

## **2024 Bus Service Improvement Plans – Guidance to local authorities and bus operators**

### **Questions and Answers for Local Transport Authorities**

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## Purpose of the 2024 BSIP

### **Q1: What is the purpose of a BSIP document?**

A: The BSIP document is a public document published on the LTA's website, for anyone to read, setting out clearly the LTA and its partners' vision and plan for improving bus services and growing bus patronage in their local area, in line with the National Bus Strategy. The NBS set out the requirement for the BSIP to be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan. The Department has reiterated this requirement to LTAs.

### **Q2: What is the purpose of the 2024 BSIP if it is not being used as a bidding document?**

A: This is an opportunity to review your existing BSIP in a different manner than would have happened under the old 2021 guidance, setting out your vision and plan for buses for your residents and stakeholders, focusing on the three themes of (i) updating the baseline to 2023/24, including highlighting achievements since 2021; (ii) setting out clearly the improvement programme to end 2024/25; (iii) getting ready for 2025 and beyond – refreshing the plan's ambition and content to set out a high quality and flexible pipeline of proposals for the 4 years 2025/26 to 2028/29 nested within the BSIP's overall 10 year vision, attractive to funders. Across all LTAs, this evidence base will be used to strengthen the case for further Government funding for buses. Therefore, a clear and concise refreshed BSIP will benefit you, your decision-makers and your residents/stakeholders, as well as Government.

### **Q3: We are considering/undertaking the bus franchising assessment process. Wouldn't refreshing our BSIP now prejudice that process?**

A: No. If you are entering or in the process of conducting a franchising assessment, you should describe where you are in that process in neutral terms, in a way that doesn't prejudice the findings of the assessment. The rest of the BSIP can still describe the outcomes you are seeking to achieve in terms of bus service improvement. If some of your ambitions and proposals are contingent on the outcome of the franchising assessment (for example – capital expenditure to purchase depots) then flag these elements as contingent on the outcome of the assessment.

### **Q4: If we are having to produce 4 year and 10 year plans - is there anything we can have as a guarantee of long term funding?**

A: The funding regime beyond 2025 nationwide in England is subject to future Spending Reviews and decisions yet to be taken. The level of long-term funding for the bus sector will be to some degree dependent on the quality of BSIPs produced across the country. In the specific case of the Network North programme, following the decision on HS2 Phase 2, £1bn has already been allocated for BSIPs for LTAs in the North and Midlands, and a larger amount for LITS (Local Integrated Transport Settlements) and CRSTS (City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements).

## Our bus vision section of the 2024 BSIP

### **Q5: What is the purpose of producing an “Our Bus Vision” section of the 2024 BSIP?**

A: The purpose is to provide a short, clear statement or graphic setting out the longer term vision for buses in the BSIP as shared by the LTA(s), local bus operators and other relevant stakeholders. It should be in line with your other relevant plans, policies and strategies, including the Local Transport Plan, and with the vision for buses set out in the National Bus Strategy, Chapter 2, The Buses We Want. It will help to explain to all stakeholders and readers what everything that follows in the plan is aiming to achieve.

## Current bus offer section of the 2024 BSIP

### **Q6: What is the purpose of the “Current offer to bus passengers” section of the 2024 BSIP?**

A: Its purpose is to make the key facts and insights about the current bus service in the BSIP area as clear and accessible as possible, identifying and spotlighting how the bus offer to passengers currently compares to the bus vision, and creating a baseline for the measurement of progress. The section should also highlight achievements since 2021.

### **Q7: The guidance (para 67) asks for a table (ideally supported by a map) setting out the supported fixed-route bus network. Why just outline subsidised services? The LTA, with operators should set out the commercial bus offer and how the LTA supported services fit/complement/provide connectivity to unserved areas.**

A: LTAs are very welcome to provide a table/list and map of all bus services in their BSIP area, showing how their network of supported services complements the commercial bus network. As a minimum, we are looking for information on the supported services network, as well as information on the budgets allocated for bus service support (para 66 of the guidance).

## 2024/25 improvements programme section of the 2024 BSIP

### **Q8: What is the purpose of the “Improvements programme to 2025” section of the 2024 BSIP?**

A: This section aims to set out a simple, clear, systematic summary of your 2024/25 bus improvements delivery programme, capital and revenue, from all funding sources and programmes, including but not limited to dedicated BSIP funding. If you are a BSIP Phase 2-only LTA, with no capital programme being funded from any other sources, then the BSIP should explain this.

