



REPORT TITLE:

Scrutiny meeting	Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee – 20/07/2023
Chair	Cllr Matt Babbage
Presenting Officer	Tom Main
Item Type	Overview
Purpose of Report	To provide an overview on progress with the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)
Recommendations/ Action sought	For the Committee to note this overview.
Forthcoming Decisions	N/A
Background Documents	Bus Back Better - Gloucestershire's Bus Service Improvement Plan
Appendices	N/A
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1. Purpose of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

In March 2021 the Department for Transport (DfT) launched the ‘Bus Back Better’ strategy in England. The goal of this strategy is to improve the quality of bus services by investing in improvements such as higher service frequencies, bus priority infrastructure, ticketing schemes, new services, and modern vehicles.

Each Local Transport Authority (LTA) was asked to develop a BSIP. This sets out the LTA’s strategic plan as to how it would improve bus services in the county. Following this an Enhanced Partnership (EP) should be agreed between the LTA and the local bus operators. The EP provides the technical framework for co-ordination between the LTA, operators, and other stakeholders.

The combination of the BSIP and EP would then form the basis for the development of bus transport and would be required to successfully bid for any future DfT funding.

2. 2021

GCC's BSIP was agreed at Cabinet in September 2021 and submitted to the DfT the following month. Initial communications from the DfT informed all LTA's that each would be allocated a proportion of the overall national budget, however this budget was revised following the requirement for continued financial support of bus operators due to the on-going impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on passenger levels and to prevent a widespread loss of bus services.

As a result of the reduced budget not all LTA's were successful in their bids for BSIP funding, GCC was one of these. Despite this disappointment, it is recognised that the BSIP/EP will still be the framework under which future funding will be awarded, so work would be needed to ensure GCC is in the best place possible when bidding.

3. Feedback from the DfT

In the months following the first round of BSIP funding, the DfT offered feedback to those LTA's who were unsuccessful in their bids. GCC immediately accepted this offer. Conversations with the DfT followed and highlighted three areas that could be enhanced. These were:

- Bus priority schemes
- Infrastructure
- Ticketing

Officers have remained in contact with the DfT, holding several online meetings and hosting one in Gloucester. This relationship building has been vital to ensuring the BSIP review is on the right track, and in raising GCC's profile which will be important when the DfT is deciding which LTA's to award future funding.

4. Work so far

To put GCC in a better position to win future funding, several actions have been taken since 2021 to achieve this.

Staffing: Using DfT capacity grants, the ITU have employed two specialist strategy consultants. The first is David Taylor. David composed the successful Oxfordshire BSIP and comes with a wealth of experience in public transport. This role co-ordinates development the BSIP and EP.

The second is Max Matteis. Max has joined us to improve the bus priority aspect of the BSIP. As a Civil Engineer, Max has developed numerous bus priority measures in England, mainly in London. This position enables GCC to have a pipeline of potential bus priority measures ready to be submitted at short notice to the DfT when funding is available. A major barrier to the BSIP in 2021 was the lack of designed schemes, the tight timescale did not allow for the design of schemes in addition to the creation and agreement of the BSIP.

The Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) has also filled a key management role (Transport Operations Manager) recently. The entire project is a collaboration between the ITU and Transport Planning, we've set up a joint BSIP strategy group that meets weekly to keep the project on track.

Targeted studies: Since the submission of the first BSIP in 2021, the BSIP strategy group has commissioned two key studies using the DfT capacity grant.

- Express Corridor – this study is to identify the key public transport corridors in Gloucestershire. This will provide an evidence-based approach for long-term investment in bus priority infrastructure. This could be as comprehensive as a bus lane, down to more minor interventions such as box junctions, traffic-light priority etc. This study is key as it gives the DfT confidence that Gloucestershire has a plan to promote buses and reduce journey times, which are a key barrier to use. This doesn't commit the council to any specific interventions, the usual GCC Governance process applies to every aspect of the BSIP.
- Interchange Hub Study – this will identify all bus stops (from Park and Ride sites down to rural stops) in the county, categorise them, and suggest a standard specification. This allows a structured investment into bus stops and illustrates that GCC has a plan to invest in the passenger experience that will encourage usage.

These studies tackle two of the three areas we were asked to look at by the DfT. We have given the DfT a summary of our approach so far and they were very receptive, stating that we're clearly on the right path to improve the quality of the BSIP.

The third area of focus – Ticketing – is more complex. This requires a commercial agreement between all operators. The DfT have recognised that this is complex and hard to achieve without the support of a back-office system, which they are working on to roll-out to all LTA's who are interested. It also means the initial agreement with operators should be sought via the Enhanced Partnership board which will commence later this year.

5. Timeline

The timeline of the next steps for both the BSIP and EP are:

Action	Expected completion date
Informal EP operator consultation	Underway, completed by 31 July
Formal EP stakeholder consultation	31 August
Agreed EP submitted to DfT	30 September
First EP Board meeting held	31 October
Reviewed BSIP brought to GCC Cabinet	22 November
BSIP agreed with DfT and published	Mid-December