

**17 November 2021****Agenda Item:6****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE****NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY AND TRANSPORT UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to:
  - Provide an update on the current impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the provision of local bus services and on ongoing Government funding up to April 2022.
  - Seek approval to submit National Bus Strategy bidding documents to Government.
  - Seek approval to develop and consult publicly on the Enhanced Partnership Plans for April 2022, with a further report to follow to adopt the Enhanced Partnership Plans following consultation.

**Information****Current Situation**

2. Since the beginning of the pandemic the Council has worked closely with bus operators and other transport partners to ensure a safe, effective and appropriate public transport network has remained in place. The Council has also worked closely with the NHS to provide additional services to hospitals and vaccination sites.
3. Passenger levels have been steadily rising since restrictions have lifted and are currently around 65-70% of pre pandemic levels, with concessionary use recovering more slowly at 55% to 60% of pre pandemic levels. Due to the impact on bus operator income and to support the transport network, Government has announced further Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) funding to support the industry from September 2021 until April 2022. This funding includes monies to support shortfalls in existing Council contracted services. In essence, Government is currently funding the difference between income and expenditure on local bus services to ensure there is sufficient capacity within the bus network to enable people to access work, education, health and leisure activities.
4. Bus operators are expected to operate between 90 and 100% of bus services to access this funding, with service levels needing to be agreed with the Council. There have been some challenges to provide 100% service levels due to the impacts of the pandemic and other factors.
5. Council operated bus services and contracted services have continued to operate throughout the pandemic and the Council has continued to directly run 17 routes with its own staff and

fleet. The current budget for local bus support is £4.1m which supports over 70 bus services. Patronage is currently at around 70% of pre-pandemic levels.

6. Services were initially provided through a revised 'on-demand' booking process and then as numbers have increased all Council operated services have returned to full operation.
7. Council Fleet Services have also helped provide additional and new services on behalf of Adult Social Care and have also supported County Enterprise Food meals service in its "meals on wheels" deliveries. Drivers have worked throughout the pandemic and essential services have been maintained throughout.
8. Mainstream school transport and special educational needs transport has continued to be provided throughout the pandemic, with additional services introduced in line with Government guidance to minimise Covid-19 transmission. These services have reverted to normal operations from September 2021. Many routes were re-planned to reduce passenger numbers and to split services which operate across multiple school sites.
9. Bus stations have largely remained open throughout the pandemic with Covid-19 control measures in place. Initially some bus stations were closed or operating hours reduced to reflect bus service levels and bus service operating hours. This has slowly changed as we have moved through the pandemic and all the bus stations are now operating at pre-pandemic levels. Bus station service provision has been adapted during the pandemic to keep staff and passengers safe.

### **Bus Service Improvement Plan**

10. In March 2020 the Government announced over £3bn to be invested in bus services and bus service infrastructure, including bus priority measures, bus stop improvements, ticketing, and Information. A 'Transport Review' paper was prepared for Committee in March 2020, outlining several National Bus Strategy bidding and funding opportunities and the Government's aspiration to publish a National Bus Strategy to help guide future investment.
11. In March 2021 the Government published the national bus strategy for England, setting out it's ambition for bus operators and councils to work more closely together to deliver better bus services
12. As outlined in the previous " National Bus Strategy and Transport Update " Committee report in June 2021, the Council must clearly set out a bid to Government on how we intend to improve bus services and infrastructure to improve bus journey times, bus services reliability and punctuality, increase passenger numbers and increase passenger satisfaction.
13. To do this, the Council is required to develop Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP), which outline the ambitions of the Council, including an indication of likely costs, followed by the development of a statutory legal agreement (called an Enhanced Partnership agreement - EP) between the Council and bus operators to deliver the agreed areas for improvement over a 5 year period. The BSIP is in effect our bid to Government to help them determine the level of funding to allocate to Nottinghamshire.
14. There are two BSIPs and EPs to reflect the different operational environments across the Nottingham conurbation and the rest of Nottinghamshire. This approach was advised by Government, particularly where local economies and travel patterns overlap significantly, as is the case with the plan that covers the Nottingham conurbation. Local bus operators are fully

signed up to this approach. It also the view that this is the most expedient approach in terms of maximising the funding available for the Council within the Nottingham conurbation and the rest of Nottinghamshire. It is important, to note that the Government expects EPs and BSIPs to be developed with bus operators and adjoining Councils, with passengers' priorities being at the heart of any proposals.

