
NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL TARGET PROGRESS: OCTOBER 2024

The Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) identifies a number of targets which are reported against on a regular basis.

Progress against those targets is reported below, also within the report a table has been compiled outlining the progress on the BSIP funded projects to date.

The Enhanced Partnership between the Council and the bus operators has been successful in being awarded £2.6m from the Department for Transport (DfT), for spending by 31 March 2025. In May 2023 the Council was awarded an additional £239,039 for both 2023/24 and 2024/25 as part of the BSIP+ scheme. The funding allocations have been released and the Partnership has been using the monies to improve local public bus services.

For more information on targets, and proposals that may lead to improvements, please refer to the 2023 BSIP and the BSIP 2024 Summary Document.

1. Journey time

A method of calculating an overall target for journey time was considered by the EP Forum in October 2022, however it was felt that the Partnership would be better served by examining point-to-point journey times regularly instead. Point-to-point journey times have been provided for a 4-week period in February 2023, however, having collated these extensive datasets it is considered that we may be better placed to focus on bus corridors in the district specified for priority measures.

Agreement was provided at the May 2023 EP Forum. This data will be used to inform future actions to improve reliability and journey speeds.

The Council has been working with operators on journey time data for the following corridors where bus priority schemes are being considered. Data has also been gathered from BODS (Bus Open Data Service).

The following corridors have initially been looked at:

- A4 Bath Road in Calcot – between the junction with the M4 and the Reading borough boundary.
- Robinhood roundabout in Newbury.

Comparison will be made with comparable corridors where bus priority schemes are not being considered.

2. Reliability

We are monitoring reliability and will increase future targets if current rates improve. It is noticeable that reliability was affected as people returned to normal life following the covid pandemic. Essential roadworks across the district have also contributed to a decrease in reliability levels. Data is recorded quarterly.

The third quarter of 2023/2024 was particularly challenging for operators with a series of utility works on a major bus corridor causing considerable delays. There were also issues with flooding at the beginning of 2024 which caused some disruption to bus services.

Operators have been reviewing timetables to improve reliability and the Council have delivered on the second phase of congestion hotspot (clearways) works to assist with reliability along the A4, with plans now being implemented for a third phase in Newbury, Thatcham, East Garston and Lambourn.

Reliability	Actuals 2018/19	Actuals 2019/20	Actuals 2021/22	Actuals 2022/23	Actuals 2023/24	6 months to 30 Sept 2024	Target 2024/25	Target 2029/30
Start	89.1%	88.8%	94.0%	91.5%	88.3%	86.43%	90%	92%
Overall	85.4%	83.8%	89.1%	84.9%	83.51%	82.64%	85%	87%
Eastern Area overall	Not recorded		88.3%	86.2%	86.01%	84.68%	86%	88%

3. Passenger growth

The Eastern Area is composed of Purley on Thames, Tilehurst, Calcot and Theale. The data is estimated until the end of Q1 2022/23, with boarding details captured after this.

To boost passenger numbers, we have launched a Connect Group Day Ticket (unlimited travel for up to 4 people), an Early Bird Concessionary Fare Ticket, operators have taken part in the National £2 fare cap scheme since 2023, we also provided free bus travel on select days since 2021 which included World Car Free Day 2024 and dates for free bus travel have been planned for Christmas 2024.

Passenger numbers	Actuals 2018/19	Actuals 2019/20	Actuals 2021/22	Actuals 2022/2023	Actuals 2023/2024	6 months to 30 Sept 2024	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30
Whole of WBC	2,342,715	2,222,530	1,555,987	1,987,043	2,168,208	1,128,408	2,300,000	2,500,000
Eastern Area	1,020,320	968,025	702,548	816,537	958,358	478,360	1,000,000	1,050,000

4. Customer satisfaction

From 2022, the Council's annual survey captures a satisfaction rating, which can identify the satisfaction of existing users as well as all respondents.

In 2023 we also asked about satisfaction with the last journey made following a suggestion via the Enhanced Partnership Forum, as it was felt this would give a more accurate comparison with the Transport Focus surveys undertaken in other parts of the country. For a further breakdown of satisfaction please refer to the 2023 BSIP document section 5.8 for more detail.

It is disappointing that overall satisfaction had dropped. Satisfaction is still higher than 2021/22 for value (more than double) in relation to time on bus and information. Satisfaction with the waiting environment continues to drop, and the Council have submitted a BSIP Project Adjustment Request to the Department for Transport to request that the Enhanced Partnership can use some of the allocated funding to address this moving forward.

