Addendum to agenda item 15 - Transport update.

The following addendum is provided to give members additional detail on the bus strategy summary contained within item 15 - 'Transport update'. The addendum provides further background to this information report

Background

1. Bus patronage has been growing in the West of England since 2012, (by around 7% per year), bucking the national trend. Officers and supporting consultants are progressing the production of a Bus Strategy for the West of England (including North Somerset).

2. The first stage of this process has been the production of an overview document to support the Joint Local Transport Plan, which sets out the work areas to be undertaken and timescales for completion of the strategy.

3. Whilst the Bus Strategy has a provisional target to increase passenger numbers by 100% by 2036, the interventions are envisaged to be shorter term in the overall transport investment programme, with further mode shift towards public transport to follow through the delivery of the subsequent mass transit network.

4. Production of the full strategy is scheduled for completion from Spring 2019. General questions about the Bus Strategy will be included in the consultation on the JLTP that will be undertaken in January/February 2019. Respondents can also comment on wider transport issues including any specifics relating to buses. This note provides a summary of recent progress, initial conclusions from the first stage of the work and next steps.

Current Position

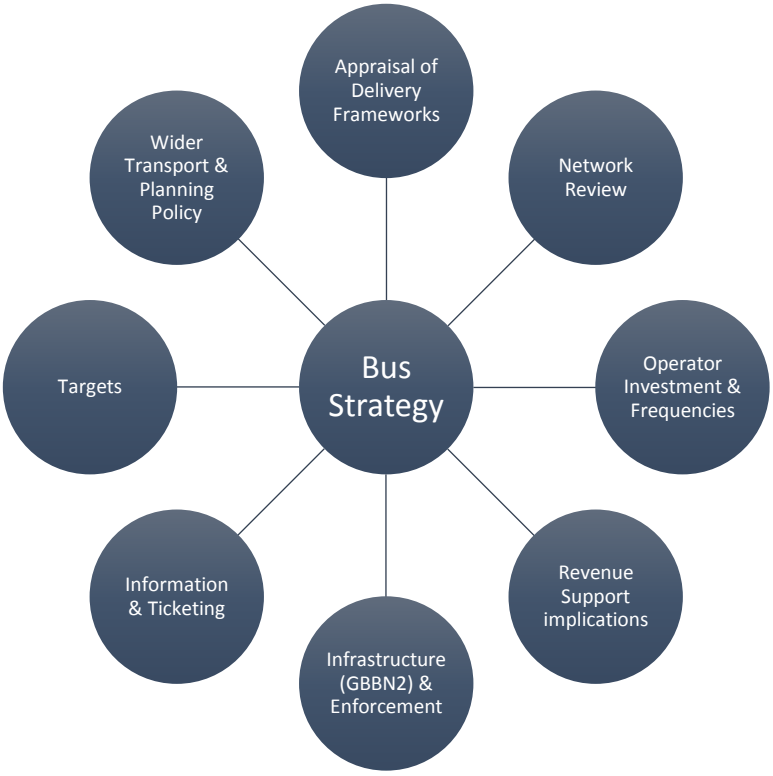
5. Stage 1 of the Bus Strategy was commenced in 2018, with the following work areas:

   - Confirmation of strategy objectives (linked to the Joint Local Transport Plan objectives);
   - Commissioning of consultant support (Arup);
   - A first round of bus operator engagement, to get input from operators at an early stage on the issues they face;
   - An assessment of the performance of the current network;
   - The production of an operating cost model (to provide an independent understanding of network operating cost and revenue levels); and
   - The production of an overview document to accompany the Joint Local Transport Plan.

