Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan 2006/07 – 2010/11

Bus Strategy

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Bus Strategy covers the period of the second Local Transport Plan from 2006 to 2011. It is a separate requirement of the Transport Act 2000 that a Strategy is produced. However the County Council brings together its strategic policies and plans over the whole range of transport provision through the Local Transport Plan, the Bus Strategy, the **Intalink** Strategy for passenger information and the Rail Strategy.

1.2 Although there have been important changes in the last 5 years to the legislative framework within which bus services are provided, the principles of a deregulated approach in the Transport Act 1985 remain. Operators are free to register services which can be run without public revenue support and the County Council has to consider the needs not met by this network and arrange any additional services it requires.

1.3 A Bus Strategy explains how those services will be identified, how the County Council will work with others to achieve the overall bus network that Hertfordshire's bus users and communities need and expect, what other measures are necessary to deliver it and how we will know whether the standards set are being met.

2. Vision and Objectives

2.1 The County Council's transport vision in the Local Transport Plan is:

"to provide a safe, efficient and affordable transport system that allows access for all to everyday facilities. Everyone will have the opportunity and information to choose the most appropriate form of transport and time of transport. By making best use of the existing network we will work towards a transport system that balances economic prosperity with personal health and environmental well being."

2.2 The Bus Strategy objectives contribute to the overall LTP shared priorities of safety, congestion management, accessibility and quality of life by:

- Providing an effective and efficient network of bus services as a travel mode which passengers will choose to use.
- Reviewing the network with others to ensure resources are used to best effect.
- Improving bus punctuality through commercial partnerships and better management of the highway network.
- Developing accessibility to employment, shopping, education, leisure and health facilities by effective design of the bus network, the use of less conventional approaches and securing maximum external funding.
- Continuing to improve vehicle quality and associated infrastructure at bus stops and interchanges to increase access to the network by those with impaired mobility.
- Raising awareness and encouraging the use of bus services through improved information, marketing and branding.

3. The Role of the Bus in Hertfordshire's Transport Strategy

3.1 Buses provide the main means for local passenger travel in the County. Their role can be sub divided into a number of functions, although often these are effectively integrated into the same service. These functions include:

- Local travel within towns to places of work and shopping, predominantly centrally located.
- The local element of a longer journey by train or express coach.
- Travel between towns to give wider choice of access to a range of activities.
- Travel from rural communities to access facilities in nearby towns.
- Travel between home and school or college.
- Express coach or bus services filling in lower demand gaps in the rail network, often on an east-west alignment.
- Meeting an extensive range of other social, medical, leisure and other needs.

3.2 The role of the bus is largely complementary to other parts of the transport system. It is inherently local rather than long distance, even though some routes have a countywide dimension. It serves a volume market, but nevertheless, individual needs and the interface with individual transport such as taxis and community transport are important.

4. Network Challenges and Trends

4.1 The operating environment for running bus services in Hertfordshire is challenging and many of the challenges are outside the direct control of operators and local authorities.

4.2 Car ownership and use by Hertfordshire residents is high and the main motorway and highway network caters for regional demands. This can generate significant and unpredictable congestion, leading to delays to bus services, unreliability, high operating costs, high fares and dissatisfied bus customers. This highlights the importance of the congestion action plan currently being developed to address one of the key HCC corporate challenges for the next five year period.

4.3 Hertfordshire does not have a dominant centre and has extensive green belt. Demand is dispersed towards different centres rather than concentrated on a single county town. This is less conducive to successful bus operation.

4.4 The proximity to London poses its own challenges. The regulated bus market within London has led to significant network improvements, but the increased demand for buses and drivers has increased costs over a wider area and put pressure on available bus operating centres. The greater security and profitability of running buses in London may be more attractive than the risks outside.

4.5 It is perhaps not surprising that the number of bus passengers travelling on Hertfordshire's buses has been in gradual decline (around 2% per annum since the mid 1990's). Although overall bus mileage is stable or even rising in some areas, this is often not achieving an effective frequency increase because competing services (in the localised locations where this happens) tend to mirror each other. Fares have continued to rise at a rate higher than general inflation. Typically at present bus costs are rising at about 7-8% each year, bus fares are rising at about 5% a year while the general rate of inflation is rising at 2-3%.

4.6 While the deregulated industry has stabilised considerably, there is still structural change. A lack of profitability led to the Blazefield Group selling the St.Albans operations of Sovereign to Centrebus in January 2004 and the rest of the Company to Arriva a year later after a Competition Commission inquiry. While 5 years ago there was significant investment in new vehicles taking place, the larger groups (such as Arriva) are no longer able to invest in new vehicles at the same rate.

4.7 The implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act has improved access to new buses since 2000 and the phased approach will achieve full wheelchair access to the bus network between 2015 and 2020, depending on the type of vehicle. The aspirations from passengers are to achieve this as early as possible. However, this would require significant investment by operators in replacing fleets and by the County Council in matching this by infrastructure improvements.

4.8 The challenge in the Bus Strategy is achieve improvements in quality and accessibility while keeping the network sustainable and affordable (for users, operators and County Council).

5. Indicators and Targets

5.1 The County Council is required to monitor some mandatory indicators as part of the Local Transport Plan and set relevant targets as follows:

a) Number of bus passenger journeys per annum
b) Percentage of residents satisfied with provision of services
c) Bus punctuality

In addition there are also locally set indicators and targets to increase the percentage of residents satisfied with provision of passenger transport information.

5.2 Bus passenger journeys per annum

Outside of London, the number of bus passengers has been in decline for some years. The Hertfordshire situation is illustrated in Table 1.The reasons for this are that fares have been rising at a rate of double the general inflation

rate, reflecting real increases in transport costs alongside additional factors affecting bus driver costs around London.

It is reasonable to assume that the decline in the region of 2% per annum will take place with no positive action. Indeed it could continue to decline if congestion gets worse and commercial bus operators find their profitability under continuing pressure. Positive progress with the congestion action plan is therefore vital if the strategy is to reverse this trend.

Table 1

Year	Estimated number of bus passengers (millions per annum)	Annual change %
2000/01	33.9	
2001/02	33.0	-2.6
2002/03	31.9	-3.3
2003/04	31.1	-2.6
2004/05	30.7	-1.3

The target set for 2010/11 is to achieve a similar bus passenger level to 2003/04 at 31m. Reversing a prolonged period of decline with a majority of services provided by operators on a business basis, and with no real terms increase in revenue funding, would be a significant success. The County Council does not underestimate the task.

The measures to achieve this will be a continuation of improvements in bus infrastructure and passenger facilities, improved information systems, local bus priority measures, Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnerships and other partnership working with operators in network design as part of the **Intalink** programme. The introduction of District free concessionary travel for the elderly and disabled will no doubt contribute to the achievement of this target.

5.3   Satisfaction with bus services

This is currently at 55% (2003/04). However, given the decline in overall use and the factors contributing to this, this level of satisfaction is creditable. The target for 2010 is to increase this to 60%. The surveys used to measure this indicator take place at three year intervals.

While the County Council sets the overall framework, it does not deliver a majority of bus services and there are a range of factors influencing satisfaction outside our control.

The County Council intends to do monitoring of services (by mystery shoppers/travellers), particularly its own contract services, to measure quality standards more objectively against industry standards. This will provide a cross check against users' or residents' subjective views and help the County Council interpret this indicator on an annual basis.

5.4   Bus punctuality

This is a new requirement, with the target being set by the industry regulator, the Traffic Commissioner. This is in two sections:

- Services departing a terminus are expected to be 95% within 5 minutes of schedule. The high expectation reflects the fact that operators have a high degree of control over this through producing reliable and realistic scheduling.

- Along the route there is a higher possibility of unpredictable events, and the target for intermediate timing points along a route is a minimum of 70% within the acceptable time frame of 1 minute early to 5 minutes late.

The County Council is planning to address this target through Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (BPiPs). These will help monitor these aspects using data from surveys and operators. However, outside these areas there will still need to be a representative system of monitoring.

5.5   Satisfaction with passenger transport information

The current base position is 39% satisfaction (2003/04). This is a disappointingly low figure given the progress made by **Intalink** partners to provide information in a wide range of formats.

The target is to increase this to 50% by 2010/11. This will be a key aspect of the review of the **Intalink** strategy which will include the timescale for 'real-time' information in some areas of the county.

