

# **The Need for Joined-up Public Transport in favour of Marlborough's Commuters...**

**to increase job opportunities,**

**cut carbon emissions**

**and improve vitality, viability and resilience of our town**



***A Report by Transition Marlborough's Transport Group, March 2012***

***transport@transitionmarlborough.org***

## **Working to Meet Wiltshire's Transport Objectives**

Transition Marlborough is working to increase local self-reliance and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the face of peak oil and climate change. One of the ways of doing this is to enable people to use public transport, instead of private cars to get to and from work. Unfortunately, our investigations have shown that Marlborough's current public transport system is not joined up and thus cannot support commuters at peak times. This lack of planning is disadvantaging our community by restricting job opportunities for people who do not have cars, especially the young. The resultant loss of many of our young people is having negative impacts on the vitality, viability and resilience of our town.

We believe that with proper planning between Marlborough Town Council, Wiltshire Council and the relevant bus companies - time-tables could be revised in order to take account of commuter train times and the demand for more direct, express bus services at peak times. If this is not possible, then dedicated minibuses should be made available to ferry passengers directly to and from the appropriate stations in time for the early morning and evening trains, see Wiltshire Council's commitment to *treat bus links to railway stations as part of the strategic network of bus services* (LTP 3-4). Better bus stop facilities are needed to inform the public and provide adequate seating and shelter. Continuing pressure should be put on the new Great Western Railway franchise holder to maintain and upgrade the services to London Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads. All this could be done in line with the clear priorities and objectives that are set out in Wiltshire's Public Transport Strategy:

## **Wiltshire's Public Transport Strategy**

The [Wiltshire Local Transport Plan](#) 2011-2026 includes the following key priorities:

- creating an economy that is fit for the future
- reducing disadvantage and inequalities
- tackling the causes and effects of climate change.

Wiltshire's goals and objectives that are relevant to this study are as follows:

- SO1 – to support and help improve the vitality, viability and resilience of Wiltshire's economy and market towns.
- SO2 – to provide, support and/or promote a choice of sustainable transport alternatives including walking, cycling, buses and rail.
- SO5 - to improve sustainable access to a full range of opportunities particularly for those people without access to a car.
- SO11 – to reduce the level of air pollutant and climate change emissions from transport.

## Access to transport in and around Marlborough

Marlborough is a small, market town, situated in the Kennet valley, 13 miles south of Swindon. Marlborough's main links with the outside world are the A4, which runs through the town centre and the A345, which connects with Swindon, the nearest employment centre. The M4 motorway is about eight miles away and can be accessed at Junction 15 for west-bound traffic and at Junction 14 (via Hungerford) for east-bound traffic, see Fig 1. Since Marlborough has not had a railway station since 1961, the rail network must be accessed via Bedwyn (in the village of Great Bedwyn) or Swindon or Pewsey that are each 7 or more miles away. Marlborough's town centre is on the through-route for buses running mainly between Swindon and Salisbury.



**Fig. 1: A-Z Map of Marlborough showing transport routes**

## Marlborough's 'top heavy' demographic profile

According to Wiltshire Council's [Joint Strategic Assessment for Marlborough Community Area](#), the population of Marlborough and surrounding villages was estimated to be 17, 910 in 2011. This data also shows that Marlborough's demographic profile is 'top heavy' because 55% of the population regularly relocates away from the area by the time they are 20 years old. It is unlikely that any of these people ever return. Table 1 shows that residents between the ages of 40-64 years form the biggest group (36% of the population) while those in the smallest group are between the ages of 20 and 39 years (just 14% of the population). This means that every year Marlborough is losing many dynamic and innovative members of its population. Wiltshire Council projects this situation to continue, at least until 2016. This is in contrast with the neighbouring town of [Hungerford](#) (which has good transport links) where 25-44 year olds make up the biggest proportion of the population.

**Table 1: Marlborough's demographic profile in 2011**

Age Group	Population	Percentage of total
0-19 years	5, 480	31%
20-39 years	2, 440	14%
40-64 years	6, 520	36%
65-90+ years	3, 470	19%

The mass exodus of the young from Marlborough is due to the lack of job opportunities, outside the service sector, in the area, together with the lack of integrated transport links to the nearest employment centres. This out-migration causes families to break up and grandparents to become isolated from their children and grandchildren. Without the support of their families, older people are susceptible to depression and are likely to become more dependent on the State, leading to higher costs for social care.

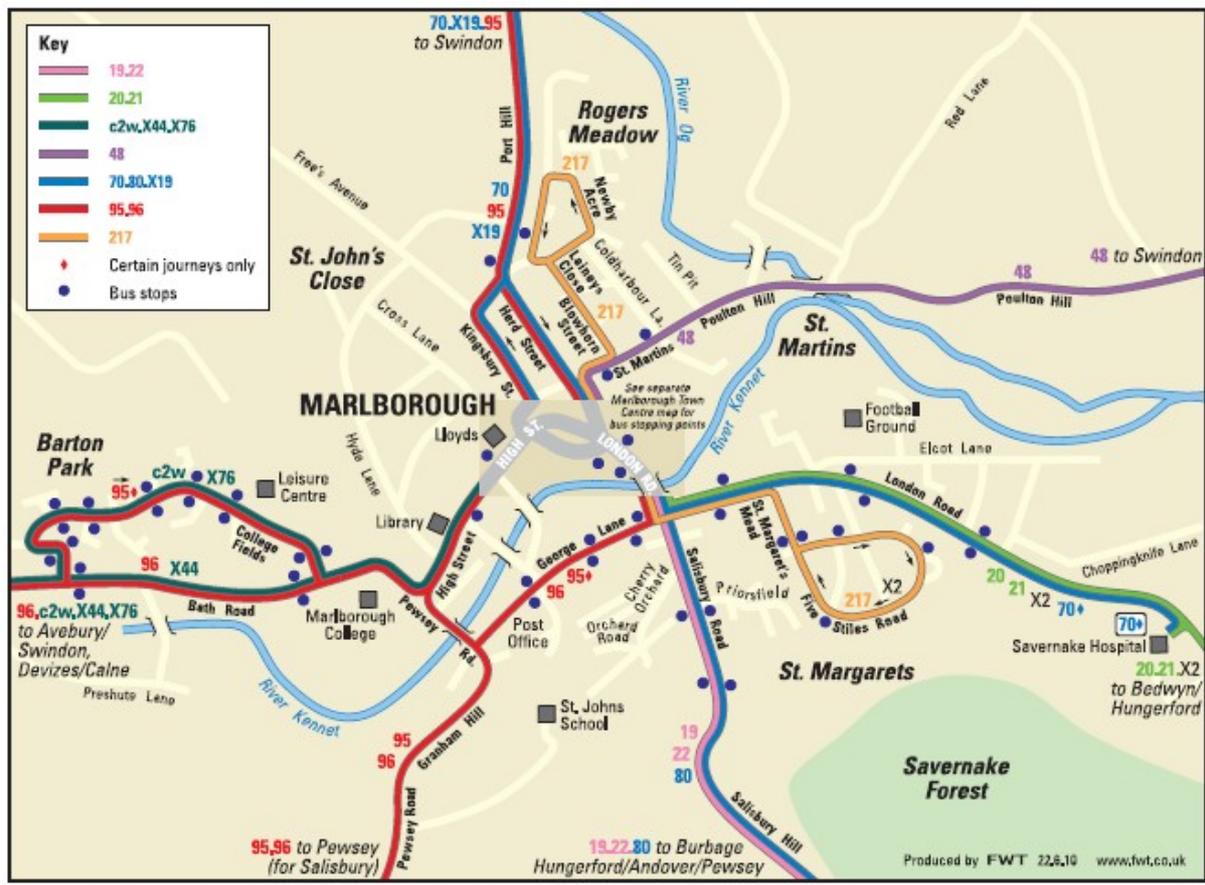
This study will expose the inadequate bus services and lack of integrated transport links that make it extremely difficult for people who are without cars to travel to work outside Marlborough.

## Is it possible to get to work using public transport?

The main employment centres for Marlborough's residents are:

- Swindon (13 miles away)
- Newbury (19 miles away)
- Reading (45 miles away)
- Bristol (50 miles away)
- London (80+ miles away)

Commuters, who want to use public transport to get to these urban centres, depend first and foremost on buses to link them either directly to Swindon or to the national rail network. Fig. 2 shows a map of Marlborough's bus routes to neighbouring towns. Most of these buses are provided by three bus companies: the Wilts and Dorset, which operates out of Salisbury, Stagecoach and Thamesdown which operate out of Swindon.



**Fig. 2: Map of Marlborough's bus routes**

Table 2 shows the journey times and frequency of buses travelling to neighbouring towns and villages. The most important destinations for commuters are Swindon town, Bedwyn station in order to catch west-bound trains to Newbury, Reading and London Paddington; and Swindon station in order to catch east-bound trains to Bath and Bristol.

