

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE
14 JULY 2008**

QUALITY OF LOCAL BUS SERVICES

REPORT OF THE CITY SOLICITOR

**Strategic Priorities: Attractive and Inclusive City and Prosperous City
Corporate Performance Objectives CI01**

1. Why has the report come to the Committee

- 1.1 To receive evidence from Nexus and the local bus operators on the adequacy of bus services in the city in response to public concerns regarding issues such as the cost and frequency of some local services.
- 1.2 This work should support the Council in achieving its strategic priorities of an Attractive and Accessible City by examining the factors constraining the growth of bus use.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 16 June 2008, the Committee considered its work programme for the year. In view of continued public concern regarding the adequacy of bus services in many parts of the city, Members agreed to invite NEXUS and the representatives of local bus operators in Sunderland to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.2 Bernard Garner, NEXUS Director General, Robin Knight, Commercial Director of Stagecoach in Sunderland and Phil Southall of Go Ahead North East have agreed to attend the meeting to discuss a range of issues and concerns including:-
 - the existing arrangements for the operation of bus services within the City of Sunderland and their adequacy;
 - the potential measures for improving partnership working;
 - the level of subsidy to bus operators
 - measures for people who are suffering social exclusion;
 - the operation of the concessionary fare scheme

3 Current Position

- 3.1 The bus is the most widely used form of public transport. Buses can carry large numbers of people thereby reducing congestion and pollution. Buses are an essential transport service for people without access to a car. For many people, buses provide a vital link between home and work, healthcare, education and leisure activities.

- 3.2 The Government is committed to reversing the long term decline in bus use and ensuring that local authorities and bus companies work together in partnership to achieve improved bus services.
- 3.3 However in most areas of the country, including Sunderland, concerns have been expressed at issues such as the cost, frequency and coordination of services.
- 3.4 The Sunderland Strategy sets as a priority the need to increase the personal mobility of people in the city by promoting all modes of transport thus increasing travel choice.
- 3.5 The Local Transport Plan 2006/11 notes that 80% of bus journeys are made by public transport in Tyne and Wear and that there is a clear need to arrest network decline, loss of patronage and to prevent reliability and punctuality from deteriorating further. It states that the challenge for Tyne and Wear is to arrest and reverse this decline, while providing increased accessibility and more travel choice.
- 3.6 NEXUS has outlined the following as key objectives of its bus strategy:
- Increase ridership (stop decline)
 - Encourage modal shift from car to bus
 - Produce reliable services – linked to bus priority
 - Improve integration between modes and services
 - Ensure good accessibility to essential services (social inclusion)
 - Improve overall product – information, passenger infrastructure, bus priority, quality vehicles, fares
 - Keep under review methods of delivering bus services (voluntary partnership through to Quality Bus Contract) to ensure integrity and development of the network
- 3.7 Currently, the bus network is comprised of:
- Superoute (commercial bus services)
 - Other commercial bus services
 - Secured bus services
 - Demand responsive services – *Linkup*
 - Schools and Works services
 - Community transport

4 National Situation

- 4.1 The bus industry outside of London was deregulated by the Transport Act 1985. Any operator holding an operator's licence was free to operate services where and when they wished provided that the Traffic Commissioners were assured that the route was suitable for use by bus.

- 4.2 While local authorities are no longer permitted to provide blanket support for bus services in their area, they are allowed to subsidise services required to meet social needs that would not otherwise be met.
- 4.3 The Transport Act 2000 set out the current bus delivery strategy options. These include:-
- Voluntary Partnership – Superroute
 - Statutory Quality Partnerships (SQP)
 - Enhanced Quality Partnerships (EQP)
 - Quality Contracts
- 4.4 Quality Partnerships are partnerships between the bus operator and the local authority. Bus operators are expected to invest in higher quality services, including new vehicles (often environmentally friendly) and staff training while local authorities invest in traffic management schemes that give bus priority, better bus shelters and other passenger facilities. Since 2000, there has been little take up of SQP's and as a result EQP's have been developed to seek to strengthen partnership arrangements.
- 4.5 Quality Contracts replace open competition with a licensed regime. Operators bid for exclusive rights to run bus services on a route or group of routes on the basis of a local authority service specification and performance targets. To date no quality contracts are operating within the UK.
- 4.6 The attached appendix sets out the respective areas of responsibilities of the key parties.
- 4.7 The Governments target is to increase bus and tram journeys by 12% in England by 2012 and to deliver growth in each region.
- 4.8 Over recent years, there has been a trend for passenger numbers to decline in every major city apart from London, the only area where services remain under public control.
- 4.9 In London, where the average fare is the same in real terms as a decade ago, bus passenger numbers have risen by 50% since 2000. London sets fare levels and determines frequency and quality of service under tightly drawn contracts with bus companies. This allows cross subsidising lightly used routes with the profits made from busier ones.
- 4.10 Nationally, fares have increased by 68% above inflation since 1986 while the cost of motoring has remained stable.
- 4.11 Modal shift from car to bus is vital if the UK is to properly tackle congestion and reduce carbon emissions.
- 4.12 There has also been growing public concern at the lack of consultation and response to community needs when operators change services, the stability

of the network, the degree to which bus services are coordinated and the current approach to concessionary fares.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Members are asked to consider the evidence received.

6. Background Papers

Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan 2006/11

Sunderland Strategy

Bus Services Across the UK – House of Commons Transport Committee

Papers of the Environmental and Planning Review Committee – November 2006

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Appendix

Areas of Responsibility

Department of Transport

- sets national strategies and targets
- provides capital funding to transport authorities
- influences the amount of highway revenue funding provided to local authorities in the Revenue Support Grant
- Provides Bus Services Operator Grant to operators

Passenger Transport Authority

- Sets Local Transport Plan in agreement with individual authorities
- Negotiates and funds concessionary fares
- Contract for operators to provide socially necessary bus services to complement commercial services

Metropolitan Districts

- Invest in bus priority measures
- Set local policy on parking, land use and planning

Traffic Commissioners

- licence operators
- monitor operator compliance

Bus Users

- Pay fares to bus operators
- Pay reduced fares with concessionary fares pass