



Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director - Place

Report to: **Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **17 July 2023**

Subject: **Public Transport Annual Update**

Summary:

This report provides an annual update on Public Transport since the previous report considered by this Committee on 13 September 2021. The Committee receives separate reports on the performance of Transport Services and on Transport Connect Limited.

This report provides an update on the following public transport aspects:

- National Bus Strategy, Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Enhanced Partnership
- Ongoing central funding for bus services and BSIP+
- The local public transport market
- Bus passenger travel update
- Callconnect services
- Bus Infrastructure and roadside information

Actions Required:

Members of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on any aspects of the report and to highlight any recommendations or further actions for consideration.

1. Background

1.1 National Bus Strategy, Bus Service Improvement Plan, and the Enhanced Partnership

1.1.1 The current national strategy for the funding of developing bus services, entitled Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to commit to a statutory Enhanced Partnership (EP) with bus operators in order to bid for funding. Over the course of the last 18 months, we have met with operators to complete the process of having an EP plan and scheme in place.

1.1.2 The EP plan and Scheme was made on April 1st, 2023, and is a legal arrangement between the LTA and bus operators which sets out the obligations in order to advance bus services in the county. The table below sets out the core aims and obligations of the scheme, and full details of the scheme can be found here [Lincolnshire enhanced partnership scheme for buses](#).

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) Obligations as the LTA	Bus Operator Obligations
Audit of bus stop infrastructure	Bus passenger charter
Maintain existing stops and bus lanes under LCC's responsibility	Ensure minimum vehicle standards of Euro 3 for all services
Consider feasibility of new bus stops/lanes	Lincolnshire Rover Ticket – first steps towards a multi-operator ticket
Bus priority measures at 1 or more junctions	Promote PlusBus, a joint rail and bus ticket
Managing roadworks effectively, including– engaging with operators	Provide Real time data when requested
Continue to manage online <i>Lincsbus.info</i> facility and roadside information	
Continue to manage online Fix My Street facility	
Run a communications campaign with bus operators targeting ENCTS (concessionary) passholders	
Promote PlusBus, a joint rail and bus ticket	

1.1.3 Throughout the process of making the EP, LCC has progressed many of the obligations set out in the document, including:

1.1.4

- Provided bus priority measures at 8 junctions.
- Audited all bus stop infrastructure in the county.
- Updated roadside information across 80% of the county, covering approximately 2,600 bus stops.
- Undertaken a countywide campaign to encourage England National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) pass holders to use buses - this campaign has received recognition from the Department for Transport (DfT) and Transport Focus as an example of best practice.

1.1.4 The nature of the BSIP process requires us to update our plan annually with the next iteration of the document to be submitted to the DfT by October 31st, 2023. This updated plan responds to feedback given by the DfT on our original unsuccessful plan, streamlining the aims and objectives to focus on smaller, deliverable schemes with the emphasis being generating passenger growth through meaningful bus priority measures, improvements in bus infrastructure and bus service enhancements. The updated plan will be available for this committee at the next meeting.

1.2 Ongoing central funding for bus services and BSIP+

1.2.1 Since April 2020, central government have provided funding to bus services, both directly to bus operators and to LTAs to ensure bus services are viable, both

through and following the pandemic. Such funding packages have been short term in nature, covering 3-6 months at a time, as the industry adapted to the changing public transport needs brought about by COVID-19. Whilst this funding was vital, it has resulted in levels of instability within the industry and lead to bus services changing frequently to adapt to demand against the funding available. Ultimately, bus operators and LTAs are working in partnership to re-establish a sustainable public transport offer.

- 1.2.2 In May 2023, Government announced a two-year funding period entitled BSIP+, to support and develop bus services across the country. The focus of this funding is to support those authorities that were unsuccessful in gaining large amounts of BSIP funding, to enable them to work collaboratively with bus operators in sustaining and improving provision in their region.
- 1.2.3 Lincolnshire has received £2.1m BSIP+ funding for the financial year 2023/24. At this current time, the details and conditions of this funding are still being worked on by the DfT. We are engaging with bus operators to scope schemes that could utilize this funding, along the principles set out in the EP.

