

Transport and Accessibility: Briefing Paper for DSP Futures Group

1. Summary

Devon County Council has been heavily involved in leading the Government's innovative work on 'Accessibility Planning' since 2003 and has recently received national recognition for its innovative work in producing an accessibility action plan for the pilot priority area of Rural Torridge. Crucially Devon's approach is one of seeing improved accessibility as a key component of sustainable community development and of recognising the importance of partnership working, engagement and consultation. The County Council's work on producing its own 'County Hall Travel Plan' exemplifies many of the issues that need to be tackled in encouraging organisations to embrace accessibility planning in their work and change the location and delivery of services. However, funding for accessibility improvements, the impacts of different improvements and identifying stakeholders who are willing to take schemes forward remain key areas of uncertainty. In addition, a key element of Devon's accessibility planning work has involved integration with the County Council's wider vision and objectives (e.g. Devon Strategic Plan). Section 3 demonstrates how improved transport and accessibility is a critical element in achieving the key 'themes' of the Devon Sustainable Community Strategy.

2. Devon's Accessibility Planning Work

'...accessibility planning'...offers a new way to find and solve local problems, checking whether people experiencing social exclusion can reach the services they need, and identifying action to take if they can't. ("[Making the Connections](#)", 2003)

'Accessibility Planning' was introduced by Central Government¹ in 2003, as an overarching framework to ensure that poor access to services, and its consequences for social exclusion, are tackled in a coordinated way. This changed definitions in transport accessibility from just access to transport for the physically handicapped to improving access to jobs and key services for all, with transport authorities directed to include accessibility planning in their local transport plans. An ensuing debate remains whether people should be taken to where services are or services should be taken to where people live and also the extent to which accessibility improvements accord with PPG13's aim of reducing the need to travel.

2.1 The Local Transport Plan and Accessibility Strategy

Devon County Council used its second Local Transport Plan (LTP) (2006-11) to set out Devon's Accessibility Strategy, identifying how it would deliver accessibility improvements to key services and facilities, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas and communities. National best-practice guidance was followed in setting out a staged process to improving accessibility to key journey destinations² (e.g. education, health care) and addressing issues barriers to access. Central to Devon's approach is partnership working, liaising with as many service providers and stakeholder groups as possible.

The 2 key elements of Devon's Accessibility Strategy are therefore:

- 1) A countywide approach to improving accessibility and
- 2) A focus on tackling evidence-based accessibility problems in 'priority areas'

In order to identify those areas that suffered from poor accessibility by public transport, the County Council conducted a strategic countywide accessibility assessment using Accession mapping software. This identified a series of 'priority areas' for transport accessibility which were then correlated with the Devon Strategic Partnership's [DSP] 'targeted communities' to identify four initial

¹ ODPM (2003) "[Making the Connections](#): Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion, February 2003.

'priority action areas' for accessibility planning to 2011 (areas where deprivation and poor public transport access coexist) - Rural Torridge, Ilfracombe-Bratton Flemming-Combe Martin, Princetown and East Devon/Somerset Border.

2.2 Delivering the Strategy

2.2.1 Priority Areas

The next stages in the accessibility planning process have involved carrying out local accessibility assessments for the priority areas, local and strategic consultation and producing robust accessibility action plans (a package of schemes for improving accessibility).

Rural Torridge was the first priority area and was the subject of detailed local accessibility assessments in early 2006. The resulting maps and evidence were used to discuss Rural Torridge's access problems with the DSP's Common Ground Partnership and the Torridge LSP in order to formulate potential solutions (a process called 'option appraisal'). These solutions were then prioritised and appraised in terms of impacts, resources and Value for Money. An 'accessibility action plan' with key actions, stakeholders and funding sources was endorsed at the Torridge LSP in November 2006. The various actions contained within the accessibility action plan are now being implemented by a range of stakeholders in partnership. Funding from the LTP's Towns, Villages and Rural Communities Programme is being used to help deliver some of the schemes and fund a Project Worker to help the action plan's delivery. Actions have included an investigation of the hospital hopper bus to North Devon District Hospital and extensive engagement with Torridge District Council on developing accessibility policies for emerging Local Development Documents (LDDs). However, further funding and commitment from stakeholders will be necessary to deliver and refine the accessibility action plan over the next few years.

Devon County Council is also working with the North Devon LSP and Transform Neighbourhood Management Programme in Ilfracombe to look at the key access issues in our second priority area (Ilfracombe-Bratton Flemming-Coombe Martin).

2.2.2 Countywide Areas

As well as tackling the specific accessibility problems of the priority areas, the County Council has also been extensively involved in improving countywide accessibility for all by sustainable transport through schemes such as Wheels to Work, Ring and Ride and an expansion of Fare Car Services. Officers in the County Council are also involved in encouraging organisations (e.g. Primary Care Trust) to recognise 'accessibility planning' as central to achieving their own priorities, targets and objectives. Devon County Council is also working with Cornwall County Council and Torbay Council to look at cross-border solutions.

