

Bus Improvement Programme

Purpose

To seek Members views on the programme of current and proposed actions to secure improved bus services in the sub region.

Background

1. Central to tackling congestion is providing viable alternatives to the car. Around 10% of all journeys to work per year in the sub-region are by bus, rising to 29% for people working in Bristol city centre and 20% in Bath. In 2008/09, some 53m passenger journeys were carried by bus in the area, an increase of 6% over the previous 5 years and above the Joint Local Transport Plan/ Multi Area Agreement target figure. Punctuality has improved with the proportion of buses starting on time increasing from 65% in 2005/06 to 76% in 2008/09. Satisfaction with bus services grew from 36% in 2003/04 to 44% in 2006/07 although we will continue to work closely with operators to improve this figure.
2. Improving bus services and encouraging bus use is key to achieving our vision for a transport system that ensures that alternatives to the car are a realistic first choice for the majority of trips. Buses are critical to achieving a modal shift from the car with consequential reductions in carbon emissions and congestion and improvement in air quality and accessibility in the sub region.
3. The quality of current bus services requires improvement and this report brings together ongoing and proposed initiatives into a wider programme of investment and development of bus service provision in the sub-region.

Improvement Programme

Secure formal joint commitments with operators to increase patronage

4. Report 7b) on this agenda details progress with the delivery of the Greater Bristol Bus Network scheme. Since funding was approved in May 2008 all four authorities and First have been working together to successfully deliver GBBN.
5. The scheme involves over £70million investment in improving bus services. It comprises of £42.3m from the Department for Transport (DfT), approximately £22.5m from the bus operator First, £5.7m developer contributions and £1.8m local authority contributions. The scheme introduces ten showcase bus corridors which will include bus priority measures, improved bus shelters, real-time information and new buses involving at least 60 separate services.
6. However, all bus services benefit from bus priority measures and junction improvements and the four authorities are encouraging all operators to acknowledge this by working towards the establishment of statutory Quality

Partnership Schemes (QPSs) where bus operators agree to minimum service frequencies, vehicle standards, service performance and maximum fares. The intention is that statutory QPSs will be established for all the GBBN corridors with a consequent rise in confidence for the level of service available.

7. The West of England Partnership therefore plans to build on the commitments and progress through the delivery of GBBN, in order to where possible achieve improvement in frequencies, reliability and quality of bus service provision in the sub-region. Appendix 1 contains details of the first GBBN QPS between Midsomer Norton and Bath and supporting Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). Appendix 2 contains the programme for completion of the following GBBN corridors which will be reflected in the delivery of corresponding QPSs.

Engage public to mobilise their influence and increased use of bus services

8. To encourage bus use, passengers need to feel confident that a bus will arrive on time, deliver them to their destination on time and cost a reasonable amount. By working together on GBBN the authorities have signalled their intention to improve the network to enable buses to keep to time by providing enhanced bus priority measures and bus lane improvements. Both operators and passengers benefit from reduced travel time and free flowing buses. We now need to work with the operators on passenger confidence and cost of travel.
9. Work on improving the network is being backed up by increased targeting of bus lane infringements which slow the buses and force them into mainstream traffic, thereby slowing all traffic. Behavioural change can take time to take effect but we will continue to explain that blocking a bus lane is a direct cause of congestion and enforce such measures accordingly.
10. The potential launch activities for GBBN and its individual corridors, together with the work on QPSs, as per paragraph 7, will be supported by a joint publicity campaign between the authorities and all local operators in order to promote the use of bus services, building on research and best practice elsewhere. A recent campaign by South Gloucestershire Council with First for the X27 Yate- Bristol-service has demonstrated how passenger numbers can be directly affected by such targeted work. Other examples of the benefits of marketing have been seen through initiatives such as the Bluestar promotion in Southampton, the Skylink services at East Midlands airport and the Go2 services in Nottingham.
11. The West of England authorities will build on the GBBN promotional work and the bus network review in paragraph 14, to identify the joint resources required to develop a sub-regional bus service marketing and publicity programme of engagement under the travel+ umbrella. The West of England Partnership will seek the participation and commitment of major employers and voluntary and community organisations in efforts to mobilise support and enthusiasm for improved bus services, with clear arrangements for subsequent evaluation.
12. The authorities will build practical alliances with other sub-regions having direct experience of action to improve services to increase learning, best practice and progress.
13. Report 7 c) on this agenda provides an update on the progress to develop ITSO smartcard use in the partnership area and the southwest region. The introduction of smartcard technology will have an additional benefit as it will allow faster

boarding of buses (less waiting at stops) and provide more detailed information on bus usage which can be used to ensure services are provided where people want them.

