

# Briefing Note

**Title:** Scrutiny update on the differences/challenges that between Dial a Ride and Phone n Ride Services

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## Background

This Briefing Note (BN), is to provide Economy Scrutiny panel with a response to a clarification question which was raised on 12<sup>th</sup> October, during the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) report presentation. Scrutiny asked for confirmation of the differences between Dial a Ride and Phone n Ride services and to confirm if the amalgamation of the services have been explored.

## **Key differences between Dial a Ride and Phone n Ride services**

In addition to Phone 'n' Ride, a local voluntary charity Dial-a-Ride, provides transport services for eligible and disabled passengers. The table summarises the key differences between the Dial-a-Ride and Phone 'n' Ride services:

	<b>Phone 'n' Ride</b>	<b>Dial-a-Ride</b>
<b>Operating Licence</b>	Public Service Vehicle licence (as a commercial operator)	Section 19 permit (as a registered charity)
<b>Service Area</b>	North East Lincolnshire only	North East Lincolnshire only
<b>Operating Hours</b>	Mon-Sat 6.30am to 6.30pm	Mon-Sun 8.30am to 4pm as determined by bookings and subject to driver availability. Hours of service are limited due to current lack of volunteer drivers
<b>Trip Uses</b>	Employment, Health Appointments, Education, Leisure and Shopping	Employment, Health Appointments, Education, Leisure and Shopping
<b>Passenger Restrictions</b>	Available to everyone	Concessionary fare pass holders (bus pass) on age grounds or those with a physical or mental disability only
<b>Passenger Assistance</b>	Driver provides minimal assistance to board/alight	Drivers provide escorted service into buildings

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<b>Fleet Size</b>	Three low floor accessible minibuses plus one spare vehicle	Up to 8 vehicles – not always in service due to volunteer driver availability
<b>Registration Fee</b>	None	£10 annual fee at present
<b>Funding</b>	NELC revenue budget, commercial passenger fares and contribution from NELC. Concessionary Fares budget for carrying pass holders	Voluntary passenger donations charitable grants and NELC Concessionary Fares budget for carrying pass holders.
<b>Drivers</b>	Paid for professional drivers	Voluntary drivers paid expenses only. Very limited numbers and problem is growing.
<b>Bookings &amp; Scheduling</b>	Bookings via NELC Contact Centre DRT Operator 8.30am to 5pm Mon-Fri - 24 hour Online Booking service Clients can book up to 14 days in advance Phone n Ride provides a guarantee of travel	Bookings via Dial-a-Ride booking office 9am to 3pm Mon-Thurs -No option to book on-line currently. Clients can book a “couple of weeks in advance” subject to volunteer driver availability Dial a Ride does not provide guaranteed travel

## Challenges of merging the Phone n Ride and Dial a Ride demand responsive transport bus services

Discussions have taken place between NELC/EQUANS Transport Officers and the Dial a Ride co-ordinator regarding the potential merging of the two services.

Dial a Ride are not willing to merge the service with Phone n Ride due to the following reasons:

- Dial a Ride view the merger as a potential risk to their organisation and see the Dial a Ride service being absorbed into the Phone n Ride service. Dial a Ride believe they are unique in what they offer to the public and wish to continue the delivery of the service in it's current format.
- Dial a Ride drivers are unpaid volunteers and Phone n Ride provide paid drivers. Dial a Ride see this as a potential area of conflict, and it may detract people from volunteering for Dial a Ride.
- If any future operating model was based around volunteer drivers, Dial a Ride do not have any capacity to take on further clients until they can recruit extra volunteer drivers,

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which they've been trying to do. Even then, because their drivers are volunteers, there's a risk that they may not be available when needed i.e. in line with current Phone n Ride operating hours.

- COVID has had a significant impact on the Dial a Ride operations as most of their volunteers are elderly themselves and after COVID they expect to have a reduced fleet. Dial a Ride are struggling to attract volunteer drivers and typically not all the vehicles are on the road at once. The Dial a Ride drivers prefer to work days during the week so driver availability in the earlier mornings, evenings and at weekends is very limited. These are key times when the Phone n Ride service operates.
- Dial a Ride provides a more bespoke tailored service i.e. provides full accessibility to side streets and full passenger assistance to and from passengers homes.
- Dial a Ride is offered to elderly and disabled passengers only (this is something which Dial a Ride wish to maintain) and the Phone n Ride service is available to all residents.
- Dial a Ride wish to remain as a registered charity, and they believe merging the two services would require a change to their charitable status.
- Dial a Ride have a reluctance to change passenger scheduling software in the future.
- Dial a Ride are not prepared to progress any further, even with the offer of funding to explore the feasibility and implement the merging of the two services.

On the above basis Dial a Ride are not prepared to discuss and potential merger of the Phone n Ride service with Dial a Ride. The potential merger of Phone n Ride and Dial a Ride was discussed at the Dial a Ride Board meeting on 5 August 2021 and the above views were re-confirmed by the Dial a Ride co-ordinator on 20 October 2021.