

Local Transport Fund and Bus Recovery Grant: Network Review Pro-Forma

As a condition of receiving recovery funding through either the Local Transport Fund (LTF) or the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG), Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and bus operators must complete Network Reviews. These will demonstrate that planning for a sustainable network, which is not reliant on Covid-19 government funding, has been undertaken. Further information is available in the supporting guidance.

Objectives

- To ensure LTAs and operators are ready for 4th October 2022 when recovery funding for the local transport sector ends.
- To provide assurances that LTAs and operators have worked together to understand the changing demands of their local areas and are adapting to these.

The below Network Review pro-forma should be completed and returned to the Department for Transport by 1st July to evidence that a Network Review has been undertaken.

Step 1: Agree scope of network which needs reviewing

| Action | Completed | Evidence / Commentary |
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| Assess local networks and agree what should be included in Network Review | Yes | <p>West Berkshire Council took the lead on local bus services predominantly or wholly within the district, including all the services operated in-house by the Council. We also reviewed the following cross boundary services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Reading Buses cross boundary services into West Berkshire, including school and football (Reading FC) buses. • The Stagecoach Link Service • Thames Travel BB3 and 143 Services • Going Forward's 133 and 142 services. <p>It was agreed that the named Local Authorities would take the lead on the following cross boundary services for which they are the contracting authority:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Hampshire County Council for the Stagecoach 7/7a Service. B. Wiltshire County Council for Swindon's Bus Company 20 group, and Stagecoach in Swindon's 46 group of services. C. Wokingham Borough Council for the Horseman Coaches 154 service. |
| Have Light Rail systems been included? | N/A | There is no Light Rail system in West Berkshire. |

Step 2: Share data

| Action | Completed | Evidence / Commentary |
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| Have LTAs received data requested from operators regarding patronage, service levels, fare revenue (as per guidance at para 17 regarding reasonable requests and NDAs at para 18)? | Yes | <p>We received feedback from all the operators we contacted (Carebus, Going Forward Buses, Newbury & District, Reading Buses, Stagecoach South, Thames Travel and West Berkshire Council).</p> <p>It was agreed that the NDAs signed by the Bus Operators for our Bus Service Improvement Plan would cover the request for information required for this Network Review.</p> |
| Have LTAs shared data on foot fall and recovery in city centres / local areas? | Yes | <p>We gave information on footfall compiled by Newbury BID (Business Improvement District) to relevant bus operators. This compared footfall for this April and May to the same months in 2019.</p> <p>Operators with services into Reading Town Centre (Reading Buses, Thames Travel and Going Forward) received information from Reading BID.</p> |
| Have LTAs and operators used the data to create a common understanding and shared set of assumptions of how they expect patronage to recover? | Yes | <p>There are concerns that recovery of local bus passenger numbers to 2019 pre pandemic levels will be slow over the next 6 to 12 months. Indeed, the major concern is that it may take longer than this to fully recover, possibly up to around 18 months or so.</p> <p>Apprehension abounds about the rise in on-line shopping, and the tendency for many to continue working from home hereafter, threatening the recovery.</p> <p>It is noted that the recovery of concessionary passenger numbers on many bus services is a real concern.</p> |

Step 3: Operators and LTAs to share risks and mitigations

| Action | Completed | Evidence / Commentary |
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| Agree local area risks and outline mitigations | Yes | The major risk identified was the assumed reluctance of many to return to using the bus, fare payers and concessionary passengers alike. To address this problem, the Council |

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| | <p>worked with local bus operators to offer free bus travel on several dates. This Christmas just gone, passengers could board participating operators services free of charge on the two Saturdays before Christmas day. This initiative replaced the traditional free car-parking offer which is now seen as a thing of the past. Other dates of free bus travel have been this year's Easter Weekend and the Platinum Jubilee Bank Holidays and weekend.</p> <p>These free bus travel days have been seen to be a success, greatly boosting numbers on our local bus services. The promotion was seen to also be of benefit to concessionary bus pass holders as they could be reassured to travel with other family members and friends who were able to travel free on these occasions.</p> <p>The free travel days were funded from the Department for Transport's Funding for Supported Bus Services Grant.</p> <p>The Council's 2022 Operator Concessionary Fares Scheme adopted the Department for Transport's gradual reducing 100% pre-Covid reimbursement rates (or the payment of actuals if these were the greater). However, given the concern of the slow recovery of concessionary passenger numbers, the Council included this clause in its Scheme: <i>During the Concessionary Travel Recovery Period, the Council also reserves the right to pay out a higher rate of pre-Covid concessionary payments, than the percentage suggested by the DfT, to any operator, although this would normally only be agreed in exceptional circumstances and where local need is identified.</i> To date, two operators have successfully evoked this clause.</p> <p>The Council has increased payment for some local bus contracts to reflect the higher costs of delivering these services, resulting from the lower ridership levels and escalating fuel prices.</p> |
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Step 4: Data used to forecast revenue on services

| Action | Completed | Evidence / Commentary |
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| Use data, scenarios and risks/mitigations to forecast revenue on services | Yes | <p>Bus Operators were contacted and asked about their views for the future of each of their services, given that all Government Covid support funding for local bus services ends this 4th of October.</p> <p>There was a feeling that running costs will continue to increase in line with the Consumer Price Index, currently at 7.8%. Fuel Prices were stated by one Operator to be rising at 25% this September, and the same again in 2023. There are also wage increases to be taken into consideration. Future rising costs are causing great concern to the Bus Operators.</p> <p>The responses from Operators in relation to future revenue on services included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No intention in foreseeable future to reduce services (one operator reported they would actually look, if passenger number continue to recover, to reinstate some withdrawn journeys). • Efficiencies are having to be sought on some existing timetables. • One Operator stated that the timetable frequency reductions previously introduced and those to be introduced before this October would have to be maintained in the foreseeable future. • Two Operators reported that they are considering halving the frequencies of particular commercial services to reduce financial losses. • One Operator is proposing a 10% fare rise on their commercial services to try and boost much needed revenue. • One Operator is considering withdrawing a particular section of route from a commercial service because they believe it is under performing relative to the rest of the route. This would, they feel, better streamline the service. The Council is working with the Operator to try and prevent this as the section of route in |

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| | | <p>question would be left unserved by a bus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some school routes are being reviewed. This may result in some not being operated as stand- alone services. Others may have their routes changes to better serve where the pupils are living. Some routes are under threat of being withdrawn. <p>We have a schedule of forecasted financial losses and small profits for the commercial services in the district that are deemed to be marginal and not sustainable at pre-pandemic frequencies and fares.</p> |
| <p>Operator to share commercial data on routes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viable Marginal Non-commercial | Yes | <p>Operators have defined each of their commercial services into one of the three categories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One commercial service was deemed to be commercially viable. All other commercial services in the district were deemed to be marginal. |
| <p>Have LTAs been able to scrutinise routes and data where necessary?</p> | Yes | <p>The designated marginal routes were all seen to have projections of either weekly financial losses or small profits. It was felt that the losses were such that they could be sustained by the wider network of services operated, in the short term anyway. In the worst case scenario, further trimming back of frequencies may be necessary.</p> <p>No service was seen as needing to be altogether withdrawn, except possibly for some dedicated school services. However, improved information on where pupils live would hopefully lead to better routing of these services, rendering them more attractive to pupils.</p> |
| <p>Has BRG funding and BSIP allocation been considered?</p> | Yes | <p>BRG and LTF funding have to date been allocated to alleviate loss of income on supported bus services in the district. We are planning to allocate some LTF funding to bus promotions.</p> <p>We await confirmation that we will be awarded our indicative BSIP funding allocation. However, it is proposed to spend some of the revenue award on ticketing initiatives and on new services, including</p> |

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| | | demand responsive services, to enhance the bus offering in the district. |
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Step 5: Agree route or service changes

| Action | Completed | Evidence / Commentary |
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| Agree route or service changes | Yes | <p>It is the consensus that no bus service will be altogether withdrawn (with the exception of possibly some dedicated school services, although no such withdrawals have been confirmed, just that they are being reviewed). Some services may experience further frequency reductions after 04 October that, although not welcome, the Council feels are reasonable.</p> <p>One service has a threatened route reduction. The Council are liaising with the Operator to try and prevent this.</p> |
| Agree which services may be prioritised for tendering | Yes | We have received no notifications for any services to be withdrawn. We are aware that all but one commercial service in the district are deemed marginal. |
| Have operators complied with reasonable asks regarding the future network? | Yes | Operators are doing all they can to sustain their commercial services. Likewise, the Council on its tendered network and De-Minimis contracts. |
| Has demand scarring been considered? | Yes | The Council regrets the reduction in frequencies to any commercial services. However, it understands the need for shrinking of such services in these times. It is satisfied that the reduced frequencies will deliver savings needed to underpin these services, and safeguard their long-term sustainability. |
| Is there an agreed timeline for delivery? | Yes | <p>We are satisfied with the service reductions and fare increases that will be in place by the 4th of October.</p> <p>We are aware of further reductions to services that may be necessary going forward. Thankfully, none of the scaling back of the network of services involves the loss of any service, just to frequencies. One commercial service is under threat of part of its route being curtailed. This matter is under constant review by the Operator and Council in the hope this action can be averted.</p> |

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| | | The Council views any further reductions to services as regrettable, but necessary to safeguard the service and sustain the wider network of local bus services in the district. |
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Step 6: Grow demand (throughout)

| Action | Completed | Evidence / Commentary |
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| Are marketing campaigns being undertaken by either LTA or operator? | Yes | <p>We have, for example, provided free bus services in the district over the two Saturdays before Christmas Day 2021, over the Easter 2022 weekend and the Platinum Jubilee Bank Holidays and weekend. Further free bus travel days in the district are being planned, including that on Thursday 22 September, World Car Free Day.</p> <p>The Council is currently working with the organizers of the Greenfest Festival that will be taking place in the local village of Hampstead Norreys on Saturday 10th September. We are currently in the process of commissioning an improved bus service from Newbury Town Centre to the village on this day.</p> |
| Are concessionary passengers being targeted by any marketing / comms? | Yes | <p>Concessionary Pass Holders should have been beneficiaries of the free days of bus travel the Council funded, for reasons outlined earlier.</p> <p>One of the new tickets we are looking to provide in the district is the Early Bird ticket for concessionary pass holders. This ticket would be available before 0930 Monday to Friday. Our Operators are currently being consulted on this in preparation for our next Enhanced Partnership meeting. The proposal is for there to be an urban area and a rural early bird ticket, both priced to offer savings over the usual ticket price at these times. Care is being taken not to undermine the reimbursement bus operators receive when pass holders travel after 0930).</p> |
| <p>What consideration has been given to encouraging modal shift through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated ticketing • Parking levies • Simpler fares • Other strategies | | <p>Our BSIP outlined proposals for simpler and better integrated ticketing between bus operators and with rail services.</p> <p>Currently officers at the Council are researching into some improved tickets to offer on its in-house services and tendered</p> |

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| <p>This can be evidenced through BSIPs or EPs.</p> | <p>network of services. These include a Group of Four Ticket and an Urban Day Connect Ticket. We are also looking into introducing zonal fares in the Newbury and Thatcham area, and zonal areas stretching out to cover the tendered rural services from Newbury.</p> <p>We are also looking into providing a Job Seekers Ticket and the previously mentioned Early Bird Ticket.</p> <p>The Council is working with officers from Great Western Rail to improve the information at Newbury Rail on nearby bus services. This includes new signage within the Station, a leaflet showing the walk routes to nearby bus stops and the Wharf Bus Station, and a Bus Real Time Passenger Information system on Platform Two. A bid to the GWR Community Fund has been submitted to finance these improvements.</p> <p>Council promoted free parking days are now a thing of the past and replaced with free bus travel days. This marks a very positive change and commitment by the Council to support the bus.</p> <p>The Council is currently drawing up a new parking strategy. This is mindful of the need not to undermine the bus when considering the cost of parking in its various car parks.</p> |
| <p>What consideration has been given to operating efficiencies and growing farebox or other revenue through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticketing strategies • Commercialisation opportunities • Reduction in fare evasion <p>This can be evidenced through BSIPs or EPs.</p> | <p>Our BSIP outlined a number of ticketing initiatives designed to make bus travel easier and more affordable.</p> <p>As described in our BSIP, the very rural nature of West Berkshire, coupled with its relatively high car ownership levels, does make operating commercial services difficult. Witness the fact that only one bus service in the district was deemed commercially viable, the others all being deemed marginal.</p> <p>Every year the Council does a data cleanse of its concessionary pass holders. This, together with our involvement in the Concessionary Bus Pass National Fraud Initiative, helps to minimize any fraudulent use of our concessionary bus passes.</p> |

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| | | <p>We are not aware that fare evasion is a big problem in West Berkshire. However, the Council will support the Police and Bus Operators to identify (and ban if necessary) any individuals believed to be evading fares or acting in an unacceptable manner on bus services in the district.</p> |
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