

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.

It was mentioned at the meeting that this process has already begun through discussions at the Local Authority and Bus Operator Forum (LABOF) and a workshop has been arranged with the Labof Steering and Executive Groups to discuss the review and development of the Bus Action Plan. This report outlines the process set out for this review and highlights a number of recent publications that may inform it.

o Proposed Workshop on the review of the Bus Action Plan

A workshop is being held on the 9th August with members of the Labof Steering Group and Executive Group. This will include representatives from Nestrans, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, First and Stagecoach.

The purpose of this workshop is to discuss:

- Background to the current Bus Action Plan:
 - How it fits into the RTS, other action plans and strategies;
 - Key achievements, failures and lessons learned during the period of the current Bus Action Plan which was published in 2009.
- Where we are now:
 - Review of progress towards achieving the current quality partnership standards and targets, including bus passenger numbers;
 - Punctuality and reliability;
 - Findings from the annual bus passenger satisfaction survey;
 - Findings from the recent 'Barriers to Bus Use' study carried out by Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, First and Nestrans.
- Discussion of the findings and recommendations made in the recently published report by Greener Journeys on 'the impact of congestion on bus passengers' (further detail on this publication is provided below).
- Discussion of the objectives and proposed structure of a new Bus Action Plan.
- Actions for the new bus action plan, including consideration of a Statutory Quality Partnership as a key mechanism for delivery of bus improvements.

A fuller report on the outcomes of this workshop will be provided to the Board in September following the workshop in August.

o The Impact of Congestion on Bus Passengers, Report by Greener Journeys

Published in June 2016 and written by Professor David Begg for Greener Journeys, this report examines what it terms '*the crisis which has developed in bus service reliability across the*

UK'. It was written in response to the recognition that bus operators often cite congestion as a major factor in their failure to hit punctuality targets, but that there is *“little documented evidence of the link between congestion, rising operating costs, fares and disappointing patronage figures”*.

The report identifies the extent to which congestion impacts on the bus network, which it suggests has been caused by:

1. *Slower speeds leading to higher costs, higher fares, fewer passengers, service decline, fewer passengers;*
2. *Slower speeds leading to increased journey time, fewer passengers, service decline, fewer passengers; and*
3. *Slower speeds, punctuality and reliability decline, fewer passengers, service decline, fewer passengers.*

It highlights that bus operators are forced to respond to these issues in one of two ways; either try and maintain frequencies, which means more buses (a greater peak vehicle requirement); or they let frequencies decline. The report concludes that on balance, *“it is unlikely that operating at the same frequency, albeit more punctually, will generate sufficient additional revenue to offset the additional costs, unless there are other factors generating patronage growth.”*

The report highlights the case of London, which for more than a decade has been the UK's bus success story. With passenger numbers doubling since the formation of TfL in 2000, it is now facing one of the fastest declines in bus use anywhere in the UK. Following on from this, one of the key lessons highlighted in the report is:

“You can get all the other ingredients right: modern bus fleet, cashless buses with the most advanced smartcard and contactless ticketing system in the world, a level of integration which is the envy of other UK cities, state-of-the-art passenger information at the bus stop and on mobile devices. Add to this population and employment growth and you should have a recipe for the London bus success story continuing. But these laudable ingredients cannot offset the rapid deterioration in bus journey times”.

The report sets out a five point plan which it believes would help to address the issues identified:

1. Set bus speed targets;
2. Demand management;
3. Bus priority;
4. Speed up dwell time at bus stops; and
5. Mobilising bus passengers – more bus champions at a local level and in devolved and central government and better communication with bus passengers.

The findings and recommendations of this report will be used to inform discussions at the bus action plan workshop and to inform the development of the next Bus Action Plan. The full report is available at <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/publication/the-impact-of-congestion-on-bus-passengers/>

o **Round the Bend: A review of local bus provision by Citizens Advice Scotland**

In 2015 Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) published a report, 'Remotely Excluded', which identified the major issues facing consumers in rural Scotland. One of the most important themes identified was the difficulty people had accessing essential services, such as healthcare and work opportunities, using the bus network. To look more closely at what was happening with public transport across Scotland, CAS carried out this regional research.

The report is presented as a collaborative research project covering the experience of 113 local communities in Scotland which identifies some of the key concerns regarding bus provision in Scotland today.

This research gathered information on over 1,200 journeys from 133 home locations to key essential services, focussing on travel times, distances and cost to the following locations: workplace, supermarket, GP surgery, hospital, jobcentre, college, bank branch and post office. This research identified a wide range of journey times from people being able to reach a GP in less than fifteen minutes by bus, to those who took more than an hour to get to the nearest college. Scotland's Post Office network was the best connected with people in over two thirds of the areas surveyed being able to walk to their nearest one.

While earlier research suggests that 55% of bus users feel buses are good value for money, the study found price also varied substantially across Scotland's bus routes ranging from 7p per mile to £1.80 per mile. In the Nairn area, bus journeys were identified as costing those on job seekers allowance 15% of their income for one return journey to the nearest job centre, while a round trip to a local supermarket could cost someone on full time minimum wage 5% of their weekly income.

Using information provided by Scotland's local authorities and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport it was also established that Scotland spent £48 million on bus subsidies to operators in 2015. This equates to £10.67 per adult in Scotland, and ranges widely from £108 per adult in the Western Isles to as low as £0.55 in Aberdeen City.

o **Recommendation**

The Board is recommended to:

- a) Note the steps being taken to review the current bus action plan; and
- b) Note the recent publications by Greener Journeys and Citizens Advice Bureaux

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