

# NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY – 2022 BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (BSIP) WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

## Document Control

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## Change History

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1.0	October 2021	Final Version for Publication and DfT Submission	PW
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Newbury Wharf Bus Station



Papercast RTPI screen at Parkway



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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In March 2021, the Government published a new strategy to improve bus services in England, outside of London – [Bus Back Better](#). The strategy sets out the Government’s vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers. Essentially this would be more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better coordinated and cheaper bus services. Local transport authorities will be given more powers to improve bus networks in their area.
- 1.2 The Council established an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators to deliver these goals, which came into effect in April 2022. This should safeguard discretionary streams of government funding for bus services to the Council and local bus operators, and also government funding for other local transport schemes.
- 1.3 The bus is seen in the strategy as a key tool in ‘Levelling Up.’ In the West Berkshire context this would include enhanced frequencies on many services, new bus links introduced including the use of demand-responsive transport, simplified fares and the extension of inter-operator ticketing, more environmentally-friendly buses, and improved marketing of bus services to wider audiences.
- 1.4 This Bus Service Improvement Plan will be refreshed each year, and progress against the targets it contains will be reported on at least every six months. It should be noted that most of the ambitions included within this document will require additional funding, either as one-off investments, start-up costs, or an ongoing commitment.
- 1.5 The West Berkshire Partnership was fortunate to be allocated almost £2.6m in funding for its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in April 2022, although this has yet to be released by the Department for Transport (DfT) and therefore few schemes are able to progress.

## 2. Overview

### 2.1 Extent of Bus Service Improvement Plan

- 2.1.1 This BSIP covers the whole of the West Berkshire District Council area, which is covered by a single Enhanced Partnership (EP). There is no appetite amongst the bus operators or the Council to progress franchising as very few services operate without subsidy.
- 2.1.2 An Enhanced Partnership is an agreement between a local transport authority and the bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. It includes a clear vision of the improvements that the EP is aiming for (the BSIP), and accompanying actions to achieve them (set out in our EP scheme).
- 2.1.3 Franchising is a model for providing bus services used in London and elsewhere in Europe. In a franchising scheme, the local authority will determine the details of the services to be provided – where they run, when they run, and the standards of the services. Bus operators would then provide their services under contract to the local authority. No other services can operate in the franchised area without the agreement of the franchising authority.



Figure 2.1 – Map of West Berkshire

- 2.1.4 The BSIP covers all registered local bus services that operate in West Berkshire, including those operated under Section 22 permits that provide vital bus services within the district.

2.1.5 We considered that a joint BSIP with any of our neighbouring local authorities would not be beneficial for improving public transport within West Berkshire as the focus would inevitably fall on the more populous area of any Partnership. However, it has been developed taking into consideration our neighbouring local authority views as far as possible, which we have sought to complement, especially regarding cross boundary services.

Services	Hp	Ox	Rd	Sn	Wt	Wk
Jet Black 1, Lime 2, 15, 16, 26, 33			✓			
2 (Baughurst), 7/7a, 44, 103, The Link	✓					
20, 22					✓	
46, 46a				✓	✓	
47		✓		✓		
133		✓				
142, 143		✓	✓			
154	✓		✓			✓

**Key:** Hp = Hampshire, Ox = Oxfordshire, Rd = Reading, Sn = Swindon, Wt = Wiltshire, Wk = Wokingham.

Table 2.1 – Bus services operating to / from neighbouring local authority areas

## 2.2 ***Duration and review of BSIP***

- 2.2.1 The document will be reviewed on an annual basis; published on the Council's [website](#); and sent to the Department for Transport before the end of each October. In addition, the targets set in the BSIP will be reviewed every six months, and also published on the Council's [website](#).
- 2.2.2 The work of the BSIP is overseen by the Enhanced Partnership Forum (Forum). This is a group consisting of representatives of the bus companies operating services within West Berkshire at the time; officers from the Council, including those involved with transport operations, policy, and highway schemes; and other interested parties such as neighbouring local authorities and representatives of bus users. The Forum meets three or four times each year.
- 2.2.3 An annual survey to seek the views of both users and non-users, first conducted in 2021, is used to inform this document and the direction of the Partnership's focus.
- 2.2.4 The BSIP builds upon the work of other strategies and plans within West Berkshire (section 3), and in turn informs revisions to them as they are updated.

### 3. Strategic Context

- 3.1 The [Council Strategy](#) contributes towards the [West Berkshire Vision 2036](#), setting out the Council's priorities for improvement. It contains six priorities, all of which benefit from effective public transport. Supporting this Strategy are the [Local Transport Plan](#) (LTP), which covers the period 2011 to 2026; and the [Environment Strategy](#), introduced in 2020, and which runs until 2030.
- 3.1.1 The LTP is supported by a number of strategies, ensuring a joined up approach to sustainable transport. This includes the [Active Travel](#); [Smarter Choices](#); and [Passenger Transport](#) strategies. The latter was produced in 2014, with three aims:
- To increase the market share for public transport services by making those services a more attractive choice for existing and potential customers;
  - To build upon prior initiatives and tally with future development proposals, so as to better integrate the provision of passenger transport services, and;
  - To help achieve an accessible and safe public transport network.
- 3.1.2 The Environment Strategy builds on the [UK's 2050 net zero target for greenhouse gas emissions](#), and the Council's decision to declare a Climate emergency in July 2019. It commits the Council to deliver carbon neutrality by 2030. It also supports the national [Transport Decarbonisation](#) plan.
- 3.2 This BSIP supports all of these documents, and follows from the [National Bus Strategy](#), which was launched in March 2021. It is also complementary to other Council strategies, including the [Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan](#), the [Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy](#), and the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's).

#### 4. Current bus offer to passengers

##### 4.1 West Berkshire – the area

4.1.1 West Berkshire is very much characterised by beautiful countryside and villages, with 74% of the district falling within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding natural Beauty (AONB). This is reflected in the dispersed and low density population pattern in West Berkshire.

4.1.2 The LTP defined four geographical areas in the district, each with differing characteristics, with most of the population being located within the first two:

- Newbury and Thatcham
- The Eastern Area (Purley on Thames, Tilehurst, Calcot and Theale)
- The North Wessex Downs AONB
- The East Kennet Valley (rural south-east including Burghfield and Mortimer)

4.1.3 According to [nomis](#), the West Berkshire population was estimated at 158,500 in 2020. ONS figures suggest that almost 31% of the population is over 55, including 17% at pensionable age, with this number rising. 43% live in Newbury and Thatcham; 18% in the Eastern Area; and 7.5% in Burghfield and Mortimer. The population density is approximately two people per hectare.

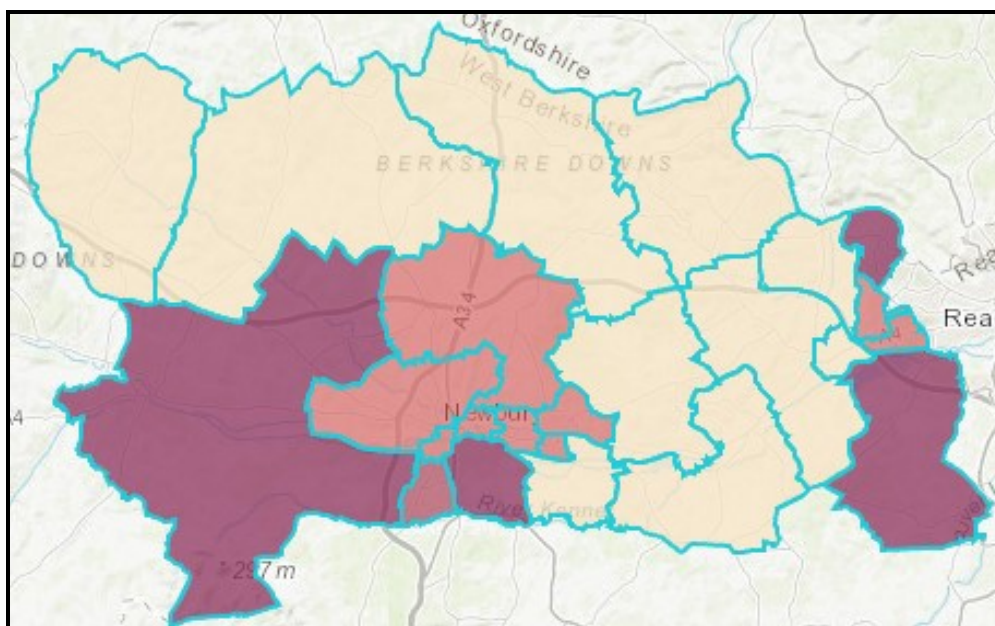


Figure 4.1 – Map showing population by ward (darker colours show more residents)

	West Berkshire (numbers)	West Berkshire (%)	South East (%)	Great Britain (%)
Economically active	88,300	87.6	81.0	78.5
In employment	85,900	85.1	77.1	75.2
Working in Information and Communication	14,000	14.9	6.1	4.5
Unemployed	2,300	2.6	3.5	4.1

Table 4.1 – Employment (April 2021 to March 2022), [nomis](#)

- 4.1.4 The high percentage working in Information and Communication are perhaps better placed to work from home, with Vodafone’s UK headquarters based in Newbury. Therefore, together with a rising population age, and homes spread widely across the district, commercial bus operation is difficult.
- 4.1.5 With retail, employment and education focussed predominantly in the urban areas, and larger rural settlements, bus services tend to radiate from either Newbury or Reading.
- 4.1.6 High levels of personal wealth, coupled with high levels of car ownership and car use overall exacerbate the difficulties in sustaining local bus services, particularly in rural areas. Notwithstanding the District’s general prosperity, there are a number of small pockets of deprivation. [Census](#) data highlights that whilst only 12% of households in West Berkshire have no access to a car, compared to the national average of 26%, this rises in some parts of Newbury / Thatcham to more than 30%.

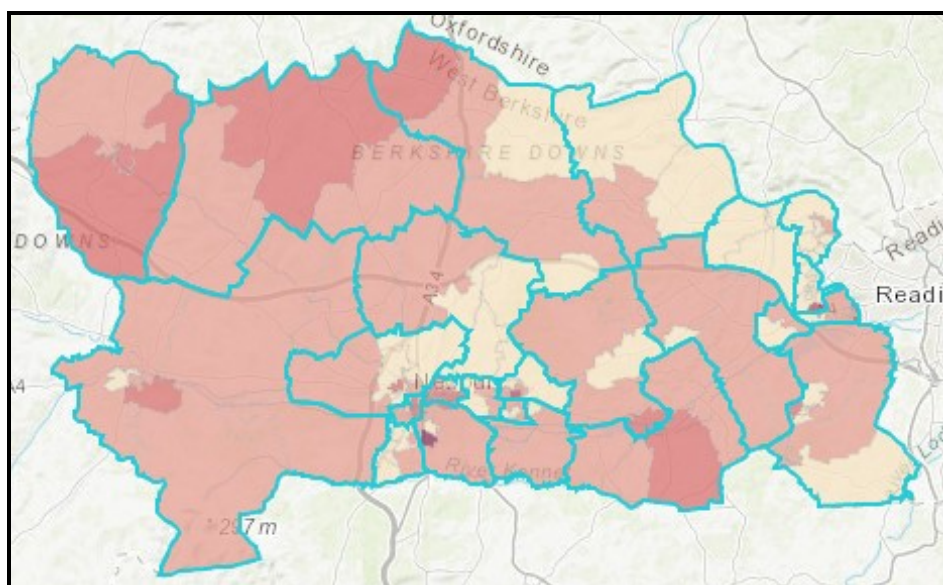


Figure 4.2 – Map showing deprivation (darker colours show more deprivation)

- 4.1.7 Positive retail and residential planning have contributed towards Newbury, the administrative and main retail town in the district, remaining relatively robust in recent years. The Park Way retail and residential development opened towards the end of 2011 in the town centre, although anchor stores John Lewis and Debenhams have closed. Similarly the Market Street ‘urban village’ development to the south of the Town Centre is well under way. When completed, it will add 232 residential homes, and 10,200 square feet of new commercial space. [Newbury Vision](#) highlight recent and proposed developments in Newbury, and a [Newbury Town Centre Masterplan](#) has been adopted by the Council.

## 4.2 **Air Quality and Climate Change**

- 4.2.1 There are two AQMAs in West Berkshire. Both are due to road traffic and exceed the Annual Mean NO<sub>2</sub> objective. Newbury AQMA also exceeds the one-hour NO<sub>2</sub> objective:
- A339/A343 (“Burger King”) Roundabout and the adjoining Greenham Road in Newbury
  - A4 (Chapel Street) in Thatcham



4.2.2 West Berkshire's 2020 [Air Quality Annual Status Report](#) recognises key elements in the LTP that can contribute towards improving air quality in the district by making the bus more attractive and reducing car usage. These are more frequent and reliable bus services with modern low or zero emission buses. In July 2019, the Council unanimously declared a climate emergency and sought to reach a net carbon position by 2030. In particular, the Council acknowledged the importance of sustainable transport.

### 4.3 **Bus services**

4.3.1 Bus services in West Berkshire are currently operated by a number of companies:

- Go-Ahead (Swindon's Bus Company, Thames Travel, Tourist Coaches)
- Horseman Coaches
- Reading Buses (Newbury & District, Reading Buses)
- Stagecoach (Hampshire, Swindon)

In addition to those services run under an Operator's Licence, another group of services are provided using Section 22 Community Bus Permits. As these provide vital links in the district's transport network, they are also included within the BSIP:

- Carebus
- Going Forward
- Ramsbury Community Transport
- West Berkshire Council

4.3.2 National Express also had a short section of one of their long-distance routes registered through West Berkshire. This is not included as it has not operated since the pandemic began, and there are no current plans to reinstate this as a result of a lack of available drivers, and low passenger numbers.

4.3.3 An overview of each of these services is included in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 below. Frequency of services is shown in Figure 4.3. Journeys (per week) are current (October 2022), whilst patronage (per month) is at June 2019 (pre-pandemic). All data relates to travel within West Berkshire only.

