

## **CABINET**

**19 OCTOBER 2021**

### **NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY, ENHANCED PARTNERSHIPS AND BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLANS (BSIP)**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Phil Filmer, Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

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#### **Summary**

This report sets out Medway Council's proposed Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Medway.

#### **1. Budget and policy framework**

- 1.1. The content of this report aligns with the Council's Local Transport Plan. It also has links with the Council's established priorities for a clean and green environment and putting Medway on the map as a smart and sustainable waterfront university city.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. The Department for Transport (DfT) published its National Bus Strategy in March 2021. The strategy changes the regulatory framework under which buses have operated for the past 35 years and will be supported by £3 billion of investment across England, along with a commitment to repurpose current funding. The main objective of the strategy is to provide passengers with more frequent, more reliable, easier to use, better coordinated and cheaper bus services. This new approach acknowledges the role the bus can play in achieving a net zero emission society and serves as a commitment to supporting bus and bus rapid transit schemes.
- 2.2. The National Bus Strategy expects all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to set up an Enhanced Partnership (EP). An EP is a statutory arrangement under the 2017 Bus Services Act whereby the LTA and local bus operators work together to improve local bus services. It needs to include a clear vision of the improvements that the EP is aiming for, alongside existing policies, and actions required to achieve them. The LTA has formal responsibility for

making the plan, but at set points in the process it can only proceed with proposals with the support of a defined proportion of local bus operators.

- 2.3. From 1 July 2021, only LTAs and operators that have confirmed their intention to develop an EP will continue to receive the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG). Medway Council has advised the DfT of its intention to develop an EP and will therefore continue to receive this funding. The developed EP and accompanying documentation must be published by 31 March 2022. From April 2022, only areas operating under an Enhanced Partnership will be eligible to receive the new funding streams from the Government's proposed £3billion budget, although this is subject to the Treasury's Autumn Spending review.
- 2.4. By the end of October 2021, Government expects all LTAs to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This must set out how LTAs will use their EP to deliver an ambitious vision for bus travel, meeting the overarching goal of the National Bus Strategy to grow back patronage after the pandemic and then to increase it and raise the mode share of the bus.

### 3. Options

The following options are available to the Cabinet:

- 3.1. Option 1 - To publish the BSIP ahead of the Government's publication deadline of 31 October 2021.
- 3.2. Option 2 - To not progress the development of a BSIP. This option is not recommended as it may prevent the Council accessing central Government funding across all facets of local transport spending and would not demonstrate a commitment to the principles outlined within the National Bus Strategy.

### 4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. The National Bus Strategy expects BSIPs to do the following:
  - Set targets for journey times and reliability improvements.
  - Identify where bus priority measures are needed, including potential bus lanes, and traffic priority measures and Bus Rapid Transit routes to transform key corridors.
  - Consider how traffic management can be improved to benefit buses through traffic signal priority, bus gates and enforcement of traffic restrictions that can benefit buses through reduced congestion.
  - Set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues and carbon reduction targets that improved bus services could address, and joint actions to transform the local bus fleet to zero emission.
  - Drive improvements for passengers by setting targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction, producing plans and costs for lower

and simpler tickets (including multi-operator ticketing) and modal integration.

- Consider the impact of roadside infrastructure and how a coherent and integrated network should serve schools, health, social care, employment, and other services.
- Consider network design and the provision of more comprehensive socially necessary bus services, including demand-responsive services.
- Consider the views of local people and stakeholders and commit to a Bus Passenger Charter that sets out what passengers can expect from bus operators delivering local bus services across their area.

4.2. Section 3 of the BSIP (see Appendix B) sets out targets for improvements to bus services and how they will be monitored. This focuses on journey times, reliability, passenger numbers and passenger satisfaction targets. Although the targets will be agreed with bus operators in principle and indicate aspirations in line with a business case, these will be subject to change through the establishment of the Enhanced Partnership (EP).

4.3. Section 4 of the BSIP (see Appendix B) outlines ways in which the Council could meet these expectations. This has been summarised in the following tables and will be submitted to the Department for Transport for consideration.

- **More Frequent and reliable services:**

<u>Delivery</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Review service frequency	Investigate frequency improvements on key routes, to operate every 10 minutes during the day and every 30 minutes at other times, subject to funding.
Increase bus priority measures	Consider traffic signal priority, improved and better enforced parking restrictions. To examine the scope for physical priority where appropriate, noting that it will take longer than other methods to come to fruition.
Increase demand responsive services	To be examined in conjunction with a new rural town on the Hoo Peninsula and Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) proposals.
Consideration of bus rapid transport networks	In conjunction with HIF development at Hoo, to consider a bus priority route into central Chatham and localised hubs across Medway.

- **Improvements to Planning/Integration with other modes:**

<u>Delivery</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Integrate services with other transport modes	Allow for PlusBus tickets to continue being used on subsidised services and explore whether shorter connection times can be established in the evenings.
Simplify services	Review key routes to ensure that the bus service network is still meeting passengers' needs. For example, the Gillingham and Rainham area would

	benefit from a review following recent developments.
Review socially necessary services	Both commercial and socially necessary routes will be reviewed as post-Covid levels of demand stabilise. It is expected that some currently commercial routes may no longer be required.
Invest in Superbus networks	Our proposals meet the Superbus criteria detailed within the National Bus Strategy: “to provide higher frequency, lower fare services”

- **Improvements to Fares and Ticketing:**

<u>Delivery</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Lower fares	Seek to reduce maximum fares, with an all-operator ticket at single operator prices, subject to funding.
Simplify fares	The majority of bus operators have indicated their acceptance of a zonal fare structure, to replace individual fare stages, again subject to funding.
Integrate ticketing between operators and transport	Seek agreement to introduce a localised version of the South-East Discovery ticket, ahead of any technological developments to allow inter-modal inter-operator ticketing. This could include versions both for Medway, and for Medway and Kent combined.

- **Make Improvements to Bus Passenger Experience - High Spec Buses**

<u>Delivery</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Invest in improved bus specifications	Add audio-visual next stop announcements to buses, in line with available funding in accordance with DfT regulations.
Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services	Develop and maintain bus services and infrastructure, offering good access to public transport for all members of the community. For example, improvements to bus stops so that buses can stop close and parallel to the kerb, allowing easy access for all passengers, and improvements to passenger infrastructure at Chatham Waterfront Bus Station.
Protect personal safety of bus passengers	Improve CCTV coverage at Chatham Waterfront Bus Station and on-board buses.
Improve buses for tourists	Most of Medway's tourist attractions can be reached easily on the key bus route network. There is further opportunity to work with tourism colleagues to improve awareness of public transport options.
Invest in decarbonisation	A progressive approach to replacing older buses and concentrating the low/zero emission alternatives on routes, particularly in conjunction with Air Quality Management Areas within Medway.

- **Improvements to Passenger Engagement:**

<u>Delivery</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Passenger charter	Commit to a Bus Passenger Charter (BPC) that sets out what passengers can expect from bus operators delivering local bus services across their area. Awaiting further guidance from the DfT.
Strengthen network identity	To be considered when inter-operator ticketing is more widely available.
Improve bus information	Format to be determined after public consultation.

4.4. Given the short timescale, the BSIP will be in outline; the DfT will not regard the content as definitive or any commitments within it as binding. The main purpose is to focus on the issues that need to be addressed, to explore possible answers and provide an early basis for Government funding decisions in preparation for 2022/23, when transformational funding begins.

4.5. Further updates will be made available through the Enhanced Partnership Plan, to be updated annually, with reporting on targets every six months.

## 5. Risk management

5.1. Risks associated with the recommendations set out in this report are summarised in the following table.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Failure to adopt a BSIP by October 31, or adopting BSIP policies that do not address the overarching aspirations of the National Bus Strategy, resulting in reduced levels of existing funding, and limited future funding opportunities	Government will assess BSIPs when making decisions about future public transport funding allocations. Government will also consider an LTA's performance in relation to their BSIP policies when determining funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes. This could include LTP funding allocations	The National Bus Strategy confirms that progressing the steps set out in the strategy on time will ensure access to existing and new funding streams. This risk can therefore be mitigated by progressing the necessary actions to the prescribed timescales.	B2
Failure to adopt a BSIP by October 31, or adopting BSIP policies that do not address the overarching aspirations of the National Bus Strategy, resulting in	The National Bus Strategy requires BSIPs to set out the Council's commitment to the principles outlined in the National Bus Strategy. It is therefore likely to have a political impact and generate significant local interest.	Progress the development of the Council's BSIP for publication by 31 October 2021, incorporating the key elements set down by Government, and demonstrating a commitment to modal shift and climate change	

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
reputational damage and compromising agreed Climate Change Action Plan objectives		objectives set out in the National Bus Strategy.	

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1. Local authorities are required to report the views of passengers and third parties during the establishment and development of the BSIP. This will initially be achieved through a review of existing evidence and data, including the Institution of Highways & Transportation (IHT) National Travel survey data. This is set out in section 3 of the draft BSIP document appended to this report. Further engagement on the Council's emerging proposals took place with key stakeholders between 13 August and 16 September 2021.
- 6.2. Key stakeholders were written to, with messages on RTI screen, and social media activity directing people to a dedicated [www.medway.gov.uk/bsip](http://www.medway.gov.uk/bsip).
- 6.3. A summary of the responses received has been included in Appendix A.

## 7. Climate change implications

- 7.1. The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019 and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 7.2. Medway's Climate Change Strategy includes the following actions, which will be embedded in Medway's BSIP:
  - Continue to deliver bus infrastructure improvements, and explore opportunities to facilitate the use of ULEV on bus routes in Medway
  - Maintain productive relationships with local bus operators with a view to establishing a 'Bus Improvement Plan' and introduce data reporting to include fleet comparison and journey time information
  - Explore opportunities for phased uptake of ULEV on supported bus routes
  - Work with local bus operators to develop a strategy that facilitates the introduction of electric buses in Medway, including the identification of funding opportunities at national level
  - Tackle congestion hotspots through Variable Message Signs (VMS), traffic signal infrastructure and programming upgrades and smart cities initiatives
  - Improvements to the operation of traffic signal-controlled junctions and crossings through programming changes or upgraded equipment
  - Continue with our proactive and dedicated approach to improving air quality across Medway through the delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan.

## 8. Financial implications

- 8.1. Progressing the development of the Council's BSIP does not have any resource implications for existing council budgets. The actions will be progressed and funded by a £100k revenue grant made available from DfT for this purpose.
- 8.2. Objectives set out in the emerging BSIP and EP would be fully costed and the implications of this presented in further reports. Implementation of the objectives and commitment to the necessary expenditure would only be progressed if approved and would be aligned to the promise of £3billion of national funding over five years set out by Government in the National Bus Strategy.
- 8.3. It is stated within the BSIP Guidance that: "Government will also consider an LTA's performance in relation to their BSIP policies when determining funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes."

## 9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The Bus Services Act 2017 amended the Transport Act 2000 to make provision for EP schemes and plans. There are no legal implications for the development of the BSIP at this stage.

## 10. Recommendations

- 10.1 The Cabinet is recommended to approve the publication of the BSIP as set out at Appendix B, supported by evidence of engagement with key stakeholders, for submission to the Department for Transport by the 31 October 2021 deadline.

## 11. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

- 11.1 To ensure Medway Council demonstrates its commitment to the principles outlined in the National Bus Strategy, securing existing funding allocations, and putting the Council in a position where it can bid for future funding to improve public transport in Medway.

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## Appendices

Appendix A - Draft BSIP Stakeholder Consultation Response

Appendix B - Draft Medway BSIP

## Background papers

DfT, Bus Back Better: National Bus Strategy for England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

National bus strategy: bus service improvement plans – guidance to local authorities and bus operators

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-service-improvement-plan>

Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnership creation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-act-2017-enhanced-partnership-creation>