

ANNEX 10:

Bus Strategy

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the Bus Strategy for Darlington. It forms an essential element of the second Darlington Local Transport Plan (LTP2) and explains the way in which bus improvements will be implemented in the authority over the next LTP period (2006 to 2011). In doing so it builds upon the strategy implemented in the first Local Transport Plan (LTP1). The following summary spells out the key issues to be addressed by this document. (Table 1)

Table 1

| SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES | |
|---|--|
| Public and stakeholder concerns resulting in year on year passenger decline | Congestion at key junctions, poor perception of bus services due to punctuality and reliability issues, lifestyle issues, poor accessibility, outdated network |
| Solutions | Physical measures – bus lanes, improved infrastructure, traffic light priorities Operational measures – improved customer care, training Perceptual measures – better marketing and information provision Other measures – free concessionary fares scheme offering enhanced benefits Above delivered through Strategic Quality Bus Partnership, Punctuality Improvement Partnership and Quality Bus Route Partnerships In addition, the Council will explore the scope for demand management and parking restraint |

The importance of the bus to the LTP

A quality bus system, meeting the needs of the residents of Darlington, is absolutely critical to the successful delivery of local our transport strategy. The geography of the town and the design of its road system mean there are limited opportunities to significantly increase road capacity, although it is possible to improve selected junctions. As detailed in the Second Local Transport Plan, we are seeking to address the following relevant issues of concern:-

- accessibility for all people,
- traffic congestion,
- safety and security, and
- information provision

It is expected that as average incomes rise in Darlington as a result of further economic growth, the levels of car ownership and use will also increase, thus resulting in increasing levels of traffic congestion. This means that we must maximise the potential of alternatives to the private car, be that bus, rail, walking, cycling or motorcycling, whilst ensuring that these alternatives are sustainable so as to promote economic growth and make a positive contribution to quality of life for all. Bus services clearly are of special importance to those who have no access to a

private car.

Darlington's Transport Strategy seeks to address the issues raised above in a sustainable manner, providing additional road capacity where it is possible and appropriate to do so but also to implement demand management measures and promote the use of sustainable modes, challenge attitudes and encourage people to change their travel behaviour. However, it does recognise that some trips have to be made by car, as there is no reasonable alternative. For it to succeed, however, we need a quality public transport system that offers an attractive travel solution that people want to use to gain access to services and facilities. The town of Darlington is currently well served by bus routes, given a tradition of high usage and low car ownership. However, this situation is under threat: patronage has been declining slowly in recent years and more people have a choice about their mode of travel. For example, a recent study carried out by the Council

into Concessionary Fares indicates that 44% of eligible residents over 60 do not take up a travel concession. This is in part due to increasing levels of access to a private car, some 68% had such access rather than being 'captive' to bus travel. This lifestyle change is reflected in all age groups as average income levels increase.

What difference does the bus make?

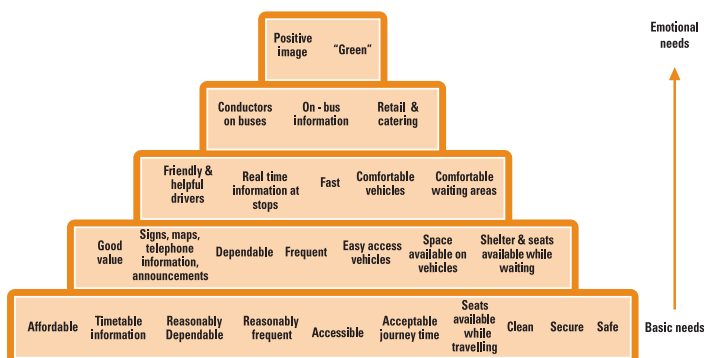
If a bus service satisfies all the basic needs (as indicated in **Figure 1**) and is also reasonably comfortable (i.e. it is a "good" quality service), what difference would this make? The key difference is that a good quality bus service will be used not only by people who have no choice, but also because people want to use it and prefer it to other options. This means that more people will use the service, and those that do will probably also use it more often. Research consistently shows that there is latent demand for "good" bus services, and there is certainly strong case study evidence that operating a good service results in more patronage.

Conversely, unless all the attributes are in place at a lower level in the hierarchy, there will be no point in providing some attributes from the next level up (**Figure 1**). They will not be valued, while there still exists a more basic shortcoming in the service.

The challenge and the vision

Attributes Hierarchy

Figure 1



Within the town and to the rural villages, the challenge that this bus strategy must deliver on is to provide a quality network and service that meets these needs and aspirations. We define such a network as one where:-

- reliability exists;
- services go to the places, and at the times that people need;
- waiting and travelling facilities are fit for purpose and attractive;
- fares are understandable and tickets interchangeable between different bus operators;
- information is easily obtainable in an appropriate format for

the user; and

- people feel safe and secure.

The Council and local bus operators need to ensure that this is provided in a coherent manner that maximises the benefits from any investment, be that a new bus shelter or a fleet of low floor buses.

In our surrounding villages, the volume and frequency of bus services is always going to be more limited, but it is essential that a service is offered that can provide access to key facilities for people without personal transport. In conjunction with the Accessibility Strategy, we will assess and develop effective ways of serving these communities through an integrated approach where appropriate types of public transport are specified according to need, making the best use of commercial and procured bus services, taxis and community transport options.

A third area that this bus strategy considers are specific transport needs, such as education, adult social services and transport for people with mobility impairments, or who cannot access conventional public transport. In respect of these areas, again we need to ensure that we are utilising our buses, taxis and community transport services to the best of their abilities, in a cost effective way that meets the ethos of the Gershon review and achieves value for money.

The need for partnership

These different challenges all require significant action over the next 5 years and our Second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) proposes implementation strategies and the commensurate funding to deliver this. However, none of this can be achieved by the Council in isolation and existing joint-working with our relevant partners will remain critical to delivering this strategy. In relation to the main bus network, the Council, local bus operators and others (such as Darlington Association on Disability) all need to work together to bring about the step-change in quality that this strategy seeks. In addition, representatives from providers, planners and users in neighbouring areas need to be involved – for example from County Durham which is the origin of some 66% of inbound bus journeys to Darlington.

The Accessibility Strategy will be developed and implemented through a strong partnership process with Darlington Partnership (the local Strategic Partnership) thematic groups as well as other organisations. The outcome of the Accessibility Strategy could necessitate the development of new bus services or alterations to existing ones by the relevant partners to meet specific needs and issues.

Our primary bus operators – Stagecoach and Arriva – thoroughly endorse our Transport Strategy approach and are offering support to the *Town on the Move* sustainable travel demonstration town initiative which ends in 2009. We plan to move forward with them by adopting a Borough wide Strategic Quality Bus Partnership, linking downwards to individual Quality Bus Routes and a Bus Performance Improvement Plan delivered through a Punctuality Improvement Partnership.

These processes must deliver the Bus Strategy during this next period, otherwise our whole LTP strategy outcomes could be put at risk. This is due to the important role that we see the bus playing over the next five years in Darlington. Therefore, an integral part of this document is to set out in more detail what the implementation of this vision entails and the respective roles of the Partners. If at the end of LTP2, all the partners have delivered on these, then Darlington residents should have the quality bus system that is capable of offering genuine travel choices and allows other elements of the LTP2 strategy to be successfully implemented. If not, then the Council will need to explore other mechanisms for ensuring the bus system delivers what local people need from it.

Layout of this document

The Darlington Bus Strategy has been prepared in accordance with DfT guidance and sets out the Council's approach to addressing the causes of declining bus use in partnership with local bus operators. The strategy is set out in the following sections:

- Policy Context (Section 2)
- Local Context (Section 3)
- Vision, Objectives and Policies for the Bus Strategy (Section 4)
- Implementation & Delivery (Section 5)
- Targets and Performance Indicators (Section 6)

2. POLICY CONTEXT

The national, regional and local policy context is set out in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the Darlington's second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) (2006 – 2011). The section below sets out the policy context for the Darlington bus strategy based on the Government and Local Government Association shared priorities for transport, the legislative framework for buses, Darlington's LTP2, Government guidance on the preparation of bus strategies, and the framework for accessibility planning.

The Transport Shared Priority

The transport shared priority was agreed between the Government and the Local Government Association in 2002. The key aims are:

- reducing problems of traffic congestion;
- improving access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need, in ways that are sustainable;
- improving road safety;
- improving air quality; and
- improving the local quality of life.

The bus strategy contributes to the achievement of each element of the shared priorities by:

- Providing a realistic alternative to the private car / encouraging modal transfer to the bus;
- Providing improved access to local jobs and services;
- Providing a safer mode of travel to the car;
- Providing a more efficient, cleaner transport system;
- And hence contributing to improved quality of life for the people of Darlington.

The Legislative Framework

Bus operations are governed by the 1985 and 2000 Transport Acts. The 1985 Act deregulated the bus market allowing commercial bus operators the freedom to choose their routes, timetables and fares and to change or withdraw their services subject to providing the required period of notice. Under the Act "socially necessary" bus services may be procured by Local Authorities if they cannot be provided commercially and must not compete with commercial services.

The 2000 Act made provision for statutory quality *bus partnerships* and *quality contracts*. The former enables Local Authorities to form partnerships with operators whereby the highway authority commits to provide bus infrastructure and facilities whilst bus companies guarantee, in a statement to the Traffic Commissioner, to operate an enhanced level of service. The latter enables the specification of services across the entire network for a particular area, funded by the local authority and operated by bus companies under a franchise agreement, much as is the case in London. The Act states, however, that this should only be pursued where bus strategy aims cannot be achieved by any other means and where it can be demonstrated that all avenues to achieve the desired strategy have been exhausted.

In addition, the 2000 Act requires local authorities to prepare Local Transport Plans, Bus Strategies and Accessibility Planning Frameworks.

Bus Strategies

2.7 The Department for Transport has published *Guidance On Preparing Bus Strategies*. The Bus Strategy, which should be an annex to the LTP or within the LTP, should contain policies to ensure that:

- Bus services meet the transport requirements of the people within their area and that the authority considers should be met, interpreted in the light of the accessibility and congestion shared priority (see accessibility paragraph later in this section);

- Bus services are provided to the required standards: see Section 4;
- Appropriate additional facilities and services connected with bus services should be provided (including bus waiting facilities, bus priority, bus service information, interchanges and integration): see Section 4.

2.8 The guidance also emphasises other needs, listed below in **Table 2** along with how we have addressed them.

Table 2 How the bus strategy responds to government requirements

| Bus strategy requirement | How addressed | Where |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| Consult with other Local Authorities, operators and bus user representatives; | Ongoing discussions with Tees Valley authorities/ preparation of Tees Valley Bus Strategy North Yorkshire and Durham County Councils consulted in development of LTP2 Transport Forum Darlington Association on Disability GOLD (Growing Older in Darlington) Transport and Young People Conference – LAA is focused on helping young people and consultation has been carried out with the Darlington Youth Assembly | This section |
| Demonstrate how subsidised bus services support the achievement of local transport objectives and address accessibility and social inclusion; | Accessibility Strategy investigating areas of need and assessing the requirement for procured services. | Main LTP Accessibility Strategy |
| Describe policies for use of rural bus subsidy grant and continued support of previously funded schemes under rural and urban bus challenges and rural bus partnership; | Apply rural bus subsidy grant according to needs identified through Accessibility Strategy. | Section 4 |
| Have regard to measures relating to local education and social services functions and steps being taken to integrate these; | Further work being undertaken in 2006 to identify linkages and common needs of users. | Section 4 |
| Improving access to jobs and services for those most in need, reduce congestion and pollution and improve safety; | The overarching aim and action plan addresses this, together with the Accessibility Strategy | Sections 4 and 5 |
| Partnership working with operators. | Strategic Quality Bus Partnership and Punctuality Improvement Partnerships established. | Section 5 |

Accessibility Strategy

The DfT's guidance on preparing local transport plans includes a new requirement for local authorities preparing accessibility strategies. These should include local targets for accessibility improvements and be underpinned by accessibility assessments.

Key requirements for accessibility strategies include the need to be:

- Set in the context of the wider vision and objectives for that area;
- Aim to improve accessibility for all, particularly disadvantaged groups and areas;
- Set out accessibility priorities within the 5 year period;
- Provide targets for improving accessibility;
- Include a series of more detailed local accessibility action plans;
- Show how accessibility is incorporated in to wider policy and scheme development and delivery on both transport and non-transport sectors;

The Accessibility Strategy has been formulated through joint working with Darlington Partnership, the local Strategic Partnership, since it closely supports the achievement of the Community Strategy. The Action Plan for 2005-06 included accessibility planning as one of five cross cutting issues to be addressed by all four of the Partnership theme groups. The aim is to work in partnership to secure and enhance accessibility to key services or facilities, to ensure that everyone in the Borough has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, all aspects of community life.

The Local Policy Context

The Community Strategy "Where Quality comes to Life", is directed at achieving an agreed vision for the Borough. As part of the realisation of this vision, Darlington Partnership has made accessibility one of its five cross-cutting issues thus placing access to facilities and services at the core of its work focus. In turn, this focus on accessibility will influence the provision of local bus services in the Borough.

Darlington's Economic Development Strategy (2004-2009) has focused the achievement of four strategic outcomes:

- increased levels of employment,
- higher wage levels,
- growth in business start ups, and
- more investment retained within the local economy.

It seeks to do this through quality of life and accessibility – both issues that transport, and bus travel, can contribute positively to.

Darlington's Local Area Agreement (LAA) is our response to the Government initiative to promote partnership working through a three year agreement between the Council, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), schools, colleges and other relevant organisations. This provides the opportunity to work differently in partnership to improve outcomes for children and young people which is the focus of the LAA. This is a major opportunity to ensure that transport is not a barrier for young people by tackling limited travel horizons, safety issues, the perceived and real costs of travel, the health impacts of travel and reducing the need to travel through better planning and delivery of services across the Authority.

Darlington LTP2

Darlington's Transport Strategy contains a vision for developing transport in the Borough from 2006 to 2030. The vision is:-

- to support the economic regeneration of, and quality of life in, Darlington;
- to improve accessibility to services and opportunities by providing travel options, so that all may participate in the life of their community;
- to tackle traffic congestion and its associated impact on local communities through a focus on sustainable travel choices and where appropriate enhancing capacity or managing demand, thus contributing to residents' quality of life.
- continue to tackle road safety and improve perceptions of safety;
- to deliver solutions to travel needs in partnership with local people, businesses and other providers.

The achievement of the vision is realised in the Second Local Transport Plan through the following six strategy objectives (see **Table 3**). Each objective is linked back to the Community Strategy and is cross-referenced both by that and the elements of the Shared Priority for transport.

Table 3 Darlington LTP Strategy Objectives

| Strategy Objective | Transport Shared Priority | Community Strategy | How the bus can help to achieve this |
|---|----------------------------------|--|--|
| A To provide the framework for sustainable development of new and existing businesses, housing and services in Darlington. | Accessibility Quality of life | Improving the local economy Enhancing the environment | Adapt the network to better serve new and existing workplaces and areas of housing through use of work place travel plans and improved liaison with developers |
| B To improve access to employment, and education, health, fresh food and leisure, , particularly for those without access to a private car, those with a disability and those that have greatest need. | Accessibility | Promoting inclusive communities Raising educational achievement Stimulating leisure activities Improving the local economy Improving health and well-being | Ensure the bus network is revised in accordance with changing needs and meets as far as possible the requirements of all members of society |
| C To tackle traffic congestion on key corridors and its potential impact on the economy and environment by making the most effective use of the transport network. | Congestion Air quality | Develop an effective transport system | Use traffic management measures and real time technology to ensure the effects of congestion on buses are minimised |
| D To improve travel safety and security for all by addressing the real and perceived risks. | Road Safety | Promoting community safety | Further improve cctv coverage both on buses and at bus stops |
| E To provide and promote travel choices to all, in particular to reduce the proportion of car driver trips. | Congestion Accessibility | Promoting inclusive communities Developing an effective transport system | Improve information provision by implementing bus information strategy via Strategic Quality Bus Partnership |
| F To improve the health of the community through increasing levels of sustainable travel and improving access to health, leisure and fresh food. | Quality of life Accessibility | Improving health and well-being | Use accessibility action plans to inform a review of the bus network and revise routes accordingly. |

Town on The Move

A Town on The Move, the national Sustainable Travel Town demonstration project enables Darlington to implement a wide range of solutions to transport problems in an integrated way, with a better prospect of achieving outcomes through best value-for-money approaches.

Extensive consultation with local stakeholders as part of the LTP2 process, focus group work and workshop sessions during 2004/5 all indicated that measures to improve public transport should be adopted in order to tackle the problem of increased traffic growth and congestion within Darlington. Many consultees identified accessibility, affordability, reliability and information as the key issues with regard to public transport provision.

Key Strategic Choices relating to public transport

As part of the development of LTP2, a number of key strategic choices have been identified and considered with partners. One of these choices, choice 5, asked whether public transport improvements should be delivered locally or through a joint Tees Valley-wide strategy. Given the essentially local nature of Darlington's bus trips, coupled with the origin of most external bus trips currently being County Durham & North Yorkshire, it has been considered appropriate that a local approach is implemented, but one that is co-ordinated with the wider Tees Valley Network Review and the Durham Transit 15 proposals.

Whilst this approach will be, on the whole, separate to that in the Teesside area, it is recognised that considerable contact will continue to be maintained with colleagues in the Tees Valley to ensure compatibility of actions and to seek stronger bus links between the Teesside conurbation and Darlington.

