

Progress of the Busway

1. The Busway corridor was identified as a key element of the transport strategy for Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis in the early 1990s, the wider strategy seeking to promote sustainable transport modes in an integrated way. In June 1993 this strategy was adopted by Bedfordshire County Council, Luton Borough Council, and South Bedfordshire District Council. The provision of a rapid transit Busway as part of a programme of improvements for public transport services throughout the area is seen as a core part of the strategy.
2. The busway follows the route of the Luton-Dunstable railway which was closed to passenger traffic in 1964 and last used for freight in the late 1980s.
3. On 18 December 2003 the Transport and Works Act (TWA) application for the Busway was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT). On the same day, the Government announced “in principle” funding of the scheme, now referred to as “Programme Entry”.
4. On 12 February 2004 the County Council as an equal promoter of the Busway declined to confirm their support for the submission of the TWA Order. Luton continued as sole promoter. The County Council subsequently reconsidered its decision and a legal agreement was signed between the two authorities to promote the scheme (see Appendix B for further details).
5. The Public Inquiry into the TWA was held during 2005, and a second Inquiry into draft Section 19 certificates for replacement open space was held in early May 2006. On 2 November 2006 the two relevant Secretaries of State published their decision letters following the two Public Inquiries. The Order was subsequently came into force on 13 December 2006.
6. An updated Business Case for the Busway was submitted to the DfT on 29 February 2008, and on 3 September 2008 the Government confirmed Conditional Approval of funding for the scheme, subject to final costs of the schemes construction being confirmed by tender prices. Conditions placed on the promoting authorities called for then to demonstrate progress has been made in securing the commitment of operators to provide services using the Busway and commitment from Central Bedfordshire Council that it is willing to take over as equal partner from Bedfordshire County Council.
7. Tender documents were despatched to contractors on 21 May 2009 and received back on 23 September 2009.
8. Submission to the Department for Transport for Full Approval / Funding offer is an ongoing process, the final application is about to be made. If approved this will result in an offer agreement.

9. Member approval is being requested to ensure the Busway is constructed as a joint project with Luton Borough Council providing Central Bedfordshire with an equal partner status.

What Happens Next

10. Members will recall that advanced site clearance work will be undertaken starting in January 2010.
11. Following Member and DfT approval for the scheme Luton will under the guidance of their Section 151 officer accept the funding award and award the contract to the preferred bidder.
12. The Busway is being constructed through a design & build contract. The contractor has developed an initial outline design which will need to be developed further. This is expected to take place within the first few months following award. During this period further site clearance and site investigation works will start followed by bridge works, many of these will require wider bridge decks and some such as the Church Street bridge in Dunstable being replaced to provide an additional lane width both for the Busway and for traffic beneath.
13. The main works will start from summer 2010 and continue through to spring 2012.
14. Upgrading of the on-road bus stops will start from about summer 2011, and will include modifications to the kerbs and pavements to allow Busway buses (fitted with a guide wheel) to dock adjacent to the stop. The stops will also be equipped with power for real time information systems and depending on location and expected usage shelters. A hierarchical system is to be adopted with key locations having shelters, advanced real-time interactive displays, help point and CCTV. The other end of the spectrum will provide for a flag pole (bus stop pole) and basic real time information display.
15. Towards the end of the main contract the real time information contractor will install the IT infrastructure required to operate and manage the system.
16. Contracts / agreements with operators will be arranged before opening that set the specification for vehicles and service level.