



27 June 2024

Title	Reading Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	James Clements, Transport Programme Manager
Lead councillor	Cllr John Ennis, Lead Member for Climate Strategy & Transport
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of this report.2. Note the content of the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 Executive Summary (Appendix 1)3. Approve the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 (Appendix 2) and its submission to the Department for Transport.4. Agree that minor amendments may be made to the Plan before its submission by the Transport Programme Manager in consultation with the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport & Regulatory Services, and Lead Member for Climate Strategy & Transport.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the current Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), and to provide further details on the work undertaken to prepare an updated BSIP in line with Department for Transport (DfT) requirements.
- 1.2. Officers have prepared an updated BSIP 2024 (Appendix 2), which has been submitted to DfT in draft (on 12 June 2024). This report is seeking approval from the Committee to submit the Council's final BSIP 2024 to DfT.
- 1.3. An executive summary is included in Appendix 1 and sets out the key principles of the BSIP 2024.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. The Council published and adopted its first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Reading in October 2021, in line with the objectives as set out in the National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better', including requiring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to produce a BSIP for their area. Reading's BSIP sets out an ambitious programme of measures to improve bus services in Reading, which was prepared in partnership with all local operators and neighbouring local authorities.
- 2.2. The National Bus Strategy also required LTAs to either establish Enhanced Partnerships with local bus operators or to implement a franchise system to manage the provision of local bus services. Following publication of Reading's BSIP last year, Enhanced Partnership (EP) arrangements were developed with bus operators in line with the relevant legislation. The Council prepared an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme and formal

notice, giving qualifying local bus operators the right to object, which was issued in January 2022. The Council subsequently made the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme with no modifications as a result of the feedback from the stakeholder and public consultation which came into effect on Friday 1st April 2022.

- 2.3. Following these arrangements, the Government undertook a review of all BSIPs and EPs submitted by LTAs and subsequent discussions were held with selected authorities. The DfT then announced indicative funding allocations for selected authorities on 4th April 2022, including up to £26.3m for Reading for the three-year period from 2022/23 to 2024/25. The DfT outlined a timetable for LTAs to submit further information and updated Enhanced Partnership (EP) Schemes to it, in order that funding allocations can be confirmed. The funding provisionally allocated to Reading is £15,939,000 capital and £10,324,600 revenue grant funding.
- 2.4. In January 2024 the Government announced the requirement for LTAs to prepare an updated BSIP 2024 document, which reflected the progress made against its original BSIP and provided clarity on future measures that are required in order to achieve the ambitions of the National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better'. The submission of an updated BSIP is a condition for the release of the LTAs 2024/25 BSIP Funding.
- 2.5. The BSIP will become a sub-strategy to the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, the new Local Transport Plan for the borough, which is being considered as a separate agenda item by this Committee.
- 2.6. The Council's Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
 - Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 2.7. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
 - People first
 - Digital transformation
 - Building self-reliance
 - Getting the best value
 - Collaborating with others
- 2.8. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

3. The proposal

- 3.1. In early 2024 the DfT requested that all LTAs refresh and update their BSIPs and submit these to the Department by June 2024. Although it was stated that this will not function as a bidding document for specific DfT funds it is a requirement for the release of our BSIP funding envelope for financial year 2024/25.
- 3.2. BSIP 2021 was only the first stage of the Council's overall plan for buses in Reading as outlined in our new Reading Transport Strategy 2040. BSIP 2024 outlines how we plan to further enhance bus services in Reading, providing even better access opportunities to everyone across the borough, continue to combat the poor air quality polluting some parts of our town, provide another step forward on our journey to create a net zero-carbon Reading and support the vision and objectives of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040.
- 3.3. The key themes for our BSIP 2024 are as follows:

- **Updating the baseline to 2023/24:** updating the 2021 BSIP's account of the current situation reflecting progress since 2021, including evolution of the local bus market post-pandemic and its issues and opportunities; highlighting achievements made since 2021 in progress with the delivery of locally driven change through the Enhanced Partnership.
- **Setting out the improvement programme in financial year 2024/25:** to reflect the known funding envelope of BSIP funding and all other funding sources for BSIP delivery, including our own resources.
- **Getting ready for 2025 and beyond:** refreshing our BSIP's ambition and content to set out a high quality and flexible pipeline of prioritised proposals for the four years 2025/26 to 2028/29, plus our longer-term ambitions. This will also align with our new Reading Transport Strategy 2040 and ensure we are ready for delivery as opportunities for funding arise.

