

Divisions Affected – All

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT

27 MARCH 2025

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Delivery Plan for 2025/26

Report by Director for Environment & Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- (a) **Approve the Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Delivery Plan for 2025/26 and its submission to the Department for Transport; and**
- (b) **Delegate authority to the Director of Environment & Highways to approve the implementation of individual projects contained in the BSIP Delivery Plan for 2025/26 and to make any changes to the programme in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport Management.**

Executive Summary

2. The Department for Transport (DfT) has allocated total bus funding of **£10,146,513** to Oxfordshire County Council for the financial year 2025/26. This is known as the **Bus Grant** and comprises both Capital and Revenue BSIP funding together with the Local Authority element of Bus Service Operators Grant (LA-BSOG).
3. The breakdown of the Bus Grant allocation for 2025/26 is as follows:
 - BSIP funding of £9,226,780 (comprised of £5,441,810 capital and £3,784,971 revenue);
 - LA-BSOG funding of £794,733; and
 - Capacity and capability grant of £125,000.
4. In addition to the above, the County Council has an estimated £2,091,324 of unspent revenue grant and £3,143,549 unspent capital grant from 2024/25 that is to be carried forward and spent in future years in line with the grant conditions.

5. The County Council is required by the DfT to produce and publish a BSIP Delivery Plan for 2025/26 by 31 March 2025. This is a condition for release of the Bus Grant funding by DfT.
6. The BSIP Delivery Plan for 2025/26 outlines how the County Council intends to spend the Oxfordshire Bus Grant and its carry over underspend from 2024/25.

Purpose of the Bus Grant

7. The Bus Grant is provided to make a real difference for people across the county by improving bus services and keeping fares down. The DfT expects all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to provide a Delivery Plan consistent with an up-to-date BSIP, which could include but is not limited to:
 - introducing new or more frequent services, getting more people to more places;
 - creating safer and more accessible bus stops, stations and interchanges;
 - ensuring bus services are punctual and reliable for passengers;
 - improvements to the bus fleet, including introducing zero emission buses;
 - improving bus service information so people know when their bus will turn up;
 - ensuring that socially necessary services are preserved or created; and
 - local fares simplification and fares reductions.
8. The Bus Grant includes an element for capacity and capability. There is an expectation by the DfT that this will be used to ensure the Authority has the necessary skills to deliver the schemes and measures in its Delivery Plan.
9. The proposed BSIP Delivery Plan for 2025/26 has been produced in accordance with the DfT terms and conditions of the funding. The full conditions can be found in Annex 2.

Development and content of the Oxfordshire BSIP Delivery Plan 2025/26

10. The BSIP Delivery Plan for 2025/26, which has been approved by Oxfordshire's Bus Enhanced Partnership Board, aligns with the ambitions of the Oxfordshire BSIP and is based on the following key objectives:
 - maintain the existing bus network;
 - make incremental improvements to core services;
 - make significant enhancements to bus stop infrastructure;
 - provide for improvements to the bus fleet; and
 - undertake design work for further bus priority enhancements.
11. Schemes were selected based on their perceived importance in improving the bus offer, as well as their deliverability within the time and budgets allowed.

