

Extract from minutes of:-

CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

9th June, 2021

Just Eat Belfast Bikes Strategic Review

The Committee considered the following report and associated appendices:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To update Members on the outcomes of the Belfast Bikes strategic review process and provide a summary of the main recommendations.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercises her delegated authority to:

- Approve the recommendations from the strategic review and priority actions including proposed phased expansion of docking stations. Specifically, 8 docking stations in 2022 and seven in 2023.
- Agree in principle to the recommended expansion and recommend that the associated £525k investment is considered as part the year end finance report which is due to be considered at the next meeting of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.
- Note the update of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes performance for Year 6 as outlined in Appendix D.

3.0 Main report

3.1 The scheme was launched in 2015 as part Belfast City Council’s physical investment programme. The Department for Regional Development provided initial capital funding for the scheme as part of their Active Travel Demonstration Projects budget. The scheme launched with a network of 30 docking stations and 300 bikes. The scheme has been operated by NSL continually since inception using bikes and supporting infrastructure from Nextbike GmbH. The scheme currently operates with 400 bikes and 48 docking stations.

3.2 Performance

A breakdown of historic rental and associated revenue is contained at Appendix D. In summary the Belfast Bikes had 65,000 rentals in the financial year 20/21, 137,000 in F/Y 19/20 and 180,000

in F/Y 18/19. Members may be aware that in March 2021 the Belfast Bikes had a record month with 28,903 rentals. Rental forecast for May is 18,491 based on daily average.

3.3 Members will be aware that City Growth and Regeneration Committee agreed to undertake a comprehensive strategic review of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes scheme and make recommendations for the future management, operation and potential expansion of the scheme. Intelligent Transport Services were commissioned in May 2019 to carry out the strategic review of the scheme and a summary of the methodology is outlined below.

Stages	Methodology & Approach
Assessment of the current network	<p>Detailed analysis of the current scale, coverage and density of the network. Factors to be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Station Location; • Usage of each station – Rentals and returns; • Capacity of the station too big or too small; • Network of stations (distance between stations); • Access to quality bicycle infrastructure; • Customer and operational feedback; • Contribution to the Belfast Agenda objectives.
Review of the Scheme Objectives	<p>The review will carry out analysis to measure if the scheme is meeting the objectives set at project initiation.</p>
Review of operations	<p>The review will consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current operation and management system; • Distribution and maintenance activities; • Infrastructure specification – terminals, bikes and docking points; • Security and vandalism including innovation in security and asset tracking; • Marketing of the scheme; and • App / website.
Future Expansion	<p>The review will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing scheme coverage and identify options for potential expansion • Risks and barriers to expansion • A business model for any future expansion (capital and revenue) <p>Production of a prioritised, fully costed and phased expansion plan based on an assessment of options.</p>
Financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the procurement options for sponsorship and advertising in order to maximise income and streamline the process;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the subscription and/or usage fees; • Consider alternative revenue sources - public funds & private investment; • Marketing of the scheme to promote growth in membership and usage.
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3.5 Active Travel Infrastructure

The consultant made several recommendations regarding the prioritisation of certain routes contained in Draft Belfast Bicycle Network Strategy that was published for consultation in January 2017. These are.

- Route 6 - CASTLE JUNCTION (BELFAST) TO WHITEROCK ROAD (BELFAST) – 5.5KM; AND SHAW’S ROAD (BELFAST) – 7.7KM
- Route 7 - CASTLE JUNCTION (BELFAST) TO FORTHRIVER ROAD (BELFAST) – 4.5KM; AND BALLYSILLAN ROAD (4.5KM)
- Route 8 - CITY HALL (BELFAST) TO GRAY’S LANE (BELFAST) – 6.3KM; AND WHITEABBEY (NEWTOWNABBEY) – 10KM.

3.6 Members will be aware that the Belfast Bicycle Network Strategy has not been finalised yet.

3.7 In May 2017 the Council agreed a response to the DFI consultation on the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network Strategy, this response is contained at Appendix C. In summary Council agreed,

‘The Council would request consideration is given to including a number of the main arterial route in city which service high density residential areas as part of the primary network. In particular, the Lisburn and Ormeau Roads suffer from heavy traffic congestion and the opportunity to develop high quality cycle infrastructure along these routes to encourage modal shift is paramount. In addition, the south and north of the city will not benefit from the Phase 1 of Belfast Rapid Transit therefore, it is considered that priority should be given to promoting other sustainable modes such as walking and cycling routes.

The Council would also propose the creation of a community greenway to the south west of the City from the City Centre along the M1 Motorway to connect with the Lagan Towpath and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. The proposed southern arm of the West Route extends from the Bog Meadows along the M1 motorway to Kennedy Way where it then travels west towards Andersonstown Leisure Centre. It is suggested that a new community greenway is developed so the route continues south alongside the motorway to connect with the Lagan Towpath.’

3.8 Stakeholder engagement and a public survey was carried out in August/September 2019 and an elected member’s workshop was held on the 27th August 2019. Further engagement with Members

on the outcomes of the review were scheduled for March 2020 but were cancelled due to the Covid 19 lockdown.

The scope of the review considered the following steps:

- Assessment of the current network
- Review of scheme objectives
- Review of operations
- Future expansion
- Financial sustainability.

3.9 Key Findings

Assessment of the current network

The main findings from the assessment of the current network are as follows:

- The scheme is generally meeting expectations of users, however the reliability of the service and maintenance of bikes are not considered consistent.
- Network coverage is an issue for existing and potentially new users. There are gaps in the network and demand for expansion of the scheme is supported by the public survey and through elected member/stakeholder consultation.
- Some stations experience low usage particularly in some parts of the north, west and east of the city. Developing a safe, convenient, and coherent cycling infrastructure should be a priority along with cycle promotion activities in these areas. Further detail of usage by station is available within the appended Strategic Review.
- Low usage of stations may also be a result of an unsuitable location and should be considered for relocation or a reduction in size.
- Vandalism is a widespread issue and various actions are proposed to tackle the issue such as CCTV, station relocation and continued PSNI/Community engagement. Detail of the cost of vandalism is contained within Appendix E.

3.10 Review of scheme objectives

The review concluded that the scheme was generally meeting objectives offering a low cost, sustainable option for travel in the city. However, there is a need to expand the network and promote cycling to ensure social inclusion and equality throughout the city. This must be considered as part of a wider active travel approach including supporting infrastructure.

3.11 Review of operations

- The general set up of operational facilities is good and is large enough to allow scheme expansion.

- The maintenance of the bikes and docking stations is a major issue that needs to be addressed. At the time of the review, most of the bikes had been in service for over 5 years with investment in new stock required. Additional investment in stock has been made over the last 12 months.
- Distribution of the bikes in the system needs to be improved, however it is recognised that this is difficult to achieve during peak hour traffic congestion.
- Consideration should be given to newer technology and security improvements from Nextbike to ensure infrastructure and user experience can be improved in the future. Members will be aware that our bike stock was recently replaced via DfI funding.
- Potentially explore a change to how the scheme is operated on the ground (such as floating bike engineer who could maintain bikes/stations in a more flexible way; for example in cooperation with local social enterprises)

3.12 Future expansion

The expansion of the scheme and its findings are the result of extensive stakeholder engagement, public survey and engagement with elected members. A summary of findings is below.

- There are gaps in the network along arterial routes and local centres in the North, West, South and East of the city. Investment in new stations should be carried out to increase network coverage and ensure social inclusion.
- Additional capacity is needed in the northern section of the city centre to service the new Belfast UU campus and the Tribeca development and in the east to service the Sirocco development. This should be funded through developer contributions.
- An assessment of the current network identified a number of existing stations which are under used and should be either relocated or reduced in size and used for expansion of new stations.
- Requests have been made from neighbouring councils and expansion into adjoining areas should be considered through partnership funding.

3.13 A recommendation is also made within the report relating to a matrix for the selection of new docking stations. The criteria for contained within the Site Expansion Matrix are detailed below.

- Employment Destinations
- Residential
- Public Transport
- Public Amenities
- Resident Requests
- Existing Usage at nearby stations
- Gaps in Network
- Survey Feedback

- Cycle Infrastructure
- Land that is either owned or managed by Belfast City Council or where express permission to situate a biking dock is already in place.

3.14 A summary of future expansion, potential relocations and complementary measures are outlined by area and included below. Areas for expansion have been selected by identifying gaps in the network along with feedback from the public survey and elected member/stakeholder consultation. Further work will be needed to determine exact locations and consider those against the Site Expansion Matrix and it is proposed that this should be discussed and agreed through the Area Working Groups meetings. These proposals have been phased over a two-year period to take account of the significant lead time and resource requirement required for an expansion. The costs are based on analogous estimates from our previous expansions of the network. In some instances, site specific conditions can result in savings or additional expense. The cost of relocating docking stations is approximately £5,000, again this is subject to site specific variations. If docking stations can be relocated from low use areas this will result in significant savings.

3.15 Members will also be aware that at its meeting on 12th May 2021 it was agreed that an additional four Belfast bikes docking stations would be deployed using DFI Active Travel funding. This expansion highlighted the following four sites

- Antrim Road, Waterworks
- Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre
- Olympia Leisure Centre
- Kennedy Shopping Centre,

3.16 Expansion – Timetable & Costs

North

There are currently four stations servicing the area located at Carlisle Circus, Mater Hospital, Girdwood community hub and Duncairn Centre.

New stations - It is proposed to expand the scheme to locate new stations along the Antrim Road, Shore Road, York Gate shopping Centre and the Duncrue estate. Translink have also been asked to include a new station as part of the York Street station redevelopment.

Phasing

- 2022 Yorkgate, Shore Road
- 2023 Antrim Road, Duncrue

Costing (North)

Year	Capital	Revenue	Total
2022	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000
2023	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000

Relocation of station - The station at Girdwood Hub has very low usage and high levels of vandalism. It is proposed that the station is relocated to one of the main arterial routes in the area.

Complementary Measures - There are also a number of stations in the area which have relatively low use therefore it is essential to develop safe, convenient and coherent cycling infrastructure as a priority such as Route 8 (identified in the draft Belfast Bicycle Network Plan) along with cycle promotion activities in these areas.

3.17 West

There are currently four stations serving the west located at Servia Street, Twin Spires, Royal Hospital (Broadway entrance) and the Shankill Leisure Centre.

New Stations - It is proposed to expand the scheme to locate new stations along the Falls Road (St Marys College/Culturlann), Andersonstown Road, Springfield Road, Whiterock Road and Shankill Road/Woodvale Road.

Phasing

2022 – St. Mary’s College, Shankill Road

2023 – Springfield Road, Whiterock Road

Costing (West)

Year	Capital	Revenue	Total
2022	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000
2023	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000

Relocation - The station located at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Broadway entrance experiences very low usage. It is proposed to relocate this station within the hospital grounds to the entrance at Grosvenor Road. This was originally the preferred location, however it was ruled out as this entrance closes between 10pm to 6am daily and would prevent customers from returning the bikes securely to the docking station during these hours. There is now a close alternative in the area to return the bikes at Twin Spires. The station at Servia Street also experiences very low use and high vandalism. It is proposed to move this station to the main arterial route along the Falls Road.

Complementary Measures - it is essential to develop safe, convenient and coherent cycling infrastructure as a priority such

as Route 6 & 7 (identified in the draft Belfast Bicycle Network Plan) along with cycle promotion activities. The Glider route and the temporary cycle route on the Grosvenor have provided some initial improvements.

3.18 South

There are currently 5 stations located along main arterial routes at the City Hospital, Lisburn Road, Stranmillis Roundabout, Ormeau Park, mid Ormeau and Rosetta roundabout.

New Stations - Gaps in the network exist and there is a strong demand indicated through the public survey. New stations are proposed for the following roads Lisburn Road, Malone Road, and upper Ormeau Road.

Phasing

2022 – Lisburn Road, Malone Road
2023 – Upper Ormeau Road

Costing (South)

Year	Capital	Revenue	Total
2022	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000
2023	£30,000	£5,000	£35,000

3.19 Complementary Measures – The river provides good cycle infrastructure but linkages to the outer areas are required such as the Gasworks Bridge and Route 4. The draft Belfast Bicycle Network Plan ignores the main arterial routes in the south, however consideration should be given to dedicated cycling infrastructure along the main arterial routes to build on the cycling culture in these areas.

3.20 East

There are currently 4 stations located Connswater Shopping centre, CS Lewis Square, Skainos, and Fraser Pass.

New Stations - Gaps in the network exist and there is a strong demand indicated through the public survey. New stations are proposed for the following areas Ravenhill road, Cregagh road, Ulster Rugby grounds, Castlereagh Road, Holywood Road, Belmont Road and Upper N'Ards Road.

Phasing

2022 – Castlereagh Road, Upper Newtownards Road
2023 – Creagh Road, Holywood Road

Costing (East)

Year	Capital	Revenue	Total
2022	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000
2023	£60,000	£10,000	£70,000

Complementary Measures – The stations at Skainos and Fraser Pass experience low usage. Cycle promotion initiatives and better linkages to cycle infrastructure would be beneficial.

3.21 **City centre, Queens Quarter and Titanic Quarter.**

This area contains 30 docking station installed as part of Phase 1 with the addition of a station at All State.

New Stations – It is proposed to provide new stations at the Belfast UU campus, the Tribeca development and in the east to service the Sirocco development. This should be funded through developer contributions.

Relocation of Stations - The assessment of the network highlighted a number of these stations which are currently under used and could be considered for relocation. They are as follows: Cromac Square/St Georges Market – close alternative at the Waterfront and Alfred Street. Millfield – although the station is located outside the Belfast Met college it has low usage probably due to the poor cycling infrastructure in this area and the dominance of the road infrastructure. Carrick Hill also has low usage and should be kept under review.

3.22 **Cost Summary**

Year	North	West	South	East	City Centre	Total Revenue	Total Capital
2022	£70,000	£70,000	£70,000	£70,000	DC	£40,000	£240,000
2023	£70,000	£70,000	£35,000	£70,000	DC	£35,000	£210,000

3.23 **Financial sustainability**

The Belfast Bikes scheme receives income from the hire of bikes and sponsorship revenue. Based on the historic revenue from bike hire and the expected revenue from sponsors it is estimated for the financial year 21/22 that the Belfast Bikes scheme will require a subvention of £244,280 to cover its cost of operation. This forecasted subvention was accounted for during the FY 21/22 rate setting process and is within Place & Economy Departmental annual budgets.

3.24 A full list of the proposals is outlined in Section 5 of Appendix A and it provides more detail on the recommendations, timetable and the costs. This includes a 5-year programme of growth assuming funding availability with an estimation of the expected revenue derived from station expansion. It should be noted that the capital cost could be reduced if underused stations are relocated and used for further expansion.

3.25 Revenue

The additional revenue that is received through the new docking stations is estimated at 15 X £5,548 - £83,220 (based on a 10 bike docking station). This revenue is offset by an additional management cost that ranges per station between £2,500 - £4,000 per annum, 15 x £4,000 - £60,000. Based on our experience an increase in docking stations and bikes will also have an associated increase in damage and theft costs.

3.26 Vandalism

As highlighted through the Strategic Review vandalism has been a challenge for the Belfast Bikes Scheme. It should be noted that all public bike share schemes experience some levels of vandalism. For this reason, within the management contract a provision is made to cover the costs of vandalism. Unfortunately, that provision within the contract has been regularly exceeded with gross costs relating to damage and loss resulting from vandalism in the F/Y 20/21 being over £13,000.

3.27 Sponsorship - The council has been successful in attracting two high profile sponsorship packages for 3 year terms since the launch of the scheme. The process to secure a sponsor has been carried out through a tender process on e-sourcing. It is recommended to use a lighter touch approach to tender for future renewal of the sponsorship contract. Resources should be allocated to warming up the market, communication activities and producing a high quality sponsorship pack.

3.28 Developer contributions - Developer contributions should be considered where appropriate through planning agreements.

3.29 Partnership funding - Joint funding bids should be considered with DfI and other government departments to expand the scheme as part of infrastructure, public realm and regeneration projects.

3.30 Marketing - Improved marketing of the scheme and offering new products such as corporate accounts and membership benefits should be implemented.

3.31 Tariff Review - It is not proposed to increase the subscription for annual users at present. The pay as you go level is also similar to other cities. It is proposed to offer free annual subscriptions to under 25's in order to encourage cycling among the youth however this requires further analysis and consideration as to how compliance can be monitored given current operational model.

Notice of Motion – Update

3.32 Rolloe

At the Council meeting on 2nd November 2020, Councillor Baker proposed a motion which was seconded by Councillor McLaughlin *'to explore a pilot scheme to use Rolloe on Belfast bikes'*

3.33 Officers are working with the company on the viability of pilot scheme and are awaiting further information from the company. Regular updates will be brought back to committee as this work develops.

3.34 Free Access to under 25 users

Following a Notice of Motion from Councillor O'Hara the Committee agreed on 4th March 2020 to, to investigate. *'as part of the current strategic review of the Belfast Bikes Scheme, consideration be given to granting free access to young people 25 years of age and under to the scheme.'*

3.35 Officers continue to investigate how this proposal might be brought forward. A number of technical constraints, listed below, have restricted progress.

- The current system and payment gateway used by the operator does not collect information on the users age. As a result, there is currently no mechanism to distinguish the age of the user.
- GDPR

3.36 Officers will continue to work with the operator to understand if these barriers can be overcome, or if other incentive-based alternatives can be developed. Anecdotally the operator and our consultants ITS have flagged other considerations about providing free provision.

- Vandalism and theft can rise when bikes are free of charge, this has been a consistent finding from dockless bike share schemes.
- The provision of free access is likely to negatively impact revenue and require an increased subvention
- If free access increases the use of the bikes which is of course a positive, it could also reduce availability of bike stock

3.37 Officers will continue to investigate options and further reports on progress will be brought back to committee.

3.38 Financial & Resource Implications

Based on the historic revenue from bike hire and the expected revenue from sponsors it is estimated for the financial year 21/22 that the Belfast Bikes scheme will require a subvention of

£244,280 to cover its cost of operation. This subvention was included in Place & Economy departmental estimates for the financial year 21/22.

3.39 An investment of approximately £525,000 is required to fund the recommended expansion of the network. If the Committee is minded to agree in principle to the recommended expansion, the Committee will need to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that £450k of capital costs is considered as part the year end finance report which is due to be considered at its June meeting. The revenue consequences of the expansion (£75k) will need to be provided for as part of the 2022/23 rate setting process.

**3.40 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

None.”

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- Concerns in relation to the fairness and equality regarding the amount of docking station amounts across the city, and the impact it might have on health inequalities;
- The need for equality screening on the proposed expansion of the scheme;
- The Site Expansion Matrix bias towards existing cycle infrastructure areas;
- The potential to lower the age limit of users from 18 to 16,
- The lack of stations at the edge of city;
- The potential for relocation and the renegotiation of existing stations with partners;
- The Expansion Scheme to be kept as an expanse of the City Centre scheme;
- The unnecessary politicising of the issue;
- The Expansion Scheme could be examined by DEA's not just quarters;
- The potential for a system work around in relation to a free service for young people;
- Free use of bikes for older people and those on benefits;
- The impact of air pollution levels;
- The poor number of students cycling to post-primary schools; and
- The potential to use the 'Civic Dollar' App for future.

The Director of Economic Development advised that the relocation of Royal Victoria docking Station was being considered and that the Council could engage with other Council's regarding potential boundary docking stations. He also confirmed that the docking station on page 59 of the report, under Phasing of East Belfast should read as '*Cregagh Road*'.

During further discussion, the following suggestions from Members for the expansion of the scheme were accepted by the Committee:

- An Equality Screening on the expansion of the scheme, to be undertaken in parallel with the roll out of the expansion and the outcome reported back to the Committee;

- To lower the age of membership from 18 to 16;
- In relation to the expansion criteria, add both levels of air pollution and access to car/van as per census data 2011/21 when updated;
- Write to the Education Minister to request support for the Belfast Bikes Scheme as a way to turn the curve on modal shift and the poor number of students cycling to post-primary schools;
- Find a mechanism to ensure that the Council could provide free/discounted access to young people; and
- Engage with the Council's and other Youth Fora regarding free access for young people.

Proposal 1

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Members of the Committee agree to recommend that the Chief Executive exercises her delegated authority to remove cycling infrastructure as part of the scoring matrix for expansion.

Following a vote, six Members voted for the amendment and twelve against and it was declared lost.

Proposal 2

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Members of the Committee agree to recommend that the Chief Executive exercises her delegated authority to include health inequalities as part of the scoring matrix for expansion.

Following a vote, thirteen Members voted for the amendment and five against and it was declared carried.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercises her delegated authority to:

1. Approve the recommendations from the strategic review and priority actions including proposed phased expansion of docking stations. Specifically, 8 docking stations in 2022 and seven in 2023;
2. Agree in principle to the recommended expansion and recommend that £450k of capital costs is considered as part the year end finance report consider by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its next meeting in June. The revenue consequences of the expansion (£75k) will need to be provided for as part of the 2022/23 rate setting process;
3. Note the update of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes performance for Year 6 as outlined in Appendix D;
4. Agree that an equality screening would be undertaken in parallel with the roll out of the expansion, as outlined in the report, and the outcome reported back to the Committee;
5. Agree to include health inequalities as part of the scoring matrix on expansion;
6. Agree to lower the age of membership of users from 18 to 16;

7. Agree to add both levels of air pollution and access to car/van as per census data 2011/21 when updated to the Expansion Criteria;
8. Agree to write to the Education Minister to request support for the Belfast Bikes Scheme as a way to turn the curve on modal shift and the poor number of students cycling to post-primary schools;
9. Agree to investigate a mechanism to ensure that the Council can provide free/discounted access to young people;
10. Agree to engage with the Council's youth forum and other youth fora in relation to free access for young people;
11. Note that the Council was in discussion regarding the relocation of the Royal Victoria Hospital Docking Station and that officers could engage with other Council's regarding the location of boundary docking stations; and
12. Note that the potential for using the 'Civic Dollar' App as a reward scheme for Bike Users could be examined in the future, once the Pilot Scheme had been completed.