

# GREATER MANCHESTER TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

## BUS SERVICES SUB COMMITTEE

Date: Friday 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2022  
Subject: Ring & Ride Performance  
Report of: Stephen Rhodes, Director of Bus, TfGM.

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### Purpose of Report

To note progress in relation to the delivery of Ring and Ride services by Greater Manchester Accessible Transport Ltd (GMATL) and its ongoing recovery post-Covid.

### Recommendations:

The Greater Manchester Transport Committee is requested to note and comment on the contents of the report.

### Contact Officers

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## **Equalities Implications**

N/A

## **Climate Change Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures**

N/A

## **Risk Management**

N/A

## **Legal Considerations**

N/A

## **Financial Consequences – Revenue**

N/A

## **Financial Consequences – Capital**

N/A

## **Number of attachments to the report: 0**

## **Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

N/A

## **Tracking/ Process**

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution?

No

## **Exemption from call in**

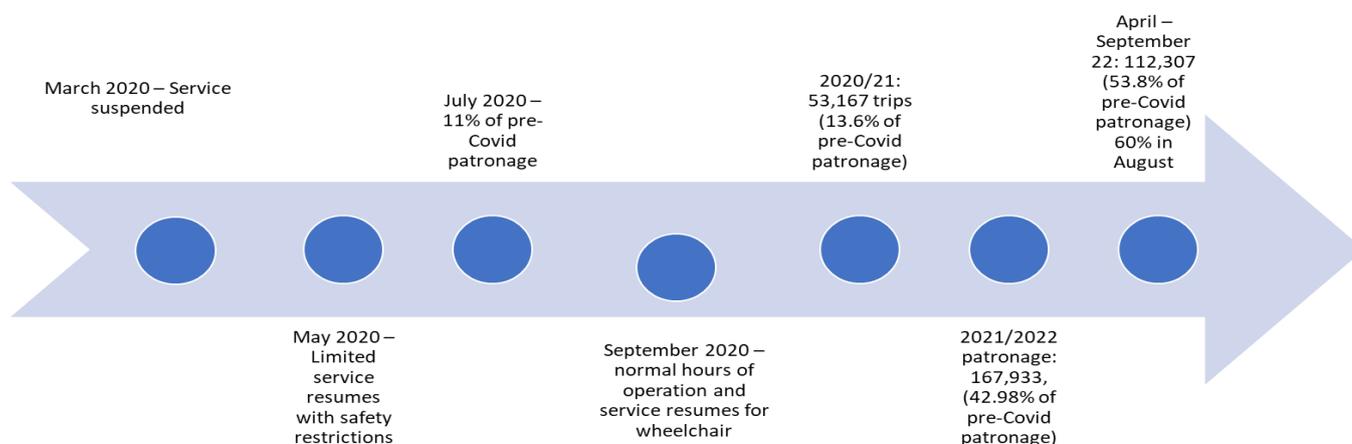
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency? N/A

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Ring and Ride service provides door to door, demand responsive transport to residents of Greater Manchester who find it difficult to use conventional public transport due to disability or mobility issues.
- 1.2 The Ring and Ride service is operated by Greater Manchester Accessible Transport Ltd. (GMATL) and grant funded by TfGM.
- 1.3 The grant is awarded subject to GMATL's compliance with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which details key service performance standards that must be delivered to ensure the service's social inclusion objectives.
- 1.4 Passengers can only use the service if they:
  - hold a TfGM Concessionary Plus Pass (available to those with the following: Severe walking difficulties; registered partially sighted; profoundly or severely deaf; or have been/would be refused driver's license for medical reasons); or
  - hold a TfGM Concessionary Disabled Person Pass (available to the following: registered blind; profoundly deaf and cannot speak/limited speech that is difficult to understand; learning difficulties; cannot use both arms; cannot talk; ex-serviceman or woman with serious walking difficulties as a result of losing a leg; or would be refused driving license as a result of severe and long-term mental health problems); or
  - are 70 years old or over, have mobility issues and hold a TfGM Older Person's Concessionary Pass; or
  - are a TfGM Travel Voucher user; or
  - are an ex-serviceman or woman with serious walking difficulties as a result of losing a leg.
- 1.5 In 2019/20 the grant to GMATL to fund Ring and Ride services was increased to £4.6 million which included £0.3 million to part fund the replacement of up to 31 fleet vehicles. Following the onset of the pandemic, in 2020/21 the grant was reduced to £3.27 million to reflect the lower level of demand, with an additional £170,000 for lease vehicles. In 2021/22 the grant was £3.5 million with an additional £163,000 for lease vehicles. The grant and additional lease vehicle allocation was set at £3.5 million with an additional £186,000 for lease costs in 2022/23.

## 2 Response to the Pandemic

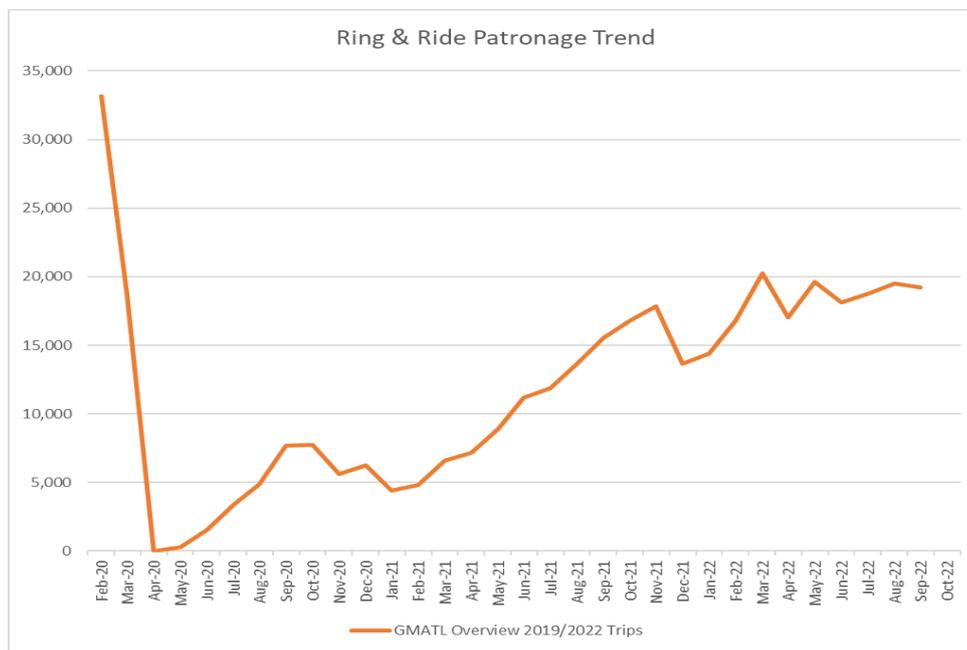
- 2.1 The service was initially suspended in March 2020 following the outbreak of Covid following an increase in 95% of cancellations. GMATL worked to resume the service with additional safety measures following government guidelines and the service had returned to the same hours of operation and levels of assistance by the September of 2022.
- 2.2 Patronage has slowly increased since then with some groups e.g. lunch clubs etc. only now returning and not always to the same numbers and frequency as before.
- 2.3 The total projected patronage for 2022/2023 is 233,010 (60%) based on the available budget and current trends. This is slightly less than the 255,000 (65%) initially projected based on the shift patterns as determined by the budget. This is because the demand hasn't returned in the same patterns as before. The service has fewer requests for trips in the evenings and weekends than previously but the daytimes are very busy. More resources are required to increase the patronage and manage demand.



- 2.4 The service has been operating at the usual times since August 2020 (between 8am to 10.45pm Monday to Saturday and 8am to 10.25pm on Sunday). Two vehicles were reintroduced in July to bring the total number of vehicles in operation to 42. The number pre-Covid was 57. An additional three vehicles were proposed and approved by GMATL's Board to be introduced imminently.

