

Agenda Item No. 4(e)

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**

24 March 2015

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

FUTURE OF DERBYSHIRE TRAIN TIMES BOOKLET

(1) **Purpose of Report** To seek the Cabinet Member's approval for a funding contribution to continue production of the Derbyshire Train Times Booklet.

(2) **Information and Analysis**

Background

Derbyshire County Council has produced the Derbyshire Train Times booklet for many years. This train timetable provides the only comprehensive details of train services serving all stations in Derbyshire, irrespective of train operator. Two editions are produced each year, at the time of national rail timetable changes in May and December. The timetable is a free A5 booklet distributed through railway stations, Derbyshire libraries, Tourist Information Centres and a number of local outlets, with a 25,000 circulation for the summer edition to meet demand from visitors and 20,000 copies for the December edition. The costs of producing this publication have been reduced significantly over a number of years due to more cost effective design and reduction in the quantity printed. For instance, printing and distribution costs for 2015-16 are planned to be £2,000 less than in 2014-15.

For many years, the Derbyshire Train Times booklet has been funded through contributions from the train operators. Derby City Council also provides funding towards this publication as part of its financial contribution to public transport timetable information in Derbyshire. Unfortunately, over recent years, the contributions from the train operators have diminished. In light of this, Derbyshire County Council carried out a review of the Train Timetable booklet to establish users' opinions of the booklet and to evaluate options for the future of the publication. As a one off contribution, the train companies agreed to fund the December 2014 edition, incorporating the rail user survey. Between 10 December 2014 and 6 February 2015, 329 completed questionnaires were received. The results are summarised below and shown in more detail in Appendix 1:

- 97% of respondents found the publication useful or very useful.
- 59% of respondents travelled monthly or less frequently.
- 89% of respondents were travelling for leisure.
- 64% of respondents use the book monthly or less often.
- 57% of respondents would pay £1.00 or more for the train timetable book
- If this timetable did not exist, the majority of respondents would use train company leaflet(s) for their rail information.

In addition, a number of letters or emails of support were received several of which are also listed in Appendix 1.

Various options have been considered to continue to provide comprehensive train timetable information throughout Derbyshire. These options are:

1. Continue to produce current Derbyshire Train Times and seek financial contributions from partner organisations

- This provides the most effective way of ensuring the timetable is widely available to potential users.
- The total cost of printing and distributing two editions for 2015-16 would be £5,500 per annum.
- It is envisaged that this publication is funded with £2,000 from Derby City Council's contribution to public transport information, £500 from the Derwent Valley Line Community Rail Partnership and £500 from the High Peak and Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership. Contributions of £1,000 each are also being sought from the three train operating companies. At this stage, these contributions cannot be guaranteed and any shortfall would need to be met from the County Council's Public Transport publicity budget
- Retaining the timetable in the short term enables opportunities to be explored for securing funding for the publication of the timetable as part of the new franchising arrangements or through the new Combined Authority.

2. Economy version of timetable

- A cheaper version, e.g. black and white cover, could make it more sustainable now and in the future. Quotes have shown this would only save approximately £1,000 over the two editions. There would be additional set up costs to alter the format of the book, e.g. redesigning the map in black and white, as well as additional Officer time to redesign some of the layout. It is also likely that this format maybe less flexible in terms of production of the book.
- There is concern that the identity of the book would be lost and be less attractive and useful for users.

3. Charging For the Derbyshire Train Times Timetable

- In the survey, 57% of respondents stated they would pay £1 or more for the booklet. This option would be on a sale and return basis with Derbyshire County Council receiving 66% of the cover price. Charging could potentially cover the printing costs, however, there is financial risk to this option as the level of sales cannot be predicted with any accuracy.
- The timetable would not be as widely available and there is reluctance from the train operators to sell the booklet at stations which severely limits the viability of this option.
- The costs and administrative time of invoicing outlets, many for small amounts, would be disproportionate.

4. Sponsorship of the Derbyshire Train Times

The option of an external sponsor has been investigated in conjunction with the Public Relations Department. No suitable sponsor was identified for a Countywide publication of this nature. The administrative costs of using a number of smaller advertisers is also likely to be prohibitive.

5. Cease in Printed Form

- The timetable could be produced online, but this would only be available to those with suitable internet access. The booklet is not currently reproduced online as the general practice is to redirect online enquires to the national rail website where any short term alterations will be.
- Online timetable information does not readily produce all travel details in the best format for planning journeys where more than one operator provides the service. The Derbyshire Train Times provides this information at a glance and its portability is valued by users.
- Existing train operator timetables and those produced by the Derwent Valley Line and North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnerships provide some of the information, but not the consistent Countywide coverage of the Derbyshire Train Times.
- The lack of a printed booklet may reduce the rail information available for visitors e.g. at Tourist Information Centres.

