



Environment, Transport
and Localities Committee

Bus Strategy Review Group

Final Report
December 2002



Bus Strategy Review Group

FINAL REPORT DECEMBER 2002

CONTENTS

	Page Number
<u>Foreword</u>	1 - 2
1 <u>Introduction</u>	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Terms of Reference	3
1.3 Review Process	4 - 5
1.4 Key Themes	5
2 <u>Service Context</u>	5
2.1 Background	5 - 7
2.2 Current Services	7 - 9
2.3 Budget	9
2.4 Service Development	10
3 <u>Key Issues</u>	11
3.1 Infrastructure	11 - 16
3.2 Routes	17 - 21
3.3 Quality	22 - 25
3.4 Information	26 - 30
3.5 Accessibility	31 - 34
3.6 Ticketing and Fares	35 - 40
3.7 Role of the Council	41 - 43
4 <u>Summary and Recommendations</u>	44
4.1 Summary	44
4.2 Recommendations	44 - 54
5. <u>Acknowledgements</u>	55

TABLES

	Page Number
1 <u>Key Witnesses</u>	4 - 5
2 <u>Modal Split – various destinations (%)</u>	6 - 7
3 <u>Bus Service Operators within Milton Keynes</u>	7
4 <u>Passenger Transport Budgets</u>	9
5 <u>Passenger Transport Budget by Cost Centre 2001/02</u>	9

ANNEXES

A <u>CMK Transport Group report January 2002</u>	56 - 61
B <u>List of evidence received by the review group</u>	62 - 63
C <u>Evidence received from the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind</u>	64 - 65

Foreword

We are pleased to be able to publish the results of an intensive investigation into the bus services in Milton Keynes.

This is not a comprehensive transport strategy. That would require an analysis of rail, taxis, cycling and walking as well as well as the role of the car.

However it is widely accepted that buses will play and have to play a dominant role in the desire to improve public transport and alternatives to the motor car in the foreseeable future. It is also widely accepted that our present bus services, whilst improving, are simply inadequate to meet modern day needs and expectations, let alone address future concerns.

A huge step change is required. Throughout this inquiry we have taken evidence from a wide range of people and organisations, from the operators, users, bus drivers, and public transport officials. We have heard from young people, from old people, from disabled people and from professionals. All have agreed that substantial improvements are required. We have seen for ourselves the deficiencies and issues that need addressing

We are able to present this report, which includes a wide number of recommendations. Recommendations for the local authority and for the bus operators. We have been able to agree on the vast majority of these. On the few, but important areas where comprehensive agreement has not proven possible we have included both the majority and minority opinions and views.

We hope now that the policy makers and operators will be able to use our report to help construct both medium and long-term strategies that will make a real difference.

We want our bus services to be at least comparable to any other similar sized town or city. The public needs a bus service that is reliable, frequent and which can provide a real alternative to the motor car. A bus service that both provides a service to people living in isolated areas, and one that caters for the mass movements of our urban areas.

It is often said that Milton Keynes was designed for the car. We largely agree with that proposition. Some may argue that it is incapable of sustaining a good bus service. We do not agree. The challenges are significant, it will not happen by sitting back and awaiting developments. It will not be cheap, but it is possible and it is necessary.

Of all the challenges that lay ahead, none is more important than harnessing commitment, drive and determination to improve our bus services.

We would finally like to thank the many people who gave up their time, effort and energy to help us compile this report, and who gave evidence and whose commitment is already proven.

In particular the panels thanks are due to the overview and scrutiny section at the Council for their support and hard work, with particular thanks to Claire Taylor who has spent many hours helping us to compile this report and steered us through all our work and activities.

Cllr Kevin Wilson
On behalf of the Bus Strategy Review Group

Members of the Bus Strategy Review Group

Councillor Kevin Wilson (Chair)

Councillor Stuart Burke

Councillor Steve Coventry

Councillor Graham Eaton

Councillor Isabella Fraser

Councillor David Hopkins

Councillor Chris Williams

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

At the meeting of the Environment, Transport and Localities Overview Committee on 9 January 2002 a report prepared for CMK Transport Group, regarding a bus strategy for Milton Keynes was considered. (Report attached as **Annex A**)

It was resolved that the Business Management Group be requested to set up a Review Group, to consider a Public Transport Strategy for the next five years for Milton Keynes.

1.2 Terms of Reference

The Environment, Transport and Localities Overview Committee agreed that the work of the review group should be guided by the following terms of reference:

- 1) To consider the contents of a Bus Strategy for Milton Keynes for the period 2003 to 2008.
- 2) To carry out such research and consultation necessary to identify the key elements of a Strategy.
- 3) To propose the broad contents of the Strategy arising from the Review Group's conclusions.

The committee agreed the following methods of working:

- 1) Inviting expert witnesses and advice from such individuals and organisations as the Review Group may decide, including:
 - Appropriate Council Members and Officers
 - Bus service providers
 - Users and potential users
 - Businesses
 - Transport action and advisory groups
- 2) By reviewing strategies prepared by this and other authorities

It was agreed that the Review Group would confine itself to a bus strategy rather than a broader public transport strategy, as such the group deliberately excluded rail, taxis and community transport from their considerations.

The committee also agreed to produce an interim report by 30 September 2002 and a final report by the end of 2002.

1.3 Review Process

The review group adopted an investigative process based around a series of meetings at which 'expert' or 'key' witnesses were invited to give evidence and express personal experiences regarding bus services in Milton Keynes.

Table one below outlines witnesses invited to give evidence at meetings of the review group and the key issues that each attendee covered.

Table 1: Key Witnesses

DATE	EVIDENCE
<p>13th August</p>	<p>Julian Peddle, Chief Executive of MK Metro Buses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between the council and local service providers. • Council strategy • Delivery of a bus service • Future development <p>David Hackforth, Head of Planning and Transport and Stuart Simmonds, Passenger Transport Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council strategy (existing and proposed) • Management information • Service development • Travel information
<p>27th August</p>	<p>Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues facing bus users with visual disabilities • Suggestions for improvements • Examples of good practice <p>Local residents/bus users (2 representatives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues around using the bus to travel for everyday purposes such as leisure and shopping. <p>MK Pensioners' Association and the Bus Users Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues facing older bus users • Issues around setting up a bus users group • Fares for older passengers <p>Councillor G Mabbutt, Cabinet Member (Transport)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council strategy and priorities • Planned improvements • Allocation of car parking revenue
<p>17th September</p>	<p>Milton Keynes Youth Forum and youth representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues facing young bus users • Travel to work and school • Young persons travel fares <p>Centre for Integrated Living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties that people with physical and/or mobility disabilities face when using the buses <p>National Federation of Bus Users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National issues around bus use, including national trends • Promoting a modal shift • Strategic issues around public transport

DATE	EVIDENCE
	<p>Local residents/bus users (3 representatives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues around using the bus to travel to work in Milton Keynes <p>MK Economic Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable and integrated transport to serve the city • Transport needs of the local economy
<p>10th October</p>	<p>Representative of local bus drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues facing local bus drivers • Pay, conditions and safety • Recruitment and retention

In addition to the four evidence sessions a number of supplementary research activities were undertaken, these included the following:

- A comparative review of neighbouring and similar local authorities bus strategies.
- A written invitation to all parish councils giving them the opportunity to contribute their own views and suggestions to the review group.
- A questionnaire sent to all residents associations.
- Review of good practice, Beacon Councils etc.
- An article in the council's newsletter (Messenger) outlining the work of the review group and requesting comments from readers.
- Members of the review group spent a day service sampling various bus routes throughout the city.

A full list of evidence collected as part of this review is attached at **Annex B**.

1.4 Key Themes

When reviewing evidence collected from witnesses and supplementary research the group identified a series of key themes that have emerged as a result of the investigation. Issues identified under each of these themes are outlined in section three below and form the main body of this report.

2 SERVICE CONTEXT

2.1 Background

Current Network

The current Local Transport Plan notes that urban bus services in Milton Keynes reached a peak in 1986 just after deregulation and that since this time bus service frequencies have declined. In addition the main local operator has changed three times in seven years and the average age of buses has been high. These factors have resulted in a generally poor perception of local bus services.

Other factors seen as historically contributing to the difficulty in developing a high quality bus service in Milton Keynes include:

- The policy of low density development
- Dispersed employment areas
- The grid road system
- Free parking (although parking regulations have since changed *October 2002*)

Since 1997 there has been a substantial investment by the new local operator (£3.8m) in new vehicles and the network is gradually improving and becoming more stable.

The Council has also been pursuing a policy of Quality Bus Partnerships, working with the local operator to provide a high quality frequent bus service on certain key routes. These partnerships include infrastructural changes such as bus priority lanes and improved vehicles. Ridership on these services appears to have increased however the Council has not been able to implement the partnerships as quickly as it was originally intended, this was largely due to lack of staff resources.

Commercial and Contracted Services

The Local Transport Plan notes that most daytime services are commercially operated but that almost all evening and Sunday services are operated under contract to the Council. These services tend to run on a less frequent (mainly hourly) basis and this reflects the level of demand and high cost of operating such services.

Travel Patterns

The table below is taken from the Local Transport Plan and the source of the data is the 1997 Milton Keynes household survey. The table shows modal share for a variety of destinations and covers both the city centre and the whole of the area covered by Milton Keynes Council.

Table 2: Modal Split – various destinations (%)

MK (Whole)	Transport Mode								
	Car Driver	Car Passenger	Bus	Walk	Train	Bi-cycle	Taxi	Motor-cycle	Other
Work	69	9	4	13	1	3	1	1	0
Home	48	19	5	23	0	3	1	0	0
Education	3	31	15	47	1	3	1	0	0
Visit	43	21	3	28	0	3	0	0	0
Shopping	46	19	7	25	0	2	1	0	0
Leisure	36	26	2	31	0	3	1	0	0
Personal Business	56	19	4	19	0	1	0	0	0
Employers Business	81	4	2	7	2	0	1	0	4

MK (City)	Transport Mode								
	Car Driver	Car Passenger	Bus	Walk	Train	Bi-cycle	Taxi	Motor-cycle	Other
Work	67	11	4	11	1	3	1	1	0
Home	47	20	6	23	0	3	1	0	0
Education	2	37	10	45	0	4	1	0	0
Visit	42	22	4	26	0	5	0	0	0
Shopping	45	19	8	24	0	2	1	0	0
Leisure	38	27	2	29	0		1	0	1

MK (City) Destination Purpose	Transport Mode								
	Car Driver	Car Passenger	Bus	Walk	Train	Bi-cycle	Taxi	Motor-cycle	Other
Personal Business	54	22	6	17	0	1	0	0	1
Employers business	82	2	2	7	2	0	2	0	3

2.2 Current Services

Service Providers

Current bus services in Milton Keynes are delivered by a number of operators with MK Metro the largest by some margin. All operators must be licensed by the regional Traffic Commissioner (Milton Keynes falls within the Eastern Region with the office of the Traffic Commissioner located in Cambridge) and services registered with them. The Traffic Commissioner can penalise operators if services fail to meet the standard registered.

Table 3: Bus Service Operators within Milton Keynes

Operator	Sample annual ridership 2001/02 final figures	Passenger Market Share	data source
Arriva the Shires local services	126171	1.864%	*
Arriva X66	56168	0.830%	**
Arriva X15	86177	1.273%	***
MK Metro	5927839	87.573%	*
First Northampton	13120	0.194%	*
SUCOC	399353	5.900%	***
Jefferies 32	85682	1.266%	***
Litchfield	17348	0.256%	****
Red Rose	29197	0.431%	****
City of MK Transport	16433	0.243%	*
Z & S International	11558	0.171%	****
Sample total:	6769046	100.00%	

Figures provided by Richard Berman, May 2002.

Data sources: * Electronic *** Manual survey extrapolation
** Part electronic/part survey **** Operator returns

Current Service Standards

Currently there is no single document that outlines the standards that local bus services must achieve. Standards are the responsibility of a variety of agencies and have been developed on an incremental basis over the years.

- **Frequencies:** Ideal service frequencies for the area are outlined in the Buckinghamshire County Council Public Transport Policy Statement (January 1994).
- **Proximity to bus stops:** Guidelines regarding proximity to bus stops are also taken from the Buckinghamshire County Council Public Transport Policy Statement (January 1994).

The Local Transport Plan notes the walk distances to bus stops will need to be reviewed.

The Deposit Local Plan advocates new development being with 400m of a bus service with a 20 minute frequency.

- **Punctuality:** Services operated on a contract to Milton Keynes Council, for example some of the Sunday or evening services have punctuality standards written into the contracts.

The Traffic Commissioner can take action if bus services fail to meet the standards initially registered.

Regional Bus Services

There are several regional bus links including an hourly limited stop service between Oxford and Cambridge via Bedford, however many regional routes tend to stop at the Coachway and there is little integration with local bus services. Park and Ride and the 210 service partly alleviates this.

Rural Transport

The Local Transport Plan notes that there is a need for a complete review of the provision and usage of rural transport and that a clear statement of what residents in rural communities can expect from their local bus service should be an outcome of this review.

The Rural Bus Subsidy Grant has helped to provide additional services but some routes not covered by this grant have been cut.

Park and Ride

To date successful park and ride schemes have been run from the Bowl and the Coachway at Christmas time. The 210 route, which also serves Kingston and Westcroft, has replaced the old park and ride route 200 and usage is increasing. Park and ride usage is likely to be affected by the new car parking charges implemented in Central Milton Keynes in October 2002, future developments will need to be reviewed with this effect in mind.

Bus Infrastructure and Information

Infrastructure on the grid roads tends to be good with most stops having a shelter and timetable case. The council maintains bus stops and shelters through a maintenance agreement with an advertising contractor.

However, hardstanding, shelter and timetable information is less satisfactory within the grid squares where some routes are 'hail and ride'. The Local Transport Plan notes a need to provide timetables at a greater range of locations in these areas.

The council provides information about public transport, and whilst it is claimed that the provision of information is improving the panel were concerned with the generally poor level and standard of information, particularly information available at bus shelters, stops and interchange points.

The Passenger Transport team is currently developing an Information Strategy and this will aim to improve the provision of public transport information in the area, taking into account developments in information and communications technology.

2.3 Budget

Tables 4 and 5 below give details of the budgets allocated to the Passenger Transport Team highlighting key areas of expenditure and areas of variation. The tables show that over the past two years concessionary fares and subsidies have been the largest areas of expenditure within the budget.

