

**REPORT TO: WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE**

DATE: 27 July 2018

REPORT TITLE: BUS STRATEGY UPDATE

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Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on progress with the Bus Strategy within the context of the new Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP).

Background

2. The JLTP is a statutory requirement of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA). It sets out the vision for transport investment in the West of England and the policy framework within which the West of England authorities will work. The new JLTP builds on the two previous Plans, 2006 to 2011 and 2011 to 2026.
3. The Bus Strategy, associate document to the JLTP, is also a requirement of WECA to produce. It will consider options to improve performance of the bus network and set out how further growth in bus patronage will be encouraged, including specific proposals and frameworks intended to encourage better, faster, more reliable and more accessible services.
4. A Core Project Team and a Bus Strategy Working Group, both led by WECA and made up of officers from the all the local authorities including North Somerset Council, are producing the JLTP and the Bus Strategy respectively.
5. The emerging draft JLTP being drawn up by officers covers a range of topic areas including the following:
 - Objectives and vision – including air quality and carbon emissions, accessibility and supporting economic growth.
 - An ambitious approach with the need to seriously consider innovative funding options such as road pricing.
 - Graphics to show where the JLTP fits in with other planning documents and organisations.
 - A focus on connectivity and mass transit – Beyond the West of England, Within, Local and Neighbourhood.
 - Specific policies and interventions.

- A schedule of major schemes including Joint Spatial Plan mitigation schemes.
- Targets, indicators and monitoring section to deliver against the JLTP's objectives.
- An emphasis on embracing technology.

Key dates	Milestones
September 2018	Local authorities endorse JLTP consultation draft
19 September 2018	Joint Scrutiny to discuss JLTP consultation draft
28 September 2018	West of England Joint Committee endorse JLTP consultation draft
October to November 2018	Consultation on draft JLTP
November 2018 to January 2019	JLTP revised following consultation, approval by local councils
1 February 2019	West of England Joint Committee endorse final JLTP

6. Consultation will start in October 2018 for a six week period. Social media will be extensively used to obtain as wide a range of people responding as possible. This will be particularly important for generating interest amongst younger people who previously have been under represented. A video and budget simulator to engage people with the impact that decisions on transport infrastructure can have are being developed. In addition, the traditional Transport Forum type stakeholder event will be held. Each council can provide more consultation events if they wish.
7. An advisory group made of representatives from transport operators and key groups has been established to provide input into the emerging Plan.

Bus Strategy

8. The Combined Authority, working with the councils, is also currently preparing a Bus Strategy to support the JLTP. Given the extent of appraisal envisaged, the West of England Bus Strategy is proposed to be undertaken in two phases. The first phase, up to October 2018, involves initial operator engagement, clarification of issues affecting the current network and the undertaking of a network review, alongside initial engagement to support the JLTP. Following comments from Members and officers on these work areas, an officer working group with consultant support will then present evidence to members to inform options.
9. A Bus Strategy Overview document has been produced, to support consultation on the draft JLTP and this is attached as Appendix A. Production of the full strategy will be jointly undertaken by the Combined Authority and the West of England councils, and initial data will be available for discussion with members from late Summer.

Economic Impact Assessment:

10. There are no direct implications arising from this report. Future bus network operating frameworks, which will be explored as part of the Bus Strategy, will need to include an economic impact assessment as part of their evaluation.

Finance Implications:

11. A virement of up to £85,000 from Retained Business Rates and Treasury Investment Income for consultant support for the Bus Strategy was agreed by the West of England Committee on 7 December 2017. Spend will be in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and for the latter will be subject to approval of a carry forward.

Legal Implications:

12. Producing a Bus Strategy is a devolution requirement of the West of England Combined Authority. The West of England Combined Authority has Integrated Transport Authority functions for Concessionary Travel, Supported Bus Services (jointly with the constituent councils), Community Transport Grants and Local Bus information including Real Time Information.

Land/Property Implications;

13. There are no implications arising from this report.

Human Resources Implications:

14. The Bus Strategy and Joint Local Transport Plan is a joint project with resources provided by all four local authorities and WECA, supported by external consultants providing technical expertise.

Recommendations

- 1) To note progress on the Bus Strategy and provide views.

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West of England Combined Authority Contact:

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the Contact Officer for the meeting who is **James White** and who is available by telephoning Joanna Greenwood on 0117 426210; writing to West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Way, Bristol BS1 6ER; email: democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

Appendix A

West of England Working towards a Bus Strategy

Overview

The West of England councils are working with the Combined Authority to prepare a new Bus Strategy for our area.

Buses have a major role to play in helping us tackle poor air quality and traffic congestion, reduce dependency on the private car and improve accessibility for everyone. More people are using the bus in the West of England. Passenger numbers have recently grown by about 7% year on year, bucking the national trend. Working with bus operators, our challenge is to maintain this growth by making bus services more reliable, quicker, accessible and attractive to existing and new passengers.

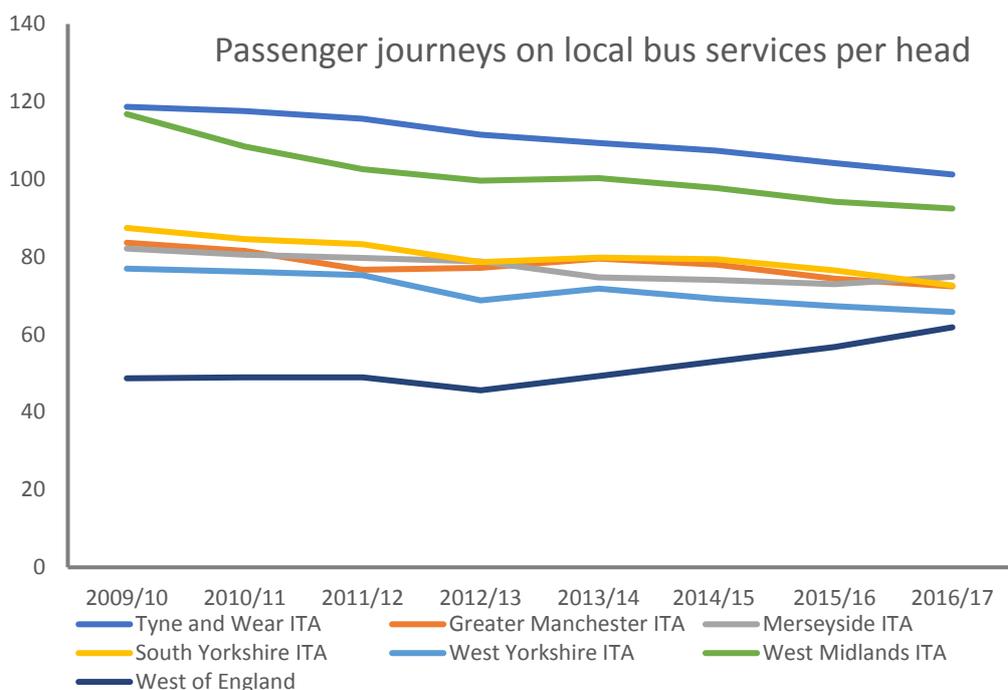
We will do this through a strategy to increase investment in infrastructure, new vehicles, simplified ticketing, interchanges and information. We will also assess new opportunities to structure and deliver bus services fit for the West of England for the next twenty years.

The full Bus Strategy will report on the work done and set out specific proposals, for publication from Spring 2019. This overview document highlights our challenges and key work areas, and sets out a work programme to address them.

Background and Our Current Challenges

In line with Great Britain outside London, most bus services in the West of England are provided by operators on a commercial basis. The councils fund and provide infrastructure like bus stops and shelters, bus priority measures and 'Real Time' information screens. Services that are not profitable but socially necessary can be funded by the councils, and around 10% of service mileage in the West of England is provided in this way.

Around 67 million bus passenger journeys were made in the West of England in 2016/17, and this total has been growing steadily (bucking the national trend). About 9% of people in the West of England use the bus to get to work. However, the number of bus trips per head of population in the West of England is still some way behind that for most other 'core' English city regions.



Fares are now broadly comparable with other equivalent areas of the UK, and 89% of passengers in the West of England are either very satisfied or satisfied with their journey. The vehicle fleet is also relatively modern – and a significant proportion of vehicles meet or exceed the `Euro VI` exhaust emissions standard.

Operating bus services is a complex undertaking. Bus operation is vulnerable to a range of wider factors such as traffic congestion, and overall profit levels in the UK bus industry can vary significantly year on year.

However, the overall bus network in the West of England is quite extensive. Most core corridors in the urban areas have service frequencies of at least every ten minutes throughout the day. However, there are gaps in the coverage of the network, and bus services to rural areas tend to be less frequent or direct in order to serve a more dispersed population.

Vision and Objectives

Our Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP) sets out an ambitious strategy to reduce car dependency and promote the use of public transport. Significant growth in housing and employment is also forecast for the West of England in the next twenty years. The bus network needs to play its part by accommodating and responding to this growth.

The JLTP’s wider policies and objectives will link with the Bus Strategy, as outlined below:

	JLTP Objective	Bus Strategy Objective
1	Support sustainable economic growth	Deliver a comprehensive bus network, maximise bus service reliability, reduce journey times and deliver simplified ticketing
2	Promote equality and accessibility	Increase availability and ease of use of accessible passenger waiting facilities and vehicles, and improve integration with other modes, thereby improving access to

		key employment, health and leisure destinations for everyone.
3	Improve air quality and respond to climate change	Operators to reduce carbon and other emissions from buses, and emissions to reduce from general traffic through increasing bus use
4	Contribute to better health, wellbeing, safety and security	Maximise service quality, in terms of vehicles, information and bus stop environment
5	Create better places	Improve public domain through the removal of car traffic, mode shift onto buses, and where possible transfer of highway space to pedestrians. Better access to places for public transport, and better design for bus services in new developments.

Targets

Our target for passenger trips will be consistent with the forecast in public transport mode share over this period set out in the recent Joint Transport Study which supports the JLTP. Our target for bus use is therefore proposed to be:

A 100% increase in the number of trips on the local bus network by 2036.

Other targets around passenger satisfaction, service reliability and accessibility will be formulated as part of the next phase of work and will be set out in the full Bus Strategy from Spring 2019.

Network Review

An open and wide ranging review of the extent of the current bus network is proposed, to help clarify areas where the coverage of the current network needs improving. The review will consider the geographical extent of the network as well as accessibility, times and frequencies of services. It is also expected that interchange between services could play a significant role in how best to fill gaps in the network.

Potential Operating Frameworks

The Combined Authority has new powers to further influence the provision of local bus services. We will work together assess the opportunities presented by 'Enhanced Partnerships' and franchising, and compare them with the status quo. The full strategy will include a robust and transparent recommendation on the best way forward.

Infrastructure and Complementary Policies

The Joint Local Transport Plan includes an ambitious major scheme programme with an emphasis on boosting investment in infrastructure for sustainable transport modes. Furthermore, where new highway is proposed, opportunities will be used to reallocate road space to public transport use on links which have been relieved of through traffic.

We will consider whether there are improvements to the bus network that could be made while we develop the bus strategy.

The JLTP also sets out a wider range of policies which the Bus Strategy will complement. In particular, measures to manage traffic capacity, air quality, parking and other possible restraint measures could play an important role in boosting bus passenger numbers.

Better Information

The Combined Authority and North Somerset Council have a duty to provide local bus information, including Real Time Information (RTI). Passenger information plays a critical role in attracting passengers, and the West of England has also significantly expanded its network of RTI displays at bus stops (there are currently over 1,000).

A Bus Information Strategy will be prepared to set out further improvements to the provision of information, including the types of information to be provided, future developments and the potential for better marketing and promotion of services and joint working with operators. Consideration will also be given to the establishment of a distinct `brand` for West of England services, in addition to the existing MetroBus brand.

Ticketing

A significant cause of delay to bus services is the time taken to load passengers, with the driver selling tickets and products. Progress has been made through the wider rollout of smartphone apps and smartcards, as well as the recent availability of contactless payment, to help address this issue. The Travelwest Smartcard will be available much more widely through the launch of MetroBus (which will also require passengers to `buy before they board`).

Multi-operator tickets are available but some products are priced with a premium and the ticket range is not widely promoted. The Bus Strategy is an opportunity to make simplified ticketing more widely available, and will look at and make recommendations on making the use of smart, multi modal and single branded ticketing the norm across the network.