2.5 See figure 1 below for an overview of completed total trips by month since the beginning of the pandemic.

Fig. 1 – Ring and Ride patronage recovery trend

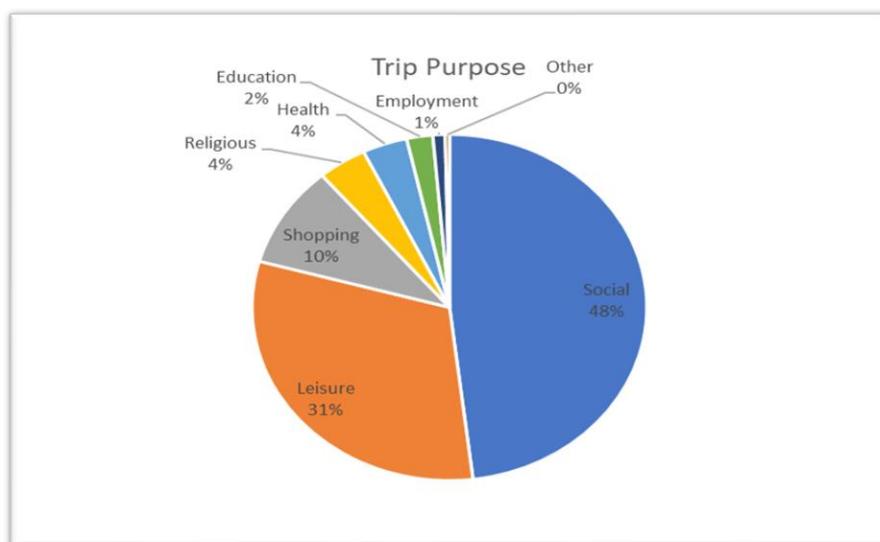


### 3 Performance

- 3.1 As of 30 September 2022, there were 6,757 registered Ring & Ride users of which 694 were wheelchair users. This compares to a total of 7,118 registered users and 673 wheelchair users when the previous Ring and Ride report was taken to this Sub Committee in March 2022. A number of inactive users were removed in August to comply with data protection policies. The number of active registered users as of September 2022 (members who have used the service within the previous twelve months) has risen to 4,088 compared to 3,436 in March 2022.
- 3.2 During the six-month period from April 2022 to September 2022 there were 145,463 trip requests and 112,285 trips performed. Trips were up by 12.6% on the previous six-month period and up 64.4% on the same period during 2021/2022. Compared to the same period in April 2019- September 2019 (pre-Covid) trips were down by 46.1%.
- 3.3 Cancellation rates between April 2022 - September 2022 were around 21% compared to 23% as previously reported in March 2022 and 19.4% in pre-Covid times (19.4% in financial year 2019/2020). Cancellation rates increased during Covid due to changes in government guidelines and plans changing due to Covid related reasons throughout this period but are now approaching their former levels.

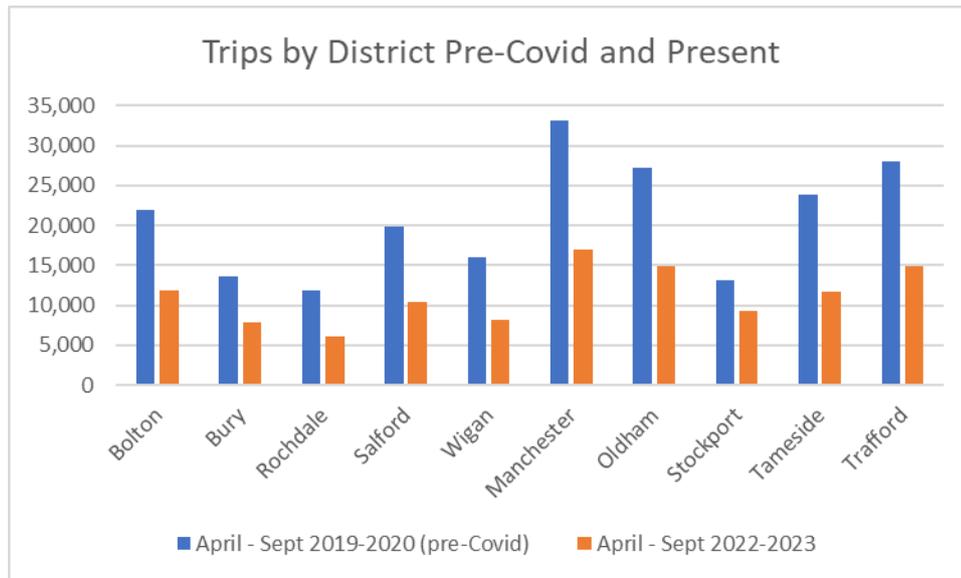
- 3.4 Between April 2022 and September 2022, the average refusal rate was 5.16%. Refusal rates have increased this year as requests have increased and the service has been affected by vehicle supply chain issues and driver shortages.
- 3.5 Between April 2022 and September 2022 wheelchair users accounted for 8,161 trips which represents 7.5% of all trips. This percentage has remained the same since this was last reported in March 2022.
- 3.6 From April 2022 to September 2022, Social and Leisure journeys were the main reasons provided for travel (48% and 31% respectively), followed by Shopping (9.5%), Religious (4%), Health (3%), Education (2%) and Employment (1%). Social and Leisure journeys accounted for 79% of all trips which was an increase compared to 54% during the period August 2020 to January 2021 as last reported to this Committee. This increase reflects the return of regular groups which are largely of a social nature and the prior focus on essential journeys during the pandemic. It should be noted that trips to day care centres are usually recorded under 'Social'.
- 3.7 See figure 2 below for a breakdown of trips by journey purpose.

Fig. 2. Trips by Purpose, April to September 2022.



- 3.8 From April 2022 to September 2022 most completed passenger journeys were completed in Manchester and Oldham (16,969 and 14,915 respectively). Most districts have recovered to a similar level of pre-Covid patronage compared to the same time period in 2019/20 (between 50% to 57%), with the exception of Stockport which has recovered to 71%. See figure 3 below.

Fig 3. Pre- and post-Covid comparison of journeys by district.



## 4 Engagement and Supply Issues

- 4.1 In June TfGM issued a survey document to gather feedback on the Ring and Ride service. 46 organisations responded involving a range of stakeholders. The key themes which came out of the report were: lack of vehicle/time availability, the perception that more marketing is required, some powered wheelchair users being unable to access the service and lower/free fares for carers. The full report will be issued to those involved.
- 4.2 GMATL and TfGM have met separately with several organisations to discuss service issues with Ring and Ride. Anecdotally, as well as feedback from the survey document suggests that although the number of requests haven't recovered to their former levels, people are now struggling to get access bookings they need. Some people have been unable to get the trips they need and so have stopped trying which will not be reflected in the figures. We have taken this evidence into account when considering the demand of the service as reported below.

## 5 Impact of Driver Shortages and Vehicle Supply Issues

- 5.1 It was reported to this Committee in March 2022 that GMATL would be able to delivery up to 65% of pre-Covid patronage on a fleet of 40 vehicles (225,000 trips). However, driver shortages and supply issues, a common issue across the wider industry in recent months, have caused some disruption to the proposed target shift output. Some vehicles have been off the road for weeks at a time with supply chain issues for spare parts. This has affected the shift output target and led to an increase of refusals (7%

in June). Two additional vehicles were added in July to provide additional resilience and an additional three vehicles were approved by GMATL's Board in November to be introduced as soon as possible. This is partly to address the above issues and partly in anticipation of an increase in demand. Officers anticipate an increase in demand when the ramped vehicles are introduced as more powered wheelchair users may be travelling. Feedback from organisations also indicates that more resources are required for regular and casual users.

