

PEWSEY VALE BUS SERVICES: SERVICE REVIEW 2014

COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL: OPTION C

Final draft to be read in conjunction with draft timetable and route maps

1 Introduction

1. Wiltshire Council is reviewing the Connect to Wiltshire (C2W) services in the Vale of Pewsey prior to awarding a new contract around the end of 2014. The Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) published their proposed new service in March 2014, and embarked on consultation up to 14 May including a public meeting on 7 May. The consultation resulted in significant levels of objection, firstly to the proposal itself but also to the conduct of the consultation process.

2. The Council agreed on 27 May to allow extra time for the local Community Area Partnerships (Devizes and Pewsey, DCAP and PCAP) to prepare an alternative proposal, and agreed to fund the necessary work. This was subject to a very tight timescale, allowing the letting of contract to be delayed by no more than three months, from November 2014 to February 2015¹, but requiring the proposal to be presented within six weeks² to allow a further round of consideration by the PTU and a second public consultation period. Further conditions were set by the PTU, that the proposal had to:

- Deliver the same level of savings, stated as £70,000 per annum, as in the original PTU proposal, demonstrated by a “credible business case”: after discussion, this requirement was modified to an undertaking to match the basic resource inputs of the PTU proposal, on the basis that if the alternative used the same resources as the original it should have the same financial performance (it would not be possible to prepare a full business case in the time available)
- Maintain provision for schools transport for entitled children
- Involve both DCAP and PCAP, and be acceptable to both
- Avoid involving the PTU in significant additional work to provide information to the consultant

3. Schools transport is provided at a similar level in the alternative proposal (termed Option C in this report) to that in the PTU option (termed Option A), but has been amended to improve the service to Pewsey Vale school, discussed with the PTU. However, it is questionable whether the compromise in using a general public transport bus to provide dedicated schools transport runs is acceptable, and the issue is discussed in this report.

4. On the community side, a Task Group was set up by DCAP and PCAP, including members of both, and the co-operation and measure of agreement between the two has been excellent. A public meeting was arranged by the Task Group at very short notice on 12 June in Pewsey, and was very well attended with around 40 people present, a high quality discussion and unanimity on the need for an alternative to Option A. In addition, the meeting set up with the PTU on 8 July

¹ There are good reasons for this, firstly that the existing buses are increasingly unreliable and urgently in need of replacement under the new contract, secondly that tender prices are likely to rise month on month, thirdly that if the process goes on beyond the current financial year the demands for cost savings will become ever more arduous.

² The initial demand was for formal submission by 4 July, but this was agreed by all parties not to be achievable, and a short extension to 14 July was agreed, subject to a draft proposal being submitted by 4 July, which was done.

coincided fortuitously with a Pewsey Area Board meeting on the evening of 7 July. The principles of the alternative proposal were outlined at this meeting, and the support for it was solid.

5. The PTU agreed to two meetings, on 12 June to scope the project, and 8 July to discuss a draft of the proposal submitted on 4 July. The latter was less productive than it might have been as neither PTU officer had been able to consider the draft proposal in any depth, so comments were provisional and largely general, but it was subsequently confirmed that the PTU had no further points to make. The level of information provided by the PTU at the outset was excellent, and there has been no need to make further demands on their time beyond one phone conversation and a couple of email exchanges.

6. The level of savings is less straightforward than it might appear. The PTU has emphasised that the primary objective of the review is to save money, as an inevitable consequence of local authority funding cuts: but there are two complicating factors in the case of the Pewsey Vale services:

- a) Wiltshire Council appears to have accepted that the complete withdrawal of evening services proposed in Option A is not acceptable – such has been the level of community objection – so retention of some service is implied, and this will have resource implications.
- b) The PTU emphasised in both meetings in June and July that the task imposed on them by the Council is to achieve the maximum savings possible, not simply to meet a set target for any given service: the £70,000 figure for Pewsey Vale services is the PTU's assessment of what is reasonably achievable. This was probably said to emphasise the primacy of the savings objective in the review, but has the unintended consequence of begging the question of what is 'possible' or 'reasonable'. It would be possible to withdraw the service completely, and that would maximise savings but is clearly not regarded as reasonable. The PTU regarded the withdrawal of evening services as reasonable, but the community clearly disagrees.

7. The daytime Option C shadow timetable has adhered to the criterion of working within the resources of Option A, apart from a later run to provide a further rail shuttle service to what is regarded as the most important train service from Paddington, which also forms part of an enhanced evening service provision. Option C uses the same number of buses as Option A, dispenses with the remote call centre for bookings, and with the above exception operates over roughly the same time period and has the same number of runs. It may vary in total mileage (difficult to assess in the timescale of the current project, and could go either way given the meandering direct route in Option A), but both options should be capable of delivering similar levels of saving. In addition, increased revenue is envisaged in Option C for a number of reasons, and a specific proposal is to re-use the £5,000 allocated in Option A to an X10 service for other purposes.

2 PTU Proposal for Wiltshire Council

1. The PTU proposal (Option A) embodies two principles which are very much supported, and which I have advocated ever since the 'Joining in Public Transport' (JIPT) report in 2002³, (also in my reports 'Villages and Beyond' (April 2010) and 'Advice on next steps' (December 2012) both for Devizes Passengers)

- a) Recasting of the circular routes as a predominantly linear service between Pewsey and Devizes
- b) Removing the remote call centre for bookings, which lacked the input of local knowledge and became an increasingly expensive luxury for the level of bookings involved

2. Option A also moved to a system of fixed routes for part of the day and demand-responsive services (DRT) at other times, probably done in order to reduce the number and cost of bookings and perhaps reduce total mileage as fewer runs would be DRT off the core route. There are however other potential benefits of a mix of fixed and DRT routes, combining the potential for quicker fixed route journeys with the coverage of DRT journeys, at different times of day.

3. In Option A, Lines 1, 2, and 3 of C2W are replaced by new Service 11 between Devizes and Pewsey, using two buses, with a third bus operating new Services 12 and 14 to the South-West and East of Pewsey respectively. ⁴ The Saturday services are operated with two buses, resulting in a lower service frequency especially on Service 11.

4. The drawbacks of Option A, as identified by the community during the consultation, and also by the current project, are:

- The complete withdrawal of evening services, affecting the Pewsey area in particular (as Devizes evening services were withdrawn several years ago, other than limited provision on a Saturday)
- Complete withdrawal of C2W services from Wilton/ East and West Grafton, and from Wedhampton, Coate/Little Horton/Horton⁵: the latter in particular appears to be in conflict with the LTP High Priority to maintain "up to a once per day (Mon-Sat) daytime return journey opportunity to settlements in rural areas" (LTP Appendix 5)
- The meandering core route on Service 11 between Devizes and Pewsey for much of the day: this neither reaps the benefit of faster journey times on a fixed route nor achieves the wide coverage of a DRT service, so is arguably the worst of both worlds
- Inadequate evening rail connections at Pewsey station: the morning service connects with all three rail services to Paddington, but the evening service ends before the most important commuter train arrives (1947), which limits the potential value of connecting with the 0719 morning commuter train (latest train arriving before 0900)

³ Joining In Public Transport, by Alan James of Eco-Logica for the Countryside Agency and South West TAR in 2002, reported on key issues for guidance on rural access based on an assessment of Wiltshire Wigglybus, predecessor to Connect2 Wiltshire in the Pewsey Vale. The report's overall conclusion was that while the service has brought a standard of public transport well above average to rural communities that previously had little or no public transport of any description, it had not achieved levels of use that would guarantee the security of service in the longer term and appeared to have reached a plateau.

⁴ This is the general pattern, although both the Service 11 buses do some 12 and 14 runs, and the third bus does one Service 11 each way as a positioning run to Pewsey, which pre-supposes that the depot is in or beyond Devizes.

⁵ There were also objections to the loss of C2W services from Urchfont and Bishops Cannings, but the argument appears to be accepted (other than by the objectors) that both villages have reasonable other services into Devizes

- The retention of a vestige of the circular Line 1 route to serve Allington via points as far east as Hilcott and Bottlesford, taking 50+ minutes on the inbound morning journeys and the outbound afternoon journey, compared with 16 to 18 minutes on the direct route via Etchilhampton
- Significant reductions in the level of service from much of the Line 2 area into Pewsey: although the Line 2 area SW of Pewsey (Manningfords, Rushall, Upavon, Charlton, Wilsford) is served to some extent by Service 12 in Option A, the rest of the area reduces to 5 or 6 runs a day and only 2 or 3 on Saturday, largely as a consequence of the occasional Line 1 circular route
- Variable quality of connections with longer distance bus routes (49 at Devizes, X5 at Pewsey) other than for connections serving Wiltshire College at Trowbridge, Chippenham, and Lackham
- Uncertainty over the booking notice period
- A view from one of the current drivers that the driver rostering would be unworkable with the current deployment of drivers, and that it was undesirable to have all three 'duties' operating all three service routes on occasion

5. Members of the, DCAP/PCAP Task Group, and the wider public, recognise the predicament faced by Wiltshire Council in the face of government funding cuts, and are realistic that a degree of cost saving is an inevitable part of the service review: but there is a real fear that if cost cutting is the primary motivation for service changes the result will be a spiral of decline in which poorer services feed decreases in usage which trigger further reductions in services next time round.

6. The alternative option proposed in this report is driven by the optimisation of services within the budget constraints, not the other way round. It offers improvements over the current services, using the opportunity occasioned by the service review to introduce efficiency improvements that deliver more for less. Option A achieves this to an extent, by moving to a more linear pattern of services and dispensing with the remote call centre: but it is felt that the pattern of services can be improved, and the case made not to withdraw evening services or services to the villages identified above.

3 Alternative proposal

1. The alternative proposal started out as Option B, which had two core routes across the Vale between Devizes and Pewsey, each with its own satellite villages off the core route in the DRT service period. This meant that the overall journey time would be quicker during the DRT period, because deviation from the core route would be more limited: but it reduced the frequency of service for any one village, as only one bus operated each core route.

2. The Task Group considered the lower frequency to be disadvantageous due to some long gaps between the arrival of one run in an anchor town and the first available departure thereafter⁶, and the improved journey time is no more than around 15 minutes compared with Option C. Option B

⁶ The worst cases related to times when a driver break was inserted into the timetable: if rostering could be worked out such that driver breaks could be factored in at driver changeover times without a break in the timetable, Option B could become more attractive, although the time saving over Option C is not all that great.

was therefore replaced by Option C, in which all DRT services cover all villages in the Pewsey Vale on most runs, and timing points are introduced at the most heavily used locations to reduce the number of bookings. This is feasible, because analysis of existing ridership data indicated that there were on average less than 30 bookings a day in total from the villages where bookings would be required under Option C, and numbers during the DRT period will be lower still.

3. The main elements of Option C are:

- Fixed routes, mostly on Service 11, providing fast journey times to serve the main commuter journey periods and the most important rail connections
- DRT services in the inter-peak period, roughly after 09:00 and before 16:30, and on the legs of the early evening runs towards Pewsey station, serving the period of the day when most DRT is likely to be required, by people dependent on the bus and for whom proximity to their place of residence is more important than journey time
- DRT service coverage extended to Wedhampton and Coate/Horton/Little Horton and Wilton/ East and West Grafton
- Evening services to meet the main needs, accepting that some reduction in service will be needed to deliver some cost savings
- Connections with longer distance bus services wherever possible, in particular the 49 Swindon-Trowbridge service at Devizes and X5 Swindon-Salisbury service at Pewsey
- Retention of schools transport services as in Option A, with one revision (see below) and subject to comments on the compromises this entails

4. The proposed daytime services are shown in the draft timetable appended to this report and operates with three buses on weekdays, two on Saturdays, with the same number of runs as Option A apart from the final round of the day (1850 out of Devizes to provide a rail shuttle back to Devizes at 1955 from Pewsey station, which would also form part of the evening service).

5. The fixed route runs take 35-45 minutes between Pewsey/ Pewsey station⁷ and Devizes, depending on route, whereas the DRT runs are allowed between 1 hour and 1 hr 15 minutes, sometimes with a layover at the end of the run to accommodate occasional awkward configurations. This is considered an adequate time allowance, but running the buses to a faster timetable would possibly make the timings less reliable, and in terms of the present exercise would simply lead to longer layover periods at each end since the constraint on the total number of runs (to match Option A) does not allow a higher frequency of service at faster speeds.

Evening Services

6. Wiltshire Council, in common with most public transport authorities, gives low priority to support funding of evening services. Perhaps the degree of public antipathy towards proposed withdrawals of evening services, here and elsewhere⁸ indicates that this priority needs rethinking.

⁷ There is an access issue at Pewsey station, as buses approaching from the North (ie coming from Wilcot) cannot turn right into the station, and it is said that they cannot turn at the mini roundabout just south of the station entrance: if that is the case even with new buses, a service from Wilcot would have to carry on to the Co-op and return to the station forecourt. There is however a bus stop on the main road before the railway bridge from where there is pedestrian access to a secondary station entrance (currently poor, and involves crossing the road).

⁸ In Lancashire, a proposal earlier this year to axe all support funded evening services caused such a backlash that it was hastily withdrawn, and services will be considered individually when they come up for renewal.

It is certainly anomalous in wider policy terms. It is a top national priority to combat childhood obesity, but apparently a low priority to provide public transport access to leisure and recreation facilities. It is likewise a top priority to combat mental health problems associated with social isolation, such as occurs amongst elderly people in rural areas, but it is apparently a much higher priority to take an elderly person to a clinic for routine chiropody than to take an elderly person to the pub for a social drink⁹. Such impacts have been reported following the withdrawal of evening services in the Line 1 service area in 2009.

7. In Pewsey, the anomaly is heightened by the amount of council investment and community energy going into the Pewsey Campus project, and the total disconnect between this and investment in the means of access to the campus that was part of its design brief. In the longer term, it may be that a Community Transport group based at the campus would be the best way of meeting its accessibility needs, but – another point dating back to JIPT in 2002 – there should be an integrated transport policy into which this would fit as part of the public transport mix, rather than an ad-hoc arrangement set up by the community champions of the Campus.

8. The decision in Option A to dispense with evening services but maintain a broadly similar level of resource for daytime services is not supported by the relative costs of each service. The evening service costs much the same per passenger trip as the Line 1 general public cost per passenger trip, and considerably less than the cost per passenger trip for Lines 2 and 3¹⁰. Furthermore, in trend terms the evening service more or less maintained its usage levels over the past year, when the daytime services had reductions in numbers of passenger trips in the range 20-30%.

9. For the current service review, it is accepted by the community that some savings have to come from the evening service, and by Wiltshire Council that a total withdrawal of the service is no longer an option. Where these two positions meet is a matter for further discussion between the Council and the community bodies, but in discussion with the PCAP members of the Task Group the following has been suggested as an opening gambit, with the proviso that it must be subject to community consultation in order to be clear on the needs of existing users:

- The evening service is possibly not essential on every weekday, at least as a medium sized bus trying to meet the needs of a very few people. Analysis of levels of use from June to September 2013 indicates that the service could be withdrawn on Monday and Tuesday with impact on only a very few users, though the existing journey purposes must be ascertained and alternatives for essential users identified (eg shift workers).
- One run could be dropped from the present service, probably amalgamating the 19:40 and 20:50 runs, which could make the service easier to operate, since at present it has to cover a huge area on a more or less hourly service frequency. However, this would not save on driver hours, only on mileage costs.

⁹ These examples are not specific to Wiltshire, let alone Pewsey Vale, but are derived from Lancashire CC's proposed criteria for assessing the value of different journey purposes: however, the gentleman needing the bus to visit the pub (in Upavon) was a response to the recent consultation!

¹⁰ Data from 2013 indicate cost per passenger trip £5.29 on Night bus, £5.22 on Line 1 (with very little education services revenue: cost per passenger trip on Lines 2&3, net of education revenue, was £6.37. It is anomalous to allocate education revenue solely to a specific service, when it is a form of cross-subsidy to the entire C2W operation including the Nightbus.

- It is questionable whether the evening service should attempt to cover such a wide area, and problems have been reported in particular with the inclusion of a Marlborough service.
- Consideration should be given either to providing a lower-cost vehicle if operated as a DRT bus service, or to replacing with a taxibus-type service. The maximum number of users on any one run in the data from 2013 was 11 (22:05 on a Friday), and usage otherwise is in the range 1-6 people.

Schools transport

10. Schools transport has been included broadly as in Option A, but in discussion with the PTU (Phil Grocock) it emerged that:

- The service to Pewsey Vale school at about 07:10 (07:05 run from Pewsey) was an error
- The service to Pewsey Vale school shortly after the arrival at North Street at 08:03 (07:15 run from Devizes) was not ideal as the school does not start until 08:50
- The service to Devizes school at around 08:15 (07:05 run from Pewsey) is timed for the start of school at 08:30, but very few schoolchildren use it¹¹

11. Phil Grocock is himself reviewing the schools provision for Pewsey Vale and Devizes schools (which in any case varies year on year according to demand), but expressed the view that it would be preferable if need be to optimise the arrival time at Pewsey Vale rather than Devizes.

