

<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
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## Rural Transport Strategy – Consultation and Implementation

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### Summary

This report sets out in detail the results of the public and stakeholder consultation exercise undertaken on the proposed Rural Transport Strategy (RTS) and gives a financial summary for the implementation of the strategy and its impact on the overall passenger transport budget.

The aim of the RTS is to improve accessibility for people living in rural areas; providing better transport to help people reach key services and facilities. The strategy includes:

- Improved inter-urban core bus services;
- Implementation of ‘*Shropshire Link*’ demand responsive transport services; and
- Improved integration between Shropshire Link, the core bus network and rail services.

A comprehensive consultation exercise was undertaken with the aim of reaching bus and non-bus users and other stakeholders involved in public transport in Shropshire. Overall the strategy was seen as a positive move towards developing sustainable transport solutions for rural areas. The proposed improvements to the core bus network were welcomed and the development of the Shropshire Link services and the associated improvement to the level of service and improved choice were well received.

In 2008/09 the part year implementation of the Rural Transport Strategy will cost an additional **£168,000**. The on-going additional revenue cost of the Rural Transport Strategy is estimated to be **£188,000** in 2009/10 and **£180,000** in 2010/11. This cost reduction is due to increased revenue from fares on the enhanced interurban services. The overall capital cost of implementing the strategy is approximately £835,000, the majority of which is expenditure on new vehicles.

The proposed strategy was considered by the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel on 15 November 2007. Since the presentation of this report it has been necessary to review the overall passenger transport in the light of projected financial pressures identified for 2008/09, including the Rural

Transport Strategy. This detailed review has unfortunately delayed reporting to Cabinet and Council by approximately 2 months which will subsequently delay the implementation of the Rural Transport Strategy from the planned June 2008 start date to August 2008.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Rural Transport Strategy as proposed and commend it to Council for implementation.

## REPORT

### Background

1. The proposed Rural Transport Strategy (RTS) is the outcome of a detailed review of rural transport services. The outline strategy was approved in principle by Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2006, and formed part of the wider Accessibility Strategy in the Local Transport Plan for Shropshire, published in March 2006.
2. Progress with the RTS was reported to the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2007. This report gave full details of the proposals. In brief, the recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel were:
  - To review all data within the report.
  - To under take a full public consultation on the strategy.
  - For officers to be 100% confident in the timeline for implementation and change if necessary.
  - For officers to give further consideration to how Sunday services could be incorporated into the strategy.
  - For officers to give further consideration to interchange between Shropshire Link services and rail.
3. On 27<sup>th</sup> June 2007 Cabinet agreed to progress the Strategy and asked officers to take account of the recommendations from the Economy & Environment Scrutiny Panel.

### Progress

4. The following paragraphs report on progress against each of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel recommendations.

### **Implementation Timetable**

5. The implementation timetable of the strategy was extended with the aim of operating the new services from June 2008. This extended timetable would allow sufficient time to plan and undertake a full consultation on the proposal and to take account of the likely delivery time for any vehicles purchased for the new services. However, as a result of the need to undertake a detailed review of the overall passenger transport budget, due to identified pressures, it has been necessary to amend the proposed start date to August 2008.

### **Sunday Services**

6. The Sunday bus network in Shropshire was designed to run on the core bus routes between the market towns and Shrewsbury. The aim of this network was to allow links between all the main urban centres via an interchange at Shrewsbury. However, the Sunday network has seen a number of service reductions in recent years due to poor patronage and high costs so that only two thirds of the original network remains. The following services continue to operate at a reduced frequency on Sundays:

- 70 – Oswestry – Shrewsbury
- 436 – Bridgnorth – Shrewsbury
- 501 – Ellesmere – Shrewsbury
- 553 – Bishop's Castle – Shrewsbury
- 64 – Hanley - Shrewsbury

7. Under the Rural Transport Strategy it is not proposed to alter this existing Sunday bus network.
8. At this stage it is not proposed to operate the Shropshire Link services on a Sunday. However, consideration may be given to this in the future, when demand for such services has been assessed and if budgets allow.

### **Rail Interchanges**

9. One of the key aims of the Rural Transport Strategy is to improve integration between transport modes and to widen the transport options and choice of destinations. Rail plays a key role in meeting these aims and integration between the Shropshire Link services and rail services will open these options to people in rural areas.
10. Connections with trains will be managed by the booking and co-ordination centre, in the same way as connections to the core bus network are managed. If a user calls the booking line with a journey

request to meet a particular train, and the journey can be accommodated within existing bookings on the service, it will be.

### **Review of data**

11. All of the data detailed within the proposals has been under constant review throughout the development of the strategy. A further review will be undertaken before the existing fixed routes bus services are deregistered, pending the implementation of Shropshire Link services.
12. Particular concern was shown over the reported numbers of passengers travelling on local bus service 553 between Bishop's Castle and Plox Green. Surveys have been undertaken to confirm these figures and the results are detailed in Table 1 and discussed later in this report.

### **Public and Stakeholder Consultation**

13. The aim of the consultation was to ensure the views and opinions of Shropshire people are fully reflected in the final planning of the Strategy. An extensive community consultation was undertaken to gather information from existing public transport users and non-users, Parish, Town and District Councils and a variety of other stakeholders.
14. The communication strategy did this through three work streams:
  - Shropshire Bus Road Show
  - Stakeholder Consultation
  - Local Bus and Community Transport Operators
15. The road show visited the market towns and other main conurbations of Shropshire to consult with local residents and visitors. The road show was undertaken using a vehicle with a similar specification to the ones proposed for use on the new Shropshire Link services. This enabled consultees to get a 'real' feel of the service and the vehicle acted as a mobile advertisement, helping to draw people into the consultation. The road shows were, wherever possible, held on the same day of the week that the existing local buses services come into the market town.
16. Consultation with stakeholders was undertaken through a number of presentations and included Parish, Town and District Councils, neighbouring authorities, Age Concern, the Primary Care Trust and the Senior Citizens forum. A presentation of the strategy was given to stakeholders on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2007.
17. Local Bus and Community Transport Operators have been kept informed of progress with the strategy since the completion of the initial draft in February 2007. A presentation was given on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2007 and included details about tendering for the new services.

18. At all of the events attendees were provided with documentation about the strategy and were encouraged to comment by completing a feedback form with a free post envelope. A brief summary of some of the key concerns is provided here. Detailed results from the consultation are given in Appendix 1.

### **Consultation Results**

19. The consultation sought an overall opinion of the strategy but also gathered information on the key aspects including:
- Core bus service improvements.
  - Shropshire Link services.
  - Proposed vehicles.
20. Approximately 750 people visited the road show over the three week period between Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August and Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September. In total 191 responses were received using the response forms distributed as part of the consultation.
21. A number of other written responses were received from agencies and authorities with an interest in transport in Shropshire.

### **Core Bus Services**

The majority of respondents supported the proposed improvements to core bus routes. 89% either supported or strongly supported the proposals, whilst just 1.5% objected.

22. The main concern regarding improvements to the core bus network came from residents who would lose a regular bus service through the introduction of a more direct route for the Shrewsbury – Wem – Whitchurch service.
23. As a result of this concern consideration has been given to how this service could be operated better to meet the needs of the local communities but also to meet the aims of core bus service element of the strategy. This has now been achieved by a compromise proposal to operate alternate journeys along the existing route with express style, more direct, journeys in between.
24. The Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel raised particular concern about the proposals for removing subsidy from supported journeys on the 553 between Bishop's Castle and Plox Green. A number of consultees also perceived that there would be a reduction in the level of service on this corridor.
25. These existing journeys are very poorly patronised and heavily subsidised by the County Council. The subsidy per passenger trip on this service is currently £65.45 one way.

- 26. To check the accuracy of the data on the numbers of passengers carried on these subsidised journeys new surveys were undertaken. The results are shown in Table 1. The survey confirmed the very low patronage levels and average of less than 4 per journey.
- 27. However, it should be noted that the level of service between Bishop’s Castle and Shrewsbury is not being reduced, although the way in which some of the journeys are delivered will be changed. These off peak subsidised journeys will be replaced by a Shropshire Link service.
- 28. The results from the survey show that the numbers of passengers travelling can be accommodated on the Shropshire Link service and the provision of a more flexible form of transport for these journeys means it will be possible to serve more villages along the corridor than the current fixed route service. It is hoped this will attract more passengers and make better use of the subsidy that is currently going into these journeys.

Date	Route	Departure Time	Numbers Travelling	Notes
25-10-07	Bishop’s Castle – Plox Green	1339 from Bishop’s Castle	1	Boarded at White Grit for Travel to Shrewsbury
25-10-07	Plox Green – Bishop’s Castle	1415 from Shrewsbury	0	No passengers boarded or alighted the vehicle
26-10-07	Plox Green – Bishop’s Castle	1015 from Shrewsbury	3	Passengers were on the bus for travel to Bishop’s Castle
			1	Passenger boarded at Llan Turn for travel to Bishop’s Castle
26-10-07	Bishop’s Castle – Plox Green	1139 from Bishop’s Castle	5	(2 adults & 3 children) boarded at Bishop’s Castle departed at Shrewsbury
			2	Boarded at Bishop’s Castle departed Hope
			2	Boarded Gravels departed Shrewsbury
			1	Boarded Hope departed Shrewsbury

TABLE 1: Passenger Numbers Local Bus Service 553

- 29. It should be noted that the proposal is to withdraw the subsidy from the existing fixed route journeys. If the operator chooses to continue to operate these journeys, the Shropshire Link service will only need to be available to provide for other journeys.

**Shropshire Link Services**

- 30. Maps were supplied depicting the Shropshire Link operating areas at each of the Road Shows and within the consultation documents. Consultees were given the opportunity to comment on the areas of operation, the proposed destinations and the times the services would be available.
- 31. Nearly 94% of respondents supported the idea of introducing more flexible bus services in rural areas and 83% supported the specific ‘Shropshire Link’ proposals for their area.
- 32. We also asked people if the proposed travel destination for each area was the one to which they would wish to travel. The majority, 84% of respondents, said they would want to travel to the proposed destinations.

Also 57% did want to travel to the specified town on the proposed days of the week; however, 36% were unsure.

33. Some consultees made specific comments on the areas of operation and the days of the week on which the services are proposed to operate. The times, areas and destinations of the Shropshire Link services have, as far as possible, been timetabled to reflect the existing public transport network.
34. As a result of the consultation responses further consideration was given to the areas of operation and the times and days when the services are available. The operating areas for a number of the Shropshire Link services have subsequently been amended to take into account these responses.
35. It is also proposed to formally register each Link service over a far greater area than depicted in the proposals, to enable any desirable modifications to be made once the service has start to operate without the requirement to give 56 days notice to the Traffic Commissioner.
36. Some concern was shown around the ability to get to appointments without the security of a guaranteed journey or predictable arrival time. As with other journeys on the Shropshire Link services, where journeys can be accommodated to meet with appointment times they will be. The inclusion of the booking and co-ordination centre in the strategy means that where these journeys are not provided for, callers will be offered alternative means of transport which could include Community Cars or Community Transport.
37. This more personalised approach is an important part of the overall strategy and will help to meet demand that can not be met by the public transport network.
38. A number of those responding also asked for the services to be extended to include evenings and weekends. The core bus network is operated at the times of day when demand for travel is at its greatest, thus providing the best service possible for the majority of people and achieves the best value for money in terms of SCC subsidy.
39. Demand for services outside of these times is a lot less. SCC have a finite budget for public transport services and need to concentrate resources at peak times.
40. The proposed times of operation for the Shropshire Link services are designed, wherever possible, to reflect the operating times of the existing local bus services they will replace. These do not currently operate during the evening or at weekends. Some areas will gain a Saturday service on the Shropshire Link network.
41. The implementation of the strategy is in response to increasing demands for improvements to rural bus services to enable access to key services

and facilities. The Rural Transport Strategy could ultimately generate sufficient passengers and revenue to introduce a wider network of evening and weekend services.

### **Concessionary Fares**

42. It is a requirement to accept concessionary travel passes on all registered local bus services. The Shropshire Link services will be registered as local bus services and therefore bus passes will be valid.
43. From April 2008 the statutory minimum for concessionary travel is changing to allow nationwide travel using local bus networks. Therefore visitors to Shropshire who are eligible for a bus pass will also be able to travel at no cost on the new services.
44. It is hoped to implement multi-operator through ticketing as part of the launch of the strategy and to offer a variety of ticketing products. This will include monthly passes and other travel options. Further work will be required with successful operators before implementing.

### **Coordination Between Shropshire Link and Core Routes**

45. Under the strategy it is proposed to deliver Shropshire Link passengers into the core bus network for onward travel to their final destination. This will enable more efficient operation of the Shropshire Link services by preventing the smaller vehicle having to enter congested market towns.
46. Some concern was shown over the ability to guarantee these connections. The booking and co-ordination centre will have a role to play in ensuring these connections are made.
47. As a result of these concerns it is proposed to give the booking centre a greater co-ordination role in providing the services and actively managing the connections. The opening times of the booking and co-ordination centre have also been extended to be open at all times whilst the vehicles are in service.
48. Shropshire Link journeys requiring a connection onto the core network will be scheduled into the vehicle routing software, timed to arrive at the bus stop a few minutes before the core bus service is due to arrive. The operatives at the booking and co-ordination centre will be fully aware of all times to ensure these connections can be met.
49. Similarly, on return journeys the Shropshire Link service will be booked to meet the core bus service a few minutes before its arrival. The bus will then be waiting for the passengers on arrival. Connections with rail services will be dealt with in a similar way.
50. The upgrading of infrastructure at the designated connecting points should help to ensure the security for passengers. The booking and co-ordination centre will be manned at all times whilst the service is in

operation which will further contribute to the feeling of security around the service and enable centre staff to provide assistance if required.

51. From respondents to the consultation 72% felt it was very important to include a shelter and seat at the bus stops, 59% stated that lighting was very important, 73% thought real time information was very important and just 28% felt access to a public phone was important.

### ***Booking and Co-ordination Centre***

52. Other aspects of the consultation repeatedly highlighted the fact that the implementation of Shropshire Link services would necessitate the removal of fixed route services and mean that passengers would be required to book the service. Consultees were also advised of the maximum and minimum booking periods, of 7 days and 2 hours respectively, proposed under the strategy. 76% of respondents supported this method of booking services. However, a total of 24% were unsure or objected to this change.

### ***Shropshire Link Vehicles***

53. The use of the vehicle on the roadshow gave those attending an opportunity to get a real feel for the type of vehicle we are proposing to use on Shropshire Link services. 94% of respondents were in support for the type of vehicle.
54. The vehicle was visited by a number of community transport operators who have experience in operating in the type of environment where the Shropshire Link services will be. In general the vehicle was praised and generally perceived as meeting the requirements of the operation. However, some concern was shown over the length of the side mounted ramp and its suitability for deployment in rural locations where there may not be sufficient space or a footpath onto which the ramp can be rested.
55. The brief to potential suppliers defined the specification for the type of vehicle deemed to be the most suited in providing the Shropshire Link service. The specification included low floor access with a wheel chair ramp and other features pertaining to full compliance with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DipTAC) recommendations.
56. The Shropshire Link services will be marketed and operated as local bus services and will, in general, carry passengers currently using fixed route bus services on vehicles with 'high step' entrances. The vehicle specification reflects this and aims to give the vehicle the 'feel' of a bus rather than a specialist transport service.
57. The alternative to a ramp is a rear mounted tail lift. However, it should be considered that the majority of passengers deemed as having mobility problems are not confined to a wheelchair and therefore the use of a low floor vehicle and ramp would be more suitable. Experience from the 49

Link service suggests that passengers felt stigmatised for having to use the tail lift.

58. Health & Safety considerations mean that when using a tail lift the driver is required to ride on the lift which has obvious time constraints and requires a higher level of training. By their very design, the driver and passenger are also required to enter the road to use the lift, making them more vulnerable to a traffic accident.
59. External tail lifts are exposed to the elements and therefore require a higher level of maintenance and periodic safety checks. There is a considerable cost involved with this and a higher possibility of failure. It is hoped that all types of wheelchair and mobility scooter will be accommodated within the vehicle. However, it is recognised that some larger mobility scooters take considerably more space than traditional chairs and can weigh significantly more. Each will case will be individually assessed to ensure the safety and convenience of all users.
60. If a situation arises where an individual is unable to board a vehicle because of a specific mobility issue or local conditions, the proposed booking and co-ordination centre will be able to make alternative arrangements for transport. As with the present arrangements this is likely to be through the community transport operators or the voluntary car schemes.
61. A number of existing bus users and operators commented that the Shropshire Link vehicles should have sufficient space to accommodate shopping trolleys and luggage. The final vehicle specification will include a luggage storage area inside the vehicle and, if suitable, overhead lockers. The vehicles will also have some boot space where larger items can be accommodated.
62. Other comments asked about the possibility for transporting bicycles. The carriage of bicycles on buses has been trialled in North Shropshire and other parts of the Country with very limited success. There are concerns about securing bikes on buses to ensure the safety of bus passengers. At present there are no plans to accommodate cycles; however, if significant demand exists this can be investigated further. It is hoped bike to bus interchange can be achieved by providing cycle parking at some bus stops and interchanges.
63. One of the key aims of the strategy is to attract new users on to services by improving the profile and image of public transport and offering a quality product which is acceptable for all. The provision of a vehicle which resembles a bus rather than a specialist vehicle will assist in meeting this aim.

### ***Promotion and Marketing of Services***

64. Comments were made on the level of promotion and marketing that will be required to meet the aims and objectives of the strategy and to

instigate a successful launch of the proposed Shropshire Link service. The core services will also need to be marketed and promoted, with a wide circulation of timetables and material to ensure maximum publicity for the network.

65. It is recognised that the success of the scheme will be dependant upon the approach taken to market and promote the service. The launch of the strategy will be preceded by a comprehensive marketing campaign which will give clear guidance on how to use the Link Services and the days and areas of operation.
66. Officers will continue to make themselves available to ensure that assistance is available for anyone with queries. The proposed booking and co-ordination centre will also have a significant role to play in promoting the services.
67. In addition to the normal marketing of the services the new vehicles will be branded to act as mobile adverts for the service and to ensure they are instantly recognisable. Where possible we will also work with the operators of the core routes to present the vehicles in the Shropshire Bus livery.
68. The core bus network and other remaining services will continue to be promoted through the regular channels. This includes the distribution of area public transport guides to libraries, visitor information centres, bus stations and other places of interest.
69. The Parish, Town, District and Borough Councils will be kept up to date with changes in their areas and publicity will be provided directly.
70. The success of the consultation road show has prompted the consideration of an annual public transport road show event. It is proposed the annual road show will follow a similar format to the Rural Transport Strategy consultation road show but provide information to users and a 'Dr Bus' consultation service.
71. The marketing of all services has been incorporated into the work of the Bus Satisfaction Task Group to ensure it fits with the brand family for Shropshire Bus. This task group was set up to ensure improvements of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) including customer satisfaction with public transport information.
72. As a result of concerns over the level of publicity and marketing for the launch and on-going marketing and promotion, we have allocated additional funding to this area.
73. A one-off road show style event, similar to that undertaken for the consultation on the strategy, will be undertaken preceding the August launch of Shropshire Link. This will visit all of the major towns and villages in the County.

74. Local marketing of Shropshire Link and core service enhancements will be undertaken through the production of timetabled information and instructions on how the service will operate including the wide circulation of the booking line number. Additional advertising will also be undertaken through local newspapers, on existing bus services and at bus stops.
75. As with all public transport marketing initiatives this will be done in partnership with local bodies including parish and town councils, visitor information centres, tourist attractions and existing bus operators. The booking and coordination centre will also have a role to play in promoting these services.
76. The on-going promotion of the Shropshire Link services will be done through existing communication channels used for the promotion of public transport services. This includes the production of local travel guides, distribution of marketing and promotional material to every household in Shropshire, attendance at local shows and events and regular press articles and advertisement.

### **Other Consultation**

77. In addition to the above, Shropshire County Council officers have also given a number of presentations and received feedback from other groups and agencies including:
  - South Shropshire District Council Policy Committee
  - North Shropshire District Council Scrutiny Panel
  - Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Task & Finish Group that had been set up to look at various public transport issues
  - Age Concern
  - Shropshire County PCT
  - Senior Citizens Forum
78. A copy of the consultation documents and the display boards were also shown at the Local Let's Talk meetings.
79. Neighbouring authorities were consulted as part of the Stakeholder consultation strategy. Meetings were also held with Telford and Wrekin, Cheshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough. The strategy was also discussed with representatives from Powys CC and the Welsh Assembly as part of the partnership working with TraCC, the Mid Wales transport consortium.

### **Consultation Conclusions**

80. In general the proposed strategy was greeted with praise. Nearly 92% of respondents supported the strategy whilst just over 2% did not. 55%

considered that implementation of the strategy would make public transport much better for them.

## **Community Transport**

81. The introduction of the new Shropshire Link (DRT) services through the Rural Transport Strategy is expected to reduce the demand for community transport services. However, community transport is part of the overall strategy and it will be needed to provide for essential transport on days when the Shropshire Link service does not run, and to cater for people with significant mobility problems who are unable to use the accessible Link service buses.
82. Historically SCC have funded Community Transport (CT) organisations at around £100,000 per year (£110,140 base budget in 2007/08) on a grant basis which has not been linked to the number of passengers carried.
83. The more established schemes (for example Shrewsbury Dial a Ride) have developed sustainable funding streams. However some of the more recent established projects are coming to the end of their pump priming funding and are now struggling to secure long term funding. These schemes now need to review their operations in the context of funding that will be available in the longer term and the fact that the Shropshire Link services will be able to provide for many of the current CT customers. These schemes (for example Bridgnorth Community Bus and Church Stretton Dial a Ride) will still provide a useful service and need to receive funding from SCC base budget.
84. The objective of some community transport schemes has been for their operation to become main stream and this has been achieved by TESS in the case of the 49 Link, which will become part of the Shropshire Link network. As a result TESS will no longer operate.
85. Under the new Rural Transport Strategy it is proposed that funding for community transport schemes should be provided for essential journeys in a similar way to the existing community car scheme. The subsidy rate would provide for approximately half of the vehicle running costs with the remaining cost being met from passenger fares. Funding would also be provided to reflect the costs of operating booking lines, including the booking and coordination of community cars that is undertaken by some community transport organisations.
86. This funding formula has been applied to all the current community transport schemes and the results are set out in Appendix 4. The following should be noted:
  - The formula funding for Shrewsbury Dial a Ride is very similar to the existing level of grant funding.

