

CABINET

15 December 2004

PARK AND RIDE SERVICE TO HOSPITAL

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 925 – Contract for Park and Ride Bus Service – 15 September 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report sets out the background to requests for a Park and Ride bus service to the Romsey Road area. The report considers two different options for providing this service and recommends that an experimental service be set up funded jointly by the City and County Councils.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1      That an experimental bus service be introduced during peak periods to link the St Catherine's Park and Ride car park with the Romsey Road area with a contribution from the City Council of £30,000 plus any additional parking income generated by users of the bus service.
- 2      That the inclusion of this £30,000 expenditure within the 2005/06 budget be approved in advance of the final budget process to enable the experimental service to be introduced as soon as possible.

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#### DETAIL:

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 For at least the last two years, there have been discussions held with the four major employers located on Romsey Road about the options for providing a Park and Ride bus service for their staff. The four employers are the Royal Hampshire County Hospital, University College Winchester, Hampshire Police H.Q., and Winchester Prison. The hospital, college and prison consider that a Park and Ride bus service may also be used by their visitors and students as well as staff.
- 1.2 There is a proposal by the County Council to provide a second Park and Ride facility in the Bushfield area, and this would be the preferred location for access to the Romsey Road area. However in the meantime the employers consider that there should be a bus link from the Bar End Park and Ride facility as an interim measure until the Bushfield facility becomes available.
- 1.3 A meeting was held in late September between representatives of the four major employers and the City and County Councils. The City Council was represented by the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport together with relevant officers. The four employers all emphasised their strong support for a Park and Ride service to the Romsey Road area, and the hospital added that they were introducing restrictions on the use of their car parks by staff from 1 October. The charges to hospital staff for a parking permit were being increased and many staff would only be allowed to park on 4 days per week. The hospital has subsequently confirmed that they now have 620 staff with 4 days per week parking permits.
- 1.4 It was proposed to the four employers that the City and County Councils would be prepared to contribute to the costs of an experimental bus service if the employers were also prepared to make a contribution. However all four employers considered that it was not their responsibility to fund any of the costs involved. They stated that employers within the town centre did not have to contribute to the costs of the existing Park and Ride bus service, and that it was inconsistent that the Romsey Road employers were being asked to contribute to a Romsey Road service.

#### 2 Proposed Bus Service

- 2.1 Following an informal meeting between the City and County Council Cabinets in early November, there was agreement that the only way to progress this matter was to introduce an experimental bus service funded solely by the two Councils. It was proposed that the City Council should contribute £30,000 and the County Council £25,000, and there would also be a small amount of additional income generated by payments from additional users of the car parks that would be added to the Council contributions.

- 2.2 Two alternatives have been considered for operating a Park and Ride bus service between Bar End and the Romsey Road. The employers would prefer option 1, an extension of the existing town centre service during both the peak and off-peak periods to give the same frequency of service as available to existing town centre users. This would require an additional bus to be added to the timetable during both peak and off-peak periods and the cost of option 1 is estimated at about £90,000 per annum. The clear benefit of this option is that it would provide a high frequency service to the Romsey Road area.
- 2.3 Option 2 would be to operate a separate bus service during peak periods only providing a direct link between Bar End and the Romsey Road. This would require two additional buses which would provide a 20 minutes frequency, and this option is also estimated to cost about £90,000 per annum. The benefits of option 2 are:
- The existing vehicles are at present overloaded with standing passengers on the busiest services during both the morning and evening periods. Option 2 would reduce the extent of overloading since some County Council staff would transfer to the new service. Option 1 would make the overloading situation worse since there would be an increase in usage with no increase in capacity.
  - Option 1 would result in the service being less attractive for existing users since the route would need to be modified to serve the rail station in both directions, and the service would be potentially less reliable due to the longer route. Option 2 would not need any modifications to the existing service, and if the experiment is not successful, the original service would continue without further changes.
  - Option 1 would need a renegotiation of the existing contract with Stagecoach that commenced on 1 November 2004. It would also need a fifth bus on the existing service that would not be to the same standard as the four existing air-conditioned buses purchased specifically for Park and Ride. Option 2 would involve a separate contract for 2 buses which is likely to be more competitive since it may be attractive to smaller operators.
  - Option 2 would specify that buses should turn within the forecourt of the hospital, and Stagecoach has tested this turning area to ensure that they have buses available that would be able to achieve this. However the existing low floor Park and Ride buses are not able to turn within this area due to the gradient at the exit. Option 1 would therefore need the buses either to u-turn at the Romsey Road/Chilbolton Avenue roundabout or within a new turning area constructed by the hospital within their Queens Road car park. Both these turning areas for option 1 could result in additional delays due to congestion during the evening peak period.
- 2.4 The level of usage of the additional service will clearly be critical. It is proposed that initially the additional service should be operated by buses with 35 seats and the service could attract about 50 additional Park and Ride users per day. If the usage was lower than 50 users per day, it would be difficult to justify a permanent service. However with 50 users per day, this would only generate an income of about £15,000 per annum so a significant subsidy would be needed for a permanent service if the contract price is an additional £90,000 per annum above the existing contract price.

The service would need to attract about 300 extra users per day to cover the anticipated contract price for the bus service.

- 2.5 The other potential problem is that use of the Park and Ride car parks has been increasing on a month by month basis since the St Catherine's extension opened in January 2004. The primary purpose of the Bar End facility is to reduce traffic flows and improve air quality in the town centre, and season ticket charges in the town centre have been increased this year and further increases are being considered by this Cabinet meeting to be implemented in 2005. There were 1,100 season ticket holders in the town centre at the beginning of 2004 and the significant increases in season ticket charges should encourage a considerable proportion of those season ticket holders to transfer to using the Park and Ride car parks. That transfer will not continue if drivers find that the car parks become fully utilised due to a significant level of usage by staff from the Romsey Road area.
- 2.6 However the potential number of Romsey Road users cannot be verified without an experimental bus service being introduced. It is therefore recommended that an experiment on the basis of Option 2 above be set up, funded jointly by the City and County Councils for a period of between 6 and 9 months. There will be a need to go out to tender for this service and then register the service with the Traffic Commissioner, so the earliest start date is likely to be in February 2005.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

#### 3 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 3.1 The City Council promotes sustainable transport options including Park and Ride in order to reduce congestion and pollution.

#### 4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 It is proposed that the City Council would contribute £30,000 and the County Council £25,000, and there should be a small income from the users. This should be sufficient to fund an experimental service for between 6 and 9 months depending on the prices received at the tender stage.
- 4.2 This City Council contribution of £30,000 will need to be approved as expenditure for 2005/06 in advance of the final budget process to enable the experimental service to be introduced as soon as possible.
- 4.3 If the experimental service attracts a modest level of usage, there will be pressure to provide a permanent service. Any permanent service would require financial subsidy and no provision has been made within the City Council's budget for such subsidy. This subsidy could be about £75,000 per annum.

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None.

#### APPENDICES:

None.