

There and Back..?

Local Solutions to Local Transport Challenges in County Durham



County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Member Network

April 2008

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Section One - Foreword

County Durham is essentially rural in nature, so getting around - whether for work, school, recreation or health needs - depends upon car ownership; access to commercially provided services (mainly buses); or services provided by the voluntary sector (community transport) or health sector.

Lower than average levels of car ownership and the demographic make-up of the County, with increasing numbers of older people who often require greater access to health services, serve to further compound the issues faced by residents across the County in relation to transport.

Whilst recent Governments have not sought to reverse the deregulation of the bus industry brought about by the Transport Act 1985, the current Government has recognised, in "Putting Passengers First" (2006) and the Local Transport Bill (2007), that transport services (primarily buses) should meet the needs of all and that vulnerable people in society are not isolated because of difficulties in accessing transport for everyday needs.

It was these actions that provided the impetus for this scrutiny project, undertaken by Councillors from the seven District Councils and Durham County Council. Members wished to enhance their knowledge about the levels of transport provision across the County; the challenges faced by providers; and the needs of users. There was also a desire on the part of members to identify where opportunities might exist for services to be improved and to make recommendations, where appropriate, linked to these issues.

This has been a fully inclusive project. There has been representation from all Councils and input/support at both member and officer levels, with meetings held on a rotational basis at the offices of all participating Councils. The project was set against the context of a single Unitary Council for County Durham and provided opportunities for prospective councillors of the new Authority to gain an understanding of the areas of responsibility in relation to transport currently delivered at different levels within local government.

The members of the Network would like to thank all of the witnesses who provided information and advice and also those officers who supported the project.

If you require this information summarised in other languages or formats, such as Braille, large print or talking tapes, contact: (0191) 383 3149

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Section Two - Terms of Reference and Membership of the Network

Terms of Reference

2.1 The following terms of reference were adopted by the network:

Focus

2.2 The network will take evidence from key witnesses involved directly and indirectly in providing transport (commercial, public and community) to local communities in County Durham. The network will also assist in developing member views on the Government Document "Putting Passengers First" and Road Transport Bill 2007.

2.3 The review will want to consider in particular:-

- What are the national and local policy drivers in relation to the transport challenge?
- What is the nature of strategic planning and the approach taken for a more seamless/coordinated approach to meeting local transport needs?
- What are the transport challenges for the public sector, i.e. NHS, Local Authority? Can accessibility planning help? What are the issues associated with access to services from a transport perspective?
- Do we have an equitable level of transport provision across the County?
- What is the extent of current bus service provision across the County and what/where are the main demands for services?
- What do local people think about current bus service provision?
- What do bus operators see as the key issues?
- What is the nature of Community Transport in the County? What are the challenges they face?
- What best practice is there in relation to providing quality local bus services, which are affordable and accessible?
- What are our findings (and recommendations, if any)?

Approach

2.4 Each meeting of the network shall rotate in venue around the eight Durham Councils, in alphabetical order.

2.5 Each meeting should have a designated lead member and lead officer, from different authorities. The role of the designated member and officer will be to respond to the action determined from the respective meeting, reporting back/organising the next meeting. This is to ensure that responsibility for delivery of the review is delivered in partnership.

- 2.6 Each meeting shall have a Chair, determined by the authority hosting that meeting.

Reporting

- 2.7 When the review is completed, each authority will report on the work of the County Durham Scrutiny Member Network to its own Cabinet (or equivalent) and Council.
- 2.8 Opportunities to report to partnership structures i.e. Local Area Agreement Board, Local Strategic Partnerships and the relevant Transport Partnership will be explored.
- 2.9 Consideration will also be given to holding a seminar/event to launch the final report of the Network, disseminating the findings of the review, to all those involved and beyond.

Timescale

- 2.10 Scoping for project began in July 2007. The project concluded in March 2008.

Membership of the Network

- 2.11 Members of the network were as follows:

District of Easington Council - Councillors Alan Burnip and Dennis Raine
Public Transport scoping group - Councillor Burnip

City of Durham Council - Councillors Amanda Hopgood and Barbara Howarth

Chester-le-Street District Council - Councillors Geoff Armstrong and Barrett
Public Transport scoping group – Councillors Barrett (lead) and Armstrong (supporting)

Sedgefield Borough Council - Councillors J.E. Higgin and A. Gray.
Public Transport scoping group - Councillors J.E. Higgin and A. Gray

Durham County Council – Councillors Joe Armstrong and Paul Stradling
Public Transport scoping group - Cllr John Davies

Teesdale District Council – Councillors Newton Wood and Richard Bell
Public Transport scoping group – Cllr DAR Forster/Newton Wood

Wear Valley District Council – Councillors Vere Shuttleworth and Mrs June Lee

Derwentside District Council – Councillors Linda Marshall and Tina Parry.

2.12 **Project Officer Task Group:**

Tom Bolton (Durham County Council)

Stephen Gwilym (Easington District Council)

Feisal Jassat (Durham County Council)

Anne Lambert (Teesdale District Council)

Jonathan Slee (Sedgefield Borough Council)

Phil Thompson (PhD student Northumbria University/Durham County Council)

Richard Startup (Integrated Transport Manager, Durham County Council)

Section Three – Executive Summary

Introduction

- 3.1 County Durham is essentially a rural County, with lower than average levels of car ownership. This means that there is greater dependence upon public transport as a means of getting about for work, leisure, health and shopping.

Key Facts

- 3.2 In relation to public transport, bus services operated by the commercial sector account for approximately 85% of provision. The County Council contracts additional services (particularly on mornings, evenings, weekends and bank holidays) to fill the gaps at an annual cost of £3.85m. Costs for providing these services have risen sharply in recent years, particularly as a result of rising fuel prices, and it has been necessary for the County Council to reduce the number of services supported.
- 3.3 There are particular issues in the more rural areas of the County, such as Teesdale and Weardale, where bus service provision is limited. There are difficulties for some people in accessing health and other important services. Older and young people are particularly affected, as are those with disabilities.
- 3.4 There are two key commercial bus operators in County Durham, Go NorthEast and Arriva. The Go NorthEast fleet is being updated and will soon consist 100% of low floor easy access buses. Arriva is likewise upgrading its fleet with 63% low floor. There are a number of smaller commercial operators within the County, although they tend to work on tendered routes, and, in the case of Weardale, within their traditional operating territory.
- 3.5 Other providers operate services, i.e. Community Transport providers operate throughout the County; ensuring important services are available to small groups of people, usually on a geographical basis. However there are issues linked to the sustainability of many such services. Patient Transport services have been commissioned by the Health Trusts in the past from the North East Ambulance Service. New models using existing commercial transport services are being piloted in Easington District.
- 3.6 A number of legislative provisions govern the manner in which transport services are provided. The Transport Act 1985 effectively de-regulated bus services. The Transport Act 2000 introduced a number of measures, including Local Transport Plans to more effectively deliver bus services.
- 3.7 The County Council's first Local Transport Plan (LTP1) covered the period 2001-2006 and included capital expenditure on transport interchanges, bus information, bus priority measures (i.e. bus lanes) and bus stop improvements. Revenue expenditure included support for local bus services, concessionary fares for 14 -16 year olds, rural bus services grant public transport access and rural bus partnerships.

- 3.8 Local Transport Plan (LTP2) will run over the period 2006/11 and has to address national priorities, shared between Central and Local government of better accessibility and public transport; improved road safety; improved quality of life and health; reduced problems of congestion; and reduced problems of air quality. It will have more emphasis on accessibility; will see the creation of and include a new bus strategy; will see integration with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan; and will engage with Local Strategic Partnerships through Area Programmes. It will encourage and support consolidation of the Community Transport sector; place less reliance on major schemes as solutions; and has transport asset management planning.
- 3.9 The County Council's Bus Strategy Durham was agreed for consultation by Cabinet in January 2008. Some of the new proposals in the Strategy for Type 2 and 3 Services will require upfront funding of £800,000 with £300,000 annual revenue costs. There is currently no budget provision for these measures.
- 3.10 Recent moves to reform public transport include "Putting Passengers First", issued by the Department of Transport in 2006, and informed by the review of bus services across the country carried out by the Department. It found that, whilst the post-war decline in bus patronage was now levelling off, the quality of bus service provision still varied greatly from place to place. In London and other areas, where more people were using buses in recent years, the key ingredient of success had been effective partnership working, with a shared willingness on the part of local authorities and bus operators to work together to invest in the long-term future of the bus sector. But, the review highlighted that, in too many areas, including many major cities outside London, partnership was still not working effectively. Many services were not meeting the high standards expected by users, and in too many places, use of buses was on a downward trend.
- 3.11 The Local Transport Bill of 2007 contains provisions to tackle congestion by empowering local authorities to develop local solutions to local transport challenges. It will provide a tool-kit of powers within an overarching national framework, provide greater flexibility for local authorities to work with bus operators to deliver services that are better matched to the needs of passengers in their local areas (including a stronger leadership role for local authorities in partnerships with operators, making franchising a more realistic possibility and a revised framework to hold local authorities and operators to account for improved punctuality and reliability of bus services). It will also strengthen arrangements for transport planning and delivery in existing Passenger Transport (PTA) and major urban areas outside London. This will require major cities, and enable other areas to review and propose their own changes to existing transport governance arrangements and update the existing powers and duties of PTAs and will update existing provisions for local road pricing schemes.
- 3.12 The County Council's Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) oversees much of the day to day public transport issues in the County, including supported services, school transport and transport for adult and community services. It also operates (or contracts) provision of the "Access Bus" and the ad-hoc booking system.

- 3.13 Concessionary fares support represents the largest payment made to bus operators with a national value in excess of £700 million annually. The Government's policy of providing free local bus travel for people aged over 60 has led to a substantial increase in concessionary fares support. A further £212m is being provided to local authorities to fund the extension of the scheme to free local bus travel anywhere in England, after 9.30 a.m., which came into operation in April 2008. In County Durham, the District funded schemes cost some £7.8m annually and there is no restriction on travel times. The scheme reimburses operators for travel on a 'no better, no worse' basis. The scheme is 'free across Durham into neighbouring Counties at all times.'
- 3.14 The County Durham and Darlington Primary Care Trusts jointly commission transport for those accessing health service provision including emergency transport; patient transport services and out-of-hours transport. Emergency transport is provided by North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust. In April 2007 Easington Local Strategic Partnership Executive commissioned a study to examine how transport was organised within Easington District. The study recommended that all the transport in the area should be organised and co-ordinated through an organisation that was able to have a strategic view of all the operations. Given that Durham County Council already commissioned transport services, it was considered that it would be best placed to take District-wide commissioning forward. A pilot scheme is currently being planned within Easington District from July 2008.
- 3.15 The County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust dealt with 75,500 emergency in-patients, 2,500 elective in-patients, 26,000 day cases, 360,000 out patient appointments and 140,000 accident and emergency attendances at five different sites in 2006/07. With regard to ambulance journeys, there are two contracts, one for the north of the County and one for the south - this separation of contracts being historical. There is a volunteer car scheme, run by Friends of Darlington Memorial Hospital which mainly caters for patients who need to be in hospital for pre-assessment before 8.00 a.m. Journeys were co-ordinated 2 – 3 days in advance.
- 3.16 Community transport is a term covering a wide range of transport solutions usually developed to cover a specifically identified transport need, typically run by the voluntary sector for the local community on a 'not for profit' basis. County Durham is predominantly rural and local communities need specific transport solutions to afford the populace access to key services. Nearly 30% of the population is over the age of 55 and at 13.2% Durham as a County has the highest percentage of people "Not in good health". Community Transport has the flexibility to provide specifically tailored and accessible transport solutions for local people with varying abilities. Community Transport provides over 150,000 passenger journeys a year in County Durham to people who cannot easily access public transport. Community Transport operators in County Durham function on short-term (2-3 year) funding packages and continually seek future funding.
- 3.17 In relation to the commercial sector, the major operators in County Durham are Arriva North East, which has 1780 employees and operates 650 vehicles in areas such as Alnwick, Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Durham, Hexham, Loftus

- and Whitby, Newcastle upon Tyne, Peterlee, Redcar, Stockton and Middlesbrough. It provided more than 50 million passenger journeys per year. The other major operator is Go North East. The company, which is part of the Go Ahead Group, carries 69 million bus passengers every year and employs 2010 staff. There are 667 Buses and Coaches travelling 56 million kilometres annually. There are 50 branded routes in the region, plus many commercial routes and a significant secured services operation of £1.2m in County Durham.
- 3.18 Evidence about a different model of integrated transport service delivery was presented by Du-IT (Durham Integrated Transport), a consortium which consists of a Project Board that steers and manages its work and protects the vision. At an operational level there is a Project Team that will design and develop the delivery model. Cameron Gordon and Steve Day presented details of the model to members.
- 3.19 The Du-IT concept is said to be a radical new approach to the problems of delivering a quality integrated public transport system, primarily in rural areas, which meets the needs of local people. It was stated to be unique in that it brings a robust financial model as evidence for introducing fundamental systematic changes with increased delivery and co-ordination at a local level via a single point of contact, currently referred to as a Community Hub and parallel development of a concept known as CT+ made up of traditional Community Transport with other Community-based transport providers and a flexibly routed demand responsive service. Du-IT is said to be unique in that it addresses the concerns of all stakeholders equally by making better use of Council Bus subsidy; joining parts of all transport budgets; giving an Expanded Public Transport Market; providing more Choice and Easier Access for Public; and slowing/stopping the increase in car use.
- 3.20 For the purpose of this project, the Network spoke with or received written evidence from the following groups:
- Older People (Age Concern, Durham County)
 - Young people (Investing in Children and Teesdale Community Resources Youth Forum)
 - People with Disabilities (The County Durham Disability Partnership)
 - The general public (via articles in the local press and local authority free newspapers)
 - Parish Councils.
- 3.21 Evidence from older people highlighted that daily mobility is a prerequisite for maintaining good quality of life, health and independence amongst older people. Previous research with older people has pointed out the fine balance between increased freedom after retirement and the contraction of space of the older person's life spheres through the ageing process. The lack of flexible forms of transport made it difficult to go out at all. Decreasing levels of mobility were associated with increasing levels of loneliness, social isolation and exclusion from participation in society. In particular, free transport is greatly appreciated by older people, but those in rural areas fear cuts in already very basic transport provision. Access to information regarding bus services, timetables and

alternatives need to be improved – many older people do not have internet access. Also, bus connections are often poor in rural areas and require more co-ordination by service providers.

- 3.22 Two groups of young people provided views about transport. Young people are frequent users of public transport. They focused on issues such as dirty and uncomfortable buses; driver attitudes to young people; transport to go to where young people wanted; greater provision for those with disabilities; and the need for seat belts. Other issues included publicity about the Teen Card and the IIC card – what could be done to better publicise their availability to young people?; concessionary seat issues (although these were not strictly speaking within the remit of the scrutiny project); a Freedom card for travel for young people and regular transport provisions to attend activities and/or concessionary transport to events.
- 3.23 Consultation with people with disabilities revealed a number of issues, including difficulties in getting to and from bus stops and not being able to stand/sit for long periods of time depending on bus service punctuality/reliability; problems in obtaining real time information on where buses go to and when at bus stops; poor experiences of obtaining travel information via the internet; for users with audio impairments, it was difficult to obtain information via the telephone or minicom systems; public reassurance that bus travel is safe regardless of the route and/or time of day - the potential to explore using PCSOs/Beat Bobbies/Street Wardens to ride on buses to provide this reassurance; easy access buses often only had space for either 1 wheelchair and 1 buggy or 2 of each at a time which could prove inadequate; absence of an 'Induction Loop System' and driver training on dealing with deaf people resulted in difficulties for such groups to such an extent that they had 'deserted' public transport. The establishment of bus service user consultative groups, including potentially the Disability Partnership; use by commercial bus operators of open days/challenge events specifically to raise awareness of accessibility issues amongst patrons and staff; and equality and Diversity awareness training for bus staff were also raised as issues.
- 3.24 Consultation with the public and with Parish Councils highlighted a number of consistent concerns as follows (ranked in order of importance):
- Removal of bus services/routes
 - Access to Public Services, particularly health services
 - Frequency of bus services
 - Punctuality of bus services
 - No bus services at night/weekends/bank holidays.
- 3.25 The conclusions and recommendations are set out in full in Section 11 of the report. **Key recommendations relate to the need for early implementation of the Bus Strategy (and funding to allow this) and for closer working between transport providers and user groups via the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum or any Health forums that may be established**

Section Four – Methodology

Project Plan

- 4.1 Initial scoping by District/County Council nominees at a meeting on 6 July 2007 resulted in a Project Plan which was subsequently agreed by the network at a meeting on 5 September 2007. This was designed to break down the project into manageable areas of focus for each meeting of the network and allow relevant witnesses to be invited to provide evidence as appropriate. The Plan was a “living” document, being amended as the project progressed to reflect new issues and lines of enquiry. A copy of the final version of the plan is attached at Appendix 1.

Evidence

- 4.2 The majority of evidence was provided at sessions of the network in the form of presentations by expert witnesses, followed by question and answer sessions linked to the three key strands of the investigation relating to:
- Health Transport Provision
 - Community Transport
 - Commercially provided bus services.
- 4.3 Information was also provided to the group about issues raised at local meetings (i.e. Transport on the Move in County Durham – 3 July 2007). Details of the evidence sessions are contained in the Project Plan at Appendix 1 of the report.

Engagement and Consultation

- 4.4 Engagement and consultation for this project took the form of:
- Consultation with Town and Parish Councils
 - Input from Young People (Investing in Children and Teesdale Community Resources Youth Forum)
 - Engagement with County Durham Disability Partnership
 - Input from Age Concern Durham County in relation older people (“Getting Around” and “All Our Tomorrows” Evaluation findings and specific comments)
 - Input from Public and Patient Forums about health service users
 - Public Feedback following publicity about the project in the local press and District/County Council free magazines.

The findings are set out in Section Nine of the report.

Section Five – Why Look at Transport in County Durham? An Overview

Introduction

5.1 In a rural County like County Durham, which has lower than average levels of car ownership, the ability to be able to get about is key to accessing leisure, health and public services. Lack of access to transport can lead to social exclusion and this is particularly relevant for some groups in society, such as older people, young people and those with disabilities. At the commencement of the scrutiny investigation, members of the network were informed by Richard Startup, Manager of the Integrated Transport Unit, Durham County Council, that in County Durham:

- There were 224,000 cars
- 29% of households had no access to a car (compared with 25% nationally)
- 66% of Households were within 30 minutes of outpatient facilities
- 85% of Households were within 30 minutes of business parks
- 95% of Households were within 30 minutes of food shopping.

5.2 The two major bus operators in the County are Go North East and Arriva. Reliability of bus services (based on Durham County Council survey figures for September 2007) was good at 99%. However, the reliability figures for services in the more rural parts of the County were lower, at around 80%. Punctuality (target – between one minute early and 5 minutes late) of buses was 93%.

5.3 The following data was provided about levels of bus services across the County:

Services	Daytime	Evening
Every 10 minutes	3	0
Every 15 minutes	5	0
Every 20 minutes	8	0
Every 30 minutes	28	4
Every hour	38	40
Less than hourly	27	3

5.4 The commercial network covers approximately 85% of provision, with better frequencies on major corridors than 1986 levels and was considered to be fairly stable. Low Floor buses constituted some 78% of vehicles (new within last 7 years). Planning of services/routes was done using ETM (ticket machine) data, demographic, census and other data, such as that from customers.

5.5 Information about bus services in the County is provided via:

- Paper based timetable leaflets
- 1,600 timetable cases (1900 by March 2008)
- Web-based - bus companies, Traveline
- SMS Text messaging

- A Real time system - bus stations/stops (also collects reliability data).

5.6 There are five bus stations in County Durham:

- Peterlee - Built 2002
- Consett - Built 1996
- Stanley - Built 2005
- Durham - Refurbished 2005
- Bishop Auckland - Built early 80's but in good condition.

5.7 The bus companies which operate in County Durham offer a number of fare packages, including:

- **7 day** - 1 zone @ £13.00
- **Buzz Fare** - 7 day - 2 zone @ £17.00
- **Get Around** - 7 days unlimited @ £10.00
- **Teen Card** - Up to age of 16 @ 50p max. (evening and weekend)
- **Arriva Weekly** - Durham district @ £13.00; North East @ £20.00
- **Seaham** - New flat fare scheme.

5.8 Most fare schemes favour regular service users and there are issues with some local people living in rural areas having to incur significant costs (i.e. £8.00 to 'sign on' at a Job Centre once a fortnight).

5.9 In addition to the commercial transport providers in the County such as bus and rail, there are other forms of provision, including that from the Community Transport Sector, meeting the needs of specific users, and also the North East Ambulance Service which provides patient transport across County Durham.



Section Six – Passenger Transport Provision: The role of National and Local Government

Passenger Transport – The Legislative Framework

- 6.1 The Road Traffic Act 1930 introduced regulation of passenger-carrying motor vehicles and marked the beginning of comprehensive state intervention in the bus industry with the introduction of both quality and quantity regulation. The 1930 Act established a system of road vehicle licensing controlled by regional traffic commissioners. This covered quality regulation - of the operators, vehicles and drivers and quantity regulation of the number and types of services operated. It provided for the award of licences to operators to run a service defined by a route and timetable with a specified fare scale. Once granted, a licence in effect conferred local monopoly rights on the operator particularly where local services in urban areas were concerned. Such services were developed on a comprehensive basis and provided a co-ordinated network, parts of which were usually dependent on cross subsidy. Ownership of the local services was predominantly public.
- 6.2 Although the structure of the bus industry had changed little over the 50 years to 1980, the market in which it operated had altered dramatically with the increased use of the car. Use of buses halved between the 1960s and 1980s. At the same time bus industry operating costs, fares and levels of subsidy increased. Almost all companies suffered from a shortfall between revenue from fares and their operating costs.
- 6.3 Following the Transport Act 1968 and the Local Government Acts of 1972 and of 1973, local authorities played an increasing role in sustaining public transport through revenue support payments, in line with their statutory obligations to provide co-ordinated public transport to meet the needs of their populations. To retain the network of services and maintain fares at acceptable levels, local authorities were asked to make good the losses by subsidy payments. The level of support provided varied considerably from area to area. Because of the extent of cross-subsidy between routes, it was often difficult to assess the value for money obtained. Bus services in large parts of rural Britain, together with many commuter-based rail and bus networks in the conurbations, continued in existence only because of the subsidy paid by local authorities and the urban Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs).
- 6.4 The Conservative government, elected in 1979, developed policies to reduce subsidies to buses, reducing the role of local government in planning and controlling bus systems and increasing competition between bus companies. It decided that the way to deal with the decline in bus services, rising costs and increasing subsidies was to deregulate the industry and allow services to be subject to competition. Legislation to deregulate the industry outside London was introduced through the Transport Acts 1980 and 1985. The 1980 Act dealt with express coach services and the 1985 Act with the traditional bus service. The

aim was "to halt the decline that [had] afflicted the bus industry for more than 20 years".

The Transport Act 1985

- 6.5 Proposals to deregulate local bus services were published in 1984 in the white paper "*Buses*" and a subsequent series of more detailed consultation papers. They were brought into effect by the Transport Act 1985 which abolished road service licensing in Great Britain (though not in London) from October 1986. The 1985 Act replaced the licensing system with a system of registration, removed the duties of local authorities to co-ordinate public passenger transport in their area and empowered them to subsidise public passenger transport services only on condition that they went out to open tender. The licensing authorities (traffic commissioners) lost many of their former powers and any licensed bus operator merely needed to register its intention to set up a service with the traffic commissioner responsible for the area, giving at least 42 days' notice. (The only exception to this is where the traffic commissioner, in special circumstances, uses his or her discretion to shorten the period of notice on request.) Any subsequent variation or withdrawal of the service also requires this period of notice. To register a new service an operator has to provide the traffic commissioner with information on the proposed route, on the terminal points, timetable and stopping arrangements, and on the vehicles to be used. The operator is then obliged to run the service according to the specification in the registration.
- 6.6 Under the 1985 Act, individual bus operators are responsible for the timetable and the introduction of new services which are dependent upon the operator's opinion of the demand for it and its commercial viability. There is no requirement in the Act or its regulations for the commercial bus operator to consult before making changes to the timetable and the position of bus stops. The criteria for registration do not include any reference to public demand or to existing services and objections can no longer be made by other operators or local authorities. The traffic commissioners are appointed by the secretary of state to license the bus operators, deal with disciplinary cases and check on the quality and safety of the service offered. Their powers include the ability to attach conditions to an operator's licence and if an operator is not running a service he has said he will, the traffic commissioner can become involved. They cannot, however, instruct an operator to run a particular service or stop in a particular place.
- 6.7 The 1985 Act gave Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) and county councils powers to secure, using subsidy, socially necessary services which were not provided by the commercial market. Controls over these services in terms of fare levels, type of bus and so on, could be maintained. Operators had the right to participate in concessionary fare schemes and the Passenger Transport Authority had powers to compel participation in the schemes. Operators were to be reimbursed for the net financial loss incurred by participating in the scheme. The Act abolished the concept of network support. A bus company could register any service which it chose to operate on a commercial, i.e. unsupported, basis. If there were deemed to be any social needs not met by commercial services then

the local authority could invite competitive tenders for additional routes or journeys on a case by case basis.

- 6.8 The 1985 Act also changed the structure of the bus industry through privatisation. Deregulation was intended to increase competition through an increase in the number of competitors and by reducing the possibilities of entry-detering behaviour. In the ten years before 1985 the bus industry was dominated by public sector companies. In the six English metropolitan counties and Greater Glasgow the vast majority of urban bus services were planned, funded and operated by Passenger Transport Executives. A number of other cities and towns had, by historical precedent, municipal bus companies under the control of the relevant district council in England and Wales, or the regional council in Scotland. Most of the remaining urban services and a high proportion of inter-urban and rural routes were operated by duplicate buses to meet unusually high demand; and the registration of a "frequent service" (i.e. at least one bus every 10 minutes) which means a timetable is not required. Part III of the 1985 Act required the sale of the National Bus Company subsidiaries to the private sector. The National Bus Company reorganised its services into 72 separate companies and these were all sold to the private sector or to management and/or employee buy-outs by April 1988. The Act also allowed local authorities, should they so choose, to dispose of their bus undertakings subject to the secretary of state's approval.

Changes since 1985

- 6.9 Since the 1985 Act a number of changes have been implemented. These have included clarifying the powers of the traffic commissioners to make it clear that they can use their powers to regulate the number of buses used in providing a service and to control the use of duplicate buses. The Conservative government also worked with local authorities on the Bus Working Group to look at issues concerning the provision of bus services and ways in which they could be improved. In 1992, following a Transport Research Laboratory study into the first 5 years of operation of the 1985 Act, a number of measures aimed at improving bus performance which would lead to more stable services, high quality accessible vehicles, convenient waiting areas, ticketing schemes, good passenger information and traffic management measures designed to help buses were introduced by the Department of Transport. The Transport Select Committee looked at aspects of the bus industry in 1993 and 1995. On the second occasion it recommended a series of reforms to ensure that the effect of market mechanisms in the bus industry operated in the interests of the passengers. It also concluded that some re-regulation was needed and recommended the establishment of a bus industry regulator.
- 6.10 The government announced a review of the buses in June 1997 as part of the integrated transport review. The aim was to promote increased use of the bus as a means of reducing congestion and pollution, particularly by attracting motorists from their cars. A transport white paper, "*A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*" was published in July 1998 and, as regards buses, it concluded that frequent changes to bus services, poor connections and the reluctance of some bus operators to participate in information schemes or through-ticketing

undermined bus services. In this climate, it was not easy for buses to match the levels of comfort, reliability and access offered by the private car. It found that deregulation had not broken the decline in local bus use, but there had been good examples of bus companies and local authorities working together in Quality Partnerships to change the image of bus services and prevent or even reverse the decline in patronage.

6.11 The white paper explained that, according to emerging market research, there were **three key factors that determined public attitudes to using public transport:**

- **frequency of service,**
- **reliability of service and**
- **attractive fares.**

People would not switch from the comfort of their cars to buses that were old, dirty, unreliable and slow. A radical change was needed in overall public perception of bus services to attract middle income and car using groups.

6.12 “*From workhorse to thoroughbred: a better role for bus travel*”, published in March 1999, following the white paper, set out the government's overall policy but also requested views on matters of detail. It looked at all aspects of buses including the scope for more effective use of bus priority measures, coupled as necessary with traffic restraint; better arrangements for passenger information and ticketing, including inter-modal travel; regulatory and other measures to improve the quality of bus services notably through the "quality partnership" approach between operators and local authorities. Great emphasis was given by the government to quality partnerships where the local authority provided traffic management schemes such as bus lanes, priority at junctions, and park and ride, and the bus operator offered better quality (in terms of comfort, 'greenness', accessibility and staff training), improved marketing, better integration and more reliable services. Some of the proposals needed primary legislation but it was felt that this should not prevent action being taken by bus operators and local authorities on a voluntary basis.

The Role of Local Authorities

6.13 The 1999 paper stated that the **prime objectives for public transport for local authorities are to:**

- **Reduce the amount of travel by private car** – and so prevent economic and environmental conditions in local communities degenerating as a result of traffic congestion, pollution and noise
- **Reduce social exclusion** – by meeting the needs of people to reach activities essential to lead an active and fulfilling life including work, education, shops, medical facilities, leisure facilities etc.

6.14 Local authorities would be encouraged through the new local transport plans (LTPs), to take a more strategic view of public transport provision in their area and related expenditure. They would be encouraged to set objectives and targets

for such factors as traffic reduction, air quality improvement and the increased proportion of journeys in their area by public transport. The guidance was clear that the LTP will be expected to contain standards for the bus network and that there will need to be extensive consultation with the local community beforehand. Planning policy guidance was also being updated. Following publication of the 1999 paper, the Transport Act was introduced. It is the 2000 Act which sets out the framework for support of local transport provision.

Transport Act 2000

- 6.15 The Transport Act 2000 implemented a package of measures to help secure better quality bus travel. This included the introduction of statutory quality partnerships to enable local authorities to enforce quality standards on routes where there has been investment on improving facilities for buses and measures to improve integrated ticketing (including bus/rail ticketing) and provide better passenger information. A key provision in the Act was that local authorities were required to prepare a local transport plan (LTP) and a bus strategy, addressing the needs of their area. There were also powers for local authorities to be given more comprehensive control over bus services under quality contracts, including control over timetables and fares, where a case could be made. The Act also guaranteed a minimum half-fare concessionary fare for the elderly and disabled on local bus journeys.
- 6.16 Funding for local authority capital expenditure on infrastructure schemes was greatly increased to help bus services, such as bus lanes to make services become more reliable and quicker. Funding for many new services was also made available through the rural bus grants and urban bus challenge schemes. Support for bus services is given by means of the Government's Bus Service Operators Grant. Public funding for buses was reviewed to ensure that it contributed as effectively as possible to the achievement of Government objectives; this work was continuing as part of the review of the Ten-Year Transport Plan.
- 6.17 A Bus Partnership Forum was established, bringing together the bus industry, central and local government into a real working partnership to help achieve the improvements in bus services all parties seek. The aim of the forum was to help identify and promulgate examples of good practice for others to follow in order to deliver better quality bus services for all.
- 6.18 The County Council is a Local Transport Authority. One of its statutory duties under the Transport Act 2000 is to prepare a **bus strategy** containing its general policies as to how best to carry out its functions in order to ensure that:
- Bus services meet such of the transport requirements of persons within the authority's area as the authority consider should be met by such services
 - Bus services meeting such requirements are provided to the standards to which the authority considers they should be provided.

- 6.19 The bus strategy is to form part of the authority's local transport plan. In developing the bus strategy, the authority must have regard to any measures they are required to take for meeting transport requirements as a Local Education Authority or a Social Services Authority.
- 6.20 The County Council also has a duty to determine, having regard to their local transport plan:
- What local bus information should be made available to the public. (Local bus information means information about routes, timetabling, fares and information about facilities for disabled persons, travel concessions and connections with other public passenger transport services)
 - The way in which it should be made available.
- 6.21 Before making such a determination, the authority must consult such organisations which appear to them to be representative of users of local services and the Traffic Commissioners. In considering how to carry out this function, the authority must have regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and must not discriminate against any operator. They also must have regard to the desirability to consider joint actions with other authorities.

Bus Subsidies (National/Local)

- 6.22 A recent consultation document from the Department for Transport (*Local Bus Service Support – Options for Reform*) issued on March 2008, provides an overview of current bus subsidy arrangements. The consultation document states that Bus subsidy plays a crucial role in supporting bus services. The public sector's investment in better bus services is around £2.5 billion in 2007/08 and will rise further in 2008/09 accounting for roughly 40% of the bus industry's total income. This links to delivery against the Government's key objectives and provides value for money. *Putting Passengers First*, which set out the Government's proposals for bus policy in 2006, noted that there is potentially a strong case for refocusing central government bus subsidy, particularly the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG).



6.23 Public support for bus services is provided in a number of ways, as shown in table below. The total amount of support has increased over the last decade, and particularly in recent years. This reflects the Department of Transport's aim of encouraging greater use of public transport and to maximise the benefits delivered by the bus industry.

SOURCE OF FUNDING	Amount 2007/ 08
Bus Service Operators' Grant	£413m
Rural Bus Subsidy Grant	£56m
Local Authority Secured Services ³ (estimated)	£330m
Concessionary Fares	£725m
London Funding	£650m
Challenge and Kickstart	£11m
Total (Revenue)	£2,185m
Capital spending (via local authorities)	£300m
Total spending	£2,485m

Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG)

6.24 The BSOG is a payment made to bus operators by the Department for Transport (DfT) that offsets a high proportion of the fuel duty paid on fuel consumed. It represents the largest proportion of direct funding (outside concessionary fares). It allows bus operators to run a wider network of services than would otherwise be the case, and may result in increased patronage. Because it is directly based upon fuel consumption, it is poorly linked to environmental objectives, particularly climate change.

Rural Bus Subsidy Grant (RBSG)

6.25 RBSG is paid to local authorities to help support the provision of non-commercial rural services and is targeted to support accessibility in rural areas. From April 2008, RBSG will form part of pooled area based funding for local authorities linked to the Local Area Agreement (LAA). It is small in comparison with BSOG with annual spending in the region of £56 million nationally. In County Durham this bought 4.15 million miles annually in 2006/07 compared to 5.06m in 2005/06. How this money is allocated and spent in future as part of the LAA pooled budget arrangements will be vitally important. The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) expressed concern about the possibility of this funding no longer being ring-fenced, commenting that a decision to spend it elsewhere could result in the loss of services which are currently supported financially.

Local Authority Spending

6.26 In addition to the central support for the bus industry through BSOG, local authorities outside London can choose to fund subsidise routes which would not be commercially viable and would not operate unless funded by local government. The cost of subsidised services is met by local authorities, principally through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) provided by Government and monies raised from council taxation. Spending nationally is estimated to be in the region of £330 million annually and as such is a significant contribution to support for bus services. In County Durham, the current level of funding is in the order of £3.85 million annually.

Concessionary fares

6.27 Concessionary fares support represents the largest payment made to bus operators with a value in excess of £700 million annually. The Government's policy of providing free local bus travel for people aged over 60 has led to a substantial increase in concessionary fares support. A further £212m is being provided to local authorities to fund the extension of the scheme to free local bus travel anywhere in England, after 9.30 a.m., which came into operation in April 2008. In County Durham, the District funded schemes cost some £7.8m annually. The scheme reimburses operators for travel on a 'no better, no worse' basis. The scheme is 'free across Durham into neighbouring Counties at all times.'

6.28 The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 provides that everyone aged 60 and over in England, and disabled people in England, will get free off peak travel on all local buses anywhere in England from April 2008. The existing statutory entitlement allows these groups to travel for free, but only on buses within their local authority area. The Act will achieve social inclusion benefits for older and disabled people in allowing them greater freedom to travel, for free, by local bus. This is a key part of the Government's wider recognition of the importance of public transport for older and disabled people, and the role access to transport has to play in improving social inclusion and maintaining well being.

6.29 The main provisions in the Act:

- Guarantee free bus travel for those eligible from 9.30am until 11pm on weekdays and all day weekends and bank holidays, across England.
- Provide a power to allow, via regulations in the future, for mutual recognition of national concessionary bus passes across the United Kingdom.
- Allow flexibility for Ministers to change the mechanism for reimbursement of bus operators in the future and enable streamlining of the administration of concessionary travel.
- Retain Ministers' ability to adjust the scope of the concession in the future via regulations.
- Enable local authorities to continue to be able to offer benefits above the statutory entitlement to their residents, such as travel before 9.30 a.m. and concessions on other modes like trams, as well as alternative forms of travel scheme, like tokens for use on taxis or community transport.

- 6.30 Steve Lockwood from the County Council's Integrated Transport Unit provided information, subsequently considered by the Network, about the changes to the Concessionary Bus Fares from 1st April 2008. The new 'National Scheme for England' for local concessionary bus travel would result in existing concessionary fare recipients enjoying the same benefits as currently received, although the national scheme included a statutory requirement for concessions to apply after 9.30am Monday to Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday. The 9.30am restriction only applies to County Durham recipients using their pass outside the County Durham boundary. Travel concessions will not be permitted on any National Express services or on any transport system operating on rails i.e. trams, Tyneside Metro etc. The existing facility for disabled persons to apply for a 'carer's' concessionary pass will continue. This pass was not 'person' specific and could be given by the disabled person to any nominated carer.
- 6.31 There are issues surrounding the procedures/guidelines in place for the issuing of concessionary passes to deaf people and it was suggested, during consultation with the County Durham Disability Partnership that a consistent approach in this respect was needed amongst District Councils as well as explanations regarding the need for GP/Social Services referrals. Reference was also made to the fact that the concessionary pass could not be used on Community Transport schemes. This was of particular concern in those areas of County Durham which relied on Community Transport schemes.

Capital Spending

- 6.32 Bus services also benefit from local authority capital investment in, for example, bus stations and bus lanes, and park and ride schemes. These are funded by local authorities, who receive support either through DfT block grant, or through grant for major schemes. Total expenditure nationally is around £300m a year.

Local Transport Plans

- 6.33 Harris Harvey, Business Manager, Environment Service, Durham County Council explained to the Network the provision made within the Local Transport Plans in relation to transport within County Durham.



6.34 The first Local Transport Plan (LTP1) covered the period 2001-2006. The **main areas of capital expenditure up to March 2006** were:

6.35 **Revenue expenditure over the 5 year period to 2006** was:



6.36 LTP1 was underpinned by a number of targets and indicators as follows:

Indicator	Start of plan period	End of plan period
Number of bus passenger journeys	25,200	24,595
Rural households near hourly or better bus service	97.4%	97.4%
Percentage of users satisfied with local bus services	45%	57%
Percentage of vehicle fleet that is low floor	16%	50%
Upgrade 2500 bus stops to meet disabled access requirements	0	2264
Improve facilities at 13 urban bus interchanges	0	13
Improve facilities at 15 rural bus interchanges	0	12
Improve facilities at 7 railway station interchanges	0	7
Percentage of bus stops with information display panel	11%	22%
Percentage of the county bus fleet with real time management info.	0%	86%
20 urban rail and bus interchanges with secure cycle parking	0	20
Maintain or increase scheduled train miles – Durham Coast Line	6455	7164
Maintain or increase scheduled train miles – Darlington-Bishop Auckland	1608	1560
Not more than 20% of public dissatisfied with the overall provision of public transport information (those who have been sent information)	20%	24%
Not more than 20% of public dissatisfied with the overall provision of public transport information (overall)	26%	32%
Develop and introduce community transport schemes	3	6
Level of dissatisfaction with ease of interchange between modes	12%	45%

- 6.37 Network members were advised that there were a number of issues which had arisen as a result of LTP1 which needed to be considered. These were:
- Extent of engagement with the public – is it sufficient?
 - How can we improve our interaction with people and make it more effective?
 - Quality of feedback – can be difficult to get at the strategic or higher level issues?
 - Time for personalised travel planning?
 - The need to be careful not to unduly raise public expectations.
- 6.38 The current Local Transport Plan (LTP2) will run over the period 2006/11. LTP2 has to address the national priorities, shared between Central and Local government of:
- Better accessibility and public transport
 - Improved road safety
 - Improved quality of life and health
 - Reduced problems of congestion
 - Reduced problems of air quality.
- 6.39 LTP2 adopts a different approach to LTP1, in that it has:
- More emphasis on accessibility
 - Will see the creation of and include a new bus strategy
 - Will see Integration with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
 - Engagement with Local Strategic Partnerships through Area Programmes
 - Will encourage and support consolidation of the Community Transport sector
 - Places less reliance on major schemes as solutions
 - Has transport asset management planning.
- 6.40 Expenditure in Year 2 of LTP2 (2007/08) has been:
- Capital settlement for the integrated transport block of £5.330m.
 - £769k on public transport/accessibility schemes
 - £100k on Community Transport schemes
 - £122k on Transport for Health schemes
 - Above three items equalling nearly £1million in total or about 20% of the block.
- 6.41 The Network was advised that the capital settlement for next 3 years was announced on 27 November 2007 and the Integrated Transport block figures were:
- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| ▪ 2008/09 (Year 3) | £5.317m |
| ▪ 2009/10 (Year 4) | £5.365m |
| ▪ 2010/11 (Year 5) | £5.396m |
| | Total £16.078m |

6.42 The Network was advised that, as regards public transport improvements in LTP2:

- The bus stop upgrading programme would be continued
- Transit 15 – This is a proposal for introducing a number of improved bus corridors along existing routes with guaranteed journey times and a high standard of reliability and frequency at an estimated cost of £6.3m for which a business case was expected to be submitted to the Department for Transport in May 2008
- Extend park and ride – (funded by Transport Innovation Fund)
- There would be more bus priority measures
- Analysis of real time data to improve services
- Real time signage would be improved
- Ticketing improvements would be made
- A car pool for Durham County Council car users would be introduced.

6.43 In relation to progress against targets in the second plan period, the following progress had been made:

Target 7 – Limit the rate of decline in bus passenger journeys to less than 1%

- Milestone for end of Year 1 was 25.361m
- Actual for end of Year 1 was 25.163m
- 198,000 journeys below milestone target.

Target 8 – Increase bus user satisfaction with local bus services to 61%

- Milestone for end of Year 1 was 57%
- Actual for end of Year 1 was 56%
- 1% short of milestone target – actual figure based on survey every 3 years (last survey carried out Autumn 2006).

Target 10 – 65.6% of households to be within 30 minutes of outpatients facilities by public transport

- Milestone for end of Year 1 was 63.8%
- Actual for end of Year 1 was 52.91%
- Short of milestone, reflecting route deletions by bus operators (the CPT commented that some of these deletions were not commercial decisions by operators but resulted from reductions in the County Council's own revenue support budget).

Target 14 – 90% of scheduled services to be arriving no more than 1 minute early or 5 minutes late

- Milestone for end of Year 1 was 80%
- Actual for end of Year 1 was 89.7%
- Well ahead of profile – measured at start of route only.

Target 19 – Increase the number of single trips undertaken on community transport by 30% to 208,000 over the plan period

- Milestone for end of Year 1 was 176,000
- Actual for end of Year 1 was 198,000
- Well ahead of profile.

6.44 The following issues were raised in relation to the LTP:

- It was difficult to change entrenched attitudes to travel, as the public took into account issues such as convenience and personal choice
- New or improved infrastructures were more expensive to maintain to standards expected by the public/users
- Revenue was not always aligned to capital spending
- Hard decisions often needed to be taken on non-viable routes/bus subsidies
- The impact of commercial decisions by bus companies which was beyond local authority control
- It was unrealistic to expect the same level of service in rural areas compared to the more urban areas
- There were pressures on transport funding directed into Local Area Agreements being used for other priorities
- It was uncertain whether there would be an LTP3 – or there could be a possible dilution of the LTP process
- Major scheme solutions were subject to regional prioritisation
- Accessibility planning had not yet delivered a sufficient knowledge base.

The Bus Strategy

6.45 The Draft Bus Strategy, which forms an integral part of the Local Transport Plan, was approved by Durham County Council in January 2008 for consultation. The key aims of the Bus Strategy are to play an important role in offering:

- Solutions to traffic congestion
- An alternative journey to the private car
- Increased social inclusion
- Better accessibility to services
- The creation of a safer and better environment.



Vision of the Bus Strategy

- 6.46 The vision of the Bus Strategy is to develop a truly integrated transport system that when worked and managed together provides a strong framework that provides frequent services with improved journey speeds on trunk routes aiming to grow patronage on routes that have the highest density of population and contributing to a strong network. This network will be complemented by good links into and out of the 'trunk' network to provide local access. There will still be a need for other services to operate in low demand areas to complete the requirement for a good geographical coverage and access to a range of vital services.
- 6.47 The Strategy states that total bus network will require coordination between those planning bus routes and those planning the local services (such as retail, leisure and health). This will ensure that maximum interchange opportunities are available and to ensure that the provision of information to passengers can be done in a co-ordinated and accurate manner using both traditional and electronic means. The busiest services would be operated with modern vehicles with easy access and low emission engines, with the aim of improving the quality of all vehicles running on the network over the period of the plan. When taken in conjunction of high quality of infrastructure, driver training, excellent reliability and punctuality the passenger experience will provide a credible alternative to the private car.
- 6.48 To complete the vision the services must be affordable and with few barriers to travel. The network will have a range of ticketing that will allow travel on all services throughout the County, which provide good discounts for regular travellers with fares on secured services pegged at affordable levels.
- 6.49 **Three different types of service have been identified currently running within the comprehensive bus network.** No single type of service can deliver effectively against all these aims, but by tailoring strategies to each type of service a range of outcomes can be achieved. The three different types of services have been identified and are simply referred to as Type 1, 2 or 3.
- **Type 1 Services** – typically are running every 30 minutes or better, will probably already have low floor buses and be running between main service centres. There are about 45 of these services currently running carrying about 20m passengers per year. The main strategy for these services is to work in partnership with the bus operators. The partnership arrangements would set service levels, such as frequency, reliability, punctuality, route branding and marketing to be achieved by the operators. In return the County Council would commit to implementation of Bus Priority measures, high quality infrastructure, further investment in real time and other information systems as well as facilitation of network co-ordination and ticketing initiatives not possible because of competition legislation. **The key partnership strategy for Type 1 services is aimed specifically at reducing traffic congestion and providing a real alternative to the car.**

- Type 2 Services** - typically are running hourly, probably not low floor and will operate around smaller towns and in rural areas. There are approximately 40 services with 5 million journeys made per year. Again the main strategy is partnership working with operators but with an emphasis on reliability, co-ordination with Type 1 services and geographical coverage. Type 2 services do not generally operate in areas that suffer traffic congestion or have a high dependency on infrastructure.

The aim of the strategy for Type 2 services would be to tackle social inclusion by ensuring the services are sustainable through improved information, quality of vehicles and coordination with Type 1 services.
- Type 3 Services** - Are running less than two hourly, require advance booking, operate with small accessible vehicles probably in rural areas. There are approximately 25 Type 3 services with roughly 100,000 journeys made per year. These services are generally supported through subsidy from Durham County Council. The partnership arrangements would again be different, with services standards set through contract conditions but requiring improved information. **The main aim of the strategy for Type 3 services is specifically to improve social inclusion.**

Other Policies contained in the Bus Strategy

6.50 As well as the main partnership strategy, there are also separate policies and proposals in the Strategy relating to:

- Partnership Arrangements** – Including details such as targets to introduce low floor vehicles such as all Type 1 services by 2009; agreed standards on reliability, punctuality and customer service; a programme of infrastructure improvements and bus priority; agreements on route branding, marketing, ticket initiatives, network planning and information. Partners will contribute in relation to Type 1 Services as follows:

Action required	Operator	Durham County Council
Investment in vehicles	✓	
Reliability, punctuality and customer care	✓	
Route branding and marketing	✓	
High quality infrastructure including clean and safe bus stations		✓
Bus priority measures		✓
Real time information	✓	✓
Co-ordinated network of services to allow interchange	✓	✓
Fares and ticketing	✓	

- Community Transport** - details the contribution Community Transport can make in delivering Type 3 services.
- Transport Innovation Fund** – gives details of the TIF bid and how this fits into the bus strategy.

- **Revenue Funding** - details the problems caused by transport inflation running significantly higher than CPI. Transport inflation includes significant costs such as fuel/oil, wages and spare parts which have risen sharply. This is highlighted by the fact that transport inflation has risen by 30.8% since 2000, whilst CPI has risen by 10.5%. If core funding only rises by CPI, this will lead to significant cuts in bus services each year simply through inflation. Current funding for 2008/9 has been set to include high levels of transport inflation, but this issue needs to be recognised for subsequent years.
- **Additional core funding** via a number of options as follows:
 - **Option 1** – Additional funding for ‘pump priming’ Type 2 services through one-off capital purchase of low floor vehicles to operate contracted bus services along with service branding and marketing of services. The aim is to increase patronage and improve sustainability with the aim of returning the service to be commercially viable. This would cost in the region of £500,000.
 - **Option 2** - To develop a Countywide Network of accessible minibus provision, that will enable travel for those who are unable to access public transport. This would include those who do not have a bus service through geographical isolation; or those who cannot use conventional bus services through mobility or disability. The services would be Demand Responsive and registered as local bus services, ensuring that operators can reclaim the tax on fuel and that passengers can use the ‘free’ concessionary travel scheme. These services will be a Type 3 service and would operate as follows:
 - County Durham would be split into zoned areas that reflect the natural local transport needs;
 - It is envisaged that a fleet of nine vehicles would be required to cover these areas;
 - Vehicles would be small wheelchair accessible, though not necessarily the same for each area;
 - Passengers can make trips within the zone of origin and to an adjacent zone in the county (one cross boundary permitted per trip);
 - Trips secured by booking through existing booking centre (minimum 1 hour before travel);
 - Connection available to low floor accessible bus services;
 - Possible bookings to hospitals outside the County if appointments held (perhaps in conjunction with the Patient Transport Service)
 - The zoned areas would be designed around the natural transport needs that already exist. The size of the zone would reflect natural and routine journeys being made within a single zone area or by crossing a single boundary to access shopping areas, doctors and ideally an outpatient hospital, although this will not be practicable in some areas. The service would be operational from 0800 until 1800 Monday to Saturday. The service would be expected to operate school contracts/day centre/social care provision during peak periods.

The estimated revenue cost of operation of this service is £300,000 per annum, with an initial capital funding of around £300,000.

- **Other Funding** – This examines alternative sources, such as those bodies that create demand in the bus network paying to meet that demand.
- **Bus Information** – this contains many of the policies that were in the Bus Information Strategy and includes Real Time Information, SMS text messaging, internet and traditional methods of providing timetable information. It also includes publishing figures on punctuality and reliability to increase transparency and engender confidence in the operation of bus services.
- **Bus Infrastructure and Accessibility** – looking at the provision of bus stops, shelters, stations and interchange facilities and safety and security at stops and on the bus. Much of this programme is delivering Local Transport Plan 2 funded schemes which includes bus stop improvement schemes with well over half of bus stops now able to accept low floor buses; interchange facilities (which include key interchange points in addition to the five bus stations within the County); details on improvement of Safety and Security at Bus Stops and Bus Stations, such as security staff, CCTV at sites and on board vehicles.
- **Fares and Ticketing** – details of the process of taking forward fares and ticketing initiatives including:
 - multi-operator ticketing;
 - further off bus ticketing to reduce the cash collected on bus from the current 37%;
 - concessionary fares for young people. High bus fares have consistently been identified as a barrier to accessing leisure and other facilities by Young People.
 - the new England wide free concessionary travel scheme due for introduction in April 2008 for the elderly and disabled.
- **Air Quality** – details of initiatives of working with operators to improve air quality of their vehicles including reduction in CO₂ emission levels through the introduction of new vehicles and widespread use of B20 diesel fuel.
- **Park and Ride** – contains details of how the Park and Ride is included as part of the strategy.
- **Network Review Process** – looking at how to provide better coordination of services between operators, changes to services and tendering arrangements.

Delivery of the Bus Strategy

- 6.51 Many of the proposals contained in the strategy are derived from ongoing delivery plans and are therefore already in the process of being delivered. The

main strategy of partnership working is currently being initiated under the framework of Transit 15, which was one of the major schemes from Local Transport Plan 2. Transit 15 potential funding to be invested in Bus Priority measures is the County Council's contribution to the partnership arrangements with Bus Operators investing in vehicles, driver training and marketing. The total investment by both partners could be double that of the initial Transit 15 funding. Go Ahead have already invested £7m in new buses many of which operate in the Derwentside area. Under a similar partnership arrangement in Tees Valley, Arriva are investing £8m in new buses. **“New” funding of £500,000 to kickstart a project with Type 2 vehicles in conjunction with commercial operators and £300,000 for the set up costs for the Type 3 option referred to in Section 6.50 above, plus a further £300,000 per annum running costs for this latter proposal will be required and is yet to be found within budgets.**

Publicly Subsidised Bus Services

- 6.52 Although most bus services in Great Britain are operated commercially, some 16% are subsidised. As a consequence of the Transport Act 1985, local authorities are no longer permitted to provide blanket support for bus services in their areas. They are, however, allowed to subsidise services required to meet social needs that would not otherwise be met. The powers of local authorities to subsidise public passenger transport services are subject to detailed tendering provisions. The rule applies to changes to existing contracts as well as to new ones and is known as the *de minimis* rule.
- 6.53 Section 89 of the 1985 Act states that the objective of competitive tendering is to secure the most effective and economic use of funds, and to secure the required level of service through fair competition. Most contracts include clauses allowing them to be suspended if another operator decides to register the service commercially: the tendering authorities are not allowed to subsidise services which are commercially registered. The contract usually specifies the detailed characteristics of the service (vehicle requirements, route, exact timetable) and very often the fares. There are two main types of contract used for tendered services:
- **minimum cost:** the tendering authority retains all revenues and the contractor tenders for the whole cost of operating the contract (revenue risk is taken by the authority); and
 - **minimum subsidy:** the operator retains all revenues and tenders for the cost of operating the service less the estimated revenue (revenue risk is taken by the operator).
- 6.54 Richard Startup explained to the Network that the County Council did not generally pay subsidies to bus operators and reported that non commercial bus services are secured by using competitive tendering on a route by route basis. The total cost of this process is in the region of £3,850,000 although some of this money can be recouped through fares. The considerations when securing services included social inclusion, alternate provision and patronage. Some low value services were secured by subsidy under de-minimus arrangements, i.e. where passenger inconvenience might be caused by having a single journey

operated by two different companies because half of the journey was un-commercial.

Durham County Council's Integrated Transport Unit

6.55 Evidence about the role of the County Council's Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) was provided to the Network by Richard Startup. Members had heard during the earlier stages of the project about some of the functions of the County Council in relation to the Local Transport Plan. It was explained that, following a Best Value Review of Transport Services in 2001, Durham County Council undertook an investigation about how transport services could be better co-ordinated. The resulting report outlined the benefits of integration of the then units of Public Transport (Environment Service), Education Transport and Social Care & Health Transport. The "Strategic Option Appraisal for Transport Services" report prepared by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2005 recommended the creation of an integrated unit involving all three transport service teams which would provide the best environment for the following:

- The potential to deliver transport services that make a full contribution to the council's corporate and service and policy objectives
- Service arrangements that deliver safe transport services and that are tailored to the customer's needs and policy drivers
- A stronger business platform to achieve continuous improvement, greater efficiency and enhanced supply chain management arrangements.

6.56 The benefits envisaged by the formation of an Integrated Transport Unit were:

- Efficiency gains through integrated planning
- Efficiency gains through a combined procurement process
- Efficiency savings through reduced work duplication
- Efficiency gains through ad-hoc booking systems
- Efficiency through standard IT systems
- Efficiency through Key Performance Indicators
- Consistent monitoring arrangements
- Consistent contract conditions and letting arrangements
- Simplification of communication processes
- Simplification of authorisation processes
- Simplification of reporting processes
- Compliance with policy

6.57 The ITU has now been in existence for just over 1 year. In that time the Unit has:

- Contributed towards service changes within Adult and Community Services being taken forward
- Assisted Children and Young People's Service to help deliver improvements in the social inclusion of children and young people. This is being done through the 'Empowering Young People' scheme

- Become firmly established as the centre of passenger transport solutions within Durham County Council, with advice and assistance being sought from various departments wishing to use transport or requiring assistance with tendering, organisation and service delivery solutions
- Provided service arrangements which deliver safe transport services, tailored to the customer's needs and policy drivers – this has been assisted by an increase in the monitoring team, greater monitoring of former Adult and Community Services contracts and greater flexibility of transport delivery which is enabling the Adult and Community Service to change its whole service delivery of Learning and Disability Services
- The ITU has established itself as the centre of passenger transport delivery with further transport commissioning functions added to the ITU and more planned. These include the whole of adult service commissioning and being re-confirmed as the regional centre for Journey Plan.

6.58 In relation to the envisaged benefits of an ITU, the following developments over the first year of operation of the ITU were reported by Richard Startup:

- **Efficiency gains through integrated planning** - Re-tendering had made this difficult, but there were now three bus service contracts which had home to school elements built in gaps in the timetable. Network area reviews were planned for 2008 which would also look at the use of home to school contracts and whether they can be turned into contract ticket journeys and carry more post 16 pupils.
- **Efficiency gains through a combined procurement process** – Large scale gains have not yet been achieved because of the short time scale the ITU has been in existence. However, all contracts were themed into geographical areas, which gave a much better awareness of the bus service contracts to operators who had previously not tendered. The result is that there have been 7 new operators who have been offered bus service contracts who have not previously operated for Durham County Council.
- **Efficiency savings through reduced work duplication** – This has been achieved to some extent although it is difficult to benchmark against the previous arrangements. The work has been streamed into function areas that will provide further opportunities. Further opportunities will present themselves with the Drive project and Local Government Review.
- **Efficiency gains through Ad – Hoc booking systems** - The existing Mobisoft system is now operational across the whole of the Adult and Community Services fleet operation. This software system allows flexible routing of our own vehicles and, in due course, contractors vehicles. This reduces 'spare' seats and prevents drivers from picking up service users who are not attending. Initial trials show that savings can be made by reducing the number of routes and vehicles employed. This is operational in the Peterlee area with the other two areas now ready to go 'on-line'. One of the results is that Durham County Council operated vehicles are now much busier. It is also possible to bring the 'looked after children' booking system into the Mobisoft system. These changes have been implemented within existing resources.
- **Efficiency through standard IT systems** - There are plans to look at this during 2008/9.

- **Efficiency through Key Performance Indicators** – A small number of Indicators have been set. The emphasis instead has been on introduction of a number of simple to measure indicators that allow users to monitor some of the functions we provide. These are all available in the service plan. These are to be used as indicators as many of them are demand driven, such as the number of CRB checks we process.
- **Consistent monitoring arrangements** - All monitoring standards have now been brought into line with the previously high standards set by Children’s and Young Peoples Service. The work of the monitoring team has meant a reduction in the numbers of vehicles receiving ‘prohibitions’ for defects during routine monitoring checks.
- **Consistent contract conditions and letting arrangements** - During the recent tender round, a standard set of terms and conditions, with individual specifications attached was employed. Placing the contracts in a single batch attracted more operators to tender for our bus services.
- **Simplification of communication processes** – The co-location of staff has made internal communication much easier and this has been echoed by external partners, who have said it is much easier to deal with a single unit.
- **Simplification of authorisation processes** - The mechanisms to authorise transport commissioning are now simplified into one mechanism and will be further improved
- **Simplification of reporting processes** - There is now only one reporting mechanism, which makes things much simpler. The merger of three different budgets is still being resolved.
- **Ensure compliance with policy** – The existence of a single ITU makes it much easier to ensure that policies are adhered to in a consistent manner.

Future Work of the ITU

6.59 Future work envisaged by the ITU is likely to include:

- Fleet consolidation and utilisation
- Greater use of Mobisoft for scheduling contract runs
- More ‘ad-hoc’ booking arrangements
- Establishing Partnership arrangements with bus operators, with young people’s fares high on the agenda
- Independent Travel Training
- Partnership commissioning with the County Durham Primary Care Trust
- Drive Project
- Network Review process
- Extended schools agenda.

Section Seven – Recent Proposals for Legislative Change

“Putting Passengers First”

- 7.1 In 2006, the Government published “Putting Passengers First,” setting out its proposals for changes to bus service provision.
- 7.2 The document put forward the view that buses matter and will continue to do so. They are a crucial part of our transport system. Two thirds of all public transport journeys are made by bus and they are a lifeline for many of our communities. Buses have a key role to play if the challenge of rising congestion on our roads is to be met and to sustain future travel growth while respecting the environment.
- 7.3 “Putting Passengers First”, was informed by the review of bus services across the country carried out by the Department of Transport including a programme of meetings and visits to capture the views of key stakeholders, such as bus operators, passenger groups and local government. The review revealed that, whilst the post-war decline in bus patronage was now levelling off, the quality of bus service provision still varied greatly from place to place. In London and some other areas, where many more people were using buses in recent years, the key ingredient of success had been effective partnership working, with a shared willingness on the part of local authorities and bus operators to work together to invest in the long-term future of the bus sector. However, the review also highlighted that, in too many areas, including many major cities outside London, partnership was still not working effectively. Bus users and the general public reported that many services were not meeting the high standards they expected, and in too many places, use of buses was on a downward trend. Without further action, a vicious cycle of decline was likely to take hold in more of our communities, with falling demand and rising unit costs forcing bus operators to raise fares and cut back services, so leading to further reductions in demand, or a need for ever-increasing levels of subsidy to maintain services.



7.4 The document expressed the Government's view that whilst better bus services mattered everywhere, they would be especially important in areas that choose to implement road pricing. It was explained that the Government had already made it clear that it expected to see a local road pricing 'pilot' scheme in a locality in the next four to five years. In areas that were developing proposals for such schemes, the ability to guarantee tangible improvements in local public transport was expected to be a crucial element of the policy package, so that more people could see a realistic, reliable and cost-effective alternative to the private car.

7.5 A clear and consistent message from the review was that there is no single policy solution that will be appropriate for the diverse range of local circumstances that exist across the country. Local authorities need an effective and flexible toolkit of interventions, so allowing different solutions in different places. The Government's key proposals were:

- **Enhancements to the existing arrangements for partnership schemes between local authorities and bus operators**, allowing statutory schemes to cover minimum frequencies, timings, and where appropriate maximum fares. Voluntary agreements would be subject to a new legal test which could permit multi-lateral arrangements between a local authority and more than one operator, provided that this is in the public interest;
- **Making quality contract schemes a realistic option**, while ensuring that these schemes can only be brought forward where the benefits are sufficient to justify them, and safeguarding the legitimate interests of bus operators;
- **Working with stakeholders to develop a new performance regime** in which operators provide punctuality data to their local Traffic Commissioner, and which operates within the new performance framework for local areas announced in the Local Government White Paper to hold both local authorities and operators to account for their contribution to the performance of local bus services;
- **Giving more opportunity to the community transport sector**, which plays a key role in many rural and other areas where services cannot be provided on a fully commercial basis; and
- **Considering the scope for refocusing the current bus subsidy regime** to ensure it remains targeted as effectively as possible and supports the Government's environmental objectives.

7.6 The Local Government White Paper established a clear principle that greater powers for local authorities need to be accompanied by stronger and clearer leadership and it was also proposed that the draft Road Transport Bill would facilitate reform of the Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives to enable a more coherent approach to transport in our major cities. The package of measures outlined in "Putting Passengers First" was intended to sustain a long-term future for buses; recognising, and seeking to build on, the private sector's strengths in management, innovation and investment, whilst recognising that in

many of our communities, we need to do more to ensure that the private sector's strengths can be more effectively harnessed to meet the needs of the travelling public.

The Local Transport Bill 2007

7.7 The main purpose of the Bill, published in May 2007, is to:

- **Tackle congestion** and improve public transport through empowering local authorities to develop **local solutions to local transport challenges**
- Provide **a tool-kit of powers** within an overarching national framework
- Provide **greater flexibility for local authorities to work with bus operators** to deliver services that are better matched to the needs of passengers in their local areas (including a stronger leadership role for local authorities in partnerships with operators, making franchising a more realistic possibility and a revised framework to hold local authorities and operators to account for improved punctuality and reliability of bus services)
- Make provisions to **strengthen governance arrangements** for transport planning and delivery in existing Passenger Transport (PTA) and major urban areas outside London. This will require major cities, and enable other areas to review and propose their own changes to existing transport governance arrangements and update the existing powers and duties of PTAs
- Update existing provisions for **local road pricing** schemes to encourage local authorities to bring forward local road pricing schemes and provide more flexibility within a clear and accountable framework, whilst ensuring schemes are interoperable and consistent.

Key proposals affecting local government

7.8 The following key proposals are included in the Bill:

Improving the quality of local bus services

- **Voluntary partnership agreements and statutory quality partnerships**

Voluntary partnership agreements would be strengthened with a revised competition test to allow multilateral agreements between a local authority and more than one operator. Such agreements could specify minimum frequencies, timings and maximum fares as appropriate. Existing arrangements would be changed to allow quality partnership schemes to cover minimum frequencies, timings and maximum fares, and to allow improvements to be phased in over time.

- **Quality Contract Partnerships**

The current test, which requires local authorities to demonstrate that quality contracts are “the only practicable way” for a local authority to implement a policy in its bus strategy, will be replaced by a set of criteria requiring councils

to demonstrate that a scheme is in the “public interest”. The current requirement for schemes to be approved by the Secretary of State will be replaced by approval by an independent Approvals Board, with right of appeal to the Transport Tribunal. The time limits for quality contract schemes will be extended and provisions will allow for schemes to be phased in.

- **Punctuality**

A new performance regime which extends traffic commissioner’s responsibilities to hold local authorities as well as operators to account for the performance (punctuality and reliability) of local bus services will be introduced. This includes the provision of improved access to punctuality data and will extend the practical scope of their powers to penalise operators. For local authorities, this will relate to their functions which impact on bus services such as the provision and enforcement of bus priority measures and coordination of road works.

- **Community transport**

Limitations on size of vehicles that can be run by community transport operators and restrictions on payments to drivers on certain services will be removed.

- **Other measures**

Other measures include increasing flexibility for local authorities to subsidise services, removing the requirement for the Secretary of State to give consent to the sale of council-owned bus companies and consideration to be given to refocusing the Bus Service Operators Grant.

- **Reforming local governance**

The Secretary of State will be able to direct local authorities in metropolitan and other areas to review transport governance arrangements and propose their own changes to existing arrangements and update the existing powers and duties of Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs). This would include options to:

- Change the constitution of an existing PTA
- Make changes to the existing transport responsibilities of PTA/Es, district councils and potentially the Secretary of State in respect of Highways agency and heavy rail.
- Allow new PTA/E to be set up or existing PTA/Es to be dissolved with agreement of all authorities affected.
- Make changes to the geographical area covered by a PTA/E, similarly with the agreement of local authorities affected.

Cities would be able to develop governance arrangements over time and keep arrangements under review.

- **Local road pricing schemes**

The draft Bill aims to give more flexibility to local authorities to take forward local road pricing by:

- Replacing the requirement for approval from Secretary of State to be replaced by a new framework of accountability which would set out guidance on scheme design, the legal framework, how local authorities can use the revenues arising and options for how it might operate.
- Allowing a scheme to be taken forward jointly by an LTA and relevant PTA
- Requiring local authorities to apply their share of the net proceeds of the scheme to support the achievement of its local transport policies
- Removing the specific powers of the Secretary of State to require a local authority to consult or hold a public enquiry, while still allowing the LTA to do so if it wishes.

It also includes measures to ensure consistency and interoperability between local schemes through specifying standard data formats, specifying unique numbering for equipment and setting standards for encryption and security. The draft Bill also makes it very clear that it makes no provision for a national road pricing scheme.

Durham County Council's Response to the Local Transport Bill

- 7.9 The Network heard from Richard Startup, Durham County Council's Integrated Transport Manager that the County Council would welcome greater control and influence over local bus services. However, it was stressed that the Authority would not wish to run services or see a return to full regulation. The Authority would, however, like the power to compel the bus companies into action. At present, it was felt that the Council was being reactive as opposed to pro-active in relation to service provision. At present a partnership was in formation but it favoured the private companies. A redressing of the balance would be very favourable from the local authority's perspective.
- 7.10 Network members noted the issue of road pricing. It was explained that with road pricing, it was essential that alternative methods of transport were provided. The key proposals that affected local government focused on a few issues. The first of these was the ability to strengthen Voluntary Partnership Agreements. This would allow local authorities to develop agreements with more than one local bus operator. At present, bus companies, through the Competition Act, were not allowed to talk to each other. This might be perceived by companies as presenting difficulties in working together on through services or co-ordinated timetables, but did ensure that they registered any agreements made. However, under these proposals Durham County Council would be able to act as an intermediary between the companies, bringing them together to deliver a more effective transport solution.

- 7.11 On Quality Contract partnerships, it was explained that, at present, the mechanisms for these partnerships were very cumbersome. The proposals would compel bus companies to work with Durham County Council. This opportunity exists currently, but the proposals would make this easier to achieve. However, cooperation was still required.
- 7.12 On the issue of bus punctuality, it was explained that at present companies provided punctuality data to the Traffic Commissioner on a voluntary basis. There was an informal agreement that the Commissioner would not publicly make this data available if it was submitted voluntarily. It was also noted that at present acceptable punctuality for companies, was no more than one minute early and no later than five minutes late. The draft proposals would enable the Traffic Commissioner to hold local authorities to account for the impact that they have upon the punctuality of local bus services. For example, if the authority conducted road works that delayed bus services on a particular route, the Commissioner would be able to hold authorities to account.
- 7.13 In summary, it was felt that, in terms of the Scrutiny Network's review, the key message was that the Draft Bill should ensure that there would be local solutions to local problems. It would also hopefully redress the balance that currently exists so that Councils are able to manage what is occurring on its own road networks. A copy of the County Council's response to the Bill was provided to the Network for consideration (See Appendix 2) and was endorsed. The response focused on:
- Powers of the Traffic Commissioner
 - Voluntary Partnership and Quality Content
 - Taxi Bus Operators
 - Community Transport
 - Punctuality
 - Subsidised Bus Services
 - Governance Arrangements
 - Environmental Effect of Local Charges, Schemes, etc.

Section Eight – Transport in County Durham: Provision and Providers

Introduction

- 8.1 The previous two Sections of the report set out the legislative and statutory position in relation to local passenger transport and the most recent proposals for legislative change. Section Eight looks in more detail at some of the key providers of services in County Durham, how and why those services are provided and the role of the County Council's Integrated Transport Unit.
- 8.2 The Network considered evidence about transport provided by:
- **National Health Service**
 - **Community Transport Operators**
 - **Commercial Bus Operators.**
- 8.3 Although rail provides important links between County Durham and the region, as well as nationally; in scoping this project it was agreed that the focus would be on road transportation, which is the commonest means of people getting about in the County.

Health Sector Provision

County Durham Primary Care Trust

- 8.4 Berenice Molloy of County Durham Primary Care Trust (PCT) advised the Network that the County Durham and Darlington Primary Care Trusts jointly commissioned transport. The following types of transport are commissioned:
- Emergency Transport
 - Patient Transport Services
 - Out-of-Hours Transport.
- 8.5 Emergency transport is provided by North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust. The North of Tyne PCT was the lead commissioner for emergency transport on behalf of the North East Strategic Health Authority PCTs. Representatives of the PCTs met with the North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust on a regular basis to discuss issues such as response times, clinical issues, cleanliness of ambulances, etc.
- 8.6 The target for Category A responses (within 8 minutes) was 75%. Performance for County Durham was currently 53.86% for responses under 8 minutes and for the Darlington area, it was 77.4%. With regard to Category B responses (within 19 minutes) for which the target was 95%, current performance was at 93.12% for County Durham and 95.75% for Darlington.

- 8.7 Patient transport services were also provided by North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust. The service was commissioned by PCT, however, the contract was held by the Acute Hospitals. It was also noted that private ambulances and taxis were also commissioned by the PCT to provide suitable alternative transport. The PCT also authorised the cost of providing transport for extra contractual referrals (appointments for treatment outside the area organised by GPs).
- 8.8 With regard to out-of-hours transport, details were given of the range of transport provided throughout the County, which included:
- Clinician transport
 - Transport to Urgent Care Centres
 - Discharge transport from Accident and Emergency Departments
 - Inter hospital transfers
- 8.9 In April 2007 Easington Local Strategic Partnership Executive had commissioned a study to examine how transport was organised within Easington District. The study recommended that all the transport in the area should be organised and co-ordinated through an organisation that was able to have a strategic view of all the operations. Given that Durham County Council already commissioned transport services, it was considered that it would be best placed to take District-wide commissioning forward. The service would provide transport for those living in the District of Easington who needed to visit family and friends at the following hospitals:
- University Hospital of Hartlepool
 - University Hospital of North Tees
 - James Cook University Hospital
 - Sunderland Royal Hospital
 - Sunderland Eye Infirmary.
- 8.10 The service would also provide transport for residents in the Easington locality who had booked outpatients appointments at the above hospitals. The concessionary fare scheme would need to apply to the service. Those wishing to use the service would need to contact the Call Centre to be established to agree a pick up point. It was anticipated that the scheme would come into operation from 1st April 2008 (subsequently the start date has been revised to July 2008).
- 8.11 The County Durham and Darlington PCTs were currently working with partner agencies to improve services to patients in relation to meeting the emergency care targets in rural areas, increasing the banding times for patient transport services and reviewing the transport to out-of-hours centres. They also needed to consider the application of eligibility criteria for NHS transport.

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust

- 8.12 Edmund Lovell, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, outlined patient transport issues for the Network in relation to the Foundation Trust.
- 8.13 In 2006/07 the Foundation Trust dealt with 75,500 emergency in-patients, 2,500 elective in-patients, 26,000 day cases, 360,000 out patient appointments and 140,000 accident and emergency attendances at the following sites:
- Bishop Auckland General Hospital
 - Darlington Memorial Hospital
 - University Hospital of North Durham
 - Shotley Bridge Community Hospital
 - Chester-le-Street Community Hospital.
- 8.14 With regard to ambulance journeys, there were two contracts, one for the north of the County and one for the south, this separation of contracts was historical.
- 8.15 Specific reference was made to the journeys undertaken by the volunteer car scheme, run by Friends of Darlington Memorial Hospital. The scheme mainly catered for patients who needed to be in hospital for pre-assessment before 8.00 a.m. Journeys were co-ordinated 2 – 3 days in advance and it was not usual practice for drivers to have to wait for patients.
- 8.16 The Trust has established a Travel and Transport Team and is in the process of compiling a action plan for submission to the Board regarding the following issues:
- How to improve patient access
 - How to increase awareness of travel and transport costs
 - Compliance with legislation
 - Green issues – reducing the Trust’s carbon footprint
 - Encouraging the use of car sharing
 - Value for money – the cost of the transport and the cost of missed appointments.
- 8.17 The Trust has agreed eligibility criteria for providing transport on patients discharge.

North East Ambulance Service

- 8.18 Stephanie Basra, Assistant Director of Ambulance Operation and Kate Hewitson, Programme Co-ordinator North East Ambulance Service provided information for the Network about the patient transport service.
- 8.19 The North East Ambulance Service Trust, which was formed on 1st July 2006, covers an area of approximately 3,230 square miles, with a population of 2.68 million. The Trust employs 1,750 people and co-ordinates and executes 1 million

scheduled patient journeys and over 1/4 million unscheduled urgent and emergency journeys every year. Its mission is to achieve excellent out of hospital care.

- 8.20 The Accident and Emergency (A&E) tier of the service employs 857 staff, of which approximately 44.7% are paramedics, who deal with, on average, more than 600 emergency calls and 300 GP Urgent calls every day.
- 8.21 The Patient Transport Service (PTS) tier employs 428 staff, who carry out more than 4000 patient journeys every week day, and over 4.03 million miles per year. The Trust has over 100 ambulance car service drivers who work on a voluntary basis and undertake over 194,000 journeys per year. PTS is an important operational service of the Trust. Non-emergency transport for patients can be booked by doctors, dentists and midwives, although the responsibility is often devolved to doctors' receptionists and hospital staff. PTS vehicles are designed for the comfort and safety of the patients and the latest vehicles have more space for wheel-chair users and tail lifts for convenience. The Patient Transport Service conveys a wide range of patients to and from their homes to out-patients' appointments, clinics, physiotherapy or non-urgent inter-hospital transfers. On average PTS crews carry over 1 million patients every year, which involves over 4500 journeys per day. Crews are trained as Ambulance Care Assistants with specialist knowledge of comprehensive First Aid, driving skills and patient moving and handling techniques.



- 8.22 The ambulance service is in the process of reforming its core business. Issues being considered include:
- Responsive single point of access to urgent care/hear and treat
 - Delivery of appropriate and effective care closer to home
 - Expansion of logistics centre
 - Fair and equitable access
 - Alternative transport provision.

- 8.23 The Service has a dedicated and skilled workforce. It operates a robust recruitment process, including enhanced CRB checks. It has comprehensive training packages for all drivers and escorts and a very good understanding of user needs. The Trust also has a variety of vehicles, which undergo routine maintenance every 12 weeks and are replaced every seven years.
- 8.24 With regard to the booking system, it is possible to book and cancel journeys on-line or by telephone up to three months in advance. The eligibility criteria have been agreed with the patient groups and the commissioners of its services.
- 8.25 Other issues being considered by the Trust include:
- The need to modernise scheduled patient transport services to reflect the longer operating hours of hospitals
 - The use of the terrafix system for vehicle tracking and deployment
 - The capacity to deal with same day requests for transport
 - Transport to urgent care centres
 - The range of vehicles used.
- 8.26 In relation to response times in East Durham the Network was advised that these were being closely monitored, following the decision for North Tees Hospital to take the more urgent accident and emergency cases and Hartlepool General Hospital the less urgent. Extra funding had been allocated to the Ambulance Service to employ two extra crews in Hartlepool to take account of the extra journey time to the North Tees Hospital.
- 8.27 With regard to response times generally, the Service does perform better in Darlington (being a less rural area) than the remainder of the County. The Service was recruiting and training extra staff with a view to improving performance/response times in the future.

Patient and Public Involvement in Health Fora Views

Patient Transport Services

- 8.28 Mike Hemmingway, North of Tyne Patient Voice attended the meeting to presented Forum views on patient transport services and booking arrangements.
- 8.29 It was explained that the Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Forum North East Ambulance Service had identified the booking of patient transport as an area it wanted to find more about and had designed a questionnaire to ask people booking the service their views. A total of 1,080 questionnaires were sent to people who made actual bookings – 380 to GP surgeries, 450 to hospitals across the North East Ambulance Service Trust area and 250 to patients in Northumberland who were able to self-book. A total of 191 were returned – 18%. The responses to the questionnaires showed that, for many, the introduction of direct patient booking by phone and the on-line facilities for surgeries, clinics and hospitals had been a success.

- 8.30 The comments section on the forms indicated that the following areas still needed to be addressed:
- The design, expansion and updating of the online system
 - The desire for more training and support by on-line users
 - Better understood direct links between the PTS and the professional staff to resolve problems
 - A system of cancellations that did not involve engaged telephone lines and frustratingly wasted time
 - Clearly understood protocols as to who was responsible for bookings, cancellations, querying late arrivals etc.
 - The need for more flexibility and pick-up times to take account of hospital appointments, etc., which were outside the normal range of times.
- 8.31 Following consideration of those comments, the Forum made the following recommendations to the North East Ambulance Service Patient Transport Services:
- The introduction of a separate telephone line, with answer phone facility, dedicated to support the on-line system, cancellations, querying late and/or extraordinary bookings. This could be enhanced by a regularly checked similarly dedicated e-mail address.
 - A campaign to ensure that every surgery, clinic, hospital department knew who their named contact was in the PTS, what the protocols were and how best to most efficiently use the systems. Some were obviously unfamiliar, even with the PTS explanatory leaflet.
 - An improvement in the design and reliability of the on-line booking system to make it quicker and easier to use, with any changes flagged up and a method of correction, which did not involve starting from scratch when an error had been made.
 - The expansion of the on-line system to cover more hospitals and departments and to make it more widely available.
 - An examination of the PTS pick-up and banding times to take account of a more flexible patient orientated health service. (Currently being implemented)
 - Consideration of direct booking by all patients but 'supported' by GP surgeries, where there was a special or understandable need.
- 8.32 Information was also provided about a survey undertaken in Autumn 2005 regarding the Patient Transport Service. The Forum had sent out 900 questionnaires to patients using the Patient Transport Service across the whole of North East Ambulance Service Trust's area and a total of 127 were returned.
- 8.33 The completed questionnaires indicated that the Patient Transport Service was very much appreciated by the overwhelming majority of those who used it. The service was well run, with most of the patients enjoying some degree of additional support from the PTS crews, however, the following points arising from the survey had given cause for concern:
- Lack of communication between patient and booking service

- Lack of communication to patients about banding times
- Lack of understanding by patients and those booking appointments about banding times
- Patients not being given the information about banding times and appointments
- Wheelchair accommodation on the vehicles
- General comfort whilst travelling.

It was reported that the Trust had addressed or was addressing the concerns.

- 8.34 The North East Ambulance Service was currently replacing the suspension on some of its PTS vehicles with an air system, to improve comfort whilst travelling and all new vehicles would have the new suspension system.
- 8.35 The PPI Forum had recommended that the North East Ambulance Service needed to provide more training to those actually making the bookings e.g. GP receptionists and hospital clerical staff, to ensure that the information contained in the PTS bookings leaflet was read and understood so that the correct information was obtained about the patient's needs. More work was also required with these staff and with hospital discharge personnel and patients to ensure that they fully understand the banding times. No-one should be told to be ready for 7.30 a.m. when the leaflet clearly stated 8.30 a.m.

County Durham Patient and Public Involvement in Health Forum

- 8.36 T. McCully from the Easington Locality of the County Durham Patients Forum provided Forum views on public transport to the Network as follows:
- Passengers with pushchairs and in wheelchairs found it difficult to access buses which did not have the low level floors
 - Buses were not clean
 - Bus fares were expensive
 - More peak time bus services were needed between cities
 - Lack of services on evenings made it difficult for people to visit relations/friends in hospital
 - There was a need for anchorage points on buses for wheelchairs and better training of drivers to show more consideration for their passengers.

Community Transport

- 8.37 Liam Wetherall from the County Durham Community Transport Operators Forum provided the following definition of community transport for members of the Network:

“Community transport is a term covering a wide range of transport solutions usually developed to cover a specifically identified transport need, typically run by the voluntary sector for the local community on a ‘not for profit’ basis.”



8.38 A recent report produced by the County Durham Rural Transport Partnerships and County Durham Community Transport Operators Forum highlighted the following issues:

- County Durham is predominantly rural and local communities need specific transport solutions to afford the populace access to key services
- Nearly 30% of the population is over the age of 55 and at 13.2% Durham as a County has the highest percentage of people “Not in good health”
- Community Transport has the flexibility to provide specifically tailored and accessible transport solutions for local people with varying abilities
- Community Transport provides over 150,000 passenger journeys a year in County Durham to people who can’t easily access public transport
- Community Transport operators in County Durham function on short-term (2-3 year) funding packages and continually seek future funding
- Community Transport in other parts of the country enjoys significant strategic and stakeholder funding streams to the benefit of all
- Community Transport was said to have been under-resourced in County Durham (**although in a subsequent comment from the Integrated Transport Manager, Durham County Council, it was advised that there had been £480,000 in 2006/07 and 2007/08**)

- In comparison, it was said that Derbyshire Community Transport operators enjoy annual funding from their County Council budget in excess of £1 million
- Community Transport operators in County Durham function on short-term (2-3 year) funding packages and continually seek future funding
- Community Transport in other parts of the country enjoys significant strategic and stakeholder funding streams to the benefit of all
- Current statutory transport budgets at Durham County Council, the Health Trusts and other potential stakeholders are operating in isolation
- The government modernisation agenda demands more service delivery by the private sector and the voluntary and community sector
- The Local Transport Plan for 2006-11 recognises the role of Community Transport and aims to enhance the resources through capital funding
- The Local Transport Plan Community Transport Strategy identifies a new role for Community Transport as a local transport service provider
- There is a need for statutory organisations to support local transport providers to afford local people the opportunity to access their services
- There is a need for the Community Transport sector to secure long-term core funding and increase capacity to provide services to stakeholders
- Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements can provide the framework to engage partners to devise a new way of delivering services
- The Community Transport Development Project will combine Community Transport services, Local Transport Plan capital, & stakeholder revenue.

8.39 The Community Transport operators providing services within County Durham have constituted themselves into a Forum and have regular two-monthly meetings to discuss issues and champion the sector.

8.40 **Community transport fills the gaps to provide affordable and accessible transport where there is lack of profit incentive for commercial organisations.** It provides a service to the housebound and also enables people to access training programmes and employment when transport proved a difficulty. Community transport is also transport that is operated by the community for the community. It provides journeys that, if not provided by community transport would not operate. Examples of community transport provision in County Durham include “Wheels to Work”; social car schemes; Demand Responsive Transport, i.e. “Dial a Ride”; and group hire. In 2006/7 County Durham community transport providers performed 198,500 passenger journeys (LTP2).

- 8.41 The Durham Community Transport Development Project report states that some schemes are set up specifically to supplement statutory services, such as countywide voluntary car schemes and the North East Ambulance Service. Other voluntary car schemes have been developed as part of wider work, such as the RSVP schemes and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers. These often fill gaps left by other providers, particularly in access to hospital and GP appointments, but there is little or no financial recognition of this role.
- 8.42 Wheels to Work schemes are usually aimed at young people accessing training or work and have mostly been individual moped loans, although car loans, driving lessons and lift sharing are all potential tools for the schemes. Being largely individually tailored solutions, these schemes tend to be very successful but very expensive.
- 8.43 The other main component of the sector is the minibus group hire operator, usually using section 19 permits and voluntary drivers, though difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient volunteers to meet demand can mean that paid drivers are often needed.
- 8.44 This last part of the sector can also be subdivided into the traditional voluntary ethos schemes and the more commercially minded social enterprise ones.
- 8.45 One of the greatest challenges facing the community transport sector is that of continuing and sustainable funding. The Durham Community Transport Development Project report states that the combined core running costs of community transport operators in County Durham (co-ordination, administration, volunteer costs) for the financial year 2006-2007 was in the region of £1,000,000. The end of January 2006 had seen just one third of that figure secured. The remainder was unconfirmed.
- 8.46 The Network was advised that County Durham community transport operators would like the opportunity to:
- prove their high standard of operating
 - obtain work from Durham County Council
 - tender for Durham County Council contracts.
- 8.47 These issues were considered at a meeting organised by West Durham Rural Pathfinder held in Durham in July 2007. Approximately 40 people attended the event. These were key officers and elected Members from Durham County Council; community transport providers and private sector providers from across the County.
- 8.48 At the event, delegates received presentations about the following issues
- **Draft Local Transport Bill** – Iain Aitchison, Lancashire County Council, suggested that the Local Transport Bill 2007, potentially provided opportunities for community transport because it acknowledged ‘significant complementary role of the sector in providing transport services’; allowed section 19 permits for vehicles with less than 9 seats’ allowed section 22

permit holders to pay drivers on local services (which meant that Section 22 “Community Bus” services would no longer need to have volunteer drivers).

- The Bill also paved the way for the operation of buses larger than 16 passenger seats. No change was expected in the requirement that any bus with more than 16 passenger seats would need a PCV qualified driver, so it was expected that operators running vehicles with more than 16 seats would need drivers with full Category D PCV licences. Assuming this section of the Bill became law, a S19 operator could apply for an S22 permit, knowing that they could have service stability by employing paid staff. Iain indicated that as far as he could see, the operator wouldn't have to register a route to get it. S22 opens the door to local bus service tendering. While an authority was not bound to accept any tender, it was suggested that if one was presented by a S22 operator, and the price was reasonable, and very importantly, compliant, it would have to be given very serious consideration.

- **Lancashire County Council experience** – Iain Aitchison shared Lancashire County Council's experience of allowing community transport operators to tender for and run local authority contracts. A Service Level Agreement had been developed to cater for community transport groups and ensure they could tender “on a level playing field”. It worked in Lancashire, and the model could be modified to meet Co Durham's own circumstances. A detailed outline was provided of how the SLA operated, although it was stated that a tender could not be accepted under 1985 Transport Act rules from a Section 19 operator.

- **HART community transport experience** – Delegates heard about

HART's experience of running local authority contracts in the East Riding of Yorkshire. They ran school contracts (Special Educational Needs, and home to school) and the following dial a ride services:

- MEDiBUS (to health care facilities)
- Bridlington DAR (general use)
- MiBUS (shopping and support groups)

- The benefits were that running contracts initially to sustain a vehicle, led to building further capacity, it can help fund the core work the organisation is there to do; it allows the organisation to build a reputation as a professional operator with the local authority and partners; and there are no lengthy monitoring reports. The downsides were short notice of termination of contracts; and low occupancy rates on SEN and rural home to school contracts with the risk of cancellation
- **Durham County Council's Integrated Transport Unit** – Richard Startup (Durham County Council) explained that the ITU is a unit that brings together all passenger transport service planning, procurement, monitoring and management functions across a range of services. Every day it is responsible for:

- Moving 15,000 children from home to school
- 1,000 social care journeys
- 5,500 journeys by bus

The unit procures for contracts in the category of ‘Hire and Reward’, using competitive tender. The required quality standards are:

- Operators licence/insurance
- CRB checked & DCC approved drivers
- Accessible training

The contracts are enforced by a VOSA regime; taxi licensing section; and an in-house monitoring team. Tender requirements mean that everyone must have the same opportunity, and tendering must be done on an even playing field. Current standards are met by 400 operators.

Community transport operators that operate under Section 19 are not currently eligible for DCC contracts. To overcome this, community transport operators could split their operating licence and operate some of their vehicles commercially to subsidise their Section 19 operation. Another way of working with community transport operators could be via a form of accreditation for non-statutory/non-funded journeys carrying people within DCC duty of care.

Section 19 Permit	PSV Operator Licence
Issued to non profit making body	Establish good repute
Differences in licence	Financial standing
Nominal fee	Nominated Transport Manager
Declaration of use i.e. Education, welfare etc	Approved Maintenance arrangements
Declaration the vehicle will be maintained	Vehicles have class 6 MOT
Vehicles have class 5 MOT	Drivers have a vocational licence
Drivers can use car licence	

8.49 A number of workshops were held to consider:

- What issues delegates believed were currently preventing Durham County Council considering community transport operators for contracts, and community transport operators being eligible/ able to meet Durham County Council contract conditions
- Solutions to overcome the identified issues
- Key individuals/ organisations that would need to be involved in making these solutions work
- Next immediate steps for taking this work forward.

8.50 The key issues highlighted by the groups were:

- The need for improved partnership working between the County Council, Community Transport, Health Trusts and the private sector
- The Local Area Agreement (LAA) should have a Social Inclusion Budget that has a transport element
- The commercial sector sees increased activity by community transport operators as a threat – opportunities for complementary working need to be explored, i.e. there may be more of a role for community transport in rural areas
- There needs to be greater clarity about what Section 19 operators can and can't do
- Durham County Council needs to be more aware of its role and duties in relation to the Compact with the voluntary sector and in providing opportunities for community transport operators
- There should be local commissioning through the LAA/Local Strategic Partnership that allows local people to make local decisions.

8.51 At the July 2007 meeting community transport operators were canvassed about their potential interest in applying for/running local authority contracts. An analysis revealed that six community transport operators would be interested in applying for contracts were they to be available.

8.52 At a later Network meeting at Crook at which community transport operators provided evidence, Richard Startup (Durham County Council's Integrated Transport Manager) acknowledged the importance of community transport and advised that the County Council had grant funded a dozen new vehicles for community transport operators. It was explained that to tender for contracts from the County Council, a PSV Operators Licence was mandatory. However, since the Rural Pathfinder organised community transport event in Durham in July 2007, social services and other related work had been offered to community transport operators, subject to vehicle checks, maintenance regime and CRB checks for drivers.

8.53 It was acknowledged that the solution was not necessarily gaining further contracts - there was actually inadequate money being generated to subsidise work already being carried out by Community Transport. The Network felt that, rather than the problem being the sole responsibility of the County Council, partners had to take some ownership of the situation as well. Transport was a cross-cutting issue affecting all four funding blocks within the LAA and it was felt that question should be posed as to what the LAA was doing about integrated transport in the region.

Confederation of Passenger Transport Views

8.54 David Holding, Regional Manager for the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), provided CPT views to the Network about community transport. The CPT is the national trade body for bus, coach and light rail operators. Membership

- includes all major Plc's such as Arriva and Go-Ahead, plus the Tyne and Wear Metro, together with a large number of smaller, usually family owned, businesses who are involved in coaching and school transport.
- 8.55 Mr Holding provided a recent history of the industry, advising that in 1986 the then Government deregulated the bus industry. Currently around 85% of all bus services were commercially operated without direct local authority subsidy.
- 8.56 He felt there was misunderstanding about the two distinct sectors of the industry - the commercial and the subsidised. This was understandable as the situation could and sometimes did arise whereby an operator would deem a service commercially viable during the day but not in the evening or at weekends. The local authority might then put the non-commercial periods out to tender and a contract would be awarded, sometimes to the same operator, using the same buses and drivers.
- 8.57 The Network was advised that Northumberland County Council was currently consulting on a Community Transport Strategy to which the CPT had responded and a copy of the response was circulated. It was highlighted that the CPT recognised the role and value of various forms of community transport in meeting needs where conventional public transport was not viable. However, community transport organisations commonly traded under Section 19 Permit conditions which were distinct from the Operator's Licence regime, controlled by VOSA and the Traffic Commissioner, which applied to commercial operators. The issue of the Section 19 Permit did not demand the same safety or financial criteria which applied under the Operator's Licence.
- 8.58 Even where use of Community Transport was restricted, for example, to residents travelling to doctors surgeries, it could sometimes compete with conventional services. It was pointed out that there needed to be strict limitation to such provision only where no alternative existed. The only limitation on Community Transport operations was that they were non profit making. Some had benefited from external funding - for example new vehicles donated from charitable organisations. The use of these for commercial purposes it was felt constituted unfair competition with local businesses. As regards demand responsive transport, it was pointed out that this could have a higher cost per passenger than the conventional bus alternative, as a result of the higher costs involved should passengers with lower mobility be carried, and also the need for a control centre would bring with it IT and Personnel costs.
- 8.59 It was envisaged that the next big issue would be travel for teenagers. The County had recently changed its policy on payment for travel to education by 16-18 year olds, reflecting increasing variety and involvement in further education. London and some other areas had already introduced concessionary travel for teenagers, which retained them as public transport users for longer and improved access to social and leisure facilities. Once the national scheme of concessionary travel for the elderly and disabled settled down, this was seen as the next logical extension.
- 8.60 Reference was made to the fact that the County Council is the biggest single customer for most of the operators and the mix of work is critical. Whilst it was

appreciated that the focus of the scrutiny investigation was not on education transport issues, it was explained that, until 2005, an Education Transport Focus Group existed at which operators could discuss matters of common interest relating to education transport with County Council officers. It was suggested by the CPT that there may be merit in re-establishing this group.

- 8.61 The question of reliability was also raised. The customer's perception of unreliable buses often results from buses being delayed in traffic or congestion. It was suggested that bus operators needed local authorities to increase traffic priorities for buses and coaches in areas of concern. An example was provided of how areas such as Brighton and Oxford have demonstrated that local authorities and bus companies can work together to generate an increase in bus use.

Bus Operators - The Role of the Commercial Bus Sector

Arriva

- 8.62 Tony Batty, Area Manager for **Arriva North East** advised that in the region the company had 1780 employees and operated 650 vehicles in areas such as Alwick, Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Durham, Hexham, Loftus and Whitby, Newcastle upon Tyne, Peterlee, Redcar, Stockton and Middlesbrough. It provided more than 50 million passenger journeys per year.

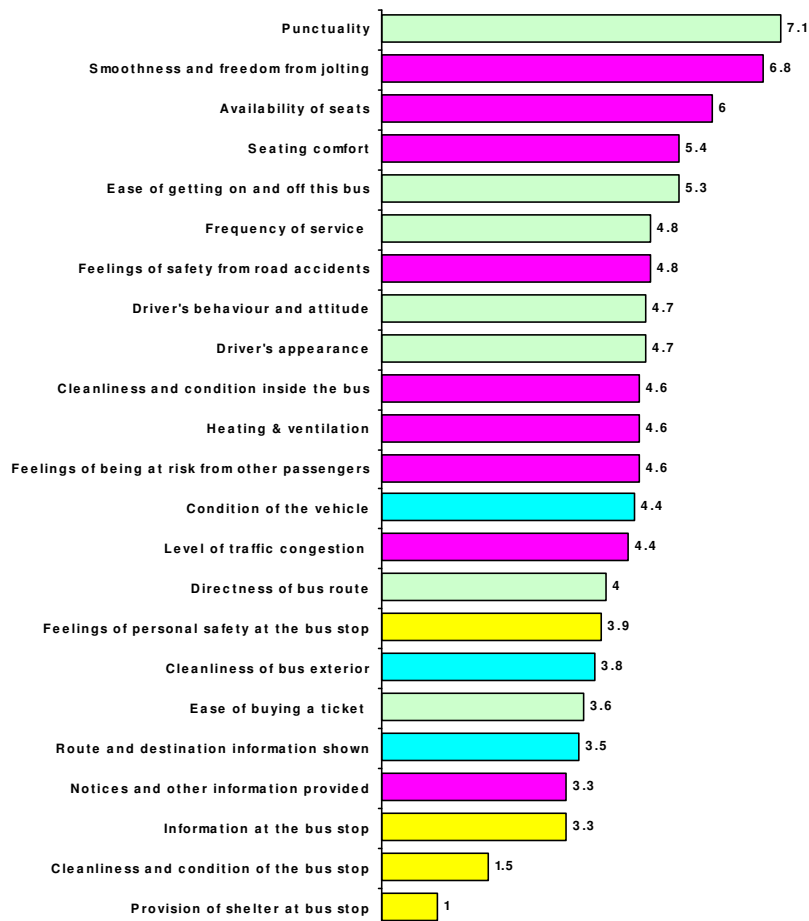


- 8.63 In relation to the company's operations in County Durham. There were 161 employees and 60 buses operating out of **Bishop Auckland** running to Hartlepool, Durham and Darlington, as well as surrounding towns, such as West Auckland, Barnard Castle and Willington. There were 145 employees and 53 buses operating out of **Durham**, providing links to Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Darlington, Peterlee and locally to Brandon, Esh Winning and within the city

centre. At Peterlee there were 96 employees and 32 buses running to Sunderland, Hartlepool, Durham, Darlington and Stockton.



8.64 It was confirmed that through regular surveys and monitoring, the company assessed customer views about the services provided. The following data was provided by the company to members about recent issues raised by customers (in percentage terms):



- 8.65 The performance of the company had improved since 2003, but Arriva acknowledged that the key issues people had were mainly related to the age of their vehicles, the availability of seats and how comfortable a person was when travelling.



- 8.66 In relation to punctuality, it was explained that from 53,181 observations, 49,184 buses had arrived not more than one minute early or 5 minutes late and thus 92% of journeys were meeting the target standard of operation. As regards future performance, the aim was to provide a reliable, high quality operation, with improved customer satisfaction, increased patronage, an excellent relationship with partners and stakeholders in County Durham, further investment in vehicles and an improved infrastructure.

Go North East

- 8.67 Martin Harris, Commercial Manager of **Go North East** provided information about the company's profile and commercial strategy. The company, which is part of the Go Ahead Group, carries 69 million bus passengers every year and employs 2010 staff. There are 667 Buses and Coaches travelling 56 million kilometres annually. The average age of vehicles is 6.9 years and nearly 100% are Easy Access. There is 100% cctv coverage on buses. The company has vehicles with the first Euro V engines in region, and 83% Euro II or above. There are 50 branded routes, plus many commercial routes and a significant secured services operation of £1.2m in County Durham. The company also has a significant schools operation e.g. 13 - St Bede's, 6 - Park View.

8.68 The Go North East Commercial Strategy is to reverse the long-term trend of reducing bus passengers, and turn around several years of falling profits. The company is to fund a major increase in investment so as to create a business with long-term viability. Taking the Go Ahead Group philosophy to the next level, the aim is to be the best and most innovative UK bus operator. A key aspect of the operation was branding of services, as buses were not an homogenous product. Branding made defining what you are selling easier and made Go North East services stand out from the crowd. Good branding could communicate frequency, speed, destinations, quality etc.



8.69 In providing bus services, the approach adopted by the company was to have distinct, single-site, business units with dedicated staffing and managers working within a clear hierarchy with linked performance, profit, investment & marketing targets. There was a business case for each individual brand and genuine delegated authority at all levels.

8.70 The company had introduced a number of specific ticket brands as part of its marketing strategy:

- **Buzzfare** – replaced a major part of our business with a brand tested with customers– and it had worked
- **Get Around** – cheap bus travel for people in full time education – so many of them wanted to Get Around that the company were swamped with applications
- **Txt2go** - the first local bus mobile ticketing system
- **New smartcard** – ticketing was on the way

8.71 Go North East also considered itself to be in the forefront of introducing value for money and innovation in fares:

- Flat Fares - £1.00 Durham, Sunderland
- Simple Fares - £1, £1.50 Seaham, Washington, Saltwell Park
- Stanley area fares - at Stanley Taxis levels
- Child Fares under review – simpler for all

8.72 It was believed by the company that the initiatives introduced were now paying dividends in the form of:

- Overall Passenger Numbers up from –3% to +2% a year so far (2008)
- Individual success stories – up to 39%
- Revenue growth ahead of patronage
- Improvement in profit
- Quadrupling of investment levels
- Greater customer satisfaction
- Greater staff motivation

8.73 Go North East advised that, in relation to improving local transport in County Durham, they felt that:

- A forum for the local authority and PTE to share their inner-most thoughts;
- Guarantees of stability of service;
- Guarantee an enhanced level of consultation when anything does have to change;
- Link fares to operating costs and discuss this openly with the stakeholders;
- Publish how well or not so well the company is doing in terms of reliability to the customer and for information;
- Quality Bus Partnerships (East Gateshead Quality Bus Partnership was signed 30 January 2008).

8.74 Prior to the meeting with bus operators, a series of questions had been sent to both companies which was based upon the consultation feedback set out in Section Nine of this report. The questions and company responses were as follows:

1. Reliability and punctuality are important to the travelling public - what are you doing to ensure that your buses turn up when expected and that they run on time?

Go North East responded:

- High reliability standards: For them 99% is not good enough
- Now achieving best in Go Ahead Group: 99.6%
- Punctuality targets are set by the traffic commissioner, they are performing well against this with 96.6% 'on time'
- Focus on reliability, demanding internal regime, timetables adjusted, more managers responsible for specific services, radio contact, Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system
- You (local authorities) can contribute massively to helping bus users.

Arriva responded:

- The County Council have access to the performance of buses
- 92% of buses meet the 'on time' target
- Buses are more reliable than people perceive them to be

- 2. The condition and cleanliness of buses was an important issue for members of the public who responded to our consultations. What are you doing to ensure your vehicles are in good condition and are clean?**

Go North East responded:

- Have a rigorous maintenance and cleaning regime
- There has been a massive investment in refurbishment
- Even greater investment in new buses – youngest, greenest fleet
- Contract cleaning, daily clean and daily external wash, regular deep clean
- Prompt response to clean up incidents
- During the day at Gateshead interchange.

Arriva responded:

- Similar to above – buses are cleaned every night and swept

- 3. Members of the public have told us that buses do not always go to the destinations they want. What are the mechanisms you use to assess demand; and provide; remove or revise services? Is this driven solely by profit considerations?**

Go North East responded:

- We analyse customer and representative feedback
- Undertake customer surveys and do market research
- There is analysis of existing levels of demand and exploration of most economical solutions
- Joint analysis of problems and solutions with partners
- More customers = more profit, and also = more social inclusion.
- More profit = investment + more service and less pressure on public sector budgets

Arriva responded:

- Similar to the above, drivers carry comment cards and there are details of how to access us via the telephone or by email.

- 4. How do you ensure safety issues are adequately addressed within your fleet?**

Go North East responded:

- Buy quality products to start with
- Rigorous maintenance system
- Zero tolerance of failure on ministry inspections
- Dedicated experienced team, training and development, apprenticeships scheme, high health & safety standards for the work force

- Full involvement of drivers in the system
- Accident prevention culture, year on year incident reduction, best results in Go Ahead Group
- Cctv, partnership with police, assault screens.

Arriva Responded:

- This starts with the drivers who have a key role to play
- Investment in new vehicles

5. Accessibility is important for older people and those with disabilities. How are you addressing these issues in operating your services?

Go North East responded:

- 100% low floor on front line services within one month – exceptions will be “Yellow Buses” (which operate school service)
- Awareness training at induction and via ‘refresher’ programme and remedial training where needed
- Unique Easy Access Wheelchair Guarantee (if a person using a low floor bus gets to their destination with Go North East and the company does not have a low floor bus to return them, a taxi return is guaranteed)
- New Disability Discrimination Act policy and customer guide soon to be published.

Arriva responded:

- Older people can benefit from schemes, the over 60s benefit from free travel
- We have issued a ‘Teen card’ for younger people although it operates outside peak times
- As new vehicles come on stream they will all be low floor to ensure that the Company complies with Disability Discrimination Act requirements by 2016

6. Older, younger and disabled passengers have highlighted concerns about driver attitudes. What do you do to raise awareness amongst your staff about the specific needs of some groups of passengers?

Go North East responded:

- Disability awareness, age-awareness and young persons awareness are all addressed in training
- Tackle problems that arise though coaching, re-training or disciplinary action
- Design out points of conflict
- Listen to and work with user groups
- Bus Users UK Audit reports in March
- Comment cards are available on buses and information is provided on where to send letters and emails and a telephone number is also provided.

Arriva responded:

- There has been a dedicated service to deal with complaints since July 2007
- Drivers have comment cards which can be given to passengers on request.

7. The level of fares was cited as a concern by some groups (especially young people). Can you advise how fare levels are set and any differential fares that are available to specific users of your services?

Go North East responded:

- Companies must operate economically and must deliver a profit that can sustain the business
- Strong record on cost control and improving results in revenue generation
- Labour costs (wages, pensions, NI)
- Fuel - a 1p rise in price per litre = £100,000 extra costs for the company
- Provide range of discounted offers for adults (Buzzfare) and Young People (Get Around) and participate in concessionary scheme for disabled and elderly people.

Arriva Responded:

- Older people can benefit from schemes, the over 60s benefit from free travel
- We have issued a 'Teen card' for younger people although it operates outside peak times

8. How are complaints dealt with in your organisation?

Go North East responded:

- There is a dedicated customer service team, completely overhauled in last 3 months
- Response within 5 days
- Managing Director personally handles MPs' complaints
- Commercial Director personally handles councillors' complaints
- Logging, monitoring analysis, via database
- Involvement of all appropriate managers in resolution and prevention.

Arriva responded:

- There has been a dedicated service to deal with complaints since July 2007.

9. A lack of buses on evenings, weekends and bank holidays was cited as concern by respondents to our consultations. What are your views on this issue?

Go North East responded:

- It comes down to demand and economics
- Commercial responsibility of operator
- Social responsibility of public sector authorities
- Go North East pursues commercial objectives responsibly, working together with the authorities to find solutions to some of these issues, but ultimately should not be seen as responsible for solving intractable social transport issues.

10. Problems over access to health services were raised as an issue by consultees. Has your company ever been approached or consulted by the NHS about proposed changes in NHS provision which might impact on accessibility to hospitals/clinics?

Go North East responded:

- Classic case – Shotley Bridge, where changes in health service provision were likely to impact on buses and only read about it in the press.
- Our bus network is often not the right place to look for the solution - small numbers of people travelling from a variety of locations to a range of health locations across a broad spread of the day.
- Smaller flexible transport options are more likely to provide an economic and appropriate solution, combined with making better use of existing NHS and other resources and creating combined budgets
- The health service should include transport in the decision making process – not as an afterthought with unrealistic expectations.

Local Authority Provided Services – “Dial a Ride”

- 8.75 ‘Dial a Ride’ bus services in County Durham are provided for members of the public who, through mobility disability, are unable to use public transport or get to a bus stop. The disability can range from problems with walking, being a wheelchair user, having a sensory impairment (blindness, deafness), breathing problems, or difficulty getting to a local bus stop because of other health reasons. The service, which operates in all areas of the County enables the user to be picked up at their door and wheelchair users can be accommodated. The service also allows users to be accompanied by escorts. Destinations include shopping and leisure destinations in and adjacent to County Durham.
- 8.76 The Access Service is funded by the County Council’s Public Transport Budget and operated via the County Council’s Integrated Transport Unit. The County Council’s own bus fleet vehicles are used and all drivers are trained to national standards including care for disabled people. To use the services, users need to be a member of each particular scheme. Details of membership and charges made per trip are available from the contact name of each service. Bookings can be made up to 10 days in advance and there is generally a once a week service to each area. Bookings are generally made via the Travel Response Centre operated by the County Council.

- 8.77 Access Bus services are now being developed to include links to more local services and health facilities as funding becomes available. Members of the Network received information about the following new Access Bus facilities which had been introduced:-

University of North Durham Hospital - Evening service for Hospital visiting (also evening shopping at the Arnison Centre if required.) Available to members resident in rural villages within 10 miles of Durham City. Operates one day per week (Mon-Fri) from each village.
Contact: Travel Response Centre.
Operated by Durham County Council.

South Derwentside Local Access Bus – from East Hedleyhope, Esh Winning, Cornsay and Satley to Consett and Stanley.
Contact: Travel Response Centre.
Operated by Durham County Council.

Cockfield/Evenwood area to Bishop Auckland General Hospital Access Bus. Evening service for hospital visiting. Available for members from Cockfield and Evenwood and surrounding villages.
Contact: Travel Response Centre.
Operated by Durham County Council.

Lanchester and district GP Access Bus. Access bus to local GP surgeries at Langley Park, Tow Law, Burnhope and Lanchester.
Contact: Travel Response Centre.
Operated by Durham County Council.

East Durham Hospital Link. Links all villages in Easington District to Hartlepool General Hospital. This service is available to elderly and disabled people visiting Hartlepool Hospital.
Contact: Communicare on Travel Response.
Operated by Communicare under contract to Durham County Council

Section Nine – Consultation and Engagement Feedback

Introduction

- 9.1 A key aspect of scrutiny is consultation with stakeholders – those individuals who either receive services or are impacted upon by the issues being scrutinised.
- 9.2 For the purpose of this project, the Network spoke with or received written evidence from the following groups:
- Older People (Age Concern, Durham County)
 - Young people (Investing in Children and Teesdale Community Resources Youth Forum)
 - People with Disabilities (The County Durham Disability Partnership)
 - The general public (via articles in the local press and local authority free newspapers)
 - Parish Councils.

Older People's Views

- 9.3 Some of the key findings of “**Getting Around**” - a study of the mobility needs of older people commissioned by Age Concern Durham County – were considered by the Network.
- 9.4 Harriet Gibbon, Chief Officer, Age Concern Durham County, explained that daily mobility is a prerequisite for maintaining good quality of life, health and independence among older people. Previous research with older people had pointed out the fine balance between increased freedom after retirement and the contraction of space of the older person's life spheres through the ageing process. The lack of flexible forms of transport made it difficult to go out at all. Decreasing levels of mobility were associated with increasing levels of loneliness, social isolation and exclusion from participation in society.
- 9.5 As the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) reported, **for older people poor transport is a contributing factor to social exclusion as ageing restricts access to those activities which enhance quality of life.** This participatory research project, which investigated issues of daily mobility and social exclusion with people over the age of 60, was carried out in County Durham between June 2005 and July 2006. Thirty focus groups utilising participatory diagramming and mapping were held in fifteen locations with a total of 119 participants. In addition, nine in-depth interviews were carried out to identify mobility issues of those who had more complex impairments.

9.6 The key findings of the Study were:

Mobility and Independence

- Mobility is necessary in order to independently carry out activities of daily living, such as shopping. Independence is greatly valued by older people and contributes to well-being
- Mobility is also necessary to carry out voluntary and leisure activities and socialize, which provide enjoyment and a sense of purpose.

Health and Mobility

- Older people are aware of the link between being active and mental and physical health
- The more physical barriers there are to being mobile the more difficult it is for the individual to motivate themselves to be active and a general decline may follow very rapidly.

Car Access

- Access to a car is greatly valued for providing independence, freedom and for its convenience. It is a necessity for many people who live in rural areas, and for those who cannot walk longer distances
- A car enables people to lead busy lives, socialize and be active in the community after retirement.

Public Transport

- Free transport is greatly appreciated by older people. But those in rural areas fear cuts in already very basic transport provision
- Access to information regarding bus services, timetables and alternatives needs to be improved – many older people do not have internet access
- Bus connections are often poor in rural areas and require more co-ordination by service providers.

Access to facilities and services

- Those villages with few or no facilities are often the same as those that have the least public transport provision or access to taxis, which makes people reliant on cars in order to access basic facilities (e.g. shops or post offices) and services (e.g. doctor's surgery)
- Accessibility for wheelchairs and scooters has been improved in many locations through dropped kerbs and ramps. This ought to be continued to increase the accessibility of buildings and public transport.

Getting around in the village or town

- In order to access facilities within the village frail older people need transport almost door-to-door or at least within a very short walking distance
- Speeding and heavy traffic makes crossing roads hazardous for older people. Many villages lack safe road crossings, such as zebra crossings
- Broken and uneven pavements cause falls and broken bones for older people
- Cars parked on pavements force pedestrians onto the road. And cars parked inconsiderately near dropped kerbs can mean a great inconvenience for, or even be a danger to, an individual in a wheelchair or on a scooter
- Many frail older people feel increasingly vulnerable and thus avoid going out in the dark or avoid groups of young people.



Mobility and Support

- Support from family and friends to get around is vital for those older people who do not have access to a car. Lifts are frequently given to the doctor's, hospitals or for going shopping or leisure activities
- The availability of other support services (provided by statutory or voluntary agencies) is a concern as people grow older, particularly in rural areas
- More support could be provided to maintain independence of those who have particular impairments, e.g. special training in coping with everyday activities for those who have become blind

- 9.7 The Network was also provided with case studies collected by Age Concern County Durham's Information and Advice Service (see Appendix 6) showing the difficulties in getting around.

Young People's Views

- 9.8 The views of young people were obtained from (1) a focus group of young people aged 13-23 from **Investing in Children** and (2) a Youth Group from **Teesdale Community Resources Youth Forum**.

- 9.9 The Investing in Children Group which met on 17 October 2007 were asked:

- How often do you use transport?
- How much did you spend on transport the last time you used it?
- If you use transport daily how much do you spend?
- Is the bus travel too expensive?
- Is transport reliable?
- Do they come often enough?
- Is more transport needed?
- Are there any places buses don't go?
- Are the buses clean?
- Are buses safe for young people?
- Do they have enough space for disabled people?

- 9.10 The young people said:

- They used public transport everyday at least 2 or three times
- Spent between £5 and £20 (and this was too expensive)
- Wanted discounts for dirty and uncomfortable buses
- Buses weren't too unreliable, but after 7pm they ran less effectively
- School buses are reliable
- Wanted more transport to Tow Law, Consett, Wolsingham and MetroCentre
- They found it hard to get around the North East of England
- They wanted buses cleaned more regularly
- There was disabled access on the larger buses, but not small busses
- Buses aren't safe and they thought that seat belts should be put in for security.

- 9.11 The Teesdale Youth Group, which met with representatives from the Network on 5 February 2008, submitted a number of questions for consideration. Richard Startup (Integrated Transport Unit) was present to assist with responses. The young people also proposed a number of solutions about transport issues.

- 9.12 The young people asked why, in rural areas, they had to pay more than those in built up areas for travelling the same distance. They were advised that, in County Durham, you pay approximately the same for travelling the same distance in rural areas as in other areas of the County. In response to a query about subsidised fare schemes for young people, the young people were informed that, apart from

a half fare scheme, Arriva operate a teen travel card for those travelling after 5.00 p.m. and at weekends. On this card you can travel anywhere for 50p. **The young people were not aware of this.**

- 9.13 The young people suggested that the council should insist that all the buses and vans it uses run on alternative fuels to help the environment. The young people were advised that the Council was looking at issues such as pool cars, but couldn't make these changes all at once. Some work had been undertaken with our bus contractors to use bio-diesel (95% ordinary diesel and 5% bio fuel), but there was not the capacity in the UK to grow the crops to move towards 100% bio fuel. Some of the technology is not widely available or suitable. There were some good schemes for electric vans. Arriva had started a bio-diesel scheme and were ahead of the other contractors currently in this field.
- 9.14 In relation to a question about what was being done to improve transport for disabled young people across the County outside of school, the young people's group was advised that the Council has adapted 2500 bus stops to enable wheelchair users to access flat floor buses. There are many wheel-chair adapted minibuses being used by community transport. Adaptations have been made to kerbs to improve access for wheelchair users.
- 9.15 The young people referred to the costs of accessing venues for leisure activities such as bowling, or the cinema, which were too expensive to get to for young people who lived in rural areas. It was agreed that there is a disproportionate cost to those who live in rural areas as well as time constraints accessing venues. Reference was made to the previous initiatives such as the "Pound Bus" which operated in Wheatley Hill and Thornley, following a previous scrutiny project looking at the "Carrier Bag Culture" (disaffected young people). This enabled young people in that area of Easington District to access other villages in the locality to attend youth clubs and other organised events. Young people asked whether an initiative could be considered for Teesdale.
- 9.16 The young people suggested that, if was not possible to access facilities outside the area, mobile facilities delivered to young people in their localities might provide a solution. Officers advised that there were a number of buses which travel around villages in the Chester le Street, Derwentside and Newton Aycliffe areas. The Council also had some new mobile libraries which might be able to provide, say, access to the internet. Members were advised that a mobile project had operated in Middleton in Teesdale for many years known as the 'Big Green Bus'. It was difficult to raise the revenue costs of running that type of project. A project is currently being developed for a new mobile facility and this was expected to cost around £280,000.
- 9.17 Members were asked if the Council could provide proof of age cards for all young people aged 11-18 so they did not argue with bus drivers about their age. The young people were advised that an Investors in Children (IIC) card should be available through their school. There is a card for those up to 13 and one for those 14-16 which would enable young people to travel at half fare travel. The Group was advised that **there is the Beeline scheme in Derbyshire which allows young people to travel half fare until their 19th birthday. The young people felt this was a good idea.** As regards young people paying full fares, the

view from officers was that this should start once they left full-time education. In relation to a question about why bus passes couldn't be used on all buses provided by all the bus operators it was explained that this was because of the competition laws.

- 9.18 The young people asked if free bus passes and discounted taxi fares should be available for those in rural areas not served by public transport. It was explained that there was some provision and a taxi-bus was used where a bus was not suitable. The passenger pays a bus fare but gets the use of a taxi for a bus fare.
- 9.19 In relation to after school activities, young people told the members Network that, if they wanted to stay behind to do after school activities, they could not get home as there were no buses. Members were asked what could be done to help so young people could stay back, take part and have wider choice and opportunities. The Head of the Integrated Transport Unit advised that this was a major issue which came up in all geographical areas not just in rural parts of the County. There was no funding for this aspect of extended schooling and was a matter that needed to be taken up with the Children and Young People's Service.
- 9.20 The young people asked why they had to pay for transport to attend Sixth Form College and Colleges of Further Education. Reference was made to the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) which gives up to £30 per week. In addition there is also the post 16 travel allowance under which the Council make a contribution towards the cost of a travel ticket. Some colleges such as New College provide free transport. Students had a choice about which college to attend and they were given a contribution of £75 toward the bus fare of £300. Reference was also made to concessionary seat scheme in relation to education transport. The concessionary seat scheme refers to spare seats on contract coaches already subsidised by Durham County Council for school transport, which may be accessed by students who are not entitled to a free seat but are travelling to the same location. Seats are only offered when all entitled pupils have been allocated a place. However, if a seat is required for an entitled pupil the concessionary place will be withdrawn, in which case a refund will be made and support with other arrangements would be offered. Following the re-tendering of school transport the County Council had recently had to withdraw 1200 seats. For young people entering employment there is the Wheels2Work scheme which provides loan scooters to young people.

“Solutions” from the Teesdale Community Resources Youth Forum

- 9.21 The Youth Forum members proposed a number of possible solutions to overcome transport difficulties:

“ON-DEMAND”

- 9.22 This would be a minibus service operated by local Community Transport or Taxi firms on a demand responsive basis. Meaning it follows no route or timetable. Instead users book a journey through a local travel centre “Hub” and the minibus meets them at an arranged location and time; this can be door to door if required.

The young people were advised that community transport vehicles were not designed to be used for commercial travel. As part of the Bus Strategy proposals mini-buses will be placed around the County which can be booked by telephone. They will be available to all people who are unable to access public transport. These vehicles will be placed with contractors and controlled by the County Council and will be available specifically to carry individuals. Reference was made to the restrictions which applied to Community Transport provision, which mainly catered for group travel, although it was explained that Community Transport Operators would have the same opportunity as other providers to provide the new service, subject to being appropriately licensed. Reference was made to the mini bus used by the youth group, which was one of twelve supported over the last 2 years under the LTP. It was advised that, whilst capital costs linked to the purchase of the vehicle had been met, groups had to raise money every year to cover the revenue costs of running the vehicles. Reference was made to the proposals in the new unitary authority for each member to have approximately £50,000 to spend in their local community. It was suggested that the proposed Area Action Partnerships and individual councillor funds could be approached to support local transport projects.

“JUST4FUN BUS”

- 9.23 This would provide a means for young people to attend larger organised events outside of their area. It could be used to attend music festivals, theme parks, sport/leisure, entertainment centres and cinemas. In fact any event that currently they do not access because of high transport costs. Again this would be promoted on an area wide basis with regular updates on forthcoming opportunities made available through the already extensive information network operated by the LEA, community groups and the now popular social networking sites.

“CAR DUDE”

- 9.24 Run on similar lines to Wheels2Work but using a car or MPV where a group of people agree to share with others the costs of transport to education, training or work. Could also be used short term to allow candidates to attend job interviews, hospital outpatients appointments etc. Young people were advised that, under the scheme Wheels2Work, the Council had bought a number of scooters. If there are no alternatives for getting to work you can join the scheme and the Council can loan you a scooter for up to 6 months. After 6 months you will be expected to make alternative arrangements.

“THE FREEDOM CARD”

- 9.25 This would enable any 16 to 19 year old who is in full time education to travel on any service bus any time free, or at the very least half the adult fare. Would also act as an incentive and improve educational choice. The Head of the Integrated Transport Unit suggested that the preferred option would be for young people to travel at half fare whilst in full-time education.

“MOBILISE VOUCHERS”

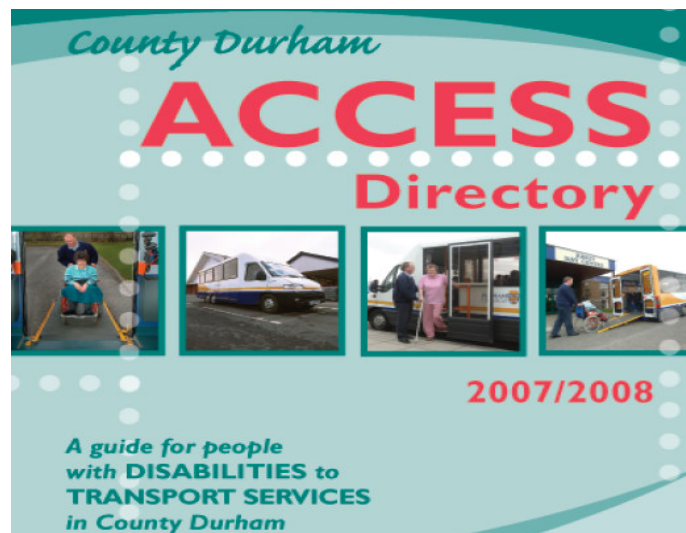
- 9.26 These could be used in some areas to help towards the cost of travel to organised activities such as youth clubs, training events and sports clubs aimed at young people who might otherwise be considered socially excluded because of their rural location. Could be used on, Buses, Taxis and Community Transport.
- 9.27 The key issues raised by young people seemed to fall into the following areas:
- Publicity about the Teen Card and the IIC card – what could be done to better publicise their availability?
 - Concessionary seats
 - Freedom card
 - Regular transport to attend activities and/or concessionary transport to events.

People with Disabilities

- 9.28 The views of people with disabilities were canvassed at a meeting of the County Durham Disability Partnership held at the County Hall, Durham on 5 December 2007. A presentation was given to members of Partnership by Tom Bolton (Durham County Council) and Stephen Gwilym (District of Easington Council) which:
- (i) Explained Overview and Scrutiny principles and placed emphasis on the importance of improving services, giving greater accountability to local people and making a difference.
 - (ii) Highlighted the issues arising from the Transport Project and detailing membership of the network and its approved Terms of Reference.
 - (iii) Invited representations about:
 - public transport usage
 - local transport services and in particular, whether services go where users want, when they want
 - what needs to be done to improve local transport
 - community transport and patient transport schemes and how these could be improved.
 - (iv) Explained what would happen next including a report from this event, how the views of the meeting would shape the review and the production of a review report with recommendations.
- 9.29 Two focus groups considered the questions identified in (iii) above. Feedback was as follows:

Group 1

- People with disabilities found it difficult to get to and from bus stops and also were not able to stand/sit for long periods of time depending on bus service punctuality/reliability
- Difficult to get real time information on where buses go to and when at bus stops but also there were poor experiences of obtaining travel information via the internet
- For users with audio impairments, it was difficult to obtain information via the telephone or minicom systems
- Access to services was often compromised by the scheduling of bus timetables. The question was put as to who was responsible for ensuring dialogue between bus companies and 'employers'/public service providers
- The Benefits of Community Transport schemes were highlighted although the lack of guaranteed revenue income or grant support meant that whilst finance was available for capital investment/expenditure, revenue costs could not be met
- For Community Transport schemes to be self sufficient, they would need to charge £2.50 per mile making them often more expensive than taxis
- The financial conditions within which Community Transport schemes operated often precluded them from bidding for DCC contracts which therefore reduced the potential for income generation
- Could the 'Direct Payments Scheme' be utilised to pay for Volunteer Car Schemes/Services?
- Public reassurance needed that bus travel is safe regardless of the route and/or time of day. The potential to explore using PCSOs/Beat Bobbies/Street Wardens to ride on buses to provide this reassurance
- Easy Access buses often only had space for either 1 wheelchair and 1 buggy or 2 of each at a time. It was felt that this could prove inadequate
- The absence of an 'Induction Loop System' and driver training on dealing with deaf people resulted in difficulties for such groups to such an extent that they had 'deserted' public transport



Group 2

Issues raised in addition to those identified in Group 1 were: -

- The introduction by one operator of a 'Guaranteed Low Floor' policy
- The perception that Easy Access buses were used more on shorter local routes than the longer city/regional routes
- Concerns about the maintenance of Easy Access vehicles and the frequency with which drivers claimed the low floor mechanism were broken
- Punctuality of services and the knock-on effect that this often had on clients accessing public services including GP and hospital appointments
- The level of service reduction after 5.30 p.m. and on a weekend
- The difference in user satisfaction/experience between commercial operators
- The lack of access to the Metro Centre directly from certain parts of central/north Durham (Chester-le-Street)
- Concerns about the need to change buses at Interchanges outside of County Durham (i.e. Gateshead, Sunderland Hetton) resulting in concessionary bus passes being invalid
- More CCTV at bus stops as well as on buses to reassure the public regarding bus safety
- Disabled users referred to services with Tyne and Wear and suggested that these benefited from better timetables, improved bus stop lighting, awareness training amongst bus driver regarding the needs of disabled people
- Patient transport is used but wheelchair users have to book in advance. Also noted was that ambulances do not take a patients own wheelchair with them if taken into hospital in an emergency. It is up to patient to arrange for it to be delivered to them.

9.30 During the feedback discussion session, the following were suggested for the Network to pursue with commercial operators:

- The establishment of bus service user consultative groups, including potentially the Disability Partnership
- The use by commercial bus operators of open days/challenge events specifically to raise awareness of accessibility issues amongst patrons and staff
- Equality and Diversity awareness training for bus staff.

Views from the General Public and from Parish Councils

9.31 As part of the project, press releases were issued by the local authorities in County Durham, inviting members of the public to submit their views on existing public transport services and what could be done to improve them. Letters were also distributed to all Town and Parish Councils within County Durham and to County Durham Members of Parliament to obtain their views on this issue.

9.32 During the course of the consultation, 204 representations were received from a total of 76 respondents. The breakdown of respondents was:

- Members of the public 58
- Parish Council/Councillor 13
- County/District Councillor 5

9.33 The top 5 issues raised by respondents were:-

- Removal of bus services/routes 33
- Access to Public Services particularly health services 26
- Frequency of bus services 21
- Punctuality of bus services 18
- No bus services at night/weekends/bank holidays 17

Breakdown of Representations by District Area

9.34 Chester le Street

There were a total of 9 complaints submitted from 3 residents. A general complaint was submitted by a resident of Beamish regarding the accessibility by bus services of Sunderland, Newcastle and Durham as well as leisure facilities at Chester le Street i.e. Durham County Cricket Club, Lumley Castle.

2 further complaints were submitted by elderly residents regarding changes to bus routes at Houghton Gate which had resulted in longer walks to bus stops which they were unable to undertake.

Derwentside

There were 15 complaints submitted from 5 members of the public and 1 Parish Council.

There were 4 specific complaints regarding the removal of the Durham bus service which passed through the Delves Lane area together with 1 general complaint regarding the availability of bus services early morning at Burnopfield. Hedleyhope Parish Council submitted complaints regarding the changes to the No. 43 and 44 routes, which had severely restricted access to the village of East Hedleyhope. This was a particular concern for residents of that area in accessing public services. Reference was also made by the Parish Council to the need for a through ticketing arrangement which would enable passengers to use various bus operators.

On a positive note, Hedleyhope Parish Council had referred to a provision of an impressive range of public transport for a largely rural county with a limited revenue stream.

Durham City

There were 27 complaints from 8 members of the public, 1 City Councillor and 3 Parish Councillors.

There were 2 high profile cases regarding the availability of easy access buses for disabled patrons which had resulted in the involvement of the local Member of Parliament.

A number of complaints were raised in general relating to cuts in services between Durham City and surrounding villages, namely Brandon, Brasside, Shincliffe, Kelloe and Rainton. Complaints had also been submitted regarding the punctuality and reliability of services together with the cleanliness of the Arriva fleet.

Easington

There were 59 complaints submitted by 22 complainants. There were 18 members of the public complained, 2 District Councillors and 2 Parish/Town Councillors. The main issue of complaint in Easington appeared to be the ability to get direct public transport links to health services to the north of the District at Sunderland and to the south at Hartlepool, North Tees and James Cook Hospitals.

Issues had also been submitted regarding the availability of public transport to access work at Dalton Park, Peterlee Asda and Bracken Hill Industrial Estates at night together with timings of the routes which appeared to serve shoppers and did not take account of the need for workers to access travel home. Again there were a number of complaints regarding the punctuality, mechanical condition and cleanliness of the Arriva fleet.

There were 10 specific complaints regarding the removal of the 45 service which ran via the East Shore Village area of Seaham.

Sedgefield

There were 79 complaints submitted from 25 complainants, of whom 17 were members of the public, 2 District Councillors and 6 Town/Parish Councils. The main concerns expressed by members of the public and the Town Councils related to the reduction in the number of services servicing Newton Aycliffe, Ferryhill and Spennymoor which linked directly to major cities in the region, namely Darlington, Durham and Newcastle.

Representations were also made regarding the availability of public transport to enable access to both local and regional health facilities for treatment as well as the need now to have to change buses to access the regions cities.

Representations were also made alleging that the cost of tickets was too high compared with elsewhere in the country.

Complaints were also received regarding the frequency and timing of the services linked once again to accessing services. A number of complaints were also received regarding the reliability of the Arriva services.

On a separate issue, a number of concerns were raised in the Sedgfield area regarding the integration of bus and train services, timetabling and routes thereof. Of particular concern was the fact that there appeared to be little co-ordination between these services on an evening and at weekends.

Teesdale

There were 3 complaints submitted from 1 member of the public and 1 Parish Council.

There appeared to be a specific issue regarding the need for either a vehicle or driver change over on the Arriva service No. 8 on a Saturday night. Lynesack and Softley Parish Council raised concerns regarding the lack of services at night in local settlements as well as Sundays particularly in respect of the ability to connect with services at Bishop Auckland and Darlington.

Wear Valley

There were 12 complaints received from 6 members of the public.

These were individual complaints centred on specific route issues although a general theme running through them was the availability of easy access buses and the cost of public transport travel. Concerns had also been made that journeys now required multiple journeys as direct routes had been removed. This increases the cost to patrons as well as the length of time for journeys which could have severe adverse effects if and when these journeys related to accessing health services.

Additional Issues

- 9.35 A number of additional issues were raised as part of the consultation exercise. 1 person who lived outside of the county but travelled into the county to work, raised concerns regarding the availability of cheap rail tickets. The complainant frequently worked shift work which spread over 2 days. This severely restricted the ability to purchase cheap or discounted rail tickets. Whilst acknowledging that this strictly did not fall within the remit of the review, the complainant requested that this issue be considered.
- 9.36 Ferryhill Town Council had expressed an interest in taking over the Ferryhill circular routes provided that the associated levels of subsidy accompanied those routes. The Town Council expressed a desire to work closely with Durham County Council in partnership to facilitate improved public transport provision in this area.
- 9.37 There were 2 other specific issues of concern raised. The first related to the need for a park and ride facility on the A.177 at Shincliffe. The second related to the excessive level of hospital parking charges which, when coupled with the costs/availability of transport links to hospitals, represented major concern for some of the more vulnerable members of the community when accessing hospital services.

9.38 A full analysis of the public representations received is detailed in the table attached to this report at Appendix 5.

Consultation Feedback from Countywide Article

9.39 A specific element of the consultation for the County Durham Joint Overview and Scrutiny Member Network project about transport was an article and survey published in Issue 29: (December 2007/January 2008) of Countywide magazine (the County Council's free newspaper). The article sought the views and experiences of local people travelling in and around the County. To encourage responses a Go North East BuzzFare pass worth £70 was offered as a prize for those respondents who wished to be entered into a prize draw.

9.40 The survey asked four questions about public transport and community/patient transport schemes:

1. Do you use public transport in County Durham? If the answer is yes, please tell us when you use it. For example, to go to work or to go out in the evening. If you don't use public transport, please tell us why?
2. What do you think about local transport services in County Durham? For example, do they go at times and to places you want?
3. What do you think could be done to improve local transport?
4. What do you think of community transport or patient transport schemes? Do they go at times and to places you want? Do you have any suggestions for how we can improve these services?

9.41 An analysis of responses showed:

(NB: the figures represent the number of responses to each question.)

A) Of the 258 surveys returned by members of the public:

Used transport	225
Used transport	35

B) Reasons for using public transport (most prevalent):

Shopping	109
Leisure	79
Work	52

C) Destination (most prevalent)

Durham	29
Newcastle	21

D) When public transport was used:

Daytime	74
Evening	32

E) Reasons for not using public transport (most prevalent) were:

Too expensive/Cost	10
Times/frequency	10
No bus route	9
Not accessible	7

F) Of the complaints about public transport the most prevalent were:

Bus Routes (destinations)	63
Frequency/Timing of Bus service	35
Not Punctual/Reliable	25
No Bus Routes at night/weekends/bank hols	19
Too expensive/Cost of Tickets	15

G) Positive comments about public transport:

Public Transport is Very Good/Quite Good/Good/Adequate	70
Buses go to desired destinations	12

H) Suggested improvements to public transport (most prevalent):

Bus Routes (destinations, stops)	66
Frequency/Timing of Bus service	43
Bus Routes at night/weekends/bank hols	25
Cost of Travel/Tickets	23
Punctuality/Reliability	21
More Information	17
Condition/Age/Size of buses	17

I) Comments regarding community/patient transport (most prevalent):

Do not know about it/Do not use/Not applicable	107
No comment	54
Very good/good	23

J) Improvements to community/transport (most prevalent):

No comment	75
Not applicable	40
More information/publicity	11

Section Ten – Alternative Concepts for Integrated Transport

A Concept for Transport Provision

- 10.1 The Network considered evidence from Du-IT (Durham Integrated Transport) about its concept for a model for delivery of integrated transport as part of the scrutiny project. Du-IT is a consortium which consists of a Project Board that steers and manages its work and protects the vision. At an operational level there is a Project Team that will design and develop the delivery model. Cameron Gordon and Steve Day presented details of the model to members.
- 10.2 The Du-IT concept was said to be a radical new approach to the problems of delivering a quality integrated public transport system, primarily in rural areas, which meets the needs of local people. It was stated to be unique in that it brings a robust financial model as evidence for introducing fundamental systematic changes with:
- Increased delivery and co-ordination at a local level via a single point of contact, currently referred to as a Community Hub
 - Parallel development of a concept known as CT+ made up of traditional Community Transport with other Community-based transport providers and a flexibly routed demand responsive service.
- 10.3 The Du-IT concept adopts a holistic approach to meeting travel needs by embracing a broad partnership of transport providers to include conventional public transport operators and the local authority, as well as the enterprise, education, social services and health sectors. This removal of artificial barriers between conventional transport providers and other sectors will enable a more intelligent and cost effective use of resources to address the increasingly complex transport needs of rural communities in the twenty first century. However each individual provider redesigns their service, it will have minimal impact on the major problem of choice and access.
- 10.4 Du-IT is:
- A Design for Total Integration of Public Transport Services at a local level
 - Based on Existing Strategies - Community, District, County, Regional and National
 - A Design based on Community Needs and Individual Wants.
- 10.5 The Network heard that Du-IT is unique in that it addresses the concerns of all stakeholders equally by:
- Making better use of Council Bus subsidy
 - Joining parts of all transport budgets
 - Giving an Expanded Public Transport Market
 - Providing more Choice and Easier Access for Public

- Slowing/Stopping the increase in car use
- 10.6 The proposals outlined to the Network for implementation of the Du-IT model would initially require:
- Development of a robust financial model, which incorporates cross-sector benefit analysis
 - Establishment of a Joint Commissioning Board
 - Development of Community Transport Infrastructure
 - Establishing Baseline information and Monitoring and Evaluation procedures
 - Development of Cross Operator, Cash free Ticketing.
- 10.7 Implementation would require:
- An Enhanced definition of Community Transport (CT+)
 - Design of Flexibly-Routed, Demand Responsive, scheduled bus services
 - Co-ordinated Delivery via Community Hubs
 - Local “Transport Action Groups”
 - A Professional Marketing Campaign.
- 10.8 Charts showing the current provision and proposed Du-IT model are included in Appendices 3 and 4 of the report. A wide range of transport mechanisms could be co-ordinated under the model including scheduled bus services, flexibly routed bus services, voluntary car schemes, car share, taxis and taxi-share, car-hire, cycle hire, scheduled train services and walk buddies. Telephone calls from enquirers would be recognised in terms of locality and routed to an appropriate regional call centre/community hubs. An example was provided of a caller in Weardale who needed to travel to West Park hospital in Darlington and the options for transport that could be provided in relation to that journey.
- 10.9 Integrated Transport could be embedded within the Strategic Partnership Framework and the model would also be developed to work with Partners in Northumberland and Tees Valley; and the North Pennines
- 10.10 The integrated transport budget for the Du-IT model would be drawn from the funding streams highlighted below:
- Education
 - Social Care
 - Patient Transport
 - Paying Passengers
 - Concessionary Fares
 - Rural Bus Subsidy.
- 10.11 Similar systems to the Du-IT model have been introduced in Finland, Italy and Belgium and have produced:
- Service improvements
 - Overall cost savings
 - Increase in use of public transport.

10.12 Whilst the technical aspects were well understood in the field of integrated transport members were advised that institutional and political barriers had so far proven very difficult to overcome. The difficulties of finding partners willing to take up the Du-IT model had to be seen against: the background of:

- Existing budgets under pressure
- Other policies increasing the pressure on transport budgets
 - Extended schools
 - Choice in hospital, schools, day care etc.
- An ageing population, with free bus passes
 - But where are the buses?
- Climate change

all of which could potentially benefit from implementation of the Du-IT model.

Section Eleven – Conclusions and Recommendations

Countywide Issues

- 11.1 County Durham is a rural County, with lower than average levels of car ownership. This means that lack of access to transport can lead to social exclusion, particularly for some groups in the County such as young people, older people and people with disabilities. Demographic changes in the coming years are likely to result in growing numbers of older people in the County. Even where there are fare schemes by the commercial bus operators, these tend to favour regular users, not those who may only need to make one or two journeys per week such as people living in rural areas who may need to sign on at the Job Centre fortnightly and incur high travel costs in doing so
- 11.2 The member Network believes that it will never be possible to provide the same levels of bus service in rural areas to those in urban areas. However there are opportunities to be more innovative in how services are provided. The Bus Strategy (currently out for consultation), which forms part of the Local Transport Plan, contains proposals to seek to address some of these issues.
Implementation of the Bus Strategy proposals is key to addressing a number of issues (particular those linked to rural areas and access) raised during the course of the scrutiny investigation.

Approach to the Investigation

- 11.3 In undertaking the scrutiny investigation members considered:
- The current levels of transport provision in County Durham
 - The existing legislative framework
 - The role of local authorities in relation to the Local Transport Plan, concessionary fares and secured bus services
 - Proposed legislative changes (“Putting Passengers First” and the Local Transport Bill)
 - Key transport providers – health, community transport, and the commercial sector
 - The views of users, including older people, young people, people with disabilities, the general public and Parish Councils
 - Alternative Concepts for provision of Integrated Transport in County Durham

Use of Buses

- 11.4 Conflicting evidence was put to the Network during the course of the investigation about patronage of buses. County Council data appeared to indicate falling numbers of passengers using buses, whereas one of the commercial operators indicated that patronage was rising. Data about punctuality and reliability appeared to indicate that operators were performing well, yet public feedback expressed concerns about these areas. Clearly there is a need for

more to be done (possibly by the operators themselves) to better promote and publicise their performance in these areas.

Concessionary Fares

- 11.5 The Network was hopeful that the new concessionary fares arrangements would generate greater use of buses. County Durham is particularly lucky to have a concessionary fares scheme that does not have restrictions in relation to peak time use. There were however, some issues about consistency across District Councils in relation to criteria and requirements of proof in relation to issues of passes for those with hearing impairments and members feel these should be investigated.
- 11.6 Issues were raised about the use of concessionary passes on Community Transport. However, the member Network was advised that concessionary passes are issued to individuals for individual travel whereas community transport vehicles provide for group travel only.

Recommendation 1

That the District Councils jointly review their existing criteria for issuing bus passes to people with audio disabilities to ensure a consistent approach.

Funding Issues

- 11.7 A number of issues were considered by the Network in relation to finance. It was clear that, in relation to the Local Transport Plan, a number of significant and beneficial schemes have been funded or proposed. There was belief amongst Network members that revenue may not always be aligned to capital (i.e. revenue implications of capital expenditure) and that more consideration needed to be given to future revenue issues when drawing up and selecting schemes.
- 11.8 The pooling of transport related funding into Local Area Agreements (LAA) was also drawn to the attention of the Network and there were concerns on the part of officers that this could potentially lead to funding being diverted into other LAA areas.
- 11.9 The Bus Strategy has the potential to address many issues raised during the project, such a rural (and urban) on demand bus service provision and more personalised travel. However, there is currently no budgetary provision for elements of the Strategy (£500,000 and £300,000 upfront costs and £300,000 ongoing revenue costs). Members of the Network are strongly supportive of the proposed Bus Strategy would urge the County Council to consider making funding available to implement the Strategy as soon as possible. An Action Plan should also be prepared in relation to implementation of the Strategy when finally agreed by the County Council.
- 11.10 Growing fuel costs are likely to continue to lead to pressure on secured (subsidised) services and the Network heard that there were concerns that

operators would not receive full reimbursement of recent rises in the cost of fuel via the Bus Service Operators Grant, particularly in view of the increasing pressure on secured bus services which may result. There was a view that, in sharing this report with the County Members of Parliament, this issue should be particularly highlighted.

- 11.11 In relation to the payment of circa. £3.85m annually in relation to secured bus services, members believe that a review of the recommendations from a previous County Council scrutiny investigation into subsidised bus services be considered to establish progress made and to consider whether the criteria for securing services were both transparent and still relevant. The point was also made that there appeared to be a lack of public awareness of the role of the Council in securing services and of the considerable expenditure involved.

Recommendation 2

To improve bus user satisfaction, the commercial bus operators be asked to consider how they can better publicise timetabling information and performance reporting.

Recommendation 3

Where Capital Expenditure is proposed via the Local Transport Plan then appropriate levels of Revenue funding must be provided to sustain such Capital investment.

Recommendation 4

The County Durham Transport Partnership Forum established via the Local Area Agreement be advised of the concerns raised during this project about the potential pooling of transport related funding into other LAA activities.

Recommendation 5

The proposed Bus Strategy be supported and the County Council be urged to consider making funding available to implement the Strategy within 2008/09. The Council should also be urged to consider whether consideration should be given to a significant increase in budget provision for the securing of bus services.

Recommendation 6

The County Durham Members of Parliament be asked to support full reimbursement of recent rises in the cost of fuel to bus operators via the Bus Service Operators Grant, particularly in view of the increasing pressure on secured bus services which may result.

Recommendation 7

A review of the previous Scrutiny Project findings regarding subsidised bus services ('Waiting for a Bus') be undertaken to establish progress made against the previous recommendations.

Recommendation 8

The criteria for determining allocation of subsidy to bus routes by the County Council be clarified and that there be greater transparency in terms of how the criteria are applied for the benefit of both Councillors and the Public.

Recommendation 9

The existing advisory mechanisms regarding subsidised bus services changes be revised to include both County, District and Parish/Town Councillors.

Recommendation 10

An Action Plan and suite of indicators be developed aligned to the implementation of the Bus Strategy.

Proposed Legislative Changes

11.12 The Local Transport Bill will further enhance opportunities for local authorities to work more closely with commercial operators to increase patronage of buses. The Network is supportive of this approach and its comments were included within the County Council's response to the Department for Transport in relation to the Bill proposals (see Appendix 2).

Health Issues

11.13 The Network was advised about a District-wide scheme for outpatients and for visitor transport which is to be piloted in Easington District with commissioning undertaken by the County Council on behalf of the PCT. The Network heard that, if successful, the pilot may provide a model for other areas of the County and they were supportive of this.

11.14 The County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust advised that it had established a Travel and Transport Team to look at issues such as patient access. The Network was aware that major health service re-configurations (such as that in the Tees Valley) can involve significant investigation into the impacts upon transport and patient/visitor access. However, commercial operators also made the point that smaller changes sometimes occur (Shotley Bridge was cited) without operators having any knowledge the change.

- 11.15 The commercial operators themselves are not blameless and removal of commercial services can also adversely impact on patient and visitor access with little or no notice to the Trusts. The Network believes in establishing any forums such as travel and transport teams, to consider travel and transport issues, the Health Trusts should consider whether membership should include representatives from the County Council's Integrated Transport Unit (ITU), Commercial Operators and User Groups. The Health Trusts should also consider how they can better consult, advise and inform the ITU and commercial operators when health service provision is re-configured. The Network believes commercial operators should also consider how they can better inform Health Trusts when service changes which may significantly impact on health service provision are proposed or implemented
- 11.16 Ambulance response times are being closely monitored in East Durham, following the decision to move more urgent accident and emergency cases from Hartlepool General to North Tees hospital. Two extra ambulance crews are being employed in Hartlepool because of the extra journey times. Network members felt that County and District Councils would benefit from being provided by the Primary Care Trust with regular performance information regarding ambulance times and patient transportation. At County level this could possibly be presented via Member Area Panels or in a future Unitary Council via the Area Action Partnerships (or equivalent).

Recommendation 11

If successful in Easington, the pilot scheme for outpatients and visitor transport should be extended county-wide.

Recommendation 12

In establishing any forums to consider travel and transport issues, the Health Trusts should consider whether membership should also include representatives from the County Council's Integrated Transport Unit, Commercial Operators and User Groups. The Health Trusts should also consider how they can better consult, advise and inform the ITU and commercial operators when health service provision is re-configured.

Recommendation 13

The Primary Care Trust be requested to provide the County and District Councils with regular performance information regarding ambulance times and patient transportation.

Recommendation 14

In addition to our recommendation about involvement of the ITU, commercial operators, and user groups in any Health Trust travel or transport forums, the attention of commercial operators should also be drawn to the need to ensure that health trusts are likewise informed of any significant changes in commercial service provision.

Community Transport Issues

11.17 The Network heard that Community Transport Operators are finding it difficult to generate sufficient income to sustain their core business; that funding packages for community transport are generally time limited and operators are continually chasing funding. The County Durham Community Transport Operators wished to obtain work from Durham County Council and tender for County Council contracts to assist their core business remain sustainable. Some Social Services and other related work has now been offered to Community Transport Operators subject to vehicle checks, evidence of a maintenance regime and CRB checks for drivers. Members believe there is a need for closer working between Community Transport operators, Health Trusts and the commercial sector. Recent comments from the Department for Transport also appear to indicate that the Local Transport Bill proposals may see a relaxation of the Section 19 regime under which community transport operators provide services, offering scope to operate in a different way.

Recommendation 15

This project has highlighted the valuable work undertaken by Community Transport schemes in ensuring that the public have access to services where commercial transportation provision is unviable. Proposed changes to Section 19 of the Transport Act in the current Local Transport Bill may encourage greater opportunities for Commercial Transport Operators in future and the Working Group believes this proposal should be supported. Likewise, the County Council should further consider whether opportunities for undertaking more Social Services type work can be extended to the Community Transport Sector in future to improve the sustainability of their operations.

Commercial Transport Issues

11.18 The County Council is the single biggest customer for most commercial operators. Given that the mix of work is critical, it was suggested to the Network that a forum should be established for regular meetings between operators and officers. There are opportunities currently for consultation and engagement via the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum which currently meets on a quarterly basis. Whilst Arriva and Go-Ahead Northern are currently members of the Forum, the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), which represents

the rest of the bus sector and coaching side of the industry, is not. In considering any changes to membership of the Forum, the role of the CPT should not be overlooked. Whilst the scope of the Network investigation did not extend to education transport, it notes the CPT proposal to re-establish an Education Transport Focus Group of Operators and County Council officers. It is understood that this request has already been submitted to the Integrated Transport Manager at Durham County Council.

- 11.19 It was made clear in evidence from the operators that they are commercial businesses and need to make a profit from their operations. In relation to health issues, the Network was advised that commercial bus networks are often not the best place to look for patient/visitor needs. There are often small numbers of people travelling from any locations across the day to a range of health locations. The pilot proposed in Easington District will hopefully determine how commercial services can play an enhanced role within an integrated model of provision and, if successful, may be rolled out across the County. The operators also made the point that they are sometimes not aware of health service provision changes which impact on their operations. We comment on this in 11.14 and 11.15 above.

Recommendation 16

The County Durham Transport Partnership Forum provides an opportunity for all providers and interest groups to meet on a quarterly basis, with an open invitation to all those with an interest, particularly in public transport, to attend (it is understood that commercial operators already participate in the Forum). The Forum is also the appropriate thematic Local Area Agreement Group in relation to transport. The Transport Partnership Forum considers not just strategic issues, but local issues where appropriate. The Forum should be asked to seek to refresh its membership, particularly as regards the CPT and those interest groups noted later in the recommendations (i.e. older and younger people's groups, disabled groups, patients and carers.)

Recommendation 17

In view of the concerns raised above, all transport providers should be encouraged to consider how the information available to the public about access to health service provision can be better publicised. We would expect the Integrated Transport Unit to lead on this issue.

Older People's Issues

- 11.20 Free transport is greatly appreciated by older people and the new concessionary fares scheme will provide opportunities not just for travel within County Durham, but for cross border travel from 1st April 2008. There is also access to Dial a Ride services for those with mobility problems, but limited rural services can lead to social exclusion. There are also issues about access to information and many older people do not have internet access, so information about services, timetables etc. needs to be printed as leaflets as well. Members of the Network

felt that there may be missed opportunities for groups such as Age Concern to shape how transport is provided in the County, by not currently participating in the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum. The proposals in the Bus Strategy for demand responsive services may go some way towards addressing the rurality issues raised by Age Concern in evidence to the Network.

Recommendation 18

Where bus user consultative groups exist or are established in accordance with previous recommendations, it is essential that Older Peoples' Groups are represented thereon. The existence of the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum should be drawn to the attention of Age Concern.

Recommendation 19

The attention of the ITU and commercial operators should be drawn to the need for printed, easily accessible documentation about services for older people to be provided.

Young People's Issues

- 11.21 Members of the Network were impressed with the engagement with young people and wide variety of suggestions they submitted for consideration. What was surprising was that clearly, some young people are not aware of different types of discount cards available for reduced rate travel (such as the Arriva Teen travel card or the IIC cards). There may be publicity issues which the commercial operators need to address in relation to this issue.
- 11.22. Young people told us that the ability for them to access leisure and recreation (particularly when travelling from rural areas) is difficult. Just as with the rurality issues raised by older people, the Network believes that the proposals under the Bus Strategy for the provision of a number of demand responsive smaller buses, may go some way towards addressing these concerns. The Network believes that all young people in full-time education should have the opportunity to travel at half fare. The Beeline scheme (in Derbyshire) which allows young people to travel half fare until they are 19 was highlighted as good practice and the Network believe that this might serve as model for delivery in County Durham and should be investigated further (including how the scheme is financed). The Network was concerned at some of the points raised by young people about not being able to participate in after schools activities due to difficulties in getting transport back home afterwards. The Network believes that funding will be key to this and this issue will need to be taken up with the County Council's Children and Young People's Service.

- 11.23 Young people raised a number of issues about safety on buses, cleanliness and driver attitudes. The Network was advised by Go North East that it did have consultative mechanisms with young people and disabled groups (although it was not clear whether any of these were from County Durham). The evidence from Arriva on consultation with specific users groups was silent. The Network believes that more should be done to encourage input from specific user groups to help shape commercial and other services. As mentioned above, the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum could provide a means of ensuring that young people's views are taken into account in shaping service provision and delivery.
- 11.24 Young people asked the Network to consider what can be done to bring facilities to them where there are difficulties in travelling in rural areas. Some areas do have travelling buses with facilities for young people and Community Education may be able to explore the possibility of current provision and whether opportunities exist to further develop provision of this type. In the future Unitary Authority, the funding proposed for local members and Area Action Partnerships may assist in raising finance to develop this type of facility. One other area members considered was whether mobile libraries may be able to be utilised to address the young people's request.
- 11.25 It was suggested by young people that specific buses should be provided for young people to attend larger organised events outside their area, such as music festivals, theme parks etc. The Network believes that there may well be opportunities for commercial operators in this area and they should be asked to consider the opportunities this type of travel might offer to their businesses.

Recommendation 20

The attention of Commercial Operators should be drawn to the lack of information for young people about discounted fares schemes and they should be encouraged to consider how information about discounted fares for young people can be more effectively targeted on potential users.

Recommendation 21

The Integrated Transport Unit should investigate the Beeline scheme and assess the potential viability of such a scheme in County Durham.

Recommendation 22

The Integrated Transport Unit should consider with the Children's and Young People's Service whether funding opportunities can be identified for providing bus travel, either via subsidy or travel vouchers, for young people who participate in after-school activities.

Recommendation 23

Where bus user consultative groups are established in accordance with previous recommendations, it is essential that Young Persons' Groups are represented. The attention of young people's groups (Investing in Children and the Teesdale Youth Forum) should also be drawn to the existence of the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum.

Recommendation 24

The proposals for on-demand responsive bus services as proposed in the Bus Strategy should help to address some young people's issues. There will be a need when services are introduced to ensure that publicity is targeted at young people, as well as other potential users.

Recommendation 25

The attention of coach operators should be drawn by the Integrated Transport Unit to opportunities which might exist for specific 'event related' transport provision for young people in the light of comments received during this investigation.

Recommendation 26

In relation to fares schemes for young people, the preference of members would be for schemes which offered half-fare for young people in full-time education.

Disability Issues

- 11.26 The Network heard that people with disabilities often find it hard to get to and from bus stops and to stand at bus stops for long periods of time. Those with visual or audio impairments can also encounter problems accessing information, either via the internet or by telephone or Minicom. The Network believes that there is a need for providers (including the County Council) to review how information is provided to ensure that people with disabilities are not prevented from accessing services.
- 11.27 There was uncertainty on the part of some members of the County Durham Disability Partnership about whether the Direct Payments Scheme could be used to pay for volunteer car schemes or services? Subsequent enquiries with Adult and Community Services revealed that direct payments can be used to fund mileage (buses, taxis etc.) for social activities, attending college or health appointments, where this has been assessed as a need by the relevant social worker. The County Durham Disability Partnership should be advised of the response from Adult and Community Services.

11.28 Other issues raised by those with disabilities included safety issues – the need for more reassurance for vulnerable people to use buses, lack of space on easy access buses for more than 2 wheelchairs or buggies at one time and the need for induction loop systems on buses. It was also said that there was a lack of driver training on dealing with audio impaired people. Particular concerns were expressed about low floor mechanisms which drivers were saying were not operating. Given the need to meet Disability Discrimination Act requirements in coming years, this is a concern to which operators need to pay particular attention in relation to their responsibilities. Just as with other groups (older people and young people), the Network believes that the Disability Partnership should seek to participate in the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum to ensure that the views of people with disabilities can be addressed in terms of service shaping and delivery. The Network would also remind commercial operators of the existence of the Disability Partnership as a potential consultee.

Recommendation 27

The attention of commercial operators should be drawn to the comments from the disability group and they should be asked to review their existing methods of providing information to those customers with visual or audio impairments.

Recommendation 28

Adult and Community Services have confirmed that direct payments can be used to fund mileage (buses, taxis etc.) for social activities, attending college or health appointments, where this has been assessed as a need by the relevant social worker. The County Durham Disability Partnership should be advised of the response from Adult and Community Services.

Recommendation 29

Commercial Operators should be reminded of their social responsibilities in ensuring that all vehicles with low floor mechanisms are fully operational (and subject to a daily test) and they should be asked to ensure that driver training reinforces this point. This also applies to issues such as ensuring that buses do not move off until passengers are seated and manoeuvring of buses. Commercial Operators should be advised of the existence of the County Durham Disability Partnership and be asked to engage with the partnership in order to raise awareness of disability issues.

Recommendation 30

Where bus user consultative groups are established in accordance with previous recommendations, it is essential that Disabled People's Groups are represented thereon.

Recommendation 31

The Network was advised that Go North East provide opportunities to input disabled people's and young people's views when determining service provision and driver training. Arriva should be asked to consider implementing similar arrangements if it does not already do so.

Public/Parish Council Issues

11.29 The majority of issues raised in feedback from the general public and Parish Councils have been addressed in the preceding Sections. The Network would urge all operators to consider how these comments may be used to improve services. There appear to be some particular issues around reliability and punctuality where more could be done by operators to publicise their performance.

Alternative Concepts for Integrated Transport

11.30 The Network was impressed with the concept for an Integrated Transport model suggested by Du-IT, but noted the difficulties in finding partners willing to take up the Du-IT model. The concept may have potential, but is yet to be tested. The Network also noted that a similar model is already being developed by the Integrated Transport Unit.

Recommendation 32

The Working Group note the potential of the Du-IT model and the similarity of the model already being developed by the County Council's Integrated Transport Unit.

Additional Issues

11.31 The Working Group noted the potential extension of the NEXUS scheme/service into the Chester-le-Street and Durham City Areas. The potential extension of Nexus into Chester-le-Street and Durham City areas will present both opportunities and challenges. Nexus is the Transport Authority for Tyne and Wear.

11.32 The success of this scrutiny project is very much dependent on the publicity mechanisms used to highlight the work undertaken, as well as the report and recommendations that have been produced. The Network would expect the newly Elected Councillors to the Transitional/Unitary Council to consider this report at the earliest opportunity. Likewise, to demonstrate that the report and recommendations was a joint review, it is important that all District Councils consider the report within their own individual Scrutiny processes and thereafter submit it to their Executive/Policy Committees where applicable.

11.33 Reference was made at the conclusion of the project about the County Council's Member Area Panels and it was suggested that these would be useful mechanisms to continue discussion at a local level on the issue of transport, including, as a first measure consideration of this report.

Recommendation 33

The potential extension of Nexus into Chester-le-Street and Durham City areas be noted and the opportunities and challenges be taken forward by the Integrated Transport Unit.

Recommendation 34

The report and recommendations be submitted to an early meeting of the appropriate County Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the May 2008 elections.

Recommendation 35

A co-ordinated approach to the consideration of the Working Group's report and recommendations be adopted by the County and District Councils early in the 2008/9 Municipal Year.

Recommendation 36

An Authority wide co-ordinated review of the Report and Recommendations should be carried out within six months of their consideration by the relevant Council Executives.

Recommendation 37

The report when agreed/finalised be submitted to Member Area Panels for information and that the question of District Council representation on the Member Area Panels be considered by the County Council.

Recommendation 38

The completed report should be shared with County Durham Members of Parliament and they should be asked to support the recommendations and raise relevant issues with the Secretary of State for Transport. Furthermore, a copy of the report should be sent direct to the Secretary of State.

COUNTY DURHAM Overview and Scrutiny MEMBER NETWORK

PUBLIC TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PROJECT PLAN

PROJECT FOCUS (TERMS OF REFERENCE) – “Fair’s Fare” (Local Solutions to Local Transport challenges)

- The importance and impact of local transport providers (commercial, public and community) on local communities in County Durham (Urban and Rural)
- To develop Member views on the Consultative Document “Putting Passengers First” - the Road Transport Bill (2007)

REMIT

- What are the national and local policy drivers in relation to the transport challenge?
- What is the nature of strategic planning and the approach taken for a more seamless/coordinated approach to meeting local transport needs?
- What are the transport challenges for the public sector, i.e. NHS, Local Authority? Can accessibility planning help? What are the issues associated with access to services from a transport perspective?
- Do we have an equitable level of transport provision across the County?
- What is the extent of current bus service provision across the County and what/where are the main demands for services?
- What do local people think about current bus service provision?
- What do bus operators see as the key issues?
- What is the nature of Community Transport in the County? What are the challenges they face?
- What best practice is there in relation to providing quality local bus services, which are affordable and accessible?
- What are our findings (and recommendations, if any)?

METHODOLOGY

- Each meeting of the network shall rotate in venue around the eight Durham Councils, in alphabetical order.
- Each meeting should have a designated lead member and lead officer, from different authorities. The role of the designated member and officer will be to respond to the action determined from the respective meeting, reporting back/organising the next meeting. This is to ensure that responsibility for delivery of the review is delivered in partnership.
- Each meeting shall have a Chair, determined by the authority hosting that meeting.

OUTCOME(S)

The provision of quality transport services in all areas of County Durham, which are affordable and accessible to people in our local communities.

REPORTING BACK

- When the review is completed it is essential that each authority report on the work of the County Durham Scrutiny Member Network to its own Cabinet (or equivalent) and Council.
- Opportunities to report to partnership structures i.e. LAA Board, LSP's and the relevant Transport Partnership will be explored.
- Consideration will also be given to holding a seminar/event to launch the final report of the Network, disseminating the findings of the review, to all those involved and beyond.