Operator	Service		Journeys	Patronage
Reading Buses	Jet Black 1	Newbury-Reading	392	Individual data not shown at request of major operator
Stagecoach in Hampshire	2	Baughurst-Basingstoke	n/a	
Reading Buses	Lime 2/a	Reading-Mortimer	378	
Newbury & District	3c	Thatcham-Hungerford	10	
Reading Buses	15	Reading-Calcot	327	
Reading Buses	16	Reading-Purley	582	
Reading Buses	26	Reading-Calcot	902	
Reading Buses	33	Reading-Tilehurst	598	
Newbury & District	103	Newbury-Greenham BP	130	
Stagecoach in Hampshire	The Link	Newbury-Basingstoke	144	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>3,463</b>	<b>136,977 €</b>

**Key:** SH 2 - only one stop within West Berkshire. 103 - journeys to Bishop's Green supported by Basingstoke & Deane BC. € = Estimate

Table 4.2 – Bus services operated without any direct subsidy

Operator	Service		Funded by	Journeys	Patronage
N&D	1a	Newbury-Thatcham	WBC	132	7,170 €
N&D	1c	Newbury-Thatcham	WBC	135	6,512 €
N&D	2	Newbury-Pigeons Farm	WBC	162	5,508
N&D	3	Newbury-Hungerford	WBC	72	2,499
N&D	4	Newbury-Lambourn	WBC	106	4,092
WBC*	5,5a	Newbury-Brightwalton	WBC	20	308
WBC*	5c	Newbury-Beedon	WBC	10	216
N&D	6,6a	Newbury-The Ilsleys	WBC	84	2,767
SH	7,7a	Newbury-Andover/Burghclere	HCC	68	1,150 €
N&D	8	Newbury-Greenham	WBC	123	2,726
N&D	9	Newbury-Racecourse	DWH, WBC	148	1,031
SBC / TC	20,X20, X22	Marlborough-Hungerford/Newbury	WCC	86	250 €
WBC*	41	Newbury-Theale	WBC	29	716
WBC*	44	Thatcham-Calcot	WBC	26	542
SS	46,X46	Hungerford-Swindon	SC, WCC	50	250 €
WBC*	47	Lambourn-Swindon	OCC,SC, WBC	60	444
CB*	75	Theale-Newbury	S22	2	43 €
GF*	133	Goring-Wallingford	S22	12	35 €
GF*	142	Goring-Reading	S22	5	20 €
TT	143	Goring-Reading	PC, WBC	61	1,747
HC	154	Stratfield Saye-Reading	BD, PC, WOK	2	4
WBC*	H1	Hungerford Circular	PC	9	145
RCT*	Flyer	Aldbourne/Ramsbury-Hungerford	S22	4	72 €
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>1,406</b>	<b>38,247 €</b>

**Key: Operator.** CB\* = Carebus Volunteer Group, GF\* = Going Forward CIC, HC = Horseman Coaches, N&D = Newbury & District, RCT\* = Ramsbury Community Transport, SBC = Swindon's Bus Company, SH = Stagecoach in Hampshire, SS = Stagecoach in Swindon, TC = Tourist Coaches, TT = Thames Travel, WBC\* = West Berkshire Council, \* = section 22 operation.

**Funded by.** BD = Basingstoke & Deane BC; DWH = David Wilson Homes; HCC = Hampshire County Council; PC = various Town and Parish Councils; S22 = Not-for-profit, funded by grants and donations; SC = Swindon Borough Council; WBC = West Berkshire Council, WCC = Wiltshire County Council, WOK = Wokingham Borough Council.  
€ = Estimate. 46 was operated by SBC in June 2019.

Table 4.3 – Bus services funded to operate

- 4.3.4 Services operated without any direct subsidy (with the exception of temporary grants to offset the effects of the pandemic) make up around 30% of the bus routes, 71% on the bus journeys, over 78% of the passenger trips, and over 78% of the bus mileage.
- 4.3.5 In addition to the services shown in Tables 4.2 and 4.3, there are a few registered commercial local school services. The main services are to Little Heath School (Reading Buses 85 to 87), Theale Green School (Reading Buses 89 and 90), and Langtree School (Thames Travel BB3).
- 4.3.6 Vodafone also has buses for the use of its employees, provided by Reading Buses, but which are not open to the general public. This network has diminished with most staff now working from home.

- 4.3.7 All Reading Buses services operate from early morning to late evening, and seven days each week, with service 26 operating 24-hours. These, together with Stagecoach's The Link from Newbury to Basingstoke, form the commercial backbone in West Berkshire thanks to the more densely populated areas which they serve. The Jet Black 1 operates later than other (non-Reading Buses) services, but only throughout the evening between Theale and Reading. Patronage on Reading Buses' services had increased by almost 40% prior to the pandemic.
- 4.3.8 Despite the best efforts of Reading Buses and Newbury & District to develop the 1a and 1c as commercial operations to supplement the core Jet Black 1 service, these are now operating with financial support from West Berkshire Council. There are believed to be many reasons for this - the relatively short distances involved (Thatcham is only 3 miles from Newbury); the lack of bus priority and heavy car dominance between the towns; the cost of using the bus; and the relatively low frequencies of the 1a and 1c.
- 4.3.9 With the exception of Reading Buses, all services operate, at best, Mondays to Saturdays between 7am and 7pm. Services in the Newbury / Thatcham area tend to operate hourly, with those extending into the North Wessex Downs being two-hourly at best, and largely timed around school movements. This can be seen on the Council's [online map](#), shown below.

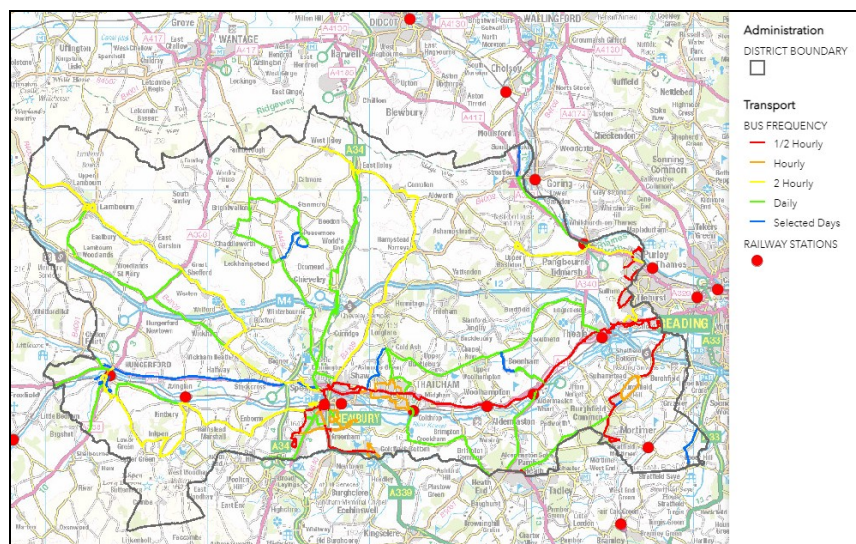


Figure 4.3 – Bus Frequency Map

- 4.3.10 Some West Berkshire villages no longer have any bus or rail service, following gradual decline over the last few decades. These villages include Aldworth, Ashampstead, Englefield, Fawley, Friilsham, Stanford Dingley, Tidmarsh, Winterbourne and Yattendon, all within the AONB; and Padworth, Sulhamstead and Ufton Nervet in the East Kennet Valley. There is no bus service to Mortimer Station.
- 4.3.11 The 75 is the only demand responsive service in the district, operating on Fridays. West Berkshire Council have previously subsidised demand-responsive transport (DRT), being an early-adopter in 2000. However ambitions have outweighed results, and the services have ceased in the intervening years. We are keen to explore this type of solution further with advances in technology and higher expectations of instant solutions in recent years. Bids for the DfT's Rural Mobility Fund, for DRT serving the lost links mentioned in the previous paragraph, were unsuccessful in 2020.

- 4.3.12 With limited resources, many Newbury-based bus services are inter-worked with the same vehicles, thus potentially building delays throughout the day. These were retimed in September 2021 to improve reliability.
- 4.3.13 On schooldays most morning peak buses continue through Newbury to serve St Bartholomew’s and Park House secondary schools, and Newbury College two miles south of the centre. This does require a number of codes and footnotes in timetables which we strive to present as clearly as possible. This is difficult because each service operates a slightly different route to reduce congestion outside each of the educational establishments.
- 4.3.14 In recent years, and in particular since 2016, the Council has found that it has had to start operating a number of services itself using accessible minibuses, as the cost of provision from bus operators would have meant that these services were unaffordable. Whilst these (and the other section 22 operated services) are usually operated on limited timetables, service 47 operates throughout the day on Mondays to Saturdays. A new 33-seat low floor accessible vehicle started operation on this route from September 2022 to prevent vehicle overloads.

#### 4.4 **Funding for bus services**

- 4.4.1 As can be seen from Table 4.3, services are financially supported from a variety of sources. Table 4.4 shows how much is required on top of bus fare revenue for services to operate in the district. The devolved Local Transport Authority Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG) of £137,099 helps to fund existing contracted bus services. In addition to the almost £2m invested in local bus services each year, section 22 operations are being operated on a not-for-profit basis, and much of their costs are covered by grants and other donations.

Funding Source		Estimated amount each year (£000s)
West Berkshire Council	Contracted bus services	£890
	In-house section 22 operations	£350
	Concessionary Fares reimbursement	£460
<b>Total West Berkshire Council</b>		<b>£1,700</b>
West Berkshire Town & Parish Councils		£10
Developer contributions inc. Greenham Common Trust		£210
Neighbouring local authorities		£50
<b>Total all subsidy</b>		<b>£1,970</b>

Table 4.4 – Financial contributions to bus services

- 4.4.2 As part of the Government’s [Better Deal for Bus Users](#), launched in September 2019, the Council were awarded £108,507 to improve current bus services, restore lost links, and support new bus services. The timing of this support coincided with the start of the pandemic, and it was not appropriate to start additional services when existing routes were struggling. Our proposed improvements are included within the BSIP, but focussed around marketing, recovery of services, additional weekend and evening services, and new links, although it was recognised at the time that the funding would be insufficient for most of these improvements.

## 4.5 **Roads and reliability**

4.5.1 The Council keeps a log of congestion hotspots in the district which have a disproportionate effect on bus services. It regularly holds internal Network Management meetings, and external Highways and Utility Co-ordination meetings to minimise disruption on the network, and resolve ongoing issues.

4.5.2 Some of these hotspots can be predictable, and particularly affect the peaks. Others can be intermittent, for example caused by inconsiderate parking or issues on the M4 motorway. The nature of the road network in West Berkshire can make it difficult to introduce solutions that promote reliable bus services without causing worse problems elsewhere.

4.5.3 The current hotspots have been identified as:

- Andover Road, Newbury
- Arlington Business Park, Theale
- Atherton Road, Hungerford
- Bartholomew Street, Newbury (between Pound Street and Market Street)
- Bath Road, Calcot (M4 roundabout to Reading Borough boundary)
- Bulpit Lane, Hungerford
- Carters Rise, Calcot (between Kennet Valley School and Albury Gardens)
- Glendale Avenue, Wash Common
- High Street, Kintbury (approx. 50m approach to Kintbury Square)
- Holt Road, Kintbury (between Harold Road and Newbury Street)
- Inkpen Road, Kintbury (approach to High Street)
- Kiln Road, Newbury
- London Road, Newbury (whole stretch of road)
- Newbury Street, Kintbury (west of the surgery)
- Priory Avenue, Hungerford (between Bulpit Lane and Priory Road)
- Shaw Road, Newbury
- Valley Road, Newbury

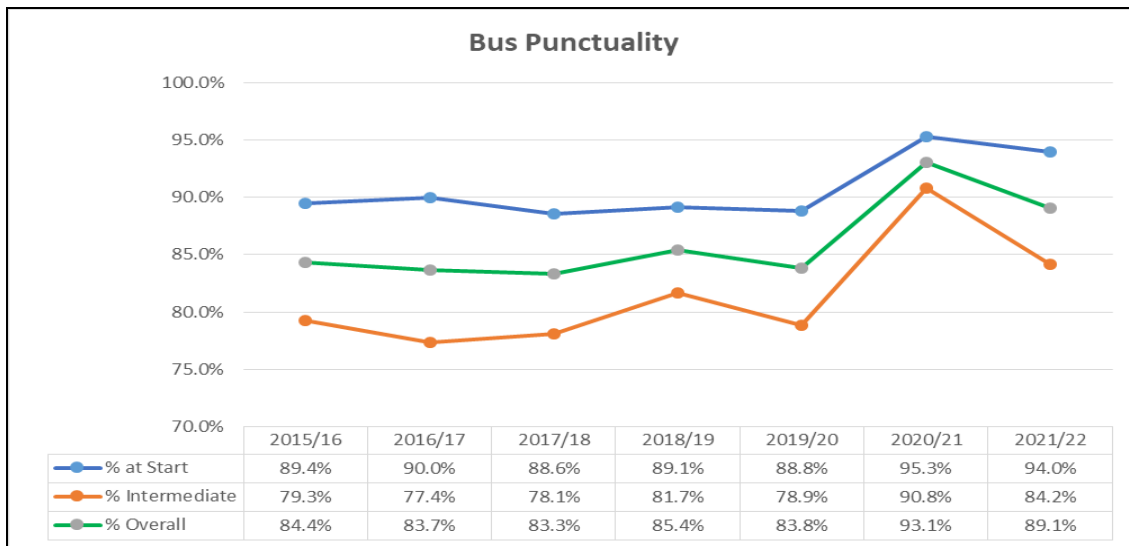


Figure 4.4 – Bus gate at Park Way bridge, Newbury © Google

4.5.4 Bus priority measures are limited in West Berkshire, and have historically been managed with bus gates, enabling more direct routes for bus services, and preventing through car traffic. The current bus gates are:

- Park Way bridge, Newbury, enforced by camera
- Two sump-busters in Calcot – Underwood Road to Carters Rise, and Pollards Way / The Chase
- Sainsbury’s Calcot, allowing buses to exit stop to gain access to Pincents Lane for IKEA
- Rising bollards between Urquhart Road and Braemore Close, Thatcham.

