



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Rapid Transit Study Presentation from DRD
Date:	16 January 2008
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Relevant Background Information

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) 2015 states that Rapid Transit is a term for high quality public transport offering improved speed, reliability and comfort. Usually these services operate on an exclusive or segregated route unaffected by other traffic congestion. The EWAY, running along the disused Comber railway line through the East of the city, was proposed in the BMTP as the pilot Rapid Transit route for Belfast. The BMTP also identified three other possible routes: WWAY serving West Belfast, CITI linking the city centre to the City Airport through Titanic Quarter and Superroute linking the Downpatrick corridor to Annadale and the south of the city.

The Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP) contained outline proposals for four rapid transit schemes, identified by protected route alignments. In bringing forward the proposals it was clarified that only the EWAY scheme was to be progressed towards implementation within the plan period 2015, with only a commitment to detailed planning for the remaining routes.

In early 2007, the Department of Regional Development, Regional Planning and Transportation Unit commissioned a study into Rapid Transit schemes for the Belfast Metropolitan Area. The remit of the study was to consider pilot routes for Belfast in particular the proposed EWAY and CITI schemes.

Key Issues

The study is nearing completion and DRD have requested the opportunity to present the main findings to the Committee.

The aim of the study was to carry out further analysis of possible route options and the most appropriate type of technology for the development of the system. The findings from the study will inform the work of DRD in relation to securing approval for the project and making submissions for funding under the Programme for Government.

During the initiation of the study DRD consulted with Belfast City Council officers to clarify the position in relation to the Council Transport Policy and aspirations embodied

in the recent responses to the dBMAP. Through this consultation the need for a fully integrated modern public transport system for Belfast was highlighted including analysis of pilot Rapid Transit routes in terms of the potential for cross city connections and broader connectivity across the different public transport modes.

Belfast City Council made detailed written representations to the Draft BMAP Public Inquiry in relation to the proposed Rapid Transit schemes for the city. (See **Appendix 1**). The Council through the Inquiry highlighted the need for more detailed consideration of the route alignments with set targets for planning and implementation of the schemes to form part of the plan review. The absence of a Rapid Transit option or proposal for North Belfast was also raised in conjunction with the need for a more integrated approach to the different transportation corridors leading into Belfast.

Belfast City Council's Transport Policy outlines a policy which supports Rapid Transit for Belfast. Policy G states "pursue/promote high profile public transport scheme for Belfast". It states that "high profile public transport initiatives such as Light Rapid Transit (LRT) schemes should be pursued in order to help raise the profile of Belfast regionally and internationally".

The findings should clarify a number of issues in relation to:

- The modification of the proposed CITI Route in dBMAP which originally crossed Musgrave Channel and the Bombardier site
- A revised CITI route and the connections to Titanic Quarter, D5 (IKEA etc) and the City Airport
- The potential for extending the CITI route to serve Queens University and the EWAY route linking to Royal Hospital and the wider potential of WWAY.
- The transport assessment and economic evaluation in relation to the potential for light rail or bus based technology. The projected passenger numbers need to justify the expenditure on different transport system- although the final decision will be made by the Assembly.
- The past announcements have identified Rapid transit bus based technology as the preferred option with high quality bus stops, off board ticketing and high frequency service.
- Whether or not the system developed initially could be modified or upgraded to light rail in the future should the demand increase or technology change.
- The detailed options in relation to the routes through the city centre and the priority that can be afforded to public transport
- The potential alignments for the WWAY Rapid Transit scheme beyond the Royal Victoria Hospital.
- The next steps for DRD in relation to detailed design and route alignment study of EWAY and CITI to identify and optimise patronage. DRD have previously indicated that consultation in relation to cross city connections with will take place with city centre businesses
- The Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy Northern Ireland.
- The provisional budget allocation for the development of a Rapid Transit Schemes over the period 2008 – 2018 and the anticipated contributions from the private sector to the development of the proposed alignments
- The timetable for the progression of the different route options and their implementation

Members may also wish to consider the implications in relation to the following issues, which will require further consideration in the as part of the next stage of the study:

- The final form of technology, capacity and the longer term potential in relation to the continued development of the city;
- The integration of the proposals with the current city centre public realm initiative;
- The relationship with the city bus re-routing study and the potential to remove lay-over facilities from the City Hall environs; and
- The implications of the proposed Bankmore link scheme which would affect the potential for the connectivity to the South of the City and Queen's.

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

Accede to the request from the Department for Regional Development to make a presentation to a future Development Committee on the progress of the Rapid Transit study.

Appendix 1