Introducing a Northern Digital Mobility Strategy

A document setting out the background of, and the opportunity for partners to provide informal views around the scope and objectives for, a **Digital Mobility Strategy** for the North of England.

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1. Background

1.1 Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan set out ambitions for integrated and smart travel across the North of England.

1.2 This took the form of the Integrated & Smart Travel Programme (IST Programme) which unfortunately closed in 2020/2021.

1.3 The aspirations this area of the STP set out remain and each area within he North continues to have ambitious plans to leverage technology to make passenger journeys smarter and more accessible.

1.4 In the absence of the IST Programme this area needs to be re-framed, and the Strategic Transport Plan amended, to reflect the changing role of Transport for the North whilst highlighting the continued case for joined-up investment in smarter travel for passengers in the North.

1.5 Transport for the North plans to develop a Northern Digital Mobility Strategy, steered by members, to take the place of the IST Programme and set out the evidence base for investment, and approaches to delivery, for digital innovation.

2. Current Context

2.1 As of January 2022, public transport is in a difficult position with patronage remaining low and regions/operators facing a cliff-edge of funding which may see services withdrawn, networks redrawn, and investment opportunities limited in favour of funding used to shore up the former.

2.2 In parallel authorities across the North met the challenge posed to them by the Government to submit ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plans which were published in October 2021.

2.3 Whilst the initial impression was c. £bn of funding could be unlocked in support of these plans the reality now appears to be nearer £1.4bn and it is unlikely that this will stretch close to the over £8bn identified as needed nationally.

2.4 Similarly, the railway, as it restructures, is under increasing pressure to identify new ways to improve financial viability in the face of reduced passenger numbers.

2.5 Across all these modal approaches there are clear ambitions to make travel more digital and to improve passenger experience with better, more joined-up, technological systems.

2.6 The funding challenges present significant challenges but there are, across the North, common digital themes that present an opportunity to make the case for joined up investment in digital mobility and support local partners in realising their ambitions.

3. Strategy Development

3.1   The planned Northern Digital Mobility Strategy (NDMS) is in an early stage and Transport for the North is keen for the scope and objectives of this piece to be set by, and reflective of, local ambitions and programmes.

3.2   The planned timeline for developing the scope, and objectives, of the planned NDMS is:
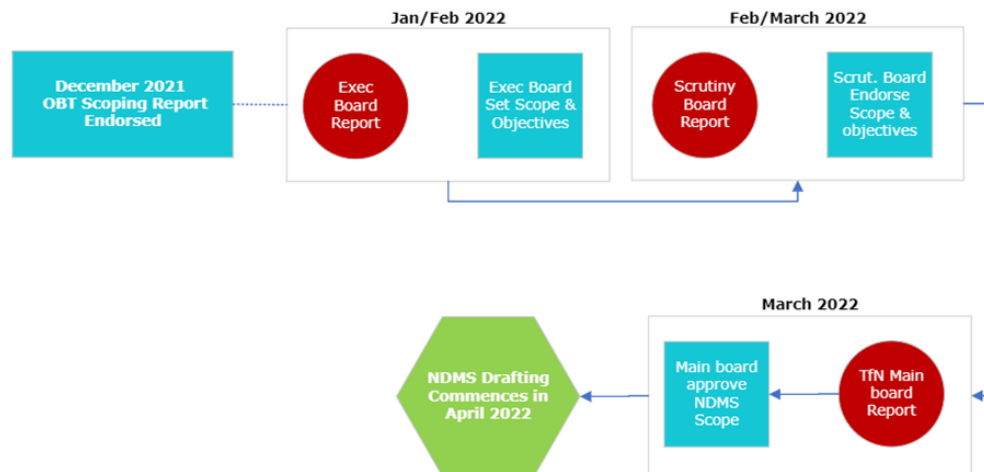
3.3   The initial stage will be to have our Executive Board, comprised of Director General/Chief Exec representatives of our 20 Local Authorities, provide constructive support in setting the scope and objectives for the NDMS.

3.4   As we work towards this in February, we are keen to engage with relevant Lead Officers for informal views on the scope and objectives of the NDMS to help steer this Executive Board discussion.

3.5   Following this the outline scope and objectives will run through our governance forums, starting with our Scrutiny Committee on the 10th March and finishing with the main TfN Board towards the end of the Month.

3.6   With the scope and objectives set in March 2022 we will begin producing the report with an initial call for evidence from partners and identifying the research and evidence base needed to deliver the strategy.

3.7   This research and evidence base will help shape the drafting of the strategy across 2022 and into planned release for consultation in early 2023.

4.   Setting Scope & Objectives

4.1   At the highest possible level Transport for the North is keen to develop a strategy that facilitates, communicates, and builds on local delivery of digital mobility interventions for passengers.

4.2   The NDMS will a thematic document, with the scope and scale determined by the TfN Board, allowing the North to speak with one voice on the development

and implementation of digital mobility at a local, cross-boundary and national level.

4.3   It could simply unify ambitions and set out how local delivery, supported with common frameworks, common standards, common approaches to implementation alongside further central investment will realise them.

4.4   Alternatively, it could take more of a pan-northern delivery approach setting out programmes of work, developing business cases to secure further funding, provide statutory advice or engage with central government to deliver those ambitions at a Sub-National level.

4.5   Or a hybrid of the two based on the existing progress across each thematic area – for example a light touch on smartcard but a heavier involvement in integrating Demand Responsive Transport.

4.6   The likely themes the NDMS would identify delivery approaches, additional support, evidence, and investment cases for are:

4.6.i	mTicketing, QR Codes & Smart Cards
4.6.ii	Multi-Modal & Integrated Ticketing Structures
4.6.iii	Information provision (E.G RTI & Journey Planning)
4.6.iv	Integration and opportunities of smart & open data
4.6.v	Mobility as a Service (MaaS)
4.6.vi	Account Based Ticketing
4.6.vii	Mobility Credits & EV Integration
4.6.viii	General Fares Reform and Concessionary Travel

5.   Benefits & Outcomes

5.1   Through identifying common themes around digital mobility and setting out a future direction across the North with a linked evidence base systems can become more uniform, less complex, and less costly to implement and administer.

5.2   Once developed this would summarise and support local delivery, identify pan-northern programmes of work to scale systems and allow members to highlight a clear case for further investment in digital systems in the North through a single authoritative document.

5.3   Depending on the scope, the NDMS would identify an evidence base to support partners as they look to deliver mobility solutions locally it will also, subject to the outcomes of a Digital Mobility Hub pilot in 2022, identify ways that TfN can support that local delivery through adding capacity.

5.4   Similarly, the NDMS will work to identify common frameworks, common technical standards and collaborative approaches to delivering shared digital ambitions across the North to make the case, and maximise the impact of any provided, further central funding from government to support implementation.

6.   Providing Informal Feedback

6.1   We would ask that members provide informal feedback on the scope and objectives for the NDMS that they'd like to see, to take the place of the former IST Programme in the STP.

6.2   Similarly, we'd welcome views on how such a strategy can be shaped and steered to help support the development and delivery of local digital initiatives; or any areas where there may be scope for pan-northern business case development – particularly across non-Combined Authority areas.

6.3   It is integral that this Strategy be shaped by members for members and that it makes a valuable contribution to the revised Strategic Transport Plan.

6.4   We believe many of these areas will build on the ambitions within bus Service Improvement Plans and we hope that the NDMS can be an effective lever in making the case for further investment in those ambitions above and beyond the financial commitments of the National Bus Strategy.

      6.4.i   Or considering the reduced NBS funding – the case for greater spread across the North along common themes from that reduced pot.

6.5   Please can you send your informal feedback to Matt Smallwood, Head of Digital Strategy at matt.smallwood@transportforthenorth.com as he drafts a scoping report for Executive Board in Early February.

6.6   Enclosed with this is the copy of a presentation made to our Operating Board which has endorsed the creation of the NDMS to a scope set by members.