

Item:
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Report to Partnership Meeting 15 September 2023

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Bus Partnership Fund

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on progress with delivering Bus Partnership Fund projects successfully bid for by Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council which was last reported to HITRANS Board in September 2021.

Background

The Scottish Government 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 is intended to 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 is focussing 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.

Highland

The Highland Council was successful with two applications to the first round of the Bus Partnership Fund securing a total of £2.76M to transform public transport in Inverness, Inner Moray Firth and Lochaber. A summary of the successful projects are detailed below:

- Inner Moray Firth – Award of £2,053,040 to implement a number of ‘quick win’ improvements including the completion of a bus gate at Raigmore Hospital and bus lane enforcement. Funding to develop the business case for bus priority measures on several key corridors around the city including the one on Millburn Road where work will complement the Active Travel improvements being developed.
- Fort William – Award of £707,000 to support the completion of two short bus only links within Fort William that will help both reduce bus journey times and improve accessibility. Funding was also secured to develop the business case for a further five options that include a variety of potential bus priority measures in and around Fort William

Update on Highland BPF Project Delivery

Raigmore Bus Gate

A new bus route that connects Raigmore Hospital to Raigmore Estate is being funded by Transport Scotland’s Bus Partnership Fund (BPF) and delivered by the Highland Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) Steering Group, comprised of Highland Council, Stagecoach Highland, HITRANS and NHS Highland.

The route, which was part of an original planning condition for the National Treatment Centre – Highland (NTCH), will help in reducing congestion on Old Perth Road outside Raigmore Hospital and improve bus services to both Raigmore Hospital and the NTCH.

Officers have worked with partners to secure planning permission for the construction of a bus and emergency service vehicle-only access between Raigmore Hospital and Raigmore Estate, secured December 2022. The project will progress to construction, with the route anticipated to be operational by Summer 2023, full funding is in place for the construction of the route, which will bring bus journey time savings of up to seven minutes as indicated by the current operator.

- Phase 1 of Construction completed (removal of existing maintenance building)
- Phase 2 Construction of Bus Gate started 10/07/23 target completion date 29/09/23, currently on track for completion date and anticipated opening 1st week in October with Ministerial opening.
- Phase 3 Erection of replacement building ongoing with targeted completion date of 30/11/23, likely to be delayed by 2/3 weeks.

Barn Church Road Bus Priority

Funding has now been reallocated from this project as a result of consultation with elected members in wards that would be impacted by this project. General consensus was that without timing for dualling of the A96 and realisation of the Park & Ride at Stratton implementing this project at this juncture was seen as too soon and should be considered at a later date when timings are known for other transport infrastructure projects in the area.

The BPF team have now submitted a change request to Transport Scotland to use the allocated funding from the Barn Church Road project to fund traffic light priority for buses at 6 additional sites within Inverness, in addition to the 20 sites where this technology has already been implemented early in 2023.

Inverness Traffic Light Priorities

A comprehensive project to add bus-priority signals to 20 signal-controlled junctions in Inverness is currently underway. This will enable traffic lights to react to real-time information sent from on-board bus ticket machines to determine if a vehicle requires priority and, if so, traffic lights will react accordingly. By implementing these upgrades, bus services will maintain timings, thus improving reliability and reducing journey times. Contractors are currently implementing these upgrades which are currently anticipated to be completed by early 2023. Project completed in February 2023

Rose Street Enforcement Camera

This project is an addition to the Rose Street Bus Link that was implemented through the Bus Priority Rapid Deployment Fund in 2021. The enforcement camera and signage were installed and completed by 31/12/21. Project Completed in December 2021.

Milburn Corridor STAG Appraisal

Consultant Stantec was commissioned to carry out a STAG to consider the potential for bus priority and active travel improvements along Millburn Road.

STAG Report complete and submitted to Transport Scotland and a pre-gateway review meeting was held in May 2023. Transport Scotland have subsequently delayed proceeding to their evaluation panel until Academy Street Committee decision is determined on the 28/05/23, this is due to the interlinkages/alignment of both projects. The evaluation will determine next steps and the moving forward the OBC element of the process.

Connecting Inverness STAG Appraisal Consultant WSP was commissioned to undertake a STAG Appraisal to appraise potential for bus priority measures from Inverness Bus Station to Rose Street and Shore Street for onward connection to the A82 & A9, and potential for strategic inter-modal connectivity to, within and from Inverness, including Park & Choose and Bus Priority measures.

