

REPORT TO SCRUTINY ECONOMY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting: 11 September 2014
Report of: Assistant Director City Development
Title: TRANSPORT INITIATIVES AND ISSUES - UPDATE

Is this a Key Decision?

No.

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive.

1. What is the report about?

This is an annual report to update Members in relation to transport initiatives and issues affecting Exeter. The emphasis this year is on rail, with new stations opening soon and more certainty in relation to the franchising process; also electric vehicles, with a strategy being presented to Members for endorsement.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Members agree continued support for the Council's involvement in the initiatives outlined in the report.

2.2 That Members agree to endorse the Electric Vehicle Strategy, as a strategy for promoting the ownership and use of electric vehicles within Exeter.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 The Council's continuing engagement with transport issues and initiatives will help to ensure that Exeter's transport needs are well served by Devon County Council, the LEP, and the transport operators.

3.2 The Electric Vehicle Strategy will assist the Council in dealing with issues arising out of the rapid take-up of electric vehicles.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

The Council's work on transport projects forms about 40% of the workload of the Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery). The Council pays an annual contribution of £15,000 to the work programme approved by the Devon and Exeter Rail Project Working Party, which includes service and station improvements. The Council also pays an annual contribution of £5,000 to Sustrans, in return for project work carried out by them.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no additional financial implications contained in the report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

None.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

No issues of concern are raised by this report.

8. BACKGROUND

8.1 Responsibility for transport rests with numerous organisations, including the Department for Transport (DfT), Devon County Council (DCC) as Local Transport Authority and Highway Authority, and private operators like First Great Western and Stagecoach who run the trains and buses. The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is also gaining an increasing role in transport issues, with funding for major schemes now devolved to Local Transport Boards (LTBs) based on LEP geography.

8.2 Exeter City Council is involved in transport issues in a number of ways:-

- (a) As local planning authority, we plan the location of development in relation to transport networks. We work closely with Devon County Council in this regard; the City Council's spatial planning policies informed production of DCC's Local Transport Plan, and conversely DCC produced a body of evidence to support our adopted Core Strategy. A product of this collaboration is the Devon Metro proposals, referred to below at paragraph 9.2, whereby it is proposed to serve Exeter's new development areas by an improved rail system.
- (b) Also as local planning authority, we endeavour to ensure that new development is located and designed to maximise use of sustainable travel modes.
- (c) We provide some transport infrastructure, notably cycling and walking routes through our open spaces, and off-street car parks.
- (d) We respond to consultations from government and elsewhere (see for example paragraph 9.3).
- (e) We also deal with the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles, although this is outside the scope of this report.

8.3 It will be seen from the content of this report that in many cases Exeter City Council's involvement in projects is as more than a mere consultee. Much of our input into transport issues is through working in partnership with DCC, and influencing decisions made by them and others to ensure that Exeter's interests are promoted. Our views on transport matters are conveyed to the LEP via the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board and through participation by the Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery) in the LEP's Transport Special Interest Group. He also represents the Council on the Regional Group for Network Rail's Long Term Planning Process.

9. RAIL

9.1 This Committee has previously resolved to endorse DCC's Devon Metro proposals, and to support the principle of working with DCC and other stakeholders to lobby for rail improvements.

9.2 A summary of the Devon Metro proposals is included as Appendix 1. They include new stations at Newcourt, Cranbrook and Marsh Barton and, in the longer term,

Monkerton/Hill Barton. Newcourt and Cranbrook stations are due to open this winter, and Marsh Barton is programmed for 2016.

- 9.3 The process for awarding the new Great Western franchise was interrupted by the review of the franchising system, following legal action by Virgin in relation to the West Coast franchise and discovery of errors by the DfT. The Department has negotiated a temporary contract with First Great Western to continue operating trains until September 2015 and has recently consulted on a proposal for a further five year contract (ie. until 2020). Along with other consultees, we have been pressing for that contract to include the various elements of Devon Metro, as well as increasing the frequency of trains to Paddington when more rolling stock becomes available. As well as providing the required capacity now and in the future, two trains an hour, one fast and one semi-fast, would square the circle between major centres like Exeter and Plymouth which want faster journeys to London, and those at intermediate points who understandably don't want any degradation of their service.
- 9.4 The national shortage of rolling stock continues to cause problems, particularly on our local lines where passenger numbers are continuing to increase. It appears increasingly likely that our demands for more and better carriages will be satisfied when the Thames Valley services are electrified in 2016 and diesel stock is available for cascade.
- 9.5 Frequent disruption caused by flooding in 2012 prompted Network Rail to draw up a list of projects to address this issue, not only at Cowley Bridge but also at other locations further up the line. Implementation of these schemes is dependent on funding in the region of £31m, which the DfT has recently approved. Having repaired the Dawlish sea wall commendably quickly, Network Rail have been studying options for diversionary routes. It is essential to Exeter that any such route should be in addition to, not instead of, the Dawlish route, which is an important commuter route into the city. The study has shown the various alternative routes to have low benefit to cost ratios, but more work remains to be done in respect of options to make the existing route more resilient.
- 9.6 It is also important that the high profile debate over Dawlish does not prejudice the resilience works that are needed between Exeter and London. Devon County Council is carrying out feasibility work in relation to a further passing loop on the Waterloo line, which would not only increase its effectiveness as a diversionary route, but enable a half-hourly service to operate to Cranbrook, making rail a more attractive travel option to residents of the new town.
- 9.7 The long-awaited plans to improve Central Station forecourt have now been completed and favourably received. They were funded by the City and County Councils and Network Rail, and complemented the significant improvements already carried out at this station by the rail industry under the National Stations Improvement Programme.

10. OTHER PUBLIC TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENTS

- 10.1 Incremental improvements continue to be made to the city's bus services, particularly to serve new development within and just outside the city boundary, using section 106 money from developers.
- 10.2 Devon County Council has recently succeeded in a bid for £900k to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund for 2015/16. Exeter is one of the areas set to benefit from

the money, some of which will be used to develop smart ticketing and real time information, as well as pump-priming further services.

- 10.3 Redevelopment of the bus station site will provide an opportunity to achieve a replacement facility that not only functions well as a bus station, but provides a welcoming gateway to the city. This was identified as a high priority when a similar transport update was presented to this Committee in September 2013. Officers from both Councils have had significant input into the emerging proposals, and a planning application is anticipated by the end of this year.

11. ROAD IMPROVEMENTS AND OTHER MAJOR SCHEMES

- 11.1 As mentioned in paragraph 8.1, funding for major schemes has now been devolved to the Local Transport Board, with further money awarded to the LEP in response to its Growth Bid.
- 11.2 The first round of schemes selected to be prioritised for LEP/LTB funding, subject to a satisfactory business case, include Marsh Barton station (see above) and Bridge Road outbound widening. It is anticipated that both projects will get under way within the next year.
- 11.3 Also expected to commence within the next year is construction of the first phase of the Tithebarn Lane link road, which is required to open up development sites in Monkerton and across the motorway in East Devon. This is being funded in part from the DfT's Local Pinch Point Fund, with further contributions from the Regional Growth Fund and from developers.
- 11.4 The proposed Alphington Park and Ride still lacks planning permission, but remains an important component of the Council's future transport strategy, supported by our Core Strategy.
- 11.5 Further afield, the Government has funded a feasibility study into further dualling of the A303/A30/A358 corridor. The Council has supported the case for this, as any improvements would increase journey time reliability, as well as resilience through providing a genuine alternative to the M5.

12. ELECTRIC VEHICLES

- 12.1 The Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery) has been tasked by the Exeter and Heart of Devon Low Carbon Task Force (LCTF) with preparing an Electric Vehicle Strategy, for adoption by the Growth Board, as a strategy for promoting the use and ownership of electric vehicles across the Board's area, and more widely throughout Devon. This reflects the increasing interest in electric vehicles both nationally and locally, including the Council's acquisition of some electric pool vehicles.
- 12.2 Growth in ownership of electric vehicles gives rise to policy issues, with organisations under pressure to respond to demands from the public. These range from a desire for more charging points (or simply more information about where to find them) to pressure to grant privileges to drivers of electric vehicles such as discounted parking or exemption from traffic restrictions. It is against this background that the LCTF considered it advantageous to have an Electric Vehicle Strategy in place, to consider these issues proactively and consistently across the area, rather than responding to

them on an ad hoc basis. The Strategy will also place the Council and other members of the LCTF in a better position to take advantage of funding opportunities that arise.

- 12.3 The Strategy is included as Appendix 2 to this report. It reaches a number of conclusions, which can be summarised as follows:-
- The ownership and use of electric vehicles is to be encouraged, especially where they can be used to complement initiatives involving sustainable travel and/or renewable energy.
 - Member organisations of the LCTF and Growth Board should take up the opportunity of fleet review, and promote take-up among others.
 - Organisations which provide parking places are encouraged to use these to expand the network of charging points.
 - Privileges for electric car drivers should only be granted after careful consideration of the impact on other policies. All privileges, including free use of charging points, should be clearly expressed as subject to periodic review, liable to be reduced or withdrawn, and/or limited to a finite number of early adopters. This is to prevent adverse consequences as take-up of electric vehicles continues to increase.
 - Organisations should assist in the provision of information to the public, such as location of charging points, ideally by providing pointers to an extant authoritative source.
 - Public authorities should use their relationships with transport organisations to promote ownership and use of electric vehicles, and all organisations should take advantage of funding opportunities.
 - Local planning authorities should promote electric vehicles, particularly through policies and conditions requiring installation of charging points in new development.
 - Commercial organisations should exploit marketing opportunities that link electric vehicles with other green products and services.
- 12.4 The Strategy is being presented to the Growth Board in October with a view to having it adopted across the Board's area, and more widely across Devon. It is recommended that this Committee endorses it in respect of Exeter.

13. AVIATION

- 13.1 The Council recognises the importance to the city of Exeter International Airport, both in terms of connectivity and the high quality jobs provided, particularly by Flybe. We have supported the airport and airline in their calls to have Air Passenger Duty reduced for domestic flights, and have responded jointly with the airport to a discussion paper on the role that regional airports can play in meeting capacity demands.
- 13.2 Flybe has announced that it will be commencing a service between Exeter and London City airport, three times daily, from October. This will provide a much needed point-to-point connection with London's key business districts, and represents a welcome vote of confidence in Exeter.
- 13.3 For connections further afield, we are principally dependent on Heathrow, and we welcome the proposed western rail connection given that no air link exists. We have contributed to the work of the Davies Commission on airport capacity, arguing that a new hub airport east of London would be difficult to access from regions outside the south east. The Commission has indicated an early preference for expansion of Heathrow or Gatwick; Heathrow expansion is considered to be the optimum solution

for Exeter, and the Gatwick option would also be acceptable, particularly as Heathrow would continue to operate under this scenario.

14. CYCLING AND WALKING

14.1 The Exeter Walking and Cycling Steering Group (comprising officers from ECC, DCC and a representative of Sustrans) continues to promote incremental improvements to the walking and cycling network. Devon County Council's successful bid to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (see paragraph 10.2 above) will enable more work to be done to promote walking and cycling in the city.

15. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

Through its engagement with transport projects, the Council will be contributing in particular to the following purposes:-

- *Improve the environment and my neighbourhood* – which includes a commitment to reduce car dependency and encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport.
- *Help me run a successful business in Exeter* – an efficient transport system is necessary to get people to work, and to enable customers to access businesses located in the city.
- *Deliver good development* – enabling development to go ahead by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure and services are in place.

16. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

The main risk is in *not* engaging effectively with other organisations to ensure that the transport systems and services being developed for Exeter meet the city's needs.

17. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

Providing a range of transport opportunities enables all residents to access the jobs and services that they need. The active travel modes (walking and cycling) are beneficial to the health of the population. The environment also benefits from a reduction in harmful emissions when people walk, cycle, reduce vehicle use by travelling on public transport, and/or use low emission vehicles.

18. Are there any other options?

The City Council's involvement in transport is probably at the optimum level; less involvement would reduce our influence in these important matters, whereas greater involvement would risk duplicating the work of others (particularly the County Council) and would not be cost-effective.

Ross Hussey

Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery)

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Devon Metro Appraisal Report – DCC 2011

Western Route – Geo-Environmental Resilience (Network Rail, June 2013)
Long Distance and Regional Urban Market Studies (part of Network Rail's Long Term Planning Process, 2014)
ECC's response to the consultation on a new Great Western rail franchise (2014)
ECC's various representations to the (Davies) Commission on Airport Capacity

Contact for enquires:
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Appendix 1
Devon Metro

Appendix 2
EV Strategy