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BUS INFORMATION STRATEGY

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Information Strategy

What is the Information Strategy?

Government see information as key part to increasing bus use, reducing car use and raising the profile of the bus.

The Transport Act 2000 (Section 139 to 141) places a duty on the County Council to work with bus operators to determine what local bus information should be made available to the public and the way in which it should be made available. Before making decisions, the Council must enter into consultation on their proposals. The Act includes powers to recover reasonable costs from operators. The Strategy then forms a part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP).

The Bus Information Strategy describes Worcestershire's approach particularly as a means of underpinning the financial arrangements for the *Traveline* information service (previously know as PTI 2000) and how we will work with operators and other LEAs.

For some years there has been concern about difficulties which potential users have in obtaining information about bus services and how they are marketed. The County Council recognises the need to have a strategy to improve the quality and image of public transport which suffers from a poor public image – particularly buses. It has been demonstrated that high-quality information can increase bus use, which can further enhance the stability and viability of the network whilst reducing car dependency.

This 'virtuous circle' will ensure that well-targeted expenditure on public transport information generates a good rate of return in economic terms, measured against Best Value and other policy objectives.

The Strategy will set agreed standards with our partners and will need to be effectively monitored to ensure continuous improvement is achieved. This requires the Strategy to be clear with achievable targets.

Passenger information is a whole process, the aim of which is to transmit information from the service provider to the user as cost-effectively as possible. In recent times this has been difficult to achieve, with more operators running local services and each pursuing its own commercial goals. A partnership approach such as *Traveline* will reduce any conflicts between a comprehensive approach and commercial objectives.

It is important to remember that the County Council has little influence over the operation of commercial bus services in its area (around 80% of the total) and that the Council's role is limited to one of impartial provider of information. Marketing a product which might be unreliable or of poor quality could lead to some loss of the Council's credibility. The County Council can and does exercise control over those services it supports, but these are only some 20% of the total.

Overall therefore, the County Council's role might best be orientated towards the consumer, particularly with regard to printed information. This approach would assist the more general aim of promoting the County Council's image by being on the side of the consumer.

The strategy also recognises the need to harness new technology for information distribution, including the Internet and real-time information (RTI) systems through WAP phones and at bus stops and indoor terminals.

Background

For a number of years, Worcestershire County Council has provided a comprehensive public transport information service for buses, coaches and trains. Four area timetable books were produced, supplemented by updates to coincide with major service changes, together with a

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public transport map. Other leaflets provided information about individual routes and Community Transport schemes. In addition, timetable panels have been maintained at 230 bus stops.

A well-developed distribution system has enabled these publications to reach a wide range of outlets. Total cost of the County Council's printed publicity was £36,000 in 1999/2000. Since then, the development of the Traveline has reduced the production of timetable books and led to a reappraisal of requirements.

First Midland Red produces a series of free area timetable booklets and a map for its own services, which largely duplicate the County Council's publications. It has travel shops in Worcester and Redditch and a number of ticket agencies across the County. Small operators provide very little bus publicity and rely on the County Council's own publications to promote their services.

The County Council is a partner and shareholder in the West Midlands Travel Information service (WMTIS) who operate Traveline for the region. During the last year, a survey of bus stops across the region took place to provide data for the regional database. A call centre was established in July 2000 to answer all public transport enquiries in the West Midlands region, and this replaced the County Council's Bus Line enquiry service in April this year.

WMTIS now provides a journey-planning facility to timing-point level; development to full journey planning and internet access will be undertaken in 2001/02. Costs of the service is shared by the operators and local authorities.

Over the last year, the Council has developed the *easyLINK* branding to improve bus service standards – in particular access, publicity and fares. The standard has been introduced on bus routes along main corridors as part of the Council's successful Rural Bus Challenge bids and ongoing partnership with the Health Authority.

The success of *easyLINK* will significantly contribute to the outcomes contained in the LTP and to promoting the bus. Invest to Save funding (ACTIVATE) will also be used to promote the bus.

ACTIVATE is a key element of the Worcestershire Transport & Health Partnership's plans to reshape passenger transport services in the County, making them affordable, accessible, available and acceptable for the County's residents. It is an integral part of a vision to meet present day and future requirements of the County's population.

ACTIVATE will use technology to bring full integration of transport services and additional benefits from a range of initiatives, including improved information provision, co-ordination and more effective use of transport resources, together with improved ticketing and management information systems.

Current Issues

Use of a timetable database will speed up the availability of information in a variety of formats, as well as enabling bus stop displays to be tailor-made for each location. The development of Traveline still requires resolution of many data issues before moving to internet availability.

The following issues are relevant:

- ?? The move to a larger-type size to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, gives us the opportunity to reappraise the effectiveness of the area booklets and to decide on the best method of providing publicity in the future.
- ?? Evidence from passengers suggests that the existing methods of publicity distribution are not reaching all those wishing to use buses, particularly on routes where small operators have replaced or supplemented First Midland Red on their traditional routes.

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- ?? The County Council is required to achieve Best Value from expenditure on publicity. This includes the cost of administration, production, distribution, audit and recovery of bad debts in relation to the benefits received by bus users (through more travel opportunities) and operators (through increased revenue).
- ?? The development of Traveline internet-based options and “real-time” information at bus stops will in time become the primary source of information which will be supplemented by printed information which will mainly be used for the initial marketing of services.
- ?? The Information Strategy must be delivered in partnership with operators, users, etc, to achieve maximum benefits and secure continuous improvements in service provision.

Objectives

The Council has the following objectives:

- ?? To consult on its information proposals
- ?? To improve public awareness of the public transport network in Worcestershire and hence increase usage to achieve the Government’s ten-year target requiring a 10% increase in bus use.
- ?? To promote the bus use and reduce car use.
- ?? To take the lead in providing printed public transport information in the County, but work in partnership with the operators.
- ?? To ensure that information is available to all its residents.
- ?? To promote Worcestershire County Council as sponsors of “socially necessary” bus services.
- ?? To foster a positive attitude to public transport in Worcestershire.
- ?? To encourage inter-modal “seamless” journeys.
- ?? To develop information via e-technology.

The main features of the Strategy should be:

- ?? Development, in conjunction with partners, of the Traveline service into an internet-based facility.
- ?? Development of printed timetables and maps, building upon the existing approach.
- ?? Development of a distribution system to maximise the impact of printed information.
- ?? Development and management of information at key outdoor locations.
- ?? Development of the *easyLINK* image and identity.
- ?? Development of existing “free” local radio and press information.
- ?? Investigation of “real-time” information, in conjunction with local bus systems.
- ?? Review of effectiveness and efficiency of the Information Strategy.

Targets

The Information Strategy will meet these objectives by:

- ?? Contributing to an increase in bus use of 10% by 2010.
- ?? Setting standards for the presentation of public transport information, recognising the needs of the community. These will include minimum print size, alternative formats for disabled users and distribution methods which offer a choice of printed and electronic formats in a wide range of outlets.
- ?? Extending coverage to 400 bus stop displays by 2004.
- ?? Building on existing partnerships to share costs and to promote public transport as an integrated network – ongoing.
- ?? Ensuring effective promotion of Travelwise to achieve maximum awareness of the telephone enquiry service and upgrading to internet standards as soon as possible. The Traveline logo to be included on all printed information at local centres and on buses.

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- ?? Ensuring that targeted travel information is an integral part of other initiatives, including bus quality partnerships, Green Travel plans, Health Service provision, safe routes to school and leisure and tourism facilities.
- ?? Investigating the provision of electronic timetable information systems at principal town centre bus stops, main railway stations, public libraries, hospitals and other information outlets (including the Internet) – ACTIVATE Project 2001 -2004.
- ?? Improving information about local bus services at principal interchanges and improving the signing of bus stops and railway stations where bus/rail interchange is expected to take place – ongoing.

Revenue funding will need to be used efficiently to implement the Information Strategy. This can be done by reviewing existing resources and seeking partnership contributions from operators via joint initiatives. The Council will continually review with bus operators how the costs of these activities should be shared and their effectiveness.

Publishing Public Transport Information

The Council will continue, with the support of local operators, to arrange publication of a series of timetable information, maps and leaflets covering Worcestershire and distributing them to the target audiences.

The Council will research alternative ways of producing timetable information with a view to making that information available to all potential passengers. As a result, arrangements for the publication and distribution of timetables may be changed if alternative systems are found to be more effective and acceptable by the public.

To increase public confidence in bus services, the Council will encourage bus operators to concentrate major timetable changes on four dates annually and will arrange for publication of timetables and leaflets in advance of the implementation date.

In conjunction with First Midland Red, it is intended to achieve a co-ordinated approach to printed timetable production by Spring 2002.

Traveline (West Midlands Travel Information Service)

Over the past two years the County Council has been (and continues to be) actively involved, regionally and locally, in the development and delivery of the first phase of the National Public Transport Information Service. It is a shareholder in a company WMPTIS Ltd – which is the focus for partnership working between operators and local authorities in the regions to deliver public transport information, including rail services.

The County Council will use Transport Act 2000 powers to ensure that Worcestershire local bus operators meet their share of the costs of delivering Traveline, and will recover costs from bus operators in its area. The Council will meet the cost of tendered services.

Both operators and local authorities in the region are responsible for maintaining electronic timetable databases with accurate and impartial public transport information and, by April 2002, for delivering such information regionally over the Internet. The County Council in partnership with the Herefordshire Council and First Midland Red share the database for the region they serve. The database is managed by the Council with electronic links to the two partners who will maintain their own data.

Future developments will require capital funding primarily through Government funding (SCA) for:

- ?? Enlarging the capacity of the call centre to meet anticipated growth in call volume in future years.
- ?? Maintaining and upgrading the database and enquiry management software to meet enhancements which take effect in 2002, including fare information.

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?? Maximising the availability of information on the Internet, recognising the rapidly growing levels of internet access and the flexibility of the format in offering 24-hour information in a range of ways (timetable pages, journey planners, route maps, including street plans showing bus stop locations, and links to other websites.

Capital expenditure can be allocated via the LTP for expenditure on public transport information.

Bus Stop Timetable Information

The Council already maintains roadside timetable displays at 230 locations, in both rural and urban areas of the County. These displays currently provide conventional matrix timetables and other relevant information. First Midland Red has historically taken the lead in the urban areas, but there is no consistent approach by operators to the level or standard of roadside information displayed.

The Council will therefore work with bus operators to achieve a set standard of information at all bus stops throughout the County. A facility for printing individual roadside displays will be developed in conjunction with the electronic timetable databases and this will be used to prepare displays which accord with DDA regulations.

Display cases are currently owned either by the bus operators or the Council, although the former are also expected to show our multi-operators displays on corridors served by more than one company. A requirement to do this will be included in a new agreement with the bus operators.

The Council is prepared to supply display cases to District, Town and Parish Councils and other organisations (eg supermarkets) at a reduced cost, and will provide regularly updated information for display in them at no further cost. In addition, information displays at major centres such as bus and railway stations, hospitals and tourist attractions will be supplied.

Use of real-time information at bus stops will be progressed through Bus Quality Partnerships in urban areas and through Rural and Urban Bus Challenges programmes. This will make use of the latest GPS technology and will include facilities for the visually handicapped.

Bus Stop Infrastructure

Much of the infrastructure associated with public transport is unattractive and does little to promote its image. Research and anecdotal evidence identifies personal security fears at bus stop as a deterrent to bus use. The design of all new public transport infrastructure should therefore address issues relating to security, accessibility and information.

The Council and bus operators will work together to improve infrastructure through Bus Quality Partnerships and other initiatives.

As part of the Rural Bus Challenge programme, there are plans to install upgraded bus stops on the Kidderminster-Worcester-Redditch corridors, to incorporate better quality information (including provision for real-time information in the future) and illuminated waiting areas, with solar-powered lighting where appropriate. The work to be implemented 2002/03. Plans for rural bus interchanges are also being considered.

The Council will be involved at an early stage in the location, planning and design of any new infrastructure for public transport, in order to ensure that the interests of users and providers of public transport are considered. Requests for new bus stops will be considered in liaison with the highway and police authorities, District and Parish Councils.

If possible, hardstanding will be provided at well-used bus stops. This will, where practicable, incorporate raised access kerbs to facilitate their use by the mobility-impaired. This standard will always be applied on routes operating under the *easyLINK* banner.

