

To Regeneration & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

DONCASTER BUS PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

| Relevant Cabinet Member(s) | Wards Affected | Key Decision |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Bill Mordue : Highways, Street Scene and Transportation | All wards | K1182 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council informally works in partnership with the South Yorkshire Public Transport Executive (SYPTTE) and local bus operators to improve bus patronage, but recent trends indicate that patronage is declining due to a number of external factors. Lower passenger volumes leads to a circle of reduced margins, less investment, reduced services, lower quality and lower customer satisfaction.
2. There are a number of ways of working in partnership with SYPTTE and operators. Consideration is being given to developing a voluntary Bus Partnership Agreement (BPA) which enables all parties to coordinate investment by increased priority, higher quality vehicles, more affordable ticketing and better marketing which has been successfully demonstrated thorough the Sheffield BPA.
3. Work to develop a BPA for Doncaster has started with evidence gathering and tabling of asks from each partner, albeit it is recognised that opportunities are limited.
4. Further detail on the BPA will be presented by officers from DMBC, SYPTTE and operators at the meeting.

EXEMPT REPORT

5. Not exempt

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. To note progress to date

BACKGROUND

7. The Council has an informal working relationship with local bus operators and the Transport Executive enabling information to be shared, issues identified and where feasible projects implemented. This has enabled a number of major bus priority schemes to be implemented

on the main radial corridors entering Doncaster, funded from external parties. Each party has its own remit influencing bus usage which broadly covers

- The Council: highway authority with powers to implement bus lanes, priority measures and associated infrastructure
- The Transport Executive: transport authority with powers to monitor service levels, provide ticketing and marketing information and provide tendered services where not commercially viable.
- The bus operators: First group, Stagecoach, Arriva and a number of smaller operators provide commercial services across Doncaster.

8. At the Scrutiny meeting each partner will present in more detail on these points.

BUS TRENDS

9. During the summer SYPTE produced a Doncaster Bus Intelligence report which analysed key data sets. The number of passengers travelling by bus in Doncaster fell by 7% last year which was primarily driven by a decline in fare paying passengers but also as a result of increasing child fares by 10p pa over the last three years. Doncaster has the second largest decline in bus mode share into the urban centre of all SY districts, and the largest decline of journeys to work.
10. Doncaster bus users are the least satisfied of the four South Yorkshire districts and are least likely to recommend it, but also the least likely to complain. Users and non-users satisfaction with value for money is just 30%. Doncaster has consistently been in the bottom two performers for punctuality and reliability since 2011.
11. Further detail on these issues will be presented at the meeting.

BUS PARTNERSHIPS

12. There are a number of options that can be considered to influence bus services in Doncaster

- Informal partnership – to continue to work informally as and when issues or opportunities arise.
- Voluntary Bus Partnership – to work in partnership through a defined, but voluntary, agreement which gives confidence to partners to invest to grow the market.
- Statutory Quality Partnership (SQP) – to designate corridors where bus priority measures are only available to operators who met certain quality standards.
- Quality Contract – to replace the current commercial market with a franchised network, specified by consultation with DMBC \ SYITA.

13. Nationally no quality contracts have been implemented (London has a franchising system), and progress of SQPs has been limited. The most appropriate way forward is to develop a voluntary bus partnership agreement which would cover

Network
Infrastructure
Tendered services
Quality standards
Ticketing & fares
Marketing \ information

DRAFT BUS PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FOR DONCASTER

14. In summer 2013 the new mayor asked the three parties to prepare a BPA for Doncaster. Heads of Terms covering the key points in paragraph 13 were drafted and presented back to the mayor in October. However it was clearly recognised that there were a number of issues that would limit the scope of the BPA which are summarised below

- The lack of competition along routes between operators means that there is little duplication of services and therefore limited scope to achieve network efficiency savings by reducing bus numbers whilst maintaining frequency.
- The high level of bus priority measures already in place (along York Road, Bawtry Road, Balby Road and within the town centre) gives little scope to provide more facilities to speed up bus journey times other than along Thorne Road or Bentley Road.
- The low car parking charges (and taxi fares) would limit the ability to grow market share by switch of mode from car to bus unless charges/fares could be increased. The current multi operators and Arriva product fare levels are higher than all day parking charges.
- The diverse demand and changing trip patterns with the move towards shift working at out of town locations which generate low infrequent passenger numbers.
- The emerging debate over efficiencies to the levy and the impact this may have on future service commitments.

15. The success of a BPA depends upon the level of efficiencies that can be achieved by improving the network or stimulating demand, which in turn would enable operators to reinvest savings into cheaper ticketing arrangements and \ or improved quality standards. This has been achieved by the Sheffield BPA which is showing a patronage growth of c. 7% in the first year of operation, bucking the national downward trend. In Doncaster's case the opportunities are more modest. The above offer is being reviewed before any proposal is considered for taking forward during 2014.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

16. As detailed in paragraph 12 there are four options that could be explored and the next step is to consider a voluntary bus partnership agreement. If this still does not achieve a demonstrable effect then consideration could be given to a statutory partnership if linked to new infrastructure investment by the Council.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. A voluntary agreement is the next logical step to improve bus services.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES

18. Better public transport improves accessibility to key services and has positive impact upon the environment.

| Priority Outcome | Implications of this initiative |
|---|--|
| Doncaster's economy develops and thrives, underpinned by effective education and skills | Improved access to employment, leisure, retail opportunities |
| Children are safe | |
| Stronger families and stronger communities | |
| Modernised and sustainable Adult Social Care Services with increased choice and control | |
| Effective arrangements are in place to deliver a clean, safe and attractive local environment | |
| The Council is operating effectively, with change embedded and sustained with robust plans in place to operate within future resource allocations | |

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

19. The three key risks are

- The offer that each partner can make is not sufficient to justify partners reciprocating investment.
- The impact of future budgets constraints restricts the ability of partners to invest in new facilities.
- External macro influences – demographic and economic changes reduces demand for buses.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

20. None arising associated with this report. Individual projects that may require legal implications (for instance signing of a partnership agreement) will be subject to scheme specific reports.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

21. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

22. To date consultation has been confined to the partners. As the agreement develops wider consultation will take place with stakeholders and the public.

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| Procurement | | Crime & Disorder | |
| Human Resources | | Human Rights & Equalities | |
| Buildings, Land and Occupiers | | Environment & Sustainability | |
| ICT | | Capital Programme | |

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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