### **Q9: What should the BSIP cover regarding bus driver recruitment and retention – and what are DfT doing to help us?**

A: The BSIP should set out what you propose to do or are already doing on this topic in 2024/25. There will be a slot at the March DfT Forum where the Department will set out what it is doing on this issue and what it would like to see from LTAs.

## Ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond section of the 2024 BSIP

### **Q10: What is the purpose of the “Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and beyond” section of the 2024 BSIP?**

A: This section aims to allow LTAs to translate the aims and ambitions set out in the bus vision into specific ambitions and proposals for specific places and elements of the overall bus offer. The concept is for a set of priorities and proposals for bus service improvement over the 4 year period 2025/26 to 2028/29 nested within a longer term view of 10 years+, preferably aligned with the LTA’s overarching Local Transport Plan. The purpose of this dual time horizon is to develop a high quality and flexible pipeline of deliverable, prioritised proposals or interventions (physical or policy), ready to go as opportunities for funding arise. Delivery capacity should be addressed – the BSIP should present a clear picture of how the LTA would go about developing and implementing their longer-term projects and, where appropriate, what delivery team resource would need to be put in place to deliver the ambitions and proposals.

### **Q11: In the guidance on ambitions and proposals for service level and network coverage, what is meant by the term 'stretch standards'? Does this mean ambitious?**

A: The term means ambitious but credible proposals for the improvement of service standards for frequency and hours of operation (by time of day and day of the week) for the different types of route in your network, to achieve your vision of bus service improvement. For example, it might be that on a given type of route you want there always to be a service offered on Sundays. Or on another type of route to offer a service of at least 2 buses per hour in the daytime, and at least one per hour in the

evenings. Or on a major corridor, a combined frequency that allows for a ‘turn up and go’ frequency of a bus every 12 minutes or better. Stretch standards for network coverage would include indicating priorities for new or restored routes, but also identifying those areas where demand is always likely to be too low to support a fixed-route, fixed-timetable service at acceptable cost and therefore other creative and innovative solutions are to be sought. LTAs might set out stepping stones towards reaching the standards, including potentially indicating the patronage growth they would like to achieve to make it viable.

**Q12: Why does the guidance ask for ambitions and proposals for bus priority measures if BSIP+/BSIP Phase 2 funding does not cover capital schemes?**

A: BSIP Phase 2 funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25 is revenue funding (RDEL) only and is primarily aimed at use for bus service support, albeit permission can be sought to use it for capital schemes. For 2025/26 and beyond, proposals for a programme comprising a mix of both capital and revenue schemes is sought, which should certainly include proposals for bus priority where it is needed to deliver the bus vision. And of course the BSIP document should be comprehensive and cover your proposals from all funding sources, not just BSIP funding, such as (but not limited to) CRSTS, Levelling Up Fund, and (in the North and Midlands) Local Integrated Transport Settlement.

**Q13: Could you please elaborate on the business case requirement for the value for money consideration? Is the threshold for a five-part business case based on individual scheme value or the overall programme value?**

A: Ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond in your 2024 BSIP constitute a plan, not a bid for funds. As such, there is no requirement for formal assurance on the vfm of proposals. Nevertheless, vfm and affordability remain crucial considerations for the development and prioritisation of post-2025 proposals. Schemes in your 2024/25 delivery programme should already have been assured as value for money, according to the standard DfT processes for assuring vfm for local transport schemes: schemes of cost <£20m (<£50m in Mayoral Combined Authority areas) require written confirmation from the LTA s151 officer that they are satisfied the scheme constitutes vfm. Above the threshold value, a DfT five part transport business case is required. These thresholds apply to individual schemes within the BSIP programme, not the programme total value as a whole.

## Targets, performance monitoring and reporting section of the 2024 BSIP

**Q14: What is the purpose of the “Targets, Performance Monitoring and Reporting” section of the 2024 BSIP?**

A: This section should put in one place the targets set out in your 2021 or more recent BSIP and summarise the monitoring evidence to date of performance against those targets. A new specification of minimum standards for a new periodic

monitoring report (which LTAs will be free to go beyond) for the public reporting of progress in delivering the BSIP, and outcomes data against BSIP targets, will be provided by the DfT at a later date. This will replace the previous requirement for six-monthly updates. The data requirements for this monitoring report will be to the maximum possible extent integrated with the data requirements for the Bus Connectivity Assessment exercise DfT will be asking LTAs to conduct this spring, and in future years. More information on this exercise will be announced in due course.

**Q15: Will targets need refreshing or do we keep these the same?**

A: The 2024 BSIP is an opportunity to review your targets and update them as you see fit.

## DfT format schemes and proposals overview section of the 2024 BSIP

**Q16: What is the purpose of the “DfT format schemes and proposals overview” section of the 2024 BSIP?**

A: The purpose of this section is to ensure there is a set of overview information on BSIP schemes and proposals across the country in the same format, irrespective of the different approaches to the rest of the document taken by LTAs. It will also provide readers of the document with a simple overview of the BSIP’s schemes and proposed schemes.

## Requirements of the 2024 BSIP

**Q17: Do I have to follow the structure for the BSIP document set out in the 2024 Guidance?**

A: No – the guidance is intended to help LTAs and their local partners to update their BSIP, keeping it up to date and relevant. Although it contains a structure and step-by-step guide on how to update the BSIP in line with the key themes for the 2024 refresh, it is not binding. Individual LTAs continue to hold responsibility for how they structure their BSIP document and what it contains. What is binding is the format for Section 6, the BSIP Overview Table, and the requirement that the updated BSIP addresses the three themes for the 2024 BSIP set out in the answer to Question 2.

**Q18: Does my LTA have to produce an updated 2024 BSIP at all?**

A: LTAs can choose not to produce a 2024 BSIP, but the publication of one is required to receive BSIP funding in 2024-25.

## Bus Connectivity Assessments

### **Q19: Is there any news on timelines for the Bus Connectivity Assessment and Bus Priority guidance?**

A: DfT will be asking LTAs to submit BCAs in spring 2024. BCAs will ask LTAs to report on a range of issues, including but not necessarily limited to connectivity, patronage, types of service, innovation and funding. BCAs will complement the 2024 BSIP, with evidence and information gathered for the BSIP being relevant for the BCA and vice-versa. The new Bus Priority Guidance will be published in due course.

## Submission of the updated BSIP and 2024/25 funding

### **Q20: So LTAs won't get year 3 BSIP funding until someone has reviewed the new BSIP? Even though it's already allocated?**

A: Each LTA has a BSIP funding allocation that is subject to the terms of the MoU. DfT will review your submitted BSIP to check it meets requirements.

**Q21: In the email sent with the guidance, it says "this submission is a condition of releasing BSIP funding for 2024-25." How long will it take the DfT to approve the document and release the funding? This now means that we won't receive funding at the start of the 2024/25 financial year, and instead be 2-4 months in already, but will still be expected to spend it by the end of the financial year. We have operators relying on this funding in April 2024 to continue service delivery, but now we will not have the funding in time.**

A: You have an allocation for 2024/25 which should allow you to plan your programme and start spending on your 2024/25 programme, in the expectation of receipt of the BSIP funding. Every effort will be made to review the BSIP quickly and enable the payment to be made soon after receipt of the submitted BSIP. There is nothing preventing LTAs from submitting an updated BSIP ahead of the 12 June deadline. If your LTA has exceptional cash flow issues, please speak to your Relationship Manager. Project Adjustment Requests may be submitted to extend certain schemes beyond March 2025, and will be considered on a case by case basis. Where there is a strong case to do so, we will consider extensions to deadlines on infrastructure schemes up to the end of September 2025 and on bus service support contracts to the end of March 2026.

### **Q22: Will the 2024/25 BSIP funding allocation be affected by the DfT's review of the submitted BSIP document?**

A: If you have provided an updated BSIP document that contains the content that it is mandatory to refresh, and met the other funding terms and conditions, then your 2024/25 allocation will be paid in full. Although the 2024 BSIP is not a bidding

document, it may be used as a factor by Government to determine levels of funding in the future.

## Timetable and deadline

**Q23: Has consideration been given to local elections? Our BSIP needs approval from Council Scrutiny and Cabinet, and May-June are some of the hardest times to get approvals from elected members due to elections. What happens if the 12 June deadline cannot be met due to local elections?**

A: The 12 June deadline has been set taking into account the fact that many LTAs will have elections on 5 May. The refreshed, up to date, more relevant 2024 BSIP document should be particularly useful to incoming new committee members and/or portfolio holders as a clear statement of the 2024/25 BSIP programme and the current state of evolving ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond. Depending on your own LTA's approvals mechanisms, if the earliest possible committee or Cabinet meeting to approve the draft document is scheduled for a time after 12 June, please speak to your Relationship Manager, and an extension will be considered on a case by case basis. Any decision to request an extension (or not to submit an updated BSIP) will impact on payment of your 2024/25 BSIP funding.

