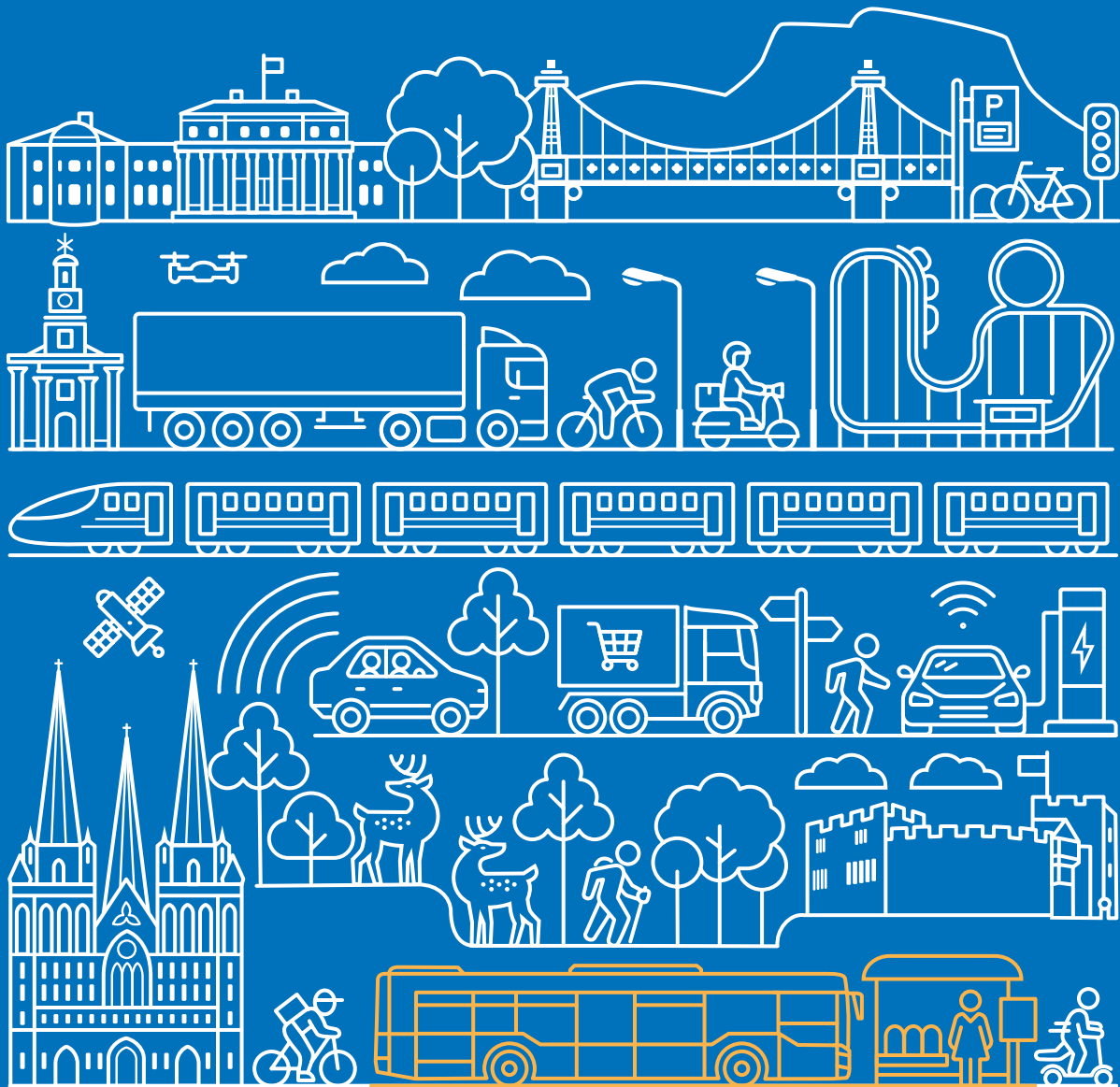


STAFFORDSHIRE Bus Service Improvement Plan

2024 to 2050

JUNE 2024

Appendix A



Staffordshire
County Council

Cabinet – Wednesday 19 June 2024

Staffordshire’s Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024

Recommendation of the Cabinet Member for Commercial Matters

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Approve Staffordshire County Council’s Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024.
- b. Provide delegated authority to the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills to make any detailed amendments to the BSIP following its approval by Cabinet.

Report Summary:

A high quality and efficient transport system is important to the County Council’s economic and environmental ambitions, connecting communities and creating inclusive employment and skills opportunities for all residents, including those without access to a car. A key component of this, is bus provision.

Working with bus operators, the County Council has taken an evidence-based approach in the development of a new 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) that aligns with the emerging Local Transport Plan (LTP). The LTP vision, objectives and programme was presented to Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 March 2023 and 11 January 2024.

Although the County Council does not run buses, the authority performs a vital role in shaping public transport provision in Staffordshire acting in its role as Local Transport Authority (LTA). This role is one of partnership, coordination, and support, to encourage the development of a sustainable bus network for the benefit of Staffordshire residents. The aim is to strengthen our Enhanced Partnership with bus operators to ensure that they play their part in delivering the BSIP.

Government guidance released in 2024, requires every authority to publish a new or updated BSIP by 12 June 2024 to secure the release of BSIP funding for 2024/25. The BSIP needs to set out our current offer, proposals for service improvements in 2024/25 and our priorities beyond 2025. The BSIP is expected to be used by Government to determine future funding levels. An Executive Summary of the 2024 BSIP is provided in Appendix 1 and the full draft BSIP document is provided in Appendix 2. A draft version of the BSIP will be submitted to DfT on 12th June 2024, but if any

revisions are required following Cabinet, a revised final version will be submitted.

The package of revenue and capital investment proposed in the BSIP, to be funded through grants and other funding opportunities, has been assessed against its expected contribution towards the National Bus Strategy goal of growing bus patronage. It is essential that a robust annual monitoring and evaluation process is established to ensure that public investment is delivering value for money. Our goal is to ensure that our investment choices help to aid the recovery of Staffordshire's bus provision.

Delivery of the 2024 BSIP will contribute to the County Council's Strategic Plan, 2022-2026. By supporting the bus industry to enhance Staffordshire's bus offer, we will:

- a. Enable residents, particularly those without access to a car, to have better access to more good jobs and share the benefits of economic growth.
- b. Contribute to thriving and sustainable communities by providing residents with the opportunity to travel more sustainably.
- c. Provide the opportunity for residents to live more active and healthier lifestyles and create independence for those who do not have access to a car.

The bus services that are proposed for improvement using BSIP+ and Network North 2024/25 funding awards are shown in Appendix 1 (BSIP Executive Summary Figure 2). These services will cost around £6m and are subject to funding being approved, following the submission of the BSIP to DfT. Our commitment is to help grow bus patronage and ensure existing routes are not cut.

In addition to the 2024/25 proposals, it is recommended that the BSIP has the following indicative financial asks for the four years between 2025/26 and 2028/29 to enable the Council to fund a balanced and complementary package of revenue and capital enhancements:

- a. £24m indicative revenue ask for supporting bus services (£6m pa).
- b. £8m indicative ask for other revenue proposals focusing on fare promotions.
- c. £23m indicative ask for capital proposals, with potential funding opportunities through Network North Local Transport Fund, developer led schemes and other bidding opportunities.

The financial figures presented for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29 are approximate and subject to change, following feasibility studies and detailed design.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills**Reasons for Recommendations:****Background**

1. In March 2021, the UK Government published its National Bus Strategy, which sets out its vision to significantly improve bus services in England. It seeks to reverse the decline in bus use, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, and encourage more people to use buses. The decline in bus use has been notable in Staffordshire. There were 22 million bus passenger journeys made in the county in 2009/10, compared to 10.3 million in 2023/24 (Department for Transport provisional figures).
2. To support the ambitions of the National Bus Strategy, we published our first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2021. Funding of £113m was requested to make our buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, cheaper, and greener. The bid was unsuccessful for several reasons, including that it lacked specific details regarding which services and infrastructure we would prioritise and why.
3. Government guidance released in 2024 requires every authority to publish a new or updated BSIP by 12 June 2024 in order to secure the release of BSIP funding for 2024/25. The BSIP is expected to be used by Government to determine future funding levels and it is a requirement that it includes:
 - a. Baseline data for 2023/24 and our achievements since 2021.
 - b. Proposed improvements up to the end of 2024/25.
 - c. Priorities and proposals for bus improvements from 2025/26 to 2028/29 and our long-term vision for bus provision in the county.
 - d. A monitoring and evaluation regime, using targets relating to passenger journeys, bus reliability, public satisfaction, and accessibility levels.
4. The 2024 BSIP will form part of the emerging new Local Transport Plan for Staffordshire. Through the BSIP, our vision for buses is that by 2050, Staffordshire will have:

