



MyBus - Proposed Review of Service Design and Operation

Committee Operations

Date of meeting 5 November 2021

Date of report 16 October 2021

Report by Acting Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To inform the Committee of a proposed review of the service design and operation of SPT's MyBus service.

2. Background

- 2.1 SPT's MyBus¹ Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service is a door-to-door, pick-up and drop-off bus service for those with a mobility issue or who have difficulty accessing mainstream public transport services. The MyBus service enables its users to make essential trips (e.g. shopping), better access a range of opportunities and in essence, live more independent lives in their local communities. In doing so, this serves to improve mental and physical health and wellbeing, and achieve wider social inclusion objectives. There are also MyBus Rural services in parts of the SPT area where access to public transport is challenging and these services are available for use by all members of the local community.
- 2.2 SPT operates 33 MyBus and MyBus Rural services across the region with approximately 420,000 customer journeys in 2019/20. However, over the previous 5 years (2015/16 - 2019/20), the service has seen a 17% reduction in patronage - the equivalent of around 70,000 fewer journeys per annum being made.
- 2.3 In response to the Covid-19 public health emergency, MyBus and MyBus Rural services were suspended on 24 March 2020. This decision was taken in light of the particular potential vulnerability of MyBus users to the virus, most of whom are elderly or disabled passengers, and in acknowledgment of the fact that many of those users would have been required to 'shield' at home during lockdown periods and when travel restrictions were put in place by the Scottish Government. MyBus services resumed on a reduced basis on 17 August 2020 with restricted booking measures, reduced operating times, physical distancing, and with a reduced number of vehicles operating over larger areas.

3. Outline of proposals

- 3.1 The impetus for reviewing MyBus is fourfold. Firstly, SPT, like all public sector organisations, faces continuing financial pressures and as a result must ensure that

¹ <https://www.spt.co.uk/travel-with-spt/bus/mybus/>

budgets are spent in the most efficient and effective way possible. The annual revenue cost of providing the MyBus service is circa £3.4 million which in 2019/20 equated to a direct cost of £8.07 per passenger trip, or around £485 per MyBus customer annually. SPT continually seeks to improve its services in line with available budgets and this review will help explore potential opportunities to provide a more effective and efficient service to our customers within the expected funding available.

- 3.2 Secondly, as has been outlined, the use of MyBus has been declining over a number of years. More recently, the on-going Covid-19 pandemic has seen patronage levels at less than a third of pre-Covid demand and since the resumption of MyBus services in late summer 2020, the number of unique service users has more than halved – estimated now to be around 3,000 across the whole SPT area with the number of vehicles needed to operate the service reduced by 60% to reflect this current demand.
- 3.3 Thirdly, in our most recent report on progress on equality issues, “Advancing Equality 2021”², SPT has committed to undertake work to establish the appropriateness of the SPT MyBus service post-Covid, including:
- Engagement with service users and potential users to understand people’s needs for the service and how this could be adapted to improve its attractiveness, responsiveness and operational efficiency. Specifically, this will consider:
 - The characteristics of users - are there sectors of the community that are underrepresented in the current passenger profile?
 - Needs assessment - is there unmet need or barriers to accessing the service?
 - Ensuring service design results in the appropriate service for MyBus passengers.
 - Understanding the social and economic value of the service.
 - Considering ways in which greater uptake could be encouraged.
- 3.4 Finally, the preparation of the new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) presents an opportunity to fundamentally review and identify, in an evidence-based and objective way, how best to serve the MyBus DRT client groups in the longer-term and the most effective and efficient mechanisms for doing so.
- 3.5 In line with the above, it is therefore proposed that SPT’s MyBus service be reviewed in a two-stage process. Stage 1 would be a short-to-medium term interim review, with a focus on, but not limited to:
- Understanding the role and purpose of MyBus
 - Objective setting
 - Comparison of MyBus pre and post-Covid
 - MyBus/MyBus Rural
 - Booking arrangements (including web bookings)/scheduling systems³
 - Days/hours of operation
 - Service coverage

² https://www.spt.co.uk/media/ivwcg0yh/advancing-equality-2021-final_updated-april-21.pdf

³ Stage 1 of the review will not undertake an in-depth assessment of the current scheduling technologies used for MyBus, but will seek to understand the operational aspects of booking and scheduling systems used.

- Usage and performance
- Customer demographic
- Trip patterns, time of day/day of week, trip purpose
- Journey analysis – scheduled/unmet/cancellations
- User engagement/user experiences
- Benchmarking against DRT services elsewhere, including operating models
- Eligibility criteria
- Value for money/social need
- Operating costs and contract arrangements
- Opportunities to partner with other organisations in service design and delivery
- Website/Social Media/Marketing
- Review recommendations

3.6 The operation of SPT’s MyBus involves overseeing the transport needs of some of our region’s most vulnerable residents, including many people over 80 and people with disabilities. Given this user demographic, there are sensitivities around the MyBus service which must be taken into account throughout the review, including the varying range of user needs. Appropriate statutory assessments including an Equality Impact Assessment will therefore be undertaken as part of the review. The review will also require extensive data gathering, analysis and engagement in order to fully understand the service and user needs. Given the scale of work involved, it is anticipated that Stage 1 will be complete by December 2022, with findings and recommendations being reported for consideration to Committee shortly thereafter.

3.7 Stage 1 of the review will require careful management and governance to ensure it is undertaken in a robust manner. In this regard, it is proposed that the review process be overseen by an SPT senior management-led Steering Group and supported by a multi-departmental Working Group.

3.8 Stage 2 will be a fuller review undertaken following approval of the RTS in 2022. It will involve a much deeper, more fundamental review of how best to connect isolated communities (including community transport and demand responsive transport), and will, for example, consider how modern, innovative technology or alternative operating models such as Mobility as a Service (MaaS) could be utilised in developing sustainable solutions.

4. Conclusions

SPT’s MyBus service and its predecessor Dial-A-Bus, have for many years helped many of the most vulnerable residents of our region lead more independent lives and in so doing, improving physical and mental health and wellbeing, and social and economic activity. However, the decline in patronage over recent years coupled with the impact of the pandemic has had a significant impact on MyBus. The review proposed will seek to consider the needs of current and future users and how best to serve them, within the budget available. Officers will continue to update the Committee as the review progresses.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to:

- Note this report; and
- Note the proposed staged review outlined in Section 3 above.

6. Consequences

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| Policy consequences | <i>In line with current and developing RTS.</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>Appropriate statutory assessments, including an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the review process.</i> |
| Risk consequences | <i>None at present.</i> |

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