

An investigation into the role express coaches could play in supporting a sustainable economic recovery, drawing on case studies along the M4 motorway corridor and South East England

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Introduction

The opportunities offered by coach transport are considerable, but are not widely enough recognised. The coach can offer:

- public transport links between locations that are not well served by the existing rail network – offering an attractive alternative to driving all the way, and with it the potential to reduce road traffic congestion;
- low cost additional passenger capacity on routes into the major cities where rail services are crowded and additional rail capacity would be expensive;
- a high quality product at a low price - the quality of the travelling environment on coaches can be high, and there is greater flexibility than rail to tailor routes and frequencies to meet passengers' needs;

and, crucially:

- affordable fares.

This paper has sought to investigate the role coach could play in promoting a sustainable economic recovery in the UK, and in particular in widening labour market catchments and providing access to employment for the unemployed, at a fare level that people can afford, whilst improving, not worsening, road traffic congestion. It looks at the challenges and considerations that would be necessary to promote an inter-urban coach vision.

The structure of this paper is as follows:

- reviews the renewed interest in inter-urban coaches, its operational capabilities and recent market re-structuring.
- looks at the role coach travel could have in addressing car-dependency land use planning based on private car dependency and its potential to integrate with wider transport networks.
- examines the future management position for the Highways Agency, the competition and regulatory issues concerning the wider bus and coach industry and the wider sustainability agenda.
- highlights key issues of this debate are highlighted by case studies of the commuter coach and coachway facilities in operation around South East England.

Renewed interest in inter-urban coaches

Since summer 2009 there has been a renewed focus from the major private passenger transport groups in the United Kingdom (UK) long-distance 'inter-urban' coach market. For example, FirstGroup launched its Greyhound operations in the UK, whilst Stagecoach continuing to develop its 'low-budget'

Megabus brand. These recent market developments signal renewed interest and belief in the future of coach travel.

Meanwhile, the bus and coach industry has come together to encourage modal shift and demonstrate the environmental and economic sustainability benefits of this sector, through the Greener Journeys initiative (www.greener-journeys.com). More use of buses and coaches would support the government's Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS) objectives, including establishing a low carbon economy.

Also in 2009, a pan-European campaign known as Bus and Coach – the Smart Move was launched (www.busandcoach.travel). This campaign aims to promote bus and coach as a fashionable mode of transport and in particular encourage growth in the use of coach. At the same time, there has been renewed interest from local and regional government in developing a vision for express bus and coach as a network, integrated with rail and other sustainable local transport.

The role of coach transport

The potential for an express coach network could provide an alternative for commuters who are unable to meet the high fares being charged by the privatised rail operators to fulfil premium payments set by the Department for Transport (DfT). However this is not a new concept, as highlighted the traditional model for example of Greenline, providing inter-urban services the around Greater London conurbation. Kings Ferry, a subsidiary of National Express has taken a strong interest in developing commuter coach services. This operator utilises the benefits of Real Time Information for commuter services based on a select a number of calling points in South East England utilising Park and Ride facilities in this region and promoting affordability compared to the local rail network or the alternative parking and congestion charge in Central London (Kings Ferry, 2010).

Coach operational capabilities

There are many opportunities to utilises the benefits of modern coaching operations and the higher quality of specification interior quality searing formations and travelling conditions than that those can be found at peak times on the heavy rail system and also the travelling on London Underground network. Coach operators are cost competitive and are also actively promoting access to internet using Wi-Fi technology to provide a productive working environment, and in certain cases providing extended operating hours than other forms of public transport. Travel by coach is becoming increasingly accessible as vehicles are featuring lift provision. Coach vehicles also make efficient use of roadspace and greater environmental performance and reduced emissions. Given the nature of its fixed infrastructure, high volume of patronage required and high investment, the rail industry can never offer complete mobility.

Coach transport can also benefit from a route network that has a high number of trip generators and utilising the benefits of the strategic highway network to establish true parkway hubs at junctions and at Park and Ride facilities. The

South East England Regional Development Agency has undertaken policy development directed at the longer term for a vision of orbital coach services on the M25 motorway, which will include integration opportunities (Anon (a), 2010). The growth of population and economic activity along the M4 motorway corridor is a fine case study given a concentration of urban settlements identified by Government as 'Growth Points' locations that could be suited to serve an inter-urban express coach network.

The perceptions of coach transport

The image of coach travel and the wider bus industry has historically been subjected to numerous stereotypes as slow 'budget' mode preferred by low-income groups in society, primarily pensioners and students. However it is clear operators are looking to make coaching a preferred choice for commuting through the quality of the on-board environment and flexibility of calling points. There are also increasing efforts to promote the bus and coach sector as a 'cool' mode of transport. The recent closure of airspace in the UK and across continental Europe saw a significant shift in patronage as demonstrated the potential market for shorter distance services.

Olympic legacy

The staging of the 2012 Olympic Games will not only provide the legacy of greater participation in sporting activities for the host country, there will also be opportunities to showcase London's public transport networks and other Olympic venues such as Weymouth. Coach transportation will have a significant role in the delivery arm through introducing a network of coach-based Park and Ride schemes located at strategic junctions around the M25 London orbital motorway (Anon (b) 2010 and Browning and Stephenson, 2010). This will provide an opportunity to challenge traditional perceptions and stereotypes of coach services.

Regional relevance

From a regional context, promoting the role for coach travel has been a key component of the Multi-Modal Studies for the South West and South Wales, with these strategies recognising the role coach transport could have in ensuring strategic routes could to function (Halcrow 2002a and Halcrow 2002b).

Market re-structuring

The bursary original abstract was submitted prior to the emergence of First Group's launch of its Greyhound operations in the UK, whilst Stagecoach continuing to develop further elements of the long-distance market through the 'low-budget' Megabus brand. These recent market developments and operation and a benchmark in quality, and a renewed belief for the future of coach travel. This has led to a marked change in the service quality and provision not only in the journey experience and the on-board features and the safety of the vehicle.

This scope now needs to be widened for the whole travel experience by delivering a programme high quality in the specification of the interchanges and integration with other modes of public transport, utilising the flexibility and

lack of the need for dedicated infrastructure compared to the heavy rail network. Also of particular focus is the long-term future of National Express Group and its approach to its core activity of the long-distance coach operations.

The dominance of National Express in the UK long-distance coach operations that was established during the nationalised network has been subjected to limited competition. This strong presence is a potential barrier to consider in attempting to broaden this marketplace. National Express's recent difficulties in the privatised rail operators suggested there that the core priority will be its coach operations, particularly following reported success of its Spanish subsidiary to avoid further merger of takeover attempts Anon (c), 2010).

Long-term coach market

Bus and coach account for more trips than rail (7 per cent compared with 3 per cent in 2008) although as bus trips tend to be shorter than average, they account for only 5 per cent of distance travelled compared with 8 per cent for rail (Department for Transport, 2009).

Current patronage levels suggest approximately 19 million journeys are made annually on the extensive network operated by National Express (Dark, 2009). This debate demonstrates the true potential that could be realised for coach travel with the delivery of the appropriate supporting infrastructure. Research undertaken by First Group highlighted that almost a half of existing rail passengers would consider travelling coach services quality on-board environment being provided by the Greyhound services (Parker-Klein, D and Jinks D 2009).

Principles of a coachway network

In order for the bus and coach industry to fulfil a vision backed by operators and government will be required in the future to overcome coach's disadvantage and of lack of priority measures such as dedicated roadspace. As Dark (2009) highlighted, executive postholders in the major transport groups suggest such a blueprint could include high frequency services running on dedicated commuter coachways, serving Park-and-Ride facilities at motorway junctions or service stations. To support this infrastructure, this requires an increase in cost of car use, such as road pricing to ensure these public transport services are competitive.

i. High-quality investment and provision

The key principle in the development of a high quality coach network is to develop supporting interchange infrastructure sited on strategic junctions on the principal highway network, primarily on motorway routes. This is because a peripheral location would overcome the time penalties that arise from calling at congested urban centre locations to provide a platform for coach services to offer a timetable that is competitive with journeys time taken by the private car.

