

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport
DATE	19 March 2024
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CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Update on the Aberdeen Rapid Transit Project
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/25/059
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TERMS OF REFERENCE	7,8

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the various workstreams being undertaken as part of the Aberdeen Rapid Transit Project, including development of the Strategic Business Case, a Bus Services Improvement Partnership Plan and planning for engagement activities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Note the work ongoing to progress the Aberdeen Rapid Transit project.
- 2.2 Instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning to bring a report on the ART Strategic Business Case to this Committee in June 2025.
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning to bring a further update on the development of a Bus Services Improvement Partnership Plan (BSIP) to this Committee in June 2025, including further development of the proposed BSIP Schemes, being promoted jointly with Aberdeenshire Council, identified at paragraph 3.13.
- 2.4 Instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning to report back to this Committee in June 2025 on the Scottish Government's proposed Bus Infrastructure Fund and £2 flat bus fare pilot, as referenced at paragraphs 3.17-3.19 below.

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 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 At its meeting on 9th May 2023, this Committee considered the ART 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 Services 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.

3.3 Item a) is being progressed by the North East Bus Alliance, with work being led by Aberdeenshire Council. An update on this is discussed below at paragraphs 3.11-3.16.

3.4 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. An update on this work is provided at paragraphs 3.7-3.10 below.

3.5 An appraisal of the routeing and interchange options for ART, in line with point c) above, was presented to this Committee in June 2024 and a desired network on which to base the further development of the business case was agreed.

3.6 At its meeting in June 2024 this Committee:

- a) Agreed 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, be incorporated within the overall ART Business Case development process, rather than continue as standalone projects.
- b) Agreed 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.

- c) Instructed 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 Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) and Franchise approach, and prior to moving to Outline Business Case.
- d) Instructed 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.
- e) Instructed 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.

Development of the ART Strategic Business Case (SBC)

- 3.7 At the end of the ART STAG Detailed Options Appraisal (which was funded through Transport Scotland's Bus Partnership Fund), 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.
- 3.9 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, now being funded through the Aberdeen City Region Deal, is developing the options for ART further and establishing more detail around the economic, commercial, financial and management aspects of delivery, including further exploration of the costs and risks associated with both a Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) and Franchise approach.
- 3.10 In further support of the SBC development, work has also included:
 - Reviewing outputs from the multi-modal corridor studies to set out and understand the degree of consistency of approach taken across the studies;
 - Setting out key remaining uncertainties, constraints and decisions required as the bus infrastructure design progresses;
 - Consideration of short, medium and long term options for delivery of ART;
 - Establishment of high level common design standards for ART;
 - Consideration of potential ART stop locations on the agreed network;
 - Consideration of future engagement requirements;
 - Consideration of future modelling requirements; and
 - Discussions with other regions across the UK, to understand their approaches and lessons learned in delivery of bus service improvements through both partnership and franchising arrangements, including with

officers from Liverpool, Portsmouth and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

- 3.10 A draft of the Strategic Business Case has now been received, and work is ongoing with partners to review this. This draft has been submitted to Transport Scotland who, although no longer directly fund the project through the Bus Partnership Fund, have retained a project assurance and guidance role in addition to their role in the wider City Region Deal Programme. Comments received will be taken on board and the SBC report and recommendations on the way forward will be reported to the City Region Deal Programme Board in May 2025, Aberdeen City Council Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee, Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services Committee and Nestrans Board in June 2025.

Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) Agreement

- 3.11 A partnership approach to delivery of ART, through the development of a BSIP Agreement, is one of the potential delivery mechanisms considered as part of the SBC. Initial meetings have been held with local bus operators to better understand how a BSIP may be used to deliver ART, considering current legislation and utilising examples of Enhanced Partnerships in England. This information has been fed into the development of the SBC Commercial Case.
- 3.12 In parallel to the work on ART, the North East Bus Alliance is actively working on developing a draft BSIP Plan, a requirement of the 2021 Bus Partnership Fund Award. The North East Bus Alliance Board (which is independently Chaired and consists of senior officer representatives from Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Nestrans, First, Stagecoach and, representing passengers, Bus Users Scotland) has considered various iterations of a draft region-wide BSIP Plan. Feedback from Transport Scotland's Bus Regulatory Team has also been sought in advance of formal guidance on the development of BSIPs being published. The latest version of the draft BSIP Plan, being promoted jointly by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, was discussed at the Bus Alliance Board meeting on 26 September 2024, and further comments have been sought from Board members prior to them agreeing a Draft for wider engagement.
- 3.13 The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 (as amended by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019) specifies that:

“a local transport authority must, at the same time as making a partnership plan, make one or more bus services improvement partnership schemes (a “partnership scheme”) relating to the whole or part of the area to which the plan relates”.

“A partnership scheme is a scheme that –

- (a) specifies the area and the period to which the scheme relates,*
- (b) imposes one or more service standards in relation to the local services that have one or more stopping places in that area, and*
- (c) specifies one or more—*
 - (i) facilities to be provided in the area as part of the scheme, or*

(ii) measures to be taken under the scheme, by the local transport authority.”

3.14 As specified in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, the BSIP Scheme should detail improvements and commitments to delivery from all partners of the agreement (local transport authorities and bus operators). The Bus Alliance Board has discussed and agreed five potential initial schemes, which are felt to be deliverable within the short term and would enable the wider BSIP Plan to be adopted:

- Scheme A – Expanding the programme of investment in live vehicle tracking and Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI), enhancing provision of both at-stop and on-vehicle digital and audio information, ensuring consistency and accessibility of information across all bus operators.
- Scheme B – To coordinate the dates on which service timetables change.
- Scheme C – Vehicle standards on local bus services, such as engine emission standards, provision of CCTV, the fitting of automatic vehicle location (AVL) technology.
- Scheme D – A Customer Charter setting out what people can expect in terms of services and how to raise concerns if they feel partners have failed to meet their expectations.
- Scheme E – A joint operator/Local Transport Authority Network Review to identify opportunities for enhancing service provision for passengers.

3.14 Work has also been undertaken on a Competition Test to ensure that the BSIP Plan and proposed schemes would comply with competition legislation.

3.15 A further update on the development of the BSIP Plan and associated Schemes will be brought back to this Committee in June 2025.

3.16 The minutes of the Bus Alliance Board meetings are reported to the Nestrans Board, with the minutes of the meetings of 14th November 2024 and 30th January 2025 reported to the [19th February 2025 meeting](#).

Identifying funding for the delivery of short-term measures

3.17 Work is also on-going to identify future funding opportunities that may support a future BSIP or enabling measures for ART. The Scottish Government budget for 2025/26 includes, subject to approval, provisions for a Bus Infrastructure Fund within an overall budget line of £164.8 million for active and sustainable travel.

3.18 Recent announcements around the 2025/26 Scottish Budget also indicate that, subject to approval, there will be an allocation for a £2 flat bus fares pilot in a Regional Transport Partnership area.

3.19 Officers are liaising with Transport Scotland and partners to understand more about these opportunities, their potential for the north east and with the intention

of submitting a bid for the Bus Infrastructure Fund to support delivery of the emerging BSIP Schemes.