3.4. The BSIP is intended to be comprehensive, whilst also being concise and accessible to the public, and therefore we have also used this opportunity to restructure and shorten the document from the earlier BSIP 2021.

3.5. As Reading Borough Council was awarded significant funding towards the implementation of our first BSIP, the opportunity to refresh our BSIP enables us to provide a summary of the excellent progress that has been made against our plans for 2021-2024. This has also enabled us to provide an updated and new set of plans for 2025 recognising a lot of the original initiatives in our first BSIP will have been implemented and we can bring forward new schemes.

3.6. Within the BSIP 2024 we have identified a number of new and enhanced measures under the key themes of:

- Service Level & Network Coverage
- Bus Priority
- Lower & Simpler Fares
- Ticketing
- Waiting & Interchange Facilities
- Bus Information & Network Identity
- Bus Passenger Experience
- Bus Fleet
- Accessibility & Inclusion
- Longer Term Transformation of the Network

3.7. The proposed shortlist of measures has been identified by transport professionals in collaboration with members of the Enhanced Partnership and reflects the local priorities to improve the public transport network in Reading. The measures support the objectives of the Council's Local Transport Plan 2040, as well as the Council's Corporate Plan and Climate Strategy.

3.8. Although the DfT have stated that the 2024 BSIP is not a bidding document, it does report on what we have already achieved, and it may be used as a factor by Government to determine future levels of funding. Therefore, we believe our track record of delivery makes a strong case to support further investment.

3.9. Any future funding opportunities resulting from the Council's published BSIP 2024 will be reported back to this Committee at the appropriate time.

4. Contribution to strategic aims

- 4.1. The development and adoption of the Council's new Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 will help to deliver the three service priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan of Healthy Environment, Thriving Communities and Inclusive Economy as set out in detail in this report.

5. Environmental and climate implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions, however, significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- 5.2. The Bus Service Improvement Plan has been developed to align with the Local Transport Plan 2040 and the Climate Emergency Strategy, with the focus on developing an inclusive Bus Network that offers a sustainable mode of travel, and which complements other sustainable modes, such as Active Travel.
- 5.3. The Climate Impact Assessment tool has been used to assess the proposal as set out within this report, resulting in an overall Net Medium Positive impact. This is in part due to the fact the BSIP 2024 will promote bus travel across Reading and encourage mode shift away from travel by private vehicle. This will in turn lead to less energy use as fewer people make individual trips by private vehicle. The introduction of our Zero Emission electric buses across the network will also lead to a 'decarbonisation' of travel behaviour throughout Reading. The assessment also acknowledges that there will be negative impacts resulting from construction activities associated with the delivery of schemes as set out within the Plan.

6. Community engagement

- 6.1. As set out within the report, the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 has been developed in collaboration with local Bus Operators.

7. Equality impact assessment

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of delivering the proposals set out within the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership arrangements to provide improved access, services and facilities for local residents.
- 7.3. In preparing the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024, officers have given due consideration to the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010, and the plan focusses on ensuring that bus travel is fully inclusive and accessible to all.

8. Other relevant considerations

- 8.1. There are none.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The Council has established the Enhanced Partnership with all local bus operators serving Reading Borough, which is a statutory arrangement termed 'enhanced partnership arrangements' under the 2017 Bus Services Act.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. The development of the updated Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 has been funded using the existing BSIP Revenue Grant.
- 10.2. The development and delivery of schemes as set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 would be subject to future funding being identified and secured, such as central government BSIP funding similar to that made available for 2022-2025.

11. Timetable for implementation

- 11.1. A draft of the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 was submitted to DfT on 12 June 2024. A final submission will be made following the decision of this Committee.
- 11.2. The delivery of individual schemes included within the Plan will be subject to future funding being secured.

12. Background papers

- 12.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. **Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 – Executive Summary**
2. **Draft Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 (pending)**