

Title of report: National Bus Strategy - Bus Service Improvement Plan

Decision maker: Cabinet member Infrastructure and transport

Decision date: Thursday 21 October 2021

Report by: Transport Services Manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve submission of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Herefordshire at appendix 1. This being due to the Department for Transport (DfT) no later than 31 October 2021 to meet the deadline of the Government's [National bus strategy for England: Bus back better](#).

Submitting the BSIP to DfT will assist the council in securing ongoing government funding support for buses and the development of the council's public transport strategy. This will support the investment in buses that cabinet identified when it determined its preferred transport strategy following the Hereford Transport Strategy Review.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet member authorises submission of the Bus Service Improvement Plan for Herefordshire to DfT.**

Alternative options

1. Not to progress the requirements set out in the NBS. This is not advised as it would result in the council losing access to central Government funding that supports bus services in the County, this funding is detailed below. In addition, not progressing the NBS would not align with the [Cabinet decision taken 3 December 2020](#) which confirmed the administration's intentions to progress package B of the Hereford Transport Strategy Review (HTSR).
 - I. Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) - a grant distributed to bus operators by the council to offset the financial effect of reduced passenger numbers on subsidised bus services, services contracted by the council.
 - II. Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG) – an annual grant received by the council that contributes to the council's budget for supporting contracted bus services in the County, currently an annual grant of £218k is received.

Key considerations

1. On 15 March 2021 the Department for Transport (DfT) published Bus back better: National bus strategy for England (NBS). In the accompanying press release the department stated:

“This national strategy sets out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered”.
2. The NBS aims to rejuvenate local bus services, making them attractive for passengers, cheaper, easier to understand and use, faster and more reliable, and greener. It acknowledges the decades-long decline in bus patronage nationally – and points to towns and cities which have bucked the trend, increasing passenger numbers with coordinated services and investment.
3. The NBS places new requirements on Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to develop BSIPs and set up Enhanced Partnership agreements (EPs) with local bus operators, to tight timescales, with action on networks and services, fares and ticketing, passenger facilities, and on-street bus priority measures. Government has confirmed that both the BSIP and EP will need to be informed by public and stakeholder consultation, including publication of a passenger charter. The strategy comes with the promise of £3 billion of national funding.
4. DfT have confirmed that they expect BSIP's to be high level documents that set out the general aspirations of the LTA for improving bus services. These high level aspirations will be defined further in an EP agreement. BSIPs are expected to:
 - I. Set targets for journey times and reliability improvements
 - II. Identify where bus priority measures are needed
 - III. Set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues and carbon reduction targets which improved bus services could address
 - IV. Drive improvements for passengers by:

- a) Setting targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction
 - b) Setting out plans and costs for fares, ticketing and modal integration
 - c) Considering the impact of roadside infrastructure (e.g. bus stops and shelters) on passenger safety, security and accessibility.
 - d) Considering how a coherent and integrated network should serve schools, health, social care, employment and other services
 - e) Taking into account the views of local people
 - f) Committing to a Bus Passenger Charter (BPC) that sets out what passengers can expect from bus operators delivering local bus services across their area.
5. This report follows on from a previous key decision report published in June 2021 which outlined the work required to meet the objectives of the NBS, the report can be viewed [here](#). The report gave approval to submit a statement of intent to DfT in June 2021 and to progress work to create a BSIP.
 6. The deadline for submission of a BSIP and accompanying funding request to DfT is 31 October 2021.
 7. DfT have issued [guidance on preparing BSIP's](#). The guidance states the following on the detail required in a BSIP:

