
APPENDIX G

Bus strategy

Introduction and overview

G.1 This appendix is the Leicestershire County Council Bus Strategy for 2006-2011. The strategy forms an integral part of the second Leicestershire Local Transport Plan as required by section 110 of the Transport Act 2000.

G.2 We have prepared the strategy in line with guidance produced by the Department for Transport on preparing bus strategies, the LTP and accessibility strategies. The strategy takes account also of the guidance issued by the Bus Forum 'task and finish' groups, particularly with regard to service stability, and the emerging guidance on bus punctuality through bus punctuality improvement partnerships.

G.3 The aim of the strategy is to define the framework within which a detailed action plan for bus improvements is developed. The action plan is already in place, having been developed and refined through LTP1 and a Best Value review in 2002, a review which focused on improving service provision and resulted in an action plan with 26 agreed recommendations. Implementation of the review is now complete but many of the actions require further development over the longer-term, as set out in this strategy.

G.4 The strategy contains a wide range of measures, each intended to contribute to one or both of the LTP objectives of tackling congestion and improving access to facilities.

Background to bus service provision and partnership working

G.5 Most bus services in the urban parts of the county are operated commercially, predominantly by Arriva Midlands and Kinchbus but also First and other companies. Most rural services, and some in urban areas, are operated under contract to the County Council by a wide variety of companies. The proportion of contract services has increased steadily to the extent that the County Council now spends over £3m a year supporting services carrying 2.8m out of the 15.3m passengers a year who travel countywide. The network is complemented by a wide range of community transport services and is supported by infrastructure investment and the measures contained in our bus information strategy.

G.6 Our key partnerships are:

- With Leicester City Council in the delivery of a joint strategy for exploiting the capacity of buses to help tackle congestion in Central Leicestershire
- With First, Arriva, Kinchbus and Leicester City Council in a Quality Bus Partnership for Central Leicestershire with the same objective
- With Kinchbus, Arriva, Paul Winson and Charnwood Borough Council in a Quality Bus Partnership having the same aims for Loughborough
- With Arriva, Stagecoach and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council in a Quality Bus Partnership having the same aims for Hinckley
- With the main bus operators and Leicester City Council for the implementation of a countywide bus information strategy
- With all the District councils, community transport operators and other local groups in the East and West Leicestershire Rural Transport Partnerships

- With the City Council and our neighbouring county councils through a series of formal liaison groups and the East Midlands branch of the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers
- With the District councils for the operation of the countywide concessionary travel scheme.

G.7 This partnership working is elaborated in later sections of the strategy but two elements - working with bus operators and working with neighbouring authorities - are described in more detail here.

G.8 Bus operators are major investors in the transport system and joint working with them is essential. We work through the partnerships above and also in many ad hoc arrangements to deliver a high proportion of the actions set out in this strategy. Examples of this work include:

- Implementation of bus corridor projects, as detailed later
- Joint management of the measures in our bus information strategy, as detailed later
- Joint working with the bus operators local communities to follow up identified service gaps and propose and implement solutions
- Joint working on services they operate under contract to us. This ensures their full commitment to the quality operation and helps to guarantee that the services are best adjusted to customer requirements
- Joint working to ensure new development accommodates bus services properly. In one recent example, developer-funded work to improve access to the Asda store at Fosse Park ensured that access was also improved for buses
- Working with bus operators to ensure our general highway investment helps their services. In one recent example, input from the bus companies to a major junction improvement on the edge of Leicester resulted in realignment of bus priority lanes in the scheme, giving improved bus journey times without increasing delays for other vehicles
- Working with bus operators on the supply of passenger journey statistics. These are processed by the County Council for reporting progress towards LTP targets.

G.9 To co-ordinate this work we hold an annual operator forum, which is supported by three forum sub groups operating through the remainder of the year. As well as wider service issues, this discusses details of operation including pupil behaviour, Criminal Records Bureau vetting, contract conditions, exclusion from tendering, safety standards, emergency contract cover, breakdown procedures, and duty of care.

G.10 We also enhance the work of the QBPs by holding separate quarterly bilateral meetings with Leicester City Council and the two major bus operators. Discussion areas are similar to those for the QBP meetings, but in the bilateral meetings we are able to explore more commercially sensitive information.

G.11 We have close working with Leicester City Council, through our joint work on bus investment in Central Leicestershire, through the Central Leicestershire QBP, through the work of Area Traffic Control on the star-trak real time information system, and through the trading agreements by which we manage contract local bus services, bus passenger information and concessionary travel on their behalf. This wide range of relationships helps to ensure the closest possible co-ordination, and this is cemented by programmed regular meetings between senior officers and members.

G.12 Contacts with neighbouring counties are of course not so intense, but nevertheless range across a wide range of issues, usually on an ad hoc basis. Overall co-ordination is

provided through the East Midlands Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers. This meets regularly to discuss current concerns, share best practice and hear reports from the special interest groups attached to it, including information and ticketing, social services and community transport, rail and education transport. The group has a representative on the national committee, helping to ensure that we stay closely in touch with wider developments.

