

CATCHING THE BUS SCRUTINY REPORT
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES:

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That First Bus review its fare structure so that the fare paid better matches the distance travelled. That First Bus review its fare structure in the light of the forum's findings on the barrier cost represents to young people. And, that First Bus report its conclusions/intentions to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Fares are set by the operator. However, Metro welcomes a fare structure review provided that the overall impact of any changes does not cause detriment to a larger number of customers.

Metro strongly supports the view that young people's usage of public transport should be encouraged through the provision of an affordable, attractive and accessible product thereby enabling them to have the confidence, skills and positive attitude required to continue to use buses and trains into later life.

Response From First:

The fare structure dates from the period when the local bus services were local authority owned and operated. At that time, there was a desire to keep fares down for passengers living in new estates on the periphery of the towns and cities. As a result of this a graduated fare scale was introduced where longer journeys were significantly cheaper per mile than shorter journeys. Once this structure was in place, increases in line with inflation tended to reinforce the pattern of higher costs per mile for shorter journeys. Over the years the structure has been simplified but has not fundamentally changed. Any fares change has to be acceptable to our customers and meet the Company's commercial requirements and in the past, a percentage increase on all fares has been the normal approach. This has made the very short journeys relatively more expensive over time.

As it states in the report, a very small percentage of total journeys are below 1 mile and this percentage is even smaller for young people, the majority of whom choose to walk such short distances.

First accepts that short journey passengers do pay a much higher rate per mile and this will be re-examined when fares are next reviewed. It must be borne in mind, however, that there is little evidence to suggest that any fares reduction would generate sufficient extra passengers to cover the losses sustained by introducing cheaper fares.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That Metro should investigate the possibility of developing a concessionary scheme whereby young people pay for the first few journeys in the usual way and then get one/two free (buy four, get one free for example but avoiding the need to pay up front) and report their findings/actions to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Metro supports the principle that public transport usage should be encouraged through the use of more imaginative ticketing structures, including the role of the concessionary scheme. Metro further understands that weekly and monthly tickets are not always the best product for occasional bus users.

The recommendation is challenging to implement because it would require the recording of journeys that young people had already made by public transport, in order to demonstrate their eligibility for the free journeys. This would require a Smart Card ticketing system with a back office to record travel undertaken across all operators. Such a system is currently being trialled in South Yorkshire with Metro's full involvement and it is the aspiration of Metro to introduce Smart Card ticketing including concessions across West Yorkshire at the earliest opportunity. Scrutiny Board should be aware that the complexity and cost of such a system means that the lead in time to implementation may take several years.

The current legislative framework does not allow Metro to impose new tickets on operators, so this would have to be implemented via a change to the current concessionary scheme or via Quality Contracts.

Metro undertakes to consider proposals for usage-based discounts (e.g. 12 journeys allowed for same cost once ten undertaken) as part of the development of Smart Card ticketing.

Metro further undertakes to review the position with regard to tickets for occasional travellers should there be any change in the legislative framework.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

That Metro and the bus companies should co-operate to develop a day pass, which can be used on all buses and that Metro report progress to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

A range of DayRover products are already in existence that can be used on all buses. They are not, however, comparable to the peak single operator tickets that

are available on First buses for example. Metro has raised the issue of on-bus sale of multi-operator day tickets on previous occasions. This has been accepted in principle by operators but there are practical issues to be addressed, for example the difficulty of making another ticket available for issue on the bus via the Wayfarer ticket machines.

Metro would welcome firm proposals from First Bus on how these issues might be overcome.

Response From First:

Earlier this year First introduced a £1.50 day ticket which is available on all days on all normal First bus services within West Yorkshire. We believe that this is a very good, value for money ticket for young people. For the majority of young people in Leeds, this ticket will cover all the journeys they need to make.

First cannot directly enter into any agreement with another bus company on fares without putting itself at risk of legal action by the Office of Fare Trading.

Metro can arrange to introduce a day Pass on all operators buses but this would be dependent on all operators agreeing to accept the ticket and associated financial arrangements. At the present time Metro have indicated that they intend to reduce the level of financial support to bus companies for the young people's concessionary fares in order to ensure that they can meet their obligations under the National elderly persons free travel system.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That Metro reviews the effectiveness of its marketing strategies with regard to young people's concessionary schemes and report its progress to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Metro undertakes regular market research every six months on a range of customer issues regarding public transport. Overall the response on awareness of concessionary passes and young people's MetroCard products is relatively high. Metro is satisfied that good use is made of a number of different marketing channels including mail shots to schools, colleges and universities, adverts on timetable displays and displays of leaflets at Travel Centres and other key venues.

