



Update on the Community Bus Fund

Date of meeting 8 September 2023

Date of report 29 August 2023

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To provide the Committee with an update on Transport Scotland's Community Bus Fund (CBF).

2. Background to report

The establishment of a Community Bus Fund (CBF) formed part of the Bute House agreement¹ signed in August 2021. The agreement states that a Community Bus Fund was to be introduced, which would support local transport authorities to improve local public transport in their areas. It also states that the fund would be available to support transport authorities to explore the full range of options set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

SPT understands that a total of £5m in capital support is likely to be made available through the CBF in 2023/2024 for projects that support bus use. It is proposed that the capital funding is distributed directly to Local Authorities across Scotland based upon transport poverty and rural deprivation indices and subject to pending agreement with COSLA. In addition, SPT understands that a total of £750k in revenue support is likely to be available through the CBF in 2023/2024 to fund supporting/preparatory works in respect of the local bus provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. It is proposed that the revenue funding is distributed to Local Authorities via a competitive bidding process being managed by Transport Scotland. As yet, there is no information available on likely CBF budget(s) beyond the 2023/2024 allocation.

In June 2023, the SPT Chief Executive wrote to all 12 Local Authorities in the West of Scotland regarding the CBF, highlighting the potential of the fund to complement SPT's Capital Programme and work underway on the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS). Views were sought from Local Authorities on the merits of a coordinated regional approach to the CBF and specifically towards a regional bid for revenue support towards work already underway on the SRBS. A copy of the letter is included at Appendix 1 for reference.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/agreement/2021/08/scottish-government-and-scottish-green-party-shared-policy-programme/documents/scottish-government-and-scottish-green-party-draft-shared-policy-programme/scottish-government-and-scottish-green-party-draft-shared-policy-programme/govscot%3Adocument/SG%2BSGP%2BTalks%2B-%2BDraft%2BPolicy%2BProgramme%2B-%2BFINAL%2B-%2BOFFSEN.pdf>

3. Outline of proposals

SPT understands the basis for the 2023/2024 CBF will include the following:

Capital Funds: Support for Local Bus Services

- In respect of Capital Funds, TS proposes to distribute the £5 million capital on a per capita basis across all 32 local authorities using Transport Poverty as an indicator of rural deprivation. Transport Poverty is defined as not affordable; not available or suitable; doesn't enable access in a reasonable time with reasonable ease; dangerous, unsafe or unhealthy travel conditions.
- Local Authorities are encouraged to consider utilising the above capital funding on the following specific actions and activities:
 - Connectivity to improve access to bus services, for example by upgrading bus stops and installing real time information electronic timetables.
 - Integration between transport modes, for example by installing infrastructure to support integration between modes, such as mobility hubs.
 - Trialling innovative transport solutions or improvements to encourage patronage or create efficiencies, for example by purchasing digital platforms to support Demand Responsive Transport.
- Whilst mindful of the limited capital funds available via the CBF, SPT would highlight that, unfortunately, transport poverty remains a key issue in both urban and rural parts of Strathclyde. Hence, we believe a coordinated approach to regional bus infrastructure across Strathclyde (in keeping with the approach taken to SPT's own Capital Programme) is key to successful delivery on a partnership basis, incorporating all available funding streams.
- Whilst yet to be clarified, it is anticipated that LA's in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire may benefit from the CBF capital fund specifically given the significant rural communities within these areas. SPT has therefore offered our assistance regarding any capital funding allocations that may follow and given the short timescales involved.

Resource Funds: Support to Explore the Full Range of Options in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019

- In respect of Resource Funds, TS proposes to invite expressions of interest for the £0.75 million resource fund from local authorities interested and, in a position, to progress activity as a pathfinder project on preparatory work to develop options to implement the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 powers for local bus services.
- Funds can be used to appoint consultancy support or temporary specialist staff costs to:
 - Review and update existing local bus /public transport strategies.
 - Review the local bus network to determine what further work is required based on information already held.
 - Assess what information is required to develop a business case, and how information will be stored and managed.
 - Assess subsidised services to allow a comparison with options in the Transport Act once available.
 - Review ticketing options.

Further to the letter issued by SPT on the CBF and positive feedback received from a number of Local Authorities on a coordinated regional approach, a meeting was convened by SPT on 21 August 2023 with senior LA and Transport Scotland officials to discuss the CBF and next steps.

They key points from this session were as follows:

- Transport Scotland outlined the background, scope, and current status of the CBF (awaiting proposal to be considered by COSLA) – as noted above.
- SPT outlined current progress in development of the SRBS including the Case for Change (expected September 2023) and options appraisal / identification of preferred option (expected March 2024). SPT further outlined additional work packages to support development and implementation of the SRBS which had been procured, though not yet approved (e.g., Development of Strategic and Final Business Cases).
- Discussion followed on merits of a regional bid to the CBF to support further development of the SRBS.

The key action from the discussion was for SPT to provide a proposal to the group, aligned and complementary to the ongoing work on the SRBS, which could be utilised as a Revenue funding bid under the CBF. It was also agreed that we would seek clarity from Transport Scotland on whether SPT could lead a revenue funding bid to Transport Scotland on behalf of our Local Authorities respectively.

SPT is currently working on the scope and scale of a potential bid to the CBF, in compliment to the SRBS, which we aim to share with LA partners for feedback before any funding submission. SPT intends to develop and share the aforementioned proposal for submission by September 2023. SPT will keep members posted as these discussions progress.

4. Conclusions

The benefits of regional coordination on funding of bus infrastructure, services, systems and studies are clear. SPT has a well-established process for investment in such local bus projects via our capital programme and revenue support for regional initiatives such as the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy. Partnership working is key to this successful approach and SPT is keen to extend our support and assistance to our partner Local Authorities in respect of the Community Bus Fund, and for the benefit of the travelling public in the West of Scotland.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>Investment in public transport supports RTS policies on modal shift, reduced emissions and supporting communities to access services.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>Any revenue funding awarded via the Community Bus Fund will be utilised by SPT to support work currently being undertaken on the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS).</i>

Capital funding awarded via the Community Bus Fund to our Local Authority partners could potentially be utilised to complement SPT's Capital Programme.

Personnel consequences

None directly.

Equalities consequences

None directly.

Risk consequences

None within this report.

Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences

Investment in public transport supports modal shift and reduced emissions.

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For further information, please contact *Gordon Dickson, Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery* on 0141 333 3407.



26 June 2023

BY EMAIL

Our ref: 19-2023-CE-VD

Dear

Community Bus Fund; Revenue Funds to Explore Options Under 2019 Transport Act

I understand all 32 Local Authorities recently received details on the distribution of Transport Scotland's Community Bus Fund (CBF). SPT are keen to support our respective Local Authorities in coordination of the CBF funds as required, to assist in dialogue with bus operators where necessary, and to ensure the best outcome for communities across the West of Scotland.

As background, the 2023/24 CBF includes both a capital allocation of £5m (eligible items include bus stop infrastructure improvements, real time passenger information displays and purchase of digital demand responsive transport systems) with individual LA allocations based on transport poverty and rural deprivation indices. It also includes a revenue allocation of £0.75m (eligible items include development of local bus strategies, local bus network reviews, assessments of data required to fulfil a business case considering options under the 2019 Transport Act, and to review ticketing options) with allocations via a competitive, first come first served basis.

Relatedly, you may be aware that SPT recently commenced development of the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS), building upon the work undertaken as part of the new Regional Transport Strategy. The timeline for the SRBS development will see Work Package 1 Case for Change report delivered in September 2023, followed by Work Package 2 Appraisal including the options under the 2019 Transport Act, to be delivered in March 2024. The full scope of works are listed below;

- Work Package 1 Case for Change
- Work Package 2 Options Appraisal
- Work Package 3 Strategy Development & Consultation
- Work Package 4 Finalise Strategy & Delivery Plan
- Work Package 5 Strategic Business Case
- Work Package 6 Strategic Advisor - Bus Reform and Organisational Change

Further details are available at the following link;

https://www.spt.co.uk/media/gr3hd3gj/sp090623_agenda7.pdf

SPT is keen to make early progress in the above work, including potentially an indicative cost assessment and business case for change in some or all of the SPT network – this will clearly need refined as we enter work package 5, but believe there is merit in undertaking early work now.

I would welcome your views on the merits of a consortium bid from the 12 Local Authorities in Strathclyde to this approach in advance of completing the Work Packages listed above, which will provide a robust Strategic Business Case for the future of local bus services in our area, based upon a comprehensive Regional Bus Strategy. Should this be of interest, SPT would be keen to hold a round table discussion to discuss this matter and agree a coordinated way forward.

I trust the above is of assistance and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Valerie Davidson
Chief Executive