



Report to Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee

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Title: **Bus Service Improvement Plans and Enhanced Partnerships**

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Recommendations:

- 1. That the Select Committee notes progress with the ongoing development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to secure long term funding for vital bus services by 31 October 2021**
- 2. That the Select Committee notes the Council's ongoing process of entering into an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators no later than 31 March 2022.**


1. Executive Summary

- 1.1** Buckinghamshire Council committed to pursuing an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators on 30 June 2021. To continue this process, we also need to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by 31 October 2021. This paper notes progress with development of the BSIP document, and the engagement processes so far used to ensure views from the general public, councillors and bus operators are included. Enhanced Partnerships between local transport authorities and bus operators will be required for future discretionary bus funding schemes from Government from April 2022 onwards, including future iterations of the Bus Service Operators Grant.

- 1.2 The Government published its new National Bus Strategy, 'Bus Back Better' in March 2021¹. This sets out how the government plans to spend the £3bn they committed to improve bus services outside London prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 The aims of the National Bus Strategy are to make buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper and gives a greater role for the Local Authorities in the planning and provision of services.
- 1.4 The Government is seeking more consistency including integrated services, ticketing, bus priority, high quality information better frequencies, and service reliability.
- 1.5 Having committed to an Enhanced Partnership process, some steps remain:
 - a) **By the end of October 2021**, all LTAs should publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), in partnership with operators.
 - b) **From April 2022**, have an Enhanced Partnership in place, *or* be following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme. Only services operated under an Enhanced Partnership or franchising scheme will be eligible for new funding streams to follow the Strategy.
 - c) **Annually** update the Bus Service Improvement Plan thereafter.
- 1.6 The Strategy sets a consistent framework for bus service planning and delivery across England outside London. It recognises the important role that bus services play in local areas but acknowledges that for decades, buses have been overlooked by policymakers and have not benefited from long-term funding commitments like roads and railways. The Strategy recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.7 The Strategy acknowledges that bus services can be confusing for passengers, split between different companies who do not accept each other's tickets. Traffic congestion has impacted the reliability and attractiveness of services, and public subsidy has fallen. However, usage in many areas continues to fall, and services are too infrequent or do not cover rural areas or indeed parts of urban areas. Further details of how the bus market in Buckinghamshire (and England as a whole) has changed in recent years were provided as part of a report for the Cabinet meeting on 29 June 2021.

¹ 'Bus back better: national bus strategy for England', DfT: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

2. Background information

- 2.1 The National Bus Strategy identifies two alternative approaches to delivering bus service improvements: Franchising and Enhanced Partnerships. Adopting one of these service models will be a prerequisite for pursuing discretionary funding streams for buses from April 2022 onwards, with an interim stated commitment to pursuing one of these necessary from July 2021 onwards. Both options require a greater role for the Council in service provision which will have implications for staff resources.
- 2.2 Buckinghamshire Council gave a commitment to adopt the Enhanced Partnership approach in June 2021. The Franchising option was not considered appropriate due to the need for additional resource to determine routes and manage (multiple) franchise areas; the limited scope for commercial operators to propose additional routes and limited benefits to bus users.
- 2.3 An Enhanced Partnership is a statutory arrangement under the 2017 Bus Services Act which can specify, for example, timetables and multi-operator ticketing, and allows LTAs to take over the role of registering bus services from the Traffic Commissioners. This is a more formal extension of the joint working that has existed in Buckinghamshire for a number of years, which led to a number of successful initiatives including introduction of the High Wycombe 'Smartzone' multi-operator ticketing scheme and coordinated timetables on two bus corridors via Bus Qualifying Agreements.
- 2.4 Each LTA is required to produce a **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)** which will set out the strategy to improve bus services in Buckinghamshire that will be delivered through the enhanced partnership arrangement. The BSIP is expected to address the following:
- The whole of the LTA's entire bus service network
 - Objectives aligned to the National Bus Strategy
 - Set out how we will achieve the objectives in the Strategy
 - Be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan
 - Be a tool for influencing the share of the £3bn of transformation funding each LTA receives
 - Set targets for journey times and reliability improvements
 - Identify where bus priority measures are needed
 - Set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues and carbon reduction targets which improved bus services could address
 - Set targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction
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- Set out plans and costs for fares, ticketing and modal integration
 - Over time LTAs will be expected to work across transport modes towards enabling a multi-modal ticketing scheme
 - Consider the impact of bus stops and shelters on passenger safety, security and accessibility
 - Consider the needs of schools, health, social care, employment and other services
 - Committing to a Bus Passenger Charter that sets out what passengers can expect from bus operators delivering local bus services across their area.
- 2.5 The BSIP must recognize the importance of bus priority measures, especially in more congested areas. To benefit from new funding, LTAs will be expected to implement ambitious bus priority schemes and draw up ambitious BSIPs. Statutory traffic management guidance will be updated to make promoting bus reliability an integral part of highway authorities' Network Management Duty.
- 2.6 It should be recognised that the guidance of BSIP is focused on more densely populated urban areas and core bus network areas. In lower-density, rural areas, less well-served by conventional buses, the Government will support new forms of provision, such as demand responsive transport (DRT). Buckinghamshire has recently been awarded a grant from the DfT Rural Mobility Fund (see Background Papers) to deliver two DRT schemes in Aylesbury and High Wycombe, which if successful, could pave the way for wider roll-out of similar schemes in future years.
- 2.7 The Government is committed to fundamentally reforming the main funding stream for bus services. The current Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) is a fossil fuel subsidy. The new funding regime will take a holistic approach targeted at the delivery of the policies in the Strategy as well as increasing patronage, and efficiency, improving the environment and securing modal shift from the private car.
- 2.8 Note that dedicated school-only services are not in scope for Enhanced Partnerships or BSIPs, as these do not qualify for public transport grants.

3. BSIP Development

- 3.1 The National Bus Strategy makes it clear that Councils need to develop their BSIPs in close partnership with operators and engage openly with the general public on their priorities for bus service improvements.
- 3.2 The Buckinghamshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been developed in line with and follows the structure set out in DfT guidance (see Background Papers). The BSIP development has been significantly constrained but the timescales set out

by Government but despite this the BSIP has been developed in partnership with bus operators, have undertaken consultation with the public, internal teams and the development of the BSIP has been guided by a specially established Member Task and Finish Group, as outlined below.

- 3.3 To support the development of the BSIP Buckinghamshire Council have appointed specialist consultants TAS partnerships to help guide the scheme.

Bus Operator Engagement

- 3.4 Bus operators are our main partner in the development on the BSIP as they, along with Buckinghamshire Council, are responsible for the delivery of the BSIP through the Enhanced Partnership that we have committed to enter into with them. Through our consultants TAS we have met individually with every bus operator in Buckinghamshire and identify their challenges, opportunities and identified their priorities to improve the future of bus services in Buckinghamshire.

Task and Finish group

- 3.5 A Task and Finish group has been established that is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Transport and is comprised of elected Members representing the broad geographical area of the county. They have helped monitor progress of the development of the BSIP and identify member priorities for improving bus services in Buckinghamshire. A total of four meetings have taken place as follows:
- 27 July - interactive workshop to establish Councillors' priorities
 - 24 August - recap of priorities and how these aligned to operator priorities.
 - 6 September - session included presentations from bus operator, to establish and discuss their priorities in relation to those from the general public and Councillors.
 - 22 September - Final Approval of the BSIP.

Public survey

- 3.6 One of the DfT's requirements for the BSIP is to include priorities from members of the public as part of the overall scheme prioritisation process. To address this, we have published a survey through "your Voice" between 2nd August and 3rd September 2021 aimed at all members of the public, including bus users. Questions in the survey have been structured around the government's priorities as set out in the National Bus Strategy, while also allowing respondents to identify their own specific needs. The responses rates have been good, and we are currently finalising the analysis of this data.

Community Board / Parish Engagement

- 3.7 We have encouraged Community Boards and town and parish councils and the High Wycombe Town Committee to respond to the public survey to ensure their local concerns and priorities are taken into consideration in the BSIP. Due to the timing of the BSIP deadlines and having to undertake consultation over the summer, we have not been able to schedule any discussions at local Community Board meetings. Instead, through the localities team, advised that we are happy to take feedback from Community Boards to ensure that their concerns are included if they wish to add anything over and above the survey.
- 3.8 The published plan will be a working document that can be updated annually and we will be able to undertake further engagement with transport users, operators and Community Boards and Parish Councils as part of this.

4. BSIP Draft Objectives and Priorities

- 4.1 The key objectives of the BSIP are outlined below and encompass the priorities as identified through consultation and engagement. Please note that these are draft and have not yet been agreed with bus operators or the Task and Finish Group.
- **Encourage Growth:** To increase network coverage and increase patronage on the core transport network. This Supports wider objectives to provide better connectivity across the County and beyond and provide mobility for all. The first step will be to restore confidence in public transport and return to pre-COVID occupancy levels.
 - **Increase ease and attractiveness of bus use:** Ensure that public transport services are easy to use, the information is available on timetables and fares and ticketing are competitive and easy to understand and purchase.

This will be achieved through keeping fares attractive to passengers and support travel between different destinations across multiple-operators and facilitate multi-modal transfer. This would be achieved through maximising the use of technology to introduce through ticketing; multi-operator ticketing – so people can use any operator on the same route - and daily capping of fares .Also by ensuring fare structures are in place that are attractive to all users including student and young person discounts.

Providing accessible and convenient information on timetables and internet and mobile apps that provide real-time updated schedules and timetables.

- **Increase Reliability:** Provide a transport network that is well maintained, free flowing, and always operating efficiently. This would be achieved through bus priority measures, Priority Public Transport Corridors and agreed service levels and reliability targets with operators.
- **Protect transport users:** – Ensure the safety and security of all transport users. Include levels of cleanliness, improved lighting at bus stops to ensure that they feel well maintained and safe. Ensure all services are fully accessible to all users. Include additional driver training to protect more vulnerable users.
- **Protect the environment:** –Buses can replace the need for several car journeys and help to support the environment by reducing the number of vehicles on the road. The BSIP will support decarbonisation through encouraging bus use, and to improve upon existing bus emissions levels through higher minimum standards for buses.

4.2 To achieve these objectives, we are developing a number of measures which are outlined in the Appendix A at the end of this report. These will be agreed with operators and translated into priorities and targets to be included in the BSIP. Again, please note that these are draft and have not yet been agreed with bus operators or the Task and Finish Group.

5. Remaining timetable for delivery

5.1 **At the Cabinet meeting of 19 October**, approval will be sought to publish the final draft version of the BSIP, subject to any required corrections.

5.2 **By the end of October 2021**, we will need to publish the BSIPs in line with Government requirements.

5.3 **From April 2022**, The Signed Enhanced Partnership will need to be in place with bus operators.

5.4 **Annually**, LTAs will need to update and publish new versions of their BSIPs. It is assumed that this will be one year after the first BSIP, i.e. October 2022 onwards. Other monitoring requirements are unclear at this stage.

6. Legal and Financial Implications

6.1 In February 2021 the Government announced long-term funding of £3bn for buses in England outside London, which will be invested in new and increased services

(including support to the bus sector to recover from the pandemic). The BSIP is the means that we bid for part of this funding to improve bus services in Buckinghamshire.

- 6.2 £450m of the proposed £3bn funding to improve bus services in England is expected to be made available later this year, with the remainder being distributed at the next Spending Review in late 2021. DfT have also recently clarified that there is a requirement (initial guidance received in August 2021) to provide cost estimates for any proposed schemes as part of the BSIP. We are engaging the support of our consultants to develop these estimates. These will be used as part of the DfT's funding formula for distributing funding, although details of this formula are not available at present. No additional council funding is envisioned to be required at this stage.
- 6.3 DfT have provided us (and other LTAs) with £100k funding to cover delivery of the BSIP. This has already been used to cover consultancy costs with TAS Partnership, who have been assisting with bus operator engagement and the BSIP drafting process since July 2021 and additional resource in the Passenger Transport Team.
- 6.4 There are no legal implications associated with developing the BSIP but the Enhanced Partnership which will be developed from it is a legally binding agreement that is separate from the BSIP.

7. Corporate implications

- 7.1 The Strategy puts forward an ambitious timetable which places the onus on LTAs to deliver. Critical work will need to commence as a priority in order to meet these challenges timescales. This is especially challenging for Buckinghamshire Council as the Public Transport Team has limited staff resources.
- 7.2 Many of Buckinghamshire's bus services operate to places outside of the Council area such as: Milton Keynes, Slough, Oxfordshire, Central Bedfordshire, South Northamptonshire, and Hertfordshire. Larger operators will already be entering into partnerships with these other Local Authorities.

8. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 8.1 Once produced, the BSIP will be published, offering a basis for further communication and engagement with the general public and community boards. After October 2021, this will be a working document, forming the basis for future engagement on bus priorities for Buckinghamshire as a whole. It is expected that feedback from the public will enable later versions of the BSIP to improve with local insights, from both the public and bus operators.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 Bus Back Better: national bus strategy for England:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>
- 9.2 National Bus Strategy: bus service improvement plans – guidance to local authorities and bus operators: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-service-improvement-plan>
- 9.3 The Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnerships:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-act-2017-enhanced-partnership-creation>
- 9.4 DfT Rural Mobility Fund website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-mobility-fund>



10. Appendix: Summary of Bus Service Improvement Plan key measures

The following table is based on the template required for submission to the Department of Transport alongside the main BSIP document.

Make improvements to bus services and planning	
<i>More frequent and reliable services</i>	
Review service frequency	<p>Current service levels and Timetables are at near pre-COVID service levels but not bus patronage – need to take this into account to secure existing route network.</p> <p>Urban network – minimum 15-minute service on key corridors during daytime and 30-minute evening frequency</p> <p>Links to new housing developments</p> <p>More demand-responsive evening services.</p>

<p>Increase bus priority measures</p>	<p>Priority Public Transport Corridors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aylesbury PPTC • High Wycombe PPTC • A4, A355 and A404 corridors. <p>Town centre improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aylesbury gyratory • High Wycombe Town Centre • Frogmoor (<u>near High Wycombe</u>) <p>Potential Bus Priority at junctions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Wycombe railway station • Exiting Wycombe bus station onto Bridge St and from Bridge St onto Oxford Rd • Exiting Wycombe Coachway onto Handy Cross roundabout • Right turn from Marlow Hill into Coachway • Marlow Hill gyratory • Right turn for buses only from A404 coming from Wycombe towards Amersham at Whielden Lane towards Amersham Hospital • A bus only slip road from the original end of Maxwell Road on to the A355 to by-pass the new roundabout at the junction of Amersham Road and the new road due to link with Pyebush roundabout.
<p>Increase demand responsive services</p>	<p>Successful Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) bids – two DRT schemes to start this year – maximise use and promote as an alternative for evening services.</p> <p>In future years depending on success of DRT to deliver in other areas</p> <p>Abbey Barn Park and Penn Wood developments - S106 funded</p> <p>Role of community transport in filling gaps in rural services</p>



Consideration of bus rapid transport networks	Not for now but possible later with larger new developments and funding availability
<i>Improvements to planning / integration with other modes</i>	
Integrate services with other transport modes	<p>Improved links to key rail stations</p> <p>Co-locating bus stops with cycle parking and e-scooter pick-up points including major bus stations</p> <p>Bus links to East West Rail; especially Winslow station</p> <p>Links to Heathrow & Luton Airports</p> <p>Lewknor interchange; High Wycombe park & ride with coach services</p> <p>X5 at Buckingham</p>
Simplify services	<p>Reduce head to head competition and co-ordinate service provision to create better frequencies for users</p> <p>Branding – identifying with specific routes, e.g. ‘Rainbow Routes’.</p> <p>Route map branding, i.e. replicating the design of Beck-style bus stop maps in London</p> <p>All services through the same location to serve the same bus stop to give clarity of where to catch buses from</p> <p>Investigate implementation of express bus services</p> <p>Better coordination of services on key corridors</p> <p>Linked also to through ticketing and multi operator ticketing</p>
Review socially necessary services	<p>Replace some subsidised services with DRT</p> <p>Maintain our socially-necessary subsidised rural service network</p> <p>Work with partners to develop alternative community-led bus schemes</p> <p>Increase evening and Sunday provision</p> <p>Investigate the use school contract resources to help improve service frequency</p>



Invest in Superbus networks	<p>Investigate pathways to achieving a core interurban network, to eventually have minimum frequency and vehicle, branding and infrastructure standards</p> <p>Suggest parallel interurban express bus and local bus provision, i.e. same end destinations but different intermediate stops – aim to be more competitive with cars.</p>
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<i>Improvements to fares and ticketing</i>	
Lower fares	<p>Extended Youth Discount Scheme</p> <p>Alignment of Youth Discount Scheme with improved 16-21 ticketing offer from operators, potentially to follow Carousel’s flat fare model</p> <p>Coordination with Bucks New University</p> <p>Jobseekers allowance discount scheme</p> <p>Re-establish Heathrow worker’s discount scheme in partnership with LHR</p>
Simplify fares	<p>Ensure common technology across operators</p> <p>Through ticketing and one bus ticket for any operator</p> <p>Introduce Tap-on / Tap-off multi-operator fare capping (similar to London ticketing), including mobile phone pay</p> <p>Ensure alignment of ticket types, e.g. single, return, day, weekly etc.</p> <p>Introduce carnet products</p> <p>Discuss tighter integration with rail operators</p> <p>Ensure all operators can read QR codes and accept payment by contactless bank card</p>



<p>Integrate ticketing between operators and transport</p>	<p>Linked to the above – to ensure operators have the technology</p> <p>Use of the Intalink Explorer as county wide day ticket</p> <p>Extended HW SmartZone with outer zone to minimum cover 1/1A route</p> <p>Create new Aylesbury SmartZone, with inner and outer zones.</p> <p>Joint ticket zone in Slough & Maidenhead area in conjunction with Slough & RBWM Councils.</p> <p>greater bus / rail ticket integration building on Plus Bus.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Make improvements to bus passenger experience</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Higher specification buses</i></p>	
<p>Invest in improved bus specifications</p>	<p>Next stop audiovisual systems (i.e. similar to TfL iBus system), where not already available</p> <p>On-board USB / wireless charging</p> <p>WiFi on longer inter-urban routes</p> <p>Introduce Maximum vehicle age</p>
<p>Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services</p>	<p>Improve timetable information. Website / App Based / paper based with real time updates available</p> <p>Improve well-used bus stops – add hardstanding to allow step-free access where not already available</p> <p>New guidelines for housing developments to include bus stops in an early stage of design – transport-by-design</p> <p>Stokenchurch Business Park improvements – increased turning circle to allow improved bus service access to the end of the village</p> <p>Review bus access in commercial areas, e.g. Cressex Business Park</p> <p>Upgrade of Bus stations</p>



<p>Protect personal safety of bus passengers</p>	<p>CCTV on all buses CCTV and lighting at key bus stops Improve lighting Improve cleanliness Review bus stop locations Minimum customer service training for drivers Encourage diverse range of bus drivers Increased consideration of needs of vulnerable groups Upgrade of Bus station especially Aylesbury Bus Station with options for future relocation and small bay allocations at High Wycombe bus station</p>
<p>Improve buses for tourists</p>	<p>New and improved links to local tourist attractions Bus map to list destinations Discounted entry for bus users e.g. Waddesdon integration with existing shuttle bus, Hughenden Manor, Stowe, Silverstone, Pinewood</p>
<p>Invest in decarbonisation</p>	<p>Minimum Euro 6 emissions standards for core network and Euro 5 for infrequent rural services. Increase modal shift in favour of decarbonisation; increasing patronage has a larger impact than changing drivetrain locally Moving toward zero-emission buses where technology can meet requirements of topography and route length Support Community Transport services investing in EVs, e.g. Risborough Bus, Winslow; investigate developer funding through section 106 payments.</p>
<p><i>Improvements to passenger engagement</i></p>	
<p>Passenger Charter</p>	<p>Set up a passenger charter with KPIs for key areas of operation and vehicle and infrastructure standards. Set up and hold regular public forums / users group</p>



Strengthen network identity	<p>Refresh route branding on urban and interurban networks</p> <p>Further promotion of Rainbow routes</p> <p>Sensible branding for cross-boundary services</p>
Improve bus information	<p>Updated reliable timetabling – website / app and paper based inclusive of all services.</p> <p>Operators to provide information on all services not just own</p> <p>Buckinghamshire Council-published maps</p> <p>Building on NextBus app – joint app which shows all available bus services, not just operator’s own</p> <p>RTPI systems – additional coverage</p> <p>Kindle-style e-paper bus stop and bus station displays to allow faster updating of information</p>
Other measures	
Other	<p>Setting a small number of fixed timetable change dates through the year.</p> <p>Work with large employers in Buckinghamshire to ensure that modal shift of employees and / or customers / visitors can be maximised</p>

