

# Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee



## Concessionary Travel Unit – Update on Performance & Digital Enhancements and Summary of Proposed National Scheme Changes

**Date of meeting** 17 September 2021

**Date of report** 1 September 2021

### Report by Treasurer

#### 1. Object of report

The object of this report is to update the Committee on concessionary travel unit performance and to advise the Committee of progress regarding digital enhancements to support administrative processing. Further, to provide a summary of proposed changes to the national concessionary travel scheme which may impact the local SCTS.

#### 2. Background

The update provided at the previous Committee outlined the background to concessionary travel unit workloads and plans underway for digital solutions to shoulder some of the burden for specific high-volume tasks, such as replacement card requests and renewal enquiries. The objective is to deliver a more efficient service as technology handles specific high-volume, repetitive processes, allowing the team to support customers with more detailed enquiries, and with varied and complex needs, on the telephone or in person, as well as process new paper applications and other more involved admin tasks. This will result in fewer calls requiring manual intervention, shorter wait times for callers, improved call handling performance and enhanced customer experience

We continue to develop these digital solutions and work with external partners at The Improvement Service (IS) and National Entitlement Card Programme Office (NECPO) to further improve them.

Since the previous update, the team has continued to work remotely with a small contingency working in the office to complete specific tasks that require them to do so. As the government relax restrictions, in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of team members attending the office has increased, however the balance is still in favour of home-working rather than a specific hybrid system.

Following the Contact Centre restructure at the end of 2020 a cross-skilling training and development plan has been implemented to ensure team members new to concessionary travel card issue are suitably equipped and supported.

#### 3. Digital Update

The previous update confirmed the Noble Systems Contact Centre Solution went live in July 2020, and was in the initial weeks of Phase One. Although we remain in this phase,

further developments have delivered improved results. Callers are increasingly using the self-serve options within the Noble Systems propriety Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to request replacement cards and for renewal information. This customer service option complements other routes to service such as telephone, email, post in-person and online. It enables specific tasks to be batched for processing, such as replacement card requests. Rather than tackle these individually while the customer is on the phone, they can leave their details in the IVR, and the team can then process this request along with all the other replacement card requests at the same time. These enhancements ensure we can better support those whose needs may be varied and complex, who may find technology challenging, through non-digital channels.

Phase Two of the Noble project requires access to customer data held within the national card management system (CMS). This will enable more complex tasks to be automated and more detailed, contextualised responses within the IVR. Unfortunately, we cannot access the data in the existing CMS as it is not possible to develop application programming interfaces (API) with the incumbent system. SPT also need a data sharing agreement to permit access.

A replacement CMS is planned for November 2021 and SPT intends to access customer data within the new system and progress to Phase Two of the Noble Project. In addition, SPTs legal team have been working with NECPO on the data sharing agreement, required to access customer data, and this should be signed and in place soon.

The Noble Systems solution continues to handle specific enquiry types within the IVR system. The IVR is able to present detailed information and responses based on what the caller needs and point callers to appropriate websites for further guidance.

For example: if a caller has lost their card, they no longer need to wait in a queue for an agent to respond to their enquiry and order a replacement card. They can now leave their details, which are captured by the system, and a replacement card is ordered, without the need to speak to someone. This service is available 24x7, callers do not need to wait for the Contact Centre to open.

Although the IVR is designed to take some enquiries away from the Contact Centre and handle enquiries out-of-hours, callers will still have the option to speak to an agent, or if out-of-hours, the messaging advises the caller to call back if they want to speak with an agent.

The Improvement Service and NECPO have also launched a new online service, [www.getyournec.scot](http://www.getyournec.scot), allowing residents, in Local Authority areas that have signed up, to apply for and manage their National Entitlement Card (NEC). SPT is working with IS and NECPO to promote the service and support sign up with partner authorities. Nine partner LAs are already live with the remainder in the process of signing up. SPT online guidance, IVR messaging and email auto-responses have been updated to highlight the new service as an option.

#### **4. Performance Results**

- Admin Processing
  - As restrictions relaxed, customer demand increased significantly. This included the usual seasonal increase as well as considerable pent up demand that had built during the various lockdowns. It became apparent a significant proportion of cardholders chose not to renew or request replacement cards during lockdowns, deciding instead to do this once they were able to use their cards.

- Admin processing times have been managed typically within the normal four-week processing timescale. On occasion demand resulted in processing times exceeding four-weeks temporarily, however resource was diverted to avoid any backlogs. Most admin tasks have been managed well within this timeframe and the team remain flexible and able to direct efforts accordingly.
- Further development of digital solutions and progress to Phase Two of the Noble Systems project will help to manage demand and reduce processing times as efficiency gains are achieved.
- Call Handling Performance
  - Call volumes and demand have built steadily however remain at around 50% of pre-lockdown levels. This is due to a combination of the digital solutions implemented to absorb some of the calls, as well as greater efficiencies in managing admin enquiries thus reducing the impact of callers chasing progress, as seen in previous years. Call queues are actively managed in real-time to move resource from admin tasks to calls as required.
  - As we progress to Phase Two of the Noble Systems project further efficiencies are expected, as well as more effective customer self-serve and automated options which will reduce the volume of telephone enquiries that require manual effort. This will result in improvements to call handling performance.

## 5. Proposed National Scheme Changes

Developments to the national concessionary travel scheme and the system used to manage it are underway. The information here intends to raise awareness of the changes and consider any impacts to the local scheme.

### Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel scheme, which will become operational on 31 January 2022, extends nationwide concessionary bus travel to Scottish residents aged under 22. Local scheme benefits, including rail and Subway concessions, will not be extended to this client group.

Transport Scotland advise the Young Persons' scheme will be delivered by Young Scot teams within Local Authorities. SPT are updating IVR messaging and online guidance to direct any enquiries to the appropriate location and training the team to direct enquiries accordingly.

There may be some migration of young disabled cardholders to the new scheme to avoid the requirement to renew every three years, however this will be an individual choice as there is a loss of local scheme benefits to consider. Impacts to the local scheme are not expected to be significant.

### Change to Card Management System

As mentioned previously, following a tender process, the NECPO advise the current card management system (CMS) will be replaced with a new supplier's system, scheduled for November 2021. Elderly and disabled concessionary travel cardholders within Strathclyde can access local scheme benefits with their National Entitlement Card with eligibility managed through the CMS.

SPT intend to use either Application Programming Interface (API) to the new CMS or reference data extracts taken by The Improvement Service to allow the Noble System to use this data to provide enhanced self-serve and more contextualised automation. This will enable further development of digital solutions.

## 6. Next Steps

The previous update advised the next phase for the project is to integrate with the National Entitlement Card Management System data to enable further automation and reduce the need for manual intervention. As this is dependent on delivery of the new CMS, scheduled for November 2021, next steps remain as per the previous update.

The new SPT website has recently launched and consideration is being given to the development of webforms. These will enable enquiries to be structured in a way that will allow them to be handled more efficiently. Specific webform enquiries will be handled automatically with others able to be batch processed for greater efficiency.

## 7. Committee action

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this paper, the progress made with digital enhancements and future integration to improve the service whilst retaining non-digital customer channels for direct contact where necessary.

## 8. Consequences

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|-------------------------|---|
| Policy consequences     | <i>None directly.</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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