

**LOCAL BUS STRATEGY**

**STRATEGAETH BWS LLEOL**

## LOCAL BUS STRATEGY - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Chapters 1-5*

- \* These provide background information about the strategy.

### *Chapter 6 SUBSIDISED SERVICES - Improving evening services*

- \* Maintain liaison with police to restore confidence in areas where problems occur.
- \* Pursue the provision of on bus CCTV provision to improve passenger safety and driver confidence.
- \* Look at alternative means of meeting more local evening transport needs.
- \* Achieve a more comprehensive strategic evening route network through the RPTS.
- \* Seek additional revenue funding to expand local evening services, particularly for leisure activities.

### *Improving daytime services*

- \* To ensure the continuation of a strong locally based bus network in all areas, it is likely that additional revenue funding sources need to be found. Sometimes, provision may be more efficiently met through alternative forms of transport (e.g. demand responsive) and these will be given full consideration.
- \* Enhanced strategic services will be sought through the RPTS and where appropriate, the local network of services will be modified to integrate with these and existing rail services.

### *Sunday services*

- \* Look at alternative means of meeting more local Sunday transport needs.
- \* Achieve a more comprehensive strategic Sunday route network through the RPTS.
- \* Seek additional revenue funding to expand Sunday services, particularly for leisure activities.

### *Diversions*

- \* The Council will exploit, wherever possible, opportunities to improve bus services by the diversion of existing routes.

### *Early morning services*

- \* To compliment the existing and enhanced service aspirations of the RPTS by the improvement of early morning bus journeys.

### *Subsidy rates*

- \* To maintain a low overall subsidy per passenger level and monitor services to ensure that this is achieved. For individual contracts, the subsidy level should not exceed £3.50 per passenger, although in certain specific circumstances, a higher subsidy per passenger may be accepted.

### *Local Transport Services Grant*

- \* To continue to use LTSG as a mechanism to meet the needs and demands of bus passengers and communities which otherwise could not be met through the commercial market or the Councils own bus subsidy budget. The emphasis will be on the provision of services which maximise identified travel needs by utilising accessible vehicles and in a cost effective and efficient manner.

### *Chapter 7 INFORMATION*

- \* To produce a travel guide.
- \* To complete the programme of naming bus stops and providing informative bus stop displays.
- \* To simplify the route numbering of the bus network in Caerphilly.
- \* Work with operators to improve the standard of route number and destination displays and to ensure that information is accurately displayed.
- \* To improve the design and provision of information for the disabled;
- \* To regularly publish information on service changes and disruptions on its website.
- \* Investigate the introduction of digital displays at key interchanges.
- \* In association with the RPTS, work towards the introduction of real time passenger information systems. any system adopted must have full compliance with all other regional systems and forthcoming national standards.

### *Chapter 8 INFRASTRUCTURE*

- \* Complete the programme of improvement to all bus stops and interchanges to achieve a high and consistent standard throughout the county borough.
- \* To provide additional bus shelters where passenger demands and local conditions allow.

### *Chapter 9 THE BUS NETWORK - Promoting use*

- \* Work with the bus operators towards achieving a bus network that is easier to understand, promote and therefore use. This process must be evolutionary and should not destabilise the existing bus network.

#### *Timetable changes*

- \* Work towards reducing the number of timetable changes, in consultation with other local authorities and bus operators. Ultimately, this will only be achieved through changes to existing legislation or by mutual agreement of an area wide consortium of operators and local authorities through the adoption of the Code of Conduct on service stability, produced for the Bus Partnership Forum.

#### *Network mix*

- \* Establish the services forming each of the above networks and their relationship with the RPTS so that their development can be focussed to meet the specific requirements of that type of service.
- \* Where the existing service provision does not meet needs, extra revenue funding will be sought to finance new services, increase frequencies or fund more innovative solutions.

#### *Making the most of the network*

- \* Work with operators to achieve clock face timetables.
- \* Promote more co-ordination between services and more opportunities of interchange between buses and between bus and rail.

#### *Access to the network*

- \* Review the current bus network to establish whether it provides the best balance between serving people, providing attractive service levels and being financially affordable.

*Chapter 10 BUSES AND ACCESS FOR ALL - Improving the bus fleet*

- \* To work towards all bus services being operated by low floor accessible buses by 2010, subject to additional funding and appropriate mechanisms being found.
- \* In the intervening period whilst the buses are being introduced, operators will be encouraged to designate specific routes to be operated by low floor accessible buses.
- \* The average age of buses serving Caerphilly county borough should not exceed 8 years.

*Improving access*

- \* Encourage and facilitate full accessibility to the bus network through the provision of well designed accessible infrastructure, driver training and the enforcement of parking and waiting restrictions.

*Chapter 11 FARES AND TICKETING - Simpler fares*

- \* Work with operators to provide simple and easily understood bus fares which can be made readily available to passengers.

*Ticketing*

- \* Work towards return and season tickets being valid on all bus routes serving the county borough, regardless of the operator and encourage wider acceptance by operators of rover type tickets.
- \* Simplify ticket products so that they are easier to understand and promote. Encourage off bus ticket sales.
- \* Overcome technical issues and achieve an ITSO compliant Smartcard scheme for Caerphilly county borough.
- \* Introduce innovative Smartcard solutions to encourage easier and freer use of the bus network.

*Chapter 12 RELIABILITY AND THE BUS JOURNEY*

- \* Work with bus operators and other bodies to provide a more reliable bus network by addressing the issues that are currently preventing this being achieved. Additional funding will be necessary, but this should first be directed at improving existing services, rather than at expanding the bus network.

*Chapter 13 GIVING BUSES A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE*

- \* Seek guidance from the Transport Board and support the RPTS to achieve wider and more effective bus priority measures, particularly on trunk bus routes.
- \* On a local level, continue to encourage the implementation of infrastructure and highway improvements which give buses an advantage over other road users.

*Chapter 14 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT*

- \* Target additional funding to CT to provide more services for those who are unable to use conventional public transport, linked with:
- \* Improving and upgrading provision, ensuring better monitoring of procedures, driver training, funding for paid drivers.
- \* Establish a new joint Council/Voluntary sector post for a mobility/accessibility officer within the council to have responsibilities of liaising with the passenger transport section, all CT groups and co-ordinate funding for them.

- \* Establish more quantitative basis for supported bus services. Development of other schemes to meet specific transport needs, particularly for individual trips.
- \* Establishment of a CT forum involving representation of all relevant sections within the council (passenger transport; taxi licensing; social services; education); GAVO; the three CT operators; Local Health care; Welsh Ambulance service; CTA.

#### *Chapter 15 TAXIS*

- \* Introduce wider promotion of local taxis at bus stations and bus stops. Provide taxi ranks in all major towns, preferably adjacent to bus and rail stations and major bus stops.
- \* Introduce a Code of Conduct for taxi operators.
- \* Give consideration to taxis as an option to buses in some area, particularly during the evening.

#### *Chapter 16 SCHOOLS AND COLLEGE TRANSPORT*

- \* Continue close liaison between both Directorates to ensure there is maximum utilisation of the bus network to meet pupil and student needs.
- \* Investigate the issue of Smartcards to students at Coleg Gwent.

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## REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT STRATEGY

### *Regional overview*

- 1 Following local government re-organisation in 1996, it was evident that many public transport issues needed to be considered over larger geographical areas than covered by individual authorities. As a result, the new unitary authorities in south east Wales, grouped into two consortia: SWIFT (South Wales Integrated Fast Transit) and TIGER (Transport Integration in the Gwent Economic Region). These consortia are committed to raising the standard of public transport journeys in their areas, concentrating, on the creation of common programmes of capital works to improve public transport infrastructure.
- 2 The local authorities in the SWIFT consortium are Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Councils, Cardiff County Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- 3 The local authorities in the TIGER consortium are Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen County Borough Councils, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council.
- 4 More recently, the Welsh Assembly Government expressed a desire for the consortia to develop more robust methods of working to ensure improvements to public transport in the medium to long term.
- 5 To this end, the ten local authorities in south east Wales set up a Transport Board to oversee all regional transport developments within their area, an area that includes half the population of Wales and a higher proportion of its economic output.
- 6 The South East Wales Transport Board was officially launched on 1st April 2003. In these early stages, its role, responsibilities and effectiveness will be continuously reviewed to ensure that it succeeds in its aims and objectives. It comprises representatives from the local authorities as well as public transport operators and user group representatives.

### *The Regional Public Transport Strategy*

- 7 The preparation of a Regional Public Transport Strategy (RPTS) is a requirement of the Welsh Assembly Government and will be used to guide their decisions on policy development and funding.
- 8 In light of the emergence of the South East Wales Transport Board (SEWTB) it was agreed that a RPTS would be submitted jointly by the TIGER and SWIFT consortia. It should be noted that it has not been possible within the short life of the new Board to fully integrate the separate TIGER and SWIFT strategies. However, whilst the RPTS therefore mainly consists of the individual TIGER and SWIFT strategies, work on identifying common themes and issues has started. The development of this into a single coherent strategy for the whole region will be a primary task of the Board in its first year.

- 9 Chapter 1 of the RPTS consists of a joint statement setting the context for the joint SWIFT/TIGER Regional Public Transport Strategy. Chapter 2 identifies the SWIFT Public Transport Strategy elements. Chapter 3 identifies the TIGER Public Transport Strategy elements. Chapter 4 focuses on joint strategy elements. Both strategies aim to increase public transport patronage through improved bus and rail infrastructure and pursuing integration through improved interchange, ticketing and information. The major initiatives include: -
- \* New Passenger Railway Lines: The re-opening of the Vale of Glamorgan and Ebbw Valley lines by 2005.
  - \* Rail service frequency enhancements: A programme of rail frequency enhancements, including half-hourly services, by 2006, to Aberdare, Maesteg, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.
  - \* Bus services: Improved service frequencies delivered through Quality Bus Partnerships with bus operators throughout the region. These include the "SWIFT Direct" network of new and improved strategic services on the major corridors to Cardiff, and the TIGER bus service frequency enhancements.
  - \* Bus Priority Infrastructure improvements to improve journey speed and reliability, especially on radial routes into Cardiff and Newport City Centres.
  - \* Rail Access: including new railway stations at Brackla, Caerleon, Coedkernew, Energlyn, Llanharan, Llanwern and Undy, as well as a programme of Park & Ride schemes and railway station improvements.
  - \* Integration of services: a major programme of interchange proposals, including Abergavenny, Blackwood, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cwmbran, Merthyr, Pontypridd, and Severn Tunnel Junction.
  - \* Bus access: systematic improvement to stops, shelters, boarding and information across the area.
  - \* Ticketing: introduction of Smartcard technology leading to integrated ticketing between bus, rail, parking and other civic services.
  - \* Information: Provision of a high quality of information and expanded "real time" information systems.

*Relationship between the RPTS and the local authority bus strategies (LABS)*

- 10 As stated above, the public transport strategies in the TIGER and SWIFT areas have been developed largely independently of each other until now. The objectives of each strategy are different, although both are consistent with Welsh Assembly Government Policy, and this is reflected within their respective strategies. It therefore follows that the demands placed upon the LABS will be different for authorities within SWIFT and those within TIGER.
- 11 SWIFT has a well-established rail strategy. The SWIFT RPTS develops the bus elements and ensures integration between the two modes. The bus strategy is largely, but not exclusively, focussed on developing a SWIFT Direct Quality Bus Network along specific corridors into Cardiff from the surrounding region. The SWIFT RPTS focuses on Regional bus services and associated improvements. It recognises that the LABS in the SWIFT area will cover local bus services as well as cross-boundary services which are not focussed on Cardiff. They will also cover taxis, Social Services, School transport and Community Transport.

- 12 The TIGER elements of the RPTS are largely an amalgamation of the existing TIGER Regional Bus Strategy and TIGER Rail Strategy. As such, it is a strategic level document that sets out the underlying principles to be applied to all forms of public transport; as well as the individual components of the TIGER strategy. In contrast, the LABS identify how elements of the RPTS will be delivered at a local level and how the principles and policies identified in the RPTS are being translated into local delivery strategies.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Transport Act 2000 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to prepare and produce bus strategies as part of their Local Transport Plan (LTP). In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government has placed more emphasis on greater inter-authority co-operation through the development of regional consortia. Caerphilly county borough, by virtue of its geographical location and its creation as a unitary authority in 1996 encompassing parts of two former County Councils has been part of two sub-regional public transport consortia, SWIFT and TIGER. From 1 April 2003, both consortia became subsumed into the newly created Transport Board for South East Wales, although at least initially, SWIFT and TIGER will continue to operate at a sub-regional level, but as sub-groups of the new Board.
- 1.2 One of the first tasks of the new Board is to produce a Regional Public Transport Strategy, a document which sets out the underlying principles adopted to all forms of public transport and focussed primarily on modal shift and the improvement of rail and trunk route bus services. Caerphilly county borough's Bus Strategy is inextricably linked to the Regional Strategy and identifies how elements of it will be developed at a local level. In particular, it pays more attention to how Caerphilly county borough will translate the principles and policies identified in the regional strategy in the context of the LTP.
- 1.3 This document, like the Regional Strategy, is a first draft. It proposes a series of actions and sets a number of targets. We recognise the need to develop both, in the context of the developing Regional Strategy and the comments we hope to receive on this report.
- 1.4 This strategy only refers to rail where it impinges on bus services.

## **2 THE REASON FOR A LOCAL BUS STRATEGY FOR CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH**

2.1 Caerphilly county borough is required to produce a Local Bus Strategy setting out its policies for bus services, their standards and facilities. The Council may need to introduce certain measures and implement new initiatives to deliver significant improvements to bus services, which can only be achieved through the Regional Passenger Transport Strategy and Caerphilly's Local Bus Strategy. These include bus quality initiatives and integrated ticketing. The main reasons for the Strategy can be summarised as follows:

- To make bus transport as widely available as possible for Caerphilly county borough's residents
- To guide and encourage bus use throughout the county borough by all sections of the community
- To set out how bus travel may be improved and tackle some of the problems faced when travelling
- To seek innovative approaches where conventional public transport is unavailable or unsuitable
- To build and sustain successful partnerships with other local authorities, the Assembly Government, private operators and the voluntary sector to improve public transport provision
- To ensure social inclusion by providing access to jobs, education and health care
- To specify how the bus aspects of the LTP will be achieved
- To meet the legal requirements of the Transport Act 2000 and the Welsh Assembly Government

2.2 It is recognised that some of the aspirations, targets and actions contained within both Strategies will take many years to achieve. Some will require changes to the legislative framework, whilst others will require significantly increased funding and in particular revenue funding. Others strengthen existing partnerships and working practices and set targets to ensure the aims are achieved. Combined, these measures will improve the quality of bus services and increase bus patronage.

### **3 SETTING THE SCENE**

#### *Social Demographics and Deprivation*

- 3.1 Caerphilly county borough is a densely populated authority, with 614 persons per square kilometre, compared with 137 for Wales as a whole and 240 for Great Britain. The most densely populated areas are Caerphilly in the south, Risca in the south-east, Rhymney in the north and a densely populated band in the middle of the county borough encompassing Ystrad Mynach, Hengoed, Bargoed, Blackwood and Newbridge. The total population is just under 170,000.
- 3.2 Figures from the 2001 census show that 29.2% of households in Caerphilly county borough have no car, compared to a Welsh average of 26%, although car ownership levels are significantly lower than this in the north of the county borough. Overall, 25.3% of households have two or more cars, compared to the Welsh average of 28.5% and this constraint on car availability has a considerable effect on accessibility and mobility. Most significant is that less than 50% of the adult population have permanent access to a car. The remainder are therefore dependant on public transport to a greater or lesser extent.
- 3.3 Between the ages of 16 and 74, 54.2% of Caerphilly county borough's population are employed, which is close to the Welsh average of 55.2%. The proportion of this group of the population who are retired is 13.7% (Wales 13.8%). However, those who are permanently sick or disabled make up 12.1% of this group, significantly higher than the Welsh average of 9.2%. Unemployment in the county borough is 3.6%, slightly higher than the Welsh and UK averages of 3.5% and 3.4% respectively.
- 3.4 Caerphilly county borough is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> overall in a ranking of local authorities in England and Wales with limiting long term illness (LLTI). The percentage of the population with LLTI is 26.3%, which compares with 23.3% for Wales and 18.5% for the UK.
- 3.5 Of the 36 electoral divisions (edivs) in Caerphilly county borough, 26 rank among the most deprived in Wales. The three most deprived are New Tredegar, Aberbargoed and the Darran Valley, New Tredegar being the most deprived and ranked 9<sup>th</sup> out of 865 in Wales. Relative to Wales, levels of deprivation are higher for income, employment, health and education, but lower for housing and access.

#### *Caerphilly CBC Objectives*

- 3.6 Caerphilly county borough is developing a community strategy with public, private voluntary and community sector partners through a standing conference and seven area forums. The objectives are:
  - To stimulate and support opportunities for work
  - To make Caerphilly county borough a place people enjoy living in
  - To develop peoples range of interests, knowledge and activities
  - To get treatment, support and care as and when required to enable people to live a full and healthy life.

3.7 In terms of transport, initiatives include:

- Regeneration – to continue a range of public transport initiatives through SWIFT and TIGER and the new south east Wales Transport Board.
- To continue transport integration public transport initiatives including the Ebbw Valley rail line and extensive bus stop improvements.
- Living Environment – to increase the proportion of local bus journeys per annum and to ensure that the planned development briefs are developed in a sustainable way, which stimulates regeneration.

3.8 Delivery will be via the voluntary sector GAVO compact and annual action plan; e-government; promoting equalities and the Welsh language and through health improvement by working with the local health board.

## **4. BUS TRAVEL – WHO IS RESPONSIBLE**

### *The Bus Operators Role*

- 4.1 Bus services are provided by a number of operators. Stagecoach in South Wales has the largest presence and operates services throughout the county borough from a number of different depots. Other operators include Glyn Williams Travel, Islwyn Borough Transport, Harris Coaches, Shamrock Travel and Clarkes Coaches. Islwyn Borough Transport is a municipal operator which is run at arms length by the Council. As such, it functions as a commercial operation. Smaller operators include Cled Williams, Glyn Evans and Newton's Travel.
- 4.2 The 1985 Transport Act deregulated the provision of bus services, giving operators the freedom to provide services (timetables, routes and fares), without influence or interference by local authorities. They only provide services that are profitable and in Caerphilly, it is estimated that about 80% of the network is provided on this basis.

### *The Traffic Commissioner's Role*

- 4.3 The Traffic Commissioner, based in Birmingham through the Welsh Traffic Area Office, has the responsibility of granting bus companies the licences to operate the buses and has a duty to ensure that they are maintained to the prescribed standards. Operators must register the timetable and route of any bus service they provide with the Traffic Area Office and have a legal obligation to operate each bus service in full accordance with its registered particulars.

### *The Council's Role*

- 4.4 The Council's Passenger Transport Section (Travelinks) is involved in many areas of bus service provision which are broadly summarised below:
- Provides bus services that operators cannot provide commercially. These are mainly evening, Sunday and more rural services that compliment the commercially provided bus network. The Council cannot subsidise services that impact on and have the potential to abstract from the commercial bus network.
  - Operates a Concessionary Travel Scheme which provides free bus travel for the over 60's and the mobility impaired. This includes the issue and management of 27,000 smart card passes and the reimbursement of participating bus operators.
  - Manages the provision and improvement of bus infrastructure to improve the quality of bus travel, including shelters, roadside bus service information, informative bus stop flag poles, carriageway markings, raised kerbs and boarding areas to provide easier boarding for passengers (in particular for the less mobile and for parents with baby buggies. The council also operates four bus stations and is responsible for the maintenance and cleansing of all of its infrastructure.
  - Implements bus priority measures which include systems to give buses priority at traffic lights, bus lanes and parking restrictions to prevent other vehicles blocking bus stops.
  - Provides impartial travel information, in conjunction with the bus operators and the Traveline Cymru telephone enquiry service. This includes timetable leaflets, bus stop and bus station timetable displays and an internet site.

- Works with bus and train operators to promote integrated services and ticketing schemes, including smart cards to improve travel opportunities.

*The Welsh Assembly Government Role*

- 4.5 The Transport Policy section of the Assembly is responsible for policy issues relating to bus services, taxis and community transport, as well as policy issues relating to railways and freight transport.
- 4.6 The Assembly has recently set up a Public Transport Unit to drive forward the policy and technical work that is needed to implement initiatives. The Transport Framework for Wales was published in November 2001 and sets out how it will lead and support the transport infrastructure and framework needed in Wales.
- 4.7 Major initiatives led by the Assembly Government include the introduction of mandatory free travel for the over 60s and disabled; the provision of Local transport services grant (LTSG) to support the introduction of new local bus services and Community Transport projects; the provision of major capital funding through Transport Grant to improve transport infrastructure; the provision of financial support to the Traveline multi modal public transport information service.

*National Federation of Bus Users (NFBU)*

- 4.8 The NFBU is a voluntary, non party political organisation to protect and promote the interests of the bus passenger. It campaigns for quality bus networks which are convenient and easy to use for all sections of the community. It works to increase the influence of bus users on local and national government decisions about public transport as well as to develop better communication between passengers and providers of bus services. The NFBU sits on the Transport Board.

## **5. CURRENT TRANSPORT PROVISION IN CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH**

### *Commercial and supported local bus services – a general overview*

- 5.1 Bus services within the county borough tend to operate in a number of distinct networks, focussed on major towns or areas. These are described as discrete areas below and focus on the Monday to Saturday daytime provision. The topography of the area has dictated the pattern of service provision, as routes running from north to south dominate, constrained by the road network and population centres, which are often located at the foot of steep sided valleys.

### *Caerphilly*

- 5.2 Caerphilly, the largest town in the county borough, is a major hub for bus operations and also benefits from a recently improved bus/rail interchange. It is the only town having a conventional radial package of development and there is an intensive network of town services serving a hinterland that includes the Aber Valley, Penyrheol, Bedwas and Graig y Rhacca, operated by Stagecoach in South Wales, supplemented by Shamrock Travel who operate some daytime services under contract to the council.

- 5.3 From the town, to the south buses serve Cardiff (two each hour via Thornhill provided by Stagecoach, one per hour via Taffs Well and Whitchurch, jointly operated by Islwyn Borough Transport (IBT) and Stagecoach); buses operate to the west to Blaencwm, at the top of the Rhondda valley (half hourly, Stagecoach) and Pontypridd (every 15 minutes, jointly operated Stagecoach and Shamrock). To the east, there is a half hourly service to Newport (Stagecoach), whilst to the north, services extend to Nelson via Gelligaer (hourly), Bargoed (two per hour via Cefn Hengoed, two via Tiryberth, one via Gelligaer), which combine to provide a 10 minute service through Llanbradach to Ystrad Mynach, operated jointly by Stagecoach and Harris Coaches. Blackwood is also served every hour on the route from Cardiff jointly operated by IBT and Stagecoach.

### *Blackwood*

- 5.4 Blackwood is another major hub for bus services and is the focus of a number of trunk routes. Newport is served by six buses each hour (jointly operated by Glyn Williams and Stagecoach), Bargoed and New Tredegar are both served by three buses each hour (IBT and Harris Coaches), Abertillery via Trinant by two buses per hour (Glyn Williams), with hourly services to Cardiff via Caerphilly (IBT/Stagecoach jointly), Pontypridd via Nelson (IBT/Shamrock jointly), Cwmbran via Pontypool and Tredegar (both Stagecoach). In addition, the council subsidises an hourly Rail Feeder service which links in with the train service at Ystrad Mynach and is only available to rail passengers.
- 5.5 Most local services are operated by IBT, sometimes jointly with Harris Coaches. Oakdale is served by four buses per hour, one extending to Croespenmaen and another to Newbridge via Crumlin. Penllwyn has three buses each hour, whilst Wyllie, Markham via Argoed and Grove Park have hourly services.

### *Bargoed and the Upper Rhymney Valley*

- 5.6 At Bargoed, situated in the middle of the Rhymney Valley, there is a distinctive split between routes to the north and south of the valley. To the north, three buses each hour operate to Merthyr Tydfil via Pontlottyn and Rhymney, following separate routes (via Deri/Fochriw; Aberbargoed/New Tredegar/Phillipstown or Brithdir). There is an hourly service to Tredegar (via Deri, Fochriw, Abertysswg and Rhymney) and these four services are operated by Stagecoach. There is also an hourly service linking Bargoed with Markham and Argoed that continues on to Blackwood, operated by Islwyn Borough Transport.
- 5.7 South from Bargoed, buses run by Stagecoach and Harris Coaches operate frequently to Caerphilly via Ystrad Mynach and Llanbradach (five buses each hour), with two extending to Newport every half hour. Cardiff is served by an hourly bus service that operates via Gelligaer and Nelson. Blackwood is served every twenty minutes by a joint IBT/Harris Coaches route operating via Pengam and Fleur de Lis and both operators also operate on a similar frequency on the route between Blackwood and New Tredegar.
- 5.8 At Rhymney, an hourly bus service links Rhymney Station with Tredegar via Princetown and Tafarnaubach, which as well as serving bus passengers, also offers the opportunity to buy through bus/rail tickets and is operated by Clarkes Coaches.

### *Ystrad Mynach and Nelson*

- 5.9 Ystrad Mynach is the intersection of a number of routes operating northwards to Bargoed (via Cefn Hengoed, Gelligaer or Tiryberth), east to Blackwood (via Maesycwmmmer), south to Caerphilly via Llanbradach (some journeys extending to Newport or Cardiff) and west to Nelson and Pontypridd. Nelson, located in the west of the county borough, has hourly services to Blackwood (jointly operated by IBT and Shamrock), Cardiff (Stagecoach), Caerphilly (jointly operated by Stagecoach and Harris) Merthyr Tydfil (Stagecoach) and Bedlinog (Shamrock). Some of these services also operate between Pontypridd and Nelson, providing three buses each hour between these towns.

### *Ebbw Valley (Crumlin, Newbridge and Risca)*

- 5.10 In contrast with the Rhymney Valley, many of the trunk services operate for the whole length of the valley, from the Heads of the Valleys towns in the north to Newport or Cardiff in the south. Routes are operated by Glyn Williams Travel or Stagecoach, often jointly.
- 5.11 To Newport, services operate every 30 minutes from Brynmawr, hourly from Ebbw Vale and Tredegar, every 15 minutes from Blackwood via Newbridge and Abercarn and every 30 minutes from Blackwood via Ynysddu. Ty Sign is served by five buses each hour, commencing at Risca, such that from Risca to Newport there are 14 buses each hour. An hourly service operates between Brynmawr and Cardiff, whilst Blackwood is linked to Abertillery via a half hourly service which operates via Newbridge and Trinant. In the Newbridge area, more local routes serve Panside, Llanfach and Treowen, whilst in Risca local routes operate to Morrisons, Afon Village and Crosskeys.

## 6. SUBSIDISED SERVICES

- 6.1 The new Caerphilly unitary authority was created in April 1996 and is unique in Wales as it is an amalgamation of two former county council areas, Mid Glamorgan and Gwent, which included the Rhymney Valley District and Islwyn Borough Councils respectively. Thus it inherited the policies of two tendering authorities. Both county councils did however have the broadly similar policy aspirations of maintaining as much of the pre deregulation bus network (i.e. services that existed prior to the implementation of the 1985 Transport Act) that could be afforded. In the 2003/04 financial year, Caerphilly county borough has a budget of £570,800 for subsidising bus services, compared to a budget of £377,500 in the first year of its inception in 1996/97. This is supplemented by LTSG funding from the Welsh Assembly, which allocated £392,899. Total patronage on all subsidised services in Caerphilly county borough is around 1.375 million.
- 6.2 Many routes serving the county borough start or finish in adjacent local authorities and cross boundary agreements exist between these authorities to share the costs of providing these services.
- 6.3 Subsidised services fall within a number of categories, as detailed below:
- 6.4 *Evening Services*

These cost about 46% of the gross budget to maintain and account for 34.8% of passengers carried on subsidised routes. The withdrawal of the last commercially provided evening routes in recent years has led to the current situation where every evening bus service in the county borough receives a subsidy. The average subsidy per evening passenger is £1.05.

Costs for procuring this work in particular have risen dramatically because in addition to the usual cost pressures operators face (improved wages and conditions, increasing insurance costs), anti social behaviour (including missiles being thrown at buses, drivers being abused and attacked) has made it increasingly difficult for operators to supply drivers to operate the services. Add to this the management time taken up dealing with these sorts of incidents, it is not difficult to see why there is very little competition from operators tendering for this type of work. It is noticeable that these anti social problems are more prevalent on routes serving communities which are not on main roads.

Caerphilly county borough has strived to ensure that each community has an hourly evening bus service, based wherever possible on the daytime service pattern in each particular area. This has been achieved at the expense of more frequent services to some other areas to ensure maximum coverage of the county borough within the resources available. The recent Steer Davies Gleave report on Community Transport, commissioned by GAVO and Caerphilly CBC, looked at bus service provision and concluded that during the daytime, 85 – 88% of the population have access to facilities (including hospitals, leisure, clinics, surgeries, colleges and adult education), which dropped typically by only 5 – 6% during the evening.

Nevertheless, there are a number of daytime links which are not provided during the evening. Some of these are strategic (e.g. Bargoed to Cardiff; Caerphilly to Cardiff via Thornhill; Blackwood to Cwmbran) and these will be considered as part of the RPTS.

Others are more local (e.g. Churchill Park; Hendredenny; Mornington Meadows; Grove Park) which would require significant additional revenue funding to provide.

**ACTION:**

- Maintain liaison with police to restore confidence in areas where problems occur;
- Pursue the provision of on bus CCTV provision to improve passenger safety and driver confidence;
- Look at alternative means of meeting more local evening transport needs;
- Achieve a more comprehensive strategic evening route network through the RPTS;
- Seek additional revenue funding to expand local evening services, particularly for leisure activities.

### 6.5 *Daytime Services*

These are generally local town based services, which cannot be sustained on a commercial basis, but provide residents with an important lifeline to access facilities. The Council spends about 21% of its gross budget maintaining these routes, carrying 32.4% of total passengers. The average subsidy per passenger is 51p. They include journeys serving Caledfryn/ Hendredenny and Rudry in Caerphilly, Wyllie (near Blackwood); Princetown (near Rhymney); Llanfach and Treowen (Newbridge) and Fernlea (Risca). In June 2002, Stagecoach undertook a comprehensive review of its services in the Caerphilly town area, which led to the withdrawal of previously commercial services to areas including Mornington Meadows and Churchill Park, which are now subsidised by the Council.

In recent years, it has been evident throughout the country that the larger bus operating groups often struggle to run town services profitably (or at least to make the returns of 15% or more demanded by their boards) and have retrenched from this type of operation, preferring to concentrate on trunk services, enhanced by increased frequencies, strong identities and improved buses. It is predicted that there will be further contractions in this type of provision and although strong trunk bus routes are essential for the economic and social well being of the county borough, frequent and reliable local services are just as essential to ensure all residents are able to access facilities wherever possible.

**ACTION:**

- To ensure the continuation of a strong locally based bus network in all areas, it is likely that additional revenue funding sources need to be found. Sometimes, provision may be more efficiently met through alternative forms of transport (e.g. demand responsive) and these will be given full consideration.
- Enhanced strategic services will be sought through the RPTS and where appropriate, the local network of services will be modified to integrate with these and existing rail services.

### 6.6 *Sunday (and Bank Holiday Monday) Services*

The cost of subsidising Sunday bus services (which also operate on Bank Holiday Mondays) absorbs about 10.4% of the gross annual budget and carry 8.7% of the total passengers at 93p average subsidy per passenger. As with evening services, the Sunday route network is now wholly subsidised, following the withdrawal of the last commercial routes in 2002.

The Sunday service pattern on most routes is that of an afternoon/evening timetable, based on historical service patterns, which have not evolved to suit the shopping and leisure opportunities which are now available on Sundays. With a few exceptions, operators have not exploited the potential commercial opportunities of taking passengers into Cardiff for example, although this is in part due to private transport being more readily available for such journeys on Sundays. Within the voucher parking zone in Cardiff, parking is free on Sundays, giving the car another advantage.

Sunday bus operation has a similar effect on driver recruitment and retention as evening work does and because of this it may prove difficult to expand the current operations, which would almost double the driver shift requirement, should all day operation be introduced. General passenger demand seems to have declined more steeply on Sunday contracts than at any other time period and frequencies can be lower (every two hours is not uncommon).

Daytime strategic services not provided on Sundays include Blackwood to Pontypridd; Blackwood to Cwmbran; Blackwood to Abertillery (via Trinant); Tredegar to Blackwood; Caerphilly to Pontypridd; Caerphilly to Cardiff via Thornhill and Bargoed to Cardiff. On a more local level, there are no services linking Blackwood with Oakdale, Bargoed, New Tredegar, Penllwyn, or Wyllie, whilst in Caerphilly, there are no services to Mornington Meadows, Churchill Park, Caledfryn and Hendredenny. Strategic routes will be given consideration as part of the RPTS and any aspirations for additional Sunday services would require substantial extra funding.

- ACTION:
- Look at alternative means of meeting more local Sunday transport needs;
- Achieve a more comprehensive strategic Sunday route network through the RPTS;
- Seek additional revenue funding to expand Sunday services, particularly for leisure activities.

#### 6.7 *Diversions*

The diversion of existing bus routes, on a deminimis basis, has proved a cost effective way in meeting some much localised needs without the need to purchase additional resources. The procurement of additional bus services would also have the potential for abstracting from other services in particular areas. Approximately 7.4% of the gross annual supported services budget is used to pay for these diversions, at an average cost of 44p per passenger. Total patronage on these diversions is 13.2% of total passengers carried. Examples include journeys to Tiryberth and Victoria Road, Fleur de Lis; Twyn Gardens; Castle View, Caerphilly and Hendre, Abertridwr.

The move by some operators to focus on simple and consistent route networks may present less opportunity to divert services in the future. The recent redesign of the bus network in Caerphilly town led to some occasional diversions being withdrawn and the operator expressed no interest in reinstating them on a subsidised basis, as the simpler network was a more marketable product for its passengers.

- ACTION:
- The Council will exploit, wherever possible, opportunities to improve bus services by the diversion of existing routes.

## 6.8 *Early Morning Services*

A small but important element of the subsidised network is the provision of journeys earlier in the day than would otherwise be provided by bus operators commercially. They cost about 2% of the gross budget, but at a relatively high average subsidy per passenger of £1.44. Just over 1% of total passengers are carried on early morning journeys.

These journeys, generally operating between 0630 and 0800 in the morning, are almost exclusively used by passengers travelling to work. The services tend to be more local than strategic (the latter tend to be better served earlier in the day), but are important in allowing residents not living adjacent to main trunk routes access to longer distance bus and rail services and hence employment opportunities.

### ACTION:

- To compliment the existing and enhanced service aspirations of the RPTS by the improvement of early morning bus journeys.

## 6.9 *General*

The balance of spend of the supported services budget is allocated for the provision of some non statutory fare paying school bus services to primary schools, which are described under the education transport section.

The cost effective use of vehicles and staff providing local bus services is a priority for the Council and wherever possible, it works closely with bus operators to ensure that resources are employed as efficiently as possible.

Overall, the average subsidy per passenger on all subsidised services is 78p, although there is wide variation in subsidy levels on individual services. This figure is also a recognised Best Value Performance indicator (BVPI) and in 2001/02, the figure was the lowest in Wales.

### TARGET:

- To maintain a low overall subsidy per passenger level and monitor services to ensure that this is achieved. For individual contracts, the subsidy level should not exceed £3.50 per passenger, although in certain specific circumstances, a higher subsidy per passenger may be accepted.

## 6.10 *Local Transport Services Grant (LTSG)*

The Council has placed emphasis on the provision of a network that will facilitate the use of public transport by enhanced journey opportunities. Improved connections between buses and also between bus and rail to promote integrated transport and the specification of buses to assist the mobility impaired have been the features of some of the new services.

The strategy of the authority has been to thoroughly examine the current provision of bus services in order to identify opportunities to improve this situation. This was undertaken in conjunction with local bus operators and where appropriate, the public transport officers from neighbouring local authorities. During the process, particular attention was given to outstanding public requests and opportunities to provide increased travel links, as well as to

reduce the walking distances to the nearest bus route by improving the service penetration within certain urban housing estates (a new route serving the Grove Park Estate in Blackwood is a good example of this).

Importance was also placed on meeting the objectives of regional transportation strategies such as SWIFT and TIGER in order to utilise the funding effectively. The impressive passenger loadings achieved by service X18, for example, a new route operating between Ebbw Vale and Newport, demonstrates that by providing the public with a faster more direct journey, it is possible to reduce car dependency and improve the modal shift in favour of public transport. Similarly, a Rail Link service between Blackwood and Ystrad Mynach Station was introduced in April 2002 to provide a more direct and faster public transport alternative to Cardiff. In the first year of operation, over 11,000 passengers were carried.

The allocation of Bus Subsidy Grant has met passenger needs and demands which previously proved impossible to meet from the Council's own supported services budget. This has enabled the expansion of its bus network offering passengers new journey choices which would not otherwise have been met. Some new services have been designed to offer real alternatives to the car through combinations of new direct routes, faster journey times, higher frequencies, and the provision of accessible buses. Other new services seek to address the issues of social exclusion, by providing direct links to hospitals or the provision of evening services to areas which were not previously served or by the increased frequency on certain services to make buses a more acceptable alternative in areas of low car ownership. It is encouraging to note that most of the services introduced have been well supported and that increasing numbers of passengers are taking advantage of the new links that have been created.

**ACTION:**

- To continue to use LTSG as a mechanism to meet the needs and demands of bus passengers and communities which otherwise could not be met through the commercial market or the Council's own bus subsidy budget. The emphasis will be on the provision of services which maximise identified travel needs by utilising accessible vehicles and in a cost effective and efficient manner.

## 7. INFORMATION

7.1 To travel by bus, people need comprehensive information on times, routes, fares and reassurance that the service is reliable. Caerphilly county borough aims to provide this through the following objectives:

- To provide comprehensive and impartial information about the whole network of bus services.
- To ensure people have an awareness of how and where the information may be obtained.
- To ensure that the information is up to date.
- To make the information easily accessible in a wide range of formats.

### 7.2 *Progress to date*

- The council works in partnership with bus operators to ensure that timetables are available for each service. Stagecoach, the dominant operator, produces high quality timetable leaflets and booklets and Caerphilly county borough has contributed towards their publication to ensure that other operator's services that are complimentary are also included. Where operators have not produced timetables for their services, the council will produce appropriate leaflets and reserves the right to charge a financial contribution to the operator. These arrangements were formalised in the Transport Act 2000.
- Produced a map and guide of bus and rail services.
- Maintains an extensive distribution network to libraries, shops, post offices, tourism centres and other council offices to ensure information is widely disseminated.
- Approximately 500 roadside and bus station displays are provided and maintained by Caerphilly county borough, which include comprehensive timetable displays and other important information.
- Over 550 bus stop flags have been installed, each carrying the name of the bus stop and service information. Over 330 of these flags display the unique reference number allocated by PTI Cymru, which may be used in some important future developments, such as SMS text messaging.
- Wherever possible, all information is updated to coincide with service revisions.
- Caerphilly county borough has worked closely with PTI Cymru in the development of the project and remains committed to its success. All publicity (leaflets and at the roadside) includes the Traveline telephone number.
- The passenger transport pages of the council's website receive 500 to 600 hits each month and is one of the most popular sections of the site. A recent development has been to introduce direct hyperlinks to the PTI Cymru timetable and journey planner sites.
- Developed the Travelinks brand on all bus stops, timetables and other public transport related information provided by the Council. This gives the public a single point of contact for all public transport issues, including bus stops, shelters and concessionary fares.

### 7.3 *Issues to Tackle*

An important aspect outside the direct control of the Council is the variable standards of destination and route identification information displayed on buses serving the county

borough. Under existing regulations, bus operators have an obligation to display appropriate information and the Traffic Commissioner can take action against an operator who does not meet these standards. The Council sets stringent standards for operators of its subsidised services and can penalise operators who do not meet these standards. Caerphilly will work in partnership with the operators to ensure route numbers and destination displays are accurately and consistently displayed.

The Transport Act 2000 places additional obligations on local authorities to work with individual operators to ensure that relevant and accurate information is delivered. The Council will undertake a review of the current route numbering in place at present to simplify it and avoid unnecessary duplication. Changes arising from this review will be incorporated into a travel guide for Caerphilly, which will provide impartial information about bus and rail travel in the county borough, including timetables, detailed maps and other appropriate supplementary information.

The provision of information and facilities for the disabled is an area where considerable improvement in information is expected in coming years. Consideration needs to be given to information coverage about services of relevance to those with physical disabilities and also how information will be made available to those with various disabilities (particularly of hearing and sight).

The council is working with the RNIB and Stagecoach to make improvements which will make travelling easier for those with sight impairments and it is intended to expand this to include all operators serving the county borough.

Service changes and disruptions to bus operations – the Council is developing its website to make this information more widely available by providing regular updates and summaries on service changes. Service disruptions, whether through pre planned events or unplanned emergencies will also be publicised.

#### 7.4 *Future Developments*

Improving the availability and accessibility of information will help boost bus patronage – a survey undertaken by MORI in 2001 for the Commission for Integrated Transport revealed that 40% of the population would use public transport more often if it was easier to obtain information.

There are many exciting developments in information provision, particularly through electronic media. The council promotes the adoption of TransXchange by operators (this is a national protocol for the exchange of bus service registration details and more comprehensive timetable information) to allow integration into databases for the Traveline scheme and other purposes.

Seek to provide better quality information displays at key interchanges through the introduction of high quality destination displays, capable of being upgraded to operate on a real time basis in line with the aspirations of the Regional PTS.

**ACTION:**

- To produce a travel guide;
- To complete the programme of naming bus stops and providing informative bus stop displays;
- To simplify the route numbering of the bus network in Caerphilly;
- Work with operators to improve the standard of route number and destination displays and to ensure that information is accurately displayed;
- To improve the design and provision of information for the disabled;
- To regularly publish information on service changes and disruptions on its website;
- Investigate the introduction of digital displays at key interchanges;
- In association with the RPTS, work towards the introduction of real time passenger information systems; any system adopted must have full compliance with all other regional systems and forthcoming national standards.

## 8. INFRASTRUCTURE

8.1 Bus shelters, bus stations, bus stop poles and flags, raised footways and accessible kerbs, bus stop carriageway markings are an important and integral part of a bus journey and this infrastructure is the Council's responsibility. There are around 1100 bus stops in Caerphilly county borough, 450 of which have shelters. In order to attract extra bus passengers, bus stops, bus stations and interchanges have to be clean, safe, convenient and attractive places to wait in.

### 8.2 *Progress to date*

- Since April 1996, 375 new shelters have been installed. The shelters are fully glazed and generally have seats and timetable displays fitted. The Council recognises that the majority of new shelters have been funded through the Assembly Government's Transport Grant programme, but it has been pro active in seeking other sources of funding for shelters which are not situated on strategic routes.
- Major enhancement of Caerphilly Bus Station, to provide the town with a modern and integrated award winning interchange for bus and rail services.
- Installed Charcon© profiled kerbs at around 400 bus stops to allow passengers easier boarding and alighting between the footway and the bus.
- Allocates a budget of around £50,000 each year to maintain its infrastructure. This ensures that routine and emergency maintenance is undertaken regularly and structures are kept in a safe condition.
- Allocates a budget of approximately £42,000 each year to cleanse its infrastructure. That allows the council to employ a dedicated member of staff and a specialised vehicle to regularly cleanse shelters and bus stations. Each shelter is therefore power washed approximately once every four weeks, with graffiti removal undertaken at the same time. The arrangement is flexible enough to allow any urgent cleansing identified during a working day to be tackled within a matter of hours.
- Maintains a policy of not charging for bus station departures, as operators will only pass any charges on to passengers through higher fares.

### 8.3 *Future Developments*

Caerphilly county borough will maintain and improve the standards of its bus stop and bus station infrastructure. Through the provision of quality infrastructure, the council will work towards quality partnerships with bus operators to achieve an attractive bus network that is sustainable and promotes passenger growth.

To achieve this, additional funding will be sought through Transport Grant. Much has been achieved through this source to raise the profile and quality of bus travel along the strategic corridors. There are about 100 bus stops in the Britannia, Fleur de Lis, Hengoed, Maesycwmmer, Nelson, Pengam and Penybryn and a further 100 in the Caerphilly basin area that require upgrading.

In many respects, providing quality infrastructure and information within residential communities is just as important as tackling the strategic corridors, as consistency in quality throughout the bus journey, particularly from the "home" stop is vital in achieving a holistic approach. The cost of these works is estimated to be around £1.2m.

**ACTION:**

- Complete the programme of improvement to all bus stops and interchanges to achieve a high and consistent standard throughout the county borough;
- To provide additional bus shelters where passenger demands and local conditions allow.

## 9. THE BUS NETWORK

### 9.1 *Understanding the network*

The bus service network in Caerphilly county borough is not easy to understand and it can be difficult to identify the main routes. Service numbers are not co-ordinated and there is indifference by some operators to display them consistently or even at all. There are examples of service numbers being duplicated, even over common sections of route and bus timetables are often irregular. The difficulty of understanding the network makes it harder to use, particularly for the intermittent bus user and results in the car being chosen instead.

**ACTION:**

- Work with the bus operators towards achieving a bus network that is easier to understand, promote and therefore use. This process must be evolutionary and should not destabilise the existing bus network.

### 9.2 *Timetable Changes*

Frequent changes to bus timetables result in uncertainty for passengers and a loss of confidence in the service. Caerphilly county borough is bordered by seven other local authorities and there are bus services which operate between Caerphilly county borough and six of these authorities, which makes limiting the number of timetable changes difficult. Ideally, changes limited to two or three defined dates every year would improve the current situation, but cannot be achieved through Caerphilly county borough in isolation. The Council supports the Code of Conduct on service standards, produced by the Bus Partnership Forum and will implement its aims.

**ACTION:**

- Work towards reducing the number of timetable changes, in consultation with other local authorities and bus operators. Ultimately, this will only be achieved through changes to existing legislation or by mutual agreement of an area wide consortium of operators and local authorities through the adoption of the Code of Conduct on service stability, published by the Bus Partnership Forum.

### 9.3 *Network Mix*

The RPTS identifies the need for improved interurban type services and seeks solutions to allow faster, more direct services to be superimposed on to the network to make bus travel more competitive with the car on longer journeys. Local bus services play an equally important part by providing residents with access to employment, shopping, health, and education and leisure facilities. Some interurban services also serve the dual purpose of providing more local links along their route and this is particularly so on trunk valley routes. For this reason, these services cannot be considered in isolation by this bus strategy or the RPTS.

Caerphilly county borough is a predominately urban area and has few communities which could be classed as rural and completely isolated from a bus service. However, it is recognised that in areas of lower population density, innovative transport solutions will be

needed, such as demand responsive transport, shared taxis or expanded community transport schemes.

**ACTION:**

- Establish the services forming each of the above networks and their relationship with the RPTS so that their development can be focussed to meet the specific requirements of that type of service.
- Where the existing service provision does not meet needs, extra revenue funding will be sought to finance new services, increase frequencies or fund more innovative solutions.

#### 9.4 *Making the most of the network*

Simple, reliable and easy to understand bus networks are likely to encourage new passengers and attract new users. Services should run at the same minutes past each hour so that they can be easily remembered (these are known as ‘clock face’ timetables). Where services run over common sections of route, timetables should be co-ordinated wherever possible so there are even service intervals on these sections. Opportunity to interchange with other bus or rail services at key locations to gain the maximum benefit from existing resources and make the network more sustainable.

**ACTION:**

- Work with operators to achieve clock face timetables;
- Promote more co-ordination between services and more opportunities of interchange between buses and between bus and rail.

#### 9.5 *Access to the network*

People need bus services that take them from where they are to where they want to be. It is not possible to measure practically and quantify network access because of the diverse needs and demands and targets are difficult to set. Caerphilly county borough will work in partnership with operators, passengers and other bodies towards providing and maintaining a good bus network for the whole county borough.

Buses need minimum passenger flows to be effective and sustainable and will never be able to cater for all individual journeys. Many journeys are not suitable or practical by public transport and some are best made by a combination of car and public transport. Other types of service – demand responsive, community based, taxis or private hire vehicles must be developed to meet the needs of those without access to a car and public transport.

**ACTION:**

- Review the current bus network to establish whether it provides the best balance between serving people, providing attractive service levels and being financially affordable.

## 10. BUSES AND ACCESS FOR ALL

### 10.1 *The Current Bus Fleet*

Approximately 150 buses are required to provide the daytime bus network which serves the county borough. The average age of these buses is 8 years old and only about 31% of these buses have easy access facilities (step free low and flat floor accessible by wheelchair users and pushchairs). However, there are significant differences in fleet constitution between operators:

- Clarkes Coaches has 3 buses engaged in local bus and rail link services, average age 9.7 year, 0% accessible, although 2 of the buses have step free access.
- Glyn Williams Travel has 28 buses operating bus services in the county borough, average age 5.9 years with 82% having easy access facilities.
- Harris Coaches (Shuttle) has 12 buses which operate wholly within the county borough, average age 11.7 years and 25% have easy access facilities.
- Islwyn Borough Transport (IBT) has 21 buses operating bus services, average age 9.7 years, 0% with easy access facilities.
- Shamrock Travel has a large bus fleet (approximately 130 buses), but only 8 of these operate daytime services which serve the county borough. Although the buses allocated can vary, typically the average age is 4 years but none of Shamrocks routes in Caerphilly county borough are served by dedicated buses with easy access facilities.
- Stagecoach in South Wales utilises approximately 75 buses to fulfil its daytime bus service provision in Caerphilly county borough. The average age is 8 years and about 27% of the buses have easy access facilities. Services are operated from 5 depots and buses are frequently transferred between depots.

The provision of fully accessible buses on all services throughout Caerphilly county borough will make the bus network more available to the mobility impaired. The introduction of these buses to improve accessibility will also transform the perceptions of bus travel. Where new, easy access buses have been introduced, their ease of use and positive image has generated an increase in usage and hence improved the financial performance of services.

Legislation demands that all bus services are operated by step free entrance low floor buses by 2016 (for single deck buses), but there would be major benefits to existing and potential passengers if action could be taken to achieve 100% provision in advance of this. This could only be achieved by working in partnership with the bus operators and it is likely that capital grants towards the purchase of compliant buses would be necessary. Alternatively, the Council will give consideration to enhancing the specification of its tendered services to require that the tender is operated by accessible buses. This would mean a rise in the cost of these services, but the buses would also be utilised on commercially provided services.

**ACTION:**

- To work towards all bus services being operated by low floor accessible buses by 2010, subject to additional funding and appropriate mechanisms being found.
- In the intervening period whilst the buses are being introduced, operators will be encouraged to designate specific routes to be operated by low floor accessible buses.
- The average age of buses serving Caerphilly county borough should not exceed 8 years.

## 10.2 *Improving Physical Access to Buses*

Making it as easy as possible to board buses will allow people maximum mobility. Accessibility in this context is important as:

- People are living longer and this will lead to increasing numbers of older people who need mobility, but are unwilling or unable to drive. The introduction of free travel for the over 60s has increased demand for travel.
- Caerphilly county borough has a higher level of residents with limiting long term illnesses. The Council has a statutory duty under the Disability Discrimination Act to help those with mobility problems to get around and to provide them with equal access to services.
- Parents with young children in pushchairs or buggies often face barriers to bus travel. Carefully designed infrastructure and accessible buses can transform their mobility and freedom.

Achieving accessibility therefore requires Caerphilly county borough to improve infrastructure to provide level boarding and alighting platforms, kerbs to allow buses to stop at the optimum point for boarding and alighting and well designed bus shelter and bus stop infrastructure. Bus drivers need adequate training in stopping close to the kerb and in awareness of passenger needs. The enforcement of parking and waiting restrictions is an important part of the solution, as the benefits of improved infrastructure and the introduction of low floor accessible buses can be negated if the bus cannot have unrestricted access to the bus stop.

Caerphilly county borough believes that by undertaking these improvements to bus services, many of the barriers to bus travel are removed and they become accessible to most people. This achieves a socially inclusive solution and a more efficient use of resources. There will always be some cases however, where specialist transport is required for people with certain disabilities which prevent them from using conventional bus services.

**ACTION:**

- Encourage and facilitate full accessibility to the bus network through the provision of well designed accessible infrastructure, driver training and the enforcement of parking and waiting restrictions.

## 11 FARES AND TICKETING

### 11.1 *Fares*

Bus fare policies and cost can be a barrier to travel. Fare structures are complex and difficult to understand and there are often inconsistencies between fares charged for similar lengths of journey in different localities, usually because of historical reasons. Bus operators are not generally good at promoting fares and the uncertainty and lack of knowledge for existing and perspective passengers does not encourage travel.

Fares that are easy to understand and compare are achievable by simplifying the fare structure. Stagecoach has introduced a zonal fare scheme in the Caerphilly town area that is much easier to understand and market. This could be applied to other town networks in the county borough and with a bit more thought, to medium and longer journeys. This would also allow fares information to be more readily available so people can establish bus fares before travelling.

On subsidised services, fare levels are kept as close as possible to those prevailing for similar commercially provided journeys. Operators are allowed to vary their revenue in line with changes on the commercially provided network to sustain the operation of contracts without the need for extra subsidy to meet increases in operating costs.

**ACTION:**

- Work with operators to provide simple and easily understood bus fares which can be made readily available to passengers.

### 11.2 *Ticketing*

There is little consistency between ticket products offered by different bus operators and information on what is available can be difficult to find. On services operated jointly by different operators, return tickets are generally inter available between companies. Between different services operating along common sections of route, tickets are often not inter available between operators and this causes confusion for passengers.

This has been overcome on subsidised services by inserting a clause into the contract conditions which makes the operator of the contracted service obliged to accept any valid return or rover type ticket for travel along common sections of route. The Transport Act 2000 gives additional powers to help and encourage operators to make return and season tickets valid on all buses, regardless of the operator and this will be actively pursued.

On all services in Caerphilly county borough, fares are available by paying cash and change is always available. However, this can have a significant effect on boarding times and changing the way people pay can speed up bus journeys. There will always be a need for cash to be taken and change to be available, but the introduction of free travel has removed the need for a large number of passengers to tender cash and operators should be encouraged to exploit this by reducing further the number of other passengers paying with cash. This would improve the reliability of services and also help other road users by improving traffic flow through reducing dwell time at bus stops.

### 11.3 *Smartcards*

The solution lies in the expansion of Smartcard ticketing, which could facilitate this aspiration. Caerphilly county borough was chosen as a pilot area for SWIFT for the implementation of a Smartcard ticketing scheme, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. There are approximately 28,000 Smartcard free travel passes that have been issued to Caerphilly county borough residents and nearly all buses operating in the county borough are equipped with readers. Stagecoach has issued commercial Megarider tickets on Smartcards for their Caerphilly town network, which allow unlimited travel on their local services for periods of 7 days.

There have been a number of technical problems associated with the implementation of the scheme and some will not be resolved until the ITS0 standard is finally published. This is a national standard for Smartcards that is being developed by Central Government in association with operators and suppliers, that will eventually enable any Smartcard to be used on any transport service, provided the scheme is capable of being migrated to meet the ITS0 specification.

Smartcard ticketing has the potential to meet the needs of passengers, operators and the council. Low cost Smartcards can replace existing rover and multi journey tickets, along with season tickets. There is potential for school and college pupils to be issued with Smartcards to allow more flexible travel arrangements, as well as opening the possibility of use in wider education and leisure activities, as well as reducing the opportunities of fraudulent use. For bus passengers, stored value Smartcards will allow the cards to have a monetary value put on to it, with the bus fare being deducted each time it is used.

Ticketing packages, sensitively priced and promoted, could offer added value, for example, free evening and weekend travel and discounted fares for anyone accompanying the holder. Such packages would encourage the use of non work trips by bus.

#### **ACTION:**

- Work towards return and season tickets being valid on all bus routes serving the county borough, regardless of the operator and encourage wider acceptance by operators of rover type tickets.
- Simplify ticket products so that they are easier to understand and promote.
- Encourage off bus ticket sales.
- Overcome technical issues and achieve an ITS0 compliant Smartcard scheme for Caerphilly county borough.
- Introduce innovative Smartcard solutions to encourage easier and freer use of the bus network.

## 12 RELIABILITY AND THE BUS JOURNEY

### 12.1 *The main ingredients*

A comprehensive bus network is unsustainable if buses fail to turn up when they are supposed to. Passengers who experience sporadic service provision will soon find alternative means of travelling and will be lost forever.

To maintain passengers and attract new ones, the main ingredients of a satisfactory bus journey are:

*Information* – readily available in a number of formats; *quality infrastructure* - to give confidence and security; *reliability* – services always run; *punctuality* – services run on time; *safety* – well maintained bus; highly competent driver; *security* - no personal safety concerns; *cleanliness* – bus is clean and comfortable inside and out.

Buses can never be 100% reliable, although the aspiration must be that every bus is on time, every time. In practice, factors often outside an operators control such as roadworks, accidents, general traffic congestion and other factors such as breakdowns will mitigate against this happening. However, an operator should have effective controls in place to react to situations as they arise to minimise the effect on passengers. Perhaps the most important of these is supervision and the ability to disseminate information to passengers effectively, in the event of unexpected events.

### 12.2 *Current problems*

Caerphilly county borough is experiencing some negative reactions by operators to shortages of driving staff, which have resulted in much poorer service provision for passengers. One operator has withdrawn some Saturday afternoon journeys on an hourly trunk route service, operated jointly with another operator. This occurs when there are major sporting events held at the Millennium Stadium or even when Wales are playing away at international rugby or football matches. This leaves two hour gaps in service on these days – totally unacceptable and impossible for passengers to understand.

Another operator providing a half hourly service to an isolated community has experienced similar staffing problems and has introduced an emergency hourly timetable which operates on days when staff shortages mean it is not possible to provide the normal half hourly service. The trouble with this is that it is often introduced with no prior notice to passengers, because it is not possible to predict the staff shortage. The timetable bears little resemblance to the normal service pattern, so passenger confidence in the route has been significantly undermined.

On subsidised journeys the problems of unreliability can be particularly acute, as the journeys are often during evenings or on Sundays where drivers can be even more difficult to provide, due to unsociable hours, antisocial behaviour of the public and physical attacks on buses. The general lack of supervision at these times can add to the problem, but passengers are far more vulnerable as they are likely to have far fewer alternative services and hence reliability is of even greater importance.

The difficulty of driver recruitment and retention is a UK wide problem at the moment, caused by a number of factors, especially pay and working conditions. The job is

stressful, through dealing with difficult passengers, working unsociable hours, traffic congestion, working to unrealistic schedules which do not allow for delays and cash handling.

### 12.3 *Solutions*

There are measures which can be adopted by operators and the Council to alleviate some of these pressures. Schedules must be realistic and include appropriate recovery time. Traffic management measures can be introduced to overcome problems which make journey times inconsistent - bus priority measures at traffic lights and on busy routes can be beneficial. Better planning and more effective dissemination of information about road works can ease the impact on buses. Bus operators can improve training standards for drivers in customer care skills. The provision of on board CCTV would provide for drivers and passengers.

Many of these measures are included in other sections of this Strategy but without addressing the fundamental staffing problems the bus industry is currently experiencing, it is unlikely that passenger growth targets will be achieved. For this reason, the first priority must be to make existing services as reliable as possible. Aspirations of increasing service frequencies and providing additional bus mileage are acceptable when staff resources are readily available, but spreading these resources too thinly will result in unreliable services and a loss of passengers throughout the core bus network.

Instead, the Council must work in partnership with bus operators and find solutions to the current problems. It must also work with the Welsh Traffic Area Office more closely to ensure that services operate punctually and in accordance with their registered particulars. It has become almost acceptable excuse that journeys which fail to operate due to driver shortages must be tolerated by passengers and this situation must be reversed.

Part of the solution may lie in the implementation of alternative transport services, such as demand responsive evening services. Effective monitoring of the supported bus service network is important, but more innovative solutions to the problem need to be sought. For example, monthly contract payments could include a bonus for 100% reliability, whilst the failure to operate a service reliably could lead to a deduction to the monthly contract payments, in addition to penalties or deduction of payment for the journeys not operated.

### 12.4 *Quality – partnerships/networks or contracts?*

In tandem with the Regional PTS, Quality Bus Partnerships will be developed and it is envisaged that many of the current failings in the bus network would be resolved by working in partnership with operators.

The Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO) are developing the concept of “Quality Networks”, a middle way between Quality Bus Partnerships and Quality Contracts, where the operators would work closely with local authorities on a voluntary basis. The proposals include some freedoms or flexibility from existing legislative/regulatory regimes, including:

- Longer term contracts between local authorities and bus operators;
- The ability to prescribe fares and frequency;

- More flexible use of existing capital funding and exemptions from competition legislation to allow joint working on fares; ticketing, frequencies, marketing and to allow organisations to work together and networks to be planned.

As far as Caerphilly county borough is concerned, the imposition of a Quality Contract would be a last resort as its philosophy has been to work closely with operators to provide the best possible bus network. An officer from Caerphilly county borough also sits on the Quality Bus Partnership working party led by the Assembly Government.

**ACTION:**

- Work with bus operators and other bodies to provide a more reliable bus network by addressing the issues that are currently preventing this being achieved. Additional funding will be necessary, but this should first be directed at improving existing services, rather than at expanding the bus network.

### **13 GIVING BUSES A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**

- 13.1 Improving the quality and consistency of bus services will help retain existing passengers and may attract some new patronage. If we are to succeed in significantly increasing bus patronage, then more dramatic steps have to be taken to make the bus a serious alternative to the car such that a bus journey can be quicker, more convenient, less stressful or cheaper.
- 13.2 The faster the bus journey is, the more attractive it becomes. Many of the improvements discussed elsewhere in this Strategy contribute towards a reduction in journey time, including reducing the need for on bus ticket sales to speed up boarding times, encouraging the expansion of easy access buses and ensuring that bus stops are conveniently located to meet passengers needs.
- 13.3 Priority measures seek to remove the unreliability of bus travel and to reduce travel time by enabling buses to avoid traffic congestion. The lead on priority measures is taken by the RPTS, as the most significant traffic congestion is encountered on strategic trunk services operating in to and out from Cardiff and Newport city centres. The enforcement of priority measures is just as important as their provision and includes effective management of illegally parked vehicles at the roadside and in particular on bus stops. Again, the RPTS seeks to address this on a regional basis and advocates the possible decriminalisation of parking offences as one option. An alternative approach advocates specific enforcement initiatives by the Police. Caerphilly county borough fully endorses the lead being taken by the Transport Board in this area.
- 13.4 On a local level, Caerphilly county borough has introduced priority for buses at traffic signals, improved junction designs to ease the movement of buses, enhanced bus interchange areas, improved bus stop design in many areas and formalised carriageway markings. In new developments, the opportunity is taken to ensure that developers incorporate measures in their scheme to ensure buses are given maximum benefit.
- 13.5 The Council has established an internal communication network between the passenger transport section, and its highways operations and traffic management sections to ensure that buses are given due consideration when works are undertaken on the highway. This ensures that road works have the minimal impact possible on the operation of bus services and has led to works being programmed outside the hours of normal bus service operation. It also allows time for operators to be consulted and measures taken to minimise the effect of the works on passengers.

**ACTION:**

- Seek guidance from the Transport Board and support the RPTS to achieve wider and more effective bus priority measures, particularly on trunk bus routes.
- On a local level, continue to encourage the implementation of infrastructure and highway improvements which give buses an advantage over other road users.

## 14 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

14.1 The Council and GAVO (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations) commissioned consultants Steer Davies Gleave (SDG) to undertake a review of community transport in Caerphilly. The two objectives of the commission were:

- to establish the need for community transport – i.e. to identify the client group and their transport needs through qualitative and quantitative research; and
- to identify practical, costed transport solutions to meet these needs.

14.2 The LTP Progress Report also covers this study, listing the consultant's recommended actions.

### 14.3 *Summary of Transport Provision*

The study concluded that overall, the local bus network in Caerphilly county borough is good, particularly on north to south routes. The analysis and consultation identified notable gaps in the network including early morning and for specific health related journeys. It noted that there is a considerable lack of accessible vehicles on the bus network, making journeys for those with mobility impairments difficult, particularly when accessible buses are not allocated consistently to specific routes. In comparison with other local authorities, it highlighted that Caerphilly county borough spends more per capita on supported bus services but less on accessible transport.

The current Community Transport (CT) provision has developed on a largely ad hoc basis and is trying to meet demand, which reportedly exceeds its capacity. Focus Group studies suggested that the awareness of CT schemes is low among residents, even the elderly and disabled and there appears to be some uncertainty over cost and how bookings can be made.

### 14.4 *Need and Provision*

The study concluded there is a clear need for CT. Information provided by the CT organisations suggested they currently provide for around 57,000 trips every year. The analysis identified that there is a potential need for substantially more trips than this in the community.

However, it noted that not all residents with transport needs require door to door transport and their needs could be met from improved/accessible public transport.

### 14.5 *Way Forward*

Given the expenditure required and current disparate nature of CT provision in Caerphilly county borough, it was recommended that a phased approach be taken, with initial improvements to the existing situation in the short term, but providing a solid framework for the development of a wider CT scheme in the future. Key to the recommendations is considering CT in the context of broader transport provision. The nature and availability of other public transport will influence the level of need for CT and the nature of its provision to meet those needs.

The primary focus of co-ordination and funding and development of CT should be to improve the provision of CT to those who are in most need of door to door transport, i.e.

those who cannot use conventional transport. A significant marketing effort is needed to promote existing and new services as they develop, to raise awareness of those eligible.

The study acknowledged that there are other social groups with unmet transport needs resulting in exclusion and not all of these could effectively or appropriately met by door to door demand responsive CT. Other mechanisms for improving transport for various needs, such as to hospitals, employment and certain leisure activities should be developed and existing initiatives built on as appropriate. In particular, more accessible local bus services would primarily help those with mobility and other physical impairments and particularly parents with baby buggies. For others, schemes to reduce the cost or the availability of flexible transport (such as taxi cards, community car schemes, wheels to work) may be more appropriate. There is a recognition that Community Transport provision is expensive and should be used to support this framework by meeting those needs that cannot be met cost effectively by public transport.

A more integrated approach to funding could aid the targeting of resources for all passenger transport, including LTSG and subsidised bus services. A framework to justify support of services is suggested, together with a criteria for support, based on demand; social need and subsidy level. Some of these criteria are already applied, although some refinement is required.

**ACTION:**

- Target additional funding to CT to provide more services for those who are unable to use conventional public transport, linked with:
- Improving and upgrading provision, ensuring better monitoring of procedures, driver training, funding for paid drivers.
- Establish a new joint Council/Voluntary sector post for a mobility/accessibility officer within the council – to have responsibilities of liaising with the passenger transport section, all CT groups and co-ordinate funding for them.
- Establish more quantitative basis for supported bus services
- Development of other schemes to meet specific transport needs, particularly for individual trips.
- Establishment of a CT forum involving representation of all relevant sections within the council (passenger transport; taxi licensing; social services; education); GAVO; the three CT operators; Local Health care; Welsh Ambulance service; CTA.

## 15 TAXIS

- 15.1 The integration of taxis with buses is not widespread in Caerphilly county borough. Taxis can fill the gaps in the bus and rail network, especially in the more remote and rural locations. The increased use of taxis does tackle car dependence and can encourage those with cars to use public transport more often.
- 15.2 Taxis are an important and undervalued part of the transport system. The taxi and private hire business is extremely fragmented, making it difficult to include as part of the transport system. That difficulty should not belie efforts at both local authority and regional level to do more to bring taxis closer to the forefront of the transport system.
- 15.3 The taxi trade is split into two – Hackney Carriages are licensed by the council and are available for hire at taxi ranks and by hailing on the street. There is a metered charge for each journey and passengers are therefore reassured of what the cost of each journey will be. Private hire vehicles are only available by booking on an office or by telephone. The successes of both types of taxis rely on good information being available.
- 15.4 Taxis have a role to play by serving locations which cannot support a viable bus service. They can also provide a community transport solution by providing a service for the mobility impaired, who are unable to access conventional public transport. Taxis can also provide competition for commercially provided bus services and this area of growth has been noticeable in recent years. For some journeys it can be cheaper for passengers to share a taxi rather than catch a bus.
- 15.5 Taxis and buses need to be more integrated and coordinated. The council has pledged in the Local Transport Plan to draw up a code of conduct for taxi and private hire operators and invite operators to join it. It has also identified to identify sites for taxi ranks in each major town. At Bargoed and Rhymney Stations, by working in partnership with Valley Lines and local taxi operators, taxi booking facilities now exist at each station. All stations on the Rhymney Line include comprehensive information displays which provide details of adjacent bus routes and taxi operators. Similar information about taxis should be provided at each bus station and on roadside displays.

### ACTION:

- Introduce wider promotion of local taxis at bus stations and bus stops.
- Provide taxi ranks in all major towns, preferably adjacent to bus and rail stations and major bus stops.
- Introduce a Code of Conduct for taxi operators
- Give consideration to taxis as an option to buses in some area, particularly during the evening

## **16 SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TRANSPORT**

- 16.1 The provision of statutory school transport in Caerphilly county borough is undertaken by staff in the Awards and Transport section within the Directorate of Education and Leisure. The Council has a legal obligation to provide free transport to and from school for pupils living beyond defined distances from their schools. For pupils under 8 years old, a 2 mile limit applies; for those over 8 years old, a 3 mile limit applies.
- 16.2 In Caerphilly county borough, a more generous qualification distance operates. For all primary school pupils, a 1.5 mile limit applies and a 2 mile limit for pupils attending secondary school. The Passenger Transport section also provides 8 fare paying school bus contracts to primary schools which are non statutory and funded from the supported bus services budget. Approximately 12.6% of this budget is spent carrying 9.8% of the total passengers on the subsidised network, at an average subsidy of £1.00 per passenger.
- 16.3 Using Caerphilly county borough's enhanced statutory criteria, transport is provided for approximately 8000 pupils each day, the majority being carried on exclusively contracted services by bus, minibuses or taxis. Included within this is the provision of specialised transport for special needs pupils. Where there are convenient bus services operating past secondary schools, the opportunity has been taken to utilise the local bus service network and issue season tickets to pupils to travel. There is close liaison between both directorates to identify whether pupils with unique journey requirements can be accommodated on the bus service network, rather than seeking expensive dedicated transport.
- 16.4 Where there are genuine opportunities for utilising the service network to transport pupils, these will continue to be exploited. The advantages for pupils are the added flexibility if they miss the bus or to attend extra curricular activities and benefit from alternative services to return home. For the authority, such funding provides support and sustainability for the local bus network. The disadvantages to the bus passenger include a reduction in the quality of journey experience, a potential increase in journey length and the creation of capacity problems because of excessive demand.
- 16.5 Dedicated contract bus provision provides greater opportunity for continuity of staff/escorts and minimises pupils contact with the general public, so there is less disruption to regular passengers. Contract buses are also more flexible when catering for the unpredictability of demand. However, bespoke buses do result in poor driver and vehicle utilisation and do not have the flexibility to accommodate pupils attending extra curricular activities.
- 16.6 In a mainly urban area like Caerphilly county borough, the opportunities to utilise the service network are very limited. Services are operated by conventional buses, rather than dual purpose or coach type vehicles traditionally employed to fulfil local bus and schools transport needs in more rural areas. The introduction of low floor, step free buses into the network in recent years further reduces the ability to utilise the bus network as the seating capacity of these vehicles (usually around 40 seats) restricts the available capacity. Recent changes in policy by the Education directorate to enhance safety by increasing escort provision and withdrawing the 3 for 2 seat concession have further reduced the available options.
- 16.7 The Council recognises the importance and fully supports the season ticket scheme operated by Coleg Gwent for students attending its facilities at locations such as Ebbw Vale, Crosskeys and Newport. The flexibility this provides for students could not be

matched by contract buses and the financial support this provides towards the bus network should not be underestimated. The administration of the scheme and the mechanism for reimbursing the bus operators involved could benefit through the introduction of Smartcards for the students and the configuration of equipment already fitted or due to be fitted to all buses in the region.

**ACTION:**

- Continue close liaison between both Directorates to ensure there is maximum utilisation of the bus network to meets pupil and student needs.
- Investigate the issue of Smartcards to students at Coleg Gwent