

West of England Enhanced Partnership Plan

Version 1.0 - February 2023



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Enhanced Partnership Plan

THE WEST OF ENGLAND ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP (EP) PLAN FOR BUSES IS MADE JOINTLY BY THE LOCAL TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES (LTAs) OF WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY AND NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 138G(1) OF THE TRANSPORT ACT 2000.

A map of the geographical area covered by the EP Plan is in Appendix 1.

The EP Plan was made on 9 February 2023.

Prior to the plan being made, Bus Operators and Local Highway Authorities (LHAs) were engaged in the preparation of the plan. They and wider stakeholders were consulted ahead of making the plan, in accordance with section 138F of the Transport Act 2000.

Passenger groups, MPs and the business sector were also invited to give their views on the local bus network in July and August 2021 as part of the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), which informs the EP Plan.

The EP Plan will have no end date but will be reviewed jointly by the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council every year in conjunction with the annual reviews of the BSIP.

Introduction

This Enhanced Partnership Plan is based on the West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan published jointly by the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council on 29 October 2021.

The EP Plan and Scheme will replace all existing voluntary partnership agreements, traffic regulation conditions and voluntary codes of conduct between the LTAs, LHAs and Bus Operators. The Advanced Quality Partnership Scheme for metrobus will be revoked.

Definitions

In this Enhanced Partnership Plan, the terms listed in the left-hand column of Table 1 below shall have the meanings ascribed to them in the right-hand column.

Table 1 - Definitions within the EP Plan and attached EP Scheme

1985 Act	Transport Act 1985 (as amended)
2000 Act	Transport Act 2000 (as amended)
2017 Act	Bus Services Act 2017
AVL	Automatic Vehicle Location
AVTM	Ashton Vale to Temple Meads metrobus route
B&NES	Bath and North East Somerset Council
BCC	Bristol City Council

Bespoke Variation Arrangements	Arrangements made under Section 138E of the 2000 Act and detailed in Section 4 of the EP Scheme
BOJ	M32 Bus Only Junction for metrobus Services
Bus Operator	Operator of one or more Local Services in the EP Area
Bus Service Improvement Plan or BSIP	The West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan, as published jointly by the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council on 29 October 2021 and any subsequent updates
CA	West of England Combined Authority
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CMA	Competition & Markets Authority
Commercial Service	A Local Service that is not operated under contract to an LTA
Competition Test	An assessment of the impact of a proposed scheme on competition, in accordance with Schedule 10 of the 2000 Act
CPME	Cribbs Patchway metrobus Extension
CRSTS	City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement
EBSR	Electronic Bus Service Registration
EP	Enhanced Partnership as defined in section 138A of the 2000 Act
EP Advisory Panel	A representative advisory group of partners and stakeholders, as described in Section 4 of the EP Scheme
EP Area	The geographical area defined in paragraph 1.1 of the EP Scheme
EP Board	A representative group of partners, as described in Section 4 of the EP Scheme and which makes decisions on the EP
ETM	Electronic Ticket Machine
Exempted Services	Those Local Services described in paragraph 1.4 of the EP Scheme
Facilities	Those facilities referred to in paragraphs 2.3 to 2.6 (inclusive) of the EP Scheme which shall be deemed as such for the purposes of Section 138D(1) of the 2000 Act
Fixed Change Date	One of two nominated dates in each calendar year decided by the EP Board - before the end of the previous calendar year - on which changes to Local Services in the EP Area can be made, apart from metrobus Services which can only be changed on the date that falls in August or September
HOV Lane	High-Occupancy Vehicle Lane
Improvement Notice	A notice issued to a Bus Operator by the LTAs after assumption of Relevant Registration Functions in the event that a Bus Operator should fail to comply with any of the Requirements or should fail consistently to meet the agreed standards for punctuality and reliability
iPoint	Installation at bus stop on metrobus routes and other places to provide information and sell tickets
JLTP4	Joint Local Transport Plan 4, as adopted in March 2020
KRN	Key Route Network
Local Highway Authorities or LHAs	Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council
Local Planning Authorities or LPAs	Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council
Local Service	A bus service as defined in Section 2 of the 1985 Act
Local Transport Authorities or LTAs	The West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council in respect of the roles defined in Section 108(4) of the 2000 Act

Measures	Those measures referred to in paragraphs 2.23 to 2.24 (inclusive) of the EP Scheme which shall be deemed as such for the purposes of Section 138D(2) of the 2000 Act
metrobus Complementary Service	A Local Service that is so designated under paragraph 2.67 of the EP Scheme and which is able to use certain Facilities and Measures as specified in Schedules 2 and 4 of the EP Scheme
metrobus Only Facilities	Those Facilities listed in Schedule 2 of the EP Scheme
metrobus Participating Operator	A Bus Operator who operates one or more metrobus Services
metrobus Performance Review Group	The group set up in accordance with the provisions in paragraph 3.48 and described fully in Schedule 5 of the EP Scheme
metrobus Service	A Local Service that meets the Operation Requirements and Route Requirements specified for metrobus Services and which is able to use the Facilities and Measures listed in Schedules 2 and 4 of the EP Scheme
metrobus Stops	A stopping point used by a metrobus Service at a location listed in Schedule 2 of the EP Scheme
NFH	North Fringe to Hengrove metrobus route
NSC	North Somerset Council
Operation Requirement	A requirement referred to in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.63 (inclusive) of the EP Scheme, imposed under Section 138A(5)(b) of the 2000 Act, other than a Route Requirement
PVR	Peak vehicle requirement (PVR)
QPS	Quality Partnership Scheme made under Section 114 of the 2000 Act
Qualifying Agreement or QA	Qualifying Agreement as defined in paragraph 17(4)(a) of Schedule 10 to the 2000 Act
Requirement	A requirement imposed under Section 138A(5)(b) of the 2000 Act
Relevant Registration Functions	The functions of the Traffic Commissioner to the extent that they relate to a Relevant Service, both within the meanings given to them under Section 6G(10) of the 1985 Act
Route Requirement	A requirement referred to in paragraphs 3.52 to 3.53 (inclusive) of the EP Scheme, imposed under Section 138A(5)(b) of the 2000 Act that falls within Section 138C(1) of the 2000 Act. I.e. requirements on the frequency or timing of local services or services of particular descriptions
RTI	Real-Time Information
SBL	South Bristol Link metrobus route
SGC	South Gloucestershire Council
SMO	Small or medium-sized bus operator
Supported Service	A Local Service that is operated under contract to an LTA
TC	The Traffic Commissioner, as defined in Section 4 of the 1985 Act, for the West of England Traffic Area
TDS	
TRC	Traffic Regulation Condition made under Section 7 of the 1985 Act
TRO	Traffic Regulation Order made under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement as defined in Section 153(2) of the 2000 Act
WEBOA	West of England Bus Operators' Association

Analysis of local bus services

Patronage trend

Bus use in the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council grew consistently over fifteen years prior to the pandemic - reaching 72.3 million single journeys in 2018-19. Some of that growth was linked to changes in population and economic performance, but a significant part was due to investment in infrastructure, vehicles and services, and fares initiatives. Whilst bus use was increasing, it was still some way behind bus use in some parts of the country and lagged behind the average bus journeys per head for England's metropolitan areas and the average for England as a whole.

With the introduction of lockdown measures in March 2020, passenger numbers fell dramatically, recovering slowly in response to the easing of social distancing and the re-opening of the economy. In 2020-21, bus patronage locally was 22 million single journeys. By June 2022, bus patronage had recovered to 75% of its pre-pandemic level, whereas bus mileage operated was roughly 85% of its pre-pandemic level.

Bus operators

The principal bus operator in the region is First West of England Ltd (trading as First Bus), which carries roughly 90% of total passenger journeys. There are 22 other operators of registered local bus services and 3 long-distance coach operators, some of whose services are partly registered as local bus services. In 2019-20, 26 million vehicle miles were operated on bus services in the region of which 1.6 million miles (about 6%) were on LTA contracts.

The West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council have 86 contractual arrangements for non-commercial bus services between them and contribute to the cost of 3 cross-boundary bus services contracted by other LTAs. In 2019-20, they spent a combined total of £5.6m in financial support for local bus services, excluding payments for concessionary travel.

Bus service network

Bus services in the region are focussed on radial corridors in the urban areas of Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare.

- Prior to the pandemic, only 7% of all local bus services had six buses per hour or more over most of the working day and were thus defined as “frequent services” by the Transport Commissioner (TC)
- About a quarter of bus services had between two and four buses per hour
- One or two buses per hour operated on the main inter-urban corridors.

Not all commercial bus services operate all day, seven days a week. Much of the financial support provided by the West of England Combined Authority is directed at evening and

Sunday services. In the case of North Somerset Council, this support is mainly focussed on services to rural communities and the peripheral parts of the urban areas.

In Bath and Bristol, there are few cross-centre services - mainly to avoid spreading the impact of unpredictable delays from one side of the cities to the other. This reduces connectivity and efficiency of operation. There are also very few orbital services around the cities and those that exist operate to low frequencies. Bus operators do not regard them as viable and are not willing to cross-subsidise them, so such services are reliant on revenue support.

Also, there are few inter-urban limited-stop services to provide fast services giving comparable journey times to cars.

Rural areas have a comparatively sparse bus network and, generally, it is reliant on revenue support. Some villages have only one or two buses per week and are used predominately by shoppers. Journey times by bus from outer terminals in rural areas to city centres are generally much longer than by car because the bus services take circuitous routes to serve as many communities as possible on the way. Also, there is very little provision of evening or weekend services to rural areas away from the main inter-urban corridors.

metrobus

A network of high-quality bus services in the Bristol urban area branded “metrobus” was launched in 2018 based on ambitious objectives that are now aligned with those of the EP Plan. Those objectives are:

- To bring benefits to persons using Local Services in the Scheme Area by providing Local Services operating as part of the four rapid transit schemes described in the Joint Local Transport Plan and co-ordinated by the West of England Combined Authority, now collectively known as metrobus. (This has now been expanded to five schemes to include the Cribbs Patchway metrobus Extension (CPME).
- To improve the quality of the Local Services, including reliability and punctuality improvements and improved journey times within the Scheme Area
- To reduce or limit traffic congestion, noise, or air pollution
- To achieve a 20-second maximum stop dwell time averaged across the overall metrobus network
- To achieve a year-on-year increase in passenger boarding numbers on each metrobus route (subject to recovery from the pandemic)
- To achieve near 100% customer satisfaction levels on metrobus routes
- To provide a smart ticketing regime that removes the routine need for any on-bus cash transactions
- Punctuality to be significantly better than both the background bus network and the Traffic Commissioner standard
- The deployment of high quality / extremely environmentally friendly vehicles on every journey

Fleet

The total fleet available to operate registered local bus services in the West of England comprises 724 buses, of which 613 are garaged within the region. The average age of the bus fleet operating in the region is 8.1 years.

Relevant factors

The partners consider that the factors which have the potential to affect the local bus market in both positive and negative ways over the life of the EP Plan are:

- Capital investment in bus infrastructure - principally from City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) and BSIP funding award
- Availability of a suitably skilled workforce, particularly drivers and maintenance staff
- Congestion
- Management of roadworks
- Impact of significant housing and employment growth
- The regulatory framework for bus services in England
- Policies set out in the Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4 and any successor plan), including those relating to parking or other charges affecting travel demand
- Changes in demand and travel behaviour as the economy recovers from the pandemic
- New mobility services
- Changes in technology - including vehicles, ticketing and information
- Clean Air Zones and Air Quality Management Areas
- Funding arrangements associated with concessionary travel, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), BSIP funding, bus revenue support, developer contributions (s106 agreements) and any new or alternative funding arrangements that either Government or local authorities put in place
- Decarbonisation and the response to the climate emergency.

The West of England BSIP sets out further details on these factors but engagement with operators and stakeholders shows the significant impact that congestion has on bus services, affecting both punctuality (whether a bus arrives on time) and reliability (whether a particular bus service runs at all or whether running times are consistent). For example, in 2018-19, 77% of non-frequent bus services ran on time across the BSIP area, with non-frequent services in Bristol being the fourth worst in England. This is well below the best performing area and below the average across all areas in England.

Lack of consistency of bus journey times is another problem caused by traffic delays. Peak scheduled times can be up to 40% longer than those in the off-peak on some of the core routes in the region. Furthermore, services can run 15 to 20 minutes behind schedule on the least reliable sections of network and 'bunching' is not uncommon. The Bus Passenger Survey carried out by Transport Focus shows that service punctuality and journey time concerns are two of the biggest areas for improvement amongst passengers.

Recently, a national shortage of drivers and engineers within the bus industry has shown that a suitably skilled workforce cannot be taken for granted. It will be vital for bus

operators and local authorities to have sufficient qualified staff to deliver the BSIP and their EP commitments in a timely and consistent manner.

Management of roadworks can also impact on the reliability and punctuality of bus services. Significant efforts are made to ensure that disruption is kept to a minimum but this is not always possible because there can be emergencies that require a quick response or limited alternative routes for bus services to take. Night working is promoted but this can be expensive and noisy for residents.

Housing and employment growth can increase traffic volumes on key points of the highway network. However, there are also opportunities with such growth to develop new markets and services or improve the financial performance of existing routes by attracting new passengers to bus services.

Managing travel demand is important in influencing the travel choices people make and the demand for bus services and their viability. JLTP4 and other policies on parking controls, active travel, enforcement, residents' parking and Clean Air Zones can all affect the relative price or convenience of other modes and the likelihood that people will choose public transport. The introduction of the Clean Air Zone in Bristol in November 2022 is a major opportunity to influence behaviour.

The pandemic is likely to have profound and long-term impacts on travel behaviour. In June 2022, bus patronage had recovered to only 75% of pre-pandemic levels - and travel by concessionary pass holders has been consistently at a lower level. Weekend and leisure travel has recovered most strongly whereas with peak-period and commuting travel has been the most depressed as changes to working patterns and working from home seem to have become embedded. The need to stimulate and promote new markets to achieve modal shift is imperative if bus operators are to become financially stable again. In some situations, support from the public sector - either on an ongoing basis or through kickstart funding - will be required.

Responding to the climate emergency is a key driver for promoting modal shift to public transport. The transport sector overall is a key contributor to carbon emission levels but buses can support the changes in behaviour that are required. Therefore, encouraging people to move to public transport, decarbonising the bus fleet and using new technology are important actions.

A key factor affecting the ability of bus operators to deliver reliable services since the pandemic has been a shortage of bus drivers. Even where recruitment drives have been successful, retention is an ongoing challenge. Addressing this issue will be paramount to meeting the EP Plan's objectives.

Passenger experience

Considerable information has been gathered on the experiences of bus passengers in the EP area and their priorities for improvement. These are set out in detail in the West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

In summary, user satisfaction with bus services is positive with 86% of respondents in 2019 stating they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied". However, this is only around the average performance of local authorities in England and is significantly less than the highest

performing areas - which achieve around 95% satisfaction. This indicates there is scope to improve satisfaction and, to inform our course of action, we have looked at users' priorities.

Extensive public consultation was carried out in the development of the West of England Bus Strategy (adopted in 2020) and more recently with stakeholders in the development of the BSIP. We have also considered the research undertaken by Transport Focus on Bus Passengers' Priorities for Improvement (September 2020).

The most important characteristics that affect passengers' experiences of bus services and the priorities for improvement are:

- (i) A well-designed bus route network that is simple, coherent, and efficient across the region. This is our fundamental aspiration for the network, and it supports users' priorities around punctuality and higher frequencies - which make services easier to use. Also, it suggests a network that is extensive in geographic scope and facilitates a broad range of journey opportunities, without having to change bus or where interchange is simple, clear, and reliable. Our engagement has revealed a clear aspiration for more engagement when changes to the network are proposed - featuring in the top five priorities of our stakeholders.
- (ii) Unreliable services and unpredictable journey times are a source of considerable frustration for passengers. The most recent information for the West of England shows that nearly one in four buses do not run to time - below the average for comparable areas, so tackling this is a high priority for our residents.
- (iii) Fares will always be an important factor in users' experiences. However, whilst the level of fares is important, the perception of value for money reflects users' views on the complete "offer" - including reliability, punctuality, frequency of service and infrastructure. All these factors have been identified as important by bus users in the West of England.
- (iv) Improvements to waiting facilities have been identified by users as a priority. Feedback has also indicated the importance of clean and presentable infrastructure, real-time information, raised kerbs to aid boarding and alighting, and general timetable information.
- (v) More frequent services are a priority for improvement for users. Prior to the pandemic, only 7% of services in the West of England operate at six or more buses per hour. Higher frequencies help reduce waiting time at bus stops and increase confidence in the network. Passengers have an inherent concern about the reliability of less frequent services because a missed journey can cause considerable inconvenience.

