

# Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024



Dorset  
Council

# Foreword

Dear Minister for Roads and Local Transport

This is Dorset Council's third Bus Service Improvement Plan and as the recently elected Cabinet member responsible for Place Commissioned Services, I am pleased to present our 2024 update.

We continue to work closely with our local bus operators within an Enhanced Partnership, exploring new ways to provide a bus network that will link with other forms of transport to provide all Dorset residents and visitors opportunities to access work, education, training, health services and leisure opportunities within Dorset and adjoining council areas. An efficient bus network will give users the confidence to leave their cars behind and contribute towards the council's target to reduce our carbon emissions by 2050.

We have made progress over the last two years and this edition of the Dorset BSIP reflects our successes but more importantly sets out our aspirations for the future that can be introduced as suitable funding is identified.



**Jon Andrews**  
**Cabinet Member for Place Commissioned Services**

# Executive Summary

Initially published in 2021, The Dorset Council Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), was a response to the Government's National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better. It contained measures to improve local bus services across England. It continues to be the strategic document which sets out how the council and local bus operators will work together to plan and deliver services across Dorset through the Enhanced Partnership with bus operators. The document will be updated regularly to keep the contents relevant.

This 2024 update reaffirms our commitment to improve bus services in Dorset by working closely with operators, and raise standards by providing:

- better network coverage and scale – more frequent services between hub locations, with feeder services enhancing rural mobility for communities across Dorset
- better integration between modes – always integrated bus services with all other modes including through timetable coordination, multi-modal travel information, and ticketing
- better and clearer information – information that is consistent, accessible, simple, clear, and coordinated, enabling the public to confidently plan and undertake connected journeys across the local bus network and wider public transport system
- better journey time reliability – faster and more reliable services through targeted corridor improvements
- better value and integrated fares – targeted fares designed to attract more bus passengers, and the roll-out of multi-operator, and multi-mode ticketing
- better vehicle standards and lower emissions – a modern, high standard zero-emission bus fleet by 2035

There are still challenges to be addressed:

- The council's public transport budget is fully committed - any meaningful interventions will need additional external funding. Contract and operating costs continue to rise. The BSIP Plus funding is welcome and has been used to maintain and support the core network and introduce improvements to infrastructure. Dorset Council will continue to seek S106 transport contributions for transport for new developments. Contract prices continue to rise

- Apart from a small number of regular Community Transport routes, rural Dorset has large areas where no formal transport is in place, and volunteer car schemes fill the gaps in public transport provision. As a result, many people who don't own a car struggle to access employment, higher level education, essential shopping and medical treatment.
- Dorset Council plans to reduce carbon emissions by 2035. During the summer months, bus companies provide extra routes and increase the frequency on existing routes in the areas which attract most tourists. This provides visitors with an alternative to car use. Although residents can benefit from the seasonal increases, because they do not run year round, they cannot be seen yet as a viable alternative to car use for residents who need the services to access facilities such as employment and health services.
- Following the success of bike share schemes in south east Dorset, a similar scheme has been introduced in south Dorset. 121 e-bikes are available to hire from a network of 30 Beryl bays across Weymouth, Dorchester and Portland. In Weymouth, there are docking bays at the main bus interchange and other key points providing first and last mile opportunities for onward travel. This will enable people to change existing travel patterns and make more use of the public transport network whether for work or leisure use.

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# Section 1 Our Bus Vision

## Introduction

The Government's National Bus Strategy was published in March 2021. It sets out a vision to improve local bus services by making them:

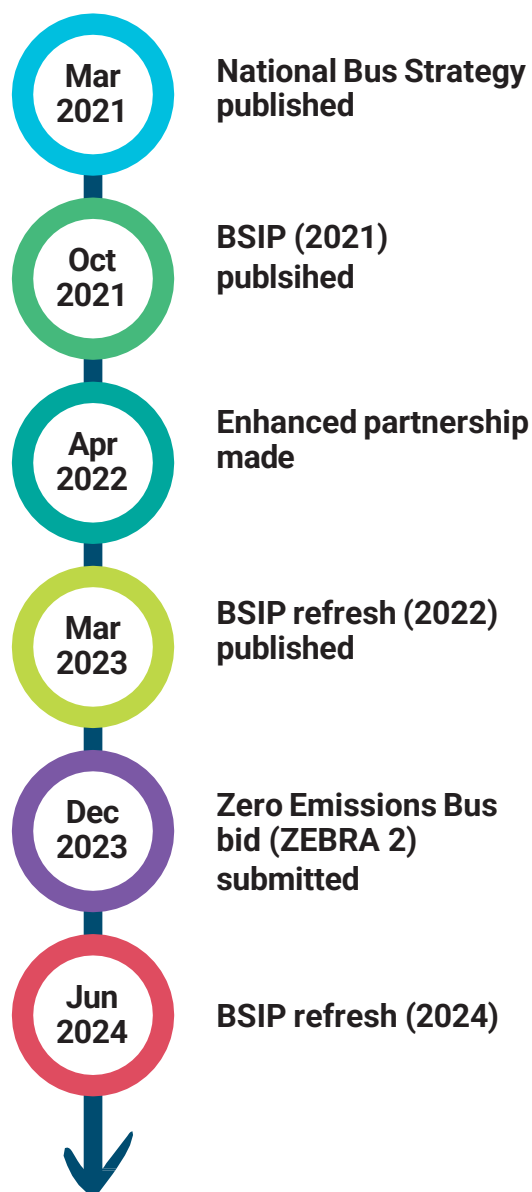
- more attractive for passengers
- more affordable
- easier to understand and use
- faster and more reliable
- zero emission

In response to the National Bus Strategy and the government's priorities, Dorset Council working closely with local bus operators prepared a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to set a vision to transform bus services up to 2030. The plan was updated in 2022 and this latest update (2024) ensures that the plan remains up-to-date and relevant to local priorities. This plan sets out an improvement programme for 2024/25 and a pipeline of proposals for 4 years from 2025/26.

BCP Council and Dorset Council are preparing a new joint Local Transport Plan (LTP4), replacing the existing plan from 2026. The BSIP will be reviewed and updated in 2025/26 to align with the publication of LTP4. Subsequent reviews and refreshes will be undertaken in conjunction with 5 yearly reviews of the joint LTP. Currently both councils have individual BSIPs, but further consideration will be given to a shared BSIP corresponding to the joint LTP area for future updates.

Dorset Council has made an Enhanced Partnership with the local bus operators running public services in the Dorset Council area. The Partnership has enabled closer working between the council and bus companies and other local groups, that prioritise passengers' interests. The Enhanced Partnership encourages local interest groups and bus users to contribute to developing our aims for the future bus network in Dorset.

Visit [Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme - Dorset Council](#) for further information on the Enhanced Partnership.



The Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body is working co-operatively beyond local boundaries with a single voice on regional transport issues. All Local Transport Authorities within the Western Gateway area are working together to progress regional bus networks that connect our regional cities, towns and villages. The vision of the Dorset BSIP links with the Western Gateways five priorities set out in the Strategic Transport Plan 2024-2050:

- Sustainable Growth and Economy
- Decarbonisation and Air Quality
- Access to Services and opportunities
- Facilitating north-south movement
- Movement of goods

## Dorset in Context

Dorset Council is the Local Transport Authority for the county of Dorset, except for the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) area. View an area profile for Dorset Council at [Area profile for Dorset Council - Dorset Council](#)

The council area is predominately rural in nature with a population of 379,578 (Census 2021). The population is spread over a large area, resulting in Dorset having one of the lowest population densities in England (152 people/km<sup>2</sup>).

