

BUS SERVICES IN MILTON KEYNES

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Service Group Planning and Transport

Executive Summary

The Committee is considering “Successful Bus Services – to consider improvements and how residents can get the best out of bus service provision” with particular emphasis on:

- What makes a commercially successful bus routes that are good quality yet profitable?
- Partnership working (Arriva)
- Growth – forecast of future usage
- Public Transport Policy – comments

The Committee has asked for a report to provide background information, referring to the recent ‘Passenger Focus’ bus passenger survey published in March 2013, making reference to the recommendations of the Bus Services Review Group (2002), and highlighting relevant parts of the Local Transport Plan and Bus Strategy.

Key issues

This section of the report considers the current legislative and policy background to public transport provision in Milton Keynes, the Recommendations of the Bus Services Review Group (December 2002), and provides some general background information on bus services in Milton Keynes.

Legislative Background

One of the key challenges is that no single organisation is responsible for all the factors that determine the quality of bus services, the boundaries are blurred and often difficult to describe to bus users and other stakeholders. Many people, for example, do not understand that the council does not control the bus services directly through a franchising or licensing regime.

At present, within Milton Keynes, and in all the neighbouring authorities, bus operators are free to register services which can be run without public revenue support (ie commercially) and the Council has to consider the needs not met by this network and arrange the additional services it deems to be required. While this means that the bus operators deliver services and are in the front line when dealing with passengers, critical aspects of the service provided are the responsibility of the local authority. The Council,

as highway authority, can influence the extent to which buses are delayed by other traffic - sometimes simple things like requiring buses to use lay-bys will delay bus journeys. The Council also sets on-street parking charges. In some cases responsibility is split, for example, both the local authority and bus operator can deliver publicity. Eligibility for concessionary travel is set down in statute and is subject to amendment from time to time by the government. Significant capital investment in transport comes via government funding (eg through the Local Transport Plan) and there is also the expectation that the private sector delivering Milton Keynes growth will contribute to improving bus services. This split of responsibilities highlights the essential requirement for partnership working.

Policy

The Transport Vision and Strategy for Milton Keynes (also known as the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3)) was adopted by the Council in June 2011. It sets out the Council's transport aims, objectives and implementation strategy for the period 2011-2031. It includes the following **Transport Vision Statement**:

By 2031, Milton Keynes will have the most sustainable transport system in the country, increasing its attractiveness as a place to live, work, visit, and do business. There will be a real transport choice to satisfy individual preferences and encourage more sustainable travel behaviour. The transport system will provide fast and efficient movement of people and goods, and will be accessible for all. Everyone will have access to key services and amenities, including employment, health, education, retail and leisure.

Transport networks, including the unique grid road and Redway networks, will be expanded and fully integrated into new developments and regeneration areas to support more sustainable communities. Connectivity to local towns, major cities, and international transport gateways and networks will be first class; and Milton Keynes will embrace new technology, being an exemplar for the latest developments in information technology, fuel technology, and new forms of transport.

The Council will work in partnership with all sectors and the wider community to deliver the transport vision and strategy.

LTP3 includes a public transport strategy (see background papers) with a range of interventions to deliver the improved provision of sustainable transport to provide a real and attractive transport choice. They include the development of a high frequency bus network along core routes, building on the good work delivered by the Council and its partners, with the potential to transition to a rapid transit network. Rural services, feeder services, and Park and Ride will support the network; and interchange facilities, information provision and ticketing will be first class. Rail and coach will continue to provide a transport choice over longer distances and services will be enhanced and promoted. Taxi and private hire improvements will be supported. Community Transport will continue to provide a lifeline to key services for those with greatest need.

The current Bus Strategy was adopted in December 2008 and being redrafted at the present time to reflect the interventions set out in LTP3.

Recommendations of the Bus Services Review Group (December 2002)

In 2002, the Environment, Transport and Localities Committee established a Bus Strategy Review Group. The Group's **Final Report in December 2002** set out 47 recommendations 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. A review of the progress made on each of these recommendations is attached as an **Annex A**.

