

Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan; Spring 2025 variation

Briefing Report for Publication



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The statutory Plymouth Enhanced Partnership (EP) was made and became effective from 1 April 2023 following approval by Cabinet on 9 February 2023.

The Enhanced Partnership is formed of two elements:

- the Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) - which sets out the plans outlined in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), providing the context for the proposed local bus service improvements and
- the Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS) - which sets out in more detail how the plan objectives will be achieved through an agreed set of actions.

The EP Plan and Scheme is the legal framework to deliver the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and 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 the BSIP objectives.

The current EPP was made on the 1st of April 2023 and is valid until it is revoked. However, following the publication of the latest Plymouth BSIP in 2024, as required by the Department for Transport (DfT) in order to reflect updated BSIP guidance (National Bus Strategy: 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plans Guidance to local authorities and bus operators), the current EP Plan is out of date. It is therefore being refreshed so that it remains aligned with the BSIP.

The updated EP Plan has been prepared under Section 138F of the Transport Act 2000 through discussions with operators and stakeholders. In this report variation, refresh and update are used interchangeably and all mean the same thing.

On approval of this Decision the updated EP Plan will be adopted and will become valid until it is revoked; there are no financial implications of this Decision because the EP Plan itself is a policy document, not a delivery plan. The 2025/26 delivery plan for the Bus Service Improvement Plan is as described in the separate Decision [Decision - L43 24/25 - 2025-26 Bus Grant for Plymouth City Council - Modern Council](#)

2. BACKGROUND

On 15 March 2021 the Government published the National Bus Strategy (NBS) for England 'Bus Back Better'¹.

The NBS required the establishment of a formal, statutory, partnership arrangement, led by Plymouth City Council as the Local Transport Authority (LTA), for all local bus services operated within the

¹ [Bus back better - GOV.UK](#)

city boundary. Partnership arrangements could take the form of either a franchise or an Enhanced Partnership², with the Council approving the development of an Enhanced Partnership (EP).

The Council, as the LTA, has formal responsibility to form the partnership and lead on the preparation of both the EP Plan and any Schemes. However, the Council can only proceed with any proposals if it has the support and input of local bus operators.

The EP Plan and Scheme must be established and 'made' in order for the Council to be eligible for Government funding to support bus services.

The NBS also requires the Council to lead the preparation of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in collaboration with bus operators. The BSIP outlines the vision, aspirations, objectives and interventions that Plymouth City Council and bus operators will take to improve the local bus network. The EP Plan sets out the improvements to bus services that the Enhanced Partnership will deliver, mirroring the objectives in the BSIP and hence the two Plans should be aligned.

The current Plymouth EP was made in April 2023 and reflects the October 2021 BSIP. It is valid until it is revoked. However, following the publication of the latest Plymouth BSIP in 2024, the EP Plan is out of date. It is therefore being updated so that it remains aligned with the BSIP.

In order to vary and update an EPP a statutory process, as set out in the Transport Act 2000, needs to be followed. This is set out in Section Three of this report, along with a summary of the EP Plan itself which is appended to this Decision (Appendix C) and the main changes between the current EPP and the Spring 2025 variation. The full change log recording all the differences between the current and proposed Plan is also appended to this Decision (Appendix D).

3. ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN VARIATION

3.1 ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN VARIATION SUMMARY

The EP Plan is being updated, as the core statutory document of the Enhanced Partnership, so that it is brought up to date with the Summer 2024 BSIP. However, the Partnership have tried to take the approach to make the content as accurate as possible for as long as possible so, for example, references to costs have been removed to save future variations to the text, which would require an update to the Plan through the formal statutory process.

However, in accordance with the statutory requirements for an EP Plan, the varied Plan still includes:

- Overview and map of the geographical area covered
- Factors affecting the local bus market
- Summary of passengers' experiences in using bus services and the priorities of users and non-users for improvements
- Trends in bus journey speeds and the impact of congestion on bus services
- Objectives that are sought for bus service provision
- Interventions needed to achieve the desired outcomes
- Governance arrangements

² The main difference versus franchising is that operators in an Enhanced Partnership have a much greater role, working with Local Transport Authorities to both develop and deliver improvements for passengers. Enhanced Partnerships also offer significantly more flexibility than franchising.

- Competition test

The most significant change between the current EPP and the proposed variation is the change in Governance for the EP Board with the updating of the EPP being taken as an opportunity to refresh the governance arrangements so that the Councils' Member Bus Champion becomes the Chair of the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Board. Currently this position is held by the Council's Head of Transport.

3.2 ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN VARIATION PROCESS

The process for updating an Enhanced Partnership Plan is set out in the Transport Act 2000. Table One provides a summary of this process, with specific details of how the process was followed for the development of the Spring 2025 EP Plan which is the subject of this Decision.

Table One: EP Plan variation process

Stage		Details	Timeline
1	Give informal notice of the intention to vary the EP Plan and invite operators to be involved in the preparation of the variation.	<p>Notify stakeholders who helped prepare the original EP Plan of the intention to vary the EP Plan.</p> <p>Invite all relevant operators to be involved in the preparation of the variation.</p>	<p>Stakeholders notified via the EP Forum on 12/09/2024</p> <p>Operators notified at the EP Forum on 12/09/2024 and at the EP Board on 07/10/24</p>
2	Prepare the variation to the EP Plan	<p>Draft the variation – in partnership with Operators and stakeholders.</p> <p>Complete the competition test and contact the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).</p>	<p>Operator EP workshop (17/10/24)</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport briefed on the draft EPP 26/11/24</p> <p>Draft EP Plan shared with operators for informal review 03/12/24</p>
3	Formally issue notice of variation	<p>Notice to all relevant operators with details of variation and operator objection mechanism.</p> <p>The notice to Operators must contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full details of the proposed variation • The operator objection mechanism that will apply and the period for making objections which should not less than 28 days. 	Operator Objection Mechanism period 06/01/2025 - 03/02/25
4	Operator objection mechanism (OOM)	Operator objection period	

