

**CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT, WASTE, STREET SCENE & FLOODING –
CLLR DR MARK McCLELLAND**

PASSENGER TRANSPORT

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REFERENCE: HTW-09-22

NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY – ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN AND SCHEME

Purpose of Report

The National Bus Strategy for England is a central government policy aimed at improving and increasing bus usage. It requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to work in legal partnership with local bus operators to achieve this growth.

Consultation

All Bus Companies running services in Wiltshire
Passenger Transport leads at all neighbouring Local Transport Authorities
The Chief Constable, Wiltshire Police
The Traffic Commissioner for the West of England
The Competition and Markets Authority
Option 24/7 (bus passenger user group)

Options Considered

The Department for Transport requires each Local Transport Authority (LTA) to establish an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme if it is to receive any funding to implement elements of its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and other funding which the Department may make available from time to time. Not to do so would exclude Wiltshire from these funding streams.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that Wiltshire Council is able to receive any government grant allocated to it, in order to deliver the aspirations, set out in the BSIP.

INTENTION TO MAKE DECISION

Following consultation with officers I give notice that I intend to make the decision set out in the attached report. If you would like to make any representations to me on this issue please do so by the 30 March 2022

The following supporting documents are attached:

Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme

The following supporting documents are available from the officer named above:

Bus Service Improvement Plan
Bus Back Better – National bus strategy for England

Date 23 March 2022

Cllr Mark McClelland

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Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene & Flooding

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Purpose of Report

1. The National Bus Strategy for England is a central government policy aimed at improving and increasing bus usage. It requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to work in legal partnership with local bus operators to achieve this growth.
2. In growing passenger numbers on public transport, the local populace and Wiltshire Council will benefit through:
 - Supporting the local economy – Improved access to shops and areas of employment to help build back and improve the economy post coronavirus.
 - Improved services to support vulnerable and elderly residents to access essential services such as shopping and medical appointments.
 - A reduction in carbon output and improvement in air quality by reducing the number of car journeys across Wiltshire.
 - Support Local Tourism – Through improved weekend, rail link services and more extended bus services a more connected public transport network can be introduced.
3. It is recommended that Cabinet:

Agrees to the making of an Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) and Scheme **(Appendix 1)**.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

4. The Wiltshire future Bus Strategy – Connected Wiltshire is relevant to all of Wiltshire Councils Business Plan's outcomes:

A thriving economy:

 - Support the local economy by making it easy and affordable for workers, shoppers and visitors to access local centres and facilitate development growth by helping to facilitate the planned housing and employment growth set out in the Wiltshire Core Strategy. This will likely take the form of a regular internal working group from all areas of the Place Directorate to ensure that public transport is being considered when developing schemes in a more joined up approach.
 - Improve journey time reliability for road users by removing some car trips from the highway network and therefore reducing congestion and delays.

Empowered People and a Resilient Society:

- By ensuring improved access to public transport is introduced, social mobility will be improved and elderly and more vulnerable members of our community can live independently for longer reducing pressure on social care services.
- Enable local groups to operate community and voluntary transport schemes particularly to provide local access and safety net transport services to meet needs that cannot be effectively provided by other means, such as the Link schemes.
- Help support Community Rail Partnerships (CRP's) to improve stations and train services, by including Wiltshire's Rail operators and the CRP's in stakeholder discussions when considering public transport.
- Ensure that local communities have a much more significant say in how public transport is shaped and delivered in Wiltshire.
- Communities will have a significant voice when service delivery has not met their expectations.
- Provide access to key services and facilities for Protected Characteristics groups as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

Sustainable Environment:

- Enhance the built and natural environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air quality pollutants from buses.
- By increasing the number of passenger trips made by public transport to 10% more than pre pandemic levels, this will contribute significantly to the Council's overall pledge for Wiltshire to be carbon neutral.

Main Considerations for the Council

5. Wiltshire Council is leading on this piece of work, to ensure that vision and overall Council policy are being considered. However, there is an inordinate amount of work involved, and tight timescales, therefore we are being supported by our consultants, Atkins.
6. Weekly progress meetings take place between Atkins and Wiltshire Council technical staff.
7. Regular meetings were held with bus operators as the EPP was developed and before it was formally shared with them for the 28-day objection period.
8. Discussion with bus operators has been very positive and builds upon the good working relationship Wiltshire has with them. Submissions for ambitious changes have been received and they generally align with emerging thinking and ambition put forward at discussions.
9. Wiltshire Council published its intent to form an EPP with our bus operators at the end of June via a Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding decision report (see background papers at the end of this report). That report sets out the process and why the EPP route was taken.
10. Wiltshire Council subsequently published its [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) (BSIP) on 31 October 2022.
11. The BSIP is enacted through the legally binding EPP. Therefore, the BSIP is very broad brush, under general headings of ambition, but without the granular detail of what

individual schemes will achieve. Even so, the BSIP is expected to be iterative, so the initial plan presented here will develop and change over time.

Background

12. In a statement to Parliament in February 2019 the Prime Minister announced £5 billion of new funding to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London. He set out a new vision to level up local transport connections throughout the country, making every-day journeys easier, greener and more convenient.
13. [A Better Deal for Bus Users](#), published in February 2020, set out a package of ambitious and innovative actions to meet the needs and demands of the travelling public, which included:

National Bus Strategy (NBS)

14. The centrepiece of the Prime Minister's announcement was revealed in March 2021 with the publication of [Bus Back Better](#) – A National Bus Strategy for England, which sets out an ambitious vision to dramatically improve bus services in England outside London through greater local leadership, to reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back to bus.
15. LTAs and local bus operators must work at pace with local communities to plan and deliver a fully integrated service.

The key goals of the NBS are making services:

- a. more frequent, with turn-up-and-go services on major routes and feeder or demand-responsive services to lower-density places.
 - b. faster and more reliable, with bus priority wherever necessary and where there is room.
 - c. cheaper, with more low, flat fares in towns and cities, lower point-to-point fares elsewhere, and more daily price capping everywhere.
 - d. more comprehensive, with overprovision on a few corridors reduced to boost provision elsewhere and better services in the evenings and weekends, not necessarily with conventional buses.
 - e. easier to understand, with simpler routes, common numbering, coordinated timetable change dates, good publicity, and comprehensive information online.
 - f. easier to use, with common tickets, passes and daily capping across all operators, simpler fares, contactless payment and protection of bus stations.
 - g. better integrated with other modes and each other, including more bus-rail interchange and integration and inter-bus transfers.
16. Wiltshire Council published its [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) (BSIP) on 31 October and, in line with central government policy, has now developed an Enhanced Partnership Plan and an Enhanced Partnership Scheme with bus operators to action parts of the BSIP as and when funding is released by the Department for Transport.
 17. Bus Back Better requires Wiltshire Council to make an EEP with its qualifying bus operators. This is a legally binding agreement through which the parties will implement the BSIP. It consists of two elements:
 - h. The **Enhanced Partnership Plan**. This is an outline agreement which sets out the terms of reference, sets up an Enhanced Partnership Forum, Board and Working Groups and sets out voting rights.

Sitting under the Enhanced partnership will be one or more

- i. **Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s)** which will implement individual elements of the BSIP as and when funding is available. At the present time no funding has been announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) so no Schemes are listed.
18. The EPP has been written in collaboration with our consultants, Atkins, and has been scrutinised by our legal team. It has also the subject of a consultation with the bus operators, who raised no objections.
 19. The EPP was also subject to “statutory consultation” as defined by the DfT and sent to the following:
 - organisations that represent local passengers
 - other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals
 - the Traffic Commissioner
 - the Chief Officer of Police
 - Transport Focus
 - the Competition and Markets Authority

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

20. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Environment Select Committee were presented with an update on the proposals for the EPP on 1 March 2022, who made the following comment(s):

It is recommended that the committee:

1. Approves and supports the forming of an Enhanced Partnership & Schemes with qualifying bus operators in order to achieve the aspirations as set out in the BSIP.

Safeguarding Implications

21. There are no safeguarding implications as a direct result of this proposal.

Public Health Implications

22. There are no public health issues arising directly from this report.

Procurement Implications

23. The EPP and EP Schemes will involve procurement activity and shall follow the appropriate procurement processes at the time.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

24. The following protected characteristics have been identified in an Equality Evidence Analysis:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Low Incomes
 - Rurality
 - People with no access to private transport

- Military status
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Shift / Part-time workers
- Carers

25. The first six characteristics are likely to be impacted greater than the rest and the following is a short summary for each of these six protected characteristics:

- *Age* - Younger and older people are more reliant on bus services and less likely to have access to a car. Also, fewer young people now hold driving licences and we live in an increasingly 'ageing society'. Younger people need affordable bus services to enable them to take up opportunities in education and work, and to increase their independence. Research has shown that many older people place particular value on 'local' and 'daytime' travel and predominantly travel for shopping, to access key services (notably healthcare) or to visit family and friends. Both groups also benefit from the health benefits of using public transport through encouraging outside activity and mobility.
- *Disability* - People with disabilities are less likely to drive and therefore could become marginalized from the wider community and more reliant on support services without independent travel options, such as supported bus services to provide them access to employment opportunities and essential services or, to visit friends and family. Disabled people are also likely to need more trips to GPs and hospitals for regular medical appointments.
- *Low incomes* - People on low incomes are particularly reliant upon local public transport services and a lack of available and adequate services can be a significant barrier to accessing employment opportunities and essential services. Public transport can also provide health benefits (as people walk more and drive less) which can be particularly beneficial for people from socio-economically deprived areas which typically have lower levels of health.
- *Rurality* - In rural areas, settlements are dispersed, and homes, jobs and services are scattered – access to everyday opportunities and services can therefore be challenging. Rural bus services can help combat social exclusion by enabling non-drivers to access shops, education, training, and essential services. They are also important for the local economy; small businesses in rural areas need good accessibility for their employees and rural buses can encourage visitors and tourists.
- *People with no access to private transport* - are particularly reliant upon local public transport services and a lack of available and adequate bus services can be a significant barrier to accessing employment opportunities and essential services.
- *Military Status* - Military personnel and their families are often located in camps in (semi) rural locations. Therefore, withdrawn or reduced supported bus services will reduce travel options to access essential services or visit friends and family. There is also an increased risk of social isolation.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

26. Wiltshire Council has declared a climate emergency and it will be imperative for the EPP to reflect the objectives of the Council's new climate strategy. Public transport, along with cycling and walking, plays a pivotal role in the reduction of carbon emissions through reduced car use and in turn improved air quality. Without an effective and ambitious active travel and public transport strategy it will not be possible to achieve the objectives set out in Wiltshire's climate strategy, and the government's [Transport Decarbonisation Strategy](#)
27. The five largest bus companies in the UK have all pledged that they will only purchase zero emission vehicles as set by the government timetable. This will likely take some time to filter down to bus services operated in Wiltshire, favouring the more city and urban set ups, but nevertheless a real step change for the industry. Future iterations the EPP will need to consider zero emission and air quality issues further and until zero emission vehicles are readily available for Wiltshire operators perhaps Euro 6 engine types could be considered as they are the cleanest diesel engine available.
28. By having more buses carrying more passengers will see an increase in modal shift and therefore remove car journeys across Wiltshire. A fully laden double deck bus for example can eliminate 70 car journeys.

Risk Assessment

29. Whilst no specifics have been identified by the DfT, it has made it very clear that any LTA failing to engage with the NBS will receive no funding from the Government. Therefore, from April 2022, only LTAs with an EP will be able to access the new discretionary streams of Government bus funding. In addition, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), subject to consultation. The DfT will also consider an LTA's performance with respect to the policies set out in its BSIP when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.
30. Already allocated funding would need to be returned to government, which would not only be reputationally damaging, but would be a retrograde step in the development of public transport and its contribution to the Council's wider objectives.
31. The NBS aims to increase ridership and in doing so more buses and bus drivers will be required. Whilst the recruitment of drivers will be the responsibility of the bus companies, there are concerns about the number of additional bus drivers it will be possible to employ. Not only are there signs of over employment in some sectors, but there are also currently incentives for bus drivers to re-train as lorry drivers, or to switch to parcel delivery. How these trends play out in the medium term remains to be seen, but they do cause great concern for the overall success of the NBS.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks are tabulated below.

Risk	Mitigation
<p>Available skills and resources to deliver all areas of the NBS</p> <p>Only 6 months of Bus Recovery Funding has been agreed post 1 April 2022, when 12months is needed. This will likely see commercial bus service de registration in October 2022, unless passenger numbers recover sufficiently.</p> <p>Uncertainty over long term funding post the current parliament</p> <p>A shortage of bus drivers to cater for additional demand</p>	<p>Additional capacity funding of £306k has been allocated to Wiltshire Council by government to address this (see financial implications below) As part of this funding, a National Bus Strategy Manager has been appointed. Once funding for the NBS managers position has expired from government grant, (3 years), Wiltshire Council will need to continue funding this post from revenue. This allocation is ringfenced.</p> <p>Wiltshire Council will work with bus operators to model a “new” 5-year sustainable bus network for Wiltshire.</p> <p>A funding risk assessment will need to be compiled by both Wiltshire Council and the bus operators to ensure that schemes put forward as part of the EP process do not adversely affect both parties on a long-term basis.</p> <p>A close working relationship with Wiltshire’s bus operators will be maintained to understand any shortfall and consideration in the BSIP to help grow employment in this sector will be made</p>

Financial Implications

32. The BSIP was intended to be an ambitious set of proposals to increase bus ridership for all the positive reasons explained above. It is understood that the level of ambition shown nationally far exceeds the level of funding available.
33. The DfT made an initial funding announcement for bus at £3 billion, but this has been tempered by the Treasury to around £1.2 billion. This change in funding allocation reflects the overall state of the economy and was revised in the autumns spending review
34. The NBS will place significant additional demands upon our staff resource. The DfT has so far awarded Wiltshire Council £306k of additional capacity funding, as it recognises that years of austerity have eroded much of the capacity and skills within LTAs to deliver on such initiatives. Some of this funding has been spent by employing the services of Atkins, as consultants, but there will be a need to employ additional staff as, whilst

consultants give us the ability to meet tight deadlines in the short term, it is important that we have the internal staff resource to meet the on-going requirements of the NBS.

35. We intend to / have appointed a:

- National Bus Strategy Officer to oversee the implementation and on-going development of the strategy in Wiltshire.
- National Bus Strategy Support and Marketing Officer to support the above and fill the marketing and public awareness gap that Atkins has highlighted.

Once the government's additional capacity funding for these posts has expired, (three years), Wiltshire Council must continue funding these positions from revenue budget.

36. The DfT has established a Bus Centre of Excellence, which will provide courses and accreditation for officers, as well as a repository for essential information and best practice. Whilst details are awaited, we anticipate that making use of this resource, possibly as part of Wiltshire's apprenticeship programme, would be advantageous.

37. The NBS aims to increase ridership and in doing so more buses and bus drivers will be required. Whilst the recruitment of drivers will be the responsibility of the bus companies, there are concerns about the number of additional bus drivers it will be possible to employ. Not only are there signs of over employment in some sectors, but there are also currently incentives for bus drivers to re-train as lorry drivers, or to switch to parcel delivery. How these trends play out in the medium term remains to be seen, but they do cause great concern for the overall success of the NBS.

Legal Implications

38. The Council's Legal Department should be engaged throughout the Council's Enhanced Partnership and Scheme with its Bus Operators.

39. In particular, legal advice should be sought on entering into the Enhanced Partnership Agreement itself and associated legal documentation, as well as in relation to the Competition Law implications and the Competition Test itself.

40. All legal documentation should be entered into in line with the Council's Constitution, SPH Manual and Signing and Sealing Protocol.

41. Wiltshire Council should delegate authority to enter into the Enhanced Partnership Agreement and associated legal documentation to an appropriate individual.

Options Considered

42. The Department for Transport requires each LTA to establish an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme if it is to receive any funding to implement elements of its BSIP and other funding which the Department may make available from time to time. Not to do so would exclude Wiltshire from these funding streams.

Reason for Proposal

43. To ensure that Wiltshire Council can receive any government grant allocated to it, in order to deliver the aspirations, set out in the BSIP.

Proposal

44. That approval be sought for Wiltshire Council to form an Enhanced Partnership and Scheme with its Bus Operators.
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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Enhanced Partnership & Scheme

Background Papers

HTW – 21 – 21 – Cabinet Member Decision Report, National Bus Strategy
Environment Select Committee of 7 September