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Ms Caroline Pidgeon  
Deputy Chair of the Transport Committee  
London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
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12 August 2010

Dear Ms Pidgeon

## **Door-to-door transport services report**

Thank you for sending me a copy of the Committee's report on door-to-door transport services in London. I am responding to your letter to the Mayor and Peter Hendy dated 8 July. TfL has studied the Committee's recommendations and I set out below our response to these.

### **Recommendation 1 – Customer Charter**

*The Mayor should ask Transport for London (TfL) to alter the Dial-a-Ride Customer Charter, after consultation with Dial-a-Ride users, by the end of 2010. The Charter should be modified to include more precise statements about the number of journeys Dial-a-Ride users should normally expect to receive over a given period of time, based on passenger demand and the level of resources available.*

As you know, Dial-a-Ride is a multi-occupancy bus service where there is no limit to the number of journeys a member could make, although the current Customer Charter is clear that TfL may 'decline a request for a journey when we do not have the resources available to provide it'.

Dial-a-Ride's ability to schedule a journey is based on a number of complex factors, including the locations and times at which customers are requesting to travel and the locations and timings of the previous and next booked trips on the drivers' schedules. In considering trip requests we must balance the need to maximise the number of trips we operate against a desire to guarantee fair access to the Dial-a-Ride service for all members. The number of trips a member would receive over a given period of time is a direct result of TfL's best balancing of these issues. It would thus be very difficult to establish accurately a 'normal' number of trips passengers across London should expect to receive.



We do agree, however, that it would be useful to review the Dial-a-Ride Customer Charter, and we shall be doing so by the end of this year. We intend to directly involve members in the review as we have done previously. We will certainly consider what changes to the Charter might be necessary to best reflect the nature of the Dial-a-Ride service and what members should expect of it.

#### Recommendation 2 – Efficiency measures

*The Mayor should instruct TfL to take the following steps to improve the availability, conduct and efficiency of Dial-a-Ride by the end of 2010:*

- *Conduct and publish a review of the problem illustrated by the case described in Case Study 4 of this report where multiple Dial-a-Ride vehicles are used to transport passengers to one event, explaining why this occurs,*
- *Publish proposals to introduce satellite depots for Dial-a-Ride vehicles,*
- *Conduct and publish an assessment of the potential for coordination between Dial-a-Ride and community transport provision.*

The Dial-a-Ride booking, scheduling and dispatching software has been designed to support a complex interplay between a number of interacting factors, such as:

- individual vehicle and equipment requirements;
- the locations and times at which customers are requesting to travel; and
- the locations and timings of the previous and next booked trips on drivers' schedules and requirements of the drivers' working time.

Dial-a-Ride endeavours to satisfy every trip request it receives, which may sometimes require scheduling decisions that would appear impractical on an individual level but are the 'best fit' solution when looked at in the context of the service as a whole. The consequence of not following this 'best fit' practice would be Dial-a-Ride refusing many more journey trip requests than it does currently. Therefore, we have no plans to undertake the suggested review. I am confident, however, that Dial-a-Ride is fully aware of the need to utilise resources in the most efficient way to provide a balanced service. Significant improvements in productivity have been achieved since the resolution, in summer 2009, of the computer problems that had adversely affected the service.

TfL inherited a number of Dial-a-Ride 'satellite' depots with long-term leases when we adopted the service in 2002. We are reviewing our strategy for the use of these depots, taking into account pan-London patterns of demand. It was not until the Management Control Centre (MCC) was fully established and the computer problems resolved in 2009 that it was possible for TfL to establish the complete, pan-London picture of demand for the Dial-a-Ride service and effectively analyse the growing demand and its location.

Maintaining satellite depots for Dial-a-Ride increases the total cost of the operation, as it requires TfL to meet multiple bills for rent, rates and utilities, etc. It is a cost that we simply cannot afford in the current economic climate.



Dial-a-Ride has identified some areas of London where clear benefits could be achieved with small satellite depots. Negotiations to sublet facilities at two sites were well advanced when both current occupants withdrew due to changes in their own business needs. We are now actively seeking alternative cost effective sites where local planning issues do not restrict vehicle movement times and we will, of course, update the Committee on progress in due course.

Dial-a-Ride already works closely with nine community transport providers<sup>1</sup>, and refers trips to these operators where appropriate on a daily basis. London Councils is currently undertaking a review of the provision of door-to-door services across London, and it is expected this could highlight opportunities to further increase coordination between Dial-a-Ride and the community transport sector and other door to door providers in London.