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Electronic Passenger Information Terminals

The potential to provide comprehensive public transport information via the Internet has opened up opportunities for much wider access to information in the home, the office, schools and colleges, health centres and hospitals, and in public libraries. New outlets for electronic information, including bus and rail stations and other main town centre locations, will be developed in 2002/03, as part of the ACTIVATE Project.

Providing Information to Specific User Groups

The Council recognises the value of making available good quality information about transport services to those groups with specific needs (such as visually impaired people). The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires Travelwise to provide the same service to all passengers regardless of disability. Such information needs to be carefully targeted to suit specific local needs. Examples are textphones, talking newspapers and minority language provision. These will be investigated in consultation with the specific groups for implementation in 2002/03.

Future Developments

The Council wants to make information about public transport services available through whatever media are best suited to the needs of potential users. Over the coming months and years, this inevitably will require further investment in new technologies such as the next generation of mobile phones. Opportunities will also exist to provide timetable information which is much more personalised to an individual's needs, in print, over the Internet or to mobile devices.

The ability to monitor bus services and provide real-time information at bus stops, home and at work is becoming increasingly available and useful to the passenger. The desire for information about fares and the possibility of making the booking of tickets easier are both matters which are capable of being addressed with emerging communication technologies over the five-year span of the LTP. Adding information about the availability of taxi and private hire car services, and about tourist and other important destinations, to the County's information systems are also developments that can and should be made over the next five years.

The anticipated introduction of a new protocol for electronic bus service registration, TransXchange will assist provision for the updating of the Council's information systems to take advantage of this development and to make the availability of information quicker and more accessible.

The ACTIVATE project, in partnership with the Worcestershire Health Authority, aims to develop links between health and transport information. This will facilitate the co-ordinated planning of transport and patient appointments by making transport information available on the NHS Intranet. Through the ACTIVATE project, enquiry terminals will be provided in the three main hospital foyers, and a series of "getting to hospital" leaflets produced by Spring 2002.

Opportunities to secure delivery of information through partnership with others will be exploited wherever these can improve the information provided and/or reduce cost of delivery.

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Appendix 1

CONSULTEES

District and City Councils in Worcestershire

Worcestershire Association of Local Councils

Centro (West Midlands PTE)

Gloucestershire County Council

Shropshire County Council

Warwickshire County Council

Staffordshire County Council

Herefordshire Council

National Federation of Bus Users

Western Area Traffic Commissioner

Community First (Community Council for Herefordshire and Worcestershire)

Worcestershire Association of Voluntary Organisations in Community Care

Bus Operators

Confederation of Passenger Transport

Central Trains

WMTIS

Worcestershire Association for the Blind

Worcestershire Health Authority

Tripscope

Heart of England Tourist Board

Chamber of Commerce: Kidderminster

Worcester

Redditch & Bromsgrove

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Appendix 2: Bus Information Strategy

<i>Item</i>	<i>Current Practice</i>	<i>Proposal</i>
Timetable books	Regularly published in four areas, with Updates subject	Provide booklets according to area need, meeting DDA requirements.
Area map	Published annually	Continue subject to review
Leaflets	Individual route leaflets, Sunday Rover leaflets, etc	Continue subject to review
Press/local radio	Weekly notice on Radio H & W "Last buses/trains column in Worcester Evening News	Continue subject to review
Bus Stop displays	230 stops already provided with timetables	To increase to 400, particularly on urban and inter-urban routes by 2004
Internet delivery of timetables	Being developed as part of Traveline	Supply by 2002
Internet Journey planning	Being developed as part of Traveline	Supply by 2002
Real-time Information	None in use	Establish as part of Quality Partnerships, Urban and Rural Bus Challenge Bids
Kiosks at hospitals, bus/rail Stations and other interchanges	Under development	Part of ACTIVATE Project 2001/02
Real-time information on Internet and mobile devices	System not yet developed	Possible future development via <i>Traveline</i>
Partnership Working	Very poor	To commence dialogue with operators and user groups to discuss the above and the co-ordinated, cost-effective provision of information. Agree new partnership agreement – Spring 2002