

Member Briefing

Number: 1762

Title: Bus Back Better: A National Bus Strategy for England

Summary: Bus Back Better the Government's National Bus Strategy for England was launched on 15 March 2021. This sets out a radical new pathway to transform the bus sector so that it is the mode of choice for short distances, advocating Enhanced Partnerships (EPs) between Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and Bus operators, bus priority schemes and better ticketing and marketing amongst other points covered in the strategy.

Background

The publication of the National Bus Strategy is timely. Members will be aware of the work of the Bus Review Task Group; established following Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 March 2020. The cross-party Task Group consists of 11 ward members and is Chaired by Councillor Paul Roberts with Councillor Andrew Cooper as Vice Chair. The key topics identified by the Task Group in its terms of reference are:

- local bus
- community transport and rural mobility
- home to school transport
- Park & Ride

The Task Group has been mindful of the enabling impact that good transport and connectivity has on the life chances of individuals and communities in our borough and means to explore benefits at minimal cost or with a view to drawing down additional/external funding to progress.

The Task Group has carefully assessed evidence in agreeing the draft priorities presented to Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee (25 January 2021), identifying a set of 35 draft priorities. Further detailed work is now being done to fully understand the costs and potential funding streams of these before they can be taken forward (or otherwise) to Cabinet as workable solutions. Key themes of integration, affordability, preparing for economic bounce back and improved ticketing and marketing across the transport sector were also identified. Many synergies with the draft findings of the Bus Review Task Group and the National Bus Strategy exist which will need to be explored further.

The [National Bus Strategy](#) sets out the Government's vision for bus transport. Advocating simple, cheap flat fares with a contactless payment, with daily and weekly price capping across operators, including rail. A network, with easy-to-understand services, consistent high standards and comprehensive information, 4,000 new green buses, and many others, running faster and more reliably in special lanes. Additionally, Statutory traffic management guidance will be updated to make promoting bus reliability an integral part of highway authorities' Network Management Duty.

Following the publication of "Bus Back Better" Baroness Vere has offered LTAs £100,000 towards the setting up of an EP for their area. A timeframe for this has been mapped by

Government, demonstrating the expectation. Further guidance is anticipated on the requirements of the EPs.

- By the **end of June 2021**, the government expects all LTAs, to commit to establishing EPs across their entire areas under the Bus Services Act 2017, and all operators to co-operate with the LTA throughout the process.
- From **1 July 2021**, only LTAs and operators who meet these requirements will continue to receive the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) or any new sources of bus funding from the Government's £3 billion budget.
- By the **end of October 2021**, Government expect all LTAs to publish a Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), detailing how they propose to improve services.

Bus Service Improvements Plans (BSIPs) must:

- be developed by LTAs in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services, and people
- cover the LTA's full area, all local bus services within it, and the differing needs of any parts of that area (e.g. urban and rural elements)
- focus on delivering the bus network that LTAs (in consultation with operators) want to see, including how to address the under provision and overprovision of bus services and buses integrating with other modes
- set out how they will achieve the objectives of the strategy, including growing bus use, and include a detailed plan for delivery
- be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan.

BSIPs are prescriptive and should amongst other things; set targets for journey times and reliability improvements; identify where bus priority measures are needed, set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues and carbon reduction targets which improved bus services could address and drive improvements for passengers e.g. setting out plans and costs for fares, ticketing and modal integration and committing to a Bus Passenger Charter (BPC).

Actual delivery of EPs is expected by **April 2022**. It is clear from that date, the new discretionary forms of bus funding from Government will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an EP.

Actions for members

Members to note the work of the Bus Review Task Group draft findings report taken [to Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2021](#).

Members to note the clear direction of travel and the need to develop an EP for the borough in order to access any future bus related funding and transform the bus offer for our residents, commuters and visitors.

To note that the Mayor of Greater Manchester announced on 25 March his decision to proceed with proposals to implement bus franchising in Greater Manchester. Any authorities

wishing to go down the same route will need to first undertake an EP and in the case of Cheshire West and Chester also seek permission from the Secretary of State.

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Date: 31 March 2021