The implementation of a Strategic Quality Bus Partnership, Quality Bus Routes and the Darlington Bus Punctuality Partnership will, however, recognise the need for local solutions to local issues under local control and will focus on tackling declining patronage.

3. Local Context

Characteristics of the Borough

Darlington Borough covers an area of 1,745 hectares and its population of 99,200 (2003 estimate) is predominantly urban with only 5% living in rural areas, the majority of these concentrated in a few outlying villages. There has been a population increase in the Borough of 1.4% between 2001 and 2005. The population is, however, expected to remain stable over the period of the Second Local Transport Plan.

Darlington itself is an historic market town, situated adjacent to the River Tees and on the East Coast Main Line. It is the 5th largest major retail centre in the North East and is a pleasant and attractive place to live, with 94% of residents in a recent survey saying they liked living in Darlington¹.

Darlington is laid out on a traditional radial pattern, with the focus of the town's transport network being the town centre. This compact physical layout is reflected in the statistic that 49% of town centre users, either walk, cycle or take the bus to the town centre (2004 survey value).

The urban nature of Darlington is reflected in the high population density of 496 persons per square kilometre, compared with 293 for the region and 380 for England and Wales. This enables Darlington to have a high frequency, dense bus network.

GDP per capita is only 85% of the national average (2002). Unemployment is double the national average, with only 70% of the resident population in employment, compared with 75% nationally. However, only one ward is in the category of the 10% most deprived in England.

Car ownership is relatively low in Darlington (68.8%) compared with the national average (73.2% - values from 2001 Census), with a relatively high level of bus travel (10%¹). Recent survey information collected as part of *Town on the Move* suggests that car ownership in 2004 is 76%¹ illustrating the rate of growth over the recent past.

Land use pattern and future developments

Significant land-use changes are planned for the next 5 to 15 years that will impact on travel patterns throughout the Borough. **Table 4** illustrates the impacts of planned developments.

Table 4 Impacts of Planned Developments

| Description | Impacts |
|---|---|
| Construction of new town centre shopping development | This development will strengthen Darlington's position as a major retail centre in the North East and is likely to generate new car trips. Provision of bus stops as part of this scheme needs to be carefully considered to ensure it does not cause disruption to existing bus passengers whilst meeting the needs of shoppers accessing the new development |
| Office developments at Morton Palms and Central Park | Morton Palms, on Yarm Road and adjacent to the A66(T) at the eastern edge of Darlington in near the A66(T) and Yarm Road, and is likely to attract additional car journeys at peak times on this already congested part of the network. Central Park is located close to the town centre and railway station, with the opportunity for more travel on foot, by bike, train and bus. |
| Educational Reorganisation and development of the Educational Village | Darlington College is moving to Central Park which is located close to the town centre with the potential for strong bus links. Further development of this site will increase the pool of potential bus users if improved bus services are provided. |
| Residential development | This is taking place mainly on brownfield sites within the urban area so there is potential for good accessibility by all modes, particularly by bus eg Central Park development. |
| Industrial and warehousing at Faverdale | More car trips are likely to be generated due to the location close to the A1(M). There is a need to ensure the site is accessible by all modes to help everyone gain access to the employment opportunities being created. |
| Provision of healthcare at Bishop Auckland hospital | Accessibility and social exclusion issues currently exist, given the distance between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. This is being addressed by ensuring free travel is offered to concessionary pass holders on Arriva Service 1,1B. |
| Durham Tees Valley Airport | Expansion of the Airport and development of an adjacent business park will lead to an increase in car trips with associated environmental and road safety implications and will require improved public transport links. This is recognised through Darlington Borough Council being active in the local Air Transport Forum and it's associated bus and rail sub-groups. |

Congestion

Traffic Congestion is a growing problem for Darlington residents and has been identified by local people and others as one key issue of concern. Traffic levels approaching the urban area of Darlington have increased on key radial links over the lifetime of LTP1. As traffic levels have increased, some individual junctions have become overloaded at certain times resulting in delays to all road users, including bus passengers. These delays are often unpredictable in terms of precise duration, thus creating problems for the accurate timetabling of local bus services.

Bus services

Commercial and supported services

Two major national operators (Arriva and Stagecoach) provide the vast majority of the town's bus network, with

some smaller operators providing tendered and school bus services. Whilst many local services are provided with stepped, high floor midibuses, there are increasing numbers of single step low floor vehicles in use, albeit with a relatively high age profile.

Both Arriva and Stagecoach operate some core high frequency local routes running at frequencies of as much as 7 to 8 minutes. The local bus network is extensive and predominantly high frequency during the daytime with few gaps in provision, although the West End area of town has frequencies of half-hourly or hourly on it's two main commercial services. Almost all services within the town concentrate on serving the Town Centre, most of these being cross-town services, serving the radial corridors. This latter characteristic does make these services especially vulnerable to the effects of traffic congestion.

Arriva also has an inter-urban network of services, focusing predominantly on County Durham, but also with some important links into North Yorkshire (e.g. Catterick Garrison and Richmond) and Teesside. Many of these services are provided on an hourly or lower frequency basis depending on the levels of demand, some funded jointly with Durham County Council. .

Approximately 75% of the local bus network by distance is provided on a commercial basis, with the Council subsidising much of the early morning, evening and Sunday services.

Many of the Council's tendered bus services are provided on a net subsidy basis, whereby the operator retains the farebox revenue collected. Experience to date has shown that contract prices to the Council tend to be lower with this approach, despite the low revenue yield obtained from some routes. Whilst in theory this type of contract should encourage the operator to increase revenue through effective marketing of the service, this is not always the case and is to be addressed as part of the Bus Information Strategy.

The second biggest category by tender type is de-minimis whereby the most advantageous solution to meet need is to negotiate a variation to an otherwise commercial route, serving the identified community. The third category, currently applied in a number of instances, is that of gross cost whereby the Council effectively hires the bus, keeping all the farebox revenue and thus all the financial risks of providing the journeys

In 2005/06, the Council spent £968,196 supporting socially necessary local bus services, including contributions from non-Council budgets such as developer contributions, Urban Bus Challenge and Rural Bus Subsidy Grant. This value is the result of significant price increases caused by inflationary pressures within the bus industry, in particular diesel, wages and insurance and locally due to the business failure of Darlington & District Services (Green Bus) in May 2005.. This company held 14 bus service contracts from the Council at the time of its liquidation and the Council incurred cost increases of up to 40% for some

replacement contracts as a result.

In 2006/07, the Council is proposing to spend £534,912 on bus services, the change from 2005/6 being due to the ending of Urban Bus Challenge funding for Service 19. The Council has, however, decided to undertake a review of the supported network during 2006/7 in order to re-evaluate the best way of meeting the Council's legal and policy commitments. This review will be based on improving local people's accessibility to employment, health care, leisure facilities, shops and other services using the substantive research collected through our sustainable travel demonstration town initiative and consultation on the second LTP. It is intended that this review will report back within the year and complement the review of the Ring a Ride service, with both outcomes being implemented in 2007/8.

In order to ensure that bus services are provided in a consistent manner across the area, a revision to the criteria which sets out what level of bus service communities should expect has been carried out, in conjunction with the emerging accessibility strategy.

The criteria are simple and relate to the maximum distance from any household to the nearest bus stop and the level of service that people may expect at certain times of the day or week to Darlington town centre.

It is recognised that many services far exceed these minimum standards especially within the urban area. The Council welcomes this and will work with operators to ensure that these services continue to provide enhanced frequencies by helping to promote use of the bus and strive to maintain bus running speeds through appropriate traffic management techniques and use of new technology.

The criteria on which the supported network review later in 2006/7 will be based are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5 Network review criteria

| Type of settlement | Maximum distance to nearest stop from any residential property | Proposed minimum service level to Darlington Town Centre | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|------|---|------|---|------|
| | | Mon-Sat daytime ¹ | | Mon-Sat off peak ² | | Sundays/Bank holidays ³ | |
| | | Min frequency and max walking distance to a service | | Min frequency and max walking distance to a service | | Min frequency and max walking distance to a service | |
| Hamlet (20 –100 population) | 300m | 2 jnys per day | 300m | N/a | N/a | N/a | N/a |
| Village (100-500 population) | 300m | Every 2 hours | 300m | N/a | N/a | N/a | N/a |
| Large Village (over 500 population) | 300m | Every 60 minutes | 300m | Every two hours | 500m | Every two hours | 500m |
| Urban area | 300m | Every 15 minutes (vehicles more than 35 seats) Every 10 minutes (vehicles with less than 35 seats) | 300m | Every 30 minutes | 500m | Every 30 minutes | 500m |

¹ 0730 to 1800

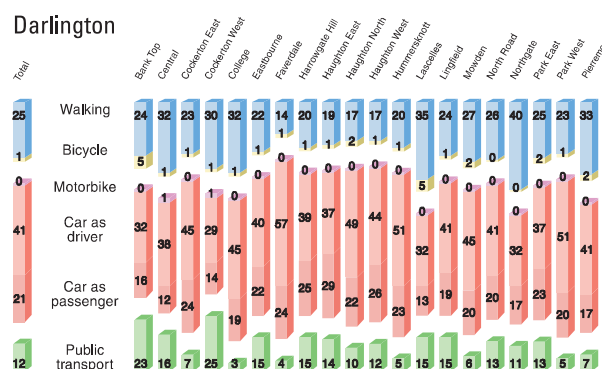
² 0500 to 0730;1800 to 2359

³ 0900 to 2359

Bus use in Darlington

Within Darlington, the level of bus use town wide (10% of all trips) varies significantly by part of town, reflecting the location and level of service, and socio-economic characteristics. **Figure 2** shows the modal split by ward, from a detailed survey of 4000 households². Bus use is over 20% in Cockerton West and Bank Top for example, but under 5% in College and Faverdale wards.

Figure 2 Mode share by ward



² Figure taken from SocialData and Sustrans: Darlington: Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town; Travel Behaviour Research, Baseline Survey 2004.

Usage is particularly strong within the urban area for trips to the town centre: 32% of all trips to the town centre are made by bus, with 39% of all shopping trips being made by bus. Despite this, overall patronage has continued to decline in Darlington (**Table 6**)

Despite some 97% of all bus journeys being “internal” to the Borough (Arriva figures), cross boundary trips are an important issue for the success of Darlington’s Strategy. In 2001, 66% of inbound bus trips for work came from origins in County Durham. The relative importance of County Durham in terms of origin bus trips is replicated in terms of outbound journeys, with the biggest percent (41%) travelling to work by bus

This dominance is reflected in the numbers of bus journeys provided into County Durham from Darlington and presents one of the biggest opportunities to increase the mode share of bus journeys into the Borough during the Second Local Transport Plan. Hence, Darlington will work closely with Durham County Council on their Transit 15 major bus corridor scheme in order to increase bus patronage between the conurbations, in particular for employment and health purposes.

Table 6 sets out usage of bus services over the first Local Transport Plan to date in Darlington. Bus use has declined by about 6% since 2001, however there has been an increase in rail use (at approximately 4.5% per annum). Indications for 2005/6 are that the decline in bus use will be at a similar level to 2004/5.

Table 6 Bus Use in Darlington

| Year | Annual Patronage | Change in patronage |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 2001/2 | 10,222,000 | |
| 2002/3 | 10,118,000 | -1.1 |
| 2003/4 | 10,069,000 | -0.5 |
| 2004/5 | 9,591,000 | -4.7 |
| 2005/6 estimate | 9,150,000 | -4.8 |

Whilst the national free concessionary pass scheme is likely to increase patronage by eligible groups, it is expected that this will be discounted by the continuing decline in other passengers. It is therefore proposed that the target should be set to 8.48m for 2010/11. This target, whilst predicting a continuing decrease in passengers, is based on a reduced rate of decline, eg reducing the year on year decline to less than 1% by 2010/11. **Table 7** provides the last BVPI indicators collated by the Audit Commission for satisfaction with bus information and bus services. It shows that Darlington is in the upper quartile for unitary authorities – the value for

BVPI103 (information) having risen again to 65% in 2005/06. It is proposed to set a target of 70% for 2010/11. BVPI 104 (Bus satisfaction is now at 63%, with a target of 65% proposed for 2010/11). It is interesting to note that whilst patronage is declining, bus users are becoming increasingly satisfied with their bus services. This may be due to the level of stability within the commercial network in recent years.

Table 7 Satisfaction Levels with Bus Information and Bus Services, Compared to Other Unitary Authorities³

| | Satisfaction with transport information | Bus satisfaction |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| Darlington | 57% | 62% |
| Average | 49.7% | 53.1% |
| Lower quartile | 45% | 44.3% |
| Upper quartile | 55% | 60.8% |

Recent bus initiatives in Darlington

Darlington was successful in securing Urban Bus Challenge (UBC) funding in 2002 to secure improved bus services to the deprived wards of Red Hall and Firthmoor, utilising some roads which were previously not served by conventional bus services. This funding allowed residents in the area access to employment, local shopping, healthcare (including the Memorial Hospital) and leisure facilities. Whilst one of the three services (no. 19) performed reasonably well (although patronage on unique sections of route was poor), it has now ceased due to the ending of UBC funding, hastened by a 50% increase in cost following the going into liquidation of the previous contractor, Green Bus, in May 2005. The other two services (10 & 11) did not meet expectations due to poor patronage as a result of reliability problems with the dedicated low floor minibuses purchased for the routes. Reinstatement of these services is proving problematic, due in part to a dispute with the manufacturer of the small, low floor buses brought specifically for this contract.

The Council has been active in identifying and securing funding from developers, such as the mixed land use development of West Park which includes the new West Park Hospital. Use of this funding and provision of some services through commercial risk by Arriva has allowed both staff and others visiting the Hospital to get there by bus during the day.

In terms of capital expenditure, the Council has recently opened 1.155km of bus lane on the Inner Ring road and has increased the number of stops with raised kerb bus boarders to 32%. 76% of buses operating in the town now have cctv, funded through LTP1.

³ BVPI indicators, Audit Commission, 2004.

Tees Valley-wide assessment of bus services and other major schemes

A review of bus services in the Tees Valley carried out in 2005⁴ highlighted some specific problems with bus services in Darlington in the opinion of local bus operators.

Operators stated that the revenue in Darlington does not justify the high frequencies and low fares on offer. The solution suggested by the review was that operators concentrate on high frequency core services, and raise fares to justify the use of more modern buses. This would, however, be contrary to the perceptions of some stakeholders that bus travel is expensive, especially for groups such as families and young people.

The review also highlighted the general overprovision of bus services, in particular to Springfield/Whinbush and Firth Moor during the daytime (10-20% of daytime patronage yet occupying 30-40% of resources). The overprovision of evening bus services through Council subsidy was also mentioned, although this has recently been addressed through the revisions to the former Green Bus contracts in July 2005.

The proposals contained in the review have been recommended to the DfT for approval by the Interim Regional Transport Board. (IRTB) This £33m scheme is a major review of the Tees Valley bus network and seeks to build on the regional strategies to provide enhanced public transport links between the key centres in the North East and the Tees Valley. Consultants have been appointed by the Tees Valley JSU on behalf of the five Tees Valley authorities to develop proposals to inform the bid during 2006. Darlington will also work with Durham County Council and other partners to implement Durham's Transit 15 scheme, another recommendation of the IRTB.

Other bus related issues

Education Transport

The Council provide 39 education transport contracts "type" services for the benefit of 1,065 pupils in education at a cost of over £680,000 in 2005/06. These are closed contracts secured through a tendering process, not registered as local bus services. In addition, the Education Service provide taxi transport for selected journeys through a further 55 contracts at a cost of some £436,941.

The Further Education Transport Partnership provide funding to assist young people to access further education. This initiative will be taken forward in the Local

Area Agreement to provide a young person's concessionary fares scheme.

Community Transport

The Council currently financially supports, through a Service Level Agreement, the provision of a Ring-a-Ride service, aimed at local residents who find it difficult to get around the Borough using public transport or taxis. The service operates like a taxi service, can accommodate wheelchairs, and taxi vouchers or cash can be used for payment. This service will be reviewed during 2006/07 in light of the developing Accessibility Strategy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and providing what users want. Links to Education Transport, Adult Services Transport and the revised Concessionary Fares Scheme will be made to inform the preferred solution. The timescale for this work is to report in Spring 2006 with a planned implementation date for any agreed proposals of April 2007

Consultation and identification of need

Stakeholder consultations on the Second Local Transport Plan

During development of the LTP, consultations have been undertaken with key stakeholders, including public, private and voluntary sectors, neighbouring authorities, transport providers and transport users. These are comprehensively summarised in **Annex 1** of LTP2 .

Part of the public consultation included a questionnaire distributed alongside an article on the proposed local transport plan strategy. Some key results of the questionnaire include:

- 76% thought that the most effective way to tackle traffic congestion is through investment and improvement in public transport;
- 70% wanted more reliable bus services by giving priority to buses on main routes within the town;
- 70% stated that they would use the bus more if better waiting facilities and timetable information were provided at bus stops.

People were also asked about their priorities for spending: if they had £100 to invest in transport, should it be spent on walking, cycling, public transport or car. Public transport was seen as requiring most investment, at 38%, with all the other modes at around 20%.

⁴ TAS Partnership for Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit, 2005: Tees Valley Bus Network Review.

In 2005, the Council conducted research into the need for a new concessionary fare travel scheme. As part of this process, survey findings showed that local people who have a pass:-

- were satisfied or very satisfied with their pass (86%),
- were of two broad types; those who used their bus pass a lot (mainly prepaid bus passholders) and those who rarely used buses (mainly taxi voucher and half fare bus passholders),
- used it primarily for shopping trips.

The results of the public consultation exercise identified the following public transport issues as being important:

- **Reliability and punctuality.** This is often perceived to be an issue, although this is not backed up in the statistical research, where a lack of travel information is the main reason for not undertaking a journey by bus. With most services travelling along radial roads, where traffic congestion is most common, local bus operators have expressed concerns that reliability is deteriorating and some forms of bus priority are needed to maintain or improve reliability. North Road is considered to be the worst for congestion, although significant employment and residential growth at Morton Palms and Faverdale/West Park are leading to growing congestion on Yarm Road and West Auckland Road;
- **Quality of fleet:** Arriva and Stagecoach's town networks comprise about 90 vehicles, with average ages in the region of 6.5-8.0 years (below national averages), although less than 20% of all vehicles are low floor and easy access. Stakeholder consultations for the Second Local Transport Plan have shown many local people believe that the quality of vehicles is poor, and that buses tend to be dirty and littered. However, user satisfaction (BVPI104) values are continuing to increase, illustrating the gap between perception and reality.
- **Accessibility:** Most of the urban area in the town is within 300m of a bus stop with a regular service. Only the West End (which may be typified as a high income, high car ownership area) has a relatively poor level of service (eg some frequencies are less than half-hourly) as do some parts of the rural Borough. As previously mentioned, the developing Accessibility Strategy will be used to inform the solutions to this.
- **Information provision** has been acknowledged as poor in the past, though the Borough Council is currently updating information and has now installed customised stop information at 89% of bus stops within the town. It is intended that this figure reaches 100% early in 2006/7.
- **Waiting facilities** again are perceived to be fairly poor, though the Borough is currently undertaking a programme of stop upgrades, including new shelters and raised kerbs at many boarding stops. This will be further addressed through the Pedestrian Heart project and the proposed Quality Bus Routes initiative. The lack of interchange facilities, or formal bus station facilities in the town centre was identified by some stakeholders as a shortcoming.
- **Fares and ticketing:** operator-specific weekly or longer tickets are available at substantially discounted rates (compared to a single fare). There is also a more expensive joint operator weekly ticket. An improvement to the range and scope of existing multi operator tickets is being undertaken as part of the STDT project and additional daily and monthly tickets are proposed for introduction in 2006. Costs of fares from surrounding villages to Darlington are considered (by consultees) to be high, although the reality is that they are relatively low in national terms. This is reflected in the fact that fare costs from outside Darlington Borough are significantly higher, stated in consultation as a particular problem for shoppers and workers from County Durham.

Stakeholder views on buses/public transport included the following:

- Bus operators: Bus lanes on key corridors; various junction and traffic management improvements to improve traffic flow; information provision at stops; continued programme of improvements at stops; would support major Tees Valley scheme;
- Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit : no specific comments made, but continues to support Darlington's public transport strategy.
- Durham County Council: Ensuring bus reliability/journey times are maintained/improved on key corridors between Durham and Darlington (Transit 15 proposal); joint delivery of Health Transport Partnership Action Plan; support for the Darlington to Durham Tees Valley Airport bus link;
- Chamber of Commerce: Priority is improving alternatives to car travel so fewer people are on the roads during the day causing congestion;
- Darlington Association on Disability: Priority is to have more wheelchair accessible vehicles (taxis and buses);

- Durham Tees Valley Airport: Bus lanes on Yarm Road to provide good quality alternative to the car; improved bus links from Rail Station and development of Real Time information for bus and rail and more integrated ticketing;
- Central 'Into Work' Team: integrated ticketing would radically improve the bus offer; travel information is a key point and access to rail services should be improved by better integration with bus services;
- JobcentrePlus: Integrated ticketing and information; improve access to employment sites on the periphery of town

Looking at all of the consultations on the LTP together, a third of all comments made related to public transport and bus provision, making it the most important single topic overall. The most commonly cited issue was fares and ticketing issues, specifically the inconsistency and inequity in fare levels, lack of integrated ticketing options and overall cost.

The next most frequently cited issues related specifically to bus travel particularly the need for bus priorities to improve reliability and level of service. Also there was concern that the bus network was not meeting modern needs, with limited services to some out of centre employment sites and a lack of buses outside weekday daytime periods (20% of these comments). The quality and comfort of vehicles and driver customer care was also criticised in 26% of comments on bus services. There was significant concern about the implications of the Pedestrian Heart scheme to the functioning of bus services in the town centre.

Summary of Main Problems & Opportunities

In summary, Darlington's local context in relation to public transport may be summarised as follows.

- **the town has good potential for increased bus use, with frequent services, low fares, a high population density and relatively low car ownership, however increasing traffic congestion and changes in peoples' lifestyles are contributing to a situation where patronage is declining and public perception of local bus services is worsening – sometimes often without foundation in fact, although users are often increasingly satisfied with the service (BVPI 104);**
- **potential for increased bus use exists on certain**

cross-boundary journeys, particularly those linking Darlington to County Durham, however;

- **local bus operators feel unable to make the necessary financial investment due to poor current performance and future prospects;**
- **the local network has not changed significantly in recent years to reflect changes in work, housing and leisure needs, and therefore may need to be altered to best meet the accessibility needs of local people within the resources available;**
- **the development of the local network needs to be supported through a range of measures, some funded through the Local Transport Plan, that work together to make the bus a realistic travel choice for local people; and**
- **there is an expectation that public transport should be improved to help tackle key issues such as traffic congestion and thus improve quality of life.**

These issues are summarised in **Table 8**.

Table 8 LTP SWOT Analysis – Bus Services

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|---|
| Compact Grid layout of town Relatively low car ownership Dense bus network Frequent services Low bus fares compared to national levels | Traffic congestion causing reliability problems Poor perceptions of bus travel Ageing fleet, few accessible buses Declining patronage Commercial overprovision of bus services relative to demand Low bus fares reducing potential for fleet replacement Incomplete range of multi-operator tickets |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| Real Time Bus Information System Bus Quality Partnership & Punctuality Improvement Plan Proposed Quality Bus Routes STDT smart travel choices Corridors of Certainty Developer & other funding Pedestrian Heart Scheme Review of Community Transport provision Revised Concessionary Fares scheme Tees Valley Bus Network Review | Increasing traffic congestion as the local economy expands Increasing car ownership leading to less bus use Possible operator adoption of core route philosophy leading to decline in secondary services Other potential commercial changes to local bus network |

4. Vision, Objectives and Policies for the Bus Strategy

Based on the policy context and local context above, our bus strategy proposes a vision:

“ To provide an efficient and affordable bus network that makes a major contribution to Darlington’s sustainable transport objectives in terms of offering a real alternative to the car by ensuring access to essential services and employment opportunities, encouraging economic development and improving the quality of life for all.”

As explained at the beginning of this strategy (Section 1), delivering a reliable, high quality, easy to use network of bus services is essential to the overall LTP delivery.

Objectives

To achieve this vision, the key objectives of the bus strategy are to:

- ensure a bus network that is *comprehensive* in terms

of providing access to key locations and promotes social inclusion, through analysis of accessibility needs and partnership working with bus operators, the local employers, educational establishments, the health service and adjoining authorities;

- investigate opportunities to *expand the bus network*, through external funding opportunities.;
- integrate bus, rail and air services so as to provide a *‘seamless journey’* for the user;
- ensure *personal safety and security* for all passengers in relation to access to the network, waiting at bus stops and travel on-board;
- assist buses to operate *punctually* and more *reliably* through the provision of bus priorities where needed and the introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement;
- improve bus journey times where possible;

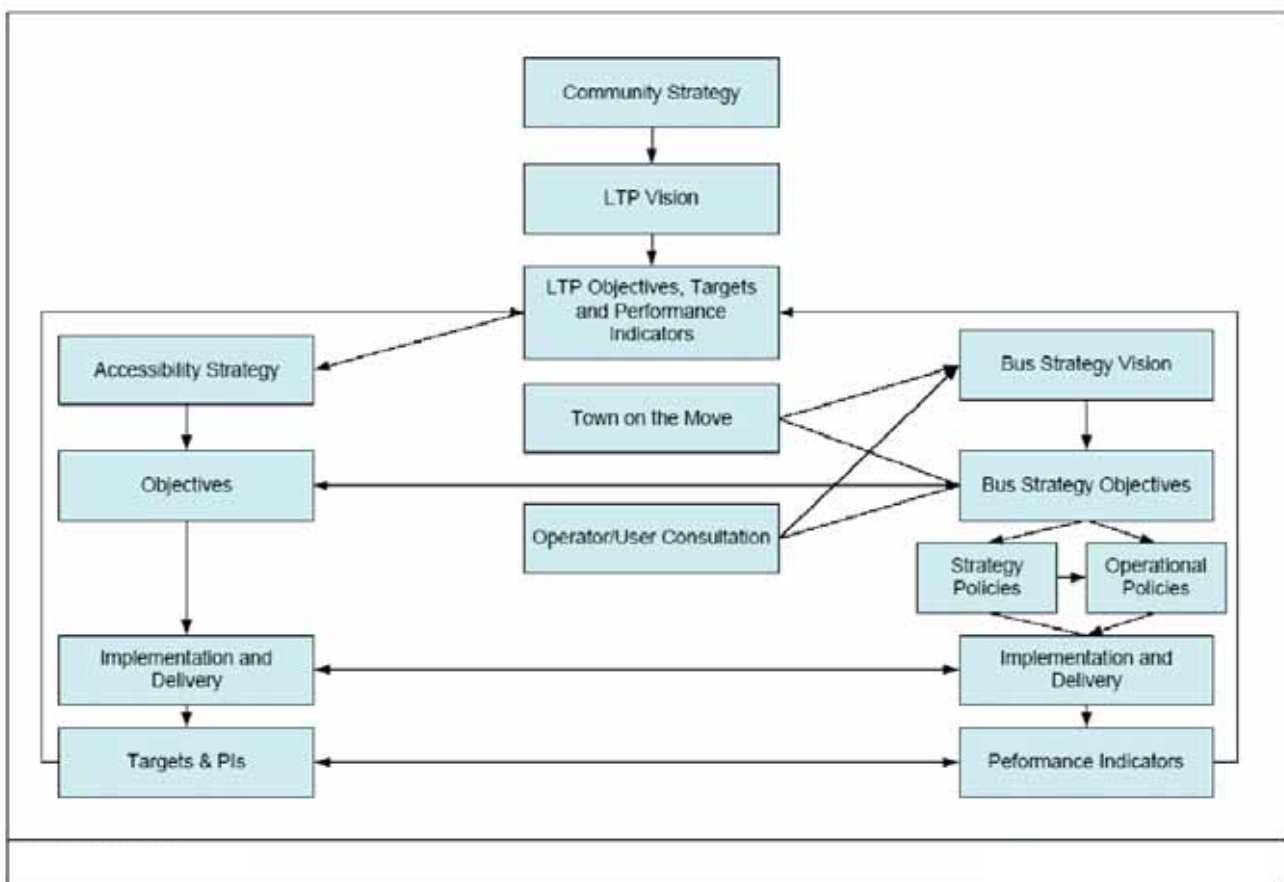
- provide *high quality information* which is up-to-date and reliable where users need them, available at home and on the network;
- proactively *market* the network and product to encourage patronage growth;
- seek to ensure that reasonable and easy to use *fares and ticketing options* are available for all users of the network;
- encourage the operators to provide a high *quality service* with accessible vehicles and drivers with a

high level of customer care;

- *work in partnership* with the bus operators and other relevant partners including the police to realise these objectives; and
- in so doing, contribute towards the *delivery of national and local targets* within the LTP and other key objectives of the Council.

Figure 3 shows how the bus strategy links to the rest of the LTP.

Figure 3 Bus Strategy links to the rest of LTP



For the main bus network, achieving these objectives relies on two key areas:

- Specifying quality across the network, in relation to services, infrastructure, information, fares and ticketing options and safety, which we do through our operational policies.
- Developing partnerships that can deliver the vision and which are accomplished through our strategic partnership policies.

The accessibility needs by bus of all residents has been considered during the development of the Accessibility Strategy for LTP2. Taking into account the needs of both town and rural residents, development of this Strategy was undertaken with a view to the ongoing reviews of community transport, concessionary fares and supported bus services. Issues to be addressed will include the needs of non-users, those who do not have access to a car, those resident in a priority ward and those with a mobility disability. Through the work of the reviews, the Bus Strategy will contribute to ensuring that all local people have access to items such as fresh food, healthcare, employment and leisure facilities.

Strategic Partnership Policies

The operational policies will be realised by working in close partnership with the bus companies and other interested parties and will aim to provide a high quality, accessible bus network offering seamless, frequent and reliable journeys.

- Establish an area-wide Strategic Quality Bus Partnership to involve all local bus operators and include agreement on:
 - town centre access and bus priority;
 - general provision and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure;
 - Traffic Management Act requirements including agreement on a Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership, Local Authority criteria for support, Service Stability Code;
 - network information and general marketing;
 - improving staff customer care;
 - network ticketing initiatives; and
 - opportunities to expand the network where possible, through external funding mechanisms.
- Establish 'local' Quality Bus Route Partnerships based on specific routes. These would include more emphasis on:

- vehicle quality;
- specific information initiatives;
- improved driver training and customer care;
- route branding; and
- innovative ticketing initiatives.

This is already under way with Town on the Move funding the refurbishment of 11 low floor Arriva midibuses which will be operating on Arriva Services 21 and 30,31 from April 2006. This initiative will also include extensive publicity and marketing of these services.

Whilst it is hoped that working in partnership with operators achieves the objectives of this strategy, it is acknowledged that currently the Quality Bus Partnership approach excludes the local authority from imposing the desired standard and frequency of service and also denies them the opportunity to establish an affordable, simple and integrated fares structure across the network. Therefore, our Action Plan (Section 5) and Targets and Performance Indicators (Section 6) articulate what we expect to achieve over this LTP2 period. If we are unable to realise these objectives in partnership, it may require the Council to consider implementation of a Quality Contract in order to further meet Darlington's long term aspirations for transport

Operational policies

These policies relate to the day to day planning and operational aspects of bus service provision and are summarised in **Table 9**.

Table 9 Operational Policies

| Policy | Key actions | Needs addressed |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Infrastructure and bus priority | <p>Ensuring the provision and maintenance of good quality bus stop infrastructure including, where necessary, attractive, secure waiting shelters fitted, where required, with CCTV;</p> <p>Implementing traffic management measures identified through the Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership which improve reliability and punctuality of local bus services;</p> <p>Taking a corridor approach to improving travel conditions on major radial roads, through the Corridors of Certainty programme including providing bus lanes, CCTV fitted bus shelters with real time information, raised kerbs at bus stops with bus bays, high levels of information provision and marketing.</p> | <p>Accessibility; safety</p> <p>Improved passenger satisfaction through improved journey times, more reliable bus services</p> <p>Improved passenger satisfaction; better travel information</p> <p>Better travel choices</p> |
| Service Improvements | <p>Ensuring that major new residential, employment and leisure developments are provided with adequate, high quality bus services through developer contributions under section 106 agreements agreed in partnership with bus operators, developers and the Council;</p> <p>Ensuring that services operated under contract to the Authority are improved by enhancing the conditions relating to vehicle quality, performance, marketing and staff training;</p> <p>Developing a 'Quality Bus Routes' programme in consultation with operators via the Darlington Strategic Quality Bus Partnership.</p> | <p>Improving the public transport experience</p> <p>Improving information provision, leading to better travel choices</p> |
| Information and Marketing | <p>Ensuring, in partnership with bus operators, the provision of adequate paper based information including individual timetable leaflets, area network booklets and maps;</p> <p>Providing, in partnership with the chosen bus stop maintenance contractor and the bus operators, comprehensive roadside timetable information and, where possible, real time bus information showing actual predicted arrival times of buses operating on the network; Installation priorities will be determined by analysis of use, using data from real time and other electronic media.;</p> <p>Further developing, in partnership with adjacent Authorities in the North East, the provision of public transport information provision via the Traveline internet journey planner and telephone enquiry service (NETIS);</p> <p>Developing, with the assistance of the Sustainable Transport Development Town initiative, a Borough wide promotional strategy for buses focussing on market segmentation and appropriate delivery media such as individualised travel plans.</p> | <p>Improved quality of life and encouraging confidence in the network</p> <p>Encouraging modal choice</p> |
| Fares & ticketing | <p>Implementing the provision of free local bus travel for the over 60's and the disabled from April 2006, enhancing the statutory minimum scheme by allowing all day travel seven days a week and also offering free travel to/from Bishop Auckland General Hospital;</p> <p>Continuing support for the provision of half fares for children between 14 and 16 years in the rural part of the Borough;</p> <p>Investigating the provision of concessionary fares for other groups e.g. 16-19 year olds, the unemployed etc using the results of a feasibility study in 2005 into multi-operator ticketing;</p> <p>Promoting new and innovative means of ticketing including multi-journey tickets, all-operator network tickets and more extensive off-bus sales in order to improve boarding times. Improving the inter-availability of tickets between bus and rail companies through partnership working.</p> | <p>LAA issues</p> <p>LAA issues</p> <p>Better value for money for public transport users</p> |

| Policy | Key actions | Needs addressed |
|---|--|--|
| Accessibility | Establishing revised criteria with regard to minimum service levels and service procurement in line with the requirements of the emerging accessibility strategy; Ensuring that access to employment both within the Borough and across the Borough boundary is maintained and where possible, further developed; Ensuring access to and from rural areas is available to all including the development of bus services for leisure use; Encouraging operators, through the Bus Quality Partnership mechanism, to invest in further provision of low floor, accessible buses. | Improved access by bus Increased bus satisfaction |
| Integration With Other Modes | Assessing the need and feasibility of providing park & ride services where appropriate; Recognising Darlington's regional importance by securing and promoting bus services that integrate with local and national rail services and air services at Durham Tees Valley Airport. | Widening horizons - LAA |
| Community Transport (including Education & Social Services) | Seeking to enhance the provision of Ring a Ride and community transport schemes for those unable to use conventional public transport. | Improved Quality of life |

5. Implementation and Delivery

Strategic delivery

Tees Valley Quality Bus Group

Darlington is an active member of the Tees Valley Quality Bus Group, established under the leadership of the Joint Strategy Unit. Representatives from major bus operators and all five Unitary Councils and the Government Office sit on this group. As well as exchanging best practice and coordinating funding bids the Group will lead on the Tees Valley Network Review project and the major scheme linked to this proposal.

