

Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011

Barnstaple and Bideford Area Strategy

Quality of Alternative Options

Walking

Walking has considerable potential within Barnstaple due to the compact nature of the town and attractive routes along the river, demonstrated by the historically high level of walking to work (16.8% in 2001). Thanks to the progress of School Travel Plans in the North Devon area, levels of walking to school have increased from 42% in 2001 to 51% in 2005. There are however challenges in the future as traditional manufacturing industries that have had a high level of walking are reducing.

The traffic levels in Barnstaple have had an impact on the attractiveness of walking in the town and particularly:

- Crossing the river to and from the town centre
- Crossing the major interchange at the Square for access to the town centre
- The Strand acting as a barrier between the town centre
- Crossing at key junctions such as Pilton Bridge
- The Barnstaple 'Our Town' survey in Autumn 2005 indicated that there were particular concerns for those with mobility impairments including the elderly and those in wheelchairs. There were many requests to provide routes that were easy and attractive to use.

There are opportunities to encourage those who need to drive to Barnstaple from rural areas to walk in from the edge of town if suitable facilities are provided. The success of the Park and Ride site at Park School has demonstrated this. The Western Bypass provides a new walking route connecting the Sticklepath area to Pottington Industrial Estate and Pilton College. The County Council is also working with partners on the possible relocation of North Devon College that has over 10,000 students (full and part time) and staff. Two sites are currently being assessed, both of which have the potential to increase levels of walking with the support of high quality routes and on-site facilities.

Walking is also a well used means of transport within Bideford, both for utility journeys and visitors. However there is a need to improve:

- Links between the town centre (particularly the recently enhanced Quay) and East the Water and the Tarka Trail across the river
- Links between residential areas and schools and the town centre

Cycling

Significant progress has been made in developing a cycle network in Barnstaple, building on the success of the National Cycle Network from Torrington / Bideford to Ilfracombe and Exmoor. Cycling levels in Barnstaple have increased steadily although some of this has been due to tourism. Cycling to work and school has been relatively low, again partly due to the changing patterns of employment. School travel plans have highlighted a number of concerns about dangerous junctions and a general lack of safe routes, particularly to Pilton College, one of the two secondary schools in the town.

Many of the problems that cyclists encounter are at similar locations to those experienced by pedestrians, particularly at major junctions. There are a number of opportunities to improve cycle links to / from and within the Pilton area and in particular the College, Business Park and North Devon Hospital. These include the redevelopment of four brownfield sites and the new link to Sticklepath and Roundswell across the river afforded by the Western Bypass. A development brief incorporating proposed routes has been produced for the area by North Devon District Council with the close support of the County Council. As noted above, the possible relocation of North Devon College provides a significant opportunity to increase

levels of cycling. The current campus is at the top of a hill and cycling levels are generally low. A high proportion of students live on the eastern side of the river within cycling distance of the potential sites.

Cycling in Bideford, with the exception of the Tarka Trail, is generally low due to a combination of difficult topography and a lack of attractive routes. There is a need to improve the link between the Tarka Trail / NCN and the town centre. The planned relocation of the community college, as is the case in Barnstaple, provides an opportunity to increase cycling levels from a low base and create a network focussed on the new site. Detailed site options are currently under consideration.

Buses

Bus usage in northern Devon has been increasing steadily over the past five years against the downward national trend, although this has plateaued off in the past year. Part of this has been due to the successful Life in the Bus Lane scheme at North Devon College which has significantly increased the levels of students travelling by bus following investment in new routes, vehicles and smartcard technology backed up by extensive information and support. Other services including the Park and Ride have also done particularly well. The overall proportion of people travelling to work by bus in the Barnstaple area is however relatively low at around 4%, partly reflecting the compact nature of the town.

Due to the rural nature of the area buses in northern Devon are heavily financially supported by the County Council with the exception of the main inter-urban routes such as those between Bideford and Barnstaple and some intra-town services. The viability of intra-town services in Barnstaple and Bideford has been falling with consequent reductions in some services. This has been in part due to:

- the poor quality of some vehicles including lack of low floor access
- increasing driver and vehicle resources required to maintain services, itself primarily a function of traffic delays in Barnstaple
- the increased operating costs due to fuel, national insurance increases etc.
- changes in travel patterns, particularly associated with retail

Data has been collected on the punctuality of services on key corridors in addition to surveys of individual services to determine the detailed causes of delays. The results indicated:

- there is a high degree of variability in the punctuality of services, both across different times of day and between different days. The snapshot survey indicated that typically 10-15% of services were late at the chosen timing point with between 0 and 5% very late.
- delays are unpredictable but tend to build up during the day with services (vehicles) that enter and exit Barnstaple several times a day particularly vulnerable and especially during the summer. In the worst case, 61% of services into Barnstaple in the evening peak were late and 4% very late.
- boarding times could be improved

Information provision is mixed but travel plan surveys indicate that there appears to be a low level of awareness of the services available including their frequency. There is also a general concern over the reliability and punctuality of services, either from experience, word of mouth or lack of knowledge.

The Western Bypass provides a major opportunity to reallocate scarce road space within the town to priority users such as buses. This will need to be combined with the redevelopment of brownfield sites to reconfigure the timetables and routes to match changing patterns of demand. A Bus Quality partnership has been developed with the major operator, First, and this provides a good basis upon which to take advantage of the opportunities.

Rail

Rail patronage on the Tarka line to Exeter has been growing successfully over the past few years (26% since 2001), particularly following the successful marketing and station

improvement work by the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership that the County Council supports. The Partnership has undertaken a detailed passenger survey to understand people's perceptions and views of the service. Key issues from this and other sources include:

- the poor condition of the station buildings at Barnstaple
- the need to improve walking and cycling links to the town centre
- better physical interchange between rail and bus services, particularly those to Bideford

Taxis

Taxis are an important part of the public transport system in northern Devon where low wages mean that many households (72% in the Barnstaple area) have only one or no car at all. They are also well used by the high number of tourists and visitors to the town. Taxis are also key to the successful management of access to and from nightclubs and pubs that are concentrated in Bideford and Barnstaple. Many of the problems for taxis in Bideford were addressed in the redesign and enhancement of the Quay in the first LTP. However the Licensing Consultation Panel for North Devon (including representatives from the industry and police) has highlighted a number of concerns in Barnstaple focussing on the need to provide more and better located taxi ranks in the town centre. Taxi operators have also expressed