1.3 The local public transport market

- 1.3.1 The County Council supports 144 local bus services. Some services are contracted directly by the Council in their entirety (79 services currently) and others involve supporting specific parts of particular routes (65 currently through this arrangement, entitled 'de minimis'). Since July 2022, we have contracted an additional 2 routes compared to the previous year; both services were previously commercial, however the operator could no longer operate them on a financially viable basis. These services have been funded through a combination of utilizing grant support from the DfT and making best use of the Council's public transport budget to ensure that we meet our statutory duty for our residents.
- 1.3.2 In September 2022, by utilizing funding from the Government's Better bus Fund, The Council contracted for a much-improved Spalding into Town service. The Service was expanded from an hourly off peak (09:00-15:00) bus service to one that spans between 07:00-18:30 on a 45-minute frequency, taking in new locations such as Springfields, Morrisons & The Johnson Community Hospital.
- 1.3.3 Bus service delivery has improved in the last 12 months with operators seeing more drivers join and importantly remain in the industry. Residents are experiencing significantly less cancellations of services than in 2022 and the majority of operators are running 90% of scheduled milage, which puts it on a par with pre-covid provision levels.
- 1.3.4 Bus service revenue is supported by re-imbusement to operators for the use of ENCTS pass holders on their services. This scheme ensures that bus operators are no better and no worse off for accepting bus passes, which provides the end user with free travel. During the financial year 2023/24, LCC provided reimbursement of this scheme at 100% of pre-covid levels. Such financial support provided a much-

needed level of stability for bus operators and allowed services to be planned, based on guaranteed funding over a 12-month period.

1.4 Bus passenger travel

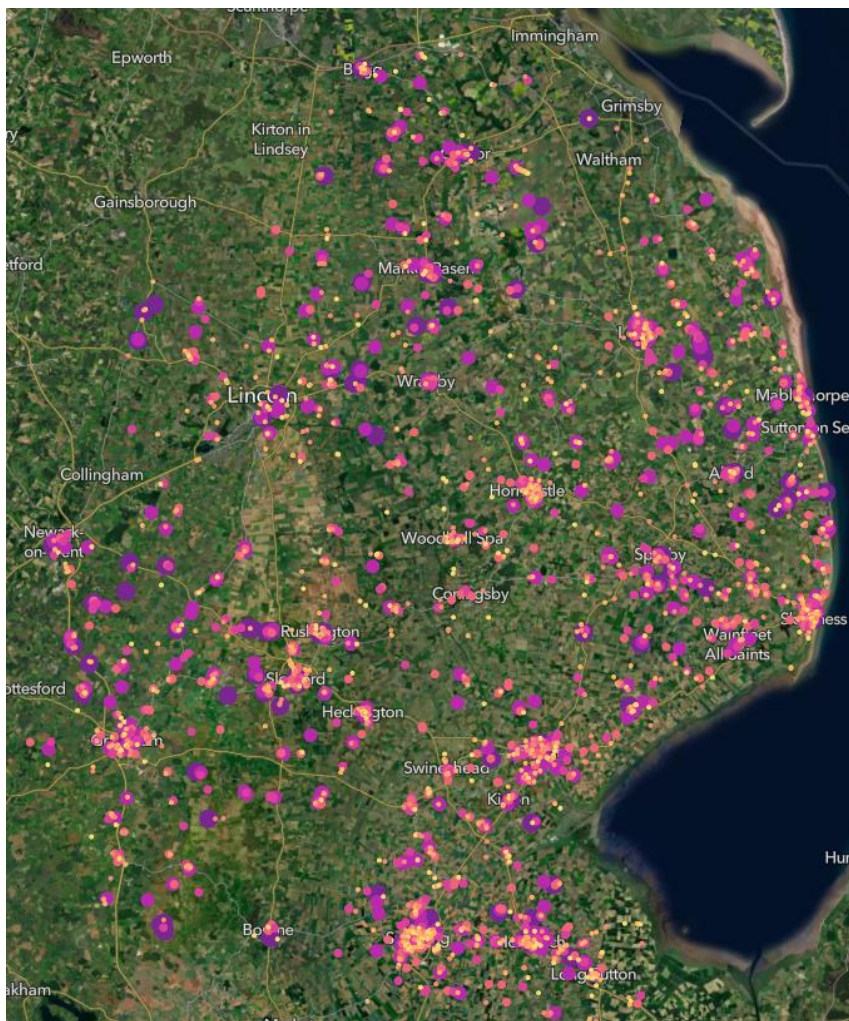
1.4.1 Government statistics show that in 2021/22, bus operators provided 10.1 million journeys in Lincolnshire compared to 4.2 million the previous year, an increase of 240%. The national picture saw passenger numbers improve on average by 194%, demonstrating that passengers returned to public transport in Lincolnshire better than most regions. Only 5 other regions saw higher growth in this period – Cornwall, Somerset, York, Bath, and East Riding. Whilst this shows a significant improvement on the previous year, it is still 3 million journeys short of pre-pandemic levels of 13.2 million journeys undertaken in 2018/19. Latest statistics for 2022/23 are yet to be published by the Government.

