

National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better

Cheshire West and Chester Enhanced Partnership Plan

April 2022

Transport and Highways



Contents

1	Enhanced Partnership Definitions	2
2	Enhanced Partnership Scope	5
2.1	The Enhanced Partnership Plan	5
2.2	Enhanced Partnership plan Introduction	5
2.3	Geographical Scope	6
2.4	Enhanced Partnership Objectives and Outcomes	7
2.5	Monitoring and reviewing progress	11
2.6	Enhanced Partnership Plan Review Timescales	11
2.7	Statutory operator objection mechanism	12
2.8	Interaction with neighbouring authorities	12
2.9	Competition Test	13
3	Local Bus Network Characteristics and Usage	14
3.1	Local Policy	14
3.2	Current bus services	14
3.2.1	Park & Ride	15
3.2.2	Bus service frequency	16
3.3	Congestion and bus journey times	16
3.4	Bus service patronage	17
3.5	Passenger experience	19
3.6	Ticketing products and fares	20
3.7	Bus priority measures	21
3.8	Bus network infrastructure	22
3.9	Information availability	22
3.10	Factors affecting the local bus market	23
4	Vision, Objectives, Policies and Outcomes	24
4.1	Our Vision for Buses	24
4.2	Overarching objectives for the bus network	24
4.3	Specific policy objectives for the Enhanced Partnership	25
4.4	Targets	27
4.5	Funding Arrangements	27
4.6	Enhanced Partnership Outcomes	27
5	Enhanced Partnership Plan Governance Arrangements	31
5.1	Enhanced Partnership Working Group	31
5.2	Enhanced Partnership Forum	31
5.2.1	EP Forum Annual General Meeting (AGM)	32

5.2.2	EP Forum Meeting Arrangements	32
5.3	Enhanced Partnership Board	32
5.3.1	Operator Representative Selection	33
5.3.2	Role of EP Board members:	33
5.3.3	EP Board decision making	34
5.3.4	Council veto	34
5.3.5	Meeting observers	34
5.3.6	Meeting arrangements	34
5.3.7	Statutory EP Plan Variation and Operator Objection Mechanism	35
5.4	Enforcement	35
5.5	Implications for small and medium sized operators	36
5.6	Enhanced Partnership Plan Review	36

1 Enhanced Partnership Definitions

In this Enhanced Partnership Plan and any Schemes made pursuant to it, the following terms shall have the meanings ascribed to them below:

Table 1.1: Enhanced Partnership Definitions

Term	Meaning
1985 Act	1985 Act Transport Act 1985
2000 Act	2000 Act Transport Act 2000
2017 Act	2017 Act Bus Services Act 2017
Bus Operators (or Operators)	All Large Operators and Small Operators running Qualifying Bus Services taken collectively.
Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)	The document first produced in October 2021 and reviewed annually, that sets out the Council's strategy for meeting the requirements of the National Bus Strategy and describes the measures that will be taken forward under an Enhanced Partnership.
Council	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Enhanced Partnership	The Enhanced Partnership covering the geographic extent of the administrative boundary of the unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester shown for identification purposes only edged purple on the plan at Figure 2.1.
Enhanced Partnership Board	The committee of selected Bus Operator representatives, and Council representatives responsible for considering recommendations put forward by the EP Forum and making decisions including specific Enhanced Partnership Scheme Variations using the mechanism in Section 5.3.7.
Enhanced Partnership Forum	The committee of all Cheshire West and Chester Bus Operators, the Council, representatives of passenger groups, local businesses, the Local Enterprise Partnership and neighbouring local authorities responsible for considering all issues affecting the Enhanced Partnership, and making recommendations in line with the Enhanced Partnership governance arrangements.
Enhanced Partnership Plan	The document that provides a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the Enhanced Partnership area.

Term	Meaning
Enhanced Partnership Scheme/s	The document/s that set out the precise detail of how the EP vision and objectives will be achieved, including any commitments made by the local authority or standards to be met by bus operators.
Enhanced Partnership Working Group	Group responsible for day-to-day operational decisions and discussion around the services that make up the Enhanced Partnership. The EP Working Group includes Cheshire West and Chester Council officers, representatives from all commercial bus operators within Cheshire West and Chester (Arriva, Stagecoach, D&G Buses, Warrington's Own Buses, Arrowbrook, and Aintree Coachline), and any other professional internal or external staffing support deemed necessary.
Enhanced Partnership Scheme Variation	A formal variation of the relevant Enhanced Partnership Scheme as a result of the process set out in the corresponding Enhanced Partnership Scheme Document. This will then constitute a formal variation of the relevant scheme for the purposes of s.138E(1) of the 2000 Act.
Facilities	Those facilities referred to in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Document which shall be deemed such for the purposes of s.138D(1) of the 2000 Act.
Large or Small Operator	Any single Bus Operator with registered mileage representing the following proportions of total registered mileage for Qualifying Bus Services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large: equal to or greater than 10% • Small: less than 10%. For the avoidance of doubt, a list of Large, and Small Operators will be published on the EP website at the start of each Council financial year.
Measures	Those measures referred to in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Document which shall be deemed as such for the purposes of s.138D(2) of the 2000 Act.
Non-qualifying Bus Service	Services excluded from classification as Qualifying Bus Services.
Qualifying Bus Service	A registered local bus service with one or more stopping place within the geographical area of the Enhanced Partnership, with the exception of:

Term	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any schools or works registered local bus service not eligible for Bus Service Operators Grant • Any cross-boundary registered local bus service with less than 10% of its registered mileage within the Enhanced Partnership area • Any services operated under section 22 of the 1985 Act • Any registered local bus service which is an excursion or tour • Any other registered local bus service that the Operators (through the Enhanced Partnership Forum voting mechanism discussed in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Document) and Council decide should be excluded from all or specific requirements of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme. <p>For the avoidance of doubt, a list of Qualifying Bus Services will be published at the start of each Council financial year.</p>
Requirements	Those requirements placed upon Bus Operators identified as such within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Document which shall be deemed as such for the purposes of s.138C 2017 Act.
Traffic Commissioner Powers	'Relevant registration functions' of Traffic Commissioners to the extent that they relate to a 'relevant service' both within the meanings given to them under section 6G(10) of the 1985 Act.

2 Enhanced Partnership Scope

2.1 The Enhanced Partnership Plan

THE CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN FOR BUSES IS MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 138G(1) OF THE TRANSPORT ACT 2000 BY: CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER

This statutory document is the Enhanced Partnership Plan for Cheshire West and Chester; it is effective from 20 April 2022 or an indefinite period but will be reviewed at least once in every 5 year period.

2.2 Enhanced Partnership plan Introduction

In response to a directive from the DfT following the release of the National Bus Strategy in March 2021, Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) published a statutory notice of their intention to prepare an Enhanced Partnership Plan for local buses in June 2021. An Enhanced Partnership is a statutory partnership between one or more Local Transport Authorities and one or more of their local bus operators that sets out how they will work together to deliver strategic bus outcomes within the defined geographical area.

In October 2021, CW&C published its Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP), which set out its high level vision, objectives, targets and initial delivery mechanisms for achieving the aims to transform the bus network in the borough. The BSIP was developed collaboratively by the Local Transport Authority (Cheshire West and Chester Council) and the main bus operators within the area. This Enhanced Partnership Plan forms the basis of the Enhanced Partnership and is effective from 20 April 2022. It sets out the overarching framework within which the Enhanced Partnership Scheme will be formed and operate.

It should be noted that an existing 'Voluntary Quality Partnership' is currently in place between Cheshire West and Chester Council and the operators Arriva and Stagecoach to govern the operation of the Blacon Pointer (1/1A/15/15A services). As noted within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme document, all of the provisions and arrangements within this VQP are to be incorporated into the Enhanced Partnership and will be replaced by the arrangements within the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme documents.

This document fulfils the statutory requirements of an Enhanced Partnership Plan as set out in the 2000 Act (as amended), including:

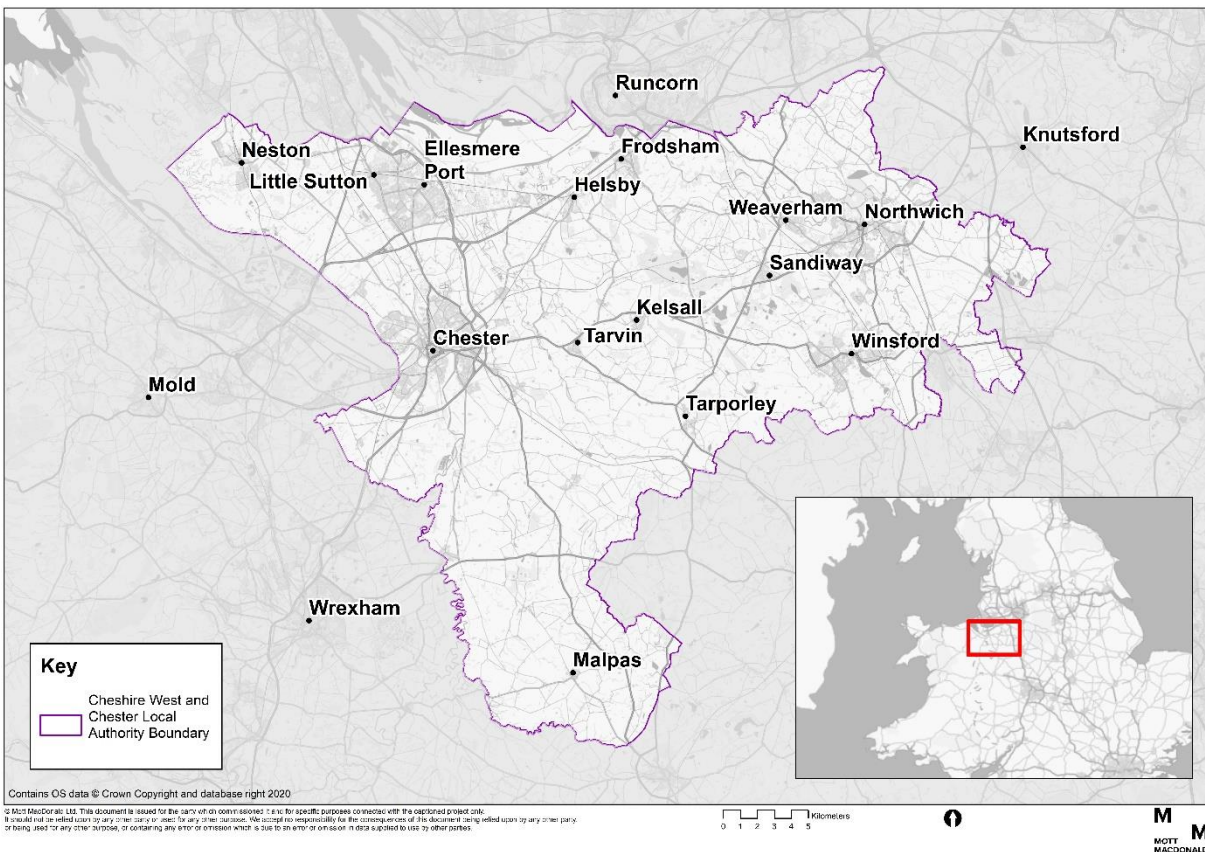
- A map of the geographical area it covers
- All the relevant factors that the parties consider will affect, or have the potential to affect, the local bus market over the life of the plan

- A summary of any available information on passengers' experiences of using bus services in the area and the priorities of users and non-users for improving them
- A summary of any available data on trends in bus journey speeds and the impact of congestion on local bus services
- What outcomes need to be delivered to improve local bus services in the plan area
- What overall interventions the partnership believes need to be taken to deliver those outcomes.

2.3 Geographical Scope

The Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) covers the geography of the unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Enhanced Partnership area



The Cheshire West and Chester geography covers a diverse area, with a number of urban centres along with a largely rural area in the central and southern parts of the borough.

The Council liaises with neighbouring authorities regularly to discuss cross-boundary bus issues. An Enhanced Partnership covering part or all of adjacent local authorities has been considered, but will not be taken forward at this time.

However, neighbouring authorities will be represented on the Enhanced Partnership Forum. The partnership may consider a cross boundary EP desirable in the future, for example in relation to cross-boundary bus services or development, and in cases where the partnership would wish to avoid a patchwork of inconsistent standards.

2.4 Enhanced Partnership Objectives and Outcomes

Alongside this Enhanced Partnership Plan sits an associated Enhanced Partnership Scheme, which sets out how the Plan will be delivered and the obligations of the parties involved. The table below summarises the objectives of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and the outcomes which are discussed within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme to achieve each objective. These are also cross-referenced against the eight priorities for bus passengers identified by Transport Focus.

Enhanced Partnership Plan Objectives	Enhanced Partnership Scheme Outcomes	Transport Focus Priorities
Operate more frequent, faster and reliable services that cover the borough spatially and temporally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revenue support fund to maintain network Improved timetable / frequency coordination Local service frequency enhancements Inter-urban frequency enhancements Rural frequency enhancements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buses running more often Buses going to more places More buses on time / faster journey times
Increase bus priority measures on key corridors to reduce delays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UTMC interventions Chester area highway interventions Towns and rural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More buses on time / faster journey times
Increase demand responsive services in areas not well served by conventional bus services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extension of targeted trials of pre-booked flexible route bus services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buses going to more places

Enhanced Partnership Plan Objectives	Enhanced Partnership Scheme Outcomes	Transport Focus Priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported services review • Supported services standards • Community enhancing routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible buses
Facilitate easy integration of bus services with other transport modes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park & Ride investment • Station link service • PlusBus improvements • Timetable and information at rail stations • Timing interventions to improve connectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better quality of information at bus stops
Simplify services to make it easier for passengers to understand where and when services operate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route numbering simplification • Information • Timing interventions to improve connectivity • Simpler ticketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better value for money • Better quality of information at bus stops
Review the provision of socially necessary services within CW&C and identify where increased provision is required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of targeted trials of pre-booked flexible route bus services • Supported services review • Supported services standards • Community enhancing routes • Collaboration with healthcare and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buses going to more places • Accessible buses

Enhanced Partnership Plan Objectives	Enhanced Partnership Scheme Outcomes	Transport Focus Priorities
	third sector providers	
Implement lower fares to make bus travel more affordable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower fares • Multi-operator ticketing • Integrate ticketing across modes and geographies • Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better value for money
Implement a simpler fares structure which enables people to easily understand the best value ticket for the journey(s) they are making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simpler ticketing • Multi-operator ticketing • Integrate ticketing across modes and geographies • Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better value for money • Accessible buses
Develop an integrated ticketing product that can be used on multiple operators and transport providers, including non-bus modes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-operator ticketing • Integrate ticketing across modes and geographies • Information • PlusBus improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better value for money • Accessible buses
Invest in vehicles which are of the highest standards in terms of accessibility, comfort and emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero emissions vehicles • Vehicle emissions standards • Other vehicle standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaner buses
Protect personal safety of bus passengers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other vehicle standards • Safety interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effort to tackle any anti-social behaviour
Improve buses for tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park & Ride investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better quality of information at bus stops

Enhanced Partnership Plan Objectives	Enhanced Partnership Scheme Outcomes	Transport Focus Priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate ticketing across modes and geographies • Multi-operator ticketing • Information • Route number simplification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible buses
Invest in decarbonisation of vehicles to contribute to reduced carbon emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero emissions vehicles • Vehicle emissions standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaner buses
Develop a Passenger Charter which sets out the standards that passengers can expect on bus services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Passenger Charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better value for money • More effort to tackle any anti-social behaviour • Better quality of information at bus stops • Accessible buses • Cleaner buses
Strengthen network identity across services which operate predominantly in CW&C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network branding • Information • Route numbering simplification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better quality of information at bus stops • Accessible buses
Improve availability, accessibility and accuracy of bus information, including routes, timetables and fares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Timetable and information at rail stations • Simpler ticketing • Multi-operator ticketing • Integrate ticketing across modes and geographies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better value for money • Better quality of information at bus stops • Accessible buses

2.5 Monitoring and reviewing progress

As per the BSIP guidance, the BSIP is a live document and therefore will be reviewed and updated as and when required, at a minimum once per year in conjunction with operators and other partners in CW&C. As part of this ongoing reviewing process, progress within CW&C with respect to the targets on buses set out in Section 4 will be reported every six months on the Council's BSIP webpage (<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/bus-strategy>). This is also where any revisions to the main BSIP document will be published, along with any explanations of why revisions have been made to the BSIP.

In addition to reviewing and revising the BSIP, the Enhanced Partnership Plan will be reviewed at least once every five years at which time public consultation will be undertaken on the effectiveness and suitability of the Plan. Consultees will include bus users and representatives from community groups, disabled groups and statutory bodies such as Transport Focus. This will be followed in each case by further review by the Enhanced Partnership Forum and Board to determine whether any changes need to be made to either the Plan or the Scheme, and a statutory period of objection of at least 28 days to provide operators the opportunity to object if the review results in any required variations to the plan. This process is described in more detail in Section 5.

In addition to the review process prescribed above, the Enhanced Partnership Forum may choose (via the Board) to enact changes to the Enhanced Partnership Plan at any of their regular meetings by exception, however any formal variations to the Plan will require the statutory variation process and the minimum 28 day statutory objection period for operators – see Section 2.7.

2.6 Enhanced Partnership Plan Review Timescales

The following timetable will apply for the implementation and revision of the Enhanced Partnership Plan:

- By 20 April 2022 – making of Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme
- By 31 May 2022 – establishment of an 'Enhanced Partnership Forum' and an 'Enhanced Partnership Board' formed of representatives from CW&CC, and bus operators, to oversee the Enhanced Partnership and delivery of the interventions noted
- 20 April 2022 – launch of the Enhanced Partnership
- From 20 April 2022 – implementation of the EPP through the Enhanced Partnership

- Starting in October 2022, six monthly (October and April) reporting on the progress of the Enhanced Partnership towards achieving the targets set out in the BSIP and EPP
- From October 22 – annual revision of the BSIP to reflect any changes to the bus context in CW&C, including review of the targets set in April 2022, and funding requirements.
- No later than March 2027 – five year review of the Enhanced Partnership Plan to ensure it remains fit for purpose and up to date.

2.7 Statutory operator objection mechanism

The Enhanced Partnership guidance provides for a mechanism to allow operator objection to the Enhanced Partnership proposals and or future variations. Once the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme have been drafted / varied and the operators notified, operators have a minimum four-week (28 day) period within which they can formally object to the proposals. If no objections are made, it will be assumed the operators are in agreement with the proposals.

If, following the operator objection period, there are material changes required to the EP Plan and/or Scheme, then a second operator objection period will be required prior to implementing the revised Enhanced Partnership.

It is noted that the Enhanced Partnership Scheme also contains a bespoke variation mechanism – this is discussed further in the EPS.

2.8 Interaction with neighbouring authorities

The EPS which sits alongside this EPP covers the same geographical area as the EPP. However, a large proportion of the bus services within CW&C are cross-boundary, into neighbouring authorities. These services are likely to be subject to similar, but potentially contradictory requirements from neighbouring authorities' EPSs. We do not, however, anticipate that any of the interventions included within the EPS will have a negative impact or present conflicts for cross-boundary services.

Our expectation is that the EPS will result in stronger collaboration with neighbouring authorities; representatives from them will sit on the Enhanced Partnership Forum associated with the administration of the EP. We will aim to seek agreement with neighbouring authorities regarding the measures put in place which affect cross-boundary services and will endeavour to be considerate of neighbouring authorities interests in the decisions that are made.

2.9 Competition Test

Making or varying an Enhanced Partnership is subject to the test in Part 1 of Schedule 10 to the Transport Act 2000, predominantly whether there is likely to be a significantly adverse effect on competition as a result of the proposals.

The Enhanced Partnership Plan has been developed in conjunction with all bus operators, is intended to apply across the Cheshire West and Chester bus network and does not propose any activity that would ordinarily impose any unnecessary restrictions on the deregulated bus market. The Competition Test set out in Part 1 of Schedule 10 to the Transport Act 2000 has been applied and it is concluded that, at this point, there will be no significantly adverse effect on competition arising from the proposed Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme.

3 Local Bus Network Characteristics and Usage

This section presents a brief summary of the evidence gathered on the existing network in Cheshire West and Chester, in terms of existing policy, supply and demand, that was presented within the BSIP and expanded upon within the Evidence Base Report. The following should be considered a summary of the most salient points with respect to this EPP only. It should also be noted that the data and evidence provided here is accurate as of December 2021 only and is likely to change as time progresses. A more detailed overview can be found in the BSIP itself and its supporting Evidence Base.

3.1 Local Policy

Cheshire West and Chester has a body of policy and strategy on the vision, ambitions, aims and objectives for the borough in relation to planning, transport and the climate emergency. In particular, and in addition to the recently published Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), the following documents have the most influence on Council policy with respect to bus provision within the borough. A review of these documents is available within the BSIP.

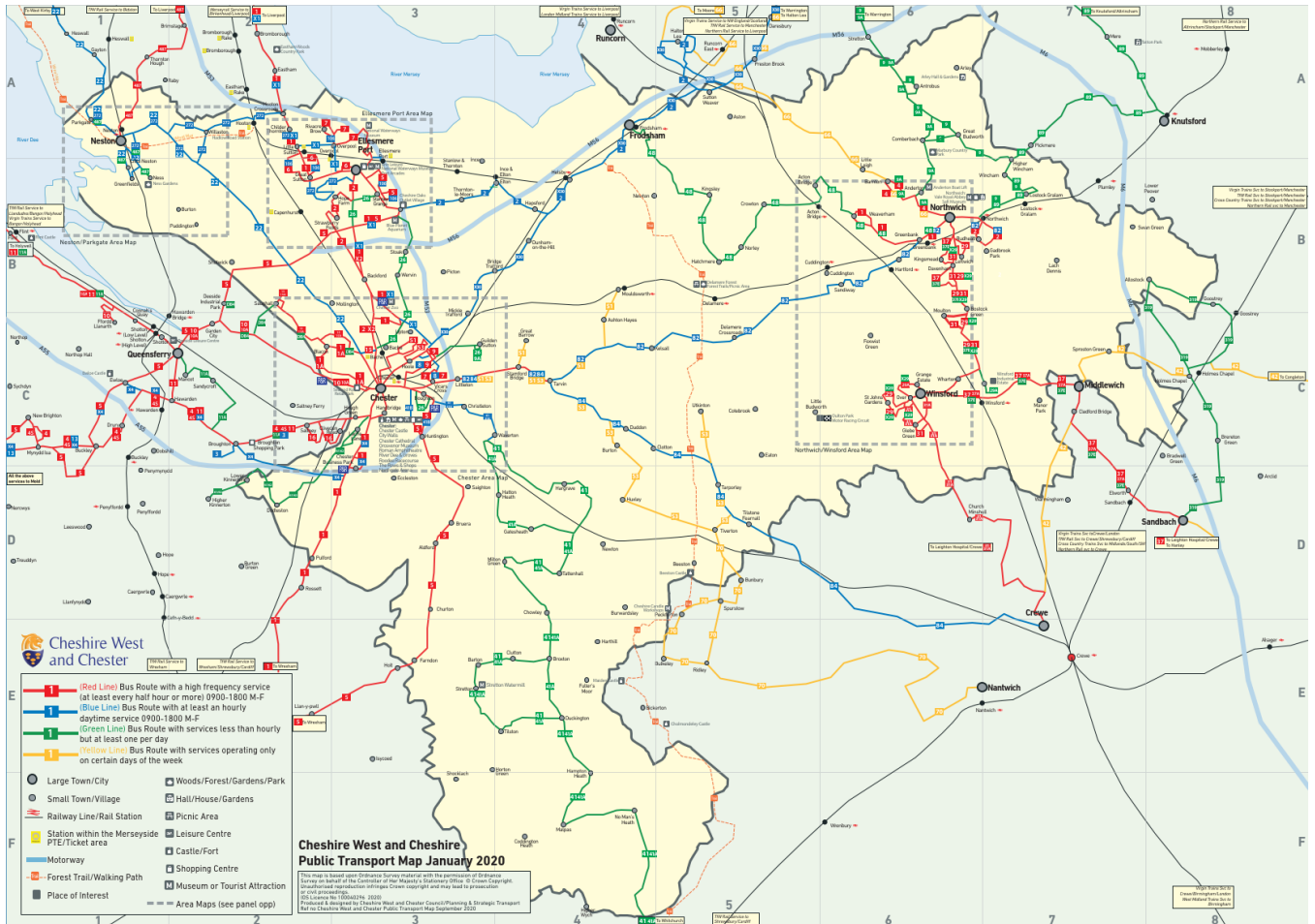
- Cheshire West and Chester Third Local Transport Plan
- Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan 2010-2030 (Part One) Strategic Policies
- Cheshire and Warrington LEP Transport Strategy 2017
- Cheshire West and Chester Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP)
- Local Area Transport Strategies for Chester, Northwich and Winsford

3.2 Current bus services

The diverse borough of Cheshire West and Chester is served by a network of around 50 bus routes, many of which straddle the boundary into neighbouring authorities including those within North Wales. At present, the network is to a large extent focused on Chester and Ellesmere Port in the west of the borough, and Northwich and Winsford in the east – CW&C's four most populous settlements. These two main urban areas are bisected by a sizeable, sparsely populated rural area, with considerably fewer and less frequent bus services.

90% of weekday daytime services in CW&C are provided by the two largest operators, with a number of smaller operators making up the remainder.

Figure 3.1: Bus Services Density



Source: CW&CC

3.2.1 Park & Ride

Cheshire West and Chester Council operates a bus-based Park and Ride system in the city of Chester, with three car parks currently in operation, plus another at Sealand Road which is currently not in use. There are over 3,100 spaces across the four park and ride sites. Buses operate on average every 12 minutes between 7am and 7pm on a weekday, every 12 minutes between 8am and 7pm on a Saturday, and every 15 minutes between 9:30am and 5:30pm on a Sunday and bank holidays. Tickets cost £2 return for an adult with up to two accompanying under 16s.

Vehicles used on the Park & Ride service are of high quality, with WiFi, USB charging, mock leather seats and Euro VI engines. The Park & Ride service is particularly well-used in the summer and Christmas periods, indicating its popularity and convenience for tourists visiting the city.

However, the Park and Ride system in Chester is loss-making and has been for a long period of time. It must be noted, however, that prior to the Covid-19

pandemic and associated health messaging concerning public transport, the services were demonstrating increases in passengers. The EP must consider how this vital component of the sustainable transport network within Chester could be improved and made more attractive to those that currently drive into the city, including difficult questions over its relationship with the rest of the local bus network. A key consideration will be in the pricing of parking in Chester City Centre since the Park and Ride system must offer a cheaper alternative for most city centre journeys to attract users.

There are three Park & Ride routes currently operating from three sites in the city: Upton (Chester Zoo) to the north of the city centre, Boughton Heath to the east and Wrexham Road to the south. The fourth site, Sealand Road, is (in late 2021) being used for Covid-19 testing.

3.2.2 Bus service frequency

Table 3.1 below shows the number of buses per hour serving each of the six largest settlements for different time periods during the week.

Table 3.1: Buses per hour by urban centre as of December 2021 (including Park and Ride and other contracted services)

Settlement	Buses per hour				
	Weekday Daytime	Weekday Evening	Saturday Daytime	Saturday Evening	Sunday
Chester	74	10	74	10	34
Ellesmere Port	13	1	12	1	5
Northwich	13	4	13	4	2
Winsford	5	2	5	2	0
Frodsham	3	0.25	3	0.25	1
Neston	4	1	3	1	1

Source: Bus Open Source Data

Bus services per hour in each urban centre highlights the concentration of services in the western part of the borough, particularly in Chester, and demonstrates the very large disparity in accessibility to bus services across the borough. Outside of Chester, there is particularly limited provision of services during the evenings and on Sundays; Northwich, Winsford and Frodsham have very few (if any) buses serving them on Sundays. This demonstrates a clear gap in the market-led provision of buses in these localities. Although there are patches of deprivation throughout the borough, there are particular concentrations around Ellesmere Port and Winsford, which are also localities with relatively poor levels of bus service provision.

3.3 Congestion and bus journey times

Table 3.2 shows car (top line) and bus (bottom line) journey times between the seven largest settlements in Cheshire West and Chester during the inter-peak

period on a weekday. The bus journey times use bus only, and do not include rail even if available. Bus journeys include waiting times between buses at changes, but do not include any waiting time prior to the first bus.

Table 3.2: Comparative journey times between selected locations (including waiting time at changes for bus) as of December 2021

	Ellesmere Port	Northwich	Winsford	Frodsham	Helsby	Neston
Chester	Car: 19 minutes	35 minutes	30 minutes	24 minutes	20 minutes	24 minutes
	Bus: 35 minutes	81 minutes	139 minutes	38 minutes	29 minutes	44 minutes
Ellesmere Port	-	30 minutes	30 minutes	18 minutes	12 minutes	18 minutes
	-	118 minutes	176 minutes	38 minutes	28 minutes	36 minutes
Northwich	-	-	12 minutes	22 minutes	26 minutes	40 minutes
	-	-	42 minutes	54 minutes	93 minutes	161 minutes
Winsford	-	-	-	26 minutes	30 minutes	45 minutes
	-	-	-	109 minutes	143 minutes	211 minutes
Frodsham	-	-	-	-	6 minutes	28 minutes
	-	-	-	-	9 minutes	107 minutes
Helsby	-	-	-	-	-	22 minutes
	-	-	-	-	-	100 minutes

Source: Google Maps

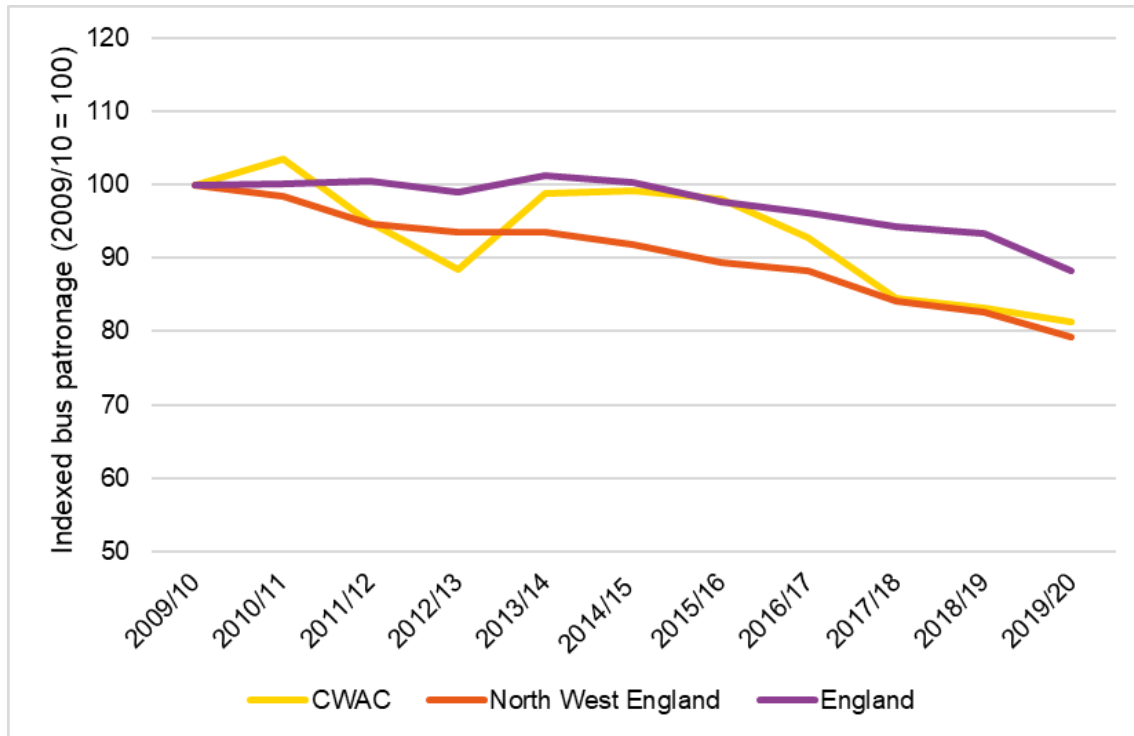
It is evident that bus only journey times are not currently competitive against car, and in some cases can take more than 4 times as long.

While bus journey times are slower than car, they do not experience significant delays as a result of congestion. Discussions with operators revealed that congestion is not a major issue for them, and this is corroborated by timetabling – morning and afternoon peak services typically have the same journey times as inter-peak and off-peak services.

3.4 Bus service patronage

Like most areas outside London, bus usage in CW&C has seen gradual decline in recent years. From a recent high of 11.6 million in 2010/11, the number of bus passenger journeys fell to 9.1 million in 2019/20, albeit with some rises and falls during that period.

Figure 3.2: Indexed bus patronage, 2009/10-2019/20



Source: Bus Operators

Table 3.3 shows the number of bus journeys made per head of population in Cheshire West and Chester and a selection of comparable localities. CW&C has the second lowest number of bus journeys per head of population among the localities included, demonstrating that bus services are not well used and are not regarded as a first choice mode of transport for the vast majority of the local population.

Table 3.3: Bus passenger journeys per head of population (2018/19)

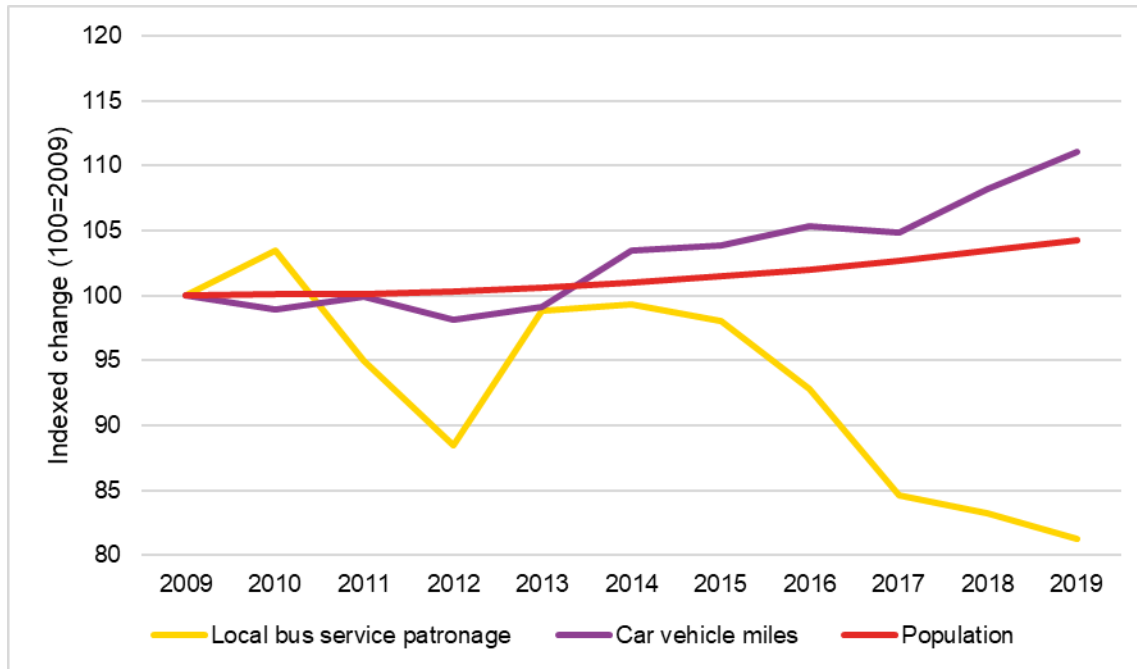
Locality (selected comparators)	Bus journeys per head of population
Cheshire West and Chester	27.5
Cheshire East	11.1
Durham	41.9
York	75.1
Kent	34.0
Essex	28.8
North West England	52.6
England	76.9

Source: Department for Transport

Figure 3.3 shows an index of bus patronage on local bus services, car vehicle miles and population in CW&C between 2009 and 2019. It shows that population has grown steadily by about 4% over the period. During this period, bus patronage has fallen by around 20%, while car vehicle miles have

increased by 11%, indicating both a shift in modal share from bus to car over the last 10 years, and an increase in number of journeys per resident. This data does not include the impacts of the pandemic.

Figure 3.3: Indexed CW&C bus patronage, car mileage and population, 2009-2019



Source: DfT, TRA8902, BUS0109 and ONS

3.5 Passenger experience

In Summer 2021, over 1,600 members of the CW&C local community, including local councillors, representatives from business and community groups, as well as members of the public, completed a public engagement survey carried out in support of the BSIP's development. Overall, respondents said they expected to use the bus less from September 2021 than they had prior to March 2020.

'Never' was the most common response among respondents with regard to their bus usage from September 2021. This, combined with nearly 6 in 10 respondents reporting it difficult or very difficult to get to where they wanted to by bus, shows the level of challenge faced by CW&CC in trying to raise bus patronage and change the mentality of people regarding buses.

The most common recorded reasons that prevent people from using bus were:

- Quicker to drive (51% of respondents)
- Doesn't operate at required times (45%)
- The bus route/stops are inconvenient (43%)
- I don't think the bus is frequent enough (40%)
- Doesn't go to my preferred destination (31%)

- Too expensive (30%)

In terms of the factors which would encourage respondents to use buses more, the most frequently selected responses were:

- Improve frequency of local bus services (66% of respondents)
- Extend hours of operation later into the evening (56%)
- Better choice of destinations (43%)
- Provide more bus services on Sunday and Bank Holidays (42%)
- Better information at bus stops and shelters e.g., real time passenger information screens (38%)
- Journey times on bus services made quicker (33%)

3.6 Ticketing products and fares

At present, there is little coordination with regard to ticketing. Operators do not generally accept each other's tickets, except on the Blacon Pointer Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between Arriva, Stagecoach, and D&G Buses. Arriva, Stagecoach, D&G and Warrington's Own Buses all offer a daily, weekly, and monthly tickets, as well as singles and returns. Apart from the VPA, these are only usable on the respective operator's own services with no interchangeability or inter-availability. In addition, Stagecoach and Arriva offer termly and annual student passes. Ticketing details for other operators in CW&C are not normally available on their websites.

The creation of a VPA between Stagecoach and Arriva to establish a multi-operator ticket exclusively for the VPA demonstrates the ability and willingness to collaborate in this way under appropriate conditions. There is the potential for the Blacon Pointer partnership to act as a blueprint for other similar arrangements. For simplicity, Table 3.4 provides a breakdown of day ticket fares only by operator to give an indication of ticket prices, but operators listed here offer a range of other ticket types, including singles, weekly and monthly tickets, as well as term time passes for students and children.

Table 3.4: Summary bus fares by service operators

Operator	Blacon Pointer Day Ticket	Adult Day (most appropriate local zone selected)	Network Return
Stagecoach	£2.70	£4.00	-
Arriva	£2.70	£4.60	-
Warrington's Own Buses	-	£5.95	-
D&G Buses	-	-	£5.50

Source: Bus Open Source Data

Apart from the VPA, the only other multi-operator ticketing offer available within CW&C is the National Rail PlusBus add-on that allows unlimited bus travel throughout a specific area over the course of a day. PlusBus is available for both Chester and Ellesmere Port although the areas of validity in both cases are rather tightly contained within the extents of the settlements themselves. Some restrictions apply on these tickets, for instance the PlusBus ticket is not valid on the City Rail Link bus in Chester which is a rather counter-intuitive restriction, given that this is one of the first interactions visitors have with buses in the city. The Council does, however, offer a stored value smart card, the Cheshire Travelcard, which enables passengers to top up with cash and then use it to pay for tickets on the bus. It is accepted by most operators, and Arriva give a 10% discount when using it to purchase a single ticket.

3.7 Bus priority measures

There are currently 2km of bus lanes in the CW&C area, all of which are within the Chester area and located at:

- Hough Green, Chester
- Sealand Road, Chester
- Wrexham Road, Chester
- Upper Northgate Street Chester
- Love Street, Chester
- Frodsham Street, Chester
- St Oswald's Way to Oulton Place Slip Road, Chester
- Boughton Road, Chester

There are also bus lane facilities on the A5116 Liverpool Road and A51 Boughton Road that were suspended during the pandemic, the former of which has not (as of December 2021) been brought back into use as an ongoing review looks into the future balance of its use, highway needs and active travel needs. Many of these facilities serve both the service bus and Park and Ride networks and, given their use by buses, bicycles, taxis, private hire vehicles and motorcycles, can provide faster journey times and uncongested road-space for a variety of non-private-car vehicles. These measures work most effectively in areas of congestion and delay for buses and other vehicles, and need to be carefully located so as to cause maximum benefit for non-car trips rather than in locations where they are easily incorporated but of potentially less benefit.

Chester also has an Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) system in place which allows the potential for detection of buses and the live alteration of signal timings to facilitate quicker journeys for bus vehicles. It should be noted,

however, that this system has been in place for some time and does not currently make use of the latest technology available to selectively offer bus priority.

It will be important to build on these existing assets within the BSIP and EP to ensure that bus priority is targeted in the most effective and beneficial locations to facilitate bus journeys and to encourage mode shift from private car to more sustainable modes of transport.

3.8 Bus network infrastructure

The £13.5m Chester Bus Interchange, and accompanying public realm, is an award-winning bus station which opened in 2017 and can handle up to 156 buses per hour at its 13 stands. Currently, around 800 buses use the facility each day, including National Express coaches, with an improved user interface for rail users, pedestrians and cyclists, amongst the core benefits. The bus interchange has good quality facilities including real-time information, retail (including a coffee shop), high quality toilets, a Changing Places facility, and baby-changing facilities and informal provision for bus layover and staff welfare. The Council is responsible for day-to-day operation of the Interchange. As the focus of the Chester bus network, the new facility provides a vital role in improving the public transport infrastructure of Chester.

Ellesmere Port bus station, located in the town centre, has recently also undergone a transformational relocation and refresh. All buses which serve Ellesmere Port call at the bus station.

In Northwich, there are seven bus stops along Watling Street in the town centre which serves as the bus hub, whilst in Winsford there is no dedicated bus terminus, but a series of stops around the town centre on Dene Drive and High Street. Similarly in Neston, there is no dedicated bus terminus, although the rail station, located in the town centre, acts as a mini transport hub, with bus services calling there, and a stop at Brook Street forming the most popular central stop. Frodsham and Helsby have no dedicated bus stations.

In total, CW&C has a total of 2,663 bus stops across the borough, of which 847 (32%) are unmarked on the highway, 563 (21%) have a shelter, and 1,357 (51%) have timetable information displayed. The Council is responsible for maintaining most of these bus stops and the shelters, however it currently has a contract in place with Clear Channel to maintain and provide advertising for 114 of the 563 stops with a shelter (20%).

3.9 Information availability

At present, there is no central resource of all bus information for the borough. The CW&C Council website provides a list of bus routes operating in the area, and where available a timetable and a link to the operators' websites. Information on operators' websites varies, with some offering maps, timetables

and ticketing details, while others are more limited. The fragmented nature of the bus network in CW&C presents challenges for CW&C in maintaining their website and online resource with up-to-date, accurate information on bus routes, timetables and fares.

3.10 Factors affecting the local bus market

Over the lifetime of the Enhanced Partnership, the following potential factors that affect the local bus network have been identified:

- Unknown Covid-19 evolution and associated lockdowns/restrictions in the coming years
- Decisions made by neighbouring authorities regarding their bus services.
This includes authorities within North Wales
- Unpredictable situation regarding the return of fare-paying and concessionary passengers to bus services, with changing working and shopping patterns
- Uncertainty over future funding availability and scale
- Threats of reduced driver availability due to difficulty in attracting and retaining drivers
- Wage inflation increasing operating costs for bus operators
- The regulatory context within which bus services operate may change with the establishment of Enhanced Partnerships
- Local population demographic profile changes in terms of age and overall number of people

4 Vision, Objectives, Policies and Outcomes

4.1 Our Vision for Buses

In producing the BSIP for Cheshire West and Chester, the following vision was derived. This vision has been taken forward as the overarching vision for the Enhanced Partnership.

“To make bus a mode of choice for the full cross-section of society by removing barriers to travel and making buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper. To build in greater levels of community involvement, to both reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back to bus, and also to improve on pre-pandemic levels of service. To create a network that supports the Council’s strategic priorities of tackling climate change; growing the local economy and delivering secure jobs; supporting children and young people to get the best start in life; supporting older residents and rural communities; and enabling more adults to live longer, healthier and happier lives”.

The Enhanced Partnership will facilitate the development of a stable, co-ordinated, and appealing bus offer that will make a major contribution to positive social, economic and environmental outcomes for residents, employees and visitors to the borough alike.

4.2 Overarching objectives for the bus network

The objectives derived during the production of the BSIP for Cheshire West and Chester are as follows. These have been taken forward to form the overarching objectives for the Enhanced Partnership.

- 1. Mitigating against Climate Change:** Reduce carbon emissions from transport by adapting our transport networks to take advantage of low carbon and renewable resources to mitigate the effects of climate change
- 2. Enhancing Connectivity within Cheshire West:** Enhance transport connectivity within Cheshire West between urban and rural areas and across local, regional and national borders
- 3. Promoting Equality of Opportunity:** Work to increase equality of opportunity within Cheshire West and surrounding areas by installing

minimum standards of transport accessibility for all areas, and regardless of individual circumstance

4. **Supporting Growth and Regeneration:** Support sustainable economic growth and regeneration within Cheshire West and surrounding areas by improving connectivity between key growth sites and accessibility to jobs and services
5. **Raise Quality of Life within Cheshire West and surrounding areas:** Ensure that transport helps to improve quality of life and enhances the local environment within Cheshire West and surrounding areas
6. **Ensure that the Transport Network is Reliable and Efficient:** Provide and develop reliable and efficient transport networks, that are integrated, accessible and inclusive, customer focused, sustainable and resilient
7. **Improve the safety and health benefits of the transport network:** Contribute to safer and more secure transport in Cheshire West and surrounding areas and promote types of transport which are beneficial to health
8. **Enhance the accessibility of the sustainable transport network:** Create a highly accessible sustainable transport network in Cheshire West and surrounding areas that offers an attractive and viable alternative to the private car throughout the day.

These objectives lie at the core of the Enhanced Partnership.

4.3 Specific policy objectives for the Enhanced Partnership

In addition to the overarching objectives for the bus network, a number of specific policy objectives have been developed to guide the development of the Enhanced Partnership. These align with the delivery themes put forward as part of the National Bus Strategy for England and form the policies regarding local bus services that will be pursued within the EP area:

- Operate more frequent, faster and reliable services that cover the borough spatially and temporally
- Increase bus priority measures on key corridors to reduce delays
- Increase demand responsive services in areas not well served by conventional bus services

- Facilitate easy integration of bus services with other transport modes
- Simplify services to make it easier for passengers to understand where and when services operate
- Review the provision of socially necessary services within CW&C and identify where increased provision is required
- Implement lower fares to make bus travel more affordable
- Implement a simpler fares structure which enables people to easily understand the best value ticket for the journey(s) they are making
- Develop an integrated ticketing product that can be used on multiple operators and transport providers, including non-bus modes
- Invest in vehicles which are of the highest standards in terms of accessibility, comfort and emissions
- Protect personal safety of bus passengers
- Improve buses for tourists
- Invest in decarbonisation of vehicles to contribute to reduced carbon emissions
- Develop a Passenger Charter which sets out the standards that passengers can expect on bus services
- Strengthen network identity across services which operate predominantly in CW&C
- Improve availability, accessibility and accuracy of bus information, including routes, timetables and fares

In addition to the specific policy objectives, Transport Focus identified a total of eight passenger priorities, noting the items that passengers want to see emerge from the National Bus Strategy (and therefore from the Cheshire West and Chester EP). These are:

- Buses running more often
- Buses going to more places
- More buses on time / faster journey times
- Better value for money
- More effort to tackle any anti-social behaviour
- Better quality of information at bus stops

- Accessible buses
- Cleaner buses

As is discussed in more detail in the BSIP and in the following section, the packages of interventions developed for delivery by the Enhanced Partnership (and described in detail within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme) have been specified so as to satisfy these strategic policy objectives.

