

Corporate Support for Community and Public Transport and SSCAT Bus

Assistant Director: Martin Woods - Assistant Director (Economy)
Service Manager: Paul Wheatley – Principal Spatial Planner
Lead Officer: Nigel Collins – Transport Strategy Officer
Contact Details: nigel.collins@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462591

Purpose of the Report

The report follows on from the previous report to the Area East Committee on 8th July 2015 and informs Members of the on-going 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.

Recommendation(s)

That members note the contents of this report.

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". The previous report sets 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 previous report and provides an update on the progress of the various work streams to date.

Report

Overview

Since the last report 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. Wincanton Transport & Accessibility Hub

- 1.1. Work has continued on this project originally presented in a report to the Area East Committee on Wednesday 10th September 2014, which outlined the proposal put forward by South Somerset Together (SST) to establish a pilot Transport and Accessibility Hub in Wincanton.
- 1.2. With the first stage of the work, which included the new more easily accessible shelter, and improved information at the Memorial Hall being completed, focus has

now centred on SCC's work arising from their successful Total Transport Fund bid¹. This work, which has included an analysis of the journey patterns from Community Transport & Health Sector transport providers to identify gaps in provision, has largely been completed along with background work on a web portal designed to facilitate journey planning across a range of public transport options². SCC is shortly due to appoint a consultancy on a short term (3 months) basis to undertake stakeholder engagement and produce a report and final specification for the portal.

- 1.3. Nationally there have been significant developments in enabling ticket machines that can read both Smartcards (including the concessionary bus passes) and contactless payments (using debit or credit cards). This will give the public a wider choice of payment types and enable easier interchange between different operators or different types of transport. Simultaneously SCC is working operators to roll out interoperable smart tickets which can be topped up on line and used to pay for travel on bus and a roll out of Real Time information including an app linked to the web portal.
- 1.4. The greater ease and flexibility in how passengers can pay for fares especially when transferring/travelling with different operators would be even more enhanced if the ability to use electronic ticketing were extended to include Community Transport (CT) minibuses. With this in mind SCC are suggesting that in due course "it would be beneficial for Wincanton CAT to have electronic ticket machines which could then facilitate real-time links to public buses and a display board could show next bus at the interchange". This would also offer easier payment options for non-concessionary pass holders wishing to use CT.
- 1.5. An Update Report from SCC regarding this work on Passenger Transport Developments within Somerset is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.6. Work has been undertaken to explore the possibility of some services (e.g. Job Centre and college courses) being provided more locally. However this has proved challenging as many of these organisations are themselves facing budget constraints and/or rationalisation. However the SCC work referred to above does afford opportunities to improve ease of access to these services. For instance one suggestion currently being considered is the use of Smartcards for job applicants. Obviously further development of such initiatives is dependent on the outcomes from SCC's Total Transport Fund work.

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

- 2.1. SDDC 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, operated by South West Trains (SWT) - 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. More specifically for Area East we are continuing to make the case for alterations to the train timetable to enable realistic commute journeys from Castle Cary to Yeovil and Taunton, as well as increased frequency of trains on the HoWL. This lobbying has seen some success this year with the summer only Sunday service from Bristol

¹ SCC successfully bid for £305,000 funding from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Total Transport Pilot Fund (March 2015) as outlined in the 8th July 2015 report

² Includes 'conventional' public buses, taxis DRT and Community Transport as well as currently "back office closed routes" for education health and social care trips.

to Weymouth extended to run from Easter Sunday until 23rd October 2016. From December 2016 this service will run all year and in addition the service from Westbury will be extended back to run from Bristol. Hence there will be two Bristol to Weymouth services allowing full days in all destinations on the route, including Bruton and Castle Cary. However there is still no service arriving at Bath or Bristol until after lunchtime on Sundays and we are continuing to promote the benefits this much needed enhancement would deliver.

- 2.3. SWT implemented timetable improvements on both the London-Exeter and HoWL in December 2015. The passenger take up on these new routes has generally been good. SWT are also offering an additional journey to Weymouth calling at Templecombe on summer Saturdays and Bank Holiday Monday until Sat 3rd September. As indicated in the earlier report it should be noted that significant timetabling improvements on the routes running through South Somerset are dependent on infrastructure improvements coming forward. Some of the measures that could facilitate better connectivity and more frequent services in South Somerset are acknowledged in NR's Wessex³ and Western⁴ Route Studies. However implementation of these measures is not envisaged until the later stages of their programme in 2043 and beyond. Nevertheless, given the planned growth both in South Somerset and regionally, it is important that we continually raise awareness of the economic and social benefits that these improvements would bring.
- 2.4. To this end SSSC has been engaged with West of England Line Route Strategy Group (WoEL SG)⁵ 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. Severe weather incidents in recent years have emphasised the vulnerability of the south west rail network to extreme weather conditions, which are occurring more frequently. It also highlighted the need for greater investment in rail to deliver resilience and connectivity for the region. Infrastructure improvements on the West of England Line (WoEL) could deliver the required resilience to the east of Exeter. The degree of resilience would also be dependent on the ability to improve the section on the Heart of Wessex line between Castle Cary and Yeovil and NR are currently assessing a range of options for consideration by the DfT. There is also potential for these improvements to increase connectivity both locally and regionally.
- 2.6. The Great Western Railway (GWR) recognises that the car park at Castle Cary train station is currently operating at capacity and impeding passenger growth at the station. As indicated in last year's report GWR has submitted a bid to the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the project is still being considered within that process. The Scheme has also been identified in the South Somerset Infrastructure Delivery Plan as Priority 2.⁶
- 2.7. GWR is also considering improvements that may be able to come forward from their own Customer & Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF). The CCIF was introduced last year to support projects that are proposed by communities to benefit that community, meet a social need and are not for commercial gain. In Area East

³ Wessex Route Study – Network Rail August 2015

⁴ Western Route Study – Network Rail August 2015

⁵ 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 SSSC– plus Somerset County Council and Devon County Council and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership as Peninsula Rail Task Force members).

⁶ 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.

potential improvements to a footpath to the southern side of Bruton Station are being considered with a view to submitting a bid to the CCIF next year.

- 2.8. Members should also note that the South Western Franchise (WoEL) is due for renewal in 2017. SSDC responded to the DfT's consultation on the proposed new franchise in February emphasising the need for DfT to recognise the growth in South Somerset to 2028 and similarly that our stations (especially Castle Cary and Yeovil) are key to improving the resilience of the South West rail network as a whole. Our response also reflected the agreed objectives of the West of England Line Strategy Group (WoEL SG). These objectives include:

2.8.1. Two trains an hour west of Salisbury and east of Exeter, with no deterioration in journey times or current service levels throughout the line between Exeter and Salisbury.

2.8.2. Yeovil to London under 2 hours

- 2.9. A number of station adoption groups on the West of England Line have joined together with South West Trains to create the Blackmore Vale Line Community Rail Partnership. The new partnership, which includes members of Friends of Templecombe Station, Friends of Crewkerne and a newly formed group at Gillingham station, launched on 11th March and is supported by a Partnership Officer. The operating model is very similar to the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership.

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. The only significant changes to bus services in Area East since the last report are:

3.1.1. Service 33 Wincanton to Frome (Weds only) was identified for withdrawal due to low usage/patronage during SCC's assessment of bus subsidies earlier this year. The subsidy has now been withdrawn and the last day of operation was Wed 18th May 2016.

3.1.2. Webberbus ceased to operate on Thursday 12 May. They had recently introduced (29th March) a new commercially operated service (i.e. without subsidy) offering journeys from Ilchester to Yeovil & Bridgwater. As the 'Buses of Somerset' (First Group) serve Ilchester with both the 54 (Yeovil to Taunton) and the 77 (Yeovil – Street, Glastonbury & Wells) no significant impact is anticipated.

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

- 4.1. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) sets out evidence on current and future infrastructure provision in South Somerset. It assesses infrastructure capacity and identifies any necessary improvements required as a result of the planned development in the South Somerset Local Plan (2006 – 2028).

- 4.2. The South Somerset Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update 2015/16 has now been published and is available to view on : [http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/early-review-of-local-plan-\(2006-2028/evidence-base/](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/early-review-of-local-plan-(2006-2028/evidence-base/)

- 4.3. 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. These are discussed in more detail in Section 2 (Rail) above.

- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. Since last year's report local residents have distributed the Deansley Way (Kingswell Rise) Travel Packs. To date Taylor Wimpey have had 40 residents claiming the green travel voucher and have paid all 40 claimants. (*amount c£3k? Subject to confirmation by Fiona Farrell.*)The majority of the purchases have been on walking items (rain coats/waterproof trousers/walking shoes etc.) and computer equipment. Unfortunately though no vouchers have been issued in respect of the SSCAT bus to date.

5. Community Transport

- 5.1. Community Transport continues to play a vital role for those who have no access to a car and either no bus service or for whom accessing the bus is just not possible. South Somerset Community Accessible Transport (SSCAT) operates Community Transport in Area East and SSCAT's Operations Manager has produced a separate Information report for this committee, which is attached.
- 5.2. Members may recall an initial proposal by SCC to reduce the 50% contribution for Concessionary Pass Holders (Bus Pass) on Community Transport to 25%. SSDC responded to the consultation robustly challenging this proposal, which was subsequently dropped.
- 5.1. Whilst members will note the healthy reserves built up by SSCAT through the Operations Manager's prudent management there is still the need to secure increases in revenue funding to ensure the scheme's long term survival.

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:

Report to Area East Committee - Wednesday 10th September 2014 "Wincanton Transport & Services Hub Update"

Report to Area East Committee – Wed 8th July 2015 "Corporate support for community and public transport and SSCAT bus"