Response from Transition Tavistock to Devon & Torbay Long Term Transport Plan 4 consultation

Vision ["Transport will facilitate sustainable growth and support reaching net zero carbon by 2050 at the latest. Well-integrated, accessible and inclusive transport will improve travel choice and benefit the health and wellbeing of everyone."]
STRONGLY SUPPORT

Objectives

Q7 Decarbonisation SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT

Q8 Reliable & resilient VERY IMPORTANT

Q9 Easier travel VERY IMPORTANT

Q10 Unlock development VERY IMPORTANT

Q11 Greater places for people VERY IMPORTANT

Q12 The place to be naturally active VERY IMPORTANT

Q13 Most important objective? EASIER TRAVEL

Q14 Other comments about the Vision and Objectives of the new Local Transport Plan?

Decarbonisation: while reducing greenhouse gas emissions is very important, we are not convinced that "reducing the need to travel" is achievable through a transport plan alone. Also reduced "need" (eg by more home working) may be balanced by more optional / leisure travel, still by high carbon modes.

Easier travel: Glad to see "reliable" included in the objective, as it is a key factor in confidence to change modes, and "rural", because rural residents do need these transport options.

Place to be naturally active: Somewhere in the document we would like to see an acknowledgement that in 2024 Devon CC is rated 2 (of max 4) on Active Travel England's capability scale, and Torbay only 1, and targets for improvement. Under current national policy, such improvement is not only a sign of commitment to active travel, but brings greater access to funding.

Connecting Devon and Torbay strategy

Q16 Support strategy? SOMEWHAT SUPPORT

Q17 Other comments on Connecting Devon and Torbay

We agree the strategic network is important for the reasons cited. The map (p12) also shows the Devon's long and complex borders to both the west (which affects our area) and the east. We do not think that the Plan gives enough attention to collaboration with the neighbouring local authorities (in our case Cornwall and Plymouth) to facilitate the cross-border travel which residents and visitors need for local trips as well as long distance journeys. This affects eg public transport routes and timetables, location of public EV charging, and cycle routes.

We support the proposal to explore reduced speed limits on the busiest major roads.

While understanding the logic of focusing limited resources for bus service improvement on the areas of greatest population, we would like to also see ambition to improve the bus network across rural Devon over the life of the plan. This is important for equity (12% of households in West Devon

do not have access to a car or van), and for car-free tourism to be a realistic prospect. Indeed, para 4.2.2 seems out of place, as it covers bus services within Barnstaple and Torbay, not just strategic routes into or across the county.

We support the intention to protect and enhance integration between bus and rail services. The protection needs to be sustained. For example, the 118 bus between Tavistock and Okehampton station is valued and used – including by some passengers starting international trips. However it has significant gaps – eg not going up to the station mid morning or mid afternoon – and ends far earlier in the evening than the train service. This increases pressure on the station car park. With the (welcome) advent of the Okehampton Interchange station, it will be even more important that a bus service from Tavistock meets every train.

We welcome recognition of long distance coach services as an important part of the network. A related action could be working with the coach operators to make it easier for both residents and tourists to find out about them.

We support the aspiration to transform the attractiveness of travel by bus as described in the final para of 4.2. High quality bus stop infrastructure is important in rural locations as well as in towns – indeed more important as passengers are likely to wait for longer, with buses less frequent and less likelihood of nearby places, eg shops, to provide shelter.

We welcome the idea of integrated ticketing for public transport. The geographical scope of this should be as wide as possible, and systems chosen in collaboration with neighbouring authorities to ensure that people living near borders are not disadvantaged. Several important bus routes serving Tavistock cross the Devon – Cornwall border (sometimes, eg #85, more than once). A bus trip such as Tavistock to Ivybridge involves a change of bus in Plymouth. Given the geography, a peninsula-wide system would be a more people-focused starting point than Devon / Torbay only. It would also be more attractive to tourists, who may not consider local authority boundaries.

We are pleased to see the Tavistock to Plymouth rail link in Figure 9, but the arrow should point to Bere Alston, not Gunnislake. The map also gives the erroneous impression that services to Penzance can be boarded at Keyham. We would like more stress on the contribution a restored rail link to Tavistock would make to resilience of the transport network, including a long term aspiration to restore the Tavistock to Okehampton link.

