

Bus Services Improvement Plan 3

Briefing Report

29 October 2024



1.0 Executive summary

On 15 March 2021 the Government published the National Bus Strategy for England 'Bus Back Better'¹. The Strategy sets out an ambitious vision to dramatically improve bus services across England (outside London) to first reverse the long term decline in the number of journeys made by bus and second encourage passengers back to the bus, post the Covid-19 pandemic. It is intended that the Strategy will deliver cheaper, more frequent and more reliable bus services for passengers.

The National Bus Strategy requires the Council, as LTA, to:-

- Establish a formal partnership arrangement, led by the Council, as the Local Transport Authority (LTA), for all local bus services operated within the city boundary.

The Council approved the development of an Enhanced Partnership with the city's bus operators, and published a Notice of Intent² on the 25th of June 2021. The statutory Enhanced Partnership subsequently commenced on the 1st of April 2023.

- Lead the preparation of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for submission to the Department for Transport (DfT). The BSIP must set out what the Partnership will deliver in order to make buses easier, cheaper and more convenient to use.

This report seeks to update the Natural Infrastructure and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel on Plymouth's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), following the publication of the Council's third BSIP in the summer (Bus Service Improvement Plan – Summer 2024).

The Council's first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) was originally approved by Cabinet on 12 October 2021 and subsequently submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT). Plymouth was one of 79 authorities to submit a BSIP, but, unfortunately, was unsuccessful in securing a funding allocation for its delivery. The DfT provided constructive feedback as to why the Plymouth BSIP was not funded in the first round of BSIP funding. This was predominantly around the use of language within the document, which in places was judged as lacking positivity and assertiveness, and the targets not being sufficiently ambitious, had the funding been awarded. At the time the DfT stressed that the BSIP would remain the bidding document for future rounds of funding and provided constructive comments around improvements that could be made to maximise Plymouth's chances of receiving future funding.

¹ [Bus back better - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

² [Microsoft Word - 210625 - Statutory Notice - Final \(plymouth.gov.uk\)](https://plymouth.gov.uk)

A refresh of the BSIP was therefore approved by Cabinet in February 2023, with approval to publish the updated Plan being delegated to the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, in association with the Cabinet Member for Transport.

To support the refinement of the BSIP the Council, on behalf of the Plymouth Enhanced Bus Partnership (the partnership between the Council and local bus operators) hosted a visit from the DfT's Buses Team in June 2023, with the updated, draft, BSIP subsequently being presented to the Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2023, ahead of its finalisation and publication in December last year.

The delivery of the second BSIP has been facilitated by the £1,633,126 revenue grant from the DfT's Bus Service Improvement Plan Phase 2 Fund (formally referred to as BSIP Plus funding) awarded to the Council in August 2023.

The BSIP Phase 2 programme includes the delivery of a flagship east-west demonstration corridor supported by complementary ancillary activities and incorporates the majority of the revenue measures set out in the 2023 BSIP allowing their collective effectiveness to generate a sustained growth in bus patronage and an increase in bus passenger satisfaction, to be assessed.

Alongside the delivery of the BSIP Phase 2 programme the Council, in response to revised guidance from the DfT on BSIPs, issued in January 2024, also prepared and published its third BSIP in Summer 2024.

Unlike the first and second BSIPs, which were aspirational bidding documents, in line with the revised DfT guidance, the Council's third BSIP is a delivery plan setting out what the Plymouth Enhanced Bus Partnership will deliver in 2024/25 to encourage, enable and enthuse more people to catch the bus, what the Partnership has done so far and what the aspirations are for the period 2025 to 2034.

The vision of the 2024 Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan, as per the 2023 Plan, remains 'to create a thriving bus network where everyone can be connected to important people and places, by services that are frequent, reliable, fast, affordable, safe and clean, which will also help Plymouth to achieve its net zero goals by 2030'. The BSIP directly responds to the objectives of the Government's National Bus Strategy and is underpinned by nine passenger priorities, identified by current, lapsed and non-bus users, along with other key stakeholders, in order to deliver bus services that people need, can be proud of and enjoy using. The measures, ranked according to the outcome of the Summer 2023 Bus Passenger Priority Survey which more than 1,800 people completed, 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. 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

5. **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
6. 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
7. **Simple** and accurate information at bus stops, online and on smart phone apps, which is easy to read and **understand**
8. **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 and
9. **Cleaner** buses and more enjoyable bus stop environments.

