



Review of 'Ting' demand responsive transport service

December 2023



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV

Review of 'Ting' DRT service

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Executive summary

ITP was appointed by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to assess the performance of the Ting Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service in relation to the service specification and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as well as wider performance measures.

The assessment was based on performance data gathered from the operator and analysed by ITP, discussions with Vectare (the service operator) and CPCA officers, as well as the results of two surveys of service users conducted in 2022 and 2023, plus mystery shopper surveys undertaken by ITP staff.

The headline findings from the data analysis for the period January to June 2023 were:

- 5023 passenger trips provided.
- Passenger trips increased by 23% over the analysis period.
- Cost per passenger trip of about £42.
- Vehicle occupancy approximately 0.7 (based on four vehicles).
- User profile was 58% adult, 22% under-19 and 20% concessionary pass holders.
- Total of 1500 registered users of the service.
- Trip cancellations and rejections are high, with only about 1 in 3 requests resulting in an actual trip being made.
- 92.7% of journey pick-ups were within 30 minutes of a real time booking request (against a KPI target of 95%).

The service in its current form is failing to meet the needs of some users and potential users. The service is trying to meet the travel demands of the population of a large geographical area to access a disparate range of destinations with a limited number of vehicles, resulting in many trip requests being declined.

The lack of clear objectives for the service and the scope for interpretation of the service specification has resulted in rural residents being less able to access the service than their urban counterparts.

The 'anywhere to anywhere' operating model, coupled with door-to-door pick-ups and drop-offs, means that Ting operates as a subsidised taxi rather than an integrated public transport service. The service is characterised by low vehicle occupancy and a much higher cost per passenger trip than most supported fixed route bus services. In addition, the success of the service is hampered by its booking system and the user application.

There is scope for Ting to be a more successful service that better meets the needs of the rural population of west Huntingdonshire. The main recommendations arising from the assessment include:

- Establishing clearly defined objectives for the service.
- Dividing the operating area into separate north and south zones and restricting certain journeys to avoid abstraction from parallel fixed route timetabled services.
- Introducing semi-scheduled elements that deviate to pick-up/drop-off on demand, in order to try and aggregate demand and increase occupancy.
- Improving the booking and application software, either by revisions to the existing or procuring a new system.
- Improving the provision of operational and performance data.
- Revisions to the fare structure and increasing fares.
- Producing a set of key performance indicators that hold the service to account and guide it towards success.
- Extending the contract duration to enable the service to grow and develop.

1. Introduction

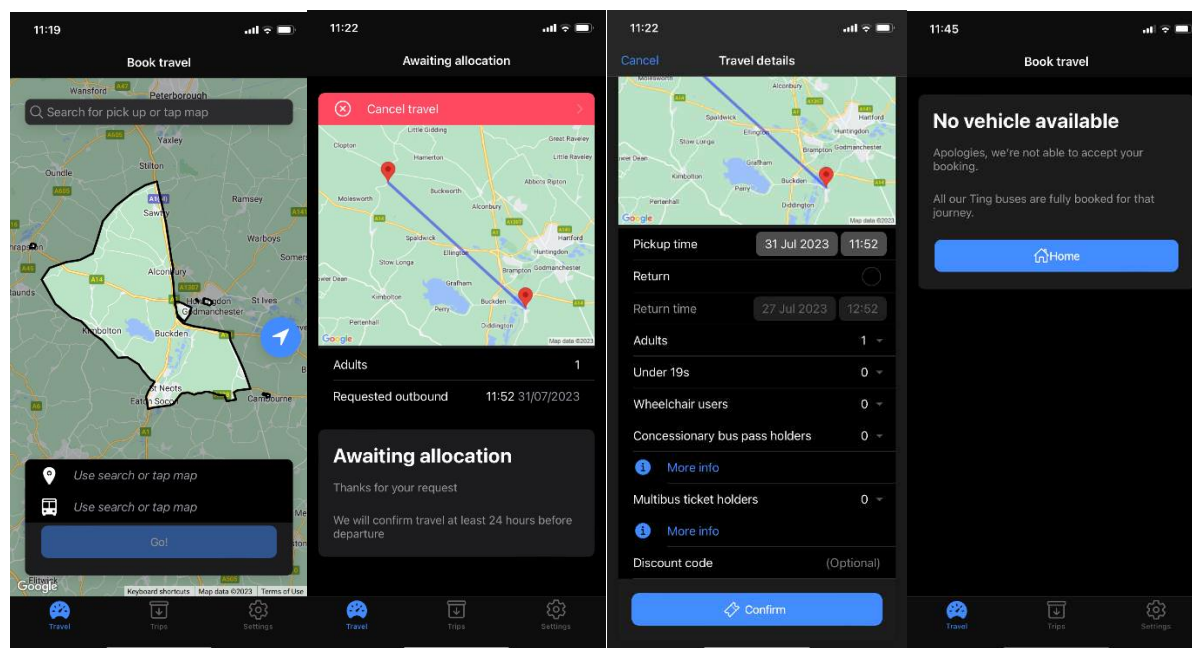
- 1.1 ITP was appointed by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to assess the performance of the Ting Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service in relation to the service specification and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as well as wider performance measures. Based on the assessment, a series of recommendations has been prepared to enhance the performance of the current service and inform the future direction of DRT provision across the Combined Authority area.
- 1.2 CPCA has an ambition to provide a comprehensive, frequent and reliable bus network across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough within the next few years. The network will enable a high proportion of the population to travel by public transport in preference to the private car. It is recognised, however, that fixed route bus services are not necessarily the best way to meet the Authority's ambition in all circumstances and there is a desire to understand what role more flexible services might play as part of an overall coordinated bus network.
- 1.3 Demand Responsive Transport or 'DRT' is the collective name for bookable transport services that operate in response to expressed demand. Services offer varying degrees of flexibility to provide shared transport to users who specify or request their pick-up and/or drop-off times and locations. DRT services are often introduced in rural areas where fixed bus services are no longer deemed feasible, and act to guarantee connectivity for rural residents to local centres.

In this report we have reviewed the Ting service, from January to June 2023, to assess:

- The objectives of the service
 - The service contract, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the response by the operator to the original tender
 - The current operating model for the service
 - Potential opportunities for improvement
 - Customer satisfaction with the service
 - Demand for and travel patterns associated with the service
 - The booking interface, booking method and the process of allocating trips and confirming bookings.
- 1.4 Discussions were held with representatives of the operator (Vectare) and CPCA officers to understand the perceived performance of the service and perspectives on where

- 2.2 Vectare provides the following services, as per the contract:
- Software that provides both 'back and front end' services to allow customers to book a journey.
 - A call centre to take bookings by phone.
 - Collection of fares
 - Provision of vehicles with a navigation system to respond to customers' journey requests.
 - Staff to operate and maintain the service.
- 2.3 The service is provided with branded vehicles - two 8-seat vehicles and two 16-seat minibuses. An additional spare vehicle is also available. Discussions with the operator highlighted that two vehicles were available all day, with two further vehicles available for part of the day. From operational data provided, it was not possible to determine exactly how many vehicles were actually in service at any given time.
- 2.4 The service operates from 06:00 to 20:00, Monday to Saturday. An adult single fare is £2 (which was the same price before the £2 fare cap was introduced in England). All under-19 trips are charged at £1 and Cambridgeshire Multibus tickets are also accepted. Concessionary pass holders travel free after 09:30 Monday – Friday and anytime on Saturday.
- 2.5 Although Vectare operates DRT services in other parts of the country, Ting is the only one where the company provides both the transport service and booking and scheduling system to run the service, including a passenger app.
- 2.6 In order to use the app, users must first download it and register their details. They are then able to book trips directly via the app by entering the desired origin and destination and required pick-up time. If a booking request is made within 24 hours of a trip, a booking confirmation (or rejection) is offered within 1 hour. Bookings can be made up to 30 days in advance, however where a booking is made longer than 24 hours in advance, confirmation is not provided until 24 hours before the trip. Figure 2-2 shows sample screenshots of the app interface.

Figure 2-2 Screenshots of the Ting app



- 2.7 Bookings made by phone are directed to Vectare’s office. Scheduling is digital, although it is possible for manual overrides to be undertaken. There are no digital algorithms to allocate trip requests to vehicles. Users are able to pay in advance or on boarding. Users are not refunded for any trip they cancel themselves.

Ting contract

- 2.8 A contract between CPCA and Vectare was signed in October 2022 for a period of 12 months, with options to extend for two further 12-month periods. The contract and response by Vectare define the service and expected outcomes and outputs to be achieved by the operator.

Objectives and service definition

- 2.9 The objectives of the service are not well defined in the contract. It is not clear whether the service is there to improve connectivity, complement existing public transport services, to provide access to market towns or to enable trips within St Neots. The contract specification merely states:

“A solution that allows members of the travelling public who live in a rural community to access a public transport system that operates in ‘near real’ time” (section 2.1)

- 2.10 The contract implies that a door-to-door service should be provided, and Vectare interpreted it this way. Therefore, unlike many other DRT services which run corner to corner using a network of virtual stops, Ting operates door to door. The contract states:

"A user may request transport anywhere within the defined operating zone; from this booking, a bus will be directed to the customer and the requested time" (section 2.3.2)

- 2.11 The contract itself makes no reference to prohibited trips, except for the requirement to serve four specific destinations in Huntingdon that are outside of the main operating zone. As such, the service does not prevent:
- The abstraction of passengers from existing fixed route services.
 - Relatively short internal trips within St. Neots, the largest population centre in the operating area.

KPIs

- 2.12 The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the technical specification are minimal. The following KPIs were specified:
- There is a need to achieve 95% of pick-ups within 30 minutes of the request.
 - 95% of telephone calls to the call centre answered in 1 minute; 99% answered in 5 minutes.
 - Emails to be responded to within 24 hours.
 - All revenue collected will be retained by the contractor, subject to providing a weekly report of revenue.

Data

2.13 In its response to the tender invitation, Vectare offered to supply the following data:

Data	KPI	Method of collection	Data format to help in achievement of KPI
Total revenue (per day, per week)	No fixed target	DRT booking system, ETM data	Weekly numerical statistic
Total patronage (per day, per week)	No fixed target	DRT booking system, ETM data	Weekly numerical statistic
Total ENCTS (per day, per week)	No fixed target	DRT booking system, ETM data	Weekly numerical statistic
Time between receipt of booking and bus arriving	95% of captured data points to be less than 30 mins	DRT booking system	
Booking requests refused	% calculated as a total lifetime service requests less than 1%	DRT booking system	
Vehicle uptime	Percentage, calculated against a reference	DRT booking system	

2.14 Although the KPIs do not include a requirement to provide operational performance data, the contract specifies that a full set of time stamped origin-destination data should be supplied each month.

2.15 In its tender response, Vectare suggested, subject to agreement with CPCA, to provide postcode heat mapping, trip modelling, specific local analysis at town/parish level, and detailed big data assessment on trends, demographics and performance with KPIs. It also indicated that raw data would also be made available for the client to undertake its own analysis, and that additional reports may be requested by CPCA.

2.16 During the course of the contract, this data has not been supplied to CPCA or analysed.

3. Data analysis

- 3.1 Vectare supplied ITP with operational data for the Ting service from January to June 2023. This data was supplied in two datasets. The first contained information on booking requests (including a user ID), trip status and ticket type, and the second contained origin-destination details. Though requested, no information could be provided on the allocation of vehicles within this dataset, nor the availability of vehicles. As such, it has not been possible to verify how many vehicles have been operational at any given time.

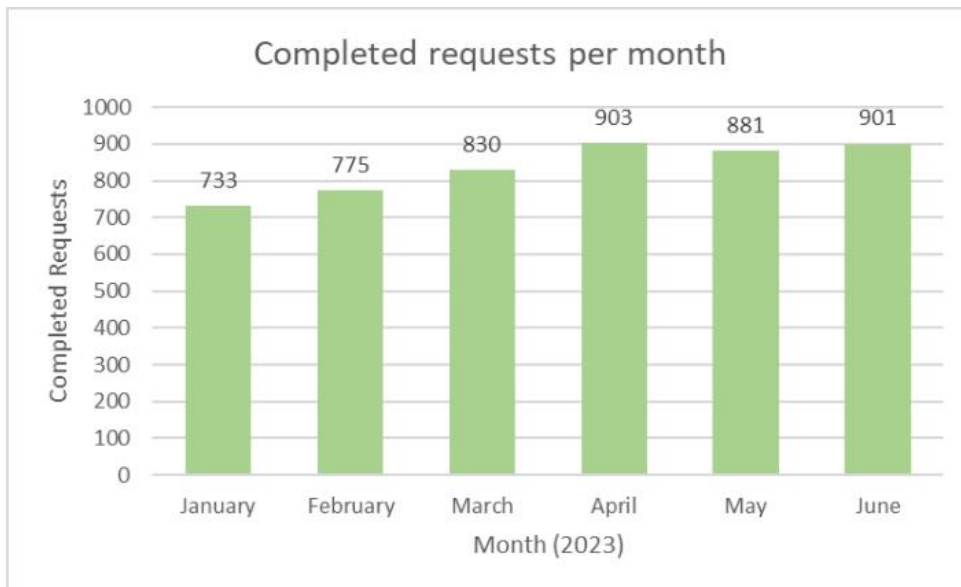
Usage

- 3.2 The first dataset allowed various indicators on usage to be identified. These are discussed below.

Completed trips

- 3.3 5023 trips were completed between January and June 2023 (Figure 3-1). Based on the contract cost of £424,998, the annualised cost per passenger trip would be £42.31.

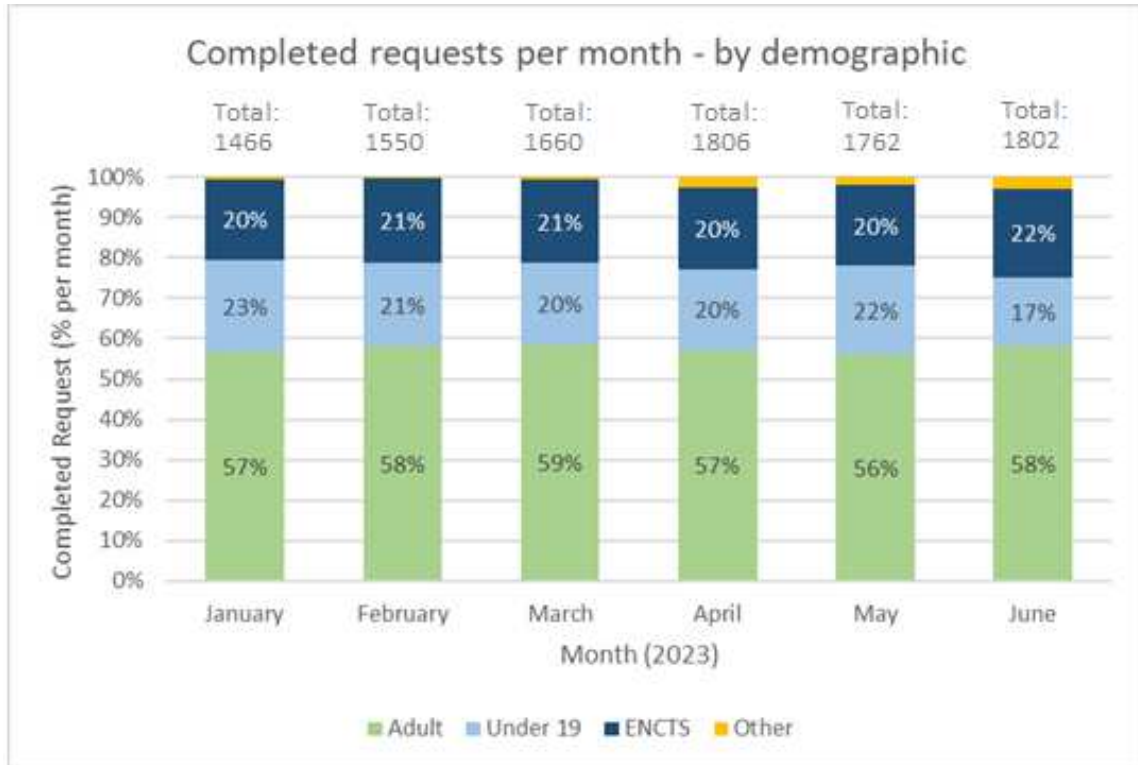
Figure 3-1 Completed journey requests



- 3.4 Between January and June, patronage increased by 23%. Throughout the period, the share of adult (~58%), under 19s (22%) and concessionary travellers or 'ENCTS' passengers (~20%) remained broadly consistent (Figure 3-2). The 'other' category

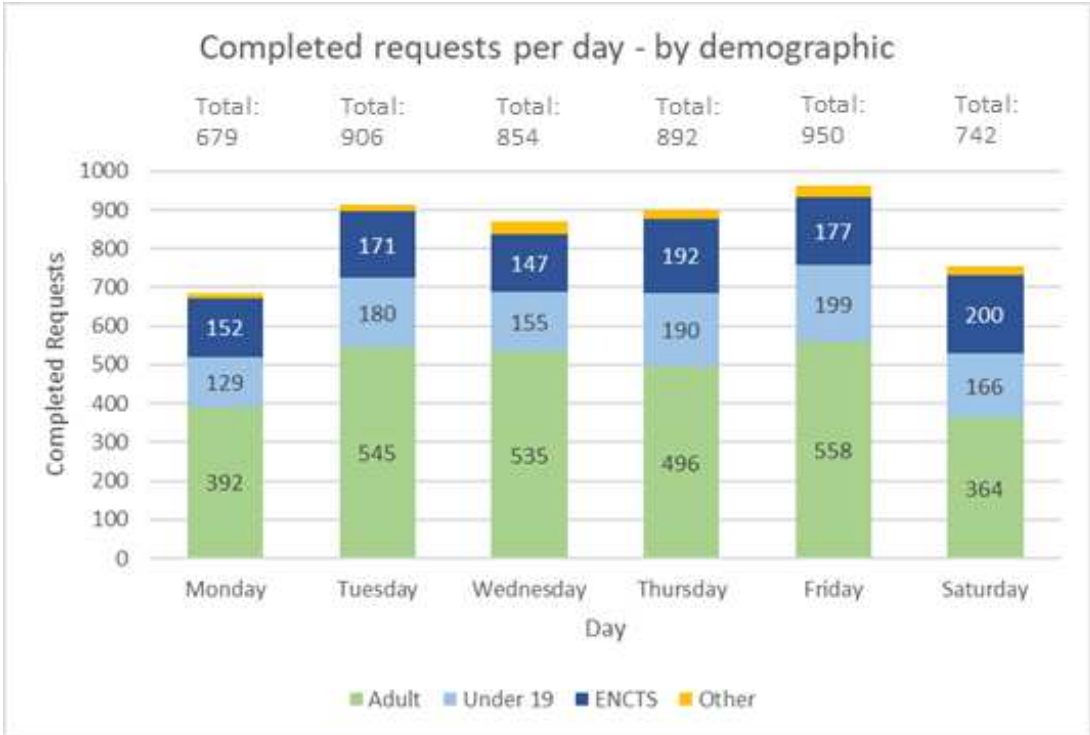
represents trips where the passenger type cannot be identified because the passenger was a wheelchair user or a Multibus ticket holder.

