

To: LEADERSHIP BOARD

On: 26 April 2023

Report by: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Heading: Review of Renfrewshire's Public Transport Provision

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council approved in the March 2020/2021 budget £50,000 to support a review of Renfrewshire's public transport provision. Shortly after the budget was approved the COVID 19 pandemic arrived and as part of the response the public were either asked not to use or discouraged from using public transport for large periods over the following 18 months. As we have emerged from the pandemic over the last 14 months, there are sustained changes to the usage of public transport, in particular bus services, with bus patronage down in Renfrewshire and although this has recovered to between 80 and 90% of pre pandemic usage, there are continued impacts associated with hybrid and flexible working and learning arrangements.
- 1.2 Renfrewshire's public transport provision has broadly taken the same delivery model for at least 10 years, with commercial bus services serving Renfrewshire's communities supported by Council funding to subsidise parts of bus routes or times/ days of routes where the commercial service provision would have ceased as agreed and delivered by Strathclyde Passenger for Transport (SPT). There have been several changes to routes and provision to Renfrewshire's communities over this time, with communities experiencing reduced or altered services, be that to locations, frequencies or time periods, with the latest changes to the bus network taking effect from the 1st of May 2023.
- 1.3 There are also several strategic national, regional and local drivers for Renfrewshire to take cognisance of to shape and influence its public transport provision in the years ahead. Section 4 of the report will go into more detail with the key drivers set out below:
- National & Regional Transport Strategies
 - Local Transport Strategy
 - Addressing the climate emergency
 - Transport (Scotland) Act – Enactment of Bus Provision Powers to Local Authorities
 - City Deal, Cultural Venues and Levelling Up transport Infrastructure and business locations
 - Supporting access to employment

- 1.4 This report sets out proposals to commence a Review of Renfrewshire's Public Transport Provision with a particular focus on the local and regional bus service provision in Renfrewshire. The review sets out with the ambition to have an affordable, sustainable, modern, efficient, fit for purpose, and demand led public transport network to meet the current and future needs of Renfrewshire's communities connecting with work, health, learning and social opportunities, whilst supporting and contributing to Renfrewshire's climate goals.
- 1.5 Some of the key strands to commence as part of the first phase of the Review will be to:
- Conduct extensive engagement with all communities in Renfrewshire to better understand current and predicted travel behaviours, identify barriers to public transport usage, identify needs and demands for public transport provision.
 - Undertake a network review of the current bus service provision
 - Undertake feasibility work in support of city deal infrastructure, business, and key housing locations
 - Undertake a network review of the rail provision in Renfrewshire
 - Appraise the Bus provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 setting out options, costs, benefits and risks available through the provision of the Act
- 1.6 A further report will be brought back to a future Leadership Board to update on the outputs from the first phase of the review and to proposed next steps in the review.
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Leadership Board:

- 2.1 Notes the commencement of the Review of Renfrewshire's Public Transport Provision
- 2.2 Notes the first stages of the Review as set out in section 5 of the report
- 2.3 Agrees for update reports to be brought back to the Leadership Board
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3. Background

Transport (Scotland) Act 2019

- 3.1 The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 is now the central legislation governing bus services in Scotland. The Act updates statutory partnership models and introduces powers to allow a transport authority to provide bus services, subject to several tests and criteria. SPT as the regional transport authority for Renfrewshire would be the body responsible for this under the current west of Scotland transport partnership model.
- 3.2 There are several potential delivery models available for bus service provision going forward and the Act sets out options including:

- **Transport Authority run services** – The Act gives local transport authorities the powers to run local bus services. These bus services should be aligned to the authority's policy priorities to meet the needs of local residents. The services would need to comply with standard market competition legislation.
- **Franchising** - Franchising is a model where a transport authority awards exclusive rights to run a bus route or routes for a set period to the most competitive bidder. A franchising framework can cover the whole or any part of their area. The Scottish Government plans to bring forward franchising regulations by the end of 2023.
- **Bus Service Improvement Partnerships** – The Act allows local transport authorities to form a Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) with bus operators within their area. BSIPs provide an updated and revised model of how local transport authorities can work with operators to improve the quality and efficiency of local services. The Scottish Government plans to bring forward BSIPs regulations by the end of 2023.

- 3.3 Buses provide significant flexibility as a transport mode and are capable of mass transit, playing a significant role in daily lives and is often the mode of transport chosen by those on lower incomes.
- 3.4 The majority of bus services in Scotland are operated on a commercial basis by privately owned operators with Transport Scotland subsidising a proportion of the costs of the bus network. Prior to 2022 this was provided through a Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) with payments also being made to operators under the national concessionary bus travel scheme. The BSOG was replaced with a Network Support Grant (NSG), which continues to be administered by Transport Scotland. The NSG continued to include temporary additional financial support to assist with Covid recovery, although this funding has since ceased in March 2023.
- 3.5 Whilst the bus operators run the services on a commercial basis, the Council is responsible for the provision of the infrastructure associated such as bus shelters, access facilities and traffic signals infrastructure.
- 3.6 SPT carried out a Bus Scoping Study in 2022 to look at what a world class bus network would look like for the region and this will be brought into our network review to identify proposals for future improvements to services.

4. Strategic Drivers

- 4.1 The Council recognises the importance bus services plays within the local area, particularly providing options for accessing areas of employment especially when considering those using bus services more regularly will come from lower income households.
- 4.2 The key drivers that will shape public transport services across Renfrewshire are set out below
- **National, Regional & Local Transport Strategies** – The National and Regional Transport Strategies have provided a framework for Councils to develop and deliver their new Local Transport Strategies (LTS). Nationally and regionally the strategies have identified several key priorities that Council's must consider as part of their LTS, including, creating a healthier environment, inclusive economic growth and improving quality of life.

- **Addressing the climate emergency** - Transport is the second biggest generator of carbon emissions in Renfrewshire. Identified public transport action plan interventions are key to helping deliver Renfrewshire's ambitious target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- **Transport (Scotland) Act – Enactment of Bus Provision Powers to Local Authorities** – The challenges outlined as part of the Transport Act will need to be addressed as part of the review with a preferred direction of travel identified.
- **City Deal & Levelling Up transport Infrastructure** – We will need to review service provision around these new business locations and engagement to identify the current and expected future demands for public transport provision.
- **Supporting access to employment** – Address any gaps in service provision to ensure we can achieve inclusive economic growth.

4.3 Consideration of these strategic drivers will form a central part of the network review and the future creation of a Public Transport Action Plan which would sit as part of Renfrewshire's future Local Transport Strategy.

5. Public Engagement Exercise and Network Review

- 5.1 The first stage of the review will be to gather public opinions and evidence on current and future demand for public transport provision across Renfrewshire. It is important that we assess gaps in network provision as well as identifying what barriers there are preventing people accessing public transport.
- 5.2 The engagement exercise would be carried out over a significant period with it being a highly visible public communications campaign including public roadshows, online and in person events to reach as wide an audience as possible.
- 5.3 The review will also include working with SPT and public transport operators to establish the extent of the review and existing gaps and barriers in the network. This work as well as establishing current demand will also assess the feasibility of infrastructure support for expected future demand on public transport provision.
- 5.4 The review will also consider the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, outlining what the potential options are and the costs, benefits and risks presented by each of the available options.
- 5.5 Although the initial focus will be on bus provision, the review will consider the current infrastructure around rail provision and assess ways to improve access such as park and ride facilities.
- 5.6 It is proposed that once the public engagement period is concluded and the network review is carried out, the information will be collated, and a report will be brought back to a future meeting of the Leadership Board for consideration.

Implications of this Report

1. **Financial** – Council has allocated £50,000 to support this initial phase of the review, along with resource support being provided from SPT
2. **HR and Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community Planning**

Our Renfrewshire is thriving / Reshaping our place, our economy and our future –
By continuing to support public transport improvements we will continue to facilitate access to employment and economic growth.
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** – none
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health and Safety** – none.
9. **Procurement** – none.
10. **Risk** – none.
11. **Privacy Impact** – none.

List of Background Papers - none

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