The main urban areas include Dorchester (county town), Weymouth and Portland. Wimborne, Ferndown and Verwood are further secondary centres in the east on the county and form part of the south east Dorset urban area. The rest of the Dorset Council area consists of market towns and villages. Having limited population between principal settlements and no critical mass to provide a strong customer base creates challenges operating and planning bus services in Dorset.

The population age profile in Dorset is significantly older than the national average. An ageing population presents major challenges with concessionary journeys being higher in Dorset versus the south west regional average, creating an over-reliance on concessionary income to support services.

Figure 1.1 – Dorset Map



## Dorset Council BSIP Area

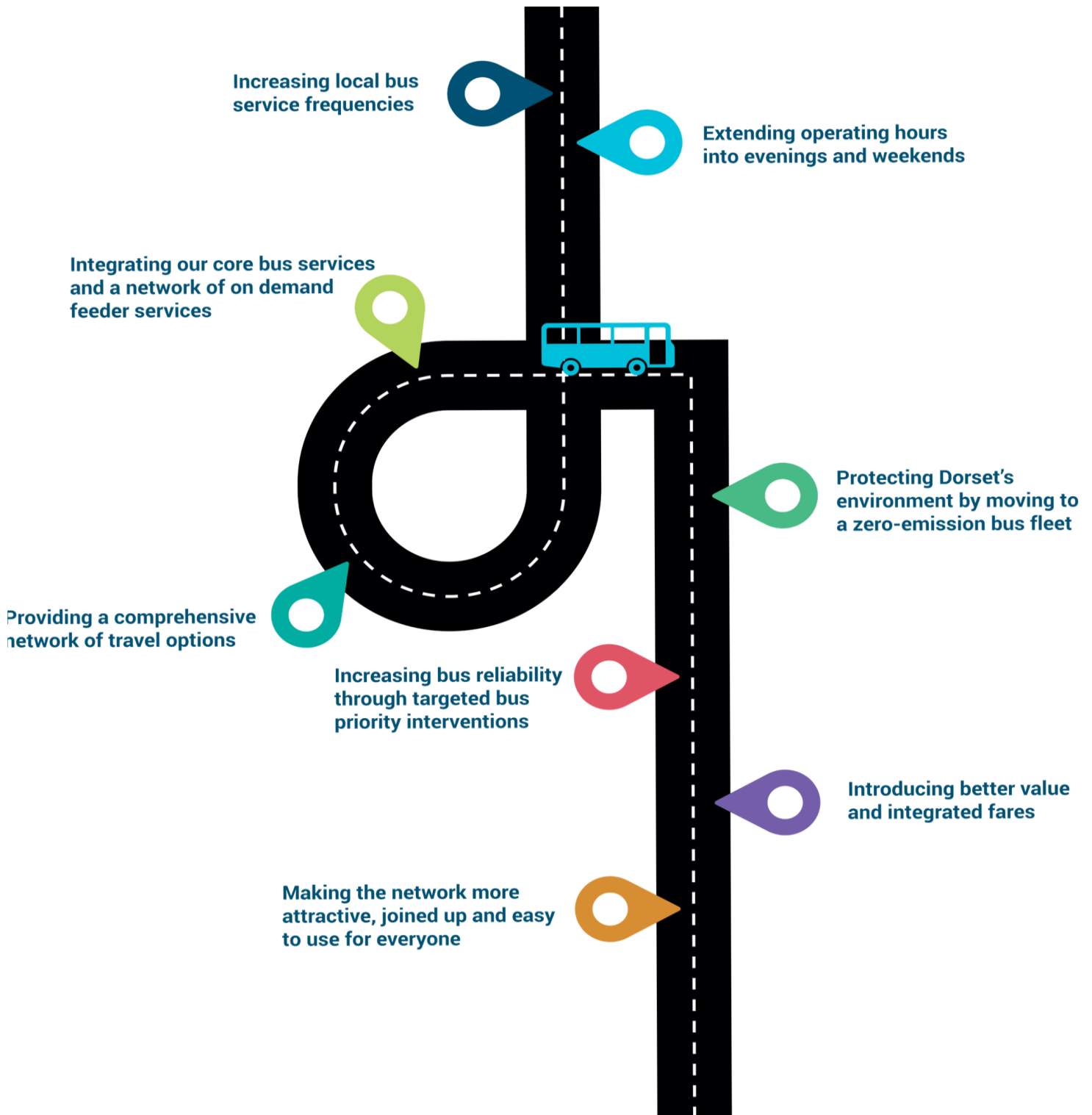


# Our 2030 Bus Vision

To create a reliable, efficient, safe and inclusive network that focuses on improving the lives of people and enhancing our local places.

## How we will get there

Our aim is to significantly grow the number of people using local buses across Dorset by:



## To achieve this vision, the BSIP focuses on six key action areas:

**Better network coverage and scale** - We will focus on developing the current bus network and growing patronage. We will work through the Enhanced Partnership to improve the core network weekday frequency and provide more evening and weekend services. We will seek funding to introduce flexible on-demand transport services feeding into the core network. We will work with the voluntary and community sectors to expand coverage across Dorset.

**Better integration** - We will focus on improving integration between all modes - bus, walking, cycling, community and voluntary transport, coach and rail. Connectivity will be enhanced through better co-ordination of timetables between different modes. We will seek to introduce safe and accessible mobility hubs that enhance the user experience. We will collaborate with our rail industry partners to improve existing bus-rail interchanges.

**Better and clearer information** - We will develop a consistent user focused approach to travel information including printed, online and 'at stop' material. We will seek funding to create a Dorset travel portal as a 'one stop' platform for travel information and develop this in future to provide 'all in' ticketing for public transport users.

**Better journey time reliability** - We will work with operators to identify key delay hotspots and develop a targeted approach to bus priority along high frequency and high use corridors. We will manage the impact of roadworks to minimise the disruption on local bus services.

**Better value and integrated fares** - We will seek to make it easier to travel on different operator's services and introduce a multi-operator ticket. We will work with the rail industry to add additional "through-fares" from rail stations to places in Dorset not on the rail network. We will work with operators to introduce a Dorset wide discount scheme for people aged 16 to 25.

**Better vehicle standards and lower emissions** - We will support operators to improve the standard of the bus fleet in Dorset, including working toward introducing zero emission buses and achieving a fully decarbonised fleet by 2035.

