

Notes of a Round Table Discussion about Community Transport in Prudhoe held on Wednesday 18th October , 7pm at Spetchells Centre, Front St., Prudhoe

Chair: George Hepburn, Chair, Prudhoe Community Partnership

Contributors: Jan Chisholm (N C C), Mark Ellis (GO NE), Robert Forsythe Huw Lewis (Nexus) Gerry Price, (Prudhoe Town Council), Vesta Moore (PCP), Joan Russell(PCP), Anne Dale (N C C), Eileen Burt (PCP), Maggie Phillips (PCP) Gordon Stewart (N C C), David Williams (TVCRP)

Apologies: Steve Beverley, Sarah Kennedy (Northern Railway), Liz Prudhoe (Adapt), Graham Robinson (Prudhoe Town Council), Fiona Forsythe (TVCRP) Marie Addison, Ken Stow (N C C)

Aim: To inform the Partnership about past experiences of community transport schemes and 'round the town' bus services and to discuss current needs, future options and possible ways forward.

1 Current needs as best known

A large number of comments around the table included:

- The impact of people moving into Cottier grange
- That Prudhoe is a hilly town and difficult to get about especially for the elderly who can feel cut off
- The need for a faster connection to Newcastle as the current journey time is off putting for commuters
- Forthcoming need for connections to shops planned for Low Prudhoe
- Town bus to bring people into town including Cottier Grange
- Transport for elderly and immobile (though previous services not well supported)
- Better connection with the train to get people to work
- Pressure on A695 and Blaydon roundabout with new housing developments
- More car parking needed at the station

2 Other points raised during this discussion:

- Section 106 money has been available following new housing developments but then runs out and there is no 'joined up' thinking between these initiatives
- The free ASDA bus appears very popular
- School buses could be used during the daytime
- 10b has to keep to time and is unable to wait for late trains
- 'Bus meets train' has proved very difficult to implement
- South Road /Moor Road and West Road junctions are very congested
- School gates are often 'air pollution' hot spots
- 111 service was successful for school runs
- Good Neighbour schemes could take people to bus stops

3 Ways of assessing need

Any assessment of need should take account of age/ mobility/ topography

GO –NE undertakes its own research but always takes a calculated risk introducing a new service that needs to pay its way within 1-2 years

Jan Chisholm offered to circulate a two page questionnaire that had been administered elsewhere in Northumberland online and in person with a 25% return rate.

4 Review of existing services

Discussion based on a traffic audit provided by Jan and attached to these notes.

Tyne Valley Ten: rebranded providing half hourly services to Newcastle and Hexham. Commended for reliability and efficiency.

Tynedale Links 686: round village service to Hexham picking up around Prudhoe. . Questions raised about how well used and how well known.

Local taxis: thought to be well used and reasonably priced for local journeys

Trains: Pacers to be phased out and new and bigger trains to be introduced including a Middlesbrough express.

Dial-a-ride: a membership scheme operated by Adapt but thought not to be well known or used.

Getabout scheme: telephone help line to advise on available services and provide transport for hospital visits etc

In other areas, there are examples of shared taxi services and volunteer driver schemes.

Those present also reported on the popularity of a free bus provided by ASDA from Prudhoe to their store at Metrocentre

5 Ways Forward

Practical steps that the Partnership could take were suggested:

- Publicising the 686, in conjunction with other parish councils to improve take up and make the service more viable. Mark offered to produce posters and Partnership will co ordinate a publicity push which would be monitored by GO – NE
- Making the dial-a-ride better known. Jan and George to discuss with ADAPT.
- Talking to taxi services about whether a shared taxi service might be tried. George offered to do so.

- Using bus stop screens to promote services. GO – NE hope to introduce them.
- Using Prudhoe to pilot bus by app schemes currently being trialed in Sittingbourne. Mark and Huw to follow progress.
- Follow up meeting with Northern Rail and TVCRP

6 Next steps

The Partnership offered to convene a further meeting in about six months time and following the publicity drive to assess its effect and consider any further actions.

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24 October

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Subsequent actions

1 Meeting with Liz Prudhoe, Adapt and Jan Chisholm. Agreed to produce leaflet publicising bus and community transport services in Prudhoe and to distribute at Aged Persons Treat and other places likely to be picked up by older people and less mobile people in order to increase take up of these services.

2 Sought meeting with Northern Rail and TVCRP but no response to date.

3 Sought meeting with Arran Cabs as they expressed interest in attending the meeting but no response to date.

4 Posters received from GO NE to publicise 686 Service and still to be distributed.

14 November