**Somerset County Council Passenger Transport Strategy 2018-2026**

**Frome Town Council Response**

We believe that Somerset’s Passenger Transport Strategy should look further ahead to 2050 to enable a more strategic and ambitious vision.

As part of this it is important that Somerset investigates or commissions a more comprehensive survey of transport needs in each area to ensure that services can be developed in response. This will help rail and bus service providers to explore and introduce additional services.

**Bus strategy**

We support Frome and Village Bus User Group’s call for increasing support for local bus services and for prioritising regular bus transport to employment areas. This is vital for people without access to a car, which includes 64% of jobseekers. In Frome key employment areas such as Commerce Park do not currently have a bus service.

In the light of budget cuts, exploring opportunities to enable better off pensioners to pay towards their ticket seems like a sensible approach. Not being able to charge bus pass holders was a key barrier to enabling our village bus service partnership with other parish councils to become viable.

Section 106 money could be used to upgrade or introduce new bus links for residents in new developments. Working with and supporting community transport providers is important too to ensure that people in rural areas don’t get cut off. Exploring opportunities for smarter services is also key, for example, enabling on-demand and shared lift services.

Introducing real time bus signs where possible will also increase service information and usage as would an interoperable smart card for bus and rail, similar to London’s oyster card. There is also an opportunity to develop express routes and / trial new routes potentially in partnership with community transport providers.

Working with communities and Parishes to explore additional mobility services such as car sharing and car club opportunities is also key. As well as ensuring all students can access the education facilities they need, working with education providers to promote bus use and walking buses is important to reduce congestion at peak times.

**Rail strategy**

Despite being one of the largest towns in North Somerset and one of only nine stations in the county, Frome is only mentioned three times in Somerset’s strategy.

Usage at Frome station increased by 70% between 2001 and 2011 with minimal increases in services showing there is growing demand for more services, especially in light of development that has happened in the area. There are currently large gaps in provision, for example, trains to Westbury leaving at either 8:16 or 10:24 outwards and often two hour gaps between trains including the peak times of 3:30 and 5:30pm.

There is a real need for an integrated transport solution for Frome linking bus services to the station for example and ensuring good links with key hubs such as Westbury and Warminster.

Improvements to the aesthetics at the station are also needed and will enhance passenger usage. Obtaining access to the far side platform would enable some improvements to be made. Additional parking at the station may also be necessary as services increase. Linking bus services to the station is also important given its out of town location.

The rail strategy could be re-organised to focus on each station area, outlining local transport needs, planned development and any other specific issues and opportunities. It should also look at transport needs across the county and highlight opportunities for additional services and stations. Opportunities for increased freight rail and possibilities of sharing these lines with passenger rail should also be explored.