

# Cabinet



Date of meeting:	09 February 2023
Title of Report:	<b>National Bus Strategy: Formation of Enhanced Partnership and Bus Service Improvement Plan Refresh</b>
Lead Member:	Councillor Jonathan Drean (Cabinet Member for Transport)
Lead Strategic Director:	Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place)
Author:	Debbie Newcombe (Sustainable Transport Coordinator)
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Your Reference:	EP Cabinet 230209
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

## Purpose of Report

This report seeks Cabinet approval to form an Enhanced Partnership with the city's bus operators in accordance with the National Bus Strategy, to commence from 1 April 2023. This is a legally binding partnership made in accordance with SI 38G (I) of the Transport Act 2000.

The report also seeks approval to undertake a complete refresh of the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), originally approved by Cabinet on 12 October 2021. This submission was unsuccessful and following feedback from the Department for Transport on the reasons why this was the case, the Council need to ensure that the Council's BSIP is more positive and ambitious as the Council's "Shop Window". The BSIP shows that the Council has a plan for buses and is what the Department for Transport will refer to in future in deciding future funding allocations for improving bus services.

## Recommendations and Reasons

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the formation of a statutory Enhanced Partnership with the city's bus operators from 1 April 2023.

**Reason:** To ensure the Council complies with its statutory duty as Local Transport Authority.

2. Approve the process of refreshing the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan by 30 June 2023.

**Reason:** To ensure that Plymouth remains best placed to receive future rounds of Government funding for bus services, as it is the BSIP that will determine the allocation of funding.

3. To give delegated authority to the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, in association with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to approve the publication of the updated Bus Service Improvement Plan.

**Reason:**

To allow the publication of an updated BSIP by 30 June 2023, to ensure the Council is ready to respond to invitations to bid for funding when the next opportunity arises.

**Alternative options considered and rejected**

The legislation surrounding the formation of partnership arrangements with the city's bus operators is able to take the form of an Enhanced Partnership or a Franchise arrangement.

Franchising was considered, but rejected on the grounds that this level of oversight on the city's bus operations was not required, and an Enhanced Partnership would be more effective for local circumstances, given the positive relationships and established working practices that are already in place with the Council's local bus operators. On 25 June 2021, the Council approved the development of an Enhanced Partnership with the city's bus operators and published a Notice of Intent on the same date.

There is no requirement for the Council to undertake a full refresh of its Bus Service Improvement Plan in 2023, so there is an option to only produce an annual update of where the Council are in terms of delivery and achieving the targets set out in the Plan. However, given the feedback received on the Council's original submission, the Council needs to act on this and therefore fully refresh the BSIP to ensure the Council is in a good position for future funding allocations, given that the BSIP is a bidding document for future bus service funding.

**Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan**

The provision of a comprehensive public transport network supports both Plymouth's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and its sustainable growth, by providing residents with sustainable transport options to access employment, education, healthcare, leisure and retail opportunities. The formation of an Enhanced Partnership and refresh of the Council's BSIP will ensure that these objectives can be achieved.

**Links to the Corporate Plan:**

The development of the Enhanced Partnership and BSIP supports the city's mission to 'build back better' and make Plymouth a great place to live, work and visit.

Whilst the Council is taking responsibility for the improvement of Plymouth's bus services through this process, the Council is, and will continue, to work closely with Plymouth's public transport providers, to deliver the Council's common ambition of making buses easier, cheaper, and more convenient to use, to encourage modal shift and patronage growth.

**Council Priorities**

**Unlocking the city's potential** – Plymouth already has a comprehensive bus network. However, delivery of the objectives of the National Bus Strategy, through an Enhanced Partnership, provides an opportunity, in partnership with the Council's operators, to make buses more affordable and more convenient for customers whilst still ensuring they can access the employment, education, medical and leisure facilities they need. This will support the recovery of both the city and public transport and allow both to build back better.

**Caring for people and communities** – Buses provide valuable links to shops, healthcare, employment, education and leisure for those citizens who do not have access to the private car or other modes of transport. Improving the current bus network across the city, in accordance with the National Bus Strategy, will ensure that residents have affordable transport options, reducing the risk of isolation, resulting in improved independence and wellbeing.

### **Links to the Plymouth Plan:**

Provision of a comprehensive bus network, through the development of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme, and the refresh of the Council's BSIP supports the delivery of the strategy set out within the Plymouth Plan and in particular policies HEA6 (Delivering a safe, accessible, sustainable and health enabling transport system) and GRO4 (Using transport investment to drive growth, and commitment to facilitate the use of sustainable transport modes).

