

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 14th September 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Policy & Resources

SUBJECT: Local Bus Service Network Issues

WARDS: Boroughwide.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide details on the overall vision for public transport provision in the borough of Halton and the goals that have been set in order to achieve this.
- 1.2 To highlight recent bus service changes affecting the public transport network within the borough and other relevant challenges and issues currently being encountered.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1. the Board note the Council's vision for public transport as outlined in Appendix 1;**
- 2. the Board note the recent changes to the bus service network within the Borough (Appendix 2) and the potential effect further reductions could have on the public transport network and passengers as outlined in the report; and**
- 3. the Board note the measures that could be used to address the impacts of reductions in bus services (Appendix 3).**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council's long-term vision for the transport system, as detailed in the Local Transport Plan, is 'to achieve sustainable, inclusive, accessible and fuel efficient transport systems that improve the quality of life for people living in Halton by sustaining economic growth and regeneration, whilst addressing climate change, by reducing carbon emissions from transport'. To facilitate this vision for the continued development of the local bus network within the Borough, the Council has set a number of goals which it will strive to deliver. A list of these goals and ambitions as well as desired minimum service levels to achieve these goals is included as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The current local bus network of services within the borough provides for approximately 6.2 million passenger journeys each year, with the majority of journeys taking place on commercially operated services

and the remainder provided for through journeys operated on behalf of the Council under contractual arrangements.

- 3.3 The local bus network in general has remained relatively stable until April 2011. However, since April this year significant changes to the network have seen service reductions in terms of frequency and route coverage and some services have been withdrawn entirely. Fares on the network have also increased over the years, however, this has not been on an annual basis. For example, the Halton Hopper family of tickets did increase by 10% from April of this year which was due to the introduction of an administration charge for the scheme. However, the ticket had not been subject to a cost increase for approximately three years.
- 3.4 The bus industry has witnessed a continued increase in operating costs, with bus operators reporting that fuel has increased on average by 13.5% during the past year alone. This is one of the main contributors to commercial services being reduced or withdrawn.
- 3.5 Operators receive Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) as a rebate on the duty paid on fuel. However, with effect from April 2012 this rebate will be reduced by 20% to 34.56 pence per litre. This may well force operators to further reduce commercially operated mileage or increase fare levels in the future.
- 3.6 One operator has also reported an increase in insurance costs of 53% for the current year.
- 3.7 The supported bus network has also experienced significant changes following a 15% reduction in the approved revenue budget for Supported Bus Services for 2010/11. As a result of the reduction in subsidy level, the Council has been forced to withdraw a total of twelve local bus contracted services; this will affect approximately 21,000 annual passenger journeys. There is also the potential for further reductions to the 2011/12 local bus budget, which would necessitate further service withdrawals across the bus network in the borough. A summary of the recent changes can be found in Appendix 2. The Council also provide an annual grant to Halton Community Transport which was reduced by £40,000 for this financial year. As a result of the reduction HCT have introduced fares on services resulting in a reduction patronage on those services which may result in further social exclusion.
- 3.8 In addition to the service changes, the Council will need to consider the future of the current Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) system. The current system has been in operation for approximately seven years and was initially delivered in partnership with Merseytravel. Merseytravel are now in the process of procuring a new RTPI system which will render the current system obsolete and therefore Merseytravel intend to de-commission the system by March 2012. The de-commissioning of the existing system will have a

detrimental effect on the Halton RTPI system as the Halton system relies on the central hub connection located at Hatton Garden in Liverpool.

3.9 There are three options available to the Council should it be possible to develop and improve the current system, these are as follows:

- upgrade the current system to operate as a bespoke system to Halton. This will, however, incur a significant cost likely to be in excess of £140,000 and for which no identified budget exists;
- continue working in partnership with Merseytravel and the new system they are currently procuring, this would be following full commissioning and would be effective from April 2012. This will also attract a considerable cost to the Council, as the current system would still have to be decommissioned and the new one procured and installed, details of which are currently unknown;
- the final option would be to discontinue the RTPI system on a permanent basis. This would be unfortunate due to work and investment that has gone into the system since its inception in 2003. This would also be to the detriment of the travelling public. A recent survey with passengers has identified that RTPI is seen as delivering a major benefit and is used and liked by the vast majority of public transport users.

