

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport
DATE	11 June 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Aberdeen Rapid Transit – Recommended Network Routeing
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/24/161
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne
REPORT AUTHOR	Kirsty Chalmers
TERMS OF REFERENCE	7, 8

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present recommendations on the desired routes for the proposed Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) network in order to enable further progression of the Strategic Business Case.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Note the findings of the ART Routeing Appraisal, as presented in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Note the views of the North East Bus Alliance on the proposed ART routes, as highlighted at 3.19.
- 2.3 Agree the proposed ART routes as outlined at Figure 1 and 3.8-3.18 to be the desired network upon which to continue to develop the business case for ART.
- 2.4 Agree that the multi-modal corridor studies be concluded at the end of Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) Detailed Options Appraisal and that the bus priority infrastructure options that align with the agreed ART routes as identified at 2.3 above, be incorporated within the overall ART Business Case development process, as illustrated at Figure 2, rather than continue as standalone projects.
- 2.5 Agree that those actions identified in the Multi-Modal Corridor Studies that do not align with the proposed ART network be progressed through separate workstreams as appropriate.
- 2.6 Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to report back to this Committee on the ART Strategic Business Case by the end of the 2024/25 financial year, including further exploration of the costs and risks associated with both a Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) and Franchise approach, and prior to moving to Outline Business Case.

- 2.7 Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to engage with bus operators, through the North East Bus Alliance, on the options for delivery of ART along these desired routes through a partnership approach.
- 2.8 Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to undertake further engagement, as appropriate, with the public and stakeholders on the development of ART to inform the Strategic Business Case, encompassing and superseding previously agreed actions for engagement on the individual corridors, and therefore enabling future engagement to be better aligned and set within the context of the wider ART vision and programme.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The [Vision for Aberdeen Rapid Transit](#) (ART) was first identified in the 2021 approved Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) as an ambition to develop a high quality, high frequency mass transit network across the city on key corridors and linking key destinations, supported by Park & Ride facilities. ART has the potential to support long-term sustainable growth and support local priorities including city centre regeneration, reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality, improving accessibility and connectivity, increasing active travel and supporting healthy lifestyles. ART now also has national recognition in Transport Scotland's Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) and in the revised National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).
- 3.2 The [Vision for ART](#) is for a high quality bus rapid transit system delivering a cross-city network connecting key destinations across the city and connected to park and ride sites. A tram-like solution, it aims to deliver fast, frequent and reliable public transport services through high segregation from general traffic, high frequency and high capacity vehicles, off-board fare collection and efficient boarding and alighting. The aim is to deliver significantly faster and more reliable journey times, enhanced connectivity, accessibility and quality.
- 3.2 Following development of the ART Vision, the North East Bus Alliance was successful in its bid to the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund (BPF) to undertake a STAG Appraisal and develop the Business Case for ART. The BPF has also funded a series of multi-modal corridor studies considering options for improving transport connections and infrastructure on four key arterial corridors into Aberdeen. These multi modal corridor studies are developing the bus priority measures that will be required to deliver ART. Progress on these corridor studies was reported to this committee in March 2024 ([Bus Partnership Fund report](#)).
- 3.3 Through the Bus Partnership Fund, the [Case for Change](#) was established for ART in a report published in May 2022 which identified the problems and opportunities the scheme seeks to address, evidenced the rationale for the development of ART, and set out the associated Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs). A Preliminary and then [Detailed Options Appraisal](#) followed, considering the form of ART in terms of infrastructure, vehicles and services as well as the delivery mechanisms available, primarily Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIP) and Franchising approaches.

- 3.4 At its meeting on 9th May 2023, this Committee considered the Detailed Options Appraisal and agreed to endorse the decisions of the Nestrans Board which included:
- a) Agreement to work with partners of the North East Bus Alliance to continue to develop a Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) agreement that could support the delivery of ART and explore with bus operators what could be achieved through this mechanism.
 - b) In parallel to further explore the costs and risks associated with both a BSIP and a franchise approach in order to fully understand the likely financial implications (both in terms of set up and ongoing revenue costs).
 - c) Further consideration to establish the desired routeing and interchange points for the ART corridors and services.
 - d) Further investigation and quantification of the wider economic and social benefits that ART may bring to the region.
 - e) More detailed financial analysis of operating costs and revenues to firm up on the level of commercial viability and risk associated with both a BSIP and franchising approach.
- 3.5 Item a) is being progressed by the North East Bus Alliance, with work being led by Aberdeenshire Council.
- 3.6 Items b), d) and e) are being explored through the Strategic Business Case for ART, funding for which has been secured through the City Region Deal and which will be reported back to this Committee on completion.
- 3.7 This report presents the findings of an appraisal of the routeing and interchange options for ART, in line with point c) above, and makes recommendations on a desired network on which to base the further development of the business case.

Recommended Aberdeen Rapid Transit Network

- 3.8 An appraisal of routeing options for ART, based on the high level vision set out in the RTS, was carried out by consultants Stantec, with support from Systra. The full report, detailing the outcomes of this appraisal is provided in Appendix 1 of this report and included two core strands of work:
- Engagement with:
 - Nestrans and Council officers;
 - Bus operators; and
 - Elected members from Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire through a workshop held on 8th March 2024.
 - Modelling using the ASAM19 strategic transport model to provide quantitative analysis to compare options and inform decision making.
- 3.5 Given the main points raised during engagement and the evidence provided through the modelling outcomes, it is recommended that the ART network is made up of two cross-city routes as described below and illustrated in Figure 1. Subject to agreement, this desired network will form the basis of future work

to develop the business case for ART with further refinement of the routes and operational details as the project progresses.

Figure 1 Recommended Aberdeen Rapid Transit Network

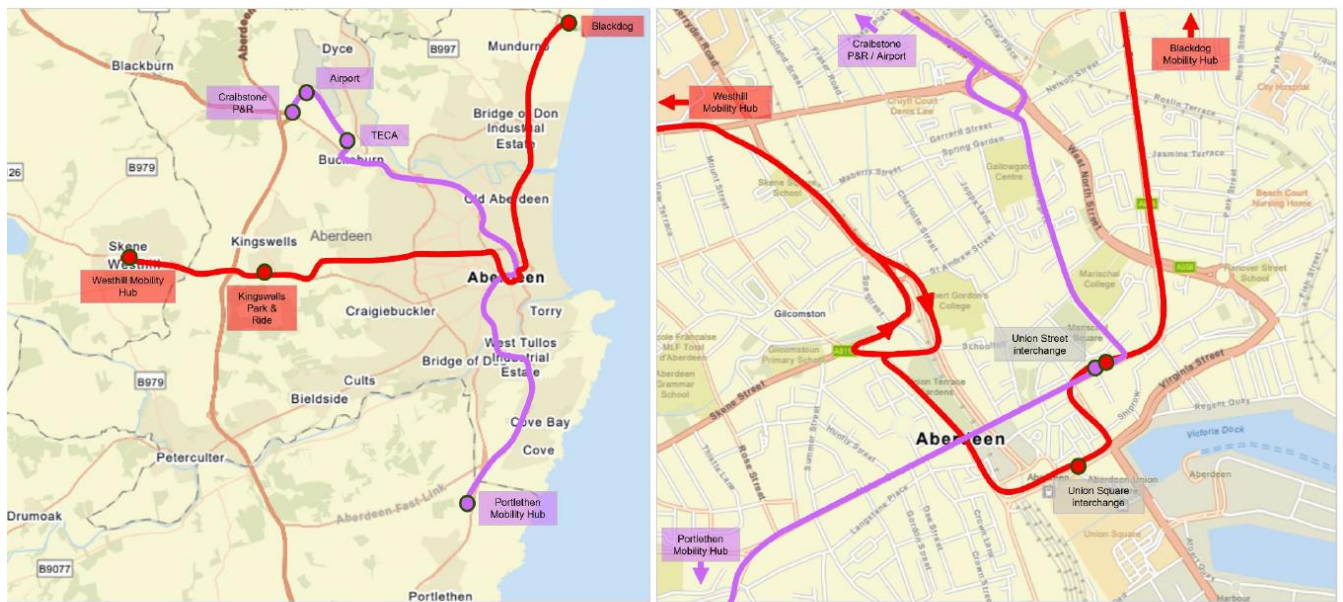


Figure 7.1: Recommended ART Network

'Red line' - Blackdog to Westhill

- 3.7 Starting in the north at a new mobility hub, incorporating park & ride facilities at Blackdog. The new development site provides the opportunity to identify land for a purpose built facility (although discussion with the developer of this site is still required).
- 3.8 For delivery in the shorter term, the existing park & ride site at Bridge of Don could be used and there may be a desire to retain some park & ride provision here in the longer term with access to ART stops from the main carriageway.
- 3.9 The route would then run via the A92, King Street, the new city centre bus priority on Market Street, Guild Street and Bridge Street, Union Terrace, Skene Square, A944 Lang Stracht connecting to the Foresterhill Health Campus and on to Kingswells, terminating at a new mobility hub / park & ride in Westhill.
- 3.10 Running to Westhill instead of terminating at the existing park & ride facility at Kingswells is anticipated to increase the potential for modal shift to bus on this corridor.
- 3.11 For delivery in the shorter term, the existing park & ride site at Kingswells could also be used. There would likely remain a requirement to retain some park & ride facilities at Kingswells and the site also provides potential for mobility hub and depot facilities if required.
- 3.12 This ART line would provide cross city connections and therefore enhanced accessibility to key destinations including Aberdeen University, Frederick Street Health Village, Union Square, Bus and Rail Stations, Foresterhill Health Campus, Prime Four and Westhill as well as connecting to new development sites at Blackdog, Cloverhill and Maidencraig.

Purple Line – Craibstone Park & Ride to Portlethen

- 3.14 Starting at the existing park & ride facility at Craibstone with connections to the Airport and TECA (although consideration and discussion with key stakeholders is required to determine the most appropriate routing to serve all three sites).
- 3.15 The route would then run via the A96, Great Northern Road, Powis Terrace, Powis Place, Mounthooly roundabout, Gallowgate, Broad Street, Union Street, Holburn Street, Great Southern Road, West Tullos Road, Wellington Road and the A92, terminating in the south at a new park & ride / mobility hub facility at Portlethen.
- 3.17 This ART line would provide cross city connections and therefore enhanced accessibility to key destinations including Aberdeen College, Union Street, the west end of Union Street, Kincorth and destinations along Wellington Road.
- 3.18 The two cross-city routes as set out above would ensure ART serves Union Square (and as such connect to the railway station and bus station, utilising the recently introduced bus priority here) in addition to the full length of Union Street. The two services would interchange at the eastern end of Union Street between Market Street and King Street, as well as at the junction of Union Terrace and Union Street. High frequency and reliable services would enable seamless interchange between the two lines further enhancing connectivity across the city.
- 3.19 This desired network was considered by the North East Bus Alliance at its meeting on 2nd May 2024 with the Bus Alliance supportive of working in partnership to explore options for delivering ART along these routes. It was acknowledged that there will need to be further and more detailed assessment of the impact of ART on the wider bus network as the work progresses, to ensure potential impacts and opportunities are fully understood and considered.

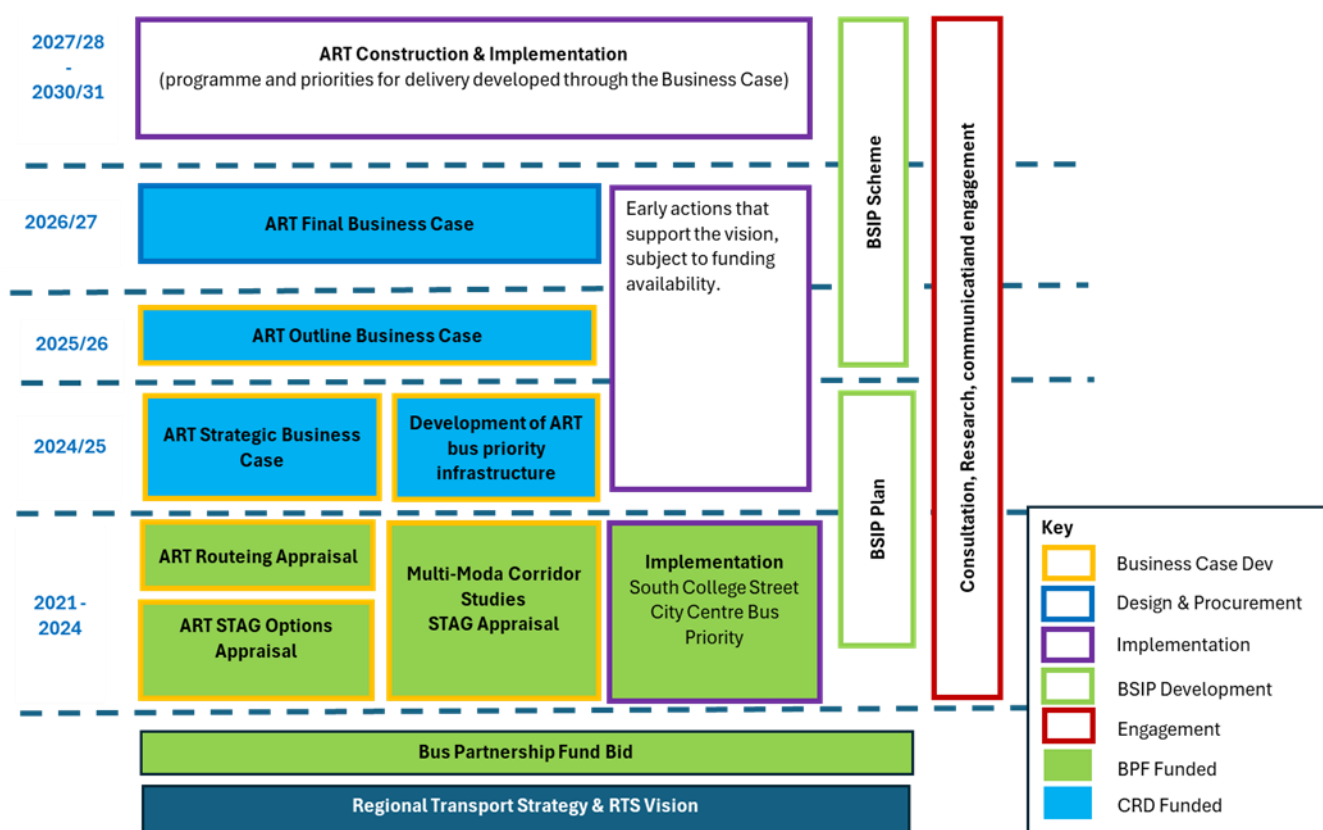
Development of the Strategic Business Case (SBC)

- 3.20 As reported to this Committee in March 2024, funding has been secured through the City Region Deal to progress the business case development for ART, including progression of the multi-modal corridor studies.
- 3.21 An agreed ART network at this stage will:
- allow the progression of the ART Strategic Business Case;
 - will enable Bus Alliance partners to engage in discussions on options for delivery;
 - will enable more detailed assessment of bus priority options aligned with the network aim for ART; and
 - will provide a clearer foundation for engagement with stakeholders and the public on the vision for ART and the destinations and communities it aims to serve.
- 3.22 The move from Bus Partnership Funding to City Region Deal funding has also provided an opportunity to re-structure the programme of work and better

align the work being done through the corridor studies with the overarching ART programme. This will enable a better understanding of how all the workstreams fit together and allow engagement to be undertaken on the corridor infrastructure within the context of the strategic longer term vision for ART.

3.23 Figure 2 below provides details of the work that has been undertaken to date through the BPF and how it is proposed this is structured going forward.

Figure 2 ART project programme



3.24 At the end of the ART STAG Detailed Options Appraisal, there was a clear desire to continue to pursue the development of the full ART vision. However, it was clear that there were a considerable number of uncertainties around costs, value for money and deliverability that required further consideration to enable the ART project and the development of supporting bus priority to move forward on a preferred pathway.

3.25 On advice from Transport Scotland’s Bus Partnership Fund team it was agreed that further development of ART would be undertaken through continued development of the Strategic Business Case. This work will develop the options for ART further and establish more detail around the economic, commercial, financial and management aspects of delivery.

Engagement

3.26 Engagement on ART to date has taken the form of:

- Engagement on the vision for ART through the development of the Regional Transport Strategy;
- Market research which sought the public's views on the existing public transport network in Aberdeen and a potential new ART network and services, undertaken in late 2022 to inform the ART detailed options appraisal;
- Engagement on the options for bus priority and active travel improvements on each of the four proposed ART corridors, undertaken through the multi-modal corridor studies;
- A programme of stakeholder, elected member and business briefings undertaken during 2022 and 2023 on the ART vision and proposals;
- Face to face visits to 318 businesses with frontages on ART corridors during February 2023 to raise awareness of ART and invite them to a business briefing; and
- Focus groups with a representative sample of local residents to test views on ART.

3.27 Engagement will continue to be key to informing the development of ART and will form an integral part of the business case development. To date, engagement on the bus priority infrastructure through the multi-modal corridor studies has been separate to the development of ART. It is recommended that this be more aligned going forward and that a programme wide engagement strategy be developed enabling any engagement on bus priority infrastructure to be clearly set in the context of one of the two ART lines proposed above.

