

5a Bus Action Plan Update

o Purpose of Report

At its meeting on 8th June, the Board heard a presentation from First and Stagecoach followed by a discussion on bus issues. As a result of this discussion, it was requested that a paper be brought back to a future meeting on how we start the process of sustained public transport growth and identifying what needs to be done to achieve this. A workshop had at this point already been arranged with the Local Authority and Bus Operator Forum (LABOF) partners for the 9th August to discuss the refresh of the Bus Action Plan and so an interim update was brought back to the Board on 3rd August.

This report now provides feedback on the outcomes of the workshop on 9th August 2016 and identifies the key issues raised.

o Background - The Current Bus Action Plan

The current bus action plan was developed by consultants MVA (now Systra) in 2009 and can be found on the Nestrans website at <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/bus-action-plan.html>

This document formed the basis of an action table that was subsequently developed and is used by Labof to identify and monitor the delivery of actions within this plan. Discussion amongst the Labof partners at the workshop on 9th August identified the key achievements since the publication of the first bus action plan as being:

- Region wide consistency of at-stop information;
- Launch of www.realtimebus.com and expansion of real time information to cover the whole region;
- Launch and subsequent expansion of the Grasshopper multi-operator ticket;
- Expansion to park and ride facilities, including expansion at Ellon and progression of sites on the A96 and A90(S);
- Development of new bus stations at Fraserburgh and Peterhead;
- Creation of mini-interchange hubs in Aberdeenshire;
- Introduction of a network of bus lane enforcement cameras;
- New section of bus lane on King Street;
- Extension to bus lane hours of operation on Great Northern Road;
- Improvements to the bus turning circle at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and improvement of services through the site;
- Annual Christmas promotion campaign focussed on park and ride;
- Introduction of low emissions vehicles (hybrid and hydrogen);
- A new bus turning circle at Dyce railway station and improved links to the airport from both Dyce and the city centre, including introduction of new Jet service, recently strengthened by additional fleet of double deck vehicles;
- Introduction of smart and mobile ticketing;
- Through access for buses at Kingswells park and ride.

o Outcomes of the Workshop on 9th August

The workshop was attended by members of both the Labof Steering and Executive Groups and included representatives from Nestrans, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, First and Stagecoach.

After discussion of the relevant issues and trends affecting the bus industry the following draft objectives for a revised bus action plan were developed:

1. To increase the number and proportion of people travelling by bus across the region, increasing access to jobs and services.
2. To improve the operational performance of bus services.
3. To improve customer satisfaction with bus services.
4. To reduce emissions contributing to improved local air quality and reducing carbon emissions.
5. Improve access to public transport for all, reducing the equalities gap across the region by reducing barriers of cost, physical access and location at the start and end of journeys.

The action plan remains a region wide plan and it was agreed at the workshop that a Statutory Quality Partnership agreement be used as a governance tool to achieve the objectives of the Bus Action Plan. It is envisaged that an SQP agreement will cover the region as a whole with action plans developed for specific corridors. This is something that has already been discussed by the Executive Group and a draft agreement is being worked up to be reported back to the Steering Group in the first instance.

The objectives of a SQP agreement will be in line with the objectives of the refreshed Bus Action Plan. The means by which these can be achieved will include reducing journey times, improving journey speeds, improving frequencies and providing a punctual and reliable service as well as quality infrastructure and information to encourage mode shift; improving the fuel efficiency of the bus fleet, utilising greener technologies; and by reducing lost mileage and re-investing the savings made through more reliable bus operation back into the services on the corridor.

o **Areas for focus over the period of the next Bus Action Plan**

Through discussions at the workshop as well as the findings from the North East Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey and the Chamber of Commerce report 'Barriers to Bus Use' it was discussed that some of the areas for focus in the refreshed Bus Action Plan should be:

- Bus Priority and pinch points
 - Consideration of the location, length and hours of operation of bus lanes and other forms of bus priority
 - Traffic management and associated opportunities to improve journey times
- Demand management to improve bus journey times in comparison to the car
 - The role of workplaces and workplace parking management and travel plans
 - Locking in the benefits of the AWPR for buses and links to the City Centre Masterplan and Roads Hierarchy projects
- Interchange hubs
 - Improvements to bus interchanges including Aberdeen bus station and development of Inverurie interchange
 - Development of the park and ride network
 - Development of the mini-interchange network in Aberdeenshire
 - Improving way finding information at bus stops and interchanges
 - Real time information and integrated ticketing to improve the passenger experience
- Bus routes and services (including scheduled, demand responsive transport and park and ride services)
 - Evaluation of accessibility to bus services and key destinations
 - Consideration of opportunities for more direct and express services
 - Development of park and ride services to enhance patronage

- Consideration of further branding of services and routes
- Bus stop infrastructure
 - Continued improvements to bus stop infrastructure, including shelters, lighting, cleanliness, disability access, road space protection such as parking restrictions, clearway markings and build outs
 - Access to and location of bus stops, particularly in rural areas
 - Facilitating interchange through grouping of bus stops in urban areas and wayfinding
- Vehicles:
 - Low emission vehicles
 - Accessibility of vehicles
 - On bus information and consideration of technology such as on bus announcements and 'Talking Apps'
 - Wi-fi on buses
 - Bikes on buses
- Information and promotion
 - Increased marketing and promotion of current services
 - Park and Ride promotion
 - Promoting real time information and using the system to its full potential
 - Highlighting the advantages of travelling by bus
 - Joint leaflets/timetables etc. where appropriate (e.g. ARI, Park & Ride sites, etc.)
 - Promoting consistent messages
 - Using technology and social media to target communication
 - Links to the Health and Transport Action Plan and THInC.
- Fares and ticketing
 - Clear information on fares and ticketing
 - Promotion and enhancement of the Grasshopper multi-operator smart ticket
 - Further development of smart ticketing to increase the share of cashless ticketing
- Consultation and engagement
 - Making it as easy as possible to use the bus
 - Better understanding of passenger satisfaction / dissatisfaction
 - More engagement with passengers, non-passengers, councillors, businesses, MPs, MSPs and other decision makers

The Labof Executive group will now take the outcomes of the workshop to develop a draft Bus Action Plan for consideration by the Board at a future meeting and consultation with stakeholders and the public thereafter.

• **Letter to Traffic Commissioner**

At its meeting on 3rd August 2016, the Board agreed to write to the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland in relation to the problem of unpredictable bus journey times requiring lengthening schedules in order to meet punctuality targets, resulting in some buses spending extended lengths of time waiting at bus stops. The letter from Nestrans to the Traffic Commissioner is provided in Appendix A and the response received is provided in Appendix B.

• **Recommendation**

The Board is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the draft objectives of the revised Bus Action Plan;
- b) Note the issues raised through the Labof workshop and the proposals for developing a draft; and
- c) Note the letter from the Traffic Commissioner.

Letter to the Traffic Commissioner from the Chair

Level 6
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10 Waterloo Place
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Dear Ms Aitken

You may recall that Nestrans has been in correspondence with you previously regarding the appropriate balance between reliability/ punctuality and journey times for buses in Scotland. We have in the past expressed a view that a strict enforcement of the 95% of buses should not exceed a time limit of 5 minutes later than timetable rule had resulted in extensions of journey time for bus passengers.

This extension of journey time is demonstrable by comparison of timetables over time. This has resulted from the variability and unpredictable nature of journey times particularly in the Aberdeen region. The net result of this is that across Aberdeen it is not unusual, indeed it is a fairly regular feature of bus travel, to see buses waiting at bus stops passing time because traffic on that day hasn't been at its predicted worst, the level used by Operators to set the timetable.

We have written to you on this and had meetings with your staff to explain the difficulties created by the variability and unpredictability of traffic in our region. There is no pattern to traffic levels between weeks and between days of the week.

The Nestrans Board have recently discussed bus operations in our region. The Board and our two Councils, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, have ambitious plans for transport and along with Transport Scotland are investing around £1billion in our roads and rail system. As part of our plans we intend to make a very significant difference to Aberdeen City Centre as the regional centre. This means maximising the use of the planned rail improvements and roads improvements to reduce car use in the city centre in order to improve bus priority. As part of our plans there will be a need for a significant increase in the number of people who access the city centre by public transport. As we only have one rail line this means that bus will have to carry a fair burden on reducing car use.

We are working with colleagues across the transport system to ensure that the conditions are right for bus to increase its attractiveness by providing priority where possible and providing disincentives for car use where practicable.

The Board were very interested in the latest research on bus attractiveness and in particular by the work carried out by Professor David Begg of Greener Journeys. In his latest paper "The impact of congestion on bus passengers" he highlights the relationship between bus user numbers and journey time.

This research complements a piece of research that Nestrans, First and the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce commissioned titled "Reducing the barriers to bus use". This research paper can be found at:

<http://www.nestrans.org.uk/barriers-to-bus-use-study-2015.html>

The paper highlights on page 1 that journey times are a **major barrier**. This is evidenced particularly in the table on page 14 where the five most important improvements that could be made were:

1. Quicker journey times
2. Express services (less stops)

3. More direct routes
4. More frequent services
5. If the buses were more reliable and punctual

Experience over the past few years has been of reducing passenger numbers resulting in poorer frequencies and in some cases withdrawal of services as bus operators try and balance service cost and income.

The Board have therefore asked me to again raise the issue of the 95% rule. We are aware that the Operators are concerned to meet this target and avoid the stiff penalties that can result from non compliance. However the Board are not convinced that setting a timetable for traffic conditions that may be experienced on two days out of twenty (and its anybody's guess which two days they may be) resulting in many journeys wasting a few minutes at each timing stop is the best way to attract passengers.

We would agree that the reliability/ punctuality target of being no more than a minute early is extremely important however waiting on the bus whilst its going nowhere is extremely frustrating. Allowing some flexibility in the bus being late occasionally could result in timetables more reflective of the average conditions rather than the worst conditions. This may result in shorter timetabled journey times, less frustrating journeys as time lost at bus stops is reduced and ultimately in increased passenger numbers.

Finding the right balance in this is a difficult task. The Board feel that a strict approach to timetable keeping is necessary to keep the bus attractive to passengers. However evidence of reducing passenger numbers, increased journey times and increased passenger frustration through buses standing still and the new evidence from Prof Begg on the relationship between journey times and passenger numbers mean that a review of the 95% rule may be beneficial to the joint aim of increasing passenger numbers on buses. The Board hope that you will consider this with your Traffic Commissioner colleagues and determine whether you agree that a review is merited. We look forward to hearing from you.



TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER FOR SCOTLAND
Joan N Aitken SSC

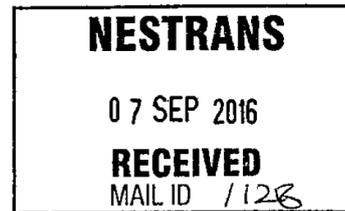
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6 September 2016

Councillor Ramsay Milne
Nestrans
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Dear Councillor Milne

Thank you for your letter of 30 August with enclosures. I will read these but I have to say that I am not in agreement with your perception of how bus passengers should be served. Punctuality and reliability and the confidence to travel are very important to passengers. You must remember that bus passengers are not in warm cars and in my view need priority especially given the numbers who depend on buses and who may not be so financially blessed as car users or be unable to drive.

The Senior Traffic Commissioner recently reviewed her guidance for England (outwith London) and Wales and I enclose a copy. It is not binding on me in Scotland but I give weight to it. You will gather that following consultation, it was decided to retain the punctuality standards. I also enclose, for your interest, a recent paper from Professor David Begg for Greener Journeys. Of course Professor Begg is no stranger to Aberdeen and you will know him. His report makes fascinating but worrying reading and I hope you can share it with colleagues.

I will be looking at standards in Scotland with a view to providing similar indications for Scotland. I will ensure you have the opportunity to comment.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Aitken".

Enc: Senior Traffic Commissioner's Guidance No.14 – Local Bus Services in England (Outside London) and Wales.
Professor Begg's paper for Greener Journeys