

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 14 October 2022

Subject: **Bus Network Plan - development update**

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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Transport Committee on the development of a bus network vision and implementation plan, which will inform deployment of Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding and the Combined Authority's response to ongoing commercial challenges faced by the bus industry.

2. Information

Background

Ambitions for an inclusive bus system

- 2.1 The existing commercially-led bus network is failing to deliver what the West Yorkshire region needs. Bus use is in long-term decline and struggling to recover fully from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Increasing public sector funding support is therefore required to maintain even the existing network of services which is, ultimately, not delivering on our ambitions for patronage growth, modal shift and to support inclusive economic growth region-wide.
- 2.2 Core to the Combined Authority's ambitions, as set out in the West Yorkshire BSIP, is to support a safe and inclusive bus system that better connects

communities across the region, particularly those in areas of high deprivation and rural areas. This means supporting bus passengers throughout their end-to-end journeys and meeting people's different travel needs / demands.

- 2.3 The existing network has been shaped by historic travel patterns and has best served the needs of people trying to travel in and out of the region's major urban centres at traditional peak times (7am-9am, 4pm-6pm).
- 2.4 Our ambition for the bus network in the future is for it to better meet people's more complex travel needs, supporting people such as parents and caregivers who travel to different locations / make numerous stops throughout their day's travel or shift workers who need to travel in the early morning or late at night.

BSIP commitments

- 2.5 As such, the West Yorkshire BSIP sets out ambitions for delivery of an enhanced and more cohesive bus network – which takes people where they need to go, when they need to go, and caters for the complexity of modern travel patterns and different passengers' need. This included the commitment to develop a 5-year network plan of improvements which will include:
- Expansion of the high frequency 'core network' – so more people live near a bus stop where a service arrives at least every 15 minutes.
 - Improvements to the regularity and consistency of less frequent services.
 - Increasing services in the early morning, evenings and at night-time.
 - Increasing services in rural, out-of-town and economically deprived areas.
 - Local "SuperBus" networks, with cheaper fares and priority on the roads.
 - More pilots of demand responsive FlexiBus services.
- 2.6 The BSIP included specific targets for improvements to network frequency by 2025 as set out Table 1.

Table 1 – BSIP targets for bus network frequency by 2025

Network	Weekday service hours	Current	By 2025
Core	12am-5am	As required	As required
	5am-7am	Every 30 minutes	At least every 15 minutes
	7am-7pm	At least every 15 minutes	At least every 10 minutes
	7pm-9pm	Every 30 minutes	At least every 15 minutes

	9pm-12pm	Every 30 minutes	Every 30 minutes
Other services	12am-5am	As required	As required
	5am-7am	As required	Every 30 minutes
	7am-7pm	Every 20,30,60 minutes	Every 20, 30 minutes
	7pm-9pm	As required	Every 30 minutes
	9pm-12pm	As required	As required

- 2.7 More information is available on the Combined Authority's ambitions for the West Yorkshire bus network in section 4.3 of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Bus network development plan

- 2.8 As reported at the meeting of Transport Committee in July 2022, the Combined Authority is developing the five-year network plan in detail. The approach being undertaken is as follows:
- **Financial Sustainability of the Current Network** - outputs of the Department for Transport (DfT) required review.
 - **Gap analysis & priorities for connectivity** - this is a mapping exercise to identify the areas that are currently poorly served by bus at present and to establish priority areas for improvement
 - **Establish accessibility standards** – this will establish standards of connectivity for communities upon which to plan the future network.
 - **Design the aspirational “to be” network** – this will set out the most effective and efficient way of ensuring each community has access to a viable bus service.
 - **Network Development Plan** – this will set out a five-year plan to work towards delivery of the ‘to be’ network. The first phase will be an implementation plan for deployment of the funding allocated in BSIP.
- 2.9 The plan will ultimately help the Combined Authority to understand its aspirations for the regional bus network. It will also help us shape how we invest the approx. £31m BSIP funding allocated (over three financial years) to transform the network and the annual tendered services budget, as well as respond to potential service cuts by commercial operators when Bus Recovery Grant funding ends in 2023.

- 2.10 Furthermore, the key outcome of this will be the Combined Authority investing in the network in a way that is more specifically tailored to the needs of our communities, and supportive of ambitions to improve the socio-economic benefits that the bus system offers the region.

Network funding support

- 2.11 Bus services have been sustained throughout the pandemic by a combination of Government and Local Government funding. A Government condition of Covid funding was to undertake a review, jointly with bus operators, of the financial sustainability of the bus network following the predicted end of Covid funding in October 2022. This revealed 11% of bus mileage would not be commercially viable when funding ends.
- 2.12 Bus operators subsequently gave notice to the Combined Authority of intended service cuts and reductions when funding ended in October. A total of 100 services would have been affected with 24 routes withdrawn.
- 2.13 On 19 August Government announced that funding will be extended for a further six months. Whilst the extended funding has prevented a widespread loss of service in October 2022, unless there is a further overall uplift in passenger revenues, this risk to the network remains albeit at a later date. Furthermore, operators have still proceeded with smaller scale cuts to service provision despite the funding extension.
- 2.14 Inflationary pressures are also being felt in the bus network increasing the cost of operation which will impact on service viability. It has been necessary to increase the Combined Authority budget for socially necessary services in response to this.
- 2.15 It will be necessary to complete the development of the Bus Network Plan by the end of the calendar year to shape the programme of service improvements funded by BSIP to ensure they are implemented by March 2023. Following this a full review of socially necessary bus services, and the tendered services criteria by which the Combined Authority chooses to fund them, will proceed during 2023/24.

Activity update

- 2.16 As part of the development of the bus network plan, a number of specific points are currently being worked through by the Combined Authority. These include:
- The socio-economic and other factors we should compare existing bus provision against to identify the key areas requiring improved bus connectivity.
 - The principles and standards we should use to define good/aspirational connectivity.
 - The criteria we should use to prioritise investment in the network.

- The long list of proposed network improvements – including new and enhanced services / routes.

2.17 These topics are explained in more detail in the following sections of this report.

Bus connectivity standards and principles

2.18 The Combined Authority is working to set standards and principles for what it judges to be good bus connectivity / accessibility. Elements being considered include:

- Distance / walking time to bus stop
- Service frequency
- Journey time to destination
- Service changes required to destination
- Time / day of the week
- Network type (core or wider networks)
- Journey speed / congestion
- Journey time / speed relative to car travel

2.19 This will help the Combined Authority to define which journeys we should be seeking to fulfil by bus and which would be better served by other modes, as well as the standards people should expect, attracting them to bus where it is appropriate to their travel needs.

2.20 The following points are provided as examples of what policy positions may be agreed on through this work:

2.21 **Good bus connectivity** between your current location and destination means:

- The bus stop is 400m or less away.
- The service frequency is every 30/15/10 minutes (max 30 min wait at the bus stop).
- Destination reachable in 60mins or better.
- Requires 2 service changes or less.
- Journey time is 125% or better relative to the same journey by car.

2.22 We should support enhancing services to provide **good bus connectivity** on local journeys:

- Over 1 mile and under 25 miles.
- Between the five district centres.
- From town centres and other strategic locations to their nearest district centres.
- Between 5am-9pm Monday to Friday, 7am-7pm Saturday/Sunday.

2.23 The standards will be developed further through engagement with stakeholders, including operators and district officers, as well as by public feedback from the Mayor's Big Bus Chat engagement process before being brought to Transport Committee for approval.

