

Report to Partnership Meeting 23 April 2021

Research and Development

Bus Partnership Fund

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on application to the Scottish Governments Bus Partnership Fund within the HITRANS area.

Background

The Scottish Government has committed to providing a long-term investment of over £500m to deliver targeted bus priority measures on local and trunk roads. This is intended to reduce the negative impacts of congestion on bus services and address the decline in bus patronage. The investment takes the form of the Bus Partnership Fund, together with the roll-out of infrastructure for the trunk road network.

The Bus Partnership Fund will complement the powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, enabling local authorities to work in partnership with bus operators, to develop and deliver ambitious schemes that incorporate bus priority measures. The Fund will focus on the evidence of how bus services will be improved by addressing congestion, but the partnership approach is also expected to leverage other bus service improvements to help tackle the climate emergency, reduce private car use and increase bus patronage.

Eligible bidders to the BPF must be partnerships formed of a lead local authority with partners potentially including neighbouring local authorities, regional transport partnerships, Transport Scotland (where appropriate, as trunk road managers) and bus operators, with the involvement of other stakeholders, such as passenger representative groups.

Eligible partnerships must be able to evidence that congestion is adversely impacting bus patronage and put forward ideas to address this. Projects funded by the BPF will be comprehensive and ambitious packages of bus priority measures; including for example bus lanes, bus gates, guided busways and traffic light priority. Partnerships are encouraged to propose other, innovative measures to contribute to the targeted outcomes. To maximise the utility of bus services, partnerships are encouraged to develop proposals which integrate bus with active travel and other forms of transport, to provide an end-to-end solution, which will reduce private car use.

The key intended outcomes of the Fund are to improve bus journey times and provide greater reliability, by prioritising bus over other types of traffic.

The Fund will operate via a competitive process over two phases, with the first being a light-touch process, designed as a proportionate ask of local authorities and their partners. This call

for proposals acts as the launch of Phase 1 and invites partnerships to come forward with outline proposals. We will assess the proposals against the assessment criteria and the evidence provided in the application form. In Phase 1, Transport Scotland expect partnerships to give an indication of the level of funding they would need to deliver their long-term ambitions.

A decision on which proposals will receive funding to move forward to Phase 2 is expected in June 2021, where proposals will then be developed through the proportionate application of the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG), and ultimately move into project delivery. However, there is also an opportunity for the fund to support investment in quick wins in .



Bus Partnership Fund Applications in HITRANS area

Argyll and Bute Council

HITRANS are providing funding for a transport consultant to support local partners including the Council, HITRANS and West Coast Motors develop an application for the Oban and Lorn area.

Oban suffers from congestion on the A85 trunk road as a result of significant seasonal variations in traffic but also outwith the summer peak as a result of increased traffic relating to ferry sailings but also general commuter traffic on the constrained network.

Local partners are intending to apply for funding to develop a Park and Ride facility on the northside of Oban along with associated improvements to support bus priority and high quality information and waiting facilities on the main bus corridor through the town. The application also includes funding for a turning circle and improved access for buses at the ferry terminals at Ellenabeich and North Cuan which serve Easdale and Luing and are regularly affected by unpredictable delays because due to the constrained space available at present.

The Highland Council

The Highland Council have prepared 3 applications:

Inner Moray Firth

The largest application includes proposals for multiple bus priority measures within the Inner Moray Firth area that aligns with the emerging spatial strategy for the area set out in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan.

In addition to a series of measures on key bus corridors into Inverness and within the city centre there are a number of proposals for surrounding settlements such as Dingwall and Invergordon.

Fort William and Lochaber

Building on the evidence base set out in the STAG Pre-appraisal for Fort William and the Fort William 2040 masterplan and vision for the area, the application identifies 7 measures on local and trunk roads which have the potential to improve bus journey times and reliability.

The Fort William 2040 steering group provides an ideal governance structure for a Bus Service Improvement Partnership should the proposals be successful.

Skye and the Cairngorms

A third application is being submitted for two areas which suffer significant seasonal congestion issues as a result of high volumes of visitors who access Skye and the Cairngorms by private car. This application includes measures which will seek to encourage more to access popular destinations by bus but also provide an improved local bus network for locals.

As part of HITRANS commitment to each application, it is proposed that HITRANS make available an allocation within our Research and Development budget to support the administration and monitoring of any Bus Service Improvement Partnership which is a requirement for any successful application.

Recommendation:

Members are invited to:

1. Note the Report
2. Support partners application to the Bus Partnership Fund and an allocation of funding from HITRANS to support the administration and monitoring of any Bus Service Improvement Partnership which will be established following a successful application

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Local bus services support a number of RTS priorities relating to Public Transport and access to employment.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment –

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Comment - An allocation of funding to support the monitoring of any Bus Service Improvement Partnership established to support the delivery of any successful Bus Partnership Fund application.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Local Bus services help improve access to many of the most vulnerable groups within the area and also provide what can be described as a lifeline service to those communities where the local bus service is the only form of public transport available.

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