

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26 October 2021

South Yorkshire Bus Service Improvement Plan

Is the paper exempt from the press and public? No

Reason why exempt: Not applicable

Purpose of this report: Discussion

Is this a Key Decision? Yes

Has it been included on the Forward Plan? Yes

Director Approving Submission of the Report:
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Executive Summary

This report seeks support for the South Yorkshire Bus Service Improvement Plan, which all Local Transport Authorities are required to produce by the end of October to gain access to further funding for local bus services.

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

The Strategic Economic Plan and the Mayor's Transport Strategy both underline the importance of the bus network to businesses, residents and visitors in South Yorkshire, whilst the independent Bus Review commissioned by the Mayor indicated a number of issues with the current network. The contents of the Bus Service Improvement Plan include a range of short, medium and long term actions aimed at supporting the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and providing the bus network that South Yorkshire needs to achieve its aims for a stronger, fairer and greener region.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and provide any comments. Subject to any minor changes the BSIP will be submitted to Government by 29 October 2021.

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

Mayoral Combined Authority Board
Transport and the Environment Board

20 September 2021
21 October 2021

1. Background

- 1.1 The National Bus Strategy, “*Bus Back Better*”, published in March 2021, required all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by the end of October 2021, in order to be eligible for transformational funding for local bus services from April 2022 onwards.
- 1.2 Guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) suggested that the overall aim of the document is to “...*explain LTA ambition to improve buses and the plans and policies that will deliver them*”. The guidance also requires LTAs to set targets relating to service improvements and outline how they will be delivered in their plans, which will be monitored and reported on annually.
- 1.3 The independent South Yorkshire Bus Review (led by Clive Betts MP), published in June 2020, provided a strong baseline for the preparation of the South Yorkshire BSIP. The Bus Review laid bare many of the issues with the South Yorkshire bus system, highlighting eight key findings that need to be addressed.
- 1.4 In response to the Bus Review a 7 Point Plan was agreed in 2020 that would be used to drive improvements on the bus network. A comprehensive programme of analysis was established to guide the MCA’s understanding of what the future bus network should look like. The first three elements of this programme – Route Analysis, Quality Analysis and Environmental Analysis – were commissioned in February/March 2021 with the aim of reporting by the end of the year.
- 1.5 Evidence gathered in the Bus Review that sets out the current situation together with the outcomes to date of the analysis commissioned by the MCA, provide an indication as to what sort of bus network the region needs and has been used to prepare an Initial BSIP in advance of the Government’s deadline for submission.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The draft BSIP for South has been developed alongside the four Local Authorities, bus operators and a number of the key stakeholders identified through the Bus Review. The Initial BSIP covers the following elements:
 - A brief description of the current South Yorkshire bus network;
 - A consideration on the wider social, economic and environmental context, and the links to the policies of the MCA and the constituent local authorities that will influence the bus network;
 - An outline of what we want from the South Yorkshire bus network, in terms of the main outcomes and impacts, as well as including some headline targets;

- An indication of how the BSIP will be delivered, including the identification of a package of short-term improvements and the broad components of the Enhanced Partnership that will be used to deliver the improvements.
- 2.2 Section 4 of the Initial BSIP starts with the Vision for the Bus Network agreed with the Board in June/July 2021 and includes the completed logic map discussed at the meeting on 2 September 2021. The headline ‘outputs’ within the logic map relate directly to those set out in the National Bus Strategy, along with some more specific outputs that are directly applicable to South Yorkshire, in line with the agreed success criteria from the Mayor’s Transport Strategy.
 - 2.3 Section 4 also contains a series of mandatory targets that measure journey time, reliability, patronage and customer satisfaction improvements, as required by the guidance. The suggested targets have been developed with a mind to the long-term ambition of the document, but also the short-term issues relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patronage. This issue was discussed by the Board at its meeting on 2 September 2021, with the agreement that the targets should reflect the need to recover patronage as quickly as possible in the next two years.
 - 2.4 Section 5 of the BSIP contains a series of 40 prioritised activities, policies and interventions for implementation by the MCA, the constituent Local Authorities and bus operators. The work done to date suggests these will influence and contribute to delivering the desired outcomes and impacts, locally, regionally and nationally. The intention is that these prioritised activities, interventions and policies included in the Initial BSIP should be seen as the collective response to the Bus Review and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the means by which the bus network that South Yorkshire wants and needs can be delivered.
 - 2.5 It should be recognised that these prioritised activities, interventions and policies will take time to implement and monitor their impact. Some are suitable for immediate implementation, whereas some will take more time, either because further work will be required to understand what is actually needed in practice or to reflect the current status of the South Yorkshire bus network following the COVID-19 pandemic. Guidance suggests that BSIPs will be ‘living’ documents, and so these priorities will be updated, particularly as the final outputs are received from the analysis commissioned by the MCA.
 - 2.6 The current legislation governing bus networks in England covers different models of delivery, each determining when and how activities, interventions and policies are implemented, with the most appropriate model selected based upon what an LTA is trying to achieve. The MCA agreed in June 2021 that the short-term priorities in our BSIP will be delivered through an Enhanced Partnership model, with the Partnership to be in place by April 2022.
 - 2.7 The Enhanced Partnership documentation requires an Enhanced Partnership Plan and one or more Enhanced Partnership Schemes (the latter being the detail of how elements of the former will be delivered). Further guidance from DfT suggests that the Initial BSIP will be used to produce the Enhanced Partnership Plan, taking in any feedback from DfT on the document submitted at the end of October and reflecting the final outputs from the analysis commissioned by the MCA.

