

North Somerset Council

Report to the Executive

Date of Meeting: 23 June 2021

Subject of Report: approval to prepare a joint **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)** and subsequently prepare an **Enhanced Partnership (EP)** with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and bus operators.

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Councillor Donald Davies, The Leader of the Council, with Executive Member responsibility for Strategic Transport; Transport Policy, Public Transport, Home to School Transport, Bus and Rail Strategy.

Key Decision: Yes

Reason: The Decision is likely to incur expenditure of more than £500,000 as part of the plan development and consultation stage, and is expected to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the Local Authority.

Recommendations

This report seeks approval to:

- 1) **issue a joint legal Notice of Intent to prepare an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with WECA and bus operators**, as required by the national bus strategy 'Bus Back Better'.
- 2) **prepare a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in partnership with WECA and bus operators**, and;
- 3) **prepare a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with WECA** to set the terms of reference for the preparation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and **delegate this to the Executive Member (in consultation with the Director of Place and Assistant Director Legal & Governance)**. We await further Government guidance on funding (expected 'Summer 2021') before the MoU can be appropriately detailed.

What is an Enhanced Partnership (EP)?

- An agreement between Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and operators to work together to improve bus services;
- Includes a clear vision of the improvements that the EP is aiming for (an EP Plan) and accompanying actions to achieve them (set out in one or more Enhanced Partnership Schemes - EPS);
- Made by LTAs but needs support of a defined proportion of operators and any relevant highway authorities;
- An EP Plan must have at least one EPS linked to it;
- LTAs must consider whether appropriate to make EP jointly with other LTAs.

1. Summary of Report

In March 2020, the Government announced [£3billion for buses](#), heralded as ‘the most ambitious shake-up of the bus sector in a generation’ (gov.uk). This was supported by the publication of the Government’s [Bus Back Better – a National Bus Strategy for England](#), announced on 15 March 2021.

This strategy sets out the following overall vision and aims:

- To get overall bus patronage back to its pre-COVID level and then exceed it;
- To make the bus a practical and attractive alternative to the car for more people;
- To make buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper;
- To offer a London-style bus network: fully integrated services, simple multi-modal tickets, more bus priority measures, high-quality information for passengers, services that keep running into the evenings and at weekends and turn-up-and-go frequencies in cities;
- Significantly more ambitious bus priority schemes in cities and congested places;
- To create a virtuous circle: increasing usage, but also reducing operating costs so better services can be sustained without permanently higher subsidy.

This represents a landmark opportunity to use significantly increased national government funding as part of what is a radical reshape of how public transport is planned and delivered in England. The guidance is clear that the BSIPs will help to ‘dramatically improve bus services in England outside London through greater local leadership, to reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back to bus’. There will also be ‘no return to a situation where services are planned on a purely commercial basis with little or no engagement with, or support from, LTAs [Local Transport Authorities]’.

This signals the beginning of the end for the commercially-viable bus service model that currently dictates the make-up of local bus networks. An opportunity of this magnitude should not be missed nor underestimated. This level of intervention is very much needed with our bus sector model failing steadily since deregulation in the late 1980s, after years of under-funded levels of investment and COVID-19 compounding these issues, threatening the current bus network format’s very existence.

To summarise, the new requirements of Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) include:

- By 30 June 2021: Deciding which statutory path to follow, either an Enhanced Partnership (EP) or a Franchise – and publish a legal notice of intent to cover this. To clarify, we are recommending choosing the EP model for improvements to the bus network and not the full franchise model. We could enter into a Franchise arrangement but this a much more detailed and resource intensive framework for bus network delivery. We have not yet developed and assessed the benefits, costs and risks of such an approach and in any event Government advice suggests it would take at least two years to put in place. This would require detailed business case development as well as full public and stakeholder consultation.
- By 31 October 2021: Submit a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as part of a bid for a share of the £3billion Transformation Funding - which if split pro rata by population would mean £40 - £50 million for the West of England. The quality of the BSIP will influence the amount of funding awarded;
- By April 2022: Have a joint EP Plan and one or more EP Schemes in place or be following the statutory processes to develop a bus franchising assessment;
- Annual commitments:
 - Delivery of improvement and EP commitments;
 - Annual BSIP review and publication;

- 6 monthly monitoring reporting.

Ultimately, this report seeks approval for the three items listed in the ‘Recommendations’ section above on page 1.

2. Policy

The national Government’s [Bus Back Better – a National Bus Strategy for England](#) is consistent with the following NSC and West of England policies & plans:

- The [North Somerset Council \(NSC\) Corporate Plan 2020-24](#)
- The [West of England Bus Strategy \(2020\)](#);
- The [West of England Joint Local Transport Plan 4 \(JLTP4\) \(2020\)](#);
- NSC’s Emergency Active Travel Fund (Tranche 1) and the Active Travel Fund (Tranche 2) scheme package;
- The emerging [NSC Local Plan 2038](#).

For more detail on how the national bus strategy and resulting workstreams are consistent with the above NSC and West of England plans and policies, please see Appendix 1 below.

3. Details

In March 2020, the Government announced [£3billion for buses](#), heralded as ‘the most ambitious shake-up of the bus sector in a generation’ (gov.uk). This was supported by the publication of the Government’s [Bus Back Better – a National Bus Strategy for England](#), announced on 15 March 2021.

As set out in the Summary above, this is a radical reshape of how public transport is planned and delivered in England, with Government clear that there will be ‘no return’ to a situation where services are planned on a purely commercial basis with little or no engagement with, or support from, LTAs.

The national strategy covers many aspects of bus operation and concludes that the current model is not working. The strategy acknowledges the contributions of both public and private sector (including naming the West of England metrobus as a case study) but ultimately highlights the failings of the deregulated market in place since 1986; further compounded by significant further losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns shattering passenger patronage and confidence. [Government data](#) shows that bus usage on average (outside London) dipped as low as 10% compared to January 2020 levels during the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020) and even now (12 May 2021) has only recovered to approximately 60% of January 2020 levels (data as of 10 May 2021). WECA also has more localised data from a large bus service operator that shows patronage in the West of England is even lower than the national average. The strategy therefore sets out a new vision for a cohesive network of attractive, high quality bus services to kickstart a new era for bus travel as an option for all.

With this comes a vast range of new responsibilities for local transport authorities (LTAs) as new ‘local leadership’ plays a much more central role in the planning of services, infrastructure and awareness. As part of the national bus strategy (NBS), LTAs are required to develop an ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in collaboration with local bus operators, highway authorities, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people. The recently received guidance is clear that:

- **By 30 June 2021:** each LTA must have committed to establishing an Enhanced Partnership (EP) (or begin the statutory process of franchising services, which we are not recommending to proceed with). Operators in those areas should co-operate with those processes. After this date, only LTAs and operators who have met these

requirements will continue to receive COVID-19 Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) or any new sources of bus funding from the Government's £3bn budget.

- **By 31 October 2021:** Each LTA must publish and submit a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as part of the bid for Transformation Funding.
- **By April 2022:** Each LTA will need to have made an EP and subsequent EP Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s) (EPS) - or be following the statutory process towards a franchising scheme - to access the new discretionary streams of transformation funding for buses. Only services operated or measures taken under an EP or where a franchising scheme has been made will be eligible to receive the new funding streams. The Secretary of State has discretion to delay payment or make individual exceptions and only services operated under an EP or franchise will be eligible for reformed Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG). The LTA must also publish its first six-monthly progress report against BSIP targets.
- **By October 2022:** Submit to Government our first annual update of the BSIP and the second six-monthly progress report against BSIP targets.

Further to this, the BSIP must:

- Take account of cycling and walking schemes, complementing those forms of travel;
- Include targets for punctuality, journey times and patronage with reporting of progress against those targets every six months;
- Be updated annually and be reflected in an updated Joint Local Transport Plan.

On undertaking joint BSIPs, the guidance states that:

'LTAs may also join together to produce a single BSIP – particularly where local economies and travel patterns overlap significantly. We expect LTAs to collaborate to resolve any cross-boundary issues. Where all, or the vast majority of, services in one area run across the border into another area (for example a small unitary authority with services running into a shire authority), we would expect a single BSIP to be produced. We also expect to see shared arrangements across any areas wishing to become new or expanded MCAs in the future.'

As stated, we are proposing to prepare a joint BSIP with WECA. Our transport network, including our bus network, is very much a West of England and not just a North Somerset network. Most of our key routes, including key corridor routes serving our four largest towns of Weston-super-Mare, Portishead, Clevedon and Nailsea, radiate from Bristol (via many of our other villages along these transport corridors) to provide a key commuter, education and leisure access to and from the city centre. The National Bus Strategy (NBS) is clear however that bus service improvements for smaller towns and villages in the more rural areas is a key priority too, but the way in which the overall transport network patterns work will continue to be on a regional basis, even as we emerge from the pandemic.

There are lots of benefits to developing a BSIP with our West of England neighbours:

- LTA resources and funding can be pooled to improve efficiency and cut costs;
- A joint scheme properly joins up cross boundary bus services;
- Local bus operators can share resources to develop the BSIP in a joined-up way.

It is important to note that from July 2021, Government will limit payment of all discretionary grants for bus services to:

- those LTAs and operators who have made a formal commitment to work together in developing an EP in their area, **or:**

- those authorities who have embarked on the process of establishing a franchising scheme. If an EP is the delivery model preferred by the LTA, there is an expectation that the formal process of making it would be complete by April 2022.

The timescales are challenging and so work has already begun on liaising with WECA and bus service operators to prepare a BSIP. The deadlines show the urgency in getting to work on this BSIP, with funding set to reduce if we do not pursue one. We need Executive Committee scrutiny and approval to confirm our commitment to creating a BSIP with WECA for our West of England bus network. This approval will also allow us to issue a joint legal Notice of Intent to prepare a joint Enhanced Partnership (EP) as appended in Annex A, as required by the national bus strategy 'Bus Back Better'.

4. Consultation

The guidance from the DfT sets out that the BSIP will need to be 'developed in collaboration with bus operators; and other stakeholders such as bus user, service provider and local business groups should also be consulted' and that overall, the BSIP should 'be developed by LTAs in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people'.

Due to the number of cross-border services across the West of England, we will work with WECA to develop a consistent consultation package on our BSIP to ensure that we engage with the above identified stakeholders closely and within the timescales of publishing our BSIP by the end of October 2021. Members will have the chance to feed into consultation planning once consultation plans are more detailed.

We are in the process of developing our consultation strategy for this important workstream and will consider utilising the new Citizens' Panel as a representative range of our residents. Not only do we have recent consultation responses on our bus network (see JLTP4 and Bus Strategy in Appendix 2 below) but the timescales are tight to have a full BSIP developed, consulted upon and published by the end of October 2021. This could be a very suitable opportunity to use the new Citizens' Panel to help review the recent bus network consultation responses to check they are still representative of residents' priorities for improvements and if not, to gain further important input.

Our consultation plan will be updated regularly to ensure that it remains fit for purpose for the ongoing consultation that is required as we develop our Enhanced Partnership by April 2021 and for the annual review and update of our BSIPs. We are also required to set up a Bus Forum for operators, stakeholders, businesses and other users, allowing an open and ongoing engagement with all these key players that are crucial to achieving the thriving bus network that is sought after. The Bus Forum is likely to be West of England wide, to match the scope and scale of the Enhanced Partnership and BSIP. The importance of consultation is emphasised in the BSIP guidance and we will be developing consultation plans to ensure it continues to play an integral part of our annual BSIP updates after the initial preparation of our first BSIP in October 2021. We will ensure we engage with all West of England bus service operators once we have approval to proceed with our joint Notice of Intent to prepare an Enhanced Partnership, as is outlined in the EP guidance received from the DfT.

For more information on the recent consultation responses we have had from the West of England Bus Strategy and West of England Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4), please see Appendix 2 below.

5. Financial Implications

It should be noted that further guidance is expected from the DfT specifically on funding this workstream in 'summer 2021', in two parts:

- 1st part based on LTA allocations via formula and a reward element based on the quality of the BSIP;
- 2nd part would be capital allocations based on the larger priority schemes identified in the EP.

As outlined in the Risks section below, there would be significant financial risks and implications should we choose to not develop a BSIP with our West of England neighbours, or not develop one at all.

