

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY 2 SEPTEMBER 2010

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. In doing so, it also acts as a progress report in relation to the paper presented to this Committee on 21 January 2010 and Executive on 9 February 2010, entitled "Transportation Strategy: Measures to reduce carbon emissions / proposed City Council input to DCC Local Transport Plan 2011-16", which formed part of a suite of papers in relation to reducing carbon emissions in Exeter. Elsewhere in this report, the papers are referred to as the "Carbon Emissions papers", and the annotation "**KM**" against a topic means that it was identified as a Key Measure in those papers.

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 state-owned. The Office of Rail Regulation regulates train services, monitoring the 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, such as contributing financially towards the purchase of new vehicles. It is important to stress that local authorities do not have any general power to subsidise services to reduce fares, apart from specific schemes such as concessionary fares for specified groups, most notably for older and disabled people.
- 2.4 In recent years there have been various funding streams available for transport initiatives, including:-
- the DfT has provided funding to local highway and transport authorities; for example, through the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) system it has funded major schemes which have been identified as a high priority at regional level, whereas Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding has existed for schemes proposed in the relevant authority's LTP;
 - it has been possible to secure money for infrastructure and to pump-prime new or improved services, where required as a result of new development, 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).

- 2.4 However, on 10 June 2010 the Government announced a series of in-year budget reductions to both capital and revenue expenditure, across the range of local authority services including transport, and informed councils that no further decisions would be taken about RFA scheme bids, pending the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. The impact on individual schemes is dealt with below.
- 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 (until March 2011);
 - provision of off-street parking;
 - on-street parking enforcement under an agency agreement with DCC;
 - licensing of taxis;
 - provision of infrastructure, including facilities for cycling and walking;
 - as local planning authority, consideration of proposals affecting highways;
 - influencing schemes being promoted by DCC.
- 2.6 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 promoted.
- 2.7 It may be that, following the Comprehensive Spending Review, the method of funding transport projects, and in particular the various funding streams, will be subject to change. What is certain, however, is that transport will be making a big contribution to the inevitable cuts in public spending, meaning that the emphasis in coming years will need to be on achieving more for less, and looking at more innovative methods of funding.
- 2.8 Against this backdrop, 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 involved bids by DCC to the DfT via the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) system, which has been placed on hold as described above.

3.2 The "Exeter Principal Urban Area" improvements (KM)

DCC's proposals have been designed to improve outbound capacity for traffic along the Alphington Road and Topsham Road / Bridge Road corridors, and to improve priority for public transport and to encourage modal shift away from the car. Elements include:-

Alphington Road corridor

- the widening to two lanes of Western Way on the approach to Exe Bridges (already implemented);
- 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.

Topsham Road / Bridge Road

- provision of two lanes on Topsham Road outbound approaching the Countess Wear roundabout and then along Bridge Road to the Matford roundabout; and
- provision inbound of a bus lane and two traffic lanes on the approach to Countess Wear roundabout.

3.3 On 13 November 2008, Members of Scrutiny Committee – Economy gave their support to DCC's funding bid for this package of proposals. It was intended that DCC would submit a major scheme bid this summer. In the light of the Government's announcement, this has been deferred, and DCC is reviewing the scope of some elements of the project to see whether cost reductions can be achieved, particularly in the light of revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the fact that residential development is likely to progress at a slower pace than was envisaged before the recession.

3.4 A planning application for the park and ride site adjacent to the Alphington junction of the A30 was submitted in August 2009. This Council was a consultee, and supported the principle of a site in that location, although it raised objections to the detailed design. The application was refused by DCC's Development Management Committee on 2 December 2009. However, a park and ride site in this location (**KM**) is still considered to be an important element of the future transport strategy for Exeter, and alternative proposals are now being drawn up. City Council officers are working closely with their DCC counterparts to ensure that the detailed design minimises and mitigates the impact on the conservation area and valley park.

3.5 **Junction 29 improvements**

This scheme, to provide access to the East of Exeter development, and particularly to revise junction 29 of the M5, is at the final full approval stage for a major scheme bid of £12m. Now that all such bids have been placed on hold by the Government, DCC is unable to proceed with the scheme, despite having all necessary powers and being in possession of returned tenders. This is delaying progress with development of the Science Park, although DCC remains hopeful that the scheme will receive approval, given its high benefit to cost ratio and its fundamental role in the East of Exeter proposals as a whole.

3.6 **Project Exe-press (high quality public transport) (KM)**

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.

3.7 DCC had intended to submit a major scheme bid for revised proposals to the DfT by late 2010. Public consultation was carried out this spring and the results are being analysed. Given the likely reductions in overall transport capital budgets, DCC is intending to review the scope of the scheme to ensure that it is affordable while providing maximum value for money. ECC will be involved in that process.

