

ChapterFive

Transport Issues and Impacts

Introduction

This Chapter covers the following transport issues which have been identified, through consultation, as being particularly significant: the future of rail services, surface access to airports, policies on taxis and private hire vehicles, distribution of freight, long distance coach travel and access to ports.

It also summarises the results of two assessments of the impacts of the Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011: an equality impacts and needs assessment and the Strategic Environmental Assessment.



The Tarka line, connecting Exeter with Barnstaple and other communities in north Devon, is a vital local public transport link for the county's residents and visitors alike. The County Council is committed to supporting the future of this and other branch rail lines in Devon.

Future of Rail Services in Devon

Improvements to the services offered by the train operating companies led to a steady growth in patronage on rail services to and within the county during the period of the Devon Local Transport Plan 2001-2006. Service reliability and punctuality have recovered following the period of severe disruption in the aftermath of the Hatfield rail accident in 2000, which resulted in many speed restrictions that affected both local and longer distance rail services.

Devon County Council places great importance on both strategic rail links to key destinations such as London, Birmingham and Heathrow, and local rail journeys for commuting, education or recreation. The County Council works in close partnership with the rail industry to:

- Financially support additional train services.
- Promote rail travel - both through direct provision of publicity and timetables, and through sponsorship of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership.
- Provide small station improvements.



Rail services will have a strengthened role over the period 2006 to 2011 and Devon County Council will seek to ensure that the recent improvements to train service patterns are retained. In particular, it will

- Support the provision of faster, limited stop journeys to and from London Paddington during the morning and evening peak periods which will contribute to continued economic growth in the Exeter sub region.
- Seek improved services and journey times on the route to London Waterloo.
- Work with the new franchise holders to secure better train services and rolling stock.
- Support the upgrading of facilities at stations to ensure that adequate facilities are available, as appropriate, at all stations, including car parking, disabled access, shelter and real time information.

Local train services are becoming increasingly important, and Devon County Council has welcomed the initiative to link the Exmouth, Paignton and Barnstaple services into Exeter, with a clock-face timetable. This has improved cross-Exeter services, and significantly enhanced accessibility of the major employment area at Digby east of Exeter city centre, and Sowton adjacent to the M5 motorway. The growth and improvement of these local rail services will need to continue to accommodate the new housing, employment and other development proposed over the period to 2026 in the Regional Spatial Strategy which has designated Exeter as a capital principal urban area. There will be a need to ensure adequate capacity on peak period trains.

The provisional Devon Local Transport Plan programme for 2006-2011 includes:

- Improving accessibility by raising platform heights at Starcross, Exeter St Thomas, Exton and Lympstone where low height platforms restrict access to trains.
- Partnership schemes to improve facilities at major stations which are "gateways" to the rail network: Exeter St Davids, Newton Abbot and Tiverton Parkway.

The expansion and development of the Exeter PUA include the provision of a new railway station on the Waterloo to Exeter line, at the new community in East Devon (Cranbrook). The new station is a crucial part of the access strategy for the new community and associated developments, which include Skypark - a high quality business park of 30ha, and the new terminal for Exeter airport. The Cranbrook new community, including the new railway station, achieved "minded to grant" planning status in May 2005, and opening of the station is planned for 2008/09, within the first phase of development.

Devon County Council wishes to see improvement of rail services on the Waterloo to Exeter route, and is seeking an hourly through train service, with a more frequent half-hourly service between Axminster and Exeter. Somerset and Devon County Councils, together with the South West Regional Development Agency, promoted a study to ascertain the track and signalling requirements for such services. The study concluded that there was a need for two additional passing loops, each around three miles long, at a total estimated cost of £23m. The County Council is currently considering how to promote the next phase of investigation, which would be the preparation of a business case for the scheme, with the objective of it being included in the Regional Transport Strategy.

Devon County Council is an enthusiastic participant in developing the Community Railways initiative, through its involvement in the joint pilot for the Tamar Valley and Looe Valley branch lines. This is a means of increasing patronage and reducing subsidy per passenger, whilst the development of lower cost models for railway

operation may help exploration of the potential for re-opening the Drake line between Bere Alston and Tavistock. Devon County Council will also continue to support train services to Okehampton, as part of the Dartmoor Sunday Rover public transport network.

Air Services and Airports

At present many of the air journeys of Devon residents and business people have to be made through Heathrow and Gatwick airports. Devon County Council supports the thrust of the Government's Air Transport White Paper, which sees a significant growth in travel from regional airports. The County Council has enthusiastically supported the growth in regional air services from Exeter International Airport since 2003, which have resulted in annual throughput at the airport rising from 400,000 to 700,000 passengers per year. The County Council is keen to see continued expansion in the number of routes operated from Exeter International Airport, and in order to facilitate this continued growth it is looking to move the airport from Council ownership into the private sector. This will enable the bringing forward of significant capital investment needed to achieve a major expansion in terminal facilities, which already has "minded to grant" planning status.

Exeter Airport and Plymouth Airport are both identified as accessibility points in the European Air Network, and the need to expand their role is recognised in the Devon Structure Plan (Policy TR14). One of the key issues prompted by expansion of air travel is the provision of adequate surface access, including development of public transport links. Specific access issues relating to Plymouth Airport are set out in the Plymouth Local Transport Plan.

The access needs of Exeter International Airport are covered in chapter 3, as part of the provisional programme 2006-2011 for the Exeter Sub Region. These include the provision of a new railway station on the Exeter to Waterloo railway line approximately 1.5 km from the airport, and the development of bus services linking the new community, Skypark and airport with other development to the East of Exeter and the city centre. Devon County Council will continue to support the preparation and implementation of an employers travel plan for Exeter International Airport.

Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles

The Department for Transport's March 2004 "Action Plan for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles" explains their integral role as part of local transport provision. Taxis and private hire vehicles play a vital role in Devon helping deliver the objectives to tackle traffic congestion and deliver

accessibility particularly for older people and those with disabilities as well as being important in terms of personal safety particularly for women.

To continue developing this role, Devon County Council facilitates a joint forum with the eight Devon District Councils as licensing authorities which has progressed:

- The development of the innovative Fare Car programme.
- Vehicle standards / development in terms of Disability Discrimination Act



Flexible Fare Car services are one of Devon County Council's range of innovative approaches to meeting the local travel needs of people in remoter rural parts of the county.

compliance and maximising the provision of accessible taxis.

- Investigating the application of consistent standards of driver vetting, and training to provide for any specific needs of older and less-able passengers.
- Enhancing interchange facilities.
- Integrating taxis into other infrastructure projects by allowing their use of bus lanes.

District Councils, as licensing authorities, have, in compliance with the Department for Transport's Action Plan, conducted reviews of their local policies relating to restriction of the number of taxi licences issued. Five of the eight Devon District Councils no longer place limits on the number issued and the remaining three authorities are still to report on surveys into unmet demand for taxi services. The results of these will be included in the Final Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011.

Distribution of Freight

Nationally, nearly 90% of all inland freight is road based accounting for approximately 15% of total vehicle miles. The South West Regional Assembly identified, as part of its September 2004 "Developing the Regional Transport Strategy", the network of national, regional and local roads which, together with the rail routes, ports and airports, comprises the regional freight network. Policy TR15 of the Devon Structure Plan sets out the approach to freight distribution.

There are Freight Quality Partnerships in Devon covering the Exeter and Newton Abbot areas, northern Devon and the South Hams. The four FQPs have helped develop an understanding of local freight distribution issues promoting constructive solutions, taking account of environmental and social concerns as well as the need of access for goods and services.

The measures for 2006-2011 are to:

- Develop the regional freight network through road signing and lorry routing.
- Work towards sustainable patterns of freight distribution in accordance with Devon Structure Plan policy TR15.
- Continue to support the implementation and review of the freight quality partnership action plans, including an investigation of the need for lorry parking.

Long Distance Coach Travel

Devon is served with a network of long distance scheduled coach services, with the main destinations being London and Heathrow airport. The main destinations for travel to Devon are Exeter and Barnstaple. The operators have low operational costs compared to rail and connect a larger number of communities. The challenges for the operators are:

- Delays due to increasing traffic congestion
- Providing fully accessible coaches
- Ensuring provision of as wide a range of services as possible in rural areas



The County Council is working with National Express and other operators to better integrate coach services with other travel modes.

Devon County Council will support long distance coach travel by:

- Enabling timetabled coach services to take advantage of time savings offered by bus priority measures.
- Improving stopping and waiting facilities.
- Working with coach operators to integrate services with other modes so as to offer a wider range of connections.

Access to Ports

“Ports in the South West are extremely diverse. The largest serve national markets; others represent vital passenger and trade links to the Continent; others cover local and regional markets which have a high importance to local communities.” (British Ports Association).

Devon’s central position along Europe’s Atlantic Area seaboard, and astride one of the world’s major shipping routes (the English Channel), is identified explicitly in the Devon Structure Plan (2004). Policy TR13 recognises the following strategic functions for the main ports in its area:

- Plymouth as a commercial and fishing port linked to the European Transport Network;
- Teignmouth as a commercial port;
- Bideford as a commercial port; and
- Brixham as a fishing port.

In addition, Ilfracombe is an example of a smaller port serving local functions.

The significance of these ports was underlined in 2003 by the Devon Strategic Partnership, whose task group report on Devon’s Transport Connections identified the priority to maintain and enhance port access in an environmentally sustainable manner.

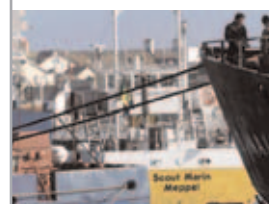
Specific issues surrounding access to/from the port facilities at Plymouth and at Brixham are addressed in the Plymouth and the Torbay Local Transport Plans.

Bideford

In 2004 the County Council completed its Bideford Quay enhancement scheme, which secured the immediate access needs for the workings of the commercial port for 30 vessels a year and the Lundy ferry. Linked to this, the County Council is promoting a significant strengthening scheme for the nearby Bideford Long Bridge, while its major scheme for the Barnstaple Western Bypass and Downstream Bridge will also provide access improvements for the port. The County Council’s Barnstaple Area Freight Quality Partnership provides the context for addressing access issues over the coming years.

Teignmouth

Teignmouth is an important port for shipping ball clay to international markets and for animal feed and fertiliser. It handles over 300 vessels a year with more than 600,000 tonnes of cargo. The port company has recently made a £4million investment in enhancing the port’s facilities including the provision of additional on site storage. Alongside this investment, traffic management arrangements have been reviewed in order to ensure that congestion issues are addressed in accordance with the County Council’s Newton Abbot Area Freight Quality Partnership.



Passengers board Exeter's new low floor Ring and Ride bus, which was launched in spring 2005. The travel needs of people with disabilities are one of the key areas addressed in the Equality Needs and Impact Assessment undertaken for the Devon Local Transport Plan.



Assessment of Equality Needs and Impacts

An equality impact and needs assessment (EINA) has been undertaken as part of the preparation of the Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 to ensure that its objectives, provisional targets and programme do not discriminate and, where possible, actively promote equality.

The assessment considered the impacts on, and needs of, the following different groups of people:

- Women and men
- People of different racial groups
- People who are part of the settled and travelling community
- People who use different languages
- People of different religions or beliefs including those who do not have a religion or belief
- Disabled people
- People of different sexual orientations
- People of different ages

The responses to the consultation on the Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 from the following groups and organisations were particularly considered in undertaking the EINA:

- Age Concern
- Bus Users UK
- Clyst Vale Community College
- Community and voluntary transport groups
- Connexions Cornwall and Devon
- Countryside Agency
- Devon and Exeter Racial Equality Council
- Devon Public Health Network
- Exeter College
- Fair Play South West
- Help the Aged
- Pilton Community College
- Rail Passenger Council
- Rail User Groups
- University of the Third Age
- Wheels to Work scheme coordinators

There is a link to the EINA at www.devon.gov.uk/transport and some of the impacts and needs which it highlights for each of the objectives of the Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 are:

Tackling traffic congestion – the need to improve the accessibility of buses and trains, and provide information about public transport services, to people of different ages, disabled people and people who use different languages.

Delivering accessibility – understanding the impacts of variations in the accessibility of services and facilities on people of different ages.

Making roads safer – recognising the needs of people of different ages and disabled people as part of the Devon road safety strategy.

Improving air quality – tackling any particular impacts of poor air quality on the health of people of different ages.

