



REPORT TITLE: Gloucestershire mass transit project update

Scrutiny meeting	<i>Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee 20th July 2023</i>
Chair	Cllr. Matt Babbage
Presenting Officer	Luisa Senft-Hayward, Transport Planning Team Leader and Kevin Mather, Atkins Project Manager
Item Type	<i>For information</i>
Purpose of Report	To provide an update on the work undertaken to date, in terms of developing the Mass Transit Stage 0 business case, Strategic Assessment, and its findings.
Recommendations	To note the outcomes of the Stage 0 business case, Strategic Assessment, in preparation for the next stage of the business case development process, the Strategic Outline Case (SOC).
Forthcoming Decisions	None known at this stage.
Background Documents	Adopted Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan (LTP) (2020-2041) https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/transport/gloucestershires-local-transport-plan-2020-2041/gloucestershire-ltp-2020-2041/ Gloucestershire's Climate Change Strategy https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/climate-change/greener-gloucestershire-climate-action/our-vision/gloucestershires-climate-change-strategy/ Gloucestershire Bus Service Improvement Plan gcc-bsip-final-2910-accessible.pdf (gloucestershire.gov.uk)
Appendices	n/a
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Background and Strategic Assessment

Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC's) ambition is to encourage a step change in travel behaviour in Gloucestershire to reduce congestion, support sustainable growth and decarbonise the transport system. To deliver this vision GCC is developing the case for a mass transit (MRT) project for the Central Gloucestershire area that will integrate into a wider Expressbus network and link to demand responsive and other sustainable transport modes through a hub and spoke system of interchanges.

The MRT is a key component of the LTP and is vital for Gloucestershire's future growth ambitions. For this reason, the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC) approved £850K of City Region Board funding for the delivery of a Strategic Outline Case (SOC), in May 2022, which is the first stage of the project business case development.

Prior to the preparation of a business case and in line with Government guidance, the funding has been used to complete an initial Strategic Assessment, building upon previous, early feasibility work. It is a high-level exercise intended to confirm the project mandate and provide a robust basis for further development of the project and its business case. The strategic assessment included a review of policy, consideration of the drivers for change, strategic aims, a strategic options assessment, and stakeholder input – principally, a stakeholder workshop held in December 2022 and input from local councillors.

Gloucestershire place characteristics

The Strategic Assessment started with an analysis of key characteristic of Gloucestershire relevant for the project. These include:

Population:

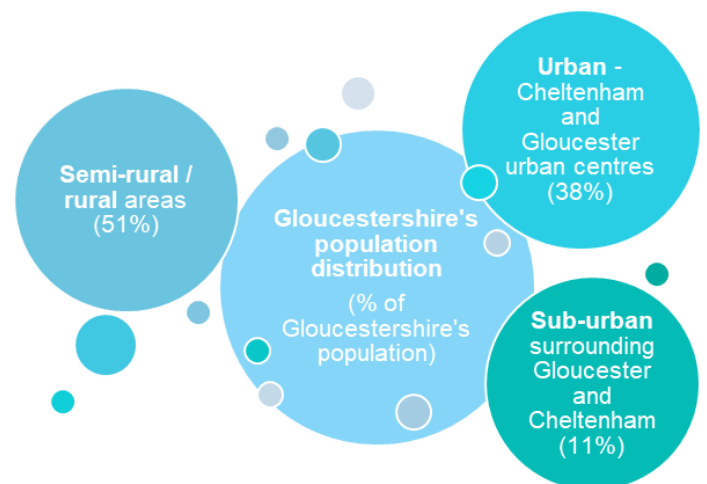
- Gloucestershire has a total population of approximately 640,000, with 49% of the county's population clustered within the urban extents centred around Gloucester and Cheltenham, with the remaining 51% in the semi-rural/rural areas.

Sustainable economic growth:

- As a county, Gloucestershire is becoming a strong 'trip attractor,' particularly into the major employment centres in Gloucester and Cheltenham.
- The County Council, Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (GFirst LEP) and the local planning authorities share ambitious growth aspirations for the area.
- Growth elsewhere in the county will also continue to drive activity and travel between central Gloucestershire and the wider county.

Public transport connectivity:

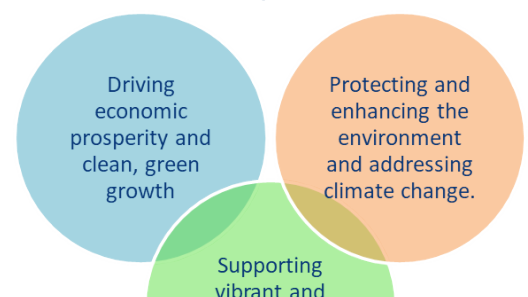
- Central Gloucestershire has reasonably good bus service coverage although service frequencies vary.
- There are two railway stations located in Cheltenham and Gloucester which provide services to London, Bristol, Cardiff, Birmingham and Swindon.



