

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment
Date of meeting: 15 July 2024
By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title: East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan
Purpose: To provide an update on the draft East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2024 update and seek authority for the delegation of the finalisation of the BSIP 2024 update to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport for submission to the Department for Transport (DfT).

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Endorse the draft BSIP 2024 update; and
 - (2) Delegate authority to finalise the BSIP 2024 update for submission to the Department for Transport to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.
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1. Background Information

- 1.1. The National Bus Strategy for England was published in March 2021, and included a requirement for local transport authorities (LTAs) outside London to prepare a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). East Sussex County Council's (ESCC's) BSIP is a joint plan in conjunction with East Sussex Enhanced Partnership (EP) members and agreed between ESCC and bus operators, who are the voting members of the EP Board. On the 25 October 2021 the Lead Member for Transport and Environment approved the Aims, Objectives and Proposals contained in the draft BSIP. These first BSIPs served as bidding documents, and the Department for Transport (DfT) awarded ESCC £41.4 million, one of the largest awards to any county council in England. LTAs prepared incremental updates to their BSIPs in 2022. In January 2024, DfT instructed LTAs to prepare a second BSIP update, along with a Bus Connectivity Assessment. ESCC submitted both of these by the deadline on 12 June 2024.
- 1.2. The BSIP 2024 update details what has been delivered to date and what will be delivered within the current BSIP period as well as setting out ambitions beyond the current BSIP period. The BSIP update is not a bidding document but does clearly set out long-term ambitions in terms of bus service improvements.
- 1.3. ESCC's shared mission remains the same now as in 2021: 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.

2. Supporting Information

Current BSIP investments

2.1. Key investments following ESCC's 2021 BSIP include:

- **Schedule bus services:** improvements to scheduled services (these are funded to 31 March 2026 after a 1-year extension to the funding period which was approved by the DfT). For detailed information on the bus service improvements delivered through the BSIP please visit: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/serviceimprovements
- **Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT):** digitally-enable demand responsive Flexibus service, which covers over 90% of East Sussex and brings 95% of rural residents within 30 minutes travel time of key destinations, 12 hours a day, 6 days a week – for further details of the FlexiBus service please see Appendix 2 or visit the FlexiBus website – www.eastsussex.gov.uk/flexibus;

- **Bus Priority:** design work on 4 on-street bus priority schemes and on bus priority at all 32 signal-controlled junctions in East Sussex;
- **Fare reductions and simplification:**
 - young person's fare reductions
 - a new multi-operator day ticket
 - the national £2 fare cap for single trips (funded directly by DfT to the bus operators)
- **QR codes:** at all bus stops in East Sussex, giving easy access to next bus departure information;
- **Interchange improvements;**
- **Bus stop improvements:** across the county, including new bus stops, raised kerbs giving level boarding, new and refurbished shelters;
- **Mobility Hubs:** construction of a new mobility hub at Uckfield (construction starting in July 2024) and design work for the new hub at Hailsham.

2.2 Following this significant investment, passenger numbers have grown from their low point during the COVID-19 pandemic. On some routes and for some passenger groups, passenger numbers are now higher than they were before the pandemic (in 2019). ESCC are currently conducting in-depth evaluation of the social and economic impacts of this investment and will include the results of the final version of the BSIP 2024 update (planned to be submitted to DfT in August 2024).

Further Work Within this BSIP Period

2.3. On Street Bus Priority

ESCC will progress work on the following bus lanes and junction improvements, taking them through detailed design to construction within funding constraints and subject to necessary approvals:

- Eastbourne – Seaside and Town centre (Station Parade)
- Peacehaven - South Coast Road
- Newhaven - Town centre ring road and Denton / The Drove

ESCC will deliver bus priority at 32 junctions in East Sussex through the BSIP bus priority project.

2.4. FlexiBus

- Extension of service period: extend the Flexibus service provision from the current 31 March 25 by a year to 31 March 2026 if there is sufficient funding.
- Enhance FlexiBus service provision to provide more journey opportunities by merging all 7 current zones into 1, subject to a distance limit. This will also allow more efficient vehicle and driver deployment. There will be consideration of extending the FlexiBus service to include Eastbourne District General Hospital.
- Taxis: ESCC will pilot the use of private hire taxis as additions to the existing FlexiBus fleet.
- Funding: ESCC will also consider how best to use funding streams to make the FlexiBus service as cost effective as possible.
- New vehicles will be introduced in July 2024

2.5. Bus Service Improvements

ESCC continues to develop service improvements throughout the current BSIP period, reviewing performance and taking necessary action to modify existing enhancements or introduce new enhancements. A summary of what ESCC proposes to deliver within the current BSIP period can be found below. For full details please see section 3 of Appendix 1.

