West Berkshire

Local Transport Plan 2011-2026

Passenger Transport Strategy

November 2014

West Berkshire
COUNCIL
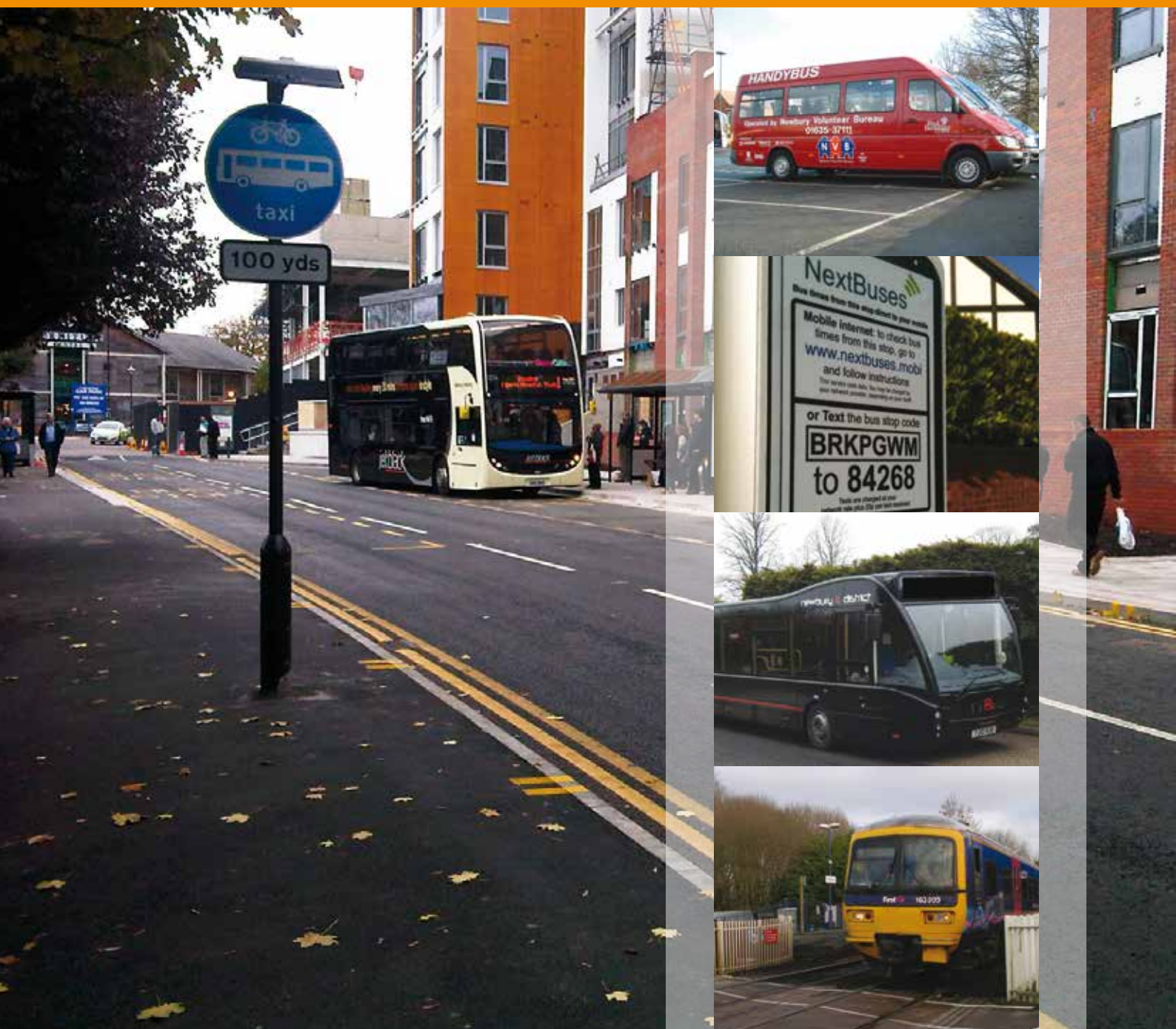
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1 Introduction and Overview

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Provision of good quality passenger transport services, customer information and supporting infrastructure is an important part of West Berkshire Council's vision for transport in the District. Rail, bus, coach, community transport and demand responsive services, together with taxis and private hire vehicles, already play a significant role in enabling access to facilities and services across the District and to destinations in other authority areas. They also provide people with travel choices and can contribute to addressing congestion and offsetting the environmental impacts of travel.

1.1.2 This strategy forms a central part of the Council's third Local Transport Plan (LTP), which covers the period 2011 to 2026. It builds upon and updates the strategy that was developed alongside the preceding LTP2, and continues the approach of taking a wider view of passenger transport provision across the District rather than focussing exclusively upon the bus or rail modes.

1.1.3 The principle underpinning this strategy is to provide services and develop infrastructure that meets the needs of customers; the residents of, employees based within, and visitors to West Berkshire, whilst at the same time having regard to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. An effective passenger transport network is essential in order to give people, in both the urban and rural areas of West Berkshire, access to the opportunities and benefits that contribute to the enjoyment of a better quality of life.

1.2 Aims & Objectives of the Strategy

1.2.1 The aims of this strategy are:

- To increase the market share for public transport services by making those services a more attractive choice for existing and potential customers;
- To build upon prior initiatives and tally with future development proposals, so as to better integrate the provision of passenger transport services, and;
- To help achieve an accessible and safe public transport network.

1.2.2 Passenger transport needs will continue to be met by bus, passenger rail, community transport services, taxis and private hire vehicles, or by any appropriate combination of these modes. These activities and modes have subsidiary strategies and common aims; their provision will be integrated to provide effective transport services.

1.2.3 The strategy seeks to reflect the differing characteristics associated with the four main geographical areas in the District identified in the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and the LTP, namely;

- Newbury and Thatcham
- The Eastern Area (Purley on Thames, Tilehurst, Calcot, and Theale)
- The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- The East Kennet Valley

1.2.4 The strategy also takes account of the close inter-relationship with, and the high demand of movement between the District and its neighbouring local authority areas, including Reading Borough, and via the strategic coach and rail networks, to and from more distant destinations, such as London and Heathrow Airport.

1.2.5 The target audience for this strategy includes a wide range of stakeholders, including;

- Existing or potential customers of publicly-available passenger transport services
- Businesses
- Community organisations and voluntary groups
- Town and parish councils
- Local transport operators and Network Rail
- Healthcare service providers
- Other service areas provided by West Berkshire Council
- Schools

1.2.6 Some passenger services are commercially viable, and the Council would expect these to continue to be funded by passenger transport operators, through revenue earned from those services. However, there are a range of other factors that need to be taken into consideration in relation to provision of other services, including social and wider economic benefits. In order to implement and help sustain such operations, the Council will work with its partners to identify contributions, for example from developers or from DfT grant funding, to augment monies from transport providers.

1.2.7 Good partnership working and effective management during the previous LTP period have been key factors in enabling the provision and retention of transport services across the District. However, the Council is now facing serious challenges in the light of reduced funding, set against an increased demand for services and coupled with the rising costs of fuel and of tenders from operators to run those services. This places an increased emphasis on ensuring that transport services supported and provided by the Council are financially sustainable, as well as spurring consideration of whether there are other innovative means of providing services efficiently and effectively.

1.2.8 The Council will seek to ensure value for money in the delivery of public transport services and schemes by:

- Promoting integrated solutions to transport issues and challenges which consider all modes of travel and other wider national and local policy objectives;
- Maximising opportunities for funding from third parties wherever possible, including from the private sector;
- Identifying, whenever feasible depending on the nature and extent of the service or scheme, a Business Case that clarifies the costs of implementing that measure relative to the benefits accruing;
- Making provision for appropriate recompense or cessation of contracts, in the event of a contractor defaulting on their obligations, and;
- Taking account of 'good practice' in delivering similar services and schemes in other local authority areas.

1.3 Passenger Transport in West Berkshire

1.3.1 West Berkshire has a complex local character (as demonstrated by the four identified geographical areas described above). The issues identified below set the context for which passenger transport services are delivered in the District, and how this strategy will need to develop future passenger transport services;

- A significant proportion of the District is rural, with 74% of the District falling within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is reflected in the dispersed and low-density population pattern in West Berkshire;

- The population density is in the region of two people per hectare, meaning that the scope for operators to evolve and maintain commercially-viable public transport services is largely restricted to the urban centres of Newbury, Thatcham, Theale, Tilehurst and Calcot;

- High levels of personal wealth, coupled with high levels of car ownership and car use overall exacerbate the difficulties in sustaining public transport services, particularly in rural areas;

- Notwithstanding the District's general prosperity, there are a number of small pockets of deprivation;

- The District has an ageing population and the number of older people is expected to rise significantly, increasing by some two thirds over the next 20 years. This will further increase demand for local transport services as most people will reach a point where, if they own a car, they are no longer able to drive safely and therefore need access to a publicly-available passenger transport service if they are to maintain their independence. This ever-growing group can receive free bus transport through the national concessionary fares scheme.

1.4 SWOT Analysis

1.4.1 A broad analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats has been carried out to help summarise the current position of passenger transport in the district and highlight possible developments for future improvements (see below). Whilst it is recognised that elements will change over time, it provides a useful snap-shot and a focus for considering a range of issues.

1.4.2 Where the items in Table 1.4 below relate to specific areas this has been indicated as follows:

[NT]: Urban Area of Newbury and Thatcham,

[E]: Eastern Urban Area

[A/K]: North Wessex Downs AONB and East Kennet Valley areas

Otherwise the statements relate to the whole District.

1.5 Structure of this document

1.5.1 Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the policy context in the Council's LTP and other corporate documents relating to passenger transport. The document then outlines a strategy for various types of passenger transport services operating in the District, including taking into account the associated infrastructure. The document will also briefly outline the delivery mechanisms and how the overall strategy will be monitored and reported.

1.5.2 The main LTP document contains a proposal for review after the first six years delivery (March 2017). It is therefore intended that this strategy will be similarly reviewed in 2019, unless any amendments are required as a result of significant changes to policy or processes in advance of this date.

Table 1.4 – SWOT Analysis for Passenger Transport in West Berkshire

Strengths

- Dedicated Transport Policy and Transport Services Teams
- Close liaison with Development Control and Planning Teams
- Close liaison with Street Works, Highways Maintenance and Traffic Services Teams
- Public Transport Infrastructure Strategy
- Public Transport Information Strategy
- Well-received customer information – District-wide Travel Guide - available in hard copy and online
- Reliable operators and services
- Active Community Transport sector
- Good rail links along east-west corridor through the District and into Reading Borough
- Company travel schemes e.g. Vodafone, AWE, Greenham Business Park [NT]

Weaknesses

- Rising costs associated with services and broader financial situation
- Revenue funding streams not linked to actual contract cost increases
- Limited rural infrastructure and services [A/K]
- Limited facilities at interchange locations
- Limited disabled access to trains and some buses, due to vehicles and/or infrastructure
- Bus travel time delays in congestion hot spots at key times of day [NT] [E]

Opportunities

- Section 106 funding for bus services and supporting infrastructure
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- DfT Access for All funding for rail station improvements
- DfT funding initiatives and challenge bids
- Further development of quality bus corridors, complemented by connecting services to outlying settlements
- Public transport opportunities linked with further developments in Newbury town centre [NT]
- Development of Real Time Passenger Information system in line with established RTPI Strategy
- Evolution of Punctuality Improvement Partnership, in line with Traffic Management Act 2004
- Localism Act: scope to use CIL funding for provision, improvement, operation, and maintenance of services and infrastructure
- Advent of not-for-profit transport operators
- Evolution of Community Transport
- Scope to link initiatives to School and Business Travel Plans [NT] [E]
- Development of 'Connect'/integrated ticketing, plus evolution of smart card technology
- Further development of 'Connect' network branding
- Electrification on local rail routes

Threats

- Contract cost of services rising by upwards of 15% upon re-tender
- High incomes and resultant high car ownership and usage
- Complex and changing work patterns
- De-registration of existing commercial services or sectors of commercial routes
- Perceived low cost of car parking in town centres [NT]
- Potential loss of off-street public transport interchange in central Newbury [NT]
- Potential reduction of direct trains to London from Hungerford and Kintbury stations following electrification of the Berks & Hants railway line as far as Newbury [A]

2. Local Policy Context

2.0.1   The development of this Passenger Transport Strategy has been primarily guided by the current Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire 2011-2026, published in April 2011, which has been prepared to take into account national transport policy and guidance, and to support the delivery of a number of West Berkshire's strategies and plans. This chapter sets out the local policy context in relation to passenger transport services and infrastructure in the District, and how these shape the contents of this strategy.

2.1 Local Transport Plan 2011-2026

2.1.1   The LTP contains a series of policies that have been developed to help deliver the plan's overall vision for transport in West Berkshire, its local transport goals, and the transport visions for each of the four areas of the District. In total, the LTP contains 15 key policies that cover the main elements of transport, with a number of supporting policies that pick up on more detailed topics.

2.1.2   In terms of passenger transport, this is covered by its own key policy (as outlined below), which is in turn accompanied by seven supporting policies that consider specific issues in more detail. In addition, the delivery and improvement of passenger transport services and infrastructure will also contribute to other LTP key policies and strategies. For ease of reference, the relevant LTP policies are listed in the text (e.g. LTP K1).

2.1.3   The key LTP policy for Passenger Transport is as follows:

Policy LTP K9

Passenger Transport

In partnership with local transport operators, the Council will facilitate and support passenger transport services operating in West Berkshire to help deliver the transport vision for the District.

2.1.4   This policy covers the range of passenger transport services available in West Berkshire that will form a variety of sustainable travel options that provide people with choice and help them to access the services and facilities they need. For these passenger transport services to be effective in attracting passengers and playing their part in minimising congestion, they need to be affordable and accessible, as well as being simple to use with clear ticketing and information. In addition, passenger transport services will have a contributory role in the delivery of other LTP key policies as outlined in the table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Passenger Transport in other LTP Key Policies

LTP Key Policy	Role of Freight
LTP K1 – Increasing travel choice	By providing people with realistic sustainable travel options, and promoting use through travel plans and information.
LTP K2 – Minimising congestion	As an effective alternative to the private car; thereby reducing car dependency and usage.
LTP K3 – Accessibility (access to services and facilities)	By enabling people to access services and facilities, including employment opportunities.
LTP K4 – Accessibility (equality, diversity, and inclusion)	By improving vehicles and infrastructure to enable better access for all.
LTP K5 – Climate change	By providing realistic sustainable travel options that reduce car journeys, and using cleaner vehicles.
LTP K10 – School travel	As a mode of travel for journeys to school.
LTP K13 – New development	As an effective measure to mitigate travel impacts of development.

2.1.5   LTP Policy K9 has seven supporting policies that cover the different types of passenger transport services operating in the District and associated infrastructure, plus other measures that help to encourage use and improve accessibility.

2.1.6   The Council is required to produce an Implementation Plan (IP) to support the delivery of the LTP. This covers shorter term timeframes than the long-term LTP strategy document and will be updated on an annual basis. The main focus of the IP will be to outline the transport-related schemes and projects that the Council intends to deliver to support the LTP. It looks at all capital and revenue funding available to the Council, from a variety of funding sources.

2.1.7   The main component of the IP is a set of tables which aim to bring together schemes and projects from the Council's Capital Programme, Service Plans, and team work programmes. This includes the Transport Services Team's Bus Infrastructure Strategy and RTPI Strategy, plus linkages to the Local Plan Core Strategy Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Measures within these strategies will ultimately feed into future versions of the IP as they are developed and when funding sources have been identified.

2.2 Links to West Berkshire Local Plan Core Strategy

2.2.1   The Local Plan Core Strategy contains a series of strategic objectives, including one relating to transport, which is as follows:

To put in place a sustainable transport network which supports economic growth in West Berkshire, links existing and new development, prioritises walking, cycling and public transport and provides a genuine choice of modes. Traffic management measures will minimise the impact of new development on the existing network.

2.2.2 Local Plan Policy CS14 (Transport) states that improving travel choice is key when working towards modal shift away from single occupancy car use in favour of more sustainable travel (walking, cycling, bus, rail, and car sharing). There is a focus on sustainable travel within and between main urban areas and rural service centres of West Berkshire to help facilitate regular journeys to work or education.

2.2.3 Passenger transport services are recognised as a key consideration for new development as a means of providing opportunities to access employment, education, and other essential services and facilities. The Local Plan looks for more sustainable patterns of development that encourage trips to be made by bus or rail modes. This will be achieved through ensuring that development is provided in proximity of existing passenger transport services, or in terms of more strategic sites, by providing the necessary infrastructure and services that will enable journeys to be made by passenger transport.

3. Local Bus and Coach Strategy

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This chapter describes the Council's Strategy for maintaining and developing bus and coach services across the District. It discusses the challenges faced in providing bus services in West Berkshire, identifies a Hierarchy of Bus Services and how each level within this Hierarchy is intended to be maintained and potentially enhanced.

3.1.2 The Hierarchy reflects the Council's identification of scope for certain connections to be provided by smaller accessible vehicles such as minibuses, which may be operated under a Community Bus Permit or similar special licence, taking account of the overall level of demand for travel. Therefore there are synergies between this component Strategy and the Strategy for Community Transport that is set out in Chapter 4.

3.1.3 Although the geography of West Berkshire is predominantly rural, it incorporates the urban areas of Newbury and Thatcham and the Eastern Urban Area that borders Reading Borough Council. When coupled with journeys between rural communities and the urban areas, this land use pattern does generate demand for a viable network of local bus services, augmented by demand responsive and community transport services to connect the smaller communities and mobility-impaired with essential facilities and with inter-regional networks.

3.1.4 There are a number of issues and challenges relating to local bus operation that can affect the perception of existing and would-be bus customers in the District, some of which include:

- A lower level of fare paying customers (as distinct from concessionary bus pass users) using local bus services in the Newbury and Thatcham urban areas when compared with neighbouring towns e.g. Reading, Basingstoke;

- High levels of out-commuting, car ownership, usage, and dependency, which often translates into congestion around key junctions in urban areas at peak travel times, which in turn can have an impact on journey time reliability and punctuality of local bus services;

- Difficulties in providing and sustaining commercially-viable conventional bus services in rural areas;

- Limited availability of early morning and late evening services;

- Increasing costs involved in providing transport services e.g. fuel, vehicle purchase or leasing charges;

- Network instability – whilst the need for small-scale revisions at set times, to react to changes in demand is appreciated, at a strategic level the bus network particularly through rural areas has historically not been sufficiently stable for people to have confidence in relying on bus and community transport services when making longer-term 'lifestyle' decisions, such as where to live within the District and how to get to work, shopping and leisure opportunities;

- Insufficient provision of through ticketing, in particular for customers wishing to transfer between bus and rail (and vice versa); and

- The potential for further development of the evolving "Connect" branding for local, contracted West Berkshire bus services.

