



Dorset
Council

Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan 2022

Cover Page

Foreword

Dear Minister for Roads, Buses and Places

I am pleased to present our refreshed plan to transform bus services in Dorset. Despite not receiving any funding from the Department of Transport in this round of funding, the council is continuing to work with our operators through our Enhanced Partnership to create a bus network that will meet the needs of people of all ages and gives our residents the opportunities they deserve to access work, education, training, health services and leisure opportunities within Dorset and the surrounding council areas.

We are concentrating on those actions that we can introduce within our existing funding structure to make meaningful immediate improvements to public transport provision in Dorset. We continue to explore other funding opportunities that could help us to reach our aims, submitting bids as appropriate. These include S106 and CIL funding from new developments for improvements to bus services and roadside infrastructure, Levelling Up Fund Round 2, the Local Transport Plan programme, and Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas.

This refreshed document demonstrates some of the achievements we've already made but more importantly our plans for the schemes that we can introduce over the next three to four years to meet the needs of our residents and visitors. In the longer term I want to see significant investment that supports us to deliver an ambitious transformation of our bus network that improves people's lives and enhances Dorset as a place to live, work and visit.



Councillor Ray Bryan
Cabinet Portfolio Holder
Highways, Travel and Environment

Executive Summary

The Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) aims to achieve significant growth in the use of our bus network through transformational improvements and the raising of service standards. The council has set out ambitious plans to put the passenger first, to improve rural accessibility and to build confidence in the bus network. It will enable us to deliver our vision for a **reliable, efficient, safe and inclusive network that focuses on improving the lives of people and enhancing our local places.**

This BSIP is a response to the Government's National Bus Strategy Bus Back Better, aimed at improving bus services across England. It is a strategic document which sets out how the council and local bus operators will work together to plan and deliver services across Dorset through an Enhanced Partnership.

Our BSIP will deliver:

- **Better network coverage and scale** – more frequent services between hub locations, with feeder services enhancing rural mobility for communities across Dorset.
- **Better integration between modes** – always integrated bus services with all other modes including through timetable coordination, multi-modal travel information, and ticketing.
- **Better and clearer information** – information that is consistent, accessible, simple, clear, and coordinated, enabling the public to confidently plan and undertake connected journeys across the local bus network and wider public transport system.
- **Better journey time reliability** – faster and more reliable services through targeted corridor improvements.
- **Better value and integrated fares** – targeted fares designed to attract more bus passengers, and the roll-out of multi-operator, and multi-mode ticketing.
- **Better vehicle standards and lower emissions** – a modern, high standard zero-emission bus fleet by 2035.

The context for the BSIP is important to understand. Significant challenges must be addressed including:

- **This BSIP was not allocated any government bus transformation programme funding.** The delivery of the BSIP programme in full will require external funding to be secured.
- **Large areas of rural Dorset have no bus service** and our communities therefore suffer poor access to daily essentials, increasing social isolation and reducing opportunities, as well as seeing greater impacts from the cost-of-living crisis.
- **Our bus operators are struggling with rising operating costs, staff shortages, and falling revenues.** The Bus Revenue Grant funding is due to end in March 2023.
- **An ageing population and a high proportion of concessionary journeys** is creating an over-reliance on concessionary fare income to support services. The concessionary fares scheme has brought great benefits for older and disabled people. However, the council is concerned operator reimbursement in rural areas is inadequate and operators are losing out due to exceptionally high demand for concessionary travel. The council needs Government to recognise the significant challenge this poses in Dorset and other rural authorities by reviewing the concessionary travel scheme and make changes to the national policy to ensure it gives a fairer deal in rural areas and supports the delivery of better bus services in Dorset.
- **Further growth in tourism to Dorset's world class natural environment is not sustainable without significant improvements to bus services within the county.** Although summer service uplifts are welcome, winter timetables do not support local residents needs and encourage them to use these services year-round.

The council and local bus operators have established an Enhanced Partnership to deliver the improvements set out within this plan. This is supported by a new dedicated officer post.

The BSIP and enhanced Partnership approach has:

- **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, provided a new real time information screen, a new waiting shelter, and improved connectivity from the station to the town centre.
- **Delivered 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.
- **Improved 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.

Contents

Section 1 Overview	6	Appendix A	39
Introduction	6	Summary of Public and Stakeholder Engagement Activities	39
Vision	6	Appendix B	40
Dorset in Context	8	Maps and Tables	40
Policy context	9		
Enhanced Partnership	10		
Section 2 Current bus offer to passengers	11		
What do people think about buses in Dorset?	11		
Local bus network review	11		
Network Changes	15		
The ‘Dorset’ bus fleet	17		
The challenges for Dorset	18		
Section 3 Achievements	23		
Managing the impact of Covid	23		
Introduction of a new tender model	23		
Improving bus stop infrastructure	23		
Establishment of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) and EP officer post	24		
Improving transport interchanges	24		
Junction enhancements & bus priority measures	24		
Improving first and last mile connections	25		
Section 4 Headline Targets	26		
Indicators	26		
Monitoring and evaluation	27		
Targets	28		
Section 5 Delivery	29		
Deliverable short-term actions (2022/23 to 2024/25)	30		
Additional actions which can be delivered if external funding is secured	35		
Medium term plan (2025/26 to 2027/28)	37		
Long Term Transformation (5 years plus)	37		
Implementation	38		

Section 1 Overview

Introduction

The Government's National Bus Strategy was published in March 2021. It sets out a vision to improve local bus services by making them:

- more attractive for passengers
- more affordable
- easier to understand and use
- faster and more reliable
- a major tool in the reduction of carbon emissions enabling the Government to reach their 2050 net zero emissions target.

Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) were invited to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) working closely with local bus operators through an Enhanced Partnership. In October 2021 Dorset Council submitted its first [Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) which set a clear and ambitious vision to transform bus services across the council area.

To deliver the 2021 BSIP the council requested an initial investment between 2022 and 2025 of £92 million, capital and revenue, with further funding required beyond 2025, to come from the Government's £3 billion bus transformation programme. Despite presenting an ambitious plan and strong case for investment in the bus network, the [Department for Transport announced](#) that Dorset was not one of the thirty-one counties, city regions and unitary authorities that had been chosen for funding. The council remains committed to creating a bus network that meets the needs of people of all ages, and gives residents opportunities to access work, education, training, health and leisure within Dorset. Although it may not be possible to implement all the transformational measures proposed at this time, the council will work with local bus operators and passengers through the Enhanced Partnership to improve local bus services and grow bus patronage.

This first annual refreshed BSIP sets out our revised priorities and the actions we need to take to move our plans forward.

Vision

Our vision is by 2030 to create a reliable, efficient, safe and inclusive network that focuses on improving the lives of people and enhancing our local places.

Aims and objectives

Our aim is to **significantly grow the number of people using local buses across Dorset** by:

- **Increasing** local bus service frequencies on core routes.
- **Extending** daily service times on core routes.
- **Providing** a comprehensive network of travel options linking up communities and reducing rural isolation.
- **Addressing** gaps in the current network by developing our core bus services and integrating feeder services that link together and utilise new techniques in flexible on demand transport.

- **Protecting** Dorset’s environment by moving to a decarbonised local bus fleet using a progressive partnership approach with local bus operators.
- **Increasing** bus reliability through targeted bus priority and other traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions.
- **Raising** user satisfaction by making local buses and the wider public transport network more attractive, joined up and easy to use for everyone.

Delivery

We have put together a short-term programme that includes measures that we can deliver within our existing budget over the next three years, and additional improvements that can be delivered if external funding is secured. Our medium to longer term plans will depend on identifying and sourcing further funding streams. Full proposals can be seen in [Section 5](#).

Table 1 – Short term delivery programme 2022/23 – 2024/25

	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 different modes to enable connectivity.	Identify, introduce and monitor mobility hubs that include safe cycle storage, waiting facilities and travel information. Increase levels of connectivity between all 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 PlusBus 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.

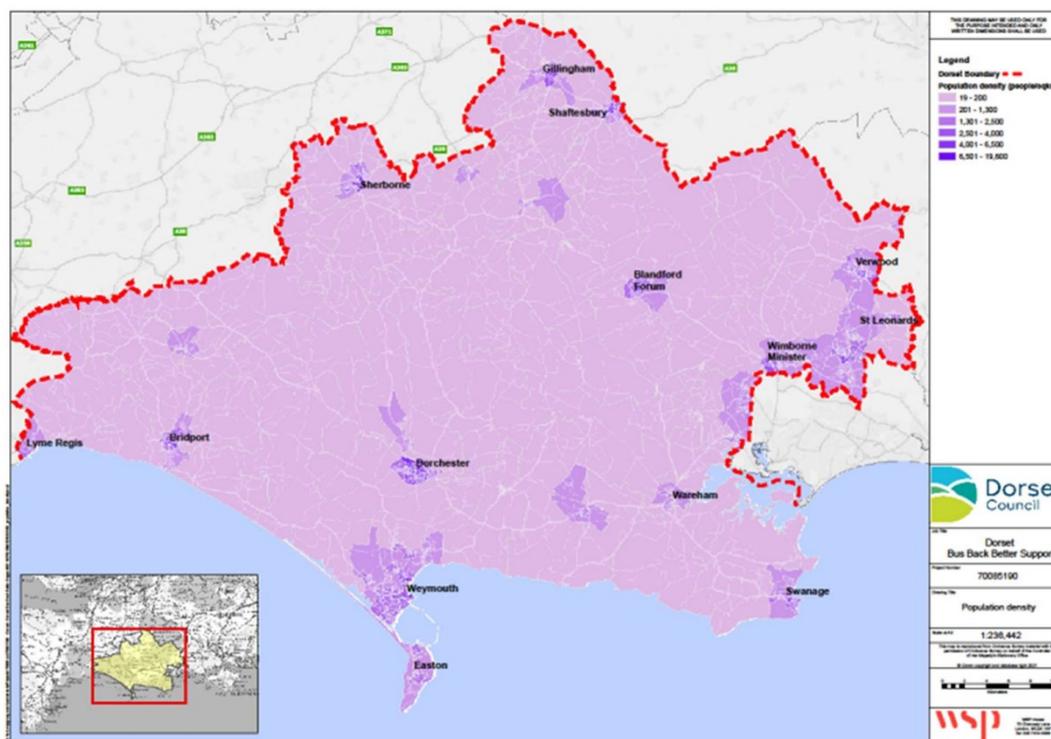
Dorset in Context

Dorset Council is the Local Transport Authority for the county of Dorset, except for the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) area. To view an area profile for Dorset Council [click here](#).

The council area is predominately rural in nature with a population of 379,791. The population is sparsely distributed across Dorset which has one of the lowest population densities in England (152 people/km²).

The main urban areas include Dorchester (county town), Weymouth and Portland, Wimborne, Ferndown and Verwood are further secondary centres in the east on the boundary shared with BCP and form part of the south east Dorset urban area. The rest of the Dorset Council area consists of market towns and villages with little or no connectivity to existing transport services. Having limited population between principal settlements and no critical mass to provide a strong customer base creates challenges operating and planning bus services in Dorset.

Figure 1 - Population Density and Key Settlements in Dorset



Dorset has one of the highest levels of deprivation with regards to geographical access to services in the country. Many of our rural areas are within the top 20% most deprived for geographical access to services, with sixty-six areas out of 219 within the top 20% most deprived nationally. The most deprived area in the county in terms of barriers to housing and key local services is West Purbeck in south east Dorset, which is the 121st most deprived area nationally out of 32,844. Those who do not have a car in these areas are severely disadvantaged with significant challenges accessing local services, healthcare, work and education. There is also a high level of rural isolation across the council area which could be resolved by better access to public transport. It is estimated that 1 in 5 households are vulnerable to social isolation/loneliness in Dorset. There is a particular problem for post sixteen students who may be limited in their career choices if they cannot access further education or apprenticeship schemes.

Weymouth and Portland, as well as other towns along the southern Dorset coast, have a high proportion of seasonal work in hospitality industries which is often part time, with unsocial hours and low pay. The lack of a transport network with affordable fares and buses that run at times that allow access to work with early starts and late finishes is challenging for many prospective employees.

The significant role of car ownership is illustrated by 84.8% of Dorset households having one or more vehicles, compared to 74.3% in England. There is a distinction between urban and rural areas, with rural areas having 85%+ of households with at least one vehicle, while in town centre areas car ownership will be much lower. Whilst Dorset does have some of the highest car ownership rates in England, a common feature within rural one-car households is those who are unable to use the car as/when required face potential mobility problems due to the lack of viable alternatives. This general reliance upon car use also poses challenges to the council's ambitions and policies around tackling climate change.

Dorset is a popular tourist destination, particularly in the coastal areas, with an estimated 15.5 million staying and day trips in 2020. Tourism is the largest economic sector in the county. The economic impact of tourism in Dorset is valued by the LEP at over £1Bn per year, employing over 40,000 people across the region.

The Jurassic Coast is England's only natural World Heritage Site, running along a 95 mile stretch of globally important geology and coastal scenery from Dorset and into East Devon. Within the [Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan \(2020-2025\)](#), rural isolation and pockets of significant social deprivation have been identified as significant issues with many small and relatively isolated communities supported by limited access to public transport. The wider promotion of sustainable transport options to visitors is listed as a critical success factor within the plan.

Dorset's AONB is a nationally important, protected landscape covering 40% of the county, stretching from Lyme Regis to Poole Harbour and reaching inland as far as Blandford Forum. In the [AONB Management Plan \(2019-2024\)](#) it is acknowledged most visitors use a car to get around which, whilst important to the local economy, has a significant impact on the AONB's landscape and environment.

The population age profile in Dorset is significantly older than the national average. An ageing population presents major challenges with concessionary journeys being higher in Dorset versus the south west regional average, creating an over-reliance on concessionary income to support services. This challenge is highlighted in [section 2](#).

Policy context

The national policy context for BSIPs can be summarised as covering three broad themes:

- 1. Bus reform:** The [National Bus Strategy](#) builds on the earlier [Bus Services Act \(2017\)](#). The National Bus Strategy provides greater emphasis on partnership working, where LTAs and local bus operators form statutory partnerships either through Enhanced Partnerships or Franchising and develop Bus Service Improvement Plans to define bus networks, service levels and fare strategies. It seeks to raise standards across England with the aim of more areas achieving levels similar to London.
- 2. Future of Mobility:** Bus services are fundamental to the Government's [Future of Mobility Urban Strategy](#) through developments such as Mobility-as-a-Service, digital demand-responsive transport and autonomous vehicles. A guiding principle is also that mobility services must be designed to operate as part of an integrated transport system combining public, private and multiple modes for transport users. The council is eagerly awaiting the government's Future of Mobility Rural Strategy which is expected to be published in 2023.
- 3. Net Zero:** The National Bus Strategy places Zero Emission Buses (ZEBs) at the heart of the Government's vision for the transformation of the bus offering in England. The [Zero Emission Buses Regional Area fund \(ZEBRA\)](#) is intended to help local transport authorities introduce ZEBs, reduce emissions, and improve local air quality. The [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](#) sets out what government, business and society needs to do to reduce emissions from transport to meet the UK's legally binding 2050 net zero emissions and climate change targets. Buses and coaches have a

crucial role to play in transport achieving net zero and driving the green transformation. We must increase the share of journeys taken by public transport – particularly in congested areas.

The important role of the bus in addressing many socio-economic issues facing Dorset is reflected in a diverse range of key local policy documents. A full review of over 30 existing local policies and strategies aligning with the National Bus Strategy has been undertaken.

The council will maximise the benefit of new national policy by viewing local policies holistically and amending appropriately. Work has commenced on a new joint Dorset Local Transport Plan which will need to align with the National Bus Strategy and reflect how policies relate to the Net Zero agenda.

Decarbonising road transport is a key action in the councils [Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy](#). Through this BSIP our aim is to continue to protect Dorset's environment by moving to a modern zero emission local bus fleet by 2035.

Our policies will also need to align with the emerging [Dorset Local Plan](#), due to be adopted in 2026, to demonstrate how the council will achieve sustainable development and seamless integration between all transport modes. This approach will deliver against the council's five key priorities set out in the [Dorset Council Plan 2022-24](#) to make Dorset a great place to live, work and visit by improving the lives of people as well as protecting and enhancing our local places.

Enhanced Partnership

Dorset Council has made an [Enhanced Partnership](#) with the local transport operators running public bus services in the Dorset Council area.

Traditionally, bus companies have not usually worked together in this way. The Dorset Enhanced Partnership will facilitate closer working between the council and bus companies operating in the area, to achieve a complete transport network that prioritises passengers' interests. With ambitious commitments to improve our bus services, the Enhanced Partnership will allow stakeholder groups and bus users to contribute to our aims for the future bus network in Dorset.

The Governance structure and the formal arrangements for the Enhanced Partnership are set out in the [Dorset EP Plan and Scheme](#). The Enhanced Partnership Board will oversee the delivery of the BSIP and EP Plan and Scheme. The Board is supported by the Enhanced Partnership Forum which draws its membership from all local bus and community transport operators, train operating companies, express coach operators, all neighbouring transport authorities, and Dorset Council officers from Dorset Travel, Highways and Planning.

A Bus User and Stakeholder (BUS) Group will represent the views of a wider group of representatives including passengers. The BUS Group reports the views of passengers and third parties on the performance of bus services locally and facilitates the exchange of views, data and ideas on how to improve bus services in the BSIP's geographical area. The BUS Group Chair is a member of the EP Forum to ensure that the views of passengers, the wider public and stakeholders have influence on how the issues raised can be addressed through the EP Plan and Scheme.

Section 2 Current bus offer to passengers

What do people think about buses in Dorset?

During 2021 and 2022 surveys and workshops were conducted with the public and local interest groups, see [appendix A](#) for details. These have strengthened the view that the bus network in Dorset is failing to meet the expectations and needs of many people to access their education, health services, employment opportunities and other essential services at the times and on days when they need to travel.

There are low levels of satisfaction with bus services in Dorset. From the 2021 public online survey, only 29% of respondents were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their local bus services. Further work is needed to gain a better understanding of the causes of low satisfaction. A target for increasing customer satisfaction levels has been set within the BSIP.

Actual and perceived passenger safety both on and off local bus services across the Dorset network is very good. 77% of residents surveyed in 2021 said they felt 'very' or 'fairly' safe when on the bus network and 5% felt unsafe. However, female bus users and residents who identified as disabled reported lower feelings of safety. Further work is needed to understand what would make women and people with disabilities feel safer accessing and using the bus network.

Several reasons that stop residents using the bus have been highlighted. The main issues have been identified as infrequent bus services, routes not going where individuals want to go, and the cost of fares. Connections between different modes of transport has also been highlighted as an area which needs improvement across Dorset. These are issues that will be addressed through the BSIP and Enhanced Partnership to encourage greater bus use in Dorset.

The engagement activity with the public and local interest groups has provided a clear list of priorities people want to see delivered through the BSIP. The top three priorities to be addressed through the BSIP and Enhanced Partnership are:

- **Additional bus routes**
- **Higher frequency services including at weekends**
- **Cheaper fares and a more understandable fare structure**

The council and its partners recognise that to achieve the ambitious transformation of bus services that people want requires significant new sources of funding. We are committed to pursuing all available funding opportunities and will continue to make the case for government investment for better bus services in Dorset.

Local bus network review

The 2021 Dorset BSIP sets out a detailed baseline analysis of the local bus network. This section does not repeat this in detail, rather it seeks to highlight the main characteristics of the current bus offer.

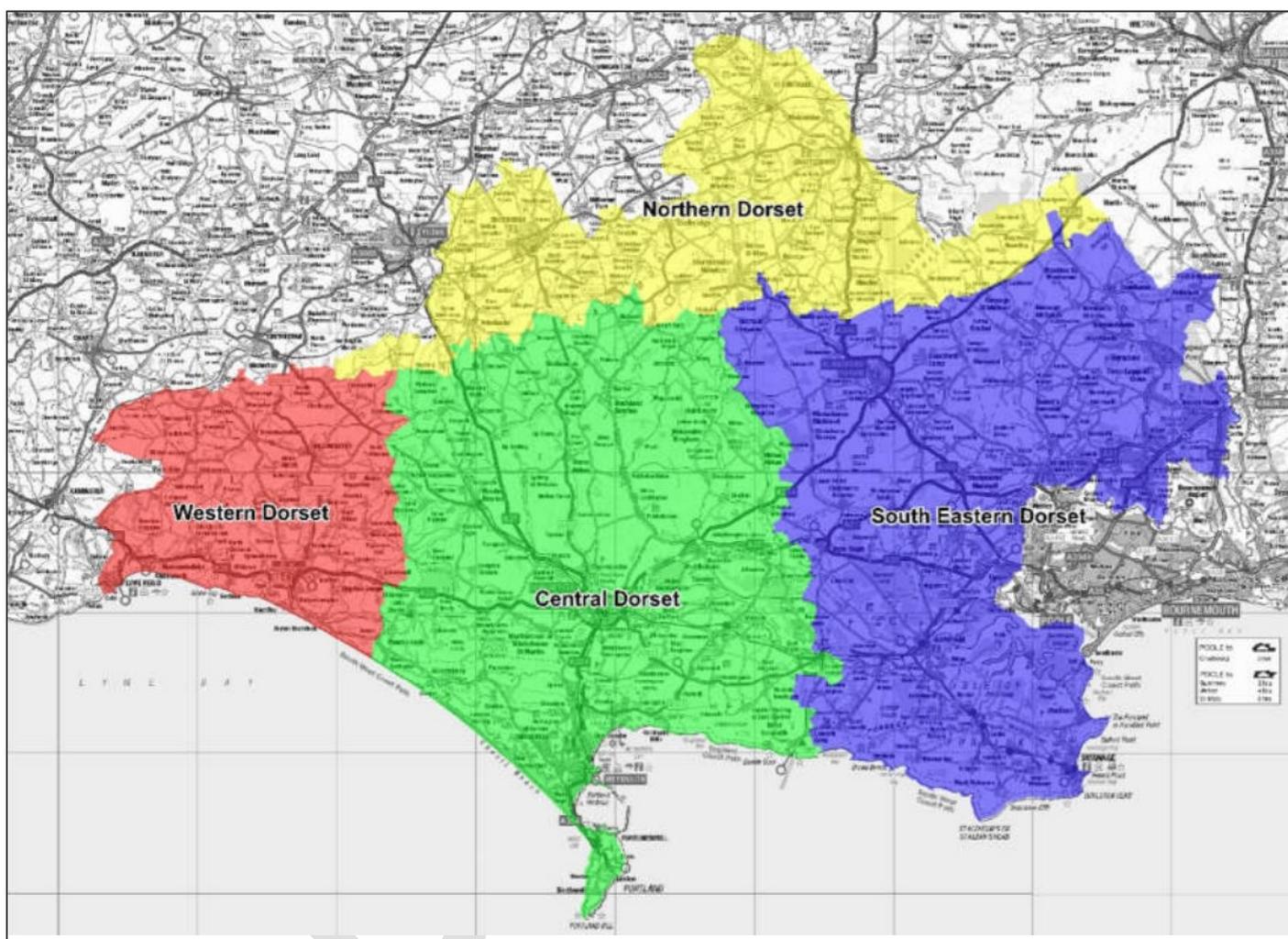
The council area is predominately rural. The 2020 report 'Transport Deserts – The absence of transport choice in England's small towns' [Campaign for Better Transport \(2020\)](#) identified areas within Dorset where there is little or no access to any meaningful public or community transport. This issue has also been highlighted by our Transport Action Groups.

Most bus services in Dorset are run commercially. Eleven services are supported by the council, together these form a core network connecting the larger towns and villages. Bus services are provided by three main operators – Go South Coast, First Bus and South West Coaches. In recent months, one operator has gone into liquidation and two others have withdrawn services that ran into the council area. The services lost as a result have in part been picked up by other operators but with reduced levels of operation.

Community and voluntary transport options run in several areas across Dorset. These schemes are varied, ranging from small neighbourhood car schemes which are totally independent, with each setting its own rules, to demand responsive style routes run by community transport operators under Section 22 licences. Over 90% of the council area is covered by one or more schemes. Although these schemes are valued by the passengers who use them, they cannot provide a level of service that allows residents to access employment and health appointments on a regular basis.

For the purposes of the BSIP we are aligning with functional housing and economic areas set out in the Dorset local plan (Fig 5.) Each have their own challenges with transport provision reflected in them.

Figure 5 - Representation of the functional areas in Dorset



South Eastern Dorset

South Eastern Dorset shares boundaries in the east and south east with the neighbouring local authorities of BCP and Hampshire County Council. In Dorset it extends towards Blandford and the surrounding villages and down to the Isle of Purbeck. The larger towns in the area along the boundary with BCP Council benefit from the urban services that run from the conurbation to the area. As a result, the majority of these services run at 30-minute frequencies from Mondays to Saturdays and also run on Sundays and in the evenings. In Purbeck, services tend to run hourly all day and into the evening from Mondays to Saturdays with fewer services running on Sundays. Seasonal timetable uplifts and additional routes are added during the summer. However, in the more rural parts of this area, around Blandford and the north east, services are not as frequent with some running on Mondays to Fridays only or on one or two days a week only. Some communities have no regular transport and rely on local community car schemes so this area would benefit from enhanced demand responsive style routes that could also run in the neighbouring North Dorset

area. The Weymouth to Waterloo rail line runs through the southern section of this area with stations at Wareham and Holton Heath. Neither have easy access to local bus services.

Dorset Council supported bus routes in this area link:

Blandford – Shaftesbury

(Yeovil) – Sherborne – Sturminster Newton – Blandford

(Salisbury) – Blandford

Blandford – Dorchester – (Weymouth)

Lytchett Matravers – (Poole)

Weymouth – Wareham – (Poole), supported during winter months only

Central Dorset

Central Dorset contains the urban areas of Weymouth, Portland, and Dorchester. Outside these settlements there are several larger villages such as Maiden Newton and Winterbourne Abbas that have no bus services, although other villages are served by commercial or subsidised routes. Where there are services, they are at best hourly. The Bristol – Weymouth and Weymouth – Waterloo rail lines run through the area from North to South and West to East but not all the stations are easily accessible from the villages they serve meaning that rail is not always seen as a viable option.

Bus routes run all through the year along the Jurassic Coast from Lyme Regis to Poole, During the holiday season these routes run every day and the timetables are enhanced. Additional routes are registered mainly aimed at capturing the leisure market, but winter levels of service are far less frequent, particularly on Sundays. Buses run from Mondays to Saturdays with no evening services. Residents using these routes to access employment cannot rely on them for all year-round travel.

Services in and around Weymouth and on the Dorchester to Weymouth corridor run frequently, up to every 15 minutes all year round, offering evening and Sunday services. Again, the service frequency is reduced for the winter months. However, there are pockets of Weymouth where commercially run routes have been cancelled due to low passenger numbers, leaving these areas with no local bus service.

Dorset Council supported bus routes in this area link:

(Yeovil) – Sherborne – Dorchester

Blandford – Dorchester

Poundbury – Dorchester (supported through Section 106 developer funding)

Weymouth – Wareham – (Poole), supported during winter months only

Northern Dorset

Northern Dorset neighbours all three of the Dorset areas as well as Somerset and Wiltshire. It is the least affected by service changes caused by tourism and the services are relatively stable all year. Services running in this area are mainly subsidised by Dorset Council or neighbouring local authorities. Yeovil or Salisbury are the closest destinations for residents in Sherborne, Gillingham or Shaftesbury requiring larger shops and amenities, and further education colleges. Apart from the Gillingham to Shaftesbury route which has a thirty-minute frequency on Mondays to Fridays and a lower frequency on Saturdays, bus routes are at the best hourly or two hourly and do not run in the evenings and at weekends. There is an intention to increase the frequency and coverage on the Gillingham to Shaftesbury route by using Section 106

developer funding. The Exeter – Salisbury – London rail line serves Sherborne and Gillingham stations in Dorset, and both have accessible access to services.

Dorset Council supported bus routes in this area link:

Gillingham – Shaftesbury

Blandford – Shaftesbury

Sturminster Newton - Gillingham

(Yeovil) – Sherborne – Sturminster Newton – Blandford

(Yeovil) – Sherborne – Dorchester

Western Dorset

Western Dorset has boundaries with Devon and Somerset as well as the Central and North Dorset areas.

There are two main bus corridors in the area that link towns and villages in the southern part of the area to Weymouth and Dorchester in the east and Axminster in the west. The routes are seasonal with daily coverage in the summer with routes operating hourly frequencies, but this is reduced during the winter months with routes operating two hourly frequencies.

A third corridor connects Bridport to Crewkerne and Yeovil. This runs to the same timetable all year round, providing eight daily services from Beaminster and three daily services through to Yeovil, but the timetable is limited to Mondays to Fridays.

Three town councils in this area subsidise varying levels of bus services for their local communities. The north west of this area has some community transport coverage but this is limited.

There is no rail network in the area but buses from these towns serve the rail stations at Axminster, Dorchester, Weymouth and Crewkerne.

Dorset Council supported bus routes in this area link:

Bridport – Beaminster – (Crewkerne and Yeovil)

Network Changes

The network has stayed relatively stable over the last year but there has been some change in the frequency of individual services. As referred to earlier, a local operator in the east of the county went into liquidation in August of this year. Another operator stepped in and within 48 hours had registered most of the routes previously covered. The effect on the Dorset network was limited, with a key route from Wimborne to Bournemouth via Bournemouth University and the railway station continuing without a break in service.

Table 1 in [appendix B](#) shows the service frequency changes between 2021/22 and 2022/23. These can be summarised as:

Increased frequency: Two routes in the south eastern area, both commercial between Wimborne and Poole. In the western area, the timetables on two commercial services have been adjusted so that the service frequency between Bridport and Axminster has been enhanced. The route between Bridport and Beaminster now extends to Yeovil.

No change: Twenty-four routes across all areas – commercial and supported.

Reduced frequency: Four commercial routes in the central area – mainly Weymouth and Portland based routes. One route in the western area from Lyme Regis to Exeter has been cancelled – it was replaced by

Devon County Council, but the frequency has been reduced and the route shortened so Exeter is no longer directly served from the Western end of the council area.

Cancelled services: One route in the central area – no replacement service has been commercially registered, and the route is not currently in scope for financial support from Dorset Council.

With support from the Department for Transport and Dorset Council the three main companies operating bus services in Dorset - First Bus, Go South Coast (operating as morebus, Damory and Salisbury Reds) and South West Coaches have largely maintained the pre-Covid network in the area. However, there are several significant challenges that persist and pose a real risk to the bus network in years ahead.

- Bus operators are facing inflationary pressures with rising fuel and utility costs.
- There is still a shortage of drivers meaning that some services are running less frequently than they were before Covid and operators are having to increase wages to maintain staffing levels.
- The Bus Revenue Grant funding is due to end in March 2023.
- Uncertainty remains over the reimbursement levels of ENCTS payments to operators.

Park & Ride

Weymouth Gateway is a park and ride site alongside the A354, the main route into Weymouth from the A35 trunk route. The site has a waiting room which is currently not in use and public conveniences which are only open during the summer months. A local bus service stops close by (200m) from the site all year round and offers a special Park and Ride ticket from that stop. During the height of the summer the local bus is often full, and passengers must wait for longer than is acceptable. Parking in Weymouth during the summer season is difficult and cars add to the congestion and pollution caused by circling to find spaces. The council submitted a bid for Levelling Up Funding to enhance this Park and Ride site making it an all year round fully functioning site with electric charging points and a dedicated electric bus service from the site into Weymouth Town Centre.

Purbeck Gateway is on the outskirts of Corfe Castle, just off the A351 between Wareham and Swanage. The A351 is the main road into Swanage and although there is not an all year round dedicated park and ride service, a local bus service stops nearby during the winter and during the summer months services call into the site. There is pedestrian access to Corfe Castle and the Swanage Railway but this is not suitable for all people. Preliminary designs have been produced for a walking and cycling route between Purbeck Gateway and the Corfe Castle Visitor Centre. Subject to confirmation of final funding and land purchase the scheme is on track to be constructed in 2024/25.

Integration with other modes of transport

Rail has an important role in the network providing links to employment and education destinations in neighbouring authorities as well as further afield. Three rail lines run through Dorset as shown on the [network map](#) in section 2:

- South Western Railway: Exeter - Yeovil - Salisbury - London Waterloo,
- South Western Railway: Weymouth - Bournemouth - Southampton - London Waterloo
- Great Western Railway: Bristol - Bath - Westbury - Yeovil – Weymouth

However, access to the rail network across Dorset is limited. Areas across the south and south east (Weymouth-Dorchester-Wareham-BCP) benefit from two trains an hour in each direction serving important commuter, business and leisure destinations. The Heart of Wessex line provides a limited service, eight trains on weekdays, through the western centre of the county between Weymouth-Dorchester-Yeovil, generally following the A37 corridor. The current frequency of this route and gaps in services at peak times

makes this route unattractive for regular commuting and make integration with local bus services difficult to achieve. In the north of the county, the London Waterloo-Exeter line serves Gillingham and Sherborne within Dorset, with an hourly daytime weekday frequency with additional peak time services, plus stations at Crewkerne, Templecombe and Yeovil Junction in Somerset.

Additionally, a heritage line runs from Swanage to Norden, just outside Corfe Castle. The line continues to Wareham where there is capacity to link into the national rail network. The Swanage Railway is developing a Strategic Outline Business Case to access funding from the Government's 'Restoring Your Railway' initiative with aspirations to deliver a regular passenger service from Swanage to Wareham. At the same time, as part of the Dorset Council Connectivity study the council is working with Network Rail to provide a Metro Service between Wareham and Brockenhurst. If we are successful, apart from opening up the Purbeck Peninsular for rail passengers, traffic along the A351 will be reduced and bus services will not get caught in the traffic congestion that builds up in this area. This will improve the reliability of bus services and consequently attract more passengers which in turn will reduce car use and carbon emissions and help the council meet its environmental targets set out in the BSIP and Local Transport Plan.

Information

Bus users and non-bus users alike have made it clear that the provision of accurate timetable information is essential to encourage people to use public transport. Whilst a key element of promoting bus services, better information was not one of the highest priorities identified by the public or stakeholders.

The availability of comprehensive passenger information is provided through a wide mix of sources including online information, printed information (at stop or as a leaflet), and information dispensed by telephone enquiry service. There is a clear gap between awareness and utilisation of the operator-specific websites and the journey planning functionality within Google (Maps) versus the Traveline South West and Dorset Council Travel Dorset websites. The [Travel Dorset](#) portal provides links for journey planning, timetables, and maps, re-directing the user to [Traveline South West](#). However, the level and range of information provided on the council website is limited and mostly signposts to external websites. Operators have varying standards and formats for their online and printed timetable information. A one stop portal hosted by Dorset Council as proposed in the BSIP would make multi-modal journey information easier and simpler to find by providing full journey planning content including rail, buses, digital demand responsive transport services and fare information.

Dorset Council has Real Time Passenger information in most of the larger towns but in the rural areas this is not the case. There are some areas that do not have reliable signal for mobile phones so there is still a dependency on printed timetable material at bus stops which must be kept up to date. There is a good proportion of bus users who continue to rely upon static information sources, particularly visitors who are almost as reliant upon timetables posted at bus stops as they are on operator-specific websites. Mobile app use is currently relatively low.

The 'Dorset' bus fleet

The fleet profile for buses used by all companies on public bus services across the Dorset Council network demonstrates that there is room for improvement:

No. of vehicles in the fleet:	118	This figure fluctuates throughout the year due to seasonal uplifts.
Average age of fleet (in years):	10	This may reduce through 2023/24 as newer vehicles are cascaded into local fleets.
Euro VI buses:	41	The number has risen significantly from the baseline figure of 9%.
Zero emissions buses:	0	The depot infrastructure is not yet in place to support this.
USB charging:	26	Increasingly available as newer buses are introduced.
Audio announcements:		The majority of the fleet used in the area has this feature.
Visual stop displays:		On most vehicles this is standard equipment

The council is very aware of the importance of reducing carbon emissions and although we are not specifying specific vehicle requirements, we are asking operators to include an Environmental Statement in their tender submissions. This can cover all aspects and actions of their operations that will lead to a cleaner carbon footprint.

The size and structure of the bus companies in Dorset varies and this is reflected in their approaches to reducing their carbon footprint. We will work with them so that proportionate steps can be taken to minimise the effect that their operations have on the environment.

First Bus is committed to becoming zero emission by 2035, this will include the fleet in Dorset, but there are no confirmed dates at the time of this update. Nationally the company has been successful in securing government funding for more than 260 zero emission vehicles, doubling the zero-emission fleet.

Go South Coast has a comprehensive approach to sustainability and as part of their decarbonisation programme they plan to transition the fleet to EV/hydrogen over the next 15 years. They are committed to working closely with the council to pursue government funding and maximise opportunities such as the ZEBRA scheme. The company is also developing a fuel efficiency plan by improving driver training and monitoring. The company will eliminate the least fuel-efficient vehicles from their fleet on the back of deliveries of new buses due to operate in the BCP conurbation.

South West Coaches is continuing to invest in low emission vehicles. Ad-Blu fuel additive is used to maximise fuel efficiency. Vehicle tracking on all vehicles monitors engine idling, acceleration and harsh braking allowing the company to offer advice to individual drivers if they are flagged up. Vehicles at the end of their life are either held in the depot and stripped for spare parts or sold for salvage where they are stripped and recycled as appropriate. The company is looking to reduce their dependence on the National Grid by installing solar panels at its depots.

The challenges for Dorset

Dorset is an area with significant transport challenges that need to be overcome in order to transform public transport.

Rural Mobility

Rural areas face specific accessibility and connectivity challenges. Large areas in rural Dorset have no bus service and rely on community and voluntary transport services to fill the gaps. Our rural communities therefore suffer poor access to daily essentials, increasing social isolation and reduced opportunities, as well as seeing greater impacts from the cost-of-living crisis.

Rural areas have a significantly higher climate impact per person than urban areas. Urban areas have seen greater emissions reductions than rural areas because of national policy and local initiatives. Rural areas face different challenges in delivering net-zero than their urban counterparts and will require different approaches and solutions. Specific challenges include:

- Limited options for active and public transport.
- A high dependence on car travel, due a lack of frequent and affordable public transport and longer distances to access services. This car dependency is exacerbating the challenge of tackling climate change in rural areas.
- Poor digital connectivity. Average download speeds are substantially lower in rural areas than urban areas and can limit the ability to work, run businesses and access digital services.
- Limited grid capacity impacts the deliverability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Population sparsity limits opportunities for at scale programmes and private sector investment.
- Higher costs of service delivery.
- Older population.
- Lower government funding per person. Rural places are financially left behind, unable to fund mobility solutions and increasing transport deserts. The delivery and the long-term operation of mobility services and infrastructure in rural areas requires sustainable funding from a range of sources both public and private sector but also from the third sector.

Funding

The amount of funding available to support local bus provision has fallen dramatically since 2008 due to a decrease in central government support funding for local authority bus services. Since 2017/18 the council has received zero central government funding.

The council's current annual budget (2022/23) for public bus service provision is £1.2m. Several contracts for subsidised routes were handed back to the council during 2022 and others are reaching the end of their contract periods. It is expected that there could be an increase of up to 100% to replace the services. These services are being retendered using a new contract model which will give the council greater control over service levels and fares, with the council in future retaining the revenues. The council is seeking to identify sources of funding to enable it to increase the budget supporting public bus services from 2023/24 and beyond.

Public transport routes, particularly those subsidised by the council provide transport to schools for those children who are entitled to free school transport as well as others who use the network to access school and colleges, so their continuation is essential.

It was estimated that to deliver the 2021 BSIP programme in full would require an initial investment between 2022 and 2025 of £92 million, capital and revenue, with further funding required beyond 2025. The funding requested sought to address public and stakeholder priorities for more buses, to more locations and operating across more hours alongside additional priorities for lower and simpler fares, faster and more reliable bus services, and greener vehicles. Without access to additional government grant funding, it is not possible to deliver these actions in full and therefore this BSIP refresh seeks to reset the short to medium term goals and focus on deliverable actions that can be achieved through existing programmes and closer partnership working.

Operational risks

There is a very small pool of bus operators in the area. This creates risks in terms of tendering contracts and securing value for money. In August 2022 Yellow Buses, who operated across the south east Dorset area, went into liquidation. Three other bus companies have withdrawn services and no longer operate in the council area. Three main companies remain in the county – two large, First Wessex and Go South

Coast and one medium, South West Coaches. Dorset Community Transport runs five local bus routes in the south eastern and western areas. These link remote villages to larger towns, giving access to essential services.

There is still a risk that companies cannot maintain timetabled services due to the ongoing lack of drivers and rising costs across the industry. Contractors are struggling with staff retention – during Covid, many drivers left the industry to meet the demand for delivery drivers as online shopping increased.

Rising fuel costs have affected bus companies, particularly those that are smaller and cannot bunker fuel by purchasing when prices are lower.

Declining passenger numbers:

Over the past 10 years Dorset has seen a significant reduction in passenger journeys on local bus services. Covid has also had a dramatic effect on the number of people travelling as these figures show:

2018/2019 – 8.2m

2019/2020 – 7.6m

2020/2021 – 2.4m

2021/2022 – 4.8m

While passenger numbers have steadily grown through 2021/22 and 2022/23 they remain significantly below pre-covid levels. Operator data shows that passenger numbers had only returned to between 70-80% of pre-covid levels on many services by early summer 2022. This is due to a significant change in commuting patterns and a move to greater home working has seen people who traditionally commuted daily now travelling on fewer days each week. However, greater leisure travel has been evident on some routes and has helped passenger numbers recover better, particularly on popular tourist services.

The challenge facing operators and the council is how to encourage people to return to using the bus network while also attracting new passengers. Fare incentives will help along with other initiatives such as discouraging car use by reviewing parking prices. However, given the high number of ENCTS (English National Concessionary Travel Scheme) pass holders these incentives will attract a relatively small proportion of the population.

Operators have advised that their peak periods are moving away from the traditional Monday – Friday travelling to work peaks so they may consider adding weekend leisure travel opportunities to increase their passenger numbers. Modernising the fleets by having a minimum standard to be agreed between the council and operators will also attract new and younger users, especially if the buses are well equipped with new technology such as USB ports, audio-visual and next stop announcements.

An ageing population

Dorset's population is significantly older versus the national average. While not unique, Dorset has one of the highest percentages of older people with 29.4% (111,658) aged 65 and over compared to an England average of 18.5%. (Office for National Statistics 2020). The 2021 Census data shows an increase of 24.8% in people aged 65 years (and over) and 33% of those aged 90 and over living in Dorset. The number of people aged over 65 is further expected to grow by nearly 50% over the next 25 years.

An ageing population presents major challenges with concessionary journeys being higher in Dorset versus the south west regional average. In 2019/20 45% of bus journeys were made by concessionary passengers, creating an over-reliance on concessionary income to support services. However, many people aged 65 and over are still choosing not to travel on public transport following the covid pandemic and this is impacting the ongoing viability of service provision.

The concessionary fares scheme has brought great benefits for older people, but the council is concerned operator reimbursement in rural areas is inadequate and operators in Dorset are losing out due to exceptionally high demand for concessionary travel. The council needs Government to recognise the significant challenge this poses in Dorset and other rural authorities by reviewing the concessionary travel scheme and make changes to the national policy to ensure it gives a fairer deal in rural areas and supports the delivery of better bus services in Dorset.

The high level of concessionary fares highlights the importance of bus travel for older demographics, but it is also recognised that these impact upon the economic viability and overall sustainability of services.

Seasonality

Significant tourism activity occurs in our coastal regions, especially along the Jurassic Coast between Purbeck and Devon. Commercially operated bus services between Lyme Regis, Bridport and Weymouth run all year round but they are enhanced during the summer months when the tourist activity is at its highest. Existing services in Purbeck are also enhanced during the summer months. Additional routes running to service campsites and tourist locations in the area are registered for the summer season along the coastal strip. Although these service uplifts are welcome, the winter timetables do not support residents and encourage them to use these services year-round. In the north of the council area although tourism is important, the numbers of people visiting are fewer than in the south and attractions and destinations tend to be on a smaller scale and bus routes remain the same throughout the year.

Further growth in tourism to Dorset's world class natural environment is not sustainable without significant improvements to bus services within the county. The wider promotion of sustainable transport options to visitors is listed as a critical factor within the plan. Given the desire to increase tourism and leisure travel, a strong emphasis is placed on better weekend services with increased access to coastal areas, the Dorset AONB and additional areas such as Cranborne Chase.

Onward travel connections

Reliable onward travel connections are important to people. However, without more frequent services implementation is difficult, particularly where bus services are trying to connect with rail or coach journeys which are also infrequent. As well as trying to connect with other services there are other demands on bus services timetables such as carrying students to schools and colleges.

Fares – cost and complexity

There is a large range of ticket products available to bus customers. Average adult fares are slightly higher in comparison to national averages, figures for Dorset suggest a +£0.27 difference. There is no consistency for passengers and in some cases fares along the same stretch of road vary between operators. This is confusing for passengers, and it also means that they can be paying more than they need to for the same journey. There is currently no through ticket to allow people to travel on buses on one ticket on multiple operators' services. There is also a lack of consistency in defining youth fares and the discounts vary across operators.

Until recently each operator set the fare structure for their services whether they were commercial or supported by the council. Under the council's new tendering model for supported routes, the council will now set the fares for those services operated on its behalf. The council intends to introduce a multi operator 'Dorset Travel' ticket that can be used across the network of supported routes and will engage with operators of the commercial networks to expand this across all routes in Dorset. We would also like to standardise a youth fare product for 16-25 year olds.

Reliability and Punctuality

Bus punctuality is below the target of 95% within the window of tolerance (up to one minute early to five minutes late). Estimates of bus punctuality across the last eight years saw a gradual rise to a three-year period at 80% or more (from 2014/15-2016/17) before a notable drop to 70% (2017/18) which has stabilised at 72.9% (2021/22). This is substantially under both regional (81.9%) and national (83.0%) levels.

Traffic flows in Dorset are very seasonal, associated with the popularity of the area as a visitor destination. This can have a significant effect on local bus service punctuality in some of our urban and coastal areas with increasing traffic levels putting pressure on local bus operators' ability to run reliably and punctually.

Large scale bus priority is not suitable in much of Dorset, especially in rural areas where traffic congestion and delays on bus routes are not common. Our street layouts often don't provide the space to allow bus priority infrastructure to be constructed. Dorset will therefore require a targeted approach to bus priority to address the causes of delay and disruption and use a range of measures including bus lanes, bus gates, advanced signal priority, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions.

DRAFT

Section 3 Achievements

Managing the impact of Covid

During the Covid pandemic, the council has done everything in its power to protect the existing bus network as far as possible. The council has:

- Continued to pay our operators 100% of the contract price on our supported routes.
- Reimbursed all our operators at 100% of their ENCTS payments based on 2019 evidence.
- Administrated the allocation of DfT bus recovery funding streams.
- Facilitated Covid vaccinations for public service bus drivers who were maintaining the network for keyworkers, including those who were running school buses to ensure that key workers' children could access education.
- Supplied PPE to transport companies which were unable to source any at the height of the pandemic and offered advice and help to protect drivers in small vehicles. This offered a level of confidence to drivers.

These interventions contributed to the public transport network remaining intact with the best possible chance to improve in the future.

Introduction of a new tender model

The council has changed its approach to contracting local bus services in Dorset to make them more accessible and a more attractive alternative to the car.

The new contract model will provide a streamlined core route network with opportunities for community transport or flexible on demand transport to feed into hubs along the route. The council is also taking responsibility for setting timetables and fare prices. The contracts will be awarded as gross cost contracts so there is no revenue risk to the operator. For passengers going 'end to end' the journey will be quicker and the flexible on demand transport element will provide more options for people who do not currently have a bus service.

As this model is rolled out, we will explore options to provide a multi-operator Dorset Ticket that will be valid initially on all our supported routes regardless of the operator. In time we aim to increase this to a Dorset wide ticket.

The first route to be tendered using this model has just been awarded (October 2022) to First South to run in West Dorset between Bridport and Yeovil. The model will be used across other supported contracts either when contracts are handed back by operators or when the contract comes to an end. To support the rollout the council is identifying sources of funding to enable it to significantly increase its public bus service support budget from 2023/24 and beyond.

Improving bus stop infrastructure

As a recently formed unitary authority Dorset has inherited a variety of different types of infrastructure at stops. We have developed our strategy for bus stop and hub infrastructure by introducing a standard design for flags and shelters at those stops we are responsible for. There will be some variations across the area which will take into account specific localities, but each will be clearly identifiable as a stop on the Dorset Council bus network. The first stops to use this new style have been installed in the Wimborne and Ferndown areas as part of the Transforming Cities project.

Establishment of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) and EP officer post

On 1 March 2022, a meeting of Dorset Council Cabinet reviewed and approved the [Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme](#). The plan and scheme took effect on 25th April 2022.

The council has established a dedicated post in the transport planning team for an Enhanced Partnership officer who will liaise with operators and colleagues in the council and community to ensure that the Enhanced Partnership delivers the aims and objectives set out within the BSIP.

A previously standalone post of community engagement officer has been incorporated into the public transport team in recognition that community transport and public bus services are intertwined. Additionally, the same team has been increased in size in recognition of the importance that public transport has for residents and visitors now and in the future.

Improving transport interchanges

[Dorset Coastal Forum](#), using funding from the Customer and Communities Investment Fund and Local Transport Funding contributed by Dorset Council, has managed a scheme to improve the environment around Weymouth Rail Station. Previously the forecourt was run down, not welcoming for passengers and functioned poorly as a bus rail interchange. The nearest bus stops were on the seafront, a 400m walk away which did not encourage visitors or residents to use local bus services for their onward journeys.

The gateway improvement scheme has opened up the forecourt area for bus users and seen a new waiting shelter and real time information screen installed. This new stop is now being served by westbound buses that go along the Jurassic Coast. Buses towards Portland stop at a newly installed bus stop opposite the station. Road improvements around the station forecourt area provide easier pedestrian crossing to this stop and improve connectivity from the station to the town centre. Passengers arriving by rail can take advantage of Plus Bus ticketing arrangements that are in place making it easy to transfer from rail to bus.

Improvements to the main public transport interchange in Bridport are being explored, linked to development and regeneration opportunities in the town.

Junction enhancements & bus priority measures

The [Transforming Cities Fund \(TCF\)](#) programme in south east Dorset is delivering the largest ever local investment in sustainable transport infrastructure. A total programme budget of £102m will create a network of 78km of new cycle and walking routes and bus improvements, connecting major housing, employment, education and retail centres. It will offer people safe, green and healthy travel options to get around, rather than relying on the car all the time, particularly for shorter journeys. In the Dorset Council area, the TCF programme has delivered or is delivering this financial year the following schemes to enhance bus and active travel links:

- Cobham Road junction, Ferndown (2022/23)
- Stapehill Road junction, Ferndown (2022/23)
- Ringwood Road corridor, Ferndown (2022/23)
- Wimborne Road East corridor, Ferndown (2022/23)
- Wimborne Road West corridor, Ferndown (2022/23)
- Wimborne Road West / Leigh Road corridor, Wimborne (2021/22)

We are currently in early stages of engagement and planning, exploring traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions for market towns, such as Blandford Forum, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Shaftesbury, Wimborne and Sherborne, including examining the potential for traffic reduction measures associated with bus priority. Town centre public realm and traffic management enhancements in

Weymouth are also being explored to enhance active travel access to public transport hubs and provide bus priority measures.

Other recently completed junction enhancements, or schemes at detailed design stage, to improve pedestrian/cycle safety and movement in town centres and along bus corridors include:

- Development-led bus priority measures in Wimborne and Shaftesbury (complete)
- Mercery Road/Dorchester Road, Weymouth (FY22/23)
- Damory Street/East Street, Blandford (FY22/23)
- Maumbury Cross, Dorchester (FY23/24)

Improving first and last mile connections

In August a new south east Dorset bike share scheme was launched covering Wimborne, Colehill, West Parley, West Moors and Ferndown and linking up with the existing Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) scheme. The new scheme provides 122 bikes and more than 50 bays across the area. The scheme is inspiring more people to take up sustainable travel, helping to improve air quality and public health, and reduce road congestion. Since launch over 1,000 users have completed over 3,000 rides using the new shared Beryl Bikes. Wimborne and Ferndown in particular act as the main local interchanges for bus travel on the wider bus network.

Detailed designs for a new pedestrian, cycle bridge adjacent to the Swannery Bridge in Weymouth are being progressed with anticipated construction of the new crossing in 2024/25. Swannery Bridge is an important road link between residential areas, the rail station and bus interchanges, and town centre. However, there is no pavement on the bridge and the official walking and cycling route over Westham Bridge is further and less direct. A new low level 80m long pedestrian, cycling bridge alongside Swannery Bridge will connect to existing pedestrian and cycle paths either side of Radipole Lake, helping people get across the lake and improve access to Weymouth rail station, bus interchanges, the town centre, and seafront areas.

To facilitate better active travel links between public transport interchanges in Dorchester an improvement scheme on Fairfield Rd is progressing to construction in 2022/23. The town is served by two rail lines with stations at Dorchester South and Dorchester West approximately a 0.3 mile walk apart. Key bus interchanges are located at Dorchester South and on Weymouth Avenue. The improvement scheme will provide a safer pedestrian and cycling environment connecting these locations.

The Gillingham growth deal package, carried out in Autumn 2020, included reducing the carriageway on Station Road (higher) to one-way to enable the improvement of the pedestrian environment by widening the footway on the eastern side, and footway improvements on Station Road (lower) to improve access to the town from the train station and its associated bus interchange. The scheme also aimed to encourage increased non-car trips along this corridor.

Section 4 Headline Targets

This section sets out targets for improvements to bus services and how they will be monitored throughout the life of the BSIP and Enhanced Partnership.

Indicators

To ensure the BSIP remains focussed on delivering its stated aims and objectives, a range of indicators will monitor bus service performance across the council area. These are:

Journey times

Through the Enhanced Partnership, targets will be set for journey times on specific corridors related to the provision of new bus priority infrastructure, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions.

Bus punctuality and reliability

Targets for reliability will be based on overall timetable adherence across the network. Additional targets will be set for bus punctuality on specific corridors related to the provision of new bus priority infrastructure, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions. The expectation is that operators benefitting from greater operating efficiencies will reinvest in more frequent services, lower fares and other improvements for passengers.

Number of people travelling by bus

The initial target is to restore passenger levels to pre-Covid levels. Deliverables achieved through the BSIP will aid and hasten this period of re-building. Long term targets for significant growth will be dependent on funding being available to deliver frequency enhancements and introduction of new services, and other currently unfunded elements of the BSIP.

Bus Mode Share

The target seeks to grow the mode share for bus travel by making buses more attractive and easier to use. The indicator is based on annual cordon surveys undertaken in Weymouth and Ferndown to monitor the percentage of peak time trips by bus.

Local bus fleet emissions standards

In the short term our target is to increase the proportion of buses that meet Euro VI or higher standards to 40% by 2025. By 2025 we will introduce our first zero emission buses with the aim of having 60% of the fleet running with zero emissions by 2030. The longer-term target is to achieve a fully zero emission bus fleet by 2035.

Core network mileage

The short to medium term target is to maintain the current core bus network of commercial and supported services. The network currently faces several threats and protecting what is there already lays the foundation for planned future enhancements. In the longer term the target is to double network mileage by 2030 with the introduction of the 30-minute frequency core bus offer, targeted corridor enhancements and development of a network of flexible on demand feeder services.

Accessibility of local bus network

Through the phased introduction of flexible on demand transport services and other feeder services the target is to significantly increase network coverage by 2030 and therefore increase the proportion of households within 30 minutes of Dorset's towns by public transport. The short to medium term goal is to identify and deliver pilot scheme(s) to test this new rural operating model and demonstrate how it could be rolled out across rural Dorset with the aim of achieving 100% coverage by 2030 subject to funding being secured.

Customer satisfaction

Through the BSIP's ambitious transformation plan we are seeking to significantly increase customer satisfaction, recognising that we're starting from a relatively low base. Changes in customer satisfaction will be monitored annually through the council's inclusion in the [National Highways and Transport \(NHT\) public satisfaction survey](#).

[Table 2](#) shows individual targets.

Monitoring and evaluation

The BSIP will be reviewed annually so that it remains focussed on transformation and meeting the needs of residents and visitors to Dorset. The BSIP is designed to be a living document and will be republished if the council and partner local bus operators feel that this is necessary.

Progress against the targets will be published every six-months from April 2023 with performance being made available through a variety of media to ensure full accessibility to all audiences, user groups and the public. As a minimum, progress will be available on the council's website on the following page: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/roads-highways-maintenance/transport-planning/bus-service-improvement-plan>

Progress will be reported through the Enhanced Partnership Board and to the council's Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee in conjunction with the culmination of the formal annual review process.

Targets

Table 2 - Dorset Council BSIP Targets (November 2022)

Indicator	Measure	2019/20 (Baseline)	By 2025	By 2030
Journey times on the core bus network	Average journey times to urban centres on core bus corridors.	Route Dependent	-5%	-10%
Bus Punctuality	% of buses operating on time (-1 minute to +5 minute window).	66%	85%	95%
Number of people travelling by bus in the Dorset area	Number of single trips per annum	7.6 million	7.6 million	8.4 million
Bus mode share	Mode share of peak time journeys to urban centres	20%	22%	25%
Local bus fleet emissions	Percentage of bus fleet Euro VI standard or higher	9%	40%	40%
Local bus fleet emissions	Percentage of bus fleet zero emissions standard or higher	0%	20%	60%
Core network mileage operated	Distance operated on core bus network	6.9 million kms	6.9 million kms	8.3 million kms
Accessibility by public transport	Proportion of households within 30 minutes of a town by public transport	70%	70%	100%
Customer Satisfaction	Percentage satisfied with bus services	51%	62%	68%

Section 5 Delivery

In seeking to make improvements and attract greater numbers of bus users, the actions in this section focus on making the network more attractive, expansive, easy to use, and affordable. This activity is set out under six themes:

1. **Better network coverage and scale** – the development of a network of bus services that run more often, to more places and for longer daily periods. To deliver this the core network of services will be strengthened to operate more frequently between hub locations, with feeder services using other fixed and flexible on demand modes. This new model will be delivered over time to enhance rural mobility for communities across Dorset.
2. **Better integration between modes** - pursue opportunities to provide better integration between rail services and all other modes including timetable coordination, multi-modal travel information, and ticketing. Working in partnership across all modes from walking and cycling for first and last mile trips, to national long-distance networks, we will work to always integrate bus services.
3. **Better and clearer information** - developing information that is consistent, accessible, simple, clear, and coordinated. This will provide the public with a single source of truth with which they can confidently plan and undertake connected journeys across the local bus network and wider public transport system. Information will be maintained through multiple channels, including at stop timetable information.
4. **Better journey time reliability** – providing faster and more reliable services across the local bus network. Partnership working with local bus operators will identify the need for targeted corridor improvements. Close working with the council’s planning service will maximise funding secured from new developments through Section 106 contributions.
5. **Better value and integrated fares** – exploring opportunities to introduce simple value fares across a smaller range of products and targeted fares designed to attract and maintain mode shift. Explore options for the roll-out of multi-operator, multi-mode ticketing using appropriate and cost-effective technology and processes.
6. **Better vehicle standards and lower emissions** - delivering a zero-emission bus fleet by 2035 and ensure interim steps to green the existing local bus service fleet through renewal of older buses or upgrading their technology. Working closely with operators to create a Dorset standard configuration linked to better mobility and Mobility as a Service concepts.

The 2021 Dorset BSIP did not receive any government bus transformation programme funding to support its delivery.

This poses a significant challenge in delivering the bus improvement programme in full as previously set out. Should no external funding sources be secured delivery will concentrate on those immediate improvements that can be introduced quickly within existing funding structures, and through greater partnership working. However, the council and our local bus operator partners remain committed to our ambitious vision to transform the bus network in Dorset and we will continue to explore all funding opportunities, and submit bids as appropriate. Should new funding be made available we will introduce those additional improvements that can be delivered by March 2025, address the identified needs of users and have the greatest potential to attract more bus users.

Detailed actions and outputs are set out below under two scenarios. The first assumes no new external funding and the requirement to work within existing funding structures. The second scenario highlights those actions that will be additionally delivered should new external funding become available and how we would prioritise how this money is spent if not sufficient to fund the entire BSIP programme.

Deliverable short-term actions (2022/23 to 2024/25)

Better network coverage and scale

Extensive public and stakeholder engagement has highlighted the need to redraw the bus network to deliver against the top three priorities for a revitalised network: buses that run more often; buses that run to more places; and buses that start earlier and finish later.

In the short-term we will concentrate on protecting, maintaining and growing patronage on the existing network. Actions include:

1. From October 2022 the council will change its tender model for contracting its supported routes. Future contracts will be tendered as gross cost contracts. The council will design the timetable that best suits passengers. The council will also set and retain the fares. This is especially important as it reduces the financial risk for the operators. The council will 'own' the route and work closely with the operators to ensure that wherever possible routes will integrate with other transport services, including the rail network. This new Dorset tender model has already been introduced on one of our supported core routes. The same model will be applied when other subsidised routes are renewed with the expectation that from then on, the model will be used for all core contracted routes in the council area. It is expected that this will apply to four routes in 2023 and a further four in 2024. To support this action the council is seeking to identify sources of funding to enable it to increase the budget to support public transport routes from 2023/24 and beyond.
2. We are seeking to move to a clearly defined hub and spoke network. As a first step when retendering the council's supported routes, the council will stipulate that there may be flexible on demand options and/or other fixed route contracts offered that will connect with the core route if there is sufficient demand. Delivery of the feeder services will depend on funding being identified. Using community and voluntary transport operators to provide these feeder services will also be explored through the Enhanced Partnership. We hope to identify funding to deliver a first 'Dorset Connect' flexible on demand service pilot by 2024/25 centred around one of our rural market towns and its surrounding communities. Scoping/feasibility work will be undertaken in 2023/24 to identify the pilot area, build up a business case and provide a detailed design for the pilot service(s).
3. A rural test-bed corridor has been identified for the introduction of higher frequency services. Enhancement of the current route between Shaftesbury and Gillingham will provide better access to the rail network and employment opportunities at Gillingham for Shaftesbury residents as well as supplying school transport for students attending secondary education in Gillingham and Shaftesbury. The Gillingham southern extension is delivering 1,800 new homes and new employment land in the area. Section 106 funding has been secured and will contribute towards the cost of increasing bus service frequencies to approximately one every 20 minutes between 07:00 – 19:00 Monday – Saturday. Section 106 funding will also contribute to upgrade bus stop infrastructure, and towards the enhancements of Community Transport schemes and community-led transport initiatives within Gillingham Town.

Better integration between modes

These actions seek to address priorities for better information, interchange and waiting facilities. Our short-term focus is to improve bus stop infrastructure on the core network, improve interchange facilities and improve first and last mile links. Actions include:

1. Feasibility work will commence in 2023/24 to design the first mobility hub to be located in a rural market town. The longer-term aim is to develop mobility hubs across Dorset, at least one main mobility hub per functional area, which will bring together a range of transport services and provide a high-quality environment.

2. The council has commenced a programme of bus stop refurbishment. This will target high use existing stop infrastructure to improve waiting environments. This programme will continue through 2023/24 and 2024/25. Where necessary new bus stop infrastructure will be installed. When installing new stop infrastructure, we will use the new bus stop design guide which has been developed for the south east Dorset Transforming Cities programme and guided the new infrastructure installed in Wimborne and Ferndown.
3. The council is working with Network Rail and train operating companies to identify and deliver improved multi-modal facilities at rail stations in Dorset. The council has previously been successful in securing Customer and Communities Improvement Funding, match funded by Local Transport Plan funding, to improve facilities including bus stop infrastructure, cycle parking, information provision and onward active travel links. Through the Enhanced Partnership we will identify priority locations for improvement and explore funding opportunities to deliver these.
4. The council has identified several highway improvement schemes to deliver better first and last mile connections with the public transport network. These are currently at various stages of development progressing from feasibility, to detailed design and finally to construction. The schemes identified in [section three](#) are due for delivery in 2022/23 to 2024/25. Other schemes will be identified through the Enhanced Partnership, the LTP capital programme, and through the development of the council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.
5. The council is exploring further opportunities to expand the south east Dorset bike share scheme into Verwood, Moors Valley Country Park, Corfe Mullen and Upton, and introduce similar schemes into other areas of Dorset including Weymouth and Dorchester. These schemes are expected to be delivered within the next couple of years.

Better and clearer information

The following actions seek to address public and stakeholder priorities for easier access to simple bus information and the DfT objective for clear information and a single bus system. Actions include:

1. The council will work with operators and stakeholders to ensure that all marked stops will have a bespoke at stop timetable display with a standard 'Dorset' display. These improvements will be introduced in 2023/24.
2. The council will create a Dorset bus and rail network map during 2023/24 when our current round of re-tenders has been completed. The map will be accessed via a new travel portal giving people the opportunity to print copies if they need to. Printed copies will be installed at key transport exchanges and larger stops.
3. The council will identify stops needing upgrading with Real Time Passenger Information. This includes plans to trial battery powered RTI displays at stops in the Purbeck area where many stops are in rural locations. If successful, this trial may be rolled out to other rural areas. To ensure that all bus stops can provide real-time information, we will place a QR code at each site. This will allow smart-phone users to access real-time information as well as bus timetables for journey planning.
4. A new travel portal will be developed to provide a new single source of public transport information. This will allow new and existing public transport users to plan journeys in confidence and receive live service updates. There is strong support from the public and stakeholders for an all-Dorset multi-modal travel app that will allow bus travellers to check service performance in real time; purchase bus and rail tickets for contactless travel; create an e-purse for tap-on/tap-off use and period ticket products; look up timetables at each bus stop; plan future public transport journeys; save information to their own profile; and see how busy approaching buses are. Working in partnership with local bus operators, other transport providers, Traveline South West and technology companies a specification and a business case will be developed in 2023/24.

5. Through the council's new tendering model, we will ensure that as new contracts are let there is a minimum standard for branding that can be put on all buses and publicity. Any supported bus service timetables must credit the council as a sponsor on publicity they produce for their supported routes. Through the Enhanced Partnership we will explore the development of a Dorset wide travel brand.

Better journey time reliability

A key government requirement is for BSIPs to include significant increases in bus priority. Current bus priority measures in Dorset are limited. Large scale bus priority is not suitable in much of Dorset, especially in rural areas where traffic congestion and delays on bus routes are not common. However, delay hot spots have been identified by local bus operators working with the council through the preparation of this BSIP. Dorset will therefore require a targeted approach to bus priority to address the causes of delay and disruption and use a range of measures including bus lanes, bus gates, advanced signal priority, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions. The following targeted actions aim to make buses faster and more reliable, competing with the car, and overall, more attractive:

1. Working in partnership with local bus operators targeted bus priority measures will be designed and delivered. Table 3 outlines a list of potential locations for the BSIP to tackle. Through the Enhanced Partnership, schemes will be prioritised to progress to feasibility study, and through to detailed design and construction where a strong business case, local member and community support, and sources of funding can be demonstrated.
2. Priorities will be designed into new developments and funding secured through planning Section 106 agreements to deliver the planned interventions.
3. The council will seek to introduce parking restrictions at known pinch points which will free up road space, thus reducing congestion and reducing delays to buses.
4. By effectively managing roadworks and access to road space, the council will aim to keep bus routes as clear as possible and programme non-essential work to be carried out during off-peak hours.

Table 3 - List of potential bus priority interventions

Location	Current Delay Location	Potential Intervention (to be explored and consulted on)
Weymouth (Central)	The Esplanade-Kings Statue (Weymouth's 'bus station')	Review of stopping arrangements, car parking provision and explore locations for a formal bus station.
	Abbotsbury Road-Swannery Bridge-Rail Station	AVL/SVD at key signalled junctions.
	A354 Westwey Road-Rodwell Road / Westham Road	Feasibility study for a one-way bus-only link across existing Westham Bridge.
	Westham Road	Review parking restrictions, rationalise crossing points and open bend leading onto The Esplanade.
	B3154 Chickerell Road junctions	AVL/SVD at signalised junctions, possible left-turn bus lane onto B3154 at B3158 Radipole Lane junction, and prioritise right-turn from Abbotsbury onto B3154.
	Haven Littlesea Holiday Park	Review traffic access/egress and on-street parking
Bridport & West Bay (West)	B3162 East St-West St	AVL/SVD at West St/South St signalised junction, explore short sections of bus lane and reallocation of parking bays.
	Bradpole, A3066 Beaminster Rd	Explore new bus lane
	Station Road, West Bay	New series of passing places and review parking restrictions. Relocation of George Street bus stop/shelter.
Lyme Regis (West)	Park & Ride Provision	Extend the seasonal P&R to all year operation
	Pound Street	Review/relocate parking bays on north side of road.
	Silver Street	Review/relocate parking bays, explore change to a one-way.
	Broad Street-Bridge Street-Church Street	Add AVL/SVD to traffic light-controlled priority sections
Beaminster (West)	The Square	Review bus stop locations and parking provision to create a formal bus stop area
	A3066 – Tunnel Road, Beaminster tunnel	Add signals at each portal with AVL/SVD
Studland (South East)	Ferry Road approach to Sandbanks Ferry	A need for (seasonal) bus priority lane on the Studland side approaching the landing jetty.

Better value and integrated fares

The following actions seek to address public and stakeholder priorities for simple to understand bus fares and tickets that can be used on all buses: Actions include:

1. We aim to introduce a Dorset wide 'young persons' bus ticket for 16–25-year-old travellers. Such a ticket is needed to support those continuing in full-time education, training, or applying for apprenticeships and those seeking/commencing full-time employment. The ticket will also help to address issues surrounding social isolation amongst younger people living in rural communities by providing an affordable, independent means of mobility. Introduced initially on the council's

supported services, a young person's bus card will entitle holders to discounted fares. Through the Enhanced Partnership the aim is for this product to be rolled out on all local buses, at all times across Dorset, and into neighbouring LTA areas when routes cross LTA area boundaries. The agreement and any exemptions will be agreed within the Enhanced Partnership.

2. Starting with the council's supported services, we will develop a 'Dorset' ticket that can be used on any of our supported routes. Through discussion with commercial bus operators, the longer-term aim is to develop a multi-operator ticket across all services in Dorset. Our aim is for passengers to be able to travel on any bus regardless of whether it is subsidised or not and for all operators to buy in to these aspirations. This will benefit all passengers by making bus travel simple and should lead to an increase in passenger numbers as the scheme rolls out. We expect that in turn this will lead to increased service frequencies. The agreement and any exemptions will be agreed within the Enhanced Partnership.
3. Starting with our supported routes we will introduce a new family ticket offering travel discounts. We will work with all operators through the Enhanced Partnership to agree the mechanisms to introduce it across Dorset.
4. We will work with all operators through the Enhanced Partnership, to reach agreement on a fare capping arrangement. Initially we will work with operators to agree the mechanisms for a flat fare town zone offering significantly reduced town fares within Weymouth and Portland. We will subsequently explore similar mechanisms for expanding to Dorchester, Bridport, and Gillingham. Without additional revenue funding in place these would need to be commercially sustainable schemes.

Better vehicle standards and lower emissions

Decarbonising road transport is a key action in the council's [Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy](#). Through this BSIP our aim is to continue to protect Dorset's environment by moving to a modern zero emission local bus fleet by 2035. Actions include:

1. Euro VI buses are proven to deliver a significant reduction in NO_x. Working through the Enhanced Partnership we will encourage operators to invest in their fleet renewal programmes and increase the number of Euro VI standard compliant buses operating in Dorset. 45% of the fleet used in Dorset is Euro VI. Currently the tender model implemented by the council does not specify a minimum Euro VI standard for buses operating on supported services. Our pool of operators is limited and although we have two national groups, the remaining operators are smaller businesses who have limited resources to upgrade their fleets. This will be reviewed at such time as the bus market and operating costs stabilise. We will continue to explore opportunities to use capital funding to upgrade the fleet.
2. Through the Enhanced Partnership the council will work with bus operators to produce bespoke bus fleet replacement plans for each operator. In the short to medium term Euro VI standard buses and zero emission buses will be targeted to operate on routes experiencing poor air quality and corridors with frequent bus services. Initially this will include services operating the following routes or town centre areas:
 - Dorchester town services
 - Weymouth town services
 - Portland to Weymouth service 1
 - Weymouth to Dorchester service 10
 - Dorchester – Bridport – Axminster service X51 and Weymouth – Bridport – Axminster service X53

- New Weymouth Park and Ride service
 - Wimborne – Poole services 3, 3X, and 4.
 - Wimborne – Bournemouth services 6, and 13
3. Through the Enhanced Partnership the council will work with bus operators to prepare and submit ZEBRA applications for zero emission vehicles. In advance of bid submission the council will engage with bus operators, Distribution Network Operators and suppliers to identify a Dorset roadmap for fleet decarbonisation. This will include an analysis of routes, depots and refuelling/recharging constraints.
 4. The Enhanced Partnership approach provides the best opportunity to work collaboratively to achieve higher vehicle standards for buses across Dorset. Through the Enhanced Partnership we will agree vehicle standards regarding facilities, comfort, safety, accessibility, ease of use, and technology. Key focus areas will include the roll-out of next stop announcements, CCTV, app-based tracking, exploring the options for bicycle facilities across the network, and enhanced on-board facilities such as USB ports.

Additional actions which can be delivered if external funding is secured

Thirty-one counties, city regions and unitary authorities received funding from the Government's bus transformation programme. The indicative BSIP funding allocations for those successful authorities were below the levels of funding requested, typically up to £20m. This provides a strong indication that should future rounds of the Government's bus transformation programme become available Dorset is unlikely to receive the full £92m requested to deliver the BSIP programme in full.

The council understands that full funding might not be possible. The following actions will be prioritised and delivered according to the amount of external funding we may receive.

Priority actions deliverable with additional revenue funding

- Delivery of an enhanced Blandford to Poole service running every 30 minutes 07:00 – 19:00, with night-time services at reduced frequency. Enhancement of the existing hourly service will create more travel opportunities and help us to achieve mode shift and increasing the public's access to employment, health, education, and leisure opportunities by sustainable low-cost travel.
- Delivery of an enhanced Dorchester – Bridport – Axminster service to provide a strategic missing link with the rail network along the south coast. Service frequency will be increased to hourly year-round, plus additional peak journeys to increase frequency to every 30 minutes. The timetable will be extended into the evenings and provide additional weekend services. We will also explore direct service options on the section west of Bridport.
- On demand services to be developed that feed into the Blandford to Poole, and Dorchester – Bridport – Axminster corridors from nearby communities along both routes. These services will enable rural areas to benefit from greater connectivity and access to essential services. Good public transport is essential in rural areas to enable mobility and access to resources that are often not available locally to people without cars and provide a viable travel choice that can reduce car dependency.
- Re-introduction of a dedicated direct service from the Weymouth P&R site to the town centre. The site is situated at Weymouth Gateway alongside the A354, the main route into Weymouth from the

A35 trunk route. It has not been in full use for several years and is currently served by a local bus service that stops nearby. During the holiday season and at peak travel times the service can be full on arrival, resulting in passengers having to wait for longer than is acceptable. The site has parking for up to 1,000 vehicles. Revenue funding will enable us to subsidise a frequent daily non-stop all year-round service directly from the site to Weymouth town centre. This will cater for residents and holidaymakers and reduce the number of cars accessing the town centre.

- Seed funding for a four-year fare capping initiative modelled on the pilot scheme developed in Cornwall. This would be introduced in tandem with increasing service frequencies and raising bus standards to provide an attractive alternative to the private car.

Priority actions deliverable with additional capital funding

- Linked to the development of enhanced services between Blandford and Poole, and Dorchester, Bridport and Axminster, mobility hubs will be delivered at Blandford and Bridport. These hubs will provide interchange and alternative access for modes such as walking, cycling, lift-shares, and taxis, supporting first and last mile trip legs. Improving interchanges is key to making our hub and spoke feeder system work seamlessly.
- The council has submitted a bid for Levelling Up round two funding to deliver a new mobility hub on the Mount Pleasant Park and Ride site in Weymouth bringing together a bus interchange, EV charging hub with solar PV, and integrating services such as shared bike hire, parcel lockers, last mile logistics, overnight camper van park, and coach stop. Through the Enhanced Partnership, the council and local bus operators are developing options to improve the Park & Ride service and to secure the revenue funding to operate this service. A capital investment for new electric buses and charging infrastructure is included in the bid to enable this development to take place and reduce carbon emissions from the bus fleet.
- The council has submitted a bid for Levelling Up round two funding to deliver bus priority on two high frequency bus corridors. Our ambition is to transform bus travel between Portland, Weymouth and Dorchester by making bus services more reliable and more attractive as a sustainable mode of transport. Significant impact and benefit could be delivered from shorter bus journey times, increased bus journey reliability, and reductions in volumes of traffic entering central areas of Weymouth and Dorchester. The interventions include up to 300 metres of new bus lane and signal priority at 14 junctions. Through the Dorset Enhanced Partnership, commitments from local bus operators will be secured to reinvest the savings achieved from greater fleet efficiency and greater ticket revenues into service improvements which may include, new services, frequency enhancements, improved evening services, improved weekend services, fare caps / cheaper fare offers. These commitments will be set out in a legal agreement and enforced through the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme.
- Roll-out of 20 zero-emission buses and supporting infrastructure for Weymouth town services, making Weymouth Dorset's first zero emission bus hub. Future zero emission bus roll out will focus on the following corridors or town centre areas:
 - Dorchester town
 - Weymouth town
 - Portland to Weymouth
 - Weymouth to Dorchester

- Dorchester – Bridport – Axminster and Weymouth – Bridport – Axminster
- New Weymouth Park and Ride
- Wimborne – Poole
- Wimborne – Bournemouth

Medium term plan (2025/26 to 2027/28)

The council has the ambition to deliver continued improvements and transformations in bus provision to drive increases in the number of people using local buses across Dorset. This is subject to being able to secure external funding to deliver key proposals. If external funding is secured we will:

- Lift core network daytime frequencies to a minimum two buses an hour
- Increase evening and weekend frequencies on the core network
- Maintain higher winter levels of service on the core network
- Develop fixed and flexible on demand feeder services to fill gaps and connect people into the core bus network
- Improve passenger environments and interchange facilities
- Develop mobility hubs that bring together public, shared and active travel modes
- Introduce fare capping with the aim of encouraging travel within towns on existing services
- Provide discounted travel across the network and on all bus ticket types
- Introduce multi-modal bus/rail smart ticketing
- Deliver targeted bus priority measures that provide reliability and journey time improvements
- Invest in newer, lower emission buses and depots with charging/refuelling infrastructure

Long Term Transformation (5 years plus)

The council seeks to make Dorset an exemplar for how flexible on demand services can increase rural accessibility to link up communities and reduce rural isolation. Efforts will continue to increase overall network coverage (routes and hours of operation) with the proposed mix of fixed and on demand feeder services, supported by the development of mobility hubs and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) provision. Community and voluntary sector models will be explored as well as investigating the potential of 'Total Transport' pilots. The ambitious aim is to achieve 100% coverage across Dorset, ensuring that every community has access to the public transport network.

The transformation of the core bus network is the foundation of our long-term plans. We are seeking to raise standards and daytime frequencies to at least a bus every 30 minutes on our core interurban network. This will provide greater opportunities for travel between our key service centres and give the public more confidence that bus services offer a viable alternative to private car use. This will be supported by bus priority measures and other traffic management measures at key delay 'hotspot' to ensure that these services are fast and reliable. The feeder network of fixed and on demand services will integrate with these core services to greatly improve rural mobility.

Modernising the bus fleet will be central to our climate change agenda, protecting Dorset's environment and improving air quality. Whilst achieving greater modal shift will help deliver on these aims, moving to a fully decarbonised local bus fleet will also be important to combat carbon emissions from road transport. The council will continue to work with local bus operators through the Enhanced Partnership to introduce modern zero emission buses, including battery electric and hydrogen fleets. The overall aim is to convert

60% of buses across the county to zero emissions by 2030 with all remaining buses running at Euro VI or better, and achieve a completely zero emission bus fleet by 2035.

The council will continue to explore initiatives to increase the use of active travel networks for first and last mile connectivity, including initiatives such as joint ticketing opportunities between bus, cycle hire and any future micro-mobility schemes, and better cycle parking provision at/near key bus interchanges.

The council will explore digital models for delivering effective services and unlocking market knowledge. The Dorset travel portal will be able to provide a platform for integrated ticketing products and facilitate tap-on tap-off contactless payments. By working with other key stakeholders, such services could be expanded to give discounted rates/savings for bus users at key tourist locations and other suitable businesses/attractions across the county, all facilitated via a single platform, to help encourage further bus use and support the local economy,

The council notes recent advances in autonomous vehicle systems. The council will continue to review national and international pilots to determine suitability and potential applications in Dorset if the technology becomes proven to be a cost-effective solution in urban and more sparsely populated rural areas.

Implementation

The transformational actions set out in this BSIP are interdependent and will only achieve the greatest impact if fully funded and implemented as a comprehensive programme.

The starting point is to stabilise the network post-covid, with the focus on maintaining the core network to form the foundation of the improvement programme set out. Having placed the network on a secure footing, attention will move to reshaping the network corridor by corridor to create more direct and more frequent core services. **Feeder services will integrate with the core network to provide Dorset wide public transport coverage.** This will be supported by schemes to improve travel times and bus reliability, and raise standards that make the bus more attractive to existing and new customers.

Significant marketing and promotional activities will highlight the new travel opportunities created and the transformational achievements being delivered.

Appendix A

Summary of Public and Stakeholder Engagement Activities

2021/22

Jul'21 Initial workshops: council members briefing and four stakeholder workshops to discuss scope of the BSIP work, issues and opportunities.

Jul'21 – Aug'21 Bus Survey: In total 1,845 surveys were completed. Residents made up 96% of the survey sample and visitors 4%.

Aug'21 Second round workshops: council members briefing and four stakeholder workshops to explore BSIP priorities.

Oct'21 Third round workshops: council members briefing and four stakeholder workshops to present draft BSIP proposals.

Dec'21 – Jan'22 Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme Operator objection period: Having already reached a consensus view on the Plan and Scheme 'shell' agreement, no formal objections were made by local bus operators.

Jan'22 Enhanced Partnership stakeholder briefing: Three briefing sessions to explain the Enhanced Partnership process, plans for governance and bus user representation, and present draft Scheme proposals.

Jan'22 – Feb'22 Enhanced Partnership statutory consultation: The consultation was run online with 23 responses received. No opposition to the Enhanced Partnership was submitted.

2022/23

Aug'22-Sep'22 public survey: 1,000 responses to survey exploring support for BSIP measures and refreshed priorities.

Sep'22 workshops - council members briefing and four area focussed workshops with the Bus Users and Stakeholder group, attended by over 100 people, to explore refreshed BSIP priorities.

Appendix B

Maps and Tables

Table 1. Strategic services (2022/2023) across Dorset (midweek) ranked by frequency

Route	Route Number	Operator	Approx Freq 2021/22	Frequency Changes 2022/2023
Weymouth - Portland	1	First	15	20 - reduced
Weymouth - Littlemoor	2	First	15	20 - reduced
Weymouth - Preston	4	First	20	40 - reduced
Weymouth - Poundbury	10	First	20	30 - reduced
Gillingham - Shaftesbury	X2	SWC	30	No change
Weymouth - Chickerell	8	First	30	No change
Wimborne – Ferndown	13	morebus	30	No change
Wimborne – Corfe - Poole	3	morebus	30	15 - increased
Dorchester Town Service	6	Damory	30	No change
Poole - Wimborne	4	morebus	30	15 - increased
Swanage Town Service	D5	morebus	30	No change
Wyke Regis - Weymouth	206	SWC	40	Route cancelled by operator – no replacement
Weymouth - Waterside	503	First	40	No change
Weymouth - Westham	3	First	45	No change
Weymouth - Littlesea Holiday Park	502	First	55	No change
Swanage - Wareham - Poole	Breezer 40	morebus	60	No change
Swanage - Studland	Breezer 50	morebus	60	No change
Blandford Forum - Poole	X8	Damory	60	No change
Dorchester Town Service	2	Damory	60	No change
Dorchester Town Service	1	Damory	60	No change
Lyme Regis Town Service	71	Damory	60	No change
Lyme Regis - Sidmouth - Exeter	9A	Stagecoach	60	180 - reduced
Poole - Ferndown - Verwood	X6	morebus	70	No change

Yeovil - Beaminster - Bridport	6	First	85	Revised service – increased.
Salisbury - Shaftesbury	29	Salisbury Reds	90	No change
Yeovil - Sherborne	58	First	120	No change
Shaftesbury - Blandford	X3	SWC	120	No change
Sturminster Newton - Gillingham	X4	SWC	120	No change
Yeovil - Sherborne - Dorchester	X11	SWC	120	No change
Blandford - Dorchester	X12	Damory	120	No change
Dorchester - Bridport - Axminster	X51	First	120	120 – from Weymouth to Bridport on respective routes and 60 from Bridport to Axminster - increased
Weymouth - Bridport - Axminster	X53	First	120	
Yeovil - Sturminster Newton - Blandford	X10	First	120	No change
Weymouth - Poole	X54	First	140	No change
Salisbury - Blandford	20	First	150	No change

Email your comments regarding this Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to:

busbackbetter@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

or write to us:

c/o Transport Planning, County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ.

DRAFT