

Sidmouth Summer Bus Project 2006

Now in its third year, the project continues to make significant progress:

- The new Hill Hopper attracts over 5,000 passengers.
- Increased access to the countryside around Sidmouth much appreciated.
- Additional month's extension into September successful.
- Over 14,000 passenger journeys recorded on the two buses, double last year's total.
- Survey confirms significant use by residents as well as visitors, and of multiple trips by both groups.
- Substantially broader sponsorship from both the public and the private sectors.
- Scope for further service improvements identified.

New Service

The principal innovation this year was a second bus service from the top of Peak Hill to the top of Salcombe Hill, to and from the Triangle (Three Cornered Plot). This "Hill Hopper" service gained over 5,000 passengers, exceeding all expectations. Further encouragement came from a survey carried out in September which confirmed that over 40% of passengers took a walk from the bus, and about a fifth walked back to the town on the Coast Path. From the survey and backed up by the substantial mail received, it is clear that the service attracted many residents (over 20% of respondents) - as well as visitors - who wished to see the countryside and views although they didn't have a car and were unwilling or unable to make the walk up either hill.

Extended Period

Both services, the Hill Hopper and the Town Hopper (which followed the route of previous years, linking the principal car parks with the main shopping area, the beaches and Connaught Gardens) were extended into September, historically a popular month for older visitors after schools have restarted. The Town Hopper's daily figure was down by only 11% from July, and the Hill Hopper's daily figure was up 2%. The extension of the operating period was clearly appreciated.

Saturday was significantly more popular than any other day, when the additional free weekend park & ride facilities at the Knowle were available.

Broad Support

These developments would not have been possible without the substantial support from many sources. The World Heritage Coast fund, administered by Devon County Council, the Sustainable Development Fund administered by the East Devon AONB team, and East Devon District Council matched the initial £5,000 support from Sidmouth Town Council. With Chamber of Commerce support, former contributors Duke's and Tile & Pine were augmented by new advertisers La Mocha/Prospect Plaice restaurant, Pure Indulgence, The Black Horse Inn and the Secret Café. The help from Clinton Devon Estates, the Norman Lockyer Observatory, the National Trust, Mr Tom Griffiths and the Sidmouth Herald was also appreciated.

Last but by no means least, the drivers from Cooks Coaches added further input, and the contributions from David Wigmore and Peter Kinglake were especially helpful. We believe this broad support is well justified by the outcomes.

Finance

<u>Income:</u>	£
Sidmouth Town Council	5,000
East Devon District Council	5,000
World Heritage Coast Fund (DCC)	5,000
Sustainable Development Fund (AONB)	6,226
Businesses in Sidmouth	<u>2,300</u>
	<u>23,526</u>
<u>Expenditure:</u>	
Cooks Coaches	19,395
Interpretation Board, NLO	1,992
AA Signage	262
Other signage, including bus advertising	571
Printing	778
Expenses	36
Balance carried forward to 2007	<u>492</u>
	<u>23,526</u>

The Future

Following a careful evaluation of this summer's operation, we would recommend a broadly similar service next year, but with both services operating on a single extended route including both hills. There are a number of reasons for this proposal:

- One service – the Sidmouth Hopper – instead of two is easier to promote
- The existing services overlap between the Triangle and Connaught Gardens.
- Simpler timetabling, with a more frequent service to the hills, and at weekends.
- A more balanced workload for the drivers.
- The flexibility to operate the service with one (or even three) buses according to demand.
- Continued coverage if a bus is out of service for any reason.

The Summer Bus team

Last year's team of Cllrs Tom Cox and Tony Reed, Kimmo Evans (AONB) and Vicky Harper (Chamber of Commerce) was strengthened by Paul Duriez (C of C) and Cllr John Dyson, who took a coordinating role during and after Tom's absence in March.

We are already planning for next year.

Additional Information

The following information is available on request:

- Daily passenger numbers and analysis
- Survey questionnaire & analysis
- Letters received from passengers (about 50)

Cllr Tom Cox
Cllr John Dyson
November 2006