Sub regional review of current bus network and rapid transit network

14. Appendix 3 contains the report on the 'Bristol Bus Network Review' presented to this Committee on 4 February 2010. First are planning to undertake a review of all their commercial bus services operated as part of their Bristol area network, i.e. within the Bristol built up area. They will also consider the role within Bristol of their interurban services to places such as Yate, Bath and Clevedon and connections to places close to but outside the built up area, e.g. Long Ashton.
15. The West of England authorities have widened the review to include all routes in the sub-region and all four authorities. This work could also pave the way for similar reviews of the urban networks in Bath and Weston-super-Mare linked to bus infrastructure improvements in the Bath Transportation Package and Weston Package major schemes.
16. The West of England authorities, by their involvement in the current review in the coming months, will play a key role in shaping and agreeing the new bus network for the area. The Councils have a particular interest in this review due to the financial support they provide for filling service and frequency gaps to create a more comprehensive network.
17. The objectives of the network review are:
 - Increase patronage and improve the bus network's share of passenger journeys
 - Improve the profitability of the network and reduce the level of public financial support required
 - Improve customer satisfaction.

To be achieved by a comprehensible, marketable network that meets current needs and demands whilst being responsive to change, e.g. to new developments such as Southmead Hospital and Hengrove Park.

18. There are considerable opportunities associated with development of flexible and demand responsive transport and partnership working with the community transport and social enterprise sectors. These will be considered as part of the review. Although the review is focused on the West of England Partnership area, it will also include consideration of services from areas bordering the West of England area, such as Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire.

Development of Rapid Transit Operating Framework(s)

19. Looking ahead, the introduction of rapid transit in the sub-region will impact on standard bus services (see attached plan of rapid transit network including Bath Package, Ashton Vale to City Centre, South Bristol Link, North Fringe to Hengrove Package). Rapid transit is seen as an additional high quality public transport service with fewer stops, not as a direct replacement for mainstream bus services. In order to ensure that rapid transit and local bus services provide an integrated service the Partnership is already looking at how the two networks will complement each other.

Programme

20. The following programme of actions seeks to achieve improvements in bus service frequencies, reliability, quality and maximum fare levels. The proposed programme is as follows:.

	Action	Timescale for Completion
Secure formal joint commitments with operators to increase patronage		
1.	Co-ordination of delivery of GBBN & complementary Showcase bus infrastructure.	Summer 2008 – ongoing
2.	Completion of GBBN Midsomer Norton to Bath statutory Quality Partnership Scheme (QPS) & supporting Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)	Summer 2010
3.	Negotiation and completion of QPS's for remaining GBBN corridors	Summer 2010 – Spring 2012
Engage public to mobilise their influence and increased use of bus services		
4.	GBBN joint publicity campaign between the authorities and all local operators as corridors are completed	Summer 2010 – Spring 2012
5.	Liaison and Best Practice Sharing with sub-regional authorities elsewhere in GB	Spring 2010 – Summer 2010 [Subject to resources]
6.	Sub-regional Bus Service Marketing and Publicity programmes of engagement (additional to and building upon existing timetable/network publicity and GBBN activities)	Summer 2010 – ongoing [Subject to resources]
7.	Ticketing/Smartcards Co-ordination and promotion	Summer 2010 – ongoing
Sub- regional review of current bus network and rapid transit network		
8.	Build on current Bristol Network Review to undertake wider sub-regional review, including coordination of sub- regional revenue supported services and tendering	Winter 2009 – Autumn 2010
9.	Development of Rapid Transit Operating Framework(s)	Summer 2010 – Spring 2011

21. The programme will be developed to further clarify priorities for action and obstacles and opportunities, in particular assessing the value for money currently afforded by the combination of bus subsidies and concessionary fares and the role of flexible and demand responsive services. It is proposed that the above programme is reviewed by the Committee on 6 monthly basis.

Recommendation

That Members give their views

That the lead public transport officers from each of the authorities attend the next meeting to provide an update on progress

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Appendix 1

Update on Quality Partnership Schemes (QPS) for the Greater Bristol Bus Network

- a. The first GBBN route to have its facilities complete (apart from RTI) will be Corridor 10 (along the A367 between Bath and Midsomer Norton). At present, this involves three separate bus services that combine to provide a regular interval over that section of route.
- b. The launch of the route will be followed by the first QPS for GBBN. The QPS seeks to increase passenger numbers, increase passenger satisfaction, improve reliability, reduce journey times and meet the needs of people accessing employment, health and education opportunities.
- c. The first QPS is an extensive, legal document which will set out necessary criteria for bus operators to comply with in order to access the measures delivered by GBBN on this corridor (such as the new bus lanes), together with the infrastructure measures also delivered and maintained by the local authority. These criteria include maximum fare levels, minimum frequencies, vehicle standards and service performance, and further details of some of the criteria are set out in paragraphs 4 to 9 below. The QPS will be supported by a complementary Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) to identify further service enhancements should indicators such as passenger numbers increase further.
- d. The QPS sets out minimum service frequencies (based on current service patterns) for each service covered by the QPS.
- e. The QPS specifies a schedule of maximum fares along the corridor based on current fare levels, together with a formula for annual adjustment reflecting cost changes in the bus industry in the preceding year (including fuel prices, depreciation, maintenance costs and wages).
- f. The QPS includes standards for vehicle cleanliness, driver conduct and presentation, in addition to vehicle accessibility (such as low floor access, handrails etc.), priority seating standards, and route and destination displays. The operators will be required to ensure all on-vehicle information is current and that all vehicles will be equipped with and report on the Real Time Information system.
- g. Service reliability in the QPS reflects that included in the registration of a service with the Traffic Commissioner, but also includes transfer of passengers due to vehicle breakdown.
- h. The QPS sets out the facilities to be delivered by the local authority and their maintenance framework, including road markings, bus stops and shelters, street lighting, traffic signal installations and enforcement of Traffic Regulation Orders.
- i. Bath & North East Somerset Council has carried out informal consultation on the draft QPS for Corridor 10 with bus operators. The Public Transport Advisory Sub-Group is considering the matters raised during consultation prior to producing a final draft for formal consultation (but see 12 below).
- j. Formal consultation now has to be undertaken with bus operators affected by the proposal, user groups, other authorities, the Traffic Commissioner, the Police and any other relevant persons. However, it cannot take place until the Real-Time Information (RTI) Agreement for GBBN has been completed and that is unlikely to happen before April 2010.
- k. Meanwhile, negotiations will start with operators on the content of the complementary Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) for Corridor 10 that will supplement the QPS. Over the course of time, the combined benefits of the improved facilities and the standard of services should have a positive impact on passenger numbers and revenue. The VPA will include “trigger points” with operators whereby, when agreed levels of patronage and/or revenue are attained, specified improvements to services will be introduced.

- i. After consultation, the draft QPS may be amended to reflect comments received. Subject to decision of Bath & North East Somerset Council, the QPS would then be made.
- m. Once the QPS has been made, there is a formal notification process to be carried out. The start date must be at least three months after the date on which it is made. At present, the earliest possible start date for the first QPS will be September 2010.
- n. It should be noted that if bus operators raise objections during the formal consultation, the process of making the QPS may be delayed whilst they are resolved, including a role for the traffic commissioner in assessing whether the objections are reasonable.
- o. It is intended that the QPS for Corridor 10 will serve as a template for the QPSs covering the other GBBN corridors. Whilst there will be features unique to each QPS, the process of implementing them will be quicker once the first QPS has been established. A programme of implementation of the QPSs on the other GBBN corridors is being finalised, and initial details are outlined in Appendix 2. The aspiration is to introduce them as soon as practicable after completion of the infrastructure work (excluding RTI).

Background information

1. Quality Partnership Schemes: statutory guidance (Department for Transport, March 2009)

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/165237/299192/qps.pdf>

2. Guidance on voluntary partnership agreements (Department for Transport, February 2009)

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgt/regional/localtransportbill/vpaguidance.pdf>

Appendix 2
Programme for Completion of GBBN Corridors

Corridor	Description	Completion Date (incl. developer contributions)	Scheduled QPS Commencement Date
2	A4018 Whiteladies Road	Feb 2012	April 2012
3	A4 Bath to Bristol	June 2011	Sept 2011
4	Route 73 North Fringe to Bristol	Dec 2011	April 2012
5	A432 Yate to Bristol	Nov 2011	April 2012
6	A37 Midsomer Norton to Bristol	Aug 2010	April 2011
7	A4174 Avon Ring Road	Feb 2012	April 2012
8	A370 W-s-M to Bristol	Feb 2011	April 2011
9	A369 Portishead to Bristol	Oct 2011	April 2012
10	A367 Midsomer Norton to Bath	March 2010	Oct 2010

Note: The QPS for Corridor 1 (M32) will be covered by the QPS's on corridors 4 & 5.

