

PARK & RIDE



City of Oxford Park & Ride bus entering the City Centre through the High Street bus gate.

Why Park & Ride?

Many people live outside traditional built-up areas, in locations difficult to serve well by public transport, but they still want to come into the main cities and towns, for work, education, shopping and entertainment. Park & Ride (P&R) services make it possible for at least part of the trip to be made without a car, reducing congestion on the approaches to the town and keeping down the amount of space to be given over to traffic and parking in sensitive central locations.

It is important for park and ride to be part of an overall parking strategy. It should not provide additional long-stay car parking, or lead to increased car mileage. Preferably, it should either supply additional short-stay car parking or release existing long-stay parking in the town centre, for re-development or conversion to short stay parking. If some car parking can be removed from city centres to less sensitive locations, land in central locations can be made available for new open spaces or for attractive alternative developments.

What is Park & Ride?

The term "Park & Ride" is most usually applied to a dedicated bus service linking a purpose built car park with the nearest town centre, or to a specially provided railway station designed

for access by car. Bus-based P&R services usually run non-stop between a peripheral car park and the town centre and do not form part of the ordinary network of local bus services, although in some places upgrading of existing networks is enabling some blurring of the distinction to take place. P&R by rail usually links with existing train services. In addition to formal P&R stations, extensive park and ride by rail takes place from car parks at traditional railway stations. Rail stations often also serve as "Kiss & Ride" terminals, a feature which could also be considered at bus-based P&R sites.

Many P&R services operate all day, every day, sometimes including Sundays, whilst others are part time (eg, Saturdays only), seasonal (pre-Christmas shopping peak) or temporary, to serve a special event (major sporting event). To attract car users, services must be frequent (eg, no less than every 15 minutes). Ideally, there will always be a bus at the stop. The service should be frequent and fast enough to make interchange worthwhile; eg, total trip time ought to be no more than it would take to drive all the way. Quality of the buses and the car park must also be attractive. Most P&R services are operated by specially procured fleets of new buses, typically to low-floor, easy access configuration.

Criteria for successful P&R are presented on the following pages, with particular regard to road-based options.

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Families with young children are important users of Park & Ride services, as seen pictured here in Reading.

Essentials of a successful P&R bus service

- **Attractive, easy-access buses:** image and ambience to compete with the car; step-free entry for families and people encumbered with shopping.
- **Frequent and reliable:** walk-on service – always a bus at the terminal.
- **Welcoming:** bus doors open at terminal for passengers to board immediately.
- **Avoid abstraction from other bus services:** Site P&R terminals so as to minimise opportunities for abstraction from rural and other local buses. Encourage upgrading of local bus network to make diversion to P&R less attractive and afford opportunities to integrate P&R with other local services without dilution of quality. (eg, First Group Metro services aim to achieve P&R quality on all key routes).
- **Town centre boarding and alighting points:** must be easily identifiable, conveniently located (as good as or better than the town centre cars parks), well signed and feature local and tourist information.

Where is P&R appropriate?

- **Free-standing town/city:** to bring out-of-town residents together at the edge of the built-up area in viable numbers for bus travel (eg, Bath, Maidstone, Norwich, Shrewsbury). In continuously built-up areas, encouraging people to take the bus or train all the way is often preferable.
- **Attractive town centre:** somewhere people really want to go, even if they cannot take their car; eg, historic cities (Chester, Oxford, Winchester, York).
- **Town centre parking expensive and in short supply:** more convenient and cheaper to use P&R (Bath, Cambridge).
- **Rural tourist honeypots:** heritage designations (Isle of Purbeck, Dorset), narrow lanes (Peak District) and crowded resorts (rail P&R Lelant Saltings–St. Ives, Cornwall and Norden-Swanage, Dorset).
- **“Parkway” rail stations:** rail heading for long-distance travel (Didcot, Bristol, Southampton Airport) or shorter distance shopping/commuting (Dalgety Bay, Fife, Haddenham & Thame, Buckinghamshire).
- **Airports:** on- or off-airport for “Park and Fly”. Short (closer in) and long-term (further from the terminals) parking often from different sites (Pink Elephant shuttle buses [Meteor Parking Ltd] at Heathrow, Stansted, Southampton and Edinburgh).

Selecting suitable locations

- **Edge of town:** to capture car traffic directly from inter-urban and rural road networks before it enters the built-up area.
- **Close to main access routes:** avoid added mileage by users diverting to reach site.
- **Away from residential areas:** avoid disturbance to residents and abstraction of passengers from local buses. Many P&R sites are close to ring-road intersections (Oxford, York).
- **Land available:** car parks take up a lot of space (a typical P&R site can accommodate 50–100 cars per hectare).
- **Good access to town centre:** direct, un-congested, with bus priority as necessary (Bristol, A4 Bath Road route).
- **Multi-purpose location for reverse P&R:** attract users in both directions, enables multi-purpose trips (York Ascomb Bar: superstore, college), provides access without a car to out-of-town commercial centres.

Provision of P&R

Partnership approach: local authorities, developers, transport operators, specialist private sector contractors

Elements of provision:

- **Planning permission, including access roads:** local authority.
- **Land and construction:** seek developer/planning gain contributions.
- **Capital funding:** local authority via Local Transport Plan, with government support and developer contributions.
- **Operation of site:** local authority or private contractor (eg Park & Ride Ltd, Long Ashton P&R, Bristol).
- **Bus service:** contract let by local authority or private contractor for supply of vehicles, crew and service. Very occasionally: commercial bus service.
- **Rail:** station car parks usually feed existing train services, funded by train operators, with local authority/government support.



Park & Ride bus entering the Pear Tree Park & Ride car park, Woodstock Road, Oxford.

What makes a good P&R car park?

- **Easy to find and use:** clearly signed in advance from access routes and on site (including price, payment system, local and service information).
- **Uncongested access:** intercepts inter-urban and rural traffic directly from peri-urban main roads, before it reaches congested urban streets.
- **Attractively laid out:** landscaping, planting; safe, no hidden corners, illuminated, direct walking routes from cars to bus stop, clear on-site signage,
- **Multi-function site:** adjoining shopping or entertainment facilities: eg, superstore (York, Ascomb Bar), cinema (Reading, Loddon Bridge), stadium, hotel and conference centre (Reading, Madejski Stadium).
- **Comprehensive facilities:** toilets, telephones, tourist information, small convenience store, disabled parking, cycle parking/lockers.
- **Secure:** well-lit, controlled entry; cctv; friendly, competent, observant on-site personnel.



City Centre penetration is restricted to buses and cycles, Oxford.



The Award-Winning Norden Park & Ride site at Carfe Castle, Purbeck, Dorset, links into the steam railway to Swanage.

Technological support

- **CCTV:** for site surveillance and security management.
- **VMS signage:** P&R spaces available, service details, prices (on access routes and at site entrance); and to advise when town centre car parks are full.
- **Bus priority at site entry/exit and along the route:** bus activated traffic signals and queue re-location to minimise delays to buses entering and leaving car park terminals; exemption from banned turns, provision of bus-only access links (York, Grimston Bar).
- **Smart payment systems:** Smart cards being adopted, to facilitate price differentiation, enable links with electronic purse and "city card" systems (York), and provide management information. Often, parking is free, with fare paid on bus: parking charges attract VAT, bus fares are zero rated.
- **Vehicle location:** automated vehicle location (AVL), radio or phone links to buses to facilitate just-in-time service adjustments and information provision.
- **Passenger information at stops:** real time information for added passenger reassurance.
- **In-vehicle information:** local radio, traffic news, service information, city information, special promotions. Possible future *en route* e-commerce opportunities?

