West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Report to:	Transport Committee
Date:	15 March 2019
Subject:	**Bus Information Strategy**
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Is this a key decision?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	☐ Yes	☒ No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:		

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 This report presents a draft Bus Information Strategy (Appendix 1) and seeks the Committee's endorsement of the key objectives and approval to consult wider with stakeholders.

2 Information

Policy Context

2.1 The Combined Authority has a duty under the Transport Act 2000 to determine what bus information should be made available to the public and the way in which it should be made available. The Combined Authority fulfil this duty by publishing a five year Bus Information Strategy.

2.2 This latest draft proposes to replace the Bus Information Strategy adopted in 2012 and sits alongside the Digital Payment for Travel Strategy, which Transport Committee endorsed in January 2019. These strategies will help to deliver the key objectives of the West Yorkshire Transport Strategy 2040, particularly the target of a 25% increase in bus patronage across West Yorkshire;

2.3   The draft Bus Information Strategy addresses a number of policies within the Transport Strategy 2040 through the provision of accessible and reliable travel information, which presents the bus system as a single network, improving passenger information for greater availability and ease of use. Working with partners the strategy seeks to develop new easy-to-access customer information, allowing greater choice between travel modes, and re-planning of journeys if disruption occurs, while ensuring travel information is available in a number of non-digital and accessible formats.

2.4   The draft strategy also endorses the Smart Futures core theme of the Transport Strategy 2040 by harnessing the advancement in smart technologies and provision of open data to further transform and enhance the information offer

2.5   The objectives of our emerging Inclusive Industrial Strategy; and the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan have also been considered in the drafting of the strategy.

2.6   Whilst the proposed strategy fulfils an obligation with regard to bus information, it is important that activities to deliver it are undertaken within a wider provision of travel information across all modes. For example information on line journey planning tools should enable customers to choose between the full range of options available for their journey walking, cycling, bus rail and road. Similarly bus and rail information should enable people to plan a journey using both modes.

What have we achieved over the past five years?

2.7   A number of enhancements have been delivered as a result of the previous Bus Information Strategy that have improved the information offering for passengers and have demonstrated a predicted shift to digital channels. This has been delivered at a reduced operating cost for the taxpayer and increased the amount of information being consumed by customers while maintaining overall customer satisfaction.

Improvement	
Webchat	Webchat was introduced within the Metroline contact centre in 2015 offering customers the opportunity to chat with customer service advisors via the website to obtain the information they required. The introduction of webchat facilitates a self-service culture as agents are able to demonstrate where on the website information can be obtained with the aim of encouraging future un-aided use of the site. Metroline handle over 11,000 webchats per year, which facilitates future self-service as customers are assisted around the website. This approach has proven to be fruitful with increasing numbers visiting the website and over 650,000 timetable downloads taking place every month.

Improvement	
Social Media	Use of social media was in its infancy at the production of the previous Bus Information Strategy boasting 6,000 followers across the Twitter and Facebook platforms. Now in its eighth year of operation, social media is a key element of the service offering real time information about planned and un-planned disruption to the network. A co-ordinated approach with operators and partners has been established to disseminate and amplify information to ensure maximum reach to passengers. Our social media platforms now have c. 40,000 engaged followers.
Website	The WYMetro.com website was constructed in a 'responsive design template', which enabled the automatic scaling of the site across all devices. Research in the production of the previous strategy had predicted that the majority of interactions would be via mobile devices. There are over 800,000 user sessions every month on the site, with over 60% of traffic to wymetro.com is via mobile devices. The website was also moved to a more secure hosting environment to improve stability during periods of high demand such as bad weather/severe disruption.
Online timetables	Development work was carried out to present timetables on the website in XML format to make viewing easier for customers using mobile devices to view timetables. Over 650,000 timetables are viewed via the website every month. This figure has increased as the provision of paper timetables has decreased showing a direct correlation between availability of the outputs.
Journey Planner	A new journey planner was introduced incorporating mapping information, which has enhanced the provision of information via this channel. Approximately 50% of visitors to the website use the journey planner.
Disruption Information	More effective use of the website, social media and Real Time screens to present disruption information has increased the reach of key service information that has enabled customers to keep informed.
Open data	The combined Authority has made timetable and real time information available via national open data sources that is being used by third party apps to provide customers with service information. Real Time information processed by the Combined Authority is viewed via third party applications over four million times every month. This approach has enabled apps to be developed and made available to customers at no additional cost to the taxpayer or resource from the Combined Authority.
QR codes/NFC tags	All c. 14,000 stops and shelters within West Yorkshire have had a QR code/NFC tag installed at every stop, which enables customers to access Real Time information for their stop. To date over two million scans have been recorded with over 90,000 being recorded every single month.
Information at every stop	Printed information has been installed and maintained at all c. 14,000 stops and shelters. It was previously only displayed at 4,000 shelters.

Improvement	
Information Points	6 Self-service information points have been installed at 6 stations, which enable customers to plan journeys, access service and timetable information via a touch screen.

Key objectives for the Bus Information Strategy

2.8   The proposed Bus Information Strategy 2019-24 seeks to build upon the significant progress of the 2012-17 Bus Information Strategy that sought to encourage the use of self-serve options for customers obtaining journey information while ensuring the provision of information via traditional sources for those who still required them.

2.9   In order to achieve the ambitious targets the Combined Authority and partners have set, a new generation of customers need to be attracted to use public transport and information is one of the key components to attract new users through the provision of dynamic 'always-live' information via a range of channels that makes public transport the obvious choice. We must endeavour to replicate and enhance the other services they consume online.