**Q24: In order to submit a document by 12 June we are going to have to submit a draft into our committee cycle by 18 April. So any guidance on public reporting of performance issued in the spring is completely impossible to inform an updated BSIP.**

A: The guidance you require to produce an updated BSIP document by 12 June has already been published. Further guidance on the data requirements for a new format BSIP monitoring report, replacing the previous requirement for six-monthly public data updates, will be issued in the spring alongside the requirements for the BCA exercise.

## New Mayoral Combined Authorities and joint BSIPs

**Q25: Our authority will become part of a combined authority in 2024 but the mayoral election isn't until May. As a result we have very little time to understand what the new Mayor's policy for buses will be. How can we deal with this?**

A: In response to representations, we have amended the requirement for a joint BSIP from LTAs becoming a Combined Authority in April 2024. Such LTAs should now follow the guidance provided for those becoming Combined Authorities in 2025, namely the 2024 BSIP should set out the pathway to a single BSIP from 2025



## BSIP Phase 3 (Network North) funding

**Q26: In terms of Phase 3 Network North funding - will any indication of post 2025 funding be given as this will aid production of BSIP?**

A: We have announced that £1 billion BSIP funds from Network North will be allocated to North and Midlands authorities. . That is an average of £250m per year which exceeds the £150m RDEL allocation for 2024/25. We are not yet able to provide post 2025 allocations for each LTA.

## Other

**Q27: Do we need to show variations between 2021 and 2024 BSIPs, like we do with EP documents? Should we remove previous BSIPs from circulation and websites, or should both documents be made available to the public?**

A: The 2024 BSIP replaces the previous BSIP. There is no requirement from DfT to highlight changes from the previous document – the BSIP is not a legal agreement in the same sense of the Enhanced Partnership scheme. There is a requirement to publish the 2024 BSIP on your website in a way that any member of the public can easily find. There is no requirement from DfT to leave up previous superseded versions of your BSIP.

**Q28: When is the LTP Guidance coming out to tie in with this?**

A: LTAs should not plan to expect any new DfT guidance on Local Transport Plans in 2024. Your BSIP should align with your LTP, but should also function as a concise but authoritative statement of your plans for bus service improvement that stands in its own right.

**Q29: Ringfencing the BSIP Phase 2 funding to revenue spend limits successful outcomes in line with our BSIP, as capital funding was a priority. This will have a negative impact on our performance.**

A: There is a process for requesting approval for BSIP Phase 2 or Phase 3 funding to be allocated to capital projects. Speak to your Relationship Manager.

**Q30: Does BSIP 2024 need consultation similar to EP?**

A: It is a requirement that BSIPs should be produced in close consultation with bus operators and relevant local stakeholders. LTAs with an Enhanced Partnership should use the Board and stakeholder group as the forum to discuss and take action to produce the 2024 BSIP. LTAs that do not have an EP should use appropriate fora and mechanisms to ensure local stakeholders including bus operators have the opportunity to input into the process for generating ideas and proposals for the BSIP and have been consulted on its final content. After the 2024 BSIP is published, where appropriate, EP Boards should in due course revise and update their Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes accordingly.

**Q31: Are there any plans to extend the March 25 deadline for BSIP spending?**

A: Project Adjustment Requests may be submitted to extend certain schemes beyond March 2025, and will be considered on a case by case basis. Where there is a strong case to do so, we will consider extensions to deadlines on infrastructure schemes up to the end of September 2025 and on bus service support contracts to the end of March 2026.

**Q32: If BSIP's are to continue beyond this year, will the capacity funding be extended for additional resource for LTAs who didn't receive BSIP 1?**

A: LTAs remain free to draw on their BSIP funding (of any phase) to support the additional capability or capacity requirements necessary to deliver the BSIP.

**Q33: At a previous DfT Bus Forum we were asked to provide confirmation of bus budgets and spend for financial year 2023/24, plus 2024/25's bus budget by the end of Jan 24 to release the next year's BSIP funding. With the new guidance, are these still required or are they now superseded?**

A: Yes, this information is still required. The same information can be used in your updated BSIP.

**Department for Transport Bus Reform team  
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