

Little Green Bus – Community Transport in Lancashire

It is gratifying to announce that the Lancashire County Council(LCC) are intending to grant the newly formed Consortium, **Lancashire Community Transport (LCT)**, a supply contract for the next 3 years , commencing on April 1st, 2015. **LCT** will consist of 5 community transport charities, including **Little Green Bus**. The contract would cover the next 3 years , with the possibility of further extension for 2 more years. The announcement was made by letter, written on the 11 th March. A 5 working day call-in period has now passed. This is being followed by a period of 11 working days to allow for legitimate legal challenges to be made. The award, if no challenges materialise, will be ratified on the 23 rd March.

Historically, Community Transport charities were required to bid on an annual basis for the privilege of providing services in specified sectors of Lancashire. The business embraced dial-a-ride bus services, the organisation of Community cars, and day trips for the elderly, which use the vehicular equipment more efficiently and brings in much needed additional revenue. Over a year ago, LCC realised that dispensing with the discrete tender bidding process would be financially beneficial for the local tax payer. The Community Transport Companies were, therefore, asked to pool their resources and expertise, without ceding their individual sovereignty, with evaluative work commencing over 12 months ago. A business plan was submitted to LCC in July 2014, and was provisionally accepted. However, the Legal department then intervened expressing concern about the „ State Aid“ situation prevailing with some of the **LCT** members. Once this problem had been resolved a new Invitation to Tender was issued, with the new bid being provisionally accepted , as described above.

The contract has several basic requirements, the main one being that there shall be a measurable growth in SPTs (Single Passenger Trips) such that at the end of the first trading year the rate of passenger numbers being carried will be 10% higher than the base rate at 1 st April, 2015(124,600 SPTs per annum). There are to be further 10% annual increases, in line with the current LCC philosophy of „ more for the same (fee)“. A number of opportunities within Lancashire exist to improve and expand the services currently provided. Particular emphasis will be placed on growing the Community Car Scheme. An extensive marketing programme, being supported by LCC funding, is being prepared to put this ambition into reality.

The 5 bodies involved are:-

Preston Community Transport
Central Lancs Dial - a - Ride
West Lancs Dial – a – Ride
Burnley, Pendle, & Rossendale CVS
Little Green Bus

Although not eligible to membership of **LCT**, being owned by LCC, TravelCare will be party to discussions in a separate Forum of community transport providers. The aim will be to wring maximum efficiency from the grouping.

Little Green Bus has been elected to be the Lead Organisation, to undertake the requisite administrative functions for the Consortium, and to be the official conduit between LCC and **LCT**.

If the Labour Party assumes power post the 7 th May, it has been stated that there would be an immediate review as to how the not for profit transport sector could be boosted, in other words how Community Transport could take over some of the current commercial work. The possible outcome could be the establishment of local groups, or co-operatives, to run mini buses /traditional buses in place of commercial services. The current LCC portfolio holder is known to adhere to this philosophy, and is keen on involving town/parish councils in such ventures. He has already pronounced his ideas to several parish councils in West Lancashire: he will be making similar presentations to the Lancashire County Council Parish & Town Council conference on Saturday 21 st March, at Burnley Town Hall.

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