Gap analysis and identification of key areas for improved connectivity

- 2.24 Work has also been ongoing to understand and evidence existing bus connectivity across the region.
- 2.25 This data-led work has sought to understand connectivity (essentially using data to map where bus passengers can travel to within 15, 30 and 60 minutes) from different locations across the region via the core and non-core networks; during weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays; and at different hours of the day, including early morning, the AM and PM peaks, and late evenings.
- 2.26 Work is now underway to identify priority areas for improved bus connectivity by scoring existing bus service provision alongside other factors. Factors include levels of deprivation; population density and predicted housing growth; employment opportunities; levels of disposable income and income spent on travel; existing local bus patronage and commercial sustainability; local car ownership levels; and connectivity to public services and other modes of public transport.
- 2.27 The key output of this work will be a data-based scoring of the need for improved bus connectivity for all areas across the region and provide evidence for the next stages of the network plan's development.

Route suggestions long list and funding prioritisation

- 2.28 The next major stage of work involves the development of a long list of suggestions for new or enhanced services / routes, and the process for prioritising investment into these – which will ultimately help define the five-year network plan.
- 2.29 A long list of suggestions is in development and has been built initially from proposals provided by the Combined Authority's Transport Services team, District Councils, local bus operators and the public via the Mayor's Big Bus Chat.
- 2.30 It is proposed to prioritise funding these services via two distinct frameworks and budgets:
- **The BSIP funding criteria** – aimed at promoting transformative enhancements, which radically improve local bus connectivity in line with the strategic ambitions outlined in the BSIP.
 - **The tendered services funding criteria** – aimed at providing, and raising the basic standards of, socially necessary but commercially unviable bus connectivity across the region. This will update the existing standards which the Combined Authority used to determine investment of its tendered services budget - and thus may reshape the existing tendered network - with a greater focus on community need and inclusivity.

- 2.31 The exact details and methodology that will inform the frameworks are still in development but the different factors it is proposed that the two criteria's will value are outlined in Table 2 below.

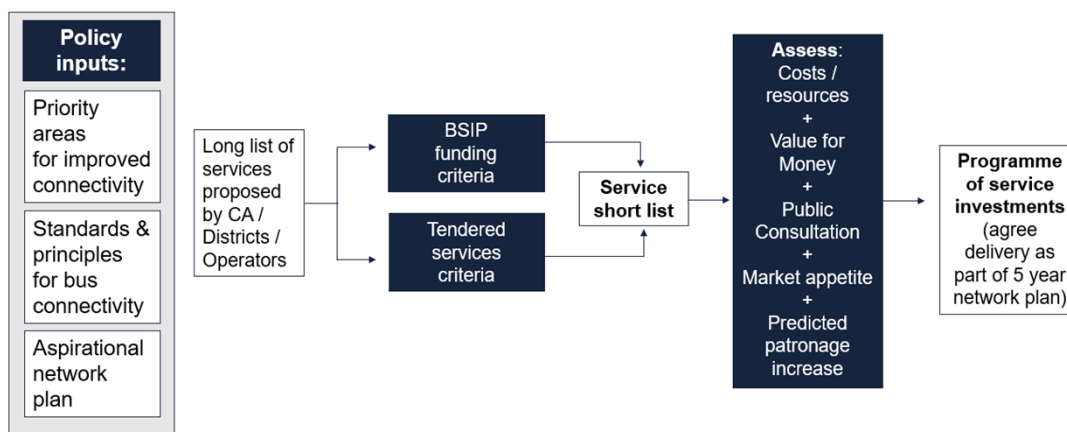
Table 2 – Proposed bus network funding prioritisation criteria

Funding prioritisation criteria	What the criteria values:
Tendered services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercially unviable services. • Response to service withdrawals. • New or improved connectivity between 7am-7pm, Monday-Sunday. • Provides links to the core network and the nearest transport hubs. • The number of new households brought within 400m of the bus network. • Improved connectivity to employment areas. • Affects a 'priority area' for improved connectivity. • Alignment with the 'aspirational network'.
Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or enhanced services. • Commercial sustainability beyond the initial funding period. • Improved service frequency, in line with BSIP targets – inc. 10 minute or better services. • Expands and improves consistency of Core Network provision between 5am-7am/7am-7pm/7pm-9pm. • Expands network provision between 9pm-5am • Expands network provision on Saturday / Sundays • The number of new households brought within 400m of the Core Network. • Improved connectivity to employment areas and other modes of public transport. • Affects a 'priority area' for improved connectivity. • Provides 'good bus connectivity', as per the agreed standards and principles, to key destinations. • Alignment with the 'aspirational network'. • Alignment with existing or planned investment in bus priority measures / highway infrastructure schemes.

