



Strategic Transport Forum

14th May 2021

Agenda Item 5: Bus Back Better

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Endorse that EEH work with local authority partners and the EEH Bus Operators Association to support the development of Bus Service Improvement Plans**
- b) Agree that EEH, as the Sub National Transport Body, work with partners to identify key strategic intra-regional bus routes**
- c) Agree that EEH should lead options for pan-regional ticketing and integration solutions on behalf of partners**

1. Context

- 1.1. On Monday 15 March 2021, the government launched Bus Back Better, the national strategy for buses in England. Bus Back Better has at its core the aim to rejuvenate local bus services, making them attractive for passengers, cheaper, easier to understand and use, faster and more reliable, and greener.
- 1.2. Bus Back Better is the most significant change in the landscape for local bus services in England (outside London) since 1986 deregulation. Greater emphasis is being placed on partnership working, with local authorities and bus operators required to form statutory partnerships that can define bus networks, service levels, and fares strategies. The government expects all Local Transport Authorities to develop Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) and set up Enhanced Partnerships (EPs), as defined in the Bus Services Act 2017.
- 1.3. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people move around and has accelerated trends that were already well established. While temporarily there has been a dip in uptake of public transport, in the long term a thriving public transport system is essential to achieving net zero carbon.
- 1.4. During the pandemic we have seen the considerable scope for businesses to increase use of flexible and remote working while continuing to function and provide services. These changes have potentially significant implications for our transport system. These changes should be captured and reflected in our planning for the Bus Service Improvement Plans.
- 1.5. Members will be aware of EEH's long standing commitment to buses. Through the EEH Bus Operators Association, the Forum has been keen to create a long-term plan to support the role of scheduled bus and coach services in the region. The publication of the National Bus Strategy, and the focus on producing BSIPs, provides the opportunity for the region to further develop its ambition for buses.

- 1.6. Provision of high-quality public transport is a key part of the five-point plan of action set out in the regional transport strategy. Interurban and local bus travel forms an essential part of our transport system, providing many with their primary means of access, as well as providing an alternative to the private car.
- 1.7. However, unless segregated, the reliability of bus and coach services is dependent on a well-performing road network. As a result, the regional transport strategy's Travel Hierarchy puts the needs of the bus at the forefront of our approach to connectivity and investment planning.
- 1.8. As well as prioritising investment in highway provision that can support bus and coach services, the transport strategy recognises the need to prioritise measures that encourage co-ordination between strategic public transport locations, including mobility hubs. Initiatives such as these, which can lead to and enable intra-regional connectivity, as well as connect seamlessly with local services, form the bedrock of the region's approach to a single coordinated transport system.
- 1.9. The DfT has committed £3 billion of funding over five years to support implementation of Bus Back Better. Five investment streams are included in the strategy, with more to follow in due course:
 - £120m for zero emission buses in 2021/22 with regional pathfinder areas to explore funding mechanisms for further investment and roll-out (including private financing, leasing and support from the new UK Infrastructure Bank). Government will invest a total of £400m in 4,000 zero-carbon vehicles over the next five years
 - £25m in 2021/22 (out of £300m total over five years) to build capacity within local authorities, ensuring we have the skills and people needed to deliver the plans. Included in this funding in the creation of a national Bus Centre of Excellence
 - Support for bus priority schemes (funding amount not specified)
 - Support for trials of five Bus Rapid Transport networks (funding amount not specified)
 - One zero emission city – 'a small or medium sized city which wants to create a zero-emission transport system, with extensive bike lanes, a zero-emission bus fleet, and a ban on nearly all petrol and diesel vehicles in the city centre.'

DfT also intends to reform Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), changing it from a fossil fuel subsidy to a mileage-based subsidy.

2. Bus Service Improvement Plans – Setting the Ambition

- 2.1. Local Transport Authorities are expected to have Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) in place by October 2021, and subsequently updated annually.
- 2.2. BSIPs are required to include targets for journey time and reliability improvements, patronage growth and passenger satisfaction, set up a bus passenger charter with rights and redress, and identify locations where bus priority measures are needed (bus lanes, traffic management, or – more ambitiously – Bus Rapid Transport networks) with plans to put these in place. There are expectations for comprehensive, updated information at bus stops and online, covering fares and real-time running information.
- 2.3. In the Heartland, a significant number of bus journeys are made across local transport authority areas as communities connect with employment, skills and leisure opportunities across the wider region. It is therefore essential that a successful BSIP incorporates wider intra-regional journeys by bus.

- 2.4. There is a need for the region to clearly identify those key intra-regional bus routes that will be most effective in supporting our wider strategic transport ambitions. Using the Regional Evidence Base, and building on experience gained through the methodologies undertaken for other regional studies, such as the Passenger Rail Study, England's Economic Heartland is well placed to provide advice on key intra-regional bus routes.
- 2.5. Subject to agreement by the Strategic Transport Forum, EEH Business Unit proposes to commence a small-scale piece of analysis. Evidence from the work will inform the Forum, local authority partners and bus operators of the key intra-regional bus services that would best be included and prioritised within Bus Service Improvement Plans in order to support delivery of a single public transport system across the region.
- 2.6. Going forward, and in future years, the Strategic Transport Forum will want to ensure EEH is able to continue to support annual reviews of BSIPs, particularly capturing our region's ambitions for innovation and the future of mobility.

3. Delivering Improvements through Enhanced Partnerships and Franchising

- 3.1. Bus Back Better also requires local transport authorities to establish one or more Enhanced Partnerships (EP) covering the whole bus network in their area.
- 3.2. Local authorities can also choose to pursue franchising – but must set up EPs as an interim measure. EPs must be developed in partnership between the local transport authority and bus operators.
- 3.3. The process for developing and agreeing an EP is likely to be onerous and resource intensive for both local authorities and operators. EEH Business Unit is committed to providing support to partners. Through knowledge sharing, coordination of best practice and drawing on expertise from the sector nationally, the Business Unit will support the region's capacity and capability to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the National Bus Strategy, particularly in seeking to develop EPs.

4. Integration and Ticketing

- 4.1. Bus Back Better encourages multi-operator tickets to be offered at the same or similar prices to single-operator equivalents and suggests local authorities and operators introduce daily and weekly capping.
- 4.2. Further work is needed at the national level to gain a clearer vision and strategy for integration and ticketing. DfT is preparing for a whole scale review of the existing architecture and frameworks around integrated ticketing. By commissioning a review, DfT hopes to take a central position on ticketing across the industry. There is a keen ambition for STBs to play a key role.
- 4.3. Subject to the Forum's agreement, EEH Business Unit is committed to leading the region's ambitions for integration and ticketing, working with existing and future plans being developed by individual partners and bus operators. The Business Unit will continue to liaise with DfT, operators and partners over the coming months to set the ambition for ticketing and integration in the Heartland region.

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