WHEN Times/Dates/ Locations	DESIGNATED LEAD Member/Officer	WHO Key Witness	WHAT Evidence/Information	HOW Meeting/Visit/ Correspondence/ Briefing Paper/ Research	OUTCOMES	WHY Focus on Remit
6 July 2007 Chester-le-Street District Council	Chair: Cllr Geoff Armstrong Feisal Jassat Stephen Gwilym Anne Lambert	Richard Startup (Integrated Transport Manager, Durham CC)	Recommendations about focus/outcomes/process "Putting Passengers First" Road Transport Bill LTP2 Other policy drivers	Scoping Meeting Briefing Paper(s)	Terms of Reference agreed Scoping Exercise to be planned with agreed focus	Agree areas of focus, outcomes and project plan What are the national and local policy drivers in relation to public transport?
5 th September 2007 (to be confirmed) Derwentside District Council	Chair: Councillor Linda Marshall Officers M Hole and F. Jassat	Richard Startup (Integrated Transport Manager, Durham CC)	Formulation of response to the Draft Transport Bill	Briefing Paper(s)	Agree Terms of Reference and focus from Scoping Group Formulation of views of the CD OS network Designate lead officers and members for each meeting Co-ordinate the gathering of data for the next meeting (led by designated member and officer) Share the remit of the project with LSP's and LAA Board's	To feed back the views of the CD OS network into the Government's consultation on the Transport Bill
2 November 2007 Durham County Council	Councillor Joe Armstrong <u>Officers</u> Feisal Jassat Tom Bolton	Richard Startup (Integrated Transport Manager, Durham CC)	County Durham Bus Strategy DCC/partner Response to Transport Bill Performance management data to include information on : Levels (and quality) of service provision	Briefing Paper(s)	Ensure the group has appreciation of the issue being considered (in the remit). Interpret the data presented to the Group	What is the extent of current bus service provision across the County and what/where are the main demands for services? Consider submitted views to

			<p>(day/night)</p> <p>Transport modelling data (including car ownership and area case studies)</p> <p>Demand for services</p> <p>Urban/Rural issues</p> <p>Subsidies (impact)</p> <p>Concessionary fares (impact)</p> <p>Performance data (including comparative data)</p>		<p>to formulate a findings paper for subsequent meetings.</p> <p>Co-ordinate the collection of data and evidence for the next meeting (led by designated member and officer)</p>	Transport Bill
<p>December 7 2007</p> <p>Easington District Council</p>	<p>Member Councillor Alan Burnip</p> <p>Officers Tom Bolton Stephen Gwilym</p>	<p>Harris Harvey LTP Manager</p>	<p>LTP2 (overview/outcomes-Area Programmes/challenges/success/consultation process)</p> <p>User satisfaction issues</p> <p>Consultation/engagement feedback from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town/ Parish Councils (via County Durham Association database (Steve Ragg) • Young People (IIC – Liam Cairns) • Disability Partnership • Vulnerable Adults <p><i>Other customer data – complaints from users and complaints from members</i></p> <p>County/District Council Citizen Panel feedback</p> <p>Feedback from Countywide, District Council free newspapers and media campaign</p>	<p>Briefing Paper(s) – Consultation feedback</p>	<p>Ensure the group has appreciation of the issue being considered (in the remit).</p> <p>Interpret the data and evidence presented to the Group to formulate a findings paper for subsequent meetings.</p> <p>Co-ordinate the collection of data and evidence for the next meeting (led by designated member and officer)</p>	<p>What do local people (including specific user groups) think about current bus service provision?</p>

18 January 2008 Sedgefield Borough Council	Member Cllr A Gray Officers Tom Bolton Jonathan Slee	County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust Primary Care Trust (Contact – Berenice Malloy) North East Ambulance Service – Mark Cotton PPI Forums North of Tyne Patient Voice Tom McCully County Durham PCT Forum	Challenges and issues faced in using transport to access health services.	Oral Evidence	Ensure the group has appreciation of the issue being considered (in the remit). Interpret the data and evidence presented to the Group to formulate a findings paper for subsequent meetings. Co-ordinate the collection of data and evidence for the next meeting (led by designated member and officer)	What are the transport challenges for the public sector? What are the issues associated with access to services from a transport perspective? Can accessibility planning help?
8 February 2008 (note - 10.30 a.m. start) Wear Valley District Council	Member Cllr June Lee Officers Tom Bolton Reece Bowman	Community Transport Providers (Liam Weatherill – County Durham Community Transport Operators Forum) Confederation of Passenger Transport – D Holding Steve Day – DU-it	The Community transport perspective. The role of the 3 rd sector. CPT role and views Models of delivery	Note of the Community Transport Event on 3 rd July 2007 Briefing Paper Oral Evidence	Ensure the group has appreciation of the issue being considered (in the remit). Interpret the data and evidence presented to the Group to formulate a findings paper for subsequent meetings. Co-ordinate the collection of data and evidence for the next meeting (led by designated member and officer)	What is the nature of Community Transport in the County? What are the challenges they face? Commercial Operator response
22 February 2008 Teesdale District Council	Member Cllr Newton Wood Officers Tom Bolton Anne Lambert	Bus Operators Martin Harris, Commercial Director - GoNorthEast Tony Batty, Area Manager – Arriva Confederation of Passenger	Individual Operator views Bus Subsidy Arrangements	Briefing Paper Oral Evidence	Ensure the group has appreciation of the issue being considered (in the remit). Interpret the data and evidence presented to the Group to formulate	What do bus operators see as the key issues? What is the nature of strategic planning and the approach taken for a more seamless coordinated approach to

		Transport – D Holding Richard Startup, Integrated Transport Manager, DCC.		Presentation/Oral Evidence	a findings paper for subsequent meetings. Co-ordinate the collection of data and evidence for the next meeting (led by designated member and officer)	meeting transport needs? Budget/Finance Issues from a commercial Operators perspective
29 February 2008 Durham County Council (Venue) (CLS to Chair)	Member Councillor Geoff Armstrong <u>Officers</u> Nigel Cummings Tom Bolton	Stephen Gwilym (District of Easington) Philip Thompson (PhD Student, Northumbria University) Age Concern, Durham County.	Consultation/Engagement Feedback	Briefing Papers	Updated Feedback from members of the public, young people and older people.	Lines of enquiry with bus operators and to inform recommendations in final report.
March 2008 Venue to be determined	Member To be determined Officer To be determined	Northumbria University	Best practice in other local authority areas (including community transport models)	Briefing Paper	Ensure the group has appreciation of the issue being considered (in the remit).	What best practice is there in relation to providing quality local bus services, which are affordable and accessible?
4 April 2008 County Hall, Durham	Member Councillor Joe Armstrong Officer Tom Bolton		Draw conclusions and formulate possible recommendations	Briefing Paper	Be able to outline the principal findings of the review. Determine the arrangement for producing the draft report of the Group.	What are our findings (and recommendations, if any)?
15 April 2008 Durham City Council	Member Councillor Barbara Howarth Officer Tom Bolton Ann Whitton		Draft Report and Recommendations	Briefing Paper	Decide the arrangements for the production of the final report.	Agree findings (and recommendations, if any)

7th September 2007

Dear Sir/Madam,

Draft Local Transport Bill

Durham County Council welcomes the Draft Local Transport Bill and supports the government's objectives of improving public transport and tackling congestion. We are generally in favour of the provisions included within the draft Bill but would seek to have the following comments and concerns addressed in order that we can make the most effective use of the legislative changes and deliver the anticipated improvements in County Durham:

Clause 1: Traffic Commissioner

We welcome the proposed changes to Traffic Commissioner powers to ensure consistency of approach across the country. However, we consider that the traffic commissioners should be given the resources to enable them to fulfil the additional duties proposed by the Draft Bill.

Clauses 3 to 24: Voluntary Partnerships, Quality Partnerships and Quality Contracts

The County Council support the strengthening of local authority powers with regard to partnerships and welcome the proposed changes to allow timing, frequency and fares to be included in partnership arrangements. With regard to Quality Contracts, we consider that the proposed relaxation of the criteria does not go far enough to make them a realistic option for the majority of local authority areas. We therefore have some concerns that the remaining options from the "tool-kit" may not provide the necessary teeth to compel operators to work in partnership.

Clause 25: Appeals relating to traffic regulation conditions

We support the proposal for appeals to be heard by the Transport Tribunal. This brings it in line with the procedure for appeals against other functions of the traffic commissioner.

Clause 26: Taxi Bus Operation

We support the extension of taxi bus licensing to include private hire vehicles. However, we would wish to ensure that safety and driver standards are not compromised by this move and suggest that the Bill addresses this through revisions to the restricted PSV licensing regime.

Clauses 27 to 30: Community Transport

The County Council supports the control of permits by the traffic commissioner. We believe this will provide a more consistent set of standards, rather than each Transport Authority implementing their own standards. We would also recommend the inclusion in the Bill of a requirement for existing permit details to be passed to the traffic commissioners. This would ensure

that all records of vehicles engaged in the carriage of passengers are available to those enforcing the appropriate regulations.

We welcome the proposal to allow smaller vehicles to operate on Section 19 permits, but would support the views put forward by the CTA that the requirement to collect separate fares on these services is an unnecessary constraint.

We support the government's thinking that the CT sector can provide a greater role in delivering the local transport network. However, in order to provide assurances and safeguard passengers in this expanded role we would wish to see CT operations fully included in the VOSA vehicle safety and maintenance regime but in a way that does not act as a deterrent to existing and potential CT operators.

Clauses 31 and 32: Punctuality

The County Council supports the enhanced punctuality regime and welcomes the involvement of local authorities in addressing punctuality. We suggest that it should be a requirement for the local authority and operators to jointly agree and publish annual performance data, such that reliability and punctuality information are made available to the public (similar to the rail industry). We also consider that the traffic commissioners should be given the necessary additional resources to make these changes effective (see comments under clause 1).

It is important to recognise the work currently being done by DfT on the Economic Evaluation of Bus Priority measures. It can sometimes be difficult to make out an economic case for major schemes in which cars are significantly delayed because priority is being given to buses. We would request that the work on this evaluation enables bus priority schemes to be easier to implement.

Clauses 33 to 37: Subsidised bus services

We are pleased that the supporting evidence for the draft Bill recognises that longer contracts can provide better value for money and encourage investment by operators. We fully support the move to allow longer contracts for secured services.

Whilst clarification of the powers to subsidise services (clause 34) is welcome, we do not consider this to be a material change in terms of giving additional flexibility to local authorities.

Clauses 38 to 55: Local Transport Governance Arrangements

The County Council supports the proposal to review the transport responsibilities and functions in PTA areas and consider that this ties in with the transport agenda around city regions and 'sub national review' proposals. We welcome the inclusion of possible boundary changes to PTAs but suggest that the Bill should be amended to allow for the possibility of part of a local authority area joining a PTA, as we feel this better reflects the objectives of co-ordinating local travel to work patterns.

Clauses 56 to 63: Transport Planning Duties

The proposal to replace Local Transport Plans with Integrated Transport Strategies and Implementation Plans in PTE areas is not applicable in County Durham. However, we welcome the department's consultation on the future of LTPs in other areas and would have some concerns if these were to be obviated by the move towards Local Area Agreements.

Clauses 64 to 70: Involvement of Passenger Transport Authorities

The proposal for road charging schemes to be made jointly by a PTA and one or more eligible local traffic authorities is not applicable in County Durham but would seem a sensible and logical way of improving local transport delivery.

Clauses 67 and 71: Environmental effects of local charging schemes

The requirement for charging authorities to have regard to the likely environmental effects of the scheme is welcomed. This fits well with our current commitments to reduce the environmental impacts of traffic within County Durham. Unlike many local authorities we currently publish our annual predictions of vehicular emissions and would have extended this to include the effects of charging in any event.

Clauses 72 and 73: Confirmation and consultation

It is the local authority which is responsible for the introduction of what are ostensibly local transport solutions and is ultimately accountable to local residents, we therefore welcome the changes to the approval mechanism for charging schemes. Although limited national guidance will be necessary to ensure consistency and interoperability between schemes, a degree of flexibility should remain to enable transport services to be provided to meet local needs.

With regard to consultation and the ability to hold a public inquiry, then this again is best determined at a local level and the proposed change is welcomed. Any local authority with a genuine intention of meeting the needs of local residents would ensure that full and open consultation is undertaken.

Clause 74: Charges

We support the proposed change to permit local authorities to vary the charge according to the method or means of recording, administering, collecting or paying the charge. This will allow local authorities to give incentives for motorists to elect the method of payment which is both cost effective and consistent with local circumstances. Failure to allow such incentivisation could lead to unnecessary and ill proportioned administrative costs which could ultimately undermine smaller charging proposals.

Clause 78: Power to require information from charging authorities

It is recognised that potential exists for public confidence in congestion charging to be undermined by the issues surrounding the retention of personal data. However, it is considered that this issue should be addressed within the appropriate statutory guidance rather than within the Bill.

Clauses 79 and 80: Information

It would seem reasonable that existing data providers, such as the DVLA, are able to recover costs to allow the continuation of existing services in the face of expected increased demand.

Clause 82 and Schedule 5: Use of revenues

We fully support the principle that all the net proceeds of all local charging schemes should be used for local transport purposes. As the revenue from a local charging scheme represents an additional payment made by local users of the transport network it is essential that this should be retained and reinvestment in local facilities. If this were not to be the case then the acceptance of a local congestion charge would be fundamentally undermined.

Other General comments

Probably the most noticeable omission from the draft Bill is any changes to Bus Service Operators Grant. We acknowledge that the department has promised to keep this matter under review but consider that the omission of changes to BSOG in the draft Bill is a missed opportunity.

The current system of rewarding operators based on the amount of fuel they use does not link with any of the government's transport objectives of increasing patronage, tackling congestion or improving accessibility.

We strongly recommend that the Government undertakes an urgent review of BSOG and would suggest that alternatives could include a proportion of BSOG being controlled by local transport authorities. Local Authorities are best placed to determine the transport needs of communities and it is these requirements that should be setting the agenda for local service delivery, rather than the commercial decisions of operators.

The draft Bill proposes more powers for the County Council to work with operators in partnership arrangements, but they fall short of giving control over the public transport network. The equivalent of BSOG funding would be used as a disincentive to removing routes/reducing accessibility and could reward operators for working in partnership, providing a level and quality of local service in a planned and co-ordinated public transport network.

Whilst reviewing the Draft Bill, it was very clear that it is possible to improve the standard and therefore the patronage on reasonably well used bus services through 'pump priming' investment. We would welcome the return of 'Kickstart' type of grants to be made available to boost improvement in services.

It should be noted that the operation of public transport in rural areas will always require public subsidy and the provisions of the draft Bill will not significantly alter this situation. In addition, measures to improve the quality and travelling experience (such as real-time information) also put pressure on local authority revenue budgets. It is therefore important for government to

consider the need for increased revenue funding alongside the above measures.

In summary, we welcome the overall content of the draft Bill and trust that you find the above comments useful. We would be happy to expand on any of the issues and trust that we can look forward to legislation that will allow us to make a positive difference to bus services for the communities of County Durham.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Bob Pendlebury OBE
Cabinet Member for Transport, Environment & Tourism

Inc- Letter of support from the County of Durham Joint Scrutiny Members Network

STATEMENT FROM :
COUNTY OF DURHAM
JOINT SCRUTINY MEMBERS NETWORK

RESPONSE TO THE LOCAL TRANSPORT BILL

SEPTEMBER 2007

Overall members of the County of Durham joint scrutiny member's network welcome the direction of travel in the transport bill with its stated purpose of tackling congestion and improving public transport through empowering local authorities to develop local solutions to transport challenges.

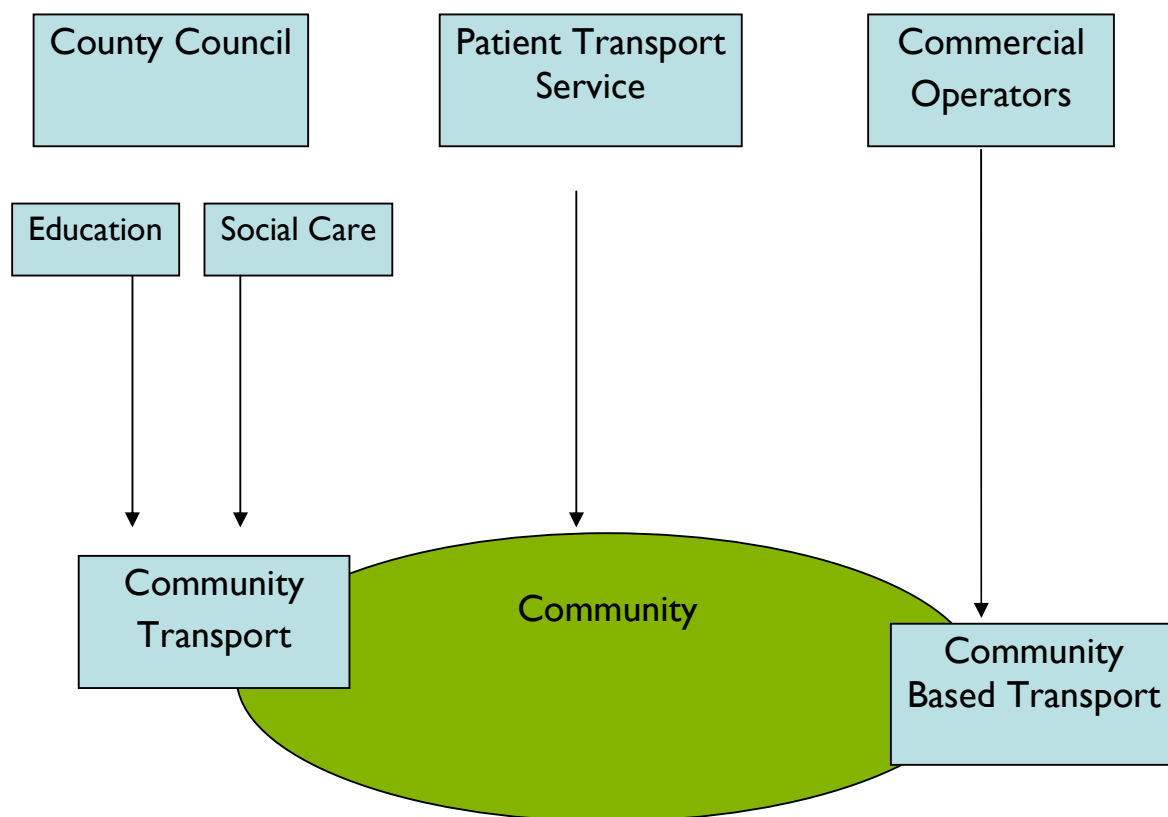
It is supportive of the key stakeholder response (attached) facilitated by Durham County Councils Integrated Transport Unit as these comments related to:-

- Powers of the Traffic Commission
- Voluntary Partnership and Quality Content
- Taxi Bus Operators
- Community Transport
- Punctuality
- Subsidised Bus Services
- Governance Arrangements
- Environmental Effect of Local Charges, Schemes, etc.

An important consideration for the network is the need for Members to ensure that their community leadership role through Overview and Scrutiny function is recognised so that Local Authorities are actively engaged in holding bus companies to account.

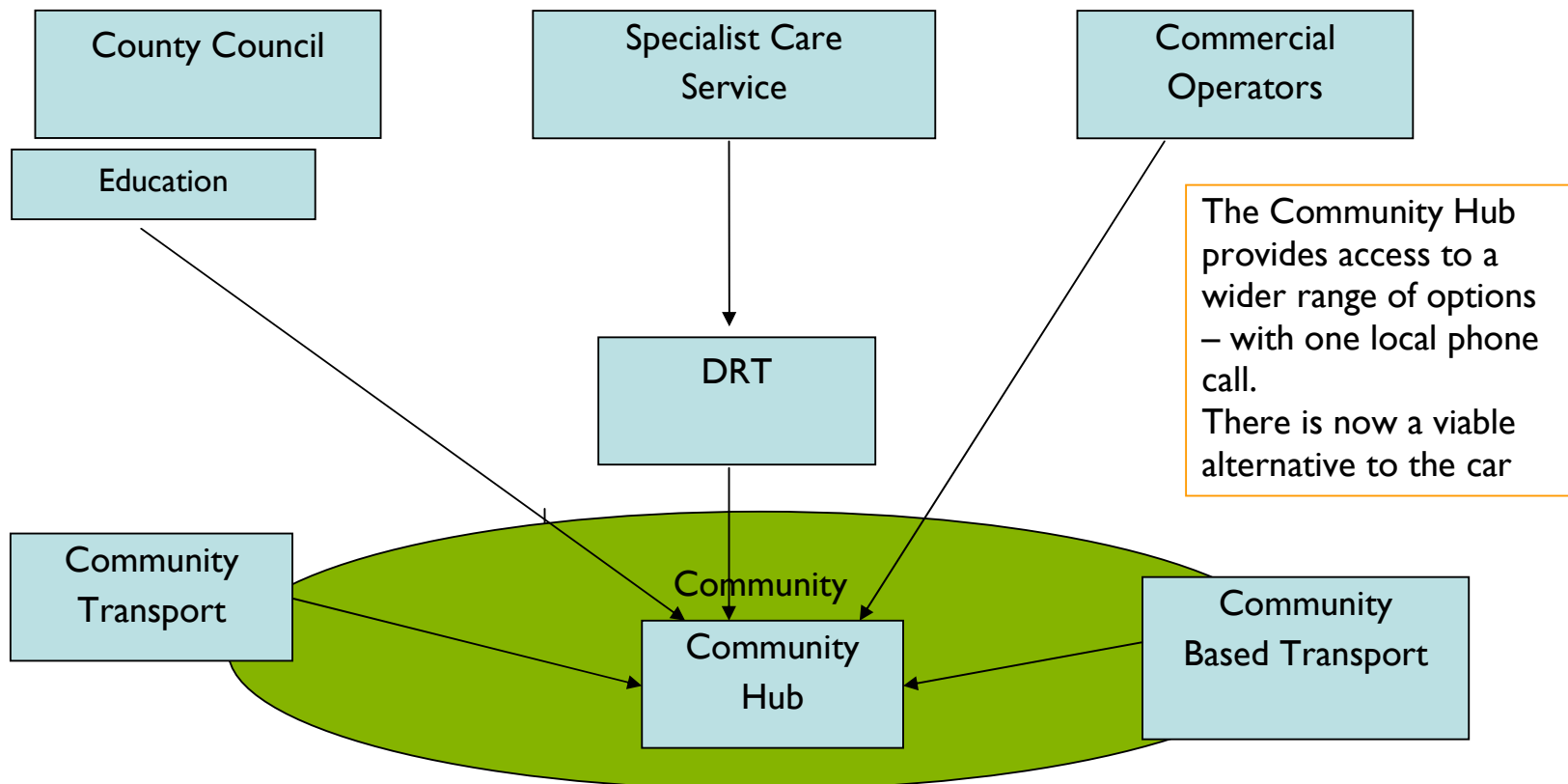
**COUNTY OF DURHAM JOINT SCRUTINY MEMBERS
NETWORK**

The Current Structure



Individuals have access to limited transport options – and must call each provider to arrange it all themselves. Hence, the car is the easiest option

The Proposed Structure



APPENDIX 5

RESPONSES TO PUBLIC/PARISH COUNCIL CONSULTATION BY DISTRICT AND NATURE OF ISSUE

	Chester-le-street	Derwentside	Durham City	Easington	Sedgefield	Teesdale	Wear Valley	Total
Nature of complaint								
General Service Complaint		1		1		1		3
No Bus Routes at all	1		1		4			6
No Bus Routes at night/weekends/Bank Hols.		1	2	9	4	1		17
Bus Routes Removed	3	4	4	10	11		1	33
Bus Routes Changed	1	1	2	3	3			10
Lack of Information on Changes			1	2	2		1	6
Accessibility/ Easy Access Problems		1	3	3	3		2	12
Cleanliness			3	2	5		1	11
Punctuality/Reliability		1	3	4	9	1		18
Buses going past "Not in Service"				2	1			3
Integration of Bus and Train Services			1		4			5
Cost of Travel/Tickets		1	1	1	7		2	12
Through Ticketing		1	1					2
Lack of Response from local Councillors	1				1			2
Access to Public Services problems		1	2	12	11			26
Need to subsidise rural routes	2			1	2			5
Location/condition of bus stops	1		1	1	3		3	9
Frequency of Bus service		2	2	6	9		2	21
Lack of Response from Bus Company		1		2				3
TOTAL	9	15	27	59	79	3	12	204
Total number of Complainants	3	6	12	22	25	2	6	76
Status of Complainant								
Member of the Public/Local Resident	3	5	8	18	17	1	6	58
Local Councillor			1	2	2			5
Parish Council/Councillor		1	3	2	6	1		13

Age Concern Information and Advice Service Case Studies

Retaining independence

Due to his disabilities Mr X has struggled with daily life for many years. Because of long term illness he has received Mobility Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for 20years. He was very unsure of applying for an upgrade of DLA, due to the fact that he relied on his Mobility payments to finance the running costs of his car and feared that these payments may stop.

After some encouragement he was persuaded to apply for an upgrade of DLA, to include some Care Component award. He was delighted to be awarded the upgrade, as this enabled him take advantage of the Motability scheme which, in turn, meant he could lease a new car and have a full warranty service for the next 3 years. So no more financial worries about how much the repair costs to his old car were going to be or how he and his wife would cope with the problems of isolation if he wasn't able to run a car.

In addition to this award, he was also entitled to an increase in the Pension Credit which he received. This enabled Mr & Mrs X to remain independent and mobile once more.

Quality of Life

Mrs R has been struggling with disabilities for many years. Although she lives in a bungalow and has various adaptations to assist in her daily life she feels quite isolated as getting out and about is difficult for her. She has good friends but doesn't like to be a 'nuisance' After speaking to her neighbour she decided to contact Age Concern Durham County. We helped her to successfully apply for Attendance Allowance and because of this and further linked benefits her weekly income has doubled. This has enabled her to visit her family and friends whenever she wants to, without having to rely on the goodwill of her neighbours. She can now afford to use a reliable, local Taxi service with familiar drivers and feels she has regained some of her independence.

Out and about again

Awareness presentations to community groups in Easington resulted in two older ladies back out in the community after being socially isolated for some years. Following presentations to groups in the past three months the Advice and Information team have been kept busy. Older people have been referred into the team to have their benefits checked with some being entitled to more money. This has enabled two older ladies to get out into the community again. They both bought scooters and have joined the local lunch club. Where they live is at the bottom of a steep incline and neither has been able to get up to the local shops themselves. One lady said "I could not ride a bike on two wheels and it felt funny on this one at first, I am used to it now."

Independent again

Mr P was extremely grateful for the help he received from Age Concern County Durham in organising transport and an escort for him to attend a hospital out-patients appointment.

Mr P is both physically disabled and visually impaired. He finds it very stressful when he has to visit places that are unfamiliar to him, so much so, that he would rather miss the appointment than go in an ambulance unaccompanied.

We contacted the Red Cross, on behalf of Mr P, and arranged for their Transport and Escort service to assist. They were able to provide disabled access transport and an escort to pick him up at home, attend the appointment with him and then to return home.

This has made the world of difference to Mr P as he now feels confident enough to request this service for himself and attend all his outpatient appointments without the stress and worry that he used to experience.