

REGIONAL PASSENGER TRANSPORT

1. Background

The implementation of appropriate solutions for passenger transport to provide access for communities in regional South Australia continues to be raised as a priority issue by the Local Government Association, the Provincial Cities Association, health service agencies and members of the community.

The Department of Transport and Urban Planning (DTUP) is committed to addressing the transport and access needs of regional communities. Significant work has already been undertaken in relation to some integrated passenger transport services. It is acknowledged that because of the complexities and scale of the issues that progress has not been made quickly enough in many areas. This appears to be a result of the lack of funding for regional passenger transport services and the reluctance for State agencies to work co-operatively together.

On 1st October the Chief Executive of DTUP met with the Chief Executives of the Department of Health (DoH), the Department of Family and Communities (DFC) and the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) to discuss the draft strategy. At this meeting representatives of each of the Chief Executives endorsed the draft strategy.

At the Minister's Local Government Forum on 25 February 2004 it was resolved to develop a State Government Policy on 'Regional Passenger Transport Access for Regional South Australians' and for this to be developed in consultation with Local Government.

Following discussion with the LGA and consultation with other State Government agencies, in particular the DoH, DFC and DECS, DTUP has developed the attached strategy entitled "Principles for Addressing Access in Regional South Australia". This strategy was forwarded to the LGA on 7th October 2004, with comments being received on 22 November 2004. The LGA concerns in relation to this strategy are expressed in the response (attached).

If the attached strategy, developed independently of the LGA, is adopted in its current form many communities in regional South Australia could wait up to 8 years for the provision of passenger transport services, this is clearly not acceptable.

2. Proposed Actions

The attached regional strategy sets out proposed actions to implement and improve passenger transport services across regional SA.

Key elements of the draft strategy are:

- A partnership approach with Local Government, in which Local Government takes a strong community advocacy role.
- Whole of Government approach, with Government agencies funding services for their clientele through a common service contract.
- Representatives of Senior Management Group are assigned responsibility to ensure regional access is addressed in a timely manner.
- An eight-year timeframe for implementing basic access across regional South Australia.
- DTUP, working in partnership with other State Government agencies and Local Government, provides support for essential access at a fair cost to passengers throughout regional South Australia.
- DECS provides support through Integrated Passenger Network contracts for fare paying students who live within 5kms of their school of right.
- Replacement of the existing provincial bus services with Integrated Passenger Networks as the current contracts terminate.

The LGA has raised four key concerns in its response to the draft strategy.

1. There is no mechanism to underpin any of the arrangements suggested in the strategy, such as an agreement between State and Local Government;
2. Progress with implementation of Integrated Passenger Services should not be reliant on State Government agencies adopting a whole of government approach.
3. The eight-year time frame should be reduced to a maximum of four years, but ideally a shorter timeframe would be more acceptable.
4. The current conflict between the provincial cities and DTUP should be addressed as a priority.

3. Provincial Cities

Whilst the strategy calls for replacement of the existing provincial bus services with Integrated Passenger Networks as the current contracts terminate. The timeframes for these are very tight. Provincial Cities will be given priority for integrated services but this will be at the detriment of other services.

Provincial Cities provide significant funding for passenger transport services. However, some smaller rural councils also financially support, either in part or by full subsidy, passenger transport within their council areas.

The Provincial Cities Association has resolved at its meeting on 30 July 2004 to advise

“.....the Local Government Association and the Office of Public Transport that unless the current regional passenger subsidies are changed to reflect Metropolitan subsidy levels, (i.e. total losses met by the State Government); upon the expiration of our current contracts or at some time as set by individual Councils, the Provincial Cities will no longer be involved in the funding of regional public passenger transport services.”

In making the above decision, the Association noted decisions taken by various Constituent Members to withdraw from the current funding arrangements during the next 12 months, e.g. Mount Gambier 31st January 2005, Whyalla 30th April 2005 and Murray Bridge 30th June 2005. The Association also noted :-

- the City of Port Augusta has had no “bus service contract” for almost two (2) years;
- the impact on rating levels of Constituent Members because of the requirement to pay the “33% subsidy on loss of operation of the respective services”.

Equity in funding is not unique to the Provincial Cities and many other country councils do not receive financial assistance from the State Government.

4. Human Resources

In relation to human resources required to implement Integrated Passenger Networks, DTUP proposes engaging local coordinators and transport authorities to undertake Integrated Transport Studies in their region. Under this strategy CPN Coordinators and/or local regional transport authorities will take the lead role in undertaking community consultation and negotiating with potential partners at the local level. DTUP will allocate a project manager for each study who will provide ongoing advice and support regarding directions and priorities for each study, who will also be responsible for the service planning phase. DTUP recognises that additional training and resources may be required to assist each CPN Coordinator and/or local transport authority to successfully conduct integrated transport studies. In addition processes will be put in place to continually monitor the progress and direction of each study to ensure the principles of the integrated model are maintained and the objectives of each particular study are met. The impacts of these additional requirements on Local Government have not been assessed.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Forum:

- Notes the attached draft regional transport strategy and that DTUP will continue to work together with the LGA, the DoH, DFC and DECS to address key concerns raised and develop a jointly endorsed final strategy which is underpinned by an agreement between State and Local Government;
- Agrees to the development of an agreement between State and Local Government to provide a mechanism to under-pin arrangements detailed in the strategy and define the roles of both spheres of Government;
- Notes the response to the strategy from the LGA;
- Receives a presentation on this issues at the next forum meeting in March 2005, which will provide advice on the current status of

- An agreement between State and Local Government for regional passenger transport;
- The revised strategy;
- The progress of integrated services;
- The current situation with the Provincial Cities Association

Attachments:

*“Principles for Addressing Access in Regional South Australia”
Comments on draft strategy from LGA*