

Notes of West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Forum

Thursday 26 September 2024 - Forum No. 8

Present were representatives of:

- Bus operators (Reading Buses, Go-Ahead and West Berkshire Council)
- West Berkshire Council (Network Management, Transport Services, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways)
- Oxfordshire County Council

The Service Lead for Highways and Transport Innovation from West Berkshire Council chaired the meeting.

Notes from Forum No. 7 in May 2024 were agreed.

Matters arising from previous Forum, which are not covered in the agenda: None.

Documentation & Funding:

- **BSIP 2024** – refresh of full BSIP document to be published in Autumn. BSIP Summary document published by 12 June 2024. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Bus Connectivity Assessment (BCA's)** – Submitted by 12 June 2024; DfT reviewing submissions.
- **EP Plan & Scheme** – Updated version published by 12 June 2024.
- **BSIP Funding Update** – Year three funding received after BSIP, BCA and EP Plan & Scheme submission. Seeking clarification on BSIP project end arrangements. Government Spending review to be completed by the end of October 2024

BSIP Targets:

- **BSIP October 2024 Report** – report due to be published by end of October 2024; data requested from operators **ACTION: WBC & Ops**

BSIP Scheme Progress:

- **BP3. Robin Hood** – Working with traffic signal provider to implement signal priority for buses; awaiting costs. Installation before end of March 2025. **ACTION: WBC**
- **BP4. Bath Road, Calcot** – Draft feasibility study received; working with traffic signal provider to get signal priority for buses installed before March 2025; awaiting cost confirmation. Assessing feasibility of physical priority measures; any installation will be post March-25 subject to funding. **ACTION: WBC**
- **BP5. Congestion Hotspots** – Plans for phase 3 bus stop clearway works underway; letters sent to residents/other parties. Positive feedback regarding bus journey times along the A4 after previous works. **ACTION: WBC**
- **BP6. Passenger Waiting Facilities** – Approximately 22 sites identified for bus shelters; work on draft agreement with parish/town councils ongoing. Discussions about installation of new Calcot Sainsburys shelter ongoing between Council and external partners. Reading Buses reported RTPI works commenced in Reading area and expected soon in West Berkshire. **ACTION: RB & WBC**
- **BS2. East of Thatcham Transport** – covering the 41/44 area of West Berkshire connecting Thatcham Broadway/Station and A4 Woolhampton/Aldermaston. No direct travel along A4 but will link with existing bus services on the A4. Some timetabled journeys will be available. Awaiting Traffic Commissioner's approval. WBC to calculate subsidy per passenger on Downlands DRT service. **ACTION: WBC**
- **FT1. Fares/Ticketing**
 - Summer Fares Campaign - Operators to send through costs from campaign; discussion held about success of initiative. **ACTION: Ops**
 - Free bus travel - World Car Free Day: Operators to provide patronage data. Christmas free travel Days: publicity co-ordination discussed. **ACTION: Ops & WBC**
 - Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme - discussions with external legal provider commenced **ACTION: WBC**

- TOTO - West Berkshire Council machines received, to be installed in early October. **ACTION: WBC**
- Zonal Fare Scheme - WBC to resume work on this for supported bus services in preparation for the end of the National Fare Cap Scheme. **ACTION: WBC**

New proposals/schemes:

- **BP7 Mortimer Railway Station Bus Turning Facility** – Approval received in early September from DfT to undertake feasibility study, to complete by March 2025; work with external consultants has begun. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Pangbourne to Calcot Sainsburys Service** – Request received to consider; discussion about possibility of extension of 16 operated by Reading Buses. Issues include uncertainty on potential patronage and notable costs. Evidence of demand required. **ACTION: WBC**

Operators Comments/Feedback:

- **Review of measures/services introduced** – X34/X24 to serve Donnington Heights from 30 September 2024; 43/93 now operated by Reading Buses (initial issues resolved with timetable change); WBCC (Northwest Downlands) progressing well, some days with less demand but generally positive feedback; BSIP-supported services (1e, Mortimer Sunday, X34, Downlands DRT) going well.
- **Updates on passenger levels/services/vehicles/reliability** – Reading Buses passenger numbers recovered to pre-pandemic levels in Newbury and rural West Berkshire (~90% in urban areas/Reading). New vehicles for Jet Black 1, Newbury contracted services and branded vehicle for 43/93 – all expected later this year. Euro 6 double decker vehicles to be transferred onto X34/X24 service.
- **Other** - Operator concerns with £2 fare cap scheme future. Service enhancement messaging being issued by Reading Buses for new university academic year. Thames Travel - some socials released promoting Better Bus Month. PSVAR accessibility regs coming into force 01/10/2024. Ideas for possible future BSIP-activities discussed.

Other Issues:

- **Annual Bus Survey** – Survey closes 29 September; preliminary findings show dissatisfaction with frequency of services and wish for more RTPI screens at bus stops. Full results to be published within BSIP. **ACTION: WBC**

Any Other Business:

- **Demand for school transport from Newbury to Swindon** – current timetables don't work for students due to long wait in between buses, options to be looked into. **ACTION: WBC**

Next Forum scheduled for 13:30 on Thursday 6 February 2025 at Shaw House, Church Road, Newbury, RG14 2DR

Abbreviations:

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|------|------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| BCA | Bus Connectivity Assessment | PSVAR | Public Service Vehicle |
| BSIP | Bus Service Improvement Plan | | Accessibility Regulations |
| BSOG | Bus Services Operators Grant | RB | Reading Buses |
| DfT | Department for Transport | RTPI | Real-Time Passenger |
| DRT | Demand Responsive Transport | | Information |
| EP | Enhanced Partnership | TOTO | Tap-on/Tap-off |
| GWR | Great Western Railway | WBC | West Berkshire Council |
| Ops | All Operators | WBCC | West Berkshire Community |
| PAR | Project Adjustment Request | | Connect |