

REPORT OF THE BUS AND RAIL SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Contents

1. Introduction
2. A brief outline of the national position following Deregulation of Bus Services, and Privatisation of the Railways
3. Bus and Rail Services in Braintree District
4. The role of Essex County Council Passenger Transport
5. Local Transport Act 2008 – Opportunities to Enhance Community Transport
6. Integration of Bus and Rail Services
7. Improvements to Rail Services – Additional Rolling Stock
8. The Rail ‘Passing Loop’ on the Braintree Branch Line
9. Witham Rail Station Footbridge Improvement
10. Parking at Rail Stations, and other Parking Issues
11. Encouraging Residents to use the Bus and Rail Network
12. The Possible Provision of a Bus Services from Witham to Stansted Airport
13. Consultation Processes in Relation to Changes in Bus Routes and Timetables
14. The Coggeshall Community Bus
15. Subsidisation of Bus Routes and Provision of Bus Stop Improvements, through Section 106 Agreements
16. Bus Shelters
17. The National Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme
18. Health and Safety Issues – Bus and Rail
19. Dealing with Safety and Supervision on School Bus Transport
20. How Bus and Rail Operators Cater for the Needs of Disabled Passengers
21. Cleanliness on Buses and Trains
22. Conclusions
23. Recommendations
24. Appendices

REPORT OF THE BUS AND RAIL SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. INTRODUCTION

An essential part of the Council's overall vision for the District is to see that the provision of transport in our communities meets local needs. A good local transport infrastructure which enables access to employment, services and facilities, is seen as essential to the future economic prosperity of the district. It also means working with partners to create new opportunities for local transport provision.

In line with this vision, the Group was set up to study bus and rail services in the District.

The Group's **key objectives** were as follows:-

1. to consider whether local bus and rail services meet the needs of our local communities;
2. to understand and assess the effectiveness of integration of bus and rail services across the district;
3. to consider broadly how the bus and rail operators deal with health and safety issues;
4. to consider how bus and rail operators cater for the needs of disabled passengers;
5. to consider how the bus and rail operators deal with cleanliness issues;
6. to consider how bus operators deal with safety and supervision on school bus transport.

How We Conducted Our Study

We commenced our investigation in mid October 2008 and advertised our study in the local press inviting members of the public and other interested bodies to make written submissions.

Individual letters were also sent to key stakeholders including:

- the bus and rail operators;
- Essex County Council Passenger Transport;
- District and County Councillors;
- Parish and Town Councils;
- User Groups.

The written submissions we received are set out in Appendix 1.

There have been meetings of the Group on 21st October 2008; 26th November 2008; 14th January 2009; 18th February 2009; 1st April 2009; 24th June 2009; and 30th September 2009.

(At our April and June meetings, we were joined by officers from Essex County Council Passenger Transport who are carrying out a review to establish the needs of residents in those Parishes that do not meet a minimum level of bus service provision.

We were also aware that the County Council had set up a Rural Commission whose brief included looking at rural transport issues)

During the course of the study members have undertaken a great deal of individual research on bus and rail services in the Braintree, Halstead and Witham Areas, and have also looked at the approach taken by some other local authorities in connection with local transport issues.

Members have reported their findings both verbally and/or through the submission of written papers.

The written papers have included the following:-

Cllr. G. Cohen – report on local bus and rail services serving Witham, lack of airport links; ‘Call a Bus/Flexi Taxi Service (Switzerland).

Cllr. R. Elliston – report on rail and bus services in Hatfield Peverel, and a similar report for Kelvedon.

Cllr. Mrs. M. Galione – report on public transport in the Cotwolds region of Oxfordshire; report on the Hatfield Peverel/Chelmsford bus service.

Cllrs. D. Mann and A. Everard – Inner Braintree bus services, outer Braintree bus services, Braintree Interchange, Braintree rail services.

Cllr. Ramage – report on rail services from Witham Rail Station.

Cllr. Mrs. J. Smith – report on rail services – Braintree, Freeport and Cressing.

Cllr. A. F. Shelton – report into local bus services in Halstead and the rural areas in the northern part of the District.

Cllr. Mrs. G. Spray – report on bus services in Three Colne Wards; report on innovative provision of passenger transport in Newark and Suffolk, and community transport in Suffolk.

It is not practical to append all of these items to this report, but copies are available on request.

We held a series of “witness sessions” in April with bus and rail operators as follows:-

22nd April 2009 – Mr. W. Hiron, Managing Director, Stephenson of Essex Ltd.

27th April 2009 – Mr. G. Hughes, Stakeholder Manager, c2c Rail and National Express East Anglia

28th April 2009 – Session 1 – Mr. A. Gipson, Coggeshall Community Bus Ltd.

Session 2 – Mr. J. Pope, Head of Passenger Transport,
Essex County Council

Session 3 – Mr. A. Pilbeam, Managing Director,
Essex/Eastern Counties, First Group PLC

Copies of the transcripts of these sessions are contained in Appendix 2.

2. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE NATIONAL POSITION FOLLOWING DEREGULATION OF BUS SERVICES, AND PRIVATISATION OF THE RAILWAYS

Bus Services

Bus services were deregulated in 1985 and competition was introduced on local bus services.

There are now two kinds of bus service that can be provided: commercial and subsidised.

Any bus operator can run whatever commercial services it wants to as long as it gives 56 days notice to the Traffic Commissioners of either an introduction of a new service, a withdrawal of a service or timetable changes. Commercial services are those provided without any subsidy and there are no restrictions on fares.

If there are gaps in the commercial bus network, the County Council as the Passenger Transport authority can design bus services that bus operators can be paid to operate. These are routes that the County Council considers are socially desirable, but are not commercially viable. The County Council sets the fares, routes and times of the subsidised services.

Rail Services

British Rail provided an integrated national rail network until the railways were privatised in 1994.

Engineering functions and rolling stock were sold, train operation was franchised, and ownership of the infrastructure was passed to a new organisation, Railtrack.

Railtrack's role was taken over by Network Rail in 2002.

Network Rail are now the freeholders of the railway network and are responsible for running, maintaining, and developing railway tracks, signalling systems, rail bridges, tunnels, level crossings, viaducts and 18 key stations. It leases out 2500 other stations and the railway track to train operating companies.

The Train Operators compete for franchise contracts let by the Department of Transport for the provision of rail services.

The franchise currently operated by National Express East Anglia includes the provision of rail services in Braintree District.

3. BUS AND RAIL SERVICES IN BRAINTREE DISTRICT

We have set out in Appendix 3 details of rail and bus services in the District including interchange facilities at rail stations, bus routes, bus operators, bus services at rail stations, an outline of school transport, and a brief summary of Community Transport and other community schemes.

4. THE ROLE OF ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL PASSENGER TRANSPORT

The Passenger Transport Team at Essex County Council deals with all aspects of passenger transport.

The team works in partnership with transport providers and with District Councils and other organisations to ensure that services are reliable, accessible, and safe and take advantage of the latest technological advantages.

Passenger Transport supplements the commercial bus network by buying

services for routes that are socially desirable, but which cannot be met by the private bus operators without financial support.

Bus Operators compete for running subsidised routes through a process of competitive tender.

Whenever bus service changes are proposed, the Passenger Transport Team undertakes consultations with over 300 representatives in parishes across the County.

We raised concerns about the consultation arrangements in Braintree and Bocking which are unparished, and were assured that in these areas District Council members are invited to comment and the Chief Executive is always notified.

Bus operators are only required by law to give 56 days notice to the Traffic Commissioners of changes to a service and consequently the Passenger Transport Team has to act very quickly in assessing whether there is a need to provide a replacement service and how that replacement service should be provided.

The County Cabinet Member has set a criteria of £5 per passenger journey as the maximum level of subsidy.

The routes in Braintree District which are subsidised by the County Council are set out in Appendix 4.

Where Passenger Transport cannot provide a replacement local bus service the Team will contact the officers in the respective Community Transport Schemes to seek their help in providing some form of service for the area in question with a view to 'mopping up' the demand which neither the commercial or the supported bus network can satisfy.

Each of the 13 Community Transport Schemes in Essex including BDCs, are supported by grant funding from Essex County Council.

Passenger Transport has a capital programme of infrastructure improvements to deliver raised kerbs to improve access to buses, improved waiting facilities and bus priority measures. Workplace and School Travel Planning Teams also ensure sustainable travel options are developed.

Passenger Transport has a responsibility to move 23,000 students who are eligible for school transport every day.

Cllr. Abbott submitted written comments (see appendix 1) detailing his concerns regarding a number of aspects relating to views concerning school transport which we noted. However, the specific issue of school transport was not within our terms of reference other than to consider how bus operators deal with safety and supervision on school bus transport.

5. LOCAL TRANSPORT ACT 2008 – OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SCHEMES

The Local Transport Act 2008 introduced an important change in relation to Community Transport Schemes that came into effect from 6/4/09.

Previously, there was a legislative requirement that Community Transport Schemes had to operate on the basis that vehicles were driven by voluntary drivers. However, the new act now provides that you can use paid drivers.

Mr. Pope, Head of Passenger Transport, ECC advised us that he felt this legislation provided a significant opportunity to enhance community transport schemes. He indicated that *“By employing and paying a driver you can have more confidence and commitment in providing regular services. There is therefore a lot of scope for Section 22 permit type operations (Section 22 - Transport Act 1985 allows a mini-bus to be operated by bodies on a local bus service on a non-profit basis) which could be operated either by the Council’s Community Transport Scheme or by the ECC’s own in-house fleet.*

By using paid drivers, there would be the scope to provide, for example, some peak hour work such as feeder services from villages to railway stations, and in between those peak times the drivers would work on providing the conventional community transport work. This could possibly be the way forward for converting some of the traditional infrequent bus services that are run into better quality service for the public. In essence, you would reduce some of the money that goes into buying local bus services and put more money into community transport.

Currently, community transport journeys have to be booked by the public in advance and this is not a popular aspect of the schemes and of course depends on the availability of the volunteer driver. Volunteer drivers being paid would ensure a consistency and a guarantee of service, and would attract those drivers with an ethos for working part-time and part voluntary.”

We feel this is a major opportunity which warrants further investigation in liaison with the County Council.

6. INTEGRATION OF BUS AND RAIL SERVICES

There is no formal process to integrate bus and rail services. This is because railways operate on their own infrastructure under a closely regulated environment whilst bus operators are free to choose the routes and timetables that they wish to operate. Consequently, integration at the local level relies on bus operators compiling their timetables to suit the arrival and departure times of train services from the station.

However, we were advised that both rail and bus operators do try to work together through joint marketing and through the sale of integrated ticketing products such as ‘Plus Bus’.

Most bus operators also have a good working relationship with one another. Although outside Braintree District, the Dengie Connection service run by Stephenson’s, for example, includes provision for Stephenson’s to issue First Buses day tickets so that passengers can travel beyond Maldon to get to Chelmsford on a First bus and vice-versa.

Essex County Council Passenger Transport is also in discussion with National Express concerning the provision of real-time bus information on station platforms. The County Council is currently looking into the provision

of a new contract to provide this facility and we feel that this will have a positive impact in helping to integrate bus and rail services.

7. IMPROVEMENTS TO RAIL SERVICES – ADDITIONAL ROLLING STOCK

We were pleased to note that the train operator National Express had concluded a new agreement with the Department for Transport to boost rail capacity on National Express services to and from Liverpool Street by the provision of additional rolling stock. This will help to improve rail services in Braintree District. The effect will be that the rail operator will be able to run more 12 car trains, and increase the number of seats available at the peak hours for trains into Liverpool Street by 14%. We understand that these proposals are likely to be delivered over a phased period between December 2010 and December 2012. The company anticipates that this should accommodate all the growth that was originally anticipated during the terms of their franchise.

National Express launched a 12 week public consultation exercise in June 2009 to seek the views of stakeholders and customers on its proposals for the deployment of the extra trains.

8. THE RAIL ‘PASSING LOOP’ ON THE BRAINTREE BRANCH LINE

This is seen as essential in improving the rail service to and from Braintree rail station along the branch line.

We were pleased to note that National Express are supportive in principle to the provision of a ‘Passing Loop’ (probably at Cressing) with a view to increasing the frequency of rail services to Braintree, subject to the appropriate business case being demonstrated. National Express suggest that a half hourly service on the branch line could be achieved by having a “shuttle” train that goes between Braintree and Witham (connecting with a London service) in addition to the regular through train to London.

Network Rail has also commented that *“The key challenge for the loop at Cressing will be to demonstrate that the financial and socio-economic benefits will offset the capital and operating costs. It is also worth noting that due to line capacity constraints between Shenfield and London, any additional services on the Braintree branch line would be likely to be limited to a Witham – Braintree shuttle.”*

We understand that further discussions are pending between Officers of the Council and representatives of National Express, Network Rail and ECC Passenger Transport.