4 **RAIL**

4.1 **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 (FGW), 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.

4.2 Services

Recent and forthcoming service improvements include the following:-

- Completion of a long passing loop at Axminster enabling an hourly service between Exeter and Waterloo, with effect from December 2009;
- A 9am start to the Sunday service on the Exmouth line, commencing May 2010 and continuing all year round;
- A new early train from Paddington, arriving in Exeter before 09.30, commencing in December 2010;
- Cascaded "Sprinter" vehicles to replace FGW's unpopular "Pacers" on local lines, 12 of which are due to arrive by autumn 2010 although the remaining 18 will be delayed until next year due to problems with the delivery of new trains elsewhere;
- Upgrading the maintenance depot at St Davids to reduce the need for trains to go to Bristol for heavy maintenance (creating 4 full time equivalent jobs in Exeter);
- Installation of ticket gates at Exeter Central, more revenue protection staff (six full time equivalents), and more ticket vending machines, following a successful bid by FGW to the DfT.

4.3 More disappointing was the publication in September 2009 of a draft Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for the Great Western region. This gave no recognition to the enhancements required to cater for the new development proposed in and around Exeter, particularly the need for new stations to serve development at Newcourt and Monkerton. As reported to this Committee in November 2009, this Council responded to the consultation. The joint impact of our response with those from Devon County Council, local user groups, and rail operators, was that the final RUS published in April 2010 at least recognised the existence of these aspirations, should demand be demonstrated and resources become available.

4.4 DCC has stepped up work on its "Devon Metro" rail project (**KM**), having commissioned studies into the feasibility and likely patronage levels of new stations. This Council works informally with DCC and the rail industry on projects such as this, other examples being schemes to improve St David's and Central stations (**KM**). We also participate 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.

4.5 At its meeting on 3 June 2010, this Committee resolved to set up a Task and Finish Group to study rail issues in more depth, with a view to reporting back to the Committee next spring. Establishment of that Group is awaiting the outcome of the elections now fixed for 9 September. However, to avoid further delay, Members are asked to approve the terms of reference set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

4.6 InterCity Express Programme (IEP)

The InterCity Express Programme was set up by the previous Government to develop a replacement for the current fleet of InterCity 125 trains, which serve the Great Western main lines. Following the announcement that electrification would take place

from Paddington to Bristol, Newbury, Oxford and South Wales, the IEP fleet was to include bi-mode trains which could run on electric power where available, and diesel power elsewhere. A review of the IEP commissioned before the general election has now been completed and reported to the Secretary of State, and an announcement on the future of the InterCity train fleet is expected at around the same time as the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Alongside this, the Secretary of State has commissioned a study into the value for money of the UK's rail industry as a whole.

5 BUS SERVICES

- 5.1 Bus travel continues to make a significant contribution to travel in Exeter. CUBS (comparison of urban bus services) data published in 2009 shows that Exeter is particularly well served by buses for a city of its size, with 73% of its population served by a service at least every 15 minutes during weekdays, and at least hourly on Sundays and right through the evenings. (Of 20 towns and cities with a similar population, only Colchester does better.) Unfortunately Exeter comes bottom of its peer group in terms of scheduled vehicle speed, at around 13 kph (8 mph).
- 5.2 Given that most of Exeter's city services operate without revenue support from DCC, this network represents a significant resource contributed by the private sector to assist in meeting Exeter's transport needs. The effectiveness of this resource can be enhanced by well-targeted public sector intervention; for example bus priority schemes can alleviate delays caused by congestion, which are a major deterrent to bus travel.
- 5.3 Another deterrent is the perceived level of fares, particularly short distance, "walk on" fares. (Better deals are available for regular travellers – see paragraph 9.4.) Members will recall that in autumn 2009, the Office of Fair Trading consulted on a proposed reference to the Competition Commission to investigate the bus industry. Members were keen that we should participate, and we responded in support of the investigation, which has since commenced, with a final report due in the summer of 2011.
- 5.4 Following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport, a response was also sent to a government consultation on smart and integrated ticketing in October 2009, supporting it as a concept, and commenting on some practical issues. Members will recall that a Devon equivalent to London's "Oystercard" was supported by the Carbon Emissions papers, one potential benefit being the availability of a "carnet" facility giving better value to occasional public transport users. Investment in smartcard systems is concentrated on the metropolitan areas, but as the technology becomes more widespread and advanced, its extension to Devon becomes more feasible.
- 5.5 Continued fleet renewal means that all Exeter city services are now operated by low floor vehicles, as are many other routes in the local area. A brand new fleet of Park and Ride buses was introduced in December 2009, and new vehicles took to the road in July of this year on route 57 between Exeter and Exmouth. Both of these purchases received some financial assistance from Devon County Council and the vehicles meet the very latest emissions standards (**KM**).

6 CONCESSIONARY FARES

- 6.1 Members will recall that as a result of strenuous efforts by Members and officers, additional grant was received from the Government to reduce the Council's funding

shortfall in relation to this scheme. A shortfall of £2.1m for the current financial year was reduced to approximately £0.45m.

- 6.2 Administration and funding of concessionary fares moves to upper tier authorities from 1 April 2011, and officers are working through the relevant local government organisations to ensure that the transfer does not take an excessive level of funding away from us.

7 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

- 7.1 This Council contributes to two services provided by Exeter Community Transport Association (ECTA):-

- £13,140 annually to Ring and Ride; and
- £4,100 to the Taxicard scheme.

DCC contributes similar amounts, as well as an additional sum to the Shopmobility service.

- 7.2 Both Councils have worked with ECTA to bring the Taxicard scheme back within budget, following a significant overspend by ECTA last year (met from its own resources). As reported to this Committee in June, the scheme is currently operating with a £75 annual limit on the amount of taxi fares that can be claimed by users, rather than the £125 limit which previously applied.
- 7.3 With effect from 2011, it is proposed to bring these contributions to ECTA within the core grants process, with funding decisions being made by the Grants Committee.

8 CYCLING AND WALKING (KM)

8.1 Cycling Demonstration Town

Exeter's designation as a Cycling Demonstration Town (CDT) comes to the end of its six year span in 2011. Much has been achieved, for example:-

- Significant parts of the Exe Estuary Trail are now complete, most recently the section from Exton to Lypstone in May 2010. The entire Trail is likely to be completed in 2014, with interim measures making the eastern side of the estuary completely cyclable from next year.
- Exeter has seen a 40% increase in cycle trips since 2005, as measured by counters at various locations, with around 22% of children now cycling to school.

- 8.2 Research¹ shows that "safety in numbers" applies and riding a bike is statistically safer per mile travelled in towns and cities where there are lots of cyclists. Given the acknowledged health benefits, it makes sense to invest in facilities which enable and encourage people to lead healthy lives, rather than to spend more in the future treating people for illness resulting from lack of exercise. Given the severe constraints on public spending, this is a message which needs to permeate all levels of government and the NHS.

¹ eg. "A Virtuous Cycle" listed under "Background Papers" below

8.3 In an attempt to embed the favourable attitudes to cycling which have sprung from CDT status, new planning applications are examined to ensure that proposals are as cycle-friendly as possible.

8.4 **Exeter Walking Project**

Exeter City Council is a member of the Exeter Walking Project (EWP), 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.

The shared use path across Wonford Playing Fields completed in 2009 demonstrates how such facilities can benefit pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities.

8.5 Project work currently being carried out by Sustrans for the EWP is the preparation of a series of walk descriptions within Exeter. The intention is to produce a set of interlinked walks, building on the success of the Green Circle and providing a network of interesting walking routes throughout the city. This would make use of existing rights of way and walks would not be signposted, therefore the only additional cost would be that of producing the necessary booklets. No funds are earmarked for this, so the possibility of sponsorship is being investigated. An online version is also proposed, which would enable the route descriptions to be set out in sections, which the public could link together and print, to provide a description for their own tailor-made walk.

9 **TRANSPORT AND THE ECONOMY**

9.1 As indicated earlier in this report, these are difficult times for the economy as a whole, and transport is likely to be disproportionately hit by Government spending cuts. However, much new development is likely to take place in and around Exeter in the coming years, so the challenge will be to find ways to enable the transport system to cope. We need to:-

- build on what we have already got;
- compete effectively for what public money is available;
- likewise compete for private sector investment; and
- break down the barriers to use of sustainable travel modes.

9.2 Public money will be scarce. However, provision of cycling and walking facilities can be achieved at relatively little cost. Given that walking is a free means of transport and cycling costs relatively little, the ability to use these travel modes is sure to be welcomed by members of the public whose personal budgets are squeezed.

9.3 In terms of public transport, Exeter is starting from an advantageous position. With eight rail stations and comprehensive bus coverage (see paragraph 5.1), there is scope for making better use of existing networks, particularly outside peak times.

9.4 As an alternative to the car, public transport is more cost-effective than is often realised. Unlimited bus travel in the Exeter area costs £12 a week or £500 a year, while an annual rail season ticket from Exmouth to Exeter costs £804. Combined with walking and cycling for shorter journeys, and perhaps membership of a car club for

harder-to-reach destinations, a package of sustainable transport options can be an economical alternative to car ownership. Accepting that many households regard car ownership as an absolute necessity, such a package can still be a cost-effective alternative to running a second vehicle.