- Improved access to Bexhill Hospital.
- Improved access to Eastbourne District General Hospital and Hastings Conquest Hospital.
- Route 29: enhanced Monday to Saturday daytime service and recently introduced evening and Sunday provision.

- Route 51: further promotional activity for the service.
- Route 313: improve coordination between buses and trains at Rye station.
- Route 1066: promotional activity.
- Hastings network reinvigoration.
- Eastbourne route 1,1A: restore the previously commercial 10-minute Monday to Saturday daytime frequency.
- Support Bexhill Community Bus.

2.6. Real-time Passenger Information

- Roll out improved and new real-time information installations across the county, supplementing the 197 existing sites with 135 new installations and upgrades to 45 existing signs.

2.7. Mobility hubs

- ESCC will complete the new Uckfield Mobility Hub (due to open in autumn 2024), and construction works for the Hailsham Mobility Hub are expected to start in September 2024.

Ambitions and proposals beyond 2026

2.8. Network improvements:

The 2024 BSIP update includes aspirations for more bus network improvements beyond the current funding, in 2026 and beyond, subject to further funding being secured. Please refer to section 4 of Appendix 1 for details of these proposals.

2.9. Fares and ticketing

Maintain reduced fares and explore further multi-operator ticketing.

- look to reduce fares in real terms, to ensure bus travel continues to be affordable and attractive for as many residents and visitors as possible and develop new multi-operator ticketing products.
- participation in any regional ticketing integration initiatives, national tap on / tap off initiative and is keen to explore Mobility as a Service (MaaS) deployments.

2.10. Longer term network Development

2029 and beyond: ESCC supports plans for high-quality mass transit including using strategic mobility hubs to intercept car trips heading into towns and cities. Please refer to section 4.7 of Appendix 1 for further details.

2.11. On-street priority and junction improvements

New on-street bus lanes and junction reconfigurations where they will have a significant impact on bus running times and punctuality. ESCC will progress work on additional bus priority proposals in Eastbourne, Seaford, Peacehaven, Newhaven and Hastings.

2.12. Bus stop Infrastructure

- Upgrades to bus stops – better shelters, kerbs and more bus stop clearways to allow easier boarding
- New bus stops where new demand is clear, e.g. to serve new residential developments
- New mobility hubs
- Engagement with partner organisations to consider taking ownership and control of bus shelters (funding permitting) across the County

2.13. Real-time Passenger Information

- Real-Time Passenger Information (RTPI): new installations and upgrades of RTPI displays;

2.14. Marketing and promotion

- Continue to coordinate marketing across members of the EP.

2.15. Passenger Charter

- The passenger charter, will be reviewed through the Enhanced Partnership in 2025

2.16. Fleet

- Operators continue to invest their own resources in fleet renewal, with new vehicles on order for delivery in 2024 and 2025.

2.17. Management and operations

- ESCC will retain the enlarged BSIP-funded Bus Team in post in ESCC in 2025/26 to support the continued delivery of the conventional and flexible bus services and seek to identify longer-term funding streams to maintain these roles.
- ESCC will continue to operate Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) enforcement on existing and any new bus lanes, to deter other motorists from driving in them to reduce bus journey times and improve punctuality to support passenger growth.

2.18. Zero Emission Buses

- Collaborate with operators to introduce zero emission buses in East Sussex. ESCC will pursue future funding opportunities as they occur.

Next Steps

2.19. Subject to the approval of the Lead Member to delegate to the Director of Communities Economy and Transport the authority to finalise the BSIP update for submission to the DfT the next steps are to:

- Finalise the BSIP 2024 update and submit this to the DfT.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. ESCC'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 bus operators who will play a key role in its delivery.

3.2. The original East Sussex BSIP submitted in October 2021 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. The BSIP 2024 update details what has been delivered to date, what will be delivered within the current BSIP funding period and ambitions beyond. The BSIP 2024 update continues to show ambitions to deliver the highest possible quality bus services that meet the needs of East Sussex residents and visitors.

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

1. Endorse the draft BSIP 2024 update (Appendix 1).
2. Delegate the authority to finalise the BSIP 2024 update for submission to the DfT to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All members

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

[East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan](#)