

Wider Policy Areas

Chapter 25 - Wider Policy Areas

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is an integral component of the Worcestershire LTP. Key objectives of the LTP are:

- To ensure transport facilitates the social inclusion of all the County's residents and
- To maximise the independent mobility of vulnerable transport users with particular regard to children, the elderly and the mobility impaired.

Inherent within all of the Package documents, are measures to promote social inclusion. The ability of the bus to penetrate almost all residential areas means it takes a leading role in removing social exclusion.

Worcestershire County Council are progressing innovative rural schemes to improve accessibility for those without access to a car. One such scheme is 'Kick-start' aimed at helping individuals that have problems accessing employment and training. This scheme currently only operates in Wychavon, but is to be expanded throughout the County in conjunction with the Employment Service, District Councils, the Chamber of Commerce, the Rural Development Commission and the Community Council.

Rural transport problems require flexible solutions. The diverse needs of rural communities cannot always be met by regular conventional bus services. The County Council is exploring schemes such as taxi-buses and post buses to strike a balance between community car, dial-a-ride schemes and a conventional bus service, and are investigating IT solutions to optimise the provision.

Even with greatly improved public transport links, community transport initiatives will continue to be necessary to provide transport for passengers who cannot use a conventional service. The County Council sees community transport as complementing the public transport network.

In providing a socially inclusive public transport system, consideration must be made to ensuring that it is affordable to all. Through partnership agreements the County Council will encourage public transport operators (bus and rail) to provide at least half price fares for the following members of the community, for all journeys within the County, and to/from adjacent districts:

- under 16's;
- under 18's in full time education;
- senior citizens;
- disabled and
- new deal employees.

In developing initiatives, the views of all sectors of the community have been sought through the various fora organised by the County, and through partnership working with the Community Council.

Disability Discrimination Act

Worcestershire County Council are committed to ensuring that transport is available to all. As such, the needs of the mobility impaired are considered throughout all strategies covered within this LTP, most notably:

- Integrated Public Transport, including accessibility criteria within the Bus Quality Partnerships, access improvements to rail platforms, and easy access, low floor, flush docking vehicles;
- Dial a Ride and other community transport initiatives (e.g. Kick-start) and
- Walking strategy, developing dropped kerbs for easy wheelchair / push chair access, tactile paving at crossing points, and audible crossing alerts.

Local Agenda 21

Sustainability is about meeting the needs of communities today and the long-term needs of generations to come. It brings together values of protecting the environment, meeting social needs and promoting economic success and calls for greater community involvement in decision-making.

Worcestershire County Council are committed to putting Sustainability values at the very core of the organisation to ensure "joined up" solutions that demonstrate real integration of environmental, social and economic considerations.

A top level team of Sustainability Stewards, Members and Officers from across the Council, are championing the work and have the ambitious task of creating a Sustainable Council.

Work with the wider community involves a variety of areas:

- the Local Agenda 21 Process and Action Plan (there is a Transport and Pollution LA21 Group);
- a forthcoming 'Welcome to our Future' Charitable Company that can fund and promote local sustainability projects;
- the various Transport fora and
- work to develop the Community Plan through the Worcestershire Partnership.

Economic Development and Tourism

The vision for the County is to:

'improve the quality of life of those who live and work in Worcestershire using economic prosperity as a foundation stone.'

The Economic Development and Regeneration Plan (EDP) assists in the delivery of this vision. Transport is an integral part of the EDP as it both influences, and is influenced by, the development strategy. The EDP addresses the issue of sustainability, ensuring that proposed economic development and regeneration activities are both sensitive to the needs of local communities of the present and future and that the direct and indirect benefits will be long term. The following section details relevant areas of the EDP.

The population of Worcestershire is expected to increase to approximately 550,000 by the year 2001, placing increasing importance in delivering a transport system which accommodates increased demand for travel, and not accepting an increase in car use as a result. The economic development plan enables this growth of prosperity within the economy. This LTP ensures that the growth is supported by sustainable transport options. Land use planning interfaces with the two disciplines to ensure the placement of economic activity is sensitive to the travel requirements of those that work and visit each site.

As a means of illustrating the importance placed on co-operative working between these disciplines, the County Council is seeking ways to make it easier for people to buy locally produced goods and services, for example:

- by providing information about producers and outlets;
- organising 'meet the buyers' events and
- in the production of a Worcestershire business directory.

Over time this will influence land use patterns, as development sites become increasingly closer to residential areas, and consequently reduce the demand for travel whilst maintaining economic prosperity and growth.

Similarly, the EDP provides support for the application to the Single Regeneration Budget for funding for the Village Retail Scheme in Worcestershire, which aims to improve local shops, including the adoption of computer systems to improve efficiency. Again this strengthens the ability of local shops to provide a local service, thus reducing travel demand for shopping trips. The EDP focuses resources on areas of greatest need and/or potential for regeneration, e.g. Kidderminster, Worcester, Redditch and Droitwich Canal, which are consistent with areas identified for transport improvements within this LTP and its associated Bid Documents.

Reinforcing the partnership approach is evident within both the EDP and the LTP, as the County Council is a member of the board of the Malvern Hills Science Park Company, along with Malvern Hills District Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). The Science Park offers a significant opportunity to utilise the knowledge and technological skills of DERA for the wider business community. The Council are also intending to set up a joint venture company with the successful bidder for the Term Highway Maintenance Contract to ensure the protection and possible enhancement of employment opportunities of staff currently employed by the Worcestershire Maintenance Services.

Finally, the County Council places an emphasis on the development of sustainable tourism, and is working in partnership with Worcestershire Tourism, the Chamber of Commerce and the private sector in the development of a strategic action plan for sustainable tourism, addressing both marketing and economic development issues.

Worcestershire Health Authority

The Health Authority is tasked with the duty to continuously improve and develop healthcare services across the County. Many of these developments, which are outlined in a first Health Improvement Programme will be in partnership with the County Council's Social Services Department, newly-established Primary Care Groups which broadly share District Council boundaries, and the NHS Community and Hospital Trusts which serve the County. The Council's Integrated Transport team have initiated discussions with the Health Authority on the way in which these developments, with their implications for new services working in new ways, may be incorporated in an overall approach to health improvement, through investment in public transport systems and also contributing to their accident reduction plans.

Hospital Link

A bid has been prepared in conjunction with Worcestershire Health Authority based on a network of bus services linking the hospital sites in Worcester, Redditch and Kidderminster. By operating via central bus and rail stations the network would also enhance inter-urban services between Worcester, Redditch, Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Bewdley and Stourport whilst improving inter-modal connections with rail services.

The bid is based on using high-quality vehicles, which would be fully accessible to all members of the community including wheel-chair users. The network would operate at regular intervals throughout the daytime period and continue into the evening in order to meet the needs of hospital staff and visitors.

