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Councillor Roger Jones
Chair, Greater Manchester PTA
Box 532, Town Hall,
Manchester, M60 2LA

Dear Cllr Jones,

ABOLITION OF LOCAL TRANSPORT PUBLIC FORUMS

We note that GMPTA has chosen to abolish the 10 Local Transport Public Forums (formerly known as LTG's). We deplore this move as it will in our view reduce the opportunities for public transport users to raise issues of local significance. It will not be possible to raise purely local issues at the two remaining sub-regional seminars, one of which is devoted to the PTA budget in any case.

We know that in future there are to be operators' surgeries but these by their very nature will be limited in scope. The LTPF's provided an opportunity to ask questions about PTA/PTE policies and to attempt to influence these policies. This will not be possible at the operators' surgeries.

We also note that a Consultation Panel is to be set up. This is in theory a good idea provided that the PTA does genuinely consult on some issues which really matter to users. Our fear is that the PTA will not consult on some issues at all or that it will present members of the consultation panel with a *fait accompli* when the decision to go ahead has already been taken, as for instance with the closure of Cross Street to buses.

We do not accept as entirely accurate the figures given in the Report to members dated 23 November 2007. Whilst it is not easy to remember details of the numbers present at meetings in 2005/6/7 I certainly do not, for instance, remember attending any Stockport LTPF's with attendance figures as low as those shown in the Report. Admittedly at many LTPF's there seemed to be

more officers attending on full pay than necessary and it is not always easy to distinguish between local members of the public, local Councillors and so called stakeholders. Just because someone represents a group and that organisation takes the trouble to send representatives why should they be penalised and not count as members of the public? The division is just an artful way of giving a completely false impression to Councillors and we strongly object.

In fact members of groups usually represent many more members of the public than individuals and may represent hundreds or even thousands of local tenants/residents, just as our members present at LTPF meetings speak on behalf of large numbers of members who may be unable to attend. To suggest in para 2.4 of the Report that so called stakeholders are anything other than members of the public is a travesty of justice. They are normally better informed and more representative of the public than individuals attending meetings.

It is interesting to note that when one of our members decided to put a few simple, inexpensive A4 black-on-white posters for a LTPF meeting at local bus stops, the relevant meeting was inundated with individual members of the public (said to be 50+). It shows what could and should be done by GMPTA/E if it really wanted the meetings to be successful. The GMPTA website certainly has its uses as a means of obtaining information but as a means of genuine consultation it is very limited indeed.

When our late Secretary Robin Polack protested to you personally about the reduction from four to two in the number of LTPF meetings to be held each year, you replied that there was no reduction, merely a change of venue for two of them to central Manchester. Having now experienced the carefully stage managed 'central' meetings we realise how right Robin was. The whole exercise is simply another step on the way to GMPTA/E exercising complete control and not being willing to accept any other point of view.

Your comments will be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

(Tony Fawthrop)
Chair, Greater Manchester Transport Campaign