



Norfolk County Council

# Bus Service Improvement Plan

Annual review and progress report



October 2022

# Executive Summary

In March 2021 the government announced a new National Bus Strategy called Bus Back Better (BBB). As part of this, and to receive any funding, Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) had to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by 31 October 2021 and form an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with bus operators by 31 March 2022 to deliver the desired and stated improvements. BSIPs should be reviewed annually and we have just completed the first annual review (October 2022).

The BSIP that was developed and published in October 2021 was for a 5-year period to 2027 and remains current in terms of our ambitions for improving public transport in Norfolk. Importantly, our 4 key objectives remain the same:

- To rebuild and increase passenger confidence
- To have a green and sustainable transport offer
- To have a public transport network that is the first-choice mode for most journeys, for existing and new customers
- To have a simple, seamless and affordable fares and ticketing offer

In April 2022 Norfolk was one of just 31 Local Transport Authorities to receive funding to deliver measures outlined in their BSIP, which was one of the highest allocations in the country. The allocation is £49.55m over 3 years (April 2022 – March 2025) split between £30.9m for capital measures and £18.6m for revenue interventions. This progress report therefore provides an update on:

- The current situation and context in Norfolk as bus services continue to recover from the covid-19 pandemic
- What we have delivered so far, since the BSIP was published in October 2021
- How we propose to spend the funding received to further improve bus services in Norfolk and meet the targets outlined in the BSIP



# Section 2:

## Context: Bus Services in Norfolk

### **Bus service network**

The network of bus services in Norfolk has remained largely unchanged over the last year, despite ever growing costs (inflation for things like fuel, wages and parts is currently sitting at about 15-20%). Patronage since the pandemic is also still lower than 2019 levels, meaning that there is less income for the bus operators to support services. Government recovery funding (CBSSG and BRG) has largely helped to maintain this stable network, as well as good support from the local transport authority (Norfolk County Council).

Passenger numbers are steadily increasing post-pandemic, giving positive signs that they may return somewhere close to pre-covid levels during 2023, giving further confidence to operators that fares revenue will return. The current average figure for passenger journeys is 80% of pre-covid levels and we are anticipating about 22m passenger journeys to be made in Norfolk in the year from April 2022 to March 2023.

Those less willing to return to public transport appear to be those with concessionary passes, as this figure sits at about 55% of pre-covid levels. And those returning to Park & Ride services is even lower, at about 40%, reflecting the decrease in commuting due to a change in working patterns.

One new service has been introduced in Norfolk since the BSIP was written – the new flexibus+ service - following a successful bid to the government's Rural Mobility Fund. This is a demand responsive service covering 85sq miles in the centre of Norfolk, feeding remote villages into the market town of Swaffham for services within the town or for onward travel using mainline scheduled bus services. The service started in March 2022 and has seen steady passenger growth every week. One of the key reasons for this passenger growth is the introduction of an App for people to make easy bookings, to pay, and to track the vehicle, thus attracting a different customer base to traditional dial-a-ride schemes. This App also calculates the most efficient route based on the bookings received, meaning that the service is delivered very effectively. A through-ticket is also being introduced so that people can make easy onward journeys with another operator when they change at Swaffham.

### **Bus operators**

The number of bus operators in Norfolk remains the same (15) with one small change - Completely Coach Travel stopped providing local bus services for us following a re-tendering exercise and a new operator, Vectare, joined the market when they won the contract for the flexibus+ service.

