

CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL: TECHNICAL ADVICE NOTE (TAN) 3

Guidance on Data Recording and Provision by On-Bus ETMs for Concessionary Travel Reimbursement

Purpose

1.1 This Technical Advice Note (TAN) suggests a minimum level of data to be provided to each Travel Concession Authority (TCA) by a Bus Operator to support concessionary travel reimbursement, and considers the potential impact on bus service operation of recording and managing discretionary entitlement transactional data for concessionary travel. It has been prepared to support:

- passholders receiving the entitlement they are due;
- drivers being able to avoid disputes;
- buses running on time and not be delayed at stops;
- value for money for little used discretionary entitlements;
- maintaining good relationships between Bus Operators and TCAs.

TAN 3 has been developed by the Operations and Technology (Ops & Tech) Working Group of the Department for Transport, including representatives of both the CPT and local government.

Introduction

1.2 The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 will amend Section 149 of the Transport Act 2000. The effect of this amendment is to require a TCA from 1st April 2008, to reimburse a Bus Operator for the provision of concessions under section 145A(1) of the Transport Act 2000 in respect of eligible journeys beginning in their own area regardless of the domicile of the passenger. The full text of the amendment is included as an annex in TAN 2.

- 1.3 For many Schemes this may require a change to current reimbursement practice, which can often be based on local arrangements (often via County Schemes) supported by payments by the authority in which the pass was issued irrespective of where a bus was boarded. The change in the basis for reimbursement only applies to the statutory concession, so any local discretionary addition such as additional travel time validity, companion passes and mode eligibility are unaffected. All reimbursement however should be based upon the collation and provision of quality usage data, generally recorded and provided by the Bus Operators.
- 1.4 The impact of the amendment in relation to data collation is therefore twofold.
- For Schemes only providing the national minimum requirement, there is a need to receive usage data based on actual concessionary travel journeys beginning in their own area. This is explored in TAN 2.
 - For Schemes offering more than the national minimum requirement, in addition to the core data requirement, there will also be a need to receive data based on discretionary entitlement usage which may or may not be subject to differing reimbursement rules.
- 1.5 The data requirement issues and practical approaches to working with Bus Operators whether operating a standard or smartcard based Scheme are explored below.

What is a Reasonable Level of Data For Bus Operators To Provide To TCAs?

- 1.6 At present the current situation of data provision is varied across England, with some Bus Operators providing Electronic Ticket Machine (ETM) data exports electronically for the TCA to interrogate, whilst others only provide paper based top line summary information. All parties agree that helpful management information can be derived from access to detailed usage information.
- 1.7 To support TCAs with the changes coming into effect in April 2008, discussions between the CPT and TCAs via the Ops & Tech Working Group have sought to define an agreed level of data that should be made available from all Bus Operators. This is outlined in Section 1.8. **Where data levels above the agreed level are currently provided, it should be possible for this to continue post April 2008.** The Ops & Tech Working Group have also considered examples of what might constitute impractical demands relating to data provision, particularly in a non-smart environment, this might include:
- Expecting reimbursement claims (or data) to be submitted in such a way that the Bus Operator would require driving staff to record the 2008 (statutory)

concessionary journeys in a significantly different manner to TA1985 (discretionary) enhancements. This is explored in Section 1.9 onwards.

- Requiring Bus Operators to submit data based on pass-issuing area for all TCAs and each concessionary journey. (e.g. TCA 258 is due to reimburse the journeys – but wants to know how many journeys relate to passes issued by each of the 290 other individual TCA's).
- Unnecessary and excessive disaggregation of data. e.g. reimbursement period is usually 4-weekly or monthly – but the TCA requires data on a daily or even on a journey by journey basis (or even by pass serial number).
- Expecting Bus Operators to disaggregate data at Boundary stops beyond fare stage level (e.g. to bus stop level) when allocating claims to TCA's.

1.8 To support this overall process, the definition of the **Agreed Level** of data that should be made available by all Bus Operators, for the national entitlement data has been defined as:

- Where Bus Operators use ETMs

To provide, on an agreed timely reporting basis, a summary of national statutory entitlement journeys within a TCA or Scheme area as agreed between the parties. If applicable such reports should identify where any cross boundary apportionment rules have been applied.

- Where Bus Operators do not use ETMs

To provide, on an agreed timely reporting basis, a summary of national minimum entitlement journeys by TCA area.

Discretionary entitlements are explored in the next section.

