Efficiency in Home to School Transport (SEND)

Current challenges and solutions

IT use in routing, client information and payments

Optimising the in-house minibus and contract taxi mix

Ian Wilkin

Integrated Transport Services Manager

Lancashire
County
Council

The backdrop

- SEND Home to School transport costs (up 29% Nationally)
- Unprecedented increase in students with EH&C Plans
- Shortfall in places at local SEND schools
- Rising Taxi / Private Hire prices
- Continued growth forecasts

Current Challenges

- SEND Growth
  - Demand for places has outstripped local provision
  - Excessive journey times and distances
  - Reduced opportunities for multi-occupancy journeys
  - Previously ineligible students now qualifying on distance alone
  - More students transition to Further Education (traditionally Day Service)
  - Reliance on a stretch Private Hire industry
  - Increased use of Independent Special Schools
    - Many provide own transport
    - Expensive, due to greater distances and higher needs

Lancashire County Council

Current best case scenario forecast SEND

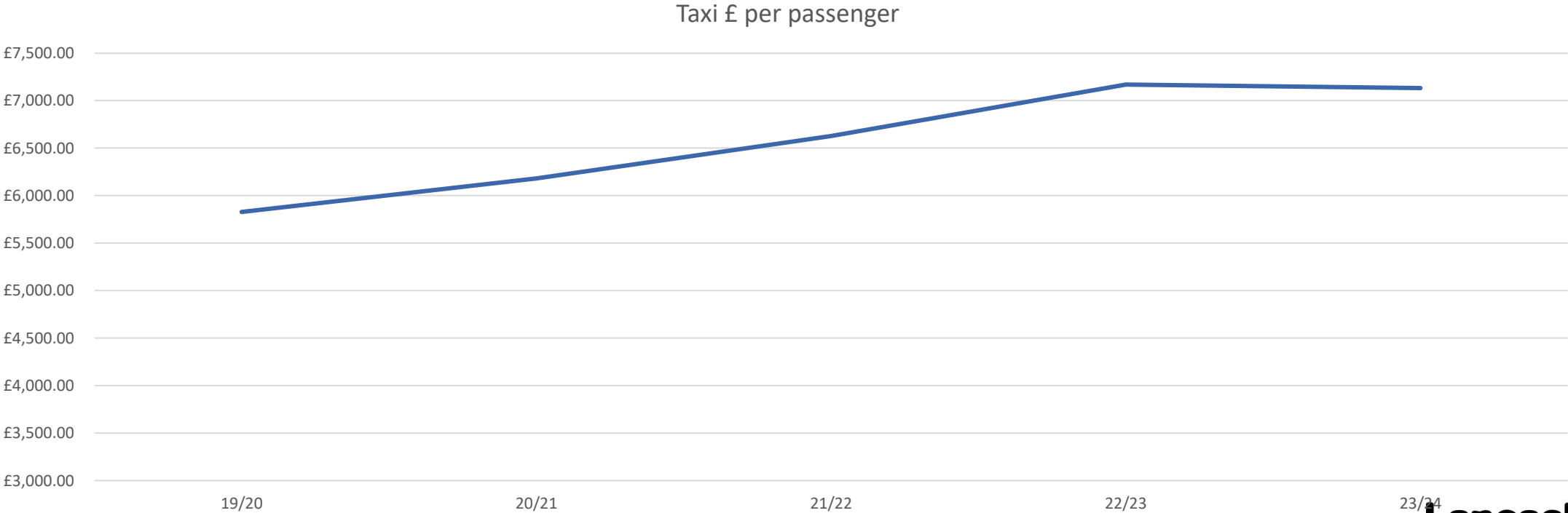Min Passenger Number Growth Forecast 7%
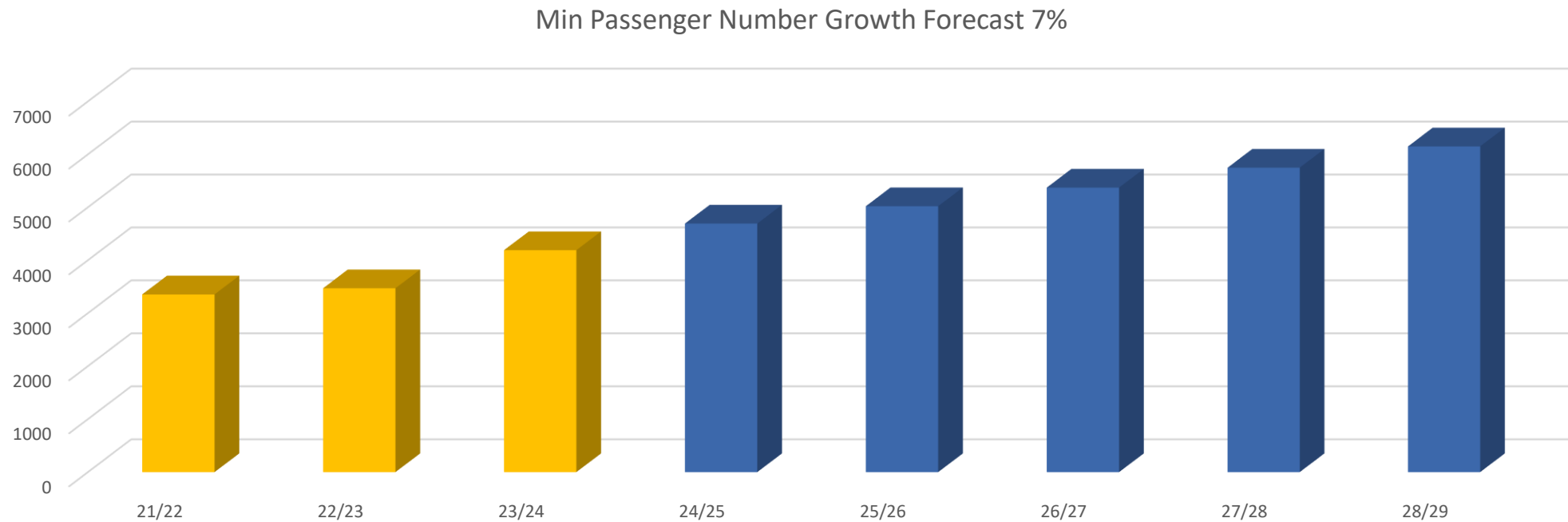
Current Challenges

- Private Hire and Taxi provision
  - Driver shortages post-Covid 19
  - Cost of Living and Fuel Price increases
  - Taxi Company buy outs and consolidations
  - Accessible and minibus marketplace
  - Reduced competition and poor quality
  - Beginning to recover slightly and prices settling

Lancashire
County
Council

Average Daily Taxi Costs – last 5 years

Taxi Daily Contract Values
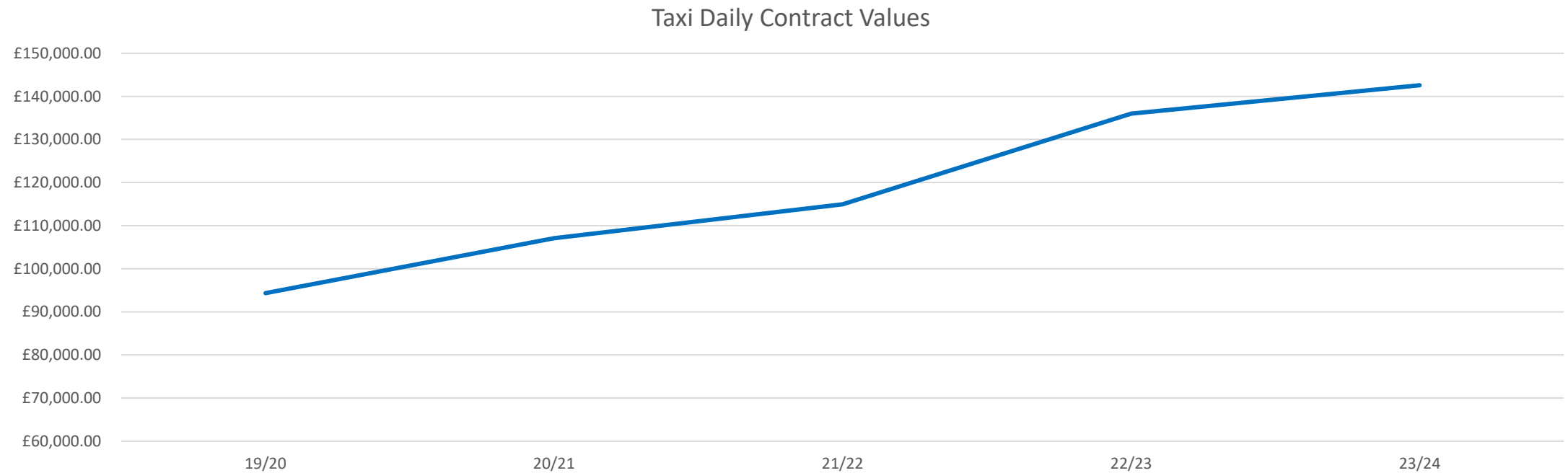
Solutions and Mitigations

- Transport Assistance Grants
- Route optimisation for Travelcare and private hire using specialised software
- A Dynamic Purchasing System
- Invest in the In-House Fleet to Save
- Independent Travel Training
- Reducing the need for Passenger Assistance
- Rationalising College Transport
- Consecutive Service Delivery Model
- Delegated budgets

Further Potential Mitigations

- The provision of sufficient school places local to SEND children is the single greatest potential action that would reduce transport costs.

- Transport managers to have input into annual EHCP reviews that are carried out by schools by heads and SEN coordinating officers.

Information Technology

Information Technology

- Lancashire's ICT Journey
    - C.A.R.T, our old faithful of 20 years
    - Enviable functionality – even now
    - Very Old-Fashioned user interface
    - Route design largely based on local knowledge
    - Had a driver App way ahead of its time
    - Clunky, losing relevance and had to go!

Bringing us up to date with the Tech

- Routing software
  - To aid efficient routing and scheduling
- New IT system from April 2024
  - All aspects of passenger and journey management (internal and external)
  - Integrations with existing LCC systems
  - Customer Relations Module
  - Streamlined payments for operators and grant holders
  - Driver App
- Vehicle live tracking and defect reporting

Lancashire
County
Council

Fleet Mix Optimisation

In-House vs Private Hire and Taxis

Lancashire
County
Council

The Shape of the Service

- In-House
  - 102 Mainly large accessible Minibuses (16 Seats)
  - All have Passenger Assistants
  - Consecutive Service Delivery Model
    - Schools followed by Adult Day Service

- Private Hire / Taxi
  - 1375 Contracts (all commission types)
  - 500+ LCC Passenger Assistants
  - Mainly Cars and MPVs

Optimising the In House / Taxi contract mix

- Solutions hierarchy
  - In-House first
  - Transport Assistance Grant offer
  - Multi occupancy private hire
    - Escorted
    - Unescorted
  - Single Occupancy private hire
    - Unescorted / Parental Support
    - Escorted
    - Specialist Support

  - Independent Travel Training usually by referral, rarely on commissioning

Invest to Save (In-House)

- 50 - 8 Seat accessible minibuses on order

- 2 in to 1 (minimum) ideology

- 30% to 35% cost reduction (based on escorted taxis)

- Exploit opportunities to single crew

- "B" Licenced driver attendants (no D1 required)

- In the face of growth, provides headroom going forward

Last 5 years – In-House / Private Hire share

In House / Private Hire Split

— Passengers on Taxis   — Passenger In-House
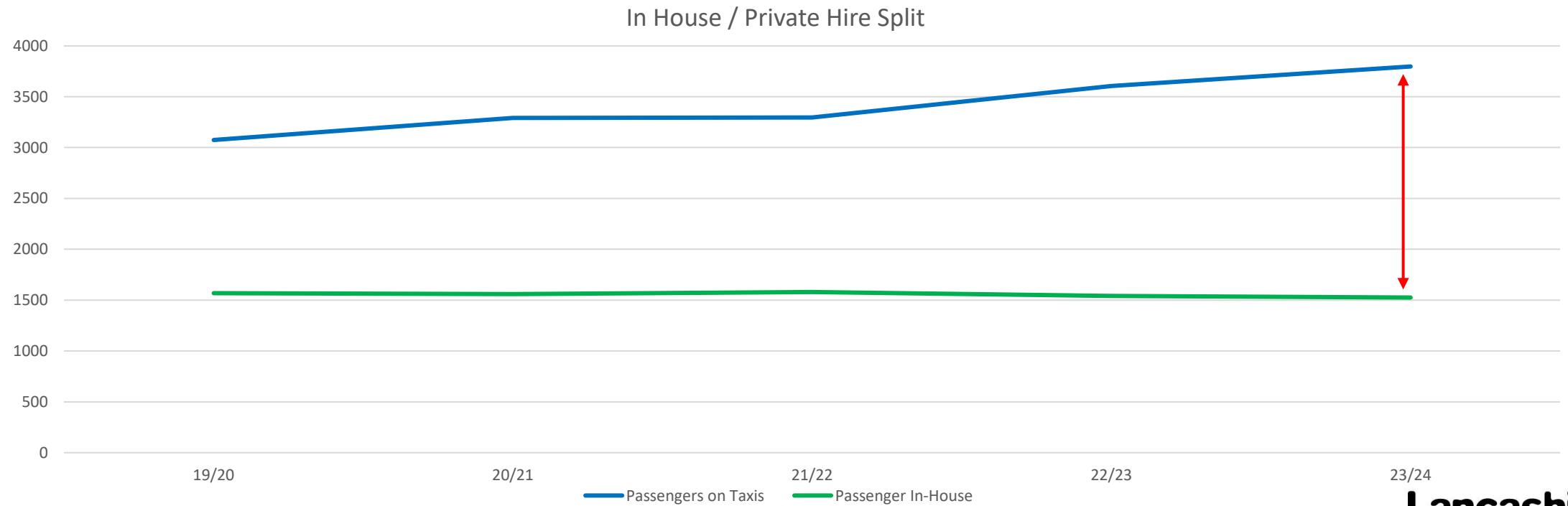
Questions

Ian Wilkin

Integrated Transport Services Manager

Lancashire County Council