Funding

The £3bn for buses announced by the PM in February 2020 (for LTAs in England), to cover a five-year period to 2025, will initially be invested in:

- Supporting new and increased services – with at least £300m of funding to support the sector recover from the pandemic in 2021-22;
- Giving LTAs the skills and people they need to deliver this strategy – with £25m of the £300m allocated in 2021-22. The £25m available in financial year 2021–22 (to support LTAs in forming partnerships and developing plans, and to create a Bus Centre of Excellence) has so far resulted in each LTA receiving £100k (Capability Funding) and more will be made available from June 2021;
- Bus priority schemes – first ones to be delivered in 2021-22;
- Accelerating the delivery of zero emission buses with £120m in 2021-22.

The bulk of the £3bn will be paid after the transformational changes begin in April 2022.

This workstream reintroduces a vast range of new responsibilities for local transport authorities (LTAs) as new 'local leadership' plays a much more central role in the planning of services, infrastructure and awareness; and over a sustained period of time. The current confirmed funding plan is only until March 2023, but the BSIP delivery plan is initially to 2025, although an extension to 2030 is possible, subject to funding availability and review of the BSIP delivery. Progress against targets is required to be reported every six months to the DfT and a refreshed BSIP produced every 12 months. It is envisaged that this will be the new normal up to and beyond 2030 for local bus network planning and management. Much greater control and responsibility over our bus and overall transport network will need funding and resource security over a sustained period of time to enable us to achieve and maintain the ambitious new plan for the future of our bus network.

As outlined in the Details section above, from 1 July 2021, only LTAs and operators who have committed to an EP or a franchise will continue to receive CBSSG or any new sources of bus funding from the £3bn budget. The new funding will be discretionary, as CBSSG is already. With CBSSG (COVID Bus Service Support Grant), this will remain in place 'for as long as it is needed.' BSOG (the Bus Service Operators' Grant) will continue as now until further notice but the BSIP guidance also explains that as part of the wider reform of the BSOG, the DfT will consult on linking payment of that reformed grant to the new EP and BSIP commitments. At present, the payments are made directly from Government to bus operators but there may be a role for Local Transport Authorities in the future.

Ultimately, when prepared and adopted, the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will outline the detailed interventions and investment required to achieve the aims of the plan and will therefore be used when bidding for the above and other funding opportunities. It is expected that it will help us to bid for significant further investment and funding.

Costs

We have only just received the BSIP guidance and further guidance on funding specifically is expected in 'summer 2021'. As this emerging workstream develops we will set out the detailed costs needed to deliver the outputs required by Government.

What is clear from the guidance however is the desire to 'create a legacy of capability in LTAs on bus-related issues.' Valuable in-house skills and capacity has been eroded in many LTAs (including NSC) since the 1990s and the Government want to help build up LTA in-house capabilities to improve and maintain the significant interventions and positive changes for our bus network.

To address this, the Government has already provided £100,000 towards local authority resource requirements to develop this significant workstream further (Capability Funding). It also indicated that further funding will be available from the end of June 2021 but this is as yet unspecified. The Strategy and guidance also state that further significant funding will be made available for the larger improvement interventions (such as capital infrastructure) in future years. There will be further traffic management costs for the Council in its new expanded traffic management and bus network planning role. There is not much detail available on this as of yet, but some of this work could be funded by income from traffic management offences.

This will enable the Council to build local skills and experience to support and maintain the network but will come with a significant resource ask if we are to achieve this. Not only will a considerably enhanced Public Transport team need multiple new full time officers (which we are already recruiting for) but other supporting functions elsewhere within the Council will be required (as well as a high potential for external consultancy support in the short to medium term). For example, there will be a significant increase in our traffic management responsibilities, with bus lane enforcement and greater control over our transport network.

6. Legal Powers and Implications

North Somerset Council are both the highway and transport authority and so have the legal powers to amend the highway and transport network, under the Council's powers as Local Highway Authority ([Highways Act 1980](#)).

To clarify, in the West of England, the transport authorities, who have responsibility for planning transport improvements, are: North Somerset Council and the West of England Combined Authority (WECA, who are the regional transport authority covering the administrative areas of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire). The highway authorities, with responsibility for maintenance of and the delivery of improvements to the public highway, are: Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire councils.

[The Bus Services Act 2017](#) gave local authorities new powers to bring about change and unlock the potential for the bus industry to achieve more passengers than it does today, through:

- new enhanced partnerships and advanced quality partnership scheme powers. These provide the framework for authorities to work side by side with operators to set a shared vision for bus services in their area, and;
- new franchising powers.

The Government is clear that we must publish a formal Notice of Intent to enter into an Enhanced Partnership (EP) by June 2021, and an Enhanced Partnership Plan and

Schemes which must be in place by April 2022. We could also enter into a Franchise arrangement but this a much more detailed and resource intensive framework for bus network delivery. We have not yet developed and assessed the benefits, costs and risks of such an approach and in any event Government advice suggests it would take at least two years to put in place. This would require detailed business case development as well as full public and stakeholder consultation.

The Notice of Intent (see Annex A) sets out the intention to prepare a joint EP, as well as the intention to prepare an Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s), as required and set out in section 138F of the Transport Act 2000.

[The Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnerships Guidance](#) sets out (under 'Notice of Intention and Invitation to Participate') that the local transport authority must:

- give formal notice of its intention to prepare an EP and invite all the local bus operators to participate in that process before they start to prepare the plan and scheme;
- (as part of the notice of intention to prepare an EP plan and scheme) should set out the geographical area which it is envisaged that the EP plan could cover (although this can be modified later) and include a contact point at the authority for further information;
- It is up to the authority to decide how they give notice of their intention to prepare a plan and scheme. They may choose to do so via their website or local newspapers, for example. The notice should, however, be drawn to the attention of all local operators running services within or into the proposed geographical area of the EP and an invitation to participate in the development of the EP should be sent to the address that is listed on the PSV operator's licence of each operator concerned;
- Once notice has been given and invitations to participate have been issued, formal discussions between authorities and local bus service operators can commence on the content of an EP. Other stakeholders such as passenger groups should also be involved at this stage to ensure that the EP package that goes forward to the next stage is likely to deliver the outcomes that are expected. The scale of stakeholder participation should reflect the size and ambition of the proposals.

NSC will closely follow the above steps once approval is given to prepare a joint EP.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

If approved, progressed and delivered, the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will radically overhaul the existing bus network to provide a vastly improved bus service and bus infrastructure provision. If the aims of the national bus strategy, through our BSIP, are achieved then there will be a significant increase in the proportion of trips by bus, replacing trips otherwise undertaken by the more polluting (and less space-efficient) single petrol/diesel car trips. Taking a local bus emits a little over half the greenhouse gases of a single occupancy car journey and also help to remove congestion from the roads (*BBC – J. Timperley, 2020 – article [here](#)*). Additionally, all specific infrastructure projects will undertake a more detailed environmental assessment.

Far reaching improvements to our bus network and services will therefore enable a shift to cleaner transport choices such as the bus (and active travel to get to the bus network wherever possible) and as we electrify (and possibly hydrogenise) our bus fleets, further emissions savings will be made.

8. Risk Management

Table 1: Risks & Mitigations of BSIP workstream

Risk	Mitigation
Insufficient funding to maintain the local bus network – resulting in unsustainably large additional costs to local authorities and ultimate failure of the bus network	It is anticipated that the level of funding devolved to us will be tapered against the expected rise in demand and fares revenue as the economy recovers. We will seek information from bus operators on current costs, revenue and grant levels. We are able to use an evaluation tool that may be able help us prioritise our bus revenue support.
Insufficient officer resource and funding to progress the work to enable a completed BSIP by October 2021	NSC are currently recruiting for experienced Public Transport officers to lead on this workstream. If unsuccessful we will draw on consultant support and WECA officers to support where appropriate.
Uncertainty on recovery of local economy and demand for buses	Through the Urban Transport Group, our colleagues at WECA have access to modelling on a range of scenarios in the other city regions. We will keep a close eye on local and regional data and patterns of public transport use.
Procurement process delays	Government has promised some limited exemption from competitive tendering rules in the Transport Act 1985 but more tendering is inevitable. NSC have good bus contract procurement expertise which will be utilised and either additional temporary staff resource or external consultants will enable us to cope with the volume.
Historically limited number of operators to provide competition	We will ensure that we follow the necessary fairness of competition guidelines and all procurement rules as set out in the BSIP guidance. This will help to ensure that the improved bus services and network that we will identify through our BSIP is open to all operators to develop a case to deliver the services.

Further to the above, a more detailed risk assessment will be developed as part of the BSIP.

9. Equality Implications

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? **No**

One of the key drivers of the national bus strategy ‘Bus Back Better’ is to improve accessibility for all. This includes physical accessibility improvements in getting to bus stops, the waiting and boarding facilities at stops and interchanges and also the vehicles themselves. The drive to improve equality and accessibility also includes improving the ease of information, such as consistent local branding of stops and services, up to date accessible timetable and route information at bus stops, same evening and weekend frequencies as day time, universal ticketing and easy smart payment options and more marketing campaigns to promote existing and new routes. Furthermore, one of the actions for national government as part of the strategy is to review eligibility for free bus travel for disabled people to ensure that the strategy helps to improve the equality of opportunity and help disabled people participate fully in public life.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), once prepared, will include a number of key objectives, including but not limited to:

- high quality bus service;
- high quality waiting environment;
- high vehicle standards.

More specific attributes are contained under each objective, including:

- Bus stops, bus stations and interchanges to be accessible, safe and inclusive by design with good facilities;
- Good pedestrian accessibility to adjacent residential areas and passenger destinations.
- Full accessibility with ample areas for pushchairs and luggage in addition to the wheelchair space;
- Setting a basic minimum standard of accessibility to network from rural areas;
- Easy access to information via Travelwest website and app, including times, accessibility information, fares and live running.

These are just some of the objectives and attributes set to be included within our BSIP that show the level of commitment to improving equality and accessibility to a vastly improved bus network, all through the direction of the national bus strategy.

A more detailed Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the BSIP development and will be reported and made available for scrutiny when possible.

10. Corporate Implications

As set out in the Summary above, this is a radical reshape of how public transport is planned and delivered in England, with Government clear that there will be 'no return' to a situation where services are planned on a purely commercial basis with little or no engagement with, or support from, LTAs.

Although extremely positive for the improvement of the North Somerset bus network in all aspects, this is a significant new resource ask for the Council; to develop, implement and monitor the BSIP on a regular basis. We are currently deploying resource from across the Transport teams and are working closely with WECA pending clarifying a longer term approach.

More focused to [NSC Corporate policies](#), the national bus strategy (via our more specific BSIP for North Somerset and the West of England) will set out a new vision and action plan to achieve a cohesive network of attractive, high quality bus services to kickstart a new era for bus travel as an option for all. This helps hit all three Corporate Plan priorities of being:

- Open (with the open sharing of bus data helping to improve bus services further including accessibility and journey planning);
- Fair (by significantly improving equality and accessibility to and on the bus network);
- Green (with the more people using the bus instead of private car, this has a huge potential to save significant carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions).

More specifically, the [NSC Corporate Plan 2020-24](#) sets out to achieve 'A transport network that promotes active, accessible and low carbon travel' and by 2023, to see 'More people using the bus network, and improvements in reliability and passenger satisfaction'. Through delivering showcase bus corridors, as well as other measures that will be detailed in the BSIP, the Corporate Plan aims to see:

- An increase in bus patronage;
- The delivery of at least one new showcase corridor by 2023, and;
- Measures to enable the unhampered movement of buses.

Preparing and then delivering a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) with WECA and bus operators and preparing a joint Enhanced Partnership (EP) would be consistent with and add further weight to our Corporate Plan aims for bus service improvements shown above.

11. Options Considered

1. NSC attempt to undertake an Enhanced Partnership (EP) and BSIP alone and not with WECA. This is not consistent with the guidance, which states that:

'...particularly where local economies and travel patterns overlap significantly...we expect LTAs to collaborate to resolve any cross-boundary issues. Where all, or the vast majority of, services in one area run across the border into another area (for example a small unitary authority with services running into a shire authority), we would expect a single BSIP to be produced. We also expect to see shared arrangements across any areas wishing to become new or expanded MCAs in the future.'

