

Communications Strategy: Interim Bus Plans

Report for Programme Board November 7

1: Aims and objectives

To work with stakeholders to produce and implement a clear strategy for communicating the temporary bus arrangements ahead of, and during, the closure of Exeter Bus Station at the end of March 2017.

To ensure passengers, businesses, stakeholders and the wider public are fully informed of the changes that will remain in place until the new bus station opens in December 2018.

To help minimise disruption through clear communications and help enable services to continue operating smoothly.

To clearly promote the message that Exeter is open for business as usual during the works, and establish a clear timetable for the changes which are due to take place.

2: Strategy

The city council's communication team is working with Stagecoach, the Bus Users Group, passenger groups and other stakeholders to implement the strategy. While the operators are responsible for running bus services, the council will take a lead in highlighting how the temporary arrangements will help ensure continuity of services until the new station opens. The strategy will ensure that the temporary arrangements will be communicated as widely as possible through a range of communication channels and face to face meetings with affected businesses.

Information will be distributed by other district councils and the county council, as most passengers currently using Exeter Bus Station live outside the city.

Communication will emphasise the major benefit redeveloping the bus station will bring to Exeter.

The strategy will:

- Help co-ordinate preparations to minimise disruption and aid the public.
- Work with Stagecoach and other partners to help ensure continuity of services
- Communicate positive aspects before and during the work.
- Inform, engage, promote, influence and assure over all aspects of the plans.
- Use innovative techniques and technology to inform the wider public about the plans.
- Anticipate potential pitfalls or disruptions and minimise, divert or manage them.
- Ensure residents, businesses, staff, key partners and the wider media understand the plans.
- Implement communications with all parties and the media in a timely and coherent way.
- Engage residents and businesses in all consultations, events and participation opportunities.
- Ensure regular feedback in response to consultations and social media activity.
- Communicate with members, colleagues and partners on developments.

3: Communication channels

Communications over the interim bus arrangements will involve:

Social media:

A series of short videos for social media are being produced. These have the potential to be shared directly among thousands of passengers. Social media video - boosted on Facebook and Twitter - explaining the interim arrangements.

Media Releases:

Including the Express & Echo, TV and radio and trade press.

Exeter Citizen:

On November 20 the winter Exeter Citizen is published, with full details of the proposed interim arrangements.

Direct mail:

Weekly email bulletins on what is happening are being sent out to subscribers of the council's GovDelivery service.

Letter drop:

In November a letter drop to all the businesses and residents in the main affected area of Sidwell Street will be posted. Letters will also be sent to businesses in Southernhay.

Leaflets:

Leaflets will be produced for passengers, in conjunction with Stagecoach. They will include a map and full details of what is happening, including a colour-coded key to the stands. They will be distributed at a number of prominent locations, in addition to the bus station, including the RD&E, tourist information, Civic Centre, train stations and public areas of large retailers like the cafés in John Lewis and M&S. Large employers like South West Water and Devon County Council, will also distribute them in staff rooms and canteens.

Website:

Full and updated details of the interim arrangements are on the council's website exeter.gov.uk/busstation

An interactive map highlighting the arrangements will be launched online.

Large employers/ business groups:

Information on the arrangements will be distributed by major business groups and forums, including Exeter Chamber of Commerce. Large employers will be encouraged to send the information to all members of staff on email.

4: Businesses and stakeholders

Businesses at the top end of Sidwell Street will receive a face-to-face visit from the communications team to explain what is happening, and when.

Information will be given in a timely manner, ensuring those affected fully understand the process. Businesses will be given a dedicated person to contact and number to call if there are problems associated with the interim plans.

Briefings informing the public, traders and stakeholders will also be held to explain the changes. A workshop explaining the changes for accessibility groups was held at St Sidwell's Centre on November 2.

The complaints/issues contact number 01392 265880 will be widely distributed.

5: Message timetable

Communications work over the interim arrangements is already well underway. A release was issued on October 21 explaining the plans, which was widely shared on social media and in the Express & Echo.

Meetings were recently held with Stagecoach and passenger groups to explain the plans and how best to communicate them.

Information has been sent to thousands of subscribers to the council's direct email update service GovDelivery.

Further media activity will take place following the HATOC meeting on November 14, which will consider granting permission for the highways works in Sidwell Street and Southernhay.

The start of work on the first of the temporary bus stand in December and January will be another big opportunity to promote the plans. Nearby businesses will also be kept fully updated of developments ahead of any work commencing, through face to face meetings.

A series of engagement days at Exeter Bus Station will begin in January. These will include handing out leaflets and talking to passengers. These will be held regularly from the New Year in the lead up to the closure of the bus station at the end of March.

Between February and March an intensive eight week media campaign of awareness will be launched, focussing on the Express & Echo and local media, backed up by social media. The distribution of leaflets will also be intensified.

There will be major publicity on the closure of the bus station on March 30, and the resulting temporary arrangements for passengers. A closing event at the bus station is expected. There is lots of scope for media activity which will help to promote the temporary arrangements, including nostalgia pieces on the end of an era for Exeter Bus Station (and the start of a new one) with old pictures and memories since it opened in 1964.

A large free-standing hoarding will be erected at the top of Paris Street (opposite John Lewis) which is colour coded to show how the existing bus station bays will be allocated temporary stands. One will also be in Princesshay. There will also be 'miniature' versions of the plans in each bus stand.