



## Concessionary Travel Unit – Update on Performance

**Date of meeting** 20 September 2024

**Date of report** 2 September 2024

### Report by Treasurer

#### 1. Object of report

To update the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee on the Concessionary Travel Unit Performance, including an update on the completion of the Contact Centre Improvement Programme (CCIP) and the initiatives that have followed since the completion as well as a review of the current performance position for both call handling and administrative tasks undertaken by SPT's Contact Centre.

#### 2. Background to report

The update at the previous Joint Committee on 15 March 2024<sup>1</sup> advised that the CCIP was working to a deadline of June for overall completion, however, the programme was completed in May - one month ahead of schedule.

Upon review, it was found several items should not proceed to implementation, mainly due to research indicating the level of anticipated benefit did not outweigh risks or costs, lack of appetite from external stakeholders to make the change, and work already being progressed by other areas within SPT. All decisions were subject to ratification at the CCIP Steering Group which met every six weeks.

Overall, the benefits from those initiatives that were implemented include better customer experience and improvements on processing times through task elimination. At the time of completion, it was agreed three workstreams would remain ongoing, subject to fresh governance and resource arrangements. These are introduction of webforms, simplification of checks and ferry card production and issue, which is discussed in more detail below.

#### 3. Outline of proposals

##### 3.1 Digital Update

Noble Systems Solutions provided a quote for the implementation of the Application Programme Interface (API) project which, if implemented, would allow the automation of self-service replacement card requests. After consideration, Phase Two of the Noble Digital project has been paused due to ongoing performance issues that have been experienced with the system. The contact centre management are reviewing alternative telephony suppliers and exploring the possibility of introducing webforms, which would be able to better integrate with a telephony provider, before making a decision on whether to

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.spt.co.uk/media/yfdbzqos/sctsjc150324\\_agenda9.pdf](https://www.spt.co.uk/media/yfdbzqos/sctsjc150324_agenda9.pdf)

move forward with the Noble project. At present, the contact centre staff are still manually processing replacement card requests received via the telephone service.

Webforms are a part of a wider organisational discussion and SPT is reviewing suppliers that may be able to provide a suitable solution for the organisation. The contact centre management has engaged with different areas of SPT to assess the benefits so that a corporate business case can be compiled. If successful, webforms could allow for quicker turnaround times for customers as they would receive contextualised responses to the enquiry, which will in turn create efficiencies for the contact centre by allowing more time to be focused on resolving more complex queries and therefore enabling better reporting of productivity of processing times.

The simplification of a checks initiative would allow customers to self-serve through the telephony system and SPT's website through webforms. This would be utilised for update of details, card renewals and replacement card requests. This will not be taken forward until the outcome of discussions on webforms is known and also the current telephony system. An update will be provided at the next SCTSJC Committee.

One of the CCIP proposals was to integrate the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Ferry entitlement with the National Entitlement Card (NEC). This would improve customer experience as it will streamline the application process and furthermore would mean that customers would no longer have to carry two separate cards when traveling by ferry. For SPT there will be estimated cost savings in the region of £22k in terms of materials to produce the ferry cards and staff processing time.

This would be a change for stakeholders involved as the entitlement will be added to the NEC when the disabled or over 60s card is issued. As a result, disabled ferry cards will no longer be processed by the contact centre, and the Post Office would no longer be required to process over 60s ferry cards. Consideration will also be given to whether to align the validity period of an over 60s ferry card (valid for 4 years) to over 60s NEC (valid indefinitely once issued) as well as aligning the validity period of a disabled ferry card (valid for 4 years) to a disabled NEC (valid for up to 3 years). This would require a change in the rules which SPT will review.

By removing the 4 year limitation on the validity of over 60s ferry cards there is a risk that cardholders may move out of the qualifying area and fail to inform SPT. As a result, some cardholders may still be able to use their ferry concession until their address has been updated and a new card is issued and used. There is currently no way of tracking such moves, with the only current safeguard being asked to renew. However, any risk associated is considered to be low and outweighed by the benefits to SPT and customers. Internal and external stakeholder buy in is a secondary risk as this will be a change for all stakeholders involved in the process. It will also be assessed whether second homeowners' ferry entitlement will be combined onto the NEC or if a separate ferry card will still be required, or indeed whether entitlement should continue.

The Contact Centre continues to provide access to services for all customers, including those with restricted or no access to digital means. The Concessionary Travel Booth within Buchanan Bus Station reopened on 6 June 2024 and has since supported 14 clients with their concessionary travel cards. Out of the 14 appointments, 9 were for first time applicants for a disabled NEC and 5 appointments were to renew a disabled NEC that had expired or was due to expire. Appointments are for those individuals who require additional support, and in these cases have been clients who have visual or hearing impairments or struggle to complete the required forms.

Appointments can be made by calling the contact centre and SPT's concessions webpage has been updated with guidance on this.

The Contact Centre agents handle a range of calls and admin processing tasks for both Concessionary Travel and the MyBus service. The centre prioritises admin processing over call handling performance to ensure that the customer core enquiries are resolved quicker. This does mean on occasion that call handling performance may reduce depending on the volume and nature of customer enquiries.

### **3.2 Admin Processing**

- Since the last Committee the Contact Centre agents have processed 24,877 NECs, 13% of which were first time applications (3,268), 20% were renewals (5,052) and 67% were replacement cards (16,560).
- Since the last Committee the Contact Centre agents have processed 7,558 postal items and 33,790 emails relating to Concessionary Travel, which include first time applications, renewals and general enquiries.
- Since the last update to the Committee, processing turnaround times for postal enquiries has remained at one to two days and processing timescales for email enquiries average at one to two weeks. The Contact Centre agents will continue to focus on maintaining these turnaround times to promptly resolve cardholder enquiries and thus improve customer experience.
- The Contact Centre agents successfully minimised an expected cyclical backlog situation of admin levels in late-May throughout June. This involved close monitoring of admin volumes and focusing a portion of the team each day to process outstanding work and avoid excessively exceeding timescales.

### **3.3 Call Handling Performance**

- Since the last Committee the Contact Centre agents have received 27,850 concessionary travel calls, with 81% answered.
- The Contact Centre agents support a range of tasks across both the concessionary travel card unit and the MyBus service. Since the last Committee the combined total number of inbound and outbound calls is 84,330. This has decreased by 12% from the previous Committee update.
- Overall call demand has increased to 63% of pre-lockdown levels.

### **3.4 Contact Centre Resource Review**

The CCIP is now complete, with other workstreams flowing off the programme which could deliver further efficiencies. Call handling and administrative tasks are all within acceptable levels with improvements being made since the last report to committee. The staffing compliment of the Contact Centre has been more stable in recent months with a reduction in long term absences and also a full complement of staff. The contact centre establishment will be reviewed annually as part of the normal budget setting process.

## **4. Committee action**

The Committee is recommended to:

- (i) note the contents of this report;
- (ii) acknowledge the progress made with admin processing turnaround times; and
- (iii) support the progress made with digital enhancements and future initiatives following the closure of the CCIP.

## 5. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>As detailed in the report.</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>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>None directly.</i>

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**Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee**

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