2.3 Land-Use Planning

A critical element in ensuring accessibility planning is delivered as planned and access to key services and destinations is improved is through integrating accessibility considerations into the spatial planning system. This has become a key element of Devon County Council's work as a Strategic Planning Authority – ensuring the LTP's accessibility planning work is incorporated into emerging Local Development Documents (LDDs), assisting local planning authorities (LPAs) in developing accessibility policies, providing mapping from Accession, writing an LDF Briefing Paper on 'Accessibility Planning' and encouraging the use of accessibility planning techniques to decide the location of new development. Similarly, in early 2006 Devon County Council provided advice on 'accessibility planning' policies to the Regional Assembly as part of developing the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West. However, if Accession is to be used more consistently and extensively, then additional funding and resources will be necessary.

2.4 National Coverage

As a result of this approach to delivering accessibility improvements, the role of Fare Cars in delivering Devon's Accessibility Strategy was shortlisted as a best-practice case study by the Department for Transport in October 2006. In January 2007, officers were interviewed by the 'Transportation Professional' (the magazine of the Institute of Highways and Transportation) regarding Devon's accessibility planning work. This subsequently formed the basis of the cover article of the magazine's March edition.

Case Study: County Hall Travel Plan

A good example of how organisations can incorporate accessibility and travel planning to achieve their own goals and objectives is Devon County Council's work on developing a 'travel plan' for County Hall. This has involved considering accessibility in its broadest sense and extensive discussion at all levels of the organisation, necessitating examination of the whole business model and how initiatives such as flexible working, home working, audio conferencing, car free days and workplace charging can assist in achieving a step-change in the way employees travel to work. Devon County Council has reduced single car trips by 23% in two years..

3. Transport, Accessibility and the Community Strategy

In the latest Devon Sustainability Community Strategy, accessibility and transport are not currently identified as themes in their own right. Transport and accessibility is a cross-cutting issue that permeates all the other themes and must be properly reflected in their specific priorities – this should be an important consideration for those working on all the themes of the Devon Sustainable Community Strategy. In a general sense improved transport and accessibility is a key element of success in achieving the aims on all the current themes.

- i) Transport and accessibility contribute significantly to the theme of Stronger Communities. Improving access to key services and reducing barriers to travel and transport enables all in the community to have access to essential services and helps deliver vibrant communities. For those without access to a car access to key services is essential to address social inequalities.
- ii) Transport and accessibility contribute significantly to the theme of Safer Devon, particularly in the sense that fear of crime is a key barrier to using public transport
- iii) Under the theme of Housing, an important factor is the need to link the locations of housing, particularly affordable housing, with the provision of sustainable transport. With employment becoming increasingly dispersed, a necessary element in working to break limited employment expectations or the cycle of non-employment is to make work accessible through an effective public transport network.
- iv) Under the theme of Children and Younger People public transport contributes to giving these groups independence and choice and helps improve their quality of life. In addition, more flexible transport is needed to enable these groups to make use of the 14-19 curriculum and extended schools programme.
- v) Under the theme of 'Older People', there is a clear link between the quality of life of older people and their ability to access public transport. As people get older they are more likely to (a) no longer drive (b) need more health care (c) have a reduced quality of life.
- vi) Transport plays a major role in delivering improved Health and Wellbeing. Recent work by Devon County Council with the Devon Primary Care Trust on Health Impact Assessments is showing the critical role of accessibility by sustainable transport to health care services in delivering broader health and wellbeing objectives. Currently health care opportunities are more available to those with cars than those without cars, and therefore there is an inequality for those who do not have access to a car.
- vii) In terms of the theme of Culture, public transport is central to engaging those who tend to be less involved in cultural activities

Conclusion

Accessibility to key services and facilities plays such an important role in people's quality of life that it should be central to all decision-making and thus at the core of the Devon Sustainable Community Strategy. A short analysis of the key themes emerging thus far in the Devon Sustainable Community Strategy has identified the need to look in more depth at access to health services, access to employment, rural transport access and how access and transport can help improve the quality of life of children, young and older people.

Devon's innovative approach to 'accessibility planning' should be taken forward into the Devon Sustainable Community Strategy Futures Group, particularly its attempts to integrate social cohesion, transport planning and land-use planning objectives. It is vital that appropriate funding and stakeholder commitment comes forward through this process to ensure a broad array of accessibility improvements and solutions can be implemented within a holistic, joined-up strategy. This is even more important considering the multiple ways in which transport and accessibility contribute to the key 'themes' within the Devon Sustainable Community Strategy and can make substantial differences to residents' quality of life in the most deprived areas of the county.