

Transforming Public Buses and Community Transport

Full Business Case – Draft (September 2026)



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Dorset's transport system is at a critical point. Public transport use remains below pre-pandemic levels, Community Transport (CT) providers face increasing operational and financial pressures, and the council's expenditure on specialist transport services has grown significantly in recent years. At the same time, the county's rural geography, ageing population and changing patterns of education, healthcare and social care delivery are increasing the importance of accessible and reliable transport whilst placing greater pressure on public finances. Dorset Council has work underway to consider its community delivery footprint through the Communities for All council plan priority, which should improve whether residents are required to travel across Dorset, as well as enable more place-based community led transport options.

The council commissioned the Public Buses and Community Transport Transformation Programme to consider how transport services could evolve to better meet the needs of residents whilst delivering improved value for money and supporting wider council priorities.

The programme is not simply about improving transport services - it is one of the council's key transformation programmes. As an enabler of wider organisational change it will create a transport system that works effectively with local partners to support access to employment, education, healthcare, day opportunities and community life. Wider transformation will take place across Children's Services, Adult Day Opportunities and healthcare services.

The programme is transformational across the whole council, designed to support the transition to a more sustainable operating model by enabling greater independence, supporting prevention, improving access to community-based services and reducing reliance on high-cost specialist transport where appropriate. The programme directly supports the council's transformation priorities through its focus on prevention, independence, community-powered services, locality delivery and long-term financial sustainability.

This Full Business Case (FBC) concludes that Dorset requires a more integrated transport system, which improves accessibility, independence and makes better use of existing transport resources, making the most of local and community providers, and reducing future dependency on high-cost specialist transport provision. The FBC defines a preferred programme of interventions, assessing affordability and deliverability, and establishing a phased approach to implementation.

The Challenge

The council already commits significant resources to transport services, with Dorset Travel managing transport expenditure of approximately £39.1 million in 2025/26.

A substantial proportion of this expenditure is concentrated within statutory and specialist transport services, particularly SEND transport, where increasing demand, growing complexity and rising contract costs continue to place pressure on budgets.



At the same time:

- public transport services face increasing operating costs and funding pressures;
- CT providers face challenges relating to volunteer recruitment, organisational capacity and sustainability;
- many rural communities experience limited transport choice;
- transport services are often planned and delivered through separate processes and funding streams; and
- opportunities to improve independence and make greater use of mainstream transport are not always fully realised.

Without further intervention, transport costs are likely to continue increasing whilst accessibility, independence and transport integration remain constrained.

The Preferred Programme

The Outline Business Case (OBC) identified an integrated transport system as the preferred strategic approach. Further evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement and financial analysis have refined that approach into a defined programme of six interrelated intervention packages based around three complementary themes:

Theme	Package	Title	Purpose
1. Reshaping Demand and Supporting Independence: to improve independence, expand opportunities locally and reduce unnecessary reliance on specialist transport whilst maintaining appropriate support for those who need it.	A	Independent Travel and Demand Management	Support more people to travel independently and more accessible services locally which are easier to serve through transport networks
2. Integrating Transport Planning and Delivery: to improve coordination, reduce duplication and support wider service transformation.	B	Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination	Coordinate transport planning across council services
	C	Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships	Improve integration with NHS and healthcare transport
3. Strengthening and Diversifying Transport Supply: to create a stronger and more resilient transport offer capable of serving both urban and rural communities.	D	Core Route (CR) Network Enhancement	Strengthen and expand the CR Network
	E	CT Capacity and Sustainability	Build CT capacity and resilience



	F	Rural Flexible Transport	Introduce targeted flexible transport for rural areas
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The packages have been designed as a single programme rather than a series of standalone projects. Collectively, these packages address transport demand, transport supply and system integration. Their combined effect is expected to deliver greater benefits than could be achieved through any individual intervention in isolation.

What will change?

Dorset-led implementation

The programme will deliver tangible improvements in residents' ability to access employment, education, healthcare, day opportunities and community life.

The first major phase of implementation will be delivered through the re-procurement of the supported bus network, introducing:

- enhanced frequencies on key CR corridors;
- Saturday operation across the full CR Network;
- new strategic bus services;
- improved connectivity between Dorset's towns, rural communities and key destinations; and
- stronger integration between public transport services including rail, CT and flexible services.

Collectively, the proposed CR enhancements represent a significant expansion of Dorset's supported bus network, increasing service provision by more than 700 additional weekly bus journeys and creating a substantially more connected and accessible public transport system.

Alongside these improvements, the council will:

1. establish a dedicated Independent Travel Training service;
2. expand the use of Personal Travel Budgets where appropriate;
3. strengthen and support CT provision;
4. introduce Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in areas where conventional bus services are not suitable;
5. improve integration between transport, Adult Day Opportunities and Children's Services;
6. develop stronger healthcare transport partnerships with NHS Dorset; and
7. improve integrated transport functions to coordinate planning, delivery and performance management across the system.

Community and place-based implementation



Through Community Conversations underway across 14 areas of Dorset over the summer and autumn of 2026, local partners (including town and parish councils, elected members, VCS colleagues and health partners) a number of place-based opportunities or solutions are being identified. Pilots for these areas will be undertaken during 2027 to complement and extend system led changes.

The programme has been intentionally designed to improve outcomes whilst retaining specialist transport where required. The objective is not to replace specialist provision, but to ensure that residents are able to use the most appropriate and proportionate transport option available to them.

An adult with a learning disability may currently rely on dedicated transport to attend a traditional day service. Under the programme, where safe and appropriate, they could receive travel training and support to use mainstream, CT or shared transport to access a wider range of community-based activities, giving them greater confidence, independence, choice and control over how they travel, while specialist transport would remain available where required.

The programme is intended to support:

- improved access to employment, education, healthcare and community services;
- greater independence and preparation for adulthood;
- reduced transport-related exclusion and isolation;
- improved accessibility for rural communities;
- stronger public and CT provision;
- improved coordination across transport services;
- better utilisation of existing resources and assets;
- support for healthy and connected communities; and
- improved long-term financial sustainability.

Importantly, many of the anticipated benefits extend beyond transport services alone and contribute to wider council priorities relating to economic prosperity, health, wellbeing, inclusion and prevention.

Investment and Affordability

The programme has an estimated total cost of £67.6 million over a seven-year implementation period, reflecting the scale of intervention required to address Dorset's transport challenges and build a more sustainable transport system. The largest element of expenditure relates to enhancement and long-term operation of the CR Network, which acts as the foundation for many of the programme's wider benefits.

This programme is one of the council's key transformation programmes and has been prioritised through service planning and medium-term financial planning because of its potential to support corporate transformation, financial sustainability and improved outcomes for residents.



Transport is not the end objective. It is an enabler of Adult Social Care transformation, SEND reform, prevention, health access, community resilience and the transition to a modern, financially sustainable unitary authority.

A significant proportion of this expenditure will be met through existing budgets and anticipated external funding streams. These include existing Dorset Travel budgets, Local Authority Bus Grant allocations, Community Infrastructure Levy and developer contributions, external grant funding and future partnership funding opportunities.

The Financial Case adopts a prudent approach. Whilst the programme has the potential to generate significant long-term benefits through SEND reform, Independent Travel Training, Adult Social Care transformation, improved fleet utilisation and health transport integration, these have been treated primarily as future cost avoidance opportunities rather than guaranteed savings. This ensures the affordability assessment remains robust.

After taking account of these funding sources, the estimated net additional funding requirement is approximately £39.3 million over seven years, equivalent to an average of approximately £5.6 million per annum.

Delivery and Governance

The programme has been deliberately structured to allow implementation to be phased and scaled according to funding availability.

The programme will be delivered through a phased approach over seven years. The first visible improvements will be delivered through the re-procurement of the supported bus network, with the enhanced CR Network becoming operational from Summer 2027. This will be followed by the rollout of Independent Travel Training, CT expansion, health transport partnership initiatives and DRT services, with later phases focused on scaling successful interventions and maximising long-term benefits.

2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30 to 2033/34
Mobilisation & Foundation: Programme governance established; supported bus procurement.	Implementation: Enhanced CR Network introduced; Independent Travel Training team established; CT grant programme expanded; health transport partnerships established; localised pilots led by the council and partners.	Implementation: First DRT zone introduced; travel training programme expands; integrated transport planning embedded; development of localised pilots and prototypes into replicable patterns of local service transport delivery.	Scale-Up & Optimisation: Additional DRT zones introduced; health transport integration expanded; benefits realisation and system optimisation

Implementation will be supported through the council's Transformation Office and Transport Beacon Team governance arrangements. The programme will utilise the Beacon Team multi-



disciplinary delivery model and will be supported by the Transformation Office to ensure robust programme management, benefits realisation and organisational alignment.

Strong partnership working will be central to delivery. Market engagement demonstrates that Dorset has an established public transport and Community Transport sector capable of supporting delivery of the preferred programme. The programme will be delivered through:

- supported bus network procurement;
- partnership working with operators and Community Transport providers;
- collaboration with NHS Dorset and other public sector partners;
- phased deployment of DRT through the Wessex Connect model; and
- strengthened contract management and performance monitoring arrangements.

Wessex Ready

The programme has also been designed to be Wessex ready. By creating a more integrated, scalable and strategically coordinated transport system, Dorset will be better positioned to participate in future devolution arrangements and regional transport delivery models. The proposed approach aligns closely with the emerging direction of travel within Wessex, which is seeking greater collaboration across transport, economic growth and public service delivery, and places particular emphasis on demonstrating practical delivery capability ahead of any formal devolution settlement.

Closer alignment between transport, health, education and economic development create the foundations for more effective regional connectivity across the wider Wessex area. In turn, this strengthens Dorset's ability to influence future regional priorities, participate in strategic transport initiatives and secure external investment to support further improvements in accessibility, economic growth and sustainable mobility.

The council will continue to work with Wessex partners through the emerging Strategic Authority programme and transport work, ensuring that Dorset's transport investment and service development plans contribute to, and are informed by, future regional transport strategies, cross-boundary connectivity priorities and economic growth ambitions.

Conclusion

This FBC concludes that the preferred programme represents one of the most significant opportunities available to the council to reshape access, mobility, independence and service delivery over the next decade.

The programme provides a balanced approach to improving accessibility, supporting independence, strengthening rural connectivity and creating a more coordinated transport system. It builds upon existing services, partnerships and assets whilst providing a clear framework for future investment and transformation.

The programme is designed to deliver early improvements for residents whilst establishing the foundations for longer-term change. Through phased implementation of the six intervention packages, the council can create a transport system that is more accessible, better



connected, more resilient and better aligned with the needs of residents, communities and public services.

The FBC therefore recommends approval of the preferred programme and associated implementation approach.



1 Introduction

This Full Business Case (FBC) sets out the proposed approach for implementing a more sustainable, integrated and efficient transport system across Dorset, building on the direction established by Cabinet in January 2026 and the findings of the Community and Public Transport Outline Business Case (OBC) completed in June 2026.

The OBC established that the challenges facing Dorset's public, community and specialist transport services cannot be addressed effectively through isolated or incremental improvements. It identified an integrated transport system as the Preferred Way Forward (the programme), combining measures to reshape demand, improve the integration and coordination of transport services, and strengthen and diversify public, community and flexible transport supply.

This FBC confirms the proposed scope and phasing of the preferred package and sets out the supporting economic, financial, commercial and management evidence. It also defines the intended benefits, delivery arrangements, governance, resource requirements, principal risks and approach to implementation. This programme sits within Dorset Council's wider modernisation and transformation agenda. It supports the council's transformation programme by recognising transport as an enabler of prevention, independence, community participation and more localised service delivery, rather than as a standalone operational service. It is also closely aligned with the council's financial sustainability programme, as rising demand for specialist transport, increasing contract costs and fragmented provision create long-term budget pressures that cannot be addressed through service-specific efficiencies alone.

The programme is particularly important to the delivery of Adult Day Opportunities redesign and SEND reform. Both agendas depend on people being able to access a wider range of education, care, employment, training, community and support opportunities closer to home. Improved public, community and flexible transport provision will help enable more personalised and community-based models of support, while recognising that specialist transport will continue to be required for residents with the most complex needs. In this context, transport is a key part of the wider prevention agenda, helping residents to remain independent, connected and able to participate in community life, while reducing the risk of escalating need and avoidable reliance on higher-cost services.

Since completion of the OBC, further option development, stakeholder engagement and technical analysis has been undertaken to refine the proposed interventions and test impact, affordability, dependencies and deliverability, including their alignment with the council's wider transformation, financial sustainability, SEND reform, Adult Day Opportunities and prevention agendas.

The preferred package combines mutually reinforcing measures to support independent travel and demand management, improve transport coordination and integration, and strengthen public, community and flexible transport provision. Together these interventions are intended



to improve accessibility, support independence, service efficiency and provide a more sustainable transport system.

The programme also supports the council's wider transformation agenda and ambition to become a modern, sustainable unitary authority. Transport is recognised as a critical enabler of prevention, independence and community participation, helping residents access employment, education, healthcare, day opportunities and community life. The programme will support wider transformation across Children's Services, Adult Social Care and healthcare by enabling more community-based and locality-focused models of service delivery, whilst promoting stronger partnership working with town and parish councils, community organisations, transport providers and public sector partners. By taking a more integrated approach to transport planning and delivery, the council can improve outcomes for residents whilst making better use of public resources and supporting long-term financial sustainability.

Together with the Parking Review Programme, this programme forms part of a wider mobility strategy that seeks to influence travel behaviour, improve access to services and opportunities, and support the development of a more sustainable, connected and financially resilient transport system for Dorset.

The programme is structured around three complementary themes:

- Reshaping demand and supporting independence through measures such as Independent Travel Training, Personal Travel Budgets and other demand-management initiatives;
- Integrating transport planning and delivery through improved coordination, planning, data sharing and system management across transport services; and
- Strengthening and diversifying transport supply through improvements to public transport, community transport and flexible transport provision.

The programme recognises that mainstream, community or shared transport will not be suitable for every journey or user. Targeted specialist provision will continue where required to discharge statutory responsibilities and meet individual safeguarding, accessibility and support needs.

Subject to approval, implementation would commence in 2027/28 and be delivered through a phased programme, with individual interventions implemented in line with organisational readiness, funding availability and delivery dependencies. Phasing will be used to manage service-continuity risks, align delivery with available funding and market capacity, establish the necessary organisational and digital foundations, and test outcomes before interventions are scaled.

This FBC assesses the value for money of the programme, its affordability, commercial viability and delivery success. It also identifies the principal uncertainties, including the future impact of SEND reform, future transport demand, provider and workforce capacity, recurring funding requirements and the timing of financial and non-financial benefits.



The FBC provides the basis for a decision on the programme, associated investment requirements, implementation arrangements and governance framework.



2 Strategic Case

2.1 Strategic Context

This section responds to Dorset's well-recognised challenges, including low bus service frequencies, limited weekend and evening provision, fragile community transport schemes, and a long-standing structural funding gap when compared with similar rural areas. These issues contribute to rural isolation, reduced access to employment and education, and greater dependency on private vehicles or specialist transport. A strategic shift is therefore needed to create a more reliable, inclusive and sustainable transport system for the county.

The council has identified a preferred programme centred on three themes: strengthening public transport, improving integration between public, community and specialist transport, and developing more flexible transport solutions for rural areas. The programme also seeks to reduce reliance on high-cost specialist transport where safe and appropriate alternatives exist, while supporting greater independence and improved access to services.

The programme has been informed by a comprehensive review of national research evaluation evidence. **Appendix B** demonstrates that transport accessibility contributes to improved economic participation, access to healthcare, social inclusion, independence and community resilience, and provides strong support for integrated approaches that combine public transport, community transport, demand-responsive transport and demand-management interventions.

Since completion of the OBC, additional stakeholder engagement, option development and technical analysis has been undertaken. This includes engagement with public transport operators, community transport providers, Transport Action Groups, Adult Social Care and Children's Services, helping refine the preferred programme and identify delivery risks, dependencies and implementation considerations. This FBC provides the evidence required to support decisions on the preferred programme, associated investment requirements and phased delivery approach. The programme supports a transition from transport services that are largely planned and delivered separately towards a more coordinated system with stronger shared planning, clearer accountability, improved information and performance management, and better connections between public, community and specialist transport. This does not remove service-specific responsibilities or statutory duties but provides a framework for closer coordination where appropriate.

2.1.1 Transport as an Enabler of a Modern Sustainable Unitary Authority

Supporting Prevention and Independence



The future direction of the council places greater emphasis on prevention and enabling residents to remain independent for longer. Transport is a critical enabler of these outcomes. Without accessible and reliable transport, residents can become isolated from employment, education, healthcare, volunteering opportunities and community life, increasing demand for council services. Improved access to mainstream, community and flexible transport can support independence, social participation and wellbeing, reducing reliance on more intensive forms of support.

Enabling Service Transformation

Many of the council's major transformation programmes will enable people to access a wider range of opportunities closer to home. The programme enables wider transformation across Children's Services, Adult Social Care and health services by supporting access to community-based opportunities, reducing barriers to participation and enabling more flexible models of service delivery.

Making Better Use of Public Resources

A modern sustainable unitary authority must maximise the value achieved from existing assets, funding and partnerships. By taking a more integrated approach to transport planning and delivery, the council can improve outcomes whilst making better use of public resources.

Working with Communities and Partners

The programme reflects the council's ambition to work with communities and partners to deliver better outcomes. Transport will increasingly be planned and delivered through collaboration with town and parish councils, community transport providers, NHS partners, businesses and local communities, recognising that sustainable transport solutions require shared ownership across the system.

Summary

The Public Buses and Community Transport Transformation Programme therefore supports the council's ambition to become a modern, sustainable unitary authority. It enables a shift from managing transport as a series of individual services towards a coordinated mobility system that supports independence, prevention, community resilience and more efficient use of public resources. In doing so, transport becomes an enabler of wider transformation rather than an objective in itself.

2.2 How the Programme Supports Existing Policies and Strategies

This FBC builds on established priorities across transport, children's, adult's and community services, and shows how the programme contributes to wider objectives such as improving access, supporting independence and achieving financial and environmental sustainability. This alignment provides a clear strategic foundation for the programme and helps ensure that



the proposed approach is both consistent with policy direction and capable of delivering long-term benefits for Dorset.

2.2.1 Alignment with Dorset Council's Transformation Programme

The council is pursuing a programme of organisational transformation designed to create a modern, financially sustainable unitary authority that delivers better outcomes for residents through prevention, early intervention, stronger community partnerships and more efficient use of public resources.

The Public Buses and Community Transport Transformation Programme directly supports this agenda by recognising transport as a critical enabler of broader service transformation rather than a standalone service.

Prevention and Earlier Intervention

The programme supports the council's preventative approach by improving access to employment, education, healthcare, day opportunities and community activities. Accessible and reliable transport enables residents to remain active, connected and independent, helping to reduce social isolation and preventing issues from escalating into higher-cost interventions and support needs.

Independence and Strengths-Based Approaches

The programme aligns with the council's commitment to supporting residents to do as much as possible for themselves. Through measures such as Independent Travel Training, Personal Travel Budgets and improved access to mainstream and community transport options, the programme seeks to build confidence, capability and independence whilst ensuring specialist transport remains focused on those with the greatest need.

Parking Review Programme

The programme aligns with the council's Parking Review Programme as part of a wider approach to managing movement, access and travel demand across Dorset. While the Parking Review focuses on the management and efficient use of parking assets, this programme focuses on improving access to alternative transport options and enabling greater independence. Together, the two programmes support behavioural change, improve access to services and town centres, and contribute to the council's ambitions for sustainable transport, stronger communities and long-term financial sustainability.

Locality Delivery and Community-Based Services

Many of the council's transformation programmes increasingly emphasise support delivered closer to home through locality-based and community-based models. Improved transport connectivity, stronger CT provision and more flexible mobility solutions are essential enablers of this shift, helping residents access a wider range of opportunities and services within their local communities.



Community-Powered Services and Partnership Working

The programme supports the council's ambition to work alongside communities and partners to deliver better outcomes. Delivery will rely on collaboration with CT providers, town and parish councils, voluntary and community organisations, NHS partners, public transport operators and local communities. This reflects a shared responsibility for improving mobility, accessibility and social inclusion across Dorset.

Financial Sustainability and Better Use of Public Resources

The programme contributes to the council's long-term financial sustainability objectives through a more integrated and coordinated approach to transport planning and delivery. By improving use of mainstream and CT where appropriate, reducing duplication, improving asset utilisation and enabling wider service transformation programmes, the programme supports more efficient use of public resources whilst maintaining support for those with the most complex needs.

Supporting a Modern Sustainable Unitary Authority

Collectively, these outcomes support the council's ambition to become a modern, sustainable unitary authority. The programme enables a transition from a fragmented transport system towards a coordinated mobility network that supports prevention, independence, community resilience and wider service transformation. Transport is therefore positioned not simply as a service, but as a strategic enabler of the council's long-term transformation objectives.

2.2.2 Alignment with Dorset Council's Corporate Priorities

The programme directly supports the council's four strategic priorities. By improving access to services, supporting independence, enabling economic growth and contributing to environmental objectives, the programme will help create stronger, more connected and sustainable communities across Dorset.

Affordable housing

The programme supports the council's emerging Local Plan by helping ensure that housing growth is accompanied by accessible and sustainable transport options. Reliable public and CT is essential for enabling access to employment, education, healthcare and other services, particularly in rural areas. By improving connectivity and reducing reliance on private cars, the programme supports the development of well-connected, inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities. Stakeholder engagement also highlighted the importance of considering transport requirements at the earliest stages of development planning, ensuring that new communities are designed around realistic travel choices rather than long-term dependence on car travel.

Growing the economy

The programme supports the council's ambition to grow a sustainable and prosperous economy, as set out in the Energising Dorset's Economy programme and Economic Growth



Strategy 2025–2040. Reliable transport is essential for connecting people to jobs, education and training, supporting access to key economic sites, and enabling businesses to attract and retain workers. By improving connectivity and accessibility across Dorset, the programme will help support productivity, investment and sustainable economic growth.

Communities for all

The programme supports this priority by improving access to services, reducing inequality and strengthening community connections. It aligns closely with the council's Age Friendly Dorset initiative, recognising that reliable and accessible transport is a key enabler of independence, wellbeing and participation, particularly for older people and residents living in rural or isolated areas. The programme also supports the council's community-centred approach by enabling localised, place-based pilots and delivery models involving transport operators, voluntary organisations, town and parish councils, and local communities to identify local accessibility needs, support community-led mobility initiatives and help develop services that reflect local circumstances. This recognises the important role of CT and volunteer-led services in supporting access across rural Dorset.

Responding to the climate and nature crisis

The programme supports the council's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and promoting more sustainable travel, as set out in the Council Plan and Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy. Transport is a significant contributor to emissions, and improving access to public and CT can help reduce reliance on private vehicles, lower emissions and improve air quality. The programme also supports the longer-term transition to cleaner vehicle technologies and a lower-carbon transport network.

2.2.3 Alignment with National, Regional and Local Strategies

The programme aligns with national, regional and local policy objectives for improving accessibility, supporting independence, strengthening public transport and creating more integrated transport systems.

At a national level, the programme supports the Department for Transport's Better Connected: A Strategy for Integrated Transport and Bus Reform agenda, both of which emphasise the importance of joined-up, customer-focused transport networks, stronger integration and coordination between transport modes, improved use of data and technology, and more flexible approaches to meeting transport needs. The programme reflects these principles through its focus on coordination across public, community and specialist transport services.

The programme also aligns with the Care Act 2014, which places a duty on local authorities to promote wellbeing, independence and prevention. Reliable and accessible transport is a key enabler of these outcomes, helping people remain active, connected and able to access services and community life.

The programme supports the direction of national SEND reform, which seeks to increase mainstream inclusion, strengthen local provision and reduce reliance on distant specialist



placements. Over time, these reforms may influence transport demand by increasing access to education and services closer to home. The reforms also place greater emphasis on preparation for adulthood, employment, training, independent living and community participation, all of which rely on effective transport provision.

Whilst SEND reform may reduce future growth in transport demand and increase opportunities for local provision and independent travel, significant uncertainty remains regarding the scale and timing of these impacts. In particular, demand associated with children and young people with the most complex needs may remain relatively stable. The programme therefore recognises SEND reform as a potential influence on future transport demand rather than an assumed source of transport savings.

At a local level, the programme directly supports the Dorset Local Transport Plan 2026-2041 and Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Together these strategies seek to create a transport system that is safe, inclusive, sustainable and accessible, while improving connectivity, supporting economic growth, reducing transport inequalities and encouraging a shift towards lower-carbon travel. The programme also complements the council's wider work on parking, place-making and demand management by improving access to realistic alternatives to private car travel.

Together with the Parking Review Programme, this programme forms part of a wider approach to managing movement, access and travel demand across Dorset. The Parking Review considers how parking assets and policy can support town centres, communities and sustainable travel, while this programme improves the availability and integration of realistic alternatives to private car use. The two programmes therefore provide complementary mechanisms for influencing travel behaviour and improving access to services and opportunities.

The programme is also consistent with wider regional ambitions for improved connectivity, economic growth and decarbonisation, including the Western Gateway Strategic Transport Plan and emerging discussions on devolution, regional collaboration and future transport governance. By strengthening cross-boundary services, developing Wessex Connect and establishing more integrated planning and delivery arrangements, the programme will help ensure that Dorset is ready to respond to future strategic authority arrangements and integrated funding opportunities.

