

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	9 <sup>th</sup> April 2013
3.	Title:	Rotherham Voluntary Bus Partnership Agreement
4.	Programme Area:	Environmental and Development Services

### 5. Summary

The report seeks agreement to enter into the Rotherham Voluntary Bus Partnership with the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTEx) and major public transport operators regarding improvements to the bus offer in Rotherham, and to note the results of the consultation undertaken during the autumn of 2013.

### 6. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to resolve that:

- (i) The proposal to enter into an agreement in respect of a Voluntary Bus Partnership for Rotherham is endorsed on the basis set out within the main body of the report.
- (ii) The results from the Consultation undertaken during the autumn of 2013 is noted.

## 7. Proposals and Details

### 7.1 Background

Buses play a key role in supporting economic growth by linking people to key facilities, education and job opportunities. This is particularly relevant in South Yorkshire where there is a dispersed population and relatively low levels of car ownership. This innovative Partnership aims to improve the service offer, grow patronage and in doing so support economic growth.

- 7.2 Research indicates customers are seeking an acceptable bus product, namely one that is simple to understand, easy to use, affordable and delivers the right customer experience. The current situation is variable in its delivery of these service attributes and as such hinders people's ability to use the bus to access employment and training opportunities as well as achieve social inclusion and environmental objectives.

If the bus network is sufficiently punctual, reliable and stable, such that customers choose to use the bus, then patronage in turn grows. This has been demonstrated through a similar partnership working in Sheffield.

- 7.3 The Partnership being proposed for Rotherham follows the model adopted for Sheffield, with minor local variations, it builds on the success of Sheffield Bus Partnership where we have seen the following achieved in the first year as a result of the overall improved package secured:

- 8.9% increase in adult fare paying passengers, 1.1% increase overall
- Punctuality and reliability consistently above that seen before the Partnership was in place
- Reduced customer complaints and increased satisfaction

- 7.4 The development of the Rotherham Voluntary Bus Partnership (RVBP) follows the discussions with the following key parties:

- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Bus operators, First, Stagecoach (Yorkshire and East Midlands), Powells, TM Travel
- Confederation of Passenger Transport UK, who have invited other operators to become involved
- SYPTE

The Development of the Partnership has been led by a Steering Group chaired by the Council and attended by SYPTE and the Rotherham ITA members.

- 7.5 The network proposals have been the subject of public consultation, following approval by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development (Minute number G54 of the meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013 refers) between 4<sup>th</sup> November and December 2013. Responses to the proposed network could be made by either completing an on line questionnaire, or by completing a hard copy of a questionnaire which was available at Travel South Yorkshire Information Centres at Rotherham and Meadowhall Interchanges. Six drop in sessions, where representatives from SYPTE and the operators were available to answer questions from the public, were held in

November at various locations across the borough where the proposed network was subject to most change as detailed below:

- Thurs 7<sup>th</sup> – 1600-2000 - Harthill Village Hall
- Mon 11<sup>th</sup> – 0900-1200 – Rotherham Interchange
- Tues 12<sup>th</sup> – 1200-1500 – Rotherham Interchange
- Wed 13<sup>th</sup> – 1600-1800 – North Anston Parish Hall
- Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> – 1100-1300 – Dinnington Interchange
- Tues 19<sup>th</sup> – 1400-1700 – Kiveton Park and Wales Village Hall

The key points arising from the consultation can be summarised as follows:

- 1,160 responses were received. Of these, 116 respondents did not specify a specific bus service.
- 79% of respondents did not support the proposed changes, 9% of the consultation responses referred to services that are were not subject to change.

Further discussions have now taken place with the partners and revised proposals have been agreed which it is considered will address 88.8% of the concerns raised at consultation.

7.6 The outcome of this collaborative work proposes the partners enter into a non-binding Voluntary Partnership Agreement, covering the following:

- Work together to improve services, to grow patronage, improve access to support economic growth and encourage modal shift. This has been based on the existing network, influenced by the South Rotherham Bus Vision consultation (2010); and the recently completed public consultation linked to this project.
- Provide a stable bus network built on customer consultation, linked to customer demand with changes (other than minor timings) to be agreed with SYPTTE/RMBC officers. Route or frequency changes will be limited to once per year with minor changes and timetable corrections limited to a maximum of 3 dates per annum.
- An affordable, more understandable ticketing arrangement, whilst having the advantage of retaining the operators' own tickets, ensuring that few customers will lose out.
- Supported by a customer service plan, joint promotion and information strategy.
- Agreed minimum standards and progressive improvements to bus specifications though the provision of environmentally friendly low floor accessible vehicles and highway improvements to make predictable journey times.
- Where bus resource is saved through the revised network this will be reinvested in the customer offer by agreement, in the first stage this is through fare reduction.
- Investment also made by RMBC/SYPTTE to support these objectives and enhance the customer offer.
- Measured through agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- The duration is a minimum of 5 years from 19 July 2014 with exceptions in extreme circumstances linked to financial or other undermining Partner actions.
- That the Agreement is subject to competition rules/laws.

7.7 Network

The network has been developed with the key objective of delivering passenger growth by improving journey opportunities, particularly through the provision of new

access to employment journeys and network stability whilst retaining established customer base and revised ticketing.

## 7.8 Investment

- (i) The base fleet and LTP investment is known, operator investment is still being negotiated but the aim is to offer a higher quality bus offer so that customers feel safe and comfortable whilst the service operates reliably and to time.
- (ii) RMBC and SYPTE will invest in enforceable bus priority schemes to reduce or maintain a consistency in bus journey times

## 7.9 Ticketing

The ticket discussions aimed at introducing a simplified ticket range offering more affordable fares to customers is centring on improving the multi-operator Travelmaster range of products, with Operators free to maintain their own ranges. The advantages of going through Travelmaster is that it allows more influence over future price rises, and includes other Operators, encourages the move to 'Smart' and has a moderating effect on individual Operator price rises/fare levels.

## 7.10 Information & Promotion

It is proposed to jointly undertake production of information and promotional material, to help both existing and potential customers know the travel options on offer and understand that is now easier and more cost attractive to use than the bus.

## 7.11 Intelligence & Management

It is intended that the Partnership is supported by a Legal Agreement that retains the confidentiality of 'data sharing'.

## 7.12 The key differences between the Rotherham and Sheffield Agreements can be summarised as follows:

- The network redesign does not reduce overall bus resource.
- Service change dates will only occur 3 times a year (currently 4) but are more flexible, due to the number of cross-boundary services and adjacent change dates, the need to manage the volume of changes at any one time reflecting the significant staff reductions made within SYPTE. However the principle of not being able to alter individual service routing or frequency more than once a year is retained.
- Fare reductions may not be as significant in Rotherham as in Sheffield. This is in part due to the geography of area and a consequence of the overall bus resource which has not been reduced. As a consequence no network operational savings can be unlocked and passed onto customers.
- Information and promotional materials are biased towards electronic availability above more costly paper based products.

## **8. Finance**

Each partner in the voluntary agreement would absorb their own costs in terms of officer time requirements. Bus operators would be responsible for investment costs in terms of fleet upgrading. The costs incurred in terms of highway infrastructure improvements would be met from the South Yorkshire Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) and the Local Transport Plan Fund (LTP) future allocations.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

Should the Council not enter in to the Voluntary Partnership Agreement then the potential for improvements to the bus offer in Rotherham may not be realised.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

The scheme accords with the policies contained in the South Yorkshire Local Transport Plan 2011 – 2015, the Sheffield City Region Transport Strategy and the Traffic Management Act 2004.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Consultation has taken place with the Director of Financial Services and Director of Legal Services.

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