

Results of the Formal Consultation on the West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme

The consultation commenced on the 18 January 2022 and ran for 28 days, closing at 5pm on 14 February 2022.

The consultation was limited to statutory stakeholders which consisted of:

- (a) all operators of local bus services operating in West Berkshire (both PSV and section 22 operators);
- (b) all West Berkshire Parish and Town Councils;
- (c) the 3 Members of Parliament in the district;
- (d) all West Berkshire Council elected Members;
- (e) our 5 neighbouring local authorities;
- (f) the Traffic Commissioner;
- (g) Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner;
- (h) Transport Focus; and
- (i) the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

The overall purpose of the consultation was to gauge support for the proposed Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme and to seek suggestions for further improvements. A total of 53 responses were received via the Survey Monkey form that was set up for this purpose.

Looking closer at the questions:

- Three responses received were No to the question '*Do you think the West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPPS) accurately reflect the priorities of the Council's approved Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)?*' One response gave no explanation. The other two responses included the points that it was felt targets were missing on when certain improvements would be delivered (hard to do this when we do not yet know our funding allocation), and that some small hamlets would continue to be unserved by local bus services (although our BSIP included 5 proposed demand responsive services which would dramatically increase the area of the district served by local bus).
- Three responses were also No to the question, '*Do you think the EPPS gives sufficient oversight of the Enhanced Partnership?*' Two gave no explanation for their response. The one explanation we received was because they felt at no time had we asked the simple question, 'What would make you use public transport?' We would not agree with this view. The BSIP consultation did ask the questions, 'What are the main reasons you/your family don't use, or don't more regularly use, the bus service?' And, 'Is there anything that would encourage you/your family to use, or more regularly use, the bus service.'
- We received one No response to the question, '*Do you think the EPPS allows for genuine improvements for bus passengers?*' This was because the respondent believed the EPPS was concentrating on improving existing services and not extending services. We would not

agree with this analysis. For example, the five proposed demand responsive bus services would serve large areas of the district which currently have no bus services.

- We received five responses to the question, *'Do you have any other comments that are critical to the adoption of the EPPS?'* These responses included asking for more specific targets (this matter has been addressed above) / Improvements for the rural areas and not just the urban areas (see earlier comment on the proposed demand responsive bus services which would all predominantly be in rural areas) / Request for feeder services from rural areas to the main bus corridors (the proposed demand responsive bus services would in some instances do this) / Smaller electric vehicles offering more frequent services to rural areas for less cost (we feel this is perhaps something for the future when such vehicles are more proven) / Reading Borough Council expressed their keenness to work in partnership with West Berkshire Council to achieve certain goals.

We look forward to working with Reading Borough Council with the joint ticketing initiative in the Eastern Area and with all the Berkshire Local Transport Authorities to produce a passenger charter.

Outside of the survey, comments were also received from Transport Focus and the Competition & Markets Authority.

- Transport Focus gave a detailed response in a different format. Overall they were very supportive and encouraging of our EP Plan and Scheme. However, they drew our attention to a few areas they felt were missing or in need of further development. These included commitments for cleaning regimes on the buses / common service date changes, aligned with neighbouring authorities / broader commitments to keeping passengers informed of service delays & disruptions / more effort to tackle anti-social behaviour / consultations with passengers regarding significant service changes / stronger methodology on consulting with passengers on how well the EP is performing. All of these points can be considered by the Enhanced Partnership at a future date.
- The Competitions & Markets Authority confirmed they were unable to provide detailed individual feedback. However, they set out some high-level points from their review of and initial tranche of Enhanced Partnership documents.

The overall verdict on the results of the consultation is that there were no key points identified that would notably improve BSIP outcomes nor material matters arising that needed to delay the adoption of the proposed EP Plan and Scheme by the Council. Hence the Council now looks to adopting the EP Plan and Scheme by 01 April 2022, subject to approvals and any necessary second operator objection process.

Transport Services Team, Environment Service

March 2022