



MyBus Review – Stage 1 - progress update and initial key findings

Committee Operations

Date of meeting 27 January 2023

Date of report 9 January 2023

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To provide a progress update on Stage 1 of the MyBus Review, including initial key findings.

2. Background

- 2.1 Further to the update to the Committee in August 2022¹, Stage 1 of the MyBus Review is nearing completion. Members will recall that the review of the design and operation of SPT's MyBus Demand Responsive Transport service is a two-stage process: Stage 1 being a short-to-medium term interim review designed to better understand, amongst other things, usage patterns; booking arrangements; eligibility criteria; user experiences; social need; comparisons with elsewhere; marketing; and to identify opportunities to improve the service in the short term. Stage 2 will be a fuller review undertaken following approval of the new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS).
- 2.2 For context, it is worth highlighting the current position with regard to MyBus operation and usage, given the considerable challenges it has faced in recent years and continues to endure. During the Covid-19 pandemic, patronage reduced to less than a third of previous levels and consequently, service levels were reduced to reflect this changing demand. Whilst MyBus usage has recently shown some signs of recovery, patronage remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels at around one-third, and the number of unique service users is just over half compared with the pre-pandemic period. While the impact of Covid-19 was significant, the emergent impacts of the cost of living crisis on current and potential users is now a growing factor which will undoubtedly affect future use of MyBus.
- 2.3 The following section provides an update on the initial key findings of Stage 1 of the MyBus review, which will in turn inform the development of the Stage 1 final recommendations for approval which will be presented to the Committee in April.

3. Progress update and Stage 1 initial key findings

3.1 General update

- 3.1.1 Under the direction of the internal MyBus Review Steering Group and supported by consultants, recent work has focused on the development of objectives for MyBus, benchmarking, data analysis, an observation visit by the consultants to see MyBus in operation including booking procedures and arrangements, engagement with users and non-users, and undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment.

¹ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/h1sn2ogl/ops260822_agenda7.pdf

Specifically in relation to engagement, a user survey was sent to a sample of 800 MyBus customers chosen at random from SPT's database of c.4,500 users. A contact telephone number was provided for anyone wishing assistance to complete the survey. The user survey period commenced on 2 December 2022 and ran until 18 January 2023. At the time of writing, over 200 completed questionnaires have been returned. This is considered a good response rate for a survey of this type and should ensure that views are representative from across the MyBus operating area from customers with varying needs, including people living in rural and urban areas, and people with disabilities.

3.1.2 Analysis of user responses is now underway and whilst the small sample of responses already examined would suggest general overall satisfaction with the service, there does appear to be a perception, at least, that the service is, post-Covid, more difficult to access. It is also evident that mobility issues exist amongst respondents and is the most common reason for using the service. A more in-depth examination of all responses will be undertaken to inform the recommendations of the review.

3.1.3 Further engagement work will start towards the end of January and will see a small number of face-to-face group interviews with local clubs and community groups across the region whose members include eligible MyBus users and non-users. This work will run concurrently with the last phase of Stage 1 to help inform findings and final recommendations. The interviews will seek to understand awareness of the MyBus service and help identify issues that stop people using the service. They will also serve to identify opportunities for improvements to the service for existing users and ways to encourage eligible non-users to make use of the service.

3.2 Stage 1 Initial Key Findings

3.2.1 Noted below are the initial key findings of Stage 1 of the MyBus Review, based on work done to date. These findings will be further developed and adapted as further work is undertaken e.g. data analysis, user/non-user engagement, best practice elsewhere, and be used to develop the Stage 1 final recommendations.

- **General** – the MyBus service is considered by users to be an essential, 'lifeline' service for many of the most vulnerable people in the west of Scotland, enabling them to enjoy more fulfilling lives and to access everyday needs.
- **Policy** – there needs to be greater clarity on the key societal group(s) MyBus is serving – e.g. older people, younger people, males/females, those with medical issues, those with mobility issues, those who live in urban areas, or rural areas and equalities groups. Further to this, the service currently provides one model of operation to serve a range of different needs and this should be reviewed.

