
DARLINGTON STRATEGIC QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Nick Wallis, Highways and Transport Portfolio

Responsible Director - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Members approval to enter into a voluntary Quality Bus Partnership agreement with operators running local bus services in the Borough of Darlington

Information and Analysis

2. Darlington Borough Council has for many years worked closely with the providers of local bus services operating in the Borough to ensure that the needs of bus users and potential bus users can be met wherever possible. Discussions have tended to take the form of consultation and agreement on various issues on an ad-hoc basis with meetings taking place between council officers and the relevant level of bus company management, as appropriate.
3. Securing an improvement in bus services in Darlington is important to the Council because 12% of all trips in the Borough (35,000 per day) are currently made by public transport, thus helping reduce traffic congestion. Bus travel helps the Council achieve its social inclusion agenda, since 24% of households do not have access to a car. The Department for Transport (DfT) decide funding allocations for investment through the Second Local Transport Plan (2LTP) on a number of BVPI and other indicators including bus patronage, bus passenger satisfaction and improvements in bus punctuality.
4. The 2000 Transport Act sought to encourage local authorities to enter into partnership agreements with bus operators in order to deliver their Bus and Bus Information Strategies. In doing this, Government recognized the need for joint working to maximize the potential of any investment. The Council, through the 2LTP and also its prestige "LocalMotion" initiative, already works to improve public transport and the proposed partnership would formalise this and better ensure reciprocal commitment from local bus operators.
5. Whilst Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships which entail the guaranteed delivery of infrastructure by councils to match investment by bus operators in vehicles were seen by Government as the preferred way forward, these have not been taken up across the country as yet due to the complexity of the process to implement one. Instead, there has been widespread use of voluntary partnerships in order to progress work on improving the quality and use of bus services.

6. An example of voluntary partnership locally is the recent work through Darlington's sustainable demonstration town project 'LocalMotion' to upgrade the quality of buses used on services 21 to low floor specification. This partnership is being implemented on service 22 later in this financial year, bringing higher quality buses to the route. Another example is the work through the first Local Transport Plan to provide CCTV systems on all local buses within Darlington. The establishment of a formal partnership will help to encourage further enhancements to infrastructure, information provision and other aspects of bus operation by establishing planned programmes of work with all partners making a contribution in terms of resources.
7. In order to work closer with bus operators to secure the provision of a more accessible, comprehensive and efficient bus service network for the Borough, preliminary discussions have been held with representatives of the bus companies and Durham Constabulary on setting up a voluntary Strategic Quality Bus Partnership which would be delivered through three sub-groups, i.e. Punctuality Improvement, Information & Marketing and Traffic Management & Infrastructure. The draft agreement for the partnership is attached as **Appendix 1**. Local bus operators would be required to deliver the requirements laid upon them by the Bus and Bus Information Strategies contained in the Second Local Transport Plan, such as timely provision of information to a common format and improvements in timekeeping of services.
8. The Partnership does not conflict with the work of the Council in developing and, if funding applications are successful, delivering the Tees Valley Connect project where selected bus routes throughout the Tees Valley would be improved. The Partnership is seen as a precursor to any statutory partnerships agreed through this project and would be replaced at the relevant time in the future.

Outcome of Consultation

9. Consultation undertaken as part of the Local Transport Plan has indicated wide support for this initiative. The bus operators have been involved in the discussions and have approved the draft agreement attached as **Appendix 1**.

Legal Implications

10. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Financial Implications

11. There are no additional financial implications in entering into the agreement, since it reflects previously agreed or provisionally identified expenditure through the Second Local Transport Plan and LocalMotion. The revenue funded work of the Council (supported bus services and concessionary fares) will continue to be dealt with separately to any partnership discussions, since these are contractual matters. However, the ambition of the partnership is to increase patronage, so encouraging increased commercial operation of bus services.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

12. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

13. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

14. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this is not an urgent matter

Key Decisions

15. This is a key decision and has been advertised in the Forward Plan.

Recommendations

16. It is recommended that the Council approves the establishment of the Darlington Strategic Quality Bus Partnership

Reasons

17. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To improve bus services for the public in the Borough of Darlington.
 - (b) To deliver aspirations set out in the Darlington Local Transport Plan

John Buxton
Director of Development and Environment

Clive Hopkinson : Extension 2657
Cc

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

DARLINGTON STRATEGIC QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

This partnership document is a commitment by Darlington Borough Council and the bus companies indicated below to work in partnership to develop bus services in Darlington through improving quality, performance, access and patronage.

This is a voluntary agreement to establish a framework by which the bus operators and Darlington Borough Council will work together to achieve the above aims. The framework will be implemented via joint plans for key agreed measures and an annual action plan.

The partnership agreement shall commence on the first day of February 2007 and continue until the last day of March 2011, unless terminated or replaced in accordance with the arrangements set out in this document.

