

Annex 4 Example Leicester Buses EP+ proposal



Enhanced Partnership Plus

– delivering franchise standards under deregulation

April 2025

Introduction

1. Leicester has nearly completed all 100 stretched commitments of its first Enhanced Partnership Scheme 2022-25.
2. Patronage is now above pre-covid levels. Fare paying levels are 16% above pre-covid but concessionary travel remains at around 70% below. Punctuality and reliability is still rising, satisfaction levels for all key measures are well above national averages and multi-operating ticketing now accounts for a third of the overall market (over £8m pa)
3. However, bus passenger levels per head of population are still around half of Nottingham, Reading and Brighton – similar sized unitaries with many of the same socio-economic characteristics.
4. A key difference is that these areas have a core urban bus network provided by a *single* local operator – giving greater cohesion, local clarity and local ownership. There is no premium for interchange between routes, a single common ticketing platform, single brand and information offer. They also have one common accelerated standard for bus investment.
5. This is also resulting in greater cross-city trip making and better use of spare contra-flow seat capacity, crucial when over 80% of travel generators lie outside the City Centre.
6. These areas are, in effect, getting most if not all the benefits that a bus franchise can deliver, but within a deregulated system.
7. It should be noted, in passing, that most of the other positive publicised features of the London and Manchester franchises are a direct result of significant additional

local government capital and revenue spend – something that could equally be delivered under the Enhanced Partnership model.

Franchise-like Network Integration with Enhanced Partnerships

8. Delivering a common integrated network standard in areas with several operators is challenging since it inevitably involves some restrictions in individual commercial freedoms in return for long term passenger growth.
9. Our agreed BSIP24 sets this situation out in more detail and proposes action in the following key areas.

Common Network plan

Aim

- A network of 24 commercial ‘mainlines’ with proposed daytime (every 15 mins), evening and Sunday (every 30mins) frequency standards
- Timetable integration or exclusivity for ‘mainlines’ served by more than one operator
- Standardised mainline operational standards – a single operational charter
- A subsidised network of 6 Greenlines to the same common frequency standards, providing wider orbital and park and ride movement.

Progress to date:

- Good progress with qualifying agreements on 9 shared corridors, but little consistent marketing/branding and harmed by Flexi (MTC) fare premia.
- Development of Greenlines with funding available to date – electric buses, Hop, Hospital Hopper frequency enhancements, improvements to Orbital.

To Progress:

- Better co-ordinated discussion with operators on commercial development of the Mainlines network
- Development of common customer charter used exclusively by each operator
- Agreed common operational standards
- Integration of park and ride services into overall network
- Further frequency improvements in 3 highlighted mainlines and 2 greenlines

Common Single Fare and Ticketing structure

Aim

- All operators exclusively use the Flexi ticketing structure

- No premium for interchange between routes
- Single common retail network

Progress to date :

- Standardisation of ticket conditions across operators
- Widening of Flexi range
- Introduction of TOTO day/week MTC capping and Mobile MTC ticketing.
- Reduced fare premium and significant increase in Flexi revenue.

To progress :

- Further reduction in fare premium
- Move to single fare structure
- Move to single ticketing structure and retail offer.

Common Single Brand, Information, Promotional Plan

Aim

- Single common brand, information and communication platforms to Leicester Buses brand guidelines
- Agreed and funded continuous marketing plan

Progress to date

- All buses use the same livery – green buses with Leicester Buses promotion throughout – inside and out
- All infrastructure exclusively uses same Leicester Buses branding . No council branding.
- Reference to partnership on own website.
- Establishment of Leicester Buses website as one-stop shop for information and ticketing
- Coordinated joint printed information to LB brand in the City centre
- Coordinated joint electronic information at bus stations and bus stops

To Progress:

- All printed, web and real time information to use one single common brand to the exclusion of others
- No corporate single operator or Council branded information provision
- All parties exclusively use one common promotion and comms plan
- Stronger Leicester buses branding to bus, bus station and park and ride sites - exterior and internally

Common electric bus network

Aim

- All buses on the mainline urban network to be electric by end 2025/26
- All buses on whole mainline and greenlines network electric by end 2030.

Progressed to date

- Well over half the Leicester network is now electric – 159 electric buses operating from four new charging depots.
- A further 18 Stagecoach electric buses are being introduced in early 2025, bringing the total to 177 – over three quarters of the urban network.
- Unsuccessful Zebra 2 bid

To Progress

- Remainder of Arriva double deckers - urban network (35 buses)
- Arriva single decker suburban network (29 buses)
- Centrebus 22 (4 buses)
- Vectare Novus Direct (4-5 buses)

However, a firm commitment from all three operators for investment to upgrade all these buses within the next 12 months should match external funding become available

10. It is hoped that over the next 18 months the Leicester Buses Partnership can further progress these integration areas under Enhanced Partnership Plus which mimics most of the integration strengths of a franchise without the turbulence, time and expense of establishing and continually managing a large bus franchise.

11. To assist operators to flex further along this integration path, it is proposed that the £9m BSIP 2025/26 funds are targeted in areas that focus mainly on the commercial mainlines, with swift further delivery in areas where there is already good momentum – electric bus investment, printed information, subsidised Flexi tickets, real time information, mainline frequencies and marketing.

12. Of course, this process inevitably forms part of a continuous assessment of the best governance model to use in future years. If we can get very close to the integration standards of a franchise under an EP Plus regime but usage per head remains significantly lower than other similar areas, then this would perhaps indicate that fault does not lie in the governance model but elsewhere eg funding levels, external land-use policies, local government boundaries etc.