

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY**  
**3 SEPTEMBER 2009**

**TRANSPORT INITIATIVES AND ISSUES - UPDATE**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report is to update Members in relation to transport initiatives and issues affecting Exeter.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Responsibility for transport rests with numerous organisations. Devon County Council (DCC) is the authority with statutory responsibility for all highways, except motorways and trunk roads which are the responsibility of the Highways Agency (an executive agency of the Department for Transport (DfT)).
- 2.2 Public transport is provided by private operators. In the case of railways, the trains are run by train operating companies, on track belonging to Network Rail, which is now state-owned. The Office of Rail Regulation regulates train services, monitoring performance of operators and restricting the level of some key fares.
- 2.3 Buses are run by private companies on a commercial basis, with Stagecoach operating the majority of services in Exeter. DCC is the local authority with statutory responsibility for transport, and it supports some services which it considers to be socially necessary and which would otherwise not run because they would not be viable. DCC also has the power to promote specific schemes, a recent example being the provision in 2008 of financial support towards new vehicles on route 2 between Exeter and Newton Abbot. It is important to stress that local authorities do not have any legal power to subsidise services to reduce fares, other than funding concessionary fares for young people and for people aged 60 and over.
- 2.4 There are a number of funding streams available for transport initiatives, including:-
- the DfT provides funding to local highway and transport authorities; for example, through the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) system it funds major schemes which have been identified as a high priority at regional level, whereas Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding is for schemes proposed in the relevant authority's LTP;
  - money for infrastructure and to pump-prime new or improved services required as a result of new development can be secured from developers through agreements under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
  - Exeter's designation as a Cycling Demonstration Town (see below) has brought a considerable amount of funding from Cycling England (a body established by the DfT).
- 2.5 Exeter City Council's involvement in transport issues has to be seen in this overall context. Although not the local highway or transport authority, we have numerous different transport-related duties and powers, including:-
- operation of the concessionary fares scheme;
  - provision of off-street parking;
  - licensing of taxis;

- provision of infrastructure, including facilities for cycling and walking;
- as local planning authority, consideration of proposals affecting highways;
- as consultee in relation to schemes being promoted by DCC.

The last of these is particularly important, and it will be seen from the following paragraphs 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 in influencing decisions made by DCC and others to ensure that Exeter's interests are safeguarded.

- 2.6 This report outlines the transport issues and schemes currently affecting Exeter, and how the City Council is involved with them.

### **3 MAJOR SCHEMES BIDS**

- 3.1 The following major schemes are the subject of bids by DCC to the DfT via the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) system referred to above. Proposals have to demonstrate a balanced approach that provides for targeted enhancements to highway capacity combined with improved facilities for public transport, cycling and walking, wherever possible.

#### **3.2 Alphington Road corridor**

DCC's proposals are to improve outbound capacity for traffic along this corridor, and as part of this to improve priority for public transport and to encourage modal shift away from the car. Elements include the widening to two lanes of Western Way on the approach to Exe Bridges (currently under construction), improvements at the Haven Road junction, the widening of Alphington Road to two lanes outbound from the junction with Marsh Barton Road to Alphington Cross, and the provision of a new park and ride facility adjacent to the A30. On 13 November 2008, Members of Scrutiny Committee – Economy gave their support to DCC's funding bid for a package including these proposals and those for Topsham Road / Bridge Road referred to in paragraph 3.3 below.

- 3.3 A planning application for the park and ride site adjacent to the Alphington junction of the A30 was submitted on 20 August 2009. The application will be determined by DCC as a County application, and the City Council will be a consultee. It is anticipated that the application will be presented to DCC's Development Control Committee in December 2009.

#### **3.4 Topsham Road / Bridge Road corridor**

The proposals for outbound traffic are to provide two lanes on Topsham Road approaching the Countess Wear roundabout and then along Bridge Road to the Matford roundabout. Inbound there would be a bus lane and two traffic lanes on the approach to Countess Wear roundabout. The scheme would also include a segregated pedestrian and cycle path. DCC is due to submit a Major Scheme Business Case to the DfT in respect of this and the Alphington Road corridor scheme in December 2009.

#### **3.5 Junction 29 improvements**

Enhancements to junctions 29 and 30 of the M5 were the subject of an earlier successful RFA bid. The most recent development has been the publication in June

2009 by the Highways Agency of draft orders and an Environmental Statement in support of DCC's proposals to improve junction 29. These include alterations to provide road access to the proposed Science Park, for which a planning application was recently submitted, also to enable traffic leaving Exeter to join the M5 southbound, and to increase the capacity of the junction generally in order to cater for the various development proposals to the east of Exeter.

#### **4 HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

- 4.1 Members will be aware that DCC's bid to the DfT in 2006 for pump-priming funding for a scheme was unsuccessful. That scheme centred on a high quality, high speed bus service from Cranbrook to the city centre and out to Alphington.
- 4.2 DCC are currently working up revised scheme details and will be involving key stakeholders including ourselves.

