

GLoucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 20 July 2023 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Angus Jenkinson	
Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr John Bloxsom
Cllr Matt Babbage (Chair)	Cllr Chris McFarling
Cllr Paul Baker (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Matt Dimond-Brown
Cllr Vernon Smith	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Lorraine Campbell	

Attended virtually: Cllr Paul McCloskey

Cabinet Member: Cllr David Gray, Cabinet for Environment and Planning

Apologies: Cllr Johnathan Lane, Cllr Robert Vines and Cllr Philip Robinson

2. MINUTES

2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on the 30th March 2023 were agreed by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

2.2 A member questioned if a report from the Economic Growth Joint Committee would be given following the update about the economically inactive statistics referred to at 4.2 of the minutes.

ACTION – Democratic Services

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1. There were no declarations of interest.

4. UPDATE ON BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

4.1 Tom Main, Integrated Transport Manager, gave an update on the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This was supported by Colin Chick,

Executive Director of Economy, Environment, and Infrastructure. The following points were highlighted:

- The National Bus Strategy was issued by the Government in 2021 to assist the bus network in its post-Covid 19 recovery. Since the first failed BSIP funding bid in 2021, Officers had been working on implementing the Department for Transport's (DfT) feedback in the hope that they would be successful in the second round of funding. The 3 key areas of improvement identified were bus priority, infrastructure, and ticketing.
- GCC did gain the DfT's Transport Capacity grant which had been used to employ a policy expert and an engineer. The Officer explained that there had also been two studies undertaken by separate consultancy groups. The first conducted by Phil Jones Associates (PJA) was to identify corridors of high frequency bus services and use this to target where bus prioritisation such as bus lanes, traffic light priority etc could be implemented.
- The second study was by Stantec into Interchange Bus Hubs; it identified every bus stop within the county to categorise them and to highlight any changes that could be implemented. There was no timeline for these studies to be completed but both were nearing conclusion.
- The Officer confirmed that making improvements to ticketing had been the hardest issue to tackle because it was the bus operators who had control over pricing.
- Following government guidance, the team created the Enhanced Operator Partnership Agreement between GCC and the bus operators within Gloucestershire. The draft agreement was currently out to an informal consultation with transport operators, it was explained that this would be followed by a formal stakeholder consultation in August.
- It was hoped that the final Enhanced Partnership Agreement would be submitted to the DfT for approval by the 30th September 2023 deadline. Should this be the case, the first meeting of the board could take place in October, in order that the reviewed BSIP could be brought to Cabinet on the 22nd November 2023, and then submitted to the DfT in December.

4.2 In response to a question, officers confirmed that the BSIP would prioritise creating express services for rural communities to connect them to the main urban centres, including the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) System.

4.3 Officers confirmed that 70% of private car journeys in Gloucestershire were over 20km, most of which finished in rural areas. Therefore, it was important that GCC found viable and efficient services to support public transport for those who live in Gloucestershire's rural communities. Members were reminded of The Robin Bus Service as an example of a very successful rural transport scheme. The Robin Service was a pre-bookable minibus service that operates in both the Forest of Dean and the North Cotswold with a service from Monday to Saturday, 7am-7pm. He emphasised that this

scheme had removed bus wastage and had made the service much more economical. It had been so successful that GCC were considering extending the service.

- 4.4 It was emphasised that the BSIP was focused on removing barriers in order to promote and improve bus use by the whole county. To maximise efficiency and improve pricing, it was emphasised that GCC's plan was also aimed to reduce bus times between the urban hubs such as Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud, Cirencester, Tewkesbury and Cinderford etc.
- 4.5 Officers emphasised they were constantly analysing the different projects with the BSIP and Local Transport Plan (LTP) to understand the effectiveness of both, and to identify any areas that needed improvement.
- 4.6 In response to a member's question about whether technology, such as autonomous buses, would be investigated for suitability, the officers confirmed that because this was a long-term bus strategy, the team did and would continue to keep an eye on transportation technological developments and would implement them if they became a genuine option.
- 4.7 A member expressed concern that the Interchange Bus Hub report could miss certain long-distance interchanges where there was a few minutes' walk between bus stops. The Officer reassured members that this would be looked at in great detail as to not miss such opportunities, and members were welcome to highlight any specific concerns with the team directly.

5. UPDATE ON PROGRESS WITH THE MASS TRANSIT PROJECT

- 5.1 Luisa Senft-Hayward, Transport Planning Team Leader, and Kevin Mather, Atkins Project Manager, gave a presentation on the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Project as included in the report pack.
- 5.2 Responding to a question about how the express bus service fitted into the MRT project, it was confirmed that the MRT would have less stops than the express bus service but would have more stops than a direct rail connection (for example, Gloucester to Cheltenham). However, it was emphasised that because it was not yet known the type of MRT that would be implemented (options such as a bus or tram-based service would be considered), they were unable to confirm how exactly the services would be integrated. It was

added that the Strategic Outline Case next year would identify a preferred corridor or general area for where the team envisioned the MRT would be.

ACTION- Luisa Senft-Hayward to provide graphic on how the Express Bus Service would fit into the MRT corridor.