It is also logical to undertake a joint EP and BSIP as our public transport works very much as a regional, West of England wide network with most of our routes, certainly the key corridor routes, radiating cross-border from Bristol. The BSIP will also form as a bidding document that will be used to lever in additional funding and investment to improving our bus network, and an NSC-only BSIP will not carry the same weight or attractiveness as a joint plan with our West of England neighbours.

2. NSC do not commit to an EP or BSIP at all. As set out in the Funding section above, from 1 July 2021 only LTAs and operators who have committed to an EP or a franchise will continue to receive COVID-support funding for bus services (CBSSG) or any new sources of bus funding from the £3bn budget. Choosing to not be eligible for potentially significant funding for a 'new era for bus travel' would be a difficult decision to justify given our financial position and the ongoing uncertainty in our failing bus network system. Concessionary fares and supported bus services would become even harder to fund and deliver. Many of our bus services would become further commercially unviable and would end, particularly given the last year with the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

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Annexes:

- Annex A – North Somerset Council's Notice of Intent to Enter into an Enhanced Partnership (attached separately to this report);

Background Papers:

- [The national bus strategy: Bus Back Better \(March 2021\)](#)
- [National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plans \(May 2021\)](#)
[Guidance to all local authorities and bus operators \(Department for Transport, May 2021\)](#)
- [The West of England Bus Strategy \(June 2020\)](#)
- [The West of England Joint Local Transport Plan \(JLTP4\) \(March 2020\)](#)
- [Bus Services Act 2017 – New powers and opportunities](#)
- [Guidance on Enhanced Partnerships](#)
- [Guidance on Franchising Schemes](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Policy alignment between Bus Back Better and NSC and West of England plans and policies

The [West of England Bus Strategy](#), consulted upon extensively in January 2020 and adopted in June 2020, considers options to improve the bus network and set out how further growth in bus usage can be encouraged. The strategy includes proposals to create better, faster, more reliable and more accessible services across Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Through this strategy, North Somerset Council (NSC) and WECA aimed to see bus passenger numbers double by 2036 (from a 2011 baseline), although this needs to be reviewed in light of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [West of England Joint Local Transport Plan 4 \(JLTP4\)](#), consulted upon extensively in January 2019 and adopted in March 2020, sets out the region's priorities for improving bus travel to be a serious alternative to the private car. Policy W1, aims to:

'Provide more public transport options and improve service quality.'

This is supported by three main interventions to support the delivery of the policy:

- Provide high quality and reliable mass and rapid transit;
- Support and enhance existing public transport services, and;
- Improve the availability and accessibility of accurate travel information and ticketing.

The bus service improvement policies and interventions contained within both the West of England Bus Strategy and the JLTP4 are consistent with the direction of the national Government's [Bus Back Better – a National Bus Strategy for England](#). The vision and aims of this positive new strategy are set out in the Summary section above.

The [North Somerset Council \(NSC\) Corporate Plan 2020-24](#) sets out to achieve 'A transport network that promotes active, accessible and low carbon travel' and by 2023, to see 'More people using the bus network, and improvements in reliability and passenger satisfaction'. Through delivering showcase bus corridors, as well as other measures that will be detailed in the joint BSIP, the Corporate Plan aims to see:

- An increase in bus patronage;
- The delivery of at least one new showcase corridor by 2023, and;
- Measures to enable the unhampered movement of buses.

Preparing and then delivering a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) with WECA and preparing an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with WECA and bus operators would be consistent with and add further weight to our Corporate Plan aims for bus service improvements shown above.

The BSIP guidance emphasises that this is not just a bus strategy for buses, but part of an integrated approach to improving the overall transport network via increasing opportunities to use lower-carbon and more space-efficient forms of transport as a realistic alternative to the private car. Further to this, the BSIP guidance is also clear that 'Government will also take into account an LTA's performance with respect to the policies set out in the Strategy when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.' It is therefore even more important that we are well coordinated in our approaches to first and last mile trips to and from the bus network. This includes having up to date, best practice policies adopted accompanied by already-identified interventions to improve active travel, the rail network and other transport options. This will ensure that we are planning for and

provide a coordinated, interchange nodes approach to our bus service improvement planning.