6. The second phase of the work will include the following areas:

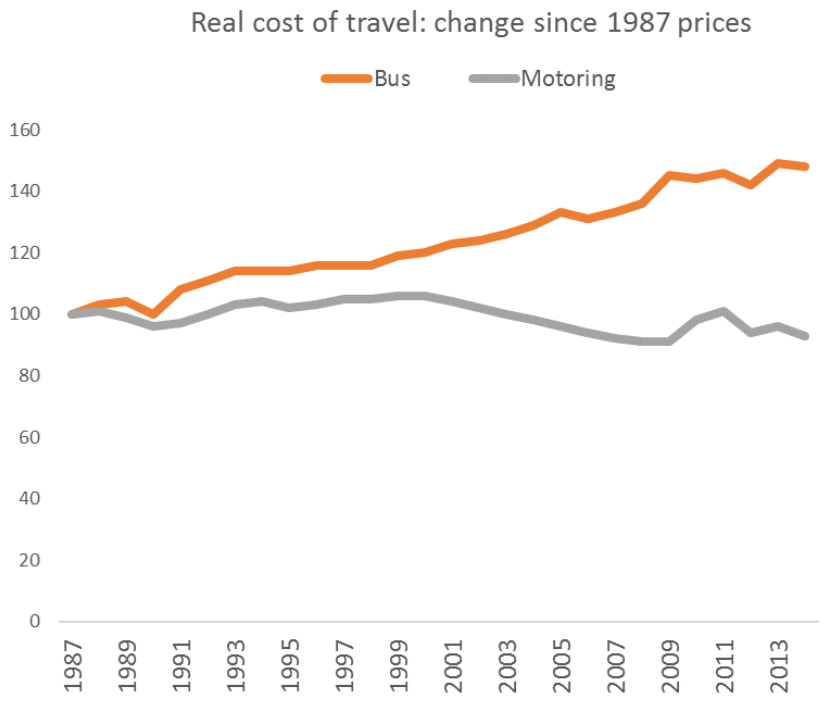
- An assessment of, and recommendations on, potential changes to the network (this work is underway), followed by operator engagement;
- A high-level assessment of delivery mechanisms;
- Production of a bus information strategy; and
- The completion of the full strategy document for consultation.

7. The main components of the Bus Strategy are shown below. A number of these work areas are substantial and interlinked, with wider implications for the overall transport network. In particular, the overview document includes an ambitious target to double bus passenger journeys by 2036, and all the key components shown below will have a critical role in ensuring that this target is feasible.

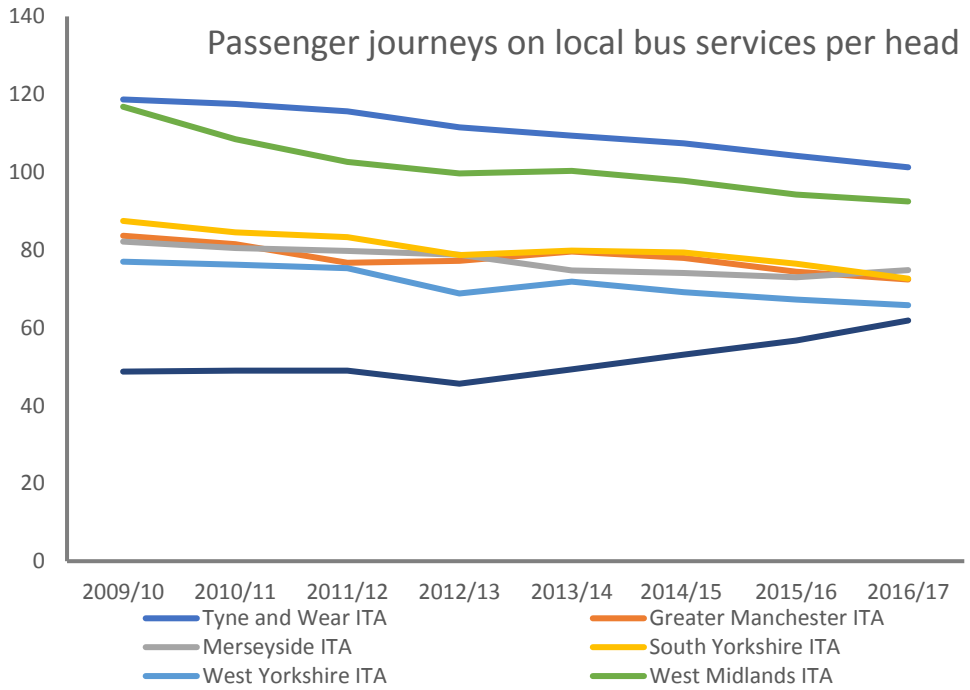


Stage One Workstream – key findings

8. At a national level, bus patronage is falling. A combination of reasons has contributed to this situation, potentially including constraints on public sector funding, rising operating costs and fares, service reductions and national fiscal policy which has, over time, increased the real cost of travelling by bus compared to that of driving a car, as illustrated below.