4.5.5 A key area of Transport Focus’s recent [‘getting passengers back on buses’](#) research was improving punctuality. The graph below shows punctuality in West Berkshire since 2015, which has been better than average when compared to other non-metropolitan areas in England over recent years. It has remained fairly consistent at around 83% to 84% until rising during the pandemic. As more traffic and higher passenger numbers are returning, punctuality is again starting to suffer.



**Key:** % shown are classed as ‘On time’, defined as between 1 minute early and 5 minutes 59 seconds late).

Figure 4.5 – Bus punctuality

## 4.6 **Bus infrastructure**

4.6.1 There are 1,043 bus stops in West Berkshire, shown on the Council’s [online map](#), below. We record the facilities at each stop (including whether they have a shelter, display case, Kassel kerb). Roadside information is maintained by the Council, or operators where they run commercial services. This includes providing information and temporary stops when affected by road works.

4.6.2 Bus shelters are owned and maintained by Parish and Town Councils, with limited scope for advertising due to the rural nature of the area. There can be a reluctance of some Parish Councils to take on ownership and liability of shelters. There is a notable lack of shelters in some parts of the district, for example in Burghfield and Mortimer, even at the most well used stops.

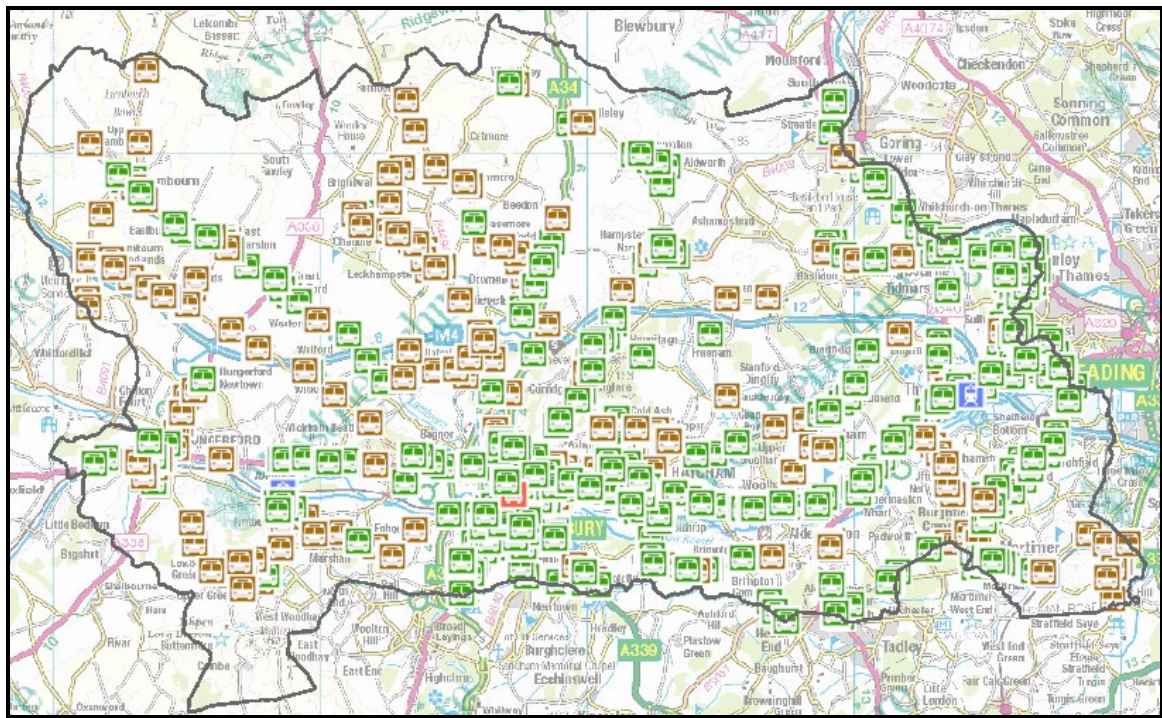


Figure 4.6 – Bus stop locations

- 4.6.3 The Council owns and maintains the Wharf Bus Station in Newbury, which opened in December 2018. This replaced the former facility in Market Street, to allow for redevelopment (see 4.1.7), and provides a more modern feel to the waiting environment.
- 4.7 **Car parking provision**
- 4.7.1 The Council is responsible for 2,670 spaces in 27 off-street car parks (in Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford, Lambourn, Theale and Pangbourne), and 469 spaces in 20 on-street parking areas (in Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford). It also manages 16 resident parking zones covering 98 roads. There is limited other paid-for parking with the main exception being the 550 space Parkway Shopping Centre car park in Newbury. Free parking is available at supermarkets in Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and Calcot, and other out-of-town retail areas including Newbury Retail Park and IKEA in Calcot. Parking charges vary to suit the purpose at each car park.
- 4.7.2 Charges in car parks in Newbury town centre are generally £1.50 an hour with incremental increases for longer periods. On-street parking is generally free for 30 minutes, then starts at £1 for an hour. Season tickets are offered at £350 per quarter or £1,150 per year. In Hungerford the hourly rate begins at 80p.
- 4.7.3 The Council's current net income budget from parking and blue badges is £2.0m. Following the change in behaviour since the pandemic commenced, this is likely to be only £1.4m in 2023/24. Parking charges, similar to bus fares, have remained at the same rates for a few years. Some short-term parking is available and cheaper than the bus, however generally it is priced more expensively than a single person's return bus fare.

4.7.4 The Council has commenced a thorough review of parking, and is developing a Parking Strategy over the next year. This review will consider the balance between the need for parking and the implications for developing bus travel in the district.

#### 4.8 **Other transport**

4.8.1 There is no current evidence to identify how well bus services are used in comparison to other modes of transport in West Berkshire, however the 2011 [Census](#) does provide some information on travel to work. With the bus being used by only 4% of those working, there is scope to increase use.

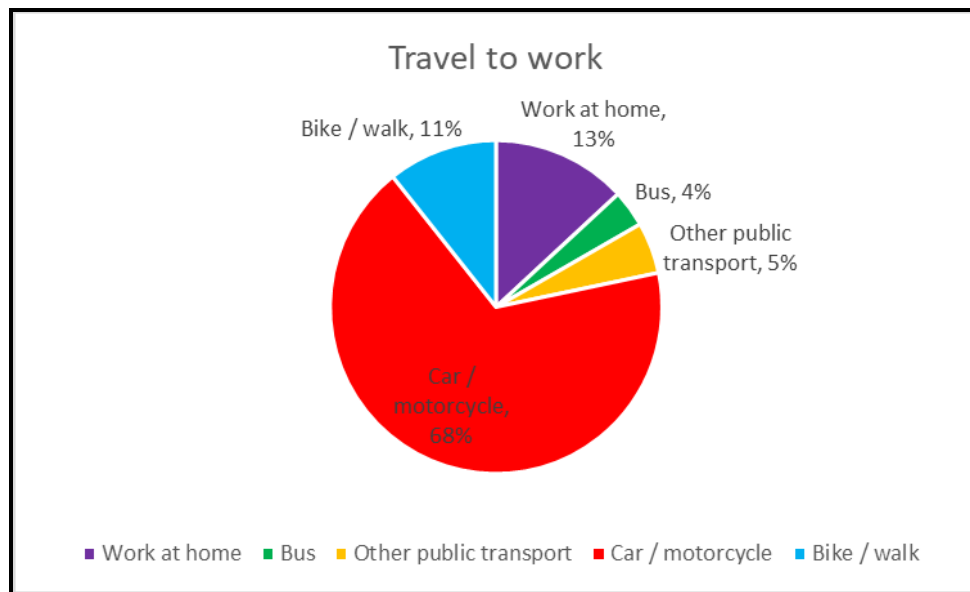


Figure 4.7 – Modal share

4.8.2 West Berkshire has 10 railway stations (shown in Figure 4.3), on three lines into Reading, all served by Great Western Railway. Most stations are on the Reading – Newbury – West Country line, with Pangbourne also linked to Oxford, and Mortimer to Basingstoke. Bus services operate near, but not directly to, most stations. Newbury Station is served directly by routes 4 and 6, but additional vehicles would be required to extend further services to the station.

4.8.3 Due to the difficulties in providing cost-effective transport within the rurality of West Berkshire, the Council has encouraged and supported community transport. The Council has been supporting fourteen groups, including the Handybus network, providing grant funding to them since its inception in 1988. All groups, with the exception of ReadiBus, are volunteer based and all operate a range of car schemes and/or minibus group travel. Transport has to be booked in advance. Every part of the district is covered by at least one scheme.

4.8.4 Taxis and private hire vehicles fulfil an important role as part of an integrated passenger transport network in West Berkshire, since they are able to provide services in situations where other transport services are not available, including a 24-hour door-to-door service.



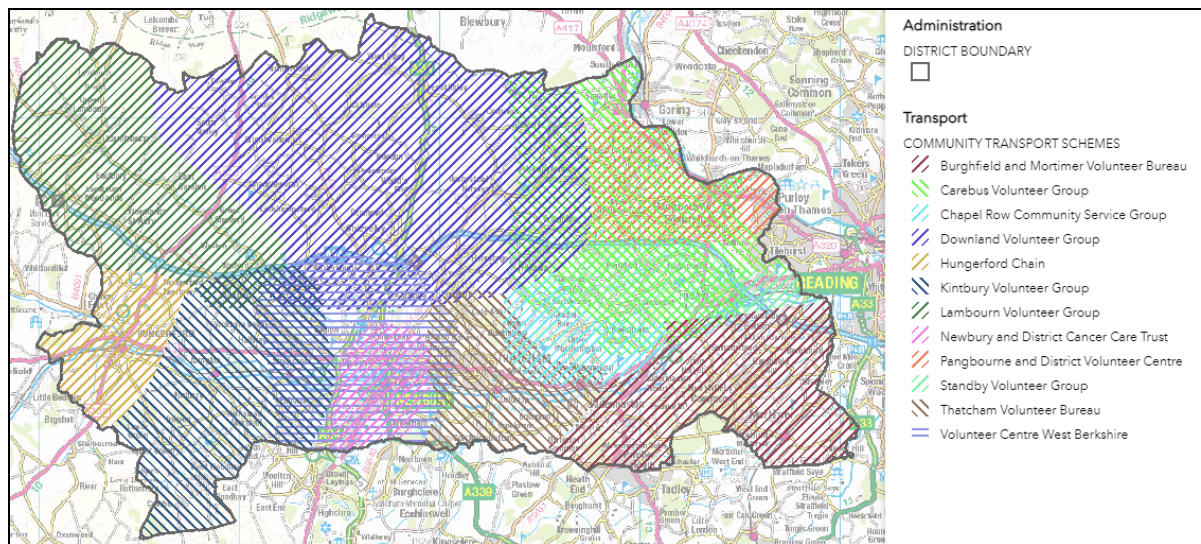


Figure 4.8 – Community transport provision

## 4.9 Fares

- 4.9.1 Most bus fares within West Berkshire are based on the traditional idea of fare stages at regular intervals along the route, with fares increasing dependent upon the number of fare stages passed through. Adult and child tickets are available, as well as singles, returns, day and period tickets. In the Eastern Area, Reading Buses use a zonal fare system, with a low-priced day ticket taking the place of return fares. The maximum age for child tickets can also vary between operators and is not easy to determine for the occasional user.
- 4.9.2 Within Newbury / Thatcham, fares are similar to those in the Eastern Area, although the maximum travel distance is lower. There is also a slight difference between the fares on commercial services and the supported network. Whilst day and period tickets are available, the multi-operator Connect ticket is expensive for travel in Newbury / Thatcham, as it covers most of West Berkshire. The multi-operator tickets are not valid on Stagecoach services.

Area		Maximum Distance	Adult Single	Adult Return	Child Single	Child Return
Newbury / Thatcham	Supported	2½ miles	£2.00	£3.50	£1.40	£2.00
	Commercial	3 miles	£2.60	£4.20	£1.60	£2.20
Eastern Area		4 miles	£2.30	£4.50*	£1.80	£3.20*
Rural West Berkshire		12 miles	£4.00	£5.60^	£2.80	£3.90^

Key: \* -Day ticket price, no return available. ^ -Day tickets are £6.00 Adult, £4.00 Child.

Table 4.5 – Bus fares

- 4.9.3 Whilst rural fares do offer good value for the distance travelled, there is inconsistency in fares for similar distances on different supported services.
- 4.9.4 The Council operates the statutory English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS), and has not offered any discretionary extras such as companions, extended hours, or other modes since 2016. It has almost 20,000 passes in circulation, of which approximately 5-6% are disabled cards. For those pass holders wishing to use services 1a/1c, 103, or Jet Black 1 between Newbury and Colthrop Turn before 9.30am, the bus companies offer a discounted ticket.

4.9.5 For those wishing to use both bus and train, PlusBus tickets are available for onward bus travel from Newbury and Reading stations, covering the two urban areas of West Berkshire. Where travel is possible by bus between two places with rail stations, the bus is always the cheapest option. On average a single fare is 61% more expensive by rail, reducing to only 19% more for a return ticket at peak times. Off-peak, whilst a single bus fare is slightly cheaper than rail, a return trip is better value by rail.

4.9.6 Information on the methods of payment available for bus fares is not always clear on operators' websites, even though most now have the ability to pay with cash, contactless bank card, smartcard, app ticket, or pre-purchased period or multi-journey tickets.

#### 4.10 **Vehicles**

4.10.1 Around 65 buses are required to deliver all the bus services in West Berkshire, including the cross boundary services each day, as well as an additional eight section 22 vehicles. The average age of the fleet, from information supplied by operators, is 9.0 years. [DfT Bus Statistics Table 0605](#) records a national average of 9.5 years for non-metropolitan areas of England (for 2020/21).

