

3 September 2020**Agenda Item:12****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE****Transport Update and Transport Recovery Planning****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on current transport activity and our transport recovery planning in response to Covid-19.

Information

2. The report outlines the actions during the Covid -19 pandemic and sets out our approach for the coming months to support safe travel throughout the county and to outline current work within transport services and our overall approach to recovery.
3. Our recovery planning is based on three key principles:
 - **Safety** – adhering to Government advice in terms of social distancing and ensuring our services are Covid-19 secure; promoting the reduction of transport emissions to protect the health of our residents and visitors to the County; and working with transport operators and users including schools, colleges and other educational institutions to ensure safety of users and staff.
 - **Our Economy & Sustainability** – investing in economic and social regeneration; exploring, designing and delivering new future-proofed models of public transport; and investing to ensure transport and highways are safe, reliable and sustainable to promote regeneration and meet resident expectations
 - **Our Connectivity** – ensuring where possible and with funding available, there is a good level of connectivity and access to public transport across the County to support social, leisure and work-related travel, being mindful of economic recovery and social isolation / health impacts.
4. Since lockdown on 23rd March 2020, Covid-19 resulted in reduced travel around the County, therefore reducing the need for transport services which in turn could lead to an impact on the viability of transport around the County. Patronage reduced to between 5 and 10% of pre-Covid levels during April and has now recovered to between 25 and 40% of pre-Covid levels. The Council currently has 75 contracts supporting local bus services with a budget of over £4m including those funded using developer contributions; 600 contracts for school and SEND transport with a combined budget of £14m; and is putting in place measures for the safe operation of all our transport services to be in step with the phased recovery and aligned with significant checkpoints such as the new autumn term for schools and colleges.

Context

5. Outlined within this section of the report is the normal transport operational context/metrics to help members understand the Covid-19 impact on these operations and the likely implications for the transport sector in the short, medium and long term; and its impact on the Council's Transport review, which was outlined in the Communities and Place Committee report, Transport Review Update on the 5th March 2020.

Adult Social Care Transport and Fleet overview

6. In normal operation, fleet have around 80 drivers, 60 vehicles and operate a mixed economy of services. This can be roughly broken down as: 50 Adult Day Centre runs with around 800 passenger trips per day, 17 local bus routes carrying around 1,000 passengers per day and 3 school routes carrying 25 pupils per day.
7. This can be broken down as follows:
 - 60% of the work is Adult Day Care transport, usually operating between 08:00-09:30 and 15:00-17:00;
 - 35% is Local Bus services. These are primarily integrated with ASCH work either providing shopping services during the day or early/late commuter journeys. There are three separate routes operated with larger vehicles including the two electric buses on the 510 service;
 - 5% are School services; these are currently for mainstream and special education needs pupils.

Local Bus

8. Most local bus services are provided by commercial operators, but this does differ from area to area, with the Nottingham conurbation approximately 98% commercial, whilst in East Bassetlaw around 10-20% is commercial. There were approximately 27m passenger journeys in the County last year.
9. Currently the County Council has around 75 contracts, financially supporting over 100 routes. Support varies from funding entire routes, minor support for commercial routes, major network support to improve transport connectivity and Fleet operated services. A significant focus of this support is on rural isolation. Pre-Covid, the Council supported 1.8m journeys per annum.
10. In terms of accessibility, approximately 75% of Notts residents are within 400m of a bus service.

School Bus and SEND

11. In Mainstream schools we provide over 150 school transport services across the County. These range from taxis to high capacity double deck vehicles.
12. There are 450 SEND transport services carrying around 1,500 pupils and students; approximately 350 escorts are required to provide support on these with some high dependency and medical support also provided.

13. The County Council also offers Independent Travel Training to vulnerable children, providing them with the skills to travel to school, college or training using available public transport. These also provide life skills which improve their opportunities on leaving education. Nottinghamshire has trained over 450 pupils over the past few years.

Bus Stations

14. The County Council has built four bus stations since 2007, in Mansfield, Worksop, Newark and Retford, with a total of 432k departures and 3.5 million passengers passing through them per annum.

15. Each bus station is different in size and has different levels of service provision with all bus stations having a physical presence throughout the day dealing with customer queries (approx. 146k per annum), cleaning and first line maintenance. There are also commercial units in Mansfield bus station, Retford and Worksop bus stations and a Stagecoach office in Mansfield to manage the local operation.

Bus Stops

16. The County Council maintains over 5,000 bus stops and 980 shelters in the County. There are also 470 shelters maintained by Clear Channel. There are currently over 8,000 timetable cases and 730 real time information displays providing next bus and disruption information.

