

# WEST YORKSHIRE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT AUTHORITY

DATE: 27 MARCH 2009

AGENDA ITEM NO: **22**

**SUBJECT: BUS STRATEGY**

## Report of the Passenger Transport Executive

### 1. **MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 1.1. Implementation of the bus strategy and new opportunities resulting from the Local Transport Act 2008.

### 2. **INFORMATION**

#### Background

- 2.1. Metro has approved a Bus Strategy as part of the second Local Transport Plan. This strategy involves a 'parallel' approach of seeking service improvements through partnership initiatives as well as developing the business case for Quality Contracts should these prove necessary.
- 2.2. This approach has been overseen by the Authority's Bus Working Group. Reports on specific topics have also been considered by the Local Transport Plan Working Group and Tendered Services Working Group.
- 2.3. The principal concern remains the level of bus patronage, which at an estimated 195 million journeys in 2008/09, continues to decline despite the growth in bus travel by senior and disabled concessionary pass holders and the introduction of free City and Town buses.
- 2.4. Metro is also concerned about the cumulative effect of year-on-year fare increases above RPI. The recent consultation in Leeds on NGT and Transport for Leeds revealed a high level of public concern about fare levels. There are also concerns about the complexity of fares and operator strategies in heavily promoting single operator tickets, to the detriment of the MetroCard multi-operator ticket range.
- 2.5. There are also concerns that the recession and cost pressures will lead to the de-registration of commercial services in 2009.
- 2.6. Nevertheless, the bus strategy approach has had some success in encouraging increased operator investment and strong focus of bus punctuality and reliability.

- 2.7. The *yournextbus* realtime punctuality monitoring system shows year-on-year improvement in bus punctuality. The Performance Improvement Partnership for Huddersfield (the first in any ITA area) has resulted in a 2% year-on year improvement in punctuality.
- 2.8. Operators procured 184 new buses in 2008. As a result the average age of buses in West Yorkshire decreased from 9 years to 8.6 years and the proportion of the fleet that is low floor increased to 63% (from 57%). The fleet of major operators is younger (average age 8.3 years) and more accessible (73% low floor) than that of other operators.
- 2.9. Despite these successes more work and more investment is needed to improve bus performance and to achieve bus strategy objective of a fully low floor fleet by 2011 and the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) target of an average age of 7.5 years.

#### Audit Commission Review

- 2.10. Metro's approach to bus partnership was reviewed by the Audit Commission in 2007. The review has been reported to the Bus Working Group and Local Transport Steering Group and an action plan developed. The action plan is being monitored through these Groups.
- 2.11. A key part of the action plan was the interim review of the second Local Transport Plan. This has now been completed with the significant outcome of a renewed focus on bus priority measures in the remainder of the second Local Transport Plan period (to March 2011).

#### Local Transport Act

- 2.12. The Local Transport Act contains new provisions relating to Bus Statutory Quality Partnership schemes, which are now referred to as Bus Partnership Schemes, as well as changing the process for introducing Bus Quality Contracts.
- 2.13. The Department for Transport (DfT) has published guidance on voluntary partnership arrangements and will be publishing guidance on Bus Partnership schemes in early 2009. The DfT has also signalled its desire to see early use of the new provisions for Quality Partnership Schemes in its recently published guidance for 2009 Kickstart bids.
- 2.14. Metro has been in discussion with operators about the development of more innovative partnership approaches, initially in the Huddersfield and Wakefield areas. These approaches would include issues such as ticketing, network design, customer care and branding as well as the more traditional approaches covering bus priority, bus shelters and vehicle investment. Bids for DfT Kickstart funding would be prepared to support these approaches.

- 2.15. The recent joint meeting of the Bus Working Group and Tendered Services Working Group has also endorsed the development of a two-stage approach to Bus Partnership Schemes, which would be 'made' by the Integrated Transport Authority and define standards of service that bus operators would have to meet in order to use defined facilities, such as bus shelters and bus stations as well as bus priority measures. The first stage would comprise a generic scheme covering the whole of West Yorkshire and consolidate a number of existing voluntary agreements relating to defined service change dates, the recently agreed good practice agreement for consultation on service changes as well covering customer care standards and environmental strategies.
- 2.16. The second stage would be linked to the development of the third Local Transport Plan and would, potentially, use the provisions of the Local Transport Act relating to maximum fares and minimum frequencies.
- 2.17. Metro has also continued work on using the new provisions of the Local Transport Act relating to Bus Quality Contracts, should these prove necessary in order to achieve the desired high quality, integrated public transport network that supports the economy as well as meeting social needs – requiring defined, common quality standards as well as integrated ticketing and branding. A financial model has been developed that will support the development of business cases, as well as informing partnership approaches. DfT guidance on Bus Quality Contracts is not expected until later in 2009.

#### AccessBus and MetroLocal

- 2.18. The Bus Working Group and Tendered Services Working Group have endorsed an approach that seeks to cater for the increasing demand for AccessBus (as a result of an ageing population) through the development of MetroLocal services and registration of AccessBus services in order to attract Bus Service Operator Grant, and thereby reduce operating costs. This would require a fare to be charged, although users would not pay this as they are entitled to free Concessionary Travel. Arrangements would be made should the travel by a carer for an existing user not be covered by a companion pass. The booking arrangements, including block bookings, would be retained. There would therefore, be no change in the service provided to users, although they would need to acquire a Concessionary Travel pass. A further report will recommend that the Authority amends its Concessionary Travel scheme to allow free travel on AccessBus before 0930 on weekdays.

#### Review of Tendered Services

- 2.19. The recent joint meeting of the Bus Working Group and Tendered Services Working Group have also commenced a wide-reaching review of the Authority's approach to Tendered Services.

2.20. Progress regarding this review will be reported to future meetings of the Authority.

Member Seminar

2.21. A seminar is proposed so that members would have the opportunity to discuss the wide range of bus strategy and bus service issues in more detail.

**3. FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1. The 'parallel' approach referred to above is being progressed within approved budgets.

3.2. The registration of the AccessBus service could save up to £250,000 per year.

**4. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

4.1. None as a result of this report.

**5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1. None as a result of this approach.

**6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1. That the update provided in this report be noted.

6.2. That a member seminar on bus strategy and bus service issues be arranged.

Director General  
West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive