

North Fringe to Hengrove Package – Programme Update

Purpose of Report

1. To update on progress and issues related to the North Fringe to Hengrove Package and to seek the Committee's views.

Background

2. The Regional Funding Allocation for major transport schemes endorsed by the Government in Summer 2009 includes a £168 million contribution towards the North Fringe to Hengrove Package. At the meeting of this Committee on 16 July 2009 a request was made for an update on progress on the Package to the 1 October 2009 meeting.
3. The Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study (GBSTS) recognised that investment in conventional bus services alone will not be sufficient to provide an attractive alternative to the private car and sustainably accommodate the increase in demand for travel arising from the expected level of development in the sub-region. The study promoted a package of bus, Rapid Transit, traffic management and park and ride schemes to address existing traffic problems, improve air quality and support regeneration and sustainable development, and its emerging recommendations were fully considered as part of the formulation of the Joint Local Transport Plan.
4. Over recent years the North and East Fringe has seen the provision of 70,000 jobs, the development of 8,000 dwellings in Bradley Stoke and a further 3,000 in Emerson's Green, accompanied by a substantial increase in traffic levels and consequent congestion, with significant further development either planned or underway. Similarly, whilst Bristol city centre has attracted major employment and regeneration schemes, traffic speeds are amongst the slowest of the core English cities and air quality in the central area has deteriorated since 2004. Communities in South Bristol experience significant levels of deprivation and difficulty accessing job opportunities, and there is a need to substantially improve transport links into the city centre and beyond.
5. The North Fringe to Hengrove Package is composed of an integrated set of transport schemes to help address these issues as follows:
 - Rapid transit routes from Hengrove to the city centre, from the city centre to the North Fringe and Emerson's Green;
 - A park and ride site alongside the M32; and
 - The Stoke Gifford Transport Link.

In particular, the Package will build on the Greater Bristol Bus Network and recent

progress in the submission of a major scheme funding bid for a rapid transit route from Ashton Vale to Temple Meads and Bristol city centre submitted in March 2009, by progressing a wider network of high quality public transport routes linking key employment and development areas, reducing car dependency and tackling traffic congestion. In addition, the Package will assist in the stimulation of regeneration and tackling deprivation in South Bristol by improving the transport network and access to job opportunities.

6. An emphasis will be placed on maintaining segregation from general traffic to deliver fast and reliable rapid transit services, together with 'turn up and go' frequencies, high profile stops and interchanges, and high quality vehicles and passenger information. In addition, where possible, opportunities will be taken to improve parallel walking and cycling links as part of the Package. In the city centre, opportunities to further improve public transport interchange will be considered as well as potential pedestrian, traffic management, cycling and public realm enhancements.
7. A Major Scheme Business Case (MSBC) is scheduled to be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) in Spring 2010. The Package as a regionally significant scheme has been identified as a national pilot for a more collaborative approach with the DfT to major transport scheme development. It is intended that this will involve a better and earlier understanding by the DfT of the nature of the scheme and way in which the business case will be developed, particularly those elements relating to the value for money case and the Package's overall costs and benefits, and is intended to reduce scheme development timescales and cost. To this end a meeting was held with the DfT in June 2009 which discussed issues such as transport modelling and appraisal, service policy and procurement, Programme and Project Management and evaluation. It is intended that this will be the first of a regular sequence of meetings with the DfT which will take place throughout the development phase.
8. Governance arrangements to steer, oversee and manage the development of the Package were reported to the 16 July 2009 meeting of the Joint Transport Executive Committee. These comprise a Programme Board, which is responsible for overseeing and coordinating activities undertaken by the three Project Boards, the latter run by Bristol City and South Gloucestershire Councils who manage the work related to the individual projects. Both Programme and Project Boards have now been established and are meeting at regular intervals.

Programme Issues

Package Objectives

9. The Package is a substantial and ambitious project requiring clear, strategic objectives consistent with DfT guidance on Delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy (DaSTS). Programme objectives have been agreed by the Programme Board as follows:
 1. *Support a buoyant economy, improve quality of life for sub-regional residents and improve local and national travel.*

2. *Encourage the shift to new forms of public transport and realise the associated environmental, climate change, safety and health benefits.*
3. *Tackle congestion and therefore the economic, environmental and health damage that is associated with it.*
4. *Enhance the opportunities for regeneration and sustainable growth through the linking of areas of economic and housing expansion.*
5. *Promote equality of opportunity and security through improved connectivity to education, employment, leisure, health and retail facilities.*

It is intended that these, with the complementary project objectives, will facilitate scheme outcomes including promoting a shift onto more sustainable transport modes and tackling congestion, encouraging regeneration and tackling social inclusion in South Bristol, and connecting and addressing the transport implications of new developments.