Given that BSIPs will have to be produced within six months, they will necessarily be outlines. We do not expect vastly detailed and granular documents running to hundreds of pages. Nor will we take them as definitive or immutable commitments or statements of intent on your part. Their main purpose is to get everyone thinking about what questions need to be addressed in the area, to explore possible answers, and to provide an early basis for funding decisions in the autumn and winter in preparation for the financial year 2022/3 when transformational funding begins.
 8. Once a BSIP has been published further work will be required to form EP agreements with bus operators. EPs are detailed agreements between LTAs and the majority of their local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. Local bus operators have opportunities to participate in the development of an EP and have a formal say on the process at several key stages. The EP cannot proceed unless formal agreement is obtained from a defined proportion of operators at each stage. The deadline for agreeing an EP with bus operators is 31 March 2022. A further governance report will be published in February 2022 which will seek approval to form an EP.
 9. Transport consultants Integrated Transport Planning Ltd have been retained to progress the BSIP and EP on behalf of the council, with the funding of the commission paid for by a capacity grant provided by DfT.
 10. As part of the BSIP work a public survey was completed to capture the views of bus users and non bus users on the priorities for bus services in the County. The full details of this can be found at appendix 2. The headline priorities identified by those who responded to the public survey were:

Bus users	Non-bus users
More frequent services (88%)	More frequent services (83%)
Information easier to find/use (79%)	Information easier to find/use (74%)
Contactless payment (78%)	Contactless payment (73%)
Serving more destinations (72%)	Serving more destinations (71%)
Multi-operator ticket (69%)	Operate later in the evening (68%)
Operate later in the evening (68%)	Multi-operator ticket (67%)

11. The BSIP sets out the following projects, and funding asks, to improve bus services in Herefordshire.

Network - funding ask from DfT for this element of the BSIP is £8.345M for the first 3 years and £3.245m per year thereafter.

- I. **Bus Network Review:** The inadequacies of the current network and level of ambition mean that the entire network will be replanned from scratch.
- II. **Develop the 'core' network:** - Enhanced levels of service on Hereford city services (15-minute frequency) and on main corridors linking market towns and Hereford (30-minute frequency) operating 7 days per week and Monday – Saturday evenings. Phased approach focusing on key corridors and core services.
- III. **Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)** – starting with a trial around a market town, assess the potential future role of responsive services and their ability to encourage new demand and replace infrequent rural services.
- IV. **Enhancing the supporting network** – develop a supporting network connecting market towns with surrounding areas, reflecting the needs of the local community and mirroring the operation of the core network where possible.
- V. **Resource the network** – develop local PSV driver training facility.

Reliability - funding ask from DfT for this element of the BSIP is £5.35M for the first 3 years and £70k per year thereafter.

- I. **Bus Priority** - Building on HTSR, congestion hotspots will be examined for potential interventions (traffic signal priority; bus lanes; bus gates). Feasibility studies will be undertaken and schemes brought forward in a phased approach, depending on funding available and relative benefit on reliability and journey time. Initial work has identified 4 areas to focus on:
 - a. **Belmont Rd** – bus lane and priority towards the city centre.
 - b. **Newmarket St** - bus lane and junction priority, supporting the development of the street as a key city interchange.
 - c. **Commercial Rd / Aylestone Hill** – junction redevelopment and bus priority
 - d. **Aylestone Hill** towards city as far as Southbank Rd – bus lane and priority.
- II. **Supporting measures:** - provision of enforcement measures, CCTV/ANPR, parking and loading restrictions

Information, branding & ticketing - funding ask from DfT for this element of the BSIP is £1.1M for the first 3 years and £25k per year thereafter.

- I. **Travel for Herefordshire** – Herefordshire Council leading a centralised, branded and coordinated approach to public transport information in all media, with all sources offering a complete picture of what is available, when and at what cost. This will improve understanding of travel options and make planning journeys easier.
- II. **Ticketing and fares strategy** - Review ticketing options and available technology to determine the most suitable options, considering the needs of different groups, including young people, and future aspirational ticketing options.
- III. **Mobile-ticketing solutions** - Support and resource for local operators to provide mobile ticketing options to customers through existing suppliers (e.g. Mytrip).
- IV. **Multi-operator ticket** – Development of multi-operator tickets for all Herefordshire and Hereford city, allowing travel across different operators with minimal premium. Sitting above other tickets, costs should be limited to administration costs.
- V. **Promotional and marketing campaigns** - Enhance the image of bus and encourage modal shift, with a specific focus on commuters, the leisure market and sustainable tourism.

