

3.3 SHARED PRIORITY – DELIVERING ACCESSIBILITY

Our long-term strategy for accessibility has been developed using our robust evidence base, as summarised in section 2.4 of this plan, on the policy review, accessibility mapping, partnership working, public consultation and other data sources covered in earlier sections of this report.

3.3.1 Prioritisation of Issues

3.3.1.1 Thematic Issues

The following issues have been identified through the existing research projects, partnership involvement and public consultation described in section 2.4. They cut across all of the themes areas and were identified at all the workshop breakout groups.

Information, Advice and Training

The themed workshop partners indicated that the amount and type of passenger transport information provided by the Council and external agencies is limiting, especially for people in rural communities or socially excluded groups of the population.

The Best Value indicator to measure public satisfaction with public transport information (BVPI 103) is very low in comparison with other authorities, at 33% in 2004 falling from 37% in the previous year. The national average is 50%. Lack of information is a barrier to accessing services and facilities. However, substantial improvements to information have already been implemented and more are planned, so some action is underway to address this issue.

Furthermore, the Accession outputs show a relatively good level of bus access which indicates that lack of transport may be a public perception rather than reality. An example of this was shown in the South Northamptonshire Rural Transport Partnership (SNRTP) survey where 68% of respondents in the area were unaware of the dial-a-ride service that was offered in their area. Furthermore, the 2005 Travel Diary Survey found that awareness of bus services across the county was varied, with nearly half of Northampton residents aware of local services whilst less than one in five of the sample in Daventry were aware of the local bus service.

It was also stated in the SNRTP survey that information should be easy to understand. Of all respondents 51% would like to see increased public transport information through a local shop / post office (70%), at the bus stop / shelter (66%) or on the Parish council notice board (48%).

Stakeholders and feedback from learning disability groups stated that lack of training for drivers of taxis and buses can prevent people with disabilities from travelling by public transport.

'Out of Hours' Access

This was an issue especially for people in rural areas who found it difficult to access key facilities in the evening and on Sundays when public transport services were limited.

The Accession outputs found that access to hospitals was poor in the evening in comparison to the rest of the day and also that there were problems for people wanting to attend adult education courses or shift work as public transport services returning from courses in the evening were limited.

Existing passenger transport services within the county tend to cease operating during the early evening, particular in areas not served by a core bus service. Furthermore, many community and voluntary transport schemes also only run on Monday to Friday until the early evening.

Land Use Planning and Local Provision of Services

Accessibility planning is not just about transporting people to services, but about how these services can be locally delivered such as locally-based or mobile facilities. There is a need to start delivering more services locally, especially in rural villages and communities, where public transport provision is lowest.

Northamptonshire's population is widely dispersed which makes localised delivery of services such as evening classes or daytime education courses very difficult.

The proposals for substantial population and employment growth outlined in the MKSM Strategy will create substantial opportunities to ensure that new developments are better located, and that accessibility can enhance delivery of the planning process.

Accessibility will therefore be considered at an early stage of a new development. The County Council will work with the local planning authorities and development agencies to ensure that accessibility planning is integrated into the overall planning system and planning frameworks. The introduction of accessibility audits (described in sections 3.3.2.7 and 3.3.4.2) will help to ensure that decisions on the locations of new or relocated services take into account transportation and accessibility issues.

Integration

Public transport needs to be integrated with important services. This can be achieved through systems that allow healthcare appointments to be booked at times which enable access by public transport, or by arranging education courses so that they can be accessed by public transport.

In addition community and voluntary transport services should link with commercially operated service to provide feeder services.

3.3.1.2 Area Prioritisation

The socio-demographic review and accessibility mapping work described in section 2.4 produced a clear picture of the key problem areas in terms of deprivation and accessibility. By examining the mapping outputs from these two work elements 18 areas were highlighted as shown in figure 3.13. These areas are a mix of urban and rural areas and were identified as having the highest levels of overall deprivation and lowest car ownership levels.

In order to prioritise the areas in terms of overall deprivation and poor accessibility, a ranking system was used. Each area was ranked by:

- Overall Index of Multiple Deprivation;
- Percentage of households with no access to a car;
- Percentage of households within 800m walk of an hourly bus service;
- Level of community transport coverage;
- Percentage of households within 60 minutes of a general hospital by public transport;
- Percentage of households within 30 minutes of a GP surgery by public transport;
- Percentage of households within 60 minutes of Job Centre by public transport;
- Percentage of households within 30 minutes of an Adult Education centre by public transport;
- Percentage of households within 30 minutes of a Post-16 education centre by public transport; and
- Percentage of households within 30 minutes of a supermarket by public transport.

The areas were ranked for each category with 1 being the worst ranked area. The results of this exercise are shown in tables 3.14 and 3.15.

Overall the worst areas are all located in rural areas of the county. It is widely acknowledged that people living in rural areas suffer from accessibility problems due to a limited public transport coverage and frequency. This is particularly an issue for those living in rural wards where car ownership levels are low and deprivation levels are high in comparison to other wards. The rural areas below have been identified as the most deprived wards in terms of Index of Multiple Deprivation, car ownership levels and levels of accessibility to key destinations;

- East Northamptonshire - Areas 1 & 2;
- Welford, Clipston and Welland - Area 3; and
- South Northamptonshire - Area 4.

However, it is also important for the strategy to examine the accessibility of urban areas in more detail. The urban areas have the highest overall levels of deprivation and lowest levels of car ownership in the county. As such they tend to have some of the best public transport services. But while this means journey time or lack of public transport may not be an issue in these areas other factors may impact on accessibility. The highest ranking wards have also been classed as priority intervention areas for Neighbourhood Renewal. Table 3.16 shows the most deprived wards in the county.

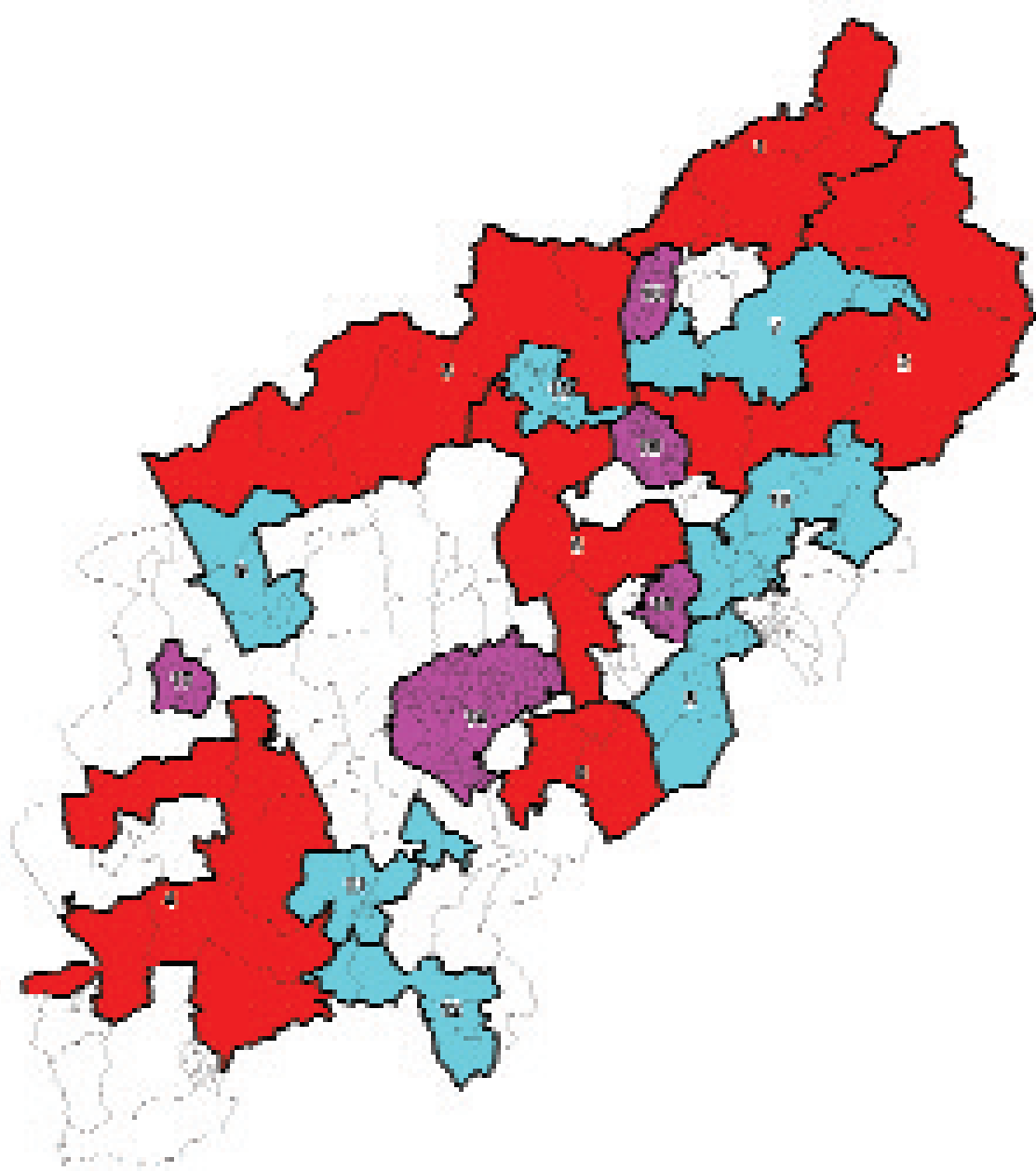
Rural Renewal Areas

As part of the Safer & Stronger Communities Block of the LAA, the Sustainable Communities Service of the County Council has recently undertaken a project to designate Rural Renewal Areas. Results are yet to be published, but when available we will fully integrate the findings of this study into the further development of Action Plans, particularly those relating to improvements in rural areas. Similarly, preparation of the Rural Priority Action Plans will take into account findings from the Accessibility Strategy.

The Council's Sustainable Transport and Sustainable Communities will need to maximise future opportunities for partnership working. For example, the idea of running an Annual Rural Stakeholder event has been discussed as one possible method of bringing together all partners with rural interests.



Figure 3.13 – Identified Priority Areas



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Table 3.14 - Priority Areas Ranking Table - Socio-Demographic Data and Public Transport Provision

Area	Name	Area Classification	Population	Households	Car ownership	IMD	Community Transport	rank 800m of hourly bus	Total Rank
1	North East Northamptonshire	Rural	4881	2015	12	7	4.5	1.5	25
15	Wellingborough	Urban	48740	19986	2	3	6.5	14	26
3	Welford, Clipston and Welland	Rural	9823	3933	16	8	1	4	29
8	Irchester and Wollaston	Town & Fringe	10383	4351	8	12	6.5	7	34
18	Corby	Urban	44360	18315	1	1	15	17	34
17	Daventry	Urban	21734	8834	5	5	10	18	38
4	South Northamptonshire	Rural	13833	5622	18	13	3	5	39
13	Desborough	Town & Fringe	15182	6249	6	6	15	12	39
14	Northampton	Urban	194459	80813	3	2	18	16	39
9	Long Buckby	Town & Fringe	5771	2383	11	17	10	1.5	39.5
2	East Northamptonshire	Rural	8122.5	3313	17	10	10	3	40
16	Kettering	Urban	51063	21791	4	4	17	15	40
5	Yardley Chase	Rural	6374	2650	14	16	2	9	41
7	Oundle	Town & Fringe	8822	3376	10	14	4.5	13	42
10	Finedon, Thrapston and Raunds	Town & Fringe	23943	9857	7	9	15	11	42
11	Towcester	Town & Fringe	14138	5667	9	15	10	8	42
6	Rural West Wellingborough	Rural	9266	3913	13	11	13	10	47
12	Deanshanger, Cosgrove, Whittlewood	Town & Fringe	9191	3643	15	18	10	6	49

Table 3.15 – Priority Area Ranking Table - Access to Services

Area	Area Classification	Population	Households	hospital rank	GP surgery rank	Jobcentre rank	Adult Ed Rank	Post 16 Rank	Supermarket Rank	Overall Accessibility	Rank
1	North East Northamptonshire	Rural	4881	2015	2	1	4	4	1	1	13
4	South Northamptonshire	Rural	13833	5622	1.5	2	2	1	4	4	15
2	East Northamptonshire	Rural	8122.5	3313	4	3	1	2	3	2	15
3	Welford, Clipston and Welland	Rural	9823	3933	1.5	6	5	3	5	5	26
5	Yardley Chase	Rural	6374	2650	12	5	7	7	6	3	40
12	Deanshanger, Cosgrove, Whittlewood	Town & Fringe	9191	3643	3	7	12	6	10	6	44
6	Rural West Wellingborough	Rural	9266	3913	11	4	8	5	9	9	46
9	Long Buckby	Town & Fringe	5771	2383	7	10	11	9	2	10	49
7	Oundle	Town & Fringe	8822	3376	13	8	9	8	7	7	52
8	Irchester and Wollaston	Town & Fringe	10383	4351	9	11	3	11	12	8	54
10	Finedon, Thrapston and Raunds	Town & Fringe	23943	9857	8	12	6	12	8	12	58
11	Towcester	Town & Fringe	14138	5667	10	9	10	10	11	11	61
13	Desborough	Town & Fringe	15182	6249	14	13	13	13	13	13	79
17	Daventry	Urban	21734	8834	6	16	16	16	14	16	84
15	Wellingborough	Urban	48740	19986	16.5	16	16	16	16.5	16	97
18	Corby	Urban	44360	18315	16.5	16	16	16	16.5	16	97
14	Northampton	Urban	194459	80813	16.5	16	16	16	16.5	16	97
16	Kettering	Urban	51063	21791	16.5	16	16	16	16.5	16	97

Table 3.16 - Most Deprived Urban Wards

Ward	District
Kingswood	Corby
Hazelwood	Corby
Central	Corby
Spencer	Northampton
Billing	Northampton
Castle	Northampton
Lumbertubs	Northampton
Eastfield	Northampton
St James	Northampton
St Andrews	Kettering
St Marys	Kettering
Warkton	Kettering
Avondale	Kettering
Wicksteed	Kettering
Hemmingwell	Wellingborough
Queensway	Wellingborough
Swanspool	Wellingborough
Croyland	Wellingborough
Brickhill	Wellingborough

3.3.1.3 Groups with accessibility problems

Residents with physical and learning disabilities were identified as having difficulties in accessing services. This was mainly due to the barriers they faced in using public transport and accessing relevant information. This is an issue both in terms of the services that are actually provided, and the training of both service providers and users.