4.10.2 Based on information from all operators (October 2022),

4.10.3 97% of the buses in use in West Berkshire are at least Euro V emission standards, with 84% being Euro VI or zero-emission (ZE). Reading Buses have been upgrading engines and in April 2021, only 88% were at least Euro V. Nine bio-methane (ultra-low carbon) and one ZE electric bus operate in Reading. Although we do not have specific information on all buses operated, it is believed to be a similar position with other operators.

Emission Standard	Number	Percentage
Zero Emission	0	0%
Euro VI bio-methane	6	9%
Euro VI	42.67	66%
Euro V bio-methane	3	5%
Euro V	10.67	16%
Euro IV	2.67	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Note:** Where an operator can use a mix of different vehicles, the 'average' position is shown. Therefore if an operator uses one vehicle to provide the service from a pool of three, with two at Euro IV, and one at Euro V, 0.67 is allocated to Euro IV, and 0.33 allocated to Euro V.

Table 4.6 – Reading Buses vehicle emissions

#### 4.11 **Passengers**

4.11.1 The following graph shows the number of passengers boarding local bus services in West Berkshire since 2009/10. The trend was relatively positive, albeit with a drop in 2016/17 and 2017/18. This was largely due to a reduction in Council spending on supported bus services which considerably reduced the supported bus network between July and September 2016, together with removing all discretionary add-ons to ENCTS. Even with this drop the number of trips in 2019/20 was still almost 10% higher than in 2010/11, compared to a national drop of [12% \(or 16% outside London\)](#).

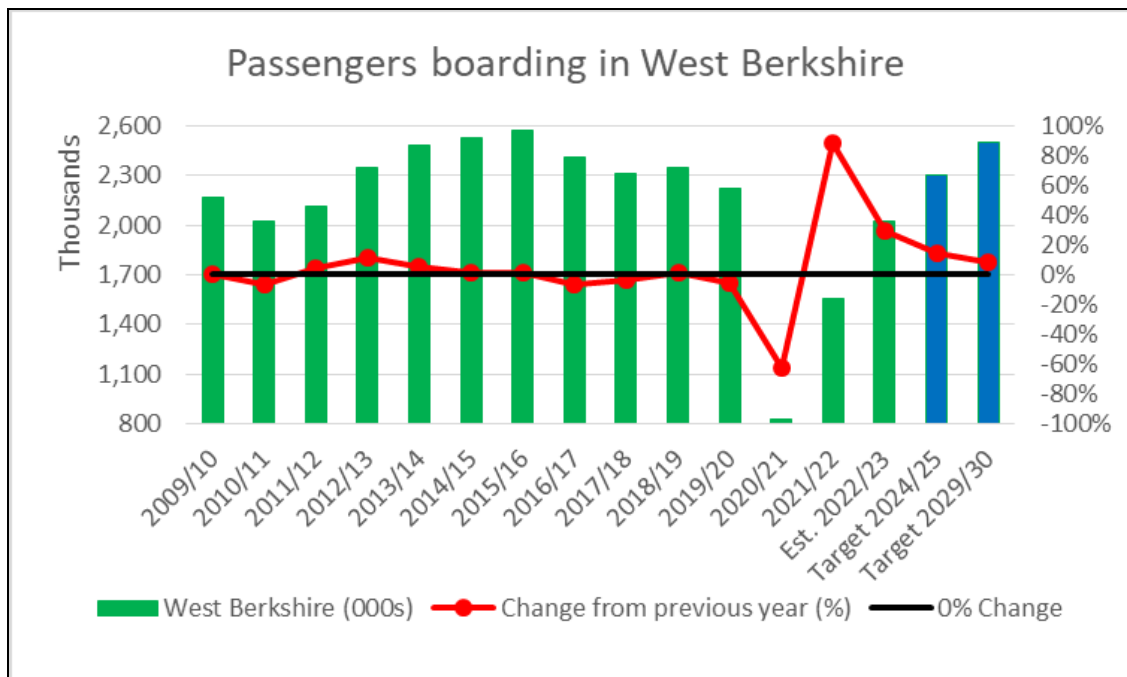


Figure 4.9 –Passengers boarding buses (compiled from Operator data)

4.11.2 Other reasons for changes in passenger numbers can be attributed positively to the Reading Buses services in the Eastern Area (strong customer focus, daily operation, higher frequencies, longer operating hours, reasonable fares, excellent publicity, fleet investment), or negatively to:

- Withdrawal of duplicated Newbury/Thatcham services when Reading Buses acquired Newbury & District.
- Congestion, causing unreliability to bus times. New developments around the town centre have particularly affected Newbury in recent years.
- The growth of on-line shopping and loss of some popular shops, rendering visits to town centres less necessary / appealing.
- The perceived low cost of driving a car, coupled with readily available parking in our town centres.
- Increases in the numbers of people working from home.

4.11.3 The onset of the pandemic affected 2019/20, however this was more prominent in 2020/21 when patronage dropped to 827,782, some 60% below the previous year. Passenger levels are now returning to nearer the pre-pandemic position, especially on the supported services.

#### 4.12 **Information**

4.12.1 The Council has a long history of producing quality information regarding public transport, and its [Travel Guide](#) is considered to be Outstanding by the renowned timetable expert [Barry Doe](#). Prior to the pandemic, printed copies were very popular. The current version (July 2022) is online only, but it is expected that printed versions will be available again shortly. The Public Transport map, has not been printed for a number of years, but is also available [online](#). Travel Guides are usually made available in Council offices, libraries, West Berkshire Hospital (Patient Information Point), some Town and Parish Councils, and on board some buses.

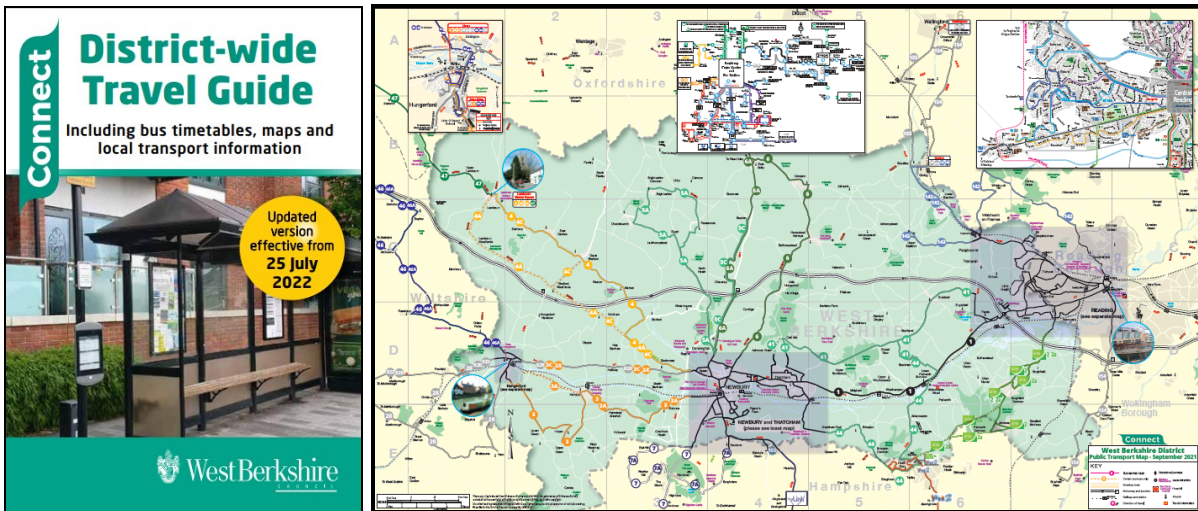


Figure 4.10 – District Wide Travel Guide / Public Transport Map

4.12.2 All services are shown on National Traveline, and operators submit their data to the Bus Operator Data Service (BODS). Other than the Council-operated services, no other section 22 operations are included as there is no legal requirement for these. Next stop announcement systems are on all Newbury & District, Reading Buses, and Stagecoach buses. All bus companies use either Facebook or Twitter for live updates, the latter also used by the Council. Most also have a user-friendly app for passengers.

4.12.3 There are twelve Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) screens in the district, most installed by the Council, but managed by Reading Buses. However one is provided by Papercast in Park Way, a long-standing trial installation, and still managed by the Council. They are at the following locations:

- Calcot: Beansheaf Stores, Charrington Road (x1), Swanholm Gardens (x1), Sainsbury's (x1)
- Newbury: Rail Station (x1), Park Way (x2), The Wharf Bus Station (x1)
- Thatcham: Broadway (x2)
- Theale: The Crown (x1)
- Tilehurst: Overdown Road / Tring Road (x1)
- West Berkshire Hospital (x1)

#### 4.13 **Barriers to improvement**

4.13.1 The pandemic continues to have an adverse impact on passenger numbers. By mid-September 2021, patronage and revenue on the Newbury contracted network were around 30% below the same period two years previously, although this has recovered to around 15-20% below by September 2022. Some of the factors preventing use include:

- Initial government messages to avoid public transport and continuing anxiety amongst some ENCTS pass holders (at least 3% of non-users in our 2022 survey still won't travel due to covid concerns)
- A wide acceptance amongst employers that employees can continue to work from home
- The rise in internet shopping

- Closure of shops and restaurants – in Newbury anchor stores Debenhams and John Lewis have both closed for good
- Frequency of existing services
- No bus services in many rural villages
- Bus fares perceived to be high

## 5. Public engagement

### 5.1 Annual surveys

5.1.1 In August 2021, the Council conducted its first annual [survey](#) to identify current satisfaction with a range of issues, as well as gain insight into what people would like in order to use bus services, or use them more often. The [2022 survey](#) looked particularly at bus use and satisfaction, the cost of travel, and how our BSIP funding is proposed to be spent.

5.1.2 We are confident that our consultations are gaining better results each year by the number of validated responses received. In 2015 (414) and 2016 (399) we consulted on cuts to bus funding. Our current survey received 1,305 responses, compared to 712 last year.

### 5.2 Frequency of travel

5.2.1 Similar to last year's survey around a third of respondents use the bus at least weekly, although the number of respondents that don't use the bus has increased from around a quarter in 2021 to almost a third in 2022's survey. This gives us more robust data from non-users which we can use to try and increase modal change. Generally, those travelling are travelling less than they were before the pandemic, although almost 62% of respondents have used the bus in the last three months.

5.2.2 From the 2021 survey, we know that around two thirds of users catch the bus in the morning, dropping to 40% in the afternoons. A further 36% travel at differing times. The bus is most used for: shopping (71%), appointments (54%), seeing friends (49%) and days out (39%). The relatively low figures for work (21%) and education (9%) are likely caused by changing working habits during the pandemic, and the very low response rate amongst under 18s in the 2021 survey (1.5%).

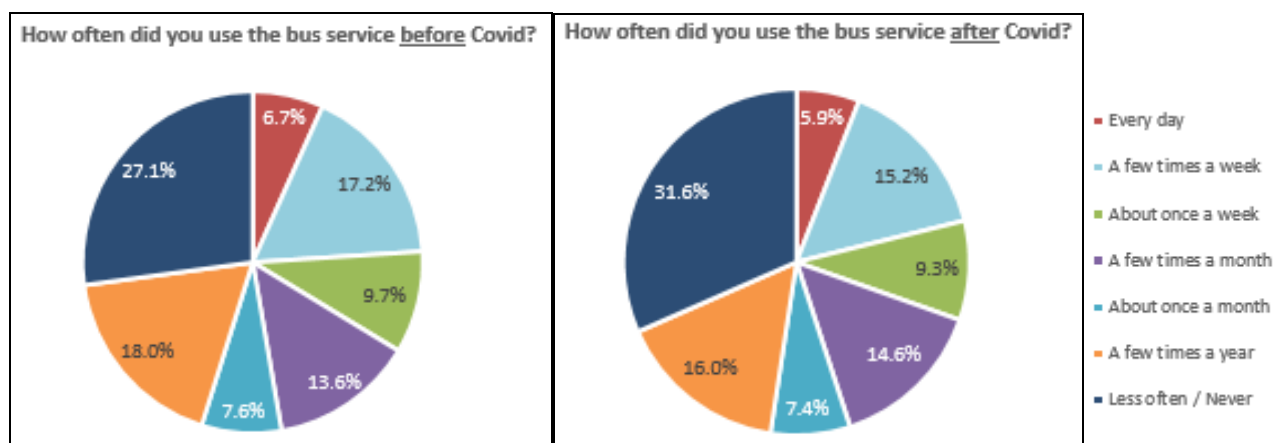


Figure 5.1 – Travel patterns before pandemic and now

5.2.3 When asked why people don't use the bus, the percentage for each reason given was considerably lower than the 2021 response rates, despite fewer options being given to choose from.

Reason for not travelling	Responses
Car is more convenient	52%
Buses are not at suitable times	51%
The bus doesn't go where I need to get to	32%
I don't know enough about buses to be confident to use them	14%
I prefer to walk / cycle	14%
Bus stops are not in convenient locations	13%
The bus is too expensive	10%
* There is no bus service	7%
I have difficulty getting to the stop / using the bus	4%
* The bus journey is too long	4%
* Fears regarding / as a result of covid	3%
Other reasons	3%

**Key:** \* Not asked as a specific option. Respondents could tick more than one box.

Table 5.1 – Reasons people do not use buses

### 5.3 Free bus travel

5.3.1 As discussed in section 7.11.8, the Partnership run a number of free bus events over the last year. At the time of the survey, users could have been aware of events through to June 2022. With each event, both knowledge of the free travel, and those taking part grew from the previous time. The percentages specifically exclude those already entitled to free bus travel through use of their ENCTS passes.

5.3.2 Of those that used the free travel at least once, 61% confirmed that it has made it more likely that they pay to use the bus in the future – a great result which is borne out by patronage data. Of the 39% who wouldn't, almost a quarter said this was because they already use the bus regularly.

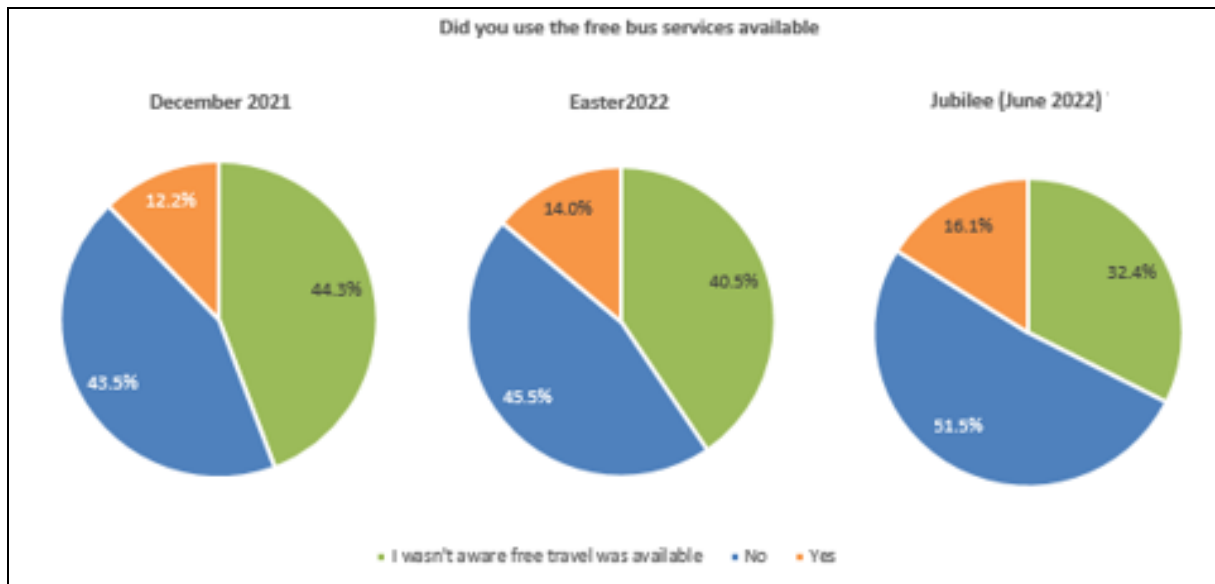


Figure 5.2 – Use of free travel promotions

## 5.4 **Fares and ticketing**

5.4.1 In the 2021 survey, 62% of respondents were in favour of a day ticket valid on all buses. For 2022, we asked which of eleven specific proposals for reducing fares respondents would prefer, as well as letting them come up with their own suggestions. For the proposals, people could rank them from best to worst. A score of 10 would be favoured by everyone. Only those that pay for travel provided answers.

<b>What bus fare or ticketing scheme would make you more likely to use the bus service in future</b>	<b>Score (out of 10)</b>
Reduced daily ticket price up to £1 off current fares	8.9
Reduced daily ticket price up to 25% of current fares	8.6
Ability to pay on all buses using a credit or debit card	8.3
Newbury / Thatcham day ticket valid on all buses	7.7
Short-hop one-way fare of £1 (e.g. up to two stops)	7.1
Ability to pay on all buses using cash	6.3
Family tickets for bus travel	6.0
Automatic daily price cap for bus travel even if you use several buses	5.7
Consistent age limit for young people's reduced fares across all services	5.6
Zonal rather than graduated fares (e.g. all travel within Newbury same cost)	5.1
Job-seekers reduced fare pass	4.1

Table 5.2 – Fares and ticketing proposals

5.4.2 Whilst the two most popular options were for reductions to current fares, it is interesting to see that the ability to make card payments was very popular.

5.4.3 168 respondents gave further thoughts on the subject, with the most popular requests being:

- For carnets of tickets, either physical or on smartcards or apps.
- Reduced price travel for ENCTS pass holders before 9.30am.
- Cheaper fares.
- App-based, pre-paid smartcards or online ticket purchase.

5.4.4 The Partnership is committed to many of these suggestions. Carnets are already available in the rural areas, as are app-based tickets and pay by card or phone for most journeys. DfT funding has been promised for price-capping (7.11.2) and to make fares more attractive.

5.4.5 Group tickets for up to four travellers, rather than just family tickets, have recently been introduced (7.12.3), discussions have commenced on consistent age limits for young people (7.11.4), and operators have agreed to commercially-back reduced price travel for ENCTS holders, which will commence from January 2023 (7.11.5).



## 5.5 **DfT-funded schemes**

- 5.5.1 Following the Council's success in being awarded funding following its 2021 BSIP, we took the opportunity to seek views on the proposed bus service improvements.
- 5.5.2 Of those that live within the catchment of each scheme, over half of respondents claimed that they would make more use of the bus if the schemes were implemented.

Proposed scheme	Use bus more
North West Downlands DRT	60%
North East Downlands DRT	57%
Pangbourne to Reading improved frequency	69%
Newbury to Harwell new service	63%

Table 5.3 – BSIP-funded proposals

- 5.5.3 In the case of the Harwell service, because it would be a new link with no established bus-using customer base we asked further questions. Around 5% of users would use it every day, with a further 31% using it at least weekly. By far, the most use would be for leisure purposes with only 8% using it solely for work, and a further 22% for a combination of work and leisure use. Opinions on where else the bus service should serve showed 68% preferred Oxford, with the next most popular destinations being Didcot, Abingdon and Wantage (all more than 30%).
- 5.5.4 When we asked if we were using the funds in the right way, 56% of respondents agreed. The vast majority of the comments received explaining how else they could be used focussed on providing new services, services on more days, or at higher frequencies. In fact, comments broadly mirrored those made in the 2021 survey for encouraging use and improvements.

Issue identified (2021 survey)	Encourage More Use	Suggested Improvements
More frequent services	47%	-
More regular service	-	32%
Being on a bus route	18%	-
More destinations	16%	22%
Cheaper services	11%	5%
Later / evening buses	8%	8%
Know the times of buses	7%	4%
Better bus / rail connections	-	4%
Weekend services	4%	4%
Pandemic over	4%	-
More direct routes	4%	4%

Table 5.4 – How we should spend our BSIP funding

## 5.6 **Satisfaction**

- 5.6.1 In 2021 we asked bus users about satisfaction with a range of factors. The net satisfaction ranged from 72% positive for drivers' customer care skills, to 18% negative for current bus timetables, although this was the only factor that had a negative net satisfaction.

5.6.2 From this, it was clear that the current times of buses, including how often they run, is the biggest issue. This is not unexpected due to the rural nature of the district and its low population densities, especially outside of the towns. It is unfortunate that we have not been allocated any funding to address this.

Attribute of Current Bus Services	Net Satisfaction
Drivers' customer care skills	72.2
Cleanliness of the buses	65.9
Comfort on the buses	60.1
Time keeping / reliability of the buses	58.3
Time on bus to complete journey	53.0
In journey information (e.g. next stop announcements)	44.2
Choice of ways to buy ticket	43.7
Facilities at your usual bus stops	34.1
Provision of bus information (printed / online / at stop / apps)	32.9
Choice of ticket types available	32.8
Environmental friendliness of the buses (fuel type)	31.3
Cost of bus fare	24.7
Current bus routes	21.8
Response to road closures / works	20.6
Current bus timetables (times / days of operation / frequency)	-18.0

**Note:** Net satisfaction is the difference between those that were satisfied or very satisfied, and those that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Table 5.5 – Net satisfaction of bus users 2021

5.6.3 In 2022 we focussed the satisfaction questions on the key elements of bus travel: value for money; punctuality; length of time on the bus; information about bus services; and the passenger waiting environment.

	All Respondents	Bus Users	Bus Users Net Satisfaction
<b>Bus Services Overall</b>	<b>46.8%</b>	<b>65.9%</b>	<b>48.4%</b>
Value for Money	48.1%	61.6%	48.5%
Punctuality	57.5%	73.7%	63.3%
Length of time on the bus	56.0%	74.8%	66.9%
Information about bus services	47.3%	63.3%	48.2%
Passenger waiting environment	38.2%	49.2%	28.4%

**Note:** Net satisfaction is the difference between those that were satisfied or very satisfied, and those that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Table 5.6 – Current satisfaction ratings

5.6.4 We were surprised at how low the satisfaction ratings are for bus users, however these scores were reduced by many expressing that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. If we assume that this category would be split equally between satisfied and dissatisfied if forced to choose, it changes the responses for bus users to:

- 74.2% overall
- 74.3% value for money
- 81.7% punctuality
- 83.4% time on bus

- 74.1% information
- 64.2% waiting environment

5.6.5 The above does show that the net satisfaction has increased since last year for time on bus 67% (53%), punctuality 63% (58%), value 48% (25%), and information 48% (33%); although for waiting environment it has fallen 28% (34%).

5.6.6 The questions asked, also allowed us to calculate satisfaction based on travel habits. Unsurprisingly satisfaction tends to drop for those travelling less often. It is also lower for daily users maybe reflecting their need to travel by bus in some cases rather than by choice.

	Daily	Few / week	Weekly	Few / month	Monthly	Few / year	Less / never
<b>Bus Services Overall</b>	68%	71%	67%	70%	60%	45%	9%
Value for Money	59%	69%	67%	61%	58%	51%	18%
Punctuality	53%	70%	78%	78%	75%	70%	22%
Time on the bus	70%	79%	79%	74%	72%	62%	15%
Information	66%	69%	67%	64%	54%	46%	16%
Waiting environment	43%	47%	56%	53%	42%	41%	16%

Table 5.7 – Satisfaction by frequency of travel – now

## 5.7 **Suggested improvements**

5.7.1 In the 2021 survey we asked respondents to tell us their suggestions for how local bus services could be improved (see Table 5.4). This year we sought a more focussed response by asking them to give us only one change.

5.7.2 It is clear from responses throughout the surveys in 2021 and 2022 that even where satisfaction is high for current service provision, there is a clear wish for improved frequencies and services connecting to more places, both within and outside of West Berkshire.

<b>Suggested change</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Days and/or times of current bus services	37%
New bus links	32%
Fares and ticketing changes	9%
Reliability, or better able to determine location of the bus	5%
Passenger waiting environment	3%
Vehicles (e.g. lower emissions)	3%
Connections to rail services	2%
No changes	4%
Other	5%

Table 5.8 – What one thing would you change to current bus services?

5.7.3 We then gave respondents a chance to share any thoughts they had regarding bus travel. As this was a free-text box, some chose to use it to re-emphasises early comments, whilst others wanted to say how good or bad they felt the current position was.

- 5.7.4 Within the positive comments, there was a lot of praise for the drivers, which more than outweighed any negative comments directed towards them.
- 5.7.5 Unsurprisingly, there was a lot of call for more frequent services (particularly to the rural areas); better links (many to places outside of West Berkshire); and for later evening (particularly the rural services, and services between Newbury and Thatcham) and Sunday services.
- 5.7.6 Better information included requests for more at-stop real-time displays, and for wider availability of printed timetables.
- 5.7.7 Within the requests for more affordable services, there were a few requests for the ability to travel before 9.30am (which we have facilitated with the introduction of early-bird tickets from January 2023 – 7.11.5), as well as introducing more generous free travel for over-60s.

Comments	Responses
Positive comments about the current position	21%
Requests for more frequent services	16%
Requests for new bus links	14%
Requests for better evening and Sunday services	10%
Requests for better information or promotion	8%
Requests for more affordable services	7%
Requests for better reliability or faster journeys	6%
Negative comments about the current position	4%
Requests for improvements to the waiting environment	3%
Requests for improved comfort and cleanliness on board	2%
All other comments	9%

Table 5.9 – Final comments

## 5.8 ***Who completed the survey***

- 5.8.1 One of the misgivings we had with the 2021 survey results, is that we had a poor response rate from younger people. Those aged up to 24 only accounted for 4.1% of the responses, and those aged 25 to 34, a further 5.4%. In contrast, those aged 66 and over made up over 43% of the responses. A couple of positives though, is that two-thirds of respondents would recommend bus use, and 20% would like to join a user group focussing on bus travel.
- 5.8.2 In 2022, we made an effort to attract more responses from young people, including posting a tiktok video and visiting some schools. This year responses from those up to 24 had risen to 6.8%. Whilst this may not seem that many more, it represents an increase from 29 to 89 respondents given the larger response. 25 to 34 year-olds added a further 6.3%, meaning that almost one in seven responses are now from those under 35. This time 25% asked to be able to give further views about bus travel.

## 6. **Headline targets**

### 6.1 ***How and why?***

6.1.1 Between the Council and the bus operators, a lot of information is available regarding bus services. This can be from a variety of sources, including:

- Ticket machines – record how many people use the services, what they pay, where they get on
- Apps / websites – can record how many visits to specific pages
- Surveys – can obtain information on satisfaction, changes people would like to see

6.1.2 The BSIP sets targets for journey times, service reliability, passenger levels, and customer satisfaction for 2025 and 2030. Progress against these targets will be reported every six months. Whilst there are overall targets for each category, some are further sub-divided to better show specific impacts that the EP is having. Targets set for 2030 are provisional, and may be amended in future years as initiatives are implemented. All targets are shown in section 9.

### 6.2 ***Journey time and reliability***

6.2.1 Whilst data is available to measure journey times and the reliability of specific services, this is not something that has been regularly monitored within West Berkshire. The exception is the supported bus network emanating from Newbury which recorded punctuality by service since the contract started in 2016.

6.2.2 Bus operators have agreed to provide specific point-to-point journey data for four weeks commencing in February and September each year. At this point, therefore, we are not setting a specific overall journey time target, although we will be able to measure the impacts on interventions associated with the BSIP and EP.

6.2.3 Figure 4.5 shows current bus punctuality, based on the average of buses departing on time and being on time at intermediate stops, and is already reported to the Department for Transport (DfT) each year. This has been fairly consistent for a number of years (excluding the increased reliability during the pandemic), but we will strive to improve this in the longer term. This reliability has also been consistently above the [national average](#), and that for non-metropolitan areas for more than a decade. We have set an overall target for reliability (bus punctuality), and a separate target for the Eastern Area, based on a specific route.

6.2.4 We continue to monitor services and seek to address problems where punctuality is below average. It may be that resolving issues on specific journeys, such as at peak times, or possibly those just after 9.30am when ENCTS pass holders begin travelling, could improve overall reliability of services.

6.2.5 We are aware that it is often factors outside the control of the bus operator or the Council that impact on reliability and journey times, such as emergency roadworks, or accidents, particularly events on the M4, which can rapidly lead to gridlock on West Berkshire roads. As part of ongoing monitoring, we will seek information on the most likely reasons for any abnormal delays.

6.2.6 Our 2022 survey showed a net satisfaction amongst bus users with reliability 63% (58% in 2021), and the time spent on the bus 67% (53%) which are already improvements on last year. Further improvement could include:

- Additional buses / drivers to allow for congestion
- Increased off-bus ticket sales
- Increased use of non-cash purchasing on board (e.g. tap and go, contactless bank cards, smartcards, apps, multi-journey tickets)
- Bus priority at congestion hotspots
- Improved safety at accident black spots
- Better management of road works
- More direct services

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30
Journey time	Specific targets not set. Journey times will be reviewed by service.				
<b>Reliability</b>					
Start	89.1%	88.8%	94.0%	90%	92%
Overall	85.4%	83.8%	89.1%	85%	87%
Eastern Area	Not recorded		88.3%	86%	88%

Table 6.1 – Journey time and reliability targets

### 6.3 **Passenger growth and customer satisfaction**

6.3.1 Due to the impact of the pandemic, it is considered pragmatic to respond to the challenge of recovering passenger numbers in the early years, before seeking to deliver growth over the longer term. The first two years (2022 to 2024) will therefore focus on delivering interventions that are likely to stabilise and recover patronage, especially with central government pandemic support now expected to end in March 2023. This will not prevent us looking at improvements to the bus network during this time.

6.3.2 From 2025, patronage projections will account for further growth beyond the 2019/20 level. Separate targets are set for the Eastern Area as this is where most growth has been in recent years. We will seek to balance new services and improved frequencies with changing consumer habits, such as online shopping and working from home.

6.3.3 The Council usually takes part in the National Highways & Transport Network (NHT) survey every two years (in the odd years). A questionnaire is sent out to approximately 3,500 households within the district, from which around 20-30% are returned. There is no distinction between bus, and non-bus, users. We have consistently recorded around 59%-60% since 2015 (although this dropped to 56% in 2017).

6.3.4 We have also established our own satisfaction targets, which will be obtained from our annual survey. The primary target will relate to satisfaction amongst current bus users.

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30
<b>Passenger numbers</b>					
Whole of WBC	2,342,715	2,222,530	1,555,987	2,300,000	2,500,000
Eastern Area (est.)	1,020,320	968,025	702,548	1,000,000	1,050,000
<b>Average passenger satisfaction</b>					
Council survey (bus users)	No survey		65.9%	67.9%	69.9%
Council survey (all respondents)	No survey		46.8%	Not set	
NHT survey (all respondents)	60%	n/a	59%	62%	64%

Table 6.2 – Passenger growth and customer satisfaction targets

6.3.5 Our survey does allow us to obtain satisfaction scores in different ways, based on how often they travel; as well as satisfaction scores with different elements of the journey experience (5.6).

#### 6.4 **Other targets**

6.4.1 Environmental improvements are important in West Berkshire, and we have therefore set targets for engine emissions for buses used in the district. Whilst we recognise that zero emissions is the ideal, we have to consider the economics too, and therefore our targets are designed around improving engine emissions in the interim.

6.4.2 In 2021 we suggested that we would set targets relating to the percentage of the population being within 300 metres of a bus stop (or 500m in the rural areas) for different frequency bus services. Unfortunately we are not able to accurately calculate this information, and therefore cannot set a target for improvements.

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30
<b>Other measures</b>					
Vehicle Emissions	Not recorded			All vehicles to be at least Euro V	All vehicles to be at least Euro VI

Table 6.3 – Other targets

## 7. Delivery

### 7.1 *What we are hoping to achieve*

- 7.1.1 If we are serious in our attempts to make bus travel a more attractive option in West Berkshire, in particular for those that do not currently use it, there are a number of initiatives that we would strive to implement. This section includes our aspirations, although we recognise that some will need to be given more priority than others, and that will be highlighted in our funding bids. Most of these will require external funding to make them a reality, and to allow them to become embedded, however they have been included in the hope that this funding will be forthcoming. Where aspirations refer to bus operations, this excludes those run under section 22 permits unless otherwise stated. Delivery priorities and scheme costs were shown in the associated funding document submitted to the DfT in 2021. Where funding has been allocated by the DfT, it is referred to as part of the relevant text.
- 7.1.2 Cross-boundary services form a vital element of the overall offer for bus passengers in our area, particularly within Berkshire which consists of six unitary authorities. These services provide opportunities for our residents to access a wider range of employment, education and leisure facilities, alongside attracting commuters and visitors into the borough from the wider county and beyond.
- 7.1.3 We will continue to work closely with our partner local authorities, both through the development of the proposals set out within this document and the subsequent establishment and delivery of Enhanced Partnership arrangements with local operators. This collaborative working will build on existing arrangements such as the Berkshire Local Transport Body and Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum, which have co-ordinated and overseen the delivery of significant bus enhancements in recent years, including new mass rapid transit corridors and park & ride facilities, and the Thames Valley and North Hants study.
- 7.1.4 The on-going coordination of plans for enhanced services will focus on ensuring key destinations throughout the county are well served by high-quality bus services, both through the delivery of key new cross-boundary bus priority measures and associated service level enhancements. In addition, we are committed to achieving a more integrated sustainable transport network in Berkshire through enhanced connectivity with rail services and facilities for walking and cycling.
- 7.1.5 We are collectively focused on continuing to build back levels of bus patronage following the reduction during the pandemic, alongside attracting new passengers to subsequently further grow levels of bus usage. This is vital part of achieving our wider objectives relating to the economic recovery, decarbonisation and the delivery of housing through the creation of sustainable communities. It also forms part of the current discussions on the potential for a county devolution deal with the government.

### 7.2 *Service frequency*

- 7.2.1 Tables 5.4 and 5.5 highlight that this is the most important factor we need to address to improve satisfaction amongst existing users, as the only area identified with a negative net satisfaction in the recent survey. Figure 4.3 shows the current bus frequencies. The Eastern Area already benefits from services operating to



higher frequencies, with early morning, evening and Sunday services, so many of the proposed changes are based elsewhere in West Berkshire.

7.2.2 Our plans in this area are to increase frequencies on the services in the table below by 2025. We would also introduce journeys later than 7pm, and introduce Sunday services outside of the Reading Buses commercial network.

Current frequency	Proposed frequency	Services
Every 12 minutes	Every 10 minutes	26 (peak)
Every 15 minutes	Every 10/12 minutes	26 (off-peak)
Every 20 minutes	Every 15 minutes	16, 33
Every 30 minutes	Every 20 minutes	Jet Black 1, Lime 2/a
Every hour	Every 30 minutes	1a, 1c, 2, 8, 9, 15 (off-peak), 103, The Link
Every 2 hours	Every hour	3, 4, 6, 143 (Pangbourne to Reading)
Daily / Less frequent	Every 2 hours or demand-responsive	5, 5a, 5c, 6a, 41, 44

Table 6.1 – Ideal frequencies

7.2.3 Specific changes we would introduce include:

- **The Link:** An increased frequency is supported by both the operator, and championed by the Transport for South East Inner Orbital Study. As well as a half-hourly frequency, we would like to see later evening journeys and a Sunday service.
- **Lime 2:** Increased frequency, especially during the evening peak period, with a possible Sunday service for Mortimer.
- **Jet Black 1:** Increased late evening journeys (particularly between Newbury and Thatcham) are supported by the operator, and would benefit the night time economy. Initial enhancements would be to Friday and Saturday evenings.
- **Pangbourne-Reading:** An improved frequency between Reading and Pangbourne, but this would be dependent upon a bus turning circle being provided in Pangbourne. This could either be an enhancement of service 143, or an extension of service 16 from Purley. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **Newbury contracted network (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9):** Because of limited resource availability, these services are inter-worked by five buses, restricting frequencies and making departure times less convenient for passengers on some services. We would also seek to run later journeys, at least on Fridays and Saturdays.
- **Reading services:** Restoration of frequencies where they have been reduced due to the impacts of the covid pandemic. All except service 33 (was every 15 minutes), and service 26 (was every 20 minutes on Sundays) have been restored.
- **103:** This is currently a Monday to Friday service, financially supported by Greenham Common Trust. A Saturday service would be useful, and would also allow for a review of this route and others in south Newbury. There are several attractors at Greenham Park, including the Base café and Arts Centre, the Peace Garden (established by the Greenham Peace Women), and access to Greenham Common, now a designated public parkland.

- **Sunday services:** We would like to introduce a Sunday service, at least within the Newbury / Thatcham area.

### 7.3 **New services**

7.3.1 Whilst improving frequencies and times / days of operation will be of benefit where bus services exist, it will do nothing for the areas where they do not. The rural nature of much of West Berkshire, and the relatively small rural settlements have led to many areas losing their bus links over time. In addition, there are definite benefits in linking key areas with fast, direct buses, especially along the north-south corridor where no direct rail links exist.

7.3.2 Areas where we see the need for new services include:

- **Newbury to Harwell / Didcot:** A proposed service has the support of Laura Farris, MP for Newbury; Harwell Campus; the Thames Valley LEP; Newbury College; local bus operators; and Oxfordshire County Council. The current public transport option from Newbury to Harwell (14 miles and 20 minutes by car) involves two trains (Newbury to Reading, Reading to Didcot), and then a bus to Harwell, a journey of at least 90 minutes. Harwell is a ‘nearby’ innovation centre of science and technology of national importance. It is well connected to Oxford, Wantage and Didcot, and the link to Newbury could be achieved by extending one of these services, thus improving accessibility to a number of work bases in south Oxfordshire for West Berkshire residents. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **Vodafone staff buses:** There has been a long-standing desire from the public for these services to be included within the local bus network. With the pandemic changing working patterns, and Vodafone looking to maximise the value of its services, this is an ideal time to pursue this, although the network has reduced to only one route between Newbury and their headquarters. A new housing development adjacent to this would benefit from these buses being available filling reverse flows in the business movements, and discussions are ongoing.
- **Mortimer Station:** The station is a little way from the village, and only has a small car park, leading people to park on the rural approach roads. A peak-time shuttle from Mortimer, Beech Hill and other nearby settlements would improve this situation. The station is also included in our DRT plans.
- **Thatcham Station:** This station is similarly remote from most Thatcham residents. A minibus service linking the station to north Thatcham is seen as a high priority.
- **Rural areas:** Within the more rural areas of the district, where no services have operated for a number of years, we are investigating DRT options. This includes a Lambourn to Hungerford option, which was popular in our 2021 survey. More details are given in the following section.

### 7.4 **Demand responsive services**

7.4.1 Following a study into demand responsive transport (DRT) within West Berkshire, we now have a better understanding of the resources required, including the technology available, and the level of service that we should be providing. The first two areas listed below were the subject of unsuccessful bids to the Rural Mobility

Fund, however funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable some of these routes.

7.4.2 The areas we are looking at include:

- **A. North East:** This includes the villages of Aldworth, Ashampstead, Bradfield, Bucklebury, Englefield, Frilsham, Hampstead Norreys, Stanford Dingley, Tidmarsh, Woolhampton and Yattendon. Many of these villages have no bus service.
- **B. South East:** This includes the villages of Aldermaston, Beech Hill, Padworth, Stratfield Mortimer and Sulhamstead. Current bus services in this area (where they exist) are not suitable for many journey purposes.
- **C. North West:** Conversion of existing services 5 and 5a to villages including Brightwalton, Chaddleworth, Leckhampstead and Peasemore would allow for wider coverage, to include Farnborough, Fawley, and Winterbourne which currently have no bus service, as well as provide more journey options than currently exist. Ideally, a Saturday service can also be added. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **D. North East / Oxfordshire border:** serving those North East villages north of the M4 motorway (Aldworth, Ashampstead, Hampstead Norreys, Lower Basildon, Streatley, Tidmarsh, Upper Basildon and Yattendon), this service would be most beneficial if a turning circle is provided in Pangbourne. The existing 143 could then focus its resource on the main Pangbourne to Reading corridor, with DRT used to link in with this, and increase the journey opportunities. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **E. West:** Operating between Lambourn and Hungerford, this includes the villages of Eastbury, East Garston, Great Shefford, Hungerford Newtown, Lambourn Woodlands, Shefford Woodlands, Wickham, Weston and Woodlands St Mary, replacing a service that last operated in 2016.

## 7.5 **Bus priority**

7.5.1 The road network in West Berkshire does not lend itself easily to the installation of bus lanes, and therefore the focus to date has been on bus gates in different forms to give clear advantages to buses over car use. In Newbury, for example, there are limited north-south routes for local traffic. Northbrook Street through the shopping centre is pedestrianised for most of the day; Park Way has a bridge over the Kennet & Avon Canal which is restricted to local buses, taxis and bicycles; leaving only the A339 for general traffic. Any delays along this route can quickly spread to nearby roads, and block the A4 in both directions towards Thatcham and Speen.

7.5.2 Paragraph 4.5.3 shows the currently identified congestion hotspots throughout the district, and some of these have been on the list for a long time, with no obvious solution. Additional funding would allow us to examine solutions in more detail at these points, as well as their implementation. Most solutions are likely to be small scale highways works rather than specific bus priority. We will also seek to address Active Travel issues where possible as part of any improvements. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.

7.5.3 Areas of bus priority that we wish to pursue include. Again, where Active Travel improvements can be made at the same time as improving bus travel, these will be implemented:

- **Pangbourne:** There has been a long-held ambition to increase bus services between Pangbourne and Reading, as for many the station is too far away for them to give up their car. Unfortunately, there is no obvious place to turn a bus within Pangbourne, as the buildings are close to the road; the residential roads have limited off-street parking; and the low railway bridge on Station Road prevents double deck vehicles accessing the station. One possible solution is to create a bus turning circle through Station Road car park, although a feasibility study will need to be undertaken, including the impacts of any lost parking spaces. This would allow for an increased frequency on service 143, or an extension of service 16 from Purley, and give a greater business case to DRT solution D in paragraph 7.4.2. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **A4 Bath Road:** The commercial Jet Black 1 can experience delays along the A4 from the Reading boundary to the M4 junction 12 roundabout. There is not considered to be the physical road space for bus lanes throughout, however we require a feasibility study to examine this in more detail, as well as other measures such as traffic light priority. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **Robin Hood Roundabout:** Similarly, towards the other end of the Jet Black 1 route in Newbury, traffic can become blocked on the A4 London Road and the B4009 Shaw Road, also affecting services 1a and 1c between Newbury and Thatcham. Again a feasibility study is required to examine options which can promote the bus further but don't have an adverse effect on the A339, as that would just lead to more congestion in the centre of Newbury. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **Atherton Road, Hungerford:** This road is used as part of a one-way loop for buses to access the terminal point in Church Street. The roads here are typically narrow and residential, with an overgrowth of hedges. Although double yellow lines have been installed, the road needs reshaping, with an alteration to the carriageway edge / hedgerow for buses to continue to use this road without difficulty. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **Mortimer Station:** The station in Mortimer is a little over one mile from the nearest bus stop. If a facility can be put in for a turning circle near the station, it will enable local residents to access trains to both Reading and Basingstoke.

## 7.6 ***Bus rapid transit***

7.6.1 Any such network would be more relevant to the Eastern Area, characterised already by high frequency commercial bus services, dense population levels, and the proximity to Reading. This will be considered along the A4 in Calcot, together with an alternative of using the existing service 26 route (which already includes bus gates). This would be considered essential if any plans are developed for a Park and Ride site in the vicinity of the M4, junction 12.

## 7.7 **Integration with other modes**

- 7.7.1 Paragraph 7.3.2 mentions the need for dedicated new services to Mortimer and Thatcham stations. Theale Station is also a short distance from the main population centre and may benefit from a shuttle service, linking the population centres and Arlington Business Park to the station.
- 7.7.2 Paragraph 4.8.2 highlights that additional vehicles added to the network (which will also improve bus frequencies) will enable more services to call directly at the station. Operators will review existing services, but there is agreement to highlight more clearly the nearest bus stops, and the walking link between them and the station. A new RTPI screen has recently been installed at Newbury Station, which gives information on services stopping nearby, as well as those directly outside.
- 7.7.3 We have had discussions with Great Western Railway (GWR) about better signposting and the possibility of adding some bus services to the rail network as “bus branch lines”, in line with their internal Integrated Transport Strategy document. Although we were unsuccessful in a bid for the Great Western Rail Community Fund this year, we will consider future bids.
- 7.7.4 Given the frequency of bus services in much of West Berkshire, linking bus journeys to train timetables is difficult, especially taking account of occasional disruption on the rail network. The majority of bus services emanating from Newbury are focussed on school movements, which need to be catered for, as these students represent a very high proportion of all passenger journeys in the area.
- 7.7.5 There are currently no long-distance coach services stopping in West Berkshire, however two of the six departure bays in the Wharf Bus Station are dedicated for coach use, allowing integration with bus services. We will encourage National Express to resume services that provide links to London, Heathrow Airport, the South Coast, Oxford and Birmingham when they are able to, but this will not be before 2024. We will also seek interest from other national coach operators.
- 7.7.6 Bicycle racks are available adjacent to the Wharf Bus Station for those wishing to travel further afield. We have no current plans to allow bicycles to be carried on buses, however we will keep this option under review.
- 7.7.7 As mentioned in paragraph 4.8.3, community transport is an important part of the passenger transport network in West Berkshire, and we will continue to support the groups and highlight their services to those who may struggle to use local buses. Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, through their Handybus operation have recently launched a dial-a-ride operation in Newbury and Thatcham with support from the Council.

## 7.8 **Simplify services**

- 7.8.1 Many urban areas of Newbury are only served by the infrequent rural routes that pass through them. The buses interwork between these services to get maximum operating efficiency with minimum resources. This is not ideal as frequencies are lower than where dedicated urban services exist. Examples of this include service 3 in West Fields, service 4 in Speen, and service 6 in Donnington. Ideally, additional

resource will allow us to have more dedicated urban services, as well as slightly improving journey times on the longer-distance routes.

- 7.8.2 Route numbers throughout the district are mostly distinct, with the exception of route number 2. There are three services with this number in West Berkshire: Newbury & District 2 Newbury to Wash Common and Pigeons Farm; Stagecoach 2 Baughurst to Basingstoke; and Reading Buses Lime 2/2a Reading to Burghfield and Mortimer. The different areas these serve, together with the names and branding of the latter, ensure that there is no confusion to the public.
- 7.8.3 Service numbers within Newbury were reviewed 20 years ago to give them a higher prominence in the town, with numbers from 1 upwards, rather than 104, 113, 146 etc. From 2016, a number of route variations were given separate letters (e.g. 4, 4a, 4b, 4c), to make it easier for users to identify that particular roads or villages are not served by all journeys. Additional resource should enable us to remove some of these variations.

## 7.9 ***Socially necessary services***

- 7.9.1 Despite most local bus services only operating due to subsidy, the Council now only has one tendered contract (Newbury services). It financially supports two further routes –1a/1c and 143. A number of other services are also operated directly by the Council using section 22 permits.
- 7.9.2 The Newbury contract began in 2016 following a reduction in funds available for bus services, and required four vehicles to be interworked to cover five distinct services. Developer funding has allowed a further bus (and service) to be added to this, allowing more recovery time on longer-distance journeys. This contract has been extended to run until the end of August 2024. It allows for additional buses to be added at an agreed price, and therefore we are able to implement improvements quickly with additional funding in place.
- 7.9.3 Quarterly meetings take place between the Council and the operator, Newbury & District, which are also attended by Reading Buses staff. This gives us the opportunity to discuss issues relating to most bus services in the district, contracted and commercial, to ensure that they are still effective.
- 7.9.4 All contracts, including those for services 1a/1c and 143, now expire at the end of August 2024 to allow a co-ordinated approach to take place to review continued operations.
- 7.9.5 By their nature, these services are not commercial. Table 4.4 highlights that almost £2m of non-direct bus fare revenue is invested each year to keep these services going. Whilst improvements that increase passenger levels may reduce the ongoing cost required, it is not expected that many of these services could ever become truly commercial. It is vital, therefore, that ongoing funding is provided, and any improvements made as part of the National Bus Strategy are funded for long enough to allow for commercial operation, or for the business case to be fully established for continued funding.

## 7.10 ***Superbus network***

7.10.1 A Superbus network provides higher frequency, lower fare services. Similar to bus rapid transit, we have no current plans for this as we need to improve services overall first. Any scheme would be most likely to work best in the Eastern Area where services already operate at higher frequencies and for most of the day. We would therefore support any bid made by Reading Borough Council subject to funding.

## 7.11 ***Lower and simplified fares***

7.11.1 Operators of commercial services feel that their fares already offer good value for money, and so they are reluctant to look at reducing them. Fare reductions may also impact on the services' commercial viability.

7.11.2 Operators are, however, keen to introduce fare capping, most likely by introducing tap-on, tap-off technology once all operators have compatible ticketing technology, which we would like to see introduced within the next two years. This will also include the Council's own section 22 operations. It is important that the software behind tap-on, tap-off is able to apportion revenue fairly between operators, which is being looked into by the DfT as it will impact cross-boundary services. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.

7.11.3 The Council is looking at fares on its supported bus services. As part of this review, it is hoped to move towards a simple, easily understood zonal fare structure rather than the current tapering fare charts. At the same time, it is hoped that fares for many can be reduced in a way that could attract new, and more frequent use.

7.11.4 We will standardise the reduced price tickets between commercial and contracted operations, including the age limits such tickets relate to (i.e. young people). We support calls for regional and national uniformity of such tickets. No later than January 2023, operators will all have clear information on fares charged on their websites, including for young people. All operators allow accompanied under-fives to travel free, and provide reduced fares until a person reaches 17. They also provide reduced price termly passes for those attending educational establishments. Reading Buses go further with reduced price options for under 19s.

7.11.5 At the Forum meeting in October, operators also agreed to introduce "Early Bird" tickets, at least between January and March 2023. These tickets will allow those with ENCTS passes to travel before 9.30am Mondays to Fridays for a discounted, but harmonised, fare.

7.11.6 We have also had preliminary discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regarding options for job seekers tickets for those looking for work.

7.11.7 We also commit to allowing people to continue to pay for bus fares by cash, whilst supporting alternative payment methods. We recognise that for some people, removing this option will be a barrier to using the bus.

7.11.8 Over the past year, a number of 'free travel' bus days have taken place. These have been in the run-up to Christmas 2021, and during the Easter and Jubilee weekends in 2022. In September 2022, free travel was provided on World Car Free Day. This was the first time free return travel was allowed to places outside West

Berkshire. As these events have proved popular, and have led to better patronage recovery, free travel will again be made available on Thursday 17 November, and then every Saturday until Christmas 2022. From January to March 2023, reduced price tickets (£2 cap per journey) should be available daily.

7.11.9 Funding for lower and simplified fares has been allocated by the DfT.



Figure 6.1 – Advertising for ‘free travel’ days

## 7.12 Integrated ticketing between operators and different transport modes

7.12.1 Operators are in agreement that day and period passes and multi-journey tickets should be available for all bus travel. As such, the Council will expand use of its Connect tickets (for Newbury-centred services), and also work with operators to implement joint ticketing in the Eastern Area, for example between Reading Buses service 16 and Thames Travel service 143.

7.12.2 Within Newbury / Thatcham, there is currently no all-operator day ticket other than the Connect Day which covers most of West Berkshire. The Council will therefore introduce a Connect Day Urban ticket which is more compatible with fares in the area.



7.12.3 In summer 2022, we introduced a multi-operator Group ticket (in both urban and rural versions) allowing one day's bus travel for up to four people. The rural ticket was launched with an introductory price to boost take-up.

7.12.4 We will continue to support the PlusBus scheme. We will support developments that allow the purchase of tickets on buses that can then be used on the rail network, rather than the necessity to purchase a through ticket in advance so that it has time to be delivered to the user, or the need to purchase a separate bus ticket for the outward journey

7.12.5 Funding for integrated ticketing has been allocated by the DfT.

### 7.13 **Vehicles and infrastructure**

7.13.1 We will expect that all buses have working next stop audio-visual announcements, Wi-Fi and USB charging facilities, with the latter facilities expected as standard by younger people. Reading Buses' successful Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) '[Completing the Connection](#)' bid has helped, and we would wish to support similar bids for other operators.

7.13.2 Vehicles will all provide level boarding. We have asked operators to provide information on where it can be difficult for buses to access stops, so that we can implement measures to assist (e.g. bus stop clearways, parking restrictions). Busier stops have Kassel Kerbs, and more rural stops will have hard standing to provide a safe place to board or alight from the bus.

7.13.3 We will support the introduction of additional bus shelters. The 2021 customer survey responses included requests for shelters in Burghfield, Lambourn and Mortimer, and one nearer the shops in Pangbourne. Ownership and maintenance of shelters resides with the respective Town or Parish Councils, and all of these Parish Councils have been supportive. It can be difficult to persuade some areas to take on this responsibility, however we will work with these to encourage investment. We are aware of some bus shelters available offering green roofs (roof gardens) which may prove more popular with both residents and Town and Parish Councils.



Figure 6.2 – Level boarding and new bus shelters

7.13.4 An increase in bus frequencies will require replanning of services using The Wharf Bus Station in Newbury. We will also consider whether enhancements can be made to improve passenger facilities, and how to accommodate any additional stops required in the vicinity, particularly for non-terminating services, perhaps by realigning existing roads.

7.13.5 Section 5.6 clearly shows that we must look at improving the passenger waiting environment. This will be a combination of boarding facilities, shelters and improved lighting.

#### 7.14 **Passenger safety**

7.14.1 We will expect that all buses have working CCTV to record images in the event of an incident on board. CCTV also covers the Wharf Bus Station in Newbury.

7.14.2 We have received requests for improved lighting at some bus stops where early morning and evening services stop, and we will look at what can be done at these locations. We will investigate solar panels / battery storage that can be installed in more remote areas as a cost-effective solution.

#### 7.15 **Buses for tourists**

7.15.1 West Berkshire is notable for its large Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and many of its towns and villages are tourist attractions in their own right. Hungerford is known for its antiques; Lambourn as a centre for racehorse training and home to several famous jockeys; and Pangbourne as a picturesque village on the River Thames, and home to author Kenneth Grahame. There are a number of other attractions too, including:

- Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College
- Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails along the northern boundary of West Berkshire
- Kennet and Avon Canal and River Kennet running the length of the district just south of the A4
- Basildon House (National Trust) and Beale Park Wildlife Centre in Lower Basildon

7.15.2 In addition there are numerous footpaths, Newbury Racecourse, and many fairs and festivals. We will produce information to promote bus access where possible, and work with attractors to seek discounted travel for visitors, including places both outside West Berkshire but accessible by a bus originating in the district.

#### 7.16 **Decarbonisation and zero emissions**

7.16.1 The major bus groups Stagecoach and Go Ahead have their own plans to decarbonise their buses, with both aiming to have zero emission UK bus fleets by 2035. In addition, the Council's [Environment Strategy](#) seeks to make the district carbon neutral by 2030.

7.16.2 We will support bus companies to replace their older and most polluting vehicles with zero emissions ones, and support any further bids to the DfT's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA), or alternative, schemes. We will also support non-ZE upgrades, and have set targets for this. We are particularly keen to support buses

that pass through either of the district's AQMAs, although the benefits here are only likely to ensue if car drivers then switch to these buses. A key part of vehicle upgrades is likely to involve retrofitting improved engines to existing buses.

