

KIRKLEES METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

BOARD: CABINET

DATE: 2 AUGUST 2006

STATUS OF REPORT: PUBLIC

AREA COMMITTEES/WARDS AFFECTED: HUDDERSFIELD AREA COMMITTEE

CABINET PORTFOLIO - TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

TITLE: HUDDERSFIELD FREE TOWN BUS

WHY IS IT COMING HERE? / WHAT DECISION IS REQUIRED?

Following the recent success of the Leeds FreeCityBus, officers from Kirklees and Metro have now developed a similar scheme for Huddersfield. Subject to Passenger Transport Authority (PTA) approval, Metro are prepared to buy the two new vehicles and cover all the costs of the first six months of a trial commencing in October 2006.

This report seeks approval to implement the Free Town Bus trial for Huddersfield in October 2006.

A further report will be considered by Cabinet towards the end of the trial period to review if the new bus service has been successful. If it is successful, the Council can then give consideration to a funding arrangement to contribute to the ongoing running costs for the permanent service.

IS THIS AN URGENT ACTION APPROVED BY CHAIR OF SCRUTINY? NO

WHAT ARE THE KEY POINTS?

Background

1. Leeds FreeCityBus was introduced on a trial basis in January 2006. It has been a huge success and now carries around 30,000 passengers per week. The Leeds trial has now been made permanent and Metro are looking to roll out similar schemes to other West Yorkshire districts. Working in partnership with Metro over the last few months, a proposal for the Huddersfield Free Town Bus service has been developed. Kirklees could be the first district following Leeds to introduce this new type of public transport service.
2. Over the last few years, the Council and Huddersfield Town Centre Partnership Ltd have funded a novelty passenger train in the town centre at the Christmas and Easter periods. This was a free service for passengers but was restricted to a very small route within the town centre. This proposal for the Huddersfield Free Town Bus builds on the success of this earlier work but provides modern accessible buses that can provide a free high frequency service to most of the town centre.

Proposal

3. Metro are proposing to provide £261,000 capital and £75,000 revenue funding for a 9 month trial (30 October 2006 – 22 July 2007). The Passenger Transport Authority (PTA) will be considering this at their meeting on 28 July 2006. The service would operate 2 brand new low floor midibuses fitted with Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) (see attached photo of vehicle type), which comply with Euro 3 standards for vehicle emissions (the lowest emission vehicle currently available). The buses can carry up to 46 passengers (31 seated / 15 standing) each and are proposed to run from 0730-1830hrs Mon-Fri and 0830-1730hrs Sat, on an 8 minute frequency. This 'turn up and go' frequency can operate successfully without the need for a published timetable.
4. This new service will provide passengers with a free bus link to various town centre attractions/facilities (see attached route map). The 1.6 mile route maximises town centre coverage whilst maintaining a high service frequency. On a trial basis, it is proposed to reverse the flow on Cross Church Street. This will have significant

benefits for the new bus service by getting right to the Kingsgate entrance and, by minimising running on the Ring Road, reduce delay to the bus and keep to the 8 minute frequency. The route would serve the bus and rail stations, Lord Street and Peel Street interchanges, the University, Kingsgate and both the indoor and outdoor markets.

5. Metro are covering all the costs for the first six months of the trial (£261,000 capital, £60,000 revenue). For the last three months of the trial (May-July 2007), Kirklees are requested to contribute on a 50/50 basis with Metro (£15,000 revenue each). The current Leeds scheme operates on the same 50/50 arrangement. It is proposed that our contribution can be funded from the Council Wide Initiative (CWI) Energy and Transport budget 2007/8.

6. Towards the end of the trial period, a further report will be considered by Cabinet to review whether or not the new bus service has been successful.

If Cabinet consider the Service to be successful, the Council can then consider a further funding commitment of £50,000 from the Council Wide Initiative (CWI) Energy and Transport Budget to support the scheme in 2007/08 from the same 50/50 basis. It will be necessary to look for future years funding during this time period.

