

REPORT TO THE TVCA OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 FEBRUARY 2024

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE BUSES SUB-COMMITTEE

REVIEW OF BUSES

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Sub-Committee on 14 July 2023 to review the area of buses and report back its findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The following Members were appointed to the Sub-Committee:

Councillor David Branson (Chair) (Middlesbrough Council)
Councillor Sonia Kane (Darlington Borough Council)
Councillor Brenda Harrison (Hartlepool Borough Council)
Councillor Steven Nelson (Stockton Borough Council)
Councillor Margaret O'Donoghue (Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council).

The focus of the Sub-Committee was to:

- i) Identify whether TVCA decisions and policies were improving bus services for residents of the Tees Valley.
- ii) Review the relationship between bus operators and local authorities / TVCA.
- iii) Consider additional activities aimed at improving services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet:

- a) That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee writes to the TVCA constituent local authorities presenting the Sub-Committee's review on buses with specific reference to:
 - i) The importance of ensuring early engagement with bus operators when establishing route requirements for new developments; and
 - ii) The need to explore opportunities through the Section 106 process when engaging with bus operators.

- b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomes the attendance of bus operators at local bus user groups and is supportive of this practice being extended to bus user groups across the Tees Valley where such opportunities exist.
- c) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives a report back on the implementation of real time bus information across the Tees Valley as part of its regular monitoring and tracking of recommendations.
- d) That progress made against the above recommendations is to be reviewed as part of a recommendation tracking system to be introduced by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. DETAIL

Scoping and review

The outline purpose of the review was to review the decisions and policies developed by TVCA in relation to bus services.

The key aims were established during an initial scoping exercise of the Sub-Committee on 7 September 2023.

Summary of Sessions

First Session

The Sub-Committee first met on the 7 September 2023 to begin a scoping exercise to establish parameters for the review. The Sub-Committee sought to establish key areas to review and agreed to focus on four of the five priorities of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The Sub-Committee identified relevant witnesses within TVCA and externally to attend future sessions to assist with information and evidence gathering.

Second Session

Members were joined by the Director of Infrastructure and colleagues from TVCA Transport team.

The following points were discussed:

- Members discussed patronage and data relating to the £2 fare cap. Members explored the reduction in bus usage and trends that had resulted in a fall in users. Members considered engagement exercises with users and potentially creating a bus user group covering the Tees Valley network. The Sub-

Anything is possible

Committee was advised that trends were national issues and that local / national surveys had been held to understand bus usage. Members felt that bus shelter infrastructure was lacking in some areas and that real time bus information would benefit service users. Members particularly highlighted the benefits of introducing bus stop real time information across the network.

- Members discussed whether aspects of the BSIP were 'protecting' existing services rather than 'enhancing'. It was felt that more could be done in the infancy of planning to support route creation / provision in new housing estates. Members were informed that suburban routes often needed to be subsidised and that planning regulation responsibilities sat with the local planning authorities not the TVCA. Members questioned whether deprived areas within the Tees Valley were less connected and that this could be a contributing factor to the reduction in job opportunities.
- Members agreed that it would be helpful to meet with the two main bus operators in Tees Valley, with sessions being set up separately with Arriva and Stagecoach representatives. It was agreed to focus the sessions on four priority areas of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP); Sustainable Network for the Future; Bus Priority Improvements; Improved Fare Offer; and Enhanced Customer Experience.

Meeting with Arriva

The Sub-Committee met with the Arriva Commercial Director for Yorkshire and the North-East on 7 December 2023. The representative was informed about the purpose of the Sub-Committee and provided with the key priorities of the session.

The following key areas were discussed:

Links to new housing developments

Members raised the topic of bus route development and the challenges faced by Arriva in the Tees Valley. Members were informed that one of the key issues for developing bus routes for new developments was that they were often not immediately available, and it caused residents to develop alternative arrangements that became ingrained. It was advised that improvements could be made in the planning stages with Section 106 agreements to ensure that routes were developed in time. It was noted that developers were generally pro-active with service providers in the pre-planning stage.

Members discussed the benefits of involving operators in the development of routes much earlier in the process. It was reported that in some areas, routes were agreed in advance of being required. Members discussed Section 106 funding, and the pressures and challenges faced due to other demands on the funding.

Bus Fares

Members were informed that the current £2 fare scheme was to end in December 2023 with a replacement subsidy to be provided by the Department for Transport (DfT) up to December 2024. The representative from Arriva felt that the provision was not a long-term solution and that people needed to be incentivised to shift their preferred mode of transport to buses. Members considered example areas with significant bus priority measures that promoted usage, for example, increased parking charges and active driver discouragement measures to support patronage. Members discussed opportunities to meet with bus operators to review the existing network and recommend improvements.

The Sub-Committee considered the demographic of bus users, with members being informed that whilst most age groups had not returned to buses post pandemic, there had been a significant increase in younger patronage. It was advised that the introduction of a north-east transport initiative existed to encourage bus uptake amongst young people.

Frequency, Real Time Information, and Transport Hubs

Members discussed the availability of evening and weekend services and were informed that these types of services were typically a financial challenge to operate with reduced patronage. It was noted that bus operators regularly reviewed services and had removed some where patronage was low.

Members requested an understanding of Bus Real Time Information (RTI), and were informed that Arriva provided this data on its app. It was reported that information was pulled from service providers and provided on bustimes.org which collated current and historic data. Members were informed that TVCA had an investment strategy to implement a Tees Valley wide RTI system. It was reported that real time bus information was mainly focussed on town centres and the busiest bus corridors.

The Sub-Committee explored the option of transport hubs. It was reported that a significant challenge was accessibility for buses, with suitable spaces for turnaround often not available. Equally, funding opportunities were either specifically for rail or buses with no joint funding opportunities available. Officers highlighted that TVCA was seeking to create a transport system that integrated all modes.

Meeting with Stagecoach

Members met with the Managing Director of Stagecoach North-East on 20 December 2023. The representative was informed about the purpose of the Sub-Committee and provided with the key priorities of the session.



Links to new housing developments

Members discussed Section 106 funding and the need for early intervention measures to be introduced. Members were informed that different approaches were applied across the UK, but more work was needed in the Tees Valley to encourage developers to work with operators to establish routes.

Members were informed that bus operators were aware of the importance of establishing stronger networks and engaging with local groups to understand the needs of the community. It was noted that there could be opportunity to establish a more joined-up approach between operators.

Bus Fares

Members discussed the £2 bus fare cap. Members were informed that funding was currently in place up until December 2024.

Whilst the cap had improved patronage for some operators there were still concerns about reliability which was largely dependent on bus priority measures. It was noted that there were opportunities for improvements if increased resources were available for bus prioritisation improvements. The Director of Infrastructure advised that capital resource was available to support this area, however this was reliant on stakeholder support for investment in road space re-allocation for buses.

Frequency, Real Time Information, and Transport Hubs

Members raised concerns about the frequency of services both in terms of turning up and operational timings. Members were informed that these were issues faced by all bus operators. In relation to late night services, it was advised that these were often not cost effective and staffing the services was challenging.

Members requested an update on Real Time Information in relation to Stagecoach. It was advised that bus operators had websites and apps that showed this information, but that TVCA had an investment strategy to implement a Tees Valley wide system.

In relation to transport hubs, Members were advised that bus priority measures had been considered in Middlesbrough pre-pandemic, however, these conversations had stalled. It was noted that there was a need to ensure the right infrastructure was in place, and that opportunities existed to integrate transportation modes with the development of train stations.

Anything is possible

Third Session

The third and final session of the Sub-Committee met on 28 January 2024 to draw together conclusions and recommendations. The TVCA Cabinet Transport portfolio holder attended the session to assist with members' queries and provide feedback, particularly in ensuring that there was no duplication of effort by the Sub-Committee and Transport Committee.

The following points were discussed:

Members discussed recommendations in relation to key priorities contained within the BSIP.

These were as follows;

- Sustainable Transport for the future;
- Bus Priority Improvements;
- Improved Fare Offer; and
- Enhanced Customer Service.

Members discussed key areas with the TVCA Cabinet Transport portfolio holder. Several recommendations arising from the sessions that had taken place were identified and agreed. These recommendations are set out on page one of this report.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications to this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific legal implications from the proposal arising from this report.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

There are no specific risks associated with this report.

7. CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Tom Bryant, Director of Infrastructure, TVCA – Attended to provide technical expertise as part of the Sub-Committee's review.

Alan Weston, Head of Transport, TVCA – Attended to provide technical expertise as part of the Sub-Committee's review.

Emily Campbell, Transport Delivery Manager, TVCA – Attended to provide technical expertise as part of the Sub-Committee's review.



Representatives from Arriva and Stagecoach – Representatives attended to provide evidence as part of the Sub-Committee's review.

8. DEFINITIONS

- **BSIP:** Bus Service Improvement Plan
- **UTMC:** Urban Traffic Management and Control system
- **RTI:** Real Time Information

Name of Contact Officer: Connor Malone

Post Title: Governance and Scrutiny Officer

Email Address: Connor.Malone@TeesValley-CA.gov.uk