

ISABELLA PLANTATION ACCESS PROJECT
Transport Trials 2 and 3
August 3 and 23 2013
Malcolm Childs

1. INTRODUCTION

In May 2013, trials were run for the provision of minibus transport into Richmond Park and Isabella Plantation and for carrying the public from Broomfield Hill Car Park to Broomfield Gate.

These trials were the first part of a planned pilot for possible arrangements to help increase access to and within the Isabella Plantation.

On Saturday August 3 and Friday August 23, the final aspects of the pilot were carried out, led by project partners, the Holly Lodge Centre. This report by Malcolm Childs gives information on each of those events.

2. TRANSPORT TRIALS 2 AUGUST 3

2.1 Background and Promotion

On Saturday August 3rd 2013, a minibus service was run around Richmond Park, from all of the Park's main car parks on the perimeter of the Park, with the destination of Peg's Pond Disabled Car Park at Isabella Plantation.

This report reflects the work involved and the time taken, together with the results of this part of the Transport Pilot.

The date chosen was Saturday 3rd August, one day before the Park would be closed for the Big Cycle ride through Richmond Park.

A decision was made at the outset to advertise this first 'around the Park' event on a low key basis. Notices were placed in all of the Park notice boards advertising this day and the next event in this pilot, (the Roehampton Estate pick up to Isabella Plantation on Friday 23rd August as part of the 60th celebrations of Isabella Plantation). These notices went in the Noticeboards at the beginning of July. In addition, leaflets were placed at Holly Lodge reception and the Information Centre at Pembroke Lodge. There was also a notice on the Isabella Plantation Project website.

The Holly Lodge Sunshine Coach was used for this purpose along with a volunteer driver from that charity.

To assist with the event, nearer to the day, 4 'A' Boards and three sets of A4 laminated sheets covering: The Project, The original leaflet in the Notice Boards, A sheet explaining the service being provided and lastly the times when the Sunshine Coach would arrive at each Car Park.

These timings were as follows: Kingston Gate Car Park at 00.00 past the hour, Broomfield Hill Car Park at 00.10 past the hour, Robin Hood Gate Car Park at 00.20 past the hour, Roehampton Gate Car Park at 00.30 past the hour, Sheen Gate Car Park at 00.40 past the hour and Pembroke Lodge at 00.50 past the hour. After the last pick up at Pembroke Lodge a visit was made to Peg's Pond Car park at Isabella Plantation to drop off and pick up on each time around the Park. Please note that Pen Ponds Car Park was left out of the equation at this stage. The First run was to be at 10.00am and the last run at 16.00pm. However a final run would be made after this to collect any visitors still at Peg's Pond .

These items were displayed on the 3rd August from 08.30am in the morning at each of the sites.

2.2 Summary of Take Up

Some 54 persons were carried, and questionnaires completed by those who rode on the bus. Of the 54 persons, 22 were taken and returned and 10 individuals only used one way.

Of the total taken 5 groups were from Pembroke Lodge, 2 from Sheen, 1 from Roehampton and 1 from Peg's Pond. Of the people carried there were 9 groups. 5 had previously been to Isabella plantation and 4 had not. The groups at Sheen had come on foot whilst the Pembroke and Roehampton groups had come by car or Bus and walked.

Of the people carried, only 3 of the groups had seen the notices on the day, the other 6 having seen the notice boards or used the Information Centre. Although numbers were low, much of this can be put down to two features: the Cycle weekend in London affected numbers in the Park; and the concessionaires in the Park informed me that early August numbers are down in the Park as many local families are away on holiday.

2.3 Feedback

From the questionnaires undertaken, the feedback was strong on the service around the Park and all felt a fee was appropriate for a 'round trip' around the Park. Prices quoted ranged from £1 to £2.50 for Adults and 50p to £1 for children. Under 5s to be free.

The majority of people carried would welcome a service around the Park with a Driver providing a commentary of the main sights to see. This was reflected particularly by the 4 groups who had come more than 10 miles and included one Overseas Tourist /Working group.

As far as Isabella Plantation was concerned there were never more than 4 vehicles in the Peg's Pond car park all day.

As well as the people carried, research was undertaken verbally with visitors and concessionaires and the Information Centre and more than 150 people were approached. The vast majority felt the idea of a minibus service around the Park was an excellent idea.

Another point that came out of discussion with people at Broomfield Hill Car Park was when was the Electric Buggy service that we piloted in May coming back! This was from both families heading off to picnic in Isabella Plantation and confirmed by the concessionaires stand at that venue.

Criticism was made of the idea of not promoting the service better but it was explained that without support of a second minibus and Volunteer and Project Management cover that this was the appropriate pilot at this time. These considerations were not advised to the people questioned but they were advised that a low key approach was being tested.

2.4 Volunteer Input

Some 10 hours time was provided on the day by the driver in operating the service and putting out the information and removing the same.

2.5 Conclusion

This pilot was for reasons of necessity 'low key' but the results were interesting and in line with views that had been expressed prior to the exercise. However, it must be tested more effectively for this type of service in a Peak time for the Plantation.

The next stage of the Project will be on 23rd August when a free service will be operated from Danebury Avenue on Roehampton Estate in support of the 60th anniversary celebrations.

The feedback on the Buggy from the car park at Broomfield Hill Car Park re-enforced views received in May 2013.

3. TRANSPORT TRIALS 3 AUGUST 23

3.1 Background and Promotion

As part of the 60th Anniversary celebration for Isabella Plantation, the Transport Group decided to run a Minibus service from the barrier in Danebury Avenue, Roehampton, to Peg's Pond at Isabella Plantation. This service was timed to be on the day of the Teddy Bear's Picnic that formed part of the 60th Anniversary celebrations.

The advertising followed the same approach as had been used for the two previous trials. This included: notices in the Park notice boards and leaflets available at the Information Centre and at Holly Lodge. In addition, posters were placed in some key places on the Roehampton Estate, and the Royal Parks website also advertised the transport information.

Following the distribution of this publicity, we were approached by a Doctor's Surgery on the Estate, and the LB of Wandsworth, who provided details of the transport to elderly residents. We received a number of telephone enquiries from nurseries on the Estate. Unfortunately, the LB of Wandsworth omitted the pick up point as the barrier in Danebury Avenue so a number of elderly people wishing to come to the Plantation were unhappy that they were not met at the

starting time of 10.00am. However, other residents walked down the avenue to our pick up point.

3.2 Provision and Summary of Take Up

We decided to enrol a second Bus from RAKAT, via the Holly Lodge Centre membership, and to this end Toni Assirati undertook her MIDAS training, so that she could be the second driver on the day. We ran from 10.00am to 4.45pm and I released the RAKAT bus at 3.30pm since we only required one bus for returning people to the pick up point.

The day was limited in numbers but we carried between us 58 persons. Of this total 25 were retired, 13 parents or carers and 20 children. Of the retired persons 18 were white, 7 were of other ethnic origin. 6 were partially limited in their movement. Of the carers/ parents 7 were white and 6 were of other ethnic origin. 14 of the children were under 5 and the remainder aged 6-8. 8 of the children were white and 12 of other ethnic origin.

3.3 Feedback

As well as those carried we interviewed probably a further 100 adults asked about what we were doing, and the feedback provided relates to all involved.

Elderly people loved the idea of being able to go to Isabella Plantation as did the nursery school which attended. They would willingly use a regular service if provided as neither group could normally get to the Plantation. All the adults were happy to consider a small fee for a service and were pleased that this pilot was free. A cost in line with previous comments on Pilots 1 and 2 suggests figure of in the region of £2 return. There is no doubt that this was well received by those going to the Teddy Bear's Picnic or just being able to visit the Plantation.

Regrettably, we received some strong feedback about letting down other elderly residents of the Estate due to the discrepancy on reporting by LB of Wandsworth.

3.4 Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for MIDAS training to be undertaken by volunteers so that both the Holly Lodge Sunshine Coach can be used as well as RAKAT vehicles as required. With the new PACE Officer in place this should be a priority.
2. The option of a service going around the Park stopping at car parks and visiting Peg's Pond Car Park at Isabella Plantation on its circuit is a definite opportunity for this project and would also benefit Richmond Park as a whole.
3. A modest fee charging ride is acceptable to the vast majority.
4. The use of this pilot to Roehampton Estate has opened up opportunities for liaison with both elderly groups and nurseries on the estate.

5. Toni Assirati spoke with RAKAT who indicated that providing a one day a week service using a driver and minibus as a pilot and the cost suggested was remarkably acceptable. I believe that within the pilot of this Project that the Steering Group should approach The Royal Parks to see whether this would be acceptable. I would suggest avoiding weekends and aim this service as a mid week offer.

6. The failure to use the Electric Buggy during the 60th celebrations was disappointing to members of the public, due to volunteer holiday commitments, but people were asked about this service and remain committed to the idea of such a service running from Broomfield Hill Car Park to the Broomfield Gate.

4. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEP

This completes the three stages we agreed to carry out in the Summer, and I genuinely believe that the feedback we have received will be of assistance to the Steering Group and the overall project.

I would recommend that with the PACE Officer now in post, the Transport Group should meet to look at the future options within the pilot.

There is a need to tie in the various elements including wheelchair availability at Isabella Plantation sooner rather than later.