

Briefing: Interchange 2004

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1. ROLE OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT EXECUTIVES

The role of passenger transport executives (PTEs) is, generally, to provide, promote and procure transport facilities in their respective areas. In total, PTEs represent nearly 14 million people who make some 1700 million public transport journeys each year; a third of bus trips outside London are made on buses in PTE areas, and a fifth of all rail trips (twice the number made on Inter-City) are made in PTE areas where around a quarter of all conurbation trips are made on public transport.

2. INTEGRATION

We once had real integration in Tyne and Wear. The introduction of the Metro, with its purpose-built interchanges, single-journey Transfares allowing the customer to buy a single time-limited ticket to be used on more than one mode, for example Metro and bus and multimodal travelcards (way before London), together with a planned network of bus services and properly timetabled connections, made a genuinely integrated network possible. The result was a growth in patronage at a time when public transport in other metropolitan areas was declining.

It is important to be clear about what we mean by integration. Integration comes at different levels: policy, strategic, and basic.

Policy is concerned with the various disciplines that bear on the planning and construction of the transport scheme: environment, land-use planning, social inclusion, route improvement. It will also deal with the organisations involved: planning, heritage.

Strategic integration deals with the travel aspirations of the community and how they can be best met given national priorities and preferred modal choice.

The basic journey—what most people think of in connection with integration—involves as the key elements hassle-free interchange; appropriate connections (concerns about times and service quality); reliable information (signs and maps at the most needed locations). And of course ticketing is a major issue: it must be available at the right price and the right place at the right time. Convenience is the major concept in interchange design: if it isn't convenient people will want to

stay on the bus or Metro and be reluctant to change; even worse, they may want to take their car into the centre of town.

3. INTERCHANGES

What makes for a good major interchange? The key element is convenience, which translates into there being a minimum distance between modes; shelter from the elements; easy-to-understand signs and maps; good lighting and security. Passenger facilities can be a real boon to waiting customers. A WC, café, a newsagent are useful to people starting their journey or changing modes; they also add to the general welcoming atmosphere at the interchange. Real-time information and sensible timings of services give a greater sense of credibility to the network. The general feel of the interchange—its public art, good maintenance/cleaning regimes, and good design—all play a part in the interchange experience. The absolute bedrock of the successful interchange is customer-friendly staff. Passengers will forgive much; they will never forgive the absence of staff who can help.

What makes for a good minor interchange? The layout needs to have a coherent where-to-board-your-bus plan, including clear directions to the next embarkation point. Again, sensible timing of services is important. Good design and visibility within the interchange will help with these issues. A good maintenance and cleaning regime will help to maintain the attractiveness of the interchange, and make it less attractive to youths looking for somewhere to hang around.

The ticketing needs to be multimodal, simple, easy to understand and good value. A variety of ways to pay is also very attractive: phone, Internet, newsagent, or at a travelshop.

Information needs to be available before the journey from travelshops, Traveline, the Internet, maps, or printed timetables. Modern technology makes bespoke departure timetables easy to provide. Real-time information—whether announcements or display—can inspire confidence and trust in the information, especially when notifying passengers of exceptions. At the destination the passenger needs information displays, leaflets and maps.

4. ISSUES FOR INTEGRATION TO SUCCEED

Interchanges must represent the minimum of delay to the traveller. They should be easy to find, whether approached by car or on foot (but waiting should be pleasant, and the

marketing opportunity that waiting people represent should not be ignored). The latest information should be easy to understand and to get (there is a clear role for Transport Direct here); getting the best ticketing should also be hassle-free. Smartcards and real-time information are important (but only where predictable journey times haven't been achieved). Regular users of the network should be rewarded.

Nexus has pioneered UCall, a demand-responsive service where users book a trip through a call centre and the computer schedules the route automatically, in its area of Tyne and Wear. The UCall driver, through a screen in the cab, is given full details of route, pick-ups, drop-offs and so on and operates a flexible route accordingly.

Operators should be under an obligation to participate, but there should be flexibility in pricing. Operators should be encouraged to invest in dedicated services and in dealing with service disruption. There are roles for taxis, bicycles, and park and ride, and these should be explored.

Passenger transport executives and local authorities should be given a greater say (or even a greater statutory responsibility) to decide local priorities and implement the appropriate schemes.

The Office of Fair Trading has been concerned that integrating bus services, especially when provided by competing bus operators, would be anti-competitive. It is now prepared to issue block exemptions. If operators are reimbursed for their participation in travelcard schemes on the basis of revenue forgone there is a real danger that they will have an incentive to increase their own single and return fares. Under this system, the higher a firm's fares, the bigger the share of the travelcard reimbursement pot it receives.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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