

## **LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN : ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2003/2004**

### **Introduction**

Wear Valley District is a diverse area which includes densely populated urban centres, and yet some of the most remote locations in England, let alone in the region. The Development and maintenance of a good transport system is fundamental to the economic and social well-being of Wear Valley, which has been affected recently by the contraction in traditional manufacturing industry and poor representation in new growth and service sectors. Improved accessibility within and beyond the District is an essential component of a range of measures being introduced to tackle the problems of the District.

The Council, therefore, views the successful implementation of the Local Transport Plan as one of the most significant ways by which wider Council objectives related to population growth, stimulating the economy, improving health, cutting crime, achieving environmental improvement, and developing lifelong learning can be assisted in very practical ways.

The partnership arrangement for local transport planning ties in very well with the integrated approach which is necessary to meet increasingly complex and inter-related transport and social-economic problems, and the District Council is happy to endorse this method of working.

### **THE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND TRANSPORT**

The Wear Valley Local Strategic Partnership involves local communities working with the District and County Councils, Police, health, business and other local service providers. The Partnership seeks to help local communities have an active role in the planning, development and delivery of services.

Through the Environment Sub-Group the LSP has highlighted transport and access to services as a major issue for the District. A major debate in April at the LSP identified a range of potential issues and solutions for consideration in LTP2.

The LSP clearly welcomes the integrated approach LTP2 proposes to ensure that all action to improve transport and accessibility accords with strategies for economic development and housing, at regional, county and local level. The full integration of LTP activity with emerging Local Development Frameworks (District based Local Plans) is essential. Concerns exist about how the District will develop within key regional strategies, including the Northern Way, and how transport can assist in increasing accessibility to the District which is situated on the edge of the proposed regional development patterns.

The emphasis on strategic infrastructure remains important, both rail and road.

The A68 is a major through route that is also a key to improved communications within Wear Valley. The draft Wear Valley Community Plan and the Weardale Strategy, which was subject to extensive public consultation and endorsement, underscore the need for further improvements to that route to ensure better access to the District. One aim is the eventual extension of the West Auckland Bypass

Stage 2 to link up to the A68, coupled with other works outside Wear Valley District (Toft Hill Bypass) to make the route north less tortuous.

The difficulty faced in accessing public transport is a particularly intractable element that has been identified. Work is needed in particular to identify more clearly and accurately the issues facing local communities in terms of travel to work and accessing community facilities. The Local Strategic Partnership has committed resources to funding innovative solutions that should be considered by the Local Transport Partnership in due course. The work of the Durham Rural Transport Partnership and the Rural Transport Co-ordinator in attempting to use innovative ways to overcome this problem also represents initiatives which the Council is particularly pleased to support. Funding has been made available by the LSP to support this approach, in particular to support community transport initiatives.

The District Council supports the establishment of the Community Rail Partnership for the Bishop Auckland to Darlington rail line.

Town centre revitalisation is a high priority for the LSP. Both Crook and Bishop Auckland are currently subject to master planning and improvement. Traffic circulation and management is an important element of this. The LSP seeks a commitment from LTP2 to support innovative ways to reconcile traffic and urban design issues and supports traffic modelling on each centre to plan more accurately for future traffic growth. The County Walking and Cycling Strategies promote a safe environment for non-motorised transport linked to wider health improvement benefits. Such initiatives are of real importance since Wear Valley has particular health problems and co-ordinated action utilising a range of measures is essential to deal with these problems effectively. The importance attached to these schemes in helping to meet the wider objectives of the Local Strategic Partnership (and the District Council) needs to be emphasised from the outset.

## **LOCAL DELIVERY**

- **Progress on Major Schemes**

The two major schemes in the District are the West Auckland Bypass Stage 2 and the Crook Bypass.

- **West Auckland Bypass**

Completion of the West Auckland Bypass is critical to achieve:-

- Better links to the west;
- Improved access to a large areas of land with development potential in the Bishop Auckland area, and
- A significant and much needed boost in environmental conditions for residents in the West Auckland/Tindale Crescent and St Helen Auckland areas.

It is noted that delays to this scheme have resulted from a public inquiry. The Council strongly support the completion of this scheme that has strong local support, (92% of respondents to a consultation questionnaire supported the scheme).

- **Crook Bypass**

This new route, now complete has opened up a number of brownfield sites and stimulated new housebuilding.

- **Tourism Routes**

The opening of the Weardale Railway in July of last year from Wolsingham to Stanhope was a tremendous boost for the tourist economy of Weardale and contributed to a 10% increase in visitor numbers. It is unfortunate that the business hit problems but the LSP is wholly committed to supporting the operation of the line.

The opening up of new cycling and walking routes should also help the tourism potential of the area and assist initiatives like the Black Grouse bus to become better established and utilised.

- **Car Parking in Bishop Auckland**

The regulation and improvement of car parking in Bishop Auckland, a fundamental element of the Council's agreed Town Centre Strategy, has benefited the town.

The car parking proposals have:-

- Maximised the availability of car parking spaces for shoppers and visitors, i.e. predominantly short stay parking;
- Made provision for workers and residents i.e. some long stage parking, and
- Improved the appearance and security of the car park (the first phase of improvements at Victoria Avenue now complete).

The District Council supports action to complement off-street parking regulation by consideration of on-street regulation (the responsibility of the County Council) in order to take into account of and mitigate any displacement effects which have occurred.

A new charging arrangement (agreed with the Town Centre Forum, and Traders Association) operates in association with a concessionary shopping scheme promoted by traders to encourage growth in retailing. The scheme continues to be monitored. Proposals are being developed to introduce a similar scheme in Crook town centre.

- **Minor Schemes Review**

The Council has commented upon the review of minor schemes proposed by the County Council as they affect Wear Valley. The Council is of the opinion that the County Council should give further consideration to the schemes in Bishop Auckland and Crook, as well as those already mentioned relating to the A68 and Toft Hill Bypass.

## **Conclusion**

The District Council appreciates the opportunity of being involved in the preparation, implementation and review of the Local Transport Plan through the County Council and the Partnership Forum. It will retain its commitment to this process and looks forward to even closer co-operation in the future.