

5 April 2011



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Chair of the Transport Committee
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London Buses

Operations Directorate

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Dear Valerie,

Thank you for your letter of the 23rd March regarding the proposed changes to the Dial-a-Ride application process. I am grateful for this opportunity to clarify matters. There is no proposal to make any changes to the eligibility criteria for Dial-a-Ride, other than to make it easier to apply under automatic eligibility criteria (by extending the current category of 'registered blind' to also include 'partially sighted').

Around 65% of applicants to Dial a Ride qualify for membership under the automatic criteria and the introduction of third party assessments is a change to the way we administer the system for the minority of applicants who do not have automatic eligibility. Rather than checking these applications in house, which we do at present, we are proposing to use independent, qualified assessors to carry out this task. The consultation we have issued is about how this new application process will work in practice and what steps we can take to avoid people who genuinely need DAR being discouraged from applying as a result of a slightly more detailed application form.

Connected to this proposal, TfL have also issued an invitation to potential suppliers to express an interest in tendering for a wider contract to provide all TfL's existing mobility assessments, the majority of which are Taxicard assessments that TfL funds on behalf of some London boroughs. The start of this contract is not expected to be until late summer, as European tendering procedures have to be followed and the exact specification of the tender is dependent on the results of the DAR consultation currently under way.

The quoted value of this contract at £400,000 does not relate to the cost to DAR of introducing assessments, which we estimate to be around £30,000 per annum but reflects the maximum cost of all TfL mobility assessments, including Taxicard assessments in a number of London boroughs, over a five year period.

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MAYOR OF LONDON

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As the process of awarding this tender will be several months long, in the short term, we will use the existing TfL supplier of mobility assessments for Taxicard applicants in certain boroughs to introduce the new application process once the consultation has been completed in April. Our originally planned date for implementation was the 30th April, but we are happy to extend this date to allow respondents additional time to respond to the consultation document.

Turning now to the specific questions you raise in your letter:


1. The TfL Surface Board has reviewed the proposal and given their approval to commence consultation and develop supply options for the introduction of an independent TfL Mobility Assessment Process (MAP) through a tendering process to provide;
 - a. an assessment mechanism for applicants to TfL's Dial-a-Ride service (DAR) who do not meet automatic eligibility criteria, and to
 - b. Continue to provide an assessment mechanism for applicants to Taxicard in two London boroughs.
2. The proposal to introduce an eligibility assessment for DAR was first made in October 2001. In May 2002, the Audit Commission also recommended that an eligibility assessment be introduced for DAR membership applicants. The proposal has therefore been consistently debated in the public arena, at local mobility forums and at DAR Local Area Panels for many years. The two TfL Door to Door reviews of recent years widely consulted over the proposal to introduce assessments for DAR applicants who do not qualify under the automatic process. TfL's Independent Disability Advisory Group (IDAG) were consulted on the 9th February 2011 before the wider consultation to disability groups was issued on 23rd March 2011. IDAG gave their endorsement to the proposals and made a number of suggestions which have been incorporated into the proposal currently out to consultation.
3.
 - a) 'Virtual' assessments are more cost effective and less intrusive than face to face assessments;
 - b) The assessments are being outsourced as this is a more cost effective solution than directly employing suitable qualified assessors (occupational therapists) to carry out objective assessments.

It is not possible to measure the extent to which DaR services are currently being used by those who do not meet the eligibility criteria as we have no independent assessments at our disposal at present through which to make such measurements. The intention of these proposed changes is to ensure that TfL's funding of the Dial a Ride resources are used to the best effect.

4. The purpose of introducing eligibility assessments is to ensure the appropriate allocation of DaR resources to those who need a door to door service and not to significantly reduce the number of eligible applicants. It is estimated that between 400 – 500 DaR applicants per annum will be declined membership and offered travel mentoring by TfL to assist these applicants to use mainstream public transport services. This would have negligible impact on total DaR membership (currently circa 48,000). The approximate additional cost of the assessments will be circa £30,000 per annum and this has been incorporated into DaR's budget and will not impact on Dial a Ride service provision.

I hope this information has allayed your concerns. I am happy to arrange for a briefing on the proposals for yourself personally, or for the Transport Committee as a whole if you think this would be a useful way to better engage you in the consultation process.

Yours sincerely



Mike Weston
Operations Director