STAG Report complete and submitted to Transport Scotland and a pre-gateway review meeting was held in May 2023. Several queries and further actions were required as a result of this meeting which have now been actioned except for the political support statement which is currently with Highland Council Senior Management to review. Once Transport Scotland have received the political support statement a time frame should be given from them to take this to their evaluation panel and further funding award for the OBC element of the process.

B9006 STAG Appraisal

The Highland Council has commissioned AECOM to carry out this STAG Appraisal which will consider bus priority measures on the B9006 corridor from the junction at Birchwood Road to the Raigmore Hospital junction on Old Perth Road.

This STAG Appraisal was placed on pause at the request of Transport Scotland to await determination of the Inshes Junction planning decision, this was supposed to have been completed by the start of August 2023 however due to the volume of statutory consultee comments the determination for the planning decision will not happen until October 2023. The consultants carrying out the appraisal have been briefed and have worked up a revised work programme with a target date for the STAG Report to be complete February 2024 and subsequently be submitted to Transport Scotland to undergo the gateway review process to determine moving to the next stage of OBC for the project.

Lochaber STAG Appraisal

The Highland Council has commissioned Jacobs to carry out this STAG Appraisal which will consider a range of bus priority measures as well as considering park and ride infrastructure.

STAG Report complete and submitted to Transport Scotland and a pre-gateway review meeting was held in May 23. Several queries and consideration were a result of this meeting and Transport Scotland are currently reviewing this alongside possible further comments from their trunk road section. The BSIP group have provided a position statement in respect of one of the packages in respect of not splitting this specific package, a response is awaited. The Project Manager needs to follow up with Transport Scotland once the political support stamen has been submitted to Transport Scotland and determine the timeframes/actions required to move to the next stage of the process.

Blar Mhor Bus Link

Positive planning permission granted in August 2023.

The BPF Project Manager is currently working through the legal element with the landowners, TRO element has commenced and the design unit are currently working up the tender documents. The target date to resolve the legal issues is September 2023 however this has been a long process and on current progress further delays are likely. The project Manager needs to review when timeframes are known and submit a change request to Transport Scotland.

Upper Achintore

This project is awaiting level details form the existing housing contractor who will also construct the bus link, once finished floor levels and funding is concluded for the phase of the housing development that the bus link will be constructed on the bus link can be progressed.

The ongoing construction and timings of the housing project has resulted in delays to the progressing of the bus link, until specific technical details are confirmed with the housing site development and funding is concluded this project has been deemed too high risk to implement.

Bus Service Improvement Partnership

Partners continue to meet every two weeks and an enormous amount of work has gone into the plan document for this with all partners participating however the publication of forthcoming secondary legislation has delayed progress through the statutory process to form a BSIP. We await the secondary legislation but form previous meetings with Transport Scotland this will not be until early 2024. In the meantime the BPF Project Officer is working on finalising the document meetings to be arranged during August/September and move this element forward with the formation of a voluntary partnership which on previous discussions all partners were keen to do.

Project Management – Highland BPF

HITRANS recruited the post of Project Manager – Bus Partnership Fund on behalf of the Highland BPF Partnership. Following internal promotion of the Project Manager to a new role in Highland Council this role will fall vacant in September 2023. HITRANS officers will engage with colleagues at Highland Council on next steps on BPF project management.

Argyll and Bute

HITRANS are working with Argyll and Bute Council and West Coast Motors to deliver the Argyll Bus Partnership Fund project following a successful bid to BPF for the Oban and Lorn area. The project will seek to implement bus priority measures designed to make local services quicker, more reliable and more attractive as an alternative to the car.

Planned improvements include funding to establish a bus lane on the A85 Trunk Road and to upgrade existing traffic signals with adaptive bus priority that will help improve bus journey times and the reliability of services in and around the town.

The funding will also see the establishment of a Bus Service Improvement Partnership for the Oban and Lorn area, which will look to bring together other key transport operators and organisations to improve local bus services.

HITRANS advertised the post of BPF Project Officer but were unable to secure a suitable candidate. HITRANS have awarded a contract to Stantec to undertake STAG appraisal of the planned measures and this work is being managed by HITRANS and the Council.

Recommendation:

Members are invited to:

- 1. Note the Report

Risk Register

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

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. There is no additional cost to HITRANS from the recruitment of the BPF Project Manager or the support we are providing to the Argyll and Bute BPF.

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.

Report by: Ranald Robertson / Julie Cromarty
Designation: Partnership Director / Project Manager - BPF
Date: 30th August 2023