1.4.2 The Council’s marketing and engagement campaign with ENCTS pass holders, to encourage them to make greater use of public bus services, was undertaken in September 2022. In 2022/23, 2.9 million journeys were made using ENCTS passes, which is an increase of 600,000 journeys on the previous year, suggesting that our campaign has been successful, and this cohort of passengers are returning to utilize buses, following the pandemic. The graph below demonstrates ENCTS passenger trends over the past 3 years encompassing pre, during and post pandemic levels. There has been an upward trend of number of passengers travelling since June 2020 as the industry recovers, however May 2023 saw 57,000 ENCTS passengers travel compared to 75,000 in November 2019.

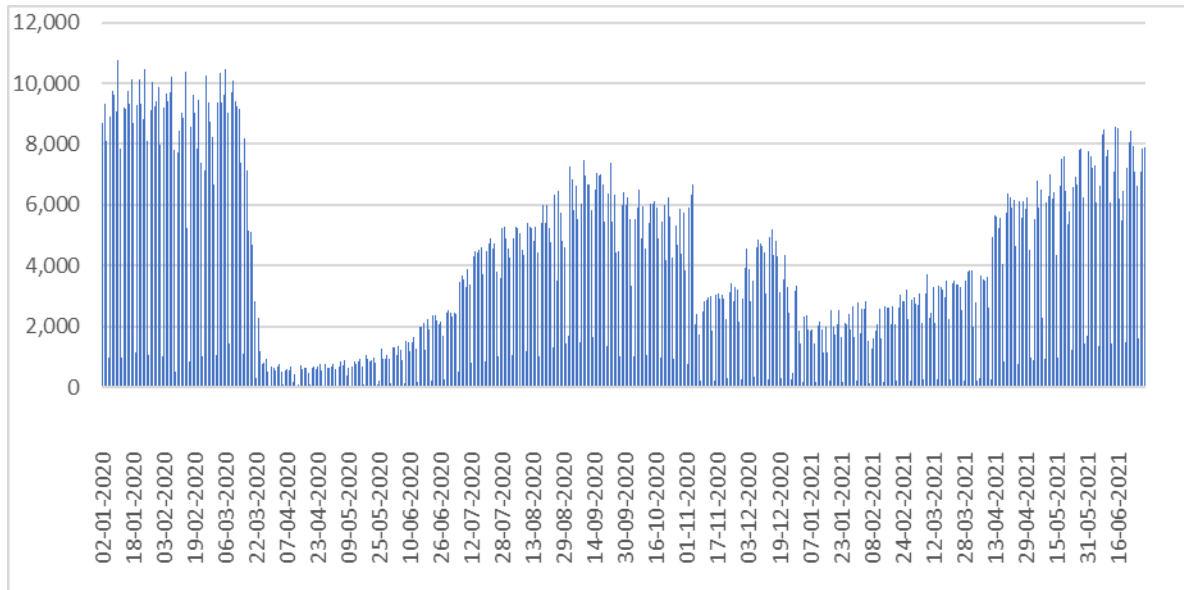


CallConnect services

1.4.3 Lincolnshire's Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service, CallConnect has seen excellent levels of passengers returning to the service in the last 12 months across the 35 services in the county. On average, weekly patronage levels are at 98-99% of pre-covid levels, suggesting passengers have high levels of confidence in the service. Below is a heatmap of passenger usage of Callconnect for the calendar year 2022, and at time of producing this, the data for Gainsborough & Stamford is yet to be collated. The data below shows that the service is well utilized across the county and provides a much-needed transport option for those who live in our deep rural areas, where the commercial viability of other services is not viable for bus operators.



