

Notes of West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Forum

Thursday 21st May 2026 - Forum No. 13

Present were representatives of:

- Bus operators (Reading Buses, Newbury & District, Thames Travel, West Berkshire Council)
- West Berkshire Council (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways, Transport Services, Highways)

Apologies were received from representatives of:

- Bus operators (Thames Travel)
- Other local Authorities (Reading Borough Council, Wiltshire Council)
- Community Transport Operators (Carebus, VCWB)

Service Lead for Highways and Transport Innovation from WBC chaired the forum.

Notes from Forum No. 12 in February 2026 were agreed.

Matters arising from previous Forum, which are not covered in the agenda:

- **RTPI at Newbury Wharf:** Solutions to be considered within RTPI review or through Small Bus Project Fund. **ACTION: WBC**

Bus Funding outcomes frameworks:

- **Funding report:** 25/26 Q4 DfT return submitted. BSIP Phase 1/2 monies spent, apart from for Traffic Signal Priority, six-month extension approved by DfT.
- **Consolidated Funding/LABG 2026-30:** Draft plan submitted to DfT. Final plan to be submitted by 18 September 2026. **ACTION: WBC**
- **2026/27 funding:** 2026-30 LABG funding and BSIP 22-26 LABG 25/26 legacy funding will be used.
- **Patronage:** Slight drop for 2025/26 (1.6%), due to concerns over roadworks/fare changes/punctuality.
- **Punctuality:** Improved by approx. 3% in 2025/26, below target of 87%. Roadworks continue to have impact.

EP Plan/Scheme:

- **Minimum Standards:** Updated [statutory guidance](#) released. Partnership must implement minimum standards in EPs by March 2027, condition of future funding payments. **ACTION: Partnership**
- **Socially Necessary Services:** Bus Service Act 2025 requires EPs to identify/publish list of SNS, outline process to be followed if services subject to cancellation/variation, process for reviewing list and provide definition for SNS. **ACTION: Partnership**
- **Bus Network Accessibility Plan:** Requirement to consult on and publish plan by March 2027. **ACTION: WBC**

Local Bus Grant Schemes:

- **Capital Schemes:**
 - **BF2 Vehicle Zero Emissions:** 2x EV vehicles operational on Council services. WBC to purchase EV van for PT projects. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **BF3 Carbon Neutral Facilities:** EV charging points at Henwick Recreation Ground near complete. EV charging points to be installed at WBC depot once utility works finished. Investigating locations in Lambourn. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **BP3 & 4 Signal Priority:** 4 sites operational in Calcot. Works advanced at Robin Hood roundabout and Calcot Sainsburys. Evaluation to follow when all sites operational. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **BP5 Bus congestion hotspots:** 7 phases completed for bus stop clearway works. Phase 8 planned, work with Highways on for repainting works. **ACTION: WBC**