Decarbonisation and Support - funding ask from DfT for this element of the BSIP is £3.335M for the first 3 years and £150k per year thereafter.

- I. **Electric vehicles** – service 78X, serving the county’s biggest employment area, enhanced and converted to fully electric vehicles. Additional resource built into the proposal brings opportunity to trial a fully electric park and ride service.
- II. **Better, cleaner buses** – Through the wider network review, and development of the core and supporting network, improvements will come from development of the ‘quality’ element of the Council’s local bus contracts and network expectations set out and agreed in the Enhanced Partnership.
- III. **Aspirational passenger charter** - This will set out what passengers can expect in using any bus across Herefordshire and be consistent with neighbouring authorities for passengers travelling across the region.
- IV. **A service for all** - Operators putting disabled passengers at the heart of their service provision and playing a leading role in creating a more accessible transport system in Herefordshire, through training and resource (i.e. involvement in DfT’s Inclusive Transport Leaders Scheme).
- V. **Infrastructure development programme** - In tandem with the Network Review, the development of an infrastructure programme to link bus and active travel modes, travel hubs in market towns and bus stop improvements.

Community impact

12. Progressing the NBS supports objective EN2 of the councils County Plan - improve and extend active travel options throughout the county.
13. Progressing the NBS supports the objectives identified by the Hereford Transport Strategy Review 2020:

- I. **Climate Emergency** : Reducing carbon emissions from the transport sector to meet the 2030 target of zero emissions;
- II. **Economy** : Creating a resilient transport system which allows reliable and efficient movement of people and goods and which supports sustainable development and a thriving local economy;
- III. **Environment** : Reducing air pollutants to create attractive and high quality places to live, work and visit whilst also protecting, considering and enhancing the natural environment and Herefordshire's built environment; and
- IV. **Society** : Providing an affordable, safe and secure transport system for all sectors of society which facilitates improved public health and has limited adverse impacts on communities.

14. This report does not have any direct effect on the lives of children in care.

Environmental Impact

15. Progressing the NBS in the County will help to deliver on the council's [environmental policy commitments](#) and aligns to the following success measures in the County Plan.

- I. Reduce the council's carbon emissions
- II. Work in partnership with others to reduce county carbon emissions
- III. Improve the air quality within Herefordshire
- IV. Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire
- V. Increase the number of short distance trips being done by sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling, public transport

Equality duty

16. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

17. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

18. The results of the public survey consultation and stakeholder workshops described below in the Consultees section have been used to carry out an Equality Impact

Assessment on the BSIP. Four equality groups were assessed as being positively impacted, and the remainder neutrally impacted.

19. Of the four groups assessed as being positively impacted:

- I. **Age** – the BSIP was felt to have a positive impact on people of age as the BSIP will deliver more buses to more places thereby increasing access to bus services. Currently 40% of bus journeys in Herefordshire are made using an English Concessionary Travel Scheme pass (ENCTS), making people of age a prominent demographic in terms of bus use in the County.
- II. **Disability** – as well as increasing the opportunity for people with a disability to access bus services through the delivery of more buses, the BSIP also includes a specific project to improve access for people with a disability:
 - a. **A service for all** – Operators putting disabled passengers at the heart of their service provision and playing a leading role in creating a more accessible transport system in Herefordshire, through training and resource (i.e. involvement in DfT's Inclusive Transport Leaders Scheme).
- III. **Sex (including issues of safety)** – the BSIP aims to improve safety through a series of network improvements that will make more frequent buses available, at more times of the day. There will also be improvements to infrastructure such as bus shelters to improve safety whilst waiting, and improvements to the availability of information which will in turn reduce waiting times at the road side and at bus stations.
- IV. **Other Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups** - Increasing the opportunities to travel by bus will assist people with limited resources/private transport to access services.

