

Notes of West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Forum

Thursday 2 February 2023 Forum No. 3

Present were representatives of:

- Bus Companies (Go Ahead, Reading Buses)
- Neighbouring local authorities (Hampshire)
- West Berkshire Council (Network Management, Transport Services, Service Director)

The Service Director for Environment at West Berkshire Council chaired meeting.

Notes from Forum No. 2 in October 2022 agreed.

Matters arising from the last Forum, which are not covered on the Agenda:

- Council received its first year funding allocation (£717k) in December 2022. Further work is required to confirm future funding allocations.
- A late evening bus services between Newbury and Thatcham is not considered commercial, but BSIP funding could be used to pump-prime the service.
- Work has not yet commenced on promoting the effectiveness of Google Maps for bus information.

Passenger Charter – one further minor change agreed. Charter to be publicised by Operators and Council on their websites once revision made.

Fares. A number of different schemes and proposals were discussed:

- Early-bird tickets for ENCTS passholders – Reading Buses reported sales of 2,374 tickets between September and December 2022 and will continue to operate the scheme. Other operators (who started offering the tickets from January) will consider the position once they have more data.
- Youth tickets – details now clear on websites for those present at the Forum.
- Free bus travel – considered success leading to higher levels of bus use in area.
- £2 fare cap – increase noted of 2-3%, but not known if decrease in period ticket sales. More impactful on longer-distance travel.
- Zonal fares – Council looking at introducing on supported services, and may then have discussions regarding commercial services.

BSIP targets:

- Council are part of stakeholder panel looking nationally at outcomes from the BSIP funding. Operators asked to approve sharing data for this purpose. The group's terms of reference will be circulated which makes a clear statement of regarding confidentiality of commercially sensitive data.
- Journey times – reminder that Operators agreed to provide point-to-point timing data for four weeks commencing in February.
- Reliability – drop noted from Q2 to Q3, but this may be attributable to more roadworks and move from BST to GMT.
- Passenger growth – local recovery appears to be 10% above national trend.

- Vehicle emissions – progress being made on making vehicles more efficient.

BSIP Capital Schemes:

- BP1. Pangbourne. Four options under consideration. Consultation to take place from May/June.
- BP2. Atherton Road. Solutions identified but involve action by landowner.
- BP3. Robin Hood roundabout. Wider scheme under consideration by Highways.
- BP4. Bath Road. Bus lanes suggested as there could be enough road space.
- BP5. Congestion Hotspots. Initial investigations underway. Campaign suggested to build support for bus priority before commencing work.

BSIP Revenue Schemes:

- FT1. Simplified Fares and Improved Ticketing. Operators agreed to provide costed ideas for fares and ticketing initiatives. Schemes to be introduced from April 2023.
- BS1. Downlands DRT. Update provided. Provisional launch date of June 2023.
- BS2. Pangbourne transport. This will follow completion of BP1.
- BS3. Harwell Service. Discussion commenced with Oxfordshire County Council.

Other issues discussed at the Forum:

- A new barrier is to be erected at Newbury Wharf to prevent pedestrians crossing the vehicle area from the A339.
- As the Council has election on 4 May, purdah restrictions will apply from 24 March.
- Agreement received to amend the service frequency table in the EPS.

Next Forum proposed for May 2023 at Shaw House, Church Road, Newbury, RG14 2DR.