Bedford's Passenger Transport Strategy
(2011 - 2021)

November 2010

1.0   Introduction

1.1   This strategy moves away from the traditional public transport focus of improving infrastructure and services, to include client transport (education and social care transport). Working in partnership with external and internal client service providers will be essential to maximise efficiencies in the transport service, promote modal shift and increase access to services.

1.2   The Borough has a substantial public transport network consisting of rail and bus services. Within the principal urban centres and on inter-urban routes, the majority of services are provided commercially by bus operators. The inter-urban services (and the Marston Vale railway line) also play an important role in meeting rural travel needs of those communities lying along those routes. Services to more rural areas, together with evening and Sunday provision on principal routes, are not provided commercially and are financially supported by the Council.

1.3   The Council provides bespoke transport services for Adults' and Children's Services clients (mainstream education, special educational needs and social care transport). This is a mixed service provision which is partly provided by the Council's in-house fleet and partly contracted out to external public transport/taxi and private hire operators.

2.0   National Context

2.1   The Local Transport Act 2008 removed the requirement to produce a separate bus strategy and also gave local authorities improved powers to influence the provision of bus services in their areas as well as giving greater flexibility for the community transport sector.

2.2   A key issue for bus users is punctuality which is inextricably linked to congestion, particularly in the peak hour. Network management is the key to managing congestion and potentially improving bus punctuality.

2.3   There is little in the way of national guidance on what to include in a passenger transport strategy, the only stipulation is that a Bus Information Duty must be considered, and this will be included as an appendix to the Strategy.

2.4   National rail services are specified by Central Government and operated under a series of competitive franchises. The rail network itself is managed by Network Rail under licence from central government. This makes it difficult for local authorities to influence in support of their local transport strategies.

3.0 Local Context

3.1 Public transport issues are reflected in each of the Bedford transport challenges and have been particularly identified as means of developing a strong economy, increasing accessibility by non car modes and promoting a low carbon network.

3.2 Our priorities for passenger and public transport, which have been set by stakeholders and reflect local priorities, include:
- Improving accessibility to services, facilities, employment, education etc. for all members of the community, including disabled, vulnerable and elderly travellers
- Increasing transport choices, in line with the "Putting People First" (social care personalisation) agenda
- A growing and ageing population
- Limited funding for the support of public transport services and for the provision of bespoke client transport services
- High cost of bespoke client transport
- Current client service delivery arrangements with regard to establishment opening times
- Reducing congestion and promoting sustainable transport within the carbon agenda

3.3 Bedford Borough Council has recently embarked on a "Transforming Transport" project, which recognises the very tough financial pressures faced and is aimed at maximising value for money. Effectively the council spends approximately £8m on transport provision each year. However, only around £1m of this is spent on public transport services, with the remainder spent on bespoke client transport services. The aim is to reallocate funding to public transport by ensuring that work is undertaken to understand travel patterns of client groups and to remove the barriers to using public transport wherever practical. This will support the social care personalisation agenda ("Putting People First") and offer greater choice to clients.

3.4 Accessibility to key services is an important local issue which affects people's quality of life. Using "Accession", an analytical tool, we are able to measure the accessibility of all Borough residents to selected key services and facilities by public transport. As expected, households in the Bedford and Kempston urban areas (where public transport networks are the most dense, connectivity is good, services are located nearby and public transport services are readily available) tend to be the most accessible.

3.5 Similarly, households in rural areas generally have the lowest accessibility to key services and facilities. Increases in car ownership have resulted in lower levels of bus use and subsequently commercial bus provision has been reduced, leaving

a lower public transport frequency and less comprehensive network. However, rural areas on inter urban routes generally have higher levels of accessibility than remoter rural areas. Rural bus services are relatively expensive and the Council recognises the urgent need to find innovative transport alternatives.

3.6 In the urban area, 86% of all households are within 400 metres (approx 5 minutes walk) of a 15 minute frequency bus service, while within the rural area, 71% of households are within 13 minutes walk of an hourly bus service.

3.7 These facts do not take into account accessibility to key services and facilities during the evening or weekend when it is acknowledged that improvements are required, particularly if public transport is to offer a viable alternative to bespoke client transport and to encourage people to switch mode away from the car

3.8 There are two railways in Bedford Borough serving four stations at present with a fifth programmed at The Wixams south of Bedford in the near future. The Midland Main Line provides fast services to London and the East Midlands, and local services through London to the south coast. The Council is working with stakeholders to reduce congestion levels around Bedford station by encouraging travel by sustainable modes.

3.9 The Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership runs a local hourly service between Bedford and Bletchley, providing an important local link to key service areas particularly for education.

4.0 Vision, key aims and approach

4.1 Vision
With such a wide remit, it is difficult to adopt a single visionary statement, so the following group of statements is proposed;

….to provide and promote the use of passenger transport services across the Borough which are accessible, efficient and affordable for users providing a real travel choice to most destinations….to ensure that the passenger transport network is comprehensive and meets users' needs through providing innovative solutions ….to seek a sustainable and affordable long-term future for bus services and promote use through easy to understand information and joined-up transport services.

4.2 Public transport aims
In order to contribute to the wider transport strategy set out in the Local Transport Plan, the Council is seeking to promote and develop public transport for two primary reasons:-

- To reduce social exclusion by providing access to a wide range of opportunities for those without a car available
- To provide the public with a wider range of travel choices as an alternative to the private car, thereby contributing to reducing congestion, which will reduce air pollution and carbon emissions, improve road safety and support economic sustainability

4.3   Client transport aims

Currently, the level of spending on bespoke client transport (Adults' and Children's services) far exceeds the funding available for public transport services support and development. In order to increase value for money and benefit all members of the community there is a need to:-

- Encourage, support and enable clients to use public transport rather than bespoke client transport
- To maximise the efficiency of client transport and encourage, support and enable clients (where appropriate) to use public transport rather than bespoke client transport
- Invest in the extension and improvement of the accessible public transport network across the Borough

4.4   In order to achieve this, the Council, in partnership with Public Transport Operators, Children's, Adults' and Health service providers and other stakeholders will work together to reduce barriers to the use of public transport by developing and maintaining a public transport system that is as far as possible:-

- Comprehensive
- Reliable and punctual
- Quick
- Fully integrated
- High quality
- Affordable
- Easy to understand
- Accessible
- Safe

4.5   Our approach will be based on the following principles:-

- Working in partnership with service users and providers, taking the leading role in co-ordinating and influencing passenger transport
- Supporting the provision of services where the market is unable or unwilling to do so
- Leading on the provision of infrastructure and information systems
- Ongoing development of a performance management regime that supports effective decision making

5.0   Delivery Action Plan

Passenger Transport Objectives	
CT1	Encourage, support and enable clients to use public transport rather than bespoke client transport
CT2	Maximise the efficiency of client transport services for those clients who are unable to use public transport
PT1	Develop and extend the public transport network
PT2	Integrate the public transport network to maximise connectivity
PT3	Improve the quality of public transport services and reduce barriers to its use
PT4	Improve public transport assets and infrastructure
PT5	Improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions

Item	Action Task
1.	Work with schools, Children's Services and bus operators to enable efficient use of bus services to and from schools
2.	Work with health care providers to improve transport to health facilities
3.	Improve partnership working with public transport operators
4.	Seek innovative ways to provide accessibility to key services and facilities where local bus services are unviable
5.	Work within the Local Development Framework to ensure that new developments are sustainable and on or near existing public transport routes
6.	Improve the use of technology for information, security and ticketing
7.	Develop the Bedford Public Transport Information Strategy (as an appendix to this document) with partners
8.	Increase personalised travel planning through Travel Plans
9.	Implement and enforce appropriate bus priority measures
10.	Improve punctuality for services through route action plans
11.	Invest in public transport facilities through a programme of improvement works
12.	Support the introduction of low emission vehicles and fuel
13.	Carry out further feasibility work for a potential station at Kempston Interchange Retail Park and prepare a Business Case if justified for submission to Department for Transport

Item	Action Task
14.	Engage with the rail industry to support improvements to line speeds and capacity on the Midland Main Line
15.	To support the work of the East West Rail Consortium for the reinstatement of rail services between Oxford / Milton Keynes / Bedford / Cambridge
16.	Provide, subject to affordability, a second Park & Ride facility to the north of the town

6.0 Resources and partnership working

6.1 The current annual spend on passenger transport is £8m, broken down as follows into
- Public Transport:
  - Route support – approx. £1m (including the Rural Bus Subsidy)
- Bespoke Client Transport:
  - Mainstream education – approx. £2.9m
  - Special education needs education – approx. £1.8m
  - Social Services Adult Care – approx. £0.3m
  - In-house fleet – approx. £2m

6.2 However, we are expecting further financial constraint and it is imperative that efficiency savings are made without diluting the basics of the service. We will therefore adopt the principles which have been approved under the Transformation Agenda and incorporate them into the action plan for the Passenger Transport Strategy.

6.3 We are already working with partners both within an outside the authority and will continue to do so