#### **5 RAIL**

##### **5.1 Outline**

Rail services in and around Exeter are run by three operators. Main line services to and from London Paddington, and onward to Cornwall, are operated by First Great Western, as are the branch lines to Exmouth, Barnstaple and Paignton. South West Trains operate between Exeter and London Waterloo, and Cross Country services travel through Exeter on their way to and from the Midlands and beyond.

##### **5.2 Patronage**

The railways have been experiencing growth over recent years, and that trend has been reflected locally. According to the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), over six million passenger journeys were made by train in 2007/8 to or from destinations in Devon (excluding the unitary areas of Plymouth and Torbay), an increase of 61% on the figures for 1995/6. All stations in Exeter and most of those in the surrounding area showed an increase in patronage between 2006/7 and 2007/8, the most recent years for which figures are available.

##### **5.3 Reliability**

Members will recall that the award of the then-new Greater Western franchise to First Great Western in 2006 was followed by a period of poor reliability. Statistics published by the ORR for the period April 2006 to March 2007 showed only an average of 75.6% of high speed services arriving at their destination within ten minutes of the advertised time. For local trains the statistic relates to trains arriving within five minutes of their advertised time, and averaged 84.2% for First Great Western for the same period. In subsequent years the figures have been aggregated for the whole Greater Western franchise and were 83.1 for the year to March 2008. In the year to March 2009, reliability improved to 90.5% overall. Locally, the Avocet Line Rail Users' Group reports that on the Exmouth ("Avocet") line operated by First Great Western reliability has exceeded 96% in recent months.

##### **5.4 Other reliability figures for the year to March 2009 were:-**

- for Cross Country services 90.1% (previous figures not available as this was a new franchise);

- for South West Trains 93.1% (showing a steady improvement from 92.3% in the year to March 2008, and 89.8% the previous year).

## 5.5 **Great Western RUS**

Network Rail is producing a Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for each part of its network, to balance capacity, passenger & freight demand, operational performance and cost, and to address the requirements of funders and stakeholders. Work started on the RUS for the Great Western network in February 2008 and a consultation draft is due to be released on 3 September, followed by a three month consultation period with the final document due to be published in spring 2010. This will cover the Great Western main line and Cross-Country lines to the Midlands and beyond, as well as local lines including those to Exmouth and Barnstaple.

## 5.6 **Great Western electrification**

In July 2009 the Council, through the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport, responded to a consultation draft Electrification Strategy issued by the DfT. The draft paper identified electrification of the Great Western main line as a high priority and set out the process for identifying further options such as the "Berks and Hants" line (the route to Exeter via Westbury).

- 5.7 The formal Electrification Strategy has now been published, proposing electrification of the main line from Paddington to Swansea by 2016 and of the Berks and Hants line as far as Newbury. It is proposed to replace the existing High Speed Train (HST) fleet at this time with "bi-mode" trains with a diesel generator at one end and an electric transformer at the other, to allow through working over the rest of the Great Western main line network. The omission of proposals for the Berks and Hants line west of Newbury is disappointing because electrification increases reliability, and reduces CO2 emissions and noise pollution from individual trains. However, the Strategy proposes that all new rolling stock for the Great Western main lines will be either electric or bi-mode, whereas future electrification to Exeter would effectively have been ruled out had a new diesel fleet been ordered.

## 5.8 **Improvements to Waterloo service**

The longstanding aspiration for an hourly service between Exeter and Waterloo was included in the South West Main Line RUS published in 2006, and is due to become a reality in December 2009, upon completion of a three-mile passing loop at Axminster which is currently under construction by Network Rail.

- 5.9 The increased frequency will be achieved by South West Trains using the rolling stock currently used to extend certain peak hour services to Plymouth and Torbay. The City Council had been pressing the DfT to ensure that frequencies would be maintained west of Exeter following the changes. In June 2009 the DfT confirmed that it had approved additional funding to First Great Western to run trains to replace these services.

## 5.10 **Branch lines**

The Council participates in the Exeter and Area Rail Working Party ("Exerail") which discusses rail issues and agrees a local programme of publicity and station improvements to promote rail use. The Council has for several years contributed £15,000 annually to this programme.

- 5.11 Members may recall that an hourly daytime service between Exeter and Barnstaple (the Tarka Line) was introduced in December 2008. Initial indications are that patronage of the line has continued to increase.
- 5.12 Use of the Exeter to Exmouth branch (the Avocet Line) has also increased in recent years (typically by around 10% a year). In July the City Council presented to the Working Party (jointly with DCC) a paper outlining the likely development pressures in the corridor served by the branch and discussing the role that an enhanced railway service might play in delivering sustainable development over the next 20 years. The paper set out ways in which capacity of the line might be increased, not only to cater for current demand but to allow for stations serving future development at Newcourt and Monkerton. The commitment of the rail industry would be essential if an increase in capacity were to be deliverable. An immediate issue for the City Council is the need for operators to commit to specific improvements so that developer contributions can be secured.

## **6 BUS SERVICES**

- 6.1 Bus travel continues to make a significant contribution to travel in Exeter, with a 3% increase in usage recorded in Devon in 2007/8. This excludes the significant increase attributable to concessionary fares.
- 6.2 Exeter city services are now mainly operated by low-floor vehicles as are numerous other routes, and DCC is implementing a programme of raising kerbs at bus stops to provide level access to these buses. Exeter City Council has asked DCC to keep Members of both Councils informed of their plans, which can be contentious if, for example, on-street parking is reduced.
- 6.3 As part of DCC's own Green Travel Plan, a new park and ride service (PR6) has recently been introduced between Sowton and County Hall, running inbound throughout the morning peak and outbound in the evening peak. As mentioned earlier in this report, DCC has now submitted a planning application for a new park and ride site adjacent to the Alphington junction of the A30.

## **7 CONCESSIONARY FARES**

- 7.1 Members will be aware of the substantial cost to the Council caused by the inadequacy of government funding for this otherwise beneficial scheme, and of the efforts being made to persuade the government to rectify the situation, ideally from 2010 although there is little time left to implement such a change. In the meantime the DfT has consulted on arrangements for administering the scheme from 2011, with a number of options including moving the administration to County Councils in two-tier areas. Exeter City Council has responded in favour of that option as instructed by Executive on 11 June 2009.

## **8 CYCLING**

### **8.1 Cycling Demonstration Town**

Exeter's designation as a Cycling Demonstration Town, initially for the period 2005 to 2008, has been extended until 2011. This is accompanied by a further £2.25 million in funding for cycling in Exeter from Cycling England, on top of the original 1.5m. The scope of the project has been broadened, with emphasis moving to links with Exeter's

surrounding countryside and leisure facilities. Links to east Devon settlements, Tiverton and Crediton are also being developed.

8.2 In 2005 a target was set of increasing cycle trips across the city by 19% over three years. In fact, counters installed at various locations showed an average increase of 37% over that period. This is a remarkable achievement given that this equates to 817 additional daily trips, around the year, whatever the weather. An ambitious target has now been set of doubling cycle use by 2011.

8.3 The Cycle Exeter programme and website were relaunched in June 2009 under the brand "Freedom of your City"

#### 8.4 **National Cycle Network (NCN)**

The key local component of the NCN is the Exe Estuary Trail, significant parts of which are now complete. Construction of the section from Exton to Lypstone is under way, and it is due to open in spring 2010. The entire Trail is due to be completed by 2012.

#### 8.5 **Tour of Britain**

The Tour of Britain (a series of city centre cycle races) came to Exeter on 28 May 2009, supported by the City and County Councils. The event was a great success with an estimated 10,000 people attending, and served to raise the profile of cycling in the city and surrounding area.

### 9 **WALKING**

#### 9.1 **Exeter Walking Project**

Exeter City Council is a member of the Exeter Walking Project, along with DCC and Sustrans. The project group meets regularly to discuss walking initiatives and promote schemes, which currently include the following:-

- the Exwick Loop – a walking route being developed around Exwick, with some sections already open but others involving land ownership and other issues that need to be resolved;
- Sir Alex Walk – improvement of the pedestrian path from Topsham to Countess Wear;
- Wonford Playing Fields – a significant length (about 1km) of shared use path (ie. for pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities) currently under construction.

### 10 **TravelSmart**

10.1 This is a project which began in 2008, whereby consultants are carrying out survey work and providing personalised sustainable travel advice to residents of Exeter and Exminster, with the intention of achieving significant modal shift. The third of three phases, centred on north-east Exeter, is currently under way, and a report is due later in the year.

#### 10.2 **Sustainable Communities Act 2007**

On 29 June 2005, Executive received proposals submitted under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. Two proposals, to facilitate the carriage of bicycles on rural buses, and to charge a levy on store car parking to raise funds for sustainable travel initiatives, were supported by Members for submission to the Local Government Association's Selector Panel, and the proposers were asked to carry out more work on a third proposal, in relation to integrated transport.

## **11 CONCLUSION**

It can be seen that despite the significant number of different agencies involved in providing transport, Exeter City Council has a significant role to play in securing improvements for Exeter. Currently there are numerous challenges to face, but conversely these bring opportunities for improving Exeter's transport systems to improve the environment and reduce congestion, to the benefit of everyone in the city.

- 12 RECOMMENDED** that the report be noted, and that Members offer their continued support for the initiatives designed to encourage more sustainable travel.

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## **ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE**

### **Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)**

#### **Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

National Rail Trends 2008-2009 Yearbook (ORR)  
Britain's Transport Structure – Rail Electrification – July 2009 (DfT)  
Transport Statistics Great Britain – 2008 Edition (DfT)  
Avocet Line Rail Users Group Newsletters 6 & 7  
Cycle Exeter Strategy – April 2008 to March 2011