- 5.3 Responding to a member's concern about the carbon impact of the project, officers confirmed that they would be looking comprehensively at the impact of the project on carbon emissions but the overall carbon reduction of getting more people to use public transport was acknowledged. They also emphasised that they aimed to create a project with multiple competitive sustainable transport options which allowed for consumer choice. Whilst the initial MRT plan was focused on connecting Gloucester and Cheltenham, there would be plans in the future to expand into other urban hubs.
- 5.4 Officers confirmed that they had organised consultations with the other MRT projects such as the Belfast Gilder. They had also been in consultation with different counties undergoing the same process such as West of England Combined Authority (WECA).
- 5.5 It was advised by officers that feasibility work had already been done and links to the previous presentations would be provided. The overall cost of the MRT project was still unknown until the type of transport system and location was confirmed.

ACTION – Luisa Senft-Hayward to provide links previous MRT presentations.

- 5.6 In response to a member's question about whether new roads would be required for this scheme to work, officers advised that this would again depend on the location of the MRT corridor. The focus was on where the demand was needed currently but also in the future.
- 5.7 In summary, officers confirmed that this project was necessary to reduce the traffic congestion in Gloucestershire, detailed analysis had been undertaken of every other available option and MRT was the most suitable. They believed the estimated cost for GCC would be around £5m, with Government funding to support the rest. It was hoped that the Transport Works Act Order would be ready to submit for DfT approval in 3 years' time.

6. UPDATE ON RAIL TRANSPORT WITHIN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

- 6.1 A report was given by Robert Niblett, Senior Planning Officer, on the updates to Gloucestershire's rail transport. The following points were highlighted:
- It was emphasised that the report aimed to summarise all current rail projects across the county and highlighted the benefits of rail transport for economic and sustainable growth. It was highlighted that GCC do not have a statutory role in this area but can and do lobby DfT and Network Rail to enhance the infrastructure for residents.
 - The report contained examples of many different schemes, but the main purpose of these schemes was identified as to forge better connections for Gloucestershire with large urban spaces such as Bristol, Birmingham and Cardiff.
 - There was a key emphasis on creating long lasting sustainable public transport and the Officer emphasised that rail services should be part of that.
- 6.2 Answering a member's question about freight rail services, the Officer confirmed that currently Gloucestershire did not have any freight terminals accessible for public use. He emphasised that whilst freight rail services were included in the LTP, it had much less influence than passenger services.
- 6.3 The Officer confirmed that the Gloucestershire Rail Vision report would include more about climate change and economic issues which were previously only briefly mentioned. It was confirmed this report would be brought to the Committee in late autumn.

ACTION – Democratic Services – to add to workplan.

- 6.4 Responding to a member's question about reopening old railway lines, the Officer made it clear that it would be unfeasible as it would cause huge financial implications due to the rebuilding and complete restructuring that would need to occur. He stated that there were much cheaper options to improve connectivity.

7. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- 7.1 The report was taken as read and the members had thirty minutes allocated for questions which were answered verbally by Colin Chick and David Owen, Director of Economy and Environment.

- 7.2 A member raised concern around the amount of temporary traffic lights around the county at the moment, particularly when there often appeared to be no work happening for vast amounts of their installation. Officers acknowledged this concern and reassured that GCC was doing all it could in this area, but its powers were very limited.
- 7.3 On being asked about GCC opportunities for care leavers, an Officer highlighted the work of the GCC Employment Hub which focused on providing access to training and jobs to Gloucestershire residents including tailored services for those who may struggle to find vacancies themselves.
- 7.4 A member raised concern about the lack of external funding for people 16-24 years old who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Officers confirmed that GCC worked closely with Gloucestershire Coalition for the Wellbeing of Children and Young People to understand how they could deliver the best opportunities for all children, including those who became NEET. Funding streams were explored with many different organisations such as Job Centre Plus, Government and Skills Funding Agency.

ACTION – Officers agreed to obtain further information about the data in relation to universal credit claimants – Colin Chick

- 7.5 A member asked about what GCC's target was to get through the backlog of DMMO (Definitive Map Modification Orders). The Definitive Map is a legal record of public rights of way and shows the routes of each footpath, bridleway, restricted byway and byway open to all traffic in the county. The officers confirmed that there was a list of all outstanding DMMOs, and the government had set a deadline of 2031 for those outstanding DMMOs to be resolved. It was agreed to provide the Committee with a further update on this.

ACTION – Colin Chick

- 7.6 A member requested more information about GCC's tracking of those residents who were earning below the national living wage. The officers confirmed that they would ask their colleague if this information was available.

ACTION – David Owen

- 7.7 Noting the level of job vacancies in Gloucestershire, a member suggested this could be an area of future consideration by the Committee.

ACTION – Democratic Services

8. GCC ECONOMIC DASHBOARD

The Committee noted the report.

9. Q4 2022/23 PERFORMANCE DATA

The Committee noted the report.

10. WORK PLAN

10.1 Considering the future work plan, members suggested the following future items:

- An update from Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee – both on their previous meeting and an update on future plans.
- GCC's response to the LGA's report on local green jobs
- Future of the LEP – it was suggested that this was added to the November meeting
- Labour market shortages

10.2 There was a discussion about spatial planning in the county. Officers confirmed that GCC had no legal power to coordinate planning, it was each district's responsibility. Concern was raised by several members that a lack of spatial planning could be leading to unsustainable and disjointed development. The Chair confirmed he would ask officers to consider how the Committee could be involved in further exploration into this area.

ACTION: Democratic Services

10.3 Noting the Committee's next meeting was due to take place in Tewkesbury, the local representative confirmed he would be speaking to his lead officers over the next few weeks on any suggested agenda items, but also welcomed members to put forward ideas if they wanted to.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 13.35pm

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

For a full overview of this meeting, please use the following link to access the recording <https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>