

Bus Service Improvement Plan Draft Delivery Plan 2025/2026

March 2025 – DfT submission document pending Highways and Transport Committee review and approval in June 2025



**Cheshire East
Bus Partnership**
Connecting People & Places

Introduction

This document has been produced in line with Department for Transport (DfT) guidance on the 2025/26 Local Bus Grant funding (previously known as Phase 4). The Local Bus Grant (2025/26) includes both capital and revenue Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding.

In order to release this grant funding, Cheshire East Council need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the DfT, setting out the terms and conditions of the grant funding and submit a proposed Delivery Plan by 31st March 2025.

This document provides a summary of the workstreams and schemes that Cheshire East Council, as the Local Transport Authority, have initially identified to deliver under the 2025/26 Local Bus Grant funding. These schemes (and the associated funding allocations) are subject to approval at Highways and Transport Committee in June 2025.

This high-level Delivery Plan also summarises the key vision and objectives from the 2024 BSIP and outlines the progress to date from previous BSIP funding allocations in Phase 2 (2023/2024 and 2024/2025) and Phase 3 (2024/2025).

The BSIP 2024 will continue to inform future priorities and schemes for development and delivery as further funding become available.

The overview of BSIP funding to date for Cheshire East is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: BSIP Funding Overview Table.

BSIP Funding	Total	Revenue	Capital	Other
BSIP Phase 2 (2023/2024)	£1,187,596	£1,187,596	£0	£0
BSIP Phase 2 (2024/2025)	£1,187,596	£987,596	£200,000	£0
BSIP Phase 3 (2024/2025)	£2,268,000	£1,818,000	£450,000	£0
Local Bus Grant (2025/2026)	£5,444,474	£2,879,963	£2,122,646	£441,865*

*Made up of Capacity & Capability Grant (£94,000) and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG - £347,865)

Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024

Cheshire East has a rich natural environment, strong sense of community and successful economy, making Cheshire East one of the best places to live and work in the UK, with strong employment opportunities, attractive places to live and high standards of education.

The challenge is how we maintain our position, continuing to create sustainable growth that will support the wellbeing of our residents and the economy on which that depends, whilst protecting existing residents and green spaces.

Improving the bus network is critical to increasing sustainable access for all, to principal towns and key service centres, enabling residents and bus users alike to benefit from an established sense of community and successful economy.

Our Vision

To achieve this, we have developed our vision which will guide BSIP development and related initiatives.

*“Our vision will **transform the bus network** within Cheshire East to provide **attractive, reliable and convenient connections** that enable more residents and visitors to **choose bus, make fewer car journeys**, to contribute to our **carbon reduction challenge** and **improve the health of our citizens**”.*

Connected to our vision is the BSIP principles and overarching policy context. These BSIP principles (Figure 1) are our commitment to work together in partnership with our bus industry partners to improve local bus services for users and the residents of Cheshire East.



Figure 1: Cheshire East BSIP principles and overarching policy context

The 2024 BSIP outlines our ambitions for the bus network as well as our commitment to delivering improved services for existing bus passengers and growing passenger numbers by surpassing the expectations of non-bus users to encourage changes in travel behaviour.

We have adopted a borough-wide approach, building on the 2021 BSIP, aligning with the National Bus Strategy for England (NBSfE) objectives and through continued engagement as part of our Enhanced Partnership (EP) processes, collaborative engagement with neighbouring authorities and following the receipt of BSIP funding in 2023 and 2024.

Objectives and Ambitions

This document reiterates Cheshire East's objectives and ambition for buses for the next 10+ years, which has already been published in the 2024 BSIP. These objectives and ambitions focus on three phases across our town, inter-urban and rural bus network.




Stabilise the Network	Quality Improvements	Network for Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage passenger growth following the Covid-19 pandemic Build better relationships with local bus operators and passengers with our Enhanced Partnership & Bus Passenger Charter Continue to support services to ensure access to employment, education and health Improve access to information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the bus fleet – newer, more modern vehicles Improve the town, inter-urban and rural networks, including flexible demand responsive transport Improve bus stop infrastructure and bus priority on core interurban Improve access to information and network identity Improve ticket offers and technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase frequencies of buses on our town networks, inter-urban routes and socially necessary services Provide more routes and route enhancements for access to services & jobs Expand flexible transport provision Improve bus priority and bus stop infrastructure Coordinate with new developments to capture s106 funding to encourage sustainable growth 
Continue	In Progress	Ambition

Figure 2: Objectives for the three key phases across town, inter-urban and rural bus networks

Short-, medium- and long-term ambitions have been identified within the 2024 BSIP, along with Phase 2 and Phase 3 funding priorities. These have been used to continue to develop the initiatives and schemes for delivery as part of the 2025/26 Local Bus Grant funding, as proposed in this Delivery Plan.

For further detail on the BSIP vision, objectives and ambitions please see the [2024 Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) published on Cheshire East's website.

Progress to Date

This section outlines the initiatives and progress to date for Phase 2 (2023/24 and 2024/25) and Phase 3 (2024/25) funding.

It should be noted that due to the recent Bus Service Review (service changes starting 31st March 2025), the delivery of further bus service enhancements, as part of Phase 2 and Phase 3 funding was paused. It was important to ensure the continuity and stability of the core network of supported bus services (funded by the Council) before delivering BSIP service enhancements, which are additional and further extend the network.

Following the recent award of contracts to local bus operators for the supported bus network, further service enhancements funded by Phase 2 and Phase 3 allocations will be commissioned early in 2025/26.

Phase 2 initiatives

For Phase 2, the Council was awarded £1,187,596 in 2023/24 for revenue funding, with an additional £1,187,596 of funding in 2024/25 which was split into £987,596 for revenue and £200,000 capital funding.

The Council has started to deliver BSIP initiatives, these are in the early stages of delivery but are already providing benefits to bus users within the Borough. These initiatives include:

The Silk Town Ticket

National Objective Alignment - Cheaper Fares

The Silk Town Ticket is a new weekly adult paper ticket that offers unlimited travel across multiple bus operators within Macclesfield and the surrounding areas.

This ticket is part of a one year trial running from September 2024 until September 2025, to simplify bus travel and encourage more residents and visitors to use public transport.



16-19 Bus Saver

National Objective Alignment - Cheaper Fares

The 16-19 Bus Saver is a new discount scheme for young people aged 16 to 19 who live in Cheshire East.

The pass was initially implemented so users could save a third on adult¹ single fares across all bus services, as long as their journey is within, starts, or ends in Cheshire East.

This has been under review following the adult single fare changes in January 2025, with proposed changes expected from spring 2025 providing a £1 flat fare ticket price.



¹ Revised following a review of uptake, feedback from users and as part of the 2025/26 funding allocation.

Buses in Cheshire East

National Objective Alignment - Easier to use for passengers

The Buses in Cheshire East website was launched and includes new travel planning capabilities, including bus service timetables and a journey planning widget (Traveline).

Promotion of System One ticketing

National Objective Alignment - Cheaper Fares

Promotion of Greater Manchester 'System One' ticketing options available to residents in the north of Cheshire East, prior to Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) introduction of bus reform (franchising). This enabled residents close to the boundary to access discounted travel.

Creation of hub stops along 38 bus route

National Objective Alignment - Easier to use for passengers

The 38 service is a strategic bus corridor connecting the principal towns and some key service centres across the borough. To complement operator investment in new vehicles, the bus stop infrastructure has been upgraded to Cheshire East's Gold, Silver and Bronze standards.

This initiative was split into three stages with stage 1 complete, stage 2 in progress and stage 3 in planning & costing (proposed to be delivered in 2025/26).



Local Bus Service Enhancements

National Objective Alignment - More frequent, comprehensive services

A range of weekend service enhancements were introduced in June 2024, which included the 130, 12 and 38 routes.

This has improved Saturday evening and Sunday service accessibility for bus users within the borough. Access for households within 40 mins to towns & key service centres by bus on a Sunday has improved from 20% pre-implementation to 54% post-implementation.

Phase 3 2024/25 Initiatives

Table 2 outlines the initiatives and progress to date for Phase 3 (2024/25) funding. For Phase 3 (2024/25), the Council was awarded £2,268,000, which has been allocated for revenue (£1,818,000) and capital (£450,000) expenditure. The Council has been developing these proposals, building on the delivery of Phase 2 initiatives, with the majority of schemes scheduled for delivery in 2025/26.

Table 2: Phase 3 - 2024/25 initiatives and progress to date

Description	National Objective Alignment	Progress to date
2024/2025 Bus Service Enhancements	More frequent, comprehensive services	Development of service enhancements for delivery in 2025/2026, including improved frequencies and extensions to existing routes, as well as additional weekend services.
2024/25 Multi-operator ticket (south of the borough)	Cheaper Fares	A recently commissioned feasibility study into the deliverability of a multi-operator ticket south of the borough. This is a commitment in the Cheshire East Enhanced Partnership Scheme and will develop lessons learnt from the Macclesfield Silk Town ticket trial.
Bus Stop Infrastructure on Strategic Bus Routes	Easier to use for passengers. Easier to understand services.	Upgrading bus stops to Gold, Silver and Bronze standards along a strategic route for delivery in 2025/26. This includes the 84/84X corridor, as well as further corridor development and prioritisation of stops and feasibility/specification of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) systems for priority locations within the borough.
Reconfiguration of Flexible / Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)	Easier to use for passengers	Undertaking work to identify opportunities to modernise flexible transport solutions to support rural connectivity to towns and key service centres. Delivery of single integrated DRT service, with extended days and hours of operation (reconfiguration of FlexiLink and Go-Too) to open new travel options to service users and complement the fixed route network - expected launch of trial in autumn 2025.
Bus Priority Infrastructure	Faster and more reliable journeys	Delivery of bus priority signal technology along the Nantwich Road corridor and at High Town/West Street junction. This is currently ongoing and is scheduled to be operational from summer 2025.

Local Bus Grant (2025/26)

Table 3 outlines a package of initiatives for the Local Bus Grant (2025/26) funding allocation, within which the Council has been provisionally allocated £2,879,963 (revenue) and £2,122,646 (capital). Additionally, to support continued operations and delivery of the initiatives with previous BSIP and the 2025/26 Local Bus Grant funding, £94,000 has been allocated as part of Capacity & Capability funding and £347,865 for Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG)².

These have been based on the aspirations outlined in the 2024 BSIP aimed at enhancing the bus offer and delivering on our vision within Cheshire East:

- Improvements to bus services: service levels and network coverage.
- Improvements to fares and ticketing – simpler and more affordable fares.
- Improved bus information and network identify, including real-time information provision.
- Improved bus stops, bus stations and interchanges.
- Accessibility, inclusiveness, personal safety and security.
- Bus priority: delivering faster and more reliable services on priority routes and corridors.
- Collaboration with local bus operators to improve the quality of the bus fleet.
- Improvements to the bus passenger experience.
- Ongoing implementation of the Bus Passenger Charter.
- Longer term transformation of the network.

The proposed initiatives and schemes are subject to review and approval at Highway and Transport Committee in June 2025.

The proposed initiatives aim to deliver a strong complementary package of measures that deliver on the BSIP vision and ambitions and deliver improvements to passengers, invest in supporting growth and sustainability, as well as ensuring deliverability.

This high-level Delivery Plan, along with a signed Memorandum of Understanding, were submitted to the DfT on 31st March 2025 to enable the timely release of funding. The final Delivery Plan will be published following the Highways and Transport Committee meeting in June 2025.

² BSOG funding is a long-standing grant and is used to offset the supported local bus budget – it is therefore not new funding and is already committed.

Table 3: Local Bus Grant Funding (2025/26) - proposed initiatives and schemes

Description	National Objective Alignment	Initiative/Scheme	Expected Outcomes
Capital Funding			
Bus Priority Infrastructure	Faster and more reliable journeys	Further investment in bus priority measures, including Imflow technology at signal junctions. Targeting up to three locations within the Borough.	Improved bus journey times through key locations in the borough. Improved passenger satisfaction
Bus Priority Infrastructure	Faster and more reliable journeys	Development of future proposals for bus priority measures, including feasibility studies and design work at three prioritised locations.	Improved bus journey times through key locations in the borough. Improved passenger satisfaction.
Bus Stop Infrastructure on Strategic Bus Routes & Towns	Easier to use for passengers. Easier to understand services	Upgrades to bus stops to Gold, Silver and Bronze standards along strategic corridors and beginning the roll out of Gold stop upgrades in five towns.	Improved quality of waiting environments for passengers.
Bus Interchange	Easier to use for passengers	Funding to support the upgrade and improvement of Macclesfield Bus Station.	Improved quality of waiting environments for passengers.
Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI)	Easier to use for passengers. Better integration with other modes	Implementation of RTPI at eight locations within the Borough, followed by the prioritisation and implementation of a further three locations.	Improved passenger information.
Revenue Funding			
2025/26 Bus Service Enhancements	More frequent, comprehensive services	Development of further service enhancements, including improved frequencies and extensions to existing routes, as well as the consideration of new services.	Improved bus offer for residents of the borough. Increased accessibility to households within 40 mins of a town or key service centre.
Continuation of Silk Town Ticket	Cheaper Fares	Continuation of Silk Town Ticket trial until Mar 26.	Cheaper fares for people travelling within Macclesfield and surrounding areas.
Continuation of 16-19 Pass	Cheaper Fares	Continuation of 16-19 pass until March 27, consideration of a £1 flat fare, following market changes and feedback since initial implementation.	Increased 16-19 travel across the borough.
Improved marketing, communications and promotion	Easier to understand services	Marketing and communications budget to support the promotion of BSIP schemes and initiatives.	Greater understanding of bus offer in the borough.

Description	National Objective Alignment	Initiative/Scheme	Expected Outcomes
Continued support for reconfiguration of Flexible / Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)	Easier to use for passengers	Continuation of single integrated DRT trial service, with extended days and hours of operation (funding for 2026/2027 operations).	Improved offer and easier to use flexible transport to residents of the borough.
Transport Focus (Passenger Satisfaction monitoring)		Cheshire East have been supported by national Transport Focus team to monitor the satisfaction of passengers, in line with BSIP targets.	Enable the monitoring of passenger satisfaction with the delivery of the BSIP initiatives and with the wider bus network.
BSIP Programme (LTA Delivery)		Additional support for the delivery of the wider BSIP programme within Cheshire East Council.	Successful delivery of BSIP initiatives and schemes for 2025/2026

Table 4: Local Bus Grant Funding (2025/26) - proposed initiatives and schemes (initial funding allocation)

Description	Initiative/Scheme	Initial Funding Allocation (2025/26)
Capital Funding		
Bus Priority Infrastructure	Further investment in bus priority measures, including Imflow technology at signal junctions. Targeting up to three locations within the Borough.	£520,000
Bus Priority Infrastructure	Development of future proposals for bus priority measures, including feasibility studies and design work at three prioritised locations.	£102,646
Bus Stop Infrastructure on Strategic Bus Routes & Towns	Upgrades to bus stops to Gold, Silver and Bronze standards along strategic corridors and beginning the roll out of Gold stop upgrades in five towns.	£700,000
Bus Interchange	Funding to support the upgrade and improvement of Macclesfield Bus Station.	£50,000
Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI)	Implementation of RTPI at eight locations within the Borough, followed by the prioritisation and implementation of a further three locations.	£750,000

Description	Initiative/Scheme	Initial Funding Allocation (2025/26)
Revenue Funding		
2025/26 Bus Service Enhancements	Development of further service enhancements, including improved frequencies and extensions to existing routes, as well as the consideration of new services.	£759,463
Continuation of Silk Town Ticket	Continuation of Silk Town Ticket trial until Mar 26.	£70,000
Continuation of 16-19 Pass	Continuation of 16-19 pass until March 27, consideration of a £1 flat fare, following market changes and feedback since initial implementation.	£850,000
Improved marketing, communications and promotion	Marketing and communications budget to support the promotion of BSIP schemes and initiatives.	£150,000
Continued support for reconfiguration of Flexible / Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)	Continuation of single integrated DRT trial service, with extended days and hours of operation (funding for 2026/2027 operations).	£800,000
Transport Focus (Passenger Satisfaction monitoring)	Cheshire East have been supported by national Transport Focus team to monitor the satisfaction of passengers, in line with BSIP targets.	£24,500
BSIP Programme (LTA Delivery)	Additional support for the delivery of the wider BSIP programme within Cheshire East Council.	£226,000