

Notes of West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Forum

Thursday 23rd May 2024 Forum No. 7

Present were representatives of:

- Bus operators (Reading Buses, Stagecoach, Go-Ahead group and West Berkshire Council)
- West Berkshire Council (Network Management, Transport Services)
- Community transport operators (Volunteer Centre West Berkshire)

Apologies were received from representatives of:

- West Berkshire Council (Network Management, Transport Services, Environment Delivery, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways)
- Community transport operators (Carebus)

The Service Lead for Highways and Transport Innovation from West Berkshire Council chaired the meeting.

Notes from Forum No. 6 in February 2024 were agreed.

Matters arising from previous Forum, which are not covered in the Agenda:

- **ZEBRA 2** – Bid was unsuccessful.
- **Free Bus Days** – Operators to provide data from Christmas 2023 dates. **ACTION: Ops**
- **32 (formerly The LINK)** – enhanced bus service began on Sunday 5th May 2024; free bus travel being offered in May on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

Documentation & Funding:

- **BSIP 2024 update** – Draft BSIP 2024 summary and table circulated in the agenda pack. Operators confirmed they were supportive of the documents and content. Operators to email the Council with any estimates of costs for 2025-2030 ambitions. **ACTION: Ops**
- **Bus Connectivity Assessment (BCA's)** – In progress; data from operators required by 24 May. **ACTION: Ops**
- **EP Plan & Scheme** – Updated and published Version 3 in January 2024 upon request of DfT which included changes previously agreed in EP forums and statement of facts. Version 4 to be updated with changes now that PAR (on Pangbourne Turning Facility, passenger waiting facilities and second DRT scheme) has been approved.
- **BSIP Funding Update** – Year 3 funding cannot to be released until: the BSIP is updated, BSIP summary and table are produced, BCA completed and EP Plan & Scheme (v4) is published - deadline 12 June 2024. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Council Budget Update** – The proposed Community Transport Grant reduction was not approved – and the grant budget are therefore as per 2023/24.

Targets:

- **BSIP Progress Report** – April 2024 target report has been published.
- **BSIP Targets** – Forum discussed review of 2021 targets – but no changes required at this time.

BSIP Scheme Progress:

- **BP1. Pangbourne Bus Turning Facility** – PAR form approved in April 2024 to reallocate funds to BP6; project no longer in current 3-year funded programme.
- **BS2. Demand Responsive Transport (2nd Scheme)** – PAR form approved in April 2024 to amend scope to include 41/44 services; planning now underway to convert services.
- **BP3. Robin Hood** – Re-design of junction not to be completed prior to March 2025; signal priority in the meantime is being looked at via Ticketer; request made for Council to also look at R2P technology. Operators to send through data on frequencies of services to help design algorithm for priorities. **ACTION: WBC & Ops**

- **BP4. Bath Road, Calcot** – Feasibility study nearing completion and initial draft submitted for review; traffic surveys undertaken and meetings to be undertaken with Reading Borough Council and Reading Buses to discuss plans once full draft received. **ACTION: WBC**
- **BP5. Congestion Hotspots** – Phase 1 & 2 bus stops clear works now complete – operator feedback: not aware of any issues. Phase 3 being prepared and other locations being looked at. **ACTION: WBC**
- **BP6. Passenger Waiting Facilities** – PAR approved in April 2024; priority locations being looked at in Calcot, Mortimer and Burghfield. Improvements to include:
 - Replacing existing and new RTPI screens and,
 - Improvements to the lighting facilities at stops.
 Agreements with parish/town councils to be drafted. **ACTION: WBC**
 Discussed extension of RTPI screens to display Stagecoach and Council services through use of BODS open data but this would need additional revenue funding.
- **FT1. Fares/Ticketing**
 - Extension of Early Bird Ticketing to Eastern area currently on hold due to £2 fare cap scheme.
 - Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme, external legal provider brought in. **ACTION: WBC**
 - Reviewed proposed 2024 Free Bus Travel days and Fares Campaign for Connect Tickets over the summer.
 - Council to amend dates for summer fares campaign to 29 July-01 September 2024. **ACTION: WBC**
 - Operators to send through costs of free bus travel days and confirm able to offer reduced price Connect tickets by 14 June. **ACTION: Ops**
 - Paying for TOTO machines on supported services; smaller operators to provide quotes; Stagecoach to confirm whether able to progress. **ACTION: Ops**
- **Review of Measures/Services Introduced** – Feedback from operators regarding new services and enhancements are generally positive; enhancements to 32 service are too early to say but similar projects in other areas have resulted in sustainable operations.

New proposals:

- **Mortimer Railway Station Bus Turning Facility Feasibility Study** – Proposal made to use some of BP5 allocation to look at feasibility study for this, allowing operators to extend services to Mortimer Station. The Forum approved the changes. These will be need to be noted in EP version 4, and a PAR submitted accordingly. **ACTION: WBC**
- Discussions were also held on the possibility of a direct service to Royal Berkshire Hospital but it was not considered that this would be commercially self-sufficient.

Other Issues:

- **Network Tender**
 - Contract in place for September 2024. New vehicles due in October/November. Discussed merit in some minor service changes – changes to be considered for September 2025. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Supported Services Update**
 - 143 (to be renumbered 43) to be operated by Reading Buses from September 2024
 - 1a, 1c and 1d contract extended for 1 year; and then will need to be retendered if not fully commercial at that point.
- **Newbury Wharf Operator Agreement**
 - Operator staff to be reminded of T&Cs of site and smoking policy. **ACTION: Ops**
- **Annual Bus Survey**
 - Planned for Mid-June to September 2024. **ACTION: WBC**
- **Better Transport Week Publicity**
 - 17-23 June 2024. Operators to submit details of any activities they would like the Council to help promote. **ACTION: Ops**

Next Forum scheduled for 13:30 on Thursday 26 September 2024 at Shaw House, Church Road, Newbury, RG14 2DR

Abbreviations:

BCA	Bus Connectivity Assessment
BSIP	Bus service improvement plan
BSOG	Bus Services Operators Grant
DfT	Department for Transport
DRT	Demand Responsive Transport
EP	Enhanced Partnership
GWR	Great Western Railway
Ops	All Operators
PAR	Project Adjustment Request
RB	Reading Buses
WBC	West Berkshire Council
ZEBRA	Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas
TOTO	Tap-on/Tap-off