

## **5c Bus Issues Update**

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### **o Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide information and updates for the Board in relation to bus issues.

### **o Background**

Members will be aware that Nestrans' Regional Transport Strategy is supported by a number of Action Plans, one of which covers Bus. The Bus Action Plan was developed in 2009 and is available on the Nestrans website at <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/bus-action-plan.html>

The Local Authority and Bus Operators Forum (LABOF) is a partnership of Nestrans, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, First and Stagecoach and aims to take forward and deliver the elements of the bus action plan and the objectives of the Quality Partnership for public transport which was signed by all parties in 2010.

This report seeks to update members on a number of matters relating to bus, many of which are actions identified within the Bus Action Plan.

### **o Bus Investment Fund**

Bids by both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council were successful in the first round of the Bus Investment Fund in 2013 and are currently being progressed. In Aberdeenshire, the funding is being used to develop mini interchange hubs along the A947 in Fyvie, Newmachar and Oldmeldrum and in the city to create through access for buses from the A944 into the Kingswells Park and Choose site.

Since the update provided to the Board in April 2014, the land has been secured for the mini-hub at Fyvie and plans for Newmachar will go before committee in the next couple of months.

In Aberdeen City, all initial patronage and car park surveys have been completed, providing a baseline against which the success of the project will be measured. Further design work has been undertaken on the through access road to take account of new footpaths and cycleways at the Prime Four development and further consideration is being given to measures internally within the Park & Ride site to prevent illegal encampments. A planning application for the through access at Kingswells Park & Ride is due to be submitted in the week beginning 28<sup>th</sup> July and delivery is anticipated for Spring 2015.

A further £3 million second round of the fund has been announced by Transport Scotland with bids to be submitted by 29<sup>th</sup> August 2014. The fund aims to enable the development of projects which have the potential to deliver improvements in bus services and infrastructure through partnership working between local transport authorities, bus operators and others. The fund is expected to run for two years, providing a maximum of £500,000 per project over

2 years. Consideration is currently being given by the LABOF partners to any potential bids to the 2014 funding round and an update will be brought back to the next board on any that are submitted.

### o **Thistle Card**

At the last Board meeting in June 2014 it was reported that the Mobility and Access Committee Scotland had requested that consideration be given to the roll out of the Thistle Card across Scotland. The Thistle Card is designed for people to alert a bus driver that they need additional time or assistance with the aim of helping anyone who has difficulty in using public transport because of their age, disability or illness. In June, the Board was supportive of exploring the roll out of this card in the North East. The idea has since been discussed at the Local Authority and Bus Operator Forum where the consensus was that both major operators in the north east already produce and publicise their own Safe Journey Cards, which have proved popular and are already well known to their passengers and drivers. It was felt that a further card would cause confusion with conflicting branding and images.

First Aberdeen's Safe Journey Card and Better Journey Card can be downloaded from their website at [http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/aberdeen/bus\\_access/safe\\_journey\\_card/](http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/aberdeen/bus_access/safe_journey_card/)

Stagecoach Bluebird's Journey Assistance cards can be found here:  
<http://www.stagecoachbus.com/customercontact.aspx>

The views of Aberdeenshire Access Panels and Aberdeen Disability Advisory Group (DAG) have also been sought. The Aberdeenshire Access Panel do not consider that there is a need for a further card in addition to the ones already publicised by the operators. There is a meeting of Aberdeen DAG in September, to which the bus operators have been invited, and this will be raised with them at this meeting.

### o **Real Time Bus website (www.realtimebus.com)**

Improvements will not be made to upgrade the current real time bus website given that real time information is now available through the nationwide Traveline.info website, Next Bus phone app and that a website providing real time information covering all operators will also be created as part of the expansion of real time information into Aberdeenshire which it is anticipated will be launched late 2014. This has been discussed with First who are happy that the site, currently operated by real time supplier Vix, is not updated but rather that we look to link the domain name [www.realtimebus.com](http://www.realtimebus.com) to a new multi-operator website. This will be explored with Aberdeenshire Council as their real time project progresses.

### o **Reducing barriers to the use of buses**

Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with First Aberdeen, is seeking to commission research into the barriers to bus use perceived by people travelling to work. Nestrans officers are working with the Chamber to develop the scope for this work and have provided initial comments on the proposal. It is recommended that a financial contribution of £2,000 from the Bus Action Plan Budget be offered towards the cost carrying out this work.

## o **Potential European Hydrogen bus project**

Members will be aware that a European project to demonstrate the potential for hydrogen buses will see the roll out of ten hydrogen buses operated by First Aberdeen and Stagecoach Bluebird in the north east from the end of this year.

However, a further opportunity has emerged for a much larger demonstration project, aimed at developing a large enough demonstration project to gain from economies of scale regarding hydrogen buses. The European Union are looking for up to ten regions to develop projects each of between 50 and 100 hydrogen vehicles. For the purposes of such a scale, the region would be Scotland and a proposal is being developed through the Scottish Seven Cities Alliance and Regional Transport Partnerships. CoSLA, Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government have also been involved in preliminary discussions, although no firm commitments have been made at this stage.

A Fuel Cell Hydrogen Joint Undertaking (FCHJU) has been established and an officer appointed through the City Council and the Aberdeen hydrogen bus project to develop the proposal further and work alongside other partners to develop a business case. The major hurdle at this stage seems to be the lack of a governance structure, with a number of local authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships and bus operators interested but unable to commit funding without greater knowledge of the project. A number of meetings have been held and an understanding built up, but there is a need for leadership, presumably from Transport Scotland, and consideration of how potential partners can collaborate to get to a position of having the knowledge to be able to progress further.

## o **Relevant publications**

A number of bus related documents have been published in recent months, all underlining the case for buses and a growing momentum around bus policy. They are:

- **Bus Priority Works For...Business, Shops, Communities, Growth** – published by PTEG (Passenger Transport Executive Group) which represents the six strategic transport bodies covering the largest city regions in England outside London. Although focused on England, the document addresses many of the common myths surrounding bus priority and highlights the benefits for businesses, shops, communities and growth. The full report is available at: <http://www.pteg.net/resources/types/reports/bus-priority-works-business-shops-communities-and-growth>
- **Bus Punctuality: Towards a Structure that can Deliver** – also published by PTEG, the report provides a summary of the current issues, responsibilities and powers relating to bus punctuality and examines the perceived shortcomings. As with the document above, this document focusses on the regime in England which is slightly different from that in Scotland but nonetheless contains conclusions relevant to the situation in Scotland. In particular, the report highlights that “*the generic case for bus priority measures has not been well made by the bus industry or by local government. There is a paucity of general materials available for local stakeholders (from politicians to business organisations) which make the case for these measures, other than to support the implementation of specific local schemes. There needs to be more emphasis publicising the wider social and economic benefits for local communities that can be delivered by improved bus priority and punctuality.*” The full report is available at:

<http://www.pteg.net/resources/types/reports/bus-punctuality-towards-structure-can-deliver>

- **Buses and the Economy II** – published by Greener Journeys, this work was undertaken by the University of Leeds Institute of Transport Studies and is a follow up to the 2012 report 'Buses and Economic Growth'. This report seeks to improve the understanding of the links between bus services and the wider economy and how these linkages could be taken into account in bus policy analysis. The study concludes that there is a significant relationship between accessibility by bus and employment; people in urban areas who are currently unemployed and seeking work rely heavily on the bus for access to employment; the bus is a vital artery for shopping trips; and that the bus has a social insurance dimension. Claire Haigh CEO of Greener Journeys is presenting the findings of this study in Aberdeen on the 21<sup>st</sup> August at a meeting being organised by the SCDI. The full report can be found at: <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/2014/07/buses-economy-ii/>

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Board note the contents of this report.

KC/4 August 2014