

**SCR TRANSPORT & THE ENVIRONMENT BOARD**

**07 JANUARY 2021**

**STABILISATION: BUS PARTERSHIPS - FUTURE APPROACH**

**Purpose of Report**

The impending progression of the Bus Review recommendations and the requirement for close partnership working between operators, LAs and SYPTE, could be supported by a revamp of the Bus Partnerships, in particular considering the level of engagement from the partners has been declining in recent years.

This paper recommends a refreshed approach to the Bus Partnerships, which is subject to agreement by all parties in the Partnerships.

The Transport & The Environment Board are asked to consider and endorse the revised approach.

**Thematic Priority** – Secure investment in infrastructure where it will do most to support growth.

**Freedom of Information**

This paper may be released under a Freedom of Information request.

**Recommendations**

That the Transport & The Environment Board endorse the proposed change in approach to the Bus Partnerships and for SYPTE to seek agreement on the revised approach from the Partnerships, in particular the communications link with the Bus Improvement Board and through that the TOB governance process.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1** The Bus Partnerships have been established for many years. In more recent years, it has become increasingly challenging to maintain levels of engagement from all parties (see Section 2.5.2).
- 1.2** With the recent publication of the Bus Review and the impending progression of its recommendations, the increased need for partnership working to support the recovery from COVID has been an opportune moment to take a fresh look at the Bus Partnerships and find a route to reinvigorating them. This paper recommends a refreshed approach, which is subject to agreement by all parties in the Partnerships.

## 2. Proposal and justification

### 2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Bus Review was published in June 2020 with its recommendations, principles and next steps endorsed by the July 2020 MCA. To progress the recommendations, a 7-point plan was developed with the first four elements being prioritised for work to start in 2020/21:

- **Governance**
- **Route Analysis**
- **Quality Analysis**
- **Environment Analysis**
- Pricing Analysis
- Model Analysis
- Cost Model

Recognising the current Covid related challenges, a phased approach will be taken, with the Bus Review analysis work packages forming part of the renewals phase:

- Stabilisation: Stabilising the Bus Network
- Recovery: Covid Funding Exit Strategy
- Transformation: Responding to the Bus Review

**2.2** The Bus Review envisages improvements across a range of service aspects and the 7-point plan will develop more detailed delivery plans based on more in-depth analysis of the current position.

**2.3** However, the 7-point plan has to be structured around the main aspects over what we can control (direct or otherwise) and cannot cover all areas highlighted in the Bus Review. There is the potential to achieve some early wins and to make improvements to processes, with the requirement for this accelerated by the impacts of COVID on the sustainability of the bus network in South Yorkshire. This will be of even greater importance when levels of central government subsidy are tapered or removed.

### 2.4 BUS REVIEW – POTENTIAL AREAS FOR EARLY IMPROVEMENTS

A more detailed review of the Bus Review documentation, highlights that there are process improvements that could be started now, because:

- they sit outside of the scope of the 7-point plan;
- they prepare the SYPTE/SCR organisation for the recommendations of the 7-point plan, and;
- they will facilitate the COVID Funding Exit Strategy, which is likely to require action prior to the conclusion of the 7-point plan work.

Having undertaken a line-by-line review of the Bus Review and the key themes of concern that might be mitigated through process improvements, the main improvement areas identified are:

i) Consultation of service changes;

Influence and leverage over the service provision (commercial network) via, for example, investment in the right projects (invest to create a more sustainable network).

- ii) Operator expert inputs into Bus Review 7-point plan to support deliverability and Local Authority engagements in the Bus Review work

The Bus Partnerships would form an excellent mechanism to support these areas and a refocus would be a good opportunity to reinvigorate the Bus Partnerships.

## **2.5 BUS PARTNERSHIPS CURRENT STATE**

### **2.5.1 Governance structure**

- The MCA has four Bus Partnerships, one in each of the districts.
- They are “voluntary” partnerships in the format required by the Transport Act 2000.
- The only Partnership formally endorsed by the MCA is the Sheffield Partnership, however, all Partnerships have been established over time and meetings have been held:
  - Sheffield established 2012
  - Rotherham established 2015
  - Doncaster established 2016
  - Barnsley established 2017
- The governance meetings for Bus Partnerships are typically:
  - Quarterly Steering Groups (SYLTE Director Chair)
  - Monthly Operations Groups (Bus Services Manager Chair)
- Meeting attendees comprise:
  - Operators
  - Local authority Senior Officers
  - SYLTE Senior Officers
- The Bus Partnerships are governed under clear terms of reference

### **2.5.2 Challenges**

- Over time, the shared interests of the three parties involved in the partnerships has somewhat eroded, as most “low hanging fruit” was dealt with early on.
- Mutual benefits (win-wins) are now more complex to achieve owing to conflicting policy decisions, greater investment levels needed, greater risks and lower risk appetite owing to downward pressure on customer demand
- Poor record of attendance from lead Officers, owing to conflicting demands on time
- A route to greater engagement and accountability would be for the Bus Partnerships to link through into formal governance forums, such as the Transport & Environment Board (e.g. via the Bus Improvement Board)

## 2.6 BUS PARTNERSHIPS PROPOSED RENEWED APPROACH

The Partnerships need to be reinvigorated by creating a new shared purpose, which each party will support.

Opportunities for shared focus areas going forward are:

- Engagement on Bus Review developments
- Strategies that support the long-term sustainability of the bus service provision (link to COVID recovery)
- Greater engagement on service design, maximising leverage over network design (e.g. trade bus lanes for service retention), facilitate true consultation
- Support prioritisation of capital programmes
- Support pricing strategies
- Create a single Steering Group meeting across all four LAs, although maintain separate Operations Group meetings for each of the four districts, to recognise time availability constraints from attendees, with a more strategic remit that is clearly distinct from the Operations Groups.
- Encourage closer engagement by linking it into the Transport & Environment Board, via the Bus Improvement Board
- Two-way feed into the Bus Improvement Board (feed out: data support, feed in: Bus Review progress updates)

## 2.7 NEXT STEPS

<b>19 Oct 2020</b>	SMT review of approach ( <b>COMPLETE</b> )
<b>11 Nov 2020</b>	Socialise approach with SCR Bus Review team ( <b>COMPLETE</b> )
<b>Nov/Dec 2020</b>	Socialise new approach with key stakeholders ( <b>STARTED</b> )
<b>Jan 2021</b>	Relaunch Partnerships

## 3. **Consideration of alternative approaches**

If of interest to the Board, the next the next 'evolution' of the new arrangements is an enhanced partnership, in line with DfT's National Bus Strategy once further details are available and arrangements can be implemented.

Consideration has been given to not making any changes to the current Bus Partnership meetings. However, it was concluded that changing our approach now does not preclude us from making further changes to the Bus Partnerships in the future. Changing the way we work now, considering the challenging times in which we are working, could aid the recovery from Covid.

## 4. **Implications**

### 4.1 **Financial**

None

### 4.2 **Legal**

None

#### **4.3 Risk Management**

None

#### **4.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion**

None

### **5. Communications**

5.1 This paper will be taken forward to the 25 January 2021 MCA meeting.

### **6. Appendices/Annexes**

None.

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