A sustainable bus network and more people choosing to travel by bus as their preferred form of transport.

5. The overarching measurable objective of the National Bus Strategy is to grow bus patronage and the BSIP recommends a package of measures to support this objective. It also helps Government to deliver its key goals of ensuring:
 - a. Buses take people where they want to go, at a time that is right for them.
 - b. Bus journeys are expeditious and run on-time.
 - c. Bus fares are simple to understand and cheaper than car travel.
 - d. Ticketing is seamless between bus services and integrated across transport modes.
 - e. Bus passengers have a strong voice and influence regarding how the bus network runs.
 - f. Bus infrastructure is accessible, safe and well-maintained.
 - g. Bus information is widely available, in various formats, and accessible to all users.
 - h. Buses are accessible, zero emission, with high-quality on-board environments.

6. To identify where investment is likely to deliver good value for money, extensive spatial mapping and data analysis has been completed, including:
 - a. Stop-by-stop patronage data to identify our busiest routes.
 - b. Assessment of the existing commercial and socially necessary fixed route bus services, to show where gaps are, focusing on:
 - i. Connectivity to jobs, colleges, universities, local services and town centres.
 - ii. Provision for our 25% most deprived areas and areas of low car ownership.
 - iii. Connectivity to rail services.
 - c. Bus reliability data and traffic delay data to identify where on the network improvements could be made to make bus travel more efficient. Corridors with high traffic levels also indicate where there is the greatest movement of people and the highest number of journeys that could potentially be made by bus.
 - d. Bus stop condition surveys mapped against patronage data to identify the main gaps in DDA compliance.
 - e. Existing non-fixed alternative bus service to identify where more innovative solutions could be trialled for rural areas that will not be able to support a fixed bus service.

7. Based on data analysis and engagement, the current bus offer in Staffordshire can be summarised as follows:

- a. 19 bus operators running around 207 services from 8 depots in Staffordshire and 14 depots outside Staffordshire.
 - b. Largest operators are Diamond Bus EM, D&G, Chaserider, First, Select and Arriva Midlands.
 - c. 56% of services operate commercially.
 - d. Fares contributing less than 50% of all income, with most of funding coming from the public purse.
 - e. Last 10 years has seen a significant drop in the distance travelled by bus services.
 - f. Bus passenger journeys have fallen by 44% since 2017.
 - g. Half of buses are below Euro VI Emission Standards (excluding retrofit).
 - h. 67% of services are inter-urban or run between settlements.
 - i. 48% of services operate cross-boundary (including Stoke-on-Trent).
 - j. Two Demand Responsive Services – Moorlands Connect and Staffordshire Border Car.
 - k. Kidsgrove and Stone have lowest level of households within 400m of an hourly bus service within our Type 1 settlements (see paragraph 8). The highest is Tamworth.
 - l. Bus use is higher amongst younger residents, mainly travelling to education.
 - m. 89% of residents without access to a car use the bus.
 - n. Bus fares for shorter journeys are disproportionately expensive.
8. All Staffordshire settlements have been assessed in terms of their capability to achieve sustainable travel, ranging from our 11 settlements with good travel options and close by facilities, to our remote villages that are unlikely to support a commercial or fixed route bus service. This has helped to target investment where we are likely to achieve the greatest patronage growth, proportionate to the level of investment needed. The assessment of Staffordshire's settlements is shown in Appendix 1 (BSIP Executive Summary, Figure 1).
9. The BSIP proposes to review the objectives of Staffordshire's Enhanced Partnership that was established with all bus operators in August 2023. To complement public investment, our measurable asks of bus operators are expected to include:
- a. Improved recruitment, retention and training of bus drivers.
 - b. Ensuring realistic setting of timetables, ensuring no services run early.
 - c. Promotion of fare offers and further development of The Knot integrated ticket.
 - d. Collaboration with neighbouring Enhanced Partnerships, including Stoke-on-Trent.
 - e. Creation of a Bus Users Forum.
 - f. Investment in new high quality and zero emission buses.

- g. Commitment to data sharing to monitor patronage, bus reliability and the delivery of reliable RTPI.
- h. Maximising use of marketing campaigns and social media to inform bus passengers of timetable changes.

BSIP Proposals for 2024/25 – 2028/29

- 10. In May 2023, DfT announced BSIP+ funding for local transport authorities who did not receive an original BSIP funding allocation “to support existing services, enhance these services, or provide new ones”. For Staffordshire County Council, this funding allocation was £1,327,673 for 2023/24, followed by a similar BSIP+ allocation for 2024/25. In October 2023, an additional revenue allocation of £4,982,000 was awarded from the Network North Phase 3 BSIP funding allocation.
- 11. A condition of the 2024/25 funding award is that local transport authorities must complete a Bus Connectivity Assessment and update their BSIP by 12th June 2024.
- 12. The bus services that are proposed for improvement using BSIP+ and Network North funding, during 2024/25, are shown in Appendix 1 (BSIP Executive Summary, Figure 2). They include extended operating hours, extended routes, increased frequencies, introduction of new routes and continued support for routes requested by communities. We are committing funds to help grow bus patronage and ensure existing routes are not cut.
- 13. These services will cost around £6m and are subject to funding being approved, following the submission of the BSIP to DfT. Delivery of the BSIP requires this level of investment to continue for the following four years, with a total ask of £24m (£6m pa). This level of growth in the network in the short term takes into account the need to strengthen the Enhanced Partnership with bus operators to ensure there is the availability of drivers and fleet to support new services.
- 14. The services proposed for investment in 2024/25 aim to grow bus patronage within all the county’s districts by:
 - a. Providing better connections between settlements, particularly on corridors not served by rail, and better connections to rail stations.
 - b. Providing residents with better links to their town centre, education, jobs, and services.
 - c. Complementing town centre economic growth proposals, being delivered by District/Borough Councils through the Towns Fund, the Future High Street Fund, and the Levelling Up Fund.
 - d. Increasing the number of residents in urban areas that live within 400m of at least an hourly bus service.

- e. Enhancing services along corridors that experience traffic delays to encourage modal shift from the car.
 - f. Improving connectivity in areas of deprivation.
 - g. Improving cross-boundary connections to Stoke-on-Trent and the West Midlands conurbation.
15. The bus services identified for support will be reviewed annually to ensure that they continue to contribute to the goal of increasing bus patronage in Staffordshire, proportionate to the level of investment needed. From 2025/26, revenue support may be removed, or moved to another service, if value for money is not being achieved or if there is the potential for the service to be run commercially. The overall aim is to increase the number of commercially operated services in Staffordshire from the current rate of 56%.
16. To complement bus service improvements, alongside marketing campaigns led by bus operators, initiatives recommended to help reduce fares and improve the convenience of bus travel, include:
- a. Promotion of The Knot and Plusbus tickets and encouraging all bus operators to accept them.
 - b. Introducing a Young Person's Travel Card, extending the age to 25 to benefit young people beyond education and into employment.
 - c. Annual fare promotions.
 - d. Developing a Staffordshire Journey Planner.
17. To maximise the potential for patronage growth, particularly on the 2024/25 supported services, infrastructure improvements are proposed for delivery, as resources permit. These include:
- a. Support Lichfield District Council in enhancing Lichfield bus station provision.
 - b. Developer commitment to deliver a bus gate in Stafford between Burleyfields and Doxey.
 - c. Keele University pilot Mobility Hub.
 - d. Leek bus station refurbishment.
 - e. Improved accessible and inclusive walking links to Stafford and Cannock bus stations.
 - f. Bus stop upgrades on key routes within settlements, as appropriate to the level of use identified through patronage data.
 - g. Improved accessible and inclusive walking and wheeling routes between bus stops and rail stations in Kidsgrove and Stafford.
 - h. Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) at the busiest stops along key routes.
 - i. Information Totems in Tamworth, Stafford, Lichfield, Cannock, Leek, Stone, Kidsgrove, Burntwood and Rugeley.

- j. Improved and well-maintained walking and wheeling routes to bus stops in Leek, Rugeley, Kidsgrove, Biddulph, Burntwood and Chase Terrace, in line with the emerging new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).
- k. Virtual bus priority, as identified by bus reliability and traffic congestion data.
- l. Electric buses committed on routes serving Burton and Tamworth with future priorities supporting high patronage routes in the north of Staffordshire, including connections to Stoke-on-Trent, that also contribute to improving air quality in Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS) in Newcastle and Leek.

Long-Term Vision to 2050

18. The long-term vision proposed in the BSIP will form part of the emerging Local Transport Plan (LTP). As outlined in the report on the LTP presented to Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 January 2024, a high-quality public transport system is required to achieve the LTP's two Guiding Principles:
- a. Provide a transport system that promotes high quality, prosperous places and puts people first.
 - b. Reduce dependency on petrol and diesel vehicles.

Legal Implications

19. We note the following legal implications:
- a. Section 63(1) of the Transport Act 1985 places a duty on the Council to secure the provision of 'such passenger transport services as the Council considers appropriate to meet any public transport requirement within Staffordshire which would not, in its view, be met, apart from any action taken by them for that purpose'.
 - b. Multi Operator Ticketing Schemes are governed by the Competition Act 1998 (Public Transport Ticketing Schemes Block Exemption) Order 2001 (as amended) and the Transport Act 2000.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

20. The 2024 BSIP is a Strategy document explaining how Staffordshire County Council proposes to support the delivery of the National Bus Strategy with the funding awarded through BSIP+ and Network North and any future funding made available by Government. There is no additional financial ask of SCC Finances.
21. In addition to the 2024/25 awards, it is proposed that the BSIP has the following financial asks for the four years between 2025/26 and 2028/29

to enable the Council to fund a balanced and complementary package of revenue and capital enhancements:

- a. £24m revenue ask for supporting bus services (£6m pa);
 - b. £8m requirement for other revenue proposals focusing on fare promotions;
 - c. £23m indicative ask for capital proposals, with potential funding opportunities through Network North Local Transport Fund, developer led schemes and other bidding opportunities.
22. The financial figures presented for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29 are approximate and subject to change following feasibility and detailed design. Where required, value for money will be assessed using DfT's Small Scheme Appraisal Toolkit and Zebra Toolkit.
23. Verbal confirmation has been given by the Department for Transport that further funding support will be forthcoming for 25/26, but the commitment is subject to the national elections and subsequent spending reviews. If funding grants are not made available by Government to secure, stabilise and grow services and patronage, in line with the BSIP request, other funding opportunities will need to be secured to meet the funding gap and deliver the BSIP.

Climate Change Implications

24. Buses are a key part of the Government's Road to Zero Strategy in decarbonising transport and addressing the Climate Emergency declared by the Council. BSIP+ & BSIP Network North funding will promote the use of public transport encouraging a modal shift away from less sustainable methods of transportation.
25. Reductions to services and service frequency on commercial bus services would severely compromise the county's bus network. It would lead to a further noticeable reduction in bus patronage and modal shift away from bus travel to private car. This would lead to additional pressure on the local highway network, e.g. increased levels of congestion, which in turn would impact air quality and other environmental factors, compromising the carbon neutrality aspirations of the Council.
26. The revised BSIP and LTP will set out a long-term vision to 2050 where every bus will be electric or hydrogen; every depot will have the necessary charging infrastructure; all the necessary changes will have been made to road layouts to accommodate zero-emission buses, and energy providers will have implemented grid capacity upgrades.

27. To adapt to changes in the weather because of climate change, buses will have white roofs; tinted windows; roof and engine insulation; ventilation; and cooling and heating systems.
28. The use of low/zero emitting buses play a vital role in improving air quality. Support will be provided to help bus operators secure funding to purchase new lower emission buses or retrofit existing ones.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 - BSIP Executive Summary
Appendix 2 - Draft 2024 BSIP

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