

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
TUESDAY 20 JULY 2004 at 10.30am**

**REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
29 JUNE 2004**

NOTE: Copies of the reports mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee and other members who have requested them. Further copies are available from Nicola Hayden, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Telephone: 01992 555560) Email: nicola.hayden@hertsc.gov.uk

1. HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS TOPIC GROUP

The Committee have received the final report of the Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group, which was established in October 2003 to consider a range of issues relating to the operation of Hertfordshire Highways. Attention was focussed on performance measurement, Joint Member Panels, recruitment and retention and communication with members of the public.

1.1 Background

The group met on seven occasions, received presentations, and asked questions of staff on:-

Hertfordshire Highways Concept and Controls
Hertfordshire Highways Performance Management System
Fault Reporting
Works Team approach to contract
Recruitment and Retention

1.2 Issues and Recommendations

The issues identified and recommendations made were in the four areas identified in the Topic Group's remit:

(a) Performance Measurement

Hertfordshire Highways has developed and has been applying a performance measuring system for assessing the performance of both suppliers (Works Team and Design Team).

The system comprises a set of Performance Indicators (PIs) for each supplier (25 for the Works Team and 23 for the Design Team). Each PI generates a score that is determined from a graph. Each PI's graph has a different "shape" or "curve" depending on what has been determined to be "unacceptable", "acceptable" and "outstanding" performance. Annual bonuses are awarded or not awarded on the basis of the scores achieved by each supplier.

The Topic Group recommended that:

- The Scrutiny Committee should receive an annual report on the performance of Hertfordshire Highways to enable them to take a strategic overview of the performance of the alliance. It was suggested that this should take place in June of each year (allowing the figures for the financial year to be gathered), but that the first report be presented to the October 2004 meeting. Following this report each year, the Scrutiny Committee would be able to select items for further scrutiny throughout the year if they so wished.
- Joint Member Panels should continue to receive the quarterly performance figures and they may refer performance concerns to officers to help develop a programme of further scrutiny.

(b) Joint Member Panels

There are Joint Member Panels in each District that meet usually on a quarterly cycle. There are a number of common and consistent approaches but there are also some inconsistencies.

The Topic Group considered that all JMPs should be open to the public and chaired by an elected member. Further it was suggested that JMP papers should be available to all members of both authorities and that these should also be posted on the appropriate District Council website. The Topic Group also felt that there should be more cross-fertilisation between the various JMPs to enable best practice to be shared.

The Topic Group recommended that:

- A Code of Good Practice be prepared and presented to a joint workshop of chairs and vice-chairs of all JMPs, and that the output from the Rectory Lane scrutiny process be incorporated into this guidance.

(c) Recruitment and Retention

The Topic Group reviewed the current vacancy situation for HCC staff in Hertfordshire Highways and noted that whilst the situation

varied across the County, overall there have been a high number of vacancies, which has had an impact on service delivery.

The Topic Group has also raised the issue of recruitment with the countywide panel for recruitment and retention to satisfy itself that sufficient corporate attention is paid to the problem in Hertfordshire Highways.

The Topic Group recommended that:

- The learning from this process be shared within the rest of the authority. It also recommended that JMPs be given regular updates on staffing levels in their areas.

(d) Communication with Members and the Public

The Topic Group reviewed how members are kept informed about the activities of Hertfordshire Highways. The Group also carried out a survey of members to determine the level of satisfaction amongst that group with the amount, quality and reliability of information they receive. This showed that in general members are satisfied with the clarity, reliability, frequency and timeliness of information they receive from Hertfordshire Highways.

However, feedback to the public was an area for concern. Having reviewed the fault reporting system, the Topic Group supported the management action taken to ensure that greater use is made of the opportunity to feed back to the public when reported faults will be repaired.

The Topic Group recommended that:

- Where individual Members raise specific issues, these are addressed.
- The feedback to the public via the website (and hence Customer Services Centre) continues to be monitored to ensure that completeness and accuracy continue to improve.

1.3 Topic Group Conclusions

The Topic Group concluded that:

- The performance regime developed to monitor the performance of Hertfordshire Highways is robust and that the output from this system should be reported annually to Scrutiny Committee.
- A Code of Good Practice should be prepared for the operation of Joint Member Panels to be presented to a joint meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Joint Member Panels.

- Current management actions to address recruitment and retention difficulties are effective, but this needs to be kept under review.
- Communication with members is generally effective, but where shortcomings were identified through the member survey, these would be specifically addressed. Communication with the public needs to be improved with regard to feedback on the repair of faults.

1.4 Comments of the Scrutiny Committee

- (a) The Committee thanked the Topic Group for its work and endorsed their recommendations.
- (b) The Committee requested that the Corporate Director (People and Property) share lessons learnt from the recruitment and retention process across all services and asked the Director of Environment to take step to ensure that this work continues within the department.
- (c) The Committee agreed that at the next Agenda Strategy meeting the Group Spokesmen would consider the protocols regarding consultation to ascertain whether further scrutiny of this issue was necessary.

2. TOPIC GROUP REVIEW OF CONGESTION

The Committee have received the final report and recommendations of the Congestion Management Topic Group, which was set up in March 2003 to look at the following issues, arising from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA):-

Paragraph 26 of the CPA – Plans to Reduce Congestion

Residents recognise few plans to reduce congestion on the roads, address the transport needs of those without or unable to use a car, or influence the behaviour of those who use cars explicitly. This issue is not included as one of the county's 23 promises to citizens.

Paragraph 10 of the CPA – Public Transport Objectives

Need to inform the public of the council's key public transport objectives and targets to ensure greater clarity of what to expect from these services.

The Topic Group has considered a national and county analysis of the issues within its remit and worked closely with a wide variety of stakeholders and partners in arriving at its recommendations.

2.1 Background

Road capacity in the county cannot be sufficiently increased to accommodate the projected increase in traffic. It is also evident that major highway improvements on non HCC roads alone will not solve the problems of congestion on the UK highway network, which will, in turn, seriously affect the

local roads in the county. Nor will enhanced investment in other modes of travel, should this ever be achievable, given the levels of funding required.

As it assessed the scope of the task, and the predicted growth of transport and travel volumes, the Topic Group considered that the strategic focus of its work should be on the management of congestion rather than its reduction, which is more appropriately addressed through local solutions.

The challenge for Hertfordshire County Council is, therefore, to establish an overall policy and supporting strategies, which seek to manage, rather than reduce, the growth in traffic without reducing accessibility. In order to achieve this balance, the Topic Group agreed to consider a wide range of issues in developing recommendations, under the four key headings of:

Demand Management – including the issues relating to parking, development control and land use planning.

Providing Alternatives to the car (mode share) – developing the capacity of other modes of transport other than the car, alongside workplace and school travel planning, and a programme of targeted campaigns to measure real changes in behaviour.

Supporting Passenger Transport – identifying more effective ways of promoting bus and rail travel and improving accessibility for all users.

Traffic Management – developing the necessary measures to help maximise the capacity of the current road network.

The Topic Group met on five occasions from July 2003 to March 2004. They sought comments from the Hertfordshire district and borough councils and from the Joint Member Panels. They also met a range of groups of stakeholders in order to gauge opinion as to their key issues and possible solutions to help manage congestion.

These groups included representatives from:

The Education Sector

Secondary headteacher
Primary headteacher
Special school headteacher
Parent/governor
PTA Representative
CSF Senior officer

The Business Sector

Hertfordshire Prosperity Forum
Hertfordshire Business Link
Chambers of Commerce

Other Transport User Groups

Association of British Drivers
British Motorcycling Federation
Friends of the Earth
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Association of Parish and Town Councils

Throughout their work written submissions were also received, and the results of the annual MORI survey on County Council and environment priorities were used to gauge public opinion.

Throughout the Topic Group's work, draft recommendations were agreed then shared with stakeholders.

2.2 Topic Group Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall the Topic Group agreed that the County Council should make a clear policy statement to recognise that there is no single solution to the problem of congestion that suits all transport users, and that any approach will need to be multi-faceted. All transport users need to consider how best they can contribute to more sustainable patterns of travel. The recommendations set out below were, therefore, made within the context of the priorities of partnership solutions and societal and individual behaviour change.

The final recommendations outlined below relate to the four key themes.

The Topic Group recommended that the County Council should:

(a) Overarching recommendations

- Make a clear policy statement that it recognises that there is no single solution to the problem of congestion that suits all transport users and any approach will need to be multi-faceted.
- Develop appropriate strategies to address the problems posed in particular hot spots around the county, which could include consideration for Park and Ride schemes, road user/area charging and other such programmes.
- Focus further policy and campaign work on local solutions, or amelioration, and on changing attitudes and behaviours.

(b) Demand Management

- Ensure that more attention across the county council is paid to land use strategies that are compatible with congestion management and minimisation.
- Review the Section 106 agreement procedures to ensure maximum and consistent benefits are negotiated for road improvements.
- Review current parking policy guidance at both county and district levels.

(c) Traffic Management

- Continue to prioritise safety of pedestrians and transport users in the county's transport policies.

- Develop a strategy for the county that co-ordinates current and future IT solutions to improve strategic utilisation of the transport network and develop a business case for an integrated management approach to the network.
- Develop a countywide speed strategy, which identifies how best to balance traffic speed against traffic flows.

(d) Mode Share

- Review and revitalise travel campaigns by considering alternative marketing approaches such as niche and direct individualised marketing techniques focusing on specific issues e.g. promoting healthy alternatives to the car for short journeys.
- Further develop the school travel plan programme to include:
 - Strategies that address the overall transport needs of schools in close geographic proximity and to encourage schools to work together in developing transport solutions.
 - Redesigning access routes and developing recommended urban journey routes.
 - Sharing facilities and producing co-ordinated travel plans.
 - Staggering schools start and finish times.
 - Re-launching/promoting cycle proficiency tests.
 - Escorting younger pupils from bus drop off points into the school grounds.
 - Incorporating non-car transport into School-home agreements.
 - Reviewing the cost of travel permits for sixth formers.
- Extend the Business TravelWise programme to further engage and influence the wider business sectors. This might include:
 - Promotion of flexible working practices across HCC.
 - Annual business awards for good practice in travel planning production.
 - More robust, outcome focussed indicators for business travel plan development
- Continue to develop and broaden the county cycling strategy.
- Create a countywide motor cycle forum to address not only the increasing numbers of fatalities but also the role safe motor cycling could play in helping to reduce traffic congestion.

(e) Passenger Transport

- Provide more targeted information for bus and rail users.
- Incorporate bus priority measures into area plans.

- Maximise the use of bus quality partnerships particularly in relation to integrated ticketing services.
- Secure better bus infrastructure through S106 agreements.
- Improving accessibility and increase patronage to public services through more user-friendly public transport facilities.
- Incorporate into reviews of school transport schemes means to implement bus priority measures.

2.3 Comments of the Scrutiny Committee

The Committee:

- (a) thanked the Topic Group for its work and in doing so thanked Officers who supported the Group and various stakeholders who gave evidence for their contribution to the work of the Topic Group.
- (b) endorsed the Topic Group's recommendations and commended them to Cabinet.
- (c) commended the recommendations in respect of school travel plans to the Director of Children, Schools and Families.
- (d) referred the report to the Transport Panel for consideration in revising the Local Transport Plan, and in particular drew their attention to the need to revitalise the TravelWise programme.

3. CONTRACT BUS SERVICES

In response to a request from County Councillor C J White the Committee have considered a report informing them of the process used to decide which bus services to provide and how changes to services are made.

Present practices, policies and strategies have evolved over a considerable time, and seek to establish a broad consensus on provision between the tiers of local government. They also seek a practical approach which recognises that both cost and use need to be balanced in a system where responsibility for the network is fragmented between the public and private sector.

Planned changes to services initiated by the County Council, which are significant in their effects, are normally subject to consultation processes with County and District Members. However, there will always be shorter-term changes precipitated by commercial operators where meaningful consultation is not possible within the legislative time scales.

The provision of bus services outside London was deregulated by the Transport Act 1985. Bus operators are free to run services on a commercial basis where they wish and the statutory duty of the County Council is to consider where needs are not met and provide contract

services where appropriate. It has to consider the effects of its action on the commercial sector and to have regard to the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly or disabled.

In Hertfordshire this function is considered in conjunction with the district and borough councils (who also have powers to secure bus services) and the funding is shared on a 75% county/25% district basis. Dedicated home to schools services are provided and funded wholly by the County Council. The situation is complex and this is compounded by cross-boundary bus services into and out of London, which operate under a different legislative framework. The Passenger Transport Unit manages around 200 contracts for local bus services, of varying value and complexity.

There is no prescriptive process for determining which services to support and each authority is free to establish its own criteria. In developing its policy and strategy documents, the County Council chose to use a cost benefit approach which attempts to quantify both costs of provision and benefits to users from running a bus service based on cost indices sourced by DfT. The rate of return sought is 25%. If benefits exceed costs by 25% then the service should continue to be provided. If the benefit is less than 25% or even negative (i.e. less than costs) then the service should be considered further. It does not follow that the service should be withdrawn.

The Transport Act 1985 limits the length of a bus contract to five years and local members are advised of service changes through a monthly bulletin.

Where the County Council is making significant change to its contract services e.g. a change to service level or withdrawal of a part/whole route to its own time scales, either for budget reasons or as part of the re-tendering of service contracts, there is wider consultation. Priority is given to the responses of the funding partners but all substantial comments are reported to the Executive Member.

The Bus Strategy committed us to a programme of Bus Network Reviews on a four 'quadrant' basis. The review process identifies:

- The main strategic bus routes in the areas;
- The commercial and contract routes;
- Congestion 'hot spots' which require bus priority action;
- Options for developing routes.

This work is being carried out in conjunction with the district councils and will enable a structured, partnership approach to service planning.

Funding for contract bus services has been shared with the district councils over the last 25 years (who fund 25% of total cost). There are pressures on this long-standing arrangement. The districts are reporting increasing difficulty in funding this expenditure (a combined total in

excess of £1m each year) and district council Best Value Reviews highlight that this is an area where districts have powers but not duties.

The process by which bus service changes are decided has developed over a long period. Some of these changes to contract services are necessitated by funding issues or by commercial service changes.

The Committee have decided that there is no need to set up a Topic Group on this issue.

CHRIS WHITE
CHAIRMAN
County Hall
Hertford, 29 June 2004