We like the idea of extending services from London Waterloo to Okehampton. This would increase the willingness of people travelling to London from the west of the county to start their train journey at Okehampton rather than driving into Exeter (with attendant cost and congestion) from fear of a missed connection.

Improving digital access is important not just for decarbonisation by reducing the need to travel, but also to give confidence in using low carbon travel choices. Mobile phone reception is now essential for checking bus times at rural stops, calling taxis, and reporting problems with EV chargepoints. Online route maps are also widely used by touring cyclists and walkers.

Exeter strategy

Q19 Support strategy? SOMEWHAT SUPPORT

Q20 Other comments on Exeter

We support the idea of additional EV charging at Matford Park & Ride. We are not clear from the plan what happened to the idea of a Park & Ride at Alphington – which would be the most convenient for drivers arriving from the west on the A30.

Figure 14 shows commendable intention to increase availability of 15 minute bus frequency connections but has a huge sector missing. Crediton is north-west of Exeter and Dawlish south. The diagram has nothing for the significant area between these directions, including the towns and villages off the A30 between Okehampton & Exeter. While Tavistock would certainly not view itself as part of Exeter's "city region", a number of people live here and work in Exeter.

Re the point on single ticketing "for multi-modal travel in Exeter", see our comment under Connecting Devon and Torbay on integrated ticketing. A scheme serving just one location must be conceived as a pilot for something that could be replicated or extended. The mention of a "zero-emission transport subscription service" is intriguing but has no supporting text or reference. Sounds a good idea, but not just for Exeter.

Torbay strategy

No comment

Growth Areas strategy

Q23 Support strategy? SOMEWHAT SUPPORT

Q24 Other comments on Growth Areas

We welcome the intention to improve attractiveness of public transport by increasing service frequency, convenience of interchange & quality of vehicles. The policy should include "add or redesign routes in a way that benefits both existing and new communities". Cutting services to one side of a town to provide them to new estates on another, as with Tavistock services 86/89 brings adverse publicity which discredits bus travel overall.

We support the proposals for the Plymouth urban fringe as they relate to Woolwell. However, the improved bus services must result in better connections between Tavistock, Yelverton, Woolwell and Plymouth without detriment to current users. It would be unacceptable to add a further loop to the #1 bus service. The resulting increase in journey times, overcrowding at peak times, and risk of delays would deter use all along the route. Devon CC should agree arrangements with Plymouth CC covering school transport from Woolwell to Plymouth secondary schools, which are closer.

While delivery of other LCWIPs is within the strategy, there is no acknowledgement of the in-preparation South Hams / West Devon LCWIP, which covers the Plymouth urban fringe growth area. Nor is the proposal within Devon's own draft LCWIP for a connection from Roborough to Clearbrook mentioned. We comment separately on the LCWIP, but note here that a cycle route suitable for commuters is already much needed, and a connection to it from Woolwell would provide an active travel route for work and leisure between Woolwell and Tavistock.

The proposal to "support active travel and improve road safety by improving crossing facilities and delivering 20mph zones where supported by the local community" appears <u>only</u> in the Barnstaple, Bideford and Northam section. It is relevant for all the growth areas, and should be in the "key elements" list. Moreover the Council could set 20mph as the default speed limit on new housing estates from first occupation.

We welcome the proposal to trial shared modes including car clubs, but question limiting this to "the largest urban areas". Rather, we suggest trialling in a range of settings, including growing villages and market towns, taking account of learning from other parts of the UK.

A gap in the LTP overall, important to Growth Areas, is use of the Councils' role in the planning process for new developments. While district councils in Devon decide planning applications, they look to Devon CC as a statutory consultee to assess highways aspects. The failure of many new developments to properly design in active travel and public transport has been well documented, eg by Transport for New Homes. The LTP is an opportunity for the County Council to commit to check and challenge this through its role as consultee.

We have seen needless car-dependence in planning applications and been surprised by the narrow scope of Highways' responses. These seem to focus on vehicle movements, and not test the developer's claims on public transport links or active travel connections. Examples of misleading claims include easy access to a cycle route on a viaduct, bus information obscuring lack of evening and Sunday services, walking routes via narrow unlit lanes, and a mixed employment / residential site with no pedestrian or cycle link between the two. We point out opportunities to link new developments to neighbouring areas through traffic free cut-throughs, but this does not appear to be within the remit of Highways responses.

We suggest an action in the LTP for Devon CC to use its role in the statutory planning process to support the strategy objectives. We would also like a commitment for the Council to engage positively, including on policy detail and staff training, with Active Travel England (which gets no mention), and with relevant national or local organisations advocating for active and inclusive travel. (We have appreciated the opportunity to engage on issues relating to buses through the Devon BUS Forum.)

Rural Devon and Market & Coastal Towns strategy

Q26 Support strategy? SOMEWHAT SUPPORT

Q27 Other comments on Rural Devon and Market & Coastal Towns

This seems more description of the issues than plans to address them. Eg "hub and ride" facilities in the opening para are welcome, but just "we could" and not developed later.

We welcome recognition of the variety of rural contexts, some spanning council boundaries, and the intention to follow Peninsula Transport's SW Rural Mobility Strategy, exploring bundles of interventions. However, it is not clear how this relates to what follows, or whether pilots have started. We agree with the final sentence of #8.1. In looking at public transport journey times from market towns, reaching the departure point from surrounding villages should taken into account.

In #8.2, we look forward to Okehampton Interchange, but such hubs need sufficient capacity over the strategy lifespan, or people will be wary of them. Plymouth's George Park & Ride is now often full.

"While affordability for many residents will likely be a barrier to purchasing zero emission vehicles" should be deleted, as it does not appear in the other place types and is an unwarranted prediction over the 15 year time span. Listing the hierarchy in the EV charging strategy is good, but comment needed re application in villages with few pavements, shops or workplaces. Pavement charging gullies need to avoid trip hazards. The Councils' role in ensuring this could be stated.

We recognise the positive picture of rural life in #8.3, but the flip side is the social and emotional loss residents face when lack of transport options forces them to give it up, eg due a health condition, a bus route withdrawn, or the cost of running two vehicles. Road dangers also limits quality of life: there are village streets where residents cannot safely stand and chat to neighbours, or walk to nearby countryside.

The intention to improve town squares and public spaces and encourage use for events, is good. Road safety should include the ways people reach the public space, not just within it.

We support improving seafront destinations for pedestrians and cyclists. There is good practice to copy in Europe, including on cycle parking. One way of enhancing vehicle parking would be seasonal park & ride facilities where narrow lanes turn off main roads to popular beachesand Offering motorists a ride on a small shuttle vehicle instead of the stress of passing opposing vehicles would also make access on foot or by cycle safer.

The greater danger on rural roads needs more prominence in the Plan. “Accident” should be changed to “collision” in #8.3. We urge an explicit commitment to controlling speeds throughout this place type. Surrey CC is identifying rural roads where the 60mph default is unsafe. Cornwall has a proactive approach to setting 20mph limits where people and traffic mix. Meanwhile we hear of Devon parishes waiting years to get limits despite clear evidence of local support. We welcome the inclusion of “Introduce 20mph speed limits in settlements where locally supported” in the key elements list, but there is no detail in the narrative. Unless the Council changes its policies, process & resource allocation, progress on changing speed limits will remain slow and the casualty tally grow. Given the cost to public services, inc social care, of severe injury collisions, this is not value for money. A more effective and efficient approach could adapted from other counties.

In #8.4 cites LCWIPs in other parts of Devon with is no mention of the West Devon / South Hams one, recently consulted on. The evidence from that consultation is relevant to active travel in this place type. Indeed, CyclingUK recently published analysis part of it as relevant to active travel in rural areas generally.

Asset Management and Road Safety

Q29 Support strategy? SOMEWHAT SUPPORT

Q30 Other comments on Asset Management and Road Safety

While we welcome the aim of reducing casualties we urge a more specific target of reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured, which is the focus of the Vision Zero partnership, of which the Councils are part. As #9.5 admits, there was little progress on this in Devon in the past decade. Reduction in slight injuries is welcome, but may owe more to safer vehicles than safer roads. We suggest that both in the detail and the summary, the number of deaths in Devon and in Torbay over the lifetime of the current plan is stated, to emphasize the human cost involved.

