

A Strategy for Buses and other Public Transport Provision In the Borough of Poole

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Government set out its vision for transport in its 1997 White Paper “A New Deal for Transport – Better for Everybody”. For road passenger transport these ideas were further developed in the 1998 document “Buses – From Workhorse to Thoroughbred”. From these came the Transport Act 2000, with its range of new powers and statutory duties for bus operators and local authorities. Subsequent White Papers considered the impact of transport services in the wider social environment, in particular the role of public transport in reducing social exclusion.
- 1.2 The Transport Act 2000 placed Local Transport Plans on a statutory basis. S110 of the Act requires each Local Transport Authority to *“prepare a document ... containing their general policies as to how best to carry out their functions in order to secure that:-*
- *bus services meet such of the transport requirements of persons within the authority’s area the authority consider should be met by such services*
 - *bus services meeting such requirements are provided to the standards to which the authority consider should be provided*
 - *such additional facilities and services connected with bus services are provided as the authority consider should be provided”*

2. Provision of Bus Services

- 2.1 There are two main reasons why local authorities should be involved in the provision of bus services:
- to reduce hardship and social exclusion by improving access to facilities by all its citizens (social welfare);
 - to improve the environment and economy by reducing dependence on the private car, thus reducing the congestion, pollution and collisions (mode shift).
- 2.2 Through the Quality Bus Partnership the shared objective of bus operators and Councils is to attract more people to travel by bus. Poole is committed to the target set in the Government’s 10 year plan for transport which is a 12% increase in bus service patronage between 2000 and 2010.
- 2.3 Achieving the main objectives above is a complex matter. Limited resources, particularly revenue funding, means there is a need to prioritise. Although there is not necessarily a conflict between the two main objectives, decisions will have to be made on which proposals are likely to be the most effective.

- 2.4 Buses are the main public transport option for most local journeys and are especially important for the socially excluded and lower income groups. However, it is important to note that, for the purposes of this strategy document, road based public transport not only includes local buses but community transport (Dial-a-Bus and voluntary car schemes), taxis and inter-urban coach services (although there is very little use of coach services for local travel in the conurbation).
- 2.5 Bus service provision is a complex matter and is not just about vehicles and drivers. Services perform a number of functions. The early morning bus takes people to work and children to school, often in competition with private cars. Inter-peak buses may be taking their passengers on shopping trips and evening or Sunday buses may offer recreation. Of equal importance is how convenient the service is. Is there a direct service or are changes required? Is the service frequent enough? Is there a service at all? What are the fares? Are there concessions available? Is there a bus shelter - with a seat? How do I find out what time my bus is and whether it's on time?
- 2.6 The provision of information and its close links with roadside passenger facilities have become of significant importance in recent years with the development of Real-time information, the national **traveline** information service and the requirement for improved access at bus stops. As a result these areas will be covered by a separate strategy.

3. The local bus network

- 3.1 Poole is a relatively dense urban area with a population of over 140,000. The Borough's position as part of a much larger conurbation and particularly its location alongside Bournemouth has resulted in a complex pattern of travel, much of which is cross-boundary in nature. This pattern of demand is not ideal for bus services; hence the relatively high car ownership and car use.
- 3.2 The Poole public transport network will be made up of complementary modes of public transport which will include conventional bus services, community transport, taxi and private hire provision, rail and ferry services. The Local Transport Authority will not normally fund services that duplicate each other.
- 3.3 Currently the bus network in Poole is principally made up of services which fall into the following categories:
- a. Core radial routes – high frequency direct routes or corridors into the town centre (e.g. Hamworthy, Canford Heath and Bournemouth corridors)
 - b. Inter-urban routes – routes to neighbouring urban areas, often express/limited stop (e.g. Blandford, Ringwood/Southampton, Salisbury)
 - c. Infill routes – lower frequency services to suburban centres provided to ensure most dwellings are within reasonable walking distance of a bus stop (e.g. Merley, Broadstone, Creekmoor, Upper Parkstone, Alderney, Talbot Heath)
 - d. Niche-market services – services provided to target a specific market (e.g. schools services, leisure facilities)

- 3.4 The majority (between 80 and 90 per cent) of the bus services provided in Poole are on a commercial basis. Of the 32 local bus contracts let by the Council, the majority operate outside the peak hours when the numbers of passengers travelling are less and thus revenue taken in fares is lower.
- 3.5 The development of the core network of services is essential to achieve the shift from private car to bus travel. However, the development of 'niche market' services have a vital role to play, especially in the context of the journey to work and the journey to school. Traditional 'works buses' have been in decline over the last 20 years or so but with employers developing Travel Plans these may reappear. Also, two of the most recent tendered local bus services to be introduced are peak-time school services for children not entitled to free transport.
- 3.6 Most of the revenue funding the Borough currently provides for bus services may be considered as contributing to social need and in many cases addressing social exclusion. Although local car ownership levels are amongst the highest of any UK conurbation, there are nevertheless around 22 percent of households without access to private cars and even in households with transport, family members maybe unable to access the car for long periods.
- 3.7 When considering the provision of bus services a balance needs to be struck between expectations, affordability and what is achievable under the legislation. It is reasonable to assume that a minimum level of bus service should be provided for all residents in the borough within a reasonable walking distance of their homes.

