

GREATER MANCHESTER PASSENGER TRANSPORT AUTHORITY

REPORT FOR RESOLUTION

COMMITTEE: Authority

DATE: 23 November 2007

SUBJECT: Public Consultation and Engagement

REPORT OF: The Clerk to the Authority

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report the findings of the review of the Local Transport Public Forums. To set out the range of existing and proposed mechanisms to enable consultation and engagement on transport issues with the travelling public across Greater Manchester and to obtain approval for restructuring the Authority's public consultation forums in this context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the review of Local Transport Public Forums.
2. Note the wide range of existing mechanisms to facilitate consultation, engagement and dialogue on transport issues with Greater Manchester residents and welcome, in particular,
 - i) the successful trial of Operators Surgeries and Meet the Manager events held at bus, tram and rail stations and
 - ii) the increasing usage of the Authority's website
3. In the light of the above, to approve the replacement of LTPFs with more frequent and more conveniently located and timed Operators Surgeries across Greater Manchester, in tandem with a minimum of two Greater Manchester Public Forums/Seminars per year.
4. Support the further development of the GMPTA website to maximise its potential to communicate with, and receive the views of, the travelling public.
5. Ask officers to monitor the revised arrangements; to carry out a review of their effectiveness after a full year's operation and to submit a further report to the Authority following the first year review.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Local Transport Groups: March 2005 cycle, report to Authority, 15 April 2005
Local Transport Public Forums: March 2006 cycle and Review, report to TNC, 7 July 2006.

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1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Prior to the creation of the Passenger Transport Authorities (PTA), there were four geographical Advisory Committees in Greater Manchester whose role was to advise the Greater Manchester Council on public transport issues. In addition, the Greater Manchester Transportation Consultative Committee commented on transport issues generally, including public transport.
- 1.2 The Transport Act 1985 required the newly established Passenger Transport Authorities to consult other PTAs, county councils, district councils, transport operators and residents when formulating policies which may affect them. The Act was not prescriptive in terms of how this duty should be discharged but prompted a review of the existing consultation mechanisms in Greater Manchester that led to the abolition of the Advisory Committees and the creation of ten district-based consultation groups.
- 1.3 These meetings have been a regular feature of the operation of GMPTA since that time, during which their stated role has been to:
 - Consult with the communities in Greater Manchester on general public transport issues
 - Communicate with, and listen to, the views of transport activists, public transport users and members of the public
 - Attempt to resolve individual and group specific public transport queries and complaints, and
 - Engage with operators
- 1.4 When the groups now known as LTPFs were originally established, they represented the Authority's main form of engagement with the public, offering a practical means of conveying the Authority's objectives and policies to a wide audience as well as a forum where members of the public could raise transport matters.
- 1.5 Mechanisms for consulting and engaging more generally with the travelling public have evolved considerably since that time. A dedicated consultation team now exists within GMPTE, for example, and the use of email and internet is increasingly the preferred form of communication for many people.
- 1.6 Over that same 20+ year period, however, the format and style of the LTPFs has remained largely unchanged and, while the effectiveness of the groups has been in question for some time, concern has intensified following recent meetings when it has been very clear for example that:
 - Attendance is poor and unrepresentative
 - There is little public appetite for the subject matter and the way it is presented
 - Meetings are perceived as being 'formal', which has the dual disadvantage of discouraging new attendees while creating the

impression – via having a Chair and a ‘Committee-style’ format – that they are official, decision-making bodies, rather than consultative groups

- Agendas and meetings last too long and are not conveniently timed
- Performance reports are generally out of date by the time of the meeting

1.7 In an attempt to address these issues, the constitution of LTPFs was modified in 2004 to permit any member of the public to attend. However despite this as well as publicising meetings extensively and holding them in the evenings to attract a wider range of users, turnout failed to improve. This, coupled with the relatively high organisational and staffing costs involved, led to a reduction in the number of meetings held, with one round of LTPFs currently held in Spring and another in the Autumn, complemented by two Greater Manchester wide Forums/Seminars – one for budget consultation in January and a second one following the Authority AGM in July to outline the Authority’s Policy Priorities and / or consult on any topical issue/s.

1.8 It is now timely, following the Autumn round of meetings, to further review their role going forward. This report sets out a summary of the current performance and proposals for restructuring the Authority’s public engagement mechanisms in this context.