## Bus priority measures

An updated table of all existing bus priority facilities across the county is below:

### Bus lanes

- Norwich - Newmarket Road – inbound & outbound
  - Norwich - Dereham Road – inbound, Orchard Street to Grapes Hill
  - Norwich - Grapes Hill – inbound Dereham Road to Grapes Hill roundabout
  - Norwich - Sprowston Road – inbound from Rosemary Road to the outer ring road
  - Norwich - Cromer Road - inbound, Norwich airport and Park & Ride site to Mayfield Avenue
  - Norwich - Aylsham Road – inbound, Baxter Court to Woodcock Road
  - Norwich - Grove Road inbound
  - Norwich - Earlham Road – inbound, West Pottergate to Paragon Place
  - Norwich - Magdalen Street – contraflow inbound, Cowgate Street to St Saviours Lane
  - Norwich - Thorpe Road – contraflow inbound - Clarence Road to Carrow Road
  - Norwich - Wroxham Road – inbound, Russell Avenue to Porter's Loke
  - Norwich - B1172 Norwich Road on the approach to Thickthorn roundabout
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### Bus only roads/links

- Norwich - St Stephens Street, city centre
  - Norwich - Castle Meadow, city centre
  - Norwich - Brazengate
  - Norwich - Catton Grove Road
  - Norwich - Market Avenue
  - Norwich - Thorpe Road
  - Norwich - Clover Hill Road to Earlham Green Lane
  - King's Lynn - Harding's Way
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### Bus gates

- Bowthorpe, Norwich - Humbleyard
  - Norwich - Access Road: Clover Hill Road to Earlham Green Lane
  - Norwich - Albion Way
  - Norwich - Catton Grove
  - Norwich - Rampant Horse Street
  - Norwich - Upper King Street
  - Norwich - Geoffrey Watling Way, adjacent to football stadium
  - Costessey, Norwich - Breckland Road adjacent to Dereham Road
  - Great Yarmouth - Regent Road
  - Great Yarmouth - King Street
  - Great Yarmouth - Regent Street
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### Bus gates/lanes to access bus stations or interchanges

- Cringleford, Norwich, Norwich - Roundhouse Way
- Norwich - To access Postwick Park & Ride site
- Cromer - Cadogan Road/A149
- King's Lynn - Albion Street
- Great Yarmouth - Market Gates
- Wymondham - Wymondham Cross/Market Place

## Bus service information

We now have 128 real-time information displays across the county, following our continuing work delivering the Transforming Cities Fund programme in Norwich city centre and the completion of the North Walsham Travel Hub.

## What do passengers think?

In June 2022 we carried out a county-wide consultation on the BSIP, to ensure we were proposing to deliver what the public and other stakeholders want. It received 1,500 responses and the headline results were:

Of most importance to people are:

- Multi-operator ticketing
- New services to more places
- Real-time information at stops
- A Travel Norfolk integrated information portal
- More frequent buses
- Fare capping
- More evening and Sunday services
- Doing the basics brilliantly

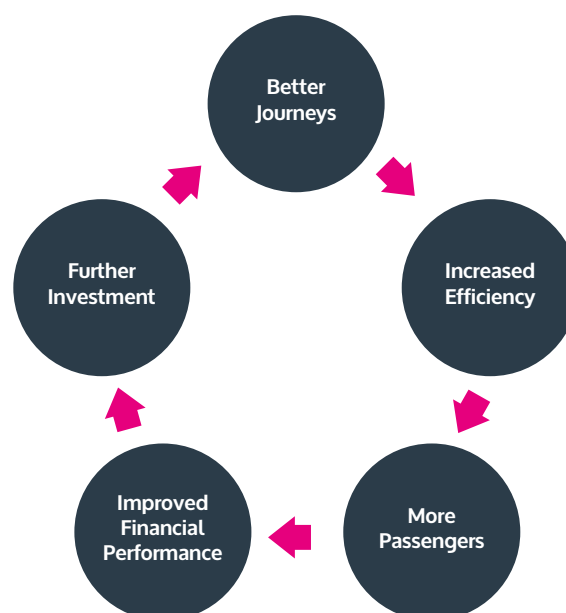
People are most dissatisfied with:

- Reliability and punctuality of services
- Value for money and fare prices

The main reasons people cited for not using the bus were:

- They are not available at the times needed
- Quicker to use an alternative mode
- Buses do not go directly to the places people need them to
- Reliability of journey time is better using another mode of transport

