

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

30 March 2023

Bus Service Improvement Plan 2022 update

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

In October 2021, in response to the new National Bus Strategy, Dorset Council submitted a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to the Department for Transport (DfT). This detailed how the council would transform the bus service network in Dorset and included a costed budget. The council's bid for government bus transformation funding was unsuccessful but there are actions in the BSIP that can be implemented from existing funding streams and through greater partnership working. The BSIP 2022 document is the annual update of the original BSIP. It sets out the council's approach to making improvements within existing budgets and has clear priorities should future funding become available.

Recommendation:

That the committee notes and comments on the refreshed Bus Service Improvement Plan and provides feedback on the short-term delivery programme through to 2024/25.

Reason for Recommendation:

The BSIP must be updated annually to ensure that the document remains relevant and submitted to the Department for Transport for review. This will allow the council and bus operators to respond quickly should there be further funding available at any point. Submission of the annual update to the DfT signals that we remain engaged with the process.

The BSIP captures the longer term aims of the council, operators, bus users and other stakeholders. These will change over time and regular consultation with operators through the Enhanced Partnership and feedback from stakeholders through the Bus User and Stakeholder group will inform the document in the future.

Although our bus transformation funding request was not met by government, there are actions within the BSIP that can progress while working within existing budgets. We will concentrate on these and make improvements to services and infrastructure when opportunities present themselves.

1. *Report*

- 1.1 In March 2021 Government launched Bus Back Better, a new National Bus Strategy (NBS) for England outside London. The National Bus Strategy sets out a vision to improve bus services in England outside London through greater local leadership, to reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back to bus.
- 1.2 Local Transport Authorities and local bus operators must work closer together and with communities to plan and deliver a fully integrated service offering multi-modal tickets, bus priority measures, high quality information for all passengers, and better turn-up-and-go frequencies that keep running into the evenings and at weekends. The Bus Services Act 2017 provides the legal basis for the changes and the Strategy committed £3 billion of new funding to achieve these goals.
- 1.3 The Government required that a Bus Service Improvement Plan would be produced by all upper-tier authorities in England covering each Local Transport Authorities full geographical area, all local bus services within it, and take proper account of the differing needs of parts of that area (e.g. urban and rural elements).
- 1.4 The National Bus Strategy provides much greater emphasis on partnership working, where authorities and bus operators form statutory partnerships to define bus networks, service levels and fare strategies. By

executive decision notice dated 29 June 2021 Dorset Council gave approval to proceed with the development of an Enhanced Partnership. On 7th September 2021 Dorset Council Cabinet approved the recommendations to:

- a) Agree the scope of the outline Bus Service Improvement Plan and the commitment of resources within existing budgets to take forward work to publish a first version of the Plan by the end of October 2021, be supported.
 - b) Agree that authority be delegated to the relevant portfolio holder, in consultation with the Executive Director for Place to approve the definitive version of the Plan before it is published.
- 1.5 There is a commitment for each Local Transport Authority to produce a refreshed BSIP each year to keep the document relevant which is why we are asking for the Scrutiny Committee to note and comments on the refreshed Bus Service Improvement Plan and approves its publication.
- 1.6 The Dorset BSIP did not receive government bus transformation funding so this refreshed document has only minor updates – the original document that was approved in 2021 - Bus Service Improvement Plan 2021 - Dorset Council remains the underpinning document.
- 1.7 The short-term delivery programme 2022/23 – 2024/25 demonstrates actions that we believe are deliverable.

	Deliverable outputs with no external funding	Additional deliverable outputs with external funding
Better network coverage and scale	Focus on maintaining the current bus network and growing patronage. Introduce the council's new tender model. Work closely with operators to identify where service improvements could be introduced on a commercial basis and from contributions secured through planning.	Improve the core network frequency and coverage on commercial and supported routes. Introduce flexible on-demand transport services feeding into the core network. Maintain summer service levels throughout the year on core routes. Eventual aim to have 100% transport coverage across Dorset with the voluntary and commercial sectors working with Dorset Council and our bus operators.
Better integration between modes	Provide better integration between all modes - bus, walking, cycling, community and voluntary transport and rail. Co-ordinate timetables between	Identify, introduce and monitor mobility hubs that include safe cycle storage, waiting facilities and travel information. Increase levels of connectivity between all