#### *Recommendation 3 – Booking process*

*The Mayor should instruct TfL to: a) Adopt and publish, by the end of 2010, specific targets for the proportion of telephone calls to the Dial-a-Ride call centre answered first time and for the length of call waiting times. These targets should be included in the Dial-a-Ride Customer Charter so users know what standards they can expect; and b) Publish performance information, from the end of 2010 onwards, on the Dial-a-Ride booking process including the performance of the call centre in relation to the targets listed above and the online booking system including take-up of this service and the impact on the call centre.*

Dial-a-Ride's current telephone system does not allow us to track the number of calls to the MCC which are answered 'first time'. We can track the number of calls that are 'abandoned' by callers – this is currently around four per cent of the total number of calls we receive, many of which are abandoned within 15 seconds. We already publish a range of information on the performance of Dial-a-Ride, including the MCC, in the regular Local Area Panel meetings with members. We will review by the end of this year whether more of the information published at the local panels could usefully be placed on the TfL website.

#### *Recommendation 4 – Satisfaction surveys*

*The Mayor should instruct TfL to modify the way it surveys Dial-a-Ride users, with changes implemented from the start of 2011/12. TfL's approach should be adapted to ensure the views of all types of users are incorporated. Specifically, the coverage of the active user satisfaction survey should be extended to those*

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<sup>1</sup> These are Hackney Community Transport, Ealing Community Transport, Brent Community Transport, Barking & Dagenham Community Transport, LaSCoT (providing Community Transport in Lambeth & Southwark), Merton Community Transport, Wandsworth Community Transport, Bromley Community Transport and RAKAT (Richmond and Kingston Accessible Transport)



*who have booked a Dial-a-Ride journey in the past month, rather than only in the past week.*

The Committee will know that Dial-a-Ride already surveys the opinion of users who actively use the service as well as those who have not used the service in the last year. Our 'Non Active User Survey' seeks to understand the reasons why such members have not contacted the service to book a trip. This process ensures that the views of all members, whether they have used the service recently or not, are recorded.

TfL has recently retendered its contract for Customer Satisfaction Surveys (CSS) across the organisation, including Dial-a-Ride. As part of this process Dial-a-Ride has taken the opportunity to review its survey method and sample. From Quarter 3 2010/11, Dial-a-Ride's CSS will sample a wider group of DAR customers drawn from all members who have requested a journey during the quarter, rather than just those who have been successful in their booking request. Sampling will take place every month and three times during the quarter, to increase the pool of those members who have tried unsuccessfully to book a trip in the previous three months.

#### Recommendation 5 – Local Area Panels

*The Mayor should instruct TfL to conduct and publish a review of the impact of changes to Dial-a-Ride Local Area Panels. This should take place after the second round of meetings is conducted in November 2010 and be published by March 2011. The review should include information on the number of users attending and the results of attendee surveys. If the review reveals poor attendance or dissatisfaction among users, new measures to improve consultation should be identified.*

The 'Local Area Panels' were a new consultative forum created by TfL after it inherited the Dial-a-Ride service in order to open up regular opportunities for engagement with all Dial-a-Ride members. Over time, TfL has engaged with Panel members to determine how they would wish for the Panels to be organised. Members themselves have made clear that they would find the Panels more useful if they were to become regional forums rather than focussing on a small number of Boroughs. The objective of the regional forums is to give Panel members the opportunity to come together and reflect on how well Dial-a-Ride has responded to the issues they have raised and also to consult on issues and suggestions for enhancement of the service. By bringing the meetings together in this way, it has been possible for TfL to expand the range of groups it engages with.

Dial-a-Ride has been conscious of the need to reach a wider audience of members and potential members who have not participated in the local panels. The current arrangements have provided the opportunity for Dial-a-Ride's senior managers to meet with around 25 groups each quarter during the last year; details of these were provided as part of my letter in March 2010.

TfL is currently undertaking a survey to determine how successful the new regional forums have been in meeting Panel members' objectives. TfL will publish the results of this survey in time for the next round of regional forums, planned for October / November 2010 and will consider them in forming arrangements for 2011.

Recommendation 6 – the future for door to door transport

*The Mayor should instruct TfL to work with London Councils to publish a consultation document, before the end of 2010, which sets out proposals emerging from the review into the future of door-to-door transport services, including any proposals for users to be allocated control of their own budgets for door-to-door transport, so users have an opportunity to contribute their views at an early stage.*

TfL is closely involved in the London Councils' review of door-to-door transport services, and is a part of the project governance board. Whilst the timescales for completion of the review are principally a matter for London Councils, TfL would expect there to be a consultation so that users have an opportunity to contribute their views. TfL may also wish to consult directly with members of the Dial-a-Ride service if the review makes proposals to change the service.

I hope this is useful. If you have any questions on the above please let me know.

Yours sincerely



**David Brown**  
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