

Bus Service Improvement Plan for Portsmouth Annual Review and Progress Report November 2022

Executive Summary

In March 2021 the Government announced a new National Bus Strategy called Bus Back Better (BBB). As part of this, and to receive future transport funding, Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) had to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by 31 October 2021 and form an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with bus operators to deliver the desired and stated improvements. BSIPs should be reviewed annually, and this is the first annual review. The BSIP that was developed and published in October 2021 was for a 5-year period to 2026 and remains current in terms of our ambitions for improving public transport in Portsmouth.

Our 4 key objectives remain:

- Shorter bus travel times
- Improved service reliability
- More bus passengers
- Higher bus passenger satisfaction

In April 2022 Portsmouth City Council was notified of an indicative award of funding to deliver measures outlined in our BSIP. Although not the full amount bid for, it was one of the highest allocations in the country. The allocation is £48.3m over 3 years (April 2022 – March 2025) split between £33.8m for capital measures and £14.5m for revenue interventions.

This report therefore provides an update on:

- The current situation and context in Portsmouth as bus services continue to recover from the covid-19 pandemic
- What we have delivered so far, since the BSIP was published in October 2021
- How we have progressed the development of our Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme and our Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Section 2:

Context: Bus Services in Portsmouth

Bus service network

The network of bus services in Portsmouth has remained largely unchanged over the last year, with one supported service requiring increased funding to continue due to reduced passenger use, the 22 from Farlington to Cosham, Drayton and Highbury and funding needed for weekday journeys on the 13/14 City Centre to Baffins/Milton following the DfT required Network Review. Over the period, most key services have reverted to pre-pandemic frequencies. This is in spite of the effects of the national shortage of bus drivers and rising costs for fuel.

Patronage since the pandemic remains significantly lower than 2019 levels, due to the change in working patterns, the reduction in city centre retail choice and reluctance from some groups to travel. This results in lower income for the bus operators to maintain services. Government recovery funding (CBSSG and BRG) has helped to largely maintain the network, as well as continued support from the local transport authority, Portsmouth City Council.

Passenger numbers are gradually increasing post-pandemic, giving positive signs that they may return. Passenger numbers overall remain depressed but have risen to 7,913,267 in the year ending 31 October 2022 up from 5,546,156 in the previous year, a good year on year increase but still only 65.8% of the pre-Covid total. Interestingly concessionary usage was c71% of 2019 levels.

Encouragingly, the Tipner Park and Ride service carried 97% of 2019 passengers for the months April to August 2022.

Portsmouth introduced a Clean Air Zone in November 2021 and has 5 Air Quality Management Areas so we were delighted in March 2022 when our bid to the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas scheme was successful. The bid, in partnership with Hampshire County Council and First Bus will see 34 electric buses enter service by March 2024. These will be used on routes 1 and 3 serving Portsmouth and Southsea and through to Fareham and the 9/9A between Fareham and Gosport for the ferry to Portsmouth. The 1 and 3 will account for almost 25% of bus journeys in the Portsmouth Clean Air Zone and travel through 4 of the 5 city AQMAs.

A ZEBRA update bid for a further 28 buses has been submitted and if successful would allow four of the longer distance routes in the South East Hampshire Rapid Transit network to become zero emission. The routes are the X4/X5 between Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton and the E1/E2 Eclipse routes which use the busway between Fareham and Gosport.

Section 3

Reflecting Residents' Priorities

The Portsmouth BSIP was built on a survey of over 1,100 residents and 32 local business in summer 2021 and in 2022, over 900 Portsmouth residents took part in the National Highways and Transport survey where the city was ranked joint second amongst 111 participating authorities. Public transport feedback is being analysed to inform the next steps in BSIP.

A survey of residents and businesses in Port Solent to inform the DDRT pilot, in partnership with Solent Transport, has been completed and is being analysed.

Portsmouth City Council will be taking part in the Transport Focus 'Your Bus Journey' starting in early 2023.

Section 4:

Delivery Programme

Our BSIP delivery programme was aligned to DfT priorities and focussed on residents' responses to make bus travel quicker, more reliable and more affordable, getting residents where they want to go at the times that they wish to travel.

The first measures to be implemented will be early morning journeys on key routes from 0430 to get people to work starting with First Bus routes 1,2,3,7,8 and 18 from week commencing 3 December 2022 and joined by Stagecoach 21 and 23 from w/c 4 January. Late night buses to 0100 on Friday and Saturday nights to support the leisure industry and night time economy start from the same dates. A conscious decision has been taken to provide links beyond the Portsmouth boundary to the wider travel area with routes to Fareham, Portchester, Havant, Leigh Park and Waterlooville recognising family connections and that travel does not recognise administrative boundaries.

A benefit of the earlier and later journeys will be that The Hard Interchange will now open 24 hours a day from 3 December to provide a safe, enclosed, staffed, waiting area and will additionally improve facilities for overnight long distance coaches which have been picking up passengers on street since the pandemic reduced operating hours at the Interchange.

2022 will also see the first buses on Christmas Day in Portsmouth for many years allowing families to get together and visit patients in the Queen Alexandra Hospital. This has encouraged the bus operators to increase commercial journeys over the festive period with many routes operating everyday over the Christmas and New Year period for the first time in a long time.

A number of other pro-public transport measures have been implemented to complement the BSIP programme.

To reduce city centre car use and support the visitor economy, the City Council used its own funds to support an open top bus service linking The Hard Interchange, Old Portsmouth and the Southsea seafront in summer 2022. Some 5,200 passengers used the service over the short season. In addition, a direct Park and Ride route to Southsea seafront was provided over the summer holidays used by just under 15,000 passengers.

To address the cost of living crisis and enable Portsmouth residents with an older person's concessionary bus pass to travel at cooler times of day and support their volunteering in charity shops and the like, the start time for the Portsmouth older person's concessionary pass was extended from 0930 to 0900 on weekdays from 1 November 2022. In addition, holders of those passes can catch the bus free before 0900 to travel to a hospital appointment reducing travel costs and improving attendance at appointments. Holders of a Disabled Person's concessionary pass have been able to travel at any time since 2020 to improve access to employment, training and education. These initiatives are promoted at many of the 246 real time displays in Portsmouth. Real time displays will be introduced across the 555 bus stops in the city, where feasible, through BSIP funding.

Information is a key means of attracting and reassuring bus passengers. In addition to real time displays, bus stops will have maps and fares information and upgraded QR codes. All operator network maps will appear on every bus together with a passenger charter and clear contact information. The buses themselves will have multi-modal audio visual displays showing connecting bus, train, ferry and coach information for integrated information across the island city transport network and beyond, thanks to BSIP funding.

Section 5

Journey Time Improvements

Contactless ticketing has been available on every bus in Portsmouth since 2017 and fares were the top priority in the residents' survey.

Early implementation of Tap on Tap off ticketing is planned through joint funding between the DfT and our two partner bus operators, First Solent and Stagecoach South. This is key to the implementation and monitoring of our range of targeted, all operator, fares promotions as set out in our BSIP:

- Under 19 discount
- Family tickets
- Evening tickets
- Jobseeker tickets
- Hard to reach groups
- 90 minute hopper

In addition, the time saving and simplicity of Tap on Tap off ticketing will break down the barriers to new users and shorten journey times to make bus travel more attractive. This is particularly important with the planned increase in jobs and homes if our road network is not to be overloaded. Our operator partners have committed that peak vehicles saved through shorter, more reliable, journey times, will be used to boost other local services.

A range of bus priority measures from enhanced and additional bus lanes to improved bus stop geometry and better enforcement will be complemented by smart traffic signals building on developments resulting from the MOVA controlled junctions introduced through the Transforming Cities Fund. These will deliver improved bus priority giving shorter journey times and more reliable services due to more consistent travel times.

Section 6:

Development of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme and the Bus Service Improvement Plan

Following the indicative award of funding in April 2022, the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership were further developed to make best use of the funding on offer.

The previous approach of co-design between the City Council and the bus operators, working closely with the DfT continued, resulting in an updated Enhanced Partnership which was approved by the Portsmouth City Council Cabinet on 21 June and allowed funding to be confirmed on 8 August. The statutory consultation process then commenced and was completed satisfactorily allowing the Enhanced Partnership to go forward to be 'made' and implemented at the Cabinet meeting for Member for Traffic & Transportation on 8 December 2022

The Enhanced Partnership between Portsmouth City Council and Portsmouth bus operators sets out how between us we are going to deliver the BSIP priorities and ambitions and places legal commitments on both sides to do so.

The Portsmouth Enhanced Partnership supports Portsmouth City Council's Imagine Portsmouth, which sets out a new city vision for Portsmouth's future by 2040. The Portsmouth EP will respond to the outcomes of the Imagine Portsmouth work, particularly about creating a city with easy travel and creating a green city. The EP also supports the draft Portsmouth Transport Strategy as our Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), and its vision.

The measures will also help address the cost of living crisis by improving access to employment, education and key services through an attractive value for money transport option.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan will be reviewed quarterly through the Enhanced Partnership Board. This will be a joint board comprising Portsmouth City Council and the main bus operators in the city, Stagecoach South and First Solent. The role of the board will be to monitor the performance indicators against targets and prioritise the work to deliver against the Portsmouth BSIP objectives. A programme Board will develop the detail of the existing and future BSIP proposals.

These are living documents which will respond to local priorities and needs which will be informed by continuing engagement with residents, bus users and the wider community through the Stakeholder Engagement Group which will include but not be limited to:

- All Bus Operators running Qualifying Bus Services;
- Community transport operators, as established;
- Portsmouth City Council (Public Transport and Highways) to act as the chair;
- Portsmouth train operating companies;
- Ferry and hovercraft companies serving Portsmouth;
- Neighbouring Local Transport Authorities;
- Neighbouring local borough councils;
- Transport Focus, and any bus user groups in Portsmouth as may be constituted; and
- Hospital trusts, tertiary education establishments, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership.

Section 7

Conclusion

This is an exciting time for public transport in Portsmouth and all that it can deliver for the city, its residents, businesses and visitors. Reviewing the BSIP submitted in October 2021 has shown what has already been achieved and those planned to be delivered over the next three years thanks to the funding received from Government and the partnership that exists between Portsmouth City Council and our local bus operators.