The 2024 BSIP will be used as the blueprint for the updated Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan. Therefore, ahead of the drafting of the updated Plan this report sets out, for scrutiny:-

- The background to Bus Service Improvement Plans
- Differences between the December 2023 and Summer 2024 BSIPs and the reason for the changes
- BSIP measures delivered over the last 12 months
- Proposed stakeholder engagement to inform future Bus Service Improvement Plans and
- Implications of the refreshed BSIP on the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan

2.0 Background

The need for a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and formal partnership to deliver it, is driven by the National Bus Strategy.

The goal of the National Bus Strategy (NBS) is *'to get bus use back to what it was before the pandemic. Then we want to increase patronage and raise buses' mode share. We can only do these things by ensuring that buses are an attractive alternative to the car for far more people.'* To achieve this goal the NBS identifies the need to make buses:-

- More frequent
- Faster and more reliable
- Cheaper
- More comprehensive
- Easier to understand
- Easier to use
- Better to ride in
- Better integrated with other modes and each other
- Greener
- Accessible and inclusive by design
- Innovative
- Seen as a safe mode of transport

These are the themes which our BSIP responds to.

Through supporting the development of a comprehensive bus network the BSIP delivers 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, we are actively supporting the Plymouth Plan policy commitments to:-

- [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(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)
- [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. HEA6 (10)
- [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, 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 (2)
- [Continue] to support and develop new and existing local passenger ferry services, by working with stakeholders. GRO4 (3)
- [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
- [Develop and deliver] targeted infrastructure interventions, consistent with the long term vision and objectives for transport set out in the Joint Local Plan. GRO4 (15)

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.’

3.0 Plymouth’s Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 (BSIP 3)

3.1 Introduction

The vision of the 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 Plan directly responds to the objectives of the Government's National Bus Strategy³ and makes buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper.

Improving people's lives is at the centre of the BSIP. We have listened to the city's current, lapsed and non-bus users, along with other key stakeholders, to find out what they would most like to see improved in order for them to have bus services that they need, can be proud of and enjoy using. As a result nine passenger priorities, ranked in order of priority by Plymouth's bus passengers, underpin the Plan. These are:

- 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
- More **reliable** services, with **faster** journey times (using bus priority measures such as bus lanes and bus gates)
- **Affordable** fares that are competitive with travelling by car, cheap multi-operator tickets and contactless payment options on every bus
- 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
- **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
- 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
- **Simple** and accurate information at bus stops, online and on smart phone apps, which is easy to read and **understand**
- **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 and
- **Cleaner** buses and more enjoyable bus stop environments.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan covers the city of Plymouth and spans the period 2024 - 2034, aligning with the ending of the current Plymouth Plan⁴ period. This is because the BSIP is a delivery plan of the Plymouth Plan.

3.2 Differences between the December '23 and Summer '24 BSIPs and the reason for the changes.

In January 2024 the DfT issued revised BSIP guidance. This new guidance required every Local Transport Authority (LTA) to produce a 2024 BSIP in order to secure the release of its BSIP funding for 2024/25. For Plymouth this was 2024/25 BSIP Phase 2 funding allocation.

³ Bus Back Better – National Bus Strategy for England (2021) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

⁴ The Plymouth Plan 2014 -2034 <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/planningandbuildingcontrol/plymouthplan>

Significantly, the guidance specifically said that the 2024 BSIP would not function as a bidding document for specific DfT funds with the emphasis now changing to the BSIP being a delivery plan.

The guidance provided a step-by-step guide on how to update the document in line with the key themes for the 2023/24 BSIP refresh with a requirement for the 2024 BSIP to clearly distinguish between:-

- what has been delivered/will be completed by the end of 2023/24,
- what is programmed for delivery in 2024/25 with the known funding envelope, and
- the ambitions and priorities for future delivery in 2025 and beyond, subject to future funding opportunities.

Furthermore, the requirement to update BSIP's annually with six monthly public reporting of progress against targets set out in the BSIP was replaced with a Bus Connectivity Assessment (BCA) exercise. The Council submitted our first BCA in June and the assessment is now expected to be an annual requirement of the Enhanced Partnership, led by the Council.

The 2024 DfT BSIP guidance also provided a suggested structure for the BSIP; this structure and how it compares with the previous recommended structure for the BSIP is shown in Figure One.

Figure One: DfT recommended structure for the 2024 BSIP and how this compares to the previous recommended structure of BSIPs⁵.

Section	2021 template (now superseded)	2024 template (now current guidance)
1.	Overview	Our bus vision
2.	Current offer to bus passengers	Current offer to bus passengers
3.	Headline targets	Improvements programme to 2024/25
4.	Delivery	Ambitions and proposals for 2025-2030
5.	Reporting	Targets, performance monitoring and reporting
6.	Overview Table	DfT format BSIP Overview Table

The Plymouth 2024 BSIP satisfies all the points set out above and was submitted, on time, to the DfT with the Plan subsequently being published in July this year.

3.3 BSIP measures delivered over the last 12 months

The Bus Service Improvement Plan was last considered by Scrutiny in late September 2023. Table One shows the BSIP measures which have been delivered since then; these measures are those delivered over and above the business as usual functions of the Council's public transport team.

⁵ [bus-service-improvement-plans-guidance-to-local-authorities-and-bus-operators-2024.pdf](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/bus-service-improvement-plans-guidance-to-local-authorities-and-bus-operators-2024.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk).

Please note the requirement for section 6 within the 2024 BSIP was changed by the DfT, post the publication of the guidance, which is why an overview table does not feature in the published Summer 2024 Plymouth BSIP.

Table One: BSIP measures delivered between October 2023 and September 2024

Period	Measure	Description	Principle BSIP priorities delivered
Oct – Dec 2023	Bus service improvement	Restoration of a bus service for the residents of Hartley Vale, Mannamead and Peverell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frequent ✓ Direct and connected
	Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) 2 Fund submission	The submission of the Plymouth ZEBRA 2 bid; the collaborative bid between the City Council, Plymouth Citybus, Go-Ahead and Cornwall Council for the introduction of 50 zero emission, electric, double decker buses on routes operating in Plymouth and the Rame Peninsula as well as the necessary associated charging infrastructure at the Plymouth Citybus depot, in Milehouse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Modern ✓ Frequent ✓ Accessible
Jan – March 2024	Investment in new infrastructure	The commencement of further TCF schemes, including works at St Budeaux designed to enhance the connections between two or more forms of sustainable transport (example by rail, bus and bike or on foot) and transform this area into an important and busy interchange.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Direct and connected ✓ Safe ✓ Simple and understandable ✓ Cleaner
	Park and Ride improvements	Introduction of measures at Coypool park and ride to improve site security including additional fencing, overnight locking of the site and improved signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Safe ✓ Cleaner
April – June 2024	Bus service improvement	The introduction of new bus routes serving the new location of the Royal Eye Infirmary, directly responding to passenger demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frequent ✓ Direct and connected
	Passenger information	Publication of the combined public transport network map; online and at key locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Simple and understandable
	Bus service improvement	The reinstatement of the Bovisand Beach Bus. A popular leisure based bus service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frequent ✓ Affordable ✓ Direct and connected

	Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) Enhancements	Upgrade of Plymouth's RTPI displays from 3G to 4G ahead of the 3G network being switched off in 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Simple and understandable ✓ Safe
	Investment in new infrastructure	Introduction of the first new bus shelters, with living roofs, on Royal Parade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Safe ✓ Cleaner
	Investment in new infrastructure	Bus stop infrastructure upgrades along four of Plymouth's four bus corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reliable and faster ✓ Accessible ✓ Simple and understandable ✓ Cleaner
	Bus service improvement	Service enhancements on the Stagecoach Service 2 and Plymouth Citybus Services 21/A improving weekday and weekend service provision on four of Plymouth's core bus corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frequent ✓ Direct and connected
July – September 2024	Investment in new infrastructure	Commencement of the Woolwell to the George transport scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reliable and faster

The 2024/25 Plan measures are being delivered through close collaborative working between the Council and bus operators with a new way of working – Scheme Delivery Groups – proving very effective.

The groups consist of representatives from the Council, bus operators and other relevant stakeholders and experts as appropriate. They are specific task and finish groups established to drive forwards specific measures with the BSIP. Currently there are three Scheme Delivery Groups are in place considering

- The Bus Passenger Charter and Bus User Group
- Passenger information and publicity and
- Zero Emission Buses

The initial focus of the Bus Passenger Charter and Bus User Group has been the establishment of the Bus User Panel volunteering opportunity which was launched in May attracting a fantastic level of engagement from the public. Within 48 hours of the volunteering opportunity the Council had received 58 applications for a Panel of 21 people with a waiting list now in place for people who wish to take part in the Bus User Panel in the future. The group have met twice so far and have considered the public transport network map and Bus Passenger Charter, allowing Plymouth's bus users to directly input into Plymouth's public transport network.

