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REPORT TO: WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY (“WECA”)

DATE: 28 SEPTEMBER 2018

REPORT TITLE: TRANSPORT UPDATE

AUTHOR: DAVID CARTER, DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Purpose of Report:

1. To update Members on progress with the Bus Strategy, Key Route Network (KRN) and Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) functions.
2. To ask the WECA to approve the recommendation for the West of England Combined Authority to form a regional grouping of Transport Authorities with the working title of ‘Western Gateway’

Background

1. The Bus Strategy and Key Route Network (KRN) are requirements of devolution. The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is now the local transport authority (LTA) and travel concession authority (TCA) for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire. Its responsibilities include supported bus service contracts (jointly with the constituent councils), management of the real-time information (RTI) system for buses and delivery of the English national concessionary travel scheme (ENCTS) for elderly and disabled people. On 7 December 2017 the Combined Authority approved arrangements for the delivery of these functions for 2018/19 and approved the associated budget allocation for the constituent councils to be grant funded.
2. Project Teams led by WECA and made up of officers from the all the local authorities, including North Somerset Council, are producing the Bus Strategy and KRN.
3. Transforming Cities Fund has previously been allocated to WECA and work is underway to consider how this could be prioritised.
4. Local Transport Authorities across England are responding to Government’s request for more strategic thinking about transport investment priorities to improve regional productivity and sustainable economic growth by forming regional transport groupings.
5. The main purpose of forming a regional transport grouping is to respond to the DfT’s preference, to have regional groupings of Local Transport Authorities, preparing a regional evidence base for a discrete sub-regional geography, against which to prioritise Major Road Network (MRN) schemes when the MRN fund become available in 20/21. The details of the DfT’s preferred construct are given in the document titled: Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network (DfT December 2017).

Bus Strategy

6. Since the Bus Strategy was last reported to the WECA Committee on 27 July 2018 officers from the Bus Strategy Working group have been working with consultants Arup on reviewing the current bus network (routes, frequencies, journey times, reliability, information, ticketing and mode share), producing a network strategy document and a bus operating costs spreadsheet model. Emerging network proposals will be evaluated and a bus operator income model will be produced to assess operator profitability.
7. It is intended to report this work in more detail to this Committee at its meeting on 30 November 2018.

Key Route Network

8. Consultants Atkins have held an initial workshop with officers from the councils to discuss possible objectives and criteria for identifying the KRN as well as reviewing experience from other combined authorities. Objectives include supporting travel by all modes, connectivity between and within economic centres, economic performance, growth and planned development in the West of England and connectivity to national networks and international gateways. The criteria being identified includes vehicles/HGVs/buses a day, connectivity to key employment/development/residential areas and as a minimum would reflect the Government's proposed Major Route Network.
9. In other regions the performance of the KRN network has been monitored in relation to traffic flow, journey times and journey reliability KPI's.
10. Options for how the KRN could look are now being developed, for members to consider in October prior to a report to this committee on 30 November 2018. However, a range of measures are possible to support potential KPI's around KRN performance. These could include priority for capital investment from WECA for improvement schemes or contributions to maintenance schemes on the KRN, as well as a number of highway functions operated by the UA's that could benefit from greater consistency across the region such as consistent operation of restricted working hours and co-ordination of utility works; or earlier intervention and increased response times for reactive maintenance.

Integrated Transport Authority Functions

11. Work has now started to develop proposals for how the Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) functions should be managed for 2019/20 and beyond. Consultants have been appointed (as approved by the West of England Combined Authority meeting on 7 December 2017) and have met with all the constituent councils to start to accurately map out the current position and develop options for future delivery of the ITA functions for which WECA is the Transport Authority.
12. For the current financial year, the original approved budget allocation was £14.67m (the Transport Levy was originally set at this level but was revised at the July Committee to £13m to reflect revised forecasts and include a £1.2m contribution from the WECA Investment Fund). There are a variety of options for how funding could be allocated for the next financial year, depending on what decision the Combined Authority makes about how these functions should be delivered. The options could have staffing and resource implications for the Combined Authority and the constituent councils. An agreed consultation approach will be developed and any staff that may be affected by any proposed changes, will be fully consulted with in line with relevant organisational change procedures, along with consultation with Trade Unions as appropriate.

