

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL TRANSPORT BOARD**

Date: 26 October 2007

Subject: **Bus and Coach**

Report of: Regional Planner
South East England Regional Assembly

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Endorse the work programme set out in Section 2;
2. Note the funding support provided by the East of England Regional Assembly to assist in delivering the work programme;
3. Encourage their organisations to provide appropriate support and assistance in taking the work programme forward;
4. Request a report for its meeting in April 2008 setting out the outcome of the work programme.

Purpose of Report:

To set out the work programme for taking forward the Board's commitment to support the delivery of proposals for the development of express bus and coach services in the region.

Key Issues:

The importance of developing a network of strategic express bus and coach services has been identified as a key element of regional policy in both South East England and the East of England. The secondment from DfT to the Assembly provides the resource necessary to take forward this priority in partnership with local transport authorities and other stakeholders. It provides the opportunity to strengthen scheme definition in time for the 2008 refresh of the forward programme.

I. Policy Context

- I.1 A key feature of the South East Plan and East of England Plans is the concentration of growth and new development in existing major regional centres: “regional hubs” in South East England; “key centres for development and change”/“regional transport nodes” in East of England. At the same time both plans emphasise the need to improve the connectivity between the regional hubs/nodes and reduce the car dependency of the regional transport system.
- I.2 Both Plans have policies to improve the public transport option for movement between the regional hubs/nodes. The draft South East Plan contains policies to “develop the network of regional hubs and spokes” (T1) and “develop a complementary and integrated network of rail and express bus/coach services along spokes and inter-regional corridors” (T3). The proposed East of England Plan has the policy to “improve inter-urban public transport... focussed on the [25] Regional Transport Nodes”; to do this “measures should include... facilities to support and encourage high quality interurban bus/coach services, particularly east-west links and other situations where rail is not available, co-ordinated with rail and other public transport”.
- I.3 The programme for rail investment in the two regions to 2014 is becoming increasingly clear as a result of recent Government announcements. There is much in that programme that will assist in delivering the regions’ policies for development of the strategic public transport network. However, for those regional spokes/links where it is now clear that there will be little change in the rail service (or absence of it) it is necessary to ensure that proposals to deliver improvements in express bus and coach services are brought forward.
- I.4 There has been a significant amount of previous work on this subject in the region in recent years, both at the regional and sub-regional level. At the regional level the Orbit and Thames Valley Multi-Modal Studies made specific recommendations relating to express bus and services. The subsequent GOSE/Regional Assembly commissioned Express Bus and Coach Study in 2003 provided more detail on some of the key issues. A South East England Bus and Coach Summit was held in November 2003 and a number of potential actions identified as a result.
- I.5 Proposals for to invest in the delivery of the Sussex Coast Expressway and the Thames Valley Strategic Coach & Bus Network were prioritised by the Board and are included in the forward programme for implementation in the period 2011-16.
- I.6 In the East of England, inter-urban bus and coach has been studied in Hertfordshire and Essex and the East of England RFA programme for 2011-16 includes an allocation of £51m (out of a total scheme cost of £141m) for South Essex Rapid Transit, which would incorporate an integrated network of inter-urban buses.

2. The Regional Role

2.1 There is a strong argument for the regional partners to take a lead in ensuring that proposals to deliver improvements in express bus and coach are taken forward:

- a number of the key challenges that need to be answered are generic, as is the legal/regulatory and funding context for implementation;
- an overview of the current status of proposals, including an audit of what local authorities/sub-regional partnerships are currently proposing to do next, will help to avoid duplication of work or incompatible schemes emerging;
- potential route networks cross local transport authority boundaries and need to be considered on either a sub-regional or regional basis;
- the potential for joint South East/East approach to implementation should be examined;
- the regions will be able to engage with HA and DfT in a co-ordinated manner.

2.2 It is proposed to take the work on express bus and coach services forward through two strands of work:

- a) Wider regional network: scoping and feasibility of implementation strategy options across the two regions;
- b) Assistance to South East local transport authorities in development of the South East RFA-prioritised schemes (Thames Valley and Sussex Coastal Expressway).

2.3 Richard Walker has been seconded from the Department for Transport to the South East England Regional Assembly to take this work forward. A 50/50 split of time between the two work strands, and a 50/50 split of project outputs from work strand (a) between the South East and East of England is envisaged.

2.4 Wider regional network

2.4.1 Under this work strand it is proposed to:

- Review of previous work and current status of proposals;
- Consider in greater detail Implementation issues and options – including a clearer understanding of the case in principle for public investment in the coach network and of the options for how to (and who to) implement in the prevailing regulatory and funding environment;
- Begin initial network definition and feasibility work – including the need to firm up on the commercial viability of potential options.

2.4.2 Initial discussions have shown this work strand is of interest to a wide range of stakeholders including local transport authorities, the bus industry, SEEDA, EEDA, the Highways Agency, DfT and major trip attractors/employers (e.g. airports). It is proposed to work closely with all relevant stakeholders throughout. The first step will be to engage with all interested parties for a thorough discussion of the

work elements set out above. Co-operation of RTB members in making this engagement fruitful is requested.

2.4.3 The objective is to be in a position to bring a recommended way forward for the role of the public sector in facilitating the development of an express bus and coach network in a way that ensures good value for money. Options for an implementation strategy will be presented along with proposals for further work to finalise an implementation strategy.

2.5 RFA schemes work strand

2.5.1 The “refresh” of the regional transport programme is planned for completion by mid-2008. Major scheme promoters will be expected to provide inputs for the refresh exercise in early 2008. It is proposed that Board members’ support to the RFA-prioritised schemes be focused in the first instance on developing scheme definition and providing better information to the refresh exercise.

2.5.2 The Thames Valley Strategic Inter-urban Bus & Coach Network formed a recommendation of the Thames Valley MMS, which was endorsed by the Secretary of State for further development. Further work was undertaken under the auspices of the Thames Valley MMS Implementation Group, including the Thames Valley Express Coaches Study undertaken in 2004-05 for the Highways Agency by Halcrow.

2.5.3 The scheme as currently envisaged has three elements:

- High Wycombe Coachway and Park & Ride (M40 J4 Handy Cross);
- Development of routes and services to strengthen and fill gaps in the strategic public transport network;
- Infrastructure improvements, including establishment of bus/coach priority measures – including, but not necessarily limited to, priority vehicle schemes on the A404.

2.5.4 The High Wycombe Coachway scheme is being developed by Bucks CC as a major scheme, and is relatively well defined. It has strong synergy with the other two elements but arguably no critical dependencies in terms of scheme justification or cross-boundary collaboration between authorities. By contrast, the preferred schemes under the second and third elements are not currently well defined, and support from the Regional Assembly on scheme definition and appraisal has been welcomed by Buckinghamshire and the Berkshire local authorities. Discussions will be held with the Highways Agency and a discussion paper will be submitted to the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum in November.

2.5.5 The Sussex Coastal Expressway proposal is being led by West Sussex CC and was the subject of a study by WSP in 2005 (West Sussex Coastal Public Transport Corridor Study Report, Oct 2005). Discussions will be held with West Sussex CC regarding the preferred nature of Regional Assembly assistance on scheme

development in the context of the Refresh exercise and the wider regional network work, if any is deemed helpful.

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