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MIGRATION FROM RAIL



A study into potential effects of the introduction of free national off peak bus travel for Senior Citizens on rail patronage in NW England

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1. Background

1.1 From 1st April 2008 free off peak (after 09.30hrs) bus travel for Senior Citizens became available throughout England. Previously this had been available only within Local Transport Authority areas and also within Wales and Scotland. Since the introduction of the latter scheme (in 2006) patterns of abstraction or migration from rail services to bus became apparent. For example in North Wales serious migration was experienced on the Conwy valley corridor and in Scotland in the Lothians and Strathclyde.

1.2 With the broadening of the scheme in England the focus has switched to migration potential on cross LTA boundary flows where the free concession becomes available. This can be regarded as a more serious threat to rail than when free bus travel was confined to relatively small travel concession areas. This research therefore was aimed at ascertaining whether there would be the possibility of any concessionary passenger migration from local and regional rail to inter-urban registered local bus services.

1.3 It was originally intended to include migration potential from Express Coach services, where concessions do not apply. However it was subsequently anticipated that any abstractions from these would be minimal as local travel by express coach is relatively expensive (a deliberate policy to price out local journeys) and the services are also relatively infrequent.

2. Findings

2.1 The research findings, both **qualitative** and **quantitative** are more fully described later in the report, but the most notable are that

- Migration from rail has already been observed in Scotland and Wales and this report points to the likelihood of migration on some cross LTA boundary flows especially with shorter end to end services where bus is more competitive on journey times.
- Local bus services are perceived as relatively more convenient and are already well used by older passengers in preference to rail or express coach¹ services.

3. The Brief

3.1 The research aimed to establish

- *Which inter-urban corridors within the NW, including cross boundary corridors, are served by relatively fast and frequent registered local services on which these concessionary passes are valid?*
- *Which inter-urban corridors within the NW, including cross boundary corridors, are served by both rail and relatively fast and frequent local bus services?*
- *Which inter-urban corridors within the NW, including cross boundary corridors, are thus “contestable” and along which there might be expected to be migration from rail or express coach?*

¹ Express coach travel by older passengers is more frequent than might be expected! (see expanded findings)

4. Methodology – Hallam University.

4.1 Travelwatch North-West initially commissioned a study by students at Sheffield Hallam University to assess the likely impacts on rail and express bus patronage of the introduction of concessionary free off peak local bus travel within England

4.2 The research was undertaken by employing a combination of primary and secondary data based on interviews, e-mail exchanges, anecdotal evidence, observations, desktop literary/web searches and their own perceptions².

4.3 Desk research was conducted to select and examine a number of representative corridors where bus services duplicated rail services. In addition Local Transport Authorities were contacted by the students through exchanges of e-mails and interviews to receive their thoughts and views on this subject.

4.4 In the event the students found the brief in its entirety to be beyond their resources. They therefore concentrated their research on a handful of corridors chosen by reference to the Draft North West Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)³. These corridors are all identified in the RTS as key regional transport corridors.

4.5 Cognisance was also taken of transport links to other areas of interest in the north-west, particularly the two major airports, Liverpool John Lennon and Manchester, as well as coastal and Lake District destinations.

4.6 The initial corridors on which the students' research was based were :-

- Manchester-Bolton-Preston-Blackpool⁴.
- Manchester-Warrington-Liverpool.
- Preston-Lancaster-Penrith-Carlisle.

4.7 The NW to North Wales coast was also selected but subsequently discarded as the English concessionary fares scheme is independent of the existing concessions in Wales.

4.8 Although beyond their brief the students conducted a survey by questionnaire at three locations in Lancashire, all of which they considered to be amongst the most important travel hubs in the region. These were Manchester Piccadilly Railway Station, Liverpool Lime Street Station and Preston Bus Station. All the people surveyed were OAP's who will be eligible in April 2008 for the new concessions. There were thirty respondents in total.

² as the students were studying planning rather than transport they had few preconceptions.

³ Appendices 1.1 to which they were referred and which identifies the key regional passenger transport corridors and shows the rail, bus and coach services, frequencies and interchanges.

⁴ The X61 from Manchester to Preston is well known cross- border service that would be an excellent example to observe any changes in passenger usage. It is curtailed to Manchester – Preston in the winter.