Collectively, these policy alignments demonstrate that the programme supports the council's wider ambitions for economic prosperity, community resilience, independence, inclusion and environmental sustainability.

2.2.4 Regional Collaboration and Devolution

Dorset is already working with regional partners to strengthen cross-boundary transport planning, including collaboration with Wiltshire Council and engagement through the emerging Wessex devolution programme. The proposed Wessex Connect approach and investment in Dorset's Core Route Network provide a practical basis for improving cross-boundary access, demonstrating delivery readiness, and positioning Dorset to participate in



future regional transport governance, transport strategies and integrated settlement funding opportunities.

Further detail on national, regional and local policy alignment is provided in **Appendix C**.

2.3 Stakeholder evidence and engagement

Since completion of the OBC, further engagement has been undertaken to test the strategic direction and identify the improvements that stakeholders consider most important. This has included the Community and Public Transport Options Appraisal Development Workshop, a follow-up discussion with Children's Services, engagement with Transport Action Groups and benchmarking with other local authorities.

2.3.1 Transport Action Groups

Feedback has consistently supported a more integrated approach to transport planning and delivery. Transport Action Groups particularly emphasised stronger core bus services, better integration between bus, rail, community transport and active travel, improved rural accessibility, safe connections to transport hubs, and continued involvement of users and local communities in service design. Engagement with young people also highlighted concerns regarding the reliability and affordability of transport, particularly within rural areas, and the impact this has on access to employment, activities, services and social opportunities.

2.3.2 Dorset Service Teams

Engagement with service teams reinforced the importance of supporting independence, improving coordination between transport and wider council services, and retaining specialist provision where individual needs mean that mainstream or shared transport is not suitable. Independent Travel Training emerged as a particularly important opportunity for supporting preparation for adulthood, access to employment and volunteering, and reduced reliance on specialist transport for appropriate individuals.

2.3.3 Community conversations

Community Conversations are being held across 14 areas of Dorset, at which many are providing examples of where transport options serve communities well, and where there are opportunities for different, more innovative or contextual responses to local need.

The council's Community Conversations provide an important channel for understanding experiences of living in Dorset and the factors that enable people to participate in their communities. Transport and accessibility are relevant to this wider conversation because they influence whether residents can reach employment, education, healthcare, shopping, volunteering opportunities, social activities and local services.

The programme recognises that transport needs and potential solutions vary between Dorset's rural, coastal and market-town communities. This supports a place-based approach in which



public transport, CT, flexible transport and local connections are considered together, rather than applying a single solution across the county.

The Community Conversations approach also reinforces the importance of developing solutions with communities and partners. Town and parish councils, CT providers, voluntary organisations and residents can provide local knowledge, identify accessibility gaps and help shape responses that reflect local circumstances. Their involvement should therefore extend beyond consultation to include, where appropriate, service design, local delivery, promotion and ongoing review.

The programme will continue to draw on Community Conversations and other engagement channels during implementation. Resident experience will be considered alongside operational and performance evidence through the proposed test, learn and refine approach, helping ensure that interventions remain locally informed and responsive to changing needs.

2.3.4 Adult Day Opportunities Consultation

Extensive engagement undertaken as part of the Adult Day Opportunities review identified transport as a critical enabler of future service delivery. Consultation and engagement activities undertaken between 2021 and 2025 highlighted a strong desire for more flexible, community-based and locally accessible opportunities, particularly amongst younger adults. Participants consistently identified transport as one of the key factors influencing their ability to access services, activities and wider opportunities within their communities. The consultation identified several themes which are directly relevant to this programme:

Benefits and Savings

The scale and timing of any future shift away from specialist transport provision remains uncertain. Adult Services have identified a need for a structured test-and-learn approach to understand how travel training, Direct Payments, Community Transport, locality-based provision and alternative transport models influence behaviour, accessibility and transport demand over time. Initial assumptions should therefore be treated as strategic aspirations rather than forecasts.

Flexibility and variety

Younger cohorts expressed a preference for opportunities that take place within the community rather than solely within traditional building-based settings. There was strong support for activities that promote independence, skill development and participation in everyday community life. Delivering this type of offer requires transport systems that provide greater flexibility and access to a wider range of locations and opportunities.

Choice and control

Service users highlighted the importance of having greater choice over how they spend their time and access support. Respondents expressed interest in more personalised approaches that offer flexibility and different ways of accessing opportunities. Transport plays an important



role in enabling this choice by allowing people to travel more independently and access a broader range of activities.

Local provision and community-based support

There was strong support for services being delivered closer to home and more closely connected to local communities. Many respondents indicated a willingness to access opportunities within their local area, providing appropriate transport options were available. This aligns closely with the programme's ambition to strengthen community-based services and improve local connectivity.

Understanding of hub-and-spoke delivery

More than half of respondents recognised the potential benefits of hub-and-spoke models of service delivery. This indicates a willingness to embrace more flexible and locally distributed approaches to accessing support, activities and opportunities, provided transport arrangements make these options accessible in practice.

Transport flexibility

Both service users and carers identified the need for more flexible transport arrangements to support participation in day opportunities and wider community life. Feedback highlighted the importance of transport systems that can support different destinations, different times of day and more personalised patterns of activity.

Communication and information

Respondents identified a need for clearer information about available services and opportunities. Some participants were unaware of activities and support already available within their communities. This reinforces the importance of improved information provision, journey planning and coordination within the future transport system.

Summary

The consultation findings reinforce the conclusion that transport should be viewed as a critical enabler of Adult Social Care transformation rather than a standalone service. Without more flexible, accessible and integrated transport options, many of the ambitions associated with community-based day opportunities, greater independence, increased choice and improved participation in community life will be difficult to realise at scale. Conversely, a more integrated transport system can help enable the transition towards a more personalised, strengths-based and community-focused model of support.

2.3.5 Age Friendly Dorset

The Age Friendly Dorset programme aims to make Dorset a place where people can live well as they grow older, remain active and continue participating in their local communities. In October 2025, Dorset became the UK's 100th local authority to register as an age-friendly community with the Centre for Ageing Better. The programme is informed by the lived



experience of residents aged over 50 and considers the opportunities and challenges associated with ageing across eight age-friendly domains.

The Understanding Ageing in Dorset: Key Findings from the Age-Friendly Survey report provides important supporting evidence for this programme. More than 700 people responded to the survey, with the findings intended to inform an Age Friendly Dorset action plan developed alongside wider data, public conversations and community insight. The report emphasises the importance of increasing independence and maintaining quality of life as Dorset's population ages.

Transport and mobility are important enablers of an age-friendly community. Accessible and reliable travel options can help older residents reach healthcare, shopping, community facilities, social activities and other essential destinations. They can also support continued independence and participation, particularly for residents who do not drive or whose transport choices are limited by mobility needs, rural location or the availability of local services.

The findings strengthen the case for an integrated transport system that provides a range of appropriate choices. A stronger CR Network can improve access between towns and key destinations, while CT and flexible transport can provide complementary options for residents and places that cannot always be served effectively by conventional services. Safe and accessible stops, suitable interchange arrangements, clear journey information and inclusive customer service will also influence whether older residents feel able and confident to use the network.

The programme will therefore seek to involve older residents directly in the design, implementation and review of transport improvements. This should include engagement on accessibility, reliability, journey information, interchange, personal safety, staff awareness and the practical barriers residents experience when planning and making journeys. The FBC already recognises the importance of representing older residents in future transport development and strengthening staff and driver awareness of the needs of different user groups.

The Public Buses and Community Transport Transformation Programme supports the objectives of Age Friendly Dorset by:

- strengthening public and CT provision
- supporting residents to remain independent and connected
- improving access to healthcare, shops, community facilities and social opportunities
- reducing transport-related isolation and exclusion
- providing flexible options for rural and less-connected communities
- improving confidence through accessible information, infrastructure and customer service
- involving older residents in ongoing service design and evaluation

The Age Friendly Dorset evidence will continue to inform implementation through the programme's proposed test, learn and refine approach. Monitoring should consider not only passenger numbers, but also older residents' reported confidence, accessibility, independence,



participation and experience of using transport services. This will help ensure that the programme contributes to improved quality of life and enables residents to remain active within their communities as they grow older.

2.3.6 Youth Voice

Young people identified unreliable and inconsistent transport, limited rural services and travel costs as barriers to accessing employment, education, clubs, activities and other opportunities outside school. They called for more reliable bus services and for the accessibility needs of rural communities to be explicitly reflected in local strategies. Youth engagement and services should also be delivered locally wherever practicable, recognising that limited transport availability and affordability can restrict participation.

2.3.7 Resident Experience and User Journeys

The examples below combine real-world resident experience with an illustrative future user journey. They demonstrate the social value of accessible transport and how the programme could support wider transformation. Mainstream, CT or shared transport will not be appropriate for every resident or journey. Specialist transport will continue to be provided where required by statutory duties, safeguarding considerations, accessibility requirements or individual needs. This reflects the approach adopted throughout the programme.

‘It gives you your independence back’ - Impact of Accessible Transport

The benefit of transport is not limited to completing a journey. Being able to reach healthcare, shopping, social activities and community services can reduce reliance on family members and carers, support personal choice and help residents remain active and connected. A resident’s experience of the Bere Regis NeighbourCar scheme reinforces the importance of treating CT and accessible public transport as preventative services and as part of Dorset’s social infrastructure. A reliable transport option can help residents maintain independence, participate in their communities and avoid the isolation that can arise when suitable travel options are unavailable.

Public Transport Supports Mobility in Later Life

A resident’s continued use of bus services at 100 years old provides a real-world example of the role that public transport can play in supporting mobility and participation throughout later life. This example illustrates why the availability, accessibility and reliability of services matter. For older residents, a bus journey can provide access to essential destinations while also enabling continued connection with local places and community life. Public transport can therefore contribute to independence, wellbeing and reduced reliance on informal support.

The example also supports the programme’s emphasis on strengthening the CR Network and improving the confidence of older residents when travelling. This includes considering accessible vehicles and stops, reliable services, clear journey information, suitable interchange arrangements and inclusive customer service.



Summary

The experiences of residents will continue to inform implementation through feedback, engagement and the programme's proposed test, learn and refine approach. This will help ensure that services remain locally informed, accessible and responsive to the differing needs of Dorset's rural, coastal and market-town communities.

2.3.8 Stakeholder evidence and engagement summary

This feedback has informed the programme objectives, service requirements and development of the preferred intervention package set out in the Economic Case and further detail of the stakeholder engagement is included in **Appendix D**.

2.4 The Case for Change

Dorset's current public bus and CT offer is no longer able to meet the needs of a modern rural county. Services are constrained by long-standing structural challenges, including low frequencies on many routes, limited weekend and evening provision, and significant gaps in coverage across rural areas. These limitations affect residents' ability to travel independently, reach essential services, and take part in employment, education and community life. This also places pressure on specialist and supported transport services, which must fill gaps where mainstream public transport is not available or reliable. As a result, there is growing reliance on more bespoke provision, including home to school (HtS) transport for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and transport for Adult Social Care and day opportunities, which places additional strain on the overall system.

Dorset's public transport network is also affected by seasonal timetable changes, with service reductions commonly implemented during the winter months. This can further reduce accessibility for residents, create uncertainty for users and undermine confidence in public transport as a reliable year-round travel option.

The county's rural geography and dispersed settlements mean that providing transport is inherently resource-intensive. At the same time, Dorset receives lower levels of transport funding than comparable rural authorities, limiting the ability to maintain or grow the network. This funding imbalance affects both public and CT and contributes to long-term fragility within the system. Many CT schemes operate with small budgets and rely heavily on volunteers, leaving them vulnerable to rising costs and inconsistent capacity. These structural issues also make it more difficult to respond effectively to increasing demand for specialist transport, which is often delivered through high-cost, individually commissioned services.

The current system is also characterised by separate planning, commissioning and delivery arrangements across public transport, CT, HtS and adult transport. These services have evolved largely in isolation, limiting opportunities to share resources, coordinate journeys, improve vehicle utilisation and make better use of available funding. This fragmentation contributes to duplication, inefficiency and a transport offer that can be difficult for users to navigate.



These pressures reduce social and economic opportunities for residents and risk widening inequalities, particularly for young people in rural communities who may be unable to access employment, education, recreation and support services without affordable and reliable transport. They also make it difficult for the council to achieve wider ambitions around community resilience, strengthening connections between generations, sustainable travel and climate action. Without intervention, the network is likely to become increasingly fragile, with reduced patronage and fewer opportunities to integrate services or improve value for money. At the same time, continued growth in demand for specialist transport will further increase costs and limit the ability to reinvest in more flexible and accessible alternatives.

Feedback from Transport Action Groups, service users and stakeholder workshops reinforces these findings. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of strengthening the core bus network, improving integration and coordination between transport modes, better serving rural communities, improving access to transport hubs, and maintaining meaningful engagement with local communities as services evolve.

The Age Friendly Dorset survey highlighted that transport challenges are not solely related to service provision, with many residents reporting that uncertainty about available services, journey planning and interchange arrangements reduces confidence in using public and CT.

The Case for Change therefore focuses on establishing a transport system that is reliable, inclusive and financially sustainable. It identifies the need to strengthen the bus network, provide better links for rural communities, support and stabilise CT, and explore flexible solutions where fixed routes cannot operate effectively. Alongside this, there is a need to take a more proactive approach to managing demand, ensuring that specialist transport is targeted where it is most needed, while enabling greater independence and supporting increased use of shared, community and mainstream transport options where appropriate. Addressing these challenges now will allow Dorset to move toward a coherent, long-term model of mobility that better supports residents, businesses and local places.

The programme seeks to support a behavioural shift towards greater use of mainstream public transport, CT and independent travel options where appropriate. The intended outcome is that residents are empowered to travel independently, access opportunities within their communities, maintain social connections and achieve greater independence, while ensuring specialist transport provision remains focused on those with the most complex needs.

It is intended to support wider outcomes including increased independence, preparation for adulthood, improved access to employment and education, reduced social isolation, greater community participation and a more strengths-based approach across Adult Social Care and Children's Services. By supporting more residents to use the most appropriate transport option for their needs, the programme can help reduce future demand for specialist transport while improving quality of life and creating a more sustainable system.

This behavioural shift is particularly important for young people, vulnerable adults and those currently reliant on specialist transport provision. There is increasing recognition of the role transport can play in supporting independence, particularly for young people and vulnerable adults. Independent Travel Training and related support can help reduce long-term



dependency on specialist transport, improve confidence and mobility skills, and increase access to education, employment, volunteering and wider community opportunities.

This FBC builds on the evidence for change established through the OBC and demonstrates how the preferred programme responds to the challenges identified. The next section outlines the objectives that will guide the preferred approach and shape the future of Dorset's public and CT network.

2.4.1 Objectives

The objectives of this programme describe the specific outcomes the council intends to achieve through transforming public buses and CT. They reflect the issues identified in the Case for Change and provide a structured basis for implementation, evaluation and benefits realisation. While they stand independently, each objective contributes directly to one or more of the council's four strategic priorities.

Objective 1: Create a more frequent and better-connected transport network

Desired outcome: A more reliable and connected transport network, with improved frequencies, fewer rural coverage gaps, stronger links between public, community and flexible services, and improved interchange opportunities at key transport hubs and service centres. More dependable services will reduce missed medical appointments, support daily life and help ensure that more residents can reach essential services without relying on a car.

Supports Council priorities: Growing the economy; Communities for all; Climate and nature.

Objective 2: Improve access to key services, employment, education, training, volunteer opportunities and essential destinations

Desired outcome: Improved and affordable access to employment, education, healthcare and essential services across Dorset, particularly for rural and isolated communities. This will support local economic activity, reduce inequalities in access and help young people and working-age residents participate fully in Dorset's economic and community life.

Supports Council priorities: Growing the economy; Affordable housing; Communities for all.

Objective 3: Reduce social isolation and increase independence for residents of all ages

Desired outcome: A more inclusive transport system that enables older residents, disabled people, vulnerable people, young people and those without a car to travel independently with confidence. This includes increasing confidence to use mainstream, community and shared transport options where appropriate, strengthening CT provision, improving mainstream services, and ensuring that residents can access community life, social opportunities and support networks.



Supports Council priorities: Communities for all; Health and wellbeing.

Objective 4: Build a financially sustainable and resilient transport model

Desired outcome: A long-term, affordable transport system that reflects the realities of a rural county with dispersed settlements. This includes reducing reliance on specialist services where mainstream options are suitable, making better use of resources and ensuring that the council can sustain improvements despite historic funding inequalities.

Supports Council priorities: Value for money; Growing the economy; Communities for all.

Objective 5: Support thriving, well-connected communities and local economies

Desired outcome: Better transport connections that strengthen town centres, support local businesses, encourage tourism and help residents engage in community life. Improved connectivity will make Dorset's local areas more resilient and attractive places to live, work and visit.

Supports Council priorities: Growing the economy; Communities for all.

Objective 6: Encourage the shift to sustainable, low-carbon travel

Desired outcome: More people choosing public or CT instead of private cars, contributing to reduced carbon emissions and improved air quality. This objective supports Dorset's climate commitments and prepares the network for future moves toward cleaner vehicle technologies.

Supports Council priorities: Climate and nature; Sustainable development.

2.5 Existing arrangements (Business as Usual Scenario)

This section sets out the current transport arrangements in Dorset. It establishes the Business as Usual (BAU) scenario against which future options will be assessed. It describes how services are currently delivered, funded and used, and highlights structural issues that any proposed model must take into account. This provides the baseline for evaluating the future improvements.

2.5.1 Current Public Transport Network

Scale and Structure of the Network

Dorset's bus network is made up of a combination of commercial services, and a network of council-supported core inter-urban routes designed to connect key towns and rural communities, known as the CR network. Rail services also form an important part of Dorset's wider transport system, providing strategic connectivity through the South Western Main Line, West of England Line and Heart of Wessex Line. While rail services are not covered by



this business case, improved integration and coordination between rail, bus and CT services represents an opportunity for future network development.

DfT [bus statistics](#) show that in 2024/25, bus services operated 5.57 million kilometres, of which 82% were operated commercially and 18% were supported by the council. The council plays a significant role as the Local Transport Authority by supporting socially necessary services that are not commercially viable, particularly in rural areas. In 2024/25, the council supported 990,000 kilometres of bus mileage, from a total public transport budget of £3.95m, providing essential connections in areas with low population density and limited travel choices.

The public bus network has shrunk 22% since 2019/20, a reduction of 1.91 million kilometres. This has been driven by a significant 29% reduction in commercial bus routes. In contrast the local authority supported network is growing, now 43% larger when compared to 2019/20, reflecting a growing need for the council to step in and ensure socially necessary services are maintained.

Core Route Network

The council has increased its influence over the CR network, which forms the backbone of Dorset's inter-urban bus system. These routes connect the county's principal towns and service centres, including Weymouth, Dorchester, Bridport, Blandford Forum, Sherborne, Shaftesbury, Gillingham and Sturminster Newton.

The network also performs an important strategic role beyond Dorset's administrative boundaries, providing access to employment, education, healthcare and transport hubs across neighbouring authority areas. As discussions continue regarding devolution and regional collaboration, the network provides an established foundation for stronger cross-boundary connectivity.

Many routes currently operate at approximately two-hourly frequencies, with limited evening provision and no Sunday services. These limitations reduce the attractiveness of public transport and constrain opportunities for residents to access employment, education, healthcare and leisure activities without relying on a car.

Recent service enhancements, including the introduction of Saturday services on several routes, have resulted in increased passenger numbers and more stable patterns of use. Evidence from the CR network suggests that residents respond positively when services become more consistent, reliable and available across more days of the week.

The network also plays a critical social role. Concessionary passengers account for a substantial proportion of journeys and CR passenger surveys indicate that over half of users do not have access to a car. Around one-third of passengers report that they would be unable to make their journey without the bus. This demonstrates the importance of the network in supporting access to employment, education, healthcare and community life, particularly for transport-dependent residents.

Feedback from the Local Transport Plan consultation identified public transport as the most important transport issue for residents, with concerns focused on frequency, reliability and



rural accessibility. Together, the evidence demonstrates that the CR network is highly valued, heavily relied upon and provides a strong foundation for future investment and integration.

Passenger Use and Trends

The DfT's [Bus Statistics](#) show that across Dorset 6.1 million passenger journeys were made in 2024/25. This remains 20% below pre-pandemic levels. Although bus patronage has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, demand continues to recover, with annual passenger journeys increasing from 4.8 million in 2021 to 6.1 million in 2024, providing clear evidence of sustained growth in bus use. It is estimated that if recent recovery trends continue, annual bus patronage in Dorset could reach approximately 8.5-9.0 million journeys by 2030, exceeding pre-pandemic levels and demonstrating the long-term growth potential of Dorset's bus network.

Concessionary passengers make up 37% of all journeys, among the highest proportions in the South West. Concessionary journeys have been slow to recover post pandemic, with a million fewer journeys made in 2024/25 compared with 2019/20.

Network Performance and Reliability

Bus punctuality remains below targets set by Government. In 2024/25, 79% of scheduled departures were recorded as on time, compared with a target of 95%. While this marks improvement over pre-pandemic performance, reliability challenges remain, particularly in peak seasons and coastal corridors with congestion pressures.

Commercial Bus Operators and the Enhanced Partnership

The council works with bus operators through a formal Enhanced Partnership, which provides a framework for joint planning, timetable coordination, network stability and alignment with BSIP priorities. Operators deliver most of the bus mileage in the county and continue to face pressures from rising costs, and low commercial viability in rural areas. The council's partnership model supports coordinated improvements but is constrained by available funding and limited levers in areas with low patronage.

In parallel with the Enhanced Partnership, the council has begun early work to understand whether alternative delivery models could better address the structural challenges facing the network. The council has secured grant funding from the Department for Transport's Franchising Support Fund to undertake a franchising pre-feasibility study, which would provide a robust evidence base comparing franchising, hybrid models and the best realistically achievable Enhanced Partnership scenario. This work is explicitly exploratory and does not represent a decision to pursue franchising, rather, it will assess the potential to improve outcomes including rural accessibility, network stability, integration with CT, and long-term financial sustainability. The study will be undertaken collaboratively with operators and partners, ensuring that the Enhanced Partnership remains the primary delivery mechanism during this phase while enabling informed future decision-making.

Fleet and Vehicle Standards



Dorset's bus fleet has an average age of 9.4 years. There are currently no zero-emission buses operating on the network. Fleet renewal continues to be constrained by operator finances, the high upfront cost of vehicles, and the challenges associated with operating in a rural, low-density environment.

Investment in new vehicles, particularly zero-emission buses, and associated technology requires significant capital outlay and long payback periods. Providing longer-term contract certainty and stable service pipelines will be critical to de-risking these investments, enabling operators to commit to newer, cleaner vehicles and to invest in supporting infrastructure and workforce capability.

The council is beginning to address these challenges through targeted capital investment using its Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) allocation. The current 2026/27 Delivery Plan includes a major project to electrify the Swanage bus fleet, combining investment in charging infrastructure with the introduction of zero-emission buses. This represents an important first step in developing a scalable model for fleet decarbonisation in Dorset, demonstrating how targeted capital funding can accelerate transition where supported by appropriate infrastructure and operational planning.

Looking ahead, a coordinated approach will be required to deliver a sustained transition toward a lower-emission fleet. Without this alignment, progress toward zero-emission vehicles is likely to remain limited and uneven across the network.

2.5.2 Community Transport

CT is a vital lifeline for rural residents, including older people, disabled residents and vulnerable adults, and those without access to a private car. Dorset has more than 75 community transport schemes, including dial-a-ride, community minibuses and volunteer car services. These provide flexible, accessible travel for essential trips such as shopping, medical and social appointments.

Dorset Community Transport (DCT), delivered by ECT Charity, plays a central role in CT provision across Dorset, combining local delivery with the scale and capability of a national operator. Operating across Dorset, including demand-responsive transport, group travel, education transport and supported bus services, DCT provides essential access for people in rural areas where mainstream services are limited or unavailable. This transport often acts as a lifeline for individuals who would otherwise rely on taxis or be unable to travel at all.

The impact of DCT's services extends beyond transport provision, generating significant social value and supporting wider council outcomes. ECT Charity's Social Value assessment identifies over £1.25 million in annual social value, with strong evidence of improved independence, reduced loneliness and better access to essential services. User feedback shows that 85% of passengers report increased independence and 90% improved access to local facilities, demonstrating the role of CT as a preventative intervention that supports health, wellbeing and reduced reliance on statutory services.



Despite these strengths, there is a clear opportunity to build on DCT's existing role by positioning it as a strategic delivery partner within an integrated transport model. This could include expanding demand-responsive provision, improving first- and last-mile connections to the CR Network, and supporting cross-sector transport needs including Adult Social Care and SEND. With established operational capability and a strong evidence base, DCT is well placed to move from a key provider to a central component of a more coordinated, resilient and scalable CT network in Dorset.

CT provision in Dorset is highly fragile, relying heavily on volunteers and inconsistent funding. Budget comparisons show the council's CT support is significantly lower than neighbouring rural authorities, contributing to gaps in provision and ongoing risks to sustainability. For example, the ATCO Survey 2024 Report highlighted that Dorset spent £5,813 on CT from its core budget in 2023/24, compared with £426k in Devon, £974k in Somerset and £122k in Wiltshire. Council CT funding has increased in the last two years, with £60k in grants issued in 2025/26.

CT services are well-used but inconsistently integrated with the wider network, and there is no digital booking or shared platform in place. This limits their visibility, coordination and ability to scale. Stakeholder engagement consistently identified stronger integration between CT, public transport and specialist services as a priority for future development.

2.5.3 Home to School Transport

HtS, particularly for children and young people with SEND, represents a significant and growing pressure within Dorset's current transport system. Demand for transport support has increased in recent years, driven by rising numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), greater reliance on specialist provision, and increasing travel distances between home and education settings. Continuing growth in SEND transport demand has placed increasing pressure on the HtS transport budget, with expenditure increasing from around £10.5 million in 2022 to £18.55 million in 2026, reflecting both a rising number of transport requests and increasingly complex travel requirements.

The current HtS model is characterised by a high reliance on bespoke, council-commissioned transport, including taxis and specialist vehicles. A substantial proportion of journeys, particularly within SEND, are delivered on a single-occupancy basis, often over long distances to access suitable provision. This reflects both the complexity of need and the limited availability of viable alternatives within the wider transport network. In many cases, pupils cannot reasonably be accommodated on existing public or shared transport services due to a combination of journey times, service availability, and individual support requirements.

Dorset's rural geography further intensifies these pressures. The decline in commercial bus services and limited coverage of the current network mean that mainstream transport is not consistently available as an alternative. As a result, the council is required to provide dedicated transport for a growing number of pupils who might, in a more connected system, be able to travel via shared or mainstream modes. This creates a structural dependency on high-cost provision and limits opportunities to optimise routes or increase vehicle utilisation.



The system is also shaped by fragmentation between transport, education and SEND planning processes. Placement decisions are sometimes made independently of transport considerations, leading to longer journeys and reduced opportunities to coordinate travel across cohorts. While route planning and procurement processes are in place, national evidence indicates that local authorities have already implemented many of the traditional efficiency measures, such as route optimisation and contract management, with limited scope for further savings under the current model.

Costs per pupil within SEND transport are significantly higher than mainstream school transport, reflecting the bespoke nature of provision. National benchmarking highlights that these costs can be substantial, particularly where single-occupancy or long-distance journeys are required. Demand continues to grow, and there is limited evidence that pressures will reduce in the short term, given wider SEND system dynamics and the time required for national reforms to take effect. Children's Services also identified Independent Travel Training as an important opportunity to improve independence, preparation for adulthood and access to post-16 opportunities for appropriate learners.

Overall, the current HtS system within Dorset is highly effective in meeting statutory duties, ensuring that eligible children and young people can access education safely. However, it is also resource-intensive, increasingly complex, and heavily dependent on bespoke provision, with limited integration into the wider public and CT network. These characteristics form a key component of the Business as Usual baseline and highlight the scale of the challenge in delivering a more sustainable, integrated transport system for the future. The council SEND Reform Programme may influence future patterns of transport demand through increased local provision, greater mainstream inclusion and a stronger preparation for adulthood focus. The scale and timing of these impacts remain uncertain and should not be assumed within the Business as Usual forecast.

2.5.4 Adult Day Opportunities Transport

Adult day opportunities transport is delivered through a combination of council owned fleet, commissioned taxi provision and limited CT, with services predominantly delivered as dedicated, home-to-provision transport rather than as part of an integrated transport network.

The council owned fleet require D1 licensed drivers and are legally restricted to specific contracted journeys, which prevents flexible use for wider community access or cross service deployment. As a result, vehicles are typically used for peak movements only and remain underutilised for the remainder of the day. This creates a structurally inflexible model.

Taxis and private hire are heavily relied upon, particularly for individuals with complex needs or where shared transport is not feasible. This arrangement is increasingly constrained, with limited wheelchair-accessible capacity, rising costs and competition for vehicles (particularly from school transport) reducing availability and increasing financial pressure.

In summary, the current model has:



- **A high reliance on specialist and bespoke transport** - Journeys are predominantly delivered through dedicated services rather than shared or mainstream options, reflecting both user need and a lack of viable alternatives in the wider transport system.
- **Limited flexibility due to fleet and regulatory constraints** - The current fleet is dominated by larger vehicles that are restricted in how they can be used, preventing integration across services and limiting responsiveness to changing patterns of demand.
- **Significant rural accessibility challenges** - Availability, affordability and accessibility barriers, particularly in rural areas, mean many users cannot access services without dedicated transport, reinforcing reliance on Adult Social Care transport for even routine journeys.
- **Workforce and operational pressures** - The system depends heavily on D1-qualified drivers, with recruitment, retention and shift patterns presenting ongoing challenges. Limited availability of passenger assistants further introduces safety and lone-working risks, particularly for individuals with higher support needs.
- **High operating costs and inefficient asset utilisation** - The current model is resource-intensive, with high costs associated with fleet ownership, maintenance, insurance and fuel.
- **Limited integration with community and voluntary sector provision** - While there is evidence of latent capacity and willingness among VCSE organisations to expand transport provision, this is currently fragmented and under-coordinated, limiting its role in supporting ASC transport needs.

Importantly, evidence shows that transport is a fundamental enabler of Adult Social Care transformation. Improved transport is also an important enabler of independence and community participation. By improving access to mainstream, community and shared transport where appropriate, individuals may be able to access a wider range of opportunities, reduce reliance on dedicated transport arrangements and exercise greater choice and control over how they travel. Without more accessible, flexible and integrated transport options, individuals are unable to access the wider range of community based services and activities envisaged within the emerging Day Opportunities model.

An aligned and strategically coordinated transport offer across Dorset will deliver both financial efficiencies and improved outcomes within Adult day provision. By optimising transport provision, the council can reduce duplication, maximise vehicle utilisation, and achieve cost savings that can be reinvested into services. At the same time, improved transport accessibility will enable individuals to attend day opportunities, community activities, and support services more flexibly, supporting independence and wellbeing.

There are clear opportunities to move toward a more integrated and efficient system. These include:

- Improved utilisation of fleet and assets across services, enabling vehicles to be used throughout the day and across ASC, SEND, CT and flexible services rather than in isolated peaks;



- Transition toward a more versatile fleet of vehicles, reducing costs, easing workforce constraints and enabling more flexible, multi-purpose use;
- Stronger integration with community and voluntary transport providers, where there is clear appetite to expand provision if supported;
- Development of shared and collaborative transport models, including taxi-share, volunteer car schemes and multi-use fleets;
- Alignment with locality-based and hub-and-spoke service models, supporting access to a wider range of community activities; and
- Closer integration with mainstream and flexible transport networks, reducing reliance on bespoke provision where appropriate and supporting greater independence.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that while the current ASC transport model provides a necessary and reliable baseline, it is financially costly, operationally inflexible and insufficiently integrated to support future service transformation. Without change, pressures on specialist transport provision are likely to increase, reinforcing the need for a more coordinated, flexible and system wide approach to transport delivery in Dorset.

2.5.5 Dorset Travel's Internal Fleet

Dorset Travel operates a mixed delivery model combining externally contracted provision with an in-house fleet that plays a targeted role in service delivery. The current fleet comprises 83 vehicles, including 62 minibuses, 16 cars and 5 vans, with minibuses forming the core of operational capacity for both SEND and Adult Social Care transport.

The fleet supports a range of essential services, including HtS transport for learners with SEND, adult day centre transport, limited mainstream provision and dial-a-bus services. Vehicles are allocated dynamically based on service demand rather than being fixed to individuals, with many drivers taking vehicles home overnight to enable efficient route starts across a dispersed and rural geography. This operating model is critical in ensuring coverage across the county but introduces constraints in terms of flexibility, fleet utilisation and future service redesign.

Fleet usage is heavily concentrated around peak periods, particularly morning and afternoon journeys associated with school and day centre transport. As a result, vehicles are largely committed during these times, with only limited availability during the middle of the day. In practice, this available time is required for essential activities including cleaning, maintenance, compliance checks and repositioning of vehicles for subsequent routes. This limits opportunities to increase utilisation without impacting reliability or requiring additional resource. The fleet is also required to operate with a relatively high level of spare capacity, with 19 vehicles held in reserve to ensure continuity of service in the context of high mileage and frequent maintenance requirements.

The workforce model further shapes fleet operation. Drivers are generally employed on flexible arrangements linked to specific routes and service times, rather than standard full-time contracts. This reflects the peak nature of demand but constrains the ability to extend services or introduce additional journeys without increasing staffing costs. Driver licensing



arrangements also introduce operational limitations. While some drivers operate smaller vehicles under standard car licences, larger vehicles such as 16-seat minibuses require drivers to hold D1 or equivalent licences. This creates a dependency between vehicle allocation and driver availability, limiting flexibility and constraining the ability to scale up more efficient vehicle types. Expanding services or increasing utilisation would therefore require additional recruitment, training and licensing, with associated cost implications.

The fleet itself is under increasing pressure from a combination of high weekly mileage and an ageing vehicle base, leading to reliability issues and increased maintenance demand. A replacement programme is in place, including the introduction of more flexible vehicle types and a transition toward HVO fuel for emissions reduction. However, this is funded on a like-for-like basis and does not provide capacity for wider fleet transformation. A transition toward electric vehicles, presents significant challenges under the current model. The reliance on drivers taking vehicles home, long rural routes and limited charging infrastructure create operational and financial barriers to adoption, with no additional funding currently available to support transition.

Overall, the Business-as-Usual position is characterised by a fleet that is essential to delivering high-need services but operates within tight operational, workforce and financial constraints. While the fleet provides resilience and targeted capability, it is not currently configured or resourced to deliver significant improvements in efficiency, integration or capacity without broader changes to service design, demand patterns and investment.

2.5.6 Funding and Current Transport Expenditure

Dorset receives one of the lowest levels of Government bus grant funding in the South West, significantly lower than neighbouring rural authorities such as Somerset, Devon and Wiltshire. Dorset's allocation for 2025/26 was £3.42 million, compared to £10.47 million for Devon and £6.4 million for Somerset. The Local Authority Bus Grant has been confirmed for 2026/27 to 2029/30 and reinforces this funding gap. The structural funding disadvantage highlighted in Table 2.1 has a direct impact on the scale and reliability of public transport services.

Table 2.1 – Local Authority Bus Grant Allocations 2026/27 to 2029/30

Authority	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
BCP	£5,639,948	£5,700,628	£5,761,307	£3,200,860	£20,302,743
Cornwall	£10,006,522	£10,071,332	£10,136,143	£3,418,756	£33,632,753
Devon and Torbay	£14,179,760	£14,292,588	£14,405,415	£5,951,665	£48,829,428
Dorset	£3,972,903	£4,007,304	£4,041,704	£1,814,608	£13,836,519
Gloucestershire	£8,219,147	£8,287,468	£8,355,789	£3,603,947	£28,466,351
Hampshire	£14,877,662	£15,010,464	£15,143,266	£7,005,301	£52,036,693
North Somerset	£4,337,550	£4,363,801	£4,390,053	£1,384,771	£14,476,175



Plymouth City	£4,641,228	£4,699,356	£4,757,483	£3,066,231	£17,164,298
Somerset	£7,196,198	£7,252,745	£7,309,292	£2,982,878	£24,741,113
Swindon	£2,780,397	£2,814,699	£2,849,001	£1,809,438	£10,253,535
Wiltshire	£6,314,363	£6,356,661	£6,398,959	£2,231,217	£21,301,200

The council currently spends a significant proportion of its budget on transport services, with a total Dorset Travel budget of £42.5m in 2025/26. A large share of this funding is directed toward HtS transport, particularly for children with SEND, where costs have increased considerably in recent years due to rising demand, more complex needs and higher contract prices. While growth in 2025/26 was lower than in previous years, ongoing demand continues to place pressure on the system.

At the same time, expenditure on mainstream school transport and supported public transport services remains significant, reflecting both rising costs and continued reliance on these services. Overall, the current spending profile shows that a substantial proportion of funding is committed to specialist and statutory provision. This limits the scope to invest in more integrated and shared solutions, reinforcing the need to improve efficiency and better manage demand while maintaining support for those with the highest needs.

The current BAU funding position limits the council's ability to increase frequencies, expand weekend services, invest in infrastructure or develop alternative transport models without targeted investment and reduced spend on specialist transport services.

2.5.7 Business as Usual (BAU) Summary

Across Dorset, the existing transport system is highly fragmented, increasingly costly and structurally constrained, with different elements, commercial bus services, supported routes, CT, HtS Transport and Adult Social Care transport, largely operating in isolation. While each component plays a critical role in meeting statutory duties and supporting access to services, the overall system lacks integration, flexibility and resilience. This results in a model that is heavily reliant on bespoke, service-specific transport solutions, particularly in rural areas where mainstream provision is limited or unavailable.

The evidence shows a consistent pattern across all parts of the system: limited commercial viability, declining or insufficient rural connectivity, and growing dependence on publicly funded transport provision. This is compounded by a reliance on specialist vehicles, constrained operator and workforce markets, and funding models that do not provide long-term certainty. As a result, public funding is increasingly being used to maintain essential access rather than to improve or transform the network, while demand for high-cost services, particularly SEND and Adult Social Care transport, continues to rise.

Crucially, the current system does not operate as a coherent network. Assets are under-utilised, services are not coordinated across user groups, and opportunities for shared or mainstream travel are often unrealised. This limits the ability to support independence,



increases reliance on door-to-door provision, and constrains the delivery of wider council objectives, including health, inclusion, economic participation and carbon reduction.

In summary, while the BAU model is effective in meeting immediate needs and statutory obligations, it is a system under increasing pressure, operationally inefficient and insufficiently integrated to respond to future demand or support service transformation. Without a shift toward a more coordinated, flexible and system-wide approach, Dorset will remain locked into a cost-intensive model that reinforces dependency, limits accessibility, and places increasing pressure on council budgets.

2.6 Current and Future Needs

This section identifies the key service gaps in the BAU model and the current and future needs that will shape development of the preferred transport system.

2.6.1 Current Needs

1. Need for more frequent and reliable services

Across Dorset, public bus services often operate at low frequencies, with many CR services running only every two hours, and several with no weekend or evening provision. This restricts residents' ability to plan regular travel and reduces trust in the network. Reliability also remains below target, with only 79% of departures on time, against a target of 95%.

Service gap: Insufficient service frequency and punctuality, particularly on inter-urban and rural routes.

Driver for change: Establishing a transport system that residents can depend on for daily travel.

2. Need for improved rural connectivity

Large parts of rural Dorset have no viable alternative to the private car, and two-thirds of rural residents live in areas with minimal or no bus provision. Connectivity gaps prevent many residents accessing education, employment and essential services. These connectivity gaps can be particularly significant for young people, limiting access to employment, training, social activities and services outside school.

Service gap: Limited coverage and poor connections between rural settlements and main centres.

Driver for change: Ensuring all communities have meaningful access to essential services through improved fixed, flexible or supported transport.

3. Need for sustainable and resilient CT

CT provides essential lifeline services for rural residents, but provision is fragile, reliant on volunteers and inconsistently funded. Dorset's CT spending is far lower than neighbouring rural councils, leaving services vulnerable.



Service gap: Inconsistent availability of CT services and lack of resilience in volunteer-dependent models.

Driver for change: Strengthening CT to ensure it can reliably fill gaps where commercial and supported bus services are not viable.

4. Need for integrated, accessible and user-friendly services

The current system lacks the integration needed to support seamless travel. Timetables are not consistently coordinated, real-time information varies across operators, and there is no unified planning or booking platform linking public, community and flexible services. Residents report difficulty accessing journey information or switching between modes. This includes improving how residents connect between CR services, rail, Community Transport, DRT and active travel where multi-stage journeys are required.

Improved alignment of transport will enhance access to day opportunities and community activities, enabling people to participate more flexibly and maintain independence and wellbeing. At the same time, it will support a stronger focus on in-county residential placements by making it easier for family members, carers, and next of kin to visit those in care homes within Dorset. This will help reduce reliance on higher-cost out-of-county placements while maintaining vital personal connections for individuals receiving care.

Service gap: Fragmented transport offer, with limited integration between services and insufficient support for multi-stage journeys.

Driver for change: Creating a coherent network that is easier to use, plan and connect across.

5. Need to support independence and reduce isolation

High levels of concessionary travel, low car ownership amongst older demographics and Dorset's ageing population highlight the importance of accessible transport in supporting independence and reducing isolation. A significant proportion of passengers state they could not travel without the bus, and many rural areas are “transport deserts,” increasing risk of social isolation.

Service gap: Inadequate support for residents who depend on public or CT for independence.

Driver for change: Delivering inclusive, age-friendly and accessible transport options.

6. Need for a financially sustainable model

Dorset receives significantly lower bus grant funding than similar authorities and has limited capacity to increase investment under BAU. Rising contract prices, ageing fleets, and demographic pressures further affect sustainability. Current arrangements rely heavily on council-subsidised services that may not be viable long term.

Service gap: Financial model dependent on low grant funding and fragile service arrangements.

Driver for change: Developing a long-term funding and delivery model appropriate for a dispersed rural county.



2.6.2 Future Needs (Emerging and Anticipated)

1. Growing demand linked to demographic change

Dorset has one of the oldest populations in England. As the number of older residents continues to increase, demand for accessible and flexible transport will rise, placing further pressure on both mainstream and specialist services.

Future need: A transport system that can support increasing levels of age-related and mobility-related travel needs.

2. Need for decarbonisation and cleaner transport

As Dorset progresses towards climate commitments, there will be increased need for investment in cleaner fleets, charging or refuelling infrastructure and modal shift initiatives. Dorset currently has no zero-emission buses, meaning future systems must consider pathways to a lower-carbon network.

Future need: A plan for transitioning to low-carbon fleet and infrastructure as part of wider climate goals.

3. Increased expectation for flexible, digitally-enabled services

Passenger expectations, particularly amongst younger generations, are shifting toward on-demand, real-time and digitally supported mobility. Dorset currently has no DRT scheme and limited digital integration across modes.

Future need: More flexible options supported by accessible digital tools that complement conventional public transport.

4. Need to support greater independence and preparation for adulthood

National policy reform, changing expectations around supported employment, and evolving Adult Social Care and SEND services place increasing emphasis on independence, community participation and access to opportunities. Transport is a critical enabler of these outcomes, particularly for young people with SEND transitioning into adulthood and individuals seeking greater independence within their communities. Personal Travel Budgets may also provide a more flexible and personalised alternative to commissioned transport for appropriate individuals and families. Their future role will require consideration of eligibility, consistency across services, safeguarding, value for money and the ability of recipients to make sustainable travel arrangements.

Whilst independent travel represents an important aspiration for many young people with SEND, the programme should recognise that children and young people with profound, complex or medically fragile needs may continue to require specialist transport throughout their education and transition into adulthood. Future transport planning should therefore balance the ambition to support greater independence with the need to maintain safe, appropriate and specialist provision for those whose needs cannot be met through mainstream, community or shared transport.



Transport also has an important role in supporting transitions into further education, supported internships, apprenticeships, employment and adult services as part of the wider Preparation for Adulthood agenda. This means aligning transport planning with education, SEND, employment and Adult Social Care pathways, so that young people are supported to access the right opportunities at the right stage of transition.

Future need: A transport system that supports preparation for adulthood, independent travel where appropriate, access to further education, training, supported internships, apprenticeships, employment and adult services, while maintaining specialist provision for children and young people whose needs require it.

5. Future pressures on specialist transport (HtS & Adult Social Care)

Demand for specialist services is expected to rise due to demographic and legislative trends. Without improvements to mainstream transport, specialist services will face increasing costs and higher dependency.

Future need: Clearer links between mainstream transport changes and opportunities to reduce pressure on specialist services.

6. Need to remain adaptable to changing demand

Future transport demand is likely to be influenced by a combination of demographic change, SEND reform, Adult day opportunities transformation, technological advances and changing travel behaviours. While some trends, such as population ageing, are relatively well understood, others remain uncertain, particularly the long-term impacts of SEND reforms and future patterns of rural mobility.

Future need: A transport system that is flexible, scalable and capable of responding to changing patterns of demand, service requirements and user expectations over time.

2.6.3 Key Service Gaps Driving Future Model Development

These gaps define the critical drivers against which future models will be tested:

- Insufficient frequency and reliability on core and rural routes
- Limited evening and weekend provision
- Large rural coverage gaps, creating dependency on cars and specialist transport
- Fragile CT unable to meet growing demand
- Lack of integration between public, community and flexible transport, including support for interchange and multi-stage journeys
- Inadequate support for independent, inclusive travel
- Growing pressures on the current funding model given Dorset's low grant allocation
- Fleet not aligned with future decarbonisation requirements
- Limited digital capability across the transport system
- Growing pressure on specialist transport due to unmet mainstream needs



These service gaps provide the baseline against which the preferred programme has been developed and will be monitored.

2.7 Scope and service requirements

This section defines the scope of the programme and the service requirements needed to deliver an integrated, sustainable and future-ready transport system. The requirements establish a framework for implementing and assessing the preferred programme, ensuring consistency between the preferred approach, implementation arrangements and expected benefits.

The future transport system is expected to operate as a coherent and integrated network capable of supporting:

- education (including SEND);
- Adult Day Opportunities;
- access to healthcare, employment and community life; and
- rural and low-density areas where traditional provision is limited.

Table 2.2 translates the evidence presented in the Strategic Case into a set of core and desirable requirements which will guide implementation and future evaluation.

System integration includes closer coordination of transport planning, commissioning, scheduling, information, asset utilisation and performance management. The preferred programme does not assume that all transport services will be combined operationally, but seeks to establish clearer oversight and improve coordination where this delivers better outcomes or value for money.

Healthcare transport, including CT journeys and the relationship with Non-Emergency Patient Transport, is an important programme interface. Opportunities for improved coordination with NHS partners will be developed where there is shared benefit, clear governance and an agreed funding and delivery model.

Table 2.2 Service Requirements Framework

Requirement Category	Core (Essential) Requirements	Desirable (Enhancement) Requirements
Access to Services	Provide reliable access to education, health, employment and community services across urban and rural areas. Enable inclusive access for a wide range of user needs.	Improve local connectivity and alignment with community-based services and hub-and-spoke models. Consider safe and accessible first- and last-mile connections to bus stops, rail stations and transport hubs, including walking, cycling and wheeling access. Enhance access to a wider range of social and economic opportunities.
Financial Sustainability and Value for Money	Deliver within a sustainable financial envelope. Reduce reliance on high-cost	Strengthen long-term affordability through innovative funding and delivery models. Enable reinvestment



	bespoke transport. Improve utilisation of existing resources.	and efficiency gains through system optimisation.
Integration	Enable coordination across SEND, Adults, community and public transport. Support shared journeys and reduce duplication. Move toward a single integrated system.	Introduce enhanced coordination mechanisms (e.g. digital platforms, shared booking). Improve visibility of demand, capacity and performance across the system.
Flexibility and Responsiveness	Support a mix of regular and demand-responsive journeys. Respond to dispersed and variable demand, particularly in rural areas.	Enable more dynamic service models (e.g. flexible routing, hybrid provision). Improve responsiveness to real-time demand and service change.
User Outcomes and Independence	Enable individuals to travel as independently as possible through travel training and personalised support. Support access to a range of activities while maintaining specialist provision where required.	Expand independence through travel training and personalised support. Further reduce isolation and improve wellbeing outcomes.
Localisation and Community Alignment	—	Align with locality-based service delivery and community-led solutions. Enable place-based transport planning reflecting local needs.
Market Development	—	Support development of a diverse provider market, including VCSE organisations, micro-providers and social enterprises. Enable innovation in delivery models.
Digital Enablement	—	Introduce digital tools for journey planning, scheduling, booking and data sharing. Improve system coordination and user information.
Environmental Sustainability	—	Support transition to lower-emission vehicles and reduced mileage. Contribute to wider carbon reduction objectives.
Workforce Sustainability	—	Improve resilience, recruitment and retention across providers and volunteers.

2.8 Benefits

This section sets out the main benefits associated with achieving the programme's objectives. These benefits represent the positive changes experienced by individuals, communities, the



council or the wider economy when the programme delivers its intended outputs and outcomes.

Outcomes describe what the programme achieves (e.g., improved access, reduced isolation). Benefits describe the measurable or observable advantages that arise from those outcomes (e.g., increased employment participation, reduced costs, improved wellbeing). Benefits are grouped by category, beneficiary, and benefit class.

2.8.1 Intended Behavioural Outcomes

The programme seeks to support a behavioural shift towards greater use of mainstream public transport, CT and independent travel options where appropriate. The intended outcome is that residents are empowered to travel independently, access opportunities within their communities, maintain social connections and achieve greater independence, while ensuring specialist transport provision remains focused on those with the most complex needs.

The intended behavioural outcomes of the programme are:

- People are supported to travel independently wherever possible, increasing their confidence, skills and control over their daily lives.
- Residents can access work, education, health services and community activities more easily, helping them to live active and fulfilling lives.
- People are less reliant on specialist services and are empowered to make informed travel choices that best meet their needs.
- Residents remain connected to their communities, reducing social isolation and improving wellbeing.
- Support is targeted towards those with the greatest need, ensuring specialist transport is available for people who cannot travel independently or use alternative transport options.
- People experience a more personalised and strengths-based approach, with support focused on building capability rather than long-term dependency on council-provided transport.
- Communities become more inclusive and accessible, enabling more residents to participate in everyday life.

