

11. TRAVEL

Car Use

Travelling by car or by plane generates a lot of carbon dioxide. One person doing a long journey in a family sized car generates about as much carbon dioxide as if they were travelling in a full plane. Travelling on a fairly full train they only generate an eighth as much, and on a coach, even less. And on short journeys cars emit 60% more carbon dioxide than on long ones. Clearly, despite the convenience of travelling by car one of our aims needs to be to reduce the number of car journeys we make with only one person on board.

Nevertheless sometimes car travel is the only option. The technology for fuel efficient and hybrid cars is developing all the time. For lay church members, ministers and diocesan officers who have to run cars these are often an option which, if not exactly environmentally friendly, is at least better than a big polluter.

Scheduled Public Transport

In some places public transport is the obvious solution to reducing car use. However, the availability of public transport in this diocese is very mixed. Local scheduled buses run in the towns but they are infrequent in the rural areas.

The privatisation of public transport has led to transport being organised as a business opportunity rather than a public service. Local councils increase the availability of public transport on routes and at times which are not economical by subsidising the providers. Currently Somerset County Council subsidises nearly all rural bus routes.

As far as rail transport is concerned local councils can argue for improved scheduling but the ultimate decision rests with the rail companies, and their concern is not principally meeting social need.

Nevertheless it is probably possible for diocesan and local church events to be organised in order to make better use of the public transport system that is available. Some events can be located at the places where public transport routes meet, and scheduled to begin and end at times which fit the schedules.

The train services in the diocese provide good links to London, to Bristol and the North and to Exeter. National Express coaches also run through the diocese and sometimes provide efficient and economical transport beyond the diocese. It could be expected that any journeys undertaken on diocesan business would be by public transport if possible.

Traveline provides journey plans and timetables for anywhere in the country on scheduled routes. (see paper 18 for details) As well as reducing the environmental impact of travel, using public transport is a way of encouraging it to continue or to improve.

Demand Responsive Vehicles and Voluntary Schemes

As well as scheduled buses there are taxis and taxi-buses which can be hired for an occasion. These can be economical if several people share the journey. In some parts of the diocese demand responsive vehicles (SLINKY buses in Somerset) are available, as is Community Transport. The use of these can be arranged in advance by groups.

There are also many voluntary car transport schemes for people needing access to hospitals, homes and surgeries and car sharing schemes run by some Local Authorities. Many church members are involved in driving for these schemes or make use of them.

Combating Isolation

In some rural parts of the diocese isolation can be a significant problem. Local churches see it as a part of their ministry to reduce that isolation. This is done in a number of ways: church contact schemes, the distribution of magazines, offers of transport, passing on information about public transport services, hiring vehicles to bring people to social events. The County or Unitary Authority has responsibility for developing a transport strategy and can be lobbied for improvements.

Travelling on Two Wheels

Small motorbikes, scooters and mopeds are very efficient on fuel. Unfortunately they are the least safe form of road transport. Buses and trains are the safest.

Many potential cyclists also have concerns about their safety, particularly on rural main roads which are often narrow. Rural cycle routes in the diocese are currently designed with tourism in mind although Somerset's 5-year transport plan does include improving cycle routes with a view to their use by commuters. In some parts of the diocese people are also deterred from cycling by the hills. However, electrically assisted bicycles are now available. In time they will improve and get cheaper.

Walking

Designated cycle paths can also be used by pedestrians. For many people walking is the ideal way to travel when there is the time: it is totally carbon neutral, it gives the traveller a good sense of place and time to reflect, it enables one to meet neighbours and it improves fitness. But for many people time is the problem.

The Use of Time

Using public transport and sharing a car clearly also take more time than simply driving alone. However, these options do give time for conversation, reading, thought and prayer. Being a passenger is also less tiring than driving. In scheduling a day or planning an event

these advantages can be considered. It is tempting for car owners to just assume they will drive and to ignore other options and their advantages for the environment and often for the traveller.

A lot of church related travel is to meetings. Sometimes matters can be discussed with phone calls, e-mails or teleconferencing. And meetings are not necessary to impart information, even though that is what some meetings seem to be for.

However, often meetings have more than one function and even though some of the aims could be achieved without the travel involved, some could not. The point is not to try to abolish meetings but to consider whether the aims of the meeting could be achieved another way, and then to make the best use of the time and the travel involved.

Impact on the Pattern of Ministry

All this logically point to patterns of ministry that are more locally based, in tune with the *Changing Lives* initiative. It is environmentally unsustainable to promote 'one man band' style ministry for incumbents over larger and larger benefices. At present these patterns are being supported by the ability to shuttle by car from parish to parish using cheap fossil fuels. As fuel prices increase and carbon use is taxed these practices will become financially as well as ethically unsustainable

RECOMMENDATIONS

The basic units of church life are the parish or local congregation, the Local Ministry Group, the Deanery, the Archdeaconry, the Diocese and the national church. Travelling is currently required of some church members in the diocese in each of these units and in each case there are different considerations to be made.

We make the following recommendations regarding travel within the diocese:

1. Parishes

- Walk, cycle, use buses or share cars as far as possible.
- Encourage community care share schemes.

2. LMGs and Deaneries

- Walk, cycle, use buses or share cars as far as possible.
- Meet centrally unless there is good reason to do otherwise. A meeting held on the periphery of a group can involve up to 50% more person-miles than one held centrally. However, it is often helpful and supportive to church members on the edge of a group if people sometimes come out to them.
- Have people in the area who develop a knowledge of local public transport so they can inform others when decisions are made or questions are asked.

- When there is a group outing use a community vehicle or a hired minibus or coach.
- Locate the clergy where there are public transport links which can then be used by their families, as well as by them on occasion.

3. The Diocese

- Hold diocesan meetings less often but for longer. Dioceses such as Europe manage with one diocesan synod a year, but held over several days. This diocese could have two synod meetings a year, each for a full day.
- Where the membership of a group is from across the diocese a meeting will involve the least fuel consumption and person-miles if it is held centrally. However, there may be other good reasons for sometimes meeting elsewhere.
- For consultations, hold Archdeaconry Meetings. Diocesan Synod members travelling to separate meetings in Bath, Wells and Taunton would do 40% less person-miles than travelling to one central meeting.
- Give serious consideration to moving Locking Deanery (Weston-super-Mare) back into Wells Archdeaconry, at least for the purposes of Archdeaconry meetings. That would reduce the fuel consumption still further.
- Encourage car sharing. This could be facilitated by e-mailing to the people attending meetings a list of the others in the group together with their phone number and e-mail. People can work out routes and cost sharing between them.
- When arranging the times of meetings the bus timetable should be considered.
- The practice of deanery confirmations should be continued. Confirmation candidates and their supporters travelling to a central service would use a lot more fuel, even in shared cars or buses, than a bishop travelling to them.
- Bishops and Archdeacons should continue to meet with groups of people in their parishes or deaneries.
- Bishops, Archdeacons and diocesan officers who work over a wide area should use hybrid cars or others with very low fuel consumption.
- In reimbursing travel costs it should be assumed that public transport will be used if it is available.