Consultation

G.13 Our bus strategy is based on a wide range of consultation over a period of years, all influencing its final shape. Amongst the main inputs have been:

- Consultation for the 2002 Best Value review, which was fully comprehensive and included questionnaire surveys, discussion groups, reviews of previous consultation and attitudinal surveys
- Continuing annual surveys of passenger attitudes, conducted on contract bus services
- A wide range of informal comment from our engagement with bus users, with local councils, through our district highway forums, and from our annual LTP consultation day held jointly with Leicester City Council
- Continuing input from our bus operators through our wide range of partnerships
- Consultation for the second LTP, which included consultation on the complete draft bus strategy and took place in spring 2005 and again in autumn 2005. Consultees included local bus operators, district councils, neighboring county councils and local user groups.

G.14 We have adjusted the strategy continuously in response to comments, with major revisions at the time of the Best Value review and following LTP consultation. We do not expect the overall shape of the strategy to alter during the coming five year period but fully expect further change to the detail in the light of customer feedback.

The objectives of our strategy

G.15 LTP2 is based on delivering six objectives:

- Tackling congestion
- Improving access to facilities
- Reducing road casualties
- Improving air quality
- Reducing the impact of traffic
- Maintaining transport assets.

G.16 Bus services have a key role to play in helping to deliver the congestion and accessibility objectives and they contribute to a lesser extent also to other objectives. Our strategy divides our work between these two main objectives, and a wide range of measures is available to meet each. Each is described under either the congestion or accessibility heading but many contribute to both. For example, the centrepiece of rural public transport provision is the hourly services network. This is provided essentially to improve access, but its regular frequency and high standards of operation are designed also to attract people to use the bus instead of cars.

G.17 It is important to note, therefore, that many of the actions to help tackle congestion also help to improve access to facilities, and vice versa. The strategy therefore needs to be seen as an integrated whole.

Tackling congestion

G.18 We aim to tackle congestion by:

- Reducing the need to travel (for example by working on school and company travel plans and better locating new development)
- Making best use of existing road space (for example by improving our traffic signal systems)
- Improving the alternatives to the car (principally by encouraging cycling and improving bus services).

G.19 Buses help because, when well loaded, they use much less road space per passenger than do cars. A central aim of the strategy is to make buses more attractive so that more people will choose to use them in preference to cars.

Improving access to facilities

G.20 Many people do not have regular access to a car or do not drive for other reasons. Public transport helps these people access services and facilities. A central aim of the strategy is to improve that access. Government now requires an accessibility strategy in LTP2, including access improvements to specific facilities for people on low incomes. Our bus strategy provides that focus and also ensures that the access role of public transport for the community at large is maximised.

The bus strategy

Tackling congestion

The quality of the whole journey experience

G.21 There is national and local research to show that people who have the choice will only use buses if the whole journey experience is of a uniformly high quality. Our strategy for making buses an attractive alternative to the car, and so helping to tackle congestion, is based on this. It requires us to improve bus information, the quality of bus stops and terminals, the speed and reliability of the bus journey, the quality and standard of the bus itself, and the service provided by the bus driver. The measures described below, with improvements to bus stops and terminals described in the section on improving access to facilities, are designed to address each of these aspects.

G.22 Since 2001 we have been carrying out annual surveys of contracted bus services to provide a whole journey experience audit, picking up the aspects noted above. Our major commercial bus service partners, in developing initiatives to improve the whole journey experience, carry out similar audits on their commercial services.

G.23 Most of our efforts in this field go into improvements to conventional bus services. Park and ride, however, also has an important part to play and is considered at the end of this section.

Role of the quality bus partnerships

G.24 The County Council can directly influence only some aspects of the service mix. To secure a comprehensive improvement we work in partnership with the commercial bus companies and other local authorities in Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs). In LTP2 we have prioritised our work on tackling congestion in the places where it is worst, namely Central Leicestershire and Loughborough. The QBPs for these areas are therefore central to our

efforts. In Central Leicestershire particularly, the work needs to be, and is, fully integrated with the efforts of Leicester City Council.

G.25 A third QBP covers Hinckley. The scope for bus company investment here is less, since bus routes are generally less profitable, but we intend to maintain this QBP in pursuit of the small scale but nevertheless valuable improvements in service which can be made. Sections below say more about the work of the QBPs.

G.26 Action 1 – We will continue to develop the QBPs as the key agency for delivering improvements in overall bus service quality.

Leicester bus corridors

G.27 Apart from park and ride, one of the most effective ways of tackling congestion in the city and outer Leicester is through bus corridor improvements in partnership with the bus operating companies. This requires a fully integrated approach between the City and County Councils, working through the Central Leicestershire QBP.

G.28 LTP2 work will concentrate on five main corridors where there is considerable scope for increasing the numbers of passengers into the City. The improvements will include:

- Upgraded bus stops with raised kerbs, new shelters and real time bus information
- Modern buses, improved schedules, customer care training and service promotion
- Bus priority at traffic signals, bus lanes and other road layout alterations where appropriate
- Better day to day operation and control to improve reliability and punctuality.