Overall, passengers' experiences of using bus services are clear and well-articulated. They align with the data we have on bus service performance and the feedback from operators and stakeholders too. These experiences give us a clear indication of priorities for improving local bus services.

Bus journey speeds

The limitations of the transport network in the West of England have acted as a constraint on growth and productivity. High car ownership and limited bus services have resulted in

fewer bus journeys per head being made here than in other city regions. In a vicious circle, low public transport demand and high private car use have combined to increase local road congestion, bringing poor environmental conditions and unpredictable bus journey times. It is estimated that the region experiences a £300m annual loss because of congestion and in 2019, Bristol was ranked as the third most congested city in the UK.

The characteristics of the local geography combined with the features of the existing road network, create a challenging environment for the bus network. The River Avon, the Great Western main line and the M4, M5 and M32 motorways create natural barriers between different parts of the region. Combined with the hilly nature of topography and the lack of dual-carriageways, this creates pinch-points and limited access corridors into our key urban areas, forcing traffic onto certain roads and increasing congestion. Incidents on the motorways can lead to major disruption in Bristol city centre and its radial routes, as well as in overall connectivity across the West of England, having a disproportionate impact on bus services.

Lack of consistency of bus journey times is referred to above. In 2017, less than 80% of bus services ran on time, with delays of up to 15-20 minutes, representing the worst performing Integrated Transport Authority in England. Prior to the pandemic, the average bus speed in the BSIP area during peak periods was reported to be 8 mph, despite the delivery of substantial bus priority measures in recent years.

In 2018/19, 77% of non-frequent bus services ran on time across the BSIP area, with non-frequent services in Bristol being the fourth worst in England. This is significantly below the best performing area and below the average across all areas in England.

Objectives

The EP Plan is intended to improve the quality and effectiveness of local bus services in the West of England by providing a framework within which all partners can invest confidently. Seven high-level long-term objectives were adopted for the BSIP and they apply equally to the EP. Each objective has several attributes, describing an ideal network and they represent the outcomes we are aiming for, as follows:

Objective 1 - High mode share for buses of overall travel market

- Good access to bus services from all parts of the area
- Good access from bus network to passenger destinations
- Positive contribution to decarbonisation plans and air quality improvements
- Positive contribution to sustainable housing and employment growth
- Declining need for subsidy as market grows organically
- Ambitious targets and trajectory for modal share and bus patronage
- Robust civil enforcement of moving traffic offences, parking, and traffic restrictions
- Extensive bus priorities, particularly on main urban routes, as continuous as possible and part of a whole-corridor approach
- Good co-ordination of roadworks

Objective 2 - High quality bus service

- Cohesive, comprehensive, and simple route network including co-ordinated radial and orbital services in the Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare urban areas with easy interchange between them

- Standard all-day routes with evening and weekend services on urban and inter-urban routes
- Turn-up-and-go daytime frequencies and evening frequencies of at least 4 buses per hour on core urban routes (including orbital routes)
- Good frequencies on principal inter-urban corridors and in smaller urban areas
- 24/7 services, where appropriate, on core urban and principal inter-urban corridors
- Feeder services to interchange hubs to boost the frequency of connections from places away from main roads, connecting to the core bus routes with integrated ticketing
- Demand-responsive services to low-density areas where appropriate, possibly operated by community transport providers
- Basic minimum standard of accessibility to network from rural areas
- High standard of punctuality
- As far as possible, journey times comparable to or better than car travel
- Sufficient capacity to meet demand
- Provision of service to new developments at an early stage, funded by developer contributions
- Regular service reviews but no more than two major change dates per year
- Good links to rail services, with buses connecting with first and last trains where appropriate
- Consistent, clear, and distinctive branding for the whole public transport network, incorporating any strong local or route-specific brands
- Unique service numbers within the network (apart from urban services in Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare) with no suffixes

Objective 3 - High quality waiting environment

- Bus stops, bus stations and interchanges to be accessible, safe, and inclusive by design with good facilities
- High quality, branded interchanges at key locations, including rail stations
- Branded, distinctive shelters at all stops wherever practical (except alighting points) with high standard of cleanliness and maintenance
- Defined, paved waiting areas at urban stops and hardstandings at rural stops with cycle parking where possible
- Good pedestrian accessibility to adjacent residential areas and passenger destinations
- Bus stations protected from closure and redevelopment

Objective 4 - High vehicle standards

- Progression to zero emissions through bids for Government funding when available, and Euro VI emission standard in the meantime
- High levels of cleanliness, comfort, and security for passengers
- Full accessibility with ample areas for pushchairs and luggage in addition to the wheelchair space
- Dual-door vehicles on core urban corridors where practical
- High level of mechanical reliability
- Audible and visible “Next stop” information
- Charging as standard
- All vehicles equipped with tap on /tap off readers

Objective 5 - High level of passenger satisfaction

- Bus Passenger Charter to set out what standards passengers can expect, including punctuality, vehicle cleanliness, accessibility, proportion of services operated and redress
- Public consultation on route and network changes
- One customer service contact point for whole network

- Measurement of passenger satisfaction to include value for money and provision of information
- Targets for punctuality and journey times

Objective 6 - High quality information

- Bus Information Strategy adopted and implemented
- Consistent, distinctive and readily identifiable branding for the whole public transport network on all media
- Easy access to information via Travelwest website and new app to be developed alongside BSIP partners, including times, accessibility information, fares, and live running
- Roadside timetable posters at all stops except alighting points
- Roadside displays in rural areas to show return bus times and basic fares information
- Timetable leaflets and comprehensive area booklets for whole network
- Printed and interactive maps for whole network and town/city plans for urban areas
- Maps at interchange stops and local centres showing pedestrian routes and road crossing points to destinations
- Fares information - including multi-operator tickets - on Traveline
- Real-time information system to cover all operators' services
- Targeted information on route and network changes
- Consistent naming of bus stops and interchanges
- Bus stops in urban areas to carry route number tiles
- Easy access to comprehensive information via website and app, covering all operators, including times, accessibility information, fares, and live running
- Full information on local bus services in railway stations
- Heavy promotion and marketing, including bus links to rail services and scenic routes
- Introductory offers to promote the network to non-users
- Continuous marketing and promotion of network and multi-operator tickets

Objective 7 - Low fares, simple ticketing, and easy means of payment

- Fare structures, initiatives and ticketing that attract new users to buses
- Low flat fares in Bristol, Bath, Weston-super-Mare, and other urban areas
- Lower point-to-point graduated fares outside urban areas
- Multi-operator ticketing as the norm - branded as part of the network branding
- Daily and weekly capping using tap on /tap off readers
- All operators equipped to take contactless payment, EMV ticketing and m-ticketing
- Contactless payment to be the norm but cash retained for the time being
- Integration of multi-operator bus ticket and multi-modal ticket into one family of tickets
- Simplified range of tickets but more flexible ticketing for part-time commuters
- Harmonisation of ticket zones, ticket types and conditions
- Reduction in fares for young people and standard discounts for children and students

Interventions

To deliver our long-term objectives, 34 Initiatives were listed in the Bus Service Improvement Plan. The list included some schemes that were already funded and in progress but the BSIP funding bid submitted in October 2021 was based on the estimated costs of delivering the others. The full list of Initiatives is:

Initiative A1- A high frequency, accessible bus network

Initiative B1 - High priority corridors where significant separation/priority can be delivered

Initiative B2 - High priority investment corridors

Initiative B3 - Medium priority investment corridors

Initiative B4 - Rural and suburban route investment

Initiative B5 - Bus lane and parking enforcement

Initiative C1 - Operator fare reduction & fares simplification package

Initiative C2 - Youth fare discounts/ reductions

Initiative C3 - Jobseekers' discounts/ reductions

Initiative D1 - Supporting the transition to digital ticketing

Initiative D2 - Supporting multi-operator ticketing as the norm

Initiative D3 - Supporting multi-modal ticketing integration

Initiative E1 - Transport Hubs and Wider Environment

Initiative E2 - Enhancement of bus stops

Initiative E3 - Roadworks co-ordination

Initiative E4 - Interaction between bus services and other modes

Initiative F1 - Brand identity

Initiative F2 - Marketing, promotion, and communications

Initiative F3 - Travel guides and journey planning

Initiative F4 - Within journey information

Initiative F5 - Providing network stability

Initiative G1 - Investment in Zero Emission Vehicles

Initiative G2 - Retrofitting vehicles to a minimum level

Initiative G3 - Enhanced passenger environment

Initiative H1 - Bus Passenger Charter

Initiative H2 - Improving bus passenger safety

Initiative I1 - Community Transport Strategy

Initiative I2 - Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport trial

Initiative I3 - Supported services

Initiative J1 - Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4)

Initiative J2 - West of England Bus Strategy

Initiative J3 - Planning policy

Initiative J4 - Future Transport Zone

Initiative J5 - Key Route Network

Funding for capital investment in the Combined Authority (CA) area has been confirmed through the CRSTS award of £540m over five years. Together with local contributions, £407m will be spent on bus priority measures and associated infrastructure in the CA area. An indicative award of capital funding for North Somerset (£48m over three years) and revenue funding for the whole BSIP area (£57.5m over three years) was made in April 2022 and confirmed in November 2022.

These awards are lower than the amounts in the bid, so full delivery of the BSIP will not be possible within the BSIP and CRSTS funding periods. Wherever possible, funded

commitments have been incorporated into the EP Scheme. More will be added by means of the Bespoke Variation Arrangements as capital schemes progress through the design and consultation stages, and operators make improvement to services to reflect savings in their operating costs. Until such time as specific information on which to quantify the benefits of capital investment is available, bus operators have made a general commitment to making proportionate improvements.

Policies

Transport policies

The current Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4) provides the overarching framework of transport policies. Our vision is that by 2036 the region will have a well-connected sustainable transport network that works for residents, businesses, and visitors; a network that offers greater, realistic travel choices and makes walking, cycling and public transport the natural ways to travel.

JLTP4 incorporates five core objectives:

- Take action against climate change and address poor air quality
- Support sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- Enable equality and improve accessibility
- Contribute to better health, wellbeing, safety and security; and
- Create better places.

A sustained reduction in car dependency and a substantial shift towards the use of sustainable transport modes will be pivotal to the achievement of these objectives. The bus plays centre-stage in this process, particularly against the backdrop of the climate emergency statements of the West of England authorities including their pledge to reach net zero carbon by 2030.

The West of England Bus Strategy (adopted 2020) established the objectives and direction for our bus network. It set a target of doubling bus passenger journeys in the region by 2036, to be achieved by restructuring the local bus network around a system of hubs and interchanges, accompanied by a simplified route network to open up new journey opportunities.

