

**REPORT TO:** Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board (PPB)

**DATE:** 21st January 2009

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Operational Director (Highways, Transportation and Logistics)

**SUBJECT:** Halton Accessible Transport Study (Update)

**WARDS:** Borough-Wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1..1 The purpose of this report is to highlight to Urban Renewal PPB and Healthy Halton PPB the emerging key findings of the Halton Accessibility Study. This Study is being funded by the Halton Strategic Partnership (Healthy Halton SSP). The report also highlights a range of issues identified by the consultants, undertaking the Study, which are proposed to form the basis of a consultation exercise with key stakeholder groups planned for the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2009.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDED: That:-**

- i) **The options as set out in paragraph 3.10 being used as a basis for consultation at the key stakeholder event planned for the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2009.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3,1 Members will be aware that the Council has for several years now provided core grant funding to Halton Community Transport (HCT) to provide a range of accessible transport services for local residents including:-

- 'Dial a Ride' for disabled and elderly residents;
- 'Women's Safe' transport service, which operates in the evenings;
- Accessible learner service for post 16 learners with mobility / learning difficulties;
- Voluntary car scheme; and
- 'Route 66' rural bus service.

3.2 The current value of the core grant funding to HCT during the current financial year is £121,610. Residents using these HCT services, are also eligible to use their concessionary travel passes to travel free after 09.30am Monday to Friday, and all day Saturday and Sunday.

- 3.3 In addition to the services provided by HCT, the Council's own 'in house' passenger transport fleet provides accessible door to door transport, mainly for vulnerable adults and young people.
- 3.4 Members will also recall that Halton Borough Council last carried out a comprehensive Best Value review of transport / accessibility arrangements in 2006. This Best Value Review and its associated Action Plan continues to form the framework for the delivery of various accessible transport improvement projects, as part of the second Halton Local Transport Plan 2006/7 – 2010/11. Improvements introduced to date include:-
- Introduction of independent travel training for vulnerable young people and adults within the Borough;
  - Investment in further new low floor vehicles, utilised by the Council's own 'in house' passenger fleet and HCT;
  - Launch of the new 'Door 2 Door' service, which seeks to better integrate the provision of accessible transport services by different agencies through the use of a new centralised passenger booking and vehicle scheduling software system;
  - Introduction of a new multi operator public transport ticket (marketed as 'Halton Hopper'), with discounted versions for post 16 learners;
  - Launch of a discounted taxi service 'Links 2 Work' for residents unable to access employment / training opportunities by conventional public transport; and
  - Launch of an accessible cycling project.
- 3.5 In recognition of these innovative improvements and others, the Council has been jointly awarded, with the Merseyside Authorities, Beacon Council status in 2008/9 for transport accessibility.
- 3.6 Following on from the Best Value Review, a Halton Accessible Transport Study was commissioned in May 2008. The purpose of the study is to critically evaluate the current and potential future demand for accessible transport across the Borough up to the year 2015/16 taking into account key demographic and other trends. It is also required to make appropriate recommendations on how the Council and its partners can better meet this future demand for accessible transport.
- 3.7 Funding for the Study has been provided from the Halton Strategic Partnership (Healthy Halton SSP), which is being undertaken by specialist consultants.
- 3.8 The Study is being carried out in 5 key stages:-
- **Stage One:** - Establish levels of existing demand –Critically appraise the existing levels of demand for accessible transport services within the Borough by all sections of the community taking into account, age, gender, mobility / disability and

household income. Patterns of existing demand were then compared to an objective assessment of potential demand for accessible transport given the existing socio demographic profile of the community within Halton **(Completed)**;

- **Stage Two:** - Objective assessment of current arrangements for the provision of accessible transport services within Halton. This considered the existing arrangements for the provision of various accessible transport services operated by Halton Community Transport (HCT) including 'dial a ride', 'Women's Safe Transport' and Halton Borough Council's own 'in house' passenger transport fleet **(Completed)**;
- **Stage Three** – A careful examination to highlight emerging 'best practice' from elsewhere in the UK and continental Europe, in terms of the provision of accessible transport services. **(Completed)**;
- **Stage Four** – Stakeholder consultation on the future direction of travel with regards to the future provision of accessible transport services within Halton; and
- **Stage Five** – Preparation of a Future Improvement Action Plan which will help inform the development of the third Halton Local Transport Plan covering the years 2011/12 – 2015/16.