Strategic alignment

Three strategic aims have been identified which reflect key priorities and policy drivers at a national, regional and local level. A mass transit

Strategic Aims



project for central Gloucestershire, as part of a wider transport strategy, demonstrates a good strategic fit and can support the Gloucestershire LTP and corporate aims of GCC and the district, borough and city local authorities.

As Gloucester, Cheltenham and their surroundings grow, with greater interdependencies between them, there has been increasing recognition amongst the local authorities and stakeholders of the potential role of a strategic public transport corridor to link the central Gloucestershire area. This has led to the identification of a potential mass transit concept in recent years within several local strategies / plans, including the Draft Local Industrial Strategy and the LTP.

Issues and business need

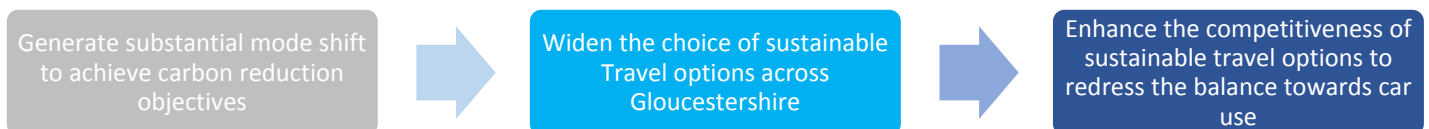
The strategic assessment identified a range of transport-related issues and opportunities relevant to the strategic aims:

- High car ownership and dependency leading to high transport carbon emissions, air pollution, congestion and delays. There is little capacity to accommodate further traffic growth.
- Poor connectivity for non-car modes, particularly between rural areas/suburbs and the urban centres (including low bus service frequencies, which are further threatened by congestion and reliability issues).
- A general performance gap between the car and public transport for medium length journeys – contributing factors include: service frequency; reliability issues; longer journey times; cost and convenience.
- There is a diverse range of customer needs, including: physical / mental ability; income; age, gender and personal security.
- New development sites often contribute to unsustainable travel behaviours, due to their location, scale and design.

The analysis concluded that due to its demographic and travel characteristics, the central Gloucestershire area offers the greatest potential for changing travel behaviour in the county. Approximately 85% of journeys to work are less than 20 kilometres and car use is high even for shorter journeys, with the majority of commuters driving less than 10 km (55%), and 35% driving less than 5 km.

In addition, a high number of trips from Gloucestershire's more rural areas start or end in central Gloucestershire and therefore, with good planning, benefits of public transport improvements in these areas can be spread to residents across the county, linking into the rural areas.

To meet the strategic aims, these key challenges need to be addressed. There is a need to:



Strategic options assessment

The strategic options assessment considered the role and suitability (strategic fit, deliverability) of a broad range of 30 strategic options across different modes and transport/non-transport policy measures, e.g.: active travel corridors, enhanced interchange hubs, targeted improvements to the bus network, access to the rail network, network/parking management, fiscal demand management measures and non-transport policy interventions such as land use planning.

Within this context, bus rapid transit and light rail options have an identified role in:

- catering predominantly for higher volume, short to medium length journeys (e.g. 5 to 20 kilometres);
- filling a gap in public transport provision between bus services and heavy rail within central Gloucestershire;
- enhancing connections between different transport modes and therefore supporting a more integrated network; and
- contributing to the overall attractiveness of the entire public transport offer for the county - encouraging multi-modal journeys to and from the central Gloucestershire area (in conjunction with Interchange Strategy, and Express bus network as outlined in Gloucestershire's BSIP).

A mass transit project should therefore be progressed in the context of a wider transport strategy (e.g. through the planned LTP update) and will need to seek to maximise the synergies between a range of interventions. For instance, demand management measures may have an important role in generating demand for mass transit, and mass transit could be integral to making demand management measures more acceptable.

Delivering strategic benefits aligned to the Central Gloucestershire vision

Mass transit, as part of a wider transport strategy, can complement wider economic, environmental, land use, health and education plans – providing a range of strategic benefits for central Gloucestershire.