We are therefore confident that all the proposals outlined in the October 2021 BSIP remain valid and will give residents what is most important to them in terms of public transport provision. This will encourage more journeys by existing users and more journeys overall by getting more people to use the bus, leading to further investment and further improvements, and so the cycle continues:



# Section 3: Objectives and Outcomes

The main **national and local strategies** that this BSIP aligns to remain unchanged. However:

- The refreshed Transport for Norwich strategy has now been adopted, and an implementation plan is underway with the aim of delivering carbon reduction, improving air quality and growing the economy within Norwich
- Local cycling and walking infrastructure plans (LCWIPs) have now been completed in Greater Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth. The wider LCWIP for Norfolk is still being developed and will take into account responses to a survey run in April and May this year
- Our Local Transport Plan (LTP4) has also now been adopted and an implementation plan is currently being developed.

We have reviewed our **objectives** outlined in the October 2021 BSIP and believe that they remain relevant a year later:

- To rebuild and increase passenger confidence
- To have a green and sustainable transport offer
- To have a public transport network that is the first-choice mode for most journeys, for existing and new customers
- To have a simple, seamless and affordable fares and ticketing offer

This is backed up by the BSIP consultation carried out earlier this year.

We have also reviewed the **outcomes** outlined in the October 2021 BSIP and these also remain relevant. The only change is the baseline for the annual bus patronage, following a change to the DfT figures (Table BUS0109a) – the baseline is not 28.911 million journeys it is 27.7 million journeys. The number of passenger journeys in the first quarter of this year (April-June 2022) was 5,358,079 which we aim to increase each quarter with the introduction of the BSIP measures outlined in the next section.



# Section 4: Delivery Programme


Our BSIP delivery programme proposed a staged approach, with short term measures (0-6 months) to get people back on the bus post covid; medium term measures (6 months - 3 years) to support life-style choices and longer-term measures (3-5 years) to move towards net zero for buses.

The following part of this annual report will focus on what we have achieved in the first year of the BSIP (the short-term measures) and also what plans we now have to deliver those medium- and longer-term measures.

## Short-term measures


### Major Marketing Campaign

Our major marketing campaign was launched in July 2022, focussing on reasons to Choose the Bus and on days out in Norfolk over the summer.



**“I like arriving feeling relaxed”**  
Another reason to choose the bus

Find your nearest bus route at  
[www.norfolk.gov.uk/choosethebus](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/choosethebus)

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**“I love being able to take the Grandchildren out for the day”**  
Another reason to choose the bus

Find your nearest bus route at  
[www.norfolk.gov.uk/choosethebus](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/choosethebus)

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We sponsored the Eastern Daily Press summer supplement; the press release was covered by the local media and Radio Norfolk; and our social media posts reached over 120,000 people. We also used bus backs to promote the campaign and had posters up at major interchanges and locations. In response to the lower patronage levels of concessionary passholders we delivered an A5 postcard to passholders living in specific targeted postcode areas, and plan to email all those with email addresses before the end of 2022.

The marketing campaign will be evaluated in terms of passenger growth before the end of November 2022 and we will continue with press releases and social media if it is proving to be successful.

### **One identity and an integrated journey planner**

The single identity of Travel Norfolk was created in April 2022 - a single travel brand for the county for all sustainable travel options – buses, walking, cycling. The logo is now being placed on buses and on all promotional material to show that even though each bus operator has their own website and brand, they are all part of one single system.



The integrated website and journey planner has taken longer to progress than anticipated. Our original target date was August 2022 but will now be delivered by April 2023.

### **Customer Charter**

A single customer charter has been produced with all bus operators that gives a comprehensive set of expectations that passengers should have when using buses in Norfolk [Bus passenger charter for Norfolk and Suffolk - Norfolk County Council](#)

Posters are being produced for display so that passengers can easily see what they should be able to expect, with contact details for when things don't quite go to plan.

The Customer Charter was co-produced with Suffolk County Council, recognising the fact that many passengers will be using services in both counties.

