

Update on Bus
Service
Improvement
Plan and
Enhanced
Partnership
November
2022



Current Bus Network Statistics 09/11/22

Overall Patronage recovery compared to pre pandemic levels;

- 77% average recovery of patronage on First bus services
- 61% concessionary recovery
- Lost mileage 3.45%
 - Driver was 2.15%
 - Traffic was 0.91%
 - Other 0.33%
- Percentage of mileage compared to Pre-pandemic 79% in NSC
- 300 drivers short to deliver current network. Propped up by agency at present!
- Circa 600 drivers short to deliver the aspirational network

The network is 21% smaller mileage, with roughly a third of the pre-pandemic patronage!

Current BSIP situation 14/11/2022

- The council received a visit from the DfT case handler 28/09/2022 to get an overview of the area and the BSIP schemes. At this meeting it was confirmed that the DfT had approved our BSIP and outline spending plans (known as the Annex 4) and that HMT were holding the pen on the release and approval of the funding.
- **The decision to finalise and release the BSIP funding remains with the Treasury, and is now postponed until the fiscal statement on the 17/11/2022.**
- The Enhanced Partnership draft has been finalised with input from the DfT. The final draft makes reference to the BSIP schemes and commitments at the request of the DfT. This is on hold until the funding is announced formally.
- The expectation is that the EP will be put out for technical consultation with statutory bodies (not the general public) before the start of December 2022. (subject to funding) If the funding is to be revised then the EP will need to be revised again prior to the consultation.
- The council has commenced recruitment for Capital and Revenue funded BSIP posts at risk, in order to accelerate BSIP Delivery from February 2023. There is interest in the roles, with the exception of the engineering posts which remain a challenge.
- The BSIP backed fares package has been launched in September. This introduced flat fares for longer distance routes and a £2 flat fare in Bristol. First are spending at risk at this stage, with written acknowledgement from the DfT that the scheme is backed by them.
- The council has facilitated meetings with Weston College with First bus to foster a driver training package similar to the HGV Covid package.

Supported Bus Service situation 14/11/2022

Supported Bus

- Following the news in September that HCT Group had fallen into administration the council lost the rural services 53,54,55 linking Clevedon, Yatton, Bristol Airport, Felton, Dundry and South Bristol. These have yet been replaced, due to a lack of funding in the absence of BSIP, and a lack of commercial interest from any operators to date.
- The 56 also ceased In August, there is no scope for a traditional bus service to serve the Walton Bay Area due to access restrictions. Alternatives are being investigated (see later slides on DRT)
- The 50 has suffered from poor reliability over the last 3 months, this relates to the driver crisis in the region, meaning Stagecoach have had to cancel journeys, often at short notice. This is damaging the confidence of the users and the long term prospects of the service to return it to a commercial footing.
- The 51/51s remains a relatively popular and successful service, a meeting was held in October to review the route and the potential to divert it to cover lost sections of the 126. First do not have any spare driver resource, as such they are unable to lift the frequency or modify the route at this time. There is little scope to tender a new service in the current climate unless more operating capacity can be found.
- The WsM network requires an complete re-work, unfortunately this is held back by the lack of progress on the completion of the north south link road, and the Winterstoke road bridge, both of which could result in a new circular bus route.
- No Solution to the Loss of the 126 at present due to lack of drivers and operator availability.

Commercial Bus situation 14/11/2022

First Bus

- First bus took action to de-register routes and frequency across the WoE area at the start of September this means that the commercial network is now 79% of what it was prior to the pandemic in North Somerset. The primary reason for this was to ensure that first are able to deliver the remaining network reliably.
- The Lost mileage (buses failing to run to run) over the last few months has been around 8% at its worst This has recently reduced to a little over 3.45% of which driver was 2.15% traffic was 0.91% 0.33% Driver related issues should be under 1% as a rule of thumb.
- The services are stabilising following the latest network review, however it is too early to tell if the services can reach acceptable levels of service.
- The DVSA are responsible for investigating lost mileage, and ultimately any enforcement action resulting from poor performance. They have approached the council to discuss this in the context of the Enhanced Partnership, a meeting to discuss localised improvements has been suggested as an urgent action.
- It is important to note First are transparent about the issues they face, but the failure to register and operate services to an acceptable level of service have the potential to undermine the investment from BSIP if improvements are not made!
- The regions RTI system is also undermining the confidence in passengers by appearing to display ghost buses, this is due to the bus operators not cancelling services in a timely fashion. The system is also time consuming, to use in their defence!

Demand Responsive Transport

The BSIP funding has £6 million over 24 months to deliver new Demand Responsive Transport services to areas that have no connectivity to public transport. The intent is to expand the FTZ pilot in WECA to cover more areas under the BSIP funding. This is a mitigation to the recent loss of network following the covid recovery work.

Officers in NSC have specified areas that do not currently have a bus network with significant populations for the provision of a new DRT service. The project is being led by WECA using specialist mapping software we have been able to identify the amount of resource required to deliver a core service.

The Combined authority have tendered for the supply of the resource, and will lead on the delivery of the back office system to support the DRT zones.

Once the required resource is established we will be able to work with the suppliers to define the exact scope and operation method, examples of this could be do we have any fixed routing and times or is it entirely demand led.

ENCTS will be accepted by default, the rate will need to increase to reflect the cost of the operation though, which we anticipate will be circa £200k per vehicle per annum.

There is a risk vehicles and drivers may not be sourced in time to launch in April 2023!

A map of the DRT zones is on the next page!

DRT zones



This map shows the operating areas for the DRT services, The large area in light blue is potentially shared with B&NES

The area covering Portishead, Clevedon, Yatton is seen as the most viable and urgent given the recent loss of services

We are trying to establish a link to Axbridge via this service too is if resource permits.

Capital Schemes Update

- The council has engaged ward and town and parish councillors along with technical consultees around the scope and design of the first 7 schemes
 - A38 Barrow Gurney Signals
 - A370 Long Ashton Bypass / Gurney Roundabout
 - A370 Brockley combe
 - A369 Martcombe Road / M5 Junction 19 south (current HOV Lane)
 - A369 Begger Bush Lane signals
 - A370 Wood hill / Wrington
 - A370 Smallway Congresbury signals
- The council are preparing responses to the engagement.
- The feedback will inform the final design works that due to start from December/January
- The procurement work to deliver the remaining schemes is progressing at pace.
- A report will be brought to the executive committee in February to outline the next steps and seek the relevant approvals for the remaining schemes.

The positives!

- BSIP Funding is still due, and remains one of the largest settlements in England.
- The Enhanced Partnership is drafted and ready
- The council is shovel ready to deliver the first 7 schemes for BSIP starting early in 2022
- The X1,X4,X7 are operating near full capacity at peak times and require additional capacity.
- The council has jointly tendered for a DRT services to start early next year (subject to interest from operators)
- Lost mileage rates are reducing and services are showing signs of recovery.

Recommendation

- The place panel requests a scrutiny session with the DVSA to understand what actions are being taken to reduce lost mileage with the local First Bus and Stagecoach operating Companies.