Our annual bus user survey ran again over the summer of 2024 until 29 September 2024 which was later than the original date; results are being assessed and will be made available in the updated 2024 BSIP.

Customer Satisfaction	Actuals 2018/19	Actuals 2019/20	Actuals 2021/22	Actuals 2022/23	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30
Council survey (bus users)	No survey		65.9%	59.7% (71.1%)	67.9%	69.9%
Council survey (all respondents)	No survey		46.8%	43.6% (70.6%)	Not set	
NHT survey (all respondents)	60%	n/a	59%	56%	62%	64%

Note: The figures in brackets under the 2022/23 satisfaction results relate to last journey made satisfaction.

5. Vehicle emissions

Very few buses in West Berkshire are older than Euro V emission standards. These older vehicles tend to be used more sparingly.

Vehicle Emissions	Actuals 2018/19	Actuals 2019/20	Actuals 2021/22	Actuals 2022/2023	Actuals 2023/2024	6 months to 30 Sept 2024	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30
At least Euro V	Not recorded			96%	95%	98%	All vehicles	
At least Euro VI	Not recorded			49%	77%	80%		All vehicles

West Berkshire Council has brought an electric minibus which will be used on the [West Berkshire Community Connect services](#). Reading Buses and Newbury & District will also shortly be introducing new vehicles into their fleet which will be used on public bus routes across the district.

6. BSIP improvement programme until 31 March 2025

West Berkshire Council has been given funding from the DfT (Department for Transport) to use on improving public bus services within the district. The funding has been broken down into a series of Capital and Revenue schemes.

The following table outlines the position on improvements funded by the BSIP since 2021 (as of October 2024):

Type	Project	Detail	Progress
Capital	BP1. Pangbourne Bus Turning Circle	Provide turning facility for buses to improve public bus links to the villages and act as a transport hub.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WBC Operations Board support not given. Alternative project approval obtained from DfT.
Capital	BP2. Atherton Road, Hungerford	Cut back vegetation to allow buses to pass more freely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project complete with BSIP funding not required.
Capital	BP3. Robinhood Roundabout, Newbury	Install bus priority at junction to improve bus reliability, part of wider junction remodelling works.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proceeding with traffic signal priority. Will look to buy/install the equipment before March 2025.
Capital	BP4. Bath Road, Calcot	Install bus priority on busy bus corridor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feasibility study commissioned, has now been completed. Proceeding with traffic signal priority before March 2025.
Capital	BP5. Congestion Hotspots	Schemes to improve issues with congestion for bus services across the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes to install bus stop clearway markings to continue until March 2025.
Capital	BP6. Passenger Waiting Facilities	To install new/improved passenger waiting facility across district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes to install waiting facilities planned until March 2025.
Capital	BP7. Mortimer Station Bus Turning Facility	To undertake study into feasibility for providing bus turning facility to improve bus links.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study to complete by March 2025. Project implementation/ deliverability post March 25 subject to funding.
Capital and Revenue	FT1. Simplified fares and improved ticketing	Introduce simplified ticketing schemes/initiatives and install ticket machines on majority of services by March 2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free bus travel days for World Car Free Day and Christmas. Group and early bird ticket schemes introduced. Increased publicity for youth fares. Developing a multi-operator ticketing scheme. Will look to introduce additional fare schemes after the ending of National £2/£3 Fare Scheme.
Capital and Revenue	BS1. Downlands Transport	Launch on-demand bus service replacing 5, 5a, 5c services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Berkshire Community Connect launched in January 2024; vehicle purchased for service. Ongoing publicity campaigns to build patronage.
Capital and Revenue	BS2. Pangbourne Transport/East Thatcham	Launch on-demand bus service in East Thatcham replacing 41/44 service as priority over Pangbourne.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intend to introduce Thatcham Connect in November 2024 Electric minibus delivered for service.

Revenue	BS3. Newbury to Harwell	Provide a bus service between Newbury and Harwell Campus to access jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X34 service launched in July 2023. • Developed service from September 2024 to serve Donnington estate.
Revenue	BS5. Introduction of evening and weekend services	Provide additional evening and weekend services across the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late evening 1e service on Friday & Saturday evenings launched September 2023. • A two-hourly Sunday bus service Lime 2a between Reading and Mortimer launched in September 2023.
Revenue	BS6. Support service for Council supported services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support for supported bus network from September 2024 to March 2025.
Revenue	BS7. Support service enhancements for current services	To provide frequency enhancements to services that are already operational.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 (formerly The LINK) service between Newbury and Basingstoke introduced late evening, additional peak and Sunday journeys from 5 May 2024.

BSIP funding has also been provided for officer support until the end of March 2025.