Assuming that the majority of commuters need to get to work before 0900 hrs., the following issues concerning the difficulty of using these bus services have been noted:

- Although there are 15 buses that travel between Marlborough and Bedwyn station each day, very few of them can be used by working people, since the first bus does not arrive at the station until 0812 ('in time' for the 0841 train) which is after the

commuter trains have departed for Reading and Paddington, while in the evening there are no buses to meet the 1824, the 1924 or the 1935 trains from Paddington.

- Pewsey station is inaccessible to non-drivers, since there are no direct bus links in the morning or evening.
- The journey time of 40 minutes for buses that go to Swindon, via Chiseldon, compares unfavourably with a direct car journey time of 23 minutes, see Table 4.

**Table 2: Journey times and bus frequency travelling from Marlborough town centre**

Destination	Distance from Marlborough (miles)	Journey time (minutes)	Frequency: buses/day (during week days)	Bus company
Bath	46	85	1	A D Rains
Bedwyn station*	7	17	15	Wilts & Dorset
Calne	13	55	7	Connect2
Chippenham	20	n/a	0	n/a
Devizes	14	30	1	Connect2
Hungerford	10	22	11	Wiltshire Buses
Newbury*	19	n/a	0	n/a
London Victoria, via Newbury & LHR	84	155	1	National Express
Tidworth	14	38	8	Stagecoach
Pewsey	7	20	1	Wilts & Dorset
Salisbury, via Pewsey	30	96	12	Wilts & Dorset
Swindon (via Ramsbury)	13	64	6	Thamesdown
Swindon train station (via Chiseldon)*	13	39	12	Wilts & Dorset
Swindon bus station (via Chiseldon)*	13	42	19	Stagecoach

\*Main commuter destinations

The lack of coordinated bus and train services are preventing commuters from using public transport.

Marlborough is 13 miles from Swindon station and 7 miles from both Bedwyn and Pewsey stations, however:

- Only two of the early morning commuter trains, the 0841 from Bedwyn to Newbury and the 0815 from Swindon to Bristol, 'connect' with buses from Marlborough, yet neither of them are likely to be convenient as they involve a 29/35 minute wait at the station, see Table 3.
- Passengers from Bedwyn face an extremely long train journey time to Bristol in the morning because they would have to travel via Reading. Later in the day the journey time is reduced to 78 minutes when the train goes via Westbury. (The [Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group](#) is currently campaigning for an early morning, fast train to Bristol Temple Meads, via Westbury).

**Table 3: Getting to work by train**

Employment destination	Departure time	Arrival time	Journey time (minutes)	Bus connection to Bedwyn/Swindon stations?
Newbury	0756	0814	18	No
	0841	0858	17	Yes (with 29 min wait)
Reading	0707	0756	49	No
	0756	0850	54	No
London Paddington	0647	0809	82	No
	0707	0838	91	No
Bristol (via Reading)	0613	0804	111	No
	0707	0904	117	No
Bristol (via Swindon)	0738	0804	26	No
	0815	0840	25	Yes (with 35 min wait)

The amount of time and the amount of money that can be saved by using the car to travel to work are both incentives for commuters to shun public transport: The public transport journey times from Marlborough to Swindon town, Swindon station and Bristol (via Bedwyn and Reading) are excessively long when compared to reaching the same destinations by car, while the length of time it takes to reach Reading (via Bedwyn station) and Bristol (via Swindon station) compare reasonably well with motor-way journeys, particularly when roads are congested – the latter journey could be significantly shortened if there were more timely, direct buses to Swindon station. Commuters could actually save time if they were able to use the bus to travel to Bedwyn station, followed by the train to travel to Newbury or London Paddington, see Table 4. Meanwhile, the cost of using a car is becoming more expensive, considering the rising costs of fuel and parking charges.

**Table 4: Distance, journey times and time saved when travelling by car to work**

Employment destination	Distance from Marlborough (miles)	Car journey time (minutes)	Public transport journey time (minutes)	Time saved by using the car (minutes)
Swindon town	13	23	42	19
Newbury	19	40	34*	Car takes longer
Reading	45	55	66-71*	11-16
Bristol (via Reading)	50	57	128-134*	61-77
Bristol (via Swindon)	50	57	88*	31
London	84	111	99-108*	Car takes longer

\*bus + train

## Assessing public opinion

Transition Marlborough's Transport Group has recently conducted two surveys to assess the difficulties faced by commuters who currently use public transport in and around Marlborough. The first survey, which was done with the help of [Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group](#), was of commuters alighting from trains at Bedwyn station on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011 and the second was of bus passengers waiting in Marlborough High Street on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

### Train Passenger Survey

The results of the train passenger survey suggest that passengers who used the trains from Bedwyn came from a range of locations in the Marlborough area and the majority of them had travelled all the way to Paddington. The most popular trains were the 0646 train to Paddington in the morning and the 1745, the 1924 and the 1935 arrivals from Paddington in the evening. All the passengers had driven to the station by car (a cause of congestion in Great Bedwyn village) because there are no suitable bus connections either in the morning or the evening, see Box 1.

Trains surveyed: 0840 to Paddington, also 1728, 1745, 1824, 1846, 1924, 1935 from Newbury/Paddington.

A total 83 passengers were questioned:

- 51 (62%) passengers travelled to Paddington
- 14 (17%) passengers travelled to Reading.
- 5 (6%) passengers travelling to Newbury.
- 32 (39%) passengers lived in Great Bedwyn.
- 13 passengers lived in Marlborough
- 15 passengers lived in surrounding villages.
- 12 passengers lived beyond Marlborough.

The most popular trains were the 0646 to Paddington and the 1745, the 1924 and the 1935 arrivals from Paddington.

Currently, there are no buses connecting Marlborough with Bedwyn station in time for the 0613, the 0646 or the 0707 trains to Paddington in the morning or the 1846, the 1924 or the 1935 trains from Paddington in the evening.

*Box 1: Survey of Bedwyn Train Commuters*

## **Bus Passenger Survey**

The bus passenger survey involved questioning all passengers waiting at the Lloyds Bank and Ladbrokes bus stops, in Marlborough High Street, between 0700 and 1300 hours.

Where possible, the results of this survey have been compared with the results obtained by Passenger Focus (PF) when they interviewed 970 passengers in Swindon in 2010; see [Bus Passenger Survey, July 2010](#). As two of the bus companies that serve Marlborough, Stagecoach and Thamesdown, are based in Swindon we were keen to compare bus stop facilities and the levels of passenger satisfaction between the two towns. Although our passenger sample was much smaller, we consider it to be representative as it involved almost all passengers who were present at the two main bus stops during a typical weekday morning (although it was a half-term holiday).

### **1. Availability of bus stop facilities**

Marlborough Town Centre has two bus stops, however neither has adequate shelter nor seating facilities – one bus stop is situated outside a clothes shop/Lloyds Bank and is for passengers travelling to Swindon, Pewsey, Bedwyn train station/Hungerford, Ludgershall, London Victoria and Salisbury, while the other bus stop is situated on the opposite side of the road, outside Ladbrokes betting shop and is for passengers travelling to Bath, Calne and Devizes.

While the overhanging buildings provide shelter (but not lighting, see image on page 1) for passengers waiting outside Lloyds Bank, there is no shelter outside Ladbrokes and only limited shelter in front of the adjacent shop (One Stop).

Two park benches, one donated by Lloyds and the other by a member of the public, have been placed in the area in front of the bank, while no seating is available for passengers outside Ladbrokes.

- *According to PF, 77% of Swindon's bus passengers have access to purpose-built bus shelters. None of the 25 bus stops in Marlborough have purpose-built bus shelters.*
- Both bus stops in Marlborough High Street have timetable displays.
- No bus stops in Marlborough have electronic displays showing the length of time until the next bus is due to arrive. *According to PF, 24% of Swindon's bus passengers have access to these.*
- None of the bus stops in Marlborough displays a route-map. *According to PF, 39% of Swindon's bus passengers have access to route maps at bus stops.*
- Although both bus stops are linked to a mobile texting service the codes for this service are not displayed. None of the bus passengers that we interviewed knew about this service. *According to PF, 19% of Swindon's bus passengers reported using this service.*



**Ladbrokes Bus Stop**

## **2. Survey results**

Of the 88 passengers who were interviewed, 44 (50%) were Fare-Payers and 44 (50%) were Bus-Pass Users. There were wide differences between the responses of the Fare-Payers compared with those of the Bus-Pass Users, in terms of satisfaction with the overall bus service, the desire for more frequent services and the need for an express service to Swindon, see Boxes 2 and 3.

- 57% were women.
- 32% use the buses daily.
- 39% were satisfied with the overall bus service, *compared with 88% in Swindon.*
- 59% were satisfied with value for money, *compared with 56% in Swindon.*
- 30% requested more frequent bus services.
- 32% requested an express bus to Swindon.
- 9% requested an improved service to Devizes.

**Box 2: Responses from Fare-Payers**

Although more fare-paying passengers said that buses were value for money than those who were interviewed by PF in Swindon, a lower percentage were satisfied with the overall bus service. When asked for possible improvements to the bus services, 30% of Fare-Payers asked for more frequent bus services and another 32% requested an express bus to Swindon (missing out Chiseldon) see Box 2.

- 79% were women.
- 32% use the buses daily.
- 61% were satisfied with the overall bus service, *compared with 97% in Swindon.*
- 14% requested more frequent bus services.
- 2% requested an express bus to Swindon.
- 20% requested an improved service to Devizes.

***Box 3: Responses from Bus-Pass Users***

A higher proportion of Bus-Pass Users were women and 61% were satisfied with the overall bus service (less than Swindon's Bus-Pass Users in PF survey); an improved service to Devizes for shopping was their most popular request.



***Swindon bus shelter with timetable, route map, electronic display and advertising***

## Conclusion and recommendations

Close examination of on-line, bus and train timetables, as well as two passenger surveys have revealed that it is very difficult for Marlborough's residents to use public transport to commute to and from work. Cuts in subsidies have meant a reduction in support of some local bus services, while a change in franchise for the Great Western Railway and the proposed electrification of the line only as far as Newbury make the future uncertain for train users.

Our surveys showed that:

- Marlborough residents who work in Reading or London cannot use the Bedwyn bus because it does not arrive in time.
- Similarly, buses that go to Swindon arrive too late for commuting to Bath or Bristol.
- Some residents who work or study in Swindon want an express bus that goes direct, without diverting through Chiseldon.
- Marlborough's bus passengers are less satisfied with overall bus services than their counterparts in Swindon.
- Marlborough's bus stop facilities are rudimentary and unlikely to persuade the public to use the buses more often.

These results suggest that only residents who can afford to run a private car are able to search for work beyond Swindon. Young people who are starting out in employment thus have little choice but to move away from Marlborough if they want to broaden their work opportunities, considering the qualifications they have acquired from local schools, colleges and universities. Indeed, they may well have learned this behaviour as they will have been forced to attend Swindon College or further afield to obtain vocational qualifications.

The social costs of the separation of family members is affecting our community in terms of residents' personal well-being and the vitality, viability and resilience of the economy of our market town (see Public Transport Strategy Objective SO1). Furthermore, rising petrol and diesel prices, the high cost of parking (£6.10 per day at Pewsey station and £8.40 per day at Swindon station) and the requirement to cut carbon emissions mean that there is urgent imperative to improve public transport in the Marlborough area.

Wiltshire Council is committed to ensuring sustainable access to a full range of opportunities for people without cars (see Public Transport Strategy Objective SO5) and to provide sustainable transport alternatives, including buses and rail (see Public Transport Objective SO2). They have also pledged to reduce the level of air pollutants and climate change emissions from transport (see Public Transport Strategy Objective SO11). In fact greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced 25% by 2022 and 80% by 2050 nationally. According to the [Campaign for Better Transport](#) transport is the fastest growing source of climate change gases in the UK. Road transport alone now accounts for 26% of all

emissions. Work-related travel accounts for over a third (37%) of total CO2 emissions from passenger transport – 24% from commuting and 13% from travel in the course of business. Furthermore, 91% of car commuting is single occupancy journeys.

We believe that with proper planning between Marlborough Town Council, Wiltshire Council and the relevant bus companies - time-tables could be revised in order to take account of commuter train times and the demand for more direct, express bus services at peak times. If this is not possible, then dedicated minibuses should be made available to ferry passengers directly to and from the appropriate stations in time for the early morning and evening trains, see Wiltshire Council's commitment to *treat bus links to railway stations as part of the strategic network of bus services* (LTP 3-4). Better bus stop facilities are needed to inform the public and provide adequate seating and shelter. Continuing pressure should be put on the new Great Western Railway franchise holder to maintain and upgrade the services to London Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads.

All this could be done in line with the clear priorities and objectives that are set out in Wiltshire's Public Transport Strategy (see page 2 of this report).

Transition Marlborough has a very diverse membership, with many professional people involved and we are very keen to engage with local government at all levels. We are already working with Marlborough Town Council, the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group, Community First and Wiltshire Council's Public Transport Group to establish a direct minibuses service to connect with the 0646 train departing from Bedwyn to Paddington and the 1935 train arriving at Bedwyn from Paddington. We see this document as an opening statement in a public transport dialogue and we are very happy to assist in helping to meet its aims.