



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 13th March 2023

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Campbell, Castle, Dee, Evans, Gravells MBE, Hilton, Hudson, Kubaszczyk, Sawyer, Taylor and Wilson

Others in Attendance

Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure,
Gloucestershire County Council
Transport Planning Team Manager, Gloucestershire County Council
Transport Operations Manager, Gloucestershire County Council
Team Leader, Local Major Projects, Gloucestershire County Council
Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : None.

109. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

110. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

111. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

112. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions nor deputations.

113. TRANSPORT IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The Future of Gloucestershire

113.1 The Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure for Gloucestershire County Council delivered a presentation on some of the

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upcoming transport transformation projects across Gloucestershire. He provided an overview of plans to deliver an all-movement junction at Junction 10 on the M5 motorway, including a new link road, improvements to the A4019 and plans to deliver a new 'Cyber City' with 10 – 15,000 new houses over the next 40 years. It was noted that delivery of this scheme would be funded externally through the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF). He also provided an overview of planned improvements to the A40, A417, Arle Court and the Gloucester South West by-pass, as well as planned upgraded cycling and walking routes across the county. He referred to the Gloucestershire Cycle Spine, which aimed to provide safe areas to walk and cycle and noted that the project would ultimately help reduce carbon emissions and benefit public health.

113.2 The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure outlined the ambition of Gloucestershire County Council to develop an Integrated Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system covering the central Severn Vale area. He explained that a similar project had been undertaken in Luton which had dramatically shortened the travel time between towns in that area, and that if the MRT project in Gloucester was approved and funded, it would be supplemented with a local bus network to help cover rural communities.

113.3 The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure also referred to railway improvements in Gloucestershire, noting that the County Council had lobbied to secure additional rail services and that there were now 3 trains from Cheltenham and Gloucester to London which would arrive in London before 9am. He advised Members that from May 2023, there would be additional Bristol to Gloucester services with a long-term goal of 4 trains per hour. It was noted that through these projects, Gloucestershire County Council aimed to provide viable alternative transport service options to car travel.

Transport in Gloucestershire – Strategic Context

113.4 The Transport Planning Team Manager for Gloucestershire County Council provided an overview of the Transport Policy Context, explaining that the role of her team was to design the Local Transport Plan for Gloucestershire. She advised Members that her team was also in the process of producing the Carbon Reduction Pathway and once complete, this Pathway would feed into other strategies.

113.5 The Transport Planning Team Manager confirmed that Gloucestershire County Council had committed to achieving net zero by 2045 and advised that in order to achieve this target, a dramatic reduction in emissions was needed. She noted that shorter trips have a disproportionate impact on emissions and that alternative travel through bus and rail had the highest potential to replace the most carbon emitting trips. The Transport Planning Team Manager provided an overview of potential interventions and the vision for Gloucestershire in 2030, which included measures such as better land use planning to reduce average car trip length, increased online activity, bringing forward the uptake of electric vehicles by 4.5 years, and excellent bus services and active travel provision.

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- 113.6 The Transport Planning Team Manager informed Members of Gloucestershire County Council's plans to install additional electric vehicle charging points over the next three years. Referring to the potential of bus and rail travel to replace the most carbon emitting trips, she noted that there was an Enhanced Partnership agreement in place with bus operators and one of the ideas was to establish an express bus corridor to connect residents living in rural areas. The Transport Planning Team Manager informed Members that the County Council had secured £1.3m in Government funding to deliver demand responsive transport, and an additional £2m for bus electrification plans which would enable the authority to bid for match funding.
- 113.7 In terms of next steps, the Transport Planning Team Manager informed Members that the County Council's Transport Carbon Reduction Strategy would be published in Summer 2023 which would set out detailed steps to reduce transport emissions in the county in order to align with emissions reduction targets. She also informed Members that the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) review was due to take place in Autumn 2023, and guidance from central Government was expected later in 2023 which would assist the Local Transport Plan (LTP) review. She also noted that it was hoped that there would be more opportunities to bid for funding in the next round of Active Travel bidding which was expected later in 2023.
- 113.8 At this point in the meeting, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure and the Transport Planning Team Manager welcomed questions from Members.
- 113.9 Councillor Wilson shared that he felt the ambition to develop an integrated MRT system was an exciting one. He noted that the projected costs of the MRT scheme amounted to £24m and the Arle Court M5 Junction projects amounted to £600m, and queried why the costs for the motorway projects were significantly higher. He also requested further information around how MRT in Luton was funded, whether through the Transport Authority or private companies.
- 113.10 The Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure explained that the planned M5 works included a new four-way junction and a 2-3 mile dual carriageway. He noted that the delivery of the motorway project was now expected to be between £300-310m. In response to Councillor Wilson's query concerning the MRT in Luton, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure explained that there was an advanced bus partnership in place in Luton and noted that the Council owned the track. He confirmed that due to the MRT system, the buses needed to be of a certain standard which in turn helped regulate the bus service and increased the exponential use of buses in that area.
- 113.11 Councillor Wilson asked whether there was an established template which other cities were using, or whether Gloucestershire would be one of the first to develop MRT. The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure noted that a 'Glider' transit was in place in Belfast, and

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similar transit developments were in place in Luton, Cambridge and Manchester. He noted that some integrated units made use of existing roads and some had segregated carriageways, therefore there were varying degrees of development.

113.12 The Chair referred to the recent decision by central Government to reduce the active travel budget in England by £200m and asked whether this was likely to have an impact on active travel in Gloucestershire. The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure noted that there would likely be an impact locally however Gloucestershire was considered to be in the top 6 counties for active travel and continued to build on its reputation. He further noted that Officers had the confidence to challenge bidding decisions where necessary, and a challenge had been successful in the Bishops Cleeve area.

113.13 In response to a query from Councillor Sawyer regarding Bristol to Gloucester rail services, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure confirmed that there would be increased frequency of trains between the cities.

113.14 Councillor Sawyer asked whether the County Council continued to lobby for improvements to local services. The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure confirmed that the authority did continue to lobby Network Rail and was pushing for 'passing routes' in areas such as Ashchurch. He explained that these passing routes allowed faster trains to overtake slower trains on the line so that services to smaller and rural areas could continue.

113.15 Councillor Pullen agreed that the proposal to develop integrated MRT was exciting. He noted that the ambition for the integrated system was to cover the central Severn Vale area and asked whether there was any scope for the proposals to cover central Gloucester and areas further south such as Cam and Dursley. The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure confirmed that the proposals were still under consideration but recognised the importance of connecting south and central Gloucester.

113.16 In response to a further query from Councillor Pullen regarding proposals for transport hubs, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure noted that these hubs were likely to be situated in more rural areas of Gloucestershire including the wider Cotswolds and Forest of Dean. He informed Members that these hubs would include provisions such as bike stands, taxi ranks and electric vehicle charging points. He explained that the aim of these transport hubs was to address decarbonisation in rural areas.

113.17 Councillor Durdey asked whether the County Council intended to engage with local businesses on carbon emission interventions or supplies. The Local Major Projects Team Leader for Gloucestershire County Council confirmed that the County Council was working with companies and the major employers across Gloucestershire to ascertain staff travel plans, with a view of offering initiatives such as additional cycle hire. The Transport

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Planning Team Manager further added that business travel was one of the most carbon intensive forms of travel, and that research had indicated that interventions tended to work best when there was new infrastructure in place.

- 113.18 In response to a request from Councillor Castle for further details on how a MRT system worked, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure confirmed that it would likely take the form of a guideway or segregated section of the road in certain areas which buses would be able to enter and break out of with the installation of some equipment.
- 113.19 Councillor Castle referred to the improvements made to the cycle path around Churchdown and asked whether consideration had been given to addressing issues around the Estcourt Road Roundabout. The Local Major Projects Team Leader noted that the aim of the improvements in Churchdown was to help keep the traffic fluid in the area. The Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure commented that there was no single fix or way to address carbon emission problems, and that although local authorities and Government could encourage and support residents to make changes to their travel habits, the challenge was for all residents to recognise their responsibility to change.