12. The majority of the proposed revenue schemes are for continuation of services and fares projects which are already in operation. Should funding not be agreed for these schemes, these existing services and projects would need to be removed resulting in poorer outcomes for other communities.
13. **Summary of Revenue schemes included within the Delivery Plan:**
- Support for bus services, primarily focused on maintaining existing funded services while introducing some enhancements and a small number of new services;
 - Continuation of three existing fare schemes, including the successful countywide multi-operator tickets known as MyBus Oxfordshire;
 - Allocation of staff resources to facilitate, deliver, and administer the programme of work;
 - Provision of a countywide bus stop audit and creation of a bus stop design guide;
 - Targeted marketing and promotion initiatives; and
 - Implementation of a travel education and support scheme for school children.
14. **Summary of Capital schemes included within the Delivery Plan:**
- Installation of further traffic signal bus priority at various junctions;
 - Delivery of three bus priority schemes plus the feasibility and design work for a further two locations;
 - Countywide bus stop improvement works including new and upgraded Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) screens;
 - Small scale improvements to Gloucester Green bus station; and
 - Establishment of a vehicle improvement fund for bus operators.
15. Other schemes from the BSIP (not included in the Delivery Plan) were considered but rejected on the basis that they were not a priority and/or not deliverable within the time and budgets allowed. They remain an aspiration for the future.
16. Suggestions received for new schemes (not included within the BSIP) were considered on the same basis as above. Such schemes may be included within a future iteration of the BSIP.
17. The full BSIP Delivery Plan is contained in Annex 1. Schemes not proposed for inclusion are contained in Annex 3.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

18. The proposals are fully compliant with a range of Council policies, primarily the County Council Strategic Plan, the Local Transport & Connectivity Plan and the Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan.

19. Priority 5 of the Council's strategic priorities is to "*invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network*". The proposals also support other strategic priorities including tackling the climate emergency and inequalities.
20. The Delivery Plan has been developed in accordance with Oxfordshire's BSIP and aligns with its primary objectives of enhancing and expanding the local bus network. This involves addressing both real and perceived barriers to bus usage, promoting sustainable travel choices, and facilitating access to essential services such as healthcare, shopping, education, employment, and training.
21. Consequently, the BSIP Delivery Plan is aligned with and directly supports the County Council's priorities for fostering an inclusive, integrated, and sustainable transportation network, contributing to making Oxfordshire a greener, fairer, and healthier county.

Financial Implications

22. As a condition for release of the 2025/26 Bus Grant funding, the County Council is required by the DfT to produce and publish a BSIP Delivery Plan by 31 March 2025.
23. Total funding to be received in 2025/26 is £10,146,513, of which £5,441,810 is capital and £4,704,703 is revenue. This is accompanied by an estimated £2,091,324 of unspent revenue grant and £3,143,549 unspent capital grant that is to be carried forward and spent in future years in line with the grant conditions.
24. The BSIP Delivery Plan in Annex 1 shows how this funding is proposed to be spent. Figures provided for each scheme are best estimate budgets at this stage, however the overall spending for the programme will be managed so as not to exceed available funds.
25. Should the Delivery Plan not be submitted by 31 March 2025 as required, the DfT may withhold or withdraw the funding. This would lead to a reduction in existing bus services, withdrawal of current fares schemes and delay or cancellation of proposed capital projects.

Comments checked by:

Filipp Skiffins, Assistant Finance Business Partner,
Filipp.Skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk (Finance)

Legal Implications

26. It is anticipated that there are no direct legal implications as a result of adopting the BSIP delivery plan for 2025/26 and submission to DfT (recommendation 1 (a)).
27. The delegation at recommendation 1 (b) for the use of the BSIP funding allocation for 2025/26 and implementation of individual projects within the BSIP

is likely to require a need for funding agreements to be drafted to both satisfy our legal requirements, as well as any terms and conditions associated with the funding which will require legal input at that time.

28. There is an intention that individual projects within the Delivery Plan which may require legal support will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Bus service contracts will be awarded in line with the Council's current procurement process via the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) and use of the direct award provisions available to local authorities through legislation.
29. The Bus Services Act 2017 introduced amendments to the Transport Act 2000 giving new powers to local authorities to facilitate improvements to bus services in their areas.
30. Following publication of the National Bus Strategy for England in March 2021, delivery of the strategy to transform the quality of bus services in England (outside London) is set out at a local level in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).
31. Department for Transport guidance published in January 2024 sets out requirements for updating BSIPs.

Comments checked by: Gareth Hale

Senior Solicitor and Team Leader Contracts and Conveyancing
Gareth.Hale@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

32. Implementing the BSIP Delivery Plan 2025/26 will require significant staff resource.
33. There are three internal council staff roles currently fully- or part-funded through existing BSIP funding to manage and/or deliver existing bus improvement projects. The BSIP Delivery Plan for 2025/26 proposes to allocate funding to maintain these positions for a further year.
34. Funding is also proposed for an additional bus infrastructure staff resource and for supplementary administrative support.
35. If no further funding is agreed for staff resources, delivery of the measures contained within the BSIP Delivery Plan may not proceed or may be delayed.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

36. An EQIA was completed in developing the BSIP Delivery Plan and concluded that this would have a positive impact on individuals and communities more broadly. The following groups would benefit in particular: younger and older people, women, those with protected characteristics of disability, race, pregnancy and maternity, people in rural locations, and those on lower incomes.
37. An EQIA for the Delivery Plan is contained in Annex 4.

Sustainability Implications

38. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) was completed in developing the BSIP Delivery Plan and concluded that there is a positive impact. This is due to encouraging modal shift away from private car use to more sustainable means, and in the potential for further decarbonisation of the bus network.
39. A CIA for the Delivery Plan is contained in Annex 5.

Risk Management

40. The principal risks associated with the BSIP Delivery Plan are:
- delayed approval of the Delivery Plan may place the identified funding at risk, and prevent the award of associated bus service contracts in August 2025;
 - there may be insufficient interest in the services to be tendered to be able to provide the required level of coverage, or prices may be unaffordable;
 - complex capital projects could be delayed and/or not completed, due to lack of design resource, increase in costs;
 - legal and procurement issues could result in delays;
 - consultation into capital projects could result in objections;
 - recruitment to posts may not be successful; and
 - costs of tendered services and/or other projects such as the MyBus scheme could be higher than expected.
41. These risks can be mitigated by:
- approval of the recommendations in this report;
 - taking the proposed approach of prioritising the continuation of existing revenue and capital projects, which have already been established;

- providing a sufficient mobilisation period both for tender returns and for the period between award and contract start date, to maximise the level of potential interest;
 - offering contracts for two years instead of one, to maximise value for money to the Council;
 - working with colleagues across the Council to ensure that sufficient resources are available to pursue the proposed projects in a timely manner;
 - early engagement with legal and procurement teams to identify any potential issues at the start of the project;
 - providing sufficient communications support to effectively convey the benefits of the proposals to the public, including co-production where appropriate;
 - an effective and timely approach to recruitment; and
 - robustly monitoring costs throughout the life of the Delivery Plan and making adjustments to projects if required.
42. Individual project managers will be responsible for identifying and mitigating against any risks for their schemes. In addition to this, the Oxfordshire Enhanced Partnership Board (consisting of representatives from County Council, bus operators and other partners) maintains a Risk Register for all schemes and activities associated with the partnership.

Consultations

43. Consultation and stakeholder engagement was undertaken during March and April 2024 in developing the latest version of the Oxfordshire BSIP. This was used to shape the aspirations and proposals contained within from which the Delivery Plan 2025/26 has been prepared.
44. Council officers, bus operators, bus user group representatives and other parties have been involved in putting together and reviewing the Delivery Plan and have indicated their support.
45. Some schemes will need to undergo the standard processes for scheme development and public consultations, particularly larger bus priority schemes. This will provide opportunities for further stakeholder and public review and input.
46. The Council uses best endeavours to consult on new bus service contracts when possible within available timescales, where substantial changes may be made or where there is more than one option available.

Paul Fermer
Director for Environment & Highways

Annex 1: Oxfordshire BSIP Delivery Plan 2025/26
Annex 2: Funding terms of the 2025/26 Bus Grant
Annex 3: Schemes not proposed for inclusion
Annex 4: Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)
Annex 5: Climate Impact Assessment (CIA)

Background papers: [Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) (Published June 2024)

Contact Officer: Katharine Broomfield
Technical Lead (Bus Service Improvement)
07523800079
katharine.broomfield@oxfordshire.gov.uk

March 2025