Improving recreation, tourism and leisure – providing for the needs of people of different ages, disabled people and people who use different languages in improving access to the countryside.

Promoting health and well-being – understanding the needs of people of different ages and people with disabilities in promoting healthy travel and active lifestyles.

Improving public spaces – recognising the different needs of men and women in planning improvements to the quality of public spaces.



Assessment of Strategic Environmental Impacts

The provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 has been identified as a plan that is subject to the requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment". Known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment or SEA Directive, the aim of the Directive is to "...provide for a high level of protection for the environment and contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans...with a view to promoting sustainable development."

An SEA has therefore been carried out "in house" within Devon County Council alongside the development of the DLTP 2006-11. Reflecting and incorporating TAG Unit 2.11, Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidance for Transport Plans and Programmes, and the New Approach to Appraisal, its purpose is to support the integration of sustainability considerations within the plan making process and inform and influence its development.

The SEA of the Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 will comprise the following three elements:

1. Scoping Report (submitted November 2004)

In November 2004 a "Scoping Report" was submitted to the four statutory environmental bodies: the Countryside Agency; English Heritage; English Nature and the Environment Agency, as well as other interested parties for consultation. Its purpose was to establish the scope of and methodology for the Strategic Environmental Assessment and to provide the basis for consultation related to the range and level of detail of the Environmental Report, the baseline it is established on, and the scenarios (Options) examined.

2. Environmental Report (submitted alongside the Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011)

The Environmental Report has been made available for public consultation alongside this document. By examining the likely environmental effects of the four Options outlined in Chapter 3, the Environmental Report outlines the extent of the likely positive and negative environmental impacts of different versions of the plan and the potential sustainability issues that may arise. Utilising the response gained from consultation on the Scoping Report, the Environmental Report (ER) is therefore the key written output of the SEA.

3. SEA Statement (to be submitted March 2006)

In March 2006, the Final Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 will be submitted alongside an Environmental Statement- the "SEA Statement". This will outline how the SEA process has influenced and informed the LTP development process and describe how consultation on the SEA has been incorporated.

After the submission of the final LTP and the SEA Statement, a monitoring process will take place in accordance with Annual Progress Report development. This will be an ongoing assessment of the progress of the LTP in relation to the environment and sustainability.

Whilst the SEA has been carried out "in house", the SEA has largely been progressed separately from the Devon Local Transport Plan development process. This has ensured a measure of transparency and impartiality in the development process. To guarantee that the SEA has informed and influenced the preparation of the local transport plan though, there has been close interaction between the relevant teams and regular opportunities for the SEA to contribute to the Plan's development.

Additional issues raised by the SEA

In addition to those that have been highlighted in Chapter 2 for each of the seven objectives of the Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011, the SEA process has highlighted the following issues:

Highway maintenance programme

The SEA process has highlighted the need for the following to continue to be incorporated as part of the highway maintenance programme for 2006-2011:

- Low noise surfacing
- Recycled materials use
- Suitable and sustainable drainage

Devon County Council's environmental audit process for transport schemes

At present, for all Devon County Council transport schemes there is an existing environmental audit process which is applied to a wide variety of transport initiatives. The SEA process has highlighted the potential for this environmental audit process to be updated. In response to this, the audit process will be revised, with a view to incorporating the SEA "topics" that have made up the technical scope of the SEA assessment process: air; biodiversity, flora and fauna; climatic factors; cultural heritage, human health; landscape; material assets; population; soil; water.

Park and Ride Services

The development of park and ride sites will have benefits in regard to air quality, encouraging people to use public transport for part of their journey, and tackling traffic congestion. Park and ride will also contribute to improved accessibility where the provision of end to end public transport services is economically and socially problematic. The SEA process however has highlighted environmental issues related to Park and Ride: it has the potential to encourage car use, require greenfield land take, stimulate an erosion of tranquillity, obscure boundary between rural and urban environments, promote a bias to car users and support longer distance commuting. These environmental impacts will be especially relevant to Exeter and Barnstaple.

Utilising the feedback from the consultation on the Environmental Report, the Final Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 will seek to incorporate, balance and mitigate these issues. The SEA Statement, which will be published with the Final Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 in March 2006, will outline how this has been achieved.