Resource implications

20. Progressing the aspirations set out in the BSIP will be dependent on external funding from DfT who have confirmed the National Bus Strategy is backed by £3bn of funding nationally.
21. A capacity grant of £165k has already been provided to the council by DfT to produce a BSIP and EP agreement, this having been used to commission consultancy support.
22. The following tables set out the amounts of capital and revenue to be requested from DfT as part of the BSIP submission. Each project includes an allowance for project management, and contingency, the amount being requested being sufficient to deliver the project in full.
23. In relation to funding requests DfT guidance states:

Where an LTA decides to pursue an EP, the BSIP content will set out a high level vision and key interventions to deliver it, with the EP plan containing the detail of how they will be delivered, so that the documents make up a blueprint for bus service improvement. 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. LTAs may wish to make an outline estimate of funding needed, accepting that it will be broad and not definitive at this stage.

In addition DfT confirmed during a workshop held on 30th September 2021 that they are keen to see specific funding requests for the three year window 2022-25, which is funded through the £3bn national bus strategy fund, but would also like to understand the ongoing funding requirements beyond this window. With the view to informing discussions with treasury and establishing longer term funding allocations. Hence the table below provides a total request for the 2022-25 window but also outlines anticipated ongoing funding requirements for a period of 5 years, from 2025-30. Whilst these figures are necessarily high level it is important to identify the likely ongoing requirement to support Herefordshire's bus network, and seek to influence long term Government funding.

Revenue or Capital cost of project	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total	Future Years (per year)
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Network (revenue)	650	3,040	4,355	8,045	3,145
Reliability (revenue)	50	25	25	100	25
Information, branding & ticketing (revenue)	200	175	125	500	25
Decarbonisation & support (revenue)	20	20	0	40	0
TOTAL - REVENUE	920	3,260	4,505	8,685	3,195
Network (capital)	0	200	100	300	100
Reliability (capital)	450	3,550	1,250	5,250	45
Information, branding & ticketing (capital)	150	300	150	600	0
Decarbonisation & support (capital)	550	1,625	1,120	3,295	150
TOTAL - CAPITAL	1,150	5,675	2,620	9,445	295

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total	Future Years (per year)
	£000	£000	£000		£000
National Bus Strategy grant funding – amount to be requested from DfT as part of the BSIP submission					
Revenue	920	3,260	4,505	8,685	3,195
Capital	1,150	5,475	2,520	9,445	295
TOTAL	2,070	8,735	7,025	18,130	3,490

Revenue budget implications	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total	Future Years
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
There are no implications for additional costs on revenue budgets – where ongoing maintenance costs have been identified these have been included in the amounts requested from DfT. .					
TOTAL					

Legal implications

24. There are no direct legal implication arising from this report to bring to the Cabinet Member’s attention.

Risk management

25. Risks associated with the recommendations set out in this report are summarised below.

Risk / opportunity

There is a risk that the council will lose access to existing central Government funding sources that support public transport in the County.

There is a risk that the council does not have the necessary resource to progress the NBS to the prescribed timescales.

The NBS provides a real opportunity to improve public transport in the County and supports the [Cabinet decision taken 3 December 2020](#) to progress package B of the HTSR

Mitigation

This will not be the case providing a BSIP and request for funding are submitted to DfT no later than 31 October 2021.

This is mitigated by the use of consultancy support that has been funded via a capacity grant provided by DfT. Passenger transport officers will support the work and have sufficient resource to do this

This opportunity can be realised by submitting a BSIP to DfT on time and by progressing the next stage of the NBS – entering an EP agreement with bus operators.

