



Transport Delivery Committee

Date	14 May 2018
Report Title	Bus Stop Rationalisation – Next Steps.
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Report Considered by	Cllr Hartley, Cllr Akhtar, Cllr Hanif, Cllr Stanley: Putting Passengers First

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Transport Delivery Committee is recommended:

- I. To note the positive elements that the trial of the principle of Bus Stop Rationalisation has had on bus performance including patronage, journey times, reliability and variability.
- II. That the current bus stops which are closed as part of the trial remain closed pending more detailed consideration and reporting, with responsibility for a final decision relating to each stop delegated to the Director of Integrated Services in consultation with the PPF Lead Members Group.
- III. The principle of Bus Stop Rationalisation be considered on other routes in the region inclusive of a review of the methodology used for the initial pilot. The Director of Integrated Services will have delegated responsibility to make any future decisions on such pilots in consultation with the PPF Lead Members Group and TDC Lead Members.
- IV. TfWM seek a greater level of direct or indirect support from operators, including financial remuneration, towards permanently implementing the existing trial and further role out.

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Transport Delivery Committee with the results of the Bus Stop Rationalisation trial and to make recommendations on the next steps.

Background

2. Congestion continues to pose significant challenges to the West Midlands. Traffic remains at record levels whilst delivering the region's ambitious growth agenda in creating jobs, housing and accommodating HS2 and extensions to the Metro has further increased road space pressure and reduced network resilience, particularly for buses. This issue has become most pronounced in Birmingham where buses on average now take over 20% longer to reach their destinations during the peak hours than 3 years ago.
3. In dealing with the congestion challenge, TfWM is leading a multi-agency approach to coordinate, communicate and mitigate network disruption, ensuring the region can continue to grow whilst more capacity and efficiency is built into the transport system in the longer term. Ensuring the bus network continues to keep moving through disruption lies at the heart of this strategy, maintaining stability for existing passengers whilst encouraging non-users to leave their cars at home and catch a bus instead.
4. Through the Bus Alliance, officers have been developing a comprehensive programme of measures aimed at treating both the causes and symptoms of delay on the bus network, including new bus lanes, priority for buses at traffic signals and other traffic management measures. Nearly £8m capital investment is planned for the highway network in 2018 alone. As part of this comprehensive approach, the potential for rationalising under-used stops on key corridors was further identified as a measure which could quickly be rolled out to improve reliability.
5. After deregulation in 1986 and prior to the 'Ribs' program early in the new century the bus operators were responsible for the provision and placement of bus stops. With numerous operators in the region and with little agreement around sharing infrastructure the number of stops in the region grew as operators competed for passengers in the market.
6. The Transport Act 2000 gave additional powers to local authorities to improve passenger information and under this program of work then Centro took control of the bus stops with a view to standardising assets and the provision of information. Unfortunately this package of work did not significantly rationalise the stops at that time and in many cases simply replicated the stops provided by the various operators. This has led to a level of over provision on a number of corridors in the area.
7. In addition Centro and TfWM have been proactive in implementing stops across the network at the request of the public, councillors, operators and other stakeholders. This was done for the very best of intentions but with little regard for journey times and accessibility provided by existing stops in the area.
8. In September 2017 a report was presented to the Transport Delivery Committee (TDC) which detailed work being undertaken by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) on 'Busting Delay on the Bus Network' with the aim of improving journey times, reliability and punctuality for bus users.

9. As part of this package of work TDC approved a recommendation to undertake a trial to rationalise bus stops within the South Birmingham Network Review Area, as set out within the report (of 4th September 2017), and pursuant to the emerging objectives of the wider Strategic Area Action Plan. A copy of this report is provided in **Appendix A**.
10. The trial commenced on the 1st October with a view to being in place for 6 months, to the end of March 2018, where a final report on the findings is to be presented to TDC for a final view on the success or otherwise of the scheme. To date the Bus Stops within the trial remain closed pending the decision from TDC.
11. To put the review into context it should be considered that whilst TfWM are responsible for the provision and maintenance of bus stops in the region the decision to use them is a fully commercial one for the operators. Whilst TDC can make a decision on whether the stops are closed or open for use it remains a decision for the operators as to whether they would look to serve them. There are a number of examples where limited stop services have been introduced on a corridor to improve journey speeds with intermittent stops served by other local services.
12. The following routes formed part of the trial;

Service Number	Route	Number of Stops	
		Inbound	Outbound
8a/8c	Inner Circle	10 (8a)	12 (8c)
50	Alcester Road	8	7
45/47	Pershore Road	6	4
63	Bristol Road	6	6

13. A full list of the stops included on each route are provided in **Appendix B**.
14. During the trial the following metrics have been recorded;
 - Customer & Stakeholder feedback – TfWM
 - Patronage – NXWM
 - Journey time - NXWM
 - Reliability - NXWM
 - Variability - NXWM
15. Each of these metrics are considered in more detail below.

Customer and Stakeholder feedback.

16. As part of the trial TfWM committed to working with National Express West Midlands (NXWM) to ensure that we remained engaged with all our stakeholders to ensure that they understood the reasons for the trial and actively sort feedback on their views.
17. 2 weeks prior to implementing the trial vinyl posters were displayed at each of the affected bus stops informing users of the trial and giving details of the next nearest stops. Details of a dedicated phone number and other methods of communication were provided giving direct access to fully briefed officers at TfWM. The posters also gave details of an on-line form where we actively sought views and opinions on the trial.

18. Prior to the trial we undertook an Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure we better understood the potential impact of the trial on all members of the community. We disseminated information via access groups and through the talking pages.
19. Details of the trial were provided through various media channels including social media, local and national printed press and local radio.
20. Officers at TfWM along with representatives from NXWM attended the Birmingham City Council Economy, Skills and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee, attended various local ward forums and provided briefings and updates to local MPs and for other senior stakeholders.
21. Throughout the trial period regular updates have been provided to the PPF Lead Members Group including reporting on key findings and any emerging issues.
22. In total TfWM have received 272 separate points of communication with regards to the trial. This includes phone calls, emails, letters and responses to the feedback form. This is an average of 4.5 cases per stop, in some cases we have received more than one piece of communication from an individual which is inclusive within the 272.
23. The table below summarises this communication by corridor.

Route	Comments	Total Number of stops	Average comments per stop
8a / 8c (Inner Circle)	16	22	0.72
50 (Alcester Road)	56	15	3.73
45/47 (Pershore Road)	49	10	4.90
63 (Bristol Road)	58	12	4.83
General (not corridor specific)	93	-	-
TOTAL	272	59	4.6

24. The trial was advertised as being an active consultation process during which comments were monitored and where a fundamental issue was reported then an investigation was undertaken and any mitigation measures were implemented. This action included the reinstatement of the stop or consideration of alternative stops to be included within the trial. During the period of the trial the following stops were reinstated;
 - Pershore Road / South Drive opposite the Tally Ho Police training Centre (service 45/47) inbound stop only
 - Alcester Road / Moor Green Lane (service 50) both directions
 - Pershore Road / Breedon Road (service 45/47) both directions
 - Highgate Middleway / Leopold Street (service 50) reinstated but swapped with Highgate Middleway/ Conybere Street which is now suspended (inbound).
 - Northfield Shopping Centre

Customer Comments

25. The majority of comments received as part of the trial were negative. This is understandable given that the trial was only sign-posted at the stops which were affected. Therefore the feedback did not include the vast majority of passengers

which will have gained from the increase in journey times and improvements in punctuality. As part of the trial we have received a small number of positive comments from people agreeing with the principle of the trial and from having seen the benefits to their journeys.

26. The comments we have received as part of the trial have been grouped in to a number of theme areas each of which is discussed in turn below;

Choice of stops closed.