7.16.3 We are particularly keen to work with our neighbouring Berkshire authorities in relation to the introduction of ZE buses and associated infrastructure, which may take the form of a County Deal.

7.16.4 We are also keen to explore whether the Council can fund or facilitate carbon-neutral refuelling stations, whether that is electricity, hydrogen, or other alternatives, although this is likely to be a longer-term initiative.

7.16.5 When we next tender for our Newbury-based bus contract in 2024, we will include options for zero emission and less polluting vehicles than the current fleet.

### 7.17 **Passenger charter**

7.17.1 We are committed to working with our operators to produce a passenger charter. Whilst they each have their own charters, we are looking to produce a short, simple, and easily understood Charter that simplifies the message to West Berkshire bus users. This is likely to consist of a list of service standards that could reasonably be expected, and the redress a passenger can expect when these standards are not met. A draft has been discussed at the Forum, which requires a few minor modifications before it will be adopted.

7.17.2 We are aware that the DfT and Transport Focus are seeking the development of a national passenger charter, and will encourage our operators to adopt this when it comes to fruition for consistency across the country.

7.17.3 We will promote the passenger charter in our publicity, including on the Council and operator websites.

### 7.18 **Network identity**

7.18.1 Bus services within West Berkshire tend to operate in clusters – the west of the district into Swindon and Wiltshire, centrally from Newbury, and in the Eastern Area. Rather than seek to introduce a “West Berkshire” branded network, we will give the local identity through the Council's publicity, ticketing, and passenger charter. The Council has been using *Connect* branding for a number of years. It is included on all of our publicity including the Travel Guide and roadside timetable displays; it is the name of our multi-operator tickets; and it is displayed prominently on the Council's section 22-operated vehicles. We will consider whether it is time to refresh the Connect branding.

7.18.2 Network identities are different in each part of the district:

- **West:** These services are tendered by Wiltshire and Swindon Councils (other than service 47, operated under the Connect name) and are in the operator's livery. As these services have very little mileage in West Berkshire, we would not seek to impose any conditions on their operations.
- **Central / Newbury:** Other than the two Stagecoach services from the south, buses here have had a variety of liveries over the years dependent upon the operator at the time. Within the last few years, this position has stabilised with the purchase of Newbury & District by Reading Buses, and all vehicles are now

in the distinctive, and smart, Newbury & District livery, which also helps vehicles to appear new – a definite bonus for bus travel.

- **Eastern Area / Reading:** For many years now, Reading Buses have been using a standard livery layout, but in different colours for different services. This approach obviously works as passenger numbers have been growing in recent years against the national trend.

## 7.19 *Information*

7.19.1 Information in West Berkshire is reasonably good with the District-wide Travel Guide, at stop information, operators own information, apps and some RTPI. This is OK if you know where to find it, and we would like to improve this.

- **Travel Guide:** We will resume printing and distribution of this in the coming months following a hiatus since 2018 for a variety of factors, since which it has been online only. There has not been a total void, as a separate leaflet was produced for some of this period covering Newbury services as these were the only ones that changed in any significant way.
- **Public Transport Map:** This has not been printed for a number of years, but we will consider whether a printed version is valuable for existing and potential users.
- **Bus stop displays:** Although many stops already have timetable cases displaying current departure times, we will increase this to cover all stops where passengers are likely to board. We will also add QR codes to each display to allow users to link directly to real time information on their bus.
- **RTPI:** We will install more RTPI screens at key stops so that those without access to a smartphone can still see when the next bus will arrive. This will include additional stops in Newbury and Thatcham, as well as Burghfield, Compton, Hungerford, Lambourn, Mortimer and Pangbourne. Two screens in Thatcham and one in Theale were upgraded in 2022, and a new screen added at Newbury Rail Station.
- **BODS:** All of our operators are now providing data to BODS, which is used to populate journey planners including Traveline. The Council will ensure this information is provided for section 22 operations. In future, this information will include not only timetables, but fare information, vehicle locations, and details of punctuality
- **Websites / Apps / Social Media:** All major operators have their own websites and apps and make use of social media. The Council will review its own website to include links to these where this will add more information than is available directly from the Council.
- **On bus:** All vehicles will have working audio-visual next stop announcements.
- **Individual service timetables:** Although these are not often produced on their own, within the Travel Guide we will add more information to each bus service to highlight the relevant community transport options for those unable to use conventional buses.
- **Information of interest:** As noted in section 7.15, buses could be used to reach many leisure facilities, and we will provide information that will help boost this type of travel.

- **Passenger charter:** We will publish a passenger charter within our Travel Guide and on our website explaining what customers can expect, and what redress they have when these standards are not met.

7.19.2 One thing that has not happened in any consistent way in West Berkshire is marketing of bus services and their benefits. We commit to changing this philosophy so that we actually make people aware of what is available and encourage use. We will seek to be ambitious with this marketing using a variety of different initiatives and techniques. This will range from press releases to reduced price (or even free) travel for specific events or to target different users. Figure 6.1 shows a number of different posters and promotional messages we have used to advertise free bus travel.

## 7.20 **Community transport**

7.20.1 We have highlighted that community transport provides an important link in the transport provision in West Berkshire (4.8.3) and we will continue to support and promote this for those unable to use conventional buses.

7.20.2 We have facilitated additional Dial-a-Ride facilities in the Newbury / Hospital / Thatcham area working with Volunteer Centre West Berkshire.

## 7.21 **Shared car use**

7.21.1 We will work with the Council's Transport Policy team to seek expansion of the current [car club](#) to provide additional options, especially where DRT is not currently planned. The car club currently provides 24-hour access to hire cars in Newbury.

7.21.2 Trials are also starting promoting car sharing facilities for some of these more remote areas.

## 7.22 **Parking**

7.22.1 For a rural area, there must be a trade-off between affordable, accessible parking and the cost of bus services. This is especially important when town centres are seeing reduced footfall from more home working and shops closing down as internet shopping becomes more the norm. Over the next year, we will develop and publish a Parking Strategy that will consider these factors, including proposals in the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan to reduce the number of central Newbury parking spaces.

## 8. **Reporting**

8.1 We will report on the targets set within the BSIP at least every six months, and this information will be published, on the Council's dedicated webpage: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/enhancedpartnership>.

## 9. Overview Table

9.1 The following table summarises the key outputs of the BSIP, and how these meet the requirements set out in the [National Bus Strategy](#). This gives an overview of the commitments which the Council and bus operators will work towards to improve local bus services.

<b>Name of authority or authorities:</b>	West Berkshire Council
<b>Franchising or Enhanced Partnership (or both):</b>	Enhanced Partnership
<b>Date of publication:</b>	October 2022
<b>Date of next annual update:</b>	October 2023
<b>URL of published report:</b>	<a href="https://info.westberks.gov.uk/enhancedpartnership">https://info.westberks.gov.uk/enhancedpartnership</a>

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30	Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words)
<b>Journey time</b>	Specific targets not set. Journey times will be reviewed by service.				We will examine all services to identify where reliability is lower, and then look at variance on individual journey times.
<b>Reliability</b>					This measures journeys departing from their first stop, and across the whole route using standard methodology (on time is 1 minute early to 5 minutes 59 seconds late). Information will be obtained directly from operators or from BODS.
Start	89.1%	88.8%	90%	92%	
Overall	85.4%	83.8%	85%	87%	
<b>Passenger numbers</b>					From Passenger counts submitted by the operators from information drawn from their ticket machines.
Whole of WBC	2,342,715	2,222,530	2,300,000	2,500,000	
Eastern Area (est.)	1,020,320	968,025	1,000,000	1,050,000	
<b>Average passenger satisfaction</b>					The Council survey data is taken from annual consultation. The NHT measure uses KBI06 Local Bus Services satisfaction.
Council survey (bus users)	No survey		67.9%	69.9%	
NHT survey (all respondents)	60%	59%	62%	64%	

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30	Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words)
<b>Other measures</b>					
Vehicle Emissions	Not recorded	Not recorded	All vehicles to be at least Euro V	All vehicles to be at least Euro VI	Information on vehicles used will be provided by operators.

Delivery - Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
<b>Make improvements to bus services and planning</b>		
<i>More frequent and reliable services</i>		
Review service frequency	Yes	Working with bus operators, we have identified routes that would attract more passengers if frequencies were enhanced. This includes the addition of evening and Sunday services and some new and reinstated links in the network. These would all require additional funding to implement.
Increase bus priority measures	Yes	Working with bus operators, we have identified sites where bus priority would reduce delays to bus services. We have also identified that a bus turning circle in Pangbourne would allow for improved frequency to be one service, however further feasibility is required to identify a suitable location for this. DfT funding has been allocated for this.
Increase demand responsive services	Yes	Many rural parts of the district currently have no, or a very minimal bus service. We believe these areas would be best served by DRT. Additional funding will be required to implement any of these schemes and some DfT funding has been allocated.
Consideration of bus rapid transport networks	Yes	Such networks may be applicable in the Eastern Area of the district. If so, we would work with Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council to achieve such ambitions for the commercial bus services here.
<i>Improvements to planning / integration with other modes</i>		
Integrate services with other transport modes	Yes	We have identified areas where bus services could be provided to rail stations. If additional resources are put in, it will also be possible for more services to serve Newbury rail station. We are discussing options with GWR to add some services to the rail network as "bus branch lines".
Simplify services	Yes	With additional resource, we would be able to improve the urban bus network around Newbury, so that longer-distance rural services could operate more directly to their ultimate destinations.

<b>Delivery - Does your BSIP detail policies to:</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Explanation (max 50 words)</b>
Review socially necessary services	Yes	The Council-contracted Newbury services are reviewed regularly with monthly information provided on patronage and reliability, allowing for minor adjustments to timetables.
Invest in Superbus networks	Yes	Such networks may be applicable in the Eastern Area of the district. If so, we would work with Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council to achieve such ambitions for the commercial bus services here.
<i>Improvements to fares and ticketing</i>		
Lower fares	Yes	Whilst operators believe their fares to already be good value, the Council are reviewing lower and/ or simplified fares. We are also using promotional fares to stimulate growth.  Operators are keen on fare-capping, which should be multi-operator. The Council is also looking at standardising age-based reduced fares between the supported network and commercial operations.
Simplify fares	Yes	We are also committed to retaining cash as a payment method for those who rely on this.  DfT funding has been allocated to support this and ticketing improvements.
Integrate ticketing between operators and different transport modes	Yes	We are committed to expanding the multi-operator Connect tickets to all Newbury-based operations, and seeking similar arrangements in the Eastern Area. As part of this we will introduce a Newbury/Thatcham day ticket. Group tickets have recently been introduced. We support PlusBus and will work with GWR to make this more accessible.
<b>Make improvements to bus passenger experience</b>		
<i>Higher spec buses</i>		
Invest in improved bus specifications	Yes	All buses will offer level boarding in urban areas, and more rural stops will benefit from hard standing. Vehicles will have working audio-visual announcements, Wi-Fi, and USB charging facilities as standard.
Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services	Yes	Additional bus shelters will be installed in rural locations. Further RTP1 screens will also be added at key stops, together with QR codes on all roadside displays to identify how far away the next bus is.
Protect personal safety of bus passengers	Yes	Available funding would be used to ensure all bus services have working CCTV. Lighting will be improved at bus stops, and we will investigate solar panels, in particular for more remote rural areas.



Delivery - Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Improve buses for tourists	Yes	<p>We will promote access to the countryside and towns and villages in West Berkshire by bus. This includes access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Footpaths including the National Trails (a major strength of West Berkshire – its vast area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)</li> <li>• Tourist attractions</li> <li>• Special events</li> <li>• Days out in general</li> </ul>
Invest in decarbonisation	Yes	<p>We will support any bids for ZEBRA (or similar) funding, and the use of zero-emission, zero-carbon buses, although funding will be required for both infrastructure and the additional costs of the vehicles themselves. We will assess future bus tenders taking account of using these vehicles.</p>
<i>Improvements to passenger engagement</i>		
Passenger charter	Yes	<p>We are committed to producing a simple, readily understood and short passenger charter that encompasses all bus services. This will consist of service standards that could reasonably be expected, and the redress available when these standards are not met.</p>
Strengthen network identity	Yes	<p>The brands used to identify bus services and networks are considered strong in West Berkshire, and there are no plans to change these. The West Berkshire brand is <i>Connect</i> which is used in the names of multi-operator tickets, on Council section 22 vehicles and in publicity / information.</p>
Improve bus information	Yes	<p>The Council's Travel Guide is already 'Outstanding', and we will recommence printing of this. We will also improve many other aspects of our information, including QR codes and RTPi for those waiting for buses. More importantly, with additional funding, we will market and promote what is available.</p>
<b>Other</b>		
Other		
Community Transport	Yes	<p>We will continue to support and promote community transport as an alternative for those who are unable to use conventional bus services.</p>
Parking	Yes	<p>We will develop and publish a Parking Strategy for West Berkshire that will take account of changing consumer habits, the environment, and the desire to encourage more use of public transport.</p>

## Glossary

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AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
BODS	Bus Operator Data Service
BSIP	Bus Service Improvement Plan
BSOG	Bus Services Operators Grant
DfT	Department for Transport
DRT	Demand Responsive Transport
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ENCTS	English National Concessionary Travel Scheme
EP	Enhanced Partnership
Forum	Enhanced Partnership Forum
GWR	Great Western Railway
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LTP	West Berkshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026
NHT	National Highways & Transport Network
NO <sub>2</sub>	Nitrogen dioxide
nomis	Official Labour Market statistics
ONS	Office for National Statistics
QR	Quick Response matrix barcode
RTPI	Real Time Passenger Information
Section 22	The Transport Act 1985 allows not-for-profit organisations to operate without the need for a full public service vehicle operator's licence. They are not subject to many of the normal licensing or legislative requirements.
ZE	Zero emission
ZEBRA	Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas

## Appendices

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## Other relevant documentation

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[West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme](#)