

Back Bus Better

Bus Service Improvement Plan

Briefing Note for Members

Background

On Monday 15 March 2021 the government launched [Bus Back Better](#), a new bus strategy for England outside London. It aims to rejuvenate local bus services, making them attractive for passengers, cheaper, easier to understand and use, faster and more reliable, and greener. It acknowledges the decades-long decline in bus patronage nationally – and points to towns and cities which have bucked the trend, increasing passenger numbers with coordinated services and investment.

Greater use of bus, and more buses being zero emission, will contribute to government's central objectives: carbon net zero and levelling up.

The strategy places new requirements on Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to develop **Bus Service Improvement Plans** and set up **Enhanced Partnerships** with local bus operators, to tight timescales, with action on networks and services, fares and ticketing, passenger facilities, and on-street bus priority measures. The bus strategy states if a local authority fails to take this forward, then they will lose out on their share of the £3billion of funding announced. They will also lose their current allocation of bus service operators grant (ESCC receives £426K pa) and future Covid bus service recovery funding (the current form of Covid bus funding, Coronavirus Bus Service Support Grant, has provided ESCC with approximately £70K per 8-week period).

The strategy states (on page 39) that Government will also consider a local transport authority's performance with respect to the policies set out in the national bus strategy when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.

Key actions for local authorities are set out on page 40 of the national bus strategy report:

- Government made an initial £100k flat payment to assist local authorities towards progressing an Enhanced Partnership or franchising arrangement. Local authorities who provided a notice of intent by the end of June 2021 received a further final payment allocation towards progressing such arrangements. ESCC received a further £279k, based on our population and deprivation levels (West Sussex received a further £403k and Kent £879k).
- By the end of June 2021 commit to an Enhanced Partnership or begin statutory process towards franchising.
- By the end of October 2021, a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) is to be published, to be reviewed every six months and to be updated annually. To be reflected in the Local Transport Plan and in other relevant local plans such as Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.
- From April 2022 the Enhanced Partnership should be in place or a decision to implement a franchising scheme to access the new discretionary streams of bus funding. This is the only way to access this funding.

The government's ambition is that their investment and the creation of new EPs will deliver a transformed bus offer. They envisage coordinated, more comprehensive bus networks, with better coverage and services operating for longer hours at higher frequencies than now.

The government wants to see simplified, lower fares, consistent across a city, town, or county network, with flat fares or maximum single fares lower than current levels and free interchange to a second bus on the same journey. The strategy encourages multi-operator tickets to be offered at the same or similar prices to single-operator equivalents and suggests LTAs and operators introduce daily and weekly capping.

The government has committed to continuing to fund free off-peak bus travel for disabled people and pensioners and free school travel for pupils living 'beyond walking distance'.

Bus Back Better sets expectations for the passenger experience, including comprehensive, updated information at bus stops and online, covering fares and real-time running information. Vehicles

should be high-quality with at least 2 wheelchair spaces per full-size vehicle and audio and visual 'next stop' announcements.

The strategy gives a strong push towards zero-emission vehicles – electric or hydrogen – and the DfT has launched an open consultation on when the sale of new diesel-powered buses should be stopped.

It sets an expectation for LTAs to work with energy providers and bus operators to coordinate the efficient delivery of fuelling and charging infrastructure. Bus companies are expected to provide or secure most of the finance required, as part of their normal asset management and renewal cycles.

LTAs are expected to make or secure significant investment in on-street bus priority measures, including bus lanes, bus gates and signal priority schemes. LTAs are encouraged to introduce bus lanes quickly (subject to consultation).

Part 6 of Traffic Management Act 2004 will be brought into effect in 2021, allowing highway authorities to enforce moving traffic offences.

Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) will:

- Need to be developed by LTAs in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies, and local businesses, services, and people.
- Need to cover the LTA's full area, all local bus services within it, and the differing needs of any parts of that area (e.g., urban, and rural elements).
- Focus on delivering the bus network that LTAs (in consultation with operators) want to see, including how to address the under provision and overprovision of bus services and buses integrating with other modes.
- Set out how they will achieve the objectives in this strategy, including growing bus use, and include a detailed plan for delivery.
- Be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan.
- Influence the share of the £3bn of transformation funding each LTA receives.
- Set targets for journey times and reliability improvements
- Include significant increases in bus priority, matched with robust enforcement.
- Set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues and carbon reduction targets
- Statutory traffic management guidance will be updated to expect enhanced bus reliability as an integral part of highway authorities' Network Management Duty. (page 46 in the national bus strategy)

Government published BSIP Guidance on 17 May 2021:

[Bus service improvement plans: guidance to local authorities and bus operators \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94424/bsip-guidance-to-local-authorities-and-bus-operators.pdf)

The BSIP Guidance confirms BSIPs should be developed in collaboration with bus operators, and other stakeholders such as bus user, service provider and local business groups (page 9). Furthermore, page 13 of the guidance states "it is mandatory that BSIPs seek and report the views of passengers and third parties on the merits and demerits of bus services locally and the performance of the LTA and the local operators. These should include local transport users' groups, MPs, local services, and business organisations and so on. Passenger survey data, if any, should be reported"

The BSIP has to collect and take account of operator and LTA data including passenger numbers by route, time of day and ticket type; bus vehicle speed and congestion data by route and time of day (using GPS vehicle data from operators), bus average journey times; granular data on operators fares and ticket types including the average price; the current bus market share compared to other modes, particularly the private car, split between urban and rural where possible; bus service frequency and bus stop network density.

The BSIP Guidance suggests LTAs may wish to make an outline estimate of funding needed, accepting that it will be broad and not definitive at this stage. The DfT said it will issue further guidance on funding and assessment in the summer.

BSIP Overview

- To be developed by LTAs in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services, and people.

- Focus on delivering the bus network that LTAs (in consultation with operators) want to see, including how to address the under provision and overprovision of bus services and buses integrate with other modes.
- Set out how it will grow bus use.
- Set out how it will be delivered.
- To be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan.
- Seek to influence the share of Government's £3 billion of transformation funding

Current bus offer to passengers

- This should provide an analysis and data of how the current bus network compares to the BSIP aims and objectives set out in the subsequent sections.
- Analysis of existing local bus services compared to BSIP outcomes
- How current services meet or fall short of BSIP expectations as set out in this guidance and the Strategy.
- LTA financial support for bus services. Explain the financial support that the LTA(s) is providing for subsidised public bus services, listing the numbers of routes and route mileage supported.
- Other factors that affect the use of local bus services. This should include the extent and pricing of parking provisions in towns and the split between LTA and private sector provision. It should also include current LTA spending on parking enforcement.

Headline targets

- Include an explanation of how and why these targets were chosen and what the percentage increase is on existing performance.
- Targets should be assessed using existing available data or data that the partnership has or can compile. They must have clear objectives and set out how success will be judged.
- Targets for journey times and reliability improvements should cover the LTA area as a whole and provide specific data for each of the largest towns in its area.
- Performance against these targets must be reported against and published at least every six months.
- Targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction. This should include details of how this will be measured.

BSIP Delivery

Set out detailed policies in each of the areas, explain delivery in more detail and how they each will work together to improve local bus services. The BSIP should contain a separate section on each of the following:

- Make improvements to bus services and planning
- More frequent and reliable services. Review service frequency. Increase bus priority measures. Increase demand responsive services. Consideration of bus rapid transport networks. Improvements to planning / integration with other modes Integrate services with other transport modes. Simplify services. Review socially necessary services. Invest in Superbus networks.
- Improvements to fares and ticketing. Lower fares. Simplify fares. Integrate ticketing between operators and transport.
- Make improvements to bus passenger experience. Higher spec buses. Invest in improved bus specifications. Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services. Protect personal safety of bus passengers. Improve buses for tourists. Invest in decarbonisation.
- Improvements to passenger engagement. Passenger charter. Strengthen network identity. Improve bus information.

Consultation Process

It is for the LTA to carry out the formal consultation and when doing so they must, as a minimum, include several statutory consultees. These are:

- all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals.
- organisations that represent local passengers.
- other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals.
- the Traffic Commissioners.

- the chief officer of police for each area to which the plan relates.
- Transport Focus.
- the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA); and
- such other persons as the authority thinks fit.

Making a Plan and Scheme

- a modified version of the Plan and/or Scheme that considers consultation responses can be made. This though may trigger the bus operator objection mechanism, and this will add a further 28 days to the timetable. The guidance states changes should only be made if they are necessary and contribute to one or more BSIP outcomes

Delivering the Plan

To access new Government funding, LTAs must be delivering their BSIP using either an EP or franchising. DfT reserves the right to withhold Government funding if postponement is used without justifiable cause. In any case, legislation does not allow these dates to be postponed for more than 12 months

Competition Issues

- It is very important that the development of plans and especially schemes are not conducted in a way that that is unfair to particular operators.
- The guidance states “effective planning is about striking an appropriate balance between competition, cooperation, over and under provision and the use of subsidy and EP powers to deliver an overall bus network that focusses on delivering BSIP outcomes and is in the interest of passengers, not individual bus operators

Out-of-Scope

- Setting the route and timetables of commercial bus services (though we would expect to influence operators’ decisions through the EP)
- Commercial single operator fares (again, we would expect to influence commercial operators’ decisions
- Sections of bus routes outside the East Sussex LTA area. Though we are expected to coordinate our approach with neighbouring LTA EPs.
- Services such as dial a ride, closed school coaches and tours that are not registered local bus services
- Community transport operators, including the local bus services they provide (though we will be expected to consider how they be integrated within the wider BSIP aims)

Costs and Funding

Development of the BSIP and Enhanced Partnership will be met by a combination of existing officer resources and Government capacity grant funding of £379K received to assist LTAs. The grant is being used to support effort from external transport consultants, a temporary Project Manager to assist with delivery, and a proposed expansion of Transport Hub staff. Consultant and Project Manager resources are being funded jointly with West Sussex County Council, to maximise value for money.