

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure
DATE	13 th September 2011
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Service 5 BRDG Funding/Real Time Upgrade Project
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/11/218

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from members to undertake a project to upgrade the existing Real Time system and install new Real Time Bus Information displays in the City Centre using government Bus Route Development Grant funding.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee agrees,

- To proceed with the proposal to upgrade and install new Real Time Bus Information displays in the City Centre

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This project would cost a total of £112,377.90 for improvements to on- street displays and £30k for a new base station. This would be funded from Bus Route Development Grant money awarded to Aberdeen City Council in 2006 from the Scottish Government. There would be no further financial requirement as ongoing maintenance would be the responsibility of First Aberdeen.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Real Time displays would remain the property of Aberdeen City Council. If First Aberdeen ceases their maintenance contract at the end of the 3 to 5 year period we would remain in ownership of the equipment but would be under no obligation to continue any maintenance on the equipment.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

In 2006 Aberdeen City Council were awarded Bus Route Development Grant (BRDG) funding from the Scottish Government to implement along with First Aberdeen significant improvements to the Service 5.

The majority of this was spent on new vehicles in order to increase the frequency of the service and to allow for the routing of the service via Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. These were purchased by First Aberdeen and funded by Aberdeen City Council using the BRDG funding.

Initially this was a great success with the patronage on the service increasing rapidly. Over the years patronage levels have decreased and the frequency of the service has also been reduced. There is no revenue budget available to support an increase of frequency on this service.

A further £200k of the BRDG funding remains. This is capital money and as such must be spent accordingly. This funding should preferably have been utilised before this date, as the BRDG project was awarded over a 3 year timescale.

Officers along with First Aberdeen have investigated a number of possible schemes to use the funding to bring about further improvements to the Service 5 or any connecting services.

The investigations to date have failed to identify a suitable option which can be delivered within budget and that is a notable enough project to bring considerable improvements to the service.

However following recent discussions with First Aberdeen a project of improving the Real Time Bus Information has been identified as a viable option.

Aberdeen City Council has now terminated the maintenance agreement for on-street real time displays. This has since been taken over by First Aberdeen, although the infrastructure remains under the control of Aberdeen City Council. Currently our Traffic Engineering and Legal Teams are preparing an agreement between First Aberdeen and Aberdeen City Council governing this arrangement.

First Aberdeen will be installing a new base-station for the real time system at Redmoss. The new base station will provide faster and improved connections to the on street real time displays, however for this to be successful a number of signs will need upgrading in order that they can fully receive the faster signal.

It is also notable that although the backroom system for the Aberdeen Real Time system appears to be working relatively well, the on street displays at particular locations can regularly produce inaccurate information.

During a meeting between Aberdeen City Council and First Aberdeen it was discussed that the BRDG funding for Service 5 could be used to upgrade Real Time displays in the City Centre so that they are in a fully working order.

First Aberdeen have noted that they would be willing to enter an agreement whereby they would be responsible for the annual maintenance of the system and the ongoing maintenance of any new and existing real time bus information displays signs for a minimum of 3 to 5 years.

If Aberdeen City Council utilise the BRDG money to fund the new base station unit and for the upgrade and purchase of new displays this will allow for the possibility of other operators eventually using the system as these will remain under our ownership. If First Aberdeen solely fund a new unit this may prove as a barrier to the inclusion of other operators. It is worth noting that Aberdeenshire Council are currently working on a project for Real Time information which should see Stagecoach Bluebird services being equipped with real time capability in this financial year.

Aberdeen City Council would also require that if any other operators wished to make use of the system then First Aberdeen should permit this, provided the other operators were prepared to pay their share of maintenance costs.

The maintenance of an on-street real time system will provide a real benefit to users of not only the service 5 but for all connecting bus services across the entire City Centre. Many passengers, particularly in the City Centre place a reliance on the real time system and its continued presence in Aberdeen is important to improving the public transport experience.

In addition the launch of the Real Time website has been a great success and this site is complimented by a working and accurate on street real time information system.

We have been working closely with First Aberdeen and ACIS to produce a costed programme of proposed improvements to be put together for the BRDG funding. ACIS are a company who specialise in real time information and provide services to passengers, transport operators and local authorities. ACIS supplied all of Aberdeen City's on street displays and undertake the maintenance on these units.

This proposed programme includes upgrading on-street displays and the addition of new signs which will be GPRS. GPRS is a "general packet radio service" and is mobile data service for mobile communications. This is a mobile form of sending information. This change will allow for faster and more accurate up to date information to be displayed to the public working in conjunction with the new base unit. The introduction of GPRS will require SIM cards to be installed in a number of screens in order that the GPRS signal can

be received. There will be an additional cost for the SIM cards which will cover 10 years, which is the minimum lifespan of a display.

Fig. 1 Project Proposal

Item	Description	Unit Price	Qty	Total
1	De-Install Existing Display to include removal and transport to storage	£252.50	82	£20,705.00
2	Supply and Install New 3 Line LED GPRS Display	£3,525.00	20	£70,500.00
3	GPRS Cost for 20 displays @ £75 year	£1,500.00	10 year SIM card	£15,000.00
4	De-Install of Display Computer and Radio to include re-Install at new location	£137.50	22	£3,025.00
5	Supply New Antenna and install	£149.90	21	£3,147.90
	Maintenance for 12 months	£27,392		
Total Cost				£112,377.90

The above noted pricing reflects installation of 20 new GPRS displays and a refurbishment programme to improve on street displays to bring them to a good working order. It also includes the removal of certain displays.

Aberdeen City currently has 151 on street real time displays. First Aberdeen's maintenance agreement with ACIS will retain maintenance on 74 of these displays. The result will be that the remaining displays will eventually not operate.

ACIS have included costs for removal of all of these non used displays, these are displays which are generally outwith the city centre and are not at key locations. As part of the maintenance agreement these signs are no longer to be maintained and as such will not be in full use. We would propose to use parts from the removed displays in order to make available all spare parts which would be salvaged and used elsewhere to improve the remaining displays in the City Centre as part of the upgrade programme. ACIS would refurbish a total of 54 displays, leaving only fit for purpose displays on street for the general public, with the addition of 20 new signs.

We believe that the project proposal put forward would be the best way to proceed to ensure Aberdeen City has working on street real time displays and there are no disused displays on street.

6. IMPACT

A key aim of the Community Plan is to ensure that all citizens have access to a range of transport options that reflect differing needs of age, gender, disability and income. The Single Outcome Agreement items 1,2,10, 12 and 14 also set a priority of delivering local and regional transport strategy objectives that improve the public transport network.

The Vibrant, Dynamic & Forward Looking document sets out a commitment to work to improve public transport in and to our city and to improve access.

It is a priority of the Council's Five Year Business Plan that Aberdeen has a fully integrated transport network. Any transport network is improved by the availability of information to the passenger and as such up to date real time information is critical to providing the passenger with the most accurate information for their journey.

The Aberdeen City Bus Information Strategy did not consider it appropriate to formulate any actions to improve or expand the operation of real time at the present time given financial constraints. However the strategy did recognise that results from public consultation suggest that there are a number of problems with the existing system and the public would like to see these resolved and the system expanded. The Strategy also recognises that both the Local and Regional Transport Strategies set out to expand the level of real-time information available.

There will be a public interest in this report as bus users value the real time system. However we do receive complaints when the system doesn't work and to improve this will provide a benefit to the public. At this stage an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment is not required.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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