

Item:

14



Report to Partnership Meeting 11 September 2020

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

COVID-19 – Temporary Bus and Active Travel Funding

Purpose of Report:

To provide an overview of the recent funding opportunities for temporary bus and active travel Infrastructure and other recent Challenge funds announced by Transport Scotland. Recommend that Members consider making representations to Transport Scotland highlighting the need for targeted funding to support remote and rural transport issues exacerbated by the impacts of Covid-19.

Background

In recent weeks, Transport Scotland has announced a number of funding opportunities to support temporary bus and active travel infrastructure. An overview of these funds and successful applications from within the HITRANS area is summarised in this report.

Spaces for People

Spaces for People is a temporary infrastructure programme which offers funding and support to make it safer for people who choose to walk, cycle or wheel for essential trips and exercise during Covid-19. The Spaces for People programme is funded by the Scottish Government and administered by Sustrans Scotland. It aims to enable statutory bodies to implement measures focused on protecting public health, supporting physical distancing and preventing a second wave of the outbreak.

The fund is now closed to new applications but since its inception over £38 million has been awarded with partner councils having applications either granted or under consideration for the following:

Lead Organisation	Total amount
The Highland Council	£1,968,560
Argyll & Bute Council	£915,000
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	£128,850
Moray Council	£778,800

Bus Rapid Deployment Fund

The Bus Priority Rapid Deployment Fund (BPRDF) has been established 'to provide funding for temporary bus priority infrastructure, to reduce the impact of congestion on our busiest routes as we progress through the route map, through and out of the COVID-19 crisis'.

It has been designed to 'help areas of Scotland with the highest concentration of congestion to make bus journeys quicker and more reliable for passengers. In turn, this will support the bus industry, by incentivising bus trips ahead of private vehicle journeys. In conjunction with similar active travel measures, it will provide a crucial role in protecting air quality in our city centres'.

An initial £10 million fund is being made available to help local authorities implement temporary bus priority measures.

Eligible measures include:

- Reallocation of road space to bus
- Reallocating parking or loading
- Bus lanes
- Bus gates
- Traffic light prioritisation
- Bus stops, waiting facilities and signage to support the temporary measures
- Management support e.g. for related planning, procurement, regulations and evaluation

The Highland Council was the first local authority to receive a successful grant with £442,855 awarded the creation of two temporary bus-only gateways - A new bus gateway connecting Inverness Bus Station (Farraline Park) with Rose Street, and a new bus gateway from Raigmore Hospital to Raigmore housing estate will provide a through route from Old Perth Road. Combined with the existing bus-only gate on Millburn Road this intervention has the potential to reduce bus journeys by up to twelve minutes.

Public School and Community Transport COVID-19 Mitigation Fund

The Scottish Government has also recently announced £7 million towards upgrading transport to mitigate against COVID-19. The newly created Public, School and Community Transport COVID-19 Mitigation Fund is intended to support interventions by transport operators that will increase capacity and public confidence for those using school transport.

The funding is available to support measures on buses, taxis and private hire vehicles, trams, subway and local ferries and planes that are used for public, school and community transport. It will help install measures needed to provide capacity and increased public confidence. These measures could include driver screens, hand sanitiser dispenser and fitting, high-performance air conditioning units or disinfectant fogging equipment.

Full details of the how the scheme will operate will be published on the Transport Scotland website with operators and local authorities provided with guidance on how to apply.

Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme

The Scottish Government has opened a new Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme. This year, the scheme will provide £9 million to help bus operators invest in ultra-low emission vehicles to help drive a green recovery out of the COVID-19 crisis while improving air quality.

The Scottish Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme is an evolution of the Scottish Government's Green Bus Fund. Through the Green Bus Fund, £17 million was invested between 2011 and 2018 to help operators overcome the initial capital costs of new buses. This scheme supported the introduction of nearly 500 cleaner buses across Scotland.

This new initiative focuses on ultra-low emission technologies (hydrogen electric or fully electric propulsion) which supports the Scottish Government's world-leading net zero targets, its commitment to delivering Low Emission Zones and the bold ambitions Scotland has for transport decarbonisation.

Full guidance on the Scottish Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme can be found on the Transport Scotland website: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/public-transport/buses/scottish-ultra-low-emission-bus-scheme/>

Other Scottish Government Funding

Bus

In addition to the new funding streams summarised above, the Scottish Government has helped support local bus services through the pandemic by maintaining concessionary travel reimbursement and BSOG payment at pre coronavirus levels. They continue to provide funding to support bus operators with maintaining bus services with another package to cover the period from 17 August until 8 November.

Active Travel

Places for Everyone: The Scottish Government has cut its match funding requirement for permanent active travel infrastructure which is administered by Sustrans through the Places for Everyone programme. Transport Scotland has said that after the closure of the Spaces for People fund for pop-up schemes, the fund for permanent active travel infrastructure will have a reduced match funding rate with 70% funding being provided for successful applications where it had previously been 50%. This will provide greater opportunity to apply for funding both to make permanent some of the temporary improvements funded through Spaces for People but also other permanent active travel infrastructure initiatives.

Smarter Choices Smarter Places

The Smarter Choices Smarter Places fund which is administered by Paths for All on behalf of Transport Scotland and provides support to local authorities and eligible organisations to encourage more active and sustainable travel choices. This fund has been adapted to reflect the impact of Covid-19 for both existing projects and new applications where measures which encourage positive travel behaviour as we move forward out of lockdown are being supported.

Conclusions

HITRANS welcomes the reduction, or in some cases the removal, of the match funding requirement to successfully apply for funding streams such as Spaces for People and the Bus Rapid Deployment Fund. However, it should be recognised that a lack of available resources to apply and deliver new non statutory initiatives can reduce the ability of local partner organisations to fully exploit these external funding opportunities.

In addition, the criteria for several of the Challenge Funds often prevents rural and remote areas from applying due to funding being targeted towards interventions that are specifically urban centric, such as congestion. Covid-19 has arguably impacted on rural transport services to a greater extent with the disparity in funding available to local and nationally funded elements of the transport network and services increasingly evident. In areas where the pre-

Covid level of services was infrequent or often just one service per day, the impact of reduced capacity on bus, rail, ferry and air services continues to be challenging with the cost to maintain even these lifeline levels of service increasingly difficult.

With recent travel demand indicating levels of private car use increasing towards pre Covid-19 levels while public transport remains very low, careful consideration of policy mechanisms to encourage people back to public transport is needed at the appropriate time within the Transport Transition Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report and consider opportunities for further applications or any representations
2. Consider how best to make representations in support of establishing support mechanisms that will assist local partners in tackling challenges specific to rural transport and those delivering them.

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – These challenge funds offer an opportunity for partner councils to ensure that the transition to low carbon transport alternatives is prioritised in the recovery from the impacts of Covid 19.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – Successful projects will support with a number of RTS objectives particularly relating to Improving active travel and low carbon infrastructure.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Comment – The reduction or removal of the requirement for match funding to apply for these funding streams is welcomed

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – support for sustainable travel modes is essential to ensuring that those without access to a private car are not disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. However, further funding support is needed to assist public transport solutions recover in remote and rural areas.

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Designation: Partnership Manager

Date: 1st September 2020