

**GREATER MANCHESTER TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE**

Date: 11 September 2020
Subject: Impact to Ring & Ride as a result of Covid-19
Report of: Alison Chew, Interim Head of Bus Services, TfGM

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with an update on the operation of the Ring and Ride service.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are asked to:

1. Note the impact of Covid-19 on the Ring and Ride service.

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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 – see paragraph 2 and Part B report

Financial Consequences – Capital – n/a

Number of attachments included in the report: main report only

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

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?		No
GM Transport Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
n/a	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.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Ring and Ride service is operated by Greater Manchester Accessible Transport Ltd. (GMATL) and grant funded by TfGM.

- 2.2 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 in order to ensure the service's social inclusion objectives.

- 2.3 In April 2016, GMATL introduced the following eligibility criteria on Ring and Ride. Passengers can now 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 are a result of losing a leg (BLESMA); 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.**

- 2.4 There are at present 13,384 registered members of Ring and Ride of which 6,288 had actively used the service in the 2019/2020 financial year (April 19– March 20). Over the same 12-month period 498,147 journeys were requested with 390,686 being completed, therefore the refusal rate was 5.82%, a slight rise on the previous financial year when it was 5.38%.

- 2.5 In the same period the number of cancellations across the service was 91,096 (19.42%), a rise on the rate the previous year (18.81%). However, this increase is due to the extremely high cancellation rate experienced in March 2020, due to Covid-19.

3. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE RING AND RIDE SERVICE

- 3.1 From mid-March 2020, Ring and Ride began to experience higher rates of cancellations attributable to passenger concerns around Covid-19. The service experienced a steep drop in demand and 90-95% of all trips were cancelled in the week preceding 23 March 2020. Following the government announcement relating to 2 metre social distancing and safety concerns for drivers and passengers, GMATL suspended the service from 24 March 2020. Drivers and contact centre agents were placed on furlough. Similar services across the UK were also suspended or dramatically reduced with resources directed elsewhere.
- 3.2 During April, Manchester City Council had a short notice requirement to move several hundred homeless people from different areas of Greater Manchester to hotel accommodation in various boroughs. GMATL used their taxi contract provision to provide some journeys to assist with this.
- 3.3 During April and May, GMATL worked with TfGM to understand how best to reintroduce a service for essential journeys only, and a limited service returned on 18 May 2020. This service operated reduced hours Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm, and was intended to cater for essential journeys only, including hospital trips. Journeys were only provided to those not requiring physical assistance to board vehicles due to safety concerns around the 2 metre social distancing requirement. A maximum of 2 passengers were permitted on board at any one time.
- 3.4 This reintroduction involved using 20 vehicles. GMATL staff worked to ensure safe working practices ahead of the drivers return to depots. Driving staff were issued with PPE, enhanced cleaning regimes were put in place and customers required to wear face coverings on board vehicles unless exempted as per government guidelines. A limited number of contact centre agents and staff returned to the Manchester One office following a cleaning regime and social distancing being put in place.
- 3.5 Initial usage of the service was very low and patronage in the first week of the service was around 2% of pre-Covid levels. By the end of July this had risen to over 11%. Since May, the Ring and Ride service has also offered an overspill capability to help deal with demand on the Logistics North Local Link service in the afternoon peak to assist with social distancing and capacity issues.
- 3.6 From 3 August, normal operating hours resumed (Monday to Sunday, 8am to 11pm), involving increasing the fleet size to 31. At the time of writing patronage levels are now at around 16% of pre-Covid levels, with over 1,000 trips each week and slowly rising. The decision was taken to reintroduce normal operating hours following government guidance that 'all staff and contractors have duties to ensure that those with protected characteristics, for example disabled people, the elderly and pregnant women, are able to access services'.
- 3.7 In addition, up to six people are now permitted to travel at the same time following the 'one metre plus' guidance issued by the Government, however in practice most journeys

still only have one or two passengers travelling at any one time as most regular bookings have not resumed.

- 3.8 It has also been considered how best to reintroduce assisted travel for those customers travelling in wheelchairs and requiring physical assistance to board the bus. It was determined that assisted travel could resume with drivers allocated with visors for these journeys in addition to existing PPE. In addition, GMATL has procured manual wheelchairs for ambulatory passengers who require physical assistance getting to the vehicle and boarding. This is so that passengers can use the wheelchair to board the vehicle, then transfer to a seat in order to reduce contact between drivers and passengers.
- 3.9 The arrangement outlined in the above paragraph, which ensures that the full door to door service is provided, are due to commence from 1 September 2020. All passengers were informed of this in writing during week commencing 17 August to enable them to request trips from 24 August for the week commencing 1 September. GMATL are now seeing an increase in requests from registered customers who had previously been unable to travel.

4. PROJECTED DEMAND

- 4.1 Although services are slowly resuming, it is uncertain when patronage will resume to normal levels. GMATL have engaged with their regular group booking organisers but most do not know when their usual activities will resume or give Christmas as a possible resumption date. With current levels of demand at only 16% and only 31 vehicles out of 40 being deployed, it is envisaged unlikely that normal demand levels will return in the short-term, and there are currently still a number of driving and contact centre staff on furlough.

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Officers will continue to monitor demand and additional capacity on the Ring and Ride service will be re-introduced as required.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Recommendations are set out at the front of this report.

Alison Chew
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