



## **Strategic Transport Leadership Board**

24 September 2021

### **Agenda Item 7: Regional Bus Study**

#### *Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the meeting:**

- a) Receive a presentation on the Regional Bus Study**
- b) Note the emerging findings of the Regional Bus Study**
- c) Discuss the key challenges and opportunities for bus services in the Heartland**

#### **1. Strategic Context**

- 1.1. EEH has committed through the region's transport strategy to ensure proposals brought forward for the development of the transport system reduce reliance on the private car; by promoting the use of public transport and shared modes, including bus, scheduled coach and rail.
- 1.2. Developing opportunities to grow bus mode share is at the forefront of EEH's approach to connectivity and associated investment plans; challenging the region to achieve a net zero carbon transport system by 2040. To indicate EEH's progress against meeting these principles, the region has committed to increasing the number and percentage of journeys made between 5km-50km by public transport.
- 1.3. As a region, emissions from transport in the Heartland are higher than the national average, and the rate at which emissions are increasing is almost double the UK average. The environmental implications at a local level of our current transport system is reflected in the number of 'air quality management areas' in the region. Increasing the number of journeys made by bus will help to address poor air quality, cut carbon and reduce the number of avoidable deaths.
- 1.4. On 15 March 2021 the government published its 'Bus Back Better: national bus strategy' for England. This national strategy sets out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England through a far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered.
- 1.5. The strategy aims to rejuvenate local bus services, making them attractive for passengers, cheaper, simpler, faster, more reliable and greener. It acknowledges the years of decline in bus patronage and has committed £3 billion of investment over five years to achieve this.
- 1.6. The strategy places a requirement on Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to develop bus service improvement plans (BSIPs) and establish either an 'enhanced partnership' or develop a bus franchising assessment. A BSIP will set out a vision for bus improvements and the key interventions needed to deliver it. Plans need not include an exhaustive list of specific interventions, but might, for instance, identify that a bus lane or bus priority is needed along a corridor. The enhanced partnership will contain the detail of how the plan will be put into action.

- 1.7. LTAs will have by now decided which statutory path to follow: either pursuing an enhanced partnership or develop a bus franchising assessment.
- 1.8. By 31 October 2021, LTAs must publish their BSIP. From April 2022, LTAs will need to have their Enhanced Partnership scheme in place or following the statutory process to develop a bus franchising assessment.
- 1.9. As a region, our spatial/economic geography and pattern of travel give rise to a high number of journeys made between local transport authority boundaries. It is therefore important that BSIPs take account of the demand for cross boundary bus provision to enable people to connect with employment, education and leisure opportunities across a wider geography.
- 1.10. Guidance to LTAs and bus operators responsible for developing BSIPs is primarily focused on the need to strengthen local bus provision within LTA boundaries. Arguably less consideration is given to the need to plan and invest in longer distance, cross-boundary public transport connectivity that is not currently served by rail.
- 1.11. The guidance advises that where there is significant bus network overlap, LTAs are expected to collaborate to resolve cross-boundary issues and/or develop a multi-LTA BSIP. EEH expects the outputs of the Regional Bus Study to act as a basis to support those discussions where applicable.
- 1.12. The allocation of BSIP funding means that regional initiatives will rely on cross-boundary cooperation and the coordination of corridor prioritisation within each authority's area. Acknowledging the pressures placed on local transport authorities by the national bus strategy, officers agreed EEH should provide regional support to the process. This support will help strengthen the development of BSIPs being developed by partners respectively. Its focus is to identify cross-boundary bus routes/corridors that have the greatest potential to deliver the ambitions of the transport strategy.

## **2. Regional Bus Study**

- 2.1. In response to the appetite from partners for EEH to provide technical input and support into the BSIP process, EEH has commissioned Atkins to develop a regional bus study. The aim of the study is to ensure regional bus services (cross-boundary) with the greatest potential to drive modal shift away from private vehicle use are considered in emerging bus service improvement plans developed by EEH partners.
- 2.2. The outcome of this study will be a report that will identify the gaps in the region's strategically important bus/coach network coverage to provide an evidence base that will support future investment. It will identify a list of cross-boundary priority bus corridors which, by virtue of not being adequately served by rail, could become the focus of bus service improvements. To support the technical analysis, the report will also set out a supporting vision and strategy for regional bus services in EEH based on user and industry needs.
- 2.3. The methodology was agreed by officers and comprises two, concurrent, but integrated workstreams. The first workstream is corridor identification. This has involved focusing on network analysis (point-to-point flows) using mobile phone data overlaid with the bus network to identify potential regional bus/coach corridors. The second workstream involves developing a regional bus strategy/vision based on user and industry needs.
- 2.4. A workshop was held with partners and DfT officials on 29 July and 7 September during which considerations for the region's bus and coach network was discussed. During both these meetings, discussions were also held on the development of authorities' respective BSIPs.



- 2.5. A workshop was also held with EEH Bus Operators Association on 16 September 2021. Work is concluding on the technical analysis and cross boundary corridors of interest have begun to emerge. Outputs are being discussed with local partners and the EEH Bus Operators Association to validate the findings and consider opportunities to explore their potential further as part of the BSIP and enhanced partnership/ franchising process.
- 2.6. A draft report will be issued week commencing 27 September 2021 which will be discussed and agreed by officers and the EEH Bus Operators Association. A final report will be issued in early October 2021.

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