

Mayoral Combined Authority Board

20 September 2021

Bus Service Improvement Plan Update

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
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Purpose of this report:	Discussion
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Is this a Key Decision?	No
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Has it been included on the Forward Plan?	No
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Director Approving Submission of the Report:

Stephen Edwards, Executive Director (SYPT)

Choose an item.

Report Author(s):

Chloe Shepherd

Chloe.shepherd@sheffieldcityregion.org.uk

Executive Summary

This paper provides an update on the workpackage one (WP1) outputs that will be used to develop our initial Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) submission in October 2021.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

The outputs produced by WP1 relate to improving the regions bus services and by incorporating them into our initial BSIP, they will support the recovery of our bus system post-COVID.

Recommendations

That the Board consider the content of this paper and the outputs from WP1 which will shape the next stages of work, to provide a view on the preferred approach to the initial Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), as set out in Section 3.

Consideration by any other Board, Committee, Assurance or Advisory Panel

Transport and the Environment Board

02 September 2021

1. Background

- 1.1 The initial BSIP setting out the MCA's proposals for improving bus services in South Yorkshire, is due for submission to the Department for Transport (DfT) in October. The BSIP guidance asks that Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) set targets relating to service improvements and outline how they will be delivered in their plans, which will be monitored and reported on annually.
- 1.2 The Route, Quality and Environmental Analysis workstreams that comprise workpackage 1 (WP1) are reporting their first set of key outputs. These three workstreams combined will set out what a better bus system looks like and provide the evidence to underpin the content of the initial BSIP. The first set of outputs provide examples of best practice from around the country, an identification of some of the barriers we face in our region to delivery as well as a strategic outline of overall network performance. They also highlight the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our bus system.
- 1.3 As we have collected a lot of strategic level evidence so far, there are areas where further work could be undertaken in detail to identify those locations and interventions that would support the recovery of the bus system post-COVID before moving onto measures that would grow the system. The Board is asked to consider the emerging strategic evidence and the areas to explore in more detail, to ensure the BSIP delivers the regions objectives for bus.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The BSIP guidance states the overall aim of the document is to '...explain LTA ambition to improve buses and the plans and policies that will deliver them'. The Transport and Environment Board have previously set out a draft Vision and Objectives for bus to shape the development of the BSIP (see Appendix A) that consists of several elements including reliability, accessibility, integration and inclusion, plus a series of delivery commitments that includes growing patronage to create a financially sustainable and stable network and delivery of our SEP objectives.
- 2.2 As BSIPs will be 'living documents' that are monitored and reported on annually, LTAs are asked to set targets that measure journey time, reliability, patronage and customer satisfaction improvements. The details of how these targets will be delivered are also required, with plans required to contain information regarding the location of bus priority measures, the role of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services, investment in decarbonisation measures and the improvements to accessibility.
- 2.3 WP1 – the Route, Quality and Environmental Analysis workstreams - will provide the evidence and information (inputs) required for the BSIP as depicted in Appendix B, showing how the starting point for our work to reform the bus network is the Bus Review that was published in 2020. From the strategic level evidence gathered so far, there are areas where further work could be undertaken in detail to support the development of our initial BSIP. The evidence also highlights the impact the pandemic has had on bus patronage, which raises questions about how to structure the initial BSIP in response.