6.   Service Planning

The County Council will adopt the following objectives and principles in influencing the design of the bus network.

- The County Council has a statutory duty to consider passenger needs and provide appropriate services to meet those needs.

- The County Council also has to balance this against the commercial service provision by bus operators and not take action which would have a disproportionate effect on their businesses.

- The network should minimise walking distances from homes or key travel attractors and be as comprehensive as possible. Maximum walking distances of 200 metres in town centres, 400 metres in urban residential areas and 800 metres in rural residential areas will be used to determine the comprehensiveness and accessibility of the network.

- The service pattern should be as simple as possible to understand and use, with common terminals for most of the day and regular frequencies between peak periods. Where evening and Sunday services are provided, these should follow daytime patterns or routeing and route number. Last journeys should run at the same times on each day.

- Regular frequency services (hourly or better) should operate at "clockface" intervals (60, 30, 20, 15, 12, 10, 6, 5 minutes) to assist passenger understanding and minimise timetable presentation. Where more than one service runs along the same section, the inter-working should be as regular as possible. It is recognised that commercial considerations may diverge from this guideline.

- In rural areas with low frequencies it may not be possible to provide consistent routes or regular frequencies. However simplicity of approach is desirable, for example the same times on different days of the week.

- Services should be as direct as possible between main areas of demand avoiding unnecessary or complicated diversions or deviations to route.

- Frequencies should be as high as is justified either by commercial viability, value for money criteria or financial resources available. Where these criteria cannot be met, the views of stakeholders and local members will be sought to assess whether the service should be provided.

- Services that are provided should be reliable within acceptable tolerances set for the type of service and the operational conditions in the area.

- At peak periods and in town centres traffic conditions may require the adoption of either non standard running times and/or recovery times to maintain reliability. Both traffic conditions and levels of use on schooldays and school holidays may be sufficiently varied to warrant different running times. In such circumstances the requirements for simplicity and reliability may not be compatible. It is important that at least 95% of journeys are able to start at the scheduled time, following Traffic Commissioner guidelines. For points along the route, the minimum target set by the Commissioner is 70%. The County Council proposes to set up Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnerships where necessary, to promote best operational practices and infrastructure enhancements that will improve network performance.

- Choice of vehicle will be a compromise between providing sufficient capacity for peak demand (which is often at school times), operating costs and suitability of vehicles for physical aspects of each route. Standardisation of vehicle type is important for the operator and the main passenger characteristics. In general the standard use of one type of vehicle through the day will be desirable and cost effective.

- The network should be capable of response to change in demand but stable enough over time to establish passenger confidence. Changes to services will

be necessary to reflect changes in the pattern of demand, a need to address financial or budget issues (for the operator or funding authority), to reflect changes in operational conditions or other circumstances (e.g. award of new contracts). Where possible these changes should be co-ordinated to selected dates during the year. The **Intalink** partnership will lead in promoting this.

- Route numbers should not be changed unless there is a completely different pattern of service. Related routes should have numbers near to each other to help passenger understanding and timetable book compilation. Duplication of route numbers within at least a 20 mile radius should be avoided. Area letter prefixes are encouraged to help create local identity and avoid number duplication. Some service number ranges will be reserved for particular types of service eg 8xx for schools services; 7xx for limited stop services.

  The County Council has established value for money assessment criteria (Appendix 1). These involve the use of cost benefit values which measure the benefit to the passenger from the operation of a contract service by valuing the alternative mode (walk, other passenger transport service, taxi etc) against the bus service. The County Council seeks a 25% rate of return over the costs of operation. These will continue to be used to judge value for money for maintaining, improving or reducing services.

7. Network Reviews

7.1 In developing the bus network, the County Council will continue the programme of area network reviews jointly with District and Borough Council funding partners and bus operators. The process also provides opportunity for wider consultation and input from bus users, other groups and interested individuals. It also supports the development of the county's accessibility strategy currently reflected in the Local Transport Plan.

7.2 The areas are South West (Watford, Three Rivers, Hertsmere), West/Mid (Dacorum, St.Albans, Welwyn Hatfield), North (Stevenage, North Herts), East (East Herts, Broxbourne). The South West Herts review has already been undertaken and the remaining area reviews will be completed by the end of 2006/07.