Figure 3-2 Completed requests per month



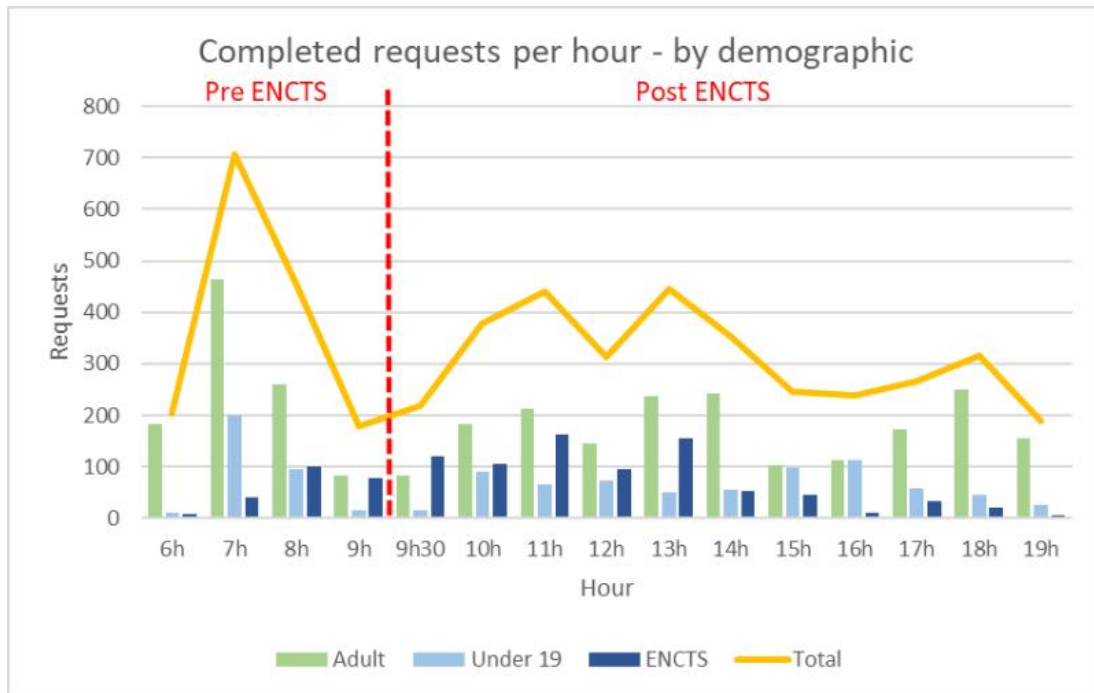
- 3.5 Friday was the most popular day for trip-making overall, comprising 19% of all completed trips, followed by Tuesday and Thursday at 18% each. Monday was the least popular travel day (see Figure 3-3).

Figure 3-3 Completed requests by day



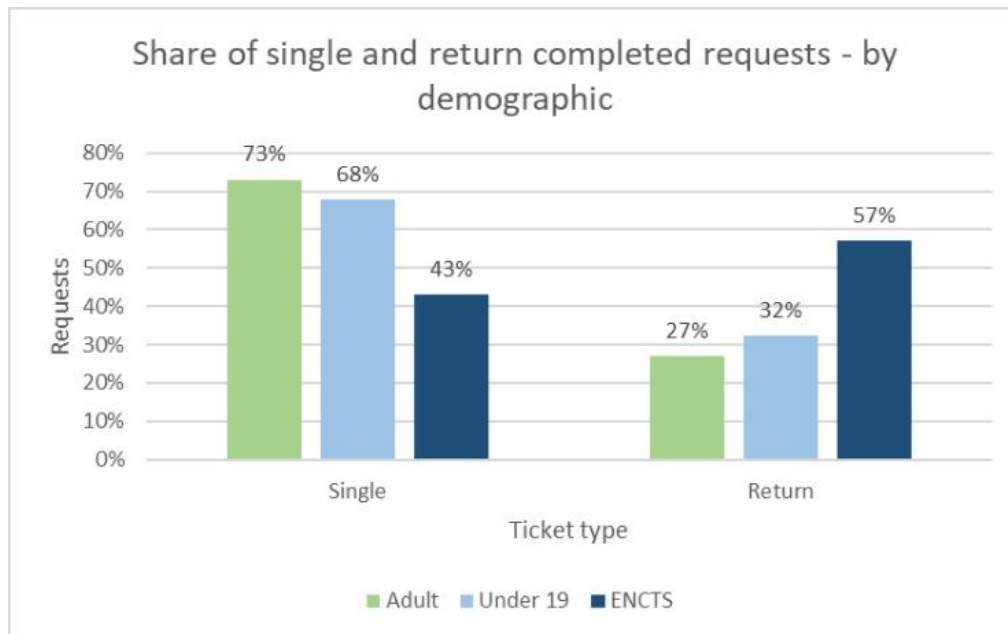
3.6 Figure 3-4 shows that 07:00 – 08:00 was the busiest time for travel among adults and under 19s. A similar peak was not evident around 17:00. There was evidence of concessionary travel holders using the service before 09:30, when a fare would be payable, although this increased after 09:30 once free travel was available.

Figure 3-4 Completed requests per hour



- 3.7 Users have the option to book single or return trips through the app or call centre. Data was not available from the operator on the proportion of trips made via the app or over the phone.
- 3.8 Single trips were the most common, accounting for 65% of all completed requests. ENCTS was the only group that consistently made more return bookings than singles (see Figure 3-5).

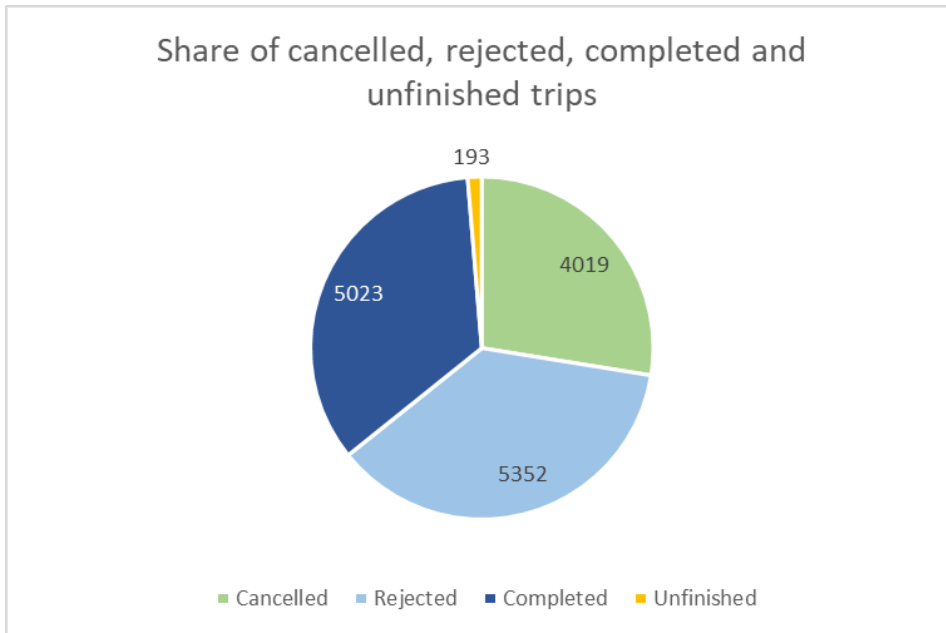
Figure 3-5 Single and return completed requests



Cancelled, rejected and unfinished trips

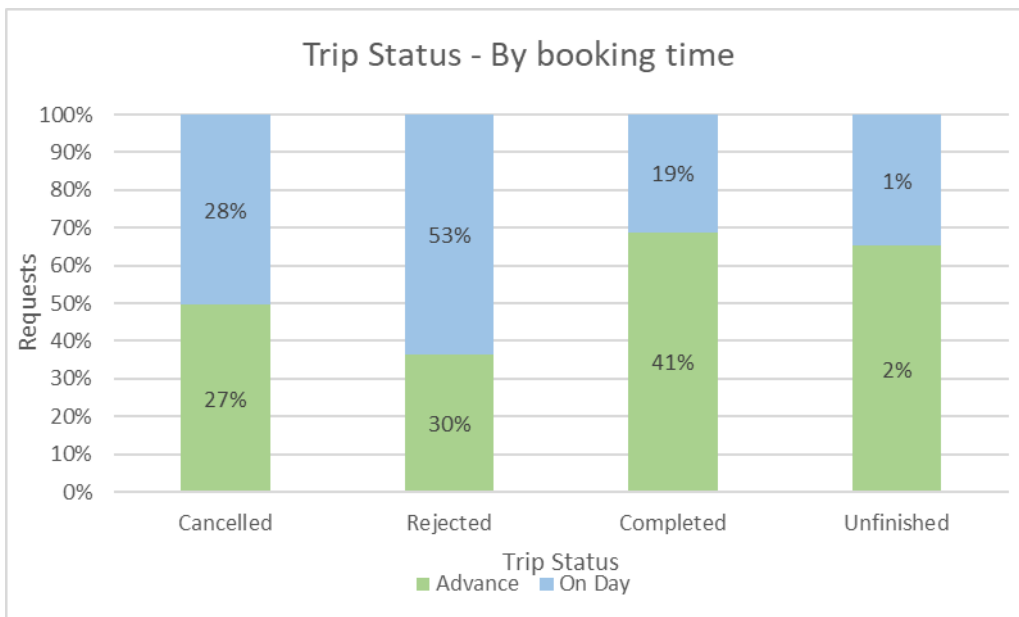
- 3.9 Of all trips requested, only 34% were fully completed. The other requests were either:
- **Cancelled** – the customer had chosen to cancel the trip, which can happen either pre or post allocation.
 - **Rejected** – there was no availability on the service at the time requested.
 - **Unfinished** – a trip where, for whatever reason, the passenger had not been marked by the driver as having alighted the vehicle (potentially because the person had not turned up for the vehicle).
- 3.10 The share of trips cancelled, rejected, completed and unfinished is shown in Figure 3-6. Cancelled trips represented 28% of all requests, rejected trips 37% and unfinished trips 1%.

