Bus Travel in South East Scotland – Follow Up Report

1.   Introduction

1.1   This paper follows the presentation and discussion of the Bus Travel Discussion Paper to the Partnership Board on Friday 22nd June 2018. This paper will highlight the main discussion points and consider proposed actions.

2.   Discussion

2.1   Open Data in the Bus Industry
- Bus policy should be plan/development led and there is a need to link transport and planning together.
- SEStran should find out what Open Data is available.

2.2   Smart Ticketing in the SEStran Region
- There is a need to bring all modes together under smart ticketing.
- Could SEStran provide regional or local ticketing strategies to provide further options to customers?
- SEStran should encourage new bus operators to enter the market and minimise barriers to make it easier to run services at the required level.
- SEStran should work to minimise the barriers to smart ticketing.

2.3   Tackling Rising Congestion
- Research is required to inform new strategy/policy to tackle congestion.
- The lack of parking at park and rides is an issue and disincentivises the public from using bus/rail to commute into Edinburgh.
- SEStran should play an active role in driving a regional solution
- Free city centre parking, outside of the controlled area needs to be addressed to prevent parked cars in residential areas.
- The new Edinburgh City Centre Low Emissions Zones, which are being brought into play in 2020, could contribute to the reduction of single occupancy car journeys in the SEStran region.
- There is a need to reduce the need for travel e.g. focus on home working or internet conferencing.
- SEStran could play a vital role in starting the debate on congestion charging, however such schemes could hit rural communities the hardest.
- Can we change our mindset and remove cars from our town centres? We must, however, be cognisant of the potential impact on economic development within our town and city centres.

2.4   Option of Intelligent Centralisation

- Under the new Transport Bill (Scotland) proposals, there may be an option for SEStran under the proposed BSIPs.
- The East Lothian Bus Charter is a good example of standards expected by the public and the council and bus operators. This can be shared with SEStran's IMF Forum and could be developed on a regional basis to set common standards across the region for bus operators.
- SEStran could share best practice and lessons learned from other Local Authorities within our region. E.g. experiences with consultations / operators changing routes and services.
- Sharing intelligence is key to success.

2.5 Equality of Access to Bus Services
- SEStran should address the implications from operators removing lifeline services.
- Service Level Agreements with community transport operators could bridge the missing link from commercially run services. SEStran could research this and propose a paper for debate.

2.6 Young People and Bus Travel
- There have been innovations in the Netherlands offering a Spotify-type subscription service for young people to use public transport. Could we link this to the yTravel project for young people? Or could this be offered for older people?
- SEStran should work with schools to understand young people's travel habits and what could attract young people to public transport.
- SEStran should engage further with Community Planning Partnerships.
- Take account of the variety of rural and urban areas and related local issues.
- Must take into consideration how bus services can help to address isolation and loneliness.

3. Proposed Actions

3.1 It is proposed that SEStran holds a meeting with bus operators to follow up on the discussion points above and **Appendix 1**. Chief Officers, transport operators, community transport representatives and Partnership Board members would be invited. The agenda for the meeting would be the bus paper which was presented to the Partnership Board and the issues that have been highlighted in subsequent discussions. It is proposed that this meeting would be held in the Autumn 2018.

3.2 The Scottish Parliament's Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee is gathering the views of individuals and organisations on the Transport (Scotland) Bill proposals. There is Call for Evidence due Friday 28th September 2018 and an online survey available here: https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/TransportScotlandBill2018/. SEStran will be using Board and meeting discussions to respond to both the Call for

Evidence and the online survey. Furthermore, SEStran's Head of Programmes has been invited to give evidence at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee meeting on the 19th September 2018.

7.   Recommendations

7.1   That the Board note and discuss the content of the report.

Appendix 1: A Discussion Paper by Barry Turner, Non-Councillor Board Member

Catriona Jones
Projects Officer
26th July 2018

Appendix 1: A Discussion Paper by Barry Turner, Non-Councillor Board Member

This paper follows on from the report considered by the Board on 22nd June. When I was chairman of RELBUS we produced a paper outlining what we thought needed to be done to improve bus services and we concluded that action fell within four categories each beginning with the letter I. They are Involvement, Integration, Innovation and Information. I found that the actions described in the report to the Board for the most part also fitted into these categories. I have identified here other actions that might be added to form a comprehensive package that could make a real difference. The order of the categories reflects my thinking on a logical order in which the issues and possibilities should be approached if we were undertaking an exercise, i.e. Ask, Act and Tell. However, the four categories don't have to be part of a specific process but should be ongoing side by side. We really should be doing something on each all the time in order to achieve progress.

Involvement

This is about asking people what they want from their bus services. Provision should always be about satisfying passenger needs and not about what might be operationally convenient or most profitable.

The report in 3.6 looks at assessing the needs of young people and this is an important consideration for the reasons set out in the report. As I said at the meeting surveys should also be undertaken with the elderly in the light of issues around loneliness and social isolation that have been highlighted in recent studies as the report says in 3.5. Bus services made accessible to the elderly in locational and physical terms and in terms of destination offered can have a very positive impact in these respects. In addition, there should be ongoing surveys of existing and potential users to ascertain whether their needs are being met. My concern with what the report says about open data in 3.1 is that it seems to be about finding out what people are doing, that is how they currently use services. It is just as important to find out what they are not doing and why. Why are people not using buses and what would make them change their mind? It's not only about the services themselves but also about the convenience of using buses; things like access to and information at stops and the availability of shelters.

