



Department
for Transport

Baroness Vere of Norbiton
Minister for Roads, Buses and Places

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: baroness.vere@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

To: To Local Transport Authority Leaders
(in England, outside London)

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Dear Councillors,

Bus Service Improvement Plans and future government funding

I am writing to you today with regards to the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs), which I have asked all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to publish and send to the Department by 31 October.

The National Bus Strategy, published in March, sets out why a BSIP is essential. It is a shared vision for transformed bus services which are key to delivering wider societal and economic goals, and the extent of its ambition will influence how the £3 billion of funding for buses is allocated. I expect your authority to produce an ambitious and challenging Improvement Plan, in keeping with the notification of intent it published on the 30 June.

Where LTAs are not also highways authorities, please forward this letter to elected leaders of your Local Highways Authorities, since they will be crucial in delivering bus priority measures. As stated in the BSIP guidance, close co-operation with authorities that have relevant highways and traffic powers is essential.

Buses support the local economy by improving connectivity and reducing congestion, which affect all road users and cost urban economies at least £11 billion a year. Buses can be key to levelling-up, with users disproportionately drawn from less advantaged social groups and places.

However, buses should not be seen or promoted only as transport for those without an alternative. There is clear evidence that they can be made attractive enough to draw people away from their cars, for example by installing bus priority lanes, reviewing parking policies and increasing frequency of services. For this reason, buses are also vital in ensuring the economy meets its target for Net Zero carbon emissions.

Buses can also play a greater role in enabling access to work. In cities outside London, 77% of jobseekers do not have regular access to a car, van or motorbike. Having found employment, affordable bus travel helps ensure that work pays and can be sustained for everyone.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach here. The crucial test is whether the BSIP delivers for the community it serves, and whether the views of operators have been listened to and taken into account. In assessing the overall quality of BSIPs, the Government will give particular weight to measures which support local bus markets as they emerge from the pandemic, for example bus priority and targeted fares reductions. This will help to ensure the best outcomes for current and future bus users.

I look forward to seeing your plans for genuinely transformational changes to bus services, which should ensure everyone finds travel by bus simple, quick and affordable. I would like to thank you for all of your efforts in developing your BSIPs at pace to meet the deadline for submission of 31 October 2021.

*Yours,
Charlotte*

BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON