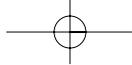




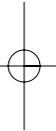
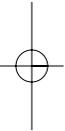
14. Rural Transport Supporting Statement

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1 Setting the Scene

1.1 Although urban areas occupy a substantial proportion of the sub-region, substantial rural areas remain. These can be classified as

- the urban fringes, and areas around dormitory towns and main roads.
- deeper rural areas, such as the southern Chew valley and the Cotswold and Mendip slopes.

Although these areas often share many characteristics, they can be distinguished in transport terms on the accessibility maps in Chapter 6 of the Local Transport Plan.

1.2 About 160,000 people live in the JLTP area's 117 rural parishes, representing 16% of the total population (2001 Census). Specific transport problems in the rural areas covered by the Plan focus on:

- Increased dependency on car use.
- Poor facilities for non-car modes.
- Lack of accessibility and social exclusion.
- Increased likelihood of people getting killed or seriously injured as a result of road accidents.

1.3 In the JLTP area there are two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) the Mendip Hills and the Cotswolds. They both have high landscape and biodiversity qualities and the respective AONB Management Plans highlight the adverse impact that traffic and highway related schemes can have on landscape and biodiversity. Traffic also impinges on other rural environments, causing increased noise and air pollution, and the reliance on the car can detract from the character of villages.

1.4 The Government's Rural Strategy 2004 sets out three priorities for rural policy:

- Economic and social regeneration – supporting enterprise across rural England, but targeting greater resources at areas of greatest need

- Social Justice for all – tackling rural social exclusion whenever it occurs and providing fair access to services and opportunities for all rural people; and
- Enhancing the value of our countryside – protecting the natural environment for this and future generations.

2. Vision

Sustainable rural communities remain at the heart of the Rural Transport Strategy.

The vision is to achieve sustainable transport provision in rural areas, whilst enhancing the local environment, integrating land use and transport planning and improving travel choice, improving accessibility and reducing social exclusion.

3. Rural Transport and Shared Priorities

Congestion

Rural residents are more likely to travel to work by car than residents living in urban areas. Increasing flows of both regular and seasonal traffic cause congestion on main roads in rural areas whilst also creating a demand for parking. Many rural roads were not constructed for the levels and type of traffic they now carry which creates increasing concerns for safety and also for highway maintenance.

Road Safety

Accident severity is generally higher in rural areas due to higher vehicle speeds and other factors. Poor pedestrian facilities and poor street lighting together with a need to safely accommodate recreational walking, cycling and horse riding are significant issues in rural areas.

Accessibility

Location of services is critical and accessibility for rural residents variable.

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Loss of a local service in rural areas can have a dramatic impact with alternatives being effectively inaccessible without a car. Access to key services is increasingly difficult with the dispersed nature of jobs, loss of local services and limited availability of public transport. This Shared Priority is considered the most important of the four in this Rural Supporting Statement, linking intrinsically with Chapter 6 of the Local Transport Plan.

Air Quality

In rural areas there is a need to promote integrated and sustainable transport and encourage modal shift away from more polluting means of travel.

Other Quality of Life issues

The quality of public spaces in villages can be eroded by poor design and maintenance of transport infrastructure. The Local Rights of Way network in the countryside contributes towards healthy living objectives. Landscape and biodiversity are major rural assets and some areas are of national importance: transport infrastructure, highway maintenance, and access to the countryside can all have a significant impact.

4. Issues

Car Ownership

- 4.1 Car use is greatest and growing fastest in rural areas. This is particularly problematic because the physical capacity of the roads to accommodate the increasing volumes of traffic is limited. Public transport is often difficult to develop in such areas; away from the main roads linking towns, demand is limited and commercial services are few. For many people who live and work in rural communities, using a car is the only practicable means of undertaking many journeys, enabling them to choose to live in rural areas and travel to towns and

cities for work, leisure, shopping and education. For others the absence of such services in rural areas leads to the ownership of a car being highly desirable. This not only increases the pressure on the road network during peak periods, but can also have a detrimental effect on the character and economic sustainability of local villages as more people choose to use external facilities, thus reducing the economic viability of local services.

- 4.2 The 2002/03 National Travel Survey shows that in large cities such as Bristol the average distance travelled is about 6,000 miles compared to over 8,000 miles for small towns and rural areas. The National Census shows that in terms of travel to work, 72% of those living in rural areas used their car, compared to 60% in urban areas. Statistics show that levels of walking and cycling to work are also much lower in rural areas than in urban areas.
- 4.3 If the Government's aspirations to promote rural economies and reduce social exclusion are to be achieved then it is imperative that a wider choice of modes/ options is available to rural residents and visitors.

Accessibility and Isolation

- 4.4 Many rural communities have few facilities close to home. There is a need to deliver transport to rural areas to ensure residents are not excluded from the normal range of services and activities. These transport problems are deeply enmeshed with the provision of facilities, in particular places of work, schools, doctor's surgeries, food shops and childcare. Problems and solutions are highlighted in the Parish Unmet Rural Transport Needs studies carried out by Community Action on behalf of the Bath and North East Somerset/North Somerset Rural Transport Partnership.
- 4.5 Car ownership in rural areas is higher than the national average, however there are many people living in rural England who either cannot drive, for reasons of age or disability, or cannot afford a car.

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Public Transport Provision

- 4.6 Public transport works best when there are large densities of population, with strong flows to major destinations, such as large towns and cities. Less densely populated areas are often poorly served particularly during evenings and weekends and often rely on heavily subsidised services. Increasing costs and reduced funding leave local authorities facing the pressure of commercial bus service withdrawals. Even though funds have been made available through Rural Bus Challenge and Rural Bus Subsidy Grant to support rural bus services, problems remain and the Councils have to look towards more cost effective and innovative solutions in these areas. Current experience with the Chew Valley Explorer bus service, for which Rural Bus challenge funding is now ending, is a salutary example: journeys satisfying travel to work demands look likely to survive, but off-peak journeys may not. The four Councils in the JLTP area currently fund a variety of demand responsive services including Community Transport, Dial-a-Ride, and Taxi Sharing.
- 4.7 Rail provides a useful link to destinations further afield and provides an opportunity for businesses and especially tourism in rural areas. However, the network is sparse and access to the few stations within the JLTP area is sometimes difficult.

Tourism and Leisure

- 4.8 Visitors are attracted to rural areas mainly because of the quality of the local environment such as wildlife sites, village conservation areas and beautiful landscapes. Avon Wildlife Trust has 14 reserves in the area. However, visitor and rural traffic is a growing problem causing congestion and pollution in some areas. There is an increasing need to protect our rural areas, particularly the AONBs and other designated areas. Councils need to explore innovative ways for tourists to move around the countryside in a more sustainable, less car-dependent way. Past

initiatives in the information field – eg leaflets on walks accessible by bus – need to be repeated.

- 4.9 For attractions in rural areas, providing new services can have two-way benefits enabling city and town residents to access the countryside, and rural residents to access the town or city. However, tourism is a major source of income and employment for the areas and is therefore an important part of the rural economy. These interactions will grow as growing urban incomes make rural leisure more popular; and farm diversification creates more attractions for leisure pursuits.
- 4.10 Rural leisure attractions in the Plan area are very varied and numerous. They cover:
- recreational walking – Cotswolds, Mendips, urban fringe footpaths, Severn Estuary coastal footpath, iron age hillforts, country parks, Cleeve Hill, Tickenham Ridge
 - water facilities – sailing, fishing: River Avon, Chew Valley Lake, Bristol Channel shore
 - historic houses – Clevedon Court, Tyntesfield, Prior Park, Dyrham
 - garden centres
 - other sports facilities – dry slope skiing, paintballing, motor bike scrambling, stock car racing
 - All such facilities require car parking provision; the National Trust lead the field in encouraging the use of public transport for visiting Prior Park and Tyntesfield.

Road Safety

- 4.11 Up to a quarter of Killed and Serious Injured casualties occur in rural areas. Vehicle speeds are typically higher on derestricted roads and therefore lead to greater severity in accidents. Pedestrians are often poorly served in rural areas and villages, especially where major roads split communities. Walking, cycling and horse riding are popular rural activities which do not mix well with heavy and/ or fast

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traffic, yet there is limited scope for providing segregated facilities for such modes due to insufficient space and the desire to preserve the rural character of the area. Poor street lighting and lack of facilities are also factors which affect levels of road safety in these areas.

- 4.12 Rural roads present different problems to those of urban roads and often require different solutions. Special attention needs to be paid to rural accident concentration sites such as major road junctions.

Regional Development Agency and the Commission for Rural Communities

- 4.13 The SW of England Regional Development Agency will be reviewing the transport work that was previously undertaken by the Countryside Agency such as The Vital Villages Programme and The Rural Transport Partnerships. Despite the introduction of Rural Renaissance, it presently remains unclear how projects will be funded in the longer term although it is understood that the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) set up in April 2005 will continue some of the work of the Countryside Agency.

Freight on Rural Routes

- 4.14 Rural roads were not designed to accommodate large lorries and the use of them on rural roads can cause problems for residents and visitors alike. The narrowness of some roads can cause problems for larger vehicles and there are often concerns about the problems of "rat running" along unsuitable roads, as the weight and width of these vehicles along inappropriate routes can damage the road surface and soft verges.
- 4.15 Through the work of the South West Regional Freight Forum and the Bristol and Neighbouring Authorities Freight Quality Partnership (FQP) a Regional Freight Map is being produced to encourage large vehicles to use the most appropriate routes. The EU Working Time

Directive that came into being in April 2005 has also put increased pressure on the availability of suitable rest areas for drivers, which is being investigated through the FQP. These issues are explored further in the JLTP Freight Supporting Statement.

Walking and Cycling

- 4.16 Walking and cycling is important not only for access to local services by residents, particularly for those without access to a car, but also for the many visitors that enjoy the opportunity to walk and cycle in the countryside.
- 4.17 However, high traffic volumes combined with narrow roads means that cycling and walking are not always considered safe on rural routes. Networks for cyclists and walkers, with links between key locations and between rural and urban areas, are incomplete, and in some cases need higher use, partly through promotion, to survive in the longer term.

Rural Environment and Transport

- 4.18 Information about the effects of transport on the rural environment is contained in the SEA Environment Report for this LTP. On main roads, noise and pollution can affect areas 3km from the carriageway itself. Figure 3 in the Environment Report shows areas within 500m of main roads in



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relation to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and wildlife sites, and research undertaken on environmental effects of traffic makes it clear that impact of transport on biodiversity in the Plan area is already quite extensive.

5. Delivery Programme in the Plan Period 2001/02 to 2005/06

5.1 During the period of the first LTPs the Councils have:

- Provided revenue support for a range of non-commercial rural bus services,
- making optimum use of Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and Rural Bus Challenge funding.
- Worked to maintain and expand community transport and dial-a-ride services, aided by Rural Bus Challenge, and other sources of funding.
- Enhanced rural bus stops with raised kerbs, new flags and shelters.
- Worked with partners to enhance access to the countryside through better information, innovative bus services, promotion of rail services, rights of way improvements and development of new cycle routes.
- Introduced traffic calming and other measures to reduce the adverse impact of traffic on villages, the JLTP area's two AONBs and the wider countryside.
- Provided new footways and speed limits in villages to improve safety.
- Implemented a range of local safety schemes.
- Worked with rural schools to develop travel plans and carried out safer routes projects.
- Carried out regular maintenance of rural highways, implemented structural carriageway and footway schemes and

maintenance schemes for bridges, retaining walls and other structures.

6. Good Practice

Fare Car – Bath and North East Somerset.

Fare Car is an innovative public transport service available to residents living in the rural areas to the north east of Bath including Langridge and St Catherine. It provides a safe and friendly shared taxi service at special rates. It is operated by Bath Taxis with financial support from Bath & North East Somerset Council. In view of the general decline of conventional rural bus services and the high levels of funding required for most Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) schemes, taxi bus schemes such as Fare Car are somewhere between a conventional bus service and a DRT scheme. These schemes are particularly well suited to rural areas and are much cheaper to run than most DRT services.

Fare Car is available to everyone who lives in the designated Fare Car Zone. Passengers can travel from their home address to and from Bath City Centre. On Wednesdays and Fridays two journeys are available from the rural area into Bath, and two journeys are available back from Bath to the rural area.



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7. Strategy

7.1 Between 2006 and 2011 the JLTP will seek to:

- provide local solutions which maintain the character of rural areas.
- safeguard and promote local services such as health and education to prevent significant traffic generation.
- encourage public transport and community transport, cycling and walking as alternatives which reduce the impact of traffic on the environment.
- develop policies and take action to enhance the environment including appropriate traffic management, highway maintenance and land use policies.
- improve access for all through more integrated and sustainable travel modes including access to the countryside.
- further develop the National Cycle Network and other walking, riding and cycling routes.
- maintain and develop the Public Rights of Way network.
- encourage integration between urban and rural bus services and between towns and other key locations.
- encourage more community transport schemes to provide the flexibility and responsiveness needed in rural or remote areas where there are smaller, scattered populations and people need to make diverse trips.
- take up new opportunities to develop more flexible routes, demand responsive, or area- based services in rural areas to meet local needs.
- expand existing Dial-A-Ride schemes to serve more rural areas: see the Community Transport Supporting Statement.
- consider careful planning of traffic management measures in order to protect the unique character of villages and the countryside.

- improve the “quality of life” through schemes for managing speed and traffic volumes in rural areas.
- investigate measures to direct traffic from sensitive sites and routes and encourage the use of more sustainable modes along these routes : see Freight Supporting Statement
- encourage the use of appropriate demand management measures at overcrowded visitor sites.
- encourage more sustainable travel for visitors by marketing and promoting more travel information.
- encourage the development of travel plans for villages and visitor attractions to reduce traffic and congestion problems.
- Continue working with local FQPs to identify problems with large vehicles in rural areas.

8. Targets

The Rural Transport Strategy will contribute towards or influence:

BV223, 224a, 224b and 187: road and footway maintenance.

BV99x, y, z: road casualties.

BV102 bus patronage.

BV104 bus satisfaction.

LTP1a, 1b, 1c accessibility.

LTP3: cycling.

LTP4: mode share of journeys to school.

LTP5: bus punctuality;

Local 1: rail patronage.