
10th November 2004

Report to

Scrutiny Coordination Committee

Report of

Director of City Development

Title

The Future Pattern of Bus Services in Coventry

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the TAS report on revision to City Bus services, the results of the recent consultation exercises and the views of the main operator

2 Background

- 2.1 In 2001 it was generally recognised that the level and quality of bus services that operated in the City were below what anyone would recognise as being of an acceptable standard. This 'crisis' point led to the establishment of regular meetings between Cabinet Members and the senior management of the main bus operators. Gradually over time the operators began to improve services and a greater cooperation between operators, the city Council and Centro emerged.
- 2.2 Part of this emerging partnership was the bid to Government for £30m for the PrimeLines project to enhance bus infrastructure provision throughout the area. As part of that bid Travel Coventry agreed to invest some £8m of their own finance to complement the bid. Stagecoach also undertook a more limited contribution to costs.
- 2.3 As part of the package of measures to enhance bus services within the City a joint study was financed jointly by Centro, Travel Coventry and the City Council to look at the future pattern of bus services within the City. This study was seen as being complimentary to the infrastructure work being undertaken within the PrimeLines project. The study was commissioned from a specialist consultancy – TAS partnership. The final report of the consultants was delivered to the partners last November.
- 2.4 Since November 2003 the report has been subject to detailed and extensive public consultation. This has involved:
- Presentations to all area Forums
 - Presentation to TUAC and other specific bodies
 - Summary report circulated to '200 local interest groups'
 - Exhibitions at the Council Open Day
 - A number of press and radio broadcasts
 - An independent market research questionnaire of 180 local bus users.

- 2.5 In recent months the level of cooperation between the City Council, Centro and the operators has been further confirmed by the signing of a 'concordat' with each of the three main operators – Travel Coventry, Stagecoach and deCoursey. This commits each party to work towards the enhancement of bus services within the city as a means of improving accessibility, reducing social exclusion and assisting urban regeneration.
- 2.6 The degree of joint working and cooperation continues to build. In fact each of the three operators have actually committed over £1m each into new buses within the last 12 months and further improvements are also being planned. 4 new services have started to serve the new Arena Tesco and 4 further routes have been extended into the site. In addition a route has been extended to Prologis and Stagecoach have increased their service frequency in the corridor.

3 Proposal and Other Option(s) to be Considered

- 3.1 During 2003 Consultants (TAS) working on behalf of Centro, the City Council and Travel Coventry undertook an independent review of the bus operations in Coventry. Existing and potential demand was reviewed and proposals were developed for alternative networks of routes that were considered to be more beneficial to customers and could be delivered within the funding that might be available.
- 3.2 In considering this report it is important to recognise that under the current legal arrangements neither Centro nor the City Council can control what services should be operated or at what times or frequencies without recourse to the introduction of a Statutory Quality Contract. Under current arrangements if Centro or the City Council wish to see services operated which operators are not minded to provide these services must either be agreed by negotiation or through competitive tendering, usually with funding support.
- 3.3 The Study concentrated on those services that are provided by Travel Coventry as they provide over 95% of passenger movements within the city. The other main operators – Stagecoach and deCoursey Travel - run important complementary services which are taken account of in the proposals.
- 3.4 The Consultants made the point that the existing service pattern in Coventry is very complicated with many sub routes and varying frequencies. Whilst this has the effect of spreading the services through most of the residential areas it has the effect of making the system difficult, particularly for the infrequent or new user to understand, and increases waiting times. National research has shown that it is necessary to deliver regular, frequent and reliable services to attract car users to public transport. The Consultants note the very radial nature of the service patterns and the lack of orbital routes. (This increases the number of people that have to travel into the city and back out again). This service pattern is historic and fails to fully recognise that Coventry has developed with both residential estates and employment areas located around an outer-ring between which bus travel is therefore difficult.

Service Strategies

- 3.5 The Consultants developed a tiered approach to developing a strategy which considered:
 - a) Network simplification and improvement within existing resources
 - b) Enhanced network using additional resources aiming to achieve current economic performance levels within 18 months

- c) Inclusive network with additional tertiary services designed to improve spatial accessibility and help meet social inclusion goals.

3.6 The Consultants proposed approach is based on a 'Turn up and go' network on the main radials supplemented by a secondary 'Key Routes' lower frequency network and a third tier of services that would require funding support, but which would ensure that all residences throughout the city were within easy access to a bus stop.

Phase 1- The 'Turn up and Go' approach

- 3.7 The Consultants have argued that a regular service operating every 8 – 10 minutes along major corridors is the one type of service that has been shown to increase ridership and encourage new users. With such a service passengers do not need to plan their journeys with a timetable, they can just turn up at the bus stop and on average a service will arrive within 4 – 5 minutes. This approach has been adopted effectively in a number of other cities and would lead to improved services for most passengers in the City. The objective would be a consolidation of the existing service provisions that would enable a higher frequency service to be delivered with similar resources to those being used today. By regularising the service frequencies interchange between services would be better and times easier to remember.
- 3.8 Whilst Coventry has no exactly equivalent arrangement it is worth noting that the introduction of the bendi-bus service on the 17/27 routes which operates along many of these principles has seen a 16% increase in patronage in its first 6 months of operation.
- 3.9 This improvement of main services would require some redistribution of resources between services with some secondary services being reduced in frequency in line with demand. However the secondary service network would still provide direct services to the City Centre although frequencies and journey times may lengthen.
- 3.10 The Consultants have taken this concept and have proposed a 'turn up and go' frequency service on 8 major corridors. They have referred to this as the 'PrimeLines Network'. In general terms this network can be described as set out in the following table.

Possible 'PrimeLines' network

Service	Route	Peak Hour Frequency (minutes)	
		now	proposed
10/11	Wood End – Stoke - City – Eastern Green/Broad Lane	20	10
12	City – University - Leamington	frequent	10
13	Whitemore park – City - Willenhall	12	10
19/20	Canley – City – Folehill – Bedworth/Victoria Farm	12 - 15	7/8
21	Wood End – City - Willenhall	10 -12	10
27	Station – City - Hospital	10	10
32/33	Tanyard farm/Tile Hill – City – Ansty Rd – Bell Green Potter Green	10	7/8
35/36	Kersley Village – City – Stoke Heath	10 -15	10

3.11 In order to support this PrimeLines Network the Consultants have recommended the secondary network that has been identified as the 'Key Routes Services'. Their indicative proposals for this are built around the following corridors.

Possible 'Key Routes' Services

Service	Route	Peak Hour Frequency (minutes)	
		now	proposed
1	Chapelfields – City – Toll Bar End	30	30
2	Allesley Farm – City – Cheylesmore	24	15
4	Binley – City – Radford - Holbrooks	15	10
5/A	Radford - Coundon – City – Cheylesmore/Stivichall - Finham	24 - 30	15
9	Brownhill Green - City	-	20
31	Tile Hill – Earlsdon- City – Cross Point - Hospital	30 - 40	30
34	Hospital – Binley Road – City – Eastern Green – Tile Hill North	30	30

Phase 2- Enhanced Turn up and Go Network

3.12 The Consultants have argued that, with the 'better' service that would be created through the PrimeLines network, the increased passenger revenue would begin to create the virtuous circle where that revenue can be fed back into providing even better services which would then repay the increased operating costs. Hence the consultants believe that an enhanced PrimeLines network could lead to a more extensive service as set out below. This strategy not only improves frequencies on some routes but brings other corridors up to the 'turn up and go' standard.

Enhanced PrimeLines network

Service	Route	Peak Hour Frequency (minutes)	
		now	proposed
10/11	Wood End – Stoke - City – Eastern Green/Broad Lane	20	10
12	City – University – Leamington	frequent	10
13	Whitemore Park – City – Willenhall	12	7/8
20	Canley – City – Folehill –Victoria Farm	15	10
20	City – Foleshill – Bedworth	15	10
21	Wood End – City - Willenhall	10 - 12	7/8
27	Station – City – Hospital	10	7/8
32	Tanyard Farm – City – Ansty Rd – Potter Green	10	10
33	Tile Hill – City – Ansty – Bell Green		10
35/36	Kersley Village – City – Stoke Heath	10 - 15	10

Bold figures illustrate changes for the previous table.

3.13 It has to be recognised that this is a significant increase in the fleet size requiring an additional 23 vehicles (at a cost of some £100k each) and hence can only be provided over a period of time.

Phase 3- Social Inclusive network

3.14 The Consultants have examined the concept of developing a network of routes that serves all areas and links to all of the major employment sites as well as the hospital. They believe that this can be achieved through the creation of an outer ring service(s). However the consultants have indicated that such a service could never be economically viable and would require an annual operating subsidy from the City Council/Centro of up to £650,000 in the first year.

Commentary on the Proposals

3.15 The consultants have analysed the effect of the proposals. It is recognised that the reduction in some ‘local services’ would lead to some loss of accessibility to some communities. Where this affects passengers who already have mobility difficulties this loss of bus service can be very important. However the consultants have also estimated the number of passengers who would benefit from the service rationalisation.

3.16 The following table sets out an analysis of that issue.

Percentage of population with access to a bus service

Option	Percentage of population within 200m	Percentage of the population within 400m
Current	85%	99%
Turn up and Go	82%	98%
Extended Turn up and Go	82%	98%

Percentage of population with access to a 10 minute or greater frequency service

Option	Percentage of population within 200m	Percentage of the population within 400m
Current	25%	42%
Turn up and Go	45%	65%
Extended Turn up and Go	49%	72%

3.17 These tables illustrate that the proposed strategy would enhance the service provision for over 80% of the population but at the expense of a lower provision for around 7% of the population. Overall the Consultants estimate that this revised structure would lead to a 16 – 18% increase in patronage.

3.18 The City Council and Centro have indicated that they would be unable to finance the circulatory bus service as suggested in the TAS Report. However agreements are now in place with the new Walsgrave Hospital, Tesco at the Foleshill District Centre, the Arena and the Prologis Business Park that they all need to fund improved bus services. Hence these agreements allow the possibility to create a regular (30 minute frequency) service around some two thirds of the City. This funding could be used to develop routes such as:

- Walsgrave Hospital to Warwick University via Willenhall and Cherylesmore
- Walsgrave to Brownhills Works via Potters Green, Bell Green, the Foleshill District Centre/Arena
- Foleshill District Centre to Keresley, etc

3.19 As part of the discussions with these developers the first set of four new routes (701 – 704) have commenced operating from early November 2004 to serve the new District Centre and the Prologis commercial area. This represents an increase of over 600,000km of route travel per year which represents an increase of 6% across the whole city.

4 Consultation Responses

4.1 Despite the circulation of the summary report to key stakeholders within the City and presentations being given to all of the Area Forums the level of response has been very poor. In large measure this can be accounted for by the complex range of issues involved. It is recognised that much more extensive comment will be received as soon as any actual proposal is made to reduce the service on any route.

4.2 Although over 1000 questionnaires were circulated only 12 have been returned. In the majority of cases these responses have raised concerns regarding the loss of services to sensitive area and possibly to sensitive individuals.

4.3 In order to provide a better response an independent market research company was retained to undertake interviews with bus users of how the TAS proposals would actually affect their travel patterns and hence what they thought of the proposals. A total of 180 interviews were undertaken with a representative sample of bus users, including regular commuters, those with concessionary passes as well as casual users.

4.4 As a 'warm up' to the major questions the respondents were asked for their view of the current bus services. Respondents were able to respond with answers of 'very good', 'fairly good', 'neither', 'fairly poor', 'very poor', or 'don't know'. Eliminating the 'don't know' values gives the following current assessment of conditions on the bus network.

Current perception of Coventry bus system

Issue	% Very Good or Fairly Good
Frequency of service	68%
Directness of Service	87%
Value for Money	61%
Length /time taken	76%
Comfort of journey	71%
Distance to nearest stop	91%
Time service starts in the morning	72%
Time service ends in the evening	60%
Personal security	78%
Provision of information	50%

4.5 These figures are very encouraging and clearly do not reflect some of the vocal comments that occur in the press from time to time. Clearly there is still room for improvement in areas such as the provision of evening services and enhanced information. (Very similar responses were received from each of the main type of bus user.)

4.6 The respondents were then asked what they thought of the TAS proposals for restructuring the network (not including the circulatory services). This question was asked for both peak and off peak network proposals and the results are presented below:

Views of the TAS Proposal on how they would affect You

	Peak service	Off peak services
Very Strong support	27%	33%
Strong Support	38%	39%
Moderate support	23%	17%
Minimal support	4%	3%
No support	7%	5%
Don't know	1%	3%
	100%	100%

- 4.7 The overall level of support for the changes correlates very closely to the figures estimated by TAS of the number of people who would benefit as opposed to those who would be disadvantaged.
- 4.8 Whilst the responses by individual user groups were all very similar there was a slight indication that commuters (the ones that we need to provide better alternatives) were more in favour of the proposals than the general population.

5 The Response from the Operator

- 5.1 Travel Coventry has responded to the TAS report in a letter that is attached to this report. As you will see they have described the report as the 'curates egg' good in parts. They have raised a number of issues, many of which are valid points. The TAS report did fail to take account of the growing importance of the District Centre at Foleshill and it was also clearly not able to respond to the emerging strategy for the City Centre and Pool Meadow.
- 5.2 Travel Coventry has raised the issue of whether the approach proposed by TAS is the most appropriate service form for the City. Traditionally the City has had a service structure that responds to local area issues and they have raised concerns regarding whether changes to that would be in the best interests of the City.
- 5.3 Travel point out in their letter that they already operate 'turn up and go' frequency services on 7 routes and hence this compares well with the TAS proposal for 8 routes.

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

TAS report

Market research Report by TTR

Location

Transport Delivery Unit CC4

Transport Delivery Unit CC4



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29 October 2004

Dear Colin

During the course of a recent chat with Rob Donald I became aware that Travel Coventry has not formally commented on the Coventry area Network Review TAS report. I apologise for this oversight, although I do know that both Martin Hancock and Bernard Delaney have made observations to both officers and members of the City Council at various meetings recently.

Equally, to a certain extent the original TAS report has been overtaken by other developments, such as the separate study on routes to serve the Arena / Tesco / Prologis development and the new policy on Pool Meadow.

Meeting Study Objectives

In overall terms the report is a true 'curates egg', good in parts with some interesting ideas, a rehash of some existing operations and some significant omissions.

At the network wide level the report does appear to fail to meet its initial objectives i.e. to analyse the current network performance, examine the potential and future needs of the City using demographic data and design three alternative networks. The three alternative networks were intended to be; -

- An optimised network within existing resources and producing similar returns to enable continued investment opportunities.
- An enhanced network that could be justified by passenger / revenue growth resulting from the recommended improvements that, within 18 months of implementation would retain current margins.
- A comprehensive network embracing the full independently assessed needs of the community that would overlay the above two proposals with a fully costed socially desirable but commercially unviable routes recognising Social Exclusion and mode shift objectives.

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I do not believe the study met its first objective of optimising the network within the existing resources, from this omission I can only assume that the current network could not be improved upon! Trying to establish a 'like for like' comparison has been difficult, but if we take TAS's 'Primeline' and 'Key Routes' and compare with our current network there would be an additional 130 hours per weekday resulting in an extra 20 + drivers, hardly fulfilling the remit of "within existing resources".

Equally the "enhanced" network put forward by TAS appears to merely rely on increased frequencies on major corridors to hopefully generate growth without any assessment of the desired origins and destinations of potential passengers. This is particularly important in relation to the city centre.

There must be a realisation that with relatively few employment opportunities in the City Centre and currently limited early evening leisure activity, it is very difficult to justify the introduction of higher frequencies in the 'shoulder' periods.

Network vs Overground

At the highest level the TAS recommendation does support the network approach adopted for a number of years by Travel Coventry and its predecessors, as there are no completely new routes or operations on any roads not currently served.

The basic principle of the TAS report has been to produce an "overground" style 'turn up and go' network on the major radial routes with some loss of penetration into the estates resulting in longer walking distances to stops, with no account of the gradients to stops being considered, and a simplified approach to route numbering.

I agree that the numbering of our services can be a little complicated to the non user and efforts are on going to simplify and market our services in a more user friendly fashion. However many of the service variants are used to serve schools or Business Parks and it is important to ensure that those passengers with highly specific destinations – e.g. a particular industrial estate not generally served by the route - do board the correct bus.

We do also believe that there are major benefits to customers in providing the current higher levels of penetration into the estates away from the radials, we would be worried by the adverse public reaction that would arise should local bus services be withdrawn from local neighbourhoods. As evidenced by a number of recent instances, there does appear to be an expectation amongst Coventry residents that their local bus service should serve local neighbourhoods.

Equally I'm sure you are aware that the 'overground' approach has received considerable criticism from residents in a number of cities where its main advocate, "First", has introduced it.

We do believe that our mixed comprehensive network approach does provide the correct balance and meets the needs of the city's residents. In conjunction with the City Councils 'Primelines' project we are beginning to achieve frequencies on the Primeline routes as suggested in the TAS report.

The table below highlights the frequencies currently achieved; -

- Service 17/27 Operates at 10' frequency.
- Service 20 etc Will shortly operate every 5' between City Centre and Windmill Road.
- Service 21 With the introduction of bendibuses in November the frequency will be less than every 10'.
- Service 32/33 Operates every 10' across the common section of route which accounts for 80% of the route.
- Service 13C Operates every 12', we will keep under review with the extension to Prologis in November and the introduction of bus lanes on Binley Road in 2005.
- Service 12 Between the City Centre and University during Term times the frequency is 10' or less.
- Service 36 Operates every 12', but will be extended to Tesco in November and we will keep in under review.

We will continue to use the TAS report as a "guide and inspiration document" and not a "bible" and we will continue to work with the City Council on the Primelines project and if the proposed bus priority measures on radial routes can improve journey times, increased frequencies can be delivered without increasing resources and without losing penetration into the estates, this would deliver the best of both worlds!

Serving the Arena / Tesco / Prologis / Walsgrave Hospital

It does seem a little strange that the report ignored the current prestigious developments in the City, Prologis, Tesco / Arena and Walsgrave Hospital.

I am aware that TAS produced a separate report for the City Council covering services to these areas but I am not aware that we have seen or been informed of the final version of this report or how its recommendations are to be provided.

Travel Coventry has in fact increased its commercial services to meet the anticipated demand from the new Tesco development and thus provided a number of additional links in the north of the city.

Cross City Links and City Centre Routes

One of the key aspects of the TAS report was the provision of a number of additional cross-city links and alterations to the current pattern of links. Whilst these links would offer additional opportunities, the practicality of their operation would depend on the final outcome of current discussions on the revitalisation of Pool Meadow and the restoration of road connections to allow practical routes to be created.

Taking this a step further I would suggest that it would be rash to alter the current route network until a final plan for the city centre has been agreed. There is an obvious impact from the plans for Pool Meadow but there will also be impacts from decisions on key access routes such as High Street.

Passenger Confusion and Uncertainty

It is generally recognised that significant alterations to routes or even route numbers cause's high levels of confusion and uncertainty amongst passengers and inevitably leads to a short term decline in patronage. I am seriously worried that some of the changes to routes and route numbering proposed by TAS are simply 'change for change sake', without any clear evidence of why the changes should be undertaken.

Marketing and Promotion

To ensure potential passengers are aware of the extensive route network available to them and improvements to the fleet, it is important that promotion and information is continually improved. Travel Coventry is currently trialing an SMS timetable service in the city, with a view to an early public launch. We have also recently completed the roll out of new display material for Travel Card Agents throughout the city to increase awareness of the range of locations from which cards can be bought.

I would like to suggest that, once the current discussions on Pool Meadow are finalised and the impact on city centre routes assessed, we undertake a joint marketing campaign re-launching the Coventry Bus Network. September 2005 would appear to be a suitable date.

Investment & Partnership

Since the report was commissioned in March 2003 Travel Coventry has invested circa £4.5m on its vehicle replacement programme and will continue to invest in its fleet, this figure is of course additional to the circa £5.5m invested in fleet during the 9 months preceding the report commissioning.

In addition, of course, there is our commitment under the Annexe E process that will see further demonstrations of our intention to ensure that Coventry enjoys a public transport provision that fully meets the travel patterns and demands of its residents

In summary, Travel Coventry is committed to working in partnership with the City Council and I can assure you that we will continue to endeavour to plan and operate a city-wide bus network that meets the needs of local residents.

Yours sincerely



BRIAN JACKSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Signed in his absence by PA, D Beaman