### **Fares offer for young people**

All operators offer reduced fares for those under 19 years of age, on a commercial basis, with no funding required from the local authority.

Our ambition in the October 2021 BSIP was to extend this to those aged under 25 – but as this required funding we were unable to implement this within the first year of the BSIP. The DfT have now allocated us funding to implement a concessionary reimbursement scheme for those aged 19-25 years old and so this will now be delivered and in place by April 2023.

### **Back to bus fares promotion**

Our BSIP asked for £556,000 of funding to deliver this across Norfolk. As that funding was not forthcoming in the first year we instead implemented a county-wide multi-operator day ticket, to use on all buses with all operators in Norfolk. It is called Norfolk Fusion and was launched in August 2022, to coincide with the major marketing campaign [Fusion - Norfolk County Council](#)

The daily fares are Adult £12; Young Person (5-19) £9 and Group (max 2 adults and 3 young people) £22. It has been well received and we plan to extend the Fusion offer to smaller areas and for different time periods.



### Contactless on every bus

This is now in place across Norfolk.

### Improved road network management

The County Council transport team is working closely with colleagues in highways and planning to ensure that network delays are reduced and better information about delays and road closures is communicated to passengers in a timely manner.

In early 2022 we were granted powers to enforce moving traffic offences and we will implement this in certain locations in late 2022.

As part of the Norfolk Parking Partnership on-street parking charges were reviewed and increased, with a view to encouraging more people to travel sustainably and leave the car at home.

### Network review and bus priority study

In April 2022 we undertook bus priority studies in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, to understand where bus priority measures like bus lanes and junction alterations could significantly decrease the bus journey times, thus making the bus more attractive to people. These studies led to the creation of a list of measures that we put to the DfT for funding, and for which we were successful. More details about the schemes are in the next section – Medium-term measures.



## Medium-term measures

The aim of the medium-term measures (October 2022 to April 2025) is to support life-style choices – to really give people the opportunity to make public transport the first-choice mode for most journeys.

### Deliver consistent bus network standards

In our October 2021 BSIP we defined a minimum level of service frequency for different sized settlements and different operating corridors; for example along urban corridors in our larger settlements (Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth) we aim to have 6 buses per hour operating in the day-time and 2 buses per hour in the off peak.

Having now been allocated £12.4m to support more bus services, we are undertaking a full-scale review of what services need to be delivered to meet these bus network standards. There will be a mix of increased frequencies in urban areas and on key corridors, more rural services where none currently exist (possibly another demand responsive service like the flexibus+ service) and also more evening and Sunday services.

Once this review has been concluded and the services decided upon (recognising that £12.4m won't cover everything that we need to do) they will be published on our website [National Bus Strategy - Norfolk County Council](#). The new services will start to be implemented from January 2023.

### Agreed timetable change dates

We are in discussion with bus operators to determine a definition of significant change so that we can agree a maximum number of timetable changes per year. This will help passengers to plan their lives around a stable network of services, without them having to worry about a bus service that keeps changing.

### Bus priority programme

Norfolk has received £30.9m for capital measures within the BSIP, 70% of which will be spent on bus priority measures (this was a key priority for the DfT when allocating the funding). The measures that will be delivered were identified following bus priority assessment visits in Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth. We then looked at the estimated time that could be saved on each bus journey and the number of passengers that would benefit from it and the resultant bus priority schemes that have been agreed with the DfT are:

#### **Norwich: Yarmouth Road/Thorpe Road**

Outbound bus lane

#### **Norwich: Queens Road bus station entry**

Bus priority from St Stephen's roundabout into the bus station

#### **Norwich: Harford P&R**

Inbound bus lane from P&R site to Tesco supermarket

#### **Norwich: Ipswich Road (Hall Road to Ring Road)**

Inbound bus lane

#### **Norwich: Dereham Road (Grapes Hill junction)**

Inbound bus lane improvements, carriageway widening and changes to road layout to stop unofficial parking and right turns

**West Norfolk: A149 Castle Rising to Knight's Hill and QEH**

Investigation into low-cost options to provide bus priority along this corridor, to assist with summer peak traffic flows