5	Formal stakeholder consultation	<p>If the variation is OK to proceed, i.e no qualifying objections are received the LTA must give notice to other stakeholders involved in the preparation of the plan and statutory consultees.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Statutory consultees for consultation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operators • Organisations representing passengers • Traffic Commissioner • Chief of Police • Transport Focus • Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) • Neighbouring LTAs • Others as required (those affected by the proposals) <p>The draft variation to the Plymouth EP Plan was also shared with EP Forum members as well as the statutory consultees (many of which are included in the Forum).</p>	Formal stakeholder consultation - 04/02/2025 until 03/03/2025
6	Council democratic processes to approve the variation to the EP Plan	Executive decision.	March 2025
7	(Final) notice to operators of the intention to make the variation (or start OOM again if further changes were made)	<p>On deciding to adopt the variation the LTA must notify local bus operators. This notice must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contain full details of the variation or state where/ how they can be inspected • State whether it is a modified version of the original proposals; any modification will require a new OOM and hence the notice should specify the operator objection mechanism that will apply and the period for making objections 	April 2025
8	EP Plan is 'made'	<p>Inform all stakeholders (everyone who has previously been consulted) that the EP Plan has been made. This must be done within 14 days of publishing the Plan</p> <p>The notification should include the web link to where it has been published.</p>	TBC; this is expected to be 1 April 2025

3.2 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

No objections were received during the Operator Objection Mechanism period. The Council therefore proceeded to stage five of the process; formal stakeholder consultation.

As part of the stakeholder consultation questions were received from two ward Councillors, who had been consulted as passenger representatives. One question queried the likely causation of the increases bus journey times as reported in Table 16 of the Plan and the second asked about an opportunity to ask local residents to feedback on the draft Plan and potential public consultation. Neither comment sought, or required, a material change to the draft Plan and hence no changes were made to the proposed variation.

The proposed variation to the Plan was also discussed with the EP Forum on the 13 February; the feedback from the Forum was a query regarding the language in the change log explaining why parking charges were no longer included in the EPP. Parking charges have been removed from the Plan in order to try and increase the longevity of the Plan and reduce the need for the EPP to be varied going forwards; this is consistent with the approach taken throughout the varied Plan to make the content as accurate as possible for as long as possible so, for example, references to costs have been removed to save future variations to the text. Again, the feedback required no change to the Plan, but the change log has been updated to better explain why the Parking charges tables have been removed.

The lack of changes to the Plan, following the stakeholder consultation, means that the Council are able to proceed with adopting the variation. Any modifications would have required stages four and five of the process to be repeated.

4. RELEVANCE TO CORPORATE PLANS

The proposed variation to the Enhanced Partnership Plan directly supports both the Corporate Plan and Plymouth Plan.

4.1 Links to the Corporate Plan: -

The update of the EP Plan supports the city's mission to '[make] Plymouth a fairer, greener city where everyone does their bit.'

As lead for the statutory Enhanced Partnership, of which the EP Plan is one of two elements, we are taking **responsibility** for the Enhanced Partnership. However, the delivery of the objectives of the EP Plan, through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) is **co-operative**. We are, and will continue, to work closely with Plymouth's public transport providers, to deliver a bus network which helps to make Plymouth a great place to grow up and grow old and helps to minimise the cost of living crisis by providing a good value transport option which connects communities with employment, education, health and leisure opportunities.

4.2 Links to the Plymouth Plan: -

Provision of a comprehensive bus network, as set out in the Enhanced Partnership Plan, 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 development updated EP Plan we 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 clear journey planning and timetable information.
- 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 and
- GRO4 (13) Use of smarter choices and travel planning to provide and promote travel choice, through the planning process

The EP Plan 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, and SPT9(9) (delivering transport projects which provide a safe and effective transport system).

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

1. Do not update the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan

This option was rejected because the statutory Plymouth Enhanced Partnership is formed of two elements:

- the Enhanced Partnership Plan – which sets out the plans outlined in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), providing the context for the proposed local bus service improvements and
- the Enhanced Partnership Scheme – which sets out in more detail how the plan objectives will be achieved through an agreed set of actions.

The EP Plan and Scheme is the legal framework to deliver the Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan and hence it is important that the EP Plan and Scheme are kept up to date. Not updating the EP Plan would mean that the published Plan would remain the April 2023 EP Plan which is now not reflective of the current (Summer 2024) BSIP. However, the current EP Plan is valid until revoked which is why this Decision is required.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISK

Approval of the variation to the Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan places no additional financial demands on the Council. This is because the EP Plan itself is a policy document which sets out the plans outlined in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), providing the context for the proposed local bus service improvements. The delivery plan for the Enhanced Partnership is the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the financial implications of delivering the BSIP are set out in separate Decisions ([Decision - SPT09 23/24 - Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus Programme \(BSIP+\)](#))

- Modern Council) and (Decision - L43 24/25 - 2025-26 Bus Grant for Plymouth City Council - Modern Council).

Furthermore, the preparation and management of the EP Plan and 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, and the 2025/26 Bus Grant which is a consolidated fund and includes the 2025/26 Bus Capacity and Capability grant allocation.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of this report it is recommended that Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure

- I. Approves the variation to, and subsequent publication of, the refreshed Plymouth Enhanced Partnership Plan, thereby updating the statutory Plan from April 2025.