

Report

13

Report to:	Corporate Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	9 March 2005
Report by:	Executive Director (Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Better Government for Older People (BGOP) Mystery Traveller Project
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1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Provide an update on the Mystery Traveller Project.
- ◆ Advise on overall outcomes from the Project.

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the outcomes from the BGOP Mystery Traveller Project be noted
- (2) that the outcomes be referred to the Older People's Assembly.
- (3) that the intention to pass the findings from the Mystery Traveller Surveys to officials from the Council's Roads and Transportation Services and to the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority be noted.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Better Government for Older People Project (BGOP) secured funding from Fresh Futures of £45,016 to fund a Mystery Traveller Project over 2003 and 2004. A Project Co-ordinator was seconded from South Lanarkshire Council to manage the project.
- 3.2 The idea for this community based project came from older people involved in a BGOP Transport Task Group. It was felt that by having older people and disabled people volunteering as Mystery Travellers on public transport, and undertaking journeys in their day to day lives, this would help provide better supported evidence for use in influencing service improvements. These improvements may be in availability of public transport, information about provision/timetable, accessibility of the buses and trains, where appropriate the cost of fares, cleanliness of the transport, customer courtesy and assistance and, integrated connections. Taxi travel surveys would also be included where possible.
- 3.3 At the outset of the project meetings were held with officials from Strathclyde Passenger Transport and also the Council's Roads and Transportation Services. This was to generate awareness about the initiative and gather information to help guide the work. Officials were advised that feedback from the surveys would be given and include the positive aspects as well as those areas where concerns were being expressed and where the findings suggested improvements could be made.

- 3.4 The Mystery Traveller Project has involved 59 volunteers undertaking surveys on their daily journeys using buses, trains and taxis. Following initial pilot testing there have been 567 bus surveys and 135 train surveys. A pilot test for taxis has also been conducted.
- 3.5 During the course of the project, a number of talks and presentations were made by the Project Co-ordinator throughout South Lanarkshire to older people's groups and voluntary organisations. These were for awareness raising, identification of issues and to recruit volunteers for the project.

4 Mystery Traveller Project Outcomes

- 4.1 The main outcomes of the Mystery Traveller Project are summarised below. A more detailed version is in Appendix 1 to this report. It should be noted that these findings are related to the journeys experienced by the volunteers involved and that this may not always be the experience of others. In addition, the surveys are not a major market research exercise but intended to provide more evidence (as opposed to just perception) as a guide to service improvements, to consider alongside any other survey work agencies may be undertaking and, to suggest where further investigation may be worthwhile.

4.2 Bus surveys.

The outcome from volunteers undertaking bus travel is predominantly positive with high percentages (e.g. 60%, 80%, 90%) for areas surveyed. Nonetheless, there are issues arising from the outcome, albeit low percentages, where improvement could be made. These are:-

- Ensuring buses arrive on time to meet connecting journeys
- Eliminating vandalism of bus shelters
- Eliminating anti-social behaviour at bus stops and on buses
- Ensuring buses depart and arrive on time
- Ensuring passenger information is provided at bus stops and on bus destination boards (including to/from health settings)
- Ensuring observation of no smoking policy is observed by drivers and passengers
- Ensuring buses are clean and litter free
- Ensuring customer service skills are implemented for drivers
- Ensuring buses are accessible for people with mobility problems
- Ensuring people are seated before the bus moves off
- Prevention of cars parking in bus bays/bus stop areas

In addition, from discussion with volunteers about bus travel, there are other issues and concerns raised:-

- Older buses being used outwith the main city areas as new replacements come in first to the cities
- Difficulty in obtaining the new Ring n Ride Service
- Availability and frequency of bus provision in the rural areas
- Withdrawing of the Post Bus Service in rural areas
- Concessionary fares and accompanying carer fares, and time of day permitted for concessionary travel
- Gap in Bus link provision from Forth to Livingston

Progress is being made and includes:-

- BGOP included as a member of the Rural Transport Forum (linked to South Lanarkshire Rural Partnership)
- Bus Shelter provision installed at Stonelaw Road, Rutherglen
- SPT implementing a planned improvement programme i.e. new Bus Stops with Information panels
- Scottish Parliament supporting OAP free bus travel from April 2006 across Scotland (Mystery Passenger Schemes to be introduced as a condition for operators offering concessionary fares).

4.3 Train Surveys

There are fewer surveys by volunteers undertaking train travel in their day to day lives. The outcome is mainly positive though less predominantly than for bus travel. Areas for improvement are:-

- Providing more audible and visual information in Waiting Rooms and on trains
- Providing improvements for accessible parking and access to platforms
- Ensuring attention to cleanliness of waiting areas and on trains

The project had some success in influencing the provision of accessible parking bays (two) being provided at Hamilton West Station.

