

Shropshire Bus Partnership: Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme

December 2021

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Definitions

In this document, the following capitalised terms shall have the meanings ascribed to them below:

1985 Act	Transport Act 1985
2000 Act	Transport Act 2000
2017 Act	Bus Services Act 2017
Bus Operators (or Operators)	All providers of Qualifying Bus Services
The Council, Shropshire Council or SC	Shropshire Council
Enhanced Partnership Scheme Variation	A formal variation of the relevant Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s) as a result of the mechanism set out in the EP Scheme, which will then constitute a formal variation of the relevant scheme for the purposes of s.138E(1) of the 2000 Act.
Facilities	Those facilities referred to in Part B which shall be deemed such for the purposes of s.138D(1) of the 2000 Act.
Shropshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (or Shropshire BSIP, or BSIP)	The Bus Service Improvement Plan published by Shropshire Council.
Shropshire Bus Partnership Board	The committee of Shropshire bus operator representatives, council representatives and stakeholders responsible for considering recommendations put forward for inclusion in Enhanced Partnership Plans, Schemes or Scheme Variations.
Shropshire Enhanced Partnership (or Enhanced Partnership or EP)	The Enhanced Partnership covering the geographic extent of the administrative boundary of the Borough of Shropshire, shown for identification purposes at Figure 1.
Measures	Those measures referred to in Part B which shall be deemed as such for the purposes of s.138D(2) of the 2000 Act.
Non-qualifying Bus Service	Services excluded from classification as Qualifying Bus Services.
Qualifying Bus Service	A registered local bus service with one or more stopping place within the geographical area of the Enhanced Partnership, except for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school or works registered local bus services not eligible for Bus Service Operators Grant.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cross-boundary registered local bus service with less than 10% of their registered mileage within the Enhanced Partnership area. • A service operated under section 22 of the 1985 Act. • A registered local bus service which is an excursion or tour. • A service run under sections 89-91 of the Transport Act 1985 where the authority retains all the revenue from that service. • Any other registered local bus service that the Shropshire Bus Partnership Board decides should be excluded from all or specific requirements of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme. <p>For the avoidance of doubt, a list of Qualifying Bus Services will be published at the start of each Council financial year.</p>
Requirements	<p>Those requirements placed upon Bus Operators identified as such within Part B, which shall be deemed as such for the purposes of s.138C 2017 Act.</p>

1. Part A - Enhanced Partnership Plan

The Shropshire Enhanced Partnership for Buses is made in accordance with Section 138G(1) of the Transport Act 2000 by Shropshire Council.

The Plan comes into effect on 1 April 2022 and will remain valid until revoked.

Introduction

- 1.1 The National Bus Strategy provided a welcome focus on improving bus services across the country. The requirement to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) gave a real opportunity for Shropshire Council to come together with its local bus operators to collectively consider the current bus service offer to residents and how it could be enhanced. The formation of a Bus Partnership that meets regularly has been a useful forum to highlight issues, discuss ideas and put forward potential solutions.
- 1.2 High car ownership and use, coupled with dispersed population, make for challenging conditions for bus services in Shropshire. The bus is not viewed as an attractive option for those with a choice.
- 1.3 The Shropshire Bus Partnership has provided the focus for collaborative working and forms the basis of the Enhanced Partnership. This will in turn facilitate the successful implementation of the planned measures, once levels of funding secured from Government are known.
- 1.4 With a relatively modest injection of funds sought through the BSIP, significant improvements can be made to the bus network in Shropshire. More buses, running to more places at more times, with cheaper fares and quicker journey times, will improve the image of buses and increase their contribution towards the better economic, social and environmental well-being of Shropshire's residents.
- 1.5 Drawing on the BSIP, this document fulfils the statutory requirements set out by the Bus Services Act 2017 of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan for Shropshire. Initially, this will facilitate the introduction of an EP Scheme aimed at supporting and developing bus services across Shropshire, to achieve the objectives set out in the BSIP.
- 1.6 In accordance with the statutory requirements for an EP Plan, this document includes:
 - Overview and map of the geographical area covered
 - Factors affecting the local bus market

- Summary of passengers' experiences in using bus services and the priorities of users and non-users for improvements
- Trends in bus use and service offer
- Objectives that are sought for bus service provision
- Interventions needed to achieve the desired outcomes
- Governance arrangements
- Competition test

