

**Nineteen 'older' residents in attendance, all over 65. This reflects the demographic of Simpson village, which is on the route of the 'old' no 18 bus. One attendee arrived late as she had spent two hours trying to return from the city centre using MK Connect.**

As context, this session was set up as technical drop in, explicitly to help people with the technical barriers and what to expect when booking. Via attended to walk people through downloading and using the app. I understand from the team that only one resident attending actually sought this support. - AW

**Improvements discussed, based on residents' experiences:**

### **1. Van Design**

- Because there is concern that the vans are difficult to get into and out of Grab Handles should be fitted.
- 'Attached' steps would mitigate fears about entering and exiting (one resident recently fell out a van)
- The seats which face each other are considered a public health issue at present.
- As it was learned that repairs (sometimes as 'minor' as broken door handles) are a constraint on the provision of the service, it is to be hoped that more robust vehicles can be purchased in future

We acknowledge the point regarding grab handles and did explore this previously, however it was not possible to source any during the lockdown period. We will be looking into this again and are seeking funding to support fabrication and installation of handles.

I'm not sure whether attached steps are viable or safe from a vehicle perspective, but I would expect with the provision of grab handles the existing extra steps will feel less precarious.

Broken door handles, while minor do make the vehicle unusable for customers. I think this has more to do with heavy use than the vehicles not being robust. That said, staff shortages at garages etc have added time to repairs so vehicles are currently out longer than we would expect. Unfortunately these are not environments that are easy to COVID proof beyond having fewer people working which slows work. - AW

### **2. Bus Driver Training**

- Explain that the step is available
- Ensure passengers do not exit on the traffic side (so park accordingly)
- Ring to say they have arrived if passenger not appeared (as well as txt)
- Training on the layout of MK and where places are, so that drivers can use common sense if app sends them somewhere which is unlikely to be the correct place, or looks unsafe.
- Take note of special instructions relating to collecting people with lack of mobility – this may mean looking around the area to pick up signage to 'out of the way' places (one residents is constantly asked to take a time-consuming walk with her mobility aid from her house which is 'round the corner' from the main building of the retirement complex because drivers do not look at the directional signs)
- As it was learned that driver recruitment is a continuing challenge with a negative impact on quality of service, a robust and long-term, multimedia recruitment initiative may be needed. How does this fit with staffing across all public services

reliant on drivers, and could a partnership approach help to overcome such challenges?

Driver training is fairly comprehensive but they are a human factor. Via's local driver manager brings drivers in for retraining where needed, so if users have specific experiences and contact us we can tackle them. I will pass these comments on to Via so they are aware of areas that may need additional focus.

Recruitment has improved greatly since the international team got involved and the Council's ability to intervene, as we are not the employer, is very limited. At the end of the day every industry reliant on drivers is feeling this pain at the moment and competing for limited resources. - AW

### **3. Pick up and Drop Off Points**

- De-commission and utilise old bus stops as a matter of urgency
- Locate 'landmark' places where there can be labelled Virtual Bus Stops (Point A, B etc) in hubs like Bletchley, CMK, train station, hospital. Mark these clearly.

We are currently exploring how best to address unused bus stops. This has to be done within the restrictions of what is legally available to us in terms of highway markings and there is nothing designed for this situation at the moment. We are looking for a viable option but it is our intention to move to these stops being used more by DRT.

The same restrictions apply around marking stops as DRT pick ups and this has been previously explored. We will revisit, but any such action will need to be balanced with the fact that marking a key location doesn't necessarily mean it's the only pick up point in that area and people need to be aware they could be directed elsewhere. This is because simply removing all other point in the surrounding area could lead to excessive walks from some other call locations which is unacceptable. - AW

### **4. App and Call Line**

- Improved communications and innovative ways, such as trainers in key communities needed to support people to become familiar with App and promote the service.
- A dedicated Help Phonenumber where people can ring to get advice on using the App and the service – avoid relying totally on e-learning and support

We would be very happy to train champions in local communities in how to use the app and where to direct people for additional support.

The 252526 number provides support on accounts and the service as well as bookings. - AW

### **5. 'Soft' Issues**

Be aware that there many older residents are not confident in using the service because of its perceived general unreliability, the lack of IT knowledge and IT confidence, phone calls taking a long time to answer and in some cases experiences of very poor service in terms of the Call Centre support, punctuality of the vans and lack of driver support. For some this is having a serious impact on mental well-being (isolation, loneliness and lack of independence) as well as an impact on finances as more taxi rides are needed. Many residents who attended the meeting were angry, anxious and frustrated at what they

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consider a poor service. Some said they would like to reduce or abandon driving, but are seriously concerned they will be 'stuck' in the village so clinging on to cars. This applies to more residents than attended the meeting.

The flexibility and extended service hours of DRT are welcome and not all experiences are negative, but they are outweighed by the general lack of confidence in the service.

We take these comments on board. We are currently preparing an expression of interest for the tackling loneliness through transport bid as we can see some opportunities we currently don't have resource for, that might make a substantial difference here. - AW

### **General Observations:**

DRT should be considered in the context of Community Transport and the Ageing Well strand of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Communications and Support to use DRT should be one aspect of an approach that also includes promoting the Volunteer Car Scheme for medical appointments and considers dedicated regular, if occasional, bus services during the week laid on for trips for older people or those with a disability e.g. for shopping. The resentment felt about the DRT service, in some areas of MK's communities, will not be assuaged by references to more sustainable buses, recycled bus shelters or reliance on e-communications.

Residents' experiences, comments and ideas should become an integral element of training and service evaluation. The 'Feedback Loop' should be employed to ensure a timely response to the issues and suggestions contributed by residents.

The two officers who attended the meeting, one from MKC and one from Via Van, are to be thanked for their thoughtful, professional and informed explanations and responses. It is hoped that senior officers and MKC councillors will be take all contributions from residents seriously and act swiftly to improve the service.

Thank you for this and the overall summary. We are looking at some practical longer term comms support (not online) and are happy to support local Parishes or groups where we can in setting up and accessing schemes like Faxi (friends as a taxi). I will connect with colleagues regarding the Volunteer Car Service, which was delayed due to the lockdown, to see where we can join up on communications. - AW