- A number of community transport schemes are currently sustained on lower levels of funding than produced by the formula.
87. In light of the above and in the interest of maintaining value for money it is proposed that:
- Funding contributions from SCC should be capped at existing levels where it can be demonstrated that the community transport organisation can operate on a sustainable basis with this level of funding.
  - The Rural Transport Officer will continue to work closely with all the community transport organisations to identify other sources of funding to reduce the funding required from SCC and this will be done with an open book approach to their finances.
88. If the formula, with capping, is accepted and a small contingency of approximately 5% is provided, £151,000 will be needed to support the existing community transport schemes in Shropshire. These costs, along with the contributions to Community Cars, Shopmobility, the costs of the Roadside Information Project and the employment of a Rural Transport Officer have been built into the proposed budget strategy for 2008/09.
89. Community transport organisations are currently being advised of the formula and the implications to their organisation.

### **Financial update**

90. In June 2007 Cabinet were advised that the additional revenue required to implement the strategy would be £167,000 revenue per year, with an initial capital outlay of £643,000.
91. Since then detailed costs have been developed through the competitive tendering of the main components of the strategy including the Shropshire Link services, improvements to the core network, implementation of the booking and co-ordination centre and the tendering for 10 new vehicles.

### **Vehicles**

92. The total value of the vehicle tender was such that the process was undertaken under full European tendering regulations. Following the advertisement of the tender 60 suppliers expressed an interest and were supplied with the tender documentation. Of these 3 submitted detailed bids: Optare, Fiat and CVI.
93. The bids were evaluated by an officer panel assessing each on quality and price. Assessment of quality included compliance with the original tender specification, ability to deliver within the specified timescale, company financial standing, prior performance and results from references.

94. A further technical vehicle evaluation was undertaken by SCC's Transport Operations Group which assessed operational considerations, including servicing, mechanical suitability and reliability. A preferred supplier has been identified and the tendering panel are due to complete their evaluation and advise the successful tendered by the end of January 2008.

### ***Shropshire Link***

95. All Operators on the existing SCC framework were invited to submit tenders for the operation of the Shropshire Link services. This included approximately 150 operators including Community Transport groups, commercial bus and taxi operators and the SCC Transport Operations Group (TOG).
96. Differing levels of interest were shown across the proposed 9 Shropshire Link operating areas; 13 operators submitted bids but only 4 operators entered composite bids to provide all services. The bids were evaluated on price, quality and past performance including compliance with existing contracts. From this evaluation the SCC Transport Operations Group were considered to be the preferred supplier.

### ***Booking and Coordination Centre***

97. The supply of the booking and coordination centre function was advertised locally and nationally through the SCC website. Interested parties included existing Community Transport providers, national call centre providers and bus operators. The SCC Customer Service Centre also submitted a quotation for undertaking the work.
98. Six external compliant bids were received which were evaluated on quality and price. The SCC Customer Service Centre is the preferred supplier of this function.

### ***Overall cost***

99. This exercise has shown the current cost (assuming a full year of operation in 2008/09) of implementing the strategy would be **£195,000 in additional revenue**, (£28,000 above the original budget) and **£835,000 in capital expenditure** (£192,000 above the original budget).
100. The additional revenue funding required to implement the Rural Transport Strategy has been incorporated into the proposed 2008/09 budget strategy. Following authorisation to proceed, officers will form contracts with the preferred suppliers for the delivery of products and services in time for the August 2008 launch.
101. The additional capital funding required will be built into the Local Transport Plan capital budget.

102. Appendix 2 provides a full comparison of the current figures with the original budget presented in June 2007. Also included within the table is a brief explanation for the differences in costs for each individual element.

**Revenue Costs**

103. As shown in Appendix 2 it is estimated that the additional full year revenue cost of implementing the Rural Transport Strategy (RTS) is £195,000. However, the Year 1 costs in the below table represent a part year operation of the strategy from August 2008 to March 2009

<b>Year</b>	<b>Implementation Period</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>Year 1</b>	August 2008 to March 2009	£168,000
<b>Year 2</b>	2009 / 2010	£188,000
<b>Year 3</b>	2010 / 2011	£180,000

104. The on-going additional revenue cost of implementing the rural transport strategy is expected to reduce to £188,000 in year 2 and to approximately £180,000 in Year 3 because of the anticipated increase in the levels of patronage and fare revenue from the improvements in the core bus network. These predictions are based upon experience with improving bus services within other parts of the County. The full details are given in Appendix 3.

105. In addition to the costs of implementing the RTS, there are other significant pressures on the overall passenger transport revenue budget for 2008/09. Together with the RTS costs for a full year operation these have been predicted to be approximately £628,000 above the existing budget provision. A detailed review has been undertaken to identify options for dealing with these pressures. The proposed budget strategy for 2008/09 therefore identifies £462,000 in additional resources earmarked for Public Transport. The balance of funding will be provided by a combination of measures, undertaken within the Directorate, including some fare increases.

**Capital Costs**

106. The total capital cost for implementing the strategy is around £835,000 as shown in Appendix 2. Capital costs of £735,000 will be funded from the Local Transport Plan (LTP) passenger transport capital budget. The additional £100,000 will be financed by the sale of five vehicles which are no longer required. At this stage the replacement strategy for these new vehicles will involve the commitment of future Local Transport Plan capital funding to replace between 2 and 3 vehicles per year on an on-going basis. This would provide for a sustainable replacement programme and ensure a vehicle fleet life of between 5 and 7 years.

However consideration is also being given to alternative procurement and replacement options.

107. The bulk of the capital investment, £769,000, is for the purchase of ten new vehicles, associated equipment and vehicle branding. Shropshire Link requires nine vehicles to operate the full network, with one further vehicle to cover routine maintenance and servicing. An eleventh vehicle, taken from the existing fleet, will also be branded and equipped to be utilised by the operator as an emergency back up vehicle.

## Timetable

108. The procurement of the various elements of this strategy and the registration of the services is unfortunately a lengthy process. The timetable for implementation is outlined below. The new services are due to commence in August 2008:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Milestones</b>
February 2008	Authorisation to proceed with strategy implementation
February 2008	Successful service / vehicle suppliers notified Start Procurement of 'Shropshire Link' vehicles
February – April 2008	Work with preferred suppliers for final planning of 'Shropshire Link' areas and core route bus services improvements.
March – August 2008	Development and undertaking of marketing and promotion strategy
March – August 2008	Implementation and set-up of Bus Scheduling software and booking and co-ordination centre
March – August 2008	Installation of interchange facilities
May 2008	Shropshire Link and Core bus route registration period
May 2008	Delivery of new DRT buses
June - July 2008	Vehicle preparation and network testing.
August 2008	Launch of new services.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

15 November 2007 – Report to Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel: ‘Rural Transport Strategy – Consultation’

27 June 2007 – Report to Cabinet: ‘Rural Transport Strategy – Progress Report’

19 June 2007 – Report to Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel: ‘Rural Transport Strategy – Progress report’

15 February 2007 – Report to Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel: ‘Rural Transport-Progress report’

March 2006 – Local Transport Plan for Shropshire 2006/07 – 2010/11

7 February 2006 – Report to Cabinet: ‘Rural Transport’

12 January 2006 – Report of Public and Community Transport Working Group to E&E Scrutiny Panel

**Human Rights Act Appraisal**

The recommendations of this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

**Environmental Appraisal**

The recommendations in this report are likely to have a beneficial impact on the natural environment by reducing the number of miles travelled on rural roads by large buses carrying few people. By replacing large unsuitable buses with smaller more efficient vehicles and only operating vehicles when there is passenger demand there should be a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, improvement in local air quality and less noise and other impacts on rural roads and communities.

**Risk Management Appraisal**

The financial implications associated with implementing the Rural Transport Strategy are still being considered. Tenders for operating the Shropshire Link services and the Booking and Coordination Centre were received week ending 26 October and are currently being evaluated. The market is volatile and costs to date have been estimates only. If costs are higher than anticipated or projected savings are not achieved then services provided will have to be reduced accordingly. A separate financial update report will be prepared as an exempt item and is due to be circulated in advance of the meeting.

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

Consultation has been undertaken with the general public, district, borough, town and parish councils and stakeholder organisations and interest groups. The details of this consultation are contained in this report.

**Cabinet Member** Councillor J. Everall

**Local Member** All

- Appendices:** Appendix 1 – Consultation Feedback  
 Appendix 2 – Cost Comparison  
 Appendix 3 – Strategy Implementation Costs  
 Appendix 4 – Proposed Funding for Community Transport Schemes

**APPENDIX 1****Consultation Feedback****Responses to questionnaire**

In total 206 responses were received.

**Demographic data**

<b>Age</b>	
16-25	2%
26-59	15%
60-75	47.5%
Over 75	35.5%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	30%
Female	70%
<b>Do you possess a bus pass entitling you to free transport?</b>	
Yes	72%
<b>Location of respondents by district</b>	
Bridgnorth	10%
North Shropshire	17%
Oswestry	10%
Shrewsbury & Atcham	9%
South Shropshire	51%
Outside county	2%

**Responses to questions**

<b>How often do you use bus services in Shropshire</b>	<b>%</b>
Almost every day	19.4
About once a week	46.1
About once a month	17.3
Once or twice a year	9.9
Less than once a year	7.3

<b>What sort of journeys do you usually use the bus for?</b>	<b>%</b>
To get to shops or services	46.5
To get to work, college or school	3.8
To get to medical appointments	16.7
For a day out	27.5
Other	5.6

<b>Do you support the proposed improvements to core bus services</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly support	60.0
Support	29.7
Not sure	8.7
Object	0.5

Strongly object	1.0
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<b>Do you support the idea of introducing more flexible bus services in rural areas?</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly support	61.9
Support	32.5
Not sure	4.6
Object	1.0
Strongly object	0.0

<b>Do you support the specific 'Shropshire Link' proposals for your area?</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly support	50.0
Support	33.3
Not sure	13.9
Object	1.7
Strongly object	1.1

<b>Would you want to travel to the town or towns proposed to be served by your local Shropshire Link service</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	83.4
No	3.9
Not sure	12.7

<b>Would you want to travel to town on the days of the week proposed for your local Shropshire Link service</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	57.3
No	5.8
Not sure	36.8

<b>Do you support the suggestions for the Shropshire Link booking office?</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly support	40.9
Support	35.4
Not sure	19.9
Object	2.2
Strongly object	1.7

<b>How important would it be to you to have the following waiting facilities at key connection points and core route bus stops?</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Shelter and seats</i></b>	
Very Important	72.1
Quite important	22.9
Not sure	1.1
Not very important	3.9
Unimportant	0.0
<b><i>Lighting</i></b>	
Very Important	59.2
Quite important	25.2

Not sure	4.8
Not very important	10.2
Unimportant	0.7
<b><i>Real time information</i></b>	
Very Important	72.9
Quite important	16.3
Not sure	5.4
Not very important	4.2
Unimportant	1.2
<b><i>Access to a public telephone</i></b>	
Very Important	28.8
Quite important	32.2
Not sure	13.7
Not very important	20.5
Unimportant	4.8

<b>Do you support the types of vehicles proposed for use on the Shropshire Link service?</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly support	70.2
Support	23.9
Not sure	5.3
Object	0.5
Strongly object	0.0

<b>Do you think the new proposals would make public transport services in Shropshire...</b>	<b>%</b>
Much better for you	55.1
Slightly better for you	25.3
No different for you	15.7
Worse for you	2.2
Much worse for you	1.7

<b>Overall do you support the proposals?</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	91.7
No	2.2
Not sure	6.1

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
Mrs A H Morgan	Clerk	Pulverbatch Parish Council	Would like smaller buses that travel much slower than present.	The RTS will implement a network of 9, 16 seat, fully accessible vehicles which are smaller than vehicles currently operating the fixed route services. These vehicles will be more suited to the environment in which they will be operating.
Ian Hutchinson	Clerk	West Felton Parish Council	Fully support enhancements in principle.	
Jim Davies	Public Transport Manager	Herefordshire Council	No direct comment on proposals, however cautioned that they have had negative experience of introducing book-ahead services. Unpopular with customers and cost prohibitive.	The response to the RTS has been very popular with people attending the consultation events
Peter Appleton	Deputy Chief Executive	North Shropshire District Council	Support the proposals. With the following comments:	
			All buses should be low floor ASAP	All of the vehicles implemented on the Shropshire Link Services will be low floor and easily accessible. Any new vehicles implemented on subsidised elements of the core network will also be low floor. It is an aspiration of SCC for all vehicles within the Shropshire fleet to be low floor. We have regular meetings with Operators to look at options to achieve this.
			Straightening of routes should not adversely affect communities on the route	The straightening of routes will not adversely affect communities on the routes. The service we intend to straighten, the 511/513, will still serve all of the towns and villages at the current frequency; however on every other journey the service will travel more directly offering an express type service.
			Changes should not negatively impact commuters	Commuters will still be able to use the core network. On core routes where the services are due to be upgraded there will be an improvement in service.
			Consider better correlation of Shropshire link services with destinations; i.e. access to nearest market town on market day.	Where possible, the Shropshire Link services have been planned to operate to destinations at the times and days of the week currently provided by the fixed route services. All of these arrangements will be subject to significant examination as part of the detailed planning of services.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
			Consider providing peak time commuter & hospital link services in future.	<p>In order to provide the best economies of scale the Shropshire Link services will be operated between school times to enable the vehicles to be utilised on school services. Therefore the Shropshire Link service would not be available for commuter services.</p> <p>As with other journeys, if passengers wish to travel to the hospital and it can be incorporated into the booking of the vehicle these journeys will be accommodated. As with the current arrangement, community transport and community cars will be able to provide essential journeys where public transport is not available.</p>
			Minimise impact on North Shropshire Community Transport by working together	North Shropshire Community Transport have been consulted on all aspects of the rural transport strategy and have been invited to tender to operate the services. SCC are currently looking at the funding arrangements for the continued support of community transport.
			Promote new services as widely as possible	The launch of the RTS will be preceded by a comprehensive promotion & marketing strategy in various media aimed at informing people of the changes to the transport service and how it is intended to operate. After implementation, marketing will continue in line with the current promotion and marketing of transport services.
			Ensure the booking & enquiry service is accessible to all	The Booking and Co-ordination Centre will be widely advertised and will be accessed via a free phone telephone number. A future aspiration is to enable booking of services through SMS (Short Message Service) text messaging and the internet.
			Improve rural waiting facilities so that they are safe, comfortable and vandal-proof.	At the main interchanges the facilities will be upgraded to provide passengers with a secure and relatively comfortable environment at which to wait. It is hoped shelters, seating and lighting will be able to be installed. Suitable locations have been chosen to try and minimise vandalism.
			Introduce new link vehicles ASAP	The strategy is subject to Council approval in December 2007. If the decision is positive it is hoped to implement the

