

## **Worcestershire County Council Passenger Transport strategy consultation.**

- 1 BDC are committed to continue working alongside WCC to improve the transport infrastructure across North Worcestershire and beyond. The passenger transport strategy is a positive step and another key document which will help inform other strategies and plans such as the review of the Bromsgrove District Plan review. BDC welcome the opportunity to work with WCC and other stakeholders, such as public transport operators, on implementing the strategy following on from this consultation period.
- 2 The focus of this response has been from the perspective of Planning and climate change. Where possible responses to the specific consultation questions posed have been answered, although opportunity has also been taken to address other issues not covered specifically by the questions asked.
- 3 The strategy contains a wide range of elements which are positive and can be supported. With increased numbers of houses to be built particularly in Bromsgrove Town, and with further housing and employment allocations to be made through the review of the Bromsgrove District plan, whilst the strategy can be supported, it is the view of BDC that more consideration should be given to how passenger transport considerations can influence spatial strategies.

WCC's consultation questions or Section headings have been repeated in **bold** below to give the context to the response.

### **WCC's aims should focus on meeting essential transport needs in most cost effective way**

- 4 If services are not cost effective then there is a danger that they could be lost, however there is ~~also~~ a need to balance the human need with environmental and financial. The social advantages that services such as buses offer should not be overlooked, for some people the bus is the only realistic method of transport, and plays a vital role in allowing people to access day to day locations and services. If financial considerations take precedent and as a result much needed services are lost, then one of many implications will be increasing instances of social exclusion as people become isolated from the wider community in which they live. Instances of social exclusion may then place further pressure on other key local public services. A balance needs to be struck between the cost of the service and the impact it has on people's lives, especially more vulnerable people in society.
- 5 The strategy mentions it will 'Further support the objective in LTP 4 to limit the impacts of transport on the local environment. The environmental benefits of bus provision and in particular more energy efficient modern buses such as those with battery technology should play an increased role in the future fleet. It's key that public transport to be as sustainable as possible, methods which reduce harmful carbon emissions need to be introduced. Innovative power solutions such as solar charging of fleet at bus stations should be considered. All efforts to increase patronage and reduce cost with new innovations will be important in allowing services to operate successfully reducing any burden on the public purse that currently exists.

### **Home to School transport should be considered for integration with local bus services.**

- 6 There is potentially a conflict of purpose / need of service for users in home to school transport. Integration between the various users groups should be explored. If a shared bus service can be achieved in a way which ensures higher quality and more frequent services though increase patronage, this will be a benefit to a larger amount of service users and potential new service users. This could also have additional benefits such as better community cohesion. An alternative model where pupil usage is high could be to continue to separate home to school and general use, although this is not considered the most sustainable way of operating buses.

**WCC should explore alternative local transport solutions.**

- 7 Agree; It would have been useful to see proposed alternatives. The strategy could elaborate upon issues such as;
- addressing accessibility issues for people with restricted mobility,
  - providing rural locations without a service that is viable,
  - community uber or similar type solution,
  - volunteer community drivers,
  - lower cost vehicles, such as 12 seaters that are more viable to run in rural areas,
  - promoting vehicles with the objective of injecting these solutions into the transport network,
  - bus stops with secure storage (there should be secure storage at all transport nodes eg bus stops and train stations,
- 8 A key issue is the integration of existing modes, it is acknowledged that the strategy does include a section on modal integration, but it is BDCs view that this section lacks sufficient detail for it to be considered a robust strategy at this point. We agree further efforts should be made to join up key nodes throughout Bromsgrove and the district. For example Bromsgrove Town Centre, and Bromsgrove rail station. A more regular and convenient service which operates between key places, should allow for greater modal shift of people away from private cars onto buses and trains. Encouraging people to access the train station by means other than the car, or making it easier to access the train station at peak times from across the town would be advantageous, both from the point of sustainable transport but also encouraging linked trips to the tow centre, helping to support its vitality. Alternatives to the current traditional bus provision including using new technologies and EVs should be explored as a more sustainable option to providing rapid transit between the rail station and the town centre.
- 9 An essential element for more northern parts of the district served by the rail routes that feed into the West Midlands conurbation will be the policy on parking at rail stations. A strategy which ensures that the station car parks are used effectively and parking issues not displaced to other areas will be key. Collaboration with authorities in the conurbation to ensure that there is a coherent strategy for parking all stations is essential.

