

The National Bus Strategy offers an opportunity to improve Somerset's bus service, both its network and its infrastructure, thereby making buses a more attractive alternative to going by car. Somerset CC has currently the fourth lowest levels of bus usage per head of population and therefore ought to be identified as a priority for investment through the National Bus Strategy. An enhanced bus partnership is how the Government's climate emergency and levelling-up agendas can deliver major benefits in Somerset.

Somerset County Council is the Local Transport Authority in Somerset but feeds into the South West Transport Board and Western Gateway Transport Board for regional co ordination.

Somerset County Council has agreed to be carbon neutral by 2030. Achieving modal shift from cars to public transport is essential if carbon reduction targets are to be met.

We make sure the needs and concerns of communities and passengers are at the heart of transport planning.

Somerset Bus Partnership Principles

The aim is to implement a culture change, getting people out of cars and instead making journeys via public transport and active travel.

1. Key Performance Indicators

The following Key Performance Indicators for the Somerset BSIP should be monitored twice a year:

- Customer satisfaction
- Passenger growth. Number of new regular bus users who previously went primarily by car, this to be monitored through bus passenger numbers each month once the BSIP is operational.
- Journey times and reliability of services
- Bus shelter maintenance and cleaning – all broken or defaced glass panes to be repaired within two months. All bus shelters to be cleaned twice a year.
- Updated bus shelter information / timetables displayed at bus stops and online at bus operator's website.
- How many bus stops with Real Time Information (RTI).
RTI on all bus shelters in all towns by end of 2023 in Somerset.
- Contactless payments available on all buses by end of 2022.
- Number of bus routes carrying bicycles?
- All buses and coaches in Somerset to be Euro 6 compliant by end of 2022.
Funding will be needed to be made available to retrofit buses.

2. Bus Service Improvement Plans

- Bus Back Better seeks to improve bus service, we need an Enhance Quality Partnership across Somerset, WECA and North Somerset, Devon and Dorset.
- The BSIP need to work across county boundaries, particularly of concern is the Bristol Bath travel to work area

3. Bus Services Provision

- The towns of Somerset (over a population of 2500) should have inter urban services providing regular connecting bus services, both to neighbouring towns within Somerset and to neighbouring towns in adjacent authorities.
 - Interurban routes should run 7 days a week, including bank holidays,
 - Services on each route running at least once an hour from early morning until late evening.
- All bus routes which have at least a 2 hourly bus service Monday to Friday should be extended to include a Saturday service. All bus routes which have a Saturday service will also run on a

Bank Holiday.

- Express interurban routes, such as Yeovil-Taunton and Frome-Bath should be considered. These routes should be in addition to the current inter urban routes serving the villages.
- Bus routes should be easy to understand. All routes should where possible run in both directions on the same road.
- The funding and management of cross border bus services should be agreed by the two authorities and monitored by a local forum.
- Intra urban town services should run 7 days a week, including bank holidays, with services running at least every 10 minutes daytime, 15 minutes evenings from early morning until late evening. Intra urban bus services should serve the railway station, hospitals, retail hubs, industrial parks and major housing estates.
- Every stage of a bus journey should be accessible, from planning a trip and buying a ticket to the infrastructure, vehicle and overall experience. Community engagement, particularly with disability groups and passengers is critical in identifying and overcoming barriers to travel.
- Great importance and rerouting of services to be given to public transport to leisure facilities e.g Longleat Safari Park, Cheddar Gorge, seaside destinations and National Trust properties on days and at times when they are open.
- Improving coordination between bus services and other transport modes. All services which serve railway stations (including West Somerset Railway and East Somerset Railway) should be timed where possible to connect with trains and operate at all times when trains are running.
- Bins at town centre / key bus stops / bus stations with cafe and toilets at bus stations / interchanges.
- Creation of interchange hubs to allow multi-modal journeys, interfacing with bicycles, local taxis and demand-responsive services, as well as cars.
- All new housing developments of over 10 houses and retail / industrial parks should have a transport plan that includes bus services and the access to them. Industrial parks should have bus links to housing in and around the town and to the local railway stations. Bus stops / service should be put in before the first house is sold or the first industrial unit is sold.
- Walking and cycling routes to bus stops should be planned and maintained, particularly on new housing developments. Safe cycle storage should be available.
- The existing Demand Responsive services should be made available to all and expanded to cover all communities which do not have regular bus services. DRT should also be expanded to cover evenings and weekends. The current work on implementing a trial Digital Demand Responsive service (developed by South Somerset District Council's Economic Development Team) should be followed through to implementation of the trial in 2023 as planned.
- Local communities should be encouraged to help suggest and develop new and innovative demand responsive services.
- Transport providers should be persuaded to work towards providing buses which are accessible to disabled, wheelchair, pushchair, visually impaired, deaf and bicycle users.
- Timetable changes should be limited to two dates per year when possible. The dates to be coordinated with neighbouring Authorities. Timetable changes should be publicised with heavy promotion and marketing before the change, during the changeover period and towards the end of any outside funding.
- Providers and Somerset County Council must consult with bus users on service changes.
- Cross boundary bus links to Bristol, Bath, Trowbridge and to North East Somerset, Dorset and Devon, must be treated with priority, and agreed with the local transport Authority, and monitored by local forum groups.
- Park & Ride services should be operational from 6.30am to 11.30pm to cater for commuters / people on shift patterns, people on a night out or at college for an evening class.
- Buses should be able to carry bicycles on bus routes. (Metric: how many routes carry bicycles).
- To reduce social isolation and discourage car use, bus services should connect rural areas to nearby towns. All new out-of-town developments should include a transport plan, with transport hubs provided to enable transport exchange between bus, rail, car, cycling and walking, taxis and other demand-responsive services.
- Somerset County Council will work with local communities to develop and provide public transport services for the small and isolated communities, working to provide innovative

solutions involving demand-responsive solutions and community transport connecting with transport hubs, bus stations, and town centres.