The other key mechanism to distribution of such literature is the use of the admissions procedures for schools and colleges, for example, sending out information within admissions packs for new entrants to schools and colleges. The use of this mechanism is under the control of the Director of Children's Services and Metro is keen to hear from her whether this mechanism is feasible. If so, Metro undertakes to work closely with Children's Services to ensure even wider distribution of information.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

That Metro develop a text messaging comments and complaints system, promote this amongst young people and report progress to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Metro is currently developing a young people's area of its website which is due to be launched at the beginning of August 2007. The site is intended both to be more 'young people friendly' but also to be a key method by which Metro consults with young people. The site will include the capacity to **email** comments and complaints, and will be widely advertised.

It is recognised that customers often feel that complaints are not considered fully or that when they are, responses take too long to be returned. Thus in parallel Metro is trialling a new means of complaint handling by which customers get same day responses to the majority of complaints and queries.

Metro undertakes to consider the possibility of handling text queries and complaints following the launch of the website.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

That Metro and First Bus investigate the possibility of developing CCTV systems on buses to record sound as well as pictures.

Response From Metro:

Metro recognises that customers feel safer if CCTV is in operation, and it has been a useful tool in both preventing crime, deterring anti-social behaviour and in managing less serious incidents of poor behaviour on buses and in bus stations.

Metro has in the past encouraged operators to install CCTV, it is a requirement on some tendered services, e.g. some schools contracts, and Local Transport Plan capital has also been made available for CCTV installation (Metro funded 50% of the costs of 730 buses to be fitted across West Yorkshire over a period of three years – around £1million). It is not believed, therefore, to represent value for money to replace existing CCTV systems by more complex systems (i.e. to include audio as well as video). In general terms however this is an affordability question.

Metro undertakes to work with First Bus to establish costs for systems with audio and the feasibility of adaptation of any current systems to establish whether this recommendation offers value for money.

Response From First:

At present First are working on a programme to complete fitment of all vehicles with CCTV. Rather than making any change to this, it would be better to complete the programme before moving to a more sophisticated CCTV system. We do take the point that sound would give a much clearer picture of what actually happens in an incident and we would be interested in further investigation of the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

That the Director of Children's Services ensures that the barriers young people face with regard to transport are taken into account by ALL decision makers and that they are a key part of the Child Impact Statement process. We ask that she report back to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Metro welcomes such a step. This is particularly important with regard to decisions about new build for schools and colleges which can mean that accessibility becomes a deterrent for some students.

Response From The Director of Children's Services

I welcome this recommendation and the support and evidence it offers me in my efforts to promote children and young people's concerns – in this case transport – right across council and partner services. I have brought the full 'Catching the Bus' report and particularly this recommendation to the attention of the Council's Corporate Management Team and received encouraging support. I am fully aware of the need to promote young people's interests relating to transport when considering issues of regeneration, regional planning and keeping young people safe, as well as the various issues around access to education. I will ask colleagues working in these areas to ensure this happens. I will also work with the Executive Member for Children's Services to identify opportunities within our work to raise awareness of the issues young people face around transport. If, as I hope will happen, a group is established to support progress around these recommendations that includes representation from the Director of Children's Services Unit, I will provide any support I can in helping it to make decision-makers more conscientious and consistent in considering barriers regarding transport for young people.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

That the Director of Children's Services investigates adding travel concessions to the other benefits of the Breeze card and reports back to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Metro officers have met with Leeds City Council officers with regard to this question. It is difficult because the eligibility criteria for concessionary travel are different to those for Breeze card. However this could be manageable under a Smart Card ticketing system, which would allow for different products and services to be placed on the same card. Such a Card would need to be ITSO-compatible – the industry standard which allows smart card applications to work together.

In the meanwhile Metro has undertaken to work closely with officers involved in Breeze card to look at joint opportunities for publicity, events and discounts.

Response From the Director of Children's Services:

As metro have outlined in their response, work is already underway to look at potential links between travel concessions and the Breeze card. Although, as Metro suggest there have been some issues around this, solutions are being sought, such as the possibility of a Smart Card .

I understand that the Metro and Breeze card websites are working more closely together and that as such Metro will support Breeze by providing public transport information on how to access Breeze events and venues where deals are available. Whilst Breeze will promote access to the Metro site so that young people know how to access half fare passes and other public transport information.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

That the Director of Children's Services orders a review of how school transport monies are being spent in Leeds to see if there is a better way in which it could be spent and reports back to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

Response From Metro:

Metro works on behalf of Education Leeds to procure bus services for home to school journeys. Much of this provision is a statutory requirement. However, the recently enacted Education and Inspections Act allows for local Authorities to become 'pathfinders'. Bids for pathfinder status are required by November 2007 and may allow Local Authorities to undertake more imaginative approaches to overcome barriers to home to school travel.

Metro is committed to working with the five West Yorkshire authorities to consider possible options for a pathfinder bid. The support of the Director of Children's Services to such a bid would be crucial in developing it further.

Response from the Director of Children's Services:

A full consultation and review of school transport issues is to take place in the autumn and we will be keen to keep Scrutiny Members and of course the Youth Council informed about and involved in this. This review will look towards the development of a more aspirational school transport policy that gives young people greater choice and independence around how they get to and from school. We will continue to look for opportunities, through partnership working, to enhance what we can offer to young people as part of a school and wider transport 'package', this will include working closely with other regional local authorities in recognition of the need for a co-ordinated approach.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

That the Youth Council and ROAR lead a campaign with one aim - to achieve free bus travel for all young people – and that everyone who works with and for young people joins with and supports them in achieving it.

Response From the Youth Council/ROAR:

The recommendation was put to the Youth Council on 19th May 2007 and met with broad support. The Council and ROAR are currently working to ensure as many young people as possible are aware of our aims and canvass for their support.

Our short term aims are:

- To develop a petition for young people to sign which will be available in paper and electronic formats
- Promote the petition and awareness through forthcoming events such as Breeze on tour this summer and the 'Be Healthy' conference on 13th July
- Send copies of our report to all citizenship co-ordinators in secondary schools and all youth group leaders in Leeds to inform them of our intentions and ask them to promote the petition
- Write to incoming Prime Minister Gordon Brown to inform him of the Forum's findings and ask for his support – a draft of this letter will be presented to the Youth Council's Executive Board on 2nd July
- Produce a press release to help raise awareness of our campaign

Our aims are also aligned to the priorities of the UK Youth Parliament so we are working to develop links both regionally and nationally with their activities and campaigns.

Whilst undertaking these activities we will be gauging the level of support and commitment of young people to these aims and developing contacts with a view to organising a larger event in the future.

Response From Metro:

Metro is sympathetic to the key recommendation of the report. The report has correctly identified that free travel is available to young people under 16 in London and the important increase in accessibility, especially for leisure opportunities as a result. The report has also noted the high cost of concessionary spend on this travel.

Metro is currently developing its own young people's strategy and the question of free travel has been debated as part of that process. Metro is aware that there is important feedback from Transport for London (TfL) about the implementation of free travel for under 16s and it is believed that this should be studied in more depth to understand all impacts that would result from supporting this recommendation. The chief concern is of course the question of affordability since it would cost many millions of pounds, for which funding is not currently available. The views of Leeds Young People's Scrutiny Forum will be an important voice in discussing how to take these ideas forward.

Response From the Director of Children's Services

Whilst my role as Director of Children's Services and an officer of the City Council means that I cannot be part of a campaign, I can support young people to have an effective campaign. I am proud that see young people are proactively campaigning for changes that could improve access and opportunities for those growing up in Leeds. As such, through the group being proposed to monitor this reports progress and through wider opportunities I will happily provide support in accessing any information, contacts and other appropriate resources that would assist the Youth Council and ROAR's work in this area.

May I once again state my thanks and congratulations to all those involved for their work on this report.

General comment from First

The Forum discussed the much better fares available to young people in London. Bus services in London have a completely different regulatory framework to that in the rest of the United Kingdom and the amount of financial support per passenger from public funds is very much higher than in the rest of the country. Public transport in the capital is also helped by revenue generated by the congestion charge levied on all private vehicles in the central area.

First believes that we already offer good value for money travel for young people. Our day ticket is a particularly good deal and the Young Persons MetroCard is also very good value for money. We accept that the cost of travel is a barrier to young people but believe that we have already taken steps to give the cheapest possible travel options to our young customers. In view of Metro's intention to finance their obligations under the elderly person's concessionary scheme at the expense of the young person's scheme, our challenge in the future will be to try and maintain existing concessions rather than to bring in further price reductions.