Scope of Service / Service Design – the operation of the MyBus service on a zonal basis by around 20+ minibuses appears to meet the requirements of most of the user groups based on current levels of demand, plus cancellation and refusal rates. However, ways to ensure that the service design continues to meet the needs of all users and potential users should be examined further, while at the same time ensuring the service continues to be a workable and affordable solution.

- **Vehicles** – the current type of bus used to provide the MyBus service could be improved to better suit the needs of certain user groups, and in some cases could be considered to be too large for expected and actual demand for the service.
- **Software** – more up-to-date software allowing for more sophisticated booking and allocation of trips is available on the current market and would improve the service offered to passengers. Similarly, consideration should be given to the potential role of Digital DRT systems providing the scope to book and deliver trips ‘live’ in real time.
- **Group Bookings** – consideration should be given to reviewing the current approach relating to group bookings (local clubs etc) for MyBus and whether this meets the objectives of providing the service.
- **Eligibility Criteria** – consideration should be given to adjusting the eligibility criteria for using MyBus to better meet the needs of those members of society who most need it. Currently, the criteria could be considered to be focused on medical issues rather than mobility issues. Further, age-related factors should be reviewed to ensure that those who most need the service are able to access it. This is particularly relevant in Glasgow and the west of Scotland where many societal groups have the lowest life and healthy life expectancies in the UK and Europe.
- **Technology** – promoting greater use of modern communications technology (e.g. smartphones) to facilitate contact with customers should be encouraged.
- **Signposting following declined request** – currently, if a request for trip is declined, there is no signposting to alternative services (e.g. Community Transport) which may fulfil the user’s requirements. This could be addressed through joint initiatives with relevant agencies.
- **Overlap between services** – there is some evidence of overlap in service provision between MyBus and other organisations services. This should be addressed, and further opportunities should be explored to, where possible, adopt an integrated approach with other providers (e.g. Community Transport).
- **Costs** – the costs of providing the MyBus service are considered to be in line with similar services elsewhere although this should be continually monitored for efficiencies where possible.
- **Interchange** – the currently small use of interchange with other modes on MyBus could be considered to be a limitation on MyBus users making full use of the mobility offered by the wider transport network.
- **Marketing** – the service could generate greater demand through more effective and targeted marketing, particularly to those groups unfamiliar with the MyBus service.
- **Environmental impacts** – the scale of operation of MyBus appears to be suited to electric vehicles, thereby reducing the service’s impact on the environment. Further consideration should be given to the use of electric buses, taking cognisance of range, availability, and operator readiness and familiarity.
- **MyBus Rural** – the distinct nature of operations in rural areas requires further consideration. Given such services are targeted at all users, not specifically those elderly or disabled, there is a need to make such services distinctive and better aligned to rural community needs.

- **Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation of MyBus** – the current reporting arrangements for performance of MyBus, and the process for utilising this for identifying service improvements should be reviewed and enhanced where possible in tandem with more modern scheduling and reporting software implementation as noted above.

3.3 Taking these findings from the various workstreams, options will be identified based on the evidence gathered, best practice elsewhere and user feedback. The draft findings, options and recommendations presented to the next meeting of the Committee in April.

4. Conclusions

The service provided by MyBus plays an important part in the lives of some of our region's most vulnerable residents, including many people over 80 years old and people with disabilities, including supporting improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as social and economic activity. However, the impact of Covid, the ongoing cost of living crisis, and the wider post-Covid challenges currently facing the commercial bus network, only serve to heighten the importance of undertaking the MyBus Review and in seeking to consider the needs of current future and non- users and how best to serve them, within the budget available.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note progress of the MyBus Review, the initial key findings, and that the Stage 1 final recommendations will be presented to the next Committee in April.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>In line with current RTS and developing new 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>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>None at present.</i>

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