

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Name of Committee** Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Committee** 8th June 2006

**Report Title** Concessionary Travel in Warwickshire

**Summary** The report provides a summary of the concessionary transport scheme currently operating in Warwickshire and brief details of a proposed new national scheme to start in April 2008.

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**Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?** Yes/No

**Background Papers** None

**CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-** *Details to be specified*

- Other Committees  .....
- Local Member(s)  .....  
(With brief comments, if appropriate)
- Other Elected Members  Councillor K Browne } For information.  
Councillor Mrs E Goode }  
Councillor Mrs J Lea }
- Cabinet Member  Councillor M Heatley – For information.  
(Reports to The Cabinet, to be cleared with appropriate Cabinet Member)
- Chief Executive  .....
- Legal  I Marriott - agreed
- Finance  .....

- Other Chief Officers  .....
- District Councils  .....
- Health Authority  .....
- Police  .....
- Other Bodies/Individuals  .....

**FINAL DECISION**                      **YES/NO**      *(If 'No' complete Suggested Next Steps)*

**SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS :**

*Details to be specified*

- Further consideration by this Committee  .....
- To Council  .....
- To Cabinet  .....
- To an O & S Committee  .....
- To an Area Committee  .....
- Further Consultation  .....

**Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee –  
8th June 2006**

**Concessionary Travel in Warwickshire**

**Report of the Strategic Director for  
Environment and Economy**

**Recommendation**

That Members note this report and endorse the partnership working between Warwickshire County Council and the five District and Borough Councils across the county in delivering an improved and extended concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled passengers in Warwickshire.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of recent developments, both nationally and locally which have enhanced concessionary travel facilities for older and disabled people, and to update Members of any further developments which is likely to lead to a national free concessionary travel scheme in April 2008.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Prior to April 2006, five separate schemes were administered across the county by the appropriate district or borough council. The schemes varied considerably, both in terms of cost and benefits offered. The Transport Act 2000 provided for a statutory minimum 50% discount on local bus services within each district or borough. When this was introduced in April 2001 it highlighted numerous limitations and inequities in schemes across the county.
- 2.2 Consultation with key stakeholders proved conclusively that inability to travel at reduced rates outside the district in which passengers resided was a major frustration. Following a series of meetings with the districts and boroughs, the County Council secured funding to provide a county wide pass option. For a charge of £10, users could choose the countywide pass option and travel anywhere in the county and to neighbouring towns and cities. The only condition was that the journey must start or finish in Warwickshire. The cost of brokering these additional journeys was met by the County Council for around £60K per annum. The county wide half fare scheme was well received and used by a significant number of passengers. This new approach also ensured regular dialogue between the County, District and Borough councils.

### **3. The Current Position in Warwickshire**

- 3.1 From April 2006, the statutory minimum requirement in the Transport Act 2000 was increased to provide free off peak travel for older and disabled people travelling on local bus services within each district or borough. All men and women aged 60 and over, as well as various categories of disabled people as defined in the Act, qualify.
- 3.2 Responsibility for providing concessionary travel schemes remains with local authorities at District, Borough and Unitary Council level. Local authorities, including County Councils, will be able to work together to provide county or area wide passes at their own discretion.
- 3.3 Passes must be issued free of charge. The statutory minimum provides for concessionary travel between 9.30am and 11pm Mondays to Fridays and all day at weekends and Bank Holidays. Again, local authorities may offer a more generous scheme.
- 3.4 The Government has provided an extra £350 million from 2006/07 to fund the cost of providing additional bus travel.
- 3.5 As part of our ongoing collaboration with the districts and boroughs, concessionary travel specialist consultants MCL were commissioned to review concessionary travel in Warwickshire, the way it is delivered and administered. The principal requirements of the study were to:-
- (i) Gather information regarding existing concessionary travel provision:
  - (ii) Develop in outline options for a multi authority scheme to meet the new national free travel requirements:
  - (iii) Assess the impact in terms of administration and cost feasibility.
- 3.6 This work was carried out during autumn 2005 and the consultants concluded that, based on projected increase in travel, an off peak county wide scheme would be affordable, and recommended that it should be introduced. Districts and boroughs obtained political endorsement to provide an enhanced free county wide facility.
- 3.7 Whilst districts and boroughs wish to retain responsibility for the issue of passes, they recognised the benefits of centralising the administration of reimbursement. The advantages seem to be evident:-
- (i) Welcomed by operators and keep their additional cost claims to a minimum:
  - (ii) Avoid duplication of skills and resources:
  - (iii) Offer scales of economy:

- (iv) Achieve more power and consistency in negotiation.
- 3.8 Officers from County, District and Borough share the view that the centralisation of reimbursement management is the best approach, and that this should be coordinated by WCC.
- 3.9 The county wide scheme now available in Warwickshire offers a facility which exceeds the statutory minimum scheme. These additional benefits are significant:-
- (i) The statutory minimum scheme only permits free travel between 0930hrs and 2300hrs on Mondays to Fridays. The Warwickshire scheme allows free travel after 0900hrs with no evening restrictions.
  - (ii) The statutory minimum scheme only permits free travel in the district or borough in which the resident lives. The Warwickshire scheme allows free travel throughout the county:
  - (iii) The statutory minimum scheme does not permit free travel outside the county in which the resident lives. The Warwickshire scheme allows free travel on any local bus service which either starts or finishes in the county, therefore providing free travel to all major towns and cities in neighbouring counties.
- 3.10 As well as providing an enhanced concessionary travel facility, the collaboration between the county, district and borough councils has provided the opportunity to adopt a more consistent approach to the situation than was previously the case. This has been welcomed by both users and providers, including drivers who no longer have to understand and interpret five separate schemes and the many passes in use within those schemes. The cost of the scheme in Warwickshire in 2006/07 is likely to be around £3.6 million, none of which is funded by Warwickshire County Council.
- 3.11 The only element of the new scheme which is not uniform relates to the issue of tokens as an alternative to a bus pass. The approach taken by the districts and boroughs to the issue of tokens is something which Warwickshire County Council has no involvement in, or control over. The current situation is as follows:-
- (i) Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council – No token issue available.
  - (ii) North Warwickshire Borough Council – Tokens issued (if required) in all areas. Elderly and disabled - £30 per annum upon payment of £5.
  - (iii) Rugby Borough Council – Tokens issued (if required) in rurally isolated areas with limited bus services. Elderly - £150 per annum, Disabled - £250 per annum.
  - (iv) Stratford District Council – No token issue available. Facility removed in April 2005.

- (v) Warwick District Council – No token issue available. Facility removed in April 2006.
- 3.12 Both Stratford and Warwick District Councils have introduced, and are funding community transport schemes to assist those in rurally isolated who may not have access to a frequent bus service. Stratford District Council introduced Community Links in April 2006 to provide demand responsive transport between 0900hrs and 1500hrs for people in rural areas who previously qualified for tokens. Warwick District Council have entered into an agreement with local community transport provider 'Racing to Get There' to provide a similar facility.

#### **4. The Way Forward**

- 4.1 Two weeks before the introduction of the new scheme, it was announced in the budget that the elderly and disabled will be able to travel free of charge on any bus in England from April 2008 under plans to introduce a national free concessionary travel scheme. This was a surprise but generally welcome announcement and followed criticism of the 2006 scheme with regard to the way in which the £350 million funding has been allocated nationally, and the differing approaches being taken at district and county level in determining the scope of provision.
- 4.2 The fact that any new scheme will not be introduced for nearly two years seems to indicate the level of consultation likely to be carried out by central government during this period. It is anticipated that this will be carried out through a number of sources including the Local Government Association (LGA), County Surveyors Society (CSS) and the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO). It has also been announced that a House of Commons Transport Select Committee is to conduct an enquiry into the provision of bus services across the UK. This includes specific questions to a wide range of stakeholders about current concerns and thoughts regarding concessionary travel.
- 4.3 A further £250 million is to be made available to fund the new scheme. At present there is no indication as to whether the scheme will be managed and funded by districts and boroughs, the local transport authorities, or directly by central government. However, any additional funding from central government for concessionary travel will of course be specifically for that purpose and will not be used to provide financial support for local bus services which cannot be commercially sustained.
- 4.4 A further report will be submitted to this Committee as soon as more substantial details are available.

JOHN DEEGAN  
Strategic Director for Environment and Economy  
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17th May 2006