	different modes to enable connectivity.	transport modes, especially where there is known demand.
Better and clearer information	Develop a strategy that provides a consistent approach to information provision across the area to include printed, online and 'at stop' material. Create a Dorset travel portal to host this information. Produce a network map for all routes.	Continually develop the Dorset Travel portal until it is a 'one stop' platform for travel information, ticket purchase and, in the future the possibility to work with the Tourism industry to provide 'all in' ticketing for public transport users.
Better journey time reliability	Develop a targeted approach to bus priority using a range of measures including bus lanes, bus gates, advanced signal priority, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions.	Provide bus priority at known pinch points and along high frequency, high use corridors, and include them in the planning stage of any future Highways schemes.
Better value and integrated fares	Initiate a multi-operator Dorset ticket, initially across the tendered services but with the aim to roll out to include all operators and services. Promote Plus Bus tickets in relevant areas.	Introduce daily fare capping. Provide discounted tickets across the area. Introduce a Dorset wide ticket for ages 16-25.
Better vehicle standards and lower emissions	Work within the Enhanced Partnership to increase the standard of the fleet in Dorset across all operators.	Introduction of first zero emission buses as initial step towards a fully decarbonised fleet by 2035.

1.8 The BSIP and Enhanced Partnership approach has already made significant achievements:

- Protected the existing bus network as far as possible from the impact of covid and threats posed by significant operating cost increases.
- Introduced a new tender model for contracting supported services. As this model is rolled out it creates new opportunities to provide multi operator ticketing and the development of community transport or flexible on demand transport to feed into hubs along the route.
- Introduced a standard design for bus stop flags and shelters with the first stops to use this new style installed in the Wimborne and Ferndown areas as part of the Transforming Cities project.

- Delivered improvements to the environment around Weymouth Rail Station gateway which has opened up the forecourt area for bus users, and provided a new real time information screen, a new waiting shelter, and improved connectivity from the station to the town centre.
- Delivering a large investment in sustainable transport infrastructure in south east Dorset through the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) programme and other junction enhancements to improve pedestrian/cycle safety and movement in town centres and along bus corridors.
- Improving first and last mile connections through the delivery of the south east Dorset bike share scheme and developing designs for future construction of schemes which facilitate better active travel links between public transport interchanges.

2. **Financial Implications**

- 2.1 Working with operators and stakeholders, we will introduce beneficial changes to the bus network where we can, within existing council funding streams.
- 2.2 Existing budgets are under pressure due to rising costs – operators are dealing with increased fuel costs and also, higher staffing costs. During COVID, many drivers left the industry to work for delivery companies and driver recruitment and retention remains an issue for bus operators. This has led to higher contract prices and in some cases service frequency has had to be reduced.
- 2.3 The council will work with the companies to maintain and improve the network and infrastructure. At the same time, all opportunities for external funding will be explored to allow us to carry out the actions outlined in the BSIP.
- 2.4 The DfT has provided funding for a dedicated post within the council to allow this work to be carried out.

3. **Environmental Implications**

- 3.1 The BSIP supports the joint Dorset Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 objective of reducing Dorset's carbon emissions through transport and the delivery of actions set out in the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy 2021 to improve the quality and availability of public transport.

- 3.2 The BSIP seeks to achieve behaviour change and mode shift away from the private motor vehicle to bus travel. Evidence shows that reducing the number of cars on the road has the potential to lead to significant carbon emission reductions.
- 3.3 The BSIP contains plans to move towards a zero-emission bus fleet and subject to government funding, we will reach this aim through our Enhanced Partnership with bus operators.

4. **Well-being and Health Implications**

- 4.1 The Enhanced Partnership will deliver the objectives of the BSIP to improve health and well-being through better accessibility, reduced social isolation and support for people to maintain independent lives.

5. **Other Implications**

- 5.1 No other implications from the recommendations in this report have been identified.

6. **Risk Assessment**

- 6.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was prepared for the 2021 Bus Service Improvement Plan - [Appendix C - BSIP EP EqIA Oct21.pdf \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](#) – and is still relevant to this refreshed version and will be revised as the plan progresses.
- 7.2 The assessment has found that there were no negative impacts on Dorset Council residents’ protected characteristics.

8. **Appendices**

- 8.1 Links to the 2021 Dorset BSIP and draft 2022 Dorset BSIP refresh:

Appendix 1 – [2021 Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) and [Appendices](#)

Appendix 2 – 2022 Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan Draft

9. **Background Papers**

9.1 Links are provided to the previous Cabinet reports and decisions:

[Bus Service Improvement Plan Cabinet Report 7th September 2021 and printed decision.](#)

[Bus Service Improvement Plan - Dorset's Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme Cabinet Report 1st March 2022 and printed decision.](#)