3.9 The key findings to date are set out in Appendix One, the main headlines of which are:-

- ***Projected large growth in the demand for 'door to door' accessible transport by the year 2011;***
- ***Approximately just over half of eligible residents actually currently use one of the existing 'door to door' services within Halton;***
- ***Existing community transport services in Halton perform relatively well compared to similar schemes in other non metropolitan areas;***
- ***Further improvements are needed to the criteria used to determine which unprofitable local bus services continue to receive revenue subsidies, with particular attention being placed to better allocate subsidies to support the Council's key priorities for reducing social exclusion.***
- ***There are potential benefits to be gained from more effective co-ordination of the various accessible transport services operated by different agencies (public, commercial and voluntary) within Halton.***

3.10 In order to develop an Improvement Action Plan for the delivery of future accessible transport services, the consultants are proposing to hold a key stakeholder consultation event on the 13<sup>th</sup> February

2009 at the Stobart Stadium, Halton. At this event the consultants are proposing to consult on several alternative 'models' of future accessible transport delivery, based on the following 'scenarios':-

- **Scenario 1:-** No change to the existing transport co-ordination / procurement and delivery arrangements- Council budget for accessible transport increasing in line with inflation;
- **Scenario 2:-**'Supply Side Changes' - by providing a different mix of services with a focus on either: (a) more collective scheduled bus type services; or (b) more individualised taxi / demand responsive services using smaller vehicles. The budget for the provision of services under this scenario would depend upon the exact mix of services;
- **Scenario 3:-** 'Demand Led Provision' - essentially letting the service users determine which type of service they would prefer to use This would involve re-allocating funding away from supporting the 'in house' passenger fleet operation and HCT to individual users. This is a high risk option, which has not been introduced effectively elsewhere and could lead to considerable service disruption;
- **Scenario 4:-** 'Supply Side Co-ordination'. This involves more effective co-ordination of transport resources by current providers (Halton Borough Council, HCT, NW Ambulance (NHS) Trust etc.) This would remove unnecessary duplication that exists between the various agencies. The consultants are particularly keen to obtain views on the potential for greater co-ordination of passenger booking, vehicle scheduling and management functions between the various organisations; and
- **Scenario 5:-** 'Commissioning Co-ordination' This involves better co-ordination / transport procurement by Halton Borough Council and the different local agencies (such as the local PCT etc), which would help to improve quality standards and ensure better value for money.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Study raises some important issues regarding the future provision of accessible transport services within Halton. Subject to the findings of the Study, which are expected in March 2009, a more detailed report setting out the results of the Study and a costed plan for implementation will be reported to a future meeting of the Council's Executive Board and Urban Renewal and Healthy Halton PPB's.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Halton Borough Council has recently attained Beacon Council status, jointly with the Merseyside authorities, which is partly in recognition of the innovative work it has been involved in to improve accessibility for socially excluded communities. This proposal seeks to build upon the solid platform of improvements already delivered.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The Study seeks to identify future travel / accessibility needs for children and young people within the Borough and make recommendations on how their travel needs can be better catered for.

### **6.3 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The Study seeks to further improve access to employment, learning and work based learning providers within Halton, building on the solid platform already achieved.

### **6.4 A Healthy Halton**

The Study seeks to address improvements to accessible services for local Halton residents seeking to access health care facilities across the Borough and neighbouring areas. NHS Halton and St. Helens have been closely involved in the Study to date.

### **6.5 A Safer Halton**

Accessible transport services are recognised as playing an important part in an overall strategy to foster safer neighbourhoods within Halton. The Study seeks to build upon existing initiatives such as 'Women's Safe' transport, which already provide a valuable service.