4. Quality Bus Partnership

- 4.1 A Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) agreement was signed by Wilts & Dorset, Bournemouth Transport and the local authorities in South East Dorset in October 1999. QBPs are a commitment to working together in partnership to apply jointly their available resources in the most effective way to improve the quality of bus travel in the area.
- 4.2 The bus operator's core business is to supply suitable vehicles and drivers to meet passenger demands. The fares charged are to cover the operating costs and contribute to profit. The bus operator will select his routes to maximise patronage and should operate vehicles that not only meet statutory requirements in terms of safety and accessibility, but also provide comfort for the passenger.
- 4.3 The bus operator cannot directly influence his 'track' and it is for the local authorities to identify where measures can be introduced to give priority to buses and their passengers. The provision of bus lanes, bus gates and road junction priorities are a matter for the local authority. The local authority is also responsible for determining the level of bus shelter provision and raised kerbs at bus stops to assist passenger boarding and alighting. The payment of subsidies for services not commercially viable and concessionary fares for specific groups

of passengers are other ways local authorities influence public transport provision.

- 4.4 Some measures are jointly provided. Public transport information in the form of timetables, maps, road-side displays, real-time information and **traveline** telephone information are examples often involving both local authorities and bus companies.

5. **Social Inclusion or Mode Shift?**

- 5.1 During the consultation process it became clear that there are a number of measures that clearly address social inclusion, for example, concessionary fares and community transport which are specifically aimed at certain groups of the population. There are also a number of measures specifically addressing mode shift, for example, bus priority, peak bus services and park & ride.
- 5.2 There are measures which can address both social inclusion and mode shift, for example child concessionary fares, joint-operator bus ticketing, school buses for non-entitled children and inter-peak buses. Interestingly, measures that traditionally have been considered as addressing social inclusion, such as evening and Sunday buses, are now also considered to contribute to mode shift. This is due to the increased activity outside traditional working hours, assisted by Sunday trading and late opening times of many facilities.

6. **The Strategy**

- 6.1 This strategy for buses and other public transport has been developed through consultation with public transport users, non-users and stakeholders. Guidance has been offered on how the Council might achieve its public transport objectives in a deregulated industry and the relative cost of the various measures available. The sources of possible additional funding were also discussed.
- 6.2 Consultees recognised that given the current deregulated bus service operating environment, it was essential to continue to work in partnership with the bus companies and neighbouring authorities to achieve the greatest benefits for the bus passenger. Consultees felt that the existing Passenger Transport Policies were still valid but there were a number of areas that require more attention. In particular, fares (including concessions available), community transport (including Dial-a-Bus) and when and where the Council provides financial support for local bus services were highlighted.

6.3 **Fares**

The cost of fares is a significant issue affecting people's ability to travel by public transport and thus access services and facilities. The cost to the passenger may be reduced by the availability of concessions or by the availability of tickets valid on different operators' services.

Concessionary Fares

The “Connect” concessionary travelcard for residents of pensionable age and people with qualifying disabilities has been well received. For the first time residents in Poole and Bournemouth have been able to travel at half-fare on all operators’ services in both areas and on services starting or finishing in Poole or Bournemouth.

- From 1 April 2003 the Borough will reduce the qualifying age for the “Connect” concessionary fares scheme for male residents to 60 years from 65.
- The Borough of Poole will consider improving the “Connect” scheme concession for its older residents by offering free bus travel to those aged 80 years and above.
- The Borough of Poole will consider extending the concessionary fares scheme to include additional categories. In particular, children under 17 and those aged 17-19 in full time education.
- The Council recognises that the government is consulting on the possible extensions to the discretionary provision of concessionary fares to include, for example, people on low incomes or adults in full-time education. Should statutory provision be made for such changes the Borough of Poole will consider incorporating them in its concessionary fares scheme.

Joint-ticketing

The Transport Act 2000 provides for local transport authorities, independently or acting jointly, to make a ticketing scheme covering the whole or any part of their area, or combined area. They may do this if they consider that the proposed scheme would be in the interests of the public and would to any extent implement the policies set out in their bus strategy.

Being deemed by some to be anti-competitive under Competition Law has stifled the introduction of joint and multi-operator tickets. However, they have been successfully introduced in some areas of the country.

- The Borough of Poole will work with neighbouring transport authorities and the local bus operators with a view to introducing such a scheme.

6.4 Community Transport

Dial-a-Bus

Dial-a-Bus is recognised as an essential service for residents with mobility problems which make it difficult or impossible for them to access ordinary buses. Improvements in accessibility to conventional buses through vehicle and bus stop design is helping more people to access these services but there remains a significant number of people who are still unable to get on and off buses or get to the nearest bus stop.

Dial-a-Bus is a door-to-door service which assists independent living and for some people reduces dependency on Social Services.

The current service, operated with two in-house fleet vehicles during the middle part of the day on six days per week is under great pressure. Improved scheduling has resulted in over 800 passenger journeys undertaken in July 2002. This represents a 36 per cent increase over July 2001.

There are over 600 Dial-a-Bus users registered with the scheme. However, independent research by Transport Consultants TAS suggest that given the borough's population, the expected take-up should be around 2,250.

The Dial-a-Bus service is currently not being marketed as there is no capacity to cope with extra demand.

- The Borough will investigate the funding of additional vehicles and drivers for the Dial-a-Bus service.

Voluntary Car Scheme

The Borough has approximately 30 voluntary drivers mainly undertaking Social Services transport work. They receive a payment for every mile driven to cover motoring expenses.

Although there is a small amount of "community" transport undertaken for the general public, there is potential to significantly expand this to provide essential journeys for the most needy residents in the Borough.

- The Borough will investigate the expansion of the voluntary car scheme.

6.5 Local Bus Services

It is recognised that the bus companies provide the majority of bus services on a commercial basis and the network is very much influenced by this. However, there remains a need for the Council to subsidise services that are not commercially viable and may never be profitable.

Whilst there remains support for the Council to subsidise services and introduce new services for a trial period, there is a need to target these and to be more innovative.

- The Council will consider the introduction of more experimental bus services to provide school transport for children not entitled to free school transport and will consider new types of services such as "feeder" services into mainline bus corridors.