DATE: 11 November 2011

SUBJECT: Proposed making of a Quality Partnership Scheme for the A6 corridor between Manchester and Hazel Grove.

REPORT OF: Bus and Rail Director, TfGM

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek approval to make the proposed Quality Partnership Scheme (‘QPS’) for the A6 corridor section from Hazel Grove (at the Rising Sun) to Manchester City Centre (at Portland Street).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

1. To authorise the making of a bus Quality Partnership Scheme (QPS) on the Manchester - Stockport - Hazel Grove corridor, as detailed in this report, being in agreement that it will:

   - contribute to the implementation of the policies set out in the Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan (and in particular the bus strategy contained therein);
   - improve the quality of local bus services by bringing benefits to persons using those services; and
   - reduce or limit traffic congestion, noise or air pollution, and hence satisfies the requirements for the making of a scheme under the Transport Act 2000.

2. Approve the proposals set out in the report for the accompanying voluntary partnership agreement.

3. Note that following the making of this scheme, enforcement of the scheme will commence on 1 April 2012 and end on 31 March 2017.
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Previous report to GMITA Committee on commencing statutory consultation on the scheme, on 17th December 2010.

Previous reports to Policy and Resources Committee on bus partnership progress on 3rd April, 5th June and 20th November 2009, 19th March 2010 and 10th September 2010.

DfT guidance on Quality Partnership Schemes

DfT/OFT guidance on the application of competition law to certain aspects of the bus market.

CONTACT OFFICERS

Michael Renshaw 0161 244 1026 michael.renshaw@tfgm.com
Steve Warrener 0161 244 1025 steve.warrener@tfgm.com
Moira Suringar 0161 244 1029 moira.suringar@tfgm.com
Howard Hartley 0161 244 1660 howard.hartley@tfgm.com
Simon Ho 0161 244 1974 simon.ho@tfgm.com
1 Background

1.1 The A6 is one of the busiest bus routes in Greater Manchester, with circa 10 million passenger journeys each year. The reliability and customer service provided by the bus operators on this route is therefore of paramount importance to a large number of bus passengers, and is a key factor in reducing the impact that traffic congestion has on economic growth, people's health and the environment.

1.2 Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) has historically worked closely with Manchester City Council (MCC), Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and Stagecoach Manchester through the Quality Bus Corridor (QBC) programme to deliver significant improvements to bus facilities along the A6. Building on this previous QBC investment of £6.7 million, and in accordance with previous resolutions of Policy and Resources committee and the Authority’s policy priorities, these partners have collaborated to develop a statutory Quality Partnership Scheme ('QPS') for the A6 corridor between Hazel Grove (at the Rising Sun) and Manchester City Centre (at Portland Street).

1.3 On the 17 December 2010, GMITA resolved to:

- approve the proposal to make a Quality Partnership Scheme for the A6 corridor and agree with the commencement of the statutory notice and consultation procedures for the A6 corridor;
- agree that the purpose of the Scheme is to secure improvements in the quality of bus operations, vehicle fleets, facilities and other improvements of benefit to passengers; and
- agree that TfGMC should be the lead authority for the proposed Scheme.

1.4 Subsequently, TfGM issued the statutory notice and launched the consultation for the QPS on the 27 January 2011. The consultation concluded on the 23 March 2011. One admissible objection was received from Stagecoach Manchester.

1.5 To remove the admissible objection, the QPS has been amended to:

- a reduced scheme period of five years. The scheme could then be extended beyond this period, subject to a formal review;
- include the city centre portion of the corridor in the scheme area. This is to reflect the importance of city centre facilities to enable operators to maintain adherence to the punctuality and reliability standards; and
- removal of restrictions on the making service changes. This will avoid potential unintended consequences of preventing an operator’s ability to respond appropriately to new competition.
1.6 The finalised QPS and accompanying Voluntary Partnership Agreement ('VPA') has been agreed with the operators. MCC and SMBC have received delegated authority, through approval at their Executive Committees on the 26 October 2011 and 3 October 2011 respectively, to make the Quality Partnership Scheme in accordance with the provisions of the Transport Act 2000.

1.7 Therefore, the scheme is now ready to be made by GMCA, MCC and SMBC. GMCA has delegated to TfGMC authority to consider and approve the making of Quality Partnership Schemes subject to TfGMC exercising this function in accordance with transport policies of GMCA and the LTP.

1.8 This report sets out to:-

- provide a summary of what the QPS and accompanying VPA are, and what they will deliver;
- outline the additional obligations of the Highways Authorities and TfGM set out in the VPA;
- consider the application of the statutory competition tests applying to the QPS; and
- request TfGMC to authorise the making of the scheme and approve the proposed obligations on TfGM outlined in the VPA.

2 Quality Partnership Scheme

2.1 A QPS is a statutory scheme under the Transport Act 2000 (as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008) which can be made, if the relevant authorities are satisfied that it will help implement their bus strategies and policies and will improve the quality of local services by bringing benefits to persons using those services, or reduce or limit traffic congestion, noise or air pollution. In this case, the relevant authorities are GMCA as the local transport authority and MCC and SMBC as the local highway authorities. In order to make the QPS, the authorities must have complied with the notice and consultation requirements imposed by the Act.

2.2 A QPS brings benefits to persons using the local services by improving the quality of the service. This is done with the guaranteed provision of bus infrastructure, matched by investment in service quality. Two of the key benefits of a QPS, identified by the Department for Transport, are:

- to ensure the delivery of effective bus priority measures; and
- to offer some degree of protection of an operator’s investment.

2.3 The potential local benefits of the QPS are detailed below:
Benefits to passengers:

- better customer relations, through driver behaviour and more consistently delivered, customer focused standards;
- stability of services within the Scheme Area and customer commitments to first and last bus;
- improving security and cleanliness;
- reduced differential between car and bus journey times and improvements to reliability and punctuality; and
- maintaining improved vehicle standards.

Benefits to GMCA/TfGM, MCC and SMBC:

- improving the overall image of bus services and promoting confidence in the bus service;
- improved passenger satisfaction;
- making public transport a more attractive choice, potentially leading to modal shift which in turn would lead to reduced or limited growth in congestion;
- improved air quality;
- better cooperation between the scheme partners in delivering wider objectives; and
- more focused or specific enforcement action through the Traffic Commissioner.

Benefits to operators:

- protection from traffic congestion and improved competitiveness to the car;
- public sector commitment to continued provision of bus infrastructure;
- increasing patronage, and therefore revenue leading to increased visibility of the service; and
- protecting operators who have undertaken to adhere to the standards from other operators operating services to a lesser standard alongside.

2.4 The proposed QPS has been designed to secure:

- continued provision of effective bus priority and traffic management facilities and bus stop infrastructure for the next 5 years that resulted from GMITA and the local authorities' earlier investment under the QBC programme;
continued high standards of local bus services, in particular around the punctuality & reliability of services and vehicle standards; and
a minimum service frequency and timings for first and last bus services.

2.5 Under the proposed QPS, the authorities will undertake to continue to provide, operate and maintain particular facilities on the A6 for the period of the scheme. The facilities specified in the QPS for Manchester consist of bus stop infrastructure and bus priority measures, most of which were first implemented between five and ten years ago.

2.6 The QPS document (attached at Appendix 1) identifies:

- the scheme area (i.e. the route);
- the facilities (i.e. bus lane, bus stops, TRO’s, etc);
- the standards of services that will be required to be met; and
- the criteria that will determine if a particular service is included in the QPS.

2.7 The operators of local bus services whose services meet the criteria will have to meet and maintain the defined standards contained in the QPS in relation to reliability, punctuality and vehicle quality. Any sub-standard performance will be reviewed by a Steering Group that will comprise of the affected operators (in this case only Stagecoach will be currently affected), TfGM, MCC and SMBC. Remedial action will be agreed through the Steering Group, through a process detailed in an associated Voluntary Partnership Agreement (see below).

2.8 Referral to the Traffic Commissioner, who has the power to enforce the QPS will be possible. This sanction will only be used as an action of last resort. The Traffic Commissioner has expressed the desire to see such partnership arrangements succeed and minimise the level of intervention required by her in such matters. A position which we would support.