Discretionary Entitlement Arrangements

1.9 It is clear that considerable variation exists in TCA Schemes across the country, in the application of discretionary entitlements. For many Schemes, the discretionary entitlement has traditionally been based around cross-boundary travel under the umbrella of Countywide schemes. For these Schemes, the change to the national entitlement in April 2008 may lead to a simplification of existing on-bus practices, and the programming of the ETMs, when back office apportionment rules have been agreed (see above).

1.10 However it must also be recognised that for April 2008, it is the application of discretionary variations which has the most potential to impact on the complexity of the programming of the ETMs to correctly record variations associated with reimbursement rules of the TCA or Scheme. An important part of meeting Bus Punctuality Improvement Plan targets (BPIPs) is the achievement of an efficient boarding environment. There are three core areas for consideration:

- Button capacity on an ETM to record discretionary variations;
- Cost effectiveness of reprogramming all ETMs for little used discretionary variations;
- Operational inefficiency of recording discretionary journeys, i.e. unreasonable expectations on drivers which may increase boarding times and cause confusion.

1.11 Currently, most Electronic Ticket Machine (ETM) recordings tend to be Scheme based, and normally developed around the pass issuer, which may or may not be the TCA:

- Reimbursement of current statutory minimum concession (free local travel) = Scheme based (normally the pass issuer);
- TA 1985 Enhancements = Scheme based (normally the pass issuer).

Because Concessions are currently local in nature, there are a relatively limited number of cards to recognise for each operator. The Bus Operator can therefore give simple instructions to staff regarding ETM recordings e.g:- Scheme A Passes = press Button 1, Scheme B passes = press Button 2 etc up to a limited maximum of Schemes. From April 2008 onwards, there will be up to 291 Schemes / pass issuers and so it will be impractical to record the 2008 national concessionary journeys by separate Scheme / pass issuer. The only practical solution is to link reimbursement claims derived around Concessionary Passenger Boarding Points within TCA areas, as outlined in TAN 2.

1.12 However, for the TA1985 Enhancements (local discretionary add-ons) the current reimbursement methodology may still, theoretically, be Scheme based.

- 2008 reimbursement for new statutory minimum concession = Boarding point based;
- TA 1985 Enhancements = Scheme based (normally the pass issuer).

Examples of Local Discretionary Add-Ons include:-

- Pre 0930 Weekday travel. (time can vary);

- Post 2300 Weekday travel (time can vary);
- Travel for companions;
- Additional modes (e.g. Light Rail or Heavy Rail).

1.13 Whilst these “add-ons” are local – their geographical extent can vary at the discretion of the authority. Options exist for add-ons to:-

- be valid within the Scheme area only;
- be valid for journeys either starting or finishing within the Scheme area. As such these add-on journeys may extend beyond the local Scheme boundary (cross-boundary);
- Be valid entirely within an adjacent area to that issuing the pass subject to recognition and reimbursement arrangements being agreed between the TCAs concerned.

1.14 Where the “add-ons” are confined to the local Scheme area only, ETM claims can generally still be made on a Boarding Point basis (because only one Scheme is valid at a particular boarding point) However, where the “add-ons” extend across the boundary the situation becomes more complex because either the journey is “out of area” and/or more than one Scheme may be valid at a particular point.

1.15 It might be thought possible that a bus driver could record all 2008 ENCTS concessionary journeys using a single button; and record all TA1985 Enhancement journeys using a different set of buttons. However, notwithstanding any capacity constraints of the ETMs this is an extremely complex operational message to articulate to staff and in reality is not operationally practical – it amounts to:-

“When the new Concessionary pass is presented to you for an entitled journey you should record it on your ETM as follows; but when the same pass is presented to you for a Local Add-On TA1985 journey, you should record the pass in a completely different way”.

1.16 Below are four scenarios where the potential complexity of ETM coding and capacity to accommodate existing arrangements could have significant operational impact on service delivery.

Scenario 1

- The bus route runs through Scheme Areas A & B;
- Schemes A & B both issue concessionary passes;
- Scheme A has a local add-on allowing pre-0930 Weekday travel within its area and for journeys which start or finish on a bus serving their area.

It is 0915 on a Tuesday in Area B and an Area A pass-holder boards the bus. The pass-holder is travelling to A and is therefore valid for travel (albeit an Area B pass holder would not be). The reimbursement claim for the journey therefore needs to go to Scheme A. If however the same concessionaire boarded the bus at 0935 – the claim would need to go to Scheme B (because it is a 2008 entitled journey - and that is where they boarded the bus).

Scenario 2

- The bus route runs through Scheme Areas A, B & C;
- Schemes A, B & C all issue concessionary passes;
- All the Schemes (A, B & C) have local add-ons allowing pre 0930 Weekday travel within their own areas and for journeys which start or finish on a bus serving their area.