3.10 It is important for the Council to continue to work with operators and other agencies/partners to increase the accessibility to public transport for residents of and visitors to the Borough, for example, by delivering the measures identified in the current LTP and future Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy. It was mentioned earlier in the report that the public transport network currently provides for 6.2 million passenger journeys per annum which could possibly be further increased by encouraging modal shift from the car to public transport. In 2010, the Halton Countrywide Travel Survey identified that the percentage of Households in the Borough that have access to a car or van has increased is now 69% (a significant increase since 2001). However, it should be noted that the process of encouraging modal shift would depend on the available funds for marketing of bus services and provision of bus services.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The removal of bus services is contrary to the aims and objectives of both the LTP3 and the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy, both of which promote the use of sustainable modes of travel and especially public transport. Lack of public transport can also encourage greater use of the private car which is also contrary to the Council's carbon reduction aims.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Further reductions in the network of public transport services will potentially create pockets of social exclusion within the borough as bus operators will continue to reduce or completely withdraw services, which are not profitable and sustainable for them to continue. Further reductions in the Supported Bus Services budget will have similar impacts. With regards to RTPI, as identified above, consultation with users of the public transport network has indicated strongly that they would like to have access to improved levels of real time passenger information.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

It is widely recognised that good quality and affordable public transport services can help to improve access to key facilities for children and young people within the borough. The network also provides children and young people with a degree of independence and any further reductions in services may result in a detrimental effect to access to these facilities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The local bus network is fundamental to the residents of Halton accessing employment and education facilities not only within the Borough but also in neighbouring Boroughs.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Improving access to health care facilities is acknowledged as a key priority in the Halton Access Plan and Halton Local Transport Plan. Public transport, particularly the local bus network, plays a vital part in accessing these facilities not only within the borough but also in neighbouring boroughs.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Continued reductions in local bus service provision, has the potential to affect passenger safety, particularly during the darker winter months.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improving access to key regeneration areas by sustainable forms of transport including public transport, walking and cycling is widely acknowledged as playing a key role in sustainable regeneration and urban renewal. In particular, public transport can be adapted to access new development sites within the borough.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 As mentioned earlier in the report there are a number of significant issues facing the Council and the bus user. The bus industry is to face its most difficult period in the coming months with significant increases to operating costs. From April 2011, concessionary travel reimbursement has reduced with one operator reporting this to be in the region of 9.5%. In April 2012, BSOG payments to bus operators from the Department for Transport will reduce by 20% thus further increasing operating costs.
- 7.2 As a consequence, there is the potential for increasing the cost of travel and reducing services still further. The increase in the operating costs to operators could potentially present a number of issues to the passengers. For example, operators have already slightly reduced services within the Borough to enable savings to be made to operating costs. A further alternative to the operators to counter the rise in operating costs could possibly be to increase the cost of travel by increasing the fares and the cost of multi journey tickets available in the Borough.
- 7.3 Potential measures that could be used to address the issues identified above can be found in Appendix 3. However, the measures identified there are very much reliant on a kick start type of funding which is reliant on the availability of funding streams from Central Government, such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, and also by continuing to work with operators to identify routes which are poorly used and developing a strategy to possibly maintain a reduced level of service.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Good quality and affordable public transport services can play a key role in ensuring all sections of the community can access a wide range of facilities.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 There are no background documents under the meaning of this Act.

Appendix One

List of Council goals to achieve the public transport vision

- Ensure the provision of reliable services which are attractive to use;
- Ensure services are fully accessible to all members of the community;
- Provide high quality information on passenger transport services within the Borough provided through a variety of channels to suit the needs of the user;
- Provide safe services and infrastructure;
- Work to make services affordable to use;
- Provide a minimum level of service to communities across the network;
- Continue to provide Travel Training for vulnerable young people and adults;
- Continue to develop demand responsive “Door to Door” type services;
- Ensure better utilisation of passenger transport provision for Halton Borough Council residents through the better co-ordination of different vehicle fleets;
- Provide excellent interchange opportunities across the network;
- Ensure user and stakeholder involvement on the continued development of the network;
- Give priority to the development of new improved services to enable Halton residents to access health facilities and employment, training and work based learning opportunities;
- Make improvements to key cross boundary bus services;
- Work with neighbouring authorities and the Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority in developing and improving bus service provision and facilities to encourage greater use of public transport; and
- Work in partnership to identify and address the needs and aspirations of the borough’s children and young people

Minimum service standards to be pursued to achieve these goals:

- 'Turn up and go' frequencies of every 15 minutes (or better) between 7.00am and 7.30pm;
- At least 30 minute frequency Monday to Saturday evenings and Sundays;
- Guaranteed connections to Local Community Services, Strategic Employment Links and Cross Boundary services at key interchange points;
- Individual routes on the network to be clearly branded and marketed;
- All services to be operated by fully accessible low floor vehicles (operated with environmentally friendly fuels and/or by low emission engines); and
- Reliability of services to be ensured by the continued 'roll out' of bus priority measures.

Appendix Two

List of Bus Service Changes

Service No	Route	Date effective	Description
200	Murdishaw to Runcorn Employment Sites (Monday to Friday)	27/3/11	Due to retendering operator has changed from Ashcroft Travel to Supertravel. No change to route and timetable.
110	Widnes – Warrington (Monday – Saturday - Sunday Evenings)	30/10/11	Service jointly funded by HBC and Warrington BC. Unfortunately WBC withdrew share of funding leaving HBC with full liability for costs.
42	Murdishaw – St Chads (Schooldays only)	30/4/11	Cancellation of service.
19	Leigh Avenue – Widnes Vicarage Rd via Halton View (Schooldays only)	30/4/11	Cancellation of service
2	Horns – Halebank (Schooldays only)	30/4/11	Cancellation of service.
66	Moore to Warrington, Frodsham, Northwich, Widnes, Halton Lea (Monday to Friday)	2/5/11	Cancellation of service due to Rural Funding ending.
14	Widnes, Vicarage Rd – Whitehouse and return (Monday to Friday)	3/5/11	Cancellation to early morning work journeys. The 0522 Widnes to Whitehouse has been added onto the 200 timetable.
66	Monday only – Moore to Widnes Green Oaks Friday only – Moore to Warrington	6/5/11	New registration to operate 66 service on a Monday and Friday only.
14	Arley Drive, Hough Green - Widnes, Vicarage Rd (Saturday)	9/5/11	Cancellation of service.
123	Murdishaw – Widnes via Halton Lea, Weston/Weston Village (Monday to Saturday)	8/8/11	New commercial service to operate an hourly timetable.

2, 12	Halebank to Widnes (Monday to Saturday)	14/8/11	Alteration to timetable start time now 23 and 53 mins past each hour instead of 10 and 30 on the 2 service. The 12 service has increased from a hourly service to half hourly.
14, 14C	Widnes to Liverpool (daily)	14//8/11	Major Alteration to service. 14 will no longer serve the Runcorn Area. Also not calling at L/pool One Bus Station.
17A, 17B	Widnes to St Helens (Monday to Saturday)	14/8/11	Alteration to service. Change to route no longer serving Lunts Heath Rd and Derby Road. Will now serve Birchfield Rd on way to and from St Helens.
61	Liverpool – Widnes – Runcorn (Monday to Saturday)	14/8/11	Alteration to service. Increased to a twenty mins service instead of half hourly.
62	Widnes – Runcorn – Warrington (Monday to Saturday)	14/8/11	Minor timetable alterations.
110/82A 3A&3C		01/04/11	These services were previously subsidised under a Deminimis agreement and are now operated on a fully commercial basis with no detriment to service levels

Appendix Three

Potential measures that could be considered or explored to address the issues identified in the risk analysis

<p>Enhanced demand responsive type services to provide for residents without access to conventional bus services.</p>	<p>The potential cost for this could be in the region of £120 per vehicle per day. The Authority could consider providing a level of subsidy to kick start the service but this would of course be subject to funding availability. Should the level of demand be sufficient then the service could, in time, possibly generate enough revenue through the fare structure for the service to become commercially viable and hence sustainable.</p>
<p>Introduction of taxi clubs whereby eligible residents could qualify to receive vouchers for discounted taxi journeys (as an alternative to receiving a concessionary travel pass).</p>	<p>Where bus services are not available residents could be encouraged to join a taxi club whereby instead of receiving a concessionary bus pass they could receive vouchers which could be used to travel by taxi. The level of discount on the journey to the passenger would be similar to the level of reimbursement to the bus operators under the existing concessionary travel scheme. This would require further investigation to establish whether it is feasible.</p>
<p>Residential travel clubs that allow for shared travel either by car or taxi.</p>	<p>Provide access to a car share data base facilitated by the Council's Neighbourhood Travel Team. The development of travel planning within the borough has been identified to potentially take forward as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid.</p>
<p>Further improvements to walking and cycling routes and facilities within the borough.</p>	<p>There are a number of schemes which the Authority is looking to improve and develop through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid. However, this bid is only at the Expression of Interest stage and should the bid be successful then funding would only be available from 2013 onwards</p>
<p>Reduction in frequencies on existing service levels, for example, from a 30 minute frequency to a 60 minute</p>	<p>Continue to work with operators to identify non profitable routes at an early stage and discuss potential</p>

frequency allowing for provision of additional routes	ways forward with the operators. Reducing the service frequency could be a means whereby some level of service could at least be maintained.
Continue to use the planning process to ensure all future developments are easily accessible by public transport	This would be dependent on securing appropriate funding through S106 agreements and ensuring all development is located within 400m of a bus stop.
Continue to monitor and apply for any future funding sources for bus services that may become available from Central Government	This would allow existing services to be sustained or additional ones developed.