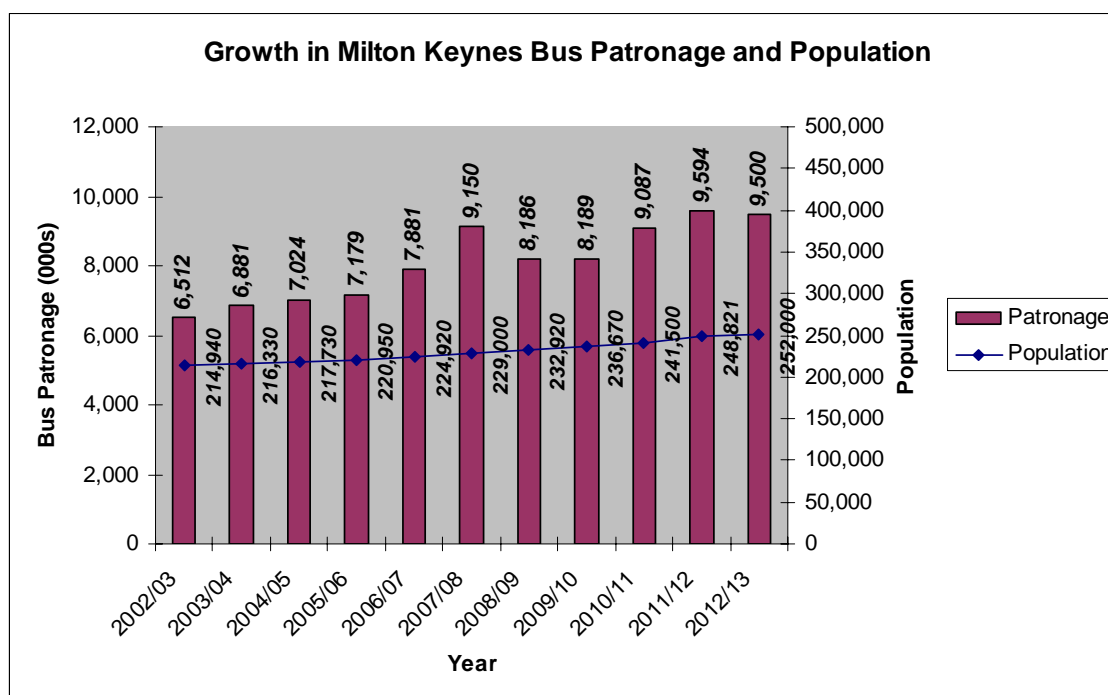
Background Information on Bus Services in Milton Keynes

The new city of Milton Keynes was designed with freedom of movement by car as a primary objective. In addition, the dispersed nature of Milton Keynes generates a multitude of cross-city movements. While this has advantages that local traffic is not concentrated on one destination but is spread throughout the network, thus not contributing to concentrated traffic congestion, it means that Milton Keynes is not so easily served by conventional bus services and can result in longer routes than necessary therefore limiting the ability of the bus to compete with car journeys.

In Milton Keynes, as elsewhere, bus travel is the main alternative mode for those who not do have access to a car either as a driver or passenger. Buses provide access to employment, education, health services and food shops. Although Milton Keynes has a high level of car use there are significant groups of people who do not have access to a car either because they are too young to drive, have a disability or are not able to afford to run a car. In addition there are a growing number of people who do not use a car by choice. The lack of access to a car is particularly marked in wards with a high index of deprivation.

Around 75% of the bus network in Milton Keynes is run commercially (ie without subsidy), with Arriva the major bus operator. The remaining 25% of the bus network, services that would not otherwise be provided commercially is subsidised by the Council. These are generally into the areas of lower population density in the urban area and in the rural areas of the borough.

The chart below shows the bus patronage total for Milton Keynes against population and indicates that overall bus patronage has recovered to pre-recession levels. The bus patronage figures shown here are those reported by the Council (previously NI177 Total Bus Patronage (BVP1102)) - this is the total number of single bus trips originating in Milton Keynes in the financial year shown. Originating trips mean that a trip from Milton Keynes to Bedford would be included, but a trip from Bedford to Milton Keynes would not. A return journey counts as two trips. The Council is required to collect this data which is based on returns made by the bus operators.



The CIPFA nearest neighbour group for Milton Keynes includes the authorities shown in the following table. Nottingham, while not in the CIPFA group, was “top of the league” for overall satisfaction with the bus journey in the Passenger Focus Bus Passenger Survey published in March 2013. (CIPFA is the **Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy**).

Bus Patronage across the CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Group for Milton Keynes

Authority & Major bus operator	Bus Patronage (millions)								% Diff	Populati on (2011 census)	Bus Journeys per head
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12			
Bracknell Forest	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.7	6.25%	113,205	15.02
Central Bedfordshire Arriva/ Stagecoach	-	-	-	-	-	3.2	4.3	4.7	-	254,381	18.48
Thurrock EnsignBus	2.7	2.7	3.4	3.4	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.4	62.96 %	157,705	27.90
Telford & Wrekin Arriva	6.3	6.4	6.3	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.6	- 11.11 %	166,641	33.61
Bedford Stagecoach	-	-	-	-	-	5.4	-	-	-	157,479	34.29

Authority & Major bus operator	Bus Patronage (millions)								% Diff	Populati on (2011 census)	Bus Journeys per head
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12			
Medway Arriva	8.3	8.5	9.0	9.2	9.3	9.3	8.6	9.5	14.46 %	263,925	36.00
Milton Keynes Arriva	7.0	7.2	7.9	9.2	8.2	8.2	9.1	9.6	37.14 %	248,821	38.58
Warrington (ex municipal bus company)	8.7	8.4	9.2	9.8	10.9	11.2	11.5	10.8	24.14 %	202,228	53.41
Swindon (ex municipal bus company)	10.6	11.1	12.1	13.0	14.1	12.5	-	12.3	16.04 %	209,156	58.81
Peterborough Stagecoach	10.0	10.4	11.6	12.5	13.0	12.1	11.7	-	17.00 %	183,631	63.71
Luton Arriva	8.7	8.6	8.0	7.9	10.7	10.0	12.4	13.6	56.32 %	203,201	66.93
Reading (ex municipal bus company)	20.1	17.8	18.1	17.6	18.2	17.8	17.1	-	14.93 %	155,698	109.83
Nottingham (ex municipal bus company)	44.4	45.0	46.1	46.5	47.3	46.7	47.6	48.8	9.91%	305,680	159.64

In terms of “bus journeys per head” Milton Keynes is higher than both Medway and Central Bedfordshire which have a comparable population. However, if Milton Keynes “bus journeys per head” was increased to the levels of the better performing authorities in the group, this would have a dramatic effect on the overall numbers.

Customer satisfaction with public transport varies according to how it is measured. Milton Keynes Council is one of around 70 local English Local authorities taking part in the NHT (National Highways & Transport) Survey. This includes a question on “Satisfaction with Local Bus Services” but this goes to both bus users and non-bus users. Arriva have done their own customer satisfaction surveys in Milton Keynes since 2009 while Milton Keynes participated (by joint funding) in the Passenger Focus Bus Passenger Survey (results published in March 2013). The results are shown below:

Satisfaction with Bus Services

Survey	2009	2010	2011	2012
NHT	48	39	47	48
Arriva Milton Keynes	60	51	62	62
Arriva UK Bus	64	65	64	n/a
Passenger Focus Bus Passenger Survey	-	-	-	73

The Passenger Focus figure of 73% is higher than Arriva's own figure which might reflect the inclusion of other operators or a bigger sample size. Unfortunately the reporting of this survey concentrated on the fact that, for "Overall Satisfaction with the Bus Journey", Milton Keynes came bottom of the league table, with Nottingham at the top. The reasons for this relatively low level of customer satisfaction are complex, but in discussion of the results with Passenger Focus, they highlighted the following points:

However, the survey points out a number of areas where Milton Keynes is different to the other unitaries included in the survey:

- 16-34 age group comprised 52% of those surveyed, against 40% for all unitaries (so bus users are younger in MK than elsewhere)
- Access to private transport was easy for 18% of those surveyed, against 30% for all unitaries (so bus users in MK have less access to private transport than elsewhere)
- Farepayers comprised 77% of those surveyed, against 65% for all unitaries
- 48% considered their journey to be value for money, against 53% for all unitaries, however in the 16-34 age group the figure was 46%, against 48% for all unitaries
- 44% were travelling to/from work, against 33% for all unitaries
- 59% did not have the option of travelling by other means, against 49% for all unitaries

In addition to the Bus Passenger Survey in 2012, Passenger Focus and Milton Keynes Council carried out joint research March 2010 with non-bus users to understand what stops people from using buses in Milton Keynes and what would encourage them to do so. Focus groups were held with non-users and lapsed users, and the participants were asked to make at least four bus journeys before they attended the focus groups. Five barriers to bus use were identified:

- **Journey time and service availability** - Many felt that buses took indirect routes and stopped frequently which made journeys slow. Services on some routes were thought to be too infrequent to use to get to work, or to return from a night out.
- **Familiarity with using buses** - As the research participants were not used to taking buses this made it hard for them to know where to start. Some found it difficult to plan their journey, to know which route to take, or to find a timetable.
- **On the bus** - Many of the participants did not use buses because they felt concerned for their personal security, particularly if there are not many other passengers. They were also put off by anti-social behaviour from youths, and

litter and graffiti on the bus. Teenagers in particular were worried about encountering strangers on buses; some mentioning that their parents would take them by car rather than letting them use the bus. Some just preferred driving; others expressed concerns around overcrowding.

- **Bus stops** - When trying out the bus before the focus group met, some participants had difficulty finding bus stops. Poor lighting made respondents feel vulnerable if they were using buses late at night. Bus shelters with information (particularly those with real time information displays) were well received. However, poorly maintained shelters undermined these advantages.
- **Financial** - Although bus travel is generally perceived as being cheaper than other modes, some assumed that travelling with a group of people would be more expensive than travelling by car. Participants noted that bus fares were often considerably lower in London, especially when using travelcards or Oyster cards. Fares were also felt to be confusing. Many participants did not know what discounts were available or when they applied.

The Passenger Focus report set out three suggestions to be adopted to address the barriers to bus use:

- Promote bus services and the benefits of bus travel - one way of doing this could be by giving away free bus tickets so people can try out the service.
- Start by addressing the barriers people feel more strongly about, for example by making it easier to find bus stops and service information and tackling problems with reliability.
- While introducing a newer fleet of buses was not thought to be essential; refitting and regular cleaning would help to overcome some of the stated concerns about dirty buses and graffiti.

While the extent to which these have been acted upon has been limited by availability of resources since the report was published in December 2010, the recent launch of the “Get on Board” smarter choices campaign provides a platform to build on. This has included promotion of services with vouchers, attempts to engage with employees in Milton Keynes, and pilot projects to improve wayfinding to bus stops. The “Get on Board” campaign has been funded from the Council’s Better Bus Area Grant awarded by DfT in March 2012 (see also **Annex B**).

The 2008 Bus Strategy set out a hierarchical, three level, approach to bus services in the borough, an approach that reflects what happens in practice in most urban bus networks, where there are top tier high frequency services on core routes (level 1) which attract the most investment, backed up by services of lower frequency (level 2/3). The new Bus Strategy will continue this approach:

- **Level 1 - Core Routes** connect key destinations and offer the highest level of provision and quality. These top tier routes should be capable of being operated commercially on a ‘turn up and go’ basis with a target of a 10-15 minute frequency. This will maximise interchange opportunities for those journeys that require a change of bus. Given the target frequency times and the supporting bus priority measures, these routes could be thought of as ‘bus rapid transit’.
- **Level 2 - Intermediate Routes** would offer an intermediate level of service away from the core routes operated on a relatively frequent daytime basis (a target frequency of every 20-30 minutes will apply). While it is expected that

these services can be provided on a commercial basis, there may be a need for some financial support particularly for early mornings, evenings and weekends.

- **Level 3 - Feeder Routes** are likely to be hourly or less frequent and are more likely to require some financial support particularly for early mornings, evenings and weekends, if they operate at these times.

The continued development of the core routes is in line with the LTP3 intervention Bo1 (“MK Star” bus network) which envisages a high frequency network of bus routes operating along arterial corridors and other corridors of high demand, providing excellent network coverage across the city. Unfortunately, the impact of the recession means that in practice even the core routes are not entirely commercial, while the effect of developer funding agreements means that some subsidised routes are as frequent as parts of the core routes.

There have been suggestions in recent years that Milton Keynes might be better served by a demand responsive transport (DRT) solution. The Council is working with the promoters of one such scheme which hopes to see a pilot operation up and running by the end of 2013. This would take advantage of advances in technology to allow the real time booking and scheduling of 8 to 10 seat vehicles priced between bus and taxi fares. If this is successful, it might be possible to provide the level 3 feeder services by this means but there are risks because the format is unproven.

While a key objective is the provision public transport network for the borough which is financially sustainable, it is likely that there will always be a need for the council to subsidise some bus services, whether in a conventional or less conventional format (LTP3 intervention Bo2).

At the present time around 25% of the bus network, services that would not otherwise be provided commercially, is subsidised by the Council. These are generally into the areas of lower population density in the urban area and in the rural areas of the borough. The Council’s budget in 2013/14 of £1.6m (excluding s106 funding) follows reductions in the budget of £300k in 2011/12; £211k in 2012/13 and £408k in 2013/14 with further efficiencies being sought for 2014/15. At the current time, s106 funding amounts to around a further £1m.

Historically, there have been three main categories of contracted bus service:

- Extending services beyond the normal commercial working hours, including evening and Sunday operation, in order to provide access to and from service employment, to improve access to and from commuter train services, and to cater for those going out for the evening that have no alternative transport choices.
- Services into the rural area where the council works with the neighbouring authorities to maintain the cross boundary services that form the major provision in the area.
- Services into the areas of lower population density in the urban area.

In principle, subsidised services should not be designed to compete with commercial bus services. The grid system, with the multiplicity of available routes between any two points, means that there is some end to end duplication of journeys (eg between Central Milton Keynes and Wolverton or Bletchley).

It seems that the reduction in council spending has not, so far, had a measurable impact on overall bus patronage. The savings indicated earlier have been achieved by changing the focus of subsidised services so that the majority of the spend is now on

daytime services to maintain accessibility for those areas of lower population density in the urban area, as well as taking into account value for money (based on the cost per passenger journey) and the availability of alternative services. The most recent budget related changes in 2013/14 generated the most complaints, mainly relating to the loss of evening journeys in the rural area around Olney.

- Evening contracts = 17% of total spend;
- Sunday contracts = 3%;
- Daytime services = 67%, to maintain accessibility for those areas of lower population density in the urban area;
- Rural services = 12%

The Council's "value for money" policy to date has been based on that inherited from Buckinghamshire County Council in the mid 1990s, with the intention of subsidising services up to a maximum of £2.50 per head per journey. However a fixed figure like this is inflexible and does not reflect particular needs or benefits. As a result, while cost per passenger journey (CPPJ) has been considered in reducing the budget, the accessibility impacts have been given greater weight (concentration on CPPJ would disproportionately affect the rural area).

Concessionary Fares: Under the provisions of the Transport Act 2000, as amended, the current statutory concession consists of guaranteed free off-peak (from 0930 until 2300 on weekdays and all day at weekends and on Bank Holidays) travel for older and disabled people on all local buses anywhere in England (this was introduced by the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007). It is up to the travel concession authorities (usually the same as local transport authorities) to ensure that eligible residents in the area are issued with a pass, if they request one, that is an ITSO compliant smartcard. The pass must be issued free of charge, but replacement passes can be charged for. The age at which older people qualify is linked to the female state pension age and will rise to 66 by October 2020. Eligible disabled people are those specified in the 2000 Act, as amended. Enhancements to the concessionary scheme can be offered by local authorities and currently Milton Keynes residents can travel for a flat fare of 50p before 0930 on Monday to Friday, within Milton Keynes. A similar concession was offered for travel on local rail services but this was withdrawn in April 2013.

In addition, the council operates a concessionary fares scheme for those up to the age of 19. This has been through a number of changes in recent years:

- In 2011, the scheme was rolled into the **All in 1 MK** card, developed as a result of input from the Milton Keynes Youth Parliament. The pass format is "credit card style" and it is also a proof of age card (meeting the requirements of the national PASS scheme with hologram) and a discount card for use in local shops (the discounts funded by the retailers).
- In July 2012 the scheme was extended so that those permanent residents of Milton Keynes aged under 19's NOT in full time education also qualify.
- In April 2013, the headline fare of 35p per single journey was increased to 45p, the first change since August 2003. The rail travel concession for junior pass holders was withdrawn at the same time.

In 2012/13, expenditure on all concessions was around £4.2 million made up of about £3.4m for elderly and disabled concessions, and £800k for Junior concessions.

Annexes:

Annex A - Bus Strategy Review Group - Final Report December 2002 - Progress on Recommendations

Annex B - Summary of the Better Bus Area Grant project.

Background Papers and Other Useful Links:

LTP3 - see

[http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/transport/documents/Milton Keynes LTP3 Main Report Final Draft V10 JTH.pdf](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/transport/documents/Milton_Keynes_LTP3_Main_Report_Final_Draft_V10_JTH.pdf) and pages 38-54 for the Public Transport Strategy

Bus Strategy - see

[http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/transport/documents/Bus Strategy December 2008 Final.pdf](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/transport/documents/Bus_Strategy_December_2008_Final.pdf)