



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

TUESDAY, 10 MAY 2022

BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP

Report of: Rick O'Farrell, Interim Executive Director of Regeneration

Cabinet Member: Wojciech Ploszaj, Portfolio holder for Business

Purpose of report

This report set out the details of the recent Government announcement relating to indicative allocations for the delivery of regional Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) and to provide an update on the development of the Enhanced Partnership (EP) for buses in the North East and its implications on the Council's future responsibilities.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- **welcome indicative allocation awarded by the Government to the delivery of the BSIP for the North East;**
- **authorise the Leader, in both his role as Leader and Northumberland's representative on the North East Joint Transport Committee, in consultation with the Interim Executive Director of Regeneration, to negotiate and agree the draft Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme(s) on behalf of the Authority whilst recognising that the Council's current responsibilities will not be diminished by the governance of this EP; and**
- **agree to receive further reports on the progressive development of the Enhanced Bus Partnership and its associated schemes as the implications for Northumberland and the Council emerge.**

Key issues

In March 2021, the Government published its National Bus Strategy (NBS), which set out an ambitious vision to dramatically improve bus services (outside London) through greater local leadership and the creation and funding of Enhanced Bus Partnerships.

The NBS required that, by the end of June 2021, local transport authorities (LTAs) commit to developing an Enhanced Partnership (EP) and publish a statutory notice to that effect. Furthermore, local transport authorities had to develop and publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and submit the plan to the DfT during October 2021, setting out the outcomes they wish to see delivered through the Enhanced Partnership together with a request for funding.

Following review of this BSIP submission, DfT have awarded the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) an indicative funding allocation of £163.5 million toward the establishment of an Enhanced Bus partnership and the funding of a series of initiatives aimed at improving the regional public transport offering. This funding is for financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25 with £73.5m for capital investment and £90.0m for revenue investment.

To access this funding, DfT has now confirmed that the draft Enhancement Partnership Plan for the North East needs to be submitted by the JTC by 30 June 2022. The DfT will subsequently review the EP and either, provide feedback or agree it meets expectations and confirm final funding allocation.

BACKGROUND

National Bus Strategy

1. The Government announced in March 2021 that funding for bus services would be dependent on authorities' and bus operators' participation in new arrangements. The National Bus Strategy (NBS) sets out the Government's requirement for each area to publish a BSIP by 31 October 2021, and to have an EP with bus operators drafted by 30 June 2022.
2. From 1 July 2021, all government funding streams for buses is only available to LTA areas that have committed to entering an EP with their bus operators (this includes both Covid-19 support grants and bus subsidy to operators which has funded bus operators to continue running essential services throughout the pandemic, and which continues to fund the revenue shortfall between actual fares revenue and pre Covid-19 fare revenue). In addition, Government have stated that they will also take account of a region's performance against the NBS when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.
3. The NBS and its funding support provides the opportunity to start delivering against the objectives set out in the region's Transport Plan; and will help buses to play an even greater part in enabling economic growth, achieving better and more equal outcomes for communities and contributing to healthy and vibrant places to live and work in the region. Accordingly, in April 2021, the North East JTC issued formal notice of its intent to prepare an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes for bus services and began working with the local transport authorities and local bus operators to pursue this.
4. Public engagement, billed as the 'Big Bus Conversation', was carried out over the Summer of 2021 on the JTC's Vision for Buses, and feedback from this engagement was used to prepare the region's BSIP, which was subsequently approved in October 2021. The plan sets out how transport bodies and bus operators will work with local highway authorities and local communities to plan and deliver a bus network where buses are better coordinated and easier to understand and use.
5. As such, it sets out a far-reaching programme of potential measures to improve bus services in the North East, which covers both revenue and capital costs to deliver the measures over three financial years from 2022/23 to 2024/25. The BSIP also provides the basis for the development of the more detailed proposals required as part of an EP.
6. Following review of the BSIP submission, DfT have awarded the North East JTC an indicative funding allocation of £163.5 million toward the establishment of an Enhanced Bus partnership and the funding of a series of initiatives aimed at

improving the regional public transport offering. This allocation makes provision for £73.5m of capital investment and £90.0m of revenue investment.

