

Bus Travel in South East of Scotland

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper is the second in a series of policy area discussion papers. This comes from a suggestion from the Chair and Deputy Chairs that the meetings of the Partnership should have a greater focus on debating and discussing strategic issues. In previous correspondence, a Board Member referred to the bus industry being at a 'crossroads' and asked for the subject to be included in a Board discussion. In light of the two recent bus consultations published at the end of 2017, and growing concern surrounding the decline of bus patronage in Scotland, this paper seeks to enable a Board level strategic discussion of possible actions for the Partnership in increasing the number of journeys taken by bus in the South East of Scotland.

2. Through South East of Scotland Transport Partnership's Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), buses are recognised as the backbone of the public transport system throughout the region. Over three-quarters of public transport journeys in Scotland are taken by bus, with many consumers relying on buses for work, health and social journeys¹. However, bus patronage has been on the decline in Scotland, with a 27 million² net reduction in bus trips in Scotland between 2011/12 and 2015/16. Specifically looking at the South East of Scotland region, passenger journeys by region for local bus services have increased from 162 million in 2005-6 to 165 million 2015-16³, however this is most likely skewed by Lothian Buses in the City of Edinburgh. Subsidised bus services have reduced more than commercial services Scotland wide, and this has disproportionately affected rural areas. However, some commercial services within the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership region have struggled with commercial viability, as during 2016 and 2017, First Bus withdrew from both East Lothian and the Scottish Borders, citing reduction of passenger numbers and loss of earnings.

The Royal Town Planning Institute highlighted in their 2016 "Poverty, Place and Inequality" policy paper, the significant severance effect of area-based disadvantage for individuals. Those living in certain less affluent areas are from evidence less mobile, more reliant on public transport and less able to commute to job opportunities given expensive and/or fragmented transport networks. Previous studies have highlighted that those who are least skilled or most remote from the labour market have the least locational flexibility in seeking new job or training opportunities and that this spatial deficiency rather than lack of skills or training has particularly afflicted some communities and individuals within them in terms of receipt of positive outcomes.

¹ 'Creating Better Journeys: Findings from the Citizens Advice Scotland bus users survey', Citizens Advice Scotland (2018).

² 'Trends in Scottish Bus Patronage: Report to the Confederation of Passenger Transport (Scotland)', KPMG (2017).

³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-no-35-datasets/>

The removal or reduction of rural bus services can be detrimental to those who do not have access to a car, highlighted through the recently published Loneliness and Isolation Consultation. The level of bus services provided during off-peak hours and in areas of relatively low demand is essential from the perspective of non-car owners, and in providing alternatives to the car. At present, many services drop off sharply or cease fairly early in the evening, which is problematic for many. In addition, many Sunday services are infrequent with some not running at all. This is a particular issue for access to education, retail and leisure, in addition to employment and health. However, the internet and internet shopping has also impacted on the way people travel and their reasons for doing so. The reduction or removal of rural bus services can either limit access to key services via affordable transport, or encourage car ownership as the only viable means of transport. Indeed, an increase in car ownership accounts for 12 million of the 27 million net reduction of bus trips in Scotland⁴.

3. Bus Travel in South East of Scotland

3.1 Open Data in the Bus Industry

The concept of Open Data is about making data held by public bodies available and easily accessible online for reuse and redistribution. Published Open Data will not impact on the fundamental right to the protection of confidential personal and commercial data.

Access to open data is essential in terms of improving bus patronage, offering innovative solutions to digital data and improving access to up to date and relevant information. There is an ever increasing expectation for digital information and for information to be made available in greater depths, in order to make journey planning easier. SEStran believes that detailed bus service and stop patronage data should similarly be made available for transport planning purposes. At present this data is not released and can severely restrict effective transport planning and project development, which again is not in the public interest.