- 5.2 GMATL are continuing to recruit drivers and are in discussions with unions over pay. GMATL are also engaging with the Department for Transport on their recent call for evidence on the subject of minibus licencing. A D1 licence is currently required for those who passed their test after 1997 but older drivers have grandfather rights (42 and older) and can drive a minibus without the additional licence. The proportion of the workforce with this this automatic entitlement is decreasing which is impacting the ability to recruit for GMATL and other organisations. The average GMATL driver age is 58. The training for the D1 is expensive with no guarantee that people will stay once completed.

## **6 Current Vehicle Situation**

- 6.1 GMATL are currently operating with 42 vehicles. 28 of these vehicles are owned by GMATL and will become life-expired between 2025 and 2028. In July 2018, GMTL agreed to TfGM's recommendation that replacement vehicles should be leased rather than bought in the short term. This would allow zero emission technology to mature and allow more flexibility while the operating model of the service was reviewed, through the Accessible Transport review. The remaining 14 vehicles are currently leased and are being extended on a 12-month basis as required, whilst a longer-term fleet replacement strategy, which seeks to realise the zero emission ambitions, is developed.
- 6.2 Initial findings and discussions with similar services in other areas demonstrate that more appropriately sized electric minibuses have become available and are in use since this was last considered. Officers will be compiling information and visiting suppliers in the coming months and will put forward a proposal to begin the replacement of the Ring and Ride fleet.
- 6.3 All the vehicles currently in service have step access and a passenger tail lift at the back for passengers using wheelchairs and those unable to access the steps. In recent

years, there have been an increasing number of newer models of powered wheelchair which, for safety reasons relating to not being able to apply the brakes whilst on the passenger tail lift, have been deemed as unsafe for travel on the current Ring and Ride service. GMATL took this decision after much consultation with MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme), health partners and wheelchair manufacturers.

- 6.4 GMATL currently have approximately 50 passengers who use wheelchairs who are currently unable to travel due to the manual brake issue. To mitigate this problem, GMATL have ordered five low floor vehicles with rear-access ramps on a two-year lease and will replace some owned vehicles which have life-expired. The vehicles were due to be delivered in December however the manufacturer has advised this will now be April 2022 due to supply chain issues. GMATL are currently investigating other options to bridge the gap in order to bring this option in sooner. Once delivered, GMATL will contact all passengers who have been affected by this issue to see if they would like to travel. They will also analyse the impact on boarding times for ambulatory and wheelchair passengers as well as carrying out customer satisfaction surveys.

## **7 Ring and Ride and the TfGM Customer Hub**

- 7.1 In 2018 the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that an Accessible Transport Review take place to consider the Ring and Ride service. The first stage proposed as part of this review, and subsequently delayed by Covid-19, was to migrate the Ring and Ride contact centre to TfGM. This enables TfGM to become a centralised point of contact for Ring and Ride and Local Link bookings and enquiries, as well as all the other channels that TfGM provides. GMATL staff affected by TUPE have been consulted. The contractual arrangements around the technology are being finalised and once agreed, a date will be set and communicated to those involved. Customers will be informed of any minor disruption to the booking centre while the transfer takes place. This will be within the next three months. Once the staff and database have been transferred, there will be a five to six month period of aligning processes with the TfGM contact centre and cross-skilling staff to permit the full integration with TfGM's contact centre.

## **8 Next Steps**

- 8.1 TfGM and GMATL will continue to explore the electric minibus market and formulate a proposal for the replacement of the vehicles due to age out between 2025 and 2028.

- 8.2 GMATL will progress the trial of ramped vehicles to enable more electric wheelchair users to access the service and proactively contact the users who are currently unable to travel using their powered wheelchair.
- 8.3 TfGM and GMATL will complete the migration of the Ring and Ride contact centre to TfGM.
- 8.4 GMATL will continue to introduce more resources using their reserves over the coming months to establish the appropriate resourcing levels post-pandemic and inform next year's budget requirement.
- 8.5 GMATL and TfGM will review the findings from the consultation document including a review of the marketing approach.