

Meeting: Cabinet **Date:** 11 June 2024

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 Update

When does the decision need to be implemented? ASAP

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 In October 2021 the first Torbay Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) was agreed and submitted to Government as a bidding document demonstrating ambitious proposals to deliver the National Bus Strategy at a local level. Since then, the funding packages available have substantially changed and the Council is required by Government to update the BSIP to reflect this.
- 1.2 The Plan will continue to set out a vision and priorities for the future of bus services in Torbay and will be a high-level document used to secure revenue grant funding in 2024 from the Department for Transport and demonstrate further opportunities for investment in future years.
- 1.3 On 15th March 2021 the Government published the National Bus Strategy, 'Bus Back Better'. This strategy applies to England and sets out a vision for improving bus services nationally. It recognises the need to act quickly, whilst acknowledging that the industry will need ongoing support for some time to recover from the consequences of Covid-19. The aim now is to re-establish patronage at pre-covid levels and then to exceed them. To do this, buses must be a practical and attractive alternative to the car, providing genuine choice to the community.
- 1.4 The strategy makes it clear that funding will be made available to Local Authorities who pursue this vision and seek to make the improvements to their services and network. Whilst the extent and timing of such funding is unknown beyond 2024, it is important to

consider as it has clear direct benefits to the Local Authority, not least in respect of accessibility for the community and supporting the carbon neutrality aims.

- 1.5 The BSIP will be delivered in partnership with local bus operators, through the Torbay Bus Enhanced Partnership, established in 2022.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 We want to see a healthy, happy and prosperous Torbay. The proposals help us to deliver this ambition by improving accessibility for everyone across Torbay, improving connectivity to facilities whether that is education, health, employment or other, ensuring those most deprived are not excluded from that connectivity. The proposals support our town centres and other trip generating hubs in our towns, and help give our community choice in how they travel and move journeys away from the private car and onto zero emission buses to contribute to reductions in Torbay's carbon footprint.
- 2.2 The BSIP will support the whole community as well as visitors and businesses. It increases the opportunities for travel around Torbay for all, whether through improvements to the vehicles used on existing services or considering alternative and new opportunities for routes.
- 2.3 It will contribute to many of the priorities and outcomes of the community and corporate plan and specifically help to achieve the following:
 - Improve transport links to and within Torbay.
 - People have better transport and digital connections to jobs and amenities.
 - Improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation.
 - People feel safe in their local area, during the day and after dark.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

1. That the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 in outline, as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be approved and submitted to the Department for Transport in June 2024; and
2. That the final publication of the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024, including design and editorial changes as required, be delegated to the Divisional Director – Planning, Housing and Climate Emergency in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024

Background Documents

Cabinet Report and Record of Decision for the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2021 (Item 267)

(available through

<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/DemocraticServices/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=741&MId=10010&Ver=4>)

Bus Service Improvement Plan 2021

(available through www.torbay.gov.uk/bus-network-improvements)

National Bus Strategy “Bus Back Better”

(available through www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better)

Bus Service Improvement Plan Guidance

(available through www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-service-improvement-plan)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A BSIP is a public document published on the Local Transport Authority's (LTA) website, intended to set out clearly the vision and plan for improving bus services and growing bus patronage in the local area, in line with the National Bus Strategy.
- 1.2 The 2024 guidance sets out that the key themes for the 2024 BSIP are as follows:
 - Updating the baseline to 2023/24: updating the 2021 BSIP's account of the current situation to reflect all developments since 2021
 - Setting out the improvement programme in financial year 2024/25: to reflect the known funding envelope of BSIP funding and all other funding sources for BSIP delivery, including the LTA's own resources.
 - Getting ready for 2025 and beyond: refreshing the plan's ambition and content to set out a high quality and flexible pipeline of prioritised proposals for the four years 2025/26 to 2028/29, nested within the BSIP's overall 10 year plus vision, attractive to funders, and ready for delivery as opportunities for funding arise.
- 1.3 Every LTA should produce a 2024 BSIP to secure the release of its BSIP funding for 2024/25. It is for the LTA to determine, with partners, the extent to which the 2021 BSIP is to be revised. Unlike the 2021 BSIP, the 2024 BSIP will not function as a bidding document for specific DfT funds. The BSIP will be subject to the transition to Devon and Torbay CCA as that body will take on devolved transport powers. Future BSIP and Enhanced Partnership arrangements will be combined across the Devon and Torbay area.
- 1.4 The Plan will continue to align closely with other policies such as the Community and Corporate Plan and Local Transport Plan, as well as town investment proposals.
- 1.5 The Council has a current Local Transport Plan (LTP) until 2026 but is bringing forward a new LTP with Devon County Council over the next 12 months. This updated LTP will be part of the devolved discussions with a decision on it to be made by the Devon and Torbay CCA as the powers for the LTA transition to that body.
- 1.6 The existing LTP is the strategic transport planning document and includes within the objectives, making better use of the transport network and strengthening/improving the public transport network. There are also a list of key elements including Improvements to public transport.
- 1.7 LTPs should set out holistic place-based strategies for improving transport networks, proposed projects for investment and ultimately how key objectives will be achieved. Bus Service Improvement Plans must be fully aligned with wider Local Transport Plans.