This solution follow a practice common in the United States and place coach/bus stops on the motorway, not solely at junctions and locations where

the motorway passes close to settlements or other major trip generators. The coaches would pull into a dedicated lay-by facility cordoned off from the carriageways with measures to deter pedestrians from walking out through the vehicle accesses. There are however the associated costs of land required for the linkages, however there could be potential to incorporate a coach lay-by within the footprint of the existing motorway boundaries (Hedcar 2009).

The introduction of priority measures at junctions and high occupancy vehicle lanes would avoid delays to journey times. As recognised by the Independent Transport Commission (2010) a key policy goal for the coach sector would be the introduction of toll lanes/road pricing on the strategic highway network thereby making coach services increasing the attractiveness and profitable. However such policy position was beyond the Independent Transport Commission's present model.

Investment is critical to improve the environment and appeal of coach stations and interchanges around the UK, which have been recognised as of the major barriers to encourage public transport usage. Infrastructure and interchanges should follow example of the regeneration of Digbeth coach interchange in Birmingham, which re-opened in December 2009 and continues to form a central hub of the national coach network. Digbeth now represents a modern transport operation, with real-time information, retail and refreshments outlets and safe, bright and comfortable seated waiting areas (Anon (d), 2010).

ii. Access arrangements

This provision could be widened to accessibility improvements based on a comprehensive package of sustainable travel initiatives to reach the interchange facilities. This would be equivalent to the travel planning activities at rail stations in the UK and also similar to the Safe Routes to School initiative promoted by Sustrans, the sustainable transport campaign. This would involve establishing car-sharing networks, pool (electric) car and integration with local commercial or demand responsive bus services to act as feeder routes. In this context, the connections for some onward and complete door to door journeys could broaden the appeal of coach services.

Pedestrian access would be a high quality and safe waiting facilities with real-time information to see approaching services and a connection to local bus routes. Car parking with priority for car-sharing and bikes and high quality cycling and walking routes to nearby destinations. This would reflect best practices principles for public transport interchanges established in continental Europe, particular in the Netherlands. This simple roll-in-roll-out format would minimise the delay to the coach service - as well as promoting the express coach-motorway market to car users by having it clearly visible to passing traffic.

Urban growth and land use planning

A legacy of the deregulation of land-use planning and transport planning has been growth on car-based economy and society with sprawling suburbs and decentralised employment activity. The current urban form which has become the norm to suit generations tied in the hyper-mobility society, based on unrestricted access to the private car and represents a challenge for public transport systems. Low density sprawling nature of suburban development of towns and cities – this is a trend that needs to be addressed and coach based travel provides the option of flexibility for operations (Headicar, 2009).

A projected increase in the population of urban settlements and the future economy will place further pressures on the UK transport system. This can be highlighted by the concentration of Growth Points on strategic transport corridors such as Swindon and Didcot. As the draft South West England Regional Spatial Strategy, outlined this could lead to a further 35 000 new households in Swindon by 2026. Growth Points could lead to further urban expansion shifting the centre gravity of traditional urban structure of towns and cities away from a fixed central bus and rail transport networks.

An inter-urban coach network based on the strategic network would also address Swindon's geographical disadvantages in heavy rail coverage. Swindon does not have direct rail links to other principal employment locations such as Aztec West centred on the M4/M5 motorway interchange Newbury or Oxford or Slough or peripheral business parks centred on the Reading junctions of the M4 motorway. Similarly a number of Growth Points locations do not have direct public transport with each other, for example Swindon and Didcot are poorly connected with towns such as Milton Keynes (Headicar, 2009).

Swindon has also been acknowledged of having advantageous location factors for a coachway given its modern urban geography has been concentrated on motorway junctions (M4, Junction 15 Swindon East and Junction 16, Swindon West); an established park-and-ride site facility, (bordered by the M4 motorway and its commuter traffic flows); major employment activity (Nationwide Building Society headquarters) and the motorway's close proximity to Central Swindon, its local cycle and pedestrian network and the Wroughton Park and Ride facility that is fed by the local urban bus network, (thereby supporting the commercial viability of these services).

Currently National Express coach routes serve Swindon by turning off the M4 and diverting on local roads with congestion) through the town centre. A dedicated coach lay-by for example could save close to 20 minutes on a London-bound coach journey, making it increasingly competitive with a private car (Holladay, 2007). The frequency of coach services could also be increased by intercepting scheduled services that would have formerly by-passed the Borough of Swindon. In this context, Thames Transport, one of principal bus operators in Swindon, currently operates 15 minute frequency from Wroughton Park and Ride via the Old Town district, Swindon Town Centre, for interchange opportunities to the wider bus network onto the northern districts of the Swindon urban area.

A future role and influence of the Highways Agency

To take this debate forward a central theme is the approach adopted by the Highways Agency (HA) given the dependence of inter-urban coach routes would be based on infrastructure under its remit. A key challenge relating to this is the nature of its future management model that will oversee its road system. For a strategic network of express coach routes based on principal road network is heavily dependent upon the status and management model of the HA. For example this organisation could become an arms-length body from Central Government, similar to Network Rail overseen by an independent regulator fulfilling a programme of specified outputs. This position may make it more responsive to a wider customer base and achieve a more efficient use of its current network (Confederation of British Industry, 2010).

The HA through its partnership arrangement with Swindon Borough Council highlights the organisation is actively looking to encourage greater efficiency of its network. In Swindon, the HA are supporting the smarter choices agenda in the development of a zonal Travel Plan for the Windmill Business Park which is the base for a number of high profile organisations. This is a major peripheral office complex in West Swindon and borders Junction 16 of the M4 featuring 4 000 employees, representing a significant trip generator. Junction 16 suffers from heavy congestion during morning and evening peak periods resulting in queuing on the M4 carriageway. A substantial contributor to this congestion is commuter traffic to Swindon and Windmill Hill Business Park. The latter has a single vehicle ratio of over 70% for staff travelling to work. Postcode analysis suggests that at least 30% of the movement into Windmill Hill Business Park travels along the M4 corridor or via junction 16. Congestion is expected to worsen as a result of continuing employment and housing growth in the Borough Swindon and incremental housing growth in smaller settlements to the south of Swindon and the M4 (Fleming, 2010).

Swindon Borough Council and the HA are contributing £15 000 each over the next 2 years to fund infrastructure improvements and undertake travel planning activities. However further detailed analysis of travel behaviour could lead this partnership in the future to delivery medium scale infrastructure schemes such as a formal coachway facility by pooling resources through a joint Travel Plan approach involving the business park. Windmill Business Park is also connected the National Cycle Network and pedestrian and lies on the route of a 10 minute frequency corridor between Swindon Town Centre and Wootton Bassett, currently provided by Stagecoach in Swindon and has bus stops within the vicinity of this particular site.

Competition and regulatory concerns

The current market framework in the bus industry also represents a challenge (with the deregulation of the long-distance services in 1980 and the opening-up of the local bus market in the 1985 Transport Act). To develop a franchised network of routes (similar to the UK privatised rail industry) to provide a co-ordinated network under a uniformed marketing brand is impossible without a revision of the legislation following the scope of the

Local Transport Act (2008) to support and co-ordinate local bus services (Clark, 2010).

Further legislative reforms would need a change in the mindset of an industry providing a network based on co-ordination rather competition. A future framework for the bus industry could consist of greater financial management such as the High Level Output Statement or the Statement of Funds parallel to the rail industry that would offer the strategic vision and the steer, particularly for long-distance, inter-urban market. A reform of this nature through further regulation would give greater accountability of the significant government expenditure and public subsidy that is allocated annually to this sector.

Sustainability agenda

The political policy agenda and also public attitude towards reducing car usage and promoting the use of sustainable travel modes is becoming an established and growing body of opinion within the UK population.

The environmental agenda is being promoted by a collation established by operators within the UK, under the banner of the Greener Journeys campaign. This is part of the wider efforts to reduce carbon dioxide and reducing the carbon footprint by substituting journeys for the private car for bus and coach travel. This demonstrates the responsiveness of the industry through the Greener Journeys campaign forum to co-ordinate coach operations into a unified body to co-ordinate the various networks under an umbrella brand. Greener Journeys state that shifting from the private car to bus or coach for just one journey in twenty five could lead to the reduction of 2 million tonnes of Carbon Dioxide (Greener Journeys, 2009 and Smart Move, 2010). There are also the global concerns associated with Peak Oil, the future costs for private car ownership and use and the political sensitivity concerns over the long-term prospects for the availability and security of supply for fossil fuel resources.

Marketing – establishing a standardised branding

To ensure that this nature of operation to be progressed forward, this will require greater co-ordination of all the various differing market products and ownership interests. This will take account of operations and also marketing ,which has become as element where the bus industry has been recognised for good practice. It is clear that a single initiative in coaching operation will not succeed on its own in terms of its impact and visibility. One recent example British Airport Authority (BAA) at Gatwick has commenced a new 'Airport by coach' service which is operated by Arriva subsidiary Excel. This service has a two-hourly frequency from Medway towns to Gatwick via Maidstone and Sevenoaks and their respective rail stations. Currently this operation has a low profile and limited significance, however as part of an integrated approach wider network benefits could be realised. There is also a need for closer co-operation with the rail industry particularly in the rail marketing and linkage with the rail stations such as clear signage and marketing (Aon (d), 2009). This follows the experience of the Traws-Cambria inter-urban bus routes across Wales which will be marketed as Trans-Cymru, which could also incorporate across the local rail services (Clark, 2010).

A common concern raised regarding public transport is to ensure it is competitively priced, particularly for walk-on fares and the casual user which would counter-act a critical aspect of the privatised railway at peak periods, utilising the latest form of ticket technology, with the greater reference and availability of electronic tickets, such as SMS. Timetables could be marked by a symbolic and easily recognised brand similar to the former British Rail logo with contact point/interface either web-based/internet call centre co-ordinated by Traveline/Transport Direct.

Household Accessibility

There are also a host of other supporting factors such as the option for affordable commuting, reducing the need for second or multiple car ownership in a household. The commonly cited reason that the main wage earner in household utilises the car for the working day.

Current regional coach services

There are three examples of regional coach markets in the UK, the services operating between Oxford to London, with two branded routes; Oxford Tube and the Oxford Express and the introduction of the Greyhound brand by First Group in September 2009, operating between London, Southampton Portsmouth and Bournemouth and the Kings Ferry operation.

Greyhound and Oxford Tube services

There are distinctive set of unique characteristics of these markets which can be defined by a marked number of trip generators focused on commuter flows, the popularity of tourism assets such as heritage and leisure and recreational destinations, a large and established student population and within easy reach the influence of London based on strategic motorway corridors (in this case M3 and M40). The Greyhound routes have been also designed to offer a competitive commuter service from Bournemouth, Portsmouth and Southampton into Central London with a journey time of just under 2 hours through avoiding a call at Heathrow International Airport (Parker-Klein, D and Jinks D 2009).

The Oxford routes provide the most intensive inter-city coach networks in the world promoting high-frequency and on-board features (such as Wi-Fi access). These onboard features and extended hours of operation cannot currently be provided by the rail industry. Stagecoach states that the average passenger loading is 60 people for each of its Oxford Tube service. A further benefit of this network is that the service offer differing calling points, particular in Central London. The regular programme of upgrading of the vehicle fleet, the onboard features and the extended hours of operation reflects a very modern travelling experience to a higher standard provision being offered on the competing parallel rail network (Lord, 2010).

Kings Ferry

On its website, Kings Ferry promotes its commuter coach service as offering a guaranteed seat, air-conditioned coach, a choice of 183 local pick-ups across 34 services in Medway and Swale, utilising Park and Ride facilities and 19 drop offs around London from Algate to Victoria, an early morning flyer

service, faster journey times (for example 48 minutes from Bridgewood to Canary Wharf (Kings Ferry, 2009).

National Express Commuter Coach (Swindon-London)

Before the onset of the recession, National Express considered a proposal aimed commuters by expanding its commuter coach concept with a new service between Swindon, Reading and central London. This proposal would have the advantage of priority measures through the use of the M4 bus lane. National Express planned to run a daily service from Swindon and Reading to central London, which would call at Hammersmith, Trafalgar Square and Victoria Street and terminate at Victoria coach station. The operator stated that fares would be between 60% and 70% below the comparable rail fare and passengers will benefit from complimentary wireless internet, a guaranteed seat and bottled water (National Express, 2008).

Coachways

This section draws on a number of coachway facilities that have established both on a formal and informal basis in the South East England demonstrating the potential and need for inter-urban coach services to serve interchange points on the periphery of urban centres on the strategic highway network.

Milton Keynes Coachway

A prominent case study of establishing a coachway in the UK is Milton Keynes with a dedicated hub serving the M1 motorway. As part of preparations for this research paper, discussions were held with David Coates, a former Council Officer, who was involved with establishing a coachway for Milton Keynes and provide an insight into the historical context from its early origins and ongoing expansion. In the early 1980s, a large bus and coach station was opened near Milton Keynes Central Rail Station (opened in 1982), a location which is contrary to officers' advice. The Council promoted a facility closer to the city centre. Coaches also served a stop in Central Milton Keynes. The bus station lied 4.5 miles from the M1 motorway, with the city 3.5 miles from the motorway. National Express operated coach services into Milton Keynes from Junction 14 of the M1. However the service frequency was very limited and the destinations were limited.

In the late 1980s National Express informed Buckinghamshire County Council that it was no looking to withdraw its Milton Keynes city centre and bus station calls. The coach operator justified its decision by stating the patronage levels generated were not sufficient to undertake a 9 mile diversion from the motorway. National Express stated to address if a calling point was identified closer to the motorway, Milton Keynes could benefit from an enhanced service opportunities.

A solution was identified close to Junction 14 of the M1, where there was a car park, a caravan that provided cafe facilities and an AA enquiry office and this location marked the first generation of the Milton Keynes Coachway.. By April 1989, the AA unit became a National Express enquiry office and a two vehicle lay-by and bus shelter funded by Buckinghamshire County Council. Whilst budgets were limited, funding was available to support a half-hourly

shuttle minibus service between the Coachway and central Milton Keynes. As a result of this infrastructure a significantly enhanced coach service, as departures increased upto 150 daily departures and established as a successful measure and capacity issues were becoming a common concern.

To address this a second phase of the coachway became necessary. This facility is currently undergoing refurbishment works to accommodate a new coach station that will incorporate a café, ticket office for local and national coach operators and also include a car parking with a capacity for 1 500 Park and Ride facility. The Milton Keynes Partnership are funding for the Park and Ride component of this scheme is has been funded through the wider improvements to Junction 14. Re-development of this interchange facility is due for completion during Spring 2010 and will provide a significant gateway for local and long-distance services.

Lewknor Coachway Park and Ride (Junction 6 of the M40 motorway and the Oxford Tube Connection

The Oxford Tube has also seen the creation of the Oxford Tube Connection, a demand responsive service to ease car parking pressures at the Lewknor (Junction 6 of the M40 motorway) as highlighted with correspondence with Neil Timberlake Assistant Public Transport Officer Oxfordshire County Council (Timberlake 2009 and 2010). This motorway junction had been served by the Oxford Tube from some years before, as a mechanism whereby Stagecoach could charge short-distance fares and thereby register the service as a Local Bus Service, enabling Stagecoach to claim Fuel Duty Rebate (later Bus Service Operators' Grant).

In response to this arrangement taken by Stagecoach patronage was attracted to this calling point. However no facilities were provided and the area lying in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), cars began to be parked along verges and underneath the motorway bridge and an informal Park and Ride facility was becoming established.

This Park and Ride site began to create problems as it grew with the increased popularity of the Oxford Tube. Acting on advice from the security services, it became necessary to prevent cars parking underneath the motorway bridge, as there was a perceived risk that (at a time of heightened security awareness) an explosive device could be contained within a car parked there and used to destroy the motorway bridge and sever a strategic road link.

This increased pressure even more on the road verges nearby, and led to a limited amount of paved parking area being established, and the beginning of the (very limited) development of the site as a Coachway Park and Ride location. However, it was felt vital to try to car parking space, and so the idea of providing an alternative bus link began to take root. The service began, in late January 2005, as part of a Rural Bus Challenge-funded package to provide a minibus service linking various communities either side of the M40 in South Oxfordshire, with the coaches of the Stagecoach "Oxford Tube" service at Junction 6 of the M40 motorway This service is now operated by

the Watlington Community Interest Community which began in March 2008, and is funded by Oxfordshire County Council until June 2011. Watlington CIC have now re-branded the service as "The Watlington Connection", and have established its own website (www.watlingtoncic.co.uk) which provides a timetabled service for the morning peak period with a demand responsive arrangement for passengers in the evening period. The service continues to reduce the demand for car parking space at M40 Junction 6.

Coachway and Park and Ride, Wycombe M40 Junction 4 and the Oxford Tube Connection

Buckinghamshire County Council and Wycombe District Council have agreed (in outline terms) for the development of a Coachway and Park and Ride facility adjacent to junction 4 of the M40 (High Wycombe), which is to be developed by 2012. If this scheme is completed as proposed this facility will be served by Oxford Tube service as well as other operators. At this stage it is unclear whether this junction 4 stop will supplement or replace the current Lewknor stop at Junction 6, M40. If the High Wycombe coachway does replace it then clearly the informal car parking at the Lewknor site will most likely disappear and the Oxford Tube Connection service would either cease or have to be significantly re-cast (Timberlake, 2010).

Reading – informal coachway, M4

Reading has an informal coachway arrangement at Calcot at Junction 10 (Reading West) on the M4 motorway, which adjoins a peripheral retail park that is served by the local bus network. This development occurred following National Express's decision not to serve Reading town centre directly due to the time penalties caused by road traffic congestion. Calcot is also served by Megabus services and international services, especially to and from Poland. This coachway fulfils the vision outlined by Souter of using mixed-use sites such as in the context of a peripheral retail park, linking into the local bus network (Anon (e), 2010). Reading Buses service 26 operates on a 12-15 minute daytime frequency and a 30 minute journey time. This service also operates on Sundays and in the evenings until midnight. In addition, Newbury Buses route Vitality 1 operates every half hour daytimes towards Thatcham and Newbury as well as towards Reading direct along the A4 (with a 20 minute journey time (Freeman, 2010).

Conclusions

This paper has sought to investigate the role, challenges and considerations that would be necessary to promote an inter-urban coach vision. The benefits offered by coach transport are considerable and not widely recognised from the flexibility of routes and innovation in seating and travelling environment to service quality and affordable fares.

Ongoing investment together with new technologies such as the continued rollout of Wi-Fi will be required to keep cities and motorways moving. With the appropriate integrated transport systems coach travel, has the attributes to play a more significant contribution to the long-term address the nation's transport issues. Learning from the legacy of the infrastructure established for the Milton Keynes Coachway and the popularity of the facility this could represent

an affordable approach to commuting compared with fares being charged on the Great Western main line railway. On this route a high premium is charged not only due to the attractive journey times available, it has become a necessity as the Government seeking greater returns from the franchise holders of the inter-city services in the privatised rail industry.

An inter-urban coach network has the potential to overcome the operational challenges and future management of roadspace once the economic recovery has been achieved. Joint partnerships between the Highways Agency and relevant local authorities such as Swindon Borough Council will be a key driver to achieve this vision together with further reforms to regulations concerning co-ordinating rather than competition in the wider bus industry.

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