



## House of Commons Transport Committee

### **'PASSENGER TRANSPORT IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES'**

#### **TravelWatch SouthWest**

TravelWatch SouthWest was established in 2001 as The South West Public Transport Users' Forum (SWPTUF) to promote the interests of public transport users in the South West of England (comprising the counties of Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Somerset and the unitary authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, Bournemouth, Bristol, Cornwall, North Somerset, Plymouth, Poole, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, Torbay and Wiltshire) - the Forum became a Community Interest Company, limited by guarantee, in August 2005. SWPTUF adopted the trading name of TravelWatch SouthWest in June 2006 and the Community Interest Company changed name to TravelWatch SouthWest CIC in November 2008.

Membership of the TravelWatch SouthWest CIC is open to every 'not-for-profit' organisation in the South West of England whose sole or principal purpose is to represent the users of any public transport service or to promote the development of public transport services - membership is also open to other 'not-for-profit' organisations' in the South West England who represent the interests of special and potential classes of public transport users e.g. the disabled or the elderly. TWSW currently has over one hundred affiliated organisations.

TWSW, which is a social enterprise company, acts as an advocate for passengers to lobby for the improvement of public transport in the region and works closely with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, business organisations and other stakeholder groups - with the dissolution of the former Rail Passengers Committee for Western England in July 2005, TWSW is the representative body for public transport users throughout the South West of England.

## Written Evidence

- **How do Government and local authorities identify demand for passenger transport in isolated communities (including rural and urban areas and island communities)?**

1. At present demand is largely calculated from existing usage/ actual ridership figures supplied by the operators. We are aware of only a very few instances where bus companies or local authorities have carried out market research to identify *potential* demand as a result of new housing developments, new employment opportunities, or to identify opportunities to reduce existing traffic congestion.

2. We believe that there are opportunities for closer partnership between bus companies and highways authorities, and between neighbouring local authorities, to share statistics for road congestion, proposed new employment areas, strategic housing sites etc, and thus analyse the potential for major commercial routes, with the rural routes serving as feeder services.

3. This was illustrated well in a consultation on bus provision in Bath and North East Somerset three years ago. This was run by Halcrow on behalf of First UK Bus, where a feature identified in the session with the major employers was that major opportunities for improved services to those employers had not ever been market surveyed. It has still not been carried out, despite requests from those employers.

4. Local authorities, and particularly groups of local authorities with a "bigger strategic picture" of travel, employment and educational needs, are in the ideal position to see how the various elements of rural transport demand can be aggregated to make up a commercial, or at least less expensive, network of services. However such integration has not been active post-privatisation, and there is at present no strategic planning platform for such joined up working between rural and urban areas. or between neighbouring authorities. Furthermore it will require a breaking down of the existing departmental separations, as between education and social services, to identify mutual benefits and savings.

It is suggested that the new local enterprise partnerships could assist local authorities in cooperation between authorities, by recognising the wider economic benefits of meeting the social and health roles of rural public transport

5. There is further the complication of the removal of former cross subsidy between services, so that profitable routes continue to be run to the benefit of the private provider while more costly rural routes (which may in themselves enable travellers to access and contribute to the success of the commercially operated ones) continue only through subsidy from the local authority.

- **To what extent are the needs of different groups of passengers (e.g. people with disabilities, older people, young people) taken into account in determining the provision of public transport to isolated communities?**

6. Despite the figures on car ownership within super output areas, which show between 20 and 30% of residents not having access to a private car, there is a broad assumption that most rural residents who are economically active have access to one. Planning based on this assumption contributes to the limited options for employment of young people in rural areas, and lower than expected levels of post-school training and qualifications. Even if a higher percentage in rural areas do have access, maintenance is financially crippling - diversion from other household needs has job mobility implications

7. The statistics relating to the different groups of those who are disadvantaged tend to be taken separately rather than aggregated.. Thus school students, people with disabilities, college and training students are calculated and generally only provided for (where provision is made) as individual minorities, rather than being grouped into a stronger total, reflecting the nature of rural communities and which could well command a stronger place in the market.

