



Department
for Transport

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Transport Director
Cheshire East Council

[by email]

Dear Transport Director,

BSIPs and ongoing Enhanced Partnership support for Cheshire East Council

Thank you for submitting your authority's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). We appreciate the time and effort you and your local bus operators have put into development of your plans.

Ministers were very pleased to see such a high level of engagement with the bus strategy across the country. As we set out in our update letter in January, and as you will recognise is often the case with any funding process, the demand for funding for BSIPs exceeded the funding available.

This means that we cannot provide new funding for your BSIP at this time. We know that news will be disappointing. However, this is not a final no, and while we can make no promises, you should not give up hope of funding. It is possible that further BSIP funding will become available in the coming months. Other funding streams, such as round two of the Levelling Up Fund (for which applications close at 12:00 noon on Wednesday 6 July) can also support investment in aspects of BSIP.

We therefore encourage you to implement all aspects of your BSIP that do not require new funding and to maintain your ambition for bus service improvements including by seeking funding from other Government funding streams when available. As set out below, we will be funding you for a dedicated Bus Enhanced Partnership Officer. Should further BSIP funding become available in the near future, we will not require you to apply for funding but will assess you and others in your position based on your initial BSIP. In many cases the miss was a narrow one and with more money it will be possible to fund more places. In making decisions on any further funding round, we may seek evidence of your willingness to continue with the plans you proposed.

For the Levelling Up Fund, should you be eligible, a fresh application will be needed.

Bus Service Operators' Grant will continue to be paid across the country; it is our intention that this will be conditional on having an Enhanced Partnership (EP) in place (or following the statutory process to consider bus franchising). We are committed to supporting you to get your EP in place and delivering for passengers.

This letter sets out what we hope will be helpful steers about EP content, and the support on offer.

Enhanced Partnerships

Although it may not be possible for you to implement many of the costlier measures proposed in your BSIP at this time, there is still a lot that can be done to improve local bus services and grow bus patronage. Some interventions may be funded from other public funding sources or on a purely commercial basis.

We would expect the EP of an LTA that is not currently receiving BSIP funding from the Department to contain, but not necessarily be limited to:

- A statutory EP plan and scheme, with appropriate governance and bespoke variation mechanisms.
- A passenger charter giving bus users rights to specified standards of service, covering punctuality, vehicle cleanliness, proportion of services operated, information and a system for redress.
- A commitment from the LTA to retain all existing bus priority measures in the geographical area of the EP (e.g. bus lanes and traffic light systems that give priority to buses at junctions), with a description of each included in the EP scheme (either included in the draft EP that is subject to consultation or, if you have already completed the consultation process, using your bespoke variation mechanism).
- A commitment from operators to reinvest any operating cost savings from any new bus priority provided in the future into the delivery of improvements in your BSIP;
- A commitment that all operators in the EP area will either draw on a single source of bus service information or publish the details of all services in the area on their website and in timetables.

Many LTAs have developed other measures, such as integrated ticketing offers, marketing, branding or bus priority, at low cost in conjunction with their operators or as part of other funding streams. LTAs are encouraged to include a list of any new bus service improvement measures that will be implemented using their own funding or via other available funding streams.

Support from DfT

The Department will continue to support this process through further funding and other practical support:

- To strengthen in-house capacity, we will provide a further capacity support (revenue) grant to your LTA in 2022/23. This should be sufficient to enable you to employ a dedicated bus Enhanced Partnership Officer for the next three years. We will write to you soon to set out the value of the grant to be made to your authority.
- To strengthen your in-house capability, we will support appropriate training for your EP Officer under the auspices of the new Bus Centre of Excellence. We will also support the community of local authority EP Officers nationwide through the networking and information-exchange activities provided through the Bus Centre of Excellence, which will include and incorporate the existing Basecamp channel.

Ticketing

Convenient bus ticketing solutions will encourage demand growth and along with improved passenger information, help encourage an integrated look and feel to otherwise fragmented networks. We are continuing to work with potential partners of a technical solution to facilitate Pay- As-You-Go multi-operator revenue allocation and will make further announcements in due course. It is our intention that this system will ultimately be available nationwide, forming the basis of a standard set of improvements available to all. We will continue dialogue with LTAs and operators to increase availability of on-board equipment and revenue processing systems to take advantage of the new solution

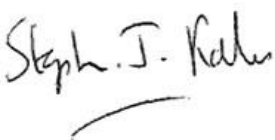
Next steps

As we set out in the bus strategy, we want to see every area forming EPs or franchising arrangements; and again, Ministers were very pleased to see that all LTAs issued notifications of intent last year to do so. Please do proceed with getting your EPs (or franchising arrangements) in place as soon as reasonably possible, so that you are able to benefit from other discretionary funds in the future. This advice supersedes that from January 2022 which asked for a draft EP to be submitted by the end of April.

As set out in Bus Back Better, we intend to consult on reform of the Bus Service Operator's Grant (BSOG), including on making the reformed BSOG available only to LTAs and operators in an EP, or where franchising is being actively pursued.

If you would like to request feedback on the assessment of your BSIP, please contact the DfT Bus Reform Engagement Team at BSIP@dft.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Fidler