Integration

This is about offering the seamless journey in terms of integrated ticketing, routes and timetables so that public transport becomes easier to use and can better compete with the private car.

There is a move towards the seamless journey as far as ticketing is concerned and smart ticketing has been focussed upon at a number of Board meetings. Contactless payment systems should be the aim as stated in 3.2 of the report. In London this has made travel for visitors like myself so much easier though as the report says there is an issue over clarity of pricing. Potential users need to know what they are paying. A move towards greater integration of services is not apparent and the report is silent on the matter. The organisation of bus services and lack of relationships between many of them in the competitive environment is often difficult to understand and is I believe a deterrent to their use. Though there is no obvious and workable

solution with the current operational regime Government appears to be waking up to the issues. Some progress has been achieved in East Lothian especially through timetables of supported services being related to those of commercial services wherever possible. However, across the region there are still problems around better integrating bus and rail services even though there is an obligation upon Scotrail to move forward on this. SEStran should perhaps look into the problems and offer assistance.

Innovation

This is about adapting and extending existing provision to meet needs and about providing services in new ways particularly to reach the more isolated communities. It is also about what can be done to create a better environment in which buses can operate.

This is where some of the real opportunities lay. I look first at rising congestion levels and their impact on bus services and bus patronage as covered in 3.3 of the report. Congestion charging may be a solution but it hits the poor hardest and those who can afford to do so simply pay the charge. Central London seems to be more congested now than it was before charging was introduced. Bus lanes have a role but they have to be enforced and there remains the problem that the lanes tend to end some distance from busy junctions in order to avoid traffic chaos. A workplace parking levy is another solution offered but again this favours the better off, and in any case it is not necessarily workplace parking that is the cause of so much peak congestion given its fairly limited supply. In Edinburgh I would say that a significant proportion of the peak commuter traffic parks on street outside controlled parking areas. Remove this option in a phased way by schemes that disallow parking by other than local residents for an hour mid day - and enforce them - and traffic would be significantly reduced in my view. It would make buses quicker and more efficient in the peaks thus allowing more buses to be available to cater for the new demand created. This is stick actually facilitating the carrot.

It is the speed of buses that puts many people off using them. For example it takes a very long time to travel from Musselburgh into Edinburgh because for the most part the buses stop everywhere, often as a consequence of other buses blocking the stops. I have two more suggestions applicable to Edinburgh and possibly elsewhere. Introduce more express buses peak and off peak and introduce a request stop system so that buses will only stop at certain muli-route stops if requested to do so. it would need to be made clear in publicity and at the stops that buses will only stop if hailed or the bell is rung.

Moving on to intelligent centralisation covered in 3.4 of the report, inequalities in public transport fares is an issue as the report says and a centralised approach is needed to address this. A centralised approach could have other applications not least in the pursuance of best practice across the region. The report looks at equality of access to bus services in 3.5.There is a great awareness of the disparity in service levels between urban and rural areas and particularly the issue of providing services to the most remote communities to help tackle social deprivation. Much is being done across the region by different local councils but there is not much in the way of

a common approach based on best practice and trying something new. West Lothian for example has a taxi bus service which might be a solution elsewhere and East Lothian is trying something similar in one location. Community transport is another option based upon resources that already exist in some rural communities. There was support at the Board meeting for some kind of brainstorming workshop on these issues and the various possibilities for tackling them in order to adopt a common approach and achieve greater consistency across the region. We need to arrange it.

There is much to be said for achieving a common approach to issues through the adoption of jointly agreed policies, collaborative measures and through developing the sharing economy as indicated in the report. Community transport is just one aspect. The report also refers to the expansion of car sharing. A collaborative initiative in East Lothian is the Bus Passenger Charter jointly produced by RELBUS, the council and the operators. It sets out the expectations of passengers and the responsibilities of the council and operators. It is a good example of working together for the common good and something like it should perhaps be universally adopted in the region.

Finally under the heading of innovation there is the question of new and adapted services. This takes me back to the involvement heading. The number of times I have heard people say 'If only there was a bus to such and such a place' or 'if only that service ran a little later'. Surveys could test the degree of interest in changing services to meet such needs and the changes made could actually increase bus patronage. And let's not forget the importance of providing bus services to new housing development, something that I don't think is high on the developers' priorities. If a bus service is there at the outset then there's a good chance that people will use it provided that it is frequent and attractive. If it is not there car use will become established. It's down to the local authorities to see that it happens.

Information

This is about making sure that people know through a variety of means what public transport is available, how to access it and what it will cost them. It's also about making sure people know who is responsible for running particular services and how they can make complaints or suggestions.

We can do all sorts of things to make the service better but if we don't tell people what's available and by whom in ways that they can access that information we will not get more people using those services. Real Time Passenger Information has been a great innovation accessible on phones, at stops and places where people congregate. We must not rely solely on new technology because many elderly people do not use it, but we certainly must make the most of it if we want to get young people on board. The balance at present is about right and new avenues for information are being explored all the time. We should not, however, underestimate the value of simple, old fashioned measures like up to date timetables at all bus stops. Disseminating information should not be just about the services themselves but other things affecting bus use like clarity of pricing, hailing buses and the Passenger Charter all referred to above.

BARRY TURNER

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