

**PARK AND RIDE CHARGE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW**

*To:* **Economy and Environment Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **14<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

*From:* **Executive Director, Economy, Transport and Environment**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Forward Plan ref:* **Not applicable**      *Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **To advise Members regarding the implementation of charges at the Cambridge Park and Ride sites, and provide an update to the report considered by the Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> February.**

*Recommendation:* **The Committee is asked to note the impact of the parking charges, the effects of the changes made to the charging system, and the ongoing need to market and promote Park and Ride.**

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## **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 On 3<sup>rd</sup> February members considered a report on the introduction of parking charges at the Cambridge Park and Ride sites. The report set out the effects on Park and Ride usage and the parking income achieved. Members were also advised of the changes that had been made or were in course of being made to improve the operation of the ticketing system.
- 1.2 Committee expressed concern about the reduction in patronage and the difficulties some users had experienced with the ticketing system. The changes to the ticketing system were noted and members requested a further report be brought to the July Committee.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Business Plan relies on income being raised from parking charges at the Cambridge Park and Ride sites. The system costs about £1M per annum to operate. Cabinet approved the principle of introducing the charge in September 2013 and the charges were implemented in July 2014.
- 2.2 Following the implementation of parking charges the patronage on Park and Ride dropped. A drop in patronage of around 5% had been forecast, but a drop of around 14% occurred in practice. Income from parking charges was also substantially below forecast.
- 2.3 The report considered by the Committee in February identified a number of problems that had occurred with the ticket machines and the measures that had been taken to address these issues.
- 2.4 Parking charges were introduced at the two Busway Park and Ride sites on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015, again to provide income to support the business plan. Unless otherwise stated information in this report relates only to the five Cambridge Park and Ride sites.

## **3 Key Issues**

### Current level of passenger numbers

- 3.1 The car parking charges were introduced on 21 July 2014. The number of passenger journeys was predicted to fall by 5 % and would take 4 years to return to the level prior to the introduction of the charge. The 4 years assumes a 1% background growth in jobs in Cambridge City. This growth has taken place and is expected to continue into the future.
- 3.2 The current reduction in passenger numbers is around 14% when compared with the same period prior to the introduction of the charge. While there are week by week and site by site variations in patronage, overall the reduction in patronage levels has been consistently of this order in comparison with the same period prior to the introduction of charges.
- 3.3 It is therefore the case that the various improvements made to the ticketing system and the marketing and promotional activities have not yet resulted in an improvement in the patronage levels.

- 3.4 It is considered that the continued impact on patronage is either the result of a greater than forecast effect of the charge, or the ongoing adverse publicity surrounding the charges, which is discouraging use.
- 3.5 The graph attached at Appendix 1 details the last fifteen years of Park and Ride passenger numbers. The figures are for annual passenger numbers up until the end of March in the calendar year noted. For example for 2015 the figure is for the period from the beginning of April 2014 until the end of March 2015.
- 3.6 As can be seen there was a period of steady growth up until 2005 and there has been some fluctuation since but a net increase overall. The current level of passenger numbers was last experienced in 2006/7. Passenger numbers peaked in 2009/10 but have fluctuated in subsequent years.
- 3.7 As reported in February there has been an increase in the use of City centre off-street car parks but this is substantially less than the loss of patronage from Park and Ride. Figures for the first quarter of 2015 show that the increase has been less than in the second half of 2014.
- 3.8 Cambridge BID have provided visitor numbers for shopping centres of comparable size to those in Cambridge. Compared to other sites in the east of England and nationally, visitor numbers are holding up well and not declining despite recent changes to shopping habits, such as internet shopping.

#### Ticket Systems

- 3.9 There are two methods of paying for parking. Users can go online and register their car's registration. They then have the option of pay as you go, or paying weekly, monthly or annually. They then need to take no further action as the system automatically identifies their car when they arrive, providing a very straightforward and relatively painless system for regular users.
- 3.10 Those wishing to pay at the sites can do so at ticket machines. The machines combine the purchase of parking and bus tickets in a single transaction. As the system works by identifying cars entering the site it is necessary for users to enter their registration number. As well as facilitating the on line system this also does away with the need for users to return to their cars with tickets.
- 3.11 The relatively complex machines and the need to recall registration numbers led to some users having difficulty using the machines. This combined with slow internet connection for credit card transactions and a lower than anticipated take up of the on line option, led to queuing and delays at the sites following the introduction of the charges. These problems were initially addressed by improved information signs, installing additional machines, and promoting the on line option.
- 3.12 The user interface on the ticket machines was reviewed in autumn 2014, taking into account feedback from users. Improvements were developed by the suppliers and trialled at Trumpington Park and Ride site during March 2015. Following positive customer feedback the software was changed at all five sites and has been installed at the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway sites at St Ives and Longstanton.

- 3.13 Queuing surveys undertaken in May confirm that software improvements and the additional machines (installed in October 2014) have eliminated queuing problems at the sites. A summary table is attached as Appendix 2.

#### Recent Customer Feedback

- 3.14 Between March and June of this year, 28 complaints were received from passengers regarding the ticket machines. The majority of these were related to difficulties experienced in making credit and debit card payments as a result of poor internet connectivity. An issue that has now been addressed.
- 3.15 In order to better understand how people use the ticketing system and to see if further improvements can be made to the whole experience a brief has been agreed for a specialist wayfinding consultancy to undertake a review. The objective of the review will be to audit and understand the process undertaken by first time users, tourists and concession users in using the ticket machines and parking procedures at the P&R.

#### Recent improvements

- 3.16 As part of the Connecting Cambridgeshire project, broadband has been introduced at the Cambridge Park and Ride sites. This much enhanced connectivity will remove the problem that occurs with losing connectivity between the ticket machines and the banks when credit card and debit card payments are being made. The switch to Broadband for the ticket machines was completed during June 2015.

#### Marketing and Promotion

- 3.17 Working with Officers at the County Council and Cambridge BID, Stagecoach ran a promotion over the Easter period offering two adult tickets for the price of one on the Cambridge Park and Ride bus services. The offer ran for the two weeks of the school holidays. A range of promotional activity was undertaken including Facebook and parent-mail (to local schools). This ensured that potential customers who may not currently be using Park and Ride services were made aware of the initiative. Despite this campaign, passenger numbers over the Easter holidays remained lower than in 2014.
- 3.18 Stagecoach increased their ordinary bus fares in April 2015, but agreement was reached with Stagecoach not to increase fares on Park and Ride until April 2016. This agreement was made in exchange for continuing the suspension of the departure charge but using a sliding scale of reductions in the departure charge. Thus if patronage recovers to within 2% of previous levels the full access charge will be paid. If patronage levels remain 12% or more below previous levels no access charge will be paid. This will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- 3.19 It is considered that longer running promotional activity will probably be needed to have a sustained impact on Park and Ride usage. Work is now taking place with Stagecoach and Cambridge BID on further promotions of Park and Ride in conjunction with other initiatives to promote Cambridge. A programme of promotion over the school summer holidays to coincide with the Cambridge BID Loving Summer promotion is in development. The

approach will be to encourage the regular use of Park and Ride over the summer holidays via the collection of stamps at Park and Ride sites and participating businesses and destinations in Cambridge. The loyalty will result in the reward of a discount or some kind of 'treat' to customers from participating businesses. Discounted bus fares will not form part of the rewards.

#### **4 Conclusion**

- 4.1 Considering all of the improvements that have been made to address concerns about the ticket machines, the bus fare price freeze and the promotions that have been run, it must be concluded that the original estimates on the likely drop in passenger numbers were overly optimistic. Nonetheless effort will continue to be made to improve and promote the service and this, together with continued and growing economic activity, possibly assisted by measures being considered by the City Deal Board to restrain traffic in Cambridge, should see an increase in Park and Ride usage and in due course a return to previous levels.

#### **5. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

##### **5.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

Park and Ride income contributes to the Council Business Plan and this reduces the level of service reductions needed to balance the budget.

##### **5.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

##### **5.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### **6 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

##### **6.1 Resource Implications**

The levels of income from charges is now expected to fall significantly short of business plan targets. This will need to be addressed within the overall Economy, Transport and Environment budget. Nonetheless, income from the park and ride charges continues to avoid the need to make further cuts in ETE services.

##### **6.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

##### **6.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

#### **6.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### **6.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### **6.6 Public Health Implications**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
Economy and Environment Committee 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2015	Room 320 Shire Hall