

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 28 January 2010

Subject: District Transport in Rural Areas

Officer contact for further information: Adrian Hendry

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the response and ongoing work to the Rural Transport Survey that was carried out by EFDC.

Report:

Introduction:

1. A local transport survey came about from the desire of some District Councillors to address the daily problems faced by rural communities regarding inadequate public transport in and around the rural locations of the District.
2. As the District Council has no authority to act on rural transport issues, it needed to draw Essex County Council's attention to this situation, but first they would need some facts to work from. Therefore, it was thought advisable to begin the review with a quick survey of the rural areas of the district. To this end a survey form was devised with which to gather basic information to feed back to the County Council. The survey form went out in 'The Forrester' magazine in the summer of 2008. An e-version of the survey was also made available.
3. The form was based on one supplied by the Rural Community Council of Essex. In the end, 381 forms were returned, of which 57 were electronic, from all over the District.
4. The data corresponding to the questions were broken down and set out in percentage and numerical form. Where the questionnaire asked for a literal response, the responses were listed.
5. The geographical spread of the respondents was quite representative of the District with just less than a quarter coming from the Loughton area. The majority were bus and train users, a large proportion wanted the Romford bus route reinstated; they also wanted a more frequent bus service on a daily basis. The problem of a lack of a bus service was also raised along with the fact that there are no direct routes and the buses tend to meander around the various settlements (something that is probably unavoidable). The need for cycle paths was also a reoccurring theme, as was the need for better pavements and repair works and numerous minor targeted local changes to roads and junctions and signage.
6. This information was passed onto the Transport Liaison Manager at Essex County Council who analysed the results. The request for repairs to footpath and potholes were referred on to the Highways Section of the County, as was the need for more cycle paths.

The Survey

7. The survey went out at the same time as a commercial bus operator was making changes to their commercial service '500', which meant a lot of people lost direct access to Romford. This meant the focus of the public was mainly around the withdrawal of that bus service. In addition, concessionary fares were only available from 9.30am. Since the survey however, Service '575' started a daily service to Lakeside, which serves Epping, Debden, Abridge, Stapleford Abbots, Havering-Atte-Bower, Romford then Lakeside. In addition concessionary travel was now valid from 9.00am.

The County

8. Essex County Council continues to work on the results of the survey, liaising with the bus companies and the Parish and Town Councils. The Transport Liaison Section at County has been working on a number of projects in Epping Forest and these are listed below. The Passenger Transport Co-ordination Centre Manager at Essex County Council has been working with the Epping Forest LSP group towards a sustainable community strategy of 'effective and accessible public and private transport networks and facilities for both residents and visitors.'

9. The County's ongoing projects are:

- As part of the LAA target, Accessibility Planning (AP) target and L152 Improve Access to Services, The Accessibility Planning team are working with Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) to improve access to key services in rural communities. The survey of Rural Services was sent out to 280 parishes from RCCE, the survey included a tick box asking whether the parish have access to key services, including general shopping, post offices, pharmacy, GP and hospitals. As a result RCCE and ECC are working together to produce a new mapping system for local bus routes. In addition to the standard bus timetables the new route maps to key services leaflets will carry a map of the bus route indicating with simple symbols the services that can be accessed.
- They are also looking to work with Willingale and Bobbingworth.
- They are looking at introducing a possible shopper bus for Stapleford Tawney and Theydon Garnon.
- They are working with a group who look after people with learning disabilities in Chigwell to access shops in Loughton.
- Investigating a shopper/leisure bus for residents of Ludgate Park and Lippitts Hill in Epping Forest who will have the opportunity to shop in Loughton or access Epping Forest for Leisure.
- A Representative for Nazeing has asked them to investigate diverting commercial service 505 via the new doctor's surgery in Lower Nazeing. Services 320 and 391 both operated on a commercial basis in the same area, are currently failing the local bus subsidy level of £5.00 per passenger journey, therefore they are looking at possible solutions around all these services.
- The Chair of Ongar and District Healthcare League of Friends, Leigh Flemming, Director of Corporate Services NHS West, Mark Squire Ongar Town Council and Wendy Jackson, Transport Liaison Manager, are looking at bus service provision to the new surgery site due to be opened in 2011 at the Ongar War Memorial hospital site.
- Following the Big Youth Debate in November 2008, Passenger Transport has worked with Epping Forest youth Assembly to help address the issues of young people and transport in the district. These include access to information, reporting faults and improving the respect of young people by drivers.
- ECC have been working with partners to promote Quality Taxi Partnerships, which includes better training, customer care and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) awareness.

LSP

10. The LSP has been working with County on rural transport matters. They have allocated £53k to support these projects. They are also presently drawing up a new Sustainable Community Strategy and access to services and rural transport will feature in that. They have secured a scheme under LAA2 which allows some primary school pupils transport home from their after school clubs. Although the schools are in urban locations the pupils themselves may well live in rural locations.

11. An officer is also looking at the possibility of additional provision of local funding to be secured through the Kick Start Scheme. This proposed that Epping Forest Community Transport would work in partnership with Epping Forest District Council and the PCT, operating a shuttle bus service which provides transport for staff, patients and visitors to St Margaret's Hospital, Epping. The route would finish at Epping Station for commuters. The service would operate under the greener environmental policy and help reduce Epping's carbon footprint. The bus would start at 7am and could run until 7pm.

Conclusion

12. The rural transport survey had thrown up a lot of travel problems for the rural community, who wanted a more frequent bus service on a daily basis. The problem of a lack of a bus service was raised along with the fact that there are no direct routes and the buses tend to meander around the various settlements. This is usual for the more rural locations because there is not always the high proportion of people in the village to make a regular bus sustainable.

13. The County Transport Liaison section has taken our survey on board and their response and related ongoing projects are listed above. The LSP are working with the county on local transport issues and are also pursuing their schemes on local transport.

14. There can never be a fully satisfactory outcome for all concerned on local transport issues especially in rural areas. However, we have drawn the attention of the relevant sections of the County to the problems expressed by the local populous and the town and parish councils and they are endeavouring to tackle the parts that they have influence or control over.