- 2.32 Following the prioritisation of suggestions via the frameworks, they will be assessed against other factors such as the cost and resources required to deliver them, value for money, public consultation, market appetite to deliver these services and the predicted patronage increase.

- 2.33 Figure 1 outlines the overall process proposed, from the background policy inputs, to developing the long list of services, prioritisation via the two funding criteria, and ultimately, agreement of investment as part of the five-year network plan.

Figure 1 - Draft process for developing the five-year network plan



- 2.34 Furthermore, bus operators will be engaged to understand whether there is appetite to deliver any of the service proposals independently on a commercial basis, or whether there are any reciprocal improvements they may wish to make in response to Combined Authority funding, before finalisation of the five-year network plan.
- 2.35 This is in addition to the full-scale review of all the Combined Authority's current socially necessary tendered services, which will follow throughout 2023/24.

Next steps

- 2.36 Additionally, external support is being procured to help map and cost the Combined Authority's future bus network. This will use the existing commercial network as a basis but radically evolve it where required to deliver the standard of connectivity needed by the region. This will seek to incorporate the full spectrum of our strategic transport ambitions, including those set out in our BSIP and Local Transport Plan, such as better multimodal integration.
- 2.37 A draft 5-year Network Development Plan including the implementation plan for deploying BSIP funds will be brought to the December meeting of Transport Committee.
- 2.38 "SuperBus" is a DfT initiative to facilitate localised service improvements jointly funded by LTAs and bus operators. SuperBus proposals were submitted by operators as part of the BSIP development process aimed at improving the commercial viability of currently marginal services through cheaper fares, bus priority and improved branding. Approximately £10m of BSIP is allocated to support SuperBus schemes and it is proposed to advance these schemes for early delivery.

- 2.39 The Enhanced Partnership with bus operators will be the mechanism used to negotiate and seek delivery of the plan.
- 2.40 Table 3 below provides a summary of the next steps required, which will ultimately lead to the first BSIP funded services being operational from April 2023.

Table 3 – Activity plan for development of the Bus Network Plan

Date	Activity
July – September 2022	Evidence gathering and gap analysis, development of principles and standards for bus connectivity.
September – November 2022	Further development of the network vision and implementation plan - including stakeholder engagement and review of feedback from The Mayor's Big Bus Chat.
November - December 2022	Local Engagement Forums with District councillors.
December 2022	Transport Committee to approve the draft network vision and implementation plan.
January – March 2023	Tendering of services and negotiation with operators to agree terms of the corresponding Enhanced Partnership scheme(s).
April 2023	Year 1 of BSIP funding deployed to fund new and enhanced services, and ongoing development of the 5-year network plan.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1 The Bus Network Plan aims to enable greater bus use across the region and reduce private car use, in turn supporting lower carbon emissions and cleaner air quality as part of the Combined Authority's response to the Climate Emergency.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1 The Bus Network Development Plan will seek to protect services to communities, particularly those areas of high deprivation, in order to support the region's inclusive growth ambitions.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 Supporting Equality and Diversity through ensuring the bus service is attractive, inclusive and accessible for all is a key aim of the West Yorkshire Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- 5.2 The development of the Bus Network Plan specifically will seek to improve equality and diversity by making buses more accessible for all, particularly people living in deprived communities, and providing more social necessary bus connectivity.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

8. Staffing Implications

- 8.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

9. External Consultees

- 9.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 That the Transport Committee notes the progress made to date on development of the bus network plan and endorses the next steps, including development of the funding criteria to prioritise investment in services.

11. Background Documents

The West Yorkshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (WYCA, 2021) - <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/7471/bus-service-improvement-plan.pdf>

12. Appendices

None.