2.8.2 Summary

A summary of the main benefits and impacts is presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Summary table of the main benefits

Category	Benefit	Key Beneficiaries	Indicative Quantified Impacts	Supporting Evidence
Economic	Improved access to	Working-age residents; young	• Increased participation in	Limited transport currently restricts access to jobs and



	employment and skills	people; employers	employment/training • Reduced missed education sessions	education, particularly in rural areas; improved connectivity supports participation
	Increased productivity and efficient use of time	Service users; public services; operators	• Reduced journey and waiting times • Fewer missed appointments • Improved vehicle utilisation	Current system includes inefficiencies and duplication; integrated scheduling improves system performance
Social and Community	Reduced social isolation and improved wellbeing	Older adults; ASC users; rural communities	• Increased participation in community activity • Reduction in reported isolation indicators	Local evidence links lack of transport to isolation; CT shown to improve social participation
	Increased independence and preparation for adulthood	SEND learners; ASC users; families	• Higher proportion of independent travel • Reduced reliance on specialist transport	Comparator authorities demonstrate independence gains through travel training and stepped support models
	Improved equity of access	Rural communities; low-income households; non-car users	• Improved service coverage • Reduced rural–urban access gap	Current provision is uneven; flexible and community models improve rural accessibility
	Improved interchange and onward connectivity	Rural residents; non-car users; passengers making multi-stage journeys; disabled and older passengers	• improved connections between services; • reduced interchange waiting times; • increased successfu	Stakeholder feedback concerning safe connections to transport hubs and integration between modes.



			• 1 multi-stage journeys; • improved user satisfaction with interchange.	
Environmental and Climate	Reduced emissions and environmental impact	Wider community; Dorset Council	• Reduction in vehicle mileage • Lower CO₂ emissions per journey • Increased use of low-emission vehicles	Current system includes duplicate and single-occupancy journeys; shared and optimised transport reduces emissions
	Reduced car dependency and mode shift	Residents without viable alternatives; wider transport network	• Increased use of shared/public transport • Reduced reliance on private vehicles	Survey evidence shows high car dependency driven by lack of alternatives; improved services support modal shift
Financial and Operational	Reduced reliance on high-cost specialist transport	Dorset Council; transport system	• Reduction in taxi spend • Lower cost per journey • Slower demand growth (cost avoidance)	Current system heavily reliant on bespoke transport; demand management reduces cost pressures over time
	Improved asset utilisation	Dorset Council; transport providers	• Increased vehicle occupancy rates • Reduced empty mileage	Evidence of underutilised fleet and duplication; integration improves efficiency
	Long-term system sustainability	Dorset Council; residents	• Stabilisation of transport costs • Reduced demand growth for specialist services	Without reform, demand and costs will continue to rise; integrated systems improve resilience



2.9 Strategic Case Conclusion

The Strategic Case demonstrates a clear need for change. Dorset's transport system faces significant challenges, including limited public transport provision, fragmented service delivery, increasing financial pressure and growing demand for specialist transport. These issues are particularly acute in a rural county, where dispersed demand makes services more difficult and costly to provide.

While the current system continues to meet key statutory requirements, it does not consistently support wider ambitions relating to accessibility, independence, economic participation and environmental sustainability. Evidence from users, stakeholders and consultation highlights strong reliance on transport services alongside clear gaps in provision, particularly in relation to public transport and rural connectivity.

In response, the Strategic Case has established a Service Requirements Framework to guide implementation of the preferred programme. This reflects the need to improve access to services, strengthen integration, support independence, manage demand more effectively and make better use of available resources.

Taken together, the evidence confirms that a continuation of current arrangements will not deliver a sustainable or effective transport system. The Economic Case therefore assesses the preferred programme and demonstrates how the proposed interventions can deliver improved outcomes in an affordable, deliverable and sustainable manner.



3 Economic Case

The OBC considered a wide range of potential interventions and concluded that an integrated transport model represented the preferred strategic direction for Dorset. The OBC demonstrated that the council's transport challenges could not be resolved through isolated service improvements or continuation of existing delivery models. Instead, the strongest-performing options combined demand management, improved coordination of transport services, and a more diverse mix of public, community and flexible transport provision.

The preferred programme has therefore been developed as a package of interdependent interventions. Individual interventions have been assessed not only on their standalone merits, but also on their contribution to the wider integrated transport system and whether they enable benefits to be realised elsewhere within the programme.

The purpose of this Economic Case is not to revisit the strategic case for integration, but to define the specific intervention packages required to implement that approach and assess their contribution to the programme objectives. Since completion of the OBC, additional evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement, benchmarking and option refinement have been undertaken to move from a conceptual model towards a defined and deliverable programme. This has included engagement with Children's Services, Adult Social Care, CT providers, public transport operators, Transport Action Groups and other stakeholders, alongside further development of the financial, commercial and delivery arrangements.

The findings in **Appendix B** provide additional support for this approach, demonstrating strong evidence for transport's role in supporting economic participation, healthcare access, independence, social inclusion and rural accessibility. The review also identified growing support for integrated transport systems that coordinate public transport, CT, flexible transport and wider public services.

Evidence from the policy assessment (**Appendix C**) and stakeholder engagement (**Appendix D**) demonstrates consistent support for a transport system built around three core principles:

- supporting independence and reducing unnecessary reliance on specialist transport where appropriate;
- integrating public, community and specialist transport services into a more coordinated system; and
- strengthening the availability, accessibility and resilience of public and CT provision, particularly within rural areas.

The evidence also highlights that no single intervention is capable of delivering the required level of change in isolation. Improved independence depends on the availability of suitable transport services. More effective integration depends on appropriate governance, systems and organisational capacity. Stronger public and CT provision requires coordinated planning, sustainable funding and better alignment with wider council services. The benefits of the programme are therefore expected to arise from the combined effect of several complementary interventions working together as a single integrated system.



Accordingly, this Economic Case shifts the focus from individual options towards a defined programme of intervention packages. Each package has been developed to address specific transport challenges and support one or more of the programme objectives established in the Strategic Case. For each intervention package, the Economic Case defines:

- the intervention objective;
- scope and delivery approach;
- target beneficiaries;
- expected benefits and outcomes;
- key dependencies;
- principal risks and constraints; and
- the relationship with other elements of the programme.

Taken together, these intervention packages form a single integrated programme designed to improve accessibility, support independence, strengthen rural connectivity, improve value for money and create a more sustainable transport system for Dorset. The Economic Case demonstrates why this programme represents the most appropriate response to the challenges identified in the Strategic Case and provides the basis for the commercial, financial and management arrangements set out in later sections of the FBC.

3.1 Development of the preferred programme

The intervention packages presented within this Economic Case have been developed and refined through the OBC, evidence review, policy assessment, stakeholder engagement and further programme development undertaken during the FBC stage. The purpose of the assessment process has not been to identify a single preferred intervention, but to determine the combination of interventions required to deliver the programme objectives and respond to Dorset's transport challenges.

Each intervention package has been assessed against a common set of programme outcomes derived from the Strategic Case. These outcomes reflect the improvements required to create a more accessible, integrated and financially sustainable transport system and have informed the development of the preferred programme.

The programme has been designed to:

- improve access to employment, education, healthcare and community services;
- strengthen public transport connectivity and rural accessibility;
- support independence and preparation for adulthood;
- reduce transport-related isolation and inequality;
- improve coordination between public, community and specialist transport services;
- make better use of transport assets and resources;
- improve financial sustainability and manage future cost pressures; and



- support wider environmental, economic and community outcomes.

The preferred programme is structured around three complementary themes:

- Reshaping demand and supporting independence (Package A);
- Integrating transport planning, coordination and public sector partnerships (Packages B and C); and
- Strengthening and diversifying transport supply (Packages D, E and F).

These themes provide the framework used to develop, assess and implement the preferred intervention package.

Post-workshop prioritisation provided further support for the preferred programme. The strongest consensus related to strengthening CT capacity, Personal Travel Budgets, technology-enabled assessment, integrated booking and scheduling, and the core public transport network. Responses generally supported retaining the full programme architecture, while indicating that Independent Travel Training, policy reform and DRT require phased development and should be progressed alongside the transport services and organisational capabilities on which they depend.

The detailed measures used to assess programme performance and benefits realisation are set out in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework within the Management Case.

3.2 Shortlisted Integrated Packages

3.2.1 Prevention, independence and demand management

Package A - Independent Travel and Demand Management

Purpose

To enable more residents to travel independently and use the most appropriate, proportionate and sustainable transport option available to them. The focus is not on reducing essential journeys or restricting access to services, but on improving independence, expanding travel choices and ensuring that specialist transport provision remains targeted towards those who require it most. The behavioural outcome sought is greater confidence and capability among residents to travel independently, where it is safe and appropriate for them to do so.

The package responds directly to increasing pressures on specialist transport services, particularly HtS Transport, SEND and Adult day opportunities transport, whilst supporting wider corporate priorities relating to independence, inclusion, preparation for adulthood and community participation. Evidence from national research, stakeholder engagement and comparator authorities indicates that well-designed travel support programmes can improve outcomes for individuals whilst helping to moderate future growth in transport demand.

The programme will adopt a test-and-learn approach, working with Adult Services and Children's Services to build evidence regarding uptake, outcomes and long-term impacts of independent travel, Direct Payments and alternative transport arrangements.



Objective

To increase independent travel, improve access to education, employment and community opportunities, and reduce unnecessary dependence on specialist transport provision through a combination of travel training, personalised support and demand management measures.

Scope

The intervention package comprises a combination of policy, support and behavioural measures including:

- establishment of a dedicated Independent Travel Training (ITT) service;
- expansion and promotion of Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs);
- review and reform of post-16 SEND transport policy;
- increased use of mainstream and shared transport options where appropriate;
- alignment of transport planning with preparation for adulthood pathways; and
- targeted travel support for individuals transitioning from specialist transport arrangements.

The package will operate alongside, rather than replace, existing specialist transport provision. Individual needs, safeguarding requirements and statutory responsibilities will continue to determine eligibility for specialist support. Personal Travel Budgets provide a flexible mechanism through which some families and individuals may be able to arrange suitable travel solutions that better meet their needs than commissioned transport. The programme therefore seeks to promote informed uptake where appropriate, whilst recognising that PTBs will not be suitable for all users.

Strategic Rationale

Independent travel emerged as one of the strongest and most consistently supported interventions throughout the development of the FBC. Children's Services identified the re-establishment of Independent Travel Training as one of its two highest transport priorities and highlighted its contribution to preparation for adulthood, employment, volunteering and long-term independence.

The intervention is also strongly aligned with national and local policy objectives. National SEND reform places increasing emphasis on preparation for adulthood, mainstream inclusion and access to opportunities closer to home. Similarly, Adult Social Care policy increasingly focuses on prevention, independence and participation within local communities. Transport is recognised as a key enabler of these outcomes.

Benchmarking with comparator authorities identified Independent Travel Training as one of the most consistently evidenced interventions for improving independence, preparation for adulthood and participation in employment, training and community life.

The evidence review (**Appendix B**) identified strong evidence linking transport accessibility with employment, education, independence, social participation and wellbeing. Evidence also



indicates that supporting individuals to travel independently can contribute to improved life outcomes whilst reducing long-term reliance on specialist transport provision.

Primary Beneficiaries

The principal beneficiaries are expected to be:

- children and young people with SEND who have the potential to travel independently;
- young adults transitioning into further education, employment or training;
- Adult day opportunities service users capable of undertaking supported independent travel; and
- the council through reduced long-term demand growth for specialist transport services.

Expected Benefits

Improved Independence

Participants will gain greater confidence, mobility skills and travel experience, enabling increased participation in education, employment, volunteering and community activities. Independent travel was consistently identified by stakeholders as a positive outcome in its own right rather than solely a transport intervention.

Preparation for Adulthood

The package will support wider preparation for adulthood outcomes, including access to post-16 education, supported employment, apprenticeships, training opportunities and volunteering. This aligns directly with both national and local SEND reform objectives.

Improved Accessibility

Successful participants will have access to a wider range of destinations, opportunities and services than can typically be provided through dedicated transport arrangements alone.

Reduced Long-Term Demand Growth

Whilst the primary objective is improved independence, successful delivery is expected to help moderate future growth in specialist transport demand through increased use of mainstream, shared and personal travel solutions where appropriate. Any resulting financial benefit should be treated primarily as cost avoidance rather than committed cashable savings. Warwickshire's programme currently supports approximately 62 learners per year and reports approximately £503,000 annual transport savings/cost avoidance at full capacity.

Wider Social Benefits

Improved mobility and access to transport are associated with increased social participation, reduced isolation and improved wellbeing. These benefits are expected to support wider council objectives relating to inclusion, healthy communities and independence.

Dependencies

Successful implementation depends upon:



- availability of accessible and reliable public transport services;
- delivery of proposed Core Public Transport Network Enhancements (Package D);
- effective coordination between Dorset Travel, Children Services and Adult Services;
- recruitment and retention of Independent Travel Training staff;
- parental, family and carer confidence;
- suitable participant assessment and safeguarding arrangements;
- continued availability of Personal Travel Budgets; and
- appropriate monitoring and support arrangements.

Risks

Table 3.1 – Package A Risks

Risk	Impact
Insufficient public transport availability in some areas	Limits opportunities for independent travel
Low uptake of Independent Travel Training or Personal Travel Budgets	Reduces anticipated outcomes and benefits
Over-estimation of potential demand reduction	Creates unrealistic financial assumptions
Parental or user concerns regarding safety and confidence	Reduces participation rates
Workforce recruitment challenges	Limits programme capacity
SEND reform assumptions not realised	Delays potential transport impacts

To address these risks, implementation will be phased, participant suitability will be assessed on an individual basis, and benefits will be monitored through the programme's wider monitoring and evaluation framework. Consistent with stakeholder feedback and policy guidance, the programme will not assume that independent travel is suitable for all users or that specialist transport requirements will reduce uniformly across all cohorts.

Relationship to the Wider Programme

This package forms a foundational component of the preferred programme. It is closely linked to the enhancement of mainstream public transport, expansion of CT and wider integration measures proposed elsewhere in the FBC. Independent travel outcomes cannot be delivered through training alone and depend upon the availability of safe, reliable and accessible transport services. Equally, many of the long-term efficiency and cost avoidance opportunities identified within the programme depend upon successful implementation of this intervention package.



Success Measures

Success will be measured through:

- number of individuals completing Independent Travel Training;
- percentage of participants achieving independent travel outcomes;
- Personal Travel Budget uptake rates;
- participation in education, employment and volunteering;
- user and family satisfaction;
- reduction in specialist transport dependency for suitable participants; and
- monitored cost avoidance within SEND and Adult Social Care transport services.

3.2.2 System integration

Package B - Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination

Purpose

To improve the planning, coordination and utilisation of transport resources across HtS Transport, SEND transport and Adult day opportunities transport. The objective is to move away from service-specific transport arrangements operating in isolation and towards a more coordinated system that makes better use of vehicles, contracts, information and transport expertise whilst maintaining statutory responsibilities, safeguarding requirements and individual support needs.

The package responds directly to the increasing cost and complexity of specialist transport provision in Dorset. Demand for SEND transport has continued to increase, expenditure has grown significantly in recent years, and both Children's and Adult Services are increasingly dependent on transport arrangements that are costly, resource intensive and often delivered through separate planning and commissioning processes. Stakeholder engagement consistently identified improved coordination, shared planning and a more integrated approach to transport management as important opportunities for future improvement.

Objective

To improve efficiency, service quality and long-term sustainability through greater integration of specialist transport planning, coordination and commissioning across Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Dorset Travel, whilst maintaining safe, appropriate and person-centred transport provision.

Scope

The intervention package comprises a number of complementary measures, including:

- establishment of integrated transport planning arrangements across Dorset Travel, Children's Services and Adult Social Care;



- greater alignment between transport decisions, placement decisions and service planning;
- implementation of shared scheduling and journey coordination processes;
- improved utilisation of Dorset Travel fleet assets;
- development of shared and multi-user transport opportunities where appropriate;
- expanded use of integrated commissioning approaches;
- improved data sharing and management information across services;
- alignment of transport planning with SEND reform plan implementation and Adult Day Opportunities redesign; and
- development of consistent performance monitoring and reporting arrangements across specialist transport services.

The package does not assume that specialist transport services can be eliminated or that users with complex needs can automatically be transferred to mainstream transport provision. Dedicated and specialist transport will continue to be provided where required by statutory duty, safeguarding considerations or individual needs.

Strategic Rationale

The current transport system has evolved through a series of service-specific arrangements that largely operate independently of one another. HtS Transport, SEND transport, Adult Social Care transport, public transport and CT are planned, commissioned and managed through different processes, limiting opportunities for resource sharing, coordinated planning and system-wide optimisation.

Evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement demonstrated strong support for improved integration between transport services, including better coordination of journeys, greater use of existing assets and stronger alignment between transport and wider service planning. Participants consistently identified shared scheduling, integrated planning and improved organisational coordination as key opportunities to improve both outcomes and value for money.

The policy review also identifies transport as an enabler of wider SEND and Adult Social Care transformation. In both sectors, the future direction of travel emphasises independence, community participation, prevention and support delivered closer to home. Achieving these objectives will require transport planning to become more closely aligned with service planning and commissioning decisions.

Primary Beneficiaries

The principal beneficiaries are expected to be:

- children and young people requiring specialist transport;
- Adult day opportunity service users;
- families and carers;



- Children's Services;
- Adult's Services;
- Dorset Travel; and
- the council through improved utilisation of transport resources and reduced duplication of provision.

Expected Benefits

Improved Asset Utilisation

Improved coordination has the potential to increase vehicle occupancy, reduce duplication and make better use of Dorset Travel's fleet and commissioned transport resources. The evidence review identified integrated asset utilisation as one of the principal opportunities associated with more coordinated transport delivery.

Improved Service Coordination

Closer collaboration between Dorset Travel, Children's Services and Adult Social Care will improve visibility of transport demand, strengthen planning processes and support a more consistent approach to transport provision across services.

Support for Service Transformation

The package will support implementation of wider Adult's and SEND reform programmes by ensuring transport decisions are better aligned with service redesign, locality working, preparation for adulthood and community-based provision.

Reduced Future Cost Pressures

Whilst significant cashable savings should not be assumed at this stage, improved coordination is expected to contribute to reduced duplication, improved vehicle utilisation and slower growth in specialist transport expenditure over time. The scale of financial benefit remains uncertain and will depend on the practical opportunities identified through implementation. Benefits should therefore be treated as potential efficiency improvements and cost avoidance opportunities until demonstrated through operational delivery.

Improved User Experience

A more coordinated transport system should simplify service delivery, reduce unnecessary complexity and improve the consistency of transport arrangements experienced by service users and families.

Dependencies

Successful implementation depends upon:

- effective collaboration between Dorset Travel, Children's Services and Adult Social Care;
- appropriate governance and decision-making arrangements;
- improved data sharing and management information systems;



- availability of suitable transport providers and fleet resources;
- ongoing Adult's and SEND transformation programmes;
- organisational capacity to implement shared planning processes; and
- development of consistent performance and reporting arrangements.

Risks

Table 3.2 – Package B Risks

Risk	Impact
Complexity of cross-service integration	Delays implementation and benefits realisation
Safeguarding and suitability constraints	Limits opportunities for shared journeys
Incompatible journey patterns between cohorts	Reduces integration opportunities
Data and systems limitations	Restricts coordination and performance management
Organisational resistance to new working arrangements	Slows implementation
Overestimation of short-term efficiency gains	Creates unrealistic financial expectations

These risks will be mitigated through phased implementation, clear governance arrangements, detailed operational reviews and by ensuring that service user needs remain the primary consideration when identifying integration opportunities. Consistent with stakeholder feedback, the programme assumes that integration must be driven by improved outcomes rather than integration for its own sake.

Relationship to the Wider Programme

This package acts as a key bridging intervention between demand management, transport integration and wider service transformation. It supports the Independent Travel and Demand Management package by improving linkages between transport and service planning, whilst also creating many of the operational conditions required to realise the benefits of enhanced public transport, CT and flexible transport provision. The package should be viewed as one of the principal mechanisms through which the wider benefits of integration will be realised.

Success Measures

Success will be measured through:

- increased vehicle occupancy and utilisation rates;
- reductions in duplicate or overlapping transport provision;



- number of integrated planning and commissioning arrangements established;
- percentage of journeys delivered through shared transport solutions where appropriate;
- transport costs per user and per journey;
- user and family satisfaction;
- alignment between transport planning and service planning processes; and
- monitored cost avoidance within SEND and Adult Social Care transport budgets.

Package C – Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships

Purpose

To strengthen collaboration between the council, NHS Dorset, healthcare providers, CT organisations and other public sector partners in order to improve access to healthcare, make better use of transport resources and develop a more integrated approach to transport planning across the public sector. The package recognises that transport needs do not align neatly with organisational boundaries and that many residents require journeys that span health, social care and community services.

The package responds to two important findings that emerged during development of the FBC. Firstly, CT providers reported growing demand for healthcare-related journeys, with increasing pressure associated with hospital appointments, outpatient services and other healthcare activities. Secondly, stakeholder engagement highlighted a perception that the NHS is not currently engaged in transport planning to the same extent as local government and CT partners, despite being a major generator of transport demand. Together, these findings suggest there is significant opportunity to improve patient accessibility and system efficiency through closer partnership working. This is consistent with the findings of **Appendix B**, which identified transport accessibility as an important determinant of healthcare access and highlighted the growing role of CT in supporting health-related journeys.

The package therefore focuses on progressive functional integration between health and transport systems, beginning with improved coordination, referral pathways and information sharing before considering more advanced integration opportunities.

Objective

To improve access to healthcare services and make better use of public sector transport resources through stronger partnership working, coordinated planning and progressive integration between NHS transport services, council transport functions and CT providers.

Scope

The intervention package comprises a series of partnership, coordination and service integration measures, including:

- establishment of formal transport collaboration arrangements between the council, NHS Dorset and CT providers;



- development of a shared approach to strategic transport planning within the Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS);
- improved referral pathways between NHS Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS), CT and council-supported transport services;
- implementation of shared eligibility and signposting arrangements where appropriate;
- increased visibility of CT capacity within healthcare referral pathways;
- improved coordination between healthcare appointments and transport provision;
- exploration of shared scheduling and journey coordination opportunities;
- exploration of opportunities to improve hospital discharge transport arrangements;
- investigation of shared fleet utilisation opportunities where operationally appropriate;
- joint assessment of future healthcare transport demand;
- development of shared data, monitoring and performance reporting arrangements; and
- assessment of whether future joint commissioning opportunities could provide benefits where these demonstrate value for money and improved outcomes.

The package does not propose the creation of a single NHS and council transport operation. Instead, it adopts a phased approach focused on improving coordination and integration between existing services whilst maintaining organisational responsibilities and statutory accountabilities.

Strategic Rationale

Healthcare-related travel represents a significant and growing component of Dorset's transport demand. CT providers reported increasing numbers of hospital, GP, outpatient and healthcare journeys, particularly within rural areas where alternative transport options may be limited. This demand is expected to increase further as Dorset's population ages and healthcare provision becomes increasingly concentrated around key service locations.

Current arrangements already demonstrate examples of successful collaboration. NHS Dorset's Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service signposts residents who are not eligible for NHS-funded transport towards Dorset's CT network and other local transport resources. CT schemes routinely provide journeys to hospitals, GP surgeries, dental appointments and other healthcare facilities. Whilst these arrangements demonstrate functional integration, they do not currently operate as part of a coordinated transport system.

The Dorset Integrated Care System provides an established governance framework through which stronger transport integration can be developed. However, transport is not currently treated as a significant integrated service area despite its importance in enabling access to healthcare, supporting hospital discharge, preventing missed appointments and reducing health inequalities. Greater engagement from NHS partners therefore represents a significant opportunity for future service improvement.



The package is also aligned with wider policy objectives relating to integrated care, prevention, independence, community-based healthcare and public sector efficiency. Improved access to healthcare services contributes directly to wider health and wellbeing outcomes, whilst more coordinated transport planning helps maximise the value derived from existing resources.

Primary Beneficiaries

The principal beneficiaries are expected to be:

- patients accessing healthcare services;
- older residents;
- disabled residents;
- residents living in rural communities;
- frequent healthcare service users;
- CT providers;
- NHS Dorset and healthcare providers;
- Adult Social Care services;
- carers and families; and
- the wider Dorset health and care system.

Expected Benefits

Improved Access to Healthcare

Improved coordination between health and transport services will make it easier for residents to access hospital appointments, outpatient services, GP appointments, community healthcare and other health-related services. This is expected to be particularly valuable for rural communities and individuals without access to private transport.

Reduced Missed Appointments

Better visibility of transport options, improved referral pathways and greater coordination between transport providers are expected to reduce transport-related barriers to attendance and help reduce missed appointments.

Better Use of Existing Resources

The package will support improved utilisation of NHS, council and CT assets through greater coordination, information sharing and journey planning. Opportunities include better vehicle utilisation, shared journey opportunities and reduced duplication of provision.

Improved Patient Experience

A more coordinated transport system will simplify access to transport for healthcare purposes and reduce the need for patients to navigate multiple organisations when seeking assistance. This is expected to improve convenience, accessibility and overall service quality.



Potential Support for Hospital Flow and Discharge

Integrated approaches to discharge transport and healthcare journeys have the potential to support more timely hospital discharge processes, improve patient flow and reduce delays associated with transport availability.

Stronger Public Sector Collaboration

The package will establish a platform for wider collaboration between health, social care, transport and community sectors. This is expected to improve long-term planning capability and strengthen the resilience of the wider transport system.

Dependencies

Successful implementation depends upon:

- active participation from NHS Dorset and healthcare providers;
- support through Dorset's Integrated Care System governance arrangements;
- continued engagement from CT providers;
- availability of suitable data-sharing arrangements;
- alignment with NHS Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services;
- organisational commitment from the council and NHS partners;
- appropriate information governance and operational protocols; and
- development of shared planning and coordination capability.

Risks

Table 3.3 – Package C Risks

Risk	Impact
Insufficient NHS engagement or ownership	Limits ability to develop integrated solutions
Differing organisational priorities and funding arrangements	Slows delivery and decision-making
Information governance and data-sharing constraints	Restricts coordination opportunities
CT capacity unable to meet increasing healthcare demand	Limits potential benefits
Over-complex integration arrangements	Increase administration without delivering significant value
Expectations exceed realistic opportunities for integration	Creates pressure for structural change that is not required



These risks will be mitigated through a phased approach focused initially on practical coordination measures, clear governance arrangements and pilot projects that demonstrate value before considering more complex forms of integration. Consistent with stakeholder feedback and national experience, the package focuses on functional integration.

Relationship to the Wider Programme

This package complements all other intervention packages within the programme. It is particularly closely linked to CT Capacity and Sustainability (Package E), recognising the increasingly important role played by CT providers in supporting healthcare access. It also supports Integrated Transport Coordination and Service Transformation (Package B) through stronger partnership working, shared planning and system-wide coordination.

The package extends the concept of integration beyond council services and introduces a broader whole-system approach involving health, care, transport and community partners. In doing so, it helps establish transport as a shared enabler of public service outcomes rather than a service delivered solely within organisational boundaries.

Success Measures

Success will be measured through:

- number of healthcare journeys supported through integrated arrangements;
- reduction in missed or cancelled appointments attributable to transport issues;
- number of referrals successfully redirected between NEPTS, CT and council-supported services;
- participation of NHS partners in transport governance arrangements;
- patient satisfaction with transport provision;
- utilisation of CT for healthcare journeys;
- implementation of integrated discharge transport arrangements;
- evidence of improved vehicle and resource utilisation across participating organisations; and
- development and delivery of jointly agreed health transport initiatives.

3.2.3 Flexible supply

Package D - Core Route Network Enhancement

Purpose

To strengthen Dorset's CR network as the foundation of the wider integrated transport system. It responds directly to evidence that the existing network is constrained by low service frequencies, limited evening and weekend provision, uneven rural coverage and historic underinvestment when compared with comparable rural authorities. The package is intended



to improve accessibility, support economic participation, strengthen rural connectivity and provide the transport backbone upon which other programme interventions depend.

The package recognises that public transport remains the primary means through which large numbers of residents access employment, education, healthcare, retail centres and community activities. It also reflects consistent stakeholder feedback that a stronger core bus network should remain fundamental to Dorset's future transport system, with CT and flexible services acting as complementary components rather than substitutes for a reliable public transport network.

Intervention Objective

To establish a stronger, more reliable and better-connected public transport network that improves access to key destinations, supports rural communities, enables independent travel and provides the foundation for a more integrated transport system across Dorset.

Scope

The intervention package comprises a programme of network investment and service enhancement, including:

- enhancement of CR frequencies on key strategic corridors;
- extension of Saturday service provision across the CR Network;
- introduction of new strategic bus services where significant accessibility gaps have been identified;
- optimisation of the wider supported bus network;
- improved integration between bus, rail and CT services;
- consideration of potential transport hub and interchange opportunities, including where rail stations, rural service centres or appropriate council-owned assets could support better connections, subject to further feasibility work;
- improvements to passenger interchange, waiting facilities, information and first-mile and last-mile connections where required;
- enhanced passenger information and journey planning; and
- continuation of partnership working through the Dorset Enhanced Partnership.

The package is based on strengthening and expanding the existing CR Network rather than replacing current provision. Investment will be targeted towards corridors and communities where evidence indicates the greatest opportunity to improve accessibility, grow patronage and reduce transport-related exclusion.

Strategic Rationale

Public transport emerged as one of the strongest recurring themes throughout stakeholder engagement, policy analysis and evidence review. Transport Action Groups consistently identified stronger bus services, improved frequencies, better integration and improved rural accessibility as key priorities for Dorset's future transport system. Stakeholders also



emphasised that public transport should form the backbone of an integrated transport hierarchy linking bus, rail, CT and active travel.

The evidence review identified strong evidence linking public transport accessibility with employment participation, economic growth, healthcare access, education, social inclusion and rural resilience. Research consistently suggests that transport accessibility supports wider economic and social outcomes whilst generating benefits that extend beyond transport services alone.

The package is also strongly aligned with national and local policy. The Department for Transport's Better Connected strategy, Dorset's Local Transport Plan, BSIP and wider economic growth ambitions all emphasise the importance of reliable, integrated and accessible public transport services.

Current performance trends provide further justification for investment. Patronage has continued to recover since the pandemic, growing from 4.8 million journeys in 2021 to 6.1 million journeys in 2024/25. Evidence from recent CR enhancements demonstrates that passenger numbers increase where service quality and availability improve, suggesting that targeted investment can support further passenger growth and wider accessibility benefits.

Primary Beneficiaries

The principal beneficiaries are expected to be:

- residents living in rural and market town communities;
- young people accessing education, training and employment;
- older residents and concessionary passengers;
- households without access to a private vehicle;
- employers and businesses;
- visitors and the tourism sector;
- healthcare users;
- town centres and local service centres; and
- communities planned for future housing and economic growth.

Expected Benefits

Improved Accessibility

Enhanced service frequencies and expanded operating hours will improve access to employment, education, healthcare, shopping and community facilities. Improved connectivity will particularly benefit residents in rural areas where alternative travel options are limited.

Increased Economic Participation

A stronger public transport network will expand access to employment opportunities, support labour market participation and improve connectivity between communities and key



economic centres. The evidence review identified a strong relationship between transport accessibility, workforce participation and economic activity.

Support for Independent Travel

The package provides a critical enabling role for Independent Travel Training, Personal Travel Budgets and preparation for adulthood initiatives. Without accessible and reliable public transport services, many of the independence and demand management outcomes identified elsewhere in this programme would not be achievable.

Improved Rural Connectivity

Greater service availability will improve access for communities currently experiencing limited transport choice and help reduce transport-related exclusion. Improvements are expected to support both essential and discretionary journeys across Dorset's rural communities.

Increased Public Transport Use

Improved service frequency, reliability and connectivity are expected to increase passenger demand over time. Recent CR performance demonstrates that investment in service improvements can generate measurable increases in passenger numbers and network utilisation.

Environmental Benefits

Increased public transport use has the potential to reduce dependence on private vehicles, contribute to modal shift and support wider environmental objectives relating to emissions reduction and sustainable transport.

Support for Housing and Development

A stronger CR Network will help support planned housing growth by improving access to employment, services and education and reducing long-term dependence on private vehicles.

Dependencies

Successful implementation depends upon:

- availability of sustainable revenue funding;
- successful procurement and mobilisation of future public transport contracts;
- continued collaboration through the Dorset Enhanced Partnership;
- operator capacity and workforce availability;
- delivery of supporting transport infrastructure where required;
- integration with CT and DRT services;
- appropriate contract management and network planning capacity; and
- alignment with wider housing, economic growth and transport planning programmes.

Risks



Table 3.4 - Package D Risks

Risk	Impact
Rising operator and contract costs	Increases long-term funding requirements
Driver shortages and workforce challenges	Limits service delivery capacity
Insufficient recurring revenue funding	Restricts ability to maintain service enhancements
Lower-than-anticipated patronage growth	Reduces value-for-money outcomes
External economic conditions affecting demand	Impacts passenger growth forecasts
Delays in procurement or mobilisation	Delays delivery of proposed enhancements

These risks will be mitigated through phased implementation, robust procurement and contract management arrangements, ongoing monitoring of service performance and close engagement with operators and stakeholders. The programme has also been designed so that enhancements can be scaled or phased according to available funding and emerging demand.

Relationship to the Wider Programme

This package represents the primary transport supply intervention within the preferred programme and provides the foundation upon which many other interventions depend. Stronger public transport is essential to the success of Independent Travel Training, CT integration and wider accessibility objectives. It also provides the strategic network around which DRT, CT and specialist transport services can be coordinated. As a result, this package should be viewed as a core enabling component of the wider integrated transport system rather than as a standalone public transport investment.

Success Measures

Success will be measured through:

- growth in passenger journeys;
- improvements in service frequency and coverage;
- reliability and punctuality performance;
- increased accessibility to key employment, education and healthcare destinations;
- customer satisfaction levels;
- number of communities connected to the CR Network;
- integration with rail, CT and flexible transport services; and
- contribution towards wider programme accessibility and independence outcomes.

Package E - Community Transport Capacity and Sustainability



Purpose

To strengthen CT as a strategic component of Dorset's wider transport system. It recognises that CT provides essential access to healthcare, shopping, social participation and community services in locations and for user groups that cannot always be effectively served by conventional public transport. The package responds to growing demand, organisational capacity pressures and long-standing funding challenges within the sector whilst supporting a more integrated and resilient transport system. **Appendix B** concludes that CT functions as both transport infrastructure and social infrastructure, generating benefits relating to healthcare access, independence, social inclusion and community resilience.

The package is based on the principle that CT should not be viewed solely as a transport provider, but as an important element of Dorset's social infrastructure. Evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement and the national evidence review indicates that CT contributes to wider outcomes relating to independence, health, social inclusion and community resilience. The intervention therefore focuses not only on service provision, but also on strengthening the long-term sustainability, capability and integration of the sector.

Intervention Objective

To develop a more resilient, sustainable and better coordinated CT sector that improves rural accessibility, supports independence and provides an effective complement to the public transport network.

Scope

The intervention package comprises a combination of organisational support, service development and integration measures, including:

- expansion of CT capacity in areas where accessibility gaps exist;
- development of stronger partnerships between Dorset Council and CT providers;
- development of community mobility partnerships with town and parish councils, CT providers and voluntary organisations
- continuation and expansion of grant funding and sector support arrangements;
- support for volunteer recruitment, retention and succession planning;
- development of shared services and collaborative approaches between providers;
- improved integration with public transport, DRT and specialist transport services;
- improved digital capability, booking and scheduling arrangements where appropriate;
- development of first-mile and last-mile connections to the CR Network;
- closer alignment with healthcare, Adult Social Care and community-based services; and
- establishment of a more strategic framework for CT planning, oversight and performance management.



The package does not seek to replace conventional public transport services. Instead, CT is intended to complement the wider network by addressing accessibility gaps, supporting vulnerable users and providing flexible local solutions where fixed-route services are either unavailable or unsuitable.

Strategic Rationale

CT was consistently identified through stakeholder engagement as a vital element of Dorset's future transport system. Providers highlighted growing demand for healthcare journeys, increasing financial pressures, volunteer recruitment challenges and concerns regarding long-term sustainability. At the same time, participants emphasised the important role CT plays in supporting healthcare access, independent living and social participation across rural Dorset.

The evidence review concluded that CT delivers substantial value beyond the journeys provided. National evidence increasingly recognises CT as a form of social infrastructure that supports healthcare access, prevents social isolation, enables independent living and strengthens community resilience. These benefits are particularly significant within rural counties such as Dorset where rural transport alternatives may be limited.

The package also directly supports local and national policy objectives relating to rural accessibility, prevention, independence, Age Friendly Dorset, Adult Social Care transformation and integrated transport planning. Policy analysis consistently identifies CT as an important part of a balanced transport system capable of meeting diverse user needs.

Primary Beneficiaries

The principal beneficiaries are expected to be:

- older residents;
- disabled residents;
- rural communities;
- residents without access to a private vehicle;
- healthcare users;
- Adult Social Care service users;
- community groups and voluntary organisations;
- CT providers; and
- residents at risk of transport-related isolation or exclusion.

Expected Benefits

Improved Rural Accessibility

Expansion and strengthening of CT provision will improve access to services, facilities and opportunities for residents living in areas where conventional transport options are limited. CT can provide a particularly important role in addressing first-mile and last-mile accessibility challenges.



Improved Healthcare Access

Healthcare-related journeys represent a growing proportion of activity within Dorset's CT sector. Strengthening the sector is expected to improve access to appointments, community healthcare services and preventative health interventions, particularly for older residents and those living in rural locations.

Reduced Isolation and Improved Wellbeing

CT enables participation in social, leisure and community activities that may otherwise be inaccessible. Improved access to these opportunities is expected to contribute to reduced isolation, improved wellbeing and increased community participation.

Increased Independence

For many users, CT provides a means of accessing services and activities without relying entirely on family members, carers or specialist transport arrangements. Improved availability and coordination of services is therefore expected to support greater independence and choice.

Improved System Integration

Closer coordination between CT, public transport, flexible transport and specialist services will support a more coherent transport offer and improve overall network effectiveness. CT providers will play a key role in supporting integrated journey opportunities and filling gaps within the wider transport system.

Greater Sector Resilience

Support for volunteers, governance, digital capability and organisational development is expected to improve the long-term sustainability of CT provision and reduce vulnerability associated with ageing volunteer bases and limited organisational capacity. CT can only support a larger role within the transport system where organisational capacity, volunteer recruitment, funding, governance and digital capability are strengthened alongside service expansion.

Dependencies

Successful implementation depends upon:

- continued engagement and cooperation from CT providers;
- availability of sustainable funding and support mechanisms;
- successful recruitment and retention of volunteers;
- development of stronger links with public transport and DRT services;
- adequate coordination and oversight capacity within the council;
- appropriate digital and scheduling capability;
- engagement with healthcare and Adult Social Care partners; and
- establishment of effective governance and partnership arrangements.

Risks



Table 3.5 – Package E Risks

Risk	Impact
Volunteer recruitment and retention challenges	Limits future capacity and service resilience
Increasing operating costs	Reduces provider sustainability
Insufficient recurring funding	Restricts growth and sector development
Organisational fragility within smaller schemes	Creates continuity risks
Growing demand exceeding available capacity	Impacts service quality and availability
Weak integration with wider transport programmes	Limits strategic benefits

These risks will be mitigated through phased implementation, targeted provider support, stronger partnership arrangements and the development of a more strategic approach to CT planning and investment. The package also recognises that increasing demand must be matched by increased organisational capacity and should not simply be transferred into the sector without appropriate support.

Relationship to the Wider Programme

This package forms a critical component of the wider integrated transport programme and is closely linked to Core Public Transport Network Enhancement (Package D), Rural Flexible Transport (Package F) and Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships (Package C). CT is expected to provide an important bridging role between strategic public transport corridors and local communities, helping to connect residents to employment, healthcare, education and social opportunities. The package also supports wider Adult Social Care, healthcare and prevention objectives by providing transport options that enable individuals to remain active and engaged within their communities.

Success Measures

Success will be measured through:

- CT passenger journeys;
- number and coverage of CT services;
- volunteer recruitment and retention levels;
- user satisfaction;
- access to healthcare and community services;
- number of integrated journeys and referrals between transport services;
- organisational sustainability measures across participating providers;



- service availability in rural communities; and

contribution towards wider programme accessibility, independence and wellbeing outcomes.

Package F - Rural Flexible Transport

Purpose

To improve accessibility in areas where conventional fixed-route public transport is unable to provide an effective or affordable solution. It responds to the significant accessibility challenges associated with Dorset's rural geography, dispersed settlement pattern and uneven distribution of travel demand. The package is intended to complement, rather than replace, the Core Public Transport Network by providing flexible transport solutions that connect rural communities to employment, education, healthcare, public transport interchanges and local service centres.

The package reflects the growing body of evidence indicating that DRT can play an important role in improving accessibility where conventional bus services are difficult to sustain. However, it also recognises that DRT is not a universal solution and is most effective when deployed in a clearly defined role within a wider integrated transport system. Consistent with the findings of the Rural Mobility Fund evaluations reviewed in **Appendix B**, the package focuses on targeted deployment to address specific accessibility gaps rather than replacing fixed-route public transport services. National experience demonstrates that DRT can be effective in addressing specific accessibility challenges but can also require comparatively high subsidy levels and careful targeting to remain affordable. The intervention therefore focuses on targeted deployment to address specific accessibility gaps and strengthen connections to the wider transport network.

Intervention Objective

To improve accessibility for rural communities through the targeted deployment of flexible transport services that complement the public transport network, support access to essential services and address identified gaps in connectivity.

Scope

The intervention package comprises a phased programme of rural flexible transport measures, including:

- introduction of Wessex Connect DRT services within defined operating zones;
- development of first-mile and last-mile connections to the CR Network, rail stations, transport hubs and rural service centres;
- provision of flexible services for communities without viable conventional bus provision;
- improved access to healthcare, employment, education and local service centres;
- integration between DRT, CT and conventional bus services;
- shared booking, scheduling and coordination arrangements;



- use of digital journey planning and booking platforms;
- pilot deployment within selected rural catchments prior to wider expansion; and
- ongoing performance monitoring and service optimisation based on operational experience and demand patterns.

The package is intended to provide targeted accessibility improvements where evidence demonstrates a clear transport gap. It does not seek to replace strategic public transport corridors or substitute for investment in the Core Public Transport Network.

Strategic Rationale

Dorset's rural geography presents significant challenges for conventional public transport provision. Large numbers of residents live in communities with limited public transport availability and substantial distances to employment, education, healthcare and retail facilities. Evidence presented within the Strategic Case demonstrates that many rural communities experience transport disadvantage due to low service frequencies, limited coverage and dependence on private car travel.

The evidence review identified rural accessibility as one of the strongest areas of need within Dorset. National evaluations of the Rural Mobility Fund indicate that DRT can improve access to opportunities that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to reach, particularly when services are designed to connect users to wider transport networks. Evidence also suggests that DRT performs most effectively when targeted towards areas of greatest need and integrated with conventional public transport rather than operating as a stand-alone service.

Stakeholder engagement produced similar findings. CT providers, Transport Action Groups and workshop participants consistently supported the use of flexible transport solutions to address rural accessibility challenges but cautioned against treating DRT as a universal replacement for fixed-route public transport. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of integration, clear service purpose and long-term financial sustainability.

The package is also aligned with national and local policy objectives concerning rural accessibility, integrated transport, social inclusion and economic participation. Both the Local Transport Plan and the evidence review identify flexible transport as an important element of a wider transport hierarchy capable of responding to the diverse needs of rural communities.

Primary Beneficiaries

The principal beneficiaries are expected to be:

- residents living in rural and sparsely populated communities;
- older residents;
- disabled residents;
- non-drivers and households without access to a private vehicle;
- healthcare users;



- young people accessing education, training or employment;
- communities lacking frequent conventional public transport services; and
- residents requiring improved access to the Core Public Transport Network and rail services.

Expected Benefits

Improved Rural Accessibility

The principal benefit of the package will be improved access to services, facilities and opportunities for communities that currently experience limited transport provision. Flexible services will help connect residents to employment, education, healthcare and retail destinations that may otherwise be difficult to reach.

Improved Access to Essential Services

Flexible transport services are expected to improve access to healthcare facilities, public services, community facilities and local service centres, particularly for residents who are currently dependent on informal transport arrangements or unable to travel independently.

Reduced Transport Exclusion

The package will help address transport-related exclusion by providing travel opportunities for residents who may otherwise face barriers associated with age, disability, location or income. Improved accessibility is expected to contribute to wider objectives relating to inclusion and community participation.

Enhanced Network Connectivity

By connecting rural communities to the CR Network, rail stations and local hubs, DRT services will strengthen the effectiveness of the wider transport system and improve access to a larger range of destinations than could be provided through local services alone.

Support for Independent Living

Improved transport availability is expected to support independence, particularly amongst older residents, disabled people and those living in isolated locations. Access to transport enables participation in community life and reduces reliance on family members, carers or specialist transport provision.

Dependencies

Successful implementation depends upon:

- collaboration with Wiltshire Council and the Wessex devolution programme;
- availability of suitable operating and booking systems;
- sustainable revenue funding;
- integration with Core Public Transport Network services;
- effective coordination with CT providers;



- sufficient passenger demand within operating zones;
- procurement and contract management capacity; and
- implementation of the wider Integrated Transport Coordination and Governance package.

Risks

Table 3.6 – Package F Risks

Risk	Impact
Passenger demand lower than forecast	Reduces value for money and increases subsidy requirements
High operating costs compared with conventional bus services	Limits scalability and long-term affordability
Duplication with public transport or CT provision	Reduces network efficiency
Weak integration with wider transport services	Limits accessibility benefits
Dependence on technology and booking systems	Affects reliability and user experience
Funding uncertainty beyond initial implementation period	Restricts long-term service sustainability

These risks will be mitigated through phased implementation, pilot deployment, close performance monitoring and targeted operation within areas where evidence demonstrates the greatest accessibility need. Consistent with stakeholder feedback and national evidence, DRT will be treated as a complementary component of the transport system rather than a replacement for strategic bus services.

Relationship to the Wider Programme

This package acts as a complementary accessibility intervention within the wider integrated transport programme. It is closely linked to the Core Public Transport Network Enhancement package, providing feeder services and first-mile/last-mile connectivity to strategic transport corridors. It also depends upon coordination with CT services and the governance, scheduling and performance management arrangements proposed within Package B. Together, these interventions support the creation of a transport hierarchy in which public transport, CT and flexible transport each perform distinct but complementary roles.

Success Measures

Success will be measured through:

- passenger journeys and utilisation levels;



- booking fulfilment rates;
- cost per passenger journey;
- number of rural communities served;
- connectivity to the CR Network and rail services;
- user satisfaction;
- access to employment, education and healthcare destinations;
- subsidy per passenger journey;
- proportion of shared journeys delivered; and
- contribution towards wider programme accessibility and rural inclusion outcomes.

3.3 Programme Interdependencies

The intervention packages described in this Economic Case have been developed as a single integrated programme rather than a collection of standalone projects. Whilst each package delivers distinct outputs and benefits, the evidence gathered during development of the FBC demonstrates that many of the programme outcomes can only be achieved through the combined effect of multiple interventions working together.

Together, the six packages seek to influence both the demand for transport and the availability of transport services, whilst providing the governance, partnerships and coordination necessary to connect them into a coherent system.

3.3.1 Key Interdependencies

Independence Depends on Transport Availability

Many of the benefits expected from Package A are dependent upon improvements delivered through Packages D, E and F. Independent Travel Training, Personal Travel Budgets and other demand management measures can only be successful where individuals have access to safe, reliable and accessible transport services. A stronger CR Network, sustainable CT provision and targeted Rural Flexible Transport services therefore provide the practical travel options that enable greater independence and reduced reliance on specialist transport. Without these supply-side improvements, the scope for achieving long-term behaviour change would be significantly constrained.

Transport Integration Enables System Efficiency

Package B acts as the primary enabling intervention for the wider programme.

Opportunities to improve fleet utilisation, coordinate journeys, integrate specialist transport and align transport with wider service planning depend upon effective governance, shared data, integrated planning processes and organisational collaboration. Whilst individual



transport services can be improved independently, many of the anticipated system-wide efficiencies rely upon the coordination mechanisms established through Package B.

As a result, several benefits identified within Packages A, D, E and F can only be fully realised if effective integration arrangements are successfully established.

Health Transport Relies on Wider Network Capacity

Package C is closely linked to both CT and public transport provision.

The evidence review and stakeholder engagement highlighted the growing demand for healthcare-related journeys and the increasingly important role played by CT providers in supporting access to health services. Improved health transport coordination is therefore dependent upon having sufficient transport capacity available within Packages D and F, together with the planning and coordination arrangements established through Package B. Similarly, improved transport access to healthcare contributes towards wider programme objectives relating to independence, prevention and community wellbeing.

Community Transport and Flexible Transport Perform Complementary Roles

Packages E and F have been designed to operate alongside the CR Network rather than replace it.

The CR Network provides the strategic transport spine linking Dorset's main settlements and key destinations. CT and Rural Flexible Transport are intended to complement this network by addressing local accessibility gaps, providing first-mile and last-mile connections and supporting users whose needs cannot be fully met through conventional public transport services.

This transport hierarchy helps ensure that each mode is deployed where it is most effective, improving overall network coverage whilst making best use of available resources.

Independence Depends on Parental and User Confidence

Successful delivery of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets will depend on user, parental and carer confidence in the wider transport system. Improvements to reliability, accessibility and service quality are therefore expected to support uptake and participation.

Programme Risks

Whilst individual intervention packages have specific risks and dependencies, several risks apply across the programme as a whole, including:

- availability of recurring revenue funding;
- workforce and provider capacity;
- successful partnership working across organisations;
- alignment with SEND reform and Adult Day Opportunities transformation;
- public acceptance and user confidence;



- inflationary pressures and transport market conditions; and
- the ability to maintain service continuity during implementation.