### **6.6 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The provision of improved accessible transport services will help to assist residents, living in socially excluded communities, to access the new employment, training, leisure and retail facilities being provided through the regeneration of the Borough.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The main uncertainty with this type of strategic study is uncertainty with the availability of future funding to deliver any identified improvements. The consultants, have been asked to prepare a fully costed and realistic implementation plan in the final report,(which is due in March 2009), to minimise any risks in terms of delivery.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 This Study will help assist the Council and its local partners to improve the provision of accessible and affordable transport services for all members of the community. The Study in particular seeks to develop improvements to ensure 'hard to reach' groups make better use of accessible transport services.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
<b>Halton Accessible Transport Study (Various technical papers produced by consultants).</b>	<b>Transport Co-ordination, Rutland House, Halton Lea.</b>	<b>David Hall Tel 0151 4717514</b>

## Appendix One

### Halton Accessible Transport Study – Key Findings to Date

- ***Projected large growth in the demand for ‘door to door’ accessible transport by the year 2011.***

Currently it is estimated that 3,880 individuals within Halton have some form of disability / mobility difficulty which results in them having problems when accessing key facilities by conventional public transport (making them eligible to use one of the existing ‘door to door’ services within the Borough operated by HCT). This equates to 3.28% of the resident population of the Borough. Given the projected growth rate in the population of the Borough by 2021, (compounded by the ageing population structure), the number of people with mobility difficulties and potentially seeking to use accessible ‘door to door’ services is projected to increase to 4,524. This equates to a potential 16% increase in the demand for ‘door to door’ accessible transport services by 2011.

- ***Approximately just over half of eligible residents actually currently use one of the existing ‘door to door’ services within Halton.***

However, currently only 1,705 eligible residents are actually members of the existing ‘door to door’ accessible transport service in the Borough. Therefore only 56% of the potentially eligible residents are actually currently members of and use the existing ‘door to door’ accessible transport services within the Borough. However, this level of existing ‘take up’ of the service is comparable with that of other community transport services across the UK.

- ***Existing community transport services in Halton perform relatively well compared to similar schemes in other non metropolitan areas***

Having analysed the operating performance of other community / voluntary transport schemes operating in other non metropolitan local authority areas, the services operated by HCT have been found to continue to perform relatively well. For instance, the subsidy per passenger trip on HCT services is currently £3.08, compared to £5.06 in Vale Royal, £5.40 in Macclesfield. For some schemes such as Basingstoke the subsidy per passenger trip is as high as £9.02.

- ***Further improvements are needed to the criteria used to determine which unprofitable local bus services receive revenue subsidies to more closely reflect the Council’s key priorities for reducing social exclusion.***

The consultants have made various recommendations to improve the methodology used to appraise the effectiveness of the various local supported bus service contracts, tendered by Halton Borough Council. In particular the consultants advocate the use of more detailed local area information on the types of households and socio economic factors, to ensure that revenue subsidies are more closely targeted at key socially excluded households and communities. The consultants were also critical of the ad hoc nature of some of the existing supported bus contracts, in particular individual early morning journeys which appear not to fit well with mainstream commercial services operating during the main daytime periods,

- **Potential benefits to be gained from more effective co-ordination of the various accessible transport services in Halton.**

The Study recognises the efforts that have been made to better integrate the various 'door to door' accessible services operated by the Council's 'in house' fleet and those services provided by HCT, through the 'Door 2 Door' initiative. However, the consultant's team feel that there are further potential benefits to be gained from even closer co-ordination of services between the two organisations. Furthermore, the consultants recommend that consideration is given to the greater integration of non emergency patient transport services, (almost exclusively provided by the North West Ambulance NHS Trust), with accessible vehicles operated by schools / colleges and commercial organisations (such as care homes). To achieve this goal the consultants recommend that other stakeholder organisations channel their commissioning, procurement and delivery management through Halton Borough Council.