As part of SEStran's 'SocialCar' project, SEStran, in collaboration with Product Forge and CodeBase, hosted a Transport 'Hackathon' (marathon of information analysis or hacking marathon) on Thursday 4th May – Sunday 7th May 2017 in Edinburgh. The aim of the Transport Hackathon was to understand how people currently use transport services in the South East of Scotland. The event aimed to understand how, through digital methods, we could make services better for everyone in the future. The event consisted of a room full of entrepreneurially-minded data scientists and analysts, designers, software engineers and transport industry professionals. These participants spent 3 days and 3 nights developing product prototypes to

⁴ 'Trends in Scottish Bus Patronage: Report to the Confederation of Passenger Transport (Scotland)', KPMG (2017).

improve transport services within Scotland. Participants from this wide range of backgrounds and skills formed teams to work on a product prototypes with support from industry experts in the transport sector and the wider technology community.

Providing this open, innovative and collaborative space, SEStran were keen to see participants use this event to bring their digital expertise to challenges faced by the transport industry in Scotland, expand professional networks, fix problems within the sector or even launch a new product or start-up.

Highlights of this event can be viewed via this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wfdb65eyL1g>

How can open data help the bus industry plan and create services for the future? Should SEStran host a further open data session as part of the yTravel project with Young Scot?

3.2 Smart Ticketing in the SEStran Region

SEStran has invested a significant amount of money in Real Time Passenger Information. Live bus times can now be accessed through the Traveline app and on digital screens in public and commercial buildings across the region. The Transport Scotland Smart Ticketing Delivery Strategy, first published in October 2012 and now updated, set out the vision “That all journeys on Scotland’s bus, rail, ferry, subway and tram networks can be made using some form of smart ticketing or payment”.

SEStran recently responded to the consultation ‘The Future of Smart Ticketing in Scotland’ and highlighted that any national smart ticketing scheme should aim to provide contactless payment systems. Integrated Ticketing through contactless payments systems should be the end objective of the national scheme. Any approach to a national smart ticketing scheme needs to facilitate, not stifle, this kind of development led by operators, or otherwise. However, contactless systems do present other barriers in terms of market perception of transparency and clarity of pricing, and therefore these issues need to be looked at in greater depth. For example, feedback from bus operators within the SEStran region has highlighted wariness amongst the public of new smart ticketing methods and there have therefore been low levels of take-up of any new smart ticketing methods.

Significant investment has already been made in smart infrastructure and further investment made in ensuring operators across the country can accept smart tickets and it is right that these benefits should be maximised. For example, South East of Scotland Transport Partnership has been successful in two rounds of the ERDF Smart Ticketing Challenge Fund and has kitted out 10 smaller bus operators with smart ticketing enabled ticket machines for tendered bus services.

How can the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership provide further support to bus operators to be ready for a national integrated smart ticketing system?

3.3 Tackling Rising Congestion

Congestion has increased average bus journey times by 10% over the last decade, leading to higher fares and undermining the attractiveness of the bus. There is a distinct trend across the most congested urban conurbations in the UK of bus journey times rising by – on average – almost 1% per annum.⁵ An example of the effects of congestion, would be the X70 Borders Buses service from Peebles to Edinburgh, which has added 20 minutes to the journey time due to congestion. There is also a direct correlation between operating speeds and patronage: a 10% decrease in speeds reduces patronage by at least 10%. The figure could yet be higher because congestion puts pressure on punctuality and reliability which can increase waiting time at bus stops. Passengers place a value two to three times as high on waiting at a bus stop as they do for in-vehicle time.

Clearly, congestion is an issue for bus patronage, and it has been addressed previously. In Edinburgh, the introduction of Greenways bus priority in 1996, following years of good conventional priority measures, resulted in a 4% improvement in journey times between 1986 and 1996. However, this trend was not sustained due to weaker enforcement, removal of priority during off peak and lack of maintenance of bus lanes.

Professor David Begg has suggested that more cities need to follow the lead of London, with the implementation of congestion charging, Nottingham, with its workplace parking levy, and Bristol, with essential car parking restraint measures. All three cities have been prepared to use both the carrot (improved sustainable transport) and the stick (car restraint). Professor Begg states that public transport improvements on their own are not a panacea for urban congestion. They have to be accompanied by traffic restraint measures.

Mobility as a Service (MaaS) brings all means of travel, transport providers and payment options together into one single service, giving customers instant access to all public transport, from trains and trams to buses and bikes⁶. MaaS and the Collaborative (Sharing) Economy have great potential to unlock underused capacity. The transport network of the South East of Scotland can at peak times be close to capacity and a lot of this is comprised of underutilised individualised vehicles travelling on the network, imposing social, economic and environmental detriment on communities. The value of the collaborative economy is to use underutilised assets, such as under-occupied cars relative to their capacity, to reduce congestion on road networks and to offset the need for further capacity expansion of network based on non-collective motorised

⁵ <https://greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Prof-David-Begg-The-Impact-of-Congestion-on-Bus-Passengers-Digital-FINAL.pdf>

⁶ <https://maas-scotland.com/what-is-maas/>

modes of transportation. This could reduce the need for the introduction of demand restraint policies such as workplace parking charges and also reduce negative outcomes from irresponsible parking of vehicles if the overall number within an area could be managed through collaborative measures.

One of SEStran's objectives laid out within the Regional Transport Strategy is "Reducing the number of commuter journeys by single occupancy vehicles within South East Scotland", thereby tackling congestion. The South East of Scotland Transport Partnership funds the joint membership to Tripshare for all eight Local Authorities and provides support and best practice. Car sharing makes more efficient use of vehicles on our road, helping reduce congestion and pollution. We have also carried out personalised and workplace travel planning through automated and manual methods. www.sestran-parkandride.com/ provides a comprehensive guide to Park & Ride services available throughout South East Scotland encouraging commuters to leave the car and take the bus, train or cycle to the city centre. We have also spent a significant amount of money on the Real Time Passenger Information project and in active travel initiatives across the region.

What further 'carrot' and 'stick' approaches should the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership support in the region to encourage bus patronage, thereby tackling rising congestion on the road network? Would a SEStran research paper on road charging or workplace parking levy be appropriate?

3.4 Option of Intelligent Centralisation

Bus operators are forced to respond to congestion and try to maintain service frequency. For every 10% decrease in operating speeds leads to an 8% increase in operating costs. If this is passed on to passengers through higher fares it results in a 5.6% fall in patronage (DfT fares elasticity of 0.7).⁷

Bus fares have risen faster than inflation, increasing by 4.7% in real terms between 2011/12 and 2015/16. It has been driven by unit cost changes and bus operators' response to changes in government policy. Operating costs per vehicle mile have increased by almost 30% in real terms since 2004/05. There has been a material reduction in the Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG) payments, falling from a high of £69.9 million in 2009/10 to £53 million in 2015/16. There has also been a reduction in the rate at which operators are reimbursed for carrying concessionary passengers from 73.6% of the adult single fare in 2006/7 to 56.9% of the adult single fare in 2017/18. All three changes have acted to squeeze operator margins and increase pressure on fares.⁸ In the RTS, South East of Scotland Transport Partnership stated that

⁷ <https://greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Prof-David-Begg-The-Impact-of-Congestion-on-Bus-Passengers-Digital-FINAL.pdf>

⁸ 'Trends in Scottish Bus Patronage: Report to the Confederation of Passenger Transport (Scotland)', KPMG (2017).

“SEStran has reviewed fares levels across the area in terms of value for money. In the longer term, SEStran will seek to address inequalities in public transport fares across the SEStran area as a medium priority”.

What can the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership do to support improved quality of bus services and tackle rising fares? (e.g. Quality Partnerships?) Whilst it is noted that member councils do not wish to progress to formal shared services such as a Model 3, what intelligent centralisation could SEStran undertake?

3.5 Equality of Access to Bus Services

The South East of Scotland Transport Partnership recognises the importance of making the bus an attractive option for travel, and the importance of equality of access to services. The recent Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness Consultation notes that “accessible transport is vital to people being able to meet face to face and stay socially active, particular for those in rural areas or later in life”.

