

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 6 June 2024

Report of the Director of Highways and Transport

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Supporting economic growth;

Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 Update

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Brief Summary

This report sets out the background to the production of the Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen joint Bus Service Improvement Plan and subsequent revisions.

This report seeks approval of the 2024 update to the Bus Service Improvement Plan to be submitted to Department for Transport by 12 June 2024. The release of Bus Service Improvement Plan funding for 2024/25 is dependent on the submission of a revised document before the 12 June deadline.

The current draft plan is attached at Appendix 'A'.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the updated Bus Service Improvement Plan documentation for publication on the Lancashire County Council website.
- (ii) Authorise the Executive Director for Growth, Environment, Transport and Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, and with the Enhanced Partnership Executive Board, to make any further minor updates to the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan set out at Appendix 'A'.



This decision should be implemented immediately for the purposes of Standing Order C28 as any delay could adversely affect the execution of the county council's responsibilities. The reason for this is to ensure the Bus Service Improvement Plan is submitted to the Department for Transport by 12 June 2024.

Detail

The National Bus Strategy for England required that all Local Transport Authorities in England publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan document by October 2021. This was updated in October 2022. However, Local Transport Authorities were informed in the summer of 2023 that new guidance would be published ahead of the next update, which was therefore postponed from October 2023.

New guidance was published on 16 January 2024 with a requirement for the updated Bus Service Improvement Plan document to be published on the authority's website as well as being submitted to the Department for Transport by 12 June 2024. Release of 2024/25 Bus Service Improvement Plan funding will be subject to meeting the deadline and the document being deemed acceptable by the Department for Transport.

Whilst the 2022 update was a refresh of the original 2021 document, the 2024 update is intended to be a substantially revised document with some significant changes to the structure from the original document. The purpose of the Bus Service Improvement Plan has changed from a document to bid for funding, to a component of the Local Transport Plan. The document is split into three distinct sections:

1. The current state of bus services, including Bus Service Improvement Plan funded improvements already implemented.
2. What is planned to be delivered from Bus Service Improvement Plan funding in 2024/25; and
3. Longer term ambitions for the local bus network.

Whilst the guidance encourages Local Authorities, which are jointly developing a Local Transport Plan and/or are in the process of forming a Combined Authority, to provide a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan, it was agreed with Blackpool Council to produce separate documents for 2024 but which are closely aligned to allow, subject to its establishment, a Lancashire Combined County Authority Bus Service Improvement Plan to be produced in 2025. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council agreed to produce a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan document once again with Lancashire County Council.

Consultants were commissioned to assist in producing the main Bus Service Improvement Plan document and subsidiary documentation in line with the Department for Transport's guidance, to make the main document an overview document with supporting, more detailed, reports as necessary.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan aims to meet the following emerging Local Transport Plan objectives:



- To reduce the impact of harmful emissions from transport, addressing air quality and climate change concerns.
- To improve local public transport, networks and interchanges.
- To improve public transport for better inter-urban and rural connectivity.
- To deliver sustainable transport systems that are accessible and inclusive for all.
- To reduce the need to travel by private car, particularly for shorter journeys.
- To facilitate economic growth and regeneration.
- To manage transport assets efficiently and effectively; and
- To improve the efficiency of local road networks.

Appendices

Appendix 'A' is attached to this report. For clarification it is summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report. Appendix 'A' is the draft version of the report, the data and commentary on activity so far and during 2024/25 is subject to amendment, the vision statement, ambitions and targets sections will remain as in the draft version.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Draft Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 Update

Consultations

All bus operators within Lancashire were contacted and asked to provide suggestions for improving bus services, along with any investment plans being undertaken. Consultants undertook a progress report to operators to keep them updated. Lancaster District Bus User Group was specifically approached for suggestions alongside a general email out to Enhanced Partnership Forum members regarding the Bus Service Improvement Plan process and suggestions they might provide.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Legal

It is not a legal requirement to publish an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan document. The ambitions outlined within the Bus Service Improvement Plan document are not legally binding.

Financial

If Lancashire County Council does not publish an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan document by 12 June 2024, the Department for Transport reserves the right to withhold payment of, or even withdraw the commitment for, Bus Service Improvement Plan funding for 2024/25 to Lancashire County Council. This would either require Lancashire County Council to continue to fund Bus Service Improvement Plan schemes itself or withdraw/not proceed with them.



There is no requirement upon Lancashire County Council to fund any ambitions set out within the Bus Service Improvement Plan document, beyond those which have already been committed to through the existing Bus Service Improvement Plan funding.

Risk management

Not publishing the updated Bus Service Improvement Plan document risks reputational damage with the Department for Transport, local bus operators and those stakeholders who have contributed to the document.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 Data Note	20/05/2024	Matthew Moll/(01772) 533356

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

