

Transport

Public Transport in Herefordshire is provided by commercial bus and train operating companies. Bus services are either fully-commercial or, where commercial operation is not viable, are operated under contract to the council. Train services are operated under a franchise from central government.

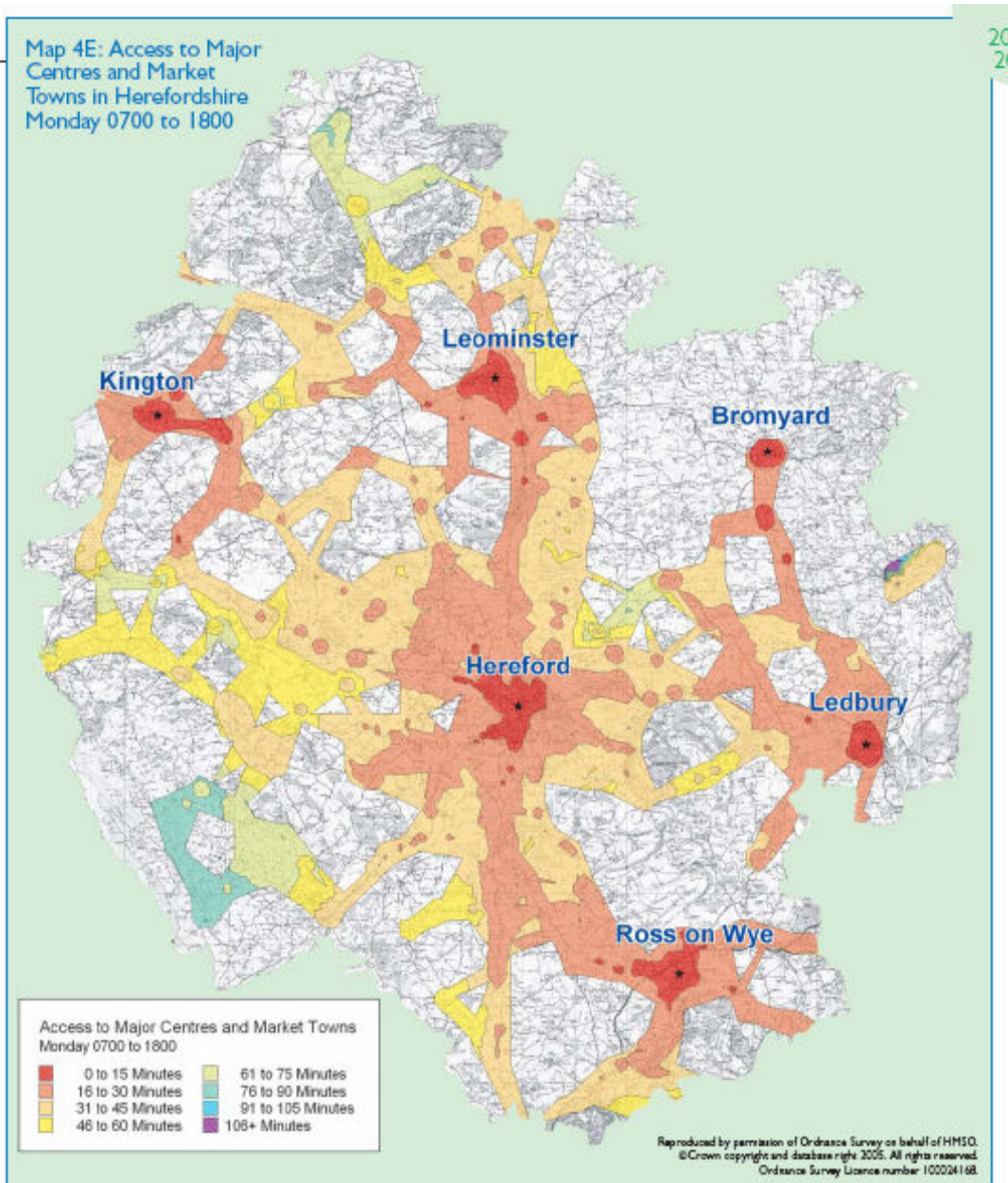
Most bus services, called "commercial" bus services, are planned and provided by bus companies, which are solely responsible for the routes, times and fares charged. "Contracted" bus services are run by bus companies to service specifications set out by Herefordshire Council, which also pays the companies the difference between the operating cost and the income from fares on these services. Contracted services are only provided where no suitable commercial service exists - 60% of the conventional bus network is provided on a commercial basis with 26 operators. There is not a predominant operator but six are significant players in the market. The commercial bus network is concentrated within Hereford and the four largest market towns. With increasing rurality, bus frequencies decrease. The Hereford urban area supports a frequent and comprehensive bus service with routes typically having a 15 minute frequency. Inter-urban routes have an hourly or two hourly services. There are no commercial journeys after 7pm or on Sundays, and even on weekdays other routes away from the main corridors have more sparse services with some having none at all.¹

Some bus services run early in the morning and do not return until evening, others leave little time for accessing health services before having to return on the only bus service back to an area, and some on only certain days of the week. For example, to travel from Bredwardine into Hereford is only possible on a bus at 07.09, returning at 13.10 on a Wednesday or a Friday, or at 17.10 for the whole week.

In many cases, because of the rural nature of the county, the bus services do not run at appropriate times or to venues that would enable people to access health services, particularly in rural areas.

The map below from the Local Transport Plan 2006-11 illustrates the issues around travel between rural villages as opposed to into urban areas with the paucity of services on offer.

¹ Local Transport Plan 2006-2011



Community Transport (CT) therefore plays an important role within Herefordshire by providing access to services for people who are unable to use conventional public transport. There are eight schemes operating in the county which are all run through charitable organisations. The schemes are all provided with grant funding from Herefordshire Council to enhance the service and are provided with support by Community First on behalf of Herefordshire Council.

The CT schemes provide a pre-booked, door-to-door transport service to help people get to local services, hospitals, visit friends and enjoy a range of leisure activities.

It provides transport for people unable to use conventional public transport services because:

- There is no public transport service available
- There is no alternative transport at the time they need to travel

- They have limited mobility, which prevents them from using bus or train services.

Community car schemes use volunteers driving their own cars to provide transport for passengers needing to make a journey. Some schemes also operate minibuses or multi-purpose vehicles which can be used by passengers in wheelchairs or people who are travelling together. Passengers pay a contribution towards the cost of the journeys which are also subsidised by Herefordshire Council. Journeys can be made to the shops, doctors, friends and relatives, hospitals, dentist, opticians and for appointments, where no alternative transport is available.

Figures from Community First, the third sector infrastructure organisation which oversees and supports the schemes in the county, on behalf of Herefordshire Council, show that last year there were 6,290 registered users making 53,900 journeys through community transport.

In addition to transport provision available direct to members of the public, the Ambulance Service also plays an important role in supporting access to medical services within the County. There is a volunteer drivers scheme which is run through the West Midlands Ambulance Foundation Trust to provide hospital journeys for patients meeting particular criteria around statutory obligations. This is not funded through Herefordshire Public Services but complements the work of the community transport schemes.