

Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee



Travel Card Unit – Update on Performance and Progress on Digital Enhancements

Date of meeting 18 September 2020

Date of report 2 September 2020

1. Object of report

The object of this report is to update the Committee on performance of the Travel Card Unit (TCU) and to advise the Committee of progress regarding digital enhancements to support TCU administrative processing.

2. Background

The update provided at the previous Committee described the background for TCU workloads, in particular explaining the annual increase in volumes between Easter and the end of the summer being of concern, resulting in extended processing times and much higher than usual call volumes. The period since the previous meeting was further complicated by Covid-19 and the requirement to move to and support remote working.

Historically, several TCU processes are reliant on staff being available in the office. These include the receipt and opening of mail as well as attending to customers at the kiosk in Buchanan Bus Station.

Following the Transport Scotland and National Entitlement Card Programme Office (NECPO) decision to suspend card production in March, a decision was made to close the kiosk and alternative procedures were implemented to ensure mail and other admin tasks could continue to be processed.

Digital hardware was provided to team members along with systems integration and remote access which allowed the contact centre to function continually with the team all working from their homes.

Throughout this period, SPT has remained in close contact with Transport Scotland and NECPO to ensure consistency of message and support for card holders in the region. The focus was on minimising risk of infection and spread of the virus and advising only essential travel should be considered. The TS appointed card bureau also suspended production during this period. Arrangements were made with bus and rail operators to permit travel for those with lapsed/expired cards and passengers who were waiting for their application to be processed.

At the time of the previous update SPT was engaging with Noble Systems Limited to begin the process to implement digital solutions with the object to provide customer self-serve options and process automation. The aim was to reduce specific high-volume and low-skill tasks requiring manual interaction and streamline processes to improve efficiency.

3. Digital Update

The Noble project went live on 21 July 2020 following a three-month delay due to lockdown and is now in the initial weeks of Phase One. This has involved replacing the incumbent contact centre platform with a more technically advanced solution with functionality better able to manage customer contact via telephone, email and sms/text.

Initial results are favourable with over 40% of renewal and replacement card telephone enquiries now being handled by the system. This equates to a reduction of 300 to 400 calls per day.

In addition, replacement card enquiries are being batched for bulk processing. This is more efficient, removes calls from the queue and allows the team to focus on more complex tasks.

4. Performance Results

- Admin Processing
 - Admin processing times were maintained at one week during March and April; however, they have extended since then and are currently at four weeks. The main contributors to the extended processing times are the expected annual increase admin volumes as well as a wave of delayed enquiries throughout lockdown. This has resulted in a significant jump in call volumes. The delay implementing the Noble System solution due to Covid was an additional factor.
 - TCU are continuing to balance the focus between call handling and maintaining admin processing times at an acceptable level.
- Call Handling Performance
 - Call volumes throughout lockdown dropped to around 50% of pre-lockdown levels. This allowed the team to focus more on ensuring admin was cleared whilst maintaining call handling performance.
 - As restrictions were relaxed it was clear pent up demand from the initial lockdown period, combined with the usual seasonal peak have resulted in a significant increase in both calls and admin workloads.
 - A key factor for investment in new technology was to better manage the annual peak in enquiries. Unfortunately, Covid-19 and the resultant lockdown delayed implementation by three months. The decision to halt card production nationwide resulted in a pent up demand from new applicants, as well as card holders requiring to renew eligibility or request a replacement card who have delayed making an enquiry during the lockdown period.
 - The impact of increased applications, emails, ordinary mail and other enquiries has resulted in a decline in call handling performance as volumes climb although this has been mitigated in recent weeks with the automation delivered by the Noble solution.

5. Next Steps

The next phase for the project is to integrate with the National Entitlement Card Management System data which will enable further automation and reduce the need for manual

intervention. This will reduce the manual effort required to process replacement card requests. SPT is working with The Improvement Service and NECPO to achieve this.

SPT is also implementing web forms to standardise online enquiries to enable further efficiencies and streamline processes.

Future phases involve full integration with the Noble system and the Card Management System to provide even greater self-serve options for customers and more specific status information regarding eligibility and renewal as well as functionality. This will happen following the completion of the tender process to replace the existing card management system.

In addition to the investment outlined above, we are also working with Transport Scotland and The Improvement Service to implement NEC Online. This nationwide initiative will enable first time over 60 and disabled applications to be made online, removing the requirement for in-person applications. Card holders will also be able to renew their eligibility, order a replacement card and make other changes such as an address or update a photo. This is a phased roll out with functionality increasing on a month to month basis. It requires the cooperation and support of all partner Local Authorities to sign up to the facility via The Improvement Service.

The digital enhancements outlined above were delayed due to the global health crisis and have not been in time to reduce the pressure for this years' peak. However initial results are promising. Enhancements and improvements planned in the coming months are expected to deliver additional benefits and efficiencies.

6. Committee action

The committee is asked to note the contents of this paper, the progress made with digital enhancements and further future integration to improve the service further.

7. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>A review of the scheme will be completed in 2019/20</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None directly</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None directly</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Improved customer experience achieved via efficiency gains and performance improvements</i>
Risk consequences	<i>Mitigations to minimise the risk to card holders</i>

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