Figure 3-6 Share of cancelled, rejected, completed and unfinished trips



3.11 Those booking on the day are more likely to have their trip rejected by the booking system, with those booking in advance being more likely to complete a trip. 33% of trips were cancelled before a trip had been allocated, suggesting that the booking service offering a time that was undesirable was a key reason for cancellations.

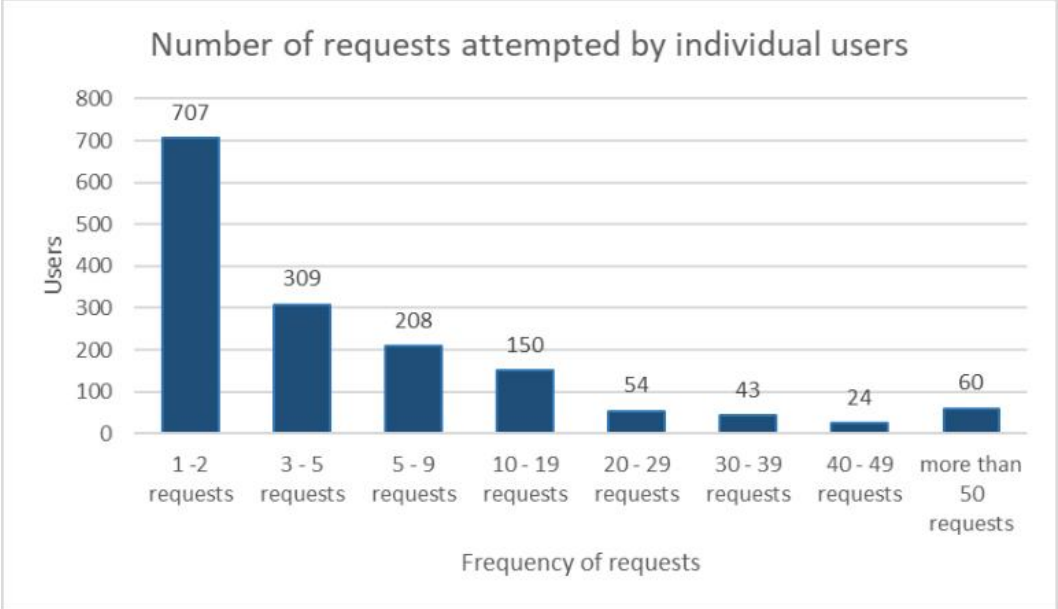
Figure 3-7 Share of cancelled, rejected, completed and unfinished trips by booking time



3.12 It appears that not being able to book a trip resulted in many users 'giving up' on using the service. 1555 registered users made a trip request between January and June

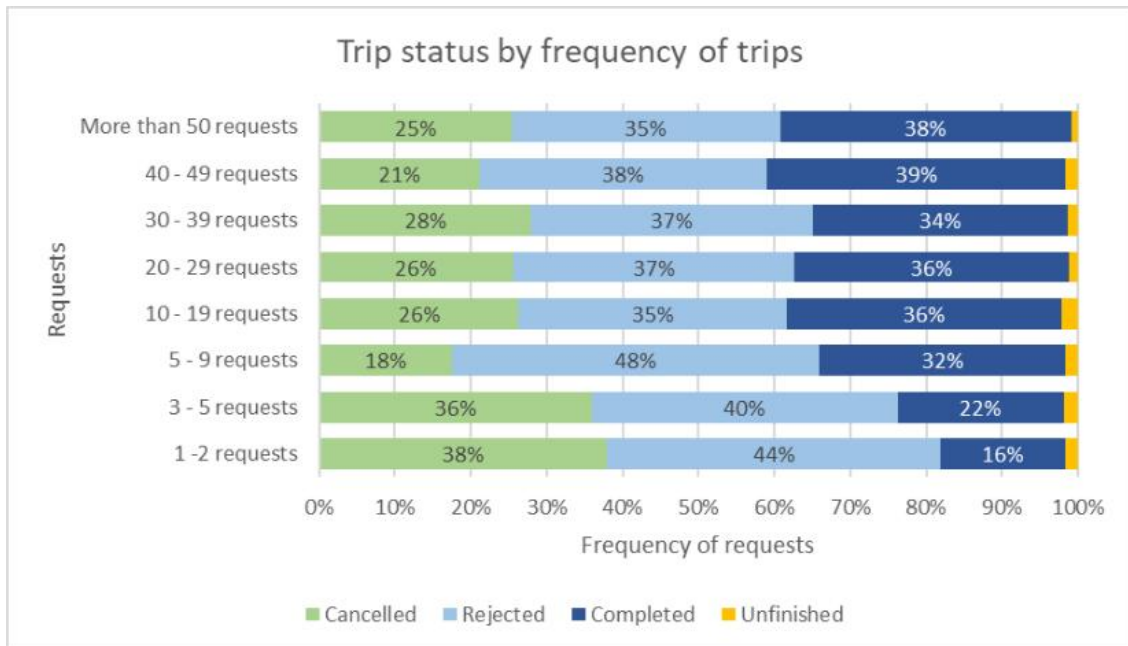
2023, of which 45% only made one or two requests. Only 21% of registered users made more than 10 trip requests throughout the period. The full breakdown is shown in Figure 3-8.

Figure 3-8 Number of trip bookings attempted by user



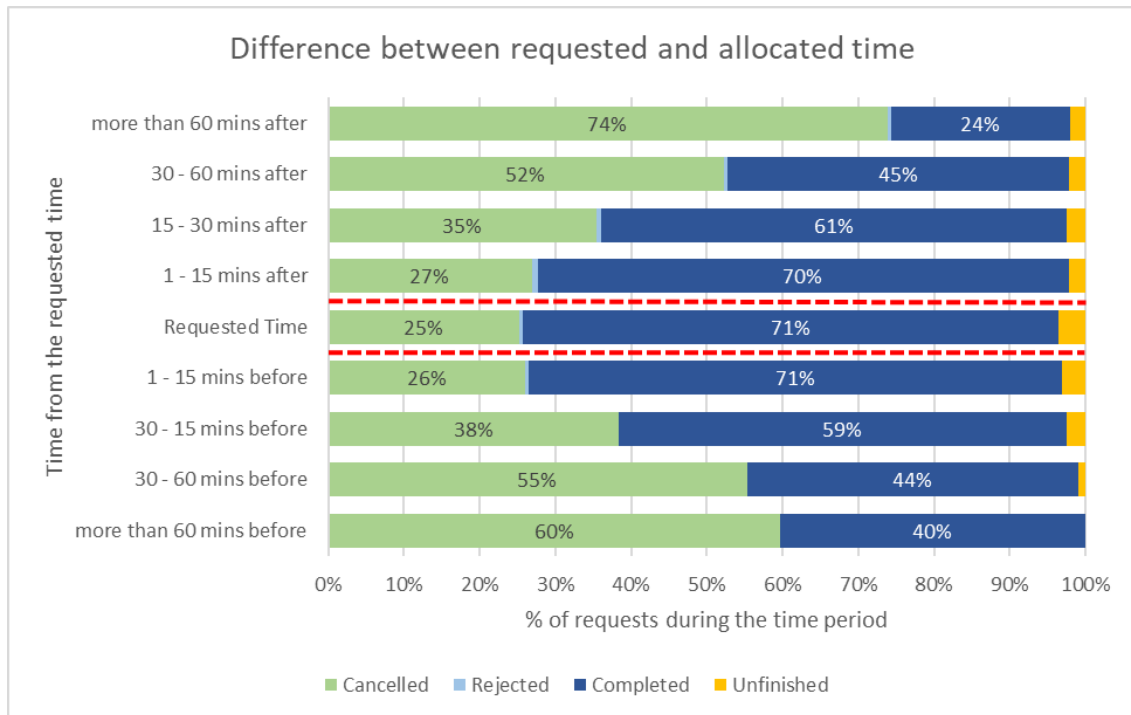
- 3.13 Figure 3-9 compares how many requests people made and the levels of cancellations, rejections and completions that each one of these users experienced as a proportion of all requests.
- 3.14 Those that made the least number of requests experienced a higher proportion of cancellations and rejections, which suggests that the users were trying to book the service but without success and therefore chose not to return. Whilst this problem is strongest amongst infrequent users, it remains present even for regular users. Even amongst those who make many requests, on average they have no more than 40% of trip requests resulting in completed trips.

Figure 3-9 Trip status by the frequency of trip requests made per user



- 3.15 When customers book, they request a pick-up time, which the system tries to match. Of all requested trips, just under 80% were allocated within 15 minutes of the requested time. 12% of allocations were beyond 30 minutes of the requested pick-up time. Taking an average of all requests, the service allocated a service on average six minutes later than the customer requested.
- 3.16 Figure 3-10 shows the share of cancelled, rejected and allocated trip requests, split by the time difference between a requested time and an allocated time. The data shows that generally users had a tolerance of 15 minutes before and after allocated time where cancellations did not increase. Beyond 30 minutes the number of cancellations rose above 50%.
- 3.17 The share of rejected bookings was much lower in this graph. This is because a rejection was generally made before allocation, and less than 0.5% of requests were rejected post allocation.
- 3.18 The main KPI indicated that 95% of successful requests should be given an allocated time that is within 30 minutes before/after the time that the user requested for pick up. Overall, the service is close to achieving this KPI, with 92.7% of completed trips being allocated to a time within 30 minutes of the request.

Figure 3-10 Difference between requested and allocated time



Vehicle occupancy

- 3.19 Vehicle occupancy remained below one passenger throughout the period, averaging 0.6. This figure assumes that all four vehicles were running throughout the day, which was not actually the case according to Vectare. If it is assumed that an average of two vehicles were operating during the day, the average vehicle occupancy per hour would be less than 1.5 passengers.

