

**RESPONSE TO Hastings and Rother Accessibility Assessment  
by the Rother Transport Action Group**

There is considerable concern from the Rother Transport Action group (RTAG) that a lack of knowledge of the area and reliance of the use of an online survey has prevented the very real access issues faced by residents in rural Rother from being addressed through this study. The transport action group has studied the needs of Rother residents for a number of years now, and most recently has included issues raised through Local Action Plans. Transport and accessibility have been two of the most widely raised issues in published plans.

The SEEDA Social Inclusion statement (2005) states "Access to a post office, food shops, GP or primary school is an issue for this region. This aspect of deprivation focuses on people on benefits. It is perhaps in these rural areas that individuals are most likely to feel isolated from the relative prosperity around them. In looking at Rother 14 wards were within the 20% with least access to services in the region. This includes wards like Fairlight (highest number of old people) and Camber (high levels of deprivation).

Access Domain	Ward	Rank (1 = least access to services)	
Worst 10%	Ashburnham	511	
	Fairlight	547	
	Westfield	550	
	Ticehurst	636	
	Bodiam & Ewhurst	641	
	Camber	683	
	Guestling and Pett	694	
	Brede and Udimore	749	
	Worst 20%	Beckley and Peasmarsh	1024
		Winchelsea	1113
Burwash		1230	
Etchingham and Hurst Green		1397	
Salehurst		1442	
Catsfield and Crowhurst		1673	

From the 2001 census rural Rother has 2818 households with no access to a car (14.7% of total households). In addition 43% of households have access to only one car, this often leaving the District with the main income earner within a household leaving the rest of the household with access needs. Of the 8,777 pensioner households in Bexhill over 40% (3522) have no car.

The report seems to lack understanding of the level of need thus demonstrated in Rother.

Access to the Conquest Hospital, shopping and schools are perceived as the most difficult in responses in 12 Local Action Plans so far published.

Whilst the document states there seems to be no particular age group which has difficulty accessing transport this directly contradicts evidence from Local Action Plans that highlight the specific difficulties for young people, before they own a car, and older people in Rother

Lack of locally available information, as well as a poor perception of reliability of commercial services is also an issue in the rural areas.

The decision to prioritise employment and further education as two of the four areas of concern has a negative effect on the community of Rother, with its large number of older people, and their needs for accessibility – which includes a number of issues such as additional pedestrian crossings, kerb lowering etc

**Accession Runs**

**Conquest Hospital**

The poor direct access to the Conquest from the majority of Rother is admitted to but there is a rather cavalier attitude to the ability to reach the Conquest using 'interchanges' Again the lack of knowledge of the local area is apparent. There are not good interchange points, except at Hastings station. At somewhere like Ore it may mean crossing trunk roads, with limited pedestrian access, and then finding which bus stop has the linking bus. The strange numbering of Hastings buses – for circular routes also catches out many residents from the Rother area who end up going the 'wrong way' round the circle and adding an hour or more to the journey.

Whilst comment is made that Tunbridge Wells is more accessible for northern Rother it does not take into account the fact that GPs refer to the Conquest.

The lack of any form of evening service is starkly obvious.

At a Local Action Planning meeting in Pebsham one elderly resident commented that the provision of parking on the route from Bexhill to the Conquest would make it feasible for him to travel by bus for hospital appointments – as the walk from parking at/near the hospital site was in itself difficult for him.

The impact of school bus times on rural timetables does not seem to have been appreciated when talking about hourly services.

There is great concern that the Conquest may not even remain as the main hospital for referral and that even more difficult journeys – to for example Eastbourne District Hospital may be expected in the future.

#### FURTHER EDUCATION

The limited timings of buses to and from Bexhill College has caused issues for students from rural areas when the timings of the bus, their study timetable and the opportunity to participate in clubs, leisure sessions etc do not match and many young people from rural areas feel they do not get the full value of experience from their attendance at college due to this limitation

There is a particular issue in the afternoon when more local students, with a choice of bus, may fill one of the buses which go to the more rural areas, leaving rural students reliant on parents to come and collect them.

It needs to be recognized that further education institutes tend to specialize in certain educational qualifications which means that a young person may need to travel to the least accessible option if they wish to study a certain subject.

Residents of Rother are pleased by the siting of Hastings New College as it should make the journey accessible for many more residents.

The cost of public transport has not been identified as a barrier to its use although this has been cited in a number of Action Plans. It is more likely to be a barrier for young people in Rother and for those working but on relatively low wages.

#### SUMMARY of OPTIONS

Option 1 (Bexhill Travel Plan) has already been highlighted by the Rother Transport Group as needing action

Option 3 (Ride sharing) is already used by rural students, but is limited by timetabling constraints and lack of transport options for students

Option 5 (enhanced rail services to Ore) is seen as very important and already highlighted by RTAG

Option 7 (shuttle buses to supermarkets) was seen to be in direct contradiction to policies wishing to preserve sustainability for our local communities

Option 8 (bespoke bus information) is something RTAG has been working with ESCC to improve for years. It is especially crucial if we want people to feel safe when changing buses.

Option 9 (personalised journey planning for students) seems to be 'worthy' rather than achievable. However a pilot project run by the Marshlink Line which used PSE lessons at Thomas Peacocke to teach students how to use the rail, buy tickets, understand and use timetables had a great deal of success and took a number of students onto a train for the first time.

Option 12 (Wheels to learning/work) a pilot of this model has been attempted on a number of times in rural Rother. The reality of the road system – in particular the dangers of two wheeled transport on the A21 and A259 have always prevented the adoption of the scheme. The issue is not about 'safer riding' but about the inherent dangers of being on a road that inappropriately carries very large HGV's. Contact with Sussex Police and Fire Service will highlight how many of the serious/fatal accidents in Rother have a motorbike involved.

Option 13 (Promote online shopping) was seen to be in direct contradiction to policies wishing to preserve sustainability for our local communities. It has also been highlighted as a very expensive option for those living alone (particularly pensioners) and that it would add to rather than support the issues around social isolation.

Option 14 (order point for shopping) some local older peoples clubs have tried this option and have found several drawbacks. Supermarkets do not differentiate between orders put in together, therefore time is spent splitting orders; replacement of goods causes argument; delivery from the drop off point to home. A number of local

shops offer local delivery already and centralizing such services would further undermine the sustainability of such shops.

Option 15 (BusPLus scheme) has been highlighted by RTAG and through Local Action Plans

Option 16 (improve interchange facilities) has been highlighted by RTAG and through Local Action Plans. In addition the need for buses and cars to 'interchange' is also highlighted by rural residents ie Park and Ride schemes

Concern was expressed by RTAG that Parish Councils had not been included as stakeholders.

Gina Sanderson

Chair

Rother Transport Action Group

10<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

#### **RESPONSE TO Hastings and Rother Accessibility Assessment**

from Martin Fisher, Vice Chairman of the Rother LSP Board

"There are a large number of issues that seem to have been treated superficially by the H&RAA. I too got the impression that on paper travel through interchanges seemed to "bring in to use" facilities for communities located far away from that service (not just rural / urban). In practice we know that expense, poor timetabling, lack of information and lack of accessibility means that travel via interchanges on public transport preclude the most vulnerable from using such a "service" and dissuades others from doing so. Clearly this adds to increased road use for those who have access to a car on a poor road infrastructure (with the negative environmental and safety repercussions of this) or increased isolation for the many people in Rother who do not have access to a car.

I particularly endorse the absence of attention in the original report to the sustainable community agenda".

10th July 2007

#### **RESPONSE TO Hastings and Rother Accessibility Assessment**

from David Marlow, Principal Planning Officer, Rother District Council

1. A perception that the Accessibility Assessment is not as "rounded" as it could be.
2. The attention on supermarkets is not only to the potential cost to more local (and accessible) shops, but seems to encourage peripherality, whereas there is a strong case for giving more attention to encouraging more people to go to the two town centres by bus/cycle.
3. I wonder to what extent the distance/time thresholds of the model contribute to an impression of accessibility being better than it is seen in practice?
4. Despite access to the hospital being the most difficult, the report does not propose any specific action. Likewise, no actions relate to cycling.

10th July 2007

#### **RESPONSE TO Hastings and Rother Accessibility Assessment**

from Councillor Ian Jenkins, Rother District Council

"There is a real lack of background knowledge and need for that information to be related to young people".

10th July 2007