2.8 The Enhanced Partnership Plan/BSIP (together with an Enhanced Partnership Scheme), will be subject to a statutory period of consultation with bus operators from mid-November 2021, followed by a period of public consultation as soon as possible thereafter, leading to the production of a Final BSIP in March 2022. This is why the current document is an 'Initial' BSIP, however, it is presented to the Board for endorsement, subject to any minor changes requested, for delegated approval by the MCA Chief Executive in consultation with the South Yorkshire Leaders and the Mayor, prior to submission to Government by the end of October.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and provide any comments. Subject to any minor changes the BSIP will be submitted to Government by 29 October 2021.

3.2 Option 1 Risks and Mitigations

The submission of a BSIP to Government on 29 October 2021 aligns with the timescales set out by the DfT and would reduce the risk of the SYMCA receiving reduced funding in future years, due to the link between the BSIP and accessing transformational funding. As the BSIP is a living document with public facing reporting against a set of mandatory targets, progress can be tracked and delivery adjusted to mitigate the uncertainty of travel patterns as we recover from the Pandemic.

3.3 Recommended Option

Option 1 is recommended to the Committee.

4. Consultation on Proposal

4.1 The BSIP has been developed following the Bus Review published in June 2020. The public consultation conducted as part of the Bus Review has been used as evidence in the development of the BSIP and therefore builds on that initial evidence base. The drafting of the BSIP has been undertaken collaboratively with Local Authority partners, bus operators in South Yorkshire and with input received from groups including Job Centre Plus and the Peak Park. Discussions have also been held with Derbyshire County Council and Nottinghamshire County Council due to the cross-boundary nature of some of the region's bus services.

4.2 The Enhanced Partnership Plan/BSIP will be subject to a statutory period of consultation with bus operators from mid-November 2021, followed by a period of public consultation as soon as possible thereafter, leading to the production of a Final BSIP in March 2022.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The deadline for submission to the DfT is 31 October 2021. With the submission date falling between the MCA meetings in September and November 2021, it was agreed by the MCA on 20 September 2021 that submission of the BSIP would be delegated to the MCA Chief Executive in consultation with the South Yorkshire Leaders and the Mayor.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

- 6.1 The delivery of the activities set out in the BSIP are highly dependent upon sufficient funding being secured and at the point of submission, the estimated funding gap is between £250 - £300m. By submitting a BSIP to the DfT the SYMCA will receive an amount of transformational funding from Government to support the delivery of our BSIP, the quantum of which is currently unknown. DfT have stipulated that the content of the first Enhanced Partnership scheme should reflect known funding sources only, therefore the intention is following submission of the BSIP at the end of October 2021, to propose a scheme based upon Gainshare and Levelling Up Fund (LUF), both of which are expected to be confirmed after the MCA Board on 15 November 2021.

7. Legal Implications and Advice

- 7.1 Following SYMCA approval in June, a Notice of Intention to Prepare an Enhanced Partnership and related Scheme was published. Publication of a BSIP to the DfT by the end of October is the next key step required in accordance with DfT guidance to deliver bus service improvements. In accordance with DfT guidance the process for implementation for the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme will continue enabling statutory consultation with operators from mid-November 2021 and then the public in early 2022.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

- 8.1 None as a result of this paper.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

- 9.1 The BSIP sets out the region's plans for improving accessibility across the bus network and on board our services. Public consultation will be held on the initial scheme in the New Year and will involve consultation with passenger groups that represent a cross section of society to test the content of the plan, ahead of delivery.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

- 10.1 The BSIP sets out the scale of change required to meet the regions net zero targets by 2035. At present the region does not have any zero emission buses and the BSIP identifies the trajectory, costs and initial projects that could begin the transition from diesel to alternative fuels.
- 10.2 The BSIP also recognises that modal shift from Private Car to Bus is vital to achieving the region's climate ambitions and as such additional measures will need to be taken, over and above fleet replacement to ensure they are met

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

- 11.1 None as a consequence of this paper.

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

- 12.1 Should the Board approve the submission of a BSIP to Government, there will be a period of public consultation on the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes we plan to deliver as set out in the BSIP in early 2022, which will require the support of the Communication and Marketing teams.