SCC Public transport Forum

A bus operator's perspective

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Stephensons of Essex

- Major independent sector operator
- 90 buses, 4 depots:
  - Haverhill, Witham, Maldon, Rochford
- Over 70 registered services, plus contracts
- Cover almost 4 million kms per year

Commercial services – such as our *Breeze* network in Bury St Edmunds

Working with SCC - tendered services & partnerships

Context

- Local bus services most used form of public transport
- Essentially a ‘local’ service – a shared responsibility between operators and LA’s
- 81% of the bus network in England outside London operates commercially – up from 76% five years ago.
- Over the same period, local authorities have cut 16.5% of the mileage on tendered services – commercial mileage reduced by just 1.6%

Growth

- Since 2004, bus passenger journeys have increased by nearly 15%. Biggest growth London.
- Other metropolitan areas down 5%
- Shire Counties (inc. unitaries) up nearly 11%
- Between 2011 & 2012 demand in semi-rural areas grew by 0.3% and in deeply rural areas by 3.9%

Satisfaction

- Most recent passenger Focus Survey:
- 20,000 bus users outside London 88% overall satisfaction score
- In London – 83%
- Scores compare very well with other industries
- But we know there is room for improvement

Rural Bus services

- Demand seems to be growing.....
- So what is the problem in providing?
- Two fold:
- Cost of supply
- Income generated

Costs

- Employment legislation 2003 – 2008
- DDA/PSVAR – modern vehicles
- Congestion – affects rural services too!!
- The Regulatory Regime – TC's/DVSA/DVLA

Revenues

- Reimbursement for carrying free passes
- Undoubted benefits to society
- Reimbursement reduced
- London = 96% of average adult fare
- Rural areas circa 48%

Revenues (2)

- BSOG – formerly FDR
- Reduced over years
- Currently guaranteed to 2016
- Represents 16p-19p per pax in rural areas
- BUT Removal – if 70% of passengers travel with concession passes (typical rural route) = cash fares increase of 37%!!

Where do we go?

- We need to look at how to stimulate demand. Carrot/stick
- Smaller buses?   But peak ‘supports’
- Reduce fares?
- Specific groups – eg 16-19
- More evening/Sunday buses?
- Non-conventional solutions?
- Put right Government policy…..

Government policy.....

- ‘Bells & whistles’ of regulatory control
- Marginal services at risk.....
- Often rural
- Reimburse concessionary travel fairly
- If BSOG retained – take care with distribution

and finally

- Remember that Suffolk has fared much better than many counties. SCC is generally supportive within funding constraints – encourages commercial operation.
- Consequently much of what may have been lost over last five years or so has been kept in a commercial form