3.28 At its meeting on 27th March 2024, this Committee agreed to 'instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to, as funding permits, undertake public and stakeholder consultation on the options established through the Inverurie to Aberdeen (A96) corridor study options appraisal, and to report the preferred option or options relevant to Aberdeen City Council back to this Committee once completed'. As one of the ART corridors, it is proposed that this action be encompassed within wider engagement on ART, rather than a standalone exercise, allowing it to be better aligned with and set within the context of the wider ART vision and programme. It is proposed that this approach is adopted for all ART corridors going forward.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Since 2021 the Aberdeen Rapid Transit project, including the appraisal of routeing options has been funded through Transport Scotland's Bus Partnership Fund. As reported to this Committee in March 2024, the Bus Partnership Fund has now been paused however funding has been secured through the City Region Deal to continue to progress the business case development for ART, including progression of the multi-modal corridor studies, also previously funded through the BPF. There are therefore no direct financial implications for the Council arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The transfer of this project from the Bus Partnership Fund to the City Region Deal entails a change in the governance framework which will now see progress reported through the CRD governance structure as part of reporting on the Strategic Transport Appraisal workstream. Engagement with Transport Scotland will continue through the City Region Deal.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Proposals for ART aim to encourage mode shift away from private car to public transport thus reducing harmful emissions and contributing to Net Zero carbon emissions.
- 6.2 There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report. Delivery of the projects described in this report may have environmental implications, and these will be captured in future assessments and reported to Committee as projects move forward to through the business case stages.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Pausing or delaying the wider ART programme risks undermining the Council's ability to achieve a range of transport, health, environmental and economic objectives associated with delivery of a step change improvement in public transport provision.	Funding secured through the City Region Deal to enable progression of the Business Case and bus priority infrastructure options.	Low	Yes
Compliance	Risk of non-compliance with external funding grant conditions.	Ensure officers are aware of conditions and deliver projects in accordance with these.	Low	Yes
Operational	Risk of bus operator partners unwilling to work in partnership to deliver the ART vision.	Engagement with bus operators on aspirations and the outcomes of the work to date and continue to explore	Medium	Yes

		alternative delivery mechanisms		
Financial	Risk that delays to the programme impact on the Councils ability to maximise funding secured through the City Region Deal.	Funding secured from the CRD for the next three years (until the end of the current deal).	Medium	Yes
Reputational	Work undertaken to date has introduced the vision for ART and raised expectations – if the Council does not continue with this work it could be seen to be abandoning aspirations or principles or seen to have wasted public money on work that is not being taken forward to fruition.	Continue developing ART and the required bus priority measures along the recommended routes.	Low	Yes
Environment / Climate	Pausing or delaying the ART programme risks undermining the Council's ability to achieve air quality and net zero targets, given that a modal shift to public transport and active travel is a key means of reducing emissions.	Continue developing ART and the required bus priority measures along the recommended routes.	Low	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

Council Delivery Plan 2024	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement Working in Partnership for Aberdeen	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Working with the Scottish Government and NESTRANS to improve the city's bus network, including considering options for an Aberdeen Rapid Transit network, with the support of the Scottish Bus Fund, and consider options for council-run services in the city.</i>
Local Outcome Improvement Plan	

Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	<p><i>The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>13 - Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate, in that measures to encourage modal shift from private car to active travel and public transport will have a positive impact on emissions; and</i> • <i>14 - Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026, in that the projects look to support more people travelling by walking, cycling and public transport.</i>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>The proposals in this report support delivery of the Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy, particularly the following elements: Increasing the number of people travelling actively for health and the environment; Delivering Aberdeen Rapid Transit; Improving the region's bus network; and Reducing emissions from transport.</p> <p>They contribute towards achieving the outcomes of the current Local Transport Strategy, particularly: Increased modal share for public transport and active travel; Reduced the need to travel and reduced dependence on the private car; and Improved air quality and the environment.</p> <p>They also contribute towards achieving the following outcomes of the Net Zero Mobility Strategy: Increased number of people taking public transport; Increased number of people walking and wheeling; and Reduced emissions from transport.</p> <p>The proposals support the City Centre Masterplan by developing high quality, faster and reliable public transport options to improve access to the city centre, reducing emissions and improving air quality.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Linked throughout the report.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1 – Aberdeen Rapid Transit Routeing Analysis – Technical Report

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