3.1.5   Table 3.1 below lists the commercial and contract bus services currently operating in the District. The Council will continue to promote both the commercially-operated and financially-supported, subsidised services that form the District-wide network, under the established 'Connect' network branding. Funding support will be carefully targeted where the need exists, but where commercial operation is unlikely to be viable.

Table 3.1 – Commercial and Subsidised Bus Services in West Berkshire (Oct 2014)

Commercial or Subsidised	Service	Operator	Route
Commercial	The Link	Stagecoach	Basingstoke - Newbury
	Jet Black 1	Reading Transport	Reading – Newbury (Mondays to Sundays)
	Lime 2	Reading Transport	Reading – Burghfield/Mortimer (Mondays to Saturdays)
	26 /N26	Reading Transport	Reading – Ford's Farm - Calcot
	16	Reading Transport	Reading – Oxford Road – Purley-on-Thames
	33	Reading Transport	Reading – Tilehurst – Turnham's Farm
Subsidised by neighbouring authority or organisation, with no funding from WBC.	7	Stagecoach	Andover - Newbury
	18	Reading Transport	Reading – Tilehurst – Calcot (Saturdays only)
	21/22/23/24	Stagecoach	Burghclere / Kingsclere / Woolton Hill - Newbury
	103	Newbury & District	Bishop's Green – Greenham Park - Newbury
	135	Thames Travel	Goring – Streatley – Moulsford – Wallingford
	222	Barnes Coaches	E Grafton – Hungerford – Newbury (Thursdays only)
Subsidised by West Berkshire Council	2	Newbury & District	Newbury – Wash Common
	3	Newbury & District	Newbury – Kintbury – Inkpen – Hungerford
	4	Newbury & District	Newbury – Speen – Stockcross – Boxford – Great Shefford – East Garston – Eastbury- Lambourn
	5	West Berkshire Council Transport Services; in house	Newbury – Walton Way – Love Lane – Donnington – Speen – Almond Avenue – Newbury. Circular services.
	6 & 6a	Newbury & District	Newbury – Donnington – Chieveley – Beedon – The Ilsleys – Compton – Hampstead Norreys – Hermitage (service 6 clockwise, 6a anti-clockwise)
	8	Newbury & District	Newbury – Greenham – Pigeons Farm - Greenham
	20, X20, 46	Wiltshire Bus & Thamesdown Transport	Marlborough / Swindon – Hungerford (contracts managed by Wiltshire Council with contribution from WBC).
	28	Reading Transport	Purley – Tilehurst – Reading (contract managed by Reading Borough Council, with contribution from WBC)
	75	Newbury & District	Beech Hill – Mortimer – Burghfield Common – Newbury (Tuesdays and Thursdays)
	82	Barnes	Great Shefford – Wantage (Wednesdays)
	90 & 95	Go Ride	Lambourn – Hungerford (service 90 – Mondays – Saturdays) and Lambourn – Wickham – Winterbourne – Newbury (service 95, Saturdays only). Demand responsive – customers are encouraged to pre-book these services.
	101	Newbury & District	Newbury – Cold Ash – Bradfield – Theale – Calcot – Tilehurst
	102	Newbury & District	Newbury – West Berkshire Community Hospital – Kennet Heath – Theale
	104 & 105	Newbury & District	Newbury – Brimpton – Aldermaston – Theale – Calcot – Tilehurst

Subsidised by West Berkshire Council	107	Newbury & District (for schooltime journeys & Saturday service) & WBC Transport Services	Newbury – Leckhampstead – Chaddleworth – Brightwalton - Peasemore
	143	Thames Travel	Upper Basildon – Pangbourne – Whitchurch-on-Thames – Purley-on-Thames – Reading (with contribution from Oxfordshire County Council)
	154	Horseman	Beech Hill – Grazeley – Reading (Thurs &Sats, with Basingstoke and Wokingham Boroughs)
	H1	West Berkshire Council Transport Services – in house	Hungerford Town Service (Wednesdays and Fridays. (Jointly funded with Hungerford Town Council).
	N1, N2, N4	Newbury & District	Late evening journeys linking Newbury with Thatcham, Wash Common, Greenham, and Speen.

3.1.6   In terms of the commercially viable services, although patronage on the Jet Black service 1 (Newbury-Thatcham-Reading) and Lime 2 (Mortimer-Burghfield Common-Burghfield-Reading) routes has grown significantly following the introduction of new vehicles, application of distinctive branding and investment by the Council in upgraded infrastructure and Real Time Passenger Information (Jet Black 1 witnessing a 25% overall increase in patronage between April 2011 and April 2014 according to Reading Buses, with their 'Lime' routes witnessing growth of 2% after relaunch in April 2014), the Lime 2 route in particular remains tentative. Similarly, in the Eastern Urban Area, patronage on Reading Buses' commercial Premier Routes grew by over 4% following the introduction of a package of quality measures, delivered through partnership working between West Berkshire Council, Reading Borough Council, and Reading Transport Limited.

3.1.7   Conversely, Table 3.1 shows that the majority of bus services in West Berkshire are operated under contract to, or with a financial contribution from, the Council (under the umbrella 'Connect' branding).

3.1.8   The Council's Approach to prioritising the funding for financially-supported services is detailed in Section 3.6.

3.2 LTP Policy PT1 – Bus Services

3.2.1 - The Local Transport Plan policy for bus services is as follows:

Policy LTP PT1
Bus Services
The Council, in partnership with local bus operators, will seek to:

i.   Provide safe, integrated, and efficient bus services that permit easy interchange with other modes of transport and that meet the travel needs of customers who choose not to use, or are unable to use, a private car.

ii. Where possible improve the quality of local bus services through initiatives such as introduction of new vehicles and customer service training.

iii. Promote the availability of bus services through appropriate marketing, in conjunction with other initiatives such as ticketing and customer information improvements.

iv. Improve access to bus services and promote the use of vehicles that are accessible to all customers including those with a disability (as defined in the DDA).

v.   Progressively introduce lower-emission vehicles and consider options for using alternative fuels.

3.2.2   The Local Transport Plan recognises the role of the local bus and coach network in providing people with credible and sustainable travel choices. These services also play a vital role in enabling people to access essential services and facilities, particularly for those without access to a car.

3.3 Bus and Coach Strategy – Objectives

3.3.1   The objectives for the Bus and Coach Strategy are as follows;

1. West Berkshire Council will seek to evolve and wherever possible enable enhancement of, the bus and coach network within the District. This network evolution shall take account of demand for travel and, in seeking to achieve the best match for service provision relative to the resources available, reflect the Hierarchy of Bus Services presented in this Strategy;

2. The Council will liaise with operators of scheduled national coach services to retain and where possible develop the long-distance, inter-urban coach network serving designated interchange points and other key, on-street stops, within and in the vicinity of, the District;

3. The Council will continue to work closely with bus operators to maintain the viability of and - through the application of any available development-related and other capital monies that are identified for bus infrastructure and related works - encourage the development of commercial bus operations, focussing on the main inter-urban corridors and the urban areas within the District, so that revenue support funding can be targeted at other areas where commercial operation is not feasible;

4. In line with the Government's Bus Punctuality Partnerships initiative, the Council will continue to work with operators to improve the punctuality and reliability of bus services, including identifying actions that the Council and/or operators could take to help reduce delays;

5. The Council will continue to work with bus operators to explore opportunities for increasing the availability and validity of the 'Connect'-branded Day, 7-day and 30-day tickets and the 'FlexiConnect' 10-trip ticket, already used on WBC-supported routes;

6. In parallel with the new Greater Western rail franchise from September 2015, the Council will work with bus and rail operators to pursue better integration of and access to services, and to examine the scope for development of bus-rail interchange facilities (see section 6.6 for further details on LTP Policy PT6 – Infrastructure and interchange) ;

7. Subject to the availability of developer contributions, the Council will continue to implement bus infrastructure and accessibility improvements, focussing on the Primary and Secondary Network, in accordance with the Bus Infrastructure Strategy;

8. In conjunction with operators and depending on the availability of developer contributions or third-party funding, the Council will continue to enhance the availability of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) and will enable and encourage other initiatives – such as further deployment of smart ticketing - to make public transport a more viable alternative; and

9. The Council shall require promoters of new developments to proactively consider and propose how access to public transport services, enabling an appropriate level of access between those developments and the nearest service centre providing

amenities including grocery shops, healthcare, leisure facilities and schools is to be provided and sustained. Encouragement will be given by the Council to locate developments, wherever possible, where they will contribute towards improving the viability of existing public transport services rather than requiring new services to be provided.

