

An update on local bus service issues and performance

Report by the Director of Planning and Transportation

Summary

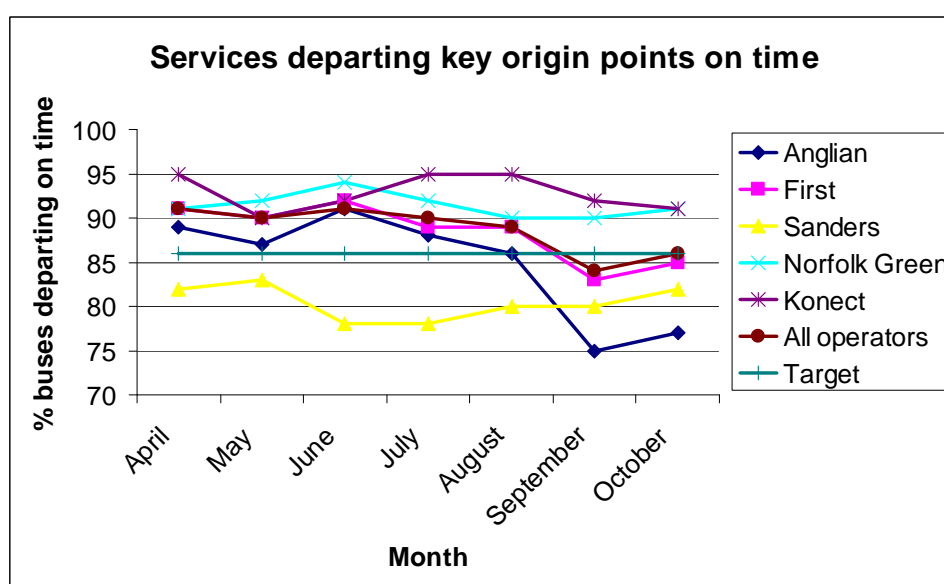
This report updates members about public transport developments and performance of bus services in the greater Norwich area. The momentum of improvement in public transport across the city has been maintained following the successful delivery of our first Local Transport Plan. Highlights include increased punctuality and reliability of buses, investment in new and more accessible vehicles and the first Low Emission Zone in the country outside London. Our improved collaboration with local bus operators is also delivering a marked improvement in the overall bus network as the number of passenger journeys continues to increase.