7.3 The network review process involves a significant analysis of local bus services and network issues to help identify any service or infrastructure changes that are required to improve services. Including the operators in the process builds operator confidence and helps to develop partnerships and service stability.

8.   School Transport Planning

8.1 For pupils entitled to free home to school transport under Education Acts, the County Council will arrange suitable transport either by running a dedicated route specifically for entitled pupils and students - an Education route (E route) or a taxi - or by issuing a pass available on local bus services or rail services.

8.2 In determining the most suitable mode of transport the County Council will take into account:

    a) Whether there is a suitable bus or rail service (a combination of route, timing and capacity). If there is, there will be a presumption that it will be used as this will ensure a wider network is available to the wider public.

    b) Cost of provision. The County Council will generally use the cheapest mode of travel, taking into account all its expenditure on transport.

    c) Speed and efficiency for the customer. The County Council will take into account convenience and journey times where there is a marginal decision between modes on cost grounds.

8.3 Where a dedicated route is provided, any surplus capacity may be made available on an assisted basis to assist accessibility to schools or colleges for those who do not qualify for statutory entitlement. The County Council publishes criteria for the selection of places where demand exceeds available space.

8.4 The County Council will seek to integrate the charging policies for home to school transport so that there is a common approach and consistency between types of provision.

8.5 The County Council will register an interest in taking advantage of changes in legislation in the future. However, this will require further assessment to decide whether any change in legislation will be suitable for Hertfordshire's situation.

8.6 For pupils and students who are not entitled to free home to school or college transport, the County Council offers a "SaverCard" concessionary scheme for local bus services and a "TrainCard" for rail services. Both schemes give discounts on travel and are funded by the County Council.

8.7 The County Council will continue to discuss the administrative and financial arrangements with operators to ensure that the rules and principles of the schemes are simple to operate and give value for money for the County and its residents.

8.8 Improvements will be made to season ticket arrangements so that payment by credit card will be available and an on-line facility will be introduced when security issues have been resolved.

8.9 The County Council provides additional specific bus services on a contract basis for pupils and students who are not entitled to free transport. In deciding whether to provide such services or continue to operate them, it will take into account:

    a) Whether the service provides access to the nearest groups of schools or not. Priority for funding will be given to local routes under 3 miles.

    b) Long distance routes over 3 miles, which do not serve the nearest group of schools, will still be provided if there is sufficient demand. However,

the County Council will charge fares on these routes which reflect costs of provision and assisted Education travel rates.

c) Whether the demand can be met by the adjustment or integration of the general passenger transport network.

d) Cost benefit criteria will be used to assess value for money in the same way as other bus services. If a service has insufficient use or the costs are disproportionate, consultation will be carried out to assist decisions on whether such services should continue.

9. Contract Issues

9.1 In securing services under contract, the County Council will normally be required by national and European legislation to seek open competitive tenders. There are some exceptions to this to promote partnership working and other options which may create a more radical relationship between the County Council and operator.

9.2 As a general principle, contracts are awarded to the lowest tenderer, but consideration is given to other factors such as the track record of operators, the wider advantages to the network that another operator could bring and the value of an improved vehicle or service.

9.3 The County Council will keep its contract conditions under review and discuss issues with operators. This will include improvements to quality standards, disciplinary procedures and indexation of contract prices. The County Council will continue to develop electronic access to tender details via the website and in due course move to electronic tendering when full safeguards on security are in place.

9.4 The County Council will improve its checks on quality standards through its contract qualification procedures and the standards set by the Intalink partnership. Particular attention will be directed towards licensing and insurance, health and safety policies, staff training, customer complaints systems and compliance with legal and contractual requirements. To monitor the quality of driver performance the County Council plans to use 'mystery shopper' surveys on an independent basis.

9.5 The County Council will continue to operate a maximum vehicle age and/or accessibility policy on contract local bus and education services as follows:

a) All day contracts – vehicle to be fully wheelchair accessible or maximum age 5 years
b) Part day contract – maximum age 10 years
c) Schools only contract – maximum age 15 years

9.6 The County Council proposes to limit vehicles under 23 seats to an age limit of 10 years, thus reflecting the economic life of these vehicles. It proposes to restrict the use of double deck vehicles on school services to routes where there are no behaviour issues and where the alternative of single deck vehicles is prohibitively costly. The use of double deck vehicles over the age

of 15 years, but less than 20 years, will be considered if the vehicle has undergone significant internal refurbishment.

9.7   The specification of vehicle age limits not only helps achieve accessibility improvements but also assists improvements in vehicle emissions. Newer vehicles meet higher Euro standards.

9.8   The legislation allows local authorities to reach agreements with operators (usually known as de-minimis agreements) without tendering. For the County Council this is possible for up to 25% of its expenditure, but its allocation is still subject to European legislation. The County Council will use these powers where:

a) the route of a commercial service needs to be diverted or extended and this is best secured by negotiation
b) the extent of coverage of the day or week of a commercial service needs to be expanded and the benefits of an agreement with the commercial provider (common vehicles, integrated ticketing and consistency of image) outweigh any risks through competitive tender of fragmentation.
c) The administration cost of tendering is disproportionate to the value of the agreement

9.9   Quality Contracts became an option available in the Transport Act 2000 where local authorities have specific programmes for congestion reduction, and it can be shown that the commercial sector is not providing services that meet customer needs. To date however, local authorities have reported that conditions and notice periods placed on the establishment of Quality Contracts to be too onerous and lengthy, and Operators see them as restricting commercial freedom.

9.10   Half the services in Hertfordshire are run as commercial services, and our nationally acclaimed partnership with Operators – **Intalink** – enables Hertfordshire to develop Quality Partnerships. There is one currently on a voluntary basis with Arriva (ex Sovereign) between Chells and Stevenage Town Centre. Investment in new vehicles has been accompanied by improvements in Quality Bus Stops and Shelters. While the initial results were promising, the introduction of significant commercial competition has undermined the Operator's position. The County Council will learn from this experience in selecting future corridors.

9.11   The criteria for a Quality partnership (voluntary or statutory) will be :

a) a route or corridor with potential for the passenger business to grow.
b) a corridor where an improvement in bus services will contribute to the overall congestion reduction and transport strategy.
c) the existence of a willing partner operator and any other potential partner involvement (eg District Council).
d) the likelihood of funding to improve infrastructure, interchanges or facilities along the route.

10. Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnerships

10.1 BPIP's have been promoted by Government to bring together the relevant parties to tackle issues of bus punctuality. The Regulator for the industry (the Traffic Commissioner) has set targets as follows:

- For departures from a terminus, a minimum of 95% of journeys should be within one minute early to 5 minutes late.
- For departures at other intermediate points, the minimum should be 70%.
- For services operating on a frequent basis, ie 10 minutes or better, the criteria is measured through excess waiting times.

10.2 These criteria are a minimum and the Traffic Commissioner will expect better performance. However, he will take into consideration local circumstances and whether a BPIP exists when determining whether disciplinary action should be taken against an operator.

10.3 The County Council, through its statutory Traffic Manager function, intends to set up BPIP's in Watford, Hemel Hempstead and St.Albans involving the main bus operators, the District or Borough Council, the Police and any other relevant agency. They will monitor services at selected points and use whatever operator information is available to determine what action is needed to improve performance. The BPIP will assess the baseline punctuality position for its area and what targets are appropriate for the future.

10.4 In other areas of the County there will still be a regime of survey and discussion with operators to monitor punctuality, and appropriate targets will also be set countywide.

11. Fares and Ticketing

11.1 On commercial bus services the level of fares and the ticketing arrangements are a matter for the Operator. The County Council will seek to influence Operators' decisions to ensure that the wider consumer need is represented and to assist Operators in delivering a successful service.

11.2 The County Council will set fares on its contract services that reflect commercial decisions. Where there are arrangements for joint ticketing between the commercial and contract sector, contract fares will be either the same or as close as possible to avoid customer confusion. Contract services will accept tickets issued by the same Operator elsewhere or by the same service number, again to assist passengers.

11.3 Where the County Council is concerned that its co-operation in fares and ticketing matters is being used to increase fares above the normal level for the area, it will bring these concerns to the attention of the Operator and it may decide, after discussion, to charge fares which are lower than those determined commercially.

11.4   The County Council will seek to use its joint working with Transport for London to influence decisions on fares and ticketing outside London and for cross boundary journeys. If necessary, the County Council will charge fares different to TfL on parallel sections of route.

11.5   The County Council will complete the implementation of "Plus Bus" schemes for all Hertfordshire stations giving bus/rail through ticketing.

11.6   Where a business case can be made, other ticketing schemes will be negotiated through Intalink to provide better bus discounts for regular travellers. The County Council will either administer the schemes direct or do so through an independent organisation to avoid breaching Office of Fair Trading guidelines.

11.7   The County Council welcomes the agreement between the District and Borough Councils to implement a County-wide free concessionary scheme from 2007/2008. This provides a simple and standard level of concession for the user and minimises the administration difficulties for Authorities and Operators.

11.8   The County Council acts as administrators of the District and Borough Councils' elderly and disabled concessionary schemes. The County Council is willing to continue in this role, with consultancy assistance, in achieving a smooth transition from a mileage based, to a usage based scheme in 2007/2008. This provides an incentive for operators to design services to maximise usage and improve vehicle accessibility for customers with mobility impairment. Usage based reimbursement can be achieved either through an Operator claiming from electronic ticket machine data or through Smartcard implementation.

11.9   The County Council will seek a consultant's view on developing a Smartcard strategy for Hertfordshire to build on the trials that have been undertaken since 1998. This may include a funding bid through the LTP for the capital costs of implementation. Because the existing Smartcard scheme has only partial County coverage and is not ITSO compliant, this will involve the re-equipment of all buses. The County Council would wish to develop the strategy in conjunction with surrounding authorities and major Operators to ensure compatibility of systems.

11.10 The County Council will continue to operate a half-fare "SaverCard" scheme for children under 16 and for scholars and students in full time education between 16 and 18. Simplification of the scheme was introduced in September 2005 to make it easier to understand and provide a more transparent payment system for operators.

12.   Passenger Information

12.1   The County Council's information strategy will be set out separately in the **Intalink** strategy, which covers both bus and rail networks. The purpose of the strategy is to define the minimum standard of information provision required of

all Operators in Hertfordshire, and the additional level of commitment to quality that **Intalink** partners make. Provisions within the strategy to enforce these standards will be used more effectively to deliver consistent quality.

12.2 In January 2005, the partnership launched the **Intalink** Business and Marketing Plan, which set out a programme of work for the period 2005/06. Although the remainder of the present agreement with partners extends to March 2009, the programme is currently being reviewed to extend to 2008/9.

The key elements of this programme will be:

- To further improve quality and reliability of data that supports the programme.
- To continue the programme of publications, seeking further efficiency in production and the potential for other income streams.
- To improve the standard of bus stop displays.
- To increase the availability of electronic information, incorporating real-time information as soon as this becomes available.
- To increase the range of multi-Operator ticketing products available to the user.

12.3 In addition to the above, the Partnership will embark on a wide-ranging programme of strategic and tactical marketing to promote additional use of the network, by existing users and new customers.

13. Bus Priority and Infrastructure

13.1 As the highway authority, the County Council has a key role to play in provision of infrastructure to support bus operation. Following extensive consultation in SW Herts as part of the Bus Network Review, it was clear that, taking into account difficulties caused by historic limitations to highway space, preference should be given to bus priority systems at traffic signals and junctions, with supporting automatic vehicle location systems providing information, rather than further introduction of dedicated bus lanes. However, the second Local Transport Plan will place great emphasis on the role of the bus in tackling congestion. Improved accessibility to services will also demand that facilities at stops are enhanced to meet customer needs.

13.2 The strategy for bus priority and infrastructure will therefore be to:

- Provide a countywide Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system, which will allow the operation of bus services to be managed more effectively by operators and BPIPs.
- Develop and implement a programme of targeted bus priority measures, in the form of bus activated signals and bus lanes, based on the information from the AVL system.
- Continue the investment programme in bus stops to improve accessibility to the network and access to the bus.

14. Interchanges

14.1 Interchanges are the focal points where customers access the network in large numbers, or change between services and/or modes. It is therefore essential that their design and function minimises the inconvenience of transfer, and keep the passenger informed and safe. In town centres, it is important that the location of the interchange gives good access to facilities such as employment, shopping and leisure, and the improvement of interchanges may often be linked directly to new commercial developments. The County Council set standards for the layout of interchanges and will in all cases wish to establish the appropriate arrangements for ongoing management and maintenance.

14.2 The strategy for interchanges is:

- To promote the specification and development of effective interchanges at key points on the bus and rail network, using the planning process to designate suitable sites, as appropriate.
- To ensure that standards of design aid efficient operation and passenger circulation.
- To secure assistance and funding through developments, wherever possible.
- To provide high quality facilities and information to the customer at these locations and to investigate options for joint management with bus and rail operators through the **Intalink** partnership.

15. Funding

15.1 The cost of contract provision, estimated at £6.8m in 2005/06, is met from local revenue sources. In Hertfordshire, services (other than specific home to school services) are jointly funded between County and Districts on a 75%/25% basis. There is additional funding from Government for rural bus services (Rural Bus Grant) and from developers through section 106 agreements. In total therefore, about £8m is needed to maintain the current bus network, assuming commercial Operators are able to continue the services which they run.

15.2 There are uncertainties around revenue funding, and the requirements depend on the extent of the commercial network and the trends in contract prices. However, the role of the Districts has played a valuable part in passenger transport co-ordination in Hertfordshire since 1974 and the Districts, as the Authorities for planning, concessionary fares and parking, have a meaningful say in where services are provided. The decisions are joint ones, with an input from a level nearer to the point of service delivery.

15.3 The County Council wishes to continue this relationship. However, it needs to be reviewed. This review would cover the level of funding to be provided, the level of service provision to be made and the arrangements for dealing with exceptional items, such as the loss of commercial provision and the unexpected increase in tender costs above normal estimates.

15.4 The use of Rural Bus Grant is integrated with other revenue funding sources to develop east-west links, quality and accessibility improvements, ensure the continuation of Rural Challenge schemes when specific funding ends, complement commercial provision by extending some services in the evenings and on Sundays and to enable some local initiatives and risk taking to be supported.

15.5 In urban areas the County Council will work with the District and Borough Councils to maximise the potential for developer contributions through s106 agreements to improve and sustain bus services related to the development.

15.6 The County Council will use its experience from large developments such as Hatfield Aerodrome to implement effective and realistic approaches to new development.

16. Urban Themes

16.1 In urban areas the key elements of the Bus Strategy are to:

- Work with commercial bus operators to enable bus services to play their part in tackling congestion – issues of frequency, service delivery, vehicle quality and fares
- Support bus priority measures to enable buses to improve reliability and punctuality, particularly through Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)
- Make improvement in bus/rail interchanges
- Identify and deliver improvements in vehicle access for the elderly and disabled
- Provide Quality Bus Stops to coordinate with vehicle programmes and meet DDA requirements
- Develop a range of quality information in appropriate forms – printed, telephone, Internet, door to door.
- Work with District and Borough Councils

17. Rural Themes

17.1 In rural areas the key elements of the Bus Strategy are to:

- Maintain a network of services similar to the present that meets local needs
- Integrate home to school transport to ensure core rural bus network is cost effective
- Investigate demand responsive schemes where demand is low and where the pattern of demand is suitable for this approach
- Support other community schemes where conventional bus services are not justified
- Improve vehicle quality across the network
- Develop a range of information in appropriate forms – web based, electronic, printed, and specifically information about local services (provided door-to-door for Hail & Ride schemes)

- Work with District and Parish Councils in developing schemes and assessing demand

18. Service Specific Issues

18.1 The County Council has identified 100 key bus corridor/businesses where it is evaluating the specific issues for those areas. This analysis will be appended to the final Bus Strategy document and will be updated annually to enable bus operators to see how the County Council's general strategies and policies are applicable to local circumstances.

18.2 These specific issues will provide a framework for considering the passenger transport impact of new development and the measures necessary to address it.

19. Individual Transport

19.1 The County Council will continue to provide a base level of Dial-a-Ride at one vehicle per District to give independence to people who are not able to use conventional passenger transport. This is being provided in-house from 2005/06.

19.2 The County Council will work with District and Borough Councils and voluntary organisations to supplement Dial-a-Ride with local schemes. It will identify funding and bidding opportunities to develop existing schemes and promote new initiatives.