<p>There is a risk that public transport operators in the County will not agree to the council's strategy that will be set out in a BSIP, and will not agree to sign up to an EP. One of the fundamentals of an EP being collaborative working with transport operators.</p>	<p>This risk is felt to be minimal as future funding for transport operators is linked to signing up to an EP in the same way that future funding for the council is linked. In addition bus operators have been regularly consulted during the drafting of the BSIP and the priorities that it identifies.</p>
<p>There is a risk that the amount of funding provided by DfT will not be sufficient to progress the priorities identified in the BSIP.</p>	<p>This risk may be realised but would not commit the council to any additional funding. Only elements of the BSIP that could be afforded from DfT funding would be progressed. The funding submission is being made using a priority order so that if not all funding is received the priority tasks can still be progressed.</p>
<p>There is a risk that no matter what improvements are made there is no significant effect on modal shift.</p>	<p>This is a risk however it is mitigated by the fact that the priorities for improvement are based on feedback received from bus users, non-bus users, bus operators and stakeholders – the BSIP sets out to make the improvements people have asked for.</p>
<p>There is a risk that elements of received funding are not spent in the prescribed timescales and have to be repaid.</p>	<p>The funding ask from DfT includes the cost of securing additional staff and consultancy support to deliver on the elements of the BSIP on time. How the project is progressing will be continually monitored throughout the life of the project.</p>

Consultees

26. A public survey was completed to capture the views of bus users and non-bus users. There were 753 respondents to the public consultation which ran from Friday 15th July to Sunday 16th August. Of these 96% were local residents, with the remaining respondents being visitors to the area or representatives of local groups and businesses. Full details of the responses can be viewed at appendix 2.
27. Two workshops were undertaken as part of the BSIP development programme. One with Elected members (17 August 2021) and one with a wider stakeholder group (19 August 2021).

The key outcomes from the workshop with Elected members included:

- I. Supportive of initiatives to train PSV drivers locally
- II. Important to recognise the leisure/tourism potential of bus services
- III. Supportive of the concept of improved frequencies and consistent core network
- IV. Agreement with draft vision and objectives

The key outcomes from the workshop with Stakeholders included:

- I. Desire to see more consistent provision / improved frequencies (hourly service on core routes 0700 – 2200 on 7 days per week)
- II. More links between market towns (e.g. Kington – Leominster)
- III. Concerns around the operation / image of City Bus Station
- IV. Herefordshire Council should take lead in information provision
- V. Vision and objectives – more ambition and more explicit objectives

28. Elected members were consulted by email to capture any final views on the priorities identified in the BSIP prior to publication. The following comments were received:

- Cllr Gandy commented on the need for more frequent bus services in rural areas, and the challenges that will come with creating modal shift from car to bus, and from car to demand responsive transport.
- Cllr Andrews commented on the challenge of creating modal shift particularly in light of high fare costs which make the bus less attractive than a taxi for groups of people. Cllr Andrews also commented on evening buses for young people.
- Cllr Bowes commented on the need for integrated, affordable, and direct school and college transport.
- Cllr Watson commented on the need for more school transport, smaller more frequent buses in rural areas, and free bus travel for young people. Cllr Watson also made the point that the needs of young people in rural areas are very different to those in the city.

All of the above points will be taken forward and considered as part of the BSIP bus network and ticketing review.

- Cllr Miln commented on the importance of a Transport Hub design that compliments the existing listed railway station buildings. This will be considered in the Transport Hub project which will include engagement with stakeholders to help develop design approach.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Bus Service Improvement Plan

Appendix 2 – Technical report - public survey responses on priorities for bus services in Herefordshire

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None.

Glossary of terms

DfT – Department for Transport
BSIP(s) – Bus service improvement plan
EP(s) – enhanced partnership agreement
NBS – National bus strategy
LTA – Local transport authority
BRG – Bus recovery grant
BSOG – Bus services operator grant
HTSR – Hereford Transport Strategy Review
ENCTS - English Concessionary Travel Scheme
EIA – Equality Impact Assessment

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman, Democratic Services Manager	08/10/2021
Finance	Louise Devlin, Finance Manager	01/10/2021
Legal	Guy Goodman, Deputy Solicitor to the Council	29/09/2021
Communications	Luenne Featherstone, Strategic Communications Manager	28/09/2021
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis, Head of Information Compliance and Equality	29/09/2021
Risk	Paul Harris, Head of Corporate Performance	06/10/2021
Approved by	Neil Taylor, Director Economy & Place	11/10/2021