

REPORT TO: PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE – 23 FEBRUARY 2004

REPORT ON: CHANGES TO TAXICARD SCHEME

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION

REPORT NO: 180-2004

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks Committee approval to change the current conditions of use for clients of the Taxicard Scheme.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee agree to;
- a the withdrawal of the "Taxigrant" scheme to operators of accessible vehicles and the transfer of the current budget allocation for this purpose to the client use budget head for "Taxicard";
 - b changes to the conditions of participation in the Taxicard scheme to permit clients up to 156 single journeys per annum (an additional potential 52 journeys).

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The additional finance required to pay for an additional 52 single journeys per year will in the most be offset from the transfer of monies from the Taxigrant scheme. However, given that this is a demand led budget any amount over that allocated by the existing budget plus the amended budget will have to be contained within the overall Planning & Transportation budget.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct implications in this regard.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Additional travel opportunities for people who find the current environment to have physical barriers are socially excluded from access to recreational, social, health and educational opportunities go some way towards a socially inclusive society.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Dundee City Council at its formation in 1996 took the decision to continue with the former Tayside Regional Council (TRC) Taxicard scheme. It was always recognised, however, that there was a shortage of wheelchair accessible vehicles and as a result these clients' travel opportunities were being restricted by the availability of suitable vehicles.
- 6.2 In the first instance during the TRC scheme the taxi trade claimed that the additional (capital) cost of an accessible vehicle was acting as a deterrent to providing this type of vehicle. Given the foregoing a decision was made by the Council (TRC) to provide

a one off capital payment of £2,000 to encourage operators by offsetting some of the additional capital required.

- 6.3 Within the first three years of this capital grant (under the then Tayside Regional Council scheme), it became clear that there were problems being caused by a minority of operators abusing the grant system. An example of this was a rather aged wheelchair accessible vehicle changing owners every year and attracting the £2,000 payment each time.
- 6.4 Discussions with the trade (just prior to the establishment of Dundee City Council) on this problem resulted in the grant payment changing from a one-off capital grant to a £1,500 per annum payment in recognition that "wheelchair operators" did incur a far higher rate of dead mileage than saloon car operators. An example of dead mileage is where an operator drops a client off at Ninewells Hospital and then has to travel due to lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles to Broughty Ferry to collect their next client. Whereas normal saloon type operators can send their nearest vehicle thus incurring minimal "dead mileage".
- 6.5 With the recent decision of the Licensing Committee to allow taxi operators licences to new applicants who will provide accessible vehicles the provision of and reasoning behind the taxi grant requires to be re-examined. Given that the current grant requires that an operator should undertake an average of circa 30 wheelchair trips per week and that the client base (within the Taxicard scheme) is circa 200 wheelchair users, the market place is relatively small and many operators will be unable to meet the trip requirement.

7 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 7.1 The Dundee Mobility and Access Partnership (DMAP) represents the interests of mobility impaired people along with the Voluntary Sector (either acting as advocates for or representing specific groups) and is chaired by a full time member of staff from the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland. At DMAP's most recent meeting the allocation of budgets for all components of the Taxicard Scheme was discussed.
- 7.2 It was generally felt that a continued "grant" to the taxi operators for providing a vehicle which incurred "dead" mileage would be better allocated to the client group to permit extra journeys over and above the current maximum of 104 per annum.
- 7.3 Officers of the Council proposed that, if this was the general consensus of the group that the budget should be targeted at the client rather than the operator (given the increased availability of accessible vehicles) and that a report should be prepared for consideration by the Council to increase the maximum number of journeys for wheelchair users from 104 per annum (an average of two per week) to 156 (an average of three per week).
- 7.4 DMAP agreed with this proposal and requested that the Council transfer the existing Taxigrant budget into the general Taxicard budget in order to facilitate this improved journey allowance. It was also noted by DMAP that, by adopting this change in policy, the same total amount of budget spend would still accrue to the taxi trade, but instead of being a direct payment to taxi operators the clients would receive the additional benefit which in turn would go back to the operators by way of payment to the operators for the additional journeys.

- 7.5 Officers of the Council did advise that, given that this is a demand led budget, predictions of estimated take up are difficult to project, in financial terms and therefore some caution should be exercised on the affordability of such an alteration to the scheme. DMAP, however, put the proposal to the vote and this came out as unanimously in favour of this option. This vote excluded the participation of Council employees.
- 7.6 Officers of the Council therefore undertook to take this proposal to the relevant Council Committees and report back to the next DMAP meeting (which is to be held before the end of March).

8 CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance), and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 None.

Mike Galloway
Director of Planning & Transportation

Iain Sherriff
Head of Transportation

IFS/EES

3 February 2004

Dundee City Council
Tayside House
Dundee