**King's Lynn: Hardwick Roundabout to Southgates**

Inbound bus lane - links to sustainable travel plans as part of the Levelling Up Fund bid

**Great Yarmouth: Southtown Road**

Inbound bus lane

**Great Yarmouth: Gyrotory Redesign**

Allow 2-way flow through Market Gates bus interchange to avoid buses having to do the whole loop - links to the new 3rd river crossing

**Norwich: Angel Road / Waterloo Road junction alterations**

Junction changed to give priority to traffic on Angel Road, so buses can enter onto Waterloo Road without stopping

**King's Lynn: Portland Street and Bus Station Access**

Junction changes to prioritise buses

**West Norfolk: A149 Lamsey Lane Junction**

Contribution to works to reconfigure junction to provide easier access onto A149 for buses

**King's Lynn: Queen Elizabeth Hospital exit**

Reconfigure junction to provide priority for bus movements

**West Norfolk: A149 Norfolk Lavender Junction**

Reconfigure junction to provide priority for bus movements

**West Norfolk: A148/A149 Knight's Hill junction reconfiguration**

Reconfigure junction to provide priority for bus movements, with a section of bus lane on the A148

Once each scheme above is implemented, bus operators will provide improvements to the services on the relevant corridor, in accordance with a reciprocal investment agreement that will be drawn up between them and the Council.

We also have a programme underway to deliver traffic light priority for buses, which essentially makes the lights turn green as a bus approaches, in order to avoid delays to the bus journey. We already have three set of lights at key junctions up and running in Norwich and are now working on how to implement a whole corridor approach. This will be rolled out across the county over the next 3 years.

### **Better bus stop standards**

Our 2021 BSIP outlined a proposal to improve bus stop standards, with bronze, silver, gold and platinum categories based on the passenger base for each stop. As part of our BSIP funding we have received £5.1m to do this, which will be spent as follows:

- Upgrades to Gold stop standard at 20 key bus stops – to include a covered waiting area, lighting, real-time passenger information, additional seating, cycle parking, printed timetable information (Exact stops to be decided)
- 50 key bus stops across the county to be fitted with real-time passenger information displays (Exact stops to be decided)
- All bus stops to be supplied with QR Boards, so that using a smartphone you can get access to scheduled and real-time bus information
- Equalities Act 2010 compliant boarding points to be installed at bus stops that are currently inaccessible for those with mobility problems.

### **Multi-operator fares with common zones and fare capping**

The county-wide **multi-operator** day ticket has already been introduced (as described above) and will be followed by others for different time periods and different areas, to be rolled out over the next year. These are being provided commercially by the bus operators, with no BSIP funding required, and the revenue and trip calculations and reimbursement to operators is being undertaken by Norfolk County Council.

We are also keen to introduce **fare capping** in Norfolk, which will mean passengers tapping off as they exit the bus so that they are only charged a maximum price for a journey, day, weekly ticket for example. This requires the installation of tap-off readers on all buses and we have received £800k as part of the BSIP funding to do this. We are aiming to implement single-operator fare-capping by April 2023 and multi-operator fare capping by April 2025, although the latter is subject to the implementation of the DfT's Project Coral back-office system.

Other fare discounts that we will be implementing, having received funding from the government for our BSIP, are:

- A 20% discount on adult fares for those aged under 25, to be delivered by April 2023
- A flat fares scheme in Great Yarmouth, to provide a simpler fare structure within the town, to be delivered by April 2023
- A flat fares scheme in another area of the county, using the learning from the Great Yarmouth pilot, to be implemented from April 2024
- A long-term fares discount, aimed at tackling the current cost of living issues. This has yet to be discussed, modelled and decided but will either be a percentage discount or a fares freeze on certain products, or a best value price promise linked to the introduction of the tap-off readers.

Common fare zones are also being discussed with operators, to make understanding the different fares offers across the different operators in Norfolk much easier.

