

Questions and Answers

*Plans for Restructuring the Rural
Transport Programme*





Questions And Answers On The Restructuring Of The Rural Transport Programme

Why restructure the Rural Transport Programme?

- ▶ To protect the provision of rural transport services into the future.
- ▶ To ensure that the provision of rural transport services is mainstreamed as a subsidised public transport service and better integrated with other services.
- ▶ To reduce the administrative overhead in the provision of those rural transport services in line with the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Rural Transport Programme (RTP) Report.
- ▶ To establish a structure to facilitate the national integration of rural transport.
- ▶ To develop further the professional management of transport services in support of the strong community participation structures.
- ▶ To develop a consistency in the management, the delivery and the quality of services.
- ▶ To put in place a formal structure that will address social exclusion and facilitate the consideration, measurement and monitoring of the social inclusion aspect of the programme in a holistic manner, through Local Authority structures.

How will the programme be restructured?

- ▶ The National Transport Authority will take a direct role in the procurement of rural transport services.
- ▶ 18 Transport Co-Ordination Units (Units) will be set up to replace the existing 35 RTP Groups.
- ▶ Applications from Fleet-Owning RTP Groups will be considered for Direct Award Contracts (i.e. contracts awarded by the Authority without competitive tendering) for the delivery of transport services.

What will be the functions of a Transport Co-ordination Unit?

- ▶ Support the relevant Local Authority in the preparation of its statutory transport plan.
- ▶ Through the Unit's voluntary board and through its extended links into the community, gather information from the community it serves regarding transport needs and social exclusion as a result of transport deficits.
- ▶ Identify those local transport needs to the NTA.
- ▶ Take bookings and handle dispatch for the relevant transport services.
- ▶ Check the performance of operators on behalf of the NTA.
- ▶ Report on monies collected by the contracted operators.
- ▶ Identify potential route changes to NTA in order to facilitate particular customers/groups.
- ▶ Suggest potential integrated services to NTA (e.g. dovetailing with HSE services).
- ▶ Support the voluntary car scheme.
- ▶ Advise the NTA on opportunities for Local Area Hackney licences.

How does a Transport Co-ordination Unit differ from a Rural Transport Group?

- ▶ A Unit will perform similar work to a Rural Transport Group. However, as well as managing services to those at risk of social exclusion, Transport Co-ordination Units have a broader role in that they will be expected over time to increase the supply of local and rural public transport to the wider community to reduce car dependency.

Why 18 Transport Co-Ordination Units?

- ▶ This represents the first stage of rationalisation. Further reduction may be required in order to achieve the recommendations in the Government Vfm Review. A

measured approach to achieving change increases the certainty of continuity of service provision during the transition.

- ▶ 18 Units provide the appropriate critical mass of population with the appropriate characteristics to sustain the running cost of the Unit.
- ▶ Better reflects practice in other countries where economies of scale can be achieved through specialised dispatch and resource allocation centres.

Why not have an exact match with Local Authority structures for the Transport Co-ordination Units?

- ▶ A 1:1 ratio of Units to Local Authorities would be sub-optimal from an efficiency point of view.
- ▶ The required level of administration overhead savings as set out in the VfM Report would not be achieved.

On what basis will the 18 Transport Co-ordination Unit areas be chosen?

- ▶ A maximum of one Unit per county will be set up.
- ▶ Where RTP Groups currently provide a multi-county service this will be retained if possible.
- ▶ Counties will be grouped together to ensure a minimum size of rural population to be served. Also natural topographic and transport movements will be considered.

What role will Local Authorities play in rural transport services?

- ▶ Local Authorities will carry out strategic transport needs assessment in their area including for those who are socially excluded and will develop annual transport plans to be delivered to the NTA.
- ▶ Where feasible, the Units will be housed in Local Authority offices and stronger ties will be developed at a local level between the managers of rural transport services and the Local Authority planners.

How will the Transport Co-ordination Units be formed?

- ▶ The Transport Co-Ordination Units will be formed from the existing RTP Groups.