3 Voluntary Partnership Agreement

3.1 To enable the effective management of the implications of the QPS, TfGM, MCC, SMBC and bus operators will sign up to a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). The VPA is a legal agreement which deals with ancillary matters to the QPS, such as arrangements for monitoring the service standards, data sharing, maintenance of the facilities and enforcement of the bus priority measures and traffic management facilities. The proposed A6 VPA includes:

- a commitment from MCC and SMBC to work towards an agreed regime for bus lane and other TRO enforcement;
an established process for on-going partnership dialogue between TfGM, bus operators and MCC and SMBC to realise improved performance for passengers along the A6 corridor; and

extra certainty to the arrangements both for how the infrastructure is managed, enforced and maintained and how bus operators will meet the agreed standards;

3.2 The outline obligations of the Highway Authorities are to:

- ensure targeted enforcement of parking contraventions and certain moving traffic offences such as bus lane contraventions;
- maintain the facilities to agreed standards Full details of the maintenance standards are given in the VPA document (see Appendix 2). These standards reflect the Councils’ current intervention levels in terms of definitions of safety hazards and the timescales for taking action/repair;
- improve road work co-ordination including cross-boundary co-ordination through the GMRAPS proposal;
- provide information on planned and emergency events through the Road Activities Register (GMRAR) and automated emergency work notifications; and
- work with operators to identify performance issues and where possible provide bus performance improvements in collaboration with TfGM.

3.3 The outline obligations of TfGM are to:

- review signal timings on at least an annual basis to ensure the continued efficient use of the highway network;
- maintain all installed bus shelters in a good and serviceable condition and to ensure that all reported incidents are made safe or repaired within 48 hours being reported and to carry out the cleaning of all bus shelters to the following specification:
  - all bus shelters are cleaned on a fortnightly basis including all elements of the shelters both internal and external including the information provision of the shelter;
  - racial/offensive graffiti will be removed within 24 hours of being reported; and non-racial/offensive graffiti removed on the fortnightly clean.
- ensure that maintenance and cleaning contractors/agencies, through the application of the contract conditions, avoid obstructing bus stops during cleaning periods;
- information regarding timetable alterations to be carried out to the following specification;
bus stop timetable information to be updated preferably coincidental with a timetable change but in any event within 48 hours of the change, with the busiest stops prioritised;

- timetable leaflet stocks at travel shops will be maintained and displayed appropriately. New leaflets or appropriate notices regarding changes will be displayed in advance of a change and old leaflets removed in a timely fashion.

- monitor the performance of the scheme and adherence to the scheme standards.

4 Competition Test

4.1 At its meeting on 11th February 2011 GMITA considered the application of the statutory competition test to the proposed Quality Partnership Scheme and concluded that the requirements of the test were met in that, in so far as the proposed scheme had an impact on competition, the impact would be proportionate to the achievement of the statutory purposes of the QPS (i.e. improving the quality of vehicles and facilities, securing other improvements to services and reducing or limiting traffic congestion, noise and/or air pollution). Since the preparation of the report which was submitted to that meeting, the proposed Scheme has been amended as described in para 2.5 above. At the request of the affected operator, the area of the Scheme has been amended to include the Manchester City Centre portion of the corridor. This is because the operator considered that achievement of the standards as to frequencies and timings was not commercially viable unless the bus priority facilities contained in the Manchester City Centre portion of the corridor were included.

4.2 In addition the restriction on service variations has been removed, with the effect that operators will now be able to vary their service registrations, within the parameters of the standards set out in the Scheme for routes, timings and minimum frequencies, and the life of the scheme has been reduced to five years.

4.3 Officers consider that these changes do not affect their advice contained in the previous report that the proposed Scheme meets the requirements of the statutory competition test.

4.4 TfGM, which will enter into the Voluntary Partnership Agreement, is also satisfied that the separate competition test applicable to such arrangements is met.
5 Recommendations

5.1 A full set of recommendations appears at the front of this report.

Michael Renshaw
Bus and Rail Director