



Delivering sustainable public transport: The case of the Better Bus Area Fund



Yena Song^{*}, Adrian Hickford, John Preston

Faculty of Engineering and the Environment, University of Southampton, UK

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ABSTRACT

Transport for South Hampshire, a joint board responsible for transport planning for a conurbation of over one million people, successfully bid for the UK's Better Bus Area Fund. This will result in investments of £7.4 million over the period 2012 to 2014, of which £4.5 million will come from central government. Investments will include installation of Wi-Fi on vehicles, Near Field Communication (NFC) tags and Next Stop Displays and Announcement systems, along with marketing initiatives, the development of mobile apps and the refurbishment of buses. These investments will be complemented by other initiatives in the conurbation, not least some £27 million of investments from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund over the period 2012 to 2015, including the development of key interchange points and bus corridors.

This paper will outline the methodology that has been developed to monitor and evaluate these investments and will detail the baseline surveys that have been undertaken, the anticipated impacts on attitudes to and usage of bus services and the results of the initial implementation of the investment programme. The extent to which such investments can revitalise bus services in an area where there has been a long run historic decline will be assessed.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the scope for technological solutions to revive the local bus market in an area that has seen a long term decline in passengers. The area in question is South Hampshire, the largest conurbation in the South of England, with a population of over 1 million and an area of 1848 km². The main centres are Southampton in the west (population 236,900) and Portsmouth in the east (population 205,100). The conurbation also includes Eastleigh (125,200), Havant (120,700), Fareham (111,600) and Gosport (82,600) Districts and part of the East Hampshire, New Forest, Test Valley and Winchester Districts (combined population in South Hampshire 167,000) (see also Fig. 1).

Transport is managed by a Joint Committee of the three Unitary Authorities (Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth) and the

eight Districts, called Transport for South Hampshire (TfSH).¹ Over 3.2 million person trips start and/or finish in the TfSH area each day, of which 2.8 million are wholly contained within the TfSH area. The modal shares are car 70%, cycling and walking 25% and public transport only 5% (TfSH, 2012).

In order to increase this low bus market share and to reduce the use of private cars, TfSH successfully bid to the UK's Better Bus Area Fund. The details of this bid are given in Section 2. In Section 3, trends in bus use in South Hampshire will be outlined. In Section 4, details of some primary data collection will be given, with a particular emphasis on focus groups with non-bus and with bus users. Lastly, in Section 5 some conclusions will be drawn and the implications for further research examined.

^{*} Corresponding author. Department of Geography, Chonnam National University, Gwangju 500-757, South Korea. Tel.: +82 (0)62 530 2682.

E-mail address: Y.Song@jnu.ac.kr (Y. Song).

¹ In 2013 TfSH was joined by the Isle of Wight but for the purposes this paper we will refer only to the original TfSH.

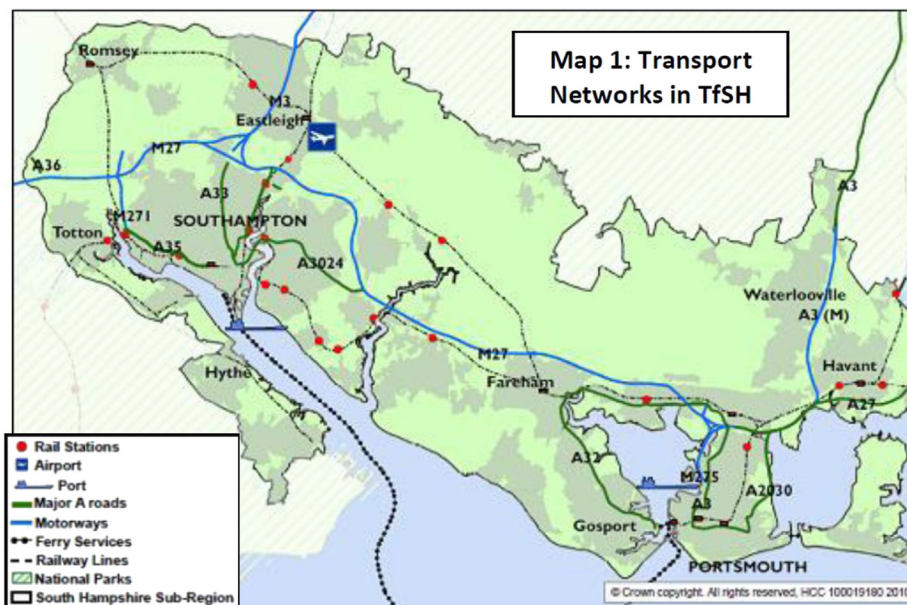


Fig. 1. The transport for South Hampshire Area.