2. **PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Attendance

2.1 The July 2006 report to Transport Network Committee that most recently reviewed LTPFs concluded that the format and nature of the meetings is out-moded and not fit for purpose. For example, it is evident that the number of people willing to devote several hours during the day to attend public transport meetings of this type is limited, as reflected in the average public attendance at each meeting (see Chart 1 below).

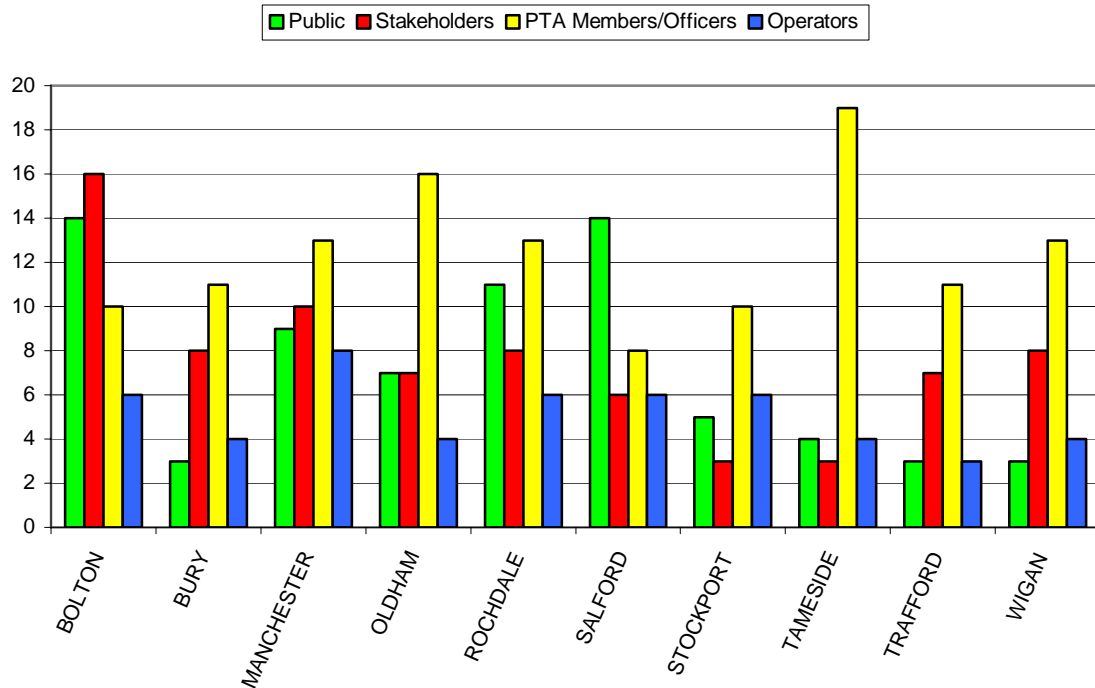
Chart 1.

	Bolton	Bury	Manchester	Oldham	Rochdale	Salford	Stockport	Tameside	Trafford	Wigan	Rounded Average
Oct-05	14	12	11	7	20	6	5	5	6	7	9
Mar-06	15	6	10	5	4	2	8	5	5	14	7
Mar-07	18	9	11	4	6	6	2	2	4	18	8
Oct-07	14	3	9	7	11	14	5	4	3	3	7

2.2 These figures demonstrate that at least half of the meetings attract a fairly constant low number of attendees on a regular basis. In the areas showing significant differences in attendance, that variance can generally be attributed to specific transport issues – for example, the withdrawal of a particular bus service. The key point, however, is that the overall trend indicates a reduction in public attendance.

2.3 Furthermore, it is also clear that the current format of LTPFs is not effective at attracting either fresh views or a fully representative range of public opinion in any given district.

Chart 2 - Comparison of Attendance - All Groups - October 2007



2.4 In Chart 2, stakeholders are defined as those attending LTPFs who represent voluntary or community groups, such as tenants, residents or campaigning associations and groups. Several stakeholders regularly attend meetings in several districts in any given round and there are some groups that are represented by many members at the same meeting, which tends to inflate the attendance figures shown in the chart above. For example, Bolton LTPF registered 16 stakeholder attendances but 5 people attended on behalf of one organisation; while two further organisations had two individuals representing them.

