



Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy and Delivery Plan: Case for Change

Date of meeting 29 September 2023

Date of report 19 September 2023

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To update the Partnership on the Case for Change for the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy and Delivery Plan (SRBS), and the next steps in the process to develop the SRBS.

2. Background to report

Members will recall previous reports to the Strategy & Programmes Committee in November 2022¹ and June 2023² regarding development of the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy and Delivery Plan (SRBS), the need for which was identified through work undertaken in development of the new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), including the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 Scoping Option Assessment Study³.

Members will further recall that the first stage in developing the SRBS was to prepare a Case for Change. Following appointment of consultants Systra in June 2023, work on the Case for Change has progressed at pace. This work has sought to consolidate and update the evidence base for issues facing bus in the region, drawing upon work already carried out in RTS development, as well as updated transport datasets and engagement with local authorities and bus operators carried out during August and September 2023.

3. Outline of proposals

The key findings of the SRBS Case for Change are set out below:

(i) Bus has a multi-faceted role to play in the future delivery of national, regional and local public policy.

Bus in our region is not only key to delivery of the new RTS, it has a cross-cutting and increasingly important role to play in the delivery of public policy and achievement of targets across a wide range of sectors, including social inclusion⁴, climate change and

¹ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/zqsayayn/sp251122_agenda8.pdf

² https://www.spt.co.uk/media/gr3hd3qj/sp090623_agenda7.pdf

³ Section 3.3 and Appendix 2, https://www.spt.co.uk/media/vh5pr15y/sp180222_agenda11.pdf

⁴ For example, Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/accessible-transport/accessible-travel-framework/>

decarbonisation⁵, public health and wellbeing⁶, economy development⁷ and sustainability, and local environment and place-making⁸. The pressure and focus on bus, therefore, in the delivery of public policy has never been more significant.

(ii) Bus use is in sustained decline.

Bus use in the west of Scotland has been in a sustained, long-term decline for many years – over the period 2009/2010 to 2019/2020, bus patronage in our region⁹ declined by 32% from 219 to 149 million passenger journeys. The proportion of people using bus as their main mode of transport to travel to work or to school has been declining, as have the proportion of people using bus as their main mode of transport for all trips¹⁰. These trends were prevalent prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the negative impact of which has only served to worsen matters, with bus patronage in 2021/2022 down by 34% on 2019/2020 pre-pandemic levels¹¹. Further, the rate of decline in bus use in Strathclyde is much greater than the rest of Scotland¹², which is particularly concerning given our region's historically lower than national average rates of private car ownership.¹³

(iii) The size of the bus network is declining.

The size of the bus network in our region, measured by total vehicle kilometres operated per annum, declined over the period 2009/2010 – 2019/2020 by 21% (and across Scotland by 13%).¹⁴ This decline means greater demands on transport authorities like SPT to fill the gap and invest in supporting bus services deemed socially necessary or which may be a lifeline for communities, and this demand has only increased post-pandemic following further cuts to commercial services.

(iv) Bus service frequency and network coverage is declining.

Currently, on many routes across our region, bus service frequency is limited or non-existent after 7pm Monday to Saturday and on Sundays. Just under one-fifth of households in the region do not have access to a bus stop within an average 5-minute walking distance.¹⁵ Of households that do have access to a bus stop within an average 5-minute walk, nearly one-quarter have services less often than every 30 minutes.¹⁶ Lack of direct bus services was also the most often mentioned issue or challenge by people responding to the RTS public survey when asked to state what stopped them from using public transport more regularly or at all.

(v) Journey delays and reliability problems affect the quality of service for passengers

Many bus routes/services across the region are affected by journey delays and reliability problems, which can be due to traffic congestion and competing road space

⁵ For example, the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan Update - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>

⁶ For example, Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cleaner-air-scotland-2-towards-better-place-everyone/>

⁷ For example, Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation - <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2022/03/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/documents/delivering-economic-prosperity/delivering-economic-prosperity/govscot%3Adocument/delivering-economic-prosperity.pdf>

⁸ For example, Scotland's Road Safety Framework - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/scotland-s-road-safety-framework-to-2030/>

⁹ Scottish Transport Statistics. Figures in this report quoted from STS are for the geographic area 'South West Scotland', which is the full areas of the 12 Strathclyde region councils plus Dumfries and Galloway.

¹⁰ Transport and Travel in Scotland.

¹¹ Scottish Transport Statistics 2022

¹² Scottish Transport Statistics 2022

¹³ Transport and Travel in Scotland.

¹⁴ Scottish Transport Statistics 2022

¹⁵ Accessibility analysis carried out for SRBS Case for Change.

¹⁶ Accessibility analysis carried out for SRBS Case for Change.

priorities. This affects the reliability and attractiveness of services from the passenger perspective, and increases costs for operators, which in turn can have a consequent effect on fares and indeed, the ultimate viability of a route.

(vi) Bus fares are increasing at a higher rate than inflation, and at a higher rate than the cost of travelling by other modes.

Between 2012 and 2022, bus and coach fares in the UK rose by 65% in cash terms, an increase of 25% compared to general inflation.¹⁷ Over the same period, rail fares decreased by 6% compared to general inflation and motoring expenditure decreased by 5% compared to general inflation.¹⁸

The National Concessionary Travel Schemes covering eligible persons aged 5 – 21, aged 60+, and disabled persons, are intended to help tackle accessibility problems related to the affordability of bus fares. However, the wider effectiveness of such schemes may be limited by bus network coverage, which has been shrinking as highlighted above. In addition, the reduced number of fare-paying passengers at a time when bus operating costs are increasing means a greater burden and reliance on fewer people.

(vii) Fares and ticketing options can be complex and difficult to understand.

Within the region, passengers have access to many ticket options with all larger operators offering a single fare and options for day/week/month/season tickets across a range of geographic 'zones' or specific routes. Prices may be different dependent upon method of purchase (e.g. on-board vs mobile ticket), and some options are only available as mobile tickets on smartphones.

In addition, a range of multi-operator, integrated tickets are available including SPT ZoneCard, Glasgow Tripper and Glasgow PlusBus (an add-on bus journey to a rail ticket purchase).

The range of tickets and fares available can be difficult to understand for existing passengers and will act as a barrier in attracting new passengers. Further, the complexity and range of products on offer will have disadvantages for passengers who lack familiarity with the bus network, have limited digital/mobile access, prefer or are only able to use cash, and/or have changeable or unpredictable travel needs.

(viii) The current model for bus is not delivering an integrated approach to bus service planning, integration with other modes, and a lack of competition in many areas is not delivering greater passenger choice.

There are no requirements on bus operators to integrate timetables with other modes, such as rail and ferry services, or other operators, and therefore connections are often sub-optimal or non-existent. This proves challenging in the provision of an integrated public transport network, both currently and for future projects such as the Clyde Metro. Further, operators currently do not share patronage or service performance data with SPT or councils due to commercial confidentiality considerations, making any detailed analysis or strategic planning of the bus network very challenging.

(ix) Public sector funding represents a significant share of operators' income.

Public sector support (including Bus Service Operators Grant/Network Support Grant, Concessionary reimbursement, and Local Transport Authority (e.g. SPT) gross costs incurred in support of bus services) represented 56% of bus operator revenues in

¹⁷ Scottish Transport Statistics March 2023

¹⁸ Scottish Transport Statistics March 2023

2021/2022 in Scotland. The proportion ranged between 43% to 49% between 2009/2010 – 2019/2020.¹⁹

It is worth highlighting that the above figures do not include capital investment (e.g. through SPT's capital programme) and maintenance of infrastructure e.g. roads. The public sector therefore provides substantial funding to the bus industry in our region yet has a limited voice in network design, service quality, fares and other such factors, raising further issues in respect of democratic accountability and decision-making in respect of bus services.

The findings of the SRBS Case for Change stage confirm and add to the evidence base developed as part of the Regional Transport Strategy. They demonstrate an overall decline in the bus network across the region and provide a clear rationale to continue development of the SRBS.

In conclusion, there is a strong Case for Change in bus in the west of Scotland.

4. Next Steps

4.1 SRBS Programme

Further detail on the key findings noted above will form the basis of the SRBS Case for Change report. Following that, the next stage in the development of the SRBS will be Options Development and Appraisal. This will involve identifying proportionate responses to the findings of the Case for Change, and undertaking an appraisal process to identify the most efficient and effective actions to address them.

To confirm, the next steps in the SRBS programme are as follows:

- Prepare and finalise the “SRBS Case for Change” report (October 2023) – this will be shared with Partnership members and published on SPT's website;
- Develop and appraise options for addressing the findings of the SRBS Case for Change (November 2023 – January 2024);
- Progress Update report to SPT Partnership (December 2023);
- Further stakeholder communications and engagement (October 2023 – February 2024);
- Recommended preferred option(s) from appraisal presented for approval to SPT Partnership – March 2024; and
- Public consultation on appraisal recommendations – post-March 2024 (dependent on Partnership approval of preferred option(s)).

4.2 Provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 – Commencement Orders

For information, members may be aware that Transport Scotland (TS) recently confirmed that the commencement orders for Sections 35-37 (Bus Services Improvement Partnerships) and Section 38 (Local Services Franchising) of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, beginning on 4 December 2023. This formally allows these powers to be utilised in practice from that date. However, in publishing the commencement orders, TS also highlighted that substantive regulations are required for both BSIPs and franchising in order to give these powers full effect, and that it is their intention to introduce these throughout 2024 alongside the development of guidance to support the use of the powers. This timeline does not affect the next stage of development of the SRBS – Option development and appraisal - should its outcome be to make use of any of the powers in the 2019 Act. However, officers will keep members apprised of the

¹⁹ Scottish Transport Statistics March 2023

development and implications of the substantive regulations and guidance noted above, and opportunities to influence them, as matters progress.

5. Partnership action

The Partnership is recommended to note:

- (i) The contents of this report;
- (ii) The initial findings of the SRBS Case for Change in section 3 above; and
- (iii) The next steps in the SRBS programme as detailed in section 3 above.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>Supports a wide range of policies in the Regional Transport Strategy, including Policy 21 Bus Quality and Integration.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>An Equality Impact Assessment is being undertaken as part of the development of the SRBS.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>Relevant assessments and mitigation of climate change and carbon impacts will be required as the SRBS is delivered.</i>

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