

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum

22nd July 2016

Agenda Item 3c: Bus Services Bill – An Opportunity

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Forum:

- a) **Agree to use the initiatives underway across the Heartland area to develop, in collaboration with public transport operators, a comprehensive approach to realising the potential of bus based services**
- b) **Agree to adopt the principles of an Enhanced Partnership as the means of embedding collaborative working**
- c) **Support the need for the proposal for a statutory Sub-national Transport Body to reflect the Enhanced Partnership approach, whilst at the same time seeking to have access to the powers to be made available to Mayoral Combined Authorities**

1. Context

- 1.1. Bus based public transport is viewed as being a critical part of the transport system, providing support to the Heartland economy, as well as connecting communities to the workplace, as well as being vital in terms of providing access to public services such as healthcare and education.
- 1.2. Bus based public transport helps reduce congestion in our urban areas, whilst at the same time, through the application of new technology, making an important contribution to improving air quality.
- 1.3. The Total Transport programme is already helping encourage innovation in terms of realising the potential of bus based public transport services. Its cross-sectoral approach is helping to identify new business models for service delivery that will help realise the potential for bus based public transport to better meet the needs of individual users, thereby providing a realistic and practical alternative to the car.
- 1.4. In many ways the One Transport initiative is contributing to the development of a data platform that offers the opportunity for providers to tailor their services to better meet the needs of individual users.
- 1.5. Both initiatives are in turn complementary to the work that SEMLEP has been pursuing in partnership with Greener Journeys: an initiative that builds upon work that demonstrates the role that bus based public transport has in unlocking economic growth.
- 1.6. All of this activity builds comes at a time when the Government is promote changes to the current legislative framework for bus based public transport.

2. The Bus Services Bill

2.1. The Bill is currently going under consideration by Parliament. The primary purpose of the legislation is to provide local authorities and bus operators with the tools they need to improve local bus services and to get more people on to buses. The proposals within the Bill can be broadly grouped into three key areas:

- Partnership – the Bill includes provisions that will enable existing Bus Quality Partnerships to be made more attractive by removing the requirement that the scheme involve the provision of specific facilities such as infrastructure.

At the same time the Bill includes provision for ‘Enhanced Partnerships’. These Partnerships would enable local authorities to work with bus operators to set a vision for bus services in their area and a plan to help achieve those improvements. Through an Enhanced Partnership it will be possible to set standards for local bus services – including vehicle specifications, branding, ticketing and service frequencies

- Franchising – the Bill includes provision to replace the existing Bus Quality Contract scheme powers with franchising powers that would allow local authorities to take control of their local bus services – i.e. in a similar way to the role of Mayor of London and Transport for London. The franchising powers would be available to Mayoral Combined Authorities or where the capability and track-record of the authority concerned is sufficiently strong and where there is an appropriate economic geography
- Open Data and Ticketing – the Bill includes provision to require the release of open data on routes, timetables, punctuality and fares, including its format. Requiring data to be made freely available will in turn offer new opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop customer-focused services that encourage greater usage of bus services.

2.2. The Bill is progressing through Parliament and is expected to receive Royal Assent by early 2017. Provisions under what would then be the Bus Services Act would then come into effect with the first enhanced partnerships potentially starting during 2017/18.

3. Opportunities for the Strategic Alliance

3.1. There are a number of issues for the Forum to consider when it comes to bus based public transport:

- A number of the larger urban areas across the Heartland have local bus services that consistently demonstrate a high level of patronage and continued growth. In such areas the challenge remains as to how to ensure that such services remain attractive set against the backdrop of continued congestion
- In more rural areas, and during the evenings and at weekends, the continued existence of local bus services is under threat, a reflection of the fact that the current service delivery model is increasingly no longer fit for purpose. However

the need to provide for the needs of individuals remains, making innovation in the service delivery model all the more essential.

- The development of the overarching Transport Strategy for the Heartland area has, as a key theme, the need for transport infrastructure and services to be viewed as a single system. In that context there is an opportunity to use the powers proposed under the Bus Services Bill to realise a truly integrated public transport system, one wherein bus and rail services are co-ordinated in a way that offers the user a practical and attractive alternative for their journey
- In this regard open source data and ticketing will be essential to realising that vision

3.2. The Strategic Alliance initiative offers the opportunity to ensure that bus based public transport makes a bigger contribution towards addressing the key challenges facing the transport system across the Heartland, in particular the need to have:

- A transport system that integrates infrastructure and services in support of both economic activity and place-shaping
- A user-centred approach to accessing transport, using applied technology and innovation to support mobility services
- Improved physical connectivity between larger urban centres, with a particular emphasis on east-west connectivity
- Improved access into and within larger urban centres that is consistent with the place shaping agenda
- A transport system that supports economic initiatives and potential in adjoining sub-national areas, including improved access to Enterprise Zones

3.3. It is therefore proposed that the Forum look to build upon the work underway across the Heartland area to develop, in collaboration with public transport operators, a comprehensive approach to realising the potential of bus based services.

3.4. In particular it is proposed that priority should be given to adopting the principles of Enhanced Partnership as a means of embedding collaborative working even more strongly across the Heartland. At the same time, the proposal for a statutory Sub-national Transport Body should reflect such an approach, whilst at the same time seeking to be given access to the powers to be made available to Mayoral Combined Authorities.

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