

PLYMOUTH BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRAMME

Briefing Report for Publication



1. Executive Summary

Plymouth City Council have secured £1,633,126 funding from the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan+ (BSIP+) Fund. This is a new fund being made available to *'help support and improve bus services for passengers'*. It is revenue funding split equally between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

In order to maximise the impact of the grant funding and achieve the principle objective of the grant, i.e to drive passenger growth, a programme has been developed which allows the implementation of the majority of the revenue measures set out in the draft 2023 Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan, in order to test the effectiveness of the measures to generate a sustained growth in bus patronage and an increase in bus passenger satisfaction. Through doing so the programme helps to deliver against the Vision of the 2023 BSIP and the nine passenger priorities which underpin the Plan.

The proposal is to deliver a flagship east-west demonstration corridor supported by complementary ancillary activities with all activities fully funded by the BSIP+ grant.

2. Background

Plymouth City Council have secured £1,633,126 funding from the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan+ (BSIP+) Fund. This is a new fund being made available to *'help support and improve bus services for passengers'*. It is revenue funding split equally between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

The Department for Transport (DfT) have advised that the funding has been allocated on a needs basis (including metrics such as tendered mileage and population) to provide support for services in the areas that need it most.

The funding is being provided in recognition of the fact that buses are the most widely used form of public transport in the UK and the importance of local bus networks in enabling people to get to work, to education, and access services such as healthcare as well as accessing leisure and hospitality.

Utilisation of the grant funding is governed by the terms of conditions of the Fund. These include:-

- The funding should be used on actions that the Council – and local operators through [our] Enhanced Partnership – believe will deliver the best overall outcomes in growing long term patronage, revenues and thus maintaining service levels, whilst maintaining essential social and economic connectivity for local communities
- Funded measures funded need to be consistent with Departmental guidance on Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs)
- Funding decisions should be based on local circumstances and need.
- Details of how the BSIP+ funding will be spent should be included in the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership

- PCC must also prominently acknowledge the role played by HMG funding in initiatives which are delivered and
- PCC will commit (including in their Enhanced Partnership where relevant) to work with operators to promote the England National Travel Concessionary Scheme (ENCTS) and to proactively inform local residents when they become aware that they are eligible for such a concession.

The Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus Programme has been developed in accordance with these grant conditions.

3. Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus Programme

The Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus Programme has been developed following a detailed review of the draft 2023 Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan, with the ambition being to deliver as many as possible of the revenue funded measures set out within the Plymouth BSIP.

The programme therefore proposes to introduce a flagship scheme and complementary, ancillary activities, in order to achieve the objectives of the Fund i.e. growing long term patronage, revenues and thus maintaining service levels, whilst maintaining essential social and economic connectivity.

3.1 Flagship Proposal:

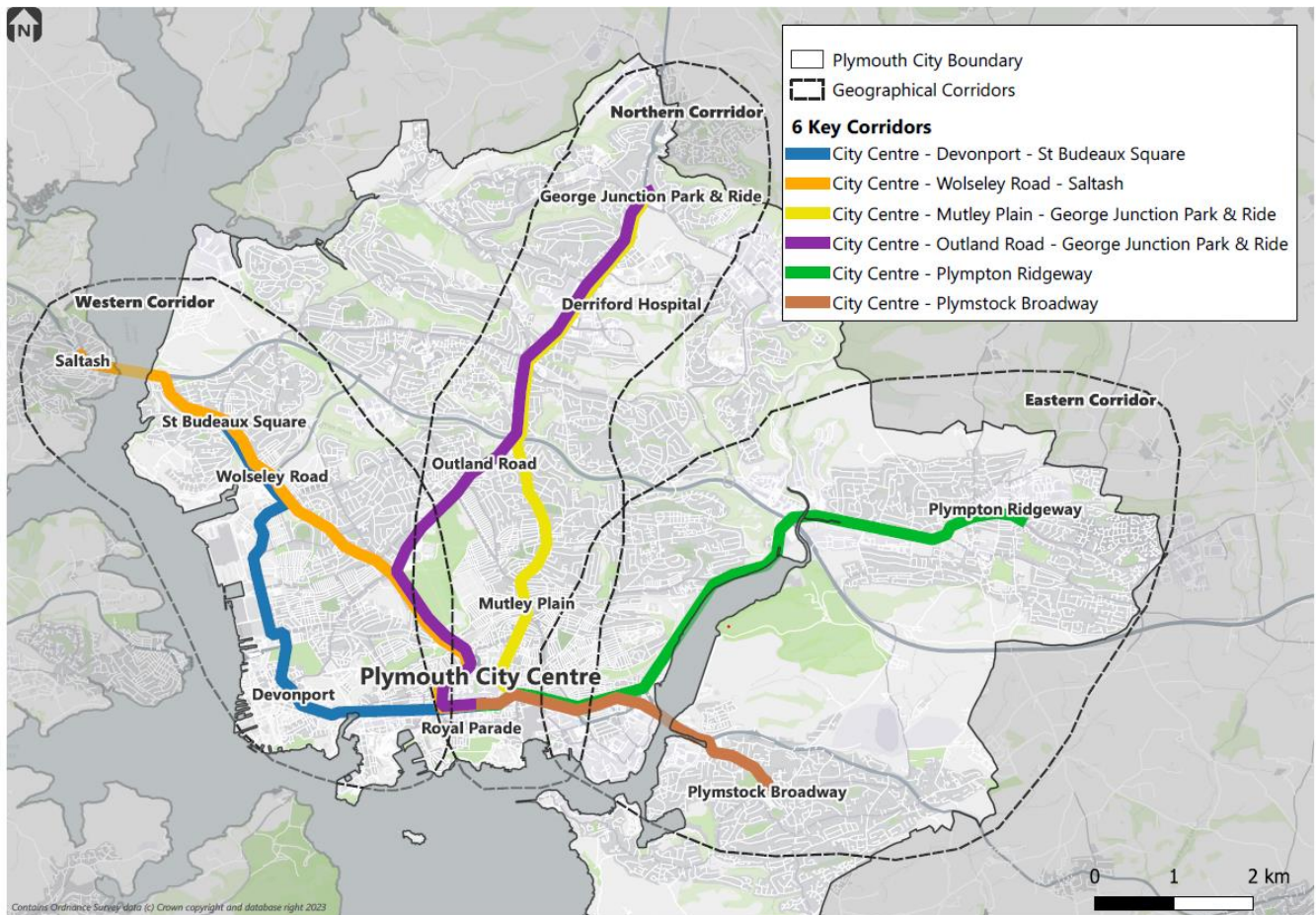
- Introduction of a BSIP+ demonstration corridor in Plymouth

The proposal is to deliver an east-west demonstration corridor in which we use the BSIP+ funding to deliver the following measures set out within the draft BSIP.

- Service enhancements
 - Addressing
 - Weekday daytimes and evenings
 - Saturday daytimes and evenings
 - Sunday daytimes and evenings
 - Providing new direct links to employment, healthcare and leisure opportunities
- Improved passenger information
 - Combined timetables
 - Passenger information
- Bus stop improvements
- Bus stop clearways
- Site improvements at Coypool Park and Ride

The demonstration corridor will span four of the six core corridors set out within the Bus Service Improvement Plan (Figure One);

- City Centre – Devonport (via Union Street) – St Budeaux Square
- City Centre – Plympton Ridgeway
- City Centre – Plymstock Broadway
- City Centre – Wolseley Road - Saltash

Figure One: Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Core Corridors

The rationale for the delivery of demonstration corridor is to maximise the impact of the funding. By concentrating delivery on a defined area it allows the programme to test the impact of as many as possible of the BSIP revenue measures and assess their combined effectiveness in boosting bus patronage and increasing passenger satisfaction, two of the four BSIP targets. This will help inform the roll out of the BSIP interventions citywide when further funding becomes available.

An east-west demonstration corridor is proposed because:-

- (1) The City Centre – Devonport – St Budeaux Square corridor is one of the strongest bus corridors in Plymouth. It is therefore expected that improvements to bus services in this area will lead to a larger and quicker increase in bus patronage than if delivered elsewhere, supporting a virtuous cycle of growth and increasing the likelihood that service enhancements kick-started by the BSIP+ funding become commercially viable post the funding period.
- (2) The wards to the west and south west of the city, in general, have higher population densities and hence the potential demand for bus services is higher than elsewhere
- (3) The wards to the west and south west of the city are those where travel to work by bus is highest – again providing an established demand for high quality bus services
- (4) As part of the Active Travel Social Prescribing programme the Plymotion travel advisors are working in the west of the city and hence will be able to promote and advise residents of the bus service improvements
- (5) By improving services in the east of the city (the Plympton and Plymstock corridors), where car use is higher, it affords the opportunity to deliver modal shift and support the Council's climate emergency actions.

In addition to the delivery of the demonstration corridor it is also proposed to deliver the following measures as part of the BSIP+ programme.

3.2 Ancillary proposals:

- Expansion of Plymouth's non-commercial routes network to include a dedicated leisure service to Bovisand and the reinstatement of a bus service to the communities of Mannamead, Hartley Vale and Peverell which lost their bus in January this year¹.
- Retention of Plymouth's existing non-commercial routes network until , at least, March 2025
- Support for Access Plymouth; allowing access to key services by residents unable to use traditional public transport
- Continuing to staff the George Junction P&R travel centre
- Funding an apprentice within Public Transport to support the delivery of the expanded programme of works being managed by the team
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the BSIP programme; with particular emphasis on the demonstration corridor

3.3 Alignment with the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan

The vision of the draft Plymouth 2023 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) is to create a thriving bus network where everyone can be connected to important people and places, by services that are frequent, reliable, fast, affordable, and safe and clean, which will also help Plymouth to achieve its net zero goals by 2030.

The draft 2023 Plymouth BSIP is underpinned by nine passenger priorities. These are:

1. More **frequent** services, more buses in the evenings and at weekends and more services (on major routes) where you can 'turn up and go' without needing to refer to a timetable
2. More **reliable** services, with **faster** journey times (using bus priority measures such as bus lanes and bus gates)
3. **Affordable** fares that are competitive with travelling by car, cheap multi-operator tickets and contactless payment options on every bus
4. More measures to help people feel **safe**, such as CCTV on buses, emergency help points in bus shelters and improved lighting. Also a commitment to make better use of real time passenger information, QR codes and apps to notify passengers about service disruptions and cancellations while they wait at stops
5. **Cleaner** buses and more enjoyable bus stop environments
6. **Simple** and accurate information at bus stops, online and on smart phone apps, which is easy to read and **understand**
7. New and extended **direct** routes to key areas and locations (such as major employers and leisure destinations); a limit of two timetable changes a year (so passengers can get to know routes and timings better); buses that are **connected** with other sustainable transport (such as trains, ferries and e-bikes); and dial-a-ride vehicles that better support communities on the outskirts of Plymouth
8. **Accessible** services, with more bus stop clearways, adequate space for a wheelchair and audio-visual 'next stop' information on buses and a commitment to customer service training to better support elderly and disabled passengers on all services

¹ These proposals are the subject of a separate Executive Decision

9. **Modern** buses that tackle climate change and are attractive, spacious, comfortable and suited to the needs of all passengers, with more buses providing child and family-friendly features such as additional space or fold-up seats to accommodate multiple pushchairs

The Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus programme responds to these priorities and delivers, in part, seven of the BSIP revenue measures (Table One).

Table One: Revenue BSIP measures

Main theme	BSIP measure	Timescales			Inclusion within the BSIP+ Programme
		Short	Medium	Long	
Accessible	Bus stop clearways	✓			Yes
Frequent	Enhanced frequencies	✓			Yes
Simple and understandable	Co-ordinated timetable information	✓			Yes
Frequent	Restored, enhanced and expanded park and ride network	✓			Yes
Safe	The George Park and Ride Travel Centre	✓			Yes
Direct and connected	Cross-city urban loop service	✓			No
Clean	Bus stop improvements	✓			Yes
Team resource	Ongoing BSIP resource for delivery and monitoring	✓	✓	✓	Yes
Direct and Connected	Market research to include researching the demand for night buses and DRT on core corridors	✓			No
Affordable	Skipper ticket: for multi-operator and multi-modal journeys	✓			No
Simple and understandable	Permanent route and destination based Personalised Travel Planning	✓			No
Simple and understandable	Community Transport Travel Centre		✓		No

Through delivering seven of the revenue measures set out in the BSIP the BSIP+ programme supports the delivery of the strategy set out within the Plymouth Plan, 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).

This is because, through the BSIP+ programme, the following commitments are achieved:-

- [Deliver] a public transport system that everyone can use, including working with the bus companies to provide, clear journey planning and timetable information HEA6(5)
- [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(6)
- [Work] with our 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(9)
- [Continue] to support the High Quality Public Transport Network and improve public and sustainable transport services through, where appropriate, subsidies and new infrastructure. GRO4 (1)
- [Maintain, improve and expand] the network of Park & Ride facilities and services GRO4 (2)
- [Continue] to support and where feasible expand Community Transport schemes. GRO4 (7)
- Use smarter choices and travel planning to provide and promote travel choice, through the planning process GRO4 (13) and

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 our 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 our transport future, embracing localism, generating independent resources to transform transport investment, and embracing changes in travel technology.’

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The use of the Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus funding is governed by the conditions of the grant. These are that:

- ‘The funding must be spent on bus measures. It cannot be used for measures that primarily benefit other modes of transport, with secondary benefits for buses (e.g. road maintenance).
- We expect you to use the funding to maintain existing service levels or on measures that are consistent with Departmental guidance on Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs)...’

Therefore, all options considered for the BSIP+ programme relate to the delivery of Plymouth’s Bus Service Improvement Plan. The alternative options considered and rejected were therefore:-

4.1 Option One: Development of an alternative BSIP+ programme, where projects are delivered citywide, rather than a focus on a flagship corridor.

The Fund allows the Council to 'use the funding to target it on the actions that they – and local operators through their Enhanced Partnership (where relevant)- believe will deliver the best overall outcomes in growing long term patronage, revenues and thus maintaining service levels, whilst maintaining essential social and economic connectivity for local communities'. Whilst a citywide programme of measures was considered this was rejected, in favour of a demonstration corridor, with accompanying, complementary ancillary measures, in order to maximise the impact of the funding. By concentrating delivery on a defined area it allows the programme to test the impact of as many as possible of the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan revenue measures and assess their combined effectiveness in boosting bus patronage and increasing passenger satisfaction, two of the four Bus Service Improvement Plan targets. This will help inform the roll out of the BSIP interventions citywide when further funding becomes available.

4.2 Option Two: Development of an alternative BSIP+ programme, which includes ticketing and fares initiatives.

The Fund does allow the delivery of fares initiatives. However, this was rejected due to the ongoing, national, fare cap programme which is expected to continue until November 2024. It was considered that the funds could be better used to support other aspects of the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan, whilst a nationally funded fares initiative was being delivered.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISK

The Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus programme will be funded, in its entirety, from the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) funding which has been awarded to the Council.

£1,633,126 has been allocated from the Fund to Plymouth City Council. Of which £816,563 will be paid in 2023/24 and £816,563 will be paid in 2024/25. The funding is revenue funding and the 2023/24 funding is due to be received by the Council at the end of September 2023.

It is assumed that the 2024/25 BSIP+ payment is paid 12 months after the 2023/24 BSIP payment, rather than in April 2024 and hence Year 1 of the programme runs from September 2023 to August 2024 and Year 2 of the programme runs from September 2024 to August 2025. Were this not to be the case and 2024/25 funds to be received in April 2024 the programme would still be deliverable as the majority of expenditure is proposed to be on services with contracts ending in March 2025.

In accepting the BSIP+ grant Plymouth City Council accepts responsibility for meeting any costs over and above the Department's contribution, including potential cost overruns. However, the financial risk to the Council is minimal because the programme developed includes a contingency and all procurements undertaken in relation to this programme will only be awarded if affordable within the programme budget.

However, there are additional financial implications of accepting the Department for Transport BSIP+ fund as set out on the Memorandum of Understanding between the DfT and Council for the Fund. These are:-

- The Authority must maintain their bus budgets from all sources. This must demonstrate that BSIP+ funding is additional to previously agreed council budgets.

- To be eligible for future funding including 2024/25 BSIP+ funding, the overall authority bus budget must be maintained at least at the same level. If concessionary travel reimbursements are reduced, the corresponding budget must be reinvested into other bus measures (e.g. tendered services).

6. TIMESCALES

The Plymouth BSIP+ programme is a two year programme with the grant being received in two tranches. The 2023/24 grant is expected to be paid to PCC in late September 2023. On receipt of the funding it is expected that 'the grant funding to be spent within a reasonable timeframe and outputs delivered within 12 months of funding receipt'.

The Plymouth BSIP+ programme will commence in October 2023 with annual reports being submitted to the DfT on expenditure and delivery.

In compliance with the Condition of the Fund the BSIP+ measures will also be included within the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership. This will be achieved through the schemes being included within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme, through variation of the current Scheme, as permitted by the Governance for the Enhanced Partnership, with the target date for the variation to be completed being December 2023.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport:

- Approves the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus Programme Business Case;
- Authorise the commencement of the procurement processes required to deliver the Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus programme;
- Delegates the authority to award the contracts to the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, where they do not already have the authority to do so.;
- Delegates the authority to dynamically manage the programme, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, where necessary and within financial approval thresholds to the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure.