

Item:

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Report to Partnership Meeting 11 November 2022

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Bus Taskforce

Purpose of Report

To update Board Members and Advisors on the establishment of a Bus Taskforce by the Minister for Transport.

Background

A reliable, affordable and viable bus network is central to Scotland's transport system. Buses provide a flexible form of public transport that can be readily adapted to suit demand. The majority public transport journeys are made by bus, and for some communities, bus is the only form of public transport. Bus is most often used by women, people on lower incomes, disabled people, young people, and members of ethnic minorities.

Government and industry share common objectives to grow demand for bus and make it an attractive and viable alternative to private car. On 1 August 2022 the Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, convened a meeting with bus operators and local government to initiate discussion on key issues, particularly rising operational costs in the face of lower patronage and workforce shortages.

Increasing patronage

Rising costs are affecting the financial viability of bus services, particularly those in rural areas where patronage is typically lower. To protect against cost volatility and ensure the financial sustainability of our bus network, we must increase patronage.

Patronage is increasing following the pandemic but not yet at pre Covid levels. In addition, some travel patterns appear to have changed more permanently following prolonged restrictions and an increase in working and shopping from home. Some elderly and more vulnerable members of society lack confidence in the safety of public transport following the pandemic.

There is still uncertainty about the extent to which all post Covid changes are permanent but it is highly likely that many new travel patterns are becoming the norm. Different bus networks will be required while maintaining flexibility to respond to (re)emerging demand and to avoid the worst effects of reduced connectivity and service cuts further reducing demand.

Workforce pressures

High driver turnover has historically been recorded among many bus operators. Since Autumn 2021, this has been exacerbated by increased rates of attrition, the global labour shortage, and further impacted by Brexit and the effects of the pandemic.

Transport Scotland convened a working group in Autumn 2021 to address these issues. The group worked with DVLA and DVSA to address the backlog in applications and reduce processing times. They also worked with DWP and looked at potential sources for new

recruits such as the ex-forces, and created a 'myth busting' paper to encourage new recruits into the industry.

Purpose

The taskforce will address the immediate challenges to help bus networks move to a more sustainable footing following Covid and ensure that recovery is fully supported by wider policies to improve bus services across Scotland.

It will specifically review and coordinate immediate activity to support patronage recovery, to address workforce retention and recruitment, and to ensure proactive communication and engagement with bus users as networks adapt post Covid.

In this context, the taskforce will convene for a total of three meetings over the course of six months, after which progress will be reviewed.

The taskforce aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Set out a collaborative pathway for increasing patronage long term,
- Co-design pathway to address driver shortages.
- Co-design best practice guidance for community engagement on networks and changes.
- Begin discussions on progressing longer term strategic goals
- Establish Regional Steering Groups to support implementation of immediate actions, and to review local bus networks - giving consideration to the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 powers and emerging travel patterns.

Scope and Remit

Membership will be limited to 21 attendees consisting of representatives from the bus industry. Attendees will be carefully chosen to facilitate proactive discussions whilst considering wider implications.

At each meeting, the Taskforce will discuss and agree next steps for each sub group along with one of the topics listed below:

- i. Sustainable and flexible networks once recovery funding ends
- ii. Smart and integrated ticketing
- iii. Progress on bus priority infrastructure and match in kind

The goal for the taskforce is to achieve the outcomes listed in the previous section. In designing solutions, the taskforce will consider the implications and opportunities for integration with other modes of public transport, to enhance Scotland's public transport network.

Recognising previous work to resolve issues, and the availability of alternative forums, some topics may be out of scope for the Taskforce in order to maintain focus on achievable solutions. Topics may be re-visited if further detail or evidence is presented.

Sub-groups

Three sub groups will be formed with the relevant stakeholders.

1. Patronage growth
2. Driver shortages
3. Community engagement

Each subgroup will work on actions between meetings, and provide updates to the taskforce alongside updates from the regional steering groups. Transport Scotland will provide the secretariat functions for each subgroup, however responsibility for the group will sit with the agreed Chair. Chairs will be agreed for the first Taskforce meeting.

Format

Meetings will be scheduled for one hour, and will be held in person where possible.

The agenda for meetings will be as follows:

1. Updates from sub groups and brief discussion
2. Strategic topic
3. Summary of agreements reached and actions to take forward

Roles and Responsibilities

The Minister for Transport's office will contact attendees in advance to arrange a suitable date and location. The Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, will Chair the meetings, and Transport Scotland will provide secretariat functions. Minutes from all meetings will be circulated to the wider group.

Members will notify Transport Scotland in advance if they are unable to attend, and apologies will be given during the meeting. Delegates may attend if notified and agreed in advance.

Members will take any actions away to their subgroups, and provide updates before or during the next meeting.

Membership

Chair: Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP

Secretariat: Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland representatives:

Bettina Sizeland

Transport Scotland representatives for each subgroup

Office of the Traffic Commissioner

Claire Gilmore

SME Bus Operator representatives:

Confederation of Passenger Transport: Paul White

Community Transport Association: David Kelly

Large Bus Operators

First Bus: Duncan Cameron

Stagecoach: Fiona Doherty

Citylink: Simone Smith

McGills/Xplore: Ralph Roberts

West Coast Motors: Colin Craig

Lothian: Sarah Boyd

Bus Passenger representatives:
Bus Users Scotland: Greig Mackay
Transport focus: Robert Samson

Local Government
ATCO: Nicola Gill & Margaret Roy
CoSLA: Catherine Damen

Regional Transport Partnership representatives

SPT: Gordon Dickson

HITRANS: Ranald Robertson

Regional Steering Groups

Transport Scotland recognise that each region will be different and want to allow freedom for groups to include topics and membership based on what best suits local needs.

Transport Scotland have asked RTPs to develop appropriate region arrangements for Regional Steering Groups whose output will be fed into the Taskforce through the RTP members on the Taskforce. The intention for the regional steering groups is to establish a group of stakeholders to consider and address regional short term issues/challenges whilst keeping sight of the longer term strategic goals for transport in the region. These steering groups would continue beyond the lifetime of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce will focus primarily on the immediate challenges facing the bus industry, and updates to and from the Taskforce will reflect this. However, regional groups are encouraged to consider a wider scope to include all forms of transport.

For the HITRANS region we propose discussing the establishment of the Regional Steering Group with the Highlands and Islands Transport Coordinating Groups (HITCOG) whose membership is made up of the public transport managers at each Council. It is likely HITCOG would form the basis of the HITRANS Regional Steering Group with the membership completed by representatives of our regional bus operators and bus users.

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.
2. Members are asked to approve the establishment of a HITRANS Regional Steering Group whose membership will be agreed at a meeting of the Highlands and Islands Transport Coordinating Groups (HITCOG).

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – The Taskforce offers an opportunity for a renewed focus and energy on growing bus use that will allow developments identified in the RTS to be taken forward if they offer a way of increasing bus patronage.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Equality

Impact – Positive

Report by:

Designation:

Date:

Ranald Robertson

Partnership Director

31st October 2022