Parties to the Agreement

Darlington Borough Council

Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington DL1 5QT

Arriva North East

Admiral Way, Doxford International Business Park, Sunderland SR3 3XP

Stagecoach North East

Wheatsheaf, Sunderland, SR5 1AQ

Leven Valley

55 Marwood Drive, Great Ayton, TS9 6PD

JSB Travel

13 Hillside Road, Coundon, Bishop Auckland, DL14 8LS

Compass Royston Travel

Bowesfield Industrial Estate, Stockton on Tees, TS18 3EG

Procters of Bedale

Leeming Bar Industrial Estate, Leeming Bar, Northallerton, DL7 9DQ

Other parties with an interest in this agreement:

Durham Constabulary
Highways Agency
North East Traffic Commissioner

Mission statement

'To stabilise and, if possible, increase bus patronage through partnership, promotion and collective action, thereby improving the economic and social well being of Darlington and its residents'

The above complements the Darlington Borough Council bus strategy vision which is:

'To provide an efficient and affordable bus network that makes a major contribution to Darlington's sustainable transport objectives in terms of offering a real alternative to the car by ensuring access to essential services and employment opportunities, encouraging economic development and improving the quality of life for all'

Partnership Objectives

- 1 To develop and retain a comprehensive, cohesive bus network that meets agreed accessibility criteria, promotes social inclusion and is integrated with other modes.
- 2 To facilitate faster and more punctual bus services through improved highway infrastructure, decriminalised parking enforcement and, where appropriate, bus priority measures.
- 3 To improve bus punctuality information by further development of bus location and real time passenger information systems.
- 4 To jointly contribute towards the delivery of targets for bus patronage, customer satisfaction with bus services and customer satisfaction with bus service information.
- 5 To work towards the provision of Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant buses on all routes in Darlington, offering high levels of comfort, cleanliness and accessibility for the mobility impaired.
- 6 To improve the consideration of bus transport in land use planning policies and in decisions on planning applications.
- 7 To develop and offer accurate, up to date information on bus services to the public in a variety of formats as specified in Darlington Borough Council's Bus Information Strategy.
- 8 To work in partnership to promote and market the bus product to local businesses, existing bus users and other road users.
- 9 To develop more attractive network ticketing initiatives and explore the introduction of cashless ticketing.
- 10 To further improve customer care through higher levels of staff training and development.
- 11 To improve personal safety and security for all passengers, throughout their whole journey.
- 12 To provide high quality bus stop infrastructure that is accessible to all.

- 13 To improve passenger comfort by increasing the number of bus stops with bus shelters and seats.
- 14 To facilitate faster and more reliable bus services through improved highway infrastructure, decriminalised parking enforcement and bus priority measures.
- 15 To achieve the local targets for the nation indicator on bus punctuality (LTP5).
- 16 To expedite the movement of buses, in accordance with the Traffic Management Act 2004 through actions such as roadworks co-ordination and enforcement of parking restrictions at bus stops.
- 17 To contribute to the achievement of road safety targets , as set out in the Travel Safety Strategy.

Targets

1. To achieve improvements in the commercial viability of bus services by agreed measures which increase patronage. (BVPI 102)
2. To improve the punctuality and performance of local bus services through the use of measures which reduce the impact of traffic congestion, delivered by a Bus Punctuality Improvement Plan.
3. To improve customer satisfaction, perceptions of passenger information and bus service reliability measured through customer satisfaction surveys. (BVPIs 103 & 104).
4. Improved driver training standards through enhanced training, NVQ and vetting procedures.
5. A year on year improvement in the proportion of bus service mileage operated by DDA compliant buses and in the number of bus stop facilities meeting DDA requirements.
6. To set a timetable for achieving an agreed maximum age for buses in regular all day service in Darlington.

Partners Responsibilities

This partnership document is a statement of intention. Under this framework agreement, projects will be developed and subsequently implemented in accordance with the Partnership Objectives and Targets set out above.

Joint undertakings between the parties

DSQBP1 To produce and agree the following joint plans:

- Punctuality Improvement Plan

- Marketing and Information Plan
- Infrastructure Plan

In addition, an annual report will be jointly produced to set out achievements and future proposals.

- DSQBP2 To improve bus service information through enhancements to at stop, leaflet and electronic formats in accordance with the Darlington Bus Information Strategy.
- DSQBP3 To improve the marketing of bus travel through joint project launches, corridor or route branding where appropriate and ongoing promotion of the DSQBP through appropriate media.
- DSQBP4 To increase the provision of on-vehicle location technology on buses to provide data for monitoring performance and to drivereal time information systems.
- DSQBP5 To develop fares and ticketing initiatives that facilitate interchange between bus services of different operators and between modes, thereby promoting bus use and assisting in reducing social exclusion and congestion.
- DSQBP6 To work within agreed service change dates as proposed by the National Bus Partnership Forum’s Service Stability Code guidelines with the aim of keeping commercial and tendered service changes to a minimum of three per year.
- DSQBP7 To support all aspects of the North East Transport Information Service (NETIS).

Period of Operation and Termination

This partnership agreement comes into effect on xxxxxxxx 2007 and will continue until 31 March 2011, unless otherwise terminated, replaced or extended. One year’s notice of termination is required and six month’s notice of extension or replacement.

Signed :

John Buxton – Director of Development & Environment
 For and on behalf of Darlington Borough Council

Date :

(Other operator names) etc

Date: