

GREATER MANCHESTER INTEGRATED TRANSPORT AUTHORITY
REPORT FOR RESOLUTION/INFORMATION

COMMITTEE: Policy and Resources
DATE: 19th March 2010
SUBJECT: Bus Partnership – Progress Report
REPORT OF: Interim Bus and Rail Director, GMPTE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Members of progress with developing the bus partnership since the last report in November 2009.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

1. Note the overall progress that has been made with the key partnership delivery elements of Code of Conduct, Quality Partnership Schemes and Target Network,
2. Agree to delegate authority for endorsing the Code of Conduct to the Clerk to the Authority and Chief Executive of GMPTE, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chair of the Bus Network Committee,
3. Note the progress that continues to be made with the pilot Quality Partnership Schemes for the Hazel Grove to Manchester and Leigh to Bolton corridors and request a further report setting out the full case for the schemes together with the views of the relevant highway authorities, and
4. Note that future service changes brought about as part of the implementation of the target network will be reported to Bus Network and PTE Services Committee.
5. Note that a report on the DfT consultation paper “Improving Bus Passenger Services Through the Regulatory Framework” will be submitted to the April Authority meeting.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Previous reports on bus strategy progress on 3rd April 2009, 5th June 2009 and 20th November 2009.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members received reports in April, June and November 2009 that set out progress with respect to the various bus partnership initiatives. This report advises Members of further work aimed at securing a network of bus services that has been designed to better meet passenger requirements and is delivered with higher standards of service (punctuality, reliability, driver behaviour etc) together with improvements to vehicle quality (engine emissions, cleanliness etc).

2. Background

- 2.1 The Authority's key bus strategy objectives, as previously reported in these progress reports, can be summarised as shown below:
- To secure consistently better bus services in terms of the quality of vehicles and their punctuality, and
 - To secure greater network coverage, particularly an increase in frequencies on parts of the network in the evenings and on Sundays.
- 2.2 Securing these changes through agreement with bus operators (the partnership approach), will entail using powers provided by the Local Transport Act 2008 (LTA 2008) covering tendering, Voluntary Agreements and Quality Partnership Schemes (QPS). In addition, the Department for Transport has just issued (9th March 2010) a consultation paper *"Improving Bus Passenger Services through the Regulatory Framework"*. A report on implications of the changes being put forward in the consultation paper, and the extent to which they could assist with the partnership approach to securing improved bus services, will be brought to the Authority meeting on 23rd April 2010.
- 2.3 Underlying the partnership approach has been the desire to build on previous work with bus operators that has helped maintain the level of bus patronage in Greater Manchester and to strengthen that relationship so as to ensure that current best practice in the delivery of bus services is captured and rolled out in a more consistent manner across the county.
- 2.4 Since November officers have continued to work with GMBOA representatives to secure change via partnership. Officers are now of the view that agreement has been secured from GMBOA representatives regarding the level of commitments they believe operators will enter into voluntarily. It is worth noting that the nature of working in partnership is such that progress is necessarily constrained by the extent to which all parties are willing to move forward. GMBOA representatives have been supportive and committed time to attend meetings although most of the development work been undertaken by the PTE.

2.5 Detailed progress on each of the partnership elements is set out in the following sections.

3. Code of Conduct

3.1 As previously reported to Members the approach to securing quality improvements has been to provide operators with an incentive to meet defined standards, set out in a countywide Code of Conduct. The Code, which would be a Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the ITA, the PTE and the Operators, would establish minimum service and vehicle standards (and improvement targets over time) and contain a number of operator commitments with respect to fares structures, driver training, uniform standards etc. A summary of the proposed Code of Conduct, which has been agreed with GMBOA representatives, is attached as Annex One. As noted earlier the Code is intended to capture current best practice and to set that as a level of standard to be applied across all Code signatory operators.