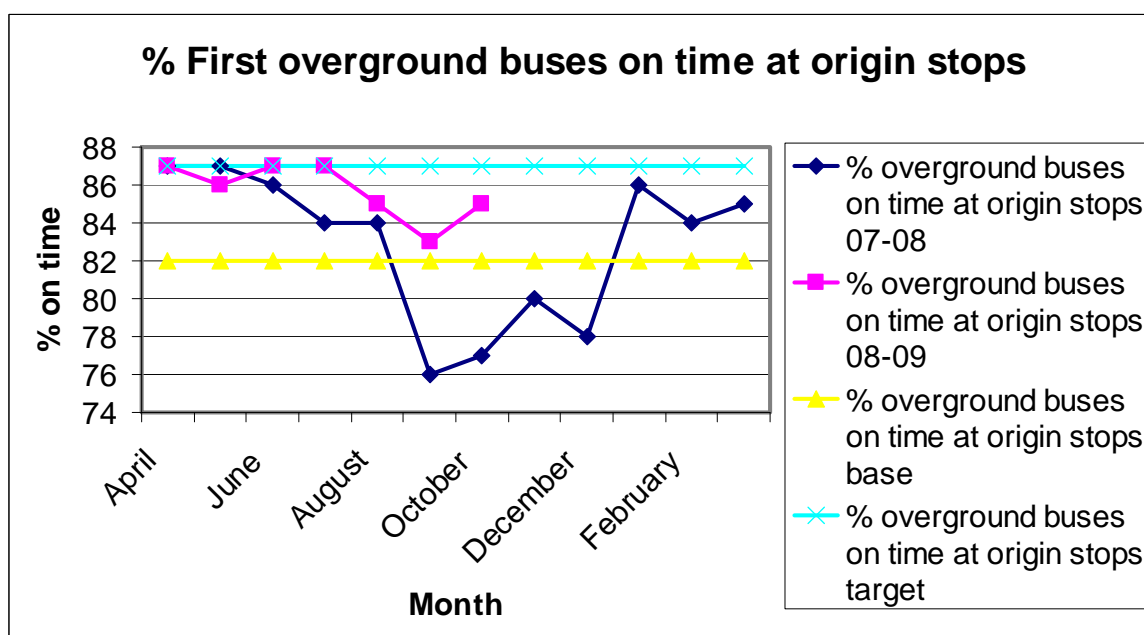
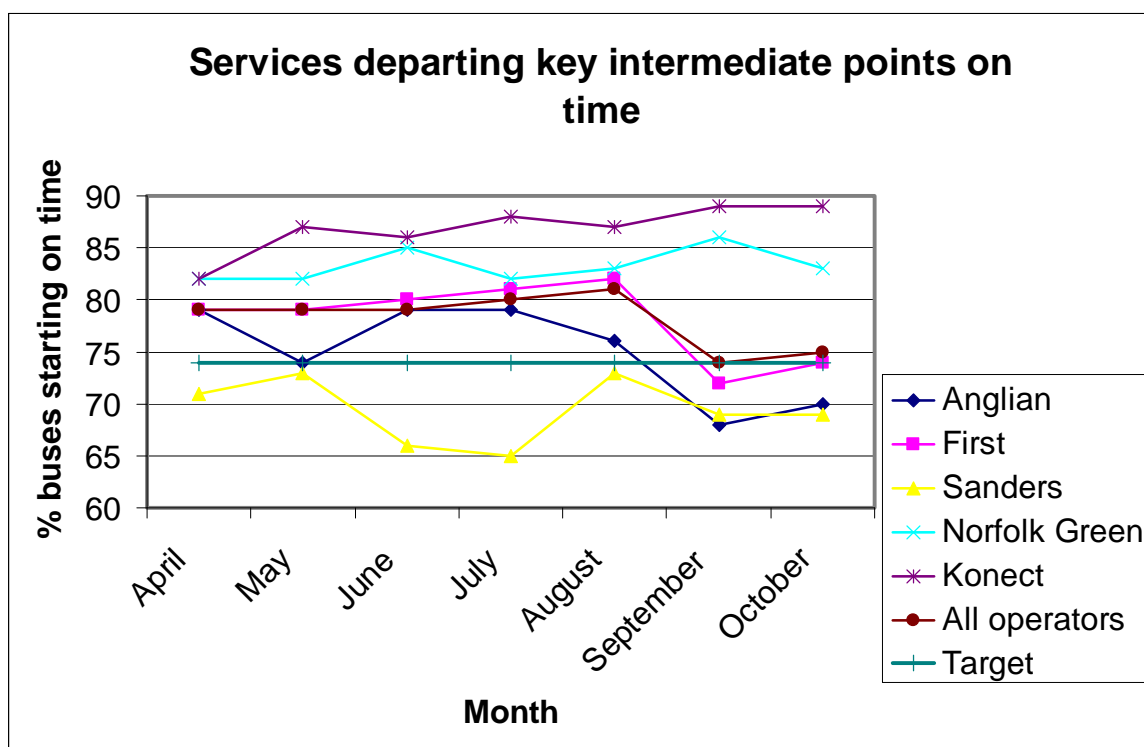
1. Background

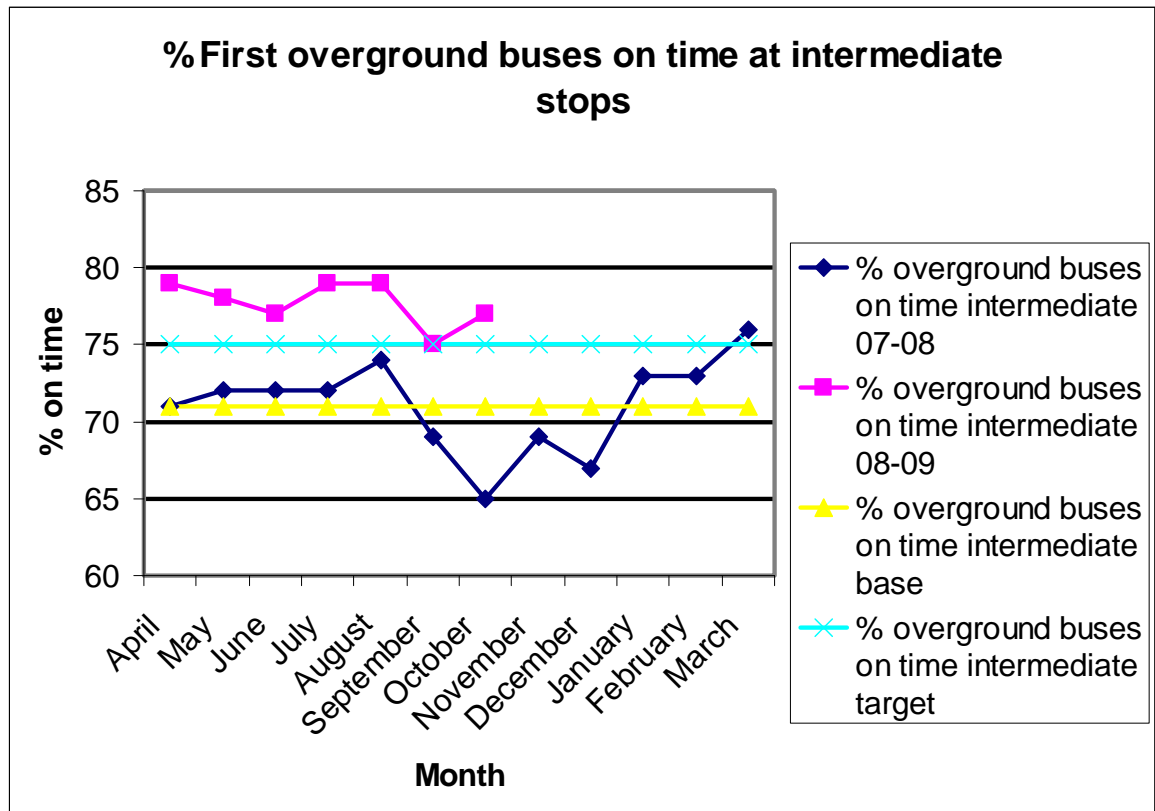
- 1.1. The annual performance report on local bus performance is brought to this committee in May. This report will focus on a number of public transport developments and give an interim review of performance since April 2008, as requested by members at a previous NHAJC meeting.

2. Punctuality of bus services

- 2.1. Punctuality of bus services is one of the 198 National Indicators introduced in April this year. The County Council monitors bus services using the ACIS BusNet tracking system and reports on the punctuality of bus services at 19 key locations across Norfolk at peak times on schooldays. The targets are laid down in the Local Transport Plan. At present, we are exceeding these targets across the county.







2.2. The County has Punctuality Improvement Partnerships with all five major bus companies in Norfolk and seven smaller operators. These are voluntary agreements which represent a “joint commitment to achieve continuous improvement in punctuality and overall reliability of bus services”. Under the terms of the agreement both parties agree to:

- monitor and collate information using BusNet to measure punctuality against targets;
- to jointly validate the data with on-road surveys where necessary;
- to meet regularly to identify trends and mutually agree actions to improve punctuality.

Planned actions will result from the information gathered and include:

- identifying areas for bus priority measures
- revision or recasting of timetables to improve punctuality and reliability, First are currently working with us to review running times of services in the Norwich area
- better communication of planned road works and closures across the network
- improved planning of engineering and staff resources

The agreements have recently been updated with higher targets to reflect the improvements made in punctuality over the last two years.

- 2.3. The value of the Punctuality Improvement Partnership agreements is shown by the recent improvements in punctuality which have, in part, come about by using data from Busnet to review performance and amend timetables accordingly.
- 2.4. Norfolk is recognised nationally as an authority that uses Punctuality Improvement Partnerships effectively. The Senior Traffic Commissioner and Eastern Area Traffic Commissioner attended Norfolk's punctuality forum with operators in May this year.

3. **Joint Investment Plan**

- 3.1 The County Council, City Council and First signed a ground breaking investment plan in December 2007. This plan commits each party to certain actions which will help with the continued improvement of bus services in the Norwich area.
- 3.2 A working group has been established which is meeting bi-monthly to monitor progress against the commitments and look at further improvements.
- 3.3 A leaflet to advise passengers of the commitments of each party has been produced and is available on buses and at key locations across the city. (Copies are available at City Hall.)
- 3.4 Improvements have been achieved that include:
- new real time information screens in St. Stephens Street, Red Lion Street and Castle Meadow
 - ticket vending machines have been upgraded to provide more user friendly screens
 - the introduction of new vehicles on the X1 Lowestoft – Norwich - Peterborough service
 - the replacement of older vehicles on Norwich area services 10 and X2
 - punctuality of Norwich overground services has consistently improved each month (see figures at 2.1)

4. **Low emission zone**

- 4.1 In July, Norwich became the first city to introduce a low emission zone outside of London. The low emission zone covers the Castle Meadow area but the benefits will extend beyond. Operators of bus services must use buses that at least meet Euro 3 emission standards on the majority of their services. By April 2010 all vehicles on urban routes and 50% on rural routes must meet these standards.

- 4.2 The County Council, through the CIVITAS project, funded upgrades to vehicles to enable operators to meet the emissions standards. Grants of up to 65% have been offered towards the cost of upgrading older vehicles. A total of £500,000 has been contributed by the County Council.

The project has resulted in low floor accessible vehicles being introduced earlier than would otherwise have been the case. One example of this is on the Neaves 32 service between Corbett Avenue and the City. As a result of this improvement passenger numbers on this service were over 30% higher in September 08 compared the same period in 2007.

- 4.3 Air quality within the Low Emission Zone will be monitored and checks made to ensure that operators are complying with the Traffic Regulation Condition.

The Low Emission Zone is one of 17 transport measures being introduced to benefit the Norwich area and beyond as part of the CIVITAS initiative for cleaner and better transport in cities, which is co-financed by the European Union.

- 4.4 In addition, the Council has provided free eco-driving training for bus drivers, which has should reduce fuel consumption, as well as reduce exhaust emissions. This method of driving also results in a smoother ride for passengers and has the potential to reduce accidents. We estimate that approaching 50% of bus drivers working in Norwich have received eco-driving to date.

5. **Driver training**

- 5.1 Bus companies invest significant time and money in driver training. In September this year, an EU Directive on Vocational Training for drivers became law. The new legislation requires drivers to hold a certificate of professional competence. Existing drivers will have to complete 35 hours of periodic training by September 2013. New drivers will have to undertake an initial qualification test.

- 5.2 In order to retain their CPC all drivers will have to undergo at least 35 hours of training every five years. Details of training given by bus companies are given in appendix 1.

6. **Public transport initiatives**

- 6.1 The County Council has invested heavily in new transport technology in recent years. Our investment in Greater Norwich includes 16 ticket vending machines, 74 real time departure information screens and 2 information kiosks at the bus station and rail station. The bus station kiosk is the most heavily used in the country.
- 6.2 Over 6000 tickets are sold through the on-street ticket machines each quarter. The machines have recently been upgraded to make them more user friendly and to offer a wider range of tickets. Further planned improvements included the acceptance of credit and debit cards.
- 6.3 The electronic information screens installed across the city allow all scheduled departures to be shown. Buses fitted with BusNet can also show the real time

arrival/departure information, giving passengers real confidence that their bus will turn up. 390 vehicles are fitted with BusNet in Norfolk, the vast majority of these vehicles operate in greater Norwich. Key messages can also be displayed on the electronic screens as a promotional tool.

- 6.4 Travel information kiosks are located in the bus station and at the rail station. These enable customers to obtain public transport information via the internet 24 hours a day. These facilities together with one in Kings Lynn are used up to 30,000 times a month.

7. Scrutiny of bus services

- 7.1 A joint scrutiny of bus services in the Greater Norwich area was undertaken during late 2007 and early 2008. The County, Norwich City, Broadland and South Norfolk Districts councils participated in this review.
- 7.2 All authorities have now reported to their relevant committees and an action plan is being drawn up led by Norwich City Council.

8. Local Transport Bill

- 8.1 The Local Transport Bill is making progress through parliament. A series of amendments were discussed at the third reading on 27 October 2008 and royal assent is expected by the end of the year.
- 8.2 A further report will be brought back to this committee in the new year regarding the possibilities that the new legislation may bring in strengthening the implementation of our transport strategies.

9. Resource Implications

9.1. Finance :

- a) Over £1m has been provided through the County's capital programme for the BusNet system. The ongoing revenue costs for the system are £210k in 2007/8 and are met by a 50:50 split between the County Council and bus operators. Staff resource has been met from the existing staff budgets in P & T. Any expansion of the system will be funded from the existing Local Transport Capital programme and revenue contributions made from bus operators.
- b) The County is expecting to spend around £2.5m on rural bus services in 2008/9 and an additional £3.7m on other suburban and urban services. A realistic choice of travel options is important for the communities of Norfolk, in particular where social exclusion and deprivation is a key factor. Any reduction in performance and reliability of public transport could have a negative effect on passenger numbers and ultimately may lead to service withdrawals and a smaller network. This could lead to pressure on the County Council to support bus services that are currently provided on a commercial basis.

9.2. **Staff :**

- a) The roll out of the BusNet project has reduced the need for intensive on-street surveys, although some monitoring is still undertaken. Existing staff resource has been redirected to manage the BusNet system and a small project team of staff from within the Norfolk Partnership are co-ordinating the final stages of development and implementation. Several Planning and Transportation staff use the system data on a frequent daily basis to support their work in network planning and management, as well as responding to customer queries.
- b) There is a significant level of resource used within the Department to manage the public transport function relating to network planning, general enquiries, media enquiries, bus registrations, performance issues, publicity production, maintenance of infrastructure like bus stops and compliance with access regulations, contract and relationship management with operators and road works and closures.

9.3. **Property :**

There are no implications.

9.4. **IT :**

Bus service registrations are managed by Norfolk County Council as the Local Transport Authority. The data that staff input from the registrations supports several activities including BusNet, the Traveline database and real time information screens.

10. **Other Implications**

10.1. **Legal Implications :**

There are no implications.

10.2. **Human Rights :**

There are no implications.

10.3. **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) :**

Local bus services are exempt as under current legislation vehicles do not have to be fully accessible until 2017. However, we are working with operators to increase the rate at which low floor vehicles are provided across Norfolk and making good progress.

The County Council has a duty under the Transport Act 2000 to make public transport information available. Where possible, information is produced to meet the County Council's strategies and incorporates DDA, other languages and plain English.

10.4. **Communications :**

There are no implications

11. **Section 17 – Crime and Disorder Act**

11.1. The local bus network helps to tackle social exclusion, and access to services enhances opportunities for people in employment and education.

12. **Risk Implications/Assessment**

12.1. The provision and performance of local bus services is very important for the Norfolk economy and our citizens. Supporting and enhancing public transport is therefore essential in meeting our targets set within the Local Transport Plan, new National Indicator targets and delivering on area transport strategies.

13. **Conclusion**

- 13.1.
- The performance data suggests that reliability and punctuality continues to improve and service standards have got better.
 - The BusNet system is providing robust data and provides a good platform for improvement of bus services in Norfolk and in particular our major urban areas.
 - All parties recognise there is room for continued improvement and that we strive to improve timekeeping performance and seek to promote best practice amongst operators for the benefit of the travelling public. The bus strategy within our Local Transport Plan provides the mechanism to do this.
 - The opportunities to review the legislative framework for bus services are provided under changes in the Local Transport Bill going through parliament now. The County Council will need to consider how best to use the legislation to further enhance and improve bus services across the county.

Action Required

The Committee is invited to note the general improvements and comment on the report.

Background Papers

Joint Scrutiny of bus services in the Greater Norwich area.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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If you need this report in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Ian Hydes on 01603 224357 or textphone 0844 8008011 and we will do our best to help.