- Cheaper school transport encouraging more people to catch the bus to school rather than parents drive them to school.
- Coaches play an important role in transporting people in Somerset across the Southwest with services provided by National Express, Stagecoach and Berry's Coaches.

4. **Infrastructure**

- Delivering improvements to services and growing bus use are fundamental requirements of BSIPs. Bus priority measures will ensure services are reliable and punctual, as well as faster and more convenient than travelling by private car, not only improving services but encouraging modal shift.
- Bus stations at Taunton, Yeovil, Bridgwater and Wells need to be protected from being sold and from any change of use. (Taunton needs to be brought back into service as soon as possible). Bus stations should be managed and monitored by physical staff who can assist passengers and with both enhanced facilities and real-time information. The passenger facilities at the bus stations need to be open from early morning to late evening.
- There must be a vast improvement in information provision at bus stops, bus stations, and major hubs. It must be a condition of running a bus service that a timetable is displayed and updated by the bus operator at every bus stop. If a bus stop doesn't have a timetable case, it is Somerset County Council's responsibility to install one. There must be an acceptance of responsibility for information being accurate and responding quickly when errors are found. Bus stops should carry code information, and Real Time Information where possible. (Metric: numbers of bus stops with Real Time Information)
- Somerset County Council must take responsibility for resolving problems with bus stops. This includes identifying who is responsible for the solution and progressing it to completion. Somerset County Council must take responsibility for all bus stops and shelters in Somerset and also be responsible for their maintenance and cleaning. All bus shelters to be cleaned twice a year.
- Improving and expanding bus priority schemes and bus priority at road junctions / lights and road works.

5. **Bus Information**

- There are millions of people in the UK without access to a bank account, mobile device or internet access, and many more who are old, vulnerable, or have poor mental health. So bus information should be available both at bus stops and online and bus operators should continue to take cash as well as offer contactless payment.
- Bus timetable information should be available at a touch of a phone, on buses (through hard copies of timetables), at bus stops, on websites and in printed format.
- Printed timetables to be available at bus stations and local Information Centres and on buses.
- Maps need to be provided at bus stops/shelters of where the bus stops are and bus routes in all towns over population of 5000.
- Bus operators must show other operators' details when more than one operator run services on the same route.
- Real Time Information must be on all bus shelters in towns in all towns by end of 2023 in Somerset. Real time information should be available via an application on a smartphone for stops where it is not economic to provide a real time display.
- Smaller operators need support in providing online digital information.
- Real Time Information on local buses to be displayed all railway stations. Maps need to be at all rail stations showing where the nearest bus stops are. Bus timetable information also needs to be made available at train stations.
- Somerset should create a transport app / total transport portal showing different modes of transport in your locality.

6. **Environmentally friendly buses**

- Somerset County Council need to demonstrate how air quality will be improved and zero

emissions achieved.

- More zero-emission buses should be provided through the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas scheme and other funding streams.
- All buses and coaches in Somerset to be Euro 6 compliant by end of 2022. Funding will be needed to be made available to retrofit buses.

7. **Tickets / Fares**

- Low flat fares for all bus operators in towns and cities e.g. in Frome £1.50 adult single fare regardless of bus operator within Frome. The cheapest bus ticket in Wells for an adult is currently £2.50 single.
- Multi-operator ticketing at an affordable price – we need a Somerset ticket plus expand the Avon Rider ticket to Mendip. Mendip's travel to work corridor is primarily WECA and Wiltshire (Avon Ride currently covers WECA and Wiltshire). We also need an equivalent to an Avon Rider and also a Somerset wide ticket for 7-day journeys and month journeys and multiple journey tickets.
- All bus operators should have their own 1-day travel card equivalent / capped fares for multiple journey use in one day.
- Look to extend the bus/rail integration TravelWest Freedom Pass across the whole of Somerset.
- Fares should be reduced and simplified with through ticketing between operators and across operators in towns as well as more through ticketing along routes that involve buses and trains.
- All bus operators should take contactless payments by end of 2022. Small bus operators may need financial support to upgrade their ticket machines.
- Through tickets on routes e.g. Taunton to Weymouth (First Bus 30 Taunton to Axminster x53/x51 First Bus to Weymouth) or cross boundary Dorset and Somerset day ticket / weekly / monthly ticket.
- Special fares for young people.
- Concessionary fares to remain but digital format for a mobile phone needs to be considered.

8. **Consultation with the RMT and UNITE Union**

9. **Marketing**

- Bus information and link to timetables to be on all cities, town and village websites across Somerset. There must be repeated publicity in all media about using buses instead of cars.

10. **Disincentivising driving by car**

- Bus travel needs to be attractive enough that people choose to use it, and affordable enough that everyone can use it.
- Somerset CC should consider disincentivising driving by car into town. This could be done through increasing the costs of driving into and parking in Somerset. This might be a mid-term initiative rather than an immediate one given the need to support the recovery of many of our High Street businesses.
- Reduce car parking spaces in areas which cause bus delays in towns including in residential areas.

11. **Transport Forum**

- A Public Transport Forum to be set up by Somerset County Council to involve local town and parish councils, bus operators, coach operators, train operators, bus user groups, and large employers. The Public Transport Forum will help feed into and develop BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership Plan.
- The Public Transport Forum will regularly review the Bus Improvement Plan and recommend changes to it and monitor the achievement of targets discussing ways to Bus Back Better in Somerset.