- 9.5 The recently concluded TravelSmart project has demonstrated that lack of knowledge of local transport options can be a barrier to leaving the car at home. Much work is therefore done in co-operation with DCC, distributing their cycling and walking maps via Customer First and Visitor Information, and using the ECC website to direct people to the information available. Our bus information page has proved a particularly popular one (recently achieving over 1900 hits in a month), since when we have been able to set up a direct link to DCC's interactive bus map of Exeter (rather than the Devon-wide version as previously). A "days out by train" section has recently been created on the Exeter and Essential Devon website.
- 9.6 As mentioned above, the TravelSmart project was recently completed and DCC will be arranging a presentation of the results during the autumn.
- 9.7 However, the biggest challenge for transport in the immediate future is a shortage of funds. A key project for the coming year will be the drafting of a planning policy document, to ensure that new developments cater properly for sustainable modes of travel, and to set out a consistent approach to seeking contributions from developers towards the facilities needed to serve their developments.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 In summary, the Council's involvement in transport issues in the coming year will focus on:-
- Information – ensuring that the public are aware of all travel options available to them, not just how to get around by car.
 - Influence – working with DCC and others on projects affecting the city, and responding to government consultations with a view to achieving the best outcomes.
 - Policy – ensuring that a sound planning policy framework is in place, to engage developers fully in catering for all travel modes within their developments, and to secure appropriate contributions to facilities which will serve those developments.

11 RECOMMENDED

- (a) that the report be noted, and that Members offer their continued support for the initiatives designed to encourage more sustainable travel, and the delivery of an ECC transportation function designed to promote the long term interests of the city;
- (b) that Members approve the terms of reference for the Rail Task and Finish Group set out in Appendix 1.

**KARIME HASSAN
INTERIM DIRECTOR**

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Devon County Council report to Cabinet 14 July 2010

Comparison of Urban Bus Services (Resolutions)

Cycle Exeter Strategy – April 2008 to March 2011

A Virtuous Cycle: Safety In Numbers For Bicycle Riders - University of New South Wales (September 2008)

APPENDIX 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR TASK & FINISH GROUP

<p>NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND CHAIR Scrutiny Committee – Economy Chair – Cllr J Winterbottom</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">NAME OF WORKING GROUP</p> <p>Rail Task and Finish Group</p>	
<p>RATIONALE/NEED FOR REVIEW/ORIGIN OF SUBJECT UNDER CONSIDERATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exeter’s growth agenda requires improvements to public transport, otherwise it will inevitably result in increased traffic, which in turn will aggravate congestion and pollution. • The funding required in order to maintain and improve the rail system is becoming increasingly scarce. • An understanding of the issues surrounding the rail system, and potential solutions and obstacles, will assist members in taking informed decisions affecting the future of the city. 	
<p>HOW DOES IT FIT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES</p> <p>It supports the following elements of the Exeter Vision:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an accessible city – we aim to encourage greater use of public transport and to lobby for a better rail network; • a prosperous city – because efficient transport systems are essential for economic prosperity; • a city that cares for the environment – because public transport has a key role to play in reducing harmful emissions and improving air quality. 	
<p>REMIT OF WORKING GROUP/TERMS OF REFERENCE/WHAT ARE OUTCOMES/AIMS AND OBJECTIVES</p> <p>Devon County Council has developed the Devon Metro concept, including proposals for improved infrastructure, additional stations, and extra train capacity, and is embarking on exercises to assess the feasibility of these proposals. The aims of the Working Group are to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the importance of rail in serving Exeter now and in the future; • assess the need for improvements; • understand the obstacles to improvement, including the funding gaps; • consider solutions; • identify ways of working with other stakeholders of achieving those solutions. 	
<p>MEMBERS ON WORKING GROUP</p>	
<p>POSSIBLE CO-OPTees</p>	

KEY STAKEHOLDERS/CONSULTEES/INTEREST GROUPS/INVOLVEMENT OF ANY PARTNERS Devon County Council, Network Rail, First Great Western, Rail User Groups.	
POTENTIAL WITNESSES Representatives of the above.	
SITE VISITS Visits to locations for potential new stations may be beneficial.	
BUDGET/RESOURCES AVAILABLE None, other than officer time.	
OFFICERS Ross Hussey (Projects and Business Manager) Karime Hassan (Interim Director, Economy and Development)	
START DATE <i>[To be determined]</i>	
DATES OF MEETINGS <i>[Approx 3 during the lifetime of the Working Group]</i>	
PROPOSED COMPLETION DATE January 2011	
REPORT TO COMMITTEE 10 March 2011	
PUBLICITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS Report to Scrutiny Committee (as above)	
MONITORING/TRACKING/EVALUATING No interim reports envisaged	