4.4 Targets

It is a requirement of Enhanced Partnerships to monitor key metrics relating to the bus network to understand how it is performing against a number of targets. These targets were derived as part of the BSIP and have been carried forward as core targets for the EP, with progress to be reviewed on a bi-annual basis. The targets for Cheshire West and Chester relate to:

- Journey time
- Reliability
- Passenger numbers and
- Average passenger satisfaction.

Specific targets were set in the BSIP, however these are contingent on the receipt of sufficient funding, unconfirmed as of December 2021. Nonetheless, performance in these four areas will be continually monitored and targets set on a bi-annual basis once the funding availability is understood. As part of this ongoing iterative process, progress within CW&C with respect to the targets on buses set out in Section 3 will be reported every six months on the Council's BSIP/EP webpage (<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/bus-strategy>).

4.5 Funding Arrangements

The Cheshire West and Chester Enhanced Partnership will draw on multiple funding sources to deliver the desired outcomes of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme. These will include:

- Council capital funding
- Council revenue funding
- Developer contributions
- Reinvestment of operator revenue generated by schemes and
- Other external funding opportunities including National Bus Strategy funding from Central Government.

4.6 Enhanced Partnership Outcomes

To satisfy the objectives and policies listed above, changes to the bus network will need to stimulate the following outcomes:

- Implement service frequency, quality and network coverage enhancements

- Expand marketing and communications
- Deliver improved reliability through physical infrastructure
- Improve data collection and analysis to better target investment
- Improve the pricing and ticketing offer
- Increase the level of partnership working through a statutory Enhanced Partnership arrangement
- Increase bus travel by young people
- Improve contracting and regulatory processes through a statutory Enhanced Partnership framework
- Implement a behaviour change programme

This Enhanced Partnership Plan will be actioned through an Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS) comprising Cheshire West and Chester Council, as the Local Transport Authority, and bus operators.

The Enhanced Partnership Scheme document sets out how the BSIP/EPP vision and objectives are to be achieved, and includes the scope of the EP Scheme and its commencement date, the obligations on CW&CC as the Local Transport Authority, the obligations on the bus operators which operate within CW&C, the Governance Structure and Bespoke Variation Arrangements, and the specific interventions which will deliver the EP Plan.

Improvements to the bus network in Cheshire West and Chester to achieve the objectives of the EPP set out in Section 4 will be delivered through 11 packages which will address the delivery themes specified in the National Bus Strategy.

The 11 packages, with a summary of the measures included in each package, are shown in the table below. Delivery of these outcomes will be contingent upon receipt of sufficient funding from various sources including Central Government. Further details can be found in the EPS document.

Table 4.1: Enhanced Partnership Scheme Packages and Outcomes

Package	Outcome Summary
1: Service Frequency – Phase A Covid Recovery Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revenue support fund to maintain network ● Timetable change co-ordination ● Improved timetable / frequency co-ordination
2: Service Frequency – Phase B Growth Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local service frequency enhancements ● Inter-urban frequency enhancements ● Rural frequency enhancements

Package	Outcome Summary
3: Bus Priority Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● UTMC interventions ● Chester area highway interventions ● Towns and rural areas
4: DRT, Socially Necessary/Supported Service Standard Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extension of targeted trials of pre-booked flexible route bus services ● Supported services review ● Supported services minimum standards ● Community enhancing routes ● Collaboration with healthcare and third sector providers
5: Modal Integration Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Park & Ride investment ● Station link service improvements ● PlusBus improvements ● Timetable and information at rail stations ● Timing interventions to improve connectivity ● Chester City Gateway integration
6: Service Branding, Co-ordination, Information and Simplification Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information improvements ● Route numbering simplification ● Network branding
7: Passenger Infrastructure Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Real time information rollout ● Stop infrastructure improvements
8: Fares and Ticketing Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multi-operator ticketing ● Simpler ticketing ● Lower fares ● Integrating ticketing across modes and geographies
9: Vehicle package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zero emissions vehicles rollout ● Vehicle emissions minimum standards ● Other vehicle minimum standards
10: Policy Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parking policy integration ● Local Plan / planning / development planning integration

Package	Outcome Summary
11: Safety, Education, Promotion and Resource Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Delivery resource safeguarding● Safety interventions● Sustainable travel promotion

The EPS document contains details on the 11 packages which were included within the BSIP and these will form the primary means of delivery of improvements to the bus network in Cheshire West and Chester.

5 Enhanced Partnership Plan Governance Arrangements

Further information on Governance, particularly Governance in relation to the EP Scheme, is provided in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Document, however below is a summary of the main aspects of partnership governance as it applies to the Enhanced Partnership Plan.

5.1 Enhanced Partnership Working Group

For the day-to-day operational decisions and discussion around the services that make up the Enhanced Partnership, an Enhanced Partnership Working Group will be incorporated to include Cheshire West and Chester Council officers, representatives from all commercial bus operators within Cheshire West and Chester (Arriva, Stagecoach, D&G Buses, Warrington's Own Buses, Arrowsebrook, and Aintree Coachline), and any other professional internal or external staffing support deemed necessary.

EP Working Group meetings are proposed to be held monthly and are used to discuss the ongoing operation and maintenance of the partnership, common issues to be resolved, and agreement of any small changes to services that may be implemented without the requirement to statutorily vary the Plan or the Scheme. At busy times, including the early months of formation of the Scheme it is expected that meetings will be required on closer to a fortnightly cycle. The Working Group also identifies the specification and scope of any significant decisions to be taken to the Enhanced Partnership Forum including those that require variations to the Plan or Scheme.

5.2 Enhanced Partnership Forum

For oversight purposes, the Enhanced Partnership will be overseen by an Enhanced Partnership Forum – in which all Operators will be entitled to participate and be invited, although attendance by individual Operators is voluntary.

The EP Forum will provide opportunities for discussing issues of all kinds affecting the Cheshire West and Chester bus network, consulting with and building consensus across the various stakeholders and making recommendations for decisions to the EP Board.

Membership of the Enhanced Partnership Forum will comprise the following:

- All Bus Operators running Qualifying Bus Services
- Cheshire West and Chester Council Officers

- Representatives from Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Representatives from Local Businesses and the LEP
- Representatives from Local Bus User Group/s if available
- Representatives from the Poverty and Truth Team for Cheshire West and Chester
- Representatives from the Corporate Disability Access Forum
- Any other representatives that the Council's own Disability Access Officer recommends should be invited for inclusion.

In addition, from time to time other external organisations may be invited to join the EP Forum on an advisory basis for fixed periods to provide specialist expertise.

5.2.1 EP Forum Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The final EP Forum meeting of each financial year will be the designated EP Forum AGM. All Operators will be invited to self-nominate or nominate other willing Operators for EP Board membership, to represent themselves and all other Operators in their category, ahead of the EP Forum AGM. A ballot will be organised by the Council at the Annual General Meeting to select Operators' preferred EP Board representatives.

5.2.2 EP Forum Meeting Arrangements

EP Forum meetings will take place quarterly. EP Forum meetings will be arranged and minutes taken by Cheshire West and Chester Council officers. If possible an independent chair will be appointed for this group although, initially, it is expected that this would be chaired by a senior Cheshire West and Chester officer. Meeting length will vary according to agenda content but ordinarily expected to be one to two hours.

Agendas and meeting papers (including a copy of minutes and outcomes of decisions taken at the previous EP Board) will be circulated by the Council no less than one week in advance of each meeting, and draft minutes circulated no more than two weeks after each meeting. Draft minutes will be approved at the next EP Forum meeting.

5.3 Enhanced Partnership Board

The EP Board will be the decision-making body of the Enhanced Partnership and will meet no sooner than 14 days after the EP Forum meeting on a quarterly basis. Certain decisions of the EP Board may require a statutory Enhanced Partnership Plan Variation – the process for this is described in

Section 5.3.7 below. Membership of the EP Board will comprise the following representatives:

- 2x Large Operators (voting)
- 2x Small Operators (voting)
- 2x Cheshire West and Chester Council to represent fully contracted service operators (voting with decision veto)

Board meetings will require a quorum of at least two Operator representatives, with a minimum of one per category (Large/Small) and one Council representative. An Operator representative may, if necessary, arrange for an alternate or deputy from the same category to participate with voting rights.