If Cabinet consider the trial has not been successful, there will be no further Kirklees funding committed beyond July 2007. If the service was discontinued, it is expected that Metro would offer the 2 buses to another District for a similar trial.

7. The Huddersfield Free Town Bus will be extensively marketed with publicity campaigns prior to its introduction and during the trial. The key messages will be “free” and “every few minutes”.

8. The following objectives have been developed as targets for Huddersfield Free Town Bus trial period:

- Patronage: minimum 10 passengers per round trip (8,000 per week)
- Accessibility: improved accessibility (evidence suggests that accessibility will improve by 16% to Kingsgate shopping area, outdoor markets and rail station)
- Mobility: a higher proportion of mobility impaired people using the service than normal bus services – more than 9% of passengers
- Modal Shift: 2% of passengers modal shift from car to bus and 1% trip generation i.e. would not have previously made the journey

Benefits

9. Improved accessibility for parents with buggies, older people and people with limited/restricted mobility. Encouraging more frequent visits into the Town Centre will facilitate economic regeneration.

10. Improved access to/from the bus and rail stations for students and commuters, will increase opportunities for public transport interchange and encourage greater use of public transport.

11. The service will attract and encourage new visitors to Huddersfield providing them with integrated transport links to Town Centre facilities and attractions.

12. If the trial is made permanent in July 2007 it is proposed that Real Time Information boards will be installed at bus stop locations so passengers can see exactly how long it will be before their next bus arrives.

Traffic Management Implications

13. To achieve the Cross Church Street part of the route an experimental Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) is proposed to:
 - a) reverse the traffic flow on Cross Church Street and the one way section of Queen Street
 - b) reverse the traffic flow on Lower King Street.
14. An experimental TRO (which has a maximum life of 2 years) is ideal for this type of project trial. Consultation with traders, businesses and the public is carried out during the trial period so that a clear judgement can be made on the overall success and implications of the project.
15. We will have to comply with all the normal signing and road marking on-street for a one-way flow, and change advanced direction signing to the theatre, for example. If the experimental TRO is not succeeded by a permanent change, then the signing etc. will have to be reversed at the conclusion of the trial period. The costs of these changes, estimated at £10,000, would be met from the Local Transport Plan capital allocation.
16. At a detailed level it is proposed to make as little change on-street as possible initially. If further changes appear to be required during the trial period these will be dealt with as they arise. The reversal of the traffic flow on King Street is considered necessary for public safety, by removing the need for vehicles to turn right across the Kingsgate main entrance if the uphill flow is maintained. As Lower King Street is currently restricted to loading and access to premises between the hours of 4pm and 10am, the number of drivers affected by this change should be minimal.

OFFICER ADVICE

1. Subject to the approval of the PTA at their meeting on 28 July 2006, that Cabinet approve the proposed 9 month trial of the Huddersfield Free Town Bus commencing October 2006 with a £15,000 Kirklees contribution from the CWI Energy and Transport Budget 2007/08.
2. That Cabinet consider a further report towards the end of the trial period to review if the new bus service has been successful. At that time Cabinet can give consideration to a further funding commitment of £50,000 from the CWI Energy and Transport Budget 2007/08 if the trial has been a success. Further funding for 2008/09 and beyond will need to be identified at a later date.
3. That the necessary experimental Traffic Regulation Order be approved for implementation.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S RECOMMENDATION

That the Officer Advice be accepted.

CONSULTEES AND THEIR RESPONSES

All consultees are fully supportive of the proposed scheme, see details below:

Police – Are fully supportive of the proposals and have requested monitoring of the effects on traffic during the trial.

Emergency Services – Are fully supportive of the proposals and have requested monitoring of the effects on traffic during the trial.

Huddersfield Town Centre Partnership Ltd – Supports and welcomes the initiative of the Free Town Bus in Huddersfield.

Bus and Train Operators – Are supportive of the proposals.

Huddersfield University – Are fully supportive of the proposals.

Newsome, Dalton and Greenhead ward members – Are fully supportive of the proposals and have requested that scheme monitoring be undertaken during the trial.

CONTACT OFFICER AND RELEVANT PAPERS

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Relevant Papers:

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