



### **MyBus - Review of Service Design and Operation – progress update**

**Committee**            Operations Committee

**Date of meeting**    26 August 2022

**Date of report**     17 August 2022

#### **Report by Chief Executive**

#### **1. Object of report**

To update the Committee on the progress of the MyBus review of service design and operation.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The commencement of a review of the service design and operation of SPT's MyBus demand responsive transport (DRT) service began after approval of a report to the Committee in November 2021<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.2 Members are reminded that the MyBus service is a door-to-door, pick-up and drop-off bus service for those with a mobility issue or who have difficulty accessing mainstream public transport services. The MyBus service enables users to make essential trips (e.g. shopping), better access to a range of opportunities and, in essence, live more independent lives in their local communities.
- 2.3 However, in recent years, MyBus use has been steadily declining. During the Covid-19 pandemic, patronage reduced to less than a third of pre-pandemic levels and, in line with current demand, has seen the service continue operating on a reduced and restricted basis. Whilst MyBus usage has more recently shown signs of recovery, patronage remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels at around one third and the number of unique service users just over half compared with the pre-pandemic period. While the impact of Covid-19 has been significant, the impacts of the cost of living crisis on current and potential users is also being monitored as a factor which could further affect MyBus.
- 2.4 The review of the design and operation of the MyBus service is a two-stage process: Stage One being a short-to-medium term interim review designed to better understand, amongst other things, usage patterns; booking arrangements; eligibility criteria; user experiences; social need; comparisons with elsewhere; marketing; and to identify opportunities to improve the service in the short term. Stage Two will be a fuller review undertaken following approval of the new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) in 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.spt.co.uk/media/wjfs3t5/ops051121\\_agenda7.pdf](https://www.spt.co.uk/media/wjfs3t5/ops051121_agenda7.pdf)

### 3. Outline of proposals

- 3.1 Following a competitive tendering exercise, Atkins was appointed in May 2022 to provide consultancy support to the Stage One review process. Atkins will be supported by The TAS Partnership, who specialise in DRT service design and delivery options development and who have expert understanding of the role that DRT can play in complementing conventional transport services.
- 3.2 A project inception meeting took place in late June to begin the review and to agree the process, confirm project requirements and establish a programme for completion. The Stage One review comprises various examination stages, as set out in the project scope and agreed at the project inception, and will convey the findings of each stage into a final report along with recommendations.
- 3.3 A key initial workstream is to establish high-level objectives for MyBus. These will be developed as part of a process to ascertain how MyBus fits with the policies and objectives set out in the new draft Regional Transport Strategy as well as other national, regional and local policies and strategies.
- 3.4 A data gathering exercise in Stage One of the review will provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of how the MyBus Service is currently used. SPT holds extensive datasets on MyBus use and operations, with staff having in-depth knowledge and experience of the service.
- 3.5 Benchmarking will inform how DRT schemes operate elsewhere and will inform Stage One. It will provide an informative and meaningful comparison with other DRT operating models and is expected to identify not only where there are similarities to MyBus operations but also where there are significant differences both operationally and financially, and will include an examination of the booking and scheduling procedures used by other DRT services. This stage will also consider aspects of other operating models that work well and could support the assessment of potential alternative approaches for delivering MyBus/DRT in the SPT area.
- 3.6 The review will seek to engage with MyBus users as well as non-users of the service. User engagement will aim to better understand the views and opinions of MyBus users about the service, how they use it, why they feel it is important to them and to understand ways in which they feel services can be improved to better meet their needs. Furthermore, this stage will also aim to understand reasons why people do not use the service and whether there are barriers, either real or perceived, in preventing them doing so, or whether there are particular people or groups who do not use the service. This could include particular age groups, people with specific disabilities or other equalities groups.
- 3.7 Taking findings from the above workstreams, optioneering will identify options or packages of options based on the evidence gathered, best practice elsewhere and user feedback, and is expected to include:
  - Identification of issues and opportunities, including efficiencies;
  - Potential ways to grow MyBus patronage;
  - How to encourage use by current non-users;
  - Improvements to how SPT can market, brand and promote MyBus;
  - Deliverability, likely impact and fit with the review objectives; and
  - Possible alternative operating models looking at short-to-medium term (1-5yrs) and longer-term (5yrs+) that could be taken forward into a more detailed Stage two review.

- 3.8 Concurrent throughout the Stage One review will be an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) to ensure that the impacts of any potential options are considered in terms of their potential impacts on protected characteristic groups, including older people and those with disabilities. Importantly, this will ensure that any emerging service design results in an appropriate service for meeting the needs of users.
- 3.9 The review will be supported by an SPT internal Steering Group who will provide input, advice and assistance to the consultant throughout the process.
- 3.10 The initial stages of the review are now well underway with SPT officers having supplied the consultants with information relevant to the operation and performance of the MyBus service. Outputs from this data gathering and analysis stage is expected imminently and will aim to capture this knowledge into a baseline report and provide a solid evidence base to support findings, optioneering and recommendations.
- 3.11 The review is programmed to conclude by December 2022.

#### 4. Conclusions

The service provided by MyBus remains a vital part of the lives of some of our region's most vulnerable residents, including many people over 80 years old and people with disabilities, by supporting improving physical and mental health and wellbeing, and social and economic activity. However, the impact of Covid, the ongoing cost of living crisis, and the wider challenges currently facing the commercial bus network, only serve to heighten the importance of undertaking the review, in seeking to consider the needs of current and future users and how best to serve them, within the budget available. The review remains on track to complete in December and officers will provide an update to the Committee in November on progress.

#### 5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

#### 6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>In line with current and committee approved new RTS.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Appropriate statutory assessments, including an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the review process.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation and Carbon consequences	<i>None at present.</i>

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