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
				new services in early summer 2008.
			Ensure new vehicles are as green as possible	The vehicles will comply to Euro 4 standards for exhaust emissions.
Mrs Anne Gore			Requests reassurance that frequency of 511/513 service would be unaffected by proposals.	The 511/513 will still serve all of the towns and villages at the current frequency; however, on every other journey the service will travel more direct offering an express style of service.
Brian Waters	Chairman	Sherifhales Parish Council	Shropshire Link services cover large areas – concern over how long journeys would take.	<p>The areas of operation have been based around the villages which are served by the existing fixed route rural bus services and whilst the areas appear large it is hoped the journeys will take no longer than existing services.</p> <p>Journey times will be monitored as part of the on-going evaluation process.</p>
			People in Sherrifhales would rather go to Telford, Shifnal or Newport than Bridgnorth.	<p>The proposed areas of operation for the Shropshire Link services have been based around the existing fixed route rural bus services. These services have been designed to offer maximum flexibility and offer combinations of journeys which were not previously available.</p> <p>Whilst the maps show the final destination for the area covering Sherrifhales to be Bridgnorth it is perfectly feasible for users to request journeys to other destinations including Shifnal or to connect with core bus 892 for travel to Telford. Residents wishing to travel to Newport will still be able to catch local bus service 323.</p> <p>Initially we intend to market the services to the destinations described. However if alternative journey requests come in to the call centre, and they can be accommodated within the operation of the Shropshire Link services, we will endeavour to do so.</p>
			Passengers are unlikely to want to change buses.	Under the Strategy it is proposed to feed Shropshire Link passengers into the core bus network for onward travel to their final destination. This will enable more efficient

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
				<p>operation of the Shropshire Link services by preventing the smaller vehicle having to enter congested market towns.</p> <p>As far as is possible these connections will be guaranteed and managed to minimise disruption. Facilities at the interchange points will be upgraded to make an interchange more acceptable.</p>
			The elderly decide when to go out based on the weather and will not want to pre-book services.	The pre-booking of services is required to make the service as flexible as possible and enable the extension of the service to all parts of the County. It is accepted that this is a change in behaviour, however, the minimum booking of 2 hrs before travel should enable passengers to assess local conditions before travelling.
			Doctor's appointments are not flexible enough to allow patients to pre-book bus services.	As with other journeys on the Shropshire Link services, where journeys can be accommodated to meet with appointment times they will be. The inclusion of the booking and co-ordination centre in the strategy means that where these journeys are not possible, callers will be offered alternative means of transport which could include Community Cars or Community Transport.
			If new proposals are unsuccessful residents may end up with worse transport provision than at present.	<p>The proposed strategy is a response to the increasing cost of providing rural transport and to improve accessibility for all in Shropshire. It is hoped the proposals are approved by the Council.</p> <p>If the proposals are unsuccessful alternative options will be identified to maintain and improve transport for rural communities.</p>
Michael J Massey	Clerk	Alveley Parish Council	Disappointed that proposals do not include provision for the Bridgnorth to Kidderminster service to go via the railway station.	Will be considered as part of the detailed planning of services.
David Currant	Chairman	Ludlow 21	Greater provision of timetable information is needed in public places and better customer care is required during service changes.	Shropshire County Council have recently changed the way in which it provides transport information and is in the process of updating information at all bus stops.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
				The bus satisfaction task group is currently looking at improved information for passengers.
			Would be better to trial proposals in a small area than implement across the county overnight.	The North Shropshire Link and 49 Link have acted as a pilot for demand responsive transport in Shropshire, both of which have been very successful. Improvements to core bus Service 70 between Shrewsbury and Oswestry have also been very successful and form the basis on which these proposals are based.
			Balance between inter-town scheduled bus services and Shropshire Link is not right.	The balance between Shropshire Link and the core bus network is governed by the likely demand from passengers and the projected numbers of persons on each corridor. With the greater number of potential passengers being on the core bus network this is where resources need to be focused. Through the planning of the services it is felt this balance has been achieved however, once implemented, the service will be under constant scrutiny to ensure the proposals remain effective.
			Welcome upgrades to core services.	
			Suggest adding mid-evening service.	The core bus network is operated at the times of day when demand for travel is at its greatest thus providing the best service possible for the majority of people and achieves the best value for money in terms of SCC subsidy. Demand for services outside of these times is a lot less. SCC have a finite budget for public transport services and need to concentrate resources at Peak times.
			Need to promote existing Sunday services.	Sunday bus services are promoted in conjunction with other local bus services. This includes the publication of area transport guides distributed to a number of outlets, at stop information, household targeted marketing and traveline.
			There is a need for a second tier of daily, less frequent (at least twice a day), timetabled inter-market town routes which could be phased out after at least two years if they fail or when Shropshire Link is successfully phased in.	The core bus network will provide a frequent service between market towns. The core bus network will run at least every two hours Mon – Sat.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
			<p>Particularly request that the following services are retained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ludlow-Tenbury Wells,</li> <li>• Ludlow-Bridgnorth via Ditton Priors,</li> <li>• Craven Arms-Bridgnorth via Corvedale,</li> <li>• Craven Arms-Clun/Bishops Castle.</li> </ul>	<p>LBS 731 Ludlow – Tenbury Wells – It is proposed for the school service element to be retained and the Monday, Wednesday, Friday service to be operated by the Shropshire Link service.</p> <p>LBS 141 Ludlow – Bridgnorth via Ditton Priors will be a semi-fixed Shropshire Link service and will continue to serve Ditton Priors and other villages on this corridor on demand.</p> <p>It is proposed for the Craven Arms – Bridgnorth services to be provided by Shropshire Link services on Mondays and Fridays</p> <p>The Bishops Castle – Clun – Craven Arms service will be provided Monday to Friday using Shropshire Link. For onward travel to wider destinations, such as Ludlow and Shrewsbury, a connection with the service 435 will be available.</p>
			DRT should augment bus services not replace them.	Unfortunately this is not possible within the existing passenger transport budget. However it is hoped the implementation of Shropshire Link will significantly improve the level of services to all parts of the County.
			In favour of DRT in very rural areas but some concerns over how scheme will work.	The scheme has been carefully planned and best practice from elsewhere has been examined. Officers responsible for the implementation of the strategy have visited other authorities in the country with similar schemes to understand how to operate a successful scheme.
			No evidence that passengers will prefer book-ahead service to current bus services.	The pre-booking of services is required to make the service as flexible as possible and enable the extension of the service to all parts of the County. It is accepted that this is a change in behaviour, however, the minimum booking of 2 hrs before travel should enable maximum flexibility.
		Shropshire Partnership	Need to consider how communities no longer served by straightened core routes will access	The straightening of some core routes is being considered as part of the strategy to reduce journey times and improve

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
			services.	efficiency in the network. It is hoped this can be achieved without a reduction in service for these communities.
			Need to consider how passengers will access locations outside of town centre e.g. Shrewsbury Hospital	This strategy addresses transport and accessibility for people living in rural areas. Access to other key services and facilities will be maintained via the core bus network and existing town services.
			Should consider extending services to weekend and evening in future.	<p>The bus network is operated at the times of day when demand for travel is at its greatest thus providing the best service possible for the majority of people and achieves the best value for money in terms of SCC subsidy. Demand for services outside of these times is limited. SCC have a finite budget for public transport services and need to concentrate resources at Peak times.</p> <p>The proposed times of operation for the Shropshire Link services are designed, wherever possible, to reflect that of the services it is looking to enhance, which do not currently operate during the evening or at weekends. Some areas will gain a Saturday service on the Shropshire Link network.</p> <p>The implementation of the strategy is in response to increasing demands for improvements to rural bus services to enable access to key services and facilities. The RTS could ultimately generate sufficient passengers and revenue to introduce a wider network of evening and weekend services.</p>
			<p>Change from timetabled services to DRT must be carefully planned, promoted and monitored if it is to succeed</p> <p>Need a strategy to get new users to use Shropshire Link as it will serve communities which currently have no public transport provision.</p>	The launch of the RTS will be proceeded by a comprehensive promotion & marketing strategy in various media aimed at informing people of the changes to the transport service and how it is intended to operate. After implementation, marketing will continue in line with the current promotion and marketing of transport services.
			Elderly view current services as vital and may feel like they are losing a service rather than gaining	The elderly and those dependant upon local bus services will be targeted as part of the promotion and marketing of the

