



Building buses up in Bracknell Forest

Bus Service
Improvement Plan
for Bracknell Forest

Annual Review

October 2022



Introduction

Bracknell Forest Council (BFC), in collaboration with bus operators, produced a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). First published in October 2021 the purpose of the BSIP is to set out a vision for how local bus services can be improved, in line with the National Bus Strategy.

The BSIP vision and objectives will be delivered by the actions in the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme, a formal partnership between the Council and local bus operators. Many of the actions in the Plan are dependent on receiving additional Government funding. In the first round of Government allocations BFC, like over half of other Local Authorities, did not receive any funding for the proposals outlined in our BSIP

There is a requirement for the BSIP to be reviewed annually and for progress to be monitored every six months. This is the first annual review for the Bracknell Forest BSIP. This review can be read as a 'stand alone' document on its own merits, but further detail is provided in the full BSIP published in 2021.

Bracknell Forest BSIP

The overall vision is **“to develop a viable and stable bus network that supports the local economy, provides better choice and improves quality of life in a safe and healthy environment”**. This is underpinned by objectives of service development and improvement, operational efficiency and better passenger experience as follows:

- Maintain and develop the bus network and its use.
- Focus on the main commercial services as the ones with greatest potential to grow, thus improving viability and enabling investment and improvement.
- Ensure appropriate supported services meet identified needs not served by commercial services.
- Establish a 'single network' view.
- Improve the efficiency of bus operations.
- Improve all aspects of passenger experience – information; fares; bus stops; service levels; journey times.

Four workstreams were identified to deliver the aspirations of the BSIP:

- **Building up the network** – enhancing and developing services
- **Building efficiency** – by tackling delays and pinch-points
- **Building value** – through easier ticketing and fares discounts
- **Building up confidence** – by improved information and passenger infrastructure

On-going impact of Coronavirus

The publishing of the Bracknell Forest BSIP and subsequent making of the EP Plan and Scheme have taken place during a period when bus services continue to be affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A range of factors including different ways of working, internet shopping, home delivery, nervousness of using public transport, and changes in travel mode and behaviour during the pandemic have meant bus patronage has not returned to the levels seen prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The reduced patronage has coincided with a period of steeply rising operating costs, particularly for fuel, parts and wages. This combination of reduced revenue and increasing costs has created significant challenges for our operators.

Although central and local government have provided grant funding to aid recovery, some local bus services have seen reductions in frequency necessary to maintain their long-term future. This impact is not unique to Bracknell Forest, in other parts of the country some services have been completely withdrawn.

Changes to local services

Significant changes affecting bus service provision in Bracknell Forest over the last twelve months are summarised below:

Change	Date	Impact
108, 150 and 157/158 services temporarily withdrawn to be replaced by E1, E2 and E3	22 Nov 2021	This temporary change was in response to an acute driver shortage and while the overall level of service was slightly diminished, the revised services proved more resilient to further driver issues.
108, 150 and 157/158 services reinstated	20 February 2022	Following a driver recruitment campaign, services reverted back to their original routes and timetables
X4 daytime frequency reduced from 30 to 60 minutes	4 April 2022	Combined frequency between Bracknell, Wokingham and Reading every 20 minutes instead of 15.
703 daytime frequency increased from 70 to 60 minutes	25 July 2022	More regular service to Windsor and Heathrow. Introduced as part of Reading Buses partnership with Heathrow Airport.

Progress so far

The Bracknell Forest Bus Partnership, comprising representatives of BFC and the four bus operators who provide local bus services in the area, was formed in June 2021. It met monthly to oversee the development of the BSIP and then the formulation of the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme. Following a period of consultation, the EP Plan and Scheme were approved and officially 'made' by BFC at the end of March 2022.

Whilst Government funding to help deliver our BSIP ambitions has not been forthcoming, the Bus Partnership has delivered the following improvements:

- a Bus Passenger Charter for Bracknell Forest, setting out what passengers could expect from bus services, was published in April 2022.
- A micro-website promoting sustainable travel was launched in September 2022. The 'My Journey - Bracknell Forest' website can be found at:

[Home | myjourney \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](https://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/home-myjourney)

The Partnership will continue to meet on a regular basis to continue to pursue a number of other actions which could be delivered without Government funding: Introduction of inter-operable ticketing so a return ticket bought from one operator can be valid for the return leg with another operator

- Consideration of ways to alleviate the impact of identified pinch-points which slow bus journey times
- Ways to promote and encourage bus travel

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

The BSIP set out four indicators that would be used to provide insights and trends relevant to bus operation, together with targets for 2024/25. These relate to:

- Journey times
- Punctuality
- Passenger growth
- Customer satisfaction

The following table summarises indicators and progress.

Theme	Measure	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2024/ 2025 target	Data source	Comments
Journey time	Average bus journey speed (morning peak 0800 – 0900)	n/a	n/a	15.7mph	15.9mph	15.7mph	Scheduled start and end times for journeys divided by route length	Measured in October each year
	Average bus journey speed (off-peak 1100 – 1200)	n/a	n/a	16.7mph	16.3mph	16.7mph		Measured in October each year
Punctuality	Proportion of bus services running on time	86%	n/a	95%	81%	90%	DfT bus statistics table BUS0902: non-frequent bus services running on time	DfT data produced annually in arrears

Reliability	Percentage of scheduled mileage operated						Data supplied by local operators	New indicator
Passenger growth	Total number of passenger journeys on local bus services	1.8m	1.9m	0.6m	1.1m (preliminary figure)	2.1m	DfT bus statistics table BUS0109: passenger journeys on local bus services by local authority	DfT data produced annually in arrears, 2021/22 not yet available
	Passenger journeys on local bus services per head of population	14.8	15.5	4.5	Not yet available	16	DfT bus statistics table BUS0110: passenger journeys on local bus services per head of population	DfT data produced annually in arrears, 2021/22 not yet available
Customer satisfaction	Proportion of residents surveyed that are satisfied with local bus services	60%	61%	60%	59%	64%	National Highways & Transport Survey	

Further indicators may be introduced in the future, depending on measures delivered .

Conclusion

The lack of funding from the Department of Transport (DfT) to support the implementation of the measures in the Bracknell Forest BSIP is very disappointing. While the scope of what we are able to deliver will naturally be affected, the Bus Partnership remains committed to the vision of developing a viable and stable bus network that supports the local economy, provides better choice and improves quality of life in a safe and healthy environment. The partnership will continue to make improvements to services whenever possible.

Future Priorities

Government have suggested some additional funding for BSIPs may be available. While the funding requirements in our original BSIP are still valid, we have set out below our current priorities;

1. Tackle infrastructure issues that cause services to be less efficient, allowing operators to provide improved service levels within similar levels of resource

- a. Replacement of traffic calming measures in Southern estates with bus-friendly measures to provide greater bus priority (£1,1150k capital funding required over next 3 years)
 - b. Introduction of traffic signal priority for buses at junctions identified as causing delays (£100k capital funding required over next 3 years)
2. Improved bus shelters and waiting areas at stops with patronage above agreed thresholds to improve customer journey (£1,260k capital funding sought over next 3 years)
3. Review of subsidised services with a view to making the supported network easier to understand and financially sustainable for the Council (£900k of revenue funding over next three years)
4. New zero emission infrastructure and fleet, on a phased roll-out over 10 years