Costs

2.5 As requested by the Transport Network Committee, officers have further examined the functions and objectives of LTPFs. These can be summarised as:

- Communicating the policies of the Authority
- Informing the public about GMPTA/E initiatives
- Undertaking consultation
- Attempting to resolve individual and groups' complaints regarding public transport
- Reporting and scrutinising the performance of public transport services

- 2.6 All these activities are clearly important to the work of the Authority, but the fact that they take place within the confines of LTPFs has in practice inhibited their effectiveness. Moreover, the costs of organising 20 LTPF meetings per year are considerable. The costing exercise below represents merely the administrative costs; a further, very significant cost is incurred in PTA/E officer time devoted to organising, preparing for and attending meetings. Given the comparatively low outcomes (in terms of genuine public engagement) received in return for this expenditure, officers believe that the Authority's desired public engagement objectives would be more efficiently and effectively delivered via the revised arrangements set out in Section 3 below.

Table 1 - Administrative Expenditure for one round of LTPFs – October 2006

	£
Translation Services	760.23
Advertising - Local Press	6,616.50
Posters	572.23
Document Printing	999.15
Room Hire & Refreshments	2,046.14
Equipment Hire - Audio Visual	1,589.32
Travel Expenses	349.60
	TOTAL 12,933.17

Operators Surgeries

- 2.7 Operators Surgeries, which are held immediately before LTPFs, have proved to be a more useful development. They provide members of the public with an opportunity to raise their individual concerns/complaints directly with senior managers from rail, tram and bus companies. If it is not possible to deal with such matters at the Surgery, then queries are recorded (on the usual GMPTE Customer Comments form) and addressed after the meeting. It should be emphasised, however, that the direct linking of Surgeries to LTPFs does, for all the reasons set out above, tend to mean this facility is currently serving a limited audience.
- 2.8 For this reason, officers arranged three trial Surgeries in Tameside, Manchester and Bolton at various times and using different formats as follows:
- Ashton Bus Station – Surgery held on a bus on the Ashton Bus Station concourse between 10:00am – 1:00pm on Wednesday, 22 November 2006.
 - GMPTE Online (Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester) – New meeting facilities at GMPTE Online were utilised for the Manchester surgery between 4:00pm - 7:00pm on Thursday, 25 January 2007.
 - Bolton Age Concern – Facilities within Bolton Age Concern were used for the surgery held on Monday, 19 February 2007, between 12:00pm and 3:00pm.

- 2.9 These sessions proved popular with the general public, attracting greater than the average turnout for LTPFs at 18, 25 and 52 respectively. The overall impression from attendees, operators and GMPTE staff was that these sessions were a useful and cost effective way of providing members of the travelling public with a means of resolving their public transport concerns directly with operators and/or the GMPTE.
- 2.10 More recently, GMPTE officers held two 'Meet the Manager' events, one at Middleton Bus Station and the other at Bury Interchange. Both sessions attracted more members of the public than would any equivalent LTPF meeting. Following this success, further sessions are proposed.
- 2.11 A similar 'Meet the Manager' session was held for Metrolink passengers at Piccadilly Station on Wednesday 17 October 2007 between 4.30 and 7.00pm. The total number of public attendees was not recorded but seven Metrolink and GMPTE staff were kept constantly busy with enquiries and complaints from members of the public. It was reported that most people were pleased to have the opportunity to speak to a Manager in person about their particular concern. Again, it is proposed that further regular events of this nature are held in the following locations.
- Altrincham Interchange
 - Bury Interchange
 - Eccles Interchange
 - Piccadilly Interchange

GM-wide Forums/Seminars

- 2.12 The recent move to holding two Greater Manchester-wide public transport Forums/Seminars annually has also been very successful. For example, the annual budget seminar held in mid-January attracts large numbers of members of the public, with the budget presentation followed by a question and answer session providing the Authority with a forum that enables informed debate whilst allowing members of the public to put their questions to leading members of the GMPTA. As evidenced by the January 2006 meeting, this forum can also be more empowering and meaningful, resulting as it did on that occasion in the clear majority view of the meeting in terms of the policy on concessionary fares being subsequently adopted.

Website

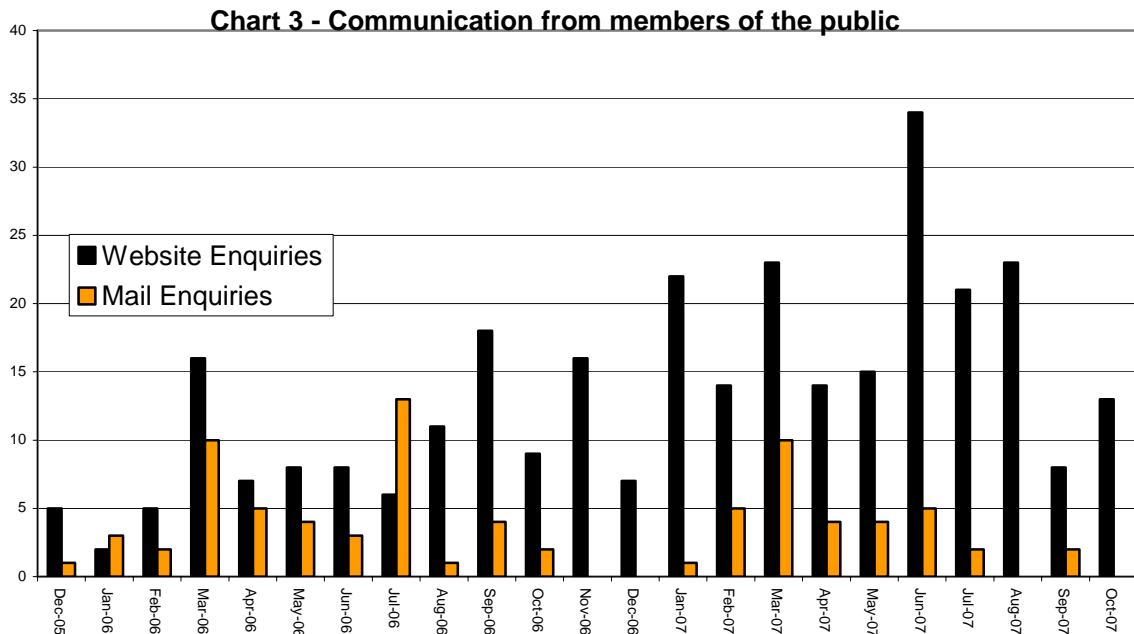
- 2.13 The development of the GMPTA website over the past two years represents another significant improvement to the public profile of the Authority. It allows full and instant public access to all reports and minutes of Authority committee meetings, provides full contact details for members, officers and operators, and provides an email facility to contact the Authority, which now generates an increasingly large daily 'postbag'. Chart 3 below shows how, in the period to October 2007, email enquiries originating from the website outnumbered those received by conventional

mail, highlighting the fact that the website is likely to soon become the primary mode of communication for the Authority. See below the statistics on usage growth shown as a comparison of first six-month period (Nov 05-Apr 06) with same period the following year, plus one-day usage at the beginning of this year's statistical period to allow an up-to-date comparison.

**Website Use - comparison of usage figures –
Daily Average Totals - by session and pageview**

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Sessions</u>	<u>Pageviews</u>
Nov 05-Apr 06	65	263
Nov 06-Apr 07	219	736
One day only - 8 Nov 07	274	1119

Session: A specific visit to the website looking at one or more pages.
Pageview: The total number of pages looked at.



2.14 The GMPTA website also allows the Authority to undertake online consultations quickly and inexpensively. For example, the online consultation on concessionary fares, which took place in summer 2006, was designed to complement the public meeting hosted by the Authority on this issue, but in fact received a greater response than that registered at the public meeting.

LTPF Feedback Form (October 2007)

2.15 A Feedback Form was distributed to each individual attending the LTPF meetings in October 2007. The form, used to evaluate administration of these meetings, was printed in a way that allowed anonymity if desired but supplied the option for information provision if required, eg email

address. Response rates were low with an average of only 19% of people attending meetings completing the form.

3. GMPTE CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

- 3.1 GMPTE now has a dedicated Consultation Team, which undertakes a wide range of consultation activities throughout the year, on both local and strategic public transport matters. GMPTE has developed www.gmppte.com/haveyoursay - an online guide to allowing people to 'have their say' and is about to launch a new "Have your say about public transport" leaflet. These initiatives encourage hundreds of people to participate in public consultations such as the extensive Quality Bus Corridor programme and other key transport investments such as proposed interchanges.
- 3.2 The GMPTE has also established a Consultation Panel whereby members of the public and representatives of organisations can register for future consultation opportunities and receive a newsletter demonstrating the impact of their feedback. The Panel enables GMPTE to select consultees from particular demographic groups or geographic areas to ensure that we consult people most likely to be affected by proposals.
- 3.3 The Executive also has an extensive research programme that ensures thousands of members of the public are polled every year on numerous aspects of public transport including specific schemes and proposals. Over 4,000 people each year are polled for the GMPTE Transport Tracking Survey that gives us a statistically representative sample of the general public's use and satisfaction of public transport and private car usage. This is in addition to the GMPTE Customer Relations service that acts as a clearing house for all complaints and suggestions concerning every aspect of public transport in Greater Manchester; well in excess of 5,000 complaints are handled every calendar year.
- 3.4 With regard to stakeholder engagement, the GMPTE has developed a number of networks and channels of communication to facilitate ongoing dialogue with transport operators and local stakeholder interests such as the Bus Operators Group and ground-breaking work to develop Accessibility Planning Partnerships. The innovative Adopt a Station initiative has also been a great success, 11 rail stations in Greater Manchester now have active groups of local people who are championing their station in partnership with GMPTE, GMPTA and other key partners such as the local authorities and Northern Rail.
- 3.5 The GMPTE is currently represented on the majority of Greater Manchester Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP), with full representation across Greater Manchester due within the coming months. Currently a Director represents GMPTE on each LSP Board with officer support at the steering group and the thematic level.

3.6 Stakeholder engagement and dialogue is also a key aspect of the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) programme. Subject to the initial outcome of the recently submitted bid, the TIF workstream will have a major communication and consultation programme targeted at the public and all relevant stakeholders, which will enable the widest possible set of views to be canvassed on all the TIF schemes within the overall programme. The proposals for engagement are currently being prepared and will be reported to the Authority in due course and at regular intervals as the TIF work progresses.

4. PROPOSALS

4.1 The Authority has a duty to communicate and publicise its work to residents of Greater Manchester. Officers propose to improve the Authority's current engagement arrangements by:

- i) Taking Operators Surgeries away from Town Halls and going out into communities and locations relevant to public transport passengers. Future Surgeries would be held at GMPTA bus stations, transport interchanges, Metrolink and rail stations or similar suitable locations in all districts. It is recommended that meetings held quarterly at times convenient to the majority of passengers and appropriately publicised will better serve the travelling public than the existing format. These arrangements will be kept under review.
- ii) Retain the existing and successful Greater Manchester Transport Forums/Seminars, but withdraw the LTPFs in their current format. Members will of course be free to call for GMPTA officers to organise additional public meetings as necessary; eg in response to a specific public transport related matter of significant local importance. It is suggested that the Chair of the Authority, or nominee, will be best placed to represent the Authority and hence to chair these meetings. Again, such a meeting would focus on the single issue of concern and be hosted in a convenient location at an appropriate time, thus encouraging genuine debate and resulting in the determination of appropriate actions.
- iii) Greater use of email correspondence and website-based consultation. Specifically, officers propose to encourage all web visitors to sign up to the Authority's email database (currently there are 333 people registered) and to issue a twice-yearly information bulletin to all those registered. This email would contain a regular Transport Bulletin plus internet links to the customer comments, bus, rail and Metrolink performance reports published on the Authority website that are prepared for Transport Network Committee. This would enable the widest number of people to be advised of public transport initiatives as well as allowing them to scrutinise the performance of all modes of public transport in Greater Manchester. Paper versions plus copies in appropriate alternative media (for visually impaired people, for example) will of course continue to be made available.

- 4.2 Subject to approval of the above, officers will address any outstanding queries raised at the last round of meetings and write to everyone on the current LTPF mailing list to advise them of the new arrangements going forward and consequent cancellation of the meetings currently scheduled for March 2008.
- 4.3 Over the longer term, it is recommended that Officers:
- i) Continuously monitor and review Operators Surgeries, particularly with regard to location, timing and attendance
 - ii) Develop further methods of fully utilising GMTRU's network to provide Members with early warning of any transport-related issues affecting communities across Greater Manchester
 - iii) Consider how GMPTA can continue to improve the PTA website to enhance communications and maximise usage, including developing practical ICT applications, such as online consultations, trial e-petitions and a dedicated 'Tell us about your local transport issues/problems' space.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The proposed revisions to the format, style, location and frequency of PTA public engagement mechanisms set out above build on incremental changes to LTPFs as a result of continuous monitoring of their performance since 2004. Data from the most recent review clearly demonstrates their relative ineffectiveness and poor value for money in terms of engaging with the widest possible audience. The proposed restructuring of current arrangements is intended to address these concerns and, as with all new systems introduced, will be the subject of ongoing monitoring, review and further feedback to the Authority.
- 5.2 A full set of recommendations appears at the front of this report.

Sir Howard Bernstein
Clerk to the Authority