

Corporate Support for Community and Public Transport and SSCAT bus

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Purpose of the Report

The report follows on from previous reports to the Area East Committee on 8th July 2015 and 13th July 2016 and informs Members of the continued work being undertaken to develop transport schemes and local solutions to reduce isolation and reflect South Somerset District Council's corporate aims to improve the economy, environment, health and help for communities.

Public Interest

South Somerset District Council (SSDC) recognises the challenges in providing good transport and accessibility in our rural areas. This report sets out how we are continuing to work with Somerset County Council (SCC), Public Transport operators and Community Transport to develop rural transport solutions. It also sets out the uncertainty regarding the future funding of the South Somerset Community Accessible Transport Scheme (SSCAT).

Recommendation(s)

That members:

1. Note the contents of this report.
2. Resolve that:
 - a) A letter is sent to all Town and Parish Councils in Area East outlining the current situation with regard to South Somerset Community Accessible Transport and asking them to precept to support the scheme over a period of 3 years
 - b) And instruct officers to meet with some of the larger Town and Parish Councils to reinforce this request.
 - c) A district wide response to the Department for Transport's consultation on the Issue and Use of Section 19 and Section 22 Permits for Community Transport be moved forward.

Background

As indicated in the report to the Area East Committee on 8th July 2015 “**SCC is the transport authority and for the most part has control over the prioritisation, funding and delivery of larger-scale transport schemes in Somerset**”. That report set out the context of how SSDC, primarily in its role as the local planning authority, continues to influence how transport improvements can be delivered. This report should therefore be read in conjunction with the 2015 report and provides an update on the progress of the various work streams to date.

Report

Overview

Since the last report to Area East on 13th July 2016, SSDC has continued to be engaged on the series of themes, initiatives and interventions previously discussed in addition to other emerging concepts. Those relevant to Area East are set out below.

1. The Total Transport Pilot Fund

- 1.1. Members will recall the previous work undertaken in respect of a Wincanton Transport and Accessibility Hub and how any future development of this concept would be dependent on the outcome of SCC's Total Transport Pilot Fund (TTPF) project.
- 1.2. In March 2015 SCC successfully bid for £305,000 funding from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Total Transport Pilot Fund. The bid required an initial analysis of the data including the journey patterns from Community Transport & Health Sector transport providers to identify gaps in provision and also what's happening in adjoining areas.
- 1.3. This required SCC to undertake analysis of current transport provision in Somerset, which involved a significant amount of work, including the mapping of passenger transport (including public buses, taxis, Demand Responsive Transport and Community Transport) as well as current 'non-public' routes for education health and social care trips. This work is now complete. The main element of the bid was to build a 'proof of concept' web portal designed to facilitate journey planning across all of the above modes, with smart application and ticketing. The portal would facilitate all transport rather than just the scheduled bus services currently on Traveline.
- 1.4. SCC has undertaken a feasibility study regarding the appetite for a web portal for transport, which included stakeholder engagement with a range of providers and users who were very keen on the concept and in particular the ability to view the details of unscheduled transport such as community transport along with the ability for users to post queries and/or requests for specific journeys onto an 'E notice board'.
- 1.5. It is recognised that at the current time many passengers may not have direct access to the portal and it is envisaged that other agencies including the various transport operators; GP surgeries; other healthcare providers; local advice/information centres etc. will be able to access the information on their behalf. The scheme would then offer the user the most suitable method of transport.
- 1.6. A specification has been written and SCC is currently in the midst of the procurement process to secure a supplier to build the portal. The intention is to test the portal over the Autumn/Winter period with a 'go live' in summer 2018.
- 1.7. SCC is working in partnership with Gloucestershire on this initiative and the Department for Transport has given a commitment to carry over the grant past the deadline originally set, as they are keen for this innovative work to be delivered and available to other Local Authorities.
- 1.8. The TTPF is specific to innovative approaches and this work has the potential for wide benefits in accessibility particularly in rural areas.
- 1.9. In addition to the development of the portal SCC is working with the NHS to increase car scheme availability, working with them to assist in accommodating these within larger GP practices and enable parking and pick up for all community based schemes at hospitals.
- 1.10. It is hoped that Wincanton and its rural hinterland will benefit from this project and the Transport Strategy Officer will update the Area East Committee as the TTPF progresses.

2. Working with Train Operating Companies and Network Rail for Rail Improvements

- 2.1. SSDC continues to urge the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) Network Rail (NR) and the Department for Transport (DfT) for improvements on all three of the train lines that serve Area East. These are:
 - 2.1.1. London (Waterloo) to Exeter, now operated by South Western Railway (First/MTR) - Templecombe Station.
 - 2.1.2. London (Paddington) to Taunton, Exeter and the south west, operated by Great Western Railway (GWR) – Castle Cary Station.
 - 2.1.3. Bristol to Weymouth; the Heart of Wessex Line (HoWL), operated by GWR – Bruton and Castle Cary stations.
- 2.2. The South Western Railway (First/MTR) was awarded the new 7-year Franchise to operate the South Western Rail Franchise, which includes the London (Waterloo) to Exeter line with effect from 20th August 2017.
- 2.3. There was some disruption to scheduled services on the London (Waterloo) to Exeter line during August whilst major improvements have been carried out at Waterloo Station to improve capacity.
- 2.4. SSDC continues to be engaged with West of England Line Route Strategy Group (WoEL SG)¹ to raise awareness of the potential for improvements on this line both in Control Period 6 (2019 – 2024) and in the future. The West of England [Railway] Line is the route between Worting Junction (west of Basingstoke) and Exeter via Salisbury, Templecombe and Yeovil Junction.
- 2.5. Members will recall that Network Rail (NR) have been assessing a range of options to deliver greater resilience to the south west rail network following the severe weather incidents of recent years. Some of these options could include infrastructure improvements on the West of England Line (WoEL) and the section on the Heart of Wessex line between Castle Cary and Yeovil. Our understanding is that NR has submitted a range of options for consideration by the Department for Transport (DfT). It is important to recognise though that should any of these options come forward it is likely to be in the long term. However, in addition to the greater resilience the benefits to South Somerset and Area East would include greater opportunities to increase connectivity in the future.
- 2.6. As indicated in the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership report to Area East committee on 9th August growth has slowed on that line due to the disruption caused by the electrification work being undertaken on the network, capacity issues, particularly on peak time journeys from Bristol and Bath, and the low frequency. SSDC continues to lobby both through the Partnership and through direct engagement with GWR and NR for service improvements.
- 2.7. Members will also recall that extending the car park at Castle Cary station was identified in the South Somerset Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) as Priority 2.² The Great Western Railway (GWR) recognises that the car park at Castle Cary train station is currently operating at

¹ The WoEL SG consists of representatives from the Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) whose areas are served by the WoEL between Salisbury and Exeter. (i.e. Dorset County Council, Dorset LEP, Swindon & Wiltshire LEP, Wiltshire Council, and SSDC– plus Somerset County Council and Devon County Council and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership as Peninsula Rail Task Force members).

² South Somerset Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update 2015/16 page 25 para 8.3. Priority 2 = infrastructure that is required to support new development proposed in the Local Plan, but the precise timing and phasing is less critical and development can commence ahead of its provision.

capacity and impeding passenger growth at the station. SSDC is actively involved in discussions as to how best to deliver this key IDP aim.

3. Working with Bus Operators and SCC for Bus Service Improvements

- 3.1. SSDC are in regular and on-going discussions with SCC and the bus operators over bus service provision in the district. There have been a number of changes to bus services in Area East since the July 2016 report and these are outlined below.
- 3.2. The Buses of Somerset undertook a review of their services earlier this year resulting in changes to the 58/58A service to maintain the viability of what is a commercial service (i.e. operated without subsidy). Details of the change, which took effect from 27th February, were outlined in a report to Area East committee 8th February 2017. The main change to the service was that another variation was added (59) to operate between Yeovil and Marnhull in Dorset with the 58/58A and 59 both operating on a two-hourly frequency. This meant a reduction in frequency to 2 hourly for the Wincanton and Templecombe section of the route, although an hourly frequency has been maintained from Virginia Ash and Milborne Port to Sherborne and Yeovil.
- 3.3. Dorset County Council has recently undertaken a review of their subsidised local bus services. This resulted in some route changes taking effect from 24th July 2017. In respect of Area East these changes include:
 - The withdrawal of the 158 service to Gillingham
 - The X10 service, operated by South West Coaches offers journeys from Henstridge and Milborne Port to Sherborne, Yeovil, Sturminster Newton and Blandford as an alternative to service 368 which has similarly been withdrawn.

4. Working with SCC and Developers on Travel Plans and Demand Management Solutions Linked to Developments

- 4.1. As indicated in the report to Area East on 13th July 2016, the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) sets out evidence on current and future infrastructure provision in South Somerset. The IDP can be viewed on : <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/early-review-of-local-plan-2006-2028/evidence-base/>
- 4.2. In respect of specific infrastructure related to public transport in Area East, the IDP recognises the need to increase car parking capacity at Castle Cary Station and more generally it supports the need for rail infrastructure improvements on both the West of England and Heart of Wessex Rail lines.
- 4.3. SSDC continues to work with SCC and developers to secure public transport improvements when possible. However the extent to which funding can be levered in is very much dependent on the scale of the development and overall viability of site.

5. Community Transport

- 5.1. South Somerset Community Accessible Transport (SSCAT) continues to play a vital role for those in Area East who have no access to a car and either no bus service or for whom accessing the bus is just not possible. SSCAT's Operations Manager has produced a separate Information report for this committee, which is attached.

- 5.2. As indicated in the SSCAT bus report there is uncertainty regarding the future funding of the scheme, which is currently reliant on reserves acquired through 15 years of prudent management. Unfortunately SSCAT has now been informed that their Lottery bid has not been selected to submit a Stage 2 of the process. That means that a potential main source of funding has now gone. The SSCAT Board of Trustees, after an emergency meeting, has decided to continue with the current service and to look for additional funding options, working with officers from SSDC. Other options such as amalgamation with a larger CT scheme and redundancies of some staff members as cost savings are also being considered.
- 5.3. There is a need to secure increases in revenue funding to ensure the scheme's long-term survival. To that end the Transport Strategy Officer will continue to work with both SSCAT and the Transporting Somerset team at SCC to explore the potential of further work streams that may complement the existing schedule. SSCAT are currently assessing the potential of some SCC Social Care related work, which although a welcome addition is only likely to achieve a small increase in revenue.
- 5.4. In many regions, local town and parish councils are now considering ways of addressing how the safety net of Community Transport (CT) can be supported. Whilst there has always been some support from town and parish councils in Area East now may be the time to explore a more coordinated and collaborative approach.
- 5.5. In view of this, and following on from the SSCAT Board of Trustees' emergency meeting, it is suggested that a letter be sent to all Town and Parish Councils from SSDC Area East Committees giving details of the current situation and asking them to precept to support the SSCAT scheme preferably over a period of 3 years. This approach also has the advantage of being easier to protect any sum allocated for the scheme and often means a greater will and flexibility to address any accessibility issues quickly. It is also suggested that it would be beneficial to meet with some of the larger Town and Parish Councils to reinforce this request.
- 5.6. However, whilst the above options are worth investigating, Members should be aware that the Department for Transport (DfT) has recently written (31st July 2017) to the issuers of section 19 and 22 permits, generally County Councils as the transport authorities. CT groups normally operate under either section 19 or section 22 of the 1985 Transport Act and the DfT has indicated that they are proposing to change their interpretation of these sections.
- 5.7. The implication is that those operators competing for Local Authority contracts using Section 19 and 22 Permits may need to do this under a PSV Operators Licence in future including the requirement under PSV regulations for drivers of vehicles on such contracts to have a valid driver's Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). Any such decision could potentially affect CT groups such as SSCAT who currently undertake contracted work (following a tender exercise) under these permits as they have up until now been encouraged (nationally) to do by the DfT.
- 5.8. The DfT is intending to explain in greater detail in a public consultation this autumn. In the interim SCC is considering its position, alongside its CT operators, in the light of these developments and the Community Transport Association is also seeking further assurances and clarification from the DfT. SCC has assured CT operators that appropriate discussions will be held with them before any changes to the way in which either contracts are procured or permits are issued pending the DfT's decision.
- 5.10 The Transport Strategy Officer will update members when the situation becomes clearer. It may well be the case that we consider a district wide response to the consultation supporting the County Council and the various CT operators across the district including SSCAT to ensure that the DfT are aware of those communities at risk of isolation.

Looking to the Future

The 2015 report to Area East sets out how SSDC continues to lobby for transport improvements. It also recognises the current financial constraints within which Government and SCC operate and the subsequent need for a robust business case for each scheme that comes forward.

The Council continues to welcome positive local input and engagement. Parish and Town councils, as well as communities, have a vital role to play in owning and helping deliver the existing measures that have already been secured, as well as identifying further enhancements.

Financial Implications

No new financial implications resulting from this report.

Corporate Priority Implications

Increasing accessibility for all residents through enhancements to public and community transport reflects the Council Plan aims and priorities to improve the economy, the environment and build healthy communities.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications

Improvements to public transport, including the easier interchange between bus and rail and better access to information, offer the potential to reduce the number of car journeys and thereby reduce CO₂ emissions.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Improvements to public and community transport reduce inequality and improve service accessibility for all.

Background Papers:

Reports to Area East Committee (“Corporate support for community and public transport and SSCAT bus”) on Wed 8th July 2015 and Area East Wed 13th July 2016.
