

To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 25 October 2021

Report by: Lead Officer

Heading: Review of Bus Deregulation and Effect on Transport Services in Renfrewshire

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board of 28 May 2019 agreed the purpose and scope of a review on bus deregulation and the effect on transport services within Renfrewshire.
 - 1.2 Findings of the review were presented to the Board over a period of months during 2019 and early 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in significant changes to the landscape of public transport and the Board of 24 August 2020 agreed to continue the review until the impact of the pandemic and future operation of bus services could be considered.
 - 1.3 This reports seeks to update the Board on the operation of bus services during the pandemic and the early stages of recovery, developments over this period and progress in relation to the bus service provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board:
 - (i) Notes the information presented at this stage of the review;

- (ii) Notes the next stage of the review.
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3. Background

- 3.1 The report approved by the Board on 28 May 2019 set out the context for the review and steps to be undertaken. Review findings were reported to the Board over several months during 2019 and early 2020, considering existing legislation and the perspectives of the Regional Transport Partnership (SPT), commercial operator McGills, Bus Users Scotland, Unite the Union and community representatives.
- 3.2 The Board of 24 August 2020 agreed to continue the review until the impact of the pandemic and future operation of bus services could be considered.

4 Bus Services During the Pandemic

- 4.1 The delivery of public transport and particularly bus services changed significantly in the early phases of the pandemic. Research undertaken by Transport Scotland indicates that during initial lockdown restrictions in March 2020 bus services were reduced to around 40% of normal operations, with patronage declining to 15% of pre covid levels¹. At this stage, resources were focused on the provision of essential services to support key workers.
- 4.2 In line with the Scottish Government's pandemic recovery 'route map'², services increased gradually to 70% of pre covid levels by summer 2020 and around 90% by September 2020. It should be noted that services operated at significantly reduced capacities of 30-40% for much of this period to allow for physical distancing measures.
- 4.3 Passenger numbers have recovered at a slower rate, reaching around 30% of pre covid levels by June 2020 and rising to around 60% in late summer as tourism and leisure sectors re-opened. The level of 60% broadly remains the position at present and longer term projections continue to be unclear, particularly in view of wider uncertainties relating to the impact of the pandemic on retail and office sectors.

¹ Transport Scotland (2020) 'Covid 19: Scotland's Transport and Travel Trends During the First Six Months of the Pandemic' <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/48971/covid-19-scotland-s-transport-and-travel-trends-during-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-scotlands-route-map/>

- 4.4 The Scottish Government has supported operation of the bus network during the pandemic through emergency grant funding, in view of the significantly reduced demand for services and associated impact on revenues.
- 4.5 The Covid-19 Support Grant has assisted operators to maintain the delivery of essential routes during the early phases of the pandemic and an increased network in view of reduced carrying capacities during later phases. Transport Scotland forecast that £191.5M was provided to support operators between 19 June 2020 and March 2021³. At present grant funding is available until 3 October 2021.

5 Bus Partnership Fund

- 5.1 A report to the Infrastructure, Land and Environment Policy Board of 26 August 2020 provided members with an update on public transport during the pandemic and the steps being progressed to support recovery, including the preparation of proposals for bus priority infrastructure which could form the basis of funding bids.
- 5.2 In late 2020 Transport Scotland launched the Bus Partnership Fund. The competitive fund seeks to complement the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, enabling transport authorities to work in partnership with operators to deliver bus priority measures, improving journey times and reliability.
- 5.2 A bid for the Glasgow City Region, including Renfrewshire, was prepared in spring 2021 through the Glasgow Bus Partnership, representing commercial operators, local authorities, SPT, community transport and Bus Users Scotland. The City Region bid has secured £3.655M from the fund⁴ of which £2M will support the development of bus priority measures within Renfrewshire. Further detail of the proposals will be reported to the Infrastructure, Land and Environment Policy Board later this year.

6 Bus Provisions of Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 – Consultation

- 6.1 The Director of Environment and Infrastructure updated the Council meeting of 24 June 2021 on the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 relating to bus services. The report noted that provisions had been delayed significantly as a result of the pandemic and that a consultation in relation to the specific guidance and regulations was awaited to allow consideration of their impact.

³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/public-transport/buses/covid-19-support-grant/>

⁴ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/mdijzb5t/sp270821_agenda8.pdf

6.2 In July 2021 Transport Scotland issued a consultation on the implementation of Part 3 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, relating to bus services. The Council's response to the consultation, which closes in October 2021, will be reported to a future meeting of the Infrastructure, Land and Environment Policy Board and inform this review.

6 Next Steps

6.1 The bus industry remains in state of flux as a result of the pandemic, new funding streams such as the Bus Partnership Fund and consultation on the provisions of the new Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. This is likely to continue in the short to medium term and at this stage it is difficult to provide a clear assessment of the likely future implications for bus services within Renfrewshire.

6.2 Progress in relation to funding streams and outcomes of consultation on the new provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 are anticipated in late 2021/early 2022 and will be reported to the next appropriate meeting of the Board as part of a paper which summarises the outcomes of the review.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None
3. **Community/Council Planning** – None
4. **Legal** - None
5. **Property/Assets** - None
6. **Information Technology** - None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - None

- (a) 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 & Safety** - None
9. **Procurement** - None
10. **Risk** - None
11. **Privacy Impact** - None
12. **Cosla Policy Position** - None
13. **Climate Risk** - None

List of Background Papers

None

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