Concessions and Ticketing

17. There are 152k concessions pass holder with 11K disabled bus passes. There are also 3.5k passes with a companion element. Each month, 3.4k elderly passes are renewed and 874 new applications are processed; 190 disabled passes are renewed, and 150 new applications are processed.

Scholars Travel Pass Process

18. Over 5k free passes are issued along with 800 discretionary passes for faith schools, 350 Post-16 students and 700 for pupils for those not entitled to free travel. Contracted services also carry around 1k fare paying passengers. There is an income of approximately £250k per annum.

19. We are currently processing the applications for the September school return for both SEND and Mainstream schools. We anticipate 800 SEN post/under 16 and 2.5k mainstream school under/post-16 passengers.

Covid-19 Lockdown and Response

Adult Social Care Transport:

20. Since 23 March 2020, day services have offered an outreach service from their bases. A number of vehicles and drivers have been made available at each Day Service and have been essential in assisting with community-based care, ensuring non driving staff (care assistants) have been transported to client's homes and where applicable, have transported clients for their daily exercise during lockdown. More recently, fleet have provided transport for community-based activities which provide essential support to individuals and respite for carers. The transport provision is tied closely to the Adult Social Care recovery plans. In

addition to day service support, Fleet have also redeployed drivers to support County Enterprise Foods Meals Distribution service – it is envisaged these drivers will be required for the foreseeable future.

Local Bus Services:

21. Shortly after lockdown the Government announced a rescue package for the bus industry (Bus Operator Covid-19 Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG)) and shortly afterwards announced emergency funding for contracted local bus services (Local Authority CBSSG (LA CBSSG)) of £150k per month. The Local Authority CBSSG was provided to contract any new services required in response to Covid-19, PPE equipment and loss of income on contracted services.
22. Supported routes were suspended in March mainly due to operators either furloughing staff or developing safe Covid practices; these are now restored, some with the help of Government funding (LA CBSSG). Local bus services operated by Fleet were switched to 'on-demand' services and continued to operate with pre-booked journeys. All services are now restored to normal timetables. Fleet vehicles have been fitted with Perspex screens and seats have been blocked where appropriate to ensure social distancing.
23. Commercial services are now operating at near pre-Covid levels at between 70-100%; however, patronage is still significantly below pre Covid levels at around 25% - 40%, but this does vary from area to area and route by route. Just after lockdown some services dropped to between 0% and 45% of pre-Covid service levels and patronage was down to between 5 and 10% of pre-Covid levels.
24. The LA CBSSG has also been used to improve services to connect NHS and key workers to their place of work and the provision of a purely on demand NHS shuttle for staff to access Kings Mill Hospital as well as improving connectivity to Retford Hospital, Newark Hospital and Queens Medical Centre on services 37/90 and 367.
25. Commercial bus services have also been supported directly from central government via the Bus Operators CBSSG arrangements to partially compensate for lost revenue. The bus operators were obliged as part of the funding package to consult Local Authorities on any changes to the network and the County has ensured this has been balanced between communities, to ensure people who need to use public transport or chose to, can do so to get to work and access essential services.
26. It should also be noted that bus operators have approached the County Council with longer term concerns for some marginal services and we are in discussions to understand the impact of potential service withdrawals or reductions in service.
27. The other main challenge for commercial and tendered bus services is if there is a longer-term reduction in patronage, which some commentators believe will be as high as 20%, this may have significant impact on marginal services especially in rural areas.
28. The government has now changed the message on the use of public transport from essential travel only, but there is still a requirement for social distancing, and it is mandatory for passengers to wear face coverings. This has reduced the capacity of public transport to below 50%. This could be an issue as we return to the 'new norm' and potentially reduces capacity to cater for the schools return. This is discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Coach Operators

29. The bus companies whose business is split between coaching (e.g. holiday tours) and bus operations have been particularly badly hit during the Covid-19 outbreak because of the current social distancing requirements making coaching uneconomic for the foreseeable future. This may in turn mean a reduction in suppliers or shrinkage in operations which may impact on tender prices in the medium to long term and in some cases impact on some commercially operated bus routes. However, the relaxing of social distancing on school transport and the reopening of leisure centres (including swimming pools) will help them in a limited way.

School Transport:

30. Schools were closed in March except for vulnerable or key worker family pupils. A small amount of transport continued for those children of key workers and this gradually increased after Easter and then again in May. Further pupil cohorts were allowed back in June and more transport was required. Before the Summer break, there were approximately 65 exclusive services operating to around 25 schools.

31. Some schools and educational establishments where SEND transport is provided closed in March, however several establishments continued to provide onsite education for the vulnerable or key worker families or young people.

32. The number of young people attending gradually increased after Easter and then again in June. Before the Summer break, there were 330 under 16 pupils attending 50 schools, 80 post 16 students attending 9 colleges and 35 EOTAS (Education Other Than at School) pupils. In total, 46% of the transport contracts were operating.

33. For both mainstream and SEND school transport, the government announced the plans for all students to return in September but there remains different guidance for dedicated transport and commercial bus operations. On dedicated transport from September social distancing is not mandatory, however the wearing of face coverings for children over the age of 11 is strongly advised. On the commercial network, social distancing is mandatory and face coverings are mandatory for those over the age of 11.

34. Council officers engaged with schools and bus operators to plan the new school networks; mindful of the fact that demand may be suppressed at least in the short term for the following reasons:

- many parents and pupils may be reluctant to use the bus because of the underlying message about public transport throughout the current outbreak;
- there is an active campaign promoting walking and cycling;
- parents are working more flexibly and are more likely to be able to give lifts to their children.

35. However, we have planned based on forecasted numbers and adapted service provision accordingly. The Council will introduce daily exact fares on some services to cater for the forecast reduction in pass renewals or new purchases and to minimise the spread of Covid-19.

36. There have been some challenges to provide school transport due to schools considering alternative solutions to keep pupils safe.

37. Based on government guidance the County Council has provided additional transport capacity and services in partnership with commercial operators in response to the challenges highlighted above.

Independent Travel Training (ITT)

38. Most schools that undertake travel training closed in March and some have now re-opened. The schools are requesting ITT to be resumed from September 2020 and the team have agreed to take small groups out to help with pressure within the school from September.

Bus Stations

39. Once the Covid-19 lockdown was announced patronage levels rapidly dropped to less than 10% of pre-Covid levels and the bus operators reduced their services accordingly as did the County Council. This led to a significant reduction in the number of departures from the bus stations and the decision was taken to close a number of bus stations to minimise costs and to reduce the potential for the spread of Covid-19.

40. All county bus stations are now up and running as the economy opens up and messaging around public transport use has changed. The number of departures has increased to between 70 and 100% of pre-Covid levels, but for this to continue this will depend on continued government funding in the short term and people's confidence to use public transport returning over the coming months. The bus stations have been made as Covid safe as possible in line with government guidance.

41. With the closure of the bus stations this led to reduced income and the deferral of some rent payments.

Concessions, Ticketing and Scholars

42. To support the renewal process for disabled applicants during Covid-19, for those renewing their passes, we have automatically renewed their bus pass for one year as they were not able to obtain medical professional confirmation during this period.

43. Also, during Covid-19 we refunded school season passes for the remainder of the school year which has resulted in a loss of income of £100k.

Concessions and Contract Support Payments

44. The County Council followed government advice on the continuation of contract payments and Concessions at pre-Covid levels to support the sector to help them through the lockdown and help them through the transport restart and recovery process. This support was complementary to the Bus Operator CBSSG and LA CBSSG. Officers have worked closely with operators to access central government funding.

Transport Recovery Planning

45. A Local Recovery Forum (LRF) Transport and Infrastructure Cell was set up to guide the restart and recovery phase for public transport which includes bus operators, rail operators, NET, County Council, City Council and District Councils partners. This cell ensures partners share relevant information and work on solutions to support the economic recovery and restart of public transport. The work includes:

- sharing government guidance related to the messaging around public transport use and the infrastructure which includes bus stations;
- examining data on traffic levels to determine action to tackle congestion;
- considering School return information from September 2020 to discuss capacity constraints and find solutions;
- co-developing the Outbreak plan and Incident Management Plan for transport and public realm. There is also a subgroup for Community Transport with its unique characteristics and sets of challenges being faced by the charitable sector.

46. The LRF Cell will support and guide the transport recovery and, in the future, when and if the Cell closes, the ongoing transport work will be managed within the Quality Bus partnership framework.

47. Throughout the Covid-19 outbreak and recovery the County Council has been using the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and Associated Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) network to exchange information regionally and nationally to implement government guidance and understand best practice.

48. Officers have also engaged with the main operators on a weekly or bi weekly basis to support their operations and guide bus service reinstatement.

Financial impact of Covid-19

49. The Council is currently forecasting that there are significant increased costs due to Covid - 19 which is a mix of reduced income i.e. reduced Departures charges at bus stations and increased costs of Home to School and SEND transport to ensure the safe return of pupils to school in September. These combined costs are estimated to be an additional £2.4m.

50. The final costs of Covid-19 are not known yet and will depend on a number of factors , including whether we have a local outbreak , and once these become apparent this will be included in future budget forecasts and reported to committee.

National Bus Strategy Update

51. Rural Mobility Fund: The government extended the bidding deadline because of Covid-19 and the County Council submitted a bid for Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) pilot projects as outlined in the previous Transport Review committee report. The proposals were:

- Ollerton: five demand responsive services in the Ollerton area with passengers able to seamlessly interchange onto connecting services;
- Mansfield: this will be a new DRT services for evening to connect people to work and leisure.

- East Midlands Airport /SEGRO: this will be a DRT services which connects south west Rushcliffe to the above destinations as well as the DNRC, East Midlands Parkway and the University of Nottingham. This will also facilitate interchange onto the wider bus network.

52. The County Council has submitted a bid for £1.5m and awaits the announcement of the bid, where if successful NCC will have to develop a joint business case with the DfT. Upon finalising the business case (which will include any adjustments due to the impact of Covid-19), the new services will be introduced in 2021/22 following consultation with stakeholders.

53. The Government has also passported £648k to the County Council to be spent on Covid-19 affected services and, if money allows, it can be used for other service improvements.

On-going Transport Recovery

54. Transport review: The focus of the current review was to systematically look at all the County Council supported network and determine whether they should be provided differently as outlined in the previous paper. However, with the current market instability and several operators highlighting issues with marginal services, these efforts will need to be refocused to take this into account. It is worth noting that commercial operators are keeping all their routes under review, whilst reviewing capital investment, so there is the potential for further services to be withdrawn or altered during the Covid -19 recovery period.

55. DRT Fleet review: The operation of Demand Responsive services have been received positively so this will inform the future rollout of DRT services and officers will look at fleet operated services changing to this model as the first phase of the Transport Review pilots. Officers will consult with stakeholders, once the future bus landscape is better understood. Other services that were originally planned for DRT pilots will now be put on hold.

56. DRT booking and payments software: It is proposed that we bring forward plans to develop web and app bookings to improve the customer experience and minimise cash handling. This advanced scoping of different market solutions will put the Council in a good position once the consultation has been completed with residents.

57. Develop My NOTTS apps: It is proposed to include concessions application, nottsbus timetables, school timetables, booking DRT (and possible payment), reporting bus infrastructure damage and lost property. This will complement the planned ongoing improvements to the Travelchoice website.

58. National Bus Strategy monies: Determine how to use these monies over next 12 months to support Covid -19 impacted services and any increases in contract prices.

59. External funding: As part of the review of the Covid-19 impact on the local bus landscape, officers will look for opportunities to use developer monies to sustain or improve services. We will also continue to seek funding for new services to support local bus operators and the local economy.

Reasons for Recommendations

60. Officers continue to work with transport partners to help transport recovery. This report highlights the actions to date to aid the recovery, longer term sustainability of the sector and maintain connectivity for Nottinghamshire residents.
61. The introduction of DRT will facilitate efficiencies in operation and improve service provision for customers.
62. Bidding for external funding supports infrastructure improvements to make the County an attractive proposition for investment.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

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

Statutory and Policy Implications

64. 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

65. 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.

Recommendations

- 1) That Members consider the actions taken and ongoing work and consider whether there are any further actions they require in relation to the issues contained within the report.

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For any enquiries about this report please contact: Gary Wood, Group Manager, Highways and Transport / Pete Mathieson, Team Manager, Development & Partnerships

Constitutional Comments (AK 04/08/2020)

66. The report falls within the remit of Communities and Place Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (RWK 10/08/2020)

67. The Council has incurred an estimated additional cost of £2.4 million within transport services as a result of responding to COVID-19. These additional costs are included in the total

estimated additional costs incurred by the Council due to COVID-19 of over £49 million that have been reported to Finance and Major Contracts Committee.

68. To date the Council has received £42.1 million in additional grant towards additional costs and lost income arising from COVID-19. The Government has also announced a scheme to support lost income. Some of the income losses in transport services may be eligible for this scheme.

69. The additional costs and lost income in transport services are being kept under constant review and will be revised as recovery plans are developed further.

Background Papers

- Communities and Place Committee: Transport Review update – 5th March 2020
- **Useful links:**
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/latest?departments%5B%5D=department-for-transport>

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

- All