The timing of the LTP consultation means the draft has been prepared and published before the recent (Nov 2024) report of the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation “Progressing the UK towards Safe System Implementation”. While many of the recommendations are national, we would like a line added to the start of this section recognising the value of the Safe System approach (already adopted by the Vision Zero partnership), committing the Councils to recognising the relevance of this report and reviewing their practice in the light of its recommendations.

In 9.2 we welcome the intention to continue improvements to streetlighting and traffic signals. These aid safety for all road users. We agree the importance of keeping cycling trails safely usable in winter, and urge that this is extended beyond Exeter. There is no mention of footway maintenance, which is important to ensuring older people feel confident to walk for short trips, and to avoiding direct costs to the Councils resulting from injury claims and care costs.

We welcome the attention to using lower carbon, nature friendly approaches to highway maintenance.

In 9.5 we welcome the aim that every route and mode is available to everybody free from the risk of fear or harm. However, just counting collisions and casualties ignores the fear of harm from collisions, and actual harm of resulting isolation and lack of exercise, which results when road danger deters walking and cycling.

The policy to "increase the number of 20mph villages and town centres where the limit is justified and locally supported" is better than nothing, but weak. It puts the emphasis on justifying a change – which in the light of other parts of this section suggests waiting until after casualties have been suffered, and probably means going only for roads where average speeds are already below 25mph, rather than those which pose greater danger. While local support is important, this is something that the Council can influence both positively through its communications and engagement process and negatively by weakness in the face of a minority of noisy objectors.

While we welcome intention to improve safety "in locations with poorer collision performance and those areas with the highest concentration of vulnerable road users, such as urban centres and places close to schools", it is also important to consider how those vulnerable road users get there. So walking routes to school, health or leisure centre matter, not just the road by the entrance.

While we appreciate that the number and seriousness of collisions at particular locations has to be a significant factor in prioritising physical changes, it should not be the only one. Surely in 21st century Britain we should not have wait for blood to be spilt at junctions which local people know to be dangerous before action is taken? We would like to see a proactive approach to identifying danger spots, including locality based lists of "small wins" where a relatively low cost change, eg widening a footway or adding a pedestrian crossing, could make a junction safer. Responses to map based consultation for the South Hams / West Devon LCWIP illustrate how the public can point out hazards. Such preparatory action increases the chances of making changes when either external or internal funding becomes available at short notice.

Q31 Do you support Devon and Torbay having a new Local Transport Plan? STRONGLY SUPPORT

Q32 Do you have any additional feedback regarding the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan?

The consultation process is well designed, with the plan presented in a variety of formats and levels of detail, webinars where questions can be put, a straightforward response process and a sufficient length of time for community groups to hold internal discussions.

While having separate strategies for the four place types is sensible, we are concerned that the Rural Devon, Market and Coastal Towns strategy is the weakest one, despite these areas accounting for half the population of Devon and two thirds of road casualties. This shows not only in the strategy content (see comments in Q27) but in the action plans (sections 11 to 14), where the tables for Exeter and the Growth Areas cover 3 pages each, but the RDMCT actions just over 1 page. A cosmetic improvement would be to put this place type first in the list, rather last where it looks like a sweep up of leftovers. The introductory paragraph describing it (section 2.4) should acknowledge

that for some rural residents – eg young people, families on low incomes, people who become unfit to drive - lack of transport options limits the “good quality of life” claimed. It should also mention tourism.

We welcome references to Peninsula wide strategies in the introduction. However there could be more attention to need to join up across borders, eg with Cornwall and Plymouth, on detail as well as high level strategy.

There is no reference anywhere in the Plan to staff or Councillor capacity or capability in dealing with complex transport matters, including potentially controversial decisions, or to the importance of ongoing training and learning from good practice elsewhere. We realise that there are probably internal documents that address the detail of these, but would like to see a sentence or two showing recognition of the importance of equipping both officers and members to deliver the agreed policies effectively.

Q33 Do you have any further comments about transport in Devon and Torbay generally?

No