We suggest there is a role for a requirement that Local Authorities look to their statutory requirements in the round rather than within separate "silo" areas.

- **What are the main challenges associated with providing better and more consistent bus and rail services to isolated communities? How can these challenges be overcome?**

8. Statistics show that the changing pattern of provision of training and employment opportunities (with increased centralisation) and the growing emphasis on house ownership have led to increasing travel distances to work and education, services and facilities. In response to these changes the wider social and transport needs of rural communities should be incorporated into all planning processes.

9. In the South West of England statistics show that the changing demographics of rural communities have left certain groups (the elderly, the children of those families who are still employed on the land and land-related businesses, and those lower paid workers providing for the social needs of these communities) expected to use public transport which has had its economic base removed. In-coming residents attracted to rural communities and able to meet their own transport needs, in turn are thus dependent upon local authority-supported services to meet the wider community's needs.

Research carried out for the former Countryside Agency showed how many rural families, faced with the need to make regular journeys to work, were maintaining a private car at the expense of a large portion of their income, and making sacrifices on food and heating to accommodate that expenditure.

- **How effectively do Community Transport services address the needs of passengers in isolated communities? How could Community Transport be improved?**

10. There are good examples in some local authority areas. However these are largely dependent upon voluntary support, and the variation of quality between authority areas is not considered to be acceptable. For users of such services improvement comes from certainty of provision, resulting in an ability to make appointments with confidence.

- **To what extent should passengers in isolated communities be expected to rely on taxis and other demand-responsive transport services?**

11. While taxi services might appear to be a solution, the economics of taxi provision rule this out as meeting rural needs.

- Successful taxi services rely upon short "downtime" , and the ability to find return fares.
- Rural taxi providers often depend upon alternative sources of income, which in turn limit their availability to provide taxi services to certain times of day
- People requiring transport are often those on low wages (e.g. farm/ rural business workers, care providers, cleaners, those on basic pension, the elderly ) who cannot afford regular taxi travel.
- Taxis do not meet the needs of those under driving age who seek access to leisure or employment, e.g. children wanting to go to a leisure facility in holiday periods or young people seeking part time employment

- **What are the main challenges associated with funding transport services in isolated communities? How can these services be made more affordable?**

12. **Challenges:**

- sparsity, and the expectation that services should be "cost effective" when no value is factored into that assessment for the wider social benefits of bus provision, (e.g. availability of labour, access to health services and education, access to retail shopping facilities, support services for the elderly etc.)
- the existing legislation leaves rural services at the mercy of diminishing local authority provision
- the lack of network planning for all public transport, that will enable rural users to see a connected service, albeit less frequent at the rural end, that enables access to urban facilities. Local bus and rail connections should be the responsibility of some authority rather than left to a negotiation system that at best is patchy but usually nonexistent.

- **`How can these services be made more affordable?**

- 13
- By assessing the wider benefits to the community as a whole of provision of quality local rural links
  - By evaluating the benefits of a public transport network as a whole and enabling the profitability of the more heavily used urban routes to acknowledge the contribution made by the feeder, rural links
  - By encouraging more bus use through the population as a whole. better marketing techniques to encourage transport efficiency and reduce congestion and pollution in the urban destinations.
  - Understanding consumer dynamics
  - Much greater involvement of user groups and bodies (e.g. town and parish councils) representing current and potential customers
  - having more up to date, easier to use payment systems (notably smart cards) that reduce cash handing and therefore bus stop dwell times.
  - by encouraging better quality buses and systems that make the journeys more attractive to regular rural to urban commuters (e.g. work stations, facilities on buses for lap top users)
  - improved marketing of buses as a modern, demand led industry
  - reviewing the interface between public and private sectors, with a view to maximising the overview of the local authority/sub regional vision and the commercial expertise of the provider.

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