

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

4 MARCH 2004

EXECUTIVE

16 MARCH 2004

RAIL ISSUES – EXERAIL PROGRAMME

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to confirm the contribution made by the City Council to this year's 2003/2004 Exerail programme and to outline the proposed contribution for next financial year (2004/2005).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The City Council is a member of the Exerail partnership administered by Devon County Council. The aim of the partnership is to encourage the use of rail, especially as an alternative to the private car. Partners contribute various sums, generally towards specific projects in their areas, and usually matched by the County Council. For the last few years the City Council has allowed for £18,000 towards this partnership from its Transportation Initiatives budget.

3. EXERAIL PROGRAMME 2003/2004

- 3.1 The programme for this year has been debated at a number of meetings of the Partnership, the most recent being 12 February 2004, when the contributions were finally confirmed. The programme this year has been targeted particularly at improving the stations on the Exmouth line and re-branding it as the Avocet line. This included:

- A new shelter at Topsham
- A disabled ramp access to Topsham station and associated revisions to car parking
- Painting of fences and lamp columns at all the stations
- New logo and signing at all stations
- Improvements to shelters at St James Park, Digby & Sowton and Polsloe Bridge stations
- Interpretation boards at Exeter central station
- New litter bins

- 3.2 The newly branded line was officially launched on 24 October 2003, to which officers and Members of the City Council were invited.

3.3 The total contribution to the improvements to the stations in Exeter on the Avocet line from the City Council and Devon County Council was £43,000. This was made up as follows:

£25,000 from the City Council
£18,000 from the County Council

3.4 A further £26,000 was spent by East Devon District Council, Exmouth Town Council and Devon County Council on stations in East Devon. Wessex Trains also undertook design, delivery and organisation of the improvements. Wessex Trains contributed £15,300 from their dilapidations budget for the whole line.

3.5 The City Council's contributions came mainly from previous years' funding for rail, which had been put aside to spend on RPP bids to improve the line. In 2002/2003, an RPP bid for these improvements was unsuccessful. A revised bid was proposed but a moratorium on RPP expenditure was imposed by the SRA, so instead a programme of improvements was drawn up jointly between the City Council, County Council, East Devon District Council and Wessex Trains. The City Council's contribution of £25,000 was made up as follows:

£12,500 Transportation Initiatives reserve
£5,500 Commitment from 2002/2003 budget
£7,000 Contribution from 2003/2004 budget

3.6 The remaining part of this year's budget has been spent on:

£8,500 for publicity, and
£2,500 support for the Barnstaple line

3.7 In 2002/2003 £5,000 was included in the Exerail budget for improvements to St Davids Station. This funding was carried through to 2003/2004 as a commitment. Half (£2,500) was put towards a topographical survey of the St Davids Station forecourt area carried out earlier this financial year with funding matched by Devon County Council. The remaining £2,500 will continue as a commitment in the City Council's Exerail budget for further design work on this project.

3.8 Appendix I shows the contribution from all Exerail partners towards the 2003/2004 programme.

4. PROPOSED EXERAIL PROGRAMME 2004/2005

4.1 Next year's programme is planned to cover many of the recurrent items including support for the Barnstaple line (to pay for two extra services a day on this line) and publicity for the local network.

4.2 Following some concerns about the level of expenditure on publicity by the Exerail partnership, a different approach is proposed this year. A joint promotion with Wessex Trains to publicise the new Devon Metro concept (see section 5 below) is proposed. This will include house to house distribution of

the new “Metro” timetable. Funding will be between £10,000 and £16,000. The £6,000 difference depends on additional input from Torbay and a virement from Mid Devon’s underspend for this year.

- 4.3 The main item of expenditure that the City Council is being asked to contribute towards is a second phase of improvements on the Avocet line, especially at Digby & Sowton station. A list of improvements is currently being drawn up by Wessex Trains and may include additional shelters at Topsham and improvements at Digby & Sowton. The County Council is also hoping to make available a sum of £50,000 from the Local Transport Plan to improve accessibility at stations. The LTP funding is only a proposal at this stage and subject to approval by Devon County Council’s Executive Committee.
- 4.4 Work is also expected to continue on developing a brief for improvements at St Davids station forecourt using the £5,000 left over from this year. Improvements will include improved access for bus services, interchange facilities for passengers, walking and cycling routes and an alternative access to the long stay car park.
- 4.5 The City Council’s suggested contribution to Exerail for next year is £20,500 including the £2,500 held over from this year for St Davids Station forecourt budget. Expenditure of the remaining £18,000 is made up as follows:

£2,500	additional services to Barnstaple
£2,000	towards publicity
£13,500	improvements to the Exmouth line

- 4.6 Appendix II shows the proposed breakdown of expenditure for all constituent authorities to the Exerail Partnership.

5. “DEVON METRO”

- 5.1 At the meeting of the Exerail Partnership in October 2003, a presentation was given by Wessex Trains of their proposal to introduce a “Devon Metro” service. The key feature of this proposal is linking the Barnstaple and Paignton services with the Exmouth services and running all of them at clock face times. Trains from Exmouth would operate every half hour running alternately to Barnstaple and Paignton, which would have a mostly hourly clock face service.
- 5.2 An advantage of this pattern of services would mean that other train operators through St Davids Station could also operate a clock face service. Clock face services are desirable as they help passengers know the timetable and attract more usage.
- 5.3 The disadvantage of the Devon Metro proposal, which it is proposed to introduce from this year’s summer timetable is that in order to operate the journeys in the time needed to fit the pattern, some existing stops would have to be discontinued until other improvements can be made on the line to

increase speeds. Stops where few passengers board and alight may see a diminution of the number of trains that stop there each day. However, it is clear that the advantages heavily outweigh any disadvantages and the proposals from Wessex Trains should be welcomed.

6. FUTURE OF THE EXERAIL PARTNERSHIP

- 6.1 The future of the Exerail partnership is currently being reviewed by the County Council. The current arrangements for the Exerail partnership are based on aspirational terms of reference rather than a firm commitment to funding from all partners. As a result, there have been problems with some authorities not being able to contribute as had been expected when the budget for the following year had been agreed. This was recognised at the October 2003 meeting of the Partnership when it was agreed that it should be reviewed and possibly placed on a firmer footing.
- 6.2 Consultations have taken place between the County Council and the constituent authorities and the outcome has been to suggest a formal Memorandum of Agreement to run for two years initially to cover the period of Wessex Trains' franchise extension from 2004 to 2006. The format of the Partnership can then be reconsidered depending on the specification for the new Greater Western franchise, which will operate from 2006.
- 6.3 The only alternative is to disband the partnership with authorities making contributions to individual projects on a bilateral basis as they saw fit. This would dissipate the coordinated focus that the current Partnership provides. At the last meeting of the Partnership on 12 February 2004, it was agreed that further discussions take place with a view to developing a Memorandum of Association.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) The programme for 2003/2004 is noted.
- (ii) The City Council's contribution to the proposed programme for 2004/2005 is supported.
- (iii) The introduction of the "Devon Metro" timetable from summer 2004 be welcomed and supported.
- (iv) The concept of a more formal arrangement for the Exerail Partnership be supported, including the development of a Memorandum of Understanding.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Reports to Exeter Area Rail Project Working Party, 30 October 2003 and 12 February 2004