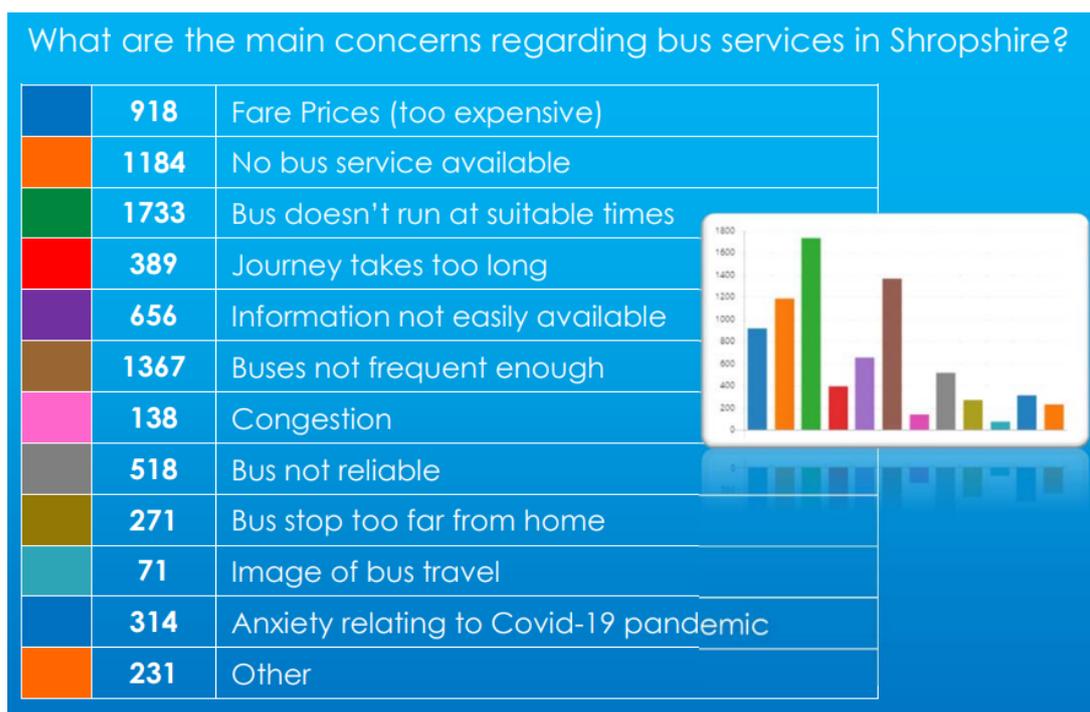
2. Bus travel in Shropshire

What do people think about local bus services?

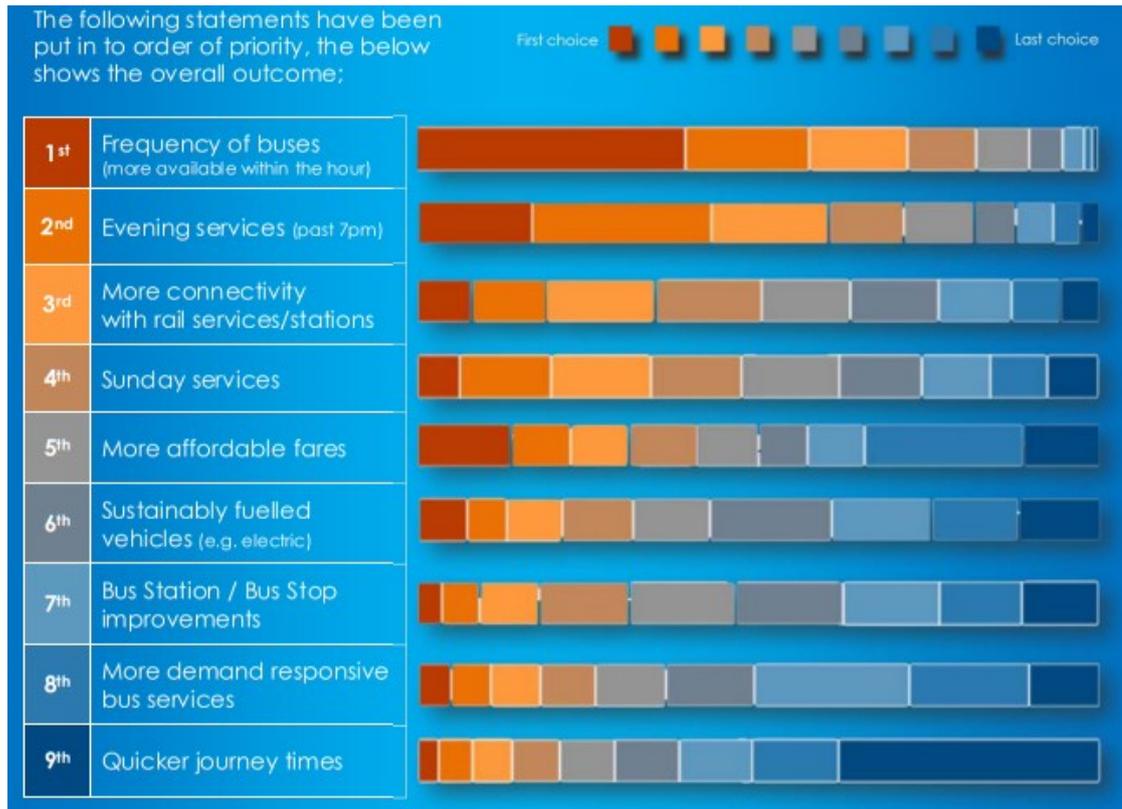
2.1 A survey undertaken during summer 2021 provided useful insights into residents' views of bus services. 2,555 responses were received from people across all parts of Shropshire.



2.2 Bus services were generally viewed as poor, particularly because they were not available, didn't run at convenient times or were too infrequent.



2.3 The survey asked people to prioritise the types of improvements they would like to see in Shropshire's bus services. The following chart shows the responses, highlighting the desire for more frequent buses, the provision of evening services and greater connectivity.