Table 3-1 Vehicle occupancy

Month	Patronage per day	Patronage per hour	Occupancy per vehicle per hour
January	28.1	2.0	0.5
February	32.3	2.3	0.6
March	30.6	2.2	0.5
April	36.7	2.6	0.7
May	39.2	2.8	0.7
June	33.7	2.4	0.6

Origin-Destination

3.20 Figures 3-11 and 3-12 show the origins and destinations of completed trips from January to June 2023. Overall, St. Neots was the strongest centre for trip requests and completions. Over 65% of completed trips either started or finished in the town. Generally, the most common drop off point in St. Neots was the town centre or the railway station, whilst origin points were more dispersed around the town and the surrounding villages. Of the top ten strongest origin-destination pairs (Table 3-2), St. Neots was an origin or a destination in nine of these.

Figure 3-11 Origins of completed trips

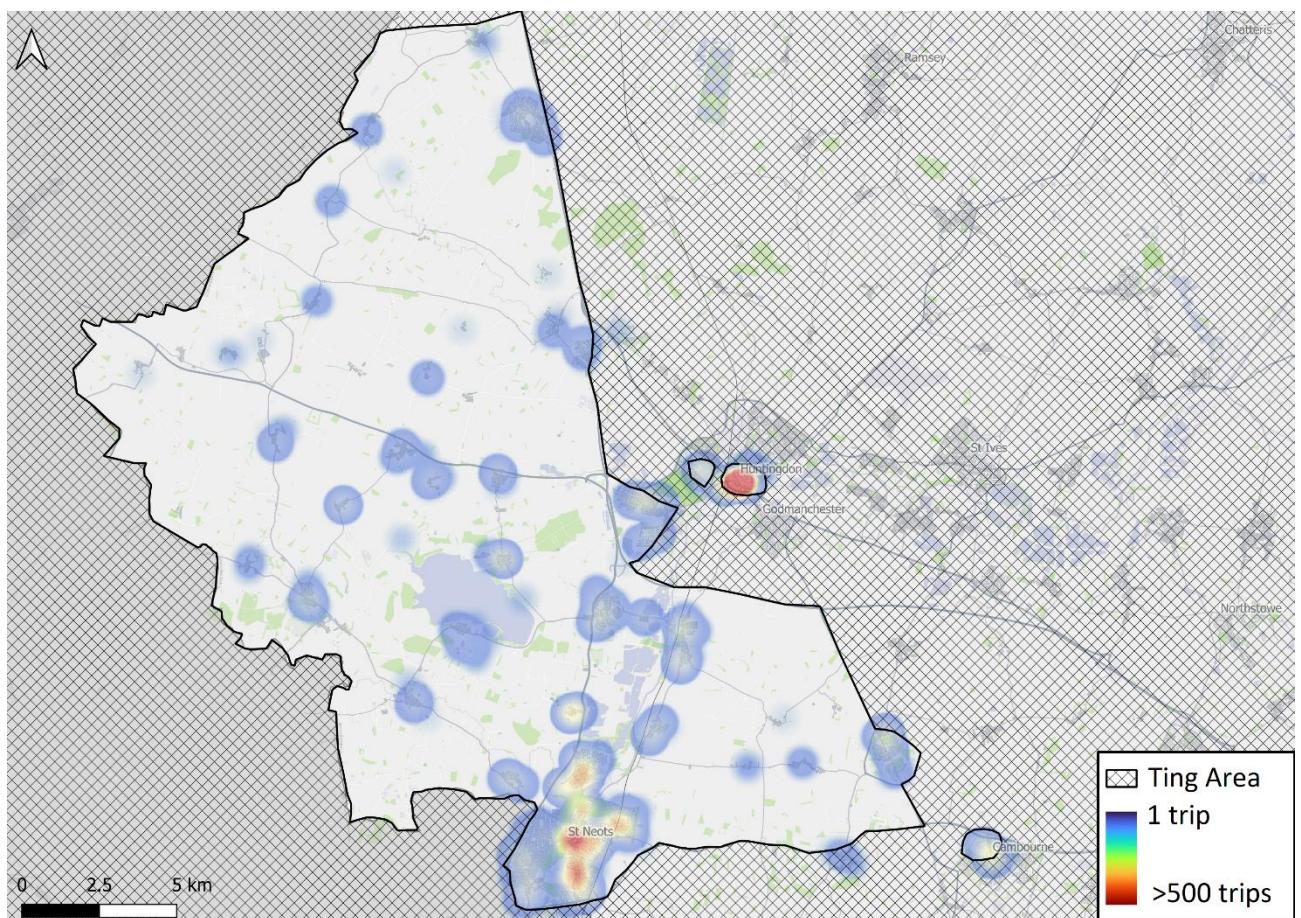
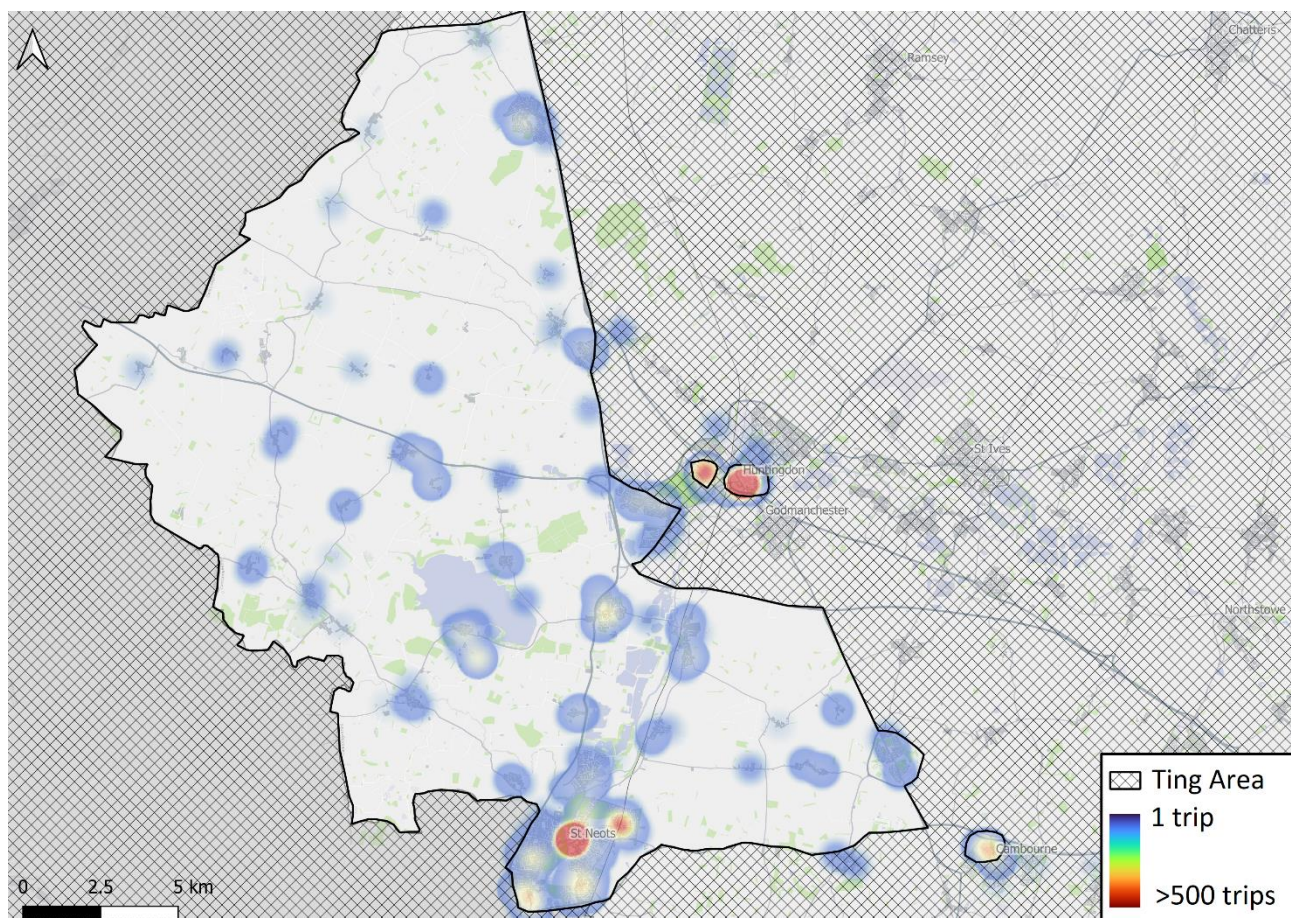


Figure 3-12 Destinations of completed trips



- 3.21 Table 3-2 shows the extent to which internal trips within St. Neots dominated the service.
- 3.22 It is possible that the service could be abstracting some passengers from conventional bus services or the train for journeys made between Buckden, Little Paxton and St Neots, Kimbolton and St Neots and St Neots and Huntingdon.