Warnings: pitfalls to avoid

- **Don't encourage extra car mileage:** P&R sites to intercept all main access routes discourage "circling the ring road". A single site on one access route will probably be insufficient; a strategy covering all routes must be prepared.
- **Conserve Green Belt land:** seek sites on lower grade land (York Naburn: former isolation hospital site, now McArthur Glen Designer Outlet retail complex).
- **Not too many sites:** no "ring of concrete" round the town; retain green links to rural hinterland.
- **Minimise traffic congestion:** ensure free-flowing access; avoid routes through known bottlenecks.
- **Not too close to town centre:** site must be far enough out to make mode change worthwhile, eg, two to four miles; a 10-15 minute bus ride (this may make P&R unattractive for some smaller towns).
- **Avoid abstraction from other bus services:** by careful planning of fares, routes and quality between P&R and mainstream local buses.
- **Shared sites:** beware conflict with site owner's primary business (eg, evening peak parking demand at cinemas and entertainment complexes).
- **Rail stations:** prevent parking in adjacent streets instead of official car park. Remedies include yellow lines, residents' parking permits and part-time parking bans to prevent all-day commuter parking.

Marketing

P&R is aimed at customers who have a choice. They would probably really rather take the car all the way, but are deterred by difficult driving and parking conditions and prices. The P&R option has to be made attractive and must be actively marketed.

A successful initial experience is vital to the attraction of repeat business.

- **Target markets:** car users who have lost the public transport habit – or may never have used it. People who are willing to give it a try: families can be attracted by “all-in” fares (single price for car and its occupants); fares must be simple, payment methods easy and non-intimidating (accept smart cards, credit and debit cards, give change). The social balance of P&R users is not the same as for bus travel generally. The most difficult markets to attract are those with company cars, free petrol and workplace parking!
- **Branding:** services must be given their own branding and be heavily advertised on and off the vehicles and away from the site (eg, at motorway service stations, tourist information offices, in hotels, restaurants and places of entertainment; on local radio and television).
- **Customer care** is paramount: customers must meet only knowledgeable and friendly staff at all times: at the terminals and on the buses. Repeat business and spreading the good news by word of mouth are vital to the long term success of a P&R service.
- **Pricing:** must offer good value relative to in-town car parks; but site must be viable: revenue must cover costs.

Where to find further information

The Effectiveness of bus-based Park & Ride by MW Pickett and S M Gray. TRL Report 207, 1996. Who uses P&R, how they would travel if P&R were not available, economic and traffic impacts.

The Travel Effects of Park and Ride. WS Atkins for DETR, 1998. Identifies the influences of the cost of central area parking and availability of PNR on the demand for P&R, the impact of P&R bus services on local buses and the need to consider improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

Park and Ride in Scotland. TRL in association with Strathclyde Passenger Transport, for Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, Research Findings No.74, 1999. A review of schemes and assessment of factors making for successful P&R, including road and rail-based schemes.

Revision of Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 13 Transport: public consultation draft. DETR, October 1999. Paragraphs 39–42 set out the Government's position on P&R and stress the need for schemes to be brought forward as an integral part of the overall approach for an area, consistent with regional transport strategies, to avoid Green Belts, to be implemented in association with improved public transport, traffic management and parking controls, and not to increase total parking stock in the town or encourage additional travel, especially commuting by car.

Environmental cost-benefits of bus-based park and ride systems. (GP Parkhurst, EPSRC Transport Studies Unit, Centre for Transport Studies, University College London, ☎020 7679 1582). A critical review of the WS Atkins report, with recommendations for ways to improve the environmental performance of P&R bus services.

Bus-based Park & Ride: a good practice guide. English Historic Towns Forum, PO Box 22, Bristol BS16 1RZ (☎0117 975 0459). 2nd Edition, May 2000. A Bible of good P&R practice. Design advice, commentary on planning matters, discussion of the wider implications and latest research.

A longer-range strategy for car-bus interchange: the “link-and-ride” concept May 2000. [GP Parkhurst, UCL: address above] A paper which advocates intercepting cars further out from towns and picking passengers up from a series of smaller car parks.

Park & Ride Great Britain: a survey and report. TAS Partnership, 2nd Edition, 2000. Available from Landor Publications, ☎020 7582 6626. Comprehensive scheme by scheme review, with details of prices, contract types, services, facilities and utilisation.

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