Table 4: Passenger Transport Budgets:

Summarised format shown in the budget book (2000/01, 2001/02)

2001-02	Budget	Actual	Variation
Management & Admin	443,050.00	476,659.87	(33,609.87)
Concessionary Fares	765,720.00	625,285.44	140,434.56
Community Transport	425,520.00	521,990.26	(96,470.26)
Subsidies	851,160.00	876,442.26	(25,282.26)
Service Development	93,270.00	124,799.60	(31,529.60)
Minibus Driver Tests	880.00	2,670.00	(1790.00)
Infrastructure	9,210.00	3,859.19	5,350.81
Total	2,588,810.00	2,631,706.62	(42,896.62)
2000/01	Budget	Actual	Variation
Management & Admin	412,380.00	445,166.18	(32,786.18)
Concessionary Fares	725,270.00	625,815.36	99,454.64
Community Transport	404,890.00	391,093.19	13,796.81
Subsidies	825,880.00	769,166.50	56,713.50
Service Development	92,560.00	76,368.91	16,191.09
Minibus Driver Tests	880.00	1,804.87	(924.87)
Infrastructure	9,210.00	11,882.14	(2672.14)
Total	2,471,070.00	2,321,297.15	149,772.85

A more detailed breakdown for the last financial year is outlined below:

Table 5: Passenger Transport Budget by Cost Centre 2001/02:

Cost Centres	Budget	Actual	Variation
Management & admin	443,050.00	476,659.87	(33,609.87)
Concessionary fares	765,720.00	625,285.44	140,434.56
Community transport	425,520.00	521,990.26	(96,470.26)
Subsidies	851,160.00	876,442.26	(25,282.26)
Bus stop displays	0.00	-5.00	(5.00)
Routel	24,440.00	29,652.59	(5,212.59)
Studies/project development	6,000.00	9,423.40	(3423.40)
Publicity - other	51,430.00	65,893.20	(14,463.20)
Travelwise	5,400.00	5,416.40	(16.40)
Promotion - other	6,000.00	14,419.01	(8419.01)
Minibus driver test	880.00	2,670.00	(1,790)
Bus infrastructure	8,940.00	3,859.19	5,080.81
Winterhill bus depot	0.00	0.00	0.00
MK coachway	270.00	0.00	270.00
Total	2,588,810.00	2,631,706.62	(42,896.62)

2.4 Service Development

Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 give a general overview of the current network and bus service operating in Milton Keynes. It highlights the fact that historically

bus services in the area have not been of a high standard and that there is a perception that buses are poor in Milton Keynes.

However the overview also notes that some service improvements have been implemented and that there is increasing stability within the network. Likewise the Passenger Transport section is also working towards improving local bus services and the list below highlights some of the key actions that will be developed over the next year.

- Review of value for money of contracted bus services
- Review of contract conditions for local bus services.
- Implementation of Quality Bus Initiatives.
- Development of a Bus Strategy.
- Development of a Bus Information Strategy.
- Development of a Park and Ride Strategy.

The team plan for Passenger Transport for 2002/03 also notes the following:

- To increase the number of journeys made by bus.
- Continued promotion of the Council's concessionary fares schemes for the young, elderly and disabled.
- Provide high quality public transport information to a wide audience through various media and the National Public Transport Information System.
- To provide strategic input into the longer term public transport options for Milton Keynes and to provide professional guidance on passenger transport requirements as part of the Central Milton Keynes Development Framework making reference to the Sustainable Integrated Transport Strategy and the Local Transport Plan.

3 KEY ISSUES

The main body of this report is taken up with a review of the evidence collected by the review group and presented as a series of themes with accompanying recommendations. A full list of evidence collected as part of the review process is presented at **Annex B**.

3.1 Infrastructure

The review group took a large amount of evidence that was based around issues that relate to the infrastructure of the network these include: bus stops shelters and stations, traffic management, signage, hail and ride, interchange points and issues around the quality of vehicles.

3.1.1 Bus Stops and Shelters

Bus stops and shelters form a fundamental part of the bus network infrastructure. They provide the point at which services are accessed and from the perspective of first impressions the quality of bus shelters indicates the general quality of the network. The group noted that where a bus stop is damaged, dirty, in a state of poor repair and without information this sends a message to passengers that they are not valued and that busses are the transport of last resort.

As such the group agreed that bus stops are of key importance to developing a quality network and likewise many of the responses received and evidence submitted made reference to bus stops, shelters and also hail and ride. Many bus users commented on the difficulty using the bus network within the city centre with one respondee simply stating that “a general comment on the service is how bewildering it is to use.” *(Comment from a bus user, email received 01/07/02)*

Representatives from the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind noted that finding the right stop in the city centre was extremely difficult and this point was supported by other bus users and witnesses.

One bus user commented “We need bus stops with some significance. Clear with routes displayed and timetables.” *(Comment from a bus user, email received 08/07/02)*

Representatives of drivers agreed that stops would benefit from being named so people would know where to disembark for certain facilities and services. They also noted the importance of consulting with drivers as part of any naming process. *(Bus Strategy Review Group Meeting, 10th October, 2002)*

Recommendation 1

Named Bus Stops

- a) Bus stops and shelters should be named and that the naming process should be undertaken through consultation with local people, Parish Councils and the bus companies.

Recommendation 1 Named Bus Stops

- b) Bus stop names should be prominently displayed on bus shelters and shown on maps and other information.
- c) Bus stop names and numbering should also be displayed on both ends of the shelter.
- d) The process of naming stops should be incremental starting with the most obvious and most commonly used locations.

Both bus drivers and the Chief Executive of MK Metro supported ending hail and ride as fixed stops encourage passengers to congregate in set locations and this means it is easier to notice, stop and pick up passengers.

Likewise many bus users supported fixed stops as they provide an opportunity for information and shelter. Fixed stops are also easier for members of the public who are occasional bus users as they are recognisable symbols of the bus network.

However there are some barriers to converting all hail and ride sections to fixed stops and these are based around both the cost and complexity of providing new shelters and stops. In addition some members of the public also expressed concern in terms of the location of shelters and whether they would attract 'loitering youths'. Older people and people with disabilities may also be disadvantaged by converting hail and ride section to fixed stops only as walking distances to bus stops may increase.

Recommendation 2 Hail and Ride

- a) Where possible hail and ride sections should be equipped with fixed bus shelters, to encourage passengers to congregate in designated areas.
- b) Where fixed bus shelters are not possible, stops with timetable information but without shelters should be provided to encourage passengers to congregate at an appropriate location.

Finally the group heard that the location and quality of bus stops is key to their functionality with evidence provided by both drivers and passengers.

One passenger identified some problems with their local stop. "The nearest bus shelter to us has graffiti, clear plastic that is dirty and sometimes fly-posting which mean you often can't see the bus coming if you're using the shelter. The stops usually have litter around them, why not put a rubbish bin right next to bus shelters, making sure they are emptied regularly. Bus shelters are draughty and cold in colder weather. The timetables are sometimes out of date." *(Comments received by email, 15/10/02)*

The group identified several key issues and they included:

- Issues around public safety
 - Lighting
 - Located away from overhanging greenery
 - Proximity to main roads, redways, other local centres

- Cleanliness
- Access
- Line of vision so both passengers and drivers can see one another

Recommendation 3 Bus Shelter Design and Location

- a) Bus shelters should have adequate shelter, seating, lighting and information. Minimum standards should be developed.
- b) At key locations, such as interchange points (see recommendation 4 below), intercom- speaking facilities should be introduced.
- c) A survey of bus stops and shelters in Milton Keynes should be undertaken, in consultation with local people and Parish Councils, to identify poorly located stops, where both passengers and drivers do not have a good line of sight. An action plan should be developed to address problems identified, and minimum standards should be considered.

3.1.2 Interchange / Transport Hubs

Any public transport system needs a number of interchange points or hubs to provide facilities for passengers making journeys that use either one than one type of transport mode or are not direct. Indeed evidence has already been noted within this report that many bus users find long and indirect routes frustrating and they potentially discourage bus use.

Indeed many respondents, both bus users and non bus users, made suggestions regarding developing a renewed bus network based upon a series of travel interchange points.

“To get more people on the bus you have to make it straightforward to find the right one with a minimal walking distance from the train/carpark. I think they have cracked this in my hometown Eindhoven Holland. The bus station is just outside the railway station, you can wait and shelter from the rain in the arrival hall and see your bus arrive and depart. There are no fixed platforms instead the bus comes to you. A large overhead display indicates what bus arrives next at what platform expected at what time. If it takes a little while for your bus to arrive you can enjoy the small shops and snackstops in the arrival hall. It works a treat.” *(Comments by email received 06/07/02)*

As a result of this evidence and the general importance of interchange points to the local public transport network the group has made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 4 Interchange Points

- a) A full review of existing interchange points should be undertaken with the objective of providing better and faster routes throughout the city, better centres for information and better waiting facilities.
- b) The following locations should be designated as key interchange points: Bletchley, the Hospital, Wolverton, CMK, CMK Rail Station, Westcroft and Kingston. Similar facilities in the North of the new City and the Open University should also be considered.

Recommendation four above notes the importance of interchange points for local public transport networks. These interchange points form a key part of the transport infrastructure and as part of this review the group members have noted a number of issues around potential interchanges that they recommend be addressed. These include the hospital with many respondents stating that it is difficult to travel to and from the site.

Recommendation 5 Infrastructural changes

- a) One of the features of Milton Keynes bus services is that buses travel East/West through the City Centre and then often North South on their main route. This produces a number of anomalies. For example at CMK it is possible to catch buses to Bletchley from stops opposite each other. This mitigates against signing such as 'buses for Bletchley'. The group notes that the CMK Structure Plan should address issues around integrated transport and recommends that solutions to these anomalies are explored.
- b) At the Hospital/Netherfield interchange a solution should be found that will enable all buses to converge on one side of the road. For most passengers at this busy location such a facility would double the frequencies of the buses they could catch.

3.1.3 Traffic Management and Bus Priority

One of the key issues that the group considered in terms of the bus network infrastructure was the impact that the road layout has on bus routes and the quality of journeys.

Council officers in planning and transport, bus drivers and the Chief Executive of MK Metro all agreed that traffic management was significant factor in the quality of the bus ride. Drivers outlined the physical problems that they suffered through driving over speed humps in estates and these included back and neck problems indeed on one route the driver has to negotiate 56 speed humps which is almost one a minute.

The Chief Executive of MK Metro also noted that poor traffic calming could have an impact on the routes that the company decides to operate. He suggested alternative traffic calming that would be more bus friendly and this included non-vertical traffic calming such as chicanes and speed cushions that allow buses to pass over unimpeded but act as a speed hump for cars and smaller vehicles.

The group also noted that this issue was of importance not only to planners, service providers and drivers but also to passengers, many of whom commented upon uncomfortable journeys as a result of speed humps.

Recommendation 6 Traffic Management (traffic calming)

A policy of removing or altering vertical and non-bus friendly traffic calming to other non-vertical schemes or safety cushions is needed. A programme to remove at least 80% of all such obstacles within 5 years is recommended, starting immediately with those that affect a number of bus services and affect the most passengers.

Other traffic management issues that the group considered included bus priority measures such as bus lanes, priority at junctions and smart traffic lights. Priority measures were advocated by the National Federation of Bus

Users representative, bus drivers, the Chief Executive of MK Metro and the Sustainable Transport Officer at MK Economic Partnership. In addition several bus users suggested that the council develop priority schemes and many complained about congestion and the length of time journeys take.

Which this evidence in mind and the existing priority measures that have already been implemented as part of the Quality Bus Initiative the group has made the following recommendation.

Recommendation 7 Bus Priority Measures

The council should seriously consider developing more bus priority measures, these should include bus lanes, designated lanes and priority lanes. The possibility of the traffic light system in Central Milton Keynes being responsive to oncoming buses should also be explored.

3.1.4 Low floor buses and raised kerbs

The group heard evidence from bus users that supported the newer style low-floor buses that have been used on the quality bus initiative routes (for example route 5) increased passenger numbers and satisfaction also supports this.

Likewise evidence from representatives of people with disabilities and older people suggested that any attempt to improve accessibility for buses was to be applauded and that this includes both low-floor buses and raised kerbs.

“A good percentage of people also find it difficult to get on and off the older type buses and are often not given time to get seated before the bus moves away. Have you plans to provide more low step vehicles and phase out those with the high steps?” *(Taken from a survey conducted by the Senior Voices Group, letter and results dated 20th July 2002)*

Recommendation 8 Low floor buses and raised kerbs

The policy of introducing low floor buses with raised kerbs to facilitate entry and exits from and onto buses is to be welcomed and the majority of the group (five members) felt that these improvements should be phased in at the earliest opportunity.

However two group members also felt that such a combination should be available at 30% of all stops within a year and 90% of all stops within 5 years.

3.1.5 Bletchley Bus Station

As noted in Section 3.1.1 above bus stops and shelters form a fundamental part of the bus network and also have an impact on the ‘first impressions’ of the service. Likewise bus stations and key interchange points have a similar function enhanced by a greater number of through passengers and as a potential source of travel information.

Both group members and bus users have noted that the facilities and general appearance of Bletchley bus station is poor, and as one of the most important transport interchanges outside of central Milton Keynes this situation is not acceptable. As such the group has made the following recommendation.

Recommendation 9 Bletchley Bus Station

Bletchley Bus Station should be upgraded with improved passenger and driver facilities as well as a travel information centre, possibly as part of the Bletchley regeneration scheme.

3.1.6 Planning policy and the development of bus services

Whilst some people will always use local bus services through lack of choice, disability or general preference, others will need to be incentivised to switch from private transport to more sustainable transport choices.

The group heard that many people are less likely to switch from car usage after they have adopted transport habits, indeed Milton Keynes Council Officers noted that the existing layout of the town does not encourage bus usage and that changing behaviour is difficult.

“Mass level change will be a long and difficult process, the town is not designed to be bus friendly, there is low density housing and a non-radial city plan and we cannot change these fundamental structures.” *(Head of Planning and Transport, Bus Strategy Review Group meeting, 13th August 2002)*

It was therefore the opinion of the group that new estates need to have adequate bus services from early stages of development to give residents the opportunity to develop bus friendly transport habits from the outset.

This also applies to young people and children and the group noted that it would be preferable to encourage people early to start using local bus services rather than persuade them after they have learnt to drive.

The group also heard that service providers find some estates difficult to operate routes through as some of the traffic calming makes the bus route difficult and uncomfortable, as such it is the groups opinion that when new housing areas are developed access for buses is planned in.

When asked what the Council could do to improve bus services the Chief Executive of MK Metro said that the Council should ‘love the bus’. He went on the comment that “The Council needs to ‘love the bus’ in order to promote a modal shift – it is the only real alternative, trams, monorails etc. are unrealistic at the moment. The Council can help by being proactive about planning, for example in terms of a depot to house extra buses in the future, effective traffic calming, publicity etc. There are major changes planned for the city centre – what effect will that have on buses?” *(Chief Executive of MK Metro, Bus Strategy Review Group meeting, 13th August 2002)*

Recommendation 10 Planning policy and the development of bus services

- a) Newly developing areas should be provided with a level of bus service that is consistent with the level that would be reasonable once they are fully developed. We recommend that planning policies be amended and developed to ensure that development occurs sequentially and in a less fragmented way.
- b) All new developments should take into account bus travel and install appropriate traffic calming measures that do not have a negative impact on bus services.

3.2 Routes

The routes that buses take form the backbone of a local public transport service and whilst it was not part of the remit of this group to comment on bus services on a route by route basis many contributors and witnesses noted issues affecting specific routes. As a result the group has addressed these issues with a series of recommendations aimed at routing issues.

3.2.1 Key corridor routes

The group heard that whilst Milton Keynes has a grid road system and as such no radial or arterial routes as other more traditional towns key routes do exist and need to be developed to support a modal shift and create a viable bus network. This evidence came from a wide variety of sources including service providers, service users and industry experts as well as council officers. Indeed this approach has been adopted through the existing Quality Bus Partnership Initiative that targets key routes for improvement and development.

In particular the Milton Keynes Economic Partnership Sustainable Transport Officer suggested that the council should concentrate on:

“Implementing and developing quality bus routes (e.g. number 5). Creating a network of quality routes that are frequent and direct, using the grid roads rather than going all through the estates. Bus stops on main routes need improving, better lighting safety etc. – without neglecting services in the estates, perhaps less frequent non-direct services.” *(Taken from the notes from the evidence session 17/09/02)*

Likewise the Chief Executive of MK Metro noted that the main increase in passenger numbers has occurred on “key routes, 5,14,23,and 4, those which exist or are identified as potential Quality Bus Partnerships. *(Taken from the notes from the evidence session 13/08/02)*

Finally the analysis of other local authorities’ bus strategies indicated a widespread commitment to developing key routes many of which have been designated as Quality Bus Partnerships for this purpose.

Recommendation 11	Key Corridor Routes
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Key corridor routes should be identified and developed and this should be a high priority.
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3.2.2 Fast routes and local services

One of the most common complaints from people that wrote in to give their experiences of the local bus service was that bus took a long time to reach their destination when compared to the equivalent car journey. Passengers expressed frustration at trips that wind through local estates rather than taking a more direct route and this appeared to be a particular problem for services operated on a contract to the Council as these services have fewer passengers and tend to serve more rural locations covering a wider distance.

Bus users made a variety of comments including making greater use of the grid roads and certain routes bypassing local estates at certain times.

In addition respondents also suggested solutions such as circular routes serving a key area.

“Have buses doing a round trip of Milton Keynes Centre” *(Comment made during the Community Strategy Consultation, July 2002)*

The need for express routes to help improve service frequencies was also supported by the Sustainable Transport Manager for the MK Economic Partnership. He suggested that better service frequency is key to improving bus usage and that frequency can be enhanced by fast routes along the grid roads letting the same numbers of buses do more trips as they take shorter routes. Less frequent trips can go through the estates for those that don't want to walk to the grid roads. *(Bus Strategy Review Group Meeting, 17th September 2002)*

The group also noted that whilst many bus users favour a fast service, especially those using the bus to travel to work, some passengers need a route that does service local estates, for example those who are unable to walk far to a bus stop. As such the group has made the following recommendations regarding striking a balance between fast routes and local services.

Recommendation 12	Fast Routes and Local Services
a)	A dual approach to fast routes whereby both fast and local services are developed. The policy described above (recommendation 4) of making enhanced use of interchange points may provide an opportunity to address both needs.
b)	Fast Direct Links should generally use grid roads between destinations. There are some obvious exceptions such as Newport Road (New Bradwell), Jonathans (Coffee Hall), and Whaddon Way (Bletchley). Other routes are more likely to use roads through housing estates.
c)	In order to satisfy local demand a range of services, possibly circular in nature should be developed that will service local estates with CMK and at least one other principal interchange facility.

3.2.3 Accessing Employment, Industry and Education

Many respondents and witness identified problems travelling to work using the bus service, whilst the city centre is reasonably well served certain groups of workers and locations have a less frequent or non-existent service that makes travelling to work a problem. Key issues included:

- Shift work
“I use the buses everyday to travel to and from work doing different shifts ranging from 6am until 8.30pm and sometimes Sunday. I want a reliable bus service all the time. My timekeeping record is dependant on the bus service. I leave in time to get to work I buy a bus timetable everytime they print a new one, but still get to work late too often for my liking” *(Response by email 05/07/02)*

- Access to areas of employment other than Central Milton Keynes
Many witnesses noted that certain employment areas within Milton Keynes are poorly served and indeed some locations have no bus service at all.
- Young people
“At my company we have had numerous recruitment problems at our Kingston and Westcroft branches due to the fact that it is very difficult to reach these areas from certain parts of Milton Keynes. We employ many 16-18 year olds that do not drive and most of our staff have to rely on parents to pick them up and drop them off, if your a parent then you will know what a pain it is to be a taxi service to your teenage offspring! We have particular problems trying to get people to work from 6am as the buses simply do not run as early as this. I know it not just us that are suffering as a result and many companies around Milton Keynes have the same problem.” *(Response by email 15/07/02)*

Recommendation 13	Accessing Employment and Industrial Areas
a)	Evening bus services should be developed to ensure that major industrial and employment areas where shift working is undertaken are served
b)	The main industrial estates, employment centres and educational campuses should also be adequately serviced either by careful route planning alongside the recommendations above or by other routes if necessary.
c)	Direct services linking towns to the north of central Milton Keynes (Newport Pagnell, New Bradwell, Wolverton and Stony Stratford) nearby industrial areas and educational facilities should be considered for improvement.

Likewise travel to access education was also identified as an issue by young people. The group also felt that the links between services for young people for example leisure facilities, school sites and further education campuses should be considered and improved. The group also felt that the service supported by Milton Keynes College should be applauded as an example of how education and public transport interests can work together. (Service X1 runs on college term days only between the City Centre, Woughton Campus and Bletchley Campus.)

Recommendation 14	Accessing Education
a)	A strategy should be developed to ensure that the main educational campuses are well served. Routing opportunities should be considered at all campuses, such as Woughton, working alongside students and the educational establishments concerned.
b)	Consideration should be given to how school bus services and ordinary bus services could co-operate better together.
c)	The possibility of linking the concessionary fares for children and young people alongside the provision of free home to school transport, for those entitled to this should be explored. There are particular opportunities here for the 16 to 18 age group.

3.2.4 Links to the hospital

A particular routing issue that was brought up by witnesses and consultees on many occasions was access to Milton Keynes General hospital. As part of the

public consultation the group received several letters and six respondents wrote letters directly remarking on difficulties travelling to the hospital. This is an issue that is of particular concern to people who have to access the hospital and associated clinics many of which may be older or vulnerable. Several people recounted experiences of missed appointments, and waiting around for hours due to irregular services.

“My appointment is at 1.30 so I wait for the 12.15 bus which has on several occasions not turned up so I have to wait for the next bus which is at 1.15 which leaves me late for my appointment. The doctors are busy enough and I have to wait until the end of the clinic to see the doctor because I was late which was not my fault.” *(Response by letter, 8/07/02)*

The group notes that the hospital provides an essential service in particular for some vulnerable members of the community. As such the following recommendation has been made:

<p>Recommendation 15 Accessing the Hospital</p> <p>A review of routes should be undertaken to ensure that all areas have good direct links to the Hospital.</p>

3.2.5 Park and Ride (route 210)

It was the opinion of the group that Park and Ride services will increasingly play an important role as part of the public transport network within Milton Keynes. The group also noted the success of Christmas park and ride schemes and agreed that current usage (non-seasonal) needs to be increased to help support a modal shift in terms of travel to and from central Milton Keynes in terms of both the shopping, employment and leisure districts.

The group considered the 210 service which links both a park and ride facility with a direct town centre and local centre service as a useful model for potential development.

<p>Recommendation 16 Park and Ride Services</p> <p>a) The 210 service should be developed as a model, integrating park and ride facilities with other services. A strategy should be developed to support this.</p> <p>b) The 210 service should run to Kingston at weekends.</p> <p>c) The potential of developing a similar service that includes Park and Ride from the MK Bowl site should also be explored.</p> <p>d) The 210 should be developed and times extended to ensure that it better covers employment needs.</p> <p>In addition a minority of the group (2 members) felt that:</p> <p>e) 210 frequencies should be improved.</p>

3.2.6 Regional links

As part of the review the group heard evidence regarding the importance of Milton Keynes as a regional centre both in terms of the local economy and also in terms of leisure opportunities and as a regional shopping centre.

Indeed the final report of the 'Oxford-Cambridge Arc' research project undertaken by SQW Limited (economic development consultants), aimed at investigating the concept of a high technology regional economy based around an arc between Oxford and Cambridge with Milton Keynes as the centre point, noted the importance of communications to support the development of the regional economy. It noted that:

"In many respects, the logic of the Arc is compelling. However if the concept has an "Achilles heel" then it probably rests in the domain of east-west communications. Simply put, the east-west infrastructure is poor in terms of both road and rail." (*Page 38, final report of the 'Oxford-Cambridge Arc' research project, October 2001*)

In addition local bus users also noted the importance of regional bus services and the role that the Milton Keynes Coachway plays. Some respondents commented upon the poor quality of the facilities at the Coachway and others stated that connections between central Milton Keynes bus services and the Coachway are poor.

"The state of the Coachway, Milton Keynes should hold their heads down in shame. If you live in Bletchley it takes two buses to get to the coachway, there are only two places to purchase National Express Coach tickets i.e. at the coachway and at the central bus station. National Express Buses can enter Nottingham, Leeds, Birmingham- why will they not come into the Central Bus Station in Milton Keynes?" (*Response by letter, 04/07/02*)

Recommendation 17

Regional Links

- a) A strategy to ensure that Milton Keynes is well linked with other towns and cities in the sub region (Luton, Bedford, Oxford, Northampton and Cambridge for example) should be developed, alongside and to compliment rail travel.
- b) Long distance coach services should also form an important part of a regional strategy.

3.3 Quality

Quality bus services are seen as essential if a modal shift towards public transport is to occur and the group took a large amount of evidence around issues that fall under the broad heading of 'quality'. This section presents evidence associated with issues such as frequency, punctuality, journey times and off-peak services.

Issues around the network infrastructure (including bus stops) and the quality of public transport information are dealt with in sections 3.1 and 3.4 respectively.

3.3.1 Quality Bus Partnerships

The group heard that the Quality Bus Initiative has been a key aspect of the existing bus strategy for the Council over the last few years. The initiative is aimed at improving the general quality of the bus service in terms of both the route, the frequency and the actual fabric of the bus itself. This report has already noted examples of the support that the Quality Bus Initiative receives and it can be summarised as:

- Support from both service providers and local authorities.
- Widespread use across the country, many examples of good practice.
- Government Policy.
- Favourable public opinions of quality initiative routes e.g. number 5.
- Increased passenger number on quality initiative routes e.g. number 5.

As such the group supports the initiative and has made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 18	Quality Bus Partnerships
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The current approach to developing Quality Bus Partnerships should be retained and enhanced.
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3.3.2 Frequency

The group heard a good deal of evidence regarding bus frequencies from across the range of witnesses. Both service providers and passengers agreed that a frequent bus service was absolutely key to increasing passenger numbers and satisfaction. Indeed potential bus users often considered an infrequent service to be one of the factors that prevents them using local bus services.

The group noted that increasing service frequencies across all routes whilst an ideal objective was unlikely to be achievable without massive enlargement of the current network capacity. This enlargement would be both in terms of the supply side, for example bus drivers, training, vehicles and depot/service areas and also in terms of the demand side. An increase in service frequencies across the network cannot come before an increase in passenger numbers and/or a trend suggesting increasing bus usage

As a result of the evidence taken the group has made the following recommendations regarding service frequencies.

Recommendation 19	Service Frequency
	<p>a) Using existing routes the group recommends that the Council and the bus company seek to find a way to increase the frequency on the following routes 5,14, 23, and 4 to at least 4 or possibly 5 an hour during the day. We believe that this objective should be achieved within 3 years commencing with the No 5 service.</p> <p>b) Saturday timetables should reflect different travel patterns compared to weekday services, however they should not generally offer a reduced bus service.</p>

3.3.3 Evening, Sunday and Night Time Services

Throughout the course of the review the group heard evidence from many bus users that off-peak services were not meeting their needs. Whilst a night owl service has been piloted and found unsuccessful the group felt that issues around off-peak services did need to be reconsidered.

Key issues included:

- Increased leisure and shopping activities on Sundays may necessitate changes to Sunday services.
- Shift workers, current services do not meet the needs of shift workers and this should be considered.
- Late night shopping and evening leisure activities may require evening or late night services on certain nights of the week.
- The group also felt that if late night services are to expand issues around both driver and passenger safety should be considered.

As one respondent noted:

“A few parts of MK have reasonable evening services but most do not. All services finish far too early, especially on Fridays and Saturdays.

Evening routes need increasing to a minimum of 30-minute frequency before they will have any chance of regular usage. However, the services as they are presently routed could cease at about 2200. Later usage is almost exclusively by younger persons who would prefer fast services via grid roads rather than a meander around several estates. I suggest such routes are operated as a "night" (N) service. These services should operate at 30-minute frequencies starting about 2200 and continuing till about 2330, extended till 0300 on Fr/Sat & Sat/Sun nights. The routes should be compatible with the established daytime and evening networks. It is important that these buses run from well-established starting points with which passengers are familiar. ” *(Comments received by email 30/10/02)*

Recommendation 20 Evening, Sunday and Night Time Services

- a) We recommend that the Council uses its powers to commission bus services to considerably improve evening and Sunday services, to complement shopping, leisure and employment needs.
- b) A reasonably comprehensive network of services should be available up to at least 11pm in the evening. Consideration should also be given to ensuring that at least key employment areas can be reached by 6am in the morning.
- c) The group acknowledges that larger towns have been able to develop all night services in a way that is perhaps beyond the reach of MK at the moment. However the group does recommend that further attempts and experiments aimed at this market up to and including at least 2am be investigated.
- d) The safety of both passengers and staff should be considered on any services that might either go through potential trouble spots or at certain times of day, especially with evening and late night services.

3.3.4 Customer comments

The Council has stated that it is committed to listening to the views of local residents, invests in various public satisfaction surveys and maintains a citizens panel and as such the group believes that these values should extend to bus users. The group also heard the views of a member of (the now defunct) MK Bus User Group and a representative from the National Federation of Bus Users (NFBU) and they both support the notion of improved customer consultation. In particular the NFBU noted the value of 'bus surgeries' where passengers could meet up with both service operators and local authorities and the MK Bus User Group advocated passenger forums. Both of these methodologies afford passengers the opportunity to directly feed back to the people that design and deliver services rather than into a lengthy comments and complaints procedure.

In addition the group has also found that witnesses, consultees and service providers have been willing to participate in the work of the group both in terms of attending meetings, providing information and responding to questionnaires and letters. As a result the group would like to make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 21 Customer Comments

- a) It should be made easier for passengers to complain or comment about services, with freepost complaint/comment forms available on buses.
- b) The council should consider setting up bus user forums.

3.3.5 Minimum Service Standards

As a result of the evidence collected throughout the review the group recommends minimum service standards be considered and adopted.

Recommendation 22 Minimum Service Standards

Milton Keynes Council should develop a coherent service standard as part of a single document and this should be made available to members of the public and bus users.

In addition a minority of the group (3 members) made a further recommendation detailing the level of service standard.

Recommendation 22 Minimum Service Standards

Access to services

- a) That in the urban area of Milton Keynes (including Newport Pagnell) that bus shelters along bus routes are provided within 500 metres of all houses to at least to at least 95% of the population.
- b) That at least 75% of the population in the urban area live within 300 metres of such a bus shelter.
- c) That at least 75% of the population in rural areas live within 500 metres of a bus shelter on a bus route.
- d) That direct services connecting to Central Milton Keynes be available for all parts of the urban area and at least the principal towns in the rural area including Lavendon, Olney, Sherrington, Hanslope and Woburn Sands.
- e) That in the Urban area 95% of the population live within 500 metres of a bus shelter that provides services direct to Central Milton Keynes on at least the following basis
 - 1) Daytime Half Hourly. Early morning and evening until 11.30pm and Sundays Hourly
 - 2) Similar frequencies to at least one other major interchange point (*previously described*)
- f) That the major towns and principal villages in the rural area enjoy a service frequency of at least hourly during the daytime and two hourly in the evenings until 11pm to Central Milton Keynes and at least one other major interchange point.
- g) That fast direct routes be provided from and to the following destinations on at least a 5 per hour day time basis
 - 1) Newport Pagnell to CMK
 - 2) Bletchley to CMK
 - 3) Bletchley to CMK via West Bletchley
 - 4) Lakes Estate to CMK via Bletchley
 - 5) Hospital to CMK
 - 6) Hospital to Bletchley
 - 7) Wolverton to CMK
- h) That fast direct routes be provided from and to the following destinations on at least a twenty minute day time basis
 - 1) Kingston to CMK
 - 2) Kingston to Bletchley
 - 3) Westcroft to CMK
 - 4) Westcroft to Bletchley
 - 5) Stony Stratford to Wolverton/CMK

Punctuality

- i) The group recommends minimum service acceptability levels, as on trains e.g. 95% of services should reach their destination within say 5 mins of time and 98% of services should run.

Cleanliness

- j) The council should adopt minimum cleaning standards and frequencies for bus shelters.

Lighting and visibility standards

- k) The council should adopt minimum lighting requirements for bus shelters.

3.4 Information

The provision of information has been an important issue throughout the work of the review group. Without exception every witness commented upon the provision of information and officers acknowledged that there was scope for improvement and that the emerging public transport information strategy provided a good opportunity to develop a plan to provide better information about local bus services.

As such the group has identified a series of key issues that the emerging public transport information strategy should address.

3.4.1 Travel Information Centre Strategy

One of the key issues that emerged in relation to public transport information is that there is no one place where up to date, informative information is available through face to face contact. Whilst the internet and telephone help lines provide information they are not accessible at the point of travel, for example in the city centre. This point was made by representatives of local bus drivers at the Review group meeting on October 10th.

“People have difficulty finding out about bus services. For example students from out of town, visitors and people whose first language isn’t English. There is nothing in the town centre to promote bus services – what about a travel centre that would help both local people and visitors.” *(Bus Strategy Review Group meeting, 10/10/02)*

In addition written timetables, leaflets and the various updates become out of date relatively quickly and the user can not always be sure that they are consulting the latest information. Respondents also noted that it was difficult to find out where the timetables and updates were available and in some cases the updates and timetables were not available from the same outlets.

As such the group would like to make a broad recommendation regarding the development of a strategy to support a travel information centre.

Recommendation 23 Travel Information Centre Strategy

A Travel Information Centre strategy should be developed in line with emerging development plans for CMK. This should include consideration of a centre close to the main bus stops in CMK where information as well as tickets and passes would be available. It should also consider smaller stations in other centres and interchange points. The strategy should also consider the use of unstaffed electronic information points. Information available on websites should also be developed to complement this recommendation.

3.4.2 Bus Route Maps

As noted above the group took a large amount of evidence about the availability, accessibility and complexity of information available from all types of bus users including those with visual impairments. In addition members of the group considered the map available at Bletchley Bus station. Members noted that the single map covering the whole of the area was large and quite complicated and as such did not translate well to a ‘pocket version’.

Recommendation 24 Bus Route Maps

- a) A new bus route map should be designed with simplicity, clarity and accessibility in mind.
- b) Simplified bus route maps covering key routes and interchanges should also be developed.

3.4.3 Main Bus Timetable

Bus users, service providers and council officers had clear ideas about the current shortcomings of the main bus timetable. These were based largely around a series of issues which are summarised below:

- People were unsure of where they could obtain a copy of the main timetable and it was generally felt that the distribution could be improved.

“Send the local timetable out with the Messenger Magazine” (Comment made by both Down Barnes Residents Association and Woburn Sands Town Council)

- People did not always have access to timetable updates so were unaware of service changes
- It was felt that too many amendments and updates were issued to the timetable and this gave the impression of an unstable service.
- The main timetable was considered complicated and unwieldy and it was felt that smaller ‘chucks’ of information would be more useful, for example area or route maps.

Recommendation 25 Bus Timetable

- a) Timetable updates should be produced on a regular basis (at least 3 times a year).
- b) The distribution of the timetable should be reviewed and improved.
- c) Pocket timetables produced by rail companies are a good example to follow.
- d) Efforts should be made to produce timetable information at route or area level, which is far easier to use.

3.4.4 Co-ordination of timetable changes

Routes and the frequencies of bus travelling them need to change and evolve as the town develops, changes are made to the road network and factors such as traffic calming and congestion increase. As such changes to timetables are an inevitable part of the bus service. However every local bus user who attended the sessions noted that information about bus services was difficult to access and many passengers complained that services were subject to change with little or no warning. Industry experts such as the representative from the Nation Federation of Bus Users, the Sustainable Transport Officer from the MK Economic Partnership and bus drivers themselves noted the importance of reliable information as fundamental to developing a bus service that has the confidence of passengers.

Passenger Transport Officers have already noted the importance of this issue and the draft Public Transport Information Strategy makes a recommendation that all major changes to bus services take place at times when new timetables will be produced. The draft strategy gives the Sundays before the start of new school terms as preferential.

Recommendation 26 Co-ordination of Timetable Changes
Bus companies should be encouraged to make timetable changes less often and on co-ordinated, pre arranged dates.

3.4.5 Information in Community Languages

As part of the evidence session that took place on October 10th, Bus drivers noted that whilst neighbouring authorities (Luton was noted as an example) provide information in a variety of community languages currently neither the Council nor the bus companies provide information in languages other than English. This lack of provision includes timetables and information at bus stops but also extends to notices on buses and in bus shelters, the internet and leaflets updating the timetable. The drivers noted that it is not an infrequent occurrence that people whose first language is not English use local buses and that the provision of travel information in a variety of community languages would help both local residents and visitors to the area.

The group has also noted that one of the key corporate priorities is to “Develop a community for all” and this has the associated priority of “promoting social inclusion and equality”.

Other key corporate policy documents that support the need for information in community languages are the Race Equality Scheme and the Milton Keynes Council Translation and Interpretation Policy. These policies note the statutory framework that means that it is “our legal responsibility to provide translators/interpreters for people whose first language is not English and for deaf and hearing impaired people.” *(Page 3, the Milton Keynes Council Translation and Interpretation Policy, 2001)*

With this evidence in the mind the group recommends that:

Recommendation 27 Information in Community Languages
The Council should investigate providing transport information in a variety of community languages.

3.4.6 Marketing and publicity

The group heard evidence from passenger transport officers and has noted that the Council is required to produce a Public Transport Information Strategy. It was also the opinion of the group that further work should be conducted around the publicity and marketing of local bus services in conjunction with the provision of public transport information.

Recommendation 28 Marketing and Publicity

Recommendation 28 Marketing and Publicity

- a) A major marketing strategy should be developed to promote bus usage within Milton Keynes.
- b) The group also recommends that a major publicity drive should be associated with this strategy

3.4.7 Information at bus stops

Bus stops provide an accessible access point to the bus network, they are easily identifiable and there is an expectation by members of the public that bus stops will also provide relevant information, as such the local bus stop needs to provide more than just shelter.

Bus users made many comments about the information available at bus stops and these range from simple ideas such as clearly displayed information to more complex issues such as real time electronic information. The list below outlines the range of evidence taken regarding the information that could potentially be provided at bus stops:

- Woburn Sands Town Council advocated telephone contact numbers for members of the public to ring in the event of a query or problem.
- There were general comments from all respondents urging clear, relevant and easily readable and information to be provided both in general and at bus stops.
- Examples of information that respondents wanted to see provided at bus stops included, the bus route, locations accessible from the stop, times of the first and last buses, key interchange points that could be reached from the stop

Many respondents noted that real time information would be beneficial, comments were made by regular bus users, service providers and parish councils. Examples of real time information systems include:

- The scrolling information schemes as used in Chelmsford and London and a railway and underground stations.
- A counting down timer (with a verbal announcement function operated by push button control) at bus stops and train stations in Perth (Australia), this system serves buses that run at regular frequencies.

As a result of this evidence the group has made the following series of recommendations:

Recommendation 29 Information at Bus Stops

- a) Services and routes available from stops should be marked on both ends of shelters.
- b) The main destinations and interchange points that can be reached from the stop should be listed.

Recommendation 29 Information at Bus Stops

- c) All shelters should include details of where to get more information, such as phone numbers and web sites.
- d) First and last bus times on each route using that stop should be highlighted as on the Tube.
- e) If zones were introduced, zoning signs or colours should be clearly marked on the stops and shelters.
- f) Real-time information should be introduced on a rolling programme beginning with some of the key routes and locations.
- g) Where the 24-hour clock system is being used, a conversion table should be shown.

3.4.8 Information on buses

During the service sampling exercise undertaken by review group members it was noted that there is a lack of travel information available on the bus itself.

“For some passengers a lack of detailed knowledge caused problems. Drivers do not announce stops and there is no information on board to tell passengers where they are. This is an added difficulty in a City where all roads look the same and there are few landmarks.” *(Councillors K Wilson and S Coventry, Service Sampling Report 10th October 2002, pages 3-4)*

On the basis of this evidence and the more general evidence regarding the availability of transport information considered throughout this section the group recommends that:

Recommendation 30 Information on Buses

A selection of timetables and route maps should be available on all buses.

3.4.9 Signage in the shopping centre

As part of a new approach to public transport information the group noted that information should be available in a variety of places and in a variety of formats and not limited to traditional timetable booklets and casings displayed at bus stops. As such the group was interested to hear the opinion of the Chief Executive of MK Metro:

“People like certainty- they like to know when and where their bus will arrive. Electronic information is not a panacea but it should be piloted. Also electronic information systems should not be restricted to bus stops, they should be in shopping centres and in railway stations. *(Chief Executive of MK Metro, Bus Strategy Review Group Meeting, August 13th 2002.)*

Likewise the group has found generally that bus users do not find the information provided adequate or accessible, passengers also noted that finding the right bus stop in the city centre was difficult.

Recommendation 31 Signage in the Shopping Centre

Directional signage should be deployed at the main shopping and entertainment centres

(particularly at CMK) to direct people towards buses.

3.5 Accessibility

The review group was keen to listen to the views of bus users to find out how accessible local bus services are, where there are barriers to using the bus and what the Council could do to make using the bus easier for more people. The group heard evidence from representatives of older people and people with disabilities and many of the issues raised were based upon the physical characteristics of the buses, bus stops and shelters. However physical issues were not the only consideration, accessibility of information was also considered important and many of these issues have been addressed in section six above which considers the provision of information more generally.

3.5.1 Better Access for People with Disabilities

As part of the evidence sessions the review group heard the experiences of passengers with disabilities. Particular evidence was taken from representatives from the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind and the Milton Keynes Centre for Integrated Living. What was clear is that for many passengers with disabilities using the bus can be a complicated and at times frustrating experience. Key issues that arose from the experience of these witnesses are summarised below and recounted in greater depth in the accompanying evidence papers (**Annex C**).

- Frequently drivers are not aware of what they can do to help passengers with disabilities.
- The lack of bus conductors means that there is no additional support and/or information for passengers that need it.
- There is often no space for wheel chairs.
- Even low floor buses are not very accessible for people in wheelchairs.
- For people with visual impairment drivers routinely announcing stops would make using the bus much easier.
- Bus stops in the city centre are inaccessible as different buses servicing the same locations go from different stops.

Examples of good practice from bus operators around the world also aim to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

- The Washington DC Metro service (both buses and metro rail) produces an 'Open Doors' leaflet entitled 'Tips for Riding Metro for People with Disabilities'. This leaflet includes information on concessionary fares, information on accessible features, telephone helpline numbers and general tips on what is available to make using the service easier for people with mobility, visual and hearing disabilities.
- Canberra City has developed an action plan to tackle access to public transport in terms of physical barriers, access to vehicles, bus interchanges, bus stops and also in terms of communication and attitudinal barriers.

As a result of this evidence there are a number of proposals and recommendations that the group would like to make to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities and mobility impairments are both identified and addressed:

<p>Recommendation 32 Better Access for People with Disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Better availability of large print information(b) Audible announcements of approaching stops(c) Enhanced driver training(d) Progressive introduction of vehicles to full DIPTAC standards(e) Measures to improve lighting, remove dark vegetation cover and other community safety measures from grid road bus stops into the main housing estates(f) Larger number and service information on the front of bus vehicles.(g) Similar information on the side of vehicles(h) Adequate storage (pushchairs and luggage) facilities in the buses(i) Better facilities inside buses for the disabled
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3.5.2 Addressing the needs of certain wards

Throughout their investigations the group has been aware that local bus services are working towards a variety of objectives. Providing facilities for people to travel to work and the city centre are aimed at generating a modal shift, making the bus a serious alternative to day to day journeys made in the car. Another key objective that local bus services meet is social, providing access to transport for those people that do not have any other option. Here bus services need to meet a variety of needs, they must provide access to employment, education, health care, local shops and services and leisure facilities.

Ward level SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) consultation, statistics indicating levels of car ownership, ward deprivation data and other public consultation when taken together can indicate wards and areas where residents have a greater reliance on public transport. As such it is recognised that some parts of Milton Keynes are more reliant on public transport than others. For example in Netherfield, where car ownership at the last count was below 50% (census 1991), public transport problems were quoted as the biggest single barrier to finding employment. Many of these areas are likely to be on or near the main transport corridors relatively close to the city centre. *(Source, SRB Consultation)*

As such the group notes that some areas within the district may have specific travel needs and that there was no evidence to suggest that these needs are being assessed and acted upon.

<p>Recommendation 33 Addressing the Needs of Certain Wards</p> <p>We recommend that the specific needs of estates and wards with low car ownership, high</p>
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Recommendation 33 Addressing the Needs of Certain Wards

unemployment, low incomes and a high level of dependency on public transport be investigated and addressed.

3.5.3 Bus Users from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds

At the meeting on the 10th October the bus drivers noted that neither the Council nor the bus companies provide any information in community languages, this includes timetables, route maps and notices both on and off buses. Whilst this issue has been addressed in section 3.4 (information) as part of recommendation 26 the broader impact has not been assessed. Language can be a barrier not only from accessing information but also accessing the wider network. Drivers noted that passengers whose first language isn't English sometimes found it difficult to ask drivers for help, for example where to disembark for a particular location, likewise ensuring that the correct ticket had been purchased also presented difficulties.

As part of the day spent service sampling (24th September) the Councillors noted that many passengers seemed to be members of minority ethnic groups.

“We observed a high proportion of people from ethnic minority groups using the buses. This is perhaps not an unexpected phenomenon, given the propensity of growing ethnic minority numbers in Milton Keynes and their disproportionate reliance on public transport. However it occurred to us that at no time have the panel given any thought to their needs, which may include language issues.” *(Councillors K Wilson and S Coventry, Service Sampling Report 10th October 2002)*

However current information collected regarding bus usage does not break down ridership into different groups of people and as such it is difficult to develop a profile of bus users in terms of social or economic factors. Any existing knowledge is based upon public surveys and market research, often conducted on a national basis, and local anecdotal evidence. Without a profile of users it is difficult to assess the specific needs of groups of people within the community.

Finally the Council's newly adopted Race Equality Scheme outlines the duty placed upon local authorities to review policy and performance in the light of the Race Relation (Amendment) Act 2000, the foreword to the document notes that:

“Nationally, the new Race Relation (Amendment) Act 2000 places a positive duty on all public authorities to promote race equality. This means that we now have a responsibility to ensure that we review our work with black and minority ethnic communities and improve our performance. We welcome the Act, which provides a comprehensive legislative framework within which we will review all our services and functions over the next three years.

Milton Keynes is developing its Race Equality Scheme to ensure that the Council as a provider of services, an employer and a community leader meets the needs of all Milton Keynes communities. In addition, we will be working with our partners and building on existing good practice in this area.

The Race Equality Scheme is about removing barriers so that we can further equality for all. “

In the light of evidence provided both by the work of the bus strategy review group and information taken from the Council’s Race Equality Scheme the group has made the following comment:

Recommendation 34 Bus Users from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds

The review group recommends that further work is undertaken to investigate and ascertain the particular needs of bus users from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

3.6 Ticketing and Fares

The group took a large amount of evidence that addressed issues around the both cost of bus travel and the availability of ticket types. Very few of those consulted considered bus fares too high and many stated that existing bus fares represented good value for money. Consultees also valued weekly and monthly ticket passes and the single charge daily travel ticket.

The group also heard evidence from representatives of older people and people with disabilities and they stated that many of the people that they represent are reliant on bus as their only means of transport. In addition many older people or people with disabilities have relatively low levels of income and as such transport represents a key area of their expenditure. As such the representatives favoured a free concessionary fares scheme.

As a result of this evidence the group noted a series of key issues.

3.6.1 Concessionary Fares

The Milton Keynes Pensioners Association stated that their key issues are free fares for pensioners and tickets that are valid for a whole journey regardless of how many changes that trip requires including journeys that may cut across administrative boundaries.

Almost every response from older people entitled to concessionary fares made the case for cheaper and in many cases free public transport.

“We are senior citizens isn’t it about time we had free bus travel as they do in London.” *(Response by letter 10/07/02)*

<p>Recommendation 35 Concessionary fares for the elderly and disabled</p> <p>a) The group recommends concessionary fares for the elderly and disabled should be incrementally reduced with the objective of achieving free transport for these groups within 3 years.</p> <p>b) The group also recommends that concessionary fares are made available to both men and women at the age of 60.</p>
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The group also heard cases of people travelling across boundaries and only being entitled to concessionary fares for part of that trip. One elderly lady who travelled between Bedford and Bletchley to tend the grave of her late husband on a weekly basis found the cumulative cost of fares extremely expensive.

<p>Recommendation 36 Reciprocal agreements for concessionary fares when journeys cross local boundaries</p> <p>The Council should investigate the possibility of instituting reciprocal concessionary fares arrangements for passholders where their journey goes across neighbouring authorities.</p>

The group also noted that there were some key issues around the fares that young people and students pay to travel within the city. Representatives from

the Milton Keynes Youth Forum attended the Bus Strategy Review Group meeting on September 17th and one of their top concerns was fares that young people have to pay. In addition representatives felt that the current schemes were complicated and inaccessible, they also felt that there wasn't enough information available for young people to be able to rely on local buses.

As such the group has made the following recommendations regarding concessionary fares for young people.

<p>Recommendation 37 Concessionary fares for young people</p> <p>a) It is recommended that the concessionary fares scheme for children and young people (under 19 if still in full time education) should be better promoted.</p> <p>b) The charge for issuing the pass should be dropped (in line with the arrangements for the elderly and disabled).</p> <p>c) Schools and colleges should be used as information dissemination points, and schools enabled and encouraged to issue such passes.</p> <p>In addition a minority of the group (3 members) made a further recommendation:</p> <p>d) It is also recommended that journey costs be reduced from the current 50p to 35p.</p>

Finally the group also heard compelling evidence from the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind regarding the extension of concessionary fares for bus users with visual impairments. This included:

- The fact that for people with visual impairment the bus is often the only means of transport and without access social isolation can be a problem.
- Many people with visual disabilities are also in receipt of disability benefit or other income support and as such transport costs can prove prohibitively expensive.

Recommendation 35 above includes bus users with disabilities however the group also wanted to note the specific needs of travellers with visual impairments.

<p>Recommendation 38 Concessionary fares for the blind</p> <p>If the Council is unable to accept Recommendation 35 (free concessionary travel for the elderly and disabled), then the group recommends that it be applied to certain disabled groups, in particular the blind.</p>
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3.6.2 Incentivising usage of the local bus network through ticketing

Whilst the general cost of bus travel has not been identified as a problem during the course of this review the group has heard evidence regarding a number of issues around the tickets available for local bus services.

Current discounts for families travelling together are only available on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays with the £5, 'Metro Family Ticket'

which gives one days unlimited travel on all MK Metro services for up to 4 people (of which no more than 2 can be adults).

In the words of one respondent,

“I have no problem with the frequency or destination offered by the buses from my estate. I would most frequently use the buses to visit the city centre along with my two children, because of the hassle involved in parking. However, this becomes prohibitively expensive because there are three of us. I would suggest a scheme where parties travelling together get progressively cheaper rates per person as the number increases.

I have experienced this on public transport in Europe where 3 or more travelling together actually pay the same as a single traveller. If you want to reduce car journeys, parking issues and increase the use of public transport them don't penalise the families.” *(Letter received, 10/07/02)*

Based in this evidence the group has made the following recommendation regarding family ticketing arrangements:

<p>Recommendation 39 Family Tickets</p> <p>Family ticketing arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that buses are an economical method for family travel.</p>
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The group has also noted that some authorities have linked bus tickets to other incentives such as the Thurrock ride and swim scheme or the discounted fast food offers that are sometimes available with parking tickets, for example in Chelmsford. As such the group has recommended that:

<p>Recommendation 40 Ticketing Incentives</p> <p>Ticketing incentives should be considered as a way of encouraging greater usage of buses, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Linking tickets to discount schemes, e.g. sponsorship by fast food companies or local attractions.• Linking bus tickets to train journeys as in the London rover tickets.• Council discounts such as leisure centre activities.

3.6.3 Through ticketing and bus fares

The Chief Executive of MK Metro noted that the passes currently available are popular with passengers. Approximately 10% of passengers purchase the £3 day tickets and 25% use a travel card which means that approximately 35% of adult fare paying passengers (i.e. those not entitled to concessionary fares) are using some form of ticket pass that is valid for more that just one journey. *(Bus Strategy Review Group Meetings, 13th August, 2002)*

However people paying concessionary fares rates are particularly affected by the lack of through ticketing as they pay on a trip by trip basis and any trip that is not direct (involving more than one bus ride) incurs a fare. As such a person having to catch two buses to their chosen destination would have to pay four

times in a round trip. This is also the case for bus users who have not purchased a pass or day ticket.

Recommendation 41 Through Ticketing

The group recommends that an investigation of through ticketing schemes be undertaken. This should include developing and promoting a number of schemes that facilitate this including daily, weekly and monthly passes. It should also include a consideration of alternative arrangements such as time-valid tickets and zonal fare structure.

The majority of witnesses and people who wrote in to comment stated that they found the cost of bus travel within Milton Keynes reasonable. These respondents were not people entitled to concessionary fares and the issues between full fare payers and those entitled to discounted travel are quite distinct as outlined in the passage above. Respondents noted that the saver tickets that are currently available offered particularly good value.

“The £3 day ticket is great and should be wider publicised.” *(Email received 01/07/02)*

“I do find the pricing reasonable, opting recently for an MK Metro Saver card which for £35 per month is affordable.” *(Email received 09/07/02)*

Indeed the Chief Executive of MK Metro reinforced the idea that the tickets and passes available are popular with passengers. As noted above approximately 35% of adult fare paying passengers (i.e. those not entitled to concessionary fares) are using some form of ticket pass.

However whilst there does not seem to be a widespread feeling that the current cost of bus travel in Milton Keynes is too high it is important to ensure that the cost of travel does not become a disincentive, likewise that any changes are implemented effectively.

“My husband boarded a bus last week from his work and gave the driver the usual amount (0.75p, the driver then informed him that the price has changed to 90p. My husband asked the driver when the changes took effect and he was told that notice were placed in the buses the previous day (30 June 2002). I think that this is not enough notice to give to passengers. The price increase should have been posted in the buses at least a month before the increase.” *(Email received, 05/07/02)*

Recommendation 44 The Cost of Bus Fares

The group has examined attitudes to bus fares and has generally found bus users reasonably content with the level of fares in Milton Keynes. However the group recommends that fares must not become a disincentive to travel on the buses and that any increases should be kept consistent with the rate of inflation.

3.6.4 A simplified fare structure

As noted above the group heard evidence from both passengers and service providers that passes and all-day tickets are popular with customers. However

where passengers were not using these passes there was some evidence of confusion with regards to the tickets available.

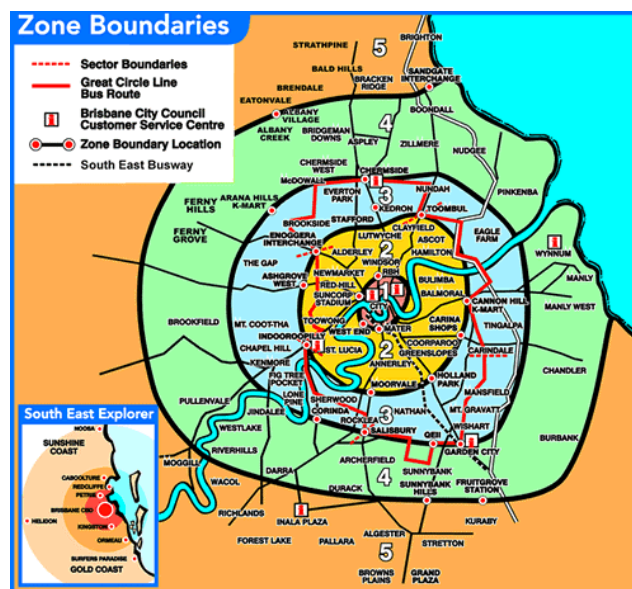
A bus user who gave evidence at one of the review group meetings noted that, “Cost is not a high priority when compared to travel in some other cities. However approaches to ticketing could be more innovative, especially with regards to the lack of return fares.” (*Bus Strategy Meeting, 27th August 2002*)

Both the Birmingham City and Lancashire County Council pathfinder projects ‘*Delivering higher quality, more reliable bus services*’ identified ticketing as an issue.

- The **Birmingham** project included an action to work with operators to assess the impact of different fare structures and concessions
- The **Lancashire** project made a commitment to develop integrated ticketing initiatives that will go beyond current practices and establish joint working relations between authorities and operators

Other examples of zonal ticketing include:

- **London Bus Zones** The London bus network is divided into two separate areas: Central London (Zone 1) and the rest of London. Flat rate fares operate within these zones with increases for travelling between the zones.
- **Oxford Bus Zones** Oxford has a zone based fares structure, supported by colour coded maps and a fare structure that reflects the zones.
- **Brisbane City Bus Zones (Australia)** Fares are calculated on the number of zones crossed.



- **Chelmsford bus zones** the bus company has recently adopted a zonal fares system.

“First Eastern National's Director & General Manager, commented ‘This new ticketing arrangement will make travel in and around Chelmsford much more simple and cost effective. We envisage our new initiative will encourage more people to use public transport, thus cutting down traffic jams and pollution. Our new zone system, which greatly simplifies the Chelmsford fares structure, is also compatible with the Government's call for public transport providers to offer transport initiatives which encourage people to use their cars less.’” *(Taken from www.firstgroup.com/firsteasternnational/news/280200.htm, 28/02/00)*

- **Brighton and Hove** the ‘One Fare Everywhere’ scheme. A flat rate fare scheme with the objective of simplifying the city’s fare structure.

“To make paying for bus travel as easy as possible there's a no nonsense flat fare of £1 for all journeys throughout the Brighton and Hove conurbation, stretching from Shoreham in the west to Falmer and Newhaven in the east.” *(Taken from www.buses.co.uk/archives/tickets/welcome.htm)*

Recommendation 43 A Simplified Fare Structure

A simplified fare structure should be considered, either a single fare throughout Milton Keynes or a simple zone system; the grid layout of the city could provide zonal boundaries.

The group believes that a simplified fares structure would considerably enhance marketing and promotional opportunities.

3.7 Role of the Council

Milton Keynes Council has a number of responsibilities with regards to the provision of public transport and these have been outlined in section two of this document (Service Context). As a result of the evidence collected the group has identified some key areas where the Council could further contribute to developing and improving local bus services.

3.7.1 Setting a clear long term vision

Both the Chief Executive of MK Metro and the Sustainable Transport Officer from MK Economic Partnerships noted that existing strategies, for example the Quality Bus Initiative, have not been fully implemented. (*Bus Strategy Review Group Meetings 13th August and 17th September 2002*)

The Sustainable Transport Officer also noted that the short term objectives of the council were not clear and that the council has many ideas, conducts research and writes reports but is not always good at implementing the results of this work.

Council officers noted that there was a need to codify the existing approach to the bus strategy, currently aspects of the strategy are located within the Local Transport Plan and aspects have been inherited from Buckinghamshire County Council from when Milton Keynes became the Transport Authority in 1997.

Officers identified the key strength of the existing transport plan as being based on a consultative approach and being based on tried and tested policies such as the Quality Bus Initiative. However the officers did note weaknesses and these include the lack of 'value for money criteria' which mean that initiatives cannot be valued or prioritised using these criteria. In addition it was accepted that the current strategy does not have a long term focus and that this was needed to ensure that the strategy contributes to developing an effective local bus service. (*Bus Strategy Review Group Meeting 13th August*)

Recommendation 44 Setting a clear, long term vision

The Council should set clear and unambiguous long and medium term objectives. These should aim to make bus services in Milton Keynes an example of excellence to all comparably sized towns and cities throughout the UK.

3.7.2 The Passenger Transport Section

It was beyond the scope of the review group to consider the performance and organisation of the Passenger Transport Section as these issues are more appropriately considered as part of the Council's Best Value Review programme.

However as a result of the review process the group has noted a number of issues that fall within the scope of the section and as such these form general recommendations.

Recommendation 45 The Passenger Transport Section

- a) The sections limited resources should be targeted at monitoring reliability and punctuality both of contract services and commercially registered services as well as ensuring that publicity and information is of a high standard.
- b) The section should work co-operatively with the bus companies to implement the bus strategy.
- c) The section should develop methods and techniques of both collating and disseminating information not just about ridership, but also about journey patterns and modal use, alongside other colleagues in the Environment Directorate and elsewhere in the Council.
- d) Consideration should be given to frequent passenger and non-passenger surveys and census.

3.7.3 Travel plans for companies within Milton Keynes

Whilst it was not within the remit of the group to consider public transport beyond bus services, issues around using the bus to travel to work were addressed at some length by the group and some evidence was heard with regards to green travel plans.

Many travel to work issues that emerged have been addressed as part of other recommendations, for example the frequency of buses during peak times, access to employment areas and buses that meet the needs of shift workers, however the group did note that local bus services are key to the success of employer travel plans.

As such the group has made the following recommendations with regards to travel to work plans and note the key strategic importance of local bus services to support sustainable travel to work. This recommendation is based on comments made by the Milton Keynes Economic Partnership Sustainable Transport Co-ordinator (*Bus Strategy Review Meeting, 17th September 2002*)

Recommendation 46 Travel Plans for Companies within Milton Keynes

- (a) The work of the Sustainable Transport Co-ordinator should be supported by a number of measures including pro-active planning policies. The Council should develop a strategy to work with schools on travel plans to minimise the use of cars.
- (b) In addition the Council should lead by example and implement their own green travel to work plan.

3.7.4 Key workers

Without drivers to operate buses the network becomes unreliable and infrequent, ensuring that there are enough drivers to keep buses running to the service standards registered with the traffic commissioner is a key concern for the local bus companies.

Indeed several bus users noted that cancellations and delays often seem to result from a lack of drivers.

“There seems to be a problem with the amount of bus drivers- there are not enough” (*Passenger attending the meeting taking place on 17th September 2002.*)

“Is there anyway to find out what the problem is, shortage of drivers due to holidays is a rather pathetic excuse.” *(Comments received by letter, 10th July 2002)*

The Chief Executive of MK Metro noted that the company has found it difficult to recruit and retain drivers and that this was particularly due to the cost of living in the area. In addition driving a bus is not an easy job, dealing with the public can be difficult and if a driver can earn the same income driving for a distribution company with less confrontation this can seem preferable.

He also noted that the company was now recruiting drivers without experience and that it takes a minimum of 12 weeks for a driver to be ready to work, blocks in the process include waiting for the driving test. *(Bus Strategy Review Group Meeting, 13th August 2002)*

Representatives of the bus drivers said that recruitment is less of a problem than retention, they agreed with the Chief Executive of MK Metro that housing costs were prohibitively expensive and that many drivers lived outside the area, travelling some distance to work.

The drivers argued that they should be seen as key workers and that any strategy to address issues around key workers should include bus drivers. *(Bus Strategy Review Group Meeting, 10th October 2002)*

Recommendation 47 Key Workers

- a) Bus staff should be considered as key workers for housing purposes.
- b) Any strategy that is developed to meet the needs of key workers should include bus drivers within its remit.

4 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary

The review group has worked to meet the objectives set in its terms of reference and has taken evidence from a wide variety of witnesses including bus users, service providers and other interested parties. The group has also reviewed examples of best practice and consulted as widely as the time frame has allowed.

4.2 Recommendations

As a result of their investigations the group has developed a series of 47 recommendations most of which were agreed by the majority of the group. Where a minority view has been given this has been clearly marked within the text of the report. The recommendations are grouped under the key issues of infrastructure, routes, quality, information, accessibility, ticketing and fares and the role of the council, with issues addressed within each of these areas.

It is the opinion of the group that the developing Bus Strategy Review will need to address issues that have been raised under each of these themes. The full set of recommendations is reproduced below.

4.2.1 Infrastructure

Recommendation 1 Named Bus Stops

- a) Bus stops and shelters should be named and that the naming process should be undertaken through consultation with local people, Parish Councils and the bus companies.
- b) Bus stop names should be prominently displayed on bus shelters and shown on maps and other information.
- c) Bus stop names and numbering should also be displayed on both ends of the shelter.
- d) The process of naming stops should be incremental starting with the most obvious and most commonly used locations.

Recommendation 2 Hail and Ride

- a) Where possible hail and ride sections should be equipped with fixed bus shelters, to encourage passengers to congregate in designated areas.
- b) Where fixed bus shelters are not possible, stops with timetable information but without shelters should be provided to encourage passengers to congregate at an appropriate location.

Recommendation 3 Bus Shelter Design and Location

- a) Bus shelters should have adequate shelter, seating, lighting and information. Minimum standards should be developed.

- b) At key locations, such as interchange points (see recommendation 4 below), intercom-speaking facilities should be introduced.
- c) A survey of bus stops and shelters in Milton Keynes should be undertaken, in consultation with local people and Parish Councils, to identify poorly located stops, where both passengers and drivers do not have a good line of sight. An action plan should be developed to address problems identified, and minimum standards should be considered.

Recommendation 4 Interchange Points

- a) A full review of existing interchange points should be undertaken with the objective of providing better and faster routes throughout the city, better centres for information and better waiting facilities.
- b) The following locations should be designated as key interchange points: Bletchley, the Hospital, Wolverton, CMK, CMK Rail Station, Westcroft and Kingston. Similar facilities in the North of the new City and the Open University should also be considered.

Recommendation 5 Infrastructural changes

- a) One of the features of Milton Keynes bus services is that buses travel East/West through the City Centre and then often North South on their main route. This produces a number of anomalies. For example at CMK it is possible to catch buses to Bletchley from stops opposite each other. This mitigates against signing such as 'buses for Bletchley'. The group notes that the CMK Structure Plan should address issues around integrated transport and recommends that solutions to these anomalies are explored.
- b) At the Hospital/Netherfield interchange a solution should be found that will enable all buses to converge on one side of the road. For most passengers at this busy location such a facility would double the frequencies of the buses they could catch.

Recommendation 6 Traffic Management (traffic calming)

A policy of removing or altering vertical and non-bus friendly traffic calming to other non-vertical schemes or safety cushions is needed. A programme to remove at least 80% of all such obstacles within 5 years is recommended, starting immediately with those that affect a number of bus services and affect the most passengers.

Recommendation 7 Bus Priority Measures

The council should seriously consider developing more bus priority measures, these should include bus lanes, designated lanes and priority lanes. The possibility of the traffic light system in Central Milton Keynes being responsive to oncoming buses should also be explored.

Recommendation 8 Low floor buses and raised kerbs

The policy of introducing low floor buses with raised kerbs to facilitate entry

Recommendation 8 Low floor buses and raised kerbs

and exits from and onto buses is to be welcomed and the majority of the group (five members) felt that these improvements should be phased in at the earliest opportunity.

However two group members also felt that such a combination should be available at 30% of all stops within a year and 90% of all stops within 5 years.

Recommendation 9 Bletchley Bus Station

Bletchley Bus Station should be upgraded with improved passenger and driver facilities as well as a travel information centre, possibly as part of the Bletchley regeneration scheme.

Recommendation 10 Planning policy and the development of bus services

- a) Newly developing areas should be provided with a level of bus service that is consistent with the level that would be reasonable once they are fully developed. We recommend that planning policies be amended and developed to ensure that development occurs sequentially and in a less fragmented way.
- b) All new developments should take into account bus travel and install appropriate traffic calming measures that do not have a negative impact on bus services.

4.2.2 Routes

Recommendation 11 Key Corridor Routes

Key corridor routes should be identified and developed and this should be a high priority.

Recommendation 12 Fast Routes and Local Services

- a) A dual approach to fast routes whereby both fast and local services are developed. The policy described above (recommendation 4) of making enhanced use of interchange points may provide an opportunity to address both needs.
- b) Fast Direct Links should generally use grid roads between destinations. There are some obvious exceptions such as Newport Road (New Bradwell), Jonathans (Coffee Hall), and Whaddon Way (Bletchley). Other routes are more likely to use roads through housing estates.
- c) In order to satisfy local demand a range of services, possibly circular in nature should be developed that will service local estates with CMK and at least one other principal interchange facility.

Recommendation 13 Accessing Employment and Industrial Areas

- a) Evening bus services should be developed to ensure that major industrial and employment areas where shift working is undertaken are served

- b) The main industrial estates, employment centres and educational campuses should also be adequately serviced either by careful route planning alongside the recommendations above or by other routes if necessary.
- c) Direct services linking towns to the north of central Milton Keynes (Newport Pagnell, New Bradwell, Wolverton and Stony Stratford) nearby industrial areas and educational facilities should be considered for improvement.

Recommendation 14 Accessing Education

- a) A strategy should be developed to ensure that the main educational campuses are well served. Routing opportunities should be considered at all campuses, such as Woughton, working alongside students and the educational establishments concerned.
- b) Consideration should be given to how school bus services and ordinary bus services could co-operate better together.
- c) The possibility of linking the concessionary fares for children and young people alongside the provision of free home to school transport, for those entitled to this should be explored. There are particular opportunities here for the 16 to 18 age group.

Recommendation 15 Accessing the Hospital

A review of routes should be undertaken to ensure that all areas have good direct links to the Hospital.

Recommendation 16 Park and Ride Services

- a) The 210 service should be developed as a model, integrating park and ride facilities with other services. A strategy should be developed to support this.
- b) The 210 service should run to Kingston at weekends.
- c) The potential of developing a similar service that includes Park and Ride from the MK Bowl site should also be explored.
- d) The 210 should be developed and times extended to ensure that it better covers employment needs.

In addition a minority of the group (2 members) felt that:

- e) 210 frequencies should be improved.

Recommendation 17 Regional Links

- a) A strategy to ensure that Milton Keynes is well linked with other towns and cities in the sub region (Luton, Bedford, Oxford, Northampton and Cambridge for example) should be developed, alongside and to compliment rail travel.

- b) Long distance coach services should also form an important part of a regional strategy.

4.2.3 Quality

Recommendation 18 Quality Bus Partnerships

The current approach to developing Quality Bus Partnerships should be retained and enhanced.

Recommendation 19 Service Frequency

- a) Using existing routes the group recommends that the Council and the bus company seek to find a way to increase the frequency on the following routes 5,14, 23, and 4 to at least 4 or possibly 5 an hour during the day. We believe that this objective should be achieved within 3 years commencing with the No 5 service.
- b) Saturday timetables should reflect different travel patterns compared to weekday services, however they should not generally offer a reduced bus service.

Recommendation 20 Evening, Sunday and Night Time Services

- a) We recommend that the Council uses its powers to commission bus services to considerably improve evening and Sunday services, to complement shopping, leisure and employment needs.
- b) A reasonably comprehensive network of services should be available up to at least 11pm in the evening. Consideration should also be given to ensuring that at least key employment areas can be reached by 6am in the morning.
- c) The group acknowledges that larger towns have been able to develop all night services in a way that is perhaps beyond the reach of MK at the moment. However the group does recommend that further attempts and experiments aimed at this market up to and including at least 2am be investigated.
- d) The safety of both passengers and staff should be considered on any services that might either go through potential trouble spots or at certain times of day, especially with evening and late night services.

Recommendation 21 Customer Comments

- a) It should be made easier for passengers to complain or comment about services, with freepost complaint/comment forms available on buses.
- b) The council should consider setting up bus user forums.

Recommendation 22 Minimum Service Standards

Milton Keynes Council should develop a coherent service standard as part of a single document and this should be made available to members of the

Recommendation 22 Minimum Service Standards

public and bus users.

In addition a minority of the group (3 members) made a further recommendation detailing the level of service standard.

Access to services

- a) That in the urban area of Milton Keynes (including Newport Pagnell) that bus shelters along bus routes are provided within 500 metres of all houses to at least to at least 95% of the population.
- b) That at least 75% of the population in the urban area live within 300 metres of such a bus shelter.
- c) That at least 75% of the population in rural areas live within 500 metres of a bus shelter on a bus route.
- d) That direct services connecting to Central Milton Keynes be available for all parts of the urban area and at least the principal towns in the rural area including Lavendon, Olney, Sherrington, Hanslope and Woburn Sands.
- e) That in the Urban area 95% of the population live within 500 metres of a bus shelter that provides services direct to Central Milton Keynes on at least the following basis
 - 1) Daytime Half Hourly. Early morning and evening until 11.30pm and Sundays Hourly
 - 2) Similar frequencies to at least one other major interchange point (*previously described*)
- f) That the major towns and principal villages in the rural area enjoy a service frequency of at least hourly during the daytime and two hourly in the evenings until 11pm to Central Milton Keynes and at least one other major interchange point.
- g) That fast direct routes be provided from and to the following destinations on at least a 5 per hour day time basis
 - 1) Newport Pagnell to CMK
 - 2) Bletchley to CMK
 - 3) Bletchley to CMK via West Bletchley
 - 4) Lakes Estate to CMK via Bletchley
 - 5) Hospital to CMK
 - 6) Hospital to Bletchley
 - 7) Wolverton to CMK
- h) That fast direct routes be provided from and to the following destinations on at least a twenty minute day time basis
 - 1) Kingston to CMK
 - 2) Kingston to Bletchley
 - 3) Westcroft to CMK
 - 4) Westcroft to Bletchley

Recommendation 22 Minimum Service Standards

- 5) Stony Stratford to Wolverton/CMK

Punctuality

- i) The group recommends minimum service acceptability levels, as on trains e.g. 95% of services should reach their destination within say 5 mins of time and 98% of services should run.

Cleanliness

- j) The council should adopt minimum cleaning standards and frequencies for bus shelters.

Lighting and visibility standards

- k) The council should adopt minimum lighting requirements for bus shelters.

4.2.4 Information

Recommendation 23 Travel Information Centre Strategy

A Travel Information Centre strategy should be developed in line with emerging development plans for CMK. This should include consideration of a centre close to the main bus stops in CMK where information as well as tickets and passes would be available. It should also consider smaller stations in other centres and interchange points. The strategy should also consider the use of unstaffed electronic information points. Information available on websites should also be developed to complement this recommendation.

Recommendation 24 Bus Route Maps

- a) A new bus route map should be designed with simplicity, clarity and accessibility in mind.
- b) Simplified bus route maps covering key routes and interchanges should also be developed.

Recommendation 25 Bus Timetable

- a) Timetable updates should be produced on a regular basis (at least 3 times a year).
- b) The distribution of the timetable should be reviewed and improved.
- c) Pocket timetables produced by rail companies are a good example to follow.
- d) Efforts should be made to produce timetable information at route or area level, which is far easier to use.

Recommendation 26 Co-ordination of Timetable Changes

Bus companies should be encouraged to make timetable changes less often and on co-ordinated, pre arranged dates.

Recommendation 27 Information in Community Languages

The Council should investigate providing transport information in a variety of community languages.

Recommendation 28 Marketing and Publicity

- a) A major marketing strategy should be developed to promote bus usage within Milton Keynes.
- b) The group also recommends that a major publicity drive should be associated with this strategy

Recommendation 29 Information at Bus Stops

- a) Services and routes available from stops should be marked on both ends of shelters.
- b) The main destinations and interchange points that can be reached from the stop should be listed.
- c) All shelters should include details of where to get more information, such as phone numbers and web sites.
- d) First and last bus times on each route using that stop should be highlighted as on the Tube.
- e) If zones were introduced, zoning signs or colours should be clearly marked on the stops and shelters.
- f) Real-time information should be introduced on a rolling programme beginning with some of the key routes and locations.
- g) Where the 24-hour clock system is being used, a conversion table should be shown.

Recommendation 30 Information on Buses

A selection of timetables and route maps should be available on all buses.

Recommendation 31 Signage in the Shopping Centre

Directional signage should be deployed at the main shopping and entertainment centres (particularly at CMK) to direct people towards buses.

4.2.5 Accessibility

Recommendation 32 Better Access for People with Disabilities

- a) Better availability of large print information
- b) Audible announcements of approaching stops
- c) Enhanced driver training
- d) Progressive introduction of vehicles to full DIPTAC standards

Recommendation 32 Better Access for People with Disabilities

- e) Measures to improve lighting, remove dark vegetation cover and other community safety measures from grid road bus stops into the main housing estates
- f) Larger number and service information on the front of bus vehicles.
- g) Similar information on the side of vehicles
- h) Adequate storage (pushchairs and luggage) facilities in the buses
- i) Better facilities inside buses for the disabled

Recommendation 33 Addressing the Needs of Certain Wards

We recommend that the specific needs of estates and wards with low car ownership, high unemployment, low incomes and a high level of dependency on public transport be investigated and addressed.

Recommendation 34 Bus Users from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds

The review group recommends that further work is undertaken to investigate and ascertain the particular needs of bus users from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

4.2.6 Ticketing and Fares

Recommendation 35 Concessionary fares for the elderly and disabled

- a) The group recommends concessionary fares for the elderly and disabled should be incrementally reduced with the objective of achieving free transport for these groups within 3 years.
- b) The group also recommends that concessionary fares are made available to both men and women at the age of 60.

Recommendation 36 Reciprocal agreements for concessionary fares when journeys cross local boundaries

The Council should investigate the possibility of instituting reciprocal concessionary fares arrangements for passholders where their journey goes across neighbouring authorities.

Recommendation 37 Concessionary fares for young people

- a) It is recommended that the concessionary fares scheme for children and young people (under 19 if still in full time education) should be better promoted.
- b) The charge for issuing the pass should be dropped (in line with the arrangements for the elderly and disabled).

Recommendation 37 Concessionary fares for young people

- c) Schools and colleges should be used as information dissemination points, and schools enabled and encouraged to issue such passes.
- d) In addition a minority of the group (3 members) made a further recommendation:
- e) It is also recommended that journey costs be reduced from the current 50p to 35p.

Recommendation 38 Concessionary fares for the blind

If the Council is unable to accept Recommendation 35 (free concessionary travel for the elderly and disabled), then the group recommends that it be applied to certain disabled groups, in particular the blind.

Recommendation 39 Family Tickets

Family ticketing arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that buses are an economical method for family travel.

Recommendation 40 Ticketing Incentives

Ticketing incentives should be considered as a way of encouraging greater usage of buses, for example:

- Linking tickets to discount schemes, e.g. sponsorship by fast food companies or local attractions.
- Linking bus tickets to train journeys as in the London rover tickets.
- Council discounts such as leisure centre activities.

Recommendation 41 Through Ticketing

The group recommends that an investigation of through ticketing schemes be undertaken. This should include developing and promoting a number of schemes that facilitate this including daily, weekly and monthly passes. It should also include a consideration of alternative arrangements such as time-valid tickets and zonal fare structure.

Recommendation 44 The Cost of Bus Fares

The group has examined attitudes to bus fares and has generally found bus users reasonably content with the level of fares in Milton Keynes. However the group recommends that fares must not become a disincentive to travel on the buses and that any increases should be kept consistent with the rate of inflation.

Recommendation 43 A Simplified Fare Structure

A simplified fare structure should be considered, either a single fare throughout Milton Keynes or a simple zone system; the grid layout of the city could provide zonal boundaries.

The group believes that a simplified fares structure would considerably enhance marketing and promotional opportunities.

4.2.7 Role of the Council

Recommendation 44 Setting a clear, long term vision

The Council should set clear and unambiguous long and medium term objectives. These should aim to make bus services in Milton Keynes an example of excellence to all comparably sized towns and cities throughout the UK.

Recommendation 45 The Passenger Transport Section

- a) The sections limited resources should be targeted at monitoring reliability and punctuality both of contract services and commercially registered services as well as ensuring that publicity and information is of a high standard.
- b) The section should work co-operatively with the bus companies to implement the bus strategy.
- c) The section should develop methods and techniques of both collating and disseminating information not just about ridership, but also about journey patterns and modal use, alongside other colleagues in the Environment Directorate and elsewhere in the Council.
- d) Consideration should be given to frequent passenger and non-passenger surveys and census.

Recommendation 46 Travel Plans for Companies within Milton Keynes

- a) The work of the Sustainable Transport Co-ordinator should be supported by a number of measures including pro-active planning policies. The Council should develop a strategy to work with schools on travel plans to minimise the use of cars.
- b) In addition the Council should lead by example and implement their own green travel to work plan.

Recommendation 47 Key Workers

- a) Bus staff should be considered as key workers for housing purposes.
- b) Any strategy that is developed to meet the needs of key workers should include bus drivers within its remit.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Members of the Review Group would like to express their thanks to all who took part in the investigation, both external witnesses and agencies that contributed evidence, members of the public who responded to consultation and officers from the Passenger Transport Team who provided detailed information to support the work of the group.

A. ANNEX A

CMK Transport Group report January 2002

A Bus Strategy for Milton Keynes September 2001

History and Developments 1997 - 2001

Future Commitments

Current Problems

Bus Patronage 1998 - 2001

Potential Network Improvements

What Next?

History and Developments 1997 - 2001

Since May 1997 when MK Metro was acquired by new management there have been a number of significant changes, many in conjunction with our partners.

- Bus fleet completely replaced
- New ticket system
- 19 low floor, low emission buses in service (a further 6 on order over the next 12 months)
- New Smartcard system on Travelcards
- Customer Care Training for all drivers
- Services 5 and 14 converted to low floor buses
- Bus priority introduced at MK Rail Station
- MK Metro has invested £4.4 million since 1997. Milton Keynes Council will invest £1,060,000 on the first quality bus route and associated measures. Milton Keynes Council spends £1.6 million every year on bus subsidies and concessionary fares
- New and improved services:
 - Route 1 - Olney to Milton Keynes doubled to hourly
 - Routes 4 and 5 - Sunday daytime service doubled to ½ hourly
 - Route 7 - new Central Milton Keynes to Bletchley via Westcroft service
 - Route 10 - hourly service Woburn Sands to Central Milton Keynes via Monkston
 - Route 12 - new Stony Stratford to the Open University service
 - Route 14A - new Deanshanger to Central Milton Keynes via Stony Stratford service
 - Route 81 - new Wolverton to Newport Pagnell service
 - Route 200 - new Coachway to Central Milton Keynes Park and Ride service
 - Route X1 - new Central Milton Keynes to Milton Keynes College and Bletchley
 - Various routes - additional journey introduced between 6.00pm and 7.30pm

Many of these have been introduced with support from partners – Milton Keynes Council, Northamptonshire County Council, Milton Keynes College, London and Amsterdam Developments and the Open University

Future Commitments

New bus radio systems May 2001

New bus shelters, stops and infrastructure on routes 5 and 14 by March 2002

Current Problems

Inadequate funding for services to new developments when construction commences to establish a culture of bus use.

Too many bus-unfriendly road humps which have been placed with little thought for drivers and passengers on bus routes throughout the city. One service goes over 59 humps in one hour.

Local bus companies, including MK Metro, have struggled to find enough drivers to cover all services. Driver shortages are a national problem and all companies have suffered similarly. However, with a desire to expand service provision and frequency driver availability will be an obstacle to service expansion.

Bus Patronage

Bus patronage is rising across the network due to:

- Better reliability
- Better staff
- Better vehicles
- Stability

The figures below demonstrate the significant progress that has been made

Passenger numbers between March 1998 and March 2001

	March 1998	March 2001	% Increase
All passengers	401,367	465,174	16
Adult/child passengers	300,219	379,589	26
Elderly passengers	101,148	85,585	-15
Routes 5 and 14	99,475	121,995	23
Travelcard users	1,875	41,188	2097
Evening/Sunday	6,681	23,244	248

Potential Network Improvements

The bus operations sub group was tasked by the Central Milton Keynes Transport Group with reviewing the spending on bus services and associated infrastructure. It is recommended that the funds already committed by Milton Keynes Council implemented are progresses and spent in this financial year. The following program of works is believed to be achievable over the next 18 months with appropriate staff resources made available to introduce the projects listed below.

- Frequency enhancement on main services (5 and 14). Typically increased from every 20 minutes to every 10 minutes.

Cost £260,000 to 31 March 2003 - dependent on the flexibility being granted by DTLR on the upper limit cap on the use of de minimis funds.

- New small high quality minibus service between Kents Hill and Central Milton Keynes. The vehicle will have a capacity of around 10 seats and will operate direct to Central Milton Keynes via grid roads with the only intermediate stops being the Open University, the hospital and the college. The route will take in the business district and the rail station in the morning and evening with shopping and leisure being the main destination during the day. The service will operate on a hail and ride basis in Kent's Hill and the service will operate between 7.00am and 7.00pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am and 6.00pm on Saturdays.

