

# PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 JUNE 2026

## OxBUS 2040: Plan for Bus and Enhanced Partnership Plus

### Report by the Director of Environment and Highways

#### RECOMMENDATION

1. The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** the proposed approach, content, engagement and consultation for the OxBus 2040: Plan for Bus and the Enhanced Partnership Plus, including delivery timescales, **RAISE** any questions, and **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet.

#### Executive Summary

2. This paper provides a high-level overview of the emerging OxBUS 2040: Plan for Bus (the Plan) and sets out early thinking to enable scrutiny of its proposed structure, content and engagement/consultation plans. It is being presented before any public consultation so that the committee can help shape and influence the approach.
3. Officers intend to return to the Committee with the final draft Plan after consultation, before it is considered by Cabinet later this year. We are currently working towards a timetable of November 2026.
4. Officers are progressing the development of the Plan and initial discussions have taken place with bus operators to inform its development. The Plan will support delivery of the County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), particularly Policy 18, which highlights the need for an effective and reliable bus network to achieve LTCP targets.
5. The Plan will set out a bold and ambitious approach to improving bus transport and connectivity across the County to 2040, aligning with other adopted plans such as the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail (Rail Plan). It will promote inclusive and accessible bus travel for all, building on Oxfordshire's existing strong bus network.
6. The Plan will be a daughter document of the Council's LTCP, adopted in July 2022. The Plan will sit under the LTCP and alongside several other Council policies and strategies relating to transport including those relating to Rail, Mobility hubs, Freight and Logistics, Active Travel and Movement and Place Plans.

7. Alongside the development of the Plan, officers are also progressing proposals for an Enhanced Partnership Plus (EP+), as agreed by Cabinet on 21 October 2025, which approved the development of an EP+ as the preferred approach to bus delivery in Oxfordshire. This will improve and strengthen the existing Enhanced Partnership (EP), which is a statutory arrangement between the local authority and bus operators, underscored by an EP Plan and Scheme setting out legally binding shared commitments to improve bus services.
8. The Plan and EP+ will be developed in parallel as there is a clear and complementary relationship between the two. The Plan sets the long-term vision, outcomes and strategic direction for buses in Oxfordshire (the “what”), while EP+ provides the primary mechanism for delivery (the “how”), translating these ambitions into specific commitments, schemes and interventions through the statutory EP framework.
9. The EP+ proposal will be submitted for approval to Cabinet or Cabinet Member Decision, at the same time or after the Bus Plan, but not before.

## **Purpose and scope of the Plan and EP+**

10. The Plan will set out the Council’s bold and ambitious plan to improve bus transport and connectivity across the County to 2040 and will replace the previously adopted Connecting Oxfordshire: Bus & Rapid Transit Strategy (2015-2031).
11. To maintain consistency across the Council’s transport policies and strategies, and to support easier public engagement with these documents, the Plan is intended to follow the same style and approach as the recently adopted Rail Plan. It will therefore include the same sections, as set out below:
  - Foreword
  - Introduction
  - Visions, themes and priorities
  - Buses in numbers
  - Opportunities and challenges
  - Delivering the outcomes
  - Monitoring and evaluation
  - Annexes
12. The proposed EP+ will build on the existing EP to include new additional and strengthened legally binding commitments on both the County Council (as the Local Transport Authority) and local bus operators. These commitments will need to comply with the Government’s new Guidance on Enhanced Partnerships which includes set minimum standards to incorporate by 1 April 2027 (see ‘Other Documents’ section).
13. Many of these requirements align closely with the measures already being considered through the EP+ approach. The intention therefore is not only to

meet these minimum standards, but - where funding allows - to go further and position Oxfordshire at the forefront of bus service improvement nationally. The Council has identified £6m of capital funding over the next three years from Oxfordshire's Integrated Transport Fund grant from the Government to support the development and implementation of EP+ measures, which in turn will support delivery of the outcomes set out in the Plan.

14. The guidance also states that a separate Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) document is no longer required, and content can instead be incorporated within the EP Plan. Officers consider this approach would be beneficial to reduce duplication, avoid potential confusion, improve clarity and accessibility for the public, and streamline the ongoing management of what would otherwise be three separate documents (BSIP, EP and Bus Plan).

## **Emerging content of the Plan for Bus**

### **Vision, themes and priorities**

15. The Vision, Themes and Priorities chapter defines the overarching vision for Oxfordshire's bus network and translates this into a structured set of themes and priorities underpinning the Plan.
16. There are three themes and three priorities as follows:
  - Theme 1: Improve connectivity and infrastructure
  - Theme 2: Climate action
  - Theme 3: Bus as place shaper
  - Priority 1: Better, safer journeys for all
  - Priority 2: Seamless travel and integrated ticketing
  - Priority 3: A clean, green bus network
17. A draft of this section with more detail is included at **Annex 1**.

### **Buses in Numbers**

18. The Buses in Numbers chapter will offer a visually engaging snapshot of the bus network, using key data and graphics to illustrate its scale, usage, accessibility and wider impacts. The latest draft of this is included at **Annex 2** and will be updated with the latest figures prior to final approval.
19. This chapter will include a countywide map of the bus network.