The City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) schemes, and related BSIP capital funding for North Somerset, will significantly enhance the region's bus infrastructure, enabling the improvements to bus frequency, speed and availability set out in our BSIP. The investment will strengthen our network of strategic corridors with bus lanes and priority, Transport Hubs and standard bus stops. It will help to build Liveable Neighbourhoods and a network of walking and cycling routes for local journeys, provide access to bus routes, and enable innovation to trial new transport approaches.

The regional Transport Decarbonisation Study is currently in progress. It will assess the carbon impact of current plans, clarify the scale of the challenge, and identify further actions that will be needed to achieve our shared ambition to deliver a carbon-neutral network. Interventions set out in the BSIP will help progress towards the realisation of our net zero carbon ambition by enabling and incentivising modal shift to buses, transitioning towards a fully zero-emission fleet and growing the number of bus passenger journeys.

Our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) sets out a package of infrastructure measures to deliver improvements to walking routes serving 30 local high streets and 55 continuous cycle routes, creating a West of England wide network. These plans are integral to our strategic corridor approach, providing strong links between the bus network and the places where people live, work, and play. Infrastructure rollout on key corridors will complement bus infrastructure proposals.

Complementary policies

Through ongoing strategic planning for the CA area and the North Somerset Local Plan, sustainable locations for strategic housing and employment development will be clarified, including an emphasis on maximising accessibility to sustainable transport modes. Through the local councils' consultations, better design principles for new developments will build on these themes to reduce car dependency and encourage the use of alternative modes.

Potential transfer of responsibilities for the Key Route Network (KRN) to the CA provides further potential to reallocate certain duties at a strategic level, potentially accelerating delivery of challenging decisions around reallocating road space to sustainable transport modes.

Parking management and pricing - current parking policy continues to progress a reduction in longer stay parking provision in central areas, through reallocating land use in Bath, Bristol and Weston-super-Mare for regeneration and public realm improvements, as well as a transfer to short-stay spaces by the rollout of Residents' Parking Zones around Bath and Bristol city centres. Residents' Parking Zones are also being introduced in North Somerset with the first scheme in Leigh Woods now operational. The authorities will review existing parking standards in their local plans to look for opportunities to further reduce car dependency. Further interventions in the provision and pricing of parking will also be brought forward dependent on the conclusions of the TDS referred to above.

Enforcement - More robust enforcement of on-street parking infringements including in bus lanes, facilitated by the existing decriminalisation of stationary and moving traffic violations by our constituent councils. Two new bus lane enforcement cameras in North Somerset have recently been implemented.

Road-space reallocation - as noted above, the CRSTS infrastructure programme will prioritise the transfer of road-space on key corridors to bus, cycling and walking schemes. This investment will be complemented by more robust enforcement of on-street parking infringements including in bus lanes, facilitated by the existing decriminalisation of stationary and moving traffic violations by our highway authorities.

Effect on neighbouring areas

Engagement has taken place with neighbouring LTAs in the development of the BSIP and EP. Cross-boundary bus services that do not play a role in the local bus network in the EP Area are included in the definition of Exempted Services in the EP scheme. All neighbouring LTAs have published BSIPs and are developing EPs. Dialogue will continue with neighbouring LTAs to ensure that a proportionate approach is taken towards the imposition of Operation Requirements on cross-boundary bus services.

We will engage with the relevant public bodies in Wales but the sole Welsh operator running into the EP Area has already been involved in engagement with the LTAs.

Review of EP Plan and EP Scheme

The EP Plan will be reviewed every year after it has been made, where possible, in conjunction with the annual review of the BSIP. The EP Scheme will be reviewed twice a year by the EP Advisory Panel - once after completion of the annual review of the BSIP and once after reporting of progress towards the BSIP targets. The outcome of reviews and any recommendations arising therefrom will be reported to the EP Board, where decisions can be taken to amend the scheme according to Bespoke Variation Arrangements.

Reviews will consider how well the EP Plan and EP Scheme are working, progress towards targets and general factors affecting the local bus market.

In addition to formal reviews, the EP Advisory Panel will give bus users and stakeholders an avenue to bring issues to the attention of the LTAs, LHAs and Bus Operators.

Impact on small or medium-sized bus operators

An assessment has been carried out of the impact of the EP Plan on small and medium-sized bus operators (SMOs). Several Bus Operators fall into this category and their needs have been considered in the light of the feedback they have given during engagement. The LTAs recognise that SMOs may not be well-placed to implement the requirements of the EP quickly, and adjustments have been made to reflect that.

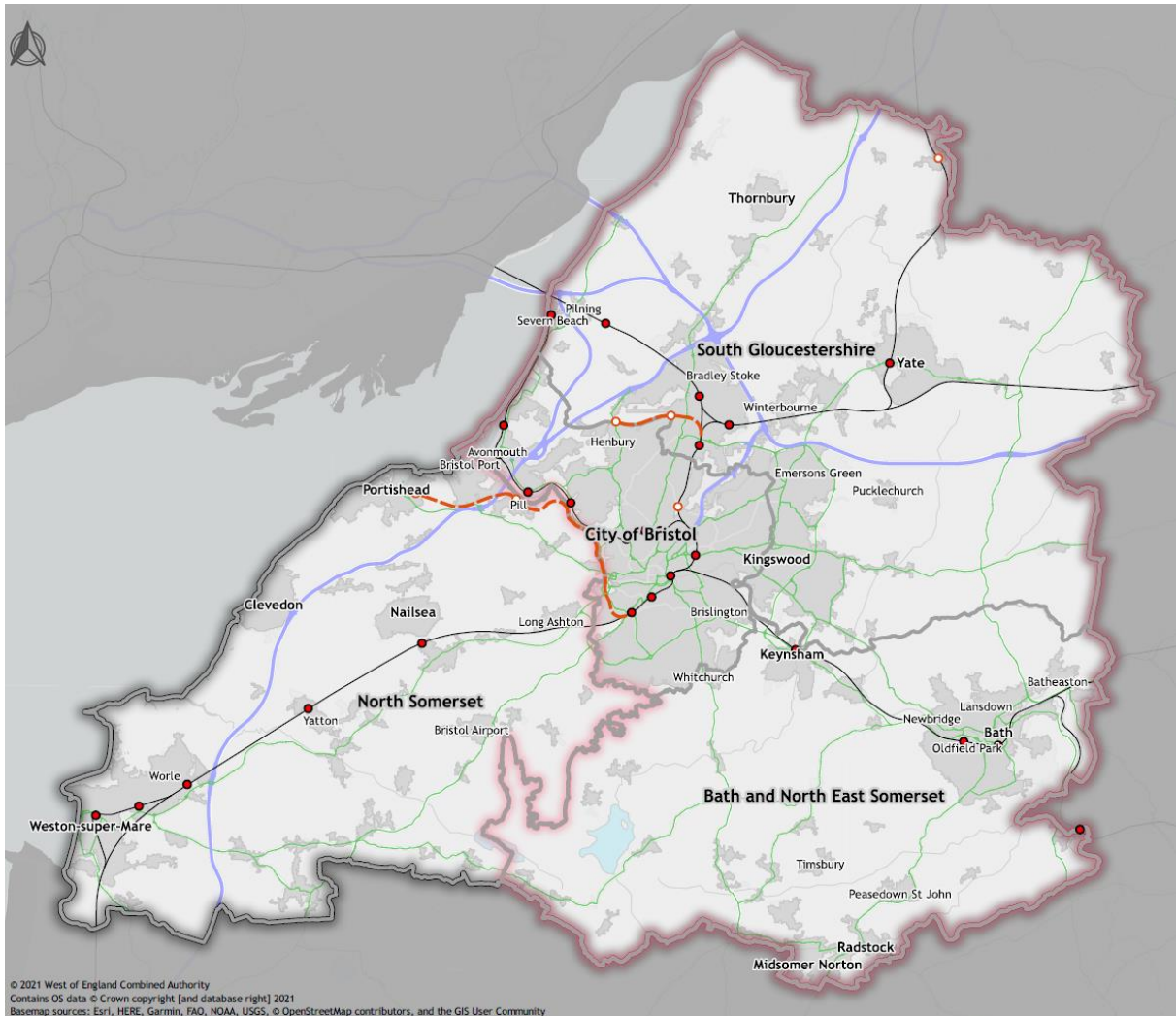
Engagement with operators on the BSIP started in June 2021 and fortnightly and later monthly meetings were held on the development and implementation of the EP. Liaison with operators on an individual basis has taken place when requested. Key concerns raised and feedback received are listed in Appendix 2 and evaluated to contain only those which are pertinent to SMOs. This table has been assessed to fully consider the impact on SMOs when introducing the EP. Mitigation measures have been included in the table which will inform discussion with operators during ongoing engagement.

The principal issues raised were around costs and timescales. It is generally acknowledged that smaller operators will take longer to implement changes because they do not have access to the same level of resources as larger operators. To mitigate this, a proportionate approach will be taken to the implementation of Operation Requirements, noting that much of the planned capital investment by the LTAs will take place over a long time period. Exemptions and derogations will be considered in appropriate circumstances too.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Geographical area covered by West of England EP Plan

Figure 1 - Geographical area covered by West of England Enhanced Partnership Plan



Appendix 2 Assessment of the impact on small and medium-sized operators (SMOs)

Issue	Feedback from SMOs	Mitigation	Comments & Next Steps
Electronic Bus Service Registration	Lack of technical / financial support (for operators not under extensive contracts to scheduling software providers)	EBSR is the Traffic Commissioners' own system and not accessible to others. A new system will be set up to receive TransXChange files. Support will be provided by LTAs to SMOs.	LTA commitment added to EPS.
Public facing s19 and s22 operations (as part of the wider network)	Not referred to in the BSIP or draft EP document, but needs to be covered. LTAs should agree not to use s22 operations as a cheap option.	Vehicles operated under s19 permits cannot be used for services open to the general public. Bus services operated by vehicles with s22 permits are excluded from EPs.	LTAs will follow guidance by entering into voluntary agreements with s22 service providers where they form part of the local bus network.
Procurement processes for contracted bus services	Not referred to in the BSIP or draft EP document. LTAs need to commit to fair procurement processes. Allegations of practices favouring large providers and changes being made to contract specification after award.	All public bodies have policies which should ensure a fair and transparent procurement system that provides value for money is in place. There is an established process to challenge procurement decisions. Contracts have flexibility for changes to be negotiated after award. Procurement of new services funded by the BSIP will present new opportunities for SMOs.	Procurement of contracts is not an issue for the EP but LTAs will review their processes to ensure fairness to all potential bidders. A competition test will be carried out on the EP Schemes
Meaningful consultation with service users and providers over revisions to	No commitment to do this by LTAs	Consultation forms part of the established procurement process but there are circumstances when it is not possible owing to the need to respond to events at short notice.	Consultation will take place on all planned route and network changes, and this will be carried out by LTAs and operators within the framework of the EP.

