



The Voice of York's Bus Users

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National Bus Strategy – Implications for York’s Bus Services

1. The much trailed National Bus Strategy (NBS) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better> (BBB) was issued on 15th March 2021.
2. It is actually pretty good and will move most authorities closer to London standards, by attempting to address the adverse effects of deregulating services outside London.
3. Despite the “free for all” that has operated in the rest of England and the national trend of reduced services followed by reduced patronage, significant growth has been seen in some areas. Brighton and Hove Buses (whose MD gave us an excellent presentation last November) and the Harrogate Bus Company are quoted as examples.
4. The document includes (p40) a useful summary of **what Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) such as York, and bus operators, must do to access the current COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) from 1 July 2021 and future funding from April 2022.** It makes clear that CBSSG is discretionary, as will be future bus funding (including a reformed Bus Service Operators Grant).
5. By the end of June 2021 LTAs will need to either commit to establishing **Enhanced Partnerships (EPs)** or should begin the statutory process of franchising services. “Operators in those areas should cooperate with those processes.” **It is essential that the council meets the June deadline, otherwise funding may stop!**
6. **Those LTAs who do not have access to franchising powers at present (including York),** but consider that it is the best route to adopt, “should progress with the implementation of an [EP] alongside applying to the Secretary of State for access to franchising powers.” **Guidance on EPs** was issued under the Bus Services Act 2017, but is soon to be updated (p13). **The council has decided – on officers’ recommendations, to opt for an EP, rather than going for franchising.**
7. **By the end of October 2021 each LTA will need to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).** “Each plan will need to be updated

annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan (LTP) and in other relevant local plans such as Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)." In York, the BSIP and LCWIP are regarded as "daughter documents" to the next LTP (LPT4). See also 9 below.

8. Guidance on preparing a BSIP (including) is given (pp41,42). This includes

- a) setting targets for journey times and reliability improvements
- b) how far current services meet or fall short of the plan's requirements
- c) how the improvements will be delivered through an EP or franchising scheme and the LTA's and Operators' investment plans
- d) How traffic management and investment are used to prioritise buses.

9. More detailed guidance on producing the BSIP (including the template to be completed) was issued by the Department for Transport on 17th May:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-service-improvement-plan>

10. **York's draft BSIP** is currently in preparation and will be submitted to Councillor D'Agorne's September's decision session. The council is receiving £100k for work on the BSIP and are commissioning consultants to supply supporting data. **York Bus Forum has been asked to identify its five main priorities for the BSIP**; these are due to be submitted to the council on 7th June and will be published on our website.

11. From April 2022, LTAs will need to have an EP in place, or be following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme, to access the new discretionary streams of bus funding. Only services operated or measures taken under an Enhanced Partnership or where a franchising scheme has been made will be eligible to receive the new funding streams.

12. LTAs are particularly asked to consider:

- a) How a coherent and integrated network should serve key travel generators. Note especially (BBB p47) "Partnerships and franchising arrangements must deliver more comprehensive services, including those which are socially or economically necessary. This includes services to smaller and more isolated places, and more services in the evenings and at weekends." New guidance will be issued on the meaning and role of 'socially necessary' services, expanding the category to include 'economically necessary' services for the first time. **All good news for York's outer areas which often depend on the very limited 'socially necessary' services which are offered by York or neighbouring authorities.**

b) The views of local people "Both parties [LTAs and Bus Operators] will be expected to move quickly and engagement with local stakeholders will follow as [BSIPs] are developed." Note especially (BBB p64) "Which could include forums such as Bus Advisory Boards being set up" **This is a great opportunity for all users to influence local bus services;** our May 18th YBF meeting included a Q and A with Julian Ridge (Sustainable Transport Manager) on York's BSIP: <https://www.yorkbusforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Key-Questions-for-York-BSIP-Meeting-180521.pdf>

13. There is also a reference (BBB p67) to the opportunities provided by **Bus Rapid Transit Schemes** – a topic addressed at the YBF April 20th meeting.

14. £3bn of new funding is promised through the NBS. This is comprised:

- a) New and Increased Services £300m minimum in 2021/22
- b) Resources to LTAs £25m in 2021/22 out of a total of £300m promised
- c) Accelerated delivery of zero emission buses £120m in 2021/22 (at least 4000 zero emission buses to be supported P32)

15. Powers for mandating the provision of **audible and visual route and next stop announcements on buses** were introduced by the Bus Services Act 2017, but require regulations to bring them into force. Despite numerous reminders, the government has failed to do this!

16. However, at page 58, it says that it will - "subject to final analysis" - make these regulations **by Summer 2022**. It will also increase the funding available "for the smallest bus companies" in 2021-22 so that they can provide the announcements.

17. So all operators who don't currently have these indicators will need to get some new or more modern buses, as fitting the technology to older vehicles is not cost effective. **In practice this mainly affects First York, who have made it clear that they are only likely to address this issue if government funding is made available!**

18. A consultation will launch on new Public Service Vehicle (PSV) Accessibility Regulations to improve access for wheelchair users.

19. For more on the NBS, see our website:
<https://www.yorkbusforum.org/documents-minutes/>

20. This briefing will be kept updated as further information becomes available.

Graham Collett Vice -Chair

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