

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT – 26<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2007**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

**BUS SERVICE REVIEW**

**PURPOSE**

1. To update the Committee on the progress made in improving Dudley's Bus Services.

**BACKGROUND**

2. A report was submitted to the September 2006 Select Committee in connection with bus Patronage and the Committee resolved that Centro be supported in its role of promoting the use of quality bus services as part of its wider transport objectives and that a future report be submitted in connection with improving bus patronage.
3. Since reporting Centro has made significant progress in taking forward the improving bus patronage agenda in Dudley and Clive Whatling (Head of Bus Network) will attend the meeting to update members.
4. The Audit Commission are soon to publish (in July) their report "Increasing Transport Usage through Partnership in the West Midlands"
5. This, allied to the draft Local Transport Bill, currently out for consultation, seeks to significantly strengthen the role of Public Transport and the role local authorities have to play in securing improvements in bus service delivery.
6. This report sets the foundation for taking many of these initiatives forward.

**BUS STATIONS & INTERCHANGES**

7. Preparation work is currently in progress for the construction of a new "state of the art" bus station in Halesowen as part of the redevelopment of the Cornbow Centre, and the station is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2008. The new facility will have high quality passenger waiting areas, closed circuit television for security and electronic passenger information associated with bus arrivals and departures.

8. Design work is in progress for the rebuilding of Stourbridge Bus Station. Work is scheduled to commence in eighteen months to two years, depending on the availability of funding. Planning is also in progress for the rebuilding of Dudley Bus Station to accommodate the Metro extension from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill, and work will be undertaken as part of the construction of the extension, currently scheduled for 2010.

#### **NETWORK WEST MIDLANDS**

9. Network West Midlands branding is now in place at all major interchanges, and on Centro's publicity material and timetables. Centro's range of prepaid multi operator tickets has been rebranded "Network Tickets" and a number of operators' vehicles are now carrying the Network symbol, although take up has not been as extensive as Centro had wished.
10. As part of the roll out, the replacement of bus stop poles and plates continues, and is on schedule for completion across the entire Centro area by December 2007. All new stops incorporate stop specific timetable information. The roll out is being carried out on an area basis, and the current position is that around 375 out of 477 sites in Dudley (79%) have had new stop poles installed.
11. Centro is also proceeding with a programme of renewal of bus shelters, and, to date, some shelters have been replaced in Dudley.

#### **CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL**

12. Legislation due to be introduced in April 2008 will entitle concessionary pass holders free off peak travel on buses throughout England. This will allow visitors to Dudley from outside the West Midlands aged sixty or over free travel on bus services in the Borough. Insofar as West Midlands residents are concerned, the PTA's current position is that the concession will continue to be allowed on heavy and light rail but within the Centro area only as a result of additional funding provided by the West Midlands Local Authorities.

#### **SAFER TRAVEL POLICE TEAM**

13. The work of the Safer Travel Police Team (STPT) continues across the area. The team make a number of pre-arranged and ad-hoc visits to the bus station in Dudley as part of their core activities. In addition to this they continue to provide a visible presence by travelling on buses in uniform. Travelwise and the STPT visit schools in the area and talk to pupils about safely using public transport and expected standards of behaviour. Centro-WMPTA and West Midlands Police are currently engaged in a review of how activities are recorded within the area and intend to further monitor passenger perceptions on Safety and Security as part of that review during 2007-2008.

#### **NETWORK REVIEW**

14. The West Midlands network is largely based on that established by the Council owned bus companies set up in the early part of the 20th century and as a result the routing derives from long abandoned local operating centres
15. Accordingly, it is perceived that the West Midlands bus network is complex to the extent that it discourages non users. Centro has, therefore, retained the services of an independent consultant (who has considerable experience in devising such networks both elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in Western Europe) to advise on an optimum network which aims to generate 7½% passenger growth whilst maintaining the PTA's accessibility targets and requiring no additional public subsidy.
16. A simplification of the network is proposed with a significant enhancement in "perceived frequency" on the major corridors, especially those serving Merry Hill Centre. This will not diminish the role of Dudley Bus Station serving Dudley as a major tourist centre as provided for by the Black Country Study. The proposals have been developed in the course of discussion with Centro and Dudley Officers and the Cabinet Member for Transport being the lead PTA member.
17. Following acceptance of the broad principles of the Network Review, the consultant's proposals have now been discussed with Travel West Midlands (TWM) as the major operator of bus services in Dudley. TWM have responded to Centro with certain proposals of their own based on the consultant's principles, and a dialogue is developing as Centro endeavours to encourage the Company to consider applying them more widely.

#### **PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS**

18. Centro is currently developing a Partnership Agreement with TWM with the company agreeing to enhance frequencies and introduce new or refurbished vehicles with Centro enhancing infrastructure on agreed corridors. The first such agreement will be signed shortly and will mainly cover services in the Streetly area, but is regarded as a template which, if successful, will be rolled out across the West Midlands. Centro is in the early stages of discussions with Go Ahead, parent company of Diamond Bus, regarding a similar partnership with them, and it is hoped that other major operators will be encouraged in the same direction.

#### **NEXT STEPS – NETWORK REVIEW**

19. Meetings to be arranged with Hansons and Ludlows who have significant operations in specific areas of the Borough. No meetings are proposed at this stage with Go Ahead Group as, from July 2007, this operator's commercial services in Dudley will by and large be confined the services 74 and 87 to Birmingham.
20. Continue dialogue with TWM with aim of highlighting enhancements on key routes in particular to Brierley Hill (i.e. opportunity to look at linkages to Heavy Rail interchange at Cradley).

21. Examine bus access to Merry Hill and explore opportunities with Westfield and bus operators.
22. Examine highway infrastructure requirements to facilitate bus reliability across the network.
23. Establish Member Review Panels (one member per ward) based on the Area Committee Structure with the remit of reviewing, on an incremental basis, detailed proposals for revised routing.
24. Discuss Review Panel outcomes with operators with a view to seeking their approval to implementation.
25. Register service alteration with Traffic Commissioner.

#### **LOCAL TRANSPORT BILL**

26. The draft Local Transport Bill was published for consultation on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May
27. The core purpose of the Bill is to tackle congestion and improve public transport. It seeks to empower transport delivery at the local level and develop the bus market through stronger joint working between the public and private sectors. Finally, it seeks to strengthen transport strategy and delivery in major urban areas and support the introduction of local road pricing as part of a package of transport improvements.
28. In particular the Bill contains proposals to give Passenger Transport Executives greater control over the bus network in their areas, albeit Centro is currently committed to partnership working with bus operators wherever possible.
29. Appendix 1 summarises the current situation and proposed changes insofar as it affect bus operations.

#### **FINANCE**

30. This report does not have any impact on the Council's finances.

#### **LAW**

31. The Transport Act 1985 deregulated bus services thereby giving operators freedom to run buses when and where they want.
32. The Transport Act 2000 introduced the provision for legally binding partnership agreements and other contractual arrangements between operators and local authorities but left deregulation essentially unchanged
33. Section 57 of the 1985 Act gives Centro the duty to secure such services as are required to meet the Passenger Transport Authority's policies where the services in question would not be provided without subsidy, and Sections 89

to 92 of the Act require that such services must generally be secured by competitive tender.<sup>25</sup> The 1985 Act gave the PTA the power to establish a Travel Concession Scheme for Senior Citizens, persons aged sixteen years or younger, and blind and disabled persons.

34. The 2000 Act introduced a statutory requirement to provide a minimum half fare concession to the elderly and disabled within their local area, which was amended to free travel from April 2006, although neither of these changes affected the Centro scheme which provided superior benefits.
35. The PTA is a levying body under the Transport Levying Bodies Regulations 1992.

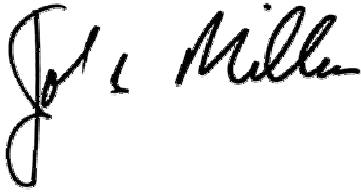
### **EQUALITY IMPACT**

36. The provision of public transport seeks to ensure equality of access to services for all and the Bus Strategy sets out how this is to be achieved.
37. The regeneration of Brierley Hill that includes proposals for relocation of Stourbridge College and the LIFT Health Centre, together with the recognition as the shopping centre for the Black Country, prompts opportunity to enhance access provision by public transport for young people to education and for those with mobility problems to health and shopping.
38. Route amendments over the last few years have significantly enhanced access to Russells Hall Hospital.
39. The school run, whereby people take children to school by car, is unsustainable and any public transport proposals need to take on board provision of services to meet the journey to school.
40. The Safer Routes to School Initiative includes looking at Public Transport and discussing with children their views on provision of bus services, this being done in conjunction with Centro.
41. As part of the Post 16 Independent Travel Initiative young people are encouraged to look at using Public Transport as an alternative to other less sustainable modes.
42. The Road Safety Unit is well placed to take forward the Public Transport Agenda with schools and will provide a focus for future consultation proposals.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

43. That the initiatives as set out in this report, in particular associated with network improvements to increase patronage, be supported.

