

Briefing Note: Midlothian Orbital Bus STAG

Introduction

Midlothian Council in partnership with the regional transport partnership for South East Scotland, SEStran, have commissioned transport consultants AECOM to complete a study into the potential for introducing enhanced bus priority measures along four key bus corridors in Midlothian, as set out below.

- A6094 Whitecraig to A6094 Eskbank
- B6293 Eskbank to A772 Gilmerton Junction
- A7 Gorebridge to A7 Danderhall
- A6094 Eskbank to A701 Straiton

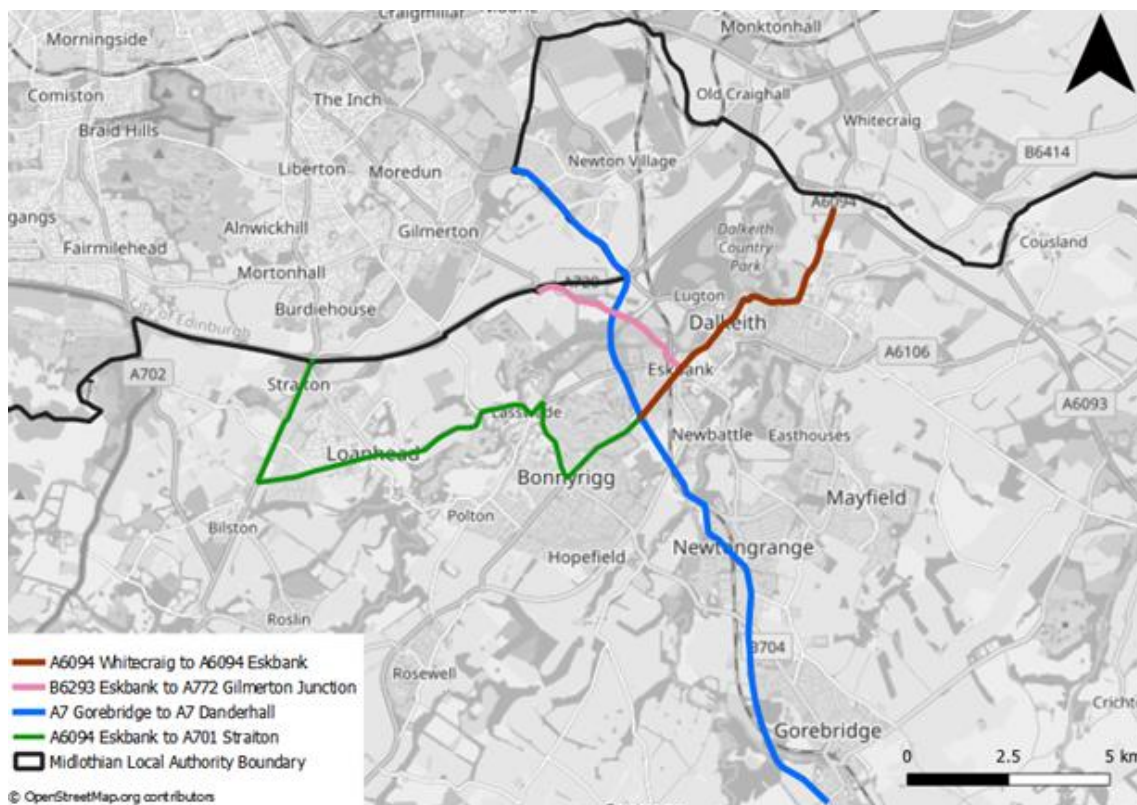


Figure 1: Study Area

The main aim of the study, which is being funded through Transport Scotland’s Bus Partnership Fund (BPF), is to develop and assess options to enhance bus priority on each of these corridors in order to reduce bus journey times and improve bus journey time reliability for trips within Midlothian and to neighbouring local authorities. Options may include bus priority lanes, bus gates and traffic signal priority for buses at junctions, designed to increase the attractiveness of bus. In developing options, consideration will also be given to opportunities to improve conditions for other sustainable travel modes, specifically walking, wheeling and cycling.

The study will be undertaken following Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). STAG represents best practice guidance for transport appraisals and is required whenever Scottish Government funding, support or approval is needed to change the transport system. This study will build on the existing body of work contained in the funding application submitted by the Midlothian Bus Alliance (MBA) to the BPF in 2021. The application set out an initial list of problems and opportunities that impact buses across Midlothian, and potential options to address these problems; further detail on this is provided below. This evidence base will be reviewed and updated as part of this study.

The purpose of this Briefing Note is to raise awareness on the commencement of the Midlothian Orbital Bus STAG Study; including the background to the study, the transport-related problems and opportunities that the study aims to address, and to outline how and when the public and interested stakeholders can feed into the study development process.

Study Approach

In line with the STAG process, a number of key tasks will be undertaken to complete the study, including:

- Identification and analysis of transport-related problems and opportunities on the corridor, building on the initial list of issues identified in the MBA's initial application to the BPF in 2021;
- Development of Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) to encapsulate the aims of any interventions and guide the development of improvement options.
- Option generation, sifting and development to identify the best performing options for further assessment through subsequent appraisal stages of the STAG process.
- Appraisal of options against the TPOs, STAG Criteria (Environment; Climate Change; Health Safety and Wellbeing; Economy; Equality and Accessibility), and Deliverability criteria.

The outcomes of this study will provide Midlothian Council with the ability to develop Outline Business Cases for deliverable options, progressing them to design and implementation stages in the future.

Study Objectives

An initial set of TPOs were prepared as part of the BPF application to guide the development and assessment of bus priority options identified, as follows:

- To improve public transport journey times between Midlothian, East Lothian and West Edinburgh.
- To improve punctuality and reliability of bus services in Midlothian through reducing the impact of congestion and traffic delays.
- To establish a Midlothian Bus Alliance, which is able to meet the requirements of a Bus Service Improvement Partnership, through developing a shared vision for bus services in the Midlothian and surrounding areas.

These objectives will be further developed as the study progresses and new objectives may be identified.

Problems and Opportunities

As part of the Alliance's initial application to the BPF, a number of problems and opportunities were identified. Problems associated with the bus network in Midlothian included:

- Poor public transport accessibility between Midlothian, East Lothian and West Edinburgh.
- Congestion and delays to bus services in Midlothian where routes intersect the dominant north-south traffic flows on the main arteries to and from Edinburgh.
- Constrained bus movements and routing options in western Midlothian due to a lack of suitable infrastructure for east-west connectivity between Loanhead, Straiton and Lothianburn.
- Public transport, particularly rail, between East Lothian and Edinburgh city centre was already at capacity pre-COVID and accessibility to other destinations is limited.
- Rapid growth and development in Midlothian, East Lothian and West Edinburgh will add pressure to the transport network.

Opportunities identified with the bus network in Midlothian included:

- Potential to improve east-west connectivity by public transport and encourage development of new bus services.
- Opportunity to increase public transport accessibility through improved punctuality and reliability of bus services in Midlothian.
- Contribute to National Transport Strategy objectives.

- Greater partnership working between bus operators and local authorities to the benefit of bus passengers and residents in Midlothian.

The full list of problems and opportunities will be reviewed as part of this study, with further data analysis and public / stakeholder consultation proposed to support this exercise.

Consultation and Engagement

Public and stakeholder engagement forms a vital part of the STAG process. For this study, two stages of engagement are proposed: (1) an initial engagement period to inform the validation and identification of problems, opportunities and options and build early awareness of the study; and (2) further engagement at later stages of the study programme which will focus on obtaining public and stakeholder feedback on the proposed bus priority improvements identified through the study.

How you can help

There will be opportunities for the public and stakeholders to feed into the study at both stages.

As part of initial engagement, the project team would like to receive feedback you may have related to bus infrastructure on the four routes. We are keen to hear about problems and opportunities related to bus infrastructure and potential bus priority options. Comments can be submitted via the **Placecheck Tool** available at: <https://www.placecheck.info/app/maps/midlothianbus> The tool allows comments to be added using an online map of the study area. Community Councils are also being contacted to promote the study and will be encouraged to access the Tool.

A second round of engagement will be undertaken at later stages of the project and will focus on obtaining feedback on bus priority options / packages emerging from the study. To inform feedback, a Virtual Consultation Tool will be used. The Tool will include information on the project and at later stages of the study it is anticipated that concept designs will be presented for comment on by stakeholders and the public. A link will also be shared closer to the time to an Online Survey to allow comments to be received. It is also anticipated there will be a limited number of drop-in sessions at community facilities in the study area.

Timescales

The findings from the study, which will feed into the production of reports in line with the STAG process, is anticipated to be completed in spring 2023.

Initial engagement is anticipated to take place in summer 2022 and further engagement is anticipated to take place in winter 2022 / 2023.

If you have any queries, please contact AECOM's Project Manager David Mayne at David.Mayne@aecom.com.

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