Young people were another group identified as having difficulties in accessing services that were important to them. All other groups have some kind of alternative transport that they could use (such as community transport services) whereas young people often have no option but to take public transport. This is a particular problem for young people in rural areas where public transport services are limited, restricting the opportunities available to them.

With an ageing population it is important to consider the needs of the elderly in planning for accessibility. An increase in the proportion of the population aged over 65 will ultimately result in a greater dependence on public and community transport as well as pressure on healthcare and other important facilities.

Households without access to a car experience access problems to certain destinations. This group is reliant on public transport, walking or cycling to get to the services and facilities they need and where public transport is infrequent or where services are not supported by public transport then they can become socially excluded. This may also be the case for households with only one car where this may be in use for the whole day at a place of work leaving other members of the household without access to a car.



3.3.1.4 Priority destinations

Hospitals were identified as an important destination for residents with Kettering General Hospital in particular being noted as difficult to access. An Action Plan for improving accessibility to health care in Kettering, including the hospital is already being developed., and is described in section 3.3.4.2.

Many would like to see major towns and centres made more accessible, including destinations outside of the county. Important destinations include: Northampton, Milton Keynes, Banbury and Towcester in the south of the county; Peterborough and Stamford to the north of the county; and Market Harborough to the west.

Without access to a car, shopping and leisure facilities can be hard to reach in both rural and urban areas. The SNRTP identified shopping and leisure as key services that residents in the district would like to be able to reach by public transport.

3.3.2 Accessibility Toolkit

In developing our Accessibility Action Plans we intend to draw from a wide variety of policy options, each of which will be able to contribute to particular aspects of improvement. In this section of the report we examined the varied roles to be played by each of these 'tools' in turn and include some case study examples of how accessibility issues are already being dealt with in the county.

3.3.2.1 The Role of Public Transport

Bus services in Northamptonshire have faced some difficult challenges during recent years, with the cost of services increasing, particularly in rural areas.

For urban and inter-urban services taking many people to specific destinations e.g. to work, education, shopping, the Strategy can be delivered by encouraging the maintenance and improvement of core networks of high frequency services within and between town centres, using accessible, high-quality vehicles backed up by appropriate infrastructure and information at stops. The council will therefore seek to enter into partnerships with operators and other stakeholders to ensure that these core services are provided. In doing so, we will draw on the experience gained from the partnerships that successfully delivered:

- The Corby Star network of services – where there has been over doubling in passenger numbers (a national record) in the first three years of operation. This shows that significant increases in bus use can be achieved with properly prepared schemes. Corby Star is a partnership of the County Council, Stagecoach, Corby Borough Council and Catalyst Corby, with using funding from a number of public sources.
- Quality Bus Partnerships – for example the Geoff Amos Great Central Connexion linking Banbury, Daventry and Rugby increased patronage on the route by 80% from 1999/2000 to 2005/06.
- The X4 Peterborough – Kettering – Northampton – Milton Keynes service has increased patronage by 91% in its first year of operation. This service is delivered by Stagecoach in partnership with the council following receipt of a grant from ODPM.

For smaller settlements off the core routes, where traditional bus services are unlikely to be affordable, we will focus on a combination of feeder bus services or Demand Responsive Transport. In rural areas we will develop these responsive services to smaller or more isolated villages as an alternative to existing infrequent (e.g. once or twice a week) services which only meet some of the community's accessibility needs.

Feeder Services

The provision of a bus network in rural areas is difficult, and where services do exist, very few are run commercially. The problems in rural areas relate to low population, high car ownership and a wide diversity of potential destinations. For villages with less than 500 population, unless they are located on an inter-urban route, it is difficult to sustain a daily bus service, even if it subsidised. For villages over 500 population, a daily bus service may be available where they are located on a clearly defined corridor but the frequency may be such that only journey to work services (to a single town centre) and off-peak daytime journeys will be possible. With funding through the Council's Public Service Agreement, some inter-urban and rural services have been improved to hourly frequency over the last 12 months, including the 8, 88 and 89.

The solution in some areas may be the provision of fully or semi-demand responsive services feeding into a core route at a specific location. It is recognised that the interchange locations must also be attractors in their own right. With this in mind, a number of potential feeder services have already been identified in two areas of the county:

- The South Northants "block" (south of the A45 and A5, west of the A43)
- In East Northamptonshire, the area to the north-east of a line drawn from Thrapston to Haringworth.

A model of the suggested routing of these Feeder Services is set out below and the detailed proposal for these Feeder Services can be found in the detailed Accessibility Strategy .



Figure 3.17 – Potential Feeder Routes in South Northamptonshire

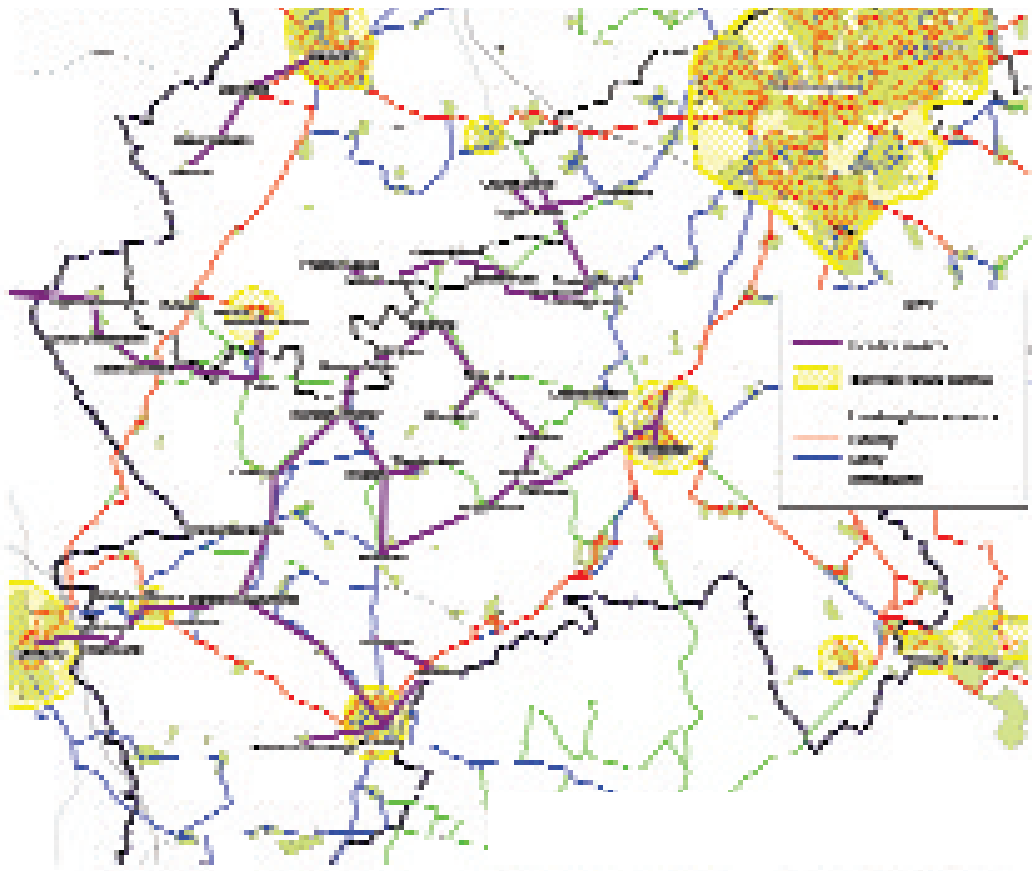
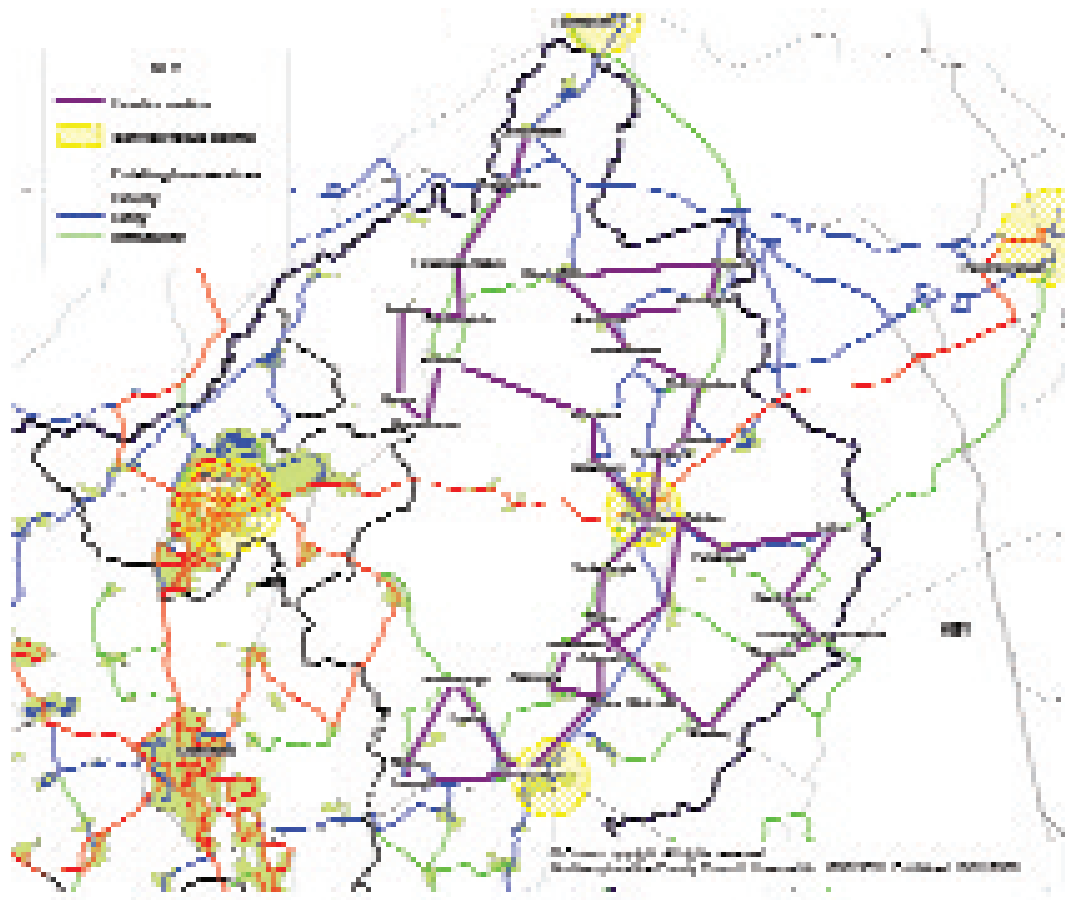




Figure 3.18 – Potential Feeder Routes in East Northamptonshire



MOBIsoft

The County Council has recently invested in state-of-the-art transport scheduling software which aims to improve the efficiency of the transport services we deliver. The software will support the running of the Integrated Transport Management Unit (ITMU) whereby one system will optimise journey planning for School and Social transport services, and the proposed Feeders which could be run on a demand-responsive basis. The software also takes into account population projections to gauge likely patronage for services, and therefore, determine the size of vehicle required.

The system is due to be officially launched at the end of March 2006.

3.3.2.2 The role of community and voluntary transport

Community and voluntary transport has a valuable contribution to make in delivering better transport in Northamptonshire. It is already providing some people with access to some essential services, and forms a lifeline for car-less people in isolated rural areas. Unlike public transport these services currently cater for very specific groups of people who are generally dispersed across a wide geographical area.

Successful Rural Bus Challenge bids have enabled two new services to be developed, and for the county to test out Demand Responsive technology in the delivery of community transport. The Journeyline service runs these services; Journeys around South Northamptonshire (JASON) and the Kettering Area Transport Service (KATS). These services provide the passenger with low-cost return journeys for work, social or shopping trips using an on-demand minibus service, bookable to registered users across a defined geographical area.

Existing services have also developed further through other Rural Bus Challenge bids. The council also supports services through its grant process.

Between them these services provide transport to healthcare, employment, training, further education and food shopping. However, the format of the services, their operational parameters, opening times and fares vary from one area to another.

The County Council has produced a Community Transport Strategy which has been approved by Cabinet in draft form for consultation with stakeholders. Issues that need to be addressed are:

- defining what community transport does and does not do;
- Community Transport's role in Accessibility Planning;
- how community transport should be delivered;
- long-term revenue funding, asset replacement and resources; and
- the role of new technologies in the delivery of community transport.

As part of this process we intend to:

- Review the services which we fund during 2006/07 and link them to the emerging accessibility targets;
- Continue to measure their impact through locally relevant targets which identify that social/access needs are being met;
- Work in partnership to develop the community transport services we already have, to meet the access needs of all sectors of the community;
- Continue to work with the key partners such as Rural Transport Partnerships to identify rural transport/accessibility needs and opportunities for funding to develop existing services and introduce new projects; and
- Explore and develop, where conditions allow, integration with conventional services to create a seamless transport service.

CASE STUDY: RAIL GETTING JOBSEEKERS BACK TO WORK

Silverlink trains will be launching a new scheme in 2006 to support jobseekers in finding a job. Their travel to work scheme enables free travel for registered unemployed people or students who have just finished compulsory or further education to travel to interviews. Once they have found a job a further 2 months of free travel is offered in order to support them through their first two months of employment.

3.3.2.3 The role of taxis and private hire vehicles

Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles are an integral part of local transport provision and contribute to Northamptonshire's wider objectives for economic growth, accessibility and the environment. They have an important role to play in the provision of public transport, especially when buses or trains are not available. They can provide people in the lowest income groups with access to vital services and enhanced quality of life.

Although the responsibility for licensing taxis rests with the District and Borough Councils, we recognise our responsibility to continue to implement improvements in facilities for taxis where appropriate, as part of our Local Transport Plan strategy.

In rural areas, we will encourage taxi sharing schemes and subsidised fares, where they are a more cost-effective than other forms of Public Transport.

We will assist with the provision of new infrastructure; including rank space and shelters. For example in Corby where all 112 hackneys have purpose-built ramps for wheelchair access, and the taxi rank has lowered kerbs and a shelter.

We will ensure appropriate provision at interchange facilities and include facilities at any planned Park and Ride sites to link with bus provision. We will allow Hackney Taxis to use any bus lanes in the County and bus-only accesses. We will examine the extension of this policy to other vehicles including Private Hire vehicles.

We will work in partnership with the seven District and Borough Councils to facilitate best practice on taxi licensing to develop consistent standards in applying quality and safety regulations. Considerations may include common licensing policies, joint licensing application and administrative services between two or more authorities.

We will support the Partnership between Taxi Licensing Officers, the County Council and Police to expand their pilot project to install automatic security cameras in all Hackneys.

3.3.2.4 The Role of Walking and Cycling

Cycling and walking can have an important role to play in improving accessibility for shorter trips. Although in theory all destinations should be accessible to pedestrians and cyclists in practice this is often not the case.

Problems can range from severance between communities caused by major roads, railways or rivers to localised problems where footpaths are not in the desired place or there are no cycle parking facilities.

We will target our walking and cycling budgets at achieving modal shift on key congested routes and on improving accessibility to key destinations. Further details of our strategy for encouraging cycling and walking can be found sections 3.2.2.8 and 3.2.2.9.

CASE STUDY: THE BIG PUSH FORWARD

A new initiative called 'The Big Push Forward' is currently being developed by the County Council in partnership with local police stations around the county. This will involve detained or abandoned bicycles being offered free of charge to community groups, schools and organisations that assist people in getting to work such as Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and Starting Off.

The scheme would help those without access to a private vehicle in getting to work, school or further education as well as helping to reach other targets such improving levels of physical health and reducing levels of crime.

This initiative is currently underway and is being presented to the 'Safer & Stronger Communities' and 'Healthier Communities & Older People' Boards as part of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) working.

3.3.2.5 The role of rights of way

The use and demand for the public rights of way network in the county has changed considerably in the last 25 years. The network, now predominantly used for recreation and access to the countryside, continues to undergo major alterations in its structure and management, to meet the requirements of current and future users.

The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2002 introduced the requirement for all local highway authorities to publish a draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by July 2005. The Local Transport Plan and the ROWIP share common objectives relating to accessibility, in particular 'to increase the number of trips made by cycling and walking'. The final Rights of Way Improvement Plan will be published in July 2006.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan will set out the long-term management strategy for public rights of way and access to the countryside for Northamptonshire.

Further details of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan are set out in section 3.6.1 on page 161.

3.3.2.6 The Role of Private Motorised Vehicles

Although one of the key principles of the Local Transport Plan is to provide high quality alternatives to travel by private vehicles, there will always be areas of rural Northamptonshire where the ownership and use of the car or motorcycle will be the only viable option for travel.

Car-Sharing and Car Clubs

Well designed car-share and car club schemes can also contribute towards the resolution of accessibility problems. We are looking to introduce car clubs as part of residential travel plans in the county. The car club scheme allows people to rent a car only when they need it and has proven in other areas to have had a positive impact on reducing the need for a second car. Car sharing and car clubs can be integral to improving accessibility as they also allow those who cannot afford a car the option of accessing a car without having to purchase one.

CASE STUDY: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ON WHEELS (NOW)

Northamptonshire ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), an independent charitable organisation, works with rural communities to improve quality of life, especially for the disadvantaged. We help rural communities to help themselves, to value diversity and to work to create a vibrant, sustainable future.

Northamptonshire On Wheels is a countywide project to provide transport solutions to young people who are experiencing difficulties in accessing training, employment or educational opportunities as a result of poor transport provision in rural areas. The project has the facility to loan / hire mopeds to qualifying applicants where no other transport solution is available.

Working in Partnership with Connexions the scheme will include, providing advice to young people on transport options, compulsory basic training, providing safety clothing and mopeds and ongoing monitoring and mentoring.

3.3.2.7 The Role of Travel Planning

The introduction of Travel Plans based around service delivery sites such as hospitals or colleges has already begun in the county, and can contribute greatly to improving accessibility for those who lack their own transport. For example:

- Moulton Agricultural College runs a fleet of minibuses to pick up students from outlying rural areas of the county;
- Northampton College have developed a comprehensive travel plan covering access to each of their sites;
- Weetabix in Burton Latimer provides a bus service for its employees as part of its travel plan; and
- Barclaycard offers reduced price bus tickets, a car sharing scheme, and monetary incentives for those that do not come to work by public transport, walking, cycling or car share.

Travel Plans as part of the planning process.

Under section 106 a travel plan is asked for at the time of application. In order to ensure that Travel Plans are submitted as part of the planning process, the Travel Choices team work closely with the local planning authority and developers. In relation to residential & commercial developments this is secured initially through the community engineer. The travel plans produced need to contain measurable outcomes and penalties for failure to reach targets. For this reason a bonding process is introduced in some cases. The Travel Plan is monitored and if necessary given a further period to achieve targets.

In relation to schools the School Travel Plan team work closely with the school undergoing development or if a new build as early in the process as possible often before governors are appointed. Again the travel plan is required to be as dynamic as possible and to have measurable outcomes that are monitored and reviewed regularly.

The Travel Choices team at the County Council work in an advisory role to local planning authorities and assist with ensuring robust travel plans are submitted before planning permission is given. This advice can now be improved through the use of Accession and Accessibility Audits to ensure that potential new developments have considered the most accessible location.



Travel Forums

The Northampton Travel Forum is held quarterly and is made up of companies and organisations involved in producing and implementing their own travel plans as well as representatives from public transport companies, Northampton Borough Council and The Chamber of Commerce. The role of the forum is to discuss and address common issues with regard to travel and transport in the area and liaise with service providers and others to address these issues.

Current members include some of the largest employers in the area such as Northampton General Hospital, Barclaycard, University of Northampton and Nationwide as well as a number of smaller employers.

A combination of large organisations can potentially hold significant sway in actioning change and driving initiatives. Successes include the planned positioning of real time timetables on three of these large organisation's sites as part of the whole Real Time process. The sharing of good practice and combined efforts on initiatives such as car sharing also show continuing success. There is now a regular link up with the Kettering Travel Forum with a combined forum twice a year.

Other Partnerships – examples of good practice

Where the County Council shares site locations with other organisations the Staff Travel Plan officer works to develop relationships with these organisations in order to tackle common travel and transport issues. This is currently the case at the Lakes site and also at Riverside. Other partnerships include the Travelsmartuk website, a travel website comprising a partnership of Bedfordshire County Council, Milton Keynes District Council and Northants County Council. More information about this website is included in section 3.2.3.3.

3.3.2.8 The Role of Ticketing and Fares

At present the geographical scope of concessionary fares is determined by individual District and Borough Councils within the county. Policies vary between borough and districts, some limiting the use of concessionary travel within their own district, others extending it to allow travel to neighbouring areas.

From April 2006, in partnership with the District and Borough Councils we will be introducing a countywide concessionary fare scheme, which will overlay the new District-based statutory free travel pass scheme with a County Council funded scheme allowing travel throughout the county and to some cross-boundary destinations for a £1 flat fare.

The new scheme will be easily understood and marketed. The aim will be to transfer to smart cards once the new scheme is established.

Integrated ticketing schemes have an important role to play in encouraging bus use. A Plus-Bus ticket giving a bus add-on to rail tickets is already available in Northampton. The Buzzcard is a joint ticketing scheme for Northampton involving the major bus operators and was launched early in 2006. The County Council will support the development of further integrated ticketing schemes across the County, and investigate how they might integrate with Smartcards.

Concessionary Fares

Borough and District Councils currently have to provide their elderly and disabled residents with a minimum of a half-fare bus pass within their Borough or District boundary only. The Government has announced that this requirement will change in April 2006 from a half-fare pass to a free pass and will make additional funding available to Borough and District Councils for this. Some (but not all) Borough or District Councils in Northamptonshire already go beyond the minimum legal requirements and allow their passes to be used beyond their boundaries.