1.4.4 An app-based booking system was introduced as a trial on the Stamford area CallConnect services in September 2021, with a view to modernising the passenger experience. To date, approximately 45% of all bookings are now conducted through the app (VIA) showing good levels of channel shift from previous telephone-based booking. The underlying platform has also brought about a more adaptive scheduling and monitoring mechanism that has improved punctuality significantly over the past 18 months.



1.4.5 The app is now being rolled out across the county, with services in Gainsborough and the areas north of Lincoln recently moving over to the platform. This project is due to complete by the end of March 2024, when all DRT services will then sit on the modern digital platform, which will greatly enhance customer experience on CallConnect as well as creating more efficient administrative processes for the Council.

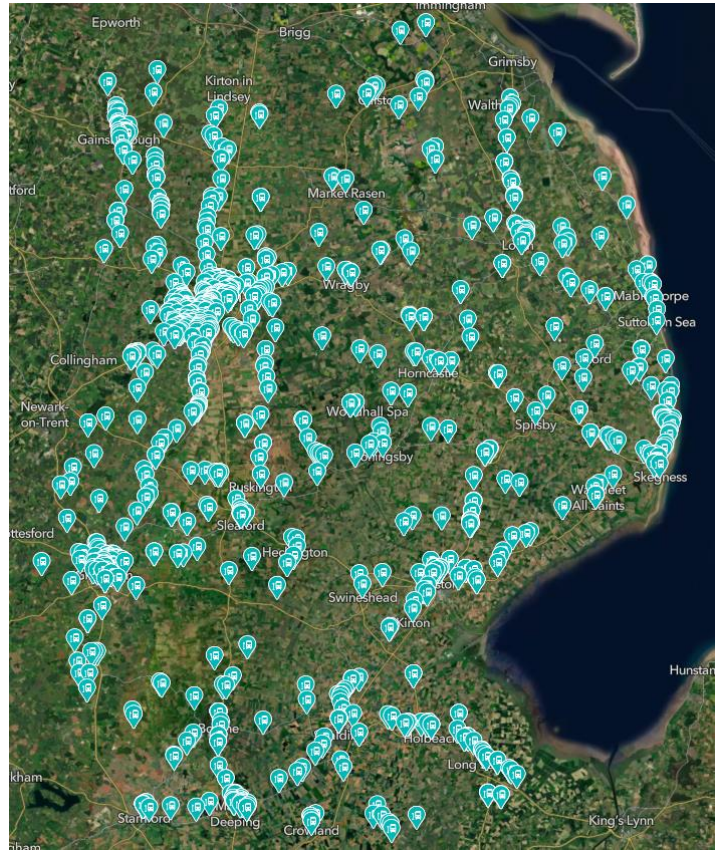
1.4.6 Lincolnshire’s Callconnect scheme has received high praise from the DfT in recent months following a visit from the department in April 2023. Colleagues from the DRT department within DfT were highly impressed with the scale and success Lincolnshire has achieved over the past 20 years and want to utilize our expertise to help steer guidance on best practice in delivering DRT in England.

1.5 Bus Infrastructure and roadside information

1.5.1 In Lincolnshire, all bus stops are the responsibility of the County Council. However, bus shelters and all associated infrastructure relating to bus stops, are treated differently. The County Council has responsibility for managing a number of bus shelters, usually on Interconnect routes, but others are the responsibility of the District/City/Borough or Town/Parish Councils.

1.5.2 LCC undertook an audit of bus stop infrastructure across the county. This data will form the basis of a review of our assets, to enable the identification of areas for improvement across the network, in order to enhance passenger experience on public transport.

1.5.3 The scale of assets that exist across the county is shown in the image below, demonstrating all the locations in the county where a bus stop exists, either through a pole, flag, or a bus shelter. In all there are 2500+ physical roadside assets in Lincolnshire



2. Conclusion

2.1 The Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee is requested to consider and comment on the detail of the report and recommend any changes or actions to the Executive Member for Highways, Transport, and IT.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The Transport Services risk register is regularly monitored and managed in accordance with the Council's approach to risk management. The two highest scored residual risks are the negative impact of operating costs and inflationary costs of bus and taxi operators, on the service budget; and the inability to recruit and retain employees.

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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