Appendix 3: Bristol Area Bus Network Review Report to JTEC on 4/02/2010

West of England Partnership

Joint Transport Executive Committee

4 February 2010

Bristol Area Bus Network Review

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of plans to review the Bristol area bus network and to seek their agreement of the proposed objectives and timetable.

Background

2. First are planning to undertake a review of all their commercial bus services operated as part of their Bristol area network, ie within the Bristol built up area. They will also consider the role within Bristol of their interurban services to places such as Yate, Bath and Clevedon and connections to places close to but outside the built up area, e.g. Long Ashton. The West of England authorities, by their involvement in the review in the coming months, will play a key role in shaping and agreeing the new bus network for the area. Both Bristol and South Gloucestershire Councils have a particular interest in this review due to the subsidy they provide for service enhancements on otherwise commercial routes and in filling service gaps to create a more comprehensive network.
3. It is critical that the review builds on the work being undertaken to upgrade services and infrastructure on the main corridors through the Greater Bristol Bus Network (GBBN) and complement the associated development of statutory Quality Partnership Schemes (QPS) currently being led by Bath & North East Somerset Council. It is therefore important to see this piece of work as one element of the on-going programme of investment and development of public transport in the sub-region. A report explaining the wider programme and context will be brought to the Committee's next meeting on 18 March 2010.

Proposals

4. It is proposed that Bristol City Council lead on the review in conjunction with First and South Gloucestershire, although officers from the other Unitary Authorities will be closely involved. Consultation on the bus network will be carried out, e.g. via the Ask Bristol website, seeking views on how and where bus routes and services might be improved. This will inform the project on the potential future bus network. In addition Bristol will evaluate the performance and value for money of existing service contracts as most of these will be due for renewal or review during 2011 and those that are required in the future will need to be tendered towards the end of 2010. In the same timescale Bristol City Council is carrying out a review of its school and social care transport services and would wish to see a coordinated procurement process for all its new contracts if possible. The review will also allow for consideration of the contribution that could be made by flexible and/or demand responsive transport as appropriate.
5. As the outcome of this review is very likely to impact on both Bristol and South Gloucestershire's contracted services and to a lesser extent on North Somerset's and Bath & North East Somerset's, its conclusion is necessary before the contracted services can be finally determined. With this in mind, together with the timescale involved for the EU procurement process, it is proposed to adopt as far as possible a common termination/renewal date of September 2011 for all Bristol's passenger service contracts.

This would also coincide with the termination/renewal date of the University of the West of England's network of services and present a further opportunity for coordination of services.

6. South Gloucestershire Council also administers a number of contracts that form an integral part of the Bristol bus network and to which Bristol City Council provides a financial contribution. All but one of these contracts is due for renewal in July 2010 (the other is in August 2014) therefore consideration will need to be given as to how these services can best be maintained until September 2011.

7. At an initial meeting between First and officers of Bristol and South Gloucestershire Councils, the draft objectives of the review were discussed. It is proposed that these are to: -

- Increase patronage and improve the bus network's share of passenger journeys
- Improve the profitability of the network and reduce the level of public financial support required
- Improve customer satisfaction.

To be achieved by:

- A comprehensible, marketable network that meets current needs and demands whilst being responsive to change, e.g. to new developments such as Southmead Hospital and Hengrove Park.

8. The proposed timescale is therefore as follows: -

Dates	Actions
February 2010 to June 2010	Public consultation & surveys, data analysis, review forms of contract. First determine their commercial network. Consultation with other service providers, eg other commercial operators, councils, UWE. Prepare proposals for supported network.
July/August 2010	Political approval for services to be tendered.
Autumn 2010	Tender process begins.
September 2011	New contracted services commence.

Recommendation

9. That the proposed objectives and timetable be agreed.

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