

Rosebird Centre Park & Ride A Review of Current Performance

The Rosebird Centre P&R facility is performing well below expectations, with the car park – which has about 106 parking spaces (including 3 for blue badge holders) – rarely holding more than 3 to 8 cars.

WCC's feasibility study into a potential Southern P&R facility contained a short section on the Rosebird Centre P&R. The study forecast that daily usage in 2012 (assumed to be 25% of the long term annual average) would be 16 vehicles during the morning peak (Monday to Friday), 49 during the off-peak and 22 on Saturdays. This translates into an annual number of bus passengers, during the first year of operation, of 33,404. In November, the service only carried 1,115 passengers which, on an annual basis, amounts to just over 13,000 passengers – less than 40% of forecast demand.

Something seems to be seriously wrong and the Stratford-upon-Avon Town Transport Group (STTG) have put their heads together to try and find out why.

Hours of Operation

Hours of operation are effectively 07.30 to 19.00 as originally the case at the Northern P&R site (first bus reaches Bridge Street at 07.40 and the last one leaves there at 18.40). The site is not open on Sunday and there is no overnight parking. In contrast, the Northern P&R is open on summer Sundays and now also allows overnight parking for hotel guests.

A major drawback is that the maximum length of stay in the car park is 9 hours (enforced by LPS). This means that an 8.30 to 5.30 commuter – who would have to catch the 8.00 bus in and the 18.00 bus back – would need to park for 10 hours. This is a major deterrent for commuters.

Charges

The charges at the Rosebird Centre P&R site are similar to those at the Northern P&R site with two important exceptions. First, an adult return costs the same £1.70, but the Rosebird Centre site charges an additional £1.00 to park the car. So, with an average off-peak car occupancy of 1.72 (shoppers), it costs £2.92 to use the Northern P&R, but £3.92 to use the Rosebird Centre site. Given that the current parking charges in the town are £3.00 for 3 hours and £4.00 for 4 hours, the Rosebird Centre P&R does not offer value-for-money.

Second, the Rosebird Centre P&R offers weekly and monthly season tickets for the same price as the Northern P&R: £6.00 and £22.00 respectively. However, when you take account of the average car occupancy of 1.15 (commuters), plus the £1.00 per day parking charge, the weekly and monthly season ticket costs increase to £11.90 and £45.30 respectively. When these are converted into the equivalent quarterly and annual payments, the weekly season is equivalent to nearly £155 per quarter and about £547 per year (for a 46 week year), while the monthly season is

equivalent to nearly £136 per quarter and about £498 per year (for an 11 month year). Compared to SDC's season ticket prices in town centre car parks of £135 per quarter and £500 per year, the Rosebird season ticket prices are not competitive.

Name

The on-street signage refers to the P&R site as the "Rosebird Centre Park and Ride." The Northern P&R, on the other hand, is referred to as the Stratford-upon-Avon Park & Ride, or Bishopton Park & Ride. It would be less ambiguous, if the two sites were referred to as the Stratford-upon-Avon Bishopton and Stratford-upon-Avon Rosebird Centre P&R or, alternatively, the Stratford-upon-Avon Northern and Stratford-upon-Avon Southern P&R (the latter being clearer).

On-Street Signage

The on-street signage leading to the P&R site is patchy. The signs on Seven Meadows Road, Clifford Lane and Shipston Road are fine. However, there is no signage on either the Banbury Road, or the Evesham Road. Two important entrances into the town are not sign-posted to the Rosebird Centre P&R.

Web Pages

Web-based information about the Rosebird Centre P&R site is almost non-existent. The SDC web site has three brief paragraphs on the Northern P&R facility (nothing on the Rosebird Centre site) and a link to the WCC web site. The WCC web site describes the Northern P&R at some length, but simply advises anyone interested in the Rosebird Centre site to follow a link to the Johnsons Coaches web site. The Johnsons Coaches web site provides information about the bus services, but little else.

The national park and ride web site (www.parkandride.net) provides no information on the Rosebird Centre site and nor does the Parkopedia's web site (www.parkopedia.co.uk). The visitor sites (www.stratford-upon-avon.co.uk) and (www.visitstratforduponavon.co.uk) also make no mention of the Rosebird Centre site.

An exception is the Shakespeare Country web site (www.shakespeare-country.co.uk) which does have a limited section on the Rosebird Centre site.

None of the sites provide the sort of information provided in the Oxford City web site which advises visitors that, "Oxford's park & ride is the easiest way to get into Oxford City Centre by car. With 5 car parks located around Oxford's ring road and fast and frequent bus services until late evening, it is the only sensible way to travel into Oxford City Centre."

Marketing

A brief conversation with one P&R user suggests that users find it very convenient for shopping trips. However, the site is not well publicised and many potential users are

unaware of its existence. Discussions with the bus driver – who did not appear to know Stratford well -- suggested that virtually no commuters use the site.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The STTG would like to see more people using the Rosebird Centre P&R facility and suggests that the sponsors seriously consider the following actions:

- (i) **Hours of Operation.** The shuttle bus operates from 7.30 to 19.00. It would therefore make more sense to set the maximum length of stay at 12 hours (not 9 hours as at present). Overnight parking for hotel guests is more problematical. The Rosebird Centre shoppers car park is locked at night, but the P&R site has no gates, no CCTV and is not patrolled by security staff. However, it may still be worth looking into potential overnight parking.
- (ii) **Charges.** Charges for commuters should match those at the Northern P&R site. The £1.00 parking charge should not apply to commuters and a quarterly and annual season ticket should also be offered.
- (iii) **Name.** Serious consideration should be given to re-branding the Rosebird Centre P&R site as the Stratford-upon-Avon Southern P&R.
- (iv) **On-Street Signage.** Suitable signage for the new site *must* be erected on the Banbury and Evesham Roads.
- (v) **Web Pages.** A separate web page should be developed for the new P&R site, linked to both the SDC and WCC web pages. WCC should also be urged to adopt similar wording to that used on the Oxford City web site, advising car users that P&R is the easiest way of getting into the town centre.
- (vi) **Marketing.** The new P&R should be actively promoted through The Herald, leaflets, the Stratforward Newsletter, etc. It might be worth offering BID members a discount and major retailers – like Debenhams, M&S, etc. – might be persuaded to provide a free cup of coffee to shoppers with a valid P&R ticket (it attracts more visitors into their shops and could be financed through their own marketing budgets). Likewise, it might be worth having a special, time-limited promotion to get people accustomed to using P&R, “buy a P&R ticket and bring a second person with you free.” Finally, it may be worth getting the bus drivers to attend the free Town Ambassador courses run by Stratforward. This could potentially provide a competitive edge to the P&R by enabling the driver to advise visitors what to see and do in the town.

Next Steps

It may be worth setting a few targets to help raise patronage. First, it may be worth targeting commuters: match the Northern P&R charges, raise the maximum length of stay to 12 hours, explore a discount arrangement with Stratforward and set a target of attracting 25-30 commuters to use the site.

Re-brand the P&R site and sort out the on-street signage in Banbury and Evesham Roads.

Launch a marketing campaign aimed at shoppers. Sort out the web pages, get an article in The Herald, distribute leaflets (to hotels, the VIC and selected shops) and attempt to get Debenhams, M&S, etc., to offer free cups coffee to people with a valid P&R ticket. Consider a time-limited, “buy one get one free promotion.” Send the bus drivers on the Town Ambassador course.

Review progress after 3 months to evaluate the impact of the above measures and revise as necessary.