### **Better service integration and hubs**

We outlined in the October 2021 BSIP that we would like to introduce new travel hubs in up to three market towns, to enable better and easier connections between services and modes, recognising that in rural areas passengers often have to change from a feeder service onto a mainline service to complete their journey.

Our BSIP funding (£1.9m) is allowing us to provide new **travel hubs** in 5 market towns over the 3-year period – at North Walsham, Cromer, Sheringham, Hunstanton and Diss. These will be

platinum stop standard and will include information and facilities to enable easy multi-modal trips, for example bike hire, bike repair stations, walking and cycling information.

We are also keen to improve **train-bus connections** and before April 2025 we will have delivered two new interchanges near the train station in Great Yarmouth (at North Quay and Vauxhall) and also a bus only exit road from Diss train station.

We continue to work with both bus operators and rail operators to align timetables to make bus-rail connections much easier.

### Next stop announcements and displays

There are already a small number of buses equipped with this facility – notably the First Excel service and most of the buses on the Coastliner service. Operators have committed to increasing the number of buses that have this facility over the next 3 years, particularly where they benefit from either a bus priority scheme or revenue funding for enhanced or new services.

This is not something that was agreed for the BSIP funding and therefore will be provided commercially by operators.

### Long-term measures

The long-term measures (April 2025 to April 2027) in our October 2021 BSIP focussed on the introduction of more modern and zero emission buses in Norfolk, in order to achieve a reduction in tailpipe emissions. All operators have a vehicle replacement programme that will help this ambition, and the County Council will continue to look for funding programmes that can help.

The first zero emission buses will be introduced in Norwich by March 2024 following a successful Zebra (Zero Emission Bus Regional Area) bid to government. £3.2m has been awarded, with £3.6m being invested by First Bus. This will mean 15 single decker electric vehicles replacing 15 Euro 3 diesel buses and includes an upgrade of the bus depot with an appropriate power supply.



# Section 5:

## Governance for delivery

**The Enhanced Partnership between Norfolk County Council and Norfolk's bus operators was formed in April 2022, with the adoption of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPP and EPS). This sets out how between us we are going to deliver the BSIP priorities and ambitions and places legal commitments on both sides to do so.**

The EPP and EPS, and therefore the delivery of the BSIP, will be managed by an EP Management Board that comprises an equal representation from NCC (senior officers and elected Members) and bus operators (representing small, medium and large companies).

The Board will meet at least quarterly and will:

- Discuss and agree the facilities and measures from the BSIP which should be prioritised for funding and presented to NCC for formal sign-off
- Agree how this Scheme should be varied to account for any new facilities and measures that are introduced
- Agree if it is more appropriate for additional Schemes to be added to the Plan instead, subject to the formal consultation process
- Be responsible for setting KPIs and measuring the progress of the delivery of the objectives and targets in the BSIP and EP Plan and Scheme(s)
- Monitor and manage the EP and adherence to it by the relevant parties, agreeing any necessary action to be taken
- Discuss any key issues that arise that affect public transport services and put forward possible mitigating solutions.

The Board is supported by topic or area-specific working groups, pulling in other key stakeholders such as district councils and businesses as required. Working and reference groups include, but are not limited to:

- Marketing
- Traffic Light Priority
- Travel Hubs and on-street infrastructure
- All operators
- Bus users and passenger representative groups
- Transport for Norwich stakeholder forum
- West Norfolk Transport & Infrastructure Steering Group
- East Norfolk Transport & Infrastructure Steering Group
- Local Transport Plan Implementation group

# Conclusion

It is still an exciting time for public transport in Norfolk and reviewing the BSIP written in October 2021 has shown that there are many things that have already been achieved and many that can be delivered over the next 3 years thanks to the funding received from the government and also the good partnership that exists between the County Council and Norfolk's bus operators.

We are still as keen as we were back in October 2021 to deliver these improvements and look forward to making things better for people so that bus travel is a real solution and option for their travelling needs and everyday life.





**Norfolk** County Council