

Area North Committee – 24th October 2007

9. Community Transport

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Purpose of the report

To update members on general transport matters and the work programme currently being carried out by the Transport Strategy Officer that either specifically relates to Area North or where wider schemes are likely to impact on Area North.

Recommendations

That members:

1. Note the contents of this report.
2. Comment on any specific accessibility problems or any particular village or hamlet that they feel the Transport Strategy Officer should take forward with Transporting Somerset (SCC), other appropriate partners or schemes to consider and where possible implement improvements.
3. Support measures to reduce barriers to travel and in particular to raise awareness of the services on offer by working with Transporting Somerset, the operators, local communities and other Key Stakeholders.
4. Instruct the Transport Strategy Officer to work with key Stakeholders to consider strategic and operational improvements to the Moped Loan Scheme to achieve long-term financial stability.
5. Instruct the Transport Strategy Officer to undertake further work to move forward the possible provision of low floor buses on Service 81 (South Petherton, and Stoke Sub Hamdon to Yeovil) in liaison with Transporting Somerset (SCC) and South West Coaches.

Background

This report summarises the current transport developments, issues and projects and informs members of the work that both the County Council and the Transport Strategy Officer are undertaking that relates to Area North.

Accessibility is a problem generally for rural communities. Somerset County Council as part of the Local Transport Plan 2 (2006-2011) (LTP2) have produced a detailed Accessibility Strategy as appendix 1 to the LTP2, which considers the issues and formulates a strategy for delivering accessibility and one of the strategic priorities is tackling rural isolation. Accessibility Planning, which also forms part of this strategy, is key to identifying and addressing social inclusion issues to enable individuals and communities to access essential services such as employment, education, healthcare, food shops, and leisure facilities.

Transport Somerset (TS), the passenger transport section within the County Council, has overall responsibility for integrated public transport provision including Community Transport. Having said that members should bear in mind that some local bus services are commercially registered by the operator who then decides on the route timings and frequency. A draft Local Transport Bill is currently under consideration with proposals to

ease the implementation of quality partnership (statutory and voluntary) and quality contract schemes with the intention of promoting further improvements to Local bus services.

Through the LTP2 accessibility strategy TS is working towards a network hierarchy of passenger transport provision, which broadly follows the following types of service:

- County: “Fastlink” Quality Bus Partnerships serving the main town centres – Taunton and Yeovil
- Sub-County: Quality Bus Partnership serving routes between market towns
- Rural: Demand Responsive, taxi bus, community transport and voluntary services etc. linking deep rural areas and villages with the Sub-County network.

Report

In consideration of addressing rural accessibility it is therefore advisable to look at the total provision currently available within the existing network hierarchy of passenger transport provision to assist in identifying those gaps. Whilst increasing the extent or scope of existing services may be required it should also be recognised that the most frequent barrier to accessibility has been the lack of available information regarding transport provision, service provision, fares and ticketing. Very often there are ways currently in place of actually making the journey, however, those members of the community who are perhaps in most need are often least able to obtain this information.

Transport Provision in Area North

The existing network hierarchy in Area North is considered below with updates on recent on impending changes.

Local Bus

The table below gives an overview of the local bus services currently operated in Area North. Obviously it is not possible to show complete workings in such a summary and the full timetables are available in issue 37 (September 2007) of the public transport timetable for the South Somerset Area, which are distributed by TS through the bus companies, Community Offices, TICs etc. Individual timetables can be viewed on www.traveline.info or both local and national travel information is available on 0871 200 22 33.

Local bus services currently operated in Area North

C = Commercially operated

P = Some journeys financially supported by Transporting Somerset

S = All journeys financially supported by Transporting Somerset

Route No.	From	To	Serving	Operator	Frequency	C	P	S
52	Bower Hinton	Yeovil	Martock, Ash, Tintinhull, Chilthorne Domer	First	Monday to Saturday hourly	✓		
54	Taunton	Yeovil	Fivehead, Curry Rivel, Langport, Somerton with Huish Episcopi & Long Sutton on some journeys & Pitney (Halfway House) on most journeys	First	Monday to Saturday hourly Sundays from Somerton to Taunton 2-hourly		✓	
81	South Petherton	Yeovil	Norton sub Hamdon, Stoke Sub Hamdon, Montacute	South West	Monday to Friday hourly. Saturday 2 hourly		✓	
377	Yeovil	Wells - connecting with 376 to Bristol	Somerton, Compton Dundon	First	Monday to Saturday hourly Sundays 2-hourly		✓	
N9	Martock	Yeovil	Express bus offers “seamless” connection with N6 – see demand responsive section below*	Nippy	Monday to Saturday	✓		
N6	Diverse area of rural parishes listed on service map in Demand Responsive section below*	Martock offering a “seamless” connection with N9		Nippy	Monday to Saturday			✓
632/ 633	Martock	Ilminster – connecting with 30A to	Kingsbury Episcopi, Stembridge East Lambrook, South Petherton, West Lambrook, Shepton	First	Monday to Saturday 2 - hourly			✓

		Taunton	Beauchamp, Barrington, Puckington with Stocklinch on some journeys					
16	Langport	Bridgwater	Aller with Huish Episcopi on some journeys	Webberbus	Monday to Saturday 2 - hourly			✓
N7	Dowlish Wake	Yeovil	The Seavingtons, Yeabridge, Over Stratton, Lopen (also serves to Crewkerne)	Nippy	Monday to Friday (Fixed route)			✓
N12	West Chinnock	Crewkerne	Norton Sub Hamdon, Lopen	Nippy	Monday to Friday (Fixed route)			✓
199	Chard	Ilminster & Crewkerne	The Seavingtons, Lopen	Stagecoach Cooks	Monday to Friday (operates in the opposite direction on Tuesdays & Thursdays)			✓
608	Isle Brewers	Ilminster	Fivehead, Curry Mallet, Isle Abbotts, Ilton	Stagecoach Cooks	Thursdays only			✓
626	Fivehead	Taunton	Curry Mallett, Beercombe	First	Wednesdays & Fridays only			✓
665	Yeovil	Street	Long Sutton, Somerton, Dundon Village	South West	Thursdays only			✓
850	East Lambrook	Langport	West Lambrook, Stembridge, Kingsbury, Muchelney, High & Low Ham	SCC	Thursday only			✓
901	Isle Brewers	Taunton	Fivehead, Isle Abbotts, Curry Mallet	SCC	Saturdays only			✓
903	Long Sutton	Langport	High & Low Ham on Mondays only. Aller, Beer Aller (prebooked only)	SCC	Mondays & Weds only			✓
904	Isle Brewers	Langport	Fivehead, Curry Rivel, Drayton. Also Isle Abbotts (Tuesdays) & Curry Mallet (Fridays)	SCC	Tuesdays & Fridays only			✓
10	Ilminster	Yeovil	Puckington, Barrington, Shepton Beauchamp, West Lambrook, Stembridge, Kingsbury,	South West	Wednesdays only	✓		

			Muchelney, Long Load, Ash, Tintinhull, Chilthorne Domer					
40	Sherborne	Taunton	Montacute, Stoke, Martock, South Petherton, Barrington, Shepton Beauchamp	South West	Thursdays only	✓		
40A	Wincanton	Minehead	Montacute, Stoke, Martock, South Petherton, Barrington, Shepton Beauchamp, Hambridge & Westport, Curry Rivel, Fivehead	South West	Mondays during school summer holidays only	✓		
ASDA 5	Long Load	ASDA Yeovil	Huish Episcopi, Langport, Somerton	First	Thursdays only	✓		
ASDA 6	South Petherton	ASDA Yeovil	Martock, Ash, Tintinhull, Stoke sub Hamdon, Montacute	First	Thursdays only	✓		
TES1	Crewkerne	TESCO Yeovil	South Petherton, Martock, Stoke sub Hamdon, Montacute	First	Tuesdays & Wednesdays	✓		
TES2	Huish Episcopi	TESCO Yeovil	Langport, Somerton	First	Mondays & Tuesdays	✓		

During the past year there have been a few alterations in the above routes. Primarily these have been:

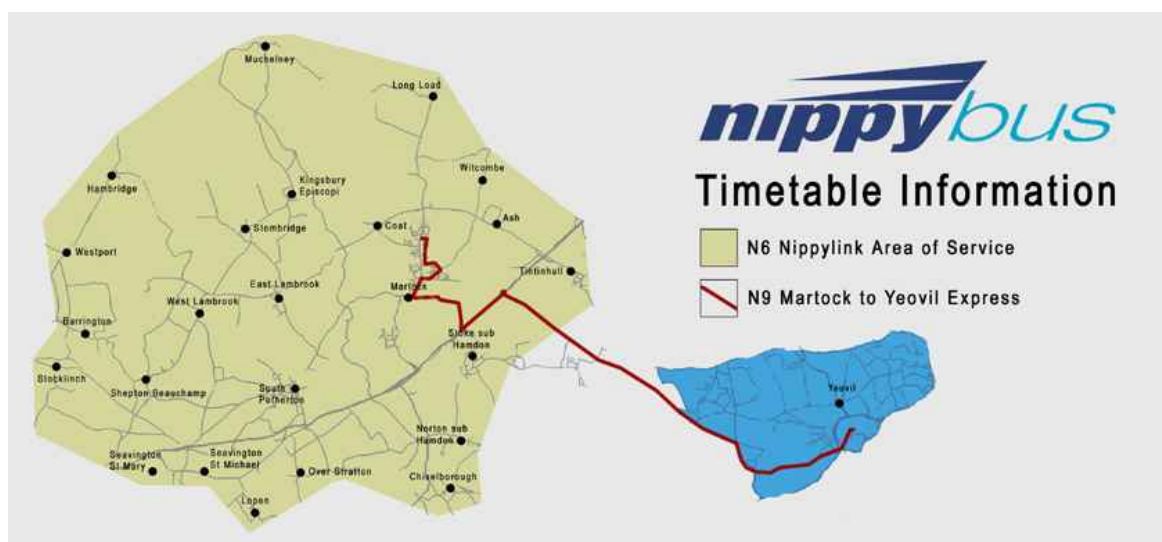
Route 54 (Taunton – Yeovil) - New low floor buses with a bespoke livery were introduced on the 6th May and these have generally been well received, although as the majority of journeys on this route are commercially operated passenger loadings are not available.