Darlington Strategic Bus Quality Partnership

At the Borough level, we will seek to further develop our area-wide Strategic Quality Bus Partnership with the bus operators and other relevant partners. The aim of the Partnership is to clarify obligations on both the local authority and the bus operator(s) in realising our bus strategy objectives, giving partners confidence that the other's obligations will be honoured and investment will be matched. For example, the Council would contribute to priority measures, vehicle equipment, improved bus stops and better information, while the operators invest in new or refurbished vehicles, driver training and collaborate on new ticketing options. The Police have a role to play in providing enforcement of parking regulations and tackling security issues when required.

As part of our Quality Bus Partnership we will also look to develop innovative approaches to improving the network or individual services, such as through developer or other external funding mechanisms.

Quality Bus Route Action Plans

Our Quality Bus Route Action Plans will be developed through discussions at the Strategic Quality Bus Partnership meetings in association with the Corridors of Certainty proposals along the main radial corridors. In 2006-2011, we are proposing to continue the Corridor of Certainty programme started in the first Local Transport Plan, providing additional bus priority measures, including bus lanes.

Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership (BPIP)

Reliability and predictability of bus services are important issues. To this extent the Council will enter into a partnership with local bus operators to improve bus punctuality, using guidance published by the Government backed Bus Partnership Forum.

This will result in a stronger position to meet bus punctuality targets as required in the LTP and demonstrate a common commitment to achieving a higher standard of service for the customer. The national requirements for each partner are set out in **Table 10** below.

Table 10 Requirements for Bus Performance Improvement - outcomes for PIP members

| | |
|---|--|
| Bus Operators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compliance with Traffic Commissioners' standards - Efficiency and economy of operation - Improved customer satisfaction - Increased ridership - Greater profitability |
| Public Transport Coordinators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved performance against punctuality target - Improved customer satisfaction - Increased ridership - Increased modal share - Reduced subsidy |
| Local Transport Authority Traffic Managers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measurable indicators of the impact of traffic congestion - Modal share indicators - Justification for future bus priority measures - Monitoring the impact of roadworks on traffic flows - Justification for real time infrastructure |

The establishment of a BPIP may allow the Council to access capital funding to invest in new technology to deliver comprehensive network monitoring at a level that may not be achievable by the operator alone – yet without the participation of operators, the Council will not be able to achieve the required standard of monitoring to comply with its Local Transport Plan obligations.

Monitoring will assist in aiming to meet the following LTP targets:

- For departures from a terminus a minimum of 90% of journeys should be within one minute early to 5 minutes late. (Trajectory set to achieve 80% by 2010/11 and 90% by 2014/15).
- For departures at other intermediate points and non timing points the same target has been set.
- For services operating on a frequent basis, i.e. 10 minutes or better, the criteria is measured through average excess waiting time.

Automatic Passenger Counting (APC)

It may be advantageous to fit automatic passenger counting units to a statistically significant number of, or all, locally based vehicles to aid the collection of data relating to patronage, stop point use and passenger kilometers on supported services. Monitoring for the purposes of meeting the punctuality targets above will be based on a minimum of 25 sites (am/pm readings) and in accordance with national guidance will include 5000 discrete readings annually. This may be achieved through the Real Time Information System where fitted, and autonomous units where not fitted. This will be discussed fully and agreed with members of the Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership.

Operational delivery

The implementation and delivery of these policies will aid the day-to-day planning and operational aspects of bus service provision and will ensure the timescales for delivering the more strategic policies are met.

Infrastructure and bus priority Improvements

Darlington Borough Council has a key role to play in the provision of infrastructure and bus priority to support bus operation. In terms of achievements, 32% of bus stops within the Borough are low floor accessible (34% of buses in Darlington are of low floor design – 2005 value), and the Council has entered into a 15-year bus stop flag improvement programme with Clear Channel. In addition, DBC has invested in a Bus Stop Asset Register which will become an integral part of the database for the Asset Management Plan. Furthermore, 76% of buses within Darlington now have CCTV, funded through LTP1.

The Council is committed to improving priority for buses through the use of bus lanes, traffic light priority and other appropriate traffic management measures. This will help to make the bus a viable alternative to the car and achieve modal share targets. Priority will also help to improve the reliability of bus services, making them less sensitive to congestion and more able to meet punctuality targets.

DBC already has a real time information system (RTI) in development, with rollout scheduled for Summer 2006. This system will provide passengers with information about waiting times, however the system can also provide increased functionality with a few improvements and extensions. It will also allow us to monitor the delivery of bus services as well as having scope to monitor patronage and bus stop point usage, thus allowing effective planning of bus stop infrastructure and route improvements for the future in the most efficient way.

The key goals for delivering infrastructure and priority improvements will therefore be to:-

- Work with local bus operators, the Police and local people to improve physical conditions for bus users, especially along Corridors of Certainty and 'Quality Bus Route' corridors.
- Implement a department wide intranet bus stop portal to improve repair times and accurately deliver maintenance to the bus stop network.
- Continue to develop RTI to monitor operational performance of the bus network and to ensure reliability and punctuality targets are met.

Service Improvements

Challenge funding and developer contributions under section 106 will continue to be used to provide services to areas previously un-served, and also to enhance existing services.

Securing funding from the Transport Innovation Fund will also be investigated to support the costs of innovative

and coherent transport measures that improve bus services.

Information and Marketing

The Council's Bus Information Strategy is set out in a separate annex to the LTP. This sets out the responsibilities of the bus operators and the Council in providing high quality information to bus passengers through the use of paper, electronic and roadside timetable information. This will build on the work being implemented through the Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town Project to provide comprehensive local area bus timetables to complement the Borough wide bus map and individualised travel marketing.

Provision will be made within the strategy to ensure standards are enforced to deliver consistent quality through programmes of continuous monitoring.

In addition to the above, the strategy proposes a wide-ranging programme of strategic and tactical marketing to promote additional use of the network, by existing users and new customers.

The recently completed review of bus services within the Tees Valley reported the following weaknesses:

- Too much focus on conventional matrix timetables
- No comprehensive map
- Timetable booklets that focus on local authority boundaries
- Inefficient duplication of information

The information strategy will ensure these weaknesses are taken into account and will contribute towards the development of a quality information strategy for Darlington.

The Council is also involved in the North East Real Time Information Project which is being delivered through a partnership between the five local authorities in the Tees Valley, Durham and Northumberland County Councils, NEXUS and the region's local bus operators. The Council's involvement in this project is founded on its desire to improve the knowledge of travel choices across the community, thereby broadening travel choices for those with a car and giving people without a car new travel opportunities that they were previously not aware of. The project therefore tackles car dependency, modal shift and social exclusion.

Fares and Ticketing

On commercial bus services, fares and ticketing arrangements are determined by the operator. Darlington Council will work with local bus operators to understand their decisions and ensure that all user needs have been considered. In addition, the Council will assist operators where appropriate in delivering services which are socially necessary and represent value for money.

On services which are supported, the Council has the power to set fare levels, and will ensure these are in line with commercial fares wherever possible to avoid confusion. Contracted services will accept commercial season tickets issued by the same operator to avoid confusion.

The train operator, GNER, is working with Peel Holdings, the owner of Durham-Tees Valley International Airport to promote through ticketing using Sky Express 737 between the Station and the Airport. The Council is supportive of such initiatives and is keen to see operator led solutions to joint ticketing needs.

Concessionary Travel

In accordance with government policy, the Council now provides free bus travel within the Borough and to/from Bishop Auckland General Hospital for selected groups of residents within the Borough, notably those over retirement age and the disabled. Alternatively, residents over 75 or those meeting the disability criteria specified in the 2000 Transport Act may alternatively opt for 50 £1 taxi vouchers for the period April 2006 to Mar 2007, allowing travel on any participating hackney carriage or private hire vehicle or the Ring a Ride service, for travel within the Borough or to any point outside, provided one trip end is in the Borough. The scheme provides extensive additional discretionary elements over and above that recommended by Government, eg free travel before 0930 and after 2300 on Mon-Fri ; some out of county travel; and the taxi voucher option.

The scheme will cost the Council £1.774m in 2006/7, of which £0.897m is being funded internally.

There will be continued support for 14 to 16 year olds to pay half fare in the rural areas of the Borough whilst the Council will also investigate, through the LAA and local bus operators, the introduction of concessionary fares for other groups, in particular the those aged 16 to 19.

Accessibility

The Accessibility Strategy will focus on solutions to accessibility problems that may or may not be transport related. Transport solutions will include bus based improvements (such as information provision and land

use design) as well as those relating to other modes.

Integration with other modes

The Council will seek to ensure that rail services (at local stations) and air services (at Durham Tees Valley Airport) can be reached by bus, and will seek to promote travel by this means where possible.

Community Transport

The Council is reviewing the provision of the Ring a Ride transport service during 2006/07, and will examine any synergies between this and other community transport functions. One possibility, is participating in the Durham Travel Response Centre to ensure that local people have the best possible transport solution for healthcare as well as shopping, leisure and employment. Any agreed proposals are currently scheduled for implementation in April 2007.

Action Plan

Table 11 outlines the action plan for taking forward the Bus Strategy. It identifies key goals starting from the publication of this Bus Strategy.

Funding

To achieve our ambitious objectives for a step change in the quality of bus services in Darlington, we require significant funding, much of which needs to come from the LTP. We hope that by demonstrating real progress against elements of our action plan, we will receive the level of support necessary to deliver the strategy.

Nonetheless, our strategy will also seek to draw in funding from other sources, notably:

- Section 106 developer contributions;
- Transport Innovation Fund;
- Matched funding from operators to deliver improvements to vehicle and service quality in relation to our improvements to infrastructure etc;
- *Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town Project.*

Table 11 Bus Strategy Action Plan

| Issue | Detail | Date | Lead | Partner |
|--|---|--|--------------------------|---|
| STRATEGIC POLICIES | | | | |
| Strategic Quality Bus Partnership | Operators, Council and relevant third parties signed up to principles of partnership | Apr-06 | DBC | Operators and others |
| Bus Performance Improvement Partnership | Operators, Council and relevant third parties signed up to principles of partnership | Apr-06 | DBC | Operators and others |
| OPERATIONAL POLICIES | | | | |
| Accessibility / network issues | | | | |
| Network Review | identify gaps in provision through detailed Accessibility strategy work | Sep-06 | DBC | |
| | review and seek tenders for revised Council procured services (implementation April 2007) | Nov-06 | DBC | |
| ongoing | DBC | | Network stability | agree Service Stability code |
| Infrastructure | | | | |
| New Bus Stops | 13 per year 2006/7 and 2007/8 then 2 per year Proposed spending £150000 during period of | LTP2 | ongoing | DBC |
| operators | Improvements to Bus Stops | 20 raised kerbs per year, 2 shelters per | year Proposed spending | £284000 during period of LTP2 |
| through SQBP | | | | |
| Apr -06 | DBC & Operators | | Special transport | Community Transport |
| Review delivery of Ring a Ride and financial support | Mar-07 | DBC & Operators | Community Transport | Strategic review of general Council services (e.g. social services/special needs transport) to assess opportunities for efficiency improvements |
| Mar-07 | DBC | | | |
| Bus priority | Town centre priority | Pedestrian Heart bus routes | ongoing | DBC |
| Operators | | | | |
| Fitting bus fleets with transponders or ensuring | bus priority through use of real time information | system | | Actions arising |
| from Punctuality Improvement Plan | Permits priority green aspect at traffic signals when late running (arising from PIP | development) Various traffic | management and other | schemes as identified |
| Proposed spending £50250 during period of | LTP2 | Apr 2006 | onwards | |
| | | Apr 2006 | onwards | DBC & Operators |

| Issue | Detail | Date | Lead | Partner |
|--|---|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Information and marketing | | | | |
| customised bus information at all departing bus stops within Borough | accurate and up to date stop specific information | 100% as at Apr 06 | DBC | |
| real time bus passenger information | On Corridors of Certainty, in the town centre and on specific 'Quality Bus Routes' as determined by QBP | ongoing | DBC | |
| enhance bus information provision in town centre | Real time information (16 units) | 2007/08 | DBC | |
| real time information | continue to work with Tees Valley authorities to fit all local buses with RTI technology | ongoing | TVJSU | DBC & operators |
| web and telephone | Continue to contribute to North East traveline internet journey planner and telephone enquiry service (NETIS) Introduce SMS service during 2006/7. | ongoing | NETIS | DBC & operators |
| marketing of bus product | Borough-wide promotion through individualised travel marketing and regional campaigns | ongoing | DBC | Operators & Regional Bus Forum |
| Integration | | | | |
| improve access/integration with airport/rail station | Continue to work with Airport and bus and train operators to encourage increased use of Sky Express 737 service connecting town centre-rail station-airport | ongoing | DBC/Airport/Rail | Operator |
| Park & Ride | study potential for P&R across Darlington | 2006/07 | DBC | |
| Service quality | | | | |
| accessible fleet | continue to extend % of low-floor vehicles. Aim to increase from 34% to 70% by end of plan period | ongoing | Operators | |
| cleanliness and comfort standards | continue to improve standards/perception of buses by increasing BVPI 104 from 62% to 65% by 2011 | ongoing | Operators | |
| enhanced levels of driver training in customer care | Operators agree to standards and monitoring as part of Quality Partnership | April 2006 | Operators | |
| Maintenance Contract | Bespoke service for bus stops & shelters | ongoing | DBC | |
| Safety and security | | | | |
| CCTV coverage of all buses | Aim for 100% fitment – to be progressed via BQP | ongoing | Operators | DBC |
| CCTV at bus stops | 32 sites fitted, new sites derived from Accessibility Strategy | ongoing | DBC | local people, Parish Councils |
| enhanced walking routes to bus stops in priority areas | Accessability strategy to identify areas where safety is a concern | ongoing | DBC | local people |
| Corridor-specific | | | | |
| Corridors of Certainty | | | | |
| North Road | Comprehensive corridor treatments tackling traffic congestion and its effects. Including bus lanes, junction infrastructure improvements including upgrades to bus stops and walking routes, new shelters and on street bus information Enhanced vehicle quality and customer care, branding and marketing of services and monitoring of reliability To be agreed by Strategic QBP, commencing with Services 21 and 30,31. | 2006/07 | DBC | Operator |
| Yarm Road | | 2006/07 | DBC | Operator |
| Woodland Road/West Auckland Road | | 2008/09 | DBC | Operator |
| Haughton Road | | 2009/10 | DBC | Operator |
| Coniscliffe Road Phase 1 | | 2010/11 | DBC | Operator |
| Inner Ring Road | | 2008/011 | DBC | Operator |
| Quality Bus Routes | | April 06 | DBC | Operator |

6. Targets and Performance Indicators

We outlined our bus strategy objectives in section 4. Many of the objectives will only be achieved via effective partnership working between bus operators, the Police, Darlington Borough Council and residents of Darlington.

To determine if the bus strategy is meeting its stated objectives there will need to be a continual monitoring programme. Some of the objectives are harder to measure, and others are long term aspirational goals that will be difficult to quantify in the shorter term. **Table 12** outlines the key indicators for the bus strategy. Targets for these indicators are reported in **Chapter 7** of the Second Local Transport Plan.

Table 12 Performance Indicators

| Performance Indicator ¹ | Notes |
|---|--|
| BVPI102: Public transport patronage | Covers all public transport. For the purposes of the bus strategy will include separate patronage figures for commercial, subsidised and DRT/CT (not as reported in LTP) |
| BVPI103: Proportion of users satisfied with local provision of bus timetable information | Trajectory set to rise from 65% (2005) to 70% by 2011 |
| BVPI104: Proportion of users satisfied with local bus services | Trajectory set to rise from 63%(2005) to 65% by 2011 |
| LTP5: Proportion of bus services running on time (within -1 to +5 minutes of scheduled time). | Trajectory towards 90% punctuality. To be agreed through SQBP and BPIP |
| Proportion of journeys not operated | To be reported over the network as a whole |
| Bus patronage on corridors | APC will allow us to collect stop level data (To be agreed by SQBP) |
| Bus service kilometres | APC load factors may be used to generate passengers/Km (to be agreed by SQBP) |
| Bus reliability | Proportion of registered bus journeys operated |

¹ Targets reported in Second Local Transport Plan