

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment
Date of meeting: 25 October 2021
By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title: East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan
Purpose: To approve the draft East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and delegate the finalisation of the BSIP to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport for submission to the Department for Transport.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) approve the Aims, Objectives and Proposals contained in the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP); and**
 - (2) delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to finalise the BSIP, containing the approved Aims, Objectives and Proposals, for submission to the Department for Transport.**
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1. Background Information

1.1. Following the East Sussex County Council Public Transport Strategic Commissioning Strategy review in 2014 the Council re-prioritised its support of bus services not provided by operators on a commercial basis. The services we now subsidise are predominantly rural services, based on the need to access education, employment, health, and shopping. The current budget for subsidising bus services is £1.75m.

1.2. On Monday 15 March 2021 the Government launched “Bus Back Better”, a new bus strategy for England (outside London). It aims to rejuvenate local bus services, making them attractive for passengers, cheaper, easier to understand and use, faster and more reliable, and greener. It acknowledges the decades-long decline in bus patronage nationally and points to towns and cities which have bucked the trend, increasing passenger numbers with coordinated services and investment. Greater use of buses, and more buses being zero emission, will contribute to Government’s central objectives: carbon net zero and levelling up.

1.3. Central to these proposals for the National Bus Strategy are new requirements for Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to have a much stronger role in specifying and organising local bus services.

1.4. At the Lead Member for Transport and Environment meeting of 21 June 2021 approval was given for the development of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) for East Sussex and the giving of a notice of intent to prepare an Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme, as required, and set out in section 138F of the Transport Act 2000. The Department for Transport were informed by a statutory notice of this commitment on the 24 June 2021 and a formal notice was published of the Council’s intention to prepare an EP with the agreement of all participating local bus operators.

1.5. The government strategy places new requirements on LTAs to develop Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) and set up EPs with local bus operators, to tight timescales, with actions on networks and services, fares and ticketing, passenger facilities, and highway bus priority measures. The strategy states that if a local authority fails to take this forward, then they will lose out on their share of the £3billion of funding announced. They will also lose their current allocation of bus service operators grant (East Sussex County Council (ESCC) receives £426K pa), as well as expected revenue grants to support operators in maintaining services whilst passenger numbers recover post-Covid.

1.6. The Government’s ambition for EPs is that their creation and investment will deliver a transformed bus offer. They envisage coordinated, more comprehensive bus networks, with better coverage and services operating for longer hours at higher frequencies than now.

2. Supporting Information

2.1. East Sussex County Council carried out a Bus Service Improvement Plan Survey between 17 August 2021 and 14 September 2021. Over 2,000 responses were received. The results of the online

survey are detailed in Appendix G of the BSIP (in Appendix 2 of this report) and below are some of the key findings:

- All respondents overwhelmingly considered that the most important improvement priority would be more frequent services, including operating in evenings and on Sundays
- Those who hold concessionary permits (i.e., older and disabled people) considered that more real time information was their second priority
- Those who do not hold concessionary permits regard lower fares as their second priority
- All respondents regarded faster and more reliable services, helped by bus priorities, as their third highest improvement priority

2.2. In addition to the survey, Stakeholder Engagement was also carried out with surveys being directly sent to:

- Members of Parliament representing East Sussex constituencies
- District, borough, parish, and town councils
- Schools
- Special interest groups
- Residents' associations
- Relevant council officers

The details of these responses are also included in Appendix G of the BSIP.

2.3. In undertaking this BSIP, the County Council has worked in close co-operation with its bus operators and with our neighbouring local transport authorities West Sussex County Council, Kent County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council. In view of the significant daily movements between the local transport authorities, the movement corridors between these authorities have been treated in a holistic manner to maximise benefits to all residents.

3. East Sussex BSIP

3.1. The Government's National Bus Strategy for England 'Bus Back Better' 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 the bus. This East Sussex BSIP outlines our ambitions, sets out structured plans and supporting policies to improve bus services, their delivery and promotion and the vehicles used, working in close co-operation with our neighbouring local transport authorities, with operators, with stakeholders representing:

- statutory consultees,
- community and business voices,
- bus passengers
- the voluntary and health transport sectors.

An Executive Summary of the BSIP is available at Appendix 1 of this report.

3.2. The National Bus Strategy has asked us to work together at pace to plan and deliver:

- A fully integrated service
- Simple, multi-modal, and attractively priced tickets
- Provide significantly more bus priority
- High-quality information for all passengers in more places
- Higher frequencies that keep running into the evenings and at weekends
- Flexible services that are available on demand

3.3. The resultant enhanced bus network we have planned in this BSIP comprehensively delivers all the above factors through a combination of conventional and on-demand bus services. The stakeholder engagement we have undertaken has identified the needs and desires of residents and visitors. These needs and desires have shaped the Council's proposals for the network enhancements. Officers have also worked collaboratively with bus operators to develop an effective and ambitious enhanced network.

3.4. The detail on specific schemes will follow on from this BSIP. This will include consultation around certain proposals, for example, bus priority schemes, and all measures proposed in the BSIP will be subject to funding being identified. Equality impacts will be identified and considered throughout the development of the BSIP and will inform proposals moving forward.

3.5. This East Sussex BSIP sets out our ambitions for bus growth targets in relation to passenger volumes, mileage operated, vehicle requirements, targeted fare reductions, accessibility to both high frequency services and rural transport provision and multi-modal ticketing. The BSIP provides a traceable path of action from the current state network to that desired in the future, explaining how this growth will be delivered and the targets set for mileposts in 2025 and beyond.

3.6. The East Sussex BSIP describes in outline terms how the County Council and bus operators in its area can achieve the overarching goal of the National Bus Strategy - to grow bus patronage: both to build it back after the pandemic and then to increase it and raise bus mode share. We have listened carefully to the views and priorities of our stakeholders and incorporated them into this BSIP.

3.7. The East Sussex BSIP will be reviewed biannually and updated annually and will be aligned with the County's Local Transport Plan. The review process will be undertaken in consultation with operators and key stakeholders as described in the BSIP.

3.8. The success of our ambitious plan is dependent on receiving appropriate funding from central government. Without such funding, our ability to introduce new routes or services is very limited. However, the Department for Transport has indicated that the ambition shown in our BSIP will be a determining factor in how much funding will be allocated. Once it is clear what level of funding will be provided, the proposals in this BSIP can then be prioritised as it is unlikely that all our proposals will be fully funded.

4. East Sussex BSIP Aims and Objectives

4.1. Our Aims

The BSIP has the following aims, which represent our statements of intent at a high level:

- Significant quality improvements in bus provision across the whole of the county
- Significantly more bus priority schemes designed to reduce journey times and enhance reliability
- A bus network that relates to the needs of all potential users
- Simplified fares and ticketing and reduced fares, particularly for young passengers under the age of 30
- A step change in terms of improved services for rural areas
- Technical and operational innovation in bus service provision
- Bus patronage in the county not only to recover to their pre-pandemic levels, but to significantly grow in future years

4.2. Our Objectives

To achieve these aims, East Sussex County Council has developed the following objectives:

- To launch new Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) schemes for all rural communities, with an objective of providing all residents with access to a 'bus' (shared transport) service. These will be based on innovative demand led principles and employ advanced technological solutions
- To increase bus service provision across the county, with a particular focus on main corridors and urban locations
- To additionally ensure enhanced access to services (conventional and flexible) evenings and weekends
- To continue and to enhance our work with bus operators to improve commercial bus services and to provide new services where demand can be identified
- To create a series of Mobility Hubs in key town locations in East Sussex, with high quality interchange connections between transport services including links with routes from the County Council's walking and cycling strategy
- To enhance the waiting environment for bus passengers by assuming responsibility for bus stops and shelters, improving their quality and standard and ensuring that up to date and well-

designed information is available through a variety of media (including in static and digital formats)

- To implement bus priority measures that will improve bus journey times and improve reliability, achieving a minimum of 95% punctuality (average across all bus services)
- To offer a simplified, yet sophisticated range of better value tickets, available to use on all bus operators' services and integrated across public transport modes.
- To introduce a new discounted concessionary bus travel scheme for children and young people, including all under 30s resident in East Sussex.
- To remove travel time restrictions for disabled concessionary travel pass holders
- To greatly improve marketing, promotion, and information for the significantly better bus provision
- To support and expedite the transition to Zero Emission Buses used on the network as part of the drive to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2050 and to assist operators to upgrade existing diesel buses to Euro VI standard to reduce emission, particularly within Air Quality Management Areas

5. Next Steps

5.1. Subject to the approval of the Lead Member to the proposals contained within the draft BSIP, the next steps are to:

- Finalise the BSIP with all the appendices and submit this to the Department for Transport by the 31 October deadline;
- Continue to work with our bus operators in developing the EP. The government have stated that EP should be in place from April 2022, therefore, a report will be presented to Lead Member for Transport and Environment on the finalised proposals for the EP prior to its submission.

6. Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendations

6.1. The Council's mission as a local transport authority is to ensure that East Sussex residents and visitors enjoy the highest possible quality bus services that provide a frequent and comprehensive choice, reduce congestion, and make a positive contribution to better air quality and decarbonisation. This mission is supported by our authority's bus operators who will play a key role in its delivery.

6.2. The East Sussex BSIP is a highly ambitious plan that seeks to stimulate and drive significant improvements to bus services across the local authority area and the wider region. These improvements are intended to:

- Initially recover bus usage from the Covid-19 pandemic, taking account of consequential changes in travel patterns
- To increase bus usage significantly in the next few years and then continue to eventually deliver a transformational change in bus usage
- Deliver a step change in bus provision to both current and new bus users
- Seek to readdress the balance in mode share between private and public transport
- Tackle vehicle emission and climate change concerns
- Ensure that buses are not only considered in every delivery step but are a fundamental and fully integrated part of our policy, strategy, and delivery process

6.3. The Lead Member for Transport and Environment is recommended to:

- a) approve the Aims, Objectives and Proposals contained in the draft BSIP (Appendix 2); and
- b) delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to finalise the BSIP, containing the approved Aims, Objectives and Proposals, for submission to the Department for Transport by 31 October 2021.

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LOCAL MEMBERS - All members

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS - None