

**Operating New Public  
Transport Concepts  
Urban and rural experiences**

**UWE/Bristol Civic Society  
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# Introduction

- *Stagecoach is the largest bus operator in the UK*
- *A strong record of continuous innovation*
- *Entrepreneurship is in our “corporate DNA”*
- *Ongoing detailed consideration of options for new forms of personal mobility*
- *My own role*
  - *at Stagecoach since 2013*
  - *A unique role addressing strategic challenges and opportunities posed by the development sector and the wider development agenda*
  - *Directly embedded in Operating Companies*
  - *Role covering most of Midlands and much of Western England*
  - *Joined from Northamptonshire County Council where I established the business case for, set up and managed a County-wide Rural DRT system*



# Northamptonshire CountyConnect

- *Rural “free-flowing” demand responsive service*
  - *Based on Lincolnshire CallConnect model*
- *Operated around 7 market towns acting as rural hubs from 2011-2016*
- *Availability aimed to have a bus at any point within a booking area within an hour of request (few rural bus routes run better than hourly)*
- *Bookable from an hour up to a week in advance*
  - *Assists regular travellers*
- *Low-floor fully accessible minibuses*
  - *Deliberately sought slightly larger buses to flexibly accommodate peak loads*
- *“Resource rationed”*
  - *“First-come first served” principle*





# What worked?

- *Comprehensive coverage of a vast rural area: politically every community had the same offer*
  - *Over 300 villages*
  - *Daily Monday-Saturday service including peak availability*
  - *Many villages had not had a public transport service ever!*
- *Reduced council spending as resource was directed to demand*
- *Customer service*
  - *Call centre was and is vital, especially for elderly, but also to help flex bookings*
  - *High standards of care from drivers*
- *Blurs edges with social services transport*
  - *CountyConnect Plus “gate to gate service” for eligible vulnerable customers*
  - *Social inclusion – a public service and not stigmatised.*
- *Tried and tested Booking Scheduling and Despatch system*
  - *Modified and updated taxi industry technology!*



# What was problematic?

- *People don't like booking*
  - *“added friction”*
  - *Many people trust a timetable more than a booking (taxis that do not appear!)*
- *Regular demands (e.g. school and work movements)*
  - *Even with carefully-defined areas, and one of two key destination hubs per bus, demands can clash easily especially when multiple destinations are required.*
- *Size of some peak demands*
  - *Home-school movements in particular*
  - *Up to 22 people per “run” – 0930 on market days to Banbury or Market Harboro*
- *Managing some customer expectations*
- *Accommodating demands at popular times of day often leads to very long and complex routings*
- *Operating speeds: driving too fast for customer comfort!*



# Ashford Town network: “Little and Often”

- *Does what it says on the tin!*
- *16 seats Mercedes Sprinter buses; low-floor*
- *Scheduled services*
  - *Mainly on pre-existing established routes*
  - *Familiarity to customers*
- *Up to every 4 minutes*
  - *Much improved evening and Sunday services (every 15 minutes)*
  - *Finishing later at night*
- *Three main routes*
- *Three supplemental routes*
  - *Running every 15-20 minutes*
  - *Previously half-hourly*
- *Always seen as an experiment: February 2017 to October 2018*







# What worked?

- *48% increase in bus usage over less than a year*
- *Whole new customer base opened up*
  - *More affluent families with children*
  - *Rail Commuters*
  - *Others!*
- *Customer Service*
  - *Large number of staff new to the company and the industry*
  - *Fresh approach and customer service training consistently delivered at the start*
- *Exceptionally high levels of evening and Sundays growth*
- *Very high levels of impact*
  - *Buses visible everywhere at all times of day and night*
  - *Finishing later at night*





# What was challenging/didn't work?

- *Mobilisation of large numbers of new vehicles and staff*
- *Seating layout and capacity was insufficient especially at peak*
- *Vehicle costs of ownership and maintenance is exceptionally high per seat (not anticipated)*
  - *Higher rate of depreciation*      Three main routes
  - *High specification*
- *Highest frequency routes hard to operate without bunching*
  - *Effective frequencies often every 10 minutes*
- *Three supplemental routes performed much less well*
  - *Demography (fewer existing customers);*
  - *newer developments with low affordable housing levels where car use already well-established*



# Big Issues for Demand-Responsive

- *Peak demands very hard to accommodate*

- *Vehicle size*
- *Routing length and journey time*
- *Vehicle availability*

- *Customer expectations*

- *Waiting time*
- *Failed bookings (“no availability at time of departures”)*
- *Length of journey highly variable*

- *Cost base*

- *Very high (fixed) unit costs; while real productivity of staff assets can be quite low over the operating day*
- *Not just a matter of eliminating any human intervention: autonomy may well not be the silver bullet*

- *Commerciality*

- *Relevance and attractiveness of service starts to decline as demands rise*
- *And/or costs rise faster than revenues*