Cost £60,000 to 31 March 2003

- Improved early evening services from 18.00 to 20.00 - there have been a number of comments from both the retail and business community that services operating at lower frequencies between 18.00 and 20.00 deter public transport use because of the long wait times between services. In consultation with the shopping centre extra journeys will be introduced which would be self supporting after 12 months. A partnership approach is suggested with the private sector requested to contribute £10,000 to this initiative.

Cost £20,000 for six month pilot before 30 September 2002

- Late night service network on Friday and Saturday nights - late night transport has already been highlighted as a major concern in the police's efforts to reduce the risk and incidence of serious assaults to residents and visitors to late night entertainment venues. A pilot night bus service has been introduced with partnership funding but further routes need introducing the tackle to problem further.

Cost £4,000 matched by £9,000 of partnership funding to allow for two pilot routes over a six month period starting June 2002.

- Secure bike and ride facilities at Newport Pagnell, Wolverton and Bletchley - this will enable cyclists to transfer from bike to bus and leave their cycles in secure facilities. A discount of the usual pass rate will be given to cyclists.

Cost £30,000 for three sites, first site implemented by 31 March 2002 followed by the other sites by 30 September 2002 and 31 March 2003.

- Removal of Speed Humps in many areas but especially Hodge Lea, Stantonbury, Shenley Church End and the Poets Estate in Newport Pagnell. Poets Estate revisions currently being designed for implementation by 31 March 2002. Investigate revisions to two of the other three suggested grid squares with second scheme completed by 30 September 2002 and the third by 31 March 2003.

Cost £70,000 for four sites - costs may exceed the budget available dependent on the types of design proposed.

- Real Time Information pilot for buses between the rail station and Midsummer Place/the centre:mk. This would appeal to many people unfamiliar with Central Milton Keynes. JMW Public Transport Support Systems offer an off the shelf real time system based on vehicle transponders rather than GPOS technology. This could make a pilot scheme cost effective with prices starting from as little as £50,000.

Cost £20,000 - dependent on seeking expressions of interest from interested companies and awarding the work. The cost of works will not require tendering through the European Union due to the level of cost.

- Bus Shelter improvements at key locations and where excessive vandalism and graffiti are being experienced. A new shelter design is being finalised for installation on the first two quality bus routes early in 2002. This design replaces the existing shelter design that has been in existence for the past 25 years. The new shelter is designed to be more robust and offer greater security by the use of lighting and more glazing panels. Adspace, the Council's shelter maintenance company, will identify shelters that are regularly targeted for replacement. The Council has also received a number of requests for new shelters and will install these as funds allow.

Cost £54,000 - this will allow for the replacement/new installation of around 18 shelters starting in April 2002.

- Removal of Hail and Ride from routes where ridership has increased - Oldbrook, Conniborrow and Great Holm. Hail and Ride is generally introduced to make services more attractive to passengers where new routes are introduced. Once passenger usage has increased this arrangement can be counter productive as the bus appears to be constantly stopping and makes journeys longer than necessary for passengers already on board.

Cost £75,000 - this will allow bus stop implementation on three routes. The estimate of £25,000 per route allows for three pairs of bus stops with provision two bus shelters. No allowance has been made for additional footpath or associated crossing points, these may incur additional costs.

- Extra staff are currently being recruited to provide resources to implement the above schemes in part. However it will not be possible to implement all of the above schemes without further staff resources being available. An allowance of £30,000 has been made for temporary internal staff or the use of consultants.

Cost £30,000 to March 2003

Identified funds for 2001/02

	2001-02	2002-03
Public Transport Support Grants	£ 25,000	£ 65,000
Bus Priority Measures		£ 50,000
Improved Passenger Access	£ 56,000	£ 50,000

Identified funds for 2001/02

Real Time Passenger Information			
Evening and weekend subsidy	£ 10,000	£ 20,000	
Improved Rural Access	£ 40,000	£ 50,000	
Sub total	£131,000	£235,000	£366,000

PSA Frequency Enhancements	£110,000	£150,000
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Total	£241,000	£385,000	£626,000
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These could be redistributed and targeted as per the following program.

	October 2001	April 2002	October 2002	
	-March 2002	-September 2002	-March 2002	
Frequency enhancements	£ 70,000	95,000	£ £ 95,000	£ 260,000
New high quality minibus service	£ -	30,000	£ £ 30,000	£ 60,000
		Kents Hill	Kents Hill	
Improved services 18.00 - 20.00	£ 7,000	7,000	£ £ 6,000	£ 20,000
Private sector contribution	£ 3,000	3,000	£ £ 4,000	£ 10,000
Late night services - Friday and Saturdays	£ 4,000	-	£ £ -	£ 4,000
Private sector contribution	£ 9,000	£ -	£ -	£ 9,000
Bike and Ride facility	£ -	30,000	£ £ -	£ 30,000
Speed hump/traffic calming	£ 10,000	40,000	£ £ 20,000	£ 70,000
	Poets Estate	Stanatonbury	Walnut Tree	
		Hodge Lea		
Real Time Information pilot	£ -	-	£ £ 20,000	£ 20,000
Hail and Ride removal new stops/shelters	£ 30,000	25,000	£ £ 25,000	£ 80,000
	Oldbrook	Conniburrow	Great Holm	
New shelters to Quality Bus standards	£ -	27,000	£ £ 27,000	£ 54,000
		9 Shelters	9 Shelters	
Short term improvements at Coachway	?	?		
Staffing for above	£ 10,000	10,000	£ £ 10,000	£ 30,000

Public Spend £ 628,000
Partner funds £ 19,000

Alongside the above works the following amounts would continue to be spent on existing services:

£95,000 - Passenger Transport Information, this includes £15,00 on the National Public Transport Information System 2000.

£425,000 - Community Transport. This is a transport service for residents of Milton Keynes who cannot use conventional public transport because they have a disability. The service provides four minibuses on fixed routes with wheelchair access.

£830,000 - Concessionary Fares support for approximately 18,000 elderly, disabled and young residents in Milton Keynes.

£850,000 - Supported network of socially necessary bus services provided early mornings, evenings, Sundays and in rural areas.

£780,000 - Park and Ride provision from the Coachway and the Bowl.

Quality Bus Route Timetable

August 2001

- Consultation on traffic calming measures on Midsummer Boulevard between Lower Ninth Street and Marlborough Gate.
- Consultation on the installation of four zebra crossings at the port cocheres between Secklow Gate and Marlborough Gate
- Tender for mock up of new three bay shelter for Milton Keynes

September 2001

- Draft tender documents for the provision of 85 upgraded bus stops on route 5, split into three separate bids.
- Draft tender documents for the installation of traffic calming and zebra crossings on Midsummer Boulevard between Secklow Gate and Marlborough Gate. The implementation of a new bus lane along Midsummer Boulevard between Grafton Gate and Marlborough Gate and the installation of a mini roundabout at the exit from Station Square onto Eldergate.

October 2001

- Tender document sent out with start date for all works of mid January 2002 with completion of works before Easter 2002.

January 2002

- Works commence on Midsummer Boulevard and bus stops on route 5.

March/April 2002

- Works on route 5 completed.

What Next?

If the report is approved by the Central Milton Keynes Transport Group, it is suggested that a further report is made to Milton Keynes Council. The report will recommend this strategy is adopted by Milton Keynes Council and the projects listed completed by March 2003.

B ANNEX B

List of evidence received by the review group

1 The current position

- a) Summary of existing Bus Strategy (taken from the Local Transport Plan)
- b) Draft Public Information Strategy (2002)
- c) Association of Transport Co-ordinating officers (ACTO) – Joint Position Statement on Bus Issues
- d) Memorandum of evidence to the Transport Sub-Committee's Inquiry into the Bus Industry. (Submitted by the LGA and other organisations)
- e) Article by Councillor Mabbutt in Aroundabout, August 2002
- f) Regional Transport Strategy

2 Information / statistics

- a) Park and Ride (routes 200 & 210)
- b) Local Bus ridership figures
- c) Performance Indicator- speed of processing applications for concessionary passes
- d) The cost of concessionary fares- various approaches

3 Notes from expert witnesses

a) 13th August

- Julian Peddle, Chief Executive of MK Metro Buses.
- David Hackforth, Head of Planning and Transport
- Stuart Simmonds, Passenger Transport Officer

b) 27th August

- Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind (4 representatives)
- Local residents/bus user (2 representatives)
- Milton Keynes Pensioners' Association and the Bus Users Group
- Councillor G Mabbutt, Cabinet Member (Transport).

c) 17th September

- Milton Keynes Youth Forum and youth representatives
- Centre for Integrated Living
- National Federation of Bus Users
- Local residents/bus user (3 representatives)
- MK Economic Partnership

d) 10th October

- Representative of local bus drivers

4 Good Practice Councils

Beacon Councils – access and mobility

- a) Nottinghamshire County Council
- b) Telford and Wrekin Council

Pathfinder Councils – delivering higher quality, more reliable bus services

- c) Cambridgeshire County and Cambridge City Councils
- d) Birmingham City Council
- e) Lancashire County Council with Preston and South Ribble Borough Councils
- f) Hampshire County Council
- g) Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- h) Harlow District Council

5 Other examples of good practice

- a) Rural Rail: The Lincolnshire InterConnect 6 (inter-connecting bus service)
- b) Canberra City- Action plan for accessible public transport (includes physical barriers, communication barriers and attitudinal barriers.)
- c) TravelEasy- integrated information service in Perth, Australia.
- d) Tips for riding the Metro for People with Disabilities (Washington DC buses)

6 Other examples of local authority bus strategies

Audit Commission comparative group

- a) Swindon Borough Council
- b) Peterborough City Council
- c) Warrington Borough Council
- d) Thurrock Council
- e) Telford and Wrekin Council

Neighbouring authorities

- f) Cambridgeshire County Council
- g) Bedfordshire County Council
- h) Northamptonshire County Council

- i) Summary report

7 Consultation

- a) Responses to the Messenger article. General report and respondents suggestions
- b) Responses from Parish Councils
- c) Responses from Residents Associations
- d) Feedback from the Older Persons Forum July 2002

8 Miscellaneous Reports

- a) RNIB report 'Travellers Tales' Executive Summary.
- b) Report provided by the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind.
- c) Service Sampling – report from Councillors Wilson and Coventry
- d) Review of a Quality Bus Scheme in Preston

9 Regulations

- a) Regulatory Impact Assessment – Quality Partnership Schemes
- b) Urban Bus Challenge 2002- Guidance on Criteria and Arrangements

C. ANNEX C

Evidence received from the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind

OVERVIEW FROM WITNESSES REPRESENTING THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND:

- The Association has approximately 500 registered members in the Milton Keynes Area and across Buckinghamshire has somewhere in the region of 3000 members. Not all people with visual impairments are registered with the Association so these figures underestimate the numbers of those affected by these issues. It is important to note that members of the Association are both blind and visually impaired, total Blindness (black blind) is quite rare affecting a small percentage of the population.
- Not all of these members use buses, as using buses with a visual impairment is difficult. However getting out and about and being an active member of the community are extremely important issues for people with visual impairments. Access to public transport helps to relieve isolation and as such is related to issues around social inclusion.
- Access to information was identified as a problem. It is difficult to get through on the general timetable number and often the information is inaccurate. The large print timetable is not good enough and written timetables become out of date very quickly and it is not always easy to get hold of an update.
- Getting a bus from your local area is much easier than returning from the centre of town, several buses go from one stop and it is difficult to identify the bus you need when there are several there. It is also difficult to link together routes as buses go from different places in the town.
- Waiting for buses is extremely frustrating, you don't know when one is coming and when it arrives you cannot always tell what number it is.

Key issues that help improve accessibility:

- Awareness training for drivers.
- Audio Announcement and descriptions, simple solution like the drivers calling out the bus number when the doors open.
- It is difficult to distinguish between buses and other large diesel vehicles and as such hail and ride can be a difficult process. Drivers need to be aware of this and stop at bus stops.
- All public buses should be the same colour and then they would be easier to distinguish.
- Through buses to the hospital: although the hospital is well served there are no through buses from Newport Pagnell, frequent changes to get to your destination make a trip less accessible.
- A dedicated sympathetic information point/line to help provide information to users with special needs or vulnerable travellers.
- Numbers on the sides of buses.
- Electronic/Audio Information at bus stops, especially in the centre of town.
- Mrs Cheriyan noted that she had brought a report, petition and examples of good practice. CT to circulate to members as part of the evidential base.
- Bus shelters need to be better, if you sit in the shelter the bus driver may not see you and then drives past. If a flashing light could be switched on this would alert the driver to the fact that someone was waiting at the stop.
- As people with visual impairments rely on buses, weekend and evening services need to be improved.

QUESTIONS TO THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND:

Q The current policy is aimed at ending the Hail and Ride system, do you generally support this?

A Hail and Ride is ok in certain situations, however improvements need to be made in terms of shelters at stops to make sure that if a passenger is waiting the driver sees and stops for them.

Q What can be done to persuade more of your members to use buses?

A A better service from the bus drivers, more awareness about the needs of users with visual impairments. The association can train drivers at a cost of £200 a session. We need to break down the myths that are associated with blindness and visual impairment and develop services that meet real needs.

Q What are the best buses for your members in terms of accessibility?

A The best buses are the low-floored buses with yellow handles. However better signage is needed, both in terms of the number of the bus displayed on the side near the door so the passenger knows the bus number they are getting onto and in terms of seating priority for the disabled.

Q Are the Quality Bus Partnership Routes better, (i.e. 5, 14, 4 and 23)?

A None of the Association members present used the quality bus routes and it was felt that a survey of members would be needed to give a realistic answer to this question.

Q What are your opinions about the concessionary fares?

A Unsure, many people are confused about concessionary fares as there is no nation wide policy. In some areas of the country concessionary travel is free and in Milton Keynes the card system is in operation. Better information is essential, both on who is entitled to it and also in terms of how it works, for example it is unclear that you can put money onto the cards on the buses rather than at a central location.

Q If there was one aspect of the bus service you could improve what would it be?

(a) More frequent services out of normal working hours in both Milton Keynes and the rest of the County. The bus service needs to support people to be part of their community, to prevent social exclusion.

(b) Audio description, even if it is just the driver announcing stops and the route number when a passenger embarks.

(c) Awareness training for bus drivers.

(d) Talking buses and stops whether this is human or machine.

(e) Drivers to announce stops.

(f) Putting the number on the side of the bus.