

Area North Committee – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008

## 8. Update on Transport Issues in Area North

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### Purpose of the report

To update members on 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

It is recommended 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. Instruct the Transport Strategy Officer to liaise with District's Local Strategic Partnership, South Somerset Together, and Transporting Somerset to raise awareness of the current public transport provision and consider potential improvements necessary to ease accessibility to services and facilities.

### Background

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

### Report

#### Rural Accessibility and Local Bus Services

Members will recall that in the last Transport Update Report to Area North on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007 the Transport Strategy Officer outlined the total provision currently available within the existing network hierarchy of passenger transport provision. This enabled members to comment on and identify gaps. One of those gaps concerns the level of cover in the Long Sutton area. A wish was expressed to include Long Sutton within the N6 Demand Responsive Area, which currently runs as far as Long Load. Unfortunately, at the present time, it has not been possible to accomplish this without causing a loss of service to other communities that already rely on this service. However, Transporting Somerset are looking at services in the Area and there will be a tendering exercise of bus routes in the New Year. The tender will invite operators to provide a demand responsive service between Martock and Ilminster to replace the existing route 633. This may provide an opportunity to re-draw the demand responsive area of service N6.

Concern was also raised that whilst the N12 route that commenced on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2007 (which replaced Safeway's 682) provides Norton, Lopen and some villages in Area West with a link to Crewkerne, it did not extend to South Petherton because of operational constraints. Whilst sympathetic with this view, Transporting Somerset point out that there has to be a balanced approach in terms of cost against the likely number of passengers. It should be recalled that the old Safeway's 682 was withdrawn through lack of patronage. The service had already attracted a subsidy from SCC but Safeway took the view (as they were quite entitled to do) that the route was still not viable.

The number of through journeys from South Petherton to Crewkerne was minimal and it would be very difficult for SCC to justify funding for such low numbers. Generally, South Petherton as a rural centre has good local facilities and there is therefore less incentive for travel between South Petherton and Crewkerne or vice versa than for journeys to Yeovil. However, Safeway's decision to withdraw did create hardship in some of the more remote villages that need access to Crewkerne for essential services and the N12 was designed to alleviate this. It is, of course, possible to travel from South Petherton to Crewkerne using the 81 to Yeovil and changing on to the 60/61 or 47.

During the past year there have been very few alterations in the local bus routes. As indicated in last year's report, Service 81 (South Petherton to Yeovil) has been operated by South West Coaches since the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2007, with a revised timetable being introduced on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 2007. Transporting Somerset has secured an agreement with the bus company to provide low floor vehicles and passenger growth has continued with the operator indicating an increase in patronage in the region of 15-20%.

A new public transport timetable booklet for the South Somerset Area has just been produced (September 2008) by Transporting Somerset and this has been distributed throughout the district. Members of the public can also obtain copies of this publication direct from Transporting Somerset. They can also request to be included on the mailing list to ensure automatic receipt of updated versions.

Goal 4 of the Sustainable Community Strategy aims to provide people of all ages and backgrounds across the district to have access to ICT and transport options. It identifies "those without their own transport are isolated, and have problems accessing services and facilities" as a key issue. To this end it is recommended that the District's Local Strategic Partnership, South Somerset Together, works with Transporting Somerset and the Transport Strategy Officer to further this aim.

### **Non – Emergency Health Transport**

The South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SWAST) are withdrawing from the Voluntary Ambulance Car Service (VACS) contract on 31st March 2009 to enable them to concentrate on their core business.

Transporting Somerset is working with the Primary Care Trust and the NHS Trusts to develop single eligibility criteria for Patient Transport Services and secure a suitable provider to deliver the VACS service. They are working with Somerset Primary Care Trust to jointly develop a transport strategy for health to ensure:

- The continuation of services lost by the withdrawal of South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SWAST) from the Voluntary Ambulance Car Service (VACS) contract.
- Provision to a better quality of transport service for healthcare in Somerset.
- Better integration of vehicles and resources.

## **Moped Loan Scheme**

The Moped Loan Scheme operated by the Somerset Rural Youth Project continues to offer 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. (The Transport Strategy Officer's report to Area North on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007 gave a full explanation on how the scheme works).

The Moped Loan Scheme has acquired 4 new bikes this year and now operates a fleet of 32 machines. 12 young people have benefited in South Somerset in the year to date with 8 actually benefiting at present. At the moment in Area North we have 3 young people who are gaining access to both employment and education that would otherwise have not been possible. One is attending Bridgwater College and uses the moped to travel to Langport to join the bus, another has gained employment in Ilminster as a result of being on the scheme and the 3<sup>rd</sup> is studying at Yeovil College. An application for a 4<sup>th</sup> person is currently pending.

At the Area North Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007, Members instructed 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. The Moped Loan Scheme receives financial support from Somerset County Council as well as a variety of funding partners over the years. South Somerset District Council contributes £5,000 per annum to this scheme from the Transport Miscellaneous budget. However, in recent years the Moped Loan Scheme has had difficulty in obtaining adequate funding and would have run at a financial loss if it had not received funding directly from the Somerset Rural Youth Project itself.

