

Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan LTP3: Consultation at GAP Offices

The following are a brief summary of issues highlighted during a consultation event held at the office of Gateshead Access Panel, on Wednesday 16th February 2011. The meeting was attended by approximately 20 disabled people and carers, including members and representatives of several disability organisations; including Gateshead Shopmobility, Gateshead and South Tyneside Sight Service, and Gateshead Access Panel. The discussions followed a general overview presentations of the current LTP3 proposals and expected operational and access improvements by John Bourn and Simon Jobe of the LTP3 Core Team and Irene Storey, Community Relations Officer for Nexus. Discussions continued for some time after the presenters left the meeting.

1. Parking.

- Multi-usage of Blue Badge bays after 6pm, i.e. for taxis: increases limitation on access and inclusion.
- No regulations for provision of WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle) parking – results in no provision by Highways Authorities. (Also a problem at Taxi Ranks – not designed for WAV operating as taxis.)
- Multi storey car parks – height limitations for WAVs.
- Charges – time limits not long enough for people who need more time to get in and out of vehicles, to get around, to use public toilets, etc.
- Size of bays often inadequate, especially for size of WAVs, and does not provide for rear or side access to WAVs.
- Access to parking signage often inadequate or non-existent.
- Infrastructure in car parks a barrier: ticket machines not accessible, ticket barriers not accessible, pedestrian routes not adequately provided or not at all, etc.

2. Q.T.C. (Quality Transport Corridors) and Infrastructure

- Only benefit disabled peoples access on the corridors.
- Can't get to bus stop / or to corridor.
- Can't get on bus due to drivers lack of customer care training. For example, quotes given to one service user from a driver were: " Me ramps not working". This especially happens when a young person with a disabled child attempts to access the bus. GAP has worked with GoNorthEast regarding this and provision of manual ramps has improved the situation but service users must complain if driver is obstructive. Drivers get confused with how to operate the electric ramps. On going training an regional / national policy needed.

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- Crossfalls at bus stops make access more difficult and can increase risk of wheelchairs (especially powered wheelchairs) overturning.
- Design of buses – only one wheelchair space – prevents wheelchair users travelling in pairs or groups (this is also the case for taxi hire).
- Bus stops audits – we’ve been waiting for this to be completed since the beginning of LTP2: early QTCs ignored the need to raise kerb and pavement heights at bus stops, as well as obstructions caused by street furniture including bus shelters, bins, and sign posts, etc.
- Design of interchange, example: door closing sensors not adequate resulting in collision or obstruction. Wheelchair users waiting to board last find automatic doors, such as those operated on bus approach/arrival sensors, close before they can access the bus.
- Real-Time Information systems need to provide audible information as well as visual.
- Announcement needed of bus approach including number and destination(s).
- Announcement needed of “Doors open (for boarding)” and “doors closing”.
- Time delay on crossings e.g. Sidney Grove and Civic.
- Materials used for crossing surfaces not always accessible e.g. stainless steel studs (as prominently used in Newcastle) are slip hazard, especially when wet. Modified (serrated) S/S versions are not an improvement as these are too severe to walk on and offer little resistance to slip when wet, especially on gradients at drop kerbs.

3. Metro.

- Design issues at stations and for metro trains: e.g. platform gap requires wheelchair users, and especially powered wheelchairs or scooter (when these were permitted to travel), to use momentum to propel themselves from platform onto car, which can result in accidents through collision with posts and in some cases the doors opposite. No amount of scooter training can overcome this bad design so scooter users are still excluded.
- Inclusive designed design required, not just access
- The gap between platform and train also creates anxiety issues for disabled and elderly people getting on and off, as well as those with young children.
- Agree with training for scooter users, e.g. Shopmobility do this automatically and have to exclude those who are not able to manage to use scooter safely for themselves or others.
- Subsidies should be provided for people who genuinely cannot get on buses/ transport. Nexus disbanded the CareBus and Demand Responsive

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and the taxi subsidy does not provide equality of opportunity for those excluded from public transport. E.g. transfer some Transport budget to social care budget to provide equality of opportunity.