4.9 The questionnaire comprised ten questions which covered Registered Local Bus Services, rail and express coach use. The questions also tried to gauge stated preferences and predict future travel methods.

5. Methodology – TravelWatch NorthWest

5.1 TWNW expanded the students' research to include a scoping exercise to identify a refined list of **cross boundary**⁵ registered local bus services with

- no existing⁶ free rail or out of area⁷ bus travel concessions
- through parallel rail and local bus services with
- hourly or better frequencies

5.2 For each corridor selected two “**contestability**” **indices** were calculated based on generalised **time** and **price** factors.

- The **Time index (T)** was based on comparing the relative generalised values of the end to end travel time by bus and rail. Half the service frequency was used as a proxy for average waiting time. The running time was also adjusted by the addition of any walking time between the town centres and their respective bus and rail hubs. The formula employed was $T = (BF/2 + BJT + WT) / (RF/2 + RJT + WT)$ where BF = Bus Frequency; BJT = Bus Journey Time; WT = walking time ; RF = Rail Frequency; and RJT = Rail Journey Time. The lower the index, the more likely migration is to occur.
- The **Price index (P)** was based on comparing the relative generalised price (fare) of bus and rail travel (taking the Senior Railcard fare). Apart from corridors, excluded by definition, where there already are existing free bus and rail travel concessions, use of the free off peak bus travel concession within England will always produce a saving, computed as RF-BF where RF = Rail Fare and BF = Bus Fare (= 0 from April 2008 but may be >0 on some cross boundary services before then). The formula employed is then $P = \text{Current Saving} / \text{Future Saving}$. Again, the lower the index, the more likely is migration to be expected
- By combining both indices as an average $(T+P)/2$ it is possible to rank the corridors in order of their contestability and thus identify those most vulnerable to rail passengers migrating to bus.

⁵ Within (between Travel Concession Authorities) and beyond the NW Region.

⁶ Pre April 2008

⁷ Travel Concession Authority's)

6. Results

6.1 The students' survey and TWNW's generalised travel time and price exercise produced a number of **quantitative** results.

6.2 Students survey

- More than half of the questionnaire respondents use their Registered Local Bus Services more frequently (generally 2/3 days per week) than any other mode of transport. They cited convenience and relatively short walking distance to bus stops as the main reason for this.
- A majority (22/30) of respondents would consider substituting bus for rail travel after April 2008.
- A majority responded that they travelled by coach once every month or every few months
- Depending on their journey a majority stated a preference for local bus services rather than the "less convenient" rail or express coach services

6.3 TWNW exercise

6.3.1 The most vulnerable cross boundary corridors in the NW of England appear to be -

- *Ulverston – Barrow (index – 0.23)*
- *Blackburn – Bolton (index 0.22)*
- *Blackburn – Burnley (index 0.33)*

6.3.2 The least vulnerable cross boundary corridors in the NW of England appear to be -

- *Lancaster – Preston (index 1.23)*
- *Liverpool – Warrington (index 1.3)*
- *Southport - Wigan (index 1.34)*

7. General Observations

7.1 There can be no doubt that free off peak bus travel for Senior Citizens just within their own Travel Concession Authority's area has generated significant additional patronage⁸.

7.2 Whether this has been new passengers or additional journeys made by existing passengers is not known, although the new England wide scheme from April 2008 is intended to be able, eventually, by the use of smart card technology, to supply the answer to this question.

7.3 There is also evidence that some rural rail services have already lost passengers to bus. The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP) are lobbying for the concession to be extended to their services, as the Welsh Assembly have done for the Conway Valley Line.

7.4 There are fears⁹ that a combination of increased costs to LTAs and to operators because of inadequate authority/operator re-imburement¹⁰ might lead to withdrawal/deregistration of services, of particular concern in rural areas where services are already infrequent.

7.5 This report has demonstrated that migration is likely on some LTA cross boundary routes.

7.6 TOWN is looking to carry out further follow on research on the effects on rail patronage within 12 months time.

⁸ for example, the 300% increase in patronage on the Jurassic Coast express in Devon!

⁹ CPT quoted in LTT No 489 7/3/08

¹⁰ based on DfT guidance to TCAs and associated Reimbursement Analysis Tool (RAT) which does not pay operators for generated trips (except where additional costs are incurred)