What criteria will be used for selection of the RTP Groups to act as Transport Co-ordination Units?

- ▶ Detailed criteria are being developed.
- ▶ The criteria and process of selection will be open and transparent to all participants.

Will there be an open procurement process?

- ▶ The services that these bodies will perform do not require a procurement process. The Authority will be grant-aiding these bodies, subject to terms and conditions.

Can only existing RTP Groups apply?

- ▶ The selection of Transport Co-ordination Units will be restricted to existing RTP Groups.

What jobs will there be in the new Transport Co-ordination Units?

- ▶ The three primary roles to be provided in the Units are: Manager/Co-Ordinator, Administrator and Dispatcher.
- ▶ Depending on the size of the Unit, the Administrator may require financial expertise.
- ▶ The development of integrated services may lead to other employment opportunities.

Will RTP Group staff have to re-apply for these jobs in newly created Transport Co-ordination Units?

- ▶ The recruitment of the people to fill the roles in the Units will be a matter for the board of that company.

What will happen to RTP Groups that do not form part of a new Transport Co-ordination Unit?

- ▶ Those RTP Groups that are independent companies and that have no other community development role will have no involvement in the future Rural Transport Programme and will have to consider their future in that context.
- ▶ Some groups are fleet owning groups and may be successful in being given a Direct Award contract for the delivery of transport services.

Will there be redundancy payments for staff?

- ▶ Statutory redundancy payments will be made to all staff that are eligible. The responsibility for determining eligibility for redundancy will rest with the RTP companies themselves. Funding for redundancy payments will be provided from the RTP Groups' own resources or failing that from the Rural Transport Programme.

Will existing voluntary boards of the RTP Groups stay in place?

- ▶ Where the existing RTPs take on a role as a Transport Co-ordination Unit or if they are directly awarded a contract for the delivery of services, they will be required to have a structure which would include a board. As the majority of the existing RTP companies have a charitable status and Officers/Directors/Trustees of a charity are not permitted

to receive any remuneration from the charity, the board members would be volunteers. Further no new funding will be available to pay board members.

- ▶ The potential for amalgamation of groups creates opportunities to strengthen the new boards that emerge by widening the community pool. In addition boards will be encouraged to ensure that they reflect the full geographical region that the Unit covers.

What company/organisational structure will be eligible to apply for a Transport Co-ordination Unit?

- ▶ Any RTP Group that is a company that is registered with the Companies Registration Office and has charitable status will be eligible to apply to be a Unit.
- ▶ An RTP Group would have to have a valid tax clearance at the time of application.

What company/organisational structure will be eligible to apply for a Direct Award contract?

- ▶ The company must be a fleet owning company and have a Road Passenger Transport Operator (RPTOL) licence.
- ▶ It must operate a minimum of 50% of services using their own fleet.

Will existing companies need to cease operating and form a new company?

- ▶ This should not be necessary; in some cases of large multi-purpose organisations, specialist subsidiaries may need to be set up. The Memorandum and Articles of Association of the existing companies may have to change to reflect the changed role of the Transport Co-ordination Units and these amendments must be sent to the Companies Registration Office.

Will existing services continue?

- ▶ Services will continue. The continuing challenge will be to maintain the current level of services given the continuing reduction in subsidy due to the State's financial situation.

Will the door-to-door services continue?

- ▶ Yes, demand responsive and flexible services which operate door-to-door or close to a residence will continue to be provided as part of rural transport services.

Will passenger assistants continue to be provided and will drivers assist passengers with their shopping etc.?

- ▶ Yes, the provision of passenger assistance will remain a core element of demand responsive and flexible rural transport services.

- ▶ A core function of the Transport Co-ordination Unit will be to foster volunteerism in the provision of transport within their area. This includes building a panel of vetted participants in community car, car-sharing, volunteer driving and passenger assistance.

Will local knowledge and relationships built up over the past 10 years be lost?

- ▶ No, the local knowledge and the relationships will be retained. Many of the staff of the RTP Groups and the operators that provide the service will remain the same. The NTA will ensure that there is a full handover period to ensure that the local knowledge is not lost.

Will there still be voluntary and community involvement in the provision of rural transport services?

- ▶ Yes, the community will still be involved in the provision of rural transport services by volunteering as board members of the Units or as drivers or as passenger assistants. These volunteers will have to meet standards of professionalism in whatever role within the service they undertake to carry out.

Will new Key Performance Indicators be set up for the programme?

- ▶ Some new KPIs may be set up but the existing KPIs give a very good overview of the service and the people that are using it.

Who will monitor these indicators and how will they be monitored?

- ▶ The National Transport Authority will monitor these indicators through assessment of regular performance reports from Transport Co-ordination Units.

Will there be any way of monitoring social inclusion to ensure that the service is targeted at the most disadvantaged?

- ▶ Certain performance indicators can function as a measure of, or as a proxy for a measure of, the improvement in social inclusion for those members of the wider population most at risk of exclusion. These will be monitored with the same interest as more general transport performance indicators.
- ▶ The new structure is specifically designed to put in place a formal structure that will address social exclusion and facilitate the consideration, measurement and monitoring of the social inclusion aspect of the programme in a holistic manner, through Local Authority structures.

Will special transport services targeted at the socially excluded still continue?

- ▶ While the majority of rural transport services currently provided under the RTP will be public transport services that are open to all, there will remain some services that are provided to particular disadvantaged groups. These will continue subject to assessment of need and continued availability of funding.

Will passenger satisfaction be monitored?

- ▶ Yes, it will be an important function of the Transport Co-Ordination Units and those in receipt of a Direct Award Contract to monitor the level of passenger satisfaction with the services that are being provided.

How will the National Transport Authority ensure consistency of provision across the country?

- ▶ The National Transport Authority has a database of all open public transport services which it will ensure is kept up-to-date. The Authority will be able to use this data to identify areas or parts of the country that have no public transport services and prioritise provision based on the availability of funding for those services.

What length of contract will be issued to the new Transport Co-ordination Units?

- ▶ The initial contract will be for two years with an option to extend for a further two years.

Will there be improvements to the accessibility levels of the fleet?

- ▶ The National Transport Authority and the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport are committed under the "Access for All" prepared by the Department to continue to improve the accessibility of the fleet by setting requirements in the contracts for transport services.

What supports will be in place for the new groups/structures?

- ▶ The National Transport Authority will provide whatever support is required to ensure that the Transport Co-ordination Units are in a position to provide the services that they are funded to do.

When will the restructuring be complete?

- ▶ It is anticipated that the RTP programme will be restructured starting Autumn 2013 and concluded in early 2014, with the preparatory work on-going during the remainder of 2013.

What role will Local Authorities play in rural transport under the new structure?

- ▶ Where practical and possible, Local Authorities will house the Transport Co-ordination Units with the aim of reducing administration costs and forging the links in local service provision.
- ▶ Local Authorities will be involved in broad transport planning in their area and will work with the Units in developing annual plans.

Will we see any interruptions and / or changes to services during the transition of the Programme?

- ▶ Services will continue as normal during the transition period.

Will the current users of the Programme be assisted and advised of how to make contact with the Transport Co-ordination Units to book the services that they currently use or wish to use?

- ▶ Yes all necessary assistance will be provided to those current and potential future users to ensure the needs of those users are met over the transition and into the new structure.

How will the level of accessibility for wheelchair users be increased in the new structure?

- ▶ The level of wheelchair accessibility is currently very high in the rural transport programme. That level of accessibility will at least be maintained if not increased in the next procurement of rural transport services. The Authority is very dependent on the level of accessible transport that is available for procurement. However, the Authority will endeavour to ensure that services become increasingly more accessible through the procurement process.

Will the Transport Co-ordination Units have a role in community car schemes?

- ▶ Yes, the Units will play a co-ordinating role in community car schemes for rural transport services in their area.



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