- 2.4 Route Analysis - The Route Analysis workstream outputs provide a strategic overview of how our bus network is performing now (post-COVID) and how the network was performing in 2019 (pre-COVID). Current data indicates that bus patronage remains at around 60% of pre-COVID levels which, presents the region with a challenge when determining a set of targets for the BSIP. As COVID Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) is due to end in March 2022, the Board may wish to set BSIP targets that focus on the recovery of patronage to pre-COVID levels in the short term.
- 2.5 To understand where investment could be targeted to have the greatest impact on patronage, the Route Analysis workstream has conducted a strategic assessment of network performance. The outputs identified a number of areas of high bus demand in 2019, where patronage has fallen in 2021, but that also experience high levels of unreliability, which negatively impacts service provision. The evidence to date also shows a number of communities that are reliant upon bus services due to factors such as low car ownership, but their disparate locations do not suit traditional, timetabled bus service provision.
- 2.6 As the evidence gathered so far is at a high level, there is the opportunity to go into more detail to examine those areas of high demand and high unreliability, to potentially identify routes and interventions that could have the greatest impact on patronage recovery in the early years of our BSIP. Further work could also be undertaken to consider how best to address the issues presented in the evidence regarding serving our disparate communities. For example, alternative models of delivery are likely to be required such as DRT to ease the pressure on traditional, timetabled services.
- 2.7 Quality Analysis - The Quality Analysis workstream has identified the different types of bus passenger across our region and the elements of a bus service that are most important to them. This work is being aligned with the Route Analysis to inform service design and a long list of quality improvements is being created that consider the entire customer journey i.e. from deciding to travel, through to journey completion. The outputs of this commission will directly feed into the customer satisfaction and accessibility components of the BSIP and aims to produce a Universal Quality Standard for passengers, captured in a Customer Charter.
- 2.8 A review of the existing partnership agreements in South Yorkshire shows that many of the measures proposed on the quality improvements long list are already captured in the current documentation but are not consistently applied across the region. This inconsistency highlights a critical role for the monitoring and enforcement of agreements if the region is to progress beyond its current position. The Quality Analysis also considers where we can seek to grow demand and highlights concerns over cleanliness as an immediate barrier when deciding whether to use public transport. The National Disability Strategy¹ (NDS) released in July 2021, also highlights the critical role infrastructure plays both on and off vehicle, in ensuring our transport networks are fully accessible to all.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-disability-strategy>

- 2.9 It is proposed that further work is undertaken to identify where standards can be harmonised, and a set of Universal Quality Standards are developed that offer passengers consistency across our bus network. In the short term, improving the perceptions of public transport and giving visibility to the cleaning and maintenance regimes post-COVID may be an area to focus on in the BSIP to assist patronage recovery. In line with the aims of the NDS, it is proposed that in the short term we prioritise those measures that will build back public confidence of using the bus system to aid recovery, alongside identifying those measures that will lead to a fully accessible bus system and ultimately public transport network for South Yorkshire, over the medium to long term.
- 2.10 Our analysis also shows that there are locations of densely clustered bus stops, which if removed may help to speed up journey times and improve reliability. Further work is required to understand the benefits of bus stop rationalisation, the outputs of which will be brought back to Board for further consideration.
- 2.11 Environmental Analysis - The Environmental Analysis workstream has produced a report on the barriers to delivery that outlines some of the key barriers to the adoption of zero emission buses in our region. This report has been created drawing on intelligence from operators both inside and outside of South Yorkshire, as well as building on the experience of other MCAs that are more advanced in their delivery of a zero emissions fleet. Appendix C summarises the themes covered in the barriers report and highlights the risk categories investigated.
- 2.11 The South Yorkshire bus fleet is older (at 11 years) than the national average (8 years), with buses in South Yorkshire currently remaining in service for 20 years before being removed from service. Due to this long operational life, the analysis indicates that in the first five years of our BSIP, many of the older and more polluting buses (Euro III and IV) will be due for replacement. At this point a decision will be made by the operators regarding whether to replace those vehicles with a zero emission alternative or with a diesel/hybrid model, as they own the fleet.
- 2.12 Modelling is underway to outline the exact number of vehicles involved, the costs and potential delivery scenarios however, the high level costs associated with replacing the oldest vehicles in the next five years are estimated to be in the region of £93,600,000 excluding supporting infrastructure costs. Noting the impact of COVID-19 on the financial sustainability of our bus system, securing operator investment of this magnitude may be difficult.
- 2.13 It is proposed that the Board consider the level of investment that may be available to support the transition to a zero emission fleet and that the BSIP focus is on treating those routes where patronage is expected to recover first, in order to support the financial case. Further work is being undertaken to identify those routes that could be prioritised for zero emission operation based upon their suitability, the environmental impact and the economic case. In addition, work is continuing on the investment trajectories, costs and delivery scenarios required to meet the MCAs net zero commitments by 2035 and 2040, which could feature in the BSIP in the long term.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patronage levels, our BSIP may need to respond to the challenge of recovering patronage in the early years, before seeking to deliver growth over the longer term. It is proposed that the first two years (2022 – 2024) focus on delivering interventions that are likely to stabilise and recover patronage following the end of CBSSG in March 2022. The latter years of our BSIP would then focus on delivering growth beyond pre-COVID levels.

3.2 Option 1 Risks and Mitigations

Arranging the delivery of the initial BSIP around the short term recovery of the patronage lost due to COVID-19 and targeting further detailed work to identify those locations that are expected to assist patronage recovery in the short term, would contribute to reducing the risk of network destabilisation following the withdrawal of Government CBSSG in March 2022. There is a reputational risk in setting targets to recover patronage to pre-COVID levels. This can be mitigated by the need to monitor and report annually on BSIP progress. If after the first year we have surpassed our initial targets, there is scope to recast a more ambitious set of targets to ensure continuous improvement.

3.3 Option 2

An ambitious set of long-term growth targets could be set out in our initial BSIP proposals to DfT.

3.4 Option 2 Risks and Mitigations

This option is not recommended due to the negative impact that COVID-19 has had on patronage. Setting targets that are too ambitious in the early years of BSIP delivery may be deemed unrealistic and ultimately prove demotivating in the early years of the new Enhanced Partnership.

3.5 Recommended Option

Option 1

4. Consultation on Proposal

- 4.1 Our BSIP is being developed in partnership with stakeholders and operators to ensure they remain fully engaged in this process.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 This is not a key decision however input from the Board at this stage in the development process, will help to shape the initial BSIP submission in October.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

- 6.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications to arise as a consequence of this report, delivery of the BSIP will require funding from multiple sources. Applications to the Levelling Up Fund, CRSTS and the ZEBRA fund are being developed and include measures to improve the regions bus system. The quantum of funding required to deliver our initial BSIP in full is still being calculated and will be reported back to this board in due course.

7. Legal Implications and Advice

- 7.1 The BSIP will initially be delivered through an Enhanced Partnership. Section 138 Transport Act 2000 provides the statutory powers to implement an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes. The legislation sets out the process to be followed including obligations on consultation. The process also allows operators to object to the proposals and if there are sufficient “admissible” objections the operators can prevent the Enhanced Partnership from progressing. In addition to the statutory process an equality impact assessment will need to be undertaken and presented to Members highlighting any impacts on persons with protected characteristics.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

- 8.1 N/A

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

- 9.1 Through the Quality Analysis workstream, interventions will be identified that can be delivered to improve accessibility across our bus network. Delivering these improvements will play an important part in creating a fully accessible transport system for South Yorkshire.
- 9.2 When considering whether to pursue detailed work regarding bus stop removal (section 2.9) to secure journey time and reliability improvements, the impact on accessibility should also be considered.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

- 10.1 Surface transport in South Yorkshire accounts for around 37% of our total carbon footprint and has additional impacts on air quality and road safety. Currently private car use is around 60% of that figure. Modal shift from cars to public transport is critical to the delivery of the region and members net zero goals and keeping us within the 6th carbon budget.
- 10.2 In investigating the costs, infrastructure and investment opportunities to influence delivery of a zero emission fleet will bring carbon and pollution benefits to South Yorkshire. The overall improvement of our bus system and aims to increase mode share will contribute to an increase in public transport use, which is a sustainable mode of transport. Investments made in improving the bus service will give a two-fold environmental impact, both in improving use rates and in decarbonising the fleet.
- 10.3 Consideration of the sources of investment that could be used to support the delivery of the environmental elements of our BSIP is recommended

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

- 11.1 N/A

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

- 12.1 The Department for Transport's 'It's Everyone's Journey' campaign seeks to promote message of inclusivity to attract people back to public transport. This is

also a critical feature of the National Disability Strategy which states that the attitudes of others disincentivise public transport use amongst disabled people. SYPTE have subscribed to participate in this campaign which will support patronage recovery post COVID-19 and ensure our system promotes a feeling of inclusivity.

List of Appendices Included

- A Draft Vision and Objectives for bus
- B BSIP Inputs Logic Map
- C Draft Environmental Analysis Barriers Report - Infographic

Background Papers

None