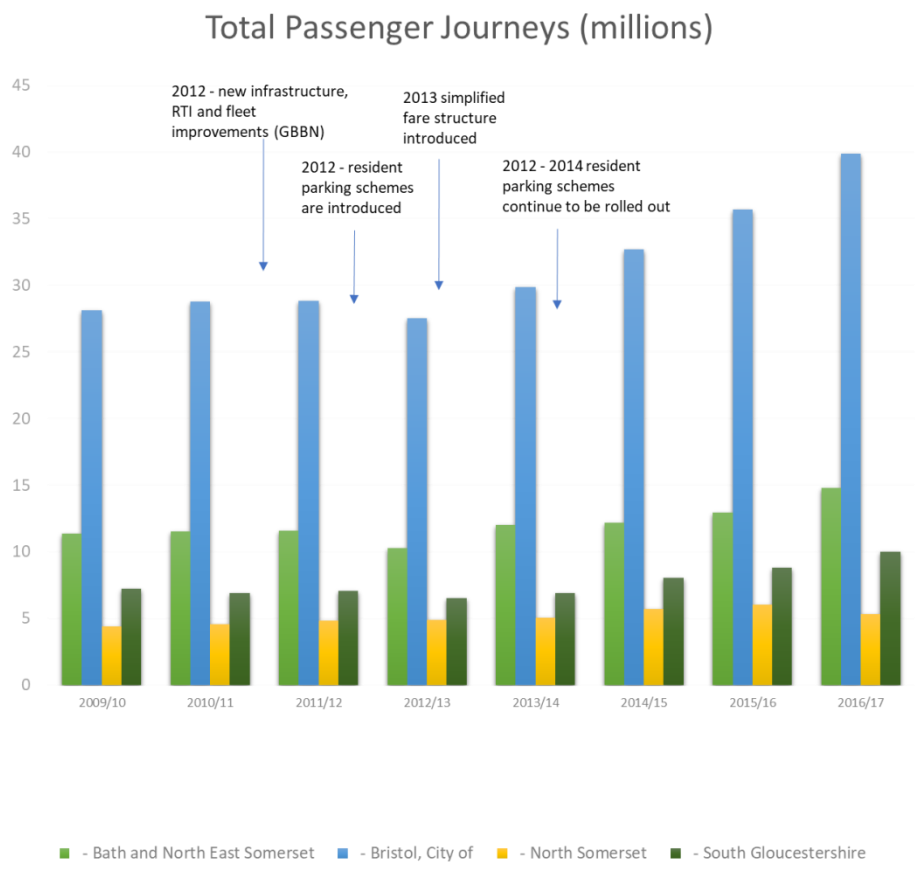


9. However, as noted above, passenger numbers in the West of England have been growing rapidly, bucking the national trend. About 9% of people in the West of England use the bus to get to work. As can be seen from the graph below, the number of bus trips per head of population is now catching up with the equivalent proportion for most other `core' English city regions.



10. Arup have undertaken an overall review of the performance of the current network. Bus boarding numbers per authority area are shown below, and reasons for growth in patronage in the West of England include the following:

- The long-term impact of the rollout of residents parking zones in Bath and Bristol;
- Major fares review by the main commercial operator (First) in 2013/4 which simplified the fares structure and reduced fares for most journeys;
- Growing population;
- Growth in student numbers at the four universities in the area
- Fleet investment by the operators;
- Commercial service development initiatives (e.g. new service from Bath to Bristol Airport via South Bristol, operated by Bath Bus Co)
- Introduction of m-ticketing and contactless payment by the major operators
- Introduction of multi-operator ticket products (joint operator / local authority initiative)
- Significant investment by the councils in bus priority measures (often in challenging locations);
- Improved bus stops and information (e.g. GBBN, £43m of local authority investment – including RTI – which is being renewed and revamped with money from WECA Investment Fund).



11. Existing frequencies, fares, passenger satisfaction and mode share along our core corridors are broadly equivalent to those of other city regions. However, there are a number of significant reliability issues and persistent sources of delay across the network.

12. The current network also has a number of gaps in its coverage. These include the extent of service provision in the North Fringe and rural areas away from inter-urban corridors. In addition, whilst patronage on core corridors is strong, the perception of the overall offer as a network could be improved. Fewer trips are being made away

from core corridors compared to other cities where interchange facilities are better and networks easier to understand.

13. Bus services to rural areas and those parts of urban areas away from the main roads have been reliant historically on revenue support from the local authorities because operators are generally unable to operate them on a stand-alone commercial basis. Financial risks to operators in maintaining and developing commercial bus services as well as a shrinkage in the supply, brought about by the closure of Wessex Bus, has greatly increased pressure on local authority budgets at a time when the authorities are required to make substantial savings.

14. Bus fares are broadly around the same level now as they were ten years ago and are now broadly comparable (if not cheaper) with other equivalent areas of the UK. Passenger satisfaction is high – 89% of passengers in the West of England are either very satisfied or satisfied with their journey experience.

15. Concessionary travel passenger journey numbers are falling and now represents around 23% of overall passenger journeys. This is partly attributable to Government changes to the qualifying age and partly attributable to the strong growth in non-concessionary travel for the reasons listed in paragraph 11 above.

16. A bus operating cost model has used publicly available information to estimate the operating costs of the current network. This includes estimates of fixed costs (such as depots), variable costs such as fuel, as well as driver and fleet costs. This work has estimated the annual cost of operating the network in the West of England (across all operators) at around £104 million pa. The next phase of work, to consider alternative network scenarios, is being undertaken against the backdrop of this cost estimate.

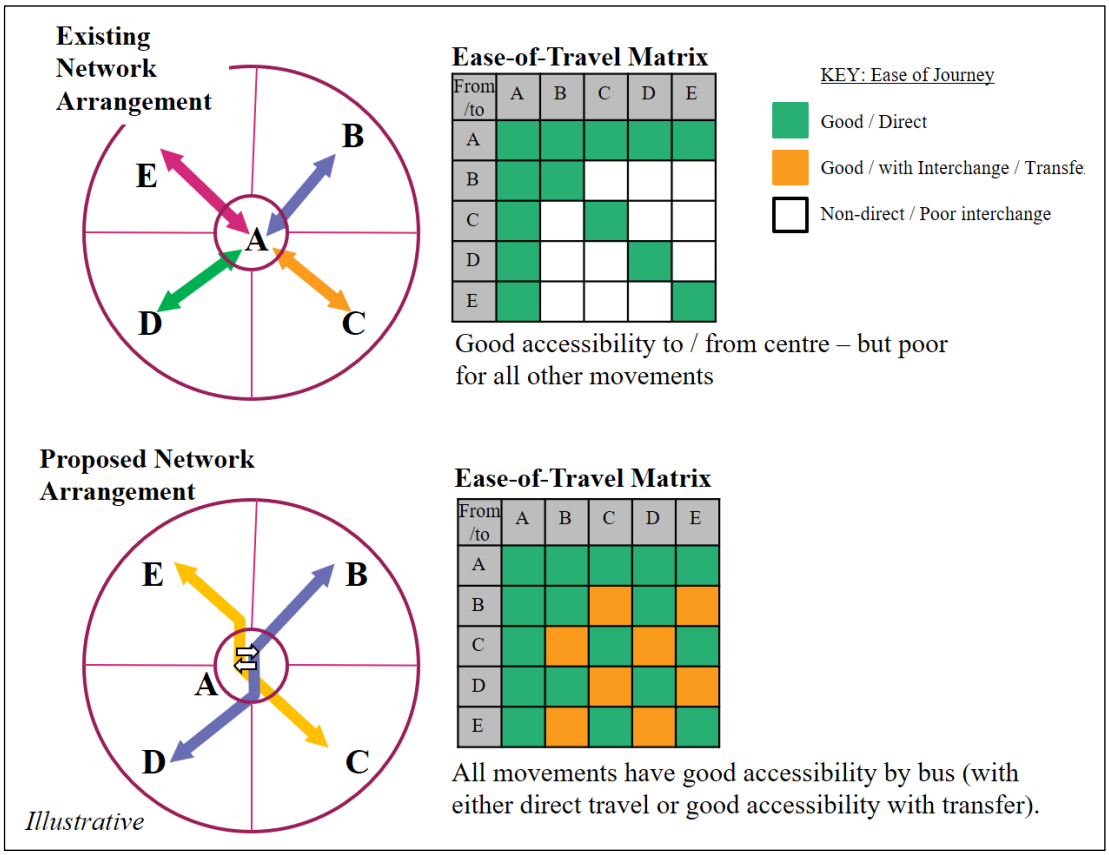
17. The vision for the Bus Strategy will be to deliver a substantial improvement to the quality, reliability and accessibility of our local bus network. The success of the Bus Strategy will be measured against its objectives. As Bus Strategy forms an important complementary strategy to the Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4), our objectives `nest' within the wider JLTP objectives as outlined below:

	JLTP Objective	Bus Strategy Objective
1	Support sustainable economic growth	Deliver a comprehensive bus network, maximise bus service reliability, reduce journey times and deliver simplified ticketing
2	Promote equality and accessibility	Increase availability and ease of use of accessible passenger waiting facilities and vehicles, and improve integration with other modes, thereby improving access to key employment, health and leisure destinations for everyone.
3	Improve air quality and respond to climate change	Reduce emissions from general traffic through increasing bus use, and reduce carbon and other emissions from buses

4	Contribute to better health, wellbeing, safety and security	Maximise service quality, in terms of vehicles, information and bus stop environment
5	Create better places	Improve public domain through the removal of car traffic, mode shift onto buses, and where possible transfer of highway space to pedestrians. Better access to places for public transport, and better design for bus services in new developments.

Phase 2 workstream areas

18. An appraisal of alternative network options forms a key part of the work programme. The suggested approach which is being considered is shown below. Arup advise that the promotion and effective operation of interchange has significant potential to boost passenger numbers, through opening up a wider range of potential trips, simplifying the network, normalising the concept of transfer and boosting passenger awareness of the network as a whole (rather than that of specific corridors in isolation).



19. It is also important to note that an interchange-based network will be reliant on the operation of a significantly higher proportion of cross-city services than is currently the case in the urban areas. At present, bus operators have to strike a balance between the operational efficiency of cross-city operation (which removes the need for layover and use of road space for bus stands) and the risk of transferring delays occurring on one side of a city centre to bus routes on the other side. Effective operation of an efficient cross-city bus network is reliant on substantial bus priority

measures along the route corridors and in the city centre, together with the placement of spare resources (drivers and vehicles) in the city centre to maintain a good level of services in the event that disruptions occur. Operator views on the suggested network will be sought later in the year.

20. The network review may have implications for the extent of supported services. Just over £5 million is spent on non-commercial bus services in the West of England currently, however all the local authorities are facing pressures on their revenue budgets. It is proposed to include a review of how supported services are prioritised in the Bus Strategy, to strengthen objective criteria by which decisions can be made. This will take account of issues such as links to economic output, available alternatives, social inclusion and rural isolation. The network review may also have implications for the role and extent of community transport operations, if a more consolidated network (with a greater emphasis on interchange) is recommended.

21. The network review will also take into account existing metrobus routes and proposed extensions. Initial feedback has indicated that boarding figures on the two routes launched to date are significantly above forecasts, and they have set examples of good practice around quality of infrastructure and branding, which are being built on through complementary services such as the T1/T2 services to Thornbury which are using some of the metrobus facilities.

22. The appraisal of delivery frameworks will involve an assessment of delivery models such as franchising local bus services (where routes, fares and frequencies can be specified and bus operators tender to provide them), alongside an Enhanced Partnership Scheme (which would retain the current open market but could provide greater co-ordination and stability). It should be noted that Greater Manchester have allocated £11.5 million for an assessment of the case for franchising in their area. A more schematic assessment is envisaged for the West of England at this stage, with an initial recommendation on a way forward from Spring 2019. It is also important to bear in mind that any franchising recommendation may have significant implications for revenue support budgets.

23. In terms of infrastructure, BCC is leading on the identification of proposals to make up the Greater Bristol Bus Network 2 project, to help mitigate the `urban living' component of the Joint Spatial Plan housing allocation and focussed on radial corridors into the Greater Bristol area. This package will be pivotal in improving service reliability and enabling the provision of more cross-city services to facilitate better use of interchange. It should be noted that other measures (such as traffic signal upgrades) are likely to play an important role, as the potential for further wide-ranging, conventional bus priority measures becomes more challenging after those packages already delivered through the GBBN1 and Metrobus major schemes. The JLTP also includes separate major schemes to improve bus infrastructure in Bath, Metrobus extensions, new and improved park and ride sites and a Metrobus consolidation project, as well as (longer term) Mass Transit corridors.

24. Operator investment is expected to be a significant `ask' as part of the overall strategy. Operator dialogue is ongoing on the potential for new investment, including the opportunity for new vehicles and higher frequencies, although this will also be dependent on the extent of infrastructure investment by the councils to ensure a robust commercial case.

25. The Bus Strategy will, inevitably, highlight the impacts of (and implications for) wider local authority policy, such as the allocation of road space, the co-ordination and management of road works, the provision (and pricing) of parking in existing and new developments, the design of new developments, air quality and longer term opportunities around the use of road pricing and other restraint mechanisms, in order to ensure that the passenger target can be met.