

Environment, Economic Growth and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Meeting to be held on Thursday, 12 September 2024

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Delivering better services;

Bus Service Improvement Plan

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Brief Summary

The focus of the bus service improvement plan, and funding from Central Government, has centred on improving bus service frequencies and enhancement, in a sustainable way, fares initiatives and improving reliability through bus priority measures.

Recommendation

The Environment, Economic Growth and Transport Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the successes to date on bus service enhancements, and how these can be strengthened in the future.

Bus Service Improvement Plan Background

The National Bus Strategy for England required that all Local Transport Authorities in England publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan document by October 2021. Lancashire County Council produced a plan in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Council. Blackpool Council wished to produce its own Bus Service Improvement Plan. The plan was updated in October 2022. On the back of the joint Bus Service Improvement Plan document with Blackburn with Darwen Council, Lancashire County Council was awarded £20.998m capital and £9.448m revenue Bus Service Improvement Plan (Phase 1) funding for 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years.

The Department for Transport stated Priorities for funding were:

1. Bus Priority Measures. Where they will make most impact not where easiest to deliver.
2. Ambitious and eye-catching initiatives that reduce and/or simplify fares, at pace.



3. Increased service frequencies and new/expanded routes.

The Department for Transport subsequently announced Bus Service Improvement Plan (Phase 2) funding on the 24 July 2023. This was revenue only, with Lancashire County Council awarded £4.5m covering 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

Finally, following the announcement of the cancellation of HS2 and as part of the HS2 North money redistribution, Bus Service Improvement Plan (Phase 3) funding was announced on the 23 October 2023. Whilst this was to cover the 2024/25 to 2028/29 financial years, funding has only been allocated for 2024/25 so far. Lancashire County Council has been awarded £7.025m in revenue funding.

Bus Service Improvement Plan Spend

From all three phases of the Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, there will have been 44 service improvements introduced, some of these improvements cover more than one service whilst some services have seen multiple improvements from different phases of Bus Service Improvement Plan funding.

The table below shows the split of the improvements by district and between improvement type – new service, diverted / extended service, daytime enhancements, evening enhancements and Sunday enhancements. Some improvements covered more than one category and district.

District	New	Diverted	Daytime	Evening	Sunday	Total
Burnley				5		5
Chorley		3	2	3	2	6
Fylde		1	2	1	1	5
Hyndburn		2	3	1		4
Lancaster		2	3	3	2	9
Pendle				1		1
Preston			4	5		8
Ribble Val	1		2	3		5
Rossendale				3		3
S Ribble			1	3		4
W Lancs	1	2	3	3	2	9
Wyre	1	1	3	1	1	7
Total	3	10	15	20	6	44

A £1 after 7pm flat fare was introduced in January 2023, followed by a 'Weekender' offer where a day ticket purchased on Saturday was valid on a Sunday, in February 2023. By July 2024, 1.571m £1 after 7pm tickets had been sold. The 'Weekender' offer was replaced in May 2024 by a new £1 all day Sunday offer, by which time 515,504 'Weekender' tickets had been sold.

In terms of bus patronage in Lancashire, in 2023/24 financial year this was 40.394m. This represents a 9% increase from 2022/23 and a 3% increase compared to 2019/20. This growth has continued into 2024/25. For the first quarter, patronage has grown by 14% overall, with 55% growth on tendered services and 9% growth on commercial services.



4.606m passengers used services supported by Lancashire County Council in 2023/24, this compares to 3.685m in 2022/23, 3.060m in 2019/20 and 2.978m in 2016/17. The 50% growth in travel on supported services since 2019/20 has been fuelled by the increase in services provided through Bus Service Improvement Plan funding as well as an increase in the Council's own budget for supporting bus services – miles operated on supported services has increased by 90% since 2019/20.

Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024

New Bus Service Improvement Plan 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 was subject to meeting the deadline (for submission to Department for Transport only due to Purdah) and the document being deemed acceptable by the Department for Transport.

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.

Our ten key principles for improving bus services in Lancashire are:

1. Frequent – Bus service running at least every 15 minutes during the day in our major towns and cities and every 30 minutes daytime on key inter-urban routes;
2. Accessible – A bus and community transport network that can be used by all;
3. Affordable – Fares which offer value for money both for the individual passenger and those travelling together;
4. Flexible – Multi-operator ticketing which can be bought from the driver, online or via an app;
5. Reliable – Create a reliable network so buses turn up on and run to time;



6. Comprehensive – A network that provides access to employment, education, health and leisure opportunities for our residents;
7. Green – Services operated by low, ultra-low and zero emission vehicles;
8. Attractive – Vehicles, bus stops and bus stations which are clean and well maintained;
9. Safe – ensure everyone can feel safe waiting for and travelling on bus services at any time of day; and
10. Informative – Easy to access and comprehensive information on the bus network including where buses go, when they go, how much they cost and if they are disrupted.

Future Ambitions

Based on the ten key principals, our 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plan sets out the ambition for the next five to ten years based on long term funding certainty from central government. This would seek to deliver:

- More bus priority including highway changes, technology intervention and creation of Bus Rapid Transit corridors, which provide high frequency dedicated bus lanes and priority.
- Continuation of bus stop accessibility audits to ensure most bus stops in urban areas and key locations in rural areas are Equalities Act compliant. Bus shelter stock will be renewed including working with our district authorities to review non-county council owned shelters meet the standards set out in the Lancashire Bus Passenger Charter.
- Expansion of Realtime information at all bus stations, bus hubs and other key locations.
- Continued enhancement of existing bus services including five key interurban services and creation of Bus Rapid Transit standard services.
- Enhancing of rural service provision and creation of new East – West bus links.
- Improving access to employment sites including meeting shift change times.
- Enhancing information provision including potential Combined County Authority wide public transport website, cross-operator bus brand and introduction of QR codes at bus stops linked to Realtime information.
- Expanding multi-operator bus ticketing across the Combined County Authority area, including authority-wide day ticket and zonal area period ticketing. Tap-on Tap-off contactless fare capping as part of national programme.
- Continued discount for Young People including future 50% discount for under 19s.
- Working with bus operators to introduce at least 100 more zero-emission buses within Lancashire by 2029.
- Continuing to employ Passenger Transport Security Officers and review the safety of bus stops including lighting, road layout and wider-visibility.
- Continuing to work with neighbouring authorities, bus operators, bus user groups and other stakeholders to improve bus services.



New Better Buses Bill

The Better Buses Bill promised as part of the July 2024 King's Speech has yet to be explained in detail by the Department for Transport. However, it is understood that it will allow all local authorities (rather than just Mayoral Combined Authorities) to implement franchising of part or all of the bus network within the authority's area without requirement for approval by the Secretary of State; and reverses the ban on new municipal bus operations introduced as part of the Transport Act 1985. There is also mention of streamlining the franchising process and providing a mechanism for holding bus operators to account, however the detail is limited.

Consultations

All bus operators within Lancashire were contacted and asked to provide suggestions for improving bus services and bus priority locations, 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

The Enhanced Partnership is a legally binding agreement made between the Authority and Local Bus operators. Failure to adhere to the Obligations placed on the Authority or on Operators could face a legal challenge.

Financial

By not following the proposals set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the priorities set by the Department for Transport there is a risk that the Department for Transport may request funds to be returned.

Risk management

Quarterly reporting to the Department for Transport is in place to ensure the Plan is being adhered to and spend is in line with expectations.



Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
Bus Service Improvement Plan	12 June 2024	Andrew Varley 01772 533336
Bus Service Improvement Plan https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/938611/lancashire-and-blackburn-with-darwen-bus-service-improvement-plan-update-31-october-2022.pdf	31 October 2022	Andrew Varley 01772 533336
Bus Service Improvement Plan https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/928075/lancashire-with-blackburn-with-darwen-bus-service-improvement-plan.pdf	31 October 2021	Andrew Varley 01772 533336

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