4.4 Taxis Surveys

A pilot survey was conducted for taxis. It is known that very few taxis or private hires are equipped to carry wheel chair users. The pilot work indicated that users naturally contacted those providers who could accommodate them. It would have been unreasonable to continue with further survey work and ask volunteers to try other providers as this may have posed a safety concern. This experience, combined with the knowledge that the Council's Licensing Section was addressing accessibility issues in consultation with the taxi trade and local Disability Forums, meant that further surveys were curtailed. Information and consultation is continuing with the Licensing Section through the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership and in liaison with BGOP.

5 Employee Implications

5.1 Employee secondment period completed 31 January 2005.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 Final claim and instalment for grant aid funding from Fresh Futures (from a total grant of £45,016) will be completed in the current financial year.

7 Other Implications

7.1 Outcomes and findings from the Mystery Traveller project will be referred to the Council's Roads and Transportation Services and Strathclyde Passenger Transport for part of their intelligence gathering on services and for service improvements.

7.2.1 BGOP will continue to be represented on the South Lanarkshire Rural Transport Forum as part of the Rural Partnership with a view to addressing transport issues in the rural areas.

7.2.2 Following the success of the Mystery Traveller Project, BGOP will continue through its Transport Task Group to conduct ad hoc Mystery Traveller surveys where possible and where there is an identified need. BGOP will also seek as appropriate

further funding sources to assist with more detailed work in areas of particular interest such as travel to and from health settings.

7.2.3 The outcomes of the Mystery Traveller Project will be reported to the Older People's Assembly.

8 Consultation

8.1 Consultation has taken place and will continue with the Council's Roads and Transportation Services and Strathclyde Passenger Transport. BGOP is in itself a consultation forum through its engagement with and involvement of older people in the partnership and all its meetings and through its link with the Older People's Assembly. The Mystery Traveller Project was a participative initiative derived from and delivered with local community involvement.

Alan Cuthbertson
Executive Director (Corporate Resources)

14 February 2005

Link(s) to Council Objectives

- Living in the Community
- Modernising Services

Previous References

Corporate Resources Committee 13 November 2002

List of Background Papers

- BGOP Mystery Traveller Full Surveys Report for 2003 and 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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Appendix 1

Mystery Traveller Project: Survey Summary

This transport survey is a community based project utilising volunteers (Older people and disabled people) to undertake short surveys of their experience using public transport in their daily lives. In the table below, the figures are actual, the ones in brackets are percentages.

Buses

Public Transport links

Issue	Yes	No
Arrive on time for onward connection	87(77%)	14(12%)

21% of respondents arrived at the bus stop they were alighting from by public transport and had an ongoing journey. 77% of these arrived on time for their onward connection. The main reason for missing connections was that the bus was late arriving.

Bus Shelters

Issue	V.Good/Good	Poor/V.Poor
Condition of bus shelter	354(78%)	93(20%)

447 respondents found a shelter at the bus stop they had used. 78% found the shelter to be in either “good” or “Very Good” condition. The shelters rated poor were often due to vandalism.

Issue	Yes	No
Seating at bus shelter	266(59%)	176(39%)

266 respondents said there was seating or “rest bar”. There was a mixed reaction to this type of rest bar seating. Some people felt the seating was too high, others said it was fine.

Personal Safety

Issue	Yes	No
Felt safe at bus stop	523(92%)	16(3%)
Felt safe on the bus	536(95%)	12(2%)

The respondents were asked if they felt safe at the bus stop and on the bus. The results shown reflect a small proportion felt insecure. Although no one was actually threatened, it was felt the presence of young people at the stop or on the bus having a carry on, was threatening.

Timekeeping

Issue	Yes	No
Bus departed on time	444(78%)	79(14%)
Bus arrived at destination on time	446(78%)	60(10%)

Majority of buses were on time. Lateness for arrival in the main was due to road works and unforeseen traffic delays.

Destination Boards

Issue	Positive	Negative
Destination board clear	520(92%)	34(6%)
Destination board accurate	474(84%)	29(5%)

A small number of respondents reported destination boards were not clear, but did not comment as to what the reason was. Similarly 29 respondents reported boards not being accurate. Anecdotal information suggests that on short routes, destination boards were not being changed when the bus turned around.

Bus Journey

Issue	Yes	No
Able to be seated on the bus	532 (94%)	21(4%)
No smoking policy observed	506(89%)	35(6%)
Bell push easy to reach	508(90%)	48(8%)

Of the 35 respondents who reported smoking on the bus, there were instances when it was the driver who was smoking.

The instances where the bell push was difficult to reach, was on the older buses used on some routes.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Issue	Yes	No
Anti-social behaviour on bus	20(4%)	535(94%)

The anti social behaviour reported was a variety of incidents including smoking, swearing, eating food by passengers.