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
			improved service.	services. The booking and co-ordination centre will have a role to play in providing this service.
			Need close links with the community and service providers in order to promote services and tailor them to community's needs.	Once operational the Shropshire Link services will be under constant examination to ensure passenger satisfaction. This could include regular questionnaires and focus groups with users.
			Should consider linking booking facility with other service providers; e.g. book hospital appointments and transport at same time	This service would be excellent for providing a fully integrated service. This could be an aspiration following the setting up of the booking and co-ordination centre.
			Consider integration between public transport and community transport. Where transport is not available booking centre should be able to book/provide information about community transport.	The inclusion of the booking and co-ordination centre in the strategy means that where public transport journeys are not possible, callers will be offered alternative means of transport which could include Community Cars or Community Transport.
			Consider extending concessionary fares scheme to community transport.	Concessionary Travel is administered and set by the Districts and Boroughs and it is their responsibility to decide upon the scheme. A number of areas do allow concessionary travel on Community Transport.  Concessionary travel will be available on the new Shropshire Link services.
			Welcome development of new interchange points.  New interchange points could be located so as to promote existing facilities in local communities.	The positioning of the Interchange points will take into consideration the convenience for passengers and try to limit the impact on the local residents. If these points can be located close to local communities this will be advantageous.
			Publicity should stress that connections will be guaranteed and procedure in place for passengers who miss connections.	The booking and co-ordination centre will manage the connections between the Shropshire Link services and the core network.  Procedures will be developed with the call centre management to mitigate against lost connections. This is likely to use local taxi operators.
			Welcome introduction of both smaller DRT buses and low floor accessible buses.	The introduction of smaller, more accessible vehicles onto the Shropshire Link services will ensure the vehicles are

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
				more suited to passengers and will be more suitable for the areas in which they will operate.
			Drivers should be well-trained to allow smooth transfer between different types of services.	All of the drivers will be fully trained in customer care to ensure travel is as good as possible.
Margaret Wilson			Bishop's Castle is a large enough town to have regular bus services. Shropshire Link should bring passengers from outlying areas to connect with existing bus services.	Bishop's Castle is an important commercial centre. Bus service 552/553 will continue. Links to other market towns would be available to more passengers with Shropshire Link.
			Concern that proposals would deter tourists	Residents are priority, but tourists will be welcome on Shropshire Link. Improvements to core services will mean tourists have improved experience and may be more likely to return.
			Better promotion of bus services is required.	Promotion will be key to success of new scheme. Buses will be branded and booking centre will help market scheme.
			The proposed access from Bishop's Castle to Telford via Shrewsbury would take too long.	The journey to Telford via Shrewsbury will take approximately 15 minutes longer. The change would ensure that we make best use of resources without duplicating journeys.
			Passengers will not be able to get to dentist etc appointments using Shropshire Link	Shropshire Link services can be accommodated to meet with appointment times. If journey is not possible passengers will be offered an alternative means of transport e.g. community transport.
			Concern that will not be able to use concessionary fares pass on new services due to time limits	Concessionary fares are a District Council responsibility – SSDC will respond.
			Bus services are a social network for elderly not just means of transport.	Shropshire Link may extend the social network as it will cover areas currently without public transport. Those who regularly travel together will still be able to do so; although service is flexible, patterns will develop. New service will offer high standard of customer care.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
Helen Vaughan	Regeneration & community development officer	Shropshire Housing Group	Evening and weekend buses are required	The bus network is operated at the times of day when demand for travel is at its greatest thus providing the best service possible for the majority of people and achieves the best value for money in terms of SCC subsidy. Demand for services outside of these times is limited. SCC have a finite budget for public transport services and need to concentrate resources at Peak times.
			Some of the routes/destinations don't make sense  Services should go to market towns on market day	Where possible, the Shropshire Link services have been planned to operate to destinations at the times and days of the week currently provided by the fixed route services. All of these arrangements will be subject to significant scrutiny as part of the detailed planning of services.
			Need better publicity, more timetable information on buses, publicity of proposed changes	The launch of the RTS will be preceded by a comprehensive promotion & marketing strategy in various media aimed at informing people of the changes to the transport service and how it is intended to operate. After implementation, marketing will continue in line with the current promotion and marketing of transport services.
			Good idea to straighten routes as it is pointless to run large buses through small villages where no-one boards.	It is proposed to straighten some of the core services but consideration must be made for retaining a service for these towns.
			Will take time to 'bed in', should be trialled and monitored.	The North Shropshire Link and 49 Link have acted as a pilot for demand responsive transport in Shropshire both of which have been very successful. Improvements to core bus Service 70 between Shrewsbury and Oswestry have also been very successful and form the basis on which these proposals are based.
			Will alternative transport be provided if Shropshire Link is full?	The inclusion of the booking and co-ordination centre as a single point of contact means that other options will be given should the Shropshire Link not be available.
			Concern about reliability of connections	The booking and co-ordination centre will manage the connections between the Shropshire Link services and the core network.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
				Procedures will be developed with the call centre management to mitigate against lost connections. This is likely to use local taxi operators.
			Request caring drivers and good customer care.	All of the drivers will be fully trained in customer care to ensure the travel experience is as good as possible.
			Request for local contractor. All buses same contractor? Needs to be good relationship between SCC/contractor/local communities.	The contracting of local bus services is subject to strict contracting regulations. All bus operators including community transport operators on the current SCC framework have been given the opportunity to tender.  The contracts have been let by area of operation in 9 separate lots with an option for composite bids. There is potential for a single or multiple operators.
			How long will contract last? If service fails will we be stuck with it for 3 years?	The initial contract period is for three years with an option to extend for a further two. From previous experience this is a suitable time required to understand the success of a scheme.
			Online booking is good idea. Needs to be an acknowledgement.	It is an aspiration to include internet booking and it is appreciated this could open the service to a number of other users.
			Booking centre staff should be helpful and have good local knowledge	All of the booking centre staff will be fully trained to ensure the best possible service.
			Need a publicised clear complaints procedure	As with other local bus services the Shropshire Link services will be monitored by the SCC compliance team. Any complaints will be directed to them for further investigation.
			Areas should be consulted on design of new bus shelter, show fit into local area.	Parish and Town Councils will be fully consulted before installation of improved infrastructure. The style of shelters will be fully sympathetic to the environment in which they are placed.
			16 seaters make much more sense from an economic point of view and considering country lanes.	Smaller vehicles will be much more suited to operating in rural areas and should help to reduce the impact on the rural environment.
Simon Norton			All towns not served by rail should have an evening bus service making a guaranteed rail connection.	Demands placed upon the passenger transport budget are considerable. Any extension to the bus network must reflect the greatest demands.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
			Publicity should make it clear that anyone can use Shropshire Link	<p>The launch of the RTS will be proceeded by a comprehensive promotion &amp; marketing strategy in various media aimed at informing people of the changes to the transport service and how it is intended to operate. After implementation, marketing will continue in line with the current promotion and marketing of transport services.</p> <p>This publicity and the call centre staff will give clear direction on how the Shropshire Link works.</p>
			Flexible services make it more difficult to book medical appointments as you don't know when you can get the bus. Timetabled services are easier	Shropshire Link services can be accommodated to meet with appointment times. If journey is not possible passengers will be offered an alternative means of transport e.g. community transport.
			Short notice bookings should be taken where possible	It is proposed that the booking of services will be available between 7 days and 2 hours before the service runs. If possible booking requests will be taken at shorter notice.
			Shropshire Link service should be extended to provide commuter service	To achieve best economies of scale the Shropshire Link services will include a school service contract. However, this does prevent the ability to offer a commuter service. The core routes will continue to provide commuter journeys.
			Services should go to market towns on market day	The planning of the Shropshire Link services has, where possible, been done to accommodate market days.
			Area boundaries should not be determined by administrative boundaries.	The operating areas of the Shropshire Link services are not defined by administrative boundaries. SCC have worked closely with neighbouring authorities to ensure they are fully aware of the proposals.
			Waiting facilities should be comfortable, with timetable information, telephone.	The strategy proposes to implement improved facilities at all major interchanges. This will include shelters, seating, timetabled information and, where possible, a public telephone.
			The booking line should be free to call.	Booking Centre will be free to call.
			Booking centre staff should have good knowledge of Shropshire.	All of the booking centre staff will be fully trained to ensure the best possible service.
Sue Yardley	Manager	Bridgnorth Visitor	Concern that book-ahead service would not suit visitors wanting transport on the spur of the	Shropshire residents must receive priority on services within the County, but tourists will be welcome on Shropshire Link.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
		Information Centre (VIC)	moment	Improvements to core services and the wider coverage of Shropshire Link will mean tourists have improved experience and will be able to access a greater number of attractions.
			Enhancement of Shropshire Shuttle service could be linked to core service improvements.	The Shropshire Link services will be able to undertake similar journeys to the destinations served by the Shropshire Shuttle providing capacity is available within the scheduled bookings.  Shropshire County Council recognise the importance of Shropshire Shuttles and is currently working with the steering group to ensure the on-going sustainability of the service.
			Consider better integration between bus and train services	The introduction of the Shropshire Link services will greatly improve accessibility for all residents and visitors to Shropshire. This will include access to rail stations where the requested journeys can be accommodated into the scheduling of the vehicles.
			Please provide VICs with up to date timetable information.	SCC are currently updating all of the timetable information for the County and developing new publicity. This information will be distributed during November, including the VICs.
Meg Gwilliam		TESS	Passengers may visit medical practitioners across county boundaries.	The Shropshire Link Service have been planned to reflect the operating areas of existing local bus services. Passengers will continue to be able to reach all destinations they previously were able to.
			Should use flexible route writing software.	The booking and co-ordination centre will use vehicle scheduling software to manage the passenger journeys. This will be relayed directly to the vehicles using real time communication technology.
			Bookings should be flexible / provisional. It is counter productive to refuse additional bookings purely due to time constraints imposed by the first booking.	The booking of services will be done on a first come first serve basis, however, a level of flexibility will be expected from passengers to ensure most efficient use of the vehicles.
			Drivers are very important. They must be highly trained, helpful, friendly, motivated, flexible, able to embrace technology etc	All of the drivers will be fully trained in customer care and the necessary technology to ensure the travel experience is as good as possible.

