

Report 08.200
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Committee Transport & Access Committee
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Introduction to the Total Mobility Scheme

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about the work of the Total Mobility scheme (the Scheme), provide an outline of Council's current commitment, and provide an update on the recent Land Transport NZ (LTNZ) and Ministry of Transport (MoT) review of the Scheme.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

At the Committee meeting on 26 March 2008 the Committee members requested that a report on Total Mobility be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

4. Comment

4.2 Establishment

The Total Mobility Scheme was established in the 1980's after work was commissioned on transport problems for the disabled. This work was supported by funds raised in a Telethon in the Year of the Disabled. It was originally a "Number 8 Wire" solution to the transport problems being experienced by the disabled community.

Initially managed by the Disabled Person Assembly, the Scheme was eventually accepted as a regional council transport responsibility and now provides for the growing demands of the disabled and aging population with mobility problems.

The Scheme, which operates nationally, essentially involves regional councils subsidising taxi travel (half-price fares capped at a maximum \$40 contribution) for people with disabilities who are not able to use public transport (see next section for eligibility criteria).

A key aspect of the Scheme is that it be available to customers at the same times as public transport is operated. This means approximately 6am till midnight, 7 days per week. It is available outside of those hours but on a slightly more limited basis.

4.3 Eligibility Criteria

People eligible for the Scheme are those who have a disability or impairment which prevents them from travelling on public transport. Eligibility is established through an assessment by an appropriately qualified person from one of the 41 disability support agencies in the region (for example, Foundation of the Blind or the Multiple Sclerosis Society etc); or Greater Wellington Regional Council's (Greater Wellington) contracted assessor - Presbyterian Home Support. Membership of the Scheme is subsequently approved or declined by Greater Wellington.

An eligible person must have a disability or impairment that prevents them from undertaking one or more of the following five components of a journey unaccompanied, on a bus, train or ferry in a safe and dignified manner:

- Getting to the place from where the public transport departs
- Getting on to the public transport
- Riding securely
- Getting off the public transport
- Getting to the destination

4.4 Operation of the Scheme in the greater Wellington region

There are approximately 8,500 registered users of the Scheme in the greater Wellington region. Persons with mobility issues are generally referred to the Scheme via support agencies or through direct enquiries to Greater Wellington.

Once assessed and registered with the Scheme, members are issued with taxi vouchers. The user pays half the metre fare and presents the completed voucher to the driver for the other half. The taxi companies then present the vouchers to Greater Wellington in order so that they can claim back the remaining fare.

20 taxi companies, throughout the region, provide service to the Scheme, and carry approximately 274,000 customers per year.

There are 32 wheelchair hoist vans in the region, operated by 5 taxi companies.

The budget for the Scheme for 2007/08 is \$2.16million, which includes administration, subsidised fares, and new/replacement van hoists.

5. Land Transport NZ / Ministry of Transport Review

5.1 Purpose of the review

During 2005 the MoT and LTNZ undertook a joint review of the Scheme. The aim of the review was to improve the Scheme's *adequacy, consistency, portability and coverage*. The Government also undertook to increase the amount of funding available to the Scheme. In August 2005 a three phase series of changes for the Scheme was announced by the MoT. Councils that implement the specific changes receive an increased funding rate from LTNZ.

Phase One

The Phase One Scheme changes, outlined in a series of eleven improvements, were released in February 2005 (refer to **Attachment 1** for details). Greater Wellington signed up to Phase One as the Scheme in the Wellington region already largely complied with the requirements of this Phase. This resulted in Greater Wellington being eligible for additional funding through an increased financial assistance rate (FAR) (increasing from 40% to 50%) provided expenditure exceeded its 2005/06 budget for the Scheme.

Phase Two

Phase Two Scheme changes, outlined in a series of a further eleven improvements, were released in 27 March 2008, (refer **Attachment 2** for details).

Although Phase Two potentially has a policy and financial impact for Greater Wellington, agreement to implement this phase will enable Greater Wellington to receive additional funding (increasing from 50% to 60% FAR) as elements of Phase Two are put into place.

Key Elements of Phase Two are:

- Entering into contracts with assessment agencies

Currently Greater Wellington has no formal arrangements with the 41 agencies that undertake the eligibility assessments. While such agreements are considered to be appropriate, entering into agreements is potentially significant in terms of administration (at least initially).

- Entering into contracts with Scheme transport operators e.g. taxi operators. These contracts would be designed to ensure quality and consistency of service

Currently we have no formal arrangements with the service providers. While such agreements are considered to be a necessary improvement to ensure a quality service is provided to Scheme users, administration and monitoring of these contracts will impact on current resource levels.

- Streamlining and improving administration systems, data collection, monitoring and evaluations

Currently the Scheme is delivered through paper vouchers. The introduction of an electronic voucher or smartcard system has the potential to significantly improve the administration of the Scheme. The introduction of such a system will also aid in the expansion of the Scheme as proposed by MoT and aid additional reporting requirements for Land Transport NZ and ourselves. The current labour intensive paper based system is likely to be inadequate.

Officers are currently investigating the introduction of an electronic solution, likely to involve the use of an individualised photographic swipe card as a replacement for the paper vouchers. The Phase Two improvements are also being investigated with a view to their implementation.

5.2 Financial implications

Implementation and initial administration of contracts for assessment agencies and taxi transport has previously been estimated to cost between \$50,000 and \$70,000. This is a one-off cost but may subsequently be followed by additional administration, as yet to be established.

The introduction of personalised electronic cards as a replacement for the paper vouchers will have an initial cost (most of which is likely to be borne by the users). This cost is still to be determined. However it is estimated the benefits, including reductions in fraudulent use of the vouchers, will more than compensate for any costs.

Off-setting the costs of making the changes required for Phase Two is the increased Land Transport NZ funding for the scheme (which does not require any matching funding from Greater Wellington). This will enable the Scheme to be delivered to more people.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***
3. ***Notes that Greater Wellington is moving towards implementing the requirements of Phase Two of the Land Transport NZ/MoT review of the Total Mobility Scheme.***
4. ***Notes that Greater Wellington is moving to introduce electronic cards as a replacement for the paper vouchers currently used for the Scheme.***
5. ***Notes that the Committee will be kept informed of progress, particularly in relation to budget implications.***

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Attachment 1: Phase One requirements arising from the Total Mobility review

Attachment 2: Phase Two requirements arising from the Total Mobility review