Bus Drivers

Issue	Friendly	Neither	Unfriendly
Bus Driver Friendly	318(56%)	236(43%)	11(2%)

In general reports on the drivers were favourable, only 11 people reported the driver being unfriendly

Comfort & Cleanliness

Issue	Good/V.Good	Poor/V.Poor
Condition of vehicle	508(90%)	48(9%)
Standard of seating	508(90%)	48(8%)
Comfort of bus	494(87%)	62(11%)
Cleanliness of bus	456(80%)	104(18%)

Most respondents found the overall condition of the vehicle to be good. The main issue is cleanliness as this has the highest response of poor or very poor

Mobility issues

Issue	Yes	No
Ability to access bus from kerb	327(58%)	88(23)
Doorway wide enough	352(62%)	69(12%)
Suitable seating /space	363(64%)	60(11%)
Seated before bus moved off	193(34%)	162(29%)

The number of cases where the bus moved off before passenger was seated is very high and is an issue which could be sorted very easily by highlighting to drivers during training

TRAINS

Public Transport links

Issue	Yes	No
Arrive on time for onward connection	12(86%)	1(7%)

A total of 61 respondents arrived at the station by public transport. Only 12 responded to the question of arriving on time for onward connection.

Station Waiting Rooms

Issue	Positive	Negative
Cleanliness of waiting room	92(68%)	11(8%)
Heating in waiting room	79(59%)	19(14%)
Seating in waiting room	80(59%)	19(14%)
Comfort of waiting room	75(55%)	24(18%)
Audible information in waiting room	42(31%)	50(37%)
Visual information in waiting room	56(41%)	39(29%)

More could be done to improve waiting rooms at stations. In particular, the main issues of overall comfort and information.

Personal Safety

Issue	Positive	Negative
Felt safe at station	133(99%)	2(1%)
Felt safe on train	117(87%)	6(4%)

All the respondents stated they felt safe at the station, 6 reported they felt unsafe on the train. Where they reported they felt unsafe, no explanation was given.

Timekeeping

Issue	Yes	No
Train departed on time	119(88%)	14(11%)
Train arrived at destination on time	118(87%)	10(7%)

The majority of respondents stated the train left on time. The people who stated the train left late gave no explanation. In 4 of the cases, the train made up time on the journey.

Anti social behaviour

Issue	Yes	No
Anti social behaviour at station	(0)	133(99%)
Anti social behaviour on train	9(7%)	124(92%)

Only one respondent expanded on the anti social behaviour on the train by stating that they told them "To be quiet" and it worked!

Ticket Conductors

Issue	Friendly	Neither	Unfriendly
Ticket Conductor Friendly	78(58%)	15(11%)	4(3%)

26 of the respondents didn't reply to this question. 4 stated that conductors were unfriendly.

Comfort & Cleanliness

Issue	Good/V.Good	Poor/V.Poor
Standard of seating	116(86%)	7(5%)
Cleanliness of train (interior)	106(79%)	19(14%)
Comfort of train	113(84%)	7(5%)
Audible information on train	61(45%)	56(42%)
Visual information on train	68(50%)	50(37%)

Mobility issues

Issue	Positive	Negative
Disabled parking available at boarding station	79(59%)	24(18%)
Access to platform at boarding station	107(79%)	18(13%)
Timetable on display at boarding station	75(56%)	50(37%)
Suitable seating on train	100(74%)	23(17%)
Suitable audio information on train	65(48%)	61(45%)
Suitable visual information available on train	67(50%)	58(43%)
Stairs to climb at destination station	78(58%)	44(33%)
Wheelchair ramp at destination station	78(58%)	44(33%)
Passenger lift at destination station	71(53%)	48(36%)

Comments

There were many comments from the volunteers regarding their experience on their journeys. Some comments are supportive of public transport and the operatives and some are not. The following list is merely a sample.

- At East Kilbride town centre there is an information centre near the bus stances with timetables etc.
- Driver was patient and helpful as I had forgotten that there was no change given. Another passenger helped with change.
- Excellent coach with added rail at the steps. Fast journey with only one stop at Prestwick Airport.
- Information Centre at Hamilton bus station.
- The East Kilbride to Hairmyres hospital appears to be an excellent service with the 201 running every 10-15mins. In addition there are two further services operating on this route.
- Whitelaws new Crusade Eclipse buses with ramps are built for wheelchair access.
- Although Keith Street bus area has been improved recently, there is only one shelter, and in theory only one bus stop. This route is used by many services and often 3 or 4 buses arrive simultaneously. It is often impossible to see destinations.
- Bus littered with free 'Metro' newspaper.
- Driver waits at Biggar an extra 4mins. For the Lanark bus to arrive. Should depart before Lanark bus comes in.
- Poor information at hospital re bus service.
- The bus timetable does not give information about a 237 bus, only 37, 137, and 11.
- The return journey from Larkhall to Lanark at 5.40pm didn't turn up. I had to wait 1 hour in a side street. I am a senior citizen. This is an hourly service with no other service running from Larkhall to Lanark.
- There was an exit door in the centre of the bus but this was not in use, causing congestion at the front when leaving. The bus looked like it had been in service elsewhere.
- This is a big bus but only had seating for 26 people. At rush hours, more passengers would be standing than sitting.
- Union Street bus stops need clearer indication of what buses go to Southern General Hospital.
- With regards to the smoking question-the driver was smoking.