The RTS notes that “SEStran will identify the current levels of information service provision and its potential role to bring added value to the delivery of these services through our Equalities Group. This is a medium priority for SEStran, given the requirements of the DDA and benefits that could accrue from delivery. Mobility impaired information services are deliverable on a regional basis including bus RTPI”.

Recent investment in bus vehicles has meant that accessible or low-floor buses now make up 90% of all buses on Scotland’s roads; this has doubled from 45% in 2005. Over £655 million was spent on Scotland’s bus networks in 2014, 56% (£364m) was from passenger tickets sales while the remaining 44% (£291m) came in financial support from local and Scottish Government⁹.

The Thistle Assistance Card and App were developed with the help of transport providers and users to provide a useful means of displaying the right information for the passenger, with symbols indicating the type of disability and a short message indicating the help required that could be read at a glance by bus drivers, train and tram conductors and other staff. The card comes with an information leaflet showing customers how to use the card and highlighting that it has no monetary significance – it is purely an information card.

From discussions with transport providers, older and disabled people and our Equalities Forum, the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership was able to understand the problems and worries faced by many when using public transport. By providing a simple form of communication between the provider and the passenger in the form of the Thistle Assistance Card, the gap between

⁹ ‘Round the Bend: A Review of local bus provision by Scottish Citizens Advice Bureaux’. Citizens Advice Bureau, June 2016.

disabled and non-disabled passengers begins to close. It also gives passengers (who wish) a form of discretion, and can reduce the worries faced when using public transport. Following the success and popularity of the card, SEStran is making the design files available to appropriate local authorities at no charge, so that these can be used as a template for the production of similar access cards throughout the country.

SEStran are also working in partnership with Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and Disability Equality Scotland to develop a regional hate crime charter for public transport, tackling hate crime in relation to five protected characteristics under current legislation (race, religion, transgender identity, sexual orientation and disability). SEStran aims to pilot a charter on a regional scale. The first stage will involve a pilot charter in three local authorities (West Lothian, Fife and Clackmannanshire). The Charter will aim to design and implement policy and guidance which challenges hate crime on the transport network, encourages reporting and thus prevention of hate crime on public transport.

What further actions can be progressed by SEStran, or by the SEStran Equalities Forum, in order to further encourage equality of access for bus travel, offering a safe and accessible mode of transport for all? One suggestion from a recent Chief Officers meeting would be collaborative working on the development of Community Transport.

3.6 Young People and Bus Travel

In October 2017, Stagecoach commissioned a study with Young Scot; '*What Do Young People Think About Bus Travel in Scotland*'. The key findings noted that many young people in Scotland view the bus as their preferred mode of transport, however the car (predominantly as a passenger) is viewed by many as the preferred means of travelling due to the car being seen as the quickest (door to door), easiest and cheapest mode. Another reason that young people did not travel by bus was down to the image of the bus or the people who use the bus, however people were not aware that many buses have improved since they last used them.

To further our understanding of how young people use the transport network, SEStran has commissioned Young Scot to deliver the yTravel project in the SEStran region. Over the next nine months – yTravel will see groups of young people investigating the public transport networks, where they run, how they work, how much they cost and how accessible they are. The young people will then develop and prototype ideas to improve local transport and their findings will be shared to shape future policy and services in Scotland. A survey will be created for all young people across Scotland in the next few months.

Regional Design Teams of fifteen young people will be set-up in four areas of Scotland; The City of Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, Fife, and Midlothian.

These Regional Design Teams will come together to create and develop ideas and recommendations for the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership. In the new year, a final report will be delivered to regional transport partnerships across Scotland, Transport Scotland, the Scottish Government and public transport companies to shape the future of public transport systems in Scotland.

What sort of questions should be included within the yTravel Scotland-wide survey in relation to bus travel and young people’s experience of their local and/or regional network?

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The discussion paper seeks to generate debate on a number of issues facing bus travel and bus patronage across the South East of Scotland.

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Policy Implications	None
Financial Implications	None
Equalities Implications	None
Climate Change Implications	None