We would urge the Cabinet to continue to lobby for this improvement.

9. WITHAM RAIL STATION FOOTBRIDGE IMPROVEMENT

This is a joint project between Essex County Council and Network Rail to provide a footbridge to link the Network Rail car park to another secure station entrance with space for a ticket machine, staircase as well as a lift, bicycle locker parking area, and disabled parking spaces near the new entrance. Installation of the new footbridge requires changes to the overhead electrification line where it spans the railway line.

We are pleased to note that funding for the scheme has now been finalised and that works are due to commence in 2009/10.

10. PARKING AT RAILWAY STATIONS, AND OTHER PARKING ISSUES

We looked generally at the issue of parking provision at railway stations.

In this respect, we considered the report of the independent rail consumer watchdog Passenger Focus entitled '*Getting to the Station – findings of research conducted at Witham – March 2007*'.

The report had concluded that most passengers who live within walking distance of a station will generally walk to it; passengers travelling to a station from rural, semi-rural and edge of town locations will generally choose to drive and park at the station; many passengers drive to a station with a better (in terms of train frequency or speed of journey) service than the station nearest to their home.

Specifically in respect of Witham station, the report concluded that there is clearly a car parking issue at Witham, and this relates to people accessing the station from outside the town. For these people, if they are to continue to use Witham additional car parking is required. There is an element of suppressed demand because the car parks are already full.

We feel the Cabinet should continue to lobby for an increase in the car parking provision at Witham station.

On the wider subject of car parks owned by the Council, we understand that there is a review pending of Council owned car parks. In this respect, we feel the opportunity should be taken to ensure that there are designated disabled bays in all Council car parks to cater for disabled drivers, but in particular for those disabled drivers who drive to the nearest car park to connect with local transport. Any parking time restrictions for the disabled should ensure that there is a sufficient period for the disabled person to travel on to the relevant location to obtain key services such as retail or hospital services, attend to their business and return to the car park.

11. ENCOURAGING RESIDENTS TO USE THE BUS AND RAIL NETWORK

We feel that encouraging travellers to use the public transport network in preference to the private motor car is important for environmental and congestion reasons.

In our evidence session with Mr. W. Hiron, Managing Director, Stephenson's of Essex we discussed the possibility of including a 'week's free bus travel voucher' to persons moving into the District as part of the Council's Welcome Pack. It was felt that this would be helpful in publicising bus services and would 'whet the appetite' of passengers for bus travel.

We feel this initiative is worthy of further investigation with the bus operators.

Mr. Pope the Head of Passenger Transport also advised us that Passenger Transport is in the process of producing a new leaflet for Braintree which is

aimed at new home owners, with a view to helping them to find out what is available as regards bus and rail services. *(A copy of the leaflet – Public Transport in Braintree District is now included in the Council’s Welcome Pack).*

We would also like to suggest that the rail operator National Express consider the possibility of extending the parameters of the ‘day ranger’ rail ticket that has successfully operated for many years across the ‘Anglia’ region, so that it includes Essex (The Anglia Region for the purposes of the ‘day ranger’ ticket includes Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, but not currently Essex).

12. THE POSSIBLE PROVISION OF A BUS SERVICE FROM WITHAM TO STANSTED AIRPORT

We were advised by Mr. Pope, Head of Passenger Transport, ECC that the Department for Transport was inviting joint submissions from local authorities and bus operators to bid for funding (‘Kick-Start’ proposals) for bus services that will eventually become commercially sustainable.

Contact had been made with First Essex Buses concerning the submission of a bid to extend the 132 service (Witham to Braintree) so that it runs to Stansted Airport.

Another ‘Kick-Start’ bid is likely to be made to upgrade the 133 service (Braintree to Stansted service via Felsted and the villages) to become a 24 hour service.

There is also a possibility of a further bid being made with another operator for a Sudbury/Halstead/Braintree/Stansted service.

Whilst there is no guarantee that these bids will be successful we feel the Council should welcome and support these bids.

13. CONSULTATION PROCESSES IN RELATION TO CHANGES IN BUS ROUTES AND TIMETABLES.

This was a particularly pertinent issue given the public disquiet that arose last year at the lack of public consultation regarding the changes to the First Group PLC service 352 (Halstead/Braintree/Chelmsford service). We questioned the First Group witness representatives on this specific issue at some length.

We appreciate that bus operators have to make the best use of their resources and that the overall purpose in making changes is to grow patronage. However, we are concerned that there should be a better system adopted by bus operators to communicate proposed changes to bus users so that they have the opportunity to comment.

We would like to see some form of voluntary protocol adopted by bus operators in this respect so that there is a consistent approach to consulting bus users.

This is reflected in our recommendations.

14. THE COGGESHALL COMMUNITY BUS

This scheme was launched in February 1982 to fill a gap in bus service provision in the Coggeshall area. It initially operated under the auspices of Coggeshall Parish Council with a grant being provided by Essex County Council. This enabled the organisers to buy the first bus and to provide a service to Kelvedon Railway Station and also some services around Coggeshall itself. The vehicle also doubled up as a community vehicle for use by local organisations and by Honywood school.

In 1985 when the Transport Act was implemented, the organisers applied for and were granted a Section 22 permit from the Traffic Commissioners in order to continue to operate the service. The permit enabled the organisers to provide a bus for hire and reward, but using voluntary drivers.

In 1994, the undertaking was transferred to the Coggeshall Community Bus Ltd – an independent not for profit organisation.

Currently, 50,000 passenger journeys are run per year of which 80% comprise the Kelvedon Rail Station run.

This does illustrate what can be achieved by a dedicated group of local volunteers whose enthusiasm extends not just to the setting up of the scheme, but who are committed to supporting and actively participating in the organisation and running of the undertaking following its launch.

We would commend the Scheme to any local groups who are considering setting up a similar transport operation, as an excellent example of a well thought out and organised local community initiative.

15. SUBSIDISATION OF BUS ROUTES AND PROVISION OF BUS STOP IMPROVEMENTS, THROUGH SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

We were advised that in a number of instances Section 106 agreements had provided an opportunity to help subsidise bus routes and to provide bus stop improvements and shelters, e.g. the Freeport Shuttle Bus Service. The requests for Section 106 contributions for bus stop improvements and bus services usually comes from Essex County Council as the Highway Authority.

However, it was noted that providing monies for bus services is problematic because the funding is only short term. If the service is not profitable to a commercial operator once the funding has expired it would have to be withdrawn or subsidised by the County Council.

16. BUS SHELTERS

Responsibility for the maintenance of Bus Shelters falls under a number of different agencies as some are owned by the District, Parish/Town and County Councils, and some are owned by the advertising contractors. The shelters also come in a variety of different shapes and sizes and the provision of shelters is somewhat patchy across the District. It is not possible to provide shelters at many bus stops, because pavements are not wide enough.

We feel that if it would be helpful if there was a series of standard designs –

for rural locations, conservation areas and urban locations - to bring some uniformity to their provision.

17. THE NATIONAL CONCESSIONARY BUS FARES SCHEME

Whilst there appears to be a general consensus amongst bus operators that the Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme for the elderly is very laudable, the operators who submitted evidence to us expressed the view that the scheme is inadequately funded by the Government, especially since the scheme was extended to allow elderly persons to travel anywhere in England.

We note that the Local Government Association has called for an urgent review of the funding of the scheme.

18. HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES – BUS AND RAIL

Our terms of reference required us to consider in broad terms how the bus and rail operators deal with health and safety issues.

Rail

The Office of Rail Regulation is responsible for Health and Safety on the railways (see the written submission from the Office of Rail Regulation contained in Appendix 1).

Network Rail has in place a management system which describes the framework and arrangements in place to deliver its health and safety objectives, and which provides a guide to the organisation's specific arrangements for controlling health and safety risks.

We also sought comments as to how the local rail operator (National Express) deals with health and safety issues and were assured that *“Safety is given the highest priority in all facets of operation including specification of the timetable, design and construction of rolling stock and fixed assets such as track signalling and stations, and the day to day delivery of the service.”*

Bus

Similarly, the evidence we received from bus operators indicated that they took their health and safety obligations very seriously, health and safety policies were in place and adhered to, and drivers received specific health and safety training.

19. DEALING WITH SAFETY AND SUPERVISION ON SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORT

All the evidence we received from local bus operators indicated that they placed the highest emphasis on health and safety in relation to school bus transport.

One operator indicated that their buses were fitted with CCTV cameras both internally and externally – the internal cameras were specifically to monitor student behaviour. There is a requirement for students to show their bus passes. Where students misbehave the bus operator issues warning letters to parents, and will ultimately impose temporary or permanent bans as

appropriate. A Schools Liaison Officer is employed to build relationships with schools, travel on school buses, and carry out bus pass checks. School bus drivers are subject to CRB checks.

One operator also carried out bus evacuation training with schools.

The County Council's Passenger Transport Team does of course have a major responsibility for organising school transport and ensuring the safety of the 23000 students who use the service every day, and for dealing with behavioural issues in partnership with operators and schools.

20. HOW BUS AND RAIL OPERATORS CATER FOR THE NEEDS OF DISABLED PASSENGERS

The evidence we received indicated that both rail and bus operators take their responsibilities seriously to ensure that they meet the regulations for being DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant.

Many buses, coaches and trains built before the regulations came into force can also be used by people in wheelchairs, although the standard may not be quite as high as it is for compliant transport.

New trains have had to meet the regulations since 1999. Train companies can apply for exemption, but they have to have very good reasons for doing so.

We understand that all trains are now accessible, and over 40 per cent are now compliant. Older trains are made more accessible when they have been refurbished. All trains will be compliant by 2020.

The train operator National Express advises customers with special needs to contact them if they need specific assistance to complete their journey. Each train operator publishes a Disabled Persons Protection Policy, which confirms the access arrangements at stations on the network and the facilities available for those with special needs.

Buses which carry more than 22 passengers come under the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 (as amended).

Since the end of 2000 all new buses used on local and scheduled services have had to meet these regulations, except smaller single deck buses which became wheelchair accessible from 2005.

The speed at which older buses are being replaced by new accessible buses varies from area to area and from route to route. Buses are sometimes switched between routes so the proportion of accessible buses will also change from time to time.

However all single decker buses will be accessible by 2016 and all double deckers will be accessible a year later.

21. CLEANLINESS ON BUSES AND TRAINS

National Express the train operator indicated that it has a strong commitment to providing the best possible service for its customers including cleanliness issues.

Similar sentiments were expressed to us by the bus operators.

One of the bus operators indicated to us that vehicles are swept out every night at the end of service, and vehicles are washed as frequently as the weather conditions allow. Another operator advised us that their fleet was accredited to ISO 14001 environmental standards which included standards on cleanliness issues.

22. CONCLUSIONS

During the course of this study, the Group has considered a significant amount of information including evidence from expert witnesses, and responses received from County and District Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, other stakeholders and Members of the public.

Current local bus and rail services go some way to meeting the needs of our local communities, but, as we are all acutely aware, the urban areas are served much better than the rural areas. The Cabinet will no doubt continue to lobby vigorously for improvements in the public transport network at every available opportunity.

Apart from the Community Transport operation that we provide in partnership with Essex County Council, we are not of course the direct providers of local transport. However, we have compiled a series of recommendations that we feel will assist either directly or indirectly, in improving local transport.

In the rural areas of the District, we are of course concerned that bus services are sparse and only a small number of Parishes have a rail service. Where public transport is limited and people do not have a private car, then the ease with which people can access key services such as work, healthcare, education and shopping can be adversely affected. As a consequence, poor public transport in rural areas affects peoples quality of life.

The Braintree District Rural Services Survey 2008 indicates that *“The lack of key services would be a less serious problem if there were adequate public transport services to the nearest location of each service centre. However, the survey shows that 12 settlements in the District (9 in Halstead Area and 3 in Braintree area) have no bus service to their identified service centre.”*

The County Council's Rural Commission interim report also reflects that *“Changing rural transport remains the most intractable of rural challenges owing to the cultural acceptance and dominance of the private motor car. Yet only 8 in 10 households in rural Essex own a car, and therefore many people rely on public transport for their mobility.”*

We await with interest the results of the study being conducted by Officers from Essex County Council Passenger Transport who are investigating the needs of residents in those Parishes that fail to meet the minimum level of bus service provision.

23. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet as follows:-

1. Further investigations should be carried out in liaison with Essex County Council Passenger Transport concerning the opportunities afforded through the Local Transport Act 2008, to enhance community transport schemes by using a combination of paid and voluntary drivers;
2. That the County Council's proposal to provide real-time bus information on rail station platforms should be noted and welcomed;
3. That the agreement reached by National Express with the Department for Transport to provided additional rolling stock which will help to improve rail services in Braintree District, should be noted and welcomed;
4. That the Council should continue to lobby for the provision of a 'Passing Loop' on the Braintree branch line with a view to increasing the frequency of rail services to Braintree;
5. That the Council should maintain a watching brief on progress in relation to the Witham Rail Station Footbridge Joint Project now that the funding has been agreed between Essex County Council and Network Rail;
6. That parking at rail stations should be kept under review particularly Witham Station where additional car parking is required (we note that the car parks servicing the Witham rail station are privately owned);
7. That in connection with the Council's forthcoming review of Council owned car parks, the opportunity should be taken to ensure that there are designated disabled bays provided for those disabled drivers who only wish to drive as far as the nearest car park to connect with local transport. Any parking time restrictions for the disabled should ensure that there is a sufficient period for the disabled person to travel on to the relevant location to obtain key services such as retail or hospital services, attend to their business and return to the car park;
8. To encourage residents to use the bus and rail network, it be suggested to:-
 - (i) Mr. Pope the Head of Passenger Transport that he investigates the possibility with local bus operators of setting up a pilot scheme for including a 'week's free bus travel' voucher for persons moving into the District that could be included as part of the District Council's welcome pack;
 - (ii) the rail operator National Express that it should consider the possibility of extending the parameters of the 'day ranger' rail ticket that has successfully operated for many years across the 'Anglia' region, to include Essex (The Anglia Region for the purposes of the 'day ranger' ticket includes Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, but not currently Essex);
9. That the proposed bids to be made by Mr. Pope, Head of Passenger Transport, ECC to the Department of Transport for 'Kick-Start' funding for:-

- The extension of the 132 service (Witham to Braintree) so that it runs to Stansted Airport (If this bid is successful we would like to see this service serve the needs of both airport employees, and passengers with their luggage);
- The upgrading of the 133 service (Braintree to Stansted Airport service via Felsted and the villages) to become a 24 hour service;
- The possibility of a bid for a Sudbury/Halstead/Braintree/Stansted service;

be supported and welcomed;

10. That it be suggested to Mr. Pope, Head of Passenger Transport, ECC that investigations be carried out into the possibility of establishing some form of voluntary protocol to be adopted by bus operators for consulting bus users on proposed changes to bus services, to ensure a uniform and consistent approach;

11. That in respect of bus shelters the Council in partnership with ECC Passenger Transport should agree a series of standard designs – for rural, conservation areas, and urban locations – to bring some uniformity to their provision, including space for prominently displaying a current timetable;

12. That the Council should consider the findings of the study currently being conducted by Officers from Essex County Council Passenger Transport into the needs of residents in those Parishes in the District that fail to meet the minimum level of bus service provision, and review what actions it can take in partnership with the County Council to improve rural bus service provision;

13. Consideration be given to the practicalities of one of the Braintree Community Transport mini-buses being based and run from a rural location in the north of the District to give it a more rural focus;

14. That there be greater flexibility within the Council's Community Transport Scheme to ensure that it can respond to all communities needs (particularly isolated rural communities) of the District;

15. That closer liaison and co-operation be undertaken with other Districts that border Braintree District, so that account may be taken of the impact of 'outside' demand for public transport services that operate across Braintree District;

16. In the context of considering new ways and ideas of meeting rural transport needs, that the innovative passenger and community transport scheme in Suffolk (identified by Cllr. G. Spray in her research) be looked at further to see whether any of the initiatives could be applied in this District.

Finally, we would like to record our thanks to all those individuals and

organisations who have contributed to this study, and for the written and oral evidence that has been submitted to us by witnesses.

The Bus and Rail Services Task and Finish Group

A. F. Shelton (Chairman)

G. Cohen

R. Elliston

A. Everard

Mrs. M. Galione

D. Hume

D. Mann

R. Ramage

Mrs. J. Smith

Mrs. G. Spray

F. Swallow

R. Wilkins

24. APPENDICES (Not attached)

Appendix 1 – Written Submissions

Appendix 2 – Transcript of Witness Sessions

Appendix 3 – Details of Rail and Bus Services in the District including interchange facilities at rail stations, bus routes, bus operators, bus services at railway stations, an outline of school transport, and a brief summary of Community Transport and other community schemes

Appendix 4 – Bus routes in Braintree District which are subsidised by Essex County Council