The County Council intends to provide a countywide flat-fare concessionary travel scheme starting at the same time as the free scheme, in April 2006. This scheme will mean that anyone with a bus pass who wants to travel outside their Borough or District boundary, including to major places just outside the County, could do so for £1 flat fare with the costs being met by the County Council.

The benefits of the Countywide scheme will be that bus pass holders can travel further for less. This is particularly important in Northamptonshire, where many bus users have to cross council boundaries to access the services and facilities they need and would otherwise have to go on paying full fare. For many elderly and disabled people, cost can be a deterrent to travel so lower cost travel will thus improve accessibility and tackle issues of isolation and social exclusion.

Smartcards

As part of the Implementing Electronic Government initiative, the County Council is proposing to introduce smartcards. Smartcards offer the opportunity to access, and pay for, a variety of services and can also be used for identification and authentication purposes. Their particular strength is in:

- **Joining-up:** a multi-application card providing the user with one token which can be an access tool for a number of public (and private) services;
- **Secure:** providing an electronic audit trail to monitor service use, and reducing fraudulent use of services;
- **Targeted:** providing specific functions for particular social groups (e.g. a concessionary travel pass for over 60s);
- **Personalised:** storing users' preferences within the card, precluding the need to give the same information repeatedly.

The County Council recently completed a smartcard scoping study, which fully acknowledged the findings of the ODPM National Research projects, and recommended the development of a consensual Northamptonshire Smartcard Strategy and Business Plan. Since then, a Smartcard Group has been set up, made up of representatives from the County Council, District and Borough Councils, and the two of the county's major bus operators, Stagecoach and First. The group has been investigating ways of using Smartcards, and has suggested that a countywide audit of cards issued to members of the public be carried out.

Smartcards will integrate with the Concessionary Fares scheme following its introduction in April 2006, helping to provide easier passenger transactions and an improved electronic audit of bus pass use. The scheme will support the transport ticketing standard (ITSO) and multi-application standard (CEN-ISSS MMUSST).

Considering the role of smart card technology, and accessibility planning, there are three facets of accessibility which smart cards can start to address:

- **Improvements in physical access:** brought about by reducing the time, costs and/or physical effort needed for the citizen to travel to undertake activities.
- **Improvements in perceived access:** brought about by changing the citizen's perception of the time, costs and ease in which to travel to undertake activities.
- **Improvements in virtual access:** brought about by the ability to undertake activities remotely and at non-traditional times, thus precluding the need to travel and/or allowing the citizen to better use the transport service and/or other services.

The detailed programme for implementing Smartcards will require further work in partnership with relevant organisations and other County Council departments. A phased approach to the development of Smartcards is proposed, beginning with Concessionary Fares and rolling out to other services such as schools, libraries and leisure facilities. This work will need to build upon the findings of the ODPM e-Innovation Project DATES which will focus on the needs of marginalised groups. Further details of our action plan for introducing Smartcards are set out in section 3.3.4.2 on page 148.

3.3.2.9 The Role of Information

During the consultation on the LTP, it was highlighted that information on transport services was particularly important to public transport users. Many of those who attended the LTP Consultation Workshops for Targeted Groups identified that people need to know, and require re-assurance, that transport is available to get to key services at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease. Information is important if there is to be an increase in the number of people travelling by public transport, as potential users need to know what sustainable alternatives are available.

Improved public transport information also has a role to play in meeting wider strategic objectives namely:

- to encourage increased use of public transport;
- to reduce social exclusion as a result of poor information about sustainable travel choices;
- to offer people information in order to make informed choices about sustainable travel;
- to ensure that the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act are better met in respect of information; and
- to promote the economic vitality of the county, taking into account the needs of residents and visitors alike.

One of the ways in which the County Council is improving the availability of public transport information is through use of the internet. We have developed a county-wide on-line public transport information, allowing residents to search and browse timetables for commercial bus services, and view information on all other bus services, including community transport services provided by the County Council.

The County Council has also tendered a contract for the continuous provision of information in all bus stops countywide. This will come into effect early in 2006. This has been supplemented with information at key destinations and transport interchanges, for example, with new public transport information at Northampton railway station. We will be extending this initiative further by siting information boards at other interchanges and key services across the county.

SMS text messaging

Another method for getting information to the customer is currently under development, whereby timetable information can be sent to a mobile phone via SMS text message. By sending a unique bus stop number by text message to a centralised computer, an automatic response will tell the individual the times of the next few buses to arrive at that stop. For those with a prior knowledge of the general operating hours of any given service it may also preclude the need for a timetable, as the text message would provide real-time information, taking account of any delays due to roadworks or congestion.

Cycle Maps

Cycle maps, in a user friendly format have been produced to cover Northampton, Wellingborough and Daventry areas. Cycle guides have also been produced for Brackmills Industrial Estate as part of the Getting Northampton to Work Initiative. The County Council is currently working with the Cyclists' Touring Club to produce a cycle map for Kettering.

3.3.2.10 The Role of Marketing/Publicity

TravelSmartUK.com is a new travel portal initiative created by Northamptonshire & Bedfordshire County Councils and Milton Keynes Council with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The site offers web-based services that assist and promote smarter travel. It links travel information systems for the area together into a single site. The aim is that this will lead to reductions in unwanted and unnecessary journeys and the promotion of alternative means of travel by providing information on different modes of transport. Tools include two interactive web tools; cycle routing and a travel mode comparator to compare similar journeys by car, motorcycle, bus, and bicycle or on foot.

3.3.2.11 Meeting the needs of people with Mobility Impairments

Whilst, as is natural in a transport plan, our Action Plans will focus on providing people with the opportunity to travel to access jobs and services, we will also be mindful of the possibilities of bringing services closer to people. Examples exist in each of our potential priority areas, ranging from distance learning or e-learning educational courses to internet shopping and home deliveries; and from home-working to peripatetic health workers and the devolved provision of health services

In consultation with our partners we will examine how the provision of health services at, or closer to, people's homes can be used to influence the priorities of our pilot Action Plan and help determine our accessibility indicators and targets, and how the lessons we learn from these discussions can be translated into later Action Plans.

The County Council has established a Social Inclusion and Equalities Implementation Group made up of representatives from voluntary sector groups and county officers. The group provides comment and advice on the County Council's Equality Action Plan and connected work programmes, and equality policies. It also provides an opportunity for consultation, engagement and collaboration between organisations and community representatives. It receives presentations and information on key developments concerning equality and diversity issues, and will put forward views or recommendations.

We have already taken many steps to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are considered at every level of service delivery and infrastructure development, including reaching level 2 of the Equalities Standard.

The County Council's Integrated Transport Management Unit (ITMU) is responsible for the provision of transport services to a wide range of people across the county, including rural communities, school pupils, and those with special needs, as well as providing transport to day centres for people with learning difficulties. The ITMU will continue to play a vital role in meeting the transport needs of these social groups, and will have a key role to play in the integration of public and other transport services.

For public transport

We will continue our programme of introducing facilities which allow ease of access to / from and onto public transport. This includes:

- In partnership with operators, introducing a low-floor bus fleet on all routes in the county and providing infrastructure that allows the journey to and from stops and interchanges to be as easy as possible for people with a mobility impairment;
- Reviewing routes to and from bus stops and interchanges;
- Promoting accessibility to stations through a partnership with stakeholders in the rail sector;
- Recognising that disability awareness training is an integral part of delivering accessibility and continuing to develop our own training programmes and encouraging operators to work with us to establish a standard disability awareness training for their staff;
- Working with operators and with the Social Inclusion and Equalities Implementation Group to continually improve the provision of information by producing leaflets and publicity in formats that comply with good practice guides;
- Introducing concessionary travel passes that allow elderly and disabled people to use passes to travel throughout the county and to specified destinations in neighbouring counties, rather than their use being restricted to specific districts within the county.