- **O11 Passenger Waiting Environment:** 23 bus shelters installed across district. Requests for further shelter locations sent. **ACTION: WBC**
- **O12 RTPI:** Procurement strategy for installation of further RTPI displays underway. **ACTION: WBC**
- **O15 Bus Gate Review:** ANPR bus gate at Urquhart Road, Thatcham operational. Cameras cover road/pavements. Other bus gates to be reviewed. **ACTION: WBC**
- **O16 Bus Stop Requests: District-wide** bus stop audit complete. New bus stops being considered. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Revenue Schemes:**
 - **BS6 Council Supported Services:** Review of changes to supported network in Newbury being considered. **ACTION: WBC/N&D**
 - **BS11. Evening and Sunday services in Newbury & Thatcham:** Procurement planning for later Evening and Sunday service in Newbury underway **ACTION: WBC**
 - **BS12. Introduction of Evening and Weekend services – rural areas:** Procurement plan to introduce X34 Sunday service underway. Request for further support for 32 service for evening/Sundays. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **BS14. Expanded DRT Services:** Consultancy sought to review future of Community Connect **ACTION: WBC**
 - **FS1. Free/reduced fare bus travel:** Noted announcement of [Free bus travel for children age 5-15 August 2026](#), await further details. Seasonal Free Bus Travel days for 2026 to be agreed outside the forum, coordination with other LTAs appreciated. Discussion on potential ideas for 2027 commenced. **ACTION WBC**
 - **FS6 Multi Operator Ticket Scheme:** Multi-Operator scheme delayed by 12 months, work on agreement continues. Connect ticket price change for 2026/27. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **IL1 Marketing of Bus Services:** Bus shelters maps to be updated upon agreement/implementation of supported network changes. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **ND2: Small Bus Project Fund:** Look to launch Summer 2026, offering grants up to £10k for capital/revenue projects to improve local bus services. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **SS2 Independent Travel Training:** Arrangements for Training course in skills to teach independent travel continue. **ACTION: WBC**
 - **TF1 Your Bus Journey Survey:** Survey has begun in district.
- **Completed BSIP/LABG schemes to date:**
 - **BP1. Pangbourne Turning Circle:** Project not given Council permission to proceed.
 - **BP2: Atherton Road, Hungerford:** Project completed without BSIP funding.
 - **FT1. Simplified Fares & Improved Ticketing:** all projects completed by March 2025 as per DfT requirement.
 - **BS1. Downlands Transport:** Service began in January 2024; all spend complete by March 2026.
 - **BS2 Thatcham Connect:** Service began in November 2024; all spend complete by March 2026.
 - **BS3. Newbury to Harwell:** Service began in July 2023; all spend complete by March 2025.
 - **BS17. 1a/1c service support:** New contract began in February 2026; spend to continue throughout funding period.

Operators Comments/Feedback:

- **Reading Buses:** New EV expect to be operational in June 2026, 18% of fleet electric. Funding available for another batch of EVs in 2027. Roadworks causing punctuality issues, especially on the A4 and Monks Lane (now re-opened). Eastbury / East Garston roadworks start June 2026.
- **Newbury & District:** Vehicle reliability good. Incident of serious vandalism on bus.
- **Thames Travel:** Free Park & Ride in Oxford popular. X34 journey times affected by roadworks, revised timetable to mitigate.
- **West Berkshire Council:** Passenger levels static on DRT and fixed routes. EV's are running well, have good wheelchair access and are popular with drivers.

Neighbouring Local Authority updates:

- None received.

Other Issues:

- **Change of EP Chair:** Service Lead for Highways & Transport Innovation will leave WBC in August 2026. Replaced by the Senior Transport Officer for Public Transport.
- **CT Capital Grant 2026/27:** Grant available, invitations for bids will be sent in summer 2026. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Local Government Reorganisation:** Decision expected in July 2026 before parliamentary summer recess.
- [Highways Improvement Programme](#) & [Highways Network Management Works Programme 2026-27](#)

Request to vary EP Scheme Annexes/Operator Voting

- Proposed changes to Annex A of the EP scheme put forward, all changes voted on and approved. Changes to be included within wide EP Plan and Scheme in 2026/27. **ACTION: WBC**

Future forum dates (subject to change)

- Future dates to be confirmed after discussion with new EP Chair. **ACTION WBC**

Abbreviations:

BCA	Bus Connectivity Assessment	PAR	Project Adjustment Request
BSF	Bus Service Fund	PSVAR	Public Service Vehicle
BSF	Bus Services Fund		Accessibility Regulations
BSIP	Bus Service Improvement Plan	RB	Reading Buses
BSOG	Bus Services Operators Grant	RTPI	Real-Time Passenger Information
CT	Community Transport		
DfT	Department for Transport	S106	Section 106
DRT	Demand Responsive Transport	SLA	Service Level Agreement
EP	Enhanced Partnership	SNS	Socially Necessary Services
GWR	Great Western Railway	TOTO	Tap-on/Tap-off
ITF	Integrated Transport Fund	VCWB	Volunteer Centre West Berkshire
LABG	Local Authority Bus Grant		
LTA	Local Transport Authorities	WBC	West Berkshire Council
LTDP	Local Transport Delivery Plan	WBCC	West Berkshire Community Connect
Ops	All Operators		
N&D	Newbury & District		