- In Gateshead some people are excluded from using Taxicard because the full range of vehicles are not part of the scheme to enable people with larger wheelchairs to access taxis provided.
- Barriers currently being installed at train stations are barriers to disabled people so disempowering them e.g. toilets on stations cannot be accessed without a ticket.
- TVM's (Ticket Vending Machines) design remains inaccessible to many people who are Blind or have severely impaired sight, and without kneespace excludes many wheelchair users for reaching the coin slots, etc. This is in spite of inclusive design solutions being requested and advised, and feedback from consultation for the T+W Metro System.
- Signage continues to be of concern, with little improvements seen during LTP2. Refurbished stations appear to be moving away from standards that have been consulted on over the years and agreed with local disability and access groups. Resulting in confusion.
- Real-Time Information systems need to provide audible information as well as visual.
- Some improvements recognised with respect to audio announcements at Metro Stations and on trains.
- Audio announcement should also be made of “doors open (for access on and off train)” and “doors are now closing”: this may have the result of reassuring people that they are being watched by the driver in control of the doors, and that they need not feel under pressure to get on or off quickly, so reducing anxiety and potentially accidents.
- Metro cab design – current redesign does not improve access for large powered wheelchairs or for mobility scooters.
- Obstruction on metros include – central posts in cabs – needs a new template for cabs. The central pole remains an obstruction – between the doors and the wheelchair bay in the car. Will discourage use by such persons, especially if they think the cars may be occupied by a lot of people standing.
- Metro needs to have assistance on platforms.

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4. Taxis

- Taxi provisions are available but cabs are still not available e.g. After the LTP meeting service, one person had to wait one hour because all of the taxi drivers were on contract.
- Taxi ranks are not accessible: –
- Kerbs and pavements are not raised as for bus ramps.
- No drop-kerbs to allow approach to rear access vehicle ramps.
- No identification of ranks to aid recognition by Blind and visually impaired – even though user trials have previously been implemented with GAP members.
- No audible aid to assist location and use by Blind or visually impaired persons.
- Lack of shelter or accessible shelter.

5. Buses

- Bus design of accessible space – a retracting pole would allow easier access when boarding alighting with a wheelchair.
- Wheelchair space too small to accommodate some larger wheelchairs / powered wheelchairs, bigger than the “standard size”.
- Clamps – lack of these is seen as a safety issue for some people who are unable to restrain their movement against bus momentum. Operators say there is no need on low floor buses but wheelchair users often complain they are sliding sideways when front wheels are not facing forward. This is often unavoidable because of tight constraints of wheelchair space.
- Real time/ audible info on buses and bus stops.

6. Electric Vehicles and Low Carbon Vehicles.

- Are electric vehicles really greener for the environment?
- Capital cost of electric vehicles appear to be artificially high – not cheaper to run over a similar life span of vehicle, and this is believed to be shorter due to fuel cells life.
- Electric vehicles are no good when battery runs out e.g. electric ramps.
- The electric and some hybrid vehicles are too quiet: a real **danger** to people with sensory impairments who cannot hear or see them coming.
- Charging points for electric vehicles (cars and vans) should be designed to be accessible for Blue Badge holders’ vehicles, Mobility Scooter users, and powered wheelchair users.

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7. Park and Ride Concerns

- Limited benefit to disabled people whose choices of transport are already limited.
- Very low expectation of use by those with own vehicles – why pay the extra to park and ride, often with less convenience, when you have to pay to run a car as your main and sometimes only form of accessible transport.
- Additional limitations due to “only one wheelchair space per vehicle” deters use also.
- These facilities need to be as accessible.
- Location and design should take consideration of use to support events in town centres, quayside and locality, e.g. with additional over-flow parking, accessible parking and drop-off, and additional capacity for accessible transport. At tall ships drop off for taxis was on a steep bank excluding wheelchair users from being able to transfer safely and some ambulant disabled people too.

8. Trains

- Some trains operators and Rail providers appear to provide assistance efficiently in many ways particularly with regard to spontaneous assistance as opposed to booking up beforehand. This however tends to be out of area eg. Leeds, York and Southcoast (Southern Trains).
- Advance booking of journey with assistance can still be problematic.
- However, Newcastle Central is not all that great even if you have booked assistance. Staff attitude can be really bad – disability equality training is needed.
- Some have concern over the Ticket barriers and operational impacts on disabled people at Central Station.

9. Cycle routes

- Inadequate (if any) separation between pedestrian and cyclists – a painted white line is inadequate.

10. Alternative Public Transport

- Nexus contracts provide alternative transport using taxis and / or Private hire operators, but some people find they cannot be accommodated due to size of wheelchair / powered wheelchair or mobility scooter.
- Contracts need to respond to need for “Reasonable Adjustments” and allow other operators who have more suitable transport to be utilised in such cases “outside of contract” or via “sub-contracting”. Some small operators need training and support in tendering for contracts.

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11. Shopmobility

- Shopmobility is the last link in the transport chain.
- Should be funded through LTPs
- Most rely heavily on volunteers – who require management, training and expenses costs.
- Many across the region and beyond have closed or reduced hours due to lack of funding.
- Service not replaced by personal ownership of mobility scooters for an number of reasons:
 - Scooters not allowed on Metro or some trains
 - Limited access to public transport generally – so many cannot go further than nearest corner / local shops.
 - Housing Associations tend to limit ownership by residents due to lack of storage space.
 - High potential need for elderly as well as less mobile and visitors to region.
 - One Shopmobility user in Gateshead said without Shopmobility he ‘would be a prisoner in his own home’.

12. Public Toilets and Changing Places Toilets

- Changing Places toilets (for people with complex needs, with or without personal assistance) are required in addition to standard accessible (Building Regulations Approved Document M) toilets.
- Several of the T+W local authorities have shown a commitment to their provision in public buildings.
- Should be provided at all transport interchanges and main stations. As advised in BS8300:2009 and expected to become a Building Regulations requirement under current proposed revisions.

13. Homezones

- No kerbs, shared surface.
- Problematic for sensory impaired people who cannot see or hear vehicles approaching or from which direction.
- People with mobility impairments also feel endangered, worried they can't get out of the way quick enough or at all.
- Anxiety issues also for people with mental health issues, and parents with young children.
- Goes against advice of RNIB and RNID, and numerous other organisations who support their campaign against use of shared surfaces.

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14. UTMC

- UTMC system will have little if any benefit for disabled and vulnerable people.
- UTMC should be used to aid disabled people's access to the urban environment and infrastructure generally, i.e. monitor locations, safety and wayfinding/ guidance equipment for correct operation / operational status (e.g. REACT system in Newcastle), loss of / deviation of pedestrian access routes due to maintenance or incident.
- UTMC should prioritise failures at light controlled crossings or loss of pedestrian routes due to maintenance or incident.
- UTMC should identify availability and location of Blue Badge parking, and not just general motorist parking bays availability in car parks (as this does not reflect availability or occupancy of the Blue Badge bays).

15. Education – Vast transport inequalities

- Travel not funded for all courses/day courses: limits ability to attend.
- Post-16 transport: LEA now asking you to pay for own transport from Mobility Allowance: results in increased potential for social exclusion.
- Social services refuse transport provision through direct payments or ask for contribution when need proven.
- Health pay £2.00 contribution towards taxi provision for hospital appointments this means on many occasions using all of mobility allowance for one week on hospital appointments. Alternative to this is hospital transport which pick up at their convenience and follow the milk round so takes for ever.

16. General Issues

- Impact Assessments are too broad and do not adequately consider implications or suitable/appropriate mitigation of enhancement for "inclusion", and barely accommodates "access" in many cases.

Example:

"EA for Component 2: Maintaining and Managing Infrastructure:

Disabled People:

Description of Mitigation/Enhancement:

Upgrades to the transport system will require the installation of ramps and handrails to ensure DDA compliancy."

This is too broad a statement and appears to assume a ramp and some handrails is the best or only answer needed to achieve a 'DDA compliant upgrade'.

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For instance, this does not respond to lack of lift access at some stations and limited access at others, as well as lack of alternative access at some Metro Stations when lifts are out-of-order.

- Where equality is impacted, local indicators should kick in, but there is no local indicator to address needs of disabled and older people.
- Consequently, inequality is extended potentially for disabled people.
- Who was involved in preparation of LTP3 Impact Assessments: Local Authority Officers should not be expected to advise on impacts unless they are suitably trained in the relevant equality.
- Impact Assessments should involve the representatives of the relevant equality strand, i.e. Disability Groups for Disability Equality Impact Assessments.
- LTP3 shows a general lack of targeted improvements or enhancements to benefit disabled and vulnerable people.
- Although many issues affecting cyclists have a parallel to some issues for disabled people and can be inter-related, especially on shared routes, the budget for cycling (albeit a green issue) is far greater generally than for disabled people's access and inclusion. Cyclist have a lot of choices of alternative transport means, whereas by comparison, disabled people have very few.
- Equality Duties do not appear to be satisfied by the LTP3 proposals.

The above summary notes have been compiled by Gateshead Access Panel with assistance of those attending the LTP3 Consultation Meeting on 16th Feb 2011, and may not necessarily reflect the order of those discussions or completeness of the content of discussions.

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