Of the above, options 2, 3 and 4 are effectively compromise options aimed at reducing the net cost to the County Council. Option 2 does not appear to be attractive in that it would reduce the attractiveness, and hence the level of take-up, whilst producing only a modest saving. There are risks associated with options 3 and 4, and both options would increase administrative costs.

On this basis, the key decision is therefore whether to continue to produce the booklet as now, whilst seeking to minimise the cost to the County Council by seeking contributions from partner organisations as outlined above or, alternatively, to cease publication of this booklet in printed form on the basis that the information is available in a different format, albeit in a less convenient format for some users.

In reaching a decision on this matter, Members may wish to bear in mind that the County Council's area Bus Timetable booklets are largely self-financing with a cover charge of £3.50.

For the reasons outlined above, charging for the train timetable is not considered to be a viable option. The next timetable starts on 17 May 2015 and a decision is required on the future of the train booklet by 31 March 2015 to enable this edition to be published on time.

The arguments for and against continuing this publication are finely balanced. It is not essential and few, if any, other authorities produce such a publication. So it is questionable whether the County Council should continue to produce it, especially in the current difficult financial climate. There is little doubt, however, that the train timetable publication is valued by those people who use it, including visitors and tourists, and the cost is fairly modest when viewed in the context of the overall public transport budget.

On balance, it is recommended that the publication of the rail timetable should be continued for at least the next two editions (May and December 2015), and that the matter be re-visited as part of a wider review of public transport.

(3) **Financial Considerations** Funding of £2,000 has been agreed by Derby City Council as part of its Public Transport Timetable Information funding for 2015-16. Contributions are currently being sought from the train operators and the Community Rail Partnerships for the remaining amount. If all these funding requests are unsuccessful, then £3,500 will be required from Derbyshire County Council's Public Transport Publicity budget.

Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

(4) **Key Decision** No.

(5) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

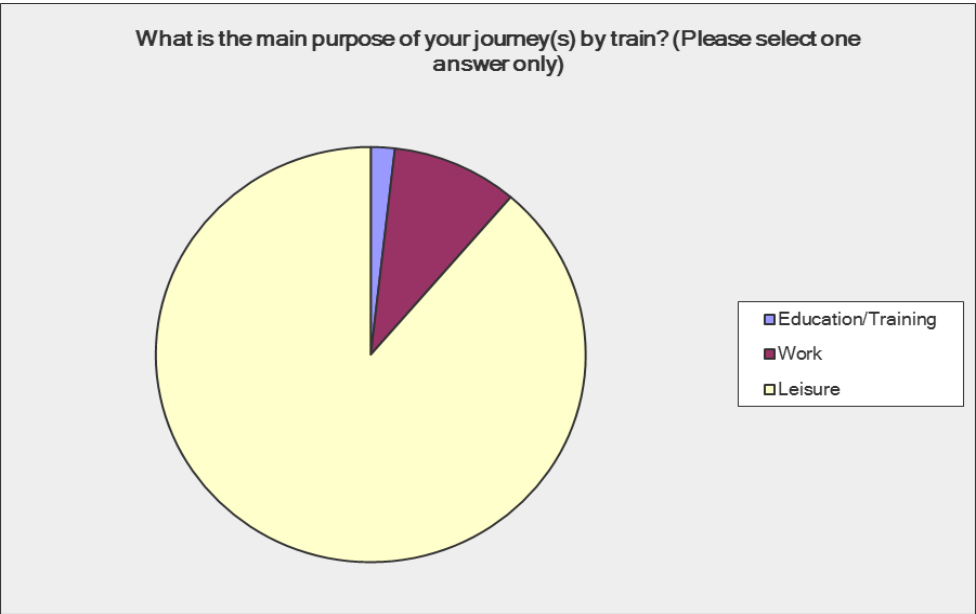
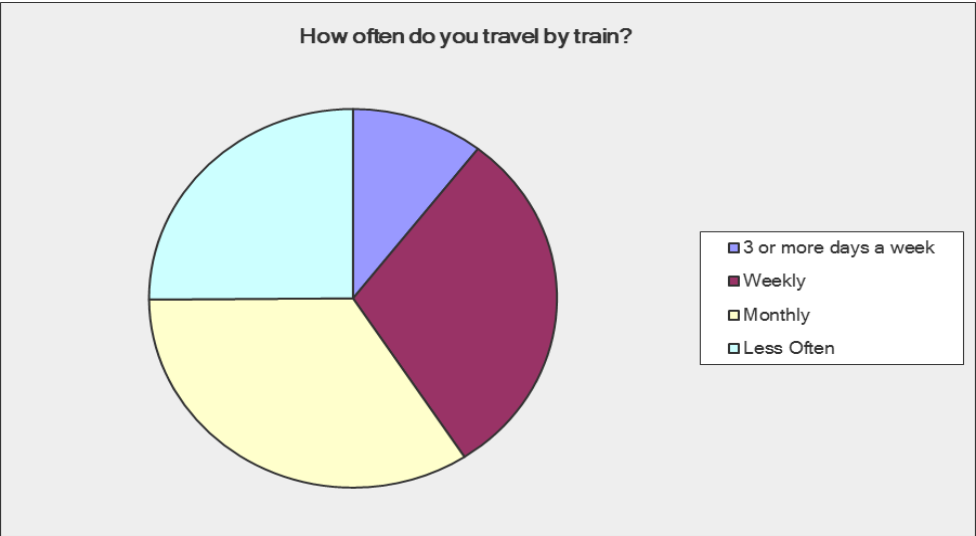
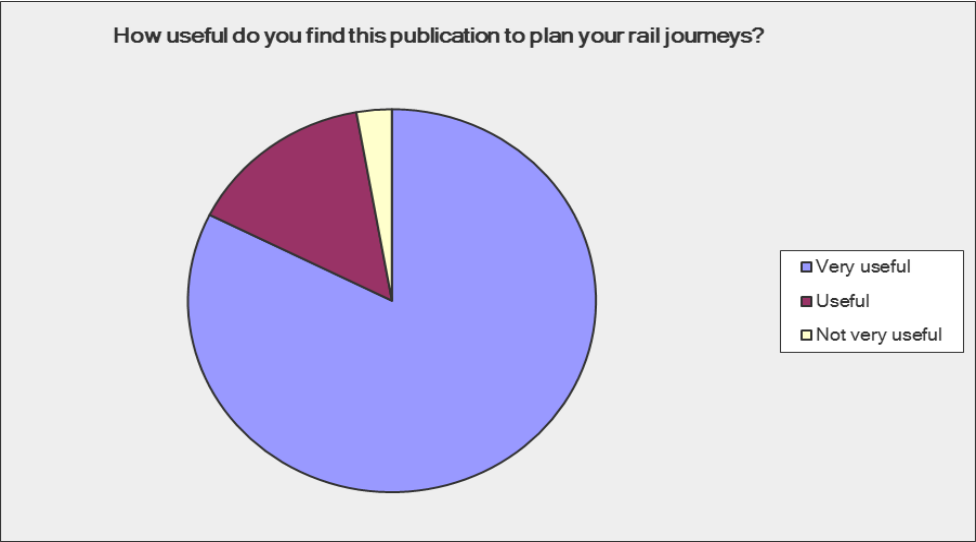
(6) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details - Alastair Morley, extension 38062.