G.29 The proposed programme is integrated with that put forward by the City Council. However, we will not in all cases invest in the same corridor in the same year, with a phased approach delivering improvements within Leicester in one year and across the boundary in the county the next. Similarly, the bus companies have other constraints on their own investment programmes and we cannot expect them to be able to invest in new vehicles and other improvements to exactly our timescales: in some cases they may invest before and in some cases after ourselves. The vital element, though, is to ensure that the investment overall is comprehensive so that all aspects of the bus journey experience are improved.

G.30 We have chosen the corridors mainly because they serve the largest populations and can be delivered in the most cost effective way. After park and ride, they offer the greatest further scope for contributing to the main LTP2 target for bus passenger journeys. The five year programme of proposed construction start for each corridor is:

- Year 1 2006/07 Melton Road from the Syston area
- Year 2 2007/08 London Road from the Oadby area
- Year 3 2008/09 Saffron Road from the South Wigston area
- Year 4 2009/10 Lutterworth Road from the Blaby and Whetstone areas
- Year 5 2010/11 Groby Road from the Glenfield and Groby areas.

G.31 These five corridor schemes will bring benefits to bus services from rural Central Leicestershire and beyond, including the county towns of Melton Mowbray, Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Coalville. Improved day to day bus operations achieved through this investment will also contribute to meeting other LTP2 outcome targets for buses.

G.32 As well as tackling congestion, the Leicester bus corridors will help meet our other LTP objectives. **Access to facilities**, including level boarding at bus stops, will clearly be improved, particularly for parents with buggies and people with mobility impairments. Newer buses will also help to improve **air quality** and reduce CO₂ emissions. Apart from the five corridor schemes, other improvements to bus stops in urban Central Leicestershire and beyond will be carried out as part of the countywide programme described in the Access to Facilities section of this strategy.

G.33 Action 2 – We will continue our programme of bus corridor schemes in Central Leicestershire, in partnership with Leicester City Council and the bus companies. We plan to complete one scheme during each year of LTP2.

Other measures to improve bus reliability and punctuality

G.34 Market research consistently shows reliability and punctuality near the top of the list of required bus service attributes for potential customers. Much of the improvement in this area must come from bus company partners in scheduling services to take proper account of likely traffic conditions and in day by day operational management thereafter. We can help, however, by taking steps both to remove delay points affecting all traffic and to protect buses specifically from traffic congestion.

G.35 We have already agreed within the Central Leicestershire QBP that we will progress a punctuality improvement plan to look in detail at all aspects of the highway system which can worsen punctuality as well as building on the work already done by the bus companies to improve their own operational management. The plan, which should be in place by late 2006, will set out specific measures to tackle these problems. We intend to extend this approach to the Loughborough and Hinckley QBP's once it is tested in Central Leicestershire. Monitoring and review systems will be agreed at the next stage of this process and this will be a key input to meeting our bus punctuality target.

G.36 The bus corridor partnership schemes described above not only speed buses up but also help to improve their reliability. We are assessing the potential for further bus priority schemes in Loughborough, where there are not the long 'corridor' routes to be found in Central Leicestershire but there may be the potential for shorter lengths of bus priority.

G.37 We can also make smaller scale improvements to help buses through congestion, for example by providing short bus-only links or giving buses priority at key junctions. In other cases there will be no opportunity for bus priority but we can invest to ease traffic congestion for all traffic, with consequent benefits for bus services affected.

G.38 Action 3 – We will:

- **With the bus companies and Leicester City Council, draw up and implement a bus punctuality improvement plan**
- **Identify and implement small-scale bus priorities which can help buses through congested traffic, focussing our efforts mainly in Central Leicestershire where congestion is worst**
- **With partners in the Loughborough QBP, review opportunities for bus priorities in Loughborough**
- **Identify and implement other improvements which help all traffic but have particular benefits for buses.**

The bus information strategy

G.39 We adopted a bus information strategy, agreed with bus company partners and Leicester City Council, in July 2003. This is now incorporated in this bus strategy. It recognises the need for high quality information, properly updated and delivered through a variety of media. The implementation of the strategy by all partners is already producing marked improvements.

G.40 Our key commitments in the bus information strategy are to:

- Maintain the bus services database for the Traveline telephone and online enquiry service, with full contribution to the costs of these
- Maintain the County Council website providing comprehensive local public transport information
- Provide and distribute high quality timetable leaflets for all contract services
- Provide full guides to the hourly services network, one for the whole county and one for Central Leicestershire
- Provide guides to the services in main urban areas, delivered door to door at six-monthly intervals
- Provide and maintain bus stop displays at all main bus stops served by contract bus services
- Provide permanent on-street displays giving comprehensive local bus information in all Leicestershire town centres and in all railway stations
- Provide data for the national Transport Direct initiative.