Role of MRT	Strategic benefits	Central Gloucestershire priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity within central Gloucestershire • Connectivity to/from central Gloucestershire • Encourage Mode Shift • Reduce transport CO2 emissions • A modern, efficient and reliable transport network • Enable sustainable growth • Customer focus • Enable high quality places • Shaping land use strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to services • Improve end to end journey time for public transport • Widening travel opportunities • Improve passenger experience • Lower reliance on car • Reduce congestion and delay • Reduce emissions • Higher public transport patronage and revenue • More affordable better value travel • Unlock new development sites • More equitable access to the transport system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the economic potential as a single functioning area • Raise the area's profile • Increase productivity • Stimulate inward investment • Improve availability of skilled labour • Attract and retain younger people • Retain a high-quality sense of place • Meet Gloucestershire's housing and jobs needs sustainably • Improve social inclusion and wellbeing

Benefits generated by mass transit have the potential to be widespread - from individuals to communities, businesses and transport operators within the central Gloucestershire area and across the wider county into rural areas.

Scope of options for a mass transit project

Based on the strategic options assessment, a spectrum of mass transit options has been identified, including bus-based and light rail options, based on both lower and higher levels of segregation (reflecting 'do less' to 'do more' approaches), on predominantly on-highway networks.

It is acknowledged that in a dense urban environment it will be difficult to achieve full segregation due to practicalities, cost and loss of amenity. However, segregation will be pursued where it is possible to do so, particularly where opportunities present themselves such as where there is new development and/or land availability, particularly outside of the dense urban areas. Further development of options should:

1. Consider mass transit as a system comprising a number of components, such as infrastructure, vehicles, service operation, fares and information.
2. Define a mass transit network, with corridors identified based on demand, functionality and the overall connectivity provided by the system, including integration with other modes.
3. Consider the right blend of technology, priority and capacity which best suits the context, travel market and constraints relevant to central Gloucestershire and beyond.

Risks, constraints and dependencies for a mass transit project

Some of the key considerations at this early stage of project development are:

Growth strategy

- Achieving greater definition of the scale and distribution of medium to longer-term housing and employment land, such that the relationship to a mass transit network can be better established. This is directly related to the development of the Joint Spatial Plan.

Relationship with the existing bus network

- Minimising the potential risk of undesired consequences of mass transit, such as impacts on the viability of existing bus services. Early and continued engagement with the main bus operator, Stagecoach, would assist with mitigating this risk.

Funding

- Early consideration of the potential funding strategy, including potential fiscal measures as part of the wider strategy. Raising the profile of the project with key stakeholder such as DfT and the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body is also likely to be beneficial.

Stakeholder support

- Developing plans for continued stakeholder engagement, including a potential public engagement exercise to support the Strategic Outline Case.

Alignment with emerging strategy, policy and studies

- Ensuring the emerging mass transit project is well integrated with relevant wider activity, including the emerging Joint Spatial Plan, planned LTP review, emerging Transport Decarbonisation Strategy, Interchange Strategy, Express Bus Network and the planning and implementation of active travel corridors.

Challenging baseline transport operating characteristics

- Current transport network and operating characteristics offer little disincentive to car use making securing mode shift towards PT in particular a significant challenge

Next steps: development of the mass transit project business case

Following this Strategic Assessment as confirmation of the project mandate, the next key milestone in the business case process for the mass transit project is the production of the SOC. This should build upon the Strategic Assessment, as a framework for further development of the supporting evidence base. Key tasks underpinning the development of the SOC should include:

- developing the case for change – October 2023: including further evidencing and verifying the strategic issues and needs identified within this Strategic Assessment;
- undertaking further options assessment – March 2024: this should be framed by the spectrum of strategic options for mass transit identified within this Strategic Assessment; and
- documenting the findings in the SOC – December 2024: The SOC will need to identify a short list of at least four options – a minimum viable option, a preferred way forward and at least two other viable options.

Conclusions and recommendation:

The Strategic Assessment has determined that:

- there are clear strategic aims for change centred on delivering sustainable growth, addressing the climate change emergency and securing a fairer and more equitable society - the key drivers for investment, objectives and issues / opportunities are sufficiently well-defined at this stage;
- the need for transport interventions to contribute to addressing these aims has been established and it has been demonstrated that mass transit has a meaningful role to play as part of a broader transport strategy for Gloucestershire alongside other transport investment programmes and projects;

- an investment in a mass transit scheme in the context of this transport strategy aligns to key strategic priorities and policy drivers at a national, regional and local level;
- there is stakeholder support and the key stakeholders' perspective has been considered; and
- the potential scope of mass transit solutions has been considered and a broad spectrum of types of mass transit has been identified as the focus for further development and assessment.

The Strategic Assessment therefore supports the progression of a mass transit project towards the first business case milestone – a Strategic Outline Case.