- 1.8 A further update to the BSIP document is likely to be required in 2025. After that, BSIP documents themselves will be updated on a less than annual basis responding to need, including synchronising with cycles for Government's multiyear spending plans.

2. Options under consideration

- 2.1 There are options about the level of ambition demonstrated in the plan and therefore the extent of the proposals. Those included in this report set out a strong basis to recover and rebuild bus use in Torbay and in many ways to initially go "back to basics". The overall rate of recovery for bus passenger journeys in Torbay is around 78%, having fallen initially from 7.6 million in 2018/19 to 2.7 million in 2020/21. Concessionary passenger journeys were at 3.5 million and reduced to 0.9 million. These have recovered to 2.3 million (66%).
- 2.2 The proposals also seek to deliver the visions of corporate policy in alignment with the National Bus Strategy.
- 2.3 The document is necessary to secure the indicative 2024/25 grant funding for bus services which will support the contracts recently approved as well as contribute to improved facilities, passenger information, and possible fare promotions. To not submit a BSIP would undermine the objectives of the Community & Corporate Plan and is and this option is therefore discounted.
- 2.4 The 2024 is a 'light-touch' update of the 2021 BSIP. It proposes many of the same schemes but, in accordance with the guidance, has updated the baseline position, notes the successes to date, and realigns some of the schemes and ambitions to the future periods. It does not seek to revisit all of the schemes, nor to pursue alternative priorities and proposals at this stage.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 3.1 If the Plan is aligned to corporate and national policy, and clearly meets those respective aims and objectives, the Council will be able to bid for funding opportunities to help deliver the plan, as well as working with the bus operators and others who may be able to provide solutions for delivery. We will also be able to maximise income from external bidding opportunities.
- 3.2 Having the 2021 BSIP in place has enabled the Council to secure over £800,000 in revenue grant to support the delivery of the new bus contracts with the investment they have brought to the local network. It also acted as a reference for the recently successful bid to secure £7.1m to introduce electric buses within Torbay in the coming years.
- 3.3 The submission of a 2024 BSIP to DfT by 12 June 2024 is a condition of the provision of any DfT BSIP funding in financial year 2024/25

- 3.4 As explained in the guidance, the purpose of the 2024 BSIP is to set out a realistic and attractive plan which explains clearly what will have been delivered by the end of 2024/25 and also sets out a 'shop window' of ambitions and proposals for the years after 2025. Although the 2024 BSIP is not a bidding document, it is the delivery plan for 2024-25 funding and a report on what has already been achieved with BSIP funding, and it may be used as a factor by Government to determine future levels of funding.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 Tendering, subsidy arrangements and associated contract management will be an integral part of getting the delivery mechanisms right for this Plan.
- 4.2 The Partnership proposals will be a legal commitment between the parties (and any new bus operators starting in Torbay in future) to achieve certain standards.

5. Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 There is ongoing close working with neighbouring Councils, particularly with Devon County Council which also links with the continuing discussions around devolution. This is important with any transport plan and proposals as there are very often cross border benefits and impacts.
- 5.2 Working with operators is also key to this process. They must be able to agree, through the partnership, to implementing and supporting the measures in order for the Plan to be successful and for bus service improvements in Torbay to be realised.
- 5.3 Given that the 2024 BSIP is a progression of the 2021 BSIP, and particularly that it does not differ in the priorities or ambitions, the proposed plan has not been to public consultation. There was also insufficient time to do such consultation and engagement work. Instead, with a clarified position from Government on the way forward with these plans (which has been unclear since the original publication in 2021), it is intended that later in 2024 work will commence on a draft BSIP 2025, ensuring continued alignment with the updated Local Transport Plan, and developing more bespoke proposals with emerging data such as where and how to target fare promotions to best effect.
- 5.4 A Bus Forum has been established which the purpose of ensuring delivery of the measures within the Enhanced Partnership. That forum will be key to the development and further engagement later in 2024/25.

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

- 6.1 The proposals do include the use of existing contracts as well as new tenders for bus services or part of services.

6.2 Where possible, through both these tenders and the partnership, local skills, employment and the use of apprenticeships will be included alongside exploring opportunities where the bus sector can support the Council as a Corporate Parent and give opportunities to those for whom we have responsibility.