G.41 We have joined an agreement with bus companies and local authorities across the East Midlands to change bus timetables only on six standard dates each year. This helps to ensure effective publicity for changes and to reassure passengers.

G.42 We were founder members of 'EMTIS', the East Midlands Travel Information Service, and have played a leading role in moving the regional Traveline telephone enquiry service forward to its present high level of performance. We have entered into a data sharing agreement to ensure effective input to Transport Direct.

G.43 Our bus stop database (Naptan) was the first in the country to go live with all information complete. It is successfully feeding into the national network and informing Traveline of all bus routes, including any changes to services, and of any new developments. We have held monthly meetings with other East Midlands authorities and Peterborough to share experience and ensure the database is fully co-ordinated across the Traveline region.

G.44 **Action 4 – We will meet fully our commitments under the bus information strategy.**

Real Time Information

G.45 We have a partnership with Leicester City Council, Arriva, First and Kinchbus to introduce the star trak real-time information system and associated star-text text-messaging. It is already in operation on 24 routes in the county and is widely welcomed by passengers. The system is costly and relatively labour-intensive to introduce and run, so needs to be applied to the most important routes if it is to be cost-effective. We will continue to invest to this end, focussing on quality bus corridors as they are introduced and on other areas where we are making substantial investment in bus stop facilities. In each case a partnership with the relevant bus company is required, the County Council funding the bus stop displays and the supporting central control system while the bus company funds the in-vehicle equipment. An

agreement has now been reached with Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire County and City Councils to expand the star trak system into those areas.

G.46 Action 5 – We will continue to invest in and develop the star trak system in partnership with the bus companies and Leicester City Council.

Ticketing and fares

G.47 The lack of flexible fares systems remains a disincentive to bus travel. Development has been much delayed by bus company concerns over national competition legislation but we have been working over a number of years to try to overcome these obstacles locally. Progress is now accelerating. As examples:

- A multi-operator ticket was introduced in Central Leicestershire in 2004
- We are working with bus company partners to try to extend this countywide and are introducing weekly and monthly tickets for services on the contracted services hourly network as a pilot in summer 2006
- We are working with Nottingham East Midlands Airport and other local authorities in the region on plans to offer improved bus ticketing for workers and passengers travelling to the airport, with the possibility of promotional pricing to help tackle the airport's currently very low proportion of people travelling by bus.

G.48 Action 6 – We will continue to work with partners to deliver more flexible ticketing arrangements for services throughout Leicestershire.

School and Workplace Travel Plans

G.49 Our work on school and workplace travel plans is described fully elsewhere in LTP2, and improved bus services can play a significant part in making the plans successful. We have five specialist staff liaising with schools and large employers on the preparation and delivery of plans and have already been able to negotiate a number of public transport infrastructure and service improvements.

G.50 Travel to school by bus is an important part of our school travel planning work, with three main elements funded through revenue expenditure as follows:

- Funding and managing travel for pupils with statutory entitlement. Our entitlement definitions extend well beyond the minimum demanded by legislation and we also make full use of any spare seats on buses to offer transport at a fare to non entitled pupils
- Funding and managing separate local bus service contracts for 'schools special' services where all the pupils are non entitled and pay a fare
- Bus service initiatives in association with the 16 Plus partnership to improve access to education for 16 to 19 year olds, including substantial funding for travel to further education colleges using season tickets on public bus services.

G.51 We currently transport 1,600 pupils to school by bus in addition to the 16,500 who are entitled to travel this way.

G.52 Action 7 – We will work with schools and employers in the context of travel plans to review bus service provision and make improvements wherever feasible.

Customer care and passenger security

G.53 Larger bus companies provide in-house training for staff in customer care and we complement that by using training providers to offer courses for smaller companies' drivers. So far, 80 drivers have undertaken this training through our initiative. The training includes a strong focus on disability awareness and is intended to improve customer confidence and satisfaction. We are also considering building on this by introducing 'Go-Skills' training for drivers in 2006.

G.54 Passenger security, both on the vehicle and at bus stops, is a primary concern. We consider this issue in the design and location of bus stops and shelters, work with the larger bus companies on specific campaigns where security has proved a problem, and follow up any reported individual instances to ensure pointers to future action are fully assessed.

G.55 To help deal with poor behaviour by students, we run a series of initiatives in partnership with schools, including guidance to students and drivers, provision of bus escorts, and the use of 12 buses equipped with CCTV. Our five single deck yellow school buses, designed to provide an example of best practice, operate with allocated seating, internal television surveillance, specially trained drivers, and systematic monitoring of satisfaction.

G.56 Action 8 – We will continue our work to ensure high standards of customer care by drivers and to safeguard the security of passengers.

Park and ride

G.57 Leicester is currently served by a single, highly successful park and ride site at Leicester Forest East (A47), which was opened in 1997. The bus service operating from this site typically carries 1,750 passengers each day to the City centre; diverting 200 cars each peak hour. A second site at Birstall, on the A6 to the north of Leicester, is to be constructed at the expense of developers, and is expected to become operational in late 2010. We are currently examining whether we can bring this site into operation sooner.

G.58 A major scheme bid to the Government to fund the Leicester West Transport (LWT) scheme, a three site park and ride development, was turned down in 2004. In parallel, the inspector for Leicester's Local Plan inquiry ruled against the use of one of the proposed LWT sites at Aylestone. Despite these setbacks, it remains the view of the County and City Councils that park and ride is the single most effective way to tackle congestion on the main arterial routes in Central Leicestershire, to improve access to Leicester City and to help promote the economic regeneration of the city centre.

Proposed park and ride site

G.59 As detailed in Chapter 4 of the LTP, we propose a third park and ride site to the south west of the city centre, close to M1 junction 21 and the Fosse Park retail centre. This site will be served by a frequent, non-stop bus service to the city centre. The estimated out turn cost of the proposal is £9.2m and we intend to fund the project jointly, with the County and City Councils each contributing £3.6m, together with £2m of developer contributions.

G.60 The cost of the scheme in the context of LTP2 is high, but this investment represents our commitment to park and ride as the best available means to achieve modal shift and therefore significant reductions in vehicle numbers in the peak hour on radial routes. Our modelling work suggests that, as a result of the introduction of Park and Ride and associated measures, a reduction of up to 10% in peak hour traffic flow on Narborough Road can be achieved.

G.61 A further study by independent consultants indicates that daily (weekday) patronage of between 500 and 700 vehicles can be expected, with Saturday patronage close to the site capacity of 1000 vehicles. These results indicate that a park and ride site of 1000 spaces is appropriate and that the service could be operated without ongoing revenue subsidy. Taken with the traffic impact, we have a project which, though expensive, clearly offers good value for money.

G.62 Following preliminary design and consultations to date, the proposed site includes:

- 1000 parking spaces including disabled badge-holder and motorcycle parking
- Access controls to prevent non user parking
- Perimeter landscaping to minimise noise and visual impact of the development
- Restoration of the historic Fosse Way as a public footpath
- Sustainable drainage system
- Feature central building with waiting facilities, toilets and security observation area
- CCTV coverage, full time security staff and perimeter fencing
- Integration of the site into the local cycle network, including cycle lockers
- Surfacing materials selected for aesthetics and low maintenance costs.

G.63 A technical appraisal of various alternative bus routes from the site to the City centre has also been undertaken. This has concluded that use of the outer ring road and the A47 will provide the quickest peak and off peak journeys, compared to the more direct route using Narborough Road and Upperton Road. This route also makes use of the existing bus priority corridor created for use by the Leicester Forest East park and ride service, providing a ready made low cost corridor for part of the new service route. In order to reduce journey times and improve reliability, the proposals include outbound lengths of bus lane on the A47 totalling approximately 500m in length. We will improve journey times further by introducing selective detection of buses at traffic signals, with the associated 'hurry call' on the green phase.

G.64 We expect the facility to be fully operational by the summer of 2010. This date assumes that a public inquiry will be necessary but significant savings to the programme can be made if an inquiry is avoided. We are therefore making considerable efforts to develop a widely acceptable planning application, including consultation with all key stakeholders.

G.65 **Action 9 – We will continue to develop park and ride in Leicestershire.**

Communicating with our customers

G.66 All these activities depend upon effective communications with public transport users, so that we can ensure our actions are driven by their requirements. As an example of this, we have a continuous programme of on-bus inspection in which our inspectors not only assess the service standards of contractor operators but also talk with passengers to elicit their views of the service. In addition, we survey customer attitudes to our contract services on a structured basis each year, and repeat the national performance indicator attitudinal surveys for all public transport services annually rather than at three yearly intervals as required by government.

G.67 We need also to be influenced by the views of people who do not currently use public transport if we are to increase patronage and particularly to be effective in tackling congestion. As well as keeping in close touch with national research on this, we have also carried out specific local research. For example, before introducing the Leicester to Loughborough quality bus corridor, which has produced a large increase in patronage, we undertook focus group

research with potential customers to explore further the specific attributes which would attract them to travel by bus.

Improving access to facilities

G.68 We have a well developed strategy for improving accessibility, set out in the 2002 Best Value review. This is described below, following a description of complementary work we have undertaken more recently to refine the strategy and include a more specific focus on social deprivation.

Accessibility strategy

G.69 We have developed an accessibility strategy action plan for implementation over the LTP period. The action plan will ensure that we take the necessary steps, with appropriate partners, to improve access to essential services, particularly for those from relatively deprived groups. The strategy has been developed jointly with Leicester City Council, as many people cross the authorities' boundaries on a daily basis for education, work, shopping or health services.

G.70 In taking the work forward we have followed government guidance in prioritising access to four key facilities:

- Work
- Education
- Health facilities
- Shopping.

G.71 The strategy supports our wider work and that of our partners. Working within these objectives, and particularly those of our Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement, we have defined the following vision for accessibility:

'Working with partners to ensure that scarce transport resources are directed to those groups and individuals most likely to suffer from social exclusion and where improving accessibility will be of the greatest benefit to society as a whole.'

G.72 Improved bus access to essential facilities plays a central role in the strategy, and we have worked in partnership with colleagues in the health, education and employment services, and with the bus companies, to ensure we plan effective measures. In doing so, we have been assisted by accessibility mapping software, which helps to ensure there is a sound analytical base for planning.

G.73 The main public transport proposals within the strategy include:

- Adjusting bus routes, stops and services to give better direct access to essential facilities
- Increasing awareness of bus service availability through better information provision as part of our bus information strategy
- Improving the scope and capacity of accessible community transport services throughout the county, with a particular focus on access to our main centres.

G.74 Full details of the strategy are set out in Chapter 5 of the LTP.

G.75 Action 10 –We will develop, implement and monitor our Accessibility Strategy Action Plan.

The hourly bus services network

G.76 Before the 2002 Best Value review, most rural and many urban bus services were already operated under contract to the County Council, but the pattern of services, dictated perhaps more by history than current need, did not maximise access opportunities. In the review, we concluded that we could use existing resources to provide an hourly daytime bus service within an 800 metre walk of 95% of all Leicestershire people. In doing so, we would transform access opportunities, because hourly bus services provide a range of access opportunities, whether for shopping, work, education or health, which was not possible with the previous more limited services.

G.77 That network is now in place. It is a mixture of commercial and contract services which allows us to provide a very high level of public transport access. As such, it lies at the heart of our strategy for improving access generally, and specifically for those on low incomes. The network includes:

- Strategic routes providing the key inter-urban links, both radial from Leicester and orbital round the County, including orbital services through Central Leicestershire
- Other hourly services linking strings of communities to main centres
- Local feeder services, often using small vehicles, linking in to county towns and the main services network.

G.78 In the last year passenger numbers have increased by 14% on a like for like basis on our contracted services forming part of the hourly network. Introducing the network has increased by 40% the proportion of rural residents with an hourly or better bus service available, compared to the government target of a 33% increase by 2010. This has come at a price, however, with sharp increases in bus contract prices leading to a current total support cost of over £3m a year. To ensure the network is affordable in the long term we will now focus on guaranteeing the highest quality standards and on effective promotion, so that patronage continues to increase and subsidy costs are controlled. There have been considerable successes already, with promotional effort increasing ridership by over 25% on specific routes. Our programme of service inspections against defined standards, with penalties against contractors who do not perform, is proving successful in raising service standards. Both these activities must be built upon to ensure continuing increases in patronage.

G.79 We do not believe it sensible to increase the 95% figure, for doing so would result in provision of hourly services to small rural communities with little demand for transport, resulting in poor value for money. What we will do, however, is to sustain this network and work to improve access both at other times and for the remaining 5% of Leicestershire people.

G.80 The County Council supports many evening and Sunday bus services on routes on the hourly services network. These have an important role in providing access for part time and shift workers and for young people's leisure activities but they are costly to subsidise: bus services are more expensive to operate at these times and they are relatively lightly used. These services have not yet been reviewed but will be, to maximise the targeted access they provide. In carrying out the review we will build on the experience of innovatory services we have been running in the Vale of Belvoir and Market Harborough areas in recent years, which are designed specifically around the evening access needs of young people. We will work further with young people's groups to ensure all the new services respond as closely as possible to their access needs.

G.81 Action 11 - We will:

- **Work to secure network stability for the hourly services network so that Leicestershire people have dependable bus services to plan around**
- **Help to secure this by continuing and improving our partnerships with our contractors to drive up service standards, and by developing further our continuous programmes of service promotion**
- **Review all evening and Sunday bus services with the intention of maximising the targeted access they offer within the limits of what is affordable.**

Complimentary Public Transport Services

G.82 31,000 people, 5% of the County's population, do not have immediate access to an hourly bus service. We have been working to ensure that the communities affected have services appropriate to meet their access needs. To secure this we consult closely with community representatives and existing service users to arrive at a consensus as to the best access solutions. This process has resulted not only in the continuation or introduction of conventional bus services but also in the introduction of innovative demand responsive service types particularly suited to places where there is limited demand. Examples are shared taxi services, community minibuses and rural dial-a-ride.

G.83 Our work in this area has been helped by the county's two Rural Transport Partnerships, covering the east and west sides of the county respectively. These have enabled a joined-up approach to be taken with the initiatives of district councils, community transport providers and others, and have also helped us to access Countryside Agency funding for specific initiatives. The responsibilities of the Countryside Agency have now been transferred to the East Midlands Development Agency but, despite possible funding difficulties, we intend to continue developing the rural transport partnerships as a key means of helping better access solutions in the rural areas.