2.4 Respondents were asked to rank a number of statements relating to various improvements. The top 10 are shown here.

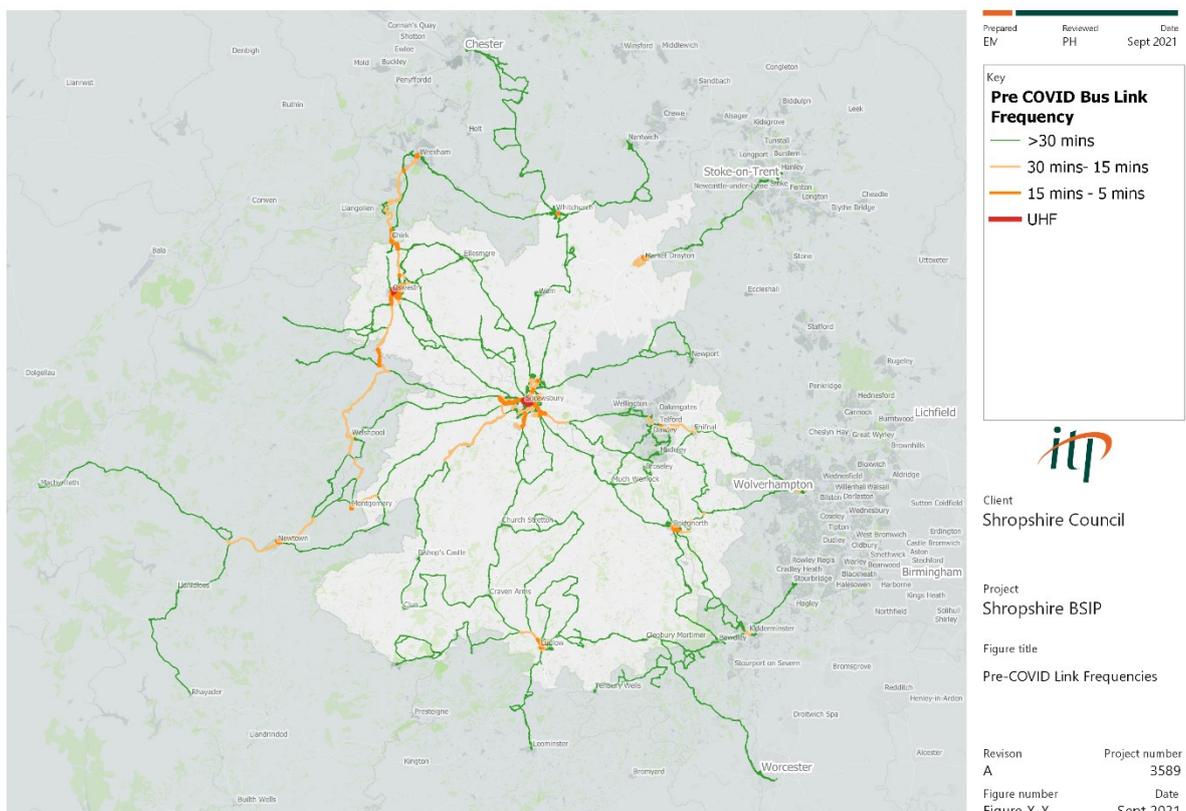
2.5 The Bus Service Improvement Plan was developed in response to the survey findings and residents' priorities.



3. Current position

Introduction

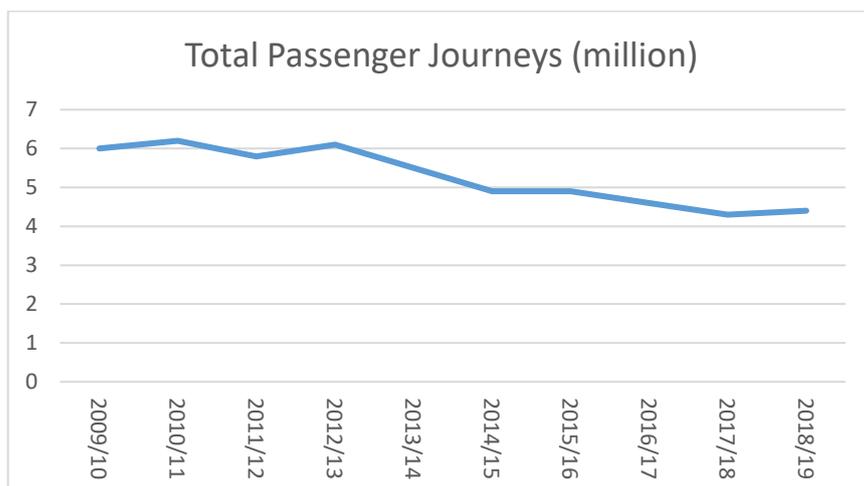
- 3.1 Local bus services are vital to the community, connecting rural areas to urban centres, enabling residents to access health services, shopping, leisure and the ability to commute to and from work. Shropshire’s public transport network has historically operated unaltered for many years with little investment to market services and increase patronage. This has resulted in many services being subsidised by the Council (68%) with poor coverage particularly in more rural areas. Where services do operate in these areas, timetabling tends to be infrequent and not meet the needs of passengers very well.
- 3.2 The largest operator is Arriva, with two other smaller independent companies based in the county. A number of other operators are located in neighbouring areas. There is a high proportion of older vehicles and fares tend to be quite high.
- 3.3 The pre-Covid bus network and service frequencies are shown on the following map.



Bus travel trends

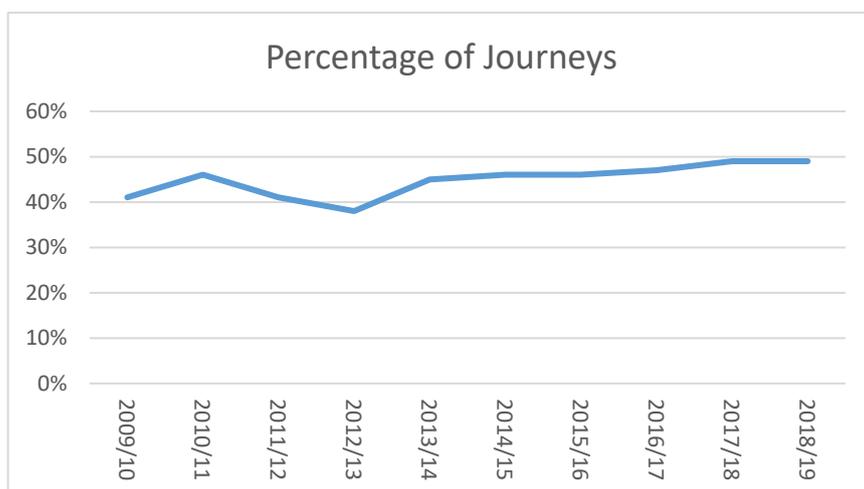
- 3.4 Shropshire has seen a downward trend in bus passengers over the last decade, from 6m in 2009/10 to 4.4m in 2018/19.

Shropshire bus passenger trends¹



- 3.5 The following figure shows the overall proportion of elderly and disabled passengers journeys made with a concessionary pass. The percentage increased from 41% in 2009/10 to 49% in 2019/19.

Concessionary travel trends in Shropshire²

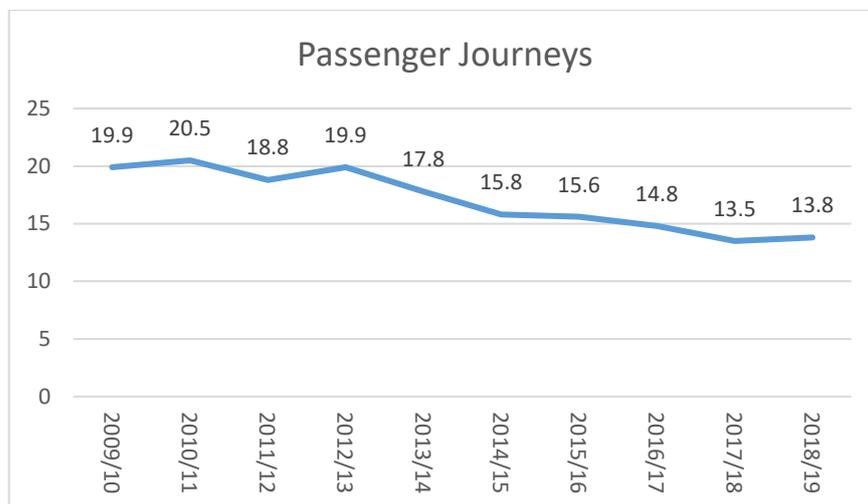


¹ Based on DfT bus statistics Table BUS0109, as published June 2021.

² Based on DfT bus statistics Tables BUS0109 and BUS0113, as published June 2021

- 3.6 Over the past decade, there has been a steady decline in the number of bus passenger journeys per head of population from 19.9 in 2009/10 to 13.3 journeys in 2018/19, a reduction of 31%.

Bus passenger journeys per head of population



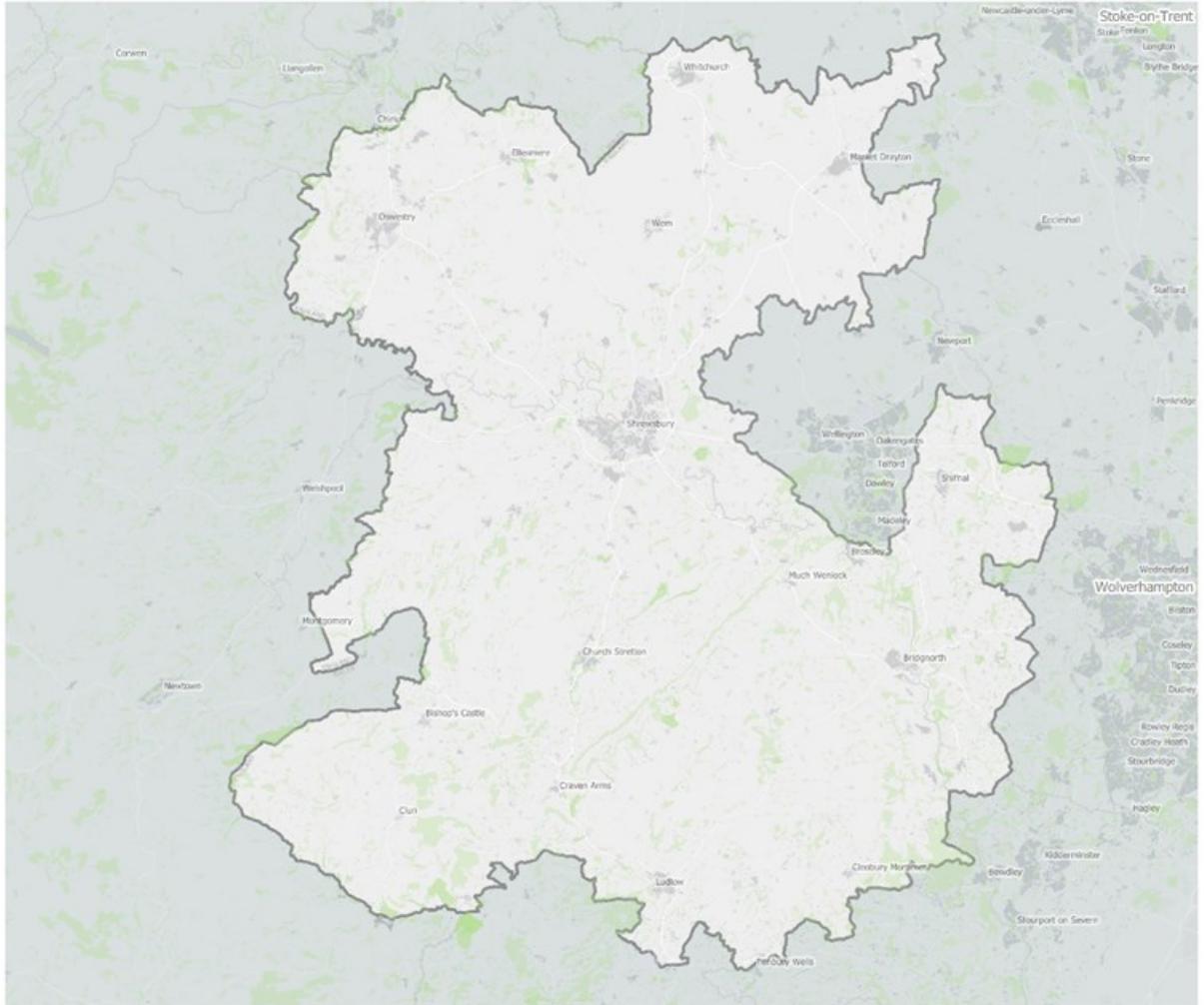
Challenges

- 3.7 There are a number of challenges for the Shropshire bus network, as follows:
- Shropshire is the second largest inland county in England, with 330,000 people spread over 1250 square miles.
 - As a significantly rural area, travel demands are sparse and diverse and many journeys quite long. This means that there is a high dependence on journeys by car.
 - There is an ageing population; an increasing proportion of bus journeys are made by concessionary pass holders, with a corresponding decline in use by fare paying passengers.
 - Bus provision is not commercially viable, meaning that many services rely on local authority support.
 - Resources are spread thinly, so services are limited, offering poor levels of connectivity and limited access to facilities and services, and there is a lack of investment in infrastructure and buses.

4. Enhanced Partnership Plan

- 4.1 The Shropshire Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan covers the whole of Shropshire.

Figure 4-1 Shropshire Enhanced Partnership Plan area



- 4.2 The Plan provides the backdrop for specific EP Schemes that will detail actions and developments to be taken jointly by partners to deliver improvements in bus services in Shropshire that will help meet the following goals and objectives.

Vision, goals and objectives

- 4.3 The Enhanced Partnership seeks to facilitate the delivery of the BSIP vision and objectives, as follows.

Vision

Buses are excellent; they play a significant role in the life of Shropshire and its people, offering convenience and choice for all.

Overall goal

To revitalise bus travel in Shropshire, by improving its image and useability, and so increasing use and underpinning a positive cycle of growth and development of bus services.

Objectives

Develop an understandable and integrated public transport network that is attractive to use.

- Provide a quality experience in respect of all aspects of using the bus.
- Tackle the perceived and actual deficiencies of the bus compared to the car.
- Allow the bus to play a greater role in supporting wider policies and strategies relating to economy, environment, health and wellbeing.
- Increase the commercial viability of bus services.

- 4.4 The key delivery stages of the BSIP are set out in the following graphic.



BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Based on the public survey & operator feedback for Shropshire



Recovery

A continuation of the fare support that the DfT has provided throughout the pandemic, ensuring that we have the foundations of a bus network to build upon, to meet the ambitions of the National Bus Strategy;

- Funding from the DfT to continue tapered support for bus services as they recover, and passenger numbers remain depressed
- Should the above fare support be made available, we would also need to maintain concessionary fare payments at pre-covid levels.



Levelling Up

Funding to improve the Public Transport Offer to passengers that reflects the needs of a rural area, this is not an expectation that we simply replicate service levels of metropolitan areas, but a fair reflection of a minimum that bus users in rural areas should expect;

- 30 minute service frequencies on key inter-urban routes
- Improved service frequencies in our towns
- Longer operating hours
- Monday to Sunday bus operations on key services
- More affordable fares
- Bus priority
- Real time passenger information
- Staffing costs to implement and administer the BSIP



Building Back Better

This reflects the ambition and innovation required to truly transform the public transport offer in Shropshire and ensure public transport becomes a legitimate choice of travel in a rural county, realising the positive additional benefits that come with that (the economy of our towns, transport decarbonisation, social and rural isolation, access to health and essential services to name a few).

- Rural Connect (DRT)
- Green Buses
- Additional Services
- Shrewsbury Connect (operational costs)
- Multi operator ticketing
- Passenger information improvements (website, app & branding)
- Greater integration with the Rail Network.
- Passenger Hub Improvements

Whilst funding submission details are still being finalised, the total bid will be in excess of £90 million and reflect the ambition to impact positively other key strategic workstreams, on a local and national level.

The BSIP submission is a live working document and there is the opportunity to revise/refine the elements within the submission as we move through the process.