It is 0915 on a Tuesday in Area B, and there are 3 concessionary pass holders standing at the bus stop – one is an Area A pass-holder, one an Area B pass-holder and one an Area C pass-holder. All three pass-holders are travelling to their respective “home” areas on the route and are therefore entitled to travel. The reimbursement claim for the pass-holder A journey goes to Scheme A; the claim for the pass-holder B journey goes to Scheme B; and the claim for the pass-holder C journey to Scheme C. If however the same concessionaires boarded the bus at 0935 – the claim for all three journeys would need to go to Scheme B (because they are 2008 entitled journeys – and that is where they boarded the bus)

Scenario 3

- The bus route runs through Scheme Areas X & Y;
- Schemes X & Y both issue concessionary passes;
- Scheme X has a local add-on allowing a companion to accompany a Scheme X pass holder for travel within its area and for journeys which start or finish on a bus serving their area (during core hours).

It is 1130 on a Thursday in Area Y and an Area X pass-holder boards the bus with their companion. Both the pass-holder and companion are travelling to X and are therefore valid for travel. The reimbursement claim for the main pass-holder journey therefore needs to go to Scheme Y (because that is where they boarded the bus); but the claim for the companion boarding with them needs to go to Scheme X (because they specified the TA1985 “Add-on”).

Scenario 4

- The bus route runs through Scheme Areas X, Y & Z;
- Schemes X, Y & Z all issue concessionary passes;
- All the Schemes (X, Y & Z) have local add-ons allowing a companion to travel with the main pass-holder within their own areas and for journeys which start or finish on a bus serving their area.

It is 1130 on a Thursday in Area Y, and there are 3 concessionary pass holders standing at the bus stop – one is an Area X pass-holder, one an Area Y pass-holder and one an Area Z pass-holder; each of them has a companion. All three pass-holders are travelling to their respective “home” areas on the route and are therefore entitled to travel. The reimbursement claim for the three main pass-holder journeys (X, Y & Z) goes to Scheme Y (because these are 2008 entitled journeys); but the claim for the companion travelling with pass-holder X will go to Scheme X, for companion with pass-holder Y to Scheme Y and for the companion with pass-holder Z to Scheme Z.

All of the above demonstrate the risk that imposing complex arrangements without sensible and easily explained procedures for drivers could lead to drivers accepting some passes for travel when the passes are not valid (with consequent effects on reimbursement), and could have an adverse impact on bus boarding times.

- 1.17 Where changes to ETMs and associated software are necessary to deal with each local TA1985 variation such changes will incur additional costs, even if an authority decides at the last minute not to proceed with the proposal, and the principles underpinning reimbursement for additional costs (where properly evidenced) would apply. This issue was addressed in Bulletin #6 in relation to the statutory concession. There are also important issues around the lead time required to make software and ETM configuration changes, which must also be considered.
- 1.18 In Scenario 4 outlined above, a discretionary scheme allowing cross-boundary free travel in both directions for a companion travelling with the holder of a disabled person’s pass after 0930 should have both the statutory and discretionary trips charged to the authority in which the journey started, with authorities recharging such costs to each other (or not, if a like for like arrangement is in place) on the basis of surveys or some other analysis of use. Similar arrangements could apply for Scenario 2.

Recommendation

- 1.19 **There is a strong view from the Ops & Tech Working Group, that wherever possible TCAs and adjoining County-wide Schemes should consider how the reimbursement of discretionary entitlements that cross TCA (or Scheme) boundaries could be managed through negotiations between TCAs rather than by having Bus Operators identify and invoice discretionary and statutory elements separately. The approach of “One button for all journeys (mandatory or discretionary)” supported by continued driver training on validity of discretionary entitlements is most likely to work best in practice. TCAs should think carefully before extending the geographical scope of their discretionary concessions outside of their own (or scheme) boundary.**

Existing Smartcard Based Schemes

- 1.20 It is acknowledged that where smart ticketing is available, it will be easier for Schemes to apply discretionary arrangements to support TCA business rules. However, existing Schemes with on-bus smartcard reading equipment and supporting systems will also need to consider the implications of April 2008 on their current arrangements. Where such a Scheme is either ITSO compliant, or will be so from April 2008, the majority of statutory journeys will be recorded through the on-bus reader. As London will not be migrating its Freedom Pass to the ITSO based standard of the All-England Pass until 2010, there will however, still be a requirement for ETMs in the Smart areas to be able to manually record a London Pass when presented as a flash pass.
- 1.21 Existing Smart areas are strongly advised to be considering what changes they may wish to make in relation to discretionary entitlements NOW to allow appropriate timelines for changes to be made.