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13. There are two interlinked decisions that the Combined Authority will need to take: 1. Approve the budget for Concessionary Fares, Bus RTI and Community Transport, and jointly approve Supported Bus provision with the constituent councils; and 2. Agree the delivery mechanism for these functions and the timeline for any associated transfer of services. In recognition of the need to feed into the budget setting process for 2019/20 work is progressing at pace. It is currently proposed to bring forward recommendations for delivery of the relevant transport functions to this Committee's meeting on 30 November 2018.

Transforming Cities Fund

14. In early 2018 WECA received confirmation of DfT's award of £80m as a further dividend of devolution from the Transforming Cities Fund.
15. Further work is required to define how this money might be best allocated against regional priorities and how these schemes can best reflect the Transforming Cities agenda. It is anticipated that the consultation on the Joint Local Transport Plan (Jan – Feb 2019) will also help to inform the allocation process.

Regional Transport Grouping

16. Strategic transport interventions play a fundamental role in driving economic growth. They facilitate the development of housing and employment space; improve connectivity between business and skilled people and improve connectivity between businesses.
17. Through a regional transport group, it is anticipated that local authorities will have the ability to have direct influence over decisions that are currently within the control of Government and its agencies e.g. DfT, Highways England and Network Rail
18. The establishment of a regional transport grouping will demonstrate commitment by the constituent authorities to working collaboratively and provide reassurance to Government about the strength of the partnership.
19. Government has stated that regional transport groupings will be given 'unprecedented access' to decision-making on national investment strategies once a Regional Transport Strategy has been adopted. This is likely to include the allocation of monies raised through the National Roads Fund (established from 2020/21) to the Major Road Network (MRN).
20. Government is open to regional transport groupings forming across more functional economic geographies rather than being constrained by historic administrative boundaries
21. There is firm consensus from local authorities across the South West Region that given the extensive geographic scope and diversity of the Region, that the formulation of two groupings is the most effective way of delivering infrastructure at a pace that meets expectations for improved productivity, housing and economic growth across the Region.
22. The transport officers' proposals for the Western Gateway regional grouping for consideration by elected politicians has been formed on the basis of mutual and shared interests in the delivery of strategic connectivity improvements to boost economic growth. The Western Gateway's Strategic Transport Strategy will identify how this will be achieved.
23. The Joint Local Transport Plan for the West of England area is under development at present, with public consultation planned for January 2019. This document remains a

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statutory requirement for WECA and North Somerset and already takes a regional perspective on the key transport challenges for the West of England area. It is therefore anticipated that any future developed Western Gateway Transport Strategy would have clear synergies with the Joint Local Transport Plan.

24. It is proposed that an inaugural meeting of the prospective Western Gateway regional transport grouping meets on the 28th September 2018. The aim of the grouping is to identify and agree which strategic transport interventions are required to drive economic growth across the prospective Western Gateway, to be able to respond to future calls for the prioritisation for MRN schemes in the region.
25. It is anticipated that a new Business and Transport Forum will be established to ensure the view of stakeholders are reflected within the Western Gateway Transport Strategy.

Consultation:

26. Consultation on the Bus Strategy and Key Route Network will be undertaken alongside the new Joint Local Transport Plan in January 2019.
27. The Mayor has been consulted on the regional transport grouping. Once agreement has been made, the Western Gateway will be required to contact a range of stakeholders including: neighbouring authorities, transport providers and other stakeholders to inform them of the arrangements.

Other Options Considered:

28. The Bus Strategy, Key Route Network and ITA functions are all devolution requirements.
29. In relation to DfT's proposals for regional transport groupings, consideration was given to not joining a regional grouping but the risk in not participating was considered to outweigh the benefits due to the DfT's stated policy preference for a regional evidence base produced by collaborating Local Transport Authorities.
30. Consideration was given to the geographical groupings across the South West of England and officers from all Transport Authorities across the old Government Office for the South West area worked together to define a proposal for two regional groupings which gained informal political approval from all Transport Authorities. One regional grouping for the 'Peninsular', (Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset) and the remainder (including the WECA area) forming the 'Western Gateway'.

Economic Impact Assessment:

31. There are no direct implications arising from this report. Future bus network operating frameworks, which will be explored as part of the Bus Strategy, will need to include an economic impact assessment as part of their evaluation.

Risk Management/Assessment:

32. There are no implications arising from the report.

Public Sector Equality Duties:

33. The public sector equality duty created under the Equality Act 2010 means that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic

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and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

34. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:
- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
 - Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
35. The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services, including policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.

Finance Implications:

36. A virement of up to £135,000 from Retained Business Rates and Treasury Investment Income for consultant support for the Bus Strategy, KRN and ITA functions work was agreed by the West of England Committee on 7 December 2017. Spend will be in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and for the latter will be subject to approval of a carry forward.
37. This proposal seeks approval for the WECA's participation in a regional transport grouping. This grouping potentially consists of 9 local authorities and is the gateway to accessing Major Road Network funding in the future.
38. Internal transport officers and resources are currently involved in defining the governance structure for the joint working relationships with other partner Councils. The estimated cost is between £10k and £15k in 18/19 and this will be met by the existing Transport budget.
39. Once the feasibility and design work is complete there will be a request to DfT for revenue funding to support the setting up and implementation of a regional transport grouping and in particular the costs of developing a regional evidence base.

Advice given by: Tim Richens, Interim Director of Investment and Corporate Services

Legal Implications:

40. Producing a Bus Strategy is a devolution requirement of the West of England Combined Authority. The West of England Combined Authority has Integrated Transport Authority functions for Concessionary Travel, Supported Bus Services (jointly with the constituent councils), Community Transport Grants and Local Bus information including Real Time Information.
41. The current initial proposals for the regional transport grouping comprise, in effect, collaboration arrangements within a fairly typical local government joint working/governance structure – namely a member-led Board with a senior officer group sitting below this etc.
42. There is no suggestion at this stage that either the grouping or body be invested with delegated authority from the members. Decision making will therefore remain with the constituent councils, and the draft terms of reference for the Board make this clear.

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43. The draft terms of reference do however contemplate the possibility of delegations in the future. Membership of the Board does not commit the Council to be involved in any particular project.
44. Involvement in the Board does not commit the Council to the establishment of a statutory body.

Advice given by: Shahzia Daya, Director of Legal and Democratic Services, WECA

Land/Property Implications;

45. There are no implications arising from this report.

Human Resources Implications:

46. The Bus Strategy, Key Route Network and ITA functions work is a joint project with resources provided by all four local authorities and WECA, supported by external consultants providing technical expertise.

Recommendation:

The WECA is recommended to: -

47. Note the ongoing work and provide views on the Bus Strategy, Key Route Network and ITA functions.
48. To approve West of England Combined Authorities' participation in the Western Gateway regional transport grouping.
49. To note that work continues in developing the Terms of Reference and draft prospectus for the Western Gateway Regional Transport Grouping
50. To appoint the Mayor to represent the Authority on the regional transport grouping Partnership Board and the Deputy Mayor as nominated deputy.
51. To authorise the Director of Infrastructure to represent the Council on the regional transport grouping Senior Officer Group.

Report Author: David Carter – Director of Infrastructure & Jason Humm – Head of Transport

Background Papers

None

West of England Combined Authority Contact:

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the Contact Officer for the meeting who is Tim Milgate on 0117 426210; writing to West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Way, Bristol BS1 6ER; email: democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk