

Briefing note for the Network Northamptonshire Total Transport Project

Background

In January 2015 the UK Government announced a new £4 million Total Transport Pilot Fund from which local authorities in England could bid for resources to implement a cross-sector approach to the delivery of supported public road passenger transport services in their area. Its purpose is to integrate transport services currently commissioned by different central and local government agencies and provided by different operators. This will allow existing resources to be allocated and co-ordinated more efficiently, resulting in services to passengers that are more effective at meeting their needs.

This UK Government initiative matched closely with proposals which had already been agreed by Northamptonshire Council members in December 2014, to develop an integrated transport model to deliver statutory and non-statutory transport services in Northamptonshire through a social enterprise model.

The County Council therefore made a bid for the available funding and received £750,000 funding for the two-year period March 2015 to March 2017. This was the largest award made from the fund to any of the 36 projects across the UK.

Initial proposals for 'Network Northamptonshire' (NNTT) Project

The Total Transport funding has been used to launch the 'Network Northamptonshire' project in June 2015. Led by the County Council, this project is being undertaken in close liaison with the Universities of Northampton and Hertfordshire, who are providing research and analytical expertise along with the overall project management support.

Key to the project is the identification of synergies which can be achieved by co-ordinating effectively the current disparate efforts of a large number of organisations in the public, voluntary and even private sectors which currently commission and promote the transport of staff, visitors and the public to serve their own needs and the needs of the wider community. Delivering these services more effectively should result in reductions of expenditure, an improvement in service, better 'value for money' and increased usage, or a combination of all or some of these.

While a number of approaches could have been taken, the Network Northamptonshire model involved the creation of a voluntary partnership of all the stakeholders using a memorandum of understanding setting out the objectives to be achieved by working together. Using powers in the Local Transport Act, 2008, such

a partnership has enabled the County Council to deem it as being 'in the public interest' to identify opportunities for co-ordination and co-operation which might not normally be possible.

The Partners

The evolving partnership involves the County Council itself (and its various departments that commission transport), the Universities of Northampton and Hertfordshire, the Further Education Colleges, the University Technical Colleges and local schools, the various NHS Trusts, the voluntary sector and even some major industrial organisations that have to provide transport for staff.

The task of the partnership will be to set the policy approach as to how deliver a 'total transport' solution within Northamptonshire and consider issues which are in the public interest. These will include the promotion of public transport, how to encourage accelerated modal shift away from the use of the private motor car and the optimum use of resources to help improve transport provision for the residents of Northamptonshire.

The Social Enterprise model

Unique to this project, and key to the success of the approach, is the creation of a suitable delivery body that can, on behalf of the partnership, actually implement 'total transport'. Again there are a number of ways that this might be achieved but the Network Northamptonshire is examining the creation of a social innovation or enterprise company which would normally take the form of a company limited by guarantee. Creating a corporate body is thought to be essential in order to implement 'total transport', with the inclusion of 'social' objectives in its Articles of Association guaranteeing that it can act in the public interest. Both the County Council and the University of Northampton have considerable expertise in developing and using the social innovation and enterprise model which would make them appropriate members of the new company/body.

What a delivery body might look like and what issues need to be considered is now being explored. Much of this work has to be completed before a delivery body can start its work or even be established.

A complete mapping of all existing transport provision across the county is currently being undertaken by the University of Northampton. As some organisations do not have a central record of all their provision, this is a significant task. However, having now mapped the home to work/school movements of circa 28% of the county's overall population, a gap analysis is underway to identify all overlaps and potential synergies.

In addition, all the partners have been tasked to examine need and whether historic arrangements are appropriate. A review of the extent to which individual arrangements can be flexed to fit in with each other and what variations in practice are possible to enable optimisation is now being generated. Once complete a process of 'joining up' can commence.

A presumption lying behind the creation of a 'total transport' approach is that the co-ordinated and combined arrangements can only be achieved if resources between all the participating organisations are 'pooled'. Thus all resources that currently lie within each organisation for moving people will have to be transferred to the new body including staff and existing contracts. It will be for the new delivery body to commission any arrangements within the area based upon the needs of partners.

The delivery body will have the full range of delivery options at its disposal including the vigorous stimulation of existing commercial public transport networks, transferring work onto public networks where possible, whilst some work can be 'contracted out' whilst other can be delivered 'in-house'. There will be a balance to be struck between 'demand responsive' and scheduled services. Some services can be organised on a 'hub and spoke' model where travellers can be fed into a 'transport hub' for onward connection to a 'spoke'. Regardless, however, of the delivery method co-ordination in an optimum manner will be dependent upon quality data and real-time information systems which will enable the delivery body to have an effective control room to deploy resources to best effect and ensure a high quality of service. Finally, pricing arrangements will need to be considered to ensure everyone gets best value and the body can make a sufficient return to invest in its own future for the interests of the partners and the wider community.

The following key outputs have already been identified:

- Improved service to the community
- Financial savings achieved through more efficient working
- Improved procurement
- Re-investment of profits into local communities
- Increased resilience and business continuity of service delivery
- Improved use of resources
- Future commercial opportunities
- Increased flexibility and speed of decision making
- Better rural service
- Increased modal shift and enhanced levels of service

Key workstreams

The intention is to conduct a detailed feasibility study to explore the potential opportunities, legal issues, potential costs and benefits of a Total Place approach, an outline implementation programme, key stakeholder and governance arrangements, together with a monitoring and evaluation strategy. A number of demonstration projects have been implemented in order to test new arrangements. The proposal will bring together commissioners and key transport providers under a new collaborative agreement, through an already-established Governance Board and Steering Group.

To date, a number of demonstration projects are underway being delivered either as desktop exercise and/or on the ground pilot projects based around the four themes of:

- Home to school/FE college transport journeys
- Access to higher education/university transport journeys
- Non-emergency health related transport journeys
- Business park/travel to work transport journeys

Current Progress and Next Steps

Programmes of quarterly meetings for the Network Northamptonshire Total Transport Governance Board and Executive Steering Group have been established for the duration of the two year programme. An agreed Governance structure is also in place which will then help to support and guide the project.

Baseline data has been collected around the four main demonstration project areas and action identified as to where the specific work in these areas will be developed. In some cases these may be further desk top feasibility exercises whilst in others they could be actual pilot project actions on the ground.

Considerable interest is being generated across UK local transport authorities as to how such a model could work in their respective areas. It is also part of the overall transport strategy for the 'Heart of England Strategic Alliance' project. This is a local authority alliance, lead by Northamptonshire County Council alongside nine other neighbouring authorities, who are developing a regional model for planning and commissioning transport.

At the same time work is being undertaken to develop the framework for the social enterprise model, using expertise within the County Council and supporting universities.

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