### **Opportunities and challenges**

20. The Opportunities and Challenges chapter will summarise the main issues shaping the Oxfordshire bus network to establish the context for future interventions. These are listed below and aligned, where possible, with the

topics in the Rail Plan.

- Oxfordshire today: a growing county under pressure
- Unlocking sustainable growth through development
- Connecting Oxfordshire to local (inc rural), regional, national and international opportunities
- Supporting our visitor and night-time economies
- Enabling inclusive, accessible safe everyday travel
- Tackling congestion, improving reliability and dependability
- Delivering a financially sustainable and growing network
- Accelerating decarbonisation while maintaining a resilient network
- Creating a seamless, integrated public transport system

21. More detail on the content of this chapter is included at **Annex 3**. Please note that this is not presented in the format it will take in the final Plan, where it will be developed into a more narrative, text-based format.

### **Delivering the outcomes**

22. The Delivering the Outcomes chapter will translate the Bus Plan's ambitions into a clear delivery framework, setting out strategic outcomes alongside the proposed interventions which are still being developed. It will include a 'Plan on a Page' - a concise, visual summary of delivery - which was a key strength of the Rail Plan. The finer detail of the interventions, particularly how they translate into actionable commitments, will likely sit within the EP+ document.

23. Six key strategic outcomes have been identified which fall into the following categories listed below.

- Network design, growth, investment (including reinvestment) and inclusive, planning-aligned services
- Network performance, stability, data and journey time reliability
- Passenger experience, integration and people-centred design
- Infrastructure, vehicles and on-board experience
- Decarbonisation, energy and innovation
- Inclusion, accessibility and travel behaviour change

24. More detail on the content of this chapter is included at **Annex 4**. Please note that this is not presented in the format it will take in the final Plan, where it will be developed into a more narrative, text-based format alongside the 'Plan on a Page'.

25. The new commitments included under the EP+ will support and align with Plan deliverables. Please note that some of these are mandatory as per the Government's new Guidance on Enhanced Partnerships.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

26. This chapter has not yet been drafted. However, it is proposed that outcomes will be monitored and progress reported through the Council’s existing LTCP reporting processes.
27. In addition, from April 2026 a new Department for Transport (DfT) accountability framework will apply. This will introduce a consistent national outcomes framework and standardised reporting requirements for all Local Transport Authorities, including on programme delivery, expenditure and performance against customer-focused indicators.

## Proposed roadmap, including engagement and consultation

28. **Table 1** sets out the proposed engagement process and timescales for developing and adopting the Plan. Engagement and consultation for the EP+ will be incorporated within this process, but it will ultimately be presented as a separate report for Council approval, followed by a statutory EP variation and operator objection process prior to adoption.

**Table 1: Proposed roadmap and timescales**

Engagement process	Timescales	Comment
Early Scoping	Completed – November 25 to February 26	Following Cabinet approval to proceed with developing an EP+ proposal, early scoping was conducted with bus operators, EP working groups and Oxon4Buses to get suggestions on the scope of the EP+. This is also pertinent to development of the Plan.
Discovery – Workshop 1	Completed – March 26	Officers used this to inform the emerging Plan and agree the overall direction of travel.
Produce and Deliver – Workshop 2	Completed – May 26	Further collaboration with operators to inform thinking.
Produce and Deliver – Governance	June 26	Members review via a briefing with the newly appointed Cabinet Member for Transport and the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Produce and Deliver – Workshop 3	July - August 26	Further engagement with key stakeholders including bus user groups to inform thinking. This is likely to include a workshop and convene an EP Stakeholder Forum meeting. In addition, subject to funding, officers are considering a recall of the Citizens Assembly and presentation at the Inclusive Transport and Movement Focus Group.
Produce and Deliver – Review feedback and	August 26	Further collaboration with operators to review feedback to date and draft a full draft Plan and executive summary version ready for consultation. This will include materials relevant to the EP+.

draft the full Plan		
Transition and consultation	September 26	Hold a 4 week (minimum) public consultation via Let's Talk and accompanying public events. Officers will also work with members and partners to publicise this Plan.
Adopt and Embed	November 26	Seek adoption from members

29. Alongside new evidence gathered over the coming months, officers will draw on findings from earlier consultation and engagement, including the Let's Talk survey (April 2024) undertaken to support the Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan, the most recent annual bus passenger surveys, and the Oxfordshire results from the National Highways & Transport survey. Previous feedback from residents consistently identified five key priorities for bus improvement (in order): faster or more direct services, improved reliability, increased service frequency, better value fares, and improved pre-journey information.
30. Recent engagement with local bus user group Oxon4Buses (O4B) highlighted the importance of strong governance arrangements within the EP, including mechanisms to incorporate passenger voice and provide constructive challenge. Key themes included maintaining a comprehensive and value-for-money network, increasing investment in the passenger waiting environment, aligning with wider infrastructure such as Oxford City Centre and rail station, and developing a more ambitious and simplified approach to fares and ticketing, alongside greater transparency and reinvestment in local services.
31. Officers will also take account of lessons learned from the development of the Rail Plan.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

