
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Department for Transport's National Bus Strategy
Author: Kirsten Keen, Senior Strategy and Planning Officer
Sponsor: Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director
Meeting Date: Wednesday 20 March 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 Stephen Fidler, Co-Director of Local Transport, DfT, will be in attendance at the Board meeting to discuss progress to date and future plans in respect of the National Bus Strategy. The Board has identified the importance of buses and scheduled coaches as critical parts of the transport system. A substantive report will be brought to the June meeting of the Board: this item provides members with the opportunity to provide a steer to shape and inform that report.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes the background context for the agenda item with DfT.

3. Context:

- 3.1 Bus services are a vital part of the North's transport system. They are relied upon by millions of citizens and critical to enabling people without a car to access jobs, education and the wider opportunities that support a good quality of life. Reliable bus services that are well integrated with other travel modes are essential to delivering the three ambitions set out in TfN's Strategic Transport Plan:

- Transforming economic performance
- Rapid decarbonisation of our transport network
- Enhancing social inclusion and health.

- 3.2 The Strategic Transport Plan has a sustainable modes target of 51% by 2050, covering both public transport and active travel. This is in comparison to the current baseline of 36%. However, the North currently has an average of 36% less bus mileage than in 2005, a steeper reduction than the national average of 28%.

If the North is to meet its ambitions for a zero carbon transport network, reduced social inequality and higher economic performance, substantial bus network improvements are required.

4. Background:

- 4.1 The National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better, published in March 2021, is an ambitious strategy that sets out how the Government would "launch a revolution in bus services". The document describes the vision and opportunity to deliver better services for passengers across England including how services are planned.
- 4.2 Since publication of Bus Back Better, the Department for Transport (DfT) has supported local authorities with the creation of Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) and Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) funding.

It has setup the National Bus Centre of Excellence and funded Enhanced Partnership roles to support resourcing within some local authorities. The

Department has also supported bus passengers with the introduction of the £2 flat fare for single journeys outside of London.

- 4.3 The impact of this is already visible across the North. This includes the procurement of hydrogen and electric buses, introducing new concessionary fare schemes for young people and improving customer service.
- 4.4 Local authorities, however, are operating in a challenging financial environment, and there has been a trend of reduced funding for bus services.

Commitments in the National Bus Strategy that have yet to be delivered, include:

- Strengthening statutory guidance on Enhanced Partnerships and franchising
 - Reforming and devolving the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG).
 - Reviewing whether it remains right that local authorities cannot set up new bus companies
 - Issuing new guidance on the meaning and role of 'socially necessary' services, expanding the category to include 'economically necessary' services
 - Ensuring that Government-funded buses deliver greater accessibility
 - Working towards the inclusion of bus services in rail journey planners as standard.
- 4.5 Transport for the North has been closely working with partners and key stakeholders to develop a set of policy recommendations for government to support partners in increasing bus patronage in the North. It is our aim to ensure these policies changes will enable partners to deliver the ambitions of the National Bus Strategy in the most cost effective and efficient way and provide local authorities with greater autonomy to deliver place-based solutions that best meet the needs of their communities. We will present our recommendations to TfN Board in June 2024.

5. Next Steps:

- 5.1 This item provides the opportunity for the TfN Board to explore with the DfT the progress and upcoming work on delivering the National Bus Strategy, ahead of considering policy recommendations at the June Board.

6. Corporate Considerations:

Financial Implications

- 6.1 This paper is for information only so there are no financial implications.

Resource Implications

- 6.2 There are no direct resourcing implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

- 6.3 Any legal implications are contained within the body of this report.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 6.4 This paper is for information only so there are no risk implications.

Environmental Implications

- 6.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and therefore does not stimulate the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment or EIA.

Bus travel has an essential part to play in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within TfNs Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around reducing private car vehicle mileage.

Equality and Diversity

- 6.6 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme so there are no implications for equality and diversity.

Consultations

- 6.7 This paper is for information only – no consultations have taken place.

7. Background Papers:

- 7.1 DfT National Bus Strategy

8. Appendices:

- 8.1 n/a