G.84 The first round of improvements to rural services was made in parallel with the introduction of new hourly bus services elsewhere. As a consequence, there has not been the time for as thorough an investigation of priority needs and best value solutions as we would have wished. We will therefore reassess all these services over the LTP2 period, working at greater length with the local communities. We expect as a consequence to introduce more 'small vehicle' services and to reduce conventional bus services, and believe this will increase access opportunities without increased cost. We will develop processes for service monitoring and review further and introduce these at the same time.

G.85 These are general-purpose services. In parallel, the Council is already active in a number of initiatives to improve transport availability for specific purposes. An example is a pilot initiative run in partnership with health authorities and voluntary sector service providers, using volunteer car drivers. This is proving successful in making it easier for those without their own transport available to access health appointments in the five areas covered by the pilot. We intend to develop this in the medium term into a more comprehensive joint initiative, providing funding can be obtained. This also has clear links with the more specific accessibility planning described above.

G.86 Action 12 – We will:

- **Review and improve services to small rural communities in a 5-year programme, looking for solutions using small vehicles which will maximise access opportunities within affordable limits**
- **Continue to develop the work of the East and West Leicestershire Rural Transport Partnerships**
- **Sustain our access to health initiative and develop it towards a countywide model.**

Transport for disabled people

G.87 We have for many years supported special services for people who have difficulty using conventional bus services. Most of these are operated on our behalf by voluntary transport schemes using volunteers' cars and community owned minibuses. A target in the Best Value review to expand the service to provide countywide coverage has been achieved, helped by the introduction countywide of a zonal fares scheme. We do, however, need to help recruit more volunteer drivers if supply is not to be rationed by lack of driver availability. We also need to continue working with the voluntary sector to support best practice in scheme management and the maintenance of high quality standards.

G.88 New low-floor buses help many people with mobility impairments. All new buses are now of this type and many routes in the county, including some contract services, already have them. Accessibility is improved further if raised kerbs are provided at bus stops, giving nearly level access. We have already installed raised kerbs at over 230 stops across the county and we will continue with these programmes during LTP2, as well as increasing the use of low-floor buses on contract services.

G.89 People with learning disabilities can often find it difficult to use public transport. In partnership with smaller bus operators we have already carried out customer care training for drivers, which has included disability awareness: the larger bus operators carry out their own customer care training. In our bus information strategy, outlined above, we are giving particular attention to simplicity and clarity in presenting timetable information. In providing concessionary travel for people with learning disabilities we already support individuals in the use of normal bus services, rather than specialist transport, wherever possible. We will develop this area of work further during LTP2 in consultation with our disabled customers and the bus companies.

G.90 Action 13 – We will work with voluntary sector providers to maintain service standards, develop new service management initiatives and recruit more volunteer drivers, as well as continuing to develop all our services for improved access by disabled customers.

Bus stop upgrades

G.91 Raised kerbs help those with mobility impairments but also contribute to making buses more accessible for many others, including parents with children in buggies and people with heavy shopping. We plan an intensified programme, funded from LTP capital. Before choosing the type of raised kerb to use, we examined best practice from a number of midlands authorities in a joint study with Leicester City Council.

G.92 We will also continue to invest in new bus shelters, and we now have a countywide maintenance contract for these to ensure that they are kept to high standards. Bus stop improvements include better standards for the display of timetable information and, where appropriate, the provision of star trak real time information. We implement bus stop upgrades with a four level hierarchy, the levels being determined by type and level of usage. The standards used are:

Level	Where implemented	Standards
1	High pick up, medium pick up but with older people or children. High proportion of users or high profile such as village centre with potential growth.	Shelter usually with lighting and seating, raised kerbs, timetable information, bus stop/stand clearway (if necessary), star trak (if on real-time route)
2	Medium pick up, high pick up but frequent service, no pavement space for a shelter	Pole and flag, timetable case and star trak (if on real time route) and/or bus stop/stand clearway, (if necessary)
3	High drop off, or sister stop to a stop with raised kerbs regardless of use	Raise kerbs, pole and flag, timetable case, bus stop/stand, clearway (if necessary)
4	Low use both pick up and drop off, usually rural stop	Pole and flag case (and may be a timetable case)

G.93 This investment will be mainly carried out at the same time as we implement bus corridor projects but we will also invest elsewhere within Central Leicestershire or Loughborough where the services are operated to high standards and improved infrastructure could contribute to increased patronage. We will also continue our programme of grants for joint funded bus shelters in rural communities and, in addition, will continue to ensure that new development provides appropriate upgrades to bus stops in the vicinity of the site.

G.94 Action 14 – We will invest in extensive programmes for the provision of improved bus stops and bus shelters.

Interchanges

G.95 Easy interchange makes the bus much more useful for journeys further afield. Interchange can be improved by better location of stops, improved waiting accommodation and critically by clear information and signing. This applies not only to interchange between buses but also to interchange at rail stations and at Nottingham East Midlands Airport. We have already prioritised interchanges for improvement and have completed many, often in partnerships with district councils and sometimes with rail industry companies. These have particularly focussed on interchanges in the county towns.

G.96 We will continue this programme through LTP2, and plan to include a major improvement to access at Loughborough rail station in partnership with the Borough Council, private sector developers and the rail industry. Our proposed major scheme bid for Loughborough will include substantial upgrading of bus interchange facilities in the town centre. Elsewhere, as well as improving interchange at Melton Mowbray rail station, we will turn our attention to interchanges in the smaller urban areas where improved facilities will further improve access to bus services.

G.97 Action 15 – We will identify during LTP2 a priority list for improvements to bus interchanges and implement these to a defined programme during LTP2.

Concessionary travel

G.98 Leicestershire has for many years had a comprehensive countywide scheme of concessionary travel for elderly and disabled people. This offers half fare travel well above the minimum standards defined by government, an alternative choice of travel vouchers usable on buses, trains and taxis for those living in the more rural areas, and free or flat fare travel passes for people with some types of disability. Concessions are currently provided for 67,000 elderly and 11,000 disabled people.

G.99 In April 2006 we will introduce further improvements to the scheme with our district partners. The Government has decided to fund free off-peak travel within each district area and we will introduce this additional concession whilst at the same time maintaining all the added value benefits of the existing scheme. Local free travel will further reduce the cost barrier to access.

G.100 There is currently some uncertainty over the longer-term future of the scheme, following the 2006 budget announcement that there will be government-funded national free travel from 2008. In the meantime, however, we will continue to work with our district council partners to maintain a comprehensive travel and efficiently administered scheme, ensuring particularly that there are no barriers to eligible people claiming concessions.

G.101 Action 16 – We will work with our district council partners to maintain the comprehensive travel scheme, keeping administrative arrangements under regular review for cost effectiveness and working to ensure that there are no barriers to eligible people claiming concessions.

Accessibility and the planning process

G.102 Careful consideration of the location of new development can help to reduce access difficulties and at the same time make transport overall more sustainable. The County Council's guide to developers, newly revised in 2004 as "Highways, Transportation and Development", makes these links clear. The new techniques of accessibility mapping can be used to help guide development location decisions and further development of this work has been integrated into our accessibility strategy.

G.103 We are also producing a guide to public transport requirements in new developments. This will be intended to make development more accessible and more sustainable, and also to generate sufficient patronage to deliver commercial bus operation at the end of any period of planning obligation support for public transport. Development layouts should be designed for good bus access, and specific measures following that can include provision of new or diverted bus services, prepaid season tickets for new residents, green travel plans, and bus stop infrastructure such as level access kerbs and new bus shelters. We will seek transport assessments which set clear modal split targets for public transport use and which are realistic as to how these are to be achieved.

G.104 Action 17 – We will develop further guidance on the public transport and accessibility requirements of development and make that widely available.

Funding

G.105 We spend approximately £2.7m a year supporting contract local bus services, £0.4m a year for accessible transport, £0.15m a year on publicity and promotion and £0.8m a year for concessionary travel. In addition, government rural bus grant of £0.87m a year is spent to help support services in rural Leicestershire.

G.106 Countryside Agency funding has contributed significantly in the past to the work of the county's two Rural Transport Partnerships. We hope to develop a similarly close relationship with successor staff within the East Midlands Development Agency to help ensure continued funding for rural transport initiatives.

G.107 We will seek developer contributions where significant development is proposed and bus services would not otherwise be provided on a commercial basis. Generally, subsidy is required to pump prime services over the life of the development or up to five years. We are building up an increasingly successful record in securing such funding.

G.108 The DfT issued a new invitation for Kickstart bids last year to replace the Urban and Rural Bus Challenge competitions. We led a consortium application involving the six councils in the Three Cities sub-region, Nottingham East Midlands Airport, incumbent bus operators and the East Midlands Development Agency. The consortium has subsequently received £700,000 to improve services to Nottingham East Midlands Airport for three years starting in April 2006, and to improve associated infrastructure. Kickstart is a valuable source of funding and we will bid again with our partners for other initiatives in future years.

G.109 The Rural Bus Grant funds about 25% of the contract bus network, offering vital support for the hourly network and other rural contract services, with current grant of £910,000 a year. It plays an essential part in ensuring we can maintain our 95% access level.

G.110 The DfT also provides support to aid the development of school travel plans. In 2004/05 we received £82,000 and schools in Leicestershire received £222,000 for work within school premises.

G.111 Action 18 – We will continue to seek appropriate external funding to add to the continued funding for the bus strategy supplied by the County Council.

Conclusion

G.112 The 18 actions in our strategy are in nearly all cases already fully resourced and being implemented using the funding resources noted above. Partnership working is key to many of them, and our various partnerships are already proving themselves to be effective. Overall, therefore, we consider the risk to effective implementation to be low, and as further confirmation of our confidence can quote our success in implementing fully the recommendations of our 2002 Best Value review.

G.113 The measures in our strategy are designed to improve access and to help tackle congestion, in an integrated way. We will continue to monitor carefully the effects of our work, and adjust our plans as necessary as we implement our strategy over the next five years.