Transport in Gloucestershire – Bus Service Update

- 113.20 The Transport Operations Manager for Gloucestershire County Council delivered a presentation on the current position and the ongoing challenges in relation to bus service provision. He confirmed that the County Council worked closely with bus operators, and although the County Council had more control over the subsidised bus network, it had little control over the commercial network.
- 113.21 The Transport Operations Manager confirmed that bus service reliability since the Covid-19 pandemic had been poor, due to pressures in the driving industry. He noted that that Stagecoach had been badly affected by the driver shortage which had resulted in a 25% reduction of services at one stage during the Summer of 2022. The Transport Operations Manager noted that Stagecoach had recently made changes to address these challenges, and had reduced the amount of buses on the network to ensure that enough drivers were operating. He related to Members that the County Council did not agree with these changes but could not intervene in decisions made around the commercial network. It was noted that rises to inflation had also had a major impact on the bus industry, due to implications on wages and fuel.
- 113.22 In terms of the current situation, the Transport Operations Manager informed Members that reliability had improved over recent weeks and that trip detection failure had dropped to around 10%. He noted that Gloucester was not as adversely affected as Cheltenham and Stroud as there was variation amongst bus depots. In relation to passenger numbers, the Transport Operations Manager advised that these were improving and were

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on average 75-80% of the pre-pandemic level, however this posed an inevitable problem for operators with less revenue. He noted that the County Council had increased funding in the transport network, and that central Government was providing monthly support payments to account for the lost revenue. It was noted that the County Council continued to lobby Government for further support.

- 113.23 Councillor Wilson asked whether there were any restrictions on how far bus operators could raise fares. The Transport Operations Manager advised that bus fares were not regulated by the County Council however operators would need to be mindful of making fares attractive to compete with rail fares.
- 113.24 Councillor Durdey queried whether the £250k cost to cover a single vehicle and driver for a year included capital costs as well as revenue. He also noted the difficulties posed by inflation and asked whether it was likely that bus operators were making any profit in the current climate. The Transport Operations Manager replied that this was an approximate figure which only included revenue, and therefore anyone purchasing a new bus vehicle would need to factor in capital costs. He further advised that central Government continued to fund support for operators and that the County Council was also assisting with support.
- 113.24 Councillor Durdey referred to the Bus Recovery Grant which had been extended by the Department for Transport until June 2023 and asked what the post-June position would be for operators. The Transport Operations Manager stated that the County Council continued to lobby Government and were building a dialogue with the Department for Transport. It was noted that this scheme had been repeatedly extended.
- 113.25 Councillor Pullen noted that the majority of the buses in Gloucester city ran on conventional fuels and asked what was being done to make buses greener. The Transport Operations Manager confirmed that it was a key aim of the County Council to roll out renewable alternative fuels. He assured Members that the County Council was putting itself in the best position to bid for more funding from Government, and that the future of green buses might not necessarily be restricted to electric fleet.
- 113.26 In response to a query from Councillor Durdey regarding alternative fuels, such as hydrogen fuel, and whether consideration was being given to planning for alternative fuels in the future, the Transport Planning Team Manager noted that alternative fuels were particularly interesting for buses and freight vehicles and confirmed that the team was working with counterpart colleagues on a regional level on this matter. She noted that although electric buses worked well in an urban environment, rural areas were more of a challenge.

At this point in the meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded during the presentation and discussion of Appendix 1 on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of business to be transacted or the nature of those proceedings, that if

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members of the press and public were present during the discussion there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Regulation 12(4)(d) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the presentation.

114. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 27th March 2023.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.35 pm hours

Chair