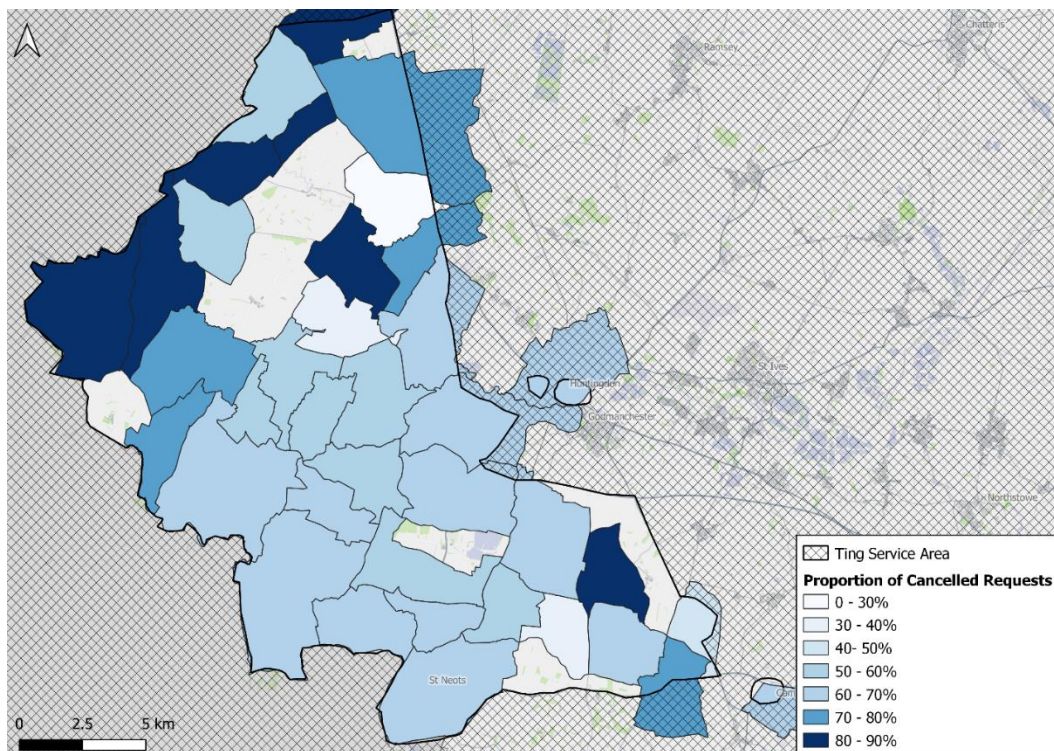
Table 3-2 Ten most popular Origin-Destination pairs

Origin	Destination	% of all completed trips
St. Neots	St. Neots	14.5%
St. Neots	Huntingdon	6.8%
Little Paxton	St. Neots	6.0%
Huntingdon	St. Neots	4.6%

St. Neots	Cambourne ¹	4.2%
Huntingdon	Perry	3.8%
Southoe and Midloe	St. Neots	3.2%
Buckden	St. Neots	2.5%
Cambourne ¹	St. Neots	2.4%
Brampton	St. Neots	2.2%

3.23 With trips generally concentrated around St. Neots and in the St. Neots to Huntingdon corridor, villages in the periphery of the operating area tended to have more requests rejected or cancelled than those in and around the two towns, which suggests there was difficulty serving these villages. This is reinforced by Figure 3-13, which shows that few trips were completed in the outer areas of the zone (however, account needs to be taken of the smaller population and consequent lower demand in these areas).

Figure 3-13 Proportion of cancelled and rejected trips versus completed requests by parish



¹ Cambourne is Cambourne Business Park

4. Feedback on the service

- 4.1 Discussions were held with a representative of Vectare to understand the operational challenges and opportunities associated with Ting. In addition, market research was undertaken by CPCA in February 2022 and again in June 2023 to explore customer satisfaction with the service. Finally, mystery user surveys were undertaken by ITP staff who tried to book and make trips on the service during the study period. The outputs from these activities are presented below.

Operator feedback

- 4.2 Vectare's Commercial and Operations Director shared views on various aspects of Ting.

Contract

- 4.3 The contract and service specification were recognised as being limited, compared with others elsewhere in which Vectare were involved. A lack of definition of the service objectives was perceived as a reason for the limitations of the service, rather than the technical specification itself.
- 4.4 Awarding a one-year contract, albeit with options to extend for a further two 12-month periods, meant that there was little incentive to build and refine the service based upon feedback and performance.

Operations

- 4.5 The technical specification was non-specific regarding the vehicle requirement for the service. There are four vehicles allocated to the service - two 16-seat wheelchair-accessible vehicles plus two eight-seat vehicles. Each vehicle runs at least once per day, but vehicles are taken out of service at times throughout the day in response to perceived lower levels of demand. Generally, the maximum vehicle provision is provided in the peak periods and it is the 16-seat vehicles that are taken out of service, unless a wheelchair booking is made.

Service zone

- 4.6 A door-to-door operating model is offered, which provides customers with the opportunity to travel from their home to anywhere within the operating zone, as well as to/from four specific points in Huntingdon. Bookings often draw Ting towards St. Neots, in part due to the curtailment of the St. Neots town bus service 61. The operator considered that this view would be borne out by the data.

- 4.7 The operator believed that the current service area, which is 360km², was too large and the service was trying to serve too many competing demands. The operator suggested that the zone should be split in two, with internal trips within St. Neots and direct trips between St. Neots and Huntingdon prevented. This would be similar to the DRT service in Swaffham that Vectare also operates, which focusses on trips from surrounding villages to/from Swaffham only.
- 4.8 Locating a dedicated vehicle in rural areas where there are no fixed services would help to avoid high levels of empty running and dead mileage. Elsewhere, the operator suggested that a semi-flexible service could be provided based around the service 66, with which Ting currently competes.

Bookings

- 4.9 Customers are able to make a booking via the app, which was developed by the operator, or by phone. Call handlers are able to make manual interventions to the booking system. If the system is able to accept the booking, a confirmation is provided within 'a few hours' rather than instantly.
- 4.10 Originally, the Vectare booking system was designed to accept real-time bookings only; the advance bookings functionality was added after the service was introduced because it was previously offered when Stagecoach provided the service (using the Via bookings/scheduling platform and app). Further revisions to the app were made recently by the operator to allow multiple bookings to be made, after customers commented that it was difficult to book the service to make regular journeys, such as for travel to/from work.
- 4.11 Generally, the booking system accepts bookings in St. Neots over those in the rural area, as it tries to maximise vehicle occupancy throughout the day, which is more achievable for short hop trips within the town. In addition, the KPI that requires 95% of real-time bookings to be met within 30 minutes hampers the service's ability to meet travel demands from peripheral areas.
- 4.12 The operator agreed that allowing users to specify a drop-off time would be a useful functionality to include in the booking system, particularly where people want to connect with a bus or train.

Fares

- 4.13 Fares are retained by the operator and currently stand at £2 for adults and £1 for under 19s. These fare levels were inherited from the previous operator, Stagecoach, rather than being adopted under the Government's £2 capped fares scheme. The operator

suggested that fares would need to be raised to improve the service’s financial performance. The operator also suggested that a zonal approach to fares might also be helpful.

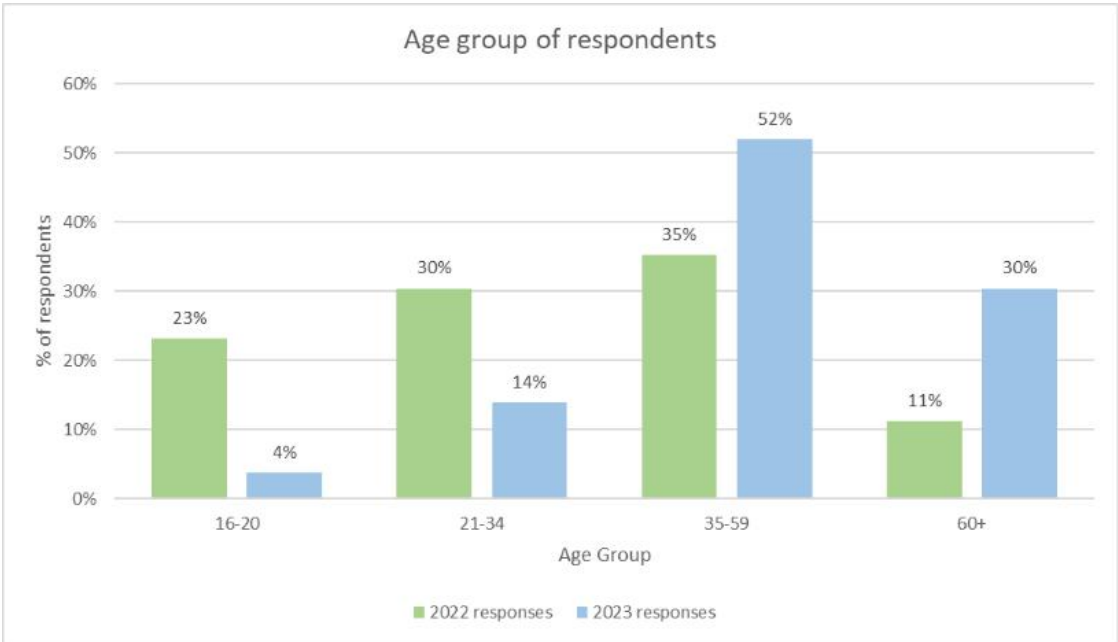
Customer feedback

- 4.14 Two market research exercises had been undertaken by CPCA independently of ITP’s research. The first survey was undertaken in February 2022 (when Stagecoach operated the service) and repeated in June 2023 (when operated by Vectare). The questions used in both surveys were identical, to allow direct comparison and any changes in customer views.
- 4.15 It should be borne in mind that the survey respondents were those who were using the service and did not include those who may have tried and been unable to book a trip.

Respondent profile

- 4.16 The age group most represented in both Ting surveys was the 35 – 59 age group. The number of respondents aged under 34 was almost 20% lower in the June 2023 survey than in the February 2022 survey, as shown in Figure 4-1.

Figure 4-1 Age of respondents in 2022 and 2023

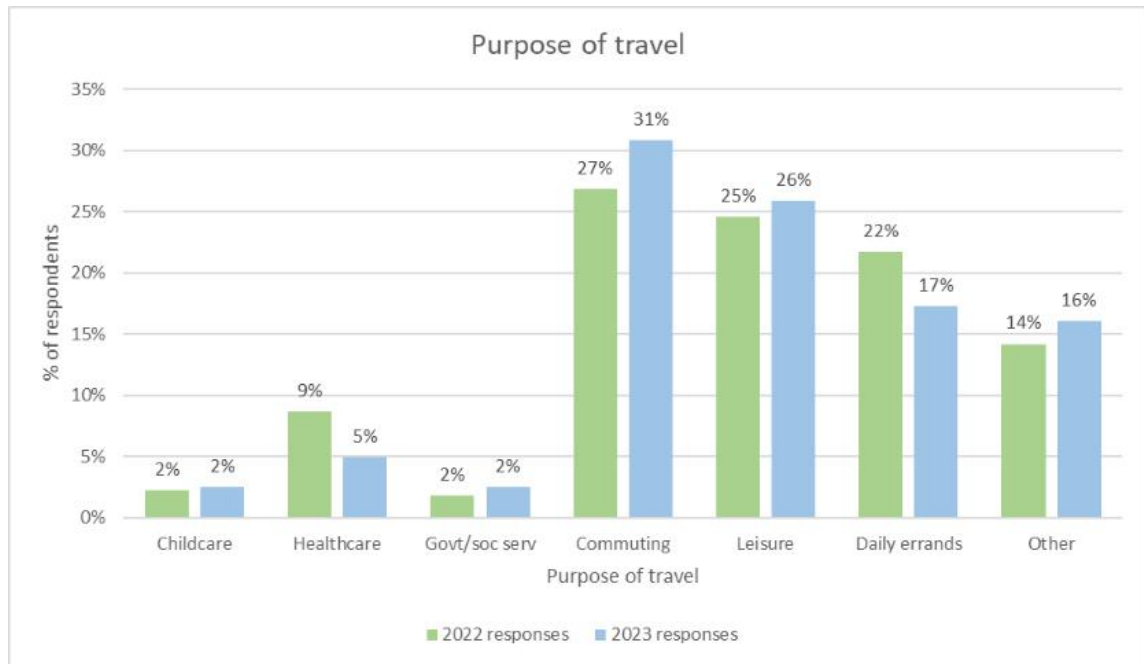


- 4.17 It was not exclusively those without access to a car who chose to use the service. In 2023, 40% of respondents had access to a car, however this was lower than in 2022 when 56% of respondents had access to a car.

Purpose of travel

4.18 Respondents' trip purposes are shown in Figure 4-2. Commuting, leisure and daily errands were the most common reasons for travel on Ting under both iterations of the scheme. The high proportion of 'other' trips may be due to the fact that travel for educational reasons was included within that category in the survey.

Figure 4-2 Purpose of travel on Ting in 2022 and 2023



User satisfaction

4.19 Respondents were asked to rank their satisfaction with the service, based on a score of one star to five stars. Figure 4-3 details the responses of those surveyed in both years.

4.20 Overall, most respondents were satisfied with the service, with satisfaction being higher in 2023 than in 2022; more than four out of five respondents ranked the service 5 stars in 2023.

4.21 A second indicator of customer satisfaction was measured by the question 'do you prefer travelling by Ting or by bus'. In 2022, 94% of respondents indicated that they preferred Ting to a regular bus, though this was slightly lower in 2023 at 88%.

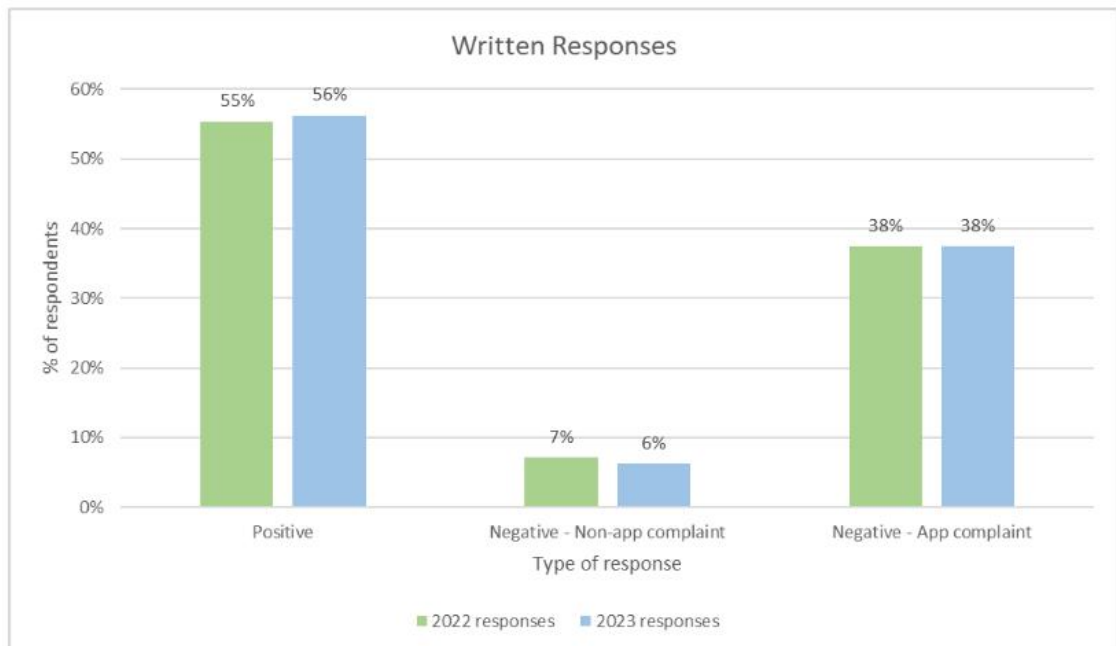
Figure 4-3 User satisfaction in 2022 and 2023



Written responses

4.22 Respondents were also invited to provide additional written responses to the survey. A breakdown of the written responses is shown below in Figure 4-4.

Figure 4-4 Breakdown of written responses in 2022 and 2023



4.23 In both surveys, the majority of respondents were positive about the service. Written responses from the 2023 survey highlighted the following:

- Vectare drivers were praised for being friendly, chatty, courteous and informative.
- Respondents raised issues with the app, with many experiencing bugs that made it difficult to book a trip.
- Respondents suggested that introducing notifications providing real-time updates would be valuable to them - some indicated that this facility was available on the Via app, when Stagecoach operated the service.
- A common response in the 2023 survey was a request for multiple bookings within a seven-day period, as booking regular trips was challenging.
- Some expressed a desire for an increase in the availability of the service, as buses were unavailable to users at times as they were occupied in other areas.

Mystery traveller findings

4.24 ITP staff tested the booking system by trying to book journeys on Ting during the course of early August 2023. On numerous occasions in the middle of the day, staff were unable to book 'in advance' trips. Staff experiences demonstrated that there were glitches in the app which crashed when they were attempting to register, book a trip and make a payment.

4.25 The mystery traveller who made an advance booking (one week beforehand) for a trip, never received final confirmation that the trip was booked or an actual pick-up time for the trip – the app merely displayed estimated pick-up and drop-off times right up to boarding the vehicle (which did not provide confidence in the service).

4.26 The lack of closely defined virtual stops (the system is reliant on home addresses or postcodes) meant that the mystery shopper was unclear until they saw the vehicle approaching in a village where they were expected to join the service. Equally, the driver was unsure where they were to collect the passenger as they were working from a postcode. The actual journey made was fine; the vehicle was well presented and the driver pleasant.

4.27 There was clear evidence of the service abstracting from fixed bus provision. The journey booked by one mystery shopper could have been made by the 150 service 20 minutes later. Similarly, the next pick-up on the journey in Hail Weston could have been made on service 150.

4.28 After the trip had been made, it became apparent from a bank statement that the journey had been charged twice. Following up with a call to the company's call centre and a subsequent email (which was responded to within 24 hours), a refund was made and an explanation that the system was being refined to avoid the possibility of two payments being taken in future.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Although patronage has grown in the period since Vectare took over operation of Ting, and those who are able to access the service are largely complementary about it, the service in its current form is failing to meet the needs of many users and potential users. The service is trying to meet the travel demands of the population of a large geographical area to access a disparate range of destinations with a limited number of vehicles, resulting in many trip requests being declined.
- 5.2 The lack of clear objectives for the service and the scope for interpretation of the service specification has resulted in a situation where the rural residents which Ting was originally intended to serve compete, often unsuccessfully, for access to the service with urban residents, particularly those in St. Neots who may already have access to scheduled bus services. The Key Performance Indicator for 95% of real-time bookings to be picked up within 30-minutes of the booking serves to further penalise the more remote parts of the operating area.
- 5.3 The 'anywhere to anywhere' operating model, coupled with door-to-door pick-ups and drop-offs, means that Ting operates as a subsidised taxi rather than an integrated public transport service. The service is characterised by low vehicle occupancy and a higher cost per passenger trip than most supported bus services. Introducing some semi-scheduled elements of service (with the ability for vehicles to deviate off-route to pick-up and drop-off) along some of the more commonly requested corridors, might help improve occupancy levels.
- 5.4 The success of the service is also hampered by its booking system and the user interface. The current app and booking platform do not offer an experience that the travelling public expects; only one in three requests actually results in a trip being made. The delay in confirmation of advance bookings until the day before travel, does not inspire confidence in users that their trip will actually be provided, which is likely to deter people from using the service.
- 5.5 Despite the shortcomings of the current service, there is scope for Ting to be a more successful service that meets the needs of the rural population of west Huntingdonshire. A number of revisions would be required to the back office booking system, the app and the operating area, to enable the service to operate more efficiently and offer an attractive service that would be available to a greater number of users.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 There is clear scope to improve the Ting service to grow patronage, increase useability, provide value for money for the taxpayer and set a basis from which the Ting concept could be rolled out in other parts of the CPCA area. Through the review of the service, data analysis, customer feedback, mystery traveller surveys and discussions with both the operator and CPCA, there are a series of recommendations to improve the service.

Clear objectives

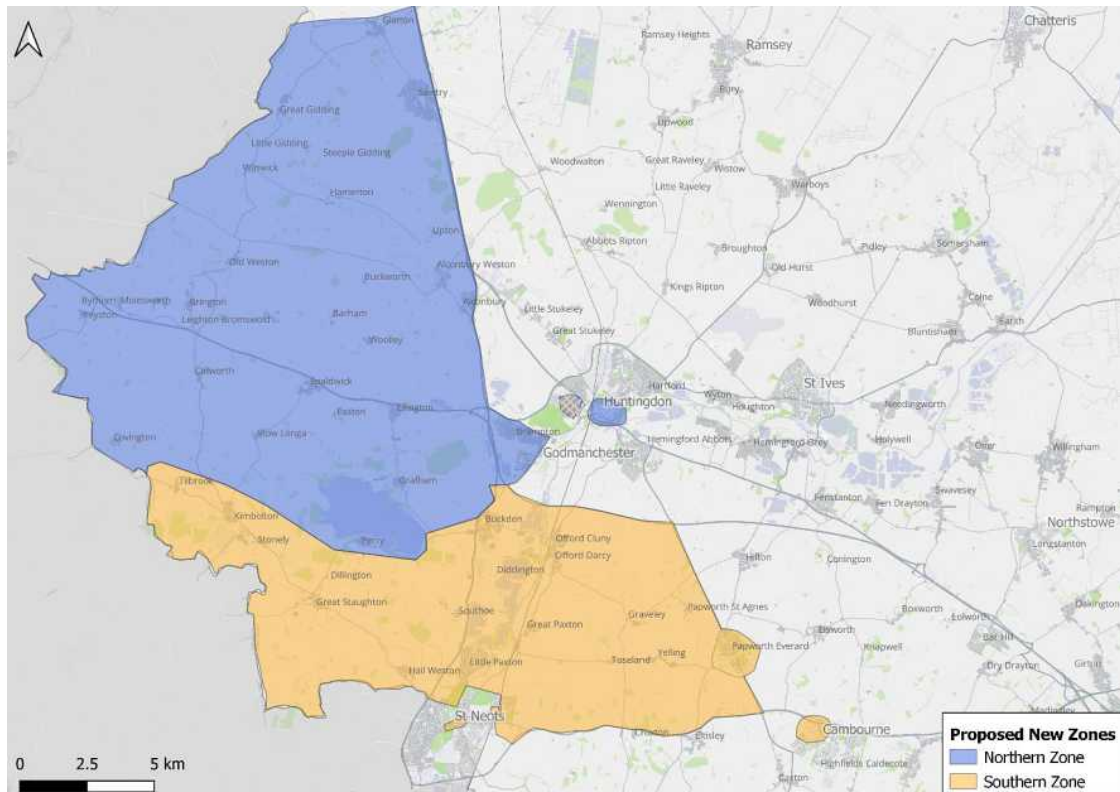
- 6.2 There needs to be clear objectives of what the service is seeking to achieve, beyond the current objective which seeks to provide access to 'rural communities' in 'near-real time'. A more workable objective would be 'to provide connectivity from rural villages without access to other forms of public transport into the nearest local centre or key employment site.' The objective should be accompanied by specific rules with regard to issues such as:
- Avoidance of abstracting passengers from fixed bus services
 - Expectations regarding walking to a fixed or virtual bus stop (for those who are able)
 - Operating area(s) as distinct from end destinations
 - Basing a journey on a desired arrival time at a destination, to support onward travel by other modes, or to enable appointments to be met.
- 6.3 A revised, more focused objective would then guide the service towards a future where it provides rural accessibility that complements, rather than competes with, the fixed bus network.

Revised service offer and operating area

- 6.4 Redefinition of the area served and what the service offers would help to achieve greater efficiency and increase opportunities for aggregating passenger flows.
- 6.5 For some corridors where there could be similar passenger demands, it would be possible to have semi-scheduled journeys that deviate off-route on-demand. Passengers would then gravitate towards those journeys, knowing that they would have a better chance of their booking being accepted. One such corridor might be Tilbrook – Kimbolton – St Neots, where semi-scheduled DRT journeys could be integrated with fixed route service 150.

- 6.6 Currently, the large service area (360km²), coupled with the need to service two population centres, spreads the service very thinly, which results in vehicles becoming unavailable and travel demands not met. Dividing the operating area in two would create one zone centred on access to Huntingdon and one focussed on access to St. Neots (see Figure 6-1). The northern zone would serve villages north of the Brampton Hut to Covington axis, where the service would have quick access along the A14 to Huntingdon. This would cover approximately 225km². The service would run to Grafham Water and Perry (for access to HMP Littlehey), given there are regular flows from these sites into Huntingdon. The current end destinations in Huntingdon would be retained.
- 6.7 The southern zone, from Tilbrook to the A14/A1 interchange and then south of the new A14 bypass, would be centred around St. Neots. This would cover approximately 135km². Unlike the current operating area, internal trips within St. Neots would not be allowed - trips could either originate or terminate within St. Neots but not both. Two drop off/pick up zones would be introduced - St. Neots town centre and St. Neots railway station - which are the points where most pick-ups/drop-offs are made in the town.
- 6.8 Trips should remain possible between the southern zone and Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, given its importance as the key healthcare centre in the area. Similarly, provision could also be made from both zones for access to the prison, as a large rural employer which also generates trips for visitors, which is located close to the border between the two zones.

Figure 6-1 Proposed new operating zones



6.9 Within each zone, one eight-seater vehicle and one sixteen seat vehicle could be allocated, ensuring good availability for users whilst also guaranteeing accessible transport in each zone.

Booking system

6.10 There are various shortcomings with the booking system which should be addressed, particularly:

- The option to book a drop-off time (to make an onward journey or appointment) or a pick-up time.
- Automated scheduling such that preloaded algorithms determine the routing of the service, pick-ups and drop-offs.
- Instant booking notifications being issued to users for advance and real-time bookings, whether in-app or via SMS.
- Reminder messages for advanced bookings.
- Clear identification of pick-up locations that are not the user's home address, most likely by the definition of a network of virtual bus stops.

6.11 There may be scope to amend the current back office booking system and upgrade the app, but it is anticipated that there would be a cost involved in doing so. An alternative

approach would be to retender the service with a more closely defined technical specification. The tendering approach would open up the market to achieve a booking system, end user and driver apps which are well established and more akin to other DRT services in the UK and the rest of Europe.

- 6.12 If further DRT services might be introduced across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, there may be merit in CPCA separately procuring a bookings/scheduling platform that can be used across all services, rather than relying on the operator to provide a system. This may also encourage more operators to tender for the provision of the transport service.

Data supply

- 6.13 With an enhanced back-office system and app, there should also come an improvement in the data supplied through the service. One of the biggest advantages of DRT in terms of data, is that a full matrix of origin-destinations, demographics and demand can be extracted and analysed to refine and improve the service. Currently this advantage is not being exploited.
- 6.14 Other than headline passenger numbers per month, basic operational and performance data has not been routinely shared with CPCA by the operator. The requirement to supply data on a monthly basis to accompany an invoice should be included within the technical specification and would ensure that the performance of the service can be continually monitored. The technical specification should also indicate the type of data to be collected, including on a per vehicle basis to enable efficiency of vehicle usage to be assessed.
- 6.15 It should be specified that the following data is provided, given that most other DRT booking systems provide this information as standard:
- Anonymised user IDs
 - Method of trip request (i.e. app or phone)
 - Date and time of request
 - Date and time of requested pick-up or drop-off
 - The date and time of pick-up or drop-off that the user is allocated
 - Ticket type (e.g. adult, youth, ENCTS)
 - Whether the trip was accepted, rejected or cancelled and the reason for this
 - Specific origin and destination point of the trip, including co-ordinates, to allow quick data analysis.

- Journey time and length
- Actual pick up and drop off time
- ID of the vehicle allocated to the trip
- Fare paid and method of payment

6.16 Indeed, where other systems are in place, local authority officers have the ability to log-in and view or download performance data themselves to gain insights into service performance.

6.17 Alongside basic reliability issues, the following should also be expected from any back-office service and application for DRT:

- Rejection of booking requests that abstract from the existing public transport offering. In other applications, as is the case with other services elsewhere in the country, a customer that tries to book a trip that can be undertaken by a fixed bus will be provided with details of that service – route, nearest stop and departure time. In this way, DRT and fixed route services complement one another rather than compete.
- Offering alternative journey times if the vehicle is not available at the requested time, to account for the fact that some journeys are not time critical.
- A customer feedback option, where customers can rate the service out of 5 and provide written feedback if there were any problems.

Fares

6.18 The current flat fare system of £2 for adults and £1 for under 19s should be reviewed. For the individualised, door to door service provided, the fare is too low. Those successfully using the service are essentially benefitting from a cheap taxi service. Equally, the service isn't valued, with evidence of people not cancelling journeys when they no longer require them. This means the vehicle still travels to the pick-up point for no-one, when it could have been available for someone else.

6.19 A zonal fare system could be an option, reflecting the possibility to take shorter trips along the A1 corridor or from villages surrounding the towns, and longer trips from the villages in the west.

Measurable KPIs

6.20 To ensure the improvements to the service that are possible, the operator needs to be bound by a series of detailed KPIs beyond the three that are currently listed. The KPIs chosen would need to ensure that customers are able to access the service, they are

able to travel broadly within the time periods they requested, the vehicles are in operation to meet demand and regular monitoring and evaluation is undertaken.

Example KPIs might include:

- Proportion of journeys carrying an agreed minimum number of passengers
- Proportion of users who are satisfied with their trip
- Proportion of users who are usually able to book a trip
- Number of operational vehicle hours available each day

Contract duration

- 6.21 The award of a twelve-month contract, even with optional extensions, provides little scope for an operator to fully invest in a DRT service. Given that it takes a number of months to build up a customer base, even with intensive marketing and publicity efforts, the operator needs more surety that the service will not be retendered at the end of the first year of operation.
- 6.22 It is recommended that the CPCA awards a minimum three-year contract for the provision of Ting in the future, to give the operator time to develop and improve the system and the service. This, coupled with active contract management and data monitoring, will help to ensure that the service meets its objectives and the needs of its target market.

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