

## The Tees Valley Bus Network Review

### 1. Background

The Tees Valley bus network is in long-term decline. Passenger numbers, whilst still high (at over 40 million per annum), have been haemorrhaging and operating costs are increasing at approximately three times the rate of inflation, assisted by escalating traffic congestion and limited, often poorly enforced, priority measures. This has translated into unreliable operation and regular fare increases, resulting in further patronage decline. The consequence is an unstable, shrinking network with an increasing requirement for subsidy.

Government policy places the bus at the forefront of local public transport provision, with demanding targets for growth, and this is reflected in the recent Second Local Transport Plan (LTP) submissions across the Tees Valley and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Although there are long-term proposals to develop a Tees Valley Metro, the bus will remain the predominant public transport mode within the sub-region. Without an effective bus network offering a viable and attractive alternative to the private car, the regeneration of the Tees Valley may be choked off by congestion.

In view of this, the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit (TVJSU), acting on behalf of the five Local Authorities and with the cooperation of the bus operators, commissioned specialist public transport consultants the TAS Partnership to determine the network best suited to reversing the long-term patronage decline and enabling future enhancement measures to be coordinated and targeted to maximise their impact. The TAS Partnership reported in May 2005, and details of its recommendations were presented to the Tees Valley Chief Executives at their meeting on 3 August 2005.

The key recommendation of the Review was for a major package of focused coordinated investment, funded by a bid for Major Scheme funding through the LTP process, in order to deliver a 'step change' in the quality of the bus network. Consultants Arup were appointed in April 2006 to take this Bid forward, overseen by a Steering Group comprising TVJSU, Local Authority and bus operator representatives. This paper summarises the main elements of the Bid agreed to date, together with their cost, funding and governance implications.

### 2. Network

The Tees Valley Bus Network Review proposed a revised network based on a hierarchy of services ranging from fast, frequent, high quality, commercially operated urban trunk routes – 'Super Core' and 'Core' Routes – to low frequency, financially supported, Tertiary and Rural services meeting social accessibility needs. The recently introduced 'Viva Tees Valley' network is Arriva's interpretation of this approach. The Stagecoach network had already moved towards this concept and further changes, on the scale of those introduced by Arriva, are considered unlikely.

The Major Scheme Bid is focused on the Super Core and Core Routes, which offer the most attractive alternative to the car and, consequently the greatest potential for modal shift. The proposed routes, as agreed by the Steering Group, are as follows, with those wholly or partially within Stockton-on-Tees highlighted in **bold**.

### *Super Core*

6	Clavering – Hart Station – Hartlepool – Fens
<b>15/15B</b>	<b>Thornaby – Stockton – Roseworth</b>
<b>17/17A/17B</b>	<b>Middlesbrough – Acklam – Thornaby</b>
23	Skerne Park – Darlington – Harrowgate Hill – Whinfield
27/27A	Netherfields – Middlesbrough – James Cook University Hospital – Marton
<b>36/37/38</b>	<b>Park End – Middlesbrough – Stockton</b>
<b>52</b>	<b>Stockton – Norton – Billingham – Low Grange</b>
<b>58</b>	<b>Stockton – Hardwick/University Hospital of North Tees</b>
63	Middlesbrough – James Cook University Hospital – Eston - Redcar

### *Core*

1/1A	High Tunstall – University Hospital of Hartlepool – Hartlepool – Seaton Carew
<b>7</b>	<b>Stockton – Eaglescliffe – Yarm</b>
7/7A	Headland – Hartlepool – Owton Manor
12	Middlesbrough – Acklam – Hemlington – Coulby Newham
20/21	Firth Moor – Darlington – Haughton Road – Whinfield/Springfield
22	Darlington – Brinkburn – Minors Crescent
24	Firth Moor – Darlington – North Road – Springfield
25	Red Hall – Yarm Road – Darlington – Cockerton – Branksome
<b>59</b>	<b>Stockton – Elm Tree – University Hospital of North Tees</b>
<b>61</b>	<b>Stockton – Fairfield – Elton Park</b>
64/64A	Middlesbrough – South Bank – Eston

Core services are also proposed from Middlesbrough to Guisborough and Loftus, and from Middlesbrough to Saltburn.

Subject to a new bus link being constructed between Thornhill and Brookfield, a new service:

11	Middlesbrough – Acklam – Thornhill – Hemlington – Coulby Newham
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will be added to the Core network, providing – with service 12 – a very simple, high frequency network in south Middlesbrough.

Owing to the potential high costs of the necessary infrastructure, and its potential for development through the Stockton-Middlesbrough Initiative and Transport Innovation Fund Bid, a further new Core route:

#### **Middlesbrough – Teesside Park – Teesdale – Stockton**

will be taken forward as a variant option.