Funding sources

- 4.5 The Enhanced Partnership will draw on multiple funding sources to deliver the desired outcomes of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s), as appropriate. This includes, but is not limited to:
- Funding provided by Central Government
 - Council capital funding
 - Council revenue funding
 - Developer contributions
 - Operator investment
 - Reinvestment of operator revenue generated by schemes
 - Other external funding opportunities

Management

- 4.6 Following the launch of the National Bus Strategy in March 2021, Shropshire Council convened a Bus Partnership Board, to which all bus operators were invited and most have attended. This met monthly to oversee the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan, published at the end of October 2021.
- 4.7 The Council published its notice of intent to develop an Enhanced Partnership on 27 June 2021.
- 4.8 The Shropshire Bus Partnership Board comprises representatives of:
- Shropshire Council
 - All operators of local bus services in Shropshire
 - Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
- 4.9 The Partnership Board has been supported and chaired by representatives of transport consultancy ITP.
- 4.1 Operating under agreed Terms of Reference, the Bus Partnership Board is responsible for the introduction and management of the EP, in addition to prioritising the planned improvements set out in the BSIP, based on funding received from Government. The Board will be responsible for the development of any future EP Schemes and agreeing variations to existing Schemes or the EP Plan.

4.2 In addition to the formal organisational framework, Shropshire Council officers have liaised with neighbouring authorities to ensure that plans are compatible and with representatives of Shropshire Bus Users.

4.3 As required by the EP guidance, the following were formally consulted on this Plan:

- Transport Focus
- Traffic Commissioner
- Chief Officer of Police
- Competition and Markets Authority
- Neighbouring authorities
- Local MPs

Small and medium sized operators

4.4 Given the variety of bus operators involved (in terms of market share, fleet size, company turnover and structure), it is important to ensure that the effects of the Enhanced Partnership do not unduly negatively impact smaller operators' ability to engage or to comply with requirements.

4.5 As such, the needs of small and medium-sized operators (SMOs) have been considered in the development of the Enhanced Partnership, with opportunities for all bus operators to participate throughout, either through individual discussions or through attendance at the Partnership Board meetings. The Plan seeks to support improvements in all aspects of bus provision, regardless of the size of operators providing services.

Competition

4.6 The Enhanced Partnership has been subject to the Competition Test as set out in Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000. The assessment, undertaken by Shropshire Council concluded that there will be no adverse impact on competition. The implementation of an Enhanced Partnership Plan and associated Scheme is aimed at delivering improvements to bus services for passengers in a deregulated environment. The Enhanced Partnership will not impact on competition, as operators will be free to amend and introduce services in the area, provided that the standards that apply to all operators are met.

Review and monitoring of the EP Plan and Scheme

- 4.7 Once the EP Plan and Scheme are made, they will be reviewed by the Bus Partnership Board annually, following the review of the BSIP. Shropshire Council will initiate each review and it will take no longer than 3 months to complete.
- 4.8 The review will include consideration of:
- The arrangements for consulting passenger representatives on the effectiveness of the EP
 - The objectives set for improving the quality and effectiveness of bus services
- 4.9 A public engagement exercise will be undertaken each year, to gather the views and opinions of both bus users and non-users. This will take the form of an online survey. Some of the same questions asked in the survey undertaken to inform the development of the BSIP will be used, in order to track the impact of any measures introduced. Also, there will be questions to help monitor progress towards BSIP targets, particularly in respect of levels of satisfaction with different elements of service. The opportunity will also be taken to gauge how effective the Enhanced Partnership has been and the impact it has made.
- 4.10 Furthermore, the Bus Passenger Charter will invite feedback from bus users on an on-going basis. Again, this will be collated to inform future developments. There will also be on-going dialogue with the bus user representative group, Shropshire Bus Users.
- 4.11 All insights and feedback will be reported regularly to the Bus Partnership, in order that consideration can be given to new measures and facilities to be included in the EP Scheme.
- 4.12 Monitoring reports for the BSIP will be produced every 6 months to demonstrate progress towards the objectives and targets set.

Variations to the EP Plan

- 4.13 Consideration will be given to potential EP Plan variations highlighted either by one of the organisations represented on the Shropshire Bus Partnership Board or by any operator of a qualifying bus service. The proposer of a variation should demonstrate how this might contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the EP Plan and current local transport policies. Such requests should be set out in writing and submitted to the Enhanced Partnership Board administrator.

- 4.14 On receipt of a valid request for a variation, SC will reconvene the Shropshire Bus Partnership Board, giving at least 14 days' notice for the meeting, to consider the proposed variation. Any proposal to proceed with the variation will lead to the Council notifying stakeholders and operators of the intention to vary the EP Plan. The planned variation will then be subject to the operator objection and consultation processes set out in s138L of the Transport Act 2000. Having passed through these, SC will make the EP Plan variation, subject to the approval of the Council.

Revocation of the EP Plan

- 4.15 If, for some reason, it becomes necessary for the EP Plan to be revoked, the Bus Partnership Board will be reconvened and follow the same process as outlined in the section 'Variations to the Plan' (noting that the agreement will be for revocation and not variation).
- 4.16 If the EP Plan is revoked, then any associated EP Schemes will be revoked automatically, as a Scheme cannot exist without a Plan. Equally, if all associated Schemes are revoked, the EP Plan would automatically be revoked.
- 4.17 If at any point in the future, the EP Plan area is included in a Bus Franchising Area, the relevant requirements set out in this EP Plan document will cease to apply from the commencement date of the Franchising Scheme.

5. Part B – Enhanced Partnership Scheme

The Enhanced Partnership Scheme (1) for Buses is made in accordance with Section 138G(1) of the Transport Act 2000 by Shropshire Council.

The Scheme comes into effect on 1 April 2022 and will remain valid until revoked.

