

Date: 2 September 2020

Subject: Funding for Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport

Report of: Eamonn Boylan, Chief Executive Officer, GMCA & TfGM

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an update on the proposed approach for the allocation of the £2,249,016 grant received from the Department for Education for Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note and endorse the approach being adopted to allocate the £2,249,016 grant received by Greater Manchester from the Department for Education for 'Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport'.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

Alison Chew Interim Head of Bus Services 0161 244 1726
alison.chew@tfgm.com

Equalities Implications: n/a at this time

Climate Change Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures – n/a

Risk Management: n/a

Legal Considerations: Internal legal advice has been sought to ensure the allocation of funding is state aid compliant

Financial Consequences – Revenue: This report considers the allocation of a grant received by Greater Manchester from the DfE, therefore there are no direct revenue implications for GM

Financial Consequences – Capital: n/a

Number of attachments to the report: n/a

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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?		n/a
GM Transport Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
n/a	n/a	

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The implications of Covid-19 mean that school transport as it existed before lockdown cannot be replaced in the same form. Social distancing on public transport, with a significant reduction in available capacity, means there is an inability to fulfil current demand requirements.
- 1.2 On 2 July, DfE released guidance on the full reopening of schools from September. The guidance sets out a new framework for supporting transport to and from schools from the autumn term and makes a distinction between dedicated school transport and wider public transport.
- 1.3 Dedicated school transport refers to services that are used only to carry pupils to school. This includes statutory home to school transport but may also include some existing or new commercial travel routes, where they carry school pupils only. Wider public transport services refers to routes which are also used by the general public.
- 1.4 As pupils on dedicated school services do not mix with the general public, the standard advice for passengers on public transport to adopt a social distance of two metres from people outside their household or support bubble, or a 'one metre plus' approach where this is not possible, will not apply from the autumn term on dedicated transport.
- 1.5 In many areas, pupils normally make extensive use of the wider public transport system, particularly public buses. Government expects that public transport capacity will continue to be constrained in the autumn term. The guidance states that its use by pupils, particularly in peak times, should be kept to an absolute minimum.

2 FUNDING FOR ADDITIONAL DEDICATED HOME TO SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TRANSPORT

- 2.1 On 8 August, Government announced a £40m funding package for dedicated school and college transport. The purpose of the funding is to enable the provision of additional transport capacity for journeys to school and college and has been allocated dependent on the number of students in each local area and how far they have to travel.
- 2.2 DfE guidance states that funding has been provided because, although there needs to be a major focus on managing demand for peak time transport, there is also a need to boost transport capacity for dedicated school and college services. Funding is intended to be spent on ensuring there is sufficient transport capacity so children and young people can get to school and college safely and on time.
- 2.3 The funding is being provided to support the costs of additional transport provision for the first Autumn half term only with the position beyond then being kept under review, based on the social distancing guidance in operation for public transport, as well as on information on demand for additional transport capacity at a local level.

- 2.4 Local areas have the flexibility to decide where the funding is spent, provided it supports transport to school or college for pupils of compulsory school age and students in 16-19 education.
- 2.5 DfE wrote to Local Transport Authorities on 11 August to outline the funding allocations and conditions. Greater Manchester has been allocated £2,249,016. Any unused funding will be returned and DfT will be requesting further information from LTAs in relation to home to school transport, including spend, contracts, capacity and fare revenues.
- 2.6 The short-term nature of the funding means that the grant is not intended to pay for addressing long-standing requests for bespoke school services.
- 2.7 This report sets out the proposed approach for the allocation of the £2,249,016 grant received from the DfE.

3 ALLOCATION OF FUNDING

- 3.1 The funding will be largely used in Greater Manchester to provide additional capacity on the commercially operated bus network, where social distancing restrictions still apply. This is for the following reasons:
- Pre-Covid analysis shows around 90% of school children in Greater Manchester who use the bus travel on the commercial bus network; and
 - Social distancing restrictions mean commercial bus services currently have their capacities reduced to around 35% of pre-Covid levels.
- 3.2 The additional capacity will be delivered through the funding of duplicate trips on the commercial bus network operating as dedicated school services, which are not subject to social distancing restrictions.
- 3.3 A proportion of the funding may be reserved to provide additional SEND capacity, depending on need.

4 PRIORITISATION OF SERVICES

- 4.1 Legal advice has stated that a consistent, data driven approach should be adopted to select which services receive funding to protect against State Aid issues. Subsequently, potential hotspots across the network have been identified and pre-Covid level patronage data for services operating through these hotspots has been analysed.
- 4.2 A long list of potential duplicate trips has been identified using the following criteria
- More than 10 children or Our Pass holders carried;
 - Patronage exceeds 150% of available capacity; and

- Service does not operate to a high frequency (the expectation is that commercial bus operators will address this issue themselves e.g. by operating specific existing trips as dedicated school services).

4.3 Operators have been approached to establish how they can deliver the additional services, which is likely to be a mix of different mechanisms:

- The operator provides the duplicate trips themselves;
- The operator sources the duplicate trips through their commercial group provision;
- TfGM provide a vehicle, but the operator takes responsibility for the operation of the service; or
- TfGM procure the duplicate trip.

4.4 Following returns from operators, confirming how they can deliver the additional services and the cost, TfGM will confirm the initial list of duplicate services.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 The additional trips will commence on Monday 7th September. A robust monitoring system will be put in place to ensure the additional services are located correctly.

5.2 It is probable that some areas will not see the predicted demand for services, or that there may be new areas of high demand. To mitigate against this risk the contracts for the additional resource will be flexible, so that the resource can be moved if required.

5.3 During the first week of September, when schools are not expected the return full time, operators will be expected to reserve spare school resource, so it can be deployed if needed.

5.4 Some floating resource will also be secured, which can be deployed immediately where problems are identified. It is expected that this will reduce over time.

6 COMMS AND CUSTOMER INFORMATION

6.1 The details of the additional services will be communicated via the following channels:

- Directly to schools – who will be encouraged to communicate with parents and students.
- On www.tfgm.com – where all relevant information will be displayed.
- On social media – where targeted messages will be considered.
- Via bus drivers – inevitably there will be questions for drivers on both affected and other routes.

6.2 It is not intended to provide any information at stops due to the timing available and the lack of flexibility this will provide.

6.3 The above will be in addition to on-going travel advice which is encouraging pupils to consider active travel options for their journeys from September, in line with government messaging.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Recommendations are set out at the front of this report.

Eamonn Boylan

Chief Executive, TfGM