15. These BSIPs and EPs will replace the current statutory Advanced Quality Partnerships (Mansfield Town Centre, Beeston Town Centre and Nottingham City Centre) and Voluntary Quality Partnership (Worksop Town Centre) already in place. The new EPs will cover the whole geography of Nottinghamshire in contrast to those already in place but will build on the strong partnership foundations already in place with bus operators. These relationships with operators have become even stronger throughout the pandemic where close cooperation has been required to keep people safe and ensure travellers can get to where they need to.
16. Government has issued a number of guidance documents to help the development of BSIPs and Eps. These stress the importance of ambitious BSIPs which look to introduce improved service frequencies, bus priority and lower fares.
17. To develop the BSIPs and EPs the following project development groups have been put in place. Arrangements include bus operators who need to legally sign up to Eps, and other stakeholders who are important to the delivery of the vision and aims of the BSIPs and EPs:
  - A Partnership Steering Group: responsible for determining the priorities to be included in the BSIPs and EPs. This group also includes passenger representation by Nottinghamshire Better Transport, bus operators, the County Council and the City Council.
  - A Local Planning Authority Group: which includes the Districts and Boroughs who are responsible for planning, place and economic development which provides opportunities for public transport improvements.
  - A Tram/Rail Operators Group: including NET, Cross Country and East Midlands Railways, to discuss integration opportunities to improve public transport.
  - A Community Transport Group: for those operators who operate bus services and provide complimentary services.
  - A Local Transport Authorities Group: made up of all our neighbours to co-operate where possible on cross border services and standards.
18. There has been considerable engagement between officers and the bus operators to understand the current picture and to prioritise the areas to take forward in the BSIP/EPs, with many strands of the BSIPs needing further development over the coming months.

## **Vision, Aims and Objectives**

19. Firstly, the partners had to agree the top-level vision, aims and objectives for the BSIP to achieve the key targets, which include: Passenger satisfaction, Passenger growth, Journey time and Reliability improvements. These targets are largely intuitive and will be refined each year as the BSIP is a living document over the life of the EP. These targets have been particularly challenging as it is not clear how the bus sector will recover over the coming months and the need for more detailed modelling of the BSIP proposals to inform them. However, it is important to note that through the existing partnership arrangements Nottinghamshire consistently scores highly in national transport focus surveys for passenger satisfaction (93% in 2018) as do a number of local bus operators (average of 94%) who are consistently in the top ten. However, through these surveys and stakeholder feedback there

are concerns from residents on service levels, access to employment and value for money especially around ticketing for young people and the lack of integrated ticketing.

20. The ambitions of this BSIP is ultimately to ensure buses have a positive impact on people's lives and the places where they reside. In order to achieve these targets, two main themes have been developed, which are:

- **Make improvements to bus services and planning** by delivering more frequent and reliable services, better integration between travel modes and better ticketing options/fares, including integrated ticketing, young person's ticketing and tickets for those seeking work.
- **Make improvements to bus passenger experience** through the decarbonisation of buses, making buses more accessible, better passenger engagement through passenger charters and improved passenger information

21. To inform this list of improvements a citizen's survey was undertaken to help prioritise the projects. A summary of the survey results is below:

- 3.5k people have responded which is split between the County and Nottingham conurbation BSIP 50/50
- 78% have access to a car with 55% working and 28%% retired.
- 18% of bus users expect bus use to reduce and 26% expected work patterns to change.
- Improvement priorities: 77% would like to see more frequent services, 75% easier to understand information, 78% better bus stops, 72 - 82% lower fares and Multi-operator tickets, 71%% better journey times.

22. In parallel to the survey, a desktop study has been undertaken to understand the current bus offer and potential areas for improvement. This study and the survey helped shape discussions with bus operators and build on current Council and operator investment. Specific improvement proposals are set out below.

## **Making improvements to bus services and planning**

### **23. Bus service improvements:**

- **Network planning and development:** This is to support the development of the bus network, into which the Council currently invests £4.1m per annum, to fill some of the gaps in the current network i.e. increasing service levels or operating hours, and evening and Sunday services. In the short term some of the funding may be needed to support some marginal services, to allow time for the BSIP interventions to grow patronage.
- **Rural Mobility Fund:** The plan also refers to the implementation of Demand Responsive Targets (DRT) services and their potential future roll out to other areas over the life of the EP to fill gaps and kickstart services. The first DRT services will be in South West Rushcliffe, Ollerton and Mansfield.

24. **Bus Priority:** To improve reliability, punctuality, and journey time:

- **Highway improvements:** There are currently several feasibility studies planned to look at highway improvements to support bus priority, and these will be included in the BSIP with indicative costs for improvements if funding becomes available. These studies include the A38, A60, A52 and A611.
- **Smart bus priority and enforcement:** There are proposals to introduce further smart bus priority at signals to help late buses, introduce further bus lanes and additional traffic offences enforcement.
- **Introduce red routes,** to minimise congestion for all highways users and maximise traffic flow.
- **Explore the potential for future Pocket Park and Rides and Park and Ride** to build on the Park and Ride proposed for the A60 at Leapool.

*Any proposals will be subject to the normal consultation and approvals processes for Highways schemes.*

**25. Infrastructure:** This includes:

- **Maintaining current investment levels** in bus stations and on street infrastructure.
- **Real Time Information displays:** There are currently 849 displays in the County and it is proposed these are increased over the term of the EP.
- **Improved bus shelters and interchanges** to provide a safe and dry waiting environment including new hubs in Ollerton, East Leake and Tuxford as part of the Rural Mobility Fund project. Other locations will be identified through the bus network review.
- **Improve safety at bus stops** with the installation of 30 CCTV cameras as well as the use of PV panels to light shelters to reduce carbon emissions. Consideration will also be given to green roofs to help biodiversity.
- **Accessible bus stops:** increase the number of accessible bus stops that includes raised kerbs and bus stop clearways to help disabled and buggy users. There are currently 1.9k stops with raised kerbs and 0.5k with clearways.
- **Improve CCTV on buses** on contracted services as contracts expire.
- **Improved audio/visual on buses for those with disabilities** and to help users identify which stop to alight. The Council will bid to a separate fund for smaller operators yet to be announced.

**26. Fares and ticketing:** This includes several improvements to ensure best value for customers and attract new customers:

- **Simplification of tickets** and work to standardise the ticket offer.
- **Introduce multi-operator ticketing pilots** in market towns in a phased approach starting in Newark. Currently there is only the Robin Hood ticket which is available in the Nottingham conurbation.
- **Develop a concessionary fare scheme for young people** to provide a minimum discount in those areas where there are currently varying levels of discount for young people across Notts. The level of discount could be adjusted in line with funding provided.
- **Unemployed passengers discount:** Operators have agreed to participate in the Government scheme offering discounts to those seeking work.

- **Contactless payment** (incl. mobile ticketing) on tendered services to enable the use of contactless payments. The Council is in the process of implementing contactless payment on its own bus services.
- **Further improvement to Robin Hood ticketing** to reflect changing travel behaviour and to introduce account-based ticketing.

## Make improvements to bus passenger experience

### 27. Co-ordination and Service quality:

- **Improvements and standardisation of information** at stops and online to reflect the partnerships between Councils and operators.
- **Improved back office software** to improve data management and customer information
- **Marketing campaigns and ticketing incentives** to encourage bus use
- **Improved journey planning**, including fares information and online booking and payment for DRT services as part of the Rural Mobility Fund project.
- **A Passenger Charter** led by operators to standardise and improve the passenger offer.

### 28. Reduce Carbon emissions to build on the County Council's investment in 6 electric buses and the City Council's similar investment:

- **A Commitment to bid for Zero Emissions Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) funding** as outlined in previous Committee reports. Early discussions with operators indicate there may be potential to invest in electric and hydrogen buses in the Mansfield and Ashfield areas. This will complement the City Council bid, supported by the County Council, for further electric vehicles in the Nottingham Conurbation.
- **Incrementally improve vehicle emission standards** for contracted services to reduce CO2 and particulate emissions.

29. If the partnership achieves commercial growth through the measures outlined in paragraphs 23-28, we expect operators to reinvest some of the monies into priority areas determined by residents and members such as service enhancements, ticketing and the decarbonisation effort. This will help ensure the long-term sustainability of the proposed service improvements.

30. The proposed BSIPs are included at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to this report. The appendices are available via the links below – in view of the document size, hard copies will be made available separately to Committee members.

Greater Nottingham BSIP: <https://www.transportnottingham.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Robin-Hood-BSIP-October-2021.pdf>

Nottinghamshire BSIP: <https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/media/4067044/nottinghamshirebuserviceimprovementplan.pdf>

## Costing Development and Proposals

31. Costs have been developed and estimated for each area for improvement and match funding identified from the County Council using existing budgets, bus operator contributions and other external funding.
32. The Council has estimated the funding required to be £98m with £42m match funding across the two BSIPs for Nottinghamshire. This is to match the ambitions of the National Bus Strategy and is a comparable ask to other County Councils.
33. As the monies are limited to develop the bus network and improve infrastructure, there will need to be a focus on those improvements that are most likely to be sustainable in the long term. Once the funding is announced the improvements outlined in this report will need to be prioritised in the EP. The improvements in the BSIPs and EPs outlined in this report are therefore subject to the funding available.

### **Implementation Resourcing**

34. Once BSIP funding levels are known from Government, Enhanced Partnerships will need to produce timed action plans for implementation. Nottinghamshire's plans which will be subject to future Committee approval, and will include consideration of resourcing requirements, including staffing structures. Any additional staffing resources will be funded from BSIP allocations.

### **Other Options Considered**

35. The Council could opt to not submit National Bus Strategy bidding documents. This option is not considered viable as it is very likely to lead to the deterioration of passenger transport provision in the County.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

36. The BSIPs form an ambitious bid to Government for National Bus Strategy funding for passenger transport improvements for Nottinghamshire residents.
37. A successful BSIP will support bus services and infrastructure improvements to make the County an attractive proposition for investment.
38. Encouraging the use of the bus helps the Council achieve its commitments to tackle climate change and improve air quality.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty Implications**

39. Consideration will be given to our Public Sector Equality Duty in the implementation of the strands in the BSIP and an Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted where necessary to assess the impact of any changes.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

40. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public-sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and

the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Implications for Service Users**

41. The proposals outlined in this report support existing and future bus users to access employment, training, health and leisure facilities. These actions are also intended to minimise the impact of COVID-19, aid the economic recovery, improve air quality and reduce CO2 emissions. Proposals have been identified following public consultation and will be prioritised accordingly.

### **Financial implications**

42. The Government has asked for an indication of likely costs for the BSIP and current high-level plans have been developed within existing budgets. Once Government has announced the funding there will be a further report to Committee.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) Committee approves the submission of National Bus Strategy bidding documents to Government in the form of Bus Service Improvement Plans.
- 2) Committee approves the commencement of consultation on the Enhanced Partnerships ahead of a further Committee report to consider Enhanced Partnerships in April 2022.
- 3) That delegated approval is given to the Corporate Director for Place, or their nominee from time to time, to prepare bids for National Bus Strategy monies and accept the monies if successful, in line with the submitted Bus Service Improvement Plans.

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**Corporate Director, Place**

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### **Constitutional Comments (LPW 22/10/2021)**

43. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Transport and Environment Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (RWK 28/10/2021)**

44. The report present details of the Council's submission of National Bus Strategy bidding documents in the form of Bus Service Improvement Plans. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the report. Once the Government has announced its decisions on funding there will be a further report to Committee.

### **Background Papers**



Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Transport and Environment Committee – National Bus Strategy and Transport update :15<sup>th</sup> June 2021
- **Useful links:**
- [Bus-Back-Better : national bus strategy for England](#)
- [DfT - Latest Transport documents](#)
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ending-the-sale-of-new-diesel-buses/ending-of-the-sale-of-new-diesel-buses>

#### **Electoral Divisions and Members Affected**

- All