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SATA News

Newsletter of the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance

Scottish Charity No SC027600

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Editorial

Welcome to the fifth edition of SATA News. If you missed the first four, they are on our website www.scottishaccessibletransport.org.uk and this one will be posted there too.

The outlook is bleak for developing more accessible transport services for disabled people or indeed for maintaining existing facilities. With central and local government cuts in both present and future provision already taking place and projected, it is time to speak up if we want to achieve equality. This is what SATA is trying to do with its emergency resolution passed at the AGM. It must continue to do so looking forward to the 2011 Scottish elections in May and we shall be seeking your help.

Meanwhile the busy year continues with meetings and consultation documents to consider. Our next meeting is an Open Meeting and will be held at the RNIB offices in Edinburgh on 11th November. It would be good to see some new faces and new members.

SATA's Perth meetings

Our AGM and Full meeting of members took place in Perth on 16th September at the Blackfriars Development Centre, Perth, courtesy of Perth & Kinross Council .

The Annual Report and Financial Statement were approved and the former is posted on our website. The Office Bearers were re-elected, namely Stan Flett as Chair, Maggie Killin and Vice Chair. Alan Rees as Secretary and John Ballantine as Treasurer. Paul Cross and Pat McGuigan retired from the Management Committee and were thanked for their services over many years. There is one vacancy which will be filled by co-option.

Two resolutions were passed. One was on a modest increase in membership subscriptions from April 2011 to keep pace with increased costs and to improve our services. The other was on cuts to transport services affecting disabled people (see below)

The presentation at the Full Meeting following the AGM was given by John Berry, on *The Journey to Health Care - Who's Responsibility?* John is Sustainable Transport Team Leader with Dundee City Council.

The Minutes of both these meetings are now on our website

SATA emergency resolution on cuts

At the AGM an emergency resolution was passed unanimously expressing concern that disabled people are becoming easy targets for cuts in transport services which will endanger or seriously limit their mobility and quality of life. The resolution gave examples, noted the governments declared commitment to equal opportunities, and called on all public bodies to consider the full implications and knock-on effects of their actions and engage in consultation with users and their representatives.

The resolution was sent out as a press release and distributed through the SATA membership, receiving widespread support. Copies were sent to MSPs of all parties including the transport minister, Stewart Stevenson. In his response, Mr Stevenson said he understood the concerns of SATA members but did little to assuage them. He said that "we all have to find ways to achieve more with fewer resources" but could only suggest that this was done by "working more closely together to identify priorities and design services accordingly". He did not say that his government would do this and involve disability organisations such as SATA. Furthermore he washed his hands of decisions by local authorities concerning local travel concessions, demand responsive transport and community transport which they had largely to meet from the block grant - and which we know is going to be reduced.

Mr Stevenson did commit his government to continuing the nation-wide free bus travel scheme at "any time of day, on eligible bus services for any number of journeys" but under the existing eligibility criteria which we know excludes large numbers of disabled people. He shared our disappointment that the level of confirmed funding for the Small Schemes element of the UK Access for All

programme for rail stations was being cut and said Scottish Ministers would continue its own investment in station improvements. He confirmed his wish to have a single mandatory charge for fees for Blue Badges across Scotland but seemed content that this should be set at £20.

DPTAC and Passenger Focus to be abolished

As part of its 'bonfire of quangos', the Coalition Government has announced that it intends to abolish both the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) and Passenger Focus, the rail and bus transport consumer watchdog. For SATA members this has echoes of the SNP Government's failed attempt in 2008, as part of its 'bonfire' proposals, to merge the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) with the Public Transport Users' Committee for Scotland (now known as Passengers' View Scotland). As then, there has been no prior consultation or impact assessment on these decisions.

It remains to be seen if the proposals will get through the necessary legislative process and to what extent they will re-awaken the desire for equivalent measures in Scotland either before or after next May's Scottish elections. The loss of DPTAC in particular will have serious consequences given its proven record since it was established in 1985 of providing information, advice and guidance, not only to government but also to the transport industry across the UK. Its declared intention to see disabled people gain the same access to transport as everyone else by 2020 now looks increasingly unrealistic.

Rail improvements

Both ScotRail and Transport Scotland have regularly keep us abreast of improvement schemes under the *Access for All* programme and we are grateful for that. We hope our comments have been helpful. We have also been consulted on the new electric seven-car Class 380 trains coming into service in the west of Scotland. ScotRail has published a report *Looking to the Future* to mark the sixth anniversary of its franchise. The report includes station enhancements and new facilities and services planned for 2011.

East Coast Trains has also consulted us on a planned upgrade to the Waverley station booking office. We also look forward to the long-awaited Waverley Steps project by Network Rail.

A National Forum for Buses?

Transport Scotland's Scottish Rail Accessibility Forum and Roads for All Forum have both worked well, with the involvement of both industry representatives and disabled people. SATA would like to see a similar National Forum for Buses and there has been correspondence with Transport Scotland to try to establish the case. It would be the best way of achieving regular dialogue on a range of issues such as the loss of socially necessary services especially in rural areas, progress on getting low-floor vehicles into service across the whole of Scotland. ironing out problems with the Entitlement Card and reader machines, and re-establishing a

national scheme to replace the Thistle Card. If you are in support of this idea please write to Transport Scotland or let SATA know.

Consultations and responses

Audit Scotland invited views on its paper *Evaluation of National Concessionary Travel in Scotland for Older and Disabled People*. SATA sent in a response by the closing date of 15th May and it is with our other consultation responses on our website. Audit Scotland's subsequent report *National Concessionary Travel* was published on 7th October. Amongst its comments it says that research shows the scheme "has had only limited impact on improving social inclusion, improving health or promoting a shift from car to bus." despite now costing just over £199 million. It has not delivered against most of its stated objectives. These include allowing disabled people, especially those on low incomes, to have improved access to services, facilities and social networks. It recommends that the strategic objectives should be clarified and that performance measures be developed to assess the impact against these objectives. Government should also work with local authorities "to understand the reasons for variations in the take up of disabled passes".

SATA responded to a **Department for Transport** consultation on *Proposed Changes to Regulations Covering Powered Mobility Scooters and Powered Wheelchairs* and issued a press release supporting EU proposals for *Bus and Coach Passenger Rights*.

The **Scottish Government** consulted on its proposals for *Blue Badge Reform* and SATA submitted a response by the 1st October closing date. It is now seeking views on its *Public Sector Equality Duty Draft Regulations and Order* by 28th November and has arranged meetings in Glasgow on 12th November and Edinburgh on 18th November details of which have been circulated..

Ross Finnie MSP is consulting on his *Proposed Regulation of Dropped Kerbs and Pavement Parking (Scotland) Bill* and invites replies by 31st January 2011 - email: ross.finnie.msp@scottish.parliament.uk if you are supportive or want more information..

Taxis in Dunoon

We have been in correspondence with a taxi driver in Dunoon who applied to Argyll & Bute Council for a licence to operate a wheelchair accessible taxi in his area. His application was turned down on the ground that there was "no demand". Taking the matter up with a council licensing official, we established that this decision was based on a survey in 2003. And yet local disability and social care groups supported the application with their own more recent survey. According to Scottish Government statistics (2009) there are no other wheelchair accessible taxis or private hire vehicles licensed in the council area out of a combined total of 191. It would appear that the determining factor was in fact the opposition of existing taxi owners with non-accessible vehicles. The council

confirmed that it had no policy on the provision of wheelchair accessible taxis/phcs which is in contravention of long-established advice from the Department of Transport and SATA.

Argyll & Bute is not the only licensing authority without either provision or policies for wheelchair accessible vehicles. Nor, in the absence of any initiative from the UK Government under the DDA, are we likely to see much change. The use of many accessible vehicles also remains out of the reach of many disabled people because of the cost and the absence of any concessionary fare schemes. Indeed, we are seeing existing Taxicard schemes being withdrawn or curtailed.

Figures of taxis and private hire cars and drivers licensed by local authority area, including wheelchair accessible vehicles, are given in Scottish Transport Statistics: No 28 - 2009 Edition Table 1.4. and can be found on the Scottish Government website under 'publications'.

SATA's Manifesto for 2012

We now look forward to the 2011 Scottish elections next May. If you would like to see changes or additions to the 2010 Manifesto, a copy of which is our website under Publications, please let us know as soon as possible.

SATA's forthcoming meetings

The date for the next meeting is Thursday 11th November 2010 to be held at the RNIB offices in Edinburgh. The speaker will be Brian Juffs, Senior Bus Development Adviser to the Scottish Government. A draft schedule of meetings in 2011 has been drawn up for consideration.

Thank you and best wishes.

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