3.4 Hierarchy of Bus Services

3.4.1 The purpose of identifying a Hierarchy of Bus Services is:

- to categorise services in a way that reflects the strategic or local connectivity that they provide;

- to help to ensure cost-effective investment where required, of public money; and

- to highlight the mode or modes available to provide each category of service, relative to demand, local circumstances, logistics and available resources (e.g. conventional bus accessible minibus and potentially vehicles appropriate for taxibus operation)

3.4.2 - The Hierarchy of Bus Services in the District is set out in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Hierarchy of Bus Services in West Berkshire

Hierarchy level	1	Hierarchy descriptor	Primary Network	Minimum Monday-Saturday daytime service frequency (07.00-19.00)	Hourly	Primary Mode or Modes	Conventional bus
Notes	The Primary Network comprises services operating over routes predominantly within urban areas that connect multiple urban centres together, or connect suburban areas to one or more urban centres. The objective is to maintain, achieve or foster commercial operation of Primary Network services		Service frequency is subject to commercial viability, level of travel demand and availability of revenue support funding. In accordance with the Approach to funding Supported Services, an enhanced level of service may be provided.	Conventional bus means a high-quality vehicle that complies with the PSV Accessibility Regulations, incorporating features such as only one step from outside into the flat-floor area of the passenger cabin, an extendable boarding ramp, contrast-colour handrails, at least one space for carriage of pushchairs or shopping bags and at least one space that may be safely occupied by a customer travelling in a manual wheelchair, either independently or accompanied.	The Council shall seek to sustain the quality of the Primary Network through: • Encouraging commercial operators to use appropriate, reliable vehicles operated by uniformed, trained staff; • Capital investment in appropriate infrastructure; • Promotion of these services as an integral part of the overall 'Connect' public transport network; and • Encouraging and enabling operators to actively participate in the provision of Real Time Passenger Information, smart-based ticketing and branding and marketing of individual services.		

Hierarchy level	Notes
2	The Secondary Network comprises services connecting rural settlements along an established and logical line of route to an urban centre and/or a rural Service Centre and affording access to the rail and/or long distance coach network. Depending on levels of travel demand throughout the operating day, coupled with logistics considerations and costs, consideration may be given to operation of smaller accessible vehicles such as accessible minibuses (which may be operated under a Community Bus Permit or similar licensing regime) to complement or in lieu of, conventional buses on certain routes. Service frequency is subject to the level of travel demand (determined through surveys and ticket machine data) and availability of revenue support funding. In accordance with the Approach to funding of Supported Services, an enhanced level of service may be provided.
Hierarchy descriptor	
Secondary Network	Conventional bus means a high-quality vehicle that complies with the PSV Accessibility Regulations, incorporating features such as only one step from outside into the flat-floor area of the passenger cabin, an extendable boarding ramp, contrast-colour handrails, at least one space for carriage of pushchairs or shopping bags and at least one space that may be safely occupied by a customer travelling in a manual wheelchair, either independently or accompanied. An accessible minibus means a quality, well-maintained, accessible vehicle with sufficient passenger carrying capacity to cater for existing demand and predicted growth, which may be operated under a Community Bus Permit or similar licensing regime.
Minimum Monday-Saturday daytime service frequency (07.00-19.00)	
Two-hourly	The Council shall seek to sustain the quality of the financially-supported services on routes that comprise the Secondary Network through: • Specifying operation of appropriate, reliable vehicles operated by uniformed, trained staff; • Provision, in conjunction with the service operator or operators, of Real Time Passenger Information and smart-based ticketing; • Provision of appropriate infrastructure; and • Application of the 'Connect' branding.
Primary Mode or Modes	
Conventional bus or accessible minibus	

Hierarchy level	Notes
3	The nature of these "Community Connect" services shall depend on the level of identified travel demand (determined through Council surveys and cross-reference to ticketing data), logistical considerations including the nature of the operating area and availability of resources. It is envisaged that community transport operators will be involved in delivering some of these services.
Hierarchy descriptor	
"Community Connect" services	The principal focus for "Community Connect" services shall be on providing a reliable connection at least once a week during the daytime for outlying rural communities on the public transport network to a specific destination or destinations. The connection shall be to an urban centre, normally within the District, to which those communities look and with direct links or onward connection to healthcare facilities and to rail or national coach networks.
Minimum Monday-Saturday daytime service frequency (07.00-19.00)	The precise nature of the operation shall depend on the factors identified above, although it is envisaged that the majority of the "Community Connect" network should be provided using accessible minibuses, or similar vehicles appropriate for taxibus- or taxishare operation, operating under a Community Bus Permit or under a similar special licence. It is acknowledged that any proposal for the operation of taxibuses or taxishares has implications for policy in relation to concessionary fares.
Frequency and nature of operation dependent on level of identified travel demand, logistical considerations and resource availability	According to the nature of the operating area, logistics and costs, "Community Connect" routes may be configured to operate on a Demand Responsive basis, supported by a system that enables that vehicle to be pre-booked and to divert within a defined area to pick-up and set-down customers who have pre-booked at safe locations.
Primary Mode or Modes	The Council shall seek to sustain the quality of "Community Connect" services through:
Conventional bus, accessible minibus, or taxibus	• Specifying operation of appropriate, reliable vehicles operated by trained staff; • Encouraging and enabling the service operators to implement appropriate ticketing and customer information systems; and • Application of the 'Connect' branding.

3.5 Commercial operation of Bus Services

3.5.1 A primary objective of this Strategy is to encourage development and enable retention of commercial bus operations, especially on corridors served by the Primary Network. The Council is keen to foster continued dialogue and partnership working to provide and maintain services that meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents. The Council will seek to assist commercial operation of bus services by:

- Continued use of public bus, as well as rail, services to carry pupils who are entitled to free or assisted school and college transport (this includes the Independent Travel Training initiative managed by National STAR College for WBC);

- Creating the conditions for punctual and reliable operation, including effective Network Management and co-ordination of Street Works as part of the Punctuality Improvement Partnership that the Council is evolving, in line with its obligations under the Traffic Management Act 2004;

- Provision – subject to the availability of capital or developer funding – of improvements, where warranted, to passenger facilities at bus stops and interchanges;

- Provision – subject to the availability of capital or developer funding (including from third parties) for on-going maintenance – of improvements, where warranted, to passenger facilities at bus stops and interchanges.

- Working with bus operators to facilitate the provision of customer information, in line with the Council's Bus Information Strategy;

- Working with operators, planners and developers to secure appropriate public transport provision for new developments and to actively promote the services within those developments (including as part of residential Travel Plans) with the objective of sustaining the service; and

- Linked to the above, seeking funding via the Community Infrastructure Levy or other developer funding route, to enable provision of appropriate infrastructure, customer information and delivery of the actual bus service at least for a specified period identified within an agreement with the developer.

3.6 Approach to funding of Supported Services

3.6.1 The Council will seek to identify and sustain funding to deliver and maintain bus services in the following circumstances, taking into account relative priority of the route or routes (as outlined in the Hierarchy of Bus Services; Table 3.2), level of demand for travel as determined through Council surveys and ticketing system data, value for money and availability of funding. Rating 'A' denotes highest priority. Individual sections of the route served may be determined through assessment to be within separate categories. Services that are wholly-commercial are not considered here. Table 3.3 below highlights the Council's approach to the funding of supported transport services:
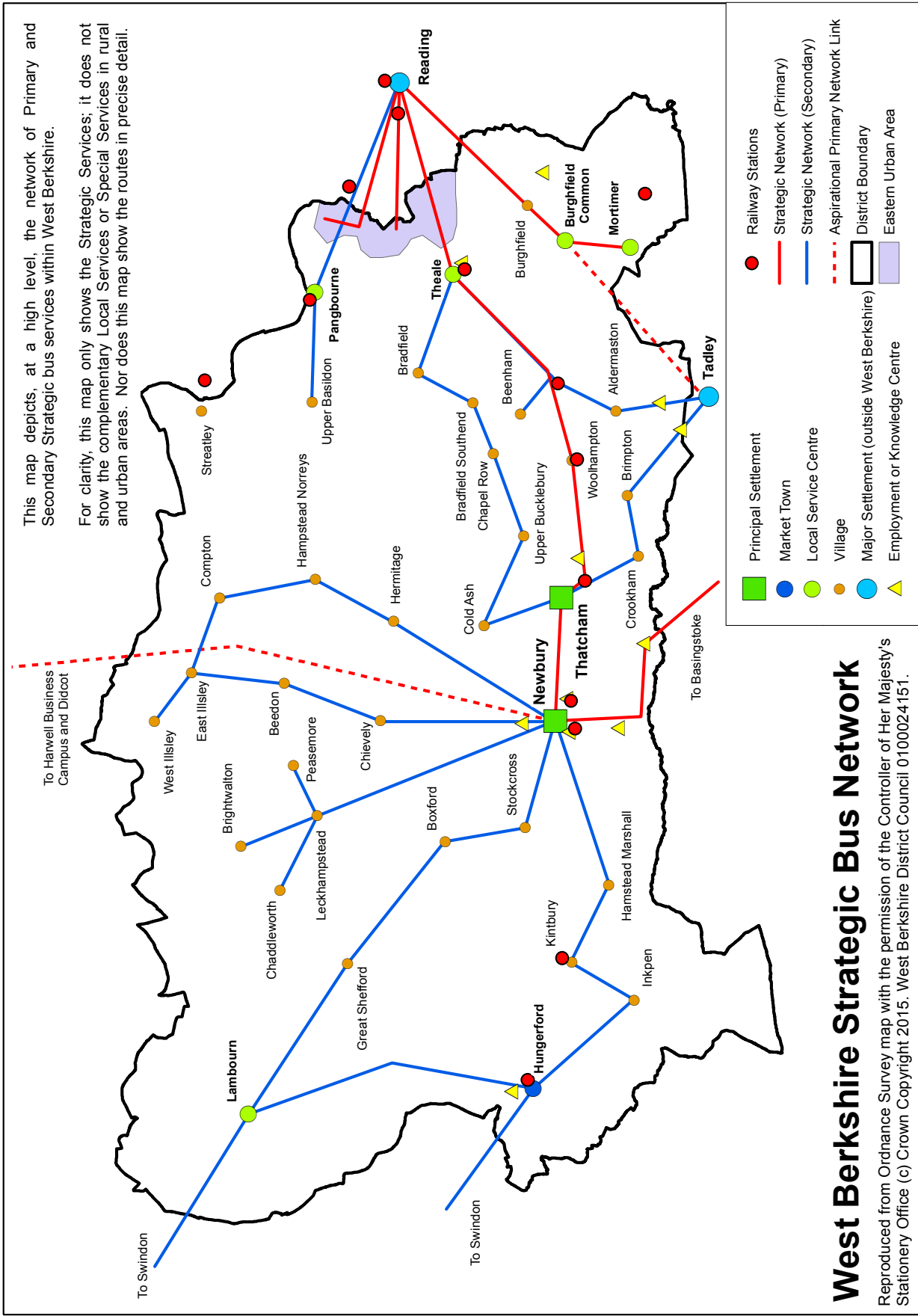
Table 3.3: Approach to funding of Supported Services