44. That Area Committee Review Panels be set up to review bus routing proposals.



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**J. B. Millar**  
**Director of the Urban Environment**

Contact Officer: John Anderson Ext. 4460, Engineering & Transportation  
Manager

**Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-**

Transport Bill 2007-06-08

Notes of meeting

Draft Audit Commission report Increasing Transport Usage through Partnership in the West Midlands June 2007.

## Appendix 1

### CURRENT SITUATION AND PROPOSED CHANGES

#### Improving the quality of local bus services (Chapter 3)

	<u>Current Position</u>	<u>Proposed Change</u>
<p><b>Voluntary partnership Agreements between local authorities and bus operators</b> (<i>clause 24 and Schedule 2</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local authorities and bus operators voluntarily agree a package of improvements to local bus services, relying on mutual agreement to ensure promised improvements are carried through.</li> <li>Local authorities can generally enter into bilateral agreements with individual operators without raising competition issues; this is more difficult for multilateral agreements for the things that matter most – timetables and fares.</li> </ul>	<p>Strengthened voluntary agreements with a revised competition test to facilitate multilateral agreements between a local authority and more than one operator. The competition test would be consistent with other domestic and EC competition law requirements, but with terms tailored to the bus market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such agreements could specify minimum frequencies, timings and maximum fares as appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality partnership schemes</b> (<i>clauses 3 to 6</i>)</p>	<p>A local authority can make a scheme whereby it enters into a formal arrangement with bus operators; under which each party commits to certain improvements (e.g. operators who commit to invest in new buses are granted access to improved facilities such as bus priority measures).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum frequencies, timings and fares cannot be included within the scope of a scheme, and all measures (by local authorities and operators) must come into effect on a single date.</li> </ul>	<p>Quality partnership schemes could cover minimum frequencies, timings and maximum fares as appropriate. Schemes would still be subject to the competition test in Schedule 10 to the Transport Act 2000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvements by local authorities and operators could be phased in over a period of time.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality contracts schemes</b> (<i>clauses 7 to 23</i>)</p>	<p>Local authorities can suspend the deregulated market in specified areas for a specified time, and following a competitive bidding process grant exclusive rights to a single operator to provide a specified service.</p>	<p>The “only practicable way” test replaced with a series of public interest criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In England, the Secretary of State’s approval role replaced with a new framework for scheme approval and appeals.</li> </ul>

	<p>specified service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before implementing a scheme, the local authority must demonstrate that it is the “only practicable way” to achieve a policy in their bus strategy; a scheme in England must be approved by the Secretary of State, and a scheme in Wales by the Welsh Ministers; and a scheme can last no longer than ten years, with individual contracts within a scheme limited to five years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The duration of a scheme could be extended beyond the current ten years in certain circumstances.</li> <li>• An increase to a maximum of ten years for individual contracts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Punctuality</b> <i>(clauses 31 and 32)</i></p>	<p>Traffic commissioners (TCs) are responsible for taking action against operators who are failing to provide services in accordance with the terms they have registered with the TCs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But TCs have limited access to punctuality data to identify areas of under-performance, and have no means of holding local authorities to account for their contribution to bus punctuality.</li> </ul>	<p>To develop a new performance regime where the local TC receives better quality data; and local authorities, as well as operators, can be held to account for their contribution to the performance of local bus services (e.g. the provision and enforcement of bus priority measures).</p>
<p><b>Community transport</b> <i>(clauses 27 to 30)</i></p>	<p>The voluntary sector plays a significant complementary role in providing transport services through two systems of permits under the Transport Act 1985.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Section 19” permits are issued to bodies concerned with education, religion, social welfare etc, for the use of vehicles with nine seats or more. They do not allow members of the general public to be carried.</li> <li>• “Section 22” permits allow the provision of local services for the general public, but prohibit the payment of drivers and the use of vehicles with more</li> </ul>	<p>For section 19 permits: to allow the use of vehicles with fewer than nine seats, and to simplify the permit issuing system so that all permits are issued by TCs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For section 22 permits: to allow drivers on those local services to be paid, and to allow the use of vehicles with more than 16 seats.</li> </ul>



	than 16 seats.	
<b>Taxi-buses</b> <i>(clause 26)</i>	Only taxi owners can apply for a “special restricted” public service vehicle (PSV) operator's licence, to enable them to provide local bus services.	Holders of a private hire vehicle (PHV) licence would also be able to apply for these licences.
<b>Traffic regulation conditions – appeals</b> <i>(clause 25)</i>	Traffic regulation conditions may be applied to a public service vehicle (PSV) operator's licence by the TCs, at the request of a local traffic authority. In these cases, appeals against such conditions are currently heard by the Secretary of State.	Appellate function transferred to the Transport Tribunal, consistent with appeals against other decisions made by the TCs.