Engagement

- 3.20 As identified in 3.6 (e) above, in June 2024, this Committee agreed to further engagement, as appropriate, with the public and stakeholders on the development of ART to inform the Strategic Business Case.
- 3.21 Key activity in this regard since then has included re-engaging with key stakeholders including Aberdeen Airport, NHS Grampian & Public Health, University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, NESCOL, Invest Aberdeen and the Getabout Partnership.
- 3.22 Meetings have been used as an opportunity to re-state the wider vision for ART, update on project progress and establish channels for future engagement. The meetings have also been used as an opportunity to understand the transport needs of these key stakeholders (many of which are located on proposed ART corridors) and how ART may benefit them in the future. This is an ongoing activity and opportunities for engagement with a wide range of stakeholders will continue to be sought throughout the duration of the project.
- 3.23 Officers are now also working with partners in Nestrans and Aberdeenshire Council to engage consultants to develop and implement a more detailed and intensive communications and engagement plan going forward. This will be centred around two key stages of work:
- **March – June 2025** – ongoing targeted engagement, communications and market research to maximise understanding, awareness and support for the ART Vision and capture wider views on the proposals. This will include continued engagement with a range of key stakeholders and community representatives with a strong focus on inclusive engagement, including children and young people, older people and disability groups.
 - **Summer 2025 – Autumn 2025** – following completion of the SBC, it is anticipated that communications activity would be increased and consultation / engagement activity widened to become more public facing. This period would have a focus on seeking public views on the outcomes of the SBC and ongoing awareness raising of the project. This will be subject to Committee decisions on the SBC report in June 2025.
- 3.24 Engagement and communication on ART is intrinsically linked to communication of the wider aims of the emerging Local Transport Strategy in terms of the wider outcomes that ART is trying to achieve and the rationale for the project. Communications activity will be co-ordinated to ensure that activity around ART can support the development of the LTS and vice versa.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Between 2021 and the end of March 2024, the Aberdeen Rapid Transit project, including the appraisal of routeing options was funded through Transport

Scotland's Bus Partnership Fund (BPF). As reported to this Committee in March 2024, the BPF has now been paused however funding has been secured through the City Region Deal for financial years 2024/25 to 2026/27 to continue to progress the business case development for ART, including progression of the multi-modal corridor studies, also previously funded through the BPF.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are different legal implications for each of the ART delivery mechanisms being considered as part of the ART Strategic Business Case, which considers both BSIP Agreements and Franchising as potential options for delivery (as specified under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 as amended by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019). These will be considered in more detail when the SBC is reported back in June 2025. There are no direct legal implications for the Council arising from the recommendations of this report.

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 ART may have environmental implications, and these will be captured in future assessments and reported to Committee as the project moves forward 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) *taking into account controls/control actions	*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	Funding secured through the City Region Deal to enable progression of the Business Case and bus priority infrastructure options. Development of the Business Case will consider costs and risks for delivery of the proposals.	Low	Yes

	with delivery of a step change improvement in public transport provision.			
Compliance	Risk of non-compliance with external funding grant conditions.	Ensure officers are aware of conditions and deliver projects in accordance with these. Regular reporting to the City Region Deal Transport Working Group on progress.	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 what can be delivered through partnership working.	Medium	Yes
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	Continue developing ART and the required bus priority measures along the recommended routes as well as a programme of communication and engagement to support the development of the project.	Low	Yes

	not being taken forward to fruition.			
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	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement: -</p> <p><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></p> <p><i>Improving cycle and active transport infrastructure, including by seeking to integrate safe, physically segregated cycle lanes in new road building projects and taking steps to ensure any proposal for resurfacing or other long-term investments consider options to improve cycle and active transport infrastructure.</i></p>
Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the following Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 02 – 74% employment rate for Aberdeen City by 2026 by improving connectivity and public transport access to employment destinations.

<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p><i>The proposals within this report support the delivery of Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 - <i>Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer by 2026 and</i> • 13 – <i>Addressing Climate change by reducing Aberdeen’s carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting the impacts of our changing climate.</i> <p><i>ART aims to encourage mode shift from private car to active travel and public transport increasing the number of people travelling actively and reducing emissions from transport.</i></p>
<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p><i>The proposals within this report support the delivery of a Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 – <i>Addressing Climate change by reducing Aberdeen’s carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting the impacts of our changing climate.</i> • 14 – <i>Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking; 5% of people cycling and wheeling as the main mode of travel and a 5% reduction in car miles by 2026.</i> <p><i>ART aims to encourage mode shift from private car to active travel and public transport increasing the number of people travelling by sustainable modes, and reducing car trips and car miles travelled.</i></p>
<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>

	The proposals contribute to the Regional Economic Strategy, in particular objectives to regenerate our city centre and towns to become vibrant and attractive places to live work and invest; to develop infrastructure for commuter, visitor and freight transportation – nationally and internationally; to improve deployment of low carbon transport in the city and urban areas, through active travel networks; and To improve access to / around Aberdeen International Airport.
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to Aberdeen Rapid Transit has been reviewed and no changes required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are no background papers to this report.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 N/A

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