

HUNTINGDON BUS STATION
(Report by Head of Environment & Transport)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Development and transport proposals in and around Huntingdon town centre could have a significant impact on the future supply of, and demand for, bus services. The location and layout of the bus station serving the town also can have a significant impact on the bus services provided and their patronage.
- 1.2 In order to better understand the impact of the town centre developments, traffic management arrangements and the siting of the bus station the Council commissioned transport consultants Steer Davies Gleave to undertake a study into bus patronage and services in Huntingdon. A copy of the report of the study is available in the Members Room.
- 1.3 This report informs Cabinet of the consultants' key findings and makes recommendations with regard to the siting of the bus station.

2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS REGARDING SERVICES

- 2.1 The consultants concluded that provision for buses is currently poor in terms of traffic management. The layout of the ring road adds unnecessary mileage and reduces reliability of bus services. This endorses the conclusions of the adopted Huntingdon and Godmanchester Transport Strategy.
- 2.2 The quality of passenger facilities also was considered to be poor when compared to best practice.
- 2.3 Nonetheless, the consultants consider that the target, contained in the Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan, of 10% growth in bus patronage for market towns in the period to 2011 is achievable in Huntingdon. This will require completion of the traffic management proposals identified in the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Transport Strategy as well as improvements to the quality of the town centre bus facilities.
- 2.4 The consultants view is that the Cambridge to Huntingdon Guided Bus provides an opportunity to offer a step-change in the quality of public transport on the most important bus corridor in the town, and associated bus priority proposals for the on-street section between Hinchingsbrooke, Huntingdon town centre and St Ives should be supported.
- 2.5 Proposals to improve bus facilities at the rail station during 2005 will help to enhance interchange facilities there and improve the level of bus service to the rail station.

- 2.6 A further strategic proposal raised in the Local Transport Plan is the provision of a Park & Ride site on the periphery of Huntingdon potentially to provide services to Cambridge and a local service to Huntingdon.
- 2.7 Given the availability of public and private parking in the centre of Huntingdon and current policies to accommodate growing demand for car parking, the consultants believe that Park & Ride for Huntingdon will not be viable in the short or medium term. Park & Ride focused on Huntingdon should only be considered if there is a change in parking policy which seeks to restrict the supply of town centre parking and an increase in its price.
- 2.8 In relation to traffic management proposals, a proposed contra-flow bus lane connecting George Street with the bus station will significantly improve the journey time and reliability of services from the Brampton Road corridor and will be an important addition to bus provision in the town centre. Delivery of this bus lane has a significant bearing on the most appropriate location for the bus station.
- 2.9 The consultants considered assisting bus movement in the centre of Huntingdon by making St Mary's Street / Hartford Street two-way for buses in association with the Chequers Court development's new access and proposed contra flow lanes in Nursery Road. Given the constraints on this link, the consultants have concluded that an effective solution cannot be delivered
- 2.10 The construction of a new A14 south of Huntingdon early in the next decade may allow the existing alignment to be downgraded and integrated into the local road network. This may assist in reducing the need for locally-derived through traffic to travel along the inner ring road. More detailed modelling work would be required to confirm this, but it may present an opportunity to reallocate road space in the town centre away from the car towards bus, pedestrians and other users in order to 'lock in' the benefits of this investment.
- 2.11 Again, detailed modelling work will be required to ensure that the new road network, comprising the downgraded existing A14 and a potential new link road between Brampton Road and Stukeley Road as part of the West of Town Centre redevelopment does not generate congestion and that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that buses have good priority in these locations.

3. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS REGARDING THE BUS STATION

- 3.1 A key element of improving bus provision is the location and specification of town centre bus facilities: specifically, whether the existing bus station can be disposed of or reduced in size in order to make way for development, with layover and other operational elements pushed out to a less central site.
- 3.2 The consultants consider that a high quality bus station facility is vital to improving future provision, as poor boarding facilities and access to bus services in the town centre are currently a major impediment to the quality of bus provision.

- 3.3 In view of the traffic management constraints the consultants have concluded that there are only two suitable potential sites: the existing bus station site or a location in Chequers Court (a facility at the existing Pathfinder House site is too remote from the town centre and difficult to access for buses).
- 3.4 The nature of the traffic management system and the prevailing congested conditions, coupled with the predominance of inter-urban services means that most services will continue to terminate in the centre of Huntingdon (as opposed to through services) and that recovery and retiming for buses will be required in the centre.
- 3.5 It is difficult to identify any other sites suitable for layover other than at the existing bus station. The dis-benefits of wasted mileage, additional traffic circulation and the need to accommodate vehicles laying over at another location mean that it is far more effective to have layover facilities within the current station site. However, there may be some justification for tightening up on permissible layover periods.
- 3.6 If the Chequers Court site were selected, it is unlikely that there would be adequate space for layover on the station site. Layover would be needed close by and a potential site exists on the corner plot of Nursery Road and Hartford Road.
- 3.7 The consultants assess that the existing bus station site is the preferred option, because it provides an effective space for operating bus services, has good accessibility to the ring road and is familiar to users. If the facility is redesigned there may be an opportunity to allow some developable land to be released (possibly for a Tourist Information Centre or other community facility).
- 3.8 Environmental improvements on a reconfigured site could also improve the appearance of this gateway into the town centre.
- 3.9 The Walden Road bus contra-flow will significantly reduce wasted bus mileage accessing the station, providing journey time savings, reliability improvements and encouraging operators to increase service frequencies.
- 3.10 Chequers Court has the potential to be an effective location (in terms of reducing wasted mileage, as well as being very central to the new planned retail development). However, if a two-way bus operation on St Mary's Street / Hartford Road cannot be achieved, then the Chequers Court site only offers better access to buses than the existing bus station if the direction of travel along this link is reversed (i.e. southbound from Hartford Road to St Mary's Street).

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Huntingdon is well served by public transport and its patronage can be increased by the provision of high quality facilities for bus passengers. The consultants have confirmed that road improvements proposed in the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Transport Strategy offer real benefits to bus operators.

- 4.2 There are demonstrable operational benefits to the retention of a town centre bus station providing space for recovery and retiming for buses.
- 4.3 Further work, completed since the completion of the consultants report, has demonstrated that it is unlikely that all the operational requirements for the town's principal bus facility could be met as part of the Chequers Court development. In the circumstances the consultants' preference for the retention of the existing site is further supported.
- 4.4 More detailed engineering and urban design work on a new station layout at the existing site will be able to determine whether an ancillary land use can be accommodated on the site as well as identifying potential environmental improvements.
- 4.5 Subject to Cabinet supporting the retention of the bus station on its existing site it is proposed that the following variations be made to the draft MTP –
- Huntingdon Temporary Bus Station (MTP 607) - £26k be converted to revenue to enable a feasibility study to be completed for a new bus station layout and the remaining £200k capital provision deleted.
- 4.6 Completing a feasibility study in 2005/06 will enable Cabinet to take a more informed view on the scheme Huntingdon Bus Station (MTP 625) which currently is included in the draft MTP with capital provision of £480k in 2009/10.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) note the findings of the consultants study;
 - b) agree to retain the bus station on its existing site;
 - c) authorise a feasibility study into an improved bus station layout; and
 - d) agree, subject to their decision in respect of recommendation (c) above, to vary the draft MTP as proposed at paragraph 4.5 to enable a feasibility study to be completed in 2005/06.

Background papers

Huntingdon and Godmanchester Market Town Transport Strategy – HDC/CCC

Study Into Services and Patronage in Huntingdonshire – Steer Davies Gleave

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