32. The County Council's Strategic Plan for 2025–28 sets out a vision for Oxfordshire to be a place where everyone can live well, with thriving communities and a strong local economy. The Bus Plan recognises bus as a key enabler of this vision, and therefore improvements in this area will make a significant and direct contribution to delivering the Strategic Plan's objectives.
33. The Council's Strategic Plan outlines key headline projects delivering a "Greener, Fairer and Healthier" Oxfordshire. This is alongside the nine strategic priorities. The Plan helps to address this as it considers how bus travel can be delivered for all communities across Oxfordshire and supports the transition towards zero emission bus journeys. This will strengthen and improve local economies, deliver improvements towards air quality and reduce noise levels and seeks to improve connectivity around Oxfordshire recognising the importance bus also has in developing places and communities.

34. As noted above, the Plan specifically looks to deliver against **Policy 18** of the LTCP by setting a clear direction and vision for bus travel across Oxfordshire, explores the infrastructure and bus network that may be required to deliver this, ensures bus journeys are improved for all and works proactively with our bus operators and other key stakeholders to continue to operate an efficient, flexible and reliable bus network.
35. Neither the Plan nor the EP+ will introduce any policies or proposed service changes that are not in line with the corporate policies and priorities.

## **Financial Implications**

36. The Plan does not create any direct financial commitments for the County Council, aside from the temporary staff resource required for its development, which has already been approved as part of the council's budget setting process. Interventions will be progressed subject to the availability of funding.
37. The EP+, however, may introduce additional commitments that require funding. Any commitments that cannot be met from existing budgets would be considered through the annual budget-setting process.
38. The Council has identified £6m of capital funding over the next three years (£1.5m in 2027/28, £2m in 2028/29 and £2.5m in 2029/30) from Oxfordshire's Integrated Transport Fund grant from the Government in order to support EP+ measures, such as additional bus priority or upgraded bus stop infrastructure. No additional revenue funding has been identified at this stage.

Comments checked by:  
Filipp Skiffins, Finance Business Partner

## **Legal Implications**

39. The approach proposed in this report complies with the Council's statutory duties under the Transport Act 2000 (as amended), which requires the Council to develop policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport to, from and within their area, and carry out their functions so as to implement those policies.
40. The Plan will be a public facing strategy document owned by the County Council and therefore the usual reputational risks may apply. There will be no commitment on the County Council to deliver on outcomes contained within.
41. In contrast, the EP+ is a statutory and legally binding document; accordingly, all draft proposals - particularly those placing new commitments on the County Council - will be subject to review by Legal.
42. Government guidance requires Enhanced Partnerships to be updated to incorporate new minimum standards by 1 April 2027 as a condition of

Oxfordshire's Integrated Transport and Bus Services Fund allocation from the Government.

43. Ownership and responsibility for the Plan and EP+ rests with the Local Transport Authority and is therefore expected to sit at Combined Authority level following devolution.

Comments checked by:  
Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Regulatory),

## **Staff Implications**

44. A temporary 'Programme Lead' position has recently been appointed to lead on the development and consultation of the Plan, funded through existing County Council staffing budgets. It is anticipated that this position will cease once the Place Shaping Redesign has been completed (currently scheduled for September 2026) as there is a dedicated role identified within the draft new structure.
45. Once the Plan and EP+ are adopted, the intention is for the relevant teams including Public Transport, Infrastructure Development, Strategic Planning, Highways Maintenance and Civil Enforcement, to facilitate delivery, supported by colleagues in Transport Strategy and Policy.
46. Officers would work alongside members to agree and discuss any additional resources if required once the plan and EP+ is adopted.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

47. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been undertaken at this stage, as it would be premature given that the detail is still being developed, however the aim of both the Plan and EP+ is to have a positive impact on equality and inclusion. A full EIA will be completed prior to submitting to Cabinet.

## **Sustainability Implications**

48. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) has not been undertaken at this stage, as it would be premature given that the detail is still being developed, however the aim of both the Plan and EP+ is to have a positive impact in supporting the Council's climate objectives. A full CIA will be completed prior to submitting to Cabinet.

## **Risk Management**

49. The key risks and mitigations are listed in Annex 5.

Paul Fermer  
Director of Environment and Highways

Annex 1: Visions, themes and priorities  
Annex 2: Buses in numbers  
Annex 3: Opportunities and Challenges - outline content  
Annex 4: Delivering the Outcomes - outline content  
Annex 5: Risks and mitigations

Background papers: None

Other Documents: [Decision details - Future Bus Regulation Options](#)  
[Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#)  
[OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail](#)  
[Oxfordshire: Bus & Rapid Transit Strategy \(2015-2031\)](#)  
[Government Enhanced Partnerships Guidance](#)  
[The Government's Vision for Buses](#)

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