Funding Priority rating	Description
A	Maintaining at least a two-hourly frequency daytime service on Mondays through Saturdays, 07.00-19.00, on routes that comprise the Secondary.
B	Maintaining at least an hourly frequency daytime service on Mondays through Saturdays, 07.00-19.00, on the Primary Network where these services are not presently in a position to be operated on a fully commercial basis; Providing support to enable the operation of specific "Community Connect" services that serve outlying communities on only one day a week or where there is no viable alternative public transport option to enable access to a local service centre, as identified in the Hierarchy of Bus Services; Maintaining urban and inter-urban services in the evening (after 19.00) to link Thatcham, Newbury, West Berkshire Community Hospital and Newbury College.
C	Provide support to enable the operation of specific "Community Connect" services more frequently than one day a week, or on a one-day-a-week basis where there is another alternative public transport option allowing access to a local service centre, taking account of travel demand as revealed by Council surveys and patronage data and encompassing feeder journeys linking in to the Primary and Secondary Network.
D	Providing Sunday and Bank Holiday daytime services on a wholly-supported basis. Providing additional new bus services within the District, where initial 'kickstart' from developers or other source is unavailable and such a service is unavailable and such a service is unlikely to be sustainable through fares and concessionary travel income.

3.6.2   The Hierarchy of Bus Services identifies that some third level "Community Connect" services may have the potential to be provided by a taxibus/taxishare operation (on the proviso that suitable accessible vehicles are to be used). Concessionary fares would be accepted on any such Council-supported service (subject to normal pass terms and conditions). To determine whether taxibus or taxishare based services could be effectively deployed in the District, the Council will investigate the feasibility of such schemes in 2015. It is anticipated that this will involve liaison with neighbouring authorities where these schemes are already in operation and a review to determine which routes/communities could potentially be served by an 'accessible' taxibus/taxishare scheme and whether there would be any suitable operators with the appropriate vehicles willing to run these services.

West Berkshire Strategic Bus Network

This map depicts, at a high level, the network of Primary and Secondary Strategic bus services within West Berkshire.

For clarity, this map only shows the Strategic Services; it does not show the complementary Local Services or Special Services in rural and urban areas. Nor does this map show the routes in precise detail.

Legend:

Railway Stations
Strategic Network (Primary)
Strategic Network (Secondary)
Aspirational Primary Network Link
District Boundary
Eastern Urban Area

Principal Settlement
Market Town
Local Service Centre
Village
Major Settlement (outside West Berkshire)
Employment or Knowledge Centre

4. Community Transport Strategy

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Community Transport is a term conventionally used to describe passenger transport services that have been developed and are operated on a not-for-profit basis by local community groups, and which are delivered through the use of either paid or volunteer drivers. These services broadly fall into two categories: community transport minibus schemes and community car schemes, whereby volunteers, using their own cars, provide lifts for people who are in need.

4.1.2 The concept of Community Transport is however evolving, with the founding of Community Interest Companies and granting of Community Bus Permits by the Traffic Commissioner contributing to diversification in the sector and enabling community organisations to take on the provision of, or supplement, conventional bus services. This chapter describes the Council's Strategy going forwards for working with local organisations to evolve the smaller-scale, accessible transport services in the District.

4.1.3 Community Transport will continue to have a key role. The principal function of these organisations will be to enable people who do not have access to, or who are unable to use, mainstream public transport services the opportunity to access essential physical services and facilities. This in turn can reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for vulnerable and isolated individuals. In addition, vehicles operated by organisations under Section 19, Section 22 and similar special licensing arrangements are likely to have more of a role to play in delivering the "Community Connect" services detailed in the Hierarchy in Chapter 3. It is intended that the development and management of these transport schemes shall help contribute towards developing a sense of community in the areas where they operate.

4.2 Community Transport in West Berkshire

4.2.1 At present, there are 8 Community Transport schemes provided by organisations that operate minibuses or Handybuses to provide transport for West Berkshire residents. Although eligibility criteria vary across the different organisations, services traditionally tend to be focussed towards older and disabled people, who cannot, or find it difficult, to access other passenger transport services. In addition, there are also 12 voluntary car schemes operating in the District that also provide transport services. In 2012/13, the total known number of journeys made using Community sector services was 70,492.

4.2.2 The Council provides support for these transport services in the form of financial contributions (historically including the provision of vehicles for certain voluntary organisations), advice and expertise in relation to running transport services, publicity through various means and training for drivers, especially relating to helping clients with a range of disabilities.

4.3 LTP Policy PT2 - Community and Voluntary Transport

4.3.1 The LTP policy relating to Community and Voluntary Transport is as follows:

Policy LTP PT2
Community and Voluntary Transport
The Council will continue to:

i.   Support community and voluntary transport services to help meet access needs of residents, particularly where these are unable to be met by conventional bus services.

ii. Promote the services provided by community and voluntary transport through comprehensive transport information guides.

4.4 The Future for Community Transport in West Berkshire

4.4.1 Community-focussed and voluntary transport services will continue to have an increasingly important role as a means of providing people with opportunities to access essential services and facilities. The main issues that will affect the provision of Community and Voluntary Transport in the District are as follows:

- Forecast demographic changes indicating a marked increase in the number of older people living in the District, including a sharp rise in the over-85 age group. This will undoubtedly increase demand for access to health care and other essential services, thus increasing demand for transport overall including accessible door-to-door services;

- Pressures on the Council's budgets for supporting conventional bus services are likely to lead the Council to explore alternative options for the provision of "Community Connect" services, such as accessible minibuses operated under special licensing regimes;

- However, increased demands for community transport services will place additional responsibility on scheme providers, increasing the risk that some schemes could fail through experiencing difficulties in coping with administrative issues e.g. recruitment of paid staff and volunteers;

- The "Localism" agenda seeks to enable local communities to have a greater involvement in influencing how services are provided in their area. This may present opportunities for local communities to develop and manage transport schemes, in particular voluntary car schemes which the Council is keen to foster;

- The Council will look to the Handybus operator to deliver replacement transport solutions to those villages/settlements where the "Community Connect" network bus service has proved to be expensive, offering poor value per customer journey and has had to be withdrawn. (Handybus schemes are already serving Aldworth, Ashampstead, Frilsham, Hampstead Norreys, Lower Basildon, Padworth Common, Stanford Dingley, Streatley, Sulhamstead, Tidmarsh, Ufton Nervet, and Yattendon).

- The Local Transport Act 2008 provides Community Transport operators with more opportunities to deliver transport services, such as amending permit regulations to allow for the use of paid drivers for publicly available community transport services;

- To achieve more efficient use of vehicle assets, especially accessible minibuses, through their use for multiple purposes (e.g. access to Adult Social Care facilities, school transport and "Community Connect" public transport services).

- The effective utilisation of any future central government grants or funding for community transport services. Such funding has already been beneficial in supporting transport services in the District.

4.5 Partnership Working

4.5.1 Effective liaison and partnership working between the Council and transport providers is crucial to the success Community Transport services, and is likely to become increasingly important in the context of co-ordinated operation of accessible minibuses and evolution of voluntary car schemes. The Council, for its part will look to continue to support community and voluntary transport schemes in the District through defining and making available appropriate contributions, publicity and offering advice and information to communities on developing and operating schemes, in particular voluntary car schemes.

4.5.2 The successful provision of voluntary car and volunteer-operated accessible minibus services such as those provided using HandyBuses is reliant on individual volunteers and community groups to operate and deliver these services. However, such schemes can experience problems in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of volunteer drivers to provide an effective level of service. This is compounded by the rising operating costs for volunteer drivers and increased regulatory requirements, such as Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

4.5.3 The Council's Transport Services Team is open to the concept of delivering transport for and in conjunction with health care providers and has had exploratory meetings with the Public Health Team and with NHS bodies.

