

Consultation, Engagement and Communications Plan

Name of engagement / consultation activity:	Bus Service Review – Public Consultation
Project Senior Responsible Officer (SRO):	Richard Hibbert
Project Manager (PM):	Jenny Marston
Project service / team:	Strategic Transport

Project Board – Corporate Input:
Strategic Transport & Parking
Children & Families – Home to School Transport
Research & Consultation
Communications
Legal
Finance
Procurement

Version control:			
Version	Author	Date	Description
v1	Chris Taylor	16/02/24	Consultation, Engagement and Communications Plan for the Bus Service Review.

Project purpose and background

An explanation of the issues and the purpose of the project, key information to set the scene

The bus network in Cheshire East plays a key role in providing access to jobs and services and connecting people and places. Buses are an essential component of an integrated transport network. They have a vital role in delivering key Council policy priorities for the economy, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, including decarbonisation.

The local bus network is made up of 37 bus services, of which 21 services are fully supported by the Council (57%), 8 are partially supported by the Council (22%), such as evening journeys, and 8 services (22%) are fully commercial. The Council currently spends £2.5m supporting bus services which are not commercially viable but are deemed important and socially necessary.

The last strategic bus service review was undertaken in 2017 and much has changed in that time. In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic struck with significant impacts for passenger transport services and government published the National Bus Strategy in March 2021, which set out to rebuild bus patronage to 2019 levels and beyond.

A methodology has been prepared based on an evidence-led approach which ensures our planning is informed and influenced by robust data and stakeholder consultation. The key tasks

in the methodology are set out as an appendix to the Committee report, including the bus support criteria, performance data, accessibility mapping and gap analysis.

It is proposed to carry out an 8 week consultation between May and June 2024 to seek the views of bus operators, service users, local businesses and residents. The Enhanced Partnership (EP) for buses has a key role to play in the bus service review.

With supported bus contracts due to come to an end on 31st March 2025, there is a need to review the existing service provision to ensure retendered services offer value for money and the best possible coverage to serve residents of the borough with the right services in the right places. This bus service review will help to inform the process of retendering of services.

In 2021, the Council was awarded £1.2m from the DfT Rural Mobility Fund to deliver a flexible, demand responsive transport (DRT) service in the south and west area of Nantwich – Go-Too was launched in October 2021 as a 3 year pilot project.

As part of the bus service review, careful consideration will be given to the blend between fixed route and flexible transport services. There are many lessons learnt from the Go-Too pilot project which can be applied across the borough and there are clear opportunities to modernise the FlexiLink service and respond to consultation results from September 2023. These services will be included in the bus service review 2024 and associated consultation process.

Project Strategic Objectives

What the key strategic objectives of the project are, and how these relate to the corporate plan

The objectives of this review are to:

- a. Maximise opportunities to focus limited resources in the greatest areas of need.
- b. Ensure supported services complement, not compete, with commercial services.
- c. Maximise opportunities to extend the role of commercial services or transfer supported services to the commercial network.
- d. Ensure that the network is coherent in terms of passenger needs, bus operations and value for money.
- e. Work in partnership with operators to develop the best possible outcomes.
- f. Identify opportunities to modernise flexible, demand responsive transport to complement fixed route bus service provision.

Any proposals as a result of this Bus Service Review will need to align with current corporate priorities, policy objectives in the Local Transport Plan (LTP), Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) objectives, the needs of local communities, and the challenges facing the bus industry including Covid-19 recovery and driver shortages.

Engagement approach

A description of the engagement approach to be used, describing the various engagement stages and methods

Engagement with local bus operators will take place through the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Board and Forum – this will ensure that industry knowledge, experience and expertise inform and influence the review, as well as bus user groups and neighbouring authorities where there are cross-boundary services. Within the Board, all bus operators who operate within the Cheshire

East EP Plan and Scheme area will be invited and entitled to participate, ensuring that the whole industry have an opportunity to input to the consultation.

A period of public consultation and stakeholder engagement is proposed to service proposals reflects the views of service users, residents, businesses and wider stakeholders. The consultation is planned to be launched during May/June for 8 weeks. It is important for the Council to be open and transparent on the details of each proposal to ensure they are fully understood.

Stakeholders and methods

A summary of the people and groups you want to engage / consult with from your stakeholder analysis including impacted groups from your equality impact assessment. The methods you will use to gather information, based on the best ways to target your key audiences or impacted groups

Stakeholder	Method	What stage
Bus Operators	Enhanced Partnership Board and Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-Consultation Stage Consultation Stage Post-Consultation Stage
Bus User Groups	Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation Stage
CEC Members	Members Briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-Consultation Stage Consultation Stage Post-Consultation
CEC Residents	Online survey and paper copies at Libraries and Customer Contact Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation Stage
Town & Parish Councils	Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation Stage
Enhanced Partnership Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair of H&T Committee Deputy Chair of H&T Committee Head of Highways Head of Strategic Transport & Parking All Bus Operators 	EP Board meetings (quarterly)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-Consultation Stage Consultation Stage Post-Consultation Stage
Enhanced Partnership Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All local bus operators Community Transport Operators Town & Parish Councils Bus User Groups Train Operating companies Other Statutory consultees Healthcare and education Police Chamber of Commerce Neighbouring Authorities & LEP 	EP Forum meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation Stage

• Traffic Commissioner		
Equality Groups – e.g. Cheshire Centre for Independent Living and Cheshire Eye Society	Targeted engagement	• Consultation Stage
Transport Focus – National Representative Body of Bus Users	Meeting/discussion	• Consultation Stage

Activity plan

The time to take for each stage including preparation, live engagement / consultation, analysis phase and feedback phase

Activity	Who / team responsible	Estimated date / timescales
<i>e.g., Draft questions</i>	<i>e.g., John Smith, Public health</i>	<i>e.g Before 10th June</i>
Draft consultation questions and supporting documents. Review and feedback of consultation questions and supporting documents Design paper copies of the questionnaire Finalise consultation questions and supporting documents / sign off. Send paper copies to print / distribute to libraries and customer contact centres.	Strategic Transport	Before 30 th April 2024
Conduct Public Consultation	Strategic Transport	01/05/2024 – 26/06/2024
Analysis and Feedback	Consultation Team	26/06/2024 – 24/07/2024

Communication plan

Communications tactics to promote the engagement / consultation

Activity	Audience	Channel	Date timescale /	Aim Messages /	Who
Press Release	Residents and wider stakeholders	Issued to all media	May 2024	Inform residents, outline the purpose of the consultation.	Media Team/Rhiannon Hilton.

Town and Parish Councils	All Town and Parish Council's	Email	May 2024	Inform Town & Parish Councils of purpose of consultation.	Strategic Transport
Bus Operators	All bus operators	Email	May 2024	Inform operators of the consultation launch.	Strategic Transport
Bus User Groups	All bus user groups	Email	May 2024	Inform user groups of purpose of consultation.	Strategic Transport
Other key Stakeholders	All key stakeholders	Email	May 2024	Inform key stakeholders of purpose of consultation.	Strategic Transport

Analysis, Reporting and feedback

How will analysis be carried out / how will the draft feedback be reported and shared with participants.

Analysis tools and expertise required:	
Reporting required:	Full reporting of consultation findings
Public feedback methods:	

Budget and Resource

What funding and resources do you need in order to successfully deliver the plan?

Budget / costs:	TBC – Transport Policy Revenue Budget
Resources:	Strategic Transport Team, R&C Team, Communications

Risk Assessment

What are the anticipated risks and mitigations?

Risk	Mitigation
Public not understanding the purpose of the consultation / inability to interpret	Use of plain English
Wording/jargon is too technical	Use of plain English
Consultation material too lengthy	Keep consultation questions short and concise
Not getting consultation started by May.	Weekly project plan, key milestones identified with sufficient lead in time built in.
Limited responses to the consultation	Communications and promotions to encourage responses. Ensure consultation material is

	engaging. Regular stakeholder engagement to keep interested parties engage.
Local elections – It becomes a political issue	Ensure consultation is complete well before Purdah