

Joining Up 'Trunk' Bus Routes with DRT Services Report

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8 February 2023

1.0 Overview:

- 1.1 At the WCC Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held in June 2022, a briefing note was requested, further to a discussion about bus provision as promoted in the Warwickshire Bus Service Improvement Plan specifically referring to the focus on key commercial 'trunk' routes being supported by feeder Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in rural settlements. Specifically, concern was expressed about how suburban bus routes around Warwickshire towns might be affected because of a focus on DRT.

2.0 Overview of the Warwickshire Bus Network:

- 2.1 The core of the Warwickshire bus network is focused on connectivity between Coventry, Royal Leamington Spa, Warwick, Rugby, Nuneaton, Bedworth, Kenilworth, Stratford-upon-Avon, Atherstone, Polesworth, Southam, Shipston-on-Stour, Bulkington, Kingsbury, Alcester, Coleshill, Whitnash and Bidford-on-Avon. In addition, less frequent bus services also call at these urban places providing connectivity to other places, such as villages and small rural settlements. Furthermore, in places such as Leamington, Nuneaton, Rugby and Stratford-upon-Avon, bus services operate solely within the town providing connectivity between residential areas and the town centre.
- 2.2 The Warwickshire bus network also caters for cross-boundary bus travel demand for access to destinations such as Birmingham, Leicester, Oxford, Northampton, Tamworth, Hinckley, Solihull, Banbury, Evesham, Daventry, Lutterworth, Chipping Campden and Moreton-in-Marsh. There are also several other primary destinations both in and outside the county, which are served by the Warwickshire Bus Network including University Hospital Coventry, Warwick Hospital, George Eliot Hospital, Queen Alexandra Hospital, Hams Hall Employment Site, Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT), MIRA major employment site, Birmingham International Airport / The National Exhibition Centre, Birch Coppice Employment Site, Warwick University, Coventry University and Jaguar Land Rover sites.
- 2.3 New residential development sites are also integrated into the Warwickshire Bus Network funded through Section 106 developer contributions secured during the planning process, e.g., Lighthorne Heath, Meon Vale, Houlton and Coton Park.
- 2.4 The majority of bus services in Warwickshire are operated on a commercial basis by private companies and these form the core of the bus network. Approximately 80% of the 14 million bus passenger journeys made in Warwickshire, pre-pandemic were carried out on commercial services.

Stagecoach Midlands is the primary commercial bus operator in Warwickshire with approximately 65% of market share.

2.5 To ensure that bus services are provided for other parts of Warwickshire, not served by the commercial bus network to provide connectivity to employment sites as well as services and facilities in urban centres, the County Council procures additional subsidised bus services through a competitive tendering process. These subsidised bus services account for the remaining 20% of bus passenger journeys made in Warwickshire. This excludes journeys on specific home to school transport services.

2.6 The County Council is responsible for providing bus services to and from schools and colleges for entitled pupils and students. These bus services also carry students who are not entitled to free transport, who pay to travel.

3.0 Warwickshire Bus Service Improvement Plan

3.1 As required by in the “Bus Back Better (National Bus Strategy for England outside London)” published by the Government in March 2021, the County Council worked in partnership with bus operators to produce a Warwickshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The BSIP sets out how the County Council will use the framework of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with bus operators to deliver an ambitious vision for travel by bus in Warwickshire by means of introducing measures aimed at helping achieve the patronage growth and increased bus modal share objectives set in the National Bus Strategy.

3.2 Included in the Warwickshire BSIP is a table setting out the County Council’s long term ambitions concerning service frequencies and hours of operation across the Warwickshire bus network, along different types of routes and locations within the county. These were outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Long Term Aspiration for Bus Service Provision across the Warwickshire Bus Network (Warwickshire Bus Service Improvement Plan)

| | Monday to Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|--|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Core Networks Urban and Peri-urban | 20 minutes between 0530-0700 | 20 minutes between 0530 to 0900 | 20 minutes between 0800 to 1800 |
| | 10 minutes between 0700-1830 | 10 minutes between 0900 to 1600 | 30 minutes between 1800 to 2100 |
| | 20 minutes between 1830-2300 | 20 minutes between 1600 to 2300 | |
| Core Network Interurban & Suburban | 30 minutes between 0530 to 0700 | 30 minutes between 0530 to 0900 | 30 minutes between 0800 to 2100 |
| | 15 minutes between 0700 to 1830 | 15 minutes between 0900 to 1600 | |
| | 30 minutes between 1830 to 2330 | 30 minutes between 1600 to 2300 | |
| Local Network & Rural Core network | 60 minutes between 0600 to 0700 | 60 minutes between 0600 to 0900 | 60 minutes between 0800 to 1800 |
| | 30 minutes between 0700 to 1830 | 30 minutes between 0900 to 1600 | |
| | 60 minutes between 1830 to 2300 | 60 minutes between 1600 to 2300 | |
| Supporting Network | We will ensure that the supported and part supported services continue to develop under the same principles of the core and local networks for access to employment, education and other activities, and to become a viable alternative to the private car. | | |
| Demand Responsive | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● - U bus● – IndieGo● - Community Transport <p>We will consider how each individual service can be brought together to complement each other, and the fixed route bus network, reduce the administrative overheads, and make more efficient use of the available resource. Additionally, we will consider how this resource can be used to provide a more flexible and sustainable solution to socially necessary supporting services, including rural areas away from main corridors, rather than traditional fixed route services.</p> | | |
| Integration | The bus network will be enhanced to ensure that bus services are timed to connect with each other, with a focus on meeting the specific times in the early morning and evening, and where services are operating at wide headways. Where practicable bus services will be arranged to provide multi-modal interchange. | | |

4.0 Response to the Concerns Raised by the County Councillors:

4.1 In accordance with the Warwickshire BSIP, County Council officers can confirm the following points:

- The operation of inter-urban and suburban bus services will continue to have a fundamental role across the county in providing residents with access to employment, education, retail, healthcare, leisure, town centre amenities and public transport interchanges; and
- The County Council will continue to financially support the operation of these inter-urban and suburban bus services when required - with the aim of achieving the level of provision set out in Table 1, however, this will not be at the expense of improving and expanding our DRT network.

4.2 County Council officers also confirm that the intention regarding the proposed provision of feeder DRT services is to fill-in gaps in on the Warwickshire Bus Network in terms of the following:

- Rural settlements not served by any rural or inter-urban bus service; and
- Rural settlements which are only served sporadically by a conventional market day rural bus route operating one or two days per week (and only providing 1 or 2 journeys per day in each direction).

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