3.3.2 Benefits Realisation Through Combined Delivery

Many of the programme's intended outcomes depend on multiple packages contributing simultaneously.

Table 3.7 – Outcome Realisation

Strategic Outcome	Primary Contributing Packages
Increased independence	A, D, E, F
Improved accessibility	C, D, E, F
Better health access	C, D, E, F
Improved transport integration	B, C
Reduced transport-related isolation	D, E, F
Improved rural connectivity	D, E, F
Better utilisation of transport resources	B, C
Improved long-term financial sustainability	A, B, D, E

This demonstrates that the programme's benefits cannot be attributed to individual interventions alone. Rather, benefits are expected to emerge from the interaction between transport services, governance arrangements and demand management interventions working together as part of a coordinated system.

3.3.3 Programme Delivery Considerations

Whilst the packages are highly interdependent, they do not all need to be delivered simultaneously. The programme has been designed to allow phased implementation, enabling individual interventions to be introduced as funding, capacity and partnership arrangements permit.

However, the sequencing of activity will be important. Early investment in transport planning, coordination and partnership development is expected to create the conditions necessary for successful delivery of later interventions. Similarly, improvements to transport supply will strengthen the effectiveness of Independent Travel Training and other demand management measures.



For this reason, successful delivery will require ongoing programme management, performance monitoring and benefits realisation across the programme as a whole, rather than focusing solely on the performance of individual intervention packages.

Benefits are greatest when interventions are delivered as a coordinated package rather than independently. Demand management initiatives require suitable transport alternatives to be available. Public transport investment is more effective when supported by CT and flexible transport services. Integration initiatives improve the ability to coordinate resources and maximise the value derived from transport investment. The preferred programme therefore seeks to optimise outcomes across the transport system rather than maximising the performance of any individual intervention.

3.4 Economic Case Conclusion

The OBC concluded that Dorset's transport challenges could not be addressed through isolated service improvements or continuation of existing delivery models. Instead, it identified an integrated transport system as the preferred strategic approach. This FBC has built upon that conclusion by defining a deliverable programme of interventions that together create a more accessible, coordinated and sustainable transport system for Dorset.

The Economic Case demonstrates that no single intervention can deliver the required level of change in isolation. Improved independence requires access to suitable transport services. Stronger public and CT networks require effective coordination and planning. Improved healthcare access requires stronger collaboration between transport providers and public sector partners. The preferred programme has therefore been designed as a package of mutually reinforcing interventions that collectively address the issues identified within the Strategic Case.

The programme comprises six integrated intervention packages:

- **Package A: Independent Travel and Demand Management**, focused on increasing independence, supporting preparation for adulthood and reducing unnecessary reliance on specialist transport.
- **Package B: Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination**, focused on improving system leadership, transport planning, resource utilisation and coordination across council services and transport providers.
- **Package C: Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships**, focused on improving access to healthcare and strengthening collaboration between the council, NHS Dorset, CT providers and other public sector partners.
- **Package D: C Network Enhancement**, focused on strengthening the public transport network through service enhancements, improved connectivity and increased accessibility.



- **Package E: Community Transport Capacity and Sustainability**, focused on developing a stronger, more resilient CT sector capable of supporting rural communities, healthcare access and social inclusion.
- **Package F: Rural Flexible Transport**, focused on addressing rural accessibility gaps through targeted DRT and other flexible transport solutions.

Collectively, these interventions provide a balanced approach that addresses transport demand, transport supply and system integration. The programme seeks to improve accessibility to employment, education, healthcare and community services; support greater independence and participation; strengthen rural connectivity; reduce transport-related isolation; improve the utilisation of transport resources; and create a more financially sustainable transport system.

Importantly, the programme has been designed to build upon existing assets, services and partnerships rather than create wholly new delivery structures. It adopts a pragmatic approach centred on better coordination, targeted investment, stronger partnerships and incremental integration of transport services across Dorset.

The programme should also monitor wider Preparation for Adulthood outcomes, including progression into further education, supported internships, apprenticeships, employment and community participation. This will help ensure that the benefits of Independent Travel Training, Personal Travel Budgets and improved transport access are assessed not only through transport cost and demand indicators, but also through their contribution to longer-term independence, inclusion and life outcomes.

The Economic Case therefore concludes that the preferred programme represents the most appropriate, deliverable and affordable response to the challenges identified in the Strategic Case. It provides the strongest balance between accessibility, independence, integration, rural connectivity, long-term sustainability and value for money while remaining capable of phased implementation within the council's organisational and financial constraints.



4 Commercial Case

The Commercial Case considers how the market can support delivery of the programme, and the approach the council will take to secure services that maximise public value. Moving to an integrated transport system represents a shift away from commissioning individual services in isolation, toward a more coordinated and flexible delivery model. This requires a commercial approach that enables different providers to contribute to a single, system-wide offer.

4.1 Procurement Strategy

The procurement strategy has been developed to support delivery of the programme whilst ensuring continuity of service for passengers, compliance with the Procurement Act 2023, and achievement of value for money for the council. All procurement activity will be undertaken in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules and the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, including transparency, value for money, non-discrimination and fair supplier access. The strategy reflects the transition towards a more integrated transport system, whilst recognising the importance of maintaining a stable and reliable core network of supported public bus services during the implementation period.

The council intends to adopt a flexible procurement approach that enables the public transport network to evolve in response to changing passenger demand, service integration opportunities, government policy, future funding settlements and the outcomes of this FBC. The commercial approach has therefore been designed to avoid locking the council into overly prescriptive service specifications and instead provide sufficient flexibility to support future network development and transformation.

For the supported public bus network, the council will undertake a market assessment to determine the most appropriate route to market. The preferred approach is to utilise the existing Passenger Transport Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) where this can demonstrably deliver value for money, sufficient market competition and the required service outcomes. If the DPS is not considered suitable, the council will undertake a compliant open competitive procurement process. Early market engagement will be undertaken with operators to test delivery models, understand market capacity, identify innovation opportunities and inform the final procurement approach.

The procurement will secure a core network of socially necessary bus services connecting Dorset's market towns, rural communities and key destinations including schools, healthcare facilities, rail stations, employment centres and local service hubs. These services form a critical component of Dorset's wider transport system and provide essential connectivity in areas where commercial bus provision is either limited or unavailable.

The council's intention is to procure supported bus services through gross-cost contractual arrangements wherever appropriate. Under this model, the council retains fare revenue and network planning responsibilities whilst operators are paid to deliver specified services. This



approach provides greater control over network development, allows routes and timetables to be planned as a cohesive network and creates opportunities to align services with wider transport objectives, including CT, DRT and future network enhancements.

Gross-cost contracting is considered the most appropriate commercial approach because it enables the council to plan services as an integrated network, align routes with programme objectives and retain flexibility to introduce future service changes. This is particularly important given the programme's emphasis on service integration, phased implementation and coordination with community and flexible transport services.

A proposed initial contract term of three years will be adopted, with extension provisions of up to four additional years (2+2), subject to satisfactory performance, affordability and continued strategic fit. This approach provides long-term certainty for operators and passengers whilst allowing the council to respond to future policy, funding or market changes if required. Regular contract reviews will assess performance, passenger demand, reliability, customer satisfaction and value for money throughout the contract period.

In relation to DRT, the council will pursue a collaborative delivery model with Wiltshire Council, building on the established Wiltshire Connect approach. Rather than procuring a standalone Dorset-specific DRT system, the council intends to utilise existing expertise, operational knowledge, technology platforms and management arrangements already established through the Wiltshire Connect programme. This approach reduces implementation risk, accelerates delivery, avoids duplication of investment and supports greater regional consistency for passengers. Dorset Council will supplement this arrangement using in-house transport resources and operational capability to deliver services locally whilst benefiting from shared systems and experience developed by Wiltshire Council. This collaborative approach represents a cost-effective and lower-risk route to introducing flexible transport services within Dorset.

Should the collaborative model prove unavailable or unsuitable, the council retains the option to procure an alternative DRT solution through a separate procurement process. This provides commercial resilience whilst maintaining the current preference for collaborative delivery.

The wider procurement programme will be phased to align with programme delivery. Priority will initially focus on securing the supported bus network and establishing the foundations for integrated transport delivery. Subsequent phases will support the development of flexible transport services, expansion of CT provision, implementation of digital coordination tools and integration of transport planning and scheduling functions. This phased approach reduces transition risk and ensures that service continuity is maintained throughout programme implementation.

The indicative procurement programme comprises:

- Early market engagement and operator consultation during Autumn 2026.
- Development of final service specifications and contract documentation through Autumn and Winter 2026.
- Publication of procurement opportunities in January 2027.



- Tender evaluation and moderation during Spring 2027.
- Contract award and mobilisation during Summer 2027.
- Commencement of new contractual arrangements from July 2027 onwards.

The procurement strategy therefore supports both the immediate requirement to secure critical public transport services and the longer-term ambition to develop a more integrated transport system. By combining flexible procurement arrangements, collaborative working with neighbouring authorities, longer-term contractual stability and ongoing market engagement, the council will create a commercial framework capable of supporting Dorset's future public, community and flexible transport network.

4.2 Market Capability and Capacity

Market engagement undertaken to date indicates that there is a strong appetite across the transport sector to work more collaboratively and support the development of a more integrated transport system for Dorset. Rather than starting from a blank sheet of paper, the programme builds on a number of well-established relationships and engagement mechanisms that are already in place across the county.

For public transport, the council has an established track record of collaborative working through the Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators. This provides a mature forum for ongoing dialogue on network planning, service performance, reliability, passenger experience, infrastructure investment and Bus Service Improvement Plan delivery. The Enhanced Partnership has played an important role in shaping recent improvements to the CR network and provides a strong foundation for future discussions regarding network development, service integration and delivery of the programme.

Engagement through the Enhanced Partnership has demonstrated that operators recognise both the challenges and opportunities associated with operating within a large rural authority area. Operators have consistently highlighted the importance of longer-term funding certainty, network stability, coordinated planning and realistic approaches to managing demand in low-density areas. The programme responds directly to these themes by seeking to create a more coordinated and sustainable transport system that provides greater certainty for both passengers and operators.

Alongside engagement with bus operators, the council convened a CT Roundtable during the development of this FBC. The event brought together CT organisations, voluntary sector partners and key stakeholders to explore the future role of CT within an integrated transport system. The discussions confirmed a strong commitment from the sector to play a greater role in supporting accessibility, tackling rural isolation and improving connectivity for residents who are unable to access conventional public transport services.

The roundtable also highlighted several common challenges facing the sector, including volunteer recruitment and retention, funding uncertainty, operational capacity and the need for stronger coordination between providers. However, participants identified significant opportunities to strengthen CT provision through greater collaboration, improved referral



pathways, better integration with the public transport network and increased access to shared resources and expertise. Realising these opportunities will require continued investment in organisational development, volunteer recruitment, governance and operational capacity aligned with package E.

The engagement undertaken to date suggests that Dorset possesses a broad and diverse transport market with the capability required to support delivery of the proposed model. Established bus operators provide the operational capacity and expertise necessary to deliver the core public transport network, whilst CT organisations offer extensive local knowledge, trusted relationships and flexible delivery models capable of addressing gaps in provision, particularly within rural communities.

The proposed introduction of DRT further strengthens overall market capability. Rather than developing a wholly new operating model, the council intends to work collaboratively with Wiltshire Council to build upon the established Wiltshire Connect service. This approach provides access to proven operational systems, established delivery processes and existing expertise, significantly reducing implementation risk. The council will complement these arrangements using in-house transport resources and operational capability, creating a delivery model that combines local responsiveness with proven operational experience.

Overall, market engagement indicates that there is sufficient capability to support delivery of the initial phases of the programme. However, achieving the full benefits of an integrated transport system will require stronger coordination between providers, continued partnership working and targeted efforts to develop capacity in areas such as CT, flexible transport and digital integration. The programme therefore seeks not only to commission services but also to create the conditions in which the transport market can evolve, collaborate and grow alongside the council's long-term ambitions for public, community and flexible transport across Dorset.

Table 4.1 – Summary of commercial strategy

Service	Market position	Commercial approach
Supported bus services	Mature	Gross cost contracts
Community transport	Developing	Grants and partnerships
DRT	Emerging	Wiltshire Connect collaboration
Digital tools	Mature	Separate procurement if required

4.3 Commercial Delivery Model

The integrated transport operating model will combine strong strategic leadership from the council, continued partnership with operators and CT providers, and the introduction of enabling technology and shared planning arrangements. The model has been intentionally designed to build upon existing strengths within the current system rather than requiring wholesale structural change from day one. This significantly improves deliverability, reduces



implementation risk and allows benefits to be realised progressively throughout the programme.

The recommended delivery model focuses on bringing transport services together within a single framework, whilst allowing implementation to be phased according to organisational readiness, available funding and market capacity.

4.3.1 Role of the council

As the Local Transport Authority, the council will act as the system leader. The council will retain responsibility for transport strategy, network planning, performance management, integration across service areas and overall programme delivery. This role extends beyond traditional contract management and reflects the need for transport services to be planned as a single system rather than a collection of individual contracts.

The council will be responsible for:

- Strategic transport planning and network development.
- Integration of public transport, CT and flexible transport services.
- Cross-service coordination between Dorset Travel, Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- Performance management and benefits realisation.
- Passenger and stakeholder engagement.
- Management of external funding and capital investment programmes.
- Delivery of demand management initiatives, including travel training and policy reforms.

A significant element of delivery will be undertaken through the Dorset Travel's Integrated Transport Function, which will provide a single point of coordination across transport-related activities. This approach will enable transport planning decisions to be informed by demand across the wider system rather than individual service budgets and operational silos.

4.3.2 Role of Operators and Delivery Partners

Bus operators will continue to play a critical role in delivering the core public transport network. Their primary responsibility will be the safe, reliable and efficient operation of services in accordance with agreed specifications, performance standards and customer service requirements.

CT providers will play an increasingly important role in providing local accessibility, first-mile and last-mile connections and access to areas where conventional bus services are not viable. The intention is not to replace public transport with CT, but to create stronger connections between the two so that each element complements the other.

DRT services will provide additional flexibility within the network, offering transport solutions in areas and at times where fixed-route services cannot operate efficiently. By combining the strengths of public transport, CT and flexible transport within a coordinated



system, the programme will create a wider range of travel opportunities than can be achieved through any single transport mode acting independently.

4.3.3 Role of Technology and System Integration

Technology will act as an enabler rather than a driver of change. The programme will avoid large-scale technology-led transformation in the early stages, recognising that successful system integration must first be supported by strong governance, effective partnerships and clear operational processes.

Initially, technology will focus on improving coordination, scheduling, performance monitoring and management information. Over time, digital tools will support:

- Shared scheduling and resource planning.
- Performance management and reporting.
- Journey planning and passenger information.
- DRT operations.
- Data sharing across providers and transport modes.
- Network performance analysis and service optimisation.

By building upon established systems and operational arrangements, the council aims to minimise development costs, reduce implementation risk and accelerate delivery of integrated transport functions.

4.3.4 Governance and Accountability

Strong governance is essential to ensuring the programme can be delivered successfully across multiple service areas and stakeholder groups.

Overall accountability will remain with the council through established political and corporate governance arrangements. Cabinet will provide strategic oversight and decision making on key investment and policy matters. Programme delivery will be overseen through a dedicated programme governance structure, supported by the Transformation Office and Transport Beacon Team.

Detailed governance arrangements are set out in the Management Case.

4.3.5 Deliverability and Phasing

A key strength of the recommended delivery model is that it can be implemented progressively rather than requiring a single large-scale transformation programme.

During 2027/28, delivery will focus on establishing the foundations of the integrated model. Priority actions are expected to include:

- Supported bus network procurement and mobilisation.
- Establishment of integrated programme governance.
- Initial demand management measures.



- CT development activities.
- Early deployment of improved coordination and scheduling arrangements.

These activities build on existing services and capabilities and are therefore considered achievable within the first year of implementation.

During 2028/29, the programme will move into a more transformational phase, including:

- Expansion of CT capacity;
- Introduction of DRT services;
- Greater integration between public, community and specialist transport;
- Enhanced use of shared planning and scheduling;
- Further network development and service improvements; and
- Realisation of the first measurable efficiency improvements and demand-management outcomes.

From 2027/28, residents will begin to see tangible improvements in service availability, network coordination and travel choice, particularly in rural communities.

Beyond 2029, further phases will focus on scaling and refining the model, introducing additional technology-enabled functionality, deepening service integration and expanding successful interventions where funding and demand support further growth.

4.3.6 Conclusion

The recommended delivery model is considered both practical and achievable because it builds upon existing services, partnerships and organisational capabilities rather than relying on untested structural change. It combines strong strategic leadership from the Council with established operator expertise, growing CT capacity and proven delivery models from neighbouring authorities. The phased approach enables early improvements to be delivered during 2027/28 and 2028/29 whilst maintaining service continuity and managing implementation risk. As a result, the model provides a credible and deliverable route to achieving the long-term vision for a more integrated, accessible and financially sustainable transport system across Dorset.

4.4 Contract Management Arrangements

Effective contract management will be critical to ensuring that the benefits identified within this FBC are realised and sustained throughout the life of the programme. The proposed delivery model involves a wider range of providers, greater service integration and a stronger focus on outcomes than traditional transport contracts. As a result, contract management arrangements must move beyond monitoring service compliance alone and provide robust oversight of performance, quality, customer experience and programme outcomes.



4.4.1 Contract Management Resource

A review of the future operating model has identified the need for additional contract management capacity within Dorset Travel. The current contract management arrangements were developed to oversee individual transport contracts and service agreements. The recommended delivery model will require more proactive supplier management and performance monitoring across a larger and more diverse transport portfolio.

To address this requirement, an additional dedicated Public Transport Contracts post will be established within Dorset Travel. This role will provide strategic oversight of public transport contracts and act as the principal point of contact between the council and transport providers. The role will be responsible for:

- Managing contractual relationships with operators and key suppliers.
- Monitoring contract compliance and service performance.
- Leading performance review meetings.
- Coordinating performance improvement activity where required.
- Supporting service variation and network change processes.
- Managing contractual risks and issues.
- Ensuring operators deliver agreed standards and outcomes.
- Supporting the transition and mobilisation of new services.

This additional resource has been identified as a critical enabler for successful programme delivery and will help ensure that the enhanced service specifications and performance expectations are effectively monitored throughout the contract lifecycle.

4.4.2 Supplier Relationship Management

The programme will adopt a structured supplier relationship management approach designed to encourage collaboration, continuous improvement and innovation whilst maintaining clear contractual accountability.

Suppliers will be managed using a tiered approach reflecting the strategic importance, value and risk profile of individual contracts. Key delivery partners will be subject to enhanced management arrangements, including regular strategic review meetings and joint performance planning.

The council's approach will seek to create long-term collaborative relationships with operators and providers whilst maintaining clear expectations regarding service quality, reliability, customer service and value for money. Where performance exceeds expectations, providers will be encouraged to share learning and identify opportunities for further network improvements. Equally, where performance falls below agreed standards, clear improvement processes will be implemented to support corrective action.



This approach reflects the programme's wider ambition to develop long-term partnerships capable of supporting future network growth and service integration.

4.4.3 Performance Monitoring and Reporting

A comprehensive performance management framework will be established for all significant transport contracts.

Performance reporting will focus on a combination of operational, financial and customer measures, ensuring that contract monitoring reflects both service delivery and broader programme objectives.

Key performance measures are expected to include:

- Service reliability and punctuality.
- Service cancellations and mileage operated.
- Passenger numbers and patronage trends.
- Customer complaints and satisfaction levels.
- Accessibility and inclusivity measures.
- Safety and compliance indicators.
- Contractual performance standards.
- Financial performance and value for money measures.

Operators will be required to provide regular performance data to enable effective monitoring of service trends and early identification of emerging issues. Performance information will also support wider programme monitoring and benefits realisation activities.

A consolidated performance dashboard will be developed to provide regular reporting to senior management and programme governance boards, ensuring that decision-makers have clear visibility of network performance and contractual delivery.

4.4.4 Review Meetings

A structured programme of meetings will be established with suppliers to ensure regular oversight and constructive engagement.

These meetings will operate at three levels:

Operational Review Meetings (Monthly)

Monthly operational meetings will focus on day-to-day service performance, operational issues, reliability, customer feedback, planned service changes and emerging risks.

Contract Performance Reviews (Quarterly)

Formal quarterly review meetings will assess performance against contractual requirements and key performance indicators. These meetings will review trends, improvement plans, financial performance and opportunities for service development.



Strategic Partnership Reviews (Annually)

Annual reviews will consider longer-term service performance, strategic priorities, network development opportunities, lessons learned and future investment requirements. These meetings will ensure that individual supplier performance remains aligned with the wider objectives of the transport transformation programme.

4.4.5 Escalation and Performance Improvement Process

A formal escalation process will be implemented to ensure that service issues are addressed proportionately and consistently.

Where performance concerns are identified, the council will adopt a staged approach:

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Minor issues will normally be addressed through routine contract management discussions and agreed corrective actions.

Stage 2: Formal Performance Improvement

Where issues persist or performance falls materially below agreed standards, a formal improvement plan will be implemented. This will include clear improvement actions, timescales, responsibilities and monitoring arrangements.

Stage 3: Senior Management Escalation

Significant or repeated failures will be escalated to senior management within both organisations. Formal contractual remedies may be considered where appropriate.

Stage 4: Contractual Intervention

In exceptional circumstances, where performance issues remain unresolved or service delivery is compromised, the council will utilise the contractual mechanisms available to protect service continuity and safeguard public value.

The escalation framework is intended to resolve issues at the earliest possible stage whilst ensuring that the council retains appropriate controls where intervention becomes necessary.

4.4.6 Assurance and Continuous Improvement

The contract management approach has been designed not only to monitor contractual compliance but also to support continual improvement across the transport network. Regular performance reviews, benchmarking, customer feedback and supplier engagement will be used to identify opportunities to improve efficiency, reliability and the passenger experience throughout the life of the programme.

Taken together, these arrangements provide a proportionate but robust framework for managing delivery risk, protecting service quality and ensuring that suppliers remain focused on the outcomes that the programme is seeking to achieve. The introduction of dedicated



contract management capacity within Dorset Travel will further strengthen the council's ability to oversee an increasingly integrated transport system and provide confidence that the proposed delivery model can be successfully implemented and managed over the long term.

4.5 Commercial Risks and Mitigation

The programme will be delivered in a challenging transport market characterised by operator cost pressures, workforce constraints and increasing competition for public sector funding. A proactive approach to market engagement, contract management and partnership development will therefore be required throughout implementation.

Table 4.1 – Risks, Impacts and Mitigations



Commercial Risk	Potential Impact	Mitigation Measures
Insufficient market competition	Reduced bidding activity may limit value for money and reduce the range of delivery options available to the council.	Early market engagement to test market appetite and inform specification development. Phased procurement and flexible packaging of services to encourage participation from a wider range of operators. Use of Framework and DPS arrangements where appropriate.
Increasing operator costs	Higher operating costs may increase tender prices and place pressure on available budgets.	Regular market engagement, robust cost modelling, phased implementation and ongoing contract management to identify efficiencies and opportunities for service optimisation.
Provider failure	Service disruption and potential interruption to transport provision.	Financial and due diligence checks during procurement, contract performance monitoring, contingency arrangements for alternative service provision and maintenance of market relationships with multiple providers.
Workforce shortages	Driver and operational staff shortages may affect service reliability and provider capacity.	Early engagement with operators, realistic mobilisation periods, phased service introduction and ongoing dialogue with providers regarding workforce planning and recruitment challenges.
Inflation and fuel cost volatility	Increased contract costs and potential affordability pressures over the life of the programme.	Appropriate contractual mechanisms, regular contract reviews, financial monitoring and phased implementation to manage exposure to cost fluctuations.
CT capacity constraints	Limited organisational, volunteer or fleet capacity may restrict the scale and pace of CT expansion.	Ongoing market and sector development activity, grant funding support, volunteer recruitment initiatives, provider development programmes and phased expansion aligned to organisational capacity.
Dependency on external funding	Delays or uncertainty in external funding may affect delivery timescales and programme scope.	Phased implementation, development of alternative delivery scenarios, alignment with existing budgets where possible and proactive pursuit of future funding opportunities.
Dependency on collaborative arrangements with Wiltshire Council and other partners	Changes in partner priorities, resources or governance arrangements may affect delivery of shared initiatives,	Establishment of clear partnership agreements, regular governance arrangements, shared delivery planning and development of contingency options should collaborative arrangements change over time.



	including future DRT expansion.	
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Collectively, these risks are considered manageable and are typical of large-scale transport and service transformation programmes. The proposed procurement approach, programme governance arrangements, market development activity and phased delivery strategy provide a strong framework for mitigating commercial risk whilst maintaining flexibility to respond to changing market conditions.



5 Financial Case

The Financial Case considers the affordability of the preferred programme, the availability of funding and the council's ability to support implementation. It sets out the programme cost profile, funding assumptions, affordability position and the principal financial risks and uncertainties that will need to be managed during delivery.

5.1 Baseline position

The council already commits significant resources to the provision of transport services. In 2025/26, the Dorset Travel budget totalled £42.6 million, representing approximately 42% of the Place Directorate's total net budget of £102 million. Total expenditure during the year was £39.1 million, demonstrating the scale and strategic importance of transport services to the council's wider service delivery responsibilities.

