

# RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY

Bus Back Better

21 June 2021

***Please note that the following recommendation/s is/are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.***

## RECOMMENDATION

### **It is recommended that:**

The board recognise and take into account the contribution improving local bus and coach services can make across the Peninsula when developing its full Transport Strategy.

The board endorse the approach of local authorities within the Peninsula Transport area towards the implementation of the National Bus Strategy.

### **1. Background**

In March, the government announced a new National Bus Strategy ([Bus back better - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)). Alongside the delivery of this strategy, there is an expectation that local transport authorities (LTAs) work towards forming “Enhanced Partnerships” with their local bus operators (by April 2022), In the lead up to these Partnerships the LTAs and their bus companies are expected to work together to and develop a Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) (by October 2021).

### **2. Proposal**

An Enhanced Partnership (EP) is an agreement between an LTA and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. It includes a clear vision of the improvements that the EP is aiming for and accompanying actions to achieve them. The LTA has formal responsibility to form the EP. They can only proceed with proposals if they have the support and input of local bus operators.

This is a high-level strategic document put together by the LTA and the operators, to include:

- The current situation for local bus services
- Proposals for improvement
  - how will we improve the quality and effectiveness of local bus services?
  - integration with other modes
- How we will work with neighbouring authorities
- Views of passengers and third parties
- How we will measure success – (including data)

### **Key Deliverables:**

The key aims from the BSIP and longer term working through the EP include

### **Network Design & Planning**

How we will improve the quality and effectiveness of bus services

- Key route network
- Integration with other modes
- Fares & Ticketing – multi operator tickets; contactless payments; lower fares
- Rural Issues – Demand Responsive Transport and socially necessary transport
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## Journey Time Improvements

Working with our colleagues in our Highways and Transport Planning Teams

- Bus reliability – data
- Bus priority – bus lanes, traffic lights, on street parking, obstructions
- Traffic Management – identifying schemes for improvements
- Monitoring of operations
- Integrated planning – e.g. Management of roadworks in collaboration with highways

## Customer Engagement

Improving confidence in bus services and the customer experience

- Information Strategy - online, printed, roadside displays, real time & infrastructure
- Branding – liveries, publicity
- Vehicle Standards - accessibility
- Customer Charter - Driver Standards, Customer Care
- Consultation and passenger satisfaction data

From these points and others, we need to facilitate a shared understanding between the LTA and operators of:

- the contribution that buses can play in meeting the needs of the local area
- the factors that can affect how, and to what extent, local people use bus services; and
- what a formal bus partnership might achieve.

Considerations within the BSIP can include:

- Financial and commercial implications of potential options
- Air quality and environmental challenges
- Planning housing and/or business developments
- Existing and future pressures on the road network
- Placing the bus at the heart of decision making on day to day transport management and on, at least, an equal footing with other modes of transport.

### 3. Alternatives

Bus companies and LTAs have received COVID Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) during the pandemic to ensure essential services are maintained. To continue to receive this funding beyond 5 July, LTAs and their local bus companies are expected to commit to working towards an Enhanced Partnership by 30 June. The status quo is therefore not an option.

Within the Bus Strategy it sets out how LTAs can consider moving to full franchising, but they must first work towards developing the Enhanced Partnership.

### 4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

High level stakeholders will be consulted on the BSIP prior to its publication in October 2021, and thereafter at 6 monthly intervals we will consult both stakeholders and service users.

The five LTAs within the Peninsula area will be meeting later in June to discuss common ground and whether anything can be issued jointly.

One crucial element of the BSIP will be how we can measure progress. We will need to engage with operators and internal colleagues to provide data in order to do this.

This could include:

- Patronage Data
- Journey Times

We will also analyse:

- Road Network Performance data
- Bus Priority Measures
- Headways data
- Traffic Management data
- Service Reliability data

## **5. Financial Considerations**

Funding – what we know about so far:

The Government has committed funding of £3bn towards improving local bus services outside of London. Once LTAs have submitted their BSIPs by the end of October, the Department for Transport (DfT) will review them and funding will be allocated from April 2022. The guidance on the allocation of this funding is due before the summer recess of Parliament and is expected to be based on an allocation around what is proposed within the BSIPs. LTAs have been told to be ambitious.

To help prepare for the EP and develop the BSIP each LTA has been allocated £100k for additional support. This is out of a total amount allocated within 2021/22 of £25million and therefore further funding will be available. This is more likely to be allocated based on the size of the LTA.

LTAs are expected to continue with their current levels of funding to support local bus services.

## **6. Environmental Impact Considerations**

The Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme announcement was made at the same time as the Buses Back Better national bus strategy announcement. Officers have been attending seminars with the DfT and considering the potential for putting together a bid. The DfT are looking at 3 or 4 national pilot projects. The total national pot is £120m and they are expecting bids of between £25m and £35m, probably in larger conurbations. They appear to be looking for a single depot conversion in an area where there can be maximum impact.

On top of this within this BSIP the transition to zero emission buses will be a key objective to promote low carbon travel.

Improving local bus services with existing vehicles remains a more sustainable option than people travelling in their own private vehicles

## **7. Equality Considerations**

Disabled people must be able to use bus services as easily as other passengers. Making buses more accessible (not just the vehicles themselves, but also bus stops, bus stations, and by providing excellent customer service) will benefit other passengers too.

Next stop announcements will help everyone know where the bus is going and when they've reached their stop. Subject to final analysis, the Government will introduce Accessible Information Regulations by summer 2022, ensuring passengers can board any bus with confidence and that they will know when to alight when their destination is reached.

The BSIPs should include measures that improve accessibility for older and disabled people, including designing appropriate networks which minimise walking distances to key destinations and streamline inter-connectivity, promoting high-quality customer service through appropriate and consistent training, modernising vehicles and upgrading supporting infrastructure to facilitate independent accessible journeys.

The design of bus infrastructure improvements should be informed by the experience of disabled people and consulted on with a range of passengers; particular care should be taken when implementing bus priority measures to ensure that they do not impede access for disabled people reliant on private motor vehicles, taxis and private hire vehicles.

The Government is committed to increase awareness of bus passenger rights including those specific to disabled passengers, and how complaints can be made. They will publish the high-level training framework to drive up standards of customer service of drivers and on-board staff who seek to understand passengers' access needs, and who tailor the support they provide accordingly.

Buses can be key to levelling-up; users are disproportionately from less advantaged social groups and places. Improved services will strengthen communities, sustain town centres and connect disabled and isolated people. But 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.

## **8. Legal Considerations**

The Enhanced Partnership will be a formal legal document as set out in the Transport Act 2017

## **9. Risk Management Considerations**

The challenging timescales present the greatest risk at the current time. However, all LTAs in the region are committed to working together as much as possible to mitigate these risk

## **10. Public Health Impact**

Improving sustainable public transport will have a positive impact for the individual using the services and for the wider environment, in particular in areas where increased pollution causes a risk to public health

## **11. Summary**

The implementation of the National Bus Strategy is an opportunity to bring public transport and in particular bus travel to the forefront of future transport planning and development across the South West.

The LTAs within the area are already looking at opportunities for working together to develop their BSIPs and move towards their Enhanced Partnerships. We recommend that the Peninsula Transport Board note the priority the Government have given buses and consider to how they can fully support local authorities with the implementation of the strategy.