



Belfast City Council

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| Report to: | Development Committee |
| Subject: | Bus Rapid Transit – Department for Regional Development Response to Consultations |
| Date: | 11 August 2010 |
| Reporting Officer: | John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470 |
| Contact Officer: | Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 |

Relevant Background Information

Bus Rapid Transit is proposed by the Department for Regional Development (DRD) as the preferred option for the rapid transit system in Belfast. A study commissioned in 2007 by DRD considered possible routes and technologies for rapid transit in Belfast. The study concluded that a bus based rapid transit system for Belfast is the viable option rather than light rail technology. In addition the study identified a pilot network of three routes connecting East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter with and through the city centre.

The Department has since released a rapid transit public consultation document in November 2009 to which the Development Committee agreed a response in January 2010. The consultation document set out how the Department aims to implement the rapid transit system at the strategic level. The document does not deal with operational details of the system such as route alignment, location and design of halts, vehicle design, or branding. These will be subject of a further consultation exercise.

The Department has subsequently published a Final Report on the consultation document summarising the consultation responses, identifying next steps, and responding to comments from consultees. A summary of the Department's responses to Belfast City Council's consultation is provided in Appendix 1.

Key Issues

In the original consultation DRD proposed a number of powers in order to allow delivery of the rapid transit system in Belfast. The Council's response can be summarised as follows:

- The Council would support the Department as the authority to implement the rapid transit proposals in Belfast but would request clarification on the role of local councils. The Council would recommend that the relevant local councils are closely engaged in the planning and implementation of the pilot rapid transit network. In doing so, this will allow for better integration between transport and local land-use planning which is proposed to transfer to councils under the review of public administration
- The Council would request clarification on the role for local councils in development of performance based contracts to ensure transparency and local accountability
- A key issue for the Council is the integration of the proposed bus rapid transit system with the existing public transport service. A sustainable transport corridor approach should be developed along with an integrated ticketing system along the route alignment
- Current rapid transit proposals do not include plans for the north and south of the City and the Council would request details of measures to ensure an equitable high quality public transport system throughout the city.

In the Final Report the Department have made some comments to the Council's consultation response, these can be viewed in Appendix 1.

The Final Report on the consultation also outlines the proposed next steps for development of the rapid transit system. The Department has gained approval from the Executive Committee to instruct the Office of the Legislative Counsel to draft a new Transport Bill. This Bill will include not only Rapid Transit but also Public Transport Reform, which the recent consultations showed an overlap in legislative requirements.

The Department plans to engage further with stakeholders, interested parties and the public in the development of the design and implementation details of the Belfast Rapid Transit system.

Throughout the final report the Department has stressed that the Council is a key stakeholder and as such will be fully involved in taking forward the proposals for the system.

Based on the responses to the public consultation the Department has decided to take forward the following policy proposals:

- An enabling power to establish the necessary legal authority for the provision of the Rapid Transit system;
- The power to acquire land in connections with the Rapid Transit system;
- The power to purchase, lease and dispose of goods and services in connection with the Rapid Transit system;
- The power to award a performance based contract for the operation of the Rapid Transit system;
- The dis-application of current route licensing legislation to Rapid Transit;
- The power to make byelaws in relation to passenger conduct in/on premises connected with the Rapid Transit system;
- The power to install, operate and maintain off-board ticketing machines in connection with the Rapid Transit system;

In addition to taking forward the above policy proposals the Department is considering strengthening the existing powers for the enforcement of the public transport corridors

on which Rapid Transit operates. This would enable the Department to remove vehicles which are obstructing the corridors and thus allow the Rapid Transit system to operate more efficiently.

The Department has also proposed to take the power to exploit any commercial opportunities which arise as a result of the exercise of its Rapid Transit functions. This will allow the Department to benefit from the advertising opportunities which arise on the Rapid Transit network.

No timescale has been offered by the Department in relation to future Rapid Transit consultations. It may be of benefit to invite representatives from DRD to present further plans and next steps to Committee ahead of public consultation exercises.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee note the policy proposals and next steps relating to rapid transit in Belfast and agree to invite DRD to present the next steps for Rapid Transit to Committee.

Decision Tracking

Further to noting the report that DRD is invited to present the next steps for Rapid Transport to Committee.

Time line: September 2010

Reporting Officer: Keith Sutherland

Key Abbreviations

DRD –Department for Regional Development

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Comments by Belfast City Council on the Detailed Policy Proposals and the Department's Responses