12. Option C has achieved this with an arrival at 08:38 (07:50 run from Devizes), but it is not then possible to have an arrival at Devizes school around 08:15 on either Service 11 bus. A PTU concern at the meeting on 8 July was that younger secondary children should not be arriving 30 minutes or more before the start of school, but Option A provides a worse arrival time – 47 minutes early – at the more important service to Pewsey Vale School.

4 Option C: Discussion points

Viability of timetable

1. At the meeting on 8 July, the PTU questioned whether the proposed Service 11 works in its DRT operational period. Option C claims to be able to serve all villages in a linear progression between Devizes and Pewsey, but several villages are located opposite each other and some distance off the core route (as defined by the timing points in the timetable). The PTU officers are concerned that this will regularly lead to awkward route configurations, and possibly require decisions not to accept some bookings if the timetable could not otherwise be maintained.

2. The counter-arguments are that:

- The problem, if it exists, also applies to Option A which has several all-embracing DRT runs (albeit fewer than in Option C, and only in the afternoon)

¹¹ There is a dedicated school run through the Vale to Devizes school, using a 53 seater bus, but this cannot access all villages because of its size so the C2W is a 'catch-all' supplementary service.

- The very low number of bookings in villages without a timing point in the timetable makes it unlikely that there would regularly be conflicts between the most awkward cases
- The timetable makes generous allowance for a considerable amount of deviation from the core route
- Even the most awkward configurations are not all that awkward
- If it were an issue, it is a relatively simple matter to devise protocols for blocking bookings that would compromise the timetable on any given run: this is a standard procedure on DRT services with timing points on a core route, for example limiting the number of deviations off-route to say three in any one run

3. The issue can be tested against existing demand patterns. There is some patchy information from 2013 on-board surveys which shows that the proposed service would be feasible, but the PTU has undertaken to provide a recent week of service operation to provide a more thorough test. This clearly cannot be done prior to the submission on 14 July.

Business case

4. The PTU is satisfied (having tendered the service at the same time as the consultation in May) that Option A delivers the order of savings envisaged in their Business Case, but there are concerns that Option C will have difficulty in doing the same, given the additional evening run and the potentially higher mileage and increased booking costs from the increased DRT operations.

5. The additional evening run, to provide the most important rail shuttle connection, is undoubtedly an increased cost. It is less clear whether there will be increased mileage, as Option A fixes the buses on an extremely meandering route for much of the day regardless of demand, whereas Option C only meanders if there is demand. There is also no doubt that whatever low-tech local booking system is envisaged with Option A will work for Option C with its low daily volume of bookings.

6. The increased cost of the additional run, and any costs incurred by retaining an evening service, could be offset in a number of ways:

- **The X10 proposal:** In Option A (additional service from Marlborough via Pewsey to Devizes on Thursday) there is an X10 service providing increased capacity on Devizes market day, but analysis of usage does not suggest that it is needed. Although two buses provide a C2W service mid-morning (Lines 1&2 and a Line 11), there is no evidence that demand on a Thursday regularly exceeds the capacity of one bus: and the 210 service from Upavon to Devizes covers much the same route in the C2W area as would the proposed X10. Removal of this proposal from Option C makes £5,000 pa available for other aspects of the service.
- **Usage by residents of Pewsey and Devizes:** There is already evidence from the community consultation carried out for the preparation of the alternative proposal, that there will be increased ridership by residents of Pewsey and Devizes with the introduction of through services. There are many more households without cars, the pool of greatest demand for public transport services, in the towns than in the villages¹².

¹² 7.7% of households in Pewsey Vale have no car, compared with 19% of households in Pewsey and 28.3% in Devizes (2011 Census)

- **Rail connections:** There will be increased revenue from the improved rail connection services. The evidence from 2009 shows that service usage rocketed with the introduction of the earlier third shuttle service, even with poor evening return connections. With better evening returns, proper marketing, and incentives such as season tickets, there can be little doubt that the revenue potential of the rail connections is significant.
- **Fares:** Current fares are low for rural bus services¹³, and whilst fare increases are never popular there is likely to be a greater degree of acceptance if the choice is between higher fares or poorer services. There is already a measure of acceptance, in DCAP/ PCAP and in the two community meetings, that higher evening service fares would be preferable to losing the service.

7. The PTU has sought to play down the beneficial effect of increased fare revenues, since fare revenue is a relatively small proportion of total revenue and education contributions are by far the greater source of income. Their argument is that a 10% increase in farebox revenue would only be around £3,000 of additional income, which would not contribute significantly to the overall business plan. There is however no basis at present for forecasting a 10%, 50%, or doubling of passenger numbers or revenue: and the increased cost of the one extra round trip is in the order of £10,000-£15,000 pa, so the contribution of increased revenues to meeting this cost is far more significant than is implied by the PTU¹⁴.

8. The business case for Option A shows that savings come mostly from scrapping the call centre, withdrawal of all evening services, and withdrawal of the Devizes-Marlborough taxibus. Savings of around £120,000 are in fact delivered, offset by an increase of £50,000 in the contract value of the new C2W service, resulting in the net target £70,000 savings (the actual figure is £66,000). The cost elements of the Option A contract have been further reduced, in particular by removing one bus from the Saturday service (saving around £14,000 pa), but this is not clear from the business case presented to the community meeting on 7th May. Nor has it been made clear to members of the community that the desired savings are in actual costs including an estimate for inflationary effects: in other words, the new service has to cost £70,000 less than the present service in spite of the pressures of inflation in contract prices. It would be preferable for the figures to be fully presented.

Schools transport

9. The difficulty of providing a good morning arrival time at both Pewsey Vale and Devizes schools has been discussed above. It is not possible to achieve both without compromising other aspects of the public transport service, and a different resource will be needed, probably for the few service users from Devizes school. The more serious compromise is the removal of the Services 12/14 from general public transport duties to provide a dedicated school run between 08:20 and 08:50 for Pewsey primary school children from the area between Pewsey and Burbage. This means that this bus cannot be used to provide a commuter run on either route into Pewsey shortly before 09:00.

¹³ Devizes to Wilcot costs £2 single, compared with £4.35 for a similar 10 mile journey from town to outlying village in North Lancashire

¹⁴ A single regular passenger on the rail shuttles would pay £1,000 to £1,500 pa fares at a price comparable to the station parking charge: it would therefore take about 10 additional regular passengers to pay for the additional service.

10. The PTU explanation is that education revenue is a large element in the income stream to support subsidised bus services, and is a statutory requirement so has to be provided somehow. Whilst many dedicated schools services are provided by other means than using public transport resources, where possible the PTU takes an opportunistic approach and uses public service buses and drivers to save money that would otherwise have to be spent on an independent service such as a taxi or hired minibus. The Pewsey primary school run is a case in point, but there are other examples in Wiltshire.

11. The point is understood, but it is not understood why this approach is adopted in some cases but not others. Pewsey primary school is the only one in the Pewsey Vale area where the service bus is 'borrowed' for a dedicated school run, and the criteria underpinning this decision are unclear.

12. The extent of unmet demand for a morning commuter service into Pewsey is not known (probably Service 14 east of Pewsey, since much of the Service 12 area has options using the X5), but should be verified before depriving the area of its public transport service at a potentially key time of day.

Booking system

13. It is not known exactly what technical system is being devised for bookings in Option A, but there is little doubt that what would work for Option A will work for Option C, given the absolutely low number of bookings per day. This aspect of bookings should therefore be cost-neutral.

14. The period during which bookings can be made, and the notice required, are matters for discussion. Since the DRT period for Option C begins in the morning, when it will be required by users, the booking centre will have to open at perhaps 08:00, or the previous afternoon. There are almost certainly advantages, possibly with relatively low cost implications, for the booking centre to be open throughout the day, rather than just mornings as seems to be the suggestion in Option A.

Driver rostering

15. Consideration has been given in Option C to the regulations governing drivers' hours on services classed as 'domestic'. The service has been designed primarily around user needs and demands rather than driver rostering. To an extent it is for bus operators to devise their own optimum system, though it is obviously sensible to take account of the regulations to avoid expensive and avoidable anomalies in the timetable.

16. Option C offers ample flexibility to accommodate the requirements for driver breaks after specified number of hours driving. Some are indicated in the draft timetable, but it is acknowledged that these could be refined considerably.

17. It is however clear that neither Option A nor Option C (nor probably the existing C2W service) can operate with only three drivers – in principle one per bus - on any given weekday. The maximum time per day that one driver can drive is 10 hours, so as soon as there are more than 30 'route-hours' per day (including dead runs to and from the depot) there has to be a fourth driver.

