



Improving Accessibility

Shoplink

A network of 8 shopper services was launched in June 2008 within the City of Nottingham. These provide buses direct from residential areas to major supermarkets once or twice each week.



Key message

- How local bus services can be targeted at the specific needs of elderly and disabled passengers, particularly those living in the more isolated residential areas of the City.
- Shopper services can be one way of improving access to sources of affordable fresh food. However, once- or twice-weekly services like this can lack profile and need a considerable amount of promotion.

Background

Shoplink is a partnership with Premiere Travel Ltd, a Nottingham-based operator, aimed at improving access for the more isolated residential areas of the City and other 'food deserts' to sources of affordable fresh food. These services are particularly aimed at elderly and disabled residents but are available to all users.

Who is involved?

A partnership between the City Council and Premiere Travel Ltd. Two of the services are also supported by Tesco as part of a Section 106 agreement for the Top Valley store. The Council purchased the vehicles used on the non-commercial services and provides significant support in the form of concessionary fares re-imbursement.

The problems and how we tackled them

- The City Council has a target for all residential areas of the City to be within a 400m walking distance of a regular bus service to a district shopping centre or the city centre. Shoplink services have introduced regular links for the more isolated residential areas.
- Car ownership in the City is lower than the national average with only 55% of households having access to a car or van. People living alone, particularly pensioners, and lone parent households are the least likely to own a car or van.
- In some areas access to affordable fresh food is increasingly an issue with the closure of neighbourhood shops, the cost and quality of food available in local shops and the prevalence of fast food outlets. Shoplink services have been introduced to enable those without their own transport to travel to supermarkets which offer a wider range of affordable fresh food.

Outcomes and impact

Shoplink services are targeted at streets without an alternative bus service and areas of the City that could be described as 'food deserts' with limited availability of affordable fresh food locally.



What could we have done better?

This type of service needs a great deal of publicity and promotion. As the services operate only once or twice a week they can lack the profile locally that a regular operation would enjoy. Further promotion of the network within the community will be necessary.

Next steps

Now that services have been in operation for 9 months the partners have been involved in a detailed review of the network. Proposals are now in hand to build on the more successful services and enhance their operation and coverage

The City Council is looking at developing this type of service further in order to provide direct links from all parts of the City to the two major hospital sites and other health care facilities. The hospitals would act as the focus for services aimed at visitors and out-patients in the same way that supermarkets do for Shoplink services. These services will be branded as Healthlink and will make intensive use of a small fleet of vehicles, just as Shoplink currently does.

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