Our success with the Emergency Active Travel Fund (Tranche 1) and the Active Travel Fund (Tranche 2) in 2020 should stand us in good stead in terms of our reputation with the Department for Transport. On this workstream, NSC was one of two authorities in England to receive more funding than bid for due to the strength and ambition in both bids and we are underway with consultation before delivery later in 2021-22.

In policy terms, our Emerging NSC Active Travel Strategy (ATS) is set to be adopted by NSC Full Council in July. The ATS is clear on the importance of linking active travel infrastructure and awareness improvements to public transport corridors and interchanges as the first and last mile of all public transport journeys. This Active Travel Strategy will help show national government that we are ready with our local policies in place to accompany this major increase of investment in our bus network with serious and ambitious active travel improvements alongside. This is consistent with the guidance we have had so far on preparing a BSIP; interlinking public transport and active travel for more space-efficient, cost-efficient, active and lower carbon journeys. A link to our Emerging ATS is available in the Background documents section below.

North Somerset Council are also underway with developing the new Local Plan, which will set out the policies and sites for residential and employment development, including required transport improvements to facilitate these, up to 2038. At the 28 April 2021 NSC Executive Committee Meeting, Members unanimously endorsed the preferred spatial strategy for our Local Plan, following full public and stakeholder consultation on both the Challenges and Choices facing North Somerset as part of [developing the plan](#).

The Local Plan will be a full plan with detailed policies on the approach to various forms of development and will set out the overall spatial strategy; where NSC recommends growth should be encouraged to meet the need for the houses, infrastructure, jobs and services North Somerset will need. This will be consulted upon later in 2021 but will work in tandem with the BSIP as both are developed throughout Summer and Autumn 2021. This collaboration across the two plans has already begun.

Appendix 2: West of England Bus Strategy and JLTP4 consultation summary

Further to the above, in the last three years we have undertaken a good level of consultation on public transport in the West of England. The [West of England Bus Strategy](#) was consulted upon extensively in January 2020 (with nearly 2,000 responses) and adopted in June 2020. It considers options to improve the bus network and set out how further growth in bus usage can be encouraged. Summarised in the [Bus Strategy Consultation Report](#), the consultation was seen as a success with support for the strategy. Responses showed that:

- 85% of people either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed with the objectives:
 - developing a comprehensive and joined-up bus network;
 - maximising bus service reliability and reducing journey times;
 - providing simplified ticketing;
 - addressing congestion;
 - developing accessible passenger waiting facilities, and;
 - continuing to improve passenger satisfaction.
- A significant majority (84.3%) agreed to the reallocation of road space to prioritise buses, with over half of all people “strongly agreeing”;
- Over two-thirds of responses agreed with the proposed target: doubling passenger numbers by 2036;
- Nearly four out of five (79.8%) people either strongly agreed or agreed that rural communities would be better served by connections to transfer hubs with over four out of five (82%) people agreeing that other transport solutions should be explored to serve rural areas instead of conventional buses;
- The highest ranked priorities for supported bus services were access to employment, hospitals and education facilities;
- The highest ranked bus strategy themes were a well-designed bus network, reliable and faster bus services and modern, clean accessible buses.

Consultation on the new West of England Bus Information Strategy is also planned this summer (2021).

The West of England JLTP4 (Joint Local Transport Plan 4) also undertook a full public consultation in February and March 2019 for six weeks and generated over 4,000 responses. The responses resulted in making over 3,500 edits and improvements to JLTP4 as a result of the consultation, which overall showed (as seen in the [Consultation Report](#)):

- a strong enthusiasm for the aims & objectives of the plan (65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed);
- support for rail, bus improvements (58 responses) and active travel (39 responses);

As a result of the consultation, key changes to the plan from the 3,500+ edits included strengthening the West of England authorities’ [Climate Emergency declarations](#), stronger text on demand management and the reallocation of street space, the removal of references to the withdrawn Joint Spatial Plan and adding the Environmental, Equalities & Health impacts of JLTP4.