

BUS ADVISORY BOARD

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Bus Advisory Board held on Tuesday 23 November 2021 at 10.00 am

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

The Chair noted that the meetings of this Board are not subject to the statutory public meeting requirements and will therefore be held virtually, with a recording to be made and published on the Council's website. Members of the public can also observe virtually. The Chair reminded attendees that the role of this Board is to provide a formal structure for discussion and engagement between the local authority and bus operators.

There were apologies from Andrew Ardlely (South Western Railway) and Doug Claringbold (First West of England).

2 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 2

There were no public questions.

3 Terms of Reference - Agreement and Acceptance - Agenda Item 3

The Strategic Manager-Highways and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones, presented the draft TOR, which have been discussed in a previous informal meeting and were attached to the Agenda. The government guidance suggests that the Bus Advisory Board (bus operators and Local Authorities and partners) help to deliver the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme; it was proposed that this be an informal partnership working by consensus and by representation to improve services. It was further noted that there are interim arrangements in place to invite the representatives from bus user groups to take part until the Bus User and Stakeholder (BUS) Group can meet to formally elect a Chair and agree on bus user representation on the Bus Advisory Board.

The Strategic Manager proceeded to highlight one change in the draft TOR, specifically to Paragraph 4.3 regarding a Vice Chair; it is now felt that if the Chair is not available, an SCC officer can chair in his place. This paragraph will be amended.

It was further noted with respect to the BUS Group that their purpose is to seek and report the views of a wide number of groups, involving free and frank exchange to assist with implementing the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) once funding allocation is confirmed, and that the Bus User and Stakeholder group will be set up before Christmas.

Questions were then asked; the first was whether the issue of bus stations and other infrastructure would be involved in the transition to the unitary Council. The response was that it is early days and this is yet to be worked out, but it is assumed that all assets of the five Councils will be combined. Any assets included within the BSIP will be discussed with District Councils, and the details will emerge later.

The Bus Advisory Board members unanimously accepted the Terms of Reference.

4 Meeting Standards - to confirm the format and standards expected -
Agenda Item 4

The Service Manager-Government and Democratic Services, Michael Bryant, reiterated that all Bus Advisory Board meetings would be run virtually, as they are not subject to the 1972 Act requiring that members attend in person. As meetings are virtual, it was requested that anyone speaking identify themselves before doing so.

The Board were further informed that agendas, reports and recordings will be available on the SCC website; the Agenda will be published five clear days before the meetings, and any public questions must be submitted by three clear days before. Meetings will be run on a consensus of opinion approach.

The Bus Advisory Board noted the meeting standards.

5 EP Process Timeline - Agenda Item 5

The associate representative from WSP presented "Bus Back Better: Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme Process", first discussing the timeline for the process. He provided background information, noting the National Bus Strategy called Bus Back Better launched by the government on 15th March 2021, which seeks to provide more attractive, affordable, understandable, useable, reliable, and green bus services. The EP Plan and Scheme need to be prepared by the end of March 2022, which is a very intensive timeline.

The Bus Advisory Board noted the timeline.

6 Draft EP Plan and Scheme - Agenda Item 6

The associate representative from WSP continued with his presentation on the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme, which has six themes:

- Transport decarbonisation
- More extensive and frequent network
- Reduced travel costs
- Improved network coordination between all travel modes

- Easy access and reliability
- Comfortable network with improved facilities

It was highlighted that the EP is a means by which to deliver the BSIP following a statutory process in the DfT guidance, which uses the Bus Services Act of 2017 and updates from the National Bus Strategy, and that the EP Plan provides a vision and objective for services while the EP Scheme provides precise details of how the vision and objective will be achieved (e.g., bus stops, targets, etc.).

The Board were informed that an important aspect of the EP is the formal operator objection period of at least 28 days following preparation of the EP Plan and Scheme and notification to operators. It was noted that, as the timescale is very tight, any unforeseen amendments or changes must be avoided; this is why meetings and other engagement between the operators and the local transport authority (SCC in this case) are ongoing. The presentation then moved to the Formal Consultation, which will include all operators affected, organisations representing local passengers, other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals, Traffic Commissioners, the Chief of Police for each area, Transport Focus, the Competition and Market Authority, and any other persons as the authority thinks fit.

In the EP Scheme, the obligations of the LTA involve facilities (new physical assets) and measures (actions to support the BSIP such as lowering fares and subsidies). All of this is subject to the award of sufficient funding through the BSIP process, which SCC will provide. The obligations of the bus operators will be proposed once the EP Scheme is fully set out.

It was then noted that:

- In the EP Scheme, the obligations of the LTA involve facilities (new physical assets) and measures (actions to support the BSIP, such as lowering fares and subsidies). All of this is subject to the award of sufficient funding through the BSIP process, which SCC will provide. The obligations of the bus operators will be proposed once the EP Scheme is fully set out.
- LTA facilities include the above-mentioned more extensive and frequent network (priorities include addressing reliability and punctuality), safe and comfortable network (introducing a bus stop design guide and hierarchy model), and facilities which can provide wider access to information across the network.
- LTA measures will include SCC support of operators towards zero emissions to achieve transport decarbonisation, seeking a range of measures such as digital Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) to meet priorities for a more extensive and frequent network, support of operators for simpler fares and promotion of growth in order to reduce travel costs, working with operators to ensure acceptance of contactless payments for all fares by April 2022 as well as launching the Think Travel information portal in order to improve accessibility and reliability, support of new mobility hubs to improve the coordination of all

travel modes, and the establishment of measures to ensure the safety, comfort, security and confidence of users.

- Operator obligations will include vehicle standards, timetables changes to improve coordination between travel modes, and improvements to ticketing via contactless payments and simple fares, enhancement of frequency, limiting frequency (i.e., operators cannot change services included in the EP without consulting the Bus Advisory Board), and coordination with light and heavy rail services, coordination of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and other types of road transport.
- Variation mechanisms will allow for any change to the EP Scheme to be made by the proposal of a Board member, which will be followed by consideration of the Board and, if there is the unanimous support of the operators and SCC, approval by the Board.

A discussion of the presentation followed; the Service Manager-Transport Commissioning, Natasha Bates, spoke on the portal, which is due to be launched imminently. Questions and comments followed, including:

- It was enquired what would happen if only part of the funding were received, and if there were certain parts of the BSIP that were considered essential. It was responded that there are 24 line items which are ranked, and it is not certain how DfT will distribute the funds as it could be for specific items or it could be overall funding. Once the funding is announced, the priority order of proposals may need to be re-visited.
- It was suggested that the bus drivers need to be referenced during consultation with operators; it was replied that this should absolutely be done, especially as the drivers often have very useful information.
- It was asked if the visually impaired could obtain paper copies of the slides; the Service Manager-Governance and Democratic Services will ensure that these are provided, and noted that Democratic Services could be contacted for any other requirements of this type.
- It was noted that there are no buses still running when late theatre performances end, and it was queried whether there could be a circular route covering villages as well as Taunton town centre. It was responded that if the funding is received, there will in fact be a core network plus later evening services daily until 11 pm using Digital Response Services, as leisure and social events are a key in the BSIP.
- It was suggested that dropped kerbs for wheelchair users should be included in the EP Scheme for equality and diversity purposes, that the Falcon service should be included as it is the only 24/7 service in Somerset, that First Bus should better coordinate its services with trains, that bus stations in larger

towns like Taunton should have required standards such as toilets and waiting facilities, and that certain corridors and cross-boundary services should be extended. It was replied that everything mentioned has been identified and covered in the EP Plan, but it will all depend on the funding allocation. It was added that there are already national legal requirements for equality and diversity.

The Chair noted that there seemed to be a broad consensus for the EP Plan and Scheme moving forward; this is the initial plan and scheme, and the consensus is that this is the method that should be moved forward.

The Bus Advisory Board received and discussed the presentation and agreed that the EP Plan and Scheme should move forward.

7 **Wider Governance Issues** - Agenda Item 7

The Strategic Manager-Highways and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones, gave a verbal update on wider governance arrangements, noting the need to set up a Bus User Stakeholder group and get views from passengers, as well as the need to set up focus groups and ask representatives to take part in the Bus Advisory Board.

It was noted that, in terms of the EP Plan and Scheme, the documents will be published very soon, so bus operators need to consider all of the content and advise the Board if there are any legal issues.

In the discussion, it was advised that there had been good working relationships with bus driver unions, and it was asked if there should be a formal mechanism to speak to them, specifically the policy officers. It was also suggested that more regional lobbying for funds should be done. It was responded that it was a good idea to work with unions and drivers, but it should be done through the operators, and that there was great involvement already in South West lobbying (the Chair noted that he would be in London next week lobbying with respect to rural transport).

The Bus Advisory Board received and discussed the presentation and agreed with the governance arrangements.

8 **Any Other Business** - Agenda Item 8

There was no other business.

9 **Next Meeting Date** - Agenda Item 9

The Board were informed that the next two meetings will be held on 16 December 2021 and 18 January 2022, with meeting held monthly.

(The meeting ended at 11.15 am)

CHAIRMAN