

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

A meeting of the Executive Member for Regeneration was held on Wednesday 23 February 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors E Polano (Chair),

**PRESENT BY
INVITATION:**

**ALSO IN
ATTENDANCE:**

OFFICERS: S Blood and C Cowley

**APOLOGIES FOR
ABSENCE:**

21/11 **TEES VALLEY COMBINED AUTHORITY ENHANCED BUS PARTNERSHIP PLAN AND SCHEME**

The Director of Regeneration submitted a report, the purpose was to approve that Middlesbrough Council become party to the 'shell' Enhanced Partnership agreement, noting that there was no direct obligations at this stage.

The report required a decision as entering in to a regional bus partnership was strongly encouraged by the Department for Transport (DfT) as part of the devolution arrangements with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). Having a formal arrangement will be looked upon favourably for future funding opportunities, so having full sign up from the Council is imperative.

The partnership also affects Council strategy and policy. The partnership requires close working with TVCA, neighbouring authorities, and bus operators to achieve a better service provision for the travelling public. This strategic approach would help to identify key improvements to be implemented, and assist in attracting funding to the region.

Within the report it provided background information, advising that since the first national lockdown in March 2020, the Government has provided financial support to the bus sector to ensure the continued provision of services despite significantly reduced passenger numbers. This recovery funding was intended to support the bus sector's return to financial sustainability.

In March 2021, the Government published Bus Back Better: national bus strategy for England. The strategy set out the long-term vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England. It should be noted that TVCA, the five Tees Valley local authorities and the Tees Valley bus operators have an long-standing history of collaboration and the work being progressed in response to the national bus strategy builds upon this.

There were two requirements that must be met, to be eligible for potential future funding to support bus provision:

- submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by 31 October 2021. The BSIP should set out a vision for delivering a step-change in bus services. A local public and wider stakeholder engagement process was undertaken during the development of the BSIP to inform priorities and this targeted both users and potential users of bus services. The Tees Valley BSIP was published in accordance with the deadline and can be viewed at Tees Valley BSIP;
- implement an Enhanced Partnership (EP), which is a statutory agreement between TVCA, the five Tees Valley local authorities and the Tees Valley bus operators. The EP is made up of two parts: the EP plan, which mirrors the content of the BSIP; and the EP Scheme where the detailed requirements and actions for services and infrastructure in the area are set out specifically.

The original deadline was for submission of the final scheme to the Government by the 31 March 2022, but this has recently been amended to submission of a draft scheme by the end of April 2022. However, given how advanced Tees Valley already is in the statutory process, the intention is to continue to work to the original deadline.

The BSIP and EP have been structured around a five-point delivery plan:

- 1) **decarbonisation** – one of the first regions in the UK to have an entirely zero emission local bus fleet;
- 2) **fares** – simpler fares and targeted promotions to drive passenger growth;
- 3) **customer experience** – putting the needs of customers at the heart of service delivery and improving information provision with one brand identity;
- 4) **infrastructure** – new infrastructure investment to prioritise bus on core corridors and improve passenger experience; and
- 5) **network** – a collaborative approach focused on core corridors and integration with the Tees Flex on-demand bus service.

It should be noted that the delivery of much of this five-point plan is dependent on securing revenue funding from government and it is understood that details of the indicative funding to support delivery of the BSIP will be provided by February 2022. The government has made it clear that should an area not implement an EP scheme, then future funding to both the Tees Valley Combined Authority, as local transport authority, and local bus operators could potentially be withheld.

As part of Spending Review 2021, it was announced that TVCA had an indicative capital allocation of £310m from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) for the five-year period from 2022/23 to 2026/27. The capital funding needed to deliver the infrastructure priority has been included in the CRSTS programme business case. It is important to understand that TVCA is party to the agreement as the local, strategic transport authority and the five Tees Valley local authorities in their capacity as local highway authorities. An officer governance structure has been established, involving TVCA, the five Tees Valley local authorities and bus operators, to oversee the work and updates have been provided to the TVCA Transport Committee.

Coronavirus continues to impact on bus services in terms of patronage, service delivery and operational timetabling. These impacts coupled with uncertainty around the potential funding to support the delivery of the BSIP has made the process more challenging. It therefore needs to be recognised that the BSIP and EP need to be fluid and will be adapted as there is more certainty, particularly around the funding allocation. In recognition of this challenge, the EP was in the form of a 'shell' agreement, which sets out the high-level priorities. There are no direct obligations on TVCA, the Tees Valley local authorities or bus operators at this stage. The EP Plan includes a bespoke variation mechanism, which enables further detail to be added at the appropriate point in time.

Any scheme that impacts on the local highway will therefore be subject to confirmation of funding and satisfactory completion of the necessary statutory processes.

OPTIONS

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

The other potential decisions that have not been recommended include:

- a) Doing nothing - this was not recommended, as it would not allow the Council to realise the benefits outlined within the report. This will have an impact upon the Councils strategic objectives such as the recently approved Local Implementation Plan and Town Centre Strategy.
- b) Re-assessing the partnership plan– this was not recommended, as the proposals have been compiled following working groups between all parties; facilitated by external consultants who are experienced in collating BSIPs in other established areas.
- c) Accept the proposals and deliver as anticipated. It is recommended that the proposals are approved as presented in order to realise the benefits of:

- Improved Road Safety
- Improved accessibility
- Supporting the local economy.
- Reducing congestion and improving local environment
- Improving public health by reducing pollution
- Ensure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic on Middlesbrough Councils Highway Network
- Act as a statement of intent to echo Governments ambitions to significantly increase the uptake of sustainable transport

ORDERED

That the Executive approve the proposals to join an enhanced regional bus partnership to improve bus service provision.

REASONS

The decision was supported by the following reason:

- 1) This was being recommended as it is a requirement from the DfT that all Authorities are signed up to an adopted Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Enhanced Partnership (EP) in order to be eligible for future funding opportunities to support bus travel.
- 2) The content of the BSIP/EP is aligned with a number of Council objectives, namely:
 - a) improving Road Safety for all road users, and reduce accidents;
 - b) improving accessibility for all; particularly those with disabilities and transport access limitations;
 - c) supporting the local economy; improving accessibility to local retail, leisure and services by improving accessibility;
 - d) reducing congestion by encouraging alternate modes of travel than the private car will improve air quality, reduce noise and help to improve the local environment;
 - e) improving public health by reducing pollution; buses emit fewer pollutants than the equivalent number of cars required to transport the same number of people;
 - f) ensuring the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic on Middlesbrough Councils Highway Network; and,
 - g) acting as a statement of intent to echo Governments ambitions to significantly increase the uptake of sustainable transport.

The decision will come into force after five working days following the day the decision(s) was published unless the decision becomes subject to the call in procedures.