The second scheme delivery group, considering passenger information and publicity, have also been very productive and most recently published the May 2024 edition of the Plymouth public transport network map. The map has been informed by stakeholder engagement including Chatterbus events in March. During the sessions the Partnership spoke to 125 people, and out of the 125 responses, 116

people liked the network map and thought it was already very comprehensive and useful; many of which provided additional comments to help us improve the next edition of the map.

The group is currently progressing the introduction of combined operator timetables to be trialled at bus stops across 4 of the main bus corridors in Plymouth, designing leaflets to promote the Partnership's bus services and developing an updated stop layout infographic to help people work out where to find their bus on Royal Parade and Derriford Hospital.

The final scheme delivery group are progressing the delivery of the Plymouth Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) 2 programme which will see the introduction of 50 zero emission, electric, double decker buses on routes operating in Plymouth and the Rame Peninsula as well as the necessary associated charging infrastructure at the Plymouth Citybus depot, in Milehouse, in 2025. The acquisition of the electric buses will not only enhance the routes that they will operate, through the use of modern, zero emission buses, but will also allow the cascade of existing Euro 6 diesel buses displaced from the electrified routes onto other services in Plymouth and South East Cornwall, modernising the entire Plymouth Citybus fleet operating in the Plymouth travel-to-work area.

3.4 Proposed stakeholder engagement to inform future Bus Service Improvement Plans

The BSIP reflects feedback from the city's current, lapsed and non-bus users, along with other key stakeholders, on what they would most like to see improved in order for them to have bus services that they need, can be proud of and enjoy using and, at its heart, are nine passenger priorities. We were delighted that more than 1800 (1,826) people responded to our Summer 2023 passenger priority survey the results of which clearly told us that the public's priorities for bus services, in order, are:

- Frequent,
- Reliable and fast,
- Affordable,
- Direct and connected,
- Accessible,
- Safe,
- Simple and understandable,
- Modern and
- Clean.

These priorities are reflected in the 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plan. However, in order to ensure that the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership stays in touch what our passengers want to see from Plymouth's bus services we continue to engage with key stakeholders through the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership and the public, through the Bus User Panel and frequent Chatterbus events.

Going forwards it is our intention to engage with all Ward Councillors, as representatives of their constituencies, through an annual survey seeking feedback on bus services and passenger priorities to be fed back to operators to inform network reviews.

3.5 Implications of the refreshed BSIP on the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan

Plymouth has had, since April 2023, a statutory Enhanced Bus Partnership and this is necessary in order to be eligible for future Government funding. The Enhanced Partnership is formed of two elements:

- the Enhanced Partnership Plan - sets out the plans outlined in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), providing the context for the proposed local bus service improvements
- the Enhanced Partnership Scheme - sets out in more detail how the plan objectives will be achieved through an agreed set of actions. Further schemes can be made as required to facilitate delivery of the Plan

The EP Plan and Scheme is the legal framework to deliver the BSIP. This allows the Council and local bus operators to work together to deliver an improved bus network and bus infrastructure to meet Plymouth residents' priorities and meet the BSIP objectives.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan therefore forms the blueprint for the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan and hence updating the BSIP necessitates the updating of the Plan as well. There is a statutory process for doing so, which will commence shortly, with the expectation being that Plymouth will have an updated Enhanced Partnership Plan by April 2025.

4.0 Financial Implications

The implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan are minimal. However, the consequences of not having a fit for purpose Bus Service Improvement Plan (and subsequently Enhanced Partnership Plan) are potentially significant as both Plans are increasingly required as a pre-requisite to access other DfT funding opportunities.

The development of the BSIP is fully funded from the DfT Bus Capacity Grant which is available to support the development of the Enhanced Partnership and associated Bus Service Improvement Plan.

The delivery of the BSIP places no additional financial demands on the Council. This is because the 2024/25 delivery programme is either funded from either existing resources, BSIP Phase 2 funding (which was secured on preparation of the 2024 BSIP) or bus operator investment.

Delivery of the BSIP, in full, will require additional resources, as set out within the Plan. This additional resource would be funded through the BSIP and hence does not represent an additional pressure on the Council.

5.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the changes to the 2024 Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan and endorses the subsequent requirement to refresh the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan.

Reason: To meet the specific requirements of the DfT's 'National Bus Strategy: 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plans Guidance to local authorities and bus operators.'

2. Endorse the proposed stakeholder engagement which will inform future Bus Service Improvement Plans.

Reason: To ensure that future BSIPs continue to provide a clear, evidenced, rationale for the improvement of Plymouth's bus services which meets the needs of current and future bus users.