

CABINET

DATE	01/12/2021
REPORT OF	Councillor Stewart Swinburn - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Sharon Wroot, Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources
SUBJECT	Procurement of Real Time Bus Information
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 12/21/02

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Real Time Bus Information (RTI) contributes towards the Council's Stronger Communities outcome by reducing transport related carbon emissions through improving the journey experience and supporting transport accessibility. The scheme also contributes to the Stronger Economy outcome by enabling and encouraging safe and sustainable access to employment, education, training and wider opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks Cabinet approval to implement an above threshold compliant tender to deliver a new contract for the provision of RTI and to delegate award of the contract(s) to the Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet;

- (1) Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport to:
 - (A) Implement an above threshold compliant procurement exercise for RTI.
 - (B) Award a four-year contract (with the option to extend the contract for delivery of the service for a further 2 years subject to high performance levels) within the budget allocated to the RTI project.
 - (C) Carry out all ancillary actions arising from the above, including full implementation.
- (2) Authorises the Assistant Director Law Governance and Assets to execute all documents in connection with the above.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The Council is required to demonstrate value for money (VfM) in the delivery of the RTI contract under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 Since 2012 North East Lincolnshire Council has delivered RTI and the system has been funded using external grant funding including the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund and Access Fund. The existing RTI system includes a back office function, 75 electronic signs which provide live journey predictions to the travelling public, essential IT links and traffic signal priority for buses.
- 1.2 The existing procurement framework is valid from 24 August 2018 until 24 August 2022. Re-tendering via a four year contract (with the option to extend the contract for delivery of the service for a further 2 years subject to high performance levels) will allow North East Lincolnshire Council to continue the delivery of the existing RTI system and to deliver further system enhancements.
- 1.3 On the 15 March 2021 the Government launched a new, long-term National Bus Strategy for England. The 'Bus Back Better' strategy sets out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers. The strategy aims to improve the quality of local bus services, increase bus passenger numbers and make local bus services easier to use.
- 1.4 The Government's goal is to return bus use back to what it was prior to the pandemic. Then the Government aim to increase patronage and raise buses' mode share. The Government's National Bus Strategy identifies this means making buses easier to understand with bus stops providing accurate information about the services stopping there. The National Bus Strategy also aims to deliver bus priority measures in order to make it more attractive to use local bus services. By providing RTI, this will allow the Council to make buses easier to understand, improve the overall journey experience and provide traffic signal priority for buses.
- 1.5 In addition to the Government's National Bus Strategy, the Transport Act 2000 states that Local Transport Authorities are required to determine what local bus information should be made available to the public. The provision of RTI fulfils the Council's duties under the Transport Act 2000.
- 1.6 Local transport authorities across the country provide RTI and the provision of the system is viewed as best practice. For example, RTI is provided by City of York Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and many other local authorities across the country provide RTI.
- 1.7 A value for money appraisal of public transport schemes assessed a RTI scheme in the West Midlands (similar to the RTI system provided in North East Lincolnshire) and concluded the benefit cost ratio of 1.9 (medium value for money). Any score above 2.0 is classed as "high" value for money and the RTI value for money assessment was just short of the high value for money assessment.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 The Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan includes funding to deliver RTI. Failure to deliver a new RTI contract may leave the Council being unable to deliver this key measure. In the event of the Council being unable to deliver this measure, the Council may have to return any funding associated with RTI from the Bus Service Improvement Plan and it may put future DfT external funding at risk.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 **Option 1 – Do nothing and decommission the existing RTI system.** This option is not recommended as it may conflict with the Governments National Bus Strategy. The National Bus Strategy requires local authorities to provide bus priority measures such as Traffic Signal Priority and high-quality public transport information.
- 3.2 **Option 2 - Advertise a tender for a four year contract (with the option to extend the contract for delivery of the service for a further 2 years subject to high performance levels).** This is the recommended option. Parts of the current RTI system are approaching the end of their life expectancy and it is recommended they are replaced with system enhancements which are either funded through the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme or through the National Bus Strategy funding (preferred option). This option will ensure the Council is best placed to obtain future Government Funding from the National Bus Strategy.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 There are potential positive and negative reputational implications for the Council resulting from this report. A formal Highways and Transport engagement process has been agreed by the Council and EQUANS for all major schemes to ensure that reputation and communications are considered at an early stage of all schemes.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan includes £250,000 revenue funding and £350,000 capital from 2022/2023 to 2026/2027. In the event of the Bus Service Improvement Plan being unable to fund the delivery of RTI, funding has been allocated in the Local Transport Plan Capital programme on the basis that system enhancements are being delivered.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Government's National Bus Strategy advises that buses (e.g. increasing the numbers of local people using bus services to travel and switching vehicles to electric) are vital to ensuring the economy meets Net Zero carbon emissions and driving the green transformation. A substantial modal shift away from the car will soon be needed if clean air targets and the Government's broader climate goals are to be met. The only mode capable of sufficient expansion in the time available is the bus. Therefore, it is important more people choose the bus for their journeys and we need to reverse the declines of the past.

7. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

7.1 There has been no consultation with Scrutiny.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The costs of the new system will be met from within existing approved budgets and will be funded entirely from external grant.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The procurement exercise will be conducted so as to comply with the Council's policy and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and supported by relevant officers.

9.2 The delegations sought are consistent with an exercise of this nature.

9.3 Officers should note that an award constitutes a further decision and will be subject to completion of an Officer Decision Record and be subject to call in. Award and implementation timelines should accommodate this.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct HR implications.

11. WARD IMPLICATIONS

11.1 All wards in North East Lincolnshire are affected by this decision.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 Cabinet Report (2 July 2018), Sustainable Travel Access Fund Programme.

12.2 Cabinet Report (20 October 2021), North East Lincolnshire Bus Service Improvement Plan).

12.3 National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/980227/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf

13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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