Service 81 (South Petherton – Yeovil) has been operated by South West Coaches since the 29th May 2007, with a revised timetable being introduced on the 13th August. Patronage levels have shown significant improvements averaging around 50%. Transporting Somerset are looking to improve with a brand led service operating with low floor vehicles replicating the success stories of 11/11A and 68, also operated by South West in Area South, which have shown significant increases in patronage since similar enhancements to these routes were implemented on 1st April this year. However the timescales for improvements to 81 are likely to be long and Transporting Somerset have indicated that this will be dependent on funding from a Section 106 Agreement coming on line from the Lufton Key site development.

Service 377 (Yeovil – Wells) – This route was introduced on 3rd September 2007 to replace the 376 Yeovil to Bristol, which now operates from Wells to Bristol. Through tickets are still available to Bristol and the main reason for the change is to enable the operator to work within the British Drivers' hours regulations as opposed to the EU regulations. There has been some concern voiced by passenger groups because of the wait on some journeys in Wells, although First have indicated that patronage on both 377 and 376 is increasing.

Demand Responsive*

Members will recall that the Nippy N6 and N9 were introduced in April 2006. The N6 serves a demand responsive area of rural parishes, as detailed on the map below. Passengers from within this demand responsive area pre-book for their journey and the service enables residents of these more isolated communities to access either South Petherton or Martock and through a “seamless” connection with the N9 “Martock Express” for on going journeys to Yeovil. The latter has made it possible to commute to and from Yeovil from these isolated areas.



These routes have seen significant growth since introduction with year on year average monthly growth at 40.8%. Some minor amendments were introduced on the N9 on the 13th August to streamline the service.

In addition Barrington, Ilton, Puckington, the Seavingtons, Shepton Beauchamp and Stocklinch are served by the Chard & Ilminster Slinky, which commenced operations in October 2006 and gives access to Chard & Ilminster on Mondays to Saturdays from 05.00hrs to 22.00hrs on a pre-booked basis. The growth on this route has been good especially in the areas with close proximity to Chard and Ilminster and this has led to problems of availability in the Area North communities since the service has often been pre-booked from elsewhere in the demand responsive area. This is a common “growing pain” with a demand responsive scheme and to alleviate this situation, the operators (Linkall SW Ltd) are giving priority to the villages in the Barrington area for bookings between 12.00 –14.00hrs on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This does not preclude residents from booking at other times however.

Community Transport

Members will recall the report on the Somerton and Langport Links service presented to the Area North Committee by the Area Support Team Leader on 26th September and a presentation by the Chief Officer of the South Somerset Association for Voluntary and Community Action (SSVCA).

Members resolved that any issues relating to Community Transport (CT) be forwarded to the Committee Administrator to be included in this Transport Update Report. At the time of writing no specific issues have been raised, although members may wish to comment either at the Area North meeting or obviously on an ongoing basis as such issues may arise.

The SSVCA also serves Area North with their CT minibus operation based in Yeovil providing transport on a weekly basis to day care centres at Curry Rivel, Langport, South Petherton, Somerton and Stoke Sub Hamdon and a regular shopping trip from Parsonage Place, Curry Rivel to Tescos in Langport, with an average of 62 persons per week benefiting from these services.

In addition the Barrington Ring A Ride scheme offers a voluntary service to take people who live in Barrington to medical appointments, opticians, visiting sick relations and other essential journeys. There is no charge but donations are welcome.