The Plymouth Plan seeks to help deliver a transport system that enables and encourages sustainable and active travel choices, provides good accessibility for the city's population to jobs and services, and supports a healthy environment. Through the requirements of the National Bus Strategy the Council will actively support the Plymouth Plan policy commitments to:

- HEA6(5) [Deliver] a public transport system that everyone can use, including working with the bus companies to provide easier ticketing, clear journey planning and timetable information, and accessible boarding and alighting across the city.
- HEA6 (6) [Work] with public transport providers to ensure that each neighbourhood is well connected to the city's High Quality Public Transport Network offering good accessibility to key destinations.
- HEA6(9) [Work] with the Council's partners, including the charitable sector, to provide community transport to enable people who cannot use conventional public transport to access health, leisure, shopping and social opportunities within the city and surrounding area.
- HEA6 (10) [Work] with regional partners, agencies and public transport operators to deliver an integrated transport system across all modes covering key locations within and adjoining the Plymouth Travel to Work Area.

The BSIP will also positively support the delivery of the commitments within the Plan to help deliver targeted integrated transport measures to help support the sustainable growth of Plymouth, in accordance with the vision, objectives and policies of the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan. Specifically:

- GRO4 (1) Continuing to support the High Quality Public Transport Network and improve public and sustainable transport services through, where appropriate, subsidies and new infrastructure.
- GRO4 (2) Maintaining, improving and expanding the network of Park & Ride facilities and services, addressing the needs of both Derriford and the City Centre including a new facility at Deep Lane, exploring suitable locations for new facilities and considering the reallocation of space at existing sites.
- GRO4 (3) Continuing to support and develop new and existing local passenger ferry services, by working with stakeholders.
- GRO4 (7) Continuing to support and where feasible expand Community Transport schemes.
- GRO4 (13) Use of smarter choices and travel planning to provide and promote travel choice, through the planning process.
- GRO4 (15) Developing and delivering targeted infrastructure interventions, consistent with the long term vision and objectives for transport set out in the Joint Local Plan.

The BSIP also supports the following policies of the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan:

- SPT9 (5)5, where it states that the local Planning and Highway Authorities with key stakeholders will deliver: “realistic sustainable transport choices and increasing the integration of transport modes so that people have genuine alternative ways to travel;”
- SPT9 (6), which seeks to get the most out of the Council’s existing network and encourage behavioural change;
- SPT9(9) (delivering transport projects which provide a safe and effective transport system); and
- SPT (10) ‘taking local control of the Council’s transport future, embracing localism, generating independent resources to transform transport investment, and embracing changes in travel technology.’

The BSIP is a delivery plan of the Plymouth Plan.

### **Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:**

The Government has provided grant funding, totalling £395,418, which is only available to Local Transport Authorities (LTA) that did not receive a BSIP funding allocation in 2022. The purpose of the grant is to ensure that those LTAs have the ongoing internal capacity and capability to dedicate to the continued development and delivery of their BSIP and Enhanced Partnership over the next three years. The Enhanced Partnership must be in place by 1 April 2023.

Delivery of an Enhanced Partnership, and associated Bus Service Improvement Plan, will require funding. The Bus Service Improvement Plan is a bidding document. The proposals set out in the Plan must be ambitious. They must demonstrate delivery of the objectives of the National Bus Strategy and a vision for delivering a step-change in bus services through an Enhanced Partnership.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan must also be accompanied by a presentation of funding requirements, including alternative sources of funding available to support delivery of BSIPs such as operator or Local Transport Authority contributions. However, there are no financial commitments on the part of the Government, Council or public transport operators associated with the submission of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Department for Transport explicitly state that they ‘do not expect BSIPs to provide detailed, definitive costings.’

The indicative ‘ask’ from the Department for Transport for the delivery of the proposals within the original Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan was circa £118M for the period 2022/23 – 2029/30. This figure may change as the refresh of the Plan is progressed.

### **Financial Risks**

There is no direct financial risk from the recommendations of this report, as the funding received to date from the Department for Transport covers the development of the Enhanced Partnership and Bus Service Improvement Plan.

However, should approval not be granted for a refresh of the Bus Service Improvement Plan, this will significantly impact on the Council’s ability to secure funding for the bus service improvements the Council is seeking in order to improve the city’s public transport network, which is needed for generating modal shift and supporting sustainable economic growth in the future.

### **Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

The aims and objectives of the National Bus Strategy have clear synergies with the Council’s declaration of a Climate Emergency and approved Climate Emergency Action Plan. Through delivery of an enhanced bus network offering cheaper fares, enhanced frequencies, improved reliability and greater convenience



**Sign off:**

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Anthony Payne, Strategic Director for Place

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes

Date agreed: 20/01/2023

Cabinet Member approval: Approved by Councillor Drear, Cabinet Member for Transport

Date approved: 20/01/2023