The current expenditure profile highlights that a substantial proportion of transport spending is directed towards statutory and specialist transport provision rather than mainstream public transport. As shown in Table 5.1, more than three-quarters of Dorset Travel expenditure is currently focused on HtS Transport and SEND Transport, reflecting both the council's statutory responsibilities and the growing complexity of transport demand.

Table 5.1: Dorset Travel Expenditure 2025/26

Service Area	2025/26 Outturn
SEND Transport	£20.2m
Mainstream School Transport	£11.7m
Public Transport	£5.7m
Operational Support	£1.5m
Total Dorset Travel Expenditure	£39.1m

Source: Council 2025/26 Outturn Position.

This spending profile illustrates an important structural challenge within the current system. Whilst public transport is expected to provide connectivity, accessibility and independence for residents, only around 15% of total Dorset Travel expenditure is currently directed towards public transport services. In contrast, over 80% of expenditure is concentrated within school and SEND transport, where services are often delivered through bespoke and highly specialised arrangements.

Mainstream School Transport

Mainstream School Transport expenditure increased from £11.4 million to £11.7 million during 2025/26, representing a modest increase of 2.6%, despite inflationary pressures



affecting the wider transport sector. Effective route optimisation, reductions in solo routes and the introduction of improved planning systems have helped contain costs and improve efficiency.

Whilst this demonstrates that traditional efficiency measures can deliver benefits, there is limited scope for further transformational savings through route optimisation alone. Most available efficiencies have already been captured, and future cost pressures are likely to be driven by contract inflation, market conditions and demand growth.

SEND Transport

SEND Transport represents the largest single area of expenditure within Dorset Travel, accounting for over half of all transport spending. Expenditure reached £20.2 million in 2025/26, compared with £19.7 million in 2024/25. While this represents a modest annual increase of 2.5%, it should be viewed within the context of previous years, which saw increases of 44.5% and 17% respectively.

The Dorset Travel team has successfully moderated cost growth despite an 8% increase in client numbers, through measures including route consolidation, improved seat occupancy, reductions in single-occupancy journeys, expansion of PTBs and targeted route reviews.

However, evidence highlights the continuing pressures within the SEND transport system:

- Dorset operated 1,032 SEND transport routes during 2025/2026.
- 362 routes were single-occupancy journeys, demonstrating the highly bespoke nature of much of the provision.
- Average transport costs were approximately £16,000 per pupil.
- Personal Travel Budgets averaged approximately £5,273 per pupil, significantly below the cost of contracted transport arrangements.
- The SEND Travel Reviewing Team reviewed 67 single-occupancy routes across 2024/25 and 2025/26, successfully consolidating or redesigning 32 routes.

These figures demonstrate that while significant efficiency work has already been undertaken, underlying demand and cost pressures remain substantial. Continuing increases in EHCPs, greater transport complexity and increasing contractor costs are likely to place ongoing pressure on budgets without broader reform of the transport system.

Public Transport

Public Transport expenditure totalled £5.7 million during 2025/26 against a budget of £4.3 million, resulting in an overspend of approximately £1.4 million. The principal cost pressure arose from concessionary fare reimbursement, where expenditure reached approximately £4.6 million, above the approved budget provision of £3.5 million.

Alongside concessionary fares, the council continues to provide financial support for socially necessary bus services, including the CR network. These services are essential to maintaining accessibility across Dorset's rural communities but are increasingly affected by market pressures.



The re-procurement of the CR network represents a significant financial consideration within this FBC. Market evidence and recent contract negotiations across the sector indicate that future tender prices are highly likely to increase. The principal drivers include:

- Continued inflationary pressures affecting fuel, maintenance and insurance costs.
- Rising wage costs resulting from driver recruitment and retention challenges.
- Increased National Living Wage requirements.
- Ongoing labour shortages across the bus and wider transport sector.
- Higher vehicle replacement and financing costs associated with fleet renewal and decarbonisation requirements.

As existing contracts reach renewal, operators will inevitably seek to recover these increased operating costs through tender submissions. Consequently, maintaining the current level of public transport provision is expected to require additional investment even before consideration of any service enhancements proposed through the programme.

Baseline Financial Position

The current baseline demonstrates three fundamental challenges facing Dorset's transport system.

First, a significant proportion of transport expenditure is concentrated within specialist and statutory services, particularly SEND transport, where costs remain high despite substantial efficiency activity.

Second, public transport services continue to face affordability pressures arising from historical underfunding, increasing concessionary fare costs and rising operator costs.

Third, although Dorset Travel has successfully delivered cost control measures across several service areas, many of the traditional efficiency opportunities have already been exploited. Future financial sustainability is therefore unlikely to be achieved through incremental savings alone.

Without intervention, the council is likely to face continuing pressure from rising specialist transport demand, increasing bus operating costs and wider inflationary pressures across the transport market. This baseline position reinforces the need for a more integrated and sustainable transport model that can manage demand more effectively, make better use of existing resources and reduce long-term reliance on high-cost specialist transport provision.

5.2 Programme Cost Drivers

The cost model has been developed to support delivery of the preferred programme over a seven-year implementation period. Consistent with the Economic Case, costs have been assessed against the six intervention packages that form the preferred programme. This approach provides a direct link between the proposed interventions, anticipated outputs and associated funding requirements.



Cost assumptions have been developed using current contract values, market intelligence, staffing estimates and service planning assumptions. A 3% annual inflation allowance has been applied throughout the model.

Table 5.2: Summary of Programme Cost Drivers by Intervention Package

Package	Intervention Package	Principal Activities	Main Cost Drivers
A	Independent Travel and Demand Management	ITT, PTBs travel support, preparation for adulthood initiatives and demand management measures	ITT staffing, training delivery, programme management, travel support resources and PTB administration
B	Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination	Integrated Transport Function, shared planning, integrated commissioning, performance management, scheduling and coordination	Additional staffing, programme management, contract management, data and performance systems, governance and organisational change
C	Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships	NHS partnership working, Integrated Care System collaboration, health transport pilots, transport coordination and referral pathway development	Partnership development, project support, pilot activity, programme coordination and stakeholder engagement
D	CR Network Enhancement	CR frequency improvements, Saturday network enhancements, new strategic services, network development and integration activities	Bus service contracts, network enhancements, service expansion, inflationary contract increases and passenger information improvements
E	CT Capacity and Sustainability	CT development, provider support, volunteer recruitment, grant programmes, healthcare transport support and sector development	Grant funding, provider support, coordination activities, volunteer programmes, digital capability and capacity-building initiatives
F	Rural Flexible Transport	Wessex Connect DRT, rural accessibility services, first-mile/last-mile connectivity and flexible transport delivery	DRT operating contracts, booking systems, vehicle provision, programme management and dedicated staffing



Package A: Independent Travel and Demand Management

Package A focuses on increasing independence, supporting preparation for adulthood and reducing unnecessary reliance on specialist transport provision.

The principal cost associated with this package is the creation of a dedicated Independent Travel Training service comprising:

- one Senior Independent Travel Trainer / Coordinator;
- three Independent Travel Trainers;
- participant assessments and support;
- staff training and accreditation;
- programme monitoring and evaluation; and
- promotion and administration of Personal Travel Budgets.

The proposed staffing structure is estimated to cost £174,000 per annum at current prices, including salary on-costs. The programme has been modelled as a recurring revenue cost throughout the implementation period.

Although modest in financial terms when compared with other programme elements, this package is expected to contribute to long-term cost avoidance within SEND and Adult Social Care transport through increased independence and reduced demand for dedicated transport provision where appropriate.

Package B: Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination

Package B provides the organisational capacity and system coordination required to deliver the wider programme.

The financial model includes provision for:

- one Senior Public Transport Officer;
- one Public Transport Contract Management Officer;
- regrading two public transport support officers; and
- expansion of CT officer capacity.

This package represents primarily organisational investment and provides the enabling capability upon which the wider programme depends.

Package C: Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships

Package C focuses on improving coordination between the council, NHS Dorset, CT providers and wider public sector partners.



The financial model assumes a phased approach centred initially on service integration and partnership development rather than major new transport provision.

Future opportunities such as shared scheduling platforms, joint commissioning or integrated healthcare transport services remain subject to further development and are therefore not assumed within the core financial model.

Package D: Core Route Network Enhancement

Package D represents the largest area of programme expenditure and forms the backbone of the proposed transport system.

The financial model assumes continuation and re-procurement of the existing supported network together with a significant programme of service enhancements.

Core Route Frequency Improvements

The preferred programme includes enhancements to four strategic CR corridors through increased service frequencies and extension of services to operate six days per week.

The proposed enhancement would increase provision across the affected corridors from approximately 292 journeys per week to 610 journeys per week, representing an additional 318 weekly journeys and an increase in service provision of approximately 109%.

Full Saturday Network

The programme also assumes completion of Saturday service operation across the entire CR Network.

This would introduce approximately 26 additional one-way journeys per week on routes currently lacking Saturday provision.

Strategic Service Expansion

The package includes provision for the introduction of three new strategic hourly services operating six days per week, improving access between key towns, rural communities and strategic destinations.

These services are expected to add more than 400 additional scheduled passenger journeys each week.

Cost Assumptions

Cost estimates have been derived from:

- current supported service contracts;
- recent procurement activity;
- operator engagement;
- expected tender uplifts; and
- inflationary pressures affecting drivers, fuel, maintenance and fleet replacement.



Package E: Community Transport Capacity and Sustainability

Package E seeks to strengthen CT as a strategic component of Dorset's transport system.

The financial model assumes increased revenue support for:

- CT grant programmes; and
- CT coordination activities.

The model assumes progressive growth in CT capability over the implementation period, reflecting stakeholder feedback regarding growing demand for healthcare journeys, rural accessibility and social inclusion services.

Package F: Rural Flexible Transport

Package F supports the phased deployment of DRT through the proposed Wessex Connect partnership arrangement.

The financial model assumes:

Initial Deployment

- introduction of one operating zone during the initial implementation phase;
- mobilisation of vehicles, systems and operating arrangements; and
- recruitment of a dedicated DRT Officer.

Network Expansion

The model further assumes expansion to between three and four DRT operating zones between 2029/30 and 2031/32, subject to performance and demand.

Provision has been included for:

- vehicle and operating contracts;
- booking and scheduling systems;
- customer support functions;
- marketing and service development;
- one DRT Officer initially, increasing to two posts as the network expands; and
- ongoing contract management and performance monitoring.

This phased approach enables demand and value-for-money performance to be evaluated before further expansion is approved.

5.3 Estimated Programme Costs



The financial modelling indicates a total programme cost of approximately £67.6 million over the seven-year period.

The programme cost profile includes both the continuation of existing transport expenditure that supports delivery of the preferred programme and additional investment required to implement the proposed interventions. It should therefore not be interpreted as wholly new spending.

Most of the expenditure relates to Package D because it includes both the continuation of the existing supported bus network and the proposed service enhancements over a seven-year period.

Table 5.3 – Programme Cost

Cost Area	Estimated 7-Year Cost (£)
Package A - Independent Travel and Demand Management	£1,241,686
Package B - Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination	£903,466
Package C: Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships	£-
Package D - CR Network Enhancement	£55,020,883
Package E - Community Transport	£1,120,000
Package F - DRT (Wessex Connect)	£9,282,486
Total Programme Cost	£67,568,520

Appendix E sets out the programme's seven-year financial forecast and the resulting additional investment requirement.

Programme expenditure will be monitored through the council's established budget management, capital governance and transformation reporting arrangements. Financial performance will be reviewed regularly through programme governance structures, with corrective action taken where costs, funding or benefits deviate from approved assumptions.

5.3.1 Potential Funding Sources

A number of existing and anticipated funding streams have been identified which could contribute towards delivery of the programme.

Existing Public Transport Revenue Budgets

The council already commits significant annual funding to supported bus services, CT and wider public transport activities. These budgets form the baseline funding position and would continue to support the integrated transport model.

Bus Service Improvement Funding

Government funding programmes relating to bus service improvements, bus reform and rural mobility continue to evolve. Whilst future allocations cannot be guaranteed, Dorset has an



allocation until 2029/30 to deliver its BSIP programmes and remains well positioned to secure future opportunities.

Community Infrastructure Levy and Developer Contributions

Several elements of the proposed network expansion align directly with planned housing growth. Funding assumptions therefore include the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding and Section 106 developer contributions where these can legitimately be applied to support new or enhanced public transport services.

Transport Efficiencies

One of the principal objectives of the Independent Travel Training programme is to reduce long-term demand for specialist transport services. There is potential for future cost avoidance from the HtS and SEND transport budget and adult transport expenditure as more people become able to access mainstream public transport independently.

External Grants and Partnerships

Further opportunities may arise through:

- Wessex devolution.
- Integrated Settlements funding.
- Department for Transport rural mobility funding.
- Health sector contributions where transport improvements support access to healthcare.
- Partnership funding from transport operators.
- Community and voluntary sector grant programmes

The programme's cross-boundary focus, integrated delivery model and alignment with wider economic, social and environmental outcomes will place Dorset in a stronger position to respond to future devolution, strategic authority and integrated settlement funding opportunities as these arrangements develop.

Indicative Funding Position

Table 5.4 provides a high-level summary of the funding position.



Table 5.4 – Funding Summary

Item	Value (£m)
Total estimated programme cost (7 years)	£67,568,520
Existing public transport budgets	£8,961,274
Anticipated match funding, grants, and other sources	£19,353,365
Net additional funding requirement	£39,253,882

A key principle of the strategy is that implementation can be phased and scaled according to available funding. The integrated transport model has therefore been designed to allow individual elements to be introduced progressively as funding becomes available.

Priority would be given to those interventions that deliver the greatest accessibility benefits, support growth objectives and offer opportunities to reduce demand for higher-cost transport services elsewhere within the council's budget.

This approach will enable the council to align future investment decisions with emerging funding opportunities, Government policy changes and demonstrated transport demand, whilst ensuring that affordability remains under continuous review throughout the lifetime of the strategy.

5.4 Benefits and Savings

The affordability assessment set out in Section 5.4 focuses on the direct costs associated with delivering the Integrated Transport Model. However, the primary purpose of the programme is not the delivery of transport savings. The programme has been designed to enable wider transformation across the council and its partners by supporting greater independence, improving access to services and opportunities, enabling community-based delivery models and reducing future dependence on high-cost specialist transport where appropriate.

Many of the most significant benefits therefore occur outside transport budgets. The programme supports Adult Social Care transformation, SEND reform, preparation for adulthood, health access, community resilience and prevention. These outcomes contribute to the council's wider ambitions around financial sustainability by reducing future demand for more intensive forms of support while improving outcomes for residents.

The programme should therefore be viewed as an enabling investment in Dorset Council's wider transformation agenda. Financial benefits are expected to arise primarily through reduced future demand growth, avoided costs and more sustainable service delivery models rather than immediate cashable savings.

5.4.1 Cost avoidance through SEND reform

One of the most significant benefits of the programme is its ability to support the council's SEND Reform Programme. National and local reform activity seeks to increase mainstream



inclusion, expand local provision, strengthen preparation for adulthood and improve access to opportunities closer to home. Achieving these ambitions depends heavily upon the availability of accessible and appropriate transport options.

The model does not assume that SEND reform will generate immediate reductions in transport expenditure. Instead, the anticipated benefit is that demand growth may be lower than would otherwise occur, reducing future financial pressures on the HtS Transport budget. Benefits may arise through:

- Reduced reliance on independent and out-of-area placements.
- Increased availability of local specialist education provision.
- Shorter average journey lengths for pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans.
- Increased independent travel capability amongst young people.
- Reduced long-term dependency on dedicated transport services.
- Improved access to education, employment, volunteering and community opportunities.

Over time, these outcomes may also help moderate future growth in transport demand and associated expenditure.

Given the uncertainties associated with both national and local SEND reforms, these benefits should currently be regarded as indicative cost avoidance rather than committed savings. Future demand forecasts should continue to be reviewed as the reform programme progresses.

5.4.2 Independent Travel Training Benefits

Independent Travel Training is one of the clearest examples of transport acting as an enabler of wider transformation. The purpose of the programme is not simply to change how people travel but to increase independence, build confidence and support greater participation in education, employment, volunteering and community life.

For many individuals, successful travel training represents an important step towards independent adulthood and reduced reliance on formal support services. It aligns closely with the council's strengths-based approach by focusing on what people can achieve rather than the services they require.

By helping young people and adults develop the skills and confidence required to travel independently, the programme can support wider council objectives relating to independence, inclusion, employment and preparation for adulthood. Over time, successful interventions may reduce demand for dedicated transport provision and support a gradual transition towards greater use of conventional public transport services.

Evidence from comparable programmes suggests that relatively small numbers of successful outcomes can generate significant long-term reductions in transport expenditure whilst simultaneously improving quality of life and personal independence.



5.4.3 Adult Social Care and Day Opportunities Transformation

Transport is a critical dependency for successful delivery of the emerging Adult Day Opportunities model. Consultation and engagement have demonstrated strong demand for more flexible, community-based and locally accessible opportunities. Without a more flexible and integrated transport system many of these ambitions cannot be fully realised.

The programme enables the transition from building-based models towards a broader range of community-based opportunities by expanding the transport choices available to individuals. This creates opportunities for people to access employment, volunteering, education, leisure activities and local community support closer to home.

As services increasingly focus on community-based support, independence and flexible access to activities, there is potential for transport provision to be planned more efficiently around individual needs and local destinations. A more integrated transport system, combining conventional public transport, DRT, CT and travel training interventions, should provide a broader range of mobility options than reliance on dedicated transport services alone.

Over time this may help reduce growth in demand for specialist transport provision, support more efficient journey planning and increase opportunities for shared transport solutions across service areas. Whilst the financial impact remains uncertain, the primary benefit is enabling a more personalised, strengths-based and community-focused model of support.

Adult Services have advised that, while transport transformation may create future efficiencies and improved outcomes, there is currently insufficient evidence to quantify any savings robustly. Benefits from Direct Payments, locality-based delivery, travel training and alternative transport models should therefore be tested through implementation rather than treated as committed savings.

5.4.4 Better Utilisation of Fleet Assets

Whilst fleet utilisation can create operational efficiencies, the wider benefit is enabling vehicles and transport resources to support a broader range of residents, services and community activities more flexibly.

A recurring theme identified through stakeholder engagement is the opportunity to make better use of vehicles and transport resources that already exist across the public sector and CT network.

Many transport assets are intensively used during relatively short peak periods but remain underutilised for significant parts of the day. This is particularly evident in vehicles used for school transport, day opportunities services and other commissioned transport operations. Opportunities have been identified to improve vehicle utilisation through greater coordination between services and organisations.

Potential benefits include:



- Increased use of existing vehicles outside peak operating periods.
- Reduced requirement for additional contracted transport capacity.
- Improved utilisation of accessible vehicles.
- Reduced levels of duplicate provision across different service areas.
- More productive use of driver resources.
- Lower vehicle idle time and empty mileage.

Whilst further work is required, early assessment suggests that better utilisation of existing fleet assets may provide significant opportunities for future efficiency improvements.

5.4.5 Health Transport Integration Opportunities

The work undertaken on non-emergency patient transport integration has also identified opportunities for closer collaboration between the council, NHS organisations and CT providers. The strongest opportunities appear to lie in improving coordination, referral pathways, scheduling and the shared use of transport information rather than creating new standalone transport services.

Potential longer-term benefits include:

- Improved utilisation of CT capacity.
- Reduced duplication between transport providers.
- Increased passenger sharing opportunities.
- Reduced empty vehicle mileage.
- Better coordination of transport demand.
- Improved access to healthcare services.
- More efficient deployment of transport resources across organisational boundaries.

Although these benefits are not currently reflected within the financial model, they represent a potentially important source of future efficiency gains and should be explored through the implementation phase of the strategy.

5.4.6 Wider Economic and Social Benefits

In addition to potential financial efficiencies, the integrated transport model is expected to deliver wider social, environmental and economic benefits. These include improved access to employment, education, healthcare and community services; reduced social isolation; improved health and wellbeing; increased public transport use; and greater independence for residents who might otherwise experience transport disadvantage.

Whilst many of these benefits cannot easily be expressed in financial terms, they represent key outcomes that support the council's wider corporate objectives and contribute to the overall value proposition.

5.4.7 Enabling Community-Based Services



A recurring theme across Adult Social Care transformation, Day Opportunities redesign, Community Conversations and wider council transformation activity is the move towards more locally delivered, community-based support. Transport is a fundamental enabler of this approach.

By providing residents with greater access to community facilities, local services, employment opportunities, health services and social activities, the programme supports the council's ambition to deliver services closer to communities and strengthen community resilience.

Improved transport connectivity also enables stronger partnerships with CT providers, voluntary organisations, town and parish councils and local service providers, helping create a more community-powered model of service delivery.

5.4.8 Summary

The financial modelling presented in this strategy does not rely upon unproven savings assumptions. The programme has instead been developed based on delivering wider transformation outcomes, supporting independence, enabling community-based services and improving long-term sustainability. Any future efficiencies, demand reductions or cost avoidance opportunities should be considered additional benefits arising from successful delivery of these wider outcomes.

There is a realistic prospect that successful implementation will help moderate future growth in transport expenditure across several service areas. The most significant opportunities are associated with SEND reform, Independent Travel Training, Adult Social Care transformation, improved fleet utilisation and greater integration between transport services. These benefits should be treated primarily as cost avoidance and efficiency opportunities at this stage, with further work required to establish robust baselines and monitoring arrangements as implementation progresses.

5.5 Sensitivity Testing

The financial model presented in this strategy represents a central planning scenario based on current service costs, known commitments, anticipated service enhancements and a set of reasonable assumptions regarding inflation, contract costs and programme delivery.

Given the strategic nature of the Integrated Transport Model, a number of future factors remain uncertain. It is therefore important to understand which assumptions have the greatest influence on affordability and the potential benefits that may be realised over time.

Rather than preparing multiple detailed financial scenarios, the assessment has focused on the principal variables that are most likely to affect overall programme costs and delivery requirements.

Inflation and Procurement Costs



The financial model assumes average annual inflation of 3% across the planning period. Actual contract costs may vary depending on future market conditions, including fuel prices, driver availability, wage inflation and operator profitability.

Supported bus service contracts represent the largest element of expenditure within the model and are therefore the area most sensitive to inflationary pressures. A prolonged period of above-inflation cost growth could increase the overall funding requirement, while improved market conditions or increased competition may reduce future costs.

The council will need to review procurement assumptions periodically to ensure future contract values remain aligned with prevailing market conditions.

Pace of Service Expansion

The model assumes the progressive implementation of service enhancements, DRT and supporting programmes over time.

Should funding availability be lower than anticipated, implementation could be phased over a longer period, prioritising those interventions that deliver the greatest accessibility benefits and strategic value. Conversely, the availability of additional external funding may allow elements of the programme to be accelerated.

This flexibility means that the overall strategy can be scaled to reflect available resources whilst maintaining its core objectives.

External Funding Availability

A proportion of the programme is expected to be supported through a combination of Government funding programmes, developer contributions and other external funding sources.

Future funding settlements remain uncertain and are subject to national policy decisions. Higher levels of external funding would reduce the net cost to the council and enable more rapid implementation. Conversely, lower levels of funding may require further prioritisation or a slower delivery profile.

For this reason, affordability should be reviewed regularly alongside emerging funding opportunities.

Demand Responsive Transport Performance

The long-term operating costs of DRT will depend on passenger demand, vehicle utilisation and whether services are integrated with the wider transport network.

Higher-than-anticipated demand may require additional capacity but could improve value for money through greater passenger numbers. Lower demand may require service redesign or a slower rollout programme.

The phased introduction of DRT has therefore been assumed to allow operational performance and demand levels to be tested before further expansion takes place.

Realisation of Cost Avoidance Benefits



The strategy identifies several areas where longer-term cost avoidance may be achievable, particularly through:

- Delivery of the SEND Reform Programme.
- The development of the Adult Social Care Day Opportunities model.
- Improved utilisation of transport assets and fleet resources.
- Greater integration between public, community and health transport services.

At present, these benefits have not been relied upon to support the affordability of the programme. This is a deliberate assumption within the model.

As a result, if some or all of these benefits are realised, the financial performance of the programme is likely to be stronger than currently modelled. Conversely, if the anticipated benefits emerge more slowly than expected, the affordability assessment remains valid because no significant savings assumptions have been incorporated within the baseline financial position.

This represents a prudent approach and avoids dependency on benefits that cannot yet be robustly quantified.

Parking Income Uncertainty

Parking income should be treated as an uncertain funding source rather than a guaranteed contribution. Future income may be affected by changes in demand, policy decisions, behavioural change, seasonality, town centre activity and wider economic conditions. The affordability assessment should therefore consider that forecasted parking revenue could differ.

Overall Assessment

The sensitivity testing indicates that the primary financial risks relate to future contract costs, inflation and the availability of external funding. However, the strategy benefits from a high degree of implementation flexibility, allowing interventions to be phased and prioritised in response to changing financial circumstances.

Importantly, the affordability assessment does not rely on uncertain savings assumptions from SEND reform, service integration or transport optimisation initiatives. These have been treated as potential upside benefits rather than essential components of the funding model. As a result, the financial case can be regarded as relatively robust, whilst retaining the potential for further efficiency gains and cost avoidance opportunities to emerge during implementation.



6 Management Case

The Management Case sets out how the programme will be delivered successfully, including governance, stakeholder engagement and programme management arrangements. At this stage, the focus is on demonstrating that the programme is achievable and that there is a clear pathway to developing detailed delivery plans.

6.1 Delivery Strategy

The programme will be delivered through a phased implementation approach. The sequencing has been designed to reflect delivery readiness, procurement timelines, organisational capacity and the dependencies between intervention packages.

The preferred programme will be delivered through a phased implementation approach reflecting delivery readiness, organisational capacity, procurement timescales and the dependencies between intervention packages.

The implementation programme has therefore been structured around four phases:

1. Mobilisation
2. Foundation
3. Implementation
4. Scale-Up and Optimisation

This approach provides a clear pathway from programme approval through to the delivery of a mature integrated transport system.

The programme will be delivered in accordance with the following principles:

- maintain continuity of existing statutory and essential transport services throughout implementation;
- prioritise interventions that establish the foundations for later phases of delivery;
- utilise phased implementation where uncertainty exists;
- ensure governance and programme management arrangements are established before large-scale service changes are introduced;
- align implementation with available funding and organisational capacity;
- maintain ongoing stakeholder engagement throughout programme delivery; and
- continuously review performance, benefits and affordability before progressing to subsequent phases.



This approach allows the council to deliver early improvements to transport services whilst simultaneously establishing the organisational capability, partnerships and governance arrangements required to support longer-term transformation.

6.2 Phased Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Mobilisation (2026/27)

The mobilisation phase focuses on establishing the foundations required for programme delivery and securing the future supported public transport network.

The principal activity during this phase is the re-procurement of Dorset's supported bus network, including the CR Network, which will provide the basis for the first major phase of transport service enhancement. This work includes market engagement, development of service specifications, procurement, contract award and mobilisation activities.

Alongside the procurement programme, the council will establish the governance, staffing and partnership arrangements required to support wider programme delivery.

Key activities include:

- completion of supported bus network procurement;
- establishment of programme governance arrangements;
- recruitment of key programme resources;
- development of implementation plans for Packages A to F;
- initiation of the CT Grant Programme; and
- establishment of monitoring and benefits realisation frameworks.

Phase 2: Foundation and Early Delivery (2027/28)

This phase marks the beginning of programme implementation and the first visible improvements for residents.

The first major intervention package to be delivered will be Package D following completion of the supported bus network procurement exercise.

During Summer 2027 the council will implement:

- CR frequency enhancements;
- additional Saturday service provision;
- new strategic bus services; and
- wider network improvements incorporated within the new contracts.

These enhancements will be introduced as a coordinated package of improvements, creating the strengthened public transport network which underpins the wider programme.

Recruitment of the Independent Travel Training Team will commence during 2027.



The team will initially focus on:

- development of the training programme;
- establishment of assessment processes;
- engagement with Children's Services;
- engagement with schools and post-16 providers;
- identification of suitable participants; and
- development of monitoring arrangements.

The first cohort of learners is expected to begin receiving Independent Travel Training during the second half of 2027/28.

The CT Grant Programme will commence using existing funding arrangements.

This work will focus on:

- capacity building;
- provider support;
- volunteer recruitment;
- service development; and
- strengthening the CT network.

The first new or enhanced CT services are expected to commence during the first half of 2027.

During this phase the council will also establish:

- integrated transport planning arrangements;
- cross-service transport governance;
- NHS partnership arrangements;
- CT coordination processes; and
- data and performance management frameworks.

These activities will create the organisational foundations required for subsequent phases of implementation.

Phase 3: Implementation (2028/29 to 2030/31)

This phase focuses on expanding the transport system and embedding integrated working practices.

Dorset Travel currently operates an in-house fleet comprising 83 vehicles, including 62 minibuses, 16 cars and 5 vans, providing transport for SEND, Adult Day Opportunities and other specialist transport services. Delivery of the preferred programme will need to take



account of current fleet utilisation, workforce availability and vehicle replacement requirements.

Fleet utilisation is heavily concentrated around peak operating periods, particularly school and day opportunity transport, limiting opportunities for wider deployment during the day. A proportion of the fleet is also retained as reserve capacity to maintain service resilience and continuity.

The current operating model creates several constraints that will need to be considered during implementation, including D1 driver requirements, workforce availability, fleet age, replacement costs and the practical challenges associated with transitioning to lower-emission vehicles in a rural operating environment.

As integrated transport planning develops, opportunities will be explored to improve vehicle utilisation, increase flexibility across transport services and align future fleet investment with wider integration and decarbonisation objectives. Any changes will be implemented incrementally to ensure service continuity and maintain the council's ability to meet statutory transport duties.

The first DRT operating zone will be introduced during 2028/29.

Following evaluation of initial performance and demand, additional DRT zones will be introduced progressively in subsequent years. This phased rollout will allow services to be refined before wider expansion is undertaken.

This phase will also include:

- further rollout of Independent Travel Training;
- expansion of CT capacity;
- rollout of additional DRT operating zones;
- implementation of healthcare transport initiatives;
- continued integration of transport planning across services;
- development of shared scheduling and coordination arrangements;
- optimisation of transport asset utilisation; and
- CR Network performance reviews.

Phase 4: Scale-Up and Optimisation (2030/31 onwards)

The final phase focuses on maximising benefits and expanding successful interventions.

Key activities include:

- further health transport integration initiatives;
- expansion of successful CT initiatives;
- refinement of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budget programmes;
- identification of additional integration opportunities; and



- development of future investment proposals.

Delivery Sequence

The implementation programme follows a deliberate sequence:

1. Strengthen the CR Network (Package D)
2. Build independence and CT capacity (Packages A and E)
3. Establish integrated planning and partnerships (Packages B and C)
4. Introduce targeted rural flexible transport solutions (Package F)
5. Scale and optimise the integrated transport system

The delivery sequence reflects dependencies identified through the Economic Case and ensures that improvements to mainstream transport, CT and demand management are developed in a coordinated manner.

The plan below summarises the delivery phases and the key milestones to be achieved.

Figure 6.1 – Delivery Plan

Activity	2026/ 27	2027/ 28	2028/ 29	2029/ 30	2030/ 31	2031/ 32	2032/ 33	2033/ 34
Governance & programme mobilisation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Supported CR Network re-procurement	●	●						
CR enhancements		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Independent Travel Training		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Community Transport grants	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Health transport partnerships	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Integrated transport planning	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DRT Phase 1		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DRT expansion				●	●	●	●	●
Recruitment	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Key:

- Phase 1 Mobilisation
Phase 2 Foundation and Early Delivery
Phase 3 Implementation
Phase 4 Scale-Up and Optimisation

Symbol



6.3 Governance and Decision Making



The programme will be delivered using the council's established transformation governance model, combining strategic oversight through the Transformation Office with delivery led by partner services. The programme cuts across multiple service areas, with successful delivery therefore requiring a transformation-led governance model rather than a traditional service-led project structure.

Strategic Accountability

The corporate director for Highways, Engineering and Transport will act as Executive Sponsor and hold overall accountability for delivery of the programme and achievement of the outcomes set out within this FBC.

Transformation Governance

The Transformation Office will provide programme assurance, challenge and support throughout implementation.

Rather than creating a standalone programme management structure, the programme will utilise existing transformation arrangements to ensure consistency with wider council change programmes.

The Transformation Office will support:

- programme management;
- benefits tracking;
- milestone monitoring;
- programme assurance;
- risk management;
- gateway reviews; and
- reporting to senior leadership.

This will help ensure that delivery remains aligned with wider corporate transformation objectives and that progress is independently monitored throughout implementation.

Beacon Team

The programme will be delivered through a Beacon Team-style multidisciplinary approach.

The Beacon Team will provide the operational leadership required to coordinate delivery across organisational boundaries and ensure that transport planning supports wider service transformation objectives.

Membership will include representatives from:

- Economy and Environment;
- Children's Services;
- Adult's service;
- Communities;



- Finance;
- Transformation Office;
- Procurement;
- Communications; and
- Data and Performance functions.

The Beacon Team will act as the primary delivery group for the programme and will be responsible for:

- implementation planning;
- coordination between intervention packages;
- issue resolution;
- programme reporting;
- stakeholder engagement;
- management of dependencies; and
- delivery of agreed programme milestones.

This approach reflects the programme's cross-service nature and ensures that transport decisions are considered alongside wider service transformation activity.

Delivery Ownership

Whilst accountability remains at programme level, individual intervention packages will have named delivery owners responsible for implementation.

Table 6.1 – Package Owners

Package	Delivery Owner
Package A - Independent Travel and Demand Management	Independent Travel Training Coordinator
Package B - Integrated Transport Planning and Coordination	Transformation Office
Package C - Health Transport Integration and Public Sector Partnerships	Transformation Office
Package D - C Network Enhancement	Public Transport Team Manager
Package E - Community Transport Capacity and Sustainability	Community Transport Officer
Package F - Rural Flexible Transport	Public Transport Team Manager

Package leads will report through the Beacon Team, ensuring delivery remains integrated across the wider programme.



6.4 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Stakeholder engagement and communications will be embedded throughout programme delivery, providing a mechanism for collaboration, continuous improvement and shared ownership of outcomes. Shared ownership means involving communities and partners not only in identifying needs, but also, where appropriate, in designing, delivering, promoting and reviewing local mobility solutions.

The programme will adopt the following five key principles.

- a) **Collaborative:** Transport solutions will be developed in partnership with communities, service users, operators and delivery partners, recognising that local knowledge and experience are essential to successful implementation. The programme will seek to develop transport solutions with communities and delivery partners, drawing on local knowledge, assets and capacity rather than treating engagement solely as consultation.
- b) **Place-Based:** Engagement activity will reflect the differing needs of Dorset's communities. Approaches that work in urban areas may not be appropriate in rural or coastal communities and engagement activity should recognise local circumstances.
- c) **Continuous:** Stakeholders will remain involved throughout implementation, monitoring and service development rather than engagement ceasing once decisions have been made.
- d) **Inclusive:** Engagement activities will be designed to ensure that the views and experiences of older people, young people, disabled people and rural communities are reflected in transport planning and decision making.
- e) **Learning-Led:** Feedback, performance data and operational experience will be used to continually refine service design and delivery. This will include improving how transport information is presented and accessed, recognising that awareness of existing services can be as important as service availability itself.

The programme will engage with a broad range of stakeholders throughout its lifetime. The programme will seek to use existing networks, forums and partnerships wherever possible. Using established relationships will minimise duplication, reduce consultation fatigue and support more meaningful engagement. Particular attention will be given to ensuring that older residents are represented within future transport development and review activities. Feedback received during programme development highlighted the importance of involving older people directly in discussions about future transport provision, service design and accessibility improvements. Table 6.2 below lists the key stakeholder groups.

Table 6.2 – Principal stakeholder groups

Stakeholder Group	Purpose
Residents and transport users	Understanding needs, barriers and user experience



Transport Action Groups	Local insight and community priorities
Public transport operators	Service planning and delivery
Community Transport providers	Service development and partnership working
Schools, colleges and training providers	Independent Travel Training, youth mobility and access to education, training and wider opportunities
NHS Dorset and healthcare providers	Health transport integration
Adult Social Care and Children's Services	Delivery of transport-related outcomes
Town and Parish Councils	Local partners supporting community-led mobility initiatives, local accessibility planning, volunteer transport and connections to the wider transport network
Community and voluntary organisations	Outreach, service design and local intelligence
Elected Members	Community representation and advocacy
Wessex Partners	Align Dorset's transport plans with emerging Wessex regional strategies, cross-boundary connectivity priorities and future economic growth ambitions.

6.4.1 Community Mobility Partnerships

The programme will explore Community Mobility Partnerships as a potential mechanism for bringing together town and parish councils, CT providers, voluntary and community organisations, transport operators, local businesses and residents. The aim would be to support a more locally informed understanding of accessibility needs and identify practical mobility responses that reflect the differing circumstances of Dorset's rural, coastal and market-town communities.

Community Mobility Partnerships would not replace the council's responsibilities as the Local Transport Authority, nor transfer responsibility for statutory transport provision to local communities. Instead, they could provide a structured way of combining strategic transport planning with local knowledge, community capacity and existing local assets.

The role of each partnership would need to be proportionate to local needs, available capacity and the opportunities identified in that area. Potential areas of focus could include identifying local transport gaps, supporting evidence for service planning, promoting CT and volunteer transport options, improving awareness of existing services, identifying first-mile and last-mile links to the CR Network, and providing ongoing feedback on resident experience.



Town and parish councils may be well placed to play a convening role where there is local appetite and capacity. CT providers and voluntary organisations could also have an important role, particularly given their experience of supporting older residents, disabled people, vulnerable residents and communities with limited mainstream transport. However, any expansion of local or voluntary sector activity would need to be supported by appropriate funding, capacity, volunteer recruitment, governance and coordination.

The approach could also inform the development of transport hubs and interchange points, for example by helping identify suitable locations and the practical facilities residents need to make interchange work. Any proposals involving land, buildings or car parks would remain subject to feasibility work, ownership considerations, funding and the relevant approval processes.

Community Mobility Partnerships should therefore be developed through a phased and proportionate approach, using existing local networks wherever possible and avoiding unnecessary new governance structures. Initial activity could focus on locations where there is a clear accessibility gap, an active local partnership and a realistic opportunity to improve connections between services. Learning from these areas would then be used to determine whether the model should be refined, expanded or used selectively.

6.4.2 Test, learn and refine

The programme will adopt a "test, learn and refine" approach to implementation.

Engagement activity, user feedback, performance monitoring and operational experience will be used to inform service development and improvement throughout programme delivery.

This will include:

- regular user feedback;
- stakeholder workshops and review sessions;
- service performance monitoring;
- community insight gathered through local networks; and
- annual reviews of programme delivery and outcomes.

This approach recognises that transport services and user needs will continue to evolve over time and ensures that delivery remains responsive, locally informed and focused on achieving the programme's long-term objectives.

The programme will also consider opportunities to strengthen staff and driver awareness of the needs of different user groups. Feedback received during programme development highlighted the importance of age-awareness and inclusive customer service training across transport services to ensure residents feel confident, respected and supported when travelling.

6.5 Monitoring and Evaluation



The primary purpose of monitoring and evaluation will be to:

- Track delivery of the Integrated Public Transport Model.
- Assess whether transport accessibility is improving.
- Measure changes in service utilisation and user behaviour.
- Understand the effectiveness of different interventions.
- Identify opportunities for continuous improvement.
- Support future business cases and funding bids.
- Demonstrate value for money.
- Quantify emerging benefits and cost avoidance opportunities over time.

6.5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Principles

The framework will be based on five core principles:

1. Outcome focused

Monitoring will focus on the real-world outcomes being achieved for residents, rather than solely measuring transport outputs such as vehicle kilometres or timetable changes.

2. Proportionate

The scale of monitoring activity will be proportionate to the intervention being delivered. Major investments, such as DRT implementation or strategic bus network enhancements, will require more detailed evaluation than smaller-scale initiatives.

3. Embedded from the outset

Monitoring and evaluation will be incorporated into programme delivery from the beginning, ensuring that baseline data is established and that benefits can be tracked over time.

4. Learning focused

The framework is intended to support continuous improvement rather than simply retrospective reporting. Findings will be used to refine services, improve delivery and shape future investment decisions.

5. Integrated across service areas

Given the links between transport, education, Adult Day Opportunities and health outcomes, monitoring will seek to capture wider system impacts wherever practical rather than considering transport services in isolation.

6.5.2 Monitoring Framework

Monitoring activity will take place at three levels:

Level 1: Programme Delivery Monitoring

This will monitor whether the interventions within the strategy are being delivered as planned.



Typical measures will include:

- Number of supported bus services delivered.
- Number of strategic route enhancements introduced.
- DRT operating zones established.
- CT partnerships supported.
- Independent Travel Training participants enrolled.
- Staffing positions recruited.
- Digital integration projects completed.
- External funding secured.

This level of monitoring will provide assurance that the programme remains on track and that investment is being delivered as intended.

Level 2: Operational Performance Monitoring

This level will focus on how well services are performing in practice.

Key measures are likely to include:

- Bus Network
 - Passenger journeys
 - Passenger growth by corridor
 - Service reliability and punctuality
 - Revenue recovery levels
 - Customer satisfaction
- DRT
 - Passenger trips
 - Cost per passenger journey
 - Booking fulfilment rates
 - Shared journey rates
 - User satisfaction
- Community Transport
 - Passenger journeys
 - Volunteer driver participation
 - Service coverage
 - Customer satisfaction
- Independent Travel Training
 - Number of learners trained
 - Successful programme completions
 - Independent travel outcomes achieved
 - Reduction in demand for escorted transport

These indicators will provide an understanding of utilisation, service quality and value for money.

Level 3: Outcome Evaluation



Whilst operational performance is important, the principal purpose of the Integrated Transport Model is to improve accessibility and support wider council objectives. Outcome evaluation will focus on the themes listed in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3 – Level 3 indicators

Theme	Example Indicators
Accessibility and Connectivity	Access to employment, healthcare, education, service coverage, journey times
Inclusion and Participation	Participation in education, employment, volunteering and community activities; user-reported accessibility; reduced social isolation; wellbeing measures.
Behaviour Change	Bus patronage, DRT use, CT use, mode shift indicators; independent travel outcomes; reduced dependency on specialist transport; user-reported confidence to travel independently
Integration and User Experience	Customer satisfaction, interchange performance, information quality, multimodal travel

6.5.3 Evaluation of Strategic Benefits and Cost Avoidance

A specific focus of the framework will be the monitoring of longer-term benefits and cost avoidance opportunities identified elsewhere within this business case.

Recognising that many of these benefits are not yet sufficiently evidenced to include within the financial model, monitoring arrangements will seek to establish whether anticipated outcomes begin to materialise over time.

Areas of particular interest include:

SEND Reform

Monitoring will include:

- SEND transport demand trends.
- Average SEND journey lengths.
- Independent and out-of-area placement numbers.
- Participation in Independent Travel Training.
- Transport costs relative to pupil numbers.

This will help assess whether SEND Reform is moderating future growth in specialist transport demand.

Adult Day Opportunities

Monitoring will include:

- Day opportunities transport demand.
- Average vehicle occupancy.
- Shared transport opportunities.
- Independent travel outcomes.



- Community-based activity participation.
- Fleet Utilisation

Transport Integration

Monitoring will include:

- Referrals between transport services.
- CT utilisation.
- Partnership activity with health services.
- Shared journey opportunities.
- Opportunities arising from future NHS and transport integration initiatives.

A dedicated Adult Day Opportunities transport workstream will be monitored through a test-and-learn framework. This will assess uptake of alternative transport arrangements, travel training outcomes, use of Community Transport and Direct Payments, user satisfaction, transport costs, and impacts on independence, participation and wellbeing. Findings will inform ongoing service refinement and decisions on whether successful approaches should be expanded.

6.5.4 Reporting and Governance

Monitoring information should be reviewed on a quarterly basis, available via a management dashboard, and reported through established programme governance arrangements.

An annual Monitoring Report should be prepared summarising:

- Delivery progress.
- Performance against key indicators.
- Emerging outcomes.
- Financial performance.
- Benefits realisation.
- Lessons learned.
- Recommended changes to programme delivery.

This annual review should inform future investment decisions, business case development, service planning and funding bids, ensuring that the strategy remains responsive to changing needs and emerging opportunities.

6.5.5 Summary

The monitoring and evaluation framework will provide a proportionate and practical approach to understanding whether the programme is delivering its intended outcomes. It will support benefits realisation, continuous improvement and future investment decisions.

Importantly, the framework focuses not only on measuring transport activity, but also on understanding how the Integrated Public Transport Model contributes to improved accessibility, greater independence, reduced exclusion and the wider transformation



programmes being delivered across the council and its partners. Over time, this approach will enable the council to quantify benefits, identify cost avoidance opportunities and continuously refine the transport system to maximise value for residents and stakeholders.



7 Conclusions and Next Steps

This FBC demonstrates that the council faces a broader challenge than transport alone. The council must create a more sustainable model for connecting residents to education, employment, healthcare, day opportunities and community life while responding to increasing financial pressures and rising demand across public services. Transport is a critical enabler of that transformation.

Doing nothing is not a viable option. Without intervention, transport costs are expected to continue increasing whilst accessibility, service integration and opportunities for independence remain constrained. This would result in growing demand for high-cost interventions, increasing pressure on council budgets and reduced ability to achieve wider corporate objectives relating to inclusion, health, wellbeing, economic opportunity and environmental sustainability.

The Strategic Case has demonstrated a strong rationale for intervention and alignment with the council's priorities, the Local Transport Plan, SEND reform, adult Day Opportunities transformation and wider public service objectives. The programme responds directly to identified transport challenges whilst supporting the council's ambition to create a more integrated, efficient and accessible transport system. Alongside the Parking Review Programme, the proposals form a coherent package for improving movement and access across Dorset, combining better transport choices with a wider approach to parking, place-making and travel-demand management.

The Economic Case demonstrates that the preferred programme provides the strongest overall balance of strategic fit, deliverability, affordability and long-term benefits. Rather than relying on a single intervention, the preferred programme combines investment in public transport, independent travel, CT, rural mobility and service integration to create a coherent and mutually reinforcing package of measures. Together, these interventions tackle both transport provision and transport demand, creating opportunities to improve accessibility whilst reducing long-term pressure on specialist transport services.

The Commercial Case confirms that the programme can be delivered using established procurement, commissioning and partnership arrangements. The planned re-procurement of the supported bus network provides an immediate opportunity to deliver the enhanced CR Network, whilst existing relationships with operators, CT providers, healthcare partners and education providers provide a strong foundation for wider implementation.

The Financial Case demonstrates that the programme can be delivered through a combination of existing budgets, service redesign, external funding opportunities and phased investment. Whilst the programme requires investment, it provides a more sustainable long-term approach than continued reliance on increasingly costly specialist transport provision. The phased delivery model also enables investment to be aligned with funding availability and allows future expansion decisions to be informed by demonstrated performance and outcomes.



The Management Case demonstrates that the programme can be delivered through a robust governance and delivery framework, combining strategic leadership from the council with programme assurance through the Transformation Office and implementation through the Beacon Team multidisciplinary delivery model. This approach provides clear accountability, effective cross-service coordination and the flexibility required to manage a complex transformation programme.

The conclusions reached throughout this FBC are supported by the evidence presented in **Appendix B**, which demonstrates strong and consistent national support for integrated transport approaches that combine demand management, service integration and flexible transport provision.

Overall, the FBC concludes that the preferred programme represents the most practical, deliverable and affordable response to Dorset's long-term transport challenges. It provides a balanced approach to improving accessibility, supporting independence and managing future transport demand while remaining capable of phased implementation within the council's financial and organisational constraints.

The FBC therefore recommends approval of the preferred programme, associated implementation approach and governance arrangements set out within this document.

Next Steps

Approval of this FBC will mark the transition from programme development into phased programme delivery.

The programme has been deliberately structured to move from early, visible improvements towards longer-term system transformation. The first phase of implementation will focus on establishing the governance, resources and partnerships required to support delivery whilst simultaneously progressing those interventions that are already sufficiently mature to commence implementation.

The re-procurement of the supported bus network provides the first major opportunity to translate the programme into tangible improvements for residents. This strengthened network will form the backbone of the wider transport system and provide the platform upon which many of the programme's subsequent interventions will depend.

Alongside network enhancement, the council will begin investing in the capacity and capability needed to support longer-term transformation. The Independent Travel Training Team will be established and will work with schools, colleges and council services to build referral pathways and prepare the first cohort of participants.

As delivery progresses, attention will increasingly shift towards integration and innovation. DRT services, healthcare transport initiatives and wider integrated transport arrangements will be introduced progressively, informed by evidence, operational learning and ongoing evaluation. This phased approach enables the council to learn from early implementation, adapt interventions where required and focus future investment on those approaches demonstrating the greatest impact and value.



The programme has been intentionally designed as a long-term transformation programme rather than a single transport project. Success will therefore be measured not solely by the services introduced, but by whether the programme improves accessibility, increases independence, strengthens communities and creates a more integrated and financially sustainable transport system.

This FBC demonstrates that the council has a clear, deliverable and evidence-based programme capable of addressing the county's transport challenges whilst supporting wider ambitions for inclusion, health, economic opportunity and sustainable growth. Through the phased delivery of the six intervention packages, the programme provides a realistic pathway towards a transport system that is simpler to navigate, better connected, more responsive to local needs and better equipped to support Dorset's communities in the years ahead.

Subject to approval, the immediate priorities for 2026/27 and 2027/28 will be:

- completion of supported bus network procurement;
- establishment of programme governance and delivery arrangements;
- recruitment of key programme resources;
- implementation of early CT initiatives;
- establishment of the Independent Travel Training service; and
- development of detailed implementation plans for the remaining intervention packages.

Taken together, the proposals set out in this FBC provide a coordinated framework for improving accessibility, supporting independence and strengthening transport connectivity across Dorset. Through phased implementation and ongoing partnership working, the programme aims to deliver lasting benefits for residents, communities and public services while supporting the council's wider strategic objectives.

