcements and publicity, warning of the planned disruptions to both the general public and local transport operators, however the situation can become problematic if emergency maintenance has to take place at the last minute. Local Authorities noted that whilst utility companies have a duty to inform the authority of planned and emergency maintenance, this information does not always make it through to the public transport department.
- 5.12 Representatives of bus users felt that whilst planned disruptions are publicised in advance, more should be done to get the message to vulnerable groups, particularly those with sensory impairments who may not notice an additional sign at a bus stop. Equality groups did feel however that bus drivers in particular should pay attention to vulnerable passengers when disruptions are in place as these often take those with sensory impairments by surprise and can cause significant confusion.

Online Services

- 5.13 The majority of attendees agreed that new technologies including online services have the potential to play a key role in bus information dissemination; however there was a common belief that users were unaware of how to locate online services. Groups generally felt that Traveline and other online facilities required undertaking a marketing exercise to raise awareness of services.
- 5.14 Considering this point, it should be noted that TACTRAN's public transport gateway facility is due to go live in Spring 2010. This will provide a central resource for all public transport information. TACTRAN have acknowledged that in order for this to be a success, they will have to undertake a considerable awareness raising exercise.

Accessibility Information

- 5.15 Generally all groups agreed that accessibility information was a significant problem. Representative groups noted that information on bus accessibility would be most useful to their members. Lack of this information can lead to people choosing another transport mode as they can not rely on being able to access the service, or perhaps more importantly an accessible return service.
- 5.16 Both public transport operators and local authorities acknowledged this point, however noted that until the majority of vehicles were made DDA compliant, it would be fool hardy to advertise accessibility. The argument being no information on accessibility is preferable to wrong information which may lead to vulnerable people being stranded due to the wrong type of bus being used on that route.
- 5.17 A common point to be raised in terms of accessibility was that audio information should be provided on buses, approaching or at stops. Similar to current practice on trains.

Fares and Ticketing

- 5.18 There was a general consensus that information on fares and ticketing should be made more widely available in advance of journeys. Operators and local authorities agreed with this however noted that major impediments prevent this such as the nature of UK fare tables and issues over competition.

Real Time Information (RTI)

- 5.19 There was a universal agreement that RTI would generally help improve information provision across the region, and tackle many of the issues outlined within this consultation. Bus operators and local authorities were aware of the significant costs of implementation which could prove prohibitive. Equality groups were less inclined to accept that improved facilities and infrastructure which would assist their members should be ruled out on the basis of cost.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Following completion of the three strands of consultation, this information note was used as the basis to inform the consultation chapter of the Regional Bus Information Strategy.