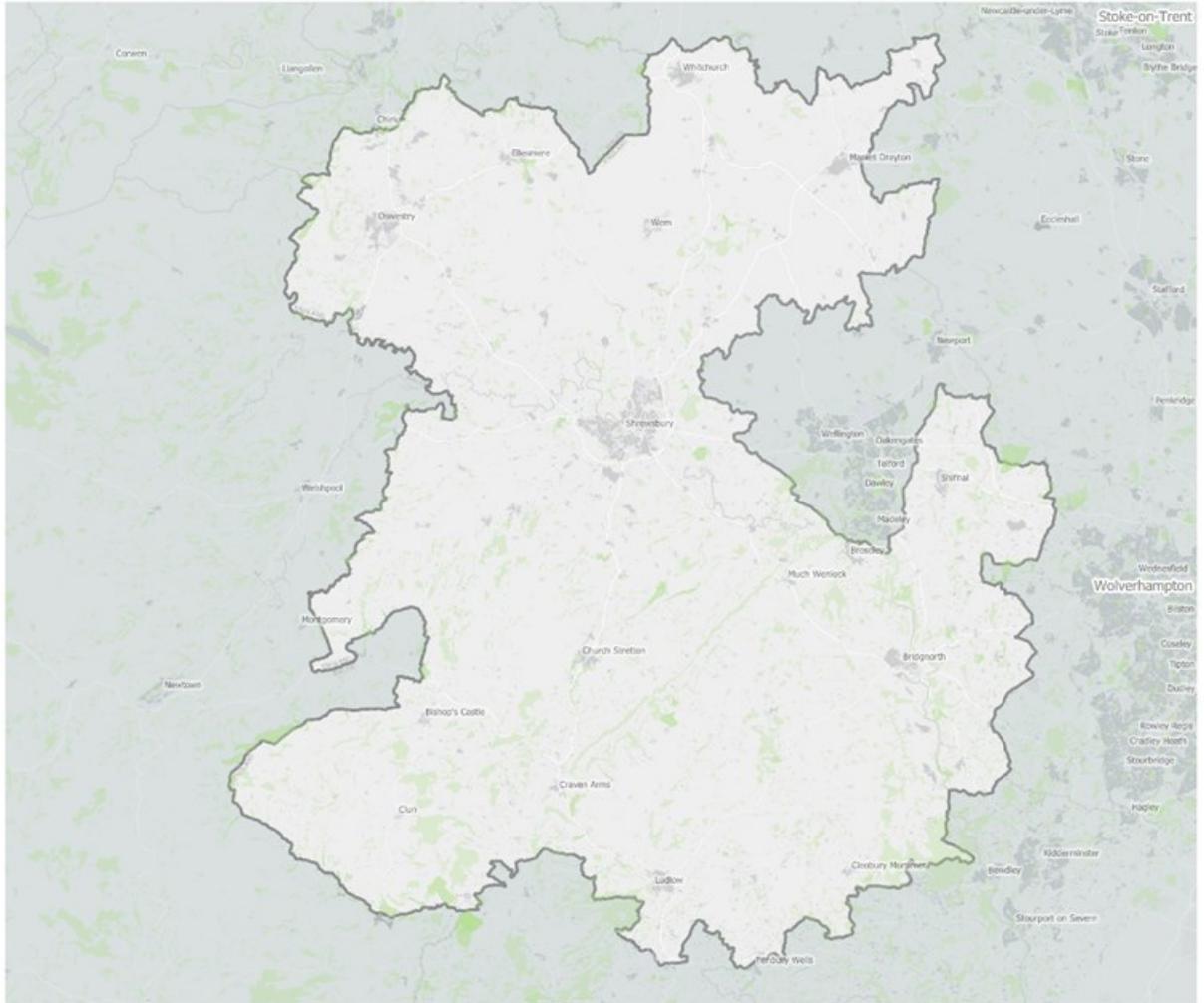
EP Scheme content

- 5.1 This document fulfils the statutory requirements for an EP Scheme as set out in s138 of the Transport Act 2000. It includes sections on:
- Scope of the EP Scheme and commencement date
 - Requirements on the local authority
 - Requirements in respect of qualifying local bus services
 - Details of EP Scheme management
- 5.2 The EP Scheme can only be put in place if an associated EP Plan has been made. Therefore, this document should be considered alongside the associated Shropshire EP Plan.
- 5.3 The EP Scheme has been jointly developed by Shropshire Council, bus operators that provide local bus services in the EP Scheme area and other stakeholders on the Shropshire Bus Partnership. It sets out obligations and requirements on both the Local Transport Authority and operators of local services in order to achieve the intended improvements, with the aim of delivering the objectives of the associated EP Plan and Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Scope of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme

- 5.4 The EP Scheme will facilitate the improvement of local bus services operating in Shropshire.
- 5.5 The EP Scheme covers the same area as the Shropshire EP Plan, namely the entire administrative area of Shropshire Council (SC). The Scheme includes all qualifying local bus services, which are those registered local bus services operating in Shropshire, except those that are exempt as indicated below in the 'Exempt services' section.
- 5.6 For the avoidance of doubt, a list of qualifying local bus services will be published at the start of each Council financial year.

Figure 5-1 Shropshire Enhanced Partnership Scheme Area



EP Scheme duration

- 5.7 The EP Scheme will commence 1 April 2022. It will have no specific end date but will be reviewed at least annually.

Exempt services

- 5.8 The following services are exempt from the requirements of the EP Scheme:
- A school or works registered local bus services not eligible for Bus Service Operators Grant.

- A cross-boundary registered local bus service with less than 10% of their registered mileage within the Enhanced Partnership area.
- A service operated under section 22 of the 1985 Act.
- A registered local bus service which is an excursion or tour.
- A service run under sections 89-91 of the Transport Act 1985 where the authority retains all the revenue from that service.
- Any other registered local bus service that the Shropshire Bus Partnership Board decides should be excluded from all or specific requirements of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme.

Requirements of Shropshire Council

- 5.9 Shropshire Council will provide various facilities and measures as set out in Column C of the following table.

Requirements in respect of qualifying local bus services

- 5.10 Operators of qualifying local bus services will be required to meet the requirements set out in Column D of the following table.

Table 5-1 Enhanced Partnership Scheme commitments and requirements

Shropshire Enhanced Partnership Scheme: commitments and requirements (commencing April 2022)

Elements to be progressed that are not reliant on BSIP funding from the DfT

Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
Element	Description	Local authority commitments (facilities and measures)	Bus operators' commitments (requirements on qualifying local bus services)
Shropshire Public Transport website	New website with comprehensive information about all bus, rail and community transport services across Shropshire.	<p>Manage the establishment and development of the website, including commissioning, design and content.</p> <p>Launch website by 31 October 2022.</p>	<p>Support the development of the website, providing information and content and links to it from operators' own websites.</p> <p>Promote and advertise the website once launched.</p>
Bus Passenger Charter	Charter setting out what passengers can expect when using bus services across Shropshire.	<p>Agree and publish Bus Passenger Charter by 1 April 2022.</p> <p>Monitor adherence to Charter and public feedback.</p> <p>Establish appropriate passenger feedback and engagement procedures by 1 June 2022.</p>	<p>Adopt and adhere to the Bus Passenger Charter.</p> <p>Promote the charter to passengers and encourage feedback.</p> <p>Agree how operators will proactively support and be part of any passenger feedback and engagement procedures by 1 June 2022.</p>

<p>Roadworks coordination and liaison</p>	<p>Ensure that systems are in place to minimise disruption to bus services from roadworks.</p>	<p>Introduce and maintain processes and procedures for SC and utility companies to co-ordinate roadworks and liaise with affected bus operators over potential disruption at the earliest consideration of works.</p> <p>Have processes in place to notify bus operators of short notice and emergency roadworks.</p>	<p>Active participation in agreed processes.</p> <p>Provide appropriate points of contact for liaison.</p>
<p>Planning and development</p>	<p>Ensure that bus service considerations are built into new development proposals from the earliest possible time.</p>	<p>Involve bus operators in discussions around new development proposals at the earliest possible opportunity.</p>	<p>Engage as necessary with SC and developers.</p>
<p>External funding bids</p>	<p>Maximise external funding for public transport provision and development</p>	<p>Lead and/or support external funding bids to facilitate improvements to public transport services.</p>	<p>Co-operate with and support external funding bids, providing data as necessary and within requested timescales.</p>

Element that is reliant on BSIP funding from the DfT (i.e. can only be progressed if funding is secured)

Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
Element	Description	Local authority commitments (facilities and measures)	Bus operators' commitments (requirements on qualifying local bus services)
Appropriate post-pandemic bus network	Ensure that the bus network matches post-pandemic demands and overall aspirations.	Subject to DfT funding, provide financial support for bus services that are still suffering from low patronage from April 2022, subject to agreeing a transition plan for each service put forward by the operator.	Devise a transition plan for each service, with agreed measures to promote/increase usage, and setting out on-going financial support requirements.

Variations to the EP Scheme

- 5.11 Consideration will be given to potential EP Scheme variations highlighted either by one of the organisations represented on the Shropshire Bus Partnership Board or by any operator of a qualifying bus service. The proposer of a variation should demonstrate how this might contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the EP Plan and current local transport policies. Such requests should be set out in writing and submitted to the Enhanced Partnership administrator.
- 5.12 On receipt of a valid request for a variation, Shropshire Council will reconvene the Shropshire Bus Partnership Board, giving at least 14 days' notice for the meeting, to consider the proposed variation. If the proposed variation is agreed by all representatives of local bus operators and Shropshire Council present, the Council will make the EP Scheme variation. Parties not represented at the meeting will be deemed to be abstaining from the decision.
- 5.13 If there is not unanimous agreement amongst representatives of local bus operators and Shropshire Council present, then the proposed variation will be put to the operator objection mechanism, but with a reduced objection period of 14 days, replacing Part 2 of the Transport Act 2000 section 138L (2) (c). The proposed variation will be advertised on the Council's website and emailed to operators of qualifying local services in the EP Scheme area. If the proposed variation passes the operator objection mechanism, the Council will make the EP Scheme variation, subject to the approval of the Council.

Revocation of the EP Scheme

- 5.14 If, for some reason, it becomes necessary for the EP Scheme to be revoked, the Bus Partnership Board will be reconvened and follow the same process as outlined in the section 'Variations to the Plan' (noting that the agreement will be for revocation and not variation).
- 5.15 If, for some reason, the EP Plan is revoked at any time, the EP Scheme would automatically be revoked, as it cannot exist without an associated EP Plan in place. Equally, if this Scheme (and in the absence of any other Schemes) is revoked, the EP Plan would automatically be revoked, as it cannot exist without a Scheme.
- 5.16 If at any point in the future, the EP Plan and Scheme area is included in a Bus Franchising Area, the relevant requirements set out in this EP Scheme document will cease to apply from the commencement date of the Franchising Scheme.