supported services			
Upgrade vehicles to Euro VI emission standard	<p>The target to get all vehicles to Euro V1 emission by 2023 is unachievable for small operators.</p> <p>Lack of financial support available support to retrofit. Retrofit supplier previously caused serious issues.</p> <p>Euro V vehicles are only 4 or 5 years old.</p>	<p>Funding will be available to support retrofitting or replacement.</p> <p>Use of existing funding options such as CAZ and Government funding bids will be supported.</p> <p>LTAs will consider exemptions until 31 December 2025 in circumstances such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) A longstanding contract with linked assets (exempt to the end of the initial contract term) (ii) Short term emergency contracts of no more than 13 months duration (iii) Where the value of the required modification exceeds the value of the asset (iv) Operators of 5 or less vehicles under a full national/international Operator’s Licence held within the EP area (v) Historic vehicles used for special events. 	<p>The wording of the EPS will include the flexibility described.</p> <p>It is recognised that contract prices may rise to reflect the higher standard being required on bus service contracts.</p>
Cost of installing new ticketing systems to facilitate multi-operator ticketing	Operators have different systems, to align them will be costly	<p>This is going to be a gradual process and financial support will be available</p> <p>Subject to Committee decision the West of England CA will fund the purchase and installation of tap off readers</p> <p>Tap off readers could make reimbursement for concessionary travel fairer for operators by linking it directly to the actual fares’ revenue forgone.</p>	A national delivery platform (Coral) is being developed for post-pay capped ticketing. Coral will provide a solution that will encompass all operators where it is applied to a local product

<p>Low fares in urban areas</p>	<p>Expectation on operators to fund upgrading vehicles and reduce fares from an increase in revenue that materialises from new bus priority measures. LTAs likely to receive funding for additional staff but operators will bear the brunt of the costs.</p>	<p>The aspiration for low fares in urban areas is in the National Bus Strategy.</p> <p>In the EP, operators will be asked to review their fares in urban areas and satisfy themselves that fares for travel within those areas are not a barrier to potential bus users.</p>	<p>Local fares have been applied by First Bus in Clevedon, Nailsea, Portishead, Thornbury and Yate, and they have been successful in encouraging local travel.</p>
<p>Concessionary travel</p>	<p>Reimbursement rate has gone down since free travel was introduced.</p> <p>Concessionary travel has only returned to 55% of pre-COVID levels and this will create a huge shortfall in operators' revenue.</p> <p>Whilst patronage is still recovering, operators need financial support to enable services to be maintained.</p>	<p>Operators have access to Bus Recovery Grant funding from Government to cover the shortfall in revenue.</p> <p>Reimbursement for concessionary travel was maintained at pre-Covid levels in 2020/21 and 2021/22 (adjusted down where mileage operated was lower than 100% of pre-Covid). In 2022/23, reimbursement has reduced as a percentage of pre-COVID levels as the year has progressed, according to a taper introduced by the DfT. Operators have moved back to reimbursement according to actual patronage where this was preferable. From April 2023, reimbursement will be according to actual patronage levels.</p> <p>A significant part of the payment is currently a subsidy because actual travel is much lower, although this subsidy amount has reduced during 2022/23 and some smaller operators are moving back to using actual patronage as the basis for reimbursement.</p> <p>Draft reimbursement rates have been calculated in accordance with prevailing Government guidance, to be used for reimbursement in 2023-24.</p>	<p>The Government guidance for 2022-23 acknowledges that the underlying assumptions behind reimbursement calculations are outdated. They have committed to undertaking a more substantial review of concessionary travel reimbursement over the coming year.</p>
<p>Governance arrangements</p>	<p>Concern about board membership and the numbers</p>	<p>Include operators with total employees in the UK of more than 250 people involved in bus operations but that have</p>	<p>The proposed EP governance structure has been amended to</p>

	of SMO operator votes not being sufficient.	less than 50% of total mileage on Local Services in the EP Area. Ensure voting arrangements do not allow the one operator to push through decisions for all.	reflect the points raised. Board decisions are now conditional on agreement by at least two of the three Bus Operator Groups.
Exempted Services	Services for football are noted as exempt but this should include all sporting and special events.		Exempted services were amended to incorporate sporting events more widely.

Appendix 3 Competition Test

Schedule 10 to the 2000 Act contains a Competition Test which applies where LTAs develop EP schemes.

There are three distinct stages to the Competition Test:

- 1** *An assessment of whether the proposed scheme has, or is likely to have, a significantly adverse effect on competition.*

If it does not have such an effect, then the competition test will be satisfied. If, however, it does have a significantly adverse effect on competition, or is likely to have such an effect, the second and third stages below must be considered.

- 2** *An assessment of whether a scheme which has a significantly adverse effect on competition may be justified.*

A scheme may be justified if it is set up with a view to achieving one or more of three specific purposes as follows:

- (i) securing improvements in the quality of vehicles or facilities used for or in connection with the provision of local services
- (ii) securing other improvements in local services of benefit to users of local services, and
- (iii) reducing or limiting traffic congestion, noise or air pollution.

- 3** *An assessment of whether the significantly adverse effect is, or is likely to be, 'proportionate' to the achievement of the purpose or purposes of the scheme*

Proportionality in this respect is explained in Schedule 10 to the 2000 Act.

In respect of the West of England EP Scheme, the LTAs have carried out a Competition Test and concluded that:

- (a) The imposition of Route Requirements is likely to have a significantly adverse effect on competition
- (b) A significantly adverse effect can be justified in this respect because it will limit traffic congestion, noise and air pollution
- (c) The significantly adverse effect is proportionate to the achievement of the objectives of the scheme.