For people, who, for whatever reason, cannot use conventional public transport, we will continue to support and develop community transport services within the county, working in partnership with the voluntary sector at the local level. Wherever possible, we will link community transport services with Shopmobility sites in town centres. We will also, continue to encourage the use of these services by people who are socially isolated.

For walking

We have completed a programme of upgrading all controlled pedestrian crossings to standards that allow ease of use by mobility and sensory impaired people. We will continue to review crossing standards, the location of street furniture and improve footways by providing dropped kerbs and tactile pavements at road crossings. We will aim to maintain smoother paths and provide easier access gradients into buildings. We will also upgrade identified routes to ensure accessibility for all.

Good walking routes are also of considerable use to those with disabled buggies, wheelchairs, etc. Where appropriate we will investigate replacing existing steps with ramped accesses to make them suitable for use by wheeled vehicles.

Our Rights of Way Improvement Plan may include:

- signing of routes to inform on their level of accessibility and on 'leafleted walks' information to readers about stiles, gates and surfaces on routes to enable them to decide on suitability
- the continued development and increased installation of kissing gates to assist with mobility problems on all appropriate routes
- reducing the gap between stile steps to increase accessibility for all users
- increase the width of standard timber bridges to allow easier access
- develop a programme of inter-village routes and where possible make them accessible to the widest range of users

Disabled Parking /Blue Badge

This service for disabled drivers and passengers has now been brought within Sustainable Transport as part of our Traffic Management Section.

Buses

By 2017 all vehicles in service must be low-floor vehicles. The oldest low-floor vehicles are now over 10 years old, but these are few in number. By 2011 (end of LTP2) it is likely that increasing numbers of first-generation low-floor vehicles will have been cascaded by major operators to their less-remunerative routes, or have appeared on the second-hand market. Between 2011 and 2017, this process might be expected to accelerate, although the approach of the 2017 deadline may put a premium on such vehicles, possibly regardless of quality.

If all services are to be operated by low-floor vehicles by 2017, we ought to aim to have level-boarding facilities at all bus stops by that date. LTP1 contains a target for all core routes to be operated by low-floor vehicles by 2010. We might therefore aim

- during LTP2 to equip the remaining core routes with upgraded infrastructure; and
- during LTP3 to equip the non-core routes..

It is likely that there are a lot more stops on the non-core routes than the core, but fewer will require shelters and so they are likely to be a lot cheaper.

3.3.3 Available Resources

In implementing our Accessibility Strategy we intend to combine our own (transport) resources and funding with the resources and funding from partners to deliver the best solution to improve accessibility for the citizens of Northamptonshire. The wider partnership approach of the Local Area Agreement will help considerably in this respect.

However, it will be difficult to lever funding from partners until action plans have been developed to a degree which demonstrates the benefits that they will bring. In this section we have therefore concentrated on setting out the funding which we will bring to accessibility planning as a transport authority.

3.3.4 Five Year Implementation Programme

We have taken the priority issues identified earlier in section 3.3, and used them to draw up a series of eight Action Plans to be implemented over the five years of the Local Transport Plan.

We will continue to develop our pilot action plan for access to health in the Kettering area. This has proved very useful in exploring some of the methods and pitfalls of accessibility planning and will help to ensure that subsequent action planning is improved.

We will develop two thematic Action Plans: one, covering land-use planning and the integration of services, is particularly aimed at addressing the challenges and opportunities of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy and influencing the location of new developments and services. The second aims to improve the information, advice and training for transport services which have been highlighted as a major barrier to the use of services even where they do exist. Without this Action Plan, many of our other improvements will be unable to achieve their aims.

We will also undertake a review of current public bus and community transport services across the county, focusing in particular on those services funded by the county council to ensure that they are being delivered consistently with our overall policy objectives.

We have highlighted three key rural geographic areas which experience significant levels of deprivation and have low levels of transport provision. These areas (shown on figure 3.13) are:

- East Northamptonshire;
- Welford, Clipston and Welland; and
- South Northamptonshire.

These areas will be a particular focus for our work, and each will have its own action plan. The remaining rural priority areas will be examined as part of the review of current public bus and community transport services across the county.

Finally we will have an Action Plan to focus on problems in our urban areas, particularly focused on the most deprived urban wards. Our initial analysis has shown that these areas are generally served so well by public transport that accessibility problems will only be highlighted if a more detailed analysis of the local situation is undertaken.

The Action Plans are listed in table 3.19 alongside the priority accessibility issue that relates to each Plan. Table 3.20 shows our 5-year delivery programme for the implementation of the Action Plans.

Table 3.19 - Accessibility Strategy Action Plans

Pilot Action Plan	
1. Kettering Health	Access to healthcare
Thematic Action Plans	
2. Land Use Planning and Integration of Services	Future service integration
3. Information, Technology and Training	Poor information
4. Public Bus and Community Transport Review	Limited evening accessibility to key services
Geographic Action Plans	
5. East Northamptonshire Rural Priority Area	Rural isolation
6. Welford, Clipston and Welland Rural Priority Area	Rural isolation
7. South Northamptonshire Area	Rural isolation
8. Urban Priority Areas	Urban deprivation

Table 3.20 - Northamptonshire LTP Programme of Accessibility Action Plans

Action Plan	Five Year Programme					
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
1 Kettering Health	Develop	Implement				
2 Land Use Planning and Integration of Services	Develop	Implement	Implement	Implement	Implement	Implement
3 Information, Technology and Training		Develop	Implement	Implement	Implement	Implement
3a SmartCards		Develop	Implement	Implement	Implement	Implement
4 Public Bus and Community Transport Review		Develop	Implement	Implement		
5 East Northamptonshire Rural Priority Area		Develop	Implement			
6 Welford, Clipston and Welland Priority Area		Develop	Implement	Implement		
7 South Northamptonshire Rural Priority Area			Develop	Implement		
8 Urban Priority Areas						
8a Kettering	Develop	Implement				
8b Wellingborough		Develop	Implement			
8c Northampton			Develop	Implement	Implement	
8d Daventry				Develop	Implement	
8e Corby					Develop	Implement

Key:

- Develop Action Plan
- Implementation of Action Plan

3.3.4.1 Developing the Action Plans

The eight Action Plans will be drawn up in slightly different ways. Each Action Plan will be allocated a transport budget, to which contributions from other partners can be added. We will start by undertaking a more detailed assessment of the accessibility problem we are trying to tackle in order to identify the geographic areas of interest, the target population and the services they are trying to access. As part of this process we will bring together a group of partners to work with us on each Action Plan. With our partners, we will then identify a range of possible solutions to these problems and from this draw up a short list of proposed measures. These are likely to be less than the optimal solution based on what is possible with the available funding.

Beyond the five-year programme

We have purposefully aimed to implement the majority of our Action Plans early in the LTP period to take advantage of the Local Area Agreement and the additional revenue funding which the council is providing. The accessibility in the county once these Action Plans have been implemented will be significantly better than it is at the moment. It is therefore slightly difficult to forecast what we will do after that, but it is likely to be either:

- Tackling issues in further areas; or
- Tackling issues in existing priority areas which have not been tackled in the initial action plans.

We will also need to monitor the changing situation as development starts to take place, and repeat the accessibility mapping undertaken as part of drawing up this strategy at regular intervals throughout the implementation period to ensure that we are still tackling the correct priorities.

3.3.4.2 Descriptions of Individual Action Plans

Action Plan 1 - Kettering Health Action Plan

This Action Plan has acted as our pilot for exploring the application of accessibility planning and the formation of effective partnerships for this purpose. Its aims have been to improve the accessibility to health care (hospital and GP) facilities within the borough of Kettering.

Action Plan 2 - Land Use Planning and Integration of Services

During 2005/06 we have piloted the use of accessibility audits to help guide the location of service provision by partners. We will now implement this approach more widely by promoting its use through partners and illustrating the benefits to their objectives that this approach can bring.

In parallel we will work with the local planning authorities to use a similar approach to inform the location of development and services through the land-use planning system and development of their Local Development Frameworks.

In the context of the scale of development proposed by the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy, this will make a major difference to the accessibility of services in the county over the next 15-25 years.

Action Plan 3 - Information, Technology and Training

The consultation on both the LTP and the Accessibility Strategy highlighted that there is a major problem of people not knowing what services are available, includes transport times, routes and costs. Another issue raised was the need to train drivers of taxis and buses in how to deal with people with disabilities. Unlike most of the other Action Plans, which involve setting up new systems and then keeping them running, it is important that the provision of good information and training is sustained on an ongoing basis as changes take place.

The proposals for the information element of this Action Plan is to ensure that information on transport services suitable to individuals' needs is available at the time they need it in order to create a more inclusive, integrated transport system, building people's confidence in transport services.

Whilst realising the continued importance of good quality information at bus stops and further promoting use of existing information sources such as Traveline and Transport Direct, we are now looking to employ new and innovative ways of supplementing the basics with information conveyed through technology such as the internet, WAP (mobile internet) and by SMS text message. We are proposing to carry out a marketed promotional campaign targeting residents and businesses countywide through a two stage process:

Stage 1:

- Continue to update bus timetables and maps recently published and adding new and up-to-date timetables and Real-Time information (where appropriate) at all bus stops and interchanges, including new Park & Ride facilities.
- Improve public transport information at transport interchanges and key services. The Council has already provided poster displays showing bus information at transport interchanges, and could provide similar details at key services such as schools, colleges, University, hospitals, GPs, supermarkets, shopping centres.

Stage 2:

Developing a website and linked telephone service providing information on all transport services throughout the county, with appropriate links to Travelline to plan journeys. The information presented online would be map-based focusing on the user's chosen origin or destination, and could display the following:

- local facilities – schools, colleges, university, hospitals, GPs, supermarkets – including info on how to access these key services;
- list of public transport services in the area, including link to Traveline website for journey details;
- community and voluntary transport providers;
- demand responsive feeder bus services; and
- other information such as concessionary fares, car share schemes, etc.

Similar information will also be made available a local level through the preparation of comprehensive, accurate, up-to date and tailor-made transport information packs for Parish Councils. By working in liaison with a key contact at the Parish Council, the County Council will provide information on all transport serving an area, for posting on Parish Noticeboards, and at local shops and services. This will be supported by the online information listed above, and will link to a Transport Newsletter providing updates on changes or improvements to transport in the local area.

Action Plan 3A - Smartcards

We have commissioned Cassidy Consulting to carry out a scoping study for a smart card strategy. The commissioned work will consist of the following elements:

- a brief for a suitable consultant to carry out the overall SmartCard strategy for NCC and partners; and
- a vision and outline proposals to be used to gain support and awareness of the benefits of smart cards for accessibility.

The work reported at the end of January 2006, and sets the framework for development of the Action Plan in 2006/07 as set out in figure 3.20 Phasing is likely to begin with the integration of Smartcards for concessionary fares in 2007/08, followed by the Buzzcard integrated bus ticket, schools transport and other key services such as libraries and leisure facilities, up to 2010.

Action Plan 4 - Public Bus and Community Transport Review

During 2006/07 we will undertake a major review of our public bus and community transport services to make sure that they are meeting the needs of the Accessibility Strategy and the LTP generally. In particular this work will look at filling gaps in service provision which have been identified using our accessibility mapping. This review is likely to result in expanded services in some areas, and the withdrawal of services which are no longer meeting the needs of communities in other areas. The review will be backed up by a total of £2.3million of additional revenue funding for rural bus services which will be provided each year over the period 2006 / 07 – 2008 / 09.

As part of this review we will identify incremental improvements to improve accessibility in the following rural priority areas (the top four priority areas are covered by Action Plans 5 to 7):

- 5 – Yardley Chase
- 6 – Rural West Wellingborough
- 7 – Oundle
- 8 – Irchester and Wollaston
- 9 – Long Buckby
- 10 – Finedon, Thrapston and Raunds
- 11 – Towcester
- 12 – Deanshanger, Cosgrove and Whittlewood
- 13 – Desborough

Action Plan 5 - East Northamptonshire Rural Priority Area

Each of our top priority action areas will have its own Action Plan. These areas are those which contain a significant number of communities which do not currently have access to daily public bus services. The Action Plans will be drawn up following a more detailed assessment of the accessibility needs of each area. Our initial assessment has indicated that a network of feeder buses linking to the core bus services could be provided at a cost of some £200,000 per annum from the identified additional budget for rural buses.

East Northamptonshire was ranked highest overall in terms of poor accessibility to services. Many areas of the district do not have access to a bus service and community transport options are limited in places. Improving access to hospitals, GP surgeries, Jobcentres and adult education centres are all key priorities within this Action Plan.

Action Plan 6 - Welford, Clipston and Welland Rural Priority Area

Our second priority action area looks across the Leicestershire border to Market Harborough for much of its service provision and is therefore important in regards to cross-boundary working both with Leicestershire County Council and with cross-boundary public and community transport operators.

A key focus for this action plan will be to ensure access to hospital facilities as accessibility mapping outputs have shown accessibility from this area to be very poor.

Action Plan 7 - South Northamptonshire Rural Priority Area

Our initial assessment has indicated that a network of feeder buses to provide a daily bus service to the majority of currently un-served villages could be provided at a cost of some £280,000 per annum. The case for further enhancement to existing services in this area will be assessed as part of the review of the public bus and community bus network (Action Plan 4).

Consultation has already identified that access to major towns and leisure facilities will be a key focus for this Action Plan.

Action Plan 8 - Detailed Identification of Urban Accessibility Issues

We will also carry out further work to identify areas that experience particular accessibility problems in urban areas. Our initial assessment has indicated that typically the priority wards are well served by public bus services, but it is accepted that there is a need to carry out more detailed assessment to identify particular needs which are not being met. Our five year programme for considering the urban areas is closely linked to our plans to develop the urban bus networks:

- Kettering (2005/06) as part of the development of a new urban bus network for Kettering
- Wellingborough (2006/07) as part of the development of a new urban bus network for Wellingborough
- Northampton (2007/08 – 2008/09) as part of a review of the bus network in Northampton
- Daventry (2008/09) as part of the development of a new urban bus network for Daventry
- Corby (2009/10) as part of a review of the Corby Star bus network introduced in 2003.