To this end SCC in conjunction with other partners including the Learning and Skills Council and the District Councils will be commissioning an independent party to undertake the development of a business case and review of the service in order for potential funders to be confident in being able to provide a longer term funding solution.

## **Concessionary Fares**

Members will recall that the new English National Concessionary Travel Pass (bus pass) was introduced on the 1<sup>st</sup> April. The new national pass uses the latest "smartcard" technology and for this reason they were produced by a national contractor Fujitsu. (Fujitsu Services Ltd were awarded the Framework Contract to produce the bulk order of bus passes nationally by the Department for Transport). Prior to the issuing of the new pass it was essential to ensure that our database including photographs was as up to date as possible and held in compatible formats required by the national scheme.

22,181 passes were produced and distributed to South Somerset residents in time to meet the 1<sup>st</sup> April deadline and the number of "South Somerset" passes in circulation as at 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008 totalled 26,266. In terms of actual bus patronage feedback from the operators to date indicate that the increase is likely to be in the region of 14% in the current year. However, the poor weather this summer may well have influenced the numbers travelling and the Somerset Travel Pass partnership (the 5 districts in Somerset together with Transporting Somerset who administer the scheme) generally feels that we are more likely to see a natural scheme growth of around 20-25% by 2009.

Members will be aware of the concerns regarding the funding of the scheme, which resulted in an inescapable bid of £554k to cover a shortfall for the funding for the original free local bus scheme (i.e. for journeys within Somerset) made through the Revenue

Support Grant. Whilst the additional separate Department for Transport funding for the national scheme may well provide for the extra costs entailed, the overall Government funding will still fall significantly short of the total scheme cost.

With regard to ongoing card production, the current contract with Fujitsu runs to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 and SCC are currently investigating future production on behalf of all 5 districts either continuing through Fujitsu or through “in-house” production at SCC. Similarly Transporting Somerset has indicated their intention to the Government Office for the South West to participate in any study into the roll out of the ITSO (Integrated Transport Smartcard Organisation) compliant smartcard (i.e. bus pass) throughout the region. This would be in terms of on-bus readers to aid in the assessment of concessionary usage, enhanced ticketing opportunities and also to consider the potential for offering other local authority applications.

In response to Members’ requests for an extension to the scheme in South Somerset to include acceptance of the pass for 24hrs, Scrutiny Committee resolved on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008 that the Transport Strategy Officer submits in August/September 2009 a fully costed proposal outlining the full cost and service implications of introducing a relaxation in timings for the existing scheme. The national off peak times are from 9.30am until 11.00pm Monday to Fridays and all day at weekends. Within Somerset the pass is currently accepted from 9.00am on weekdays.

### **The SSDC Travel Plan**

The District Executive approved the existing SSDC travel plan on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2002. Since that time there have been dramatic improvements in the development, implementation and effectiveness of travel plans. Best practice through exemplar projects has evolved and it is intended through this work to emulate those examples, which have delivered workable alternatives to single occupancy car journeys on the ground.

As a Planning Authority it is important that we lead by example and our own Travel Plan needs to be proven to work if we are to persuade others to follow suit. PPG 13 (paragraph 87) expects local authorities “to set an example by adopting their own plans.” Whilst the existing SSDC Travel Plan may have reflected the guiding principles at that time its review and upgrade is long overdue if it is to continue to fulfil the aspirations of PPG13 in light of more recent guidance and the emerging Local Development Framework. It is also a key piece of work identified in the Carbon Reduction and Climate Change Adoption Strategy recently endorsed by the District Executive on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

Transport is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions, and commuter and business travel constitute nearly 40% of miles driven by car. At the same time we need a transport system that can support the movement of people and goods in order to ensure a growing and vibrant community. Travel Plans look at ways of achieving effective transport systems that can deliver a choice of travel options to the user that could save money, give opportunities to build healthy exercise into daily life, ease stress and often make journey times to work faster. It is about leading by example and thinking of ways to make alternative travel patterns a viable option for all staff.

An important initial stage in working up an effective travel Plan is to establish current travel patterns and to identify the potential of alternative options. To this end a questionnaire is being sent to all staff in October to evaluate how people currently get to work and to meetings, and to ask about the various alternative options. Whilst this is a questionnaire that we are sending out to staff we would really appreciate it if Members could also participate. Paper copies will be put in the Members' Room and electronic

copies will shortly be e-mailed to you. It is intended that an interactive questionnaire will also be put on the Member's pages of the website.

The Travel Plan project team will then research, analyse and evaluate the alternatives, which broadly fit into 7 options: Walking, cycling, public transport, responsible car use, information technology, zonal travel planning and personalised travel planning. Zonal travel planning will consider options for working with neighbouring organisations to assess the potential of achieving the critical mass necessary to deliver or enabling cost benefits for delivery in terms of economies of scale. Personalised travel planning looks at raising awareness of the alternatives and the benefits that can be achieved for individuals or specific groups.

The Carbon Reduction and Climate Change Adoption Strategy envisages that this work will be completed by December 2009.

### 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