3.2 The intention would be to monitor compliance with the Code using, as far as possible, existing arrangements such as the performance and reliability monitoring surveys. In time the intention would be to make use of Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) data to reduce the cost of manual surveys. However, this would be dependent on future investment programmes and data share agreements with bus operators. Operator performance would be published on at least an annual basis and failure to perform against code standards would ultimately result in that operator being removed as a code signatory. This reputational risk would provide a performance incentive.

3.3 The Code is a Voluntary Partnership Agreement and as such there can be no requirement for operators of local bus services to become a signatory to it. However, it is believed that the majority of local bus operators will be willing to become code signatories and agree to performance and fleet improvement targets that exceed their current levels of performance. The three main bus operators, Arriva, First and Stagecoach, have all indicated that they will become code signatories.

3.4 The Code of Conduct should drive up improved quality in four areas:-

- Timetabled services should become more punctual at the start of their journeys with 90% departing on time.
- Frequent services should have more even gaps between buses, and not have gaps equivalent to two consecutive buses missing.
- Passenger satisfaction with services should improve as a consequence of operators paying more attention to cleaning, provision of passenger information, driver attitude and more careful driving behaviour.

- Newer vehicles should be introduced more quickly than might otherwise have happened.
- 3.5 However, it should be noted that the Code will not lead to any resolution of passenger concerns about the lack of an integrated ticketing system as it is not possible to agree common ticket products or prices in Voluntary Partnership Agreements.
- 3.6 The Code of Conduct will be subject to an annual review with GMBOA to consider its effectiveness and any proposed changes. The outcome of this review will be reported to Members together with a report on the level of compliance of individual operators with the Code's standards.
- 3.7 It is recommended that Members note the progress made with the Code of Conduct and agree to delegate authority for endorsing the Code of Conduct to the Clerk to the Authority and Chief Executive of GMPTE, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chair of the Bus Network Committee,

4. Quality Partnership Scheme(s)

- 4.1 As reported in November pilot Quality Partnership Schemes (QPS) are being developed for the Hazel Grove to Manchester and Leigh to Bolton corridors. Quality Partnership Schemes can be introduced where previous investment in infrastructure facilities, in these cases as part of the QBC project, has provided operational benefits for operators. The QPS would specify service and vehicle improvements that operators must commit to meet, if they are to use the infrastructure provided. The proposed standards would require high standards for punctuality, reliability and vehicles. These two pilot corridors have been chosen as they represent corridors where previous QBC investment has led to improved bus operations. The purpose in promoting the QPSs is to capture these benefits and secure them for the next 10 years.
- 4.2 The QPS would be made jointly with the relevant highway authorities as making the scheme involves a commitment to keep the infrastructure in place for the duration of the scheme. A supporting Voluntary Partnership Agreement to the QPS would also place certain maintenance and enforcement obligations on the PTE and highway authorities. Subject to the Authority's approval to continue work on these QPSs, the formal views of the relevant highway authorities will now be sought regarding the obligations the QPS would place upon them.

4.3 Whilst a QPS is a “scheme” made by the ITA and Highway Authority the Department for Transport make it clear in their guidance that:

“A QPS is best developed in partnership with all potentially affected operators to ensure that the standards are set at an appropriate and achievable level to deliver the proposed benefits.”

4.4 Before making a QPS the ITA must be satisfied that:

- The QPS will contribute to the implementation of their local transport policies, and
- The QPS does not have a significantly adverse effect on competition or, if it does, the effect is proportionate to the benefits secured through the improvement in the quality of vehicles or other improvements such as punctuality and reliability.

4.5 Where a proposed QPS includes requirements to route frequencies or timings, as would be the case with the above schemes, relevant operators have the right to object and if it is found to be an “admissible” objection the scheme cannot go ahead with that requirement included. The grounds for an admissible objection are that:

- It would not be commercially viable for an operator, acting in a competent and efficient manner, to provide services to the standard specified, and
- It would not be practicable for an operator to meet the standard specified at the time it would come into effect.

4.6 As can be seen from the above there is a considerable amount of detailed work involved in getting to the point whereby the ITA can be asked to formally commence the making of a QPS. Considerable progress is being made but officers are not yet in a position to present the full case before the ITA and it is proposed that this be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

5. Target Network

5.1 Since the last round of operator discussions, as reported to Members in November 2009, further work has been undertaken to amend the target network to reflect those comments and responses made by operators that either brought additional passenger benefit or addressed operational concerns.

5.2 It is now proposed to take forward the implementation of changes initially giving priority to those changes, approximately 10% of the target network, that operators felt could be introduced commercially. This is involving a further round of operator discussions to identify where Qualifying Agreements might be necessary and to ensure that

any commercial service changes do not leave parts of the current network un-served necessitating additional tendered support.

- 5.3 Further discussions will take place with relevant operators to discuss how best to bring forward those service change proposals that operators have initially indicated might require support. Any such changes will only be made within the overall existing level of support the ITA has made available for tendered services.
- 5.4 In cases where the proposed changes require relatively minor changes to existing tenders, these contracts will be offered for option tender in the normal manner. In other cases, where the routes in the proposed network are significantly different from those of the current network, existing tender specifications will no longer be relevant and completely new specifications may need to be drawn up. The implementation of such changes will be dependent on the expiry date of tenders related to those services to be changed.
- 5.5 Service changes proposed as a result of these discussions will be brought to Bus Network and PTE Services Committee for Member review in the normal manner. Each such service change will be clearly marked as according with the target network with the merits of each briefly outlined in the regular "Forthcoming Changes to the Bus Network" report.

6. Summary

- 6.1 In summary, this report advises Members of further progress with the Bus Partnership proposition as set out below:
 - that progress has been made with the key partnership delivery elements of Code of Conduct, Quality Partnership Schemes and Target Network
 - that the Code of Conduct is now reaching a point where officers are able to recommend that the ITA can endorse the Code and can commence seeking signatories to it
 - that progress continues to be made with the pilot Quality Partnership Schemes proposed for the Hazel Grove to Manchester and Leigh to Bolton corridors and that a further report, setting out the full case for the schemes and the views of the relevant highway authorities, will be needed before the ITA is asked to formally commence the process of making the schemes

- to note that future service changes as part of the implementation of the target network will be reported to Bus Network and PTE Services Committee

7. Recommendations

See front sheet of report for recommendations.

Michael Renshaw
Interim Bus and Rail Director

Summary of Code of Conduct for Local Bus Services

Introduction

- 1 The Code of Conduct contains the supporting and explanatory text which underpins the Voluntary Partnership Agreements between GMPTE and individual bus operators in Greater Manchester.
- 2 The Code has been developed by GMPTE in partnership with the Greater Manchester Bus Operators Association (GMBOA) to establish a set of partnership working agreements and minimum standards for local bus services operated by Code signatories.
- 3 The objective of the Code is to grow the overall market for bus travel by raising the quality of service to the travelling public, through improving operating conditions and standards and to work, in partnership, to identify and promote improvements to the operating environment for buses across Greater Manchester. This will include working with the relevant highway authorities to address issues which impede the operation of buses.
- 4 Home to School services and Ring and Ride/Local Link services are not covered by the Code's standards. Similarly, those bus services for which the main part of the service operates out of Greater Manchester would not, generally, be covered by the Code.

What does it mean?

- 5 The agreement means that Partnership operators will;
 - increasingly provide fully accessible buses, maintained to a high standard and using the latest low pollution fuels and engines;
 - ensure that drivers are trained to drive with an awareness of both passenger comfort and the need to minimise energy use and be sympathetic to the needs of passengers when boarding and alighting;
 - agree standards and targets for bus service punctuality, regularity and reliability.

Bus Operating Standards

- 6 The Partnership Agreement sets county-wide standards for the running of buses, which operators are expected to achieve.

These are that;

- at least XX% of advertised bus journeys will be operated
- On scheduled services at least XX% of advertised bus journeys will leave the start point of the journey on-time; (in this context on-time means not more than 1 minute early and 5 minutes late)
- On frequent services – services which run at intervals of 10 minutes or less – passengers expect buses to run very often and the waiting time at the bus stop to be minimised. For these services, for at least XX% of the time, gaps in service will not exceed twice the average gap.

