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# SCRUTINY REPORT

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORT (BUSES) TASK GROUP**

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## **SCRUTINY REPORT**

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**Completed: January 2008**

Committee Services Officer: Andy Jessop

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# ***TRAVELLING FIRST CLASS?***

**SURVEYS, REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT (BUSES) TASK GROUP**

***OF BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL***

**WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS TO ACHIEVE:**



***A VISION OF A NEW AND PRESTIGIOUS BUS STATION IN THE CENTRE OF  
BROMSGROVE***



***MODERN ACCESSIBLE BUSES, SPECIALIST TRANSPORT SERVICES,  
BETTER ROUTES, MORE FREQUENT SERVICES, REAL TIME TRAVEL  
INFORMATION, BETTER WAITING AREAS, IMPROVED DRIVER TRAINING  
AND CUSTOMER SERVICE***

**Task Group Members:** Councillors B. Lewis F. CMI (Chairman), D. Hancox, Mrs. J.D. Luck, P.M. McDonald and C.R. Scurrrell).

18<sup>th</sup> January 2008

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## 1 Foreword

I am pleased to present this Scrutiny Report on behalf of the Task Group members, and am indebted to Councillors D. Hancox, Mrs. J. D. Luck, P.M. McDonald and C.R. Scurrrell for their support, assistance and determination in completing this challenging review. I am also very grateful to David McGrath (Facilitator, Link Support Services (UK) Ltd), our Scrutiny Support Officer Andy Jessop, and to Ray Crossland, representing the Bromsgrove Disabled Action Group. Members and officers of Worcestershire County Council Integrated Transport Strategy Group were also very generous in giving their time and co-operation and informing our thinking by attending our Scrutiny meetings.

Our Group carried out two surveys of bus passengers to gather evidence of their experiences and knowledge of bus travel at first hand, and we also invited widespread participation via post and email using the 'Together Bromsgrove' newsletter. Our gratitude is extended to the 257 members of the public who informed us of their experiences, gave us their opinions and forwarded ideas for consideration by the Task Group.

In addition, and to reinforce our Scrutiny, particularly with regards to accessibility and inclusion, the Group appraised the merits of Redditch Borough Council's "Dial-a-Ride" Scheme, and we are particularly grateful to the Peter Rose (Redditch Dial-a-Ride, Shopmobility and Market Manager) for his guidance in this respect. Representatives from the Group also attended a meeting of the Equalities and Diversity Forum, and subsequently considered a report from them entitled "Achieving Disability Equality in the Bromsgrove District" which highlighted (inter-alia) that accessible public transport was needed for disabled people who did not own a car; that transport within the district was poor, and that, accordingly, it was a "number one priority issue."

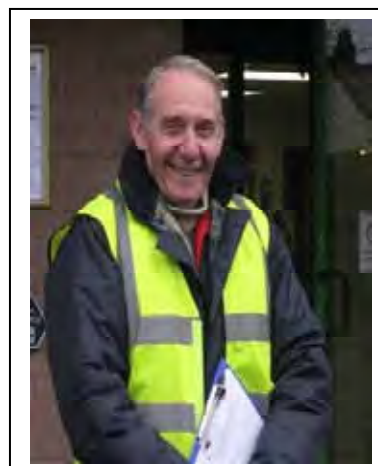
The review – and this report - has two facets to it:

- (1) it reveals the shortcomings of Bromsgrove Bus Station and its infrastructure, the non-existent bus service to and from the railway station, the general mediocrity of the services currently available and the low level of local public regard; and
- (2) it identifies the potential for Bromsgrove to achieve a new, prestigious station, infrastructure and service that is truly 'fit for purpose' which should inspire current users and entice car owners from their vehicles.

We do not believe that the proposals contained in this report are 'pipe-dreams' or a 'wish list'. We believe that there is an emerging political will and an overwhelming social and environmental case for a radical overhaul of our local transport system within the regional transport context.

Councillor B. Lewis F. CMI,  
Chairman, Public Transport (Buses) Task Group,

January 2008.



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## 2 Summary of recommendations

1. Establish a Partnership Project Team to plan, raise funds and implement a new purpose-built town centre bus station for Bromsgrove.

Against the backdrop of increasing traffic volumes and its associated adverse effects on congestion, air quality and carbon emissions, together with the timely prioritising of the regeneration of Bromsgrove town centre, this Council should encourage the establishment of a Partnership Project Team consisting of all relevant stakeholders to achieve the best possible result for a new and improved facility on this existing site.

*(Cost: It is not envisaged that this will involve any financial implications, other than perhaps some minor initial set-up costs).*

2. The need for a major review of routes and frequencies to provide (a) better links to outlying areas (b) better links to major amenities such as Hospitals and (c) evening and Sunday services.

A major complaint which emerged from the surveys and questionnaire replies was that more frequent services and better links were required to outlying areas, key community amenities (e.g. hospitals) and better evening routes and Sunday services were requested. Accordingly, the Task Group are of the view that the County Council, along with bus operators and Bromsgrove District Council should embark on a major review of routes and frequencies to produce new business cases to provide those services required by the community (e.g. a circular service connecting Bromsgrove, Redditch, Worcester, Kidderminster and returning to Bromsgrove).

*(Cost: It is envisaged that the County Council would initiate such a review, possibly with the help and co-operation of the Local Strategic Partnership Transport Theme Group, or externally from someone like the Bus Users UK Group).*

3. Introduce a bus shuttle service between the proposed new railway station and the town centre.

The new railway station being built by Network Rail will have a "Park-and-Ride" facility adjacent to it, which will be in accordance with the County Councils "gold" or "silver" standard. The Task Group recommend therefore that this Council should participate to the fullest extent in a new partnership aimed at supporting and advising upon the bus interchange facility to the proposed new rail station, e.g., advising on routes and frequency based on local research.

*(Cost: This matter should be referred for discussion by the Railway Station Theme Group).*

4. Modern accessible bus fleets through proactive involvement by Bromsgrove District Council and Worcestershire County Council to develop a new 'vehicle rolling stock' (buses) strategy and bid for funds.

This should be addressed/achieved via the County Council's rolling stock renewal strategy. The Task Group recommends that this Council supports moves by the County Council to continue to develop such strategy and invites this Council to become proactive partners in future bids for new rolling stock. The Task Group also requests that the Council submits this report as part of the "evidence" required to support such bids.

*(Cost: Nil).*

5. Joint feasibility study to introduce 'Dial-a-Ride' and other community transport to Bromsgrove.

The Task Group recommend that, in accordance with best practice, preparatory discussions be commenced with Redditch Borough Council to assess the feasibility of a joint bid (via the County Council) for a co-operated Ring-and-Ride scheme, and also that the Council should investigate with the County the potential to introduce a Community Bus Service to further "infill" gaps in current services.  
*(Cost: Nil. However, there would be a cost implication should a joint scheme with neighbouring Redditch Borough Council for an extended Dial-a-Ride scheme be implemented).*
6. Provide new bus shelters and improve waiting areas.

It was noted that the County Council were to introduce a "Worcestershire Standard" bus shelter/stop, which was commended by the Task Group, as it was felt that there is a need for a uniform standard, and they recommend a period of consultation to establish whether (and where) more pick-up points could be located (see below). The Task Group also requested that, given the implications for winter bus travellers, urgent action should be taken at a number of sites mentioned in the report to repair damaged/vandalised bus shelters.  
*(Cost: There would be a cost implication for any repairs carried out to shelters, or for the provision of any new/additional shelters within a non-parished area of the District.*
7. Consider other (convenient) pick-up areas.

In addition to the need for more (modern) bus shelters, a number of people responding to the surveys indicated that consideration could also be given to (a) an increased number of pick-up points (to bridge the walking gap especially for those with mobility difficulties); and (b) the flexibility to "flag down" drivers in areas where it is safe to do so.  
*(Cost: Nil).*
8. Improve bus time tables and make them more widely available.

The County Council are currently considering the production of a new strategy to apply a consistent approach to the marketing and delivery of information on passenger transport services in Worcestershire, and, as part of such review, will re-assess all their printed, electronic and face-to-face and marketing information. Accordingly, the Task Group (a) commends the move towards a "best practice strategy" by the County Council in this regard, and (b) urges Bromsgrove District Council to use a variety of "engagement" methods available to it (e.g. Together Bromsgrove, website, etc.), to consult with the public further to support the County's preparation of a new marketing and information strategy.  
*(Costs: Nil).*
9. Offer Bromsgrove District as a 'pilot' area (to the County Council) for the introduction of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) at major amenities.

Clearly Bromsgrove should not be left behind in the move towards modernising the information (and methods of providing information) to our bus travellers. There are a range of initiatives being planned or suggested, from a new railway station to a new bus station and town centre redevelopment, which makes this essential. The Task Group therefore recommends that the Council becomes a pilot authority to work with

our County Council partners to develop and implement a local best practice marketing and implementation strategy which can become a model for the County. (Costs :Nil).

10. Introduce a 'London Underground' style bus route map.  
In order to help local residents plan and envisage travel around the area, it is recommended that, as part of the review, a route map be produced similar to the London Underground system map. The map would be based on a North/South and East/West configuration to enable it to capture the main destinations, i.e. Birmingham/Bromsgrove/Worcester (being North/South) and Redditch, Bromsgrove, Stourbridge (being East/West). This would enable all principal villages and estates along these routes to be listed together with the appropriate bus service number. (Costs: Nil – this could be something that the County might sponsor/organise the launch of a design award)
11. Improved driver training to improve customer service.  
The County Council are seeking to ensure the development and delivery of appropriate training and assessment programmes from September 2008 (Passengers) and September 2009 for all small and medium sized operations in Worcestershire. The Task Group therefore (i) commends the County's Strategy for bus driver training to this Council; (ii) asks that a copy of this report be forwarded to all bus operators drawing their attention to the broad issue of reminding drivers of their duty of care and courtesy to passengers; and (iii) recommends that a newsletter in this regard be sent from the County Council to all operators and drivers. (Costs: Nil).
12. Proactive involvement by Bromsgrove District Council in the Worcestershire County Council Transport Strategy.  
Having established a good working relationship with the relevant officers from the County Council during the consideration of this issue, it is the view of the Task Group that this Council should continue to foster this good relationship through a proactive involvement in the Worcestershire County Council Transport Strategy. (Costs: Nil).
13. A new Bus Station for Bromsgrove  
The existing bus station is wholly owned by Worcester County Council, and, as such, future development would be their primary responsibility. Our liaison with the County has engendered a positive response leading to a general appreciation that
  - (a) It is essential that the town centre bus station is completely rebuilt (preferably on the existing site) and should involve public consultation at the design and layout stage, which should include 'County Standard' bus shelters and signage;
  - (b) The site of the present bus station is the preferred site according to the public survey, and lends itself to be developed incorporating an Information Centre and perhaps a Police Drop-In Centre; and
  - (c) The existing toilet block should be re-located, possibly on ground opposite the Drill Hall)

Our discussions with Worcestershire County Council have revealed a willingness to establish a Joint Working (or Focus) Group with the critical focus of achieving a new Bus Station for Bromsgrove.

*(Costs: There will no doubt be a cost implication in effecting (a), (b) and (c) above, but which are unspecified at this point in time.)*

14. Joint County and District Town Centre Steering Group

The Task Group Chairman, Councillor B. Lewis F.CMI, be invited to sit on the Joint County and District Town Centre Steering Group to assist the Council in ensuring any approved recommendations contained within this Scrutiny Report are implemented.

*(Costs: Nil).*

### 3 Background and terms of reference

*'Increasing traffic volumes and its associated adverse effects on congestion, air quality and carbon emissions is a key problem....'*

*The situation is likely to continue to deteriorate as long as the private car remains the dominant mode of travel choice, even for short journeys...The proposed growth in travel demand arising from the Regional Spatial Strategy puts further emphasis on the needs to provide a sustainable and realistic alternative to the car for certain types of journey'*

*(Passenger Transport Accessibility Best Practice Report November 2007 – Worcestershire County Council)*

#### Terms of Reference

At a meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board held on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2007 it was decided that a task group would be established to scrutinise issues relating to public transport in and through the Council's area, with specific reference being made to buses.

The Task Group's terms of reference, which were compiled by the appointed Chairman, Councillor B. Lewis F. CMI, were approved (as amended) by the Board at its meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007, although the Chairman did remark at the first meeting of the Task Group that there was a possibility that the work of the Group might involve some "cross-border" enquiries (i.e. transport systems employed by West Midlands/Worcestershire County Councils). Further comments were made at a subsequent meeting of the Cabinet, where the Leader suggested that the scope of the Task Group should be extended to include the impact of the proposed re-development of the Bromsgrove Railway Station, particularly with regard to issues associated with the relocation option which would allow for increased parking capacity, a bus interchange facility, and potential for a Park-and-Ride station in a strategic location. Comments were also expressed that transport links to railway stations across the whole of the district should also be covered by the scrutiny exercise. Whilst it was conceded that these latter points were extremely important and relevant issues, and that due consideration would be given during the overall deliberations, it was considered that, with the timescale available to the Task Group for consideration and report, they would not take up a predominant amount of the Groups' time and/or recommendations. (Indeed comments were made that this was an issue worthy of a possible scrutiny exercise of its own). For information, the full terms of reference are set out in the attached **Appendix 1**.

#### Summary

It is a Government requirement that Local Authorities provide a Public Transport Strategy that best meets local needs and provides best value for money, at the same time subsidising services which are considered vital to the public good, thus allowing the community to access social activities, health care and educational amenities.

In this regard, a Local Transport Bill was published in November 2007, and covered four key policy areas, namely (i) Improving local bus services; (ii) Reforming local transport governance; (iii) Updating the legal framework for local road pricing schemes; and (iv) Delivering the new regulatory framework for bus services ( See attached notes from the Local Government Association at **Appendix 2**).

Briefly, the role of the Public Transport (Buses) Task Group was to examine the current bus services (or the lack of), timetables, bus condition and age, and the general availability and acceptability to current bus users at large within the Bromsgrove District.

### **Methodology**

There were a total of 9 Task Group meetings, and at the first meeting a schedule of work was compiled, and the group decided on a range of activities, including

- Endeavours to establish who was operating the various bus services, and to interview the key Personnel if possible;
- An examination of timetables, fares and available subsidies;
- Liaison with Worcestershire County Council to establish their remit for services, current thinking and opportunities to work together;
- Discussions with representatives from Equalities and Disability groups regarding accessibility and inclusion;
- Involvement of the District Council's Assistant Chief Executive and Transport and Engineering Officers;

To bring together the above-mentioned points a "One Page Strategy" was adopted (see **Appendix 3**) to focus and clarify members' aims into specific areas i.e.,

- (a) Listing 'ambitions' to promote 'step change' and creative thinking;
- (b) Establishing current performance levels so that our 'starting point' for the review was grounded in reality;
- (c) Wide consultation of the travelling public with a view to establishing current satisfaction levels and areas for improvement;
- (d) Consultation with strategic partners and other transport experts;
- (e) Development and resource support for members (e.g. training, admin and facilitation support);
- (f) Project management planning (i.e. who does what, when, how and to what timescale); and
- (g) Anticipated outcomes.

***This approach meant that the scrutiny investigation was not simply an exercise in 'fault finding' or appraising the 'status quo' but instead a purposeful, evidence based examination of transport issues (focused on buses) and an earnest attempt to articulate a new, achievable vision for Bromsgrove***

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## 4 Consultation and background research

### Opening Gambit – press release

At the start of the review a press release was issued by the Council, and the Public were encouraged to submit comments and suggestions relating to bus services in the town and its environs. Nineteen letters and emails were received and it became obvious that more work was needed to engage directly with people who had views but did not tend to correspond with the Council.

### Contacting Bus Operators

The Task Group Chairman also wrote to the Managing Directors and Chief Executives of the fourteen bus companies Operating in/through Bromsgrove (**Appendix 4**) enclosing a questionnaire and seeking their views. Sadly, only five replies were received, two of which were in the form of personal interviews, with Mr. Mark Davis, proprietor of MRD Travel, and Mr. Sean Simpson, Network Performance Manager, First Travel.

### Face-to-face surveys of bus users

After opting to apply a more hands-on approach, the Task Group undertook **two** face-to-face surveys of the public at Bromsgrove bus station and obtained the views of **107** concessionary travellers. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at **Appendix 5**.

**Survey no.1** was held in the late morning and resumed in the late afternoon of Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2007, and collected (in the main) views from concessionary bus pass holders. This survey also captured objective data regarding the **condition of buses** (e.g. age and accessibility) with some subjective comments regarding external appearance.

**Survey no.2** was conducted in the early evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2007 and involved interviews of some **40** commuters.

Whilst carrying out these surveys we also sought views of a small number of bus drivers, people who were considering using the buses, and two local beat Police Officers.



## Reply form in 'Together Bromsgrove' magazine

The survey was designed by the Task Group in conjunction with officers from the County Council and also became the basis for a separate postal survey (i.e. reply form) which was issued in the winter edition of Bromsgrove District Council's own publication 'Together Bromsgrove'. The reply form was aimed at both bus users and non-users. This 'easy to use' format was more successful than the initial press release and generated **91** responses.

The survey form is titled "Bus User Survey for Bromsgrove District Council" and is part of the "IMPROVEMENT" section of the "Together Bromsgrove" magazine. It contains the following questions and options:

- Q1 How many times per week do you use bus services?**
  - Every day
  - At the weekend
  - Once a week
  - Once a fortnight
  - Once a month
  - Other (please specify)
- Q2 Why do you usually take the bus?**
  - Work
  - Shopping/leisure
  - Social
  - Visiting family/friends
  - Education
  - Hospital
  - Tourism
  - Other (please specify)
- Q3 Which of these things would encourage you to use the buses more often? Number your top 3 with 1 being the most important?**
  - More convenient pick up/drop off points
  - Improved waiting areas
  - More direct routes
  - Cheaper fares
  - More information about public transport
  - More frequent service
  - Cleaner buses
  - More accessible buses e.g. lower platforms
  - Reliable service
  - I use it as much as I am able to already
  - Other (please specify)
- Q4 Do you have a car at your disposal today?**
  - Yes  No
- Q5 Where do you CURRENTLY look for passenger travel information? • Please tick ALL that apply.**
  - Local media
  - Leaflet
  - Website
  - Telephone
  - On the bus
  - By text/SMS
  - At the bus stop
  - I just know
- Q6 Where would you PREFER to look for passenger travel information? • Please tick ALL that apply.**
  - Local media
  - Leaflet
  - Website
  - Telephone
  - On the bus
  - By text/SMS
  - At the bus stop
  - I just know
- A FEW BRIEF DETAILS ABOUT YOURSELF PLEASE**
- Q7 How old are you/What age group do you belong to? • Please tick ONE only.**
  - 18 or under
  - 19-24
  - 25-34
  - 35-49
  - 50-64
  - 65+
- Q8 If you are 60 years old or over, do you have a concessionary travel pass?**
  - Yes  No
- ARE THERE ANY OTHER COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?**
  - YES  NO
- WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE KEPT INFORMED OF OUR REVIEW OF BUSES?**
  - YES  NO
- IF YES - PLEASE SUPPLY DETAILS E.G. NAME ADDRESS/EMAIL**

The form includes several empty boxes for providing details and a logo for "worcestershire county council" at the bottom right.

In total, our consultation exercise resulted in responses from **257** members of the public being received.

## Equalities and Diversity

As referred to earlier, as part of the terms of reference, the Task Group covered accessibility and suitability of bus services for people with mobility difficulties. It is interesting to note the comments contained in a separate report recently completed and entitled "Achieving Disability Equality in the Bromsgrove District" by Rhyan Berrigan. For completeness, a copy of part of that report is attached (**Appendix 6**), and the parts of the report which related to public transport are shown on page 19, paragraph 4.3.

Members of the Disability Action Group also very kindly reciprocated with our visit to them by attending some Task Group meetings and participating in our survey work.

## The Expert View

Mr. Steve Harrison (Project Leader, Transportation) Worcester County Council and his colleagues were immensely helpful in providing us with background data, reports and examples of 'best practice' which has inspired us to be positive, forward looking and creative in what we can achieve for Bromsgrove.

Likewise the Chairs' review of the Ring and Ride Service in neighbouring Redditch was ably supported by Mr Peter Rose during a 'benchmarking visit' in November '07.

## To avoid re-inventing the wheel:

Worcestershire County Council have recently (November 2007) published a series of Best Practice Reports to 'support the development and provision of a high quality passenger transport system...' We have drawn on these reports to (in part) substantiate and inform our recommendations and commend these reports to Bromsgrove District Council. It is our hope that, in turn, our work helps to inform the Bromsgrove dimension of these County-wide reports i.e.

- **Passenger Transport Infrastructure Best Practice Report**
- **Passenger Transport Accessibility Best Practice Report**
- **Passenger Transport Vehicles & Rolling Stock Best Practice Report**
- **Traffic Management and Parking for Passenger Best Practice Report**
- **Passenger Transport Marketing and Information Best Practice Report**
- **Community Transport Best Practice Report**
- **Land Use and Development Control for Passenger Transport**
- **Executive Summaries Best Practice Workshops 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 2007**

Source [www.worcestershire.gov.uk/transport](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/transport)

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## 5 Making sense of the numbers

Statistics can prove or disprove any point. There are inevitably potential issues of (a) surveyor bias (which we have done our best to remove); (b) the vested interests expressed when talking to professionals and interest groups (e.g. bus drivers, operators, strategic partners etc.); and (c) whether the people (for example) who respond to postal surveys are typical of the travelling public. In addition, our 'consultees' expressed multiple views, and some of the opinions captured were sometimes hurried as passengers boarded their buses.

Nevertheless we have endeavoured to speak to *'the ordinary man and woman on the Bromsgrove omnibus'* and there are a number of irrefutable trends that emerge from the survey work. The trends will be obvious to anyone who spends even a short period of time investigating this matter and they cannot be ignored.

Of 91 **postal replies** received via the Together Bromsgrove survey;

- **30** respondents said that more **frequent services** was their **first priority**;
- **22** respondents said that more **frequent services** was their **second priority**, and
- **5** respondents said that it was their **third priority**.

Therefore 57 people (nearly 63%) rated this as one of the top three priorities.

Other main priorities included the need for:

- More information (12 first priorities);
- A reliable service (11 first priorities);
- More convenient drop of points (9 first priorities);
- Improved waiting areas (6 first priorities);
- More direct routes (6 first priorities).

In our first "face-to-face" survey of 107 bus users at Bromsgrove Bus Station, 88 people asked us to **record specific comments on the survey sheet (indicating a strong opinion)**. Of these:

- **35** people made comments relating to **poor frequency and gaps in routes**;
- **13** comments were received concerning the need to improve the **bus station**;
- **5** comments described '**rowdyism**' on the buses by school children;
- **9** people expressed dissatisfaction with **timetabling** arrangements;
- **9** people made adverse comments regarding **drivers**;
- **17** respondents felt that they were generally satisfied but added a caveat stating that **bus frequency and the bus station need to be improved**.

In our second face-to-face survey involving 40 commuters, **strong opinions** were received from 32 people. Of these:

- **17** comments were received concerning the need to **improve the bus station**;

- **13** people made comments relating to **poor frequency and gaps in routes**;
- **2** made comments regarding 'nefarious behaviour' of school children in and around the station area.

In both 'station surveys' it was noticeable that people were highly likely to comment on the area that they were standing in whilst responding to the survey – particularly if it was (as with the December survey) cold, raining, with little shelter, poor seating and a predominance of litter!!

To summarise therefore the issues commented upon most often are:

- (a) The need to improve the **FREQUENCY** and **RELIABILITY** of the bus services;
- (b) The need to bridge **GAPS** in **ROUTES** and;
- (c) the need to **IMPROVE THE BUS STATION** itself;

Other issues that were mentioned less often – but are nevertheless very important are also dealt with in this report e.g. the need for

- (d) greater **ACCESSIBILITY** on the buses for people with mobility difficulties;
- (e) improved **ROLLING STOCK** and **DRIVER TRAINING**;
- (f) a reduction in **NUISANCE** and **LITTER** caused by young people using the bus services and station; and
- (g) a new railway interchange.

This report therefore attempts to provide realistic solutions to these issues which, we feel, **can** be achieved with our partners.

## 6 A new bus station for Bromsgrove

To say that Bromsgrove has a bus station is somewhat of a misnomer. It is more accurately described as a 'linear arrangements of bus stops' poorly suited for that purpose.

The station is characterised by:

- **Poor access for bus drivers** (who sometimes have to circle to gain access – and are unable to stop at designated points);
- **Poor waiting areas** that are inadequately sheltered from the elements (of particular concern given the potential for hypothermia for the elderly);
- **Inadequate timetable information and no 'real time' information;**
- **Poor signage** which adds to the feeling of **confusion and congestion;**
- A general appearance of being **run down with poorly maintained public toilets;**
- Frequent complaints of **poor links to outlying areas and inadequate service frequency** and **unhelpful drivers;**
- Frequent complaints of **rowdy school children littering the vicinity;** and
- A feeling that Bromsgrove Bus station is the '**poor relation**' compared to others areas (Worcester, Kidderminster etc.).

In their own words, here is a sample of comments from survey respondents:-

*"The bus station is dirty, badly maintained, few seats or timetables"*

*"Provide better cover from the rain"*

*"Buses don't stop at designated places - very confusing"*

*"The bus station is improved but still very poor compared to Worcester and Kidderminster"*

*"The bus station is appalling – there are no seats"*

*"Don't re-site the bus station to Recreation Road – this will involve an extra walk for the elderly and mobility impaired"*

*"Switch off engines at Bromsgrove bus station"*

*"I am partially sighted- there is a lack of shelter when waiting"*

*“Buses and coaches easily congest the area - have to circle 3 times to get in”  
(DRIVER)*

*“Put the number 93 on the bus stop so people know where it will stop” (DRIVER)*

*“The toilets at the station are appalling”*

*“Provide better cover from the rain...I’m cold and wet”*

Bromsgrove bus station is tolerated by the local community as a ‘necessary evil’ but it is certainly not an advert to promote increased use of the service.

### **A new Bus Station for Bromsgrove**

**The existing bus station is wholly owned by Worcester County Council**, and, as such, future development would be their primary responsibility. Our liaison with the County has engendered a positive response leading to a general appreciation that

- (d) It is essential that the town centre bus station is completely rebuilt (preferably on the existing site) and should involve public consultation at the design and layout stage, which should include ‘County Standard’ bus shelters and signage;
- (e) The site of the present bus station is the preferred site according to the public survey, and lends itself to be developed incorporating an Information Centre and perhaps a Police Drop-In Centre; and
- (f) The existing toilet block should be re-located, possibly on ground opposite the Drill Hall)

Our discussions with Worcestershire County Council have revealed a willingness to establish a Joint Working (or Focus) Group with the critical focus of achieving a new Bus Station for Bromsgrove.

*(Cost: There will no doubt be a cost implication in effecting (a), (b) and (c) above, but which are unspecified at this point in time.)*





## Bromsgrove – The Way Forward

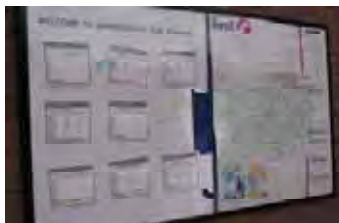
- A Partnership Approach (for bus and rail stations):
  - County & District Councils (officers & members)
  - Infrastructure providers (e.g Network Rail)
  - Service operators
  - User representatives
- Agree outcomes;
  - Quality of facilities
  - Capacity
  - Implementation programme
  - Ongoing funding
- Identify costs
- Identify funding
- Deliver scheme

**We therefore recommend that Bromsgrove District Council agree to initiate and participate to the fullest extent in a new partnership focused on achieving a new bus station for Bromsgrove**

**We currently have this:**



Linear stops/poor seating  
A narrow slip road prone to congestion



Poorly presented  
time-table Information



Culverts used for dumping  
Extensive littering

**Working with our partners we COULD have something more like this:**



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## **7 Improved routes and frequency**

A major complaint which emerged from both the 'face to face' survey work and the "Together Bromsgrove" questionnaire establishes the requirement for more frequent bus services and better links to

- (a) **Provide new or extended services to outlying areas where residents feel cut off and unable to use public transport;**
- (b) **Provide better links to key community amenities (such as hospitals)** where there is obvious demand but limited and inconvenient supply (e.g. services finishing before visiting hours); and
- (c) **Provide new and better evening routes and Sunday services** as it is apparent that a lack of these services frustrates the use of other public amenities.

### **Improved Routes and Frequency**

A lack of frequency and gaps in routes and services was **the** issue most complained about in the surveys undertaken.

**The Task Group is of the view therefore that the County Council, in conjunction with its bus operators and Bromsgrove District Council, should embark on a major review of routes and frequencies to produce new business cases to provide those services required by the community.**

*(Costs: Nil)*

Section 9 of this report expands on this recommendation to include a review of rolling stock (and funding bids) as part of the County Council's move to develop a 'Vehicles and Rolling Stock Strategy for Worcestershire'

Below are the details, comments and suggestions received from current bus users which underpin our conclusions:

**(a) Provide new or extended services to outlying areas where residents feel cut off and unable to use public transport**

**In their own words:** LINKS TO WYTHALL / HOLLYWOOD / CHARFORD / KIDDERMINSTER AND HAGLEY

*"I Live in Wythall- can't get to Bromsgrove without going to Redditch or Brum"*

*"Wythall and Hollywood only have an hourly bus service- forces us to use car"*

*"I can't get from Birmingham to Wythall at night - can't go to the theatre"*

*" We are cut off and can't use buses"*

*"A Sunday and evening service is needed for Wythall"*

*"More Sunday buses in Charford"*

*"More frequent service needed through Belbroughton, currently every 1.5 hours"*

*"The last bus from Kidderminster to Bromsgrove is at 4.30pm !"*

*"143 service has been reduced - Birmingham Rd/Lickey end residents don't have bus route"*

*"Hagley is very poorly served. Some of the 192 service axed recently"*

*"Hagley, Romsley, Clent, Bromsgrove not linked up"*

*"The Hagley link is terrible"*

*"I can't get home to Redditch from Bromsgrove after 6.00pm"*

*"I can't get to Redditch from Romsley in time for work. Would use bus if I could."*

*"Very poor service which is unreliable, can only use car"*

*Services criticised for poor frequency included the 93, 141, 143, 144, 145, 177, 192, 202, 318 and 627.*

It is apparent, therefore, that the bus services connecting Bromsgrove with Birmingham, Redditch and other outlying areas are **not satisfying public demand**. The survey illustrates the demand for improvement.

**(b) Provide better links to key community amenities**

The population of Bromsgrove is served principally by four hospitals. The scrutiny review found that evening visiting to all, with the exception of the Princess of Wales hospital, was not possible as the bus services were not compatible with visiting times.

A similar situation is evident on Sundays, when hospital visiting is more convenient to most.

Bus services (in general) from Bromsgrove to the various hospitals is severely criticised for the lack of appropriate service – it is felt that this must be addressed sooner rather than later as we have an ageing population which will, by definition, be more likely to require hospital services and will need the support of family visits.

**In their own words: LINKS TO LOCAL HOSPITALS**

*“I work at Bromsgrove Hospital (POW). The Sunday bus is every two hours, the 334 and 343 leave Bromsgrove within four minutes of each other-stagger them to provide a better service”*

*“I am Disabled – it is a nightmare since they stopped the 143 route( Catshill to the Alex Hospital)”*

*“More buses needed at night on 143 - they finish too early for those visiting Hospital”*

*“I live in Hollywood. The only bus from the Alex Hospital is the 178 Johnsons Travel. It leaves at 17.39 but visiting time is until 8.00 p.m.”*

*“We need more frequent links to HOSPITALS in Redditch & Bromsgrove - means long waits”*

*“X3 no longer stops at PRINCESS OF WALES & ALEXANDRA HOSPITALS”*

*“Direct bus from Bromsgrove to Alex hospital please”*

*“Kidderminster hospital bus should go to Redditch hospital without us having to change bus”*

*“Would like 3rd bus to Redditch hospital from Catshill’.*

**(c) Provide new and better evening routes and Sunday services** as it is apparent that a lack of services frustrates the opportunities to use other public amenities.

