

## **Report to Councillor Joy Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport**

**June 2022**

### **Bus Back Better**

- **Draft Enhanced Partnership and**
- **Bus Service Improvement Plan spending priorities**

### **Report by Matt Davey, Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning)**

**Electoral division(s): All**

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#### **Summary**

Following the launch of the [Bus Back Better](#) bus strategy for England in March 2021, the County Council and local bus operators committed to form an Enhanced Partnership (EP) to deliver an improved bus offer in West Sussex, and to contribute to the ambitions set out in the West Sussex Transport Plan and the Climate Change Strategy.

The partnership developed the [Bus Service Improvement Plan - West Sussex County Council](#) outlining ambitions to assist post-pandemic bus patronage recovery, and thereafter improved bus services in West Sussex. The BSIP included a bid of £90m submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) at the end of October 2021 for evaluation. This bid was for capital and revenue funding for 2022-25.

In response the DfT has indicated that £17.4m is likely to be granted subject to a whole bus network review and clarifications on what improvements will be prioritised. This means that some of the original ambitions could be delivered if agreed by DfT.

The Enhanced Partnership has also developed an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme documents which need to be submitted to DfT at the end of June. These documents describe how the council and bus operators will work together to deliver the agreed aims of the BSIP within the available funding from the DfT, the County Council and from members of the partnership.

#### **Recommendation**

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked to approve -

1. the West Sussex Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (as set out in appendices 2 and 3) and, subject to no substantive amendments made by the DfT, delegate

authority to the Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning) to approve the Enhanced Partnership Plan

2. the Bus Services Improvement Plan proposed spending priorities, set out in Appendix 4.

## **1 Background and context**

- 1.1 WSCC (West Sussex County Council) [agreed to enter into](#) an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators. The partnership is being established to deliver countywide bus service patronage recovery and improvements in line with the [Bus Back Better](#) National Bus Strategy for England.
- 1.2 Whilst bus services had flourished in the north of the county with a thriving economy, the impact of the pandemic on Gatwick Airport and Crawley has been dramatic. Services across the rest of the county had mixed success. Bus route '700 – Coast liner' between Portsmouth and Brighton has the highest number of passengers. However, in smaller towns and our sizeable rural areas, bus services have retreated. This presents ongoing challenges to improve the bus offer to residents as a viable alternative to their cars, and to assist carbon emission reductions.
- 1.3 The BSIP now sits as a strategy linked to the West Sussex Transport Plan with aligned policies and approach. It is expected that WSCC will commit to prioritise active travel (walking and cycling), and shared travel (including buses) schemes, with travel solutions to improve public health, and contribute to the WSCC [Climate Change Strategy](#). Future highways improvement schemes delivered by WSCC, and developers will prioritise these travel modes.
- 1.4 The DfT requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and their partners to deliver their draft Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes by end of June 2022, and documents are expected to cover partnership structure, governance, user representation, decision processes, and commitments by all parties. This will allow LTAs to set up Enhanced Partnership arrangements as soon as possible with planned spend agreed once evaluated by the DfT.
- 1.5 Priorities set out by residents in an engagement exercise in September 2021 varied by age group. Younger people, people in rural areas, and families want lower fares, seeing fares as a barrier to using buses. All age groups, including older people, want more frequent bus services including evenings and weekends. More real-time information screens (showing expected arrival times of buses) were the top choice for all age groups. Doubling the number of screens across the county to nearly 700 is included in the Spend Plan.
- 1.6 Bus companies have seen quite challenging changes in ridership during and arising from the pandemic. Recovery is ongoing with bus companies working with the DfT and LTAs to safeguard bus support funding and to help them design services to maximise financially sustainable networks. To that end they have shown a strong preference for infrastructure improvements such as bus lanes and gates as well as roadside infrastructure (real time passenger information/bus stops) to improve the offer for residents. They also have signalled a willingness to work towards provide carbon neutral services with commitments for zero carbon fleets by some operators by 2035.

## **2 Proposal details**

- 2.1 Following an ambitious BSIP being submitted in October 2021 with a bid of more than £90m, the DfT confirmed that the council has an indicative award of £17,401,596 (of which £11,982,180 capital and £5,419,416 revenue).
- 2.2 The indicative award was confirmed in a letter to the council dated 4 April 2022 (Appendix 1) that outlined the DfT's requirements of the council. This included the submission of the council's BSIP spending priorities based on the available funds and Enhanced Partnership documents by the end of June 2022.
- 2.3 Whilst there could be up to approximately £17.4m available, the spending priorities submitted will be subject to clarification discussions with DfT. This will establish what they will be willing to provide BSIP funding up until April 2025 on bus service improvements.
- 2.4 In addition, due to ongoing impacts of the pandemic on bus use, the DfT directed operators and LTAs to jointly review both commercial and supported bus networks by end of June 2022. This is to ensure a more financially sustainable network is in place for when Covid recovery grants end on 30 September 2022. The approach of the main bus operators has been to reduce frequencies on some services. In some cases, these have remained reduced but may be fully reinstated should patronage rise again.
- 2.5 The way that the Enhanced Partnership will deliver the BSIP ambitions within the available funding are outlined in the draft Enhanced Partnership Plan (Appendix 2) and Scheme (Appendix 3). These are draft as they need to be reviewed by the DfT following submission and agreeing funding levels.
- 2.6 The draft BSIP Spending Plan is attached at Appendix 4. It contains details of the council's priorities for the current BSIP funding round. Broadly these priorities include planned infrastructure improvements such as bus priorities on key corridors, better roadside infrastructure, and information to facilitate greater modal shift and other benefits.
- 2.7 The Spending Plan has been developed following discussions with DfT and their consultants to ensure ambitions meet expectations but also are fully delivered within the current spending window (up until 31 March 2025). This led to the removal of funding towards a bus lane on the A259 between Chichester and Bognor Regis that is still to be pursued but will be delivered after the current BSIP funding window.
- 2.8 The main spending priorities include:
  - 1) Introducing a bus fare discount scheme for young people (16-21 year olds) across the county
  - 2) Funding towards bus infrastructure improvements in Crawley including a new multi-modal interchange in the town centre improving access to bus and train services in the station gateway
  - 3) Funding towards infrastructure on buses allowing passengers to enjoy fares capped at their lowest levels and lead to greater integrated tickets across different bus operators across the county

- 4) Funding to extend a new bus lane in Manor Royal in Crawley to improve bus speeds making buses more appealing and reduce emissions
- 5) Funding a programme to double Real Time Passenger Information screens (RTPI) across the county
- 6) Funding a programme to improve signalling to give buses priority in at least 20 junctions on main bus routes across the county
- 7) Funding a programme of bus stop improvements across the county
- 8) Establishing new regular express bus services (the 55x) connecting Littlehampton and Chichester with high quality infrastructure to attract new users
- 9) Piloting Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) services to connect communities where conventional services won't work on their own.

2.9 The young persons' fare discount scheme will allow 16-21 year old residents to travel with their adult fares reduced to child fare levels making access to key services such as learning and recreation as well as to jobs more affordable and accessible. The scheme will be developed alongside East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council offering young people all year-round child fares on local buses to engender a bus culture and increase access to valuable services.

2.10 The Crawley infrastructure improvements have been developed through the Growth Programme in collaboration with Crawley Borough Council, Metrobus and the Business District to improve the bus offer in the town allow buses to run faster and provide a very visible message to potential users. It will also allow Metrobus to use their new zero emission buses being introduced in 2022. Savings from the schemes will be ploughed back into better local bus services. The criteria for capital funding are prioritised where schemes are more advanced and/or supported fitting into the 2022-25 funding window. Therefore, there are more improvements proposed in the north of the county currently, notably in Crawley, dovetailing into existing and planned growth work. Future improvements along the coastal region will take more time to deliver as plans are not as developed to be considered for the BSIP bid each year.

2.11 Real time information screens scored very highly in the BSIP consultation. This will allow a doubling of screens on key corridors and at key locations increasing visibility of bus travel as a viable alternative and encourage greater bus use.

2.12 The signal improvements follow advances in technology that allow lights to be changes to green when buses are waiting speeding up their journeys, making them more reliable and appealing to users as well as reducing emissions.

2.13 There are many existing bus stops that could benefit from improved facilities and access for passengers getting to, from and waiting for services.

2.14 The 55x bus service is a proposed extension to the existing 55-bus service operating between Chichester and Tangmere. It is proposed to have a frequent service operating between Littlehampton and Chichester though areas of Ford, Yapton, Barnham, Westergate to Tangmere onwards to Chichester. This service would link to existing onward services to Bognor Regis and the rail hub at Barnham providing services for staff at St Richard's Hospital, students at Chichester University and staff and shoppers for the retail parks in East

Chichester. It would also provide a corridor link for workers, shoppers, students, and visitors to the seaside destination of Littlehampton. The proposal includes enhanced roadside infrastructure.

- 2.15 DDRT services will be trialled in some areas of the county both alongside conventional buses and as an alternative delivery mechanism and it highly favoured by the DfT. DDRT services can include a number of types of transport services including a conventional bus that diverts to serve where the greatest demand is, a mix of conventional bus and small community bus services as well as use of shared taxis especially during unsocial hours where demand is lower. This will be a joint project with East Sussex County Council.
- 2.16 The Enhanced Partnership Plan includes ambition to work in the future with partners on a roadmap to a zero-emission fleet including vehicle and engine replacements, and investment in depot and fuelling infrastructure. The latter will be explored with partners including District/Borough and neighbouring councils. Funding will be sought to upgrade existing buses to the cleanest EU6 emission standard, prioritising areas where there are Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). The partnership will also work on future bids for Government grants for zero emission buses to switch to vehicles that can accommodate the operating distance range required for all-day and evening operations.
- 2.17 The Enhanced Partnership will be required to submit, through the County Council, annual BSIP bids to the DfT for funding each year. These will be subject to the County Council's decision-making processes.
- 2.18 Additional staffing to deliver schemes estimated at 4 FTE to be funded by the grant over the 3 years.

### **3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)**

- 3.1 The alternative of not submitting documents for an Enhanced Partnership is discounted, as it could lead to DfT ceasing existing grant funding towards bus recovery and ongoing fuel duty grants to bus companies.
- 3.2 The DfT has outlined that Enhanced Partnership Plans not including any larger scale bus priority measures such as bus lanes would likely not meet their funding criteria. This would negatively impact future funding opportunities.
- 3.3 The other alternative of a more prescriptive EPP would likely not be accepted by bus operators.

### **4 Consultation, engagement and advice**

- 4.1 Bus operators were engaged in April 2022 on challenges they face coming out of the pandemic and how bus services could improve. With the challenge of recovery funding likely to cease in October 2022 (see 3.1 above) they were very keen to work with the council to explore other ways to help services to recover and where improvements could facilitate greater bus use.
- 4.2 The County Council, East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Surrey County Council, Hampshire County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council officers have discussed their respective approaches and content of their Plans. This is to ensure they will work together to deliver similar results such as ticketing schemes and cross border services in locations such as Gatwick Airport area.

- 4.3 A public engagement exercise was carried out during September 2021 to understand barriers to use, and ways services could be improved. This included online and paper surveys, that received 3074 responses from residents, District, Borough, and Town & Parish Councils, businesses, and bus user representatives.
- 4.4 WSCC and Surrey County Council Officers jointly met with Gatwick Airports Ltd to understand the impacts of the pandemic on the airport as a major transport interchange and the economy of surrounding area. This allowed exploration of potential service and infrastructure improvements to aid recovery and for the airport to flourish again and work towards a carbon neutral status.
- 4.5 A one-off Task and Finish Group (TFG) of the Communities, Highways, and Environment Scrutiny Committee (CHESC) considered the proposed spend on 11 April 2022, broadly supporting officers' recommendations, but noted the implications for bus services when bus recovery funding (BRG/LTF) is no longer available from October 2022. This was further discussed with CHESC at its meeting on 10 June 2022 following the Cabinet Member attending a meeting with the Under Secretary of State for Transport. CHESC considered the proposals in detail, asked that any revisions to the final proposals are shared with the Committee and agreed that the TFG should continue to meet to understand where work on the viability of current services, and the development of projects within the bid, had reached.
- 4.6 Significant consultation was undertaken with highways engineers on deliverability of capital schemes within the 2022-25 funding window. Following a steer from the DfT, the A259 Bognor Roundabout bus lane ambition was removed to be considered over a longer period.
- 4.7 The EP Plan and Scheme will be consulted upon with statutory stakeholders (Transport Act 2000, section 138F (6)) including:
- All affected operators
  - User representatives
  - Affected local authorities
  - Traffic Commissioners
  - Police
  - Transport Focus
  - Competition and Markets Authority

## Finance

- 5.1 The following table shows capital and revenue expenditure contained in the Spend Plan. Funds for 2022/23 are expected to be available from October 2022.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Capital	£0.40m	£4.71	£6.87m
Revenue	£0.99m	£2.52m	£1.90m

- 5.2 The summary table below includes the outline priorities based on the indicative award of £17,401,596 (of which £11,982,180 capital and £5,419,416 revenue). These are all subject to further discussion with DfT.

Capital		Revenue	
Crawley Town Centre Interchange and bus lanes	£5.30m	New bus route 55x	£1.20m
Tap Off infrastructure on buses allowing lowest fares to be charged	£1.30m	Young persons discounted fare scheme 19-21 years old (child fare)	£2.00m
Manor Royal bus lane	£1.08m	Rural Demand Responsive Transport Schemes	£1.20m
Real time information screens	£2.50m	Bus Information Improvement Programme	£0.14m
Traffic Signal Priority	£1.20m	Use your bus Promotions	£0.04m
Bus Stop Infrastructure improvements	£0.60m	Capped Fare Ticketing Processing	£0.43m
		BSIP Delivery Costs	£0.40m
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£11.98m</b>		<b>£5.41m</b>

- 5.3 The County Council will require additional officer resource to support and deliver the BSIP ambitions through the Enhanced Partnership. Additional public transport staff are needed to work with the bus operators to review the network and oversee the delivery of Programmes of proposed improvements.
- 5.4 The ability to deliver the BSIP will depend upon the level of funding awarded by the DfT. In the event this is less than requested the proposals will be reviewed and prioritised for delivery within the funding available. Commitments beyond the current grant period will also need to be reviewed and assessed in line with the available funding.
- 5.5 There is no additional capital borrowing requirement arising from the proposed BSIP. Any match funding provided by the County Council will be identified from within existing approved budgets.
- 5.6 Please note that the proposed spending on capital improvements in Crawley is in addition to Growth Bid funding already provided.

## 6. Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
<p>Potential Loss of -</p> <p>Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG) currently valued at £0.374m to WSCC</p> <p>Bus Recovery Grant/Local Transport Fund grant, based on patronage levels pre-Covid</p> <p>Concession fares reimbursement, to be based on patronage (journeys taken) by disabled and older people</p>	<p>Follow DfT direction, including -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review and recast of bus network to reduce cost to the public purse</li> <li>- Increase bus priority</li> <li>- Introduce Reduced fares</li> <li>- Introduce Demand Responsive Transport in rural areas</li> </ul>
<p>Possible loss of central Government funding towards highways improvement schemes</p>	<p>All future highways improvements schemes to include prioritising active and bus sustainable travel solutions</p> <p>WSCC bus team to monitor developments and schemes for adverse impacts on buses</p>
<p>Buses not sufficiently contributing to Climate Change Strategy</p>	<p>Enhanced Partnership to develop 'roadmap' to zero carbon emissions, and propose bids for funding (e.g.- through ZEBRA)</p>
<p>DfT does not agree with all elements of the Spending Plan</p>	<p>Officers are regularly meeting DfT about the proposals so any issues with content will lead to alternatives form within the approved BSIP being substituted</p>
<p>Changes to priorities for funding by the Enhanced Partnership</p>	<p>The EP Scheme has a bespoke variation clause (5.6) that protects all the parties following DfT guidance</p>

## 7. Policy alignment and compliance

- 7.1 The EP documents (Plan and Scheme) address the Government's expectations of establishing a statutory Enhanced Partnership to continue to receive funding to support local bus services. The EP Scheme document is an enforceable agreement.
- 7.2 The existing statutory duty of reimbursing free off-peak bus travel for entitled older or disabled people on timetabled local bus services is not affected. However, there is a risk that not establishing an Enhanced Partnership will lead to bus services being withdrawn due to reductions in Government funding. This would adversely impact some people with protected characteristics.



- 7.3 The Government has been clear that the establishment of Enhanced Partnerships is needed for future funding bids for zero emission vehicles to help to achieve climate change targets. In addition, improvements in bus services will help to improve public health outcomes with increased use of local buses over cars.
- 7.4 The EPP and BSIP spend plan contribute to outcomes in the Council Plan, notably A Sustainable and Prosperous Economy, and Improving Access for Residents and Visitors. In addition, they contribute to the delivery of the County Reset Plan supporting new and existing businesses and those sectors hit hard by COVID-19.
- 7.5 There will be positive Crime and Disorder implications if the EPP is implemented. These arise from buses being more readily accessible (better frequencies, lower fares) making it easier for residents to access learning and/or paid employment reducing social deprivation that is known to reduce crime.
- 7.6 There are a number of Social Value related opportunities as the Social Value Framework will be applied when procuring additional services. This could enable better outcomes for residents and businesses including local employment, and opportunities through partnering with bus operators and community transport organisations to create supply chain benefits.
- 7.7 The proposals align with the Sustainable and Prosperous Economy priority in Our Council Plan. The EP can enable better access to learning and employment opportunities, as well as help support local businesses with cost effective travel solutions for employees and customers.

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## **Appendices**

1. DfT letter, 4 April 2022
2. West Sussex draft Enhanced Partnership Plan
3. West Sussex draft Enhanced Partnership Scheme
4. Summary Enhanced Partnership LTA Spending Plan

## **Background papers**

None