**WCC should consider supporting new technology initiatives.**

- 10 Agree; including those which support sustainable transport integration live feed notices (delays, alternative routes), contactless payments, e-tickets and through ticketing. Also use of more sustainable technology in fleets (electric, hydrogen, etc.)
- 11 Smart traffic management such as,
- scheduling additional buses at expected peak times, particularly aligning the arrival and departure times with rail services,
  - giving buses right of way at traffic lights,
  - the creation of bus lanes where possible and appropriate,
  - Creating better links between bus and rail and shared uber/community rides etc. particularly to help support the weekend/retail and evening economy
  - Consider the potential introduction of a congestion charge at certain times, whilst ensuring adequate provision for those that need access via public transport, this could help address congestion issues within the town centre.

**To what extent do you agree with how we propose to decide if we financially support a particular bus service?**

- 12 Agree: supporting decision to provide access for residents to local centre (healthcare, education, shops etc.). However, we must have due regard to prioritising support to areas with higher population density over those with smaller populations. In theory, with adequate management & partnership working, commercial viability in urban areas could be higher. Funding support should not be targeted to urban areas because they are poorly run, above much needed rural transport that is less commercially viable.
- 13 Deprivation, car ownership, primary journey purpose should be the primate indicator of the benefit of supporting the service, followed by economic viability. However, the strategy suggests that the economic viability of the service is the key priority.
- 14 The commitment to supporting community transport is welcomed. The strategy suggests that in rural areas WCC will work with Parish Councils and interest groups to define the most appropriate solution, BDC would be interested in also being part of this work. The work should not stop at defining the most appropriate solution; it also needs to deliver the most appropriate solution as well.

**Worcestershire Developments**

- 15 In the longer term this should be the focus of the strategy. Whilst decisions about where new development takes place are complicated, time consuming and influenced by a wide range of factors, the ability of new developments to help sustain existing passenger transport options or create new passenger transport option should not be overlooked. BDC welcomes the commitment to work *'with planning authorities and developer to ensure developments is brought forward in locations that offer genuine opportunities for access by a range of travel modes.'* WCC has already committed to developing a Strategic Transport Assessment (STA) and subsequent strategy with BDC as part of the plan review process. The

STA and subsequent strategy needs to consider all options in terms of the facilitation of passenger transport at the outset. This means the correct tools need to be in place to ensure that the evidence for the required infrastructure is robust, so all infrastructure that is eventually identified to support development is deliverable.

- 16 BDC do not feel that the strategy of encouraging developers to engage with operators goes far enough or is early enough in the process; similarly whilst seeking S106 funding is an essential part of the planning system it should be considered from the outset. It is accepted that in some areas it will be difficult to align the need for development and passenger transport provision. As identified above locations for new development, where possible, should be in places where the development helps sustain existing or create new passenger transport opportunities, and this consideration should be part of the evidence collected to justify the development.
- 17 Leaving the engagement with developers and the operators once a site has been allocated, introduces the very real possibility that the development location is not one which is commercially viable for the operator, and therefore an acceptable passenger transport solution is not provided. Also if likely 106 requirements are not known from the outset before land is allocated, the amount of s106 which may be required for the passenger transport solution could be at a level which is not viable for the development to sustain, therefore again the service does not get provided as intended. Early meaningful and evidenced based engagement with all stakeholders will be key to the ensuring the scenarios above do not happen.
- 18 Other initiatives within new developers and where possible with existing developments, could be the use of some of the following to encourage the use of more sustainable forms of transport.
- Work place parking schemes
  - Better promotion and education on alternative more sustainable modes
  - Better facilities within new development to encourage cycling and walking such as showers and lockers for staff members, or the ability to hire bikes and scooters
- 19 In conclusion we hope the above proves useful in informing the final strategy, BDC will continue to work with WCC on preparing a robust complimentary planning and transport strategies. Decreasing the reliance on personal motor vehicles and therefore assisting in the reduction of carbon emissions, improving air quality and reducing congestion, providing a better environment for residents and visitors to live and work in.