**In their own words: IMPROVE SUNDAY AND EVENING SERVICES**

*“Can’t get home to Redditch from Bromsgrove after 6pm -therefore can’t socialise in Bromsgrove”*

*“More evening buses between BROMSGROVE and Redditch”*

*“Alvechurch needs a better weekend service and extra morning buses”*

*“Need to re-introduce the evening service on the 177”*

*“The last bus from Kidderminster to Bromsgrove is 4.30 p.m. - needs to be later”*

*“Stoke Prior needs a Sunday service”*

*“More Sunday services in Charford”*

*“A Sunday and evening service for Wythall’*

*“Sunday and Bank Holiday buses please for Wythall/Hollywood”*

*“Better weekend service and extra morning buses for Alvechurch”*

A specialist Sunday Service provided by the County or “a. n. other” bus operator could be the solution.

The Task Group noted that with the introduction of cross-country ‘concessionary’ bus passes scheduled to commence in April 2008, it is conceivable that there will be an increase in the number of passenger journeys – and therefore increasing levels of frustration felt by passengers at the poor frequency and gaps in routes and service.

**The Task Group recommends that Worcester County Council investigates the opportunity and business case to provide, via a bus operator or through one of its own County-owned (and branded) buses, to complete a circular service connecting Bromsgrove, Redditch, Worcester, Kidderminster, and returning to Bromsgrove ( i.e. a circular route).**

## **8 A bus shuttle link from the new railway station**

The new railway station being built by Network Rail will have a 'park and ride' facility adjacent to it. The 'park and ride' area will be in accordance with Worcester County Councils' 'Gold' or 'Silver' standard.

It is considered essential that that the proposed bus interchange (providing the shuttle service to the town) is completed simultaneously with the other works.

*A number of comments were received regarding poor links between buses and the rail service e.g.,*

*"The 143 from Redditch doesn't give enough time to pick up train passengers – we need a Station Shuttle Service"*

*"All buses should link up to the new station that I heard about".*

In the County Council's most recent best practice publication 'Executive Summaries' Best Practice Workshops 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2007, it is clear that new Rail and Bus Stations should operate to the 'Gold or Silver Standard'. In relation to bus interchange facilities this includes:

*'ADEQUATE CAPACITY FOR ALL SERVICES: Sufficient bus bays/platforms/layover facilities to accommodate existing levels of service with sufficient capacity/space for future expansion' and....*

*FREE CAR PARKING: For passenger transport ticket holders and bona-fide bus/rail users. All stations are to be treated as Park-and-Ride sites' (page iv)*

**We therefore recommend that Bromsgrove District Council agrees to participate to the fullest extent in a new partnership aimed at supporting and advising upon the bus interchange facility to the proposed new rail station – e.g. advising on routes and frequency based on local research**

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## 9 Improve rolling stock (buses)

*“There is clear evidence that improving the quality of passenger transport vehicles has a major role in supporting balanced and integrated transport strategies. Passenger transport vehicles meeting the needs of users in terms of safety, accessibility, capacity, comfort and information can support the development and funding of a passenger transport network offering a realistic and sustainable alternative to the car”*

(Passenger Transport Vehicles and Rolling Stock Best Practice Report Nov 2007).

So how good is the bus ‘rolling stock’ serving the people of Bromsgrove – and does it need to be upgraded? During the first ‘face to face’ survey at Bromsgrove Bus Station, one of the Task Group members recorded details of the number of buses frequenting the site, their age (based on registration plate) and made a subjective judgement on the external appearance (e.g. clean or not).

Comments were also made by our surveyor regarding the age and condition of buses, together with their ability to accommodate wheelchairs, a pram or a shopping trolley. In short, the age and accessibility of buses left a lot to be desired.

The survey indicated the following:

- 26 **different** buses arrived at the bus station (a number of local route buses made a number of “repeat” journeys while we were on site);
- 16 were managed by “FIRST” (61.5%);
- The average age of the “FIRST” buses was **7 years old**;
- The average age of other buses was **9 years old**;
- The oldest bus operated was by “CLEARWAYS”, which was **seventeen years old** (1990);
- The general overall visual impression of all buses was that of “*ok/ reasonably clean*”; and
- Both “FIRST” and “LUDLOWS” had low floor entrance capabilities but none of the buses could be said to have all of the facilities needed to encourage use by people with mobility difficulties, as referred to below.

(N.B. Subsequent to the surveys undertaken by the Task Group, a Vehicle Examiner from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) has conducted vehicle condition checks at the Bus Station, during which he spoke to a number of drivers, reminding them of the legalities of leaving their engines running unnecessarily, and also of the damage to the environment and the health risk such action poses to the general public within the vicinity of the bus station).

### The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Regulations 2000

These govern the provision and minimum standards for various features including:

- A space for a wheelchair with suitable safety provisions
- A boarding device to enable wheelchair users to get on and off vehicles
- A minimum number of priority seats on buses for disabled passengers
  - The size and height of steps
  - Handrails to assist disabled people
- Colour contrasting of features such as handrails and steps to help partially sighted people
  - Easy to use bell pushes throughout a bus
- Audible and visual signals to stop a bus or request a boarding device
  - Equipment to display the route and destination

The view from our expert adviser on accessibility (who was present at the survey) Mr Ray Crossland is:

*“I see no evidence that bus operators are fully ‘gearing up’ to serve the needs of people with mobility difficulties (or even carrying heavy loads). Even if people with mobility difficulties can access the bus through low level platforms, it is then extremely difficult for them to move around. This means that a crucial part of the community is discouraged from using the buses.”*

The Task Group supports this view and none of our surveyors (or passengers) felt that Bromsgrove is served by modern, well equipped and fully accessible bus fleets.

From a legal perspective we believe that all **new** buses must now conform to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and that all buses, regardless of age, must conform by 2017.

However, by virtue of the cost of DDA compliant buses, even at the “second-owner” stage, it is questionable whether the smaller operators can sustain the ever-increasing costs based on their current business models. This has ‘knock-on’ effects for the increasing aged rolling stock ranging from poorer air quality from inefficient engines to a general deterrent to travel by bus.

The need to support the development and introduction of new, suitable rolling stock through subsidies is overwhelming. The position of our partners at the County Council is clear and positive and involves drawing together a vehicle and rolling stock strategy for Worcestershire.

- *‘for inclusion within the Worcestershire Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy’...and to*
- *Provide the evidence base required to underpin funding bids to external bodies (such as the Dept of Transport) for enhancement of the Worcestershire passenger Transport network’ (page i Executive Summary)*

An important addition to the establishment of appropriate and modern rolling stock for Bromsgrove would be through the introduction of a 'Ring-and-Ride' and Community Taxi, or similar scheme. For clarity:

A Ring-and-Ride/or Dial-a-Ride is a 'door to door' service which is pre-booked by individuals. These individuals become members of the sponsoring organisation and pay a fare. The service is usually grant funded and operates using minibuses or cars.

This is different to a Community Bus Service/Community Taxi scheme whereby minibuses are operated by volunteers and paid drivers serving regular routes to published timetables – available to all members of the public.

We have certainly found demand for both services. For the Ring-and-Ride Scheme it is possible to envisage a link between (or expansion of) the currently successful service in Redditch to provide an efficient and effective Bromsgrove/Redditch service facility. (Further details of the Redditch scheme can be obtained by telephoning 01527 64910, or by visiting the website [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) and keying in Redditch Dial-a-Ride).

Approaches for funding could be made via the County Rolling Stock Strategy for start up Capital and Revenue costs for both Ring-and-Ride and Community Bus Services. It is worthy of note that the annual cost to Redditch Borough Council for the 'Ring-and-Ride' scheme is approximately £300,000 - however, some relief is available by way of grants and fares recovery.

#### **In their own words: RING-AND-RIDE SERVICE**

*"I would like a ring-and-ride service like they have elsewhere. I have 2 sons – both in wheelchairs"*

*"We need a ring-and-ride because there is no bus service from Hollywood to Bromsgrove - I'm 76"*

*"A ring-and-ride for Wythall please".*

This Task Group therefore:

- |  |
|--|
| <p>(a) <b>Supports moves by the County to develop a Vehicles and Rolling Stock Strategy and invites this Council to become proactive partners in future bids for new rolling stock;</b></p> <p>(b) <b>Requests that the Council submits this report as part of the 'evidence' required to support such bids;</b></p> <p>(c) <b>Commences preparatory discussions with Redditch Borough Council to assess the feasibility of a joint bid (via the County) for a co-operated ring-and-ride scheme; and</b></p> <p>(d) <b>That Bromsgrove District Council should also investigate – with the County Council – the potential to introduce a Community Bus Service to further 'infill' gaps in current services.</b></p> |
|--|

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## 10 Providing new bus shelters

The Worcestershire County Council's Transport Strategy identifies that a 'Worcester Standard' of bus shelter/stop will be introduced. This will bring uniformity across the County, save for a variation in style to suit village scenes. It is conceivable that in future, Parish Councils will be asked to contribute to the funding of village bus shelters.

This approach should be encouraged as the way forward and is **recommended**.

Certainly there is some evidence of public dissatisfaction with the condition (and lack of modernisation) of bus stops, e.g.,

*"Other places have decent bus stops and shelters - we're not very good at those"*

*"Proper seats in bus shelters please"*

*"Solar powered stops and shelters to provide information about the next bus".*

There were also comments regarding the need to repair specific bus stops/shelters, e.g.,

*"Replace bus shelters in Marlbrook"*

*"Re-instate bus shelter by the Museum in Bromsgrove. It was well used."*

*"Shelter needed in Belbroughton, outside Talbot"*

*"More bus shelters in Charford"*

*"Bus shelter o/s St Chads Church in Rubery has a leaking roof and is vandalised"*

*"Please repair seat in Alvechurch to Redditch Bus stop - Parish Council won't do it because of vandalism"*

*"Cleaner buses please and MORE bus shelters".*

*In addition to the need for more (modern) bus shelters, a number of people during our surveys mentioned that consideration could also be given to:*

*(a) an increased number of pick-up points (to bridge the walking gap especially for those with mobility difficulties); and*

*(b) Flexibility to 'flag down' drivers in areas where it is safe to do so.*

**This Task Group commends the need for a uniform standard and recommends a period of consultation to establish whether (and where) more pick-up points could be located. The Task Group requests urgent action to repair the damaged/vandalised shelters identified above given the implications for winter bus travellers.**

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## 11 Transforming Bus Timetable Information

Each local authority has a statutory duty to provide bus service information (Transport Act 2000). There is however no statutory duty to market the local passenger transport network although the need to do so proactively in conjunction with our County Council partners has become apparent throughout this review.

Our survey research found widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of availability (and accuracy) of timetable information.

### In their own words: THE NEED TO IMPROVE INFORMATION

- “More timetables at bus station, also at Morrisons and bus stops in Aston Fields”*
- “Not enough timetables at Bromsgrove Station”*
- “Timetables needed for all services at the Bus station”*
- “Don’t put timetables too high on bus shelters so we can’t read them”*
- “Catshill timetable info is limited – I get it from Library - need more details*
- “A map showing routes is a good idea”*
- “Notify local routes in local papers”*
- “Real-time electric info at bus stops”*
- “Ink smudges easily on timetables”*
- “Timetable information is FALSE on the bus stops Redditch to B'ham - says there is NO Sunday service”*
- “Need better timetables so that I know where buses go and can plan trips”*
- “Proper timetable books needed”*
- “Changes in timetables are not properly announced”*
- “This timetable at the bus station is 2005 therefore out of date”*
- “More accurate timetables at station please”.*

In order for bus travellers to plan their routes and time efficiently, bus time tables must be:

- Current
- Available at bus stops, on buses, local shops, community locations and other amenities (e.g. Railway station)
- Free
- Relevant to a particular route
- Updated

Timetables should also be

- Displayed in larger print or Braille for those with visual impairments
- Available in a range of format from electronic media, paper format to ‘electronic real time passenger information displays (RTPI) at shelters
- Positioned appropriately
- Using quality printed materials which does not decay, fade or smudge easily.

Clearly there is scope for the County Council, Bus Operators and Bromsgrove District Council to work in concert to provide high quality local travel information.

The County Council is currently considering the production of a new strategy to

*“apply a consistent approach to the marketing and delivery of information on passenger transport services in Worcestershire. It is also recommended ( in the document referred to below) that ‘Worcestershire County Council prepare a review of all their printed, electronic and face-to-face information and marketing information.....”*

Further, (and under the Transport Act 2000),

*“it is recommended that, where an operator fails to ensure the provision of required information, Worcestershire County Council uses its powers under the Transport Act 2000 to arrange for the necessary information to be made available to the public and to recover from the operator the reasonable costs of doing so’.*

Page iii

**The Task Group therefore:**

- **Commends the move towards a ‘best practice strategy’ by the County Council**
- **Urges Bromsgrove District Council to use a variety of ‘engagement’ methods available to it ( e.g. ‘Together Bromsgrove’, website etc.) to consult with the public further to support the County’s preparation of a new marketing and information strategy.**

Insofar as Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) is concerned, Worcester County Council are looking to work with other local authorities in this regard:

*“to provide where appropriate,( and subject to funding), passenger transport information in electronic format...at key passenger transport interchanges such as bus stations and rail stations.”*

*The further roll-out of RTPI systems to other locations should be explored in terms of costs and benefits. These additional locations should include:*

- *Hospitals*
- *Town and City Centres*
- *Major Leisure and sport facilities*
- *Along key passenger transport service corridors that carry a volume of passengers.”*

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Clearly Bromsgrove should not be left behind in the move towards modernising the information (and methods of providing information) to our bus travellers. There are also a range of initiatives being planned or suggested (from a new railway station to a new bus station and town centre re-development) which makes this essential.



**This Task Group therefore recommends that Bromsgrove District Council becomes a pilot authority to work with our County partners to develop and implement a local best practice marketing and implementation strategy which can become a model for the County.**

**A London Underground style route map for Bromsgrove and the surrounding area.**

**In order to help local residents plan and envisage travel around the area it is recommended that (as part of the above mentioned review) a route map be produced similar to the 'London Underground System' map.**

The map should be based on a North/South and East/West configuration to enable it to capture the main destinations, i.e., Birmingham, Bromsgrove, Worcester ( being North/South) and Redditch, Bromsgrove, Stourbridge (being East/West).

This would enable all principal villages and estates along these routes to be listed together with the appropriate bus service number.

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## 12 Improving bus driver skills

A condition of the Worcestershire County Council subsidy to bus operators requires bus drivers (operating on subsidised routes) to undergo a two hour driving test. The re-testing is at three year intervals.

Our survey revealed less than complementary comments regarding the skills and attitudes of some drivers ranging from:

*“Drivers are impatient”*  
*“Can’t understand the drivers”*  
*“Bus drivers move off before people are seated”*  
*“Rude drivers--sometimes break the speed limit”*  
*“Drivers not cheerful”*  
*“Drivers could be more pleasant”.*

It should be noted, however, that we **did** receive some complimentary comments (shown below) but it is clear that there is not a consistent level of driver skills or customer service across the network of providers:

*“145 drivers are friendly”*  
*“007 drivers are helpful and kind.”*

Neither is the problem simply a local issue. In the County Councils’ recent ‘Passenger Transport Driver Training Best Practice Report Nov 2007’, they cite national statistics regarding complaints against drivers, i.e.,

*“A study in 2005 concluded that of the 43,043 complaints received (0.002% of all passenger journeys), 36,634 were attributable to drivers” (Section 3.10.1).*

A number of the most commonly complained about issues were mentioned by our respondents, which included

- Poor or dangerous driving
- Poor/ unhelpful attitude
- Not allowing those unsteady on their feet to sit down before moving off, etc.

We have found the County Councils’ attitude and approach to this issue as helpful, positive and forward looking. In the above-mentioned Best Practice Report they state:

*“Worcestershire County Council, as a major provider of and sub-contractor of passenger, education and special needs transport, has the opportunity to take a lead in the setting of both driving standards, customer care and disability awareness for all members of the community’ (Section 5.3).*

The County are seeking to ensure the:

“Development and delivery of CPC training and assessment programmes from September 2008 (Passengers) and September 2009 for all small and medium sized operations in Worcestershire.”

(It may be prudent to consider the impact of the said training in terms of passenger satisfaction at a later date).

**This Task Group therefore:**

- **Commends the County strategy to Bromsgrove District Council**
- **Asks that a copy of this report be forwarded to all bus operators drawing their attention to the broad issue of reminding drivers of their duty of care and courtesy to passengers**
- **Recommends that a newsletter in this regard be sent from the County Council to all operators and drivers.**

**APPENDICES**

**1 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**2 LOCAL TRANSPORT BILL**

**3 “ONE-PAGE STRATEGY”**

**4 CHAIRMAN’S LETTER TO BUS COMPANIES/LIST OF COMPANIES**

**5 FACE TO FACE SURVEY FORM**

**6 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY REPORT (RHYAN BERRIGAN)**

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE –**

#### **PUBLIC TRANSPORT(BUSES) TASK GROUP**

The terms of reference as set out below were noted and approved at the first meeting of the Task Group, held on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007:-

“Bus routes and frequencies; bus load factors; bus suitability and age; value for money, and accessibility and suitability of the bus service for disabled users”.

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## Local Transport Bill

8 November 2007

### Councils must have a greater say in delivering high quality, sustainable and affordable public transport.

LGA key messages on the Local Transport Bill, published today:

- **Strong local leadership is essential in tackling congestion and improving local transport services.** This will require councils to join up all the different elements of transport to benefit the local economy, the environment and to provide better access to services for all; as such, solutions must be decided and delivered locally.
- **Franchised contracts for local bus services should be delegated to local authorities, rather than unelected panels.** We support the proposals designed to enhance partnerships and remove obstacles to franchised local bus services. However, we oppose approval of these by an appointed panel, when this power should be delegated to democratically accountable local transport authorities.
- **Greater powers over transport planning should be devolved to groups of councils in major urban areas.** Proposals to devolve more transport powers and allow for a bottom up reform of governance arrangements in major urban areas are positive. This will give authorities realistic options for improving services and enable a more cohesive approach to transport planning. We want flexible transport powers devolved to groups of authorities at the sub-regional level and allow individual areas to make decisions on governance arrangements.
- **Road pricing are only one vital element of a wider package required to allow councils to raise investment and improve local transport services.** We support the increase in flexibility for councils to bring forward local road pricing schemes. But such schemes can make sense only as part of a wider package of powers over decisions and funding that allow councils to invest in roads, buses and trains and provide better public transport to benefit the local area.

#### Summary of government proposals:

The stated purpose of the bill is to tackle congestion and improve public transport through empowering local authorities to develop local solutions to local transport challenges. The intention is to provide a tool-kit of powers within an overarching national framework.

The bill covers four key policy areas:

- Improving local bus services
- Reforming local transport governance
- Updating the legal framework for local road pricing schemes
- Delivering the new regulatory framework for bus services

#### Further information

For further information on this briefing, please contact Andy Taylor in LGA Public Affairs at [andy.taylor@lga.gov.uk](mailto:andy.taylor@lga.gov.uk) or 020 7664 3334.

briefing

## Summary of key proposals affecting local government

### Improving the quality of local bus services

#### Voluntary partnership agreements and statutory quality partnerships

- Voluntary partnership agreements will be strengthened with a revised competition test to allow multilateral agreements between a local authority and more than one operator.
- Existing arrangements would be changed to allow quality partnership schemes to cover minimum frequencies, timings and maximum fares where there are “no admissible objections” from relevant bus operators. This bill would also allow for improvements to be phased in over time.

#### LGA view

- The LGA supports the proposals to allow councils to enter agreements with more than one operator and to specify minimum frequencies, timings and fares. We are disappointed that the bill now states that a QPS can include provisions as to maximum fares, frequencies or timings only where there is agreement from operators. This will give operators, rather than local authorities, the upper hand in negotiating deals on fares and frequencies and seriously undermines the objective of giving Local authorities more control over bus services.
- It appears that some progress has been made on competition issues since the publication of the draft bill. We will look closely at the revised proposals to ensure that they are proportionate and give local authorities and operators' confidence that they can satisfy the competition authorities.

#### Quality Contract Schemes

- The current arrangements require local authorities to demonstrate that quality contracts are “the only practicable way” for a local authority to implement a policy in its bus strategy. Under the bill's proposals, this will be replaced by a set of criteria requiring councils to demonstrate that a scheme is in the “public interest”. The current requirement for schemes to be approved by the Secretary of State will be replaced by approval by an Approvals Board appointed by the Senior Traffic Commissioner. The time limits for quality contract schemes will be extended and provisions will allow for schemes to be phased in. There will be no requirement to secure approval for straightforward continuations of schemes, or for certain types of variations to existing schemes.

#### LGA view

- The LGA has argued for a significant reduction in the barriers to the use of quality contracts where Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) consider this approach to be the best means of delivering their bus strategies. We therefore support the replacement of the Secretary of State's approval role with a new framework for approval. However, we believe that this power should be delegated to LTAs as elected representatives of their communities, rather than appointees who have no democratic mandate.
- We are therefore pleased with the proposals to remove the “only practicable way” test and support the revision to the proposals for the “competition” test to be replaced by a broader “proportionality” test within the public interest criteria.
- We remain concerned that the process for development and approval of Quality Contracts may present barriers to local authorities' ability to implement the schemes in practice. We will be lobbying during the parliamentary process for the bill to address these issues.

#### Punctuality

- The bill includes proposals designed to improve quality of punctuality data provided to Traffic Commissioners and to give them additional powers to hold operators to account for their contribution to the performance of local bus services. Local

authorities' contribution to performance will be monitored and managed through the national indicator on punctuality included within the new performance framework and the duties under the Traffic Management Act.

#### **LGA view**

- The LGA recognises that the current regulation exercised through traffic commissioners is inadequate and that better monitoring of standards of service delivery is required. We are pleased that performance arrangements for local authorities are within the framework for local areas as proposed by the Local Government White Paper. Traffic Commissioner involvement and intervention should come into play only where issues affecting punctuality cannot be resolved locally.

#### **Traffic Regulation Conditions**

- The bill clarifies that traffic regulation conditions may be applied in order to address an anticipated future need, as well as an existing one.

#### **LGA view**

- This will allow proactive rather than purely reactive imposition of traffic regulation conditions which will be helpful, for example in preventing excessive competition between operators (bus wars) before it has significant detrimental effect on services.

#### **Other measures**

- Other measures include increasing flexibility for local authorities to subsidise services; a review of the Bus Service Operators Grant; removal of the requirement for the Secretary of State to give consent to the sale of council-owned bus companies. The bill will also remove restrictions to allow Passenger Transport Authorities to buy and lease buses, bringing them into line with other LTAs.

#### **LGA view**

- These are a positive set of proposals. We particularly interested in working with government to look at how subsidies which are currently related to fuel usage could be used as effectively and as well targeted as possible to tackle objectives such as carbon reduction.

### **Reforming Local Governance**

- Local authorities in metropolitan and other areas outside London will be empowered to carry out a review of transport governance and propose changes to existing arrangements. In a change to previous proposals, authorities will no longer require direction from the Secretary of State to initiate a review of governance.
- The bill changes the name of Passenger Transport Authorities to Integrated Transport Authorities.
- The bill also provides options for updating the existing powers and duties of PTAs, including:
  - Make changes the constitution of an existing PTA
  - Make changes to the existing transport responsibilities of PTA/Es, district councils and potentially the Secretary of State in respect of Highways Agency and heavy rail.
  - Allow new PTA/E to be set up or existing PTA/Es to be dissolved with agreement of all authorities affected.
  - Make changes to the geographical area covered by a PTA/E, similarly with the agreement of local authorities affected. New boundaries will be able to follow district boundaries rather than county boundaries as previously proposed.
- Cities will be able to develop its governance arrangements over time and keep arrangements under review.

### **LGA view**

- This set of proposals is intended to allow bottom-up reform of governance arrangements and enhance powers for transport in the major urban areas. Much of this directly reflects the LGA's arguments for devolving transport powers to cities and their surrounding city regions and stronger leadership within PTAs. We have argued that as circumstances differ in different parts of the country, flexibility to allow decisions on the most appropriate governance arrangements to be made by individual areas is crucial. We are pleased that the requirement for the Secretary of State to "direct" local authorities and PTAs to review local arrangements has been dropped.
- We are also pleased that Government has listened to arguments from local government that new sub-regional governance arrangements should be able to be extended to cover district boundary areas, rather than having to include whole county areas as was previously proposed.

### **Local road pricing schemes**

- The bill aims to give more flexibility to local authorities to take forward local road pricing by:
  - replacing the requirement for approval from Secretary of State with a new framework of accountability which would set out guidance on scheme design, the legal framework, how local authorities can use the revenues arising and options for how it might operate.
  - allowing a scheme to be taken forward jointly by an LTA and relevant PTA
  - requiring local authorities to apply their share of the net proceeds of the scheme to support the achievement of its local transport policies
  - removing the specific powers of the Secretary of State to require a local authority to consult or hold a public enquiry, while still allowing the LTA to do so if it wishes.
- It also includes measures to ensure consistency and interoperability between local schemes through specifying standard data formats, specifying unique numbering for equipment and setting standards for encryption and security.
- The bill also makes it very clear that it makes no provision for a national road pricing scheme.

### **LGA view**

- Increased flexibility for local road pricing is welcome and we are pleased to see that the consultation document states that the decision to undertake such schemes is for individual areas to decide.
- The proposals in the bill do not however address significant barriers to establishing local schemes :
  - how the substantial amount of upfront funding required will be provided; and
  - how they will form part of a wider package of powers to deliver improved transport networks.
- If local schemes are to be successful, local authorities implementing them will require real freedom and flexibility to invest in and plan for improvements in public transport in advance of the introduction of a scheme.

### **New regulatory framework for bus services**

#### **Passenger representation**

- The bill now includes enabling powers to allow a new national body to represent passenger interests to be established.

#### **LGA view**

- As locally elected representatives of the community, local authorities are best placed to represent the interests of bus passengers in their areas. The LGA is keen to engage with Government on proposals for passenger representation to ensure they develop in

a way that supports local authorities in this role.

#### **Traffic Commissioners**

- The bill will place the existing Senior Traffic Commissioner role on a statutory footing and enable him to issue guidance to the Traffic Commissioners.
- The bill has abandoned proposals consulted on over the summer to radically restructure the traffic commissioner system. Instead it introduces flexibility to allow traffic commissioners to be allocated more flexibly according to workload and areas of expertise.

#### **LGA view**

- Again we are pleased that Government has listened to local government's response to its proposals for reform to the traffic commissioner system. The LGA argued that a stronger regulatory regime and increased consistency and efficiency among traffic Commissioners could be delivered with modifications to the existing system without creating a centralised bureaucratic system. The proposals in the bill should still allow for flexibility in decision making according to local circumstance.

#### **Further information**

For further information on this briefing, please contact Andy Taylor in LGA Public Affairs at [andy.taylor@lga.gov.uk](mailto:andy.taylor@lga.gov.uk) or 020 7664 3334.

The full text of the bill and the government's response to the consultation on the Draft Transport Bill 2006 can be found here:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/localtransportbill/>

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**ONE-PAGE STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT (BUSES) TASK GROUP**

**What is the broad Topic area?** *'Travelling First Class'* A review to support improvements to bus service travel in and through the Bromsgrove district

**What are the specific topic areas?**

- 1/ Internal condition of the buses (suitability and age) in the operators vehicle fleets
- 2/ Access to buses for the public with restricted mobility or heavy loads (Shoppers/Mothers)
- 3/ Bus routes & frequency

**What are the ambitions?**

- 1/ To improve the quality of travel for bus users (leading to more bus users)
- 2/ To improve entry onto buses. To promote this as a viable option for all sections of the community (elderly, people with mobility difficulties, shoppers with heavy loads)
- 3/ To improve frequency of bus routes where appropriate

**How well do we perform at the moment?**

We will review the current condition of the vehicle fleets. We have asked a number of questions to establish the current 'benchmark' see below

**Who shall we consult about the current service and how we can improve it?**

**Residents of Bromsgrove:** possibly via our Customer Service Panel or similar body

**Businesses:** Visits to (and from) bus operating companies (e.g. Clearways/Diamond/First)

**Expert Witnesses:** Equalities and Diversity forum visit by the Chair and Cllr McDonald (13<sup>th</sup> Sept), County Cllr Ed Moore (Transport Working Party) and Mr Harris (Author of Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy). Other experts to be identified

**What other help do we need?**

**Research help:** to answer the following questions: **(1)** How many bus operators – names & addresses (SM) **(2)** How many buses in each fleet & carrying capacity (SM) **(3)** number with 'low loaders' (SM) **(4)** Future plans to improve vehicle fleet (SM) **(5)** demographic information to show the changing nature of the travelling public (HB) **(6)** Other reviews carried out like this by other authorities (David M) **(7)** Other similar districts – how do we compare and what can we learn from them (David M) ? **(8)** Legal position regarding payment of subsidies (SM) **(9)** Route information (SM/BL)

**Key:** BL: Cllr Brian Lewis SM: Steve Martin. David M: David McGrath. HB: Hugh Bennett

**How long should it take?**

**4 months** – within which timescale we will complete:

- ✓ Base line/ benchmarking exercise to assess condition of fleet (end Sept 07) if statistical information available
- ✓ Interview operators/ identify improvement plans/ make recommendations (end of Dec 07)

**What will be the outcomes?**

*Recommendations to improve internal vehicle condition, access to buses and targeted improvements to specified routes*

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
THE COUNCIL HOUSE  
BURCOT LANE  
BROMSGROVE  
WORCESTERSHIRE, B60 1AA



The Managing Director  
First Midland Red  
Heron Lodge, London Road  
Worcester  
WR6 2EW

**bromsgrove council**  
[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

10<sup>th</sup> September, 2007

Dear Sir,

**Re: Bus Services in Bromsgrove and Environs**

The Bromsgrove District Council Scrutiny Steering Board has outlined several issues which it deems worthy of Scrutiny.

I have been appointed Chairman of the Task Group, which is exploring the provisions of the existing bus services in the Bromsgrove District.

It is therefore, necessary to have your thoughts, insofar as your Company is concerned, regarding present conditions of service, and future aspirations, say, for the next five years and should include the following points:-

- Routes. Can they be improved ?
- Age of current fleet of buses
- Replacement schedule for new buses
- Will replacement buses have facilities for the physically impaired, i.e. wheelchairs, prams etc.
- Anticipated customer use (load factors)
- Do any of your company routes serving Bromsgrove, receive Worcestershire County Council subsidy support ?
- Does your Company liaise with other bus operators regarding route time tables and frequency of services?
- Your views regarding bus stops in the Bromsgrove District, and in particular the Bromsgrove bus station, would be appreciated.

I would appreciate your comments at your earliest convenience.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

**Councillor Brian Lewis**

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER SENT TO THE FOLLOWING:-

Company	Title	First Name	Last Name	Job Title	Address 1	Address 2	City	Postal Code	Work Phone
Birmingham Coach Company	Mr Howle	Geoffrey	Howle	Chairman	Cross Quays Business Park	Hallbridge Way, Tipton Road	Tividale, Warley	B69 3HY	
Central Connect Ltd	Mr Elms	Steve	Elms		Beacon House	Long Acre	Birmingham	B7 5JJ	01213222731
Clearways Coaches	Mr Wheeler	David	Wheeler	Managing Director,	56 Meadow Road	Catshill	Bromsgrove	B61 0JL	01527 872556
Cotton Coaches (Euroliners)	Mr Stiles	Glen	Stiles	Managing Director	1631 Bristol Road South	Rednal	Birmingham	B45 9UA	
First Midland Red					Heron Lodge	London Road	Worcester	WR6 2EW	01905 763888
Hensons Coaches					60A Heyes Lane	Lye	Stourbridge	DY9 8RD	01384 894020
Hardings Coaches	Mr Playford	Malcolm	Playford		Oxleasow Road		REDDITCH	B98 0RE	
Johnsons Coach Travel					Liveridge House, Liveridge Hill	Henley-in-Arden	SOLIHULL	B95 5QS	01564 797010
Ludlows Bus And Coach Company			Ludlows Coaches	Managing Director,	Coombs Road		Halesowen	B62 8AA	0121 559 7506
Midland Rider					Unit 6 CMT Trading Estate	Broadwell Road	Oldbury	B69 4BQ	07989 948810
MRD Travel	Mr Davies	Mark	Davies	Managing Director	60 Woodrow Lane	Catshill	Bromsgrove	B61 0PL	01527 875592
Travel Express					30 Cotton Road	Penn	WOLVERHAMPTON	WV4 5AT	
Travel West Midlands	Mr Rampton	Richard	Rampton	Head Office,	51 Bordesley Green		Birmingham	B9 4JZ	0121 254 7200
Whittle					Foley Business Park	Stourport Road	KIDMINSTER	DY11 7QL	01562 820002



**Bus User Survey for Bromsgrove District Council**

*Hi we're from Bromsgrove Council and we're doing a quick survey to see how bus services can be improved in this area*

**Q1 How many times per week do you use bus services?**

- Every day
- At the weekend
- Once a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once a month
- Other (please specify)

M	<input type="text"/>
F	<input type="text"/>

**Q2 What is the purpose of your journey today?**

- Work.
- Shopping/leisure
- Social
- Visiting family/friends
- Education
- Hospital
- Tourism
- Other (please specify)

**Q3 Which of these things would encourage you to use the buses more often? Tell me which are your top 3 with 1 being the most important?**

- a) More convenient pick up/drop off points
- b) Improved waiting areas
- c) More direct routes
- d) Cheaper fares
- e) More information about public transport
- f) More frequent service
- g) Cleaner buses
- h) More accessible buses e.g. lower platforms
- i) Reliable service
- j) I use it as much as I am able to already
- k) Other (please specify)

**Q4 Where have you travelled from today?**

*(Postcode/Road/area)*

**Q5 Where are you travelling to today?**

*(Postcode/Road/area)*

**Q6 Number bus you are waiting for/ just got off?**

**Q7 Did you have a car at your disposal today?**

Yes No

**Q8 Where do you CURRENTLY look for passenger travel information?**

Please tick ALL that apply

- Local media
- Leaflet
- Website
- Telephone
- On the bus
- By text/SMS
- At the bus stop
- I just know

**Q9 Where would you PREFER to look for passenger travel information?**

Please tick ALL that apply

- Local media
- Leaflet
- Website
- Telephone
- On the bus
- By text/SMS
- At the bus stop
- I just know

A FEW BRIEF DETAILS ABOUT YOURSELF PLEASE

**Q10 How old are you/What age group do you belong to?**

Please tick ONE only

- |             |       |
|-------------|-------|
| 18 or under | 19-24 |
| 25-34       | 35-49 |
| 50-64       | 65+   |

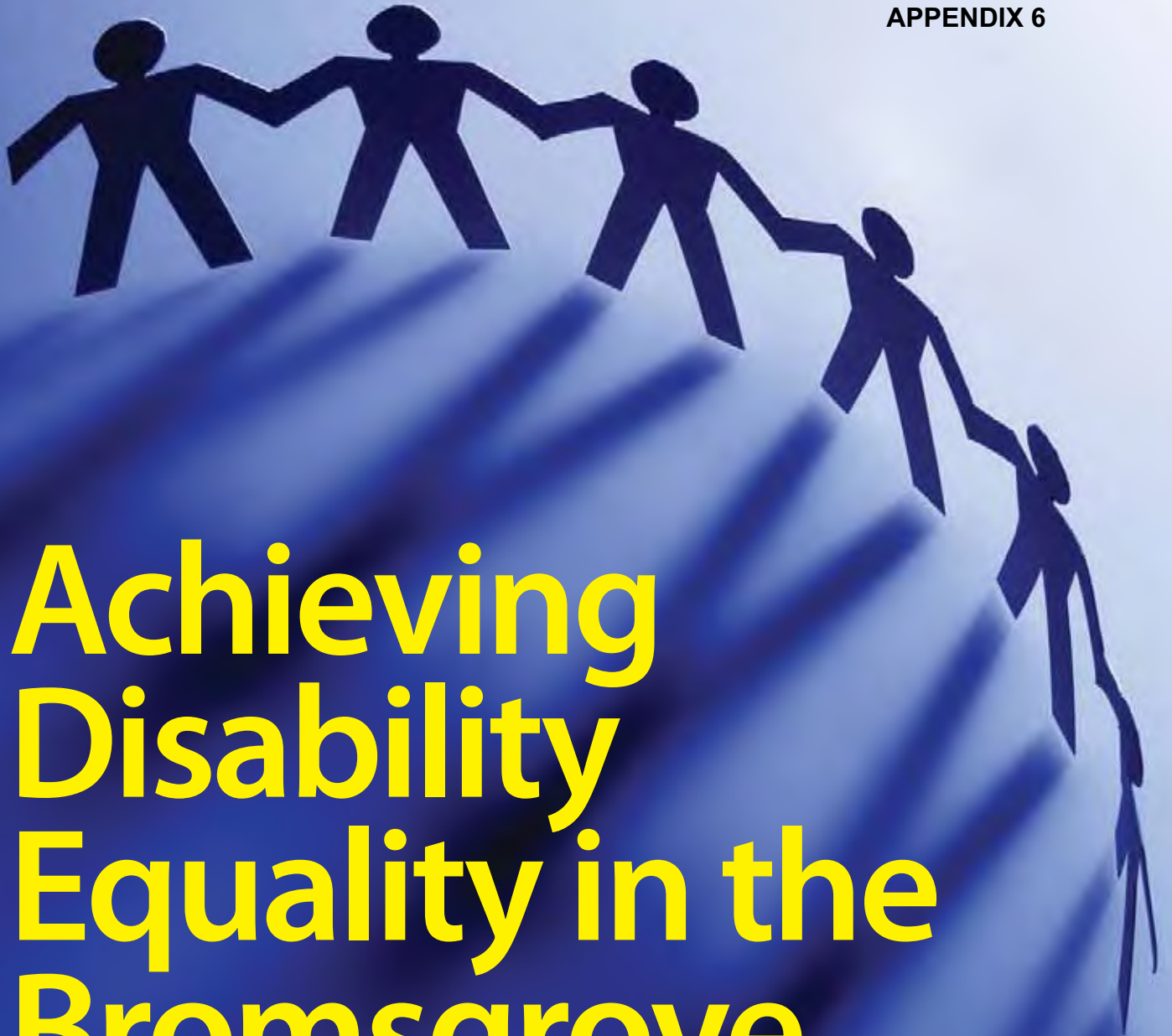
**Q11 If you are 60 years old or over, do you have a concessionary travel pass? Yes/No**

**Q12 How would you describe your ethnicity?**

- |                                     |              |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| White: British                      | White: Irish | White: Other                      |
| Mixed: White & Black Caribbean      |              | Mixed: White & Black African      |
| Mixed: White & Asian                |              | Mixed: Other                      |
| Asian or Asian British: Indian      |              | Asian or Asian British: Pakistani |
| Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi |              | Asian or Asian British: Other     |
| Black or Black British: Caribbean   |              | Black or Black British: African   |
| Black or Black British:             | Other        | Chinese                           |

ARE THERE ANY OTHER COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE KEPT INFORMED OF OUR REVIEW OF BUSES? YES NO  
IF YES – PLEASE SUPPLY DETAILS E.G. NAME ADDRESS/EMAIL



# Achieving Disability Equality in the Bromsgrove District

Report of Research Findings  
by Rhyan Berrigan



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council

[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

November 2007



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#### **4) Findings**

Throughout the course of my investigation and from points discussed at the Disabled Users Group on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007 it became clear that the high dependency unit, although important, was not top priority. Instead it emerged that transport was top priority. The High Dependency Unit and access to the Town Centre was second and third priority respectively.

I interviewed disabled people, getting their individual perspective. 3 issues came to light 1) Transport; 2) HDU and 3) Access to the Town Centre. All affect disabled people in the Bromsgrove District as does the exclusion of outer lying areas such as Wythall, Alvechurch and Hagley.

I decided to focus my report on Transport, the HDU and accessibility of the Town Centre.

##### **4.1) Transport**

In one of my first meetings, when discussing the priority issues affecting disabled people in the local community, it was stated that “there would be no point installing a HDU and improving access to shops in the Town Centre if disabled people could not get to the Town Centre to access them”. Accessible public transport is needed for disabled people who do not have access to a car. Transport is poor that is why it is a number 1 priority issue. While meeting with a wide range of disabled individuals and disabled organisations, in the Bromsgrove District, the common theme was that transport needed to be improved. Bromsgrove’s rural population have difficulty getting into the Town Centre. Alvechurch, for example, have better public transport links to Redditch than to Bromsgrove.

##### **4.2) Parking**

Disabled parking charges is another transport issue disabled people felt very strongly about. Bromsgrove District Council is the only Council in the County to charge disabled people for parking. There are a number of disabled people in the Bromsgrove area who are disabled enough to be entitled to and subsequently apply for disabled Blue Badges.

#### **Bromsgrove Customer Service Centre 2006/07**

There is a steady stream of Blue Badge applications throughout the year; there are similar numbers of applications every month. The average number per month from July 2006 to June 2007 = 152, 75% (1366) are dealt with face to face and 25% (456) apply by post.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of Blue Badges Issued</b>
June 2007	150
May 2007	162
April 2007	127
March 2007	170
February 2007	147
January 2007	146
December 2006	107
November 2006	157
October 2006	185
September 2006	154
August 2006	158
July 2006	159
<b>Total Badges Issued</b>	<b>1822</b>

Disabled people classified under the autistic spectrum could be entitled to Blue Badges later in 2007. Therefore Bromsgrove District Council could receive more Blue Badge applications. More people will also be able to claim the reduced cost disabled parking permit, this would reduce Bromsgrove District Council's revenue received from parking charges and parking permits.

Having to pay for disabled parking is still a major bone of contention. The majority of disabled people I spoke to had strong negative views on the issue. They felt that they hadn't been consulted when the Council started to impose charges. In discussion with my colleague I discovered that there had been a consultative process before Shopmobility was set up.

When deciding on disabled parking charges and parking permits the Council would not have been able to take into account the proposed changes in Blue Badge eligibility. If Blue Badge eligibility does change the Council would have to rethink its parking strategy.

There has recently been further dialogue between Bromsgrove District Council and the disabled community regarding car parking charges.

#### 4.3) Buses

Buses are inaccessible to wheelchair users. 1<sup>st</sup>) according to disabled people I have interviewed there is only 1 space for wheelchairs if indeed they have any space at all. 2<sup>nd</sup>) If a bus is full to capacity; few people are willing to move for the disabled wheelchair passenger. Mobility scooters are bigger than they have been in the past so are not allowed on the buses as they are too big. Learning disabled people I have interviewed have stated that they find the bus time tables confusing. The bus times are not clear, the print too small and is often obscured by graffiti. The unreliability of the buses was also raised. The unreliability of buses was a particular concern to learning disabled people and their support workers. Learning disabled people are encouraged to go out and about in the local community if able to do so. It is pointless if a learning disabled person travels to another part of the District and cannot return due to irregular timetables. In order for learning disabled people to build up confidence whilst travelling independently they need a reliable and frequent service, allowing them to learn a routine.



New regulations which came into force on 4 December 2006 gave disabled people a 'right of access' to goods, services and facilities, with respect to transport services. These duties make it unlawful for a transport operator to discriminate against a disabled person simply because they are disabled, or to treat disabled people less favourably or fail to make a reasonable adjustment to the way they provide their services. In light of these regulations, bus operators throughout the country will have to review their policies and procedures to ensure that they are not in contravention of the new duties. However, buses do not have to be fully accessible until 2016. Come 2016 bus operators in the Bromsgrove District could stop operating altogether rather than comply with the new access legislation.

Many bus companies in Bromsgrove use old buses that have steps. Wheelchair users, people with mobility problems and parents with babies in prams would not be able to access the buses without a ramp. Many disabled wheelchair users and those who are mobility impaired have free bus passes but they are not benefiting from free travel because they cannot get onto a bus.

Bromsgrove District Council does not have control of the bus services. They can however inform bus companies of disabled people's access problems and press for companies to do something about inaccessibility. By bringing the problem of accessibility for disabled people to the attention of various bus companies, the bus companies are more likely to act.

In the Bromsgrove District, buses are run by several different companies. It would be difficult to approach each company individually. It has been suggested that the District Council first raise concerns of disabled people's inaccessibility to public transport by contacting Worcestershire County Council. The County Council can then approach inaccessibility issues with the bus companies directly. The regularity of the bus services is poor. Many buses run on an hourly basis and only run for a short time frame throughout the day.

#### 4.4) Dial-a-Ride

The majority of disabled people I talked to would like to see a Dial-a-Ride scheme set up in the Bromsgrove District.

The Dial-a-Ride scheme is part of community transport. Dial-a-Ride schemes vary from one area to another. I researched the Redditch Dial-a-Ride scheme. Redditch pays their 6 drivers a salary. Paying minibus drivers a salary is not the norm but there are a few areas that do.

The Redditch Dial-a-Ride operates to and from the Town Centre. The scheme looks at the transport needs in the area they cover, where there are gaps not covered by a good bus service. As Bromsgrove bus service is poor there would be a lot of gaps in transport that could be covered by Dial-a-Ride. There would be potentially a large number of users in the Bromsgrove District.

The service is aimed at people that are unable to use public transport. There are no age restrictions on Dial-a-Ride users; most however are in their 70's/80's. There is a high proportion of elderly people and disabled people in the Bromsgrove District therefore lots of potential service users.

In order to use Dial-a-Ride it is a legal requirement that users have to register before using the service. Registration is free of charge.

Dial-a-Ride operators would have to apply for an operators permit costing £7.00 a year for each vehicle under section 19 of the Transport Act. Operating permits are a legal requirement. Changes in the Transport Act will come into force later in the year.

Size of the minibus has to be considered. The most regular size minibuses have 9 seats with 1 wheelchair space, the size Redditch generally uses. Minibus sizes range from 8 seaters to 16. Less than 8 seats are classified as a car. 16 seats are classified as a bus. Operators can not pay drivers of cars because then the service becomes like a taxi service. The size of minibus depends on scheme, it is difficult to judge the size of the minibuses required.

Doctors and social services refer many people to Dial-a-Ride; it improves customers' quality of life and access to the community.

#### Pros

Dial-a-Ride is a popular choice of transport service; many disabled people would like to see the scheme set up as soon as possible.

Fares have to be cheap and comparable to other means of public transport. The service improves disabled peoples quality of life. Service users have more independence not having to rely on friends and family to get out and about and are able to maintain social links.

Dial-a-Ride fares are cheap. Fares cost £1.50 one way and £3.00 return. Concessionary pass fares cost 50p 1 way, 1.00 return. To provide one journey it costs Dial-a-Ride £7.50.

Section 19 of the Transport Act states that the Dial-a-Ride scheme can only charge for cost of transport, this makes source of financial assistance important because it would be difficult to self finance.

In Redditch there is a very big demand for the service. There are six minibuses are in use and sometimes all six driving about community at same time.

## Cons

There is only one wheelchair space in most common sized Dial-a-Ride minibus. Running of an effective Dial-a-Ride service is complex. A software package that allows the service to be run as efficiently as possible is expensive.

Minibuses themselves are expensive. Second hand minibuses are cheaper to buy however they may have to be adapted. The quantity of minibuses required to run an efficient service varies from place to place. Bromsgrove is spread out with rural areas. A greater number of minibuses may be required to run a good service. Strict maintenance procedures have to be followed, drivers have to check their vehicle for wear and tear every morning and general maintenance and fuel costs are all a great expense.

Redditch Dial-a-Ride is over subscribed, sometimes the service is fully booked and they have to turn customers away.

Customers can book up to three days in advance. Generally the customer is not encouraged to book transport on the same day because the service doesn't want to become like a taxi service. However late bookings are accepted if there is enough space in the minibus. Bookings for medical appointments can be booked seven days in advance because appointment times are at specific times. 10/15 % of customers use the service for medical appointments.

Flexibility is a must. Booking over phone is the most popular method but it is possible to book face to face, email or fax as well. Dial-a-Ride staff try to match bus routes to times of customer appointments. It is important to have a maximum travel time so customers know what to expect in journey time and ensure that customers know that the service cannot guarantee to pick up a passenger then drop them off straight to their destination. Drivers must follow a route picking up all the customers along the way.

There are regular group bookings; roughly 70% of customers are group bookings. Roughly 30% of service users are individual bookings. Groups consist of 4 or more people. Booking reservations need to be confirmed every week. There are a lot of group pick ups. It is often the same people every week that pre book slots for regular activities e.g. Age Concern. Group travel is more efficient

### 4.5) Dial-a-Ride - Issues to consider:

Minibuses have to be checked every 6 weeks. Minibuses with a tail lift have to have the tail lift inspected every 6 months to check if it is in good working order. The more minibuses purchased means the more maintenance involved. Maintenance takes a large amount of the budget but it is legal requirement.

Before drivers start their rounds they have to go through a 20 minute check list every morning. When timing drivers' shifts and bookings you must allow time for completion of the safety check list. Simple checks include tyre pressure and condition before the start of the journey.

The service operates Monday – Friday 8.45am– 4.20pm. Evening and weekend schemes were researched but there was not enough demand. Paying drivers more money if they worked evenings and weekends and lone working would need to be considered if Bromsgrove wanted a Dial-a-Ride service to run evenings and weekends. Bromsgrove Council may consider operating the scheme on evening and weekends especially if Shopmobility opens on Saturday. There is a seasonal variation in demand, similar in variation to Shopmobility usage. In winter there are few bookings after 3.30 because of the dark afternoons.

Redditch Dial-a-Ride uses Mobirouter computer software to run the service efficiently. The software looks complicated on the screen, confusing to start with. There is 3 days training to get used to the software however it has taken staff members a month to feel confident using the system.

### Pros

The software enables office staff to log bookings and plan routes of the day's bookings easily. Colour coding is used, using the code staffs know when minibus over booked, full, or half full.

Office staff can map customers pick up points, the software package shows the precise route every minibus is travelling. Therefore it is easier to fit in late bookings allowing the service to become a more efficient system.

Since Redditch Dial-a-Ride started using the software package it has picked up more passengers with same number of minibuses. The software package maximises the services potential and customer demand. The software package enables the drivers to have a computer print out of their routes before start of their journey. The routes are easier to follow and more structured.

### Cons

The system looks complicated to use at first. The office staff take a while to become fully confident using the software package. The software package could crash. If this occurs, until the system is back up and running, operating the Dial-a-Ride service would be difficult.

There are too many pop up windows on screen to get to customer/route details and to log/cancel booking, therefore making the booking process complicated.

Minibuses are accessible, they have a moving step which can be lowered to help people to step on to the minibus, and there is also tail lift for wheelchair access.

Fuel is expensive; the Dial-a-Ride service spends £20,000 on diesel a year. It is costly to run a successful Dial-a-Ride service.

Employment of staff is another cost to consider. To run the software package smoothly staff must be adequately trained. Redditch employs three office staff who log and coordinate the bookings plus a manager to oversee the scheme plus six drivers. Cost is an important issue, costs include fuel costs, tax, operating permit, minibus maintenance and office staff and drivers salaries to name but a few.

Bromsgrove District Council would have to decide whether or not to pay Dial-a-Ride minibus drivers a salary. Salaried minibus drivers are an added expense but maybe necessary to maintain a full compliment of drivers to meet customer demand. Wyre Forest Dial-a-Ride have volunteer drivers, however they never have a full compliment of drivers to meet customer demand.

Who would control Dial-a-Ride and fund the service is something to be researched further. Many Dial-a-Ride schemes are funded at least partly by Worcester County Council grants. Redditch Borough Council also funds Redditch Dial-a-Ride.

If Bromsgrove Council were to decide on minibuses with over 16 seats there would a legislation problem. Using minibuses with over 16 seats would mean having to have only volunteer drivers because otherwise it could be seen as competition for public bus services.

One suggestion is to link the Dial-a-Ride scheme with Rural Rides, to help keep Dial-a-Ride set up costs down.

#### 4.6) Rural Rides

Rural Rides is a similar scheme to Dial-a-Ride in its aims and activities. Its aim is to assist anyone who has difficulties in accessing public transport in order to attend medical, social and other appointments. Also for any other travel necessary to support their daily living needs. Rural Rides activities are provided by volunteer drivers who take people to appointments – medical and social and other essential needs. Also for shopping, visiting relatives and friends and any other important visits to be made to support them in getting around in the community in which they live.

#### Pros

Combining the two schemes could speed up the process and time scale in which Dial-a-Ride is set in the Bromsgrove District. Setting up a Dial-a-Ride service as soon as possible would be very positively received by the local disabled community. The feasibility of linking with Rural Rides requires further research.

Rural Rides is a popular service, however it is over subscribed. The fares in comparison to Redditch Dial-a-Ride are expensive. However Bromsgrove is a very different area to Redditch. Bromsgrove is more rural and spread out, a Bromsgrove Dial-a-Ride service would have to cover more miles. Bromsgrove Dial-a-Ride fares maybe more expensive than Redditch Dial-a-Ride fares, this needs further research.

Cons

Rural Rides uses volunteer drivers, there is never a full compliment, not enough to meet demand. The volunteer drivers use their own cars and are only paid a mileage allowance; this may explain their expensive fares. The Rural Ride service cannot accommodate less mobile and disabled customers who need help getting in or out of the car. The service also cannot accommodate wheelchair users. The volunteers' cars have no access ramps and are too small to carry wheelchair users. Most of the volunteer drivers are retired so they are not physically able to lift a customer out of the car. Rural Rides would need more funding if it was to run a minibus service and take on more staff to cope with the rise in customers. Accessible transport would mean disabled people could attend public events more easily. This meets with the legal requirement of the Disability Equality General Duty to "encourage participation by disabled persons in public life."

Funding could come from a range of sources from Worcestershire County Council, Lottery funding, and Bromsgrove District Council subsidy.

The feasibility of linking Dial-a-Ride with Rural Rides requires further research.

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