Moped Loan Scheme

Transport can be a huge barrier to opportunity for young people living in the countryside. To help address this the Moped Loan Scheme (MLS) operated by the Somerset Rural Youth Project (SRYP) offers rurally isolated young people the chance to have a moped on loan at low cost over a period of 6 months to enable them to access education or employment. An extension to the 6 months is occasionally considered where it is necessary to complete an academic course. Generally, however, the scheme members become self-sufficient transport wise after the 6 months and 19 young people in South Somerset (7 in area North) gained advantage to independent travel for the year 2006/2007. A further 6 District Wide and 4 in Area North have completed the scheme in the year to date. Three young persons are currently on bikes in Area North with further applications pending review or waiting to take the Compulsory Basic Training.

Each of these three young people are travelling to work and accessing courses of further education at Bridgwater College, Cannington College and Richard Huish at Taunton.

The mopeds are invaluable tools that are enabling them to pursue their individual goals of either A levels or qualifications in and future employment in Motor-sport Engineering, and arboriculture.

The participants are charged £10 per week towards the running costs (maintenance, tyres and oil) with the young person being responsible for fuel. They are encouraged to make this payment by direct debit to encourage elementary budgeting for vehicle costs and 98% of scheme members have taken up this method. Insurance is covered by SRYP with the riders being responsible for the £250 insurance excess in instances where they are deemed negligent. There is also a £40 initial charge for a helmet to approved Gold Standard, which is then correctly fitted by an accredited partner garage.

An excellent recent example of the benefits of the scheme concerns a young 17-year-old man who resides in an isolated community near High Ham who has now been able to start a Level 3 Advanced Diploma in Motor-sport Engineering at Bridgwater College, a course which attracts students from as far a field as London. As a direct result of the mobility and independence provided by his moped, he now also has a part time job that is providing him with an income that we hope will sustain him through his period of study.

SRYP hold events to promote the scheme by attending sixth form assemblies and setting up displays in college foyers to ensure young people are aware of the service. The aim is to select the individuals who will benefit most from the scheme and to supplement public transport or community transport rather than duplicate. Of course, nearly all applications received are well founded and with limited bikes available, difficult decisions have to be made. However, a young person who is not selected for the Scheme will receive support and advice until solutions to issues involving access to employment, training, education and transport can be identified.

The District contributes £5,000 per annum to this scheme from the Transport Miscellaneous budget. There is currently some uncertainty relating to the long term funding of this scheme, however, the MLS advisory group, that consists of SRYP and key partners including the County and District Councils, are currently looking at strategic and operational developments aimed at achieving long term financial stability.

Concessionary Fares

Members will recall that District Councils have had a statutory obligation to provide free bus travel for over 60s and eligible disabled from the 1st April 2006. The scheme followed the same criteria of the previous arrangement, which offered 50% fares and we have continued to participate in the Somerset Travelpass scheme. This operates in partnership with the 5 districts in Somerset with Somerset County Council acting as administrators.

Members should also note that, although there is no statutory obligation to provide concessionary fares on Community Transport, provision is made within the Somerset Travel Pass scheme. Free travel on production of a valid concessionary bus pass is permitted where the service is a direct replacement or in lieu of a traditional local bus service where this has either been withdrawn or evidence of need has been established for the implementation of such a service. The service must be pre advertised as either Fixed Route or Demand Responsive to operate within pre-determined zones and with pre-determined fares. The Chard & Ilminster Slinkybus operated by Linkall (SW) Ltd falls into this category.

A concession of 50% is offered for journeys by Community Transport that give access to local services and enable social inclusion that commence, run through and terminate

within the district. To qualify, these journeys should occur where no public transport is available, or such transport is not accessible, or where no pre-advertised service, as mentioned above, is provided. Passengers must be in possession of a valid concessionary pass and purchase an individual ticket; this being capped at a maximum return fare of £12.00 i.e. a maximum concession of £6.00.

A similar concession is also offered for journeys to hospitals and medical centres that fall outside of the district where requests for free transport have been previously declined by the Patient Travel Advice Centre but would otherwise qualify as indicated above.

From 1st April 2008 the concessionary fares scheme will go national for any local bus journey across England irrespective of where the pass holder lives. Responsibility will remain with the Districts and the cost will be incurred wherever the travel falls (i.e. if a person is visiting another District on holiday, the cost of reimbursement to the bus operator lies with the district within which the journey takes place).

Funding for this new scheme is a major issue with SSDC being significantly under funded for the current District Wide Scheme through the Revenue Support Grant and although the additional cost of the national scheme is to be met by a special grant there are concerns that this will not be enough to accommodate the anticipated growth for an area which will attract visitors. The special grant process is at present out to consultation with responses required to the Department for Transport by 23rd November 2007.

Financial Implications

There are no direct Financial Implications to Area North arising from this report.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The schemes referred to above support the corporate aims and objectives to:

- Increase economic vitality and prosperity
- Improve health and well being of our citizens
- Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities

Other Implications

None

Background Papers: *None*
