

Midlothian Orbital - Case for Change & Preliminary Options Appraisal

Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Report for Information

1 Recommendations

It is recommended that Council notes the executive summary report detailing the outcomes from the Case for Change and Preliminary Options Appraisal stages of the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) process.

2 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the Midlothian Orbital Bus STAG process by way of an executive summary on the Case for Change and Preliminary Options Appraisal stages.

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3 Background

- 3.1 The Bus Partnership Fund (BPF) complements the powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, enabling local transport authorities, in partnership with bus operators, to work together to develop and deliver ambitious bus priority schemes to tackle the negative impacts of congestion on bus services.
- 3.2 The Fund is guided by the evidence on how bus services will be improved by addressing congestion but it will also leverage other bus service improvements to make bus travel more attractive and, in turn, will help tackle the climate emergency, reduce private car use and support modal shift. The BPF is managed by Transport Scotland.
- 3.3 The BPF is a capital fund to develop and implement bus priority infrastructure. This initial award has been made to support the Midlothian Bus Alliance (MBA) through funding resources required to conduct appraisals and business cases. Appraisals are developed under the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG), forming a significant part of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for bus priority infrastructure developments. STAG represents best practice guidance for transport appraisals and is required whenever Scottish Government funding, support or approval is needed to change the transport system.
- 3.4 The MBA, led by Midlothian Council, formed in 2021 and made a successful bid to the Bus Partnership Fund (BPF). The successful element of the bid was to develop four key routes within the Midlothian area. The project was awarded £302,000.
- 3.5 The opportunities identified within the bus network in Midlothian included:
 - potential to improve east-west connectivity by public transport and encourage development of new bus services
 - opportunity to increase public transport accessibility through improved punctuality and reliability of bus services in Midlothian
 - contribute to National Transport Strategy objectives
 - greater partnership working between bus operators and local authorities to the benefit of bus passengers and residents in Midlothian
- 3.6 Public and stakeholder engagement forms a vital part of the STAG process. An initial stakeholder engagement period to inform the validation and identification of problems, opportunities and options and build early awareness of the study was undertaken in the summer of 2022 and continues. Further engagement at later stages of the study programme will focus on obtaining public and stakeholder feedback on the proposed bus priority improvements identified through the study.
- 3.7 The findings will then feed into the production of reports in line with the STAG process, expected to be completed by spring 2023.

4 Executive Summary

4.1 The study area encompasses the four key bus corridors in Midlothian:

- Corridor 1: A6094 Whitecraig to A6094 Eskbank
- Corridor 2: B6392 Eskbank to A772 Gilmerton Junction
- Corridor 3: A7 Gorebridge to A7 Danderhall
- Corridor 4: A6094 Eskbank to A701 Straiton

4.2 The corridors traverse many of Midlothian's largest settlements, including Loanhead, Lasswade, Bonnyrigg, Eskbank, Dalkeith, Newtongrange and Gorebridge. The routes operate through a number of key junctions, including Eskbank Road Roundabout, Sheriffhall Roundabout, Eskbank Toll and Gilmerton Road Roundabout.

4.3 STAG states that location-specific problems or opportunities should be the rationale for any appraisal. Following a review of public and stakeholder feedback and findings from analysis of 2022 data (which built on the original BPF application in 2021), the following problems and opportunities related to bus priority measures have been identified in the study area.

Problems

- Bus congestion (all Corridors)
- Right turn movements causing bus congestion (Corridor 1)
- Uncontrolled on-street parking causing longer bus journey times (Corridors 1 and 4)
- Constrained movements at Eskbank Toll (Corridor 1)
- Rapid growth and development in Midlothian adding pressure to the transport network (all Corridors)
- High proportion of travel to work by car and risk of Transport Poverty (all Corridors)
- Bus access to A7 from Stobhill Road causing longer bus journey times (Corridor 3)

Opportunities

- Improve east-west connectivity by public transport and encourage development of new bus services
- Increase public transport accessibility through improved punctuality and reduced variability of bus services in Midlothian
- Contribute to National Transport Strategy objectives
- Greater partnership working between bus operators and local authorities to the benefit of bus passengers and residents in Midlothian

- Encourage greater modal shift
- Bus Priority Technology
- Match in Kind

Opportunities associated with proposed or committed schemes / projects, including A701 Relief Road, A7 Urbanisation Scheme, Sheriffhall Grade Separation and Dalkeith town centre regeneration are important considerations, to ensure any bus priority measures either form part of, or are complementary to, ongoing transport schemes.

- 4.4 The Preliminary Options Appraisal stage presents a qualitative appraisal of the options being considered.
- 4.5 Options were sifted against several criteria, including how they performed against Transport Planning Objectives and Deliverability Criteria. Rationale for sifted out options includes where they: were either “out of scope” and not eligible for BPF funding; they performed poorly against the sifting criteria; they were associated with feasibility challenges; or they were considered to have little to no impact on reducing bus congestion.
- 4.6 In line with a proportionate approach, options which performed positively against sifting criteria were retained and form part of an Option Package. Four option packages have been developed, one for each of the four study corridors, as below:
- Option Package 1: Measures to improve bus priority on Corridor 1 A6094 Whitecraig to A6094 Eskbank, including Road Space Reallocation, Redesign of Bus Stops, ITS and Signing & Lining.
 - Option Package 2: Measures to improve bus priority on Corridor 2 B6392 Eskbank to A772 Gilmerton, including New Infrastructure, Signing and Lining and Redesign of Bus Stops.
 - Option Package 3: Measures to improve bus priority on Corridor 3 A7 Gorebridge to A7 Danderhall, including New Infrastructure, ITS, Signing & Lining and Redesign of Bus Stops.
 - Option Package 4: Measures to improve bus priority on Corridor 4 A6094 Eskbank to A701 Straiton, including New Infrastructure, Road Space Reallocation, Redesign of Bus Stops, ITS and Signing & Lining.
- 4.7 Each option package contains a range of individual options (option measures) which are detailed in the report.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 In line with STAG, the next stage of work will involve a Detailed Appraisal of the shortlisted options i.e. the four option packages identified through this study. This will involve further development of options including high level design work to enable cost estimates to be prepared, as well as further assessment of option deliverability, risks and impacts to inform the detailed assessment. At the Detailed Appraisal stage, the option packages will be appraised against

SMARTened Transport Planning Objectives, STAG Criteria, Deliverability Criteria, and Costs to Government.

- 5.2 There will also be further engagement to obtain feedback from the public and stakeholders. Engagement will involve stakeholder workshops and a public drop in session close to one of the study corridors.

6 Project Budget

- 6.1 The BPF expenditure is closely scrutinised through the project team and Transport Scotland, with key milestone reporting dates.

7 Performance Reporting

- 7.1 Robust scrutiny to project management is undertaken quarterly by Transport Scotland.

8 Report Implications

8.1 Resource

The BPF award of £302,000 is funding this process and study.

8.2 Digital

Not applicable.

8.3 Risk

The risk of not undertaking the study will have a negative impact on finding interventions towards encouraging bus travel, patronage and climate impacts.

8.4 Ensuring Equalities

The process of impact assessment runs throughout the development process and is focussed on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). The objectives of the EqIA are to integrate the consideration of relevant equalities issues and impacts into the development of the study options.

8.5 Additional Report Implications

See Appendix A

8.6 AECOM Midlothian Orbital Bus STAG: Executive Summary

Appendix B

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The route map outlines the phases of service recovery and transformation which will underpin the Single Midlothian Plan.

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious
- None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The report aims to deliver best value.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Extensive consultation is imperative.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report aims to measure progress through outcomes.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The report is based on the creation of a wellbeing economy which prioritises prevention, fairness for people, the economy and the environment.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The improvement and enhancement of our environment.