Name	Position	Company	Comment	SCC response
			Booking centre staff must be motivated friendly, helpful, understanding and able to clearly explain DRT. Also need good local knowledge.	All of the booking centre staff will be fully trained to ensure the best possible service.
			It will take a long time to build passenger numbers as the public are wary of new scheme and do not understand DRT. Good communication, marketing and promotion are key and should be maintained.	The launch of the RTS will be proceeded by a comprehensive promotion & marketing strategy in various media aimed at informing people of the changes to the transport service and how it is intended to operate. After implementation, marketing will continue in line with the current promotion and marketing of transport services.
			Will SCC be able to co-ordinate community transport schemes if funding only 51%?	<p>Further work is currently being undertaken to determine an equitable means of supporting the Community Transport.</p> <p>It is proposed that this subsidy will be based upon a similar scheme to the existing Community Cars subsidy. The subsidy would be based upon a number of factors including vehicle running costs and bookings taken.</p>
			SCC should continue to fund Shropshire Shuttles service.	SCC are currently undertaking a review of subsidy for the Shropshire Shuttles services.

**Key points arising from stakeholder consultation:**

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number of responses (total 220 responses)</b>
Evening, early morning and weekend services should be considered in future	36
Core buses should be more frequent/hourly (particularly 435)	16
New services need to be well promoted/current services need better publicity. (In particular timetables should be available at bus stops/on buses)	15
Bus and train services should be better integrated	15
Shropshire Link vehicles should have disabled/wheelchair access	13
Welcome upgrades to core services	12
Concern about frequency of timetabled services to market towns, destinations available to specific areas.	8
Drivers should be well-trained, understanding of passengers needs and caring to allow smooth transfer between different types of services.	8
New buses are comfortable, good size, appropriate	8
Need to stress that connections are guaranteed and put procedure in place for passengers who miss connection or where core service is full.	7
Core routes should have low floor buses	6
Need better integration between community and public transport	6
Concern that Shropshire Link may not be successful, should be trialled/phased in and monitored or may lead to poorer public transport provision if unsuccessful	5
Concern over ability to make and get to doctor/dentist appointments on Shropshire Link	5
Booking centre staff should be very knowledgeable about Shropshire	5
Concern over willingness of customers to use book-ahead service.	5
Shropshire Link vehicles should carry bicycles	5
Need better services to hospitals	5
Concern over how communities no longer served by straightened core routes will access services	4
Concern about passengers willingness to change buses or wait at interchange points	4
Concern about punctuality/reliability of core services	4
Shropshire Link vehicles should have room for shopping, trolleys and luggage	4
Elderly use current market towns services as vital social meeting place, and may feel like they are losing a service	3

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number of responses (total 220 responses)</b>
rather than gaining improved service.	
Need close links with the community and service providers in order to promote services and tailor them to community's needs and to be able to monitor services.	3
Need procedures to provide alternative transport if Shropshire Link is full	3
Services should go to market towns on market day	3
Concern that Shropshire Link would not suit tourists	3
Drivers of different services should be able to communicate with each other	3
SCC should continue to fund Shropshire Shuttles service	2
Need a strategy to get new users to use Shropshire Link as it will serve communities which currently have no public transport provision.	2
Short notice bookings should be taken where possible.	2
Core buses should carry bicycles	2
Buses should be more affordable, not cost any more than at present	2
Will people in urban areas be allowed to use the link to get out to rural areas?	2
Shropshire Link vehicles should be British	2
Commuters should not be affected by changes to core services	1
How will passengers on core services access facilities located outside town centre?	1
Should consider linking booking facility with other service providers	1
Need a clear, well publicised complaints procedure	1
Local communities should be consulted on new waiting facilities.	1
The booking line should be free to call.	1
A monthly bus pass should be available	1
Shropshire Link vehicle should allow scooters to be carried	1
Should be able to book wheelchair/pushchair space in advance	1
<b>Waiting facilities should have:</b>	
Seats	6
Shelter	4
Timetables	4
Be vandal proof	4
Telephone	3
Do not need lighting as services are daytime only	2
Coach drop off point	2
Shelters should be non-smoking	2

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number of responses (total 220 responses)</b>
Toilets	2
Good visibility to drivers	2
Noticeboards for local public information	1
CCTV	1
Dustbins	1
Cycle parking	1
Room for wheelchairs	1
Taxi information	1
Lighting	1

**APPENDIX 2**

**Cost Comparison**

**APPENDIX 3**

**Strategy Implementation Costs**

**APPENDIX 4**

**Proposed funding for Community Transport Schemes**