

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	12 June 2013	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2563
TITLE:	Bid for designation as a Better Bus Area	
WARDS:	Bathavon North, Bathavon West, Clutton, Lambridge, Lyncombe, Odd Down, Publow & Whitchurch, Twerton, Walcot, Westmoreland, Widcombe	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Table of outline proposals		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 A joint bid to the Department for Transport by the West of England Partnership authorities for designation of a network of key bus service corridors as a Better Bus Area.

1.2 The government's aim for the funding is for it to be used to increase bus patronage in busy urban areas, in support of creating growth and cutting carbon emissions.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet agrees that:

2.1 A bid should be submitted to the Department for Transport for designation of a network of key bus service corridors in Bath & North East Somerset as part of a Better Bus Area in conjunction with other West of England Partnership authorities and local bus operators.

2.2 The Divisional Director for Planning & Transport Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, be given authority to approve the final details of the bid.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 It is estimated that, if successful, the bid will involve the devolution of a total of £220k over four years and the top-up funding over the same period will be £88k, making a total of £308k. This will be used to deliver specific projects identified in the bid.
- 3.2 There will be no additional capital or revenue funding requirement on the Council to deliver these projects.

4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 If successful, these proposals will help build a stronger economy and create neighbourhoods where people are proud to live by attracting new passengers to buses from cars, reducing waiting times for buses, reducing bus journey times and reducing overall net carbon emissions.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Department for Transport has invited Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to bid, either individually or jointly, for designation as a Better Bus Area (BBA) where they can show that they have a clear plan for improving bus services in the area that is being developed locally in partnership with bus companies. Bids must be submitted by 21 June 2013.

- 5.2 In designated BBAs, the government will calculate how much Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG) would be payable each year to all bus operators in respect of commercial bus services and transfer it incrementally to the LTAs over four years. In addition, every designated BBA will receive "top-up" funding equivalent to 20% of the total value of BSOG for commercial services in the BBA.

- 5.3 BBA bids must:

- demonstrate good value for money,
- have a better Cost Benefit Ratio than the current BSOG payment arrangements,
- be carbon neutral or better so that, for example, additional bus mileage is balanced by fewer car journeys,
- not involve a direct subsidy to operators except for *de minimis* payments to offset the loss of BSOG on very minor services,
- not include funding for marketing or advertising.

- 5.4 Guidance published by government suggests that LTAs should use the BBA funding on better enforcement of bus priority measures, improvements to street infrastructure, additional bus priority measures, improvements to traffic management, demand management, network redesign and improvements to passenger information and ticketing.

- 5.5 In respect of Bath, the proposed bid covers three corridors:

- (i) London Road (A4) between Cleveland Place and Stambridge;
- (ii) Lower Bristol Road (A36) between Lower Oldfield Park and Mill Lane (Twerton);

- (iii) Wellsway (A367) between Lower Bristol Road and the Odd Down Park & Ride site

5.6 In addition, it is proposed that the A37 corridor between the boundary with Bristol and Chelwood Roundabout should form part of one of the proposed BBA radial corridors from Bristol City Centre.

5.7 The funding likely to be available will enable much better enforcement of existing bus priority measures and parking restrictions to be carried out, together with some small-scale improvements to bus priorities. Bus operators have given qualified support for a bid along these lines. A “long list” of measures drawn up after consultation with operators is at Appendix 1 but there will be insufficient BBA funding to deliver all the schemes listed. The final bid will comprise measures drawn from this list to match the funding available.

5.8 If the bid is successful, a Partnership Board will be created to deliver the scheme and it will consist of representatives of the bus operators and the LTAs.

5.9 In the event that specific projects prove to be undeliverable owing to insufficient funding, the Partnership Board will consider alternative projects in the BBA to best meet the scheme objectives.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet Member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed at this stage because the final bid will include consideration of the impact of the plans on persons who share a relevant protected characteristic.

8 RATIONALE

8.1 This is an opportunity to build on the impressive track record of the West of England Partnership authorities in obtaining funding from government for transport improvements. In recent years, successful bids have been submitted for the Greater Bristol Bus Network, Bath Transportation Package, Local Sustainable Transport Fund, Better Bus Area Fund (2012) and Green Bus Fund.

8.2 The future of BSOG beyond the next government spending round in 2015 is uncertain. BSOG was reduced by 20% in April 2012 and there is a widespread view within the bus industry that it may not survive in its present form, if at all. If the opportunity to bid for BBA designation is not taken, there is a chance that the money currently paid by government through BSOG to support bus services will be lost to the industry. In that event, operators may seek to replace that portion of their income by increasing fares or reducing costs through withdrawal of weaker services. Some small operators may withdraw from the market altogether.

8.3 In a BBA, the effect of the devolution of funding will be to re-direct it away from a direct subsidy to bus operators into provision of measures that will increase bus ridership and/or reduce operating costs. This is a more sustainable way of using

that funding and the BBA designation will draw in additional funding in the form of the top-up payments.

8.4 The Council has developed very good partnership working with local bus operators and this is an opportunity to develop that relationship further.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 A bid based on a geographical area, such as the Bath urban area or the whole West of England Partnership area, was considered but not supported by bus operators.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Consultation has been carried out electronically with the Section 151 Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer.

10.2 Consultation has been carried out with local bus operators, including a meeting of Bath operators with the Bus Expert Improvement Panel on 26 February 2013 and a workshop for all West of England operators on 8 April 2013. Operators gave qualified support for a bid comprising specific route corridors.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 Social Inclusion; Sustainability.

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

12.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	Andy Strong, Public Transport Team Leader, 01225 394201
Sponsoring Cabinet Member	Councillor Caroline Roberts
Background papers	Guidance on applying for designation as a Better Bus Area (Department for Transport, February 2013)
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	