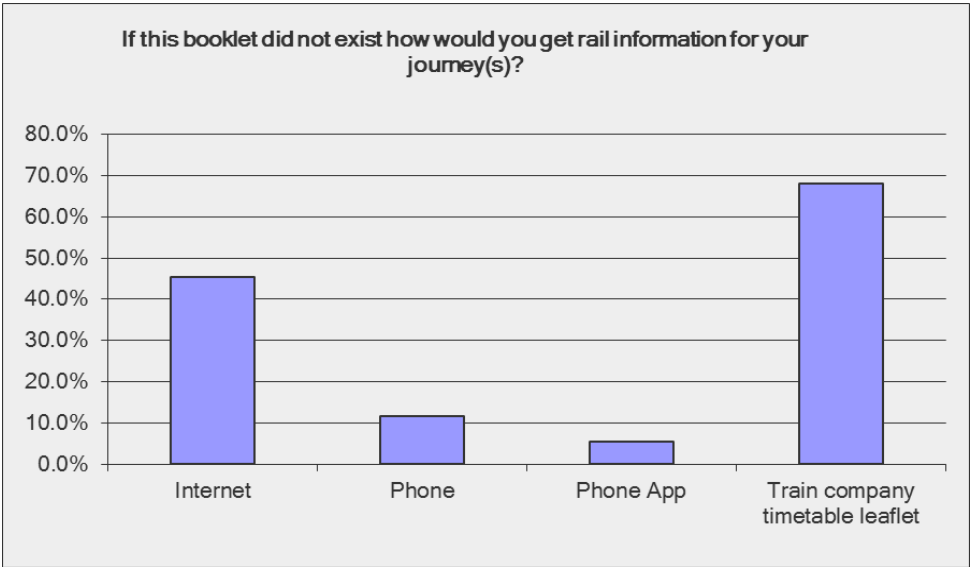
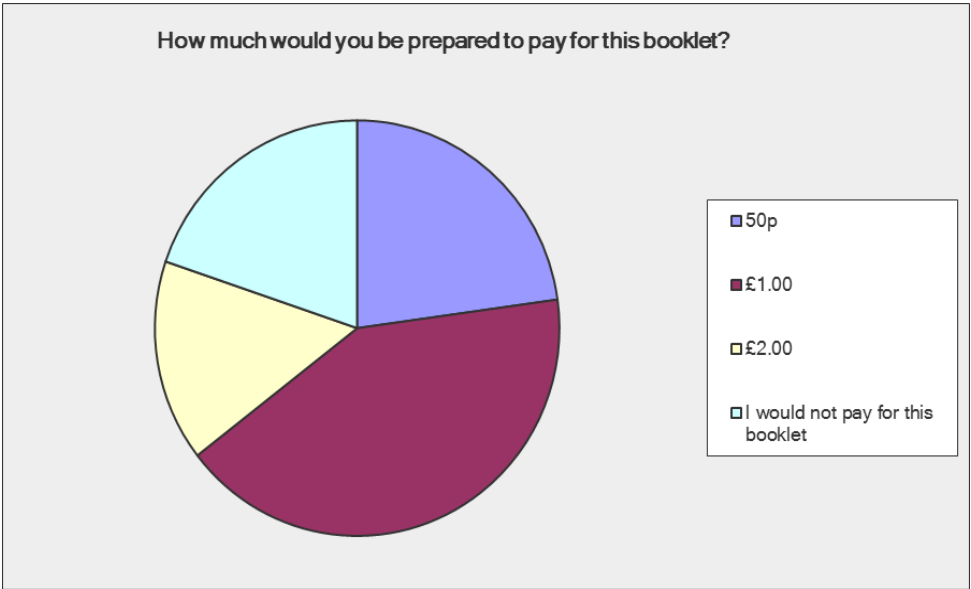
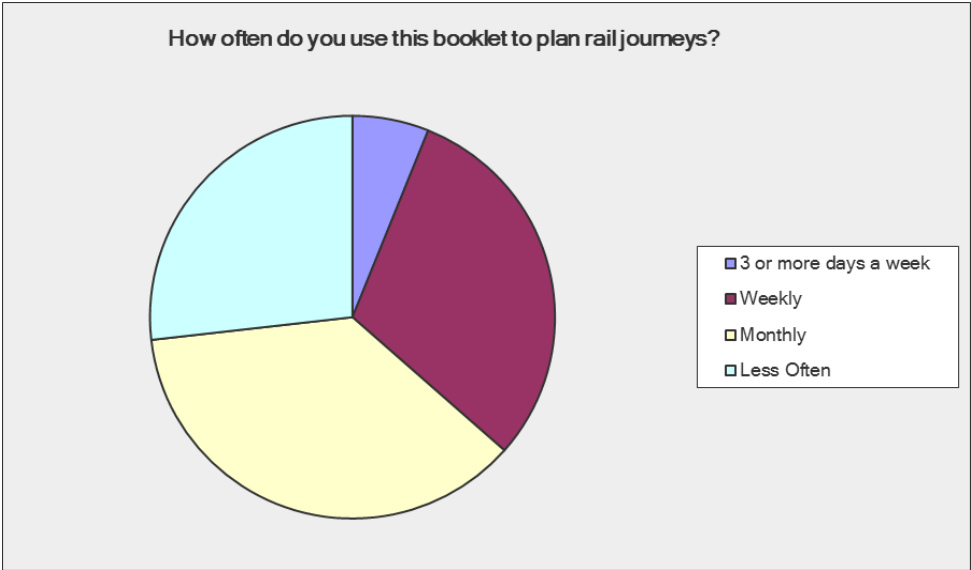
(7) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That the Cabinet Member approves:

- 7.1 The continuation of the Derbyshire Train Times publication in its current format in 2015.
- 7.2 A maximum contribution of £3,500 from Derbyshire County Council's Public Transport Publicity budget towards the cost of the production of the Derbyshire Train Times publication.
- 7.3 The production of the timetable beyond 2015 be revisited as part of a wider review of Public Transport currently being undertaken.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

Appendix 1 Further Details of Derbyshire Train Times User Survey





A selection of comments received from respondents:

"I just say an enormous thank you to the people who have worked over the years to produce this excellent guide! I work all over the country and make most trips by train and for many years the guide is a constant and incredibly useful travelling companion". JM from Matlock.

"Just to reiterate my wholehearted support for both the Derbyshire wayfarer (even from Beeston) and the timetable: both used extensively by me and the family for many years. It would be a great shame if these were discontinued". BC from Beeston.

"I find the Derbyshire train times booklet invaluable - I don't have a smartphone so can carry the booklet around when I'm travelling, & it saves time & effort involved having to check individual journeys on the net or via expensive rail enquiry phone calls; it also enables me to look at alternatives at a glance instead of having to do fresh enquiries every time. I'd willingly pay for future copies & consider it money well spent". MC from New Mills.