

Project Stroud

Transport Theme Group Report

Task

The task for the group was to agree the key issues concerned with the provision of an adequate transport system for Stroud both at present and in the future when the various developments had been completed.

Meetings

Two meetings were held. The first (12th October) was a fact finding meeting at which the current transport arrangements were spelt out together with those initiatives which were expected to come to fruition in the near future. Present at the meeting were Lawrence Elcocks from the Environment Department of the County Council, Tiina Emsley from Stroud District Council's Regeneration Section, and Terry Parker (Project Stroud). The second meeting (25th October), although called as a Town Centre Partnership meeting, was open to the public with traffic and travel as the main discussion item. The meeting was attended by Mr and Mrs Cole of the Warehouse Nightclub who were the hosts, District Councillor Liz Peters, Elizabeth Sargeant (Pedestrians Association), Graham Stanley (Vision 21./Project Stroud), Juliet Shipman (Stroud Civic Society), Geoff Beckerleg (Stroud Valleys Project), Edward Lane Stroud Taxis), Rob Fear (HSBC/Chamber of Trade), Terry Parker (Project Stroud).

Bus Station

The consensus was that the temporary arrangements at Merrywalks were working well. There is a widely held view that the situation could become permanent. Much will depend on progress with the Interchange but the County Council does not rule out the possibility that at least the four bays on the convent side of the road could remain to accommodate north bound buses. Bill Wrather, the developer, has expressed surprise that the scheme continues to be referred to as temporary. When the development is completed passengers will be able to access the facilities at the various levels by means of lifts from the bus stop area.

Bus policy

The closure of the bus station resulted in 14% less bus usage. This contrasts with a 1.4% increase in the number of their passengers outside of London. Stagecoach is keen to provide a 15 minute interval service between the Railway Station and Merrywalks. To do this they would look to financial support from the County and District Councils. Stagecoach believe that there is a need for a wide ranging debate to define a bus services strategy for Stroud. The company wishes to see dedicated bus lanes considered as part of the strategy although there is a question mark over the practicality of such lanes given the Stroud topography. Bus driver recruitment/retention is a problem for Stagecoach. There is a need for bus companies to introduce multi-operator tickets across all routes. Stagecoach has difficulty with this concept but the scheme has Government support although it is not contained in current transport regulations.

Taxis

The one-way system in London Road has considerably increased the cost of taxi fares. There is a requirement to look at the integration of taxis into the public transport system. This should include taxis having the same priority road usage as buses. A system of subsidy for taxi charges should be considered. Although there is a well supported lobby for London Road to be opened for exiting traffic, the consensus at the meetings have been to retain the present system until the Merrywalks roadworks, which include the creation of a single roundabout, have been put in place.

Social evening/night transport

This has been identified as the main problem for the future when the Merrywalks leisure complex is open. At present there are different periods of evening activity. Friday and Saturday nights are of particular concern when, in the main, young people are leaving Stroud as late as 4am. Earlier in the week the main activity time is between 6pm and 11pm. There would seem to be a strong case for bus subsidy in the period after July 2005 when the Merrywalks development will be open. Such subsidy to continue until passenger usage enables bus operators to run the evening services at an economic level. The recently introduced Gloucester evening service is apparently a success. The Cheltenham survey of the town's evening economy is possibly relevant to Stroud. The policing of buses in the evening is a matter of concern as is the vulnerability of taxi drivers who are also operating unaccompanied during the late evening and early morning hours. There is the need to provide a telephone for bus drivers.

Daytime services

Hinterland services

The demand-led response link service in the north/east Stroud area is scheduled to begin in the New Year. This service will operate in the Bisley, Miserden, Sheepscombe, Cranham and Painswick areas linking with the 46 Cheltenham/Nailsworth route. A Rural Bus Challenge grant bid for £129,000 was successful to enable the creation of the service over an initial period of two years. The system should have been introduced in December 2004 but the vehicle manufacturer with whom the order was placed has gone into liquidation. The GCC has a number of minibuses which are able to be allocated for local use. There needs to be an audit of potential users.

Superstore bus services

Tesco run regular bus services to and from the surrounding villages in the Stroud area. Asda also run a return service from the Stroud area to Gloucester.

Other services

JUMPSTART

The Gloucestershire Rural Community Council now has four strands to its JUMPSTART operation. Their fleet of Mopeds has been increased from six to twenty. The scheme enables those living in the rural communities to find employment and education opportunities in the county's towns such as Stroud. 38% of all job seekers in rural areas say that transport is an obstacle to obtaining work.

Ring and Ride and Volunteer Car Service

This service is provided by the Stroud and District Volunteer Bureau. It enables those who are physically impaired to be taken from their homes to a variety of venues in the Stroud area.

Stroud Valleys Community Car Club

This scheme has the benefit of reducing the number of vehicular movements in the Stroud area as well as providing financial savings to its users.

Other issues

Pedestrian and Cycling improvements

The GCC could not support a cycle way which would operate against the traffic flow along the London Road. There is an ongoing need to monitor possible methods of improving paths for pedestrian and cyclists. The part pedestrianisation of the High Street is of particular concern.

Key issues

Merrywalks complex

The key issue identified at the stakeholder meetings is the need to provide an adequate public transport system to meet the needs of the public during the evening and night hours. Such a system will become essential when the Merrywalks entertainment complex has been completed.

Car parks

Because of the reduction in the number of public car spaces available in the town in recent times, a question mark arises over the adequacy of public car parking in Stroud. Those seeking parking now often have to wait for spaces to become free whereas in the recent past car parks such as Cheapside have always had spare capacity. The situation needs to be monitored as the various developments are completed. Once these are completed there should be an audit of car park signs.

Terry Parker

8.11.'04