Options A and C both have between 30 and 40 hours driving time per day, so require a fourth driver. This has the advantage that the main driver breaks (30 minutes) can be programmed at changeover times, without a break in the timetable, which increases timetabling flexibility.

Bus vehicle size

18. The current C2W buses are the smallest available Optare Solo vehicles, said to have 16 seats on the C2W routes although this Solo generally has 18 to 20 seats even with a wheelchair space. The maximum current occupancy is around 24 on any one run on Line 1 (driver information) though not necessarily all on the bus at the same time: this suggests that vehicles of similar capacity will be required on Service 11. However, the residual Line 2 area and the whole of the Line 3 area have lower occupancy rates, so could probably be operated with a smaller minibus-type vehicle with greater fuel efficiency¹⁵.

19. Consideration should be given to using completely different vehicles on the evening services, where occupancy rates of less than 6 are the norm, which could be accommodated by MPVs or small minibuses. The only time this number is exceeded is the late run on Friday, which should be examined further as it may or may not generally have all 11 people in the bus at the same time.

5 Summary and Conclusions

1. The alternative proposal (Option C) has significant benefits over Wiltshire Council's proposal of March 2014 (Option A).

- It ensures that there is some public transport service in all areas covered by the existing C2W service serving those without any other transport choices
- It provides fast fixed route services along two different routes between Devizes and Pewsey, covering most of the villages in the Vale on one or other route (compared with Option A which similarly covers most villages but on a single meandering route with a long journey time), at times designed to make important morning and evening rail connections and offer commuter journeys into the two towns
- It maintains some evening service, although the precise nature of the service is subject to further discussion and development
- It improves on connections with the 49 and X5 longer distance bus services in Devizes and Pewsey respectively, although it is not possible to do this at all times of day
- It has greater potential for maintaining and increasing ridership

2. The community's alternative Option C is based on the same resources as the original proposal, apart from increased levels of service in the evening. This apart, it should be in the same ballpark of costs, and therefore should deliver the same order of savings.

3. The need to retain some evening services has been recognised by Wiltshire Council, though it remains to be seen how much will be offered.

¹⁵ Bus manufacturers are wary of smaller vehicles doing regular bus duties, arguing that an ordinary minibus is not designed for the wear and tear involved in everyday use as a service bus.

4. It is argued in this report that the extra round trip on Service 11, to provide a rail connection just before 20:00, is vital to the success of the rail connection services, and with good marketing and incentivised pricing it could be largely self-funding, not only in its level of use but in encouraging further uptake of the corresponding inbound rail connection services at Pewsey Station.

5. Marketing of all parts of the revised service pattern will be essential to its uptake. Britain generally does not have a great record of marketing local buses, but there is a proposal emerging from DCAP and PCAP to use community marketing in partnership with the new operator to raise awareness of the service and to involve the local communities in tangible and beneficial inputs to the quality of service.

6. The requirement on the Council's part to make savings on its support funding for public transport is understood and accepted by the Pewsey Vale community. There is, though, a widespread concern that if savings are the principal driver of service change then wider issues of equality, health and social value¹⁶ and fairness to all sectors of the community may be lost in a frenzy of cost-cutting.

7. Even more than this, there is a view that the longer-term sustainability of services will be jeopardised if the depth of cuts is such that the 'patient' can no longer survive. If the deterioration of service goes too far, it will be the agent of further decline in usage and will foster the next step along the way to total disintegration next time round. A level of funding support is required at which the quality of service is maintained, in order to protect the investment that is being committed, even if that investment is to be at a lower level than was previously the case. Otherwise, there is a danger of simply throwing money away on the path towards extinction.

Alan James
14 July 2014

Client Note from Devizes and Pewsey Community Area Partnerships

This report and appended documents do not form part of the formal consultation.

The Alternative Proposal was submitted by the Pewsey Devizes Task Group to the Public Transport Unit on 14th July for their comment. The documents are being made available to wider participants for community feedback on the final draft.

Public consultation will be initiated by Wiltshire Council on 15th August and close on 30th September.

Feedback by 8th August to: Devizes CAP: admin@dcap.org.uk or Pewsey CAP: pcap@hotmail.co.uk

¹⁶ The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public bodies to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.