2. The Better Bus Area Fund (BBAF)

A bid was made to the BBAF in February 2012 to cover funding for the period from April 2012 to March 2014. This resulted in an investment of £7.4 million, of which £4.5 million will come from central government. Investments will include installation of Wi-Fi (£1.2 million) and Next Stop Displays and Announcements on 500 vehicles (£0.6 million) and Near Field Communication (NFC) tags at 4500 bus stops. In addition, there will be marketing initiatives based around the My Journey brand (£1.5 million),² the development of mobile apps (building on work undertaken by University of Southampton Computer Science students), the refurbishment of buses (LED lighting on 500 buses and internal and external refurbishment of 140 buses - £1.8 million) and a bus priority scheme in Gosport (Rowner Roundabout - £1.1 million). There is also some budget for staff training and for monitoring.

These investments will be complemented by other initiatives in the conurbation, not least some £27 million of investments from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) over the period 2012 to 2015, including the development of key interchange points and bus corridors, along with the introduction of Smartcards (in autumn 2014) and the roll-out of Personalised Travel Planning and Workplace Travel Plans. Similar measures are being implemented in the Southampton and Portsmouth LSTF programmes over the same period (with further investments of almost £9 million).

However, there is relatively little evidence on how such technological improvements impact on bus demand and on attitudes to bus use. Balcombe (2004, Chapter 8) give valuations in terms of pence or in-vehicle time minutes per trip of measures such as CCTV and real time information provision. Currie and Wallis (2008, Table 2), using evidence from Australia, inferred that Next Stop Displays could increase patronage by 0.34%, whereas on-vehicle CCTV and related security measures could increase patronage by 1.19%. The TfSH submission refers to the experience of First Group in Tavistock who found Next Stop Displays increased patronage by 10%. It also makes use of a report by The 10 Percent Club (2006)

which details the demand impacts of bus improvements in nine locations, although many of the upgrades are more comprehensive than those proposed for South Hampshire. Currie and Wallis (The 10 Percent Club, 2006, Tables 4 and 5) cite examples of bus improvements in Australia which, excluding free fares schemes, have increased route patronage by between 10% and 70%, and by between 2% and 53% in Europe, including a 5% increase in Southampton related to real time information (although the system on which this was based, Romanse, has been withdrawn, and replaced by Citywatch).

TfSH forecast that these measures will lead to an 8% increase in bus patronage and 5.6% increase in public transport's modal share. Assuming, the volumes of all other modes are kept constant and a base public transport mode share of 5%, this suggests a bus modal share of 3.5% in the base. The BBAF package is forecast to increase annual bus boardings in 2014 from a do-nothing reference case of 37.8 million to 40.8 million.

3. Trends in bus use in South Hampshire

The bus market in South Hampshire is dominated by three of the 'big five'. First Group, who acquired the former Municipal operators in Portsmouth and Southampton and the former National Bus Company subsidiary in Fareham and Gosport provides 48% of service. The Go Ahead Group, which operates Blue Star and Unilink services, developed from a combination of new starts and the acquisition of the National Bus Company depot in Eastleigh, has 31% market share. Stagecoach acquired two National Bus Group depots in Portsmouth and Winchester and has an 11% market share. An independent operator, Velvet, based in Eastleigh, has a 4% market share, with other operators having a 6% share. The four largest operators have formed the South Hampshire Bus Operators Association (SHBOA).

Data on bus usage by Unitary Authority level is shown by Table 1. Hampshire has a 2011 population of 1,317,700, of which 607,100 (46%) live in South Hampshire. It should be noted that since April 2006 a free fare concession for bus use has existed in England for the over 60s and eligible disabled people. This statutory concession operates between 9:30am and 11:00pm Monday to Friday and all

² See, for example, <http://www.myjourneysouthampton.com/>.

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