

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

19th January, 2005

Members Present:-
Councillor Clifford
Councillor Mrs. Johnson
Councillor Mutton
Councillor Patton
Councillor Ridge
Councillor Sawdon (Chair)

Scrutiny Board (3)
Members Present:-
Councillor Mrs. Harper
Councillor McNicholas
Councillor M. Noonan

Cabinet Members
Present:-
Councillor Arrowsmith (Cabinet Member (Urban Regeneration and Regional Planning))
Councillor Taylor (Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance)) (The Leader)

Employees Present:-
C. Eastman (City Development Directorate)
J. Russell (City Development Directorate)
C. Steele (Legal and Democratic Services Directorate)
A. Townsend (Legal and Democratic Services Directorate)

By Invitation:-
M. de Courcey (de Courcey)
B. Delaney (Travel Coventry)
M. Hancock (Travel Coventry)
R. Smith (CENTRO)
R Woods (CENTRO)
B. Wildman (de Courcey Travel)

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Stagecoach Travel.

83. The Future Pattern of Bus Services in Coventry

The Chair welcomed the representatives of the bus operators and CENTRO to the meeting and briefly outlined the purpose of the meeting. The TAS report had been issued in November 2003, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee were concerned that not all parties were in agreement with the recommendations of the report and that work on instigating the report's recommendations had not commenced. James Russell gave a brief introduction to the study which had been jointly commissioned by Coventry City Council, Travel West Midlands and CENTRO. Consultation with stakeholders had taken place and the final report had recommended a series of service and timetable changes and the development of a number of key routes within the city which would operate a "turn up and go" level of service. It was felt that there were differences of opinion as to whether the TAS report had achieved what it set out to.

Robert Smith of CENTRO gave a brief introduction and explained that CENTRO's principal objective was to improve public transport in the West Midlands, in Coventry this centred on buses. It was noted that there were several elements to the overall package that should be considered in addition to the bus services themselves including the introduction of modern buses, integrated ticketing, improved customer service, better cleaning and fewer cancellations. CENTRO felt that the improvements to the network needed to be made more quickly than was currently the case and should be more comprehensive.

Bernard Delaney of Travel Coventry gave a brief presentation in response to the TAS report. He pointed out that the report had not demonstrated the need for a commercial orbital route in the city nor the introduction of services to additional roads/areas; instead, the report's central proposal was the introduction of a turn up and go service.

Travel Coventry felt that the report contained both good and bad elements although they did not feel that it dealt sufficiently with the issue of passenger origin and destination and relied more heavily on increased frequency. Travel Coventry felt that there could be problems with the turn up and go proposals for radial routes, particularly as radial routes in the city were not as highly populated as those in other towns, for example Leicester. Accommodation in Coventry tended to be centred in housing estates near to the main roads and Travel Coventry were concerned that concentrating buses on the major roads could take buses away from these areas the service less visible. In addition, it was noted that city centre employment was low in Coventry which meant that passenger destinations were often not necessarily the city centre. Travel Coventry indicated that they are developing a route identified in the TAS report, namely Eastern Green to Henley Green via the city centre and Ball Hill, in order to test the principles of the TAS report. It was noted that work had started on this and that it was intended to introduce it towards the end of the year and that users would be consulted.

Mike de Courcey of de Courcey Travel indicated that he generally concurred with the comments made by Travel Coventry. It was noted that de Courcey Travel had recently invested £1.3m on the introduction of new buses and infrastructure.

Members questioned the bus company representatives on aspects of the TAS report and the presentations made at the meeting, in particular:-

- **Missing Buses and Recruitment Problems**
Travel Coventry acknowledged that there had been a recruitment problem in the bus industry. Steps had been taken to improve this and as a result were now recruiting from elsewhere in the EU, for example Poland. The recruitment process was ongoing.
- **Orbital Routes**
Members acknowledged that it may not be financially viable to introduce an outer orbital route that ran throughout the day, but suggested that, as current job creation areas tended to be located on the outskirts of the city, an orbital route could link areas with high levels of unemployment and low car ownership to job creation areas and that an outer orbital route may be useful at peak times. It was noted that de Courcey Travel were beginning to introduce these types of services (for example Willenhall to the Prologis

Park) and that Travel Coventry were now operating a route from the new hospital site via Tesco to the Prologis Park. It was also planned to have a hospital to Willenhall and on to Warwick University route in operation by mid 2006.

- **Socially Inclusive Bus Networks**

Members felt that there was a need to ensure that the bus network was socially inclusive. It was noted that socially inclusive networks were often developed by the use of Section 106 monies. It was acknowledged that these monies only lasted a certain amount of time and the issue would be whether the services were sustainable or worth supporting when the funding expired. Members considered that services may be under used due to lack of publicity and it was suggested that it could be useful to ensure that the employers located at the business parks were aware of the bus routes in place. Members emphasised that networks to places of employment should not be introduced at the expense of other sections of the community, for example the elderly.

- **Pool Meadow**

The Bus Operators indicated that they had met with Council Employees and outlined proposals regarding the number of services that they felt could use Pool Meadow. A meeting was scheduled to take place shortly to finalise plans and consider any amendments that may need to be made to the road network to assist access to the bus station and achieve full use. CENTRO indicated that they were keen to see Pool Meadow in use and wished to ensure that all operators were treated fairly with regard to the allocation of stands and layover spaces. CENTRO believed that access to the bus station was best achieved by the use of existing roads and also opening up a route across Millennium Place. Travel Coventry emphasised that they did not see there was a choice between operating from Pool Meadow or city centre bus stops, they believed that both must be used in order for passengers to access shopping and other key areas. Members were concerned that, in the past, bus companies had stopped using Pool Meadow as the number of passengers boarding there had reduced and buses were running into and out of the facility empty. They suggested that if passengers were alighting from buses near to the shopping areas then the buses would still run empty into and out of Pool Meadow.

The Committee went on to discuss the charges levied for the use of Pool Meadow and the current deficit situation. CENTRO explained that charges were made per bus departure, therefore, as the number of buses using Pool Meadow increased so the deficit situation was likely to get better.

The Committee explored discuss the potential to open up a vehicular route across Millennium Place. The Cabinet Member indicated that Senior City Development Directorate Officers had checked with the Millennium Commission who had confirmed that this would not entail grant repayment. Councillor McNicholas indicated that he understood that no discussions had yet taken place between the Millennium Commission and City Development Directorate Officers.

- **Routes**
The Cabinet Member reported that work was ongoing to simplify routes in the City; there was some confusion with routes at the moment, for example routes 32, 33 and 33a.

Customer Service

Travel Coventry confirmed that bus drivers were undergoing customer service training. At the moment 62% of drivers had achieved the relevant NVQ Level 2, which included a customer care module. Councillor Patton suggested that, as part of the driver training, the use of defibrillators could be included. Travel Coventry agreed to look into this.

- **Evening and Weekend Frequencies**
Travel Coventry indicated that it was difficult to provide the frequent services in evening and weekends on a commercial basis as there was little employment in the city centre and people were not encouraged to stay in the city centre after work. They confirmed that should the employment pattern in the city centre change, then bus services could also be considered.

The Chair thanked the travel companies for their attendance at what he believed to have been a very useful and helpful discussion. With regard to the way forward he suggested that Scrutiny Board (3) could look in more detail at the issues relating to Pool Meadow and future route development.

RESOLVED that the issues be referred to Scrutiny Board (3).

84. **Consideration of Call-Ins**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported on the following call-ins that had been received:-

(1) **The Future of the City Council's Housing List**

The report had been called in by:-

- (a) Councillors Clifford, Harrison and Mulhall.

The reason for the call-in was "to better understand how this decision will be beneficial to tenants, prospective tenants and the City Council."

- (b) Councillors Nellist, Ms. McKay and Mrs. Stone.

The reason for the call-in was "to further examine the potential impact on the citizens of Coventry if the Council were no longer to maintain a publicly accountable housing register."

(2) **Developing Partnership Arrangements with Henley College to Develop Brandon Wood Farm as a Centre of Excellence**

The report had been called in by Councillors Mrs. Lucas, Clifford and Harrison.

The reason for the call-in was "to better understand the consultation process and also to better understand the potential implications for the users."

The Committee considered the call-ins in the light of the approved criteria for determining whether call-ins were appropriate (Minute 01/02 refers).

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the call-in (1) as detailed above be considered by the Committee at their meeting on 9th March, 2005 and that the Cabinet Member (Health and Housing) be requested to attend.
- (2) That the call-in (2) as detailed above be considered by the Committee at their meeting on 2nd March, 2005 and that the Cabinet Member (Community Services) be requested to attend.

85. Outstanding Issues

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services that identified those issues on which further reports have been requested in order that Members could monitor progress.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That item 1, second bullet, (Best Value Review of Highways and Highways Maintenance and Planning and transportation Best Value Reviews – Further Report) be rescheduled to 2nd February, 2005.
- (2) That item 2 (Best Value and Scrutiny Reviews Vibrant City Centre and Neighbourhood Plan/Best Value Review City Centre Strategy) be rescheduled to 2nd February, 2005.
- (3) That item 6 (New Footway Between 215 and 315 Lentons Lane) be rescheduled to 26th January, 2005.
- (4) That item 8 (Coventry Transport Museum) be rescheduled to 16th February, 2005.