4.6 Publicity

4.6.1 The promotion of Community Transport schemes is largely based around raising awareness of the existence of schemes and transport options to potential passengers, many of whom are in 'hard to reach' groups. Information on accessible minibus and voluntary car schemes should be in a format that is readily available, easy to understand, and simple to use. The Council promotes these services within its District-wide Travel Guide, which is produced in hard copy format once a year and is also available to download from the Council's website. This Guide aims to provide people with information on all the transport options available.

4.6.2 The Council will continue to help promote Community Transport schemes operating in the District. This will include working with providers and local parishes to increase awareness of transport options at the local level. In addition, the Council will look to work with service providers, such as local hospitals and GP surgeries, to market the available transport services to people who require them.

5. Taxis & Private Hire Vehicles

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs) fulfil an important role as part of an integrated passenger transport network, since they are able to provide services in situations where other transport services are either not available (e.g. isolated communities or at hours outside of service operation). They offer a 24-hour door-to-door service that can particularly benefit people with mobility impairments or can help reduce private car dependency by providing links to rail stations or bus stops.

5.1.2 The Council is responsible for licensing taxis and PHVs, and at present, there are 192 licensed taxi and 130 PHV's in West Berkshire. The Council also makes use of taxis and PHVs to meet home-to-school transport requirements where appropriate and for journeys associated with social care provision. We continue to investigate the scope to encourage and enable students to travel independently.

5.2 LTP Policy for Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles

5.2.1 The LTP policy relating to taxi and private hire vehicles is as follows;

Policy LTP PT4
Taxi and Private Hire Cars
The Council will work with partners to:

i.   Deliver appropriate infrastructure to support the activities and operations of taxi and private hire services in West Berkshire.

ii. Provide information through adequate signing of taxi ranks and to continue to provide information for residents, particularly requiring specialised vehicles, through comprehensive transport guides

iii. Facilitate training for call operators and drivers to improve services particularly for customers with a disability (DDA).

iv. Encourage the provision of a range of vehicles to deliver services suitable to cater for all groups

5.3 Future role of taxis and private hire vehicles

5.3.1 The partners that are involved in the delivery of LTP PT4 include the drivers of taxis and PHVs, and the groups and associations they form to coordinate and develop their work.

5.3.2 Such partnership working may extend to the investigation and development of taxibus/ taxishare services, where taxi and PHV operators could potentially have a greater role in providing local transport needs using appropriate vehicles where these are unable to be met by conventional bus services. Paragraph 3.6.2 outlines that the Council will further explore whether such schemes would be operationally or commercially viable in West Berkshire.

5.3.3 In terms of fleet composition, the Council policy since 2005 has been that all new taxis must be wheelchair accessible (although there is no such requirement for PHVs). Operators are also encouraged to enable their drivers and call centre operators to attend disability awareness training, which is currently provided by the Council.

6. Passenger Rail Strategy

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 This chapter looks at the strategy relating to the Council's aspirations to maintain and develop rail passenger services and to improve passenger facilities at rail stations in the District. At present, the Council has no statutory powers or responsibilities in relation to rail services and infrastructure. Instead, these lie with the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) who provide the train services, and Network Rail who own and operate most of the rail infrastructure in Great Britain.

6.1.2 However, the Council is keen to see that rail services will continue to have a major role in catering for the transport needs of the District, and will seek to be involved wherever the opportunity arises in liaising with the rail industry. This will include looking to strengthen partnership working with Network Rail, the TOC, and interested community groups. The Council will also respond to all DfT, Network Rail, and train operating company consultations that have potential impact on rail services in West Berkshire.

6.2 Current rail services in West Berkshire

6.2.1 Rail services in the District have become increasingly important over recent years, and provide effective links for regular commuting and leisure journeys to Reading and London, as well as local trips to Newbury. There are three rail lines that run through West Berkshire with ten stations, plus a further two stations that lie just outside the authority area but can be easily accessed by West Berkshire residents (see Figure 6.1 below).

6.2.2 Each of the three rail lines in the District provide local Thames Valley rail services, which have a mainly eastwards focus towards Reading and London Paddington. These being;

- Kennet Valley line services between London & Reading to Newbury and Bedwyn (Wiltshire), serving Theale, Aldermaston, Midgham, Thatcham, Newbury Racecourse, Newbury, Kintbury, and Hungerford Stations.

- Oxford local services between London & Reading to Didcot and Oxford serving Pangbourne station, plus nearby stations used by West Berkshire residents at Tilehurst (Reading BC) and Goring & Streatley (Oxfordshire).

- Reading to Basingstoke line services, serving Mortimer station.

6.3.3 In addition, some West of England inter-city services call at Newbury, along with some semi-fast services that call at Theale, Thatcham, and Hungerford. These provide faster services to Reading and London, and connections westwards to Westbury, Taunton, and Exeter. Further onward connections to the South Coast, the Midlands, Bristol, and South Wales can be made by changing trains at Reading. In total, approximately 3.66 million rail journeys start or finish at West Berkshire stations on an annual basis [1].

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[1] *2013/14 Station Usage Data, Office of Rail Regulation*

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (c) Crown Copyright 2011. West Berkshire District Council 100024151.
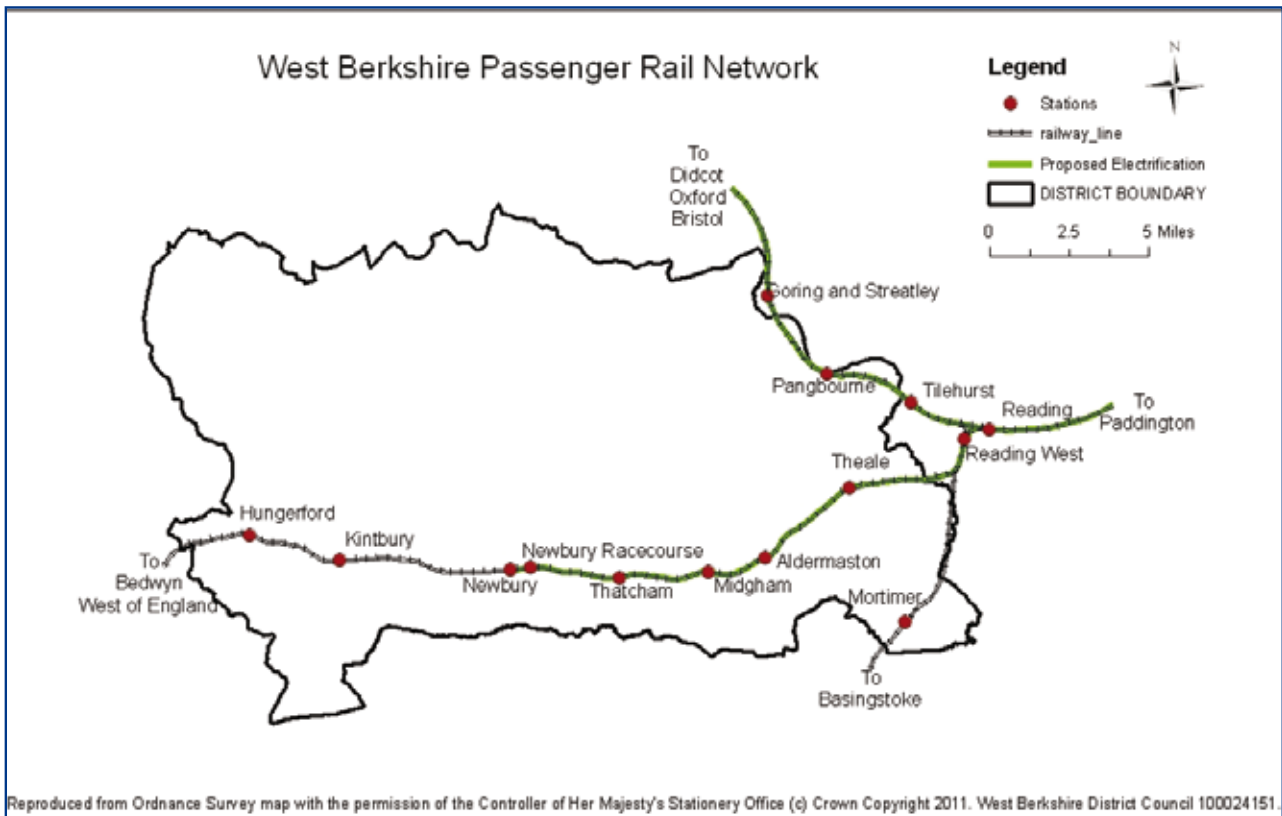
Figure 6.1: Passenger rail network and stations within and bordering West Berkshire

6.3.4   At present, all rail passenger services in the District are provided by the same TOC (currently First Great Western - FGW), operating under the Great Western franchise from DfT until September 2015. The DfT now intends to award a further new 3½ year direct award franchise with FGW (subject to negotiation) to follow-on from the expiration of the current franchise to March 2019. The new direct award franchise is intended to cover a period of upheaval on the Great Western network as a result of forthcoming substantial infrastructure upgrades such as electrification and the introduction of new and cascade of existing rolling stock. It is intended that a new competitively tendered franchise will commence from March 2019.

6.3.5   The TOC and Network Rail are also responsible for the rail infrastructure and station facilities. The Council currently holds regular meetings with the TOC and Network Rail with a view to improving passenger facilities at stations (such as security, information systems, cycle and car parking), and to improve accessibility for all rail passengers. The Council will seek to continue partnership working with the rail industry during the course of the replacement franchise.

6.3.6   Rail services in West Berkshire have a strong emphasis on commuting trips to Reading and London, with considerable numbers of West Berkshire residents making these journeys on a daily basis. This has contributed to capacity issues on morning peak hour rail services to Reading and London, which is set to worsen according to rail industry passenger forecasts. In order for rail to remain an attractive choice of travel and to cope with predicted increases in travel, it is important that additional capacity is provided to accommodate this demand. Proposals to electrify the lines to Newbury and Oxford will provide opportunities to run longer trains on these services. The Council would also be supportive of proposals from Train Operating Companies to replace the obsolescent, cascaded rolling stock that is presently used for services between Reading and Basingstoke (serving Mortimer), a route that currently experiences overcrowding on peak hour services.

6.3 LTP Policy PT3 - Rail Travel

6.3.   The Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire contains a specific policy relating to rail passenger services in the District, which is as follows;

Policy LTP PT3
Rail Travel

To continue to encourage the use of rail as an attractive and viable travel choice, the Council, in partnership with Network Rail and the train operating company, will seek:

i.   The provision of safe, integrated, affordable and efficient rail services that facilitate easy interchange with bus services and other modes of transport and that meet the travel needs of rail customers.

ii.   The improvement of local and inter-city trains and of rail stations in West Berkshire to make these accessible for all customers.

iii.   Appropriate marketing of rail services in conjunction with other initiatives such as ticketing and customer information improvements.

The Council will also:

iv.   Support the development of the regional rail hub at Reading Station in order to address capacity issues that affect Kennet Valley Line services.

v.   Support proposals for future electrification of the Great Western Main Line from Reading to Newbury, and to lobby for this to be extended westwards to cover services between Newbury and Bedwyn.

6.4 Maintaining and Developing Local & Inter-urban Rail Services

6.4.1   Rail services will contribute towards the LTP's overarching vision by providing an effective travel choice, with the delivery of this being supported by Policy LTP PT3 outlined above. Therefore, the Council would like to see the following for local and inter-urban passenger rail services in the District:

- At minimum, maintain existing passenger rail service levels and frequencies at all West Berkshire rail stations as specified in the Service Level Commitment for the current Great Western franchise, and to seek improvements as part of any changes to the Service Level Commitment, particularly in relation to the service specification and pattern following completion of electrification due in December 2016.

- Increased capacity on peak hour rail services from West Berkshire stations to Reading and London Paddington, particularly on services where overcrowding currently occurs.

- Improvements to strategic rail infrastructure, including Great Western mainline electrification, Reading Station upgrade, and Inter-city Express Programme.

- Maintain current levels of direct trains to Reading and London Paddington from stations on the Kennet Valley line, in particular from stations west of Newbury at Kintbury and Hungerford, following the proposed electrification of the Great Western Mainline to Newbury.

- Development of long-term proposals for western rail access to Heathrow airport.

- Maintain and enhance rail links to the west of the District on West of England services.

6.4.2   The Council is supportive of national strategic rail infrastructure projects, such as Great Western mainline electrification, Reading Station upgrade, and the Inter-city Express Programme, that will deliver improvements in rail travel for West Berkshire residents. Furthermore, the Council, through the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, is supportive of achieving western rail access to Heathrow airport.

6.4.3   Rail services in West Berkshire provide a viable travel choice for local communities by providing opportunities to access employment, other essential services, and leisure opportunities in nearby urban areas. The Council will therefore seek to work with local community groups and other neighbouring authorities to maintain and where possible enhance local rail services and to support longer-term strategic improvements to the rail network.

6.5 Access to Rail Stations, Facilities, and Trains

6.5.1   The provision of good facilities at stations can significantly improve the overall passenger experience and make rail a more attractive travel choice. Successful partnership working with the current TOC has led to delivery of improvements to facilities at Aldermaston, Midgham, Theale, and Thatcham stations under the DfT's "Access for All" station improvements scheme. The Council will continue to work with the rail industry to assist and encourage future improvements at stations.

6.5.2   The Council has an aspiration for all rail stations in the District to be fully accessible for all rail passengers regardless of disability. At present, several stations are not or are only partially accessible to rail passengers with disabilities. In response, the Council has completed an access audit of all rail stations, which includes an action plan of the improvements required for each station. The Council will look to work in partnership with the rail industry (which has it's own legal requirements to deliver accessibility improvements on all passenger trains by 1st January 2020) and interested community groups to help prioritise, identify funding, and deliver these improvements. This may include preparing bids for any future DfT funding initiatives (such as "Access for All"), and seeking contributions from developers through the development process.

Figure 6.2: Enhanced customer facilities at Aldermaston Station

6.5.3 - The Council has identified a particular priority for improvements to passenger facilities at Newbury station. This includes the provision of lifts within the station itself to enable step free transfer between the two main platforms (thus negating the need for a tiring and lengthy diversionary route outside of the station), improvements to cycle parking, and better pedestrian connectivity with the town. In addition, proposals to redevelop land close to the north (Station Approach) entrance to the station represents an opportunity to provide a clearer, more direct route to Newbury town centre and to improve the image of the station as a major gateway to the town. The Council will seek to work with all interested parties in delivering the necessary improvements to the station.

6.5.4 The Council recognises the value of local community involvement in promoting and lobbying for improvements at local rail stations. The localism agenda may provide opportunities for communities to work in partnership with the Council and the rail industry in having greater involvement in the management of their local stations. This might include small-scale maintenance and improvement projects such as painting and planting schemes to help make stations an attractive community asset.

6.5.5 Personal safety of rail passengers is an important consideration, and adequate security is essential at and around stations as well as on trains, particularly for late evening services. This also relates to car and cycle parking security since theft and vandalism can act as a deterrent to rail travel. Therefore the Council will continue to work with the TOC, Network Rail, and the British Transport Police to improve security. This may include the provision of help points at unmanned stations, CCTV on stations and in car parks, and adequate lighting and visibility.

6.6 Interchange with other modes

6.6.1 Interchange is an important part of passengers' overall journeys as changes are invariably required to/from other transport modes at or close by to the station. The LTP contains a policy relating to infrastructure and interchange, which is as follows:

Policy LTP PT6
Infrastructure and Interchange
The Council, in partnership with local transport operators will seek to:

i.   Facilitate provision of appropriate facilities at transport interchange locations including rail stations and coachways, at individual bus stops and at other nodes on the public transport network in accordance with a prioritised programme.

ii.   Enable development of pedestrian, cycle and bus routes to deliver good interchange opportunities for travel within and between urban areas including linking to rail stations.

iii. Deliver adequate, easily-understood signage to assist customers when using interchanges.

6.6.2 The Council will look to work with its partners to improve interchange facilities at rail stations for the better safety and convenience of rail passengers. This includes clear pedestrian and cycle routes, secure cycle parking, improved connectivity with bus services, bus stops and waiting areas, taxi ranks, and car drop-off points.

6.6.3 In addition, the LTP and its Transport Visions emphasise developing travel choices and using sustainable transport modes, and therefore sustainable access to stations (i.e. walking, cycling, bus, taxi) will be encouraged. The Council will seek to work with the rail industry, other transport operators, and local groups to develop Station Travel Plans to bring a coordinated approach to identifying and delivering key interchange improvements. Such plans could help reduce congestion, improve safety, and alleviate parking constraints at and around rail stations, and may include:

- Provision of safe, direct, well signed and lit walking routes to stations, including reducing conflict with road vehicles on station forecourts.

- Safe cycle access to stations and provision of adequate, covered, and secure cycle parking facilities.

- CCTV on station platforms and outside stations

- Improved bus/rail integration (e.g. bus access/turning points at station forecourts, availability of integrated ticketing)
- Provision of conveniently located taxi ranks
- Convenient car parking arrangements at stations
- Provision of information and help points at unmanned stations

6.6.4   Provision of sufficient car parking at stations is frequently considered an essential component in making rail an attractive travel choice, particularly from remote communities. Rail station car parks are usually provided and managed by the TOC who are able to charge for parking. The Council does however have concerns regarding the impact of station parking, particularly where this can have an adverse effect on traffic and parking in neighbouring residential areas or in private car parks. Proposals for extending car parks at stations are considered as part of the development control process.

6.7 Park and Rail at Theale Station

6.7.1   The LTP also contains a policy (PT7) that seeks to explore the opportunities and benefits that park and ride may bring to the West Berkshire community. This contains a specific reference for the Council to explore opportunities with Reading Borough Council and the rail industry for a transport hub focussed around Theale rail station to provide a good quality transport interchange and serve as a park and rail facility for access east and west along the Kennet Valley line.

6.7.2   The Council, in partnership with Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils, submitted a joint large project bid for the DfT's Local Sustainable Transport Fund in December 2011. The development of a park and rail facility at Theale station was included as part of this bid. Such a facility would bring benefits to the wider Reading area by providing a fast, convenient passenger transport link to Reading town centre from areas to the west of Reading, and would help to alleviate congestion on the A4 Bath Road to the east of M4 J12.

6.8 Customer Information, Fares, and Ticketing

6.8.1   Readily available and easy to understand information on timetables, ticketing options, and travel information is an important element in encouraging and sustaining passenger rail travel. Successful partnership working with the current TOC has already led to the delivery of customer information points at unmanned stations in the District, and the Council will look to continue this partnership working with the new franchisee.

6.8.2   The Council recognises the value to rail passengers of manned stations in providing information on tickets, fares, and travel advice, and would not be supportive of blanket measures to close ticket offices; and would encourage the rail industry to consider any such review on a station by station basis and to consult widely prior to making any decision. In particular, the Council does not wish to see Theale and Thatcham stations revert to being unmanned.

6.8.3   The affordability of rail travel is a national concern with rail fares experiencing above inflation rises in recent years, which for lower income groups can act as a barrier to travel. Therefore, the Council will look to work with the new franchisee to ensure that passengers have greater awareness of the ticketing options and fare structures available to them (e.g. promoting off-peak travel, advanced purchase, and group-save tickets), including the retention of scholars/discounted season tickets for under19's travelling to school/college.

6.8.4　It is expected that the new franchisee will develop more flexible approaches to ticketing over the course of the new franchise. This could include a wider availability of ticket sales from local outlets (e.g. shops) and development of smartcard ticketing schemes. There is also a need for greater working between rail and bus operators to develop more flexible and integrated ticketing arrangements to provide more seamless travel between bus and rail.

7. Information, Promotion, and Ticketing

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Effective promotion and provision of information are vital elements in increasing the use and promoting the awareness and viability of passenger transport services. They can help to preserve transport services in local communities, maintain the viability of transport services, and maximise the Council's investment in transport services. The development of more integrated and smart ticketing initiatives also offer passengers greater purchasing options and the ability for more seamless and convenient travel.

7.2 LTP Policy PT5 - Passenger Transport Information, Promotion, and Ticketing

7.2.1 The LTP policy relating to passenger transport information, promotion, and ticketing is as follows;

Policy LTP PT5
Passenger Transport Information, Promotion, and Ticketing

The Council in partnership with local transport operators and user groups, will look to provide and improve transport information, promotion, and ticketing through:

i. Continuing to produce comprehensive, easily-understood printed information on passenger transport services in the District.

ii. Continuing the delivery and improvement of Real Time Information on the District's bus and rail networks (including audible announcements) to support and enhance other forms of customer information.

iii. Continuing to actively support and promote 'Traveline' – the national public transport information service.

iv. Extending ways in which information can be made available, such as text and mobile internet.

v. Working with organisations delivering Travel Plans to develop promotions and ticketing options to support their goals of increasing sustainable travel.

vi. Continuing to promote and support concessionary travel on passenger transport services in the District.

vii. Continuing to actively promote and develop integrated ticketing initiatives and smartcard products.

7.3 Transport Information and Promotion

7.3.1 The Council has an important role in ensuring that accurate and easily-understood information is available to existing and potential customers, and produces a series of transport guides and a public transport map that can be downloaded on line or available in printed format. The Council's Public Transport webpage www.westberks.gov.uk/publictransport also has links to the national Traveline journey planner. Further details on the Council's approach to providing transport information can be found in the Council's Bus Information Strategy.

7.3.2   The Council has developed the "Connect – Quality Travel for West Berkshire" umbrella brand for the local bus network. This branding is being introduced on tickets (e.g. Connect Day and FlexiConnect 10-trip tickets), vehicles and on publicity material (e.g. Connect Transport Guides, bus network posters). Further development of the "Connect" branding may include its application to smartcards or smart travel products.

Figure 7.1: Connect logo on bus network poster (left) and Travel Guide (right)
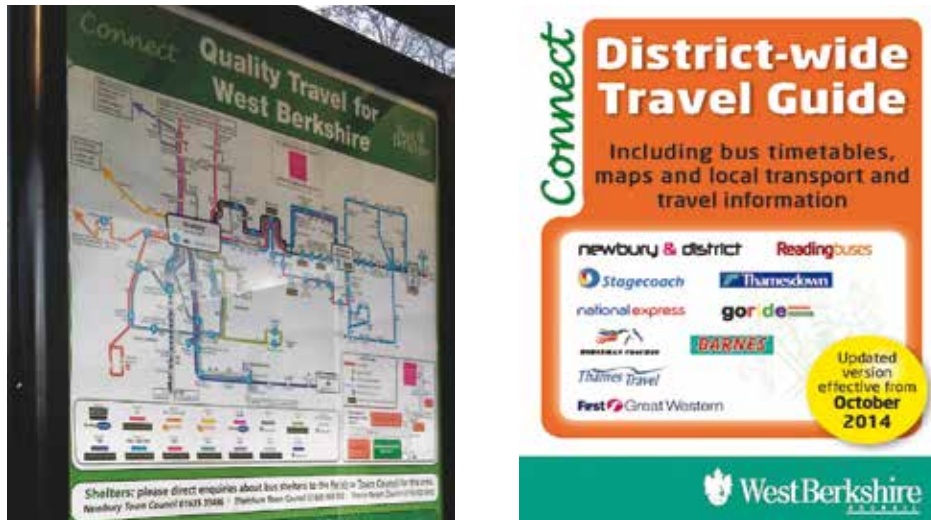
7.3.3   Some local operators already offer customers up-to-date online travel information. For instance, Reading Buses and Thames Travel already encourage customers to use applications such as 'Twitter' and 'Facebook', as well as their own respective websites, to receive up-to-date travel information. In addition, further ways of providing online and live information will be explored, such as promoting the mobile phone 'apps' developed by Traveline South East for journey planning and live arrival information.

7.3.4   Transport operators have also introduced distinctively-branded vehicles for particular services. The Newbury-Reading bus service has been rebranded as Jet Black 1 and uses distinctively branded vehicles; this branding won a national industry award for bus livery of the year 2011. Other branded routes include the lime 2 / 2a route (Mortimer-Burghfield Common-Burghfield-Reading), the yellow 26 route (Calcot-Reading) and Stagecoach's The Link route (Newbury-Kingsclere-Basingstoke).

7.3.5   Information on passenger transport services/timetables, including the Council's Travel Guide, will also be made available as part of wider travel awareness campaigns, (such as Personal Travel Planning projects) undertaken by the Council under its "Change the Way You Move" sustainable travel branding. In addition, information on passenger transport services will also be used as part of Travel Information packs supplied as part of residential Travel Plans for new housing developments and workplace travel plans.
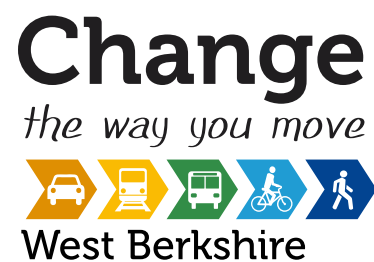
7.4 Integrated and Smart Ticketing

7.4.1 The Council welcomes and will be responsive to, the further evolution of integrated ticketing initiatives and smart ticketing technology, as these will benefit customers through opportunities for combined travel between bus and rail, easier and more efficient ticket purchasing, and cashless transactions. We will look to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities and transport operators to develop integrated ticketing and extend smart ticketing technology across transport networks as and when funding and opportunities become available. In order to facilitate the advancement of such systems, a detailed Smart Ticketing strategy will be developed.

8. Delivery

8.0.1   Successful delivery of the Passenger Transport Strategy in most cases will be dependent on continued partnership working with the various transport operators in the District (bus, rail, community transport, and taxi and PHVs).

8.0.2   The Council has produced a Bus Infrastructure Strategy, a technical document that supports the Passenger Transport Strategy and which sets out standards and outlines how bus infrastructure (e.g. bus stop flags, shelters, and information cases) will be installed, maintained, and updated for both commercially operated and supported bus services. In addition, a Strategy for Real Time Passenger Information has been developed to guide future development and delivery of this system

Figure 8.1: An example of an improved bus stop in Kintbury featuring new shelter, Kassel kerbing, pole and clearway.

8.0.3   In addition to a Bus Information Strategy a Smart Ticketing Strategy has been produced to guide the further deployment of this technology within the District.

8.0.4   Improvements to facilities at rail stations will be sought and delivered through partnership working with the rail industry, which may be through DfT funding programmes or developer contributions. The Council's accessibility audit of rail stations, has identified a schedule of possible improvements which will be used to inform where improvements need to be delivered.

8.0.5   These delivery programmes will feed into the Council's annually updated LTP Implementation Plan, which outlines a detailed three-year capital works programme that the Council proposes to deliver.

8.0.6   The "Connect" branding concept for bus services in West Berkshire will continue to evolve. This will include the further branding of tickets, vehicles and information items.

9. Monitoring

9.0.1   There is a need to monitor the delivery of improvements to passenger transport infrastructure and services to ensure that these occur in a timely manner; and to measure outcomes in terms of increased usage and passenger satisfaction. The annually updated LTP Implementation Plan will provide the mechanism for reporting on progress towards delivery of improvements to infrastructure and services associated with this strategy.

9.0.2   The Passenger Transport Strategy will be monitored using the following;

- Former National Indicator 178 – Bus services running on time
- Development of infrastructure and services – As outlined in the Bus Infrastructure Strategy and delivery tables in the LTP Implementation Plan
- Bus passenger numbers – usage data from bus operators
- Customer satisfaction surveys – undertaken at a sample of bus stops
- Rail passenger numbers – Station usage data from the Office of Rail Regulation consisting of estimates of total numbers of people entering and exiting at stations

If you require this information in an alternative format or translation, please call
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