## Our journey so far

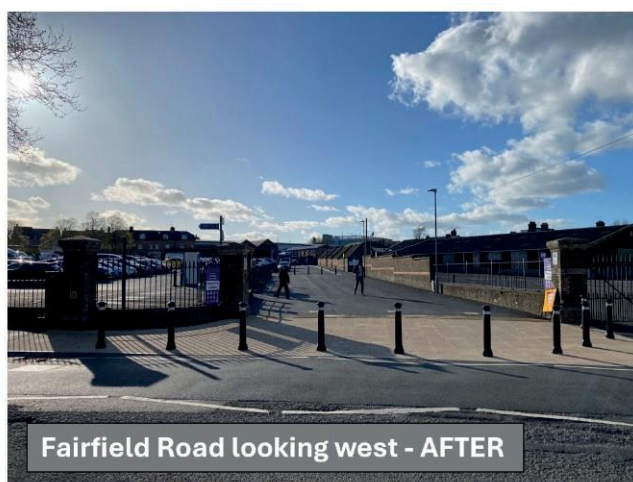
The BSIP and Enhanced Partnership approach has already made some significant progress. This includes:

- Managing the impact of COVID-19 to protect the bus network as far as possible, ensuring the network remains intact and providing the base to improve in the future.
- The council has established a dedicated post in the transport planning team who will liaise with operators, council services and the community to ensure that the Enhanced Partnership delivers the BSIP vision and objectives.
- The council has changed its approach to contracting local bus services, taking greater control over routes, timetables and fares. The new contract model has provided a strengthened core route network, making these bus services more accessible and attractive.
- We have begun a programme of bus stop infrastructure improvements by introducing a standard design for flags and shelters. The first stops to use this new style have been installed in the Wimborne and Ferndown areas. Further roll out to upgrade bus stop infrastructure is taking place corridor by corridor.
- Work to improve the environment around local Rail Stations and provide better bus facilities has been undertaken at Weymouth and Gillingham. The council is working with Network Rail, South Western Railway and Great Western Railway to identify and deliver further improvements. Other improvements at key interchange locations are being explored, linked to development and regeneration opportunities.
- The Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) programme ([Transforming Travel in south east Dorset - Dorset Council](#)) in south east Dorset has delivered bus improvements, connecting major housing, employment, education and retail centres. A number of junction enhancements to improve pedestrian/cycle safety and movement in town centres and along bus corridors have also been completed.
- A bike share scheme has expanded onward travel connections in south east Dorset and in 2024/25 a similar scheme will launch in the Weymouth, Portland and Dorchester areas.
- In October 2023 First Wessex began a pilot bus service in the Southill area of Weymouth that had been without a bus route since 2016. This trial service was supported by the council with CIL funding for the winter 2023/24. The service is currently running commercially with good signs of passenger growth. The service may require further council support for the winter 2024/25 period while the route becomes re-established.
- Residents in Martinstown and Winterbourne Steepleton, two villages to the east of Dorchester, have been successful in campaigning for a bus service to return to their community. First Wessex has reinstated a bus route through the villages on a trial basis. Dorset Council facilitated this diversion by arranging for overhanging branches to be cut back and timetable cases to be installed. A decision will be taken in September as to whether this diversion is adopted on a permanent basis.

- Dorset Council covers a largely rural area that relies heavily on tourism. During the summer season, First Wessex and Go South Coast introduce enhanced timetables on services that run along the Jurassic Coast from Studland in the east to Lyme Regis in the west. Additional seasonal routes are registered each year to tourist destinations from holiday parks. These summer timetables have gradually been introduced earlier in the year with some additional services now running from Easter through to the end of September before returning to their off-peak timetables. As well as benefitting visitors to the county, the summer services are important for residents as they offer access to seasonal employment and leisure opportunities. Bus use also reduces the number of cars on the road and contribute to the council's aims to reduce carbon emissions.
- Improvement schemes have been designed and constructed to create better active travel links between public transport interchanges and provide a safer pedestrian and cycling environment connecting these locations. In Dorchester, a safer walking route for passengers transferring between Dorchester South and Dorchester West rail stations has been established.



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## Section 2 Current bus offer to passengers

This section sets out an updated baseline, spotlighting key facts about bus services in Dorset. The analysis compares the current bus offer with the aims and objectives of our bus vision. Thus, it identifies areas for improvement. A short-term programme of improvements is set out in Section 3, and our longer-term transformation plans are set out in Section 4.

### Local bus network review

#### Bus use

There were an estimated 5.4 million bus journeys across Dorset in 2022/23<sup>1</sup>. While passenger numbers have steadily grown through 2021/22 and 2022/23, they remain significantly below pre-covid levels (71% compared to 2019/20).

Many people aged 65 and over are still choosing not to travel following the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of concessionary passenger journeys in 2022/23 has recovered to 58% compared to 2019/20.

#### 2022/23 headlines:

- 5.4 million bus passenger journeys
- Over half a million bus passenger journeys per month June – September
- 13.5 bus passenger journeys per head of population
- 1.9 million older and disabled concessionary bus passenger journeys
- 37% of total passenger journeys made by concessionary passengers, the highest percentage in the south west region
- 88% of bus passenger journeys on commercially operated services
- 619,157 bus passenger journeys supported by Dorset Council

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<sup>1</sup> Bus Connectivity Assessment

# Bus Frequency

The local bus network is defined by commercially run town services operating at high frequency and a core network of less frequent daytime rural services that connect market towns and urban areas across Dorset.

The heat maps presented in Figures 2.1 – 2.4<sup>2</sup> demonstrate the variation in bus service frequencies across various days and times. Each map is a cumulative total of bus frequencies and shows the number of buses per hour in a combined two-way direction. Comparing the maps reveals stark differences in provision during weekday daytimes (0900-1600) and evening and weekend operations.

## Comparison of Bus Network Frequency by day and period

Figure 2.1 - Midweek hours 0900 – 1600

Figure 2.3 - Saturday 0900 – 1600

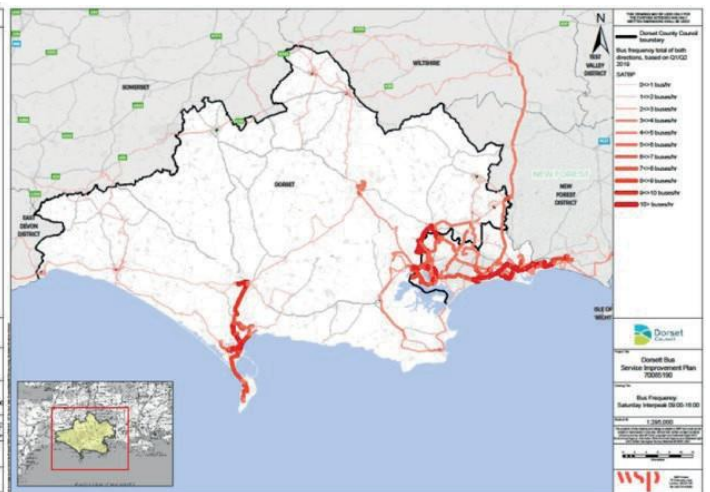
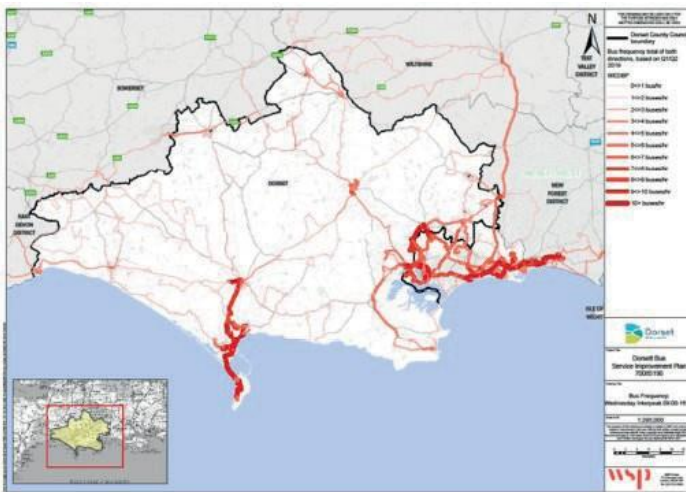
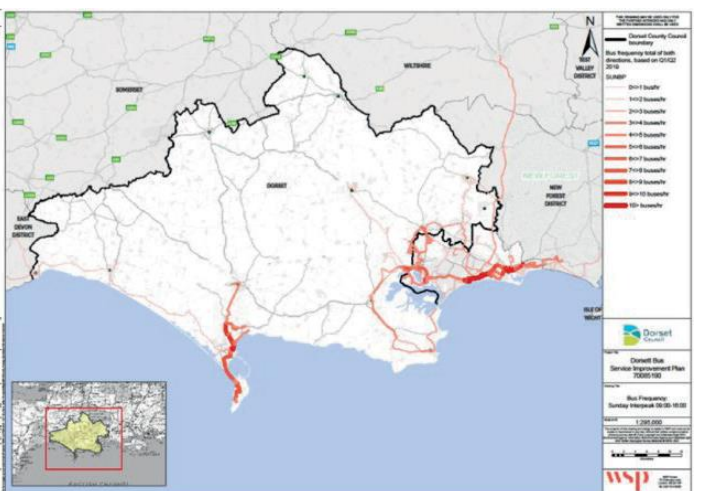
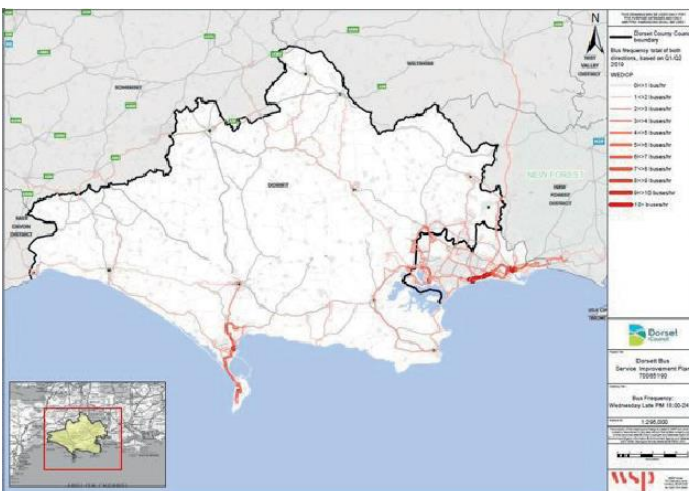


Figure 2.2 - Midweek hours 1800 – 2400

Figure 2.4 - Sunday 0900 – 1600



<sup>2</sup> The heatmaps have been taken from the 2021 BSIP. The pattern of services has not changed significantly during this time.

## Bus Reliability

Bus punctuality is below the target of 95% within the on-time window of up to one minute early to five minutes late. In 2023/24, only 78% of scheduled departures were recorded on time<sup>3</sup>. This is an improvement compared to the baseline in 2018/19 when only 69% were recorded on-time. The heatmaps have been taken from the 2021 BSIP. The pattern of services has not changed significantly during this time.

Traffic flows in Dorset are very seasonal, associated with the popularity of the area as a visitor destination. This can have a significant effect on local bus service punctuality in our urban and coastal areas with increasing traffic levels putting pressure on local bus operators' ability to run reliably and punctually.

Large scale bus priority is not suitable in much of Dorset, especially in rural areas where traffic congestion and delays on bus routes are not common. Our street layouts often don't provide the space to allow bus priority infrastructure to be constructed. Dorset will therefore require a targeted approach to bus priority to address the causes of delay and disruption and use a range of measures including bus lanes, bus gates, advanced signal priority, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions.

### 2023/24 headlines:

- On-time 78.13%
- Late 13.6%
- Early 8.27%
- Operator on-time range high 81%, low 69%

## Network Coverage

Figure 2.5 presents an overview of the current core bus network. This network provides important connections between our main towns enabling people to access jobs, healthcare, retail, leisure and many other critical services.

In 2023/24 there were 5.83 million bus service kilometres operated<sup>4</sup>. Commercially operated services accounted for 77% of this total, while the council supports 22% of the network. Compared to 2019/20, the network has shrunk by 15%, but has now stabilised since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of Dorset council residents can access a town centre by public transport. In March 2023, 75% of residential households were within 30 minutes of a town centre by public transport.

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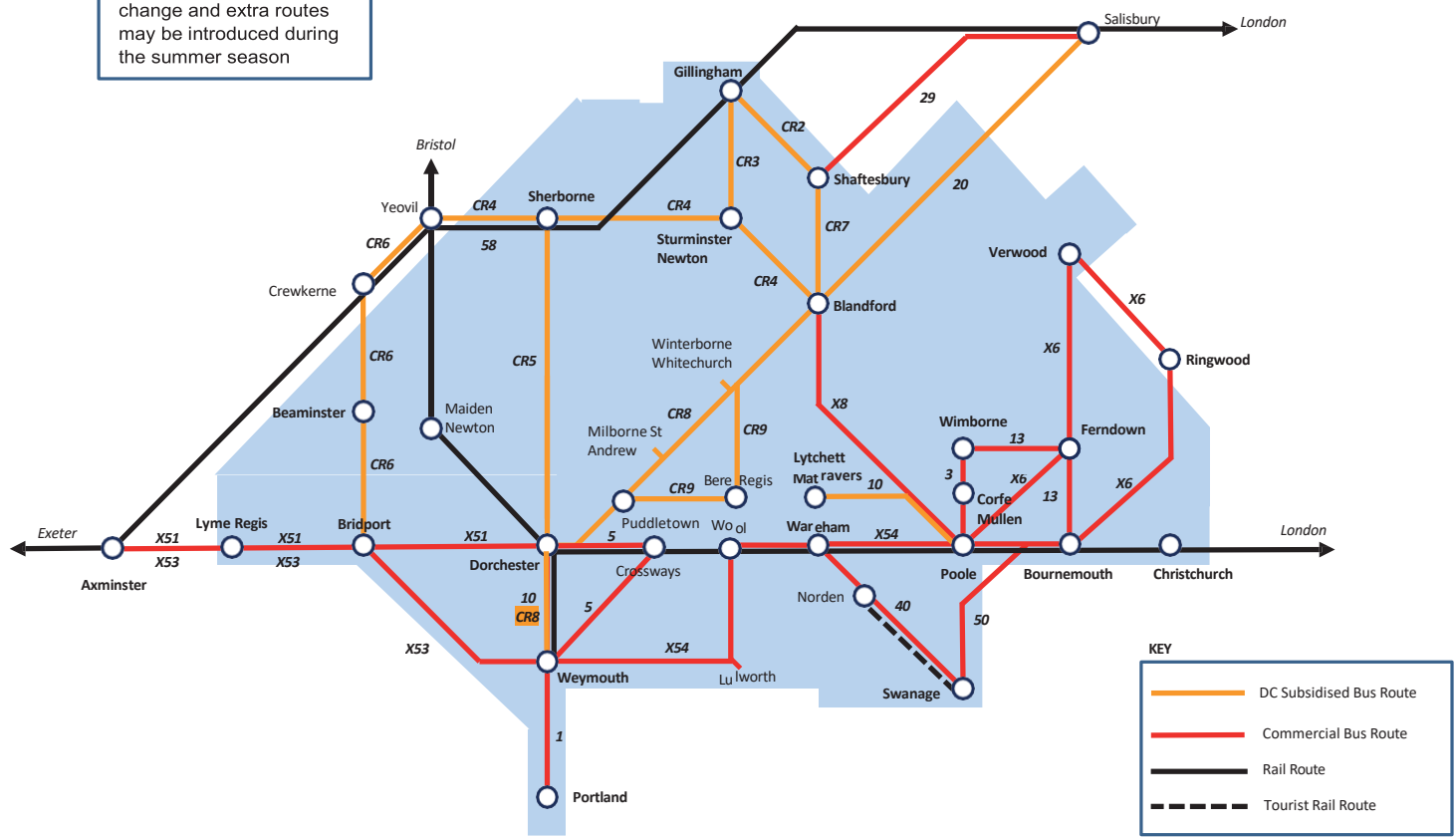
<sup>3</sup> Analyse Bus Open Data for 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. Based on 3,797,466 departures recorded.

<sup>4</sup> Bus Connectivity Assessment

Figure 2.5 – Bus network

## Wider Area Transport Network for Dorset Inter Urban & Core routes

Please Note: Service Numbers may be subject to change and extra routes may be introduced during the summer season





## 2023/24 headlines:

Category	Number of Services	KM's Operated	Passenger Journeys
Commercial Services	38	4,502,431	4,776,747
LTA supported (tendered and de minimis) services	18	839,467	385,089
Mixed commercial / supported services	8	460,614	234,069
Community transport services (S19 / 22)	3	28,344	14,500
Totals	67	5,830,856	5,410,405

## Vehicle Standards

The average age of the Dorset bus fleet is 9.4 years old<sup>5</sup>. This has improved in recent years, reducing from an average age of 11 years in 2021. The share of the bus fleet meeting the latest EuroVI low emission standards has increased, now at 62% in March 2024, compared to only 9% in 2021.

There are currently no zero emission buses (ZEBs) in operation across the county. The council is committed to working with local bus operators to pursue government funding and introduce the first zero emission buses in Dorset.

### 2023/24 headlines:

- Average age of bus fleet = 9.4 years
- Proportion of the bus fleet EuroVI emission standard = 62%
- Number of zero emission buses (electric or hydrogen) = 0
- Proportion of buses under five years old = 29%

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<sup>5</sup> Bus Connectivity Assessment. As measured on 31st March 2024.

## LTA Spending

In 2023/24 the council's spend on public bus services was £2.5 million, excluding grants from the Department for Transport. This is an increase over spending in 2022/23 which was £2.3 million. Most of the spending goes on providing a core network of council supported services, with the rest of the budget going on bus stop infrastructure. Since 2021/22 the council's public transport budget has increased by approximately 90%.

### 2023/24 headlines:

- Council budget allocated for bus services = £2.5 million
- Spend on supported services = £2.4 million
- Spend on infrastructure = £110k
- Concessionary fares reimbursement = £2.9 million

## Customer Satisfaction

Surveys have highlighted that the bus network in Dorset is failing to meet the expectations and needs of many people to access education, health services, employment opportunities and other essential services.

There are low levels of satisfaction with bus services in Dorset. The National Highways and Transport Network Survey 2023 survey showed only 48% are satisfied with local bus services overall.

A 2021 BSIP survey highlighted several reasons that stop people using local buses. The main issues identified were:

- Infrequent bus services
- Routes not going where individuals want to go
- Cost of fares
- Connections between different modes of transport

The engagement activity with the public and local interest groups has provided a clear list of priorities for the BSIP. These are:

- Additional bus routes
- Higher frequency services including at weekends
- Cheaper fares and a more understandable fare structure

## Key challenges for Dorset

Dorset is an area with significant transport challenges that need to be overcome in order to transform public transport. Specific challenges include:

- Large areas of rural Dorset have no bus service. Regular public transport is restricted to commercially run bus services in larger urban areas and inter-urban services supported by the council. Many of our rural communities suffer poor access to daily essentials, social isolation and reduced opportunities. Just over one in five of our residents (83,500) do not live within thirty minutes by public transport of a town centre (during peak am weekday times, 2022). 175,000 residents (46%) live in areas within the top 20% most deprived nationally for access to services (2019/20 data).
- Public bus services play a critical role in the delivery of home to school transport. The council is facing significant cost pressures, particularly regarding home to school transport (mainstream and SEND) and public transport.
- 29.6% of Dorset's population is aged 65 and over and this is the highest of any unitary authority in England. 107,000 of Dorset's residents would currently qualify for an Older Persons Bus Pass. Dorset sees a higher rate of elderly and disabled concessionary passenger journeys versus regional and national averages.
- Delivery of the BSIP programme in full will require external funding to be secured. The 2021 BSIP was not allocated any government bus transformation programme funding (out of 79 local authority bids, only 31 were successful). The council has also failed with Levelling Up Fund and Rural Mobility Fund bids. The council receives less Revenue Support Grant from Government compared to the average of £2.8m (2021/22) for single tier and county local authorities in the south west<sup>6</sup>. The council's annual Integrated Transport Block capital grant of £1.9m for local transport schemes has not increased since 2015/16 and due to inflation is now worth considerably less. This is hampering our ability to deliver our transformational BSIP programme.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: LG Inform benchmarking tool from the Local Government Association

## Section 3 Improvement Programme to 2025

This section sets out a delivery programme for the current financial year. This is based on the known funding currently available which includes the council's budgeted spending and known government allocations.

### Our commitments for in year improvements 2024/25

#### Better network coverage and scale

Dorset Council will continue to subsidise core route services that complement the commercial network to ensure that connectivity across the area is maintained. We constantly monitor these routes, making changes where possible to best suit the needs of passengers – current and potential. We have introduced new contract arrangements on our supported services that give us greater control. Dorset council contracts the operation to bus companies to run these routes on our behalf, and we keep the revenue and decide service levels. There has been some success in recent months with the reintroduction of previously withdrawn services.

Since COVID-19, journey patterns have changed – weekend leisure travel has increased and the traditional Monday to Friday commuter market has decreased as more people work from home. As a first step, Dorset Council is looking to re-introduce Saturday services on the core network of supported routes as they are tendered. The first route to include Saturdays (from Blandford to Dorchester), is being trialled. If this is successful, and funding is available, we will roll this out to other routes on our core network.

#### Better integration

Dorset Council is working with South Western Railway (SWR) and local transport groups to make improvements at targeted stations in South Dorset, on the Wareham to Weymouth stretch of the line. For bus passengers, these key improvements will include:

- additional or replacement way finding on station forecourts to local bus interchanges, amenities and attractions.
- signage from platforms to station bus stops.
- RTPI and other electronic information displays at stops and where applicable, on the station platforms will be clearer, particularly at stations serving wider communities.
- Upgrades to bus stops and shelters where appropriate, subject to available funding.

The Council, in partnership with Beryl Bike, operates a dockless bikeshare scheme in south east Dorset covering Parley Cross/Ferndown to Wimborne, Upton and Corfe Mullen. Following the success of this scheme, a new bikeshare scheme will launch in Dorchester, Weymouth, and Portland during 2024. Funding has come from CIL and Council capital funding. The funding will provide 30 marked docking bays and 121 electric bikes. There is capacity for expansion of the scheme should further funding be identified. Bikes can be hired by the minute, or day and will provide an essential means of connecting people to the public transport network for onward travel.

## Better and clearer information

We are reviewing the information provided at bus stops in Dorset. Except for Weymouth and Portland, the majority of stops in the council area are maintained by Dorset Council, although some are managed by parish and town councils. We will introduce a programme to regularise Dorset stops and work with bus companies and town and parish councils to provide bus stops that reach a common standard across the whole area.

As a rural authority, Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI), is largely limited to stops in larger towns and communities where there is easy access to the electricity network. In future, new and replacement RTPI will be supplied by self-powered units that do not rely on an electrical supply. The units are cheaper to install and maintain. They can be installed in rural locations and their presence will be invaluable in giving passengers reassurance that the bus is on the way to them.

We will upgrade our publicity offer. Council maintained stops and shelters will have printed timetable information which will include a QR code with a link to live timetable information. Over the last year, Dorset Council has been modifying and reviewing the supported bus network of socially necessary core route (CR) services. This work is nearing completion and as a result, we have an interest in publicising these routes and their journey opportunities – as well as any day-to-day travel information affecting them. In the coming year we intend to pro-actively publicise and promote use of these 'CR' routes.

## Better journey time reliability

Only 78% of buses currently run on time in Dorset. The council has been awarded £580,000 from the Government's Green Light Fund to upgrade signal equipment at several junctions. A programme to install signal priority enabled infrastructure at the Weymouth Harbour Junction and a series of improvements at junctions in Dorchester is now underway. The corridor between Portland, Weymouth and Dorchester has a frequent bus service and congestion levels are high. This programme will help to improve bus reliability and reduce delays on these routes.

## Better value and integrated fares

Following a successful pilot using a group of 15 Young Adults leaving the Dorset Council care system, the council will look to introduce a Dorset Travel Card for use on our Core Route supported bus services. Initially, this will begin with internal use within the council where we have a duty to supply transport. Where there is a suitable Dorset Council supported route, users will be issued with a Dorset Travel Card for their transport requirement. They can also use the card on any CR services at weekends and during school holidays. Any Directorate that supports clients with travel arrangements will also be offered the opportunity to purchase passes. We anticipate that this will offset some of the transport costs. A wider roll out of this new scheme will begin from September 2024.

Wareham is the closest mainline rail station to the Purbeck Peninsular. There is a frequent bus service from Wareham through to Swanage that operates daily. We will work with SWR to add the station to those already offering Plus Bus ticketing for onward travel. This could reduce traffic on the A351 and as a result, lead to a decrease in high carbon emissions along a corridor that passes through protected environments.

## Better vehicle standards and lower emissions

The fleet profile in Dorset is improving but currently there are no Zero Emissions buses running in the Dorset Council area. We did not receive funding in either of the ZEBRA funding rounds but we will continue to work with operators to identify suitable routes so that we are 'ready to go' should further funding rounds open.

We are keen to encourage operators to provide Tap on Tap Off (TOTO) contactless payments and Audio and Visual announcements across their Dorset fleets. First Wessex and South Somerset has confirmed that they will have TOTO this year and Go South Coast has the capacity but currently it is only available in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council area. Audio visual announcements are more widely fitted. TOTO and audio visual announcements make travel easier for all passengers, including those with sight and hearing loss.

## Section 4 Ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond

The council has the ambition to transform bus provision and drive increases in the number of people using local buses across Dorset. This is subject to being able to secure external funding to deliver key proposals. If external funding is secured, we will lift core network daytime frequencies, and increase evening and weekend frequencies. We will enhance rural accessibility and reduce isolation by expanding network coverage and integrating fixed and on-demand services. We will target a 100% zero-emission bus fleet by 2035, modernise infrastructure, prioritise buses to improve reliability, and exploring digital solutions for integrated ticketing and payments. Additionally, we will consider the potential of autonomous vehicles for future transport solutions in Dorset.

The following proposals will be prioritised and delivered according to the amount of external funding we may receive. Should no external funding sources be secured, delivery will concentrate on those improvements that can be introduced within existing funding structures, and through greater partnership working.

### Our Aspirations for 2025/26 to 2028/29

#### **Bus network planning and improvements to bus services**

The transformation of the core bus network is the foundation of our long-term plans. We are looking to raise standards by increasing Monday to Friday daytime (7am – 7pm) frequencies and providing more evening and weekend services on our town services and core interurban network. This will provide greater opportunities for travel and give the public more confidence that bus services offer a viable alternative to private car use. This will be supported by bus stop infrastructure upgrades and bus priority measures as well as other traffic management interventions at key delay ‘hotspots’ to ensure that these services are attractive, fast and reliable. These upgrades will help to achieve mode shift and increase sustainable low-cost travel opportunities.

Good public transport is essential in rural areas to enable mobility and access to resources that are often not available locally to people without cars. We are seeking to move to a clearly defined hub and spoke network. Our plan includes an ambition to introduce feeder Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) to fill in rural gaps in the current local bus network. These services will focus on supporting greater levels of rural mobility by improving access to the core bus network and other modes of travel. The goal is to enhance accessibility, reduce rural isolation, and offer viable alternatives to private car use within Dorset.

## Our main proposals to increase bus service frequency include:



### **Swanage to Poole every 30 minutes (07:00 – 19:00, with night-time services at reduced frequency)**

Seed funding is required to provide the uplift to this commercial service to double the frequency Monday to Saturday. Additionally, an hourly Sunday service will be maintained all year round. Beyond the seed funding it is anticipated that the increased frequency will be continued commercially.



### **Blandford to Poole every 30 minutes (07:00 – 19:00, with night-time services at reduced frequency)**

Seed funding is required to provide the uplift to this commercial service to double the frequency Monday to Saturday. An hourly Sunday service would further enhance this service. Beyond the seed funding it is anticipated that the increased frequency will be continued commercially.



### **Gillingham to Shaftesbury every 20 minutes and provision of additional weekend services**

S106 funding has been secured to improve local bus services and community transport. Developer contributions are expected from 2025 and will provide an uplift on this council supported service to provide three services an hour Monday to Friday. Enhanced weekend services will also increase the attractiveness of the service and ensure Shaftesbury residents can access rail services at the weekend.



### **Increase core route weekday frequency to hourly (07:00 - 19:00) with additional peak hour journeys**

Seed funding is required to provide the uplift to core route services to provide a regular minimum of an hourly service all year round across the network. This will improve connectivity, increase the attractiveness of the services and make accessing employment, and other essential activities much easier.

Supporting these bus service upgrades will be a complementary package of corridor infrastructure upgrades, which will see additional real time information screens installed, improved waiting shelters and replacement flags and poles installed at key locations to improve the user experience.



## Our proposals to introduce new services include:



### Introduce weekend services on the council supported core route network

Creating a Saturday inter-urban network will target increased sustainable leisure travel, and this will provide a viable travel choice for employment trips and health appointments. In rural areas of Dorset, such services are not commercially viable and will require ongoing revenue support from the council and other partners to secure these services long-term.



### Dedicated Weymouth Park and Ride service

The site has parking for up to 1,000 vehicles and is currently served by a local bus service that stops nearby. Revenue funding would enable the council to contract a frequent limited stop service directly from the site to Weymouth town centre. This would cater for residents and holidaymakers and reduce the number of cars entering the town centre area searching for parking.



### Direct services to Bournemouth Aviation Park and Airport, Bournemouth Hospital and Wessex Fields

Providing direct bus services would greatly improve access to local employment opportunities and sustainable travel options for people living in South East Dorset. The council will work with BCP Council and local bus operators to design new services to improve cross boundary routes and improve access to these key destinations.



### Develop cross county services

We will look to simplify the core network by removing the need to change buses and make longer distance journeys more appealing and easier to make. This will be achieved by merging supported contracts when retendered and specifying vehicle standards to improve comfort and the overall user experience. Blandford and Dorchester will function as hubs providing onward travel opportunities, with new interchange facilities provided at mobility hubs.

## Our on-demand feeder service proposals include:



### South East Dorset rural mobility pilot

The council is developing a pilot proposal to introduce on demand services to provide regular connections from rural villages into the core route network and other local bus routes or rail services. Users will interchange at mobility hubs providing a range of onward travel connections with integrated ticketing. The services will also improve access to tourist and leisure destinations. The council will work with a range of partners to deliver this pilot, including with BCP Council.



### North Dorset – South Wiltshire on demand service

Working with Wiltshire Council, we aspire to develop a cross-boundary DRT service covering south west Wiltshire and north east Dorset, focusing around the Warminster, Gillingham and Shaftesbury areas. Initial discussions have taken place with both public and private sector partners, including regionally significant tourism and leisure destinations. The project will encourage partners to play an active role in the design and mobilisation of the scheme.



### West Dorset 'Connect' on demand service

We aspire to introduce on demand services to provide connections with the X51/53 and CR6. Many rural villages in this area have no access to the bus network and would benefit from the greatly enhanced connectivity that feeder services would provide. The area experiences high levels of seasonal tourism and the new on-demand services would improve access within the Dorset National Landscape and to the World Heritage Jurassic Coast.



### Community and voluntary sector solutions

Working in partnership with the community and voluntary transport sectors we will develop the role of these services to enable essential journeys and unlock rural communities. The new core route contract model provides opportunities for community transport to feed passengers into hubs along the route. We will also investigate the potential of 'Total Transport' pilots.

## Bus priority

We will develop a targeted approach to bus priority using a range of measures including bus lanes, bus gates, advanced signal priority, traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions.

We will provide bus priority at known delay hotspots along high frequency, high use corridors, and include bus priority in the planning stage of any future highway improvement schemes.

We are currently in the early stages of engagement and planning, exploring traffic management, road space re-balancing and placemaking interventions for market towns, such as Blandford Forum, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Shaftesbury, Wimborne and Sherborne, including examining the potential for traffic reduction measures associated with bus priority. Town centre public realm and traffic management enhancements in Weymouth are also being explored to enhance active travel access to public transport hubs and provide bus priority measures.

Through the Enhanced Partnership the commercial bus companies will be expected to reinvest the savings achieved from greater fleet efficiency and greater ticket revenues into service improvements which may include, but is not limited to, new services, frequency enhancements, improved evening services, improved weekend services, fare caps / cheaper fare offers. These commitments will be set out within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme and enforced through the Enhanced Partnership governance.

**The following targeted proposals aim to make buses faster and more reliable, competing with the car, and overall, more attractive:**



### Portland to Weymouth Corridor

Our ambition is to transform bus travel between Portland and Weymouth town centre by making bus services more reliable and more attractive as a sustainable mode of transport. The package is focused on encouraging mode shift and increasing bus patronage, through bus priority measures. Benefits will be delivered from shorter journey times, increased reliability, and reductions in traffic entering central areas of Weymouth.



### Weymouth to Dorchester Corridor

There are significant commuter flows out of the Weymouth area, to Dorchester. However, bus punctuality is affected by traffic congestion, particularly in peak times and summer months. Bus priority measures including junction improvements and signal priority will provide a more reliable and faster bus service between the two towns.



## Wimborne and Ferndown to Poole and Bournemouth Corridors

Working in partnership with BCP Council, the DfT funded Transforming Cities Fund programme has delivered a programme of road improvements and bus stop upgrades along the Wimborne to Ferndown corridor. This has improved the standard of stops and upgraded junctions. Work to complete the network will address bus priority at Pennys Hill junction in Ferndown and Parley Cross Roads in West Parley. These schemes are currently in preliminary design.



## Market town interventions

Design work is underway in Blandford Forum, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Shaftesbury, Wimborne and Sherborne to develop traffic management, associated bus priority and public realm improvements. This could include signal priority, short sections of bus lane and relocation of on-street parking bays.



## Ferry Road, Studland

There is a significant need for bus priority measures on Ferry Road, Studland on the approach to the Sandbanks Ferry. This is a private road in the control of the ferry company. Traffic builds up at this location, particularly during the summer tourist season and bus priority would be greatly beneficial to ensure the reliable running of the Swanage to Bournemouth bus service. A scheme would involve the creation of bus cages as refuge areas, and the relocation of on-street parking.

## Improvements to fares and ticketing

The council and local bus operators are engaged with the development of the multi operator contactless ticketing project led by West Midlands Combined Authority. We actively support the development of a national back-office system that will support our future ambitions to introduce a multi operator ticketing product that will give users a more seamless travel experience, value for money and greater confidence to use public transport.

Subject to the roll out of a single national IT solution and the availability of external funding, we would seek to implement the scheme in Dorset as soon as viable to do so. The costs of implementation are currently unknown. We would work alongside local authorities across the region to develop a business plan to implement this solution.

The following proposals seek to address public and stakeholder priorities for simple to understand bus fares and tickets that can be used on all buses:



### Introduce a Dorset wide 'young persons' bus ticket for 16–25 year-olds

This initiative would support those continuing in full-time education, training, or applying for apprenticeships and those seeking/commencing full-time employment. The ticket will also help to address issues surrounding social isolation amongst younger people living in rural communities by providing an affordable, independent means of mobility. Introduced initially on the council's supported services, a young person's bus card will entitle holders to discounted fares.



### Fare Capping

We will work with all operators through the Enhanced Partnership, to reach agreement on a fare capping arrangement. Initially we will work with operators to agree the mechanisms for a flat fare town zone offering significantly reduced town fares within Weymouth and Portland. We will subsequently explore similar mechanisms for expanding to Dorchester, Bridport, and Gillingham. Without additional revenue funding in place these would need to be commercially sustainable schemes.



### Family / Group Discount Scheme

Starting with our supported routes we will introduce a new family/group ticket offering travel discounts. We will work with all operators through the Enhanced Partnership to agree the mechanisms to introduce it across Dorset.

## Improvements to the bus passenger experience

These proposals seek to address priorities for better information, interchange and waiting facilities. Our desire is to improve bus stop infrastructure on the core network, improving interchange facilities and improving first and last mile links, and providing easy to understand and accurate travel information. Significant marketing and promotional activities will highlight the new travel opportunities created and the transformational achievements being delivered.