- 7 The partners would seek to agree a series of challenging yet realistic performance targets for operators to work towards achieving these standards, which recognises the contribution that the district authorities and GMPTE have to make in improving performance in the long term.
- 8 A series of interim targets will be set on an operator by operator basis. This will provide that the proportion of services run by the operator which comply with the standard increases year on year.
- 9 The aim will be to bring all services run by operators in the Code of Conduct up to the standard within an agreed timescale, after which, Code signatories will be expected to maintain this standard of performance of across all of their services.
- 10 GMPTE and bus operators who are signatories to the Code, are committed to working together to identify and address operational issues on the bus network and develop improvement plans, in partnership with the district authorities.

Vehicle Standards

- 11 The partners have agreed that the bus fleets will be improved with the introduction of modern, fully accessible, low emission buses.
- 12 All buses should;
 - clearly display the correct service number and destination/route information;
 - display information about fares and ticketing, Traveline and the operator's customer pledge;
 - meet reasonable standards of internal and external cleanliness;
 - be generally free from litter and graffiti;
 - maintain a good standard of maintenance of seating and other fittings;

- maintain a comfortable temperature inside the vehicle appropriate to the weather conditions.
- 13 GMPTE will agree targets for the make up of bus fleets with individual Code signatories which will deliver new vehicles earlier than they might otherwise have done.

Driver Standards

- 14 The drivers of buses operated by Code signatories are expected to be courteous and sympathetic to passenger needs, especially when boarding and alighting, to drive with an awareness of passenger comfort, and be mindful of the need to minimise energy use in line with wider environmental objectives.
- 15 Code signatories should have a structured driver training programme in place, based on the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence requirements. This is to include:
- training based on safe and fuel efficient driving, covering matters such as fuel consumption and pollution,
 - awareness of the needs of people with a disability and be willing to make reasonable adjustments to assist such passengers.
- 16 Code signatory operators will be expected to have a uniform standard and require staff to comply with the standard whilst on duty, so that operating staff are presented as smart, tidy and professional.

Fares and Ticketing

- 17 Code signatories will be required to be a member of Greater Manchester Ticketing Limited (GMTL) and participate in countywide ticketing schemes.
- 18 Code signatories will be expected to work collectively with GMPTE to develop a countywide fares and ticketing strategy and to participate in the development of a Greater Manchester Smartcard scheme.

Passenger Infrastructure

- 19 GMPTE will ensure that all passenger waiting facilities meet reasonable standards of cleanliness, and are maintained to a good standard.
- 20 All displays relating to service information will be regularly inspected and maintained to ensure that it is current and relevant to the location

Network Development

- 21 Code bus operators will agree to work with the GMPTE service planning function to regularly review their services and consider what changes might be required in response to changes in travel demand arising from new developments, local and national economic trends etc.
- 22 In order to maintain bus network stability, Code signatories will undertake only to make changes to routes and timetables on a limited number of Service Change Dates, except by mutual agreement in exceptional circumstances.
- 23 Code operators agree to notify GMPTE with summary detail of any intended service changes at least 21 days in advance of their registration in order to allow a reasonable time for meaningful consultation between Code partners.

Other issues

- 24 Code operators will be expected to maintain a high standard of vehicle presentation and all buses will carry a distinctive livery, so as to be clearly identifiable as being operated by the company.
- 25 Code signatory operators will be required to establish and maintain a company website providing details of their services, fares and ticketing arrangements and any forthcoming changes/disruptions to their services.
- 26 Code of Conduct operators undertake to inform Traveline and/or GMPTE of any known substantial delays or network disruption in a timely manner.
- 27 Code signatories who operate within Manchester City Centre will agree to abide by the terms of Cityplan.
- 28 GMPTE and GMBOA should, jointly, review the Code at least annually to consider what changes or additions might be appropriate. Such changes may include legislative changes, and other relevant guidelines or policy documents.