7. Tackling Climate Change

7.1 It is well known that transport is a considerable contributor to carbon emissions in Torbay and in our role as influencer we have both a responsibility and an opportunity to support change. This will be a core objective of the Plan.

7.2 This is firstly achieved by encouraging and giving the opportunity to our residents, visitors and those working within Torbay to switch journeys from the private car to sustainable modes, including buses. We can also further reduce emissions by reducing those emitting from the buses and progress on this has been made with new vehicles operating on the most recently tendered services and will be further improved through the delivery of electric buses following the grant funding award.

8. Associated Risks

8.1 There is a significant risk if the proposal is not implemented. This risk is that the Authority is not likely to be eligible for funding from Government towards the public transport or other specific funding opportunities for the bus network. The Partnership will need a plan for what to deliver and funding to enable delivery.

9. Equality Impacts - Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups

2021 Table	Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
Older or younger people	<p>Improved access to facilities has a positive impact on this group. All age groups with people who do not have access to a motorised vehicle are likely to be impacted. This group are less likely to have the same opportunities for other travel choices and as such may rely more on public transport.</p> <p>Young people are most likely to use buses for employment, education and training. This age group are more reliant on digital forms of information provision via mobile apps and web applications. Evidence indicates a high proportion of bus passengers are older people with concessionary passes. This group are most likely to use buses for shopping, leisure and to attend health</p>		

	<p>appointments. This age group will continue to require access to traditional paper based forms of information such as printed timetables and timetable books.</p>		
<p>People with caring Responsibilities</p>	<p>Improved access and more frequent services, linking to key facilities, could have a positive impact on this group – especially if caring within the community and helping residents to live independently. Exploring ticket options for this group is also an option proposed.</p> <p>Carers who do not have access to a motorised vehicle are likely to be impacted. The Plan seeks to make bus services more attractive, cheaper, easier to use, faster, more reliable, and greener. Vehicle and bus stop accessibility, including low floor buses, raised curbs and space to transport pushchairs and wheelchairs, is critical for carers.</p>		
<p>People with a disability</p>	<p>Ensuring that all services are fully accessible and fitted with on board audio-visual equipment, as well as ensuring there are more services, accessing more facilities will have a positive impact on this group.</p> <p>Disabled people who do not have access to a vehicle are likely to be impacted. The Plan seeks to make bus services more attractive, cheaper, easier to use, faster, more reliable, and greener. The National Travel Survey (NTS, 2019) identifies that people with a disability or illness expected to last more than 12 months make more trips by bus than those without a disability. Vehicle and bus stop accessibility, including low floor buses, raised curbs and space to transport wheelchairs, is critical for anyone with a physical impairment. Accessible information provision is also critical, both pre journey and during the journey, including traditional paper based information, digital media, and on bus announcements and displays. Through the Enhanced Partnership information will be produced in an easy to read/understand format for customers with visual, hearing, and physical disabilities, and all other customer groups.</p>		
<p>Women or men</p>	<p>The proposals will have a positive impact on both users and non-users of the bus network and as such is likely to have a positive impact on this group although there are not specific proposals.</p>		
<p>People who are black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) (Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community)</p>	<p>The proposals will have a positive impact on both users and non-users of the bus network and as such is likely to have a positive impact on this group although there are not specific proposals.</p>		

Religion or belief (including lack of belief)	The proposals will have a positive impact on both users and non-users of the bus network and as such is likely to have a positive impact on this group although there are not specific proposals.		
People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual	The proposals will have a positive impact on both users and non-users of the bus network and as such is likely to have a positive impact on this group although there are not specific proposals.		
People who are transgendered	The proposals will have a positive impact on both users and non-users of the bus network and as such is likely to have a positive impact on this group although there are not specific proposals.		
People who are in a marriage or civil partnership	The proposals will have a positive impact on both users and non-users of the bus network and as such is likely to have a positive impact on this group although there are not specific proposals.		
Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave	Ensuring that all services are fully accessible, as well as ensuring there are more services, accessing more facilities will have a positive impact on this group.		
Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)	Improved access to public transport and through those links, improved access to facilities and employment will have a positive impact on this group. Low income groups who do not have access to a car are likely to be impacted. The Plan seeks to make bus services more attractive, cheaper, easier to use, faster, more reliable, and greener.		
Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)	Supporting the community to be able to move around, not to be isolated, and to have the access to services/facilities they need and can benefit from for their health and wellbeing will have a positive impact on this group. The Plan seeks to make bus services more attractive, cheaper, easier to use, faster, more reliable, and greener.		

10. Cumulative Council Impact

- 10.1 The working relationship with SWISCO is critical for the 'highways' implementation aspects of the plan.
- 10.2 There is also a connection with Public Health, and with both Children's and Adult's services as representatives of key groups in the community who rely on the support of public transport.

11. Cumulative Community Impacts

11.1 None