20. Surface Access to Airports

20.1 The County Council will work with airport providers, bus and coach operators and adjacent local authorities to produce and implement effective surface access strategies. These will include improvement of service levels, new services, where demand justifies this, and improvements in vehicle quality and marketing.

20.2 The County Council expects airport providers to use funding streams available to them to support both the airport's surface access strategy and Hertfordshire's general bus strategy. This recognises that airports are not just a national or international transport hub and a location of employment, but a transport interchange for local needs.

21. Crime and Behaviour of Passengers

21.1 The reality of crime, or just the perception that it might exist, is a factor leading to the localised disruption, suspension or withdrawal of services and reduced use of the network, particularly in the evenings.

21.2 The County Council will work with Operators and relevant agencies tackling these issues to minimise these effects. Schemes may involve the use of CCTV systems, anti assault screens, the improved deployment of police or

enforcement resources, joint working with community representatives and better communications systems. The County Council will identify a passenger transport budget to contribute to measures on bus services that are part of a wider strategy to deal with anti social behaviour issues.

21.3   On home to school services, the County Council will work with schools, Operators and parents to promote a safe travelling environment by reviewing its procedures and Code of Conduct, revising its contract conditions to make responsibilities clearer and improving availability of training courses for Operators and drivers.

22.   Consultation With Users

22.1   The County Council will work with Bus User Groups to identify problems and solutions at strategic or local level. The County Council will promote and facilitate a wider Forum of bus users during the Bus Strategy period.

22.2   The County Council will consult with District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils on significant changes to local bus services (other than schools services) operating under contract to the County Council. On changes to home to school transport, the County Council will work closely with schools.

22.3   *Intalink* publicity shows users how to contact Operators and the County Council, though its website, has a feedback section so that the users can make *Intalink* members aware of their views.

22.4   The County Council will organise bus surgeries from time to time at local points when it considers there are significant issues on which to get feedback. It will use 'mystery traveller' surveys on a sample of the contract bus network to obtain an independent assessment of the quality of service provided and to assist in monitoring contract performance.

APPENDIX 1 – COST BENEFITS ANALYSIS CRITERIA FOR SUPPORT OF CONTRACT SERVICES

This appendix sets out the County Council's approach to value for money on contracted local bus services.

The principle of an economic evaluation is to take into account all the costs and benefits of a policy decision, regardless of who incurs them. It is widely used in significant transport investment decisions such as road construction and major capital projects.

The objective is to quantify whether the expenditure (in this case the provision of a local bus service) gives a positive rate of return and whether that rate of return is better value than other uses to which the money could be put. It also offers a means of comparing expenditure between services should the available budget be limited and it can also model 'what if' scenarios to assess the effects of changes in policy.

Cost Benefit Analysis cannot provide all the answers. On relatively small investment decisions it is impractical to look at the wider environmental, traffic and safety implications and it may be difficult to examine the future potential for a service in a developing area. It is however an extremely valuable management tool.

There are two elements to cost benefit analysis – the cost is the expenditure committed to provide the service; the benefit is the value (quantified in monetary terms) to the passenger of that service compared to the alternatives available.

This values is calculated for both the passenger journey using the contract service, (taking account of the walk to the bus stop, the wait at the bus stop and the time travelling), and the nearest equivalent (usually walking or another bus/train of a taxi). Nationally accepted values of time are used to value each element of the passenger trip. To these are added the actual fares incurred. The difference between the total values of contract provision and the alternative gives a value of the benefit. These are summated for the total number of passengers on the service and compared to the expenditure to give a rate of return.

In practice the County Council cannot know where each passenger is travelling and what the most realistic alternative might be and so up to three generic trips on each contract are taken and weighted on available usage information.

The County Council sets a target rate of return of 25%. It is accepted that a margin of error is desirable given the difficulty and cost of obtaining representative data and those services below the target rate of return are investigated in more detail.

The County Council will continue to keep the target rate of return under review, as part of its Bus Strategy.

As indicated above the technique is a tool for assessing value for money. It does not take account of many wider issues. It only looks at passenger trips actually made on a contract service whereas many journeys are only possible by using other parts of the passenger transport network. It does not take account of the value of a service used on an irregular basis by a wider population and accounting for only the trips actually made on the journeys supported is likely to under-value the benefits. It is at this stage that interpretation of the results is important.