Submission Timescales

10. The timescale to submit the MSBC includes a number of key milestones for the two councils to meet:
 - Assembling background information and data sources to enable an initial evaluation of potential scheme options on a range of criteria, including consistency with programme and project objectives, deliverability, cost and operating frameworks, for completion by October 2009.
 - Ongoing stakeholder engagement on scheme options leading to fuller consultation on a preferred package in December.
 - As part of the pilot approach, further data collection and model refinement to satisfy DfT appraisal requirements during October and November 2009.
 - Detailed appraisal of the preferred package and production of the MSBC documentation.
 - JTEC and BCC/SGC approval in February/March 2010 prior to submission of the MSBC in March 2010.
11. This is a challenging timescale which will require an intensive and targeted work programme and effective engagement with stakeholders. There are also indications from the DfT that any deferment in the submission timescale may risk the strategic funding allocation for the Package. However, the timescale will be facilitated by the pilot status of the Package and regular liaison with the DfT to clarify appraisal requirements early in the process.

Options Assessment

12. Transport consultants are currently undertaking the initial evaluation of potential scheme options including impact on the programme and project objectives, deliverability and DfT assessment requirements. This is a recent commission and

results from this work are expected to be forthcoming in October.

13. This work will inform the specification of 'modelling options', necessary to assess the overall feasibility of the Package at a strategic level in initial testing and discussions with the DfT in terms of achieving a Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2 or more. It should be emphasised that this modelling work will not at this stage preclude full consideration of alternative scheme options arising particularly through stakeholder representations, which will feed via the Councils' Project Boards into the later designation of a 'preferred option' by December 2009 for wider consultation.

Communications Strategy

14. The Communications Strategy places an emphasis on early engagement on the projects within the Package. Background information on scheme options is currently on the West of England website, including summaries of both segregated and highway-based rapid transit options, the Stoke Gifford Transport Link and park and ride alongside the M32.
15. The next stage in this process will need to be a short-listing of options, and Bristol City and South Gloucestershire Council officers will, through engagement with stakeholders and consideration of representations, assess scheme options to enable the identification of a preferred package for wider consultation in December.
16. The West of England Partnership Office will continue to provide a strategic overview to assist this process and ensure consistency of consultation material, whilst with reference to the agreed governance structure, engagement on scheme options will be undertaken and managed by Bristol City and South Gloucestershire Councils.
17. As part of the appraisal of the Ashton Vale to Temple Meads and Bristol City Centre Rapid Transit scheme, a Technology Review was undertaken during Summer 2008 into potential modes to operate the scheme. The Review recommended the selection of a bus-based option for the Ashton Vale route but highlighted the need to revisit this recommendation for future Rapid Transit routes in the network. Accordingly, there is now a need to commission further work to consider potential modes and recommend the most appropriate mode option for the rapid transit corridors in the Package in order to deliver its objectives within the available funding.

Package Cost and Funding

18. Development costs up to MSBC submission have been agreed between Bristol and South Gloucestershire Councils. Longer term, in addition to the RFA allocation, as per DfT guidance the councils will need to identify a minimum 10% local funding contribution towards the implementation cost of the Package, and will need to consider this factor when negotiating with developers on sites along the affected corridors.

Looking Forward

19. The next stage in the programme will be for the councils to commence the short-listing of scheme options facilitated by engagement with stakeholders and the DfT,

in parallel with further data collection and model refinement leading up to fuller public consultation in December. The Technology Review into potential modes will be undertaken in the Autumn to input into the consultation period. An update on progress and consultation responses will be provided as part of the Major Scheme Monitor in February prior to a decision whether to endorse the submission of the MSBC in March 2010.

Recommendation

That the Joint Transport Executive Committee notes the progress made with the North Fringe to Hengrove Package and gives views.

Officer presenting the report:

Barbara Davies, West of England Partnership Office

Tel. 0117 922 4923; email: barbara.davies@westofengland.org