

DRAFT DAVENTRY RAPID DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT PILOT UNO BUS PROPOSAL

From : Tony Ciaburro

To : Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Chris, further to our recent meeting I am now able to provide you, as promised, the latest thinking regarding a potential pilot scheme for Demand Responsive Transport in the Daventry area along the lines we discussed. I must stress again that at this stage it is still under consideration and will not be debated until the next Uno Bus Board meeting scheduled for 12th September, 2018. However, if you could provide me with some feedback on the draft proposal then it will be fed into the Board discussion and help inform any decision made regarding the Business Case under preparation. I have also attached a schematic (not to scale) of the outline proposal which should help a little with any discussions you may have with the Parish Councils and others.

The good news is that having had a chance to analyse the extensive “big data” we hold, the initial indication is that the potential opportunities are very encouraging. So much so, we are now considering the possibility of providing an “integrated package” of bus services and not just the Demand Responsive initiative as originally thought. Obviously the details of the supporting information are commercially sensitive and, therefore, not included here. Having said that, hopefully the following description will help clarify what could be on offer to Daventry and how you and others can become more involved.

Integrated Package

As you know, we have an innovative new funding model based on the “Total Transport” concept under investigation that will form part of the eventual business case. Therefore, one of the key principles is that the proposed new Integrated Package of bus services is commercially viable and does not rely on bus subsidies from the public purse. With that in mind we have interlinked a pilot Demand Responsive Transport Zone with new scheduled corridors that serve Rugby, Long Buckby and Northampton train stations, Daventry, Rugby and Northampton town centres, together with a possible park and ride opportunity to DIRFT. Our initial evaluation tells us that this could well be a viable proposition with a positive return on investment within three years. Therefore, we are not seeking traditional bus subsidies for this package, but we are interested in a new form of partnership with key stakeholders who can be engaged and contribute in different ways compared to present, as outlined later on in this note.

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Rapid Demand Responsive Transport Zone

An initial pilot zone has been identified. This is centred on Muscott for design purposes and will pick up many rural parishes and villages within about a six mile radius. This is not a rigid radius but can be flexed where it makes sense to do so. The key features of the service within the pilot zone are as follows:-

- Customers will use a smart new technology app to book, pay and track the services operating within the zone. This can be done in advance or on the day.
- Around 6 state of the art 16 seater minibuses will operate within the Zone at any one time. The buses will all be digitally connected and routes will be automatically and dynamically optimised as bookings are made. The average occupancy is expected to be around 4 to 6 people.
- Each minibus will have USB sockets and 4G Wi-Fi. There will be DDA compliant wheelchair space.
- Guaranteed maximum waiting time for customers is expected to be about 20 minutes. This will be registered with the Traffic Commissioner and subject to regulation. However, the average wait is expected to be around 10 to 15 minutes.
- Maximum journey times are not expected to exceed around 30 minutes within the Zone.
- Customers will be given an estimated pick up time, a fixed charge for the journey and an estimated time of arrival at the destination. Acceptable potential variances in pick up and destination times will be registered with the Traffic commissioner and regulated.

How it works

- Anyone wishing to make a journey within the Zone will be able to book and pay for a seat on the minibus using an easy to use smart phone app. This can be done in advance or on the day. Once booked, seats, pick-up and drop off points are guaranteed. Customers can choose to accept the offer or not.
- Charges for the pilot service will be approximately £1 per mile, subject to Business Case, making the service cheaper than a taxi and a little more costly compared to a conventional bus service
- There is no fixed timetable or scheduled routes - just a Zone. The service will respond flexibly and dynamically to daily demand within the Zone using sophisticated algorithms that optimise routes to ensure everyone is picked up and dropped off at their designated times.

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- The service will be designed to run to nearby virtual “street corners” in order to guarantee waiting, arrival and journey times. However, it will also be possible for some customers to book door to door service for a premium charge.
- The bus service can be tracked by customers waiting to be picked up.
- The Demand Responsive Service will operate 6am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 8pm on Saturday.

Corridor Bus Services Connecting Daventry to the Rail network

This is work in progress. However, it is expected that there will be high frequency peak period services to Rugby and Northampton train stations and town centres, with a reduced service off peak. Fares will be set competitively and be cheaper than respective all day parking charges.

DIRFT Park and Ride

This is at an early stage of investigation. The idea would be to make use of the two park and ride car parks the University manage in the Sixfields area of Northampton if there is a demand. This could be tailored to meet the needs of identified organisations to provide a bespoke service.

The Ask of Potential Partners and Stakeholders

Although the intention is that the Integrated Package of Services is commercially viable, the payback will take three years. There will also be significant start-up costs, both capital and revenue. In order to ensure that there is a service from April 2019 then contributions from potential partners and stakeholders could help sway the decision of the Board on the eventual Business Case and implementation plan.

A contribution of £50k per annum from a collection of stakeholders for three years would make the difference. This is a fraction of the true cost of delivering the integrated package of bus service. This contribution could be shared between potential partners in proportions to be determined by them collectively. For example 10 Parishes or organisation can get together and contribute £5k each. The more an organisation pays then the higher level of service they would expect to receive.

When we met we mentioned that idea of dedicating an additional bus to an individual parish for one day a week to do as the Parish Council sees fit. If five Parishes got together

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then for £12.5k per annum each the bus could be rotated between parishes Monday to Friday. We can do things like this because we are a social enterprise and operate under slightly different rules compared to conventional bus operators and because of the proposed potential governance arrangements outlined below.

Given the innovative nature of this proposition and the potential new governance arrangements it is hoped that Government may wish to be formally engaged in the pilot process in order to test out whether or not similar approaches can be implemented elsewhere. The savings in publically funded bus subsidy and transport costs to our partners, including the University, Northamptonshire Health foundation Trust, St Andrew's Healthcare and the General Hospital in Northampton could be substantial. A contribution from Government of £300k spread over two years would certainly help with costs of this start up proposition.

New Governance Arrangements

At present, local communities have little or no say in bus service operations affecting their area. Private bus operators in effect tell the community the service it is going to receive, and local authorities offer limited involvement in the establishment of contracted subsidised bus services for socially necessary reasons, which are then fixed with little room for manoeuvre. This new arrangement should not be confused with either of these situations.

What is on offer for potential partners in return for their contributions is meaningful engagement in the design, operation and on-going governance of proposed services tailored to meet their specific needs and that of the local community. A new public/private sector Governance Board would be established to oversee the development and operation of bus services in their area and provide the interface with local communities and customers.

Next Steps

Your thoughts and views on the above would be appreciated. If these could be received by mid-August, at the latest, then they can feed into the Board report on the outline business case scheduled for the 12th September meeting.