5.3.1 Operator Representative Selection

Operators representing each of the categories of Operator membership above will be invited to self-nominate or nominate other willing Operators in writing to the Council prior to each EP Forum AGM. Where there are more than two nominees for any single category, all Bus Operators in the same category will be given the opportunity to vote by secret ballot undertaken among those present at the EP Forum AGM for a preferred representative. Voting will be on the basis of one vote per Operator (where Operators are part of the same holding company or group, they will only be entitled to one vote between them). Operator representatives will be reselected on an annual basis.

The voting procedure for membership selection will be a simple majority and be administered by the Council. Where there is a tie, a run-off vote will take place between the leading tied Operators.

In the event that an EP Forum AGM ballot fails to select Operator representatives for one or more Operator category, the statutory Operator objection mechanism set out in the Enhanced Partnerships and Schemes (Objections) Regulations 2018 will be used to determine the views of Operators in that category for the purposes of EP Board votes (in terms of objection or otherwise to the proposals). The statutory operator objection mechanism is discussed in Section 5.3.7.

5.3.2 Role of EP Board members:

Operator representatives will be acting on behalf of all Operators in that category, not on behalf of their own company alone. Representatives will be responsible for ensuring attendance at all EP Board meetings in that year, and ensure they have:

- (a) fully reviewed and understood all meeting papers in advance of attendance
- (b) the required mandate from the Operators they represent.

5.3.3 EP Board decision making

Decisions of the EP Board will be made by way of a vote through a show of hands from those with voting rights. Decisions will be passed by way of a simple majority of all members of the EP Board entitled to vote (on a one voting member one vote basis). Members not exercising their vote will be deemed to be abstentions.

Operators will be entitled to make known their concerns in writing to the Council if they object to a particular vote of the EP Board. The Council will review the circumstances and consider whether these are such that use of its veto is required as provided for below.

5.3.4 Council veto

These controls ensure that the voting system does not allow an individual Operator to influence the Enhanced Partnership to its own commercial benefit or to harm competitors; there is no opportunity for a group of Operators to vote in a co-ordinated manner to mutual benefit on a sustained basis; there is no discrimination between Operators; and that actual or potential competition, entry to new services and by new Operators, or innovation, is not inhibited. The Council may, in exceptional circumstances, exercise a veto over EP Board decisions which it may reasonably believe or suspect them as having anti-competitive implications or being otherwise significantly against the public interest.

5.3.5 Meeting observers

Any other Bus Operator, and Council representatives will be able to attend the EP Board meetings as observers but will not have the right to vote. Observers may be invited to make comments or ask questions of the EP Board at the Chair's discretion or invited to defer these until the next EP Forum meeting.

5.3.6 Meeting arrangements

EP Board meetings will take place not less than 14 days following EP Forum meetings with provision for additional meetings as required to take decisions which in the opinion of the Chair cannot be deferred to a scheduled meeting, provided that a quorum can be achieved, with not less than one week's notice being given. Meetings will be arranged, chaired and minutes taken by the Council. Meeting length will vary according to agenda content but ordinarily be one to two hours.

Agendas and meeting papers will be circulated to all Board members no less than one week in advance of each meeting date, and draft minutes circulated no more than two weeks after each meeting. Copies will also be distributed to all EP Forum members so any issues or concerns can be discussed with the

relevant Operator representative, to be raised at the EP Board meeting. Draft minutes will be approved at the next EP Board meeting.

5.3.7 Statutory EP Plan Variation and Operator Objection Mechanism

In cases where, in response to a proposal put forward by the Enhanced Partnership Forum, a variation is required to the Enhanced Partnership Plan (as distinct from the Enhanced Partnership Scheme), or in cases in which agreement cannot be reached on, for example, operator representative selection, the statutory operator objection process will be used. This process will last not less than 28 days and will provide all bus operators of qualifying services in Cheshire West and Chester the opportunity to object to the proposal put forward and to present alternative proposals. Where individual operators decide to object, they should provide their justification for doing so.

Objections should be put in writing to a specified postal and email address. Objections will then be assessed by the Council. Full details of this process and the means by which an objection is assessed is provided in the Guidance for Enhanced Partnerships (Oct 2021)¹.

5.4 Enforcement

For the purposes of enforcement of the stipulations of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and its accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s), the Council (either directly where the Council has delegated to it Traffic Commissioner Powers, or indirectly via the Traffic Commissioner), will apply the following arrangements in relation to local bus service registrations.

If a Bus Operator should fail to observe or perform any of the requirements of the Enhanced Partnership Plan or its accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s), then the Council shall be entitled to serve a written warning notice on the Bus Operator. The warning notice will detail the failure to observe or perform the requirements in question with sufficient detail as the Bus Operator may require to enable it to understand and identify the alleged failure(s) (a 'Warning Notice'). The Council may also, at its discretion, invite the Operator to participate in discussions about any specified failures, before a Warning Notice is issued.

In the event that a Warning Notice is served on a Bus Operator which, in the opinion of the Bus Operator (acting reasonably) is factually inaccurate, is unfair or unreasonable, or has been issued in error, the Bus Operator shall be entitled to provide evidence to support their claims. The Operator may also request a face-to-face meeting with the relevant representatives of the Council to discuss the evidence and express its concerns in person. The parties shall meet as soon as reasonably practicable at a mutually convenient location and discuss the Warning Notice and the Bus Operator's concerns in good faith. In the event

¹ The National Bus Strategy: Delivering Bus Service Improvement Plans using an Enhanced Partnership - Guidance – DfT 2021

that the Council is of the view that the Bus Operator's concerns are valid, it shall withdraw and cancel the Warning Notice with immediate effect. Such withdrawn and cancelled Warning Notice shall not be deemed a valid Warning Notice for the purposes of calculating the number of Warning Notices issued against a Bus Operator as below.

The Warning Notice shall state on its face that it is a Warning Notice and shall set out the measures which the Council requires the Bus Operator to take (acting reasonably) to ensure that the requirement(s) are met, that failure to meet these does not occur again, and the reasonable timescales within which the Bus Operator is to effect such measures. The Bus Operator shall use all reasonable endeavours to comply with the terms of the Warning Notice. In the event that the Council serves more than three Warning Notices on a single Bus Operator within any continuous twelve month period, or the Bus Operator fails to remedy a Warning Notice within the specified timescales without reasonable excuse, the Council shall, subject first to the outcome of the statutory appeals process available to the Bus Operator if engaged, be entitled to cancel the local bus service registration.

In arriving at a decision regarding the issuing of a Warning Notice or cancelling a bus service registration, the Council will take into account the effects of any agreed scheme or improvement which was anticipated to have a beneficial effect on the Bus Operator's operations, but which has not been delivered or materialised, to the extent that the delivery of such scheme or improvement was outside the Bus Operator's control.

5.5 Implications for small and medium sized operators

Given the variety of bus operators involved (in terms of market share, fleet size, company turnover and structure), it is important to ensure that the effects of the partnership do not unduly impact upon smaller operators' ability to engage or to comply with requirements.

The EP Board will therefore consist of equal numbers of representatives from large operators (defined as those representing more than 10% of the total registered mileage of qualifying services), and small operators (defined as those representing less than 10%). In addition, it should be noted that Bus Operator Requirements will not be placed upon certain categories of service (Non-qualifying Services), which represent many smaller operators' main commercial interests.

For the avoidance of doubt, a list of Large, and Small Operators will be published on the EP website at the start of each Council financial year.

5.6 Enhanced Partnership Plan Review

As noted in section 2.5, the Enhanced Partnership Plan will be reviewed at least once every five years at which time public consultation will be undertaken on

the effectiveness and suitability of the Plan. Consultees will include bus users and representatives from community groups, disabled groups and statutory bodies such as Transport Focus as well as the general public - the EP Forum will have the ability to recommend any specific additional groups that should be consulted. This will be followed in each case by further review by the Enhanced Partnership Forum and Board to determine whether any changes need to be made to either the Plan or the Scheme, and a statutory period of objection of at least 28 days to provide operators the opportunity to object if the review results in any required variations to the plan.