27. Feedback questioned how we had made the decision to close those stops identified in the trial and that in some cases this had inconvenienced individuals or created unforeseen issues such as requiring a further walk on a gradient, having to cross busy roads or stops in the vicinity of certain key destinations.
28. The initial study prior to the trial considered a number of key metrics;
- TfWM adopted bus stop access standards;
 - Relative levels of use;
 - Accommodating future development;
 - Connectivity to local services and facilities
 - Interchange with other modes.
29. The studies concluded that Birmingham had the highest ratio of bus stop density in Europe with over provision in a number of areas. In a number of cases bus stops are as little as 130m apart. The study went on to define that a number of stops could be removed along the corridors without affecting the adopted 400m access standard nor connectivity to key local services / facilities and/or interchange with other modes.
30. The purpose of the trial was to undertake a dynamic consultation which actively reviewed all correspondence and to better understand any concerns raised as a part of the trial. This was undertaken and in some cases resulted in the reopening of swapping of other stops within the trial.
31. If we are to continue to consider such rationalisation of stops on other corridors a review of the methodology used to determine which stops to be included is recommended. This should include local accessibility giving greater consideration to the changed walking route including the need to cross principle roads or junctions, with or without pedestrians crossing, passenger walking routes around key strategic centres and any significant change in gradient.

Stop Usage

32. A number of respondents asked a question pertaining to the advantage of closing stops which reportedly had the fewest number of users. The argument being that if limited numbers were using the stop and / or only periodically used then there was limited advantage from the stop being included in the trial.
33. The work undertaken prior to the review identified and included relatively low used stops. However whilst these stops have low usage they are used regularly meaning that a high proportion of buses have to stop increasing journey times for the vast majority of passengers and benefitting very few.

Increased Journey Time

34. For a relatively small number of passengers the rationalisation trial will have extended their overall journey time. Unfortunately this will be the case as a small number of people will be required to walk slightly further, but within TfWM access standards, with the closure of some stops. However the results have shown that with the increase in journey time and service reliability the vast majority of passengers will have benefitted from the trial.

Operational Measures

35. The trial was successful at improving both journey times and reducing the volatility of journey times. A summary of impact on patronage and punctuality, provided by NXWM, is provided in Appendix C.
36. The reported patronage data is reported as year on year patronage set against the network trend this takes account of seasonal variation. An average route would be 0. As identified routes in South Birmingham have been most significantly hit by congestion which has led to greater than average reductions in patronage.
37. Punctuality is a measure of the number of buses which arrive on time. In this case this relates to the proportion of buses arriving (on average) at stops along the route in the window of 1 minute early to 5 minutes late.

Inner Circle

38. In the three months (July to September) before the trial patronage on the 8a/8c was on average 5.2% below average. For the last 3 months of the trial, January to March, this has improved to 0.8% below average. This equates to an additional 1,700 weekly passenger trips than had been forecast for that period. In addition punctuality has also improved from 74.2% of buses being on time to over 78%.

Alcester Road

39. Service 50 which operates on the Alcester Road corridor has seen an improvement in patronage from being 2.2% below the average trend in the 3 months prior to the trial to 0.4% in the last three months. This equates to an additional 1,100 weekly passenger trips above the forecast trend. In addition punctuality has also improved with an additional 6.2% of buses operating within the punctuality window. During the period of the trial service 50 has seen the greatest improvement in punctuality.

Pershore Road

40. Of the 4 corridors included in the trial the 45 and 47 services have seen the lowest level of improvements. In the three months before the trial patronage was 2% below the average trend. For the latest 3 months this had reduced to 1.8% accounting to just 38 passengers per week. Similarly punctuality has seen a smaller improvement rising by 2.9% to 76.1% of services operating on-time.

Bristol Road

41. Of all the corridors in the trial Bristol Road has the worst punctuality for buses. At the start of the trial 65.3% of services operated on-time. In the last three months of the trial this had increased by 4.9% to 70.2% of buses. Patronage has also seen an improvement rising from being 0.5% below the trend to a real term increase above the trend of 4.2%. This equates to an additional 1,792 passengers each week.
42. In summary; punctuality on all services has improved faster than the improving trend; Patronage has increased against the declining trend; journey times are up to 3 minutes faster for the majority of users; over the 6 month period of the trial nearly 106,000 additional passenger trips have been taken against the declining trend.

Next Steps

43. The data within the report shows that there has been an improvement to journey times, reliability and variability on the specified routes in South Birmingham during the period of the trial. Whilst there will have been other factors on the route affecting these metrics it is a safe assumption that some of these benefits will have derived from the bus stop rationalisation trial.
44. During the same period, on these corridors, we have also seen a more positive patronage trend with decline seemingly slowed compared to other routes in the region. In real terms this reflects an increase in patronage against the forecast.
45. During the period of the trial there have been a number of local issues which, through the active nature of the trial / period of consultation, we have looked to address, including reopening and altering some of the stops included within the trial. These were as follows;
 - Pershore Road / South Drive opposite Tally Ho Police Training Centre (service 45/47) inbound stop only.
 - Alcester Road / Moor Green Lane (service 50) both directions
 - Pershore Road / Breedon Road (service 45 / 47) both directions
 - Highgate Middleway / Leopold Street (service 50) reinstated but swapped with Highgate Middleway / Conybere Street.
 - Northfield Shopping Centre.
46. There remains a number of stops where further dialogue is required with operators, local stakeholders and elected members before a firm and final decision can be made as to whether they will remain closed. This would include but not be limited to consideration around the following stops;
 - Pershore Road / First Avenue
 - Pershore Road / Edward Road
 - Breedon Road / Frances Road (Persshore Road)
 - Alcester Road / Warstock Road
 - Bristol Street / Rickman Drive
 - Stratford Road / Walford Road

47. In conclusion the recommendations from the trial are;

- TDC note the positive elements that the trial of the principle of Bus Stop Rationalisation has had on bus performance including patronage, journey times, reliability and variability.
- That the current bus stops which are closed as part of the trial remain closed pending more detailed consideration and reporting, with responsibility for a final decision relating to each stop delegated to the Director of Integrated Services in consultation with the PPF Lead Members Group.
- The principle of Bus Stop Rationalisation be considered on other routes in the region inclusive of a review of the methodology used for the initial pilot. The Director of Integrated Services will have delegated responsibility to make any future decisions on such pilots in consultation with the PPF Lead Members Group and TDC Lead Members.
- TfWM seek a greater level of direct or indirect support from operators, including financial remuneration, towards permanently implementing the existing trial and further roll out.

48. TfWM will continue to receive requests for new stops and to consider the placement of existing stops on the network. These requestes come through various channels including supporting local authorities on highways schemes and developers through section 106 & 278 agreements. With the forecast increase in housing and employment we will work to ensure that stops are placed appropriately to give access to the network whilst ensuring that journey times are not significantly affected. TfWM will continue to assess each of these on its own merit, in consultation with relevant operators, but giving a greater level of consideration to other stops in the area and the accessibility offered.

Financial Implications

49. The key cost considerations at this stage of the trial have been relatively marginal and are related to the printing and display of bus stop information and bus stop flags.

50. If it is agreed that the trial would be made permanent then there would be costs associated with removing the bus stop infrastructure such as poles, shelters, kerbing and electrical disconnections. By way of an example removal of a bus stop shelter, highway markings and permanent removal of an electrical connection would cost in the region of £2.7K.

51. A number of the sites identified within the trial have advertising panels on the shelters. The revenue raised from these displays contributes towards the maintenance and cleaning costs of the on-street infrastructure estate. Removing these panels would have a negative impact on this funding stream. Alternative sites may be able to be identified for the displays but there will be costs associated with moving the displays which could be significant if electrical connections are required.

52. The costs to TfWM of permanently implementing the existing trial and any roll out of further trials would be at least partly offset by securing financial contributions from operators, especially as operators will be amongst the key beneficiaries of any positive outcomes achieved such as reductions in journey times and increases in patronage.

Legal Implications

53. There are no legal implications arising directly from this Report.

Equality Implications

54. Customer comments need to be taken into account in terms of any future rationalisation projects/pilots and connectivity to a wider range of local services and facilities needs to be taken into account. No further equality implications arising directly from this report.