

Equality Impact Assessment Form

1. Persons responsible for this assessment:

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Directorate: Environment	Date of Assessment:19 th Jan 2011

2. Name of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function:

Concessionary Fares changing to statutory scheme hours – allowing free travel after 09:30hrs.

Is this new or an existing one? Existing (but new to GCC. This service was previously provided by the Districts)

See also the associated EIA into the proposed change of location for issuing concessionary bus passes.

3. Briefly describe its aims and objectives

Free travel on local bus services in England was introduced in 2008 with the aim of improving the quality of life for older and disabled people.

Providing concessionary fare passes is a statutory service that from 1st April 2011 passes from the Districts to the County Council. In addition to the statutory minimum service, councils may add discretionary elements at their own cost.

This EIA relates to a proposed GCC policy to provide free travel only during the statutory hours of 09:30 to 23:00hrs Mondays to Saturdays and all day Sundays and Bank Holidays. This means passengers must to pay to travel before 09:30hrs. We are doing this because it meets the statutory minimum requirement and because we will not receive funding from government to provide travel before this time, and expect to have to top up funds for the statutory scheme by at least £600k per annum. This approach is consistent with two key principles of Meeting the Challenge: providing the basics and living within our means.

Until now the districts have allowed travel before 09:30hrs as a discretionary enhancement. Passes are valid:

- from 9am in Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury; and
- all day in Cotswolds, Forest of Dean and Stroud

4. Who is intended to benefit from it and in what way?

Concessionary Fare bus passes are available to Gloucestershire residents of national retirement age and to disabled people.

By not allowing passes to be used before 09.30hrs, we anticipate that we will be able to reduce what we have to pay bus operators by approximately £300k per annum. This will enable us to fund the statutory scheme within our proposed budget and the money saved will be able to help us to continue supporting public transport routes which might otherwise be withdrawn or reduced - which would have a significant impact on the ability of residents of all age groups to access essential services such as health, education and employment.

5. What outcomes are expected?

If passes are not valid before 9.30, we expect that:

- Some journeys will be delayed until the next bus after 9.30hrs.
- Some passengers who currently travel free before 9.30 will still do so, but will pay
- Some journeys will be made by other modes of transport, e.g. by car, on foot.
- Some journeys will not happen at all.

Information from other authorities which have already made the change suggests that it is difficult to predict how much of each of these will happen.

6. Have you consulted on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function?

Yes, between mid November 2010 and mid January 2011, we held a joint consultation with district councils on proposals to change the time of travel and the application process.

Nine local drop in sessions were held across Gloucestershire. Publicity was through local media, posters in libraries, district offices, on buses and at bus stops. A telephone help line and web pages were established and a public survey undertaken - this could be returned by freepost or completed online.

As of 19th January 2011 just under 900 completed responses had been received, representing just under 1% of all bus pass holders.

Assessment of the first 570 returns indicated that 52% considered that the changes would have some impact on them and 34% considered that the changes would have a significant impact. 134 people said that the change in travel time to 09:30hrs would have a significant impact and the top five impacts given were:

1. difficult accessing health appointments (26%)
2. buses don't run till after 09:30hrs or are too infrequent (22%)
3. public transport journeys more difficult, e.g. connections (16%)
4. financial hardship (13%)
5. impact on access to educational courses, paid work and volunteering (8%)

It should be noted that 75% of respondents said they have access to other transport (a car in 94% of these cases).

Response to Consultations

To help mitigate the health concerns we have had discussions with CACD and identified a need to raise awareness of patient choice in the NHS. Most GP's offer appointment times and hospitals offer patients a 'Choose and Book' service to arrange convenient times.

Where travel before 9.30am is necessary, people on a low income may be eligible for reimbursement of their travel expenses. If someone receives a means tested benefit they will be able to claim the cost of fare to hospital (or any other NHS establishment) for themselves and a companion. If someone is not on means tested benefits but still on a low income, they may be eligible for partial help with fares.

With regard to concerns about buses not running before 09:30hrs, and infrequent services, it is clear that this is mostly a rural issue. Therefore we are considering a simple rule whereby we nominate specific services and communities where travel before 09:30hrs is allowed. For financial reasons such measures must be low or nil cost.

We are also in discussions with CACD and GAVCA about the potential impact on organisations which rely on volunteers, including hospitals and charities. Some respondents have raised concerns about the serious impact that restrictions could have on volunteers that use the bus. In most cases they can claim expenses however small organisations/ charities would be most affected. In these times of financial restraints this could create a barrier to volunteering. Issuing a special 'volunteer' bus pass is not advisable given the immediate priority to implement the card issuing service for the statutory scheme and concerns about the practicalities of verifying applications and withdrawing cards from people when they stop volunteering.

Similarly some concerns were expressed that attendance at educational courses could be affected unless course hours or permitted travel times are changed. A practical solution has not been identified but timetabling of courses could be addressed in the next academic year.

Although there is some concern about those aged over 60 paying to travel to work, it should be noted that government policy is to raise the age of entitlement to state pension age by 2018 so that the statutory bus pass is only available to disabled people of working age.

The possibility of allowing disabled people to use their passes before 9.30 has been considered, as this is important to many disabled people to allow them to get to courses. This has not been pursued due to the financial implications. We are considering suggesting to bus operators that they may wish to allow half price travel before 9.30 for people with disabled passes. There may be practical reasons why this is not feasible, and it will be a commercial decision for all commercially operated routes.

7. What evidence has been used for this assessment: eg Research, previous consultations, MAIDEN?

We have mapped all communities where the only bus service of the day departs before 09:30hrs. We are using feedback from the questionnaire and comments made at local drop in sessions.

8. Could a particular group be affected differently in either a negative or positive way?

Please evidence that you have used the Consultation toolkit and planning template <http://staffnet/index.cfm?articleid=5203>

	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Evidence
Age	X			Passes are available to people of retirement age. Reducing the hours they are valid will reduce when older people can travel free.
Disability	X			Passes are available to disabled people. Reducing the hours they are valid will reduce mean that disabled people will have to pay if they travel before 9.30. This is expected to have most impact on disabled people who work and who therefore need to travel before 9.30.
Gender	X			Men: until recently passes were available to anyone over 60; hence a number of men who are still working are currently in possession of one. These people may currently be using their pass to get free travel to work. This group will be negatively impacted in that they will not longer get free travel to work
Race including Gypsy & Traveller			X	
Religion or Belief			X	
Sexual Orientation			X	
Transgender			X	
Other groups: eg Rural Isolation, Long term unemployed, Deprivation Health Inequality	X			Rural: In areas where the only bus runs before 9.30, people will be being denied a free bus service and would have to pay to travel earlier. We are consulting on the impact of this and may consider allowing travel before 9.30 on certain bus routes

		X		Rural: By reducing the costs of concessionary fares, some rural bus routes that are currently subsidised may not have to be stopped.
Community Cohesion	Describe how the proposed activity, policy, strategy, service, procedure or function will contribute to Community Cohesion. You will need to consider; Is there equality between those who will and won't benefit from the proposal? Are there strong relationships between groups and communities in the area affected and will the proposed action promote positive relationships? Does the proposal bring groups / communities into increased contact with each other			Free bus travel contributes to community cohesion by facilitating travel by the elderly and disabled. It also increases the number of people travelling on bus routes, some of which might otherwise be under utilised and hence under threat. Restricting free bus travel to after 9.30 is not expected to prevent people from travelling directly since they can still travel before 9.30 if they pay, or wait until after 9.30. Hence it should not affect community cohesion. By slightly increasing the number of fare paying passengers it is possible that the policy will help to enable some services to remain open at a time when heavily subsidised services are under threat.
Community Cohesion (Contd)				

9. If you have identified a negative impact in question 8, what actions have you undertaken or do you plan to undertake to lessen or negate this impact?

See results of consultation for mitigations proposed.

Please indicate whether these actions will be carried forward into level 2 or level 3 business plans.

Action(s):	How will this action be Monitored/Evaluated	When will policy / service / strategy / procedure / function be reviewed?	Carried to Level 2?	Carried to Level 3?
Consultation into impact of 9.30 change	Report in January 2011	January 2011	N	N
Consider exceptions to the 09:30 rule	Identify routes and publicise these in March	September 2011	N	Y
Publicise NHS travel rules	Part of comms plan	March 2011	N	Y

Declaration

We are satisfied that an Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function * (delete those which do not apply) and where a negative impact has been identified, actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact.

We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the County Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment

Completed by: Pippa Dickinson

Date: 19/1/11

Role: Project Manager

Countersigned by Head of Service Philip Williams Date: 19/1/11

Date for Review: September 2011

Please forward an electronic copy to the Equalities Team by emailing

equalities@gloucestershire.gov.uk

The original signed hard copy and electronic copy should be kept with your team for audit purposes.