

### The case for the Busway

#### Regional status

1. The Milton Keynes/South Midlands Sub-Region is one of four growth areas identified in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan up to 2031 committing the area to approximately 42,000 new homes and 35,000 new jobs.
2. The Luton Dunstable conurbation is identified in the East of England Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy as a Priority Area for Economic Regeneration, based on the high levels of deprivation in parts of the area. Low incomes are a key reason for deprivation and the higher than average levels of unemployment and low educational attainment are two main contributory factors to this.
3. Many of the deprived areas also have lower than average levels of car ownership. The busway services will pass through or close to many areas of deprivation, in particular the Dallow and Biscot wards close to Luton town centre together with parts of Lewsey, Tithe Farm in Houghton Regis and Northfield in Dunstable. These services will open up opportunities for improved access to jobs and further education/training and therefore is expected to contribute to higher standards of living and quality of life in some of the most deprived areas.

#### Local status and challenges

4. One of the major challenges facing the Luton Dunstable and Houghton Regis conurbation is the 'growth agenda'. While this brings opportunities to benefit new and existing communities the challenges to manage this growth are substantial.
5. Existing travel in the area is localised with 33% of the journeys made being less than 2 miles and 22% being between 2 and 5 miles<sup>1</sup>. The draft Core Strategy seeks to deliver growth in a sustainable way and improve accessibility to public transport.
6. Congestion has a severe impact on the reliability and journey times for bus services in the peak periods, particularly on the approaches to and within Luton and Dunstable town centres, and the heavily trafficked A505 between Luton and Dunstable and East Luton corridors. Bus priority measures have been implemented wherever practicable, though the opportunities for further implementation of measures are limited by the demands on the existing highway network and the lack of attractive alternatives for car users in the event of road space re-allocation.

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<sup>1</sup> Core Strategy: Preferred Options April 2009 (Par 2.6)

## Opportunities

7. 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.
8. The Luton-Dunstable corridor is a key element of the transport strategy for Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis, and accords with the wider policy framework and objectives as set out in the Local Transport Plan (2006-11) for the conurbation, which identifies improved public transport as being critical to achieving wider economic, social and environmental objectives that will benefit the community as a whole. The Busway is also consistent with the National, Regional and Sub-Regional policy objectives to improve the quality and reliability of public transport and encourage travel by more sustainable modes.

## The Proposal

9. The Busway will be opened as a private route allowing the Councils to set criteria such as standards and level of use. Discussions with bus operators have been ongoing since the Busway's initial concept to establish the viability and preferred service patterns to ensure a successful take-up of the system. The Councils have recently sought and received four formal Expressions of Interest from operators to run services along all or part of the Busway. A Service Delivery Plan is being developed with the operators specifying the principles of operation, namely:
  - (a) A commitment to run buses to a minimum agreed service level.
  - (b) Specification for busway vehicles.
  - (c) Access arrangements (including control of bus operations)
  - (d) Quality standards
  - (e) Ticketing and fares
10. In inviting contractors to tender for the design and build of the Busway the Councils defined a number of objectives for a quality rapid transit system serving Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis consistent with the Local Transport Plan objectives and national policy considerations, to deliver a system which:
  - (a) is an attractive alternative to the car;
  - (b) maximises mobility and accessibility for all, and is easy to use;
  - (c) is environmentally friendly;
  - (d) is safe from both a personal and technical viewpoint; and

- (e) contributes to integration of land use and transport planning by supporting wider planning and regeneration policies, and provides the maximum opportunities to interchange between different modes of transport.
11. While the Busway will be let as a design and build contract the design requirements stipulates that the Busway follows the route of the disused Luton-Dunstable railway. Buses would join and leave the Busway at selected points, enabling them to serve residential areas of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and the west of Luton. In making use of the disused railway alignment, the Busway avoids parts of the congested road network and provides improved journey times and greater reliability. The Busway route passes close to a number of sites proposed for re-development. It will provide improved journey opportunities to jobs, education and retail facilities and support measures to improve social inclusion and regeneration, and provide a sustainable means of transport for those people without access to a car.
  12. The scheme involves improved bus stops and the installation of passenger information systems, the displays offer facilities for the visually impaired and hard of hearing with systems like SNAPPY and REACT 3 that can automatically adjust screen fonts and sound levels. Stops on the Busway will comprise platforms raised to bus floor level, contiguous with the sides of the guideway. They will be long enough to accommodate a single bus up to 18 metres in length, and will be equipped with high specification infrastructure including shelters, static and real time passenger information, seats, CCTV etc. They may also be equipped with ticket machines.
  13. Busway stops will be provided at the following locations:
    - (a) Dog Kennel Down serving the Portland Ride area of Houghton Regis and the Printers Way area of Dunstable;
    - (b) The White Lion Retail Park at Dunstable;
    - (c) Toland Close serving the Charnwood Rd/Stavelly Rd area and the Luton & Dunstable hospital;
    - (d) Clifton Road serving the Maple Rd/Wimborne Rd area and Luton Town FC;
    - (e) Luton Station serving the town centre and nearby residential areas;
    - (f) Power Court, serving the planned mixed use development in the south-east of the town centre and the University.
  14. In addition vehicles will stop at Bedford Square in Houghton Regis, in Dunstable town centre, in Luton town centre, along Kimpton Road, and at London Luton Airport. To give busway services priority where they run on roads, particularly around the town centres, traffic management measures will be introduced including new bus lanes, vehicle detection equipment and signalling. These measures will be carefully designed and monitored to ensure the optimal operation of the local road network.

15. The Luton Parkway Station will be served by its new northern entrance with a strong possibility (CIF funding) of buses also serving the existing entrance by using an existing tunnel. This will result in the Parkway Station being better served than in the original scheme.
16. West of the M1, there will be an emergency access/ maintenance track running alongside the Busway; pedestrians and cyclists will be allowed to use this access track. LBC are also currently exploring the opportunities to continue the cycle track alongside the Busway to the east of the motorway.
17. Combined with other improvements to the transport and land use infrastructure within the conurbation, the busway is predicted to reverse the current decline in local public transport use resulting in a shift away from the use of the car, leading to reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality. A marginal increase in the number of buses on the highway network is forecast but this will have no noticeable impact on traffic conditions and will be more than countered by people transferring from car to bus resulting in fewer cars on the road.

## **Assessment**

18. The scheme has been through an independent comprehensive assessment process as required by the DfT to secure funding. This is via a Major Scheme Business Case (MSBC) submission that demonstrates the case for the scheme in the following five aspects.
19. This MSBC is a live document developed during the DfT approval stages and available on LBC's web site.
  - (a) Strategic - to demonstrate that the scheme is consistent with and will contribute to local, regional, and possibly national, objectives in transport and other relevant areas.
  - (b) Appraisal and value for money - to demonstrate the likely benefits and disbenefits of the scheme against its likely costs (see also section below).
  - (c) Delivery - to demonstrate how the promoter will be able to deliver the scheme to time and budget, including a clear project plan, governance arrangements, plans for stakeholder involvement and engagement and robust risk management plans.
  - (d) Financial - to demonstrate that the scheme is based on sound costings, that the promoting Local Authority is able to meet its own contribution, that any proposed third party funding is confirmed, and the Local Authority is willing and able to underwrite this element.
  - (e) Commercial - to demonstrate a sound procurement strategy and a rigorous approach to any private sector involvement
20. The MSBC was submitted to government for funding and progressed from "Programme Entry" status to more recently "Conditional Approval" status.

21. The Local Partnerships (a joint venture between the Local Government Association and Partnerships UK, incorporating 4ps) have also been involved, undertaking Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Gateway Reviews, firstly on the business justification for the scheme in September 2007 and again in May 2008 on the procurement strategy and readiness for procurement. A third Gateway Review, focused on the investment decision, is scheduled for early December.
22. These reviews aim to provide independent professional support to local public bodies to improve their ability to source and deliver high quality, cost-effective public services and infrastructure.
23. Action plans were produced following the reviews and the recommendations from these reviews informed the production of action plans and these have all been fully implemented.

### **Benefits**

24. Major developments proposed as part of the emerging Core Strategy for the Luton and South Bedfordshire Growth Area can be served by public transport through potential extensions to the busway infrastructure.
25. In addition to the town centres and any new commercial premises proposed as part of major mixed use development sites, the busway will also improve transport connections to existing and proposed key employment sites in the south and east of the town such as Luton Airport and the proposed Wigmore employment area on the east side of the airport.
26. The busway will reduce the reliance on car journeys on congested roads leading to the town centres and thereby provide longer term options for traffic management once a viable public transport system is in place.

### **Integrated Ticketing**

27. Through First Capital Connect, rail tickets will be offered to London and other destinations, which will include travel on the bus services to the rail station. More details can be found on plusbus (<http://www.plusbus.info/>). It is intended that the busway services will also participate in the plusbus scheme.

*“PLUSBUS is a discount price 'bus pass' that you buy with your train ticket. It gives you unlimited bus travel around town, at the start, the finish, or both ends of your train journey.”*

28. Longer distance express bus routes to Milton Keynes and Leighton Buzzard will use the guideway, allowing passengers faster and more reliable access to West Coast Main Line rail services to the Midlands and the North.

### **Reliability**

29. Busway will also have priority over other traffic on the "on road" sections of the network by using bus lanes and transponders fitted to the vehicles to switch traffic lights to green as they are approached.

30. Busway vehicles will be linked to a control centre and information about the service will be displayed in real time at each stop. Taken together, this means that passengers:
- (a) Will be able to plan their journeys, knowing they can rely on arriving at work or at the train station or airport by a given time.
  - (b) Will not have to allow extra time for important journeys "in case of traffic".
  - (c) Will always know when the next vehicles will arrive and their destinations.

### **Usage Expectations**

31. Usage is projected at over 3.5 million passengers a year by 2021. This projection is based on modelled forecasts. Previous similar projects such as the Leeds busway, the Fastrack system in Kent Thameside and the Fastway system which operates in West Sussex between Crawley, Horley and Gatwick showed patronage increase well in excess of such modelled forecasts against a background of declining bus patronage.
32. The Luton Dunstable busway is a much larger scheme, with significant additional benefits to those mentioned above. These indications provide a good level of confidence for the future of public transport in our area.

### **Journey Times**

33. Currently, the average speed of a conventional bus over the 6 mile journey from Dunstable town centre to Luton train station is less than 13 miles an hour; the journey can take more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour
34. The busway will do the same journey on its dedicated guideway in about  $\frac{1}{4}$  hour, including three scheduled stops, reaching speeds of up to 50mph on the guideway

## Luton Dunstable Busway