2.10   The way in which people travel is changing. Over the past five years there has been a change in the bus travel trends which has included growth in the journeys made by young people, set against an overall decline in levels of bus patronage over the period 2004/5 – 2014/15. How people wish to pay for travel and consume information is changing too. The West Yorkshire Tracker survey has shown that more people than ever before own a smartphone and use it to access internet content – in West Yorkshire all respondents to the survey aged 16-44 had access to a mobile phone and about 95% had internet access via a mobile phone .

2.11   A draft Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 which sets out the following key objectives in Section 5:

1.   **Digital First** – focus delivery to mobile devices
2.   **Always Live** – up to date information on the move
3.   **Customer driven** – the customer selects the information they need
4.   **Network-wide** – fixed information at stops and interchanges
5.   **Inclusive** – everyone has access according to need and requirement.
6.   **Cost-effective** – for the local taxpayer

2.12   In developing the Bus Information Strategy 2019-24 a number of considerations have been made to establish the direction of travel.

- Customer feedback and research has identified that the internet is increasingly becoming the first place people of all ages go to find out about when and where buses operate.

- Enabling buses to be easy to use is key to growing their use. A focus is therefore needed on providing information about buses to those who currently use them infrequently.

- Young people have been identified as the growth market which will drive delivery of policy targets to grow bus patronage– the information offer needs to be designed to meet their needs.

- Public funding for bus information is limited – we need to be innovative to reach customers via cost effective channels – online/smartphone enable this.

- The emerging Bus Alliance presents the opportunity for reviewing activities and cost sharing agreements with operators.

- The importance of providing reliable up to date information to customers will increase as we manage the short term disruption caused by the significant investment planned in the transport infrastructure over the coming five years

- Those who are not able to interact with digital information need to be able to access the information they need via a cost-effective solution.

- The policy objectives of the Transport Strategy 2040 and the West Yorkshire Bus Strategy 2040.

2.13 Adapting the provision of information to bus passengers to meet changing demand requires the Combined Authority to re assess its role in delivering information to the customer The role of the public sector in providing public transport information is changing as people access information on mobile devices through third party digital services like Google. The new strategy seeks to place the Combined Authority as more of an enabler than a direct provider.

Under the previous strategy the ITA/Metro was the major provider of information services. The new strategy proposes to place the promotion of services and products with the bus operator with the Combined Authority ensuring a network wide availability of information and, as digital becomes the primary means of delivery, curating the data necessary for delivery by other parties. The strategy suggests the Combined Authority will need to play a co-ordinating role as the provision of travel advice in times of disruption becoming increasingly important. Section 9 of the Strategy sets out how provision and roles are proposed to change.

Projects and next steps

2.14 This Strategy has been developed to reflect a changing environment. It proposes a list of projects to be delivered in the coming 3-5 years together with a series of immediate next steps to be delivered in 2019/20. Requests for capital funding for such projects would be submitted in a separate capital request report.

2.15   Consultation will be carried out with stakeholders to obtain views on the draft Strategy in Appendix 1 that will further inform the strategy details. This will take place throughout the summer and a final version of the strategy, with consultation summary, will be presented to the Transport Committee in Autumn 2019. Equality Impact Assessment of the final proposals will be carried out during this period.

2.16   The Combined Authority has set its Budget and Business Plan for 2019/20 which incorporates the following actions in support of the emerging Bus Information Strategy. Work will start on these at the same time as engagement on the wider Strategy:

- **Digital** – consider linking to customers on wymetro.com to third party journey planner tools (eg Traveline or Google) rather than the current bespoke tool.
- **On the Network** – adopt a new approach to signposting people to bus services initially in Leeds funded though Connecting Leeds but extended to other towns and cities. Tailor the provision of information provided at bus stops to customer need**.**
- **Face-to-face** – refurbishment of Travel Centres to adopt the self-service approach used in retail banking
- **Print** – develop printed timetable provision to replace current booklets. Responsibility for printed material promoting bus services, including timetables will be with the bus operator. The Combined Authority will remain responsible for network wide printed information.

2.17   Technologies are changing in a fast moving environment and it will be necessary to keep this Strategy under continued development. An updated version of the Strategy will be presented to Transport Committee together with an updated work programme and finalised set of KPIs.

2.18   The annual tracker survey will be used to monitor the performance of the strategy measuring usage and satisfaction across outputs in addition to wider patronage increase KPIs.

3   Financial Implications

3.1   The Combined Authority set its 2019/20 budget on 14 February 2019 based upon a reduction of £1million in the Transport Levy. Cost effectiveness is a key objective of the draft Bus Information Strategy which aims to reduce the net cost to the taxpayer of providing information.

3.2   The Strategy seeks to deliver a clearer identification of those costs which are appropriate to the Combined Authority's role and those which should be borne by bus operators. The accompanying report on the IT Block Programme identifies where the Combined Authority would fund capital schemes which enable the delivery of enhanced information services identified in the strategy.

4   Legal Implications

4.1   There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5   Staffing Implications

5.1   There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report. A delivery plan will be developed for the projects identified as part of the Strategy and this will be presented to a future Transport Committee meeting for approval.

6   External Consultees

6.1   Consultation has been undertaken with external stakeholders (including West Yorkshire Ticketing Company and bus operators) to help shape the objectives and projects included in this draft Strategy. A wider engagement with stakeholders and interested parties will proceed prior to presenting a final strategy for consideration by the Committee later in 2019.

7   Recommendations

7.1   That the Committee endorses the key objectives within the Bus Information Strategy as summarised in paragraph 2.8 of this report.

7.2   That the Committee endorses the next steps set out in Section 2.13 of this report.

7.3   That the Committee approves the issue for wider stakeholder engagement of the draft Bus Information Strategy in Appendix 1.

8   Background Documents

None.

9   Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Bus Information Strategy.