Enhanced Bus Partnership for the North East

7. The DfT defines an Enhanced Partnership as follows: “An Enhanced Partnership (EP) is an agreement between a local transport authority (LTA) and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. It includes a clear vision of the improvements that the EP is aiming for (known as an EP plan) and accompanying actions to achieve them (set out in one of more EP schemes). The local transport authority has formal responsibility for making the scheme, but at set points in the process they can only proceed with their proposals if they have the support of a defined proportion of local bus operators.”
8. To inform the development of the EP Scheme drafting, initial work has taken place to identify the prioritised order of schemes to be included. The outcome of this is a list in ranked order with the eventual content influenced by the indicative funding available. The results, detailed in the table below, have been split between revenue and capital schemes and ranked according to deliverability criteria and their performance in addressing the Key Performance Indicators in the BSIP.

Revenue Projects	Capital Projects
Under 19 Ticket <i>(Subsidised travel for under 19's)</i>	Intelligent Transport Systems <i>(Corridors and Realtime upgrades)</i>
Network Improvements <i>(Superbus, Rural, Interurban and Connect routes)</i>	Bus Priority Corridor Package
All day Operator Ticket <i>(Multi operator/modal travel with fares cap)</i>	Park and Ride development and delivery
Night Network	Tranche 2, Bus Corridor works
Tourism Development Routes	Spot Fixes on the Highway Network

9. An EP Plan and Scheme(s) are currently being developed by Transport North East (TNE), working with Local Authorities, Nexus and bus operators, in accordance with Government guidance. The final EP Plan and scheme needs to be submitted by the end of June with the key milestones in this process being:
 - By the 2 May, submit a DfT specified summary table setting out a costed, credible and regionally set of agreed projects what the funding allocation will be used to deliver
 - By 30 June, submit an updated DfT summary table; the draft EP Plan and Scheme; and any additional documents for commitments which are not included within the EP; together with confirmation from section 151 officers that the funding represents value for money

- The DfT will then review the EP and either, provide feedback or agree it meets expectations and confirm final funding allocation.
10. Given this timeline, Cabinet is requested to give authority to the Leader, both in his role as Leader and Northumberland’s representative on the North East Joint Transport Committee, in consultation with the Interim Executive Director of Regeneration, to negotiate and agree the draft Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme(s) on behalf of the Authority.

Conceptual Governance Arrangements

11. Throughout the preparation of the draft EP scheme, TNE has been reminded of the need to ensure that the respective decision-making powers of the JTC, Nexus, and the County Councils, and where appropriate Local Authorities in their capacity as highways authorities with costed, credible and regionally agreed projects. As such, the governance arrangements of the EP should not diminish this to any extent.
12. On this basis, the overarching governance principle is that there are no decision-making powers aligned to any bodies which will make up the operating structure of the EP; and that these bodies should be focused on building consensus as to the best way to proceed on issues. Once consensus is reached on a matter, if a decision is required by, for an example, Northumberland County Council, the matter must be passed forward to Northumberland County Council for a decision to be reached through its established governance.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy	This approach will provide ongoing support to transport providers during the Covid-19 recovery phase and support the economic recovery of the region, as well as supporting the Council’s strategic objective to connecting people by provided access to education, employment, and social activities.
Finance and value for money	The North East’s BSIP set out an ambitious request for Government funding for the delivery of measures relevant to bus services. Entering an EP is a requirement to receive ongoing Government funding for bus services. Future reports will be brought to Cabinet for decision making where the EP requires any financial support from the Council for specific schemes.
Legal	The overarching principle of the EP is that there are no decision-making powers aligned to the any of bodies which will make up the governance structure of the EP; and that these bodies should be focused on building consensus as to the best way to proceed on issues. Once consensus is reached on a matter, if a decision is

	required by, for an example, a Local Authority, the matter must be passed forward to that the Local Authority for a decision to be reached through that Local Authority's established governance.
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities	(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Implementation of the EP will assist in reducing social exclusion by improving access for the young, elderly, unemployed/low waged and people with disabilities.
Risk Assessment	The main risk associated with the programme is that any significant underspend or failure to deliver schemes that have external funding linked to them may lead to a loss of that funding and jeopardise the potential to secure additional funding in future years.
Crime & Disorder	Proposals within the BSIP, to be developed through the EP, will assist in improving safety and security for the travelling public
Customer Consideration	None
Carbon reduction	The EP will be a crucial element in providing a sustainable transport system capable of supporting Northumberland's environmental, social, and economic objectives. It seeks to reduce car dependence and increase sustainable travel, thereby contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions.
Health and Wellbeing	Improving opportunities for sustainable travel through improved bus services will encourage more activity and benefit health by improving air quality.
Wards	All wards

Background papers:

- [National Bus Strategy](#)
- [National bus strategy: bus service improvement plans – guidance to local authorities and bus operators](#)

Report sign off

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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