Our proposals include:



### Develop mobility hubs across Dorset

To make the hub and spoke system work effectively, we will seek to create new mobility hubs, each tailored to network and area needs. These mobility hubs will provide access to a range of travel options and provide purpose-built facilities. A number of potential mobility hub locations are being explored, linked to other proposals set out in this BSIP, including at Weymouth, Dorchester, Blandford, Wareham, Bridport, and Gillingham.



### Create a Dorset Bus Portal

We will work towards introducing a new travel portal to provide a new single source of public transport information. This will allow public transport users to plan journeys in confidence and receive live service updates. There is strong support from the public and stakeholders for an all-Dorset multi-modal travel app. Working in partnership with local bus operators, other transport providers, Traveline South West and technology companies a specification and a business case will be developed.



### Standardised at stop information and branding

The council will continue to work with operators and stakeholders to ensure that all marked stops have a bespoke at stop timetable display with a standard 'Dorset' display. We will establish a minimum standard for branding that can be put on all buses and publicity. Through the Enhanced Partnership we will explore the development of a Dorset wide travel brand.

## Improvements to the bus fleet

The council will work with local bus operators to introduce modern zero emission buses, including battery electric and hydrogen powered. This will help make bus travel an attractive way to travel and protect Dorset's environment and improve air quality.

The overall aim is to convert 60% of buses across the county to zero emissions by 2030 with all remaining buses running at Euro VI or better and achieve a completely zero emission bus fleet by 2035.

Future zero emission bus roll out will focus on the following corridors or town centre areas:

- Dorchester town
- Weymouth town including new Weymouth Park and Ride services
- Portland to Weymouth
- Weymouth to Dorchester
- Dorchester – Bridport – Axminster and Weymouth – Bridport – Axminster
- Wimborne – Poole - Bournemouth
- Swanage – Poole – Bournemouth
- Poole - Blandford

Through the Enhanced Partnership the council will work with bus operators to prepare and submit funding applications for zero emission buses.

The Enhanced Partnership approach provides the best opportunity to work collaboratively to achieve higher vehicle standards for buses across Dorset. In collaboration, we will agree vehicle standards regarding facilities, comfort, safety, accessibility, ease of use, and technology. Key focus areas will include the roll-out of next stop announcements, CCTV, app-based tracking, exploring the options for bicycle facilities across the network, and enhanced on-board facilities such as USB ports.

## Longer term transformation of the network

The council seeks to make Dorset an exemplar for how flexible on demand services can increase rural accessibility to link up communities and reduce rural isolation. Efforts will continue to increase overall network coverage (routes and hours of operation) with the proposed mix of fixed and on demand feeder services, supported by the development of mobility hubs and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) provision. New community and voluntary sector models will be explored. The ambitious aim is to achieve 100% coverage across Dorset, ensuring that every community has access to the public transport network.

Modernising the bus fleet will be central to our climate change agenda, protecting Dorset's environment and improving air quality. Whilst achieving greater modal shift will help deliver on these aims, moving to a fully decarbonised local bus fleet will also be important to combat carbon emissions from road transport. The council will continue to work with local bus to introduce modern battery electric and hydrogen fleets.

The council will continue to explore initiatives to increase the use of active travel networks for first and last mile connectivity, including initiatives such as joint ticketing opportunities between bus, cycle hire and any future micro-mobility schemes, and better cycle parking provision at/near key bus interchanges.

The council will explore digital models for delivering effective services and unlocking market knowledge. The Dorset travel portal will be able to provide a platform for integrated ticketing products and facilitate tap-on tap-off contactless payments. By working with other key stakeholders, such services could be expanded to give discounted rates/savings for bus users at key tourist locations and other suitable businesses/attractions across the county, all facilitated via a single platform, to help encourage further bus use and support the local economy.

The council notes recent advances in autonomous vehicle systems. The council will continue to review national and international pilots to determine suitability and potential applications in Dorset if the technology becomes proven to be a cost-effective solution in urban and more sparsely populated rural areas.



## Section 5 Targets, Monitoring and Reporting

This section sets out our targets for improving bus services and how they will be monitored throughout the life of the BSIP and Enhanced Partnership.

The BSIP will be reviewed regularly so that it remains focused on transformation and meeting the needs of residents and visitors to Dorset. The BSIP is designed to be a living document and will be republished if the council and partner local bus operators feel that this is necessary. Future reviews and refreshes will be undertaken in conjunction with reviews every 5 years of the joint Local Transport Plan.

Progress will be reported annually using data collected for the DfT Bus Connectivity Assessment. Progress reports will be available on the council's website on the following page: [Bus Service Improvement Plan - Dorset Council](#). Progress will be reported to the Enhanced Partnership Board, Bus User and Stakeholder Group and to the council's Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

The following indicators will be used to monitor bus network performance across the council area and chart progress.

Long term targets for significant growth will be dependent on funding being available to deliver frequency enhancements and introduce new services, and other currently unfunded elements of the BSIP.

### 2023/24 headlines:

Indicator	Measure	2023/24 (Baseline)	By 2030
Number of people travelling by bus	Number of single trips per annum	5.4 million	+40%
Core network mileage operated	Distance operated on core bus network	5.83 million	+25%
Accessibility by public transport	Proportion of households within 30 minutes of a town by public transport	75%	+10
Bus Punctuality	% of buses operating on time (-1 minute to +5 minute window)	78%	+17%
Local bus fleet emissions	Percentage of bus fleet zero emissions standard or higher	0%	+60%
Customer Satisfaction	Percentage satisfied with bus services	48%	+10%

# Glossary of transport terms

## **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)**

A strategic document setting out a vision and plan for enhancing bus services in a specific area.

## **Core Route (CR)**

A 'CR' prefix on a bus service number used on some bus routes in Dorset indicates that the service is entirely subsidised by Dorset Council and forms part of our 'core route network'.

## **Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)**

Flexible services that provide shared transport to users in a defined area. Routes can have a combination of flexible or timetabled journeys based on demand.

## **Enhanced Partnership (EP)**

An agreement between a local authority and the bus operators in its area, to deliver a joined-up network of bus services.

## **Local Transport Authority (LTA)**

The LTA administers registered bus services that run in their area. In England (outside the metropolitan areas and London), it is either the Unitary Authority or the County Council for that area.

## **Local Transport Plan (LTP)**

An LTP sets out transport strategy and outlines a programme of measures to be delivered over the short, medium and long term. It covers all types of transport including public transport, active travel, private motor vehicles, roads and freight.

## **National Bus Strategy (NBS)**

This national strategy sets out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered.

## **Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI)**

Provides information about public transport services in 'real time'. This allows passengers to see which services are due to arrive at stops and what time they are expected.

## **Tap on Tap off (TOTO)**

Passengers tap on and off a bus using a smart card, contactless bank card or smart phone and the best value fare is calculated in the background. A price limit per day can be set.

## **Traveline South West**

A journey planner for travel using public transport across the South West of England and beyond.

## **Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Board (WGSTB)**

One of seven sub-national transport bodies aiming to transform strategic transport links across their respective areas, providing the infrastructure needed to drive economic growth

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