There are also aspirations to extend the Core network, with the development of additional services, from Middlesbrough and Stockton to Ingleby Barwick.

### **3. Specification**

The Steering Group has recently agreed the Bid Specification, based on the adoption of a consistent approach for each route category. Partnership working, including with third parties such as Adshel and the Police, will be crucial to delivery.

The agreed specification for the Super Core Routes consists of the following elements. The specification for the Core Routes, although slightly less comprehensive, is similar to that adopted for the Super Core Routes.

#### *Bus Priority and Route Management Measures*

Comprehensive priority measures will be implemented to alter the traffic balance in favour of buses. These measures will include:

- A 'clearway' approach along the whole route, with consistent traffic signs and road markings, designed to assist reliability and deliver an overall operating speed of 21 mph (18 mph for Core Routes);
- Priority lanes, with consistent hours of operation and extensive segregation, including the introduction of new links and infrastructure where necessary;
- Bus gates or bus priority at all signalised junctions;
- A review of waiting and loading restrictions to minimise the impact of such activities along the route;
- Improved carriageway alignments to allow buses to access stops easily, particularly at locations where on-street parking is an issue;
- Comprehensive enforcement; and
- Real time Automatic Vehicle Location and monitoring.

#### *Bus Stops and Interchanges*

Bus stop locations will be reviewed to ensure they are in the optimum location for their catchment and to maximise the facilities that can be provided. Stops will meet a number of benchmarks, including:

- Route branding;
- A location identifier and code for receiving departures by text message;
- An illuminated shelter;
- Timetables and service numbers;
- Real time information at key locations;
- Bus Stop Clearways;
- A wheelchair accessible, and obstruction-free boarding and alighting zone;
- Standard kerb heights to accommodate low floor buses;
- Clearly defined pedestrian routes and crossing points with tactile paving and dropped kerbs; and
- A maintenance agreement with an obligation to meet prescribed standards.

Key interchange points, such as the town centres, will benefit from the above features as well as information points, CCTV camera coverage and other facilities depending upon their importance.

#### *Service*

Services provided will meet the following standards, and will be supported by the provision of comprehensive, high quality, accessible information:

- A minimum operating day of 06.00 to 23.30, seven days a week;
- A minimum frequency of eight buses per hour (six per hour on Core routes) at even headways between 07.00 and 19.00, Monday to Saturday;
- Fully commercial operation, after an initial period to build sustainable patronage;
- A reliable, robust operation with service withdrawals limited to the immediate aftermath of a vehicle breakdown;
- New state-of-the-art vehicles meeting the latest Euro IV emission standards;

- Fully low floor buses with on-board CCTV; and
- A simple, zonal based fare structure, using technology to minimise boarding times and remove the driver from transactions wherever possible.

#### **4. Costs and Funding**

Each element of the Bid specification is currently being costed on a route-by-route basis. Patronage increases, and other benefits, will be attributed to each enhancement measure based on experience elsewhere, supplemented and reinforced by modelling. This will enable a Cost:Benefit Ratio to be calculated and optimised, if necessary by removing features that add little value. The best possible, evidenced, Major Scheme Business Case will then be submitted to the DfT.

£33 million has provisionally been allocated to the Tees Valley Bus Network Review through the recent Regional Funding Allocation process, and the Secretary of State for Transport confirmed that the scheme had been included in an 'Indicative List' of schemes to be progressed to a stage sufficient to allow construction to start during the period between 2009/10 and 2015/16 in an announcement made on 6 July 2006. However, it is hoped that this timetable can be brought forward, particularly as some of the schemes identified for funding within the region over the next three years are still at a relatively early stage of development.

The new rules governing Major Scheme funding require that a proportion of the costs be met through local contributions. For the capital and Quantified Risk Assessment elements, this contribution must be at least 10%. This contribution could come largely from the bus operators through investment in vehicles and training, and the costs of operating the enhanced levels of service that underpin the scheme.

Although further local commitments will be required to support the 'Additional Risk Layer' and any costs over and above the Approved Scheme Cost, this is a legitimate use of the LTP 'Integrated Transport' block allocation and developer contributions. In addition, the Scheme is flexible in that it can, if essential, be reduced in scale without necessarily reducing the benefits correspondingly.

#### **5. Governance**

Strong partnership working will be a prerequisite of the Scheme's success. This needs to be supported by an effective governance structure that will enable the project to be developed and delivered. It is envisaged that this structure – which is currently being developed alongside Central Government in advance of the Local Government White Paper to be published in the autumn – will be based on an evolution of existing working partnerships within the Tees Valley, rather than the introduction of additional tiers of governance.